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FILE NO.

BURGOYNE'S OBJECTIVE IN THE SECOND  
BATTLE OF SARATOGA, OCTOBER 7, 1777

by

Charles E. Shedd, Jr.  
Park Historian

December 15, 1952

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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
REGION ONE  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

December 23, 1952

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park  
From: Assistant Regional Director, Region One  
Subject: Historical Research Report

We have carefully reviewed Historian Shedd's completed research report entitled "Burgoyne's Objective in the Second Battle of Saratoga, October 7, 1777." It is a most excellent report in every respect, well written and scholarly in treatment. Mr. Shedd's reasoning is shrewd, evidently based upon a mastery of the available primary and secondary source material. The report will be most valuable in furthering interpretive development, as well as general development at the park. Mr. Shedd is to be commended on its preparation.

For our own part (and we certainly are not Saratoga "experts"), we cannot quite down the feeling that General Burgoyne's move was a reconnaissance -- with enough force to exploit whatever advantage presented itself; a reconnaissance that could turn itself into a full attack or breakthrough if such seemed practicable. This seems to follow, especially, from Burgoyne's lack of detailed knowledge of the terrain and his contemptuous opinion of the probable American reaction to his move (that is, they would stay in their entrenchments).

Burgoyne's own reasons (page 4), admittedly ambiguous, do not deny the foregoing interpretation. He did not speak definitely of "forcing" and "dislodging," but only of "discovering" whether such was possible. The reports of the General's council of war, cited in the text, indicate his follow-up intentions. Incidentally, his reference to "convenience of retreat" may possibly have reference to the convenience to the British of an American retreat. As Mr. Shedd points out on page 38, Bemis Heights was probably the last point above Albany at which (from the nature of the terrain) the Americans could hope to make a successful stand. An American retreat therefrom would, indeed, have been a convenience to General Burgoyne, trying to make contact with British forces moving up the river. Meanwhile, if the heavy reconnaissance proved that

an attack was not feasible, nightfall would indeed, as Lieutenant Ambrey pointed out -- have provided the necessary "insurance" for a withdrawal to the established British line. With regard to forage -- at least this was the minimum purpose of the expedition -- it was a "goadng" factor which certainly had to be alleviated in some way.

(SIGNED)

Daniel J. Tobin  
Assistant Regional Director

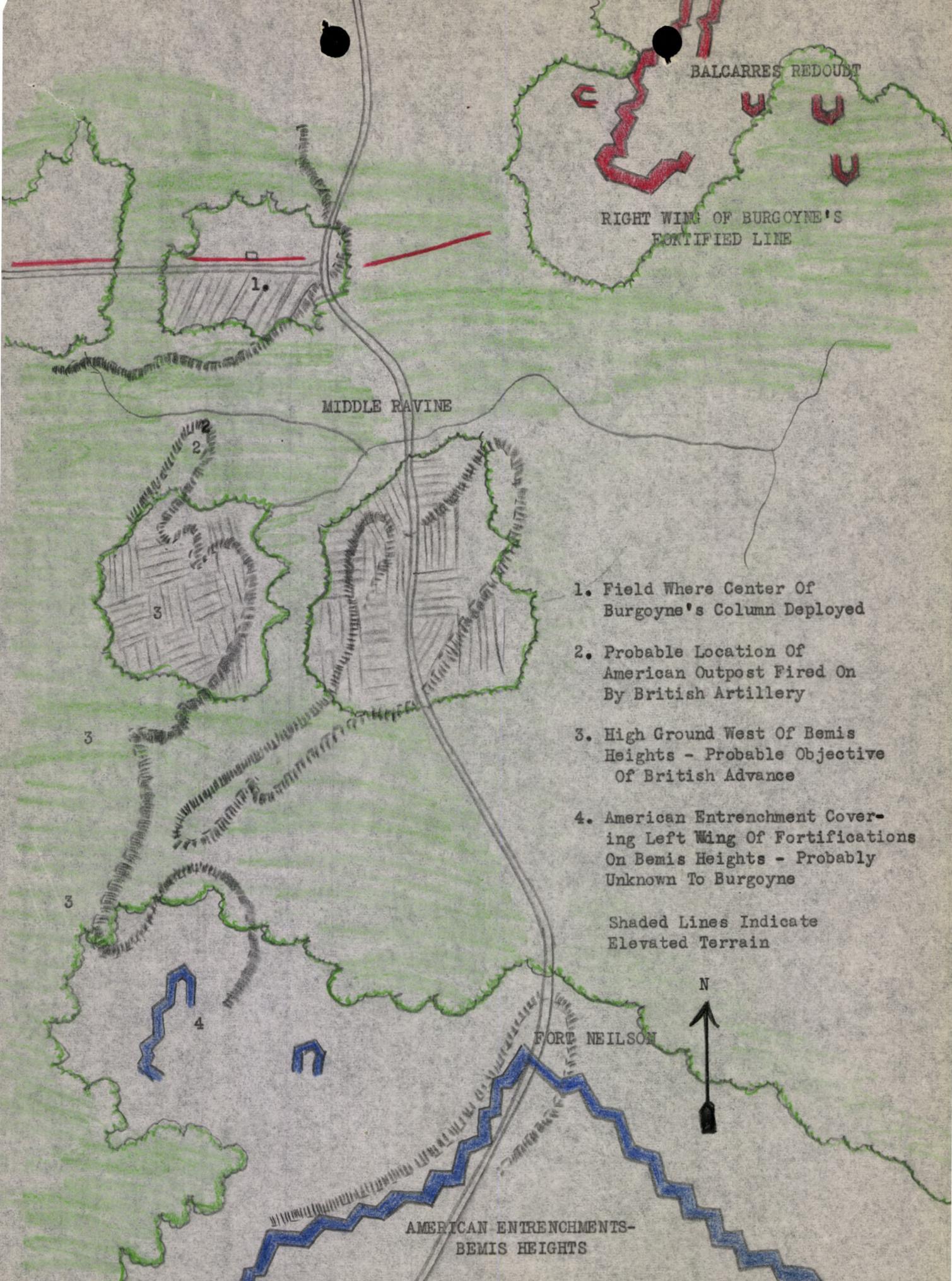
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Sketch Map to Accompany Report  
Burgoyne's Objective in the Second Battle of Saratoga  
October 7, 1777

Scale

1 Inch Equals 800 Feet





BALCARRES REDOUBT

RIGHT WING OF BURGOYNE'S FORTIFIED LINE

MIDDLE RAVINE

- 1. Field Where Center Of Burgoyne's Column Deployed
- 2. Probable Location Of American Outpost Fired On By British Artillery
- 3. High Ground West Of Bemis Heights - Probable Objective Of British Advance
- 4. American Entrenchment Covering Left Wing Of Fortifications On Bemis Heights - Probably Unknown To Burgoyne

Shaded Lines Indicate Elevated Terrain



FORT NEILSON

AMERICAN ENTRENCHMENTS-BEMIS HEIGHTS

BURGOYNE'S OBJECTIVE IN THE SECOND  
BATTLE OF SARATOGA, OCTOBER 7, 1777

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Sketch Map at End of Report

BURGOYNE'S OBJECTIVE IN THE SECOND BATTLE OF SARATOGA  
October 7, 1777

INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 1777, 17 days after the first battle of Saratoga, British General John Burgoyne committed 1,500 picked troops and 10 pieces of artillery to a movement around the American left flank on Bemis Heights. The move was contested by the Americans and in the ensuing action Burgoyne's troops were hurled back into their field fortifications and compelled to retreat. Ten days later Burgoyne surrendered the remnants of his expeditionary force at Saratoga, the present village of Schuylerville, New York.

The motives for or the objectives of the abortive move on October 7 have never been satisfactorily understood or interpreted. The flank march has been called by some historians a "reconnaissance in force", while others indicate that the move was an attempt to seize ground from which an attack could be launched against the fortifications on Bemis Heights. One outstanding authority on the Saratoga campaign briefly discusses the possible motives for the movement and dismisses the subject by declaring "The whole thing was vague."<sup>1</sup>

To interpret clearly the battles of Saratoga the forward movement of the British army on October 7 must be analyzed in order to make a reasonable, documented estimate of its significance and purpose. This report is an attempt to correlate useful information from primary and secondary sources which will provide a conclusion based on interpretation of available knowledge.

### Burgoyne's Self-defense

On October 4, Burgoyne had called a council of war to discuss the army's next move, following two weeks of inactivity after the battle of September 19. Generals Phillips, Fraser and Riedesel were the officers called to the commander's headquarters. Burgoyne proposed that the entire army, except for 800 camp guards be committed to an attack on Gates' left flank and rear. The plan was a bold one, entirely too bold for the liking of Burgoyne's subordinates. The council adjourned without taking decisive action. The Great Ravine area was inspected, and it was the opinion of the army's leaders that it could not be held by the 800 men proposed by Burgoyne. Then at a war council on October 5 the stolid Riedesel proposed a retreat north to the Battenkill where the invaders had crossed the Hudson. Here, he reasoned, the army could cover its communications with Canada, while waiting for encouraging news from Sir Henry Clinton, whose forces were known to be advancing up the Hudson from New York City. Fraser seconded Riedesel, and Phillips withheld comment.<sup>2</sup>

Burgoyne was adamant against retreat. In his order of June 30, ordering the army to move forward, he had closed with the stirring injunction "This Army Must Not Retreat."<sup>3</sup> The order still held. Burgoyne still seemed to feel that the Americans could not stand against the disciplined charges of his regulars, despite the colonials' showing in the bloody drawn battle of September 19.

At this point Burgoyne's own statements made then and later should be examined for a clue as to his intentions. From his own remarks, admittedly colored by after-knowledge, Burgoyne appeared to have placed considerable reliance on Clinton's force moving up the river toward

Gates' rear. In his published narrative Burgoyne stated:

.....on the second day after the action, I received intelligence from Sir Henry Clinton, of his intention to attack the highlands about that time [two days after the first battle] and I was hourly in expectation, I thought a justly founded one, of that measure operating to dislodge Mr. Gates entirely, or to oblige him to detach a large portion of his force. Either of these cases would probably have opened my way to Albany. In these circumstances, could the preference upon these alternatives admit of a moment's reflection? To wait so fair a prospect of effecting at last the great purpose of the campaign, or to put a victorious army, under all the disadvantages of a beaten one, by a difficult and disgraceful retreat; relinquishing the long expected cooperation, in the very hour of its promise, and leaving Sir Henry Clinton's army, and probably Sir William Howe's, exposed, with so much of the season of the campaign to run, to the whole force of Mr. Gates, after he should have seen me on the other side of Hudson's River."<sup>4</sup>

In a letter written to Clinton on October 25, Burgoyne referred to the lack of cooperation which had wrecked the plan of invasion and remarked without apparent rancor "...I saw the desperate state of things and that nothing but a successful action could enable me to advance or retreat."<sup>5</sup>

Burgoyne's reasoning against a retreat appear valid enough, when it is remembered that he was unaware of Clinton's plans, and could only assume that the original plans for the juncture at Albany were still in force. This belief on the part of the British commander that no matter how circumstances altered during the campaign his orders were to effect a junction at Albany with British forces from the south contributed in no small measure to the final disaster. The orders drawn up by the King and his councilors were inflexible in many ways,<sup>6</sup> but their intent certainly was not that Burgoyne should lead his army to destruction while blindly following a course drawn up far from the scene of action.

Although Burgoyne made no mention of it, the bloodless conquest of Fort Ticonderoga early in the campaign undoubtedly had made a great impression on him. By taking advantage of American blunders and mounting artillery on nearby Mount Defiance, Burgoyne, by the mere threat of a cannonade, had forced the evacuation of the "Gibraltar of the North." As he pondered on his next move against Gates, the British commander must have weighed the possibility of another such coup against the Yankees. In a letter to Lord George Germain, the British Colonial Secretary, Burgoyne wrote:

"...when no intelligence having been received of the expected cooperation, and four or five days for our limited stay in camp only remained, it was judged advisable to make a movement to the enemy's left, not only to discover whether there were any possible means of forcing a passage should it be necessary to advance, or of dislodging him for the convenience of a retreat, but also to cover a forage of the army which was in greatest distress on account of the scarcity."<sup>7</sup>

In his narrative of the expedition Burgoyne voiced his belief in the success of this move when he stated ".....Confident I am, upon minute examination of the ground since, that had the other idea been pursued [i.e. had Gates received the attack in his entrenchments], I should in a few hours have gained a position, that in spite of the enemy's numbers, would have put them in my power."<sup>8</sup>

More revealing than Burgoyne's statements quoted above was the composition of the detachment detailed for the expedition. Included in this force were 1500 of Burgoyne's best troops and officers. Designated to make the move against the American left flank were the following units: The right column - The British Light Infantry and the 24th regiment;

with Breymann's Chasseurs, Jagers and Grenadiers; the center column - detachments of the German regiments of Riedesel, Rhetz, Specht and Hesse Hanau and a detachment of the Royal Artillery; the left column - The British Grenadiers, with picked troops from the British 9th, 20th, 21st and 62nd regiments.<sup>9</sup> In addition to these troops, a contingent of Indians and provincials skirted the British right flank to divert the Americans in that quarter.<sup>10</sup>

It seems unlikely that the best troops in the army would be selected by Burgoyne simply to reconnoiter the American position on Bemis Heights, or to cover foraging parties.

Probably the best clue to Burgoyne's intentions is the assignment of 10 pieces of artillery to accompany the expedition of October 7. Only with the greatest difficulty could heavy ordnance be moved through the wilderness. One British artillery officer remarked that "Once a 12 pounder is removed from the Park of artillery in America it was gone."<sup>11</sup> In these circumstances it is not likely that 10 guns would be taken on a scout or foraging expedition.

The guns detailed for the movement included six 6-pounders, two 12-pounders and two howitzers.<sup>12</sup> These last named weapons were especially useful against entrenched positions. More than any other factor, the inclusion of the field guns and howitzers provides strong evidence that Burgoyne fully intended an attack on the American left at Bemis Heights. Possibly his orders were intentionally vague for experience had taught him that the wary Americans were quick to learn of any contemplated move on the part of the invading army. Another explanation for the failure to state in a specific objective for the

October 7 move is the fear of failure that had been growing in the British commander after the hard-fought battle of September 19. He may have declined to state an objective because, realizing the mounting odds against success, he feared that failure to gain that objective would shake the morale of troops already on half-rations and deserting in growing numbers.

While Burgoyne did not at the time assign a specific objective to the movement of October 7, he revealed more of his intentions during the course of the Parliamentary hearing into the defeat at Saratoga which began in May 1779. During the course of the inquiry requested by Burgoyne, many of the surviving officers of rank were examined by Burgoyne and others, and their testimony published by the General. The evidence, based on Burgoyne's narrative and the testimony of his officers, amounted to a vindication of the British Commander's conduct of the invasion of the northern colonies in 1777. From Burgoyne's questions, and the answers of the witnesses, a picture emerges of the condition of the army between the battles of September 19 and October 7, and the motives behind the movement of October 7, become increasingly apparent.

In the testimony of Captain John Money, deputy quartermaster-general of the expedition, we find a hint of Burgoyne's intentions on October 7, and the artillery previously discussed becomes more important. Following is a transcript of Money's testimony. Burgoyne asks the questions.

Q. Had you an opportunity, after you was prisoner, to see the left of the enemy's entrenchments? [This was that portion of the American line extending southwestward from Fort Neilson on the highest ridge constituting Bemis Heights.]

A. I had.

Q. Was the ground within cannon shot of the left open and commanding it?

A. All the ground I saw was cleared and entrenched.

Q. Was there not ground within cannon shot that would have commanded that entrenchment on the left?

A. There was.

Q. Had we gained possession of that ground, and been able to erect batteries of our heaviest guns, would not the whole line of the enemy have been enfiladed?

A. The ground alluded to was entrenched, and commanded the whole of the rebel camp and lines. If the army had got possession of that ground, I do not believe the rebels would have staid one hour in their camp.

Q. Did you ever hear, in conversation with rebel officers, that General Arnold, foreseeing that inconvenience, had marched out of his lines, and attacked, without orders from General Gates?

A. I did hear that General Arnold had marched out on the 7th of October, without orders from General Gates. I did also hear that he advised the going out to meet General Burgoyne on his march, and engaging him before he approached their lines; and the reason he gave was this: If General Burgoyne should ever come near enough their lines to be able to make use of his artillery, that he would certainly possess himself of their camp; that their troops in that case would never stand anywhere; but if, on the other hand, the rebels should be defeated in the woods, the troops would, after that, have confidence in their works, for which reason Arnold advised risking an action in the woods before General Burgoyne came near enough to see their works.<sup>13</sup>

In his testimony, Captain obviously confused Arnold's actions on September 19 with those of October 7, as it was in the former battle that Arnold supposedly persuaded Gates to meet the enemy in the field rather than in the entrenchments on Bemis Heights. However, Money's statements indicate that there was an awareness in both armies of the possibility that Burgoyne, following the successful tactics used at Ticonderoga, might render the American position untenable with artillery fire.

Burgoyne's questions as to the probable effect of artillery fire on the American left, gives an additional clue as to his motives for the flank movement, and especially to his reasons for including 10 pieces of artillery in the advance.

In examining this particular extract of testimony, it seems probable that the ground referred to by Burgoyne and by Captain Money as commanding the American left was the low ridge running north and south at a distance of approximately 800 yards due west of Fort Neilson, the highest point of ground within the American lines. As shown on the accompanying sketch map, there were American fortifications on this ridge, in advance of the main system of entrenchments. If these were the entrenchments referred to by Money, and it appears likely that they were, he was quite right in his opinion that they would command the American left. That the American commanders were aware of the tactical importance of this elevated ground is evident in the fact that fortifications were thrown up to prevent the enemy taking possession of the ridge - the very move that Burgoyne contemplated, judging from the statements in his Narrative of operations and from the questions he put to Captain Money.

Money, of course, testified that he saw the entrenchments on the American left after he was taken prisoner, but the commanding ridge itself was undoubtedly known to Burgoyne prior to the second battle. Given the conditions of forest and terrain in 1777, such a commanding elevation would be visible from the British lines. Additional confirmation of Burgoyne's knowledge of the ridge west of Bemis Heights is found in the contemporary maps of British Lieutenant W. C. Wilkinson which show commanding hills in the area referred to by Burgoyne and Captain Money.

Up to this point, most of the evidence examined has pointed to Burgoyne's intention to seize high ground west of Fort Nelson and open with artillery on the Americans. The presence of 10 cannon with the flanking force, and the existence of the high ground, plus the statements of Burgoyne and his officers do point to this intention to employ artillery directly against the American lines. The evidence is strong too, that the British commander contemplated an attack on the American left wing if artillery alone was not effective in dislodging the "Yankess."

Here again a useful source of information on Burgoyne's intentions on October 7 is the transcript of testimony at Parliamentary hearing into the defeat at Saratoga. Burgoyne's own statement as to the reasons for the move to the American left have already been quoted in this report. He mentioned "forcing a passage" and "dislodging" the enemy for the convenience of a retreat. The latter remark is a strange one, for if the enemy could be dislodged there probably would be no necessity for a retreat. But the terms "forcing" and "dislodging" are not ones that imply a simple reconnaissance or foraging expedition. Neither would 1500 of the best men in the army and the cream of its officer corps be detailed for such purposes.

It would be the height of folly to rest the case on Burgoyne's words alone, for that wordy and literate gentleman is not the most reliable authority for his own or anyone else's actions. Still, he was a professional officer of skill and experience, and his actions speak, if not more loudly at least, more accurately than his words as to his reasons for the attack.

There is additional testimony in the Parliamentary inquiry which in nearly every case tends to substantiate Burgoyne's hints at some stroke against the forces on Bemis Heights.

First of the ranking officers of the invading army to be called to the witness stand was the Earl of Balcarres, commander of the British Light Infantry during the campaign. Lord Balcarres was not a very cooperative witness, modestly demurring at many of the requests for his opinions on Burgoyne's conduct of the campaign. It is obvious in reading his testimony that he had no special desire to vindicate his commanding officer by statements inconsistent with the facts as he saw them, but those questions which he did answer were replied to with honesty and candor.

The crux of Balcarres' testimony on the action of October 7 is contained in the following brief exchange; Burgoyne may have asked the question.

"Q. Does your Lordship think it would have been advisable [sic], in point of prudence, or just to brave troops, who had suffered severe loss, to attack an enemy the morning after that loss, [of September 19] posted within entrenchments, which it was impossible to reconnoitre.

"A. That attempt was tried on the 7th of October, and did not succeed."<sup>14</sup>

The question was probably put by Burgoyne, who after the defeat at Saratoga maintained that an attack without adequate knowledge of the American position would have been a blunder. The question seems framed to demonstrate that the movement of October 7 was not an attack - since it failed - but was a reconnaissance of the American lines. Balcarres did not fall into the spirit of the question and his blunt reply leaves no doubt that he felt that the movement of October 7 was an attack against entrenchments which had not been reconnoitered and was not simply a reconnaissance in force and certainly not just a foraging expedition.

In the testimony of Captain Bloomfield, of the British artillery, Burgoyne again indicates the objective of the advance of October 7 when he asked Bloomfield:

"Do you remember the position of the King's troops from the time of the attack on the 19th of September to the attack of the 7th of October?

"A. Yes

"Q. Had the army made a movement to gain the left of the enemy's entrenchments without previously constructing redoubts on the heights that commanded the plain, would not the bateaux, provisions and hospital have been left open to an attack from the enemy's right?

"A. They would have been left exposed undoubtedly."15

Here again Burgoyne declares his intention to "gain the left of the enemy's entrenchments," not just reconnoiter or forage, and, significantly he refers to the "attack" of October 7. The testimony of Burgoyne's officers is important not so much for their recollection of specific orders concerning the attack of October 7, but for their reflection of the mood and opinions of the army command as it faced the problem of dislodging Gates' forces from Bemis Heights. In a small professional army the closely knit officer corps would undoubtedly be aware of the intent and motive for a movement of a large portion of the army, even if such intent and motive were not specifically stated in written orders.

The next important piece of testimony relating to the attack of October 7 was that of Lieut. Col. Kingston, adjutant general of the army and secretary to Burgoyne.

"Q. From your conversation with the chief engineer, and from other circumstances, have you reason to know, that every possible means were used after the action of the 19th, to obtain a knowledge of the ground on the enemy's left? / The entrenched ground southwest of Fort Neilson. /

"A. I had frequent conversations with the chief engineer on that subject. I believe his attention was given to that point almost every day, and a knowledge of that ground I understood to be very difficult to be obtained.

"Q. Was not the right of the enemy deemed impracticable?

"A. I had no opportunity myself of seeing the right of the enemy; but I understood from others, that the position was too strong to be attacked with any prospect of success.

"Q. Did you conceive that the chief purpose of that movement was to attain a knowledge of the left of the enemy's position, and if expedient to attack them there?

"A. I understood it was."<sup>16</sup>

#### OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES

Turning to the large body of primary source material on the Saratoga campaign, it is surprising to find so little information of value on the movement of October 7. Most of the participants, American, British and German, who recorded their impressions of the battles deal with the more obvious aspects of the attack of October 7. The American attack on the British detachment and the struggle for the Balcarres and Breymann redoubts are described in considerable detail, but the motivation for the British advance on October 7 has been obscured by the more dramatic, colorful events which followed. However, for purposes of understanding contemporary opinions and knowledge, the primary sources must be noted. Many of the participants interested in preserving their accounts of the battles were men of intelligence and sincerity, honestly desiring to give posterity a record of their stirring times. In some cases the diary or letters of lowly British conscript or an American backwoods militiaman are more valuable than the report of a field officer, in that they provide an insight into the minds of the men who carry out orders. Often, what

these men think and observe is a better clue to the intentions of the general officer than the formal reports explanations and apologies issued by the man of commanding rank.

Contemporary British and German Accounts Relative to the Movement of  
October 7, 1777

1. General Riedesel

Riedesel, commanding the German troops with Burgoyne, described the problems confronting the British commander and how he proposed to solve them prior to October 7.

"In the evening of the 4th of October he Burgoyne had a conference with the generals, Phillips, Riedesel and Fraser, in respect to future operations. The subjects of consultation were the strength of the enemy, who outnumbered him four to one, his ignorance of their position, the lateness of the season, the scarcity of provisions, and the nonreception of intelligence from General Clinton. Several plans were proposed by him by which he hoped to extricate himself from these difficulties. His idea was as follows: To surround the left flank of the enemy; and, after leaving eight hundred men for the defence of the ground between bridges Nos. 1 and 2, high ground south of and covering the Middle Ravine and Great Redoubt area on the Hudson endeavor to get in its rear. This proposition caused considerable controversy; for the question arose whether eight hundred men would be sufficient for the purpose assigned them. The safety of the whole army depended upon this; for if this force should be beaten and the bridges in its rear taken, then the entire army would be completely cut off; and even if this detachment held its ground the position might still be lost - since, as three or four days were necessary to get round through the woods and pathless thickets, the enemy would have abundant of time to mass his force on this spot, when he would, in all probability, capture the men and destroy the two bridges - the only means of retreat. Such a hazardous undertaking must be thoroughly considered; and it was, therefore, agreed to inspect carefully on the next day the fortifications in that place and the surrounding country."<sup>17</sup>

Examination of the position to be entrusted to the 800 camp guards found it too difficult to defend without additional support from the rest of the army. Riedesel then suggested that if it was impossible to get in the rear of the enemy in one day the army should fall back to its old position behind the Battenkill, the creek just north of the village of

Saratoga, where the British and German forces had crossed the Hudson on September 13. Here, Riedesel pointed out, the army could open communication with Lake George to the north, and could await the coming of relief from the south. At first Burgoyne would hear of no retrograde movement, but after consideration made a counter proposal:

"He said that on the 7th. he would undertake another great reconnoitering expedition against the enemy's left wing, to ascertain definitely his position, and whether it would be advisable to attack him. Should the latter be the case, he intended to advance on the enemy on the 8th with his entire army; but if he should not think an attack advisable, then he would, on the 11th, march back to the Battenkill.

"At ten o'clock in the morning of the 7th, rations and liquor for four days having been previously issued to the army, General Burgoyne, with fifteen hundred men and eight cannon [plus two howitzers], started on his reconnoitering expedition, accompanied by Generals Riedesel, Phillips and Fraser. The troops, on this occasion, were taken from all the regiments except the 47th. All the Indians (one hundred and eighty) and the corps of provincials crossed the right flank in a large circuit through the woods. The detachment itself divided into three columns, advanced towards the right to within a quarter of an hour's march of the enemy's camp. The first picket, which was met near Waisser's house [the Barber cabin, in S C on Historic Base map], and was driven in, and the eminence, on which it had stood, occupied. The British were then placed in such a position, that the smallness of their number was concealed as much as possible. In this situation they remained for an hour and a half, during which interval the generals consulted together as to the manner in which the reconnoissance should be continued. Toward three in the afternoon, the yagers discovered near a house, that lay a little way in advance and was separated from them by a ditch (ravine), a small body of Americans. The latter, however, grew stronger and stronger; and Burgoyne, supposing they meant to oppose his further advance, fired his two twelve-pounders at them several times, but without producing the least effect. On the contrary, they continued to increase in number. Finally at four in the afternoon, they attacked his left wing with great spirit, soon forcing the English grenadiers, who were stationed in the woods at this point, to retreat."<sup>18</sup>

It seems remarkable that an experienced officer of Riedesel's ability would not question the use of 1,500 men and 10 pieces of artillery for a reconnaissance through an area he described above as "woods and pathless thickets." Stranger still is the contradictory record left by his wife the Baroness Von Riedesel, whose diary and letters written during the campaign have given us one of the most human stories in Saratoga literature. Writing on the 18th of October, 1777, the day after the capitulation of the British army, Madame Riedesel set down her impressions of the events leading up to the surrender. This document was signed and attested by all of the German regimental and battalion commanders. The Baroness wrote in part:

".....General Burgoyne, with whom it went hard to make a thoroughly backward movement, declared that, on the 7th, he would make a reconnaissance <sup>as</sup> near as possible to the enemy's left wing, in order to ascertain whether or not it could be attacked. In the first case, he would on that very day, the 7th, immediately attack the enemy; *italics mine* but if, on the contrary, the enemy's position was too strong, he would, on the 11th of October, at once retreat to the Battenkill."

The discrepancy between the account of General Riedesel and that of his wife is an important one. Riedesel claimed that if an attack on the American left wing was advisable, Burgoyne would bring up the entire army for that purpose on October 8. The Baroness, on the other hand, states emphatically that if the American left could be attacked, Burgoyne would do so "immediately". The Baroness was in her husband's confidence throughout the campaign and her account, written immediately after the event probably had her husband's knowledge and approval. Undoubtedly, the General's own recollections were recorded sometime later, for during and immediately after the hard-fought campaign he had little time to pen his memoirs.

### Unknown German Officer

Following the capitulation at Saratoga on October 17, 1777, Burgoyne's captive army was marched to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where it spent the winter. In a letter written on November 15, one of the German officers serving with Burgoyne wrote his account of the campaign to a fellow-countryman. Relative to the movement of October 7, he wrote:

"Our provisions continued to decrease; the soldiers were reduced half a pound of bread and the same quantity of meat per day - a state of things which they endured with patience. Meanwhile, although the enemy had it in their power to attack us <sup>with</sup> four times as many men as we had, they showed no inclination to do so. To retreat seemed too hard lines for General Burgoyne. In Albany we had plenty of friends willing to reinforce us; and for this reason the General resolved to attack the enemy and endeavor to force his way through their lines. We could only attack the enemy on their flank; and in order to hew a way for our columns and artillery, and at the same time reconnoitre their position, an expedition of 1500 men under command of the several leaders of the army, with a number of heavy cannon, was undertaken on the 7th of October."<sup>20</sup>

This officer was obviously not well informed as to the reception the invaders would receive in Albany, but his statements on the movement of October 7 are interesting. In this account, as in Baroness Riedesel's, Burgoyne is shown as being personally unwilling to retreat, not on strictly military grounds but because he could not bring himself to turn his back on the enemy after such high hopes for success. The General begins to emerge as an officer lacking the moral courage to retreat.

### Captain Pausch

One of the best contemporary descriptions of the flank movement of October 7, is that found in Captain Georg Pausch's journal of his service with Burgoyne. Pausch commanded the Hesse Hanau artillery during the expedition. Of the movement of October 7, Pausch wrote:

"Oct. 7th. In the forenoon, I received an order to have in readiness two 6-pound cannon with the requisite ammunition; also my Brigade, prepared to march immediately at a given signal. About 10 o'clock, there gathered in front of the camp and on the Place d'Armes of the left wing of the German troops, a division consisting of all those portions of the German regiments there represented. Altogether, these numbered about three hundred men under the leadership of Lieut. Col. Specht [Pausch means Speth, not Specht. Brigadier-General Specht was commander of the Regiment Specht. Speth was Lieutenant Colonel of the Regiment Riedesel, the commander of the Infantry regiment of Riedesel. To this latter regiment, the Regiment Hesse Hanau furnished 1 officer, 6 subalterns, 1 drummer, and 75 privates under the command of Capt. Schoel. We defiled to the right in front of our army towards its right wing as far as the Brigade of Brig. Gen. Fraser, where we halted. Here I found already assembled, among other regiments, the English battery of light infantry grenadiers, the Albanian and Canadian volunteers, and the small remnant of our Indians' who were in readiness for the march. The English Artillery furnished two howitzers, two 12 pound and our 6 pound cannon for the right wing of our battery, under Lieut. Dufais. Everything being quiet along the lines, I went, myself, with the first named two cannon of my Brigade, on this expedition.

"Behind the entrenched camp of Fraser, where we halted and where we were obliged to wait for further orders, there were collected in Fraser's tent the Generals of the army. After first holding in it a council of war, the Generals went to another tent, in front of which the Savages were gathered, and announced to them (as I suppose, according to the usual Indian custom, which to me is utterly unknown and unintelligible) the order of to-day's march and the duties required of them. This conference lasted, in all, two hours, when we again resumed our march; and the reassembled corps once more started. There were now added to the German Division the small remnant of the Brunswick company of Yägers consisting of about 100 men, and as many more of the Brunswick Grenadier Battalion. The latter constituted the entire force of this small corps, now reduced to about fifteen hundred men in all."21

Reading of these extensive preparations, and lengthy councils of war, the expedition cannot be dismissed as a mere reconnaissance expedition. The Indians and American and Canadian volunteers mentioned by Pausch, above, were ideally suited for scouting in the heavy forests; it was not necessary for the commanding Generals to accompany them with the elite of the army. Granted that the savages and provincials were not

trained observers whose opinions of the enemy's position could be relied upon, they nevertheless could have provided a protective screen for experienced engineers and artillerymen reconnoitering the entrenchments on Bemis Heights. Burgoyne had pointed out at the Parliamentary hearing that his Indians and provincials were inferior to American riflemen, but he had continued to employ them throughout the campaign.<sup>22</sup> Pausch continues his narrative with a description of the march from the entrenchments.

"We followed the road farther for fully half an hour, during which we halted several times both for the purpose of sending out the volunteers and Indians on reconnoitering expeditions, and of making the road passable for the Artillery over the bridges. The reports of the advance-guard continuing favorable, and their repeated message, assuring us that as yet every thing was all right, we continued to march for the length of time above mentioned, half an hour when we found ourselves in front of the extended left wing of the hostile army, of which, however, we could not see anything whatever, on account of the dense woods and the distance."<sup>23</sup>

Here we find the volunteers and Indians carrying out the type of assignment for which they were best suited, scouting in advance of the regulars. The advance was a cautious one and a special care was taken to keep the artillery closed up on the main body. This ponderous advance now appears even less like a reconnaissance and more like a full scale flank attack. Confirmation of the fact that action was contemplated even before the American troops struck, is found in Pausch's account when he states:

"Meanwhile, work was still progressing on the entrenchments of our two wings; and it took, by the way,  $3/4$  of an hour to march from one wing of our army to the other; during which march, not the least sign of the enemy was seen, nor were we molested by him in the least. Presently, by order of Major Williams of the English Artillery, the two 12-pound cannon were brought up and placed in front of the above named house, an abandoned cabin in the field where the advance had halted while a small body of troops moved out to reconnoiter. and after being made ready, they were loaded.

"No one knew what all these arrangements meant; but I shortly afterward learned from Capt. Gen. Quarter-Master Gerlach, that it was intended to make a diversion at this point; and that the corps was for the protection of the general staff."<sup>24</sup>

What the diversion referred to above was to be or what it was intended to accomplish is not stated by Pausch, but it is probable that he had reference to the flank march by the British Rangers, Provincials and Indians, ordered by Burgoyne. Pausch's position, and that of the German contingent was in the center of the advanced line. A diversion at that point, probably by means of heavy artillery fire also could serve to support the advance of the British troops on either flank.

Contemporary British Accounts of the Movement of October 7, 1777

Burgoyne's own narrative has been cited earlier in this report, but there are several accounts left by British participants which help to clarify the situation leading up to the abortive attack of October 7.

Lieutenant Digby:

This officer of the 53rd regiment of British Grenadiers remained with Burgoyne while the most of his regiment was left behind to garrison Fort Ticonderoga. Digby was a careful observer with more than ordinary literary talent. In his classic account is the following description of events on October 7.

"7th....A detachment of 1500 regular troops with two 12 pounders, two howitzers and six 6 pounders were ordered to move on a secret expedition and to be paraded at 10 o'clock, though I am told, Major Williams (Artillery) objected much to the removal of the heavy guns; saying, once a 12 pounder is removed from the Park of artillery in America (meaning in the woods) it was gone. From some delay, <sup>due</sup>, no doubt, to the council of officers and the 'pow wow' with the Indians described by Pausch above the detachment did not move till near one o'clock, and moved from the right of our camp; soon after which, we gained an eminence within half a mile of their camp, where the troops took post; but they were sufficiently prepared for us, as a deserter from our Artillery went over to them that morning and informed them of our design....About 3 o'clock, our heavy guns began to play, but the wood being thick, and their exact knowledge of our small force, caused them to advance in great numbers, pouring in a superiority of fire from Detachments ordered to hang upon our flanks, which they tried if possible to turn."<sup>25</sup>

Digby then describes the route of the British and German forces, and offers his own opinion of the fatal flank attack:

"Some here did not scruple to say, General Burgoyne's manner of acting verified the rash stroke hinted at by General Gates in his orders of the 26th; but that was a harsh and severe insinuation, as I have since heard his intended design was to take post on a rising ground, on the left of their camp, -- the 7th -- with the detachment, thinking they would not have acted on the offensive, but stood to their works, and on that night our main body was to move, so as to be prepared to storm their lines by day break of the 8th; and it appears by accounts since, that Gen Gates would have

"acted on the defensive, only for the advice of Brigadier General Arnold, who assured him from his knowledge of the troops, a vigorous sally would inspire them with more courage than awaiting behind their works for our attack, and also their knowledge of the woods would contribute to ensure the plan he proposed."<sup>26</sup>

The rash stroke which General Gates hinted at appeared in his congratulations to the army for its conduct in the battle of September 19. Gates predicted that the enemy would have to regain all he had lost by one rash stroke or fail completely.<sup>27</sup> The overwhelming success of his prediction probably surprised Gates as much as anyone else. In the statement above, Digby falls into the same error that Captain Money made in his testimony before the parliamentary inquiry. It was in the first battle that Arnold supposedly exerted his influence to have Burgoyne met in the field before he could attack the Americans in their entrenchments. The greatest importance of this extract from Digby's narrative is his agreement with the view taken by others in the army that the march of October 7 was the prelude to offensive action. If it is true that the remainder of the army, that portion left behind to cover the fortified camp, was to join in a dawn attack on the American lines it seems more probable than ever that the artillery accompanying the expedition would be used to keep the colonials pinned down in their lines while the rest of the British and German troops could be brought forward for the attempt. This account agrees with Riedesel's, that if the expedition found the situation favorable, the entire army would be used for the attack. See above, page 14.

#### Anburey

This officer, a lieutenant in the 24th regiment is the author of a series of remarkable letters in which he describes his travels through America with the army of Burgoyne. Of the action on Oct. 7, he wrote:

"The day after the date of my last letter, a detachment of 1500 regular troops, with two twelve-pounders, two howitzers, and six six-pounders, went out between eleven and twelve o'clock. The reason, no doubt, for the General's marching at this time, rather than earlier in the morning, was, that in case we should not prove victorious, he had the night to favor his retreat.

"The intention of this detachment was to make a movement to the enemy's left, not only to discover whether there was a possibility of forcing a passage, if necessary to advance, or dislodge the enemy, in order to favor a retreat, but likewise to cover the forage of the army, through the scarcity of which we were in great distress. This being a project of much importance, General Burgoyne took with him Generals Phillips, Riedesel and Fraser, as officers best qualified, and with whose assistance he had every hope the plan would succeed."<sup>28</sup>

The reasons given by Amburey for the movement of October 7 are, almost word for word, those advanced by Burgoyne in his letter to Lord George Germaine from Albany following the surrender at Saratoga. See page 4 above. Amburey's book of letters was first published in 1789, and it is probable that in editing the letters, Amburey injected material which was not known to him during the Saratoga campaign. The claim that the expedition was for the purpose of covering a foraging party is a weak one. In light of the evidence already presented, the gathering of forage was only incidental to the broader objectives. In the first paragraph above, however, Amburey indicates that some aggressive action was intended when he comments that the purpose in beginning the march fairly late in the day was to give the army the protective cover of night if it was forced to retreat. This observation is a superficial one, for darkness would work equally well for the Americans if they were beaten and forced back. In spite of its obvious after-thought, however, Amburey's narrative does imply that offensive action was contemplated.

Sergeant Lamb:

Sergeant Roger Lamb, a trooper with Burgoyne, left a valuable account of his experiences during the ill-fated expedition from Canada, but he, too, apparently relied on Burgoyne's explanations for the fatal movement of October 7. Wrote Lamb in a book published in 1811;

"Matters were drawing at this time to a crisis - Our picquets and advanced parties were almost continually firing and skirmishing, so much so that the officers and men refreshed and slept while exposed to the enemy's fire. All rested in their cloaths, and the Field-officers were always patrolling. We could distinctly hear the Americans felling and cutting trees; and they had a piece of ordnance which they used to fire as a morning gun, so near us, that the wadding from it sometimes struck against our works. General Burgoyne was now most unfavourably posted, and a retreat, if possible, was highly expedient. In this idea he sent out a detachment of 1500 men, with two twelve-pounders about noon, to perceive, if it were practicable, to force a passage; by dislodging the enemy, and covering the forage of the army, which became scarce. On this important affair he was accompanied by Generals Phillips, Riedesel, and Fraser."29

Contemporary American Accounts Relative to the British Movement of  
October 7, 1777.

Wilkinson:

The controversial James Wilkinson, serving at Saratoga as adjutant general to Gates, has recorded in his Memoirs one of the most detailed accounts of the campaign against Burgoyne. Though his account tends always to glorify his own role in the Saratoga story, an adequate study of the British advance of October 7 must take into consideration Wilkinson's narrative. Of the October 7 advance Wilkinson wrote:

".....on the afternoon of the 7th of October, the advanced guard of the centre beat to arms; the alarm was repeated throughout the line, and the troops repaired to their alarm posts. I was at head quarters when this happened, and with the approbation of the General, mounted my horse to inquire the cause; but on reaching the guard where the beat commenced, I could obtain no other satisfaction, but that some person had reported the enemy to be advancing against our left. I proceeded over open ground, and ascending a gentle acclivity in front of the guard, I perceived about half a mile from the line of our encampment, several columns of the enemy, 60 or 70 rods from me, entering a wheat field which had not been cut, and was separated from me by a small rivulet; and without my glass I could distinctly mark their every movement. After entering the field, they displayed, formed the line, and sat down in double ranks with their arms between their legs. Foragers then proceeded to cut the wheat or standing straw, and I soon after observed several officers, mounted on the top of a cabin, from whence with their glasses they were endeavouring to reconnoiter our left, which was concealed from their view by intervening woods.

Having satisfied myself, after fifteen minutes attentive observation, that no attack was meditated, I returned and reported to the General, who asked me what appeared to be the intentions of the enemy. "They are foraging, and endeavouring to reconnoitre your left; and I think Sir, they offer you battle."<sup>30</sup>

The halt in the wheat field, witnessed by Wilkinson, had a purpose not comprehended by that American Officer. Burgoyne in his letter of October 20 to Lord Germaine had described how his troops were formed before the American left while the British rangers, provincials and Indians were ordered to work their way through the woods

into the rear of the American and then make a demonstration to draw attention from the frontal advance of the main body. The halt in the wheat field probably was to give this force time to take its position in the American left flank. Obviously, this phase of the plan was clumsily conceived and executed, based as it apparently was on the conviction that the American army would wait in its entrenchments while Burgoyne exposed his forces in plain view.

Boardman:

This Connecticut militiaman served in Arnold's division during the Saratoga campaign, and his terse account of the action of October 7 contains a piece of information which fills a gap in the confused picture of events on that day. Boardman wrote in his journal:

"Tuesday 7th....This afternoon about three O Clock Burgoyne's flying camp, commanded by Frasier, Advanc'd within about half a mile of our advanc'd Picquet to Drive them from a Hill where Capt. Blague and fifty men & myself one of the Number were posted, at which they kept a smart Cannonade for a Quarter of an Hour, while our Men muster'd along & sent a party to come upon their Backs, where they soon fell at it on all sides, & Drive the Enemy from their Artillery upon the full go to the Hessian Camp where our Genrl, Little thought of Danger, fors't his way through & Spared none till a Ball Break hás leg & kill'd his Horse."31

This unpretentious account contains information out of proportion to its length. From it we learn that, as referred to earlier in this report, there was an American outpost on the left of the fortified line and in advance of the main works. This American picket may be the one referred to by General Riedesel who described the bombardment of American troops separated from the British line of battle by a ravine - see page 14 of this report. A ravine south of the field in which the British and

German troops were formed may be seen today; actually it is the western extension of the Middle Ravine which separated the opposing armies between the battles of September 19 and October 7. One fact is clear; there was an American entrenchment or outpost on elevated ground visible to the British, and it came under the fire of their artillery. Burgoyne was not moving forward completely unaware of the opposition in his front, and made no move to fall back or entrench the ground he had gained.

Obviously he meant to move forward toward his objective in spite of enemy resistance.

From other accounts quoted and analyzed in this report it has been difficult to identify the nature of the target of the British guns which opened fire from the wheat field, beyond Riedesel's statement that several shots were fired at a small body of Americans. From Boardman's account it is evident that an American outpost in the British line of advance was fired upon prior to the American counter-attack. It is unlikely that Burgoyne would have invited attack by this bombardment if he did not intend to fight if necessary. Probably as Riedesel surmised, the British commander opened fire with his artillery to drive away troops which might have opposed his further advance toward the prized high ground toward which he was moving.

Hughes:

Confirmation of the significance of the shelling of this advanced picket is contained in a statement by J. M. Hughes, an aide de camp of General Gates during the battles of Saratoga. In a manuscript describing the campaign of 1777, Hughes wrote:

"Both armies, after this, continued in a state of preparation, but without anything important happening, until the 7th of October, when it was perceived by the advanced picket, about twelve o'clock at noon, that the enemy were in motion, and that a body of troops with artillery and intrenching tools were disposed to fix themselves on an eminence that lay opposite to our left, which would have annoyed our lines if they had been successful. Upon this information, General Gates ordered an attack to be made, the army then being at the lines."<sup>33</sup>

Hughes' mention of entrenching tools is the only reference to such equipment being carried by Burgoyne's troops. If, indeed, they did have such tools, the implication is stronger than ever that Burgoyne did not intend simply to see what he could do of the American left and then withdraw to his own fortifications. From Hughes' account, and this officer was an aide to Gates during the campaign, it appears that Burgoyne had every intention of remaining on the advantageous ground he planned to seize.

Glover:

Brigadier General John Glover, a portion of whose command took part in the action of October 7, throws additional light on the commanding ground which was Burgoyne's goal in the advance of the 7th. Glover's account was written in a letter to General William Heath of October 9, by which time he should have had ample opportunity to get the facts of the action two days before. However, his description is a unique one in its interpretation of the opening clash. Glover wrote:

"...on Tuesday last the enemy advanced from their right with a design to take post on our left. Our scouts were drove in--they continued advancing.

"Three regiments /Glover probably means the brigades of Learned and Poor, and the Virginia rifle corps and light infantry commands of Morgan and Dearborn/ were ordered out, who met them a mile from our lines, a small eminence between them, each rushed hard for it--our troops gained it. The attack began at 4 o'clock, P.M., continued till dark, without any intermission, during which we drove them two miles, and at last entered their works sword in hand."<sup>34</sup>

Glover's description of the rush for the "small eminence" between the lines does not agree with other accounts of this action, as, according to other contemporary sources, the British had halted in the wheatfield when the American attack struck. However, his reference to the eminence between the lines is another confirmation of the existence of elevated ground near the American left flank, and this brief account indicates that the American forces were sensitive about this position. The rush for the hill mentioned by Glover may have been his interpretation of the artillery action during which Burgoyne's guns fired on the outpost held by Oliver Boardman and his companions.

Blake,

Lieutenant Thomas Blake of the First New Hampshire regiment kept a journal of the movements of the American army during the Saratoga campaign. Under the entry of October 7 Blake confirms the bombardment of the American advance guard by British artillery, as recounted by Militiaman Boardman above, Blake wrote:

"Oct. 7 - A detachment of the enemy marched out upon the left of our army, consisting of the grenadiers and light infantry, with 6 field pieces, and posted themselves on a small height in a cleared field about a quarter of a mile from our advanced guard, where they began a cannonade upon the riflemen, and the three Hampshire regiments were ordered out to attack them...."<sup>35</sup>

The British artillery fire directed against the American outposts has been emphasized here because of its significance in determining Burgoyne's intentions in the advance of October 7. The fire from British guns was not defensive. The American counter-attack had not begun when the English guns opened against the American riflemen posted on the elevation in advance of the colonials' left wing. If, as has been generally accepted, Burgoyne's flank movement was simply a reconnaissance and foraging expedition, it does not appear likely that the British artillery would have opened fire before an adequate idea of the American position had been gained. However, it may have been that the fire from the British line of battle formed in the wheat field was intended as a diversion to cover the advance through the woods of the provincials, rangers and Indians, about to be dispatched by Burgoyne to get in the rear of the American left. The evidence is strong, however, that in drawing up his line of battle and opening with his artillery Burgoyne expected the Americans to withdraw into the main entrenchments on Bemis Heights, where they could be pinned down by artillery fire. Burgoyne hints strongly that such was his intention when he quizzed Captain Money so closely during the parliamentary inquiry. Burgoyne asked Money, "Had we gained possession of that ground [i.e. high ground commanding the American left wing], and been able to erect batteries of our heaviest guns, would not the whole line of the enemy have been enfiladed?" Captain Money was in complete agreement with the statement.<sup>36</sup>

Before any final conclusions are drawn from the contemporary evidence available, an examination must be made of a number of secondary sources relative to the British advance of October 7. A great many of these

secondary accounts which can be disregarded in this report give only Burgoyne's stated motives for the advance, which were "not only to discover whether there were any possible means of forcing a passage should it be necessary to advance, or of dislodging him for the convenience of a retreat, but also to cover a forage of the army which was in greatest distress on account of the scarcity." Other historians, however, have examined the problem with more attention to the composition and movements of the expeditionary force in order to determine its real purpose. Most of the secondary accounts quoted and discussed below are those which at least attempt to go beyond mere acceptance of Burgoyne's vague statement in an effort to ascribe the motive for and objective of the fatal advance of October 7.

Brooks:

"It has been necessary, for some time, to send out large parties to cover any provisions destined for the British camp; General Burgoyne determined, therefore, to select a heavy detachment of his best troops, for the ostensible purpose of covering a forage, which should move to the left of the American lines, and, after making a reconnaissance [sic], endeavor to dislodge the Americans, or force a passage through the entrenchments; in the event of being successful, the whole army was to follow."<sup>37</sup>

Lossing:

This American historian of the 19th century sometimes was guilty of accepting local tradition and "recollections" of eyewitnesses as historical fact, but his work has stood the test of time perhaps better than most of his contemporaries. Lossing visited the historic sites of the American revolution and employed this personal observation in interpreting the events which he described. In his narrative of the Saratoga campaign, Lossing wrote the following relative to the British advance of October 7:

"Time rolled on, and Burgoyne heard nothing further from Clinton. Following Clinton's letter of September 12, in which that officer informed Burgoyne that forces from New York City would advance against the Hudson River forts in Gates' rear. His provisions began to fail, and on the 1st of October he was obliged to put his troops on short allowance. This occurred on October 3, not 1. Not a man or a biscuit was allowed to reach him from any quarter. The militia were flocking into Gates's camp from all directions, and perils of every kind were weaving their web around the proud Briton. At last he was reduced to the alternative to fight or fly. The latter was both impracticable and inglorious, and at a council of officers it was resolved to fight. This statement is misleading. For an account of the council of officers, see page 14 of this report.

"On the morning of the 7th of October, Burgoyne, at the head of fifteen hundred regular troops, with two twelve pounders, two howitzers, and six six pounders, moved toward the American left, to the northern part of a low ridge of land about three fourths of a mile northwest from the American camp, where they formed a line in double ranks. He was seconded by Phillips, Riedesel, and Fraser. The guard of the camp upon the high grounds was committed to Brigadiers Hamilton and Specht, and that of the redoubts and plain near the river to Brigadier-general Call. This movement was for a two-fold purpose, to cover a foraging party sent out to supply the pressing wants of the camp, and, if the prospect was favorable, to turn the left of the American army, and fall upon its flank and rear. Small parties of loyalists and Indians were sent around through by-paths, to hang upon the American rear and keep them in check."38

#### De Fonblanque:

This sympathetic biographer of Burgoyne might be expected to analyze the British advance of October 7 seeking justification for the attempt. His account, however, is disappointing, although it does pose an interesting question as to Burgoyne's hope of breaking through to Clinton in the south.

"Days passed over wearily, while the English army lay inactive, awaiting tidings of that co-operation which never came, and Burgoyne at length determined to make a movement upon the enemy's left, to ascertain the chances of forcing a passage; at the worst to cover a foraging party sent out in the hope of supplying his exhausted magazines. Much depended upon the result of the operation, for although he was ignorant of the successes of Clinton, on the Hudson the capture of Forts Clinton and Montgomery, on the Hudson,

"south of Albany<sup>7</sup>, his breach of the enemy's line, and further advance towards the south, must soon have given the two generals tidings of each other's movements, and a junction would have been assured, for the advanced guard of the southern expedition was now actually within forty miles of Albany."<sup>39</sup>

Drake:

Of all the secondary sources examined, only one made a detailed analysis of the British movement of October 7 logically based on the organization of the expedition. This author reasonably attached much significance to the artillery which Burgoyne detailed to accompany his 1,500 regular troops. In his study of the Saratoga campaign Drake wrote:

"Burgoyne could not bring himself to order a retreat without first making one more effort for victory. He dwelt strongly upon the difficulty of withdrawing the army in the face of so vigilant and powerful an enemy. He maintained his own opinion that even in order to secure an honorable retreat it would be necessary to fight, and so it was determined.

"It is evident that Burgoyne nourished a secret hope that fortune might yet take a turn favorable to him; otherwise, it is impossible to account for his making this last and most desperate effort, under conditions even less favorable than had attended his attack on the 19th of September.

"Fifteen hundred men and ten guns were chosen for the attempt. In plain language, Burgoyne started out to provoke a combat with an enemy greatly superior in numbers, with less than half the force his former demonstration had been made with. His idea seems to have been to take up a position from which his cannon would reach the American works. After entrenching, it was his intention to bring up his heavy artillery, and open a cannonade which he was confident the enemy could not withstand, as their defensive works were chiefly built of logs. And out of this state of things, Burgoyne hoped to derive some substantial benefit."<sup>40</sup>

It is unfortunate that this historian did not footnote his study, although his account is obviously based largely on sources already cited in this report, plus the author's own logical interpretation of known facts.

Nickerson:

Hoffman Nickerson, author of what is probably the most valuable historical work on Saratoga, briefly reviewed Burgoyne's motives for the unsuccessful attack of October 7 but was unable to arrive at any conclusion. However, his discussion does throw some light on the confusion in the minds of historians attempting to ascribe a reason or excuse for the flank movement of October 7. Nickerson writes:

"In proposing this reconnaissance Burgoyne's motives were mixed and what he hoped to accomplish is by no means clear. He talked afterwards of a hill commanding Gates' left which he proposed to occupy in order to begin an artillery duel on advantageous terms. No such hill exists nor was the attempt made, while the reconnaissance was still unopposed, for its main body to approach the nearest point of Gates' position nearer than a mile. Should the reconnaissance show the rebel left to be approachable, then Burgoyne purposed on Wednesday the 8th to attack in force. Should an attack seem unwise, he would retreat to the Battenkill <sup>^</sup> a stream flowing into the Hudson from the east, a short distance north of Saratoga, now Schuylerville on Saturday, October 11.....There was some talk of dislodging the enemy to facilitate a retreat. The whole thing was vague. It is not even certain whether the lesser objective of foraging was planned from the first, grave as was the need of the invaders' animals for green forage."<sup>41</sup>

In analyzing Nickerson's remarks one discrepancy is outstanding. The historian states in reference to the commanding ground mentioned by Burgoyne that "no such hill exists." A hill, or rather a system of low ridges west of Bemis Heights runs north and south within easy cannon range of the American left wing. On one of these elevations, was an American outpost already described in this report. Nickerson is in error when he states categorically that no hill exists. It cannot be documented satisfactorily that these elevations were those mentioned by Burgoyne, but the evidence indicates that they must have been.

## CONCLUSION

In drawing a conclusion from the primary and secondary sources cited in this report one difficulty becomes immediately apparent. This difficulty lies in attempting to analyze the imponderable state of Burgoyne's mind between the first and second battles of Saratoga. Any balanced study of the British flank march of October 7 must take into account the British commander's indecision between taking the advice of some of his subordinates to retreat without risking a second action and his own desire to win glory and success by snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

An excellent insight into Burgoyne's thinking at this critical time is the account of the historian Hoffman Nickerson who wrote:

"Burgoyne himself, hoping against hope, hated to give up and retreat. Should he do so he feared for his career, for he knew how the cowardly Germaine [British Colonial Secretary] detested anything smelling of overcaution in his generals. The thought kept running through Burgoyne's mind that the minister might have meant the army from Canada to be hazarded, perhaps even deliberately sacrificed, in order to further British action elsewhere. Even if that were so, he knew Germaine's baseness too well not to fear the latter's turning upon him should he meet disaster, and (since his boast when crossing the Hudson) [i.e. 'Britons never retreat'] the 19th of September and the hard logic of facts had pressed it in upon him that disaster might come. Still, like the gambler Gates knew him to be, he would play his cards to the end."<sup>42</sup>

Additional confirmation of Burgoyne's personal opposition to what he feared would be a dishonorable retreat is found in the account of Baroness Riedesel, page 15, and the letter of German officer, quoted on page 16.

Thus there is good reason to believe that Burgoyne had no intention of withdrawing until a second effort either broke the American lines or proved conclusively not only to the officers and troops in the field but to the authorities in England that the Yankees could not be beaten by the forces available. No matter what the opposition or cost, the ambitious Burgoyne probably intended to fight on October 7 - if not to gain victory then at least to honorably justify a retreat which was so distasteful to him.

That the British commander intended to give battle on the 7th is borne out by the facts derived from the numerous primary and secondary sources quoted and interpreted in this report. At the council of war on October 5 Burgoyne set down the alternatives which he believed would stem from the movement to be made two days later.

(1) If suitable ground could be seized, an attack would be launched against the forces on Bemis Heights (2) If a successful attack seemed out of the question, the army would fall back to the Battenkill, north of the village of Saratoga.

In the light of subsequent events, in the manner in which the "reconnaissance" was carried out, it seems probable that the latter alternative, retreat, was mentioned only to calm the fears of his subordinates and enlist their whole-hearted support for the forward movement. It is the writer's opinion, based on a careful review of all the evidence, that Burgoyne had no intention of simply moving forward on a scout and retreating if the situation was not auspicious for an attack. Had he merely intended to reconnoiter, he would not have divided his army to such a dangerous extent in the face of a

determined enemy, nor would he have sent 10 priceless field pieces into the wilderness, with the risk that they would have to be abandoned in the course of a retreat. Burgoyne with all his pomposity and vain glory was no fool, completely lacking in military skill or experience. If the movement was nothing more than a reconnaissance, it does not seem probable that the artillery of the expedition would have been ordered to open fire on the American outposts before even the British rangers, provincials and Indians could work their way through the forest on the American left flank, or before an adequate examination of the opposing entrenchments was accomplished. It is more likely that Burgoyne expected to drive in the American outposts which were dug in on the high ground in advance of the main system of entrenchments on Bemis Heights, and follow on their heels with his infantry and artillery while, by Burgoyne's own orders, the rangers and provincials would create a diversion in the rear.

That Burgoyne had a definite objective in mind is substantiated by his repeated references to the high ground commanding the American left flank and by his persistent questioning of Captain Money and other officers at his parliamentary inquiry about elevated ground within cannon shot of the American left. That there was high ground held by American forces a few hundred yards north of the American entrenchments is attested to in the contemporary journal of Oliver Boardman, cited above, who was one of a party of American riflemen stationed on the elevation. More important is the fact that the British forces were aware of this high ground, as demonstrated when their artillery opened fire on it.

The importance which Burgoyne attached to this elevated position is evident in his statement that had Gates not counterattacked when he did "I should in a few hours have gained a position, that in spite of the enemy's numbers, would have put them in my power." While this statement may be attributed to after-knowledge, events of October 7, 1777, indicate that the British general did intend to seize the outpost and the ridge which runs west of Bemis Heights. When this ground was in his possession, Burgoyne could use his cannon to good effect. That this is exactly what the Americans feared he might do is apparent in the account of Gates aid-de-camp, J. M. Hughes, quoted on page 27. The evidence is unquestionable that the American commanders were sensitive about the left flank, for they as well as Burgoyne realized that there was the one chance for the enemy to achieve a breakthrough.

Burgoyne, by his own statements, expected to defeat the Americans if they remained in their entrenchments until he could bring his own forces into position. The puzzling halt of the British advance on October 7 was probably to give the rangers and provincials time to work around the left of the American lines. This ill-advised pause in the wheatfield, and the opening of the British artillery against the Americans perhaps confirms Burgoyne's implied belief that the Americans would not attack him in the field but would remain entrenched on Bemis Heights. After his near-disaster of September 19 when the Americans had fought so fiercely around Freeman Farm, this assumption was extremely bad judgment.

The strategic implications of the advance are important. Had Burgoyne been able to drive the Americans from Bemis Heights either by artillery fire or full-scale attack, his chances of reaching Albany and of linking up with General Clinton to the south would be vastly improved. At the worst, he would at least be past the bottleneck created by the narrow defile between Bemis Heights and the Hudson River. The American army would have had great difficulty in finding suitable defensive terrain closer to Albany. As events happened, the advance of October 7 and the disastrous battle that followed were fatal to Burgoyne's plan of conquest of the northern colonies, although some historians have asserted that the campaign was lost before it began, as a result of misunderstanding and sheer bungling.

From the tactical standpoint, however, it seems clear that the movement of October 7 was not "vague" in intent, although it was ill-timed and awkwardly executed. Based on the information gathered in this report three principal facts emerge. (1) Burgoyne did not intend to make a mere reconnaissance in force or cover a foraging party. (2) He had a definite objective in mind, although this was not implicitly stated. The objective was the elevated ground west of Bemis Heights and within cannon shot of the American encampment. (3) Burgoyne intended to use artillery to drive the Americans from their camp or to hold them in their entrenchments until the remainder of the British and German forces could be brought up and a full-scale attack made.

In the light of all the evidence presented it is the writer's opinion that the movement of the British army on October 7 cannot be

dismissed as a vague sort of reconnaissance in force. It was Burgoyne's last desperate attempt to break through the American army in his path; an attempt he had resolved to make before he would consent to a humiliating retreat.

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