

The Battle of Forts Montgomery and Clinton, 1777

On this day in history, October 6, 1777, the **Battle of Forts Montgomery and Clinton are lost by the Americans. 1777 brought about a plan by the British government to split off New England from the rest of the colonies.** General John Burgoyne was to march south from Quebec with a large army that would meet another large army at Albany commanded by General William Howe coming up from the south.

Burgoyne's mission was successful at first, but eventually ran into trouble when its long supply lines became unsustainable and his Indian allies abandoned him. Burgoyne became stalled at Saratoga about 30 miles north of Albany, facing an army of 9,000 Americans just to the south.

When Burgoyne received word that General Howe had gone to capture Philadelphia instead of coming to Albany, he knew his army was in jeopardy. He wrote to General Henry Clinton, who had been left in charge of New York City in General Howe's absence, and asked him to send immediate help. Clinton sent 3,000 soldiers up the Hudson on October 3, informing Burgoyne that he would begin an attack at Forts Montgomery and Clinton around the end of the month in hopes of drawing at least some of the Americans away from Burgoyne. By the time Burgoyne received the message, he knew the help would come too late.

Fort Montgomery sat on the north ridge of a gorge where the Popolopen Creek empties into the Hudson, while Fort Clinton sat on the south ridge. Both forts guarded a great chain stretched across the river to prevent British ships from sailing upriver

On October 6, Clinton landed 2100 soldiers at Stony Point and marched them north toward Fort Clinton. After they engaged a scouting party, the forts were alerted to the British presence. Clinton sent 900 men under Lt. Col. Mungo Campbell to march around the

The Battle of Forts Montgomery and Clinton, 1777

gorge to Fort Montgomery, while the rest waited with General John Vaughn for a simultaneous attack on Fort Clinton.

American General George Clinton, who was also the rebel governor of New York and a future vice-president, and his brother, General James Clinton, guarded the two forts with about 700 men, so they were outnumbered 3 to 1. George Clinton sent out men to guard Fort Montgomery from the west. They put up such a strong defense that Campbell's men took all day to finally reach the fort. When they finally breached the fort, Campbell was killed and the British went on a vicious crusade, killing everyone they could. Governor Clinton and about half the defenders escaped. Meanwhile at Fort Clinton, the Americans put up an equally strong defense. Like Fort Montgomery, Fort Clinton eventually fell. James Clinton and many of his soldiers escaped down the cliff to the river.

The Americans lost 75 killed or wounded and 263 captured, while the British had 41 killed and 142 wounded. After the Battles of Fort Montgomery and Fort Clinton, the British broke the chain extending across the river and sailed north for further attacks. Eventually, however, this force was called back to New York in order to send aid to General Howe in Philadelphia. Both forts were burned by the British upon their retreat.

In spite of the tactical victory by the British, this mission was ultimately a massive failure because General Burgoyne received no help at Saratoga and was forced to surrender his entire army. This American victory encouraged France to join the war on the American side, ultimately sealing the fate of Great Britain's hegemony in North America.