

27 Howe Billy Wished France Wouldn't Join In



General Howe had already served in America. In 1759 he led Wolfe's troops to seize Quebec.

A **hoop-stay** was part of the stiffening in a skirt; a **jupon** was part of a corset. **Matrons** are married women. The **misses** are single girls; **swains** and **beaux** are young men or boyfriends. **Making love** meant flirting. **British Grenadiers** are part of the royal household's infantry.

Sir William Howe (who was sometimes called Billy Howe) was in charge of all the British forces in America. It was Howe who drove the American army from Long Island to Manhattan. Then he chased it across another river to New Jersey. And, after that, he forced George Washington to flee on—to Pennsylvania. It looked as if it was all over for the rebels. In New Jersey, some 3,000 Americans took an oath of allegiance to the king. But Washington got lucky again. The Europeans didn't like to fight in cold weather.

Sir William settled in New York City for the winter season. Howe thought Washington and his army were done for and could be

Swarming with Beaux

Rebecca Franks was the daughter of a wealthy Philadelphia merchant. Her father was the king's agent in Pennsylvania, and the family were Loyalists. Rebecca visited New York when it was occupied by the British. Her main interest in the war was that it meant New York was full of handsome officers:

My Dear Abby, By the by, few New York ladies know how to entertain company in

their own houses unless they introduce the card tables....I don't know a woman or girl that can chat above half an hour, and that on the form of a cap, the colour of a ribbon or the set of a hoop-stay or jupon....Here, you enter a room with a formal set curtsy and after the how do's, 'tis a fine, or a bad day, and those trifling nothings are finish'd, all's a dead calm till the cards are in-

troduced, when you see pleasure dancing in the eyes of all the matrons....The misses, if they have a favorite swain, frequently decline playing for the pleasure of making love....Yesterday the Grenadiers had a race at the Flatlands, and in the afternoon this house swarm'd with beaux and some very smart ones. How the girls wou'd have envy'd me cou'd they have peep'd and seen how I was surrounded.

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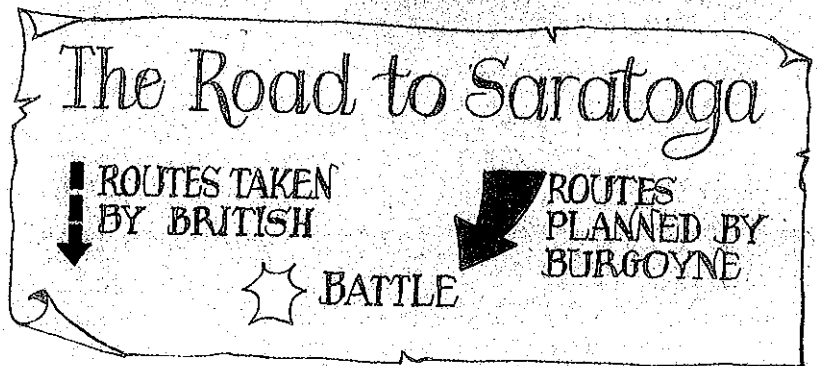
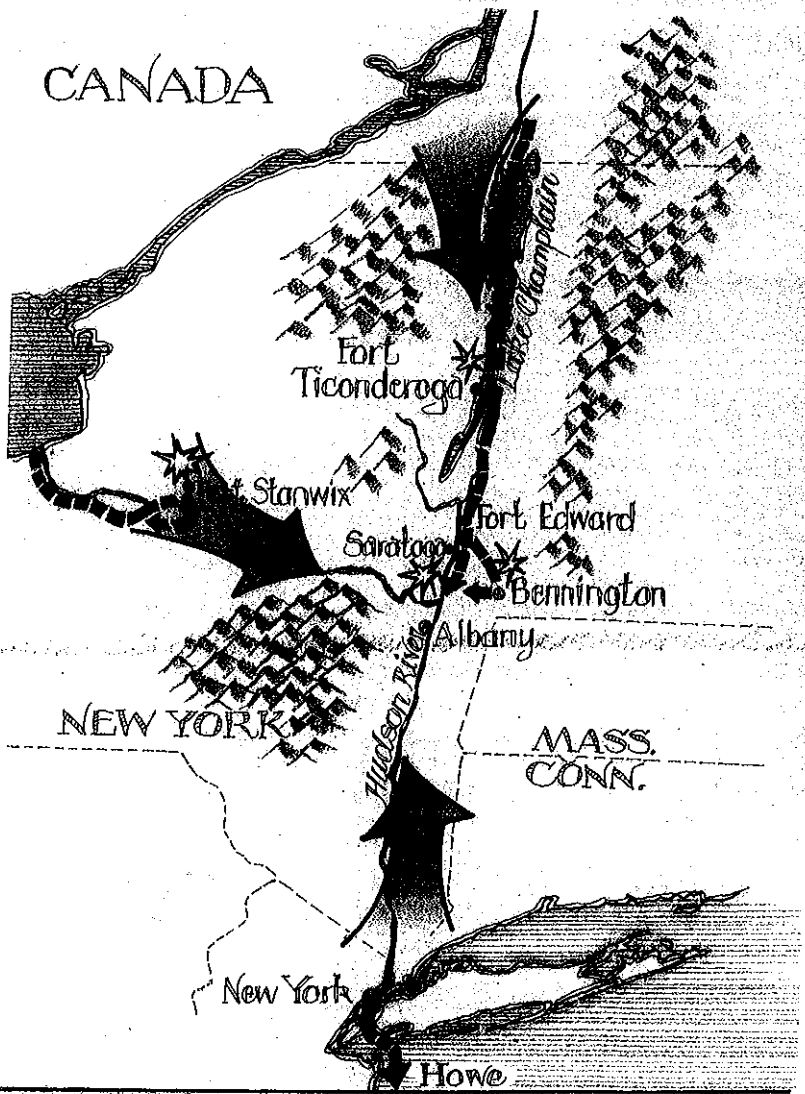
finished off in springtime. Besides, Billy Howe loved partying. And some people say he liked the Americans and didn't approve of George III's politics. For reasons that no one is quite sure of, General Howe just took it easy.

But George Washington was no quitter. On Christmas Eve of 1776, in bitter cold, Washington got the Massachusetts fishermen to ferry his men across the Delaware River from Pennsylvania back to New Jersey. The river was clogged with huge chunks of ice. You had to be crazy, or coolly courageous, to go out into that dangerous water. The Hessians, on the other side—at Trenton, New Jersey—were so sure Washington wouldn't cross in such bad weather that they didn't patrol the river. Washington took them by complete surprise.

A week later, Washington left a few men to tend his campfires and fool the enemy again. He quietly marched his army to Princeton, New Jersey, where he surprised and beat a British force. People in New Jersey forgot the oaths they had sworn to the king. They were Patriots again.

Those weren't big victories that Washington had won, but they certainly helped American morale. And American morale needed help. It still didn't seem as if the colonies had a chance. After all, Great Britain had the most feared army in the world. It was amazing that a group of small colonies would even attempt to fight the powerful British empire. When a large English army (9,500 men and 138 cannons) headed south from Canada in June 1777, many observers thought the rebellion would soon be over.

The army was led by one of Britain's



General Burgoyne's redcoats carried far too much equipment. Each man's boots alone weighed 12 pounds. They took two months to cover 40 miles from Fort Ticonderoga to Saratoga, and lost hundreds of men to American snipers.

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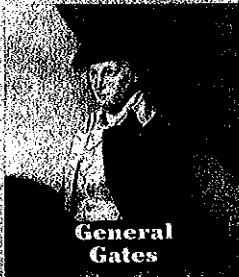
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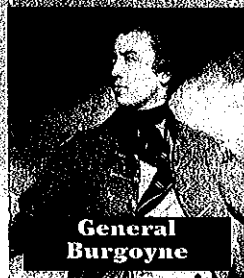
Four Plates and Two Glasses

A Boston newspaper tells of the British surrender at Saratoga:



General Gates

General Gates invited General Burgoyne and the other principal officers to dine with him. The table was only two planks laid across two empty beef barrels. There were only four plates for the whole company. There was no cloth, and the dinner consisted of a ham, a goose, some beef and some boiled mutton. The liquor was New England rum, mixed with water, without sugar, and only two glasses, which were for the two Commanders-in-Chief; the rest of the company drank out of basins. ... After dinner, General Gates called upon General Burgoyne for his toast which embarrassed General Burgoyne a good deal; at length, he gave General Washington, General Gates, in return, gave the King.



General Burgoyne

most colorful officers, General John Burgoyne. Burgoyne was known as Gentleman Johnny. He was a wild character: a drinker, gambler, actor, playwright—and a pretty good general. He said:

I have always thought Hudson's River the most proper part of the whole continent for opening vigorous operations. Because the river, so beneficial for conveying all the bulky necessaries of an army, is precisely the route that an army ought to take for the great purpose of cutting the communications between the Southern and Northern provinces.

Which means, in ordinary English, if Burgoyne could capture the Hudson River area, he would cut off New England and New York from the rest of the colonies.

Burgoyne made careful plans. His army would go south along Lake Champlain and the Hudson River, heading for Albany, New York. Sir William Howe was supposed to come north, along the Hudson, from New York City to Albany. Another British army was expected from the west. Burgoyne planned to trap the American army like an insect squashed between three fingers. Then he and Howe could march south together and mop up the rest of the Rebel forces.

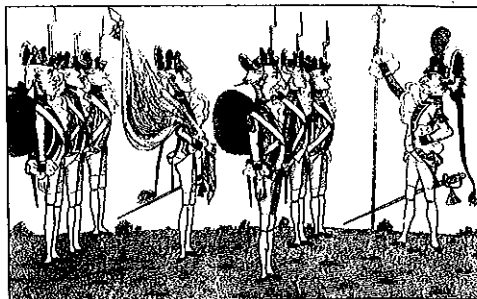
Things didn't go as Burgoyne expected. General Howe decided to head for Philadelphia instead of Albany. And the western army got involved in other battles and never made it east. Nevertheless, General Burgoyne went ahead with his plans. He sailed down Lake Champlain and recaptured Fort Ticonderoga (the fort that Ethan Allen, Benedict Arnold, and the Green Mountain Boys had taken). In London there were wild celebrations when that news arrived. King George yelled, "I have beat them! I have beat them!"

Then Gentleman Johnny went on to Fort Edward. When the Patriots saw him coming, they abandoned the fort. But they found another way to fight. They cut down trees and threw them all over the roads. That slowed the British army and the wagons and the heavy cannons they dragged with them. The Americans sniped—Indian-style—from the woods. Those small guerrilla attacks kept the British soldiers on edge, and scared.

Burgoyne began running low on food. When he learned there were food and horses in Bennington, Vermont, he sent some troops to get them. That was a mistake. His men got whipped in a battle at Bennington. But, finally, the British army reached Saratoga, New York, and there Burgoyne faced a big decision.

Saratoga edges the Hudson River, just north of Albany. General

Horatio Gates was in command of the American forces at Saratoga. Gates placed his men on a high bluff overlooking the road to Albany where it squeezes between hills and river. Colonel Tadeusz ("Thaddeus" in English) Kosciuszko (Ta-DAY-oosh kush-CHOO-shko), a Polish military engineer serving with the Americans, had picked the site and fortified it with cannons. That gave Burgoyne a difficult choice. He could march his men down that treacherous narrow road, or he could fight the Americans on their fortified heights. He chose to fight.



A British cartoon made fun of the fancy uniforms and hairdos of the French soldiers.

What happened? Farmers poured into the area; soon the American force was three times the size of Britain's army. The American farmers were sharpshooters, and their rifles were deadly accurate. The battle wasn't even close. The British lost about 600 soldiers at Saratoga; American casualties were about 150.

On October 17, 1777, the incredible occurred: the great General Burgoyne and his whole army surrendered! The European soldiers were marched to Boston, made to promise they would not fight in America again, and sent back to England. The Americans were jubilant.

A fast ship sailed out of New York harbor heading for France with word of the victory at Saratoga. This was just the kind of news Ben Franklin was waiting to hear.

Franklin had been sent to France to ask for aid. The French admired Franklin and they had a grudge against the British. They'd been fighting England off and on for hundreds of years. They were still mad about losing the French and Indian War. But they didn't think the colonists had a chance against Great Britain. No one wants to support a losing cause.

The victory at Saratoga changed everything. It got the French to join the war on the American side. France sent gunpowder—lots—and soldiers and ships. (The next time you see a Frenchman or Frenchwoman, you can say thank you. We might not have won independence without French aid.)

But the war wasn't over. There was still much hard fighting to be done.



At Christmas, Washington crossed the ice-choked Delaware River and captured nearly 1,000 Hessian troops in Trenton, New Jersey. He lost only two men, who froze to death.