In Burgoyne's Defense

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History is debate, history is discussion, history is a conversation. These exchanges may focus on an event or an interpretation of the event, and in each instance the exchanges are based upon available information. Authors of history, when exercising their prerogative to present or ignore available information, have the responsibility to avoid creating misconceptions by omitting key information.

As an example, a common misconception has been created by authors who opt not to use available information when writing about who was responsible for the strategic planning of the failed British campaign from Canada in 1777. The expedition ended with the surrender of General John Burgoyne at Saratoga. While ignoring information to the contrary, some authors conclude that the plan was created by Burgoyne and accepted by the British leaders. Authors often use language without any supporting information, such as: *Burgoyne …*

> *developed the plan; was the architect of the plan; wrote the strategy; came up with a plan; or designed the invasion plan*

As a result, many readers hold the misconception that Burgoyne was responsible for planning the failed expedition and, consequentially, blame him for the turning point of the Revolution. However, this misconception ignores contradictory information presented during a 1779 Parliamentary inquiry called at Burgoyne's request to look into the failed expedition.

Burgoyne compiled a collection of the papers and testimony submitted during the hearing, which he published in 1780 under the title, *A State of the Expedition from Canada: As Laid Before the House of Commons.* The proof at the hearing strongly supports Burgoyne's claim that his orders were developed by the King and his ministers in London and not by him.

Northern Campaign of 1777 - Military Plan

Champlain-Hudson route: The British ended the Campaign of 1776 by successfully driving the Americans from Quebec and then south on Lake Champlain. British leaders assumed that after retiring for the winter months, the British troops would return during the Campaign of 1777 to continue the attack moving south along the Lake Champlain, Lake George, and Hudson River route.

Since pre-colonial times, the Champlain-Hudson route, which runs the length between Canada and New York City, had been a well-traveled military and trade passage. From the beginning of the War, the British were focused on taking control of this route in an effort to isolate New England (the "hot-spot of rebellion") from the colonies to the south which, it was assumed, would better assure a British victory.

Campaign of 1777 proposal: In anticipation of the Northern Campaign of 1777, several generals submitted proposed military plans, each of whom proposed a plan for the Champlain-Hudson route. Burgoyne, second-in-command in Canada under Lord Gen. Guy Carleton, submitted a strategy proposal to Lord George Germain, the Secretary of State for the American Colonies, who was responsible for the conduct of the War. Burgoyne's proposal, entitled "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada," included several strategies. As did the other generals, he proposed a Champlain-Hudson plan which provided for the Canada troops to move south along the river route with the goal to occupy the Hudson River Valley and isolate New England. His Rhode Island plan provided for troops to join British forces from Rhode Island to move against Connecticut in order to isolate and take control of New England. An alternative St. Lawrence plan had troops boarding ships on the St. Lawrence River to join forces coming from New York City along the New England coast to take control of New England.

Latitude in Burgoyne proposal: Actually, Burgoyne's proposal was not a plan; it was more a sampler of possibilities in a seven-page presentation which outlined alternatives and provided the commander with discretion to select alternatives and adjust strategy with changed circumstances in the field.

He used conditional phases such as: *entrust the latitude of [making a choice]; the next measure must depend upon those taken by the enemy*; *in that case it would be advisable to; if it be determined that … [then]; should those efforts fail, [then]; should the object appear worthy [then]; "should it appear, upon examination of the really effective numbers*…" (Burgoyne, Appendix, No. III *Thoughts*… ii)

Review by George III and ministers: King George III and his ministers were responsible for reviewing and selecting campaign plans, which ultimately became the basis for the campaign orders. King George revised Burgoyne's submission by writing comments and edits in the margins and making erasures to delete significant provisions. He and the ministers also revised Burgoyne's Champlain-Hudson proposal by eliminating all references to discretion or latitude and reducing the plan to a limited order merely to advance directly to Albany. The King wrote, "*the force from Canada must [be available to] join [Gen. Howe] in Albany."* [General William Howe was commander in chief of the British army in America, headquartered in New York City.]

The King also completely rejected and deleted the Rhode Island plan and also the St. Lawrence plan with the comment, "*I greatly dislike that idea."* He also deleted all references to discretion, which lead Burgoyne to comment, "*that every discretionary latitude which I had proposed was erased, while the plan was in [the King's] hand."* (Burgoyne, Review Evidence 95)

In effect, King George and the ministers transformed Burgoyne's broad list of discretionary alternative actions into a narrow plan directing him to march to Albany. Germain then reduced the ministers' limited plan into Burgoyne's orders.

Identifying the versions of campaign plans: During the process of developing the campaign orders there were four iterations of Burgoyne's campaign plan which can be referenced as follows: (1) the *"original version*" which is Burgoyne's original submission of discretionary options set forth in his "Thoughts for Conducting the War…"; (2) the "*erasure version*" is a copy of #1 showing the edit notations, margin notes, and erasures made by the King and ministers; (3) the "*clean version*" is a revised copy of #2 incorporating the ministers' revisions but with all the edit notations removed or cleaned; and (4) the "*campaign orders*" were the actual campaign orders set forth in a letter from Germain to Carleton dated March 26, 1777, which bears no resemblance to the *original version.*

The distinction among these four iterations helped Burgoyne disprove the claim circulating in Parliament that he had developed the plan used for the failed expedition. He learned of the claim when he arrived back in England in May 1778, after having been paroled from American captivity after the Saratoga surrender.

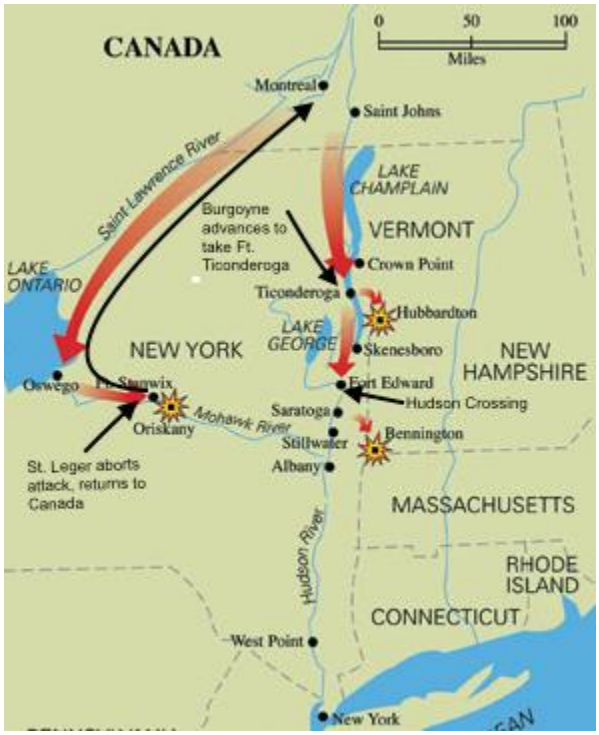
By identifying the various versions, Burgoyne clarified a misrepresentation being made by the accusers. He showed that the accusers were presenting a copy of the *clean version* and falsely claiming that it was the proposal authored by Burgoyne. He then produced the *erasure version* showing the original language of his proposal together with the deletions, revisions and erasures made by the King and ministers, which "…*were erased while the paper was in his lordship's hands*." Burgoyne pointed out:

> *From that [ministers' clean version] paper, as it appeared without erasures, naturally arose the conclusion, that the plan I had to execute was completely my own. (*Burgoyne, Prefatory Speech 3)

Burgoyne charged that the use of the wrong version was an intentional misrepresentation. He pointed out that the accusers, as members of Parliament, certainly were aware of the distinction between the *original* and *clean versions*, and he asked his accusers, "*If so, I must ask the noble lord, why he suffered that error to prevail?"*

Thus, it is correct to say Burgoyne developed a plan, i.e., the *original version*; however, it is not correct to say either that he developed a plan that was accepted by the ministers or that he developed the plan that became the campaign orders.

Expedition from Canada into New York



Campaign Orders from Germain: On March 1, Burgoyne received command of the Campaign of 1777 to invade New York from Canada. On March 26, Germain issued the orders for the expedition in the form of a letter directed to Carleton in his capacity as Governor of Quebec and Burgoyne's superior in Canada. In the letter, which arrived in Canada May 16, Germain directed Carleton to make allocations of troops for the campaign, and also instructed Carleton to give Burgoyne his campaign orders which limited Burgoyne to focus only on advancing to Albany and gave no other specifics. Germain's Orders directed Carleton to:

> *You [Carleton] are to give him [Burgoyne] orders to pass Lake Champlain and from thence, by the most* ***vigorous exertion of the force under your command, to proceed with all expedition to Albany and put himself under the command of Sir William Howe.*** (Burgoyne, Appendix ix)

This was the extent of his orders. Germaine confirmed to Burgoyne that the plans in his orders, which granted no discretion, were a deviation from the plans suggested by Burgoyne and that this change had been approved by King George.

The narrow orders set forth in the March 26 letter to Carleton were the only orders Burgoyne ever received from British leaders directing his conduct for the northern campaign. Burgoyne stated: "*the letter to Sir Guy Carleton, dated March 26, 1777, were … the only orders I had to act upon."* (Burgoyne, Prefatory Speech, 3)

Burgoyne's Concern with Orders: Burgoyne was concerned that his orders, which were developed by ministers who were 3,000 miles from the battlefield, did not provide the commander any latitude of judgment in the field. From London he sent a letter to Howe dated March 27, discussing how the orders diverge from his proposal, particularly for its lack of discretion. In a subsequent letter from Quebec to Howe, Burgoyne again complained that the orders omitted any latitude to make decisions and limited him specifically to forcing his way to Albany and a junction with Howe; he wrote:

> 1st letter*: [it would be my wish] that a latitude had been left me for a diversion towards Connecticut, but that such an idea being out of question,* ***by my orders being precise to force the junction at Albany.***
>
> 2nd letter*: under the present precision of my orders, I should really have no view but that of joining him [in Albany], nor think myself justified by any temptation to delay the most expeditious means I could find to effect that purpose.* (Burgoyne, Narrative 6)

Fort Ticonderoga: Burgoyne began the northern Campaign in early June by sailing 9,000 troops south on Lake Champlain, where he captured Fort Ticonderoga during the first week of July. Unexpectedly, Burgoyne was forced to cut 1,000 of his troops to garrison the captured fort because Germain had failed to provide the necessary garrison troops. Burgoyne wrote to Germain that giving up these troops drained the life-blood of his force:

> *nor did I then think the garrison of Ticonderoga would fall to my share alone … too heavy a drain it is upon the life-blood of my force to give it due strength.* (Burgoyne, Narrative 7)

The British successfully engaged the retreating American rearguard at Hubbardton and then moved to Skenesborough (currently Whitehall) where they began their march south to Fort Edward, where they would cross the Hudson River to be on the west side where Albany was located.

Each delay of the forced march to Albany afforded the Americans the opportunity to better prepare by increasing their number of troops and strengthening their defense positions.

Burgoyne encountered delays: by trails blocked by fallen trees placed by retreating troops; by a mistaken assumption that the surrounding area would be an abundant source of food for the troops and fodder for the horses; by an inefficient supply chain from Canada terminating at the Hudson River near Fort Edward; and by the mistaken assumption of loyalist support along the march. Germain's limited orders did not permit Burgoyne to consider any alternatives which would allow for him to deal with any of these delays.

Fort Edward Crossing: In July, Burgoyne reached the Hudson River near Fort Edward at the location where the supply-line from Canada terminated after having traveled south on Lake George and portaged over a wagon trail to the Hudson. With communication with Canada ending, Burgoyne stayed at the Duer House in near-by Fort Miller for a month accumulating sufficient provisions for twenty-five days. Burgoyne continued to meet unexpected developments while constrained by Germain's orders which limited him to force his way to Albany.

- August 7, in an effort to acquire much needed provisions and additional horses, sent troops to raid Bennington where they were overwhelmed by American militia, losing nearly 1,000 troops killed or captured.

- received confirmation that Howe would not be moving north from New York to join in securing the Hudson River Valley since he had moved his troops south to occupy Philadelphia.

- received confirmation that the British support troops expected to be arriving from the Mohawk Valley had withdrawn from action and were returning to Canada.

- received intelligence that the Americans were transferring their primary defense from near Albany, at the junction of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, to relocate north at Bemis Heights just twenty-five miles south of Fort Edward; his letter to Carleton reported, *"[the enemy] at present in force in Saratoga, where they profess the intention of standing a battle.*"

- received intelligence that the presence of his army was bringing out significant numbers of local militia.

Faced with these continuing developments, including the loss of the 1,000 troops at Bennington and the 1,000 troops left to garrison Ticonderoga, Burgoyne wrote to Germain on August 20, 1777, from a "Camp near Saratoga." He was troubled that his orders did not allow him the discretion to choose the most advantageous course of action to remain in place, retreat, or select an alternative course which may well produce more favorable results for the British.

In his letter he stated that in light of the current situation he believed it was his military duty to exercise discretion to pause at Fort Edward to await developments that would assist his movement forward. However, he continued, he nevertheless was going to continue to move toward Albany because his restrictive orders did not allow him the latitude to make a decision to remain in place. He wrote:

> ***Had I latitude in my orders****, I should think it my duty to wait in this position, or perhaps as far back as Fort Edward, where my communication [supply chain] with Lake George would be perfectly secure, till some event happened to assist my movement forward; but my orders being positive to 'force a junction with Sir William Howe,****' I apprehend I am not at Liberty to remain inactive*** *longer than shall be necessary to collect twenty-five days provisions.* (Burgoyne, Appendix xxv)

This is an important letter which demonstrates that while engaged in the field he was experiencing a continuing concern that his orders denied him the discretion he had sought in his original proposal. Burgoyne was convinced that if he had been allowed to alter his march to advance through Connecticut he could have accomplished the goal of isolating New England from the southern colonies and also meeting troops from New York along the Hudson south of Albany.

The letter was written before Burgoyne marched to Saratoga and eight weeks before the Surrender. It is not an after-the-loss cover letter. He was making a valid professional assessment while in the field regarding the campaign orders which he had not proposed and which he was finding to be unworkable.

Saratoga Surrender and Parole: On September 13, Burgoyne's army began crossing the Hudson on a bridge of boats about 15 miles north of Bemis Heights and resumed the march to Albany. However, unable to break through the American lines at Saratoga, Burgoyne surrendered on October 17. Pursuant to the terms of surrender set forth in the Convention of Saratoga, the British Army became the Convention Army and was marched to Boston to await transfer to London.

In spring 1778, Burgoyne was paroled from captivity and permitted to return to England having given his word of honor that he would return upon demand of the Americans and he would refrain from military service in America.

Seeking Parliamentary Inquiry or Court Martial

Parliament resistance: Arriving on May 13, 1778 in London on parole, Burgoyne met resistance when seeking an inquiry into the failed campaign. Parliament and the ministers rebuffed Burgoyne's request for an inquiry or court martial and ignored his speeches in Parliament during which he described the perverse effect his restrictive orders had in the field during the expedition.

In a speech before parliament on May 26, while demanding an inquiry, he told Parliament,

> *I am here to vindicate my conduct against the false and barbarous interpretation that have arisen and have been suffered to prevail, by those who could have contradicted them, at home … and to lay before government important truths … the misfortune that disenabled me from performing my duty in the field.* (The Substance…Speech of General Burgoyne 21)

The demand for an inquiry was denied.

In his speeches Burgoyne made clear that he intended to prove: first, the primary cause of the failed campaign was that as commander he had been denied any latitude in the field to react to developing situations; second, the

orders denying him any latitude was contained in Germain's letter of May 26, 1777, which is the only campaign orders he received; and third, he himself was not responsible for the campaign strategy since his proposals had been rejected by the King and ministers. The strategy was theirs and not Burgoyne's.

The government appeared to be concerned that if granted a hearing, Burgoyne may well prove the government to be responsible for the failure of the Canada campaign. They continued to resist his requests.

In a speech on May 28, 1778, Burgoyne portrayed himself as "*a persecuted man … a marked victim to bear the sins that do not belong to me."*

When Burgoyne requested an audience with King George to explain his position, he was told he could not see the King until a Board of General Officers inquired into his conduct. However, the Board refused to take up the matter since Burgoyne was a paroled prisoner. The prohibition of an audience with the King remained in force.

In response to continuing requests for a hearing, on June 5 the War-Office conveyed an order to Burgoyne from the King to return to Boston with no mention of Burgoyne's request for an inquiry. The order stated:

> *[the King] judging your presence material to the troops detained prisoners in New England, under the Convention of Saratoga t*o return to America was *"a neglect of duty, and disobedience of orders."*

When Burgoyne responded that he needed to remain in England for health reasons, the Royal response directed:

> *Return to [your troops in Boston] as soon as you can, without any risk of material injury to your health.* (Burgoyne, Lord Barrington Letter)

In September 1778, as Burgoyne continued his demands for a Parliamentary inquiry or a court martial, the King again warned Burgoyne his refusal to return to America was "*a neglect of duty, band disobedience of orders.*" Burgoyne responded that the Crown did not have legal authority to order him to deliver himself to the enemy's prison. He remained in England and continued his demand of Parliament to conduct a hearing.

Parliament inquiry*:* Finally, in May 1779, a House inquiry was opened to look into the failure of his expedition; however, the inquiry was to be closed and not opened to the public. Burgoyne opened with a statement that he intended to clear his reputation by showing the limited nature of his Orders that prevented him from performing his duty during the Campaign. (Burgoyne, The Speech 1)

Burgoyne focused on Germain's orders of March 26, 1777, which left him no strategical discretion to engage in any deviation from the orders that he must advance forcefully to Albany. Burgoyne's officers were in accord that the orders gave limited authority only to force their way to Albany.

> Bur*goyne. Do you know or believe that the idea of forcing our way to Albany was prevalent throughout the army?*
>
> *Earl of Harrington. In every conversation I had with different officers of the army, I never remember once to have heard it doubted, but that we were to force our way. (Burgoyne, EVIDENCE 51)*

Burgoyne described Germain's orders as:

> *… cutting off every proposed latitude, and confining the plan to one only object,* ***the forcing a passage to Albany****, the orders framed upon that plan could be no otherwise understood, … (emphasis added)* (The Substance…Speech of General Burgoyne 21)

Parliament avoids decision: Before the inquiry was finished, Parliament opted to terminate the hearings without reaching any decisions or passing any resolutions. Burgoyne called this a "contrivance" by Parliament to avoid making a public determination regarding Germaine's role in bringing about the Saratoga Surrender.

On September 24, 1779, Burgoyne again was ordered by the King to return to America. Burgoyne once again demanded a court martial or, in the alternative, he offered his resignation from both his military position and political appointment under the Governor of Quebec. The King accepted his resignations.

In the end, Parliament never conducted a full trial, and no formal determination was ever rendered regarding who was responsible for developing the battle plan for the Canada Campaign of 1777. Yet, there are some who, while opting to overlook available information, continue to ascribe authorship of the failed campaign to Burgoyne and consequentially attribute to him the responsibility for the turning point of the Revolution.

Burgoyne's prisoner of war status was eventually resolved when he was exchanged for more than 1,000 American prisoners. He gradually passed out of the public's eye to focus on his career as a playwright. He died on June 4, 1792, at the age of 70, and was interred at Westminster Abbey.

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