

YOURTURN

Benedict Arnold should never be forgiven his betrayal

I am writing in response to Bill Stanley's Aug. 25 column in which he praised the efforts of his father, also named Bill Stanley, to rehabilitate the image of Benedict Arnold.

Bill Stanley was a good man. He was a Marine, stockbroker, state senator, and supporter of many economic and social causes connected to Norwich. For many years, he was Norwich's leading citizen. He died in 2010.

Perhaps Stanley's greatest contribution to Norwich was his monthly columns that graced the pages of *The Norwich Bulletin* and *The Day*. The columns, which he began writing in 1990, were titled "Once Upon A Time." The columns focused on local history, primarily describing daily life in the 20th century from Thompson to Groton.

Stanley even mentioned my mother in a column that he wrote about the 1940s, when he and his Norwich buddies would drive to Jewett City to dance with the friendly girls at a gathering place called the "Spa."

Because Benedict Arnold was a Norwich native, Stanley spent much of his life trying to rehabilitate Arnold's image by emphasizing Arnold's military accomplishments in the Continental Army and minimizing his treason. He gave lectures and wrote extensively in support of Arnold and, in doing so, unfortunately portrayed Arnold as a sympathetic figure who stumbled into treason due to mistreatment by the Continental Congress, which denied him promotions.

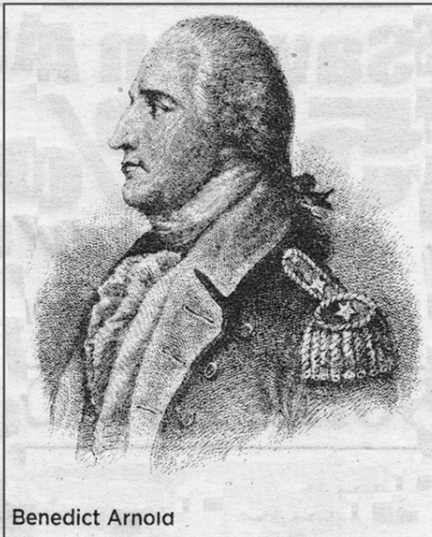
Incredibly, following Stanley's campaign to rehabilitate Arnold's image, the Old Norwichtown Burial Ground allowed a path on its property to become part of the Benedict Arnold Trail, a 2-mile pathway that winds through Norwichtown. The trail passes less than 30 yards from the grave of Samuel Huntington, president of the Second Continental Congress and later Governor of Connecticut.

In 1776, Huntington signed the Declaration of Independence, which effectively put a noose around his neck. Huntington would have been hanged if the British had won the war.

Benedict Arnold was born in Norwich in 1741. The son of a prosperous merchant, Arnold attended private school in Canterbury with the goal of attending Yale College. However, his father became an alcoholic and destroyed the family business, shelving Arnold's college plans.

In 1762, Arnold moved to New Haven and, as a young man, built a prosperous merchant business himself.

The Revolutionary War began in April 1775, with battles at Lexington and Concord. In May 1775, Arnold secured an appointment as a colonel in the Massachusetts militia and attacked the British at Fort Ticonderoga in



Benedict Arnold

upstate New York.

Arnold's militia, joined by Vermont's Green Mountain Boys commanded by Ethan Allen, defeated the British and captured a treasure trove of artillery, which was later shipped to Colonial forces who were surrounding British forces in Boston.

Arnold and Allen clashed sharply over who should get credit for the victory. Under pressure, the British relocated to New York City in 1776.

In September 1775, General George Washington ordered Arnold, now a colonel in the Continental Army, to lead a military expedition into Canada with the objective of capturing Quebec City, a British stronghold. Washington's plan called for Arnold's forces, moving westward, to meet up with General Richard Montgomery's forces, moving eastward, outside of Quebec City, which was protected by a fortress. The two forces would then attack Quebec City in separate areas and hopefully capture it.

In accordance with Washington's plan, the two forces met outside Quebec City to coordinate their maneuvers and launch attacks. However, during a severe blizzard, their attacks against Quebec City failed, producing hundreds of American casualties.

The Americans had expected Canadian residents living unhappily under British rule to aid them in the battle, but that did not happen. General Montgomery was killed. The defeat allowed the British to maintain their Canadian base of operations for military actions in upstate New York.

Historians give Arnold great credit for marching his soldiers to Quebec City, a 400-mile journey, under extreme conditions.

Arnold's forces departed Massachusetts in

September 1775. They endured desertions; disease; lack of food; lack of supplies; bad roads; no roads; soaking rains; driving snows; and poor maps — all for the opportunity to fight the vaunted British Army at the end of the line.

Arnold's forces shrank from 1,100 to 600 by November 1775. They shrank even more by the time of their attack in December 1775. Arnold and his men fought bravely.

After failing to suppress revolutionary activity inside Boston, the British left Boston and began executing a plan to cut New England off from its sister colonies south of New York. The cutoff point was New York State. The British overran western Long Island and New York City in August 1776.

In October 1776, a British naval force of over 50 ships sailed south onto Lake Champlain in upstate New York. The British hoped to gain control of upstate New York so that their forces based in Quebec would have easy access to the state for future military operations. Arnold, now a brigadier general, commanded 15 American ships near Valcour Island on Lake Champlain.

Luring the British into a false sense of complacency, Arnold attacked. American and British forces clashed in a battle that was highlighted by intricate and deadly naval maneuvers.

Arnold's forces were crushed and suffered nearly 200 casualties. Eleven of his 15 ships were destroyed. The British gained control of Lake Champlain.

However, while the British won a tactical victory, Arnold won a strategic victory because the battle prompted the British to suspend plans to continue fighting in upstate New York. The British had their own wounds to heal and, concerned about the frigid upstate weather, decided to put off operations until spring 1777.

The British decision not to continue fighting allowed the Continental Army to assign more soldiers to upstate New York before engaging the British again.

In February 1777, the Continental Congress passed over Arnold and promoted to major general five officers who were junior to him. Washington, a strong ally of Arnold, thought that the Continental Congress must have made an administrative mistake which, as it turned out, was not the case.

In May 1777, after Arnold had forced the British out of western Connecticut, the Continental Congress promoted him to major general but did not reinstate his seniority over the five junior officers who had been promoted before him. In July 1777, Arnold resigned from the army in anger, only to rescind his resignation after Washington convinced him to remain in the army.

In spring 1777, the British planned to com-

bine their military forces operating in New York before launching coordinated attacks throughout the state to finally cut off New England from its sister colonies. To that end, General John Burgoyne would move his army south from Lake Champlain. Colonel Barry St. Leger would move his forces east from Oswego and General William Howe would move his army north from New York City.

The three commanders would meet in Albany. Burgoyne, Leger nor Howe ever made it to Albany.

Burgoyne was stopped at Saratoga, 40 miles north of Albany. St. Leger got enmeshed in a long siege of an American fort as he moved east. And Howe decided to attack Philadelphia. British communications were poor.

The Battle of Saratoga began on Sept. 19, 1777. Burgoyne's army was marching south toward Albany, while an American army commanded by General Horatio Gates was marching north. Burgoyne commanded 6,000 soldiers and was outnumbered by a 2-to-1 margin.

The Continental Army was positioned on a hill called Bemis Heights. The British Army was positioned on flat ground called Freeman's Farm. The two opposing armies fought on the farm. Burgoyne split his forces into three sections: a right flank, a middle column, and a left flank. Burgoyne's plan was to have his right flank roll up the Americans' left flank, which was commanded by Arnold. Had Burgoyne's flanking attack been successful, the Continental Army could have collapsed.

However, instead of waiting for the British to attack, Arnold attacked and thwarted the British move on the American left flank. Arnold also helped other Continental forces turn back the British middle column, forcing the British to fight defensively.

The British lost 600 men; the Americans lost 300. The battle was inconclusive and merely set the table for the second Battle of Saratoga three weeks later.

In the meantime, thousands of American reinforcements poured into the area, pinning the British down on Freeman's Farm. After the fighting on Sept. 19 ended, Gates, who disliked Arnold, removed Arnold from command of his soldiers because Arnold had allegedly criticized Gates in front of fellow officers during the battle.

Pinned down on Freeman's Farm and with little prospect for reinforcements, Burgoyne, on Oct. 7, 1777, decided to attack the Americans, again breaking his forces down into a right flank; a middle column; and a left flank. With far superior numbers, the Americans were ready to fight. The Americans destroyed the British left and right flanks and placed immense pressure on the British middle column.

Burgoyne recognized that his army was

Arnold when he arrived at Arnold's home. Arnold departed for West Point, leaving Shippen at home with Washington's advance team.

However, instead of traveling to West Point, Arnold jumped aboard a British ship, HMS Vulture, and escaped down the Hudson River to New York City, which was controlled by the British. Washington arrived at Arnold's home soon after Arnold left it. When Washington couldn't find Arnold at West Point later in the day, he knew something was awry.

When Washington returned to Arnold's home after visiting West Point, Colonel Alexander Hamilton, a future Secretary of the Treasury, gave Washington the correspondence that had come in during the day, including Jameson's letter. That letter, coupled with Arnold's unexplained absence from his home and West Point, convinced Washington that Arnold had betrayed his country.

Washington asked Shippen about her husband. She told him that she was shocked by his allegation that Arnold had committed treason. She said falsely that she knew nothing about any treasonous plot.

Whether it was because of her beauty and charm, as some historians claim, or lack of evidence, Washington allowed Shippen to return to her family in Philadelphia. Arnold's decision to leave Shippen at home while he fled to New York City was wise. Their physical separation at the time his treason was discovered created an impression that they weren't co-conspirators even though they were.

Negotiations to exchange Andre for Arnold failed. Andre was hanged by the Continental Army on Oct. 2, 1780. Arnold was appointed brigadier general in the British Army. Shippen was reunited with Arnold in New York City in November 1780.

Arnold's last visit to Connecticut was on Sept. 6, 1781. As a brigadier general in the British Army, Arnold commanded a flotilla of ships that departed from New York and sailed up Long Island Sound to attack New London and Groton. About 1,600 soldiers were on board the ships.

Upon arrival at the mouth of the Thames River, Arnold split his soldiers into two groups — one group of 800 commanded by him to attack New London and another group of 800 commanded by Colonel Edmund Eyre to attack Fort Griswold in Groton. The purpose of the attacks was to retaliate against privateers (private ship owners seizing cargo with the approval of the Continental Congress) based in New London who had seized a British cargo ship named the Hannah and, more important, to put a scare into Continental Army officials so that they would scale

back the redeployment of soldiers to Virginia, which was becoming the new battleground of the War.

British officials wanted Continental Army officials to believe that, if they redeployed too many soldiers to Virginia, New England would be vulnerable to attack; the British wanted to fight a slimmed down Continental Army in Virginia.

Arnold met little resistance in New London, overrunning a handful of Continental soldiers. His forces roamed throughout the city, setting fire to over 140 buildings, including houses; warehouses; and businesses. His forces also burned the Hannah, the privateers' prized seizure.

Fight for Fort Griswold

Across the Thames River in Groton, Eyre's forces were locked in a ferocious fight at Fort Griswold, which stood on top of a hill and was protected by marshes and thick vegetation. Slowed by the terrain near the fort, Eyre's forces were vulnerable. About 160 Connecticut militiamen under the command of Colonel William Ledyard ripped through Eyre's forces with musket and artillery fire during their uphill climb to the fort, producing substantial casualties.

Eyre's forces responded with musket fire and a fixed bayonet charge up the hill. Out-numbering Ledyard's forces five-to-one and making steady progress up the hill, Eyre twice asked Ledyard to surrender. Ledyard refused to surrender both times.

Eyre's forces soon breached a door to the fort and poured in to continue the battle. Eyre's forces captured a cannon and fired at the militiamen in the fort. At that time, Ledyard was prepared to surrender and, in accordance with military protocol, presented his sword to Eyre. Eyre accepted Ledyard's sword and, perhaps angry at the casualties that his forces had sustained, stabbed Ledyard to death with the sword.

As if on cue, Eyre's forces began massacring the militiamen inside the fort, killing dozens in cold blood. From start to finish, the battle for Fort Griswold lasted less than an hour. Arnold reported to General Clinton that the battle claimed 51 British lives, with 160 wounded.

Colonial casualties, including the ones massacred, were 90 dead, with 36 wounded. On that day, Arnold concluded his battlefield career as an arsonist and a murderer of his one-time neighbors.

Military hostilities between the United States and Great Britain ceased on Oct. 19, 1781, when General Charles Cornwallis surrendered his army to Washington at Yorktown,