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The Northern Command: Personalities and Politics

The Two Contenders

The history of the Continental Army's northern command revolves around two men of radically different origins, political principles, military experience, and command styles. Without a full understanding of who these men were and how one came to lead the Northern Department during the summer of 1777, it is impossible to completely grasp and appreciate the rich complexity that was the Saratoga Campaign in general, and American involvement in those operations in particular.

The first of these men, Philip John Schuyler, descended from New York's patroon stock, an aristocrat by birth, wealth, and demeanor. Patrician that he was, he was far from being an effete product of privilege. Schuyler willingly followed a routine of economic and political activity that taxed his less-than-robust constitution. His public service began during the Seven Years' War as a captain, commissary, and major, when he displayed the same talent for logistics that marked his Revolutionary career. Like most of the Hudson River grandees, he was a reluctant revolutionary. Politically, he stood somewhat to the right of such main-line conservatives as George Washington, John Adams, and Roger Sherman. But unlike Adams and Sherman, Schuyler committed little of his philosophy to paper, and the record does not document his personal political philosophy. When the Continental Congress turned to creating generals, its members recognized the political necessity of naming a New Yorker by appointing him a major general, ranked only by Washington, Artemas Ward, and Charles Lee. Schuyler's leadership of the American invasion of Canada of 1775-1776, however, produced a growing chorus of criticism that was a prelude to the fourteen months of political in-fighting over the northern command.

Schuyler's assets were his political and social connections, an administrative capability that made him a master of detail, and devotion to his state's and nation's interests as he perceived them. His weaknesses included an arrogance toward those he considered his social inferiors (which compromised his effectiveness when dealing with undeferential men and less patrician politicians), a lack of aggressiveness that invited censure, and a penchant for blaming others when things went wrong.[1]

The second man under consideration, Horatio Gates—the godson of that sometimes-venomous diarist, correspondent, man of letters, and gossip Horace Walpole—was born in England, probably at Hornby Castle, Yorkshire, or Malden, Essex, in 1728 or 1729. According to Walpole, Gates' mother Dorothy was a housekeeper for the Second Duke of Leeds, and Robert, his father, may have been a butler or a journeyman tailor before becoming collector of customs at Greenwich. Their son somehow managed to acquire an above-average education and in 1749 entered the British Army at the rank of lieutenant. His plebian birth made his entry into an officer class dominated by gentry and aristocrats unusual.

After a few months service with his regiment at Halifax, Gates became a captain-lieutenant in Colonel Hugh Warburton's Regiment, and in September 1754 a captain in the Fourth Independent Company Foot, stationed in New York City. He participated in General Edward Braddock's 1755 campaign and was wounded at Turtle Creek. After recovering, Gates served in the Mohawk Valley as brigade major under Generals John Stanwix and Robert Monckton and accompanied the latter to Martinique. In April 1762, he received a major's commission in the 45th Regiment, posted in Nova Scotia. Two years later he transferred in that rank to the 60th [Royal American] Regiment, which he exchanged for a half-pay majority in the 74th Regiment.

Despairing of further preferment, Gates resigned from the army. In 1772, he emigrated to America where, early the next year, he settled on a plantation near Shepherdstown, [West] Virginia. While stationed in New York during the mid-1750s Gates had become associated with members of the Whig Club, and for the rest of his life espoused the liberal sentiments that eventually found expression in Jeffersonian republicanism. Those views made him a critic of British imperial policies, and he was an early advocate of independence.[2] The former British major resumed his military career when the Congress named him adjutant general of its new army with the rank of brigadier general on June 17, 1775.[3] In that capacity he performed yeoman service helping organize and train the fledgling Continental Army.

Excepting Benedict Arnold and Charles Lee, Gates proved to be the war's most complex American general. Physically brave, intelligent, a competent administrator, blunt, profane, and quarrelsome, he was capable of mortgaging his substantial talents to overarching ambition and ethical inconstancy. Contemporaries as diverse as Benjamin Franklin, John and Samuel Adams, Jefferson, James Madison, and Henry Cruger respected him, and contemporary evidence portrays him as popular with the soldiery. Yet, for more than a century, American writers were almost unanimous in calling him incompetent, cowardly, scheming, dishonest, a worse leader than David Wooster and Artemas Ward—and Arnold's moral inferior.[4]

Certainly Horatio Gates was cast in an unheroic mold. Even soldiers who liked him called him "Granny Gates." He lacked Washington's commanding presence and Schuyler's icy dignity, and he had none of Arnold's and Anthony Wayne's charismatic flair. Gates' political views were anathema to some who feared the threat of social revolution. Still, anti-Gates bias has been more visceral and longer-lived than other antipathies because he was allegedly party to and beneficiary of what conspiracy-mongers termed the Conway Cabal. According to their demonology, a corps of malcontents, including army officers and congressmen, combined to replace Washington with the intriguer—Horatio Gates. Worthington C. Ford, editor of the *Writings of George Washington*, attributed a new dimension to the spurious victor of Saratoga's perfidy when he wrote in 1911 that

Washington had stripped his army of an essential part of his strength to place Gates beyond risk of defeat, and facing the British at Brandywine he had lost a battle because, as he thought, Gates had not promptly returned those loaned troops. No doubt exists of the intention of Gates in retaining them, in spite of the urgent sending of [Alexander] Hamilton by Washington to hasten their return. To enjoy the full sweets of victory, to magnify his own success and importance, and to make sharper the contrast between his victory and Washington's want of it, Gates was willing to risk the destruction of the "main" army under Washington.[5]

To construct that damning indictment, Dr. Ford misrepresented relevant facts. The "loaned" troops were Daniel Morgan's riflemen, who joined Gates in August. The battle of Brandywine occurred on September 11, just eight days before the first engagement at Saratoga. Washington did not ask for their return (if they were no longer needed), until September 24, thirteen days after Brandywine. Gates obviously needed them for the final fight with Burgoyne on October 7. The British general surrendered on October 17, and Morgan left to rejoin Washington the next day. Hamilton visited the Northern Department between October 31 and November 5, but not to request the return of Morgan's riflemen, who had departed thirteen days earlier. What he did request were reinforcements from three Continental brigades still with Gates: those of Paterson, Glover, and Nixon. On November 7, two days after Hamilton left, Paterson's and Glover's men marched south, leaving Nixon's the only Continental brigade in the entire department.[6]

Ford's grossly inaccurate account of events was an extreme expression of the virulence even a reputable scholar could resort to in discrediting the man he believed betrayed the national hero. Criticism of Washington, whatever its nature and motivation, was treasonous. To aspire to replace him, as Gates' traducers claimed he had done, could not be the ambition of a man capable of defeating Burgoyne. Ergo, he was not the real architect of victory; others, notably Schuyler and Arnold, deserved the credit. The disastrous battle of Camden in August 1780 confirmed their judgment of the man they agreed had intrigued against the noble Washington and the selfless Schuyler. Underhandedly securing the command of the Northern Department was thus, for Gates, but a prelude to becoming commander-in-chief.

What was at Stake?

The story of how Horatio Gates became commander of the Northern Department in 1777 has implications not limited to the political ramifications of Congress' other appointments. Every general officer's appointment was political—it could not be otherwise. No military establishment existed from which the Congress could select candidates qualified only by merit and seniority. It had created (or adopted) an army, and it had to create an officer corps using the only mechanism at its disposal—politics. Therefore, place of residence, social status, prominent friends and supporters, political views, and military experience influenced Congressional nominations and the order of appointment. When Congress gave the northern command to Schuyler or Gates, most of those considerations were in play, along with others peculiar to the time and prevailing circumstances. "I take notice of this appointment of Gates because it had great influence on my future fortunes," penned honest John Adams in his *Autobiography* about how Gates came to find himself in command. "It soon occasioned a competition between him and Schuyler, in which I always contended for Gates, and as the rivalry occasioned great animosities among the friends of the two generals, the consequences of which are not yet spent."

Adams continued:

> Indeed they have affected the essential interests of the United States and will influence their ultimate destiny. They effected an enmity between Gates and Mr. [John] Jay who always supported Schuyler, and a dislike in Gates of Hamilton who married Schuyler's daughter…. I never had in my life any personal prejudice against Schuyler… But the New England officers, soldiers, and inhabitants knew Gates in the camp at Cambridge. Schuyler was not known to many, and the few who had heard of him, were prejudiced against him from the former French War. The New Englanders would not enlist to serve under him, and the militia would not turn out. I was, therefore, under a necessity of supporting Gates.[7]

Adams, like other delegates, responded to regional issues that had political implications—whether in support of Gates or Schuyler.

Alexander Hamilton avenged his father-in-law on Adams in his *Letters from Alexander Hamilton Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq*., by attempting to sabotage his election campaign in 1796. He also intrigued against him from within the cabinet during his presidency, a vendetta that contributed to the eventual defeat of the Federalist party.[8]

Professor Jonathan G. Rossie, who devoted the major part of his *The Politics of Command in the American Revolution* to a detailed study of the Gates-Schuyler rivalry, argued that the rivalry was, in part, a product of the important debate about the meaning of the American Revolution. Gates' supporters were principally, but not exclusively, found among men who believed that liberty required that the states be the seat of ultimate power, whereas Schuyler's support came almost exclusively from nationalists who wanted to hedge the Revolution with limits that would lead to creating a strong central government, safely dominated by a political and social elite. The contest anticipated the divisions that produced the new nation's political parties.[9] Professor Rossie's interpretation deserves respectful consideration because, while other forces operated, the struggle for the northern command did provide the Revolution's left and right wings an arena before coherent parties existed as vehicles for political competition.

Previous Leadership Controversies: The Canadian Command

Selecting a replacement for General Richard Montgomery as field commander in the North after he was killed during the 1775-1776 American invasion of Canada posed especially difficult problems. Montgomery's death and Arnold's serious wound caused the command to devolve upon Brigadier General David Wooster who, in addition to detesting and being detested by Schuyler, was sixty-five years old, incompetent, and in poor health. Because the general commanding in Canada was subordinate to the commander of the Northern Department, mutual hostility between the two was bound to affect adversely the army's effectiveness.[10]

Wooster soon made the inevitable a reality when he issued orders regulating the troops in Canada. Schuyler complained to Congress that his subordinate was being insubordinate, and demanded that orders affecting the force in Canada be cleared through him. Wooster argued that the man in the field with the troops, not the department commander in Albany, was the proper person to issue such orders.[11] As long as Schuyler remained in command of the department and continued to exercise that command from Albany or his country estate at Saratoga, anyone named to the Canadian post would almost certainly fail.

There were men in Congress and the Continental Army who believed that Schuyler would make solving the command problem easier by resigning. Henry Knox told Gates "from Schuyler's conversation that he wished to be excused acting as general."[12] Rumors to that effect reached members of Congress, and some were delighted to hear them, relay them, and hope that they were true. New Englanders, with whom his unpopularity approached unanimity, were not alone in wishing to see the New Yorker replaced. Others were severely critical of his management of the Canadian campaign, recognizing that he was not the best choice to lead that kind of quixotic venture to a successful conclusion.

Indeed, Schuyler was not the best choice to lead any martial venture. "In depth and breadth of mind, in stability of intention, in firm decisiveness to plan and to execute, in the ability to meet a confused situation, discern its essentials, and expend his energies upon them," wrote even a sympathetic student, "Schuyler was somewhat deficient." The New Yorker, continued the writer, lacked the executive power required to make a man an "effective and successful general officer." Nor had his "slight" military experience as a captain during the French and Indian War "been sufficient to induce a habit of command." Finally, he noted, Schuyler "had not the physical vigor nor ruggedness needed to cope with the hardships and deprivations of a wilderness campaign."[13]

General Schuyler might have overcome his military limitations and personal haughtiness if he had been able to gain his men's confidence and respect by sharing their hardships and dangers, and if he had displayed the kind of dynamic leadership that men such as Benedict Arnold, Richard Montgomery, and Daniel Morgan were capable of achieving. But ill health plagued him, especially during moments of stress and crisis. For example, after spending two weeks of September 1775 with his troops, Schuyler thereafter remained at Ticonderoga, his Saratoga estate, or his Albany mansion while the department's soldiers suffered privation, death, and defeat. His absence from the battle zone contributed to the indiscipline, low morale, and inadequate combat performance that characterized too much of the campaign. Many in Congress knew that, and hoped the general would accommodate them by resigning—which he would not do.

Since the commander of the Northern Department would neither exercise personal command in Canada nor quit his post, to whom could the Congress give an assignment that promised more travail than glory? Charles Lee seemed to be the only major general with the qualifications required for such demanding duty. Lee, however, was Schuyler's senior in rank, with a commission dated June 17, 1775, while Schuyler's was dated two days later. In spite of the inherent potential for trouble, in that his seniority precluded his being Schuyler's subordinate, the delegates unanimously elected Lee commander in Canada.[14] He would vacate his post at New York City; and Schuyler would replace him there, implying that Lee would control operations both on the New York frontier and in Canada.

While Congress' arrangement was already fraught with potential for trouble, President of the Continental Congress John Hancock's letter of February 1776 advising Schuyler of Lee's appointment guaranteed that the potential would become a certainty. Intent upon placating the New York general, he told him that appointing Lee did not reflect a lack of confidence in his generalship. In fact, he gilded the lily by writing that the delegates would have preferred seeing Schuyler lead the restoration of American fortunes in the North. Because, however, they were "apprehensive should you be sent on so fatiguing a service as that of Canada must be, especially at this inclement season, your country would be deprived of the advantage of your services… it was thought best to send General Lee to Canada, reserving for you the command of the forces and conduct of military operations in the colony of New York."[15]

Schuyler thus retained effective command of the Northern Department, while Lee was expected to lead the troops in Canada. The delegates in Congress expected them to cooperate as equals, each to "as Far as in your power give mutual aid in supporting the cause of freedom and liberty."[16] Expecting two vain, hypochondriacal, rank-conscious men to work for "the cause of freedom and liberty" rather than for themselves was supremely naive. Lee was eccentric, capable, and irascible. As a career officer, he entertained a low opinion of generals of less experience who owed their commissions to their political positions. Schuyler was determined to retain command, and intelligent enough not to fall for Hancock's flattery. He knew all too well that many in Congress blamed him for the Canadian debacle. On the same day that the president of Congress penned his letter, Schuyler wrote one of his own disputing Wooster's assertion that the commander in Canada was in any degree independent of the man commanding the Northern Department. The field command had never been a separate one, and General Montgomery had always conducted himself as a subordinate.[17] His letter had the virtue of disabusing the most optimistic delegate about the wisdom of naming a general to the field command who was senior to the departmental commander. Creating an independent Canadian Department seemed the logical solution.

There was at the same time, however, a need to establish a department in the South, where the British threat was rapidly worsening. Loyalist sentiment there was strong. In South Carolina, Tories tried to seize control of the government in a virtual civil war. And a strange conversation between Lee and British General Henry Clinton that took place in early February, when they had a chance meeting in New York, assumed a newly-ominous importance. Clinton told Lee that he was leading a major offensive against Charleston, South Carolina. Lee was skeptical, observing to Washington that for him "to communicate his full plan to the enemy is too droll to be credited."[18] As Professor Rossie later noted, in so doing, Clinton "revealed both a whimsical nature and an utter contempt for American military power."[19] But it became alarmingly apparent that Clinton had been candid with the former British lieutenant colonel who had turned his coat and become a rebel general.

The thoroughly-alarmed Congress did what its severely-limited mandate allowed it to do: it authorized fourteen Continental battalions for service in the South and undertook an extensive reorganization of the army, dividing the country into four departments. The Eastern Department included New England; Washington would be both commander of that department and commander-in-chief. Schuyler would command a Middle Department, comprised of New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. Lee would command the department in Canada. To counter Clinton's threat, Congress made Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia a Southern Department.[20] But who would be its commander?

The only major generals without department commands were Artemas Ward and Israel Putnam. Even if they had been military geniuses—which they were not—they were unacceptable to the Southerners, who wanted Virginian Charles Lee. On February 27, the day Congress created the Southern Department, Edward Rutledge of South Carolina nominated Lee. But the Canadian command's importance and the conviction that Lee was the only general in whom all interested parties would have confidence made Congress reluctant to send him south. Lee thus continued, until the first week in March, to try to improve the Americans' grip on New York City, at once outraging the state's Provincial Congress and earning the equivalent of a censure from the Continental Congress for administering loyalty oaths and arrogating civil authority to himself.

Finally, on March 1, Congress decided to invest Lee with command of the Southern Department and, without Washington's advice or approval, appointed John Thomas to the Canadian command with the rank of major general.[21] Neither Washington nor Lee approved of that arrangement. In spite of his earlier reluctance to take on the Canadian command, Lee, noting that he alone among the candidates spoke French, expressed the logical opinion that "it would have been more prudent to have sent me to Canada." The commander-in-chief shared that view. "As a Virginian I must rejoice at the change," he wrote Lee on March 14, "but as an American, I think you would have done more essential service to the common cause in Canada. For besides the advantage of speaking and thinking in French, an officer who is acquainted with their manners and customs and who has traveled in their country must certainly take the strongest hold on their affections and confidence."[22] Washington also knew that, as a New England veteran of King George's War and the French and Indian War, Thomas was not the man to win the habitant's support.

As Rossie observed, appointing Thomas to the Canadian command without Washington's advice and concurrence set an unfortunate precedent that made the commander in the North directly responsible to the Continental Congress rather than to the commander-in-chief, a degree of independence justified on neither military nor political grounds.[23] Congress compounded its folly by failing to produce a definitive statement of Schuyler's position in the chain of command, and as long as that remained unresolved, the potential for trouble remained undiminished. Charles Lee was his senior, and Schuyler would have accepted his appointment without demur. But Thomas, in addition to being a New Englander (a species unloved by Schuyler) was the army's most junior major general. The fact that he possessed combat leadership experience that the New Yorker lacked did not compensate for his other attributes.

If Schuyler had complied with Congress' order to replace Lee in New York City as soon as his chronically troublesome health permitted, the problem of his role might have been mooted. But he refused to go to the city, offering the argument that leaving Albany would cause supplying the troops in Canada to suffer. Congress accepted the logic of his contention and countermanded its directive. From his headquarters at his home in Albany, Schuyler would command the Middle Department, while managing logistics for the army in Canada. Presumably, Thomas would enjoy the same degree of independence that the delegates had vested in Lee. That presumption, however, fell short of certainty because they disagreed among themselves about whether, in the changed circumstances, Canada was really a separate department, and whether Thomas or Schuyler held the chief command in the North.[24]

The Aftermath of Defeat in Canada

Schuyler's, Thomas', and Benedict Arnold's best efforts, coupled with the diplomacy of a congressional commission made up of Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase, and the brothers Carroll, Charles and John, could not prevail in Canada. Thomas died of smallpox on June 2, just one month after taking command. Brigadier Generals William Thompson and John Sullivan failed in their attempts to salvage the situation against Sir Guy Carleton. By July, the defeated wreck of the American army that only ten months earlier had departed Crown Point staggered back to where the campaign had begun.

During the search for scapegoats upon whom to cast the sins of omission and commission that marked that campaign, bitter personal and regional animosities surfaced in disgraceful mutual recrimination. General Schuyler unreservedly blamed every failure and mistake on New Englanders, and some of his indictments were plausible enough to convince delegates from middle and southern states of their justice. New England tardiness in sending reinforcements and the conduct of some New Hampshire soldiers at Quebec were especially damaging.[25] When Congress' emissaries returned to Philadelphia, their reports reinforced anti-New England sentiment. They were particularly unsparing in their condemnation of David Wooster, declaring him "totally unfit," and that his presence with the troops was "prejudicial to our affairs; we would humbly advise his recall."[26]

Samuel Chase, an uncritical partisan of General Schuyler and to whom New England egalitarianism was anathema, also insistently held that region and its soldiers responsible for every American failure.[27] John Adams, whose normal discourse was argumentation, found Chase's accusations especially galling. Leading the defense of his native region, he denounced the Marylander for fomenting discord between Northern and Southern soldiers during his stay with the army.[28] The impenitent Chase continued unabated his castigation of Yankees and unqualified support of Schuyler's every act. Not to be outdone in vituperation, some irresponsible New Englanders resorted to slandering Schuyler, even going so far as to suggest he was disloyal.

The period immediately following the Canadian debacle was not the Continental Congress' finest hour. Disappointment and helplessness conspired to make even normally responsible men debase the coinage of political discourse. When delegates from New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania united to cast the odium of defeat on New England they ignored their own states' slowness in responding to the call for reinforcements, and the fact that when their soldiers belatedly arrived at the front, their effectiveness in resisting the British advance did not surpass that of the New Englanders'. In fact, all of the troops defeated by the British under Simon Fraser, in the defining fight at Trois Rivieres on June 8, were from New Jersey and Pennsylvania.[29]

Yet, even more than David Wooster's inept leadership and the tardiness of reinforcements, time played a significant role in defeating the Americans in Canada: Congress wasted weeks before authorizing the invasion, Schuyler wasted as much time organizing it, and the British bought additional time for themselves by their excellent defense at Fort St. Johns in the autumn of 1775.[30]

A Commander—for Canada?

As the British made preparations to launch their 1776 counter-invasion from Canada, Congress wrestled with choosing a new commander for the 1,000 pox-ravaged, dispirited, near-mutinous men who comprised the northern army—most of them embittered New Englanders. To expect General Schuyler to rebuild that army into an effective fighting machine required an optimism few objective observers could muster. The Congress desperately needed to select a major general with organizational experience who was untainted by defeat, did not share the animus against Yankees, and who did share their brand of republicanism. One man, Horatio

Gates, had those qualifications.

Gates was the army's senior brigadier general, commissioned on June 17, 1775, two days after Washington was named commander-in-chief. As adjutant general, a position for which Washington may have nominated him (the Virginian had served with him during Braddock's campaign and was well aware of his service as a brigade major), Gates had played a significant part in organizing and training the Continental Army.[31] As ranking brigadier general, Gates—and not Thomas—would normally have been promoted in March, but his importance as adjutant general probably persuaded Congress to defer his advancement. Artemas Ward's resignation on April 23 created a vacancy for Gates to fill on May 16.[32]

On May 18, before either Gates or Washington knew of the former's promotion, the latter received from George Merchant, an escaped prisoner of war, papers that included copies of treaties concluded between Britain and German princes providing for the employment in North America of some 17,000 German soldiers.[33] Merchant also brought a letter to Benjamin Franklin covering one dated February 13, 1776, purporting to be addressed to Cadwallader Colden, Royal Lieutenant Governor of New York. That piece of correspondence reported that fifteen British regiments were probably at sea bound for America. These organizations, combined with German mercenary reinforcements who could sail in April, totaled approximately 30,000 enemy soldiers the King would be able to employ against the rebellious colonists by the end of June 1776.[34]

In addition to that alarming report, the letter included venomous criticism of Franklin and John Jay and a suggestive reference to replacing Washington with "A general of the first abilities and experience [who] would go over if he could have any assurance from Congress of keeping his rank; but being very high, he would not admit to have anyone but an American his superior, and that only in consideration of the confidence due to an American in a question so peculiarly American." A second letter dated February 14 announced that "A general of first rank and abilities would go over, if the Congress would authorize anyone to promise him a proper reception. This I had from Mr. Lee, agent for Massachusetts, but it must be a secret with you, as I was not to mention it."[35]

The "Mr. Lee" in question was Arthur Lee, the unstable and trouble-making brother of Washington's long-time friend and supporter, Richard Henry Lee. The implication was clear. In Arthur's opinion (and one certainly shared by others), Washington was not a man of "first abilities," and the command should go to a European soldier possessing those abilities, probably the Comte Francois de Broglie.[36]

Washington forwarded the original to Franklin, the addressee, with a copy to Richard Henry Lee. More important, he sent his adjutant general—Horatio Gates—to Philadelphia with the copies of the Anglo-German treaties. They were so important that Washington knew Congress would need to act without delay. Because he was reluctant to leave New York while the probability existed that the British fleet might appear, he sent Gates to represent him in developing a strategy for dealing with the new situation. Washington made it clear to President Hancock that his adjutant general enjoyed his confidence and had important latitude in representing his commander. "[Gates'] military experience and intimate acquaintance with our affairs," explained Washington, "will enable him to give Congress the fullest satisfaction about measures necessary to be adopted at this alarming crisis, and with his zeal and attachment to the cause of America, have a claim to your notice and favors."[37] During the evening of the day

Washington penned that endorsement, he received an urgent invitation from Hancock to come to Philadelphia for rest and consultation with Congress. At the same time, headquarters received notification that Gates had been promoted to major general and that Quartermaster General Thomas Mifflin had been made a brigadier general.[38]

John Hancock's letter notifying Gates of his advancement contained the flattering news that Congress had promoted him because of "the very great service you have performed for America by introducing order and discipline into the Army of the United Colonies, as well as your zeal and ardor for the American cause."[39] Those words certainly gratified the new major general, who was no more immune to flattery than his commander and several of his colleagues. They also accurately summarized his services and confirmed his confidence in Congress' perspicacity.

Washington shared the good opinion of Gates' services, but he did not welcome Hancock's request that the newly-promoted generals be assigned to Massachusetts. The threat of a British offensive there was too remote to justify posting them in a strategic backwater. Gates, who departed New York on May 19 before the arrival of the notice of his promotion, learned of it after arriving in Philadelphia on the twenty-first. Because by that time Washington had accepted Hancock's invitation to consult with Congress in person, Hancock deferred consideration of the documents from Merchant until the commander-in-chief was present.[40] Washington reached the capital on May 23, where consultations involving Washington, Gates, Mifflin, and a congressional committee continued for a week.[41]

While the deliberations were under way and the Canadian situation continued to deteriorate, Congress wrestled with what to do about the Canadian command. John Sullivan believed that his service in the North had earned him the right to the post. Washington obliquely but effectively scotched that chance in a letter by observing that Sullivan obviously wanted it, but "Whether he merits it or not, is a matter to be considered." Sullivan, continued Washington, "was active, spirited, and zealously attached to our cause.… But he has his wants, and he has his foibles. The latter are manifest in a little tincture of vanity, and an over desire of being popular, which now and then leads him into some embarrassments."[42] After paying tribute to Sullivan's personal attributes, the commander-in-chief observed "as the security of Canada is of the last importance to the well being of these Colonies, I should like to know the sentiments of Congress, respecting the nomination of any officer to that command." He obviously did not believe that Sullivan was the man for the job.

Congress' delegates had all but made their decision by June 13, when Schuyler's faithful supporter, Samuel Chase, wrote to Gates that a general "is to be sent [to Canada] with the powers of a dictator. Many have their eyes upon you, and I doubt not, that you will be appointed to this great and important [post]."[43] After more discussion, they made it official on June 17, resolving "that General Washington be directed to send Major General Gates into Canada to take command of the forces in that province." The decision granted Gates authority that John Adams ironically described this way: "We have ordered you to the post of Honour, and made you Dictator in Canada for six months, or at least until the first of October.… We don't trust you generals, with too much power, for too long Time."[44] The comment was more than a puckish aside. It was a reminder of the traditional Anglo-colonial distrust of generals and military establishments.

General Washington carried out Congress' directive on June 24, when he informed Gates, who was now back in New York City, that he was to command in Canada. He did not presume to give his old adjutant general detailed orders, noting that "The distance of the scene and frequent changes which have happened in the state of our affairs in Canada do not allow me to be more particular in my instructions. The command is important, the service difficult but honorable; and I most devoutly pray that Providence may crown your arms with abundant success."[45]

The new major general left New York City to take over his new duties on June 25. Daunting problems awaited him. The decisive defeat at Trois Rivieres had taken place earlier that month, followed by Arnold's retreat to St. Johns with 3,000 invalids. "Where, or in what Condition I will find the Army, I have no conception," Gates wrote John Adams. "The Prospect is too much clouded to distinguish Clearly."[46]

Overshadowing everything was the ambiguity of his mandate from Congress. Buoyed by words like those written by Adams and Chase and his own wishful thinking, Gates flattered himself that it conferred plenary powers in the northern theater. Congress had, however, significantly circumscribed his authority when it did not define his command relationship with General Schuyler, who remained commander of the Northern Department, which was the base for all operations. The delegates clearly meant for Gates to exercise substantially independent command of the field force in Canada, which Montgomery, Wooster, Thomas, and Sullivan had exercised in practice. If, as was all too probable, that force withdrew into New York and reentered the Northern Department, what would be its commander's relationship with the department commander? Failure to provide for that eventuality compromised Gates' position and provided fertile ground for official and personal conflict that could only make resisting British aggression from Canada more difficult.

Congress compounded its error by leaving the embittered John Sullivan with the northern field army. In his June 7 letter to Washington hinting that he wanted the Canadian command, Sullivan declared himself unwilling to serve under anyone other than Washington or Charles Lee. That declaration persuaded the commander-in-chief that leaving Sullivan in place was unwise. Unfortunately, not enough delegates shared that concern.[47]

Sullivan's resentment was neither the sole nor the most serious problem plaguing command of the northern troops. By the time Gates arrived at Albany and was a guest in Schuyler's mansion, the force he was to command had retreated from Isle aux Noix to Crown Point—back into his host's Northern Department. So long as the army remained south of the Canadian border, Gates, the junior major general present, would remain Schuyler's subordinate.

Instead of possessing the powers described by Adams and Chase, Gates faced a reality he was unwilling to accept: that his commission was dormant except in Canada, where there were no longer any American troops and where none would be in the foreseeable future. Insisting, however, that Congress intended him to command the northern force wherever it was, his appointment of Morgan Lewis and Joseph Trumbull to deputy quartermaster general and deputy commissary, respectively, brought matters to a head in a confrontation with Schuyler.[48] Although willing to confirm whomever Gates appointed, Schuyler clarified the command relationship by asserting "that he conceived the army to be altogether under his command when on this side of Canada subject however to the control of General Washington; that in his absence General Gates commanded the army in the same manner as General Sullivan did now and only as the eldest officer."[49] In brief, Gates was succeeding Sullivan. Because everyone, including Schuyler, knew that his chronic poor health would preclude his commanding in the field, Gates would, indeed, enjoy a considerable degree of independence—but at the sufferance of Schuyler, who would continue to possess plenary authority in the North. The seeds of discord in the later Saratoga operation were now firmly planted and already beginning to bear poisonous fruit.

Both men realized that Washington and Congress needed to remove all ambiguity. "As both General Gates and myself mean to be candid, and wish the matter settled without any of the chicane which would disgrace us as officers and men," wrote Schuyler to Washington in an effort to clarify the situation,

> we have agreed to speak plain, and to show each other what we have written to you upon the occasion, and he has accordingly read the whole of what I have said…. If Congress intended that General Gates should command the Northern Department, wherever it may be, as he assures me they did, it ought to have been signified to me, and I should have immediately resigned the command to him; but until such intention is properly conveyed to me, I never can, I must entreat your Excellency to lay this letter before Congress… to avert the dangers and evils that may arise from a disputed command.

The commander-in-chief promptly forwarded the letter to Congress, warning of the "evils which must inevitably follow a disputed command." He also observed that the troops on the northern frontiers would now be limited to defensive operations and that one of the two major generals—obviously Gates—could be more usefully employed with the Grand Army.[50]

Congress' delegates quickly reconfirmed its decision to vest Schuyler with overall command, resolving on July 8:

> That Major General Gates be informed, that it was the intention of Congress to give him command of the troops whilst in Canada, but had no design to vest him with a superior command to General Schuyler, whilst the troops should be on this side of Canada; that the president write to General Schuyler and Major General Gates, stating this matter, and recommending to them to carry on the military operations with harmony, and in such a manner as shall best promote the public business.[51]

While the resolution affirmed that, with the army back within the bounds of the Northern Department, Gates did not possess a "superior command" to Schuyler, it did not indicate that Gates was the subordinate, implying that the two generals would share command. President Hancock's letter to the principals clearly indicates that that was the delegates' naive intent.

Not every delegate believed that the Solomonic decision would stand up under the strains inherent in two ambitious, strong-willed men sharing the burdens of command in a theater that provided a stage for intense sectional and ideological rivalries. Samuel Adams, whose bluntness and realism were probably unsurpassed among his colleagues, prophetically predicted the arrangement's failure when he wrote, "Admitting that both generals have the accomplishments of Marlborough and Eugene, I cannot conceive that such a disposition [of the northern command] can be attended with any happy effects, unless harmony subsists between them. Alas!" Adams continued, "I fear this is not the case—already disputes have arisen, which they have referred to Congress! And although they appear to treat each other with a politeness becoming their rank… altercations between commanders who have pretensions so nearly equal, I mean in point of command, forbode a repetition of misfortunes."[52]

"Command carried with it the concomitant of responsibility," Professor Rossie aptly noted in his interpretation of Congress' effort to order command relations. "Both Schuyler and Gates would be acutely aware that a mistake by one would ruin the reputation of the other. The joint command, therefore, demanded a complete selflessness on the part of the two generals—a quality neither Gates nor Schuyler ever had in abundance."[53]

Ridiculing the Continental Congress for its management of military affairs has been all too easy. The manifest absurdity of its arrangements for command on the critical Canadian frontier cast its deficiencies in high relief. Justice and accuracy, however, require recognizing the complexity of the problems it faced and the limited resources it could bring to their solution. Congress—the creature of an emergency, endowed with ambiguous authority by suspicious member colonies, and lacking decisive coercive power—had nevertheless formed a union of confederated colonies, created a military establishment, opened diplomatic relations, and borrowed money. During May, June, and the first days of July, while trying to cope with the Gates-Schuyler problem, the delegates also consulted, debated, and approved the final draft of the Declaration of Independence. No other revolutionary body has wrought so well.

Gates' reaction to clarification of his status was mixed. On the one hand, he wrote to John Adams from his command post at Fort Ticonderoga, "I am no Dictator here… I have been Deceived and Disappointed in being removed from a place where I might have done the Publick Service"—an obvious sarcastic rebuttal to Adams' allusion to the dictatorial authority of the commander in Canada.[54] In a more politic vein, he told Hancock that he hadwritten to Schuyler "to assure him of my entre [sic] satisfaction and acquiescence in the Resolve of Congress. And my unalienable resolution to obey his Commands."[55] Once again secure in his position as northern commander, Schuyler could be and was generous toward his unwilling second, and professed himself pleased by the "perfect harmony" prevailing between them.[56] Both men did, indeed, seem determined to subordinate personal ambitions to the public service to which they repeatedly vowed devotion, and cooperated in preparing to resist Carleton's southward advance.

Carleton's Offensive and the American Response

While Guy Carleton constructed his fleet for his southward invasion and the American forces at Ticonderoga worked on its defenses, Schuyler and Gates made their decision to abandon the old ruined works at Crown Point. Arnold, Sullivan, and Frederick William von Woedtke concurred. But twenty-one officers, led by Colonels John Stark, William Maxwell, and Enoch Poor, drafted a protest petition. They argued that the army must dispute every foot of ground. Abandoning the old fort would provide the enemy with a strong position from which to attack Ticonderoga and make it impossible for the American boats to operate north of Crown Point. They also feared the British would use the works at Crown Point to support Indian incursions against the New England frontier.[57]

General Schuyler summarily dismissed their protest, declaring that abandoning Crown Point was "Indispensably necessary for a variety of reasons," and that their arguments did not "bear sufficient weight" to justify reversing the decision.[58] His tone so angered the colonels that at least one of them leaked the news of the controversy to a friend serving with Washington, who brought it to his commander's attention. Washington consulted some of his subordinates, one of whom, Nathanael Greene, reflected his New Englander's bias when he wrote to Governor Nicholas Cooke of Rhode Island that Schuyler has reached "one of the most mad resolutions I ever heard of, that is to quit Crown Point… we lose all the advantage upon the lake [Champlain];we have so much suprimity [sic] that the enemy could not enjure [sic] us this summer. We lay all the back parts of New England open."[59] Greene was Washington's ablest lieutenant, and his views carried weight with his chief and his fellow officers.

Washington shared the opinions of Greene and other members of his staff and addressed a letter to Schuyler, whom he held responsible for what he believed was an ill-conceived decision.[60] The letter's tone, however, was too reserved to convey the full measure of his disapproval. On July 19, he wrote a more candid reflection of his opinion to Gates, with whom he was (at that time) on more intimate terms. Washington professed himself skeptical of Schuyler's claim that his troops were not capable of defending Crown Point. He further opined that the field officers' dissent seemed to cast doubt upon the professed motives behind the decision. Washington went on to rehearse the colonels' arguments, declaring that

> [n]othing but a belief that you have actually removed the army from the Point to Ticonderoga, and actually demolished the former; and the fear of creating dissension, and encouraging a spirit of remonstrating against the conduct of superiors by inferiors, have prevented me, by the advice of the general officers here, from directing the post at Crown Point to be held until Congress should decide upon the propriety of its evacuation…. I must… express my sorrow at the resolution of your council, and wish, that it had never happened, as everybody who speaks of it also does; and that the measure could yet be changed with propriety.[61]

Gates' reply to Washington's suggested strictures came in the form of a letter as blunt as any the commander-in-chief ever received from a subordinate. Simply put, the major general defended Schuyler without reservation. "Your Excellency Speaks of those Works to be Destroyed at Crown Point," began Gates. "Time, & Bad Construction of those Works," he continued,

> had Completely Effected that business long before General Schuyler came with me to Crown Point. The Ramparts are Tumbled down, the casemates are Fallen in. The Barracks Burnt, and the whole so perfect a Ruin, that it would take Five times the Number of Our Army for several Summers, to put Those Works in Defensible [sic] Repair. Your Excellency also mentions the Troops expected to reinforce this Army; it would be to the last Degree improper, to Order Those Troops to Crown Point, or even hither [Ticonderoga] untill [sic] Obliged by The most pressing Emergency, as that would only be heaping One Hospital upon another…. Everything about this Army is infected—The Cloaths, The Blankets, The Air & The Ground they walk upon.[62]

Gates not only presumed to correct Washington's misapprehensions concerning Crown Point's condition and the general situation on the northern frontier, he voiced resentment that general officers of Washington's staff, of whom only Israel Putnam had personal experience in the North, had subjected his and Schuyler's decision to uninformed review.

The commander-in-chief's response reflected the not-too-surprising fact that he found the letter's tone offensive. He did, however, retreat from his unqualified condemnation of the decision to withdraw from Crown Point, and assured Gates that “there was council called” to review the matter and that he had merely discussed it with his general officers. Washington concluded that he would “not take up more time upon the subject, or make it a matter of further discussion.”[63]

Schuyler responded to the growing criticism with a letter to Washington, written on August 6, that his censure by the generals’ council in New York City was such an insult that he would resign unless Washington and/or Congress, in turn, censured the council’s members. Washington repeated what he had told Gates and advised Schuyler to drop the subject. If, however, he should persist, his letter threatening to resign would be forwarded to Congress.[64] The New Yorker did not persist, but neither did he not forget the matter, which he believed proved there were men in the army and Congress intent on ruining him. His suspicions were exaggerated, but not altogether unfounded, for there were some who seized every opportunity to discredit his conduct. When, on July 17, Washington informed Congress of his disapproval of abandoning Crown Point, John Hancock quickly announced that the commander-in-chief had the authority to deploy all Continental troops, including those assigned to the Northern Department, a clear signal that Washington was empowered to reverse Schuyler’s command decisions.[65]

Schuyler’s relations with Congress suffered additional damage during a series of conflicts with Congress, the later recounting of which will be an important part of the details of this story.

Carleton’s Offensive and the American Response: Gates and Arnold

While Schuyler conducted bootless duels with Congress and Carleton’s men prepared to penetrate the American interior, Gates at Ticonderoga did what he could to change the quality of a force that had ceased to be “an army but a mob… ruined by sickness, fatigue and desertion, and void of any ideas of discipline and subordination.”[66] Morale depended upon his and Schuyler’s receiving and transporting the materiel required to improve shelter, clothing, rations, and arms.

Smallpox’s ravages still jeopardized the health of men whose exposure to the disease had been so limited as to make them especially vulnerable. Inoculation was effective in reducing its severity, but field conditions rendered its administration difficult. Gates attacked the problem by ordering that all pox-stricken men be confined in a hospital at Fort Edward, that inoculating incoming recruits cease, and that the newcomers go into quarantine at Skenesborough.[67] His efforts paid dividends: by mid-August the army was free of the disease.[68] As the summer progressed, the men at Ticonderoga improved in health and morale. Strict, consistently-applied discipline reinforced unit effectiveness. By the end of October, Gates reported to Schuyler that the troops “here are in good spirits and think only of victory.”[69]

The most important lieutenant serving the commander at Ticonderoga was Benedict Arnold. Although Arnold was sometimes a difficult subordinate himself, relations between Gates and the Connecticut general were at this time amicable and productive. Arnold’s relations with lower-ranking officers created additional headaches for his military superiors and Congress, but his dealings with Captain Jacobus Wynkoop, whom Schuyler had placed in command of the lake flotilla, were judicious and demonstrated a firm grasp of the type of tactics peculiar to inland naval operations. Gates directed Arnold to supercede the inadequate temporary commodore. When on the night of August 15 Arnold arrived at Crown Point to assume command, Wynkoop refused to recognize his authority. While still trying to cope with that insubordination, Arnold heard, during the afternoon of the nineteenth, that an enemy force was approaching and, without informing Wynkoop, sent two schooners to investigate. Claiming that he suspected the boats' crews of deserting to the enemy, Wynkoop halted them by firing a signal gun. A furious Arnold threatened him with arrest, and Wynkoop, arguing that only Congress could place another officer over him, nevertheless ordered the schooners to continue their investigation.[70]

When informed of the incident, Gates ordered Arnold to arrest Wynkoop and send him to Ticonderoga. Arnold complied, but softened the blow with a letter recommending leniency. "I believe the Commodore was really of opinion that neither of us had the authority to command him," explained Arnold. "He now seems convinced to the contrary and sorry for his disobedience to orders. If it can be done with propriety, I wish he may be permitted to return home without being cashiered."[71] Gates concurred and allowed the stubborn Dutchman to ride to Albany with his pride largely intact. Arnold had behaved responsibly and generously, effectively ridding the Northern Department of an unfortunate appointment whose continued involvement in matters concerning the inland flotilla would have been disastrous. The matter of the Hazen court-martial was more serious and less admirably managed.

Moses Hazen was almost as complex a character as Arnold, frequently the object of suspicion, yet often an important and useful American officer. He had fought honorably at Crown Point, Louisbourg, Quebec, and Sillery during the Seven Years' War, winning a commendation from General James Wolfe and retiring at half-pay from the 44th Regiment of Foot. A wealthy landowner in Canada by 1775, Hazen's conduct during the Revolution's first year was sufficiently ambivalent to earn the suspicions of both armies. The British imprisoned him for a time, and both they and General Montgomery confiscated his property. He redeemed himself with the Americans during the invasion of Canada, and on January 22, 1776, was commissioned colonel of the Second Canadian Regiment.

Unfortunately, Hazen and Arnold embroiled themselves in a confusing and compromising dispute over confiscated goods, and Arnold charged him with insubordination. Gates authorized a court-martial with Colonel Enoch Poor, at that time commanding the 8th Continental Infantry, presiding. Between them, Arnold and members of the court turned the proceedings into a farce that saw him denouncing the court and challenging its members to duels and the court's refusing to hear his prime witness. After trying to extract an admission of fault from Arnold, Poor turned the minutes over to Gates with the request that Arnold be arrested and the Congress advised of the general's contempt for military law. Arnold, for his part, wanted the delegates to investigate the court's conduct.

Gates reviewed the transcript, dissolved the court, and declined to arrest Arnold, observing in his report to Congress that "the wrath of General Arnold's temper might lead him a little farther than is marked by the precise line of decorum to be observed before and towards a court martial." Understanding the circumstances, continued Gates, "I am convinced if there was a fault on one side there was too much acrimony on the other. Here again I am obliged to act dictatorially and dissolve the court martial…. The United States must not be deprived of that officer's services at this critical moment." Gates added that, while he was required to forward the matter to Congress, he believed that the delegates "will view whatever is whispered against General Arnold as the foul stream of that poisonous fountain detraction."[72]

By rescuing Benedict Arnold from almost certain disgrace, Horatio Gates did in fact make sure that "the United States [was] not… deprived of that officer's services at [a very] critical moment." It was at this juncture that Arnold went off, prepared his fleet, and fought the battle of Lake Champlain, foiling Sir Guy's 1776 invasion of the Northern colonies.

Schuyler Besieged

While Arnold's ad hoc sailors and Gates' Ticonderoga garrison of Continentals and militiamen thwarted Carleton's designs, military politics continued with barely perceptible abatement. In the midst of an unseemly fight over the Northern Department's commissariat, Walter Livingston, Commissary of Stores and Provisions and a Schuyler protégé, submitted his resignation, which Congress accepted on September 14. On that day Schuyler submitted his own resignation as "a major general in the army of the American States," but promised to remain at his post until a successor was appointed, which he assumed "need not exceed a fortnight."[73]

One can sympathize with the New York general's frustrations and growing suspicions that critics were conspiring against him. But resigning at a juncture when Washington faced victorious Sir William Howe at New York, and the delegates were struggling with more problems than their slender resources were intended to bear, was irresponsible. He knew if Congress accepted his resignation, Horatio Gates would become departmental commander—and he did not intend to advance that rival's cause. Evidence deduced from subsequent events suggest that Schuyler expected Congress to reject his untimely resignation, unequivocally endorse his performance, and "prevail" upon him to continue to command the northern army.[74] If he did, in fact, expect the delegates to respond in that fashion, the sarcastically self-righteous correspondence that soon issued from his pen testified to either self-destructive hubris or a remarkable political ineptitude on the part of a man who was not a political naif.

Schuyler took particular umbrage to a September 14 congressional resolution—passed nine days before receipt of his resignation—consigning fifteen tons of powder, 20,000 flints, and 200 reams of cartridge paper to Gates' Ticonderoga garrison.[75] Because the resolution consigned those supplies "to General Gates for the use of the army in the Northern Department," Schuyler interpreted the measure as by-passing his authority. Not even a letter from hard-pressed General Washington, trying to reassure him that the resolution was a response to a requisition from Gates, and that the words "for use of the Northern army" inferred no denigration of his authority, could mollify him.[76] The department commander's emotion-charged misinterpretation marked the end of the fruitful spirit of cooperation between him and his lieutenant that had prevailed since early July.

Professor Rossie's examination of the political ramifications of the tortured relations with Congress is useful. "Increasingly convinced of Gates' ambition, Schuyler may well have regretted his letter of resignation," writes Rossie. "Needless to say," he continued,

> there was no such regret evinced by the New England congressmen. Elated by Schuyler's resignation, Elbridge Gerry predicted that "harmony will ensue" in the Northern Department. There was another reason to rejoice. "We have obtained Colonel Moylan's resignation and General Mifflin is come again into the office of quartermaster general," he jubilantly informed Gates on September 27. Thus the Lee-Adams junto—the powerful congressional faction led by the Lees of Virginia and the Adamses of Massachusetts of which Gerry was a member—could be well satisfied. Bound together by the common conviction that reconciliation [with Britain]

> was now hopeless, the junto sought to advance those who shared that belief…. Livingston had been disposed of, Schuyler was on his way out, and Gates would almost certainly succeed to the command of the Northern Department.[77]

The anti-Schuyler faction's rejoicing proved premature. Its members underestimated the political skills of another strong bloc—one not yet fully committed to independence, but very committed to General Schuyler and, like him, "reluctant revolutionaries."

The New York Convention immediately took the offensive with a "spirited remonstrance" warning that "fatal and total destruction" would follow if Schuyler ceased to command in the North. Connecticut delegate William Williams suspected that Schuyler had personally initiated the remonstrance.[78] Congress appointed Edward Rutledge and William Hooper of North Carolina and Thomas McKeen of Delaware to take the remonstrance under consideration and report back. All three were known Schuyler partisans, and Phillip Livingston assured the convention's president that their report would "without question, be satisfactory."[79]

Williams correctly predicted that Schuyler's advocates would be so numerous and aggressive that those who would have been willing to accept his resignation "will give way to such a torrent in his favor for the sake of peace." President Hancock rather abjectly apologized to the general for tardiness in responding to letters, pleading the press of business, and promised to mend his ways. More important, Congress on October 2 resolved:

> That the president be desired to write to General Schuyler, and inform him that the Congress cannot consent, during the present situation of our affairs, to accept his resignation, but request, that he continue the command which he now holds; that he be assured, that aspertions [sic], which his enemies have thrown against his character, have had no influence upon the minds of the members of this house, who are fully satisfied of his attachment to the cause of freedom, and are willing to bear testimony of the many services which he has rendered to his country; and that, in order effectually to put calumny to silence, they will, at an early date, appoint a committee of their body, to enquire fully into his conduct, which, they trust, will establish his reputation in the opinion of all good men.[80]

The resolution was not a model of consistent logic. After declining to accept the general's resignation, condemning critics of his performance for casting aspersions upon his character, and fulsomely praising him, it promised expeditiously to appoint commissioners to "enquire fully into his conduct," trusting their inquiry would confirm the delegates' opinion. There was sound logic behind the internal contradictions, even if first glance suggests otherwise. The resignation's timing virtually insured its rejection. On August 27, the British had driven Washington from Long Island to Manhattan, which he had to abandon, leaving New York City to the enemy. It seemed for a while that the American army's central force might disintegrate. Schuyler and both his supporters and his critics knew this, and the delegates' resolution reflected fundamental reality. Schuyler had adroitly maneuvered the Congress into endorsing his stewardship.

Nor was the general finished with Congress. Before passing its resolution of October 2, it had, on September 25, enacted another one that appointed commissioners to "consult with the commanding officer of the northern department, and such other officers as may be thought proper." Because Congress had not yet acted upon his resignation, Schuyler was still commanding the Northern Department, and thus was the one, pending that action, with whom Congress' agents would consult.

But the general interpreted the matter very differently. In a letter dated September 27, and before formal rejection of the resignation, President Hancock informed Schuyler that the commissioners were on their way to discuss with him matters pertaining to his command. Schuyler, on October 6, instructed Hancock that he had erred in notifying him because "I find by the resolution of 25th ult. that the commissioners are to confer with General Gates," wrote Hancock. "My name is not so much as mentioned in any of the resolutions of that except in the second, and by that it would seem as if I acted under General Gates. Indeed from the resolution of that day it seemed unnecessary to have sent me any of the other papers, as it strongly implied that I do not any longer command in this department."[81] He also wrote to Washington on the same day that, without advising him that his resignation had been received and that he no longer commanded the Northern Department, Congress was sending George Clymer of Pennsylvania and Richard Stockman of New Jersey on their way to Ticonderoga to consult Gates "with respect to the army under his command."[82]

The general's letters to Hancock and Washington were not consistent with the facts. The resolution of September 25 contained no reference to Gates, but did refer to Schuyler twice. Schuyler either misrepresented the resolution's language or, on the basis of erroneous information, was responding without having seen it. His letter to Washington with the quotation concerning Clymer and Stockton was made up out of the whole cloth. Congress did not name the delegates until September 26, and their instructions did not direct them to confer with Gates.[83]

General Washington chose to ignore Schuyler's letter. So, once again from his Saratoga country house, Schuyler picked up his quill and wrote to Hancock a letter dated October 16. "The calumny of my enemies has risen to its height, their malice is incapable of heightening the injury," blasted Schuyler, who continued:

> I wish for the sake of nature they had not succeeded so well, I wish they had not been countenanced by the transactions of those whose duty it was to have supported me. In the alarming situation of our affairs, I shall continue to act some time longer, but Congress must prepare to put the care of this department into other hands: I shall be able to render my country better services in another line, less exposed to the repetition of the injuries I have sustained.[84]

The general's complaints were unwarranted. Congress had done more than confirm him in his command. It had expressed itself fully satisfied with his dedication to the common cause and acceded to his own request for an enquiry "effectually to put calumny to silence." Schuyler responded by yet again offering to resign, accusing the delegates of conspiring with his critics.

One week later he fired another salvo in his attack on Congress. This time, Schuyler alleged that its August 17 resolution exonerating General David Wooster of misconduct was

> couched in such terms as to leave even to the candid and judicious no alternative but that of supposing that Canada was not properly supplied either by Congress or me. Judge on whom the public censure would fall and let every gentleman in Congress fancy himself in my situation.… Is it consistent with the dignity which should be inseparable with the most respectable body on

earth, partially and precipitantly to enter into a resolution which leaves so much room for the public to consider me a faithless servant? Deeply sensible of the injury I have sustained from the hand which ought to have supported me, I shall endeavor to be patient [and] do my duty in this critical juncture with zeal, alacrity and firmness.[85]

Even loyal supporters found that letter distressing. When the delegates acquitted Wooster, they did nothing to impugn Schuyler's integrity and devotion. If, as Robert R. Livingston warned him, they should have to choose between him and Congress, "your very friends must take part against you, or contribute to lessen the influence of a body on whose power their very salvation depends. Should any unfortunate accident happen, it would be charged and perhaps justly, to your precipitate conduct (for such it would be called) & God knows whether you could escape the blind resentments of the people."[86]

Schuyler's faithful friend Edward Rutledge undertook to repair the general's relations with Congress with a proposal that Schuyler come to Philadelphia to confer with the delegates, who, after hearing his plans for defeating Carleton's "making an Impression from Canada; and having obtained full powers for that purpose, let him return to his command to carry those measures into execution." Since Schuyler already possessed all the powers that Congress could grant, Rutledge probably hoped that the general's presence would be enough to confound his critics. He also noted that a visit from Schuyler would also have a much-desired political result, by helping suppress democratic "popular spirit."[87]

Gates on the March

Sir William Howe's successes against Washington on Manhattan and in New Jersey aborted Schuyler's projected visit. After failing to raise an adequate response from Pennsylvania and New Jersey militias, Congress on November 23 resolved "That General Washington be directed forthwith to order, under his immediate command, such of the forces, now in the Northern Department, as have been raised by the states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey."[88] Because Carleton had by that time withdrawn into Canada, veteran soldiers could safely march south to reinforce Washington's disintegrating Grand Army.

After a summer of defeat, retreat, and despair, the troops under the commander-in-chief's immediate command were reduced to a total of 3,765 "Present Fit for Duty & on Duty."[89] Ignorant of Howe's decision to suspend operations and bivouac his army on the Delaware River side, Washington feared an attack on Philadelphia. His existing force was too small to defend the city. Since many of the men's enlistments expired December 1, and most of the rest would be free to leave at the year's end, survival required early and effective reinforcement.

On November 26, Washington ordered Gates to march the New Jersey and Pennsylvania Continental regiments to Philadelphia.[90] Gates had anticipated Washington's need when, on November 15, he wrote to Schuyler that he believed Howe's objective was the American capital, and that a "large body of Troops could not be too soon assembled upon the west side of the Delaware." Gates, therefore, would order eight Continental regiments to march to Albany for winter quarters, "or be at Hand to Succour the Southern Army, as occasion might require."[91]

After receiving Schuyler's order to place Colonel Anthony Wayne of the 4th Pennsylvania Battalion in command at Ticonderoga, Gates started southward with eight regiments on

December 2.[92] Six days later, when they were in Orange County, the New York Council of Safety urged Gates to join forces with Generals Charles Lee and George Clinton, who together had a combined Continental and militia force of about 9,000 men.[93]

Washington had detached Lee for service east of the Hudson, but when conditions worsened in New Jersey he urged him to rejoin the main army. Contemptuous of Washington's capacity for command, Lee responded with perilous tardiness. The Council of Safety's members wanted to retain Lee's, Clinton's, and Gates' forces to defend the Hudson Valley. Ignoring Washington's and the nation's greater need, Lee contributed an unpalatable morsel to the disgusting stew when, on December 13, early on the same day that a British patrol captured him, he wrote Gates a letter condemning Washington's allowing Fort Washington to fall, with the gratuitous observation that he had "unhing'd the goodly fabrick we had been building—there never was so damn'd a stroke—entre nous, a certain great man is damnably deficient."[94]

Gates immediately rejected the Council's proposal to join with Lee and Clinton, and persuaded its members that what they suggested was patently foolish.[95] Since it was clear the general was determined to join Washington, the Council's spokesman informed him that Clinton would accept orders respecting his New York militia.[96] Although Gates would have been very pleased to add the militiamen to his force, they were unwilling to leave their state, and Gates lacked the authority to coerce them.

After a march marked by rain and snow, Gates led his column across the Delaware during December 16 and arrived at Washington's camp on the twenty-second. Once reunited with the commander-in-chief, Gates volunteered advice that, fortunately, Washington rejected: withdraw across the Delaware and abandon Philadelphia. Gates believed the retreat from New York City and across New Jersey had so demoralized the soldiers that they could not be rallied north of Maryland.[97] But Washington, reinforced by the 600 effectives Gates brought in and approximately 2,000 Pennsylvania militia, had a total of 7,659 men. And it was with those soldiers that Washington wrought the miracle of Trenton-Princeton.[98]

Gates, however, did not participate in that miracle. With Washington's assent, he rode to Baltimore, whence Congress had adjourned because of Philadelphia's vulnerability. The general claimed that his health had so declined as to limit his capacity for active combat command. Critics, however, have unfairly attributed Gates' trip to a combination of cowardice and ambition. But at least three contemporaries who were in a position to know—Thomas Nelson, Elbridge Gerry, and John Hancock—referred to his poor health in correspondence.[99]

Professor David Nelson, who carefully studied the details of the general's career, argued that if ambition was Gates' lodestar, he would not have absented himself from Washington's staff. "In fact, if politics had been uppermost in his mind, he would have realized that to serve under Washington in a military skirmish… could only bolster his reputation with Congress, not to mention with Washington himself," explained Nelson, "who would certainly have appreciated Gates' remaining with him in an hour of need. Better to have arrived on the doorstep of Congress as a victorious, or even defeated, general who had stood high in Washington's favor than to sit idly by while others fought.[100]

Gates reached Baltimore on December 28, and he certainly contacted delegates who had supported him and still favored a change in the northern command, as is reflected in Samuel Adams' note to kinsman John: "Congress is very attentive to the northern army and care is taken effectually to supply it with everything necessary this winter for the next campaign."[101] The New

England-Virginia bloc continued intent on replacing Philip Schuyler.

The Vexatious Problem of Rank: Appointments, Seniority, Promotions, and Assignments

The Congress that convened in Baltimore at the end of 1776 included a number of new, inexperienced delegates, some of whom lacked their predecessors' political acuity. Pressing problems tested them. The national military establishment needed enlarging and staffing, and the chronically inefficient logistical system had to be reformed if the army were to survive. Personal ambition, provincial jealousies, and philosophical principle made Congress' task more difficult than a catalogue of issues would reveal.

Take, for instance, the need to create a larger army. How large must it be? How should its ranks be filled? Hard experience convinced many officers that they could not win the war without a large regular army that could quickly respond to enemy initiative or exploit promising opportunities. On September 16, while Washington was directing the successful delaying skirmish at Harlem Heights, Congress authorized enlisting eighty-eight regiments through state quotas "to serve during the present war." Units already enrolled and recruited for the war's duration would be counted toward the total authorized strength. Every enlisted man would receive a bounty of twenty dollars and entitlement to allotments of 100 acres. Officers received congressional commissions, but "the appointment of all officers and filling up vacancies (except general officers) [would] be left to the governments of the several states."[102]

Conceding the power to appoint company and field grade officers to the states did not resolve a fundamental issue. Did ultimate authority over the Continental Army reside in the states or with Congress? If the latter was, in reality, "merely a forum for the individual states, then the appointment of officers and their promotions should rest with the states. If, on the other hand, Congress was more than the sum of its parts, then it should exercise the final authority in all matters touching upon the Continental Army—including the promotion of its officers." Some delegates realized that dividing the appointment authority posed more problems than it solved. Fearing that the states would appoint unqualified men, Congress requested of General Washington that he send it a list of officers he wished to have retained in the army. Congress expected to "send the list with a Member of Congress to their respective states who have been ordered to stress the necessity of appointing men of education…."[103]

Matters came to a head during February 1777, when Washington notified Congress that it needed to appoint three major generals and ten brigadiers. The delegates responded with a debate that Thomas Burke of North Carolina described as "perplexed, inconclusive, and irksome."[104] There was general dissatisfaction with the performance of several commanders, and members disagreed about how to select and promote generals. John Adams, who was disinclined to view them with awe, wrote to his wife Abigail that "Schuyler, Putnam, [Joseph] Spencer, and [William] Heath, are thought by very few to be capable of the great commands they hold…. I wish they would all resign."[105] Although Adams himself had faults that some contemporaries delighted to contemplate, he also enjoyed important assets, among them intelligence and honesty—and other testimony supports his statement. Schuyler, for example, had more critics than committed champions, and "Old Put" was often an object of condescension that approached ridicule. In 1779, Major General Alexander McDougall described Spencer as a fool and Heath as an "honest, obstinate man." Consistent with his distrust of generals, Adams suggested, “For my part I will vote upon the general principles of a republic for a new election of general officers annually, and every man shall have my consent to be left out, who does not give sufficient proof of qualifications.”

Other delegates were not ready to go along with Adams’ application of the ancient practices of the Roman Republic. Some believed that the Congress should establish rules for promotion, and proposed several. Delegates from Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina proposed that the states recommend appointments based upon the number of men they provided: “three battalions, one brigadier, nine [battalions] one major general;” the members rejected that apportionment. Some delegates favored the simple solution of promoting according to seniority.[106] Others, however, found that criterion unacceptable. Thomas Burke had an idealistically orderly streak that found expression in a profound distress at Congress’ failure to agree upon a standard for promotions, and that led him to favor basing promotion upon the number of regiments [battalions] raised by the states.[107]

Everyone agreed that, regardless of the standard adopted, Congress had to reserve the right to reward outstanding merit. Finally, on February 19, the delegates passed a resolution intended to be a compromise including all the diverse proposals: “That in voting for general officers, a due regard shall be had to the line of succession, the merit of the person proposed, and the quota of the troops raised, and to be raised, by each state.”[108] That catch-all effort to comprehend every shade of opinion so nearly approached the meaningless that it, when applied, worked manifest injustice to Benedict Arnold, John Stark, Jedediah Huntington, and Jeremiah Wadsworth. “The overall effect of the promotions was to breed dissatisfaction among many of the officers who felt they were unjustly passed over, and to pose a dilemma for Congress,” summarized one scholar. Many high-ranking officers were unfit for command, but if Congress ignored their seniority and promoted more capable junior officers, “it was subjected to insults and threats.” Contrarily, if Congress tried to promote men solely on seniority, its efforts were lampooned “by those states whose tardy support of the war had deprived them of general officers, while the present quotas of troops they were contributing entitled them to positions of high rank. But if Congress chose to take this into consideration, and thereby passed over able senior officers from states which had their ‘quota’ of generals, then they did these men an injustice and risked their resignations.”[109]

Application to Schuyler and Gates

The politics of appointments and mutual resentments produced the poisoned environment into which the Gates-Schuyler contest for the northern command was revived by another exercise in politics. On September 12, 1776, Gates named John Trumbull, artist son of Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull, deputy adjutant general of the Northern Department. The young man did not receive his commission until February 22, 1777—more than five months after Gates named him. Noting that he had been serving as acting deputy in that position since June 28, 1776, Trumbull asked Congress to date his commission from that date.[110] It was an unexceptional request, but personalities and politics kept compliance with it from being routine. Four factors were at play: 1) The president of the Continental Congress, John Hancock, did not like the Trumbulls; (2) Gates made the appointment, a fact that could not fail to embarrass Trumbull with Schuyler’s supporters; (3) The delegates were in a testy mood about appointments and criticism; and (4) Trumbull couched his request in terms that fed that mood. He believed he was the object of deliberate animosity, not the victim of an oversight caused by the press of business, and so he intended to "lay aside my cockade and sword."[111] Gates, together with Trumbull's friend and supporter James Lowell, tried to persuade him not to resign. The major general asked Hancock to recommend that the commission be "reinstated from the time of his embarking with me at New York, to join the Northern Department."[112] The delegates, though, were by now quite impatient with complaining letters from officers, including an especially hectoring one that arrived from the pen of General Schuyler.[113] A less-provocative request from young Trumbull would have mollified them, but his response was so belligerent that they resolved to ask Gates to select a replacement; Trumbull resigned.[114]

While young Trumbull was busy irritating members of Congress, Gates was lingering on their doorstep, playing the game that engaged 18th-century generals: politics. New Englanders were especially hospitable. When they learned Sir Henry Clinton had captured Newport, Rhode Island, Samuel Adams and other Yankees suggested that Gates or Nathanael Greene (another favorite of theirs) be detailed to retake the town. Washington aborted that scheme when he replied that Benedict Arnold and Joseph Spencer had received the assignment.[115]

On February 5, Washington made Gates commandant at Philadelphia.[116] Fifteen days later Congress resolved that future enlistments be for three years or the war's duration, and that Gates resume the post of adjutant general.[117] Washington endorsed the proposal. "I look upon your resumption of the Office," he wrote Gates, "as the only means of giving form and regularity to our new army."[118] Gates was now firmly impaled on the horns of a dilemma, torn between his ambition for an independent command and not offending Washington and friendly delegates. He hesitated to place himself again under the commander-in-chief's personal command., and knew that his supporters were working to have him replace Schuyler in the Northern Department, whose commander would preside over the campaign to repel the next British invasion. Most of the soldiers for that campaign would come from New England, and few northerners believed Schuyler was the leader who would successfully turn back the invaders.

Working to Schuyler's disadvantage was his chronically unpleasant relations with Congress, which worsened as the general, convinced that the delegates harbored men committed to his downfall, penned a succession of letters reflecting his frustrations and suspicions. Certainly many facts justified his suspicions, and military conditions in the North would have frustrated a commander more resourceful than Schuyler. But the tone of his correspondence discomfited his supporters and was grist for his critics' mill.

In its December 9, 1776, issue, Hugh Gaines' *Gazette and Weekly Mercury* published what purported to be an intercepted letter from Commissary Joseph Trumbull to Delegate William Williams of Connecticut. Williams, a veteran of the Seven Years' War, signer of the Declaration of Independence, a dedicated patriot who on several occasions volunteered his money and credit to the Revolutionary cause, was an implacable Schuyler critic. The letter attributed to Trumbull contained an "odious suspicion" of Schuyler's character.[119]

Believing in the letter's authenticity was easy enough for Schuyler: he had opposed Joseph Trumbull's appointment, and he knew of Williams' open opposition to himself. On February 4, 1777, Schuyler wrote a letter upbraiding Congress for not immediately defending him against his calumniators.[120] The letter did nothing but fuel the increasingly adversarial climate and convince Congress to resolve

That it is altogether improper and inconsistent with the dignity of this Congress, to interfere in the disputes subsisting among officers of the army; which ought to be settled, unless they can be otherwise accommodated, in a court martial, agreeable to the rules of the army; and that the expressions in General Schuyler's letter of the 4th of February, "that he confidently expected Congress would have done him justice, which it was in their power to give, and which he humbly conceives that they ought to have done," were, to say the least, ill-advised and highly indecent.[121]

President Hancock informed the general of the resolution and advised him to moderate his style. Schuyler ignored that wise counsel and decided to plead his case before Congress as a member of the New York delegation, departing Albany on March 24. In the meantime the Adams duo introduced, and the delegates passed, a resolution installing General Gates as the independent commander at Fort Ticonderoga. Hancock executed the resolution on March 25, directing Gates to "immediately repair to Ticonderoga, and take command of the army there."[122] By underlining those six words, Congress made clear its intent: Schuyler retained nominal command of the department, but Gates would be the operational commander—a point accented by Gates' being permitted to select Major General Arthur St. Clair as his second-in-command.

The politics of command was producing ill-conceived decisions that could only exacerbate a disgraceful commingling of ambition, factionalism, and provincialism that corrupted all parties.

Gates Takes Charge

When Horatio Gates reached Albany on April 17, Schuyler had already left to attend Congress, leaving Gates the senior officer present. Establishing his headquarters in Albany, he promptly began to function as de facto department commander, technically exceeding the authority granted him by Congress. But the Northern Department had to be prepared to meet the challenge of the renewed offensive every informed person expected would come during the upcoming summer. The northern winter had severely limited what could be done, and April was rapidly drawing to a close. A commander attending Congress could not make the daily decisions now required.

This does not mean Schuyler had been derelict in his duties. Plagued as he was by poor health, he had done what he could to administer his extensive department and perform his duties as Indian Commissioner. Acutely conscious of American vulnerability in the Mohawk Valley, he had assigned French engineer Captain B. de la Marquisie to rebuild the ruined Fort Schuyler [Stanwix] (although that assignment did not end satisfactorily, as previously discussed). Before he left he replaced Colonel Samuel Elmore's Connecticut troops with Colonel Peter Gansevoort's 3rd New York Regiment of the Continental Line.[123] Preparations at Forts Stanwix and Dayton had a special urgency because Schuyler and Washington expected the next invasion would descend the Mohawk Valley, reversing Jeffrey Amherst's 1760 route. Schuyler felt more secure about the Champlain-Hudson country, with its massive Fort Ticonderoga standing athwart that route.

But Gates rightly believed that preparations to repel the coming British campaign could not be deferred until the uncertain date of Schuyler's return. Conditions at Ticonderoga were especially worrisome. Much of the barracks' fabric was ruined, and the barracks were too far from the defensive works. An undiplomatic plea to Washington for tents succeeded only in irritating the commander-in-chief. Supplies desperately needed at the fort were lying undelivered in the Albany depot.[124]

Expecting the British to field more than 11,000 men, Gates sent a requisition for 13,600 men to Congress. But the New England militia was tardy in arriving, and Gates, darling of the region's legislators, asked Joseph Trumbull, "What infatuation has Seized my Yankees [?] They take the Field as tardily as if they were going to be hanged."[125]

Loyalism was strong in New York, and Gates committed soldiers to dealing out summary judgment. He evinced more satisfaction with their effectiveness than the facts justified when he told Hancock that Toryism was "diminished this way; About Twenty have been killed… many are in the several Goals [jails] of this and Neighboring Counties, and the rest offer to Surrender."[126]

Gates must have realized there were officers in the Northern Department whose loyalty to General Schuyler was undiminished, and he could not have been surprised to learn that Lieutenant Colonel Richard Varick, the Deputy Commissary General of Muster and erstwhile aide to Schuyler, was corresponding with the general. Schuyler asked Varick to learn all that he could about the ramifications of Gates' appointment to Ticonderoga. After conversations with Dr. Jonathan Potts and Colonel Morgan Lewis, both Gates confidantes, Varick reported, "I have the greatest pause of suspicion, that there is more on the carpet, than either he [Potts] or Col. Lewis choose to have mentioned to any person who they are not certain of being equall[y] prejudiced in General Gates favor as themselves." Gates made a point of letting the young colonel know that the correspondence had been intercepted. A justifiably dismayed Varick wrote Schuyler on April 18, "It is rumored that he [Gates] is to command in the department & that he has the appointment of all the staff for this army."[127] Divided loyalties, however natural, did not augur well for affairs in the North.

An important product of Gates' brief stay in Albany was his analysis of what he expected the enemy to undertake during 1777. General Howe's primary objective would be the conquest of New York state by effecting a junction of troops from New York City with an invading expedition from Canada. Interestingly, Gates anticipated that Sir William, either deluded by non-military factors or acting upon uninformed orders from London, might be so distracted as to undertake to capture Philadelphia. Whatever happened, Gates expected that the British army in Canada would advance south along the Champlain-Hudson line, with Fort Ticonderoga its first objective.[128] The unfolding of events during 1777 confirmed his analysis. Horatio Gates was no military genius, but he did possess a core of professionalism that served the Americans well during this critical period.

Push Comes to Shove

While Gates worked to prepare the Northern Department for the inevitable invasion, important events moved Congress into another chapter in the politics of command. And it finally gave Schuyler the formal inquiry he craved. Since no one had charged him with any offence, nor had he been the object of any action that dishonored him, some delegates opposed the inquiry, arguing that it was in itself an implied censure. The New York members, however, effectively countered with the question, “If the general had done his duty faithfully, why was his authority pared away to nothing and the command of the army, in effect, transferred from him to General Gates, a junior officer?”[129] Congress responded on April 17 by appointing a thirteen-member committee to investigate the total record of Schuyler’s service.[130]

Everyone expected the committee to vindicate the general. But Gates’ continued service as field commander with extraordinary authority was incompatible with Schuyler’s powers as department commander. The latter rightly recognized the delegates’ inconsistency in retaining him in command in his department while bestowing upon Gates a separate command that made him the effective commanding general in the North. Schuyler would not agree to serving at Albany unless he received absolute command “over every part of the Northern department”; he would return to Albany only as a civilian.[131] Three days after making that declaration, he informed Washington that he intended to resign.[132]

A summary of the rather complex military-political situation is in order: Gates commanded at Ticonderoga with authority that made him the Northern Department’s field commander and, in Schuyler’s absence, de facto department commander as senior officer present; Schuyler, the department’s commander, was attending Congress as a New York delegate, intent upon salvaging his military reputation and authority; Congress instituted an investigation, at the general’s insistence, into his conduct that everyone expected would endorse his stewardship in the North; Schuyler threatened to resign if Gates occupied a command at Ticonderoga that was, in reality, independent of the department commander; and finally, Schuyler’s opponents intended for Gates to emerge as northern commander.

Those men who desired Gates’ elevation to northern commander were too optimistic. They underestimated the pro-Schuyler faction’s political resourcefulness and their grasp of logic. In the first place, that faction undertook more than just obtaining an endorsement of the general’s past performance—they sought to restore him to unqualified command. To that end, they exploited the accurate perception that New York harbored many who would welcome British success. Only General Schuyler’s military and political leadership stanched the flow of disaffected folk into overt Toryism. To remove him just as a King’s army was poised to enter the state would ensure its loss.

The shift in sentiment occurring as the delegates deliberated both disappointed and angered Gates. He saw no reason why the man commanding on the northern frontier should not have his headquarters at Ticonderoga, just as the British had done during the Seven Years’ War. The fort was the primary obstacle on the invasion route and would be the enemy’s first objective. Further, it acted as the nerve center for any defensive action to interdict that route, and was where the general directing the American forces should be—and Gates was determined to be that general. Gates resolved not to serve on the front if Schuyler were to exercise superior command at Albany. If that was Congress’ will, he would request dismissal from its service.[133]

With the able leadership of New York delegates, General Schuyler’s supporters rallied to vindicate the general and have him exonerated of all accusations of improprieties in managing funds sent during 1775 for operations in Canada. The general submitted a remonstrance to Congress that justified “himself in every particular.”[134] The delegates responded by resolving that his “memorial was satisfactory, and that the Congress entertained the same favorable opinion of the general as they entertained before passing the resolution”—which constituted “a complete and honorable vindication of the general’s character and conduct.” The New Yorkers believed that neither they nor Schuyler had to worry about the thirteen-member committee's inquisition.[135]

That optimism received official confirmation when, on May 15, the Board of War recommended to Congress

> That Major General Schuyler be directed to proceed to the Northern department, and take upon himself the command there…. That a letter be written by the President to Major General Gates, informing him, that Major General Schuyler is ordered to take upon him the command of the Northern department; and that Congress remains desirous that Major General Gates should make his own choice, either to continue in the command of the Northern department, under General Schuyler; or to take upon him the Office of Adjutant General in the Grand Army immediately under the Commander in chief, with the rank he now holds.[136]

The Board's recommendation offered Gates the Hobson's choice between serving as Schuyler's subordinate or accepting the post of adjutant general—which in February had been deemed a demotion, and under the conditions obtaining in May would be even more demeaning.

Gates' supporters attacked the Board's report, but—by a vote of five states to four, with two divided and two not present—the delegates accepted it on May 22. The New England states—excepting Rhode Island, which had no delegates present—and Richard Henry Lee opposed acceptance. The majority of the Virginia delegates, Maryland, New York, North and South Carolina, and Pennsylvania voted to return Schuyler to the Northern Department. Georgia and New Jersey divided. The unexpected Virginia majority for Schuyler was decisive.[137]

Jonathan Trumbull and James Lowell immediately reported Congress' action to Gates, who was outraged, as his opponents had expected and hoped he would be.[138] He had, after all, on the eleventh of the month declared that he would seek an "Honourable Dismission" if his cause did not prevail. However, if they were intent on calling his bluff, he frustrated them by obtaining Schuyler's permission to appear before Congress. His opponents were not deeply disturbed by the prospect of his demanding a hearing, believing themselves "indifferent about his resentment."[139]

At Roger Sherman's request, Gates on June 18 gained admittance before the delegates "to communicate Intelligence of importance."[140] Prefacing his presentation with a few general remarks, he quickly turned to his reason for appearing before men who "a few days since without having given any cause of offence, without accusation, without trial, without hearing, without notice" had reduced him by supercession, and proceeded to denounce the New York delegates, especially James Duane, as authors of his humiliation. During the donnybrook that ensued, the New Yorkers demanded his expulsion, while New Englanders clamored for him to be heard. The former prevailed, and Gates withdrew.[141]

The fiasco was a thoroughly unedifying performance during which the general and those who had urged him to appear made a serious tactical blunder that played into the hands of the New Yorkers. Just a few months earlier in February, not a single delegate from that state had attended the Continental Congress; its influence was at low ebb. But by mid-April, William Duer, John Jay, Philip Livingston, and James Duane led a six-man delegation, and by the end of June those able men had conducted a bold campaign that salvaged General Schuyler's career and seized the initiative in ordering affairs on the northern frontier.

Candid and perceptive men spelled out to Gates the nuances of the politics of command. The Congress had really not intended for him to command the Northern Department. Hubris and political machinations had misled him. Though he now realized that he and his partisans had made a fool of him, he neither resigned nor continued to protest. A cool-headed reassessment revealed his situation to be less bleak than it had seemed. Schuyler was running against Brigadier General George Clinton for governor of New York. If, as seemed probable, the former won election, Gates would succeed him in the Northern Department. State domestic politics promised to give him what the politics of command had withheld.

With John Burgoyne preparing to invade, the time for the commander of the department charged with repelling that invasion to seek the governorship of the state that would be the invasion's theater was unpropitious; but Schuyler, expecting to win, did not campaign aggressively. To Schuyler's and Gates' shared surprise, George Clinton won the election. Schuyler was less popular with farmers and tradesmen than with the state's political and social elite, and Clinton was a formidable popular leader. Thus, Schuyler continued as department commander.

The War Intervenes in the Politics

It was during this point that Burgoyne re-took Ticonderoga without an assault. On July 8, three days after the Americans evacuated the great northern citadel, Congress disposed of Gates by ordering him "to repair to headquarters and follow the directions of General Washington."[142] While he awaited the commander-in-chief's orders, he made a brief visit to his home at Traveller's Rest. After returning to duty he again rejected the post of adjutant general, and Washington placed him in temporary command of General Benjamin Lincoln's division. On July 24, Lincoln had gone northward to take charge of organizing the Northern Department's New England militia.[143]

In a series of further reverses, Schuyler's main force retreated southward, to the accompaniment of a rising chorus of criticism of the general's conduct of the defensive campaign. Even men who had steadfastly supported him were having second thoughts. His future son-in-law, Alexander Hamilton, admitted in a letter to Robert R. Livingston that "I am forced to suppose him inadequate to the important command with which he has been intrusted. There seems to be no firmness in all his actions…."[144] By early August, the Americans had retreated to Stillwater on the Hudson's west side, where they began preparing field fortifications. But after eleven days Schuyler again ordered his men to retreat, and by August 18 his main camp was only nine miles from Albany.

Meanwhile, Congress and Washington received news of Fort Ticonderoga's loss with shocked disbelief. The commander-in-chief took what tardy measures he could to relieve the pressure on Schuyler by marching from Middlebrook, New Jersey, to Morristown, posting General John Sullivan at Pompton, and sending General Samuel Holden Parsons to relieve John Nixon's brigade at Peekskill, so that it could rush northward to reinforce Schuyler.

As noted in the previous chapter, Arthur St. Clair, Ticonderoga's commander, became the scapegoat upon whom everyone, including Schuyler, placed the blame for not repulsing the enemy. But Schuyler, as he had in 1776, also held New England responsible, arguing that if that region had reinforced him the fort would not have fallen. He conveniently ignored the fact that in March, Washington had diverted most of the New England units intended for Ticonderoga to

New Jersey and Peekskill, a deployment of which Schuyler was properly informed. Schuyler characterized the replacements he did receive as being one-third blacks and boys, then assured Washington that he would smile "with contempt on the malice of my enemies, and attempt to deserve your esteem, which will console me for the abuse which thousands may unjustly throw out against me."[145] New Englanders eagerly entered the lists against their old adversary, accurately gauging the shift taking place when Congress communicated directly with Benedict Arnold without going through Schuyler. The politicians directed the former to assemble militia to "check the progress of Gen. Burgoyne, as very disagreeable consequences may be apprehended, if the most vigerous [sic] measures are not taken to oppose him."[146]

Others, including some New Yorkers who had special cause for concern—their state was, after all, the one most immediately affected by Burgoyne's invasion—wanted Schuyler and St. Clair called to account. On July 26, New Jersey delegate Jonathan Sargeant introduced and Daniel Roberdeau of Pennsylvania seconded a motion to recall both men and direct Gates to replace Schuyler.[147] During the debate that followed, New England delegates, anticipating victory, argued that both St. Clair and Schuyler had forfeited their soldiers' confidence. Exaggerating the role of the militia, they claimed that, while their region's militiamen would not serve under the Northern Department's senior generals, they would gladly do so under Gates. More damaging to Schuyler was that New Yorkers had come to share the growing disaffection—a fact of which the general was painfully aware.[148] Congressional opponents engaged in some hyperbole in limning Gates' comparative military virtues.[149]

Opponents of Sargeant's motion were quite willing to recall St. Clair and investigate his evacuation of Ticonderoga, but recalling Schuyler was another matter. Conditions in the North, not the general, were to blame they argued—neglecting to remember that they and the department commander bore at least some of the responsibility for those conditions. In light of those conditions, they claimed, no one could have repelled the enemy. And, as usual, they charged that Yankee machinations were behind all criticism of the general. Yet, every report from the North made their contentions less plausible. Finally, the New York delegation advised the state's Council of Safety that they doubted the wisdom of continuing to oppose Schuyler's recall and believed doing so would serve neither the general's nor the state's best interests.[150]

On July 29, Congress resolved to inquire into the evacuation of Ticonderoga and Mount Independence and "into the conduct of the general officers at the time of the evaquation." A committee of five members, three of them New Englanders, would recommend the mode for conducting the investigation.[151] James Lowell succinctly assessed the reason for and the risk inhering in the resolution when he wrote to New Hampshire delegate William Whipple that he was certain Gates would receive the northern command, and that "I hope the militia of New England will do justice to our labors by turning out and behaving well. The unpopularity of the Northern commander has been declared a bar to our hopes—therefore the change."[152]

So Congress' delegates had, with varying degrees of willingness, decided to recall their discredited northern generals, leaving Gates as Schuyler's logical replacement. However, the politicians wanted Washington to accept the responsibility of naming "such general officer as he shall think proper" tocommand the Northern Department.[153] Washington would have none of it. He thanked President Hancock for the "high mark of confidence" that Congress reposed on him, but wished "to be excused…."[154]

No longer able to defer their decision, the delegates on August 4, by a vote of eleven states to one, conferred the northern command upon Horatio Gates.[155]

Summation

Intrigue marked the process by which the Continental Congress chose the commander of the Northern Department, and students have looked upon that intrigue with appropriate distaste. But intrigue characteristically marks struggles for power, and the American Revolution was, in the final analysis, a struggle for power—where it would reside and who would exercise it. Determining who would command the Revolution's forces aptly illustrated that fact.

The loser in the contest for command, Philip Schuyler, deserved well from the country he served. His negotiations with the Abenaki and Iroquois Confederacy were skillful, if not uniformly successful. He administered a wide-flung and difficult command. No available general could have more effectively slowed the British advance between Forts Anne and Edward. Schuyler was also the principal architect of American success in the Mohawk Valley. Unfortunately for the New Yorker, he was not an accomplished strategist or tactician, enjoyed generally poor health, had never personally commanded men in battle, and was not an inspiring leader whose personality and resourcefulness could restore American fortunes in the North.

Horatio Gates, who won the contest, had spent his adult years in military service. In 1777 he received the responsibility for restoring those fortunes. The rest of this study is an account of how he executed that charge.