

The Battle of Bennington

Scripted By Darrell Osburn

[image of Burgoyne- music: The British Grenadiers]

D} British General John Burgoyne had an excellent plan to win the Revolutionary War.

[image of King George]

D} He arranged everything in England. The plan was approved by King George the 3rd in January, 1777.

1. [British and Hessian marchby]

D} Burgoyne would march his army south from Montreal, Canada, along the Hudson River.

[Map of New York State, circa 1777]

D} He would link up with the forces of British general Sir William Howe,

[image Howe]

D} who was in New York City, and those of Leftenant Colonel Barry St. Leger, who was in Ft. Oswego. All 3 armies were to converge on Albany, New York.

[wider shot map of colonies]

D} This move, along with a naval blockade, would cut out the heart of the rebellion, the northern colonies, and isolate these colonies, from the rest of America.

[Image of GW]

D} And if that happened, General George Washington would likely have to give up the fight for American independence.

2. [Burgoyne's army march by, cannons and loaded wagons are pushed and pulled by hand]

L} Burgoyne had a mixed force of about 8,000 troops, consisting of 3,800 British and 3,000 German mercenaries, called Hessans. The rest of his army was composed of Canadians, Tories and Indians. He had a lot of cannons, 138, in all. There were hundreds of wagons and push-carts, some of which were filled with vital supplies and some were filled with not-so-vital supplies. British generals usually liked to take their

luxuries along with them. In addition, about 1,000 women and children accompanied the army south.

3. [Americans chopping down trees]

L} The few roads that did exist in upstate New York, were hardly more than trails. The march was made even more difficult because the Americans felled trees across the paths, broke dams to create swamps, and destroyed bridges-all in an effort to slow the progress of the British army.

[Burgoyne partying]

4. Kid} Burgoyne's attitude about this was, "They can slow me down, but they can't stop me."

D} The plan that had looked so good in the King's palace back in January did not look so good by August, in the vast wooded wilderness of upstate New York.

[image of Arnold]

D} American general Benedict Arnold was able to trick St. Leger's force into turning back to Ft. Oswego, at Ft. Stanwix.

[Image of Howe]

D} Meanwhile, General Howe saw an opportunity to capture Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia was the American capital where congress met.

5. [British march by outtake?]

D} Howe, after getting approval from the British government, marched his army south, leaving only a small force to hold New York City.

6. [Burgoyne partying]

D} Though Burgoyne did not yet realize it, he was all on his own.

7. [Brunswick Dragoons struggle by]

L} Burgoyne did realize that his army needed a lot more horses. One of his German units, the Brunswick Dragoons, had no horses at all. These 200 trained horsemen were intended to ride. They had therefore been issued the sort of equipment that cavalry would normally get, including sabers, carbines,

[close on heavy boots marching by]

L} and boots that weighed 25 pounds apiece.

8. [Burgoyne issues orders in English, through an interpreter, to Hessian officer, Lt. Col. Baum]

L} Burgoyne believed the solution was a raid on the town of Bennington, Vermont. His scouts informed him that there was a large stockpile of supplies collected there. He ordered Lt. Col. Freidrich Baum, who spoke no English, to depart with 800 men, mostly Hessians. His orders were to take all the horses, cattle, food, and anything else of value. In addition, Baum and his men were to collect taxes and to spread the false rumor, that this detachment was the advance guard of Burgoyne's army and that their intention was to march to Boston.

[see below]

9. [militia sees British army through the trees, fall back to report to officers]

D} The Americans had no trouble tracking the British army's progress, as Burgoyne could only march one mile a day.

10. [American officers get reports, look at maps]

D} Every move was being watched and reported. Burgoyne sent Baum, a commander who could not speak English, on a complex mission, into an area full of hostile Americans. It was risky.

[image of Stark]

D} American Colonel John Stark was a highly experienced, but highly independent, officer.

[outtake of Bunker Hill]

D} He was a hero at Bunker Hill. But when he did not receive a promotion to become a general, he resigned from the Continental army and went home to New Hampshire.

11. [British army marching through the woods]

D} With a large British army plodding southward along the Hudson River, alarm spread throughout Massachusetts, Vermont, New York and New Hampshire. Col. Stark decided to re-enter the fight.

12. [lots of militia gathering in the town]

D} Because of the panic created by Burgoyne's approach, Stark was able to recruit 1,500 militiamen within the space of one week!

[image of Seth Warner]

D} Among those responding to the call, was Seth Warner

13. [militia with "green mountain boys" flag]

D} with his New Hampshire militia unit known as "the Green Mountain Boys".

[Image of Ethan Allen]

D} Ethan Allen had been the leader of the "Boys," and would be, again. But Allen was at this time a prisoner of the British. Seth Warner was in charge.

14. [Hessian force, marching. Show each group as described-loyalist militia look like American militia except that they have white pieces of paper pinned to their hats]

L} Baum set out with his 200 dismounted Brunswick Dragoons, 50 German riflemen, known as Yagers. He had nearly 40 Brunswick infantry, about 100 Indians, 50 British Lt. infantry marksmen, 400 Loyalist militia and 2 small cannons with 13 artillerymen.

15. [US officers look at maps, get reports]

16. [Am. Colonel Stark received reports]

17. [Am. Kid officer} Sir, we have reports that Burgoyne's Indians are tearing up the countryside!

18. [Stark issues orders]

19. [US militia marching]

D} Colonel Stark sent orders for all of the scattered American forces to assemble at Bennington. Stark left Bennington and marched west with about 400 men, to intercept the Indians.

20. [small skirmish, Americans fire only one volley, then retreat]

L} Baum's force soon encountered a small detachment of Americans, who were guarding some stockpiles of food in a mill. Baum's superior force quickly drove off the Americans and captured the supplies.

21. L} Baum sent word to Burgoyne about this action and told the British commander that there was supposed to be a small enemy force at Bennington, but these were expected to flee with the approach of the Hessens.

22. [Through telescope, Baum encounters Starks' main force]

L} Baum quickly realized that he was facing a much larger force than he expected. And that force was not running away, as expected. Baum sent the message to Burgoyne that reinforcements were needed, as soon as possible.

23. [Baum sends a messenger to Burgoyne for help, Hessen army marches by]

24. L} In response to Baum's plea for reinforcements, Burgoyne sent Lt. Col. Heinrich Breymann, with about 650 Hessens. Breymann's force consisted of 330 Brunswick Grenadiers and 280 Light Infantry. The Hesse-Hanau Artillery brought two cannons that fired six pound balls, and 30 men to operate them.

25. [Baum falls back to a hill and entrenches]

L} Expecting the Americans to attack, the Hessans retreated to a hill and dug in.

26. [Tories with white pieces of paper in their hats, arrive to reinforce Baum]

L} Baum received some welcome, but unexpected reinforcements, when a small party of Loyalists arrived.

27. [Stark surveys the Hessian position with a telescope, pan Hessian position]

28. [Col. Stark points to the enemy]

D or kid} Stark said, "there are your enemies, the redcoats and the Tories and they are ours, or this night Molly Stark sleeps a widow!"

29. [Americans melt back into the trees]

30. [Baum pans Americans at the bottom of the hill with trees behind them, sees the Americans disappear into the trees]

L} When Baum saw Stark's men disappearing into the trees, he assumed they were withdrawing.

31. [militia in 3 groups, one going to the right, one to the left and one staying in the center]

32. L} The Americans approached both flanks of the Hessen lines.

33. [Militia put white paper in their hats]

D} Stark used a clever trick to infiltrate Baum's lines. He knew that the loyalist militia adorned their hats with white pieces of paper, so that they could tell themselves apart from their identically dressed enemies.

34. [Baum's troops do not fire on the approaching American militia, supposing they are Tories. Militia infiltrates Tory and Hessian lines]

D} So Stark had his men do the same thing. This little deception allowed the Americans to get right into the Hessen lines.

35. D} [Americans frontally advance on the Hessen fort]

Stark Warner led the attack on the center,

[see below]

36. D} which was the cue for the American militia to remove their white pieces of paper from their hats and start shooting the Hessens from behind!

37. [Baum's militia, etc., runs away]

L} The Tories, the Indians and the Canadians heard firing going on all around them and quickly retreated when they realized they were surrounded.

38. [dragoons defend the fort]

L} But the Brunswick dragoons held off the Americans for about 2 more hours. Then they ran out of ammunition.

39. [Dragoons attempt to break out, using their swords, Baum is shot]

40. L} At about 5 p.m., the Dragoons, led by their commander, attempted to cut their way out with swords. But soon, Lt. Col. Baum, was killed.

41. [Hessans surrender –eechh egaben meecheh!]

42. L} With the death of their commander, the desperate Hessans finally surrendered.

43. [Arrival of Hessian reinforcements]

L} At about the same time, the long-awaited reinforcements arrived. Heavy rain had delayed Breymann and his 650 men.

[see below]

44. L} They were too late to save Baum's detachment, yet the Hessian reinforcements came at an opportune moment. The Americans were looting the supply wagons, corralling prisoners and chasing the fugitives of Baum's command.

45. [The Hessans charge]

L} The Hessans charged and were beginning to drive the disorganized Americans back.

46. [Green Mountain Boys arrive]

D} But just in the nick of time, Seth Warner and his Green Mountain boys appeared.

47. [Green Mountain boys attack, shooting and driving the Hessans back, while re-organized Americans join the attack--- shooting and fighting]

48. [Cut to Breymann directing his men in battle]

L} Breymann personally commanded the rear guard and held the Americans long enough for a few hundred of his men to escape and re-unite with Burgoyne.

49. [dead and wounded scene and Hessian prisoners]

D} In all, the independence-minded Americans lost about 70 men killed and wounded. But the Hessans lost more than 200 men killed or wounded and about 700 were taken prisoner.

[battle scenes/outtakes]

D} The Battle of Bennington, which was fought on August 16th 1777, turned out to be a critical blow to Burgoyne's plans. It reduced the size of the British army by 1,000 men. It set the stage for Burgoyne's total defeat 2 months later, in the turning point battle of the Revolutionary War, Saratoga.