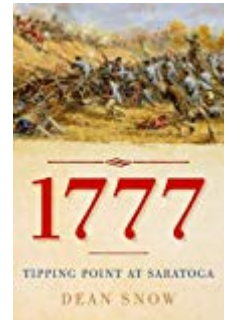


Dean R. Snow. *1777: Tipping Point at Saratoga*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 456 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-061875-9.



Reviewed by Jobie Turner

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Dean Snow performs yeoman's work in *1777: Tipping Point at Saratoga*, illustrating the decisions, battles, and tug-of-war between both sides, with extensive culling of primary sources. Far from being a one-off battle, Saratoga (north of Albany, New York) lasted from September 19 to October 17, 1777, with two major engagements and a long pause of waiting and watching in between. According to Snow, the final American victory, in which British general John Burgoyne surrendered to American general Horatio Gates, "changed everything" (p. 389).

The author aptly illuminates the difficulties that Burgoyne had in supplying himself from the British positions in upstate New York and Canada, while Gates had forces and supplies aplenty, which seemed to stream to the American side daily. He treats both leaders impartially and attempts to glean from the primary sources their strategic calculus of when to attack and when to defend. Ultimately, Snow concludes that logistics determined the direction and outcome of the battle. By early October, the "ration of flour or bread had

been cut by a third" for the British and "all other options were gone. Gates knew Burgoyne's provisions were short" (pp. 221, 235). Burgoyne had to attack before he ran out of supplies, while Gates could wait. In the ensuing battle, the British mounted a weak offensive and were eventually surrounded, forced to surrender, and taken prisoner by the Americans.

Snow's conclusion as to the results of the battle do not differ from the wider scholarship of Saratoga, but where he adds value is in his detailed approach. Snow fleshes out the battle in intimate detail, using his experience as an archeologist at the Saratoga National Park and harnessing a significant amount of primary research. Snow covers the battle hour by hour. In doing so, he teases out fascinating substories of camp followers, officer's wives (such as General Frederick Riedesel's wife, Frederika, who accompanied the Hessian forces), common soldiers, and even a British woman who was killed assisting her husband during the defense of Balcarres Redoubt. Snow's previous work at the park enriches the

complexity of the battle and the understanding of the terrain's impact on the operational approach and the tactics of the belligerents. Snow chronicles every hill, dale, and stand of trees involved in the battle, in addition to the daily machinations of the staffs of Burgoyne and Gates.

As for the most famous combatant at Saratoga, the American Benedict Arnold, Snow shows him as tactically lucky at best and a conniving, head-strong careerist at worst. For example, in the attack on the Balcarres Redoubt, Snow describes Arnold as a "deranged general," charging, directing, and shouting at soldiers from both sides (p. 270). Rather than being the battle genius worn down by the politics of the Continental Army, Snow paints Arnold as capable of only rash decisions.

The impressive detail of the book is a double-edged sword for Snow's narrative. While following the battle hour by hour during periods of conflict helps to pace the story and provide a full understanding of the decisions made in combat, the microscopic view during the lull—in this case eighteen days between the major battles—turns tedious in places. In addition, the broad claims of the title are too much for his analysis; this is not 1777 as a year in the war, but the battle of Saratoga he describes.

All told, however, Snow does an admirable job illustrating how far the Continental Army had come from the chaotic force of 1775 which besieged Boston, was walloped in New York, and performed the miracles at Trenton and Princeton in 1776. Gate's Army was no mere green army that needed stealth and surprise to beat the Hessians in New Jersey, but rather a proper force of the European mold. The result is an excellent and detailed account of the battle which is an invaluable guide for any serious scholar.

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