

LETTER VI

Wherein young John Smith describeth the desperate siege of the logging camp and the memorable capture of the loggers.

Smithville, Down East, in the state of Maine,

March 24, 1839.

Dear Ginerall ----- I've jest got another letter from my son John, down in our disputed territory, and 9 as I know you feel anxious to hear how they get along down there, I hasten to send you a copy of it. It is as follers:

Our Disputed Territory, pretty near the

Line, March, 20, 1839.

Dear Father ----- Tell mother I ain't shot yet, though we've had one pretty considerable of a brush, and expect every day to have some more. Colonel Jarvis has took quite a liking to our little Smithville detachment. He says we are the smartest troops he's got, and as long as we stick by him, it isn't Sir John Harvey, nor all New-Brumzick, nor even Queen Victory herself can ever drive him off

of Fitzherbert's farm. Perhaps you mayn't remember much about this Fitzherbert farm, where we are. It is the very place where the British nabbed our Land Agent, Mr. McIntire, when he was abed, and asleep, and couldn't help himself, and carried him off to Fredericton jail.

Let'em come and try to nab us, if they dare; if they wouldn't wish their cake was dough again, I'm mistaken. We got up pretty considerable of a little kind of fort here, and we keep it manned day and night ---- we don't mor than half of us sleep to once, and are determined the British shall never ketch us with both our eyes shet.

But I'spose mother's in dreadful fidgets to know About the brush, that I mentioned in the first part of my letter, so I must make haste and get along to it. It wasn't exactly a scratch with the British soldiers, but something jest about as bad, and I don't know but a little worse, for it was along with them thieving trespassers, that's been cutting down our trees, and stealin' our logs. And I think I should as lives run my chance among thieves.

That night arter we got here, when the sentries was all placed round the fort, and the things all put up for the night, Colonel Jarvis asked us to go in and set down and have a chat. So we did; and he asked us all about our march down here to our disputed territory, and what the news was to home, and if we see the governor as we come along, and if he sent any word to him,

and so on. Sargent Johnson told him all about it, and told him the governor was terrible earnest for him *to hold on to the logs*; and said he musn't never flinch a hair, nor give up an inch of our disputed territory, let what would come, and he must put a stop to their cutting down our timber.

Colonel Jarvis said, the governor might let him alone for that; if Sir John Harvey got hold of any of them logs, he would have to get up ailer in the morning than ever he did yet.

"Now, Sargent Johnson," said the Colonel, "you are a smart officer, and you've got a smart little company here; and bein' you've jest come into the service, it wouldn't be no more than fair that you should have a chance to take hold of some kind of a job that should be an honour to you and your company, and show to the people of the state what sort of grit you are made of. I think it's very likely there's some of them are thieving chaps about here in the woods yet, cutting down our timber; and you may take your men in the morning, and load up your guns and go off on a cruise, and see if you can ketch any of the rascals, and bring 'em and their teams off here prisoners of war; and the rest of us'll stay here and guard the fort while you are gone. If the rascals set out to fight, don't show 'em no quarter, but take 'em, dead or alive, and bring 'em off to the fort."

Sargent Johnson told him, "that was jest sich a job as we should like, and we'd be out in the morning bright and airly and go at it."

Accordingly, as soon as it was daylight in the morning, I turned out and gave Sargent Johnson a touch, and told him 'twas time to be starting. He was on his feet as quick as a wink, and told me to call the men and tell them to get ready. In a few minutes we got our breakfasts, and put some dinner in our

knapsacks, and see that our guns was all well loaded; and after the Colonel told us which way we better go, we marched off, and struck right into the woods.

We had rather tough getting about, pretty much all the forenoon, stretching about through the bushes, and climbing over logs and stones, and working our way through the swamps; but towards noon we begun to come along into the timber land. And, my stars! Sich great whapping pine trees, as straight as a candle, and tallas a liberty-pole, and standing all round as thick as the bean-poles in our garden, I guess you never see.

“Ah,” says Sargent Johnson, “this is the place where them thieving chaps picks their huckleberries. We shall get upon the track of some of ‘em bime-by.

At last we come to a pretty considerable of a kind of a little river. Sargent Johnson told us to keep a sharp look out now, for they hauled the logs into these small rivers and brooks, and in the spring, when the ice broke up, they would shoot ‘em along out into the Aroostook river, and then scoot ‘em away off down the St. John’s river, and carry ‘em off to Enland, and nobody knows where. We followed the river up a mile or two, and at last I heard a sharp kind of a click, like the sound of an axe chopping wood. I listened a spell, and then I heard it again; and I told Sargent Johnson we was close upon ‘em, for I could hear ‘em chop. At that we all stopped and listened, and we could hear ‘em as plain as day. Sargent Johnson then told us to see that the primin’ in our guns was all right, and to foller him as still as mice. So we crept along as careful as if we was going on eggs’ Bime-by we got on to a little piece of rising ground, where we could look down towards the bend of the river, and there we see ‘em as busy at work as a thief in a mill. They had a little log

cabin for themselves, and another one for their oxen; and one chap was jest driving the oxen in, to give 'em some hay, and the rest was going in to dinner; all but the one that we heard chopping; and he was digging his axe into the side of a great large pine tree, as big round as a hog-set. Bime-by one of 'em come to the door and hollered to him, and told him to come into dinner, for the beans was all turned out, and growin' cold. But he said the beans might go to pot for what he keered, for he wouldn't come in till he got his tree down, any how. So he kept his axe a going, click, click, and we kept still and looked on. We see the tree was pretty nigh off; and bime-by we heard a crack, and then a little louder crack; and we looked up, and see the top begun to lean and tremble a little--- it was a monstrous great big tree--- and then the cracks came quicker and louder; crack, crack, double crack, and the old tree begun to whisk through among the tops of the other trees with a roaring sound like a harrycane, and then, in two winks of a hum-bird's eye, it went crash on to the ground like a clap of thunder, and made all smoke again.

“By king,” said Sargent Johnson, “if that's the way they steal our timber, I think it's a caution.”

After the tree was down, the chap stuck his axe into the stump, jest as when any body's a readin' he puts his finger on where he left off, and then he went into the camp to dinner.

“Now,” says Sargent Johnson, “now's the time; while they are at dinner we'll surround the camp, and take 'em by surprise.”

We looked down to the bank of the river, and we see two or three everlastin' great piles of logs, as big as two or three houses, that they had cut, and hauled, and rolled down the bank.

This made some of our company feel a little blue, for fear they might be too many for us; and they asked Sargent Johnson if we hadn't better wait till they come out of the camp, so we would see how many there was of 'em. For there was only eleven of us, and by the great pile of logs they had hauled down the river, there might be a hundred of them.

Sargent Johnson said he didn't care if there was five hundred; he'd surround their camp and take 'em prisoners. And says he,

“If any of you is cowards, you may turn about and go back now, and them that stays will have the honour all to ourselves.”

At that they coloured up some, and said they was no cowards, but was ready to go as fur as he would.

So Sargent Johnson then gave us off the plan of the campaign. And says he-----

“You see there is a door to the cabin, and it stands a little ways open; and you see there's holes cut out through two sides of the cabin for windows. Now we must creep as still as midnight, so that they shant see us nor hear us, and when we've surrounded the cabin, I'll give a little bit of a low whistle, and in a moment, two of you must poke your guns right into then windows, and I'll step right into the middle of the door with my sword in one hand and my gun in 'tother, and two more of you must spring right behind me and poke your guns in over my shoulders, one over my right shoulder and 'tother over my left shoulder; and the rest of you must stand off, all ready to fire, about two rods from the camp, as a core deserve. Colonel Jarvis says it's always best to keep a core deserve, when you are goin' to make an attack. As soon as I've got in the middle of the door,

and staring of 'em right in the face, I'll sing out to 'em like thunder----'Now you rascally stealin' chaps, now I've got you; now if you don't give up in a minute, we'll shoot you down like squirrels.' And I guess that'll fetch 'em tu. If it don't, and they set out to fight, why then we must fight, that's all; and that's what we come down for.

After Sargent Johnson had given us our orders, we told him we understood 'em, and would stick to him through thick and thin. So we crawled along towards the camp as fast and as still as we could. We had to climb right over that thunderin' great big tree that they jest fell, because it was sich a bad place to get round ary end of it. But at last we got along up within three or four rods of the camp and Sargent Johnson made a sign for us to halt, so we might all get ready; and come to look round, one was missing, for there wasn't but ten of us. And come to look round to see who it was, it was Billy Wiggins. Sargent Johnson looked cross enough, and a little surprised too; for he said, for all Billy was sich a fumbling, clumsy little chap, he never thought he was a coward. At that I looked back the way we come, and I see Billy's head bobbing up and down behind the great pine tree, as he was jumping up with all his might and trying to climb up on to it. I see in a minute what the difficulty was; he couldn't get up on to the tree, and he didn't dare to holler, for that would muster 'em out of the cabin. So I run back and jumped up on to the tree and got hold of Billy's hand and hauled him over. And we pretty soon got all ready to make the attack. Every man had his gun pinte towards the cabin and all ready to pull. I and Jonathan Downing was to stand behind Sargent Johnson and pint our guns over his shoulders; and Seth Josslyn was to stand to one window and Billy Wiggins to 'tother. As soon as we was all ready, Sargent Johnson give a

little, easy whistle, and we all sprung to our places; but before Sargent Johnson had time to begin to speak, Billy Wiggins's gun---I guess there must be something the matter with Billy's forefinger, for his gun blazed away like lightning into the cabin window, and his ball went splash right into a log on 'tother side. And all in the same breath the rest of our guns was all pokin' in on every side, and Sargent Johnson was bawling out to'em with his roaring voice and calling of'em "stealin rascals." Oh. Father! I wish you'd been there. If you ever see a flock of mice in the buttery nibbling round a pan of meal, and see the old cat jump right into the window and land right down in the middle on'em, and see how them mice went it, you might guess a little how them prisoners of ourn jumped and sprung round and screamed. As I was looking right in over Sargent Johnson's shoulder, I could see the whole on't. There was six of'em, and they was all setting round the table eating their dinners. They had a great large milk-pan in the middle of the table full of baked beans and three or four pounds of fat pork on the top of it; and a kettle of soup on one end of the table, and bread and potatoes and so on, all over the table. And when the thunder-clap broke upon'em all at once, they all sprung right up as if they'd gone out of their skins; and the table went like a lock of hay in a whirlwind. It bounced up in the first place almost to the roof of the cabin; and when it came down, the beans flew from one side of the room to the other, like shot in a pepper-box; and the soup-kettle and the bread and the dishes and the potatoes I couldn't keep the run of.

After the first scream was over, and they see they wasn't killed, one of'em sprung and ketched a handspike that they had to stir the fire with, and another ketched up a stool that they had to set on, and another run behind the door and brought out an old gun. But when they see our guns pokin' in round so thick, they

sprung into the corners and squat down behind the barrels, and began to holler “don’t fire! don’t fire!” At last after they began to get still a little, so he could be heard, Sargent Johnson told’em to lay down their arms. At that, one laid down his handspike, t’other one his gun, and things begun to get considerable quiet.

Then Sargent Johnson asked’em if they was willing to surrender themselves prisoners of war. At that, one of’em that seemed to be the head man among’em, a short, thick, fat man, with a red face and a bluish nose, stepped forward and asked Sargent Johnson what he wanted. The sergeant told him they must deliver themselves up as prisoners of war and be carried to the American camp.

“And then what’s to be done with us?” said he.

“Well, then, you’ll have to be sent to Bangor, to be tried for stealing the logs on our disputed territory,” said Sargent Johnson.

“Well, then, we’ll die first,” said he, and he sprung back and ketched up the gun. But when he looked round and see the rest of his men was as white as cloth and quivering behind the barrels, and see our guns all panted right at him, he see ‘twas no use. And says he, “Captain don’t fire, I give up.” And he brought his gun and give it to Sargent Johnson. Then Sargent Johnson orderd’em to come out two by two, and we took and tied them together by twos, so we could guard’em easy; and then we went to the hovel and took out the oxen. There was two yoke of oxen and a hoss; and we yoked’em up and loaded all the provisions they had in the camp and started off for our fort. Jonathan Downing drove the oxen; and Billy Wiggins----- Sargent Johnson said Billy was sich an unlucky kind of feller he had no patience with him; but after all, he said he didn’t know but what

his gun goin' off so, did about as much good as any thing---- so on the whole, bein' he had sich short legs, he said Billy Wiggins should ride the hoss.

So when we all got ready, we marched off toward s our fort, and got back jest about sunset. And as we was coming up the hill toward the fort, they all come out to meet us and give us a salute. I guess you never see a man more tickled than Colonel Jarvis was. He hopped up and down and slapped Sargent Johnson on the shoulder more than forty times; and declared if the oxen was only fat enough, we'd have one of 'em roasted whole the next day for dinner.

But I can't say any more to-day; so give my love to the folks, and I remain your loving son,

John.

Dear General, so much for my son John's second grist. Don't you think he grinds it out pretty well for a boy that isn't seventeen years old yet?

Yours.

John Smith, Esquire