Appendix H

An American Partnership Torn Asunder: Benedict Arnold, Horatio Gates, and the Battle of Freeman's Farm, September 19, 1777

General Discussion

Almost four decades after the Battle of Freeman's Farm, James Wilkinson published an interpretation that, despite the author's character flaws, is a useful contribution to understanding what happened on September, 19, 1777. His observations are excerpted below in a lengthy quotation that provides a reference for commentary. "The battle was perfectly accidental," began Horatio Gates' aide-de-camp,

neither of the generals meditated an attack at that time, and but for Lieutenant-colonel Colburn's report, it would not have taken place; Burgoyne's movement being merely to take ground on the heights in front of the great ravine, to give his several corps their proper places in line, to embrace our front and cover his transport, stores, provisions and baggage in rear of his left; and on our side the defences of our camp being not half completed and reinforcements daily arriving, it was not General Gates' policy to court action. The misconception of the adverse chiefs put them on the defensive, and confined them to the ground they occupied at the beginning of the action, and prevented a single manoeuvre, during one of the longest, warmest, and most obstinate battles fought in America.

Wilkinson continued:

General Gates believed that his antagonist intended to attack him, and circumstances appeared to justify a like conclusion on the part of Burgoyne; and as the thickness of the investing wood concealed the position and movements of either army…sound caution obliged the respective commanders to guard every assailable point; and thus the flower of the British army, the grenadiers and light infantry, one thousand five hundred strong, were posted on an eminence to cover its right, and stood by their arms, inactive spectators of the conflict until near sunset; while General Gates was obliged to keep his right wing on post, to prevent the enemy from forcing the flank, by the plain bordering the river. Had either of the generals been apprised of the

dispositions of his antagonist, a serious blow might have been struck on our left or the enemy's right, but although nothing is more common, it is as illiberal as it is unjust, to determine the merit of military operations by events exclusively. It was not without experience that the Romans erected temples to Fortune….[1]

Wilkinson's observations have the virtue of being more judicious and objective than the judgments rendered by some students whose partisanship flavors their observations. That it contains factual errors will become apparent, and his interpretation was not infallible. But it represented the judgment of an informed and intelligent witness.

Wilkinson's characterization of the battle's being "perfectly accidental" is an oversimplification. When Fraser's Corps, the artillery, and the [British] right wing of his army crossed the Hudson during Saturday September 13, Burgoyne knew that his adversary was at Stillwater and anticipated a fight; his troops camped that night "in columns in order of Battle."[2] Three days later, while his army lay at Dovegat [Coveville], Burgoyne led a large reconnaissance (Digby claimed it numbered 2,000 men), accompanied by six field pieces. He knew the Americans occupied Bemis Heights and blocked the road to Albany.[3] He knew with equal certainty that he would have to reopen that route by ruse or force, and the deployment of his troops reflected that certainty.

To summarize the British position: Burgoyne was too far from Canada to be reinforced and resupplied; autumn and the end of the campaigning season were rapidly approaching; he could not winter on the upper Hudson; he was less than fifty miles from his objective, where he could winter; Gates and his swelling army in their fortified camp blocked the way. Burgoyne intended to dislodge them.

The British commander, his staff, subordinate commanders, and officer corps had spent their adult lives in military service. While there was, as yet, no Royal Military College nor Kriegsakadamie, experience and study had made them professionals. That professionalism was apparent in the manner General Burgoyne deployed his outnumbered force to attack an enemy entrenched in works of whose extent and strength he had imperfect knowledge. Consciously or otherwise, he employed Pierre de Bourcet's "plan with branches," sending three separated columns to converge against the Americans, an intelligent tactic given his objective and his limited information about Gates' position and deployment. De Bourcet, a French strategic theorist, recommended that a commander divide his attacking force into two or more columns that could reunite quickly to concentrate his full force when required, but in a manner threatening multiple or alternative targets, forcing the defender to divide his strength and compromise his capacity to concentrate his defensive resources. The three-column deployment also provided flexibility, allowing it to respond to one blocked approach by exploiting another, more promising, one.[4]

Terrain, the American position, and the size of his army severely limited the British commander's options. A massed attack in column along the river flats at Jotham Bemis' tavern would have been suicidal. The hilly, wooded topography north of Bemis Heights afforded no ground suitable for massing and advancing either in line or column against the American left wing. De Bourcet offered a theoretical solution.

Burgoyne intended to take, and Gates meant to retain, Bemis Heights. Wilkinson was correct in that neither general anticipated the manner in which the battle developed. Gates

expected Morgan to observe, not engage, the British. The term “accidental” was, however, less applicable to Burgoyne. His objective was to force or entice Gates out of his fortifications and to divide his numerically stronger defensive force. In that Burgoyne was partially successful.

Once the fighting developed, neither army displayed impressive tactical skill. Better coordination between Fraser’s and Hamilton’s columns early in the fight before Learned’s Brigade deployed could have overlapped and turned Morgan’s and Enoch Poor’s left. But Burgoyne and Fraser credited the Americans with more sophistication than they possessed. The American use of an aggressive turning action against the British right made the latter so obsessed with occupying high ground overlooking the battlefield that they failed to employ aggressively their elite corps against the vulnerable American left. When Fraser finally committed his men later in the day, he did so in a limited, reactive manner.

For their part, the Americans made no concerted attempt—even when they had the numerical advantage—to turn the enemy’s right flank. There is no credible evidence that Generals Gates, Arnold, Poor, or Learned imposed any kind of tactical direction beyond ordering regiments onto the battle line. The result was reliance upon frontal assault sustained by committing additional men. Stolid, stubborn Freiherr von Riedesel came marginally closer to exhibiting initiative when he attacked the American line’s right flank shortly before sunset. But that was more the result of falling in line with Hamilton’s left than of foresight on his part.

The courage of the company officers and enlisted men compensated for their commanders’ limited effectiveness, repeatedly fighting their way through the smoke, confusion, and terror to attack, withdraw, and counterattack. The Americans faced up to their enemy’s deadliest weapon, the bayonet charge, so bravely as to render it indecisive. The Europeans, except briefly during the battle’s first phase, tenaciously maintained their order and fire discipline in unfamiliar terrain against a strong enemy and Morgan’s expert marksmen. They overcame the odds to outfight the Americans and eventually drive them from the field.

The Role of Benedict Arnold

A comprehensive discussion of the battle of Freeman’s Farm requires a careful examination of Benedict Arnold’s role. The part played by his division’s brigades is obvious. But there are two closely connected questions concerning his personal role. The first concerns whether he personally led his men into battle. The second is whether Horatio Gates prevented him from delivering the “knockout blow” that would have brought about John Burgoyne’s defeat and ended the campaign. Both are important questions to which an impressive quantity of ink has been devoted. Yet a review of the evidence with as much objectivity as can be summoned justifies contributing to the volume of print.

“It is worthy to remark,” wrote James Wilkinson, whose testimony again provides a starting point for our examination,

> that not a single general officer was on the field of battle on the 19th Sept, until the evening when General Learned was ordered out, about the same time Generals Gates and Arnold were in front of the center of the camp, listening to the peal of arms. When Colonel [Morgan] Lewis, deputy quarter-master general returned from the field, and being questioned by the General, he reported the indecisive progress of the action, at which General Arnold exclaimed, “by G-d I will put an end to it,” and clapping spurs to his horse, galloped off at full speed. Colonel Lewis

immediately observed to General Gates, "you had better order him back, the action is going well, he may by some rash act do mischief." I was instantly dispatched, overtook and remanded Arnold to camp.[5]

One of the influential Livingston clan was Robert R. Livingston, an important Revolutionary-era statesman and diplomat closely associated with General Philip Schuyler by kinship and political interest. Two of his relatives played important roles in the Saratoga campaign: a cousin, Henry Brockholst Livingston, was an Arnold aide; and Robert's brother, Henry Beekman Livingston, commanded the 4th New York Continental Regiment. The Livingstons maintained a strong sense of family and did not hesitate to support their kinsmen's interests. In that spirit, Robert R. wrote to General Washington on behalf of his brother on January 14, 1778. His letter reads, in part:

I take the liberty to inclose to your excellency an extract of a letter to him [Henry Beekman] under general Arnold's direction by a gentleman of his family [staff], he being unable to hold a pen himself. After a warm recommendation of his conduct, both in camp and in the field, and giving him and his regiment full share of the honor of the battle of the 19th of September (in which General Arnold, not being present, writes only from the reports of those who were….)[6]

Henry Brockholst Livingston and his friend, Richard Varick, were Arnold's active partisans during his quarrel with General Gates, and they gave him exclusive credit for every American success on September 19. The former wrote to General Schuyler that Arnold "is the Life and Soul of the Troops—Believe me, Sir, to him and to him alone is due the Honor of our late victory. Whatever share his Superiors may claim they are entitled to none." Echoing him, Varick declared, "This I am certain of, that Arnold has all the Credit of the Action of the 19th, for he was ordering out troops to it, while the other [Gates] was in Dr. Potts tent back biting his Neighbors…"[7] Yet while they credited Arnold with making the critical decisions and issuing the orders putting them into effect, they did not represent him as personally leading his division into battle.

To assess their judgments' validity, the testimony of other contemporaries is useful. Colonel Philip Van Cortlandt, another scion of an important New York family with close connections to General Schuyler, was commander of the 2nd New York Regiment, which left its position on the camp's left wing about 4:00 p.m., with orders to extend the line facing the British grenadiers. Van Cortlandt recorded that he received orders from Arnold on his way to the firing line, but he was not specific about whether he received them from the general personally, through an aide, or more probably through General Poor, his brigade commander.[8]

Jared Sparks' papers in Harvard's Houghton Library contain contradictory testimony. When the historian toured the battlefield in 1830, he visited John Neilson, New York militia sergeant and owner of the house in which Generals Learned and Poor made their quarters and the cabin that housed Arnold. His guide was a talkative old veteran named Ezra Buel. Both men served at Bemis Heights. "Arnold was inactive, and took no part," both told Sparks. "In fact, there was no general officer in action. At one time Buel says he saw Genl. Poor, with two or three other officers, quite in the rear of the American Army, and taking no part in the action. The fighting

was under the eyes of Morgan, Scamill [sic] and Ciley."[9]

However, the same collection also contains an account written the day after the battle prepared by General Poor. It presents the strongest evidence of Arnold's personal participation in the fighting:

Arnold rushed into the thickest of the fight with his usual recklessness, and at times acted like a madman. I did not see him once, but S [probably Colonel Scammell] told [me] this morning that he did not seem inclined to lead alone, but as a prominent object among the enemy should present itself, he would seize the rifle-gun and take deliberate aim.[10]

Thus, while he placed his division commander on the battlefield, Poor did not credit him with exercising responsible command. Considering his remarkable testimony is appropriate for three reasons. First, Poor apparently saw nothing of Arnold within the camp, which argues for Arnold's being on the field. Second, Poor reported what he had been told by someone else—probably Scammell, commander of the 3rd New Hampshire Regiment—which was on line with Morgan's riflemen by 1:30 p.m. Third, Poor was not an Arnold partisan. He had been president of the court-martial that acquitted Moses Hazen and ordered Arnold's arrest in December 1776—the same arrest that Gates declined to execute. Poor's evidence was circumstantial and portrays Arnold's conduct in an unfavorable light—but it is important.

Hezekiah Smith was chaplain to Colonel Thomas Nixon's 6th Massachusetts Regiment, a unit of Brigadier General John Nixon's command (the brigade posted on the extreme right blocking the road to Albany and not an active participant in the fighting). In his 1885 editing of Smith's papers, Reuben A. Gould quoted the chaplain as saying that Arnold personally commanded his division. Later writers identified Smith's papers as a source testifying that Arnold exercised that command on the Freeman farm.

Of the American participants cited, three (Wilkinson, John Neilson, and Ezra Buel) unequivocally denied that Arnold personally led his men into combat. Henry Brockholst Livingston and Richard Varick credited him with directing the battle. Neither, however, placed him anywhere but in camp, and Varick's letter credited Arnold with "ordering out troops." General Poor reported that he had been told Arnold participated in the fighting, more as a private soldier than as a division commander. Chaplain Smith said that Arnold commanded his division, but that he was more than two miles from the battle line (and so may not have meant the general exercised personal command on the field). Robert R. Livingston wrote explicitly to Washington that Arnold was not present on the field.[11]

James Wilkinson's unsavory character invites skepticism. The details recounted in his *Memoirs*, however, stand up well when compared with facts established by more respectable sources. He published his book in 1816, while Richard Varick, Henry Brockholst, Henry Livingston, Morgan Lewis, and Robert Troup—men in positions to know whether he lied—were alive. Five colonels who commanded units that fought during September 19 were also alive in 1816: Rufus Putnam, 5th Massachusetts; Edward Wigglesworth, 13th Massachusetts; William Shepard, 4th Massachusetts; Philip Van Cortlandt, 2nd New York; and James Livingston, Canadian Regiment. Henry Dearborn, who commanded the light infantry and was later secretary of war, was also alive and publicly prominent. Yet, a diligent search of contemporary published literature (some of it characterized by controversy and vituperation) and surviving

correspondence and personal papers has failed to produce a refutation of Wilkinson's account of the battle.

The confusion and smoke of combat precluded the recognition of individual American officers by British and German combatants. Max von Eelking, editor of the English edition of von Riedesel's correspondence and journals, however, asserted that Arnold personally led the American soldiers. An examination of von Riedesel manuscripts in the New York Public Library's Bancroft Collection and the Niedersaechische Staatsarchiv, Wolfenbuttel, does not support Eelking's statement. The baron's letter to the Duke of Brunswick mentions only one officer by name: Horatio Gates.[12] In none of his papers deposited in Wolfenbuttel did von Riedesel credit Arnold with personal participation, noting only that he had learned that the American troops were from Arnold's Division. Von Eelking took so many liberties when he edited the German's papers that using his work requires caution.

Secondary sources disagree on Arnold's role at Freeman's Farm. One of the earliest to comment was Charles Neilson, who in 1844 contradicted his own father's firsthand testimony by writing that Arnold, on a gray horse, returned from the battlefield and asked Gates for reinforcements. The latter responded, "You shall have them, sir," and immediately ordered out Learned's Brigade, whereupon Arnold rushed back "at full gallop and the men after him in double quick time."[13] Charles Neilson's book embalmed many errors, confusing the events of September 19 and October 7, and inventing dialogue for which there is no corroborating evidence. Believing that he accurately portrayed Arnold as leaving the firing line to ride back to camp for reinforcements rather than sending a courier requires a suspension of critical faculties and reflects a gross ignorance of command practice.

A more serious writer was the Italian scholar Charles Botta, who, without citing a single source, wrote that "Arnold exhibited upon this occasion all the impetuosity of his courage; he encouraged his men with voice and example."[14] Arnold's kinsman, Isaac N. Arnold, penned an extravagant, undocumented story of the general's career that included such details as the color of his horse and verbatim dialogue unreported by any contemporary.[15]

Historian-writer Hoffman Nickerson, as usual, wrote the most influential version of Arnold's personal role. After describing von Riedesel's attack on the American right on Freeman's farm, he followed Wilkinson's account—with one important difference:

At this moment the Americans were without the dashing leadership of Arnold, who had ridden back to ask for reinforcements. In answer to his request Gates ordered out a whole brigade, that of Learned. Gates and Arnold were for the moment listening together to the sound of firing, Arnold sitting on a gray horse, when Colonel Morgan Lewis, Gates' Quarter-master general, … who rode in and reported the action still undecided. Whereat the vehement Arnold exclaimed, "By God ! I'll soon put an end to it!" And spurred off at a gallop. Hardly had he done so, however, when Lewis said to Gates that the latter had better order him back, since the action was going well and Arnold by some rash act might do mischief. Gates therefore despatched Wilkinson, who overtook Arnold and transmitted Gates' order to return to camp, which Arnold obeyed.[16]

Nickerson ignored contemporary testimonies, of which he was certainly aware, and invoked unreliable Charles Neilson and inventive Isaac Arnold to represent Arnold as having

led an unidentified part of his command into battle, then returned to camp to request reinforcements. The captain knew enough military history to know that no responsible general officer would leave his men on the firing line to function as his own courier, returning to solicit support. Nickerson's detestation of Gates led him to enhance Arnold's role.

Christopher Ward's readable *The War of the Revolution* contains a riveting description of Arnold dramatically leading his entire division into battle and securing a victory that fell short of being complete only because Gates thwarted his delivering the knock-out blow.[17] Two of Arnold's recent biographers have categorically placed him at the head of the battle line. Willard Sterne Randall, combining Wilkinson's and Isaac Arnold's versions with other unnamed sources, tells an equally stirring story.[18] Other students have been equally divided.

Benedict Arnold left us a brief written account regarding his role in the fighting. "On the 19th just when advice was received that the enemy was approaching," penned the angry general to his commander just three days later on September 22, "I took the liberty to give as my Opinion that we ought to march out and attack them, you desired me to send Colonel Morgan and the light infantry and support them. I obeyed your Orders, and before the Action was over I found it necessary to send out the whole of my Division to support the attack no other troops were Engaged that day," he continued, "except Colonel Marshals Regt of General Paterson's Brigade."[19]

Arnold wrote nothing suggesting that he had to argue his tactical case with Gates, that he acted on his own initiative, nor that he led his division into battle. Gates desired him to "send" Morgan and the light infantry, and "before the Action was over, I found it necessary to send out the whole of my Division." His statement is consistent with the fact that he committed his troops piecemeal, one brigade at a time, which argues against his personally "leading" them. We know that his subordinate brigade commanders remained in camp. Believing Arnold left his commanders there while he led their men in successive commitments onto the field of battle, returning to camp to bring up reinforcements, strains credulity. If he had, in fact, initiated the American action, had led his men into combat, and been denied requested support, Benedict Arnold would have reminded Gates of those facts in a letter penned in the midst of the bitter quarrel that erupted between the two generals.

Livingston and Varick did not place Arnold at the head of his troops on Freeman's farm. "[T]his I further know," wrote Varick in a September 22 letter to General Schuyler, "that he [Gates] Asked where the Troops were going, when Scammils Batt marched & upon being Answered, he declared no more should go, he would not suffer the Camp to be exposed." Varick concluded: "Had Gates complyed [sic] with Arnolds Repeated Desires, he would have gained a Genl. & Compleat Victory over the Enemy."[20]

Upon that unsupported allegation, later writers constructed an indictment of Gates' competence. William L. Stone, an early and energetic student of the campaign to whom we owe much, never missed an opportunity to disparage the man who displaced Philip Schuyler. "Arnold was not only the hero of the field, but he had won the admiration of the whole army," Stone wrote, kicking off what would become an influential paragraph:

There was not a man, officer or private who had participated in the battle, or who witnessed the conflict who did not believe that if Gates had sent reinforcements, as Arnold again and again begged him to do, he would have utterly routed the whole British army. So general was this

belief, and so damaging to Gates, that as an excuse to save himself from reproaches coming from every side he gave out as the reason that the store of powder and ball in the camp was exhausted, and the supplies of ammunition from Albany had not arrived. No one could dispute this, yet none believed it.[21]

Mr. Stone may have known of contemporary sources supporting that sweeping interpretation. If he did, he did not identify and cite them.

Sir John Fortesque declared in his magisterial history of the British Army that "Had Gates sent to Arnold the reinforcements for which he asked, Arnold would certainly have broken the British center."[22] Much-traveled Benson Lossing carried that interpretation a step further when he wrote, "Had he [Arnold] been seconded by his commander, and strengthened by reinforcements… he would doubtless have secured a complete victory. But for Arnold on that eventful day, Burgoyne would doubtless have marched into Albany at the autumnal equinox a victor…."[23]

Hoffman Nickerson penned the classic indictment of Gates when he accused him of keeping Arnold from rejoining his division and failing to take advantage of von Riedesel's move to Freeman's farm by attacking the column the German commander left behind in the valley and destroying Burgoyne's stores, thus ending the campaign.[24]

Christopher Ward, a better stylist than Nickerson, wrote what is arguably the most coherent condemnation of Gates. Accepting Nickerson's and Lossing's accounts and ignoring all primary sources, he accused the general of refusing to reinforce the men on the battle line, depriving them of Arnold's leadership, and failing to attack Burgoyne's left column after von Riedesel moved to Brigadier General James Hamilton's support.[25]

In summation, those accounts assert that Gates refused Arnold's requests for reinforcements, apparently from among the men posted on his right wing. While no contemporary evidence supports that thesis, it has gained wide acceptance. Even if supporting evidence should surface, Gates could have pled sound strategic reasons for not withdrawing men from the wing that was the key to why he had positioned his army on Bemis Heights: interdiction of Burgoyne's only viable route to Albany. Gates knew from reconnaissance that Burgoyne had posted a column on the road and he was ignorant of von Riedesel's movement from the road to support Hamilton's left.

A Detailed Analysis

Assessing those interpretations, which have been shared by other students, requires reviewing in some detail the sequence of American commitments between 3:00 and 6:30 in the afternoon and evening of September 19. Because the sources are less than precise about timing events, the times that several units departed camp and deployed in the field are approximations arrived at by examining the evidence as carefully as possible and applying the information to determining, as logically as possible, the time required to move regiments in formation under the conditions in existence on the field.

The first American regiment to join the fighting during the second half of the afternoon was the 2nd New York, which left Enoch Poor's Brigade's sector of the camp between 3:00 and 3:30, covered the 1 and 3/10-mile approach march, and deployed on Henry Dearborn's left by

4:30. They were followed, about thirty minutes later, by the 4th New York, which by 5:00 p.m. had deployed between the 1st New Hampshire and Cook's Connecticut Militia. Thirty minutes thereafter, Latimore's Connecticut Militia fell in between Cook and Dearborn to counter Fraser's threat to flank the Americans fighting Hamilton's men on Freeman's farm.[26]

By 5:00 p.m., Fraser was posing a more serious threat to overlap and turn the American main line by advancing the British 24th Regiment, Alexander Fraser's rangers, and the British and German grenadiers about 650 yards, forming a right angle by deploying northward for seventy yards.[27] That was the most dangerous threat the Americans had yet faced, and Arnold and Gates responded by committing the 10th Massachusetts Regiment from Paterson's Brigade and the first brigade-sized reinforcement, Learned's Brigade.[28]

Nickerson, Ward, and Randall cited Learned's deployment to illustrate Gates' culpability in keeping Arnold from exercising personal command on the line at a critical juncture. Nickerson set the tone:

By recalling Arnold Gates deprived the American troops engaged of command other than that of leaders of unit…Had Learned's brigade of over eight hundred effective rank and file been directed by Arnold, or indeed had any other superior officer familiar with the ground and the precise position of the units engaged, been on hand to command them, their intervention might still have brought victory…. Lacking such direction they went astray, and instead of joining the action against Burgoyne's centre column, they blundered against outposts of Fraser, leaving their comrades in the centre unaided.[29]

Ward seconded Nickerson with the statement that Learned, "Instead of striking the British center…led his men in a futile attack on Fraser's wing and was beaten off. All other aid, Gates refused."[30] Randall repeated the allegation that Learned "blundered" into position against Fraser because Arnold was not permitted to exercise his proper command function.[31] To summarize: if Gates had permitted Arnold to direct the fight from the vantage point of the battlefield, he would have deployed Learned's Brigade against von Riedesel's reinforcement, defeated the baron's attempt to save Hamilton, and decisively won the day.

The interpretation's validity depends upon four assumptions: (1) That Arnold had returned to headquarters from the field for reinforcements and been retained in camp by Gates; (2) That Fraser was inactive, posing no threat to the Americans engaged on Freeman's farm; (3) That Learned's mission was to attack von Riedesel; and (4) That Learned's incompetence made him "blunder" into a "futile" engagement with what Nickerson called Fraser's "outposts."

Contemporary evidence—especially Arnold's own description of how he exercised command—contradicts the first assumption. The fourth assumption is patently ridiculous because Learned, like the other brigade commanders, was in camp and was not on the field. The following observations address the two remaining assumptions. British and German sources testify that Fraser was active during the battle's second phase and that his column deployed westward on line, opposing Latimore, Dearborn, and Van Cortlandt, and before 5:00 p.m. threatened to turn their left. It was in response to that threat—not one posed by von Riedesel—that Arnold and Gates committed Learned's Brigade and the 10th Massachusetts Regiment. Von Riedesel did not receive Burgoyne's order to reinforce the center column until about the same time Learned's Brigade and Colonel Marshall's regiment left Bemis Heights. Thus, his column

was not even on the way to Freeman's farm when they marched into battle. Learned's men did not get lost in the woods and blunder into the wrong position; rather, they went where Arnold sent them: to refuse Fraser's threat to flank the American line.

The responsible criticism that critics should level at Gates was for not reinforcing the main line of resistance. He certainly had the units available to do so. General John Glover's 2,100-man brigade occupied the position on Bemis Heights to the right of Arnold's Division. Committing it immediately after Learned's Brigade departed for the front—that is, about 5:30 p.m.—could have strengthened the line at a crucial time. Glover's men could have extended the American left, helping neutralize Fraser's threat from that direction. They could have served a more decisive purpose if they had deployed to the right, reinforcing that flank to meet and probably repulse von Riedesel's attack. Neither Arnold nor Gates knew, of course, that the German had come to Hamilton's assistance until between 5:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., but less reluctance on Gates' part to commit more men would have provided a potentially decisive tactical superiority. It is important, however, to remember that there is no credible contemporary evidence that he failed to make effective decisions in spite of Arnold's pleas to do otherwise.

Reinforcing the right would certainly have forced Burgoyne's center to withdraw from Freeman's farm to reinforce the column on the road to Albany. But Fraser's elite corps would have remained a dangerous and unpredictable factor. Fraser and Burgoyne formed a resourceful combination. A headlong charge and pursuit—and Americans had a predilection for headlong action—would have exposed them to attack on their left flank by relatively fresh troops, well-positioned for such an attack. Approaching darkness made even the best-coordinated action hazardous—and that kind of coordination did not mark American performance that day. Assuming that eliminating the British center would have ended the campaign on September 19 is assuming too much.

Including Glover's Brigade, Gates retained in their positions a total of some 4,412 men. His critics condemned him for not employing at least some of them to destroy the remains of the left column after von Riedesel moved to Hamilton's support and seizing the artillery train, bateaux, and supply wagons left on the Albany Road. The charge seems plausible until one considers the time factor. No one in the American camp knew what the left column's situation was until after von Riedesel attacked the American right flank on Freeman's farm—that is, until after 6:00 p.m. Colonel Andrew Colburn, who commanded the reconnaissance on the east side of the river, had rejoined his regiment, the 3rd New Hampshire, and sources do not document intelligence received from parties operating on the western side.[32] Assuming that Gates knew by 6:00 p.m. the size of the enemy force left on the Albany Road, was an attack that late in the day feasible? John Nixon's 1,200-man brigade was the unit closest to the road. Forming it for an effective two-mile-long approach march and attacking in column could not have been accomplished before dark.

As Don Higginbotham observed, Gates accurately took the measure of Burgoyne when he occupied and fortified Bemis Heights.[33] He chose a prudent, economical strategy for frustrating his enemy's designs, one that he was capable of modifying at Arnold's suggestion. As they had in 1776, the two generals complemented each other and achieved a strategic victory that cost their enemy at least 600 irreplaceable men. American losses numbered just 319—substantially fewer than a more aggressive tactic would have produced. Most important, they stopped the advance to Albany and imposed a delay when every delay made American victory more nearly certain. Sadly, within three days ambition, vanity, and petty partisanship destroyed that remarkable

American partnership.