

Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters

Pension Application of John Champe W4153

Phebe Champ VA

Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris

To the Honourable the Senate and house of representatives of the United States of America.

The memorial fo the undersigned humbly sheweth, that your memorialist having been informed that your honourable body are about divising means for the more effectual relief and support of the surviving Officers and Soldiers of the revolutionary Army, their widows and orphans, and whereas your memorialist hath been advised by those who are better informed on those subjects than himself, to submit his claim to the consideration of the Government, assured that a grateful country will seize with pleasure any opportunity which may occur to evince their respect for the memory of one, who although in an humble stations, among the Patriots, who so greatly contributed under providence to acquire the Independence of Our Country, was not altogether unknown to fame. It is therefore with honest pride that your memorialist can annouce that he is the son of John Champe who in the late revolutionary war was a Sergeant major, in the squadron of Dragoons then commanded by Lieutenant Colo Lee [Maj. Henry Lee in Sep 1780], and who after the desertion of Arnold, was selected, and ordered by General Washington into the enemies camp in the feigned character of aq Deserter, to ascertain the situation, views and movements of the Enemy, and likewise, to seize the person of Arnold and convey him to the american Camp, if an opportunity offered; the service was performed with that courage, and prudence, which at once justified the selection, and the wisdom and penetration of him that made it, though not sufficient in all its parts, it was sufficiently so to answer in some measure, the object for which it was intended – [see endnote]

Your memorialist conceives it unnecessary to give a particular detail of facts, and circumstances which are now identified with the history of our country, but hasten to detail such as are not so generally known, the late John Champ the father of your memorialist, (as always understood) lived in Loudon [sic: Loudoun] County (Virginia) when he first entered the army, after the conclusion of the war he resided in Hampshire county where your memoriaist was borne, and about twenty years since in a tour through the western country in serch of Lands, near morgan town on the monongahela [sic: Morgantown on the Monongahela River in present West Virginia] he died, the mother of your memoreaist still a widow lives in the state of Ohio, in Pickaway County and Madison township; Your memorialist is well assured that his father has never drawn any land from the Government, nor has any provision ever been made for his widow or children; the papers as your memorialist is informed which would establish his claim upon the government, are now in the hands of one Cocy, who if still living resides it is believed in the town of Romney (Va) Your memorialist in submitting those facts, to the consideration of Congress would beg leave to disclaim any thing like mercenary motives, for himself he consider it the best possible patrimony he could inherit, to be known and acknowledged as the son of one who had so distinguished himself in such a cause, and would gladly emulate his his fame by pursuing his steps, but it is rate that the best intentions, even when accompanied with prudence and capacity will alone rais a man from entire obscuri[ty] without the aid of some fortuitous circumstances in his fa[vor]. Your memorialist entered the army at the commencement of the tale was as a Sergeant and remained in that capacity until the close of the same, when your memorealst left the service; for any information in relation to his character and conduct, he begs leave to refer to Gen^l McArthur Colo. Croghan Major A S Langham & Colo. Gratiot. Your memorealist having done the duty of Clerk in the Adjutant Generals Office at Detroit, after it was retaken by Gen^l Harrison, until just before the termination of the war, at which time was ordered from that post by General McArthur to Erie (Pa) and in February 1815 was recommended by him for a Lieutenancy in the army – and under these circumstances your memorialist begs leave to submit to the liberality and Justice of your honourable body whether some provisions ought not not to be made to his

mother and the rest of the heirs which are in number six besides himself who are in a state of reduced circumstances, and to him self in addition to anything, which in strict Justice may be due him in right of his father, whether if satisfied of his integrity and capacity, an appointment to some Civil or Military Office under Government could with propriety be conferred

Detroit 1st Feby. 1818

[signed] Nath^l. Champ

To the members of the House of representatives and of the Senate of the United States in Congress Assembled.

The Petition & memorial of Phebe Champe widow and relict of the late John Champe, now of Franklin County in the state of Ohio, humbly sheweth that her late husband John Champe (who was born in Loudon County, state of Virginia) in the year AD 1776 enlisted into the Legion of cavalry commanded by the then Major since General Lee, and was made a serjeant major under that distinguished and valuable officer – that soon after the treason of the notorious General Arnold, certain papers fell into the hands of General Washington, which were calculated to impress the mind of the Commander in chief, with the belief, that Arnold was not alone in the treason – that another General, standing high in the confidence of Washington, the army and the country, was implicated in the treason of Arnold. General Washington filled with anxiety on that account; wishing to ascertain the truth if possible; to bring back again General Arnold to head quarters, where he might suffer the punishment which his rank treason recuited; and also save the life of Major Andre, who had been taken as a spy [see endnote]; committed the delicate and arduous task of attempting to accomplish all these objects, to your Petitioner's late husband, John Champe. With a view of effecting these objects, General Washington directed the said John Champe, then a serjeant major as aforesaid, to desert [from] the American camp then near to New York, to the British Head Quarters, then in that city. The secret at the time alluded to was known to no one, except Gen. Washington, Major Lee and the said John Champe. In order to cover the real intention, Gen. Washington ordered the said Champe, to carry away with him his horse, his cloathes, his arms, accoutrements and the muster book of the Legion. – Gen. Washington in order to induce the said Champe to enter on the perilous enterprise, promised him a lieutenant's commission; and any pecuniary reward, which he might demand, for the faithful performance of which he pledged his own honor, as well as the honor of congress. Your Petitioners husband obeyed the order of his beloved General – went to the British camp and for and during all the time he remained in that camp kept up a secret correspondence with Gen. Washington; dissipated the doubts of Washington as to the fidelity of the American General whom he had suspected, but from circumstances not within his control, was not able to bring away the Traitorous Arnold. After effecting all within his power, he the said Champ returned to the Continental army, but Gen. Washington, fearing lest the said Champ might somehow fall into the hands of the enemy, after giving him a few guineas, dismissed him with an assurance, "that his faithful and arduous services should not be forgotten by his country – that congress were then poor, but when the country became more able, he should be amply rewarded." Before anything more was done, your petitioner's husband died about twenty years since, leaving a widow and seven orphan children, who were all young, and with little or no property wherewith either to educate or support them – that your petitioner has by her labour supported and educated her orphan children – that she has continued a widow ever since the death of her husband John Champe – that she is now nearly sixty years of age – that her children are all poor – that only three of the seven are married – that she is now old, infirm and poor, and no longer able to support herself by labour, heretofore her only resource – that she put her husband's papers, which General Washington gave him, several years since, into the hands of General Lee, in order to get some lands for her children, but before he had done anything in the premises, he died [25 Mar 1818], as she has been informed – that the lands in the Virginia military district which remain unlocated are of no value and her only hope is, that Congress will redeem the pledge heretofore given by the great and good Washington – that Congress if they should deign to read this simple statement of facts, may, by referring to the XXXth chapter of Lee's "Memoirs of

the War in the Southern Department of the United States," satisfy themselves as to the truth of the greater part of this memorial. The following are the names of her children with those of the places where they reside (to wit) Eleanor [page torn]man, late Eleanor Champe, intermarried with Jacob Hartman, Amelia Keys late Amelia Champe, intermarried with William Keys, William Champe and Mary Champe, reside in Pickaway county in the state of Ohio – John Champe who resides in Franklin county Ohio. Susannah Willfong late Susannah Champe, intermarried with David Willfong in Ross county in the same state and Nathaniel Champe who resides in Detroit. Your Petitioner prays to be placed on the pension roll of the United States and have such an allowance made for her future support as to Congress may seem meet and that such a grant of land may be made to her children, in the new tract lately purchased of the Indians in Ohio, as Congress under all the circumstances attending the call may think proper to give them, for the zealous and faithful services of their deceased father and your petitioner as in duty bound will ever Pray
Dec'r 15th 1818. Phebe herXmark Champe

[The above petitions failed, and on 15 Dec 1837 Phebe Champe again petitioned Congress for a pension. This petition states erroneously that John Champe "was attached by General Washington to head the detachment to take Arnold during the revolutionary war."]

Pension Office,/ March 6, 1839

Sir, [Hon. John P. Floyd, Secretary of War,/ In compliance with your request, I have the honor to give you the little information the records of this office afford relative to the services of Sergeant Major John Champe in the revolutionary war.

On an alphabetical transcript roll, made up from the muster rolls of Lee's legion, is borne the name of John Champe, Corporal, of the Second Troop, enlisted 7th April 1778, for the war; promoted to Sergeant January 1st 1779. This is the only entry found on our rolls. The muster rolls of Lee's Legion are not in this Office. We have no hint respecting the corps into which Champe is said to have enlisted in 1776, and therefore are unable to verify that part of the history of his service. Possibly the records of Loudon County may throw light upon his early service.

A pension was granted to Phebe Champe, the widow of John, by a special Act of Congress approved July 7th 1838, at the rate of \$120 per annum, on account of his services as a Sergeant. The widow was then a resident of Franklin County, Ohio. In a letter from G. Swan to Hon. J. Ridgway, dated Columbus, Jany. 6, 1838, it is stated that "Sergeant Champe and his surviving wife were married in July 1782." [The letter here repeats information from the above petitions of Nathaniel Champ and Phebe Champe.]

The pension of Phebe Champe was allowed to run from the 4th of March 1831, and was probably paid to the time of her death, the date of which does not appear from the papers in this Office, but may be shown by the books of the Third Auditor.

The heirs of John Champe continued to prosecute their claims before Congress from 1818 until 1847, when an Act was passed, approved the third of March 1847, allowing to his heirs a sum equal to five years' full pay of an Ensign. See 9th Vol. Statutes at Large, page 697. This allowance amounting to twelve hundred dollars, was paid to the three surviving sons, William, Nathaniel and John, and to the heirs of the four deceased daughters, with the exception of \$57 14/100, the share of George W. Willfong, son of Susannah, whose residence was not ascertained. I cause inquiry to be made at the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives, and at the First Auditor's and Register's offices, for the original papers upon which the Act of March 3^d 1847 was predicated, but could not find them.

Sergeant Champe was not, by law, entitled to land from the United States. An application for land was made by the heirs to the 16th Congress but was refused. If he received bounty land it was probably granted by the State of Virginia [see below].

The foregoing is all the information I have been able to find in response to Mr. Kercheval's

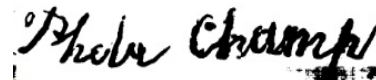
inquiry, and I can only add the expression of my regret that the archives of the government afford such imperfect and meagre materials towards the history of services so meritorious.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

[The following is among the [Revolutionary bounty-warrant records in the Library of Virginia](#):]

State of Ohio } Ss:
County of Franklin }

Be it remembered, that on the [blank] day of [blank] Anno Domini 1828 (twenty eight) personally came and appeared before me, the undersigned Justice of the peace in and for the aforesaid County the named Phebe Champe who being duly sworn, did declare and say, that on or about the [blank space] day of July 2[?] 1783 she was married to the named John Champe, who during the revolutionary war was sergeant Major of the Legion commanded by Majr., afterwards Lieut. Col. Lee, that she well recollects of having frequently heard her said husband, recount the circumstances [illegible word] his being employed by Major Lee, after Arnold's treason to seize the said Arnold whilst in the City of New York and deliver him at the head quarters of the American Army – that she had seen papers relating to this subject, but is now unable to say what became of them, but that she feels confident that up to the date of his death, which took place at John Buck's [illegible word] mills in the State of Virginia on the thirtieth day of September 1798 the promises made to him by authority of Gen'l Washington were never fulfilled, and the said deponent, further testified and said, that William Champe, now aged thirty three years, is her son, by the said John Champe dec'd. and that he now resides in Franklin County, within the state afresaid about three miles from Columbus. That William Champewho resided in the County of [blank] near Chillicothe is an uncle of the said William Champe on his fathers side and further, the deponent saith not.



Sworn to and subscribed before me this thirteenth Day of December eighteen hundred & twenty eight

Andrew Dill justice of peace

[Certified by William Champe, the uncle referred to.]

NOTE:

After the treason of Gen. Benedict Arnold and his desertion on 25 Sep 1780, Gen. Washington conceived a plan to send a pretended deserter to the British to determine whether other American officers were involved and to attempt the abduction of Arnold. Washington consulted then-Major Henry Lee, commander of a corps of dragoons, who recommended Sergeant-Major John Champe. Champe became an associate of Arnold in New York City and found no evidence of a wider conspiracy, but the abduction scheme failed because of the departure of Arnold's troops for his invasion of Virginia at the beginning of 1781. Champe had no choice but to accompany Arnold until he could escape, and he was not able to rejoin Lee's Legion until late in 1781 in South Carolina. He was then discharged for fear of his being captured and executed as a deserter from the British army. Had he served to the end of the war, his widow and children would have been eligible for pay under the act of 1828. Lee devoted Chapter 30 of his [Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States](#) (1827) to Champe's exploit as he later recollected it.

British Major John Andre had been captured carrying documents that revealed Arnold's treason. British General Henry Clinton had proposed to Gen. Washington the exchange of three American prisoners for Andre, but Washington insisted that Clinton return Arnold in exchange for Andre. Washington had hoped that the capture of Arnold would allow him to return Andre to the British, but Andre confessed to being a spy and was hanged before Champe could carry out the abduction of Arnold.

The file includes a printed copy of the bill granting Phebe Champe a pension. The text of the bill is largely a copy of Lee's account of Champe's service.