

PRESENTATION ON ETHAN ALLEN

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Ethan Allen is rightfully called the “Founder of Vermont”. There is a minority who believe he tried to betray the American Cause in his later years. This presentation will show that is not the case and although he had his faults, he was a true American Patriot.

He was born January 31, 1738 in Litchfield Connecticut the oldest of seven siblings. His father was a moderately successful farmer and land speculator. His family came to first settle in Massachusetts in 1632. In 1740 his family moved from Litchfield to Cornwall, CT a major mining area. In 1756 Ethan and his eighteen year old cousin served as Connecticut militiamen fighting for the British in the French and Indian War. His unit’s assignment was to seize Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point. His service in the French and Indian War was without incident. He did not get to see combat but his service ignited an ardor to serve in the military. He got to travel to the New Hampshire Grants the territory east of Lake Champlain from New York to the western border of New Hampshire on the Connecticut River.

From his early youth he showed signs of brilliance. He was a voracious reader. He started pre-Yale studies with a tutor and showed excellence in algebra, geometry, and accounting, the “Classics” and Greek and Latin. Tragically, his father suddenly died at age 40 leaving Ethan to keep the house and raise his seven siblings which ended any prospects of going to Yale. He successfully kept the family farm and sold his father’s investment property in Wyoming, PA (now called Susquehanna Valley). He got into land speculation and like many Americans made and lost a lot of money. He did not see his future in farming and invested in iron mining. He soon was successfully mining, smelting the ore and making huge iron pots to produce potash the essential ingredient of gun powder. Like most businessmen in Connecticut the British trade restrictions helped turn him against the Crown.

Ethan was always a bit of a rebel and that included his religious beliefs. He chafed against the strictures of Anglicanism and explored Deism and joined the Congregational Church. In 1764 smallpox was decimating New England. Smallpox inoculation was illegal at that time in Connecticut. Always unafraid to do new things he had himself inoculated on the church pulpit in front of the congregation. The

congregation saw that as sacrilege and had him banished from town. He next moved to Massachusetts to mine lead there and then to the New Hampshire Grants where in 1767 he bought a "Grant" of approximately 36,000 acres from New Hampshire's Governor Wentworth Benning. There was competition between the Colonies of New York and New Hampshire for the Grants. Settlers were paying New Hampshire for Grants and New York was demanding they pay for the same land. Ethan took up the cause of the aggrieved settlers with a vengeance making himself many powerful enemies in New York. His leadership got him command of the Green Mountain Boys. Allen volunteered to serve and the Connecticut Committee of Safety gave him a commission as a Colonel and authorized him to assemble soldiers to attack Fort Ticonderoga. Benedict Arnold obtained a similar commission from Massachusetts with the mission to seize Fort Ti. They arrived across the fort at nearly the same time which set up a classic confrontation of command. After nearly coming to blows they agreed to jointly command the operation and on May 10, 1775 seized Fort Ti without firing a shot. Arnold returned to Connecticut under investigation for padding his expense account. Ethan remained around Fort Ti and volunteered his services to MG Phillip Schuyler who was given command of the Northern American army. Schuyler hated Allen because Schuyler was a New York land owner who had clashed with Allen over the Grants. Ultimately, Schuyler allowed Allen to serve under his command. Due an illness and his advancing age Schuyler gave command of the Northern Army to BG Richard Montgomery whose mission was to invade Canada via Montreal. Allen's orders from Montgomery were to conduct a recon and recruiting mission around Montreal. In a rash attempt to capture the city Allen was captured by the British on September 25, 1775.

Allen was the type of Damn Yankee the British loved to hate. He was a natural born leader, brilliant, fearless, crude, bull headed, arrogant, impulsive, egotistical, confrontational, physically imposing and principled. British Military Governor of Montreal BG Richard Prescott put Allen in irons for 30 days in Quebec and with great fanfare sent him to London to be executed at Tyburn the execution post at the Tower of London. He and his men barely survived the winter voyage hardly fed or clothed. Gen Montgomery was finally successful in capturing St. John on Nov 2, 1775. Montreal fell soon thereafter on Nov 11, 1775. Lord Guy Lt Gen Carleton Commander of the Canadian British Army barely escaped capture which would have been a game changer for the Revolution. He escaped capture in the clothes of a refugee fleeing the city. Prescott, not so lucky, was captured aboard one of the vessels that was corralled by the Americans in the River.

Lord Germain and King George III were not pleased to have this high profile problem dropped on their doorstep. The anti-war Whigs in London made a big scene of Allen's abuse. The crowning event occurred with the news of Prescott's capture and Gen Washington's note to George III which said: "As ye shall do to Allen, so shall we perfectly do to Prescott". Not wanting to see one of their generals publically hanged George III had Allen sent back to America as a POW. During his voyage back to America the captain of the British ship treated Allen and his men with humanity. Because he and his men were so loosely guarded they proposed to Allen to capture the captain, throw him overboard and sail to freedom. Allen would have none of that because the British captain was treating them with rare humanity.

Allen eventually ended up in the POW death houses in NYC. He was not a model prisoner. He intimidated guards, organized ways to raise morale of his fellow prisoners and was as disruptive as possible which landed in him in the worst of all places the former British cargo ship JERSEY. But he was still of value to the British. On May 3, 1778 Allen was exchanged with 39 officers, 34 privates and 3 surgeons for British LTC Archibald Campbell a Member of Parliament who had been captured aboard a ship outside Boston. Allen had spent 953 days as a POW. In July 1777 while Allen was in captivity Vermont declared itself an independent Republic.

Within a day after his release Allen reported to Washington who was shocked at the emaciated, jaundiced and obviously grave condition of Allen. Washington gave him all his back pay as a colonel and the mission of preventing war between New York and New Hampshire which would have been devastating to the Revolutionary cause.

No friend of anyone who supported the British, Allen instigated the passage of the Banishment Act of 1778 in Vermont which authorized the expulsion of all Loyalists from the Republic and confiscation of their lands. Reacting to the harshness of the Act a new Banishment Act of 1779 at least gave Loyalists to defend their property against confiscation.

In January 1779 Allen started writing his *Narrative of his Experience as a POW* which went through eight printings before the end of the War and became one of the most widely read documents in the first half of the 19th Century. His narrative helped improve international standards for the treatment of POWs world-wide. It opened the door for the parole of enlisted soldiers and common treatment of officers and enlisted prisoners.

March 30, 1780 a secret bribe was communicated in writing by British Loyalist Colonel Beverly Robinson to Allen who within hours showed it to Vermont Governor Thomas Chittenden. Allen was offered enormous tracts of land, money, a generalship and the chance to officially lead the new Crown sponsored land. Chittenden, Allen and the Vermont Council hatched a plan to first ask for a halt to British attacks on Vermont from Canada, the return of Vermont POWs they had captured in these attacks and for this they would lay the groundwork for approval of the British plan to take control of Vermont. The plan prevented war between New York and New Hampshire and stalled for time. However, Allen had to play his hand with credibility so he had many secret meetings with British General Frederick Haldimand took and spent the money which has led a few historians to believe Allen was really scheming to sell out Vermont to the British. That is preposterous in view of the 953 days of brutal treatment he endured by the British as a POW, his leadership to eject Loyalists from the Republic and the fact that Governor and Vermont Council were all part of the plan.

He deceived the British with his “Big Stall” until the war was over. He then tried year after year without success to broker an agreement between New York and New Hampshire to seek their approval of Vermont. He exhausted himself mentally, physically and financially in the process. At the age of 51 on February 12, 1789 Allen suddenly died of an apparent stroke just one week after Washington was elected as President. In 1791 Washington held a special election and Vermont was elected into the United States as the 14th State.

It can be said that no other single individual before or since sacrificed more, endured more, did more, worked harder or longer to create his State than Ethan Allen. He truly deserves the title “Founder of Vermont”.

PRIMARY SOURCES

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