

Between Battles: Fortifying and Squabbling

The Fighting Does Not Continue

After sundown and the American withdrawal to Bemis Heights, General Burgoyne's men who had fought the battle of Freeman's Farm lay down on the field in ranks and under arms. They had no time to bring up rations, tents, or baggage, and so shivered through the chill autumn night, listening to the cries of wounded men to whom they could not minister in the darkness. The cold at least spared them the stench that rises where men die violently—one which no veteran of combat can ever forget. The belief that they had won the day when their stubborn enemy quit the field may have made their discomfort less acute, but those most heavily engaged were too tired to savor any sense of victory.¹ The men of the left column under General Freiherr von Riedesel lay on their arms along the Albany Road, but they had access to food and blankets and so were less fatigued than their comrades on the battlefield.

Dawn brought relief from the night's cold, and wagons and carts arrived with rations and baggage for the men on the main line of resistance. Those carts and wagons carried wounded to the hospital located near the Albany Road, where the army had camped on the eve of battle. Burial parties collected the dead and interred them east of Freeman's house.²

The equally weary Americans of Arnold's Division spent a somewhat more comfortable night in their tents and, after hours without food, could prepare and eat their rations. Surviving sources are silent about how well they rested. Some likely slept the sleep of exhaustion. Others, even veteran campaigners, may have been too stimulated to relax, fearful that their successful interception of the advance on their camp was only a temporary purchase of time, and that they would have to fight again on the morrow. The men manning the American right wing, who had not participated in the fight, were alert to repel an enemy advance down the Albany Road. Before dawn, American scouts were out between their lines and Freeman's farm, observing and harassing their enemy.³

The men of both armies expected General Burgoyne to resume his offensive during the twentieth. The 53rd's Lieutenant William Digby wrote in his journal what may have been camp scuttlebutt, that Generals Phillips and Fraser urged an immediate renewed attack upon the

American position, but that their commander postponed the action because of “our hospitals being so full and the magazines not properly secured to risque [sic] that movement.”⁴ According to American Adjutant General James Wilkinson, British General William Phillips later provided him a more plausible explanation:

After the affair of ... 19th September terminated ... Burgoyne determined to attack you the next morning on your left, with his whole force; our wounded, and sick, and women had been disposed of at the river; the army was formed early on the morning of the 20th, and we waited only for the dispersion of the fog, when General Fraser observed to ... Burgoyne, that the grenadiers and light infantry who were to lead the attack, appeared fatigued by the duty of the preceding day, and that if he would suspend the operation until the next morning, he was persuaded they would carry the attack with more vivacity. Burgoyne yielded to the proposition of Fraser; the orders were countermanded, and the corps returned to camp; and as if intended for your safety and our destruction, in the course of the night, a spy reached Burgoyne with a letter from General Sir Henry Clinton, advising him of his intended expedition against the highlands, which determined Burgoyne to postpone the meditated attack of your army, and wait events; the golden opportunity was lost—you grew stronger every day, and on the 7th of October overwhelmed us.⁵

Burgoyne did receive such a communication from Sir Henry Clinton, and the hope it engendered would have fateful consequences.

The Americans Continue to Fortify

During the seventeen days that elapsed between the main battles around the Freeman farm, more than 6,000 Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York militiamen arrived, bringing Gates' force to slightly more than 15,000 rank and file. The Americans extended and strengthened their fortifications until they formed a continuous line from the river to Neilson's farm and thence southwestward for three-quarters of a mile.⁶

Among the first measures taken by the Americans to improve their defenses was constructing an abatis of felled trees in front of their line. Richard Varick wrote to General Schuyler on Monday, September 22, that “The woods round us are cut & cutting down to form an Abbatis [sic] against a charge of bayonets or sudden Surprise.”⁷

In a letter to Major General William Heath, Brigadier General John Glover reported: “We are making every necessary preparation to receive them [the British], by felling Trees, & Abiteeing [sic] the passes between the North [Hudson] River, & Saratoga Lake about 6 miles distance.”⁸

Colonel James Wilkinson provided the most complete description of the state of the fortifications on October 4:

Gates' right occupied the brow of the hill near the river, with which it was connected by a deep intrenchment [sic]; his camp, in the form of a segment of a great circle, the convex towards the enemy, extended rather obliquely to his rear, about three-fourths of a mile to a knoll occupied by

his left; his front was covered from the right to the left of the centre, by a sharp ravine running parallel with his line and closely wooded: from thence to the knoll at his extreme left, the ground was partially cleared, some of the trees being felled and others girdled, beyond which in front of his left flank, and extending to the enemy's right.... The extremities of this camp were defended by stoney batteries, and the interval was strengthened by breastwork without intrenchments, constructed of the bodies of felled trees, logs and rails with an additional battery at an opening left of the centre. The right was almost impracticable; the left difficult of approach.⁹

The British also Fortify

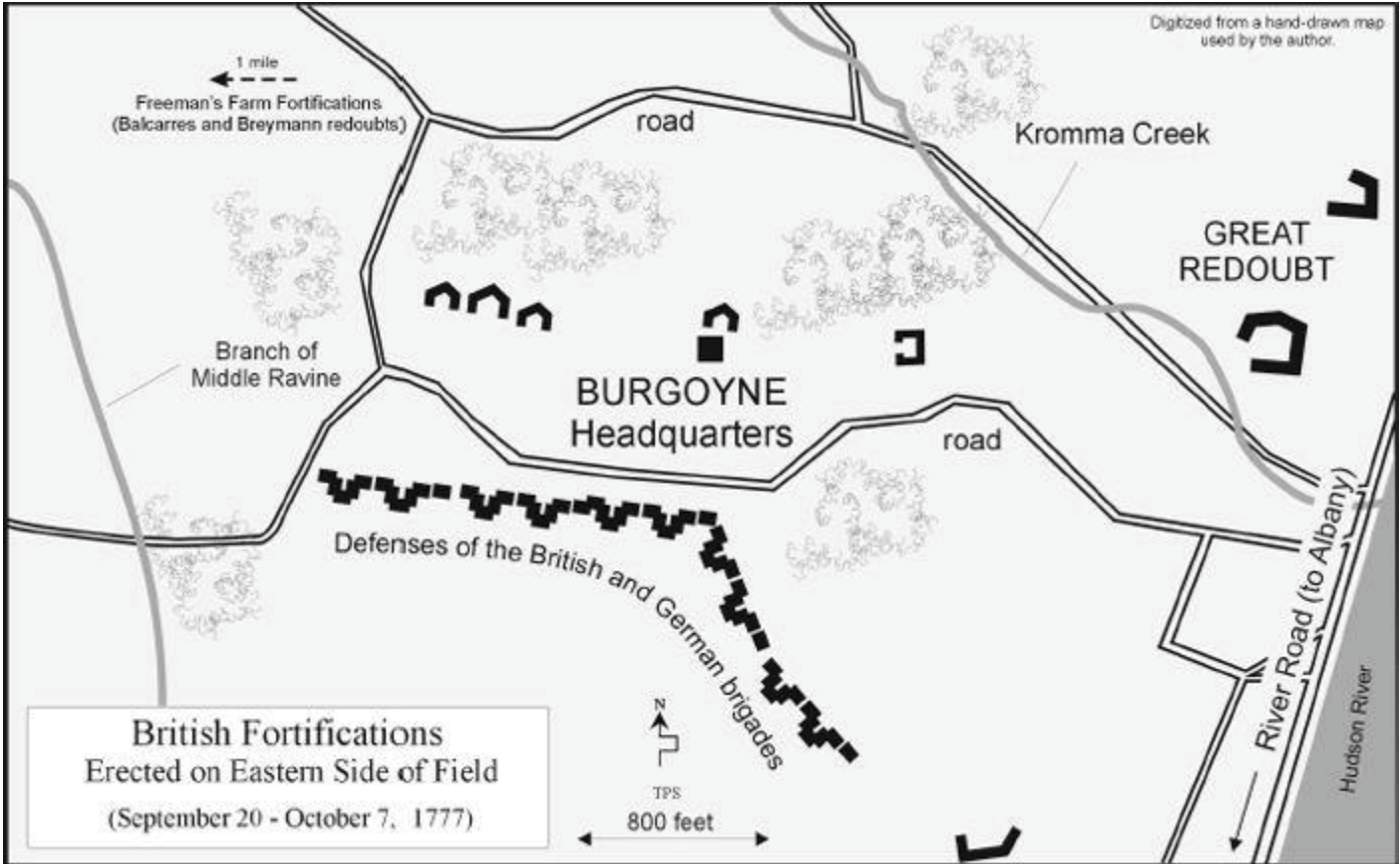
General Gates' defensive strategy, based upon denying Burgoyne access to Albany, made extending and strengthening his interdicting field fortifications eminently logical. Burgoyne's raising strong static works did not. His aggressive strategy required relentless pressure imposed by a mobile force that would not give its enemy an opportunity to marshal its resources. His purpose was to bring his army to Albany, where it would cooperate with Sir William Howe's 1778 campaign.

He may have hoped to accomplish that mission without active assistance from the lower Hudson. September 19 was the climax of an evolving epiphany. The battle at Hubbardton was small, but viciously fought; the Bennington raid was nothing short of an outright disaster. So by mid-September, the general was desperate for Sir Clinton to assist him by moving upriver toward Albany. The enemy he fought on Freeman's farm was very different from the one that had retreated from Fort Ticonderoga. These Americans had advanced northward from the Hudson-Mohawk junction, closed the route to Albany, and fought his veterans to a standstill with courage and skill. The news that Sir Henry was active below Albany added a welcome factor to the strategic equation. Burgoyne did not abandon his objective when he did not renew the offensive on September 20, but he did decide to buy time to allow Clinton's moves to distract the former major sitting on Bemis Heights with his newly-effective force of Continentals and militiamen. That required preparing field works that would serve as a base of operations from which he could, with renewed vigor, resume the initiative and unite with the forces from New York City in Albany.

Possessing the battlefield placed Burgoyne in a strong tactical position. A series of ravines, which began southwest of Freeman's farm and ran eastward to within half a mile of the river before turning south, covered his front. The ravine drained by Kromma Creek — which extended all the way from McBride's farm (north and west of Freeman's farm) to within 200 yards of the river—protected his rear. His engineers improved the position by erecting a series of small outworks along the northern crests of the southern ravines until those ravines turned southward. From that point the interval between the ravine systems forms a plateau that was occupied, in part, by the farm of Jeremiah Taylor. The British and Germans prepared a strong line of entrenchments along the axis of that plateau to the hill west of the river, where a series of redoubts ran north and south along bluffs north and south of the Kromma Creek that covered the Albany Road, artillery park, hospital, and bateaux. The three fortifications north of the Kromma Creek came to be called the Great Redoubt. Outposts north of the kill's ravine, later called the Great Ravine, protected the rear from American attempts to attack from that quarter.

The British fortified camp was thus a counterpart in its tactical role to the American position on Bemis Heights; and, like it, its most critical problem lay in providing for a defense

against a turning attack from the west, where the British camp lacked a strong natural position at its western end comparable to the crest of Bemis Heights on the Neilson and Woodworth farms. To correct that deficiency, Burgoyne's men erected two redoubts: one on the Freeman farm that contemporaries called the Light Infantry Redoubt—and later generations the Balcarres Redoubt—and a second, smaller German post north and west of the Light Infantry Redoubt that would be called the Breymann Redoubt. There were two additional outposts, one west of the Balcarres Redoubt, another west of the Breymann Redoubt. To defend the rest of the interval between the fortifications, Canadians stockaded two cabins on the road that ran between the Freeman and McBride farms.

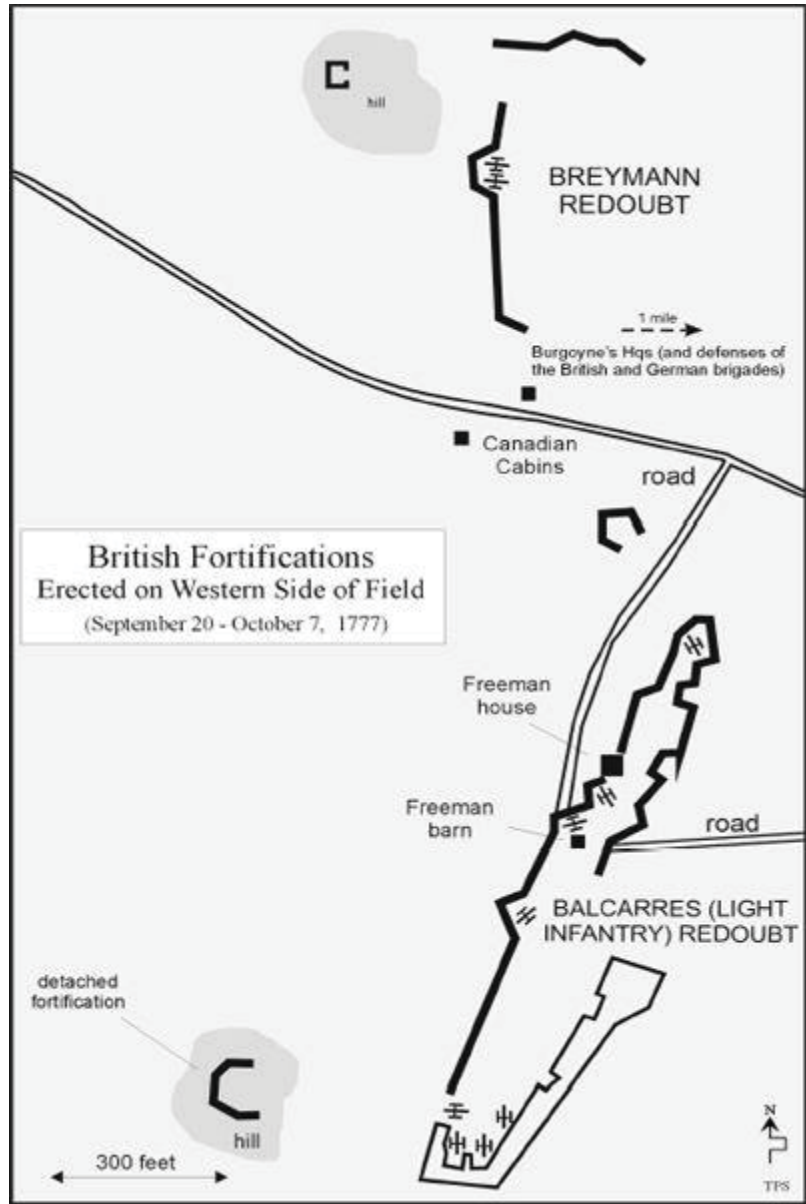


British Fortifications
Erected on Eastern Side of Field
(September 20 - October 7, 1777)

General Burgoyne had issued an order that defined the standard for such field fortifications in general as early as June 20, while his army was at Sandy Bluff on Lake Champlain: “Officers of all ranks commanding Forts, and Detachments, are constantly to Fortify in the best manner the circumstances of the place, and the implements at hand will permit. Felling Trees with their Points outward, barricading Churches and Houses, Breastworks of Earth and Timber, are generally to be effected in a short time, and the Science of Engineering is not necessary to find and apply such resources.”¹⁰ Applying this concept to particular cases always involved some adaptation. The fortifications Burgoyne’s men built at Freeman’s farm are discussed in more detail below.

The Light Infantry or Balcarres Redoubt had the dual purposes of defending the interval between the ravine systems, and covering the head of the southern ravine where it originates in a web of small “runs” south and southwest of the Freeman farm. “The Army immediately began to fortify its position,” wrote Hauptmann Georg Pausch of the Hesse-Hanau Artillery in a letter to Hessian Adjutant General Baurmeister dated November 26. “[O]n the fields where the first battle was fought, General Fraser’s corps encamped behind a great redoubt, built of timbers and earth. Its length must have been at least one hundred fifty chains [a conservative estimate]. The walls in some places were six feet high. Eight cannon—four light six, two light three-pounders, and two five and a half howitzers—were mounted in embrasures.”¹¹ Pausch recorded in the September 20 entry of his valuable *Tagebuch* that the dead were buried on the battlefield, “instead of on the hill because breastworks were thrown up there [*anstatt auf der hohe, weil die Brustwerke war dort gebauen*].” He described the redoubt’s construction:

[An] entrenchment of newly felled trees laid on top of one another... The cannon and howitzers battery is placed on the hill, and the openings between the trees are filled with earth. And on the outside, too, earth is thrown over them [*Die Batterie fur Cannonen und Haunitzen ist auf die Hohe gesetzt, und die Eroffnung zwischen die Baume mit Boden gefullt, Draussen ist Boden sie uber gewerfen*].



In his account of the battle of October 7, Pausch mentioned a picket west and slightly north of the Balcarres Redoubt's northern terminus as being "a little earth-work, eight feet long by five feet high."¹²

"[F]or the defence of the right flank," the Baron von Riedesel wrote in his journal of the campaign, "a large redoubt was constructed on the former battlefield near the corner of the wood that had been occupied by the enemy on this side of the ravine."¹³ He further noted that fortifying the camp continued daily, that a field of fire was cleared for a distance of 100 paces in front of the position, and that more than 1, 000 men were engaged for two weeks in the fatigue details.

Lieutenant William Cumberland Wilkinson's maps, testimony taken during the parliamentary inquiry, and the above contemporary statements present a description of the Light Infantry Redoubt that we can summarize. Built on a roughly north-south axis, facing west, the fortification was 453 yards long, incorporating the Freeman house and barn. At the front's southern terminus the rampart turned eastward for about 180 yards, then northeastward for approximately 150 yards. Sally ports gave access into the fort, and embrasures were built into the wall to accommodate eight pieces of artillery.

Northwest and within sight of the Light Infantry Redoubt the men of Lieutenant Colonel [Oberstlieutnant] Friedrich Breymann's Brunswick grenadiers built a smaller, but critically important, fortification. According to General Freiherr von Riedesel, its purpose was "to defend the right flank of the Corps of Brigadier Fraser en potence and at the same time cover the road that ran over the hill into the rear of the army."¹⁴ Captain Pausch also described this redoubt in a letter to Baurmeister:

The Reserve Corps Riedesel under Lt. Col. Breymann encamped on a hill on the right, where a fortification of trees was built en potence. Its front occupied seven hundred fifty feet and stood about seven feet high with musket ports. Two three-pound cannon from our corps were in place in the center. The camp lay behind it at an angle, protected by a breastwork of trees.¹⁵

That description agrees with American James Wilkinson's account: "The right flank of the enemy, occupied by the German corps of Breymann, consisted of a breastwork of rails piled horizontally between perpendicular pickets, driven into the earth, formed en potence to the rest of his line, and extended about 250 yards across an open field, and was covered on the right by a battery of two guns. The interval from the right...was committed to the defense of the provincialists, who occupied a couple of log cabins."¹⁶

The descriptions provided by Pausch and Wilkinson agree, in general, with one given to Jared Sparks in 1831 by General Morgan Lewis, who had served as Gates' quartermaster during the Saratoga operations. Lewis described the German redoubt as being seven or eight feet high and built of small trees supported by strong posts, "with an opening about nine or ten inches wide, suitable for small arms.... It was a very excellent cover against infantry, being of sufficient thickness to prevent musket balls from passing through."¹⁷

Information about the several outworks erected west of the Light Infantry and Breymann Redoubts is diffuse and fragmentary. Wilkinson's map depicts a fairly strong post on the western slope, on a low ridge in front of the Light Infantry Redoubt that 19th century writers called the "Bloody Knoll," and a small work slightly north of the redoubt's northern terminus.

Wilkinson's map of the action of September 19 shows two buildings beside the road that ran south of the Kromma Creek's south branch between the homes of Freeman and McBride, one on either side of the road. His map of the encampment indicates that they were incorporated into two outworks, which von Riedesel wrote were occupied by the Canadian companies of Novin and Boicherville. Several accounts of the October 7 attack on Breyman's post refer to them as the "Canadian Cabins."

Another outwork of the Breyman Redoubt stood near the crest of the bank northwest of that fort's right end. It was a nearly square structure with an opening in the rear covered by a traverse.

The accompanying sketch, scaled at 1 inch: 800 feet, illustrates the Anglo-German fortifications east of Fraser's encampment behind the Light Infantry Redoubt. Because the works on the British right flank were involved in the battle of October 7 and their sites are easily identified and accessible for visitors to Saratoga National Historical Park, they have received more attention than the left wing of Burgoyne's fortifications, which were nonetheless important to his defense system.

Because he had some knowledge, albeit imprecise, of the details of Gates' fortified camp, Burgoyne did not operate in an intelligence vacuum. He sent scouting parties out, trying to learn what they could about their enemy, including his strength, deployment, and intentions. Possibly most productive was information collected from the numerous loyalists living along the Hudson. The nature of intelligence collection makes its documentation elusive, so only ambiguous hints survive among contemporary sources. But the British commander and his staff did know that the men on Bemis Heights outnumbered them, and the fight of September 19 had taught them not to underestimate their courage and resourcefulness. Fortifying their right flank on the Freeman and McBride farms defended them against the most likely threat: a turning movement emanating from the American left. But a movement against their artillery park, supply wagons, bateaux, and hospital, although less probable, could not be safely discounted.

General Burgoyne identified the reasons for fortifying his left in a letter to Lord George Germain. His troops, after "fortifying their right, and extending their left to the Brow of the heights, so as to cover the meadows through which the great river runs, and where their bateaux and hospital were placed[, t]he 47th regiment, the regiment Hesse Hanau, and corps of Provincials, incamped [sic] in the meadows for further security.... On our side it became expedient to erect strong redoubts for the protection of magazines and hospital."¹⁸

Burgoyne Pins his Hopes on Clinton

While his soldiers built fortifications, scouted, and exchanged fire with American patrols, General Burgoyne waited for the promise contained in the coded note he had received before dawn on Sunday, September 21, which Sir Henry had written in New York City ten days earlier. The two generals had agreed upon a system of apparently innocuous letters, which Burgoyne decoded using an hourglass-shaped cutout laid over the letter. Burgoyne lost the original from Clinton, but reconstructed it from memory: "You know my good will and are not ignorant of my poverty. If you think two thousand men can assist you effectually, I will make a push at [Fort] Montgomery in about ten days, but ever jealous of my flanks. If they [the Americans] move in force on either of them, I must return to save this important post. I expect reinforcement every day. Let me know what you wish."¹⁹

A commander whose situation was less desperate than Burgoyne's would have derived

little hope from that ambivalent message. First, Sir Henry wanted Burgoyne's sanction for moves he had long hoped to make but dared not make unless they were specifically requested, because of the risk to New York City. Second, even if those reinforcements could arrive within a few days of departure, Clinton did not intend to depart for the Hudson Highlands for "about ten days," meaning that his force would not leave New York before the twenty-second. Third, if Clinton's flanks were threatened he would immediately return to defend the city. Burgoyne's forlorn assumption that 2, 000 men advancing toward Albany could extricate him at that late date reflected his despair.

The Arnold-Gates Quarrel: Many Contributors

While Burgoyne's soldiers fortified their newly-won position and awaited confirmation of the hoped-for cooperation from Sir Henry Clinton, and while American Continentals and militia strengthened their lines and absorbed reinforcements, Generals Gates and Arnold engaged in a dangerous, unedifying quarrel.

Their relations previously had been amicable over a long period. Gates, while commanding at Fort Ticonderoga during the autumn of 1776, had provided critical support to Arnold's construction of the lake flotilla that fought Sir Guy Carleton's inland navy at Valcour Island from October 11 to 13, 1776. Earlier that same year, Gates salvaged his subordinate's career when the Hazen court-martial turned over its records to him and requested Arnold's arrest for contempt. Gates dissolved the court and refused to arrest the defiant general.²⁰

For his part, Arnold had held himself aloof from Gates' and Schuyler's sometimes sordid competition for the Northern Department's command while carefully cultivating both men. His own difficult relations with some subordinates and fellow officers and his conflict with the Congress that had led to his tendering and then suspending his resignation gave Arnold reasons to court their good will: he needed all the influential help he could muster. For example, two letters dated August 21, one to Schuyler and another to Gates, congratulated both men on the American victory at Bennington, a victory to which Gates had contributed nothing and Schuyler little more, in almost identical words.²¹

His relations, while respectful with both men, had been more intimate with Gates than with Schuyler. In brief, the correspondence of Generals Gates and Arnold during 1776 and 1777 reflected friendship and mutual respect. Yet, within hours after dealing their enemy an important blow, the two men most responsible for the success or failure of American arms on the northern frontier were on the way to becoming irrevocably estranged.

Many students of the campaign have speculated about the estrangement's origins.²² Suggestions include many alleged affronts Gates had committed on Arnold: reassigning troops from his command; preventing Arnold from making the Freeman's Farm victory complete by withholding reinforcements and holding him back; displaying jealousy in general, but particularly by withholding credit for victory in reports to President Hancock and Congress; bumping Arnold from second to third in command in favor of Benjamin Lincoln; and general class and political differences.

Of those who have speculated on the estrangement, Professor Paul David Nelson was the most sympathetic to Gates. Thus, we must examine closely his contention that relations between the generals began to deteriorate shortly after Gates took over the Northern Department because he replaced Arnold with Lincoln as second-in-command. That interpretation rests upon four

assumptions: (1) that Arnold had been the department's second-in-command under Schuyler; (2) that Lincoln joined the department after Gates became commander on August 19; (3) that Gates officially changed the chain of command after becoming commander; and (4) that Arnold had requested and Gates refused reinforcements during the fighting on Freeman's farm.²³

Both Arnold and Lincoln joined Schuyler's command in July. Schuyler ordered the former to the front at Fort Edward and the latter to Manchester to assume general command of the New England militia operating east of the Hudson.²⁴ While the subject of who was second in the department's chain was not addressed in orders, seniority dictated that Lincoln was the second-ranking general officer, although Arnold's presence with the main body of troops made him temporarily second in Schuyler's absence (which was most of the time) or in the event of the commanding general's death or incapacitation. That de facto command structure prevailed so long as Lincoln was detached and Arnold was senior officer present. It would change whenever Lincoln rejoined the main body, when Arnold would revert to being the third in seniority. In so far as the department's command structure was concerned, relationships did not change when Gates succeeded Schuyler. Lincoln would be second-in-command with dormant right of succession whether Schuyler or Gates was department commander.

An important clue lies in a letter Richard Varick wrote to Schuyler at 2:00p.m., September 12, the day the army occupied Bemis Heights. After describing the new position, Varick added this postscript: "N. B. I forgot to tell you that a little Spurt happened on Wednesday Eveng between Gates & Arnold. Inter Nos."²⁵ That morsel of gossip introduced a matter that was the seed of distrust that, nourished by personalities and events, matured into a dangerous clash. The "little spurt," as Varick flippantly reported it, probably grew out of an administrative confusion concerning the assignment of the 2nd and 17th Albany County Militia, Graham's Regiment of Dutchess and Ulster County Militia, and Cook's and Latimore's Regiments of Connecticut militia. On the ninth of September Gates directed Arnold to assign those units, and Arnold brigaded the New York militia with Enoch Poor's Brigade and the Connecticut troops with Ebenezer Learned's command.²⁶ The next day—not immediately before the fighting of the nineteenth—Deputy Adjutant General James Wilkinson published a general order that assigned the New York units to John Glover's Brigade.²⁷ When Arnold vehemently objected, Gates defended the officious young lieutenant colonel, mollifying Arnold by promising to issue an order reversing the assignments. Gates, in the press of events, did not keep that promise.

Although some students have written that disagreement about the conduct of the fighting on the nineteenth and Gates' alleged refusal to reinforce Arnold further damaged relations, a careful study of the battle does not support that interpretation. Gates acceded to Arnold's recommendation to engage the enemy on Freeman's farm and supported that decision with more than 4,000 men. There may have been undocumented disagreement over details, but Arnold, even during his bitterest dialogue with Gates, never accused his commander of dereliction nor failure to support the men committed to the fighting.

The immediate occasion for the rupture was Gates' report to President of the Continental Congress John Hancock, in which, after briefly describing the battle of the nineteenth, wrote: "The General good Behaviour of the Troops on this important Occasion cannot be surpass [sed] by the most Veteran Army, to discriminate in praise of the Officers, would be Injustice, as they all deserve the Honor & Applause of Congress; Lieut. Cochburn & Lt. Col. Adams with the rest of the unfortunate Brave who fell in their countrys cause deserve a lasting monument to their

glory.”²⁸

Someone untruthfully told Arnold that Gates had referred to the troops engaged in the fight as a “Detachment of the Army.” The informant was probably Varick, whose position as deputy commissary-general of musters gave him access to headquarters. His letters to General Schuyler during September and October document his knowledge of matters reported and discussed among the staff. In fact, in a letter of September 21, Varick bragged about stealing a copy of Colonel John Brown’s letter of September 18 to General Lincoln that reported the former’s action against Ticonderoga.²⁹ If Varick was the source, he also knew that what he reported to Arnold was false. Whoever reported the letter’s contents obviously conveyed to Arnold the impression that the commanding general’s report was worded in a manner that made it an intentional slur.

Almost simultaneously with dispatching the report of the battle of the nineteenth came a general order regularizing the status of Morgan’s Corps. That unit, which was an independent organization composed of men detached from several Virginia and Pennsylvania regiments, had been sent by Washington to provide the Northern Department with a light infantry capability. Gates enlarged the Corps on September 11 by the organization of a battalion of light infantry under command of Major Henry Dearborn of the 3rd New Hampshire. The addition of those light infantrymen, who were drawn from several regiments and armed with smooth-bore muskets, significantly increased the Corps’ firepower by providing it with a rapid-fire capability to match its marksmanship, derived from the accurate but slow-firing rifles. The Corps posted on the left wing of the American line, and although no orders assigned it to Arnold’s Division, he had considered it a part of his command. The General Order of September 22 cited the unit’s independent status and officially defined its commander’s place in the chain of command with the following words: “Colonel Morgan’s corps not being attached to any brigade or division of the army, he is to make returns and reports to headquarters only; from when cealone he is to receive orders.”³⁰

Gates acted completely within his prerogatives as the department commander to whom General Washington had detailed Morgan, but Arnold agreed with Livingston and Varick that the order was a studied insult.

The Rupture

Not one to suffer what he considered an insult silently, Arnold appeared at Gates’ headquarters in the Woodworth House sometime during the evening of the twenty-second. Livingston described the meeting to General Schuyler:

Matters were altercated in a very high Strain - - - Both were warm - - - the latter [Gates] rather passionate & very Assuming - - - Towards the End of the debate Mr. G - - - told Arnold - - -: He did not know of his being a Major General—he had sent his Resignation to Congress - - - He had never given him Command of any division of the Army.³¹

James Wilkinson similarly reported that Gates replied to Arnold’s protest (which neither Wilkinson nor Livingston quoted) by discussing whether, in the light of Arnold’s suspended resignation, the latter had any rank or command. That was followed by “high words and gross

language; and Arnold demanded a pass to go to Philadelphia.”³² To Arnold’s surprise, Gates did not plead with him to stay, but replied that “Genl. Lincoln would be here in a day or two, that he should then have no Occasion for him; and would give him a pass to go to Philadelphia, whenever he chose it.”³³ Shocked and furious, Arnold returned to his quarters, where he wrote a letter that summarized his role in the recent action and recited his grievances. That letter is so important to the story that it merits quoting at length:

...I have been informed that in the Returns transmitted to Congress of the killed and wounded in the action the troops were Mentioned as a Detachment of the Army, and in the Orders of this day I observed it is mentioned that Col. Morgan’s Corps not being in any Brigade or Division of this Army are to make Returns and reports only to head Quarters, from whence they are alone to receive Orders - - - Altho it is notorious to the whole Army they have been in and done duty with my Division for sometime past. - - - When I mentioned these matters to you this day, you were pleased to say in Contradiction to your repeated Orders you did not know I was a major Genl or have any Command in the Army - - - I have ever supposed a Major General’s command of Four Thousand men, a proper Division and no Detachment when composed of two Brigades forming one wing of the Army and that the General and Troops if guilty of misconduct or cowardly behavior in the time of Action were justly Chargeable as a Division and that if on the other hand they behave with Spirit and Firmness in Action they were Instly entitled to the applause Due to a Brave Division not [a] Detachment of the Army would have thought extremely hard to have been Aminable [sic] for their Conduct.

“I mentioned these matters,” Arnold continued,

as I wish Justice done to their Division, as well as particular Regiments and Persons - - - For what reason I know not (as I am conscious of no Offense or neglect of Duty) but I have lately Observed little or no attention to Any Proposals I have thought it my Duty to make for the Publick Service, and hen a measure, I have proposed has been agreed to, it has been immediatly contradicted, I have been received with the greatest coolness at Head Quarters, and often huffed in Such a manner as must mortify a Person with less Pride than I have in my station in the Army - - - You said you expected General Lincoln in a day or two when I should have no command of a Division, that you thought me of little Consequence to the Army, and that you would with all your heart give me a pass to have whenever I thought proper. As I find your observations very just that I am not, or that you wish me of little Consequence in the Army, as I have the Interest and Safety of my Country at heart, I wish to be where I can be of the most Service to Her - - -I therefore as soon as General Lincoln has arrived here request your Pass to Philade, with my two aides de Camp and their Servants, where I proposed to Join General Washington, and may possibly have it in my Power to Serve my Country altho I am thought of no Consequence in this Department.³⁴

The letter is important for both what it included and what it omitted. It omitted any accusation that Gates had refused to reinforce the men Arnold committed to the fight on Freeman’s farm. Nor did it claim that the commanding general had restrained Arnold from inflicting the coup de grace that would have defeated Burgoyne at the end of the nineteenth’s

battle. Arnold's three principal grievances were: (1) Gates' omitting specific reference to him and his division in his report to Congress; (2) The order defining Morgan's position in the chain of command; and (3) That his recommendations had not received the attention they were due, and that when they had been accepted they were "immediately contradicted." These were not issues that justified the violent rupture that ensued. But Arnold was persuaded to interpret them as personal affronts that could be addressed only by Gates' sending a new report to President Hancock, rescinding the order regularizing Morgan's status, and apologizing for not according Arnold the deference due him. Gates, not unnaturally, considered Arnold's manner and language insubordinate; to a man who had spent his career in the army, insubordination, from whatever source, was not tolerated. Both men had been under severe strains, and with their enemy still less than a mile and half away, those pressures continued to take their toll. Both were also under the influence of subordinates whose roles in the affair were, to put it charitably, irresponsible.

Gates read Arnold's letter late in the evening and replied the following morning. "I did not receive your letter until I was going to Bed last Night," explained the army's commanding general. "The permission you requested for yourself and Aids [sic] de camp to go to Philade is Inclosed."³⁵ Gates then addressed the following to President Hancock: "Major general Arnold having desired Permission for Himself and Aids de Camp to go to Philadelphia, I have granted his Request. His reasons for asking to leave the Army at this Time shall with my Answers be transmitted to Your Excellency."³⁶

Arnold, who certainly believed that Gates really did not dare permit him to leave the Northern Department and carry his grievances to the Congress and General Washington, returned Gates' note with the following:

When I wrote you yesterday I thought myself Intitled to an answer and that you would at least condescend to acquaint me with the reasons which induced you to treat me with the affront and indignity, in a publick manner, which I mentioned and which has been observed by many Gentlemen of the Army, I am conscious of none but if I have been guilty of any Crimes deserving such treatment I wish to have them pointed out that I may have an Opportunity of vindicating my conduct I know no reason for your Conduct unless I have been traduced by some designing Villain - - - I requested Permission for myself and aids to go to Philadelphia, instead of which you have sent me a Letter to the Honble John Hancock Esqr which I have returned if you have any letters for that Gentleman which you think proper to send sealed, I will take charge of them. I once more request your Permission for myself and Aids to Pass to Philadelphia³⁷

Arnold thus rejected the pass that Gates provided. He really did not want to present himself under prevailing conditions to a Congress with whom he was in bad odor and to which he already had tendered a letter of resignation. Nor could he have been eager to rejoin General Washington, whose low tolerance for insubordination was well known. Arnold may have expected Gates to ask him to remain in the department. Or he may have hoped that, when news that he intended leaving became known, officers and men would be so insistent that he stay that the commanding general would have no option but to beg him to stay and acknowledge his indispensability. His hubris was so great that he could not conceive of an American success without him. Whatever his reasons, Arnold remained on Bemis Heights without a formal

command.

Underlings Stoke the Flames

While tensions in the camp on Bemis Heights were building to a dangerous pitch, Schuyler's protégés Livingston and Varick kept their patron informed with biased, detailed letters. Their devotion to Schuyler and hatred of Gates made them Arnold's partisans, and they described the developing controversy with unconcealed pleasure and no apparent consideration except that Gates be discredited. From the day that Gates replaced Schuyler, they kept up a running criticism of the new commander's motives and decisions, and while they piously called upon Heaven for victory, they made it manifest that Providence would have to grant that victory in spite of Gates' craven incompetence.

In a revealing note penned two days before the Freeman's farm fight, Richard Varick declared that "Should Fortune declare against Us, It may be Necessary that some Disposition be made by You for the Consequences of that important Event; I think it therefore my Duty to give You the Earliest Intelligence."³⁸ Varick was at least pretending that Schuyler would have to redeem American interests, justifying his detailed reporting of conditions and events in the American camp. In the letter of the nineteenth that described that day's fighting, Varick wrote concerning Gates, Arnold, and his own devotion to Schuyler: "I will sooner see him [Gates] downed and Quartered, than do anything for him out of my Line. But Arnold I will cheerfully serve.— It is not fit I should put it on paper lest the Letter may be seen by Others. I shall execute my Duty to You, as soon as I shall have the pleasure of being with You."³⁹

Varick lost no time reporting the quarrel's opening to the general in a lengthy letter written during September 22, the day Arnold confronted Gates. Like Arnold's opening letter to Gates, it is central to any study of the Arnold-Gates conflict:

...I am sorry for my Country[']s Sake to give You the following Intelligence, Which I beg You to keep Inter Nos.— Matters between Genl. Gates and Arnold got to such a Pitch, That I have the fullest Assurance, Arnold will quit the Department in a Day or two....Gates has not treated him with Common Civility & politeness for these several Days past, I think I gave You a Hint of It in my first Letter.— Since which he has been unsufferably rude.— He seems to be piqued that Arnold's Division has the Honor of beating the Enemy on the 19th.— In Consequence of which he has this day declared in Genl. Orders, that Morgan's Corps & Light Infantry under Major Dearborn, belong to His Brigade or Division, & are subject to No Orders but those from Head Qtrs. Altho a few days since he ordered Arnold to add them to one of the Brigades of his Division.— Matters came so high, that Arnold told him he would not suffer the Treatment & asked Gates' Pass to Philadelphia & Gates said he would give it with all his heart.— "He further told Arnold, he should not have a Division."— This I am certain of, Arnold has all the Credit of the Action of the 19th, for he was ordering out troops to It, while the other was in Dr. Potts tent backbiting his neighbors for which words had like to ensue between him & me & this I further know, that he Asked where the Troops were going, when Scammell's Batt. Marched & upon being Answered, he declared no more should go, he would not suffer the Camp to be Exposed.

“[H]ad Gates complied with Arnold’s Repeated Desires,” continued Varick,

he would have gained a Genl. & compleat Victory over the Enemy.— but it is evident to me, he never intended to fight Burgoyne, till Arnold, urged, begged & entreated him to do It—Nay, he meant by Moving the Army to cast an [illegible] on Your Reputation, in hopes that Burgoyne would be frightened by his Movement from the South & North...I apprehend much that a certain person, whose Conduct much bespeaks the Character of a Sycophant, & who affects great Friendship for You, has no small share in attempting to injure Your Reputation when Set in Competition with Genl. Gates’ & is at Bottom of the Dispute between Arnold and Gates.— I apprehend if Arnold leaves us, we shant Move unless the Enemy run up the River.— He had the full Confidence of the Troops & they would fight gallantly under him.— If he quits I shall not stay longer unless I can probably see Saratoga [Schuyler’s estate ten miles north of Bemis Heights at modern Schuylerville].⁴⁰

This remarkable letter is a primary source of the traditional anti-Gates interpretation of both the fighting on Freeman’s farm and the generals’ quarrel.

“I am much distressed at Gen. Arnold’s determination to retire from the Army at this important Crisis,” Henry Livingston wrote to General Schuyler the following day, “...—His presence was never more necessary.” Livingston continued:

He is the Life and Soul of the Troops – Believe me Sir, To him & him alone is due the honor of our late Victory.— Whatever Share his Superiors may claim they are entitled to None - - - . He enjoys the Confidence & Affection of Officers & Soldiers.— They would, to a Man, follow him to Conquest or Death - - - His absence will dishearten them to such a degree, as to render them of but little Service - - - The difference between him & Mr G - - - has arisen to too great a height to admit a Compromise. I have, for some time past observed the great Coolness, & in many instances, even disrespect with which Gen. Arnold has been treated at Head Qr. - - - His proposals have been rejected with marks of Indignity -- - His own orders have frequently been contravened—and himself set in a ridiculous light by those of the Commander in Chief - - - -⁴¹

After parroting Arnold’s recitation of his grievances, Livingston continued his interpretation of events:

The Reason of the present disagreement between two old cronies, is simply this—Arnold is your friend - - - - - I shall attend the general down—Chagrining as it may be for me to leave the army, at a time when an Opportunity is offering for every young Fellow to distinguish himself, I can no longer submit to the Command of a man whom I abhor from my very Soul - - - His Conduct is disgusting every One, but his Flatterers & Dependents, among who profess to be your Friends - - - A Cloud is gathering & may ere long burst on his Head - - -⁴²

The young officers’ letters and Arnold’s catalogue of grievances are couched in language suggesting a common source expressed in interchangeable terms.

Two days after the quarrel erupted, Varick predicted that it would end in a duel between the generals and reported, with obvious relish, that Arnold had challenged General Benjamin Lincoln's authority to issue orders to units in the American left wing. According to his letter to Schuyler, Arnold observed Lincoln, who had arrived at Bemis Heights during the evening of the twenty-second,

giving some Directions in his Division, He applied to him to know whether Gates had given Orders about It, was answered in the Negative; he then told him he tho't Lincoln's Division... lay on the Right & that the left belonged to him & Gates ought to be in the Center, he requests Lincoln to Mention this to Gates & have it fixed Arnold is determined not to suffer any one to Interfere in his Division & says It will be certain Death, to any Officer, who does, in Action If it be not settled before,— that Gates can't refuse him his Commd. & will not yield it Now as the Enemy are expected - - - & to thwart Gates' wish to have none but such as will Crouch to him & his Humours, in Camp, he will Remain, if I am not seriously Mistaken - - -⁴³

If Varick's account can be trusted, Arnold pretended to believe that he continued to command the left wing, and that Lincoln was to command the right and Gates the center. Since that had never been the case, Arnold's contention was patently spurious. Lincoln's arrival from east of the Hudson River would, however, as earlier noted, pose a command problem—even if Arnold and Gates had remained friendly. Lincoln was the former's senior, and his presence relegated Arnold to being the third-ranking general officer present. On the other hand, that would not necessarily have affected the distribution of divisions among the three men. In fact, the distribution that Arnold pretended to believe had been settled upon was a sensible one that may have been discussed orally at the time Gates ordered Lincoln to join the main force on the Hudson.

More serious was Arnold's denial that Gates had the authority to remove him from his command and his threatening any officer who "interfered" with his division with "certain death." Arnold knew that Gates had orally relieved him and that a commanding general possessed such authority. His threat to kill any officer who exercised any command in his old division "in Action If it were not settled before" was puerile and indefensible. Regardless of whether he was bluffing or in earnest, Arnold's conduct was irresponsible and mutinous.

There is, of course, a possibility that Varick's account was inaccurate or exaggerated, and that his enthusiasm for Arnold's cause and his desire to exploit the quarrel to discredit Gates led him to tell too lurid a story. Be that as it may, a general order issued the next day formalized the command structure by vesting Lincoln with command of the right wing and reserving the left to Gates' personal command.⁴⁴

The tone of the young men's letters of the twenty-second and twenty-third approved Arnold's threat to leave the Northern Department. They seemed almost to hope that his departure would result in an American defeat that would discredit Gates and vindicate Schuyler. Their tone changed when they reported events that began to unfold on September 24.

Others Attempt Intervention

By the twenty-fourth of the month, “Arnold’s Intention to quit this department is made public, and has caused great uneasiness among the Soldiers.” Henry Livingston wrote to Schuyler that General Poor had proposed that he, Learned, and the colonels of Arnold’s old division present an “Address” to Arnold thanking him for his leadership, especially “for his conduct in the late Action,” and asking him to remain in camp. That Poor and Arnold were old adversaries heightened the proposal’s dramatic implications. Poor’s regimental commanders (Joseph Cilley, Wilborn Adams, Alexander Scammell, Philip Van Cortlandt, Henry Beekman Livingston, Thaddeus Cook, and Jonathan Latimore) signed the “Address.” Learned’s colonels (John Bailey, Michael Jackson, James Wesson, and James Livingston) agreed with the petition’s “propriety, but declined to sign because they feared giving umbrage to General G [ates]. A paltry Reason for Officers of rank to allege for not doing their duty...” The refusal of the Learned’s officers to sign, claimed Livingston, doomed the “Address.”

Livingston next reported that only intervention by the general officers (Lincoln, Learned, Poor, Nixon, Paterson, and Glover) could “bring about a reconciliation.” He claimed that General Lincoln, who was “anxious for Arnold’s stay,” had been proposed as the proper person to sponsor the negotiations—as, indeed, he was, as the senior officer present.⁴⁵

Livingston’s September 25 letter to Schuyler explained how the generals’ efforts fared:

I mentioned in Letter, Yesterday that I was in hopes the General Officers would take some measures to prevent Genl. Arnold’s leaving the Army - - - When the matter was hushed, some thro’ jealousy, others for fear of offending Gates, declined having anything to do with the dispute - - - They all wish him to stay—but are too pusillanimous to declare their sentiments—There the matter rests - - - Some indeed were weak enough to propose that Arnold should make concession and thus bring about a compromise - - - His Spirit disdains any thing of the kind— He seems more determined than ever, & I fear will too soon put his resolution into Execution - - -⁴⁶

The generals disappointed Livingston by trying to bring about a reconciliation through some negotiated compromise. At least some of the general officers believed that Schuyler’s young champions were a source of trouble and undertook to relieve tensions by removing at least one of them from the camp. Varick reported to Schuyler that someone...

[Had] thrown out in an unmanly manner, that Arnold’s Mind was poisoned by some of those about him, here I feel myself touched. Altho’ the person alluded to in Mine (I think) the 10th... Who Affects great Friendship for You [James Wilkinson], was polite enough to tell Major Chester, Livingston’s Antagonist, that the first step toward an accommodation, will be to get rid of Livingston. - - - This Arnold was informed of but disdains so ignoble an act....

Livingston, for his part, “has too much Regard for his Country to remain, when by Sacrificing his own Pleasure he may possibly promote Its Wealth.” He would leave for Albany the next day; Varick would follow, if there were no action by Saturday or Sunday, although it would give him “more pleasure, if I can see Saratoga First,— This pleasure I fancy I should have this Day enjoyed, if Genl. Gates had Either furnished Arnold with troops on the 19th or permitted us to go out on the 20[th]...”⁴⁷

The sacrificial lamb, Livingston provided more details in his letter to Schuyler. He first reported that Arnold had consented to stay at Bemis Heights in response to a letter from all of the general officers, excepting Lincoln, “tho’ no accommodation has taken place- - -” He continued with an account of the negotiations, as told him by Arnold:

I find myself under the necessity of returning to Albany, & merely to satisfy the Caprice & jealousy of a certain great person - - - It has been several times insinuated by the Commander in chief to Genl. Arnold, that his mind had been poisoned & prejudiced by some of his family—And I have been pointed out as the person, who had this undue influence over him - - - Arnold has always made proper replies on these occasions, & despised the Reflection - - - But since the last Rupture, another Attempt has been made, in a low, indirect manner to have me turned from Genl. Arnold’s Family - - - Major Chester, (who by the bye is an impertinent Pedant) attempted to bring about a reconciliation - - - For this purpose he consulted with the Dep: A Gen [Wilkinson]—And in the Course of their conversation, was told that some overtures were necessary on Arnold’s Side - - - That Gates was jealous of me; & thought I had influenced Arnold’s conduct - - - that of course it was necessary to get rid of me to open a way for an accommodation - - - When this was told to Arnold, he could scarcely contain himself & desired Chester to return for Answer—that his judgment had never been influenced by any man, & that he would not sacrifice a Friend to please the “Face of Clay”....⁴⁸

This interesting letter claimed that, even before the post-battle argument, Gates had accused Arnold of being unduly influenced by Livingston, that the latter had “despised the Reflection,” and that after the “last Rupture” men working for a reconciliation made the young man’s departure a condition. If Livingston’s account was accurate, the general officers succeeded in persuading Arnold to remain in camp, hoping that he and Gates would reconcile. Arnold, while agreeing to remain, refused to make any concessions that would represent a retreat from the position he had taken during his confrontation with the commanding general. Then, according to Livingston, the generals addressed another letter to Arnold that formalized his agreement to stay without requiring any concession on his part. About the only firm conclusion to emerge is that the general officers concerned with effecting a reconciliation persuaded Arnold to stay, that Livingston was a troublemaker, and that all would profit from his leaving.

Why Varick was not also identified as a candidate for rustication is not clear, and he was exercised that he was not so honored. Perhaps the men involved in the negotiations knew more about the characters and actions of the two men than we do and believed that Livingston was more of a threat to harmony. As a mere volunteer aide to Arnold, he was also more readily expendable.

For his part, Richard Varick was determined to share his friend’s distinction. After all, for one of his sense of importance, being reduced to being a comparative cipher was demeaning. He wrote Schuyler on the twenty-sixth:

...I told Arnold this mornng. I should leave Camp soon on that Account.— As Livingston does not leave Camp, till to Morrow, I believe We shall go in Company, unless I hear that Something is in Agitation soon.— I am rather too great a check on the Director Genl. & some of his associates, too Staunch Friends to Gates to live with, without giving some of them a Rub, & It rather a

Disagreeable Situation to check Others & be checked in Language Yourself. - - -I shall never fail to do the Duties, I oweMyself, be It who it may, that opposes me. - - -⁴⁹

The details of what prevailed upon Arnold to decide not to make good his threat to leave the Northern Department, beyond the suspicion that he never really intended to leave, are elusive. We have only Livingston's and Varick's versions as they transmitted them to Schuyler. The petition Poor circulated has not survived. Of the colonels whose support in begging Arnold not to leave he solicited, four (Daniel Morgan, Joseph Cilley, Philip Van Cortlandt, and Rufus Putnam) left personal papers, but they contain no references to the petition. In fact, none mentions the quarrel. Papers of three of the generals (Lincoln, Glover, and Nixon) also exist. They, too, contain nothing that supports the story we have been following. Soldiers batten upon gossip and rumor, especially when it concerns headquarters and what officers are doing when they are not in view. One would expect the men on Bemis Heights—who certainly heard that something was afoot, and that the most dramatic member of the officer corps had threatened to leave them and been displaced—to have commented on that dramatic event in journals or memoirs. And yet, strangely, no contemporary diary, journal, nor later memoir (other than those already cited) mentions the controversy.⁵⁰ And none reflects a decline in morale.

The Unhappy Upshot of it All

So, Benedict Arnold remained in camp, ignored by Gates, without a command, and reduced to the cipher he had complained of being in his correspondence with the commanding general. But he took pains to demonstrate his contempt for authority by bestowing a fifty dollar reward, indirect violation to department policy, on a soldier who had killed an Indian during the retreat from Fort Edward. Gates reprimanded him. Arnold obviously hoped to develop another quarrel, but Gates dropped the matter by accepting Arnold's contention that he was, in Schuyler's absence, in temporary command when the Indian had been killed.⁵¹

On October 1, when militia were appearing daily to swell his ranks, and Gates was improving his position while he waited for an increasingly-desperate Burgoyne to make his next move, Arnold delivered his final round in the pistolary duel. Once again, this is worth quoting at length:

Notwithstanding the repeated ill treatment I have met with, and continued daily to receive, treated only as a cypher in the army, never consulted or acquainted with one occurrence in the army, which I know only by accident, while I have every reason to think your treatment proceeds from a spirit of jealousy, and that I have every thing to fear from the malice of my enemies, conscious of my own innocency and integrity, I am determined to sacrifice my feelings, present peace and quiet, to the public good, and continue in the army at this critical juncture, when my country needs every support.... I beg leave to say, that when Congress sent me into the department at the request of his excellency General Washington, they thought me of some consequence, and I believe expected the commander-in-chief, would consult with me, or at least would have taken my opinion on public matters. I think it my duty (which nothing shall deter me from doing) to acquaint you the army are clamorous for action. The militia who compose a great part of the army are already threatening to go home. One fortnight's inaction will, I make no doubt, lessen

your army by sickness and defection at least four thousand men, in which time the enemy may be reinforced to make good their retreat.... I have reason to think, from intelligence since received, that had we improved the 20th of September it might have ruined the enemy, that is past, let me entreat you to improve the present time.... I hope you will not impute this hint to wish to command the army, or to outshine you, when I assure you it proceeds from my zeal for the cause of my country in which I expect to rise or fall.⁵²

Gates did not respond. In fact, he never made further written reference to relations with his unhappy lieutenant.

The generals' quarrel did credit to neither man. Arnold was pathologically sensitive concerning his honor and toward any hint of disagreement or criticism. His violent temper got out of control, and he behaved toward Gates in a manner that he would not have tolerated had their roles been reversed. Gates acted within his prerogatives, but he was petty in dealing with a valuable, charismatic combat leader. Because he did not commit his version of the dispute to writing, we can only guess at why he did not do more to retain the friendship and services of a man with whom he had for more than two years maintained a mutually useful relationship.

Perhaps the generals would not have fallen into their disgraceful squabble if they had been free of the influences of others who sought to profit from it. We have noted the satisfaction with which Livingston and Varick reported their detailed versions of the quarrel. And we have their testimony that those seeking a reconciliation considered them provocateurs. They exploited whatever potential issues divided the two generals, feeding Arnold's vanity and sense of persecution, persuading him that he was the victim of Gates' malice. It was probably Varick who falsely told Arnold that Gates had called his division a "Detachment of the Army" in his report to Hancock, and that it was an intentional slur. If our knowledge of the quarrel is accurate, what Varick told Arnold was the immediate occasion for the generals' rupture. The young men hoped to discredit the man who had displaced Schuyler, to whom they displayed a loyalty that eclipsed the one they owed their country.

Omnipresent James Wilkinson was mischief's real work of art. Varick, in a September 22 letter to Schuyler, implied that Wilkinson was "attempting to injure" Arnold. The details of his role are more elusive, but he had an influence on Gates—who was no more immune to flattery than some of his greater contemporaries—that was less than benign.⁵³

Finally, there was Philip Schuyler, who had reason to detest Gates and who could not bring himself to restrain his young protégés. He did nothing to dissuade them from being agents of discord, obviously encouraging their mutinous correspondence when he could have recalled them, with paternal firmness, to their duty. If we relied exclusively upon his papers deposited in the New York Public Library, we could assume that his role was passive—and he meticulously preserved his personal and official correspondence. But did he omit anything revealing that he was an active party to the quarrel? The Lloyd Smith Collection deposited in the Morristown National Historical Park's library contains a letter Schuyler penned to Varick at 6:00 on the morning of September 20. It suggests that an entrenchment be added between the Hudson and a swamp on the extreme right flank—an obvious response to the sketch of the fortifications on Bemis Heights that Varick had provided him.

But there was more. Schuyler wanted Varick to show the letter, not to Gates, Kosciuszko, or Stevens, but to Arnold, and warned Varick to destroy his letters, "lest an accident should [put]

them into hands I do not wish they should fall into I mean the person you mention [Gates].”⁵⁴
Unfortunately, General Schuyler was a party to a disgraceful and dangerous quarrel.

