

*Extra for [unclear]*

Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

October 10, 1957

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Superintendent, Saratoga NHP

Subject: Study of the Location of the American Fortifications Effected  
By the Construction of the Proposed Tour Route Projects R-34,  
R-35 and R-36

Attached is a report entitled, Documentary Study of the  
Location of American Fortifications Effected by the Construction of  
the Proposed Tour Route for Saratoga National Historical Park, pre-  
pared by Park Historian Luzader in compliance with Mr. Palmer's memo-  
randum dated September 5, 1957, subject: Historical Report, American  
Lines.

(Sgd.) I. J. ELLSWORTH

I. J. Ellsworth  
Superintendent

In duplicate  
Enclosures



DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF THE LOCATION OF AMERICAN FORTIFICATIONS  
EFFECTED BY THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROPOSED TOUR ROUTE FOR  
SARATOGA NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Introduction

This report is submitted in compliance with Acting Regional Director Palmer's memorandum dated September 5, 1957, subject: Historical Report, American Lines. Its purpose is to assist in the planning for archeological reconnaissance of the sites where the proposed tour route may pass over portions of the American Revolutionary period entrenchments.

The area with which this study is concerned is the eastern portion of the American fortified lines extending from the site of Fort Neilson on the west to the northern River Redoubt on the east. These are located on the Historical Base Maps, Drawing NHP-SAR-2011, as running eastward from 13E to 14H; 15H; 16H; 14I; and 15I.

The right or eastern wing of the American camp was, except for outworks in the river flats, located on the high ground west of the Hudson River approximately three miles north of the village of Stillwater. The River Redoubts lay along the crest of the bluffs approximately one hundred feet above the level of the river. From the bluffs above the river the land lies in a rolling fashion, cut by ravines, until it reaches a point near the head of these ravines when it begins a steeper ascent to the site of Fort Neilson.



This portion of the American line was strategically the most important part of the American position because it dominated the route to Albany, the control of which was the determining factor in the selection of Bemis Heights for the American stand against Burgoyne's invasion.

While the American position was never contested because both battles were fought north of the fortifications, they constituted an obstacle to the British advance and provided the American with both a protected line of last resort and a base of operations. The River Redoubts, situated as they were on the river bluffs above the road, which passed between the base of the hills and the river, were the basic defensive position and comprised the strongest American fortifications.

Contemporary accounts indicate that the River Redoubts were completed by the time of the first battle, September 19. However, the main line of resistance was only partially completed at this date, consisting of some entrenchments at the extreme right with some unentrenched log barricades between that point and Fort Neilson.<sup>1</sup>

- 
1. (1) General Philip Schuyler Papers, New York Public Library, N.Y.C., documents, 604; 605; 606; 608; and 610.
  - (2) William Heath Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.
  - (3) Wilkinson, James, Memoir of My Own Times, Philadelphia, 1816, Vol. I, pp. 236; 239-240; 235-236; 266.
  - (4) Warren, Benjamin, "Diary of Captain Benjamin Warren on the Battlefield of Saratoga" Journal of American History III (1909) pp. 210-211. SNHP Microfilm Roll, 4, item 2.
  - (5) Wild, Ebenezer, "The Journal of Ebenezer Wild (1776-1781) who served as Corporal, Sergeant, Ensign, and Lieutenant in the American Army of the Revolution," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, second series, VI (1890), pp. 93-5. SNHP Microfilm Roll No. 8, item 36.
  - (6) Hitchcock, Enos, "Diary of Enos Hitchcock, D. D., a Chaplain in the Revolutionary War." Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society, VII (1899), Edited by William B. Weedon, pp. 133-4. SNHP Microfilm Roll No. 8, item 32.



After the first battle the main line of resistance was strengthened by uniting the various barricades into a continuous line from the southwestern crest of the ravine to the rear of the northernmost River Redoubt (16F and 15H; NHP-SAR-2015) to the apex of the lines at Fort Neilson. By the time of the second battle, October 7, the Americans had a solid fortified line, protected on the northeast by the River Redoubt and to the north by fortified outposts.

On September 19, 1777, the right wing of the American line was manned by approximately 5,000 men of Gates's Division, consisting of Glover's, Nixon's, and Patterson's brigades, plus some part of Stevens' Independent Battalion of Artillery. It was this body of troops that Major General Benedict Arnold wanted General Gates to commit to the fighting at the Freeman Farm during the engagement of September 19. However, Gates refused to comply with Arnold's request because to do so would uncover the lines dominating the road to Albany and because of a serious shortage of ammunition. This disagreement marked the beginning of the argument between the two generals that was to be climaxed with Arnold's being relieved of his command. Without going into detail, it is worth noting that while Gates has been severely criticised for his refusal to commit the right division, the strategic reason for the selection of the American position was the domination of the defile between the river and the hills, and the withdrawal of the troops from this portion of the line might very well have resulted in a successful British advance down the road. As long as this strong point was held by the Americans the only hope of British success lay in their moving against the American front in the wooded hills west of the road, where the effective use of



conventional European tactics in the employment of Bayonet charges and artillery would be impossible, and the fighting would be done on American terms.

After the first battle the Americans continued to work on their fortifications, as has been noted, and on October 7 the right wing was occupied by approximately 7665 men of Gates's Corps and Lincoln's Division, including Morgan's Rifle Corps, Stenvens' Artiller Battalion, Colonel Jeduthan Baldwin's Detachment of Engineers, Wolcott's Connecticut Militia Cavalry, Glover's Nixon's, Patterson's brigades, and Warner's Brigade of Militia.

While he continued to man the right wing in order to forestall any attempt of the British to move along the road, the tactical situation had changed by Burgoyne's committal of the Major portion of his effective force, and Gates committed a part of the right division to the fighting, including Morgan's Corps and elements from Warner's, Glover's, and Patterson's brigades.

Thus, the right wing of the American line was a major key to Gates's strategy of forcing the British to choose between the horns of an unpleasant dilemma. Burgoyne could elect to move southward along the road against the almost impregnable American strong point dominating this route or he could move into the hills where he would be forced to fight under conditions precluding the effective use of his artillery and massed infantry.

While the determination of the exact delineation and character of the American right wing cannot be made without further archeological research, its general position and character have been well established.



The delineation of the northernmost of the American River Redoubts at 16H; 15H; 15I; and 14I of NHP-SAR-2011 conforms very closely to Rufus Putnam's and John H. Brandow's maps and with Varick's letters to General Schuyler of September 12, 16, 17, 1777.<sup>2</sup> A portion of the fortifications appears to still exist in 15H; 15I; 14I; 14H of the Historic Base Map. This area is of especial importance because it is the site of the River Overlook which is Stop Number 3 of the Proposed Tour Route, and, as such, will have a significant role in the park's interpretive presentation where the strategic importance of the site will be interpreted. If, as the writer believes, these are entrenchments, they should be stabilized.

The main line of the American right wing which begins in 16G and transverses 15G, 15H, 14G, 14F and 13F to 13E conforms to Putnam's and Brandow's maps and in part with Charles Neilson's and William C. Wilkinson's maps.<sup>3</sup> Because the proposed tour route crosses this line in F14 an archeological reconnaissance should be undertaken at this point.

As has been noted, the exact alignment and nature of the fortifications on the right wing of the American camp must await more comprehensive archeological research. However, documentary evidence and the archeological reconnaissance undertaken under the direction of former Archeologist Robert Ehrich throw substantial light on the subject.

- 
2. (1) General Philip Schuyler Papers, op. cit.  
(2) Putnam, Col. Rufus, Map, An Orthographic View of the American and British Armies on the 7th and 8th of October, 1777.  
(3) Brandow, John H., Map, Map of the American and British Fortified Camps. Also Showing the Saratoga Battlefields of September 19 and October 7, 1777. Published in 1900.
  3. (1) Putnam, op. cit.  
(2) Brandow, op. cit.  
(3) Burgoyne, Lt. Gen. John, A State of the Expedition from Canada, London, Printed for J. Almon, 1780.



It has been noted that remains of portions of the fortifications of the northernmost of the River Redoubts appear to be still discernible. These are earthworks that may have been thrown up over logs, and they vary in depth from a few inches to about five feet, with an exterior height of from approximately three to six feet. A portion of these surface remains runs along the eastern face of the hill within musketrangle of the route of the colonial road to a point near the northern extremity of bluff where it joins an elevated "platform" formation. Along the rear of the redoubt site is a long embankment that lies at the edge of the southern crest of the ravine that separates this area from the site of the eastern extremity of the main line. This feature corresponds with Putnam's map and with Sparks' description of the redoubt. Perhaps, more significantly, it gives some reason to Varick's criticism of the construction of this fortification in his letter to General Schuyler of September 16, 1777:

"You will observe that we have some new works in Front of Nixon's Brigade on the North side of the Valley on a Narrow Ridge. I don't approve of the more Advanced Breast Work, next the River on the Ridge, for the Moment they drive our Troops out, it serves as a Work for them against the small Redoubt, as it is at least if not higher than It."

In Varick's eyes, Gates could do nothing well, and the location and construction of this fortification was no exception. However, his criticisms can be useful for current purposes. He noted that if the enemy captured the redoubt its construction would afford a fortified work against the American position south of the ravine. This would mean that the redoubt was built in such a manner that a wall would lie between the interior of the fortification and the main line. The embankment along the crest of the ravine fits into the picture too neatly to be a matter of mere accident, resulting from the post-war utilization of the site.



Varick's animus toward Gates prevented his appreciating the strategic reasoning behind the location and construction of the redoubt, nor did he agree with Gates and Burgoyne that the position was almost impregnable.

Except for the extreme right, where some surface indications may mark the site of the entrenchments, all surface evidences of most of the main line of fortifications have disappeared as a result of erosion and 150 years of cultivation. In fact, it is very probable that there were no entrenched fortifications except for the extreme right of the line. Wilkinson, in describing the appearance of the American fortifications as of October 4, wrote:

".....The extremities of this camp were defended by strong batteries, and the interval was strengthened by a breastwork without entrenchments, constructed of the bodies of felled trees, logs and rails, with an additional battery at an opening left of center."<sup>4</sup>

Excavating in this general area has indicated that the bed rock of shale lies about ten inches below the original top soil, which may explain why wooden unentrenched breastworks were used.

While the limited amount of archeological reconnaissance has shed some light upon the character of the American fortifications, it has not been extensive enough to provide anything approaching a comprehensive picture of the line. The only such research that has been undertaken near the proposed tour route was accomplished prior to World War II under former Archeologist Robert Ehrlich. In the course of investigating the American line he opened a series of trenches numbered VI and VII.

---

4. Wilkinson, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 236.



His report is quoted in part:

"American Lines Central Section.

Area of Trenches VI and VII: East of the steep hill on which stood Fort Neilson, the land slopes gradually to the east. This relatively level ground is dissected by ravines which grow broad and deep as they run eastward to the river. Between the head of one such ravine and the foot of the slope below Fort Neilson, is a low rise of ground running north and south. Since a line following the crest of this lower rise would cover the flank of the lines, and also overlook the ravine in front of it, two east-west trenches were opened across it. Since no traces of fortifications were found, a long north-south trench was opened following the crest of the ridge, connecting the two cross trenches, and extending southward on the theory that such an approach must somewhere cut the main line as it crossed the low land to climb the hill to its apex at Fort Neilson.

"The soil here is of a yellow stony clay with outcroppings of slate at the northern part of the ridge. The humus is dark brown and rather shallow. When the humus was removed and the yellow clay scraped clean, groups of parallel, evenly spaced, narrow bands of dark earth appeared. These obviously represent the bottoms of furrows where the plow point cut into the subsoil. Traces of dead furrows and information from Mr. Charles Neilson, the former owner of this property, all indicate that this area was cultivated.

"Somewhat south of Trench VI a band of gray earth flecked with black particles of decomposed or burnt wood appeared. A southeast extension was opened from the north-south trench, to trace this deposit while a corresponding northwest area was opened in the hope of following it further.

"Investigation showed the discoloration to represent the fill of two very shallow and irregular pits approximately six inches in depth. A few square sectioned nails and some decomposed and burnt wood occurred in these.

"The two pits lay one across the main trench and the other in the southwestern extension. An interpretation as to the significance of these two pits must be extremely tentative, and there is not sufficient evidence to establish whether they form a part of the main line, an outpost, or are merely by-products of later farming operations.

"Further to the south the trench crossed a small gully which may also represent the original position of the American line. The topography does not seem to warrant so marked a drainage pattern unless it were started by some artificial cause such as a trench line which had been left exposed, a dead furrow or some such comparable scar.



The former owner, Mr. Neilson, is of the opinion that a dead furrow was the original cause. The gully, however, leads directly toward a low rise back of the ravine behind which the American line ran. The rise itself must have been utilized as a strong point in the line as the ravine here at its head offered only slight protection.

"Taking this into consideration, it seems quite possible that this may show where the center of the line ran...."<sup>5</sup>

Since this very limited reconnaissance is all that has been accomplished along the proposed tour route, additional archeological research will be necessary before any definite information concerning the effect of the road construction can be obtained.

The proposed tour route will cross or come near the American fortifications at approximately F14; H14; and H15 of SNHP-SAR-2011. Because the depiction of the fortifications on the Historic Base Map is diagrammatic and the scale is 1 inch = 800 feet, the exact location of the portions of the fortifications effected by the construction of the proposed tour route can be determined only after an archeological reconnaissance has been accomplished.

---

5. Ehrlich, Robert, Progress Report On The Archeological Program of Saratoga National Historical Park, pp. 6 - 8.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### National Park Service Studies

Snell, Charles W., A Report on the American Fortified Camp at Bemis Heights, September 12 - October 8, 1777, represents a compilation of descriptions of the American position based upon primary and secondary sources.

Snell, Charles W., Historical Outline For Historical Base Maps Drawing NHP-SAR-2011 (2 sheets) is a revision of the earlier 1941 Historical Outline. This report cites sources that were used in drafting the Historical Base Map, on which the American and British lines were diagrammatically drawn.

Ehrich, Robert, Progress Report On The Archeological Program of Saratoga National Historical Park.

### Maps

and

Brandow, John Henry, "Map of the American/British Fortified Camps. Also Showing the Saratoga Battlefields of Sept. 19 and Oct. 7, 1777," Published 1900. Hoffman Nickerson, author of Turning Point of the Revolution considered this the best topographical and historical representation of the battlefield area. While its usefulness can not be denied, there are places where its representation of the American lines is faulty, especially in depicting the portion just east of the Blockhouse.

Neilson, Charles, "Map of the Battleground on Bemis Heights 19th Sept. and 7th Oct., 1777. The British and American Camps, Including a part of the surrounding country as it was at that time." Published 1844. This map is inaccurate in much of its topographical and historical information.

Putnam, Col. Rufus, "An Orthographical View of the American and British Armies on the 7th and 8th of October, 1777." Although this is a rough sketch without scale it represents the best primary source relative to the location and character of the American line.

Varick, Richard, "Map of the American Camp." This is a manuscript sketch included in a letter from Varick to General Philip Schuyler dated Sept. 12, 1777. Although a very rough sketch, it shows the general outlines of the American camp.



Wilkinson, Lt. William C., "The Encampment and Position of the Army under Lt. Gen. Burgoyne at Sword's House and Freeman's farms on Hudson's River near Stillwater, 1777. Faden Collection No. 69 $\frac{1}{2}$ ." This manuscript map is the most accurate contemporary one. However, its usefulness, insofar as the American lines are concerned, is limited to the location of the northernmost of the River Redoubts because he, naturally, had no opportunity to chart the major portion of Gates's position.

#### Primary Sources

##### Diaries:

Hitchcock, Enos, "Diary of Enos Hitchcock, D.D., a Chaplain in the Revolutionary War." Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society, VII (1899). Edited by William B. Weeden. SNHP Microfilm Roll No. 8, item 32.

Warren, Benjamin, "Diary of Captain Benjamin Warren on the Battlefield of Saratoga," Journal of American History III (1909). SNHP Microfilm No. 4, item 2.

Wild, Ebenezer, "The Journal of Ebenezer Wild (1776-1781) who served as a Corporal, Sergeant, Ensign, and Lieutenant in the American Army of the Revolution," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, second series, VI (1890). SNHP Microfilm Roll No. 8, item 36.

##### Collections:

William Heath Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

General Philip Schuyler Papers, New York Public Library, New York, N. Y.

Jared Sparks Collection, Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

##### Published Works:

Burgoyne, Lt. Gen. John, A State of the Expedition from Canada, London, Printed for J. Almon, 1780.

Wilkinson, James, Memoir of My Own Times, Philadelphia, 1816.