

The Revolutionary War Locations Of

John Milligan 1st

(Aug. 1751 County Down, Ireland – Feb. 1838 Triadelphia, WV)

His Enlistments of

(Aug. 1775-Aug. 1776)

(Aug. 1776-Jan. 1, 1777)

(Autumn 1781)

By Donna (Milligan) Carlson

&

Thomas L. Milligan

August 11, 2007



“In Memory of John Milligan who departed this life Feb. 6, 1838 in the 88th year of his age” Stone Church Cemetery, Elm Grove, West Virginia

Cover Photo by Skip Magyar
Shadyside, Ohio

When John Milligan first immigrated to Colonial America in 1771, it seemed as though English domination (probably just one of the reasons he left Ireland) seemed to follow him to his new country and home.

In 1770, not quite a year before John arrived in America; English Parliament had repealed the Townsend Act. They also allowed the Quartering Act to expire. Then, in a new law, The British Government carefully kept a small import duty on tea, as a symbol, that Parliament had the power to tax the colonists. All of these changes came about as a result of growing violence against the English for taxing the colonists without the colonists having any representation in Parliament itself. The anger of the colonists over English rule, in general, began to flare social uprisings and eventually boiled over into street brawls and the looting of the homes of officials. During one of these brawls on March 5, 1770, later described as “The Boston Massacre”, three civilians were killed by a group of English soldiers on sentry duty. Crispus Attucks, a black, was the first killed and two others were mortally wounded and died later.

Because of the repeal of the Townsend Act and the expiration of the Quartering Act, ill sentiment by most of the colonists toward Great Britain nearly lost all of it’s momentum but there was still a deep hatred for the British under the unassuming calm of 1771 that was instilled in a vast majority of them because of the Boston Massacre. John Milligan, when he landed in New Castle, Penn. In 1771, fit right in with the social sentiment of his new country. Instead of escaping the English rule of his native Ireland, he found himself, once again, in a situation where England, by keeping its duties and taxes on the colonists, was influencing the very existence of the freedoms which he hoped to find in America.

The Author, as well as others of our family, believes that John Milligan I was “Indentured”. That is, someone, already here in America, paid the passage for his voyage to America. Then, after he arrived, he was expected to work for the person or people that paid his way, for a period of time, to pay back his indenture. Even John himself writes that he lived in Pennsylvania for two years (1771-1773) after his arrival to America. Most likely this was to pay back his indenture and to save enough money to get on with his life. In November of 1772, while John was living in Pennsylvania, there was a social revival of ill sentiment against British rule by many people including Samuel Adams and other “Sons of Liberty” in Boston. They managed to persuade a Boston town meeting to create a “Committee of

Correspondence”. This committee was specifically designed to articulate and publicize the patriot’s complaints against the British. As a result of this, other committees were formed in other colonies: Connecticut, New Hampshire, North and South Carolina, Rhode Island and Virginia, where formation was encouraged even more by Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson.

Then, one night, in December of 1773 the Boston Tea Party occurred.

Now John doesn’t say exactly what month he left Pennsylvania and moved to Berkeley County, Virginia. All he said was that he lived in Penn. for about two years before he moved (Aug. 1771-1773). Maybe he initially thought that fighting the British in Boston wasn’t his concern and he left Pennsylvania for the lush hills and spring fed valleys in the farmlands of Virginia; finally setting out on his quest that started in Ireland, years earlier, to make a living for himself; to live free without English domination or Religious persecution. I’ll bet he dreamt that one day, he’d own his own plot of land. For an Irishman, to have his own land was the extension of his very soul; it was the essence of his very being where he was the Master and “To Hell” with everyone else who didn’t think so. As we continue however, we learn that a new fight for freedom and a new struggle for Independence catches him.

We would venture to say that John Milligan, as well as many other new Irish immigrants to America, were so disappointed to find their dreams and aspirations of a new life in America, crumbled, that there was only one eventual alternative. To fight! Yes, fight for the freedoms they desperately desired and dreamt about while yet in Ireland and on the long voyages at sea.

For John and his native countrymen, this wasn’t only a fight for American Independence from England. It also was the renewal of an Ancient Irish struggle against a despised enemy, the one that burnt and drove them from their meager homes in Ireland. The Irish rallied to the Patriot cause with Colonial and British leaders alike, feeling their presence.

In New England, Loyalists pen the Irish as, “The most God-Provoked Democrats this side of hell.” When the fighting started, these Irish were the first to fill the ranks and there was widespread agreement that they formed the very heart of the Continental Army, both in numbers and in spirit. A British officer once informed the House of Commons in England that, “Half

of the Rebel Continental Army was from Ireland.” Yet, stern and somewhat dour, these Irish indeed, formed a large part of the troops that remained steadfast through the trying winter months of 1776 at the crossing of the Delaware to The Battle of Trenton, the harsh stay at Valley Forge later on in 1778 and earlier on, there where the long marches of men to Cambridge that eventually lead to the Siege of Boston and The Battle of New York.

As for John Milligan, he was close to Valley Forge during the winter of 1776 prior to the Battle of Trenton. The famous winter Washington’s Army took at Valley Forge didn’t occur until February of 1778. John Milligan was discharged from his second enlistment period of five months on January 1, 1777 in Trenton and probably went back home to Berkeley County, Virginia. His next enlistment of two months didn’t occur until the fall of 1781 when he enlisted as a prison guard to watch Cornwallis’ captured troops after the Battle of Yorktown in Virginia. That was the end of John Milligan’s involvement in America’s Revolutionary War.

Within the following pages you will find a copy of John’s pension document (which he submitted 3 times) and is his “Recollections” of the campaigns he participated in, in his own words but written out by a man he paid for the task, a typed out transcript of the document and maps of the locations he claims to have been, while serving in the Continental Army. We found John’s pension document in the National Archives of the Newbury Library in Chicago, Illinois. Along with the maps and my own commentary to the historical narrative, we have included various texts of the engagements and have also included footnotes and other references.

As a result of his honest service to his new country, John Milligan tried to acquire a pension from the Sec. of War which was granted from funds set aside by the Congress of the United States for the Veterans of the Revolutionary War. This is John Milligan’s sworn statement to the War Department.

As you will see on the following page, the document number is in the upper left hand corner of the page. If you would like to acquire a copy of this document from the National Archives, this is the document number you will use to specify to the library when making your request.

1835

64

1771

135
64

John Milligan served me year & seven months.

I the undersigned John Milligan in 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 wit. I shall be 24 years old in August next - am a native of Ireland, came to the United States in my 20th year of age. Landed at New Castle, Penn. in Pennsylvania about two years ago went to the county of Berkeley Co. and there during the war of the Revolution and until within the last forty years when I moved to this country. In August 1775 I went after the Battle of Brantford to the Enlistment in Berkeley county under Capt. Stephens or Stephens for one year, Stephens Enlisted Company of Rifle Men (about twenty in number) in that county. A Merchant Serjeant and Lieut. of the company Abraham Shepherd, Esq. and I was Enlisted by the Serjeant. We rendezvoused at Shepherd's house and were marched from thence to Gettysburg - winter but a few days when we accompanied with three other rifle companies to West Capt. Morgan from Winchester - Capt. Crockett from old town Md. + Capt. Parris from Frederick town Md. were ordered to Berkeley in Post's Neck and from that place to Station Island. at this latter place we remained for a short time and then being ordered to this island we were discharged. I had a written discharge from Capt. Stephens which he has long since given up.

Shortly after my return to Shepherdstown a Mr. Koeltz Esq. went to my Island intending to establish in John's name as follows to the army. a few days after an arrival of Gen. Sullivan's army starting with their baggage were taken prisoners. the balance of the American army under Gen. Washington & Mearns left their retreat to New York my self & Charles went to Poles Brook. I then in the fall of the year, Enlisted under Capt. Livingston for five months in the Pennsylvania flying Camp. Our company was marched to Fort Mifflin and attached to Col. Stephen's Regt. - a part of our company under Capt. Morgan was sent on to the

Relief of Fort Washington. Whilst there the whole party
with some few exceptions, was taken prisoner when the
attack was made on the fort. I was in guard up the
river, and in that way escaped from the hands - after
the capture of Fort Washington. Fort Mifflin was abandoned
by the Americans - after my capture, was taken prisoner &
was attached to Capt. Cooper's company, which with the balance
of the army under Genl. Erass (I think Erass)
retreated across Jersey to Trenton - crossed the Delaware
river & encamped in the woods opposite Trenton. There was
in cold weather, we had neither tents nor blankets - one
Christmas night we were ordered to cross the Delaware
the ice to cooperate with Genl. Washington's army in the
capture of the Hessian army at Trenton. This enterprise proved
highly successful. The whole Hessian army was taken prisoner.
I was also changed at Trenton in December day, my imprisonment
of five months having expired. I got my uniform discharge
because my regiment captured several men then a prisoner
of war - In the fall of the year 1781, I volunteered in
Buckley's company for ten months to guard Cornwallis
Prisoners then at Lancaster. I served at that place for
the ten months under Capt. Erass - thus ended my
service. Mr. Jacob writes my Declaration to which
I give the same account in substance as follows -
Mr. Jacob's charge on the 17th of August of the above
last subscribed my name - July 5. 1835.

Wm. Halligan
N. York

John Halligan

a copy of the Declaration
July 5. 1835

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 wit-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 Shepardstown and we marched from there to Cambridge. We were there for 5 days when our company with three other rifle companies, to wit, Capt. Morgan's from Winchester, Capt. Cresuppi 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 Shepardstown 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 cooperate 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.

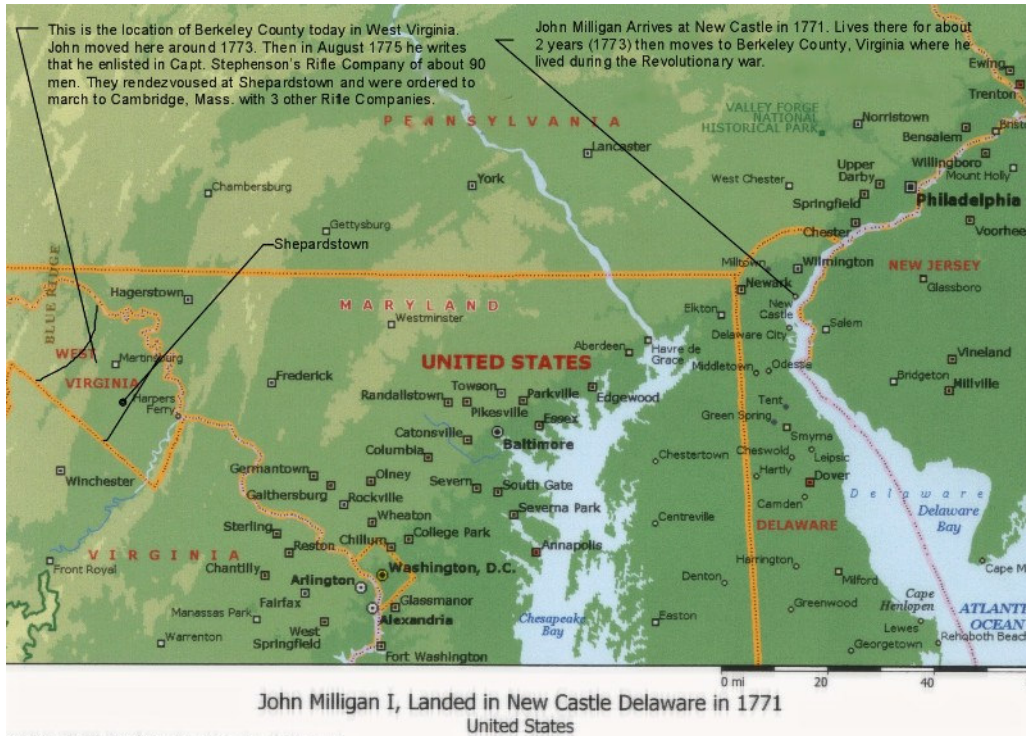
** Note 2: General John Sullivan and Lord Sterling (William Alexander) were both taken prisoner on Long Island in the Battle of Long Island on August 26, 1776.

***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.



The document reads:

“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 the 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 Shepardstown and we marched from there to Cambridge. We were there for 5 days when our company with three other rifle companies, to wit, Capt. Morgan’s from Winchester, Capt. Cresupi 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.”



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 Shepardstown.



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!"

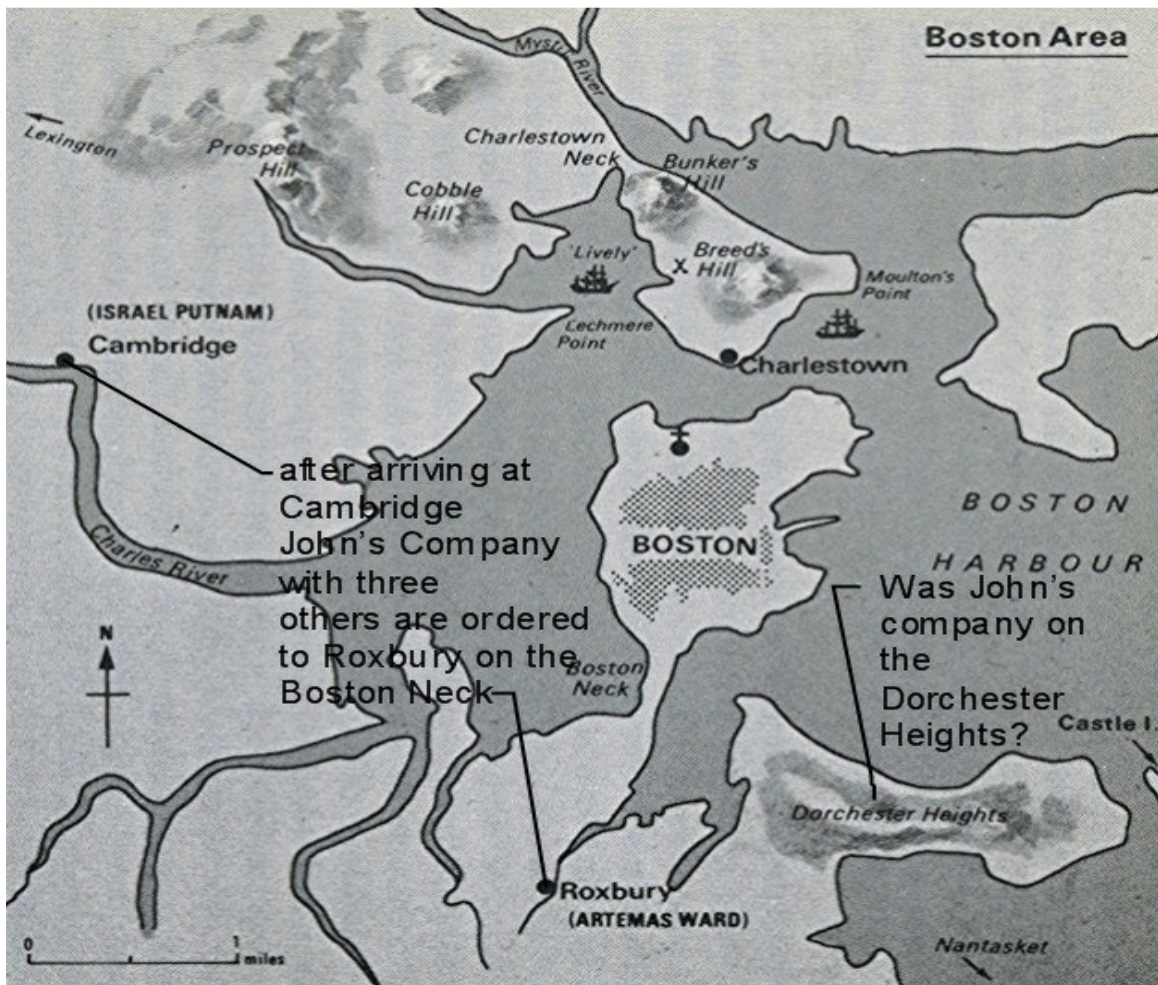
Stephenson's men from the area of Berkeley County, Virginia marched thirty to thirty-six miles a day and even then couldn't keep up with Daniel Morgan's men whom they were supposed to accompany. Even after Gen. Lee's "embellishment" to Congress of their shooting skill, as it turns out, they all were 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”.



Danial 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.

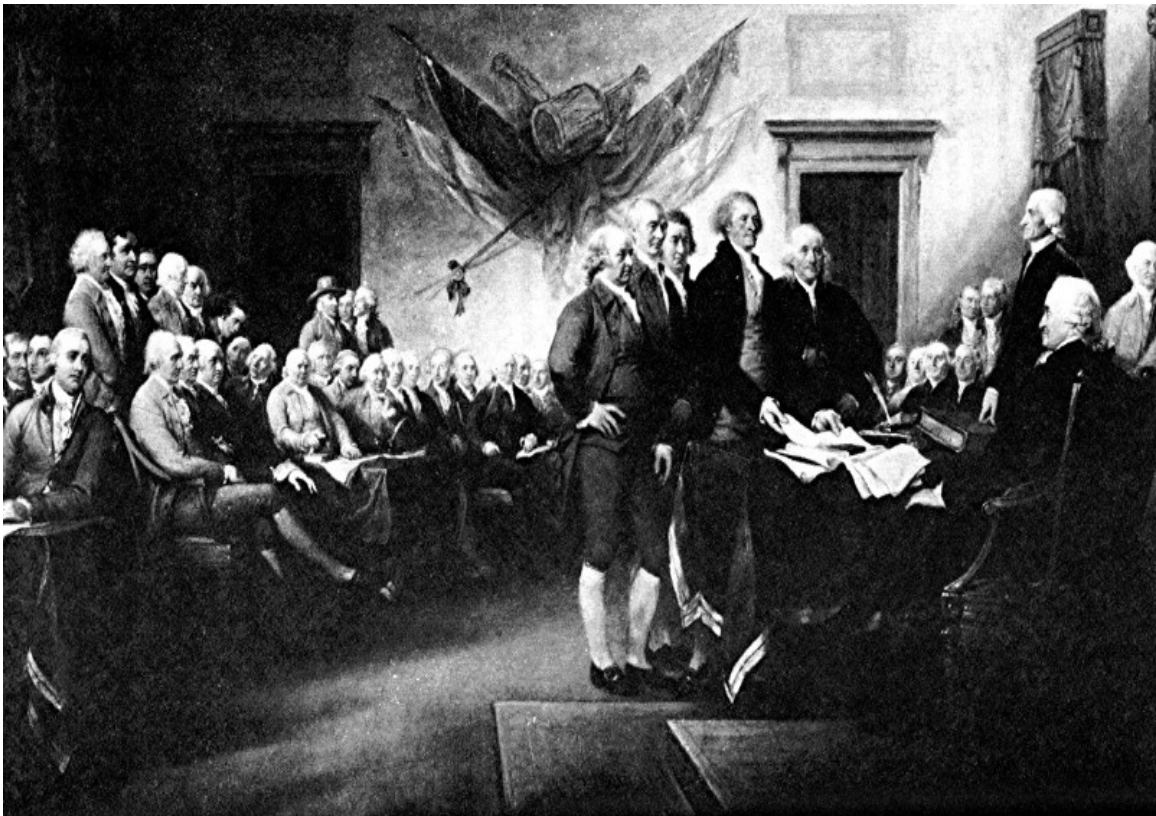


Now we know that John Milligan, by his own words, tells us that his company was ordered to Roxbury, on the Boston Neck. Then we read on and discover that Washington wanted to put a placement of men on the Dorchester Heights.

In his book, Days of History Vol. 2, Jordan D. Fiore writes, “Monday, March 4, 1776. “The firing on Boston continues during the night, and, before daybreak of the following day, Gen. John Thomas and some 2,500 men moved from the Roxbury line to take possession of The Dorchester Heights. Before morning they have thrown up an adequate cover. Two forts are constructed on the heights under the direction of Col. Gridley and Col. Rufus Putnam and five companies of riflemen are brought into place.

Was John Milligan one of the 2,500 men from the Roxbury Line? The probability is pretty high that he was.

Think about it. When the Declaration of Independence was being signed in July of 1776, John Milligan was in Roxbury already having helped defend the Independence cause at the Siege of Boston.



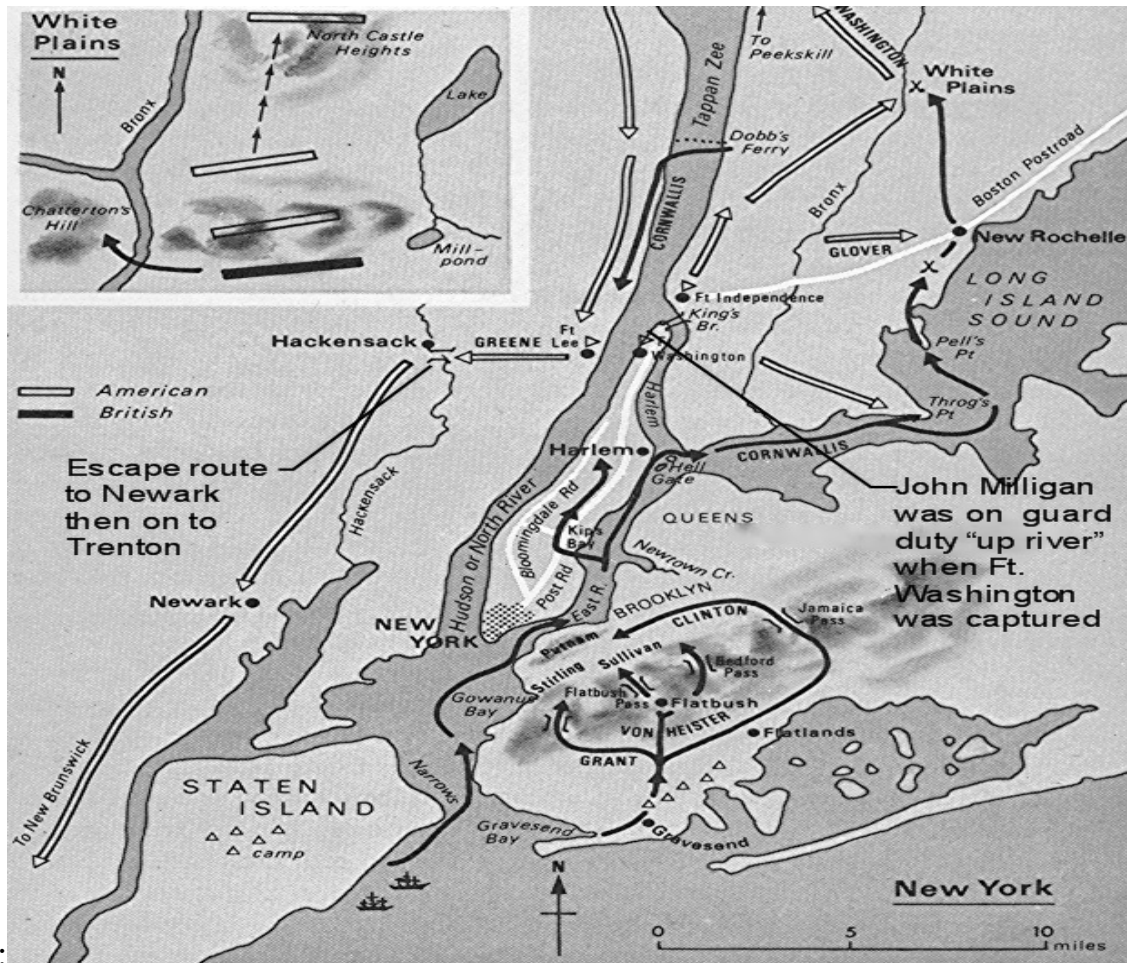
Also, if you are following the historical narrative time line of dates, you will be able to realize that John Milligan spent a total of 9 months of his first enlistment at Roxbury and the remaining 3 months on Staten Island before the Battle of New York. After his first enlistment period of one year ended (early August 1776) he says that he returned to Shepardstown.

Note: I have to wonder at this point if John didn't use this time to marry his wife, Sarah Robinson? Perhaps they met during this period and after his enlistments, (Jan. 1, 1777) when he got back to Berkeley County, they were married. There is a high degree of acceptance that they were married sometimes prior to 1779, the year of the birth of their first born child.

His Document reads:

“Shortly after my return to Shepardstown 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 (on August 23, 26 or 27th, 1776) 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.”

The Battle of New York:



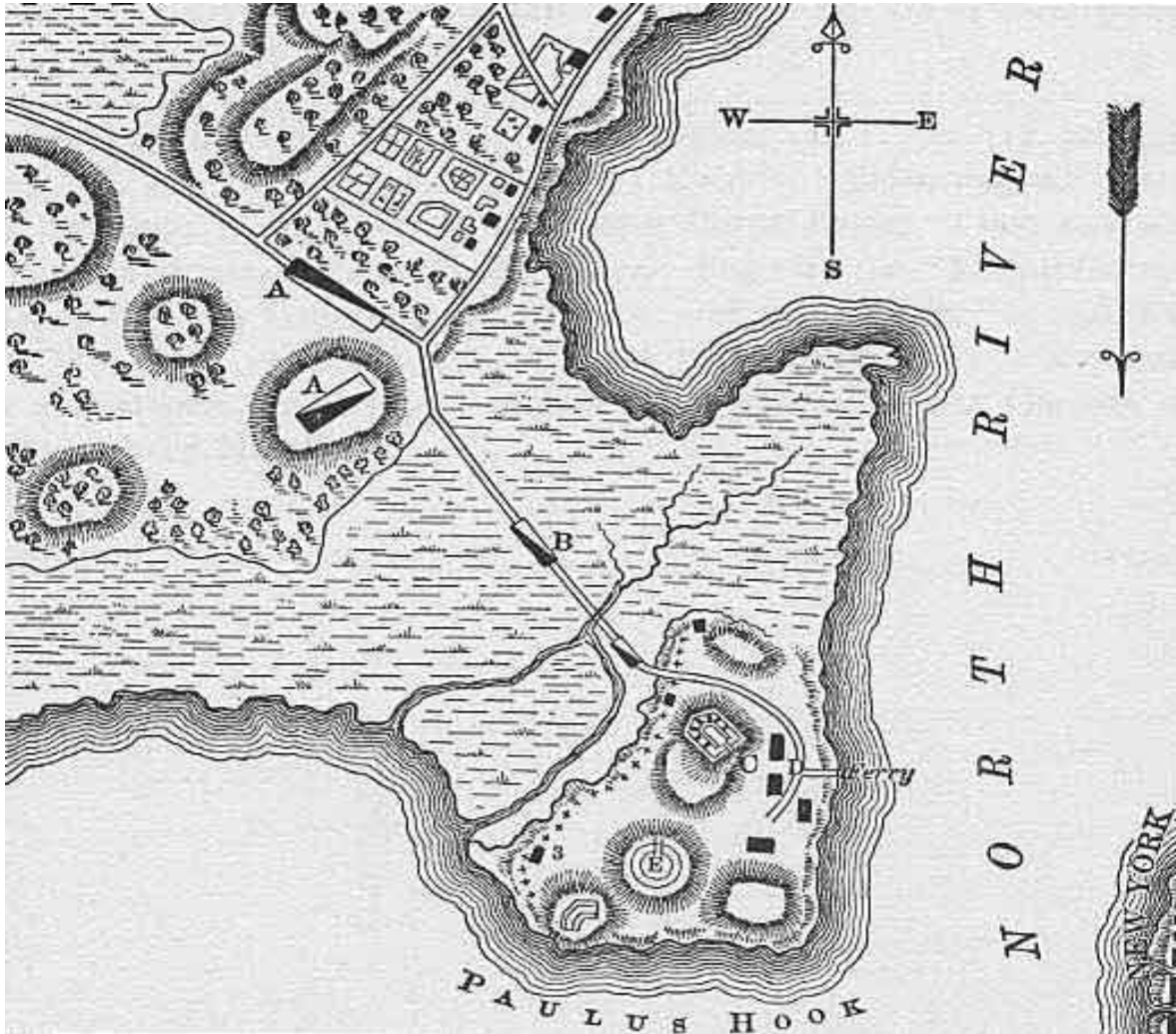
The Battle of New York actually started as a major campaign on Long Island. Early in the morning on the 27th of August 1776 the British offensive began. With the Hessians moving forward against the American outposts at Flatbush and the Bedford passes. Grant's division advanced along the coast road and struck Sterling's men. 10,000 men commanded by Clinton himself with Cornwallis' division in the lead marched East against Sullivan's strongholds and by 3 A.M. British forces were approaching the Jamaica Pass. Colonel Miles, in charge of the Eastern flank, marched up with 500 of

his riflemen and discovered an overwhelming British force and they were quickly subdued. Clinton meanwhile allowed his men to rest for breakfast but were on the march again by 7 A.M.

Gen. Sullivan, who was in charge of the American center positions, realized that they were almost completely surrounded. His men in disarray started to lose heart and began leaving the battle. Slowly at first they started to trickle away to safety but soon there were streams of Americans running for the wooded hills in the rear of Sterling's brigade by the shore. The crumbling of the American center and the disintegration of the eastern flank left Gen. Sterling and his men facing the entire British invasion force alone. The only route for escape was through the swamps to the west. So Sullivan sent as many as he could in that direction and he led a small force of 250 to cover their rear. By noon, the British had won a decisive victory. This was a disaster for the Americans with 1500 killed, wounded or captured. On August 29th Washington after a council of war decided to retreat from the Brooklyn defenses and made plans to get his men safely across the East River to Manhattan. The evacuation began at dusk on the 29th and went smoothly. There was even a blanket of fresh fog rolling in to hide the retreat of American forces. The evacuation was complete by dawn of the next day. Most made their way to New York but John Milligan writes and tells us that he and Charlter went on to Paulus Hook. Because they didn't see any sign that the colonists were going to realize their defeat and come around for formal surrender activities, the British now made plans for the invasion of Manhattan.

John doesn't really tell us when his second enlistment period started. All we are told for sure is that a few days after their return to Long Island (probably on 25, 26 or 27 August 1776), Sullivan and Sterling were captured (August 29th, 1776), Washington's Army is retreating to New York and that he and Charler, went to Paulus Hook (NJ) as part of the Retreat and that they were there in the fall of 1776.

Paulus Hook:



I believe that upon his return to Long Island “to establish himself as a sutler,” John Milligan, then a civilian, gets himself caught up in the retreat of Washington’s army at the end of August 1776 after they lose the Battle of Long Island and escaped (retreated) to New York. He and Charlter continue over the Hudson River to Paulus Hook (Jersey City, New Jersey today) This

must be where he re-enlists for 5 months in The Pennsylvania Flying Camp under Capt. Smyzer.

Using the map on page 19, let's continue on with what John Milligan says next in his document about how Ft. Washington was captured, the abandonment of Ft. Lee and Washington's retreat from New York across to New Jersey and on to Trenton.

Again in John's own words:

"I enlisted under Capt. Smyzer for 5 months in Col. Swoops: The Pennsylvania Flying Camp. Our company was marched to Ft. Lee, New Jersey and attached to Col. Swoops 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 the British. After the capture of Fort Washington, Fort Lee was abandoned by the Americans."

Howe made an abrupt withdrawal of his troops that set Washington back in thought. Finally he concluded that Howe might either advance up the Hudson to join the British forces coming from Canada or might cross into New Jersey and march on to Philadelphia. The tactics he used to counter these possibilities was to send Lee with 7,000 troops to the North Castle Heights. To stop a British force from Canada, he sent Gen. Heath to Albany with 4,000 men. Finally, to meet a move westward into New Jersey, he, himself led the 2,000 troops that were left across the Hudson to join Gen. Green and his men at Fort Lee on the west bank of the river.

The most difficult issue was to decide to save Fort Washington (see the map on page 18). Gen. Green insisted that the fort should be held. So on the 12th of November, he and Green had themselves rowed over to inspect the fort. Colonel Magraw was in command there. He was also adamant that the fort should be held.

Then on the 15th of November, Howe's men began an attack on Fort Washington from the south. Green, by his own command, reinforced the

garrison. Later on the same day while in Hackensack organizing an escape route through New Jersey, Washington received a dispatch saying that Magraw was being attacked from both north and south. (Remember now that John Milligan states that he was at Fort Washington and on guard duty “up river” during this attack.) Washington knew that Magraw was determined to hold the fort at all costs. So he returned to Fort Lee shortly before dawn on the 16th. Just before noon it was learned that Cornwallis brought a column of men across the Harlem River on the east and the fort was then being attacked from 3 sides. (The escape route for John Milligan was to the west and across the Hudson to the Fort Lee side of the river) Washington knew that the fort couldn’t be held and sent orders to Magraw to evacuate his men. The courier returned sometime later with a message from Magraw thanking the General for his concern but he had to report that he had gone too far with negotiations for surrender and that he could not “in Honor” break them off. Fort Washington was lost.

Still at fort Lee, Washington wrote a report to Congress and then returned to Hackensack to resume and establish his line of retreat for what remained of his army. On Nov. 20th he received a dispatch from Gen. Green that a strong British force had crossed the Hudson and was approaching Fort Lee. Washington immediately rode out to organize the evacuation of his men. The only avenue of retreat was for the Americans to make it to the Hackensack Bridge before the Brits got there. Time was of the essence. So with the men gathered and Washington at the front of the column, off marched 2,000 men, John Milligan among them, to the Hackensack Bridge. This was Washington’s greatest defeat up to this point in the war. The army lost everything, including most of their cannon. They did manage to salvage the ammunition though but everything else was gone; tents, blankets, entrenching tools, everything. Along with the ammunition they did manage to save a dozen 8 pounder cannon that will be used later at the Battle of Trenton. With only a few hours to spare, the Americans were able to escape and make their way to Newark, New Jersey and on to Trenton.

What a story to be part of! John Milligan escaped being captured at Fort Washington by being on guard duty “Up River” from the fort. This is incredible since the whole place was over-run. A person has to wonder how he made it back across to the western shore and Fort Lee.

This is excellent narrative into what Private John Milligan gives us in a few short sentences within his pension document. While the attack was made on Fort Washington, John was up river on guard duty. This perhaps places him closer to “The Kings Bridge area” (see map on page 19) during Gen. Howe’s attack of the fort. Howe’s attack was from the north and the south. So John must have seen the attacking British troops marching from the north. You really have to wonder how he managed to get back across the Hudson River to the Fort Lee side. Did he and the men that were on guard duty with him follow the shoreline of the river south past Howe’s men to escape with Washington’s Army in the boats back to Ft. Lee? Did he make a swim across the river from where he was to Fort Lee and then to Hackensack in Washington’s retreating column of 2,000? It’s likely that we will never know for sure what his specific details were of his escape but in either event, his escape from the British was a harrowing experience that I’ll bet he never forgot and the best part is that he’ll get to fight another day.

Now let’s remember that this was 20th of November 1776. He only has 5 or 6 weeks left of his 2nd enlistment remaining.

When Fort Washington was captured, Ft. Lee abandoned and with Sterling and Sullivan being captured in the battle of Long Island just weeks before on Aug. 29, 1776, the army lost just about all of the stores it had. The soldiers were very lucky to escape with their rifles and powder and lives. This will prove disastrous later on when the men try to settle into the come on of very cold winter weather in the wood line across the river from Trenton without tents or blankets.

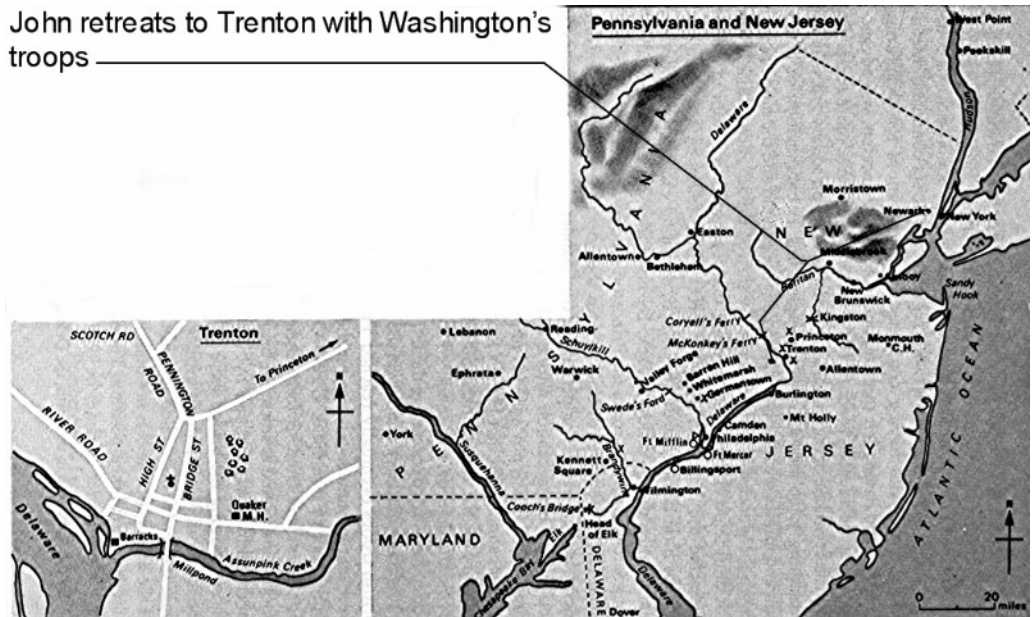
Let’s continue on with John’s words. In the document he says:

“After my Captain was taken prisoner, I was attached to Capt. Swoop’s Company under Gen. Ewing. We retreated across Jersey to Trenton.”

His Captain Smyzer must have been taken prisoner at Fort Washington.

Washington's retreat was on and with John among his troops; his Continental Army retreated all the way from the Hackensack Bridge to Newark and then on to the tree lines of the southern shore on the Delaware River opposite the city of Trenton.

The Battle of Trenton:



John's words continue:

“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 (again) 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 Year's Day. My enlistment of five months having expired. I got no written discharge because my original Captain Smyzer was then a prisoner of war.”

Rather than wait for the British to make the next move, Washington decided to strike. He had devised a plan to cross the Delaware on Christmas night and attack Trenton at dawn from the north. In his plan, Ewing had

instructions to cross with his men just south of the town to cut off any retreat. Cadwalader and his troops were to cross farther south along the river than Ewing to stop any reinforcements from coming up. Washington had the foresight to collect boats from the Pennsylvania shore during their retreat. Most were called "Duram" boats and could carry up to fifteen tons. So on Christmas afternoon, Washington collected his "chosen" regiments out of about 2,500 men, in a valley about a mile from McKonkey's ferry crossing. They also had the 12 artillery pieces that they managed to save from Fort Lee along with their draft horses. They crossed first and took the longest amount of time. Washington hoped to have all of his men and cannon across by midnight but ended up almost 3 hours behind because of the river being so choked with ice. Also a light snow had covered the ground and a fierce wind started to blow. The roads were frozen and slippery. After the Americans were in position, they opened the battle with cannon fire. The Hessians reciprocated and managed to get off only 12 shots. During this cannon fire by the Hessians, 5 of their 8 draft horses were killed and a number of their artillerymen as well. The Americans also opened fire on the Hessians assembled in the town's courtyard. They tried to retreat into an orchard but their path was blocked so they tried to mount an attack of their own. The Hessian's advanced gallantly, but suffered many losses and when Rall, their commander was mortally wounded, the Germans started to lay down their arms and surrender. All of Washington's men, including Ewing's and Cadawalar's made it across the river by the 27th of December and actually witnessed the battle from the opposite shore. Finally! Here was a taste of victory after months of defeat. Quite a few of Washington's men were to be discharged on New Years Day. So Washington used this victory to try to talk men into re-enlisting. This was one of his first tasks after occupying Trenton. He needed to keep his army in tact as news of the Hessian's defeat at Trenton was spreading fast and he feared a counter attack from the British. He even offered the men an additional \$10 bounty. Allot of men stayed on to fight but John Milligan, left the military and his second enlistment period of 5 months ended on January 1st, 1777 in Trenton, New Jersey. Back to Berkeley County he would go.

The Milligan Family oral history says that while John was in Trenton he found a complete set of German leather and shoe repair tools that he kept as booty from the spoils of war. It's been told that he lost the tools he originally used to mend the men's boots. Perhaps he did. We know that he became a tanner later in life and would hand this talent down to his children as well.



As inaccurate as this painting is in its historical setting, we know for sure that John Milligan was at the Battle of Trenton and crossed the Delaware as part of Washington's Army. History and John himself described being "ordered over the Ice to co-operate with Gen. Washington's Army to capture the Hessian Army." Most of the crossings were done by boat. Washington gathered his selected regiments in a valley about a mile from McKonkey's Ferry (see map on page 25) and they, along with what was left of their artillery and horses, crossed at the ferry point. The remainder of the troops to the south of Trenton crossed over the river within the next 2 days or so. Yes there were too few boats for the number of men with Ewing's units to the south but they made it across in plenty of time to spend the New Year in Trenton.



This image is named “The Capture of the Hessians” By John Trumbull. John Milligan said, “The enterprise was highly successful. The whole Hessian Army was taken prisoners.”

John Milligan was discharged on New Year’s Day 1777 and probably returned to Berkeley County and home. He didn’t have anything more to do with the military until the fall of 1781 as he continues to have written in his pension document.

“In 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 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

What wonderful history of John Milligan’s (from County Down, Ireland in August of 1771) military years. Written and researched from his own words to be handed down to his family for generations to come. We as his legacy need to remember how difficult it is to be American at times but isn’t it

excellent to know that without John we would not have an existence at all. His war time efforts also have given his family its first tradition of being part of America's defense for the values we all hold dear. To those of you that read this lengthened version of John's Revolutionary War Campaigns, I will tell you now that I have tried to be as accurate as John's original document allows us to be. Yes there is some speculation perhaps with the questions I've asked, "did he do this or that" or "was he here or there" etc. But for the most part there was no deviation from his original story taken from his own words.

For those of you who are yet to come in our family and take the opportunity to read this document in the distant future, remember to always cherish your personal history. Keep it clean and unobstructed by hearsay and take our family traditions to heart. Wear the Milligan name with respect. You deserve it.

God Bless You All,

Donna (Milligan) Carlson & Thomas L. Milligan
August 12, 2007

We would like to thank Skip Maygar for the use of his photograph of John Milligan's Gravesite in Ohio County, W. Virginia. Thanks Skip!

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