

RETURNING WITHOUT PERMISSION: THE TROUBLED MILITARY CAREER OF ROGER ENOS

A controversial incident that occurred during the 1775 expedition to Quebec led by Col. Benedict Arnold was the decision by Lieutenant Colonel Roger Enos of Simsbury, Connecticut, and the three companies under his command, to return to Cambridge, without authorization, before they reached Quebec. Much inaccurate information has been written about Roger Enos and his military career. One reason for this is that almost the only published biographical information on his life is the favorable piece written by his descendant, Horace Hayden, and published in *March to Quebec*.¹ The Hayden article presents Enos in a very positive light, but it has inaccuracies and leaves out some relevant history of his subsequent career. The information that follows has been obtained from the public record and was included in my recent book, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and men of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775*.

Roger Enos was born in 1729 in the town of Simsbury, Connecticut to David and Mary Eno. His father David died as a soldier in the Cape Breton campaign of 1745. Roger served in the French and Indian War and he first appears on the rolls of Major General Phineas Lyman's regiment in 1759 holding the rank of Sergeant-Major. By 1764, he was in Israel Putnam's Regiment as the captain of the fifth company, which was in the expedition sent that year against the Pontiac Indian uprising.²

Very little is known about his life between the French and Indian War and the American Revolution, except that he was appointed, along with Israel Putnam, Rufus Putnam and Phineas Lyman, to survey lands in the Mississippi Valley that were granted by the crown to provincial troops who served in the French and Indian War. Enos also married during this time. On March 10, 1763, he married Jerusha Hayden in Windsor, Connecticut. They had five children, one of whom, named after her mother, married Ira Allen of Vermont, brother of Ethan Allen.³

In April of 1775, Roger Enos was appointed by the Connecticut General Assembly, as a Captain, to command the 3rd Company of the Second Regiment led by Colonel Joseph Spencer, and was later commissioned as a First Major in that regiment on May 1, 1775. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the Spencer regiment on July 1, 1775. General George Washington commissioned Enos a Lieutenant Colonel in the 33rd Regiment of Foot of the Continental Army on September 11, 1775, shortly before the Arnold expedition left Cambridge.⁴ Due to his rank, Enos was designated as one of four division commanders.

Enos' division was in the rear of the expedition from the time it left Fort Western on September 25, 1775 and carried the bulk of the expedition's food supplies. On October 25th, Enos and his officers made the decision to return to Cambridge with their men and supplies even though they lost a vote of all officers present on the question of whether they should continue on to Quebec or return to Cambridge. The vote was six for going on and five for returning, but the Enos Division decided to return anyway.

When Enos returned to Washington's headquarters in Cambridge, Washington ordered him placed under arrest and then convened a Court of Inquiry to recommend a proper course of action. Washington's reactions are described in his letter of December 5th to Arnold as follows: "You could not be more surprised than I was at Enos's Return with the Division under his Command. I immediately put him under Arrest, and had him tried for quitting the Detachment without your Orders."⁵

The Enos Court-Martial was held on December 1, 1775, at Cambridge, with Brigadier General John Sullivan presiding. The witnesses who presented testimony were Colonel Enos, Captains Scott, Williams and McCobb and Lieutenants Hyde and Buckmaster.⁶ All of the witnesses were officers in the Enos division, and it is not surprising that their testimony was self-serving and inaccurate. Since Arnold and the rest of his officers and men were in Canada when the court-martial was held, there were no other witnesses to present contradictory evidence.

According to the published account of the court-martial, Enos was being tried for "leaving the detachment under Colonel Arnold, and returning home without permission from his commanding officer". In his Connecticut Bar Journal article, Attorney Richard Bell cites Article XXIII of the Articles of War that had been adopted by the Continental Congress on June 30, 1775, as the specific provision under which Enos was tried. Article XXIII states

that, "Any officer or soldier who shall, without urgent necessity, or without leave of his superior officer, quit his platoon or division, shall be punished according to the nature of the offense, by the sentence of a regimental court-martial."

Each of the Enos division officers testified that, although Enos wanted to go on, they urged him to return with his division. The primary reason given for insisting that Enos return with them is because his presence was necessary in order to control both the men of his division and the sick men from the other divisions, who were returning with them. What clearly comes across in the testimony is that the other officers' primary purpose was to address the question of "urgent necessity", which would give Enos a justifiable reason to excuse his conduct.

The decision of the court-martial was a unanimous opinion: "that Colonel Enos was under a necessity of returning with the Division under his command, and therefore acquit him with honor". The decision uses similar wording to that of the Article XXIII by the use of the word "necessity." It is clear that the court was aware of the wording of Article XXIII and made sure their decision to acquit used the correct wording. They conceded that Enos did not have the permission of his commanding officer so the only other factor that would justify him leaving his assigned task was the concept of "urgent necessity". Attorney Richard Bell concludes: "A review of the testimony as recorded doesn't square with the journals in the important particulars noted, and what does come through from the testimony to the Court is an air of prefabrication."⁷

Bell goes on to conclude: "Enos' division was a major and critical component, on which others depended. It was the least taxed and the best provisioned. Arnold, the commander, was far in advance. Three of the four divisions were plunging into the unknown, and what's more, they all-- including the Second Division which Enos tried to persuade to turn back-- made it. Enos' defection at Cambridge or Newburyport or even at Fort Western, for whatever reason, might never have come to our attention. Coming when and how it did, it was inexcusable."⁸

In January 18, 1776, after his court-martial, Enos sent a letter of resignation to General Washington. The letter requests Washington's "permission to resign my command" based on his conclusion "that I do not stand in that character, at Head-Quarters, which, as a Field Officer, is necessary to my being serviceable to the great cause in which we are engaged". In his letter, Enos describes his service in the "last campaign", meaning the Quebec expedition, as "if not with good fortune, at least without censure".⁹ Washington accepted Enos' resignation and he left the army.

In November of 1776, eleven months after his court-martial, Roger Enos was promoted by the Connecticut General Assembly to the rank of colonel and was appointed as commander of one of four state militia battalions that were being raised to join with the Continental Army near New York. His appointment called for him to serve until March 15, 1777. In May of 1777, the General Assembly appointed him to be colonel in one of the state battalions to be raised for the "defense of this state till the first day of January next." A Greenwich history states that the troops under his command engaged in foraging so excessive that the town at a special meeting voted as follows: "Whereas the troops of Colonel Enos' regiment quartered in this town have committed great outrages upon the property of some of the inhabitants of this town ..." The proposal requested the selectmen "to apply to the field officers for redress of the aforesaid grievances."¹⁰ There is no record of any redress.

A year later, in June of 1778, Enos commanded one of two state regiments that were ordered to serve in the Hudson River area for three months. In October of 1778, Enos' regiment of state troops was ordered to the south-western part of Connecticut on the sea coast, with one company to Norwalk, one to Stamford and the rest to Greenwich to "guard and defend the Inhabitants in those parts against the invasion and incursions of the enemy by sea and land". By November 3, 1778, Enos' Regiment was again in Greenwich, and they remained stationed at Horseneck in Greenwich until May of 1779.¹¹

Enos' troops became the subject of complaints by the citizens of Greenwich for their unsavory conduct. The first complaint against Enos occurred in January of 1779, where he was accused of taking lightly a complaint by Dr. Amos Mead that a soldier of his regiment "threatened a negress belonging to Mead". In April, another complaint was filed that Enos' regiment confiscated guns from a party of six men and refused to give them back. In May, the Town of Greenwich complained to the State of Connecticut that they had suffered more from Enos' Regiment than from the British. The town accused Enos of "immorality" and of having insulted and beaten Dr. Amos Mead. The Connecticut General Assembly reported that they found the charges against Enos' conduct as an officer without

support but that he was guilty of the assault on Dr. Mead. One would think the assault would be sufficient to support the charge regarding his conduct as an officer. The Assembly avoided taking any action by concluding that since Enos was not in Hartford they could make “no decree against him”. Greenwich protested the Assembly report but it was never modified or overturned.¹²

Roger Enos moved from Simsbury, Connecticut to Vermont in 1781. By June of 1781, Enos was fully entrenched in the politics of Vermont. At that time, he and three other men wrote to the Vermont Board of War offering them detailed advice on how to assign the Vermont militia troops that were then in the field.¹³ The subject matter of this letter and the way it was written leave the reader with the impression that Enos was positioning himself to obtain an appointment in the Vermont militia.

On July 10, 1781, Enos’ efforts were successful, and he was appointed as a Brigadier General by the State of Vermont, which put him in charge of the entire Vermont militia. After living in Vermont for just sixteen months, he was able to get appointed to the highest military position in the state. His appointment is confirmed by Ira Allen in a letter to British General Haldiman on July 10th.¹⁴ Enos wrote a letter to General George Washington on August 26, 1781, informing Washington that Vermont had appointed him to command the Vermont militia.¹⁵ Washington finally responded in a rather curt letter, dated October 6, telling him that he should consider himself “under the immediate command of Major Gen’l Heath, who commands the Army at the Northwest.”¹⁶ There is no evidence that Enos ever corresponded with Heath.

On October 17th, Enos wrote to the Speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives recommending that a force of 1500 men be raised in Vermont to serve for a period of three years in order to defend that state against an expected British attack. The cost of such a step was more money than was anticipated and the Assembly responded by appointing a committee to consider the appropriate steps to be taken “for the defence of the State in the ensuing year”.¹⁷ On December 15, 1781, Enos resigned from active military service with the State of Vermont, having served as militia commander for five months.¹⁸ However, in 1787, he obtained another promotion from Vermont, this time to Major General of the 1st Vermont Division, a position which he resigned in 1791.¹⁹

Between 1781 and 1792, Enos was a member of the Vermont Board of War, the Vermont General Assembly and a trustee of the University of Vermont. During those years, he played an active role in the affairs of the state. By 1792, he had resigned all public offices, and the Enos family settled down in Colchester, Vermont with their daughter, Jerusha, who was married to Ira Allen. Roger Enos died in Colchester, Vermont on October 6, 1808 at the age of seventy-five years, and is buried in Burlington, Vermont. He is buried in the same plot as Ethan Allen and his son in law, Ira Allen.²⁰ In 1836, at the age of ninety-seven, Roger Enos’ wife, Jerusha, submitted a claim for a pension based on her husband’s military service, almost thirty years after his death.²¹

Looking at Enos’ military career in the Connecticut militia, one sees the same lack of leadership in Greenwich in 1777 and 1779 that he demonstrated in the Quebec expedition, which is evidenced by his inability or unwillingness to control his men. He further demonstrated a significant lack of personal control in the beating of a private citizen in 1779, while his regiment was in Greenwich. Despite that record, Enos was able to parlay his previous military experience throughout his entire career into one promotion after another. His lackluster record reveals no real achievement.

A contemporary reaction to Enos’ actions on the expedition is reflected in a letter from James Warren to John Adams in November of 1775 where Warren refers to Arnold being within a few miles of Quebec. He goes on to tell Adams the following: “one Colonel Enos of Connecticut, with three companies he commanded as a rear guard, had come off and left him, while advanced thirty miles ahead, and perhaps at Chaudière Pond. This officer certainly deserves hanging.”²² Warren pulled no punches in his assessment. Unfortunately, no one in Connecticut accepted Warren’s assessment, and Enos extended his military career much longer than was appropriate under the circumstances.

Enos was the opposite of Benedict Arnold in almost every way. Enos was indecisive and lacked the leadership ability to make hard spur of the moment decisions, to effectively lead troops in battle and to control the men in his command. There is no record of strategic planning to achieve a successful military objective or the ability to plan and implement a complicated military campaign. He was never a commander in a battle and never demonstrated the

ability to lead his men to a victory. All of these traits were paramount in Arnold, who continually demonstrated the ability to plan campaigns and win battles, even under severe conditions.

The military career of Roger Enos was mediocre at best. He had no real achievement and his only claim to fame is his questionable actions on the Arnold expedition. If his subsequent record had been one of valor and accomplishment, it would be credible to conclude that his action in the wilderness was an anomaly, and that it was correct of the court-martial board to give him a pass for those acts. With an impressive military record, it would be easier to find that his behavior on the expedition did not amount to desertion, and that he did actually make the appropriate decision based on the facts he had. The argument would be that his future conduct demonstrated that he deserved the promotions and that the court-martial verdict was correct. However, one cannot ignore his subsequent record despite his promotions and high rank. The totality of his actions during the march belies the finding of the court-martial. Roger Enos' reputation must be judged on what he did, and not from the finding of the court or from the subsequent promotions he received from Connecticut and Vermont.

END NOTES

¹ Kenneth Roberts, Comp. & Ann. *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1946.

² Rolls of Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, 1755-1762. Vol. I-II. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Society, 1903-5. Enos appears on multiple muster rolls in Lyman's Regiment. The rolls show his progression in rank during that war.

³ Eno Family Assoc; Stiles, 244.

⁴ Letter of Washington to Enos confirming the appointment to Lt. Col. is found in his wife's pension application . NARA Pension Files.

⁵ Washington to Arnold, Dec 5, 1775. *Washington Papers LOC*, image 040140.

⁶ Enos Court-Martial. AA, 4th, 4: 238.

⁷ Richard G. Bell. The Court-Martial of Roger Enos, I. *Connecticut Bar Journal*, vol. 73, 2000: 458.

⁸ Bell, 460-461.

⁹ Enos resignation letter to Washington. *American Archives*, 4th, 4: 768.

¹⁰ Daniel Mead. *History of Greenwich, Fairfield County, Conn*. New York: Baker & Goodwin, 1857, 138-9.

¹¹ CT Archives XIV, 181-190; Public Records of CT, 541.

¹² Mead, History of Greenwich, 138-9; Spencer P. Mead. *Ye Historie of Ye Old Town of Greenwich*. New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1911: 120-1; CT Archives XIV, 181-190; Hinman, 144-5.

¹³ Letter from Roger Enos, Samuel Fletcher, Samuel Herrick and Gideon Amesbury to VT Board of War, June 23, 1781. *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, 109.

¹⁴ Records of Governor and Council of State of Vermont, 108.

¹⁵ Washington to Enos, Oct. 6, 1781. George Washington Papers, Library of Congress, and cited in Records of Governor and Council, 448-9. Washington acknowledges Enos' letter of August 25th.

¹⁶ Washington to Enos, Oct. 6, 1781.

¹⁷ Records of Governor and Council, 449.

¹⁸ The date of resignation is derived from two sources. Rolls of Soldiers in Revolutionary War, 1775-1783:541 which is an abstract of a payroll for Brigadier General Roger Enos which starts on May 24, 1781 and ends of December 15, 1781. The 2nd is a letter from Lieut. Gov. Payne of Vermont to President Weare of New Hampshire wherein Enos is one of three men appointed to settle land disputes with New Hampshire. Not likely if he was still commander of the Vermont militia.

¹⁹ Stiles, 244.

²⁰ Stiles, 244.

²¹ See Enos wife's pension application based on Roger Enos' services in NARA pension files, Record Group 15.

²² James Warren to John Adams, November 14, 1775. *Warren Letters*. Vol. I. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917: 181-182.