



The dramatic Battle on Snowshoes diorama measures 5 feet by 30 inches.

BATTLE ON SNOWSHOES

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

French and Indian War history combines with figures made by John Jenkins Designs to inspire James H. Hillestad to build a diorama depicting a wintry firefight

I can't help but be captivated by the toy figure artistry of John Jenkins. The level of detail, the animation and the high standard of painting are mind-boggling.

Last fall I became enthralled by the Battle on Snowshoes series by his company, John Jenkins Designs. The mix of green-clad Rogers' Rangers, British Redcoats, French regulars and marines, Canadian militia, and Woodland Indians creates a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes.

And the fact that the battle took place in a snow-covered forest added, for me, a new level of drama for diorama building.

ACHIEVING AUTHENTICITY

Consulting with historians, museum curators and re-enactors, I gathered background information that would enable the faithful re-creation of the clash.

As with other dioramas I have worked on, this one would be 5 feet by 30 inches in size. Topography would be even more important than in previous dioramas.

This scene would include three mountains: Bear, Cook's and Bald, with the last also known as Rogers' Rock. The diorama would also encompass a frozen stream named Trout Brook and a sliver of frozen Lake George, all in what is now upstate New York.

Seventy of Jenkins figures would be used in this scene re-creating the Second Battle on Snowshoes March 13, 1758.

Rangers had also been involved in the

lesser-known First Battle on Snowshoes, which had taken place in the same general vicinity Jan. 27, 1757.

SETTING AN AMBUSH

Events were set in motion when the illustrious Capt. Robert Rogers set off from Fort Edward with 180 men. His goal was to reconnoiter the French forts at Carillon (Ticonderoga) and St.

Frederic (Crown Point).

Traveling north on a frozen Lake George, Rogers' Rangers used ice creepers on their feet. After they emerged on the west bank, they changed to snowshoes to cross terrain blanketed by 4 feet of snow. They made for Trout Brook, where Rogers planned to ambush a French resupply party from nearby Fort Carillon. Rogers later wrote, "We



The French ambush of the Rangers erupts.



Rogers' Rangers fight back.



French marines advance along the frozen Trout Brook.

kept close to the mountain, that the advanced guard might better observe the riverlet on the ice of which I imagined the enemy would travel."

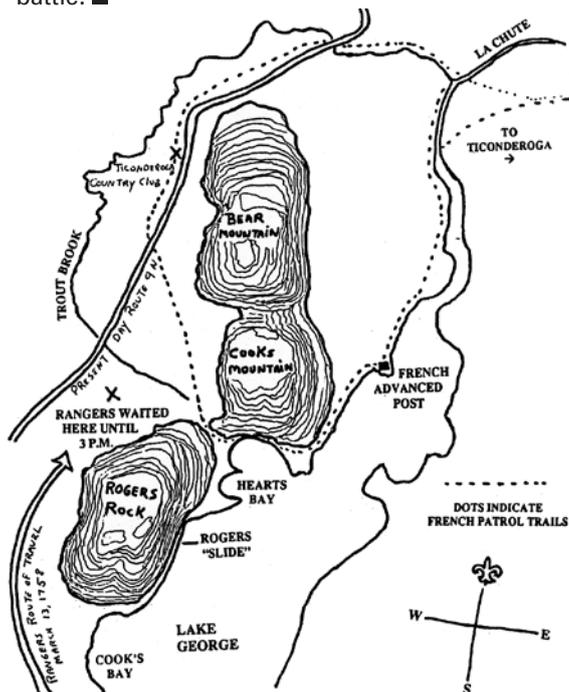
RANGERS ROUTED

At first the March 13 attack went well for the Rangers. More than 50 enemy Indians were quickly felled.

However, unbeknownst to Rogers, this group was but the vanguard of a main force of 200 French forest fighters and Indians. They were headed by a brilliant partisan leader, Jean-Baptiste Leveault de Langis de Montegron (or Langy), who orchestrated the near annihilation of the Rangers.

Rogers' ambushers became the ambushed and the battle raged into the night. Rogers lost 126 men. Escaping under cover of darkness, he and the 54 survivors limped back to Fort Edward to fight another day.

The diorama depicts the start of the final battle. ■



Battle on Snowshoes map by Bob Bearor, historian, re-enactor and author of "The Battle on Snowshoes." The diorama is based on the terrain believed to be where the battle took place.

“ We kept close to the mountain, that the advanced guard might better observe the riverlet on the ice of which I imagined the enemy would travel. ”
--Robert Rogers



Ranger casualties are evacuated.



A Ranger is captured.