

The following is a transcript of John Milligan's Pension Document. It is a lot more legible than the writing style of the day in 1835 when the document was created. They used elongated s's for the letter "F" and so on.

The Document reads:

John Milligan served one year seven months.

I the undersigned John Milligan, on pursuance of the requisitions of the Secretary of War, give the following statement of my service as a soldier in the War of the Revolution and statement of my age, to whit-I shall be 84 years old in August next and a native of Ireland. I came to the United States in my 20th year of age. I landed at New Castle. Lived in Pennsylvania about 2 years then went to County of "Berkeley" Virginia and lived there during the War of the Revolution and until within the last forty years when I moved to this county.

In August 1775, just after the Battle of Bunker Hill, I enlisted in Berkeley County under Capt. Stephenson for one year. Stephenson enlisted a company of riflemen (about 90 in number) in that county. Herish and Scott were Lieutenants of the company and Abraham Shepard was a surgeon. I was enlisted by Lt. Scott.

We rendezvoused at Shepherdstown and we marched from there to Cambridge. We were there for 5 days when our company with three other rifle companies, to whit, Capt. Morgan's from Winchester, Capt. Cresup from Old Town, Va. and Capt. Price's from Frederichstown, Virginia, were ordered to Roxbury on the Boston Neck, and from that place to Staten Island. At the latter place we remained for the last 3 months of my time having then and there expired. We were discharged. I had a written discharge from Capt. Stephenson which has been lost many years ago.

Shortly after my return to Shepherdstown a Wm Charlter and myself went to Long Island, returning to establish ourselves there as sutlers* to the army. A few days after our arrivals, Gen. Sullivan and Lord Sterling with their brigades were taken prisoners**. The balance of the American army under Gen. Washington made safe their retreat to New York***. Myself and Charlter went to Paulus Hook. I was there in the fall of the year. I enlisted under Capt. Smyzer for five months in Col. Swoops: The Pennsylvania

Flying Camp. Our company was marched to Fort Lee, New Jersey and attached to Col. Swoop's Regiment. A part of our company under Capt. Smyzer was sent on to the relief of Fort Washington. Whilst there the whole place, with some of us escaping was taken prisoners. When the attack was made on the fort, I was on guard up river and in that way escaped from the British. After the capture of Fort Washington, Fort Lee was abandoned by the Americans. After my captain was taken prisoner, I was attached to Capt. Swoop's Company under Gen. Ewing; we retreated across Jersey to Trenton. We crossed the Delaware River and encamped in the woods opposite Trenton. This was in cold weather and we had neither tents nor blankets. On Christmas night we were ordered to cross the Delaware over the ice to co-operate with Gen. Washington's Army to try to capture the Hessian Army at Trenton. This enterprise proved highly successful. The Whole Hessian Army was taken prisoners.

I was discharged at Trenton on New Years Day. My enlistment of five months having expired. I got no written discharge because my original Captain Smyzer was then a prisoner of war.

In the fall of 1781, I enlisted in Berkeley County for two months to guard Cornwallis' prisoners then at Winchester, Virginia. I served at that place for 2 months under a Captain Evans and this ended my terms. Mr. Jackson wrote my Declarations when I gave them same account under oath now given. Mr. Jackson charged me 7 dollars in the writing of this abstract; I here with inscribe my name - July 1, 1835.

John Milligan

A copy W_____
July 5, 1835

* Note 1: A "sutler" in those days was like a traveling PX for the soldiers. John Milligan was a shoe cobbler by trade and his first duty anyway was to mend and repair the shoes the soldiers wore. There is a wonderful story of his finding a set of German Cobbler's Tools just after the Battle of Trenton. His own tools being lost at the abandonment of Fort Lee, allowed him to take possession of the German Tool Kit he discovered at Trenton. The "spoils of war" is more to the point.

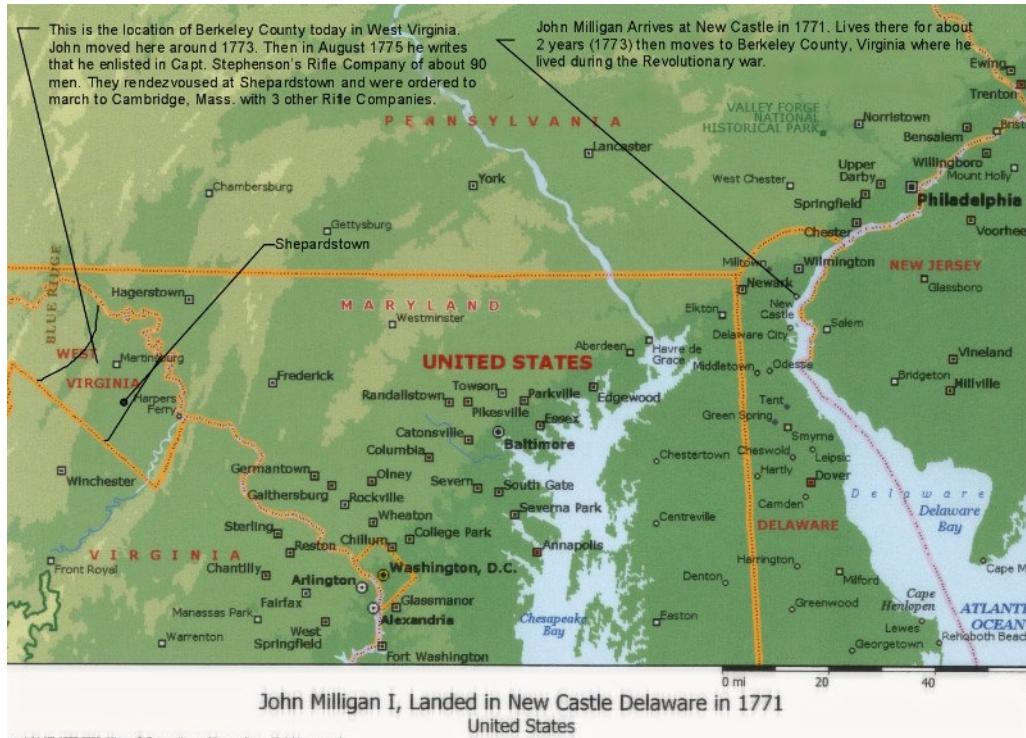
** Note 2: General John Sullivan and Lord Sterling (William Alexander) were both taken prisoner on Long Island in the Battle of Long Island on August 26, 1776.

***Note 3: General Washington's Army retreated to New York from Long Island on August 29, 1776. "American Heritage Book of the Revolution" by the editors of American Heritage Magazine.

Now we'll look at this document or rather what it says in a bit more detail. I have taken the liberty to create a few maps of John's landing at New Castle, moving to Berkeley County and his entrance into the military along with the engagements that John himself mentions as part of his war time experiences. In a few short sentences he managed to tell us and the Sec. of War a full 1 year and 7 months of conflicts that he took part in. Actually there was allot more than his just being at The Battle of Trenton as many of us Milligan's recall in his history today.

Note 4:

Notice, on the maps, how close he lived to the original Mason-Dixon Line of Southern Pennsylvania. He said that he lived in Penn. for about 2 years after he landed. Then at some point later, New Castle became a part of Delaware. This was due to the change of state boundaries between Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia and was when the Eastern lower foot of Pennsylvania became Delaware. Many will need to know this when searching various State Archives for documents into John's past. You just have to know where and which state to look in for documents. Dates will be important to you.

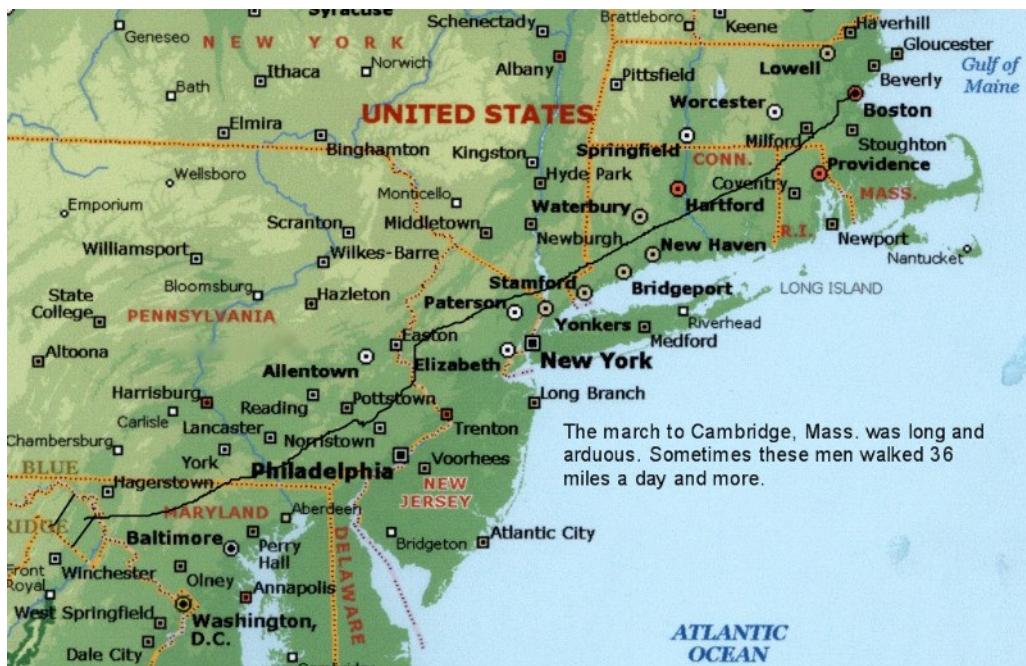


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Once again, in a single paragraph, John not only covered his companies march to Cambridge but in one sentence, blazed the Battle of Boston and then the march back to Staten Island and the Battle of New York. Let's take a closer look at these engagements.

Historical documentation chronicles Capt. Stephenson's movement from Berkeley County, Virginia and gives us a bit of color into his company and his men (including John Milligan) by describing their "target Practice" on a piece of wood. We also find that John Milligan, in his document, mentions the other rifle companies his company rendezvoused with in Shepherdstown.



Frontier Hunting Shirt

Washington's goal of trying to improve the discipline of his army was made more difficult by the arrivals of the frontier riflemen that Congress had recruited on the recommendation of Gen. Charles Lee. He mentioned the potential positive qualities of these men. He told Congress that, "their amazing hardiness, their methods of living for extended periods of time in the woods without carrying provisions and the quickness that they can march for great distances." "Above all," he said, "is the accuracy that each man possessed in the use of the rifle gun." "There is not one of these men who wish a shooting distance less than 200 yards or a target any larger than that of an orange." "Every shot is fatal!"

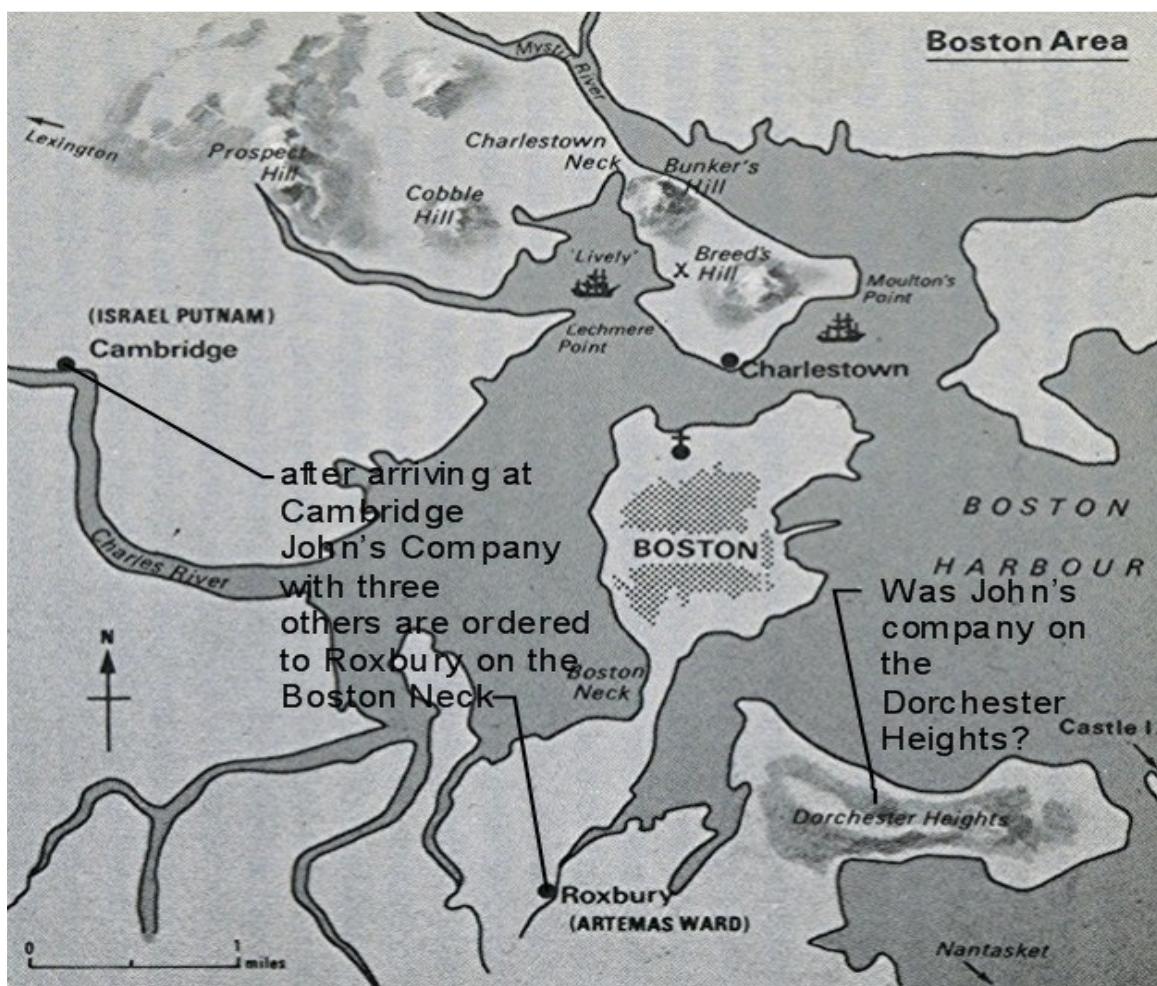
Stephenson's men from the area of Berkeley County, Virginia marched thirty to thirty-six miles a day and even then couldn't keep up with Daniel Morgan's men whom they were supposed to accompany. Even after Gen. Lee's "embellishment" to Congress of their shooting skill, as it turns out, they all were fine marksmen. Upon their arrival to Cambridge one of the men discovered a board hanging on a tree and drew a nose on it out of chalk. The board was shot full of holes by the first forty making the test. By the time the rest of the company shot, the board itself was blown off of the tree.

These men were backwoodsmen and somewhat rowdy but they were all fine physical specimens and every one wore a “Hunter’s Shirt” which Washington himself persuaded General Forbs to adopt back in 1758. As soon as these “Shirtmen” were established in their camps, they began to slip off and make their way to the British outposts. Some of the men went alone and some made their way in pairs. Whenever they spotted a Redcoat, they would take aim and fire; mostly at the furthest range of their rifles resulting in a waste of good powder that had no increase of British casualties. The seemingly endless shooting was the main reason for Washington’s order of August 4th 1775 against “Futile Firing”.



Daniel Morgan

The Siege of Boston:



From Lechmere Point, Washington looked over the bay surrounding Boston. He saw that the water was frozen this February, all of the way across the channel. He realized this as a new way to reach Boston. So he conceived the idea of making an attack over the ice and put the idea to his generals. They all disagreed with him and asked him not to proceed.

Then he suggested the occupation of Noodle's Island in the North of the bay or of the Dorchester Heights peninsula in the south. The Idea was to lure the British out into a fight and he wanted to instigate the situation enough to make them move. His other generals approved the occupation of the Dorchester Heights idea mostly because of its approach by land for their troops but also there were already troops (just as John Milligan tells us in his document) located on the Boston Neck at Roxbury. Artemus Ward was in command of this area and he dispatched orders to have Dorchester Heights occupied. The troop movements from Roxbury happened throughout the night. When they got on the Heights they discovered the ground had thawed out enough to be able to dig trenches. In the morning when the British became conscious of the new American redoubts on the hills were so close to their positions, they fired off some of their cannon at the Americans to no avail. They couldn't elevate the cannon enough to blast the Americans out and most of their cannon rounds fell harmlessly below the crest of the hills. Washington's plan worked. The British not only started firing their cannon at the new American defenses but after a war council, General Howe decided to try to storm the Americans from their new positions. He ordered one of his forces to go by water on the night tide to Castle Island to assault the eastern tip of the Heights. Then he sent another group of men to cross the bay in flatboats to attack the north face. Before the Brits could get the plan underway, a fierce storm came up and by nightfall, it became evident that the boats wouldn't be able to land troops on Castle Island because of high seas. Also any flat bottomed boats headed toward the Dorchester Heights would be swamped. When there were no signs that the storm was going to let up, Howe called off the plan.

Nothing much happened until the 10th of March 1776. There was movement on days previous to the 10th that let Washington know that Howe was planning something but he didn't know what. Then on the 17th of March when the winds were favorable for the Brits to sail, the wharves became thronged with redcoats. First seen entering their boats then making for the vessels that lay at anchor nearby, these ships spread their canvass and made way to Nantasket. Then on the night of 19-20 of March, the British were heard demolishing their defenses on Castle Island and blew up the buildings that couldn't be burned.

Several more uneventful days went by. Then on the morning of the 27th at 11 o'clock, the flagship Fowey hoisted signal and by 3 o'clock the whole fleet weighed anchor, set sail and made out to sea.

The ships with 1,000 Tories aboard set sail for Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Washington was convinced that they were going towards the Hudson. He was so convinced that he sent his army marching in that direction. This proved to be a wise move on Washington's part as it wouldn't be long until the British would sail down to lay siege to New York. John Milligan said as well that after spending 9 months on the Boston Neck that they marched to Staten Island where he spent the last three months of his first enlistment. Now we can see why he was awarded his pension. He knew the history of this portion of the War intimately. He was there.