

# The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Tower

*“Connecticut’s Valley Forge”*

## June 2010 NewsLetter

Gen. Israel Putnam was the major planner of the Battle of Bunker Hill ...



Bunker Hill CT

### Cambridge MA - June 1775

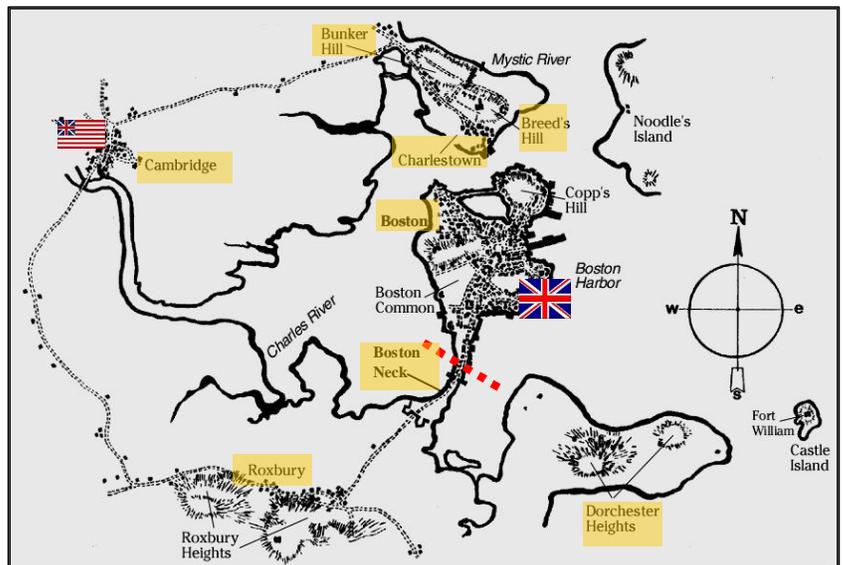
By the end of the first week after the opening salvos of the shots fired at Lexington and Concord, more than 20,000 men had filed into Cambridge MA, the headquarters of the army made up of New England colonies militia units. This rag tag army was holding the professional veteran army of King George III of England cooped up on the peninsula of Boston. This initial assemblage of farmers, craftsmen and merchants from all over New England came in response to the call-to-arms by the MA Provincial Assembly. It was overwhelming to the British army in Boston. The militias outnumbered the Brits by 4 to 1, or more. But now that several weeks had gone by, many of the militia were thinking of planting their fields. Crops had to feed both their families and their livestock. Individuals and groups were leaving the camp in droves to return to their farms and businesses.



Militia units filed into Cambridge from all over Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Rhode Island. They carried an assortment of old muskets of different bores, and very little ball and gun powder.

This giant hodgepodge of men answered to only their own officers. This was before George Washington arrived in Cambridge to start the Continental Army (July). The senior officer at Cambridge was Massachusetts’ General Artemas Ward (the provisional assemblies of the other states voted to have him as senior commander). Ward was an officer during the French and Indian War, as were most of the senior officers in the New England military. Gen. Ward did his best to assemble, feed and manage this huge body of militia units. Naturally, there were problems in the chain of command, but since they were in Massachusetts, Ward was supreme. Connecticut’s Gen. Putnam was second in command, but often in disagreement with Ward. Ward was ultra conservative and careful. Putnam was just the opposite. The later wanted to hurry up and get things done. As the Americans lost more men to leaving camp, the British were getting reinforcements shipped in from England.

The American headquarters received secret information about British plans to take over one or two crucial hills which looked over Boston. Artillery on either of these hills could pin down the British troops on their little island. The word was that plans were being made for these objectives within a matter of days. Ward, the conservative, wanted to place troops at all locations where the British might attack. (Dorchester Heights, Roxbury, Cambridge, and Bunker Hill). Putnam wanted to put the concentration at Bunker Hill and make the British come to them. Putnam’s plan won out, but only with a limited amount of troops, supplies and ammunition. Ward spread the rest of the army around the horn.



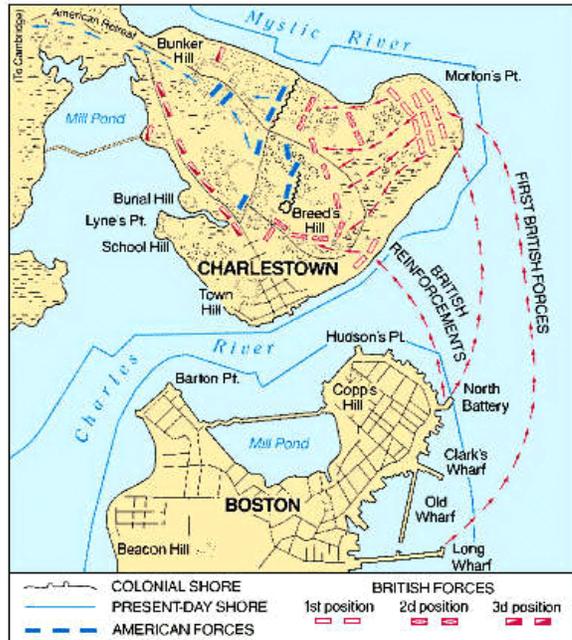
The British were making plans to take over Dorchester Heights, Bunker Hill and ,or Roxbury, which blocked the only road from Boston. Command of all or any of these places would give the British a “land-based” footing for further incursions against the rebel army they thought to be a “joke”. The British expected a quick victory.

## June 17, 1775 – Battle of Bunker (Breed's Hill)

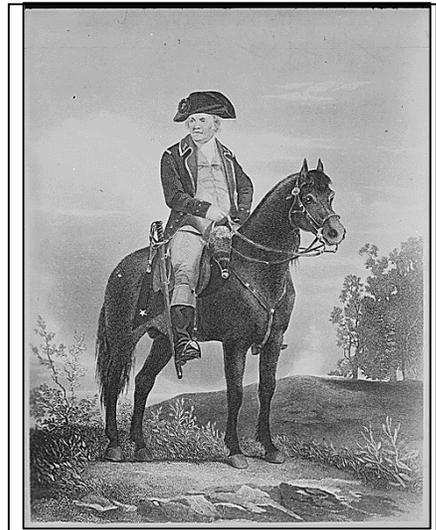
The American troops were exhausted from working all through the night. The day was terribly hot. Promised food, water, and ammunition never made it to the Bunker Hill. Putnam rode to Cambridge several times to plead with Gen. Ward (to no avail) for additional troops and supplies. Putnam finally took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

A couple of weak points that were 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 led by Putnam were placed along the rail fence between the main redoubt and the beach. These moves prevented the British from flanking the American lines.



Putnam and Prescott let men onto Bunker Hill late the night of the 16<sup>th</sup>. They dug out the main redoubt and breast work before sunup the next morning. Other troops fortified rail fences and stone walls. When seen in the morning, the naval ships opened up with cannon fire.



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

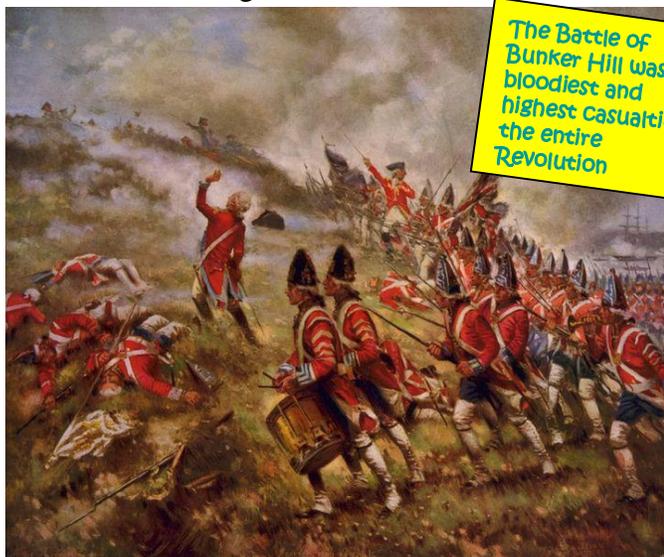
The legendary command, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes" has come to symbolize the conviction and determination of the ill-equipped American colonists facing the world's most powerful army during the "Battle of Bunker Hill", June 17, 1775. Most of the fighting actually took place on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



### BLOODIEST BATTLE OF THE WAR!

The British lost more than 100 of their officers that day.



Percy Moran

The Battle of Bunker Hill was the bloodiest and highest casualties of the entire Revolution

◀ 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!

**“Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes!”**



One of the most often asked questions at both the Visitor Center and the Museum is “Who said the ‘Whites of their eyes’ command?” It’s amazing on how many expert historians espouse their viewpoint as being the gospel.

J.L.Bell is a Massachusetts historian and writer who specializes in the start of the revolution in and around Boston. He has one of the best Boston rev war web sites at <http://boston1775.blogspot.com>

Mr. Bell has spent a considerable amount of time researching the above question. He has read battle reports and diaries from those men and officers at Bunker Hill. He has read biographies about these same players. His final determination is that no one can be definitely credited with this order. He goes on to say that anybody, credentialed historian or not, should offer source data of someone who heard the remark. There is no such “source data” to date. Bell says the two men most credited are Israel Putnam and Col. William Prescott.

Bell goes on to offer data that this saying, which relates to soldiers not wasting their ammunition on far away shots, was actually said in a least two other armies in Europe a century earlier. One army was the Scots ... the other was the Prussians. It was a common command by many many officers to their men just before battle. Bell says it could have been either Putnam or Bell, or many of the officers on Bunkers Hill. No one had a claim on something repeated by so many different officers ... Or armies.

Bell said in ending his research, that if he had to choose one man - it would be Putnam.



*Old Put could have said it, but so could any of the other rebel officers on Bunkers Hill that day.*

## Bunker Hill dead may lie under gardens –

In Boston, history is always just below the surface. And in Charlestown, underneath a row of genteel gardens, is believed to be a mass grave containing the bones of possibly dozens of British soldiers.

The site, part of the sprawling Bunker Hill battlefield, has been pinpointed by a curator from Colonial Williamsburgh in Virginia and a Charlestown historian who are confident they know where the bodies were buried 15 feet underground in what had been a rebel-dug ditch that featured some of the days most ferocious fighting. Above ground, few residents on quaint, stately Concord Street appear to know they might be living atop a historic, makeshift grave.

Goldstein, the curator from Williamsburg, and Anderson, the local historian from Charlestown, were led to the site by a combination of scrupulous research and informed intuition. Using newspaper accounts of the 1845 discovery of several dozen skeletons nearby, British Army records of after-battle burials, and meticulous knowledge of troop movements that day, Goldstein has set his sights on a string of small lots stretching down the east side of Concord Street from Monument Square. Goldstein and Anderson are eager to survey the area with ground-penetrating radar which could spot anomalies in the soil that might be human remains.

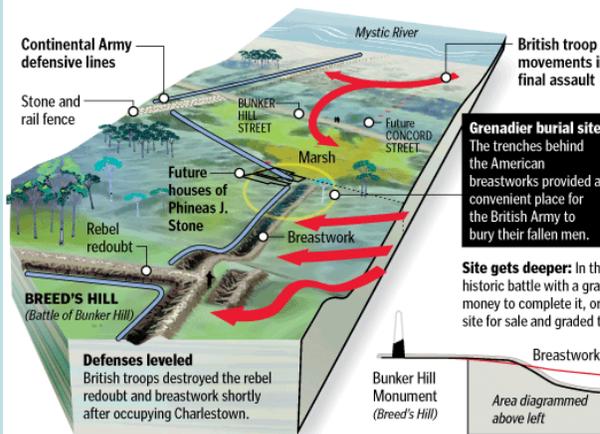
### History of the remains

Recovering the remains of British grenadiers dates back to a chance discovery in 1845 while a Charlestown homeowner was digging a well. Evidence from that dig plus historical maps, records, and an engraving are being used for the current recovery effort.

# 1775

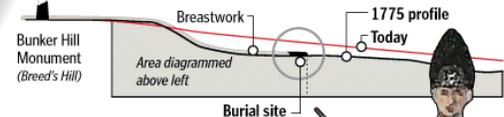
After a third and final assault on June 17, British forces were able to dislodge a stubborn Colonial army from hastily constructed earthen defenses on Breed's Hill. But the costs for victory were high in human lives: 226 British and 140 American soldiers were dead. With so many fallen soldiers, the British needed places to bury their dead.

SHORELINE: ■ 1775 ■ TODAY



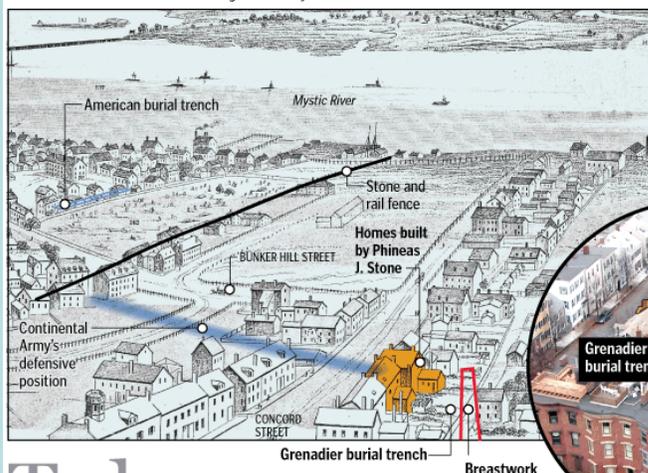
**Grenadier burial site**  
The trenches behind the American breastworks provided a convenient place for the British Army to bury their fallen men.

**Site gets deeper:** In the late 1830s, the effort to memorialize the historic battle with a granite monument ran low on funds. To raise money to complete it, organizers prepared 11 acres of the 15-acre site for sale and graded them for development.



# 1848

Rendered from the monument observatory in 1848, this engraving of the Bunker Hill battleground depicts homes that were built on Concord Street in the early 1840s by Phineas J. Stone. The grenadiers' grave was found in 1845 when well diggers were excavating in the backyard.



# Today

A recent photograph from the same vista shows the Stone buildings have changed little in over a century and a half, connecting the buildings to those in the 161 year old engraving.

SOURCE: Erik Goldstein; "A British Grenadier's Button from a Bunker Hill Grave," *Military Collector & Historian*

JAMES ABUNDIS/GLOBE STAFF

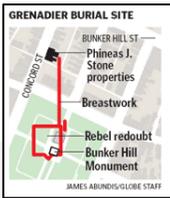
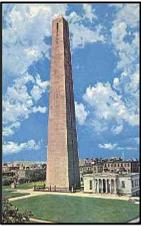
# June 2010 FANs Meeting

To contact us:  
[friendsofputnampark@comcast.net](mailto:friendsofputnampark@comcast.net)



The June meeting was held at the visitor center on Monday, June 14th, 2010.

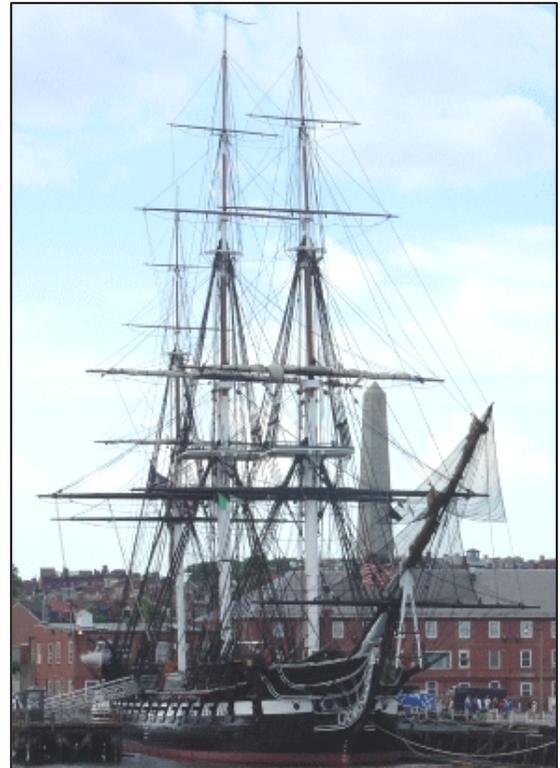
## Notes from the prez ...



1. **President's Opening:** Scott welcomed the group.
2. **Treasurer's Report:** T.G. filled us in on the state of accounts and updated us on School Week revenues and expenses with the final results showing that we had another very successful School Week event.
3. **Park update:** Nate filled us in on the status of the Park. The Visitor Center and Museum will continue to be staffed with three guides. The flag pole at the museum is repaired and back in use. David Korn was the Eagle Scout who built the 4 or 5 new benches along the park perimeter road. Ridgefield Roofing installed copper gutters and downspouts on the Visitor Center. This was an oversight on the original construction on the building. Looks great.
4. **School Week Recap:** Nancy did a fabulous job in orchestrating this event ... assisted onsite with the help of other committed members!!!! This year was a full five-day program with eight re-enactor stations and more students' A long round of applause was given to Nancy for her outstanding job.
5. **Next Event:** Nancy Cowles updated the group on the upcoming Summer Craftsman Program. Seven of the nine weekends during July and August have crafts persons for those weekends. Nancy is still looking for two more to fill in the schedule. One of the CT 5<sup>th</sup> reenactors was at the meeting and might be able to fill one of the weekends.
6. **Visitor Center Committee:** Scott Stetler will work with Nate, Al and Nicole to complete the upgrade of the Interpretive Displays with funds received from the Meserve Grant



**Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775:** An unfortunate twist of fate for one young Redcoat, Charles "Bugeyed" Bingham, was not knowing that the opposing American general had just uttered the historic command, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes."



Editor's Note: Last month my son-in-law retired from his naval career. The retirement ceremony was held aboard the oldest ship in the United States Navy, the USS Constitution (Old Ironsides), which is docked at the Charlestown Navy Yard. The Bunker Hill Monument can be seen through the rigging. The monument is on the site of the "redoubt" which was the main fortification. This is the same view the British war ships had on June 17, 1775.

The next FAN's Meeting will be on Monday, **July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010**  
at **7:00PM** at the Visitor Center at Putnam Park.  
[friendsofputnampark@comcast.net](mailto:friendsofputnampark@comcast.net)