

# BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 2 ★ Issue 6

## Early American Wars: *Saratoga*

**DATE:**

Sept. 19 – Oct. 17, 1777

**LOCATION:**

Saratoga (present-day Schuylerville), New York

### OPPOSING FORCES

**British Army:** Approximately 6,500 troops (British Regulars, German mercenaries, militia, and Native Americans) commanded by Maj. Gen. John “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne, plus an additional 800 troops commanded by Col. Barry St. Leger.

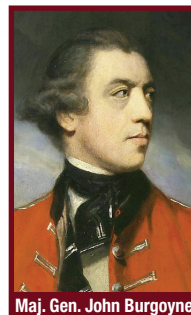
**Colonial Forces:** The initial force of around 4,500 Continentals and militia would grow to over 10,000 by the battle of Bemis Heights. These forces were initially commanded by Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler, who was replaced by Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates. Key subordinates included Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold, Brig. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, and Col. Daniel Morgan.

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

As the campaign season opened in 1777, the American cause hung in the balance. Gen. George Washington's defeat in New York and his subsequent retreat into New Jersey had put American forces on the defensive. Despite his successes at Trenton and Princeton, Washington was doing everything he could to hold his army together as enlistments expired. The British, meanwhile, had the confidence to launch a plan to divide the Colonies along the Hudson River. After a promising British start, however, the Saratoga Campaign would grind to a halt before turning into a stunning American victory. The battle rejuvenated the cause of independence while sowing the first seeds of doubt in Britain's Parliament. Most significantly, the American victory convinced France's King Louis XVI to officially enter the war in support of the Americans. This critical French alliance would make Saratoga the turning point in the American Revolution.

### STRATEGY & MANEUVER

**Actions by the British:** On 30 November 1776, after Washington's retreat from New York, Gen. William Howe advanced a plan for the upcoming campaign season to split New England from the rest of the Colonies along the Hudson River – Lake Champlain line. With Washington on the defensive, Howe believed he could hold him with a small force while moving 10,000 troops through New England from Newport, Rhode Island, while another 10,000 troops moved up the Hudson from New York. These two forces would then converge with a third force moving down from Canada.



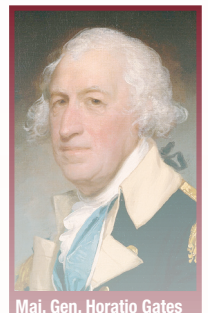
Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne

British Prime Minister Lord Frederick North. It was approved on 3 March.

Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne, who had secured his own command in Canada, submitted a separate plan to divide the Colonies along the same line. From his base near Montreal, Canada, he would lead an 8,000-man force down the Hudson River Valley, advancing by boat down Lake Champlain and then marching cross-country to Albany. (*Map 1*) Simultaneously,

another 800 men under Col. Barry St. Leger would move from Lake Ontario into the Mohawk River Valley to rendezvous with Burgoyne. A third column from Howe's force would move north up the Hudson. Oddly enough, Burgoyne's plan was approved on 29 March – after Germain had approved Howe's amended plan, in which he had changed his initial focus to the capture of Philadelphia. Although it is reasonable to assume that Germain expected both plans to support each other, the fact remains he approved two separate plans from two different commanders with no guidance or requirement for coordination between them. It would be a costly mistake.

On 13 June, as Howe's army was moving against Washington, Burgoyne began his campaign by moving south on Lake Champlain. (*Map 1*) Three weeks later, he arrived at Fort Ticonderoga, where, despite its fortifications, he compelled Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair and his American defenders to evacuate on 6 July. With his superior numbers and no more strongholds in his way, Burgoyne's campaign seemed off to a promising start. But things changed when he reached Skenesborough on 7 July, where instead of moving his heavily



Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates

burdened army back to Ticonderoga and using the waterway of Lake George to move south, he chose a land route. Unfortunately, the small wagon trails, ravines, thick woods, and dense underbrush made the going slow. At one point, British movement slowed to a mere mile a day. With his provisions dwindling, Burgoyne's beleaguered army finally halted near the village



Gen. William Howe