

Desperate Days

FIND OUT

- What battles were fought in the Middle States?
- Why was the Battle of Saratoga important?
- How did volunteers from other lands help the Americans?

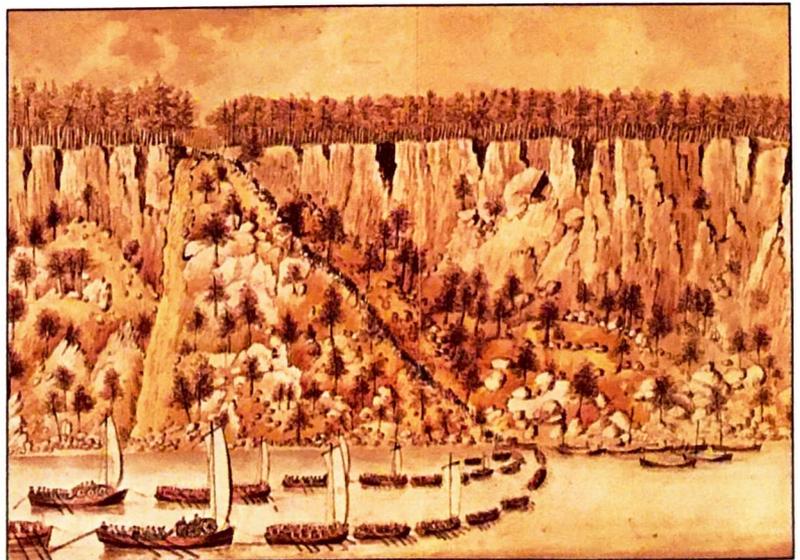
VOCABULARY cavalry, neutral

One morning in late June 1776, rifleman Daniel McCurtin glanced out his window at New York harbor. A startling sight met his eyes. He saw “something resembling a wood of pine trees trimmed.” As he watched, the forest moved across the water. Suddenly, he realized that the trees were the masts of ships!

“I could not believe my eyes. . . when in about ten minutes, the whole bay was full of shipping as ever it could be. I declare that I thought all London was afloat.”

Pursuing General Washington

In November 1776, the Continental Army retreated from New York into New Jersey. The British followed closely behind. This sketch shows British troops landing at Fort Lee, New Jersey. **Geography** What river did the two armies have to cross to reach New Jersey?



By noon, a British fleet was anchored offshore. General Howe and his redcoats had arrived in force.

The arrival of the British fleet in New York marked a new stage in the war. Most early battles of the American Revolution were fought in New England. In mid-1776, the heavy fighting shifted to the Middle States. There, the Continental Army suffered through the worst days of the war.

Campaign in New York

Washington had expected Howe's attack and had led his forces south from Boston to New York City. His raw army, however, was no match for the British. Howe had about 34,000 troops and 10,000 sailors. He also had ships to ferry them ashore. Washington had fewer than 20,000 poorly trained troops. Worse, he had no navy.

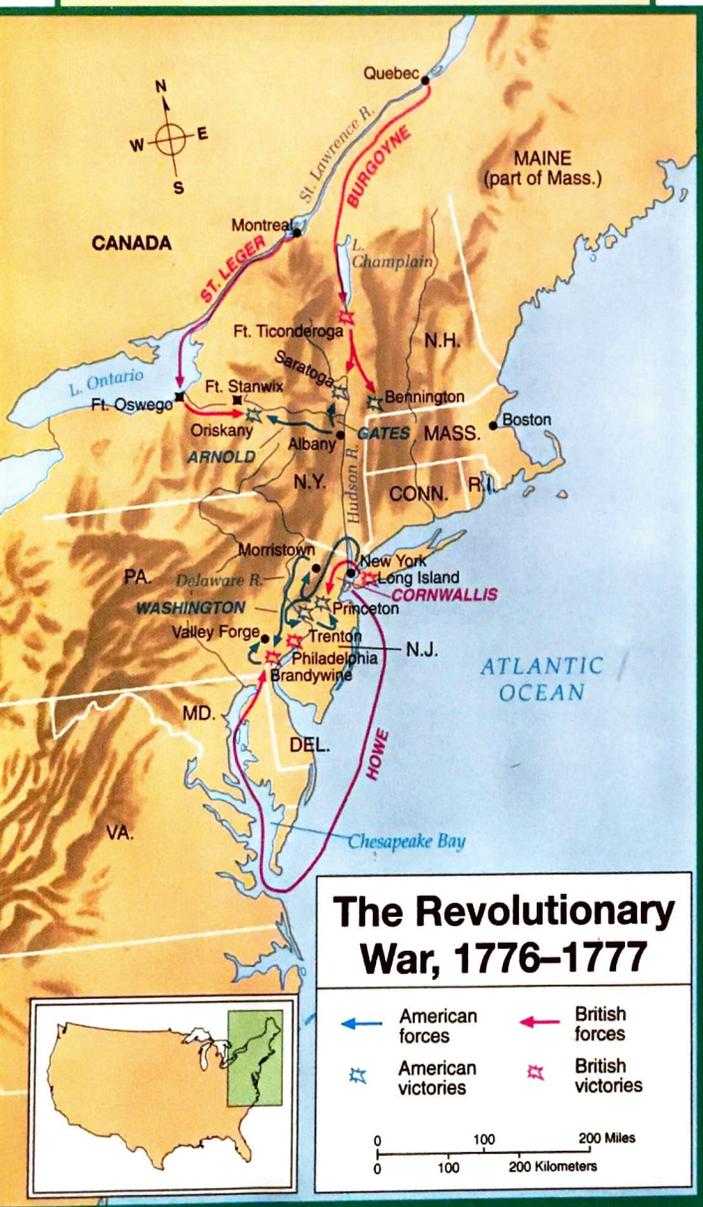
Washington did not know exactly where Howe would land. He sent some forces to Long Island. Others he sent to Manhattan.

On the run. In August, Howe's army pushed ashore on Long Island. In the **Battle of Long Island**, more than 1,400 Americans were killed, wounded, or captured. The rest retreated to Manhattan. The British followed. To avoid capture, Washington hurried north.

MAP STUDY

In 1776 and 1777, American and British forces fought many battles over a large land area. An American victory at the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777 marked a major turning point of the war.

1. What route did St. Leger's army take after leaving Montreal?
2. Who won the Battle of Brandywine?
3. **Understanding Causes and Effects** Based on the map, why do you think many Patriots left Philadelphia in 1777?



Throughout the autumn, Washington fought a series of battles with Howe's army. In November, he crossed the Hudson River into New Jersey. Pursued by the British, the Americans retreated across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. (See the map at left.)

Nathan Hale. During the campaign for New York, Washington needed information about Howe's forces. Nathan Hale, a young Connecticut officer, slipped behind British lines and returned with the details. Soon after, the British captured Hale. They tried and condemned him to death. As Hale walked to the gallows, he is said to have declared: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

New Hope for Americans

Months of campaigning took a toll on the Continental Army. In December 1776, Washington described his troops as sick, dirty, and "so thinly clad as to be unfit for service." Every day, soldiers fled camp to return home. Washington wrote to his brother: "I am wearied to death. I think the game is pretty near up."

The Crisis. Thomas Paine had retreated with the army through New Jersey. Once again, he took up his pen. This time, he wrote *The Crisis*, urging Americans to support the army.

“These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it *now* deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”

Grateful for Paine's inspiring words, Washington had *The Crisis* read aloud to his troops.

A bold move. The Americans needed more than words to help their cause, how-

ever. General Washington decided on a bold move—a surprise attack on Trenton.

On Christmas night, Washington secretly led his troops across the icy Delaware River. Soldiers shivered as spray from the river froze on their faces. Once ashore, they marched through swirling snow. “Soldiers, keep by your officers,” Washington urged.

Early on December 26, the Americans surprised the Hessian troops guarding Trenton and took most of them prisoner. An American summed up the **Battle of Trenton**: “Hessian population of Trenton at 8 A.M.—1,408 men and 39 officers; Hessian population at 9 A.M.—0.”

Cheered by victory. British General Charles Cornwallis set out at once to retake Trenton and capture Washington. Late on January 2, 1777, he saw the lights of Washington’s campfires. “At last we have run down the old fox,” he said, “and we will bag him in the morning.”

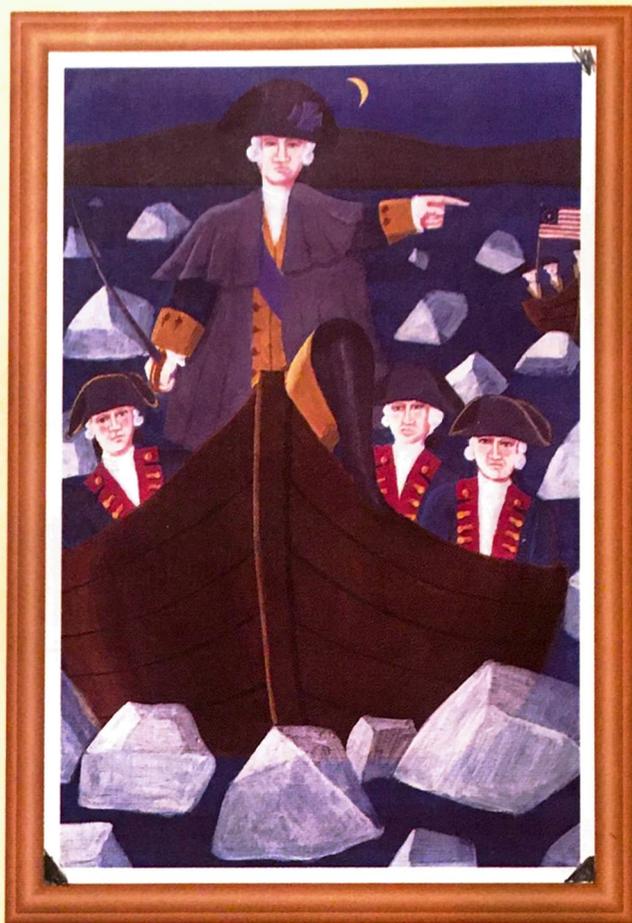
Washington fooled Cornwallis. He left the fires burning and slipped behind British lines to attack Princeton. There, the Continental Army won another victory. From Princeton, Washington moved to Morristown, where the army spent the winter. The victories at Trenton and Princeton gave the Americans new hope.

A New British Strategy

In London, British officials were dismayed by the army’s failure to crush the rebels. Early in 1777, General John Burgoyne (buhr GOIN) presented George III with a new plan for victory. If British troops cut off New England from the other colonies, he argued, the war would soon be over.

Burgoyne wanted three British armies to march on Albany from different directions. They would crush American forces there. Then, in control of the Hudson River, the British could stop the flow of soldiers and supplies from New England to Washington.

ART GALLERY OUR COMMON HERITAGE



OSCAR DE MEJO

Crossing the Delaware, 1896

*On Christmas Eve 1776, Washington led his troops across the icy Delaware River to surprise Hessian troops dug in at Trenton, New Jersey. In this striking painting, Oscar de Mejo, an Italian-born American artist, captures the drama of Washington’s crossing. De Mejo has a deep interest in American history and has painted many scenes from the nation’s past. **The Arts** What impression does this painting give of George Washington?*

Brandywine and Germantown. Burgoyne's plan called for General Howe to march on Albany from New York City. George III, however, wanted Howe to capture Philadelphia first.

In July 1777, Howe sailed from New York to the Chesapeake Bay. (See the map on page 170.) Despite Washington's efforts to stop him, Howe captured Philadelphia. He then went on to defeat the Americans at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. Howe now retired to comfortable quarters in Philadelphia for the winter. Washington retreated to Valley Forge, where he set up his own makeshift camp.

Meanwhile, two other British armies under Barry St. Leger (lay ZHAIR) and Burgoyne marched from Canada toward Albany. St. Leger tried to take Fort Stanwix. However, Benedict Arnold drove him back with a strong American army.

Success at Saratoga. Only Burgoyne was left to march on Albany. His army moved slowly because it had many heavy baggage carts to drag through the woods. To slow Burgoyne further, Patriots cut down trees to block the route and dammed up streams to create swampy bogs.

Burgoyne retook Fort Ticonderoga. He then sent troops into Vermont to find food and horses. Patriots attacked the redcoats. At the Battle of Bennington, they wounded or captured nearly 1,000 British.

Burgoyne's troubles grew. The Green Mountain Boys hurried into New York to help the American forces. At the village of Saratoga, the Americans surrounded the British. When Burgoyne tried to break free, the Americans beat him back. Realizing he was trapped, Burgoyne surrendered his army to the Americans on October 17, 1777.

A Powerful Ally

The American victory at the **Battle of Saratoga** was a turning point in the war. It ended the British threat to New England. It

also boosted American spirits at a time when Washington's army was suffering defeats in Pennsylvania. Most important, it convinced France to become an ally of the United States.

In 1776, the Continental Congress had sent Benjamin Franklin to Paris. His job was to persuade the French king, Louis XVI, to help the Americans with weapons and other badly needed supplies. The Congress also wanted France to declare war on Britain. France had a strong navy that could stand up to the British.

The French were still angry about their defeat by the British in the French and Indian War. But Louis XVI did not want to help the colonists openly unless he was sure they could win. Saratoga provided that proof.

In February 1778, France became the first nation to sign a treaty with the United States. In it, Louis XVI recognized the new nation and agreed to provide military aid.

Cold Winter at Valley Forge

French aid arrived too late to help Washington's ragged army at Valley Forge. During the long, cold winter of 1777–1778, the Continental Army suffered severe hardships in Pennsylvania.

American soldiers shivered in damp, drafty huts. Many slept on the frozen ground. They had little or no warm clothing. Some soldiers stood on guard wrapped only in blankets. Many had no shoes, and they wrapped bits of cloth around their feet. As the bitter winter wore on, soldiers suffered from frostbite and disease. An army surgeon from Connecticut wrote about the suffering:

“There comes a Soldier, his bare feet are seen thro his worn-out stockings, his Breeches not sufficient to cover his nakedness. . . his whole appearance pictures a person forsaken & discouraged.”

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Through the Wilderness to Saratoga

The plan seemed simple. All General Burgoyne had to do was lead his men from Canada to Albany. There, they would meet up with two other British forces. They would take control of the Hudson River and drive a wedge between New England and the rest of the colonies. The rebellion, Burgoyne assured his superiors, would soon be over.

Burgoyne set out down Lake Champlain with 9,500 men in June 1777. He was sure he would be in Albany by the end of summer. He did not realize that his planned route of attack crossed lakes, swamps, mountains, and trackless forests. His splendidly equipped army was ill suited to fighting a war in a wilderness.

At first, things went well for the British. They captured Fort Ticonderoga with little opposition. Burgoyne was now supposed to continue southward by way of Lake George to the Hudson River. Instead, he chose to turn east and march overland to the Hudson. That proved a serious mistake.

Burgoyne's advance slowed to a crawl. The army took 24 days to cover 23 miles. Soldiers clothed in wool worked up to their chests in mud to build bridges across streams.

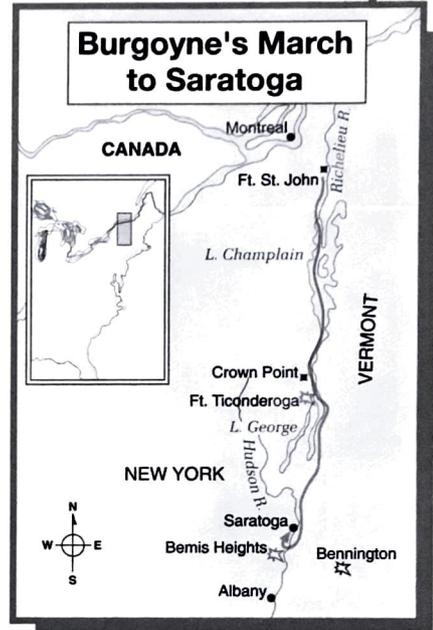
Mosquitoes and "punkies," tiny insects with needle-sharp bites, rose from the

swamps to attack the men. The Americans slowed British progress even more by felling trees and rolling boulders across trails.

Burgoyne's forces finally broke out of the forests in late July. Weakened and short of supplies, they clashed with the Americans several times.

Burgoyne met the main body of the American forces in the area of Bemis Heights, near Saratoga. Outnumbered by more than three to one, Burgoyne surrendered on October 17, 1777. All that remained of his force—5,700 men—became prisoners of war.

■ How did Burgoyne's lack of knowledge about the American land help cause his defeat?



British cannon

ACTIVITY Imagine that you are General Burgoyne. Write a series of telegrams to your superiors in London describing your trek through the wilderness.

When Americans learned about conditions at Valley Forge, they sent help. Women collected food, medicine, warm clothes, and ammunition for the army. They raised money to buy other supplies. Some women, like Martha Washington, wife of the commander, went to Valley Forge to help the sick and wounded.

Help From Abroad

Throughout the war, volunteers from Europe arrived to join the American cause. The Marquis de Lafayette (lah fee YEHT), a young French noble, brought trained soldiers to the United States. He fought at Brandywine and became one of Washington's most trusted friends.

Two Polish officers joined the Americans. Thaddeus Kosciusko (kahs ee UHS koh), an engineer, helped build forts and other defenses. Casimir Pulaski trained **cavalry**, or troops on horseback.

Bernardo de Gálvez. Help for the Americans came from New Spain, too. At first, Spain was **neutral**—it did not take sides in the war between Britain and its colonies. But Bernardo de Gálvez, governor of Spanish Louisiana, favored the Patriots. He secretly supplied medicine, cloth, muskets, and gunpowder to the Americans. He also sent cattle from Texas to feed the Continental Army.

Spain entered the war against Britain in 1779. Gálvez then seized British forts along the Mississippi and Gulf of Mexico. He also drove the British out of West Florida.

A Prussian officer. Friedrich von Steuben (stoo buhn) from Prussia helped train Continental troops. Von Steuben had served in the Prussian army, considered the best in Europe. A lively man, Von Steuben kept everybody in good spirits. At the same time, he taught American soldiers skills, such as how to use bayonets. Until then, many soldiers had used their bayonets to roast meat over a fire!

Although Von Steuben spoke little English, he drilled troops and taught them to

march. He ordered each soldier to put his left hand on the shoulder of the man in front of him. Then, Von Steuben called out in his German accent: "Forward march! One, Two, Three, Four!"

Growing confidence. By spring 1778, the army at Valley Forge was more hopeful. A New Jersey soldier observed:

“The army grows stronger every day. The troops are instructed in a new and so happy a method of marching that they will soon be able to advance with the utmost regularity, even without music and on the roughest grounds.”

While soldiers drilled, Washington and his staff planned new campaigns against the British.

SECTION 3 REVIEW

- 1. Locate:** (a) New York, (b) Delaware River, (c) Princeton, (d) Albany, (e) Saratoga, (f) Valley Forge.
- 2. Identity:** (a) Battle of Long Island, (b) Nathan Hale, (c) Battle of Trenton, (d) John Burgoyne, (e) Battle of Saratoga, (f) Marquis de Lafayette, (g) Thaddeus Kosciusko, (h) Friedrich von Steuben.
- 3. Define:** (a) cavalry, (b) neutral.
- 4.** Why did many Patriots feel discouraged from late 1776 to early 1778?
- 5.** Describe three results of the Battle of Saratoga.
- 6.** Why was an alliance with France important to Americans?
- 7. CRITICAL THINKING Analyzing Ideas**
Why do you think that people from other lands—such as Lafayette, Pulaski, and Gálvez—were willing to risk their lives for the American cause?

ACTIVITY Writing to Learn

Write a newspaper article about a battle of the American Revolution.