

Burgoyne's defeat raised the Americans' morale to the point that many believed the war could soon be ended. Although this hope was to prove overly sanguine, the effect on the British troops in America had been devastating. Ambrose Serle, secretary to Lord Richard, commander of the British fleet, wrote on November 1: "On this Evening I recd. a Confirmation of the sad news, that Genl. Burgoyne and about 5000 of his army were so hemmed in by the Rebels...that after two or three Conflicts with them he found himself obliged to capitulate....This is the most fatal Blow we have yet felt, and will I fear occasion every sort of Chagrin & Uneasiness at Home. GOD save & bless my King and Country from the wicked Conspiracies of all their Enemies." The Loyalist and former resident of Maryland, William Eddis, who was also with Howe's army in Philadelphia, also learned the "particulars of this unhappy, unexpected event" on November 1, commenting that "an universal dejection has followed; every loyal countenance bears the most evident impressions of sorrow and disappointment."

Burgoyne's surrender had been a stunning victory for the Americans, but it was not without its problems. The terms of the capitulation stated that Burgoyne and his men were to be marched to Boston, on American rations, where they were to embark immediately for England. Burgoyne and his men had agreed not to engage in the American campaign again, but General Washington justly feared that the British government would simply replace Burgoyne's so-called "Convention Army" with fresh troops garrisoned in Great Britain, dispatching them to America in time for the spring campaign. Furthermore, the enthusiasm for General Gates was reflected not only by songs such as that which appeared in Dunlap's Baltimore newspaper, but in friction between high-ranking officers in the American army and members of Congress. Some, known collectively as the Conway Cabal, sought to replace Washington with Gates as commander in chief. Gates himself virtually ceased communicating with Washington, preferring instead to address his remarks directly to Congress. To complicate matters, Congress during the month ordered Washington to investigate and report to it each American defeat or retreat, and of those specified in the resolve two were actions that had recently occurred under his command. One of the retreats Congress ordered Washington to investigate was the fall of Fort Mifflin, a heavily fortified installation on Mud Island in the Delaware River that had been the last impediment to the free passage of British ships upriver to Philadelphia. Commanded by a young Marylander, Lt. Col. Samuel Smith, until November 11 when he had to be evacuated because of a wound, the fort was abandoned on the night of November 15.

Washington had hoped that Fort Mifflin could be saved, and he had done everything in his power to reinforce it. Fort Mifflin could not have withstood the incessant bombardment of the British under any circumstances, but the garrison was weakened by Washington's inability to provide it adequately with supplies and men. Many of Washington's troops were literally barefoot, and the cold, wet weather of November meant that they were useless as foot soldiers. The problem of securing adequate supplies for his army daily became more urgent for Washington during the month of