

War Stories

I've never thought of my family as being particularly bellicose, but it is a fact that a number of my ancestors played substantial roles in some of our country's major conflicts.

Perhaps most notably, direct ancestors of mine were closely involved at both the beginning and the end of the Revolutionary War. On April 19, 1775, in Concord, Massachusetts, when the colonials turned back the British troops and the real fighting began, my great-great-great-great-grandfather **James Barrett, 1710-1779**, was the colonel at the head of all the militia, and it was the arms in his keeping, many stored on his farm, that the British had come out from Boston to destroy. He was sixty-five years old then, with a bad leg which kept him from doing much marching, but he could ride, and he sat on his horse that fateful day near the Old North Bridge, issued the command that signaled open rebellion, and the firing began.

His son **Nathan Barrett, 1735-1791**, who was also my ancestor, was there as well, one of the captains among the Minutemen – a group of younger men so-called because they were ready to take up arms at a moment's notice. A report that Nathan was wounded during that first battle, was later found not to be true.

And six years later, in October of 1781, at Yorktown, Virginia, when the last major and decisive battle of the war was fought, and Lord Cornwallis surrendered the entire British force to George Washington, another of my great-great-great-great-grandfathers (each of us has thirty-two of those), **Benjamin Lincoln, 1733-1810**, was very much in on the action. When the battle was over, Cornwallis, pleading illness, sent his second-in-command, Brigadier Charles O'Hara to formally make the surrender. Washington, saying, "Deputy should surrender to deputy," responded by sending Lincoln to receive him. As *The American Heritage Book of the Revolution* describes it, "With a characteristically generous gesture, Washington nominated General Lincoln, who had undergone humiliation at Charleston, to act for him. Lincoln, with a bow to his superior, rode forward, hoof-beats loud in the hush, touched O'Hara's sword in token acceptance, and then briefly told him how the garrison was to march out and where it was to stack arms before returning weaponless to Yorktown to await further orders."

That night, Washington gave a dinner for O'Hara, leaving the dinner early himself to send a message to Congress, reporting the huge victory. Undoubtedly Benjamin Lincoln was at that dinner; he must have found it particularly savory.

Some twenty-five years before all of that, in 1755, the French and Indian War, which has been described as "the war that made America," dealt a devastating blow to another branch of my ancestral family.

The French and Indian War, which later blended into the Seven Year War in Europe, was principally an effort by the British to drive the French out of North America. Both sides enlisted Indian warriors to help, the French from tribes in the West, and the British from those in the Northeast. The British, of course, brought in militia from the colonies as well. A young man by the name of George Washington was among those from Virginia, and many others, who would show up later on both sides of the Revolutionary War, including both James Barrett and Benjamin Lincoln, had gained valuable military experience fighting the French. And another one of my great-great-great-grandfathers, **Moses Porter, 1722-1755**, was the captain in command of a company from Hadley, Massachusetts.

Joining a regiment under the command of Ephraim Williams, for whom Williams College was later named, Porter and his company headed for Crown Point on Lake Champlain in upstate New York, where the French had built a major fortification from which they launched attacks throughout New York and New England. On September 8, 1755, near Lake George, in a battle later referred to as the Bloody Morning Scout, they were ambushed by the French, and forty-six soldiers in the regiment were killed, including Colonel Williams, Captain Porter, and their Mohawk adviser known as Old Hendrick.

Moses Porter left behind his young wife, an eight-year-old daughter, and their new house, which had been constructed just three years earlier, the first substantial house built outside the stockade in the town of Hadley

Moses Porter's family first learned of his death on September 14, when his Indian guide rapped on a window of the Hadley home, and handed his sword in to the now-widowed **Elizabeth Pitkin Porter, 1719-1798**. The sword in

its scabbard, but without its hilt, is still on display at the old house, which is now known as the Porter-Phelps-Huntington Museum.

Moses Porter's only child, **Elizabeth Porter, 1747-1817**, called Betsey by her family, was my great-great-great-grandmother.

When I think of the Civil War, naturally one family name surfaces right away – my own. My great-grandfather, **David Mack Goode, 1835-1883**, for whom I was named, was a farmer in Chesterfield County, Virginia, near Richmond. He served in the Confederate Army throughout the four years of the conflict. Wounded several times and paroled at Appomattox in April of 1865, he was Captain of Company K in the Virginia Infantry, a part of Mahone's Brigade. His obituary in *The Richmond Dispatch*, upon his death on August 15, 1883, noted that his farm property had been destroyed during the war, but that he "bent his sword into a plowshare, and his spear into a pruning hook," and made his farm "blossom as a rose" again.

One of his granddaughters, **Lona Marie Goode, 1897-1956**, trained as a nurse at the Medical College of Virginia, in Richmond, then went out to staff a hospital in Norton, in the mountainous Southwestern part of the state. There she met and married an Episcopal clergyman, **M. Paul St. Agnan Huntington, 1882-1967**, who had left a post at St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston to serve a mission church in the coal-mining community. That pretty Southern lady was, of course, my mother.

When I think of our family and the First World War – at that time often called The Great War – my thoughts go primarily to my uncle Freddy, **Frederic Dane Huntington, 1889-1940**, my father's younger brother. He and my father were very close. When my father was married in 1922, he chose Freddy to be his best man, and Freddy brought his own bride-to-be, Elsie Entress, down to Norton, Virginia in 1924 so that my father could marry them.

Freddy graduated from Harvard College in 1912, an outstanding athlete, particularly in hockey and football, who would later be added to its Varsity Club Hall of Fame. He went on to Harvard Law School, completing his studies there in 1915, and joined a law firm in Boston. He also joined the national guard, and was made captain in the First Massachusetts Field Artillery. In the summer of 1916, when President Woodrow Wilson called out the national guards of several states, including Massachusetts, to help

with troubles in Mexico, he went down to the Mexican border, spending several months, presumably in the pursuit of Pancho Villa.

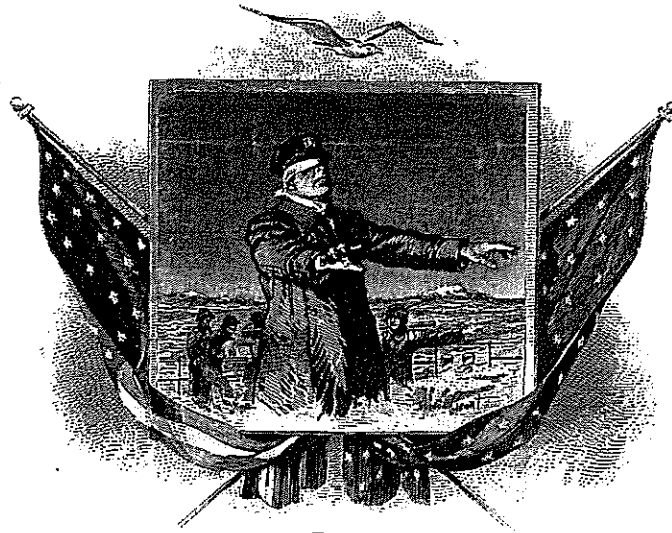
His regiment was federalized, designated the 101st Field Artillery in the 26th “Yankee” Division, and in July of 1917, sailed to France. The battery that Freddy commanded fired the first artillery shell marking the national guard’s participation in the war. He then saw service in the Chemin des Dames and Meuse-Argonne sectors, and briefly with the Judge Advocate General after the hostilities ended.

When I transcribed some of my father’s diaries a few years ago, I learned that on April 7, 1919 – he was on the staff of St. Paul’s Cathedral in Boston at that time – my father managed to get aboard a lighthouse tender and go out in Boston harbor to escort in a transport ship filled with returning troops of the 26th Division. There was great excitement, amid the din of cheering and whistling, but no sign of Freddy. After several days of great worry, and some high level investigation, he discovered that Freddy, for reasons not well explained, had gone missing in France ten days before sailing, and had finally turned up in a French hospital suffering from pneumonia. He ended up staying in France for another four months, serving on temporary duty with the Judge Advocate General, before at last returning home to Boston in mid-August.

The war was a shattering experience for him, as it was for so many other people. There is no record that he was otherwise wounded, but in a 1920 entry my father wrote in his diary that Freddy still coughed a lot – “ the gassing two years ago had left its toll.” His mother said that he was never the same man again.

My aunt, **Catharine Sargent Huntington, 1887-1987**, spent much of the year 1919 in France also, engaged in reconstruction work, I believe for the YMCA, in a group which she helped to organize among her Radcliffe friends.

In another interesting side note, my father noted in his diary on February 18, 1918, that he had sent off a sea-glass that had belonged to his sea captain grandfather, **Epes Sargent, 1784-1853**, to be used in the war for sighting submarines, and expressed the hope that it would someday be returned, as it was a family treasure. Remarkably, when the war was over, it was returned, and now may be seen in the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House in Hadley. I



*The United States of America
Department of the Navy*

*The thousands of binoculars, telescopes,
spyglasses, and navigation instruments furnished
the Navy by individuals, in response to its appeal for*

"Eyes for the Navy"

*have been a vital contribution in the protection of our
warships, transports, and supply vessels, against the
submarine activities of the enemy, during the Great War.*

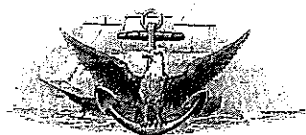
*The Navy acknowledges, with thanks and
appreciation, your cooperation, and this certificate is
issued to*

Rev. W. P. Huntington

*in recognition of the sacrifice made for the safety of our
ships and the assurance of final victory.*

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Assistant Secretary of the Navy.



have a certificate signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, thanking my father for participating in the “Eyes for the Navy” program.

I was at Lenox School in Massachusetts, when World War II began. Lenox was a small Episcopal preparatory school. Its motto was “Non ministrari sed ministrare” – not to be served but to serve, and as the war progressed rapidly and intensely, we were reminded frequently of the large percentage of the school’s alumni who were serving our country, and the growing number who had already given their lives for it. Years later, in January of 1961, when President John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural address, said memorably, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but rather ask what you can do for your country,” I thought back on all of those daily chapel services at Lenox, when we were given the latest casualty figures, and reminded of our obligation to help others, not to seek help for ourselves. My guess is that the students in many New England preparatory schools at that time heard that same message. I believe Kennedy acknowledged that he had himself.

A great many of us in my generation of our family were actively involved in the Second World War. My brother, **William P. Huntington**, served in the Army, much of the time in Italy and France. As I recounted in *The Army and Me*, I served in the Philippines and Korea (not in the Korean War, which came later, but during the occupation of Korea after the war with Japan ended.)

A first cousin of mine, **John H. Huntington, 1916-1987**, turned down by the U. S. military for medical reasons, joined the American Field Service and drove an ambulance with the British Eighth Army in North Africa

A fascinating story of life in the British Army during the war has been told by **Brian Urquhart**, in his autobiography *A Life in Peace and War*. Brian, a British citizen, was married to my first cousin, **Alfreda Huntington**, whose father, **Constant Huntington, 1876-1962**, was an expatriate at that time, living in England, where he headed up the London branch of the G. P. Putnam’s publishing company.

Brian was a student at Oxford when war was declared in 1939, and he enlisted right away. He says that actually he thought he was joining the Royal Navy, but he filled out the wrong form and found himself in the British Army instead. After officer training, and several other assignments,

he was recruited to a group which was developing plans for the use of gliders and parachute troops in the war. Miraculously he survived a practice drop over Wiltshire, when his parachute failed to open. He writes that he recalls looking down to find that he was speedily overtaking the soldiers who had jumped before him, and then looking up to see that his parachute looked more like a tulip bud than a mushroom !

But somehow Brian recovered and finished out the war. He then joined the secretariat of the new United Nations, where he spent the next forty years in a distinguished career, waging peace around the world. He retired as Under Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1985.

There have been other wars during the last fifty years, at least five in which our countrymen have fought on soil other than our own – the Korean War, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and now Afghanistan and Iraq. Although I have not researched the matter very thoroughly, I believe our family's involvement in them has been minimal. I don't regret that at all.

DMGH
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