

Battle of Bunker Hill

Author Unknown



OVERVIEW

Two weeks before George Washington took command of the colonial army, Americans took action in Boston against superior British forces at Bunker Hill (actually Breed's Hill). On June 17, 1775, the Americans fought until they ran out of gunpowder. The British claimed victory as the Americans retreated. The Battle of Bunker Hill was described in this letter written by a colonial officer.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- How does the author hint at how the Americans ultimately won the war?
 - What were some of the obstacles the colonists faced to winning the war?
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Finding the zeal of the troops so great . . . it was resolved to force General Gage to an action; with this view it was determined to seize possession of the height on the peninsula of Charles-Town, which General Gage had occupied before the 19th of April, and erect some batteries on Banhin-hill [Bunker-hill], to batter down the town and General Gage's camp on the common and his entrenchment on Boston neck (which you know is only about three fourths of a mile across); 4000 men commanded by General Putnam, and led on by Dr. Warren, having prepared every thing for the operation as well as could be contrived or collected were stationed under a half unfinished breastwork and some palisadoes fix'd in a hurry. When the enemy were landed, to the number of 2500, as we are since informed, being the light infantry and the grenadiers of the army with a compleat train of artillery, howitzers and field pieces, drawn by 200 sailors, and commanded by the most gallant and experienced officers of the last war; they marched to engage 3000 provincials, arrayed in red worsted caps and blue great coats, with guns of different sizes, few of which had bayonets, ill-served artillery, but of invincible courage! The fire from the ships and artillery of the enemy was horrid and amazing; the first onset of the soldiers was bold and fierce, but they were received with equal courage; at length the 38th regiment gave way, and the rest recoiled. The King's troops were commanded by General Howe, brother to that gallant Lord Howe to whose memory the province of Massachusetts Bay erected a statue; he marched with undaunted spirit at the head of his men; most of his followers were killed round his own person. The King's troops about this time got into much confusion and retreated; they were rallied by the reproaches of General Howe, and the activity of General Clinton who then joined the battle. The King's troops again made their push against Charles-

Town, which was then set on fire by them, our right flank being then uncovered, two floating batteries coming in by the mill dam to take us in the rear, more troops coming from Boston, and our ammunition being almost expended, General Putnam ordered the troops on the left to retreat; the confusion was great for twenty minutes, but in less than half an hour we fell into complete order; the regulars were so mauled they durst not pursue us 200 yards; almost the last shot they fired they killed good Dr. Warren, who had dressed himself like Lord Falkland, in his wedding suit, and distinguished himself by unparalleled acts of bravery during the whole action, but particularly in covering the retreat; he was a man of great courage, universal learning, and much humanity. It may well be said he is the greatest loss we have sustained. General Putnam, at the age of 60, was as active as the youngest officer in the field. We have lost 104 killed, and 306 wounded; a Lieutenant Colonel and 30 men are prisoners; we anxiously wait their fate; if there are any severity used the war will become most horrid.—We lost before the action began 18 men by the fire of the ships and the battery from Boston; these were buried before the assault. The number of the King's troops killed and wounded are three times our loss. A sailor belonging to one of the transports, who was busy with many of his companions in rifling the dead, and who has since deserted, assured me the ground was covered with officers. The cannon was dreadful. The King's troops began firing at a great distance, being scarce of ammunition deferred our fire. It was impossible to send troops from Roxburgh, because we expected an attack there, or at Dorchester neck. I am well informed many of the old English officers are since dead.