

## ***British Plans for 1777: Fight the War “From the Side of Canada”***

### *Proposals Galore*

On November 30, 1776, while General George Washington's demoralized men retreated across New Jersey, General William Howe, recently knighted for his Long Island victory, wrote two letters to Lord George Germain, the Secretary of State for America. The first reported on the recent Westchester campaign and Fort Lee's capture. The second advised Germain that he intended to quarter a large body of troops in "East Jersey," and that he expected the Americans to try to cover their capital city, Philadelphia, by establishing a line on either the Raritan or Delaware River.

More important for future events, Howe also proposed a plan for the next year's campaign. Sir William noted that he had received word that Sir Guy Carleton had abandoned his southward drive down the Champlain-Hudson line. Howe fully expected, however, that Carleton would renew his campaign in the spring, but that he would not reach his objective of Albany until September 1777. Sir Guy's 1776 performance made that a reasonable assumption.

"In that persuasion," Howe proposed a plan that he believed might "finish the War in one year by an extensive and vigorous Exertion of His Majesty's arms." He intended to continue the current strategy against New England, "the cradle of rebellion." Howe proposed two simultaneous offensives: one from Rhode Island to take Boston, and a second from New York City up the Hudson to rendezvous with the renewed advance from Canada. That was not, however, the sum of Howe's strategy for 1777. Howe wanted a third force to operate in New Jersey to check Washington by exploiting American concern for Philadelphia's security, which he "proposed to attack in the Autumn, as well as Virginia, provided the Success of the other operations will admit of an adequate force to be sent against that province." Subduing South Carolina and Georgia could wait for the winter of 1777-78.

Howe's plan to end the war in one campaign lasting a little more than one year was an ambitious one. But he was not the only British general proposing plans designed to bring the expensive American war to an end. The various plans of different generals made different assumptions, aimed at different strategic goals, required different resources—and even envisioned different commanders. Howe himself would supplant his own plan at least twice, as

successive British and American successes altered the equation.<sup>1</sup> Out of these various intentions and realities would come the campaign of 1777, one that would result in, and then be so affected by, the battle of Saratoga.

### *Howe Initiates the Debate*

Howe's initial proposal of November 30 required 35,000 men and ten additional ships of the line to assure success against the 50,000 men the Continental Congress had resolved to raise.<sup>2</sup> To provide Howe with 35,000 men would require a reinforcement of 15,000 rank and file, which he hoped might be "had from Russia, or from Hanover, and other German states, particularly some Hanoverian Chasseurs, who I am well informed are exceedingly good troops."

Sir William's second letter, especially its latter part, reflected an important strategic assumption. He believed that only the hope of French aid kept the rebellion alive, and that if the threat of foreign support were neutralized and the force he proposed was "sent out, it would strike such Terror through the Country, that no Resistance would be made to the Progress of His Majestys Arms in the Provinces of New England, New York, the Jerseys & Pennsylvania, after the junction of the Northern and Southern Armies." Howe's objective continued to be recovery of territory rather than the destruction of the rebel army. Like Henry Clinton and unlike Germain and Lord Cornwallis, Howe believed that victory required expansion of the area of effective imperial control. He thus aspired to take only so much territory as he expected to be able to occupy. The royal army's continued presence in that territory would enable the loyal majority to declare itself, enroll in provincial corps, and assume an expanding role in restoring imperial authority.<sup>3</sup> Sir William intended to achieve victory by moving with impressive strength through centers of rebellion, relying upon overawing the disaffected, animating the loyal, and demonstrating to the wavering the futility of resistance, rather than upon hard and costly fighting against an elusive and resilient adversary.

### *The Cabinet Begins its Considerations*

Sir William's letters reached Germain's office on December 30, 1776, and the Cabinet began discussing them on January 10, 1777. Like most Britons, the ministers anticipated an early victory in America. Many civilian observers were less sanguine than were army and naval officers. The general's first letter, by reporting the autumn's successes, confirmed the official optimism and so set the tone for responding to the second letter. Because Howe's strategy for 1777 did not dispel the prevailing euphoria and conformed to the objectives of the 1776 campaign, it was acceptable.

But Howe's projection of manpower requirements made the colonial secretary and his colleagues uneasy. Germain did not trust his fellow countrymen's determination to continue to support the war if it became too costly in men and money. In fact, he had been resisting committing more troops to North America since mid-autumn, when he told Prime Minister Lord North that he would not want more men, and that it was "sufficiently difficult to keep up and recruit what we had, that he hop'd Expences would rather diminish."<sup>4</sup>

Ministerial unease found faithful reflection in Lord Germain's January 14 letter to the

general. “When I first read your Requisition of a Reinforcement of 15,000 Rank & File,” began Germain,

I must own to you that I was really alarmed, because I could not see the least chance of being able to supply you with the Hanoverians, or even with Russians in time. As soon, however, as I found from your Returns that your Army is reinforced with 4,000 more Germans (which I trust will be procured for you) 800 additional Hessian Chasseurs, & about 1,800 Recruits from the British, & about 1,200 for the Hessian troops under your Command, will consist of very near 35,000 Rank & File. I was satisfied that you would have an Army equal to your Wishes, especially when I considered that the Enemy must be greatly weakened and depressed by late Successes, and that there was room to hope that you would not find it difficult to embody what number of Provincials you might think proper for Particular Parts of the Service.<sup>5</sup>

But since the ministry in its unease most wanted to be reassured, the correspondence was marked by wishful thinking, ambiguity, and flawed interpretation. Because the most recent returns reported that Howe had some 27,000 “effective men,” Germain and his colleagues persuaded themselves that a 15,000-man reinforcement would raise Sir William’s strength to some 42,000, substantially more than the 35,000 figure the general said he needed. Interpreting the returns uncritically and accepting the 35,000 figure as representing Howe’s assessment of his immediate requirements led the ministers into successive misapprehensions. Failing to analyze the returns provided them with what seemed to be a good prima facie basis for claiming that 7,000 men would bring Howe’s force to “very nearly 37,000 Rank & File.” But while Howe’s return used the term “effective men,” it was not a realistic representation of his strength because it included men who were on detached service, sick, and prisoners of war. Howe really reckoned from an estimated 20,000 men present and fit for duty, not 27,000.<sup>6</sup>

Timely assembly and then transport of the reinforcements as well as their numbers were also critical. Sir William’s goal of taking only as much territory as he could effectively occupy presupposed manning garrisons, so the need for a 15,000-man reinforcement was a long-term one that included provisions for occupation troops. In brief, Howe’s strategy for defeating the revolutionaries required a continuing expansion of military re-conquest until it encompassed all of the colonies. That meant that the closer the British came to success, the more men would be required to both occupy areas already won and simultaneously carry on the campaign against those remaining in rebellion.<sup>7</sup> Thus, his proposal that Russian or additional German soldiers be engaged made sense: if the reinforcements were to support long-term as well as immediate operations, there was sufficient time to complete the necessary negotiations and transport the auxiliaries to North America.

Whitehall deferred comment on Howe’s operational plans until after the Cabinet learned more about the existing situation in the war theater at the end of 1776. Germain advised the general that judgment was suspended until “His Majesty...shall have an Opportunity of taking into consultation the whole State of this Momentous Affair.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Howe’s Second Thoughts*

As events tend to do in time of war, the situation changed. On December 20, ten days before

his November 30 correspondence reached London, Sir William sent Lord Germain a radically new plan for the 1777 campaign — one that reflected a dramatically different situation in the Middle States. Events in New Jersey had moved with stunning speed. Instead of being on the Raritan as the end of the year neared, his army had chased Washington across the state to the Delaware-Pennsylvania line. The American seat of government in Philadelphia was temptingly vulnerable, and the rebellion seemed to be tottering toward dissolution. Jerseymen and Pennsylvanians were daily forswearing their disloyal ways and seeking pardons to restore them to their former allegiance. Those who persisted in the perverse course of resistance were rapidly losing the capacity to give force to their seditious designs.

While British opinion was unanimous in viewing New England as the seed bed of rebellion, informed men on both sides of the Atlantic knew that Pennsylvania was critically important to America's future. It was politically mature, with a diverse, comparatively well-informed, prosperous citizenry that included a larger proportion of men of liberal sentiments than any other region. Its capital, Philadelphia, was the major American port, a lively cultural and economic center, the third largest city in the empire, and — since the First Continental Congress' convening there during the autumn of 1774 — the Revolution's political seat.

But Pennsylvania's people, like their fellows in the other Middle Colonies, were less militantly hostile to imperial policies than New Englanders and Virginians. Not only was their more diversified economy less vulnerable to Parliament's measures, many Pennsylvanians sensed that they profited from the imperial connection. Half a century later, William Livingston recalled what a wrenching experience it was for the people of the Middle Colonies to break their ties with Britain. "They had themselves suffered little, if at all, under imperial rule," he wrote. "Under it they had prospered and multiplied."<sup>9</sup> These colonists living in the very middle of the pluralistic middle of British North America already enjoyed to an important degree the kind of society that other Americans aspired to, and it had become a reality without needing a revolution. An effective majority for resistance to parliamentary "Intolerable Acts" developed only with difficulty and over articulate and reasoned opposition.<sup>10</sup>

Because Sir William believed that Washington's reverses in the other middle states of New York and New Jersey strengthened opposition to rebellion, it was logical to conclude that threatening Philadelphia would force Washington to stand and fight. Victory, therefore, was within his grasp. "[T]he opinions of the people being much changed in Pennsylvania," Howe summarized, "and their minds in general, from the progress of the army, disposed to peace, in which sentiment they would be confirmed by our getting possession of Philadelphia, I am from this consideration fully persuaded the Principal Army should act offensively on that side where the enemy's strength will certainly be collected."<sup>11</sup>

Changing the order of priorities required postponing the New England offensive until after reinforcements arrived from Europe, so "that there might be a Corps to act defensively on the lower part of Hudson's River to cover Jersey and facilitate in some degree the approach of the Canada Army."<sup>12</sup> In this proposal Sir William lowered his manpower requirements from 35,000 to 19,000 men. Of these, 2,000 would remain in Rhode Island, while 4,000 would defend Manhattan. He would employ 10,000 against Philadelphia, and 3,000 to defend New Jersey and operate on the lower Hudson to "facilitate the northern army's advance."<sup>13</sup> Three thousand men could really do little to support action on the northern frontier, but Howe did not expect that such support would be needed before September, by which time the flow of events and the arrival of

requested reinforcements would enhance British capabilities.

Howe's December 20 letter departed from the assumptions that had informed British strategy since 1775. Instead of concentrating the combined power of the Canadian and "Principal" armies against New England, he proposed to leave the former force to make its way southward largely alone toward an ill-defined objective, while he overran the Middle States, captured the rebel capital, and ended organized resistance to imperial authority.<sup>14</sup>

### *Washington Provokes Howe's Third Plan*

Before Lord Germain and his colleagues had received *either* of Howe's proposed plans, the military situation in New Jersey took yet another dramatic turn that blasted the general's fragile optimism and reordered his strategic priorities. With audacity inspired by desperation, General Washington attacked and captured most of Howe's German troops at Trenton on the morning of December 26, defeated Lord Cornwallis' rearguard under Lieutenant Colonel Charles Mawhood at Princeton on January 3, and executed a skillful withdrawal into the hills around Morristown. Washington's army, crowded to the precipice of dissolution shortly before, not only survived but regained West Jersey.<sup>15</sup>

When Lord Germain wrote his January 14, 1777, letter, he was still ignorant of the events that made Trenton and Princeton immortal in the annals of military history. He could look back on 1776 with justifiable satisfaction. His administration had raised, equipped, and transported large armies to North America. Canada remained British, Manhattan and Long Island were reclaimed, and — so far as the secretary knew — New Jersey and Rhode Island were secure. The rebellion seemed almost crushed. In fact, at the time Germain made his assessment, Britain was closer to winning the war than she would ever be again.

While the colonial secretary did have reason to congratulate himself, the failure to end the American war during 1776 exposed Britain to perils that only a victory in 1777 could dispel. The concentration of so much of her military capability in America was a bold, calculated gamble taken in the face of French hostility. Against that danger weighed the advantages of ending the colonial rebellion before European neighbors could intervene to Britain's disadvantage. That the rebellion was almost crushed was not good enough; its actual defeat had to be accomplished, and soon, because French conduct during 1776 made it clear that European peace depended upon an early British victory. Throughout the summer France inched toward war, watching and hoping for an opportunity to recoup interests and prestige lost during the Seven Years' War. Everything she sought depended upon events in America. Would Britain and her rebellious children reconcile? Could the Americans continue to fight and make independence a reality? When British success on Manhattan seemed to answer the second question in the negative, the French drew back from internationalizing the conflict. But England still needed an early and unequivocal victory to make the withdrawal of her perennial nemesis permanent.

Washington's New Jersey victories, then, were indeed a turning point and perhaps the most important one in the war. Coming after an unbroken series of defeats, they revived the languishing revolution and discouraged loyalists who had recently anticipated an early vindication of their decision to stand by the Crown. The battle field successes gave force to Thomas Paine's pamphlet *The Crisis*, published on December 23. The value of Continental currency rebounded. Military morale, which had verged on collapse, recovered immediately, and recruiting parties, which had failed to obtain enlistments only days before, enrolled whole

companies in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Virginia. Interested European observers, especially the French, began to believe that the American rebellion, which after British successes on Long Island and Manhattan had seemed a hopeless cause, might again be worth encouraging and exploiting.<sup>16</sup>

The effect of Washington's phoenix-like recovery on General Howe was immediate and profound. It doomed the peace efforts in which he and his brother, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, had invested their energies and prestige. And their pacification-directed strategies stood exposed in all their inadequacy. The general who had just days earlier on December 20 confidently predicated his plans for the next campaign on nurturing American desires for peace, eleven days later predicted that achieving victory would require another major campaign.<sup>17</sup> By mid-January deepening pessimism persuaded him that he did not "now see a prospect for terminating the war but by a general action and I am aware of the difficulties in our way to obtain it, as the Enemy moves with so much more celerity than we can...."

Because that "general action" must engage Washington's revitalized army, Howe required reinforcements. Twenty thousand more men would not be too many, but he could make do with 15, 000. The larger figure would make possible an advance against Pennsylvania by land and water. The main force would move through New Jersey, while the balance would ascend the Delaware River. Such numbers would enable Sir William, at the same time, to post a large enough force in Rhode Island to raid New England.<sup>18</sup>

### *Burgoyne Weighs In*

A third party to British planning for 1777 appeared when Lieutenant General John Burgoyne returned to London during the night of December 9. Like other officers who were members of Parliament, Burgoyne returned to attend the winter sessions, and in his case to also attend to family matters that had been affected by his father-in-law's death in February and his wife's in June of 1776.<sup>19</sup> Sir Guy Carleton had given Burgoyne a memorandum to deliver to Lord Germain. The document contained general proposals and manpower and materiel requisitions for the renewed northern offensive, and he recommended Burgoyne to Germain as a source of firsthand information.

Carleton's memorandum requested a 4,000-man reinforcement, a part of which would be employed to increase regimental strengths by 100 men each. "With a reinforcement to the above amount, and well composed, a large Corps may be spared to pass Lake Ontario, and to operate upon the Mohawk River. Another Corps might possibly be employed to penetrate to Connecticut River." Carleton's main force would ascend Lake Champlain southward, take Ticonderoga, effect a junction with the Mohawk diversionary column, and establish a base for attacking Massachusetts and Connecticut.<sup>20</sup> Although he did not identify Albany as his destination, including for a rendezvous with a force of British soldiers moving northward from New York City, Sir Guy assumed that such a junction would occur if he were to cooperate with Howe. Carleton, however, intended to carry out the northern invasion without assistance from the lower Hudson.

Carleton's memorandum, however, was little more than a first draft, a few brief sentences on a single sheet of paper, and he had asked Burgoyne to enlarge upon that outline. This the latter did during his homeward voyage. The result was entitled "Memorandum & Observations

relative to the Service in Canada, submitted to Lord George Germain,” a sixteen-page detailed synoptic report organized under the headings of “General Carleton Requisitions” and “Observations.” Because preparing the report helped Burgoyne organize his thoughts in a manner that influenced the drafting of his own plan for 1777, a detailed review is useful.

Burgoyne’s first observation responded to Carleton’s requisition for a battalion of seamen, numbering at least 300 men, to man the transports and frigates needed to support the southward advance. Anticipating some possible arguments against the idea of attaching 300 seamen, Burgoyne endorsed his commander’s requisition in concept, but argued instead for the assignment of watermen recruited from the rivers of England, supervised by naval officers, to man the “Battalion Boats” that carried stores and supplies, as “particularly in those of the foreign Troops, who cannot learn to row well, [they] would be of great use in point of regularity and Expedition.” Burgoyne considered and rejected alternatives. He noted that the practice of detailing rowers from the regiments should not apply in a situation in which men had to be detailed as boat and supply guards, and that relying upon Canadians for the service was not a realistic solution because “their great practice upon the water being in canoes which paddle; they are very awkward with an Oar, they are besides under no discipline, continually desert, or pretend sickness.” If instead the commander had the proposed corps of watermen available, he would be able to dispense with a greater part of his naval complement once the army passed the lakes and reached the Hudson’s upper reaches.<sup>21</sup>

Carleton’s second requisition was entitled “Augmentation of Artillery Consisting of two Companies & the whole number [of] Companies in the Service...completed to an hundred Men each.” Burgoyne’s endorsement noted that “The Artillery, after the light [infantry] troops, is the [most] important Arm in the American war. The Assistance obliged to begin from the Line to that Service [during] the last Campaign was a great weakening to the Regiments at the same time that it is a very inadequate Substitute for trained Artillery men.”<sup>22</sup>

Next, Sir Guy reported he would need, early in the spring, provisions for six months “at the full Ration for one third more than the Effectives of Soldiers & Seamen.” In a lengthy observation, Burgoyne supported the one-third augmentation as necessary to provide supplies for the Canadians, Indians, artificers, and provincials, and to make up for inevitable losses due (substantial losses were inevitable in a wilderness campaign) to accidents, lost items, and waste.<sup>23</sup> The expedition could not succeed without the services of Canadians, Indians, and loyalist provincials, and they had to be assured of adequate rations and stores. Men making decisions at Whitehall without the benefit of colonial experience needed educating about conducting a campaign “from the side of Canada,” and Burgoyne was a willing did act. He was “persuaded that the demand of Genl. Carleton in the Article will be found to be put as low as can be made consistent with the probable Emergencies of the Service.”

Burgoyne then wrote his longest and most relevant comments concerning Carleton’s need to requisition 4,000 men to reinforce his current army. The army in Canada, observed Burgoyne, numbered only 10,174 men, “in which number is comprised a good deal of useless stuff, viz. men recruited in Germany for the British Regiments, and sent over last year. Not one tenth of which will be fit for the ranks, from Infirmities, malingering Habits, Dejection, or Profligacy of Disposition. Many of the Irish Recruits and Drafts,” continued Burgoyne, “are equally bad. In the Germans are also many unserviceable Men.”

In addition, the Royal Highland Emigrants included a number recruited from among American prisoners of war during the summer of 1776. Their conduct before being captured had

not impressed Burgoyne, and he expected many of them to desert at the first opportunity.<sup>24</sup> The men of an other loyalist unit, the Royal Regiment of New York, were “not yet any thing like Soldiers, having wanted Commissioned Officers & Serjeants to train them.”

Burgoyne summed up his assessment of British military strength in Canada as follows:

Upon the whole therefore, when a moderate Deduction of Sick is added to the useless, the whole of the Canada Army as it now stands, allowing for the Recruits arrived in the Autumn, and I believe not all comprised in the returns, will not exceed eight thousand men of such troops as I believe your Lordship would wish to risk the fate of an offensive Campaign upon, or the Reputation of any General you may think proper to recommend to his majesty.

He recommended leaving 3,000 men in Canada, although “Genl. Carleton may possibly think a thousand more necessary.” Citing Benedict Arnold’s march to Quebec, the American attack on Three Rivers [Trois Rivieres], and “the project...conceived by Washington for penetrating into Boston with a corps of five thousand men, and thereby changing Ground with Genl. Howe, at the time he meant to attack the Works at Dorchester,” Burgoyne noted that the Americans were “capable and inclined” to undertake rash offensives. Even if such a riposte did not occur, there was a need to guard against “small incursions to secure your convoys of Supply, which must all pass first up the St. Lawrence to Sorell, and afterwards by that River and Lake Champlain.”

Like others who served in Canada, Burgoyne suspected that some of its people were inclined towards subversion and that many were reluctant to honor the “Duty of Corvies, which will be indispensably necessary for the Supply of the Army, even among the well affected.” An adequate force was necessary to support the British government and give effect to its writ, and he proposed the disposition of the regular troops left in Canada reflected in the table below:

Quebec Garrison	500
Posts on the Chandiere and disaffected Parishes [to] Point Levis	300
Montreal Garrison and posts between that town and Oswegatchie	300
Trois Rivieres	100
Chain from Sorrell to Chamblees	100
St. John’s	200
Isle Aux Nois, LaPrairie, Vergere, towns on the south shore of St. Lawrence and communication posts to St. John’s	200
Escorts for Convoys over Lake Champlain	400
Allowances for Sickness, Desertions & other Casualties	600

Such piecemeal use of troops for garrisoning purposes was in keeping with Howe’s long-term strategic approach of expanding the territory held, but it would vitiate the army’s strength as a striking force, and weaken its ability to defend itself against the enemy’s striking force.

Because the British could not afford to have these additional security requirements back in Canada satisfied by regulars alone, it would be necessary to have Canadians available to



provide support services. Arrayed behind the regulars, approximately 500 men would carry out patrols and man posts to intercept enemy communications, prevent desertions, procure intelligence, and generally keep the country quiet. Another 2,000 would work on fortifications, and a similar number, with carts and horses, would transport artillery, provisions, other stores, and baggage to the water and across the portages. (Burgoyne perceptively noted that this need for horses and carts would coincide with the Canadians' corn-planting season.) A final 1,500 to 2,000 men, Burgoyne hoped, would be attached to the army pursuing the Americans.

From this bounty of manpower the general believed Canada could afford to contribute only 2,000 men, and more than it would provide if "any Diminution is made in the number of Regulars left among them." And even this number was bound to be affected by any plans, overt or otherwise, by France to recover Canada. In that case, "All the Reasons for having a respectable force there, will derive double Weight, for safe as the Country may be against a second Seduction by the Rebels it is obvious to the slightest Observation that many parts of it are liable to be seduced by the French."

On his own initiative, Burgoyne added a concluding requisition that proposed construction of twenty-four gunboats capable of carrying light twenty-four-pounders, heavy twelve-pounders, and eight-inch howitzers. He supported that suggestion with a letter from Major General William Phillips to Carleton, and argued that prefabricated boats would be superior to any that could be built of green lumber during the campaign.

Burgoyne concluded his "Observations" by arguing that in order to carry out "a vigorous opening of the Campaign," nearly all the requested commodities (personnel and supplies) needed to be assembled altogether and to arrive in Canada "early in the year," and then should leave Montreal by June, after which the St. Lawrence became problematical for transportation purposes.<sup>25</sup>

### *Burgoyne, Carleton, and Germain*

Burgoyne returned to England under some apprehension about his reception. How men perceived his relations with Carleton was critical. Would that general's detractors associate the subordinate with the commander's flawed 1776 campaign? Just what, exactly, was Sir Guy's standing at Westminster?

It certainly was not obvious that Carleton was out of favor. A man who had so recently as the past July received the red ribbon of a Knight of the Order of the Bath, along with a special warrant permitting him to assume the title and wear its insignia before being formally invested, would not be naked to his enemies. His father-in-law, Howard, Earl of Effingham, boasted an old and noble lineage with kinship to the Duke of Norfolk and descent from a cousin of Elizabeth I who had commanded the fleet that defeated the Spanish Armada. Those sorts of ties still counted. More important, Sir Guy had a supporter in the King, who valued him enough to award him the Order of the Bath over Lord Germain's objections.<sup>26</sup>

Against those favorable odds stood Germain's and Carleton's mutual hostility, of which Burgoyne was keenly aware. He would need to take careful account in his dealings with the secretary of state. Gossip and newspaper stories represented Burgoyne as being in Sir Guy's bad graces, which could have helped lessen the effect of Burgoyne's famously haughty manner.

"Gentleman Johnny" sought to smooth the path to his reception with a letter written to Germain from Portsmouth explaining that he was coming to Whitehall at Carleton's behest to

expound on the plans for the next year's campaign, assuring his Lordship of his zeal for the King's service.<sup>27</sup> Burgoyne presented himself to Germain's cabinet at noon on December 10, bringing with him Carleton's proposals and his own "Observations."

He may also have delivered Sir Guy's most recent dispatch, dated October 22.<sup>28</sup> In it, Carleton reported that cold weather precluded reactivating the post at Crown Point and that he had withdrawn his army into Canada. He expected the Americans to construct an other lake flotilla during the winter.

Carleton's letter closed by commending his emissary Burgoyne:

I cannot omit on this Occasion mentioning to your Lordship the great satisfaction I have received from the Services of General Burgoyne, not only for the Zeal and readiness with which he concurred with me in promoting his majesty's Service, but from the attention and assiduity which he showed in his countenancing & preventing all faction and party in this Army. Dispositions to which your Lordship must be sensible, when unfortunately they are encouraged by Persons eminent by their Stations, are capable of defeating the most zealous Endeavours, and of rendering abortive the best concerted plans of Operation...<sup>29</sup>

By seemingly making him a party to his own personal feud with the secretary, Carleton compromised Burgoyne. Sir Guy represented him as having known about Germain's subversion of the 1776 campaign by introducing malcontents into the Canadian army and having acted to thwart its designs. For his part, Burgoyne always professed loyalty to Sir Guy, though he likely believed that Carleton's effort to insert him into the dispute justified tempering that loyalty.

Whether Burgoyne actually went beyond criticism to intrigue has been the subject of much historical debate. Some contemporaries and many students contend that he came to realize that Carleton's abandonment of Crown Point and withdrawal to Canada, once known, had so damaged Carleton's reputation at court that Burgoyne decided to conspire to supplant him as commander. That allegation only surfaced after the defeat at Saratoga, however, and Burgoyne would vigorously defend himself against this accusation during the subsequent Parliamentary debate in November 1777.<sup>30</sup>

As 1776 gave way to 1777, however, Burgoyne's star was in the ascendent. He could not have been in London long before learning Germain intended him, and not Carleton, to lead the new year's advance south from Canada. The secretary was determined that Sir Guy would not command the next campaign. Burgoyne did not have to intrigue to displace Carleton, and he knew it.

Lord Germain sent Carleton's dispatch and the memorandum to the King and asked to meet with him to report on his interview with Burgoyne.<sup>31</sup> Burgoyne attended the royal levee at St. James Palace during the morning of December 11 and met with the King that afternoon. Two days later, George III wrote to Lord North informing him that he would not dismiss Carleton because that would be unjust in the face of his valuable services. He observed, however, that "Perhaps Carleton may be too cold or not so active as might be wished, which may make it advisable to have the part of the Canadian army which must attempt to join Gen. Howe led by a more enterprising commander...Burgoyne may command the Corps to be sent from Albany...."<sup>32</sup> Lord Germain's desires notwithstanding, the King at this point seems not to have yet made a firm decision to invest Burgoyne with the invasion's command.

Another general was on his way home from America. The disgruntled Henry Clinton returned to England at the end of February with two objectives in mind.

The first was to obtain redress for the affront he believed Lord Germain had offered him in a statement published in the *Gazette* soon after receiving Clinton's and Admiral Sir Peter Parker's reports of the Carolina expedition. That statement implied that Clinton had landed on Long Island in Charleston harbor, found the channel separating it from Sullivan's Island too deep to ford, and passively waited for the navy to reduce the Americans' "palmetto fort."<sup>33</sup> Clinton believed that he had a potent double-barreled weapon of self-defense: he could threaten to both resign his commission, and to publish the complete text of his Sullivan's Island dispatch. A comparison of the latter with the slanted extract Germain had released would expose how the secretary had twisted facts and maligned the general and his troops.

The second objective was to obtain an assignment that would release him from serving under Sir William Howe. Clinton's personality made him an unsatisfactory subordinate. As Professor Wilcox observed: "He was vociferous in suggestions and criticism, and hurt when they were brushed aside; he was quick to take the initiative, as at Bunker Hill and White Plains, and resented being called to heel."<sup>34</sup> By the end of 1776 Clinton knew that he disliked Howe, with whose strategy and tactics he had disagreed during operations around New York. As noted, Howe strategically focused upon capturing territory — in that instance Manhattan and its environs — with a minimum risk in men, a strategy that precluded an early decision at arms. Clinton, by contrast, favored aggressive tactics that included concentration and attack, the primary objective being the destruction of the enemy's army — which was what he had proposed at Manhattan. Exploiting British naval superiority in a joint amphibious operation that would envelop Washington's army went hand-in-hand with his land-based operation. The only time that Howe's headquarters accepted his suggestions, and then only reluctantly, was during the battle of Long Island, when he led the main assault around the Americans' left wing, an enveloping thrust that carried him behind the enemy center and produced perhaps the most brilliant tactical success Britain obtained during the war. Clinton wanted no more duty under the commander who had given him the most onerous assignments, spurned his advice, never thanked him for service well-performed, and squandered the fruits of that service.

He had a third, personal, reason for returning home. The general was a devoted father, and he missed his motherless children who were in the care of his sisters-in-law, Elizabeth and Martha Carter. His homesickness for Weybridge and its household was palpable in his private correspondence.

Clinton sent Captain Duncan Drummond ahead to test the political climate at Whitehall. The captain's reception was encouraging. Germain and the King seemed sympathetic, and George III was "thoroughly well satisfied with every part of his conduct: I have as high an opinion of him as any officer in my service."<sup>35</sup> Gratifying as the King's flattery may have been, Henry Clinton wanted solid proof of the government's good graces.

Clinton pursued his goals with uncharacteristic circumspection. His careful offensive was the product of his realization, soon after he arrived in London, that Carleton and Howe, rather than he, were out of favor in some quarters. Standing just below them, if their futures were at risk he might profit from their discomfiture. Under such circumstances, discretion might serve his desired ends more effectively than pique.

The *Experiment*, Captain James Wallace commanding, reached London with news of the German debacle at Trenton on February 12. Eleven days later Howe's official report on Trenton, together with news of Lord Cornwallis' defeat at Princeton and the British withdrawal from West Jersey, reached Whitehall.<sup>36</sup> The ministry blamed Howe for the state of affairs that resulted following Washington's brilliant recovery at Trenton and Princeton, but it was careful to keep that censure from becoming common knowledge and grist for opposition mills. Clinton had it in his power to embarrass the government by raising questions about his commander's management of the recent campaign. This he refrained from doing. Instead, he was prudent in public statements and in a letter to *The Public Advertiser* that minimized the importance of Washington's successes and represented prospects for victory as being better than they appeared to be.<sup>37</sup>

Discretion aside, Clinton found himself in a strong position to command the next invasion from Canada. He was Burgoyne's senior, he wanted the post, and he enjoyed the King's favor. Indeed, on February 24, four days before he arrived, George III advised Lord North that he intended to propose Clinton for the northern command and Burgoyne for his replacement as Howe's second.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the position seemed Clinton's for the asking. But as much as he coveted it, he did not ask for it — probably because he expected Howe to give it to him when the army from Canada came under his authority.

And so it came to pass that the government selected John Burgoyne instead of Henry Clinton. The ministry offered Clinton another post, that of military commander in Canada, which in effect demoted Carleton to civil governor. It was an attractive offer to a man who hungered for independent command, but he rejected it out of regard for Sir Guy.<sup>39</sup>

An unhappy Henry Clinton was left with two very unappealing alternatives: resignation or returning to the uncongenial post under Sir William Howe. He still wanted to correct the public record of the Sullivan's Island fiasco — a revision ardently dreaded by the ministry. The King would not consent to his retirement. The Order of the Bath sweetened a deal that returned the newly-invested knight to Sir William's "family" with a dormant commission to succeed Howe should he resign or become incapacitated. For the moment, Sir Henry's ardor to publicize the interesting dispatches relating to the failed Carolina campaign cooled.<sup>40</sup>

### *Burgoyne's Proposal*

On February 28, the day Clinton arrived in London, John Burgoyne submitted to Lord Germain his lengthy memorandum "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada."<sup>41</sup> The document contained no novelties. Instead, it proposed a continuation of the strategy that had informed British planning since 1775, and repeated much that Burgoyne had "observed" when he presented Carleton's October 22, 1776, dispatch to Germain on December 10. It did embody, however, proposals for the forthcoming campaign that were, in essence, discussions of alternatives.

The initial objective would be to secure navigation of Lake Champlain. Reoccupied Crown Point would provide a temporary base of operations. After retaking Ticonderoga in early summer, the old fort and its satellites would "become a more proper place for arms than Crown-Point." With the lake and the "Gibraltar of the North" secure, he explained, "The next measure must depend upon those taken by the enemy, and upon the general plan as concerted at home." If

that “general plan” required Howe’s entire army to operate on the Hudson, and “if the only object of the Canada army is to effect a junction with that force,” Burgoyne proposed advancing to Albany by way of Lake George. Although he expected the Americans “to be in force upon the lake,” he hoped to use “savages and light forces” to force them “to quit it without waiting for naval operations.” Failing that, he might resort to the South Bay-Skenes-borough route, which would entail “a great deal of land-carriage for the artillery, provision, &c which can only be supplied from Canada.” If the Americans continued in strength around the lake, it would be necessary to leave “a chain of posts, as the army proceeds, for securities of your communication, which may too much weaken so small an army.” If land operations failed to overpower the enemy, making necessary an attack by water, the army had to be prepared by having available “carriages, implements, and artificers, for conveying armed vessels from Ticonderoga to the lake.”

The general reiterated that a part of his “Thoughts” was the product of the “supposition that it be the *sole* purpose of the Canada army to effect a junction with General Howe, or after co-operating so far as to get possession of Albany and open communication to New York, to remain upon the Hudson’s-River, and there by enable that general to act with his whole force to the southward”[emphasis added] in conformity with Sir William’s November 30 plan, which Germain received on December 30.

A potential alternative, continued Burgoyne, would be to operate directly against New England by forming a junction on the Connecticut River with the “corps in Rhode Island. Should the junction between the Canada and Rhode Island armies be effected upon the Connecticut,” he explained, “it would not be too sanguine an expectation that all New England provinces will be reduced by their operation.” Burgoyne also suggested that an important secondary offensive along the ancient Lake Ontario-Mohawk River route would provide “a diversion to facilitate every proposed operation.”

If the army from Canada was judged inadequate “for proceeding upon the above ideas with a fair prospect of success, the alternative remains of embarking the army at Quebec, in order to effect a junction with General Howe by sea, or to be employed separately to co-operate with the main designs, by such means as should be within their strength upon other parts of the continent.” Burgoyne noted that a sea-borne expedition would be less threatening to the Americans, nor “so effectual to close the war, as an invasion from Canada by Ticonderoga. This last measure ought not to be thought of, but upon positive conviction of necessity.”

That final option was really a counsel of desperation, justified only if the strategic situation became drastically worse in the spring. It would require leaving too large a force in Canada, reducing the reinforcement force’s tactical and strategic value. A large fleet, already committed elsewhere, would have to be diverted. The troops could not reach New York City until September, and all of the advantages inhering in a two-pronged attack would be lost.

Nowhere in Burgoyne’s discussion of these alternatives does he infer that establishing a chain of forts along the Champlain-Hudson line and isolating New England were campaign objectives in and of themselves. British successes on both the upper and lower Hudson might happily result in New England’s strategic isolation, but the campaign’s purpose, in the final analysis, was primarily to make a strong additional force in the American interior available to Sir William Howe for use in executing whatever plan was adopted across the Atlantic at Whitehall.

Because his “Thoughts” discussed alternatives Burgoyne believed could accomplish the

required overall goal, he did not precisely identify any intermediate objectives. Once Ticonderoga was again British, the “general plan of the campaign concerted at home” would determine the course the campaign would follow and identify the incidental objectives. He assumed that the ministry would develop and promulgate a definitive plan that would prescribe how he and Sir William would coordinate their respective operations. The closest that he came to anticipating an ultimate objective was when he based his first alternative upon the assumption that his campaign’s “sole” purpose would be to form a junction with Howe, or “after cooperating so far as to get possession of Albany open communication to New York, to remain upon Hudson’s River, and thereby enable that general to act with his whole force to the southward.” That “whole force” would, of course, include the troops from Canada. And so Burgoyne expected to act in concert with Howe, but he did not define the form that cooperation would take. For that, “Gentleman Johnny” looked to the King and his ministers for direction.

Optimism born of high self-esteem attended all of John Burgoyne’s public career, but when he planned to move an army from Canada into New York’s interior, optimism did not blind him to the difficulties nature and the enemy could throw in his way. He assumed the Americans would strongly reinforce Ticonderoga (whose works could hold about 12,000 men), station a large flotilla on Lake George, and block the crude roads from Ticonderoga via Skenesborough to Albany by felling trees, destroying bridges, and erecting fortifications, “There by obliging the King’s army to carry a weight of artillery with it.” Because he expected to meet determined resistance, Burgoyne suggested that the “operating army” required at least 8,000 regulars, plus a strong train of artillery, a corps of watermen, 2,000 Canadians, and at least 1,000 Indians.

### *The King Responds*

Prerogative made the King the captain-general of all the realm’s armed forces. No constitutionally-responsible minister administered the military establishment. The King might appoint a commander-in-chief, but the Hanoverian kings had a strong military tradition and prided themselves on personally exercising their military prerogative. Like his grandfather, George III preferred to dispense with the services of an intermediary, so from 1770 until 1776, when Lord Jeffrey Amherst received the post, the army had no commander-in-chief.<sup>42</sup>

King George cherished his prerogative, but he did not presume a monopoly on military expertise. Wisely, he had either Lord Jeffrey Amherst or Adjutant General Edward Harvey review Burgoyne’s “Thoughts.”<sup>43</sup> The solicited critique of his proposals guided George III when he responded to the projected plan, in his own hand, in “Remarks on the Conduct of the War from Canada.” Indifference to detail was not one of the King’s attributes, and the following excerpts from his holographic “Remarks” illustrate the seriousness with which he addressed his royal duties. “The outlines of the plan seem to be on a proper foundation,” he began.

The rank and file of the army in Canada (including the 11th of the British, McClean’s corps, the Brunswicks and Hanover) amount to 10,527; with the eleven additional companies and 400 Hanover Chasseurs, the total will be 11,443.

As sickness and other contingencies must be expected, I should think not above 7,000 effectives can be spared over Lake Champlain, for it would be highly imprudent to run any risk in Canada.

The fixing of the stations of those left in the province may not be quite right, although the plan proposed may be recommended. Indians must be employed, and this measure must be avowedly directed....

As Sir William Howe does not think of acting from Rhode Island into Massachusetts, the force from Canada must join him at Albany.

The Diversion on the Mohawk ought, at least, be strengthened by the addition of 400 Hanover Chasseurs.

The provisions ought to be calculated for a third more than the effective of the soldiery, and the general ordered to avoid delivering these when the army can be subsisted from the country.

Burgoyne certainly undervalues the German recruits.

The idea of carrying the army by sea to Sir William Howe would certainly require the leaving of a much larger part of it in Canada, as in that case the rebel army would divide that province from the immense one under Sir W. Howe. I greatly dislike that idea.<sup>44</sup>

In his memorandum the King effectively selected from the alternatives Burgoyne proposed when he wrote “the force from Canada must join him[Howe] at Albany,” underlining his words. Thus, when he drafted his memorandum, the King expected a junction of forces at Albany. There was, however, a possibility that his servants might interpret those words in critically different ways — as the unfolding of events would prove. Nonetheless, King George III’s reply bestowed royal approval upon Burgoyne’s plan.

On March 1, John Burgoyne received command of the army that would invade New York from the side of Canada.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Government Formulates its General Plan*

The colonial secretary had begun drafting the government’s plan long before the King wrote his memo. Germain’s first draft had been written in response to Howe’s optimistic second plan, contained in Sir William’s letter of December 20, and then Burgoyne’s royally-approved “Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada.” Before Germain completed that draft, he received Howe’s considerably more pessimistic January 17 and 20 correspondence. Burgoyne’s plan assumed cooperation with Sir William — to the end (in the King’s problematical words) that “the force from Canada must join him at Albany.”

However, Howe’s three letters, optimistic and pessimistic alike, made it obvious where ultimate responsibility for determining strategy and assigning missions resided. In his December 20 dispatch, he “desired that any other Plan might be mentioned to him that might be thought more advisable.” Burgoyne similarly had committed himself to act in conformity with “the general plan of the campaign concerted at home.”<sup>46</sup>

Germain and his ministerial colleagues, responsible for determining what that general plan would be, could take justifiable satisfaction in how they had met the rebellion’s challenges — at

least until the final days of 1776. True, Washington's eleventh-hour recovery had blasted hopes of immediate victory, but some optimistic observers professed to believe that the recovery was merely the final spasm of a dying revolt. Germain himself was still captivated by his own optimism, still intent on avoiding asking Parliament to provide more troops for America, and still eager to believe that Sir William, his personal nominee, would win the war if he could be persuaded to act more ruthlessly.

Still, Germain was unable to resolve the various proposed plans' inherent inconsistencies in assumptions, strategic goals, and required resources. In that state of mind, he wrote to Howe the following ambiguous directive:

In my despatch of 14 January...you were informed that His Majesty thought proper to defer sending you his Sentiments on your Plan for the next Campaign, until He was enabled to take the whole into His Royal Consideration.

I am now commanded to acquaint you that the King entirely approves your proposed Deviation from the Plan which you formerly suggested being of the Opinion that the Reasons which have induced you to recommend this Change in your Operations are solid and decisive.

The King also recommended...

[a] 'warm Diversion' against Massachusetts and New Hampshire coasts that would not only impede Levies for the Continental Army, but tend much to the Security of Our Trade, and indeed, it scarcely admits a doubt but that these Benefits must inevitably result from such an Arrangement; For as, on one hand, it is scarcely to be expected that those Provinces will part with Men when their Presence must be wanted for the internal Defence of their own respective Districts; so on the other, a salutary Check will unavoidably be put to the Successes of the Privateers, when we have destroyed or taken Possession of the Ports.<sup>47</sup>

General Howe's sights were on Philadelphia and the Middle Colonies as central to victory and pacification, but George III still saw New England as there bellion's nursery, and correctly appreciated the importance of Yankee military and marine contributions to that rebellion. As the King's servant, Lord Germain could not be faulted for transmitting the King's proposal that the Howe brothers take operations against New England into "serious Consideration, so far as your intended Plan will admit." But the colonial secretary's responsibilities went beyond the duty to make the royal pleasure known to the Crown's servants. Germain was the minister most directly involved in the process of concerting a "general plan." He played a major role in shaping the King's perceptions, and was the principal architect of the strategies necessary to make the royal pleasure a reality.

How realistic was Germain's directive to Howe? Did the secretary believe that General Howe could, with the force available to him, take and secure Philadelphia, immobilize Washington, raid New England, *and* form a junction with Burgoyne at Albany? Unless the rebellion was truly in its death throes, only the most ill-informed and optimistic official could have been that naive. In fact, the secretary was poorly informed — but he could not help being so. He was dependent upon Burgoyne, Carleton, Howe, and others for intelligence that was



flawed and out of date when he received it, and he was captive to the logic of his relations with them.

Whatever his flawed perception, Germain nonetheless brought to his responsibilities a singular determination, a devotion to duty, and a high opinion of his own capacities. Within a few days, however, he would be guilty of an act of negligence that would color later assessments of those supposed qualities.

### *The Generals Are(n't) Instructed*

Sir Guy Carleton was the first to receive direction. On March 26 — the same day Burgoyne again attended the King's noon levee and received his oral instructions — the secretary informed Carleton that as soon as he had driven “the rebel forces from the frontiers of Canada, it was his Majesty's pleasure that you should return to Quebec, and take with you such parts of your army as in your judgement and discretion appeared sufficient for the defence of that province; that you should detach Lieutenant General Burgoyne, or such other officer as you think most proper, with the remainder of the troops, and direct the officer so detached to proceed with all possible expedition to join General Howe, and put himself under his command.” With those words, Lord Germain advised his enemy that he would not lead his army in the renewed campaign.

The secretary continued, delivering a gratuitous, if veiled, criticism of Sir Guy's aborted 1776 campaign by implying that another commander would redeem that lost opportunity:

With a view of quelling the rebellion as soon as possible, it is become highly necessary that the most speedy junction of the two armies should be effected; and therefore, as the security and good government of Canada absolutely requires your presence there, it is the King's determination to leave about 3000 men under your command, for the defence and duties of that province, and to employ the remainder of your army upon two expeditions, one under the command of Lieutenant General Burgoyne, who is to force his way to Albany, and the other under the command of Lieutenant Colonel St. Leger, who is to make a diversion on the Mohawk River.

His Lordship continued with the slyly insulting admonition, “I am to acquaint you, that as soon as you shall have fully regulated everything relative to these expeditions (and the King relies upon your zeal, that you will be as expeditious as the nature of the business will admit) it is his Majesty's pleasure that you shall detain for the Canada service” a total of 3,770 soldiers, which the secretary specifically detailed, and put under the command of Burgoyne a total of 7,173 soldiers, which he also specified, “together with as many Canadians and Indians as may be thought necessary for this service.”

After furnishing Burgoyne “in the fullest and completest manner with artillery, stores, provisions, and every other article necessary for his expedition, and secured to him every assistance which it is within your power to afford and procure,” Carleton was to give him “orders to pass Lake Champlain, and from thence, by the most exertion of [the] force under his command, to proceed with all expedition to Albany, and put himself under the command of Sir William Howe.” Germain concluded with this final, crucial, paragraph:

I shall write to Sir William Howe from hence by the first packet; but you will never the less endeavour to give him the earliest intelligence of this measure, and also direct Lieutenant General Burgoyne and Lieutenant Colonel St. Leger, to neglect no opportunity of doing the same, that they may receive instructions from Sir William Howe, it is his Majesty's pleasure that they will act as exigencies may require, and in such manner as they shall judge most proper for making an impression on the rebels, and bringing them to obedience; but that in so doing they must never lose view of their intended junction with Sir William Howe as their principal objectives.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately for the cause of British arms, the secretary failed to fulfill his obligation to "write to Sir William Howe...by the first packet." When Germain stopped by his office on his way to depart for a weekend in Kent, he discovered that neither his undersecretary nor his deputy secretary had finished preparing the clean copy of the order to Howe. With his horses standing in the street, Germain refused to wait for the job to be completed. His deputy proposed to simply inform Howe by sending him a copy of Burgoyne's instructions. The order intended for Howe was soon finished, but Germain by this time was on his way to Kent. Lacking a signature, the order was filed and never sent.<sup>49</sup> And so it came to pass that neither Lord Germain nor his aides sent explicit orders to General Howe directing him to move troops northward to Albany to rendezvous with Burgoyne and St. Leger.

### *Germain's Concept*

In the absence of such instructions, Howe was left to interpret his role instead of doing so in keeping with what was supposedly required of him by the "general plan concerted at home," which reflected the ideas and requirements contained in Burgoyne's "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada."

Germain's later letter of May 18, 1777, notifying Howe that the King and his ministers seemingly approved of whatever the general thought wise, contained this phrase regarding a campaign against Philadelphia: "trusting, however, that whatever you meditate, it will be executed in time for you to cooperate with the army ordered to proceed from Canada."<sup>50</sup> The secretary seemed to anticipate that Sir William could make a flying excursion to Philadelphia, occupy it with out serious effort, spend a few days organizing a loyal government, and return to New York to take whatever action was needed to cooperate with the forces moving south under Burgoyne. So strong was Germain's conviction that Howe could and would return to New York City in time to personally cooperate with Burgoyne, or that he would leave a force adequate for that purpose in the city, that he neither issued definitive orders to Howe nor advised Burgoyne of everything else the former intended doing.

Confident of Sir William's judgment, the secretary contented himself with stating his trust that the general would not permit the Philadelphia campaign to jeopardize the northern expedition's success. Such trust, of course, is a poor substitute for clarity. Germain's benign hope, in the form of his May 18 letter, reached Howe on August 16 — too late to influence events. By then, Howe was on his way to Philadelphia, and Burgoyne was advancing down the Champlain-Hudson line.

Behind Lord Germain's optimistic leaving Sir William free to act as his discretion dictated

was the secretary's concept of the plan he was responsible for concerting and articulating. That plan, as he claimed to conceive it, did not require the three forces to operate in concert to meet at Albany (although he did expect an unarticulated degree of "co-operation"). Rather, he expected Burgoyne and St. Leger independently to reach Albany, where they would become parts of Howe's command, hold the territory gained, and be available for Howe to employ in future operations. That interpretation seemed consistent with Burgoyne's statement in his "Thoughts" when he wrote, "the sole purpose of the Canada army [is] to effect a junction with General Howe; or after co-operating so far as to get possession of Albany and open communication to New York, to remain upon Hudson's-River, and there by enable that general to act with his whole force to the southward."<sup>51</sup> Germain apparently did not envision Howe needing to contribute directly to the junction at Albany. Burgoyne and St. Leger would operate independently until they became available to Sir William at their Albany rendezvous.

"[W]ith regard to the Canada campaign," Lord Germain later informed the House of Commons on November 18, 1777,

the honourable gentleman was under a mistake when he imagined that General Burgoyne had orders to fight his way to New York and then join Sir William Howe; his entire orders were to clear the country of rebels as far as Albany, which town was prescribed to him as the boundary of his expedition, unless circumstances might make it necessary to co-operate with General Howe, in which case he was to assist him to the utmost of his power.<sup>52</sup>

The final sentence implied that Germain expected Howe — and not Burgoyne nor St. Leger — to need assistance securing the Hudson valley.

Given this conception of the intended 1777 campaign, it was unnecessary for Germain to send direct personal orders to Sir William. With a copy of Burgoyne's instructions and the secretary's approval of the Philadelphia expedition, Howe had been told all that he needed to know.

### *Howe's Intentions*

The absence of such orders would not excuse Howe for failing to act on the Hudson, if a reasonable assessment of the strategic situation dictated doing so.

That makes it necessary to attempt to determine how he conceived his role, whether that concept was valid, and whether his actions were consistent with his concept.

Sir William certainly was aware that a junction at Albany was contemplated, and that he was the avowed beneficiary of Burgoyne's and St. Leger's missions. For his part, his letter of November 30 had predicated his first plan for 1777 upon the success of renewed aggressive action down the Hudson. Germain had also dropped hints. In his letter of April 19, the secretary advised the general that the Hessian chasseurs, mentioned in his letter of March 3 as intended for Howe's army, were to be part of St. Leger's force, which was to become part of Howe's command when it reached Albany. He also told the general that the men holding local commissions as brigadiers would cease to hold that rank when they joined him.

But Sir William was not a subtle man, and hints did not make a very profound impression on him. As early as April 5, when he learned that reinforcements from England would fall short

of the number requested and that his southern campaign had already been so delayed that he could not take Philadelphia in time to enable him to cooperate with any expedition from Canada, he wrote to Sir Guy Carleton. Howe's missive advised Carleton that he must not expect a cooperating column to come up the Hudson during the early phases of the next campaign. Any army coming down from Canada must, therefore, make its way on its own.<sup>53</sup>

That Sir William acknowledged some obligation to cooperate in the campaign's execution is apparent in the following paragraph:

The further progress of this Corps, depending so much upon the enemy's movements cannot be foreseen at this Distance of Time; still I flatter myself and have Reason to expect, the Friends of Government in that part of the country [the Hudson Valley] will be so numerous, and so ready to give every aid and assistance in their power, that it will prove no difficult task to reduce the more rebellious part of this Province; In the meantime I shall endeavour to have a Corps upon the lower part of the Hudson's River sufficient to open the communication for shipping thro' the Highlands, at present obstructed by several forts erected by the Rebels for that purpose, which Corps may afterwards act in favor of the Northern Army.<sup>54</sup>

Like Burgoyne and Germain, Sir William invested more confidence in loyalist capabilities than he should have. But more to the point, while giving priority to Pennsylvania, he promised to commit a "Corps" to acting in Burgoyne's behalf by exerting pressure on the Americans from the lower Hudson.

Howe was prudently concerned about Washington's potential for affecting events in the north. He knew that if the American commander-in-chief turned his attention in that direction and moved against Burgoyne, that general would be in grave danger. "Washington is waiting our motions here, and has detached Sullivan with about 2, 500 men to Albany," Howe advised Burgoyne on July 17. "My intention is for Pennsylvania, where I expect to meet Washington, but if he goes to the northward contrary to my expectations, and you can keep him at bay, be assured I shall soon be after him to relieve you."<sup>55</sup> Howe had, by the summer of 1777, absorbed the hard-learned lesson not to underestimate Washington's capacity for exploiting strategic opportunity.

Sir William explained his concern in greater detail in a letter he wrote Germain on July 16. He expected the American commander to try to cover Philadelphia by following him to Pennsylvania, in which case he thought that Burgoyne would experience few difficulties (except the logistical problems inherent in the type of expedition being undertaken) in reaching Albany. "[O]n the other hand," continued Howe,

if General Washington should march with a determination to force General Burgoyne, the strength of General Burgoyne's army is such as to leave me no room to dread the event; but if General Washington's intrusion should be only to retard the approach of General Burgoyne to Albany, he may soon find himself exposed to an attack from this quarter and from General Burgoyne at the same time; from both which, I flatter myself, he will find it difficult to escape.

Howe went on in an effort to justify approaching Philadelphia by ascending the Delaware River:

Under the circumstances I propose going up the Delaware, In order to be nearer his place than I should be by taking The course of the Chesapeake which I once intended, or preferred to that of the Delaware provided the enemy had discovered a disposition to defend Pennsylvania.<sup>56</sup>

### *Clinton Returns, and the Sparring Continues*

Newly-knighted Sir Henry Clinton returned to New York on July 5, the day Howe embarked upon his Pennsylvania campaign. Clinton recorded a conversation he had with Howe on July 13, ten days after he rejoined his commander.<sup>57</sup> “I told him I thought Washington had before this detached a great force to meet Burgoyne,” recalled Sir Henry. “He [Howe] said he hoped he would go with his whole Army, for that he could never come back, and could not live there... Said I did not know whether he could come back, but was sure Burgoyne could not come forward, upon which depended the whole campaign. He said he hoped to see Burgoyne no further than Albany, and he wrote him word he could not cooperate with him early.”<sup>58</sup>

Howe convinced himself that Burgoyne and St. Leger were strong enough to reach Albany unaided unless Washington went to Philip Schuyler’s aid, in which case the two British armies would unite to crush him. That happy possibility persuaded Howe that approaching Philadelphia via the Delaware would place him in the best position to exploit whatever strategic opportunities his enemy’s movements offered.

Clinton, however, long opposed to such an expedition,

took the liberty...to say that it was highly probable that [while] the fleet was gone to sea that Mr. Washington would move everything that he could collect against General Burgoyne or me, and crush one or the other; as neither would be capable of withstanding such superior force unless time intelligence should fortunately bring the fleet to our relief. My arguments were at first little attended to, tho’ from a conviction of the solid grounds upon which they were founded repeated perhaps oftener than was agreeable. By degrees, however, I thought I was listened to; [but]the momentary suspense which seemed to have been occasioned by what I said, soon yielded to predilection Sir William had for his own plan, which he told me could not with propriety be laid aside on account of its having been approved at home.<sup>59</sup>

Clinton concluded that Howe was aware of the dangers inherent in the Philadelphia campaign, but believed that, because it had the royal approval, he had little choice but to go ahead.

Nonetheless, Clinton continued to press upon his superior the alternative to Howe’s plan, emphasizing its positive potential. “I told him with regard to his present plan was a good one but that I thought the time of the year bad, and that the better move would be to act upon the Hudson in force, if possible the junction and then the four provinces were crushed.”<sup>60</sup>

In other venues, such as a letter to General Edward Harvey, Clinton instead emphasized possible negative consequences: “The only thing there fore in my opinion left for us now in the middle of July, is to cooperate in force with the northern army, not by a junction with it (for that I can never advise) but that sort of communication which will give us possession of Hudson’s

River; as it is, I al most doubt whether the northern army will penetrate as far as Albany.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, in either coloration Clinton dissented from Sir William’s optimistic appraisal of Burgoyne’s chance for success, contending that the lower Hudson would have to be secured if the troops from Canada were to even reach Albany successfully.

His protests continued without any result other than Howe’s admitting that he did not expect Burgoyne to advance south of Albany. Sir Henry recorded the following overall assessment of the strategy:

When the design of employing an army under General Burgoyne on the Upper Hudson was mentioned to me; I took the liberty of suggesting the Hazard of miscarriage unless it was supported from below; and the consequent propriety of directing an early cooperation of Sir William Howe’s whole force on the lower District of the River. For the attacking[*of*] Philadelphia (which I understand to be the object of that General Officers first operations in the ensuing campaign) could be undertaken only upon the principal [*sic*] of drawing on a general action with the Rebels; I humbly presumed that End (if anything could effect it) was more likely to be obtained by a vigorous exertion of the two British Armies on the Hudson; the passes of which must consequently fall under their power.<sup>62</sup>

Instead of a mere junction at Albany, Clinton favored cooperating in a conquest of the Hudson. The British could then turn their combined attention to taking Philadelphia.

Howe admitted that he had formerly believed that to be the best plan, but reports of large numbers of loyalists in Pennsylvania had persuaded him that the southern move would be better. Clinton agreed that there might be “friends of the Government” there, but similar expectations in New Jersey had ended in disappointment. He also pointed out that Howe would have to maintain a defensive force in New York and Rhode Island while prosecuting the Pennsylvania offensive. But Howe only replied by falling back upon the royal approval — though *without* invoking its admonition to undertake action there *only if* doing so did not jeopardize the northern campaign’s success.

Clinton also recorded the curious fact that, even after Howe’s expedition got under way, he (Clinton) could not bring himself to believe Philadelphia was Howe’s real objective. He suspected the move was a feint intended to conceal a quick return and an advance up the Hudson to cooperate with Burgoyne. In his account of the American war entitled *The American Rebellion*, Clinton claimed that he was “persuaded he intended to deceive us all, though he was pleased to say he was going to sea with the present northerly wind, I should expect to see him return with the first southerly blast and run up the North River.”<sup>63</sup>

In spite of Clinton’s arguments and Howe’s own apparent occasional misgivings, Sir William did launch the campaign that gained him the capture of Philadelphia — a pyrrhic success because, as many scholars have noted, the city figuratively took him captive while the American Congress simply moved the government first to Lancaster and then to York.

In a letter of October 22 to Lord Germain, after Burgoyne had surrendered his army at Saratoga and Howe learned that his defeated colleague had declared that he expected to meet a cooperating force at Albany, Howe wrote:

In my last letter to Sir Guy Carleton, a copy of which was transmitted to your lordship in my

despatch of April 2nd 1777, no. 47, and which His Majesty was pleased to approve, I positively mentioned that no direct assistance could be given to the northern army. This letter I am assured was received by Sir Carleton and carried by him to Montreal before General Burgoyne's departure from thence.<sup>64</sup>

Sir William never deviated from that self-exculpation.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Planning Ends*

Our study of British plans for "the War from the Side of Canada" has examined Carleton's proposals and requisitions, Burgoyne's 'Observations' and his 'Thoughts,' and Germain's and Howe's perceptions of what implementation of those 'Thoughts' entailed.<sup>66</sup> Planning for the American campaign of 1777 began with numerous proposals by multiple generals, which were then responded to and modified by other government officers.

Given the dilatory communications and transportation technology of the day, some difficulty with efficient exchange of proposals, the effective production of a consensus, and the authoritative delivery of the resulting plan would have been predictable anyway. Add to that the personal likes and dislikes, the past rivalries, and the continuing career competition amongst the various officials involved, military and civilian alike, and the likelihood of differing interpretations of any less-than-clear directions were magnified.

Under those directions each particular general and minister had either obligations he was himself to fulfill, or obligations that he delegated to others to fulfill, or both. Whether any particular one of the variant interpretations of those obligations that developed were the result of honest confusion, willful disobedience, or shameful negligence is impossible to absolutely establish at this late date. What is certain is that these questions became the subject of bitter argument and the casting of many aspersions.

What can be said with certainty is that the residue of ambiguity and confusion that adhered to the plans and their execution contributed to the military situation in which General John Burgoyne and his soldiers found themselves when the 1777 campaign began to unfold: that of an army making its way, unsupported, deep into hostile territory, with the season advancing, and supplied with insufficient men and materiel to meet the challenges with which its enemies and the circumstances would confront it.

