

THE BATTLE OF SARATOGA & THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

The Battle of Saratoga

In New York, the British were attempting to accomplish their goal of dividing the colonies in half by taking control of the Hudson River. Traveling through New York the British Army was getting bogged down in thick forests. The Patriots had chopped down large trees and dammed rivers to create obstacles. All along the route, the colonial militia swarmed out of nowhere to attack the Redcoats. As the British neared Saratoga, New York, they found themselves surrounded by the Patriots. On October 17, 1777, the British were forced to surrender to colonial General Horatio Gates.

From September 19 to October 7th, 1777, British and colonial forces fought for eighteen days. The battle of Saratoga was really two battles. The British army, led by General John Burgoyne, moved at a snail's pace through the rough terrain. This gave colonial General Horatio Gates time to gather a larger force. Washington sent Gates a crack regiment of Virginia riflemen and two brigades of continental soldiers from the Hudson Highlands. Altogether Gates had about 6500 men. On September 19, Burgoyne attacked the colonial army. Benedict Arnold, sent by Washington to assist Gates, led the continentals into the woods to block the British flanking column. The battle raged for most of the afternoon with Burgoyne and the British troops eventually winning the advantage. The colonial forces had to retreat to safer ground. Burgoyne made another assault on colonial forces on October 7, but this time Benedict Arnold led the Patriots to defeating the British. The British retreated to Saratoga where they were surrounded and eventually forced to surrender.

The Battle of Saratoga in New York was the turning point of the Revolutionary War. It was the greatest victory yet for the American forces. The victory gave the Patriots something they had been desperately seeking, foreign help.

The French Alliance

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

The French were eager to hurt Britain, but they were also cautious. France and Britain were rivals for power and France was still angry about their defeat by the British in the French and Indian War. However, Louis XVI did not want to help the Americans openly until he was sure they could win.

The American victory at Saratoga convinced France and other nations that the United States could stand up to Britain. In February 1778, France became the first nation to recognize the United States. In it, Louis XVI recognized the new nation and agreed to provide military aid. Even before France had officially agreed to support the Patriot cause the Marquis de Lafayette, a young French noble, brought trained soldiers to help the Patriots. He became one of Washington's most trusted friends and played a significant role in securing the French alliance. Lafayette's success in lobbying King Louis XVI resulted in French military aid on scale that helped weaken the British resolve to continue. Ultimately, the French Alliance, provided the newly created United States with much needed troops, supplies and most importantly a navy which would be instrumental in defeating the British.

SOURCES: Castillo, D. (2002). *The American Nation: Beginnings through 1877* (pp.172-173). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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