ANALYSIS: Saratoga, June – October 1777

Instructor Notes:

* Animated actions within a slide is annotated by (*Click Slide*)
* *Italics* denote either discussion questions or doctrinal terms. Doctrinal terms will sometimes be followed with the FM reference in (Parenthesis).

**SLIDE 1** – Introduction. The Battle of Saratoga is essentially two separate engagements separated by two and one half weeks, but fought in the same general area. It becomes the turning point of the war and transforms the war from an isolated revolution of colonies against their mother country, to a ‘world war’ involving several European counties.

**SLIDE 2**

* 1. Strategic Overview:

The British strategic plan of 1776 had sought to eventually unite the New York invasion force with their forces based in Canada (*Click Slide*). Thus, while Howe battled Washington in New York and New Jersey, Sir Guy Carlton, commanding the British forces in Canada, drove south and had several tactical victories. However for strategic reasons, he felt his advances toward New York could not be held and eventually withdrew back to Canada. By the end of 1776, while the British had overwhelming tactical victories throughout New York and New Jersey (with the exception of Washington’s raid on Trenton and Princeton) the situation was strategically empty. Washington’s Army still existed and the New England States remained attached to the rest of the colonies. (*Click Slide*)

Thus, the overall goal to join forces and cut NE off was still alive in 1777 and the English Secretary of State for America, Lord George Germain, was in a position to complete what had begun the year prior. However, in February, 1777, instead of focusing the British forces on one goal, he approved two separate, diverging campaigns. At the end of the 1776 campaign, General Howe, the overall commander of British forces in America, decided to shift the primary objective of his New York forces to the capture of the American capital of Philadelphia (*Click Slide*), while also agreeing to support a Canadian force in their movement south, at an undetermined time, with an undetermined strength (*Click Slide*). This vague support, however, was dependent on reinforcements that England was having difficulty supplying. After Germain approved Howe’s plan, he was approached by MG John Burgoyne, Carlton’s deputy commander in Canada, who was in England to promote his plan to have 8,000 regulars attack south and link up with Howe’s troops in Albany (*Click Slide*). He would then become part of Howe’s command. To assist this movement, a small force under Colonel Barry St. Leger would conduct a supporting attack from the west along the Mohawk River to draw forces away from the two main attacks (*Click Slide*). The Royal Secretary also approved this second plan and thus Burgoyne would move south on 20 June while Howe, on 23 July began his movement away from Burgoyne, by sea.

DISCUSSION: (*NOTE: This discussion can be covered here or at the end of the section after the battle has been discussed*) Analyze the British plan using the POW of Unity of Command/Effort, Objective, Offensive, (FM 3-0) and the concept of interior lines(FM 3-0, Para 5-35):

UNITY OF COMMAND/EFFORT: *For every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander.*  While General Howe was the de facto overall commander of forces in North America, he did not establish himself as the overall commander to accomplish the strategic goal of isolating New England. Howe was more interested in taking Philadelphia and did not coordinate his effort with Burgoyne’s operation. Further, Burgoyne’s force from Canada would not fall under his direct command until it reached Albany. This loose chain of command arrangement was exacerbated by the long line of communication back to Great Britain and the Crown’s overall coordinator, Lord Germain.

One could argue that while there was no Unity of Command, there was Unity of Effort. Germain saw these two operations as mutually supporting. Both movements forced the American’s to choose between either defending against the northern or southern attack. Either way, the Americans could not possibly defeat both movements – one would surely be victorious. The British believed that the Americans did not have sufficient forces to defeat both attacks. However, Germain discounted some important points:

- The Americans did not put the same emphasis on the capital as Howe did. Washington’s main objective was to keep his army alive, not prevent the fall of his capital.

- Howe elected to move his forces by sea and attack Philadelphia from Chesapeake Bay rather than attack it directly using an overland route (where Washington was located). This gave Washington the ability to keep his options open. Since Howe decided to bypass Washington’s blocking forces, it now gave him *interior lines* between Washington’s army and the northern forces. Washington had the option to send forces north, which he did (1,500 continental troops), while simultaneously attacking Howe at the time and place of his choosing (which he also did at Brandywine). While it appears that the British were on the OFFENSIVE by attacking Philadelphia, they had in reality lost the initiative (OFFENSIVE: *Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative*) because the Americans were able to successfully deal with each British threat sequentially on their own terms.

The British Strategic plan also violated the POW of OBJECTIVE: *Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.* While the overall objective – cutting off New England - appeared to be a clearly *defined*, *decisive* and *attainable* objective, the actions of the two separate attacking forces were not. The capture of Philadelphia was not *decisive.* The Americans, who’s 13 colonies did not apply significant value to their central capital, simply moved the Continental Congress 40 miles west to York*.* The northern attack was not *attainable* as it relied on a supporting attack from New York City, which was also never *clearly defined*. [As a spur to debate, what if Burgoyne had moved more quickly? Would that have made the northern attack more attainable?]

* 1. Comparison of Forces:

British Forces:

Leadership: Northern force lead by MG “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne.

* Very ambitious officer: Wanted to promote himself and seek glory
* Married into Nobility and wealth and became a soldier and politician (was a member of parliament – not an unusual occurrence during this time period)
* He enjoyed his wealth and comforts, and was often in trouble due to high debts.
* He was an expert cavalryman and understood the importance and utilization of artillery.
* Was the junior ranking general to be sent to support Gage during the Boston disaster of 1775. He was present to see the high price paid in attacking fortified patriots at Bunker Hill.

Troops:

* Assets: Burgoyne expected the regular forces in Canada to contain 8,000. However, he only had:
  + 4,000 English regulars
  + 3,000 German Mercenaries
* Limitations:
  + Only 650 Canadians (Burgoyne had hoped for 2,000 – He did not foresee this to be a large problem as he thought that Tories would join the cause along the way – this never happened)
  + Only 500 Indians (Burgoyne was hoping for 1,000). This number decreased as the expedition advanced (many disserted along the way). This situation left Burgoyne’s army blind as Indians provided much of the intelligence collection for his force.
  + St. Leger’s Force had very few Regulars:
    - 500 English, German and Canadian Soldiers
    - 900 Indians
    - This force was to rely on recruiting the local Tory Population which also never materialized.
  + A large baggage train with many personal effects. – This would slow his expedition down considerably.
* Combat Multiplier: 52 Cannon – Burgoyne brought these guns to insure he could meet and defeat any fortified American positions. He had a very good appreciation of American capabilities when dug in (Bunker Hill). While these cannon, along with the large baggage train would slow the expedition, they would prove to be a great combat multiplier once battle was joined.

American Forces:

Leadership: Horatio Gates:

* Originally an English born professional soldier who, after fighting in North America during the F & I war, eventually retired from the military and moved to the Colonies in 1773 as a private citizen.
* Became the first Adjutant General of the American Army
* Good organizational skills
* Well liked by the NE forces
* EXTREMLY cautious commander, who always supported the course of action requiring the least risk.

Troops:

* Assets/Limitations:
  + 6,500 Continentals
  + 1,500 Militia
    - The Militia was not well trained and their enlistments were short. They were, however, motivated to protect their homeland. This is a great advantage over German Mercenaries who only fought to be paid.
    - This number grew as time went on. By the end of the Campaign, local Militia would swell his total ranks to 14,000 troops.

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* Combat Multipliers:
  + 300 Rifleman under Colonel Daniel Morgan (additionally, Morgan’s mere presence was a motivating factor). While the Kentucky rifle they carried had a much slower rate of fire than the smoothbore musket, they were capable of very accurate, aimed shots at great ranges. (Smoothbore muskets, carried by the majority of troops on both sides, were very inaccurate, and were intended to provide a high volume of fire needed for the linear tactics of the day). Morgan’s Rifleman were continuously teamed with Major Henry Dearborne’s Continental Light Infantryman, who complimented the accurate, slow rifle fire with massed, rapid, smoothbore defensive fire.
  + Benedict Arnold – Extremely aggressive Commander and well liked/respected by the troops. He is given command of the American left wing. As we shall see, Arnold may have been the most important asset the Americans had during the battle.
  + Note: The Americans also had about 40 cannon, but these never left Bemis Heights, and saw no action during the engagements.

**SLIDE 3**

* 1. Opening Moves

On 20 June, Burgoyne began movement south toward Albany (*Click Slide*). Initially the expedition met with great success with St. Leger’s rapid movement to Oswego and Fort Ticonderoga’s fall on 2 July without a fight. However, an aggressive campaign by the initial American Northern Army Commander (a New York Dutchman named Schuyler – liked by New York troops, but not trusted by New Englander’s) to block the British path with fallen trees and ambushes considerably slowed Burgoyne’s movement (*Click Slide*). This allows for the American strength to grow and establish defensive positions south of Saratoga. Burgoyne finally arrived at Fort Edward on 30 July, and proceeded to build up supplies for the continued movement toward Albany.

Prior to and following Burgoyne’s arrival at Fort Edwards, two events occurred:

26 July: (*Click Slide*) General Howe sailed for the Chesapeake Bay with his forces to capture Philadelphia.

3 August: (*Click Slide*) St. Leger laid siege to Fort Stanwix. An American relief column was formed under General Nicholas Herkimer (*Click Slide*), but was defeated by St. Leger on 6 August at the Battle of Oriskany (*Click Slide*).

Burgoyne’s attempts at gaining supplies and forces were hampered by a long and poorly resourced supply line. Therefore, to get his expedition back on track, Burgoyne looked to raid American supplies to his front. He established a small force under Colonel Baum, and sent him forward to capture the American magazine at Bennington (*Click Slide*). However, a strong New England militia force, gathered just the week prior under New Hampshire Colonel John Stark, surrounded, attacked and killed/captured this force, resulting in Burgoyne losing 900 troops that he could ill afford (*Click Slide*).

Burgoyne then learned of two additional blows to his expedition:

* Carlton informed him that he would not replace the 900 troops that Burgoyne had left to occupy Fort Ticonderoga
* Benedict Arnold, who recently arrived in the Northern Army to assist in the effort, volunteered to make a second attempt to lift the siege at Fort Stanwix. (*Click Slide*) Lacking sufficient troops, he utilized a half-wit prisoner, known as Hon Yost, to inform St. Leger’s Indian allies that 3,000 continental troops were approaching. Already suffering from low moral, and often regarding the insane as holy men, the Indians, which were a majority of St. Leger’s forces, quickly dispersed, forcing St. Leger to give up the siege, and withdrew back to Oswego (*Click Slide*).

Burgoyne was thus forced to decide between two options: withdraw his force back to Canada or attack. To his front he faced a growing American force (now under Gates who fortified a position tied to the Hudson River at high ground know as Bemis Heights) (*Click Slide*) with no diversionary forces to the west, no supporting attack from New York, losses of 1,800 troops to his own forces, very few Tories in the area and a very sporadic supply line due to American attacks to his rear. However, due to his personal drive and his faith in his regulars, Burgoyne decided to continue the attack on the Americans and moved to the west side of the Hudson on 13 September, 1777 which would result in the 1st Engagement of the Battle of Saratoga (*Click Slide*).

**SLIDE 4**

* 1. Burgoyne’s plan of attack

Since many Indians had deserted, and the few left in his army were compromised by American counter-intelligence efforts, Burgoyne had little knowledge of the American forces. He thus planned to split his forces into three columns. In essence, he was conducting a *meeting engagement* and was attempting to develop the situation (*Click Slide*).

**SLIDE 5**

* 1. First Engagement – Sept 19, 1777, Freeman’s Farm

To the west Burgoyne sent BG Simon Fraser with the largest force, 2000 regulars, to swing wide and hopefully gain the American western flank (*Click Slide*). Burgoyne traveled with BG Hamilton who had 1,100 troops and moved up the center, (*Click Slide*) while Baron Friedrich von Riedesel, also with 1,100 troops, moved along the river bank to protect the supply train. (*Click Slide*)

Arnold, the American left wing commander, detected the three columns, and identified an American advantage: thick forest prevented the British columns from mutually supporting each other. Arnold argued to Gates that by attacking the British forward of their current position at Bemis Heights, the Americans could defeat each column in turn. Gates, who preferred to leave his army in the Bemis Heights fortifications (oblivious of the danger of being outflanked to the west), finally allowed Morgan’s 300 rifleman and 300 light infantry under Dearborne to move forward (*Click Slide*). After first contact, Arnold moved more troops in to support the initial attack (*Click Slide*). Fraser’s forces joined as well (*Click Slide*) and as the battle intensified, Arnold moved back to Bemis Heights to acquire more troops. Unfortunately, Gates was concerned that the battle would get out of hand and ordered Arnold to remain within the fortifications. Now, without their aggressive commander, Riedesel arrived on the American flank with 500 men and two cannon (*Click Slide*), the Americans were forced to withdraw (*Click Slide*). But the damage to the British was done: Their attack was checked and their losses were again more than they can afford:

* + - British Losses: Over 600
    - American Losses: 319

**SLIDE 6**

Burgoyne, against the counsel of his subordinate commanders, wanted to attack again immediately. Before he could begin, however, he received word from General Clinton, Howe’s deputy commander in New York City, that reinforcements had finally arrived from England. Clinton planned to move north with them as soon as possible. (*Click Slide*) Burgoyne therefore elected to fortify his position (*Click Slide*) and allow the situation to develop. He hoped that Clinton’s effort would sufficiently threaten Gate’s rear and draw American forces away from Bemis Heights. But time was against Burgoyne at this point: his supply line was cut by the Americans putting his troops on 1/3 rations at this point, sickness was rampant, and the desertion rate was high. To complicate matters, Clinton had downgraded his effort from New York City to little more than a weak diversionary feint and stopped well short of Albany. (*Click Slide*) He did not want to involve himself in Burgoyne’s impending disaster. Meanwhile, Burgoyne was unaware of Clinton’s decision not to join him because messengers had been intercepted by the Americans. Thus, by 5 October, not knowing the status of the southern forces, Burgoyne was desperate for a solution and decided to conduct a *reconnaissance in force* (FM 3-90, Para. 13-39). This movement resulted in the second engagement of the battle. (*Click Slide*)

**SLIDE 7**

* 1. Second Engagement – 7 October 1777. Barber’s Wheatfield and Brymann’s Redoubt

Burgoyne assembled 2000 men and 10 cannon (*Click Slide*), and began a movement to the south-west. If this reconnaissance was a success, Burgoyne planned to attack with the full strength of his army the following day.

In the interim between the two engagements, the Americans were faced with a crisis of their own. Due to continual conflict between Arnold and Gates (primarily due to Gate’s omission of Arnold’s efforts in his report to congress on the initial engagement), Arnold had been relieved of command. Thus, it was Gates that sent a force forward to stop Burgoyne’s second attack. With the report of the British movement, he stated: “Well then, order on Morgan to begin the game.”

Poor’s Brigade, moving out second after Morgan’s forces, hit the British left flank first (*Click Slide*). Due to a longer and more difficult route, Morgan hit the British right flank later in the day (*Click Slide*), with Learned’s Brigade finally filling in the center position between the two (*Click Slide*). (*Double envelopment* – FM 3-90, Forms of Maneuver, Para. 3-29) Arnold, although technically relieved, could not be kept from the battlefield. On his own initiative, Arnold left Bemis Heights and arrived with Learned’s unit in an agitated state (some reports called him drunk, other’s called him mad) and took over command of the battle by force of will.

The British line bent to this onslaught, but did not break due in large part to their combat multipliers: artillery and the strength of their officers. However, the American combat multiplier, sharpshooters with Pennsylvania Rifles, quickly eroded those officers. The engagement finally ended when one of Morgan’s sharpshooters (Tim Murphy) hit and fatally wounded BG Fraser. With the loss of this key officer, Burgoyne lost his will to continue the fight and the British conducted a very disorderly withdrawal back to their fortifications in the vicinity of Freeman’s Farm (*Click Slide*).

Arnold, driving the enemy from the field, attempted a *pursuit* (FM 3-90, CH 7) of the disorganized British, but was unable to take advantage of their disorganized withdrawal before they reached the safety of their fortifications. The Americans were thus forced to conduct a hasty *attack* (FM 3-90, CH 5) on Balcarres’ Redoubt, which proved futile (*Click Slide*). With this failure to take the British positions, Arnold then observed Learned’s Brigade moving north, to the rear of the American lines (*Click Slide*). He took control of this unit, and, with continued frenzy led an attack between Balcarres’ Redoubt and Breymann’s Redoubt. They *penetrated* (FM 3-90, Para 3-25) (*Click Slide*). the enemy line forced the German mercenaries holding Breymann's Redoubt to retreat (*Click Slide*). However, Arnold was wounded in the leg just as the redoubt fell, and the American attack stalled. Just as Riedesel’s flank attack on 19 September forced the Americans to withdraw, the high ground of Brymann’s Redoubt provided the Americans with a mastery of the British line. Burgoyne was once again forced to withdraw from the field late that evening (*Click Slide*). The British had lost almost 900 killed, wounded and captured vs. the American losses of 150. Burgoyne moved north on 8 October and occupied a position near Saratoga, but was unable to withdraw further north as his lines of communications had been cut by the Americans. He therefore surrendered his command on 16 October 1777.

* 1. Strategic Result:

-The British were prevented from cutting off New England

-Credibility of the American cause was increased greatly.

-France joins the American effort – The Revolution now became a global war.

* 1. Analysis:

Note: The instructor can discuss the following tactical topics either during the BA or at the end:

September 19 – Freeman’s Farm

*Was Burgoyne’s OBJECTIVE clearly defined?* - No. Burgoyne’s lack of intelligence resulted in his plan to attack with three separate columns that were unable to support each other. This action did not represent a clearly defined vision. Burgoyne seems to be just throwing out his troops, and letting the resulting situation dictate his next action. At best, his objective seemed to be defeat the American Army and seize Albany. A better intelligence gathering operation and a better defined attack plan was in order for Burgoyne’s decreasing forces. While his Western column was weighted in hopes of enveloping his opponent, there was no coordination with the other two columns. Thus, instead of a deliberate, MASSED attack on the Americans, the British essentially conducted a dispersed, *movement to contact*. (FM 3-90, CH 4).

*Did Gates have the correct plan of keeping his forces in place at the fortifications on Bemis Height?* - While it may be said that by keeping his forces behind the fortifications gave his soldiers an advantage, given that a portion of the Army was untrained militia, Gates was violating the POW of Offensive. Since he was giving up the initiative to Burgoyne, he was allowing Burgoyne the choices of when and where to attack. Any advantage that the fortifications gave to the Americans (which in Gates defense, had been proven at Bunker Hill) could have been taken away from him by the British ability to occupy high ground to the west, and destroy those fortifications with their combat multiplier – Artillery. The ability of the British to outflank the Americans had also been proven at Long Island.

*Was Arnold’s move forward to attack each column correct?* Yes. The three British columns were not able to quickly support each other due to the heavily wooded area that they were moving through. Conversely, the situation was perfect for Morgan’s sharpshooters They could use well aimed rifle fire against the enemy without having to face masses of regulars in conventional battle. What saved the British columns from destruction however, was the Americans violation of Unity of Command/Unity of Effort. While Gates was the overall commander, he did not share the same concept of the operation as his commander forward, Arnold, who was attempting to take advantage of the British vulnerability. Due to Gates’ insistence that ½ of his army should remain within the works at Bemis Heights, Arnold was denied the troops needed to finish the job of destroying each column separately. Mass was also violated as Arnold was only able to piecemeal his forces into the fight, while the British did the same. It was the appearance of Riedesel on the American flank that tipped the scale in the British favor and forced the Americans to withdraw. A massed attack on Hamilton’s column could have destroyed it in time for the Americans to then destroy Fraser and Riedesel in turn prior to their ability to commit to the original engagement.

October 7 – Barber’s Wheatfield/Breymann’s Redoubt

*Given that Burgoyne’s forces were rapidly decreasing, supplies were running dangerously thin, and the disposition of Clinton’s force was unknown, was Burgoyne correct in attacking on October 7?* While there is no right answer here, this is a good time to open the discussion to the cadets and allow them to come to their own conclusion about options as the British Commander.

Points that should be part of the discussion:

* The continued lack of British reconnaissance, even though it has been 20 days since the last attack.
* The piecemeal nature of Burgoyne’s attack – like Gates before him, he left a large portion of his army to the rear (granted, this is considered a reconnaissance in force, but it was an incredible risk to take such a large force when his army was shrinking rapidly – he had, in effect, split his force, and endangered the ability of his main body to attack as such the next day). Like the 1st engagement, he had endangered a column of 2000 men who could not be supported by the rest of the army.
* Burgoyne’s continued faith in the English Regular to defeat the enemy, no matter what the odds. (overconfidence/underestimation of the enemy) Possibly a smaller scouting force to determine enemy strength, then a ‘roll of the dice’ with everything he had to mass on American weakness would have been a better option.
* The need to do *something* – retreat could mean just as much a defeat as loss in battle.

*Why did the Americans win the Battle of Saratoga?*

* One important point to make in this battle is that it was a very ugly victory. The Americans violated almost as many POWs as the British, yet were still victorious.
* The Americans strength in sharpshooters in a densely wooded area. This was a great combat multiplier that stripped the British of much of its leadership.
* Poor British overall strategy that just added up against them:
  + Uncoordinated efforts between Northern and Southern commanders – Burgoyne was left without a critical supporting effort to the south.
  + Inability to properly supply the troops from Canada (the need for forage lead to a critical loss of troops at Bennington)
  + Loss of Offensive – Washington was able to divert continental soldier at will – The British, while on the offensive, did not adhere to the POW of OFFENSIVE. The British did not *retain the initiative* and the Americans were never forced to react. They were able to attack just as easily as the British were.
* Possibly the most important point to make here is the significance of just one man in a battle. This is a classic example of one man making a difference, and it can be seen on three levels:
  + Burgoyne’s personal drive for a victory and his overconfidence in the British Regular. Another commander may have turned back the expedition after the continued setbacks the British faced in the events leading up to the battle (Carlton saw a strategic flaw in his position the year prior, and turned back, even though he had continuous tactical victories).
  + The loss of Fraser on October 7th shattered the British resolve to stand and fight. The loss of this pivotal figure was too much for the morale of the British to take, and forced them to fall back to their fortifications.
  + Possibly the most powerful example of one man making a difference in this battle is the eventual traitor of America, Benedict Arnold. The Battle would not have taken the turn it had without this aggressive commander present. History may have recorded this as the Battle of Bemis Heights, as that is where the American Commander, Gates, wanted it to occur. On both September 19th and October 7th, it was Arnold’s will that inspired the men to attack. It is not a coincidence that when he was detained back at Bemis Heights on the first day, and wounded on the second day, the American effort halted. It is quite possible, had he not taken a traitorous route later in the war, he may have been known as one of America’s greatest generals.