



SOME UNFAMILIAR FACTS ABOUT NEW HAMPSHIRE AT THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL

New Hampshire's participation at Bunker Hill was led by John Stark of Amoskeag. His military career in the Revolution began after Concord and Lexington and found him in the thick of most of the important battles of the conflict.

However, his greatest fame, as recorded by Biographer Howard Parker Moore, is that he

"Held the line at Bunker Hill"

Immediately upon hearing the news of Concord and Lexington, Stark quit his sawmill at Amoskeag and led New Hampshire patriots to Cambridge. He was made Colonel of the first New Hampshire Regiment, which was formed into fifteen companies.

Among the New Hampshire patriots who also hurried to Cambridge were:

34 led by Captain Andrew McClary, Innkeeper of Epsom

100 led by Dr. Henry Dearborn of Epping

54 led by Captain Nathan Hale of Rindge

29 led by Lt. Col. Isaac Reed, Innkeeper of Keene

108 led by Captain Joe Hackett of Exeter

78 led by Captains Crosby, Spaulding, and Toune from Amherst.

I. Chelsea Creek

Before June 17th, New Hampshire troops fought the British at Chelsea Creek. This proved to become an important victory for the New Hampshire men on June 17th on the Mystic River shoreline. Stark's Regiment was stationed at *Winter Hill* (now Somerville) and his headquarters were at the *Royal House* in *Medford*. Colonel Reed's 2nd Regiment was camped at *Charlestown Neck*.

On May 27th, Stark led 300 New Hampshire men from Chelsea at ebb tide in shallow water to Noddles Island and Hog Island (now East Boston, Orient Heights, and Logan Airport). Against British fire they drove off cattle and sheep which the British were using for fresh meat. In the fighting, the British Fleet Commander, Admiral Graves, sent into the Upper Chelsea Creek an armed schooner, *Diana*. She got mired in the shallow water, drifted to the American shore, and was beached. Graves then sent an armed sloop, the *Britannia*, to save *Diana*. *Britannia* also got stuck in the mud, and was only saved by British sailors desperately pulling her off the sandy shallows with rowboats. The *Diana* was abandoned and the Americans stripped her of rifles, powder, supplies, money, and cannon, then set her afire.

The part Stark's New Hampshire men played in this affair had fortunate results for New Hampshire on June 17th. After May 27th, Admiral Graves became obsessed with fear of shallow harbor water. For this reason, on the morning of June 17th, he refused General Howe's request to place a warship in the mouth of the Mystic River to cover the beach. In fact, there was enough deep water. Graves said "No" because he did not have the slightest knowledge of the river's shoals and mud flats. Though Admiral of the American station for over a year, he had failed to take soundings of the river.

2. The British Attack Force

The best known of the British regiments in Boston in June, 1775, was the *Twenty-third-Royal Welch Fusiliers*. They were the heroes of the Battle of Minden in 1759. Then there was the *Fourth, or King's Own*, today called the *Royal Lancasters*. Beside this was the *Fifth, the Northumberland Fusiliers*. Then there were the Tenth, the 38th, the 43rd, and the 52nd. The *Forty-third* had been in the center of the line under Wolfe at Quebec. There were also the Royal Marines, with one hundred years of proud history behind them. There were other regiments. A regiment was about 350 men.

With such unmatched infantry, Gage made plans to wipe out the ignominy of Lexington by fortifying the Hill on Charlestown Neck and then subduing Cambridge.

However, on the morning of June 17th, the British discovered that the Americans had already fortified Breed's Hill (Bunker Hill) in Charlestown. Forthwith, General Gage gave orders to Howe to take the Hill by force of arms without delay.

As we know, the night before, Colonel Prescott and Colonel Gridley had led 1,000 men from Cambridge up the Hill and set them to work to build an infantry redoubt. The size has been variously stated from 70 to 132 feet square. The map prepared by Lieutenant Page, Howe's engineer, gives the same number in

yards. Suffice it to say the redoubt was well laid out with earthwork, five feet high and three feet across the top. The men worked all night and through the morning sun with shovels and short rations to make it a defensible military entrenchment.

At daybreak the British warships opened fire on the redoubt. It soon became clear to the Americans that the British were planning to attack. Aware of this, General Ward, the American Commander in Cambridge, after needless delays, ordered 200 Connecticut troops under Major Knowlton to Prescott's aid. Then he sent orders to the New Hampshire men under Stark and Reed to be in readiness to advance.

3. American Response

Aware that a major battle was impending, early in the morning Stark had surveyed the area of the Charlestown Peninsula. He returned to Medford and ordered his men at Winter Hill armed for action. They were amply supplied with powder brought over from Cambridge and Fort William and Mary. Each man was dressed in simple homespun, had his musket, one full gill of powder, fifteen musket balls and one flint. Compare, if you will, that equipment with the forty tons of material necessary to put one man in the field today. These men were rugged woodsmen, wearing native homespun, without any issued uniforms. They were, man for man, the best troops in the American Army that day.

Stark's military experience divined that the British should plan to surround the Redoubt and storm it from all four sides. This was the method Stark himself later used in capturing 600 German mercenaries at Bennington--and by American Colonel Williams in capturing 1,200 British and Tories under Major Ferguson at King's Mountain, South Carolina, in 1780.

To forestall such a plan, Stark planned defenses across the peninsula from the edge of the Redoubt to the Mystic River shore. About 9 o'clock Stark sent 200 New Hampshire men under Lieutenant Colonel Wyman to guard the Redoubt on Prescott's right. In Prescott's command were also 117 New Hampshire men from Hollis under Captain Dow. Connecticut had put 200 men under Major Knowlton on Prescott's immediate left, and about noon Stark sent Colonel Reed's Regiment over the Neck to form beside Knowlton.

It was about 1 o'clock in the early afternoon when Stark led the first New Hampshire regiment from Winter Hill down Broadway over Charlestown Neck (now Sullivan's Square). At the Neck, there was gathered a frightened mob. They could hardly be parted. Major Andrew McClary, the fearless giant from Epsom, rode ahead and called out to the mob to let his comrades pass. The crowd opened and Stark led his men with slow measured step across the Neck. Captain Henry Dearborn of Epping and Nottingham, later Secretary of War, by Stark's side, suggested they quicken their step as a British frigate, *Symmetry*, was landing shells nearby. Stark replied, "Dearborn, one fresh man is worth ten fatigued ones", and he maintained the same measured pace.

4. Colonel Stark's Position

Stark took his position along a rail fence between the Redoubt and the river's edge. He ordered his men to take up one fence, pass the rails through another fence, and hang upon them the hay that lay in cocks and haystacks on the ground before them. This small breastwork gave confidence to the men, though it provided little protection except from the view of the enemy. Between the end of the rail fence and the water's edge of the river, which was a lower beach about six yards wide, he ordered the erection of a low stone wall. Behind this wall, he placed Captain John Moore and his men from Amoskeag, the quality of whose courage he knew was as unyielding as the wall itself.

It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon that Howe had formed his wide battle line, across the peninsula from the Mystic to the right of the Redoubt. Just before the British advanced, Stark went out in front of Moore's men on the beach and drove a stake into the ground about 120 feet in front of the stone wall. He turned and said, "There, don't a man fire till the Redcoats come up to that stake. If he does, I'll knock him down."

As Stark had foreseen, the pick of the British regiments, the 23rd Royal Welch, followed by the 4th, the King's Own, advanced, first firing high, then with bayonets down.

The Americans' long Brown Bess muskets were ready and loaded. The Patriots were three deep, one on his knees, one crouching, and one standing. Stark and Major McClary had brought in the rules of Rogers' Rangers. This produced a steady stream of deadly fire. "Fire low, aim at their waist bands", shouted Major McClary. Two lines were reloading while one line was firing. Stark's men were firing the traditional "buck and ball", four pieces of buckshot to every bullet, making their every shot all the more effective.

[t was the nearest thing to a modern machine gun fire. The British Fusiliers were solid, standing moving targets.

No troops, even the Royal Welch, could stand such accurate and deadly fire. It came again and again. The Fusiliers advanced, fell in great numbers, halted, wavered and broke. The same with the British 4th (the King's Own) and then the Tenth. Leaving piles of dead and wounded, they retreated in disorder and confusion.

All along the battleline, Howe was equally repulsed, (1) by the New Hampshire muskets under Stark and Reed behind the rail fence; (2) by the Connecticut muskets under Putnam and Knowlton; (3) by Prescott's fire from the Redoubt; and (4) by the New Hampshire men opposing the Royal Marines on the right of the Redoubt.

Amazed, yet dogged and persistent, Howe reformed and made a second attack, still sending his special force against Moore's stone wall on the beach. Again his regiments were repulsed with great loss. The grenadiers on the beach lost three quarters or as many as nine-tenths of their men. Charlestown was set afire. And again Howe and Pigo, the Marine Major, were repulsed and defeated and, with their few remaining men, left the field.

Let us suppose that there had been no Chelsea Creek skirmish in May. In all probability Admiral Graves would have yielded to Howe's request for a warship in the mouth of the Mystic. Had there been, no one knows what effect the close range of these heavy guns would have had. The May Chelsea Creek skirmish had persuaded Graves to keep away, as has been previously indicated. This item was of much

importance, as it changed the course of battle.

Meanwhile, however, General Gage, watching from the Boston side, sent reinforcements of marines under General Henry Clinton. Howe, the emblem of British military courage, wanted "no more", but Clinton persuaded Howe to turn his direct attack, with new artillery he had landed, upon the Redoubt, while making only a reigned attack upon the Stark/Reed New Hampshire rail fences. So as the afternoon was wearing on, the British made a third attack. And for the third time, the stone wall and rail fence under Stark's command remained impregnable.

But the results at the Redoubt were different. First the gap between the swamp and upper outer defenses were forced and broken by artillery. In short order the British stormed the north end of the Redoubt with bayonets, once they gained the protection of the outside ramparts. The murderous fire of the Defenders of the Redoubt could not continue without ammunition and the support of reinforcements to match those of the British. Pigat swung into the Redoubt over the rampart from a tree, just as Major Pitcairn was killed shouting to his men to advance.

Prescott's men, reduced to about 150, without ammunition and exhausted from their long night's labors, fought courageously with their musket butts and clubs, until they were overwhelmed. The gallant Prescott gave orders for a last volley and retreated. He fought hand to hand for his life with his sword. At the Redoubt at this time, 43 Americans were killed and 46 wounded. Clubbing their way down through the rear of the Redoubt, the Americans yielded their position with great courage. Here the gallant Dr. Joseph Warren, holding back the British to enable his comrades to escape, was killed by a sudden blast of the English musketry.

Back on Bunker Hill there were some 500 green troops thrown into chaos from the continuous stream of shot and shell the British ship gunners were pouring across the hilltop. They crouched behind rocks and trees or lay prostrate on the ground. They refused to obey General Putnam's call to go forward. Among these was corpulent, talkative Colonel Samuel Gerrish. He had led his men across the Neck, but now, by example to his men, he lay on the ground moaning that he was too exhausted to advance. His captains also refused to lead forward.

On the other side of Charlestown Neck the situation was no better. Colonel Scammons was ordered to lead his regiment across the Neck "to the Hill", but with almost inexcusable stupidity, he marched his men to Cobble Hill, a feeble elevation on the landward side of Charlestown Neck and stayed there, never crossing the Neck to reach Gridley's Redoubt. Meanwhile, at the same spot, Major Scarborough Gridley, Colonel Gridley's older son, was also malingering with his artillery company, refusing to cross the Neck. It was at the very time his father was in desperate need of artillery assistance--and himself loading the last remaining cannon beside the Redoubt.

Then, back at Bunker Hill, there was Colonel Masfield with his regiment, ordered to go to Prescott's aid. With Colonel Scammons, the two colonels, with 700 fresh men with full ammunition pouches, simply sat out the battle watching Major Gridley fire pop shots at the British Symmetry and Glasgow. However, there was Colonel Gardner, who paced up and down on Prospect Hill waiting for orders to advance to Prescott's aid. Finally the order came, and he voluntarily led his men over the Neck on route to Prescott's Redoubt. Unfortunately en route they came over the rear hill, Bunker Hill. Here his men were stopped by General Putnam, who ordered them to lay down their arms and take up shovels for entrenching. In obeying this useless order they never reached Prescott--and in fact, when the British later swept over Bunker Hill, Colonel Gardner received a mortal wound.

Beside Colonels Gerrish, Scammons, Mansfield, and Major Gridley, there was also Colonel Jonathan

Ward's regiment from Worcester, who delayed in crossing the Neck and never reached the Prescott battle line.

5. Friends on Each Side

Some of the leaders on both sides of the battle had formerly fought together side by side.

1. Stark had fought with General Howe's brother at Ticonderoga.
2. Gridley had fought with General Howe in the capture of Quebec from the French.
3. Colonel Prescott had been offered a commission in the British Army by General Gage because of his services at Louisberg, Nova Scotia.
4. English Major John Small was an old friend of General Putnam. In fact, General Putnam saved his life by calling away fire which would have felled him.
5. Lieutenant Colonel Abercrombie, also British, had served with General Putnam against the French.

So among the battle leaders on both sides were friends and comrades fighting each other, as occurred in some instances eighty-nine years later in our Civil War.

6. The Significance of the Battle

While the Stark and Reed regiments remained intact, they covered the retreat of Prescott's men from the Redoubt. The New Hampshire men had thrice repelled the enemy with great slaughter. While the British under Howe, Pitcairn, Clinton, and Pigot were storming the Redoubt, Stark foresaw its fate. His troops wished to abandon their position and attack the enemy in the rear, but Stark had witnessed such scenes before and knew the Redoubt would fall, and that any effort to save it would fail. The Stark/Reed regiments were led off the field by Stark in such order that they were not pursued.

Referring to the battle in a letter from a British officer, it was stated, "The work of Stark's neighbors from Amoskeag whom he had placed behind the stone wall to battle Howe's purpose to flank the Redoubt was the most deadly of all the carnage of that bloody day."

There were ninety-six dead bodies piled up on the beach besides those who were merely wounded, and these were of the light infantry who were expected to carry off the laurels of victory. A letter from an officer of the Royal Army says: "As we approached an incessant stream of fire poured from the rebel lines. It seemed a constant sheet of flame and fire for twenty minutes. Our light infantry was served up in companies against the grass fence without being able to penetrate. Indeed, how could we penetrate? Most of our grenadiers and light infantry, the moment of presenting themselves, lost three fourths or nearly nine-tenths of their men. Some had only eight and nine in a company left, some only, three, four or five." The official figures of losses were 419 patriots and 1054 British killed or wounded. The British had 92 officers killed or wounded. General Howe himself wrote that the success was too dearly bought.

Whatever advantage the British had gained from capturing the Redoubt, they could not follow up. Their forces were so completely demoralized that further punishment might easily have been severe. The British also took the entrenchments Putnam had dug out on Bunker Hill, the higher hill behind Breed's Hill. It was here that all further advances of the British ended. The rest of the day and the following weeks the

British sadly devoted to the care of their wounded, dead and dying.

As you may know, the figures on the exact number of New Hampshire men engaged in the battle have long been in dispute.

On one of the two granite tablets (1975) now facing the north stairs at the monument is engraved "Colonel Stark commanded 900 New Hampshire men at the rail fence and at the stone wall on the Mystic River shore. New Hampshire 1975 Bicentennial Commission."

Apparently this figure was taken from a Connecticut writer's biography of General Putnam. The author, Reverend Increase N. Tarbox, wrote, "We conclude Colonel Reed led 442 men to Bunker Hill. We judge it safe to say that Stark and Reed brought 900 men to Bunker Hill," and adds, "We are satisfied that New Hampshire had no less than 960 men in the field. Some would place the number higher."

It was General William Howe who led the British troops up the Heights of Abraham to conquer Quebec under General Wolfe in 1760.

The same William Howe, the master of light infantry maneuver, found himself engaged in one of the most ghastly frontal assaults in the history of warfare.

There was from Stark's stone wall and rail fence a fire more destructive than anything the British veteran officers had seen in Europe's most sanguinary battlefields.

There were about 1500 determined American frontiersmen with muzzles loaded, opposing the 2300 British attacking. They used the rapid-loading Brown Bess muskets. Three men kept loading the muskets as fast as they could--quickly--so there was a continuous fire. Howe's losses: 1054 men--226 killed, 828 wounded, almost 50 percent of the attacking force. The shocking British casualties immobilized Gage and Howe. Ninety-two out of approximately 250 officers engaged were lost--over one-third.

Americans: 140 dead
271 wounded
30 badly wounded and captured

As previously stated, it has been noted that no battle of the Revolution accomplished more for the Patriot cause. We wish to confirm this statement for the following reasons:

The undaunted and almost superhuman force of the New Hampshire men under Stark repulsing the world-conquering British regulars, especially the 23rd Royal Welch Regiment, first shook the British Army command and then the mighty British Empire.

General Howe, also General Burgoyne, who was watching the battle from a Boston tower, never forgot the deadly havoc and despair the New Hampshire troops wrought upon their officers and men. The grim

impression made upon Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne lived with each of them throughout the war. They never again led troops against entrenched men. So it was to be found that this first battle, in the terrible lesson it taught, was really the first decisive battle of the war years that followed. It dissipated the fears of those who predicted that untrained countrymen and rough frontiersmen could not stand up against the assault of trained disciplined regulars from Europe, whether British or Hessians.

Following the battle, all plans by Gage, Howe, and Burgoyne to break through siege lines in Cambridge, Roxbury, or Dorchester were abandoned. In effect, the rest of New England was protected--and freed. The city of Boston became the barracks for an idle British army. Howe would not storm Dorchester Heights, even before Colonel Knox brought the cannon from Ticonderoga.

7. Effect Upon General Howe's Later Battle Strategy

After General Howe left Boston in March 1776, his army first again in August opposed Washington at Brooklyn Heights. Though Howe, far outnumbering Washington's men, could probably have broken through Washington's defenses, he refused to try--and Washington saved his army by bringing them across the East River under cover of night. Likewise, in October 1776, at White Plains, Howe would not attack.

In the fall of 1777, Howe captured Philadelphia. During Washington's subsequent winter hardships at Valley Forge, again Howe refused to attack. Furthermore, when Burgoyne was stopped at Saratoga, to his sorrow, he learned that Stark's New Hampshire frontiersmen were on a river bluff to block his retreat. Rather than direct a frontal attack of Stark, in the line of his retreat, he surrendered.

Following Bunker Hill, the colonists began receiving munitions and supplies from France, notably through the port of Portsmouth, New Hampshire--about three years later, in February 1778, Franklin arranged the American alliance with France. It is reported that when Franklin first heard the story of the battle and the repulse of the British, he exclaimed, "The King has lost his colonies." We can suppose Franklin had Bunker Hill in mind as well as Saratoga when he negotiated the treaty with France.

In 1843 in Charlestown at the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument, New Hampshire's noted statesman and orator, Daniel Webster, whose father fought in the Revolution, said "The consequences of the Battle of Bunker Hill are greater than any ordinary conflict. It was the first great battle of the Revolution and not only the first blow, but the blow that determined the contest--and one thing is certain; that after the New England troops had shown themselves able to face and repulse regulars, it was decided that peace could never be established but on the basis of the independence of the colonies."

Although General Stark was to take a foremost part in later important battles such as Trenton, Princeton, Bennington, Saratoga, the Canadian Expedition, the Northern Department Command, and the last sortie of the British from New York--Springfield, New Jersey--it is said that his greatest contribution to the

success of the American Revolution was that

He held the line at Bunker Hill!

In this accomplishment, there was hardly a 1775 town of New Hampshire which did not have some native son participating.

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