

**DRAKE
SAMUEL
ADAMS**

BURGOYNE'S INVASION
OF 1777

Samuel Drake

Burgoyne's Invasion of 1777

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Samuel Adams Drake Burgoyne's Invasion of 1777 With an outline sketch of the American Invasion of Canada, 1775-76

INTRODUCTION

Among the decisive events of the Revolutionary struggle, Burgoyne's campaign deservedly holds the foremost place, as well for what it led to, as for what it was in inception and execution – at once the most daring, most quixotic, and most disastrous effort of the whole war.

Burgoyne was himself, in some respects, so remarkable a man that any picture of his exploits must needs be more or less tinted with his personality. And this was unusually picturesque and imposing. He acquired prestige, at a time when other generals were losing it, through his participation in Carleton's successful campaign. But Burgoyne was something more than the professional soldier. His nature was poetic; his temperament imaginative. He did nothing in a commonplace way. Even his orders are far more scholarly than soldier-like. At one time he tells his soldiers that "occasions may occur, when nor difficulty, nor labor, nor life are to be regarded" – as if soldiers, in general, expected anything else than to be shot at! – at another, we find him preaching humanity to Indians, repentance to rebels, or better manners to his adversary, with all the superb self-consciousness that was Burgoyne's most prominent characteristic.

To the military critic, Burgoyne's campaign is instructive, because it embodies, in itself, about all the operations known to active warfare. It was destined to great things, but collapsed, like a bubble, with the first shock of an adverse fortune.

This campaign is remarkable in yet another way. It has given us the most voluminous literature extant, that treats of any single episode of the Revolutionary War. In general, it takes many more words to explain a defeat than to describe a victory. Hence this fulness is much more conspicuous upon the British than upon the American side of the history of this campaign. Not only the general, who had his reputation to defend, but high officials, whose guiding hand was seen behind the curtain, were called to the bar of public opinion. The ministers endeavored to make a scapegoat of the general; the general, to fix the responsibility for defeat upon the ministers. His demand for a court-martial was denied. His sovereign refused to hear him. It was thus meanly attempted to turn the torrent of popular indignation, arising from the ill success of the expedition, wholly upon the unlucky general's head. Burgoyne's heroic persistency at length brought the British nation face to face with the unwelcome fact, which the ministers were so desirous of concealing, – that somebody besides the general had blundered; and if the inquiry that Burgoyne obtained from Parliament failed to vindicate him as a captain, it nevertheless did good service by exposing both the shortcomings of his accusers, and the motives which had guided their conduct with respect to himself.

Besides the official examination by the House of Commons, we have several excellent narratives, written by officers who served with Burgoyne, all of which materially contribute to an intelligent study of the campaign, from a purely military point of view. These narratives are really histories of the several corps to which the writers belonged, rather than capable surveys of the whole situation; but they give us the current gossip of the camp-fire and mess-table, spiced with anecdote, and enlivened with the daily experiences through which the writers were passing. And this is much.

In his defence, General Burgoyne vigorously addresses himself to the four principal charges brought forward by his accusers: namely, first, of encumbering himself with a needless amount of

artillery; secondly, of taking the Fort Anne route, rather than the one by way of Lake George; thirdly, of sending off an expedition to Bennington, under conditions inviting defeat; and, lastly, of crossing the Hudson after the disasters of Bennington and Fort Stanwix had taken place.

The real criticism upon Burgoyne's conduct, so far as it relates to the movement of his forces only, seems to be that from the moment when the march was actually to begin, he found himself in want of everything necessary to a rapid advance. Thus, we find him scarcely arrived at Skenesborough before he is asking Sir Guy Carleton for reënforcements to garrison Ticonderoga and Fort George with, to the end that his own force might not be weakened by the detachments required to hold those fortresses against the Americans, when he should move on. It would seem that this contingency, at least, might have been foreseen before it forced itself upon Burgoyne's attention. Yet it was of so serious a nature, in this general's eyes, that he expresses a doubt whether his army would be found equal to the task before it, unless Carleton would assume the defence of the forts referred to above.

At this time, too, the inadequacy of his transportation service became so painfully evident, that the expedition to Bennington offered the only practicable solution to Burgoyne's mind.

These circumstances stamp the purposed invasion with a certain haphazard character at the outset, which boded no good to it in the future.

Carleton having declined to use his troops in the manner suggested, Burgoyne was compelled to leave a thousand men behind him when he marched for Albany. Carleton, the saviour of Canada, was justly chagrined at finding himself superseded in the conduct of this campaign, by an officer who had served under his orders in the preceding one; and, though he seems to have acted with loyalty toward Burgoyne, this is by no means the only instance known in which one general has refused to go beyond the strict letter of his instructions for the purpose of rescuing a rival from a dilemma into which he had plunged with his eyes wide open.

The Prelude with which our narrative opens, undertakes first, to briefly outline the history of the Northern Army, which finally brought victory out of defeat; and next, to render familiar the names, location, and strategic value of the frontier fortresses, before beginning the story of the campaign itself.

Few armies have ever suffered more, or more nobly redeemed an apparently lost cause, than the one which was defeated at Quebec and victorious at Saratoga. The train of misfortunes which brought Burgoyne's erratic course to so untimely an end was nothing by comparison. And the quickness with which raw yeomanry were formed into armies capable of fighting veteran troops, affords the strongest proof that the Americans are a nation of soldiers.

So many specific causes have been assigned for Burgoyne's failure, that it is hardly practicable to discuss all of them within reasonable limits. The simplest statement of the whole case is that he allowed himself to be beaten in detail. It seems plain enough that any plan, which exposed his forces to this result, was necessarily vicious in itself. Moreover, Burgoyne woefully misestimated the resources, spirit, and fighting capacity of his adversary. With our forces strongly posted on the Mohawk, St. Leger's advance down the valley was clearly impracticable. Yet such a combination of movements as would bring about a junction of the two invading columns, at this point, was all essential to the success of Burgoyne's campaign. To have effected this in season, Burgoyne should have made a rapid march to the Mohawk, intrenched himself there, and operated in conjunction with St. Leger. His delays, attributable first, to his unwise choice of the Fort Anne route, next, to Schuyler's activity in obstructing it, and lastly, to his defeat at Bennington, gave time to render our army so greatly superior to his own, that the conditions were wholly altered when the final trial of strength came to be made.

What might have happened if Sir W. Howe had moved his large army and fleet up the Hudson, in due season, is quite another matter. The writer does not care to discuss futilities. In the first place, he thinks that Burgoyne's campaign should stand or fall on its own merits. In the next, such a movement by Howe would have left Washington free to act in the enemy's rear, or upon his flanks, with a fair prospect of cutting him off from his base at New York. Of the two commanders-in-chief, Washington

acted most effectively in reënforcing Gates's army from his own. Howe could not and Carleton would not do this. From the moment that Burgoyne crossed the Hudson, he seems to have pinned his faith to chance; but if chance has sometimes saved poor generalship, the general who commits himself to its guidance, does so with full knowledge that he is casting his reputation on the hazard of a die. As Burgoyne did just this, he must be set down, we think, notwithstanding his chivalrous defence of himself, as the conspicuous failure of the war. And we assume that the importance which his campaign implied to Europe and America, more than any high order of ability in the general himself, has lifted Burgoyne into undeserved prominence.

PRELUDE

I.

THE INVASION OF CANADA, 1775

Canada's attitude.

England took Canada from France in 1759, and soon after annexed it to her own dominions. Twelve years later, her despotic acts drove her American colonies into open rebellion. England feared, and the colonies hoped, Canada would join in the revolt against her. But, though they did not love their new masters, prudence counselled the Canadians to stand aloof, at least till the Americans had proved their ability to make head against the might of England.

That England would be much distressed by Canada's taking sides with the Americans was plain enough to all men, for the whole continent would then be one in purpose, and the conflict more equal; but the Americans also greatly wished it because all New England and New York lay open to invasion from Canada.

Nature had created a great highway, stretching southward from the St. Lawrence to the Hudson, over which rival armies had often passed to victory or defeat in the old wars. Open water offered an easy transit for nearly the whole way. A chain of forts extended throughout its whole length. Chambly and St. John's defended the passage of the Richelieu, through which the waters of Lake Champlain flow to the St. Lawrence. Crown Point¹ and Ticonderoga² blocked the passage of this lake in its narrowest part. Ticonderoga, indeed, is placed just where the outlet of Lake George falls down a mountain gorge into Lake Champlain. Its cannon, therefore, commanded that outlet also. Fort George stood at the head of Lake George, within sixteen miles of Fort Edward, on the Hudson. These were the gates through which a hostile army might sally forth upon our naked frontier. Much, therefore, depended on whether they were to be kept by friend or foe.

Ticonderoga.

In natural and artificial strength, Ticonderoga was by far the most important of these fortresses. At this place the opposite shores of New York and Vermont are pushed out into the lake toward each other, thus forming two peninsulas, with the lake contracted to a width of half a mile, or point-blank cannon range, between them: one is Ticonderoga; the other, Mount Independence. Thus, together, they command the passage of the two lakes.

Ticonderoga itself is a tongue-shaped projection of quite uneven land, broad and high at the base, or where it joins the hills behind it, but growing narrower as it descends over intervening hollows or swells to its farthest point in the lake. That part next the mainland is a wooded height, having a broad plateau on the brow – large enough to encamp an army corps upon – but cut down abruptly on the sides washed by the lake. This height, therefore, commanded the whole peninsula lying before it, and underneath it, as well as the approach from Lake George, opening behind it in a rugged mountain pass, since it must be either crossed or turned before access to the peninsula could be gained. Except for the higher hills surrounding it, this one is, in every respect, an admirable military position.

¹ Crown Point, built by the French in 1731, greatly strengthened by the British, who took it in 1759.

² Ticonderoga, familiarly called "Ty" because the early spelling of the name was Tyconderoga. Built 1755-56 by the French, taken 1759 by the British, under Amherst. Three weeks before the battle of Lexington, an agent of Massachusetts was sent to ascertain the feelings of the people of Canada. His first advice was that "Ty" should be seized as quickly as possible.

The French, who built the first fortress here, had covered all the low ground next the lake with batteries and intrenchments, but had left the heights rising behind it unguarded, until Abercromby attacked on that side in 1758. They then hastily threw up a rude intrenchment of logs, extending quite across the crest in its broadest part. Yet, in spite of the victory he then obtained, Montcalm was so fully convinced that Ticonderoga could not stand a siege, that he made no secret of calling it a trap, for some honest man to disgrace himself in.³

Ticonderoga, however, was henceforth looked upon as a sort of Gibraltar. People, therefore, were filled with wonder when they heard how Ethan Allen had surprised and taken it on the 9th of May, 1775, with only a handful of men; how Seth Warner had also taken Crown Point; and how Skenesborough⁴ and Fort George, being thus cut off from Canada, had also fallen into our hands without firing a shot.⁵

Thus, in the very beginning of the war for independence, and at one bold stroke, we regained possession of this gateway of the north; or in military phrase, we now held all the strategic points by which an advance from Lower Canada upon the United Colonies was possible.

³ Montcalm's Prophecy came true in St. Clair's case in 1777.

⁴ Skenesborough, now Whitehall, named for Philip Skene, a retired British officer, who settled on lands granted him after the French War. He had about fifty tenants, and a few negro slaves.

⁵ The Captured Artillery was taken to Cambridge on sleds in midwinter, by Colonel Knox. It enabled Washington to bring the siege of Boston to a favorable conclusion.

II. THE INVASION OF CANADA

Invasion of Canada.

The prompt seizure of the lake fortresses had a marked effect upon the wavering Canadians.⁶ Many joined us. More stood ready to do so whenever the signal for revolt should be given. Success begets confidence. The Americans were now led to believe that by throwing an army into Canada at once, the people would no longer hesitate to free themselves from the British yoke. The time seemed the riper for it, because it was known that the strong places of Canada were but weakly guarded. Could Quebec and Montreal be taken, British power in Canada would be at an end.

Our army retreats.

1776.

With such promise held out before it, Congress resolved to make the attempt. Forces were ordered to both places. One body, under General Montgomery,⁷ mustered at Ticonderoga. Ethan Allen went before it to rouse the Canadians, who were expected to receive the Americans with open arms. This army moved down the lake in October, taking St. John's and Chambly in its way, and Montreal a little later. The other, led by Colonel Arnold,⁸ ascended the Kennebec to its head, crossed over to the Chaudière, which was followed to the St. Lawrence, and came before Quebec at about the same time Montgomery entered Montreal. Montgomery hastened to Arnold with a handful of men. Together they assaulted Quebec on the morning of December 31. The attack failed, and Montgomery fell. The Americans lay before Quebec till spring, when the arrival of fresh troops, for the enemy, forced ours to retreat to Montreal. This, too, was abandoned. Our army then fell back toward Lake Champlain, setting fire to Chambly, and St. John's behind it. The enemy followed close, recapturing these places as our troops left them. Very little fighting took place, but the Americans were greatly disheartened by having constantly to retreat, and by the loss of many brave officers and men, who fell sick and died of the smallpox. July 1 the army finally reached Crown Point, ragged, sickly, and destitute of everything. Weakened by the loss of five thousand men and three commanders, it was no longer able to keep the field. Instead of conquering Canada, it had been driven out at the point of the bayonet. The great question now was, whether this army could hold its own against a victorious and advancing enemy.

General Gates⁹ took command of the army at this critical time. Convinced that he could never hope to hold both Crown Point and Ticonderoga, and knowing Ticonderoga to be much the stronger,

⁶ The Wavering Canadians. The Massachusetts revolutionary authority had been at work upon the wavering Canadians since 1774, with only partial success. (See note 2, preceding chapter.) The Americans thought the Canadians would seize the opportunity of freeing themselves, but events proved this opinion ill-grounded. A political connection between the Protestants of New England and the Catholics of Canada, except for mutual defence, could hardly be lasting, nor did the priests favor it. The military advantages were equally questionable, though great stress was laid upon them by Washington and Schuyler, even after the allegiance of the Canadians had been confirmed to the British side by the reverses our arms sustained. If we had conquered Canada, it would doubtless have been handed over to France again at the close of the war.

⁷ General Richard Montgomery, of Irish birth, had served under Amherst at the taking of Crown Point and Ticonderoga in 1759, settled in New York, been one of eight brigadiers created by Congress in June, 1775; General Schuyler's illness threw the chief command, for which he proved himself eminently fitted, on Montgomery. His having served on this line was much in his favor.

⁸ Colonel Benedict Arnold had once been a soldier at Ticonderoga. He went there again with a commission from Massachusetts, when the fortress was taken by Allen. He had also spent some time in Quebec. These facts had influence in procuring for him a command in the invading expedition.

⁹ General Horatio Gates, a retired British major, settled in Virginia, was made adjutant-general of the army, June, 1775.

in a military view, he decided to remove the army to that place at once. This was promptly done.¹⁰ The soldiers were set to work strengthening the old, or building new, works, under the direction of skilful engineers. Of these new works the strongest, as well as most important, because they commanded Ticonderoga itself, were those raised on the peninsula opposite the fortress on the Vermont side, which was christened Mount Independence on the day the army heard that the colonies had declared themselves free and independent.

Having thrown a bridge across the strait, between Ticonderoga and Mount Independence, the Americans waited for the enemy to come and attack them, for with such leaders as Gates and Stark they felt confident of gaining the victory.

The British were equally active on their side. After driving the Americans from Canada, they next determined to make themselves masters of Lake Champlain, recover the forts they had lost, and so gain a foothold for striking a blow at our northern colonies.

For this purpose they set about building a fleet at St. John's. Vessels were sent out from England, for the purpose, which were taken to pieces below the Chambly rapids, brought across the portage, and put together again at St. John's. By working diligently, the British got their fleet ready to sail early in October.

Well knowing the importance of keeping possession of the lake, the Americans turned Skenesborough into a dockyard, and were straining every nerve to get ready a fleet strong enough to cope with the British. As everything needed for equipping it had to be brought from the sea-coast, the British had much the advantage in this respect, yet all labored with so much zeal, that our fleet was first ready for action. Gates gave the command of it to Arnold, who had once been a sailor, and whose courage had been tried so signally under the walls of Quebec.

By the middle of August, Ticonderoga was in fighting trim. The enemy's delays had given time to make the defences so strong that an attack was rather hoped for than feared. Ignorant of the great preparations making at St. John's, the Americans also believed themselves strongest on the lake. Our fleet, therefore, went forward with confidence to the battle.

Naval battle, October 11.

On the 11th of October the British flotilla was seen coming up the lake. The rival forces met at Valcour Island, and the battle began. From noon till night the combatants hurled broadsides at each other without ceasing. The British then drew off to repair damages, meaning to renew the fight in the morning. This gave Arnold a chance to slip through them unperceived, for his vessels were so badly shattered that all hope of gaining the victory was given over. He was pursued and overtaken. Near Crown Point the battle began again, but the enemy's superior forces soon decided it in his favor. Rather than surrender, Arnold ran his disabled vessels on shore, set fire to them, and with his men escaped to the woods.

Having thus cleared the lake, the British commander, Guy Carleton,¹¹ sailed back to St. John's, leaving Ticonderoga unmolested behind him, to the great astonishment of our soldiers, who said Carleton deserved to be hanged for not following up his victory over Arnold.

¹⁰ The Removal of the Army from Crown Point to Ticonderoga was strongly opposed by Stark and others, and disapproved by Washington.

¹¹ Guy Carleton, British governor of Canada, though driven from Montreal by Montgomery, had successfully defended Quebec against him. He reconnoitred Ticonderoga, but seems to have thought it too strong to be attacked with his force.

BURGOYNE'S INVASION

I. THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

After the British had gone back to Canada, it was thought they would return as soon as the lake should be frozen hard enough to bear artillery. But when it was found that they had gone into winter quarters, and the danger was past, part of the garrison of Ticonderoga was hurried off to Washington, who was then fighting against great odds in the Jerseys. This winter was the dark hour of the Revolution, upon which the victory at Trenton¹² shed the first ray of light. So low had the American cause fallen at this time, that, but for this unlooked-for success, it is doubtful if another army could have been brought into the field.

The British were really planning to invade New York as soon as the lakes should be open again, in the spring. For this campaign great preparations were making, both in Canada and England. Quiet, therefore, reigned at Ticonderoga throughout the winter of 1776 and 1777.

General Burgoyne sailed for England in November, to lay before the king a plan for subduing the colonies in a single campaign. Burgoyne was a good soldier, popular with the army and government, brave to rashness, but vain and headstrong. He knew the Americans were not to be despised, for he had seen them fight at Bunker Hill, as well as in the campaign just closed, in which he himself had taken part; yet an easy confidence in his own abilities led Burgoyne into committing many grave errors, not the least of which was underestimating this very enemy.¹³

George III. wants the war pushed.

Any plan that promised to put down the Americans, was sure of gaining the king's ear. Justice was never tempered with mercy in this monarch's treatment of his rebellious subjects. His heart was hardened, his hand ever ready to strike them the fatal blow. Moreover, the Americans had just now declared themselves independent of Great Britain. They had crossed their Rubicon. To crush them with iron hand was now the king's one thought and purpose. No half measures would do for him. He told his ministers, in so many words, that every means of distressing the Americans would meet with his approval. Mercenaries, savages, refugees – all who could fire a shot, or burn a dwelling, were to be enrolled under the proud old banner of the isles. No more effectual means could have been devised to arouse the spirit of resistance to the highest pitch.

Burgoyne's ambition was kindled by the hope of making himself the hero of the war. He combined the qualities of general and statesman without being great as either. He wrote and talked well, was eloquent and persuasive, had friends at court, and knew how to make the most of his opportunity. On his part, the king wanted a general badly. He had been grievously disappointed in Sir William Howe, whose victories seemed never bringing the war any nearer to an end. Burgoyne brought forward his plan at the right moment, shrewdly touched the keynote of the king's discontent by declaring for aggressive war, smoothed every obstacle away with easy assurance, and so impressed the ministers with his capacity, that they believed they had found the very man the king wanted for the work in hand.

¹² Victory at Trenton. After being driven from the Jerseys, Washington suddenly turned on his pursuers, and by the two fine combats of Trenton and Princeton, compelled much superior forces everywhere to retreat before him, thus breaking up all the enemy's plans for the ensuing campaign, saving Philadelphia, and putting new life into the American cause.

¹³ Underestimating his Enemy. Burgoyne candidly admits as much in his letter to Lord G. Germaine. *State of the Expedition*, Appendix, xcii.

The plan proposed for making short work of the war was briefly this: The American colonies were to be divided in two parts, by seizing the line of the Hudson River; just as in later times, the Union armies aimed to split the Southern Confederacy in two by getting possession of the Mississippi. To effect this, two armies were to act together. With one, Burgoyne was to come down the lakes from Canada, and force his way to Albany, while the other was coming up the Hudson to join him. Once these armies were united, with full control of the Hudson in their hands, New England would be cut off from the other colonies by forts and fleets, and the way laid open to crush out rebellion in what was admitted to be its cradle and stronghold.

Ever since Sir William Howe had been driven from Boston, in the spring of 1776, the opinion prevailed among American generals that, sooner or later, New England would become the battleground.¹⁴ This view was sustained by the enemy's seizure of Newport, in December of the same year, so that the Americans were perplexed at finding themselves threatened from this quarter, until the enemy's plans were fully developed.

St. Leger's part.

There was yet another part to the plan concerted between Burgoyne and the British cabinet. It was seen that in proportion as Burgoyne moved down toward Albany, he would have the fertile Mohawk valley on his right. This valley was the great thoroughfare between the Hudson and Lake Ontario, Niagara, and Detroit. In it were many prosperous settlements, inhabited by a vigorous yeomanry, who were the mainstay of the patriot cause in this quarter. The passage to and fro was guarded by Fort Stanwix, which stood where Rome now is, and Fort Oswego, which was situated at the lake. Fort Stanwix was held by the Americans, and Oswego, by the British. Perceiving its value to the Americans not only as a granary, but as a recruiting station, and in view of the danger of leaving it on his flank, Burgoyne decided to march a force through this valley, clear it of enemies, and so effectively bring about a timely coöperation between the two branches of the expedition. Freed of fear for himself, he could materially aid in the work intrusted to his auxiliary. It followed that the Americans, with whom Burgoyne himself might be contending, would, of necessity, be greatly distressed by their inability to draw either men or supplies from the Mohawk Valley, no less than by the appearance of this force upon their own flank. The command of it was given to Colonel St. Leger, who was ordered to proceed up the St. Lawrence to Oswego, and from thence to Fort Stanwix and Albany.

It must be allowed that this plan was well conceived; yet its success depended so much upon all the parts working in harmony together, that to have set it in motion, without consultation or clear understanding between the generals who were to execute it, is inconceivable. At a distance of three thousand miles from the scene of war, the British cabinet undertook to direct complicated military operations, in which widely separated armies were to take part. General Burgoyne received his orders on the spot. General Howe did not receive his until the 16th of August; his army was then entering Chesapeake Bay. Burgoyne was being defeated at Bennington, at the time Howe was reading his despatch, and learning from it what he had not known before; namely, that he was expected to coöperate with the army of Burgoyne. These facts will so sufficiently illustrate the course that events were taking, as to foreshadow their conclusion to the feeblest understanding.

In order to make the war more terrible to the Americans, the British cabinet decided to use the Indians of Canada, and the Great Lakes, against them. Not even the plea of military necessity could reconcile some Englishmen to letting loose these barbarians upon the colonists. Though enemies,

¹⁴ New England the Battle-Ground. Sir William Howe did propose, at first, operating against Boston from Rhode Island, with ten thousand men, while an equal force should effect a junction with the army of Canada, by way of the Hudson. This purpose he subsequently deferred for an advance into Pennsylvania, but Burgoyne asserts that he was not informed of the change of plan when he sailed for Canada in April; and, though Sir William Howe afterward wrote him to the same effect (July 17th) a letter which was received early in August, Burgoyne, nevertheless, persisted in his intention of passing the Hudson, notwithstanding he knew, and says (August 20th), that no operation had yet been undertaken in his favor. *State of the Expedition*, 188, 189; Appendix, xlvii.

they were men. Lord Chatham, the noblest Englishman of them all, cried out against it in Parliament. "Who is the man," he indignantly asked, "who has dared to associate to our arms the tomahawk and scalping-knife of the savage?" All knew he meant the prime minister, and, behind him, the king himself. Had not King George just said that any means of distressing the Americans must meet with his approval?

II. BURGOYNE'S ARMY

Having thus outlined the plan of invasion, let us now look at the means allotted for its execution. There were in Canada ten thousand British soldiers; in New York, thirty thousand. Burgoyne was to take with him seven thousand, of whom three thousand were Germans in the pay of England.¹⁵ In discipline, spirit, and equipment, this was by far the best little army that had yet taken the field in America.

Good judges said that England might be searched through and through before such battalions could be raised. Forty cannon, splendidly served and equipped, formed its artillery train. All the generals, and most of the soldiers, were veterans. In short, nothing that experience could suggest, or unlimited means provide, was omitted to make this army invincible. It was one with which Burgoyne felt he could do anything, and dare everything.

Besides these regular troops, we have said the government had authorized and even attempted to justify to the world, the employment of Indians. Four hundred warriors joined the army when it marched, and as many more when it reached Lake Champlain. They were to scour the woods, hang like a storm cloud about the enemy's camps, and discover his every movement. For this service they had no equals. In the woods they could steal upon an enemy unawares, or lie in wait for his approach. In the field they were of little use. Much of the terror they inspired came from the suddenness of their onset, their hideous looks and unearthly war-cries, and their cruel practice of scalping the wounded.

To these were added about an equal number of Canadians, and American refugees, who were designed to act as scouts, skirmishers, or foragers, as the occasion might require. Being well skilled in bush-fighting, they were mostly attached to Frazer's corps, for the purpose of clearing the woods in his front, getting information, or driving in cattle. With his Indians and irregulars,¹⁶ Burgoyne's whole force could hardly have numbered less than ten thousand men.

Taken as a whole, this army was justly thought the equal of twice its own number of raw yeomanry, suddenly called to the field from the anvil, the workshop, or the plough. Its strongest arm was its artillery; its weakest, its Indian allies.

Burgoyne divided his force into three corps, commanded by Generals Frazer, Phillips, and Riedesel, – all excellent officers. Frazer's corps was mostly made up of picked companies, taken from other battalions and joined with the 24th regiment of the line. As its duty was of the hardest, so its material was of the best the army could afford. Next to Burgoyne, Frazer was, beyond all question, the officer most looked up to by the soldiers; in every sense of the word, he was a thorough soldier. His corps was, therefore, Burgoyne's right arm. Phillips commanded the artillery; and Riedesel, the Germans.

¹⁵ Soldiers were hired from the petty German princes for the American war. The Americans called them all Hessians, because some came from the principality of Hesse. George III. also tried to hire twenty thousand Russians of Empress Catharine, but she gave him to understand that her soldiers would be better employed. There was good material among the Germans, many of whom had served with credit under the Great Frederick; but the British showed them little favor as comrades, while the Americans looked upon them as paid assassins. Not one in twenty knew any English, so that misconception of orders was not unfrequent, though orders were usually transmitted from headquarters in French. A jealousy also grew up out of the belief that Burgoyne gave the Germans the hardest duty, and the British the most praise. At Hubbardton, and on the 19th of September, the Germans saved him from defeat, yet he ungenerously, we think, lays the disaster of October 7th chiefly at their door.

¹⁶ Indians and Irregulars. It is impossible to give the number of these accurately, as it was constantly fluctuating. Though Burgoyne started with only four hundred Indians, the number was increased by five hundred at Skenesborough, and he was later joined by some of the Mohawks from St. Leger's force. In like manner, his two hundred and fifty Canadians and Provincials had grown to more than six hundred of the latter before he left Skenesborough. Most of these recruits came from the Vermont settlements. They were put to work clearing the roads, scouting, getting forward the supplies, collecting cattle, etc. Their knowledge of the country was greatly serviceable to Burgoyne. In the returns given of Burgoyne's *regular troops*, only the rank and file are accounted for. Staff and line officers would swell the number considerably.

In the middle of June this army embarked on Lake Champlain. Of many warlike pageants the aged mountains had looked down upon, perhaps this was the most splendid and imposing. From the general to the private soldier, all were filled with high hopes of a successful campaign. In front, the Indians, painted and decked out for war, skimmed the lake in their light canoes. Next came the barges containing Frazer's corps, marshalled in one regular line, with gunboats flanking it on each side; next, the Royal George and Inflexible frigates, with other armed vessels forming the fleet. Behind this strong escort, the main body, with the generals, followed in close order; and, last of all, came the camp followers, of whom there were far too many for the nature of the service in hand.

In the distance the American watch-boats saw this gallant array bearing down upon them, in the confidence of its power. Hastening back to Ticonderoga, the word was passed along the lines to prepare for battle.

For the Mohawk Valley expedition, St. Leger, who led it, took with him about seven hundred regular troops, two hundred loyalists, and eight guns. At Oswego, seven hundred Indians of the Six Nations joined him. With these, St. Leger started in July for Fort Stanwix, which barred his way to the Hudson, just as Ticonderoga blocked Burgoyne's advance on the side of Lake Champlain.

III.

THE FALL OF TICONDEROGA

(July 5, 1777.)

A hundred years ago, the shores of Lake Champlain were for the most part a wilderness. What few settlements did exist were mostly grouped about the southeast corner of the lake, into which emigration had naturally flowed from the older New England States. And even these were but feeble plantations,¹⁷ separated from the Connecticut valley by lofty mountains, over which one rough road led the way.

Burgoyne's companions in arms have told us of the herds of red deer seen quietly browsing on the hillsides; of the flocks of pigeons, darkening the air in their flight; and of the store of pike, bass, and maskelonge with which the waters of the lake abounded. At one encampment the soldiers lived a whole day on the pigeons they had knocked off the trees with poles. So the passage of the lake must have seemed more like a pleasure trip to them than the prelude to a warlike campaign.

In his way up the lake, Burgoyne landed at the River Bouquet, on the west shore, where for some days the army rested.

To this rendezvous, large numbers of Indians had come to join the expedition. It was indispensable to observe the customs which had always prevailed among these peoples when going to war. So Burgoyne made them a speech, gave them a feast, and witnessed the wild antics of their war dance.

He forbade their scalping the wounded, or destroying women and children. They listened attentively to his words, and promised obedience; but these commands were so flatly opposed to all their philosophy of war, which required the extinction of every human feeling, that Burgoyne might as well have bidden the waters of the lake flow backward, as expect an Indian not to use his scalping-knife whenever an enemy lay at his mercy.

Still, it is to Burgoyne's credit that he tried to check the ferocity of these savages, and we would also charitably believe him at least half ashamed of having to employ them at all, when he saw them brandishing their tomahawks over the heads of imaginary victims; beheld them twisting their bodies about in hideous contortions, in mimicry of tortured prisoners; or heard them howling, like wild beasts, their cry of triumph when the scalp is torn from an enemy's head.

While thus drawing the sword with one hand, Burgoyne took his pen in the other. He drew up a paper which his Tory agents were directed to scatter among the people of Vermont, many of whom, he was assured, were at heart loyal to the king. These he invited to join his standard, or offered its protection to all who should remain neutral. All were warned against driving off their cattle, hiding their corn, or breaking down the bridges in his way. Should they dare disobey, he threatened to let loose his horde of savages upon them. Such a departure from the rules of honorable warfare would have justified the Americans in declaring no quarter to the invaders.

Well aware that he would not conquer the Americans with threats, Burgoyne now gave the order to his army to go forward. His view of what lay before him might be thus expressed: The enemy will, probably, fight at Ticonderoga. Of course I shall beat them. I will give them no time to rally. When they hear St. Leger is in the valley, their panic will be completed. We shall have a little promenade of eight days, to Albany.

¹⁷ Feeble Plantations. No permanent settlements were begun west of the Green Mountains till after the conquest of Canada. After that, the report of soldiers who had passed over the military road from Charlestown on the Connecticut River, to Crown Point, brought a swarm of settlers into what is now Bennington County. Settlement began in Rutland County in 1771.

On June 29 the army was near Ticonderoga. This day Burgoyne made a stirring address to his soldiers, in which he gave out the memorable watchword, "*This army must not retreat.*"

The next day, Frazer's corps landed in full view of the fortress. The rest of the army was posted on both sides of the lake, which is nowhere wider than a river as the fortress is approached. The fleet kept the middle of the channel. With drums beating and bugles sounding, the different battalions took up their allotted stations in the woods bordering upon the lake. When night fell, the watch-fires of the besiegers' camps made red the waters that flowed past them. But as yet no hostile gun boomed from the ramparts of Ticonderoga.

What was going on behind those grim walls which frowned defiance upon the invaders? General Gates was no longer there to direct. General St. Clair¹⁸ was now in command of perhaps four thousand effective men, with whom, nevertheless, he hoped to defend his miles of intrenchments against the assaults of twice his own numbers. His real weakness lay in not knowing what point Burgoyne would choose for attack, and he had been strangely delinquent in not calling for reënforcements until the enemy was almost at the gates of the fortress itself.

Burgoyne knew better than to heedlessly rush upon the lines that had proved Abercromby's destruction.¹⁹ He knew they were too strong to be carried without great bloodshed, and meant first to invest the fortress, and after cutting off access to it on all sides, then lay siege to it in regular form.

July 2, Mount Hope seized.

To this end, Frazer's corps was moved up to within cannon-shot of the works. His scouts soon found a way leading through old paths,²⁰ quite round the rear of the fortress, to the outlet of Lake George. This was promptly seized. After a little skirmishing, the enemy planted themselves firmly, on some high ground rising behind the old French lines, on this side; thus making themselves masters of the communication with Lake George, and enclosing the fortress on the rear or land side. While this was going on, on the west shore, Riedesel's Germans were moved up still nearer Mount Independence, on the Vermont shore, thus investing Ticonderoga on three sides.

A more enterprising general would never have permitted his enemy to seize his communications with Lake George, without making a struggle for their possession, but St. Clair appears to have thought his forces unequal to the attempt, and it was not made. The disaster which followed was but the natural result.

Mount Defiance occupied.

Just across the basin formed by the widening of the outlet of Lake George, a steep-sided mountain rises high above all the surrounding region. Its summit not only looks down upon the fortress, in every part, but over all its approaches by land or water. Not a man could march without being distinctly seen from this mountain. Yet, to-day, the eye measures its forest-shagged sides, in doubt if they can be scaled by human feet. Indeed, its ascent was so difficult that the Americans had neglected to occupy it at all. This is Mount Defiance, the most commanding object for miles around.

July 5.

Burgoyne's engineers could not help seeing that if artillery could be got to the top of this mountain, Ticonderoga was doomed. They reconnoitred it. Though difficult, they said it might be done. St. Clair's timidity having given them the way to it, the British instantly began moving men and guns round the rear of the fortress, and cutting a road up the mountain-side. The work was pushed forward day and night. It took most of the oxen belonging to the army to drag two twelve-pounders

¹⁸ General Arthur St. Clair, of Scotch birth, had been a lieutenant with Wolfe at Quebec; he resigned and settled in Pennsylvania; served with our army in Canada; made brigadier, August, 1776; major-general, February, 1777.

¹⁹ Abercromby lost two thousand men in assaulting these lines in 1758. Since then they had been greatly strengthened.

²⁰ Through Old Paths. The Indians had passed this way centuries before the fortress was thought of.

up the steep ascent, but when they were once planted on the summit, Ticonderoga lay at the mercy of the besiegers.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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