

# The Shock Felt 'Round the World

by Ruth Spencer Johnson

**S**hocking news was making its way across the Atlantic Ocean. It could travel only as fast as the ship could sail, but a man on the ship carried word from America that would stun the powerful nations of Europe. When the vessel landed in France, the messenger set off on horseback toward Benjamin Franklin's home near Paris. Franklin and his fellow diplomats were there, waiting anxiously for details of the war back home. The fighting had been going badly for the Americans, and Franklin had recently heard reports that the British had captured the important city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

As the messenger rode into the courtyard on December 4, 1777, Franklin called out to him, "Sir, is Philadelphia taken?" "Yes, sir," the man answered. Dismayed, Franklin turned away. "But, sir, I have greater news than that," the rider cried out. "General Burgoyne and his whole army have surrendered!"

The joyful news of Britain's surrender at Saratoga electrified the people of France and altered Europe's attitude toward the Americans and their struggle for independence. Earlier in the war, the Second Continental Congress had sent Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee to France to convince that powerful country to ally with America in its fight against Britain. France could provide financial aid, supplies, troops, and ships that America desperately needed. But discouraging war news had made France

Lieutenant General John Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga was immortalized in a painting by John Trumbull that now hangs in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. In it, Burgoyne offers his sword to Major General Horatio Gates, who refuses to take it.



**The surrender of the British army at Yorktown in 1781 ended the fighting in the Revolutionary War.**

**I never had any doubt that the Americans could win.**



reluctant to back a losing cause. It would help only unofficially by sending money and ammunition in secret. The remarkable British surrender at Saratoga gave courage to the French leaders that perhaps the Americans could win the war after all.

France feared that Britain, after its devastating defeat, might now be ready to reconcile with its former Colonies. But France, still smarting from its loss to Britain in the French and Indian War (1754–1763), wanted revenge. Aiding America could cripple Britain while boosting France’s prestige. Within days of the messenger’s arrival, French leaders decided to negotiate an alliance.

In England, the news of Burgoyne’s surrender horrified the country. An alliance between France and America meant that Britain would have to fight on more than one front. A wider war would strain Britain’s treasury and force British commanders to move some troops and ships from North America to protect their profitable Caribbean colonies, as well as their holdings in India and the Mediterranean. Other soldiers and vessels would have to relocate to Britain to defend the homeland in case of a French invasion across the English Channel.

Britain, growing weary of the difficult war, offered peace terms to its former Colonies: America could have its own Congress. It could control everything except foreign policy and trade. Britain would repeal the acts



that had incited the colonists to rebel. But Britain refused to recognize an independent country.

Americans might have accepted this offer at an earlier stage. But the Saratoga victory had boosted their morale and their confidence in their army. It showed that the Continental soldiers and militia troops could defeat the highly trained British regulars. The Americans demanded nothing short of independence.

France and America signed treaties of alliance, friendship, and trade on February 6, 1778. A few months later, Britain declared war on France. The war then spread to include Spain and the Netherlands, while other European countries joined together against Britain without formally entering the hostilities. What had started as a colonial rebellion escalated into a global conflict with fighting that reached around the world.

The surrender at Saratoga forced Britain to adopt a new strategy. Unable to protect both cities, British generals ordered the evacuation of Philadelphia in June 1778 so they could concentrate their troops on the defense of New York City. From there, the British focused on invading the South instead. They planned to capture key port cities where, they believed, Loyalists would rally to their side.

Despite some significant victories, Britain encountered difficulties in the South. The hoped-for Loyalists did not rally to their cause. Continental Army troops joined by militia forces simply refused to stop fighting. Finally, in October 1781, British soldiers found themselves boxed in by American and French forces at Yorktown, Virginia. With no way out, the British surrendered. Four years almost to the day after Saratoga, Yorktown became the last major battle of the Revolutionary War. After complicated negotiations, America signed a peace treaty with Britain in 1783.

The shock of the American victory at Saratoga was truly felt across the ocean and around the world. The dramatic triumph was a crucial turning point in the war. It gave confidence to America, and hope to the world, that the fledgling country just might succeed.

According to a 1999 *New York Times Magazine* article, the Battles of Saratoga deserve recognition as some of the most important battles in the last 1,000 years. They marked the beginning of the end of one empire—the British—and the rise to power of another—the United States of America. 🐎

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The final page of the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1783, shows the signatures of the American delegates.

without difficulty and without requiring any compensation.

Article 10<sup>th</sup>

The solemn Ratification of the present Treaty, expected in great joy and esteem shall be exchanged between the contracting Parties in the Space of Six Months or sooner if possible to be computed from the Day of the Signature of the present Treaty. In Witness whereof we the undersigned plenipotentiaries have in their Names and in Virtue of our Full Powers signed with our Hands the present Definitive Treaty, and caused their Seals of our States to be affixed thereto.

Done at Paris, this third Day of September, in the second Year of our said Independence, & Eighty three.

John Adams

John Jay

John Jay

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

**After reading the passage on the aftermath of Saratoga, answer the following sentences in full sentences.**

1. Why did the Continental Congress send Benjamin Franklin and others to France?
2. Why was it so crucial for the delegates to succeed? What could that France provide for the Americans?
3. Why had France been hesitant to ally themselves with the Americans?
4. How did the Battle of Saratoga affect these attitudes?
5. Why did the prospect of France entering the war "horrify" the British? What would the British be forced to do as a result of this new alliance?
6. Following the Battle of Saratoga, the British government offered many concessions to the Americans, but what did they absolutely refuse to do?
7. Why could the American Revolution be considered a 'world war'?