
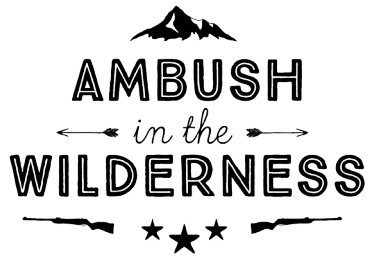


AMBUSH
in the
WILDERNESS



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Illustrated by
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*To my parents,
Bob & Shirley Harrison,
with love*

- KH

Western Pennsylvania, 1753 – 1763



*Fort Duquesne was a much fought-over encampment. Fort Prince George was built by the British in 1754. That same year the fort was captured, rebuilt, and renamed by the French, who called it Fort Duquesne. It remained under French control for four years, when in 1758, the British regained and rebuilt the fort, calling their conquest Fort Pitt. Nearby Braddock's Field was the site of the Battle of the Monongahela.

Prologue



The 17th and 18th centuries were a time of tremendous European expansion and aggression. European nations fought for control of lands on their own continent as well as lands abroad. France and England, key combatants, battled each other here in America in four wars spanning nearly seventy-five years. The final and decisive of these wars is known as the *French and Indian War* (1754-1763).

Ambush in the Wilderness takes place during this war, in the dramatic Battle of the Monongahela. Fought in western Pennsylvania, this two-hour battle was host to the strategic talents and death-defying participation of a twenty-three-year-old volunteer named George Washington.



Chapter
ONE

Western Pennsylvania - 1753

“THERE IT IS, PAPA,” CALLED PATRICK.

With a gentle squeeze of his heels, Patrick Egan urged his horse into the glade.

He leaned forward in his saddle and eyed the simple log shelter. Except for the roof where a few strips of bark had slipped out of place, everything seemed in order since the last time they had come through on their way to Logstown.

Patrick thought back to when he had helped his father pound the thick stakes into the ground two years earlier. That’s when his mother had died, leaving his father no choice but to take Patrick with him on all of his trips to the fur-trading post along the Ohio River. At first, Patrick hated it. He thought the cabin looked as cold and lifeless as he felt. But now at age thirteen, Patrick pretended it was his own private military cabin, like the ones reserved for high-ranking officers in the colonial militia. He smiled.

“Twill be dark soon,” said his father. “We’ll take shelter and arrive in Logstown by noon.”

John Egan stood tall and fit in his saddle. Born

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in Scotland, he was known as a brave, strong, and fair-minded man. Patrick's German mother Anna had said he had "warrior blood" in him. Patrick agreed. Hadn't his father told him, drilled him, that a man's gun and his horse were his most important possessions? Hadn't he talked many times of what it meant to have courage, saying, "Courage is doing what you have to do even when you're scared"?

Patrick watched his father swing down off his mount. He liked the way the horse shifted its weight whenever his father mounted and dismounted. It was as if the horse sensed that the man who held its reins was of great importance. *He is, after all, the finest fur-trader in the Ohio Valley,* thought Patrick.

The October air was still warm and dewy against Patrick's face. It smelled of dry wood chips and moist earth. Wings fluttered softly overhead. Crows cackled. Squirrels scattered. Behind him birch and pine twigs snapped under the hooves of the pack train. There were five horses in all. Each one was tied to the one in front by a rope which now led them into the small meadow. There they'd graze on the sweet grass until satisfied.

The horses snorted and bobbed their heads as Patrick's father loosened their loads. Bulging leather packsaddles sagged under the weight of the merchandise inside: gunpowder, knives, axes, and awls. There were also tomahawks, brass wire, buttons, silver bracelets, and pigs of lead to be melted down for bullets. Patrick pictured the many fine pelts that their goods would buy from their trades with the Indians:

deer, elk, and buffalo and bear skins, along with furs from beaver, wolf, fox, and raccoon.

Patrick hurriedly fastened the leather hobbles on his horse. He hoped it wasn't too late to look for his friend Gwayo.

It had been weeks since he had last seen his Mingo friend. He was a member of the Six Nations Confederacy, what the French called Iroquois, or as they called themselves, Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse. His home was at the mouth of Crow's Run just north of Logstown in a place the white man called Mingo Town.

Patrick scanned the thick, silent woods where his friend liked to hunt. *Where are you, Gwayo?*

"Patrick!"

Patrick turned around. His father was standing in front of the cabin holding a piece of parchment. It was torn at the top where his father had ripped it from the cabin post.

"What is it, Papa?"

"'Tis a note from the French."

Moving closer, Patrick studied his father's face. Dirt and sweat were buried in the creases between his eyes. The muscles in his jaw tightened the way they did whenever his father was deep in thought.

"The king of France is warning all Englishmen to leave the Ohio territory and stay east of the Alleghenies," said his father.

Patrick's face grew hot. He remembered what the friendly Indians had reported earlier that morning: more French soldiers had been spotted paddling

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down the rivers in their painted canoes. They were noisy as they floated along in their white and blue uniforms chanting the *Te Deum* and shouting, “Vive la France! Vive le Roi!”

And there were French fur traders, too. More of them were encroaching into western Pennsylvania to compete in the purchase of furs.

“The French can’t make us leave, can they, Papa? After all, this isn’t *their* land.”

“Aye,” said Patrick’s father. “But they claim it is. They care nothing about Sebastian Cabot’s voyage giving England her proper claim to the New World. They say they have their own explorers.” He stooped down and grabbed a fistful of earth. “News is they’re planning to set up a chain of forts along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.”

French forts—right here along the Ohio River? Patrick could feel his heart pumping in his chest. He slowed his breathing, hoping to appear unshaken by the news. It was the first time his father had talked to him this way—as if he were one of the men at the trading post gathering together to share important information and opinions—and Patrick didn’t want him to stop.

Until recently Patrick hadn’t worried much about the French or the Indians who sided with them. He knew that some Indians such as the Six Nations remained neutral, choosing not to side with France or England. But there were others—fierce Indians he was told—who could be persuaded. Stories of scalplings and attacks on English colonials surfaced now and again; most, however, occurred farther

north and east. Was all that about to change?

Patrick searched for words. “If the French ever caught us, what would they do to us? Take us prisoner?”

His father didn’t answer.

“Mr. O’Rourke says they’re all talk. Says they’re just trying to frighten us.” He searched his father’s face for a reaction. He could see the muscles in his father’s jaw begin to tighten.

“Don’t worry, Patrick,” said his father. “No Frenchman is going to take us. Not alive, anyway.” He ripped the parchment into thin strips and tossed them into a pile of cold ashes. “I’ll start the fire,” he said.

Patrick tried to take comfort in his father’s words. *But what exactly did he mean? Was he serious when he said they wouldn’t take them alive?*

Patrick went to work on the cabin floor, hoping to put the matter out of his mind. Carefully he lifted each piece of large bark that blanketed the ground. He was looking for snakes. One morning, having forgotten to check under the bark the night before, Patrick awoke to find a four-foot timber rattlesnake coiled up against his leg. His father grabbed the snake behind the head as calmly as if he had picked up a stick. He sliced the snake into chunks and boiled it over the fire. The juicy meat made a grand breakfast.

As he worked, a strand of black hair fell from Patrick’s cap. Briars clung to his leather shirt. His moccasins and leggings, caked with dried mud from fording the creeks, felt like dried cornhusks against his skin. No matter. Patrick liked the way his muddy clothes made him feel as though he were a hard

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worker like his father.

With no sign of a snake, Patrick began to search the woods for boughs of hemlock to fashion into a soft mattress. Darkness was falling; soon it would be difficult to see.

He had just spotted a branch to harvest when, abruptly, he froze. There was a rustling in the woods. *The shuffle—could it be—human feet?*

Patrick's eyes searched the trees. Nothing. His body was still but his mind was wild—*The French!*

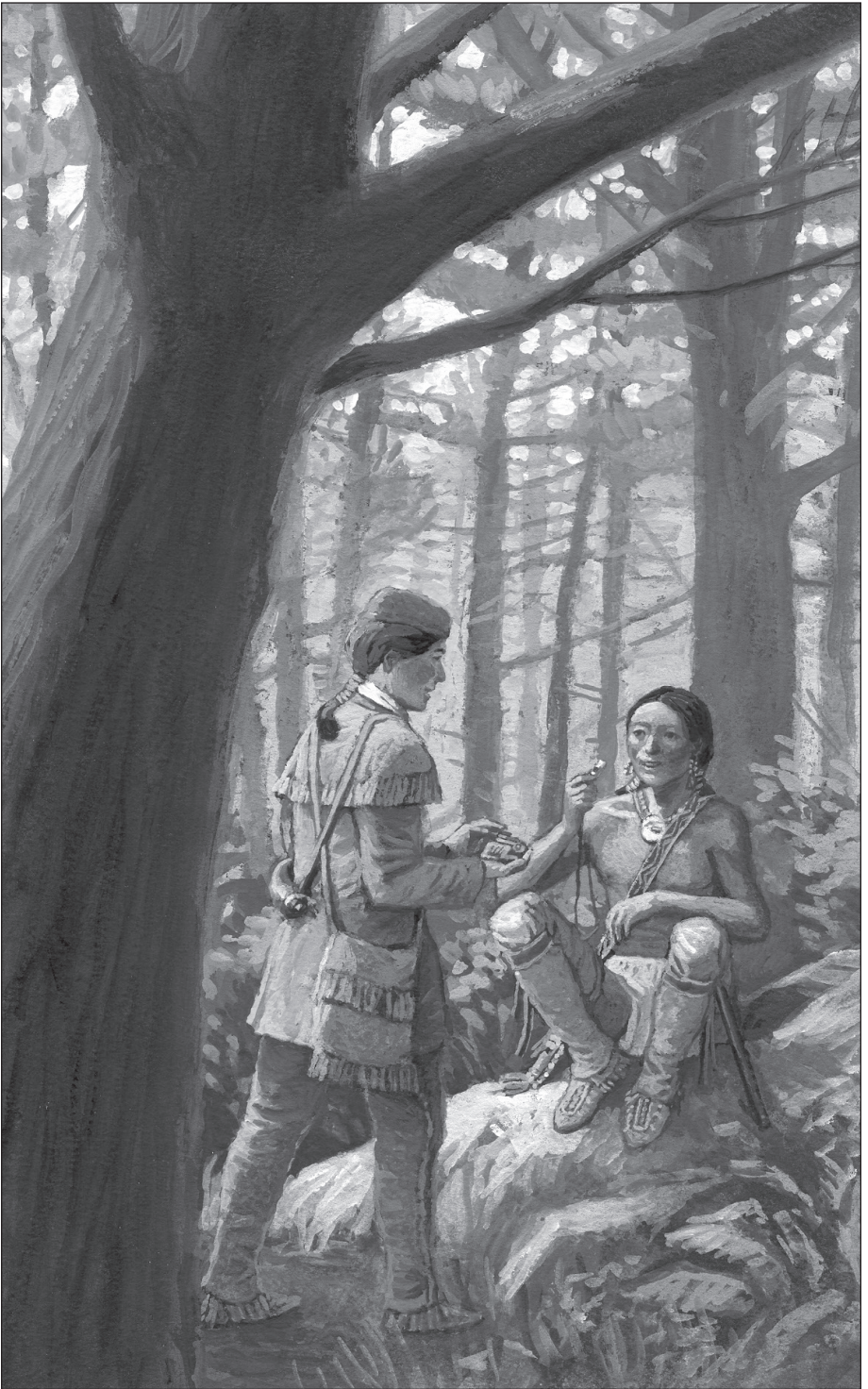
He stiffened. Something moved to his left. *It could be a deer*, he thought. *Or the wind*. Slowly from behind a tree there appeared the unmistakable outline of a man's head. Patrick felt his body turn tingly, weightless.

Before he could react, the thin figure jumped out and began bounding toward him through the trees.

"It's you!" cried Patrick.

Gwayo flashed a broad smile. His name meant "rabbit." Although he had been named by the clan mother at birth—before anyone knew how well the name would suit him—Patrick marveled at how well it did. Gwayo's body, wiry and lithe, moved with such quickness and grace. His face was oval-shaped, thin, with eyes as dark as freshly tilled soil. Patrick had taught him some English and Gwayo, in turn, had helped Patrick to become quite skilled at discovering old Indian footpaths. It was good to see his friend again.

Gwayo held out his hand. Inside was a small rabbit carved out of birch. Often when the two met, they



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would exchange small gifts of friendship. Patrick had long understood the importance placed upon such gifts by Gwayo's people.

"It's beautiful," said Patrick, taking the wooden rabbit. He could see from the fine detailing that Gwayo had worked many days on his craft. Of all the trinkets and fancy treasures Patrick had seen at the trading post, he could not recall seeing one as intricate and beautiful as this. "Thank you," he said. "Now I have something for you."

The silver whistle dangled from a leather thong. Smiling, Gwayo took the shiny object and turned it over in his hands to examine it. Then he placed it around his neck.

"Put it in your mouth and blow," instructed Patrick. He demonstrated the action with his own hand and mouth.

Slowly, as if unsure, Gwayo placed the whistle between his lips. With eyes fixed on Patrick, he slowly breathed air into it. Only a soft hiss escaped.

Patrick chuckled. "Blow harder," he said, puffing his cheeks full of air.

Before his friend could respond, Patrick heard a chilling cry.

He spun around toward the cabin. He stood rigid, squinting, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the growing darkness. But horribly, he didn't need his sight to know the source of the familiar call.

It was his father.

And he knew there was but one reaction to that particular sound—the one his father had taught him—*run!*