

This Day in History... June 17, 1775

Battle of Bunker Hill

On June 17, 1775, American colonists inflicted heavy British casualties in their loss at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

After the battles of Lexington and Concord, the American colonists sealed off access to Boston by land. Though the British Army still controlled the waterways, the officers were concerned the colonists would bombard the city from the surrounding hills. The British planned to attack the colonists to push them away from Boston.

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress received word that the British regulars were going to attack. The colonists decided to fortify Bunker Hill to protect the Charlestown Peninsula to the north of Boston. On the night of June 16, 1775, Colonel William Prescott led 1,200 men to the peninsula for preparations. After some discussion, Breed's Hill was chosen for the defensive position because it was closer to Boston than Bunker Hill. They built a square fortification with 6-foot-high earthen walls.

When General Gage, commander of the British regulars, saw the fortifications the following morning, June 17, he decided to attack that day. It took almost six hours for the Red Coats to assemble, and several more hours to ferry them across the Charles River. By 3:00 p.m., they were finally ready to attack.

Meanwhile, the colonists continued to extend their defense down the sides of the hill using dirt, fence posts, and hay. Reinforcements arrived and filled in some of the gaps along the colonists' line. Knowing they were short on ammunition, Colonel Stark, leader of the New Hampshire regiments, placed a stake about 100 feet from the fence and ordered his men not to shoot until the British passed the mark.

The Red Coats approached Breed's Hill in long columns. When they were within range, the colonists fired on them and inflicted heavy casualties. The British retreated, regrouped, and attacked again with the same results.

After reinforcements arrived, the Red Coats made a third attempt to take the hill. The colonists were running low on ammunition, and retreated. The British gained control of Charlestown Peninsula but paid a terrible price: 226 were dead and 828 were wounded – nearly one third of the soldiers who participated in the battle.

Colonel Prescott proved an able leader of the colonial forces. Before the battle, he reportedly told his men, "Do not fire until you see the whites of their eyes." Though his men were poorly trained and had little ammunition, they served as America's central defense at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Among the American casualties that day was General Joseph Warren. Pictured on US #1564, Warren was a Massachusetts doctor. He organized patriots in Boston at the outbreak of the war and served as president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. He also set Paul Revere out on his famous midnight ride and fought at Lexington and Concord. Though he was commissioned a Major General just days before the Battle of Bunker Hill, Warren chose instead to fight alongside his soldiers.

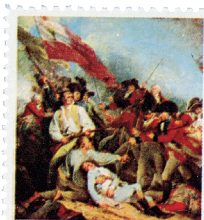
The Battle of Bunker Hill, which actually took place on Breed's Hill, showed that the inexperienced colonial militias could stand up against the well-trained British. It increased support for independence from colonies that were previously undecided. This early battle of Revolutionary War gave the colonists the courage to continue in their fight for independence.



Stamp picturing the Bunker Hill flag and monument.



A coil version of the stamp above.



Bunker Hill 1775 by Trumbull
US Bicentennial IOc

Bicentennial stamp pictures the death of General Joseph Warren at Bunker Hill.



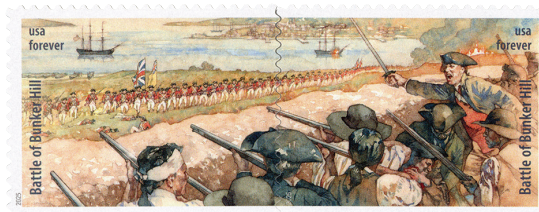
Stamp issued to honor Trumbull and pictures Thomas Grosvenor from the same painting as above.



Though called the Bunker Hill flag, many historians believe the colonists didn't carry this flag there.



2025 Bunker Hill Monument stamp



Se-tenant from the 2025 Battlefields of the American Revolution sheet commemorating the 250th anniversary of the start of the war.

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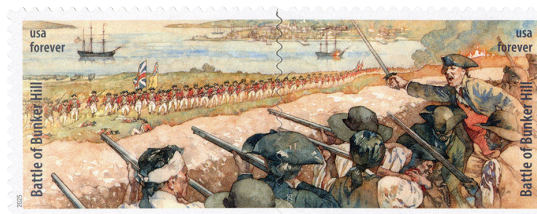
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