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Three patriots—John Paulding, David Williams and Isaac Van Wart—searched a man they thought was a bit suspicious. He wasn't wearing a British uniform—a big mistake since a spy out of uniform faced dire consequences if captured—when the three patriots found damaging information inside of the man's boot.

The man was John Andre, an important British intelligence officer, who had obtained key information from an American traitor (who also convinced the Brit to travel out-of-uniform). Had Andre not followed the what-to-wear advice of Benedict Arnold (the American turncoat), he may have been treated differently. This Currier & Ives lithograph, published circa 1876, is titled: "The capture of Andre: By John Paulding, David Williams and Isaac Van Wart, at Tarrytown, N.Y., Sept. 23rd, 1780." [Online via the Library of Congress](#). Click on the image for a full-page view.

Benedict Arnold insisted on a personal meeting with John Andre. Knowing such a meeting would require him to go behind enemy lines, Andre initially resisted but finally gave in. He would wear his uniform, however. To dress in disguise, or use a false name, would automatically render him a spy, if he were caught.

The meeting with Arnold (on September 21, 1780) took longer than expected, but Andre left with priceless documents. Benedict Arnold gave him key data about West Point, including troop placement. Because his ship (the *Vulture*) had moved up river, Andre was stranded. He would have to return by land, inside American lines.

Against his better judgment, Andre removed his uniform, wore a disguise and used passes (prepared by Arnold) in the name of John Anderson. Joshua Smith, a loyalist and associate of Arnold, traveled with him. Believing he was safe, once the two men reached neutral territory on September 23rd, Andre continued alone.

By 9 a.m. that morning, he was apprehended by suspicious militiamen. Searching Andre, the men (John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart, and David Williams) found the West Point documents. It was the beginning of the end for John Andre.

When the local commander, Lt. Col. Jameson, learned a Brit possessed confidential West Point information, he immediately reported it to his commanding officer: Benedict Arnold! By the time events were reported to General Washington, Arnold had escaped. He boarded the *Vulture* and was taken to British lines. Andre was not so fortunate.

Washington ordered a Board of Inquiry to investigate the facts. The generals on the Board concluded John Andre, Adjunct General to the British Army, was a spy because he had disguised his clothes behind enemy lines and traveled with a false name. The Americans didn't want Andre, though. They wanted Benedict Arnold. The British command thought Washington would follow the unwritten rule of war: Captured generals would not be executed. They knew, however, what would happen if they returned Benedict Arnold. The British refused to deal.

The generals on the Board of Inquiry recommended that John Andre be executed. General Washington agreed. Concerned about his chief of intelligence, General Clinton wrote to Washington, expressing concern about Andre's situation. Washington responded, politely telling Clinton the decision would stand. Washington then ordered Andre's execution, to be "carried out this afternoon at five o'clock precisely."

John Andre was hanged. No one wanted that to happen. Both sides respected his gallantry. The person whom the Americans wanted to hang, Benedict Arnold, first escaped and then wore a British uniform. After the war, he went to England where (but for a brief stay in Canada) he lived the rest of his life.

Perhaps the Americans executed Andre (scroll down 50%) in retaliation for the death of Nathan Hale, the 21-year old hero who was caught by the British and hanged as a spy in New York (in 1776). Hale, who at his death allegedly said, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country," slipped from life into national legend. Benedict Arnold, on the other hand, fell from honor into perpetual national disgrace.

It would not have been like Washington to retaliate, however. John Andre's execution was meant to set an example. Meanwhile, in South Carolina, another patriot was setting an example that was frustrating the British to distraction.

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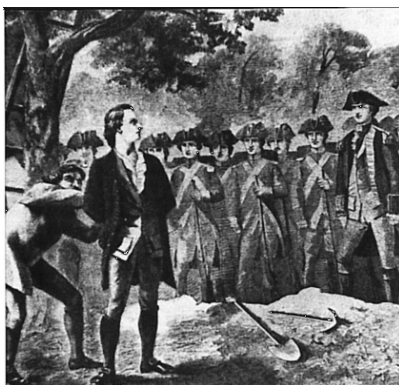


Benedict Arnold

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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Nathan Hale - Captured by the British

Image online, courtesy Central Intelligence Agency website.

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Nathan Hale - Hanged by the British

Image online, courtesy [U.S. History Images](#) website.

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