

PRELUDE TO SARATOGA:

Herkimer at Oriskany; Stark at Bennington

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

THE surrender of "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne, the luckless British commander, at Saratoga on October 17, 1777, is not only one of the high spots in the history of the United States but it is also a milestone in world history. "Rebellion, which a twelvemonth ago was a contemptible pygmy, is now in appearance become a giant!" wrote a contemporary and his estimate of the importance of that event soon proved to be accurate.

For this victory won for the American Patriots an alliance with France, England's traditional enemy, and this marked the beginning of the end of their fight for freedom. So there was good reason for Creasy, the historian, to include the fighting around Saratoga among his "Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World." But a necessary prelude to that fighting were two other engagements, small in terms of the number of men engaged but big in their results. It is doubtful if Horatio Gates could have stood at Saratoga as the victor had it not been for Nicholas Herkimer at Oriskany and John Stark at Bennington.

Asthe year 1777 opened, the British government began to realize the real magnitude of its task of subduing the rebellious American colonies. Three plans of waging a successful war against them were open. The first was a strict naval blockade combined with placing strong garrisons at strategic points from which attacks could be launched against detachments of rebel forces. The second was to concentrate on Washington's army and destroy it.

The third plan, outlined to Lord Germain by Gen. John Burgoyne, second in command in Canada, was to march one army south from Montreal, another east from Oswego and a third north from New York, all three to unite at Albany. Thus, by holding the Hudson river, the British would isolate New England from the other colonies and "cut off the head of the rebellion."

The plan was fundamentally unsound because it would draw each army far from its base of supplies as it advanced and it would enable an active enemy, operating on interior lines, to strike and defeat the separate armies before they could join forces.

But Germain, as though to justify his right to the title of "England's worst war minister," decided to adopt Burgoyne's idea. Even at that, it might have suc-



THE BATTLE OF BENNINGTON (From the painting by Chappel).

ceeded if the minister had not showed such a perfect genius for blundering.

Burgoyne's Invasion Begins.

In June, 1777, Burgoyne started south from St. Johns with his army of British regulars, French-Canadian militia, Hessian mercenaries, and a large force of Indians. He easily captured Fort Ticonderoga, thanks to the blunder of its American commander, Gen. Arthur St. Clair, in not fortifying Sugar Hill which overlooked the fort. After a difficult march through the wilderness, the British commander also captured Fort Edward.

Meanwhile, the invasion from the West had begun. With a force of 1,500 men, including British regulars, Loyalist (Tory) volunteers and Indians, Col. Barry St. Leger advanced from Oswego and on August 3 laid siege to the old British post of Fort Stanwix which had been renamed Fort Schuyler by the Americans. The fort which stood on the present site of Rome, N. Y., was garrisoned by Continentals commanded by Col. Marinus Willett and Col. Peter Gansevoort who immediately appealed to the Committee of Safety in Tryon county for help.

The chairman of this committee and brigadier-general of its militia was Nicholas Herkimer—"Old Honikol Herkimer," they called him. He at once set out for the relief of Fort Schuyler with a force of about 800 militia divided into four regiments, commanded by Col. Ebenezer Cox, Col. Jacob Klock, Col. Frederick Vissscher and Col. Peter Bellinger.

On August 4 this force assembled at Fort Dayton near the mouth of West Canada creek, crossed the Mohawk river near

the present site of Utica, N. Y., and reached Whitestown the next day. Here Herkimer sent a messenger to Gansevoort to arrange for co-operation against the enemy. The commander at Fort Schuyler was to fire three cannon shots as a signal that a detachment was ready to make a sortie from the fort, whereupon Herkimer would launch his attack against St. Leger.

The Impatient Militiamen.

But his couriers were delayed in getting through the enemy's lines

Schuyler. Gansevoort, who had been wondering what the distant firing meant, immediately ordered the three cannons fired as a signal that he was ready to make a sortie. Herkimer's men heard the reports but they could not advance now.

So great was the slaughter on both sides that finally the Indians, who had been assured of an easy victory, became discouraged. Raising the cry of retreat, "Oonah! Oonah!" they left the field. Seeing this and hearing the firing in their rear, caused by Colonel's Willett's sortie against St. Leger's camp, the Tories also retreated. Late in the afternoon Herkimer's army held the field which it had bought at such a fearful price—150 dead, 150 wounded and 60 or more missing.

Ten days later "Old Honikol" Herkimer died at his home near Little Falls, to which he had been removed after the battle. Meanwhile General Schuyler

was met by General Lincoln with orders to join Schuyler at Stillwater. He was also met by the Vermont council of safety which urged him to disregard Schuyler's orders. The state government of New Hampshire upheld him in his decision to go to Bennington.

On August 13 Stark received word of the approach of Baum's expedition. Without waiting to be attacked, Stark marched out the next morning to meet the Hessian commander. He also sent messengers to Manchester to summon Col. Seth Warner's regiment of Continentals, which had been left there in charge of Lieutenant-Colonel Safford, and ordered him to rally the militia in that section. He then drew up his forces near the little settlement of Walloomsac to await Baum's attack. Although the engagement which followed is always referred to as the Battle of Bennington, and is regarded as a high point in Vermont's history, it was not



"I VILL FACE THE ENEMY!"—General Herkimer at the Battle of Oriskany. (From the painting by F. C. Yohn, courtesy, the Glens Falls Insurance Company.)

and the unruly militiamen—most of them frontiersmen and typical "rugged individualists"—began to chafe at the delay. Again and again they demanded that their officers lead them against the foe.

Enraged by Herkimer's refusal, they went so far as to call him a Tory who would betray them and sacrifice the defenders of Fort Schuyler. But the crowning insult came when Colonel Cox shouted "He dares not march! He is a coward!" Herkimer sprang up, his face white, his eyes blazing. Colonel Bellinger and Major Frey

had called for volunteers at Stillwater to go to the relief of the fort which bore his name. Benedict Arnold led them and as he neared the fort he sent spies into St. Leger's camp who spread word of the coming of a great force of Americans. The Indians, still further discouraged by this news, decamped by the hundreds, as did many of the Loyalists. St. Leger was forced to withdraw his regulars in haste, leaving behind him all of his camp equipment, which fell into the hands of the defenders of Fort Schuyler. So Herkimer and his men had not died at Oriskany in vain.

The Second Blow.

The second blow was struck in Vermont on the very day that "Old Honikol" died. It was the victory which John Stark and his New Hampshire and Vermont militia, plus a small force from Massachusetts, won from a detachment of Burgoyne's army and it, perhaps even more than Oriskany, sealed the doom of "Gentleman Johnny's" high hopes for success.

When that general reached Fort Edward on July 30 he found himself in a difficult position. He had positive orders from Lord Germain to push on to Albany. His baggage train was sadly inadequate for a march through the wilderness ahead of him. At Bennington, Vt., some 30 miles southeast of Fort Edward, a great store of supplies had been gathered for Schuyler's army and General Burgoyne decided to risk a foray to capture them. But when he sent Colonel Baum with a force of 600 Hessians to capture the supplies he was underestimating badly both the numbers and the fighting qualities of Stark's men.

Stark was a native of Manchester, N. H., and had served with distinction with Rogers' Rangers in the French and Indian war and as a colonel at Bunker Hill, at Trenton and at Princeton. When congress passed him by in promoting officers in the Continental army, he resigned from the army.

Several months before, Vermont had declared its independence as a state. When Burgoyne captured Ticonderoga consternation spread throughout the new commonwealth because the Vermonters felt that this capture laid them open to whatever punishment Burgoyne might wish to inflict upon them. So they called upon New Hampshire for assistance in repelling the invaders.

A Premature Censure.

Accordingly, New Hampshire raised a force of militia and put John Stark in command with the rank of general. Incidentally, officers of the Continental army and congress resented this action and the latter, on August 9, passed a vote of censure upon him for accepting the appointment. This was three days after his victory and just a day before the news of it reached them!

On August 7 Stark marched his men to Manchester, Vt., where he

fought at Bennington nor was it in Vermont. Walloomsac is in New York, six miles from Bennington, and Stark's victory should more properly be known as the Battle of Walloomsac.

Baum arrived near Bennington on August 15 and, gaining some idea of Stark's strength, pitched his camp, entrenched and sent back to Burgoyne for reinforcements. The next morning, although it was raining in torrents and Warner's force had not yet arrived, Stark decided to attack. After skillfully surrounding the enemy, he launched his assault on Baum's entrenchments.

Stark's men fought desperately, and early in the afternoon gained the crest of the hill and after a half-hour of desperate fighting, much of it hand-to-hand, they shattered Baum's force. Its survivors fled from the field, leaving in the hands of the victors their mortally wounded commander.

No sooner was the victory won than the undisciplined frontiersmen scattered over the field to plunder the Hessian baggage train. Their commander had completely lost control of them and was entirely unprepared for battle when a force of 500 British, commanded by Lieutenant-Col-



Gen. John Stark

onel Breyman, suddenly came up. At this critical juncture Warner marched on the field. Stark's men rallied around them and Breyman was defeated.

The Battle of Bennington raised the morale of the Patriots after a long, unbroken chain of discouraging reverses. Congress now reversed its censure of Stark by voting its thanks to him and his men and making him a brigadier-general in the Continental army.

But most important of all was the effect which this battle had on the fortunes of General Burgoyne. Weakened by the losses of the force he had sent to Bennington and struggling against a shortage of supplies, he plunged on southward to keep his rendezvous with final failure at Saratoga.

Ask Me? Another

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects



Praiseworthy Spirit

What we call public spirit is a moral quality, a particular and highly specialized form of unselfishness.

It was Dean Inge who said there was such a thing as fatty degeneration of the conscience.

A man allows himself to become "slouchy" because he feels he has something more important to think about than beauty.

Move or Be Mastered

Most people master their environment, if they ever do, by moving away from it. Perhaps, in their case, that's the best way.

A man of few words may convince you of his wisdom; but for companionship he is a flop.

Better to be afraid of the dark than to be afraid of the light.

With all its drawbacks, life is still a splendid adventure.

Analysis Might Kill It

People love without reason, and they are averse to analyzing the emotion.

Don't drive anyone into a corner where he has to tell the truth if you value his friendship.

A "rugged individualist" is one who hurts your feelings and doesn't care if he does.

"Humanitarian" is a modern word coined to express a modern idea.

Only One Blue

True blue is not the kind that means a melancholy depression of spirits. That blue rests on false premises.

It is more blessed to give than to receive; but one likes to have this fact acknowledged by the beneficiary.

A foolish man pursues a course that he knows will make him drunk and then is disappointed in the result.

1. Has the population of the United States increased or decreased in the last ten years and how much?
2. What is the world's longest airline?
3. How many people have lived since the beginning of recorded history?
4. For what countries did the United States coin money last year?
5. What was the beginning of the motion picture industry in Hollywood?
6. Do the cold waters of the temperate and frigid zones contain more plant and animal life than do the warm waters of the tropics?
7. How does the Maxim silencer work?
8. Why do sharks fight back down?

Answers

1. A census of population was taken in this country in 1930 and the next will be taken in 1940. Any other figures that may be given are simply estimates. The United States had a population of 122,775,046 in 1930; the estimated pop-

ulation on July 1, 1935, was 127,521,000, showing an increase of nearly five millions in five years.

2. The world's longest air line is that between Amsterdam, Holland, and the Dutch East Indies, 9,000 miles away. There are two departures weekly at each end of it.

3. The eugenics department of the Carnegie institution estimates that 30,000,000,000 people have lived since the beginning of recorded history, some 6,000 or 7,000 years ago.

4. For Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Colombia and San Salvador. This coinage totaled 72,180,449 pieces.

5. In 1907 Selig opened the first California studio in Los Angeles. The first picture was the "Count of Monte Cristo" in 1,000 feet. Soon after that time other motion picture studios in New York opened California studios.

6. More plant and animal life per square mile is found in the cold waters of the temperate and frigid zones than in the ocean waters of the tropics.

7. The Maxim silencer is a tubular device attached to the muzzle of a firearm that renders the discharge practically noiseless. The device has an interior spiral which, permitting the ejection of the bullet, retards the explosion of the gases by causing them to rotate before escaping.

8. Because of the peculiar conformation of the shark's mouth, it is necessary for it to turn on its back when attacking an object at the surface of the water. A shark's mouth opens below its snout on the under side of its body and it is, therefore, unable to bite anything directly above it without turning over.

A Refreshing Drink

IN THE summertime, cool drinks are so grateful to parched young throats. Here is a cold cereal drink you can mix in a jiffy. It is very refreshing and nourishing to boot.

Quick Cooler.

- 2 level teaspoons Instant Postum
- 1 cup cold milk

Combine ingredients in beverage shaker or in glass jar with tight top. Shake thoroughly until all cereal is dissolved. Sweeten to taste and serve. Serves one.—Adv.

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