



The Battle of **BUNKER HILL** **JUNE 17, 1775**



Resource Information

This resource is designed to provide students with background information and to help them decide why remembering Bunker Hill on its 250th Anniversary is important.

Please adapt the lesson as needed for your students needs.

Standards listed are from the 2024 Alabama State Course of Study for Social Studies.

Standards Addressed:

- SS.4.6
- SS.6.8
- SS.10.1
- SS.12.2



The Battle of Bunker Hill

On June 17, 1775, the hills of Charlestown, Massachusetts, became the site of the first major battle of the American Revolution. Though fought primarily on Breed's Hill, the engagement is famously known as the Battle of Bunker Hill. It marked a turning point, proving that the colonial militia could stand toe to toe and fight with British regulars, setting the stage for a long fight for independence.

In an attempt to break the colonial siege of Boston, British General William Howe ordered a massive assault on an American fortification on Breed's Hill.

Approximately 1,200 Colonial troops, commanded by Colonel William Prescott, had dug in overnight. As British troops advanced in tightly packed lines, the Americans held their fire—reportedly under Prescott's famous command: "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

The British took the hill after three charges, but at a tremendous cost: over 1,000 British casualties, including many officers. American losses were under 500, and although technically a British "victory", the battle boosted colonial confidence and demonstrated that the revolution would not be easily suppressed.

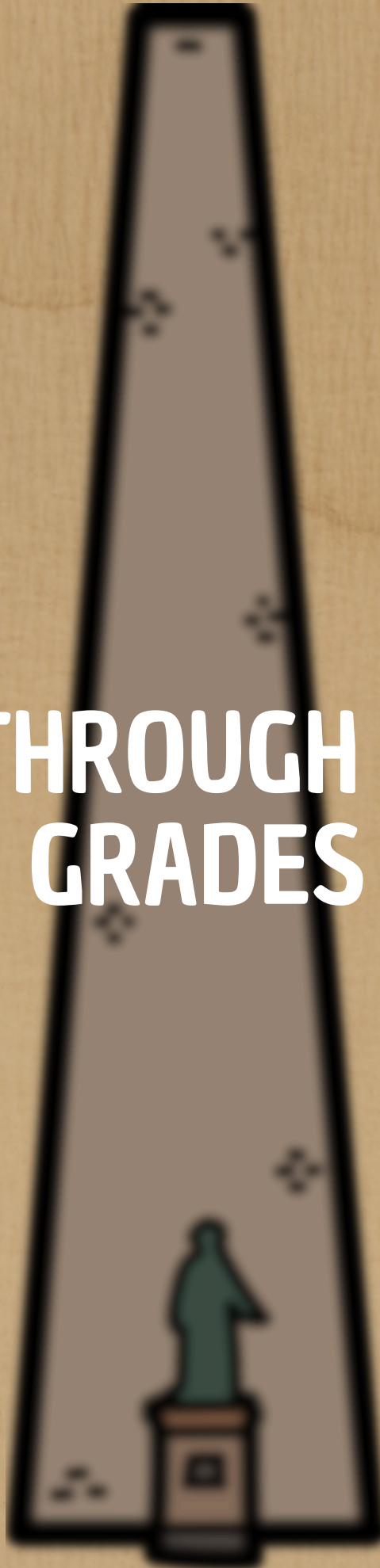
Among the heroes of that day was Dr. Joseph Warren, a prominent Boston physician and patriot leader. Though appointed a major general three days earlier, Warren volunteered to fight as a regular soldier on the front lines. He was killed during the final British assault while defending the retreat. Warren played a vital role in organizing the early resistance in Boston, including sending Paul Revere and William Dawes on their midnight rides in April 1775. His death made him one of the Revolution's first and most revered martyrs. It was once said that if Dr. Warren had survived the War, his name would have been as well known as that of Washington.

Also fighting that day was Salem Poor, a formerly enslaved African American who purchased his freedom in 1769 and joined the Massachusetts militia. Poor's actions during the battle were so remarkable that fourteen officers formally petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to recognize his bravery. They wrote that he "behaved like an experienced officer" and was "a brave and gallant soldier." Though many Black patriots' contributions have been overlooked, Poor's courage at Bunker Hill is one of the earliest documented examples of African Americans fighting heroically in the cause of liberty.

The Battle of Bunker Hill remains a symbol of American courage, sacrifice, and shows the diversity of those who fought for independence. The legacies of Dr. Warren and Salem Poor remind us that freedom was won not by one class or color, but through the united struggle of people from all walks of life. As we mark its 250th anniversary, we remember not just a battle, but the spirit of a revolution.



FIFTH THROUGH EIGHTH GRADES



Lesson Plan

- Engage
 - Prompt (on board):
 - “Would you stand your ground even if you thought you might lose?”
 - Discuss with partners or write a 1-2 sentence response.
 - Connect to colonists standing up to British forces.
- Elaborate
 - Guided Reading & Lecture (15 minutes)
 - Background information provided within resource.
 - Mini-Lesson with Map and Visuals
 - Use map to show Boston and Breed’s Hill.
 - Background Highlights:
 - Date: June 17, 1775
 - Who: Colonial militia (Patriots) vs. British Army (Redcoats)
 - What happened: Patriots built fort on Breed’s Hill; British attacked in waves.
 - Outcome: British won the hill—but lost many more soldiers.
 - Why it mattered: Showed colonists could stand up to trained British forces.
 - Introduce Key Figures:
 - Colonel William Prescott & General Thomas Gage
- Explore
 - Analyze a Quote (5–10 minutes)
 - “Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes.”
 - Discuss what this quote meant and why it was important.
 - Why might the Patriots have waited to fire?
 - Graphic Organizer
 - Students complete cause/effect chart (provided)
 - Causes of the battle
 - Major events during the battle
 - Immediate and long-term effects
 - Optional Extension: Create comic strips or illustrated timelines.
- Exit Ticket (Provided)
- Assessment
 - Participation in discussion and partner work
 - Completed graphic organizer or timeline
 - Thoughtfulness in exit ticket
- Extension / Enrichment Ideas
 - Write a diary entry from the perspective of a Patriot soldier.
 - Build a model of the hill and troop movements using clay or blocks.
 - Compare the Battle of Bunker Hill with Lexington and Concord.

Causes and Effects of The Battle of Bunker Hill

Causes	Effects

Name: _____

Exit Ticket *The Battle of Bunker Hill*

Why was this battle important even though the Patriots didn't win?

How might it have made colonists feel about their chances?

What would you have done if you were a Patriot soldier?

What was the most important thing you learned about the Battle of Bunker Hill?

Why do you think people still remember this battle today?



NINTH - TWELFTH GRADES



"Bunker Hill at 250 – Why It Still Matters"

Why care about 250 of Bunker Hill?

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Analyze primary source documents from the Battle of Bunker Hill and answer questions about them.
2. Identify key figures and their roles in the battle.
3. Evaluate the significance of the battle in the broader context of the Revolutionary War.
4. Connect the lessons of the battle to modern ideas about leadership, resistance, and national identity.

INTRO (Please adjust as you wish)

"Imagine you're a farmer who picked up a musket to defend your town, knowing the enemy is one of the most powerful armies in the world. Why do you fight?"

-Students write quick responses.

-Share a few aloud.

-Transition: "This was the reality for the people who stood on Breed's Hill in June 1775." (Explain how and why)

BACKGROUND

Mini-Lecture or Video Summary (you can use or adapt): Possibly look at the events of the War up to Bunker Hill? Then...

<https://youtu.be/mgeq7uqgm8>(American Battlefield Trust Video on Bunker Hill)

-British troops planned to seize control of the hills around Boston.

-Colonial militias dug in on Breed's Hill (not Bunker Hill!).

-On June 17, 1775, British troops attacked—three waves, heavy losses.

-Famous quote: "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

Possible Points of Emphasis: (Please add your own)

- Though a British "victory," the high cost showed the colonists were serious.
- Morale boost for Americans.
- Set stage for full-scale revolution.

PRIMARY SOURCE WORK

Group Work might work best here to divide up the primary sources for better comprehension. Break students into small groups. Each group gets one primary source (excerpts or simplified versions – please edit if you wish), with guiding questions.

Sources (possible examples): (Or use others you prefer)

Sources (possible examples): See full documents on following pages.

1. Letter from Colonel William Prescott to John Adams (American commander)
2. British perspective on the Battle of Bunker Hill – June 1775
3. Testimony of Peter Brown (Soldier who fought) to his mother – June 25, 1775
4. Newspaper account from the New England Chronicle – June 22, 1775
5. Painting: "The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill" by John Trumbull

GROUP QUESTIONS FROM PRIMARY SOURCES:

- Summarize what the source tells you.
- What biases or perspectives are present?
- What emotions or motivations are shown?
- Why might this source be important 250 years later?

DISCUSSION

Discussion Questions:

- How did the battle change people's understanding of the war?
- Which primary source had the strongest impact on you, and why?
- Why do we still talk about Bunker Hill 250 years later?
- Can you think of modern examples where people took big risks for what they believed in?

CLOSING ACTIVITY

"In one sentence, explain why the Battle of Bunker Hill still matters today."

OPTIONAL FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

- Research a Key Figure (e.g., Joseph Warren, William Howe, Peter Salem) and present a "This is Your Life" mini-presentation.
- Battlefield Geography Analysis: Map out the terrain using Google Earth or historical maps.
- Compare with Another Battle: Contrast Bunker Hill with Lexington & Concord or Saratoga.

Camp at Cambridge August 25.1775

Sir

I have recd. a Line from my Brother which informs me of your desire of a particular Account of the Action at Charlestown, it is not in my Power at present to give so minute an Account as I should choose being ordered to decamp and march to another Station.

On the 16 June in the Evening I recd. Orders to march to Breeds Hill in Charlestown with a party of about one thousand Men consisting of 3 hundred of my own Regiment, Coll. Bridge & Lieut Breckett with a Detachment of theirs, and two hundred Connecticut Forces commanded by Capt. Nolten, We arrived at the Spot the Lines were drawn by the Enginier and we began the Intrenchmant about 12, o Clock and plying the Work with all possible Expedition till Just before sun rising, when the Enemy began a very heavy Canonading and Bombardment, in the Interin [Interim] the Enginier forsook me, having thrown up a small Redout, found it necessary to draw a Line about 20 Rods in length from the Fort Northerly, under a very Warm Fire from the Enemys Artillary, About this Time the above Field Officers being indisposed could render me but Little Service, and the most of the Men under their Command deserted the Party.

The Enemy continueing an incessant Fire with their Artillary about 2, o Clock in the afternoon on the seventeenth the Enemy began to land a northeasterly Point from the Fort, and I orderd the Train with 2 field Pieces to go and oppose them and the Connecticut Forces to support them but the Train marched a different Course & I believe those sent to their support followd, I suppose to Bunkers Hill, another party of the Enemy landed and fired the Town, There was a party of Hampshire in conjunction with some other Forces Line a Fence at the distance of three score Rods back of the Fort partly to the North, about an Hour after the Enemy landed they began to march to the Attack in three Columns, I commanded my Lieut Coll. Robinson & Majr. Woods. Each with a detachment to flank the Enemy, who I have reason to think behaved with prudence and Courage.

I was now left with perhaps 150 Men in the Fort, the Enemy advanced and fired very hotly on the Fort and meating with a Warm Reception there was a very smart firing on both sides. after a considerable Time finding our Amunition was almost spent I commanded a sessationtill the Enemy advanced within 30 yards when we gave them such a hot fire, that the [y] were obliged to retire nearly 150 yards before they could Rally and come again to the Attack. Our Amunition being nea [r]]ly exaustid could keep up only a scattering Fire. The Enemy being numerous surrounded our little Fort began to mount our Lines and enter the Fort with their Bayonets, we was obliged to retreat through them while they kept up as hot a fire as it was possible for them to make we having very few Bayonets could make no resistance, we kept the fort about one hour and twenty Minutes after the Attack with small Arms,

This is nearly the State of Facts tho' imperfect & too general which if any ways satisfactory to you will afford pleasure to your most obedient humble Servt.

William Prescott

British perspective on the Battle of Bunker Hill – June 1775

Camp of Charlestown Heights

Lieutenant J. Waller, First Royal Marine Battalion

Amidst the hurry and confusion of a camp hastily pitched in the field of battle, I am sat down to tell you I have escaped unhurt, where many, very many have fallen. The public papers will inform you of the situation of the ground and the redoubt that we attacked on the heights of Charleston. I can only say that it was a most desperate and daring attempt, and it was performed with as much gallantry and spirit as was ever shown by any troops in any age.

Two companies of the first battalion of Marines, and apt of the 47th Regiment, were the first that mounted the breast-work: and you will not be displeased when I tell you that I was with those two companies, who drove then bayonets into all that opposed them. Nothing could be more shocking than the carnage that followed the storming this work. We tumbled over the dead to get at the living, who were crowding out of the gorge of the redoubt, in order to form under the defences which they had prepared to cover their retreat. In these breast-works they had artillery, which did so much mischief, but these they were obliged to abandon, being followed closely by the Light Infantry, who suffered exceedingly in the pursuit. The rebels had 5000 to 7000 men, covered by a redoubt, breast-works, walls, hedges, trees and the like, and the number of the corps under General Howe, (who performed this gallant business) did not amount to 1500. We gained a complete victory, and entrenched ourselves that night, where we lay under arms, in the front of the field of battle. We lay the next night on the ground, and the following day encamped. The officers have not their marqueess, but are obliged to lie in soldier's tents, they being more portable in case of our advancing.

We had of our corps one major, 2 captains, and 3 lieutenants killed, 4 captains and 3 lieutenants wounded; 2 serjeants and 21 rank and file killed, and serjeants and 79 privates wounded; and I suppose, upon the whole, we lost, killed and wounded, from 800 to 1000 men. We killed a number of the rebels, but the cover they fought under made their loss less considerable than it would otherwise have been. The army is in great spirits, and full of rage and ferocity at the rebellious rascals, who both poisoned and chewed the musket balls, in order to make them the more fatal. Many officers have died of their wounds, and others very ill: 'tis astonishing what a number of officers were hit on this occasion; but the officers were particularly aimed at.

I will just give you a short account of the part of the action where I was particularly concerned. We landed close under Charlestown, and formed with the 47th Regiment close under the natural defences of the redoubt, which we drove the enemy from, climbing over rails and hedges. So we closed upon them; but when we came immediately under the work, we were checked by the severe fire of the enemy, but did not retreat and inch. We were now in confusion, after being broke several times in getting over the rails, etc. I did all I could to form the two companies on our right, which at last I effected, losing many of them while it was performing. Major Pitcairne was killed close by me, with a captain and a subaltern, also a serjeant, and many of the privates, and had we stopped there much longer, the enemy would have picked us all off.

I saw this, and begged Colonel Nesbitt of the 47th to form on our left, in order that we might advance with our bayonets to the parapet. I ran from right to left, and stopped our men from firing, while this was doing, and when we had got in tolerable order, we rushed on, leaped the ditch, and climbed the parapet, under a most sore and heavy fire. Colonel Nesbitt spoke very favourably of my conduct, and both our Majors have mentioned me to Lord Sandwich in consequence of it. One captain and one subaltern fell in getting up, and one captain and one subaltern was wounded of our corps; three captains of the 52nd were killed on the parapet, and others that I know nothing of. God bless you! I did not think, at one time, that I should ever have been able to write this, though in the heat of the action I thought nothing of the matter.

Testimony of Peter Brown (Soldier who fought) to his mother - June 25, 1775

Cambridge June 25, 1775

Dear and Hon'd Mother

As per my Duty to you, I would in- form you of my present state and employment, being rather scrupulous whether you ever may receive these lines, shall give but a short sketch of affairs, which if otherwise I would. Before these long threat'ned difficulties began among us, I had plan'd out to go to Connecticut where I expected to work the Summer; but the Allwise in his providence hath very differently plann'd my summers work, which I hope may turn to his Glory and my good. I suppose I need not tell you acquaint you of the manner in which the enemy first approach'd us at Concord, it is more than probable you have had it in print long since When I was first alarm [ed] I was at Westford, whither I went to take leave of my Friends, and settle some affairs that I had in hand, was call'd about Day-light, or a little after, and rode as post that forenoon, before I could get to Concord, after which I pursu'd with the rest and fought that day, tarried at Cambridge that Night, being forbid to go home, soon after this there was an Army establishd all business then being stagnated, and a great deal wholly broke up, I did not know what I could do better than to en- list. Therefore being hearty in the cause, I did it directly (and listed) under Captn Oliver Bates, in Collo Prescott's Regiment with whom I tarried a while till he our Captain was taken sick and went home, when Mr. Joshua Parker by succession took his place, and makes his ground good, in whose company I remain yet, where I do a Clerk or Orderly Sergants business; which requires much care but the Duty is easier, and the pay higher than a private Soldiers --. Friday th 16 of June we were orderd to pa rade at six 'o Clock, with one days provision and Blankets ready for a March somewhere, but we knew not where but we readily and cheerfully obey'd the whole that were call'd for, were these three Collo Prescotts, Frys, and Nicksons Regiments -- after tarrying on parade till Nine at Night, we march'd down, on to Charleston Hill against Copts hill in Boston, where we entrench'd & made a Fort, ten Rod long, and eight wide, with a Breastwork of about eight more, we work'd there undiscoverd till about five in the Morning, then we saw our danger, being against Ships of the Line, and all Boston fortified against us, The danger we were in made us think there was treachery and that we were brought there to be all slain, and I must and will say that there was treachery oversight or presumption in the Conduct of our Officers, for about 5 in the morning, we not having more than half our fort done, they began to fire (I suppose as soon as they had orders) pretty briskly for a few minutes, then ceas'd but soon begun again, and fird to the number of twenty minutes, (they killd but one of our Men) then ceas'd to fire till about eleven oClock when they began to fire as brisk as ever, which caus'd many of our young Country people to desert, apprehending the danger in a clearer manner than others who were more diligent in digging, & fortifying ourselves against them. We began to be almost beat out, being fatigued by our Labour, having no sleep the night before, very little to eat, no drink but rum, but what we hazzarded our lives to get, we grew faint, Thirsty, hungry and weary. The enemy fir'd very warm from Boston, and from on board their Ships till about 2 oClock when they began to fire from Ships that lay in Ferry way and from a Ship that lay in the river against us, to stop our reinforcement, which they did in some Measure one cannon cut three Men in two on the neck, Our Officers sent time after time for Cannon from Cambridge in the Morning & could get but four, the Captn of which fir'd a few times then swung his Hat three times round to the enemy and ceas'd to fire, then about three o Clock there was a cessation of the Cannons roaring, soon after we espied as many as 40, boats

or barges coming over, full of troops it is supposed there were about 3000 of them, and about 700 of us left, not deserted, besides 500, reinforcement that could not get nigh enough to us to do us any good till they saw that we must all be cut off or some of them then they ventur'd to advance -- When Our officers perceivd that the enemy intended to Land, they ordered the Artillery to go out of the fort & prevent it if possible from whence the Artillery Capt'n took his pieces and return'd home to Cambridge with much haste, for which he is now confin'd and it is expected must suffer death. -- The enemy landed, fronted before us, and form'd themselves, in an oblong square, in order to surround, which they did in part -- after they were well form'd they advanced towards us in order to swallow us up, but they found a Choaky mouthful of us, 'tho we could do nothing with our small arms as yet for distance, and had but two Cannon, and no Gunner, and they from Boston, and from the shipping firing and throwing Bombs, keeping us down, till they almost surrounded us. -- But God in Mercy to us fought our battle, and tho' we were but few in number, and suffer'd to be defeated by our enemy, yet we were preserv [ed] in a most wonderful manner, far beyond our expectation and to our admiration for out of our Regiment there were but 37 kill'd 4 or 5 taken captive, about forty seven Wounded & Oh may I never forget Gods distinguishing Mercy to me, in sparing my Life, when they fell on my right hand, and on my left, and close by me, they were to the eye of reason no more expos'd than myself --When the Arrows of death flew thick around me, I was preserv'd while others were suffer'd to fall a prey to our Cruel enemies O may that God whose Mercy was so far extended in my preservation, grant me his grace to devote my future Life to his divine service -- Nor do I conclude that the danger is yet over, unless God in his Mercy either remove our enemy, or heal the breach -- but if we should be call'd again to action I hope to have courage and strength to act my part valiently in defence of our Liberties & Country trusting in him who hath hitherto kept me, and hath cover'd my head in the day of battle, and altho' we have lost four out of our Company & several taken captive by the enemy of America, I was not suffer'd to be touch'd

I was in the fort when the enemy came in, Jump'd over the wall and ran half a Mile, where balls flew like hail stones and Cannon roar'd like thunder, but tho I escap'd then it may be my turn next after asking your Prayers must conclude wishing you the best of Blessings, still remain your Dutiful Son

Peter Brown

PS, I wish very much to come and see you, 'tis in vain to think of that now, I desire you to write to me, direct to Peter Brown Cambridge, to be left at Colo Prescotts Chambers in the South Colledge, & send by way of Providence to Roxbury from whence it will be likely to come safe my love to Polly Sally & Patty have not leisure to write to them in particular, and Conveyance very uncertain, hope they will excuse me this time --Today at Cambridge, tomorrow Tomorrow the Lord only knows where
P Brown

Mrs. Sarah Brown

Newport

Rhode Island

Newspaper account from the New England Chronicle - June 22, 1775

Last Friday Night a Detachment from our Army began an Intrenchment on an Eminence below Bunker-Hill, about a Mile to the Northward of the Center of the Town of Charlestown. The Enemy appeared to be much alarmed on Saturday Morning, when they discovered our Operations, and immediately began a heavy Cannonading from a Battery on Corps Hill, Boston, and from the Ships in the Harbour. Our People, with little Loss, continued to carry on their Works till 10' Clock, P.M. on Saturday, when they discovered a large Body of the Enemy crossing Charles-River from Boston.

They landed on a Point of Land about a Mile Eastward of our Intrenchment, and immediately disposed their Army for an Attack, previous to which they set Fire to the Town of Charlestown. It is supposed the Enemy intended to attack us under Cover of the Smoke from the burning Houses, the Wind favouring them in such a Design; while, on the other Side, their Army was extending Northward towards Mistick River, with an apparent Design of surrounding our Men within the Works, and of cutting off any Assistance intended for their Relief. They were however, in some Measure, counteracted in this Design, and drew their Army into closer Order. As the Enemy approached, our Men were not only exposed to the Attack of a very numerous Musketry, but to the heavy Fire of the Battery on Corps-Hill, 4 or 5 Men of War, several armed Boats or floating Batteries in Mistick-River, and a Number of Field Pieces: Notwithstanding which, our Troops within the Intrenchment, and at a Breast Work without, sustained the Enemy's Attacks with real Bravery and Resolution, killed and wounded great Numbers, and repulsed them several Times; and after bearing, for about 2 Hours, as severe and heavy a Fire as perhaps ever was known, and many having fired away all their Ammunition, they were over-powered by Numbers, and obliged to leave the Intrenchment, retreating about Sunset, to a small Distance over Charlestown Neck. Our Loss, from the best Information we can obtain, does not exceed 50 killed, and about 20 or 30 taken Prisoners. The Town of Charlestown, supposed to contain about 300 Dwelling Houses, a great Number of which were large and elegant, besides 150 or 200 other Buildings, are almost all laid in Ashes by the Barbarity and wanton Cruelty of that infernal Villain, Thomas Gage.

The Enemy yet remain in Possession of Charlestown, and have erected Works for their Defence on Bunker-Hill. It is said they have brought over from Boston Part of their Light-Horse. Our Troops continue in high Spirits. They are fortifying a very high Hill, about a Mile and an half from this Town, and within Cannon Shot of the Enemy on Bunker-Hill.

The following is a Copy of a Letter from a Person of Credit, and is thought by many judicious Persons to contain Accounts not far from the Truth. "Hingham, June 19.

"Yesterday I came out of Boston at 2 o'Clock P.M. I heard the Officers and Soldiers say that they were sure that they had a Thousand or more killed and wounded; that they were carrying the wounded Men from 4 o'Clock on Saturday until I came away. General Howe commanded the Troops. They buried their Dead at Charlestown. Among the Dead was Major Pitcairn. A great many other Officers are dead. There were 5000 soldiers went from Boston. The Soldiers and Officers exult very much upon taking our Lines." J.B.

The Account of the Number of Troops which came from Boston, as mentioned in the above Letter, is corroborated by Observation of a Gentleman at Chelsea, who saw them in the Boats and judged the Number to be near 5000. It is reported that one of the Enemy's General Officers is among the Slain, said to be either Howe or Burgoyne.

