

“royals” planted about six hundred yards distant from the northeast bastion, harmed no one.

Shortly after dark, on Tuesday night, as is related by Lieutenant-Colonel Willett, “the Indians, who were at least one thousand in number, spread themselves through the woods, completely encircling the fort, and commenced a terrible yelling, which was continued at intervals the greater part of the night.”

Brigadier-General Nicolaus Herchheimer, purposing to go to the relief of the besieged fort, began marching toward it with a thousand Tryon County militia.¹ On Wednesday, the sixth of August, about eleven o'clock in the morning, three men brought a letter from him to Colonel Gansevoort apprising him that he and a part of the succoring force had reached Oriskany, eight miles distant, and desiring him to signal the arrival of the dispatch-bearers by firing a cannon. Having complied with the request, Colonel Gansevoort immediately planned a diversion to favor the safe arrival of the militia. He ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Willett to sally upon the camp of the provincial royalists south of the fort with a body of two hundred men—one-half the number to be taken from the Third New York Regiment and the other from the Ninth Massachusetts—which was ultimately supplemented by fifty men under Captain Abraham Swartwout to guard “a light iron three-pounder,” under the direction of Major Badlam. The sortie was, however, delayed nearly an hour by a heavy shower of rain.

Meanwhile Brigadier-General Herchheimer had not waited to hear the firing of the cannon at the fort notifying him of the receipt of the message, but had advanced and fallen into an ambuscade of the enemy, and was there unexpectedly attacked. Although the foremost militia bravely defended themselves, yet the disconnected manner in which the different companies were marching, led to a deplorable loss of valiant men and a speedy discomfiture of the wounded officer's confused force.

“As soon as the rain ceased, Lieutenant-Colonel Willett lost not a moment in sallying forth from the gate of the fort. As the enemy's sentries were directly in sight of the fort, his movements were necessarily very rapid.” The British picket-line was driven in and the outlying guard attacked and dispersed without any embarrassing delay. “Sir John Johnson, whose regiment was not over two hundred yards distant from the advance guard, and who himself, the weather being warm, was in his tent with his coat off, had not time to put it on before his camp was forced. * * * *

“Adjoining the camp of Sir John Johnson was that of the Indians. This also was soon taken, so that a very few minutes put Lieutenant-Colonel Wil-

¹ Tryon County embraced that part of the State of New York then lying west of Albany County.