

this, the commander of the vanquished would write out the conditions upon which he would accept surrender. Shortly after Burgoyne's representative handed Gates a letter asking for time to draw up a list of these conditions, Gates handed him a letter containing his own terms for ending hostilities. This unorthodox move permitted Burgoyne to offer a counter proposal--that is, that his army not actually surrender, but by signing a "convention" agreeing to return to England and not to engage in further action in the war, be spared the fate of detention as prisoners of war. To the astonishment of Burgoyne and most Americans, Gates accepted these terms. It was not actually until October 17, however, that the British finally stacked their arms. The three-day delay was caused by Burgoyne's suspicion that Gates had agreed to the convention because he knew Clinton was close at hand (Clinton was not, but fear that he might be was the main reason Gates accepted Burgoyne's terms). Ultimately, Burgoyne was forced to sign the document, attesting to his consent to the terms of surrender.

On October 17 the American army, drawn up into two lines, watched as more than 5,000 of the enemy marched into a meadow north of the Fishkill to stack their arms. According to one British officer: "About 10 o'clock, we marched out, according to treaty, with drums beating and the honors of war, but the drums seemed to have lost their former inspiring sounds, and though we beat the Grenadiers March, which not long before was so animating, yet then it seemed by its last feeble effort, as if almost ashamed to be heard on such an occasion."

The surrender of Burgoyne, over 300 of his officers, more than 5,000 troops, and all of his guns, cannon, and other materiel was a stupendous American victory. It proved to be the decisive turning point in the war. Sensing the enormity of the damage caused by Burgoyne's defeat, the British evacuated Ticonderoga and Crown Point, and Clinton retreated from the highlands below Albany and returned to New York. The enemy now was confined to but two American locations--Rhode Island and Philadelphia. As further acknowledgement that Saratoga had thrown the enemy on the defensive, the British withdrew from Germantown on October 18-19 to Philadelphia.

Why did Gates keep Congress, General Washington, and everyone else in suspense for so long before he submitted his official report on the events at Saratoga? First, the capitulation did not occur on the 14th as originally reported, but rather three days later on the 17th. Second, as a letter written by Jacob Cayles, one of Gates's officers,