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Abductions in the American Revolution: Attempts to Kidnap George Washington, Benedict Arnold and Other Military and Civilian Leaders

Christian McBurney

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The tactic of kidnapping enemy leaders, used in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, dates to the American Revolution. George Washington called such efforts "honorable" and supported attempts to kidnap the British commander-in-chief (twice), Benedict Arnold (after he turned traitor) and Prince William Henry (a future king of Great Britain). Washington in turn was targeted at his Morristown winter headquarters by British dragoons who crossed the frozen Hudson River. New Jersey Governor William Livingston performed a patriotic service by going to considerable lengths to avoid being abducted by the Loyalist raider James Moody. Sometimes these operations succeeded, as with the spectacular captures of Major General Charles Lee, Major General Richard Prescott, Brigadier General Gold Selleck Silliman, and North Carolina's governor Thomas Burke. Sometimes they barely failed, as with the violent attempt by British secret service operatives against Major General Philip Schuyler and the mission by British dragoons against Thomas Jefferson. Some of the abducted, such as signer of the Declaration of Independence Richard Stockton and Delaware's governor John McKinly, suffered damage to their reputations. The kidnapper risked all--if caught, he could be hanged. This book covers more than thirty major attempted and successful abductions of military and civilian leaders from 1775 to 1783, from Maine to Georgia, and including two in Great Britain.

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