

John André

You are Major John André, deputy adjutant general to Sir Henry Clinton, commander-in-chief of British military forces in North America. In this role, you assist Sir Henry with the administration, maintenance, and supply of those forces, as well as with the planning of operations and the acquisition of intelligence.



You were born in London on 2 May 1750, to Antoine André, a merchant from Geneva, and his wife, Marie Louise André (née Girardot). After attending two boarding schools in England, you spent several years in Geneva, putting a finishing touch upon your formal education, perfecting your knowledge of Continental languages, and exploring the possibility of a commercial career.

In January 1771, at the relatively advanced age of 21, you obtained, by purchase, a commission in the 23rd Regiment of Foot (Royal Welch Fusiliers.) Later that year, after serving for eight months as an ensign, an inheritance allowed you to purchase a lieutenancy in the 7th Regiment of Foot (Royal Fusiliers.)*

*In the Royal Welch Fusiliers, an ensign was called a “second lieutenant.” Nonetheless, his duties were identical to those of ensigns in other infantry regiments.

As both of 7th and 23rd Regiments of Foot were styled as “fusiliers,” you were able to transfer from one unit to the other without spending too much money on new uniforms and equipment, or too much time on learning a new drill manual. (At a time when subaltern officers of most infantry regiments carried pole arms known as “spontoons,” their counterparts in fusilier regiments were obliged to obtain, at their own expense, cut-down muskets known as “fusils.”)

In 1774, you accompanied your regiment to Quebec, the newest of the eighteen provinces of British North America. In the autumn of 1775, you participated in operations against the Rebel forces that had invaded Quebec and, in particular, the defense of Fort St. Jean, on the Richelieu River, between the city of Montreal and the northern shore of Lake Champlain.

When, on 3 November 1775, the British garrison of Fort St. Jean surrendered, you passed into Rebel captivity. After relieving you of your valuables, the Rebels sent you to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where you lived, on parole, as a lodger in a private home, awaiting news of the prisoner exchange that would allow you to return to your regiment.

A few weeks after your release, you transferred to another infantry unit serving in North America, the 26th Regiment of Foot, to take up a vacant captaincy. It was with that regiment that you took part in the operations that, in September of 1777, culminated in the capture of the city of Philadelphia, which had served as the Rebel capital for the first two years of the war. During the occupation of that city, you became *aide de camp* of Major General Charles Grey and, as such, temporary occupant of a house owned by the most famous of all Rebel leaders, Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

In June of 1778, when British forces evacuated Philadelphia, you moved to the city of New York, where you became *aide de camp* to Sir Henry Clinton. Soon thereafter, Clinton made you his deputy adjutant general, a position that brought with it a free promotion to the rank of major. Thus, in the course of a little more than eight years, you went from being one of the oldest ensigns in the British Army to one of its youngest majors.