

## This Day in History... July 9, 1760

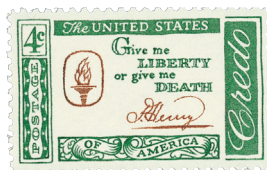
# Happy Birthday to Peter Francisco

Pedro Francisco, also known as the “Virginia Giant,” the “Giant of the Revolution,” and the “Virginia Hercules,” was born on July 9, 1760, in Porto Judeu, Terceira, Portugal. Francisco’s early life is filled with mystery and intrigue. When he was five years old, he was found on the docks at City Point, Virginia, and taken to the Prince George County Poorhouse. He didn’t speak English, but kept saying the name “Pedro Francisco,” leading the locals to call him Peter. They soon realized he was speaking Portuguese and noticed that his clothes were of fine quality. Once they were able to find a translator, they discovered his dramatic story...

Francisco told them that he had lived in a mansion near the ocean. His parents were a wealthy noble couple that had settled on the island of Terceira. One day, he and his sister were kidnapped from the grounds. While his sister escaped, Francisco was taken to a ship. Historians have suggested that the kidnappers planned to hold the children for ransom or sell them as servants in North America, but changed their minds. Another legend claims that Francisco’s parents arranged the kidnapping to protect him from being harmed by one of their political enemies.

Patrick Henry’s uncle, who was a prominent judge, took in Francisco. Peter grew to be 6’ 8” and weighed about 260 pounds. At the time, the average man was about a foot shorter. Because of his large size and strength, he was apprenticed to a blacksmith when he was old enough.

In 1775, Peter heard Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death” speech and became a revolutionary at age 14. He wanted to enlist in the Continental Army right away, but his guardian advised him to wait a year. As soon as he turned 15, Francisco enlisted with the 10th Virginia Regiment.



*From the American Credo Series*

Francisco fought bravely at several notable battles, including the Battle of Brandywine. He also fought at Germantown and Fort Mifflin. The young soldier received his first wound in 1777. His regiment was serving as rear guard during an American retreat. He and a young Marquis de Lafayette were both injured and received care from Quakers who lived nearby. After spending the winter at Valley Forge, Francisco was part of the force that intercepted the retreating British at Monmouth Court House in New Jersey. He was again wounded, but went on to fight at Cowpens. At Stony Point, Francisco suffered a nine-inch cut on his stomach, but continued to fight. He was the second person to enter the fort, killed 12 British soldiers, and captured their flag. He was specifically mentioned in General “Mad” Anthony Wayne’s report and was rewarded \$200 for his efforts. At the Battle of Camden, Francisco had noted that American troops left behind one of their valuable cannons, which was stuck in the mud. According to legend, he picked up the 1,100-pound cannon and carried it on his shoulder to keep it from being captured by the British. Also at Camden, he claimed to have saved his commander’s life. Francisco went on to fight at Guilford Courthouse, again suffering severe wounds. After recuperating, he volunteered to spy on Banastre Tarleton and his raiders. This led to one of his most famous (though probably embellished) feats, Francisco’s fight. Sometime in July 1781, he claimed to have been surrounded by Tarleton’s men outside of a tavern. They ordered him to give them his silver shoe buckles and he told them to take the buckles themselves. A dramatic fight ensued in which he killed one man, wounded eight others, and captured eight of their horses.

Francisco was then summoned to join the army at Yorktown, though he didn’t fight. After the war, he sought a basic education, attending school with children who were fascinated by his war stories. He later married and had children. In the 1820s, Francisco petitioned Congress and the Virginia Legislature for support. In his final years, he was the sergeant-at-arms for the Virginia State Senate. Francisco died of appendicitis on January 16, 1831, and was buried with full military honors. A few locations in the US with large Portuguese populations have monuments to Francisco – a park in Newark, New Jersey, and Peter Francisco Square in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Maryland celebrate March 15 as Peter Francisco Day (the anniversary of the Battle of Guilford Court House). The American-based Portuguese Continental Union also awards the Peter Francisco Award to people or groups that bring prestige to the people of Portuguese heritage in the US. There are also monuments to Francisco at his birthplace in Terceira and Hopewell, Virginia (where he was originally found in the US).



*Stamp pictures Francisco carrying the 1,100-pound cannon at the Battle of Camden.*



*Stamp honors the Battle of Monmouth and Molly Pitcher.*

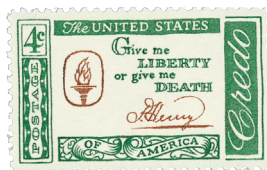
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