

I got started in tracing my family tree many years ago through the efforts, excitement, enthusiasm, and encouragement of my Aunt Fauna Waite Taylor. At the time, I was living in Tennessee and had become interested in the local Civil War history. When my Aunt Fauna informed me that I had a great, great grandfather that had been there and fought with the 1st Michigan Light Artillery, somehow the history of this great conflict became even more real and exciting.

Over the years my interest in climbing the family tree has never wavered, but as a sidelight, I've also found that many of my Waite and associated family ancestors served their country faithfully in many conflicts. You too, may have discovered ancestors that served in the military, and in some cases, may have even given their life for their country or their beliefs. In an effort to make our genealogical history a little more real and interesting in terms of our Waite and associated family's military history, in the next few months I will attempt to fill in some of the background of why, when, and where our ancestors served in America's military conflicts. I hope the information presented will make your ancestors become more real and give you a little insight into your family's rich military history. I am unable to answer specific questions about your ancestor's military service, however, in future articles I will provide some excellent resources you can use to do your own research.

King Philip's War

Though lasting only 14 months, on a per capita basis, King Philip's War was the bloodiest war in America's history, with at least one sixth of all adult male colonists in New England, and an even higher percentage of Native Americans losing their lives in the conflict. (To put these numbers into perspective, if this war was fought today and the same percentage of the population was involved, it would end with the deaths of more than 8 million Americans!) On top of that, this war could well have ended the colonization of the northeastern portion of what is now the United States.... perhaps all white settlements in the New World. Undoubtedly some of the more than 100 Wait or Waite family members living in America at the time either fought and died as soldiers or were killed by the Indians in this war.

The War That Could Have Ended the Colonization of New England

At the center of this catastrophe was one man. Named Metacomet by his family, he was later nicknamed "King Philip" by the English for his haughty mannerisms. One of the many ironies of this conflict is that Philip was the son of Massasoit, the Indian chief who had helped the Plymouth Pilgrims survive their first winter in the New World. After Massasoit's death, Philip became the Sachem of his people, the Pokanokets, who were a major tribe within the powerful Wampanoag Indian Federation.

In the 55-year span of time between the arrival of the Mayflower and the outbreak of King Philip's War, the English had prospered, multiplied and expanded their settlements. At the same time, the native Americans were in a slow state of decline from diseases introduced by the Europeans, and the loss of their tribal lands to the ever increasing population of white settlers. The stage was set for a major confrontation between these two opposing cultures by 1675 when Philip stepped forward to make a stand, declaring "I am determined not to live until I have no country".

The war was actually touched off by a common enough occurrence, when several Wampanoag braves killed some English cattle near what is now Bristol, Rhode Island. The retaliating farmer killed an Indian, setting into motion a native uprising that would eventually threaten to wipe the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Bay Colonies out of existence.

Encouraged by King Philip, his Wampanoag warriors were immediately joined by the Nipmuck Indians who lived in what is now central Massachusetts, presenting a formidable force. One of the first towns they attacked was Brookfield, a frontier settlement deep in the land of the Nipmucks. The siege of the town would turn out to be one of most dramatic incidents of the war. The natives first laid ambush to a company of soldiers of which eight were killed. The rest of the company barely made it back to the garrison at Brookfield. Philips warriors pursued them and burned every building in town. They then surrounded the wooden garrison where surviving soldiers and settlers huddled, then pushed a flaming cart to the side of the building and watched as the flames began licking their way up the wall. Using the last of their drinking water, the settlers succeeded in slowing the blaze, but they now faced an awful choice.... stay inside and die by fire, or try and flee which probably meant being scalped and killed by the Indians. But luck was with the garrison. The clouds opened up and a seemingly miraculous heavy rain shower fell and doused the flames. The town of Brookfield, however, was abandoned and lay in ashes for the next 11 years.

The Nipmuck and Wampanoag warriors next turned their attention to the settlements along the Connecticut River Valley. This valley produced thousands of bushels of grain each year and was known as the breadbasket of New England. By the fall of 1675, the Nipmuck and Wampanoag braves were joined on the warpath by all of the tribes that lived along the Connecticut River including the Pocumtucks, Squakheags and the Norwotocks. Their concentrated attacks soon forced the English to abandon the town of Deerfield as well as the entire Pioneer Valley.

After the attack on Deerfield, the English sent a heavy column under the command of Captain Lothrop back to retrieve any remaining grain and bring it to the garrisons at Hadley, Northampton and Hatfield. Though the trek to Deerfield went without incident, while bringing back the several wagonloads of grain and crops, the soldiers became complacent, placing their muskets in the wagons and stopping to pick wild grapes to quench their thirst. Without warning, the Indians viscously attacked the column. Within minutes 71 soldiers were killed. Troops led by Captain Moseley heard the muskets firing from several miles away and raced to the scene but arrived too late to save Captain Lothrop and his men. Skirmishing heavily until after dark, the English were forced to abandon their dead on the field of battle.

After this disaster, the English colonists were in complete disarray. Some even concluded that the war was a result of God's punishment of the Puritans for not abiding by strict religious codes. The Puritans then lashed out at their easiest scapegoats, persecuting Quakers and imprisoning or hanging many neutral and Christian Indians.

In October, Philip's forces struck again with raids on the towns of Hatfield, Northampton and Springfield where 30 houses were burned. Attacking warriors now included members of the Agawam tribe. This tribe had been peaceful, but became hostile when settlers took some of their children for hostages as a

precautionary move against an attack. Their strategy backfired and only served to enrage the Agawams into joining Philip and burning Springfield.

As winter set in, the attacks diminished as the natives moved into a position from where they could tighten the noose around their ultimate prize, Boston. But it would be a difficult winter for the Indians, too. With much of their traditional crops left unattended during the summer, hunger now took its toll. The English meanwhile, were becoming desperate. With the central part of Massachusetts now firmly in the hands of the natives, they began to think things couldn't get any worse. They were wrong.

One of the biggest fears for the English had been that the powerful Narragansett tribe (which had lived peacefully in Rhode Island with the followers of Roger Williams for many years) might soon enter the war. In a colossal blunder, the colonists decided to make a preemptive strike against the neutral Narragansetts. In December of 1675, a force of one thousand soldiers from Massachusetts Bay Colony, Plymouth Colony, and Connecticut Colony marched into Narragansett territory in southern Rhode Island and to a battle that would become known as the Great Swamp Massacre. (By the way, this colonial army camped for several nights on the Post Road in North Kingstown, Rhode Island, just a few hundred yards from where I lived for several years).

An Indian traitor betrayed his own people and told the English the exact location of the large Narragansett fortress-camp surrounded by a palisade, deep within a swamp. The colonist army descended on the camp during a blizzard, felling a single large tree across the protective moat to provide entry into the fort. When the English finally breached the fortress-camp walls, vicious fighting ensued in which more than 500 Narragansetts were slaughtered (mostly women and children), and the entire camp was set ablaze. The surviving Narragansett Indians fled the battlefield, to enter the war on the side of Philip, and their rage knew no bounds.

In the next few months, Narragansett warriors raided and burned the towns of Medfield, Groton, Sudbury, Plymouth, Rehoboth, Providence, Marlboro and others. In February of 1676, Indian war parties descended on the town of Lancaster and succeeded in storming the garrison where all of its settlers had taken refuge. Colonial morale was at an all time low and it seemed as if all the New England colonies were on the verge of falling to the savage forces of King Philip.

However, the power of the Indians was now in decline. They were short on food, weapons, powder and shot, but worse, reinforcements were arriving almost weekly from England through Boston and other ports, leaving Philip's forces facing superior numbers of colonial soldiers. They were also about to suffer another massacre, this time at their main camp on the Connecticut River.

In May of 1676, Captain Turner and Captain Holyoke launched an attack on the Indian camp at the northern end of the Connecticut River. Surprising the Indians at dawn, they slaughtered scores of natives in close quarters combat as they fled their wigwams. Many others tried to swim across the river to escape the soldier's muskets, bayonets and swords, only to be drowned as the swift current swept them over the falls. Warriors from surrounding areas then launched a counterattack, killing Captain Turner as he and his men fled back to Hadley, but the damage had been done. This major war camp of the Wampanoags and Nipmucks had been effectively wiped out. As a result, the Indian alliance soon

collapsed and the few warriors that escaped the camp either fled north or went on fighting in a lost cause.

Philip, with only few warriors left, made his way back to his tribal headquarters near what is now Mount Hope, Rhode Island where he continued to use hit and run tactics on isolated farms throughout the area. However, by the end of the summer of 1676 he was finally tracked down and ironically, it was a friendly Indian scout's musket that sent a musket ball through Philip's heart. The death of King Philip effectively ended the Native American resistance in New England, but true to his word, Philip had gone down fighting "determined not to live until I have no country". During his reign of terror, Philip had created such hate and fear among the English that after his death, his body was drawn and quartered, and his head was cut off and paraded it through the streets of Plymouth. In one final ignominious act, the colonists sold Philip's son into slavery where he died in Bermuda.

No one may ever know how close the English colonists came to being defeated in this war. But it is generally believed that if King Philip had managed to hold his alliance of tribes together; if he could have established a secure supply system; and if he had persuaded other neutral tribes to join his struggle against the whites, the colonization of Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island would have been set back many years, probably delaying, or defeating efforts for the creation of a United States.

Further Study

- The History of the Indian Wars in New England: From the First Settlement to the Termination of the War with King Philip in 1677; 2 volumes in one; William Hubbard
- Changes in the Land, by William Cronon, Hill and Wang, NY.
- Flintlock and Tomahawk, by Douglas Leach, Parnassus Imprints, E. Orleans, LA.
- The Connecticut River, by Edwin Bacon, Putnam's Sons, NY and London.
- King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict; Schultz & Torgias
- A Puritan Outpost, by Herbert Parsons, MacMillan Co., NY.
- Soldiers in King Philip's War : Official Lists of the Soldiers of Massachusetts Colony Serving in Philip's War, and Sketches of the Principal Officers; George Madison Bodge
- History of the Town of Northfield, Massachusetts, 150 years, by J.H. Temple and G. Sheldon, Joel Munsell, Albany, NY.
- Narratives of the Indian Wars, by Charles Lincoln, Barnes & Noble, Inc. NY.
- Famous Indian Chiefs, by D. Johnston, Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, NY.
- King Philip's War, by G. Ellis and J. Morris 1906, Grafton Press Publishers, NY.

The French and Indian War

The war that raged in North America from the mid 1750's through the early 1760's was but one small part of the larger struggle between England and France for dominance in world trade and naval power, and was part of what the Europeans called "The Seven Years' War". As a matter of fact, this struggle for European dominance had been going on for years. The two main issues in this struggle were French and

British colonial rivalries in North America and India, and conflict for national supremacy in Europe. The name "French and Indian War" is really a misnomer that makes it sound as if the French were fighting the Indians. This war was actually fought between the Great Britain and France, with the American Indians allied with the French, and the American colonies alongside the British.

Whose side were we on anyway?

The French and English had coexisted relatively peacefully in North America for nearly a century. But by the 1750's, as both English and French settlements expanded, religious and commercial tensions began to produce new frictions, and new conflicts. The French had explored and claimed a vast region of the continental interior, ranging from Louisiana in the South to the Great Lakes in the North. To secure their hold on these enormous claims, they founded a whole string of communities, missions, trading posts, and forts, with four major cities, Montreal, Detroit, New Orleans and Quebec as the centers of the French empire in North America.

The English, meanwhile, were preparing for the great population leap across the Appalachians into Ohio and beyond. In 1749 a group of Virginia businessmen secured a grant of 500 thousand acres in the Ohio valley for settlement purposes. They were not impressed with Joseph Celeron's claim (made in the same year) that this entire region belonged to France. In an effort to keep the English from expanding into French lands, the French began construction of a new fort in the Ohio valley. Interpreting this as a threat to their western settlements, the English began making military preparations and building fortresses of their own in the area.

For the next five years, tensions between the English and the French increased, until in the summer of 1754 the governor of Virginia sent a militia force (under the command of an inexperienced young colonel named George Washington) into the Ohio valley to challenge French expansion. Washington's men built a crude stockade they called Fort Necessity and then staged an unsuccessful attack on a French detachment. The French countered with an assault on Fort Necessity, trapping Washington and his soldiers inside. After about a third of his men had died in the fighting, Washington surrendered the fort. This clash was generally considered the beginning of the French and Indian War.

The French and Indian War lasted nearly seven years, and moved forward in three distinct phases. During the first phase (from the debacle at Fort Necessity in 1754, until the expansion of the war to Europe in 1756) it was primarily a local, North American conflict. The English didn't do very well in these first years. There were a few British naval reinforcements but the colonists managed the war largely on their own. By early 1756 virtually all of the Indian tribes had become allied with the French, with the exception of the Iroquois who kept themselves as neutral as possible.

The second phase of the struggle began in 1756 when the governments of France and England formally opened hostilities between their nations, and a truly international conflict began. The fighting now spread to the West Indies, India, and Europe itself, but the principal struggle remained the one in North America where the English had suffered nothing but frustration and defeat. Beginning in 1757, William Pitt, the English secretary of state, began to transform the North American war effort by bringing it under total British control for the first time. He did this by forcing supplies, equipment, shelter, and

manpower from the colonists. This was cause for much resentment among the colonists who resisted, sometimes violently. By 1758, the friction between the British authorities and the colonists was threatening to bring the entire war effort to a halt.

The third phase of the war was initiated when William Pitt (seeing the errors of his ways) began relaxing many of his policies that the Americans had objected to. This resulted was an immediate increase in colonial support for the war and a dramatic increase in American enlistments. Pitt also dispatched large numbers of additional troops to the colonies, and almost immediately the tide of the war began to turn in England's favor. The French, plagued by poor harvests and now even more outnumbered than before, could no longer offer serious resistance to the British regulars and American militiamen. In July 1758, the French fortress of Louisbourg was captured, and in September of 1759, the supposedly impregnable city of Quebec fell to General Wolfe's British and American army. Within a year, the French Army formally surrendered Montreal, and the North American phase of "The Seven Years' War" was over.

The French and Indian War had profound effects for both the British Empire and the American Colonists. Although victory over the French in North America meant a tremendous expansion of British territorial claims, the cost of the war had greatly enlarged Britain's debt. The war had generated substantial resentment towards the colonists among English leaders who were not satisfied with the financial and military help they had received during the war from "his majesty's colonial subjects". These and other factors combined to persuade the English government that the colonies needed a major reorganization, and that the central authority should be in London. Plans were set into motion to give London more control over the governing of the colonies, including a force of 10,000 regulars to be permanently stationed in the colonies and paid for by new taxes gathered from the colonists themselves.

The war had equally profound, but very different effects on the American colonies. The colonists had learned that they could not always count on England's military might to be there when they needed them for protection. They also learned that the Crown could force severe hardships upon them to prosecute a Royal war over which they had no control. Even more important, they learned that although their individual thirteen colonies had little in common with each other, when united together, they became a force to be reckoned with. So, although the French and Indian war was fought against the French and the Indians, ultimately, it had many long-term consequences that would lead to the American Revolution.

Many of our Wait(e) ancestors actively fought in this "war among nations", and some undoubtedly died as a result. More were probably killed fighting the Indians than fighting the French, especially if they lived anywhere close to the frontier. As you search through your family history, look for death dates, especially male deaths, between 1754 and 1760. They may very well have been casualties of the "French and Indian War".

The Road to Revolution

Although not strictly military actions, many of the events that led up to the American Revolution were military in nature and directly responsible for the ultimate deaths of thousands of Colonists and

Englishmen alike. I hope this short narrative of those events gives you a little better picture of why so many of our ancestors felt strongly enough about their personal liberties to pay the ultimate price for American independence.

By 1764 there were close to 2 million people living in North America including hundreds of Wait or Waite families, living mostly in New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Many of our ancestors had fought in The French and Indian War and though life was tough, peace reigned on the continent and there was a spirit of hope and progress throughout the land. However, across the Atlantic the English government was deep in debt from the cost of the war with France, and to King George III and his Parliament, it seemed only fitting that the colonies should pay a portion of this debt as well as the cost of defending the wild frontiers of the British Empire in America.

Toward that end, Parliament passed a series acts and taxes on the colonies in 1765 that included a tax on the importation of all goods brought into the colonies from outside the Empire, the right of the British military to billet their troops in private homes without the householders' consent, and a royal tax on any newspaper, public document, pamphlet, even playing cards and dice (the tax that most directly affected every colonist). For more than a hundred years they had been granted the constitutional power to tax themselves and many colonists felt this new taxation was illegal, and neither warranted nor justified. What further angered the colonists was that they were not even allowed to send any representatives to Parliament to speak for them.

There were immediate protests across America and colonists begin to hear of a coordinated resistance to what was being called deliberate abuses of colonial liberties. A resistance group in Boston calling themselves the Sons of Liberty was organized and within months similar groups had formed up and down the Atlantic coast. Well-orchestrated and publicized manipulation of public opinion by the Sons of Liberty routinely triggered violence against anyone in the colonies that supported taxation without representation. King George and his officials in London were astonished to learn of the unrest, but turned a deaf ear to any complaints from their American subjects. Over time, however, pressure to repeal the Acts also came from within the House of Commons and in 1766 Parliament repealed the Acts with two immediate and lasting effects.

First of all, it spawned a growing resentment in England over the contempt the colonies showed for their mother country, which in turn fueled King George's efforts to find new ways to force the colonies to provide for the royal treasury. The other and more profound effect is that it emboldened the colonies to realize they could have a direct impact on their own future.

In 1767 the Prime Minister proposed a new series of taxes on a long list of imported goods including paper, ink, lead, glass, and tea. Known as The Townsend Acts, they are as unpopular as the Stamp Act and within three years opposition (some of it violent) in both America and Parliament brought about their repeal as well. But as a compromise, the tax on tea would remain in effect. Fully expecting opposition to the tax, the Crown decided that military force would be the most effective solution to any more protests, and in 1768 a large garrison of troops was dispatched to Boston. The presence of these

new troops as well as new restrictive and inflammatory laws on the American colonies only fed the flames of passion and some colonists began to consider a separation from England as a real possibility.

By 1769 a grass roots boycott of all British goods that had begun in Philadelphia had spread as far north as New Jersey and Rhode Island and as far south as Virginia. Because of Virginian support of this boycott, the Royal Governor of Virginia dissolved the House of Burgesses, but the elected members resume their meetings at a local tavern in Williamsburg where they agree to continue the boycott of British trade goods. As a result of the boycott, many Americans began to feel a new spirit of independence and agree that there is virtually nothing they could not make themselves if it meant living without English goods.

By 1770 most colonists had not yet developed the concept of a separate identity from England, but in March of that year a well-publicized massacre of civilians by British troops in Boston spurred many to begin to believe that the tyranny of the Crown could no longer be tolerated. In November of 1772 a town meeting was held in Boston that endorsed a radical proclamation asserting the rights of the colonies to self-rule.

The continued tax on tea had been a sore point with the colonies for some time, and when three ships loaded with tea belonging to the East India Trading Company arrived in Boston harbor in December of 1773, local citizens refused to allow it on shore. The Royal Governor announced that the tea would be unloaded even if it meant using cannon to disperse the crowd. But the night before the issue was to be forced, colonial activists dressed as Mohawk Indians swarmed over the ships and dumped 342 crates of tea into Boston harbor. Within months, an angry English Parliament passed the first of a series of Coercive Acts (called Intolerable Acts by the Americans) which effectively shuts down all commercial shipping in Boston harbor until the taxes owed on the destroyed tea was paid.

By May of 1774 the colonies of Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania began to call for an inter-colonial congress to discuss a common course of action against the British. In response, Parliament enacted the next series of Coercive Acts that effectively ended any self-rule by the colonists. These new acts included the Administration of Justice Act, which prohibited any Royal official from being sued in a colonial court, the Quebec Act, which established a central government in Canada and extended the Canadian borders far south into territories claimed by Massachusetts, Connecticut and Virginia, and an expanded version of the 1765 Quartering Act requiring all American colonies to provide housing for British troops.

The relationship between the American colonies and England had come to a crossroad. Strong voices in every colony began to call for drastic actions, and in September of 1774 the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia with representatives from every colony except Georgia. They resolved “not to obey” the latest Coercive Acts and called for the formation of local militia units. Massachusetts decided to go even one step further and begin defensive preparations for a state of war.

In response, King George III added insult to injury by endorsing the New England Restraining Act requiring all New England Colonies to trade exclusively with England. One final straw was added when in April of 1775, Massachusetts military Governor Gage was ordered to enforce the Coercive Acts and

suppress “open rebellion” among the colonists by all necessary force, setting the stage for an armed conflict that would last seven bloody years and on a scale never seen before on the American continent.

It had taken less than 10 years, but through a series of ill-conceived and disastrous actions by the Government in London, the American colonies had gone from a loyal, productive, and valuable asset to the Empire, to what the King and his Parliament considered being an unruly and rebellious child in sore need of discipline. From a colonial point of view, they found themselves taxed at every turn, and had seen their rights as loyal British subjects snatched away one by one including their right to be represented in Parliament like every other British subject. Worst yet, the heavy hand of the British military had begun enforcing the very loss of those basic rights.

By the summer of 1776 there was still no universal agreement from every colony on every issue. As a matter of fact, during the American Revolution, almost one of every three people struggled to remain loyal to the Crown. But a unified front against a perceived tyranny had been firmly established, and for the first time, the 13 American colonies had begun to formulate the concept of a united federation of colonies, separate and independent of Great Britain.

For more information on the American Revolution, consider reading:

- Rise To Rebellion; Jeff Shaara; Ballantine Publishing Group; © 2001, ISBN 0-345-45206-2
- American Heritage, American Voices: Colonies and Revolution; David C. King; John Wiley & Sons; © 2002, ISBN 0-471-44391-3
- Faces of Revolution: Personalities & Themes in the Struggle for American Independence; Bernard Bailyn