

Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements

Pension Application of Philemon Holcombe: S4399

Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris

State of Tennessee }
Fayette County To wit }

On this 14th day of April in the year of our Lord, one thousand, eight hundred and thirty four, personally appeared in open Court, before the Justices of the court of pleas and Quarter sessions of said County and state (now sitting) Philemon Holcombe, a resident of said county and state, aged seventy two years on the 21st day of December next, who being first duly sworn according to law doth on his oath make the following declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the act of congress passed June 7th 1833.

That he entered the service of the United States in the County of Prince Edward, state of Virginia, on the first day of June in the year seventeen hundred and eighty (in his Eighteenth year of age) He joined as a private and volunteer, a company of cavalry commanded by Captain Richard Randorlph [sic: Richard Randolph], in which Company David Randorlph [sic] was Lieutenant. Some time thereafter in the same year, time not recollected, this company marched to the town of Petersburg, Virginia, and was there attached to the Brigade of Virginia Militia commanded by Gen'l. Robert Lawson. He continued in the service until the first day of December one thousand seven hundred and eighty, when the militia and volunteers were discharged without having been engaged in any battle with the Enemy. He further states that on the third monday in February (Prince Edward County Court day Virginia) in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty one - That he with Thomas Watkins, Abraham Venable, and other patriots raised on that day a volunteer Troop of Cavalry. The Officers were chosen by the members of the Troop. Thomas Watkins was elected Captain, Philemon Holcombe Lieutenant and Samuel Venable Cornet. There was an arsenal at Prince Edward Court house where the troops was equipped, and marched the day following to the County of Mecklenburg, Virginia and near Taylor's ferry on the Roanoke river in said County. the said troop was attached to Gen'l. Robert Lawson's Brigade of Virginia Militia and marched with said Brigade to the state of North Carolina and near the High rock ford, on Haw river, joined the American army, under the command of Gen'l. Nathaniel [sic: Nathanael] Green, and was then attached to a regiment of Cavalry commanded by Colo. William Washington, under whom we were engaged in marching from one point to another, on the British lines. At different time before and after the action of Guilford, this deponent had command of cavalry forces to reconnoitre and scour the country and was in several skirmishes with the Tories of North Carolina and in one of the expeditions, two days before the action of Guilford, when watching the British Army, commanded by Earl Cornwallis, they approached so near to Tarltons Regiment of Cavalry [sic: Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton's Legion], which was concealed by the woods, that in retreating Samuel Venable, the Cornet, and some of the privates were made prisoners. And on the 15th day of March, one thousand, seven hundred and Eighty one was fought the memorable Battle of Guilford Court house, North Carolina. The American army was drawn up in three lines. The front line was composed of the [North] Carolina Militia commanded by Generals [John] Butler and [Thomas] Eaton. The second line of Virginia and Maryland Militia, commanded by Generals Stephens [sic: Edward Stevens] and Lawson - the third Line of continental Troops, commanded by General [Isaac] Huger and Colonel [Otho Holland] Williams. Colo. Lee's legion of Cavalry was stationed on the right, and Colo. Washington's on the left flank of the army [see note below]. The engagement was brought on by Colo. Lee. Colo Washington's command was in view of the conflicting armies and were spectators of the bloody scene for several hours. The Carolina Militia had given way, and the second and third lines of the american army were hard pressed, and the British columns were passing to the rear of the american line, flushed with victory, marching rapidly and in some confusion. At this important crisis, the brave and gallant William Washington ordered a charge upon their columns, and cut his passage through them. This bold and daring stroke secured the safe retreat of the Virginia and Maryland and continental lines. After this Colo. Washington moved against a large body of Tories, two hundred in numbers, who were formed near the Court

house. They were well armed. On the approach of the Cavalry, they fired their guns, and took shelter in the Court house, and under it, for it was not underpinned. The British army moved from Guilford Court house, and were pursued by General Greene, as far as Ramsey's Mills on Deep river [4 Apr]. This deponent was in all these scenes and discharged his duty as Lieutenant. He thinks there is not now living a single private of the Prince Edward Troop. The celebrated Peter Francisco, who was Sergeant at Arms to the Virginia House of Delegates, was the last of them, who died about three years ago [16 Jan 1831; see Francisco's pension application W11021]. The officers died many years since. The deponent further states that so soon as the troops was disbanded, he received from General Robert Lawson, the appointment of Major, the first of April, one thousand seven hundred, and Eighty one, and was afterwards commissioned by the Governor and Council of Virginia. He was placed in the second regiment of Virginia Militia, commanded by Colo. St. George Tucker. This deponent was selected by General Lawson some time in April or May 1781 to take charge of a detachment of Virginia Militia, two hundred in number, that had been collected at Brunswick Court house Virginia. He performed this service and marched them to the Point of Fork on James river [at the fork with Rivanna River], and there joined the army commanded by Baron Steuben. At this place there was an engagement between the British and American forces [5-6 June 1781], across James River; on the night of the day of the engagement the Baron had fires built up, in view of the British Army, and immediately thereafter retreated; and by daylight the next morning was many miles distant. He marched on to Charlotte Court house Virginia, and there remained until reinforced by Gen'l. Lawson's Brigade, and other forces. From this point the Army marched to Richmond Virginia, and from thence to the Malvin Hills [sic: Malvern Hill], about fifteen miles below Richmond, and there joined the Army under General LaFayette. From this point the Army marched to Williamsburg, where General George Washington the Commander in Chief of the American forces, arrived with the main Army, about the 14th of September 1781. In a few days thereafter the American army was marched to Yorktown, where the siege of that place was continued by the French and American forces united until the surrender of Lord Cornwallis, which took place on the 19th day of October 1781. This deponent continued in service for a short period after the day to the 1st of December 1781. He states that he served six months as a volunteer private in the Cavalry services, one month and a half as a Lieutenant of Cavalry, and eight months as a Major of Virginia Militia. And for this service, he asks of his country a pension. That he had no written discharge from the Army, and that there are no written documents by which he can prove the facts above stated except his service as a Major. This he hopes to establish by creditable witnesses who were soldiers that served their Country with him. His commission as Major, has long since been lost or mislaid. He further states that he hereby relinquishes every claim whatever to a pension or annuity except the present, and declares that his name is not on the pension roll of the Agency of any state. [signed] Phil Holcombe

And the said Court propounded the following questions to the said Philemon Holcombe.
Question 1st. Where and when were you born?

Answer. I was born on the 21st. day of December 1762, in Prince Edward County state of Virginia.

Question 2^d. Have you any record of your age, and if so, where is it?

Answer. My age is recorded in a large family bible now in the possession of Doctor William H Robertson (my son in law) Amelia County, Virginia.

Question 3d. Where were you living when called into service; where have you lived since the Revolutionary War, and where do you now live?

Answer. I was living in Prince Edward County State of Virginia, and continued in said County until I was thirty eight years of age. I then removed to the county of Amelia, State of Virginia, and resided there until May 1829, when I removed to Fayette County State of Tennessee, where I resided ever since, and am now living.

Question 4th. How were you called into service: were you drafted, did you volunteer, or were you a substitute?

Answer. The whole of my service was voluntary, and rendered from no other motive than a conviction of duty.

Question 5th. State the names of some of the Regular Officers who were with the troops where

you served - such continental and militia regiments as you can recollect, and the general circumstances of your service.

Answer. I have already named General Nathaniel Greene commander of the southern Army, General Huger, and Colo. Williams who commanded the continental Troops at the battle of Guilford, Colo. Henry Lee, and William Washington who commanded the two regiments of Cavalry. I recollect also Colo. [Charles] Lynch who commanded a regiment of Volunteer Riflemen [often called the Botetourt Riflemen], Capt. Trigg, Captain Jones, Capt. Helms and Captain [Robert] Kirkwood from the state of Delaware, and Capt. Hoffman from the Virginia Line, who commanded a company of Regular Officers of the Militia, Generals Eaton & Butler, North Carolina, Stephens and Lawson Virginia & having been attached to Lawson's Brigade, before and after the action of Guilford I knew most of the Officers, and those that I recollect I will name: My brother John Holcombe commanded the first regiment; St. George Tucker the 2^d. Beverly Randolph the 3^d. and Henry Skipwith the 4th. I knew Majors Thomas Watkins, Samuel Duval, Wood Jones, John Overstreet, and Asa Purnell. There were the Baron Steuben, Marquis de LaFayette, and George Washington the Commander in Chief, under all of whom I served for some period during the year 1781. I entered the Army before stated, very young, a private. My conduct and course gained me the confidence and approbation of Gen'l. Robert Lawson, Colo. Beverly Randolph of Cumberland, who was twice Governor of Virginia, and St. George Tucker who was after the War one of the Judges of the Court of Appeals in Virginia. I was promoted by my own efforts, aided by the influence of those distinguished patriots. I was intimate with all the field Officers of this Brigade, and I believe I am the only survivor. My services were rendered during the years 1780-81, mostly in Virginia, when the sufferings of the Army were very great. We were often in want of food, and had very poor pay; but the men of those days knew what hardships were, & encountered them with an ardor and zeal, worthy the glorious cause in which they had embarked.

Question 6th. Did you receive a discharge from the service when you acted as a private, and did you ever receive a Commission; and if so by whom was it signed, and what has become of it?

Answer. I do not recollect whether I received a written discharge, when disbanded at Petersburg from Capt. Randolph's Cavalry. If I did it is long since lost or mislaid. I received no Commission as Lieutenant of Cavalry, for the Company was raised on the Spur of the occasion, for the express purpose of aiding the Southern Army, commanded by Gen'l. Greene, who had been manoeuvring, marching and counter marching for more than a month, to avoid a general engagement with Lord Cornwallis. I received from Gen'l. Lawson the appointment of Major, and was commissioned by the Governor and Council of Virginia. I think my Commission was signed by Thomas Jefferson. Of this however I am not certain for Virginia was invaded in this year by Arnold and the civil authorities of the state were thrown into great confusion, and the civil Officers of the State government had to retreat before Tarlton's Cavalry [4 June 1781]. My Commission is lost or mislaid. Personally appeared in open court, Philemon Holcombe, who has subscribed the declaration above, who being duly sworn deposed and saith, that his discharge as a private if he ever had one, is long since lost, as also his Commission as Major. [signed] Phil Holcombe

The affidavit of James Warwick of the Town of Lynchburg county of Campbell, state of Virginia. This affiant is Sixty nine years old the 19th day of February 1833. He was called into the service of his country in the year 1781, in the month of March in the character of a private, and in the month of April, in the County of Prince Edward, he was attached to the Brigade of Virginia Militia commanded by General Robert Lawson. He was placed in the 1st Regm't commanded by Col. John Holcombe. the 2^d Regiment was commanded by Col. St George Tucker. The 3^d Regiment was commanded by Col. Beverly Randolph and the 4th Regiment by Col. Henry Skipwith. Thus situated in the month of April or May he became acquainted with Col Philemon Holcombe, now a resident of the State of Tennessee, Fayette county, who was then a Major of the 2nd Regiment commanded by Col. St George Tucker. This part of the Army was placed under

the command of Baron Steuben and was marching and countermarching for three months from James River to Charlotte Court-House in the State of Virginia. During this time till the 13th of July, the time of my discharge I knew Philemon Holcombe as a Major who continued as this affiant believes to act in the capacity of Major till after the Siege of York, and till the Virginia Militia were disbanded. This affiant regards it as a duty which he owes his country and Col Philemon Holcombe now an applicant for a pension, to state that as an officer of The Revolution, no one stood higher, both with the Officers and Soldiers of the Army. This affiant may say with truth that while he was a rigid disciplinarian, he was the sincere friend of the Soldier, and no officer was more popular, more respected and more beloved by the private Soldiers than Major Philemon Holcombe, and his standing as a patriot and a citizen of unimpeachable character has continued undiminished even down to this day.

Given under my hand this 9th day of November in the year of our Lord 1832
[signed] James Warwick

The affidavit of Daniel B. Perrow taken in the Town of Lynchburg Virginia on the 12th day of June 1834 to be used in the application of Major Philemon Holcombe of Tennessee (formerly of Virginia) to obtain a pension for revolutionary services.

The affiant being first duly sworn, deposeth and sayeth, that he was a soldier in the American revolution - that he served a tour of six weeks in the year 1781 in the months of June and July, in the Brigade of Virginia militia commanded by Gen'l. Robert Lawson. He was attached to the 1st regiment commanded by Colo. John Holcombe - and during his service he became acquainted with Philemon Holcombe who was a Major in the [blank] regiment (the number not now remembered) commanded by Colo. St. George Tucker. [signed] Daniel B Perrow

The affidavit of William Turner of the county of Amherst State of Virginia taken at the residence of said Turner in consequence of his indisposition on the 24th day of May one thousand eight hundred & thirty four.

This affiant being duely sworn, deposeth and saith: He is seventy four years of age on the 30th day of September next, he entered the Army of the Revolution in the year one thousand seven hundred & eighty, that he was a private and afterwards a sarjeant in a company of Virginia Militia, commanded by Young [or Younger] Landrum of the county of Amherst. This company was attached to the Brigade of V. M. commanded by General Robert Lawson, sometime in the year 1781. In the spring of that year, he became acquainted with Philemon Holcombe, who held the office of Maj in the 2nd Regiment of Virginia Militia commanded by Col. Saint George Tucker. that the aforesaid Philemon Holcombe during this year frequently performed the duties of the Col. and as an officer no man in the army was more truly esteemed. I can say with truth from my own experience, that he was the firm and sincere friend of the Soldier. This deponent continued in the Army untill a few days before the seige of York and left the said Major Philemon Holcombe in it, who he believes continued in the service of his country a month or two after the Seige. This Affiant is himself a pensioner. & further he saith not.

[signed] Wm Turner [see also his pension application W6321]

Lynchburg [VA] July the 1st 1834

Dear Sir

I acknowledge the receipt of your favor of June the 24th saying to me that my father's papers are placed on file and that there will be no objection to issuing a certificate for his services in the revolutionary war, 6 months as a Major & 6 months as a dragoon. In relation to his services as a Lieutenant of Cavalry, the troop was raised at the request of General Lawson, who commanded a brigade of Va. Militia, on the Spur of the occasion, whether the officers had any papers or certificates from him, I do not recollect to have heard my father say, but I have often heard him say that it was raised at the special instance of General Lawson. John L. Cruit and James Morton of P. Edward could probably give me some information on this subject, but as both of them are very old men, it is likely nothing satisfactory could be had. I feel it my duty to return you my thanks for the speedy manner in which you have issued this claim, and on the part of my father most cheerfully acquiesce in your decision. You will forward me his certificate

to this place which will be conveyed to him by a friend who visits the west this summer.

Yours with respect

Thos. A Holcombe

NOTES:

Most accounts of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, including *The Revolutionary War Memoirs of General Henry Lee*, state that Lt. Col. Henry Lee's Legion was on the left flank, and Lt. Col. William Washington's Dragoons were on the right flank, both just behind the front line.

Another deposition in support of Philemon Holcombe was made by David G. Talbot. See his pension application S7690.

On 26 Sep 1854 in Fayette County Francis A. Watkins assigned power of attorney to obtain any additional pension due to her father, Philemon Holcombe, deceased.

In the file is the following query:

The Union League Club, San Francisco May 23-16

The Commissioner of Pensions

Dear Sir:

I wish to determine the military record of one Philemon Holcombe. Family tradition gives the following account of his services. Joined a military company raised by students Hampden Sidney College Va. 1776. Joined Army 1777. Served as a Lt of Horse under William Washington during Southern Campaign taking part in Battles of Camden, Cow Pens and Guildford. Returned to Va. raised a troop of Horse which he offered to Henry Lee but was refused on account of poor condition of command. Joined Gen. Lafayette in Va and was assigned to staff of that General with rank of Major. Witness final surrender at Yorktown and was gayelted[?] a Lt. Col. & returned to his home.

In 1814 He was made "master of Horse" for the State of Va. with rank of Lt. Col. He died in 1833. Adjutant Generals office offers only the information 1. That he served at Battle of Guildford as a Lieut in troops of Dragoons commanded by William Watkins. 2nd. That he was Lieut. Col. in an unnamed Va. Cavalry Regiment in Sept. 1814.

Any further information that your office may have will be gratefully received.

Verry Respectfully

John Lee Holcombe Capt. G.A.C. U.S.A.

Address will be Fort Khameakhamea [Kamehameha?], Honolulu H.I.