

Types of Military Service

By AJ Berry

The past nine years, James F. Morrison and I have been working on the pension applications for the Revolutionary War. The process is lengthy, first the documents have to be accessed and then I select a deposition which was given by the soldier, if possible. The handwriting in many cases is deplorable; the spelling was done however it sounded best by the scribe. Then there is the difficulty of making out some of the words due to these problems. I do make typos in addition! Then Jim will correct the transcription, and verify the service. Pensions corrected and end noted have an * in front of the names. He verifies the information through the regimental records, payroll records, and the muster rolls. Some complain about the spelling, it is not us, but spelling was not standardized in that time.

Just because a soldier says he served, doesn't necessarily mean he did so. Old age, time, and illiteracy were mostly the culprits. Then too there was another large factor. The men wished to qualify for a pension. The \$80 a year was a handsome pension. You will find some of the old men married young women, because the women knew they would have an income for as long as they lived.

If a man served in the Continental service, usually he would simply state so because the service was continuous and they were wintered by the government. These were the national troops, Washington was the Commander-In-Chief. Often there were physical descriptions when the men enlisted, so if they went AWOL, they could be identified.

The Levies served mostly for 6-9 months and they were the state troops, often drafted or levied from the militia.

Then there was the militia, these were the county troops and served when called. This could be a day or two or a week or two, etc. Six months of service was necessary to qualify for a pension and the man had to have witnesses to verify the service. Naturally they wanted to qualify and often stretched the time, can't say I blame them. A scouting detachment was usually about 3 days, no more than a week, but the soldier might claim 3 weeks. The service had to be documented or verified by other sources. So many interesting stories come from these men.

Mostly the men fought in non-winter months, except for the New York Line who served on the Continental Establishment, those troops were wintered, others were discharged.