

The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park

June 2007 NewsLetter



Bunker Hill Flag



Bethel/Redding CT

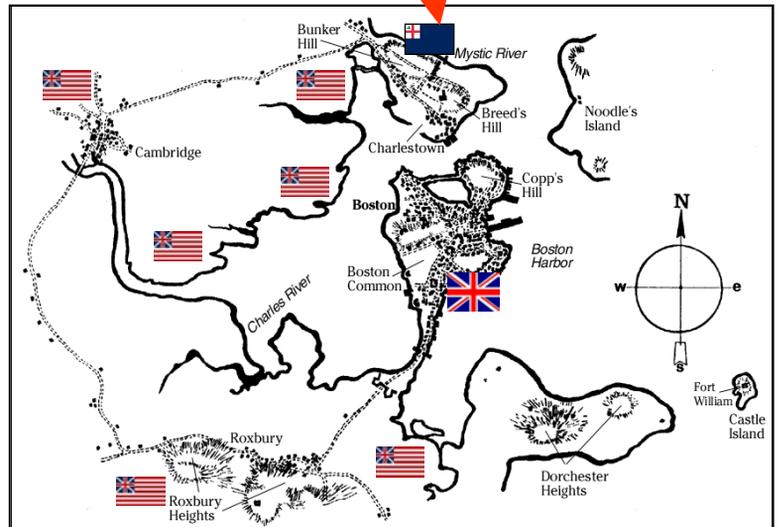
June 1775 - British Troops In Boston Under Siege

The American Revolution began with the first blood drawn at Lexington and Concord. Those confrontations caused more than 20,000 militia men from New England to gather at Cambridge, Massachusetts. These men were not professional soldiers, but rather farmers, craftsmen, fishermen and merchants from towns and villages. Almost none wore uniforms. Many had no guns. They all answered only to their immediate captain or major from back home. There was no overall military command hierarchy.

The senior officers from the different states did have something in common, they gained their military experience in the French & Indian War. In fact most of these officers served with many of the British officers who were now holed up in Boston under siege.

Gen. Artemus Ward of Massachusetts was the most senior commander. Gen. Israel Putnam from Connecticut was the other senior leader. There was no national army organization at this point. Gen. George Washington was enroute to Cambridge to form the Continental Army. In the meanwhile, the most senior officers on the scene did the best they could to hold the British cooped up in Boston. There were several critical locations to guard and protect: Boston Neck at Roxbury, Dorchester Heights, Bunker Hill and Cambridge, where most of the provincial troops were quartered.

In June, intelligence from Boston said that The British were planning to take over Dorchester Heights and Bunker's Hill; both of which looked down upon Boston. Gen. Putnam of CT urged the Committee of Safety and Gen. Ward's other officers to fortify Bunker's Hill *before* the British got there first.



Boston under siege. The British were hemmed in by American troops surrounding the peninsula. However they still controlled the sea.



Don Troiani

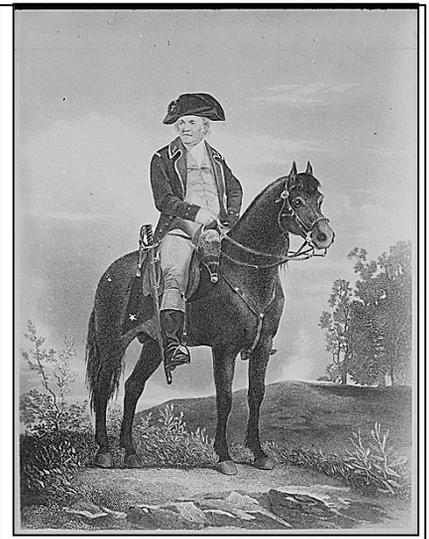
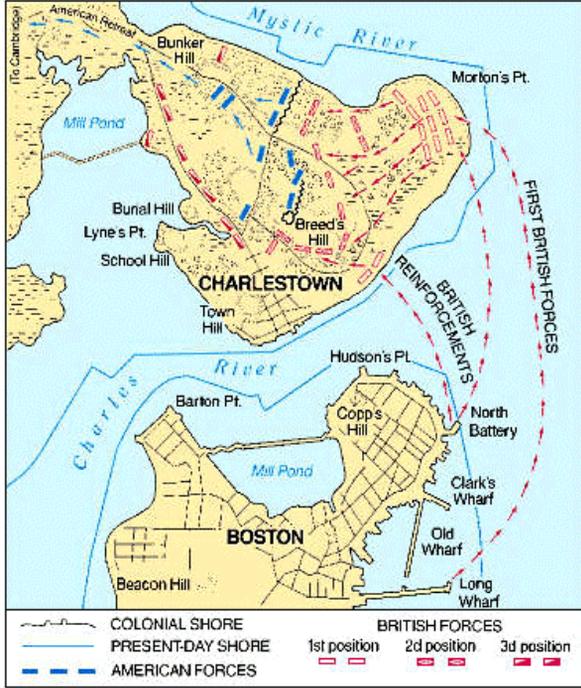
Putnam's plan was approved. American troops went to Bunker's Hill in the dead of night on June 16th and began digging the earthen redoubts. When dawn came the next morning, seaman on the British ships in the harbor were first to see the new fortifications up on the hill. Col. William Prescott (on the right) and newly appointed Maj. Gen. Joseph Warren stood on the parapet ordering the troops to hold their fire

The Battle of Bunker (Breed's) Hill – June 17th

The American troops were exhausted from working all through the night. The day was terribly hot. Promised food, water, and ammunition never made it to the Bunker Hill. Putnam rode to Cambridge several times to plead with Gen. Ward (to no avail) for additional troops and supplies. Putnam finally took it upon himself and ordered NH and CT troops to follow him to Bunker's Hill.

One of the problems that surfaced that day was the fact that the various states troops would not follow orders from an officer from another state. Even though Putnam was the senior officer on the hill, the MA and NH officers ignored most of his orders. This included his dealings with MA Gen. Ward himself. MA Col. William Prescott ran his own show at the redoubt, ignoring Putnam's presence.

One weak point that was soon corrected on-the-spot was the rail fence and beach area on the Mystic River flank. Col. John Stark from NH put his men along the stone wall they created on the beach; and CT and MA men were placed along the rail fence between the main redoubt and the beach. These moves prevented the British from flanking the American lines.



Gen. Israel Putnam Senior Officer at the Battle of Bunker (Breed's) Hill

The legendary command, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes" has come to symbolize the conviction and determination of the ill-equipped American colonists facing the world's most powerful army during the "Battle of Bunker Hill", June 17, 1775. Most of the fighting actually took place on Breed's Hill, the site of the existing monument, a 221-foot granite obelisk.

The Battle of Bunker Hill was the first major battle of the American Revolution. Despite the colonial army's shortcomings, it was led by such capable men as Colonel William Prescott, Colonel John Stark and General Israel Putnam, who had experience fighting alongside the British in the French and Indian War. Although the British Army ultimately prevailed in the battle, the colonists greatly surprised the British by repelling two major assaults and inflicting great casualties. Out of the 2,200 British ground forces and artillery engaged at the battle, almost half (1,034) were killed or wounded. The colonists lost between 400 and 600 combined casualties, including popular patriot leader and newly-elected Major-General, Dr. Joseph Warren, who was killed during the third and final assault.



HEAVY LOSSES



Percy Moran

◀ The British regiments under command of Gen. Howe were forced to make a head on assault (instead of flanking). The Americans, waiting until the enemy got close, repelled the first two attempts. The British lost half of their men in casualties that day. The highest rate of the war!

The Burning of Charlestown and the Last Assault

Col. Prescott and Gen. Putnam sent American troops down into the town of Charlestown to prevent the British from flanking the other side of the lines. So many redcoats were going down as casualties, Gen. Howe ordered the naval vessels and the battery on top of Copp's Hill in Boston (near Old North Church) to destroy the town by cannon fire. The ships fired molten red hot iron at the wooden buildings of the town. The entire town was consumed in flames. Even so, the American militia continued their efforts to stop the British from flanking. It worked, forcing the head-on assaults on the American lines.



Copp's Hill Cemetery near Old North Church. The British set up artillery batteries here to bombard both the town of Charlestown and the American positions on Bunker Hill which were directly across the Charles River. Several thousand spectators from Boston watched the battle from their roof tops.

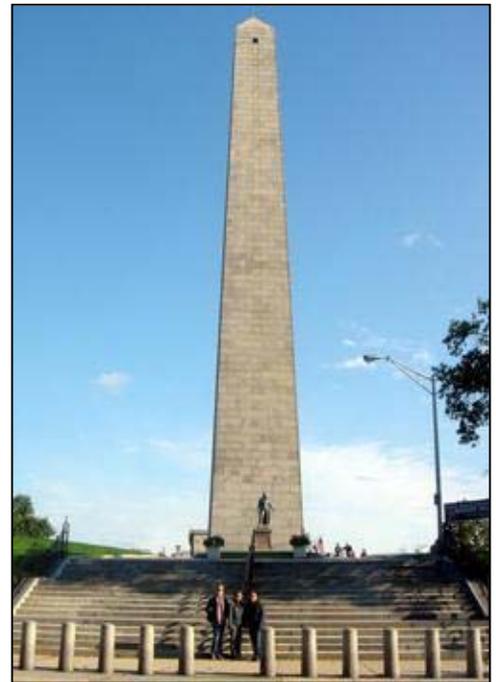


John Lodge
This drawing shows the awful devastation laid upon Charlestown, which was adjacent to the Breeches and Bunker Hill positions. The British columns can be seen marching in order up the hill toward the redoubt and breastworks.



H. Charles McBarron

On the third and final British assault, the Americans finally ran out of ammunition. The rebel fighters turned to using their muskets as clubs in the hand to hand final combat against the dreaded bayonets of the redcoats. None of the much needed supplies were delivered to the hill that day. Powder, bullets, food, water and reinforcements!



Highly visible from all around Boston is the reminder in stone of the first real battle of troops against troops in the Revolutionary War. There was no turning back after this. Americans were at war with Britain.

Many of the men that fought at Bunker Hill were also at the Reading Camps in 1778-79. NH Captain Henry Dearborn led his company in its first battle at Bunker Hill. Dearborn was the camp commandant at Camp Reading (today's Putnam Park) just prior to the troops leaving Reading in 1779.

June FAN's Meeting

To contact us: friendsofputnampark@comcast.net



Maj. General
William Howe

1. Rosemary Payne gave the **Treasurers Report**.
2. Rosemary Payne reported on the Summer Craftsmen Program. Seven out of the 8 weekends are scheduled to date. Need to get out publicity.
3. This year's **Living History Event** (for public), set for October 20 & 21st. Invitations have been mailed.
4. The Membership Committee met to discuss names on the current list, many of which were purged due to no contact, no dues, and or no e-mail addresses. Almost 60% of newsletters are now being transmitted by e-mail.

The Friends of Putnam Park purchased two replica Revolutionary War muskets w/ bayonets for the new Park Visitor Center. The first was the British "Brown Bess" Short Land Service Musket; and second, the French 1766 Charleville Musket:

Brown Bess ...

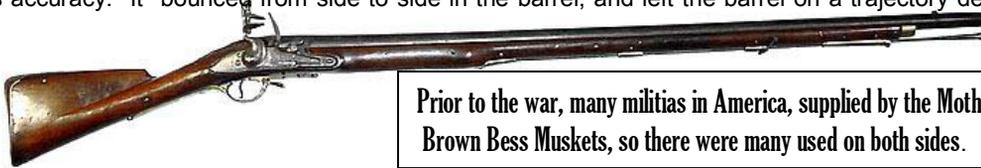


The Brown Bess

The standard infantry musket during the American Revolutionary War was the Short Land Service Musket (New Pattern), better known as the Brown Bess. It was called a pattern musket because its parts were standardized, with the original parts kept in a pattern vault, so standardized and interchangeable parts could be made.

The Brown Bess was not designed particularly for accurate aimed fire. It was accurate for about 50-70 yards, and was usually fired during a marching charge across a field of battle. It was fired in volleys, roughly aimed at the enemy, to be followed by a bayonet charge that decided the battle.

The Brown Bess had a smooth bore, could fire about 4 shots per minute, weighed 10 pounds, fired a .75 caliber ball, and was reloaded with powder in a paper cartridge. The powder used left quite a bit of residue in the barrel, and could not be fired a large number of times before cleaning. To compensate for the sludge buildup, the ball was smaller than the barrel, which decreased its accuracy. It bounced from side to side in the barrel, and left the barrel on a trajectory determined by its last bounce



Prior to the war, many militias in America, supplied by the Mother Country, also had the Brown Bess Muskets, so there were many used on both sides.

French Charleville

In 1763 France adopted a new model infantry weapon, much stronger than the previous models, to answer the accelerated fighting during the War of the Seven Years (which ended that same year). The new rifle however appeared soon to be too heavy and after

only three years it was replaced by its modified version, known as **Model 1766**, projected by M. de Montbeillard, Inspector of Saint Etienne Manufacture.

The new model appeared to be very strong and reliable in spite of it being remarkably lightened. The **Model 1766** was manufactured in more than 150,000 pieces until 1770. After such date it has been progressively replaced by the Model 1770 & 1777, all the rifles the corps used till then were given back to be stored. When the American War of Independence started in 1776, France happened to have plenty of Model 1766 rifles and supplied large quantities to the United States of America Army. The Marquis de Lafayette personally delivered a gift of 25,000 of these rifles from the French Government to General Washington. This helped turn the tide of the American Revolution.



The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening, July 10th**
at **7:00PM** at the **Visitor Center** at Putnam Park.