

Prince Simbo



A carved cow horn that Private Prince Simbo used to carry gunpowder, is located at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Image Credit: Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

Prince Simbo (1740 or 1750-December 14, 1810) – In 1777, Prince Simbo joined Captain Ebenezer Hills's Company in the 7th Connecticut Regiment, Huntington's Brigade, First Division.¹ He enlisted in Glastonbury, Connecticut—as did Sampson Freeman and six other Black men throughout the war.² Simbo most likely enlisted as a free man, though the evidence remains inconclusive.³ If free, he “likely had more significant

rights and privileges associated with membership to the militia” prior to enlistment.⁴

Simbo served in the Continental Army throughout the remainder of the war. He encamped at Valley Forge, and his unit fought at the Battles of Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth.⁵ A surviving receipt indicates that commanders procured Simbo and fellow soldier Sampson Freeman much-needed blankets during the Valley Forge encampment. Simbo seems to have fared relatively well otherwise. Yet, two years later, the Connecticut soldier incurred a serious illness or injury at the Jockey Hollow encampment. In December 1779, Simbo took a thirty-day furlough, but then commanders listed him as “Sick Absent” until July 1780, when they transferred him into the Invalid Corps.⁶ Established by Congress, this unit provided “guard details and drill training,” which freed up able-bodied soldiers to fight on the front lines.⁷

After the war, Simbo returned to Glastonbury. The 1790 U.S. Federal Census listed him as Head of Household, living with five other free (unnamed) persons.⁸ This number most likely included his wife Phebe. Prince and Phebe may have attended First Church of Christ, Congregational, since the church recorded their date of death in 1810 and 1815, respectively.⁹

In November 1777, just before marching into Valley Forge, Simbo carved a cow horn he used to carry gunpowder. A witness to history, this beautiful work of craftsmanship still survives. It indicates that Simbo knew how to read and write, as he included the following inscription on it:

Prince Simbo
his horn made at Glastenbury
November 17th

Decorative motifs on the horn include the all-seeing eye, and a bird carrying a banner with the word “Liberty” (not shown).¹⁰ Simbo’s personal military records also survive, including pay stubs and the receipt for blankets, suggesting that the family once stored them together, intact—conscious of the history they held.¹¹ Today, you can view Prince Simbo’s gunpowder horn and military papers at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, whether in person, or **online** at <https://collections.si.edu/> by searching Prince Simbo.