



General Washington wanted to capture Benedict Arnold. To help him achieve that goal, he talked with one of his trusted officers, Henry Lee, who headed the Light Dragoons (one of the Continental Army's most prestigious units).

Lee immediately thought that his Sergeant Major, John Champe, could be trusted with the job of faking his own desertion, getting close to Arnold and then springing a trap to capture him. Once captured, Arnold could be tried and hanged for treason.

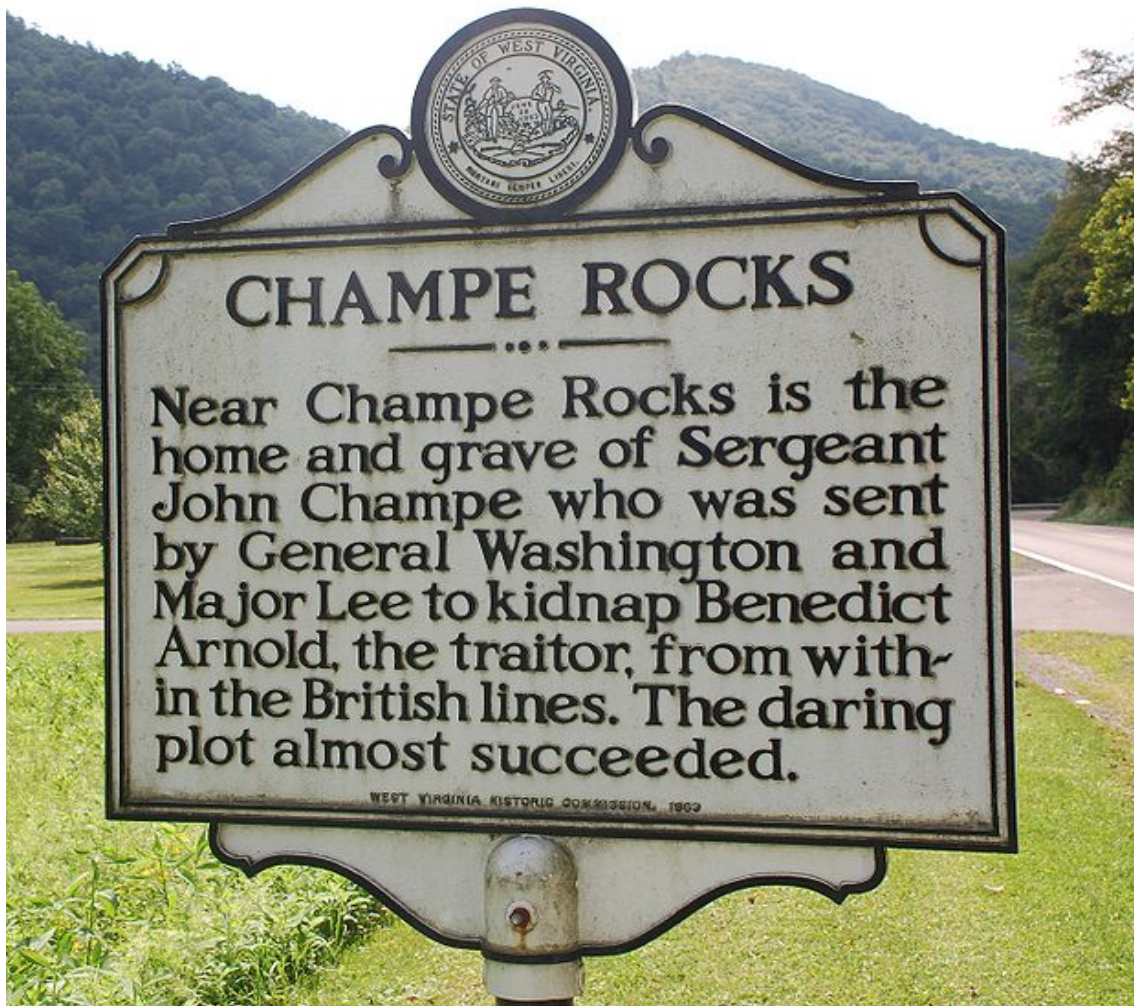
Champe initially turned down the request until General Lee convinced him that it was a great honor to be selected for such an important task. Convinced that he should take on the responsibility, Sgt Champe packed his clothes and fled.

Unfortunately, he was spotted by an American patrol who chased him. They came so close to capturing Champe that he could only escape by jumping into the Hudson River - without his horse. British troops on the New York shore spotted him and fired at his pursuers. Champe claimed to switch sides, was paid a bounty and became a Patriot deserter.

Soon after, on a New York street, Champe met the man he needed to capture. Arnold "convinced" Champe to work for him (as the top sergeant in a unit the turn-coat general was forming). Now close to his target, Champe formulated a plan to deliver Arnold back to the Americans.

Then, after everything was in place, Champe's new unit was sent to Virginia. His plot unraveled, with Champe on his way to fight against his own side. Fleeing the British, once his transport ship arrived in Virginia, Champe became a deserter from both sides - and only Washington and Lee knew the truth.

Because it was too dangerous for him to go back to his old unit, Champe was discharged from the Continental Army. Despite Washington's efforts to trap Arnold, the former American general remained with the British for the duration of the war.



Click on the top image to expand its view.

Credits:

The escape of Sergeant Champe. In the endeavor to carry out Washington's plan to capture Arnold and to save ... Andre, 1780. Lithograph by Currier & Ives, 1876.

Image, Library of Congress.

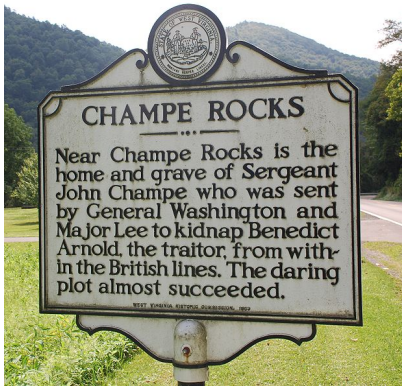
Champe Rocks image: Historical Marker on route 55 - Champe Rocks - is near the place of John Champe's last residence in what is now Pendleton County, West Virginia. The reference to his grave, however, is incorrect. He died, in poverty, on 30 September 1798 while staying at Prickett's Fort (near what today is known as Fairmont, West Virginia). Image by Jarek Tuszynski; online via Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/How-to-Fake-a-Desertion-and-not-Get-Caught-John-Champe>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/How-to-Fake-a-Desertion-and-not-Get-Caught-John-Champe>



John Champe Marker

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>



How to Fake a Desertion and not Get Caught - John Champe

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>