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Theodore Corbett, *No Turning Point: The Saratoga Campaign in Perspective*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2012. Pp. xii, 436. ISBN 978-0-8061-4276-0.

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In his latest book, historian Theodore Corbett again<sup>1</sup> focuses on the American Revolutionary War in northern New York and Vermont, specifically the often covered Saratoga Campaign. But rather than emphasizing the military side of the operation, Corbett examines the cultural setting of the campaign, maintaining that “[Gen. John] Burgoyne did not realize that his plans would have to be imposed upon an already existing and confusing civil war, and that it would be difficult to separate friend from foe” (3).

A secondary objective of the book is to exonerate Burgoyne of blame for the defeat and surrender of his army. Corbett explains that the British general’s plans were, to start with, more a list “of possibilities” (4) and that “implementing such a plan would be [Lord George] Germain’s responsibility, and one he let slip by” (5). Corbett is revisiting here an argument that has raged since the 1779 Parliamentary inquiries into the loss of Burgoyne’s army. There are several schools of thought: some historians, like Corbett, blame Germain, who was Secretary of State for the American Department, others blame Burgoyne, and still others Gen. Sir William Howe. “I contend that after Burgoyne surrendered, there was no turning point in the regional war that surrounded and penetrated the Saratoga battlefields.... Most military historians<sup>2</sup> disregard the civil war altogether, while focusing on the professional armies. This account of the Saratoga Campaign shows that one does that at one’s peril” (369, 371).

Corbett describes the origins and the religious and political leanings of the inhabitants of the Champlain-Hudson region—farmers, landowners, Native Americans, and slaves. In this regard, he is following a recent trend in American Revolutionary studies.<sup>3</sup> Geographically, he argues that the tension between factions in the area from Albany north to Canada and east of Lake Champlain into Vermont guaranteed violence.

The author tries to show how British commanders, starting with Sir Guy Carleton, Governor of Canada, tried to take advantage of these divisions to lessen support for the rebellion. Burgoyne followed Carleton’s lead by invading New York, but unlike him, he enlisted the aid of local Native Americans, like the Mohawk, as well as the Mission Indians from Canada and other nations from the Great Lakes region. This further factionalized the war-torn area. The American rebels also gained some support from Native Americans, namely the Oneida and Tuscarora. But, because the agendas of these nations did not always fit those of the American and British generals, the complexity of the situation worsened.

As the campaign unfolded, Burgoyne focused on pacification, as Corbett calls it, hoping to ensure that local people would not take arms against his forces; in an effort to re-establish their allegiance to the crown, he offered them protection and hard currency for their provisions. However, as the campaign went on, Burgoyne began to recruit local Loyalists, up to an eventual total of some eight hundred troops. Meanwhile, the initial American commander, Gen. Philip Schuyler, implemented “a scorched earth policy” (141), hoping to force the locals to flee southward out of the area; his men confiscated provisions in order to deny them to the British.

1. His previous work includes *A Clash of Cultures on the Warpath of Nations: The Colonial Wars in the Hudson-Champlain Valley* (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mtn Pr, 2002) and *Revolutionary New Castle: The Struggle for Independence* (Charleston, SC: History Pr, 2012).

2. Though he names no names, he likely means, e.g., Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America’s Revolutionary War* (NY: Henry Holt, 1997), and John F. Luzader, *Saratoga: A Military History of the Decisive Campaign of the American Revolution* (NY: Savas Beatie, 2008).

3. See, esp., Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (NY: Viking, 2005).

In this setting, Burgoyne ordered Baron Friedrich Adolph von Riedesel, commander of a contingent of German soldiers, to march to heavily Loyalist Castleton, Vermont, and extend pacification measures there. It was thought that his presence might enable Loyalist leaders to recruit more men, as well as secure horses, cattle, and other supplies. Riedesel could then march down the Connecticut River to disguise Burgoyne's ultimate destination. However, a local Loyalist, Philip Skene, convinced Burgoyne instead to send Riedesel toward Burlington, a rebel stronghold. Corbett conjectures that Skene had personal motives for this advice, such as weakening his rivals in the area. Unfortunately for Burgoyne, local forces led by Gen. Seth Warner attacked Riedesel and decisively defeated his combined German and British forces. "The defeat ended [the] pacification policy in Vermont, although conditions in New York remained amicable" (206). Corbett maintains that Loyalists continued to join Burgoyne despite this defeat.

In a mere six pages, Corbett describes the military climax of the campaign at the battles of Freeman's Farm and Bemis Heights (September and October 1777).<sup>4</sup> Gen. Horatio Gates commanded nine thousand men against Burgoyne's six thousand at Freeman's Farm. The American rebels also threatened to cut Burgoyne's supply line back to Lake George and Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain.

At this point, Corbett argues, Burgoyne made a fatal mistake. Instead of retreating to Lake George, he dug in and waited for the aid that Sir Henry Clinton had promised to deliver from New York City. Clinton did attack up the Hudson River from the city, but only came within seventy miles of Burgoyne's besieged camp. Corbett believes the British general could have escaped almost up to the last days. "But Burgoyne, claiming to be under orders to reach Albany, was fixed on the south and the possibility of Clinton's successful foray advancing the British to Albany—a dilemma that influenced his conduct during the siege" (242). By 14 October 1777, Burgoyne was cut off and trapped. He surrendered on 17 October after giving his Loyalist troops permission to escape (most of them to British posts on Lake George).

By November, almost two thousand men, chiefly Loyalists, had retreated from Lake George and Ticonderoga into Canada, forming "the nucleus for future invasions and continuation of the civil war" (243). For Corbett, that is the big news, not the surrender of the army: "The Battles of Saratoga brought no glory to the British arms or Lord North's government.... Historians who believe [the surrender ended fighting in the region] wish to skip the rest of the war and get on to the development of the new nation in the late 1780s. This is not the perspective found here" (252, 257). In each of the next six years, the British, still controlling much of the Lake Champlain-Lake George region, invaded upstate New York and Vermont, from which people continued to migrate north into Canada. Meanwhile, the civil war raged on, especially between Vermont and its neighbors, New Hampshire and New York.

Corbett praises Frederick Haldimand, the new governor of Canada, for effectively merging Loyalist and Native American forces with detachments of British regulars to launch multiple raids that stirred confusion and anger among the Americans—"civil war was rekindled every time Haldimand sent out a raid" (311). Haldimand also attempted to attract factions from Vermont, including Ethan Allen's, into an alliance with the British in Canada. The talks failed but caused divisive tensions in Vermont and nearly led to violence. Leaders of Vermont declared their neutrality only in the latter years of the war.

As the war came to a close, Loyalists emigrated to Canada, where Haldimand, on his own initiative, established towns for them west of Montreal along the St. Lawrence River and on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. Meanwhile, the violence between debtors and the landed wealthy in New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire mirrored the larger disturbances of Shays' Rebellion (1786–87) in western Massachusetts. Thus, civil strife continued even after the close of the Revolutionary War itself.

Corbett proves his thesis that the surrender of Burgoyne's army did not end the civil war in the Champlain-Hudson region. Drawing on manuscripts and letters from Great Britain, Canada, and the states of Vermont and New York, he provides a glimpse into the lives and personal motives of individuals and families caught in the turmoil. In the process, he discusses the peculiar initial reluctance of the British military, from the top down, to enlist Loyalists as a military resource, until Burgoyne and Haldimand took it upon

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4. That, by contrast, the Battle of Bennington gets eight pages shows where the author's true interest lies.

themselves to recruit and use them effectively. He challenges the conventional wisdom of convicting Burgoyne and Carleton for the failures in 1776–77 and denies that Saratoga was the decisive battle of the Revolutionary War.

Readers should be aware that *No Turning Point* is not strictly speaking a military history. Actual military operations and battle tactics are described in only a couple places (the battles of Hubbardton and Bennington). Corbett devotes most of his book to relocating the “turning point” in the protracted civil conflict in New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire, rather than analyzing particulars of pitched battles at Saratoga or elsewhere.

The author sometimes overstates or misstates his case. Thus, he claims that Burgoyne’s advance from Skenesborough to Fort Edward was unimpeded by the rebels, whereas other historians of the campaign correctly stress the delays imposed by the Americans. In addition, he downplays Burgoyne’s logistical difficulties.

While some historians have exclusively seen Burgoyne’s logistics difficulties in terms of obtaining carts and animals, in fact, once his army completed travel from Skenesborough to the Hudson River, most of his supplies were carried, as they had been on Lake Champlain and Lake George, by bateaux.<sup>5</sup> Wood Creek, between Skenesborough and Fort Edward, had long been a water transportation corridor, which admittedly was more of a canoe route than one for heavier bateaux. There is no question, however, that Burgoyne’s bateaux arrived at the Hudson by way of Wood Creek. (182)

But the fact that Burgoyne sent his heavier artillery via Lake George suggests there were logistical problems entailed in the use of Wood Creek. Corbett at times even undermines his thesis that Saratoga did not mark a decisive turning point: “After Burgoyne’s defeat, the chances of keeping their homes became increasingly dim, and Loyalists left of their own accord and sought protection in Canada, Britain, or other parts of the British Empire” (272).

Still, Theodore Corbett has done a most valuable service for all students of the Revolutionary War by setting General Burgoyne’s plans and operations against the larger backdrop of civil unrest, chaos, and violence in the Hudson-Champlain region during the entire period of the war and the early Republic.<sup>6</sup>

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5. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “bateau”: “A light river boat; esp. the long tapering boats with flat bottoms used by the French Canadians.”

6. Several maps and illustrations are helpful enhancements.