

Coordinates: 42°22′34.9″N 71°3′38.8″W﻿ / ﻿﻿ / ﻿

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Battle of Bunker Hill

The **Battle of Bunker Hill** was fought on June 17, 1775, during the Siege of Boston in the early stages of the American Revolutionary War. The battle is named after Bunker Hill in Charlestown, Massachusetts, which was peripherally involved in the battle. It was the original objective of both the colonial and British troops, though the majority of combat took place on the adjacent hill which later became known as Breed's Hill.^{[5][6]}

On June 13, 1775, the leaders of the colonial forces besieging Boston learned that the British were planning to send troops out from the city to fortify the unoccupied hills surrounding the city, which would give them control of Boston Harbor. In response, 1,200 colonial troops under the command of William Prescott stealthily occupied Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill. During the night, the colonists constructed a strong redoubt on Breed's Hill, as well as smaller fortified lines across the Charlestown Peninsula.^[7]

By daybreak of June 17, the British became aware of the presence of colonial forces on the Peninsula and mounted an attack against them that day. Two assaults on the colonial positions were repulsed with significant British casualties; the third and final attack carried the redoubt after the defenders ran out of ammunition. The colonists retreated to Cambridge over Bunker Hill, leaving the British in control of the Peninsula.^[8]

The battle was a tactical, though somewhat Pyrrhic victory for the British,^{[9][10]} as it proved to be a sobering experience for them, involving many more casualties than the Americans had incurred, including a large number of officers. The battle had demonstrated that inexperienced militia were able to stand up to regular army troops in battle. Subsequently, the battle discouraged the British from any further frontal attacks against well defended front lines. American casualties were comparatively much fewer, although their losses included General Joseph Warren and Major Andrew McClary, the final casualty of the battle.^[11]

The battle led the British to adopt a more cautious planning

Battle of Bunker Hill

Part of the American Revolutionary War



Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill

by John Trumbull

Date	June 17, 1775
Location	Charlestown, Massachusetts
	42°22′34.9″N 71°3′38.8″W﻿ / ﻿﻿ / ﻿
Result	See Aftermath
Territorial changes	The British capture Charlestown Peninsula

Belligerents

 United Colonies	 Great Britain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecticut Massachusetts New Hampshire Rhode Island 	

Commanders and leaders

 William Prescott	 William Howe
 Israel Putnam	 Thomas Gage
 Joseph Warren †	 Sir Robert Pigot
 John Stark	 James Abercrombie †
	 Henry Clinton

and maneuver execution in future engagements, which was evident in the subsequent New York and New Jersey campaign, and arguably helped rather than hindered the American forces. Their new approach to battle was actually giving the Americans greater opportunity to retreat if defeat was imminent. The costly engagement also convinced the British of the need to hire substantial numbers of Hessian auxiliaries to bolster their strength in the face of the new and formidable Continental Army.

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Geography

Boston, situated on a peninsula,^[12] was largely protected from close approach by the expanses of water surrounding it, which were dominated by British warships. In the aftermath of the battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, the colonial militia, a force of about 15,000 men,^[13] had surrounded the town, and effectively besieged it. Under the command of Artemas Ward, they controlled the only land access to Boston itself (the Roxbury Neck), but, lacking a navy, were unable to even contest British domination of the waters of the harbor. The British troops, a force of about 6,000 under the command of General Thomas Gage, occupied the city, and were able to be resupplied and reinforced

 Samuel Graves
 John Pitcairn †

Strength

~2,400^[1]

3,000+^[2]

Casualties and losses

115 killed,
305 wounded,
30 captured (20 POWs
died)

Total: 450^[3]

19 officers killed
62 officers wounded
207 soldiers killed
766 soldiers
wounded

Total: 1,054^[4]



Location within Massachusetts



1775 map of the Boston area (contains some inaccuracies)

Bunker Hill, with an elevation of 110 feet (34 m), lay at the northern end of the peninsula. Breed's Hill, at a height of 62 feet (19 m), was more southerly and nearer to Boston.^[17] The town of Charlestown occupied flats at the southern end of the peninsula. At its closest approach, less than 1,000 feet (300 m) separated the Charlestown Peninsula from the Boston Peninsula, where Copp's Hill was at about the same height as Breed's Hill. While the British retreat from Concord had ended in Charlestown, General Gage, rather than immediately fortifying the hills on the peninsula, had withdrawn those troops to Boston the day after that battle, turning the entire Charlestown Peninsula into a no man's land.^[18]

British planning

Throughout May, in response to orders from Gage requesting support, the British received reinforcements, until they reached a strength of about 6,000 men. On May 25, three generals arrived on HMS Cerberus: William Howe, John Burgoyne, and Henry Clinton. Gage began planning with them to break out of the city,^[19] finalizing a plan on June 12.^[20] This plan began with the taking of the Dorchester Neck, fortifying the Dorchester Heights, and then marching on the colonial forces stationed in Roxbury. Once the southern flank had been secured, the Charlestown heights would be taken, and the forces in Cambridge driven away. The attack was set for June 18.^[21]

On June 13, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress was notified, by express messenger from the Committee of Safety in Exeter, New Hampshire, that a New Hampshire gentleman "of undoubted veracity" had, while visiting Boston, overheard the British commanders making plans to capture Dorchester and Charlestown.^[22] On June 15, the Massachusetts Committee of Safety decided that additional defenses needed to be erected.^[23] General Ward directed

by sea.^[14] In theory, they were thus able to remain in Boston indefinitely.

However, the land across the water from Boston contained a number of hills, which could be used to advantage.^[15] If the militia could obtain enough artillery pieces, these could be placed on the hills and used to bombard the city until the occupying army evacuated it or surrendered. It was with this in mind that the Knox Expedition, led by Henry Knox, later transported cannon from Fort Ticonderoga to the Boston area.^[16]

The Charlestown Peninsula, lying to the north of Boston, started from a short, narrow isthmus (known as the Charlestown Neck) at its northwest and extended about 1 mile (1.6 km) southeastward into Boston Harbor.



The Battle of Bunker Hill, by Howard Pyle, 1897

General Israel Putnam to set up defenses on the Charlestown Peninsula, specifically on Bunker Hill.^{[24][25]}

Prelude to battle

Fortification of Breed's Hill



Array of American forces for the Battle of Bunker Hill

On the night of June 16, colonial Colonel William Prescott led about 1,200 men onto the peninsula in order to set up positions from which artillery fire could be directed into Boston.^[26] This force was made up of men from the regiments of Prescott, Putnam (the unit was commanded by Thomas Knowlton), James Frye, and Ebenezer Bridge.^[27] At first, Putnam, Prescott, and their engineer, Captain Richard Gridley, disagreed as to where they should locate their defense. Some work was performed on Bunker Hill, but Breed's Hill was closer to Boston and viewed as being more defensible. Arguably against orders, they decided to build their primary redoubt there.^[28] Prescott and his men, using Gridley's outline, began digging a square fortification about 130 feet (40 m) on a side with ditches and earthen walls. The walls of the redoubt were about 6 feet (1.8 m) high, with a wooden platform inside on which men could stand and fire over the walls.^{[29][30]}

The works on Breed's Hill did not go unnoticed by the British. General Clinton, out on reconnaissance that night, was aware of them, and tried to convince Gage and Howe that they needed to prepare to attack the position at daylight. British sentries were also aware of the activity, but most apparently did not think it cause for alarm.^[31] Then, in the early predawn, around 4 a.m., a sentry on board HMS Lively spotted the new fortification, and notified her captain. Lively opened fire, temporarily halting the colonists' work. Aboard his flagship HMS Somerset, Admiral Samuel Graves awoke, irritated by the gunfire that he had not ordered.^[32] He stopped it, only to have General Gage countermand his decision when he became fully aware of the situation in the morning. He ordered all 128 guns in the

harbor, as well as batteries atop Copp's Hill in Boston, to fire on the colonial position, which had relatively little effect.^[33] The rising sun also alerted Prescott to a significant problem with the location of the redoubt – it could easily be flanked on either side.^[31] He promptly ordered his men to begin constructing a breastwork running down the hill to the east, deciding he did not have the manpower to also build additional defenses to the west of the redoubt.^[34]

British preparations

When the British generals met to discuss their options, General Clinton, who had urged an attack as early as possible, preferred an attack beginning from the Charlestown Neck that would cut off the colonists' retreat, reducing the process of capturing the new redoubt to one of starving out its occupants. However, he was outvoted by the other three generals. Howe, who was the senior officer present and would lead the assault, was of the opinion that the hill was "open and easy of ascent and in short would be easily carried."^[35] General Burgoyne concurred, arguing that the "untrained rabble" would be no match for their "trained troops".^[36] Orders were then issued to prepare the expedition.^[37]

When General Gage surveyed the works from Boston with his staff, Loyalist Abijah Willard recognized his brother-in-law Colonel Prescott. "Will he fight?" asked Gage. "[A]s to his men, I cannot answer for them;" replied Willard, "but Colonel Prescott will fight you to the gates of hell."^[38] Prescott lived up to Willard's word, but his men were not so resolute. When the colonists suffered their first casualty, Asa Pollard of Billerica,^[39] a young private killed by cannon fire, Prescott gave orders to bury the man quickly and quietly, but a large group of men gave him a solemn funeral instead, with several deserting shortly thereafter.^[38]

It took six hours for the British to organize an infantry force and to gather up and inspect the men on parade. General Howe was to lead the major assault, drive around the colonial left flank, and take them from the rear. Brigadier General Robert Pigot on the British left flank would lead the direct assault on the redoubt, and Major John Pitcairn led the flank or reserve force. It took several trips in longboats to transport Howe's initial forces (consisting of about 1,500 men) to the eastern corner of the peninsula, known as Moulton's Point.^{[40][41]} By 2 p.m., Howe's chosen force had landed.^[40] However, while crossing the river, Howe noted the large number of colonial troops on top of Bunker Hill. Believing these to be reinforcements, he immediately sent a message to Gage, requesting additional troops. He then ordered some of the light infantry to take a forward position along the eastern side of the peninsula, alerting the colonists to his intended course of action. The troops then sat down to eat while they waited for the reinforcements.^[41]

Colonists reinforce their positions

Prescott, seeing the British preparations, called for reinforcements. Among the reinforcements were Joseph Warren, the popular young leader of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety, and Seth Pomeroy, an aging Massachusetts militia leader. Both of these men held commissions of rank, but chose to serve as infantry.^[40] Prescott ordered the Connecticut men under Captain Knowlton to defend the left flank, where they used a crude dirt wall as a breastwork, and topped it with fence rails and hay. They also constructed three small v-shaped trenches between this dirt wall and Prescott's breastwork. Troops that arrived to reinforce this flank position included about 200 men from the 1st and 3rd New Hampshire regiments, under Colonels John Stark and James Reed. Stark's men, who did not arrive until after Howe landed his forces (and thus filled a gap in the defense that Howe could have taken advantage of, had he pressed his attack sooner),^[42] took positions along the breastwork on the northern end of the colonial position. When low tide opened a gap along the Mystic River to the north, they quickly extended the fence with a short stone wall to the water's edge.^{[42][43]} Colonel Stark placed a stake about 100 feet (30 m) in front of the fence and ordered that no one fire until

the regulars passed it.^[44] Just prior to the action, further reinforcements arrived, including portions of Massachusetts regiments of Colonels Brewer, Nixon, Woodbridge, Little, and Major Moore, as well as Callender's company of artillery.^[45]

Behind the colonial lines, confusion reigned. Many units sent toward the action stopped before crossing the Charlestown Neck from Cambridge, which was under constant fire from gun batteries to the south. Others reached Bunker Hill, but then, uncertain about where to go from there, milled around. One commentator wrote of the scene that "it appears to me there never was more confusion and less command."^[46] While General Putnam was on the scene attempting to direct affairs, unit commanders often misunderstood or disobeyed orders.^{[46][47]}

British assault

By 3 p.m., the British reinforcements, which included the 47th Foot and the 1st Marines, had arrived, and the British were ready to march.^[48] Brigadier General Pigot's force, gathering just south of Charlestown village, were taking casualties from sniper fire, and Howe asked Admiral Graves for assistance in clearing out the snipers. Graves, who had planned for such a possibility, ordered incendiary shot fired into the village, and then sent a landing party to set fire to the town.^[49] The smoke billowing from Charlestown lent an almost surreal backdrop to the fighting, as the winds were such that the smoke was kept from the field of battle.^[50]

Pigot, commanding the 5th, 38th, 43rd, 47th, and 52nd regiments, as well as Major Pitcairn's Marines, were to feint an assault on the redoubt. However, they continued to be harried by snipers in Charlestown, and Pigot, when he saw what happened to Howe's advance, ordered a retreat.^[51]

General Howe led the light infantry companies and grenadiers in the assault on the American left flank, expecting an easy effort against Stark's recently arrived troops.^[52] His light infantry were set along the narrow beach, in column, in order to turn the far left flank of the colonial position.^[53] The grenadiers were deployed in the middle. They lined up four deep and several hundred across. As the regulars closed, John Simpson, a New Hampshire man, prematurely fired, drawing an ineffective volley of return fire from the regulars. When the regulars finally closed within range, both sides opened fire. The colonists inflicted heavy casualties on the regulars, using the fence to steady and aim their muskets, and benefit from a modicum of cover. With this devastating barrage of musket fire, the regulars retreated in disarray, and the militia held their ground.^[54]



The first British attack on Bunker Hill; shaded areas are hills



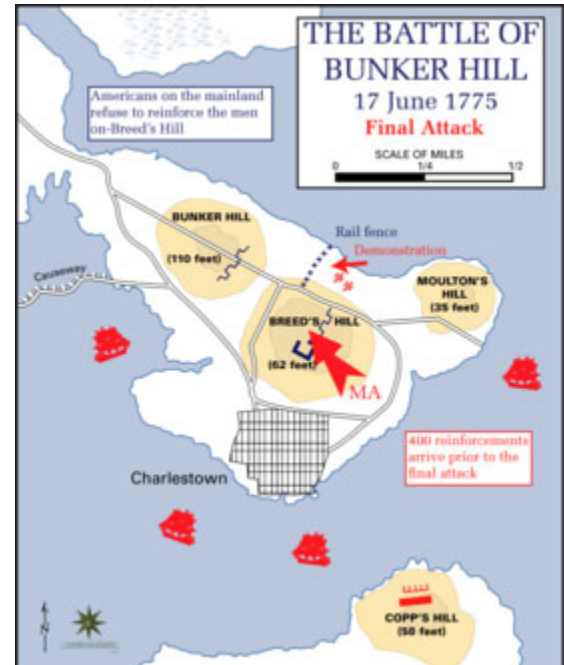
The second British attack on Bunker Hill

The regulars reformed on the field and marched out again. This time, Pigot was not to feint; he was to assault the redoubt, possibly without the assistance of Howe's force. Howe, instead of marching against Stark's position along the beach, marched instead against Knowlton's position along the rail fence. The outcome of the second attack was much the same as the first. One British observer wrote, "Most of our Grenadiers and Light-infantry, the moment of presenting themselves lost three-fourths, and many nine-tenths, of their men. Some had only eight or nine men a company left ..."^[55] Pigot did not fare any better in his attack on the redoubt, and again ordered a retreat.^[56] Meanwhile, in the rear of the colonial forces, confusion continued to reign. General Putnam tried, with only limited success, to send additional troops from Bunker Hill to Breed's Hill to support the men in the redoubt and along the defensive lines.^{[57][58]}

The British rear was also in some disarray. Wounded soldiers that were mobile had made their way to the landing areas, and were being ferried back to Boston, and the wounded lying on the field of battle were the source of moans and cries of pain.^[59] General Howe, deciding that he would try again, sent word to General Clinton in Boston for additional troops. Clinton, who had watched the first two attacks, sent about 400 men from the 2nd Marines and the 63rd Foot, and then followed himself to help rally the troops. In addition to the new reserves, he also convinced about 200 of the wounded to form up for the third attack.^[60] During the interval between the second and third assaults, General Putnam continued trying to direct troops toward the action. Some companies, and leaderless groups of men, moved toward the action; others retreated.^[61] John Chester, a Connecticut captain, seeing an entire company in retreat, ordered his company to aim muskets at that company to halt its retreat; they turned about and headed back to the battlefield.^[62]

The third assault, concentrated on the redoubt (with only a feint on the colonists' flank), was successful, although the colonists again poured musket fire into the British ranks, and it cost the life of Major Pitcairn.^[63] The defenders had run out of ammunition, reducing the battle to close combat. The British had the advantage once they entered the redoubt, as their troops were equipped with bayonets on their muskets while most of the colonists were not. Colonel Prescott, one of the last colonists to leave the redoubt, parried bayonet thrusts with his normally ceremonial sabre.^[64] It is during the retreat from the redoubt that Joseph Warren was killed.^[65]

The retreat of much of the colonial forces from the peninsula was made possible in part by the controlled retreat of the forces along the rail fence, led by John Stark and Thomas Knowlton, which prevented the encirclement of the hill. Their disciplined retreat, described by Burgoyne as "no flight; it was even covered with bravery and military skill", was so effective that most of the wounded were saved;^[66] most of the prisoners taken by the British were mortally wounded.^[66] General Putnam attempted to reform the troops on Bunker Hill; however the flight of the colonial forces was so rapid that artillery pieces and entrenching tools had to be abandoned. The colonists suffered most of their casualties during the retreat on Bunker Hill. By 5 p.m., the colonists had retreated over the Charlestown Neck to fortified positions in Cambridge, and the British were in control of the peninsula.^[67]



The third and final British attack on Bunker Hill

Aftermath

The British had taken the ground but at a great loss; they had suffered 1,054 casualties (226 dead and 828 wounded), with a disproportionate number of these officers. The casualty count was the highest suffered by the British in any single encounter during the entire war.^[68] General Clinton, echoing *Pyrrhus of Epirus*, remarked in his diary that "A few more such victories would have shortly put an end to British dominion in America."^[9] British dead and wounded included 100 commissioned officers, a significant portion of the British officer corps in North America.^[69] Much of General Howe's field staff was among the casualties.^[70] General Gage, in his report after the battle, reported the following officer casualties (listing lieutenants and above by name):^[71]

- 1 lieutenant colonel killed
- 2 majors killed, 3 wounded
- 7 captains killed, 27 wounded
- 9 lieutenants killed, 32 wounded
- 15 sergeants killed, 42 wounded
- 1 drummer killed, 12 wounded

The colonial losses were about 450, of whom 140 were killed. Most of the colonial losses came during the withdrawal. Major *Andrew McClary* was technically the highest ranking colonial officer to die in the battle; he was hit by cannon fire on Charlestown Neck, the last person to be killed in the battle. He was later commemorated by the dedication of *Fort McClary* in *Kittery, Maine*.^[72] A serious loss to the Patriot cause, however, was the death of Dr. *Joseph Warren*. He was the President of Massachusetts' Provincial Congress, and he had been appointed a Major General on June 14. His commission had not yet taken effect when he served as a volunteer private three days later at Bunker Hill.^[73] Only thirty men were captured by the British, most of them with grievous wounds; twenty died while held prisoner. The colonials also lost numerous shovels and other entrenching tools, as well as five out of the six cannon they had brought to the peninsula.^{[74][75]}

Political consequences

When news of the battle spread through the colonies, it was reported as a colonial loss, as the ground had been taken by the enemy, and significant casualties were incurred. *George Washington*, who was on his way to Boston as the new commander of the *Continental Army*, received news of the battle while in New York City. The report, which included casualty figures that were somewhat inaccurate, gave Washington hope that his army might prevail in the conflict.^[76]

We have ...
learned one
melancholy

The Massachusetts Committee of Safety, seeking to repeat the sort of propaganda victory it won following the battles at Lexington and Concord, commissioned a report of the battle to send to England. Their report, however, did not reach England before Gage's official account arrived on July 20. His report unsurprisingly caused friction and argument



The Bunker Hill Monument



Ralph Farnham, one of the last survivors

truth, which is, that the Americans, if they were equally well commanded, are full as good soldiers as ours.^[77]

A British officer in Boston, after the battle

between the Tories and the Whigs, but the casualty counts alarmed the military establishment, and forced many to rethink their views of colonial military capability.^[78] King George's attitude toward the colonies hardened, and the news may have contributed to his rejection of the Continental Congress' Olive Branch Petition, the last substantive political attempt at reconciliation. Sir James Adolphus Oughton, part of the Tory majority, wrote to Lord Dartmouth of the colonies, "the sooner they are made to Taste Distress the sooner will [Crown control over them] be produced, and the Effusion of Blood be put a stop to."^[79] About a month after receiving Gage's report the Proclamation of Rebellion would be issued in response; this hardening of the British position would also lead to a hardening of previously weak support for the rebellion, especially in the southern colonies, in favor of independence.^[79]

Gage's report had a more direct effect on his own career. His dismissal from office was decided just three days after his report was received, although General Howe did not replace him until October 1775.^[80] Gage wrote another report to the British Cabinet, in which he repeated earlier warnings that "a large army must at length be employed to reduce these people", that would require "the hiring of foreign troops".^[81]

Analysis

Much has been written in the wake of this battle over how it was conducted. Both sides made strategic and tactical missteps which could have altered the outcome of the battle. While hindsight often gives a biased view, some things seem to be apparent after the battle that might reasonably have been within the reach of the command of the day.

Years after the battle, and after Israel Putnam was dead, General Dearborn published an account of the battle in *Port Folio* magazine, accusing General Putnam of inaction, cowardly leadership and failing to supply reinforcements during the battle, which subsequently sparked a long lasting and major controversy among veterans of the war, various friends, family members and historians.^{[82][a]} People were shocked by the rancor of the attack, and this prompted a forceful response from defenders of Putnam, including such notables as John and Abigail Adams. Historian Harold Murdock wrote that Dearborn's account "abounds in absurd misstatements and amazing flights of imagination." The Dearborn attack received considerable attention because at the time he was in the middle of considerable controversy himself. He had been relieved of one of the top commands in the War of 1812 due to his mistakes. He had also been nominated to serve as Secretary of War by President Monroe, but was rejected by the United States Senate (which was the first time that the Senate had voted against confirming a presidential cabinet choice).^{[83][84][85][86]}

Disposition of Colonial forces

The colonial forces, while nominally under the overall command of General Ward, with General Putnam and Colonel Prescott leading in the field, often acted quite independently.^[87] This was evident in the opening stages of the battle, when a tactical decision was made that had strategic implications. After deliberating with General Putnam and Colonel Gridley, Colonel Prescott and his staff, apparently in contravention of orders, decided to fortify Breed's Hill rather than Bunker Hill.^[88] The fortification of Breed's Hill was more provocative; it would have put offensive artillery closer to Boston.^[89] It also exposed the forces there to the possibility of being trapped, as they probably could not properly defend against attempts by the British to land troops and take control of Charlestown Neck. If the British had taken that step, they might have had a victory with many fewer casualties.^[90]

While the front lines of the colonial forces were generally well managed, the scene behind them, especially once the action began, was significantly disorganized, due at least in part to a poor chain of command. Only some of the militias operated directly under Ward's and Putnam's authority,^[91] and some commanders also disobeyed orders, staying at Bunker Hill rather than joining in the defense on the third British assault. Several officers were subjected to court martial and cashiered.^[92] Colonel Prescott was of the opinion that the third assault would have been repulsed, had his forces in the redoubt been reinforced with either more men, or more supplies of ammunition and powder.^[93]



A historic map of Bunker Hill featuring military notes

Disposition of British forces

The British leadership, for its part, acted slowly once the works on Breed's Hill were spotted. It was 2 p.m. when the troops were ready for the assault, roughly ten hours after the *Lively* first opened fire. This leisurely pace gave the colonial forces time to reinforce the flanking positions that had been poorly defended.^[94] Gage and Howe decided that a frontal assault on the works would be a simple matter, when an encircling move (gaining control of Charlestown Neck), would have given them a more resounding victory.^[90] (This move would not have been without risks of its own, as the colonists could have made holding the Neck expensive with fire from the high ground in Cambridge.) But the British leadership was excessively optimistic, believing that "two regiments were sufficient to beat the strength of the province".^[95]

Once in the field, Howe, rather than focusing on the redoubt, opted (twice) to dilute the force attacking the redoubt with a flanking maneuver against the colonial left. It was only with the third attack, when the flank attack was merely a feint,^[96] and the main force (now also reinforced with additional reserves) squarely targeted the redoubt, that the attack succeeded.^[97]

Following the taking of the peninsula, the British arguably had a tactical advantage that they could have used to press into Cambridge. General Clinton proposed this to Howe; having just led three assaults with grievous casualties, he declined the idea.^[98] The colonial military leaders eventually recognized Howe as a tentative decision-maker, to his detriment; in the aftermath of the Battle of Long Island (1776), he again had tactical advantages that might have delivered Washington's army into his hands, but again refused to act.^[99]



View of the Attack on Bunker's Hill with the Burning of Charlestown, by Lodge

Historian John Ferling maintains that had General Gage used the Royal Navy to secure the narrow neck to the

Charleston peninsula, cutting the Americans off from the mainland, he could have achieved a far less costly victory, but he was motivated by revenge over patriot resistance at the Battles of Lexington and Concord and relatively heavy British losses, and also felt that the colonial militia were completely untrained and could be overtaken with little effort, opting for a frontal assault.^[100]

"The whites of their eyes"

The famous order "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes" was popularized in stories about the battle of Bunker Hill. It is uncertain as to who said it there, since various histories, including eyewitness accounts,^[101] attribute it to Putnam, Stark, Prescott, or Gridley, and it may have been said first by one, and repeated by the others.^[102] It was also not an original statement. The idea dates originally to the general-king Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632) who gave standing orders to his musketeers: "never to give fire, till they could see their own image in the pupil of their enemy's eye".^[103] Gustavus Adolphus's military teachings were widely admired and imitated and caused this saying to be often repeated. It was used by General James Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham, when his troops defeated Montcalm's army on September 13, 1759.^[104] The earliest similar quote came from the Battle of Dettingen on June 27, 1743, where Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Andrew Agnew of Lochnaw warned his Regiment, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, not to fire until they could "see the white of their e'en."^[105] The phrase was also used by Prince Charles of Prussia in 1745, and repeated in 1755 by Frederick the Great, and may have been mentioned in histories the colonial military leaders were familiar with.^[106] Whether or not it was actually said in this battle, it was clear that the colonial military leadership were regularly reminding their troops to hold their fire until the moment when it would have the greatest effect, especially in situations where their ammunition would be limited.^[107]

Notable participants

A significant number of notable American patriots fought in this battle. Henry Dearborn and William Eustis, for example, went on to distinguished military and political careers; both served in Congress, the Cabinet, and in diplomatic posts. Others, like John Brooks, Henry Burbeck, Christian Febiger, Thomas Knowlton, and John Stark, became well known for later actions in the war.^{[108][109]} Stark became known as the "Hero of Bennington" for his role in the 1777 Battle of Bennington. Free African-Americans also fought in the battle; notable examples include Barzillai Lew, Salem Poor, and Peter Salem.^{[110][111]} Another notable participant was Daniel Shays, who later became famous for his army of protest in Shays' Rebellion.^[112] Israel Potter was immortalized in *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, a novel by Herman Melville.^{[113][114]} Colonel John Paterson commanded the Massachusetts First Militia, served in Shays' Rebellion, and became a congressman from New York.^[115] Lt. Col. Seth Read, who served under John Paterson at Bunker Hill, went on to settle Geneva, New York and Erie, Pennsylvania, and was said to have been instrumental in the phrase *E pluribus unum* being added to U.S. coins.^{[116][117][118][119]} George Claghorn of the Massachusetts militia was shot in the knee at Bunker Hill and went on after the war to become the master builder of the USS Constitution, a.k.a. "*Old Ironsides*", which is the oldest naval vessel in the world that is still commissioned and afloat.^{[120][121]}



According to the John Trumbull painting, this flag of New England was carried by the colonists during the battle.



This flag, known as the Bunker Hill flag, is also associated with the battle.

Notable British participants in the battle were: Lt. Col. Samuel Birch, Major John Small, Lord Rawdon, General William Howe, Major John Pitcairn and General Henry Clinton.

Commemorations

John Trumbull's painting, *The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill* (displayed in lede), was created as an allegorical depiction of the battle and Warren's death, not as an actual pictorial recording of the event. The painting shows a number of participants in the battle including a British officer, John Small, among those who stormed the redoubt, yet came to be the one holding the mortally wounded Warren and preventing a fellow redcoat from bayoneting him. He was friends of Putnam and Trumbull. Other central figures include Andrew McClary who was the last man to fall in the battle.^[122]

The Bunker Hill Monument is an obelisk that stands 221 feet (67 m) high on Breed's Hill. On June 17, 1825, the fiftieth anniversary of the battle, the cornerstone of the monument was laid by the Marquis de Lafayette and an address delivered by Daniel Webster.^[123] (When Lafayette died, he was buried next to his wife, Adrienne de La Fayette, at the *Cimetière de Picpus* under soil from Bunker Hill, which his son Georges sprinkled over him.)^[124] The Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Memorial Bridge was specifically designed to evoke this monument.^[125] There is also a statue of William Prescott showing him calming his men down.



Bunker Hill clipper ship

The National Park Service operates a museum dedicated to the battle near the monument, which is part of the Boston National Historical Park.^[126] A cyclorama of the battle was added in 2007 when the museum was renovated.^[127]

In nearby Cambridge, a small granite monument just north of Harvard Yard bears this inscription: "Here assembled on the night of June 16, 1775, 1200 Continental troops under command of Colonel Prescott. After prayer by President Langdon, they marched to Bunker Hill." See footnote for picture.^[128] (Samuel Langdon, a Congregational minister, was Harvard's 11th president.)^[129] Another small monument nearby

marks the location of the Committee of Safety, which had become the Patriots' provisional government as Tories left Cambridge.^[130] These monuments are on the lawn to the west of Harvard's Littauer Center, which is itself the west of Harvard's huge Science Center. See footnote for map.^[131]

Bunker Hill Day, observed every June 17, is a legal holiday in Suffolk County, Massachusetts (which includes the city of Boston), as well as Somerville in Middlesex County. Prospect Hill, site of colonial fortifications overlooking the Charlestown Neck, is now in Somerville, which was previously part of Charlestown.^{[132][133]} State institutions in Massachusetts (such as public institutions of higher education) in Boston also celebrate the holiday.^{[134][135]} However, the state's FY2011 budget requires that all state and municipal offices in Suffolk County be open on Bunker Hill Day and Evacuation Day.^[136]

On June 16 and 17, 1875, the centennial of the battle was celebrated with a military parade and a reception featuring notable speakers, among them General William Tecumseh Sherman and Vice President Henry Wilson. It was attended by dignitaries from across the country.^[137] Celebratory events also marked the sesquicentennial (150th anniversary) in 1925 and the bicentennial in 1975.^{[138][139]}

Over the years the Battle of Bunker Hill has been commemorated on four U.S. Postage stamps.^[140]



Statue of William Prescott in Charlestown, Massachusetts



Issue of 1959

Issue of 1975

Issue of 1968

Issue of

1968

Left stamp depicts Battle of Bunker Hill battle flag and Monument
 Left-center, depicts John Trumbull's painting of the battle
 Right-center depicts detail of Trumbull's painting
 Right depicts image of Bunker Hill battle flag

See also

- [List of American Revolutionary War battles](#)
- [List of Continental Forces in the American Revolutionary War](#)
- [List of British Forces in the American Revolutionary War](#)
- [Dr. John Hart, Regimental Surgeon of Col Prescott's Regiment who treated the wounded at Bunker Hill](#)
- [Royal Welch Fusiliers](#)
- [USS *Bunker Hill*](#)

Notes

- In 1822 Dearborn wrote an anonymous plea in the *Boston Patriot* to urge the purchase the site of the Bunker Hill

battlefield which was currently listed for sale.^[82]

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- ↑ *Chidsey* p. 122 counts 1,400 in the night-time fortification work. *Frothingham* is unclear on the number of reinforcements arriving just before the battle breaks out. In a footnote on p. 136, as well as on p. 190, he elaborates the difficulty in getting an accurate count.
- ↑ *Chidsey* p. 90 says the initial force requested was 1,550, but Howe requested and received reinforcements before the battle began. *Frothingham* p. 137 puts the total British contingent likely to be over 3,000. Furthermore, according to *Frothingham* p. 148, additional reinforcements arrived from Boston after the second attack was repulsed. *Frothingham*, p. 191 notes the difficulty in attaining an accurate count of British troops involved.
- ↑ *Chidsey*, p. 104
- ↑ *Frothingham* pp. 191, 194.
- ↑ Borneman, Walter R. *American Spring: Lexington, Concord, and the Road to Revolution*, p. 350, Little, Brown and Company, New York, Boston, London, 2014. ISBN 978-0-316-22102-3.
- ↑ Hubbard, Robert Ernest. *Major General Israel Putnam: Hero of the American Revolution*, p. 85, McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, North Carolina, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4766-6453-8.
- ↑ Hubbard, Robert Ernest. *Major General Israel Putnam: Hero of the American Revolution*, pp. 85–87, McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, North Carolina, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4766-6453-8.
- ↑ Hubbard, Robert Ernest. *Major General Israel Putnam: Hero of the American Revolution*, pp. 87–95, McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, North Carolina, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4766-6453-8.
- ↑ *Clinton*, p. 19. General Clinton's remark is an echoing of *Pyrrhus of Epirus's* original sentiment after the *Battle of Heraclea*, "*one more such victory and the cause is lost*".
- ↑ "Battle of Bunker Hill" (https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Bunker-Hill). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. December 8, 2016. Retrieved January 25, 2016. "Although the British eventually won the battle, it was a Pyrrhic victory that lent considerable encouragement to the revolutionary cause."
- ↑ Hubbard, Robert Ernest. *Major General Israel Putnam: Hero of the American Revolution*, pp. 94–95, McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, North Carolina, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4766-6453-8.
- ↑ 18th century Boston was a peninsula. Primarily in the 19th century, much land around the peninsula was filled, giving the modern city its present geography. See *the history of Boston* for details.
- ↑ *Chidsey*, p. 72 New Hampshire 1,200, Rhode Island 1,000, Connecticut 2,300, Massachusetts 11,500
- ↑ *Alden*, p. 178
- ↑ Visitors to Boston, upon seeing the nearby hills, may conclude that they are too low. The hills were once higher, but were lowered by excavations to obtain landfill used to expand Boston in the 19th century.
- ↑ Martin, James Kirby (1997). *Benedict Arnold: Revolutionary Hero* (https://archive.org/details/benedictarnoldre0000mart). New York: New York University Press. p. 73. ISBN 978-0-8147-5560-0. OCLC 36343341 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/36343341).
- ↑ *Chidsey* p. 91 has an historic map showing elevations.
- ↑ *French*, p. 220
- ↑ *French*, p. 249
- ↑ *Brooks*, p. 119
- ↑ *Ketchum*, pp. 45–46
- ↑ *Ketchum*, p. 47
- ↑ *Ketchum*, pp. 74–75
- ↑ *French*, p. 255

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26. [Frothingham](#), pp. 122–123
27. [Ketchum](#), pp. 102, 245
28. [Frothingham](#), pp. 123–124
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32. [Frothingham](#), p. 125
33. [Brooks](#), p. 127
34. [Ketchum](#), p. 117
35. [Ketchum](#), pp. 120–121
36. [Wood](#), p. 54
37. [Ketchum](#), p. 122
38. [Graydon](#), p. 424
39. [Chidsey](#), p. 84
40. [Frothingham](#), p. 133
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42. [Ketchum](#), p. 143
43. [Chidsey](#) p. 93
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45. [Frothingham](#), p. 136
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48. [Ketchum](#), pp. 152–153
49. [Ketchum](#), pp. 151–152
50. [Frothingham](#), pp. 144–145
51. [Ketchum](#), p. 160
52. [Ketchum](#), p. 152
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55. [Ketchum](#), p. 161
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63. [Chidsey](#) p. 99
64. [Frothingham](#), p. 150
65. [Frothingham](#), p. 151
66. [Ketchum](#), p. 181
67. [Frothingham](#), pp. 151–152
68. [Brooks](#), p. 237
69. [Brooks](#), pp. 183–184
70. [Frothingham](#), pp. 145, 196
71. [Frothingham](#), pp. 387–389 lists the officer casualties by name, as well as this summary
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73. [Ketchum](#), p. 150
74. [Ketchum](#), p. 255
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External links

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About people in the battle

- [Israel Putnam Website \(https://web.archive.org/web/20060404194948/http://www.israelputnam.com/index.html\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20060404194948/http://www.israelputnam.com/index.html)
- [Genealogy of Captain Samuel Cherry, who fought at Bunker Hill \(http://www.jhowell.com/tng/getperson.php?personID=11956&tree=1\)](http://www.jhowell.com/tng/getperson.php?personID=11956&tree=1)

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