

THE PAINFUL WARRIOR

By

Dave Barry

He is an enigma in American history. He was, arguably, the one person after George Washington most responsible for the American victory in the Revolution.

His great, great grandfather knew Roger Williams, helped settle Rhode Island and served several terms as Governor of Rhode Island. His great grandfather was Speaker of the House of Deputies in Rhode Island.

He was born in Norwich, Connecticut and learned his trade from a relative who took him in when his father lost all the family money through drinking and gambling.

At age 16, he went with his Norwich militia unit to serve in the French & Indian War, but saw no action.

He became apothecary and merchant in New Haven, who sailed his own fleet of ships.

He was well read on the arts of war, and rose from his civilian endeavors to commander of the 2nd Connecticut Governor's Footguard.

He led his Footguard unit to Boston two days after the Battles of Lexington and Concord after forcing the New Haven leaders to give him their powder.

He was co-commander of the American attack on Fort Ticonderoga in May of 1775- the first American offensive action in the Revolution, capturing not only the fort, but a British warship as well. The cannon captured at Ticonderoga eventually allowed Washington to drive the British from Boston.

Less than a week after taking Ticonderoga, he led a naval strike force to the Canadian border capturing a second British ship which gave the Americans command and control of the Lake Champlain corridor for nearly a year and a half.

Promoted to Colonel in September 1775, he led what is still termed an "epic march" from Boston to the coast of Maine and from there over unknown and difficult terrain some 300 miles in the dead of winter to attack and besiege the citadel of Quebec on New Year's Eve 1775. He was seriously wounded in his left leg during the assault.

He was promoted to Brigadier General in the Continental Army in January 1776.

Although faced with overwhelming enemy opposition, he led the remnants of two American armies out of Canada by way of the vital Lake Champlain corridor in the spring of 1776.

From May to October 1776, he oversaw the construction and manning of a fleet of 16 ships--which comprised America's first Navy, and was named its commander, becoming an Admiral of an inland navy. Some historians have termed this ship building effort and the battle which followed as the first "arms race".

In October of 1776 he led this fleet in a three-day engagement at the Battle of Valcour Island. Though he fought his fleet to its destruction, it was a strategic victory which prevented the British from advancing into the heart of the American Colonies for another year (until the summer of 1777). One of the ships of this fleet was raised from the Lake in 1935 and is on display at the Smithsonian--it is the oldest existing American warship.

By April of 1777, he had been passed over for promotion to Major General, but still rallied to the cause to lead a militia force to repel a British raid at Danbury and Ridgefield, Connecticut in a two-day running battle where he had two horses shot out from under him.

In May of 1777, he was belatedly promoted to Major General but without his seniority and awarded a caparisoned horse for his services by the Continental Congress.

In July 1777, he was appointed as second-in-command of the American Forces forming at Saratoga, New York, to meet the renewed British advance out of Canada, part of a three-pronged British plan to divide and conquer the New England states.

In August of 1777, he volunteered to lead a force in relief of Fort Stanwix in the Mohawk Valley that effectively blunted the western prong of the British advance from Canada.

In late September 1777 and again in early October, he led troops in decisive engagements at Saratoga, New York, which stemmed the second of the British three-pronged invasion, after being relieved of his command by the Commanding General. In the climactic attack on the British fortifications, he was wounded for a second time in the same leg as at Quebec. (A small marker bearing a sculpted left boot and a General's epaulette marks the spot where he fell on the Saratoga battlefield). His victories at Saratoga not only caused the surrender of an entire British army, but also succeeded in bringing France into the war on the side of the Americans.

In June of 1778, he was appointed the first military Governor of the City of Philadelphia but was subsequently court-martialed for performing his duty. In August of 1780, he received command of the American fortification at West Point.

As an American general, he had been relieved of his command twice for disagreements with his superiors, been passed over for promotion, been court-martialed twice, had been denied most of his requests for reimbursement of his personal funds advanced for the war effort and had been wounded twice while leading his troops into battle.

By October of 1780, he had achieved the dubious distinction of being the only American General in history to serve in that rank on both sides of a war.

In 1781, as a British General he led a daring raid up the James River in Virginia culminating in the capture of Richmond.

His sons and grandsons became leaders in the British army and served their country with honor with one son becoming a lieutenant general and a knight and a great grandson serving in WWI as a major general.

He died in 1801 at the age of sixty and is buried in St. Mary's Battersea Church in England. He was:

"The Painful Warrior, famous'd for fight,
After a thousand 'victories, once foil'd, Is from the Book of Honor, raz'd quite,
And the rest forgot for which he toil'd."---Shakespeare

He was: Major General Benedict Arnold (1741-1801)