PETER FRANCISCO

Washington's One-Man Regiment

by

James Henry Bailey,
of Petersburg, Va.,
Class of 1939.

This essay won the Cincinnati prize in 1939.
******** "A tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner." ********

Sir Philip Sidney
Peter Francisco
Washington's One-Man Regiment

A remarkable mystery of American history is the fact that "incredible colossus", as he has been called, Peter Francisco, who perhaps is our greatest individual fighting-man, is almost entirely unknown. Within the past three years, however, interest in this dramatic and extraordinary figure has been somewhat revived, due perhaps to accounts of his life published in two widely-read magazines. However, a full, scholarly account of this man who was the hero of every town and hamlet in the thirteen states and the devoted friend of Lafayette, John Marshall, Nathaniel Greene, Henry Clay, and Patrick Henry, and the engravings of whose startling adventures were best-sellers in his day, remains to be written. Today, not one American in ten thousand can say that he ever heard of Peter Francisco.

The origin of Francisco is obscure. The accounts of it found in the pages of those two older historians of Virginia, Charles Campbell (History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia) and Henry Howe (Historical Collections of Virginia) is unreliable. Both these accounts agree that he supposed he was a Portuguese, and that he was kidnapped and taken to Ireland during his infancy where, hearing much of America, he indentured himself to a sea-captain for seven years in payment for his passage. However, as a matter of fact, Mr. James Durell, of Petersburg, Virginia, has left us an eye-witness' account of Francisco's arrival in this country. He tells us that on a clear, June morning in 1765, an un-
known barque appeared in the harbor of City Point (a small colonial trading-port on the James River in Virginia,) lowered a longboat which carried a child ashore, and immediately upon the return of the sailors in this boat, weighed anchor, turned, and sailed eastward to the sea. The deserted boy, sturdy and black-eyed, was about five or six years old and wore a suit of some rich foreign cloth with collars and cuffs of fine lace, all extremely ragged and sea-worn. On his shoes were heavy silver buckles with the initials "P. F." and something else too badly scratched to be read. One man who understood a little Spanish learned from the child, whose language was a broken mixture of Portuguese, French, and Spanish, that his name was Peter Francisco. That a child of this age could indenture himself seems, to say the least, unlikely.

Again, Howe and Campbell both agree that Francisco had no recollection of his parents; although we have the testimony of his descendants, handed down through family tradition, that he remembered his mother as small, dark, and vivacious, speaking, he believed, French constantly, while his father's language was in another tongue. In the nights aboard ship coming to America when Francisco was cold, hungry, and heartsick for his mother, a sailor, whom he afterwards believed to have been a Spaniard, would take him in his arms, and try to soothe his grief.

We shall probably never know the real story of the origin of this great soldier, although the Hon. Robert Hoke, of Tennessee, who had read a notation found among the musty records in a Spanish crypt that in the mid-eighteenth century the father and infant son of the Castilian house of Francisco were ordered beheaded for political reasons by royal decree but
that when the day for the deed arrived the boy had disappeared and only the father was left to pay the penalty, consulted the Court Historian at Madrid but, the records of that period having been lost or partially destroyed, no information could be discovered other than a corroboration of the disappearance of a male child of that age about this time. According to family tradition, Francisco in later years recalled a splendid home in a park, from which three men with sweetmeats and alluring words had enticed his sister and himself. These men had later released his screaming sister but had thrown a cloak about his head and taken him aboard a ship which had promptly set sail. He felt sure that he would have recognized his little sister, even after the passage of years, had fate ever thrown them together.

Be that as it may, for a week while the city fathers discussed what to do with him, Francisco slept at night in a corner of the warehouse, where the women of City Point saw that he was well-fed and the watchmen on the wharf stood guard over him. But before the authorities could agree on the child's fate, Judge Anthony Winston, of Buckingham County, which he represented in the legislative assembly of Virginia, came from Williamsburg to City Point to await the arrival of a vessel on which he was expecting freight. Hearing the story of Francisco's strange arrival, and being moved by the boy's lovable manners, the sympathetic Judge gained permission to take him to his home. (Just before the Revolution, the boy was legally adopted by his benefactor, although he retained his own name.) Here at "Hunting Towers" (one mile east of New Store and two miles southwest of Buckingham Court House, on the old stage road between Lynchburg and Richmond), Francisco was daily on the farm and soon was looking after the interest of the Judge whose days were occupied with political issues.
Significant is the fact that Judge Winston was the uncle of Patrick Henry, for "Hunting Towers" became a hotbed of the leaders of that movement of rebellion against the mother country which at this period was sweeping through the colonies. Inflamed with the spirit of liberty, the young Francisco accompanied the Judge when he went as a delegate in March, 1775, to the Virginia Convention convened, due to the hostility of Lord Dunmore in Williamsburg in St. John's Church in Richmond. The convention appointed Henry, Colonel of the First Regiment and "Commander of all forces raised and to be raised for the defense of the Colony," and Francisco, though only fifteen, besought Judge Winston to let him enlist immediately in Henry's regiment but the Judge urged delay. Accordingly, in respect for his benefactor's wishes, Francisco promised to wait a year before enlisting.

However, in 1777, the sixteen-year old Francisco enlisted in the Tenth Virginia Regiment under the command of Colonel Hugh Woodson, of Prince Edward County. At this time, says Mr. Robert Buckner in his article on Francisco, the youth was six feet, six inches in height, and weighed two hundred and sixty pounds, and Miss Winston describes his appearance thus: "In personal appearance Francisco is described as being most striking, attracting the attention of strangers wherever he went. He was six feet, one inch in height, and weighed two hundred and sixty pounds; yet being exceedingly muscular and active, no one ever thought of him as a clumsy, overweighted man. His features were extremely handsome; his hair and eyes were very black, the latter being peculiarly bright and expressive; and the muscular development of his arms was so full and pronounced that at one glance anatomists readily recognized the strength of a modern Herceu-
les." Indeed, as a young child, he had begun to show proof of that
amazing strength which the old sporting Judge had increased by strenu-
ous exercises, and which later won for him the title of "The Giant of
Virginia."

Woodson's regiment joined Washington's main force at Middlebrook
and Francisco's first battle was the Brandywine, where, according to Mr.
Buckner, he was severely wounded. He was among the skirmishers
around New York and Philadelphia, and was a conspicuous defender of Fort
Mifflin on Mud Island in the Delaware River. At both Germantown,
where in an individual brawl he perfected the dainty trick of seizing
two opponents in his hands and cracking their heads together like egg-
shells, and Monmouth, where according to Miss Winston he was severely
wounded by a musket-ball, the effects of which he complained during his
whole life, he led the American attack. In the successful charge on
Stony Point—a rocky promontory on the right bank of the Hudson River
armed with heavy batteries and garrisoned with six hundred men under the
command of Sir Henry Clinton—at midnight on the fifteenth of July, 1779,
Francisco, despite a nine-inch gash in the stomach, was the first soldier
after Major Gibbons to scale the walls. Here, also, he killed the col-
or-bearer, and this whole exploit giving him great renown he became the
hero of his command.

For six weeks he remained at Fishkilns recovering from the wound be-
fore rejoining his regiment. At Powell's Hook, he was bayonetted through
the thigh, but continued into the British lines to kill two Grenadiers.
Then, his first enlistment of three years being ended, Francisco returned to Virginia for a few days; but almost immediately volunteered again and accompanied Colonel Mayo's regiment of Gates' brigade into the Carolinas.

During the Battle of Camden at the crisis of the heavy fighting the artillery horses were shot down and the cannon was sorely needed in another part of the line. Francisco accordingly lifted the enormous gun, weighing 1100 pounds and carried it two hundred yards to the new position. As the Americans were being driven from the field, Francisco stayed close behind his colonel, William Mayo, of Powhatan. A British cavalryman overtook them and swung his sabre at Colonel Mayo's head when Francisco turned and shot the redcoat in the heart. Then taking to the woods he sat down to rest when another dragoon surprised him and ordered him to surrender his musket. Then, according to Howe, the following incident took place: "With feigned humility, he replied he would (surrender), and added, as his musket was empty, he had no further use for it. He then carelessly presented it sideways, and thus throwing the soldier off his guard, he suddenly levelled the piece, and driving the bayonet through his abdomen, hurled him off his horse, mounted it, and continued his retreat."

Miss Winston says that he "rode at a rapid rate through Tarleton's men, to whom he presented himself as a friend by crying out: 'Huzza, my brave boys, we have conquered the rebels!'" In this manner, Francisco caught up with his elderly colonel, who was exhausted. Dismounting, he lifted his officer into the saddle, thus making possible Mayo's escape to Hillsboro, N. C. Later, Colonel Mayo, as a testimony of his regard, presented Francisco with a sword which he had been in the habit of using on dress occa-
sions. The blade of the sword measures 33½ inches in length, and including the hilt, measures 39½ inches. Although this weapon was but a toy in the hands of "the Giant of Virginia" he preserved it as a valued gift, and it is now preserved in the Virginia State Library at Richmond. (After the war, Colonel Mayo willed Francisco, one thousand acres of land on Richland Creek in Kentucky, but as there was some resentment by members of the Mayo family, Francisco relinquished the gift.) In the meantime, Washington, who had become a great friend and admirer of his "one-man regiment," heard Francisco complain that the ordinary sword was too light and short for his purposes. So the General had made for him a massive blade so long and so heavy that no other man in the regiment could swing it with one hand.

This tremendous weapon soon became a legend among both armies and was afterwards presented by Francisco's daughter, Mrs. Edward Pascud, of Petersburg, Virginia, to the Historical Society of Virginia.

After the defeat of Gates at Camden, General Nathanael Greene was placed in command in the South, and this general soon changed affairs. The battle of Cowpens was a decided victory and Francisco was there, marked for special slaughter by a price put on his head, dead or alive, by Cornwallis. The "Virginia Giant" now joined Watkins' cavalry—a wild and ragged band of young adventurers who could not be bothered with uniforms. At the battle of Guilford, their swooping charge on the Queen's Guards was the deciding point in the American victory. At nearby Scotch Lake, these freelance cavalrmen found the British strongly entrenched on the crown of a steep hill a hundred yards from the lake. Immediately on sighting the enemy, Francisco dismounted and crept to a point under the brow of the hill.
Here he found the tents from which the enemy had retreated and also several large barrels which he supposed to contain gunpowder. Lying on his stomach with his head shielded from the British fire by a barrel, Francisco rolled it down to the lake, where it was found to contain shirts, overalls, and other supplies as badly needed as the powder. Francisco then returned alone to the north side of the fortified hill, where he had observed eight splendid horses belonging to the British. He dashed among them and under severe fire brought all of the animals safely back to his camp.

The most famous of Francisco's remarkable actions occurred during Washington's charge on the Queen's Guards at the Battle of Guilford Court House on Thursday, March 15, 1781, at which time the British under Lord Cornwallis—fresh from the conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, were driven from North Carolina by the American forces under Major General Nathanael Greene. Rev. William Henry Foote in his Sketches of North Carolina, Historical and Biographical, describes the incident as follows:

"The carnage was dreadful. At this time it was, as Lieutenant Holcomb related to Dr. Jones of Nottoway, that the noted Francisco performed a deed of blood without a parallel. In that short encounter, he cut down eleven men with his brawny arm and terrible broadsword. One of the guards thrust his bayonet, and in spite of the parrying of Francisco's sword, pinned his leg to the horse. Francisco forbore to strike, but assisted him to extricate his bayonet. As the soldier turned and fled, he made a furious blow with his sword, and cleft the poor fellow's head down to his shoulders. The force of the blow, added to the soldiers speed, sent him on a number
of steps, with his cleft head hanging upon each shoulder, before he fell. The astonished beholders shouted, "Did you ever see the like?" For this feat, Francisco was offered a commission which he refused because he lacked the education which he felt an officer should possess. He was left for dead on the Guilford battlefield, where he was discovered by a man named Robinson—a Quaker, who carried him to a nearby house. As soon as he could walk, Francisco travelled on foot over two hundred miles to Virginia, where he volunteered for active service.

Now (1781), Francisco's officers granted him permission to range as a lone wolf, "independent to think and act however best he might cripple the enemy." This is of importance as the only instance on record in the American army where such complete "carte blanche" has been given to any soldier, much less to a private from the ranks. Francisco exercised the privilege immediately.

During the mid-summer of 1781, Colonel Banastre Tarleton's cavalry, ranging ahead of Cornwallis' march toward Yorktown, were scouring the Blue Ridge hills of Albemarle County, Virginia, for Thomas Jefferson and the Commonwealth's legislature, who fled to Charlottesville. This quarry having scurried into safe hiding, Tarleton made a course east through Buckingham County and on into Amelia for the next best prize—Francisco. The "one-man regiment" was at this time stopping in Amelia County at Pen Ward's Tavern, the owner of which having betrayed his whereabouts to Tarleton, that colonel dispatched a sergeant and his sabred squad of eight to surround the tavern and bring back Francisco for summary execution.

Unaware of any danger, Francisco was sitting quietly on the porch, when, in the words of Henry Howe: "Nine of Tarleton's cavalry rode up and at
once told him he was a prisoner. Seeing he was overpowered by numbers, Francisco made no resistance. Believing him to be a peaceful man, they all went inside, leaving Francisco and the Paymaster together. The latter then demanded of Francisco that he give up his watch and the massive shoe buckles he was wearing. To this Francisco replied, 'It would grieve me to part with them and I refuse to give them into a soldier's hands, but you have the power to take them if you see fit.' Whereupon the soldier put his sabre under his arm and bent to take the buckles. Francisco finding this a favorable opportunity to recover his liberty, stepped back one pace, drew the sword from under his adversary's arm, and instantly gave the trooper a blow across the skull. The soldier was brave, however, and although severely wounded, drew a pistol and at the same time he pulled the trigger, Francisco cut his hand nearly off with the sabre, and the bullet just grazed him. Ben Ward, the tavern owner, brought out his own musket and gave it to one of the British soldiers and urged him to make use of it. The Dragoon mounted the only horse available and presented the gun at Francisco's head. It missed fire; Francisco rushed the muzzle of the gun, a short struggle ensued and the soldier was disarmed and wounded. Tarleton's troop of four hundred men were in sight. All was hurry and confusion, which Francisco increased by repeatedly hallooing, as loud as he could, "Come on, my brave boys; now's your time; we will soon dispatch these few and then attack the main body!" The wounded man flew to the troop, the others were panic-struck (sic) and fled. Francisco seized Ward, and would have dispatched him but the poor wretch begged for his life;... The eight horses that were left behind, Francisco gave him to conceal for him. Discovering Tarleton had dispatched ten more in pursuit of him, Fran-
(42) Cisco made off. He evaded their vigilance. They stopped to refresh themselves. Francisco, like an old fox, doubled, and fell on their rear...."

On the next day when Francisco returned for the eight horses Ward had kept for him, the innkeeper demanded two "for his trouble." Francisco therefore took six horses to Prince Edward Court House, where he sold five, retaining one for himself, (which he called "Tarleton"), and delivered the money to a government agent.

(An engraving of this incident entitled Francisco's Encounter with the British Dragoons hangs in Independence Hall at Philadelphia. Beneath it appear these words: "This representation of Peter Francisco's gallant action with nine of Tarleton's Cavalry, in sight of four hundred men in Amelia County, Virginia, is respectfully inscribed to him by Jacob Webster and James Worrel of Pennsylvania." When some doubt as to the truth of this occurrence was expressed when the engraving was first made, it was vouched for by Francisco's brother-in-law, James Anderson, Jr., and his mother-in-law, Sarah Tyler Anderson, who knew of the engagement at the time of its happening).

In October, 1781, Francisco witnessed the final triumph of the Revolutionary cause which he had served so well, with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Following the surrender, he rode to Richmond with the Marquis de Lafayette, whom he accompanied to a reception at the home of a wealthy young cavalry officer, George Carrington, to which they were brought by Lafayette's aide, Major Richard Anderson, whose cousin, Susannah Anderson, was engaged to Carrington. Francisco and Miss Anderson seem to have fallen madly in love at once, but her father, James Anderson, of "The Mansion"
Cumberland County, (Va.) refused to consent to the marriage of his sixteen-year-old daughter to an uneducated private soldier of mysterious origin. Francisco's friendship with Lafayette dated from the Brandywine, where, five weeks after he landed in America, the French nobleman had been shot through the leg, and where Francisco, in his first battle, had received a deep bayonet wound below the heart. The two youths had at that time been taken to the little, stone house of a Quaker family named Gilbert. Lying side by side for long weeks of suffering, the French aristocrat and the American private began a remarkably strong friendship which endured to the end of their lives. Years later, on the occasion of Lafayette's triumphal visit to America in 1824, Francisco, then past sixty, set out for Richmond on horseback to visit his friend. In the midst of a formal reception in the Marquis's honor, when word was brought to him that Francisco had arrived, the following scene took place as described by Francisco's son, Dr. Benjamin Francisco: "An aisle was made for them where they made a most affecting and affectionate embrace. By request of General Lafayette, his old comrade-in-arms was made one of his special escort for the entire trip, and in the home of Chief Justice Marshall, the General and my father were among the most stately of the dancers. He escorted the General from Richmond to Petersburg, where by his own request the Marquis was introduced to my brother, Dr. Peter Francisco and myself, my two sisters, Mrs. Dandridge Spotswood and Mrs. Edward Pescud, and my sister-in-law, Mrs. James Anderson Francisco........" Francisco was present in October, 1824, when the College of William and Mary bestowed upon Lafayette the degree of Doctor of Laws, and soon after the General had returned to France,
Francisco christened a new-born son "Robert Lafayette."

General Nathanael Greene was also a warm friend of Francisco. After the battle of Guilford, he presented him a razor case, now preserved in the Hall of History at Raleigh, N. C. The case bears the inscription: "Peter Francisco, New Store, Buckingham County, Virginia. A tribute to his moral worth and valor. From his Comrade in Arms, Nathanael Greene."

For the four years following his meeting with Susannah Anderson, Francisco worked to educate himself and save the money for a home. He applied for admission to a country school as an ordinary pupil and secured the countryside for every book which he could buy or borrow, and is said to have read through complete libraries. The schoolmaster, Mr. Frank McGraw, wrote: "Francisco would take me in his right hand and pass me over the room, playing my head against the ceiling as though I had been a doll. My weight was one hundred and ninety pounds.......Peter evidently inherited eloquence, his range of information was a revelation of deep thinking, and he possessed the rare but simple formula of originality and directness. His ability was striking, his personality charming. He possessed vast physical courage with a gentleness whose foundation was fixed, and he had a true reverence for God."

Francisco's great industry, and his intimate friendship with Washington, Lafayette, and other prominent men finally removed the last objection of the Anderson family. Peter Francisco and Susannah Anderson were married in 1785, but after five years spent at "Hunting Towers," Mrs. Francisco died, leaving a son, James Anderson Francisco. Francisco was married twice thereafter: first, to Katherine Fauntleroy Brooke, daughter of Robert Brooke, of "Brooke Bank," Essex County, (Va.) who died in 1821, leaving four children--two
boys and two girls, and, secondly, to Mary Beverly Grymes, widow of Major Robert West, a wealthy planter, who survived Francisco without issue.

The year after the revolution, Francisco opened a small tavern at New Store, Buckingham co. (Later this tavern was burned but for years the walls still stood and were referred to as the remains of Francisco's tavern.) Then he moved to a place on Willis River about two and a half miles from New Store. (However, tradition says that Curdsville, an early town in Buckingham, situated at the head of pocket navigation on the Willis River, was named by Francisco for Joseph Curd, a Revolutionary soldier from the county who, following the war, gave him a bit of land conveniently located at the junction of several plantation roads and two stage routes, where he set up a smithy.)

The rovings of Francisco from Buckingham to Cumberland, back to Buckingham, to Charlotte and finally to Richmond, where in 1825, through the influence of his friend, Mr. Charles Yancy, he was appointed Sergeant-at-Arms in the Virginia Legislature, may be traced through the dry legal documents to be found in these counties concerning pleas against him for debts. He dressed luxuriously and seemingly forgot to pay for his fine buttons and broadcloth. Or to take a dietary example, we find a Mr. Stuart suing Francisco in Cumberland County Court House for cider long drunk and shotes that scarcely had a dressed hide left on a slave's shoes to keep them in memory. "A white mare" is taken from him in payment of debt, or a slave, or a wagon, and in one case, a "pair of iron kittle".

But Francisco was a man of peace and dignity and as good company was in demand on all occasions. A letter written to Samuel Sheppard, III, of "Merry Oaks", Hanover County (Va.) reads in part: "Today Peter Francisco was with us and a good glass of port before dinner made us feel like new
"Merry Oaks," Hanover County (Va.) reads in part: "Today Peter Francisco was with us and a good glass of port before dinner made us feel like new men. Francisco has become a product of the social influences of Virginia, and as charming as those who know they are descended from England's royalty. He has a fund of humor and is a keen observer, maybe the result of being so close to nature in his boyhood. He sang for us and his voice——I cannot describe it. There is a power, depth and sweetness of tone with wonderful potency...." In early December, 1805, a number of veterans of the Revolution met in Buckingham County. Mr. Sheppard, one of the party, gave an account of the gathering in a letter to his brother, as follows: "Last week some two dozen veterans of the late war gathered at the Court House for a re-union, the oldest eighty-eight years and the youngest forty-one. We had excellent punch, fine port, cakes baked by the ladies of the village, pastries, venison, pork and turkey, and other accessories. The hero of the occasion was Peter Francisco, not yet fifty years old, who entertained us with feats of his amazing strength. He offered to wrestle with me, but though I am a large man, I did not feel like running the risk of widowing my wife. Mr. McGraw, however, challenged Francisco to a fencing match and in that overcame him, but in feats of strength he had no equal." At "Red Oak," home of Major Peter Stratton in Buckingham County, Francisco was a common visitor when he lived nearly at "Locust Grove." Here, he often left the yard chair in which he sat——when he came to pass the day with Revolutionary comrades——buried to the first rounds in the turf.

The authentic stories about Francisco's feats of strength are numerous but none is so well-known as the following: In 1800, while on a visit
to the Francisco home, Henry Clay asked his friend if he had ever met any-
one who matched his strength. Francisco told the statesman this story:

"When I was keeping tavern at New Store, a Mr. Pamphlett rode up and made a full stop in front of my porch. Supposing him to be a traveller who wished accommodations, I went to greet him. Sitting on his horse, he ad-
dressed me thus: 'Are you Peter Francisco?' I answered him 'Yes.' 'Well,' he replied, 'I have come all the way from Kentucky to whip you for nothing.'

'I called a servant and sent him to the branch for a handful of switch-
es. On his return I handed them to Mr. Pamphlett and told him to use them over my shoulders. Then he could go back and say he had whipped me and save himself the trouble of further questioning. Mr. Pamphlett finding he could not provoke me to fight, dismounted and opened a little gate leading into my wife's flower garden. He came close and asked me to allow him to feel my weight. He raised me several times, remarking I was quite heavy.

'I then said, 'Mr. Pamphlett, let me feel your weight.' I raised him twice and the third time pitched him over a fence four feet high into the road. He was considerably hurt by the fall, but on his recovery he told me he would be satisfied if I would just put his horse over after him.

'This was a most unusual request and I had never before tried lifting a horse. But I led the animal to the fence and with my left hand under the horse's belly and my right hand behind him I put the creature over. He looked very much startled—the horse was frightened, and I was more or less astonished at myself. Then hastily exclaiming, 'I am satisfied!' Pamphlett mounted his steed and rode away. I replied, 'Good-bye, Sir—call again when you are passing,' but he never came back."
During the great fire in Richmond in 1811, Francisco was attending the theater in which the conflagration began. Mrs. Nelson, whose life Francisco saved, stated that "He returned again and again to the flaming building and brought out more than thirty people in his strong arms." (He asked that his name be omitted from the list of those who aided in rescuing people from the flames.)

Mrs. Horat Willis, whose husband was a nephew of Napoleon I, wrote:

"It was my pleasure to visit in the home of Mr. Peter Francisco. At that time it was the custom for manly men to try their strength in many ways. One of my host's daily pleasures was to carry me on the palm of one hand and my sister on the palm of the other at arm's length about the yard, while we touched but the tips of our fingers to his head."

Once Francisco and a friend were travelling to a cock-fight when they met a farmer laboring with a six-horse team to pull his wagon-load of tobacco from a mudhole. Francisco instructed the farmer to unhitch the horses, and then to the astonishment of the two men he easily lifted the rear end of the heavy-laden wagon and shoved it forward to solid ground.

As these stories quickly spread, the tavern near Francisco's home became a famous meeting-place of veterans and travellers by stage.

Excellent as was Francisco's military service during the revolution, it was not till thirty-nine years after the surrender at Yorktown that he received any compensation other than his slim soldier's pay during the war. But in December, 1784, Mr. Richard Lee, member of the Committee of Claims in the Virginia House of Delegates then assembled in Richmond, presented a petition from Francisco for compensation for services rendered while acting
as a Volunteer Light Dragoon in the south with Colonel Washington's troops, and for a valuable horse he had lost while in the service. Owing to the parsimonious spirit of the House at this time, the petition was not granted. Six years later, of his own account, Mr Lee again pressed Francisco's claim. He gave a resume of his brave deeds on the field of battle, and asked that he be paid for the horse, which had been purchased and equipped at his own expense. Therefore, on the 30th of December, 1790, the following act was passed by the Legislature:

"Sect. 1. Whereas it has been represented to the present General Assembly, that Peter Francisco of the county of Charlotte, entered into the Virginia Line as a soldier at a very early period of the late war with Great Britain, received several wounds in the course thereof, and distinguished himself by numerous acts of bravery and intrepidity; and whereas the said Peter Francisco afterwards joined the cavalry to the southward, under the command of Colonel William Washington, having first purchased at his own cost a very valuable horse, which being worn down by hardship died in the service; Section 2. Be it enacted by the General Assembly, that as well to compensate the said Peter Francisco for the loss of the said horse, as to reward him for his valor, the auditor shall and he is hereby required to issue him a warrant on the Treasury for the sum of 75 pounds, payable out of the contingent fund."

It was not till 1820 that Francisco's claims were recognized, but this delay was partly due to the fact that he had lost his pocket-book during the North Carolina campaign, in which were all of his vouchers. They were found, and sent him from the little Moravian town of Salem, N. C.
Francisco dictated a petition to John Randolph, of Roanoke, then a member of Congress, who journeyed from Washington to Richmond to present the petition to the Legislature, which at last awarded Francisco a small pension, of which he himself received only $36.

In 1819, Francisco applied to Congress, through Hon. John W. Eppes, for a pension, but the committee of the Senate, to whom the petition was referred, reported against it. After his death, his widow applied and was pensioned.

**********

Peter Francisco died on Sunday, January 16, 1831. On the following Tuesday, (Jan. 18) the Richmond Enquirer carried the following death notice: "Died--On Sunday, in this city, after a lingering indisposition, Peter Francisco, Esq., the Sergeant at Arms of the House of Delegates--and a Revolutionary Soldier, celebrated for his extraordinary strength, his undaunted courage, and his brilliant feats--The House of Delegates have determined to pay him the honors of a Public Funeral, and to bury him with the honors of war--The House have accordingly adjourned until tomorrow. The Resolutions passed on this occasion, and the Encomiums that were paid to the old Soldier's memory, are detailed in our accounts of the Proceeding of the House."

In the same paper under the title--"Proceedings in the House of Delegates, January 17, 1831" we find the following article: "Death of Peter Francisco: Mr. Yancey said, that he had the painful duty to perform of announcing to the House, the death of Peter Francisco, late Sergeant-at-Arms to this House; that the members of this House will form a procession
and attend the place of his interment.

"Resolved also, That in consideration of the distinguished military services rendered by the said Peter Francisco, during the Revolutionary War, that the Governor of this Commonwealth cause the remains of the said Peter Francisco to be interred with military honors, and at the public expense.

"Resolved, That a committee be appointed, to consist of five members, to superintend the funeral, arrange the order of procession, and interment of Peter Francisco, deceased, and that the committee invite the attendance of the Governor and Council, the Speaker and members of the Senate and their officers.

"Mr. Barbour rose to second the resolutions presented to the House. The loss of any citizen, who was an officer of the House, could not but be deeply regretted. But Francisco was no common man and he was happy that some record was to be left to his merits and his memory. In ancient times monuments were erected to men who had performed worthy services; but in modern times their worth was inscribed on our records and by the aid of the press were sent far and wide. He had said Francisco was no common man. By nature he had been endowed with extraordinary strength, the most determined intrepidity, and the warmest patriotism. It was not his lot to be advanced in rank during our Revolutionary struggle. But as a private soldier he gave a striking example of bravery, and performed exploits that have scarcely ever been excelled. Not only in the North, but the South, he displayed his heroism. And the achievements which he performed in Virginia, overcoming three or four of the enemy, and causing them to fly, leaving their property in his possession, has seldom been equalled. Let us, then,
perform due honors to the memory of Francisco. Such opportunities of honoring the brave would not occur very often, for the ranks of the Revolutionary heroes were fast decaying. By the arms of such men the liberty of our country was achieved, an achievement of vast moment to the whole world for it had not been confined to this country. It had gone across the waters, to the shores of Europe, where nations were following the example of America. To such men, then, honor was due; and he joined most heartily in the respect proposed to be paid to the remains of Peter Francisco."

Francisco's obituary appeared in the Richmond Enquirer on Thursday, January 20, 1831, and reads as follows: "Honor to the Dead: The House of Delegates did not meet on Tuesday. It paid the last honors to the memory of Peter Francisco. (The Senate adjourned for the purpose of joining in this ceremony.) All the Volunteer Companies of this city turned out with alacrity to testify their respect to the deceased. The procession, was a long and respectable one. Capt. Mumford's Company of Light Infantry Blues--Captain Richardson's Lafayette Artillery Company--Captain Harrison's Dragoons--and Captain Bolling's Company of the Public Guard united with members of the Legislature, the Governor and Council, the Public Officers, and Citizens, and Strangers, in the last act of respect, for the memory of the Revolutionary Soldier.

"At 2 o'clock, according to the order of the Committee of Arrangement, the corpse of the deceased was conveyed into the centre of the Hall of the House of Delegates, by a detachment of the three Volunteer Companies of the City--the officers and companies themselves attending the solemn occasion."
"The Right Rev. R. C. Moore read the funeralservice from the Speaker's chair and followed it by an appropriate discourse—We lay the conclusion of it before our readers:

"I have been led to the consideration of the subject which has been discussed, by the death of Peter Francisco, one of the remaining warriors of the Revolutionary War, and perhaps an individual, who, in the subordinate rank he filled, performed as many acts of heroism, as any person engaged in that long and trying conflict. He possessed a degree of bodily strength superior to that of any man of modern times; and that strength with which he was endowed, was exerted in the defence of the country which gave him b

"He informed me that he had been severely wounded three times: once by a musket ball, and twice with the bayonet. But, my brethren, strong and powerful as were his bodily powers—invincible as he was in the field of battle—formidable as was Francisco to human enemies—he has, at last, fallen a victim to disease; an enemy to whose power we must all succumb, and who will sooner or later lay us all as prostrate, as lies the body of the man, to whose memory we are now paying the last tribute of our attention and respect.

"It is honorable to the legislative body of the state thus to notice the death of an old Revolutionary Soldier. It is doubly honorable to the representative of the people as the tribute is paid to an individual, whose situation in life was humble—devoid of the glitter of wealth, or of elevated rank in society; and whose claim to their attention is founded on his love of country, and his Revolutionary services.
"To dilate upon his character as a warrior, forms not the duty required of me by the committee appointed to superintend his interment.

Believing, however, that it will be agreeable to you to hear something of his death-bed scene, I must request your indulgence a moment longer, while I carry you to his sick-room; and portray to your view the last hours of Francisco as a Christian soldier.

"The first intimation I had of his illness, was furnished me in a letter from Petersburg, requesting me to visit and console him in his sufferings. Upon entering the apartment, I disclosed to him the object I had in view. He expressed his thankfulness for the regard I manifested towards him, and listened to my instruction with the deepest and most solemn attention. The offices of the religion in which we were engaged were attended to by him with great solemnity and feeling, he was sensibly impressed with his situation, and in prayer discovered a sensibility honorable to him as a soldier and Christian.

"On my second visit, I perceived that his strength had sensibly declined, and that his symptoms were fraught with danger. I spoke to him of death, and told him of the love of that Saviour, who suffered on the cross, and who had died for his salvation. He remarked with great feeling, that he was afraid he had put off his preparation for eternity too long. In reply to his remark, I told him of the willingness of the Saviour to receive him—that he desired not the death of a sinner—that he had tasted death for every man—that he has solemnly declared "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." I beseeched him to fly for refuge to the cross of Christ and assured him that he would find a place of perfect safety, in the
affectionate bosom of the penitent sinner's friend. He raised his arm and
in language of the most affecting description, and with great feeling ex-
claimed, "I will take hold of the Cross—I will take hold of my Redeemer,
who is my only dependence, and will not let him go—I am willing to die—
I am willing to leave the world—I would rather go than remain here." We
again united in devotional duty, and I bid the old Christian farewell.

"My brethren, he is gone to that country from which no traveller re-
turns—Let us imitate the example he has afforded us in his last moments,
and make the Saviour of Mankind our refuge also.—Amen."

"Soon after three o'clock the procession left the hall and attended
the corpse to the New Burying Ground in the suburbs of the city where
Military Honors were paid to the old soldier."

Francisco's portrait, an oil painting copied from an original by an
unknown artist, formerly hung in the Virginia State Library at Richmond,
but it has been moved in recent years to the Executive Mansion in the same
city.

Signed: James H. Bailey
Notes

1 An article entitled "Peter Francisco", of which Mr. Robert Buckner, a scenario writer, of Hollywood, California, was the author, appeared in The Elks Magazine (Eastern edition), November, 1926, Vol.XV, No.6, and another article on Francisco entitled "Incredible Colossus", written by Mr. Clarence E. Boykin, Richmond (Va.) newspaperman, appeared in Coronet, February, 1929, Vol.V, No.4.

2 There is a biography of Francisco, however, written by his descendants, Nannie Francisco Porter (Mrs. William A. Porter, of Richmond, Va.), and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, and entitled The Romantic Record of Peter Francisco, which was published by the McClure Company, Inc., Staunton, Va., 1928.

3 Cf. Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, The Romantic Record of Peter Francisco.

4 Campbell (History of the Colony, Ancient Dominion of Virginia) and Howe (Historical Collections of Virginia) both state that Francisco was indentured to Judge Winston.

5 Cf. Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit. (According to a family tradition mentioned in this volume, when the judge arrived at his Buckingham home, "Hunting Tower" or "Hunting Towers," a maid-servant was appointed to care for the boy and later this faithful nurse was presented as a wedding present to Francisco's young bride.

6 Hon. B.F. Dixon, in his address at the unveiling of the tablet to Francisco at the Guilford Battle Ground in North Carolina, said that Francisco was sent to the poor house of Prince George County (Virginia) where he remained "until he was large enough to be of service to man, and then he was bound out to Mr. Anthony Winston, of Buckingham County, Va." This statement is also made by Miss Nannie B. Winston in her pamphlet entitled Peter Francisco, Soldier of the Revolution, Richmond, 1883.

7 Cf. Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.

8 Cf. Ibid.

9 Howe agrees with this figure (Historical Collections of Virginia, Charleston, S.C., 1845).


12 Cf. Ibid.

13 In her pamphlet, Peter Francisco, Soldier of the Revolution (Richmond, 1880), Miss Nannie B. Winston tells us that the officers and men of this garrison under the command of Colonel Smith withstood for several days an incessant cannonade and bombardment, but finally the block houses were demolished, the palisades beaten down, the guns dismounted, and the barracks reduced to ruins. The heroic little band was reduced to forty in number, when, there being scarcely a fortification left to defend, they set fire at night to whatever was combustible of the fort, and crossed to Red Bank by the light of the flames.


17 Cf. Robert Buckner, op. cit.

18 Cf. Hon. E.F. Dixon, Peter Francisco, Greensboro, N.C., 1819. (An address delivered at the unveiling of the tablet to Francisco at the Guilford Battleground.)


20 Cf. Ibid.


22 Cf. Robert Buckner, op. cit.

23 Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Virginia.

24 Nannie B. Winston, op. cit.


26 Cf. Ibid.

27 Buckner says the length of the blade was five feet, while the Encyclopaedia of Virginia Biography states that it was six feet from hilt to point.
Its whereabouts are now unknown.


Cf. Clarence E. Boykin, op. cit.

Cf. Robert Buckner, op. cit.

"A company of dragoons had been...raised in the counties of Prince Edward, Amelia, and Nottoway, and made a part of Lee's famous Legion; whose deeds are so romantically detailed in his memoirs of the Southern War...A company of militia dragoons was raised in Prince Edward, under the command of Thomas Watkins, Philemon Holcomb, Charles Scott, and Samuel Venable were the other officers. Among the privates was the famous Peter Francisco. This company was attached to Colonel Washington's command; it is said Captain Watkins offered himself and company to Lee, who refused them because they were not 'fine enough dressed'"--Rev. William Henry Foote, Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical, (first series), 405.

Cf. Robert Buckner, op. cit.

Cf. Ibid.

A tall granite shaft at Greensboro, N.C., now marks the spot where "Peter Francisco, a giant of incredible strength, killed eleven British soldiers with his own broadsword, and although badly wounded by bayonet, made his escape."

Cf. Robert Buckner, op. cit.

Cf. Ibid.

Cf., Clarence E. Boykin, op. cit.

Historical Collections of Virginia

Francisco had put the badly scratched shoe buckles he wore when he arrived in Virginia in the keeping of Mrs. Winston, but Judge Winston had given him others—buckles of silver set with brilliants—to take their place. (Cf., Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.)

The sketch of Francisco in the William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine says he "cut the soldier's head in two, killing him instantly." ("Peter Francisco, the American Soldier", William and Mary College Quarterly Historical
Buckner says that Tarleton's cavalry, startled at the sight of the famous Francisco, and fearing an encounter with a superior force, whirled in the dusty road and galloped out of sight. (Cf., Robert Buckner, op. cit.)

Cf., Robert Buckner, op. cit.

Cf., Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.

This incident is also commemorated by a stone marker placed at West Creek, near Crewe, Va., in May, 1931, by the James Allen Chapter, N.S.D.A.R. The inscription reads: "Here at West Creek Peter Francisco captured single-handed nine of Tarleton's dragoons, July, 1781."

The Encyclopaedia of Virginia Biography gives her name as "Mary" Anderson.

Cf. Robert Buckner, op. cit.

Cf. Ibid.

Mannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.

Cf. Ibid.

Cf. Robert Buckner, op. cit.

Cf. Ibid.

Francisco took his second bride to "Locust Grove", the home left by his first wife to her son. (Cf. Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.)

Mary Beverly Grymes was born in Brompton, England, (a western suburb of London), in July, 1762. At the age of five, she became a member of the family of her grandmother, Mrs. Randolph, of London. She came to America at fifteen, living first with her uncle, Governor Edmund Randolph, and then with another uncle, Phillip Ludwell Grymes, of Brandon, Middlesex County. She inherited Francisco's pension and 160 acres of bounty land. She returned to her kinspeople after Francisco's death and twenty years later, records show that she was asking the state of Virginia to pay her the accrued amount of Francisco's pension, which had not been paid annually. (Cf. Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.)
Cf. Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.


Hills on record in Cumberland County Court House show that he wore "high hats and silk stocks," bought generously of "bright waistcoats," and donned "gay clothes furnished in highest taste."

William Shepard, op. cit.

William Shepard, "Shepard and Other Buckingham Families" (Part II), William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine (second series), 1937.


Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.

Ibid.

Robert Buckner, op. cit.

Cf., Ibid.

A grandson of Francisco related the following incident, which occurred during a visit to his grandfather at "Locust Grove": "While sitting at breakfast one morning my grandmother said to her husband, 'Mr. Francisco, there is a new calf in a boggy place and the servants cannot get the cow to come away.' With a pleasant smile my Grandfather replied, 'Well if nothing else will do her ladyship I will carry her out!' After breakfast my grandfather said to me, 'Little son, let's see about the baby calf and her mother.' We went down to the swamp and sure enough the cow and calf were in the bog. Grandfather was very patient at first, he coaxed and called, but the cow refused to come. After a time the old gentleman became angry and with a muttered exclamation that sounded rather more emphatic than 'Your ladyship' said, 'All right, I'll bring you out.' He threw some rails over the swampy places and crying out to her 'Come on, you old fool, you!' he took the cow under one arm and the calf under the other and brought them out to land, the cow shaking her horns in great surprise, and dangling her legs in a most ludicrous manner." (Nannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.)
66 Cf. Mannie Francisco Porter and Catherine Fauntleroy Albertson, op. cit.

67 Cf. Ibid.

68 Cf. "Peter Francisco, the American Soldier," William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine (first series), April, 1905.

69 Cf. Ibid.

70 Shockoe Cemetery
Bibliography

Books


Howe, Henry, Historical Collections of Virginia, Babcock and Co., Charleston, S.C., 1845.

Porter, Nannie Francisco, and Albertson, Catherine Fauntleroy, The Romantic Record of Peter Francisco, the McClure Company, Inc., Staunton, Va., 1929.


Newspapers, Magazines, and Pamphlets


Dixon, Hon. B.F., Peter Francisco (an address at the unveiling of the tablet to Francisco at the Guilford Battle Ground in North Carolina), Greensboro, N.C., 1910.

"Peter Francisco, the American Soldier", William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, (first series) Vol.XIII, April, 1905.

Richmond Enquirer:
(a) Tuesday, Jan. 18, 1831
(b) Thursday, Jan. 20, 1831

Shepard, William, "Buckingham County", Farmville Herald, Farmville, Va., March 29, 1935 (reprinted in Today and Yesterday in the Heart of Virginia, Farmville, Va., 1935)


Winston, Nannie B., Peter Francisco, Soldier of the Revolution, Richmond, Va., 1893.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge information received from Dandridge Spotwood, Esq., and Miss Martha E.D. Spotwood, of "Sterling Castle", Petersburg, Va., descendants of Peter Francisco.