

The New Commander Rebuilds

Gates Assembles his Army

The Northern Department's new commander joined its main body of troops in its encampment at the junction of the Hudson and Mohawk rivers on August 19.¹ The men present, about 4,000 fit for duty, were organized into four brigades commanded by Brigadier Generals John Paterson, John Glover, John Nixon, and Ebenezer Learned. Learned's Brigade was on detached service with Major General Benedict Arnold's expedition to relieve Fort Stanwix. Units not assigned to brigades included approximately 300 artillerymen and eighty engineers or artificers.² Other departmental troops were in the Mohawk Valley under the overall command of Colonel Goose Van Schaick of the 1st New York Regiment and east of the Hudson and in the Hampshire Grants with Major General Benjamin Lincoln.

Horatio Gates outlined the disposition of the men under his immediate command in an August 22 letter to General Washington:

...I found the main body of the Army encamped upon Van Schaicks Islands, which are made by the Sprouts of the Mohawk River Joining with Hudsons River; Nine Miles North of Albany — A Brigade under Genl.[Enoch] Poor [is] encamped at Londons [Loudon's] Ferry on the so[uth]Bank of the Mohock [sic] River, five miles from hence; a Brigade under Genl. Lincoln, had joined Genl. Stark at Bennington; & a Brigade under Genl. Arnold Marched the 15th to Join the Militia of Tyron [Tryon]County, to raise the Siege of Fort Stanwix....³

All of the men at Van Schaick's Islands and Loudon's Ferry were Continentals and overwhelmingly New Englanders: eleven of the fourteen regiments were from Massachusetts, three from New Hampshire.⁴ A New York unit, the former 1st Canadian, together with three Massachusetts regiments were operating with Benedict Arnold. The force's preponderance of New Englanders had been an embarrassment to General Schuyler, contributing to his alienation from the men he commanded and compromising his effectiveness. An aggressive and victorious commander could have overcome the inherent sectional imbalance; Schuyler was neither.

George Clinton, New York's first elected governor, acted on August 1 to increase his state's contingent when he complied with a congressional requisition and set in train the mobilization of militia to contribute to the Northern Department's manpower requirements. He dispatched from his capital at Kingston two important letters. One was to Colonel Morris Graham of the Dutchess and Ulster County Militia explaining that "[t]he operations of the Enemy against this State to the Northward as well as the exposed situation of the Southern Counties, renders it expedient to call into actual service a very considerable Proportion of the Militia." Ulster County regiments commanded by Colonels Snyder and Pawling were to supply 160 men each, while four Dutchess County regiments were to supply 350 men each.⁵ Clinton's order concluded with this injunction: "As the Safety of the State may depend upon the instant Execution hereof it is expected that the Men to be raised in Consequence of these Orders will be in the City of Albany within ten Days of the Delivery hereof."⁶

Governor Clinton's second letter was to Brigadier General Abraham Ten Broeck, commanding the Albany County Militia, the state's largest military unit. "The late Operations of the Enemy in your Quarter," explained the governor, "renders it necessary to use every Exertion to collect a Force to prevent their pursuing the advantage they have already gained by penetrating farther in this State." He informed the general that he had ordered reinforcements for the garrisons in the Hudson Highlands to enable General Washington "to draw from thence a Part of the Continental Troops to reinforce the Northern Army." He also told Ten Broeck about the orders to the Dutchess and Ulster County militias and directed the militia commander to detach from his brigade 1,000 men in two regiments to reinforce the Northern Department.⁷

The governor's executive acts bore impressively early fruit. Within three weeks, on the day after Gates assumed command, the general was able to issue an order establishing two new regiments of 500 men each from the Albany county force.⁸ Colonel Graham's composite regiment from Dutchess and Ulster Counties arrived at Van Schaick's Islands on the last day of August. Thus, all three units ordered north by Governor Clinton on the first day of August had joined Gates by month's end. Two regiments of New York Continentals, the 2nd and 4th, Colonels Philip Van Cortlandt and Henry Beekman Livingston, respectively commanding, arrived on the twenty-second.⁹ New York's contributions to the Northern Department's main force now totaled three Continental and three militia regiments.

The 2nd and 4th were in camp only one day when they found themselves on the march to reinforce Arnold's column moving to the relief of the besieged Fort Schuyler. At a council of war convened by him at German Flats on August 20, the expedition's senior officers had resolved to request reinforcements, and Colonel Marinus Willett left for Gates' headquarters to ask for 1,000 light infantry. The department commander did not have them, but he responded by sending the newly-arrived New York infantry regiments. Because British Brigadier Barry St. Leger raised his siege on the same day the units left camp, they returned to camp on the twenty-ninth.¹⁰

The most important addition to Gates' command joined him on August 30, when Colonel Daniel Morgan arrived with his 451 riflemen.¹¹ Morgan's Rifle Regiment had its origin in General Washington's creation, during the summer of 1777, of an elite light infantry battalion of 500 picked Continental sharpshooters from western Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Most of the Virginians were drafted from Morgan's 11th Virginia Regiment; the others hailed from several Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania regiments. On August 16, the commander-in-chief

ordered Morgan to march his new command to Peekskill, New York, where General Israel Putnam would provide boats to transport it to Albany, where Morgan would report to Gates. Washington testified to the confidence he had in the new elite unit when he wrote, “The approach of the Enemy in that Quarter, has made further reinforcement necessary, and I know of no Corps so likely to check their Progress inproportion to its Numbers as that under your command. I have great dependence on you — officers & men, and I am persuaded, you will do honour to yourselves & essential services to your country.”¹² Daniel Morgan and his men would justify that confidence.

Gates, however, expected Morgan to join him on the twenty-third with “1, 000 Picked men.”¹³ He was disappointed on both counts: contrary winds delayed departure from Peekskill, and the corps’ strength was only slightly more than half the number Gates, for some reason, expected to receive. Finally assured of Morgan’s imminent arrival, he wrote to him on August 29 that he had “much satisfaction in being acquainted by General Washington of your march for this Department.” Gates had the quartermasters supply Morgan with carriages, tents and other equipment, and usher his men to a camp laid out for them at Loudon’s Ferry. He “[d]raughted one Sub[altern], One Serjeant, and One Corporal, Fifteen pickt Men from Each Regiment to Serve with your Corps & under your Command.”¹⁴

While the riflemen settled into their camp, Benedict Arnold returned from the Mohawk Valley with Learned’s Brigade. The march to and from Fort Stanwix had been exhausting, leaving ninety-four men “sick-present” and 135 “sick-absent” when it mustered on September 7. Gates ordered the men to rest at the main camp for one day before moving on to Loudon’s Ferry at daylight on September 10.¹⁵

The Challenges of Supply: Ammunition, Clothing, Shoes, Blankets, Bayonets, Wagons...

In spite of the department’s enhanced numerical strength, its commander still faced formidable tasks to prepare it to defeat enemy designs. He might have rendered them less daunting if he had not summarily rejected General Schuyler’s conciliatory overtures. The New Yorker’s loyal partisans would probably have been less zealous in their efforts to promote discord among the staff if their patron had received more deferential treatment from his successor. For his part, Schuyler worked diligently to increase the flow of supplies, and he continued to carry out his diplomatic responsibilities in dealing with New York tribes.

Administration consumed endless hours of Gates’ time, although in this he was very much in his professional element. Since his days as a brigade major during the previous war, he had acquired additional experience and developed a grasp of detail that helped him be an effective adjutant general during the American army’s first year. That background served him well during his early weeks in the Northern Department. He was doubly fortunate that his predecessor was also a skillful administrator. The command that he assumed in mid-August had many problems, but neglected administration was not one of them. However, if the northern army was to become more aggressive, its management had to respond to that posture’s demands. Even with good luck, the requirements taxed his competence and patience.

Logistics to support a reversal of American fortunes strained the army’s resources. On the day he took command, Gates received a report from Major Ebenezer Stevens, commander of his artillery battalion, directing the general’s attention to a “Return of Ordnance Stores wanted in the

Northern Department.” Twelve ammunition wagons with harness and horse, fifty sets of harness for field pieces, twelve tons of bar lead for musket balls, a ton of 3-pound shot, papers and flannel cartridges, twenty sets of “Mens Harness” to help gunners manhandle their cannon, an ammunition wagon for every regiment, 100 yards of sail cloth for covering ammunition, and twenty tons of grape shot were only some of the supplies required.¹⁶

Commissary of Artillery Ezekiel Cheever’s response to the major’s requisition was willing, if discouraging. He could not fill the orders, especially the one for twelve tons of bar lead, for he had no more than five tons in stock. He promised to forward “one half or more, as it may come to hand.” The other articles would be on their way “as soon as Q Master Pynchon can furnish teams...as fast as in my power.”¹⁷ Lieutenant Colonel David Mason, Deputy Commissary-General of Military Stores at Springfield, promised that he would ship the ordnance supplies as soon as teams and guards became available, coupling that positive news with a complaint that Colonel Cheever had assumed unwarranted authority “in relation to the Department of Supplies.”¹⁸

On the day the allegedly officious Cheever penned his discouraging report, Colonel Hugh Hughes, whose post as assistant to Quartermaster General Thomas Mifflin provided him with opportunities to observe the Continental Army’s supply operations, responded to Gates’ request for additional logistical support. Hughes’ letter was an informative yet depressing discussion of the sorry state of affairs obtaining in the Commissary Department:

...In fact the whole Place of Commissaries, Ins and Outs, if I may be allowed to use a vulgar Phrase, look like Cats in a strange Garret at one another, and not one of them knows what he is about[.] Such are the unhappy effects of Shifting Hands in the Midst of a Campaign Sir, and of which, I am well informed, your worthy Predecessor, avows himself the Contriver! I don’t verily believe any Age had produced a Mathematician capable of Calculating the Eccentricity of this All-governing Planet.¹⁹

Procuring adequate clothing and shoes, a chronic problem for all 18th-century armies, was especially critical for the new nation. Commissary of Clothing Major George Measam, Deputy Commissary-General of Purchases Jacob Cuyler, and other military and civilian agents invested countless hours of continuous effort to provide minimal supplies to the army engaged in an autumn campaign on the northern frontier.

Two days after he took over his new command General Gates received from Major Measam a report that included the welcome news that 1,000 coats and 380 shirts would reach the northern army from Philadelphia. The coats Measam described ranged from red coats faced with red, to blue faced with red, to drab with red, to brown with white; some were faced with green or blue; still others were “Brown turned Green.” Few Northern Department soldiers actually wore the “Buff and blue” favored by tradition and patriotic artists.

Less welcome was word that the shipment would include no shoes, the shortage of which never completely ended.²⁰ Some relief, however, came from Major General William Heath, commander of the Eastern Department, who sent what shoes he could from Massachusetts stores.²¹ By the second day of September Measam managed to have 850 pairs available, but of “Good shoes fit for Campaign there is but 606 pairs — Besides which, there are upwards of 300 pairs very Thinn [sic] Pumps, french made, not fit for Campaign purposes.”²²

Major Stevens' letter of September 3 provides a glimpse of the hardships common soldiers suffered when he explicitly described his artillerymen's needs. The gunner asked the general to issue an order to the Commissary of Cloathing [sic] to procure sixty blanketts [sic] for my men as they are much in want, having not more at present than six to a Company likewise a proportional number of shoes and Stockings and other Cloathing understanding that some Cloathing and blanketts have arrived [at Albany] and my men being in Suffering Condition is the reason of my application to your honor.²³

Three days before Gates' men began their march northward, Measam provided encouraging news that he had a "fine parcel of Uniform Coats . . ., there is Blue faced red sufficient for two middling full regiments and Brown faced red for one regiment." There were additional articles of clothing at Albany, Boston, and "to the southward." But he needed a full accounting from the regimental quartermasters to match needs with supplies. He did not have enough hats, but he had a "great plenty of Mill's Caps both red and blue which I hope will be a very good substitute."

George Measam's letter provides a rare insight into a neglected subject: the callous indifference some revolutionary officers demonstrated toward their men's welfare. He was keenly aware of the soldiers' physical needs and the difficulties attending meeting even the most basic ones. Blankets were in critically short supply. As of the third of September he had on hand only 187 of them. Dr. Jonathan Potts, deputy director-general of hospitals, was pressing him for as many blankets as he could get. Although shipments made more available, by the tenth Gates told General Schuyler, who wanted some to use in negotiations with Indians, that none were left in the stores. "Some gentlemen are very pressing to obtain the fine Large Blankets," reported Measam, who was disgusted by the entire state of affairs. "I think it not generous of them — taking two Blanket[s] for one person upon your Unlimited order. I have delivered to Col. Kosiceusko [sic] one very fine Large Blanket with which he is not satisfied, he says I will get your positive order for another." The artilleryman took matters into his own hand. "As I am informed there are great numbers in camp without a blanket I thought it not a fair Distribution to give two large Blankets to one man without your particular order upon some particular occasion, and I flatter myself what I have done will meet your approbation."

Gates supported Measam and also approved the distribution of fifty much-needed blankets to the hospital, though fewer than Dr. Potts requested, making the surgeon "angerey [sic]."²⁴

General Schuyler conscientiously responded to his successor's letter of September 10 by assuring him, on the eleventh, that he would arrange for moving surplus blankets from Fort Stanwix to the Hudson.²⁵

Richard Varick provided General Gates and future students with a brief assessment of three of the army's five brigades (excluding the riflemen and artillerymen) when he reported the results of musters. Nixon's Brigade was "pretty well clothed and well armed except for the want of a few Bayonets, that their arms were clean & in such order as does Honor to the officers commanding them." Inspecting Paterson's Brigade revealed that the soldiers kept their muskets clean but many lacked bayonets and that "most of the Non Commissioned Officers & privates stand greatly in need of Clothing." Learned's field-wise veterans were "well armed, their Arms in good order, but deficient in bayonets, their Clothing is tolerably good."²⁶ The shortage of bayonets, of course, aggravated a weakness that too often plagued Americans in combat against

British regulars.

Requisitioning wagoneers compounded the transport problems. From Albany, less than one day's drive from Gates' headquarters, the army's quartermaster Morgan Lewis wrote, "One of the persons sent out after waggons [sic] has returned Without any Kind of Success. He has brought me a List of Such Persons as have been applied to and refuse to go, who amount to almost forty; most of them alledging [sic] the Want of Drivers in excuse; owing to the late [recent] Draughts of the Militia." Lewis closed with the good news that he had, while writing his letter, learned that one of his assistants, whom he had sent seventy miles downriver, had succeeded in engaging ninety-seven wagons and drivers — a major coup, and one that served Gates well during the shift northward.²⁷

The Challenges of Supply: Food

Food was of course vital, and maintaining a consistent, reliable schedule of rations challenged quartermasters and purchasing agents. In 1775, the Continental Congress prescribed a soldier's ration as follows:

Resolved, That a ration consist of the following kind and quantity of provisions: 1 lb. Beef, or 3/4 lb. Pork or 1 lb. salt fish per day; 3 pints of peas or beans per week, or vegetables equivalent, at one dollar per bushel for peas or beans; 1 pint of rice, or one pint of Indian corn, per man per week; 1 quart of spruce beer or cider per man per day or nine gallons of molasses, per company of 100 men per week; 3 lbs candles to 100 men per week, for guards: 24 lbs soft, 8 lbs hard soap, per 100 men per week.²⁸

Officers were authorized extra rations ranging from one for lieutenants to five for a general. Women and children accompanying the army also received a daily ration, and efforts to limit their numbers failed: their presence was an important morale factor for which the army paid a high price in provisions, shelter, and discipline.

Despite whatever Congress might resolve about a soldier's rations, commissioners frequently were unable to procure the prescribed foods. Substitutions were so common as to be the rule. Fresh vegetables were usually impossible to find in sufficient quantities to be significant (spoilage being the main culprit). Beer, cider, and rum were chronically scarce. Wartime inflation, profiteering, and corruption conspired to make providing for the soldiers' needs a thankless and exhausting task.²⁹

Poor and inadequate supplies were chronic, but General Schuyler and his agents had forestalled a subsistence crisis during 1777. Their efforts made possible the optimistic report that Deputy Commissioner General for Issues John Bleecker prepared for Jacob Cuyler concerning provisions in store at Albany on the last day of August. On hand were thirty-eight tierce [casks] and twenty-two barrels of bread, sixty barrels of flour, forty cattle, 400 sheep, and sixteen hogsheads and eighty barrels of rum. Future supply seemed assured because

...A large quantity of Flour is minutely Expected in from Esopus and Kinder Hook. The Commissary at New Haven has been wrote to...senda thousand barrels of Pork or Beef to the landing at Fish Kill, as soon as the Express return, Genl. shall be made acquainted what I have

to dependon from that quarter for Salted meat.— a number of purchasers of LiveStock are Employed in Several parts of New England, so as on Computation, to furnish the army weekly with 100 head of Cattle, but as his Honr. Genl. Gates has by Verbal message of [to] yourself Signified that provisions ought to be made for 15, 000 men, the purchases of live Stock shall be increased, and Every measure to the Utmost of my Endeavours shall be pursued to accomplish the Victualling of that Body of Men.³⁰

General Gates' administrative experience persuaded him prudently to base his victualing requirements upon the abovementioned projection of 15, 000men. His command never included that large a complement, but given the number of extra rations required for officers and camp followers and the accidents that attended field supply, his projection was realistic. Setting so high a requisite produced increased effort to purchase larger numbers of stock. Even so, the supply of meat failed to keep up with demand. General Washington intervened and released half the salt meat on hand at the magazine in Ulster County for shipment northward, but that store had only 433 barrels of beef and pork on September 7.³¹ General Heath again provided critical support when he ordered on September 12 that 300 barrels of pork and 700 barrels of beef be moved to the magazine at Bennington.³² On the same day, General Lincoln wrote from Pawlet that he expected a shipment of flour.³³

Gates' army consumed at least eighty head of cattle daily, and prices climbed to twenty pounds per head as beasts became harder to find. Schuyler was forced to request additional money because, "A Supply of money must always be in the hands of my Purchasers for without it nothing can be Done[.]flour and many other articles must be procured for the Army."³⁴ By September14, the supply of flour on hand at the Albany magazine was down to thirty barrels, which could not be forwarded for lack of casks. However, two sloops laden with flour, salt beef, and pork were due that evening, which quartermaster Morgan Lewis promised to send immediately to the camp.³⁵

Brigadier General Joseph Palmer of the Massachusetts Militia visited the Northern Department during the first week of September and departed with a clear understanding of the urgency of expediting a steady flow of supplies from the Eastern Department. Six days after returning to Boston, he informed Gates that he had stopped at Westfield, where he found "Several hundred Blankets and large Quantities of rum, Rice, Port-wine and Oatmeal, but...no positive orders for forwarding them; these were Continental Stores, so we cou'd only advise to their being forwarded as soon as possible." When he reached Springfield, Palmer learned that sixteen wagon loads would immediately set out for the Hudson Valley.³⁶ The situation at Westfield illustrates that chronic communications problems delayed distribution of supplies, even when stores were available. Gates' correspondence reveals that by September's third week, his men were receiving a reasonably consistent flow of foodstuffs, and other sources do not contradict that conclusion.

Logistics remained a serious concern, but they were not serious enough to dominate command decisions. Gates did have the decisive advantage of operating on interior lines with access to sources of resupply. Logistics, on the other hand, often drove his foe's decisions. Burgoyne operated far from his supply base and was dependent upon a vulnerable line of communication that precluded timely delivery of the sinews of war.

Flawed intelligence has been a bane to commanders throughout recorded history. Before Prussia bureaucratized its command structure during the 19th century, no army had a staff recruited and trained specifically to collect and evaluate intelligence. Both Burgoyne and Gates were professionals who appreciated the importance of informed knowledge about the enemy, his strength, deployment, and intentions — but neither had access to a system capable of providing requisite data.

The situation on the northern frontier was especially difficult. Because they commanded a department extending westward from the Connecticut Valley and the western border of Massachusetts to the upper reaches of the Mohawk Valley, and northward to the Canadian frontier, Schuyler and Gates devoted significant energy and time to soliciting and studying reports from a widely-scattered field. Because both armies lacked an adequate cavalry component, the commander's traditional eyes and ears, scouts — often drawn from light infantry — provided most of the raw information about immediate conditions. They reported on the terrain and enemy deployment, and brought in captives and local people for interrogation. The generals also relied upon their staffs, subordinates, civil authorities, and private persons for collecting routine and specialized intelligence. Both commanders even conducted personal reconnaissance. In the final analysis, they were their own G-2. Ultimately, both officers performed their command functions hampered by limited, imprecise, and conflicting information about their own forces and the enemy.

Limited reconnaissance and intelligence abilities notwithstanding, Gates managed to correctly divine Burgoyne's strategy. From his headquarters at VanSchaick's, Gates learned more about Burgoyne, residing at William Duer's Fort Miller house, than the British general knew about American capabilities and movements.

News from the Mohawk

Gates, as had Schuyler before him, keenly understood the need to invest heavily in thwarting British designs on the Mohawk. As earlier discussed, on his first day as department commander Gates solicited information from Benedict Arnold, who was at Fort Dayton in German Flats. The dashing son of the Havens had caught up with Ebenezer Learned, whom Schuyler had dispatched to reinforce Gansevoort at Fort Stanwix. Arnold received his new commander's letter during the evening of August 20 and replied the next day. He told Gates he intended to leave that morning with 1,000 Continentals and a "handful" of militia to raise Brigadier St. Leger's siege of Stanwix. With his customary flair, Arnold assured Gates that "you will hear of my being victorious or no more, & as soon as the Safety of this part of the Country will permit I will fly to your assistance." Arnold also reported that General Nicholas Herkimer had died from his wounds suffered a fortnight earlier at Oriskany, and that he was "credibly informed that gen. St. Leger has sent to Gen. Burgoyne for reinforcement," suspecting, however, that the latter had none to spare. Still, added Arnold, the matter might be "worth inquiring into."³⁷ Gates, of course, knew that a paucity of manpower was not the only thing that precluded Burgoyne's sending men to the Oneida Carrying Place; the distance was too great to permit providing timely reinforcement.

Arnold also sent Gates the minutes of the council he had called on the twentieth that

resolved to request reinforcements from the main army. Arnold really wanted his commander to send Morgan's riflemen, the only "light troops" in the department until September 11, when Gates created a battalion of light infantry under the command of Major Henry Dearborn. The commanding general was not about to send Morgan's Corps on what was really a secondary mission, but he did immediately detach the 2nd New York Regiment and Livingston's New York regiment to support Arnold. (The British withdrawal before they reached Arnold's column aborted their assignment.)³⁸ Arnold delayed his departure from Fort Dayton for Fort Schuyler long enough to write another letter — this one to General Schuyler telling him that he believed St. Leger's enemy force outnumbered his own two to one (which he probably knew was untrue), and that the Oneidas and Tuscaroras would arrive at German Flats on the twenty-second. Arnold also congratulated Schuyler, as he had Gates, on Stark's and Warner's stunning victory at Bennington.³⁹

Bad roads and security concerns that attended a march through the woodshed the same delaying effect upon Arnold's advance that they had on the movements of less flamboyantly aggressive leaders. He progressed only ten miles during two days after leaving Fort Dayton. Fortunately, the moment he had negotiated that distance, an express brought the following message, which he forwarded to Gates:

1777 Aug. 22

Fort Schuyler

Gansevoort to the Honble. General Arnold or Officer Commanding the Army on their March to Fort Schuyler.

This morning at 11 o'clock I began a Heavy Cananade [sic] upon our Enemies Works which was immediately returned by a number of Shellsand Cannon — About 3 o'clock usual Deserters came in who informed me that Genl. St Leger with his army was retreating with the utmost Precipitation — soon after which I sent out a party of About Sixty men to enter their Camps, who soon returned and confirmed their accounts....About 7 o'clock this Evening Hanjost Schuyler arriv'd here and informed me that General Arnold with Two Thousand Men, were on their march for this Post in Con-sequence of which, I send you this information.⁴⁰

Arnold professed to be at a loss "to Judge of their real intentions, whether they have returned home, or retired with a view of engaging us on the road, I am inclined to the former from the Acct. of the Deserters & from their leaving their tents and Considerable Baggage...."⁴¹ Leaving his own artillery and tents, Arnold and 900 of Learned's men began a forced march, hoping to catch up with St. Leger's rear and capture his guns and heavy baggage. As noted in a previous chapter, Arnold reached Fort Stanwix during the evening of August 24, "too late after so fatiguing a March to pursue the Enemy that Evening." A 500-man detachment followed the British until heavy rain forced the return of all but a "small party," which reached Oneida Lake in time to watch the last of the invading enemy crossing in boats.

Arnold left Gansevoort's and Van Schaick's 700 men at Fort Schuyler with two month's provisions. In spite of General Schuyler's best efforts to woo the Indians of the Mohawk Valley, only the Oneidas and Tuscaroras proved friendly. Still, Arnold believed that the American garrison had little reason for concern, so decisively had St. Leger and the Johnson faction been

frustrated.

Focusing on Burgoyne

Soon after Gates arrived at Van Schaick's Islands, he received from the vigilant George Measam especially valuable intelligence that helped him assess less reliable reports. The source was an obligingly garrulous Hanoverian soldier who deserted from the British 53rd Regiment at Fort Edward. According to the prisoner, Burgoyne's army numbered 6,000 men when it landed at Quebec. His command included:

- Ten British regiments of about 300 men each;
- Six German regiments of about 500 men each;
- Ten grenadier companies of about 30 men each;
- Ten light infantry companies of about 30 men each;

Of this number, the following remained behind in Canada:

- Three British regiments;
- One captain, two lieutenants, and fifty men from each British and German battalion;

About 800 men garrisoned Ticonderoga:

- A British regiment;
- A German detachment;

The resulting main army, at Fort Edward (as of when the man deserted), was comprised of the following:

- Six British regiments (the 9th, 20th, 53rd, 24th, 21st, and 47th), each with 300 men, totaling 1,800;
- Five German regiments, totaling 2,200 men;
- Indians and loyalists between 400 and 500, of whom 200 to 300 were Tories (whom the "General looked upon in a manner of spies");

The Lake Champlain fleet was comprised of:

- The "Floating Battery," armed with twenty-four 12-pounder guns;
- The *Royal George*, armed with twenty 12-pounders;
- The *Carleton*, armed with twenty 12-pounders;
- Two other vessels armed with eleven or twelve 6-pounders each;
- Gunboats (approximately twenty-four);
- "One gun Batteaus[:] a vast number sufficient for the Army and Provisions."⁴²

Although flawed in its report of regimental strengths, the man's account provided a generally accurate description of Burgoyne's army.

While Arnold's assessment of the relative security of the northwestern frontier was realistic, the northeastern sector was still in grave danger. The British held Ticonderoga and dominated Lakes Champlain and George. True, Gates could be certain that Burgoyne would not receive reinforcements from Canada, and that his line of communication was vulnerable. But so long as the enemy maintained a substantial presence in northeastern New York and the Hampshire Grants, Gates needed reliable intelligence about conditions north and east of the main area of operations. He was fortunate that in Benjamin Lincoln he had a dedicated surrogate whose self-effacing patience and tact faithfully served his commander and the cause they shared.

An early message from Brigadier General John Fellows of the Massachusetts militia was an example of the misinformation the department's

commander had to guard against. Writing on August 22 from Sheffield in northern Massachusetts, Fellows reported that a prisoner had told his captor on the day Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Baum's troops marched to Bennington (or the previous day), that "Genl. Burgoyne detached Brig. Gen. Frasier [sic] together with the Light Infantry, Grenadiers and Savages to the Westward — if this intelligence is true his object is beyond doubt Fort Schuyler [Stanwix]." Fellows probably was skeptical, since he added in his message to Gates that he thought it his duty to transmit the prisoner's story.⁴³ The report worried Gates not at all. He knew no corps-sized force could ascend the Mohawk from Fort Miller without colliding with elements of his own army.

Collecting supplies and intelligence could be only a prelude to making decisions that would determine whether the Northern Department's new commander and his men could frustrate John Burgoyne's designs. By the first week of September Gates commanded a stronger, better-equipped army with higher morale than General Schuyler ever had at his disposal. His enemy was correspondingly weaker — having suffered two serious defeats at Bennington and Fort Stanwix — and pursuing Schuyler's retreating force had dangerously stretched his line of communications. The strategic tide had turned away from Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne in the Americans' favor. Exploiting that seachange, however, required sagacity, a clear-sighted strategy, and good luck.

Horatio Gates was in command of an army comprised of brave and motivated soldiers. Only time would tell whether he was the man who could lead them to victory.

