

Philip Morse
Revolutionary War Patriot
1757 – 1839

My 4th Great Grandfather, Philip Morse, was born May 24, 1757 in Hardistonville, New Jersey.

In the spring of 1777 he enlisted in a Continental Army regiment that was assembled at Monmouth Court House, New Jersey by Colonel Oliver Spencer. Morse was assigned as a private in Captain James Broderick's company.

The unit was sometimes known as the 5th New Jersey Regiment, but in most historical records it was called Spencer's Regiment. On September 11, 1777 they fought under the command of George Washington in the Battle of [Brandywine](#) and in the battle of [Germantown on October 4th](#). The Continental Army lost both battles, which denied them control of Philadelphia and allowed the British to quarter there over the winter of 1777-1778.

Washington then had to seek winter quarters elsewhere and marched his 12,000 man Army into Valley Forge on December 19th.

Accompanying Washington to Valley Forge were the Marquis de Lafayette, Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton, combat engineer Pierre L'Enfant, (the designer of Washington D.C. in 1791) and Lt. Col. John Laurens, son of the then-President of the 2nd Continental Congress. And, Martha Washington came to the camp on February 10. She visited soldiers at their campsites and in the camp hospital and organized a sewing circle of women who crafted, and patched socks, shirts, and trousers for the soldiers. I would like to think that Mr. Morse, although just a private, at least laid eyes on these notable people from time to time throughout that winter.

The Army at Valley Forge suffered greatly from severe shortages of food, clothing, blankets, shelter and adequate sanitation. Twenty five hundred soldiers died of exposure, starvation and disease. Another 4,000 men were listed as unfit for duty. Spencer's Regiment shared in this suffering, having entered Valley Forge with 127 men fit for duty, and departing with only 69. Against these terrible odds, Mr. Morse was among those 69 survivors.

In late February of 1778 when the Army was about to collapse as a result of the deprivations, Friedrich von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge from Europe with a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin. Washington saw great promise in the Prussian officer and immediately appointed him as the Army's Inspector General to replace General [Thomas Conway](#), the infamous perpetrator of the [Conway Cabal](#).

Von Steuben began by creating standards of sanitation, and then worked to eliminate the incompetence, graft, and war profiteering that contributed to the shortages at Valley Forge.

He also began a program of training and discipline to raise the morale, discipline and military readiness of the troops. To do so, von Steuben picked 120 men from various regiments to form what he called an honor guard for General Washington. Von Steuben trained them in such things as military formations, marching and bayonet skills. He then deployed them to demonstrate these military skills to the rest of the troops in the encampment. Mr. Morse was a member of von Steuben's honor guard.

Philip Morse
Revolutionary War Patriot
1757 – 1839

The Army's morale at Valley Forge was further transformed on May 6, 1778 when news of the French alliance reached General Washington. He organized a great celebration in which thousands of soldiers performed large drill formations and fired salutes from muskets and cannons. Washington and the other military leaders observed these activities, and at the conclusion of the celebration Washington awarded each soldier with one gill of rum.

Sometime thereafter the British left Philadelphia for New York and the Continental Army departed Valley Forge on June 19, 1778 to pursue them. About 75 miles to the east they caught up with them and fought the [Battle](#) of Monmouth on June 28. This battle was fought to a stalemate, but gave hope to Congress and the rest of the country that Washington's Army was now able to withstand a strong, well-fed and well-trained British Army.

The Battle of Monmouth was notorious for having been fought in temperatures exceeding 100 degrees, and almost as many troops on both sides died from heat stroke as from enemy fire and bayonets. The battle is also known for a combatant named Mary (nicknamed Molly) Ludwig Hays. She not only fought the British, but also spent much of the day carrying water to soldiers and artillerymen, often under heavy British fire. General Washington later asked about the woman he saw loading a cannon on the battlefield. When told about Molly's courage, he issued a warrant making her a non commissioned officer. For the rest of her life she called herself Sergeant Molly. Her feats that day also led to the legend of Revolutionary War heroine [Molly Pitcher](#).

The battle of Monmouth was the last major battle in the northern theater, and Washington afterward moved his army to White Plains, NY.

In the spring of 1779 the Continental Congress became increasingly concerned about the Iroquois Confederacy of six Indian nations that occupied the territory between Pennsylvania, New York and Canada. Egged on by loyalist commander Col. John Butler, Butler's troops and four of the Indian nations began savagely plundering rebel settlements. One of the worst of these were in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley, where 360 armed Patriot defenders were annihilated, Another was the assault on Cherry Valley New York where Indians killed and scalped 16 soldiers and 32 civilians, mostly women and children, and took 80 captive, half of whom were never seen again.

To address this worsening crisis, Washington organized the Sullivan Expedition and gave Major General John Sullivan the following order:

“The Expedition is to be against the hostile tribes of the Six Nations of Indians, with their associates and adherents. The object is the total destruction and devastation of their settlements, and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible, ruin their crops now in the ground and prevent their planting more. Their territory must not be merely overrun, but destroyed. And, you will not listen to any overture of peace before the total ruinment of their settlements is effected. Our future security will be in their inability to injure us, and in the terror with which the severity of the chastisement they receive will inspire them.”

Philip Morse
Revolutionary War Patriot
1757 – 1839

Spencer's Regiment, with Mr. Morse still serving in James Broderick's company, participated in [Sullivan Expedition](#) from June 8 through September 15th of 1779. Without going into the details that would sound unnecessarily repugnant to 21st Century readers, I'll just say that the expedition accomplished its objective. The Iroquois Confederacy was completely destroyed and the Iroquois culture was nearly so.

After the Sullivan Expedition Spencer's regiment was reorganized and was later disbanded, with its troops being reassigned to other units. Sometime in 1780 Mr. Morse joined Captain Jonathan Holmes' company in the 2nd New Jersey Regiment of Maxwell's New Jersey Brigade.

In 1780 the 2nd New Jersey Regiment was involved in two notable skirmishes as the British probed into New Jersey hoping to attack Washington's army in Morristown. In the first, known as the Battle of Connecticut Farms, British and German troops crossed over Staten Island Sound to the mainland at Elizabethtown. On June 7th, the day after their crossing, the enemy advanced towards Connecticut Farms where they were successfully opposed by the New Jersey Brigade and the New Jersey Militia. At the end of that day's battle the British withdrew to Elizabethtown and constructed fortifications.

From June 8th through the 22nd the New Jersey troops kept watch on British forces encamped behind their Elizabethtown fortifications. On June 23 the Battle of Springfield began when British left their fortifications and again tried to break through to Morristown. Although some units were initially overrun, the New Jersey Regiments successfully fought back, causing the British army to retreat back to Elizabethtown. At midnight on the 23rd the enemy troops crossed back to Staten Island. This marked one of the last major engagements of the Revolutionary War in the north and effectively put an end to British ambitions in New Jersey.

Mr. Morse and his compatriots were not yet done, however.

During the remainder of 1780 and continuing into 1781, the northern Continental Army was gaining strength with the arrival of French ground and naval forces. In the South, however, Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis was having some success against Continental troops, particularly at the second siege of Charleston and in Camden, South Carolina. Because of the difficulty of supplying his army that far to the South, and because of stiffer than expected resistance in North Carolina, Lord Cornwallis decided to relocate to the Williamsburg neck of the Virginia Peninsula and proceeded to set up his headquarters in Yorktown, VA. There he also hoped to assist the British navy in gaining control of the Chesapeake Bay and began constructing a deep-water port. Washington reacted by sending troops to Virginia, including Mr. Morse's 2nd New Jersey Regiment. At around the same time the French fleet arrived at the mouth of the Chesapeake, denied British access to the Bay, which left Cornwallis' army without fresh supplies, reinforcements or a viable means of escape.

Mr. Morse arrived in Virginia either in June of 1781 with a vanguard of New Jersey troops led by the Marquis de Lafayette, or on September 23rd with the remainder of New Jersey troops under Washington's command.

Philip Morse
Revolutionary War Patriot
1757 – 1839

The siege of Yorktown began on September 29th. First, the Continental troops dug trenches in which to advance toward the town's fortifications. Then cannons were set up, an intense bombardment was touched off and the British returned fire. However, the Continental troops were better protected in their trenches and watched as the town was being destroyed. The war of attrition continued until the night of October 14th, when one of the pivotal events of the Revolutionary War occurred.¹ That night, the New Jersey Light Infantry under the command of Colonel Alexander Hamilton led a bayonet-to-bayonet assault, which capturing Redoubt Number 10. This was one of two key British strongpoints that controlled access to the town. The plan also called for French Troops under the command of Lafayette to capture the other one, Redoubt Number 9, once Number 10 had been secured, which he did shortly thereafter.

In Thomas Fleming's definitive book, *Beat the Last Drum: The Siege of Yorktown* he says:

“The moment Lafayette, waiting in the first parallel trench, knew the redoubt was captured, he sent his division inspector, Major William Barber, to Baron de Vioménil to let him know that redoubt number ten was in American hands.”

Major Barber was the direct superior to Jonathan Combs, Mr. Morse's company commander. So, I believe that Mr. Morse was either involved in this momentous event, or was at least close enough to witness it.

On the morning of October 17th, a British drummer appeared followed by an officer waving a white handkerchief, and the articles of capitulation were signed on October 19, 1781. Thus was concluded the last battle of the Revolutionary war. Washington marched his troops to New Windsor, New York, the town directly adjacent to his headquarters in Newburgh. They remained stationed there until the Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783, which formally ended the war.

Mr. Morse, along with all members of his 2nd New Jersey Regiment, was furloughed on June 6, 1783 at Newburgh.

After the war, Mr. Morse married, and moved with his family and other members of his community to Himrod in Steuben (now Yates) County New York. Interestingly, he was probably not a stranger to that land just West of Seneca Lake, as prior to the 1779 Sullivan Expedition the Iroquois occupied it.

Years later when Congress authorized compensation for Revolutionary War veterans, Mr. Morse applied for and received a pension of \$8 per month. He was also awarded 100 acres of bounty land, but there is no indication that he ever actually claimed it. He undoubtedly needed that \$8, as we know from the list of assets in the notarized letter in his pension file shows that he had very little. An excerpt from that letter is [here](#).

¹ How important was this? Please see the illustration [here](#). It is the frontispiece from Robert K. Wright, Jr.'s magisterial work, *THE CONTINENTAL ARMY*, written for the US Army's Lineage Series in connection with the bicentennial. He could have chosen anything, but he chose a painting that depicts this moment.

Philip Morse
Revolutionary War Patriot
1757 – 1839

He is buried at the Old Himrod Cemetery and a marker honoring his Revolutionary War service was placed on his grave in 1957.

Mr. Morse's daughter Elizabeth married James Perry, my 3rd Great Grandfather. Their Grandson William Perry served in the New York Volunteer infantry in the Union Army during the Civil War, and his grandson, my father Maurice Perry served in the South Pacific during World War II.

Finally, I was privileged to serve in the Army as a drill instructor, where I learned and taught many of the drills and formations that were originally established by General von Steuben so many years earlier at Valley Forge.

Respectfully,
Michael D. Perry
June 6, 2016

(Appendices start on the [next page](#))

Philip Morse
Revolutionary War Patriot
1757 - 1839

Appendix 1



THEY SCRAMBLED UP THE PARAPET

Military professionals launched this bayonet attack on Redoubt 10 during the siege of Yorktown. Only an army with thorough training, sophisticated organization, esprit de corps and courage could have attempted this assault. The Continental Army had become such an army. The hastily assembled Group that gathered at Lexington in the spring of 1775 evolved by the fall of 1781 into the effective force shown here. Howard Pyle's modern masterpiece captures this "spirit of victory."

[Back to footnote](#)

Philip Morse
Revolutionary War Patriot
1757 – 1839

Appendix 2

Listing of Assets from a notarized letter filed by Philip Morse on February 8, 1821 in support of
his Revolutionary War Pension Application

Real Estate

None

Personal Estate

One cow

Two calves

One weaving loom

Three chairs

One ax

One three-pail kettle

Two pails

One iron pot

Four knives & forks

Four common plates

Three cups & saucers

One teakettle

One teapot

One stack of wheat - about 20 bushels

Two shoats

One hoe

Liabilities

I am indebted to different persons in about the sum of \$50

The original of this letter, described [here](#) and unknown to me at the time, was sold on eBay in February of 2013.

[Back to original page](#)