

Life of General Philip Schuyler

CHAPTER SIX Burgoyne's Invasion Evacuation of Ticonderoga Schuyler's Military Operations

IN THE AUTUMN OF 1776, the British under Carleton had ascended Lake Champlain as far as Crown Point, had destroyed the American fleet under Arnold and had threatened Ticonderoga.

But, impressed by the strength of that fortress, and fearing a long siege protracted into the winter months, they had withdrawn into Canada.

Carleton's prudence had disappointed his government and had surprised the Americans, who were well prepared for attack.

That the British should appear again before Ticonderoga in the spring was a natural expectation.

Schuyler had kept as strong a garrison there as he could during the winter, and in March he was actively employed in efforts to strengthen it.

He represented to Congress the importance of Ticonderoga and the certainty of its being attacked.

But little result was obtainable from Congress.

That body had not much to give either in men or munitions of war.

It was doing what it could for Washington, and hardly knew how to meet the demands which came from every military quarter.

Moreover, the Board of War was not inclined to pay much attention to Schuyler's representations, because, as we have seen, it was endeavoring to place the military control of the northern department in the hands of General Gates.

At the end of March this was actually done.

Whatever Gates's commission might mean, it certainly gave him command over Ticonderoga.

Thus, Schuyler not only found himself debarred from proceeding in his work at that fortress, but he was obliged to leave Albany, to go to Philadelphia and to spend as much time there as Congress might require, to investigate his past conduct and to define his military status.

During the most important months of April and May he was necessarily at Philadelphia, and without power or responsibility in the northern department.

During these months Gates was the commanding officer there.

But he, absorbed in his correspondence with his friends in Congress, worrying lest his plans to supersede Schuyler should prove ineffective, remained inactive in Albany, paid not a single visit to Ticonderoga, and contented himself with telling St. Clair to "call lustily for aid of all kinds, for no general ever lost by surplus numbers or overpreparation."

Thus, when Schuyler returned to Albany on the 8th of June, once more in command of the department, he found everything as he had left it, except that two months' provisions had been consumed and not replaced.

The two precious months of spring which should have been devoted to adding troops, provisions and ammunition to the military resources of his department were gone.

Of the magnitude of the invasion which was impending, of the great force gathering at Quebec under Burgoyne, he knew nothing.

But that Ticonderoga and the province of New York were threatened by an attack of some kind from Canada, he felt sure.

His incessant efforts to obtain more men and supplies were rewarded by an addition of five hundred men, which he sent to St. Clair with a good supply of provisions.

He gave detailed directions to St. Clair regarding the further fortifying of the defenses about Ticonderoga, and ordered him to keep scouting parties in the woods along the shores of Lake Champlain to report any approach of the enemy.

On the 15th of June a British spy was captured, and from him Schuyler obtained the first definite information of the enemy's plans.

The spy reported that General Burgoyne was at Quebec and intended to attack the province of New York by way of Lake Champlain, while Sir John Johnson at the head of Canadians and Indians was to descend the Mohawk Valley and join Burgoyne near Albany.

Schuyler assumed this information to be true.

But he had as yet no idea of the great size of the invading force.

As far as his knowledge went of troops then in Canada he felt that he could hold Ticonderoga with the garrison already there.

But against the expedition of Sir John Johnson down the Mohawk Valley, he had no force to oppose.

He wrote to Washington at once, stating the circumstances and asking for reinforcement to defend the Mohawk Valley.

Washington was then near Middlebrook, in New Jersey, opposing General Howe.

Gates had arrived in camp from Philadelphia, and he assured Washington that there was no likelihood of invasions of any consequence from Canada at the time.

Washington, in his uncertainty, sent no troops, but ordered General Putnam, who was encamped near the Hudson Highlands, to be ready to move up the river at a moment's notice with four Massachusetts regiments.

Schuyler then went to Ticonderoga, and on the 20th of June, after an inspection of the troops and defenses, held a council of war, which was attended by Major-General St. Clair and Brigadier-Generals Poor, Patterson and de Fermoy.

The situation was far from satisfactory, but as the force of the enemy expected was unknown and much underestimated, the outlook was by no means discouraging.

The whole number of troops was about three thousand, of whom five hundred were sick or otherwise ineffective.

Many were "actually barefooted and most of them ragged."

The requests for clothing which Schuyler had made to Congress in March had met with no response, and Gates had made no efforts to supply the troops during his two months of command.

There were provisions enough for the present, and a few days later Schuyler sent up a further supply which he had collected from different points and concentrated at Fort George.

The men were in good spirits and ready to fight.

But they were too few for the extent of ground to be covered.

There were two forts, one on either side of the narrow passage which connects Lakes George and Champlain.

One was the old fort taken by Ethan Allan and Benedict Arnold in May, 1775.

The other a star fort built in 1776 under Schuyler's orders.

The two were connected by a floating bridge four hundred yards long, built of heavy timbers connected by iron chains and supported by twenty-two sunken piers.

To the north of the bridge was a great boom carrying a double iron chain with links an inch and a half thick.

The bridge was protected by batteries at either end, and with the boom formed a barrier to the passage of vessels.

Connected with the two forts were quite extensive outworks, but these, as well as eminences in the immediate neighborhood, Sugar Loaf Hill and Mt. Hope, could not be occupied for want of men and cannon.

Against such an attack as was anticipated, of perhaps three thousand men, Ticonderoga was considered defensible.

The men on the ground could hold the two forts and the bridge, and it was resolved to defend them to the last.

As to the outworks, and the neighboring hills, it was recognized that, unless re-enforcements came, they could not be defended.

On the other hand, it was not supposed that the enemy would come in sufficient force to take possession of them.

As yet there was no news of the British, only the knowledge that an attack from Canada was to be expected.

Schuyler, having the business and safety of the whole northern department to provide for, then returned to Albany.

Having received confirmatory information regarding the invasion of the Mohawk Valley, he took measures to organize the Whigs there, and instructed Colonel Nicholas Herkimer, who lived near the Little Falls of the Mohawk and commanded the Tryon County militia, to prepare his men for the protection of the western frontier.

To Washington he described his plans and his needs.

Not only was he without any adequate force to meet Sir John Johnson in the west, but in case of weakness or disaster at Ticonderoga, he had no reserve to call upon.

In all the northern department outside of the forts at Ticonderoga, there were hardly seven hundred men under arms, and these were dispersed at several posts guarding supplies.

In this situation, on the 27th of June, he received word from St. Clair that the enemy was approaching.

Burgoyne's army which was ascending Lake Champlain, was already assembling at Crown Point.

The water was dotted with vessels conveying the troops from St. John's, and the wooded shores were swarming with savages in war paint.

The army now invading New York, of the size and objects of which so little was known to the Americans, was intended by the British ministry to be the means of dividing the rebellious country into two parts, rendering their co-operation impracticable, and thus making easy the separate conquest of New England and the southern colonies.

A similar idea had prevailed in the military operations of the year before, when the British had taken possession of New York City and the lower Hudson, and Carleton had made his attack from Canada.

But now the plan was to be carried to completion by an overwhelming force.

General John Burgoyne was a distinguished officer and had done good service in the recent war in Portugal, causing Carlyle to speak of him as "the Burgoyne who begins in this pretty way at Valencia d'Alcantara."

He had made himself well known by the development of light cavalry, and his regiment, called Burgoyne's Light Horse, was a favorite feature of the British army and much valued by the King.

He had made a runaway match with the daughter of the Earl of Derby, was a courtier, having the ear of George the Third, and on the best of terms with the ministry.

He had written some military treatises of value and was always pleased to take a pen in hand.

Proclamations which he wrote for Gage at Boston, and during this campaign for himself, were expressed in the pompous manner of the expiring Johnsonian style.

He was a member of Parliament.

His character and intentions were good and his disposition humane.

While with Gage's army at Boston he had acquired much respect for the fighting qualities of the rebels, which was not diminished during his campaign with Carleton in the autumn of 1776.

When that campaign was concluded he obtained leave to return to England for the winter, carrying with him a plan for the operations of 1777 which coincided so nearly with the ideas of the ministry that it was readily adopted.

A powerful army was to invade New York from Canada by way of the Sorel River and Lake Champlain, take Ticonderoga and descend the Hudson Valley to Albany.

Another force made up of Canadians and Indians under Sir John Johnson was to approach from the west by way of Oswego, reduce the Mohawk Valley, and join the main army at Albany.

At the same time General Howe, then at New York City, was to ascend the Hudson and form a junction with the other divisions.

If successful, the campaign would cause the complete reduction of New York, the division of the colonies into two parts, and result in their being unable to assist each other, and turn into an overwhelming attack.

The plan seemed a good one and, if followed out exactly, gave every promise of success.

There was one alteration which Burgoyne sought to have made in it.

That in case he found it inexpedient or impossible to perform his part, he should be allowed some latitude of action, such as to divert his course into New England.

But the ministers refused his request.

The orders were positive.

Burgoyne must march on Albany.

Howe must ascend the Hudson to meet him.

Burgoyne, being in London, received and understood his orders.

But, extraordinary to relate, Howe never received his.

That he made no movement in the direction of Albany gave as much surprise to Washington as anxiety to Burgoyne.

The reason was unknown until long afterwards, when Howe's orders were found unsigned in a pigeonhole in the War Office.

There came to light among the papers of Lord Shelburne was a memorandum stating that Lord George Germaine, "having among other peculiarities a particular aversion to be put out of his way on any occasion, had arranged to call at his office on his way to the country in order to sign the dispatches, but as those addressed to Howe had not been 'fair copied' and he was not disposed to be balked of his projected visit into Kent, they were not signed then, and were forgotten on his return to town."

Such being the business methods of Lord George Germaine's office, the expedition against Albany was limited to the attacks under Johnson and Burgoyne.

But even thus, it might well seem overwhelming in numbers and strength.

Burgoyne arrived at Quebec in May, and transports continued to land troops until he had an army of nearly eight thousand men, of which about four thousand were British regulars, three thousand Germans and one thousand Canadians and Indians.

The army was thoroughly equipped and had a fine train of brass cannon.

The soldiers, both German and British, were veterans, and the officers had been selected for ability.

Generals Fraser, Phillips, and Hamilton.

Majors Lord Ackland and Balcarres.

Each had reputations founded on active service.

General Riedesel, in command of the Germans, had served with credit through the Seven Years' War.

Burgoyne ordered the concentration of all his forces at St. John's at the foot of Lake Champlain on June the 1st, and they had assembled there by the 8th, about the time that the first news reached Schuyler of an intended invasion.

Here the army was joined by four hundred Indians, whom, it should be said, Burgoyne employed only because his orders required it.

With the vain desire to control their ferocity, and to limit their activities to legitimate warfare, he made them an address in his best Johnsonian style, which, in the rough version of an Indian interpreter, must have puzzled a band of savages bent upon loot and scalps:

"Warriors, you are free!"

"Go forth in the might of your valor and your cause."

"Strike at the common enemies of Great Britain and America, disturbers of public order, peace and happiness, destroyers of commerce, parricides of the state."

"The circle around you, the chiefs of His Majesty's European forces and of the Prince's, his allies, esteem you as brothers in the war."

“Be it our task, from the dictates of our religion, the laws of our warfare, and the principles and interest of our policy, to regulate your passions when they overbear, to point out where it is nobler to spare than to revenge, to discriminate the degrees of guilt, to suspend the uplifted stroke, to chastise and not to destroy.”

“I positively forbid bloodshed whenever you are not opposed in arms.”

“Aged men, women, and children and prisoners must be held secure from the knife or hatchet even in the time of actual conflict.”

“In conformity and indulgence to your customs, which have affixed an idea of honor to such badges of victory, you will be allowed to take the scalps of the dead when killed by your fire or in fair opposition, but on no account or pretense or subtlety or prevarication, are they to be taken from the wounded or even from the dying.”

Burke ridiculed this speech amidst the laughter of the House of Commons.

"Suppose," he said, "that there was a riot on Tower Hill."

“What would the keeper of his Majesty's lions do?”

“Would he not fling open the dens of his wild beasts, and then address them thus.”

“My gentle lions, my humane bears, my tenderhearted hyenas, go forth I But I exhort you, as you are Christians and members of civilized society, to take care not to hurt any man, woman, or child.”

From St. John's, the British army was conveyed southward in boats to Crown Point, where Burgoyne reviewed them and made an address ending with the words: "This army must not retreat."

On the 27th of June the army began its movement upon Ticonderoga.

The Indians and Canadians, posting themselves in the neighboring woods, the regular troops taking up commanding positions which the Americans, for lack of men, had been unable to occupy.

By July 5th Ticonderoga was invested by an army of more than seven thousand regular troops.

Within the main works were about three thousand provincials indifferently armed, but determined and confident.

St. Clair had no idea of the size of the army which was attacking him.

On July 3rd he wrote to General Heath.

"They have approached to within three miles of Ticonderoga, where they are intrenching themselves and also are throwing a boom across the lake."

This does not convey with it an idea that they have any great force."

On the 27th of June Schuyler was in Albany providing for the defense of the Mohawk Valley, when he received news from St. Clair that a British force had arrived at Crown Point.

He sent off immediate expresses to Washington, to the governors of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, and to the Committees of Berkshire and New York, stating that an invasion was actually in progress and begging for re-enforcements.

It was the great difficulty of Schuyler's situation that he belonged to a colony sparse in population, of which the southern portion was already in possession of the enemy and the remainder too thinly settled to furnish troops.

He must depend for soldiers upon the neighboring colonies, and they would not withdraw men from the fields until the danger was known to be imminent.

Thus, while Ticonderoga was being attacked, weeks must ensue before troops could be gathered in New England and forwarded to him.

When Washington received Schuyler's information that the British had occupied Crown Point, he had a difficult problem to solve before he could think of sending help.

Howe was evidently about to make some movement.

His army had left Perth Amboy and had camped on the shores of New York Bay.

Howe himself, had made his headquarters on Staten Island, off which the fleet had anchored.

He was going somewhere.

Was it North or South?

The movement against Ticonderoga might be a feint, while the main British army in Canada proceeded by sea to join Howe.

If Burgoyne were really invading New York in force, Howe would surely ascend the Hudson to join him.

If Washington should move up the Hudson ahead of Howe, the latter might march southward upon Philadelphia.

Washington could do nothing but watch Howe and go where he went.

At present all he could do for Schuyler was to order some troops then at Peekskill to march to Albany.

"If we can keep General Howe below the Highlands," he wrote to Schuyler July 2d, "I think their schemes will be entirely baffled."

During those few days in Albany, Schuyler was absorbed in providing for the defense of the western frontier, whence came alarming news.

Savages were scalping settlers and burning houses along the border from Fort Stanwix to the Susquehanna River.

The threatened invasion from Oswego under Johnson had spread terror through Tryon County, the inhabitants of which made constant appeals for aid.

Through Colonels Van Schaick and Herkimer, Schuyler organized the Whigs and sent them arms.

He urged the patriot inhabitants to join in efforts for their own protection, and assured them of Continental support.

"If we act with vigor and spirit," he wrote to Herkimer, "we have nothing to fear, but if once despondency takes place the worst consequences are to be apprehended."

While thus providing for the various needs of his department, Schuyler was awaiting impatiently the arrival of the promised troops from Peekskill, for whom he had sent sloops down the river.

There was no sign of them on the 5th.

"If they do not arrive by tomorrow," Schuyler wrote to Congress, "I shall go on without them, and do the best I can with the militia."

They did not arrive, and Schuyler set out alone for Ticonderoga.

When between Saratoga and Stillwater, he was met by Colonel Hay bearing the astounding and incomprehensible news that St. Clair had evacuated Ticonderoga with all his men.

Schuyler knew that the fortress was insufficiently manned, and that its capture by a superior force was only too possible.

But that it should have been evacuated without a struggle was beyond explanation.

And St. Clair had disappeared absolutely.

Colonel Hay could not tell where he was.

Several days elapsed before any word was received from him.

Presuming that the American army must have proceeded southward, Schuyler dispatched couriers into the woods with orders for St. Clair or the officer in command to join him at Fort Edward on the Hudson River, south of Lake George.

There he went himself at once and established headquarters.

To Washington, to Congress, and to the Committee of Safety, he communicated the bare fact of the evacuation, for which as yet he could give no reason.

The news of the loss of Ticonderoga spread with great rapidity through the country.

Unaccompanied as it was by any explanation, the worst construction was put upon it for both St. Clair and Schuyler.

Accusations of treachery were loudly made and readily believed.

All of northern New York was in consternation, even the people of Albany preparing for flight.

The militia, which Schuyler had been organizing, lost heart and melted away.

In New England prevailed an intense feeling of anger and discouragement.

Pierre Van Cortlandt wrote to General Putnam:

"The evacuation of Ticonderoga appears to the Council highly reprehensible, and it gives them great pain to find that a measure so absurd and probably criminal should be imputed to the direction of General Schuyler, in whose zeal, vigilance, and integrity the Council repose the highest confidence."

On July 18th Washington wrote to Schuyler:

"I will not condemn or even pass a censure upon any officer unheard, but I think it a duty which General St. Clair owes to his own character to insist upon an opportunity of giving the reasons for his sudden evacuation of a post which, but a few days before, he, by his own letters, thought tenable, at least for a while."

"People at a distance are apt to form wrong conjectures, and if General St. Clair had good reason for the step he has taken I think the sooner he justifies himself the better."

“I have mentioned these matters because he may not know that his conduct is looked upon as very unaccountable by all ranks of people in this part of the country.”

“If he is reprehensible, the public have an undeniable right to call for that justice which is due from an officer who betrays or gives up his post in an unwarrantable manner.”

Schuyler found himself the object of the most violent personal attacks.

In New England especially, he was openly accused of having treacherously delivered the fortress into the hands of the enemy.

He wrote to John Jay:

"Those that form unfavorable conclusions from my absence from Ticonderoga ought to know that I hastened from it in order to provide for its safety, to throw in a greater quantity of provisions and those reinforcements of men which I had applied for; that I had everything to do, nothing, literally nothing, having been done whilst the department was committed to General Gates's direction."

"I might easily have exculpated myself from the many heavy charges which have been brought against me," he wrote to Congress, "if I had dared to venture a publication, which must necessarily have contained extracts from my letters to Congress, to His Excellency General Washington, and to the general officers under my command, but as such a step might have prejudiced the public, I have hitherto waived it, hoping that a little time will discover that I have labored under unmerited calumny."

He further wrote to Washington: "I will, however, go on smiling with contempt on the malice of my enemies, doing my duty, and attempting to deserve your esteem, which will console me for the abuse that thousands may unjustly throw out against me."

Amid the general blame and clamor it is not difficult to imagine the state of feeling in Congress and the effect on Schuyler's reputation and prospects.

The Gates party, whose schemes had so lately come to naught, now felt itself justified, and seized so favorable an opportunity to carry out its defeated purpose.

John Adams exclaimed: "We shall never be able to defend a post until we shoot a general!"

Samuel Adams wrote to Richard Henry Lee: "I confess it is no more than I expected when Schuyler was again appointed to the command there."

"Gates is the man of my choice."

The news of the evacuation of Ticonderoga, at first unexplained, and when explained not well understood as a military necessity, gave to the New England delegation the excuse they needed to put their unworthy favorite in Schuyler's place.

Let us see what had caused this event, so discouraging to the country, so injurious at the time to the reputation of St. Clair, so unjustly fatal to Schuyler's military career.

Ticonderoga, while a very strong position if fully manned, was untenable by a force insufficient to defend its whole extent.

The narrow pass through which flowed the waters of the lake was surrounded by eminences which commanded the main works below and which should have been occupied by batteries.

In the previous assaults on Ticonderoga the contending forces were not possessed of cannon of long range.

Thus, these distant eminences had been useless, and the struggle had occurred below at the forts near the water.

The Americans under St. Clair were too few to man more than the lower forts.

There were several outlying works recently constructed, which they had been obliged to leave empty.

To defend the forts and outworks and to keep on the neighboring hills a force sufficient to prevent the enemy from taking possession of them, would have required between six and eight thousand men.

St. Clair had only about three thousand, which was enough only to defend the lower forts where they were concentrated.

That St. Clair was hopeful of his ability to hold the position was due to his ignorance of the size of the attacking army, and especially of the long range of their guns.

Three-quarters of a mile south of Ticonderoga, rises six hundred feet above the surface of the lake, a rocky crag then called Sugar Loaf Hill.

The practiced military eye of General Phillips took in the position.

He knew that some of his fine guns could carry from that crag into the forts.

That it was inaccessible for cannon he did not believe.

"Where a goat can go," he said, "a man can go, and where a man can go, he can haul up a gun."

Working at night, Phillips placed a battery on the top of Sugar Loaf Hill, which he renamed Mount Defiance.

On the morning of July 5th, the American army saw the British artillery frowning down above them.

The red coats on Mount Defiance could look down into the American works and count the men.

Their guns could rake the forts.

Ticonderoga had become a trap in which the American army was caught, and could be destroyed.

St. Clair saw that his position was lost.

His duty now was to save his army.

That night he marched it out of the forts and southward into the forest.

The next day the British flag was flying in triumph over Ticonderoga, while a strong detachment pursued the Americans up Lake George and through the woods.

The difficulties of the retreat and of communication made it impossible for St. Clair to inform Schuyler of what had happened or of his line of march until several days had passed.

That St. Clair, under the circumstances, had done his duty as a prudent officer, was in time universally acknowledged.

Of this unfortunate and final appearance of Ticonderoga in our military annals so interesting an account is given in the autobiography of John Trumbull, the artist, that it may be repeated here.

Trumbull was an aide on Gates's staff when the latter was in command at Ticonderoga in the previous autumn.

Trumbull wrote:

"The position of our army extended from Mount Independence on the right and east side of the lake to the old French lines on the west forming our left, protected at various points by redoubts and batteries, on which were mounted more than a hundred pieces of heavy cannon."

"After some time, it was seen that the extreme left was weak and might easily be turned."

"A post was therefore established on an eminence, nearly half a mile in advance of the old French lines, which was called Mount Hope."

"Thus our entire position formed an extensive crescent, of which the center was a lofty eminence, called Mount Defiance, the termination of that mountain ridge which separates Lake George from Lake Champlain, and which rises precipitously from the waters of the latter to a height of six hundred feet."

“The outlet of Lake George enters Champlain at the foot of this eminence, and separates it from the old French fort and lines of Ticonderoga.”

“This important position had hitherto been neglected by the engineers of all parties, French, English, and American.”

“I had for some time regarded this eminence as completely overruling our entire position.”

“It was said, indeed, to be at too great a distance to be dangerous, but by repeated observation, I had satisfied my mind that the distance was by no means so great as was generally supposed, and at length, at the table of General Gates, where the principal officers of the army were present, I ventured to advance the new and heretical opinion, that our position was bad and untenable, as being overlooked in all its parts by this hill.”

“I was ridiculed for advancing such an extravagant idea.”

“I persisted, however, and as the truth could not be ascertained by argument, by theory, or by ridicule, I requested and obtained the general's permission to ascertain it by experiment.”

“General, then Major, Stevens was busy at the north point of Mount Independence in examining and proving cannon.”

“I went over to him on the following morning, and selected a long, double-fortified French brass gun, a twelve-pounder, which was loaded with the proof charge of best powder and double shotted.”

“When I desired him to elevate this gun so that it should point at the summit of Mount Defiance he looked surprised, and gave his opinion that the shot would not cross the lake.”

“That is what I wish to ascertain, Major, was my answer.”

“I believe they will, and you will direct your men to look sharp, and we, too, will keep a good look-out, if the shot drop in the lake their splash will easily be seen, and if, as I expect, they reach the hill, we shall know it by the dust of the impression which they will make upon its rocky face.”

“The gun was fired, and the shot were plainly seen to strike at more than half the height of the hill.”

“I returned to headquarters and made my triumphant report; and after dinner requested that General Gates, and officers who were with him to walk out upon the glacis of the old French fort where I had ordered a common six pound field gun to be placed in readiness.”

“This was, in their presence, loaded with the ordinary charge, pointed at the top of the hill, and when fired it was seen that the shot struck near the summit.”

“Thus the truth of the new doctrine was demonstrated, but still it was insisted upon that this summit was inaccessible to the enemy.”

“This also I denied, and again resorted to experiment.”

“General Arnold, Colonel Wayne, and several other active officers accompanied me in the general's barge, which landed us at the foot of the hill, where it was most precipitous and rocky, and we clambered to the summit in a short time.”

“The ascent was difficult and laborious, but not impracticable, and when we looked down upon the outlet of Lake George it was obvious to all that there could be no difficulty in driving up a loaded carriage.”

“Our present position required at least ten thousand men and a hundred pieces of artillery for its doubtful security.”

“I assumed that it would be found impossible for the government, in future campaigns, to devote so great a force to the maintenance of a single post.”

“As there was no road on either side of the lake by which an enemy could penetrate into the country south, he must necessarily make use of this route by water, and as the summit of Mount Defiance looked down upon and completely commanded the narrow parts of both the lakes, a small but strong post there, commanded by an officer who would maintain it to the last extremity, would be a more effectual and essentially a less expensive defense of this pass than all our present extended lines.”

"The events of the succeeding campaign demonstrated the correctness of my views."

"For General St. Clair was left to defend Ticonderoga without any essential addition to the garrison which had been placed under his command by General Gates in the preceding November, because the Congress could not spare more men or means."

"As a result, when General Burgoyne presented himself at Three-Mile Point, no opposition could be hazarded to his movements, and instead of assaulting the works, as had been formerly done by General Abercrombie in 1757, he silently turned the left of the position, crossed the outlet of Lake George, and established a battery of heavy guns on the summit of Mount Defiance."

"The shot Burgoyne's troops fired from Mount Defiance, plunged into the old French fort and lines, and reached all points of Mount Independence, so that, as I had predicted, the whole position became untenable and was immediately abandoned."

"General St. Clair became the object of furious denunciations, whereas he merited thanks for having saved a part of the devoted garrison."

"That same garrison he saved, subsequently formed the nucleus of that force by which, in the course of the campaign, General Burgoyne was ultimately baffled, and compelled to surrender his victorious army by the convention of Saratoga."

Schuyler had his share in the responsibility for the neglect to secure Mount Defiance, but the responsibility of Gates was far greater.

He was in command at Ticonderoga when the subject was so forcibly called to his attention by Trumbull.

Yet he was satisfied with casting ridicule upon the discovery of a young American officer.

And worse yet, during the two months of April and May of 1777, while he had the independent command of Ticonderoga, and should have been there examining and improving its defenses, he had, instead, remained in Albany, writing to his friends in Congress, and scheming to supplant his fellow-officer.

And yet this was the man who was now to profit by the misfortune which was largely the result of his own negligence and want of judgment.

When St. Clair left Ticonderoga, he had no boats to convey his army up the lake, and so struck off to the southeast through the woods, where he would be out of the way of a force pursuing by water.

When his rear guard was at Hubbardton, a few miles south of Ticonderoga and east of Lake George, it was attacked by General Fraser and a thousand of his men.

In this engagement the Americans were at first successful, and beat back the British.

But after reinforcement of Fraser, by Hessians coming up under Riedesel, the Americans retreated, leaving about three hundred killed and wounded.

The pursuit of the British, however, had been so checked by this battle, that St. Clair was able to join Schuyler at Fort Edward on July 12th without further casualties.

But the long march through the woods of St. Clair and his men had prevented him sending an earlier account of himself to Schuyler, who had been much blamed for not knowing the situation of this part of the army.

The retreating troops had saved nothing but their arms and clothing.

They were much discouraged by the hardship of the flight, and along the way, many militiamen had deserted and gone home.

Harvest time was approaching.

As long as victory seemed probable, the militia were willing to remain and fight.

But, disheartened by this reverse, two complete New England regiments went off in a body.

It was not, perhaps, a technical military desertion.

The terms of enlistment were so loose that the men could almost choose the day when they saw fit to declare their time to be up.

But these desertions left St. Clair not more than fifteen hundred men.

At Fort Edward, Schuyler found himself in a position of extreme difficulty.

Including five hundred men under Nixon, who had at last arrived from Peekskill, militia whom he had collected himself, and St. Clair's troops, his army numbered about three thousand.

They were diminishing rather than increasing.

While the continental troops remained faithful, the militia were constantly dropping off.

There was almost no artillery.

Scouts reported the enemy to be approaching by the lake and by land.

An army of six thousand veterans, furnished with fine artillery and elated by an easy success.

While Frazer and Riedesel were working southward through the woods on the trail of St. Clair, Burgoyne, with the rest of his army, advanced in the same direction by the lake.

Within two days after Schuyler had reached Fort Edward, twenty miles south of Lake George, the enemy was at Skeensborough, east of the lake, and rapidly approaching Fort George at its head.

On July 10th, two days before St. Clair arrived, Burgoyne's army was distant from Schuyler only twenty miles.

In the neighborhood south of Lake George were three so-called forts, but rather fortified storehouses.

Fort George at the head of the lake, Fort Anne to the southeast, and Fort Edward twenty miles south on the east bank of the Hudson.

The latter was the largest and the best protected, but yet was not to be considered defensible against such an army as Burgoyne's.

The Marquis de Chastellux, who visited it soon after, said that it could be taken easily by five hundred men with four siege guns.

Forts George and Anne were depots for stores with small garrisons to guard them.

Schuyler burned these two forts, added their garrisons to that of Fort Edward, and removed the stores to the same place.

He thus secured a supply of provisions ample for his small army at present, and concentrated all his men in his strongest position.

The problem of getting provisions was already becoming serious for Burgoyne and British detachments soon after attacked Forts George and Anne only to find them empty.

The news that these two positions had been abandoned was received at Philadelphia with unjust and ignorant blame.

Schuyler, it was said, had given up two more forts to the British.

Instead of which he had saved the provisions from two store-houses.

Schuyler's correspondence at this juncture shows constantly his appreciation of the most important work before him, of the only military policy which could avert defeat.

That policy was to delay the British advance.

If Burgoyne could continue his rapid progress southward there was no force now between him and Albany capable of preventing his arrival there.

But time must bring re-enforcements to the American army.

When the people of the river counties of New York and Western New England realized that Burgoyne with his German mercenaries and Indians was actually upon them, they would leave their fields and homes and help defend them.

Assistance, too, would surely come from the Continental army near New York.

Besides, and quite as important a fact, Schuyler realized that the longer Burgoyne was delayed the more impossible would it be for him to keep his army in provisions.

What he possessed he had brought from Canada and captured at Ticonderoga.

But the supply was limited.

It could not last long.

The great distance from his base in Canada made that resource impracticable.

Moreover, his communication with that base, through the long stretch of devious waterway and forest, could be, and before long was, cut off.

The evacuation of Ticonderoga and the possession of boats on the lake had made it easy for the British to reach Fort George, only twenty miles from their insignificant enemy.

But Schuyler knew so well the physical geography of those twenty miles that he felt able to hold off Burgoyne for a long time.

The land was covered by heavy forest, and intersected by streams which formed frequent swamps.

Several roads existed, rough, but practicable.

Schuyler sent a thousand men up these roads with axes.

The trees were cut on either side so that they fell across each other, with trunks and branches intersecting, till a tangle was formed which a man could hardly penetrate.

Every bridge was destroyed and the streams choked with fallen trees.

The success of Schuyler's operations was shown by the fact that while the British army had been only four days from Ticonderoga to the head of Lake George, they required twenty days of the hardest work to reach Fort Edward, only twenty miles further.

And these twenty days were of decisive importance.

They gave to the American re-enforcements the time to collect.

And they saw the beginning of Burgoyne's fatal difficulty.

The want of subsistence for his men.

Although Schuyler's prompt action in this emergency had obtained the delay so vital to the American cause, the situation at Fort Edward might well have seemed hopeless.

While he sought to encourage the army by promises of speedy help, he could not conceal from Congress and from Washington the true state of affairs.

"Desertions prevail," he wrote to the latter, "and disease gains ground."

"Nor is it to be wondered at, for we have neither tents, houses, barns, boards, or any shelter, except a little brush."

"Every rain that falls, and we have it in great abundance, wets the men to the skin."

“We are besides in great want of every kind of necessaries, provisions excepted.”

“Of camp kettles we have so few that we cannot afford above one to twenty men.”

“There were thirty pieces of cannon in the fort, but no carriages for them.”

“Nixon had brought up two from Peekskill, which formed the available artillery in case of a movement.”

“I have indeed written to Springfield,” continued Schuyler, “for the cannon which were there.”

“But the answer I got was that they were all ordered another way.”

“I have also written to Boston, not that I expect anything will be sent me, but that I may stand justified.”

“For I have never yet been able to get much of anything from thence.”

“In this situation I can only look up to your Excellency for relief.”

“Permit me to entreat you to send me a re-enforcement of troops and such a supply of artillery, ammunition, and every other necessary, except provisions and powder, which an army ought to have, if it can possibly be spared.”

Washington replied that to detach any considerable number of men from his own army would be to weaken himself too much.

Howe's troops were partly embarked upon the fleet off Staten Island, whether to ascend the Hudson to Burgoyne's assistance or to proceed southward could not be learned.

Howe might suddenly re-land, and Washington must watch him with all the force at his command.

The most that he could do at present was to hold Glover's brigade in readiness to march northward if circumstances permitted.

But he was able to assist Schuyler in another way.

The latter had written regarding the desertions which were weakening the army at Fort Edward.

Some of these were due to the privations endured since the loss of Ticonderoga.

But another cause contributed much to the depletion of the army.

It was nearly harvest time.

The militia were anxious to return home to gather crops.

They were unwilling to make sacrifices for a colony not their own, and the terms of enlistment were too loose to hold them.

As they were resolved to go, Schuyler made the best terms he could by obtaining the promise that one half would remain for three weeks longer if the other half were discharged.

Bancroft blames Schuyler for this action, saying:

"There could be no hope of a successful campaign, but with the hearty co-operation of New England."

"Yet Schuyler gave leave for one-half of its militia to go home at once, and the rest to follow in three weeks."

The injustice of this blame is shown by Schuyler's own account of the event to the Committee of Safety of New York:

"It was evident that if we had not consented to suffer part of the militia to return to their habitations, we should have lost the whole."

"It was therefore resolved, in full council of general officers, that half should be permitted to leave us, provided the others would remain three weeks."

“These conditions were accepted by them, and one thousand and forty-six of the militia of this State, officers included, remained.”

“But not above three hundred out of twelve of those from the county of Berkshire, in the State of Massachusetts, and out of about five hundred from the county of Hampshire, in the same State, only twenty-nine commissioned and non-commissioned officers and thirty-four privates are left, the remainder having infamously deserted.”

Gouverneur Morris, present at the time, wrote thus regarding the desertions of the militia:

“Three hundred of the militia of Massachusetts Bay went off this morning, in spite of the opposition.”

“We should have said entreaties-of their officers.”

“All the militia on the ground are so heartily tired, and so extremely desirous of getting home, that it is more than probable that none of them will remain here ten days longer.”

“One-half was discharged two days ago, to silence, if possible, their clamor, and the remainder, officers excepted, will soon discharge themselves.”

The militia who remained were restless, and their promised three weeks of service of little help.

In this difficulty Schuyler asked Washington for one or two general officers, New England men, who would have influence in holding the New England troops already there, and who might recruit others.

Washington sent Generals Arnold and Lincoln.

They were both popular among Eastern troops, and proved of the highest value.

As Washington could not send continental troops to Schuyler, he did his best to procure militia for him.

To the brigadier-generals of militia in western Massachusetts and Connecticut he wrote, pointing out the danger to New England should Burgoyne be successful, and the calamity involved in the threatened division of the Eastern from the Southern States.

"It cannot be supposed," he said, "that the small number of continental troops assembled at Fort Edward is alone sufficient to check the progress of the enemy."

"To the militia, therefore, must we look for support during this time of trial, and I trust that you will, immediately upon the receipt of this, if you have not done it before, march with at least one-third part of the militia under your command, and rendezvous at Saratoga, unless directed to some other place by General Schuyler and General Arnold, who, so well known to you all, goes up, at my request, to take command of the militia in particular."

"I have no doubt that you will, under his conduct and direction, repel an enemy from your borders who, not content with bringing mercenaries to lay waste your country, have now brought savages, with the avowed and express intent of adding murder to desolation."

To this appeal of Washington response was made, slowly at first, but increasing as the danger became more widely understood.

Schuyler had to face Burgoyne with his small and waning force for three weeks before he could even know that substantial help was on its way.

But not only was Burgoyne to be faced, provision must also be made against the invasion of the Mohawk Valley, and the courage of the people must be kept up.

The Committee of Tryon County and the inhabitants of western New York, instead of taking their own measures and arranging for their own defense, kept applying to Schuyler for the protection of continental troops, of which he had so few himself.

"I am sorry, very sorry," he wrote to them, "that you should be calling upon me for assistance of continental troops when I have already spared you all I

could, when no army has yet made its appearance, when the militia of every county in the State except yours is altogether called out.”

“For God's sake do not forget that you are an over-match for any force the enemy can bring against you, if you will act with spirit.”

“I have a large army to oppose, and trust I can do it effectually, and prevent their penetrating to any distance into the country.”

“Keep up your spirits, show no signs of fear, act with vigor, and you will not only serve your country, but gain immortal honor.”

To General Herkimer, in command of the Tryon County militia, he wrote:

"We must oppose the enemy where they show themselves, that is here at present, and although Ticonderoga is abandoned, I am nevertheless not afraid that they will be able to get much lower into the country.”

“Keep up the spirits of the people, and all will be well.”

At the end of July he replied to a discouraged appeal from the Committee of Safety at Albany:

"When an enemy threatens to invade a country, alarms, real or false, arise in every quarter.”

“Some of these are created by the fears of good subjects, whilst others are propagated by friends of the enemy.”

“Schoharie may labor under apprehensions that have arisen in one or the other of these ways, or from some real cause.”

“I will at present admit the latter.”

“But is that reason sufficient for free men to lay down their arms, ignobly submit to the enemy, and betray their own, their posterity's, and their country's dearest rights to a cruel and relentless enemy, whose greatest strength consists not in their numbers, but in our apprehensions?”

“Let not a base or womanish timidity take place of that prowess which but a little while ago was so conspicuous.”

“Let the inhabitants of Schoharie determine to repulse the enemy, if they should attempt an attack.”

“Let them hunt after and seize every Tory in their vicinity, and let a few gentlemen from Albany who are acquainted with the people in that quarter go into that district and revive the spirits of the people.”

“But never let them talk of submission.”

Washington, who had been watching Howe so long and anxiously, at last knew that the latter was bound for Philadelphia, and therefore that place must be his own destination with all the men at his command.

Regarding the continental troops at Peekskill, he wrote to Governor Trumbull:

"No more can be detached from thence to the Northern army than have already gone."

“Two brigades, Nixon's and Glover's, have been ordered from thence to their aid.”

“This being the case, there can be no doubt that he will make a vigorous push to possess Philadelphia, and we should collect all the forces we can to oppose him.”

To Schuyler he wrote that he could send no troops except those under Glover.

But he felt sure that "the New England States, which are so intimately concerned in the matter, will exert themselves to throw in effectual succors to enable you to check the progress of the enemy, and repel a danger with which they are so immediately threatened."

Thus the main reliance of Schuyler for men must be on the New England militia.

They were so distant and so scattered, and the means of communication were so slow, that none could tell in what numbers nor at what day they might be expected.

On July 27th the advance of the British under General Fraser was announced by scouts to be near Fort Edward, where it had arrived after three weeks of cutting through Schuyler's obstructions.

Whether or not to defend this position was now the question.

Schuyler heard from Philadelphia that his enemies there were talking about Fort Edward as a strong place, which if abandoned would be considered a repetition of Ticonderoga.

"I find from letters from below," he wrote to Washington on the 26th, "that an idea prevails that Fort Edward is a strong and regular fortification."

"It was once a regular fortification, but there is nothing but the ruins of it left, and they are so utterly defenseless that I have frequently galloped my horse in at one side and out at the other."

"But when it was in the best condition possible, with the best troops to garrison it, and provided with every necessary, it would not have stood two days' siege after the proper batteries had been opened."

"It is situated in a bottom on the banks of the river, and surrounded with hills from which the parade may be seen within pointblank shot."

"I doubt not that it will be said that Fort Miller, Fort Saratoga, and Stillwater are considerable fortifications, of neither of which is there a trace left, although they still retain their names."

Generals Arnold and Lincoln were now with Schuyler.

A council of war, at which all the general officers were present, decided unanimously that no stand could be made at Fort Edward, which was never intended to resist an enemy with artillery.

Further, that the army should cross the Hudson and take position on a high ground out of the forest, near Stillwater or Saratoga.

This move was made immediately, Arnold accompanying Schuyler, while Lincoln went to the eastward into Vermont to rouse the militia there, some of whom were already collected under General Warner.

By July 31st the American army had camped on a hill near Stillwater, about thirty miles north of Albany, while Burgoyne's army had occupied Fort Edward and spread southward along the west bank of the Hudson.

On August 5th Schuyler wrote to Washington:

"By the unanimous advice of all the general officers, I have moved the army to this place."

"Here we proposed to fortify a camp, in expectation that re-enforcements will enable us to keep the ground and prevent the enemy from penetrating further into the country."

"But if it should be asked from whence I expect re-enforcement, I should be at a loss for an answer, not having heard a word from Massachusetts on my repeated application, nor am I certain that Connecticut will afford us any succor."

"Our Continental force is daily decreasing by desertion, sickness, and loss in skirmishes with the enemy, and not a man in the militia now with me will remain above one week longer, and while our force is diminishing, that of the enemy augments by a constant acquisition of Tories."

"But if by any means we could be put in a situation of attacking the enemy and giving them a repulse, their retreat would be so extremely difficult that, in all probability, they would lose the greater part of their army."

This was the darkest moment of the campaign.

Events were about to occur which would strengthen the Americans and weaken the British.

Although Schuyler could not know it, New England was gathering and sending the men whom he needed so much.