CHAPTER VII – PAPER WARFARE AND TICONDEROGA

LADIES first. Before proceeding with John Burgoyne, let us devote a little space to Frau Generalin, or Mrs. General, Baroness Riedesel. She was a very remarkable character, more so than her husband. He, when quite a boy, was with the Hessians, who, in their Hessian boots, fought for England in the Seven Years' War. Like Lord George Sackville, he was at Minden. Unlike Lord George Sackville his gallantry and intelligence in that battle won him the approval of the Duke of Brunswick. He was, too, a thrifty fellow, and while in North America saved fifteen thousand thalers out of his forage allowance. The *Letters and Reports* of this couple were first published in Berlin in 1800. They cover the period 1776 to 1783, and give a lively picture of military life at this time. But the General is not so lively as his wife. Doctor Johnson is supposed to have said, "A man who does not mind his belly will not mind anything." This was the General's motto; he is always talking of food and of the price of food. When on board ship on his way to England in March, 1776, he mentions, with contempt, the English breakfast of tea and bread-and-butter. But he notes with approval that at dinner six toasts were nightly drunk, ranging from a Health to His Majesty King George III to "A Good Voyage to America." He drank nothing but wine on the voyage, nor can one blame him, for he speaks of the water as *stinkend.* When he reached Canada the first thing he did was to grumble that though there was plenty of meat and fowls and milk, there were no vegetables.

His wife is much more entertaining. She went with her three children from Wolfenbuttel to England, intending to follow her husband to Quebec, in spite of the fact that she had been told that there was nothing to eat there but horse-flesh and oats. There are curious little notes about her life in England. In London she finds everything very dear, including the Queen's oculist, who charged her three guineas for putting something into her eyes which hurt them horribly. She sees the King and Queen in St. James's Park, where, daily, thousands of people would take the air. But Bristol, to which she paid a visit, is not so pleasant. Looking out of the window of her lodgings she sees two sailors "stripped to the buff" (what is one's buff?) "pounding each other." And worse was to come. Her foreign dress excited remark, and very unpleasant remark too. When she took her walks abroad the simple, light-hearted Bristolians would follow her, point at her with the finger and pronounce the brief, yet damning, verdict: "French whore." This is, I believe, what they call in this engaging city, treating people "Bristol fash," i.e., *à la mode de Bristol.*

But a great honor awaited her when she got back to London. Lady George Germain presented her at court, the Queen asked her in a queenly way if she liked sea voyages and the King kissed her, "At which I became fiery red,

it was so sudden." When she reaches Canada she is very critical about the ladies' clothes, for they wore badly-cut and dirty dresses. She also gives interesting details about their petticoats, vests and other intimate garments which I will briefly dismiss as *lingerie,* trusting that this is the right word. She took her three children with her and there is a charming touch when the General, travel-stained and begrimed, first met them. One of the little girls, who had no recollection of her father but was very familiar with a portrait of him all shining and resplendent in uniform, burst into tears, with, "No, no, this is a nasty papa, my papa is pretty."

Mrs. General liked bear's flesh, and notes the interesting fact that the smell of burning cedar-branches keep away flies but is also, so she had been told, a frequent cause of miscarriages. One has heard of *Desire under the Elms,* but Miscarriage under the Cedars is quite a new idea.

The Baroness evidently did not like Burgoyne; she says that he "lost his head," which is not true, and to anticipate matters she notes with pain that just before the surrender "he was very merry and spent the whole night singing and drinking and amusing himself with the wife of a Commissary who was his mistress and, who like him was fond of champagne." Another German, von Eelking, corroborates this: he says, practically, "There was a sound of revelry by night," champagne flowed like water and "by the General's side sat the beautiful wife of a Commissary who was his mistress." And a Brunswicker complained that Burgoyne was inordinately fond of "rattle-snake soup." This does not sound like a delicacy, but Germans have always had odd tastes in the way of food, witness the German baron in Smollett who thought asafetida excellent.

If anybody feels inclined to blame Handsome Jack for this philandering, let me tell him a story which, I think, has never before appeared in print, of one of the possible reasons why Napoleon lost Waterloo, a riddle which has puzzled military historians from 1815 onward to the present day. A friend of mine, visiting the battlefield many years ago, got into conversation with an aged Belgian peasant. He assured my friend with pride that the real reason the Emperor did not win the battle was that he had spent the hours before the action, not in making preparations for his first (and last) encounter with the "Sepoy General," but in chatting and gallivanting with the speaker's grandmother. The Belgian troops did not behave well at Waterloo. They showed an anxiety, laudable in citizens, but less laudable in soldiers, to know from personal observation what was happening in Brussels, so hurriedly went there to see. But we must not forget that an Englishman of some standing in John Company's service, Mr. Josh Sedley, thought it would be even better to leave Brussels altogether. Whatever the Belgians may have done, or not done, at Waterloo, this

excellent lady amply atoned for her fellow countrymen's shortcomings. I would also adduce in Burgoyne's defense that Blucher, better known as Marshal Forward, when on his way to Paris, stopped at an inn, the obsequious landlord of which asked if His Excellency wanted anything. His Excellency briefly replied, "A wench." Moreover a French officer said after Vittoria to the Duke of Wellington, who was himself by no means indifferent to female charms, "*Le fait est, Monseigneur, que vous avez une armée, mais nous sommes un bordel ambulant.*"

But let us leave Burgoyne the lady-killer and return to Burgoyne the soldier.

Even in those days propaganda was not unknown, and Burgoyne produced a thundering specimen of it. It is worth quoting in full, because then one can thoroughly appreciate the delightful parody of it from the American side. Here is his manifesto, or proclamation, which was dated June twentieth at Putnam's Creek.

"By John Burgoyne, Esq.
"Lieutenant General of His Majesties Armies in America, Col. of the Queen's regiment of Light Dragoons, Governor of Fort William in North Britain, One of the representatives of the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament and Commanding an army and fleet employed in an expedition from Canada.

"The forces intrusted to my command are designed to act in concert and upon a common principle with the numerous armies and fleets which already display in every quarter of America the Power, the Justice (and when properly sought) the Mercy of the King. The cause in which the British armies are exerted, applies to the most affecting interest of the human heart, and the military servants of the crown, at first called forth for the sole purpose of Restoring the rights of the Constitution, now combine with love of their Country, and duty to their Sovereign, the other extensive incitements which spring from a true sense of the general privileges of mankind. To the eyes and ears of the temperate part of the public, and to the breasts of the suffering thousands in the Provinces, be the melancholy appeal, whether the present unnatural Rebellion has not been made a foundation for the completest system of tyranny that ever God in his displeasure suffered for a time to be exercised over a froward and stubborn generation. Arbitrary Imprisonment, confiscation of property, Persecution and torture unprecedented in the Inquisition of the Romish Church are amongst the palpable enormities that verify the affirmative. These are inflicted by Assemblys and Committees, who dare to profess themselves friends to Liberty, upon the most quiet subjects, without distinction of age or sex, for the sole crime, often for the sole suspicion, of

having adhered in principle to the Government under which they were born, and to which, by every tie, Divine and human, they owe allegiance. To consummate these shocking proceedings, the profanation of religion is added to the most profligate prostitution of common reason; the consciences of men are set at naught, and multitudes are compelled, not only to bear arms, but also to swear subjection to an usurpation they abhor. Animated by these considerations, at the head of troops in the full power of health, discipline and valour, determined to strike when necessary and anxious to spare when possible, I, by these presents, invite and exhort all persons, in all places where the progress of this army may point (and by the blessing of God I will extend it), to maintain such a conduct as may justify in protecting their Lands, Habitations and Families. The intention of this address is to hold forth security, not degradation, to the country. To those whom spirit and principle may induce to partake in the glorious task of redeeming their countrymen from dungeons, and re-establishing the blessings of Legal Government, I offer encouragement and employment, and upon the first intelligence of their associating, I will find means to assist their undertakings. The domestic, the industrious, the infirm and even the timid inhabitants I am desirous to protect, provided they remain quietly in their houses, that they do not suffer their cattle to be removed, nor their corn or forage to be secreted or destroyed; that they do not break up their bridges or roads, nor by any other acts, directly or indirectly, endeavour to obstruct the operations of the King's troops, or supply or subsist those of the enemy: every species of provision brought to my camp will be paid for at an equitable rate and in solid coin. The consciousness of Christianity, my Royal Master's Clemency, and the honour of soldiership, I have dwelt upon in this invitation, and wished for more persuasive terms to give it impression; and let not people be led to disregard it by considering their distance from the immediate situation of my camp. I have but to give stretch to the Indian forces under my direction (and they amount to thousands) to overtake the hardened enemies of Great Britain and America. I consider them the same wherever they may lurk. If notwithstanding these endeavours, and sincere inclinations to effect them, the phrensy of hostility should remain, I trust I shall stand acquitted in the eyes of God and men in denouncing and executing the vengeance of the State against the wilful outcasts. The messengers of justice and wrath await them in the field: and Devastation, famine and every concomitant horror that a reluctant, but indispensable prosecution of military duty must occasion, will bar the way to their return."

Though I like and admire John Burgoyne, Horace Walpole was right when he called this fustian a "rhodomontade in which he almost promises to cross America in a hop, step and a jump." He also alludes to the writer of it as General Hurlothrombo and General Swagger. An anonymous pamphleteer of the day puts it well: "General Burgoyne shone forth in all the tinsel splendor of

enlightened absurdity." Gentleman Johnny would have been better employed in making arrangements for his supplies from Canada than in writing such high_ falutin bosh. But as stated above, this manifesto had one delightful result, the counterblast and parody by Francis Hopkinson.*

"Most high, most mighty, most puissant and sublime General.

"When the forces under your command arrived at Quebec in order to *act in concert and upon a common principle with the numerous fleets and armies which already display in every quarter of America the justice and mercy o f your King,* we, the reptiles of America were struck with unusual trepidation and astonishment. But what words can express the plenitude of our horror when the *Colonel of the Queen's regiment of light dragoons* advanced towards Ticonderoga. The mountains shook before thee, and the trees of the forest; bowed their lofty heads—the vast lakes of the North were chilled at thy presence, and the mighty cataracts stopped their tremendous career and were suspended in awe at shy approach.—Judge, then, *oh ineffable Governor of Fort William in North Britain,* what must have been the terror, dismay and despair that overspread this paltry Continent of *America* and us its wretched inhabitants. Dark and dreary, indeed, was the prospect before us, till, like the sun in the horizon, your most gracious, sublime and irresistible proclamation opened the doors of mercy, and snatch'd us, as it were, from the jaws of annihilation.

"We foolishly thought, blind as we were, that your gracious master's fleets and armies were come to destroy us and our liberties; but we are happy in hearing from you—and who can doubt what you assert? that they were *called forth for the sole purpose of restoring the rights of the constitution to a froward and stubborn generation.*

"And is it for this, Oh sublime *Lieutenant General,* that you have given yourself the trouble to cross the wide Atlantic, and with incredible fatigue traverse uncultivated wilds? And we ungratefully refuse the proffer'd blessing?— To restore the rights of the constitution you have called together an amiable host of Savages and turned them loose to scalp our women and children, and lay our country waste—this they have performed with their usual skill and clemency,

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*Author of that delightful lyric, *My Generous Heart Disdains,* of which one stanza runs:

Shall a girl's capricious frown
Sink my noble spirits down?
Shall a face of white and red
Make me droop my silly head?

As good as anything by George Wither, whose *Lover's Resolution perhaps* suggested it.

and we yet remain insensible of the benefit and unthankful for so much. Goodness

"Our Congress have declared independence, and our Assemblies, as your highness justly observes, have most *wickedly* imprisoned the avowed friends of that power with which they are at war, and most *profanely* compelled those, whose consciences will not permit them to fight, to pay some small part towards the expences their country is at in supporting what is called a necessary defensive war. If we go on thus in our obstinacy and ingratitude, what can we expect but that you should, in your anger, *give a stretch to the Indian forces under your direction, amounting to thousands, to overtake and destroy us;* or, which is ten times worse, that you should withdraw your fleets and armies and leave us to our own misery, without compleating the benevolent task you have begun, in *restoring to us the rights of the constitution.*

"We submit—we submit, most puissant *Colonel of the Queen's regiment of light dragoons, and Governor of Fort William in North Britain!* We offer our heads to the scalping-knife and our bellies to the bayonet. Who can resist the force of your eloquence? Who can withstand the terror of your arms? The invitation you have made in the *consciousness of christianity, your royal master's clemency, and the honor of soldiership,* we thankfully accept. The blood of the slain, the cries of injured virgins and innocent children, and the never-ceasing sighs and groans of starving wretches, now languishing in the gaols and prison-ships of New-York, call on us in vain whilst your sublime proclamation is sounded in our ears. Forgive us, oh our country! Forgive us, dear posterity! Forgive us, all ye foreign powers who are anxiously watching our conduct in this important struggle, if we yield implicitly to the persuasive tongue of the most elegant *Colonel -of her Majesty's regiment of light dragoons.*

"Forbear then, thou magnanimous *Lieutenant General!* Forbear to denounce vengeance against us.—Forbear to *give a stretch* to those *restorers o f constitutional rights, the Indian forces under your direction.*—Let not *the messengers of justice and wrath await us in the field, and devastation, famine, and every concomitant horror* bar our return to the allegiance of a Prince who, by his royal will, would deprive us of every blessing of life, with all possible clemency.

"We are *domestic,* we are *industrious,* we are *infirm and timid,* we shall *remain quietly at home and not remove our cattle, our corn or forage,* in hopes that you will come at the *head of troops in the full powers o f health, discipline, and valour,* and take charge of them for yourselves. Behold our wives and daughters, our flocks and herds, our goods and chattels,—Are

they not at the mercy of our Lord the King, and of his *Lieutenant General, Member of the House o f Commons, and Governor o f Fort William in North-Britain?"*

This caused great mirth not only in America but also in London. Horace Walpole wrote to the Countess of Upper Ossory : "I have never seen more humour, nor better kept up. It is as much admired as it deserves." This is praise from Sir Hubert Stanley, for Horace Walpole for all his old-womanish love of gossip and scandal, was a fairly sound critic. There was also a parody, in Hudibrastic verse, published in the *New York Journal.* The most spirited lines in it deal with the Indian threat:

If any should so hardened be
As to expect impunity
Because *procul a fulmine,*
I will let loose the dogs of hell,
Ten thousand Indians, who shall yell,
And foam and tear, and grin and roar,
And drench their maukesins in gore;
To these I'll give full scope and play
From Ticonderog to Florida;
They'll scalp your heads, and kick your shins,
And rip your guts, and flay your skins,
And of your ears be nimble croppers
And make your thumbs tobacco-stoppers.

Burgoyne also addressed the Indians in a speech of terrible pomposity which must have given the unhappy interpreter a very bad half-hour while he was translating it. He begins by flattering them, they are too sagacious and too faithful to be deluded or corrupted, except for "the refuse of a small tribe" who had been led astray by specious allurements and insidious promises of the rebels. But he tells them that there are certain laws and customs of war to which they must conform.

"I positively forbid bloodshed when you are not opposed in arms.

"Aged men, women, children, and prisoners must be held sacred from the knife or hatchet, even in the time of actual conflict.

"You shall receive compensation for the prisoners you take, but you shall be called to account for scalps.

"In conformity and indulgence to your customs, which have affixed an idea of honour to such badges of victory, you shall be allowed to take the scalps of the dead, when killed by your fire, and in fair opposition; but on no account, or pretence, or subtlety, or prevarication, are they to be taken from the wounded or even dying; and still less pardonable, if possible, will it be held to kill men in

that condition, on purpose, and upon a supposition, that this protection to the wounded would be thereby evaded."

This is all to John Burgoyne's credit: at all events it was well meant. Horace Walpole made fun of it, and a greater than Horace Walpole, Edmund Burke, guyed it in the House of Commons. He imagined a riot on Tower Hill and the Keeper of His Majesty's lions* addressing the animals in his charge: "My gentle lions, my humane bears, my sentimental wolves, my tender-hearted hyenas, go forth: but I exhort ye as ye are Christians and members of a civilised society, to take care not to hurt man, woman or child." The fat and lethargic Lord North, when he heard this, was, so Horry tells us, "almost suffocated with laughter."

"An Old Chief of the Iroquois" must have astonished Burgoyne by the brevity of his reply; or perhaps the interpreter was tired, he certainly had every reason to be. The Chief "in a few well-chosen words," as they always say in the papers, remarked:

"I stand up in the name of all nations present, to assure our father, that we have attentively listened to his discourse. We receive you as our father, because when you speak, we hear the voice of our great father beyond the great lake.

"We rejoice in the approbation you have expressed of our behaviour.

"We have been tried and tempted by the Bostonians; but we have loved our father, and our hatchets have been sharpened upon our affections.

"In proof of the sincerity of our professions, our whole villages able to go to war, are come forth. The old and infirm, our infants and wives, alone remain at home.

"With one common assent we promise a constant obedience to all you have ordered, and all you shall order; and may the Father of Days give you many, and success."

(Loud and prolonged grunts)

The Indians were led by La Come St. Luc, a French-Canadian who had fought under Montcalm. When Canada became by conquest a British colony, he became a British subject, and helped to capture Ethan Allen, and was in his turn taken prisoner. When he was exchanged in April, 1777, he returned to Canada, furious against *"ces gueux."* He was an eager advocate of the employment of

*In the eighteenth century the Tower of London was to Londoners what the Zoo is nowadays.

the Indians and went so far as to say. *"Il faut brutalizer les affaires."* He must therefore have listened with disgust to Burgoyne's commands in his speech, and Burgoyne was to find him a nuisance rather than a help, and later on a traitor.

On June thirtieth Burgoyne issued a General Order:

"The army embarks tomorrow, to approach the Enemy. We are to contend for the King, and the constitution of Great Britain, to vindicate Law, and to relieve the oppressed—a cause in which his Majesty's Troops and those of the Princes his Allies, will feel equal excitement. The Services required of this particular expedition are critical and conspicuous. During our progress occasions may occur in which, nor difficulty, nor labour, nor Life are to be regarded. This Army must not Retreat."

Ticonderoga, though it had been strong enough to keep Carleton off the previous fall, was in rather a poor way the following spring. The American officer, John Paterson, who had been sent there to make an inspection, reported on May second that the garrison, then not quite two thousand men "sick and well," had few blankets, while many of them had neither shoes nor stockings. Clothing, provisions and reinforcements were badly needed. But it was no use for St. Clair, in command at Ticonderoga, to call for reinforcements—there was no food for them. The tents were bad, the powder magazines so rotten that fifty pounds of it a week got damaged, and there was no paper for cartridges. The batteaux would not float for want of pitch and tar; everything had been neglected. To defend the works required, St. Clair estimated, ten thousand men. Of the two thousand he had many were mere boys, and there was only one bayonet for every ten men. Paterson was a shrewd observer. He reported, "We have had no late intelligence from Canada, but from their seeming supineness it is generally believed they are meditating and preparing for some important stroke." On the other hand, it should be mentioned, in St. Clair's defense, that in June he was assured by Congress that the British would transport most of the troops in Canada by water to help Howe to take Philadelphia, and that the movement on Ticonderoga would only be a feint. "This the Board of War had received from reliable authority." *(The St. Clair Papers.* Annotated by W. H. Smith, 1882.) Matters were not made any easier by the fact that Schuyler, in command of the Northern Department, was not popular with the New Englanders. He was an aristocrat* and a disciplinarian; Gates was constantly intriguing against him. On June fifteenth a British spy was captured, and St. Clair learned that Ticonderoga was shortly to be attacked.

*His mother was a Van Cortlandt, and his wife a Van Rensselaer.

It was a fine flotilla that on July first, "the day being fine," took Burgoyne and his troops over Lake Champlain Indians in their birch canoes each containing twenty to thirty, barges packed full with red-coats, music and drums perpetually playing, gun-boats, the frigates *Royal George* and the *Inflexible* as escorts, and Burgoyne, Phillips and Riedesel each in his pinnace—to the American scouting vessels it must have seemed a veritable British Armada. A contemporary American ballad puts it picturesquely, if roughly:

Burgoyne, the King's commander
From Canada set sail;
With full eight thousand reg'lars
He thought he could not fail.
With Indians and Canadians
And his cursed Tory crew
On board his fleet of shipping
He up Lake Champlain flew.

The troops landed a few miles short of Ticonderoga, and the Indians celebrated it by getting drunk.

General St. Clair, as stated above, was in command at Ticonderoga, with about two thousand effectives. But what really commanded Ticonderoga and also Fort Independence on the opposite shore of the lake, here little wider than a river, was Sugar Loaf Hill, a crag rising precipitously to a height of six hundred feet. So steep was it, in fact,* that the Americans had not thought to fortify it, or to occupy it, although an intelligent officer in the garrison, John Trumbull, had shown by actual experiment that a shot fired from a twelve-pounder in the fort could and did reach Sugar Loaf Hill. The converse of course held good, but nothing was done. Gates was actually present when this shot was fired, so the blame was his, not Schuyler's nor St. Clair's.

General Phillips saw possibilities here: he observed, "Where a goat can go a man can go, and where a man can go he can haul up a gun." Lieutenant Twiss, the commanding engineer, constructed a road of sorts, guns were manhandled up, hoisted from tree to tree by ropers, Phillips urging the work forward "with the same vehemence with which he drove his artillery at Minden, where he broke fifteen canes over the horses," and Sugar Loaf Hill had its name changed to Fort Defiance.

A Council of General Officers was held and it is significant that St. Clair, who presided, mentioned as forming part of the garrison "about 900 militia that have joined us, and *cannot stay but a few days."* It was unanimously decided that Ticonderoga, now a trap rather than a fort, must be evacuated. This was done, it was obviously the only thing to do, on July sixth, and the British

*In an old map of 1776 it is described as "Supposed inaccessible for carriages."

occupied it. When the news reached London on August twenty-second, King George ran into the Queen's room, crying, “I have beat them ! beat all the Americans.” Walpole wrote; “I hear Burgoyne has kicked Ticonderoga into one of the lakes—I don't know which, I am no geographer.”

The King wanted to bestow “the vacant Red Ribbon,” *i.e.,* the Order of the Bath, on Burgoyne, and Lord Derby was approached in the matter. Burgoyne apparently had told his wife's nephew that he had “a strong objection to the honor above mentioned,” so the matter was dropped.

The loss of Ticonderoga, which had been regarded as a kind of Gibraltar, was a great blow to the Americans, and there was a general demand for a public inquiry. Schuyler, writing on the ninth of July from Fort Edward to the Council of Safety of the State of New York, began: “What could induce General St. Clair and the general officers with him to evacuate Ticonderoga, God only knows.” Many accused St. Clair of treachery, and the same charge was brought against Schuyler. John Adams said that they would never be able to defend a post until they shot a general. Even Washington, as a rule imperturbable, seems to have been slightly upset. He wrote to Schuyler, “It is an event of chagrin and surprise, not apprehended nor within the compass of my reasoning: this stroke is severe indeed and has distressed us much.” Probably it was to the American cause a blessing in disguise. St. Clair put it well when he said, “We have lost a post but saved a province.” Had Burgoyne been held up there any length of time, had he found it necessary, as he had anticipated, to lay formal siege to it, it is quite possible that a relieving army would have driven him back over the Lake to Canada, with his force more or less intact, and with sea power ready to transfer it to some other point. As it was, he set out through the woods and swamps on the route which led him ultimately to the Convention of Saratoga.

It is rather curious that, before Burgoyne started through this maze of woods, there should have been published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in London, a detailed account of the Military Geography of the country. There is a very significant passage, evidently written from first-hand knowledge:

“The American woods have in some places a great deal of underwood, in other parts none at all. The difficulties of making roads in such situations may be reduced to three. First, the trees in general, in their natural state, are very close to each other. In the second place, fallen trees, lying in all directions, some sound, blown down by winds, others in a rotting state, are as plenty as lamp posts upon a highway about London, and frequently as thick as the lamps upon Westminster bridge; these being irremoveable, and almost innumerable, the road is continually upon the turn to one side or the other, to get clear of them. In

the third place, about every two or three miles, probably, there is a bridge to be made, twenty, thirty, or forty feet high, and twice or three times as long, over a creek, or rather a great gutter, between two hills, and the avenues, when the ground is very high, want levelling. The sum of the perplexities must be charged to the account of swamps."

What an admirable country through which to retreat, and what a difficult country through which to pursue! I suppose that, but for the railway, the same might be said of it at the present day.