

Foreword

According to many historians, history is replete with “turning points.” Each is a catalyst upon which a social movement, a government, a technology, or a war made a decisive turn and forever changed the destiny of the overall historic event.

Properly speaking, the “turning point” of the American Revolution—the most singular decisive moment of the Revolution as a whole—must be Congress’ resolution for independence voted on July 2, 1776. That event marked the point of no return, and the ratification of the Declaration of Independence that followed manifested the position of what was then a majority of Americans: the United States was a free nation of independent states no longer subject to the rules and laws of Britain. A declaration by a rogue citizenry assembled in Philadelphia was one thing. Validating Congress’ bold action in the eyes of the enemy and other nations of the world, which could only happen through military means, was an entirely different matter.

The military events of 1775 generally favored the Patriots’ cause, largely because the British were caught off-guard during the war’s early months. Their operational plan for subduing the American rebellion, however, nearly ended the war the following year. That it did not was due largely to General George Washington’s masterful end-of-year attacks on Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey, and Thomas Paine’s timely and uplifting *Crisis*. The stunning reverses in the field saved the American cause from its pending ruin born of continual British victories and its own disillusionment. Such was the precarious state of the revolution in early 1777, and why that year promised to be a decisive one.

Operating under the belief that the end of the rebellion in America was in sight, British military strategy for 1777 was even more ambitious than it had been in 1776. While the British Army of the North American Colonies (lying on the Atlantic coast) commanded by General Sir William Howe orchestrated an invasion to take the American capital of Philadelphia, General Sir Guy Carleton’s British Army of the Province of Québec (and its dependent territories and the frontiers) would engage in the more audacious design of moving a pair of armies from Canada in order to combine their strengths at Albany, New York. As is so often the case in history, politics intervened. Command of the invasion passed from Carleton to an excessively overconfident, dashing, and eager-to-prove-himself lieutenant general named John Burgoyne.

The 1777 British invasion from Canada is often referred to as the “Burgoyne Campaign” because he personally planned, proposed, lobbied for, organized, and commanded the operation. Though the “Burgoyne Campaign” promised much, success eluded British arms. A lack of coordination, overconfidence, and a dangerously-low opinion of the Army of the United States—together with American determination, brilliant defensive strategy, and the stellar leadership of soldiers like Benedict Arnold, John Stark, Daniel Morgan, and Thaddeus Kosciuszko, to name just a few—carried the day. No single American was responsible for the tremendous victory, but

the lion's share of the credit rests with Northern Department commander Horatio Gates. His decision to fight on the west side of the Hudson River, and then aggressively pursue and surround Burgoyne's retreating army resulted in the catastrophic British surrender. And it was the surrender at Saratoga, not its several battles and satellite operations, which marked the true "turning point" of the American Revolutionary War.

There are many reasons why the Saratoga surrender proved to be such a decisive pivot point in the war's fortunes. The most important was that it convinced France to openly recognize the independence of the United States and join it in a commercial and military alliance against Great Britain. The recognition of American independence by France, one of the age's great world powers, gave necessary legitimacy to the self-proclaimed United States. That recognition provided French soldiers, money, credit, and matériel to the Patriot cause, all of which combined to bring about the decisive battlefield victory at Yorktown in October 1781, where the majority of the Franco-American allied force was comprised of French soldiers and sailors.

Saratoga's impact did not end with the involvement of France, for truly great moments in history create shock waves that are not restricted to place or time. French, and later Spanish and Dutch, involvement in the American War for Independence elevated the conflict from a colonial rebellion to the international stage. To the dismay of Great Britain, the warring colonial powers clashed in Florida, the West Indies, India, Africa, Gibraltar, the islands in the English Channel, and the Mediterranean Sea. French involvement in the war proved expensive, however, and ended up ruining the French economy. Deteriorating economic circumstances on the continent were a major cause of the French Revolution and the eventual ascension of Napoléon Bonaparte, the Napoleonic Wars, and a continued upheaval of European government and society well into the 20th century. The success of the American Revolution channeled energies into other national movements of independence throughout the world in countries in Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. The people whose lives were affected by the success of the American forces at Saratoga number in the hundreds of millions.

Due in great measure to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Saratoga National Historical Park was authorized in 1938 in order to preserve and protect the grounds of the battlefield, as well as interpret for the public its monumental significance. It's ironic that the fields of fighting, which had such an impact on the shaping of world events, are so well preserved. Nearly 100% of the battle sites are located inside the boundary of the park, as are perhaps 90% of the encampment and fortification sites. That, in combination with a stunningly beautiful viewshed, is a monument to 20th and 21st century historic preservation.

Over the years, a number of books have focused on the military and political events that brought Burgoyne's and Gates' armies together in upstate New York in September and October of 1777. Unlike previous authors, however, John Luzader writes with a thorough understanding of the subject, made possible from decades of writing and research. As a former park historian of Saratoga National Historical Park, he is able to bring to bear his years of methodical and experienced study and deep access to the park's unparalleled collection of source material related to the Northern Campaign, which he helped to build. Mr. Luzader has walked the grounds of the battlefield countless times, is intimately familiar with the landscape he writes about, and understands the critical role it played in both the strategic and tactical situations faced by the armies. In addition, Mr. Luzader personally collected copies of valuable unpublished manuscript sources from Germany and Great Britain, which are necessary for a proper understanding of the chain of events that led to Saratoga. His excellent history of the military and

political aspects of this campaign, and keen discussion of its principal players, is the result of his analytical approach and extensive use of primary sources. No one who has ever written a book about the Northern Campaign of 1777 knows more about this subject.

It is my great honor to introduce *Saratoga: A Military History of the Decisive Campaign of the American Revolution*, by former park historian John Luzader.

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