

Lesson Twenty-One

Less Than The Best

LESSON IDEA

To examine the weak characters and treasonable acts of Benedict Arnold and Charles Lee, and contrast them with such authentic heroes as Daniel Morgan, Nathanael Greene, and Francis Marion.

PREPARATION

Read the discussion portions of today's lesson and review the stories from previous lessons about Greene, Morgan, and Marion. The "hero chart" suggested last week could also be used to illustrate the specific character traits lacking in Arnold and Lee.

AMERICA'S FIRST AND most notorious traitor, Benedict Arnold, actually entered the Revolutionary War as a fire-breathing patriot. In 1775, Arnold was a druggist, bookseller, and militia leader in New Haven, Connecticut — a man noted for his hatred of British Redcoats.

After the battles of Lexington and Concord, the citizens of New Haven voted against sending men and arms to the Continental Army at Boston. Benedict Arnold was furious, and almost went to war with his own town. He demanded powder and ball from the town depot. When his demand was refused, he sent a fiery "either-or" message to the town fathers — *either* they deliver the keys to the powder house *or* he would order his men to break open the door and help themselves. That was the style of this egotistical, hot-tempered, and domineering man. The town fathers reluctantly surrendered the keys, and the fuming captain led fifty Connecticut patriots, smartly uniformed in scarlet, white, and black, on a march to Boston.

When he arrived, Arnold immediately proposed sending troops to capture British cannon, guns, mortar, and stores at Fort Ticonderoga, a poorly guarded, out-of-the-way enemy fort at the

southern end of Lake Champlain in New York. He asked and received permission from the Massachusetts Committee of Safety to recruit four hundred men for the venture — and was, at the same time, appointed a colonel in the Continental Army.

BUT, UNKNOWN to the men at Boston, the Connecticut Committee of Safety had already directed Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys of New Hampshire to capture Fort Ticonderoga. Arnold, hearing of the plan and fearing Ethan Allen might outrace him to glory, did not wait for the men he had recruited to join him, but galloped north with a single servant on the trail of the Green Mountain Boys. When he

caught up with the mountaineers, he boldly demanded to be placed in command, arguing that Allen did not have proper orders. The brawny, high-spirited mountain men laughed at the cocky stranger; and Allen, a powerful man who could have decked the feisty Arnold with a single blow, was amused but unmoved by the bullish tactics of the Connecticut colonel.

"What shall I do with the rascal?" Allen asked his men. "Put him under guard?"

"Better go side by side," one of them advised.

Finally, Allen agreed to let Arnold march at the head of the column — provided he gave no commands. Catching the British by surprise, Allen, Arnold, and the Green Mountain Boys captured Fort Ticonderoga without a fight and the next day marched farther north and seized the British post at Crown Point. A few days later, Arnold, this time supported by his own men who had finally caught up with him, captured the post at St. John's on the Richelieu River.

Although the victories sparked American



Benedict Arnold

