

## Battles of Saratoga

General timeline; Location:

The major battles fought September 19, 1777 to October 7, 1777; Hudson River Valley, New York

Generals at the Battle of Saratoga:

Major General John Burgoyne commanded the British and German forces.

Major General Horatio Gates and Brigadier Benedict Arnold commanded the American army.

Size of the Armies at the Battle of Saratoga:

The British force comprised some 7,500 British, Hessians, Canadians and Indians.

The American force was around 12,000 to 15,000 militia and troops.

Context:

In 1777, British strategy called for a three-pronged attack seeking to gain military control of the strategically important Hudson River Valley, with three separate groups converging near Albany.

By August, Burgoyne had captured Fort Ticonderoga, defeated fleeing American troops at Hubbardton (Vermont) and occupied Fort Edward, on the edge of the Hudson River. After a contingent of Burgoyne's troops was defeated in the Battle of Bennington, his reduced forces marched south toward Saratoga in early September.

To disrupt the British advance south, Gates had his troops erect defenses on the crest of Bemis Heights, a series of bluffs from which both the Hudson River and the road can be seen. From there, American artillery had the range to hit both the river and the road.

The Americans also erected a fortified wall a little less than a mile from Bemis Heights. The wall extended about three-quarters of a mile, creating a line shaped like a large "L". Twenty-two cannons were placed behind this defense, providing the Americans with artillery cover.

The two armies engaged in combat at Freeman's Farm on September 19. While the British held off the Americans, their losses were great. Burgoyne's battered forces dug trenches and waited for reinforcements, but none came.

On October 7, Burgoyne launched a second, unsuccessful attack on the Americans at Bemis Heights. With no means of escape, Burgoyne eventually surrendered to Gates on October 17. (Battlefields)

Why was it important?

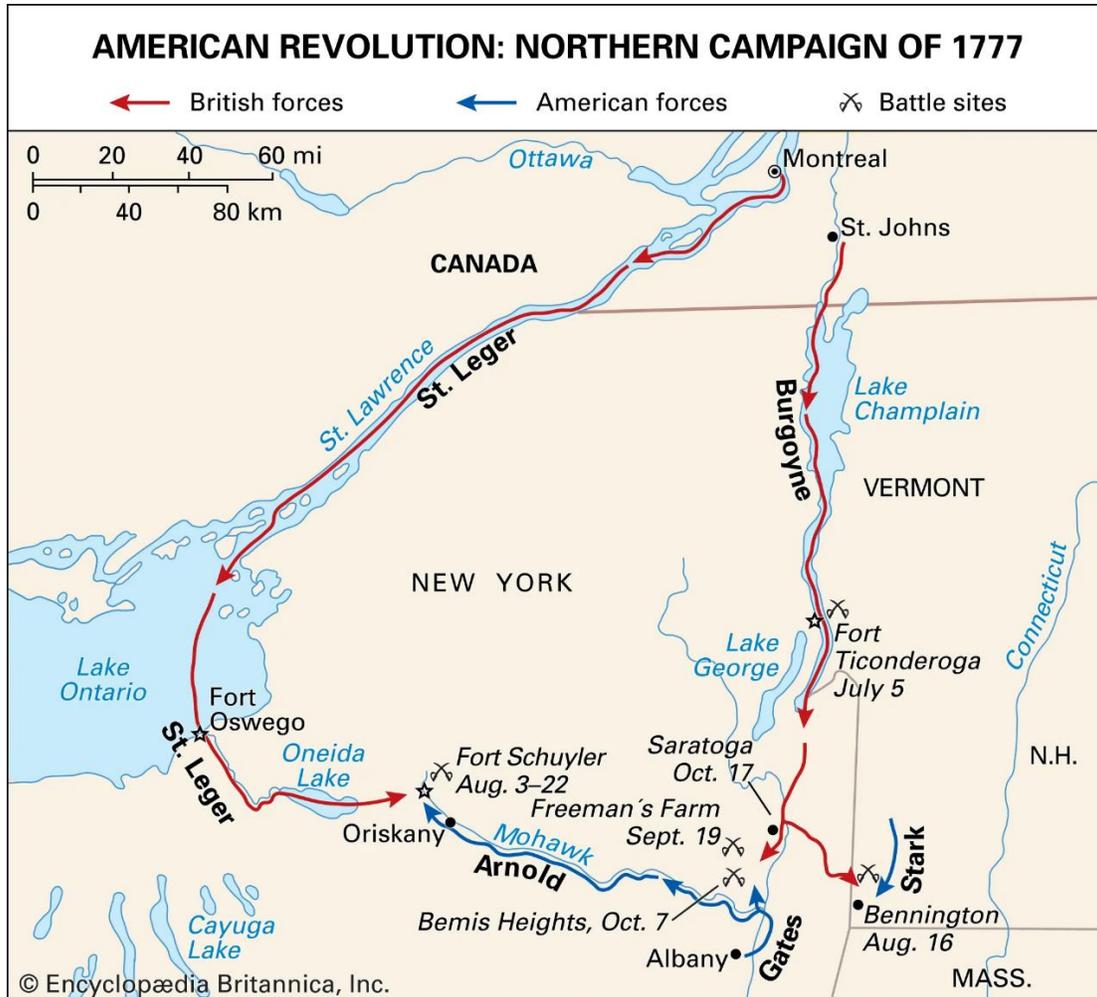
American troops battled and beat a British invasion force, marking the first time in world history that a British Army ever surrendered. (NPS) It was one of the most decisive American battles of the Revolutionary War.

The outcome convinced the French Court of King Louis XVI that the Americans could hold their own against the British Army, sealing the alliance between America and France. France's financial and military support contributed to Washington's victory at Yorktown in 1781, which effectively ended America's War for Independence. (Battlefields)

The failure of the American invasion of Canada in 1775–76 left a large surplus of British troops along the St. Lawrence River. In 1777 these troops were to move south for an attack on Albany, New York.

General John Burgoyne, coming down from Canada via Lake Champlain and Lake George, was to meet at Albany a much smaller British force under Col. Barry St. Leger, who was to advance from Oswego along the Mohawk Valley.

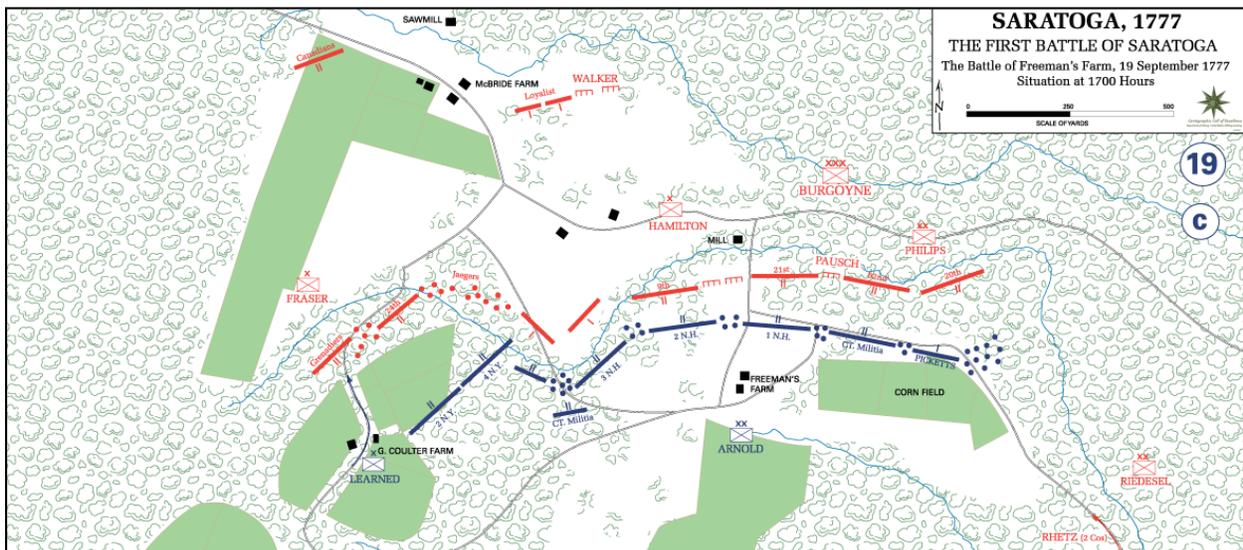
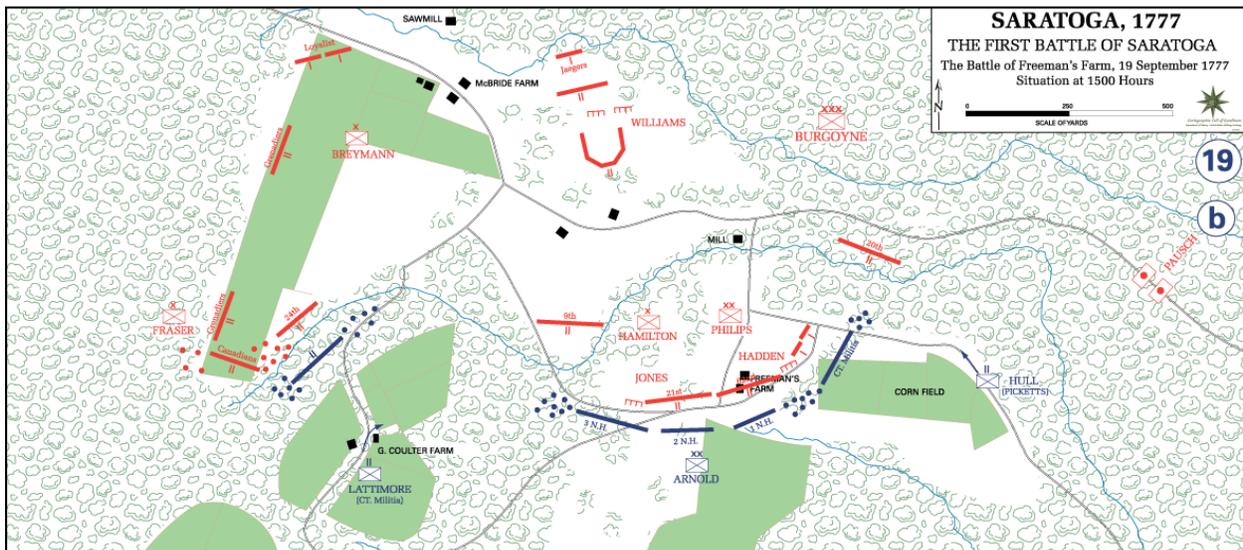
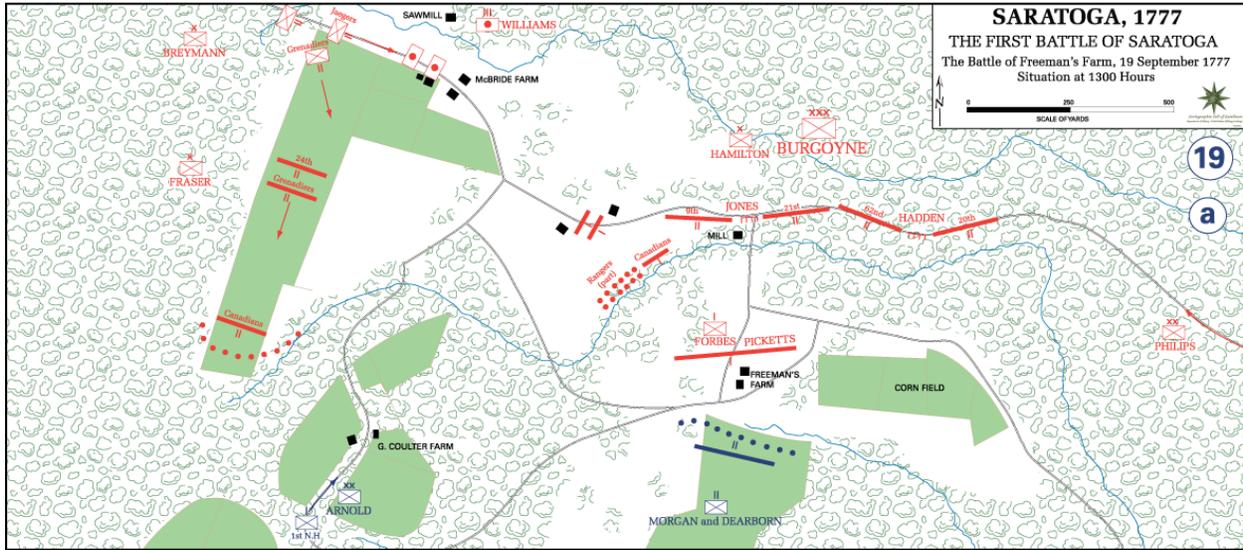
Coming up the Hudson from the south, Gen. Sir William Howe's army was to serve as the third prong of this complex offensive campaign. With Albany and the Hudson Valley in British hands, the patriot hotbed of New England would be effectively severed from the mid-Atlantic colonies.



### Freeman's Farm - September 19, 1777

In September of 1777, American troops were firmly ensconced in defensive positions near the Hudson River, in upstate New York. British General John Burgoyne divided his 7,500 men into three columns to probe the American defenses.

On September 19th, Colonel Daniel Morgan's American light infantry clashed with the middle column near the farm of John Freeman. It was a hotly contested fight, as the battle grew in size and intensity throughout the day. Burgoyne pressed reinforcements forward, threatening to overrun Morgan's position. (Battlefields)



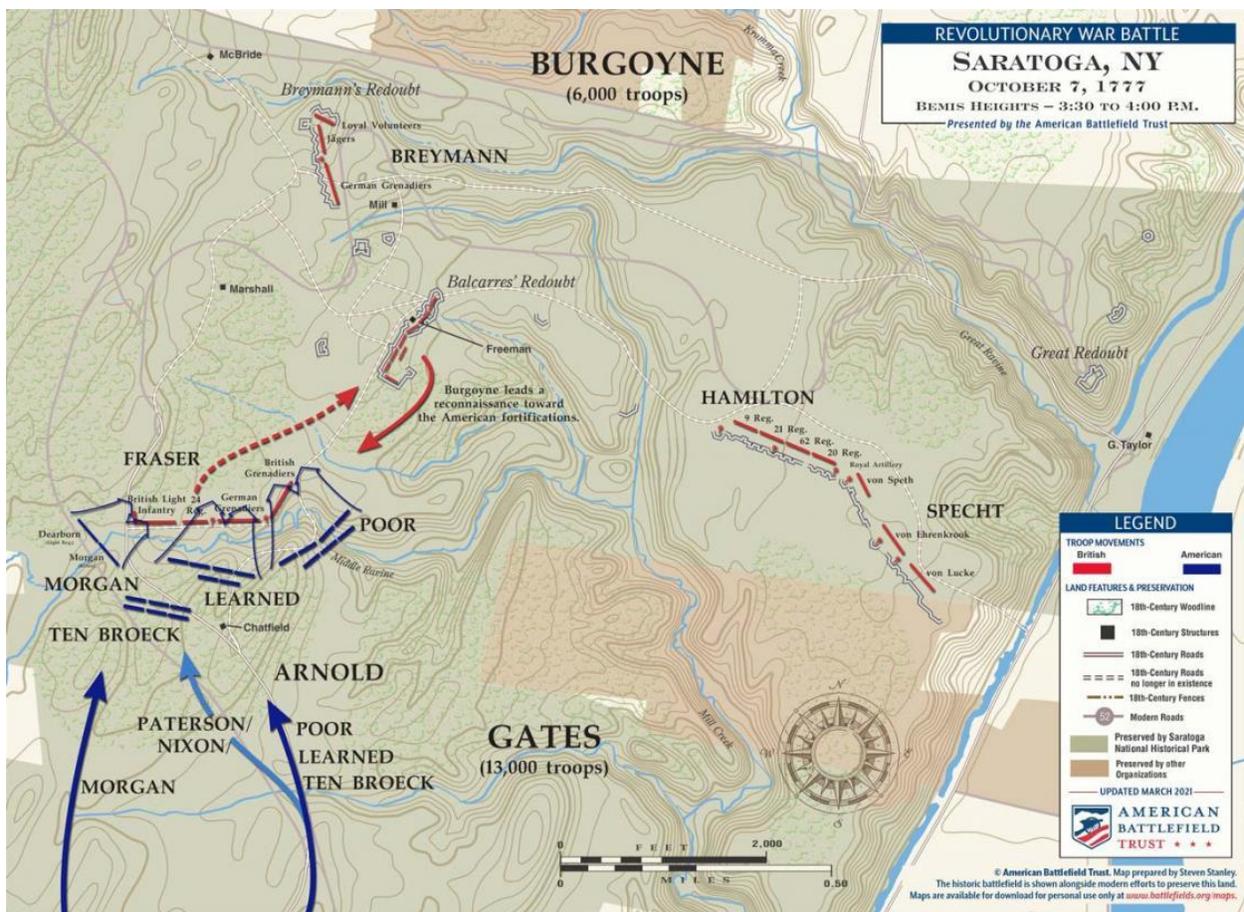
Meantime, American commander Horatio Gates learned of Morgan's predicament and sent fresh troops to bolster the flagging American lines. A see-saw action occurred throughout the day, with the field changing hands several times.

Near the end of the day, the British mounted a fierce attack on the American right flank. Darkness and tenacious fighting saved Morgan and his men. Ultimately, the British Army held the field, but the action had slowed their forward momentum, and they chose to dig in and await reinforcements. (Battlefields)

### Bemis Heights – October 7, 1777

Following intense fighting with the Continental Army in September, at Freeman's Farm, the British Army fortified themselves behind two defensive redoubts (protective barriers) – the larger, better-defended Balcarres Redoubt and the weaker Breymann Redoubt. American forces, led by General Benedict Arnold, managed to take the Breymann Redoubt, which gave them a strong position behind the British lines.

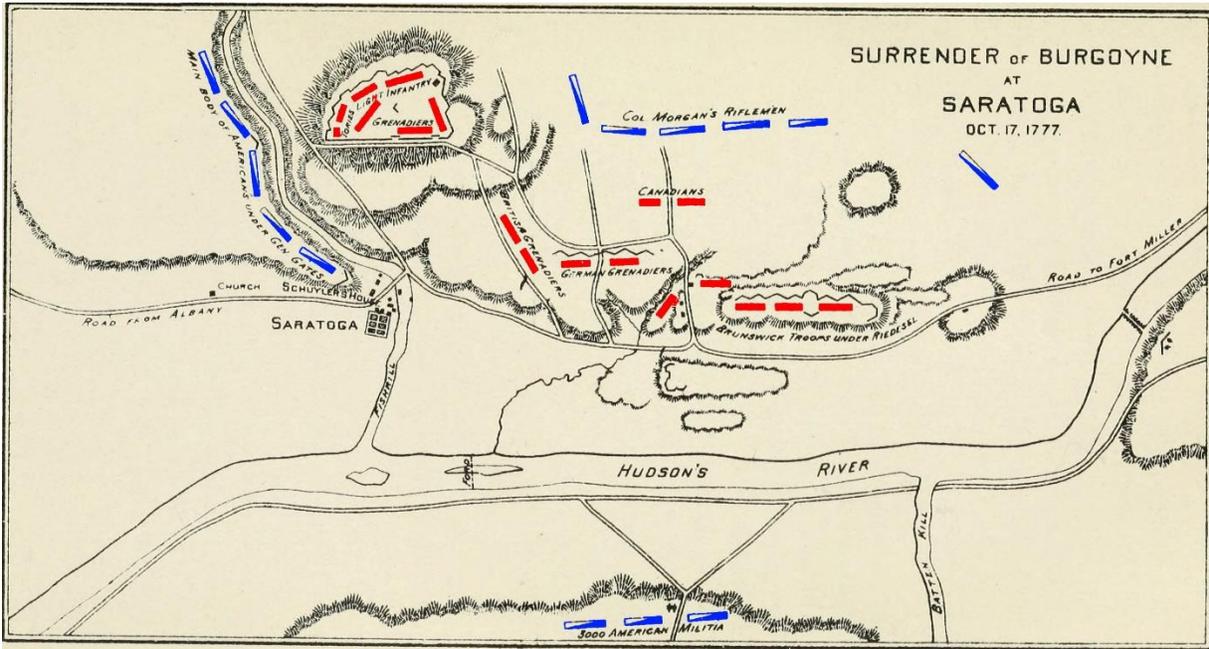
Benedict Arnold galloped into the fray and rallied the Americans in the attack on the Breymann Redoubt. A fellow officer in the Continental Line said that Arnold “behaved more like a madman than a cool and discreet officer.” During this engagement, he sustained a serious wound in his left leg.



By early evening, the Americans secured possession of the Breymann Redoubt and gained a tactical advantage, as it was the far right flank of the British lines.

From here the Americans could easily get behind British lines. Realizing their plight, the British pulled back into their Great Redoubt near the river and held out for several weeks. (Battlefields)

On the morning of October 8, General John Burgoyne's army attempted to escape north, but a cold, hard rain forced them to stop and encamp near the town of Saratoga. Cold, hungry and weary, they dug in and prepared to defend themselves, but within two days the Americans had them surrounded.



After a week's negotiation, Burgoyne's army surrendered on October 17, 1777.



The Battle of Saratoga fought in two stages on September 19 and October 7, 1777, proved to be a turning point in the American struggle for independence.

Saratoga was unquestionably the greatest victory yet won by the Continental Army in terms of prisoners and captured arms and equipment. Nearly 6,000 enemy soldiers were taken, along with 42 cannon and massive quantities of stores. (Army-mil)

Following the American victory, morale among American troops was high. With Burgoyne's surrender of his entire army to Gates, the Americans scored a decisive victory that finally persuaded the French to sign a treaty allying with the United States against Britain, France's traditional enemy.

The entrance of France into the war, along with its financial and military support, in particular its navy, was in the end crucial to Washington's victory at the Battle of Yorktown in October 1781, which effectively ended the war.

But the French were not alone in supporting the Americans following the Battle of Saratoga. The Spanish and later the Dutch provided support as well, eager to seize the opportunity to weaken their British rival.

It also had a direct impact on the career of General George Washington. Without the victory at Saratoga, American forces would likely not have received critical assistance from the French, and faith in the war effort would have been weakened.

But the victory of General Horatio Gates at Saratoga also led to a serious but ultimately unsuccessful effort to replace Washington with Gates as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. (Mount Vernon)

Information here is primarily from American Battlefield Trust; National Park Service; Britannica; Mount Vernon; Army-mil

(On a personal side note, I am a descendant of Israel Moseley (he is my 4<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather). Israel Moseley was a Patriot who fought in the American Revolution. Born in 1743, Israel graduated from Yale in 1766. He served as a private in Captain Daniel Sacket's company, Colonel Woodbridge's regiment from August 20 to October 23, 1777 in the Northern department. He fought in the Battles of Saratoga.)

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young