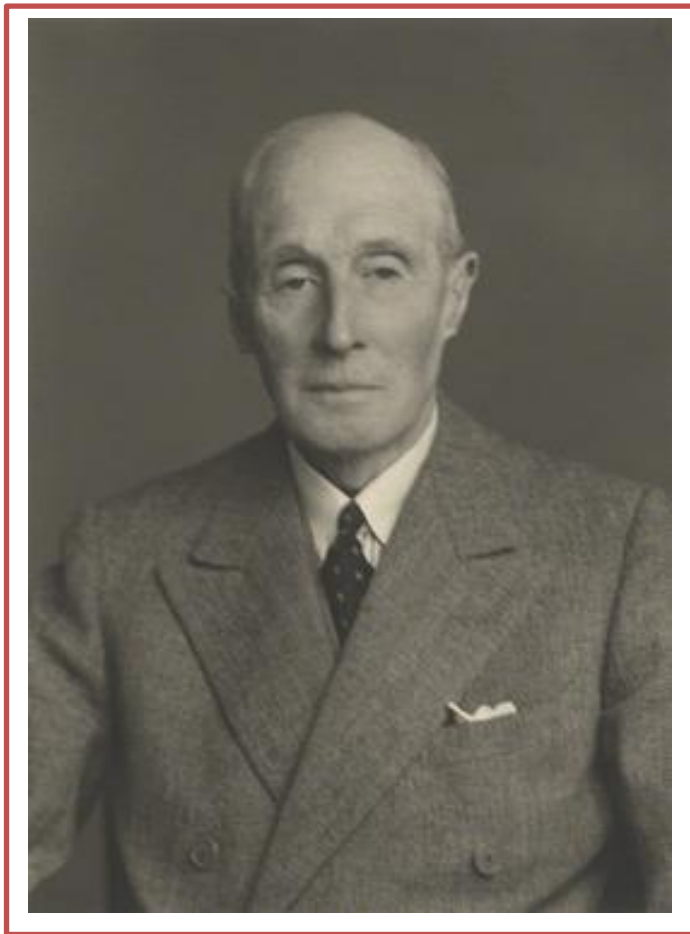


2023

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.



A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL E. F. NORTON

A concise biography of Lieutenant General Edward Flix NORTON, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*, who served in the British Army from 1902 until 1942.
Copyright ©www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk (2023)

A Concise Biography of Lieutenant General Edward Felix NORTON, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

Version: 2_1

This edition dated: 29 December 2023

ISBN: Not yet allocated.

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means including; electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, scanning without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A. (copyright held by author)

Assisted by: Stephen HEAL

Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Lieutenant General Edward Felix NORTON, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

Introduction

Lieutenant General Edward Felix NORTON, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.* was an officer in the British Army from 1902 until his retirement in 1942. He was born in Argentina, to British parents, but he was educated in the U.K., and he gained entry to the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. He was commissioned in the Royal Artillery, and being a skilled horseman, he was selected to join the Royal Horse Artillery. His initial posting was to India, but he came back to serve in France throughout the Second World War. NORTON was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross during the war.

Following the war, NORTON was able to pursue his great love of mountaineering, being able to participate in two expeditions to climb Mount Everest in 1922 and 1924.

NORTON's Army career progressed steadily during the 1930's, without being spectacular. The beginning of the Second World War found NORTON as a District Commander in India, in the rank of Major General. That could have been the summit of his career, but events allowed him the opportunity to move to Hong Kong as the Acting Governor and Commander-in-Chief. This involved promotion to the rank of Lieutenant General. Once he left Hong Kong, he returned to India, where he retired in 1942. NORTON retired to the U.K. where he died near Winchester in 1954.

Early Life

Edward Felix NORTON, who was generally known within the family and by friends as 'Teddy', was born in San Isidro, Argentina on 21 February 1884. He was the second son of Edward NORTON (1841 – 1923), a director of the Royal Mail and Union Castle shipping company, and his wife Edith Sarah (nee WILLS) (1855 – 1936). Edward senior had been born in Diss, Norfolk, on 13 August 1841. Their children were:

- John Herbert NORTON (1879 – 1963)
- Amy Charlotte NORTON (1882 – 1944)
- Anne C. NORTON (1883 – ?)
- Edward Felix NORTON (1884 – 1954)
- Arthur Harris Ridout NORTON (1887 – 1888)
- Eric Alfred NORTON (1889 – 1933)
- Richard Conyers NORTON (1897 – 1918)

Edward NORTON senior had built up the Estancia la Ventura on the pampas some three-hundred miles south of Buenos Aires, and his mother was the daughter of Sir Alfred WILLS, judge of the Queen's Bench Division. His early life was in a luxurious colonial mansion, and as a young child, he was introduced to horses and learned to ride them and to bond with them. Polo was a very popular sport in Argentina at the time, with the national team having the lowest handicap in the world, which at one time was minus nine.

NORTON, however, was sent back to England for his education, where he attended Charterhouse School, near Godalming in Surrey. This school encouraged and developed his love of equestrian sports and outdoor pursuits and NORTON set his sights on a career in the Army where he could continue these important aspects of his life. After Charterhouse, he entered the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, from which he was commissioned into the Royal Artillery on 24 December 1902 as a Second Lieutenant (service number 6306).

NORTON was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 24 December 1905, and he was posted to Meerut in India in 1907. In 1910, he was awarded the coveted 'jacket' and transferred to the Royal Horse Artillery where he served with 'R' Battery at Mathura. His commanding officer, Major (later Lieutenant General) A. E. WARDROP said of NORTON in 1912, '*A great Gentleman, a gallant horseman, a true friend.*'

His early and formative years in the British Army were spent on the North-West Frontier of India, an area that was rarely quiet in terms of military activity. It was not all work, and NORTON was able to spend at least one month each year hunting for ibex and other animals in the Hunza, Chitral and Kashmir valleys. During this period, he was the Aide-de-Camp to the Viceroy at Delhi. He organised the 'Kadir Cup' for six years, this being the blue-ribbon meeting of the hunting and equestrian world in British India. In 1913, NORTON led a team from his battery that won the Muttra Cup

NORTON was promoted to the rank of Captain on 30 October 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. He was sent to France where he served for the duration of the war, and he was awarded the Military Cross early in the war on 18 February 1915.

On 19 June 1915, he was appointed a Brigade Major, Royal Artillery, 1st Canadian Division, a post he held until 13 November of that year, when he was appointed a Deputy Assistant Adjutant General as the Staff Officer to the General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery with the Canadian Army Corps. NORTON was promoted to the rank of Major on 24 April 1916.

On 12 February 1917, he returned to Regimental duties and served as the Officer Commanding, 'D' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) on 26 July 1918, to add to the Military Cross he was awarded earlier.

The citation for his D.S.O. stated:

Maj. Edward Felix Norton, M.C., R.H.A.

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He has earned distinction on many occasions, and invariably handled his battery under heavy fire with great skill; on one occasion fighting a rearguard action with remarkable ability and coolness.

With the end of the war, Major NORTON led 'D' Battery to India. Between 29 September 1922 and 23 August 1923, he held the post of Brigade Major (Temporary) at Chanak in Turkey. On 29 December 1923, he was promoted to the rank of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel.

Having performed effectively in staff appointments during the First World War, NORTON was selected for entry to the Staff College, and attended the Staff course at Camberley commencing on 22 January 1921. He completed the course on 8 February 1922 and was granted the important letters of *p.s.c.* after his entry in the Army List. Edward NORTON senior died at Uplands House, Fareham, Hampshire, on 20 May 1923.

His main passion was mountaineering, and he was a member of the Everest expeditions of 1922 and 1924. He started climbing at the Eagle's Nest above Sixt in the Haute-Savoie while staying at a chalet built by his grandfather Sir Alfred WILLS, who was the founder and third president of the Alpine Club. With his brother, NORTON stalked chamois over ground which was so bad that even local men kept off it. He climbed as often as he could and he was selected for the second British Mount Everest expedition, led by George Leigh MALLORY and Theodore Howard SOMERVELL. With these men, he reached the then record height of 26,985 feet. They were the first to pass the critical level of 8,000 metres, without supplementary oxygen.

In the 1924 expedition, the leader Charles Granville BRUCE was taken ill, so NORTON took charge of the difficult third Everest expedition. There were several setbacks, with blizzards and ferocious winds. NORTON led the first serious attempt to reach the summit, without using oxygen which he felt was unnecessary. At 28,000 feet, SOMERVELL was forced to give up due to serious throat trouble, so NORTON went on alone. He reached the great couloir on the North Face at 28,126 feet, which was later named NORTON's couloir. In doing so, NORTON set another record that was not bettered for another fifty-four years by anyone climbing without using oxygen.



Above – The group of Mountaineers of the 1924 Expedition, with NORTON in the centre standing.

Left – A portrait of NORTON on that expedition.

Courtesy of: the Indian Defence Review.

NORTON described the ascent as follows:

Beyond the couloir the going got steadily worse. It was not exactly difficult going but it was a dangerous place for a single, un-ropeed climber. The strain was beginning to tell, and I was getting exhausted. In addition, I began to experience some trouble with my eyes. I was seeing double and in doubt where to put my foot. It was by now 1.00 pm, and a brief calculation showed that I had no chance to climb the remaining 800 to 900 feet if I were to return in safety. In an hour, I had gained under 100 feet in height and in distance perhaps 300 yards, at a point subsequently fixed by theodolite at 28,126 feet

I retraced my feet to rejoin SOMERVELL. We decided we must go down the mountain and own ourselves beaten in a fair fight.

Another attempt was undertaken by MALLORY and Andrew Comyn IRVINE, from which neither of them returned. NORTON handled this tragedy with impeccable dignity, and his dispatches from the mountain provide a lucid and moving account of climbing in this period. On his return, NORTON was the main author for the official book called *'The Flight for Everest 1924'*.

After his return from the Himalayas, NORTON married Isabel Joyce PASTEUR on 18 December 1925, and they had three sons together. NORTON had been elected to the Alpine Club in 1922, but he refused to become the President in later years due to his ill-health. He was a founder member of the Himalayan Club and the Mountain Club of India. In common with the other members of the 1922 expedition, he was awarded an Olympic silver-gilt medal (the *prix d'Alpinisme*) which was presented at the 1924 Winter Olympics. In 1926, NORTON was awarded the founder's medal of the Royal Geographical Society. At the presentation, Colonel Sir Francis YOUNGHUSBAND said of NORTON, *'And the men who pioneered the way (to the summit of Everest) deserve in full measure the gratitude of their kind for the sacrifices they made'*.

In terms of his Army career, his next appointment was to the War Office as a General Staff Officer, 2nd Grade, between 23 January 1926 and 16 January 1928. He then attended the recently established Imperial Defence College in London, after which, on 23 January 1929, NORTON was promoted to the rank of Colonel (his seniority dating from 29 December 1926) and he was appointed to the Staff College at Quetta, in British India, as an instructor. He was there for just over three years, leaving on 31 March 1932 to return to the United Kingdom. With effect from 1 April 1932, Colonel NORTON held the appointment as Commander Royal Artillery, 1st Infantry Division at Aldershot, for which he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Brigadier. On 13 September 1934, he was transferred to become the Brigadier General Staff of Aldershot Command, while still holding the rank of Temporary Brigadier. NORTON was appointed an Aide-de-Camp to the King in 24 August 1937, a position he held until his promotion.

On 1 April 1938, NORTON was promoted to the rank of Local Major General on being specially employed in India. On 19 October 1939, he was promoted to the substantive rank of Major General (his seniority dating from 24 December 1937) and appointed the District Officer Commanding the Madras District in Southern Command, India. On 8 June 1939, he was made a Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (C.B.), which was a common honour granted to Army officers of the rank of Major General, and this was in recognition for his period in command of the Madras District. NORTON relinquished command of the Madras District in May 1940, on being appointed the General Officer Commanding the Western Independent District, based at Quetta. He arrived with his family at Quetta on 19 May 1940, and they occupied the official residence of the G.O.C., which was called Orchard House. This was a two-storey house, with a fine view across the plain to the mountains on the horizon. He had been in post for less than two months when events intervened.

Sir Geoffrey Alexander Stafford NORTHCOTE, the Governor of Hong Kong, had developed heart problems and was recalled to London. NORTON was chosen to replace him on a temporary basis, and so he left Quetta and he travelled to Hong Kong. He flew to Singapore, from where he took of boat to Hong Kong. On 6 August 1940, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant General and assumed the role as Acting Governor of Hong Kong. In addition, NORTON assumed the role as Commander-in-Chief of Hong Kong, to whom Major General GRASSETT, the General Officer Commanding Hong Kong, reported.

During his tenure in Hong Kong, tensions between Japan and the United States of America were increasing over Japan's war with China. This raised the threat of invasion of the British colonies in South-east Asia, with Hong Kong being seen as particularly vulnerable to Japanese aggression. Within Hong Kong, the British and business communities were concerned that any threat of invasion was alarmist, and that this could provoke Japan. The Governor and his officials were aware of their precarious position, and with NORTON, they led the drive to upgrade the 'passive defences' of the colony, such as air raid shelters. Another issue that NORTON had to contend with was the order from the Colonial Office for the wives and children of 'European' families to be evacuated to Australia, via the Philippines. This was an unpopular order, which many families decided not to comply with. There were issues with the definition of 'European' families, as many were of mixed race. This left the Chinese majority population vulnerable and without support. NORTON grappled with this issue throughout his period in the colony, feeling that it could not be made compulsory.

NORTON tried to become involved with the Chinese community, of which he had no previous experience, but he was also aware of a Japanese community in Hong Kong, who were providing intelligence on the British armed forces and civilian administration. By late October, NORTON had become established in the Hong Kong society, and his workload as Governor reduced. There were weekly meetings on defence, Chinese Affairs, and business matters. Every second Thursday was a meeting of the Legislative Council, and the War Council met on Fridays. NORTON conducted inspections of A.R.P. arrangements, and visits to the police, fire, hospitals, and refugee camps. He managed to play tennis at least once a week, and he took a walk every morning.

Lieutenant General NORTON knew that his tenure as Governor was temporary, and there were rumours that NORTHCOTE was to return in December 1940, but this did not come about.

On 21 February 1941, Lieutenant General NORTON was declared supernumerary to the establishment, and around this time, while out walking with Major General GRASSETT in the hills of Hong Kong, he slipped and fell, head-first, eight feet to the concrete bottom of a storm drain. This contained several inches of stagnant water. NORTON was concussed and unconscious for a short time, and Major General GRASSETT saved his boss from drowning by helping him up out of the drain. NORTON was seriously injured, and he was coughing up blood for two weeks, and never really resumed his role fully.

With the return of Sir Geoffrey NORTHCOTE, NORTON relinquished the role as Acting Governor on 12 March 1941, and with it, the rank of Acting Lieutenant General. On 16 May 1941, NORTON was regranted the rank of Acting Lieutenant General on being appointed the District Officer Commanding the Western Independent District in India. This static command within British India was formerly Western Command, but it was downgraded to the status of a District in 1938. The headquarters were based in the city of Quetta, and the District comprised four brigades, namely:

- Quetta Brigade,
- Khojak Brigade,
- Zhob Brigade – Loralai,
- Sind Brigade Area – Karachi.

He was appointed the Colonel Commandant of the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery on 25 July 1941, and Colonel Commandant of the Royal Artillery on 6 December 1941. NORTON was promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant General with effect from 9 October 1941. The Western Independent District was abolished in April 1942 with the reorganisation of the commands within British India, leaving Lieutenant General NORTON without a post. He retired from the British Army on 11 October 1942, aged fifty-eight years, and was granted the honorary rank of Lieutenant General. He reached the age limit for recall on 21 February 1944, and he ceased to belong to the Reserve of Officers.

NORTON, his wife, and family moved to Winchester, and he took up the role as the Commander of the North Hampshire sector of the Home Guard. When the Home Guard was disbanded late in 1944, he served as the commandant of the Hampshire Army Cadet Force from 1944 until 1948. In 1953, NORTON was consulted by the Brigadier John HUNT who was destined to lead the first successful ascent of Mount Everest. Lieutenant General NORTON died at his home of Morestead Grove, Morestead, Winchester in Hampshire, on 3 November 1954. He was survived by his wife, and he left an estate to her of £51,385 7s 7d.

Edward NORTON was tall and athletic in build, and was a fine horseman, a keen shot and enthusiastic fisherman. His service as an Army officer allowed him to indulge in his sporting activities, but he also had an interest in natural history, and on his trips to the Himalayans, he collected birds and flowers that he brought back to the British Museum. NORTON was also a skilled draughtsman and painter in watercolours. His preferred canvas was that of a landscape, with the Himalayan mountains provided the backdrop for many of his works. He was also known for his quick and witty sketches of his friends and companions. NORTON was also widely read, well informed, and considered to be a charming companion. He valued integrity in himself and others highly. In terms of his leadership, he was not at all pretentious or remote, and was well respected by the Gurkhas, Sherpas and Bhotias that he worked with in the Himalayan mountains.

NORTON married Isabel Joyce PASTEUR (1900 – 1992) on 13 December 1925 in London. They had three children, Richard who was born in 1926, Hugh in 1936 and a third child.

Bibliography and Sources

Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945

Published by: Savanna Publications 1999 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Army List January 1946
90, Dartmouth Road, Forest Hill, LONDON. SE23 3HZ [ISBN 1 902366 02 6]

War Services of British and Indian Officers of the Indian Army 1941

Published by: Savanna Publications 2004 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Indian Army List 1941
90, Dartmouth Road, Forest Hill, LONDON. SE23 3HZ

[ISBN 1 902366 2 31 X]

The London Gazette

24 February 1903	The London Gazette, Issue 27528, Page 1216
30 October 1914	The London Gazette, Supplement 28960, Page 8861
16 February 1915	The London Gazette, Supplement 29074, Page 1689
2 June 1916	The London Gazette, Supplement 29608, Page 5566
8 September 1916	The London Gazette, Supplement 29741, Page 8877
11 December 1917	The London Gazette, Supplement 30427, Page 13082
14 December 1917	The London Gazette, Supplement 30434, Page 13227
23 July 1918	The London Gazette, Supplement 30813, Page 8748
28 January 1921	The London Gazette, Supplement 32210, Page 838
28 January 1921	The London Gazette, Supplement 32211, Page 846
7 February 1922	The London Gazette, Supplement 32603, Page 1159
13 October 1922	The London Gazette, Issue 32755, Page 7202
21 September 1923	The London Gazette, Issue 32864, Page 6345
28 December 1923	The London Gazette, Issue 32892, Page 9110
26 February 1924	The London Gazette, Issue 32912, Page 1723
2 March 1926	The London Gazette, Issue 33138, Page 1566
19 March 1926	The London Gazette, Issue 33143, Page 2016
20 January 1928	The London Gazette, Issue 33349, Page 440
17 February 1928	The London Gazette, Issue 33357, Page 1137
1 February 1929	The London Gazette, Issue 33462, Page 770
26 April 1929	The London Gazette, Issue 33489, Page 2768
8 April 1932	The London Gazette, Issue 33815, Page 2293
10 June 1932	The London Gazette, Issue 33834, Page 3790
18 September 1934	The London Gazette, Issue 34088, Page 5904
27 August 1937	The London Gazette, Issue 34430, Page 5439
1 April 1938	The London Gazette, Issue 34498, Page 2157
19 April 1938	The London Gazette, Issue 34503, Page 2594
17 May 1938	The London Gazette, Issue 34511, Page 3196
18 October 1938	The London Gazette, Issue 34562, Page 6500
28 October 1938	The London Gazette, Issue 34565, Page 6694
6 June 1939	The London Gazette, Supplement 34633, Page 3854
7 July 1939	The London Gazette, Issue 34643, Page 4664
14 January 1941	The London Gazette, Supplement 35044, Page 339
21 March 1941	The London Gazette, Supplement 35115, Page 1723
8 April 1941	The London Gazette, Supplement 35133, Page 2089
4 July 1941	The London Gazette, Supplement 35211, Page 3899
2 December 1941	The London Gazette, Supplement 35369, Page 6937
13 February 1942	The London Gazette, Supplement 35458, Page 761
1 September 1942	The London Gazette, Issue 35690, Page 3855
22 September 1942	The London Gazette, Supplement 35716, Page 4159
9 October 1942	The London Gazette, Supplement 35740, Page 4431
17 November 1942	The London Gazette, Supplement 35791, Page 5041
25 December 1942	The London Gazette, Supplement 35836, Page 5626
25 February 1944	The London Gazette, Supplement 36398, Page 985
7 July 1944	The London Gazette, Supplement 36600, Page 3227

27 May 1947 [The London Gazette, Supplement 37967, Page 2424](#)
16 January 1948 [The London Gazette, Supplement 38181, Page 497](#)
13 February 1948 [The London Gazette, Supplement 38209, Page 1120](#)
2 March 1951 [The London Gazette, Supplement 39162, Page 1159](#)
London Gazette web-site: <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/>

[Accessed 2 February 2011]

Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives – Location Register

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/lhcma/searchlocreg.cgi>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The War Against Japan

By: Major General S Woodburn KIRBY, C.B., C.M.G., C.I.E., O.B.E., M.C. and others

Volume I – The Loss of Singapore

Volume II – India’s Most Dangerous Hour

Volume III – The Decisive Battles

Volume IV – The Reconquest of Burma

Volume V – The Surrender of Japan

First Published: H.M.S.O. (1958)

This edition published by: The Naval and Military Press Ltd (2004)

Who Was Who

Volume VIII 1981-1990

Published by: A & C BLACK Publishers Ltd.

‘Loyalty and Honour’ – The Indian Army September 1939 – August 1947

Part I Divisions

Part II Brigades

Part III

By Chris KEMPTON

Published by the Military Press (2003)

[ISBN 0-85420-228-5]

Websites

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

- <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35258>

Lt Gen E F NORTON: A Distinguished Soldier

- www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/lt-gen-e-f-norton-a-distinguished-soldier/