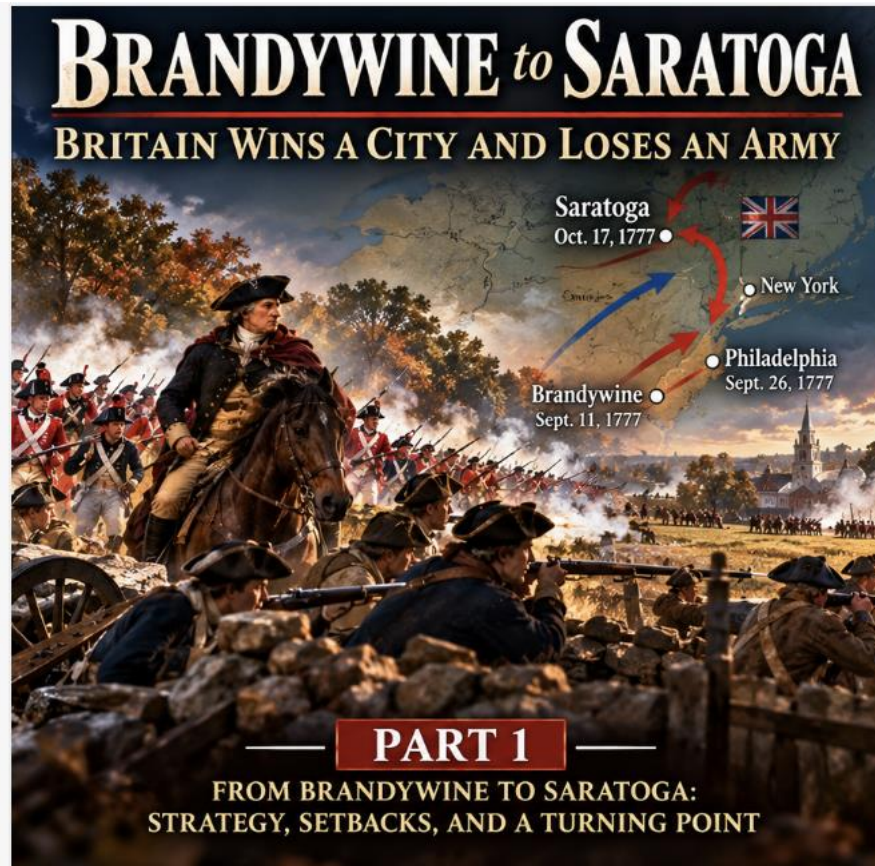




How the British Lost the War:

Part 1: Brandywine to Saratoga:

Britain Wins a City and Loses an Army

America's First September 11

Long before September 11 became associated with the terrorist attacks of 2001, another September 11 marked a dark day in American history. On **September 11, 1777**, George Washington's Continental Army met the British under General Sir William Howe along Brandywine Creek in Pennsylvania.

The Americans lost.

Howe outmaneuvered Washington with a wide flanking movement while another British force held the Americans' attention at the creek. Washington's army was driven from the battlefield,

although it escaped destruction. The defeat opened the road to Philadelphia, and the British occupied the American capital on September 26.

Viewed by itself, Brandywine appeared to be an impressive British success. But something else was happening hundreds of miles to the north, and it would prove far more important than capturing Philadelphia.

Two British Armies Going in Different Directions

Britain's strategy for 1777 included an ambitious campaign down the Hudson River. General John Burgoyne would advance south from Canada toward Albany while another British force moved through the Mohawk Valley. The larger purpose was to control the Hudson corridor and help isolate New England, where the rebellion had begun, from the other states.

But General Howe had another objective: Philadelphia. Instead of moving north from New York to cooperate directly with Burgoyne, Howe transported most of his army south and went after Washington and the American capital.

Thus, during September 1777, two major British armies were pursuing two different objectives. Howe defeated Washington at Brandywine while Burgoyne continued south toward Albany.

The Americans were divided as well. Washington had to defend Philadelphia and therefore could not simply take his main army north against Burgoyne. But American regulars and militia increasingly concentrated against the northern British army. Burgoyne, meanwhile, was moving farther from his supplies and the reinforcements he expected.

The consequences soon became apparent.

Eight Days After Brandywine

Only eight days after Washington's defeat, Burgoyne's army fought the Americans at **Freeman's Farm on September 19** in the first Battle of Saratoga. A second battle followed at **Bemis Heights on October 7**. Burgoyne's position deteriorated rapidly as American strength increased and his own supplies and manpower dwindled.

On **October 17, 1777**, Burgoyne surrendered nearly 6,000 British and German troops.

The contrast was remarkable. Within a matter of weeks, Britain had captured the American capital but lost an entire army.

It was becoming apparent that **occupying American territory was not the same thing as defeating the American Revolution.**

The Victory That Brought in France

Saratoga changed the nature of the war. Until then, France had assisted the Americans without openly entering the conflict. The American victory demonstrated that the rebels could defeat a major British army in the field.

On February 6, 1778, France formally allied itself with the United States.

Britain was no longer simply fighting rebellious colonies. It was now fighting France, and the American Revolution was becoming part of a much larger international war. British planners had to think about the Caribbean, the Atlantic and other imperial possessions as well as North America.

Suddenly, holding Philadelphia made considerably less strategic sense.

Philadelphia Wasn't Worth Keeping

In 1778, Sir Henry Clinton replaced Howe as British commander in chief. The British evacuated Philadelphia on June 18 and concentrated their principal northern force at New York, where the Royal Navy provided protection and supplies.

Washington followed, and the armies fought at Monmouth on June 28. But the character of the northern war was changing. Washington had survived. His army was still intact. France was now an ally, and Britain had an empire to defend.

Capturing Philadelphia had not ended the Revolution.

So Britain looked elsewhere for a way to win.

The War Moves South

British planners increasingly turned toward the southern states, where they expected substantial Loyalist support. Savannah fell, followed by Charleston in May 1780. The capture of Charleston was one of Britain's greatest victories of the war.

Lord Charles Cornwallis then attempted to extend British control through the Carolinas. But the old problem returned. British forces could capture important places and defeat American armies without necessarily controlling the countryside. Loyalist support existed, but not in the numbers British planners needed. Patriot militia continued fighting, while American forces attacked British detachments and supply lines.

At Kings Mountain, an important Loyalist force was destroyed. At Cowpens, Daniel Morgan defeated a British force under Banastre Tarleton. Cornwallis then pursued General Nathanael Greene across the Carolinas.

At **Guilford Courthouse on March 15, 1781**, Cornwallis technically won. But it was the kind of victory Britain could no longer afford. The British suffered serious casualties while Greene withdrew with his army intact.

Once again, the Americans demonstrated a principle Washington had understood since the beginning of the war: **an American army that survived to fight another day could be more valuable than possession of a battlefield.**

Cornwallis Moves to Virginia

Cornwallis eventually moved north into Virginia. His relationship with Clinton in New York was complicated by differing strategic views and the enormous distances that made communication slow. Clinton preferred consolidating British gains farther south; Cornwallis believed aggressive operations were necessary to destroy American resistance.

By August 1781, Cornwallis had established his army at Yorktown on the Chesapeake, where he expected the Royal Navy to provide security, supplies and reinforcement.

Britain had come a long way since its victory at Brandywine. It had captured Philadelphia, abandoned Philadelphia, shifted the war south, captured Charleston and won another costly battlefield victory at Guilford Courthouse. Yet the Revolution was still alive. Washington remained outside New York, Nathanael Greene continued fighting in the South, and Cornwallis had moved his increasingly isolated army to the Virginia coast.

Then George Washington saw an opportunity to do to Cornwallis what the Americans had done to Burgoyne at Saratoga: trap an entire British army far from the main British force in New York.