

Veteran Families of East Millard County

By Sherry Shepard

Military service in East Millard County has an unusual way it is done. In many cases, multiple members of the same family have joined to serve our country. Not just one single individual. Fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, and grandfathers from the same family all continuing the tradition of military service. Whether this is done to follow in their footsteps, to embrace their love of country and its defense or some other reason, this tradition is a remarkable one in our area. The entire list of this happening would be very long.

Touching on a few examples of this, we go back in time to the beginnings of military service within the early Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The earliest group was known as the Nauvoo Legion and was formed as a state-authorized militia of the city of Nauvoo, Illinois. The group became active February 4, 1841 and continued until January 1845.[[]

In 1847, Brigham Young reformed the remnants of Nauvoo Legion into a fully functional force, which was organized into sub-units for each of the Utah counties as the Deseret Territorial Militia. This group was active from 1852 to 1887.

One of the earliest military names we find connected to East Millard County is that of Private Isaiah Huntsman, who was one of the 500 recruits from the pioneer wagon trains that became part of the Mormon Battalion. The name Ezra Huntsman also appears on this list. This group marched to Southern California and then on to Utah to join their families. When arriving in California, they found the fighting was over and they were assigned to units in the area, soon traveling east to reunite with their families in Utah. Some of these soldiers worked for a short time at Sutter's Mill and discovered gold in 1848, sparking the largest gold rush in American history. Another group stumbled upon and buried the remains of an ill-fated immigrant group known as the Donner Party. Yet others carved a new road

through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Most of the soldiers reached Utah Territory in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

The Deseret Militia was called upon to fight in some of the skirmishes with the Indians of the area. These included Battle Creek, the Battle at Fort Utah, and the Walker War, in which 20 soldiers and numerous Indians were killed.

The Utah Militia was called up again in the Utah War against federal troops entering Utah from 1857 to 1858. They were involved with destroying supplies and avoided direct fighting. With around 6,000 personnel from northern group, they were assigned to slow down Albert Sidney Johnston's army. This army was sent by President James Buchanan to put down the "rebellion by the people of Utah", as they called it. Both sides stopped engagements after agreement was reached permitting the army's passage through Salt Lake City, establishing Camp Floyd.

An interesting sidelight to the Utah War, as that at the time there was a small group of missionaries sent out from our area. They were called home to help protect the residents of Fillmore from Johnston's Army. They were told to "help in the defense of Zion".

The missionary group included, whose names will in some cases sound very familiar: T.R. King, E.E. Holden, Peter Robison, and John Ray from places in Europe, William Felshaw from the eastern United States, Jame Brooke from Africa and Gabriel Huntsman from eastern Canada.

After this conflict, the Federal government appointed Utah's territorial governor, and the force was allowed to exist at the command of the governor. Federal authorities had hoped the new government officials would take over but life went on much as normal.

During the American Civil War, federal troops either were removed from Utah, or in many cases left to join the rebellion. The federal government, in a "friendly move", asked Brigham Young for his help. With his permission, two units of the reorganized Nauvoo Legion were hired by the United States to protect Western mail and telegraph lines from Indian attacks in what is today Utah and Wyoming. The soldiers saw no action. According to historical records, "Neither the

Legion nor any other Mormon troops participated in the main theaters of the war” during the Civil War, and the Legion's involvement ended in 1862.

The Black Hawk War 1865-1872, was the final use of the militia. Over 2000 troops were sent against Indians led by Ute Antonga Black Hawk.

In 1870 the Utah Governor, J. Wilson Shaffer ordered the Legion inactive unless he ordered otherwise. The Utah Territorial Militia never organized again and it was disbanded in 1887.

In 1894, as Utah began preparation to become a state, the Utah National Guard was organized as the official state militia. The local unit was led by George Huntsman as its first commander, with other officers Mark Paxton and LaVoy Kimball. George was the son of Gabriel Huntsman and the great nephew of Isaiah Huntsman mentioned above. Colonel George Huntsman had four sons: Ross, Dwight, Byron and Knox, all of whom served in the military. Knox, the youngest, served in the 82nd Army Airborne and the Utah 19th Special Forces. His son Tim also joined the military. Other family members also have joined in the armed services.

In an interview with American Legion Post 61 Commander David Allen, I asked about the tradition of family members joining the military and was immediately given many examples of this from our local communities.

Paul Stevens, who recently was honored as he celebrated his 100th birthday on July 4, was in the Navy on board the aircraft carrier, the USS Steamer Bay. It is interesting to note that Paul was among the first sailors to be on the Steamer Bay, as it was brand new at that point. When he left the Navy after his service was over, the ship was also decommissioned at the same time. During his tour of duty, Paul received seven battles stars, which were awarded for battles he had taken part in. Names of places like Okinawa, Palau, the Philippines and others are associated with those awarded stars.

Paul has two sons who also the Armed Services as part of the Army. Dennis served in Viet Nam and Doug in Panama.

Another grandfather, father and son group serving our country are the Hare's: Richard, Bart and Cody. Richard is the father of Bart and the grandfather of Cody, and served our country in the Army in Korea. Bart and Cody were in the National Guard and Cody was deployed to Iraq.

Ross Stevens of Holden served in the Navy. He was part of a fighter squadron and stationed on three different aircraft carriers: The Ticonderoga, The Shangri La, and the Coral Seas. He had cousins who also joined the Navy.

The list goes on and on with the same pride in the bonding they felt to have served our country as their close relatives had.

One family seemed very prominent on the list. Garn Whatcott served in the Army in World War II, where he was wounded in action. He also had two brothers in the war, Harold and Wilfred. Harold was also wounded and Wilfred was killed in action on an island in the South Pacific.

Garn's brother-in-law Duane Bartholomew was also in World War II. Duane's son Craig served in Viet Nam and Randy was in the Utah Army National Guard

Garn's sons Bart, Tracy and Brett served in the Utah Army National Guard. Pictured to the right of Garrett and Steve were deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom. The men on the left are Garrett Whatcott, son of Jeff Whatcott, and Steve Whatcott, son of Lamont Whatcott. Garrett and Steve were also in that conflict. Steve's daughter and her grandpa Lamont both served in the Utah Army National Guard.

Moving on a generation, we find Tracy's daughter Tina Whatcott Semanoff in the National Guard. She is pictured here with her husband Joe running the Beaver Marathon, carrying the national flag. Also pictured in camouflage with her husband Braxton Albrecht is Ashtyn Bowles Albrecht, Tracy's granddaughter, who is a member of the National Guard. She is the daughter of Wynter Whatcott Dalton. Wynter's son Bridger Bowles has recently joined the National Guard. Other members of the family have also been part of the Armed Services.

Steve, Lamont, and Garrett Whatcott as well as Tina Whatcott Semanoff rose to the rank of Sergeant Major.

A salute to all those who have served and especially to those who have followed the example of their family members in carrying on this tradition of military service.



