

The Battle of Bunker Hill

It used to be that men fought for beliefs and dreams, for what words meant, and for the possibility of these ideas to better mankind. Patrick Henry exemplified this three months prior to the battle of Bunker Hill, rallying many men to war in his famous speech by crying out, "Give me liberty or give me death." These ideals are what drove our forefathers to fight England for the each colonies freedom and for what are now the United States' freedom. Their belief in freedom from a tyrannical rule is what drove the colonies to dissolve from the English rule and become their own nation. "We fight not for glory or for conquest. We exhibit to mankind the remarkable spectacle of a people attacked by unprovoked enemies, without any imputation or even suspicion of offence"(Tansill, pg 16). The battle for Bunker Hill was a turning point in the movement for separation.

The American Committee of Safety decided to defend the colonists of Boston by setting up a defense on top of Bunker Hill, issuing Colonel Prescott the orders to defend that hill (Wood, pg 5). On the night of June 16, 1775, Prescott set off with his men to fortify Bunker Hill. While he marched toward Bunker Hill, he joined Brigadier General Israel Putnam, a renowned soldier from the French and Indian Wars. At the base of Bunker Hill, Prescott and his advisory officers met to decide exactly how they should defend their position. They decided to first fortify Breed's Hill, a significantly lower and a more open hill to attack than Bunker Hill, so that if necessary they could fall back to Bunker Hill. Prescott ordered his exhausted men to start digging trenches to defend Breed's Hill with supplies that Putnam had brought with him. They dug trenches and built up their defenses until late into the morning of the seventeenth. When British ships

started pounding the hill with cannon fire, the men digging stopped in fear of being hit. Prescott jumped up onto the parapet they were building, walked calmly around while forging courage back into the hearts of his men who were running low on ammunition, food, and water (Leckie, pg 115).

Just before lunch General Howe of the English army landed his marine attack shy of Breed's Hill. The British soldiers ate lunch before they started their attack on Breed's Hill. Howe then led the soldiers towards the hill finding Stark's men waiting for them. Stark had shown up after Prescott had started to build his defenses. He would help Prescott by building and defending a wall down by the water. His men commenced firing at a rapid rate cutting down Howe's men faster than it was to be expected. Hibbert writes, "General Howe, leading the main assault in person as he had promised to do and supported by Brigadier Robert Pigot with the 43rd and 52nd Foot, found himself on three occasions quite alone, all the staff around him lying dead or wounded." The British made two advances both resulting in their retreat. "They were beginning to respect those raw peasants at whom they had previously scoffed." (Stratemeyer, pg 181). The third advance gave them a break with the Americans running low on ammunition. Surgeons from the English side said that the resolute Americans even used old nails and angular pieces of iron to fire at the redcoats (Hibbert, pg 58).

Many of the British officers lay dead or wounded, but General Howe was still able to rally his men and attack Breed's Hill again. While all of this was going on Putnam was back at Bunker Hill trying to rally the American officers to help support Prescott defend Breed's Hill. It was to no avail; try as he might no officer would send his men through the shelling from the British ships just off shore. Putnam was said to have even

started pounding the hill with cannon fire, the men digging stopped in fear of being hit. Prescott jumped up onto the parapet they were building, walking calmly around forging courage back into the hearts of his men who were running low on ammunition, food, and water (Leckie, pg 115).

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beaten men with the flat of his sword to try to get them to cross the field between Bunker and Breed's Hill (Wood, pg 27). Eventually the amount of Redcoats was overwhelming for the Colonial Militia and the British soldiers began to climb over the defenses. In a desperate attempt to keep his positioning on Breed's Hill Prescott commanded his men to, "Twitch their guns away! Use your guns for clubs."(Leckie, pg 120). Prescott's men did their best and were moderately successful in disarming the enemy. Swinging and shooting their firearms the colonialists fought valiantly, but they could not push back the British and were forced to retreat to Bunker Hill. Of the 1500 men that fought that day defending Breed's Hill, the American patriots had 271 men killed in action, 140 men wounded, and thirty men captured. The British had 2500 men with 1150 casualties. In total, Howe's losses represented forty-five percent of his men and eighty percent of his officers. The colonists may have lost the hill but won the battle in numbers. They also won the respect of English officers. Matloff said that it was an astonishing feat that had sobering affect, for it taught them that American resistance was not going to be a simple thing to overcome.

These undaunted men fought for something that they all believed in: that no man could be raised above them and that they were not going to have their freedom taken away from them by the British. "Among the Natural Rights of the colonists are these: first, a right to life; second, to liberty; third, to property; together with the right to support and defend them in the best manner they can."(Samuel Adams Committee of Correspondence; Declares the Rights of the Colonists. Amos and Gardiner, pg 122). This is what they believed in and fought for. At all times before and after Bunker Hill did the colonists think, "Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great

and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly attainable.”(Tansill, pg 16). Never did the Americans change their ideals. This is what they fought and died for: their freedom.

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