

PART II

Victory and Defeat in the North (1776–1778)

It was a little hard, that after a man had devoted his whole time and talents (however poor the latter might be) to the service of his country, that the *event*, and not his conduct, should determine his character; that to be *unsuccessful* and guilty should be the same thing, and that he should be held up as a public criminal, for not doing what could not be done!

ADMIRAL HOWE

Believe, where war is concerned, few men in command would stand acquitted, if any after-knowledge of facts and circumstances were brought in argument against decisions of the moment.

JOHN BURGOYNE

CHAPTER 3

The Peace Commissioners?

THE HOWE BROTHERS

On May 25, 1775, HMS *Cerberus*—a sixth-rate warship of twenty-eight guns—sailed into Boston harbor with troop reinforcements from Britain. Named after the three-headed dog of classical mythology that guarded the gates of hell, the ship carried three major generals—William Howe, John Burgoyne, and Henry Clinton, all of whom had received their promotions on the same day. Howe was the most senior because of his years of continuous service in the army, whereas the fifty-eight-year-old Burgoyne was second in seniority to Howe in spite of being the oldest among them. Clinton was the youngest and most junior of the three generals. He was painfully shy and spent much of his time on deck, escaping a confined cabin with six roommates and suffering acute seasickness. During the “very disagreeable passage” of seven weeks, there was nevertheless an atmosphere of camaraderie among the three aspiring commanders, who held one another in high esteem. They were each about to embark on a service in which they would compete for command, glory, and victory in America.¹

Howe, Burgoyne, and Clinton represented the best of the general officers in the British army. They had been selected to command in America from 119 possible candidates who ranged in rank from major generals to full generals. They had not been appointed on the basis of seniority or patronage. Although senior to both Burgoyne and Clinton, Howe ranked only 111th in rank of the 119 generals in the British Army. Since generals never retired, the choice was limited only by age and health. Others were disqualified by their lack of suitable training, their political opposition to the war, or their refusal to serve in America. This left about a third of the total number to be considered as possible candidates, of whom twelve were thought outstanding. The government congratulated itself upon the final selection. As George III later reminded his Cabinet, the three major generals were “thought the best in his service to command the troops” in America, and in the House of Commons, Lord George Germain described them as “the fittest men for the service in the army.” Although John Burgoyne claimed that they were the personal choice of the monarch and although such appointments were ultimately the prerogative of the crown, George III said that their selection had been unanimously approved by the Cabinet.²

In 1775, members of Parliament ridiculed the idea that the army would encounter significant resistance in America. In the House of Commons, speaker after speaker told “ludicrous stories” of the military incapacity of Americans to the great “entertainment of the House.” It was claimed that the Americans “were neither soldiers, nor could be made so; being naturally of a pusillanimous disposition, and utterly incapable of any sort of order or discipline.” It was said that owing to their laziness, lack of cleanliness, and defects of character, “they were incapable of going through the service of a campaign,” and that they “would melt away with sickness before they could face an enemy.” On February 2, Colonel James Grant told the House that the Americans “would never dare to face an *English* army.” A veteran of the French and Indian War and former governor of East Florida, Grant claimed that five thousand regular troops could march from one end of America to another without serious opposition. In April, Richard Rigby said that “it was romantic to think they [the Americans] would fight.” There was a debate as to whether the militiamen and minutemen should be considered enemy belligerents, with the rights and status of a nation, or merely traitors and rebels who should not be dignified with the conventions of war and prisoner exchanges.³

The home government had sent Howe, Burgoyne, and Clinton to quash the rebellion and to bolster Lieutenant General Thomas Gage, who combined the role of governor of Massachusetts and commander in chief of the British army in America. Gage had lived twenty years in America and was married to an American. During the French and Indian War he had raised a light infantry regiment that was trained to fight under the irregular conditions of warfare in America. With a tall slender physique,

he was a popular and mild-mannered officer who was admired as a man of great integrity even by his critics. Before Lord North became prime minister in 1770, Gage had urged the home government to use force to put a speedy end to sedition in the colonies. He had warned that moderation and forbearance would only stiffen resistance.

In the final months of 1774, Gage suddenly began to equivocate. He proposed suspending the Coercive Acts on discovering that all of the thirteen colonies were embracing the cause of Boston. The following year, he became despondent of a military solution without doubling the number of troops to a minimum of twenty thousand. He observed that the rebels knew what they were about and that “in all the wars against France they never shewed so much conduct attention and perseverance as they do now.” The home government turned against him, thinking him too timid and supine, and he became known in the army as the “Old Woman.” In the opening salvo of the war on April 19, 1775, Gage had suffered a serious reversal and heavy casualties when he sent an expeditionary force twenty miles into the countryside to seize weapons and revolutionary leaders believed to be located at Lexington and Concord.⁴

Before the land reclamation projects of later years, Boston was located on a virtual island with just a narrow strip of road connecting the peninsula to the rest of the continent. Howe, Burgoyne, and Clinton arrived to find the British army and its loyalist supporters besieged by thousands of revolutionary militiamen who had begun to encircle the city in the days following the skirmish at Lexington and Concord. Surrounded and outnumbered, the army was invested by what Burgoyne described as “a rabble in arms, who flushed with success and insolence, had advanced their sentries to pistol shot of our out-guards.” The naval ships in the harbor were exposed to rebel cannon fire. The troops, officers, and inhabitants were still “lost in a sort of stupefaction which the events of the 19 of April had occasioned.” They vented emotions ranging from censure and anger to despondency. Howe, Burgoyne, and Clinton found the walls of their residences daubed night after night with mock royal proclamations threatening vengeance on the rebels. They were similarly ridiculed in messages of congratulation.⁵

On June 17, 1775, less than three weeks after their arrival, the three major generals had their first taste of battle in America at Bunker Hill. Henry Clinton described the astonishing perseverance with which the revolutionary militia overnight fortified the high ground at Breed’s Hill and Bunker Hill, located to the north of Boston across the Charles River on another peninsula called Charlestown. In preference to a strategy suggested by Clinton, Gage opted for a plan proposed by Howe. Far from contemplating a crude frontal attack, Howe envisaged a turning movement, with a feint attack to distract from the main thrust of the army against one of the enemy flanks. It was to be preceded by naval cannonade from the harbor and the blast of field artillery. Howe showed great courage by personally leading the assault, and at one stage of the battle, he was the only officer in the front rank left standing. In an eyewitness account, Sergeant Roger Lamb described Howe as acting with “coolness, firmness, and presence of mind.” Like other British eyewitnesses, Lamb was impressed by the marksmanship of their opponents who “behaved with great resolution and bravery, and by no means merited the appellation of *cowards*, with which they were so often branded in England.” Howe was appalled to witness wave after wave of his infantry felled by repeated volleys of accurate enemy fire. As he watched in disbelief while his elite light infantrymen were repulsed, he wrote that he had never experienced such a moment before.

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Howe’s plan was poorly implemented because of the inexperience and indiscipline of his mostly raw troops. The effectiveness of the assault was blunted by a six-hour delay waiting for high tide, and by fences that were completed by the rebels just before the attack. However, it was the failure of his troops to keep advancing with their bayonets in the face of enemy fire that made the price of victory so high. Contrary to his orders, they stood, retreated, and tried again. The British won the battle of Bunker Hill, but at such a cost in the lives of men that Henry Clinton wrote in his memoirs “a few more such victories would have shortly put an end to British dominion in America.” Some of the oldest officers and soldiers “declared it was the hottest service they had ever seen.” Of an estimated 2,200 troops engaged, there were 1,054 casualties. The overall fatality rate was relatively standard for battles in Europe. It was the proportion of officers killed that was startling—amounting to over one-eighth of all British officers killed during the American Revolutionary War. Howe wrote that when contemplating

“the loss of so many brave officers, I do it with horror.” On July 25, 1775, the return journey of the *Cerberus* brought official confirmation of the news of the British losses at the battle of Bunker Hill to England.⁷

Gage was the first in a succession of military commanders to be blamed for the British defeat in America. On October 10, he handed over his command to William Howe and left Boston on the official pretext that he was to consult with government ministers in London. The historian Edward Gibbon wrote that good men rejoiced when they heard of his recall. According to John Burgoyne, “the secret and real reason” that Howe had not wanted to serve in America was because he had a “low opinion” of Gage and “dreaded acting immediately under the orders of an officer whose talents were far inferior to his command.” Indeed, Gage initially misled the home government by giving the impression that resistance might easily be overcome and that opposition was largely confined to Boston. When he reversed his opinion to predict widespread support for the revolutionary movement and the need for a much larger military force, the government became intent on replacing him.⁸

Gage disappeared into relative obscurity, supporting his large family on a small income in England, but he lived to see his successors suffer similar humiliation. In 1778, he sat on the commission of inquiry into General John Burgoyne’s conduct at Saratoga. Promoted to a full general after the fall of Lord North’s government in 1782, Gage died five years later at Portland Place in London. Burgoyne wrote at the time of Bunker Hill that it was no reflection on Gage to say that he was unequal to the command in America, because “few characters in the world would be fit”; the position required “a genius of the first class, together with uncommon resolution, and a firm reliance upon support at home.” It was a situation “in which Caesar might have failed.”⁹

In almost four months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the British lost America. On March 17, 1776, after almost eleven months under siege, General Howe withdrew all his 6,000 troops and 900 sick from Boston. They were accompanied by some 1,100 American loyalists who were mostly ordinary people such as farmers, artisans, and tradesmen. Although the home government had ordered the withdrawal as a tactical retreat, it was humiliating because it was precipitated by enemy troops and militia commanded by George Washington, the forty-three-year-old Virginian appointed by Congress to turn the rabble gathered around Boston into professional soldiers of the Continental Army. Washington had been able to make up the deficiency in his artillery thanks to Benedict Arnold’s and Ethan Allen’s capture of the British fortresses of Ticonderoga (May 10, 1775) and Crown Point (May 12, 1775) near Lake Champlain. In a remarkable feat of endurance, Henry Knox arranged for fifty-eight mortars and cannon from the fortresses to be dragged by boats, sledges, and oxen three hundred miles south to Boston. Knox was a twenty-five-year-old former Boston bookseller whose military knowledge was mainly derived from reading. In another daring and enterprising effort, the besiegers had dug trenches and mounted the guns overnight on Dorchester Heights and had begun to bombard the British garrison in Boston.¹⁰

While William Howe’s army awaited reinforcements in Halifax, Nova Scotia, British authority collapsed from Georgia to New Hampshire as the rebels won control of the militias, the law courts, the presses, and the assemblies. The royal governors either fled into exile or sought refuge on board warships. The vaunted military superiority of the British was shown to lack substance. In Canada, the British were forced on the defensive by Generals Benedict Arnold and Richard Montgomery who led a detachment of the Continental Army in taking Montreal and besieging Quebec. The fifty-one-year-old British governor and commander in chief in Canada, Guy Carleton, only escaped capture by disguising himself as a farmer to escape from Montreal to Quebec. The British lost the initiative and were crucially unable to protect and defend those who remained their supporters and friends in America, where they were known derogatorily as Tories. The first year of the war ended in retreat for the British and a propaganda coup for the forces of rebellion in America.

The arrival of Howe, Burgoyne, and Clinton had not deterred the revolutionary movement. Grandiosely styled a “triumvirate of reputation” by Burgoyne, they were lampooned in doggerel by a London wit:

Behold the *Cerberus* the Atlantic plough,
Her precious cargo, Burgoyne, Clinton, Howe.

Bow, wow, wow!

The *Cerberus* and its three illustrious passengers were to suffer grim fates in America. While stationed off New London in 1777, the *Cerberus* narrowly evaded becoming the victim of one of the first underwater mines, developed by David Bushnell, the Connecticut-born inventor of a man-propelled submarine known as the *American Turtle*. The *Cerberus* was less fortunate the following year. After unsuccessfully attempting to escape two French frigates on August 5, 1778, the *Cerberus* was scuttled and blown up by her own crew off shore at Newport, Rhode Island. As for the three major generals, they would each hold senior command, each preside over major reversals, each suffer humiliating recalls, and become each other's critics and bitter rivals. Their names would be indelibly associated with the British loss of America.¹¹

I

If British defeat seemed inevitable after the withdrawal from Boston, the Howe brothers were to reverse the situation with a spectacular series of victories beginning in the summer of 1776. In July, Major General William Howe was joined by his older brother Admiral Richard, Lord Howe, who commanded the British fleet in North America. The Howe brothers were distinctive and impressive. They were physically imposing, with tall athletic builds and swarthy complexions which caused Admiral Howe to be nicknamed in the navy "Black Dick," and General Howe to be called "the savage" by his sister and mother. Like Lord North, the brothers resembled George III, and indeed their mother was believed to be an out-of-wedlock daughter of George I. Their father had been governor of Barbados who had died before either of his sons had reached their teens.

The Howe brothers were close and supportive of one another. Their joint commands created the potential for successful combined operations between the army and navy, which was a crucial advantage for launching amphibious attacks against the major cities along the East Coast of America. The brothers were each known for their almost reckless courage. They kept their own counsel and were famously taciturn. In his description of "those brave and silent brothers," Horace Walpole remarked that General William Howe "was reckoned sensible, though so silent that nobody knew whether he was or not" and that the admiral was as "undaunted as a rock and as silent." According to Nathaniel Wraxall, Admiral Howe expressed himself in such a convoluted style that "it was by no means easy to comprehend his precise meaning." Charles Stedman, an American-born officer in the British army, wrote of "the hauteur and frigid reserve" in the deportment of the admiral which "ill qualified him as a soother and a mediator between two contending parties."¹²

Their oldest brother, George Augustus, third Viscount Howe, had been a hero in America, having been killed in action at Ticonderoga in the French and Indian War. He was famous for wearing hunting shirts and trousers, and living in a frontier manner. He was honored by the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, which voted £250 to erect a monument in his memory in Westminster Abbey. In the second pamphlet in his essays on *The American Crisis*, Tom Paine accused William Howe of being forgetful in brandishing "his sword against those who, at their own charge, raised a monument to his brother."¹³

The Howe brothers had exemplary military records and were veterans of many campaigns. After attending Eton in 1746, William Howe began his lifelong career in the army at the age of seventeen as a cornet in the Duke of Cumberland's Light Dragoons. Under the cover of darkness during the French and Indian War in 1759, he led the advance guard of Major General James Wolfe's force that scaled the Heights of Abraham and captured Quebec. William Howe was similarly prominent in the capture of Montreal in 1760 and Belle Île on the coast of Brittany in 1761, and in the conquest of Havana in 1762. On his arrival in Boston in 1775, he was described as being held in great repute, and much esteemed both for his "military genius, and care for his army."¹⁴

After short stints at two schools favored by the upper classes for the education of their teenage sons, Westminster and Eton, Admiral Lord Howe had joined the navy at the age of thirteen in 1739. Aged twenty-two, he became the captain of the flagship of Rear Admiral Charles Knowles. He accompanied George Anson on his voyage around the world. He was rapidly promoted to first lieutenant in the spring of 1745 and captain in the spring of 1746. As captain of HMS *Dunkirk* in 1755,

Howe fired the first shot of the Seven Years' War, and he led a British squadron in the great naval victory at Quiberon Bay off the coast of France near St. Nazaire in 1759. Commanding the *Magnanime* in 1760, he anchored within sixty yards of the French fortress of Île d'Aix. As he and a pilot stood heroically alone, he made the rest of his deck crew lie down in order to bombard the fort at such close quarters that it capitulated within thirty-five minutes. Admiral Howe ultimately spent fifty-nine years in active service and became one of the most celebrated naval commanders of the age.

The military experience of both brothers gave them familiarity with both the Caribbean and North America, and they were also practitioners and innovators in tactics best suited to the conditions of warfare in North America. Together with George, General William Howe had helped to develop the use of light infantry during the French and Indian War. These faster and more agile troops were better adapted than heavy infantry for conditions in America, and although the army had dabbled in their use for over thirty years in Europe, they were not formally introduced into each foot regiment until after they had proven their worth in America. Together with the grenadiers, the light infantry companies were the elite of each regiment and were often placed as flank companies. They were occasionally formed into special battalions. Howe's knowledge of light infantry and unconventional warfare was important in his selection as commander in chief.¹⁵

In England in the summer of 1774, William Howe had intensively trained seven companies of light infantry on Salisbury Plain and demonstrated their capacity in front of George III at Richmond. He was known for his careful and regular inspections that made his troops some of the fittest and most active in the British army. Lord George Germain wrote that nobody understood better than Howe the past lessons of warfare in America and the need for light troops who had been "taught to separate and secure themselves by trees, walls, or hedges." Germain was persuaded that Howe would "teach the present army to be as formidable" as the troops Howe had led in Canada during the French and Indian War. In December 1775, he was described by George Washington as the "most formidable enemy America has."¹⁶

Admiral Howe was one of the most influential admirals in the development of the eighteenth-century Royal Navy. Beginning with his time commanding squadrons and flotillas in the Seven Years' War, he was interested in revising the system of signals and fighting instructions that so frequently plagued commanders during fleet maneuvers and battles. He took a keen interest in administrative detail. During his command of the *Magnanime* in 1759, he kept a "captain's order book" in a novel attempt to improve the management of officers and crew. He made radical proposals for altering the ship's guns, including the use of priming tubes, flannel cartridges, and locks on the cannon to improve safety and the rate of fire. His ideas were fully adopted in the navy twenty years later.¹⁷

Admiral Howe pioneered the naval code of practice for amphibious warfare, in which the navy transported and gave logistical support to the army in beachhead landings. As with the signal system and fighting instructions, there was no standard procedure for amphibious warfare before May 1758. Howe issued what became the standard directives and signals for embarking and landing troops in hostile surroundings, together with regulations for maintaining the chain of command for army transport ships. He also introduced flat-bottom boats, able to carry half a company of infantry or twenty-five men, with hinged bows that acted like gangplanks to enable the troops to disembark quickly. He likely had a role their design.¹⁸

The Howe brothers were both members of Parliament and both ambivalent about the war in America. In 1766, Admiral Howe had been one of the few members of Parliament who wanted to receive the petition of the Stamp Act Congress in New York. Like Edmund Burke, he believed in the absolute authority of Parliament over America, but he thought it inexpedient to require a formal acknowledgment of supremacy from the colonies. In 1774, William Howe opposed the Coercive Acts aimed at punishing Massachusetts. In a general election of the same year in Britain, he assured his Nottingham constituents that he would refuse an invitation to command British forces in America. Beginning with a meeting on Christmas Day in December 1774, Admiral Howe tried to open negotiations by meeting with Benjamin Franklin in London. His sister, Caroline Howe, told Franklin that she wished that Admiral Howe was going as a peace commissioner to America which she "should like much better that General Howe's going to command the Army." In March 1775, the admiral lamented the strictness of a bill to restrain the trade of New England, but nevertheless voted for it,

claiming that it was necessary “as the only moderate means of bringing the disobedient provinces to a sense of their duty, without involving the empire in all the horrors of civil war.”¹⁹

In Britain, the political opponents of the war had some support within the army and navy, where a few officers declined for reasons of conscience to serve in America. They included generals such as Lord Frederick Cavendish, Henry Seymour Conway, Sir George Howard, and Sir John Griffin. According to Horace Walpole, General Conway caused much offense by saying in Parliament that an officer who disapproved of the war ought not to go to America, but some officers followed his advice. Major John Cartwright refused the invitation of Admiral Howe to be one of his naval lieutenants in America, writing that it would be a desertion of his principles. The earl of Effingham resigned his commission when his regiment was ordered to America, thinking it inconsistent with his character and unbecoming of his dignity to enforce policies that he had opposed in Parliament. He wrote to the secretary for war that he was unwilling to deprive fellow subjects of those liberties “which form the best security for their fidelity and obedience to government.” He expressed dismay at being obliged to quit the profession of his ancestors, to which he had applied himself since childhood and had intended to dedicate his future. In a speech in the House of Lords in May 1775, Effingham said that the moment had arrived that he most dreaded, when his military profession had become incompatible with his duty as a citizen.²⁰

The Howe brothers were typical of the majority of army and navy officers in believing that “it was no part of their military duty to enquire into the justice or policy of the quarrel,” once the decision to go to war had been determined by the king and Parliament.²¹ When an irate constituent challenged him over breaking his election promise and accepting a command in America, William Howe replied that the private sentiments of every man should give way to public service at a time of crisis. He had actually sought the command from the government, which he justified as a duty but which also reflected his military ambition. In November, Admiral Howe told the House of Commons of his painful struggle between “his duty as an officer, and his duty as a man” in which “if commanded his duty was to serve,” but otherwise he would decline. By January 1776, the admiral had become more defensive of the war, arguing that since the designs of the colonial opposition had become fully known, “we had no alternative left but to push our operations by sea and land with vigour, or for ever relinquish our claims, and submit to whatever terms America thought fit to prescribe.”²²

The brothers not only held the military command, but they were also jointly appointed to be peace commissioners. Admiral Howe had insisted upon being named a peace commissioner as a condition of his accepting the naval command in America. He had wanted the peace commission to have wide-ranging powers to grant pardons and to offer concessions as well as to consist solely of himself and his brother. He was opposed by the secretary of state for the American Department, Lord George Germain, who threatened resignation rather than allow such discretionary authority to the Howe brothers and wanted pardons restricted to those who swore oaths of allegiance, with no additional concessions.²³

Germain blocked Howe’s appointment until he had succeeded in limiting the terms of the peace commission to prevent the admiral from granting any significant concessions or acting on his own initiative. However, he did reluctantly agree to allow the two brothers to serve as the sole peace commissioners. In the view of one Cabinet insider, the government was in an invidious position and could not afford to risk alienating the brothers by denying their terms. The Howe brothers therefore had dual roles as military commanders and peace commissioners in America.²⁴

II

According to a rifleman on Staten Island, the approach of the British army and navy looked like London afloat. Another eyewitness said he could not believe his eyes: the invasion fleet was like a forest of trimmed pine trees. On a Saturday afternoon on June 29, 1776, New Yorkers watched the approach of an armada of about 9,000 troops, accompanied by 110 ships, with General Howe aboard the frigate *Greyhound*, arriving from Halifax. General Henry Knox of the Continental Army and his wife Lucy, watched in horror from their breakfast table on the second floor of one of the grandest mansions in

Manhattan at No.1 Broadway. The city was instantly in uproar, “the alarm guns firing, troops repairing to their posts, and everything in the height of bustle.” Knox wrote to his brother “My God, may I never experience the like feeling again!”²⁵

As the invading armada continued to gather, Howe waited in daily anticipation of being joined by his brother and the grand fleet from England. On Monday, July 12, 1776, at about seven o’clock in the evening, there were cries of joy “almost like that of a Victory” upon the arrival of the fleet led by Admiral Howe aboard his flagship, the sixty-four-gun HMS *Eagle*. The fleet made a fine appearance with colors flying, guns saluting, and men. There were nearly 150 ships of varying sizes including 10 large warships, 20 frigates, numerous transport ships, 10,000 seamen, and 11,000 troops. On August 1, another contingent of 2,000 troops and 45 ships, together with Major Generals Henry Clinton and Lord Charles Cornwallis, joined Howe. They were returning from an unsuccessful expedition led by Clinton against Sullivan’s Island in Charleston, South Carolina.²⁶

The force continued to grow with the arrival of an additional 3,000 British troops and another 8,000 mercenaries from Germany. Packed like herrings on board their ships, the tall men were neither able to stand up between decks, nor sit up straight in their berths. There were six men to each berth—which was intended for only four—with the consequence that the men slept in what was called “spoon fashion:” in order to turn in bed, one would call “about face,” and they would all turn together. It had required the service of almost the entire British merchant fleet to carry troops to America from different embarkation ports in Canada, Germany, Ireland, and England.²⁷

It was the largest British expedition ever sent across the Atlantic. Two-thirds of the total British army and 45 percent of the Royal Navy were serving in America and the Caribbean. There were some four hundred ships of varying sizes in New York. The combined invading force was greater than the estimated 30,000 population of Philadelphia, the largest city in America. A seventy-four-gun ship alone had at least 600 crew members and larger vessels had even more. Howe’s army of over 32,000 troops greatly outnumbered the 19,000 troops of Washington. General James Grant wrote on the eve of the campaign: “if a good bleeding can bring those Bible-faced Yankees to their senses—the fever of Independence should soon abate.”²⁸

Following his withdrawal from Boston, Howe had transformed the army while stationed in Halifax. Together with Burgoyne and Clinton, he believed that inexperience and poor training had undermined its performance at Bunker Hill, and he repeatedly disembarked them for training from the transport ships where they lived in cramped and freezing conditions. Exhibiting the characteristics that had made him such an effective brigade commander, Howe drilled each regiment in light infantry tactics. In order to adapt to the conditions of warfare in America, he introduced looser infantry formations with wider gaps between each man and only two lines deep rather than the conventional three used in Europe, allowing for greater mobility across broken ground. His two-line loose formations later became the standard practice of the British army. Howe permitted changes in uniforms to make them better adapted to local conditions, with shorter jackets, fewer frills, and smaller caps. He favored and promoted officers familiar with light infantry training throughout the army.²⁹

General Howe’s object was the conquest of New York, which had major strategic advantages. John Adams described it as “a kind of key to the whole continent,” and in the opinion of Lord George Germain, “as long as you maintained New York the continent was divided.” New York was a major port and potential naval base, and its possession depended upon sea power which played to the strength of the British. Owing to its situation at the mouth of the Hudson River, its conquest opened up possibilities for penetrating the interior along the Hudson north to Lake Champlain and Canada, creating the potential to cut off New England. Furthermore, the city and the region of the lower Hudson were thought to be centers of loyalist support for the British. Manhattan Island was still largely farmland and forests, with a rough and craggy terrain that survives in areas like Central Park. The center of population was on the southern tip of the island in the region of Wall Street and lower Broadway.³⁰

On Thursday, August 22, 1776, after a night of terrible thunder and lightning, the Howe brothers launched an amphibious attack on Long Island. At 8:00 A.M., Generals Clinton and Cornwallis led the advanced guard of 4,000 elite light infantry troops to occupy the southwest of Long Island. In two and a half hours, Howe landed 15,000 men and 40 pieces of cannon near the town of Utrecht. He subsequently increased their number to 20,000. Believing that Howe would first attack Manhattan,

disperse and the war will be over.” General Hugh, Lord Percy, wrote to his father that the campaign would put a total end to the war, and wrote to Lord George Germain that “this business is pretty near over.” The success similarly aroused high expectations among government circles in Britain. George III conferred the coveted Order of the Bath on William Howe, who was thereafter known as Sir William Howe.³²

With the battle for the control of Long Island over, Howe began the battle for control of Manhattan. On September 15, 1776, he began with an attack upon Kip’s Bay, a small cove which is now landfilled at the end of East 34th Street. It was undefended by enemy artillery, there was open meadow that precluded the enemy from concealing themselves, and it was close to the Post Road which was one of the major arteries from lower Broadway to what is today the upper East Side. The attack began with a suitably dramatic opening salvo when five naval ships bombarded the shores from a distance of less than two hundred yards. With 4,000 British and Hessian troops, Clinton led the first invasion party in an uncontested landing, which precipitated a general panic and retreat among the defending militia, to the visible ire of George Washington. Entire rebel companies disbanded and returned home. The original contingent of 13,000 Connecticut militia dwindled to 2,000. Between 1775 and August 1776, some 18,000 civilians had evacuated New York City in anticipation of the arrival of the British, and the population fell to 5,000. By the late afternoon of September 15, the invaders had occupied lower Manhattan. At Old Fort George, a woman hauled down and trampled the Union Flag of the Continental Army and raised the Union Jack.³³

By late September, however, Howe was already having misgivings about the possibility of ending the war in a single campaign. Washington had occupied strong defenses at Harlem Heights, the high ground in Manhattan between the Harlem and Hudson rivers around modern 125th Street. Believing that the enemy was “too strongly posted to be attacked in front,” Howe chose to try to encircle Harlem Heights by landing troops above the northern tip of Manhattan Island in Westchester County. His move forced Washington to abandon his defenses and retreat eighteen miles north across the Harlem River to White Plains. On October 26, 1776, the two armies faced off against one another at the battle of White Plains. Howe’s main offensive had to be postponed owing to a violent rainfall that made the ground so slippery that he deemed it too risky to march uphill. Nevertheless, his earlier flanking movement forced Washington to retreat, leaving behind two exposed rebel fortresses—Fort Washington and Fort Mifflin on either side of the present day George Washington Bridge—which secured communications between Manhattan and New Jersey. On November 16, Howe’s German mercenaries stormed Fort Mifflin and took some 2,837 prisoners, including 230 officers. On November 29, in an effort to cut off Washington’s retreat to Hackensack, Cornwallis captured Fort Mifflin along the Jersey shore of the Hudson River. The British had gained possession of Manhattan, which became their headquarters and main base in America for the duration of the Revolutionary War.³⁴

With the capture of Manhattan, Howe sent Cornwallis in pursuit of Washington into New Jersey as far as New Brunswick, only sixty miles north of Philadelphia. Washington’s army numbered only about thirty-five hundred, from a peak of twenty thousand in August. On December 1, 1776, Cornwallis just missed intercepting Washington crossing the Raritan River at Brunswick. Howe proceeded to set up an eighty-mile-long chain of garrisons in East Jersey for the purpose of provisioning his army in New York during the winter. With a view to ending the war by a final blow against New England, he sent Clinton to capture Newport, Rhode Island, which surrendered without resistance on December 8. It was the best bay on the east coast for anchoring the fleet, and ideally located for attacks upon New England. In another major coup, the British caught General Charles Lee, a former British army officer and one of the most senior generals in the Continental Army. His captors made his horse drunk in their undisguised pleasure. They included men whom Lee had once commanded as a British officer in Portugal under John Burgoyne.

It was the lowest ebb of the revolutionary cause. Serving in Washington’s army, Thomas Paine began the first of his series of rebel propaganda tracts entitled *The American Crisis*, with the words, “These are the times that try men’s souls.” Since July, Howe’s army had taken 4,500 prisoners including four generals, 235 iron cannon, 24,000 shells, 17,000 cannonballs, and some 2,800 muskets. He had

won four major battles, at Long Island, Kip's Bay, White Plains, and Fort Washington. The Continental Congress fled from Philadelphia to Baltimore. Washington wrote that "our affairs are in a very bad way . . . the game is pretty near up—owing in a great measure to the insidious arts of the enemy."³⁵

III

Despite their spectacular successes, the Howe brothers are generally regarded as having missed the best opportunity of winning the American Revolutionary War. General Sir William Howe seemingly failed to follow up victories to trap Washington and the Continental Army. After the battle of Long Island, he had not pursued the remnants of Washington's army or prevented its escape to Manhattan. After the skirmish at Harlem Heights, Howe's army had waited more than a month before his next move, while making no effort to trap Washington in Manhattan by cutting off his escape route across the Hudson. At White Plains, Howe waited three days, enabling Washington to move his supplies to the safety of New Jersey, and then failed to pursue Washington. By instructing Cornwallis not to go beyond New Brunswick Howe may have missed one of his best opportunities to ensnare Washington. In 1777, known ominously as the Year of the Hangman, because the three sevens looked like three gallows, he lost time by not opening the campaign until June.

Howe's lethargy was attributed by critics to his hedonistic lifestyle. Howe's wife, Frances, the daughter of the Right Hon. William Conolly, of Castletown in County Kildare, had remained in England. During the siege of Boston, Howe began an affair with Elizabeth Lloyd Loring, whom he publicly accompanied on social occasions and who became known among his officers as "the Sultana." She was the wife of an American loyalist, Joshua Loring, whom Howe promoted to be commissary for prisoners, in which role he was detested for his alleged mistreatment of the men in his charge. Following the delay in opening the campaign, the relationship was mocked in popular verse:

Sir William, he, snug as a flea,
Lay all this time a-snoring;
Nor dreamed of harm, as he lay warm
In bed with Mrs. Loring.

Another ditty was written by a loyalist:

Awake, arouse, Sir Billy,
There's forage in the plain,
Leave your little filly,
And open the campaign.

The *London Evening Post* suggested that Elizabeth Loring had been purchased from her husband in return for a contract, and that the country had to "Pay the Piper for the Pimping." Howe shared with her a taste for drinking and gambling. He was very different from his abstemious brother, but such indulgence was probably more a consequence than a cause of delays in the movement of the army.³⁶

General Howe's extreme caution was more explicable in terms of the strategic ideas that he shared with his brother. In their joint capacity as commanders and peace commissioners, the brothers aimed to win by a combination of military pressure and offers of conciliation. They had a sophisticated approach that indicated an appreciation of the political and psychological elements of warfare. Since they were attempting to suppress a rebellion among fellow subjects rather than fight a foreign war, they were wary of using destructive methods that might alienate the majority of the population. They favored a more humane approach in order to both win the support of the people and create the conditions necessary for a harmonious postwar reconstruction of civil government. They anticipated that the combination of overwhelming force and conciliatory gestures would be sufficient to persuade the rebels of the futility of resistance. Although he had originally intended to win by a decisive battle, General Howe shifted his tactics with an emphasis upon maneuver rather than trying to trap Washington in Manhattan, a change that fatally lost him the best chance to win the war. Similarly, Admiral Howe never seriously attempted to attack and burn ports along the coast because he believed it would make

reconciliation more difficult and force people to fight by starving them. Captain Johann von Ewald, a *Jaeger* (light infantryman) in the Hessian army, was mystified by the restraint of General Howe until he “perceived what was afoot. We wanted to spare the King’s subjects and hoped to terminate the war amicably, in which assumption I was strengthened the next day by several English officers.”³⁷

Before leaving Britain, General Howe had explained his view of the situation in America. He contended that the insurgents were in a minority, and believed that the opponents of imperial revenue duties would return to obedience in return for a redress of their complaints. He further claimed that the few who sought independence would relent once they discovered that “they were not well supported in their frantic ideas by the more moderate.” After his landing at Staten Island in July 1776, General Howe wrote that he had great reason to expect a large body of inhabitants to join the army from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. He believed that they were only waiting for the right opportunity “to give Proof of their Loyalty and Zeal for Government.” Serving in the commissariat department, Charles Stedman later suggested that Howe had been hoping that his victory at Long Island “would produce a revolution in sentiment capable of terminating the war without the extremity which it appeared to be, beyond all possibility of doubt, in his power to enforce.”³⁸

It was indeed an axiom of British policy that the majority of Americans were loyal, and that the revolution was nothing more than a coup achieved by “the intrigues of a few bold and criminal leaders.” It was not a spontaneous popular movement, but rather a “contagion,” in which the “flames of sedition” were started and spread by an “armed faction,” a few firebrands, “a rascally banditti,” or “a set of puritannick ingrates,” who had usurped legal authority in an experiment that was likely to end in anarchy and oppression. In Britain, the advocates of war saw themselves as liberators of a “deluded and unhappy multitude” against “the arbitrary tyranny of their leaders” and their “tyrannical Congress, Committees, Conventions.” They were rescuing “a vast number of our fellow subjects in America from the despotism not to be exceeded in the history of mankind.” It was a view that seemed reasonable given the tactics of intimidation used by local committees of safety to purge the loyalists by various means ranging from tarring and feathering and confiscating property to arrest and execution. It was a view promoted and reinforced by former colonial officials and by American loyalist exiles in Britain.³⁹

Admiral Howe was especially idealistic about the possibilities of a negotiated settlement. On arrival in New York, he issued a proclamation announcing his powers as peace commissioner to grant pardons and to declare peace. The troop transports that accompanied him tellingly had names like *Good Intent*, *Friendship*, *Amity’s Admonition*, and *Father’s Good Will*. General Howe warned his older brother that the declaration of the peace commission was likely to be ineffectual, but the admiral was adamant about showing “the people of America that the Door was yet open for Reconciliation.” Upon arrival in America, Admiral Howe immediately attempted to open negotiations by sending an officer with a flag of truce across the bay to Manhattan with a letter for “Mr. Washington.” The officer returned with a reply that there was no such person other than General Washington. Admiral Howe tried again with a letter addressed to “George Washington, Esq., etc. etc.” It was again declined. Finally, the admiral succeeded in setting up a meeting between his adjutant general and Washington at No. 1 Broadway. It accomplished nothing because it failed to recognize the changed situation in America following the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The contest was no longer about redressing grievances. It was a struggle for independence.⁴⁰

On September 11, 1776, Admiral Howe convened a peace conference at Staten Island while his brother prepared the invasion of Manhattan. The admiral met with a delegation from the Continental Congress consisting of John Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, and John Rutledge of South Carolina. He omitted mention of some of the more awkward preconditions of peace that had been stipulated by the home government. The terms were still so unattractive that they were actually published by the Continental Congress. Explaining that he could only negotiate with them as “private gentlemen of influence,” John Adams replied that he might “consider me in what light you please . . . except a British subject,” causing Howe to observe to Franklin and Rutledge that “Mr. Adams is a decided character.” In the words of Howe’s private secretary, Ambrose Serle, “they met, they talked, they parted.” It was the only official meeting between representatives of the two governments until the end of the war.⁴¹

After their successful landing on Manhattan, the Howe brothers tried again with a direct appeal

to the people. On September 19, 1776, they issued a joint declaration that announced that the king was willing to revise royal instructions and parliamentary legislation relating to America. In London, the government was caught unaware when confronted by the opposition parties with news of the declaration. Lord North referred questions about its authenticity to Lord George Germain. It was greeted with ridicule on all sides. The brothers still persisted. On November 30, 1776, as the Continental Army was withdrawing through New Jersey, they issued another proclamation that offered to pardon anyone who swore an oath of allegiance within sixty days. It embarrassed the government. In the House of Commons, General Henry Seymour Conway was critical of what he called a mixed system of war and conciliation. He argued that the objectives of the campaign “should be clear, simple and decided, not involved in doubt, perplexity, and darkness.” The contradictions in the objectives of the two brothers mirrored the divisions within the government about the conduct of the war.⁴²

The peace overtures were not sufficient in themselves to explain the failure of Howe to act with greater vigor against Washington. Even before his arrival in New York, General Howe was more skeptical than his brother about the possibilities of negotiation, writing that there was not the least prospect of conciliating the continent until the rebel armies had been “roughly dealt with.” With remarkable prescience and shrewdness, he confessed that he was doubtful of an outright victory when the enemy was unlikely to engage on equal terms in open battle and when his opponents had the advantage of “having the whole country.” The enemy army would instead retreat a few miles beyond the navigable rivers “where ours cannot follow them.” Although he appreciated that there were many inhabitants who were “well affected” to Britain, he doubted that they would assist “until his Majesty’s arms have a clear superiority by a decisive victory.” He attempted numerous times to win decisively. If his objective seemed to vacillate between seeking out the enemy army and occupying territory, it was because he was unable to draw out Washington.⁴³

Howe was cautious because he could not afford to sustain heavy casualties in America. As he told a parliamentary committee of inquiry in 1779, he thought it his duty “not wantonly to commit his majesty’s troops, where the object was inadequate.” “Light Horse” Henry Lee retrospectively claimed that Howe lost his nerve after witnessing the battle of Bunker Hill. It was common to have the casualty rates in eighteenth-century battles of about a third of the troops. In response to his criticism of his failure to pursue the enemy aggressively after the battle of Long Island, Howe insisted that if he had continued to fight, “the only advantage we should have gained would have been the destruction of a few more men,” at a cost of perhaps a thousand or fifteen hundred of his own men, which “would have been but ill repaid by double that number of the enemy.” He could not have destroyed Washington’s army, which was mostly in Manhattan. At White Plains, Howe was more eager to engage than his generals, but he denied that he could have cut off Washington’s retreat into New Jersey. Howe had given Cornwallis orders not to pursue Washington further than New Brunswick because his detachment might have become dangerously exposed owing to the proximity of another rebel army commanded by General Charles Lee. The troops were in any case exhausted by the pursuit.⁴⁴

IV

It was when Howe was bold that he suffered his greatest setbacks. While still giddy with the success of the landing at Kip’s Bay in Manhattan, elite British light infantry troops pursued and taunted retreating enemy rangers by sounding the “View halloo!” (which signified that the fox is in sight and on the run). The provocation incensed Washington’s adjutant general, for whom “it seemed to crown our disgrace.” The encounter occurred in the area of the current location of Columbia University on the upper West Side. The British troops included the kilted Scottish Royal Highland Regiment, otherwise known as the Black Watch, which had fought in America during the French and Indian War. The most intense fighting occurred at about noon in a buckwheat field around present West 120th Street between Broadway and Riverside Drive. Instead of a repetition of the rebel flight at Kip’s Bay, the British not only met determined resistance, but suffered the humiliation of having to turn their backs in retreat when they were nearly cut off, although they eventually recovered and put the enemy to flight. After what he called a “pretty sharp skirmish” that became known as the battle of Harlem Heights (September 16, 1776), Washington appreciated that “this little advantage has inspired our troops prodigiously . . . they finding that it only requires resolution and good officers to make an enemy (that they stood in too much

dread of) give way.” Howe waited a month before making another advance, using the intervening time to gather intelligence and to consolidate his position in Manhattan.⁴⁵

Howe discovered the perils of an ambitious strategy even more dramatically when he entered New Jersey. Buoyed by the capture of Manhattan and Long Island, he saw an opportunity to occupy a large area of territory and to provision the army. With the encouragement of Lord Cornwallis, Howe spread his army in a chain of garrison posts, known as cantonments, across the breadth of New Jersey, between Perth Amboy and the Delaware River. Clinton advised against the strategy on the grounds that the enemy had already shown skill in attacking isolated posts. In a letter to Germain on December 20, 1776, Howe admitted that his posts had been “rather too extensive” when his army entered winter quarters in New Jersey. He had every reason to be relatively confident, however. He had advanced 170 miles in two months, and the enemy army was shrinking since it was largely composed of citizen militiamen whose enlistments were due to expire before the end of the month.⁴⁶

In what became one of the iconic moments of the Revolutionary War, George Washington returned with his army across the Delaware River. Howe was a victim of his own success. He had driven his opponent into making a desperate bid. With some troops marching shoeless through the snow, Washington and his ill-equipped and ill-fed men defied a major storm, floating ice, and swift currents in the river. In a stunning counteroffensive that lasted less than two weeks, Washington surprised and captured the garrison of German Hessian troops at Trenton on December 26, 1776, and forced Howe to retreat from all his posts in New Jersey, except a small area around the River Raritan.

It is likely a myth that the fourteen hundred Hessians at Trenton were asleep or drunk after celebrating Christmas. Following constant alarms occasioned by enemy militia, the garrison had been on duty throughout Christmas Day. They were commanded by fifty-six-year-old Colonel Johann Rall, who had led the successful assault on Fort Mifflin and won the esteem of Howe. Rall was so nervous about an attack that he set up outposts beyond the town and insisted that one company of troops sleep with their muskets ready. Complaining that his garrison had not slept owing to constant raids, he sent dispatch riders with an escort of a hundred men and two guns to impress his difficulties upon the senior commanding officer, General James Grant, and appealed for British troops to be stationed nearer him at Maidenhead. However, contemptuous of the rebels, he neglected to build redoubts or fortifications for his artillery. “Incessantly intoxicated with strong liquors,” Colonel Rall may have been drunk the previous evening. In any case, he failed to open a letter warning him of an imminent attack. He was to be killed in a short battle of less than an hour in which Washington’s force killed or captured nine hundred men with the loss of only one officer and a private. Although Howe blamed Rall for the disaster at Trenton, Lord George Germain later commented that Howe should never have posted such a small force so close to the main enemy army.⁴⁷

Determined to regain support and restore the morale of the Revolution, Washington crossed the Delaware again in late December and circumvented a force of 7,000 men led by Lord Cornwallis to inflict another blow against a rear garrison of the British army at Princeton (January 3, 1777). During this raid of great daring and stealth, Washington shouted “It’s a fine fox chase, boys!”—a clear allusion to the hunting metaphor earlier used by the British. He estimated that he captured or killed 500 to 600 men against the losses listed by Howe at 276. Suffering casualties of thirty soldiers and fourteen officers, he destroyed the British 4th Brigade guard at Princeton.⁴⁸

It was because of his expectation of widespread loyalist support that General Howe had dispersed his garrisons so widely in New Jersey. He originally intended not to post his forces beyond New Brunswick and Newark, but was encouraged to expand further when almost five thousand Americans swore oaths of allegiance, including one of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence, Richard Stockton. In occupying Trenton, General Howe had hoped to incorporate what he believed to be strongly loyalist country to the east of Princeton in the county of Monmouth. The belief was increasingly contradicted by experience. In December 1776, Admiral Howe told his secretary that “all the People of Parts & Spirit were in the Rebellion.” In the spring of 1777, Colonel William Harcourt, the commander of the 16th Light Dragoons, wrote home from New Brunswick, “You may be assured that we are almost without a friend (I mean from principle) on this side of the Atlantic . . .” In July, Major General James Grant, who had once boasted that he could subdue the entire country with five thousand troops, admitted that “we have no friends.” During the parliamentary inquiry into his

conduct in 1779, Howe defended himself by saying that he “found the Americans not so well disposed to join us, and to serve us” as he had been “taught to expect.” Howe had equally underestimated his enemy and the chances of a counterattack.⁴⁹

Far from finding latent support in New Jersey, the British occupation was subject to continued resistance in small-scale partisan warfare known as *petite guerre*. As Cornwallis was to discover in his later conquest of South Carolina, the British army was plagued by constant raids and ambushes by local militia and citizen bands. Howe’s communications were frequently cut off between Amboy and New Brunswick. Throughout the campaign, Howe had difficulty obtaining intelligence from the inhabitants about the local terrain. Since it was mostly “wood, creeks and swamps,” he had to move cautiously and was unable to rely on accounts from “inhabitants entirely ignorant of military description.” His army suffered some of its worst setbacks when mounting foraging parties, in which they were opposed by rebel groups as large as seven hundred to a thousand men. Sir James Murray, a young Scottish officer, described one such encounter in which an officer and sixty men were killed. By the end of the winter of 1776–77, Howe had lost half his army. More troops were killed in minor forays than in battles.⁵⁰

Howe was also impeded from pursuing a bolder strategy against Washington by the difficulties of obtaining supplies, transport, and food, a logistical problem that vexed him at every turn and continued to plague the army throughout the war. It was because of the shortage of shipping and supplies that Howe had delayed his withdrawal from Boston in 1775 and his departure from Halifax to begin the campaign in New York in 1776. The shortage of food restricted his strategic choices when he had to capture territory in order to sustain and feed his army, since he otherwise had to import his supplies and food from Britain. It was a factor in his decision to secure New York before attempting to defeat Washington’s army, and in his “much criticized” decision to take Rhode Island in 1776. The need for forage and food was also a motive for invading New Jersey. The demand for food increased with the arrival of loyalist refugees in New York and the destruction caused by a mysterious fire there in September 1776. The need for food was the primary reason for mounting foraging parties that resulted in such heavy casualties during the harsh winter in New Jersey. Similarly, the shortage of boats was a problem that Cornwallis claimed prevented him from crossing the Delaware River in pursuit of Washington.⁵¹

Even before the war escalated into a global conflict with France and Spain, British resources were overstretched in America. Admiral Howe had insufficient ships to both support the army and mount a naval blockade. In 1776, even if he had wished to enforce a blockade, he had only fifteen spare ships to cruise the Atlantic coast. Furthermore, it was often impractical for warships to negotiate the coastal creeks and tide harbors. Although Howe attempted to improve the dockyard facilities in New York, he had to send ships to be refitted at English Harbour in Antigua, or Port Royal in Jamaica, or one of the dockyards in England. Without an effective blockade the enemy was able to import vital military supplies for the Continental Army and launch privateers with a devastating impact on British trade. Although his squadron retook 26 British ships and captured 140 enemy ships, Admiral Howe was never able to keep more than about 30 warships blockading the East Coast.⁵²

Britain had jeopardized its own security and that of its empire in order to mount the offensive in America in 1776. It reduced garrisons in England, Scotland, Ireland, and the West Indies. Hanoverian and German mercenaries replaced British troops to garrison Minorca and Gibraltar. At the beginning of the war, approximately 12,500 British troops garrisoned Ireland (the equivalent of almost a third of the British army), Dublin contained one of the largest systems of barracks in Europe, and the Irish Parliament was required to fund the cost of 15,000 troops. Unlike England, Ireland was predominantly Gaelic speaking and Catholic (with a ratio of at least three Catholics to every Protestant). Although German mercenaries replaced some of the British troops sent to America, the garrison fell to a quarter of its prewar level, raising fears of potential insurrection. In March 1776, nine ships of the Continental Navy and 100 Continental marines successfully attacked Nassau in the Bahamas island of New Providence, and occupied the town and fortress for two weeks. The marines removed military stores including gunpowder, and took the governor prisoner to New England. It was the first amphibious landing of the rebel navy and the first engagement of what later became the United States Marine Corps.

53

The redeployment of troops to America was a cause of a Jamaican slave rebellion in the summer

of 1776. The island had a slave population that outnumbered whites by twelve to one, and the revolt began when one of the two regiments garrisoning the island was about to embark for New York to reinforce General Howe. The slave leaders were aware that there were fewer troops on the island “than at any other time in their memory,” and that the local naval force was about to convoy a homeward-bound merchant fleet. They knew that “the English were engaged in a desperate war, which would require all their forces elsewhere [so that] . . . they could not have a better opportunity of seizing the country to themselves.” An inquiry by the island assembly concluded unanimously that the slaves had “placed their strongest hopes” on the withdrawal of the troops, which was the primary cause of the conspiracy. In the meantime, the valuable merchant convoy was delayed, enabling rebel privateers to equip and prepare. It was eventually separated from its naval escort by bad weather, leading to losses to enemy privateers valued at over a million pounds sterling.⁵⁴

In his election bid of 1774, General Howe had told his constituents that it was beyond the power of the entire British army to conquer America. In Boston in July 1775, General Hugh, Earl Percy, complained that the army was “so small that we cannot even afford a victory, if it is attended with any loss of men.” In a speech in the House of Commons in November 1776, General Henry Seymour Conway said that the military force “was totally inadequate to the purposes of absolute coercion” in America. Edmund Burke observed that none of the members with military experience were willing to vouch for the sufficiency of the military force. Secretary at War Lord William Barrington warned that the Americans “may be reduced by the fleet, but never can be by the army.” The army was not adequate to simultaneously fight a war while garrisoning Britain, Ireland, Jersey, the Caribbean, Minorca, Gibraltar, and India.⁵⁵

V

The lack of supplies and troops caused General Howe to revise his original campaign plan for 1777 and thereby contributed to the disastrous sequence of events that led to the defeat of General Burgoyne at Saratoga. In a letter to Lord George Germain of November 30, 1776, Howe outlined an ambitious strategy for the conquest of New England. It included an army of 10,000 marching to Albany to meet another British army from Canada that was to be commanded by General John Burgoyne. However, it required 15,000 additional troops to provide a total of 35,000 troops in opposition to the anticipated 50,000 troops voted by the Continental Congress. After suffering the setbacks at Trenton and Princeton, Howe submitted another more modest proposal that made no mention of sending his army north to meet Burgoyne’s army at Albany.⁵⁶

On January 20, 1777, Howe radically revised his plan with a new objective of capturing Philadelphia, which he thought an easier target than New England. He expected less opposition because he still believed that the loyalists were predominant in Pennsylvania. Although he was ultimately proved wrong, it was a justifiable view. There were significant pockets of loyalist support in Philadelphia and in the neighboring counties of Bucks and Chester. Thomas Paine complained of the numbers of people in Pennsylvania “who are changing to whig and tory with the circumstances of every day.” It was easy to exaggerate the extent of loyalist support because of the pacifist stance of the Quakers and the neutrality of many German sects like the Mennonites, Amish, and Dunkers. Moreover, Howe regarded Philadelphia as the capital of the American Revolution. It was the location of the Continental Congress and the largest city in British North America. Having never given up his desire to crush the Continental Army, Howe anticipated that Washington would “risk a battle to protect that Capital.” In a later testimony, Howe said that it had always been his opinion that “the defeat of the rebel regular army” was the surest road to victory.⁵⁷

Howe was deterred before the campaign even started because his plan for victory required a larger army. He was expected to win with fewer troops than he had commanded during the conquest of New York and an army that was small by the standards of warfare in Europe. He ultimately received 2,900 reinforcements, a fifth of the number that he originally requested and half what he thought necessary just to attack Philadelphia. His relations with Lord George Germain began to sour. He was angered that Germain included the sick and wounded when calculating the number of troops available for offensive operations in America. He resented Germain’s assurances that the shortage of troops would be compensated by “the weakness of the enemy, and the good inclination of the inhabitants.”

Howe interpreted the failure of the home government to send more troops as evidence that his own opinion no longer carried weight and that he did not have the confidence of the ministers. Indeed, Germain became sarcastic in his letters to Howe, and his dissatisfaction was reflected in progovernment newspapers in Britain. In June and July, the *Morning Post* published articles critical of the tardiness of the brothers in sending reports, and sought their recall.⁵⁸

In his defense of the campaign before the House of Commons in 1779, Howe ridiculed the expectation that he could have made major new conquests with a force that was sufficient only for the seizure and occupation of New York. In an argument encapsulating the British problem in America, he asserted that it was self-evident that “the power of an army must diminish in proportion to the decrease of their numbers” and that their numbers in the field must necessarily decrease “in proportion to the towns, posts, or forts, which we take, and are obliged to preserve.” The shortage of troops was mirrored by the inadequate size of the fleet, for in order to support the operations of the army, Admiral Howe virtually suspended the blockade of the coast of America. Sir William Howe had begun the campaign with an army “14,000 short of the number I had expected.” He had an army of conquest, but insufficient troops for the large-scale occupation necessary for the recovery of America.⁵⁹

Because of the shortage of troops and the threat posed by the enemy to his communications, Howe again changed his campaign plan with the decision to go by sea to Philadelphia rather than take the shorter route by land from New York. This further delayed the start of his campaign. In a letter to Germain on April 2, containing his proposal to “invade Pennsylvania by Sea,” Howe wrote that “restricted as I am from entering upon more extensive Operations by want of force, my Hopes of terminating the War this year are vanished.” He thought it possible that by the end of the year, he might be in possession of New York, the Jerseys, and Pennsylvania, “tho’ this in some Measure must depend upon the successes of the Northern Army” commanded by General John Burgoyne. Before getting under sail on July 7, he warned Germain that “I do not suppose” the planned junction of the two armies at Albany “can happen this Campaign.” He added that “a Corps of 10,000 effective fighting Men I think would ensure the Success of the War to Great Britain in another Campaign.”⁶⁰

Owing to the late arrival of the convoys of stores and camp equipment from Britain, Howe felt unable to open the campaign until June 7. Never wavering in his belief that the surest means of winning the war was the destruction of Washington’s army, Howe lost another six weeks in attempting to lure Washington from his encampment at Middle Brook, on the hills above the Raritan in New Jersey. Even after he had begun to embark his troops for Philadelphia, he pulled them back and crossed the river when he thought he had another chance to trap Washington. The futility of such cat-and-mouse games left him little alternative but to conquer territory and to build up loyalist support.⁶¹

On July 23, the Howe brothers finally launched the expedition to Philadelphia with a combined armada of 13,000 troops and 225 ships. Owing to General Howe’s disdain for the German mercenaries, only 4,441 of his troops were Hessians. He left the remainder with Clinton in New York who had a total of 9,000 troops. According to an official report of rations, Howe’s army was accompanied by 652 women and children. The women were wives, common-law partners, and camp followers who acted as nurses, seamstresses, launderers, cooks, and vendors.

In the meantime, General John Burgoyne was marching south from Canada with the object of meeting Howe’s army at Albany. Howe had delayed his departure from New York until he was confident that Burgoyne’s expedition was well under way.⁶²

Upon arrival at the mouth of the Delaware River on July 30, Howe lost more valuable time by his decision not to land his army there, but to proceed via Chesapeake Bay to the Head of Elk (near modern Elkton in Maryland), fifty-five miles south of Philadelphia. The change added another month to his journey during which the troops suffered cramped conditions aboard ship at the height of summer. In England, the *St. James’s Chronicle* published a satirical article alleging that the government had made unsuccessful inquiries in search of Howe’s whereabouts in Knightsbridge, on the Serpentine River, and at the Lost and Found Office in Holborn. Howe’s decision not to land at the Delaware was due to naval intelligence about the proximity of Washington’s army and the hazards of landing in marshy terrain along that river. It was also motivated by his intention to cut Washington off from the military depots in York and Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He anticipated no opposition in Maryland and southern Pennsylvania. However, the delays to the expedition precluded any chance of Howe marching north to Albany to join

Burgoyne's army from Canada. After arriving at the Head of Elk on August 30, Howe again warned Germain that he would be unable to fulfill his orders to complete the recovery of Pennsylvania "in time for me to co-operate with the Northern Army."⁶³

Howe enjoyed considerable success in meeting his objectives for the campaign of 1777. As he had anticipated, his march north was opposed by Washington who attempted to prevent the British army from crossing the sharp banks of the Brandywine Creek. It was an excellent defensive position for the enemy army with hills and forests along a deep valley. Varying in width between 50 and 150 yards, the creek could only be forded in seven places, of which the most accessible was Chadd's Ford on the main route from Kennett square to Philadelphia. At the battle of Brandywine on September 11, Howe repeated the strategy that had served him so well at Long Island, by deceiving the enemy into expecting a frontal assault by troops commanded by General Wilhelm von Knyphausen. Beginning in darkness at about two o'clock in the morning, Cornwallis with 7,500 men marched twelve miles across the forks of the Brandywine in order to turn the enemy's right at Chadd's Ford. As Cornwallis engaged the enemy rear at about 4.30 P.M., Knyphausen simultaneously launched a frontal attack. After two and a half hours of what General Henry Knox called "the most severe action that has been fought in this war," Washington was forced into retreat across the Schuylkill River with 300 of his men killed, around 600 wounded, and another 400 taken prisoner, against 90 British dead and 488 wounded. In the early hours of September 19, a messenger arrived in Philadelphia to warn of the rapid approach of Howe's army. The Continental Congress adjourned the next day and moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and about a quarter of the population left the city in advance of the arrival of the British. Writing in his journal after the battle, Captain von Ewald reflected that "one will perceive that General Howe is not a middling man but indeed a good general."⁶⁴



Howe yet again displayed the talents of an able tactician. Washington still attempted to obstruct his advance on Philadelphia, by leaving a division commanded by “Mad” Anthony Wayne on the south side of the Schuylkill River. General Charles Grey earned the sobriquet “No Flint” Grey when he ordered his troops to remove the flint from their rifles and to use only their bayonets in a surprise nighttime attack on September 21, in which they surrounded Wayne’s camp two miles south of the Paoli Tavern. In what became known as the “Paoli Massacre,” some three hundred Americans were killed compared to eighteen British losses. Howe then successfully deceived Washington by moving his army upriver away from Philadelphia in a feint to give the impression that he was about to attack the rebel arsenal at Reading and outflank the Continental Army.

At about ten o’clock on the morning of September 26, Lord Cornwallis at the head of both English grenadier battalions as well as Hessian grenadiers, along with a part of the artillery, marched in triumph into Philadelphia, with the bands playing martial music. As the army entered from Germantown along Second Street, the inhabitants thronged along the streets to see them and seemed “to rejoice on the occasion, tho’ by all accounts many of them were publicly on the other side before our arrival.” According to Captain John Montresor, the troops received the “acclamations of some thousands of inhabitants, mostly women and children.” As the rear of the army with the light dragoons passed, the

band played “God Save the King.” Although frightened by the somber demeanor and moustaches of the Hessians, a boy of ten marveled at their fine martial appearance, their friendly attitude, and their hearty handclasps. Another observer was appalled by the motley camp followers of animals, goats, asses, wagons, horses, and women. In her house on the south side of Chestnut, Deborah Logan observed “what we thought the haughty looks of Lord Rawdon and the other aide-de-camp” of Lord Cornwallis.⁶⁵

Washington narrowly failed to inflict a counterblow against the British in Pennsylvania similar to his victories at Trenton and Princeton. At 3:00 A.M. on October 4, his army of 8,000 regulars and 4,000 militia made contact with patrols of the 9,000-strong British outpost at Germantown. Howe had not fortified the town, trusting that the enemy would not have “dared to approach after so recent a defeat as that of Brandywine.” In any case he was distracted with clearing the Delaware River in order to supply Philadelphia. When he received news of the attack, he said “That cannot be!” During the two-and-a-half-hour battle at Germantown, he witnessed the line of his troops being driven back, causing him to furiously exclaim, “For shame, Light Infantry, I never saw you retreat before, form! form!” There was thick early morning fog which reduced visibility to thirty yards or less. When Howe suddenly came under fire, an officer of the 52nd Regiment recalled that “we all felt pleased to hear the grape rattle about the Commander-in Chief’s ears after he had accused the battalion of having run away from a scouting party.” During the battle, Washington returned Howe’s dog with a note sending his compliments, writing that the dog “accidentally fell into his hands, and by the inscription on the collar, appears to belong to General Howe.” Washington had nearly triumphed but for confusion caused by the fog, and the stubborn resistance of the British 40th Regiment which had occupied Chew House in the north of Germantown. The building was “riddled by cannonballs and looked like a slaughter house with blood splattered around” from the incessant fire of the enemy artillery commanded by General Henry Knox. The day was saved for Howe by the arrival of reinforcements under Cornwallis from Philadelphia.⁶⁶

During their nine-month occupation of Philadelphia, the British revived the entertainments suppressed by the Continental Congress. There were cockfights, horse races, and cricket matches. The Southwark Theatre reopened with British officers joining a troop of actors known as “Howe’s strolling players,” who largely performed farces and at least one Shakespeare play, *Henry IV, Part I*. There were performances once or twice a week with the proceeds donated for the care of widows and orphans of the army. The audiences could enjoy spectacles like Lord Cathcart playing the role of a servant and being kicked on stage in George Farquhar’s *The Inconstant*. The British also opened clubs and assembly rooms in Philadelphia, and the senior officers gave private balls, concerts, and dinners. The City Tavern hosted a ball every Thursday, as well as acting as the largest gambling club, with a faro bank kept by the Hessians, where “everyone from the Commanding General to the youngest ensign assembled.” The bids were as high as a thousand guineas and fifty thousand dollars, which ruined many good officers, some of whom “shot themselves out of desperation,” while many were forced to sell their commissions and leave the army. The editor of the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, the first newspaper to print the Declaration of Independence, switched allegiance to publish articles in support of Britain. The State House (Independence Hall)—where the Continental Congress had voted for the declaration—became a prisoner of war camp. In the grounds, the army drilled and paraded daily, and the bandsmen gave regular public concerts. Their barracks extended from Second to Third Street and from Tammany to Green Street, and Howe moved his headquarters to the Morris mansion at Market Square. Philadelphia became a garrison city.⁶⁷

Despite deceptive appearances, the British were far from luxuriating in Philadelphia while Washington and his army suffered at Valley Forge. Every public building was used to house two thousand sick and wounded British and Hessian soldiers. The army was placed on half-rations, and there was a shortage of medical and hospital supplies that caused tension between the British and the Hessians. Unable to obtain supplies, the city became a prison for as many as fifty thousand inhabitants and troops. The journals and letters of officers complained of the extortionate prices of every necessity. Howe had difficulty in trying to arrange a quasi-civilian government, causing conflict with the leading Philadelphian loyalist, Joseph Galloway, who was to become Howe’s greatest critic in England.⁶⁸

As early as October 16, the success of the Philadelphia campaign was suddenly overshadowed by rumors that Burgoyne had surrendered his entire army at Saratoga in upstate New York. It was the

turning point of the war. While rumors were still pending on October 22, General Howe wrote a letter of resignation to Lord George Germain in which he complained of the “little Attention . . . given to my Recommendations since the Commencement of my Command.” His Philadelphia campaign seemed nothing more than a frivolous excursion, and worse still a distraction that contributed directly to the British defeat at Saratoga. News of his victory at Philadelphia and Burgoyne’s defeat at Saratoga appeared almost simultaneously in newspapers in Britain. In the words of a correspondent in the *Morning Post*, “the joy of General Howe’s success has been so soon followed by the mortifying news of the brave General Burgoyne.” Like an actor who had missed his cue, Howe was accused of having ignored orders to form a junction with Burgoyne at Albany.⁶⁹

VI

Howe had been well aware that he was expected to make contact with Burgoyne’s army and assume overall command when it reached Albany from Canada. The home government had planned to cut off radical New England along the Hudson River from the rest of America. This was to be achieved by Burgoyne’s army marching south from Canada and Howe’s army marching north from New York to converge at Albany. Howe and his brother were also expected to strike against the coast of New England. This had already been the plan for 1776 when Germain hoped that Howe would meet the army of General Sir Guy Carleton advancing south from Canada. It was then aborted only because Carleton failed to take Fort Ticonderoga and his army returned to Quebec. In the first iteration of his plans for the campaign in 1777, Howe had included the concept of a junction with Burgoyne’s army at Albany.

Lord George Germain had reminded Howe that he was expected to link with Burgoyne and undertake raids on the coast of New England. On July 5, Howe acknowledged the receipt of a copy of Germain’s instructions to the governor of Canada stipulating that Burgoyne “must never lose view of their intended junctions with Sir William Howe as their principal objects.” On August 16, Howe received a letter from Germain sent on May 18 “trusting . . . that whatever you may meditate, it will be executed in time for you to co-operate with the Army ordered to proceed from Canada.” According to an account assiduously circulated by the earl of Shelburne, Germain delegated the task of writing and sending the plan of the campaign to one of his under secretaries, Christopher D’Oyly, because he was impatient to leave for his country home at Stoneland and consequently did not wait to see his instructions carried out by D’Oyly. William Knox, an under secretary in the American Department, later confirmed the substance of the story, with the exception that he claimed that Howe acknowledged the receipt of the letter containing the plan but suppressed the contents, while no copy was kept in London. Knox may indeed have intended to imply a conspiracy and cover-up involving D’Oyly as a friend of Howe. In any case on September 3, Germain wrote again to Howe of “the Joy you must have derived from the Accounts of General Burgoyne’s rapid Progress, and the fair Prospect which you may now have of an earlier Junction.”⁷⁰

From conversations with army officers who had returned from London, Howe was also aware of the expectation that he would join Burgoyne. On May 8, he met with a Major Nisbet Balfour who had been sent by Germain to urge the Howes to carry out raids on the coastlines of Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire in support of Burgoyne. On July 5, Sir Henry Clinton returned to America from England where he had spent time with Germain. He was very familiar with the plan to unite the armies along the Hudson and finish the campaign in 1777. While Howe was still in New York, Clinton implored him to abandon the proposed Philadelphia campaign in order to join with Burgoyne at Albany. His case was weakened by their mutual dislike of one another. As Clinton wrote in his unpublished memoirs, “by some cursed fatality we could never draw together.” Apart from the strategy at the battle of Long Island, Howe had consistently rejected alternative plans proposed by Clinton.⁷¹

By mid-July 1777, the majority of Howe’s senior officers had advised against the Philadelphia campaign, including “No Flint” Charles Grey and Sir William Erskine. Cornwallis supported Howe, dismissing the opposition of another staff officer, Sir William “Woolly” Erskine, saying “Faugh! Faugh! Woolly only wants a junction with Burgoyne so that he may crack a bottle with his friend Phillips.” Even George Washington believed that Howe “certainly ought now, in good policy, to endeavor to cooperate

with General Burgoyne.” When it became apparent at the end of July that Howe was abandoning Burgoyne, Washington still thought it so improbable that he wrote that he could not “help casting my eyes continually behind me.”⁷²

Howe justified his own conduct on the grounds that Germain had endorsed his various plans for the conquest of Philadelphia. He further argued that he did not have the troops or ships to both conquer Philadelphia and mount raids on New England. He doubted that he had the capacity to hold territory over the winter in a region that was so hostile. In regard to the planned junction along the Hudson, Howe claimed that he would have been accused of wasting the campaign “merely to ensure the progress of the northern army.” He added revealingly that it might have been said that he “had enviously grasped a share of that merit” from Burgoyne. Howe had given advance warning both to Germain and to Burgoyne that he would be unable to march north to Albany.⁷³

There was little danger of Howe stealing the thunder of Burgoyne, but there was a real chance that he might be eclipsed by Burgoyne blazing a trail from Canada. Howe was the commander in chief, but he was given a subordinate role in the plan for the junction at Albany, whereas his modified plan to take Philadelphia offered him the opportunity to shine as much as Burgoyne. In choosing to attack by sea, furthermore, the Howe brothers were able to play to their greatest strength in combining the army and navy. They would be able to display the talents that had given them prominence in their respective services—the use of light infantry and amphibious warfare. Burgoyne, for his part, had been disappointed that he had not originally been appointed commander in chief rather than Howe. Clinton was upset at being given a cameo role of commanding the forces in New York with an inadequate force to fend off Washington’s army and create a diversion in favor of Burgoyne. The general strategy of 1777 had thrown the apple of discord among the three generals who had traveled so amicably together aboard the *Cerberus* to Boston.

Howe was too professional a soldier to have deliberately allowed Burgoyne to fail at Saratoga. He had indeed expected him to succeed. Howe did not sail from New York until after he had received news of Burgoyne’s capture of Fort Ticonderoga, and he did not thereafter expect the northern army to face serious opposition. This was the real source of the seemingly lax instructions and lack of coordination among the campaigns of 1777: the whole plan was predicated on the anticipation of support from the majority of the population and of a weak enemy. After hearing of Burgoyne’s victory at Ticonderoga, Howe wrote: “I apprehend Genl Burgoyne will meet with little interruption [other] than the Difficulties he must encounter in transporting stores and provisions for the supply of his Army.” He instead hoped that the success of Burgoyne in the north might deflect Washington’s forces in Pennsylvania. He was not in the least concerned that Washington might march north, since “the strength of Genl. Burgoyne’s army is such as to leave me no Room to dread the Event.” For his part, Burgoyne was equally confident that he would not need help from Howe. He was still with Governor Sir Guy Carleton when a message arrived from Howe warning him not to expect much assistance during the march south of Ticonderoga. As for Germain, he assumed that Howe would be able to complete the Pennsylvania campaign in time to support Burgoyne. He was unperturbed when he discovered that the junction was unlikely to happen, writing that it would be “more honour for Burgoyne if he does the business without any assistance from New York.” Germain was more worried about Howe than about Burgoyne, and thought it was the former who might need assistance from the latter. Indeed, he only regarded a junction as desirable rather than essential.⁷⁴

The root cause of the defeat was not that there too many cooks spoiling the broth in the planning of the campaign, but that the politicians and the generals had all assumed little opposition from the enemy and widespread loyalist support. The various plans underestimated the popularity of the independence movement and of what John Adams called the real American Revolution—the radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people with the spread of republican ideas enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson went beyond the usual formula of listing grievances used in the many regional declarations of independence by towns, counties, and states. His genius was to begin by establishing a broad set of popular principles—his “self-evident truths.” Influenced by his love of poetry and music, the declaration was written in a rhetorical and

persuasive style that rivaled Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Paine. As Jefferson readily admitted, it was not intended to be original but to capture the popular thought of the time—what he called the American mind.⁷⁵

The Declaration of Independence articulated the radical republican creed of the American Revolution. Its promise of a better future gave purpose to the struggle, beyond simply changing one ruling elite for another. Republicanism invoked a language of liberty, natural rights, representation, and equality, the meaning of which was sufficiently ambiguous and elastic to allow for more utopian and radical interpretations than originally intended. It appealed to the aspirations of ordinary people, and was well suited to the relatively egalitarian social conditions among the free white population in America. The republican ideology of the revolution led to actual changes in state constitutions that permitted greater participation in government and new emphasis upon actual representation. When combined with messianic religious overtones and a sense of righteous indignation, it was a compelling formula for what the revolutionaries dubbed “the Glorious Cause.” There was a thrill and excitement that they were beginning the world anew. British and loyalist claims that the majority of people were being duped by a few unscrupulous revolutionaries were less persuasive than the popular conspiracy theory of a deliberate pattern of British policy to create a tyrannical system of government in America.⁷⁶

The popularity of revolutionary ideology was reinforced by the threat of coercion against anyone who resisted. In the Association of 1774, the Continental Congress had set up committees of safety (also known by other names such as committees of observation) in every town and county to enforce the boycott against British trade. The role of the committees expanded in the initial absence of local government. They administered test oaths and laws together with the justices of the peace, and they acted in concert with the militia to police the population and purge loyalists. Their presence forced ordinary people to make choices. In areas of apathy or opposition, the militia of other regions intervened. The requirement that citizens serve in the militia forced those who were neutral to identify themselves actively with the revolutionary cause or go into exile. The British interpreted such coercive methods of recruitment as evidence of the tyranny and desperation of the revolutionaries. Still, although opinion continued to shift among what is called today “the silent majority,” the population increasingly embraced the revolution.⁷⁷

The opposing sides began to regard one another as foreigners and not as brothers engaged in a civil war. A British marine captain described the American people as a “levelling, underbred, artfull, race of people,” devoid of principles, “a sad set of Presbyterian rascals.” He was so perturbed by their formality of dress and their deliberately slow speech that he longed “to shove a soup ladle down their throat[s].” The officers and soldiers frequently alluded to their opponents as cowardly because of the unconventional tactics of the militiamen and their avoidance of open battle. During the retreat from Lexington and Concord in April 1775, soldiers had vented their anger at being shot from behind bushes by ransacking houses. Major John Bowater of the Marines wrote about being hurt beyond conception when he contemplated fine men aged as young as fifteen who had lost limbs. He every day cursed “Columbus and all the discoverers of this Diabolical Country.” There was also an ideological component. The British regarded their opponents as criminals who were committing acts of rebellion and treason that did not entitle them to the usual conventions of war.⁷⁸

The presence of British soldiers, known as “Bloodybacks” and “Lobsters,” helped alienate popular opinion in America. Although there were many instances of soldiers making friends among the Americans, a British officer admitted that the troops more typically “planted an irrecoverable hatred wherever we went.” Between a quarter and a third of Howe’s army were German mercenaries. It was one of the most consistent complaints of the various declarations of independence at the local and state level that the British had used foreign mercenaries against their fellow subjects. The British relied on the terror inspired by the bayonets of the infantry and the charge of the cavalry. It was often successful in causing opponents to flee but it resulted in terrible carnage and bloody mutilated carcasses. The British had difficulty in distinguishing between enemy combatants and civilians because militiamen did not wear uniforms or carry standard weaponry, often conducting raids in small bands without officers. In December 1776, Howe ordered that armed men who were neither officers nor in uniform but who fired at troops should be hanged without trial as assassins. The subject was debated in Parliament.⁷⁹

Although there were atrocities committed by both sides, those attributed to the British were

recounted in the revolutionary press and helped perpetuate the image of a hostile foreign presence. After the battle of Long Island, there were accounts of the bayoneting of prisoners of war and even the massacre of provincial troops in newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. During an engagement fifty miles north of Philadelphia at Crooked Billet (May 1, 1778), a report to the revolutionary Pennsylvania Council claimed that British troops had burned alive fully clothed men in buckwheat straw and committed acts of butchery worse than those of the most brutal savages. The more poignant tales of revolutionary courage and sacrifice created national martyrs and heroes. Howe ordered the execution without trial of Nathan Hale, a graduate of Yale and an officer in the Continental Army, who was hanged for spying in New York on September 22, 1776. Captain John Montresor, the chief engineer of the British army, wrote to Enoch Hale describing how his brother had mounted the gallows with the words, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."⁸⁰

Despite being crimes punishable by death, British troops committed acts of rape and plunder. The twenty-two-year-old Lord Francis Rawdon described how the "fair nymphs" made the men as riotous as satyrs for "fresh meat." He quipped that a girl could not step into the bushes to pluck a rose without running the imminent risk of being ravished, adding that they "are so little accustomed to these vigorous methods that they don't bear them with proper resignation." He recounted with equal levity instances of gang rape by seven men and another by a group of grenadiers.⁸¹

The practice of plunder was a notorious problem. General Howe attempted to suppress it with a series of proclamations and occasional executions, but then, to the consternation of Lord Cornwallis, he increasingly turned a blind eye. It was difficult to regulate plunder because the army was unable either to purchase sufficient food locally or import enough from Britain, so that the troops often suffered from hunger. Furthermore, plunder was regarded as part of the legitimate spoils of war.

Plunder was all too often indiscriminate against friends and foes alike. There was even a special vocabulary for it within the army where it was called "grabs" and "lobs." In New Jersey, Major Charles Stuart condemned the way the soldiers judged everyone rebels, "neither their clothes nor property spared, but in the most inhuman and barbarous manner torn from them." Although repeated orders were "given against this barbarity," they were disregarded because the crime was not punished and "Thus we went on persuading to enmity those minds already undecided, and inducing our very Friends to fly to the opposite party for protection." Major Stephen Kemble, from a loyalist family in New York, decried the unmerciful pillaging—"no wonder if the Country People refuse to join us." He described marauding that was so outrageous and cruel that the troops threatened death to anyone who opposed them and even violence against their own officers. In British-occupied Philadelphia, the plundering by the troops antagonized the civilian population and not least the American loyalists. The soldiers stripped houses, furniture, fences, gates, and sheds for firewood. The British officers and the loyalists often blamed the Hessians and female camp followers, but in fact the practice was universal. The possessions of avowed rebels were regarded as fair game. After occupying the home of Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, Major John André looted his books, musical instruments, and scientific equipment despite the protests of his friend, the young Swiss-born officer Pierre Eugène du Simitière. Possibly acting under orders, André took the Benjamin Wilson portrait of Franklin which he gave to General Charles "No Flint" Grey. The portrait hung in the ancestral home of the Greys until 1906 when it was returned to the United States and now hangs in the White House.⁸²

The process by which the presence of the British army alienated popular opinion was evident in Queens County in Long Island, one of the first areas to be recaptured by Howe in 1776. It comprised the towns of Newton, Flushing, Jamaica, Hempstead, and Oyster Bay. At the beginning of the war, the population was largely neutral or loyalist. Only 12 percent of the inhabitants had renounced allegiance to the crown, compared to 27 percent who identified themselves as loyalists. Their attitudes changed during the course of the war when they were under military rather than civil government. They were also the victims of plunder not only by soldiers but also by corrupt commissary officers who purchased supplies and provisions from them. They suffered billeting of soldiers in their private homes during the winter. The inhabitants were unsuccessful in their recourse to law. It did not help that the British turned the churches and meeting houses of what they regarded as nonconformists and "rascally sects" into prisons and barracks. Unlike seventeenth-century Tories, the American loyalists were not believers in passive obedience and divine right, but shared the belief of their fellow countrymen in the rule of law,

liberty, and government by consent. They believed that the rebellion was unjustified because there was not an absolute state of tyranny and because the unpopular measures of the imperial government were reversible by other means. In the later stages of the war, the residents of Queens County increasingly voted for candidates for town meetings who were neutral, rather than avowed loyalists.⁸³

In consequence of all these abuses, there was decreasing loyalist support for the British in America. Contrary to General Howe's expectations regarding the strength of the loyalists in Pennsylvania, before his landing in the Chesapeake, the inhabitants deserted their homes, drove away their livestock and removed their arms. Instead of finding support on his arrival, he complained that "the prevailing disposition of the inhabitants . . . seem to be, excepting a few individuals, strongly in enmity against us." In Philadelphia, Howe was surrounded by a hostile countryside. He spent two months opening the Delaware River against determined resistance by Washington's army and revolutionary militia who tried to cut off supplies to the city. His campaign culminated in the bombardment and capture of Fort Mifflin.⁸⁴

The chimera of loyalist support had lured Howe into extensive operations in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and it had been the pretext for an ill-fated campaign of Henry Clinton in North and South Carolina in 1776. Nevertheless, the British continued to be beguiled by the promise of countless legions of loyalists elsewhere in America. The belief was sustained by the seeming decline in enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause and the difficulty of obtaining volunteers for the Continental Army after 1776. Thomas Paine wrote of the "summer patriots and the sunshine soldier," and Washington complained initially of the apathy of the population in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The British obtained useful intelligence from the population in southeastern Pennsylvania, and Howe believed that loyalist sympathies began to revive during his occupation of Philadelphia.⁸⁵

The latent potential of the loyalists was never disproven because the British never held swathes of territory for long enough to test the possibilities of the restoration and the reconstruction of imperial government. The loyalists were disappointed when they did rally, only to be forsaken by the British as happened in Boston, North Carolina, and New Jersey in 1776. It did not help that the British did not restore civil government in New York or Philadelphia. The commanders did not trust the allegiance of the population and it was militarily inconvenient to negotiate with an elected assembly. It was a chicken-and-egg situation. The British needed to demonstrate that they were able to hold territory to attract support and allegiance, but such a strategy overextended the army. Following the conquest of New Jersey in the winter of 1776–77 and of Philadelphia in 1777–78, British power imploded in the wake of popular insurgencies.

VII

The debacle at Saratoga has inevitably overshadowed the success of Howe's Pennsylvania campaign against Washington. It was after the conquest of Philadelphia that Washington and his army endured the infamous winter encampment at Valley Forge. Their sacrifice and endurance became one of the abiding national images of the war. It was after the conquest of Philadelphia, too, that Washington's leadership was challenged by the Conway Cabal. Although it is doubtful that there was a real conspiracy to replace Washington with Horatio Gates, Washington himself believed that there was a movement to supplant him and confronted his critics through the medium of the Continental Congress. Washington and his army were to emerge stronger from the trials of the Conway Cabal and Valley Forge, but this is apparent only with hindsight. The number of his troops fit for duty dropped from 14,122 in December 1777 to 7,316 in March 1778. Despite the victory at Saratoga, the winter of 1777–78 represented a period of great vulnerability in the cause of independence, thanks to the success of Howe's campaign in Pennsylvania.⁸⁶

On May 25, 1778, three years to the day since he had first arrived in America aboard the *Cerberus*, Sir William Howe sailed from Philadelphia to England on the *Andromeda*, named after the princess of Greek legend who, after being chained to a rock, escaped the sea monster Cetus. The name was appropriate, for following the outbreak of war with France and new orders from London to return his army to New York, his last duties involved preparing the evacuation of Philadelphia which he had so dearly won. Howe had been popular among his officers who arranged a remarkable farewell event. Known as the Mischianza, it began with a regatta, followed by various entertainments that included

fireworks, gun salutes, and a grand dinner. Sir William Howe blamed his resignation on the “little attention” that the government had paid to his advice and the lack of confidence that he had received from his superiors. He became even more indignant when Germain made no effort to dissuade him from resignation and did not observe the usual courtesies of thanking him for his service. Howe returned determined to vindicate himself in England.⁸⁷

Always close to his younger brother, Admiral Howe also requested permission to resign. Both brothers had received increasingly sarcastic letters from Lord George Germain. Admiral Howe was congratulated by Germain for his indulgence in not suppressing subsistence fishermen and allowing swarms of rebel privateers off the coast of France. Indeed, Howe had always given priority to supporting the army, rather than blockading the coast and launching raids. There was a long history of differences between himself and Germain that dated from their service together in the Seven Years’ War and their disagreement about the terms of the peace commission in 1776. Admiral Howe also had a poor relationship with the earl of Sandwich. The admiral told his secretary that he had never enjoyed the confidence and civility of any government minister since the resignation of the earl of Dartmouth in 1775. He was especially upset at the treatment of his brother.⁸⁸

While Admiral Howe was awaiting his successor in 1778, he was to demonstrate some of those qualities that later made him a hero in the naval war between Britain and France. He assisted in the final evacuation of Philadelphia, with his fleet accompanying the transports with military supplies and loyalists. As he cleared Delaware Bay on June 29, Howe received his first intimation of the sailing of a French fleet commanded by Admiral Charles Hector Théodat, comte d’Estaing, who was sent specifically to entrap Howe’s fleet along the east coast. Within nine days of sailing out of the Delaware, Howe heard that the French fleet was already off the coast of America. His fleet was outnumbered with the possibility that the British army might be encircled and trapped in New York or Rhode Island. A young lieutenant in the 4th Regiment described the way that Admiral Howe met the crisis with the “same cool tranquility and clearness [that] attend[ed] all his orders,” seemingly unperturbed by the multiplicity of demands upon him. For eleven days, the two fleets faced one another, and Howe made a strong enough showing to dissuade d’Estaing from attacking New York. In addition, he successfully defended the British garrison at Newport in Rhode Island against d’Estaing. Britain might otherwise have lost the war much earlier in New York or Newport. Finally, on September 26, 1778, Admiral Howe sailed for England.⁸⁹

In the meantime, General Sir William Howe had demanded a parliamentary committee of inquiry to clear his name of any responsibility for the events leading to Burgoyne’s surrender at Saratoga. This became a personal parliamentary battle between the Howe brothers and Lord George Germain. There was a chance that the brothers would prevail; they were close to George III who was willing to dispense with Germain, the other government ministers were prepared to retain the Howes in command in America, and their friends rallied in their support. The dowager viscountess, Charlotte Howe, likened by the newspapers to a “Roman matron,” accused Germain of abusing her sons by employing hacks to plant derogatory articles about them in the newspapers. Their friend Christopher D’Oyly resigned in protest as under secretary to Lord George Germain in the American Department. Although Germain triumphed, General Howe was courteously received at court and Lord North approached Admiral Howe about replacing the earl of Sandwich as first lord of the Admiralty. They lost the support of the king, however, because they argued that the war in America was unwinnable, causing him to write to Lord North “L[ord] Howe should mind his own business and take the Plans as he found them.”⁹⁰

The Howe brothers became an embarrassment to the government and a boon to the opposition parties. Between April 22 and June 30, 1779, a committee of the whole House examined the war in America in what became an inquiry into the conduct of the Howes. Sir William began with his defense before the House of Commons which he subsequently published as a pamphlet. On April 29, Admiral Howe made a speech accusing the government of character assassination against himself and his brother through the use of pamphleteers, newspapers, and coffeehouse runners. In May, the brothers succeeded in having witnesses called, including Lord Cornwallis whose examination was much anticipated. His evidence proved disappointing, however, because he insisted upon keeping to the facts and refused to pass judgment on the decisions of his commander. He was due to return to command in America.

The attempt of the brothers to vindicate themselves was tantamount to a vote on the competence of the ministry of Lord North. They failed because the government still held a large majority in the House of Commons, and the inquiry was eclipsed by news of the declaration of war with Spain. On June 29, the committee of inquiry was adjourned. The issue was kept in the public eye by a campaign of twenty-five pamphlets whose primary authors were two American loyalists living in London, Joseph Galloway and Israel Mauduit. Galloway had been the prime witness against the Howe brothers during the hearings in Parliament. Mauduit's pamphlets, which called for both brothers to be impeached, were written with the connivance of Germain. The pamphlet campaign provoked Sir William Howe to publish an edited version of a speech in his own defense that he made in the House of Commons in 1780.⁹¹

VIII

The careers of the brothers did not end in ignominy. Following the fall of the government of Lord North, General Howe became a member of the Privy Council, lieutenant general of the Ordnance, and colonel of the 19th Regiment of Dragoons. During the French Revolutionary War, he was promoted to full general and had an important role in supervising the defenses of Britain against Napoleon. He subsequently became governor of Berwick-upon-Tweed (1795–1808) and Plymouth (1808–24), and succeeded Admiral Howe as fifth Viscount Howe in the peerage of Ireland. He outlived both Burgoyne and Clinton, and died childless at the age of eighty-five in Plymouth on July 12, 1814, a year before the battle of Waterloo. He was buried at Twickenham outside London.

Admiral Howe became one of Britain's most celebrated naval commanders. After the fall of the government of Lord North in April 1782, he was promoted to full admiral and became commander of the Channel Fleet. In October, he led the famous relief expedition of the British garrison in Gibraltar. Between 1783 and 1788, he was head of the navy as first lord of the Admiralty during the premiership of William Pitt the Younger. He was raised in the peerage to an earldom with the title of Earl Howe and Baron Howe of Langar in 1788. On the death of Admiral George Rodney in May 1792, he was appointed vice admiral of England. It was during the French Revolutionary Wars that his reputation reached its peak when he defeated the French fleet of Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse off Ushant in 1794. He inflicted some seven thousand casualties, capturing six ships of the line and the sinking another, in what became known as the Glorious First of June. Howe was said to have been almost constantly on deck for five days and four nights while the fleets were in regular contact.

The Glorious First of June was the first major British naval victory of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. It was to be commemorated in prints, souvenirs, ceramics, mugs, coins, and tokens. It was painted by the artist Mather Brown, who did portraits of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson while they were in London in 1786. On board his flagship *Queen Charlotte*, Howe was presented with a diamond-hilted sword by George III. His senior officers were given Irish peerages, including Admiral Thomas Graves and Sir Samuel Hood who had both commanded at the battle of the Chesapeake Capes in which they had been outmaneuvered by the French fleet off Virginia during the Revolutionary War. In 1796, Howe was appointed admiral of the fleet and general of the Marines. Among his last official duties in Portsmouth, Howe presided over the court martial of Admiral Sir William Cornwallis, the brother of General Lord Charles Cornwallis, who was accused of disobeying an order from the Admiralty. He found in favor of Admiral Cornwallis. In 1797, he became a member of the Order of the Garter.

After fifty-nine years of service in the navy, Howe had the opportunity to practice the conciliatory approach that he had advocated in America when he was personally asked by George III to negotiate with naval mutineers at Spithead in May 1797. The entire Channel fleet was in mutiny, and there had been actual bloodshed in which unpopular officers had been forced to leave their ships. Despite severe inflation and raises given to the army in the 1790s, the wages of the ordinary sailor had not increased since 1652. Howe was known to be popular with the ordinary seamen, earning him the sobriquet "the sailor's friend." He had shown concern for their welfare and conditions throughout his career. He was rowed out to each ship where he received petitions and listened to grievances. By offering concessions and a royal pardon, he successfully ended the mutiny with the fleet sailing again a month later. It was his last official duty—and the outcome he had wanted for America.⁹²

During the final years of his life, Admiral Howe suffered from considerable pain caused by gout which had afflicted him for over thirty years. He needed crutches to walk between the rooms of his London home, and had frequently sought relief from the spa waters at Bath as well as trying the fashionable “electricity” treatment used to cure gout. He died at his home in Grafton Street in London, on August 5, 1799, aged seventy-three, and was buried “without pomp or parade” in the family vault at the parish church at Langar in Nottinghamshire. His grief-stricken wife Mary was five years his junior and survived him by almost exactly a year. She was from a landed family by the name of Hartopp, and they had been married for forty-one years and had three daughters. A portrait of her early in their marriage by Thomas Gainsborough has been described by one art critic as the most forceful portrait ever painted of a woman by that artist ([Figure 15](#)). After the war in America, they spent much of their time together between their home in London and Porter’s Lodge, their country estate in Hertfordshire, but Mary also accompanied him from London when he went to negotiate with the mutineers at Spit-head. The couple left considerable properties in England and Ireland. A monument to Admiral Howe by John Flaxman, commissioned by the government in 1803, was em-placed in St. Paul’s Cathedral in 1811.⁹³

CHAPTER 4

“The Old Gamester”

JOHN BURGOYNE

London greeted the news of the British surrender at Saratoga with disbelief. From early November 1777, rumors of an impending disaster had begun to circulate. At the beginning of December, there was still such incredulity and doubt that a correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle* called upon readers to resist “mischievous impressions” put about by the agents of darkness and “channels of infamy and falsehood.” The newspapers were simultaneously printing descriptions of the victorious exploits of Sir William Howe and his occupation of Philadelphia. On December 4, the first reliable confirmation of the defeat arrived in a letter from the governor of Canada, Sir Guy Carleton. George III “fell into agonies on hearing the account.” According to Horace Walpole, the king tried to disguise his concern by affecting to laugh and pretending “to be so indecently merry, that Lord North endeavoured to stop him.” When challenged by opposition speaker Isaac Barré in the House of Commons, Lord George Germain was forced to acknowledge news of the defeat in a speech which “struck the house with astonishment; and such a gloom appeared on the countenance of every member, as might be supposed to have settled on the face of every Roman senator, when the defeat at Cannae was announced in the senate.” On December 15, any lingering doubt was dispelled when the official account of the surrender reached London.¹

Anthony Morris Storer, the member of Parliament for Carlisle, wrote to a friend that he could have no idea what an effect the news of the defeat had on the minds of people in London. He said that those unconcerned about the war were suddenly awakened from their lethargy to see to “what a dreadful situation we are reduced.” He thought everyone at fault “at this dreadful check.” As to whom to blame, no one could say, but “all seem, however, to be willing to excuse Burgoyne.” The *General Evening Post* described the way that the patrons of coffeehouses had become armchair generals: “having only fought battles in books, or formed attacks upon paper, by a comfortable fire-side,” they variously judged the conduct of General Burgoyne.²

John Burgoyne, the general who commanded the British army at Saratoga, seemingly embodied the image of the aristocratic dilettante and buffoon who was inevitably defeated by the simple, practical merits of the opposing commanders. Both a soldier and a playwright, he was a showman with staged mannerisms and speech. There was a rash quality in his propensity for gambling and cavorting. Burgoyne was said by one contemporary to have “more sail than ballast.” His theatrical personality made him a popular subject of parody in contemporary satires and lampoons. Horace Walpole variously called him “General Swagger” and “Julius Caesar Burgonius,” and described him as “a vain, very ambitious man, with a half understanding that was worse than none.” According to Nathaniel Wraxall, Burgoyne’s appearance seemed more fitted to a drawing room than a military camp.³

In a portrait by his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds of 1766, Burgoyne appears a glamorous figure with long, dark brown hair (Figure 16). His head is turned, so that he gazes to one side with a look of determination. His face is pale with dark rims around the eyes. The dramatic effect of the portrait is emphasized by a battle scene in the background and darkened clouds from the smoke of war. He is wearing the full brocaded scarlet uniform of a general, a fashionable grey waistcoat with black lining, together with the silver buttons and epaulettes of his cavalry regiment, the 16th Light Dragoons. His right hand clasps a saber while his left hand rests on his waist. He was the subject of more satires and biographies than any of the British commanders during the Revolutionary War. He was portrayed in George Bernard Shaw’s play, *The Devil’s Disciple* (1897). Indeed, Burgoyne has become the popular stereotype of the men who lost America.⁴

Burgoyne was in fact the least aristocratic of the British commanders in America. The Howe

brothers were the sons of an Irish viscount, Clinton was the cousin of the second duke of Newcastle, Cornwallis was an earl, and Thomas Gage was the second son of an Irish viscount. Burgoyne was plain “Gentleman Johnny.” He was descended from landholding gentry who had lived in Sutton in Bedfordshire at least since 1500. Like many gentry families, they had profited from the opportunity to obtain land following the dissolution of the monasteries. They had sat in Parliament since the 1560s and had supported Parliament in the English Civil War against Charles I. It was a respectable pedigree, but there was speculation about Burgoyne’s legitimacy. Horace Walpole repeated the rumor that he was the out-of-wedlock son of Lord Bingley, chancellor of the Exchequer under Queen Anne, an allegation supposedly made by Lady Bingley. The story gained some currency when John Burgoyne’s mother was left a substantial bequest by Lord Bingley. In the event of having no legitimate offspring, Bingley had intended the rest of the estate to go to “my godson, John Burgoyne” in return for taking his surname Benson.⁵

Burgoyne instead cultivated his own influential connections with the earls of Derby who owned extensive lands in Lancashire in the northwest of England. The first earl of Derby had played a decisive role in putting the Tudors on the throne of England at the battle of Bosworth in 1485; the fifth earl had been a patron of William Shakespeare who performed as an actor at Knowsley, the Derby family home near Liverpool; and the twelfth earl established the still popular annual horseraces, the Oaks and the Derby. The family was a major political presence in the northwest of England, especially in Lancashire including Liverpool. Burgoyne met James Smith Stanley, who later became Lord Strange and heir to the earldom of Derby, while they were both at Westminster School in London. Although five years younger than Stanley, Burgoyne remained a close friend of a man of “whose integrity and political judgment I had the highest veneration, and who was besides my benefactor, my patron and my friend.” At the age of twenty-eight, Burgoyne became his brother-in-law when he eloped with the fifteen-year-old Lady Charlotte Stanley, the youngest of six daughters of the eleventh earl of Derby. Her father disapproved but was eventually reconciled to the marriage. It was a testimony to the charisma and charm of Burgoyne that his relationship with the Derby family survived the death of Lord Strange in 1771 and the death of Lady Charlotte in 1776.⁶

The patronage of the Derby family assisted Burgoyne in his driving ambition to rise to high rank and fame as a cavalry officer. Burgoyne was descended from a family with a military tradition that had been granted the right to bear arms in the reign of Henry VII. His father had been a captain in the army, but gambled away the family fortune and died a debtor. After leaving school at the age of fifteen, John Burgoyne entered the army as a subbrigadier in the Horse Guards. His military career was twice interrupted at the cost of his seniority in the army, which he was to regret. On the first occasion, for reasons that remain obscure, he sold his commission in the Horse Guards in November 1741, and then returned as a cornet with the 1st Royal Dragoons, known as “the Royals,” with whom he rose to the rank of captain and saw active service against the French during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48). His regiment made repeated charges at the battle of Fontenoy (1745) in the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium). After marrying Lady Charlotte Stanley in 1751, he again sold his commission and escaped his creditors by moving to France. The couple visited Rome, where Burgoyne was painted against the background of the ruins of the Colosseum by the artist Allan Ramsay, who later did the coronation portrait of George III. Burgoyne’s commitment to a military career was suggested by his daily reading of the leading military manuals of the period and his conversing on military issues with authorities such as the future French minister, the duc de Choiseul. After the birth of a daughter in 1755, Burgoyne was accepted into the Derby family by his father-in-law and resumed his military career in England.⁷

Burgoyne made his reputation as a soldier in Europe during the Seven Years’ War. Returning to the army as a captain in the 11th Dragoons, he distinguished himself in a landing near Saint-Malo on the coast of Brittany in 1758, one of several unsuccessful coastal raids aimed at gaining the offensive against France. The expedition involved the same men who were later to blame one another for British strategy in America before Saratoga, including Lord George Sackville (Germain), William Howe, and Lord Richard Howe. Burgoyne was afterwards appointed lieutenant colonel of the 2d Regiment of Foot Guards. A still greater honor and profit for an officer of his relatively junior status, he was chosen to raise a new light cavalry regiment, the 16th Light Dragoons, who were commonly known as Burgoyne’s

Light Horse. The cavalry regiments had greater social *éclat*, so that the purchase of commissions was more expensive than for infantry regiments.

In recruiting and commanding his new regiment, Burgoyne demonstrated flair and originality. He did not resort to the time-honored technique of delegating the raising of men to recruiting sergeants but personally undertook the responsibility doing so in Northamptonshire. He wined and dined the local gentry, encouraging them to join as officers or to use their influence to entice men to enlist. Burgoyne distributed posters that highlighted the glamour and excitement of service in a light cavalry regiment with promises of the finest horses in the world, “superb clothing,” and the “richest accoutrements.” He offered a life of universal respect in which members of the regiment would be courted by the rest of society and admired by women. Burgoyne appealed in his advertisements specifically to the unemployed and poor, quoting from Shakespeare that “There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads to a fortune.” He signed off, “Nick in instantly and enlist.”⁸

Burgoyne wrote a code of conduct for the officers of his new cavalry regiment that was unparalleled in the British army until the early nineteenth-century reforms of Sir John Moore. Reflecting the humanitarian ideals of the Enlightenment, the code was introduced not “as the orders of a commanding officer, but as the sentiments of a friend, partly borrowed and partly formed upon observation and practice.” He prohibited officers from swearing at soldiers and exhorted them to treat their troops as “thinking beings.” Insisting on “complete social equality” between officers in private conversation, he encouraged informality, and even the occasional joke, with the men on suitable occasions. He suggested that officers devote some time each day to studying. He recommended that they learn to read French since “the best modern books upon our profession are written in that language.” He stressed the importance of writing skills and the ability to draw. He thought it imperative that an officer should be capable of doing the tasks he required of his men, stressing that officers should be able to dress, bridle, and equip horses. They should know every strap and buckle. Such familiarity would enable them to review their troops more critically and to hold them to higher standards.⁹

Burgoyne won his greatest military laurels in Portugal, the oldest ally of Britain. Following the declaration of war by Spain in 1762, Burgoyne was sent to defend Portugal under the command of Wilhelm, count of Schaumburg-Lippe (Count La Lippe), a German military adventurer who was one of the foremost artillery officers of the age, reputed to be an out-of-wedlock son of George I. In order to prevent the Spanish forces from coming across the border to attack Lisbon, Burgoyne led a mixed force of different foreign nationals in the bold capture of the walled frontier town of Valencia de Alcántara. After a forced march of fifty miles, he led a cavalry charge that took the colors of three Spanish regiments. When the Spanish later recovered and began to invade Portugal, Burgoyne sent Charles Lee to take a Spanish post and depot at Villa Velha, a village flanked by two decaying Moorish castles. Lee later became a general in the Continental Army in America. Burgoyne was promoted to the rank of full colonel, and received a diamond ring from the king of Portugal that was personally presented by the first minister, the Marquis de Pombal. La Lippe wrote an encomium about Burgoyne’s service which was published in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, and paid for the 1766 portrait of Burgoyne by Sir Joshua Reynolds which is now exhibited in the Frick Collection in New York.¹⁰

I

Burgoyne was a remarkably progressive and successful commander. In 1765, he traveled through Europe with the object of studying the different national armies, as well as of conversing with veterans and commanders like Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick. With introductions he secured abroad from the earl of Chatham, he visited the battlefields of central Europe and talked to the “principal actors on both sides.” He attended lectures in mathematics and languages at the Brunswick Military Academy. In Prague, he dressed in disguise to observe a military base of the Holy Roman Empire and witnessed drill parades of Bohemian and Moravian troops of the Austrian army.

On his return to England, Burgoyne wrote a pamphlet, *Observations and Reflections Upon the Present Military State of Prussia, Austria, and France*, that compared the national armies of Europe. After completing a draft in 1766, he sent it to the earl of Chatham who had presided in government over the great British victories of the Seven Years’ War. Burgoyne’s pamphlet showed his ability to think conceptually about warfare. He made a shrewd sociological argument that training and tactics reflected

national character. While admiring the assiduity and meticulousness of Frederick the Great of Prussia, Burgoyne was critical of his methods of training that degraded “all intellectual faculties” and reduced men “as nearly as possible to mere machinery.” He did not think such techniques transferable to British soldiers who he insisted should always be treated as “thinking beings.” Their officers should instead appeal to their reason, their patriotism, and their camaraderie. He thought that a system whose maxim was “not to reason, but to obey” was a liability among senior officers who became nothing more than “expert artificers.”¹¹

Burgoyne was impressed by the quality of Irish émigrés who had risen to senior ranks in the armies of Europe, especially among the Catholic powers of France, Austria, and Spain. They included the “Wild Geese,” the Irish brigade of Jacobites, who turned the fortune of Marshal Saxe’s army against the British at the battle of Fontenoy (1745). Burgoyne hinted that Britain should enlist Roman Catholics, including Irish Catholics, who were traditionally excluded from service in the army. Although always concerned with his own sartorial elegance, he believed that the clothing of soldiers should be designed with a view to “lightness, warmth and ease.” He stressed the importance of adequate pay for the morale and quality of an army. His concern for the treatment of his troops earned him the sobriquet of “Gentleman Johnny.”¹²

Although his pamphlet was impressive for its erudition, it was also shameless self-promotion in anticipation of the outbreak of another war in Europe. Burgoyne used every means to advance his career in the army. He lobbied aggressively even by eighteenth-century standards. Within a year of rejoining the army in 1757, he wrote to the commanding officer expressing resentment at “serving *under* so many men whom I had commanded.” He had an overweening desire to make up for the earlier intermissions in his military career which had lost him seniority among his contemporaries. In Portugal in 1762, he was the only British lieutenant colonel to be given the temporary rank of brigadier general to enable him to command the Portuguese as well as the British. He was not satisfied and wrote to the prime minister, the earl of Bute, seeking to be made a full colonel. Bute replied that it was not possible since there were a great many more senior lieutenant colonels. The explanation did not appease Burgoyne, who applied again to the secretary at war, Charles Townshend. He became even more importunate when he heard about the promotion of other lieutenant colonels who included Henry Clinton. He protested that the other promotions were not based solely on merit but upon family weight. He warned that denial of his promotion would be a slight to his patron Lord Strange, and made his claim to be “upon the same list as Mr. Clinton.” Bute relented and made him a full colonel “out of regard to Lord Strange, and your own merit.”¹³

Like many aspiring army officers, Burgoyne pursued a simultaneous career in Parliament. When he was first elected as MP for Midhurst in 1761, he was one of sixty-three army officers in the House of Commons. Although he regarded himself as an independent, he rarely deviated from the politics of Lord Strange, whom Walpole regarded as one of the foremost speakers in the Commons. Burgoyne did not speak in debates for much of his first ten years in Parliament. In the election of 1768, he stood to represent the town of Preston in north Lancashire, where many of the residents were tenants of the earl of Derby. Although the national electorate consisted of less than 20 percent of adult males, the right to vote varied considerably between constituencies. In this case, the earl of Derby had recently persuaded the House of Commons to enfranchise virtually all the male householders in Preston. As the earl of Derby’s nominee, Burgoyne’s candidacy challenged the power of the local burgesses who had previously held the exclusive right to choose the town’s MP. It became a contest over the future political control of Preston. The election was violent, with looting, fist fighting, and gangs roaming the streets, so that the candidates had to be protected by bodyguards.¹⁴

Burgoyne went to the poll carrying a loaded pistol in each hand, which he justified as necessary for his own protection but which his opponents claimed he used for intimidation. He wore his regimental uniform and was accompanied by a guard of soldiers. Allying himself with the large population of religious dissenters, he won the election. However, he paid a price for his success when the town burgesses sued him for intimidation and won their case in the Court of King’s Bench. Burgoyne was fined the considerable sum of £1,000, and some of his supporters were fined £100 each. His three sergeants and drummers were sent to prison but not fined because they were too poor. The popular anonymous newspaper letters of Junius alleged that, in return for political support, the duke of

Grafton, the prime minister, paid Burgoyne's fine and rewarded him with the lucrative sinecure of governor of Fort William in Scotland. Junius protested that such appointments were intended as pensions in reward to retired military personnel for good service and that it was hardly merited by one who "was not very conspicuous in his profession." Junius wrote of Burgoyne that "no man was more tender of his reputation," and proceeded to imply that he was a card shark who preyed on drunken young noblemen in games of piquet. A few years later, Burgoyne leapt to his feet clutching his sword when the accusation was repeated in the House of Commons.¹⁵

In 1772, Burgoyne was promoted to the rank of major general, together with William Howe and Henry Clinton. George III admired Burgoyne's cavalry regiment which he regularly inspected, watching exercises on Wimbledon Common. George III raised the regiment to a royal unit in 1766, and the 16th Light Dragoons thereafter became known as the Queen's Light Dragoons.¹⁶

Burgoyne rode the wave of success. He sought out the most fashionable venues and society in London. Always fond of theater and the world of the arts, he was a friend of the Shakespearean actor David Garrick as well as of Sir Joshua Reynolds. He was a member of the sparkling circle of Georgiana Cavendish, the duchess of Devonshire. He befriended both government and opposition politicians including Edmund Burke, Lord North, Charles James Fox, George Selwyn, the earl of March and Queensberry, and the duke of Devonshire. He was regularly in attendance at the Green Room of the Drury Lane Theatre. He dined at the Thursday Night Club and at the Star and Garter in Richmond, and he frequented the gaming tables of Brooks's Club and White's Club. He went to the horseraces at Salisbury and Newmarket. After the Preston election in 1768, he purchased stylish new homes in London and in Lancashire. He employed the Scottish architect Robert Adam to totally renovate his London house which is still standing at 10 Hertford Street in Mayfair. He built Cooper Hill at Walton-le-Dale in Lancashire, on the site of a Roman military encampment, near Patten House, the home of Lord Strange. Burgoyne designed the house, which was supposedly the first in England to have a lightning rod as invented by Benjamin Franklin.¹⁷

In June 1774, Burgoyne wrote his first play which was later performed in the West End as *The Maid of the Oaks*. Written as part of a newly fashionable *fête champêtre*, or rural festival, it celebrated the engagement of his twenty-one-year-old brother-in-law, Lord Edward Smith-Stanley, later twelfth earl of Derby, to Lady Betty Hamilton, the daughter of the duke of Argyll. It was held at The Oaks, a country house and hunting lodge that Burgoyne leased from the Derbys near Epsom in Surrey, about fourteen miles southwest of central London. At the extravaganza, costing more than the house at £500,000, Burgoyne was the master of ceremonies. He greeted the guests, whom he conducted to a "voluptuous scene" with a specially created orange grove, concealing a band playing minuets composed for the occasion by the violinist François Hippolyte Barthélemon, accompanied by the acclaimed soprano Polly Young and the drunken, fiddle-playing earl of Erskine. There were fireworks, archery stands, and ninepins, with shepherdesses on velvet-clad swings and kicking nymphs hanging from trees. There were young men bowling and playing skittles, surrounded by merry rustics in scenes evoking Arcadia. The female guests received a bouquet of flowers presented by two Cupids. Many of the entertainers were thespians who belonged to the troupe of celebrated actor David Garrick from the Theatre Royal in London. A temporary tented pavilion designed by the architect Robert Adam contained a ballroom adorned with Etruscan art and seats covered in crimson.¹⁸

After dinner, the guests watched Burgoyne's masque which was later revised by David Garrick and performed as a five-act play at the Theatre Royal. It anticipated musical comedy, which was to become so popular among the rising middle classes. The plot was a farce in which a gentleman is due to be married to a simple country girl who is an orphan. A friend of the groom tries to stop the marriage, questioning the motives of the bride and denouncing all English women as covetous, and the groom's father threatens to disinherit him, but all to no avail. The wedding proceeds when the guardian of the bride reveals that he is her father, that she is an heiress, and that he had kept her real identity secret to ensure that she would only be married by someone who genuinely loved her. The play was notable for the advocacy of women's equality by one of the characters, played by Frances Abington, the subject of a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds now at the Yale Center for British Art. The scenery was painted by the noted artist Philip James de Loutherbourg. The couple whose engagement the play commemorated had a less happy ending. They last appeared together in the drawing room of St. James's Palace on May 2,

1778, before the countess eloped and had a child by a former lover, John Frederick Sackville, the son of the earl of Dorset and nephew of Lord George Germain.¹⁹

II

Burgoyne prided himself on his political independence, but occasional opposition to the government was also an avenue to political rewards in exchange for future support. Following a dispute over the Falkland Islands off Argentina in 1770, he voted against a peace treaty with Spain. George III wrote to North that “seeing Colonel Burgoyne’s name on the side of the minority appears so extraordinary that I almost imagine it was a mistake.” Burgoyne voted against the Carib War in St. Vincent in 1772–73 in which the planters on the island had tried to take over the land of the native people, and which precipitated a heated debate about the rights of indigenous peoples with Burgoyne supporting the Caribs. After some equivocation, he supported the Royal Marriage Act (1772) to give George III the authority to prohibit members of the royal family from marrying without the permission of the crown. George III wrote to North that if Burgoyne had failed to support the measure, “I should have felt myself obliged to name a new Governor of Fort William.”²⁰

Burgoyne became more politically active and attempted to make his reputation on the subject of the East India Company that ruled British India. It was a commercial corporation with its own army, navy and administrators, and even its own flag with stars and stripes. The company seemed incapable of self-regulation and was in severe debt owing to the increased cost of defending and administering its expanded territories, but the government regarded it as too big to fail. Burgoyne proposed a series of measures to restore the credit of the company and the public faith in it, including a reduction in dividend payments to stockholders and a grace period for the payment of its debts. He argued that such temporary solutions needed to be accompanied by a series of fundamental reforms in the administration of the company and the financial ethics of its employees.²¹

In April 1772, Burgoyne made a major parliamentary speech in which he asserted that the government must “hold up the mirror of truth to the Company,” the deficient regulation of which excited and gave play “to the vicious passions of men.” He proposed and then chaired a select committee of investigation which turned into a sensational exposure of corruption within the company. His committee included Lord George Germain, Lord Richard Howe, Isaac Barré, and Charles James Fox. Burgoyne sought more government oversight and intervention in the company’s affairs, whereas Lord North wanted the relationship between the state and the company left more ambiguous. It was a very sensitive issue touching upon the rights of private property and also raising the fear that state control might open the floodgates to political corruption by giving the government a wealth of new patronage. North was not keen to publicize the fraudulent activities of the company employees and set up his own secret committee aimed at undermining the committee established by Burgoyne. North granted the company a loan while insisting that the government was not obliged to save private enterprises that were foundering.²²

On May 3, 1773, Burgoyne responded that reforms were meaningless without identifying and punishing former crimes. He revealed the discoveries of his own committee, exposing the most prominent, wealthiest, and most successful of the East India Company servants, Robert Clive, known as Clive of India, who had done much to consolidate British power in the subcontinent. He had been the victorious commanding general at the battle of Plassey (1757), for which he became Baron Clive of Plassey and which was significant in expanding British power in Bengal. Lord Clive was connected with the government of Lord North, and had a small following of members who owed their seats to his patronage. Following the revelations, Burgoyne was successful in passing a series of resolutions in the House of Commons asserting that the British state owned all territorial acquisitions acquired by the East India Company and that private gifts acquired by company servants were illegal. However, he was defeated in his attempt to formally censure Lord Clive who made a spirited defense, in which he famously said that “I stand astonished at my own moderation” in taking perquisites and gifts. Following the ordeal of the investigation by Burgoyne, Clive suffered sleeplessness and became addicted to opium. In November 1774, Clive of India committed suicide at his London home in Berkeley Square.²³

Unlike the Howe brothers and Cornwallis, Burgoyne consistently supported authoritarian policies in America. In 1766, he voted against the repeal of the Stamp Act and in favor of the

Declaratory Act, and in 1774, he supported the Coercive Acts which triggered the Revolutionary War. His views were conventional. He believed in the supremacy of the British Parliament over America, and regarded America as a child who had been ruined by the misplaced indulgence, “lenity and tenderness” of Britain. However, he stressed his desire to see the crisis solved by persuasion. In a debate on the tea duty on April 19, 1774, he claimed that he did not wish to see the colonies “prostrate at our feet,” an invocation of an unfortunate speech years earlier by Lord North. He said that he did “not wish to see America conquered by the sword, and bowing to force, but convinced by reason.” He believed in consultation in all matters and in treating the colonies as a partner in empire. He denied that removing the tea duty would remove all grievances in America, since it was “the right of taxation they contend about, not the tax; it is the independent state of that country upon the legislature of this, which is contended for.” During his speech, the members became inattentive and noisy, “being tired of the debate.” It was quipped that “the General belonged rather to the heavy than the light horse.” Walpole described him as a pompous speaker who made studied and florid speeches. which were not striking.²⁴

III

When he was invited to assume a junior command in America in February 1775, Burgoyne was reluctant to accept until he was personally persuaded by George III. He received his first intimation of the appointment in January from Charles Jenkinson who was a confidant at the Treasury of both the king and Lord North. While they walked together among a crowd outside the House of Commons, Jenkinson said that he wished Burgoyne were in America “with a look and emphasis that conveyed more than accidental conversation.” Burgoyne suspected that Jenkinson was sounding him out, and replied that “every soldier must go where he was ordered” but that he “believed in the present state of things, *that* service would not be desirable to any man.” On February 2, Burgoyne was summoned by the secretary at war, Lord Barrington, who began by informally talking about the previous evening’s debate on America which had kept the members late and “was very tiresome.” Barrington made other various “chit-chat observations of that sort” and then suddenly mentioned, “with an abruptness something like what Horace recommends to an epic poet,” that he hoped “everything in America would mend” with the arrival of Burgoyne. Barrington broached the subject with a total indifference of expression and tone of voice.²⁵

Burgoyne thought this manner of breaking the news “rather singular” when it was “one of the most important, of the most unexpected, and . . . *the most disagreeable events of my life.*” Although he was secretary at war, Barrington was opposed to going to war with America. If war was inevitable, he argued against using the army in favor of a naval blockade. Earlier in his career, Burgoyne had offended Barrington by writing to remind him of his important connections and ridiculously complaining that he had not received a chaplain and choir for his new cavalry regiment—which would have increased his income from the regiment. The request elicited a furious reply from Barrington that Burgoyne was comparing himself to more senior officers of “uninterrupted service to the army,” and that he had already received “a series of favours of which the army does not furnish a precedent, and to which with all his amiable and valuable qualities as a man he had not the least claim as a soldier.”²⁶

When Burgoyne responded that he would decline the service in America if it was optional, Barrington hastened to assure him that he believed Burgoyne to be the personal choice of the king, who had not been influenced by anyone and who had selected the generals “with no view than to scrupulously appoint to each particular service the person in his judgment best adapted to it.” Burgoyne professed that he felt it an honor “to be classed with such colleagues” and asked the minister to convey his ready obedience to the king.²⁷

Burgoyne ascribed his own hesitation in accepting the command to private family matters. He was concerned by the growing incapacity and illness of his wife. The couple had lost their only child, a ten-year-old daughter, Charlotte Elizabeth Burgoyne, who was buried in the North Cloister of Westminster Abbey in 1764. Burgoyne wrote of the pain of separating “for a length of time, perhaps for ever, from the tenderest, the faithfulest, the most amiable companion and friend that ever man was blessed with—a wife in whom during four and twenty years I never could find a momentary act of

blame!” He feared that his death might leave her financially embarrassed: “To supply the requisites of her rank, to reward the virtues of her character, I could only bequeath her a legacy of my imprudences.”

28

Burgoyne was also professionally unhappy with the appointment because it did not give him an independent command but simply made him an adjunct to two more senior major generals. He wrote that he “began to feel regret at being selected merely to make up a triumvirate of reputation.” Burgoyne lobbied members of the government to become governor of New York and replace William Tryon. He tried to patch up his relations with Lord North following their differences over the East India Company. He talked to Charles Jenkinson who he believed had nominated him for the post with the intention that he alone should be commander in chief in America. He met with Lord George Germain. He told General William Howe of his desire to be “employed in some more active station than the mere inspection of a brigade.” He became convinced that Lord North supported him but that William Howe had used “every engine of interest” against him. There was a rivalry for command before the generals had even departed aboard the *Cerberus* from England.²⁹

Before leaving England, Burgoyne gave a speech in the House of Commons in favor of the government’s American policy. His active participation in debate was in contrast to the silence of Clinton and Howe, who were fellow members but who never gave a speech until much later when they defended their commands in America. Burgoyne explained his intervention on the ground that there was much public speculation about the sentiments of the military commanders in regard to America. There was particular concern that the generals had such latitude in their orders that they might be influenced either by inflammatory speeches in favor of violence or by advocates for humiliating concessions. He said that he intended to conduct himself with both bravery and compassion. The army would inevitably be made the instrument of correction, but it should desist from “the sudden and impetuous impulse of passion and revenge.”³⁰

Burgoyne conceded that there was “a charm in the very wanderings and dreams of liberty that disarms an Englishman’s anger.” The British should remember that they are “contending against fellow subjects and brothers,” but it should not be forgotten that they were fighting for the fate of the British Empire. He believed all the governments in the previous ten years had some share in the errors that had been committed, but it had become a simple issue as to whether the representatives of the nation were willing to support the conviction of “the great rational majority of people in England” of the supremacy of Parliament. Britain would otherwise revert to “primitive insignificance in the Map of the World and the Congress of Philadelphia” would become “the Legislature to dispense the blessings of Empire.” Walpole called Burgoyne’s speech a “set oration” but said that it was admired, and Burgoyne had the speech published. It was one of the very few hostile British tracts to be reprinted and circulated in America in 1775.³¹

Shortly before leaving London for Portsmouth, Burgoyne had a breakfast meeting with Thomas Hutchinson, who was then regarded as the best-informed and most prominent American loyalist in Britain. Burgoyne was openly critical of the government, the absence of vigorous direction, the indecision of the Cabinet, and the aptness to procrastinate. Although he was due to sail in just over a week, he had not received any formal instructions. On the morning of April 18, 1775, upon his embarkation from Portsmouth for America, Burgoyne entrusted a letter to a friend which, in the event of his death, was to be sent to the king seeking royal protection for Lady Charlotte Burgoyne. The letter repeated his fears about his leaving his wife in “very narrow [financial] circumstances” when her health was weak. He wrote that she had committed no fault except that of love and generosity in choosing him against the wishes of her family. Despite his many absences, they had never been estranged from one another.³²

IV

Burgoyne was predictably frustrated and impatient in Boston, where he was nicknamed “General Elbow Room” because he was reputed to have said, “Well, let *us* get in and we’ll soon find elbow-room.” Within three weeks of his arrival, Burgoyne was writing to Lord North that his position left him powerless to enable him to contribute to the military situation in America. He requested to take a leave of absence to return to England before Christmas. In a letter to one of the secretaries of state, he

described himself as “a useless spectator” at the battle of Bunker Hill (June 17, 1775). As the most junior of the major generals, he led the artillery which was briefly engaged in a cannonade of the enemy. He complained that his lot placed him “in a motionless, drowsy, irksome medium, or rather vacuum, too low for the honor of command, too high for that of execution.” It was a situation he said that he had foreseen and predicted.³³

Burgoyne wrote vivid accounts of Bunker Hill. He intended them for circulation and sent letters unsealed to allow his wife to make extracts before forwarding them to his correspondents. His letter to Lord Palmerston included an account of the death of Major John Pitcairn, who had commanded the advance guard on the march to Concord. At Bunker Hill, he led the final assault on the enemy lines, with the cry “now for the glory of the Marines!” He was believed by tradition to have been killed by Peter Salem, a black soldier depicted in the famous painting of the scene by John Trumbull. Burgoyne described the way that Pitcairn’s son, who was also an officer in the Marines and who was near his father when he fell, “carried his father upon his back to the boats, about a quarter of a mile, kissed him, and instantly returned to his duty.” Burgoyne thought about the war in artistic and melodramatic terms, concluding this account by saying that the scene “in the hands of a good painter or historian, would equal the most that can be found in antiquity.” He elsewhere described himself as an insignificant actor in a great cause.³⁴

Burgoyne indeed urged the government to use propaganda to persuade not only the enemy but public opinion everywhere. Historian George Athan Billias credits him with understanding psychological warfare and “grasping the implications of the revolutionary idea that the British were fighting a people in arms rather than a professional army,” and that they were engaged in a war of ideology. Burgoyne wrote that it would be wise policy to promote the impression of the superiority of regular troops over enemy irregulars through writing and discourse. He proposed that the government commission the composition of a manifesto before the next campaign. He was aware of the importance of persuasion and the possibilities of altering perspectives through rhetoric. On June 12, 1775, General Thomas Gage chose Burgoyne to write a proclamation imposing martial law on Massachusetts that aimed to divide the population by offering pardons to those who lay down their arms and by threatening those who continued to resist. Although it has since been ridiculed for its rhetorical flourishes, it represented an attempt at persuasion.³⁵

Burgoyne similarly hoped to influence opinion in his public correspondence with the British-born General Charles Lee who had served under him in Portugal before becoming disenchanted and emigrating to America. Lee was one of the most original and innovative strategists among the generals of the Continental Army, and had advocated fighting an exclusively guerrilla war against the British. He initiated the exchange with Burgoyne, of whom he wrote that there was “no man whose esteem and affection could, in my opinion have done me greater honour.” His purpose in writing was to warn Burgoyne not to be misled by the misrepresentation of the views of Americans in Britain. Lee had traveled the entire extent of the eastern seaboard and conversed with all orders of men, among whom he found that “the same spirit animates the whole” and that they were “determined to preserve their liberties or perish.” Lee predicted that any attempt to crush the rebellion “must be ineffectual. . . . You cannot possibly succeed.” Burgoyne replied that there was no state of tyranny and that it was still possible to obtain a redress of grievances from Britain. He wrote that he was “no stranger to the doctrines of Mr. Locke, and others of the best advocates of the rights of mankind,” and declared his “reverence almost amounting to idolatry upon those immortal Whigs who adopted and applied such doctrine” under the Stuarts. Burgoyne suggested a meeting, but it was discouraged by both the home government and the Continental Congress.³⁶

Burgoyne displayed his boredom by seeking amusements in Boston. He established a riding school in the Old South Meeting House, thereby snubbing the New England Congregationalists. When he was taken prisoner after Saratoga, he was bitterly reminded of his riding school by his captors as they passed through Boston. Burgoyne also wrote plays for the private theatricals of the British army which were mostly staged at Faneuil Hall. He wrote the prologue and epilogue for an adaptation of Voltaire’s *Zara*, ridiculing the prudery of the Congregationalists. Lord Rawdon read the prologue and a ten-year-old girl delivered the epilogue. Burgoyne also wrote a farce entitled *The Blockade of Boston* that portrayed George Washington “as a bumbling figure with an oversized wig and trailing sword.” As

the curtain rose on the first night, an orderly sergeant ran onto the stage shouting “The Yankees are attacking.” The audience applauded and laughed until they heard real alarm guns, and the officers immediately dispersed to go to their units and posts “leaving the Ladies in the House in a most Terrible Dilema.” Mercy Otis Warren parodied Burgoyne in her own play *The Blockheads* (1776), in which he was called “Elbow Room.” She was intimately connected with the rebel movement in Boston and was the sister of the Patriot leader James Otis. She later wrote a three-volume history of the war that was among the earliest accounts by an American.³⁷

Burgoyne continued to send home schemes and plans for ending the war. After he witnessed Bunker Hill, his thinking evolved. He viewed the rebellion broadly in both its political and military dimensions, simultaneously advancing alternative political and military solutions. Like the Howe brothers, he favored first trying a peaceful approach and a negotiated settlement. Burgoyne suggested that he be released from service to go on a fact-finding trip to those states that had yet to experience the full impact of the war. He denied any desire to have a formal commission, but simply to act as “an individual member of Parliament, a friend to human nature, and a well-wisher to the united interests of the two countries.”³⁸

He also elaborated on a military solution, giving a grim portrayal of conditions in Boston. He did not disparage the rebels, noting that their defense had been well conceived and obstinately maintained at Bunker Hill. Their retreat was no flight but was covered with bravery and military skill. They were experts in the use of firearms. Their leaders might be “profligate hypocrites,” whose political ideas were “founded upon false principle . . . supported only by sophistry and frenzy,” but they often had “great ability.” The countryside was surrounded with fortifications, so that rebels driven from one hill simply retrenched on the next, necessitating continual sieges against them. The British troops were only sufficient to secure convoys and communications between the army and the supply depots against an enemy “who are all light troops.” There were insufficient cattle and forage. The sick and wounded were without provisions and even broth. The army lacked intelligence, not just of the rebel congresses but of activities among the hills just half a mile away. In fact, Burgoyne thought it desirable to evacuate Boston. There were insufficient troops and supplies to remain in the city.³⁹

Burgoyne proposed that the situation in Boston might be eased in the short term by the British fleet attacking off the coast of Rhode Island. The expedition might “try the temper and strength of places, by degrees, to the southward.” It might also be a diversion to cover and facilitate greater objects—namely New York—whose possession Burgoyne regarded as strategically vital to holding America. Long Island was potentially an excellent source of supplies and provisions to support operations along the Hudson River. He envisaged cutting off New England by the junction of two armies marching toward one another along the Hudson from New York and from Canada.⁴⁰

Burgoyne wrote that Britain and Ireland did not have sufficient forces to subdue the rebellion, a view that he claimed represented “the sentiments of those who know America.” He thought it necessary to raise a large army of foreign mercenaries to begin the operations up the Hudson, while the army from Canada should include British regulars and Canadians together with a “large levy of Indians.” Burgoyne’s wish to employ Indians was later attributed to Germain, but Burgoyne recognized “that the rebels are more alarmed at the report of engaging Indians than at any other measure” and he therefore recommended “the expediency of diligently preparing and employing that engine.” He additionally suggested that the insufficient number of regular troops might also be compensated by “a supply of arms for the blacks, to awe the southern provinces, conjointly with detachments of regulars.” The army operations should be supported by a large naval fleet sweeping across the whole eastern seaboard, which might “possibly do the business in one campaign.” Britain could not afford half-measures, which would only produce “much fruitless expense, great loss of blood, and a series of disappointments.”⁴¹

V

Before the end of December, Burgoyne was back in London where he was able to start jockeying for a better position in America and to become more closely acquainted with Lord George Germain, the secretary of state for America. Burgoyne continued to develop his thinking for the next campaign on the voyage home and presented the results to the Cabinet in a paper entitled “Reflections upon the War in America.” He recommended a more effective blockade of the coast to cut off supplies to the rebels. In

common with the campaign plan for 1776, the main objective remained a junction of two separate armies moving north from New York and south from Canada.

Burgoyne's revised version was noteworthy because it showed a respect for rebel fighting ability and appreciation of the problems posed by warfare in America. The rebels were unlikely to risk a general combat or a pitched battle. They preferred to use earthworks and palisades made from felled trees to cover and entrench themselves. Burgoyne dismissed the low opinion of the militia that was so prevalent among fellow officers. He thought it adept at using the terrain to its advantage with its woods, swamps, stone walls, enclosures, and hiding places. "Every private man was his own general, who will turn every tree and bush into a kind of temporary fortress" from whence, after firing his shot with "deliberation, coolness, and certainty which hidden safety inspires," he skipped to another vantage point and then the next. He concluded that the enemy militia was a respectable adversary even in retreat.⁴²

Burgoyne stressed the importance of mobility and flexibility to contend with conditions of warfare in America. He argued for an increase in the size of the light infantry which should become the standard in the British army. He envisaged using artillery to dislodge the rebels followed by a resolute attack of light infantry. In order to mount a more effective blockade of the coast, he suggested the use of smaller armed craft varying from schooners of ninety tons to rowboats. He imagined these smaller boats acting like satellites, oscillating around the primary planet of a large warship or frigate. They would be the equivalent of light infantry in their ability to navigate every inlet, passage, and sound.⁴³

Burgoyne was successful in his bid for advancement and was appointed second in command to Guy Carleton, the governor and commander in chief in Canada (Figure 19). The government had originally intended to appoint Henry Clinton, but he was commanding the expedition that ended in failure in Charleston. The appointment proved bittersweet. Burgoyne's wife lost both her parents within two days of each other while he was in England, and her own health was already ailing when her grief was compounded by the death of her favorite sister. Burgoyne sought to remain with her and considered resigning his commission, but in March 1776, he reluctantly sailed again for America.

As a huge armada of troops and ships assembled off New York under the command of William Howe, Burgoyne arrived with a massive reinforcement in Canada. Between early May and the middle of June 1776, the garrison of nine hundred British regulars swelled to twelve thousand troops, a third of whom were German auxiliaries primarily from Brunswick. Burgoyne's convoy included a talented group of general officers serving under him, like the forty-one-year-old Baron Friedrich von Riedesel, who commanded the three German brigades, and the forty-five-year-old artillery commander Major General William Phillips, who had previously served with Burgoyne in Portugal. Phillips was later described by Thomas Jefferson as "the proudest man of the proudest nation on earth." Brigadier General Simon Fraser led the 24th Foot. During the Seven Years' War, Fraser had commanded a light infantry unit and served as aide-de-camp to the duke of Brunswick. He gained acclaim for attacking and driving off four hundred French troops with only fifty men at the north German village of Wezen in 1761.⁴⁴

Since December 1775, Quebec had been under siege by a small but valiant force of the Continental Army led by Generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold. The assault was launched at midnight during a blizzard on December 31. Montgomery, a former British officer and a friend of Charles James Fox, was one of the first to be killed in the initial attack, and Arnold was wounded in the leg and forced to return to Montreal. The siege gradually lost momentum owing to dwindling enlistments and a smallpox epidemic that spread throughout the continent during the years of the Revolutionary War. With the melting of the ice along the St. Lawrence River and the imminent arrival of the reinforcements commanded by Burgoyne, Arnold abandoned the siege and began to withdraw.⁴⁵

Burgoyne reached Quebec to find Guy Carleton already in pursuit of the retreating Continental Army. Carleton had been acting governor for a decade. Six feet tall, with an impressive military posture, he was known as cold and haughty but was regarded as a very capable officer who had been a close friend of the hero James Wolfe. As described by Sergeant Roger Lamb, "his presence was itself a garrison, he was a man of ten thousand eyes, and was not to be taken unawares." In 1776, Carleton was the most senior British army officer in America. The European population of Canada consisted of some three thousand British subjects, who were mainly merchants and artisans, and as many as seventy-five thousand French Canadians. Carleton had shown vision in integrating the largely French population into

the British Empire by persuading the home government to restore French law and to tolerate the Roman Catholic Church. He was against the establishment of an elected assembly because it would have allowed three thousand Protestant British subjects to rule over the majority French Catholics. His advice prevailed and was eventually enshrined in the Quebec Act (1774). The act alienated the British minority who were consequently sympathetic to the Revolution. However, the concessions proved enough to maintain the neutrality of the French population, though insufficient to obtain their active support in the war.⁴⁶



At the end of May 1776, Burgoyne followed Carleton to Three Rivers (Trois Rivières), an Indian settlement on the St. Lawrence River between Montreal and Quebec. The Continental Congress had poured resources into the invasion of Canada, sending an additional fifty-three hundred troops to make a second attack on Quebec. Just as the British overestimated the extent of loyalist support in America, the Continental Congress exaggerated the potential for support for the Revolution among the inhabitants of Canada. Near Three Rivers on June 8, Fraser drove back an advanced guard of enemy reinforcements commanded by Major General John Sullivan of the Continental Army.

While Howe prepared to invade New York, Burgoyne pursued the retreating army of Sullivan, during which “some of his men nearly caught Arnold prisoner.” His troops raced in transport boats to overtake their opponent, but contrary winds enabled the armies of Sullivan and Arnold to unite at St. Johns, and Burgoyne arrived there in time to see them rowing away toward Lake Champlain. He and Carleton were unable to continue the pursuit for lack of boats to cross the lake, but by the beginning of July 1776, Burgoyne had driven the enemy from Canada. Benedict Arnold was the last to leave. He supposedly shot his horse to prevent it being captured and vowed that he would return to recapture Canada. He did not return until after the war—as a British subject.⁴⁷

Like William Howe, Carleton was cautious and persisted in the belief that conciliatory behavior might lead to a rapprochement. He released prisoners of war and showed them clemency in the hope that this might sway opinion in America. They included Daniel Morgan, “the Old Wagoner,” who later became a general of the Continental Army and the victor at the battle of Cowpens (1781). Rather than lose precious time waiting for boats, Burgoyne sought permission to lead a force across Lake Ontario and cut off the enemy before they could attempt to block the British from crossing Lake Champlain into upstate New York. Burgoyne also hoped that his proposed diversion might assist William Howe in marching north from New York and joining with Carleton along the Hudson. Burgoyne’s request was refused by Carleton, who lost weeks waiting for his guns to be dragged down from St. Johns, his boats to be disassembled to enable him to cross the ten-mile portage near Chambly, and his marines to arrive from the St. Lawrence. The delay allowed the enemy force to strengthen their fortifications at Crown Point and Ticonderoga, the former situated at the north end of Lake George and the latter near the southern end of Lake Champlain.⁴⁸

Upon Carleton’s resuming his advance along the Richelieu River, his progress was blocked by a flotilla prepared by General Philip Schuyler, who had appreciated the importance of maintaining naval superiority on Lake Champlain. The fleet was hastily completed by Benedict Arnold, and Carleton lost vital time building ships to engage Arnold. Although he triumphed against Arnold in a naval battle off Valcour Island (October 11–13, 1776), the delay enabled Colonel Thaddeus Kosciuszko, the Polish engineer, to strengthen the massive fortifications at Fort Ticonderoga whose strategic location on Lake Champlain guarded the entry into New York. On November 3, Carleton seized the fortress of Crown Point which was a natural stepping stone to the capture of Ticonderoga. The distance between the fortresses was only fifteen miles. Owing to the onset of winter and the strong garrison of the Continental Army at Ticonderoga, Carleton decided to return to Canada and give up Crown Point. He had successfully defended Canada against an invasion that had cost the enemy five thousand men. However, his failure to continue his offensive meant that he was unable to fulfill his mission of supporting the operations of William Howe’s army in New York.⁴⁹

As he had done during the siege of Boston, Burgoyne once again took leave to return to Britain. He had assumed that Carleton would retain Crown Point for the opening of the campaign the following year, and it was only after he had departed that he discovered that Carleton had given up the fortress. Like Clinton under Howe, Burgoyne balked at not having his advice accepted by Carleton, and though he did not openly challenge Carleton, he spoke of his frustration in a letter to Clinton occasioned also by the fact that in June 1776 during his absence from England, his wife had died and been buried next to their daughter in the North Cloister of Westminster Abbey. In writing to Clinton, Burgoyne sought the consolation of a fellow widower. He told Clinton that he had nearly burned his letter knowing, “too well your mind to think you can read it without pain.” He then proceeded to complain of Carleton’s conduct of the campaign in Canada. While telling Germain that he was returning to England because of his health and the need to attend to the affairs of his late wife, Burgoyne wrote to Clinton that he was returning because “a secondary station in a secondary army is at no time agreeable.” The day after his arrival in England on December 9, 1776, Burgoyne met with Lord George Germain. It was an opportune moment.⁵⁰

Germain was disappointed with the progress of all his commanders—Guy Carleton in Canada, William Howe in New York, and Henry Clinton in South Carolina—who had failed to win a decisive victory with the huge forces that Germain had sent to America in 1776. More than ten weeks before Carleton vacated Crown Point, Germain and the Cabinet had decided that Burgoyne was to supersede Carleton, but the order did not reach Canada until the spring of 1777. Far from acting from spite,

Germain aimed to preserve the seniority of Howe, who was junior to Carleton, before the anticipated junction of the two armies at Albany. Nevertheless, Germain's relationship with Carleton became acrimonious, with Carleton sending him indignant, rancorous letters. Although an admirer of Carleton, George III thought him "highly wrong in permitting his pen to convey such asperity to the Secretary of State." Germain dismissed Carleton's subsequent conduct of the campaign as being "without sense or vigour." He tried to prevent George III from conferring upon Carleton the Order of the Bath in reward for his successful defense of Canada.⁵¹

Burgoyne was to deny that he had ever endeavored to supplant Sir Guy Carleton in command of the British forces in Canada. When Burgoyne had departed for England, Carleton gave him a draft proposal to present to the government for the campaign of 1777. During the home voyage, Burgoyne edited and expanded Carleton's plan into a sixteen-page report entitled "Memorandum & Observations Relative to the Service in Canada." Burgoyne added his own clearly marked commentary, headed "Observations," in which he critiqued and expanded upon "General Carleton's Requisitions."⁵²

In addition to meeting with Germain, Burgoyne obtained an audience with George III, who had already concluded that Carleton "may be too cold and not so active as might be wished" and needed to be replaced by "a more enterprising Commander." The king recommended Burgoyne for the command to Lord North. On Christmas Day 1776, before he had even been appointed to command the army in Canada, Burgoyne placed a bet of one pony—the equivalent of fifty guineas—against the opposition leader Charles James Fox, in the wagers book at Brooks's Club in London, that he would "be home victorious from America by Christmas Day, 1777." In early January, there were newspaper reports of his riding with George III for almost an hour in Hyde Park.⁵³

Burgoyne spoke the same language as Germain and George III, with promises of bold strokes in contrast to the seemingly hesitant strategies of Carleton and Howe. At the end of February, he presented Germain with a memorandum entitled "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada." It had the specific objective of the northern army uniting in Albany with Howe's army from New York, with the aim of cutting off New England from the rest of America by control of the Hudson River, which was navigable as far as Albany. The idea of a junction between two armies had, of course, already been an objective of the campaign in 1776 when General Howe had been expected to join forces with Carleton's Canadian army.⁵⁴

In his memorandum, Burgoyne deviated from earlier plans only by suggesting some additions, most notably a third diversionary force to march via Lake Ontario and Oswego to the Mohawk River. The purpose of this third force was as much political as strategic. It was to support loyalists along the Mohawk Valley. It was to be commanded by Barry St. Leger, a veteran of frontier fighting during the French and Indian War. Burgoyne additionally proposed an attack on Connecticut. His memorandum left open an option to embark the army by sea from Quebec to New York to join Howe. However, he did not think the sea route to be an equally effective strategy "to close the war" as one by land. He significantly failed to offer thoughts regarding the transportation and provision needs of the army after it had reached Fort Edward. It was as if he did not expect any obstacles once he had crossed Lake Champlain and captured Fort Ticonderoga.⁵⁵

VI

In March 1777, Burgoyne was appointed to the command of the northern army in Canada. Germain had previously approached Henry Clinton who was also in London. He had told him that the job was his for the asking, but Clinton was too diffident. Burgoyne showed no such modesty. He was poised to take the limelight. His appointment displaced both Carleton and Clinton; it relegated Howe to the subsidiary role of supporting a junction at Albany. His subsequent behavior throughout the campaign suggested that he thought he could succeed alone, and that he never imagined that he might need assistance from the very generals whom he had trumped.

On April 2, 1777, the fifty-five-year-old Burgoyne sailed for Canada from Plymouth aboard the *Apollo*. His orders from the home government embraced the essentials of his original plan, with minor modifications which he later blamed for the failure of the campaign and which he attributed exclusively to Germain. His orders eliminated some of the suggestions that he had proposed in his memorandum. He was not given permission to make an eastward feint toward the Connecticut River nor to travel by

sea to New York. These changes were in accordance with the comments of George III, written in his own handwriting, entitled “Remarks on ‘*The Conduct of the War from Canada.*’” They were based on at least two other memoranda and very likely on the opinion of Lord Jeffrey Amherst, the lord lieutenant of the ordnance, who was a favorite military adviser of the government and a hero of the French and Indian War. Burgoyne expressed no concern at the minor revisions but rather satisfaction that the material part of his plan had been adopted by the king and Cabinet.⁵⁶

Before his departure from England, Burgoyne wrote to Howe with details of his orders to join him at Albany. Soon after his arrival at Quebec on May 6, 1777, Burgoyne wrote to Howe again, repeating that he was to command the army from Canada and that his orders were to force a junction with him. He soon after received a letter written by Howe to Carleton which made clear that Howe would be unable to reach him at Albany. Howe explained that his force was too small to detach a corps along the Hudson River, and that should Burgoyne think it expedient to advance beyond the frontiers of Canada, he would have “little assistances from hence [New York] to facilitate his approach.” Howe warned that he would probably be in Pennsylvania when Burgoyne was ready to advance into New York, and that Burgoyne must “pursue such Measures as may from circumstances be judged most conducive to the Advancement of His Majesty’s Service.” Burgoyne was unperturbed by the message and subsequently defended himself saying that it “had never weighed on my mind.” He thought it had been written before Howe received new instructions from Germain, “which I must have supposed to relate to co-operation” with Howe at Albany.⁵⁷

The preparations for the expedition were not propitious. Burgoyne wrote that he was surprised and mortified “to find a paper handed about at Montreal publishing the whole design of the campaign almost as accurately as if it had been copied from the Secretary of State’s letter.” His force was nearly a third below the number that he had requested consisting of 7,300 men rather than the 11,000 specified in his original memorandum. He commanded 6,740 regular soldiers, of whom 3,724 were British and the rest mostly German mercenaries from Brunswick. Like Howe and Clinton, he much preferred British troops to German. It was largely just prejudice, but the mercenaries did pose operational difficulties because of the difference of language and the problem of integrating them into a single fighting force. However, Burgoyne’s force included some of the oldest and best regiments in the British army. His officers included thirty future generals and four members of Parliament.⁵⁸

The expedition recruited only four hundred Indians rather than the proposed thousand. They included warriors of the Iroquois and Algonquin nations from areas between Quebec and Lake Ontario and beyond. The Iroquois League or Six Nations had been a powerful presence in upper New York. At the Council of Oswego in 1775, Joseph Brant (also known as Thayendanegea) who was a chief of the Mohawks, and Sir Guy Johnson, the British superintendent of Indian affairs, had negotiated an alliance with the Mohawks, the Senecas, the Onondagas, and the Cayugas, though they failed to win over the Oneida and Tuscarora peoples who sided with the Continental Congress (Figure 18). During the winter of 1775–76, Brant and Johnson had gone to London where Brant’s father had been one of the four native chiefs to visit Queen Anne in 1710. Brant was to join the second expedition from Canada along the Mohawk, commanded by Barry St. Leger, which aimed to encourage loyalist support and create a diversion in favor of Burgoyne’s march to Albany. In Burgoyne’s expedition, there were also Ottawas and Abenakis from Odanak, Bécancour, Caughnawaga, Saint Regis (Akwasasne), and the Lake of Two Mountains (Oka). According to historian Colin G. Calloway, the majority of these warriors were coerced into joining the expedition. The courting of their support by both sides certainly placed Indians in an invidious position of choosing between the lesser of two evils.⁵⁹

Burgoyne had only eight hundred militia and French Canadians rather than the two thousand that he had anticipated in his memorandum to Germain, and within two months their numbers dwindled through desertion to thirty. Carleton was scathing about Burgoyne’s expectation of assistance from the Canadians, which he said “was surely not [based] upon information proceeding from me.” Although Carleton by implication blamed Germain, Burgoyne had made the original estimates, despite the low turnout of Canadians during Carleton’s offensive of 1776. Unlike William Howe, Burgoyne did not seek permission to change the plan when it was apparent that he lacked the minimum troops that he had earlier deemed a necessary condition for success.⁶⁰

Burgoyne was also accompanied by his mistress, who was the wife of a commissary officer

named Rousseau. Other women traveling with the army included the pregnant Lady Harriet Acland, the daughter of the earl of Ilchester and wife of the commander of the grenadiers, Major John Dyke Acland. They were later joined by the thirty-eight-year-old Baroness Frederika von Riedesel, the wife of the German commander, and her three little daughters. She was determined to join her husband and spent over a year making the journey from Germany. She wrote a journal of her time in America, which was published in 1800. There were officially about 225 women and 500 children among the camp followers of the army, although it was alleged at a subsequent inquiry that the number of women was closer to 2,000.⁶¹

The expedition was debilitated from the start by the lack of carriages, wagons, carts, horses, and drivers to haul the artillery and supplies. Burgoyne was to be criticized for the amount of artillery and supplies that he took with him, which impeded his advance across forests, rivers, and areas of virtual wilderness. His train of artillery consisted of 138 field pieces and siege equipment, which required fifteen hundred horses to haul. He justified the artillery as “formidable to raw troops” and opponents who were adept at building entrenchments, and as necessary for attacking and defending Ticonderoga and Albany. However, there is no contemporary evidence for the popular story that he used thirty carts to carry his personal possessions. Burgoyne spent a month in Canada trying to obtain four hundred horses—less than a third of his requirements—and five hundred wagons. He and Carleton had likely assumed that they could make up the deficiencies with *corvées*, detachments of unarmed provincials impressed by the government to repair roads, carry provisions, and provide temporary labor.⁶²

Burgoyne appreciated the power of words in warfare. From his office desk aboard ship, he had written a proclamation to the Americans that was printed and published on June 24, 1777. It denounced “the present unnatural rebellion” as establishing “the compleatest system of Tyranny that ever God in his displeasure suffered for a time to be exercised over a forward and stubborn generation.” The assemblies and committees of the rebels had inflicted “Arbitrary imprisonment, confiscation of property, persecution and torture, unprecedented in the inquisitions of the Romish church.” He invited the population to return to the blessings, protection, and security of legal government. He darkly threatened that he had “but to give stretch to the Indian Forces under his direction,” who he claimed “amounted to thousands,” and who would overcome “the hardened enemies of Great Britain.” He wrote ominously of the vengeance of the state against willful outcasts, and conjured images of devastation, famine, and “every concomitant horror that a reluctant but indispensable prosecution of military duty must occasion.”⁶³

On June 21, 1777, Burgoyne addressed a congress of four hundred Indians near present-day Willsboro on the River Bouquet, which ran eastward from the Adirondacks about forty miles north of Fort Ticonderoga. He called upon the warriors to go forth “in the might of your valour and your cause” to strike at the “disturbers of public order, peace, and happiness—destroyers of commerce, parricides of the State.” His speech cautioned against brutality. He prohibited bloodshed against unarmed opponents and the use of knives or hatchets against elderly men, women, children, and prisoners. He similarly only permitted the scalping of dead enemies. He offered rewards for prisoners and asked that they be well treated.⁶⁴

In both England and America, Burgoyne’s speeches and proclamations alternately aroused horror and derision. He and the home government were condemned for employing Indians by both the opposition in Parliament and the revolutionaries in America. The earl of Chatham claimed to discern a frown on the faces in the tapestry looking down upon the House of Lords. According to the memoirs of Horace Walpole, even government ministers “laughed at his pomp.” Edmund Burke parodied Burgoyne’s oration to the Indians, with Burgoyne as the keeper of lions during a riot in the zoo at the Tower of London. Burke imagined him flinging open “the dens of the wild beasts” with an address to “My gentle lions, my humane bears, my tender-hearted hyenas, go forth! but I exhort you as you are Christians, and members of a civilized society, to take care not to hurt any man, woman, or child!” Burke’s speech was so humorous that Lord North became convulsed with laughter, the tears rolling down his plump cheeks.⁶⁵

Burgoyne’s use of Indians, French Canadians, and German auxiliaries alienated popular support in America by making his advance seem like a foreign invasion. The Canadians were suspected as potential agents of tyranny, because they were mostly French and Roman Catholics who were popularly

identified with the absolutist regimes of continental Europe. The Declaration of Independence had referred to the Germans “as large Armies of foreign Mercenaries,” who had been transported “to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny,” and spoke of “the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.” The employment of such forces was revealing of the dilemma facing the British, whose insufficient manpower necessitated their allying with the most marginalized elements of American society.⁶⁶

Avoiding the delays that had beset Carleton in 1776, Burgoyne’s invasion force set off in a grand procession down Lake Champlain, surrounded by vistas of the Adirondacks to the west and the Green Mountains to the east. As his convoy of boats approached the wildest part of the lake, the weather was remarkably fine and clear, with not a breeze stirring. His whole army appeared “in such perfect regularity as to form the most complete and splendid regatta you can possibly conceive.” It was a majestic sight, with the Indians in the vanguard in their birch canoes holding between twenty and thirty men each, followed by the gunboats, together with brigs and sloops, and women camp followers in the rear. The fleet presented a formidable appearance as it became visible on the horizon from Fort Ticonderoga. It easily crushed the rebel naval resistance, which was minor compared to the opposition of the previous year by Benedict Arnold at Valcour Bay.⁶⁷

VII

Although Horace Walpole wrote scathingly of “General Swagger” who “promises to cross America in a hop, step, and a jump,” Burgoyne initially achieved dramatic effect in the swift momentum of his descent into America. It took him little over a week to advance the same distance that Carleton had covered in four months in 1776. He not only succeeded where Carleton had failed by taking Crown Point, but he also took the glittering prize of Fort Ticonderoga, the largest fortress complex in North America with the capacity to hold up to twelve thousand men. Located at the south end of Lake Champlain in upstate New York, it occupied a critical strategic site for command of both that lake and Lake George. The rebels had spent over a year strengthening the fort. Between July 2 and 6, Burgoyne laid siege to Ticonderoga. His artillery officer, Major General William Phillips, favored mounting guns on an unguarded promontory called Sugar Loaf Hill (later Mount Defiance) overlooking the great fortress. He was famously said to have advised “Where a goat can go, a man can go, and where a man can go, he can drag a gun.” Upon seeing the British advantage, the besieged rebel garrison of 1,567 men evacuated and escaped unharmed, leaving Burgoyne the master of Ticonderoga.⁶⁸

Before confirmation of the victory arrived, expectations of success ran high within government circles. The lord advocate for Scotland, Henry Dundas, was so excited that he could hardly wait for the post. William Eden, an under secretary of state and a confidant of Lord North, thought the campaign was close to ending the rebellion. William Knox, an under secretary of state for the American Department, predicted that there would be a special newspaper edition announcing a great victory. John Robinson, secretary to the Treasury, advised Lord North to delay the opening of Parliament until the arrival of good news from America. When news of the capture of Ticonderoga arrived in London, George III was said to have run into the boudoir of Queen Charlotte exclaiming, “I have beat them! Beat all the Americans!”⁶⁹

Burgoyne was the man of the moment. He was rewarded with the brevet (temporary) rank of lieutenant general, and was also invited to become a member of the Order of the Bath. Before he had even left England, Burgoyne had assumed that he would receive such an offer, and had asked that it be declined on his behalf by the earl of Derby. It was an odd decision for one so brazenly ambitious. George III had personally revived the prestige of the order, and made such awards only sparingly to maintain its exclusivity and status. However, he had already conferred knighthoods and membership of the order on Sir William Howe, Sir Henry Clinton, and Sir Guy Carleton. A gambler by nature, Burgoyne was playing for the highest stakes in anticipation of a yet higher honor. General George Washington predicted that Burgoyne’s successes “may precipitate his ruin,” and that he would pursue “that line of conduct which of all others is most favorable to us.”⁷⁰

Burgoyne had to leave over a tenth of his regular army to garrison the massive fortifications at Ticonderoga, a force that he had wrongly assumed he might replace with reinforcements from Canada. His request for additional troops was initially denied by Carleton on the grounds that he did not have the

authority to reassign his troops outside Canada owing to very precise orders from Germain. Although there is no evidence that he acted from malice, Carleton was incensed by Germain's treatment of him and requested to resign as governor in late June 1777. While Burgoyne was in England, Carleton did little to obtain horses and wagons in preparation for Burgoyne's campaign. He was opposed to the use of Indians and obtained only four hundred for Burgoyne while managing to raise a thousand for the expedition of St. Leger along the Mohawk. He had waited two weeks before giving Burgoyne the letter to himself from Howe with the critical information that he was unlikely to be able to join Burgoyne in Albany. Carleton appreciated the importance of the letter, which he passed on to Burgoyne with the comment that Howe was "wishing you a happy and Successful Campaign." After Burgoyne had departed from Canada, Carleton wrote to Germain of "those evils which might naturally follow to the publick from the chief commands being given to an inferior officer" while he was "to act as a subaltern office[r]" in his own government under Burgoyne. Burgoyne never blamed Carleton. He later always went out of his way to acknowledge his assistance.⁷¹

Like Howe after the conquest of New York, Burgoyne did not expect much opposition after the conquest of Ticonderoga, but anticipated a triumphal procession through loyalist territory south to Albany. He easily outnumbered the forty-five hundred troops of the Continental Army under General Philip Schuyler, who was unpopular among New Englanders because he had championed land claims of New York against Massachusetts and New Hampshire. They preferred General Horatio Gates, which led to a leadership contest between Schuyler and Gates. According to the testimony of one British officer, "the army in general did not think" that the rebels "would make a stand any where." Burgoyne was so confident of success that he requested leave to return over winter to Britain and was disappointed that his orders did not permit him to attack Connecticut. General Howe similarly thought it would be plain sailing for Burgoyne after Ticonderoga. He waited until he heard confirmation of the victory and then embarked with the fleet from Staten Island for Philadelphia. Howe believed that he was creating a diversion in favor of Burgoyne by drawing away the troops commanded by George Washington, and Burgoyne gave no hint that he would need help.⁷²

Burgoyne began a relentless pursuit of the escaped garrison from Ticonderoga, which necessitated his proceeding by land through Skenesborough, now Whitehall in New York, rather than by water across Lake George toward Albany. Although he was to justify the decision on the ground that he only had enough shipping to send his baggage and supplies across the lake, he wanted to maintain the appearance of a victorious advance, whereas the lake route would have required him to double back to Ticonderoga. While still at Crown Point, Burgoyne had issued a general order that "this army must not retreat." In his later defense of the campaign, he admitted that he was influenced by the negative general impression that "a retrograde movement is apt to make upon the minds both of enemies and friends." At Skenesborough, his army was joined by some six hundred loyalists, which seemed to confirm earlier optimism in regard to the political persuasions of the local inhabitants.⁷³

Burgoyne was obliged to suspend operations to await the arrival of provisions, transportation, and tents. He later recalled that for every hour that he contemplated the strategy of the army, he had to spend another twenty wondering how to feed it. Furthermore, his progress was contested at every stage. An advance force commanded by Simon Fraser encountered unexpectedly fierce resistance from a rearguard of the retreating rebel garrison. Having marched 150 miles in a few weeks, Burgoyne's army took almost a month to go 22 miles from Skenesborough to Fort Edward on the Hudson. The troops were so short of wagons that they used a hundred boats each pulled by six or more horses. Their path was obstructed every ten or twelve yards by great trees that the rebels had felled lengthways with their branches interwoven. They had to build some forty bridges to cross deep ravines and to construct a logwood causeway over a morass two miles wide. They marched through heavily wooded forests, creeks, marshes, morasses, swamps, and hilly countryside. The conditions were made worse by heavy rainfall. The few clearings and farms were desolate, as Schuyler was conducting a scorched-earth retreat and his troops were driving away cattle. Burgoyne was accompanied by fourteen hundred horses in a region destitute of forage, and his force was slowed down by the long artillery train. There were not even enough horses to mount his German dragoons. In the meantime, the Continental Army was reinforced by troops sent by Washington under Brigadier Generals Benedict Arnold and Benjamin Lincoln.⁷⁴

Upon approaching Fort Edward, Burgoyne suffered a major setback in attempting to win support among the local population with the killing of Jane McCrea, which became a legend of British brutality in America. Her death allegedly occurred from the blow of a tomahawk following a quarrel between two of Burgoyne's Indians over the reward for accompanying her as bodyguards to meet her fiancé in the army. She was a curious heroine for the revolutionary cause, because she was engaged to a loyalist officer called David Jones. Nevertheless, the incident was used by the revolutionaries as propaganda. In a published letter to Burgoyne, General Horatio Gates of the Continental Army expressed abhorrence "that the famous lieutenant-general Burgoyne, in whom the fine gentleman is united with the scholar and soldier, should hire the savages of America to scalp Europeans, and the descendants of Europeans." Gates embellished the incident with a sentimental account of the "young lady lovely to sight, of virtuous character and amiable disposition . . . scalped and mangled in the most shocking manner." He portrayed her "dressed to meet her promised husband," but instead meeting murderers "employed by you." The fact that Jane McCrea was engaged to a loyalist made the episode more poignant because it suggested that Burgoyne was unable to control his Indian allies and that they were capable of indiscriminate murder of Americans. The account by Gates was published in every newspaper in America between August and October 1777. The incident became one of the enduring images of the American Revolution in depictions like the celebrated painting by John Vanderlyn in 1804.⁷⁵

Upon reaching Fort Edward, Burgoyne's supply lines extended 185 miles to Montreal. He was so short of provisions that his "army could barely be victualled from day to day." Nevertheless, he remained optimistic, writing to Clinton that he expected to reach Albany no later than August 23. Clinton wrote in his memoirs that this letter showed Burgoyne "to be in the highest spirits, and did not contain an expression that indicated either an expectation or desire of cooperation" from Howe.⁷⁶

Burgoyne waited another week at Fort Edward. He had lost his original momentum owing to the shortage of provisions, and he ideally wanted to accumulate a three-month supply before his arrival in Albany. It was because of the lack of forage for the horses that Burgoyne sent out an expedition to Bennington, the location of a military depot together with food supplies of grain, flour, and cattle. Burgoyne had heard that it was lightly guarded by militia, and he also acted under the belief that the enemy was "broken and disconcerted" and that the sympathies of the local population were "five to one" in favor of Britain. Although Riedesel had recommended a raid into the Connecticut valley, Burgoyne ordered a much more ambitious operation, sending the German detachment further south under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Baum. Burgoyne wanted to continue his advance and reunite with Baum's detachment on the way to Albany. He was later accused of sending an inadequate force too great a distance.⁷⁷

What followed was a stinging defeat for the detachment (August 16), for which, like Howe after Trenton, Burgoyne blamed the German officers. He claimed that Baum had failed to observe instructions to proceed with the "utmost caution" by establishing posts for a secure retreat, and to avoid an engagement without the "certainty of success." Instead of meeting with support, Baum's detachment was infiltrated by enemy troops pretending to be loyalists. He was also simply unlucky that two thousand rebel militiamen from New Hampshire and Massachusetts had coincidentally planned to rendezvous at Bennington under the command of Colonel John Stark, a veteran of Bunker Hill. During the ensuing battle, Baum's troops were surrounded and outnumbered in a double-double envelopment by four flanking columns of enemy militia. Burgoyne sent a relief expedition of dismounted German dragoons commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Heinrich von Breymann. Impeded by their cumbersome cavalry uniforms with thigh-high jackboots and giant spurs, Breymann's men nearly suffered the same fate as those of Baum. Breymann was shot five times in his coat and once in his leg. Burgoyne's two expeditions lost more than a thousand men in the attempt to capture the arsenal and provisions at Bennington.

Although Baum had shown poor judgment in the execution of the mission, the real cause of failure was the misleading intelligence about the strength of American loyalists. Baum was outnumbered by over two to one, which was indicative of the popular support for the Revolution in New England. Within less than a week, a tenth of the adult male population had enlisted for service in the militia of New Hampshire. Similarly the expedition led by Barry St. Leger failed to stir a loyalist rising

along the Mohawk and to divert the enemy from Burgoyne. After an unsuccessful siege of Fort Stanwix, St. Leger withdrew when he was less than twenty-four miles from Burgoyne's army at Fort Edward. Unlike Burgoyne, he did not feel compelled to obey the letter of his instructions from Germain to proceed down the Mohawk River to Albany and put himself under the command of Sir William Howe.⁷⁸

At the end of July, Burgoyne wrote that he was ignorant of Howe's movements. He discovered that at least two of his messengers had been hanged by the enemy and suspected the same fate had attended messengers sent by Howe. On August 3, he received a two-week-old letter from Howe that made clear that his objective was Pennsylvania, where he expected to encounter Washington. Howe promised to follow Washington if he moved northward and assured Burgoyne that Clinton would "act as occurrences may direct" in New York. Burgoyne did not communicate the contents of Howe's letter to his men or even fellow commanders like Riedesel. He was subsequently informed by Clinton that Howe had gone to the Chesapeake. On August 20, Burgoyne admitted to Germain that the prospects for his campaign had become "far less favourable," since the majority of the population supported the Revolution and the enemy conducted themselves "with a secrecy and dispatch that are not to be equaled."⁷⁹

In the same letter to Germain of August 20, Burgoyne rehearsed what became his exculpatory argument after Saratoga. If it had not been for positive orders to the contrary, he claimed, he would have considered it his duty to remain stationary or even to withdraw to Fort Edward "where my communication with Lake George would be perfectly secure, till some event happened to assist my movement forward." However, Burgoyne insisted that his orders did not give him the discretion to stay inactive, but rather required him to "force a junction with Sir William Howe." He wrote that he never foresaw that he would be left to pursue his own way through "such a tract of country, and hosts of foes without any co-operation from New York." He ended with a flourish that whatever his fate, he was confident that his good intent would not be questioned.⁸⁰

Burgoyne was hedging his bets by blaming his orders for his decision to advance. He had himself vowed that his army would never turn back, and he had been critical of supine tactics of Gage in 1775 and Carleton in 1776. He had made his reputation by daring and boldness, while none of the other British generals felt bound by their orders to pursue a course of folly. In contrast to Burgoyne, Howe had revised his orders from home throughout the campaign and later blamed Germain for not giving him sufficiently positive orders to go to Albany. Germain had made it his maxim that commanders should have discretion, because they were the most competent judges of conditions in America. Burgoyne had never defined what he meant by a junction or communication, and what he expected to achieve on arrival in Albany. It had always been an ultimate rather than an immediate goal of the campaign. As Germain observed of the original plan proposed by Burgoyne, "a co-operation of Howe's army was not expected . . . the expedition [was] undertaken as an independent enterprise to be executed by the force allotted for it." Burgoyne had even written that he would need heavy artillery to defend Albany in the event of his spending "winter there, without communication with New York." Burgoyne might have been more persuasive if he had argued that he felt morally compelled to advance by his promises to the government, as well as by the expectations of both his army and Lord George Germain.

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Later on, facing an inquiry before Parliament, Burgoyne was inconsistent in simultaneously blaming his orders and arguing that he was under pressure from his own troops to continue. He called former officers as witnesses who testified that the troops thought it their indispensable duty to risk an action before returning to Canada: given their temper and language, they would have been satisfied with nothing less than crossing the river to fight the enemy. Quartermaster General Captain Money said that if they had returned without fighting "the army would never have forgiven the general, nor the general have forgiven himself." The earl of Harrington, who was captain of the 29th Foot, said "that General Burgoyne's character would not have stood very high either with the army, this country, or the enemy, had he halted at Fort Edward." In his published defense of the campaign in 1780, Burgoyne claimed "that no proof that could have been brought from appearances, intelligence or reasoning, could have justified me to my country, have saved me from the condemnation of my profession, or produced pardon within my own breast, had I not advanced, and tried a battle with the enemy." He had only to recall the criticism of Carleton by Germain after the retreat from Crown Point in 1776.⁸²

VIII

On September 14, Burgoyne crossed the Rubicon when his army used a bridge of boats to pass the Hudson River. He had been warned that all safety of communication would cease the hour that he did so and severed his two-hundred-mile supply line from Montreal. His officers and troops had earlier discarded all their baggage except essentials, and although his men spent virtually a month trying to collect provisions to last thirty days, he later claimed that he only had provisions for thirteen days. However, there was no sense of impending doom among his officers and men. The army was in good spirit and keen to engage the enemy. Baroness von Riedesel recalled in her journal “the high hopes of victory and of reaching the promised land,” and the enthusiasm with which they heard Burgoyne rally them with the words “Britons never retreat.” Burgoyne never told his army that it was unlikely to be met by Sir William Howe, but then he had never suggested that the success of his campaign was predicated on such a junction.⁸³

Meanwhile, the revolutionary forces awaited Burgoyne’s advance at Bemis Heights, under General Horatio Gates, commander of the Continental Army in New England. A former British army officer, Gates had fought in both America and the Caribbean during the French and Indian War. His mother had been the housekeeper to the duke of Leeds and he was reputed to be the duke’s out-of-wedlock son, while his godfather was Horace Walpole. A ruddy-faced man who wore thick spectacles, Gates was possibly even more ambitious and political than Burgoyne. Perceiving an opportunity to cut off Burgoyne, George Washington had reinforced Gates with troops commanded by Daniel Morgan and Benedict Arnold. Known as “Old Wagoner,” Daniel Morgan was a large man, six feet tall and weighing two hundred pounds, who commanded a crack regiment of riflemen carrying Kentucky and Pennsylvania weapons that were much more accurate than the smoothbore Brown Bess muskets of the British. Popularly remembered as a traitor in the United States, Benedict Arnold was previously an American hero who had helped lead the successful capture of Ticonderoga and the invasion of Canada in 1775. He had frustrated Carleton’s advance at Valcour Island in 1776, thereby preventing an earlier planned junction of the British army at Albany.

Gates’s force had the advantages of interior lines, better intelligence, numerical superiority, favorable terrain, plentiful provisions, and ease of resupply and reinforcement. Commanding the route to Albany, Bemis Heights was an ideal position for defense on a plateau with steep bluffs rising some two to three hundred feet overlooking a narrow defile on the west side of the Hudson River. The area was heavily wooded, with an occasional clearing for a farm, which made it difficult for Burgoyne to maneuver his army and make effective use of his artillery. The terrain favored the skirmishing tactics of the rebel militia and riflemen. Burgoyne faced an invidious choice of either running a gauntlet of enemy fire or launching a frontal attack against a well-entrenched enemy. His opportunity of retreat was gradually closed by enemy troops who began to retake some of the forts and supply posts on the way to Canada, including Fort Edward.

Over the course of a month, Burgoyne was defeated in an interconnected series of engagements in the environs of Saratoga. After crossing the Hudson, most of the accompanying Indians left his army. Although he was later dismissive of their utility, his army was blind without the Indians acting as scouts. His knowledge of enemy movements was hindered by the hilly and forested landscape. His center column approached a small clearing known as Freeman’s Farm, named after the farmer whose abandoned cabin stood in the midst of a field which was mostly obscured by woods. Although only four miles apart, the opposing armies had been unaware of each other until one of Gates’s patrols fired upon a British foraging party who were digging potatoes on another abandoned farm.⁸⁴

On September 19, Burgoyne sent a detachment of Tories, Canadians, and Indians to establish outposts on an undefended height overlooking Gates’ army at Bemis Heights. From this vantage point, he hoped to use his artillery before ordering his infantry to force the rebels back to the Hudson. This instigated the battle of Freeman’s Farm (also known as the first battle of Saratoga), in which Burgoyne’s troops were outnumbered by the forces of Gates. Burgoyne had always trusted in British bayonet charges to ensure victory, but his men’s repeated attempts to charge were ineffectual owing to the thickness of the wood and the accuracy of the enemy riflemen, some of whom were hanging from trees. Burgoyne’s plan to take the height was foiled by Benedict Arnold, who perceived a weakness in the

British center and an opportunity to divide Burgoyne's force by attacking the German troops of Baron von Riedesel. According to the eyewitness account of Roger Lamb, an Irish-born private in the army, Burgoyne "behaved with great personal bravery, he shunned no danger; his presence and conduct animated the troops (for they greatly loved the general)." In his narrative which was turned into a novel by Robert Graves, Lamb described how Burgoyne "delivered his orders with precision and coolness; and in the heat, fury, and danger of fight maintained those true characteristics of the soldier—serenity, fortitude and undaunted intrepidity." Between a third and a half of the British soldiers were wounded, killed, or taken prisoner, during four hours of incessant fire on both sides of which Lamb wrote: "Few actions have been characterized by more obstinacy in attack or defence." The 62nd Regiment began the battle with 350 men of whom only four or five officers and sixty soldiers remained effective by early evening. In one artillery detachment, the captain and thirty-six of the forty-eight men were either killed or wounded.⁸⁵

There was not a moment of respite from the smoke. When one marksman spotted the lace decoration of a saddle, he thought he had killed Burgoyne, but he had actually wounded a Captain Green, the aide-de-camp to Major General Phillips. The army abounded with officers in their teens. Among the casualties of the 20th Regiment, three young officers were buried together, of whom the oldest was seventeen. The sixteen-year-old Lieutenant Hervey, who was the nephew of the adjutant general of the British army, took his own life with an opium overdose to avoid an excruciating, slow death with the words, "Tell my uncle I died like a soldier." Burgoyne was close to defeat when the British army was rescued by the arrival of Riedesel and his Brunswickers. The British held the field in a last desperate bayonet charge, but with crippling losses.⁸⁶

Burgoyne intended to resume the offensive the next day but was dissuaded by Fraser. Heartened by a message from Sir Henry Clinton that he would "make a push" northward from New York to deflect Gates, Burgoyne again called off an attack and instead began to entrench by building redoubts along the two-and-a-half-mile front of his army. The two sides were deadlocked for seventeen days, during which Gates was reinforced by over six thousand Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York militiamen, giving him a total of fifteen thousand rank and file. In the words of Sergeant Lamb, these "numerous parties of militia . . . swarmed around like birds of prey." Burgoyne's outposts were subject to raids by Oneida, Tuscarora, and Stockbridge Mohican warriors, from the only native tribes to ally with the Continental Army. The armies were in such close proximity that there was constant skirmishing, with not a day or night passing without the "roaring of cannon and whistling of bullets." The British officers and men slept in their uniforms ready for action at any time. Burgoyne put all his hope in the prospect of a relief expedition by Clinton.⁸⁷

It was not until September 21 that Burgoyne indicated that he needed help from Clinton, and asked him to attack or menace Fort Montgomery, on the Hudson fifty miles upstream from New York. Clinton was already angry that Howe had gone to Philadelphia and left him in a "most starved defensive" in New York. He recalled in his memoirs that Burgoyne, "so far from calling for assistance, scarcely even hinted that he expected cooperation" until the arrival of his letter on September 29. Burgoyne still failed to communicate the urgency of his situation to Clinton. Except for the check at Bennington, Clinton described how every account before October 5 had "represented his progress . . . as most flourishing." Burgoyne had difficulty communicating with Clinton. They wrote to one another in cipher: each had an hour-glass shaped frame with which to isolate a message from the rest of the text and decode it. The messengers had difficulty moving through enemy territory and despite swallowing a message wrapped in a silver musket bullet, Lieutenant Daniel Taylor of the 9th Regiment of Foot was intercepted and hanged as one of the unfortunate couriers. On October 3, Burgoyne put his troops on short rations while assuring them that "there were powerful armies" ready to come to their assistance. He was banking on help from Clinton, who left the same day with three thousand men up the Hudson. It was a vain hope, however, since Clinton did not have sufficient troops to mount a rescue mission and aimed merely to open up the Hudson River as far as Albany. He might at best create a diversion to draw away some of Gates's troops.⁸⁸

On the eve of the battle of Bemis Heights (also known as the second battle of Saratoga), Gates had the measure of Burgoyne, and predicted that despair might cause him to risk all upon one throw, saying "he is an Old Gamester." Burgoyne ignored General Riedesel's proposal to retreat to Fort Miller

where he could maintain a line of communications to Canada. When the battle commenced the on October 7, Burgoyne personally led fifteen hundred men against the left wing of the enemy army in an effort to occupy the hill whose capture had evaded him during the first battle. In this crisis, Sergeant Lamb wrote that he “appeared cool and intrepid.” When Gates’s troops simultaneously broke the right and left flanks of his army, Burgoyne ordered a general withdrawal, but the messenger was wounded before he could deliver the command. Acting without authority from Gates, Benedict Arnold assumed the direction of the field and rushed into the fray, rallying the rebel troops to prevent British artillery from firing upon their lines. A German soldier fired point-blank at Arnold in the same knee in which he had been wounded at Quebec. The shot crippled Arnold for life, leaving one leg shorter than the other, but did not prevent his turning the battle into a decisive rebel victory. Burgoyne himself had been dangerously exposed during the battle when a shot passed through his hat and another tore his waistcoat. He claimed that he might have struck a fatal blow against the enemy but for Arnold.⁸⁹

The campaign began to wear an aura of tragedy. General Simon Fraser, who had been both friend and adviser to Burgoyne, was shot and mortally wounded. He was nursed through the night by Baroness von Riedesel, and buried the next day at sunset on the battlefield in accordance with his dying wishes. The voice of the officiating chaplain never wavered during the funeral while enemy batteries fired into the midst of the mourners who were covered in dust thrown up by cannonballs. Burgoyne described “the mute but expressive mixture of sensibility and indignation upon every countenance,” believing that the memory would remain “to the last of life upon every man who was present.” Burgoyne was similarly moved by the plight of Lady Harriet Acland. She had endured all the privations of the campaign to be with her husband. After he was shot through both legs and taken prisoner during the battle, she went into the enemy camp to nurse him. Burgoyne was affected by the courage and forbearance of a woman habituated to “all the soft elegancies, and refined enjoyments, that attend high birth and fortune.” He had lost some 600 men in the battle against 150 enemy losses.⁹⁰

Like Cornwallis at Yorktown, Burgoyne was surrounded and outnumbered when he surrendered at Saratoga. After the repulse of his attack on October 7, he retreated to Old Saratoga, now called Schuylerville. With his army close to starvation and subject to constant fire, Burgoyne held a council of his general officers, together with regimental commanders and even captains, who voted unanimously to surrender. Burgoyne had some 6,500 men, but less than 4,000 fit for action, against 20,365 effectives under Gates. In the midst of anguish, with surrender inevitable, Baroness von Riedesel described Burgoyne as “having a jolly time” and “spending half the night singing and drinking and amusing himself in the company of the wife of a commissary, who was his mistress and, like him, loved champaign.” During these final days, the baroness recalled the moaning at night of a dying lieutenant, whose arm had been torn away at the shoulder by a cannonball, which was “doubly gruesome as the sound re-echoed through the cellar.”⁹¹

Between October 13 and 17, Burgoyne opened negotiations for surrender. He was able to obtain liberal terms from Gates who was fearful of the advance of Sir Henry Clinton’s advanced corps, led by Major General John Vaughan, that approached within forty-five miles south of Albany. Burgoyne played a game of brinkmanship to the very end, threatening to break off the negotiations and reconvening his council officers to consider reversing the surrender agreement when he thought he again had a chance. The surrender terms were more like an armistice, and Burgoyne attempted to disguise the reality of his surrender by having the agreement named the Convention of Saratoga. The terms permitted Burgoyne’s army to return to Britain on condition that it never again served in America.⁹²

During the subsequent surrender ceremony, a witness described how the drums seemed to have lost their formerly inspiring sound. The band played the “British Grenadiers,” a favorite of the British army in America, “which not long before was so animating, yet then it seemed by its last feeble effort as if almost ashamed to be heard on such an occasion.” Gates spared the British further humiliation by keeping his army out of sight in the woods as the vanquished troops piled their arms while his fifes and drums played “Yankee Doodle.” In a scene that was repeated at Yorktown, some of the British soldiers broke the butts of the muskets as they threw them down with impotent rage and defiance. The

commanders raised their hats to one another. Burgoyne said to the former half-pay major of the British army, “The fortunes of war, General Gates, have made me your prisoner.” Gates replied: “I shall always be ready to bear testimony that it has not been through any fault of your Excellency.”⁹³

The Convention of Saratoga was never honored by the Continental Congress, on the grounds that some of the soldiers had kept their cartouche boxes and that Burgoyne had said that “the public faith is broke” when he was unhappy with his accommodation in Boston. It conceded too much to the British. Burgoyne’s army might have been retained in America or used as a replacement at home for troops sent for service in America. Sir William Howe did, in fact, secretly plan to send the German troops to Britain while retaining the British troops from Saratoga in America. The surrender agreement turned out to have been no more than a face-saving formula for Burgoyne.

The prisoners appeared “a sordid set of creatures in human figure—poor, dirty, emaciated men” when they marched into Cambridge. The great number of women accompanying them “seemed to be the beasts of burden, having bushel baskets on their backs, by which they were bent double.” They were barefoot and clothed in rags. The continued imprisonment of Burgoyne’s army became a source of grievance among the British high command and the ministry in London.⁹⁴

For eight weeks during the winter of 1778–79, the four thousand convention prisoners marched 641 miles from Cambridge to Charlottesville. Nearly half of them were Brunswickers from Germany. They were kept in the Albemarle Barracks where their former path to imprisonment is now called Barracks Road. With a population larger than any town in Virginia, the prison barracks became a shanty town with poor conditions and little protection for the ordinary soldiers. Nevertheless, a company of British soldiers built a “comedy theater” where they performed two plays every week, with changes of scenery and a sign with the words: “Who would have expected all this here!” According to one of the German officers, the drummers were turned into “queens and belles.” The officers lived in grander style, renting the plantation houses of local gentry. Major General William Phillips lived at Blenheim, the home of Edward Carter. Thomas Jefferson frequently entertained some of the German and British officers at Monticello. He wrote to Phillips that the war that divided their countries should not be the source of animosity between individuals, and Phillips reciprocated with invitations to Jefferson to be a guest in his box at the camp theater and to dine at Blenheim. Jefferson was particularly fond of Captain Baron de Geismar with whom he played the violin. Martha Jefferson accompanied them on the piano, while Baroness von Riedesel led the dances in the late evening at Monticello. After his release, Geismar gave his sheet music to Jefferson, writing “Be my friend, do not forget me and persuade yourself of my Sincerity.” Many of the convention prisoners successfully contrived to escape during their captivity, and a number of them rejoined the British army in New York. In November 1780, the three thousand remaining prisoners were moved to Maryland. Escapes continued, and there were only 472 prisoners left when they were eventually released in 1782.⁹⁵

IX

After the surrender at Saratoga, Burgoyne finally reached Albany as a prisoner rather than a victor. He wrote to his nieces that he was so exhausted that he could scarce hold his pen, and described his situation as attended with perplexity, distress, and trial that affected all his faculties and feelings. He was bitter that he had been “surrounded with enemies, ill-treated by pretended friends, abandoned by a considerable part of my own army, totally unassisted by Sir William Howe.” He had had to conduct difficult negotiations that required the most undisturbed reflection, after having been under perpetual fire and spending sixteen sleepless nights, without a change of clothes. After all his misfortunes, he knew he was about to face another war “with ministers who will always lay the blame upon the employed who miscarries.” He wrote to another correspondent that he expected that ministerial ingratitude would “be displayed, as in all countries and at times is usual, to remove the blame from the orders to the execution.” Burgoyne was ready again to do battle and to vindicate himself in Britain.⁹⁶

His strategy of defense was to blame Germain’s orders, which he insisted gave him no alternative but to continue to Albany. He claimed to believe that his army had been deliberately sacrificed by the government as a diversionary force to assist the campaign of Howe and argued that he had merely exerted “a spirited *execution* of his orders” and that “the utmost that malevolence can say will be that I have been too bold.” He took the precaution of sending a copy of his letter of explanation

to the earl of Derby in case “the Ministry should curtail or mangle any part of it in their Gazette.” In April 1778, Burgoyne was released on parole and returned to Britain. Upon his arrival in Plymouth in May, Nathaniel Wraxall claimed, Burgoyne met with the politician Charles James Fox, who “in a long and confidential interview” offered to support him if he blamed Lord George Germain rather than General Howe. Whether or not he made such an agreement with Fox, Burgoyne joined the opposition in attacking Germain. Together with the Howe brothers, he aimed to obtain a court martial or parliamentary inquiry to clear his name.⁹⁷

On his return to London, Burgoyne was refused an audience with George III. He was initially granted a military tribunal, but it declined to judge his conduct of the campaign on the grounds that he was a prisoner of war. His strategy of not only holding the minister responsible for his failure, but also arguing that the war was unwinnable and courting the friendship of Fox, alienated George III who consequently supported Germain. Although the king had initially supported the idea of an inquiry, the government subsequently stonewalled such attempts. Burgoyne defied government orders to return to his captivity in America. In May 1779, a parliamentary committee was finally convened to investigate both his command and that of Sir William Howe. Although the inquiry enabled him to call and examine a succession of witnesses, it dissolved at the end of the parliamentary session and the committee never reported. On October 9, Burgoyne was given an ultimatum either to be stripped of his offices or to return to America. He chose to resign his various lucrative appointments, which left him financially ruined, in what he dramatically called a “suicide of my professional existence.” Lord Jeffrey Amherst thought such treatment “severe usage” but failed to dissuade George III.⁹⁸

Burgoyne became a much-embittered figure who was always ready with a speech to recount the details of his campaign in the House of Commons. With the encouragement of Edmund Burke, he published his defense both in a letter to his constituents on his resignation in 1779 and in a pamphlet entitled *A State of the Expedition from Canada as Laid before the House of Commons* in 1780. Burgoyne understood the value of publicity. He travelled to Beaconsfield to have Edmund Burke read and revise the manuscript of his pamphlet, which he republished in an enlarged edition in 1780 and dedicated to Major General William Phillips, whom he had left in command of his captive army in America. The pamphlet had overtones of the Declaration of Independence, beginning: “When it becomes necessary for men who have acted critical parts in public stations to make an appeal to the world in their own justification . . .” He gave up his original intention to write his memoirs, however. In February 1782, he was finally released from his parole and was formally exchanged for Henry Laurens of South Carolina who had been taken prisoner on a diplomatic mission to Holland and kept in the Tower of London.⁹⁹

Burgoyne was sixty years old at the end of the war in 1783. During the short coalition government of Charles James Fox and Lord North, Burgoyne was appointed commander of the army and privy councilor in Ireland where he headed an army of fifteen thousand. Following the fall of the Fox-North administration, he resigned from office in January 1784. It was the end of his military career. By throwing in his lot with his old gambling partner and club friend Charles James Fox, he precluded any chance of political favor from George III. He ceased to go to court after attending a royal levée where he “had the mortification to perceive a different countenance” from the king than he was “used to be honored with.” When there was talk of war with Spain in 1788, he again offered his services as “an old soldier,” saying that should death be near, “he would rather meet it in the duties of the field than amidst the sorrows and afflictions of a sick bed.”¹⁰⁰

Burgoyne also became less active in politics. Nathaniel Wraxall described him in the House of Commons in the late stages of the Revolutionary War, commenting that he rose above ordinary height and had clearly possessed a distinguished figure “but years had enfeebled him though he was cast in an athletic mould.” Burgoyne voted for parliamentary reform. He remained in opposition, voting against the government of William Pitt the Younger. He continued to support measures to increase the public accountability of the East India Company, and he supported the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings who was charged with corruption during his tenure as governor general of India (1787). Burgoyne favored army reforms and denounced the selling of commissions, saying that officers should not rise to high rank “without ever seeing a soldier, or knowing what a firelock was.” His last speech concerned army pay, when he expressed concern for the salaries of junior officers.¹⁰¹

While the revival of his military and political career eluded him after the Revolutionary War, Burgoyne had a new lease of life as a successful playwright. He wrote a musical comedy with Richard Brinsley Sheridan called *The Lord of the Manor*, which was performed at the Drury Lane Theatre in December 1780. Sheridan was the manager of the theater and at the height of his literary fame as the author of *The School for Scandal*. Burgoyne's most successful play, *The Heiress*, first performed at Drury Lane in January 1786, went through ten editions during the first year and was translated into four languages with productions in both France and Germany. Walpole quipped that "Burgoyne's battles and speeches would be forgotten, but his delightful comedy *The Heiress* still continues the delight of the stage and one of the most pleasing of domestic compositions." Written over the course of two summers spent at Knowsley, Burgoyne dedicated it to the twelfth earl of Derby, whose wedding had occasioned his first play, *The Maid of Oaks*. The earl was so enchanted with the leading actress in *The Heiress*, Elizabeth Farren, that he caused a society scandal by marrying her weeks after the death of his first wife, whom he had refused to divorce despite a long separation.

Burgoyne never remarried, but he had a long-standing affair with an actress, Susan Caulfield. They had four children, of whom the oldest, christened in August 1782, was John Fox Burgoyne who served as a colonel in the American war of 1812–15, fought at the battle of New Orleans. Later on, he was chief engineer to Lord Raglan in the Crimea. He retired as a field marshal, and his statue in London is often mistaken for his father. His son Hugh joined the navy and won the Victoria Cross in the Crimea, and a few years after that war died when his ship, an experimental ironclad called HMS *Captain*, capsized and sank.¹⁰²

On August 4, 1792, while working on a musical production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, in which he was updating the English, General John Burgoyne died suddenly at his London home. He was seventy years old. In accordance with his wishes, his funeral was a modest affair with few mourners. He was buried next to his wife and daughter in the North Cloister of Westminster Abbey. The grave remained unmarked for 160 years until it was simply identified as that of "John Burgoyne 1723–1792." His last will and testament expressed regret at his sexual transgressions and the hope that "my sensualities have never injured, nor interrupted, the peace of others." Burgoyne died virtually insolvent. He was never publicly commemorated until a plaque was recently installed on his home at 10 Hertford Street in Mayfair.¹⁰³

X

Although he had allied himself with Howe and the opposition parties in order to place the onus of the failure of Saratoga on Germain, Burgoyne had been perceptive about the fundamental causes of British failure in America. He recognized that British strategy was predicated on the fallacy that the ordinary people were latently loyalist. Before crossing the Hudson, Burgoyne wrote to Germain that "the great bulk of the country are undoubtedly with the Congress, in principle and zeal." He described how the movements of the army were shadowed by militia who assembled three or four thousand troops within twenty-four hours, bringing their own provisions and returning to their farms when the crisis passed. Hanging on the flank of his army "like a gathering storm," there were men from the Hampshire Grants (New Hampshire and Vermont), which Burgoyne described as "a country unpeopled and almost unknown in the last war, [but] now abounds in the most active and most rebellious race of the continent." At the surrender ceremony on October 17, 1777, Burgoyne complimented Gates on having an inexhaustible fund of men who were "like the Hydra's head, when cut off, seven more spring in its stead." After his defeat at Saratoga, he had a long meeting with Germain in Pall Mall in which he represented "the truths respecting the dispositions of the people in America" which he knew to be "very different from the ideas" prevalent in the government.¹⁰⁴

In his published account of the campaign of 1780, Burgoyne was scathing about the potential for loyalist support in America. He had found the loyalist units in his army to be "a tax upon time and patience." They were motivated by such diverse influences that it was impracticable to make arrangements with them. There was the man who sought to profit by mustering a corps, another who was exclusively concerned with the protection of the district in which he resided, and a third who was wholly intent upon revenge against his personal enemies. They all shared a repugnance against any idea of subordination. In sending the detachment of German troops to obtain provisions and horses in

Bennington, Burgoyne had been told that the “the friends of the British cause were five to one, and that they wanted only the appearance of a protecting force to show themselves.” He received his information from “persons of long experience and residence . . . who had been present on the spot when the rebellion broke out; and whose information had been much respected by the administration in England.”

¹⁰⁵

Burgoyne observed that the enemy commanders had encountered no opposition in raising troops, but “not a loyalist was found earnest enough to convey me intelligence” in the Hampshire Grants. He asked rhetorically why the loyalists had not risen around Albany to challenge the separate and distinct military corps that was gathering from remote areas to support General Gates. Why had they not risen in the populous and supposedly well-affected area along the Mohawk to support St. Leger at Fort Stanwix? He wrote ruefully that “a critical insurrection from any one point of the compass within distance to create [a] diversion, would probably have secured the success of the campaign.”¹⁰⁶

Burgoyne privately admitted that his conjectures about the enemy had been very different at the time of his victory at Ticonderoga. He acknowledged that his earlier views “were delusive” and regarded it as his “duty to the state to confess it.” He was contemptuous of those who doubted the quality of rebel military skills, which reflected “a prejudice that it would be very absurd longer to contend with.” Even during the campaign, he had conceded that the secrecy and alertness of the enemy was not to be equaled. After his surrender at Saratoga, he paid tribute to the Continental Army, which he was “sorry” to say was the equal of any British army in America. It had all the fundamentals of a well-regulated army in discipline, subordination, regularity, and courage. The militia was inferior in method and movement, “but not a jot less serviceable in woods.” His awareness that he had been deluded may explain some of his rancor towards Germain, who more than ever justified the continuance of the war in terms of the potential support of loyalists.¹⁰⁷

The implications of the defeat at Saratoga changed the British war for America. Although France was already contemplating an open alliance with the United States, Saratoga demonstrated the potential of the American Revolution to succeed against Britain. By helping to ensure French entry, it transformed the war into a global struggle in which British military resources were deflected by other military priorities in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, India, and the Channel.¹⁰⁸

CHAPTER 5

“The Achilles of the American War”

LORD GEORGE GERMAIN

Between November 1778 and July 1779, Parliament refought the battle of Saratoga. The leading British generals and politicians were all present and played off against one another in a mutual blame game. It was parliamentary theater at its best. Sir William Howe and John Burgoyne demanded inquiries to clear their reputations. Horace Walpole salivated at the welcome prospect of the confusion likely to develop between generals, admirals, Cabinet ministers, and the returned peace commissioners. The war and the government were on trial. The issue was whether the defeat at Saratoga had been due to bad planning by the politicians or to poor implementation by the generals. The main target was the secretary of state for America, Lord George Germain, who was the chief architect of the Revolutionary War in Britain.¹

During the course of the parliamentary debates on Saratoga, returned army officers and generals gave devastating testimonies that the war was unwinnable because the majority of Americans were determined to oppose Britain. Major General “No Flint” Charles Grey, who had commanded at the “Paoli Massacre” and at Tappan, said “that with the present force in America there can be no expectation of ending the war by force of arms.” He thought that the American people “were almost unanimous in their aversion to the government of Great Britain.” Throughout his time in the war, he claimed that the size of the British forces was inadequate to subdue America. Sir John Wrottesley, the member for Stafford who had served as an officer for three years in America, warned that “if 50,000 Russians were sent, they could do nothing . . . our posts are too many, and our troops too much detached . . . the chain of communication was too far extended.” Wrottesley had voted with the government for nine years, and had previously supported the war, but he had come to the conclusion that we are “not able to carry on the war offensively.”²

In March 1779, Sir William Howe made an “unexpected and direct attack” on Lord George Germain. He asserted that if his military decisions had not been based on the minister’s directions, they had at least not been discouraged or contradicted by him. Howe called for an inquiry and a full examination of Germain to acquaint the nation with the true cause of the failure of the British campaign in America in 1777. Howe attributed his resignation and that of his brother to their treatment by Germain. He concluded by asserting that it would be impossible either to restore peace or to prosecute the war while the conduct of the war was continued in the hands “of the present noble secretary” for America. Germain seemed “astonished at this unexpected attack” and entered into a defense of his actions, claiming that the charge supposed “him of much more consequence than he really was, by attributing to him the sole management of the war.” During the successive days of the debate, Charles James Fox accused Germain of being the author of the “miscarriage” at Saratoga, because the minister had not given sufficiently explicit orders to Howe to meet and assist Burgoyne at Albany. Fox was said to have made the case “with extraordinary temper and judgment, and without any acrimony.” Languishing on the front benches of the government side of the Commons, Germain said nothing, other than to respond to specific questions. Later during the debates, he finally defended himself “in a good speech, though many thought he did not clear himself.”³

There were well-grounded rumors that the government was so fearful of defeat that it was about to make a sacrifice and dismiss Lord George Germain. In January 1778, George III had given Lord North the choice “that either the Secretary or the General should retire.” In May, Germain wrote that he had found the parliamentary session “too fatiguing and almost intolerable.” He told a friend that he was ready to resign, but that he would first disprove the accusations against him himself in the House of Commons. Walpole thought that Germain was not only fearful of being sacrificed by the government but also of an impeachment proceeding by the opposition. In Parliament and St. James’s Palace, the

other Cabinet ministers physically and publicly distanced themselves from Germain. Charles James Fox publicly hinted that Germain was so dissatisfied that he was threatening to resign. By his gestures during Fox's speech, Germain implied assent, and his reply to Fox made little effort to defend his colleagues in the government. In June 1778, Germain had felt slighted by Lord North who had removed him from the Board of Trade in favor of the earl of Carlisle. Prepared to resign, Germain suggested that Carlisle assume all his duties as secretary of state for America. During these debates, Germain was painted by the artist George Romney in a manner that suggested his plight (Figure 21). The portrait shows Germain standing in front of his country house at Drayton in Northamptonshire. In the background, thunder clouds loom. His hand rests on a virtually blank piece of paper, with a finger pointing to a few words at the top, which simply read "To the King."⁴

In the period of declining government majorities in March 1780, the opposition nearly removed Germain by a margin of only seven votes with a motion to eliminate the position of secretary of state for the American Department. During the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in London in the summer of 1780, Germain had to seek the help of friends to barricade the entrance and passages to his home along Pall Mall, and then "coolly waited for the attack of the populace." Richard Cumberland had just returned from a diplomatic mission to Spain to discover "the rebellion of America transplanted to England." At Germain's home in Pall Mall, Cumberland was ushered by night through a suite of five rooms "the door of every one of which was constantly locked" after him.⁵

I

Born Lord George Sackville, Germain was the youngest and favorite son of the duke of Dorset. At six feet tall, he had a commanding presence with clear blue eyes, a prominent nose, and a muscular physique. There was an alertness about his face combined with a look of melancholy, a trait associated with the Sackvilles. According to Nathaniel Wraxall, he had a robust and vigorous appearance, "an air of high birth and dignity," and a keen look of purpose that "pervaded every lineament of his face." Educated at Westminster School and Trinity College Dublin, Germain exuded a powerful intellect which was apparent in his eyes, "the motions of which were quick and piercing." He was, however, conscious of not being well read in literature and the classics, for which he had little inclination.⁶

Germain seemed to be reserved, reticent, proud, distant, and haughty in public. In private, he was completely relaxed, and he liked to dine at home with his family and drink a pint of claret. He judged his audience well, "always saying enough, and not too much." He spoke plainly, using the "commonest expressions." He was an entertaining conversationalist who told stories of his military exploits and indiscreet anecdotes about the royal family, raising "the curtain that concealed the vulgar eyes [from] the palaces of Whitehall, of St. James's, of Kensington, and of Hampton Court." He related gossip about famous people dating back to the beginning of the century. Wraxall maintained that no one who saw him on such social occasions would have ever suspected "that the responsibility of the American war reposed principally on his shoulders."⁷

Other than Lord North, Lord George Germain was the most prominent government spokesman in the House of Commons. The combination of a powerful voice and an impressive physique made him an imposing figure there. He spoke with vehemence and animation, and his speeches were clear and cogent. Horace Walpole thought him one of the best speakers in Parliament. According to the otherwise hostile earl of Shelburne, Germain never spoke on subjects that he had not fully mastered. Edmund Burke said of him that few members were more diligent in their attendance and that debates seemed to be his principal amusement.⁸

When he became secretary of state for America in 1775, Germain was a seasoned politician with thirty-four years of experience in Parliament. In the 1750s, he had been a principal speaker against such parliamentary luminaries as William Pitt the Elder and Henry Fox. Like Lord North, he was a master of parliamentary style, an excellent judge of "the prolongation and acceleration of debate," with a capacity to read his audience to determine the best length of his speeches. As he sat down on the government front benches, he took the pulse of the chamber by eyeing the opposition ranks to see who was present and who was absent. He used to say that it was possible to *see* everything in the Commons, while *hearing* nothing but declamations. He claimed to have acquired his skills while secretary to his father, when he was lord lieutenant of Ireland. His great weakness in debate was that he lacked the

ability of North to remain placid and to turn opposition attacks into humor. He instead was irritable and easily roused. He “was less artful in debate than North,” and well known for an “unguarded mode of expression.” As the minister most associated with the war, he was a favorite target of the newspapers and the opposition parties.⁹

A military veteran who had commanded an army and fought in battle, Germain was in many ways unusually well qualified to provide political oversight of the war for America. He was descended from a long and distinguished military ancestry. At the battle of Fontenoy (May 11, 1745), he saw his regiment cut to pieces and only three officers escape unwounded, while he himself was shot in the breast and captured. A year later, during the Jacobite rebellion in Scotland (1745–46), he aggressively and successfully pursued the defeated clansmen through the Highlands in the aftermath of the British victory at Culloden. The duke of Cumberland described him as having shown courage and an inclination to the military trade that was not always present among the higher ranks. In 1758, he served with the Howe brothers and was wounded in a raid on the French Channel port of St. Malo. Although Horace Walpole claimed that Germain and the Howes did not get along and that this was the source of later friction in their relationship, Germain had respect for the military abilities of both and later supported their appointment as joint commanders in America. He was a protégé of one of the great strategists of the era, Field Marshal John Ligonier, and was highly regarded by one of the most revered heroes of the British army, a former lieutenant colonel in his regiment, James Wolfe, the victor of Quebec.¹⁰

However, Germain carried the fatal stigma of having been pronounced unfit to serve in the army by a court martial in condemnation of his role at the battle of Minden in northwestern Germany (August 1, 1759). At the time of the battle, Germain was a forty-three-year-old lieutenant general serving under Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, who was commander of the allied forces in western Germany and the son-in-law of Frederick the Great. Minden was one of the great battles of eighteenth-century Europe, a victory of the coalition arrayed against France in the Seven Years’ War that pushed the French army back toward the Rhine. Like most European battles, it dwarfed the scale of warfare in Revolutionary America. At the head of twenty-four cavalry squadrons comprising thirty-three hundred troops, Germain failed to pursue the French when they began to retreat. After waiting for a while, he moved forward slowly with only part of his cavalry and lost an opportunity to rout the enemy and gain an even more spectacular victory. It was later alleged that he had repeatedly and deliberately disobeyed orders to charge, and he was obliquely criticized in the official report of the battle by Prince Ferdinand.

Germain resigned from his command and returned to England. Although not formally charged, he insisted upon a court martial to clear his name and to explain his actions. It was a matter of personal honor and pride, even though he thereby risked the death sentence. In 1756, Admiral John Byng had been executed on his own quarterdeck when a court martial had found him guilty of not fully engaging the French fleet, inspiring Voltaire’s famous line in *Candide* that the British shoot an admiral from time to time “pour encourager les autres” (“to encourage the others”). There were mitigating circumstances for Germain’s inaction at Minden. His view of the battlefield was obscured by a forest, and he received contradictory orders that were imperfectly and inaudibly relayed by messengers speaking in German. Such considerations did not sway the fourteen generals at his trial who found him guilty of disobedience and “unfit to serve his Majesty in any military capacity whatever.” It was the lightest punishment available to the judges. According to an unconfirmed report, he escaped the death penalty by just one vote.¹¹

Walpole claimed that “the shrewdest observers thought his non-compliance with [his] orders flowed from malice to Prince Ferdinand, not from cowardice.” The two commanders had quarreled throughout the campaign. Germain resented Prince Ferdinand for not allowing him to command the British infantry as well as the cavalry, while Prince Ferdinand was secretive about his plans and had not sufficiently briefed Germain. On the other hand, some Hanoverian officers had previously complained that Germain was so imperious that “none of the foreign troops can bear him.” Regardless of the merits of his case, Germain had little prospect of a fair trial because he was associated with the opposition leaders who were critical of the war in Germany. George II personally called for Germain’s name to be struck off the list of the Privy Council. He also ordered that the sentence be read out to every regiment of the British army, with the comment that it was “worse than death,” and that it be reported in the

London Gazette. The episode devastated Germain's father, who had doted on his younger son and who retired to solitude at the family home at Knole in Kent.¹²

The specter of Minden overshadowed Germain's career and proved a major liability in his role as secretary of state for America. Many of the generals and army officers serving in America had been present at the battle, among them Lord Cornwallis, William Phillips, and Baron Friedrich Adolf von Riedesel who commanded German troops from New Brunswick in Burgoyne's campaign. Before serving in the Revolutionary War, half of the officers of the Fusiliers or 23rd Regiment had been present at the battle of Minden. Frederick Haldimand, a Swiss-born general in the British army who became commander in chief in Canada in 1779, had been a witness in support of Germain at the court martial, as had Cornwallis's father. Some of the leading opponents of Lord North's government had been present at Minden, including the earl of Shelburne and the duke of Richmond. In 1770, after taking four days to settle his affairs for his wife and child, Germain fought a duel in Hyde Park against George Johnstone, a former governor of West Florida, who had said that it was not proper for a man to defend the honor of the House of Commons "who had forfeited his own honor." After nearly getting killed by a bullet that hit his pistol, Germain gained some public respect for his coolness and intrepidity, while the "brutality" of Johnstone made him appear a boisterous bully.¹³

Regardless of the validity of the original accusations, the decision of the court martial was a serious liability for someone overseeing a war and dealing with military men. While Germain was secretary of state for America, his opponents regularly invoked Minden. After the withdrawal of the British from Boston in 1776, Temple Luttrell said mockingly that Germain had set an example in Germany for the army. In February 1777, John Wilkes said that "Lord North, like a true *dictator*, had chose for his *Master of the Horse*, the noble lord . . . who, to his immortal honor, with great and invincible courage advanced and charged the enemies of the country at the head of the British *Horse*." During the debates on Saratoga in May 1778, there was nearly a duel between Luttrell and Germain, after Luttrell said that Germain had been promoted for disobedience and timidity. Claspng his sword with his hand, Germain stood up in a violent rage, vowing that he would not tolerate such an insult from an assassin and a most wretched character. Luttrell left the chamber and refused to retract a word, declaring that he would prefer to be sent to prison, and left the chamber ready to fight a duel. After two hours of histrionics, he finally made an apology to Germain.¹⁴

Germain was a divisive figure. He was certainly able to command allegiance and respect. He was fondly regarded by the two great memoirists of the period, who were otherwise at the opposite ends of the political spectrum. Horace Walpole, whom historians accuse of having perpetuated a jaundiced view of the government in his memoirs, wrote of "the uncommon excellence of his abilities" and claimed to have "always lived on civil terms with him." Walpole particularly admired the way that Germain remained loyal to the duke of Gloucester, the younger brother of George III, who was ostracized for having married Walpole's niece without the permission of the king. Germain was the only member of the government to be portrayed in entirely laudatory terms in the contemporary memoirs of Nathaniel Wraxall, who knew him so well that in the later years of Germain's life he was "on terms of great intimacy" with him, and who regarded it as an "honor to enjoy a place in his friendship." Germain initially impressed some of the leading American loyalist exiles in Britain. Thomas Hutchinson, the American-born governor of colonial Massachusetts, wrote in his diary that Germain had "the character of a great man" and that he was a "true friend to both countries." Hutchinson found him polite, affable, and friendly. Peter Oliver, the American-born former chief justice of Massachusetts, thought that Germain had good sense and a "firmness of mind" that well qualified him to be secretary of state for America, and that was "equal to the subdual of an American Rebellion."¹⁵

Others detested Germain and regarded him as cunning. Charles James Fox delivered some of his most venomous personal invectives against Germain. While the British defeat at Saratoga was still only rumored in London in November 1777, Fox launched a brilliant and bitter philippic against Germain in which he accused him of being "an illomened and inauspicious character" who was unfit to serve the crown, and who was ignorant and incapable in his conduct of the war for America. It was an example of the opposition alienating support by being too shrill, since moderate members thought the speech too personal and severe. In another speech, in December 1777, Fox likened Germain to Dr. Sangrado, a notorious Spanish physician "who would persist in drawing blood because he had written a book on

bleeding.” He held Germain principally responsible for the atrocities of the war, including “the inhuman measure of employing . . . savages” not to subdue but “to exterminate a people who we still pretend to call our subjects.” By the defeat at Saratoga, he declared, Germain had brought about “the final loss of our colonies.” After accusing the government of stupidity and ignorance, “Fox flamed still more and charged Lord George with the whole blame of the badness of the plan” that had led to Saratoga.¹⁶

Oxford historian Piers Mackesy suggests that the enmity toward Germain cannot be explained simply by the events at Minden, but that the particular viciousness of these personal attacks was due to his reputed homosexuality. There had long been unsubtle mentions in the press of scandal, with references to Germain as the “buggering hero” in the scurrilous writings of John Wilkes, Charles Churchill, and the anonymous Junius. When London society was rocked with stories of the trial of the duchess of Kingston on charges of bigamy in the House of Lords in 1776, Germain was libeled in a verse publication entitled *Sodom and Onan*. The duchess had commissioned the pamphlet in revenge against Samuel Foote who had written a play in which she was unflatteringly featured. As a friend of Foote, Germain was attacked in the poem:

Sackville, both Coward and Catamite, commands
Department honourable, and kisses hands
With lips that oft in blandishment obscene
Have been employed . . .

Apart from words for explicit sexual acts, at the time there was not even a language to describe same-sex relationships. In contrast to the more ambiguous attitude of late seventeenth-century England, homosexuality was increasingly associated in literature and drama with effeminacy. There was a latent fear that the nation was becoming effeminate, which was regarded as evidence of its decline.¹⁷

Germain made little attempt to disguise his sexual preferences. He had been married to Diana Sambrooke, who died of measles at the age of forty-seven in the midst of the Revolutionary War in January 1778. She was fifteen years his junior, and they had two sons and three daughters. Upon their first meeting, she impressed his favorite sister as a sensible, clever, and good-tempered woman. Although the Sambroke family was related to the earl of Salisbury, Germain was thought by some to have married beneath him. According to Horace Walpole, “she was a good woman,” and “her death was a great blow to him”; it coincided with the recent arrival in London of news of the defeat at Saratoga. On her death, Germain missed a week of critical Cabinet meetings about the future of the war, while he retired to grieve at Knole. Nevertheless, the suspicion that he was homosexual or bisexual had begun long before her death. While secretary of state for America, Germain gave greater currency to such rumors by his patronage of the playwright Richard Cumberland, whom he appointed to be secretary of the Board of Trade, and of the American loyalist and scientist Benjamin Thompson, whom he made his under secretary of state. Cumberland and Thompson were both very capable and distinguished in many spheres, but they were both reputed to be lovers of Germain.¹⁸

Richard Cumberland had left a promising academic career at Cambridge University to be the private secretary of Lord Halifax, who was a highly regarded president of the Board of Trade. He also became one of the most successful playwrights of the period, with *The Brothers* (1769) at Covent Garden, and *The West Indian* (1771) and *The Fashionable Lover* (1772) at Drury Lane. After the Revolutionary War, he reestablished his reputation as a dramatist with *The Jew* (1794) and *The Wheel of Fortune* (1795). He eventually wrote over forty plays, as well as poetry, three novels, and several books of recollections. He was married with two daughters and four sons. In her diary in 1777, Mrs. Thrale, the friend of Samuel Johnson, wrote of Richard Cumberland, “I have a notion, *Dieu me pardonne* [God forgive me] that Cumberland is a—. . .” She continued, “Effeminacy is an odious quality in a He creature, and when joined with low jealousy, actually detestable.” Long after the war for America, she was still writing that something whispered in her heart that “Cumberland did like the *Masculine* gender best.” In 1780, Germain sent Cumberland on an important diplomatic mission to try to negotiate peace with Spain. After the Revolutionary War, they became neighbors, and Cumberland wrote an

affectionate personal memoir in which he called Germain “one of the very best companions of the age, though he had neither the advantages of literature, the brilliance of wit, nor any superior pretensions to a fine taste in the elegant arts.”¹⁹

Benjamin Thompson was unique among American loyalists in gaining high office in Britain and later in the Holy Roman Empire. He was even knighted, which caused the marquess of Wellesley to dub him “Sir *Sodom* Thompson, Lord Sackville’s *under* Secretary.” He was one of the most talented scientists of his era and an expert on gunpowder, and is credited with having been the first to suggest that heat is a mode of motion. He designed an oven called the Rumford Roaster. He became a fellow of the Royal Society, where his portrait still hangs, and a founder of the Royal Institution. He established the Rumford medals awarded by the Royal Society, together with awards in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Rumford professorship of physics at Harvard University. In later life he moved to Bavaria, where he was the founder of the English Gardens in Munich and became Count von Rumford of the Holy Roman Empire.²⁰

Rumford was also twice married; he divorced his first wife and separated from the second. He was regarded as dangerously ambitious. He lived for a period with Germain during the Revolutionary War. The American loyalist Samuel Curwen described Thompson as a “shop lad” from Massachusetts who by “a strange concurrence of Evils” was serving under Germain with whom he “always breakfasts, dines, and sups . . . so great a favourite is he.” Thomas Hutchinson recorded in his diary that Thompson spoke freely of living with Germain. Hutchinson commented cryptically, “some points look strange.” In another of his oblique diary entries, Hutchinson wrote that he had heard “what it’s shocking to think of,” after someone had described Thompson as a scoundrel; he thought Germain remiss for allowing the world “to insinuate such things.” When he heard Thompson repeat some private remarks made by George III to Germain, Hutchinson wrote that Germain was “extremely incautious in trusting such an amount of his conversation with the King to a young man,” especially one so indiscreet.²¹

In 1782–83, Thompson served in America as a lieutenant colonel commanding his own loyalist cavalry and infantry corps, the King’s American Dragoons. He fought at Charleston and saw service in Long Island. In 1785, he wrote to Germain from Munich that “rank, titles, decorations, literary distinctions . . . and some small degree of military fame I have acquired (through your availing protection).” He continued that he wished he could celebrate his happiness in “the society of my best, my only friend! Look back for a moment, my dearest friend, upon the work of your hands. *Je suis de votre ouvrage* [I am your creation]. Does it not afford you a very sensible pleasure to find your child has answered your expectations?”²²

II

When he became secretary of state for the American Department in November 1775, Germain did not have a large parliamentary following to strengthen the government. He was chosen for his abilities and for his commitment to the cause of winning the war for America, as well as being more vigorous and less conciliatory than his predecessor, the earl of Dartmouth. Despite being a detractor of Germain, the earl of Shelburne thought he had the potential to be prime minister but for the episode at Minden. The historian Edward Gibbon believed that Germain had valuable abilities that few “country boors” were capable of understanding or valuing. Gibbon attributed his unpopularity to public knowledge of the findings of the court martial, his proud behavior, his solitary lifestyle, and his indifference to county meetings. At the time of his appointment, North thought that the government was lucky to acquire him. North felt much easier at having such a “responsible person” in the House of Commons, when so many of the Cabinet members were in the House of Lords. Nevertheless, North was not fond of him, while Germain said of North that he was “a trifling supine minister.”²³

Germain had recommended himself to the government by becoming one of the foremost champions of coercive measures in America. Despite his support of the Rock-ingham government, he voted against the repeal of the Stamp Act (1766). During the debates on the Townshend Duties (1767), Germain successfully pushed Charles Townshend to give an assurance that he would raise a tax in the colonies, and tried to make him guarantee that the colonial tax would cover the entire cost of keeping an army in America. He reminded the government that indulgence in the past was not rewarded by “these undutiful children.” In Ireland earlier in his career, he had argued that the crown had the right to dispose

of unassigned tax revenue without consulting the Irish Parliament. During the debates on the Coercive Acts in 1774, he warned against allowing America to “steal a constitution they had no right to,” and he attributed the crisis to the willingness of past governments to give in to the demands of the colonies. He urged the government to adopt “a more manly method than that in which we have hitherto trifled.”²⁴

During the debates on the Massachusetts Governing Act (1774), Germain said that the government had not gone far enough in extending imperial oversight. He mocked the involvement of colonial merchants in politics, saying that they should follow their occupations, rather than considering “themselves as ministers of that country” and engaging in politics “which they do not understand.” He suggested that the Massachusetts council be appointed by the king, the town meetings be abolished, the method of selecting juries be changed, and colonial charters be treated as revisable. He decried the tendency of past governments to make verbal assertions about sovereignty over the colonies, but not to enforce the law. He was confident that “by a manly and steady perseverance, things may be restored from a state of anarchy and confusion, to peace, quietude and due obedience to the laws of this country.” In another debate during the third reading of the act, Germain said that he understood the maxim that it was better that ten guilty men should escape than that an innocent man should suffer, but he asked rhetorically, “What is the state of Boston? Anarchy and confusion. Have they at this instant a civil magistrate that dare act? Have they any redress for any one grievance but what depends upon the will of the licentious multitude?” Unless the home government took action, he warned that there would be government by the mob, acting under the guise of the banner of liberty: “they will assert every right, and they will substitute their Assembly in the place of your Parliament.” In January 1775, Germain said that he would gladly approve petitions from America, “but if they resisted for what they call their rights, he would treat them with Roman severity.”²⁵

In a conversation with Edward Gibbon, Germain “was in high spirits and hopes to re-conquer Germany in America,” in other words to redeem the stain of Minden by victory in America. The process of his rehabilitation had begun with the patronage of George III. It helped that he was able to change his name from Lord George Sackville, owing to a bequest by Lady Betty Germain in 1769 that required him to adopt her surname in order to receive the estate of Drayton House in Northamptonshire. She was an aunt by marriage who was a widow with no surviving children, and she and her husband had favored Lord George among the Sackvilles.²⁶

Like George III, Germain believed that Britain would cease to be a great and powerful nation if it lost America. He became the minister responsible for the war when it had already been in progress for over six months and thereby inherited a conflict that was already going badly for Britain. Before he was appointed secretary of state for America, the British army had suffered severe casualties in its pyrrhic victory at Bunker Hill; it had lost Fort Ticonderoga and Montreal while it was besieged both in Boston, by the Continental army commanded by George Washington, and in Quebec, by forces commanded by Benedict Arnold. Britain had lost control of the colonies to radical leaders and revolutionary governments, while most of the royal governors had been forced to seek sanctuary. The decision had already been made to quit Boston, withdraw from America, and send an expedition to North Carolina, and the generals had already been appointed. Germain was left with the herculean task of masterminding the reconquest of America and the reconstruction of British government there.²⁷

Germain infused a new energy into the war effort with the aim of winning in a single campaign. Like George III, he believed in the importance of the war and the need to prosecute it with vigor. They both spoke the same language of the need for bold, vigorous, and decisive measures. He “wished that the whole power of the state should be Exerted, that one Campaign might decide whether the American Provinces were to be subject to G.B. or free States.” He worked feverishly to raise recruits and supplies so as to send out the largest force ever assembled by any European power for service in the Americas. It was a monumental achievement. He sent out more troops than requested by either William Howe in New York or Guy Carleton in Quebec, as well as a force to serve under Henry Clinton in the Carolinas. The Admiralty had said that it was impossible. The first lord of the Admiralty, Lord Sandwich, called it an unprecedented achievement and General Sir William Howe praised Germain. In the opening months of 1776, Germain was in great spirits, saying that the war would be won in a single campaign and that he would establish himself by it. The opposition *London Evening Post* was predicting that he would replace North as prime minister.²⁸

Germain believed it necessary to negotiate from a position of strength by winning a decisive military victory, as well as being impelled by a sense of urgency about the need to forestall France from entering into the Revolutionary War. He was therefore against the conciliatory approach advocated by Lord North and the Howe brothers, writing that “the sentimental manner of making war, will, I fear, not have the desired Effect.” He argued that leniency was misguided and even inhumane because it was likely to prolong the war. The opposition parties associated him with a doctrine of unconditional submission. Although he approved of the naval abilities of Admiral Howe, Germain went to great lengths to prevent the Howe brothers becoming the sole peace commissioners in America. He was against granting pardons to the revolutionaries until the elected assemblies had acknowledged the absolute authority of Parliament. He clashed with Lord North and the earl of Dartmouth, who wanted to give broad discretionary negotiating authority to the Howe brothers. Their differences were so acute that all parties threatened to resign until they were dissuaded by George III. Although he conceded to the brothers becoming the sole peace commissioners, Germain prevailed in severely restricting their authority and scope of action.²⁹

All the same, Germain had a more realistic and pragmatic approach to the war than is often appreciated. He anticipated from the outset some of the difficulties posed by warfare in America. He allowed for the problem of communications with field commanders acting at great distances, arguing that they necessarily required much discretion and freedom in directing strategy. More surprisingly, he did not underestimate the potential of an enemy who used unconventional methods of warfare. He appreciated that “an enemy that avoids facing you in the open field is totally different from what young officers learn from the common discipline of the army.” He was well aware of the setbacks suffered by the British army in the early stages of the French and Indian War and the defeat of General Edward Braddock at Monongahela in 1755. He recalled how Braddock’s army had been sacrificed to the skill of enemies who were virtually unseen, as well as to military convention by which the troops kept together and fired as a single body but “could neither defend themselves nor annoy their opponents.” He understood that the conduct of the war would require uncommon abilities in a field commander. He advocated the use of light infantry troops who had been taught to disperse and secure themselves by trees, walls, or hedges to protect the main body of the army from ambushes and surprise. He critically believed that Britain could not “support a protracted War, nor bear to have any considerable part of the National strength remain inactive or unemployed.” He urged that “every Advantage must therefore be seized, every occasion profited of.”³⁰

Germain’s strategy for winning the war in 1776 was to isolate radical New England from the rest of America. He favored the immediate conquest of New York because of its strategic location between the northern and southern colonies, and controlling the mouth of the Hudson River. The navy was to blockade and launch raids along the coast of New England. Germain expected Guy Carleton and the British army in Canada to march south and to join up with the army of William Howe. Even before he became secretary of state for America, Germain stressed that it was “absolutely necessary” for the army to win with “one decisive blow” against Washington. He thought it defied common sense to protract the war and advocated “exerting the utmost force . . . to finish this rebellion in one campaign.” His strategy represented what most military historians believe to have been the best opportunity for Britain to win the American Revolution.³¹

Germain’s intentions for the campaign were thwarted by his commanders, whose desire to conciliate their opponents caused them to act with less aggression and urgency in engaging the enemy than he expected. Owing partly to their negotiations and offers of amnesty, the Howe brothers lost the best opportunity of the war to defeat Washington’s army and to exploit their victory at the battle of Long Island (August 27, 1776). In his descent from Canada, Guy Carleton similarly attempted to sway popular opinion by releasing prisoners of war and by refusing to make greater use of the Indians. His patron in England was the duke of Richmond, a leading opponent of the war in Parliament who had also been present at the battle of Minden. Germain and Carleton also had opposing views of the policy of conciliating the French subjects in Canada enshrined in the Quebec Act. Germain’s view of Carleton was colored by negative accounts that he received from his confidant Colonel Gabriel Christie whom he

had appointed quartermaster general of the army in Canada, a choice that Carleton blocked by instead appointing his own brother, Thomas Carleton. Christie's criticism of Carleton was reinforced by the accounts of the campaign from Burgoyne, serving as Carleton's second in command.³²

Germain held Carleton rather than Howe chiefly responsible for the British failure to win the war in the campaign of 1776. He faulted him for not catching up with the rebel force before it reached Lake Champlain and for abandoning the capture of Crown Point. He believed that Carleton could have deflected Washington's army in New York and prevented the British defeat at Trenton by continuing his invasion from Canada, whereas his withdrawal from Crown Point enabled rebel troops to join the undermanned army of Washington and to fight at Trenton. Britain was never again able to equal the forces sent to America in 1776. Germain's plan had offered the best chance of a military solution, but his opponents were skeptical that a spectacular military victory would be sufficient to win back the allegiance of the American people. Even if the British had defeated Washington, it might have exceeded their resources to police North America with a large military presence comparable to the garrisons that controlled Ireland.³³

Germain's plans for the 1777 campaign were much the same as those of 1776, with the aim of cutting off New England, though placing greater emphasis upon a naval blockade and raids along the coast of New England. He largely adopted the advice of John Burgoyne in regard to the specifics of the invasion of America from Canada. It was Howe, not Germain, who made the decision to attack Philadelphia and to travel by sea via the Chesapeake. He changed his plans so late that he left virtually no option open to Germain other than to endorse what amounted to a *fait accompli*. When the campaign unraveled with the defeat at Saratoga, Burgoyne and the Howe brothers made common cause and avoided mutual blame in order to win the support of the parliamentary opposition parties, who were willing to hold an inquiry to absolve the generals and to attribute exclusive responsibility for the defeat to Germain. It was all part of a broader attack on the government and its management of the war in America. Germain was an easy and vulnerable target, given the notoriety of his court martial. He was not close to the other government ministers. He had been a political independent during most of his parliamentary career and had occasionally voted against the government of Lord North. Unlike the earl of Sandwich, he did not have a large political following whose defection might affect the stability of the government. He was dispensable.

However, his planning of the campaign revealed deficiencies that continued throughout his direction of the war for America. This was equally apparent in his direction of the war in the Caribbean and particularly his planning of a remarkably ambitious expedition to Central America.³⁴

III

In 1780, Lord George Germain launched one of the most ambitious British enterprises of the American Revolutionary War. It is rarely featured in standard accounts of the war beyond biographies of the two men who first distinguished themselves in the episode: Horatio Nelson, the future victor of Trafalgar, and Lieutenant Edward Marcus Despard, who was executed in 1802 for an attempt to seize the Tower of London and assassinate George III. The expedition aimed at nothing less than the conquest of Spanish America through Central America. The chief medical officer of the expedition, Dr. Benjamin Moseley, described it as "the best concerted and most important enterprise that had been conceived during the war." It was part of a general reorientation of the British war effort from North America to the Caribbean. Germain was to write to Major General John Vaughan, commanding the British army in the Lesser Antilles, that "the West Indies will become the principal theatre of war."³⁵

In June 1779, Spain had declared war on Britain with the aim of recovering former territories including the Floridas, the Bahama Islands, Jamaica, Gibraltar, and Minorca. Fearful for the consequences of revolution in its own empire in South America and the Caribbean, Spain neither became an ally of nor formally recognized the United States. It signed a treaty exclusively with France which committed France to assisting Spain in the restoration of Gibraltar. In New Orleans, the young Spanish governor Don Bernardo de Gálvez launched an invasion against British West Florida whose boundaries extended along the seaboard of the Gulf of Mexico, through Pensacola to Mobile, Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez in the present-day states of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. By the end of September 1779, Gálvez had seized the British posts in Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez,

clearing British settlers from the entire region around the Mississippi. In Central America, the Spanish governor of Honduras similarly made the first strike against the principal settlement of British logwood cutters at St. George's Key.³⁶



FIGURE 1. George III. Portrait by Johann Zoffany, 1771. George III is shown in uniform as captain general of the British Army with the star of the Order of the Garter. Before the Boston Tea Party in 1773, he had little role in the policies that led to the American Revolution. However, he was to become the most outspoken advocate of force and even wanted to continue the war after the defeat at Yorktown. He refused to negotiate with opposition leaders committed to withdrawal from America. Supplied by Royal Collection Trust/© HM Queen Elizabeth II 2012.