

February, 1776: "It is impossible to give you a just idea of the lowness of the Continental credit here, from want of hard money, and the prejudice it is to our affairs. . . . The general apprehension that we shall be driven out of the Province as soon as the King's troops can arrive, concurs with the frequent breaches of promise the inhabitants have experienced, in determining them to trust our people no further. . . ."

CHARLES CARROLL, reporting on his visit to Quebec.

Colonel Arnold Moves North

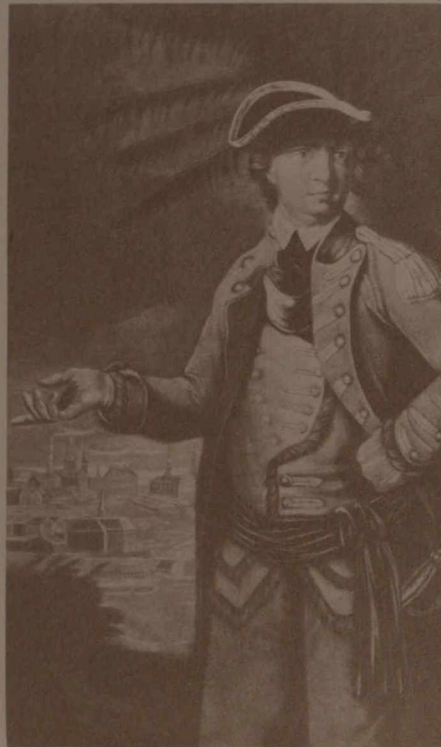
On December 31, 1775, the rebellious American colonies lost a battle and with it half of a continent.

The battle was for Quebec City. Colonel Benedict Arnold, athirst for fame, led the attack. Had it succeeded, he might conceivably have replaced George Washington as Commander in Chief. The Capital of the United States might be Arnold, DC. But he lost.

The adventure began on a fine September day.

Arnold had 1,200 men — fourteen companies — and two hundred flat-bottomed bateaux. He planned to enter Quebec through the back door — up the Kennebec and Dead Rivers in Maine to Lake Mégantic in Quebec, then down the Chaudière River to the St. Lawrence. He had purchased the bateaux from a helpful Kennebec Yankee named Reuben Colburn, at

An English mezzotint, published by Thomas Hart in 1776, showing Colonel Benedict Arnold with Quebec in the background



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forty shillings each. They had been hastily made from green lumber.

On September 11, the troops moved out. Accompanying the troops were six youths, too highborn to be enlisted and too young to be commissioned. One, a comely boy of 19, would grow up to be the young United States' second notorious bad man, Aaron Burr, who would be Vice President under Thomas Jefferson and would kill Alexander Hamilton in a duel.

The army reached the Kennebec and boarded the bateaux on September 18. The leaky bateaux smelled of fish and the soldiers got very sick. As Simon Fobes of Bridgewater put it, ". . . such a sickness, making me feel . . . so indifferent whether I lived or died."

They made their way to Fort Western (Augusta, Maine) and the weather turned cold. They lit fires and some, at least, drank rum. One of them, a simple young man from Yarmouth named James McCormack, got angry at his captain and, shooting at him, killed another youth named Reuben Bishop, of Connecticut. McCormack was court-martialed and sent to General Washington for execution.

They sailed on. The bateaux leaked and casks of wet peas and bread exploded. The salted fish and beef began to rot. At Skowhegan the Kennebec roared between two ledges only twenty-five feet apart, and the men had to drag the four-hundred-pound bateaux up an almost perpendicular shore around a cascade almost a hundred feet high. "Could we have come within reach of the villains who constructed these

crazy things," wrote George Morison, a young rifleman, "they would fully have experienced the effects of our vengeance."

On October 8, the rains started. Dysentery swept the camp. Captain Henry Dearborn killed and ate his dog. A flash flood destroyed the remaining supplies. Only five hundred exhausted men reached the Chaudière and sailed on to Quebec City.

General Richard Montgomery, who had captured an undefended Montreal, joined them in early December. Most of the enlistments would be up on January 1, so they attacked on December 31 in a blinding snowstorm. Montgomery was killed, Arnold wounded, forty men lost, and three hundred eighty-nine captured.

Arnold and the tattered remnant stayed near Quebec for several months in the vain hope of aid from the US or the local inhabitants. But, as Carroll's report indicated, the Americans were not welcome in Quebec. When the British sailed up the St. Lawrence after the first spring thaw, Arnold retreated.

He later would win victories on Lake Champlain and at Danbury, Connecticut, Fort Stanwix and Saratoga, but his great chance was past. He grew cynical and frustrated. He was appointed Commandant of West Point, and one day in September 1780, he decided to seek a new career and had a heart-to-heart talk with a British major named John André. His fame would endure, his name a synonym for traitor.

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