

To Control the Mohawk: The Battle of Oriskany and Siege of Fort Stanwix

Secondary, But Important

Indians, traders, and settlers all followed an ancient route that ran from the Atlantic to Lake Ontario. Nature made the site of modern Rome, New York, key to that route's use and control. The Mohawk rises northeast of that city and flows east until it unites with the Hudson River to reach the Atlantic. On Rome's northern flank is Wood Creek which, with the Fish Kill, the Oswego River, and Lake Oneida, provides a waterway in the other direction to Lake Ontario. Men following that riparian highway had only to traverse the nearly level portage between the Mohawk and Wood Creek to travel by water from the sea to Lake Ontario and Canada's interior. That short portage was the Great or Oneida Carrying Place, and its possession was essential to controlling access to the northwest frontier.

Indians and colonists knew from experience that the Mohawk was a gateway to a vast region. Maps and reports taught the same lesson to officials in London and Versailles.¹ There was another, more salient, reason why it was important: the country between the upper Hudson and Lake Erie was home to the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. They numbered no more than 10,000 to 12,000 and could field fewer than 2,000 warriors by the second half of the eighteenth century. Their Confederacy, however, was the strongest native force in North America and one with a hostility, hallowed by bloodshed and tradition, to France and her respective Indian allies. But for this Confederacy, the French and their Huron and Algonquian clients would have flanked British North America on the north and west. The Six Nations were also entrepreneurs of a fur trade that made the northwest frontier an important economic resource.²

At the close of the colonial period, much of northern and western New York continued to be frontier. Much of it was Iroquois country, but the Six Nations were weakened and their people, especially the Mohawks, Oneidas, and Onondagas, had closer and more dependent contacts with whites. The latter were a mix of English, German, and Highland Scot, with a minority of Dutch families. The valley's preeminent personality was Sir William Johnson, who from 1756 until his death in 1774 served as superintendent of Indian affairs for the tribes north of the Ohio River.

The half of New York bordering on Canada and the Iroquois lands, including the Mohawk

Valley from two miles west of Schenectady, was separated from Albany County in 1772 to form Tryon County. Its people entered the Revolutionary era with families and communities divided. Some joined rebellious fellow-colonists, while others remained faithful to old ties or hoped to remain neutral. Others found the choice wrenching as they chose between competing claims to their allegiance. The English and Dutch, most of whom were native-born, probably included more dedicated “Patriots” than the other ethnic groups. Highlanders could be found in both camps. Those who were British army veterans, with little affection for the Hudson Valley gentry who provided most of the province’s leadership, tended to remain loyal to the Empire. The Germans, without strong emotional ties to England, found choices less agonizing and many favored rebellion. Others remembered shabby treatment from the aristocratic families whose scions provided the rebellion’s leadership, and preferred a royal government to a native oligarchy. Some tried, as they or their elders had during the last imperial war, to remain neutral in a quarrel they believed was not theirs.

The Revolution along the Mohawk was, as elsewhere in frontier communities, more a civil war than a social revolution. Sir William Johnson’s extended family provided loyalist leadership. The heir to his title and some of his political influence was his son, Sir John, whose Palatinate mother gave the Johnsons a useful tie with local Germans, to whom Sir William had been a sympathetic patron. Guy Johnson was Sir William’s nephew, son-in-law, and successor to the Indian superintendency. Daniel Claus was another son-in-law, and John Butler was a loyal lieutenant to the senior Johnson. Closely associated with those men was Joseph Brant [Thayendaga], Sir William’s secretary and brother of Molly Brant, Sir William’s Indian mistress and mother of six of his children.

Sir John tried to organize the valley’s loyalists and Indians into a coherent provincial force, but the revolutionary party frustrated his efforts and placed him and some of his supporters on parole. Apprehensive of his influence, New York’s revolutionary government decided to arrest Sir John. When he learned Colonel Elias Dayton with a party of men was about to seize him, Johnson fled to Canada, where he raised the King’s Royal Regiment of New York.³

Sir John’s flight did not dispel American worries about the Mohawk Valley. The region’s economic potential, its political and military significance, and the importance of the Six Nations made its security absolutely essential. Few men knew more about New York’s affairs than General Schuyler, and he had a long-standing personal interest in the region that included 8,000 acres of Cosby’s Patent that he acquired in 1772. On June 8, 1776, that canny gentleman, as commissioner of Indian affairs and commander of the Northern Department, wrote a letter to the President of the Continental Congress recommending stationing soldiers at the Oneida Carrying Place and, significantly, that the Indians be informed that the Americans intended to maintain a military presence in the Mohawk country.⁴

Without waiting for congressional action, Schuyler wrote to General Washington on June 11 that he was “preparing everything I can with the utmost secrecy for taking post at Fort Stanwix, which I propose to do immediately after the conference with the Indians.”⁵ Congress acted on June 14 by passing a resolution directing Schuyler to hold his conference with the Indians and to build a fortification at Fort Stanwix. The resolution also directed Washington to support these efforts. The commander-in-chief complied accordingly.⁶

Schuyler and the commissioners did not succeed in persuading the Indians to enter into early negotiations, but the general did not allow that to delay preparations for occupying the

Carrying Place. He ordered Colonel Elias Dayton of the 3rd New Jersey Regiment of the Continental Line to occupy Fort Stanwix with 500 men of his regiment, Colonel Cornelius Wynkoop's 4th New York Continental Regiment, and seventy-five Tryon County militiamen. Dayton's composite force reached the fort on July 23. Schuyler, meanwhile, had moved to German Flats to meet with Indians who, he reported to Washington, raised no objections to American occupation of the Mohawk portage.⁷

A "New" Fort and its Garrisons

Colonel Dayton found Stanwix's fort dismantled and ruined.⁸ Instructions directed him to secure the Carrying Place, provide a base for patrols, and either rebuild the fort or erect a new one. General Schuyler left selecting the alternative to the colonel, noting, "As I never was at Fort Stanwix, I cannot positively recommend any particular place for erecting a Fortification, but from the best Information I have been able to procure, I am led to believe that Spot on which the Fort stood the most Eligible, of this you must be the Judge."⁹

To save time and have a structure ready to occupy before winter, Dayton elected to rebuild. His engineer was Nathaniel Hubbell, one of those quiet heroes of the Revolution about whom we know too little. Within less than a fortnight Dayton wrote to the general, praising his men's industry and predicting that the "Fort will be Tenable by 15 August."¹⁰ Schuyler, in turn, wrote to Washington on August 1, "Fort Stanwix is repairing and is already so far advanced as to be defensible against light artillery."¹¹

Dayton reported to the department commander on the same day that "The Fort here which at present is very defensible against almost any Number of Small Arms we had this day the pleasure to name Fort Schuyler."¹² By the beginning of September, General Schuyler, who had spent most of the latter part of the summer at German Flats talking to Indian delegations, believed the new fort could withstand any force the enemy was likely to use against it that year. Hubbell and the men under his supervision had accomplished their task in spite of disturbing rumors of enemy activity, continued demands on time and manpower to provide patrols, and the departure of the 4th New York's detail, which was ordered eastward on August 2.¹³

Like most of the Continental Army's men, Colonel Dayton's New Jersey troops' enlistments expired at the end of 1776. To replace them, Schuyler ordered Colonel Samuel Elmore's Connecticut State Regiment to move from German Flats to Fort Schuyler [Stanwix]. That unit occupied its new post on October 17, but because there were barracks for only 200 men, part of the regiment returned to German Flats to winter at nearby Burnet's Field.¹⁴

The Mohawk frontier was quiet during the winter of 1776-77, but there was little reason for complacency. Sir Guy Carleton's 1776 invasion had been an earnest of British intent to carry the war into the interior. Although he had withdrawn into Canada during November, evidence was persuasive that the campaign was merely deferred, to be resumed the next season. The politics of command of the Northern Department, sectional and personal rivalries and loyalties, and chronic shortages sapped energies and tested commitment to the Revolution. Washington's desperation-born aggressive action at Trenton and Princeton had preserved the army and boosted morale, but to many it seemed the odds still greatly favored the Empire—and that the next major campaign might well end the rebellion.

Fort Stanwix stood unfinished and, although defensible against small arms and light

artillery, remained vulnerable to a determined attack supported by heavier field pieces.¹⁵ Nathaniel Hubbell had made excellent progress repairing the fort during the summer of 1776 and had begun collecting materials during the autumn in anticipation of resuming construction the next spring. One of the Continental Congress' last acts of 1776 was a resolution on Saturday, December 28, directing that the winter be spent strengthening Fort Schuyler and building other fortifications on the Mohawk, and that all departments of the army were to contribute what was needed to support those efforts.¹⁶

Sometime early in 1777 a new and rather mysterious Frenchman replaced Hubbell. Bernard Moussac de la Marquisie was a volunteer assigned to the Northern Department whom Schuyler ordered to the Carrying Place to “repair this fort in the same form it was last war.”¹⁷ Declaring that the fort was too ruined to repair, Marquisie persuaded Schuyler to authorize construction of a new post—an incredibly foolish decision that, if carried out, would have destroyed American defensive capabilities in western New York. To begin with, the previous year's labors would have been wasted. Building a new fort would exceed available resources and could not be completed before the summer's end, whereas every informed person expected aggressive enemy action during the coming campaign season. As it was, a critical shortage of men for fatigue details plagued Colonel Gansevoort's 3rd New York, which replaced Elmore's command during April and May. Marquisie's decision was especially indefensible in light of Schuyler's conviction that Burgoyne's invasion would reverse Amherst's march, descending the Mohawk.

The Frenchman soon gave Gansevoort and his second-in-command, Marinus Willett, ample reason to wish themselves rid of his services. His plan to raze the existing fort in the face of time and manpower constraints was dangerously imprudent. His construction of buildings within the fort's field of fire and design of the covert way pickets impeached his professional qualifications. He also intruded himself into Indian affairs and bragged to General Gates that representatives of the Six Nations had insisted upon treating with him, and that it was his good offices that had secured their neutrality. (The historical record indicates no such thing.) In his hubris, Marquisie urged the general to order a Captain Florimont to Stanwix, where “the sight of another French officer will confirm to the savages what I have already told them—and also you may be assured he is an honest man.”¹⁸

Notwithstanding the Frenchman's overweening confidence, Colonel Gansevoort reported on June 15 that “nothing of any importance is yet done towards strengthening the fortification ...”¹⁹ Marinus Willett wrote thirty years later that Marquisie's incompetence prompted Colonel Gansevoort to order Willett to arrest the engineer sometime in July, after it became known that the enemy was approaching.²⁰ Whatever the circumstances, on July 10 Schuyler ordered Gansevoort to “send Capt. Marquisie down & let Major Hubbel [sic] superintend the works.”²¹

Contemporary sources do not record the work done under Hubbell's supervision between July 10 and August 3, the day British Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger began his siege. The evidence is clear, however, that no new fort as proposed by the French captain replaced the older work. Twenty-three days were insufficient for razing the existing structures and building the fort that the British commander described as

a respectable Fortress strongly garrisoned with 700 men and demanding a train of Artillery we were not masters of for its speedy subjection. Its form is a kind of Trapezium or four sided figure with four Bastions freized and picketed, without them is a good ditch with pickets nipping out a

considerable way at the salient angles of the Bastions ...²²

That description still fit the pre-revolutionary fort precisely.

British Considerations

The primary purposes of the campaign that John Burgoyne proposed for 1777, as contained in his “Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada” are detailed in an earlier chapter dealing with that subject. It is necessary, however, to revisit the general’s treatise and relate it to the proposals for the Mohawk expedition.

“To avoid breaking in upon other matters,” Burgoyne explained, “I omitted in these papers to state the idea of an expedition at the outset of the campaign, by the Lake Ontario and Oswego, to the Mohawk-River; which as a diversion to facilitate every proposed operation, would be highly desirable, provided the army should be reinforced to afford it.” He went on to propose:

that Sir John Johnson’s corps, a hundred British from the second brigade, and [a] hundred more from the 8th regiment, with four pieces of the lightest artillery, and a body of savages; Sir John Johnson to be with a detachment in person, and an able field-officer to command it. I should wish Lieutenant-Colonel St. Leger for that employment.

I particularize the second brigade, because the first is proposed to be diminished by the 31st Regiment, remaining in Canada, and the rest of the regiment, drafted for the expedition, being made also part of the Canada force, the two brigades will be exactly squared.²³

Burgoyne’s “thought” about the Mohawk expedition ambivalently proposed a diversion while questioning its efficacy. It is important, however, to remember that his “Thoughts” discussed alternatives. He did not argue persuasively for the western expedition’s military utility. True, it would create a diversion, but would it be effective enough to justify the commitment of the scarce regular troops the operations required? In the event, his decision to provide for a diversion on the Mohawk was undertaken more to serve political ends than to secure military objectives.

Informed men at Whitehall understood that the Mohawk was the gateway to an extensive interior whose importance would eventually rival that of the Champlain-Hudson country. Pontiac’s Conspiracy of 1763 was fresh in their memories, and prudence dictated that the western tribes become accustomed to giving precedence to imperial interests. More pressing was the need to nurture the loyalty of the Six Nations: two of them were refusing active support to their traditional allies, and one, the Oneidas, was actively assisting the rebels. Victorious British soldiers in the valley would guarantee the fidelity of the faithful and recall the wavering and alienated to a proper relationship.

This included as well the local loyalists, who figured significantly in the Government’s decisions—not only the active ones such as the Johnsons and their associates, but also crypto-loyalists and passive sympathizers. The former had suffered self-exile for their principles, raised a force of “provincials,” and persuaded authorities at home that the majority of the valley’s people would rise for King and empire whenever a British army gave substance to

royal governance.

St. Leger Assembles His Expedition

The marriage of military and political purposes induced the ministry to commit itself to the Ontario-Mohawk expedition, and Lieutenant Colonel St. Leger of the 34th Regiment, scion of an old Anglo-Irish family, received the “local” rank of brigadier.²⁴

His expeditionary force was to include 100 men from each of the two regiments stationed in Canada, the 8th and 34th; Sir John Johnson’s Regiment (the Royal Greens); Walter Butler’s ranger company; 342 Hanau Jägers, of whom only about eighty men actually joined the expedition; and forty artillerymen to serve two 6-pounders, two 3-pounders, and four 4.4-inch Coehorn mortars. Auxiliaries would include “a sufficient number of Canadians and Indians.” The returns found during Colonel Willett’s raid on St. Leger’s camp on August 6 reveal that the British force of 1,400 included 800 white troops (200 British regulars, 300 Royal Greens, seventy rangers, eighty Germans, and 150 provincials) and 600 Indians.²⁵

The white troops left from Lachine, across the river from Montreal. On June 23, St. Leger received intelligence that “there were 60 men in a picketed place” at the Carrying Place. That inaccurate report persuaded him to hurry through the wilderness and storm what he believed to be a weak frontier post incapable of defense against his artillery. Skeptical of the intelligence, Colonel Daniel Claus dispatched a reconnaissance force that returned to report a very different situation. In a letter to William Knox, Claus recorded St. Leger’s fateful selection of which intelligence to believe and thus act upon:

Between 60 & 70 Leagues from Montreal my reconnoitering party returned and met me with 5 prisoners (one a Lieut) and 4 scalps having defeated a working party of 16 rebels, as they were cutting Sodd [sic], towards repairing and finishing the old Fort which is a regular Square, and garrisoned by upwards of 600 Men, the Repairs far advanced, and the Rebels expecting us, and were well acquainted with our Strength and Rout[e]. I immediately forwarded the Prisoners to the Brigr [Brigadier] who was about 15 Leagues in our Rear. On his Arrival within a few Leagues of Buck Island he sent for me, and talking over the Intelligence the Rebel Prisrs. gave, he owned that if they intended to defend themselves in that Fort, our Artillery were not sufficient to take it, however he said he was determined to get the Truth of these Fellows. I told him that [?] examined them separately they agreed in their story; and here the Brigr. still had an opportunity & time of sending for a better train of artillery, and wait for the junction Chasseurs [Jägers] which must have secured us success as every one will allow, however he was still full of his alert, making little of the Pris[one]rs Intelligence.²⁶

Although St. Leger refused to await the arrival of more Jägers or to send back for additional guns, he agreed to go to Oswego, which he had intended bypassing, to join the Indians assembled there.

This was evidence of trouble in that quarter. Daniel Claus had been the expedition’s superintendent of Indians since July 8. The junction with the warriors occurred at Oswego on July 23. When Claus arrived he met with Joseph Brant, who informed him that 300 of his Indians would arrive that day, but that they were almost destitute of supplies, especially ammunition,

because Colonel John Butler had supplied them so minimally that spring, and they had been on service for two months. The next day Claus received an order to join up with St. Leger at Salmon Creek. When Brant learned of Claus' intention to depart, he went to Claus' tent and remonstrated with him. Brant, recalled Claus, "told me that as no person was on the Spot to take care of the Number of Indians with him, he apprehended in case I should leave them they would become disgusted & disperse, which might prevent the rest of the 6 Nations to assemble, and be hurtful to the Expedition." Brant begged Claus to explain the situation to St. Leger. As Claus explained it, the Indians were not only short on supplies, but lacking nearly every attribute the campaign and the British required. "St. Leger mentioned in-deed my going was chiefly intended to quiet the Indns. with him who were very drunk & riotous, and Captn. Tice who was the Messenger informed me, that the Brigr. ordered the Indians a Quart of Rum apiece which made them all beastly drunk and in which Case it is not in the power of Man to quiet them."

Claus continued:

Accordingly I mentioned to the Brigr. by Letter the Consequences that might affect his Majestys Indn Interest In case I was to leave so large a Number of Indns that [were] Come already, & still expected. Upon which Representation and finding the Indians disapproved of the Plan and w[ere] unwilling to proceed, the Brigr. came away from Salm[on] Creek, and arrived the next day at Oswego with the Compy of 8th & 34 Regt. and abt 250 Indians.

Havng equpd [sic] Josephs party with what necessities and Ammunition I had, I appointed the rest of the 6 Nations to Assemble at the 3 Rivers a convenient place of Rendezvous & in the way to Fort Stanwix, and desired Col. Butler to follow me with the Indians he brought with him from Niagara and equip all at the 3 Rivers.²⁷

This episode serves to further demonstrate that securing and retaining effective Indian support was both critical and difficult. Some of the Indians were reluctant to take an active part in serving imperial interests. They had retentive memories that included broken promises and exploitation. Sir William Johnson, the white man who had held title to their loyalty and affection, was dead, and none of his heirs inherited enough influence to assume his mantle. John Butler and Daniel Claus knew the Indians and enjoyed their trust, but mutual antagonism limited their usefulness. Joseph Brant, who could identify with both races, tried to obtain fair treatment for his people, while committing them to British interest. Sir John, who did not inherit his father's political skills, had the bad luck to operate in a climate very different from the one in which Sir William had functioned so effectively. St. Leger was unfit by training, experience, and temperament for leading these warriors. The Indian was always an uncertain factor in white men's campaigns—as Burgoyne and St. Leger were about to find out.

The Continentals Garrison, and the Militia Marches in Relief

While Continental troops garrisoned Fort Stanwix, defense of the Mohawk Valley settlers fell to the Tryon County militia under the command of Brigadier General Nicholas Herkimer [Herkheimer], leader of the pro-revolutionary German settlers. Herkimer had the task of preparing a divided people to defend themselves, and he struggled with hostile forces both

external and internal. That many Germans, whose forebears had suffered exploitation at the hands of Hudson Valley grandees, were among the county's militia made the general's task more difficult. Criticisms of almost every decision he made aggravated his problems.

A case in point was his handling of a meeting in July at Unadilla with Joseph Brant. Details are obscure and susceptible to conflicting interpretations. Knowing too well the horror that would attend Indian participation during the fighting that was certain to come, Herkimer may have urged Brant to keep his people neutral. The Mohawk leader instead declared for the King and, without interference from the militia, who outnumbered the warriors 380 to 130, withdrew to Canajoharie Castle.

Herkimer's cool-headedness did not win him the plaudits of a grateful public, and his leadership was weakened with tragic consequences when he tried to succor Fort Stanwix early the next month. Yet with a perversity that taxed Philip Schuyler's much-taxed patience and understanding, the people of Tryon County neither replaced nor fully trusted their county chairman and militia commander.

A few days before the Unadilla conference, while Burgoyne was at Crown Point, General Schuyler received explicit information about enemy plans. In a letter dated June 29, Schuyler wrote to the Tryon County commander that Sir John Johnson was on his way to Oswego and planned to attack Fort Stanwix. He ordered Herkimer to prepare his militia to support the fort's garrison "at a moment's notice."²⁸ Schuyler followed that order with a message to Colonel Gansevoort, informing him that "A report prevails that Sir John Johnson intends to attack your post. You will therefore put yourself in the best posture of defence ... I have written General Herkimer to support you with the militia, in case you should be attacked. Give him therefore the most early intelligence if any enemy should approach you."²⁹

Gansevoort was already aware of the danger. Oneidas had reported to him that they had encountered hostiles who intended to attack the fort.³⁰ The colonel and his garrison drove themselves almost to exhaustion to render their post as defensible as possible and to block Wood Creek. A severe shortage of men and the colonel's fear of a surprise attack during the work made the task as stressful as it was arduous. Schuyler acted to provide Gansevoort with additional manpower, ordering Herkimer to set 200 men to clearing the road between Forts Dayton and Stanwix so that reinforcements could reach the latter more quickly, and to detail an equal number to reinforce the garrison.³¹

There was irony in ordering the militia to provide 400 men at a time when Tryon County's committee of safety was pleading with the general to dispatch Continental troops to defend the Mohawk frontier. Schuyler had available in the Hudson Valley 5,193 Continentals and an artillery detachment to oppose Burgoyne's thus-far-successful army of 6,341 regulars and an uncertain number of Indians, Canadians, and provincials. "I am sorry, very sorry that you should be calling upon me for assistance of Continental troops when I have already spared you all I could [the 3rd New York]," the harried department commander responded on July 10 from his temporary headquarters at Fort Edward. "For God's sake do not forget that you are an overmatch for any force the enemy can bring against you, if you will act with spirit."³²

The spirit that actually animated Tryon County's patriots at the time is revealed in a long letter from the harassed Nicholas Herkimer. In compliance with Schuyler's instructions, he had ordered 100 men to reinforce the fort's garrison. But the county chairman, Lieutenant Colonel William Seeber, and some committee members countermanded the order. Herkimer succeeded in

getting that problem resolved, but because the militiamen feared for their families' safety they were reluctant to obey orders to muster. They expressed special fear of the Indians, openly declaring "that if the enemy shall come, they will not leave home, but stay with their families, and render themselves over to the enemy." Herkimer claimed that "whole numbers of men in each district are so far discouraged, that they think it worthless to fight, and will not obey orders for battle, if the county is not in time succored with at least 1,500 Continental troops." The loss of Ticonderoga "made the greatest number of our affected inhabitants downhearted, and maketh the disaffected bold...."³³

Schuyler responded to Herkimer's realistic pessimism by ordering Colonel James Wessons' 9th Massachusetts Continental Regiment into Tryon County to put some steel into the backbones of the "downhearted" and awe the "disaffected."³⁴ Reinforcements for the fort's garrison arrived from the 3rd New York Continental Regiment and the New York militia.³⁵ To enhance security and improve local morale, Schuyler placed all troops in the county under the command of a senior colonel of the 1st New York named Goose van Schaick, who was recovering from a wound received at Ticonderoga on July 6.³⁶

Fort Stanwix's garrison was acutely conscious of the dangers it faced. While militia fatigue details protected by Continentals worked at obstructing Wood Creek, scouts reported the enemy column's approach. More immediately ominous were the hostile Indians found prowling the woods trying to ambush members of the garrison and local civilians. On Sunday July 27, three girls went raspberry picking about 500 yards from the fort. Indians fired on them, killing and scalping two and wounding the third. To prevent ambushes and consolidate his force, Gansevoort withdrew the fatigue parties.³⁷ On July 28, he sent downstream "those women who belonged to the Garrison which had children with whom went the Man that was Scalped the Girl that was Wounded Yesterday & Sick in the Hospital."³⁸

At great risk to themselves, Oneidas and friendly Mohawks brought the colonel intelligence of St. Leger's progress and the activities of native war parties. The quality of that intelligence was difficult to assess.

Captain Thomas De Witt, who had remained at Fort Dayton, arrived during the thirteenth with about fifty men of Gansevoort's regiment, and Major Ezra Badlam brought in 150 of Colonel Wesson's 9th Massachusetts. The fort's commissary, a man named Hanson, brought word that seven bateaux loaded with ammunition and provisions were coming upstream. Within twenty-four hours Oneidas came into the fort with information that 100 "Strange Indians" were at the ruins of the old "Royal Block House" and approaching the fort. Fearing that the hostiles intended to intercept the boats, Gansevoort detailed 100 men to reinforce the bateaux-guard.³⁹

There was much that the fort's commander did not know, but he was certain of one thing: within a few hours the enemy would arrive. Colonel Willett's Orderly Book recorded the garrison's deployment, with pickets on night watch, alarm signals to spur the manning of the bastions, and assignments for each of the garrison's detachments.⁴⁰

St. Leger Approaches; Surrender or Siege?

The Americans' blocking of Wood Creek had been so effective that St. Leger's column was advancing too slowly for his purposes. His fear was that additional men and supplies would reach the fort before he could invest it. In order to obtain intelligence and intercept any relief

parties, he ordered an advance guard under Lieutenant Bird toward the fort. Most of the Indians would not cooperate with the lieutenant and refused to move. Bird conducted a personal reconnaissance, and his report to his commander closed with his quixotically volunteering to “invest” the fort.

St. Leger’s reply represents an interesting reflection of the range of possibilities, both favorable and unfavorable, he envisioned. “[Y]our resolution of investing Fort Stanwix is perfectly right,” he began, “and to enable you to do it with greater effect, I have detached Joseph [Brant] and his corps of Indians to reinforce you.” St. Leger continued:

You will observe that I will have nothing but an investiture made; and in case the enemy observing the discretion and judgment with which it is made, should offer to capitulate, you are to tell them that you are sure I am well disposed to listen to them: this is not to take any glory or honour out of a young soldier’s hands, but by the presence of the troops to prevent the barbarity and carnage which will ever obtain where Indians make so superior a part of a detachment ...⁴¹

Ridiculing the brigadier’s optimism in imagining that the Americans might surrender to so limited a show of force is tempting. But St. Leger shared some of his contemporaries’ common views: disdain for colonial arms and a justified fear of what Indians would, in the absence of a large number of regular troops, do to a surrendered garrison. While he certainly hoped that a mere show of force would persuade the defenders that they could honorably surrender, he probably did not expect that to happen; St. Leger’s orders simply provided for that possibility.

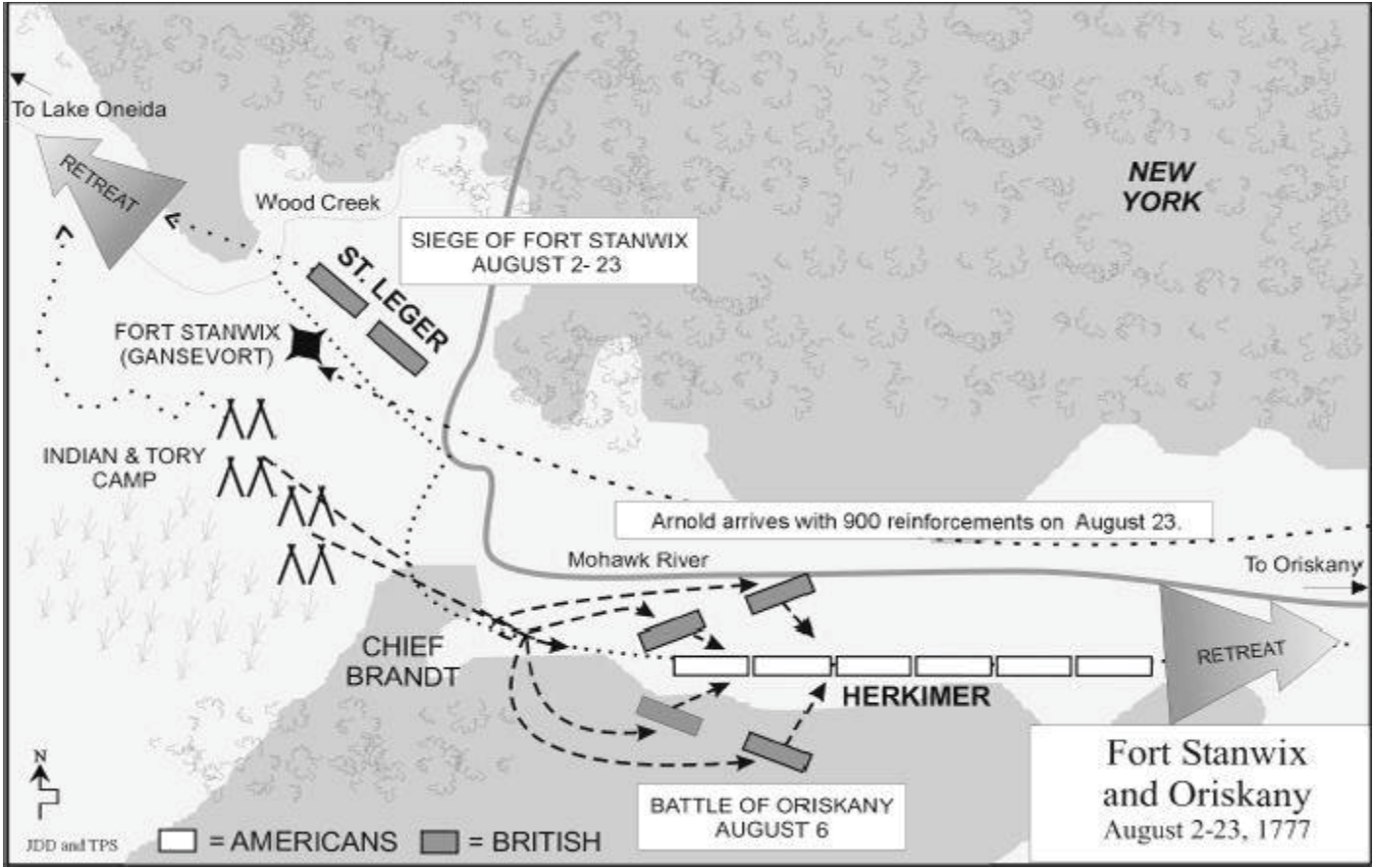
The bateaux that Colonel Gansevoort expected approached the fort shortly after St. Leger’s advance party arrived at Fort Newport’s ruins. The contents of the four bateaux were successfully unloaded and conveyed into the stronghold. Nearly simultaneously, the main fort’s sentinels detected the proximity of St. Leger’s advance troops, and the garrison manned its posts. Just then, the bateauxmen who had stayed behind with their boats ran up to the fort, having been fired upon and chased back from the river by the enemy, with a loss of two wounded, one missing and one captured. That evening, thirty men sortied to set fire to two barns near the fort. They took the precaution of taking with them a field piece, with which they first fired grapeshot into the barns, “to of[f] the Enemys Indians that might have been Skulking about them.”⁴²

St. Leger’s advance party had failed to intercept the supply boats, but the fort’s “investiture” was now underway. He was unable to commit all of his men to the siege, however, because 110 of them worked for nine days clearing obstacles from Wood Creek, and another party was busy cutting a temporary road from Fish Creek over which to move artillery and supplies.⁴³

There is a tradition that on August 3, the siege’s opening day, St. Leger paraded his troops to overawe the garrison. Contemporary American and British reports are silent on the subject, although Ensign William Colbreath noted in his journal entry for August 3, “about three o’clock this afternoon the Enemy shewed [sic] themselves to the Garrison on all Sides Carry’d off some Hay from a Field near the Garrison.”⁴⁴ His description falls far short of any theatrical show of force. Even if one did occur, it might have had the opposite of the desired effect: such a “review must have shown them [the American garrison] that in white men alone the numbers of St. Leger’s force were at most equal, if anything inferior to their own,” as Nickerson noted.⁴⁵ In any case, at 3:00 p.m. that afternoon, St. Leger sent Captain Tice under a flag to demand the fort’s

surrender, and to promise protection to the garrison—if the demand was met. Colbreath recorded that Gansevoort rejected both demand and promise “with disdain.”⁴⁶

Knowing that the enemy would attack whenever he could emplace his artillery and bring up the men working on the temporary road and clearing the passage on Wood Creek, the garrison continued to strengthen the defenses. Harassing fire from the Indians forced the fatigue parties to confine work to the night time. During the night of the fourth, details ventured out to bring in twenty-seven stacks of hay for the cattle impounded in the fort’s ditch, and to burn a house and barn obstructing the field of fire. The Indians’ fire wounded six and killed two men during the fourth and sixth. Late on the afternoon of the fifth, the British burned the barracks that Marquisie had built outside.⁴⁷



The Battle of Oriskany

During the same afternoon of August 3, St. Leger received word from Sir William Johnson's Indian mistress, Molly Brant, that a relief column was approaching the fort and would be within ten or twelve miles of his camp by that night. The British commander now faced the serious tactical problem of sustaining a siege while repelling a relief column.

The relief column was General Herkimer's response to learning of the British advance on the fort. On June 30, he ordered the Tryon County militia to muster at Fort Dayton. By August 4, between 800 and 900 men had assembled and begun marching to raise the siege. During the night of August 5, Herkimer dispatched scouts forward to inform Gansevoort of his advance and to ask him to cooperate if the enemy attacked the militia. He also asked him to fire three shots to affirm his willingness to make a sortie when Herkimer's column approached, then to engage the men besieging the fort to prevent their concentrating on the militia.

Herkimer reached a critical point in his approach march during the morning of August 6. No shots had been heard from the fort. Should he continue to advance or await the requested signal? He convened a council to discuss the question. Herkimer wanted to wait for the signal, but the overwhelming majority of his officers favored an immediate advance. The general maintained his position with traditional Teutonic stubbornness, and the discussion became heated. Some of the officers accused him of Tory sympathies, making much of one of his brothers being an officer in Sir John Johnson's regiment. Berated and maligned, the elderly farmer-soldier yielded and gave the order to march. With his Oneida scouts in the lead, Herkimer took the head of a double column of some 600 men, followed by a 200-man rearguard.

When he received Molly Brant's message, St. Leger dispatched approximately 400 Indians and the light infantry company of Johnson's regiment, under Sir John, Colonel Butler, and Joseph Brant, to ambush Herkimer's column.

With fatally poor march security, the Tryon County men tramped to a place about six miles from the fort where the road crossed a broad ravine about fifty feet deep with very steep banks. There, the Anglo-Indian party had laid an ambush, with the light infantrymen on the west and the Indians along the ravine's margin in a rough half-circle, leaving the eastern side open to Herkimer's men. When the middle of the column was deep in the ravine, the light infantrymen intended to check its head while the Indians closed their circle around the rearguard.

The column's main body had made its way into the ravine and up the western side when the Indians east of the ravine opened fire and rushed the road-bound militia, springing their trap too early to surround the rearguard, which promptly fled. The light infantry and the Indians on the west rushed forward. While rallying his men, General Herkimer was wounded in one of his legs, and his horse was killed. According to some accounts, he sat on his saddle, stripped from his dead horse, where he smoked his pipe and directed the defense of his embattled command.

With skill and steadfastness, the ambushers completed their circle while the Americans took cover behind trees, formed in small circles, and fought with a valor born of desperation, and often hand-to-hand. After perhaps three-quarters of an hour a cloudburst opened, soaking the muskets' priming; the fighting paused. During that lull, Herkimer's men took cover by twos, so that when one had fired and was reloading, the other would be ready to shoot any enemy who moved against them. The Tryon County men gave a good account of themselves that day. The Indians, who experienced heavy casualties, became more cautious as the minutes ticked past.

At this point in the action, a second British detachment under Major Watts arrived on the scene. Johnson ordered his men to turn their coats inside out to conceal their uniforms so they could advance under the guise of a sortie from the fort. When Herkimer's militia discovered the ruse they attacked, triggering a fierce hand-to-hand fight that ended when the Indians retreated, followed by their white allies. Too badly mauled to pursue, the militia collected their wounded, including their general, and marched back to Fort Dayton. Herikimer's severely injured leg was eventually amputated, and he succumbed to his wounds on August 16.

A Sortie Becomes a Raid

That same morning of August 6 was a time of uncertainty at Fort Stanwix. The garrison observed that the Indians, who had been maintaining a sniping fire, were leaving the immediate area for the lower landing on the Mohawk. The officers and men feared that something was afoot in the valley, and that the loyalty of its inhabitants would weaken if the fort were reported taken. "This Morning the Indians were seen going off from around the Garrison towards the Landing as they withdrew we had not much firing," a concerned Colbreath recorded in his journal. "Being uneasy least [sic] the Tories should Report that the Enemy had taken the Fort [...] Lieut. Diefendorf was Ordered to get Ready to set of[f] for Albany the Evening to Inf[orm] Genl Schuyler of our Situation."⁴⁸

Before the lieutenant could leave, the men Herkimer had sent with his message announcing his approach arrived at Stanwix. As Colbreath recorded, now "the Communication which has been Entirely Blocked up" was opened; now the garrison learned of the imminent arrival of 1,000 militiamen to relieve them; now they learned of the three-gun signal which Herkimer awaited. The latter was immediately fired off, "followed by three cheers by the whole Garrison." Further responding to Herkimer's requests, Colonel Gansevoort dispatched 200 to 250 men with a field piece under Lieutenant Colonel Willett to rendezvous with the militia.⁴⁹

Willett set out down the old military road that ran between Albany and Oswego. When his column was about half a mile from the fort it came upon Sir John Johnson's unoccupied camp and instantly changed its mission. Forgotten was the sortie's purpose to support the embattled Herkimer. The troops instead raided the abandoned camp, a nearby Indian one, and perhaps Lieutenant Bird's at "Lower Landing Place," about one-half mile distant. "Nothing could be more fortunate than this enterprise," Willett reported with less than self-effacing satisfaction. He continued:

We totally destroyed routed two of the enemy's encampments, destroyed all their provision that was with them, brought off upwards of fifty brass kettles, and more than a hundred blankets (two articles which were much needed by us) with a number of muskets, toma-hawks, spears, ammunition, cloathing, deer skins, a variety of Indian affairs, and five colours, which on our return to the fort, were displayed on our flagstaff, under the Continental flag.⁵⁰

Willett's men skirmished with some fleeing Indians before turning about to return to the fort. A detachment of British regulars tried to intercept them, but "The ambush was not quite formed when we discovered them, and gave them a well directed fire.—Here especially, Major Badlam, with his field piece, did considerable execution," reported Willett. "[H]ere, also, the

enemy were annoyed by the fire of several cannon from the fort, as they marched round to form the ambushade. The enemy's fire was very wild, and though we were very much exposed, did no execution at all."⁵¹

The loot taken from the camps, as Willett later revealed, included "several bundles of papers and a parcel of letters belonging to our garrison, which they had taken from our [Herkimer's] militia, but not yet opened There were likewise papers belonging to Sir John Johnson, and several others of the enemy's officers, with letters to and from Gen. St. Leger, their commander; their papers have been of some service to us." Willett's men also captured prisoners who were carried into the fort and interrogated. They reported the disturbing news of the fight at Oriskany, the size of St. Leger's force, and the number and types of his artillery.⁵²

The raid on the Indian camp did have some unintended though important results. The loss of clothes, blankets, and provisions, coupled with the loss of several of their chiefs at Oriskany, dampened the native warriors' enthusiasm for what threatened to be a long and unrewarding siege—a species of operation for which they rarely had an affinity. In fact, the British situation was not nearly good enough to give much promise of success, unless St. Leger could persuade the fort's garrison that defending its post was doomed to failure.

St. Leger put the best possible face on recent events when he reported the series of events to Burgoyne. Herkimer's militia "fell into it [ambuscade]. The completest victory was obtained," the brigadier continued, stretching the truth for his superior. "Above 400 lay dead on the field, amongst whom were almost all the principal Movers of Rebellion in that Country." The fighting, he boasted, crushed enemy morale—"The Militia will never rally" and nothing stood in the way that will "retard my progress in joining you [except] the reinforcement of what they call their regular troops by way of Halfmoon up the Mohawk River. A diversion therefore from your army by that quarter will greatly expedite my junction with either of the grand armies."⁵³

At this time, however, Burgoyne was many miles north of Halfmoon and in no position to send St. Leger's Mohawk expedition any form of assistance.

Again: Surrender or Siege?

Fort Stanwix's garrison enjoyed a respite from enemy fire during most of August 7, although "at 11 o Clock [sic] this Evening," wrote the journalist Colbreath, "the Enemy came near the Fort called to our Centinels, telling them to come out again with Fixed Bayonets and they should give us Satisfaction for Yesterdays work, after which they fired 4 small Cannon at the Fort we laughed at them heartily and they returned to Rest."⁵⁴ The fort's defenders now knew that the enemy had finally brought up their artillery, and during the eighth, the besiegers fired more shots, which the garrison "in order to Return the compliment, they [the enemy] were Saluted [sic] with a few Balls from our Cannon."⁵⁵

About 5:00 p.m. on August 8, St. Leger's adjutant, Major Ancrum, accompanied by Colonel Butler and a surgeon, approached the fort under a flag. In essence, the parley consisted of the British urging the Americans to surrender, and the Americans refusing to do so. During the first day of the cease-fire that followed the parley, St. Leger again sent a flag to the fort with a written statement of the oral demands made the previous day. These exchanges included the British issuing dire warnings of what their Indian allies would do to the American soldiers and their families if the garrison was defeated. As far as the defending Americans were concerned, any

blood shed in that manner would be on British hands. When St. Leger played on the Americans' responsibility for avoiding a bloodbath, the Americans retorted that the responsibility lay with the British, who as officers, gentlemen, and the supposed representatives of civilization, had a duty to not allow the slaughter of innocents.⁵⁶ Neither side yielded its position.

The post-parley armistice was to have lasted three days, but the British began a bombardment that night at 10:30, a "well directed fire" that continued all night. Gansevoort had the fort's papers and money stored in the southwest bastion's bomb-proof. An exchange of artillery continued at intervals during the next week, with very little effect on the garrison and none on the fort's fabric.⁵⁷

And then, recorded Ensign Colbreath, "The Enemy threw some Shells Horrisontally [sic] at out Works."⁵⁸ The explanation behind Colbreath's journal entry is found in St. Leger's report to Burgoyne. "It was found that our cannon has not the least effect upon the sod-work of the fort," observed the brigadier, "and that our royals [mortars] had the power of teasing, as a six-inch plank was a sufficient security for their powder-magazine, as we learnt from deserters." Lieutenant Glenie, one of St. Leger's artillerymen appointed to act as an assistant engineer, devised a rather ingenious method for reducing Fort Stanwix. Glenie, explained St. Leger, "proposed a conversion of the royals (if I may use the expression) into howitzers. The ingenuity and feasibility of this nuance striking me very forcibly, the business was set about immediately, and soon executed." When field trials revealed that "nothing prevented their operating with the desired effect but the distance, their chambers being too small to hold a sufficiency of powder," a decision was made to "approach the fort by a sap to such a distance that the ramparts might be brought within their portice, at the same time all materials were preparing to run a mine under the most formidable bastion." St. Leger, it seemed, had found a way to solve the vexing problem of Fort Stanwix.⁵⁹

A map drawn by Colonel Francois de Fleury, a French engineer fighting for the Americans, depicts a portion of St. Leger's deployment of positions for the siege. The absence of a scale limits its usefulness in determining distances, but an estimate (based on the size of the square formed by the fort's bastions, 335 to the side, except for the eastern face) of the distance between the original battery positions and the fort was approximately 350 yards. The sap or approach trench was directed toward the northwest bastion.⁶⁰

While the besiegers worked at the sap, the garrison and its enemies maintained an exchange of fire. The fort suffered little or no damage, although a few casualties occurred among the defenders. On August 21, a woman in the fort who was "big with Child" was wounded in the thigh by artillery fire. The next day she gave birth to a daughter in the southwest bastion's bombproof. According to Colbreath, mother and child "do well with the Blessing of God."⁶¹ The enemy also diverted the stream that supplied the fort with its main source of water, forcing the garrison to dig wells inside the fort. Sorties went out for a variety of purposes, and both sides lost men through desertion.

The Threat to the Mohawk Valley: Schuyler Responds with Arnold

The British did not ignore the region Fort Stanwix defended while the stronghold itself was under siege. After the battle of Oriskany, Sir John Johnson proposed to take 200 men and "a sufficient body of Indians" down the valley to bring the people back to the royal cause. St. Leger,

however, “said he could not spare the men, and disapproved of it.”⁶² A few days later Walter Butler took two regulars and three Indians to German Flats in an effort to enlist the inhabitants’ assistance in persuading the fort’s garrison to surrender. Butler carried with him a proclamation signed by Sir John, Daniel Claus, and John Butler that combined a clumsy combination of cajolery and threats. “Surrounded as you are by victorious armies, one half (if not the greater part) of the inhabitants friends of the government,” concluded the proclamation, “without any resource, surely you cannot hesitate a moment to accept the terms proposed to you, by friends and well-wishers to the country.”⁶³ Fort Dayton’s garrison captured the little party, aborting the venture into psychological warfare.

While Gansevoort and St. Leger contended for control of the Mohawk country, events were underway elsewhere that would prove decisive in frustrating British designs. General Schuyler was retreating southward along the Hudson before Burgoyne’s hitherto victorious advance, struggling to retard that advance and prepare his main army for a stand that would repel the British invasion. Shortages, personality clashes, political rivalries, and a succession of disheartening reverses conspired to bring his task to the brink of failure. Still, the general did not neglect his responsibilities in the western sector of his command. During July, Schuyler devoted hours trying to obtain additional Continental troops for Tryon County, and sought the state’s help in finding militia units to send up the Mohawk, as evidenced by his previously-noted letters to the county’s committees and General Herkimer in which he tried to encourage and advise them.

On August 6, Schuyler’s assistance took a more concrete form when he ordered Brigadier General Ebenezer Learned’s Brigade of Massachusetts Continentals to march from Van Schaick’s Islands to Fort Stanwix’s relief. He also wrote to Tryon County’s committee requesting its militia’s cooperation.⁶⁴

The main body of Schuyler’s army lay at the village of Stillwater, and from that place Major General Benedict Arnold departed on August 13 to command operations on the Mohawk.⁶⁵ The department commander ordered Arnold to “repair thither [to Tryon County] with all convenient speed and take upon you the command of all the continental troops & such of the Militia as you can prevail upon to join your troops. Fort Schuyler is being besieged you will hasten to its relief and hope that the Continental troops now in the county of Tryon, if joined by some of the militia will be adequate to the business.”⁶⁶ Arnold set out immediately for Albany, where he met Colonel Willett, and together they hurried to Fort Dayton, which they reached on August 20.

The next day, Arnold convened a council consisting of Brigadier General Learned; Colonels Willett, John Bailey (2nd Massachusetts), Cornelius Van Dyke (1st New York), Henry Beeckman Livingston (4th New York), and James Wesson (9th Massachusetts); and Lieutenant Colonel John Brook (8th Massachusetts). The members discussed the possibility of enlisting Indians, and the information brought to Fort Dayton by Oneidas reporting that St. Leger’s force included “upwards of 1,000 Indians ... and other forces are near 700, besides some Tories....” Arnold noted that the members of their own column “are 933, and 13 artillerymen, exclusive of a few militia, the whole not exceeding 100 on whom little dependence can be placed.”

What options were open to Arnold’s small command? To answer that question, he put the matter before the council, asking its members “whether it is prudent to march with the present force and endeavour to raise the siege of Fort Schuyler, or to remain at this place, until reinforcements can be solicited from below, and more of the militia turned out to join us, and

until the Oneidas had determined if they would join us, of which they give encouragement.” The council’s conclusion was as follows:

Resolved, That in the Opinion of this Council, our force is not equal to that of the enemy, and it would be imprudent and putting too much to the hazard to attempt the march to the relief of Fort Schuyler, until the army is reinforced: the council are of the opinion that an express ought immediately to be sent to General Gates, requesting he will immediately send such reinforcements to us as will enable us to march to the relief of the fort, with a probability of succeeding and that in the meantime the army remain at the German Flatts, at least until an answer can be had from General Gates, and that all possible method be taken to persuade the militia and Indians to join us.⁶⁷

As this episode makes clear, Benedict Arnold—who had a well-earned reputation for audacity equaled by few, if any, of his contemporaries—approached the relief of Fort Stanwix with uncharacteristic caution. While it was true that St. Leger’s force outnumbered Arnold’s column, the total American strength, including the fort’s garrison, was more than equal to that of the enemy. At most, St. Leger’s white troops numbered 700 to 800 men, of whom 300 were Canadian militia, not the most reliable of units. The Indians, who may have numbered 800 at that time, were of limited usefulness in a pitched battle, and even their total had been reduced by losses suffered at Oriskany. Between Arnold and Gansevoort the Americans had a maximum of 1,746 men, of whom all but about 100 were Continentals.⁶⁸ St. Leger could not have both maintained the siege and repelled Arnold’s relief column. If he abandoned the siege, the Stanwix garrison would be free to cooperate with Arnold to attack him. Perhaps the responsibility of an independent field command sobered the flamboyant general who, when he did not hold ultimate responsibility for the conduct of a campaign, so often made his superiors appear pedestrian.

If Arnold was not prepared to march on, he was at least prepared to sound aggressive. A proclamation he issued over his name denounced the enemy’s barbarity, claiming that “Humanity to those deluded wretches, who are hastening blindfold to destruction, induces me to offer them, and all others concerned whether savages, Germans, Americans or Britons PARDON, provided they do, within ten days from the date hereof, come in lay down their arms, sue for protection, and swear allegiance to the United States of America.” To the obdurate, he addressed these words: “But if blind to their own interest and safety, they obstinately persist in their wicked courses, determined to draw to themselves the first vengeance of Heaven, and of this exasperated country, they must expect no mercy from either.”⁶⁹

Willett once again returned eastward to deliver the council’s resolution to General Gates and to request a reinforcement of 1,000 light infantrymen. Arnold was playing games. He knew Gates did not have 1,000 light infantry to send to him. In fact, Gates’ only light troops were Dan Morgan’s riflemen, who numbered fewer than 500 effectives, and Gates had not yet brigaded them with drafted infantry into a composite corps of riflemen and light infantry. Arnold was positioning himself, in case his mission failed, to plead inadequate support from headquarters—a ploy not unique in military history.

Without waiting for reinforcements, Arnold resorted to his own application of psychological warfare that has few parallels in American history and folklore. The local patriots had uncovered a particularly inept Loyalist plot in the vicinity of German Flats. Among the

prisoners taken was one of the least impressive members of the numerous Schuyler clan, a mentally deficient eccentric named Hon Yost Schuyler. Hon Yost had lived among the Indians, who apparently believed that his affliction gave him a peculiar relationship with the supernatural. The local whites held him in neither awe nor affection, and they condemned him to death for his part in the plot. His brother Nicholas and their mother came to Arnold's camp to plead for the unfortunate man's life.

Retaining Nicholas as a hostage for his brother's performance, Arnold promised to spare Hon Yost if he would enter the enemy's camp and play upon the Indians' emotions by exaggerating the size of Arnold's force. Delighted with the opportunity, the half-wit enthusiastically entered into the spirit of the charade with a cunning that belied his intellectual limitations. To give credibility to his story that he had escaped from captivity, he had bullets shot through his clothes. A conspiratorially-inclined Oneida agreed to follow Hon Yost, at a credible interval, to confirm his story.

Because they had heard disturbing news that a large relief force was on its way, the Indians were susceptible to the young man's deception. When they asked him how many men were in that force, he looked up and pointed to the leaves on the trees—the implication obviously clear. The dramatic episode left a profound impression upon those who watched it. Taken before St. Leger, he enlarged upon his story and predicted that Arnold with 2,000 men would be upon the besieging force's rear within twenty-four hours.

At that propitious moment the cooperative Oneida appeared with some Indians he had met in the woods. Arnold, explained the helpful Indian, had no quarrel with St. Leger's Indian allies, and intended to attack only the British and the Tories. One enthusiast added that a talking bird had warned him that great numbers of hostile warriors were on their way to destroy the fort's assailants. The Indians, already disheartened by the bloody Oriskany fight and becoming impatient with the paucity of loot, prisoners, and scalps, found irresistible the reason for going home.⁷⁰

St. Leger, Sir John, and the Indian superintendents, Butler and Claus, tried to persuade their allies not to overreact to the wild tales of Arnold's advance. The commander convened a council at which he learned that 200 warriors had already deserted. The chiefs announced that if he did not retreat, they would abandon him.⁷¹

We cannot know how much Hon Yost's story influenced the Indians. We do know that the campaign had been unprofitable and that they had no stomach for a prolonged siege and another pitched battle. For them, Hon Yost's fortuitous appearance offered an excellent excuse for doing what they wanted to do: abandon the expedition. Daniel Claus put the best possible face on the debacle. "The Indians," he explained,

finding that our besieging the Fort was of no Effect, our troops but few, a reinforcement as was reported of 1500 or 2000 Men with Field pieces, by the way, began to be dis[pi]rited & file off by Degrees: The Chiefs advised the Brigr to retreat to Oswego and get better Artillery from Niagara & more men to return and renew the Siege, to which The Brigr agreed and accordingly retreated wch. was on The 22 of Augt.⁷²

The withdrawal was so precipitous that the troops left most of their equipment behind, to the garrison's satisfaction.⁷³

At German Flats, meanwhile, General Arnold learned of the enemy's attempt to dig approach trenches at Fort Stanwix. Fearful that an attack might carry the fort, Arnold finally decided to hurry to its relief. An express message met him when he was about two miles on his way, advising him of St. Leger's withdrawal. Arnold pushed 900 men forward in an effort to catch up to and engage the enemy's rear, but they reached the fort at 5:00 p.m., too late to press the pursuit. The next morning, he dispatched 500 men to continue the chase, but bad weather forced him to abandon the effort. A small party that pressed on reached Oneida Lake in time to see the last of the British regulars crossing it in boats.⁷⁴

