



The American Revolution

A Historical Series Sponsored by William Hightower Chapter #35
Sons of the American Revolution

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Article 9-2

The Grand Plan in Action:

The British had gained the battlefield by the close of day 19 September 1777, and during the night the Americans had fallen back to their strong position on Bemis Heights. The British and General Burgoyne had paid dearly for the success of the day with nearly 600 killed and wounded. Burgoyne had lost most of his field officers and 3/4 of his artillerymen during the day's battle. The British 62nd Regiment had been reduced in size to one company of men, still able to fight. The American losses on the other hand were estimated at 300 killed and wounded.

Unknown to British General Burgoyne was the fact that during this day's battle, American General Lincoln had stormed and taken back Fort Ticonderoga, thus cutting off any escape route the British might employ in retreating back to Canada. Burgoyne and his generals held a war council that night, and determined to delay further attack

until 21 September 1777, in anticipation that British General Howe would soon be closing the pincer from the South. Another thing Burgoyne and his generals did not know was that their anticipated pincer attack by British General Howe would not be coming, as he and his army had set sail back in August from New York to Maryland in order to engage with British General Cornwallis. They planned a combined attack on American General George Washington. After this battle at Freeman's farm, Burgoyne knew he was in trouble, but he didn't know just how deep that trouble was.

An interlude in the fighting developed as September slowly melted away with both armies holding their positions and constantly picking at one another with sorties and patrols. This lull and British inaction, as history shows us, turned out to be a colossal British mistake. Burgoyne's men began to starve, desert, and lose morale, while American General Gates's army grew daily, up to 12,000 men by October.

On 4 October 1777, British General Burgoyne called for another council of war. The day-long discussions covered many options, but no decisions were made, nor was any plan of action put into order. The next day, 5 October 1777, the conference was resumed and Hessian General Riedesel proposed a general retreat, but General Burgoyne rejected the idea as dishonorable. It was finally agreed that a combined British-Hessian force of 2,000 men would attack the American left flank at Bemis Heights. This force constituted more than 1/3 of the total British forces. The American army that British General Burgoyne faced on 7 October 1777 had grown to over 12,000 well-armed and well supplied men. This army was led by a man who

knew exactly how much trouble Burgoyne was in, because General Gates had intercepted British General Clinton's negative reply to Burgoyne's request for help.

The 2,000 man British force with all of the British artillery faced off with a 8,000 man American force over Barber's wheat field near Mill Brook. At about the hour of 2:00 PM on 7 October 1777, hostilities opened with a sharp British attack, with mostly ineffectual British volleys falling short or going over the American defenses. The British then gave a bayonet charge. The Americans held their positions and fire until the British were at close quarters. The American volleys disintegrated the British attack and disabled both commanders. A counter attack led by Colonel Daniel Morgan upon British General Fraser's reserve units killed General Fraser and set the British army into a rout.

This first action sent the British army back to their trenches and resulted in the Americans taking all of the British artillery. The brief one hour action resulted in Burgoyne's loss of 400 critically need men. The American counter attack, led by Benedict Arnold, was directed against the Hessian army holding the right British flank. In the course of fierce fighting, the Hessian Colonel Breymann was killed and his right flank redoubt was taken by the Americans. Darkness ended the hostilities for the day and Burgoyne's army lit fires at all of its forward positions, while escaping under the cover of darkness and vacated the battlefield to the Americans. Burgoyne continued his retreat and by 13 October 1777 had reached the town of Saratoga, New York, where he became surrounded by the American army. On 17 October 1777, Major General John (Gentleman Johnny) Burgoyne surrendered the entire British invasion force to American General Horatio Gates. This American victory

marked the turning point in the northern campaigns of the American Revolutionary War and succeeded in holding the northern colonies together. This victory resulted in a stalemate with the British over the war in the northern colonies, and prompted the French under Louis XVI to commit his nation to war with Britain and align France with the American colonist. The decisions made in France were keenly watched by Spain and King Carlos III, who began to increase material aid to the colonist, and to plot how this crisis could be turned to Spain's advantage. Suddenly, the rebellion of American colonist against their mother country had become a global war involving the rich and powerful nations of Europe.