

The Adventures of Israel Putnam

By Sophie Jones

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*(Written as a fifth grade report, Williamstown Elementary School,
Williamstown MA. Sophie's grandmother, Katharine Cox Jones, added the
endnotes.)*

“He dared to lead where any dared to follow”

- from the epitaph of Israel Putnam
by The Rev. Timothy Dwight

Israel Putnam was a pioneer, a Ranger in the French and Indian War, and a Major General in the Revolution. Israel Putnam’s biography by Colonel David Humphreys was the first biography of an American by an American citizen. This was how famous he was in his day. Humphreys also wrote the biography of George Washington but later. The reason that I chose Israel Putnam to be the subject of my report is because I am his great-great-great-great-granddaughter¹.

Israel Putnam was born on January 7, 1718 in Salem Village Massachusetts, as the twelfth child of Elizabeth Porter and Joseph Putnam. Israel married Hannah Pope in 1739. Israel and Hannah Putnam bought land in, and moved to, Pomfret Connecticut². He was a clever farmer, he grew fruit trees and raised livestock instead of trying to grow wheat in the stony New England soil. In Pomfret there was a big she-wolf that would raid the farmers’ sheepfolds. One winter she was especially hungry and killed 70 sheep and injured many others, so he and some other farmers tracked the wolf to her lair. They tried to make the wolf come out by setting sulfur on fire at the entrance of the cave. Realizing that it wouldn’t work and neither would setting dogs on her, he asked his black slave to go in and shoot the wolf. When the slave refused Putnam himself decided to go in and shoot the wolf. He made a torch of birch bark and a yoke of hemp that he tied around his ankle. He gave the end to the other farmers and told them to pull if they felt a tug on the rope. With this he advanced into the cave³ and crawled until he saw the wolf then he

kicked the rope and was pulled out. He went in again, this time with his gun, and shot the wolf and was pulled out. This incident made him a local hero.

When the French and Indian War began Putnam rushed off to fight in it. While he was fighting some very interesting things happened to him. This made it possible for him rise to the rank of Colonel. He was on a scouting mission with Rogers and his Rangers on September 14, 1755. They were surveying Crown Point when a French sentry stumbled across them in the woods and called the alarm. Then Putnam hit the French sentry over the head with the butt end of the rifle he had, then ran. Afterwards Putnam counted one bullet in his canteen and fourteen in his blanket.

Putnam had further adventures in the French and Indian War. On August 8, 1758 450 French and Indians prepared to ambush the English. Major Putnam and the 1st Connecticut were in the front, Rogers and his Rangers in the rear. Suddenly the battle began. Then a Caughnawaga chief captured Putnam and tied him to a tree. A French officer tried to shoot Putnam, but he missed so instead Putnam was hit in the jaw with the butt end of the gun. After the battle ended Putnam was loaded with as many packs of the wounded as possible, and forced to march without shoes and with hands tied behind his back. It was determined by the Indians that Putnam should be burned alive. To do this they stripped him and bound him to a tree with fuel around it singing all the while. Suddenly a French officer to whom an Indian had run to tell of the “glad” tidings came and scattered the burning sticks and unbound him. Then Putnam was marched first to Ticonderoga, then to Montreal. At Montreal Colonel Peter Schuyler, the senior officer in

the prison, sent the French a whole lot of money. The French, were on short rations and were happy not to have so many prisoners to feed, gave them their freedom. This adventure made Putnam an English hero. Putnam returned home from the war in 1765.

When Putnam heard about the battle of Lexington and Concord he rushed off to join the American army as 4th in command. He was the field commander at the Battle of Bunker (Breeds) Hill. The Americans snuck in at night and fortified Breeds Hill before the sun rose. Putnam took command at Breeds Hill and rode up and down shouting to rally his men. One of the famous things he is supposed to have said is “don’t shoot ‘til you see the whites of their eyes.” He might have said this because powder and shot were in short supply and the guns were not very accurate. The British attacked 4 times and were driven back 3 times (the 4thtime the Americans ran out of ammunition). The British lost more than 1000 men. Putnam tried to get reinforcements from across the Charlestown Neck but couldn’t get them to come across because of the British cannonade.

Washington met Putnam on July 2, 1775, and made him a Major General, because he had the qualities of a natural leader Putnam was sent to Philadelphia to organize defenses. Gunpowder was in dangerously short supply along with cannon balls and cannon. Putnam went on raids to salvage shot for the Americans by deliberately inviting British cannonade. The British landed a large navy force and the Americans were pushed back. The Americans retreated back to Boston. Then the Americans built forts in Boston. The result was that the British left Boston without a fight. Then Putnam was sent to New York to finish the defenses, and discipline the troops who were drinking and going out with the ladies. He also found that the large Tory population was still supplying a British

ship called the Asia, so the first thing he did was cut off the Asia's supplies. He also tried to impose a curfew, which was not a success. Then he extended the fortifications. He was in the rear at the battle of Long Island. Putnam was then put in charge of the Hudson Highlands, but the campaign didn't go very well. Putnam was not very good at the big tactical decisions, he was better at rallying the men under fire, conducting raids, and the small scale fighting.

On his way home he suffered a stroke. In May of 1780 he wrote a letter to Washington saying he could not command anymore. On the 29th of May in 1790 Israel Putnam died.

Israel Putnam led a very exciting life. He was a pioneer farmer, a scout in the French and Indian War, and a Major General in the Revolution. His biggest contribution was the rallying of his untrained volunteer troops at Bunker Hill. He was a man who liked to sing and tell stories which was good because he had a lot of them to tell.

¹ Sophie is the:
daughter of Kevin Jones & Moira O'Hara Jones
granddaughter of Katharine Cox Jones & Vincent C. Jones
gt granddaughter of Mollie Brown Cox & N, Hadley Cox
gt gt granddaughter of John Murdoch Brown & Eliza Day
gt gt gt granddaughter of Emily Putnam Brown & James Brown
gt gt gt gt granddaughter of Daniel Putnam & Catharine Hutchinson
gt gt gt gt gt granddaughter of Israel Putnam and Hannah Pope

² Now Rt 169 & Spaulding Rd, Brooklyn Conn.

³ Wolf Den Park

Note: The home Daniel Putnam, *Putnam Elms*, with additions by Daniel Putnam and James Brown, now belongs to the Colonel Daniel Putnam Association. It is on Church Street, Brooklyn.