

**HISTORY OF THE BATTLE OF  
BUNKER'S [BREED'S] HILL, ON  
JUNE 17, 1775; FROM AUTHENTIC  
SOURCES IN PRINT AND  
MANUSCRIPT**

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**GEORGE E. ELLIS**

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HISTORY

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BATTLE OF BUNKER'S [BREED'S] HILL,

ON JUNE 17, 1775,

*FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES IN PRINT  
AND MANUSCRIPT.*

BY

GEORGE E. ELLIS.

WITH A MAP OF THE BATTLE-GROUND.

BOSTON:

LOCKWOOD, BROOKS, AND COMPANY.

1875.

THE  
BATTLE OF BUNKER'S [BREED'S] HILL.

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PREPARATIONS.

THE reader of the following pages is supposed to be informed of the state of affairs in and around Boston at the time of the opening of hostilities at Lexington and Concord, between the provincials and the royal forces. The expedition sent into the country by the British commander on April 19th, to seize or destroy the military supplies which had been gathered at Concord, under the full prescience that they would be needed in the final rupture that could no longer be averted, was but partially successful in its objects, was inglorious in its whole character and results to the invaders, and decisive only in its effects upon the purpose and resolve of an outraged people.

The Continental Congress at Philadelphia was still deliberating, averting a declaration which would break the last bond of allegiance to the mother country, and vainly hoping still to settle the strife by negotiation. Reinforcements of foreign troops and supplies were constantly arriving in Boston. Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne came, as generals, on the 25th of May. Bitterness, ridicule, and boasting, with all the irritating taunts of a mercenary soldiery, were freely poured on the patriots and on the "mixed multitude" which composed the germ of their army yet to be. The British forces had cooped themselves up in Boston, and the provincials determined that they should remain there, with no mode of exit save by the sea. The pear-shaped peninsula, hung to the mainland only by the stem called the "Neck," over which the

tide-waters sometimes washed, was equally an inconvenient position for crowding regiments in warlike array, and a convenient one for the extemporized army which was about to beleaguer them there.

The islands in the harbor, which were, for the most part, covered with trees and growing crops of hay and grain, with horses, sheep, and cattle, were envied prizes for the soldiers, who lacked fuel, fodder, and fresh meat. The daring enterprise of those who lived in the settlements near on the mainland, attempting the ventures by night, or in the broad light of day, had stripped these islands of their precious wealth, much to the chagrin of the invaders. The light-house in the harbor was afterwards burned. In the skirmishes brought on by these exciting but perilous feats, especially in that attending the successful removal of stock and hay on Noddle's Island, now East Boston, and on Hog Island, the provincials obtained some valuable implements and muniments, especially four 4-pounders and twelve swivels. And from this beginning, all through the seven years of war that followed, the rebels were largely indebted for their weapons and accoutrements, and much other material of prime necessity and value to them, to their raids and privateering successes against the enemy.

The town of Charlestown, which lay under the enemy's guns, had contained a population of between two and three thousand. The interruption of all the employments of peace, and the proximity of danger, had brought poverty and suffering upon the people. They had been steadily leaving the town, with such of their effects as they could carry with them. It proved to be well for them that they had acted upon the warning. It would seem that there were less than two hundred of its inhabitants remaining in it at the time of the battle, when the flames kindled by the enemy and bombs from a battery on Copp's Hill laid it in ashes.

On the third day after the affair at Concord, the Provincial Congress again assembled, voted to raise at once 13,000 men,

to rally at Cambridge and the neighborhood, and asked aid from the other provinces, to which Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire responded. The forts, magazines, and arsenals, such as they then were, were secured for the country. Then, for the first time, the title of enemies became the synonyme of the English, military or civil, and of those of tory proclivities who sympathized with them. General Gage, the commander, was denounced as the agent of tyranny and oppression. An account of the affair on April 19th was sent to England, with an address closing with the words, "Appealing to Heaven for the justice of our cause, we determine to die or be free."

By advice received from Lord Dartmouth, the head of the War Department, General Gage issued a proclamation on the 12th of June, in which he declared the discontents to be in a state of rebellion, offered a full pardon to all, with the exception of Hancock and Samuel Adams, who would lay down their arms and bow to his authority, and announced that martial law was now in force.

This proclamation, issued on the first day of the week, was to be illustrated by a fearful commentary before another Sunday came.

#### THE PROVINCIAL ARMY.

Of the 15,000 men then gathered, by the cry of war, at Cambridge and Roxbury, all virtually, but not by formal investment, under the command of General Ward, nearly 10,000 belonged to Massachusetts, and the remainder to New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. They have been designated since, at various times and by different writers, under the extreme contrast of terms, as an "organized army," and a "mob." Either of these terms would be equally inappropriate. The circumstances under which the men who were to constitute our army were drawn together, and the guise in which they came, without other concert or preparation than a wide-spread sense that almost any day with its alarm



and outrage might summon them from field, barn, and workshop, will best define and describe them as they present themselves before us now. The hardships they were to bear and the services they were to perform may secure to them as rightful a claim to be called soldiers as if they had been drilled in Pickering or Steuben's manual, and had been accoutred and armed with all the skill of a contractor and from all the resources of an arsenal. Our troops were "minute-men" extemporized into fragmentary companies and skeleton regiments. The officers, chosen on the village-green or in its public-house, paying for the honor by a treat, or perhaps because they kept the premises where the treat could be most conveniently furnished, were not commissioned or ranked as the leaders of an army for campaign service. The yeomen of town and village had not come together at the summons of a commander-in-chief through adjutant, herald, or advertisement. They came unbidden, at an alarm from the bell on their meeting-house, or from a post-rider, or from the telegrams transmitted by tongue and ear. And they came for what they were and as they were, with their light summer clothing, in shirt and frock and apron; with what was left from their last meals in their pantries packed with a few "notions" in sack or pillow-case, and with the ducking-guns, fowling-pieces, or shaky muskets used in old times against the vermin and game in the woods and the Indian skulking in the thicket. And for the most part they were as free to go away as they had been to come. They were enlisted after a fashion, some prime conditions of which were their own convenience or pleasure. They might stay, as some of them expressed it, "for a spell, to see what was going on in camp," or they might plead the state of their farms, or the condition of their families, as a reason — not an excuse — for going home, with the promise of a return better prepared for what might be wanted of them. Such of them as came from the seaboard might bring with them old sails for tents, while the midsummer days made it scarcely a hardship to many to

have only the heavens for a roof. Generally their towns were expected to keep them supplied with food.

The men who made the centre and the flanks of the camp at Cambridge constituted an irregular and undisciplined assemblage, with the spirit and intent of a military host, but not yet organized into an army. They were without accoutrements or uniform, with no commissary, no military chest, no hospitals, no roll-call, no camp routine. The Provincial Congress had the matter of organization under debate two days before the battle in Charlestown, and had appointed a committee "to consider the claims and pretensions of the colonels." Recruits and stragglers were continually coming in; and many groupings on the scene might have suggested a picnic, had such a thing then been known, for there were not wanting mothers, daughters, and sisters, as lookers-on among them. A most characteristic feature of the local and traditional usages of Massachusetts is illustrated in the fact that of the company of minute-men in Danvers, Asa Putnam, a deacon of the church, was chosen captain, and the Rev. Mr. Wadsworth, the pastor, his lieutenant.

The forces then mustered at Cambridge as a central camp, and, stretching from the left at Chelsea almost round to Dorchester on the right, for nearly three quarters of a circle, were indeed not organized, nor yet had they any characteristic of a mere mob. They combined in fact four independent armies, united in resistance to a foreign enemy. They certainly did not constitute a national army, for there was as yet no nation to adopt, maintain, and command them. They were not under the authority of the Continental Congress, for the authority of that Congress was not as yet acknowledged, nor had that Congress as yet recognized those forces, nor decided that it meant to come to the fight, and so would have need of an army. General Ward was in command of the Massachusetts soldiers. The New Hampshire regiments had been put temporarily, and for the occasion, under his orders. The soldier's coming with their officers from Connecticut and

Rhode Island were not under the command of Ward, save as the friendly purpose which led them to volunteer their arms in defence of a sister colony, would be accompanied by the courtesy that would make them subordinate allies. Each of the Provinces had raised, commissioned, and assumed the supply of its respective forces, holding them subject to their several orders. After the battle in Charlestown, the Committee of War in Connecticut ordered their generals, Spencer and Putnam, while they were on the territory of this Province, to regard General Ward as the commander-in-chief, and suggested to Rhode Island and New Hampshire to issue the same instructions to their soldiers.

These provincial troops also were respectively almost as loosely organized and officered as was the combined army which they helped to constitute. Their field-officers held their places at the favor of the privates, and were liable to be superseded or disobeyed; while even after Washington took the command of the adopted army, he was constantly annoyed and provoked by the obstinate resolution of the soldiers to assign place and rank according to their own inclinations and partialities.

It is evident that forces composed of such elements, drawn together by the excitement of the hour, and subject at any time to discord and disintegration, could act in concert only by yielding themselves to the influence of the spirit which had summoned them from farm and workshop at the busiest season of the year, when each of them was most needed at home. Yet many of those provincial soldiers, though undisciplined by any thing like regular service, were by no means unused to the severities and exactions of a military life, having had experience in the Indian and French wars. They had learned, above all the other accomplishments of their profession, the art of covering themselves, especially their legs, behind an earthen screen, the butt of a tree, a thicket of bushes, or a stone wall.

One regiment of artillery, with nine field-pieces, had been