

**Betrayal by Benedict Arnold**  
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Benedict Arnold had a gold plated combat record in fighting for the American Cause. However, he had many enemies, was three times accused of war profiteering and financial mismanagement, passed over for promotion to Major General and felt victimized and unappreciated. In May 1779 through intermediaries he contacted British HQ in New York and expressed his willingness to “Turn Coat”. After a series of coded communications an agreement was set in place for Arnold to betray the American cause in return for substantial compensation: 20,000 Pounds Sterling for the successful capture of an American fort or army and an unspecified sum for a failed attempt. Arnold demanded 10,000 pounds for an attempt that failed and disclosed his perfidy. Arnold’s request for this sum was not accepted by the British. They only agreed to pay 6,000 pounds if his plot was discovered.

The British had unsuccessfully tried to “turn” numerous American generals so the offer by Arnold to betray the American cause was a one-time golden opportunity. Major John Andre’

was British Commander In Chief's Adjutant and had recently been appointed his Chief of Intelligence. Clinton was reluctant to appoint Andre' as Arnold's "handler" in view of his lack of spy training and inexperience. With persistence and persuasion Andre' got Clinton to relent.

General Washington wanted to assign Arnold to a major combat command at the end of his time in Philadelphia because of his outstanding battle reputation. Arnold knew it would be difficult to compromise a major combat command so he feigned disability due to his injuries from accepting such an assignment. Washington reluctantly agreed to Arnold's desires and appointed him on August 3, 1780 as Commander of the West Point, NY garrison, a key post that could serve as a method of dividing the northern American states from those in the south.

In early September 1780 a plan was developed by Andre' whereby Arnold would give to the British the defensive plans of West Point which would allow for its easy capture by the British. Because of Andre's lack of spy training Gen Clinton gave Andre' four specific direct orders regarding any dealings he might have with Arnold:

1. Do not wear anything but your British Officer uniform behind enemy lines.
2. Do not enter American controlled territory.
3. Do not have on your person any incriminating documents behind enemy lines.
4. Do not operate behind enemy lines under a false name.

Through secret communications Andre' and Arnold agreed to meet on September 11<sup>th</sup> at Dobbs Ferry on the Hudson River twenty five miles south of West Point. The lower east side of the Hudson was controlled by the British and the West side by the Americans. The British sloop HMS *Vulture* had the assignment of attacking with gunboats American boat traffic on the river.

As Arnold was approaching his appointed place on his personal barge on the September 11<sup>th</sup> at Dobbs Ferry British gunboats from the *Vulture*, not knowing of the plan, attacked his barge nearly killing him which spoiled this golden opportunity for Arnold and Andre' to meet. Somehow the Captain of the *Vulture* (Captain Andrew Sutherland) did not get the word of the meeting and thus failed to restrain his ship's gunboats from attacking Arnold's barge.

Clinton tried to set in motion another meeting between Arnold and Andre'. In fact Arnold was occupying Robinson's former house across the Hudson from West Point during this time. For unexplained reasons he failed to do so. Arnold was apparently unaware of the specifics of Clinton's new plan. On September 18<sup>th</sup> in a secret communication Arnold sent the following coded communication to British HQ: "I shall send a person to Dobbs Ferry or on aboard the *Vulture* Wednesday night the 20<sup>th</sup> instant and furnish him with a boat and flag of truce. You may depend on his secrecy and honor, and that your business of whatever nature may be kept a profound secret. To avoid censure, this matter must be conducted in the greatest secrecy. I think it will be advisable for the *Vulture* to remain where she is (up river – my note) until the time mentioned". Clinton gave Andre' instructions to have Robinson deliver the order to the commanding officer of the *Vulture* (Captain Andrew Sutherland) to move the ship south to Dobbs where it would be safe for Andre' to meet Arnold. This set up a conflict: Arnold asking to keep the ship up river where it would be safe for him to meet Andre' and Clinton ordering the ship be moved down river where it would be safe for Andre' to conduct the meeting. Contrary to Clinton's order to Andre' for Robinson to deliver the order, Andre' on September 19<sup>th</sup> traveled up the river to the *Vulture* **with** Robinson to personally deliver the order. Through coded messages Arnold became aware that Andre' was aboard the *Vulture*. Thinking that the meeting could be best conducted while the ship was up river Andre', Sutherland and Robinson all aboard the *Vulture* jointly agreed to disobey Clinton's order to move the ship

down river to Dobbs. This was a fateful decision that ultimately had devastating consequences for Andre'.

On September 20<sup>th</sup> Arnold tried to convince an unsuspecting Joshua Hett Smith a local wealthy landowner to assist in the plan by having a tenant farmer named Samuel Cahoon and his brother to row Smith's boat to the *Vulture* to pick up a passenger (Andre'). The Cahoons were reluctant to go. After a day's delay with threats and plied with rum and a promise of 50 pounds of flour by Arnold, the Cahoons finally made the trip with Smith to the *Vulture* on the evening of September 21<sup>st</sup> to pick up the mysterious passenger who Arnold called a merchant, named John Anderson (Andre'). Andre', Sutherland and Robinson consulted together to decide whether Andre' would be violating Clinton's order not to operate behind enemy lines if he just went to the shoreline to meet Arnold. They were wary but agreed it was not a violation if he just met at the edge of the river. Andre' donned a long civilian coat over his red British Regimental uniform jacket and was rowed by the Cahoons to the shore where he met with Arnold. The discussions between Arnold and Andre' became lengthy and Arnold provided Andre', much to his distress, a horse to ride several miles up-river with him to Smith's house to continue their negotiations.

While at Smith's home Arnold provided Andre' detailed documents about vulnerabilities of West Point and how it could successfully be attacked. Andre' did not want to take the papers having committed them to memory. Arnold insisted Andre' take them claiming they would be more credible to Gen Clinton when given to him. Against his good judgment and wishes Andre' put the papers between his stockings and leg. Arnold pressed for a compensation agreement if the plot failed and he was compromised. Andre' did not have authority to

promise more than the previously agreed amount of 6,000 pounds if the plot failed. According to Arnold, Andre' agreed to recommend to Clinton the 10,000 pounds if the plot failed.

The Cahoons had been up all night and were exhausted as dawn was breaking and took their boat up river. As the sun began to rise on the morning of September 22<sup>nd</sup> while Andre' and Arnold were completing their discussions at Smith's house, a Colonial officer named LTC James Livingston decided to drag cannon through the woods to the shore of the Hudson and fire at the *Vulture*. The ship was hit multiple times which caused Captain Sutherland take the ship more than 12 miles down the Hudson out of sight which stranded Andre' on shore in American territory.

Because Andre' was unable to return to NYC via the *Vulture* Arnold wrote out safe conduct passes for guards to permit Andre' and Smith to travel by land or boat if possible to British territory. There was no way for Andre' to go down the river to safety by boat. Smith agreed to escort Andre' to safe British territory by horseback down the east side of the river, but only if Andre' discarded his Regimental Redcoat which he reluctantly did and put on a civilian hat and jacket. On the afternoon of September 22<sup>nd</sup> Andre' set out by horseback with Smith as his escort and crossed over the Hudson at King's Ferry down the east side of the river towards British lines. While riding down the trail late on the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Andre' and Smith were sharply challenged by a Colonial Captain by the name of Ebenezer Foote and his guards. Captain Foote's pointed questions about their mission seemed to rattle both Andre' and Smith. Andre's pass got them through but Captain Foote recommended that they stay overnight because of the strong possibility of their being attacked by robbers and thugs who frequented the area at night. Smith and Andre' agreed to stay overnight at a local farmer's home. The next morning on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Smith said he was too fatigued to go further and left Andre' to travel by

himself the remaining short distance to British territory. Now riding alone Andre' encountered American Col Samuel Webb riding up the trail who had been a POW in NYC and was known to Andre'. Although Webb did not recognize Andre' the encounter seemed to rattle Andre' even more. Near Tarrytown, NY at about 9 AM Andre' was challenged by three American Militia guards named; John Pauling, David Williams and Isaac Van Wart. One was reportedly wearing a discarded Hessian jacket which gave Andre' the impression he had crossed safely into Loyalist territory. They pointed their guns at Andre' and grabbed the reins of his horse. Wrongly thinking he was in Loyalist territory, Andre' identified himself as a British officer. If he had first shown his pass by Arnold he might have been let through. Thinking Andre' had money the guards ordered him to strip. Finding no money in his clothing they ordered Andre' to take off his boots and found nothing. Ordered to take off his stockings the papers were revealed showing he was a spy. Only one of the guards was literate but he could see that the documents revealed information that could compromise the safety of West Point. The guards demanded money and Andre' promised vast sums, but they realized there was no way that amount of money could be delivered. The guards consulted with each other and decided to send Andre' under guard to the local American military post commanded by LTC John Jameson.

Jameson was conflicted about what to do with Andre'. He couldn't believe Arnold was part of a plot to compromise West Point. He sent Andre' under guard to Arnold and then sent by courier the incriminating papers to General Washington who was about to arrive back at West Point from his meeting with the French in Connecticut. Major Benjamin Tallmadge who was chief of Washington's secret service got word that a suspicious individual had been captured and raced to see Jameson. Tallmadge urged Jameson to have Andre' recalled back until the matter could be completely investigated. Jameson very reluctantly agreed to recall Andre'

only after Tallmadge said he would accept full responsibility for the matter. As a compromise for returning Andre', Jameson sent a note to Arnold indicating that a suspicious individual by the name of John Anderson had been captured with incriminating documents. Andre' was successfully brought back and placed under guard under Jameson. Arnold got the note from Jameson just minutes ahead of Washington's arrival and fled to the river shore and was rowed down the river to the *Vulture* which immediately sailed to NYC.

Washington arrived at West Point just as Arnold had left and was astounded when he read the incriminating documents. Washington prepared West Point for the anticipated attack by the British which never came. He then arranged for his most senior generals to conduct an investigation and quick trial of Andre' who foolishly admitted he was on a spy mission. Andre' was sentenced to hang as a spy. Andre' pleaded to be executed by firing squad as an honorable military man. In a vain attempt to get Arnold, Washington offered to exchange Andre' for Arnold, but General Clinton would have none of that. In accordance with international rules of law Andre' was hanged on October 2, 1780 on a gibbet in the manner of a common criminal in front of thousands of spectators and left to hang for 30 minutes as an example to others who might be inclined to commit treason. The lack of remorse on the part of Arnold is reflected in the fact that just thirteen days after Andre's execution he was pestering Clinton for the 6,000 pounds compensation.

While Arnold was in NYC Washington authorized a mission to "snatch" but not to kill him. Washington wanted to have him publically hanged. Arnold was not only reviled in the Colonies but also by the British who were now his protectors. The British could hardly countenance in their midst a military man who would so dishonor himself by selling out his country for money. Despite this, Arnold was commissioned a Brigadier General in the British

Army and sent to southern Virginia for combat operations where he plundered and burned large swaths of Virginia during his nearly six months there. He then was sent to New London, CT to lead an expedition against the Americans at Fort Griswold in New London, Connecticut. While there is some controversy about Arnold's role in the affair, many Americans who had surrendered at the fort were massacred. After the American victory at Yorktown Arnold moved to England with his wife and unsuccessfully tried to establish several businesses. On June 14, 1801 Arnold died in Falmouth, England and was buried in a small London church cemetery. After the war at the request of the British Andre's body was disinterred and returned to England for honorable reburial there.

## SUMMARY

This golden opportunity to deal a possible mortal blow to the Revolution failed because:

1. Gen Clinton should never have relented to assign Andre' an untrained intelligence officer to this high threat opportunity
2. Gen Clinton did not co-ordinate his plans with British Navy Captain Sutherland to prevent the *VULTURE* from firing on Arnold's barge on September 11<sup>th</sup>.
3. Willful neglect by Andre' to ignore Gen Clinton's admonition not to go behind enemy lines, not to be out of uniform behind enemy lines, not to be out of uniform behind enemy lines and not to operate behind enemy lines under an assumed name.
4. Willful disobedience of Gen Clinton's order to move the *VULTURE* down south to Dobbs Ferry by Major Andre' Colonel Robinson and Captain Sutherland.



## **SOURCES**

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