

= Military career of Benedict Arnold , 1781 =

The military career of Benedict Arnold in 1781 consisted of service in the British Army . Arnold had changed sides in September 1780 , after his plot to surrender the key Continental Army outpost at West Point was exposed . After spending the rest of 1780 recruiting Loyalists for a new regiment called the American Legion , Arnold was sent with 1 @, @ 600 men in late December by General Sir Henry Clinton to Virginia , with instructions to raid Richmond and then establish a strong fortification at Portsmouth .

Landing in Virginia on January 4 , 1781 , he raided Richmond the next day . After raiding a few nearby communities , he returned to Portsmouth , where his troops established fortifications . They remained there until late March , when 2 @, @ 000 reinforcements led by General William Phillips arrived . Phillips took command of the forces , and Arnold served under him as they resumed raiding operations aimed at potentially establishing a permanent presence at Richmond . Although they fought off a spirited militia defense in the Battle of Blandford in late April , the timely arrival of Continental forces under the Marquis de Lafayette prevented the taking of Richmond . Phillips continued to raid , but was ordered to Petersburg to effect a junction with General Charles Cornwallis , who was marching up from North Carolina . Phillips died on May 13 of a fever , and Arnold was briefly in command again until Cornwallis arrived a week later . Arnold returned to New York , suffering from a recurrence of gout .

When French and American movements to encircle Cornwallis at Yorktown became apparent to General Clinton , he sent Arnold on a raiding expedition in early September to New London , Connecticut in an attempt to draw American resources away from Virginia . Arnold raided the port , but a detachment of his troops was involved in the bloody Battle of Groton Heights at a fort across the Thames River . The operation was the last command Arnold held . In December , he and General Cornwallis , who had been released on parole after his surrender at Yorktown , sailed for England .

During his command of British troops , Arnold did not command a great deal of respect from other officers . His actions in Virginia and Connecticut were criticized , and allegations that he was primarily interested in money circulated in New York . On his arrival in England he was also unable to acquire new commands either in the army or with the British East India Company . He resumed his business and trade activities , and died in London in 1801 .

= = Background = =

Benedict Arnold was born in 1741 into a well @-@ to @-@ do family in the port city of Norwich in the British colony of Connecticut . He was interested in military affairs from an early age , serving briefly ( without seeing action ) in the colonial militia during the French and Indian War in 1757 . He embarked on a career as a businessman , first opening a shop in New Haven , and then engaging in overseas trade . He owned and operated ships , sailing to the West Indies , New France and Europe . When the British Parliament began to impose taxes on its colonies , Arnold 's businesses began to be affected by them and the resulting , sometimes violent , opposition , which he eventually joined . In 1767 he married a local woman , with whom he had three children , one of whom died in infancy . She died in 1775 , and Arnold left his children under the care of his sister Hannah at his home in New Haven .

= = Continental Army service , 1775 ? 1780 = =

Arnold had distinguished himself early in the war , participating in the capture of Fort Ticonderoga in May 1775 and then boldly leading a raid on Fort Saint @-@ Jean near Montreal . He then led a small army from Cambridge , Massachusetts to Quebec City on an expedition through the wilderness of present @-@ day Maine , where he was wounded in the climactic Battle of Quebec on December 31 , 1775 . After leading an ineffectual siege of Quebec until April 1776 , he took over the military command of Montreal . He directed the American retreat from there on the arrival of British

reinforcements , and his forces formed the rear guard of the retreating Continental Army as it headed south toward Ticonderoga . Arnold then organized the defense of Lake Champlain , and led the Continental Navy fleet that was defeated in the October 1776 Battle of Valcour Island .

During these actions , Arnold made a number of friends and a larger number of enemies within the army power structure and in Congress . He established decent relationships with George Washington , commander of the army , as well as Philip Schuyler and Horatio Gates , both of whom had command of the army 's Northern Department at different times during 1775 and 1776 . However , an acrimonious dispute with Moses Hazen , commander of the 2nd Canadian Regiment , boiled over into a court martial of Hazen at Ticonderoga during the summer of 1776 . Only action by Gates , then his superior at Ticonderoga , prevented his own arrest on countercharges leveled by Hazen . He had also had disagreements with John Brown and James Easton , two lower @-@ level officers with political connections . His conflict with them resulted in ongoing suggestions of improprieties on his part . Brown was particularly vicious , publishing a handbill that claimed of Arnold , " Money is this man 's God , and to get enough of it he would sacrifice his country " .

In December 1776 Washington sent Arnold to coordinate the defense of Rhode Island after the British occupied Newport . Due to inadequate supplies and militia training , no offensive action was possible . In February 1777 Arnold , along with several other brigadiers , was passed over by Congress for promotion to major general . While en route to Philadelphia to discuss the matter , he stopped in New Haven to visit his family , and fought in the rearguard Battle of Ridgefield against a British raiding party in which his left leg was injured once again . In Philadelphia , Arnold threatened to resign over the issue of rank , but demurred when it was learned that Ticonderoga had fallen . Sent north to assist in the defense of the Hudson River valley , he helped lift the Siege of Fort Stanwix in August , and then played key roles in the two Battles of Saratoga in September and October . He was stripped of his command after the first battle in a dispute with General Gates , who had come to see Arnold as a competitor for rank and glory . Midway through the second battle he rode off to the battlefield anyway , and led the troops to in a spirited attack on two British redoubts , suffering serious injuries to his leg .

After Arnold had recovered from his injuries ( he walked with a cane for the rest of his life ) , Washington gave him the military command of Philadelphia after the British withdrew from the city in May 1778 . There his actions increased political opposition to him , and further inquiries were made into his affairs . He also began consorting with Loyalist sympathizers , and married Peggy Shippen , the daughter of one such man . Shortly after , he opened negotiations with General Sir Henry Clinton , mediated by Major John André , offering his services to their side . After resigning his Philadelphia command in anger after poor treatment by Congress and local opponents , he sought and acquired in July 1780 the command of West Point , the key Continental Army base on the Hudson River . Pursuant to plans to make its taking easier by the British , he systematically weakened its defenses . When the plot was exposed in September 1780 with the capture by American forces of Major André , Arnold fled to New York , and was given a commission as a brigadier general in the British Army . Major André was hanged as a spy , greatly upsetting the British .

= = British Army service = =

The British gave Arnold a brigadier general 's commission with an annual income of several hundred pounds , but only paid him £ 6 @, @ 315 plus an annual pension of £ 360 because his plot failed . He and his wife settled in New York , where the Loyalist elites at first snubbed them , but were eventually overcome by Peggy 's charm . Arnold began recruiting a new Loyalist regiment , the American Legion , enrolling his young sons in the unit ( at least on paper ) . General Clinton then assigned Arnold to lead an expedition to the Chesapeake Bay . As his force began to take shape in November and December , rumors swirled in the city that many officers were refusing to serve under him . Many of the British soldiers in New York held Arnold responsible for the death of the popular Major André .

Arnold 's preparations for the Chesapeake Bay expedition interrupted a scheme hatched by George

Washington and Henry " Light Horse Harry " Lee to kidnap Arnold . Pursuant to the plan , Lee 's sergeant major , John Champe staged a " desertion " from Lee 's unit in New Jersey to British lines in New York late in October 1780 , and convinced Arnold to take him on as a senior noncommissioned officer . Champe was supposed to make contact with covert operatives working in New York , with whom he would work to kidnap Arnold . After observing Arnold 's habits , a plan was developed to be executed on the night of December 11 . Arnold ordered his troops , including Champe , to embark on transports on December 11 , and thus scuttled the attempt . ( Champe participated in the start of the expedition , and finally managed to escape several weeks later and return to Lee 's unit . Washington and Lee rewarded him richly , and convinced him to retire from military service so that he would not risk hanging for his role in the affair if he was captured . )

= = = Virginia = = =

Arnold 's force of 1 @, @ 600 troops arrived off Virginia on January 1 , 1781 . Landing his troops on January 4 , he captured Richmond by surprise and then went on a rampage through Virginia , destroying supply houses , foundries , and mills . This activity brought out Virginia 's militia , led by Colonel Sampson Mathews , initiating Arnold 's return to Portsmouth to hold the port there . The relative inactivity of holding the port led Arnold to request a change of command . When reinforcements arrived in March , they were led by William Phillips ( who had served under Burgoyne at Saratoga ) , who took over the command . However , Clinton did not issue orders recalling Arnold , so he accompanied Phillips on new raiding expeditions into the Virginia countryside . The force advanced on Petersburg , where they defeated a militia force led by Baron von Steuben at the Battle of Blandford in late April . The arrival at Richmond of the Marquis de Lafayette and 900 Continental troops , sent by General Washington to oppose Arnold , prompted Phillips to begin making his way back to Portsmouth . While en route , they were ordered by Charles Cornwallis , the commander of the British southern army , to return to Petersburg , where he would join them with his force . Phillips fell ill on the way , and died of a fever at Petersburg on May 12 . Arnold commanded the army only until May 20 , when Cornwallis arrived to take over . One colonel wrote to Clinton of Arnold , " there are many officers who must wish some other general in command " . Cornwallis disregarded advice proffered by Arnold to locate a permanent base away from the coast that might have averted his later surrender at Yorktown . Shortly after Cornwallis 's arrival , Arnold suffered a severe attack of gout , and returned to New York .

During Arnold 's time in Virginia two things happened that had a negative impact on his reputation . He wrote a letter to Lord George Germain , the British colonial secretary , criticizing Clinton 's conduct of the war . Word of this communication reached Clinton , and Arnold was met on his return to New York with a frosty reception , and assignments to perform menial administrative tasks . Arnold attempted to make amends , writing to Germain , " I find my letter has given umbrage ; I am extremely sorry for it . " The second incident was a dispute with his naval counterpart on the Chesapeake , Captain Thomas Symonds , over the distribution of prizes captured during the various expeditions . Symonds was so incensed by Arnold 's attitude that he refused to leave port to respond to reports of transports carrying Lafayette 's troops on the bay . The incident became widely known when Arnold got back to New York , prompting one officer to write , " [ Arnold ] has hurt himself by discovering too much fondness for cash ... if he is attached to the latter ... he is no acquisition for us . "

Arnold 's stint in Virginia also demonstrated that he was a target of Patriot wrath and revenge . Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson issued a large reward for his capture , and Washington gave orders to Lafayette to summarily hang Arnold should he be captured . Lafayette had shadowed Arnold and Phillips when they went to Petersburg to join with Cornwallis . After Phillips died , Arnold tried to open communications with the marquis ; the letters were returned unopened by Lafayette . Washington approvingly wrote to Lafayette that " your conduct [ ... ] meets my approbation [ ... ] in refusing to correspond with Arnold . " In conversation with one of Lafayette 's officers sent to confer on prisoner exchanges , Arnold is said to have asked what would happen to him should he be captured . The response was , " We should cut off the leg which was wounded in the country 's

service , and we should hang the rest of you . " ( The Boot Monument at the Saratoga National Historical Park , honoring his role there , includes a representation of Arnold 's left boot . )

= = = New London = = =

On his return to New York in June Arnold made a variety of proposals for continuing to attack economic or military targets ( including West Point ) in order to force the Americans to end the war . Clinton was not interested in most of Arnold 's aggressive ideas , but the arrival of 3 @, @ 000 new Hessian troops led him to relent . He authorized an expedition against the port of New London , Connecticut , near Arnold 's childhood home of Norwich . On September 4 , not long after the birth of his and Peggy 's second son , Arnold 's force of over 1 @, @ 700 men raided and burned New London and captured Fort Griswold , causing damage estimated at \$ 500 @, @ 000 . British casualties were high ? nearly one quarter of the force sent against Fort Griswold was killed or wounded , a rate at which Clinton claimed he could ill afford more such victories . Although Arnold only reported 44 killed and 127 wounded in his official report , there were unofficial whispers that between 400 and 500 casualties had occurred , with at least one claim that it had been like " a Bunker Hill expedition " . The capture of Fort Griswold included American allegations that the British attackers slaughtered the surviving garrison after it had surrendered ; of a garrison numbering about 150 , more than 130 were killed or seriously wounded . Although Arnold was not in a position to influence what transpired at Fort Griswold ( he remained in New London and observed the action at Fort Griswold across the river ) , he was somewhat predictably blamed by many on both sides for the affair .

= = Later years = =

Even before the surrender of Cornwallis in October , Arnold had requested permission from Clinton to go to England to give Lord Germain his thoughts on the war in person . When word of the surrender reached New York , Arnold renewed the request , which Clinton then granted . On December 8 , 1781 , Arnold and his family left New York for England . In London he aligned himself with the Tories , advising Germain and King George III to renew the fight against the Americans . In the House of Commons , Edmund Burke expressed the hope that the government would not put Arnold " at the head of a part of a British army " lest " the sentiments of true honor , which every British officer [ holds ] dearer than life , should be afflicted . " To Arnold 's detriment the anti @-@ war Whigs had gotten the upper hand in Parliament , and Germain was forced to resign , with the government of Lord North falling not long after .

Arnold then applied to accompany General Carleton , who was going to New York to replace Clinton as commander @-@ in @-@ chief ; this request went nowhere . Other attempts to gain positions within the government or the British East India Company over the next few years all failed , and he was forced to subsist on the reduced pay of non @-@ wartime service . His reputation also came under criticism in the British press , especially when compared to that of Major André , who was celebrated for his patriotism . One particularly harsh critic said that Arnold was a " mean mercenary , who , having adopted a cause for the sake of plunder , quits it when convicted of that charge . " In turning him down for an East India Company posting , George Johnstone wrote , " Although I am satisfied with the purity of your conduct , the generality do not think so . While this is the case , no power in this country could suddenly place you in the situation you aim at under the East India Company . "

Despite repeated attempts to gain command positions in the British Army or with the British East India Company , he saw no further military duty . He resumed business activities , engaging in trade while based at first in Saint John , New Brunswick and then London . He died in London in 1801 , and was buried without military honors .