

BATTLE OF LONGWOODS

March 4, 1814

Commanded by Captain James Basden

Royal Scots Light Western (Caldwell) Rangers
89th Foot Light Kent and Middlesex Militia
British Indian Department

Commanded by Captain Andrew Hunter Holmes

24 th U.S. Infantry Michigan Mounted Infantry
27 th U.S. Infantry Michigan Military Calvary
28 th U.S. Infantry

On March 3, 1814, the Western (Caldwell) Rangers observed an American military camp on the western edge of Twenty Mile Creek (20 miles west of Delaware), straddling the Longwoods Road. Captain William Caldwell sent word to the British detachment in Delaware. The next morning, Colonel Andrew Stewart sent 250 regulars, militia and natives under the command of Captain James Basden to meet with Caldwell. They marched to Strathburn through more than 30 centimetres of snow which had fallen during the night. Meanwhile, while waiting for the British reinforcements, Caldwell had unsuccessfully attempted to draw the Americans from their abattis and his men withdrew towards Delaware.

Caldwell met up with Basden and the Delaware reinforcements at Strathburn and, in late afternoon, they proceeded to the eastern edge of the Twenty Mile Creek to prepare for battle. Disregarding the advice of Caldwell and others to flank the Americans, Basden decided to drive the enemy out of their position with a frontal attack by his British regulars. The rangers, militia and natives took to the north and south flanks. About an hour before sunset, to the sound of bugles, Basden led the British regulars across the bridge, charging up the snow-covered slope. The Americans unleashed an “uncommon fire” which decimated the front ranks of the British regulars who tried vainly to attack up the slippery slope but suffered severe casualties. The militia and natives were also pinned down by very determined American fire from the flanks of the abattis. Almost all the British officers, including Basden, were wounded or killed, leaving only Ensign Francis Miles of the 89th, who sounded the retreat at sunset.

The British withdrew with 52 wounded and leaving 16 dead on the snow-covered field. At Strathburn, they met Captain Stewart with additional reinforcements from Delaware. But it was too late; they had been soundly defeated and they returned to Delaware.

The Battle of Longwoods represented a major turning point in the war in the London District. The British subsequently withdrew from Delaware to Burford, turning this part of Upper Canada into a no-man’s land, subject to American raids from Detroit against area farms in search of food and supplies. Settlers in Thames Valley were constantly robbed and pillaged. Many frightened families abandoned their farms and did not return when the war ended late in 1814.

Near the end of February, 1814, Captain Andrew Hunter Holmes led American forces from Detroit along the shore of Lake Erie thence to the ruined village of Fairfield, destined for Delaware. Travelling on the Longwoods Road they were joined by about 80 men led by Lt. Lee of the Michigan Militia Calvary who were in pursuit of Canadian Militia. On March 3, 1814, travelling along the Longwoods Road, they arrived at Twenty Mile Creek. On the western edge of the bank overlooking the creek, they constructed an abattis of brush and logs to protect the men and horses. They had left Detroit a week earlier and many were suffering the effects of cold, wetness and hunger. As a result, Captain Holmes sent 20 of his men back to Detroit, leaving 160 to attack the British at Delaware.

When they arrived, they spotted Canadian defenders encamped on the eastern slope of the creek. However, on the morning of March 4, they discovered that the Canadian force had withdrawn. The Americans dispatched a small group of cavalry who followed the Canadian’s trail in the snow to the east. Seeing a large number of British regulars, rangers, militia and natives at Strathburn, they hurried back to the abattis to inform Captain Holmes. Many of the Americans were anxious to retreat, but with the encouragement of Captain Holmes and Ensign Heard, they decided to make their stand or die in the effort.

Late in the afternoon, the British attacked. The Americans, protected by the abattis, responded by firing rapidly and tellingly on the massed British regulars. The British struggled to climb the icy slope and the American fire caused severe casualties. The British regulars attempted to breach the abattis, but the Americans were able to keep them at bay; few managed to get close. The Canadian militia, rangers and natives attacked the American flanks with little success.

After over an hour of continuous gunfire exchange, the British began to withdraw. Soon the area was empty, except for the dead British regulars. Even though his men had won a clear victory, Captain Holmes would not allow them to rob the dead British soldiers of their shoes and clothes, in respect for the bravery the British had shown. The American casualties amounted to 5 killed and 3 wounded.

Captain Holmes and his officers were concerned that the British would counterattack and they withdrew.

British Casualties

Capt. D. Johnstone	John Bunn	Tomas Jones	Abraham Taylor
Lieut. P. Graeme	Wm. Condon	Thomas Murphy	Uriah Trimm
Sgt. James Savage	Thom Connors	Wm Shaw	Lawrence Wall
	John Hazeldine	James Sheldon	
	James Hogan	Alex Smith	

*God and the soldier we alike adore,
In time of danger, not before,
The danger past and all things righted,
God is forgotten, the soldier slighted.*

(Thomas Jordan)

American Casualties

Philip Beard
Levi Bunnell
Joseph Donahoe
Thomas Watkins
Eri Wooden