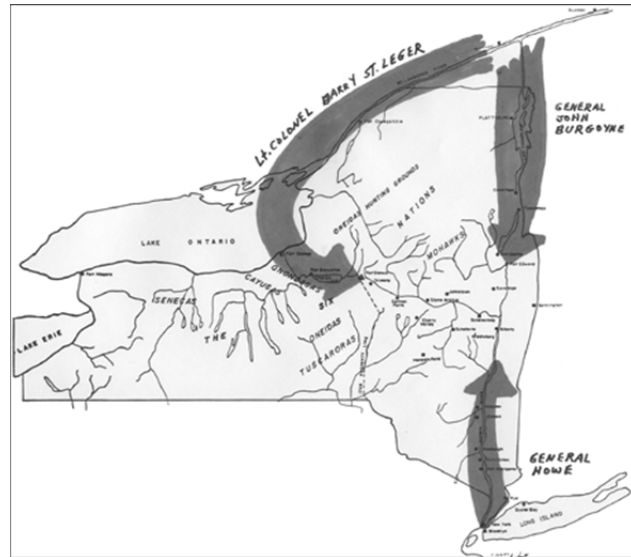


When the English colonies in North America took the drastic step of taking up arms against their mother country, the odds were stacked heavily against them. At the time, Great Britain was the most powerful nation in the world. It had a massive and experienced army and navy. How could a disorganized collection of colonial militias hope to defeat a proud and ancient empire? People at the time laughed at the idea.

And yet—that group of colonies, with little in the way of supplies and even, at times, food, did manage to defeat the world’s most powerful nation. The story of that astonishing victory is one of bravery, dedication, and determination. The Battle of Saratoga was the pivotal point at which the colonists’ fortunes began to tip from certain defeat to eventual triumph.

British planning for the Battle of Saratoga began with the idea that the New England colonies were the center of the rebellion. The British believed that by cutting New England off from the rest of the colonies, they could end the war. To do so, they devised an attack from three directions. British general John Burgoyne and a large army of about 10,000 troops would move in from Canada south along the Hudson River valley to Albany, New York. At the same time, a smaller group of soldiers under Colonel St. Leger would travel from the west to eventually join Burgoyne’s men in Albany. The final arm of the attack would come from the south into the lower Hudson River valley. These men, under British general William Howe, would attack forts in the valley. Their goal would be to distract George Washington and his men from the real attack on Albany.

As the British began marching on Albany, the Americans were busy, too. Troops under the command of General Horatio Gates moved to a point north of Albany. There, they chose a high point overlooking a bend in the Hudson River called Bemis Heights and began fortifying their position. The Americans placed 22 cannons on the heights and built strong walls behind them. They also



This map shows how the British planned to advance on Albany in 1777. Albany is located where the three arrows would meet.

constructed walls in the lowlands along the river. From their high position, the Americans could easily fire on the British if they marched along the river road to Albany.

Meanwhile, British General Burgoyne was forced to make some adjustments to his original plan. He had expected help from British troops advancing from the south under General William Howe and from the west led by Colonel St. Leger. General Howe, however, was worried about leaving New York City undefended while he traveled northward to meet up with General Burgoyne in Albany. Howe feared George Washington and his troops would enter the city behind him and retake it. So he took his troops to Philadelphia with the intention of drawing Washington away from New York. Howe left a small force under the command of General George Clinton to meet up with General Burgoyne. At the same time, Burgoyne learned that Colonel St. Leger would not be attacking from the west at all. It seemed Burgoyne would have to face the American forces with very little help. Little did he know that those forces were growing daily, as calls for reinforcements were answered by more and more Americans eager to fight for liberty.

As the British neared Bemis Heights on September 19, 1777, American forces waited on their high ground. General Burgoyne's plan was to surround the Americans from three directions. He divided his troops into three groups, which he ordered to circle around behind the Americans. At midday on September 19, one group of the British advance clashed with American troops in the farm fields of a man named John Freeman. The fighting went on all day. In the end, the British triumphed. Many men on both sides lost their lives that day in Freeman's field.

Expecting help to arrive from General Clinton within weeks, Burgoyne's forces dug in and began building their own defensive walls. Fate dealt the British a blow that October, however. Rather than continuing onto join Burgoyne's forces, General Clinton was ordered to return to New York City. In the meantime, the American forces on the heights had reached 13,000 men.



^!^, British General John Burgoyne, known as "Gentleman Johnny," surrenders to American forces at Saratoga on October 17, 1777.

Then came the battle that turned the fortunes of the war toward the Americans. On October 7, Burgoyne sent some 1,500 men on a mission to find food and scout out the American position. Winter was coming. With supplies running short, Burgoyne had been forced to put his men on half-rations. The British forces were detected by the Americans, however, and the resulting battle lasted all day. In the end, the British were forced to retreat. They did not get far. Travel was slow, because a cold rain had been falling for days, and the roads had turned into muddy traps that buried wagon wheels and slowed horses. Eight long miles brought the British to Saratoga, where American forces waited. Within two days, General Gates's troops had completely surrounded the British. Burgoyne had no choice but to admit defeat.

General Burgoyne surrendered to General Gates on October 17, 1777. As Burgoyne handed his sword to the conquering American general he said, "The fortunes of war have made me your prisoner." Gates graciously replied, "I shall always be ready to testify that it was through no fault of your excellency."

Word of this major American victory quickly spread through the colonies. With the news came a blossoming hope that the war could actually be won. With this hope came renewed enthusiasm for continuing the fight against the British.

Across the ocean, in France, other people also began to believe in this American Revolution taking place so many miles away. Because the rebels had forced the mighty British to surrender at Saratoga, the French decided to join the war on the side of the Americans. Soon afterward, Spain and the Netherlands did the same. Now the Americans had powerful allies on their side, and though the war was far from over, it was only a matter of time before freedom would reign.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** Where did the British troops plan to converge?
  - A.** New York City
  - B.** Albany, New York
  - C.** Hudson Bay, Canada
  - D.** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
  
- 2.** After the battle in Freeman's Field, Burgoyne expected help from General Clinton. What happened instead?
  - A.** Clinton was attacked by American troops.
  - B.** Clinton was ordered to retreat to New York City.
  - C.** Colonial St. Leger and his forces arrived in time to help General Burgoyne.
  - D.** Clinton traveled west to help Colonel St. Leger.
  
- 3.** Why is the Battle of Saratoga considered a turning point in the Revolutionary War?
  - A.** The Americans gained international allies in the war after the British surrendered.
  - B.** The battle showed the strength of the British troops over the American troops.
  - C.** New fighting tactics and weapons were used that changed military tactics forever.
  - D.** The battle ended the Revolutionary War because the Americans surrendered.
  
- 4.** Describe one thing that could have gone differently at the Battle of Saratoga that would have resulted in a British victory. In your answer, use specific examples from the reading passage.