

---

# NEW HAMPSHIRE'S MILITIA IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

---

CW2 THOMAS E. GRAHAM II, HISTORIAN, JOINT FORCE HEADQUARTERS

---

## CONTENTS

---

Historical Background .....	2
1650 – 1750: Colonization.....	2
1754 – 1763: The French and Indian War.....	2
1764 – 1774: Increasing Tension.....	3
1774: Gunpowder .....	3
Fort William and Mary.....	4
December 13, 1774 .....	4
December 14.....	5
Epilogue to Fort William and Mary.....	6
Lexington and Concord.....	7
Historical Background.....	7
April 18, 1775.....	8
April 19.....	8
Epilogue to Lexington and Concord.....	10
Interlude.....	11
Bunker Hill .....	12
Historical Background.....	12
June 16, 1775.....	12
June 17.....	13
Epilogue to Bunker Hill.....	15
Bennington.....	16
Historical Background.....	16
August 14, 1777.....	16
August 15.....	16
August 16.....	17
Epilogue to Bennington .....	19
References .....	20
Photography .....	20

---

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

---

---

### 1650 – 1750: COLONIZATION

---

The history of these Revolutionary events begins with the very first colonial settlements. During the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the new continent saw its biggest wave of immigrants: first the Pilgrims, followed a few years later by thousands of Puritans. Around 1650, and for the century following, new immigration almost completely stopped, while the colonies were populated by generation after generation of American born Englishmen.

After initial settlement, the English Crown played a minimal part in the oversight of her colonies for over 100 years. More pressing issues at home included problems with Parliament, a civil war, a great plague, religious uprisings, and foreign wars. The only attention given to the colonies involved granting or updating charters, for the purpose of extracting natural resources, or financial returns.

In these same 100 years, the colonists had learned self governance by representation. They engaged in local and international commerce, and they maintained a militia for self defense, primarily against the French and their Indian allies. Almost imperceptibly, they were becoming less British, and more distinctly “American.”

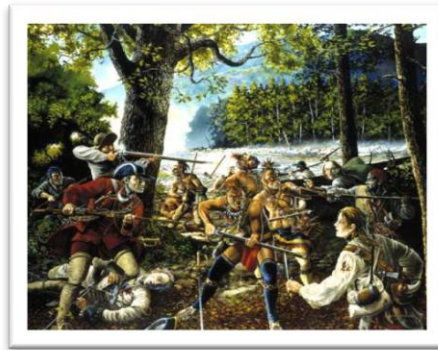


FIGURE 1 - FRENCH AND INDIAN

---

### 1754 – 1763: THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR

---

The 100 years of conflict with the Indians culminated in the 1754 French and Indian War. England got heavily involved in this war, sending thousands of soldiers to ensure a British domination of the continent. The victory was long and costly and the British sovereign determined that those who had benefitted the most – that is, the colonies – should compensate the most.

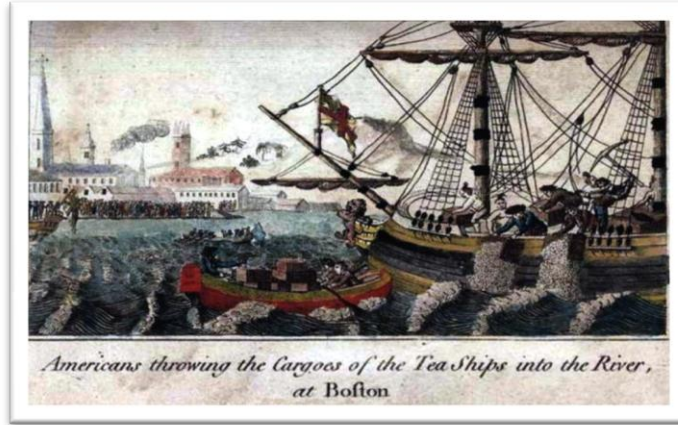


FIGURE 2 - BOSTON TEA PARTY

---

### 1764 – 1774: INCREASING TENSION

---

The next 10 years saw a succession of British attempts to extract revenue from her colonies. Each new tax was ill received and while cooler heads petitioned the king to withdraw them, hotter heads took more immediate action, such as the Boston Tea Party, depicted here. Some of the British tax legislation included:

- 1764 Sugar Act
- 1765 Stamp Act
- 1766 Stamp Act repealed
- 1767 Townsend Revenue Acts (paper, glass, tea, lead, etc.)
- 1770 Townsend acts repealed
- 1773 Tea Act
- 1774 Coercive Acts (closing of Boston Harbor to colonial commerce)
- 1774 Prohibition of gunpowder to colonies

---

### 1774: GUNPOWDER

---

Tensions continued to grow, and in October of 1774, Britain prohibited the importation of gunpowder into the colonies while controlling the existing supplies – a remnant from the French and Indian War.

The colonists were in danger of losing all access to gunpowder, as there were no powder mills, nor a ready supply of saltpeter – the primary ingredient of black powder. This had to be produced following a laborious English process. Gunpowder's considerable manufacturing difficulties are what gave the existing colonial gunpowder its great value and importance.

*“In 1775, the greater part of the powder stored in the colonial magazines had lain there since the Seven Years’ War. The few powder mills were in ruins. . .”*

*Orlando W. Stephenson  
The American Historical Review, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Jan., 1925), pp. 271-281*

## FORT WILLIAM AND MARY

---

LOCATION:	NEWCASTLE ISLAND, NH
DATE:	DECEMBER 14 & 15, 1774
ACTION:	RAID ON THE FORT
MAJOR FIGURES:	
COLONIAL:	JOHN LANGDON (MERCHANT) MAJOR JOHN SULLIVAN
BRITISH:	CAPTAIN JOHN COCHRAN

---



FIGURE 3 - PAUL REVERE

DECEMBER 13, 1774

---

By December, news of the gunpowder prohibition had reached the colonies, and it became a catalyst for action through many of the colonial settlements. With news of British reinforcements headed to Fort William and Mary, Paul Revere was dispatched to Portsmouth to urge the townspeople to capture the powder stored at the tiny New Hampshire fort.



FIGURE 4 - FIFES AND DRUMS

---

## DECEMBER 14

---

At Noon On December 14<sup>th</sup>, a fife and drum parade called Portsmouth citizens to assemble – a group which included militia men and officers. Governor Wentworth had been made aware of the crowd’s intention and had sent his private secretary to warn them of the high treason they were about to commit. He had also sent a message to Captain Cochran at the fort, to be vigilant against any intruders.

Around 3:00 PM, John Langdon and a crowd of 400 arrived at the fort. Langdon and Captain Robert White were both admitted into the fort to discuss their issues. They were sent out again after disclosing their intention to capture the powder, with the warning that they would be fired upon if they tried.

Minutes later, both men made good on their intentions.

Captain Cochran fired cannon and musket on the approaching crowd – *arguably the first shots of the Revolutionary War*. The mob, seeing the cannon’s wicks burning, “made for the wall” and avoided the cannon fire, then stormed the fort before they could be reloaded, capturing Cochran and the fort’s seven defenders with no known casualties. The captured powder was sent up river through the Piscataqua ice to be hidden in various cellars and barns in the surrounding towns.

In addition to securing the 100 barrels of powder, the colonists demonstrated a second purpose to their visit as they pulled down the large British flag to a round of “Huzzahs.” It was a direct challenge to the British Empire and its power, an overt act toward a military confrontation.

## EPILOGUE TO FORT WILLIAM AND MARY

---

The next day, December 15, in conjunction with John Langdon's previous attack, Major John Sullivan led a larger group back to the fort where they went after everything else of military use that they could locate and carry, including 16 cannons.

The attack on Fort William and Mary was arguably the *first* armed and organized attack on British troops in the Revolutionary War. As such, the shots fired by Captain Cochran were the first volley of the war, predating Lexington and Concord.

The next spring, an oxcart of captured powder was sent to Cambridge, too late for the Battle of Bunker Hill, but replenishing the colonial supply which had all but run out in that battle.

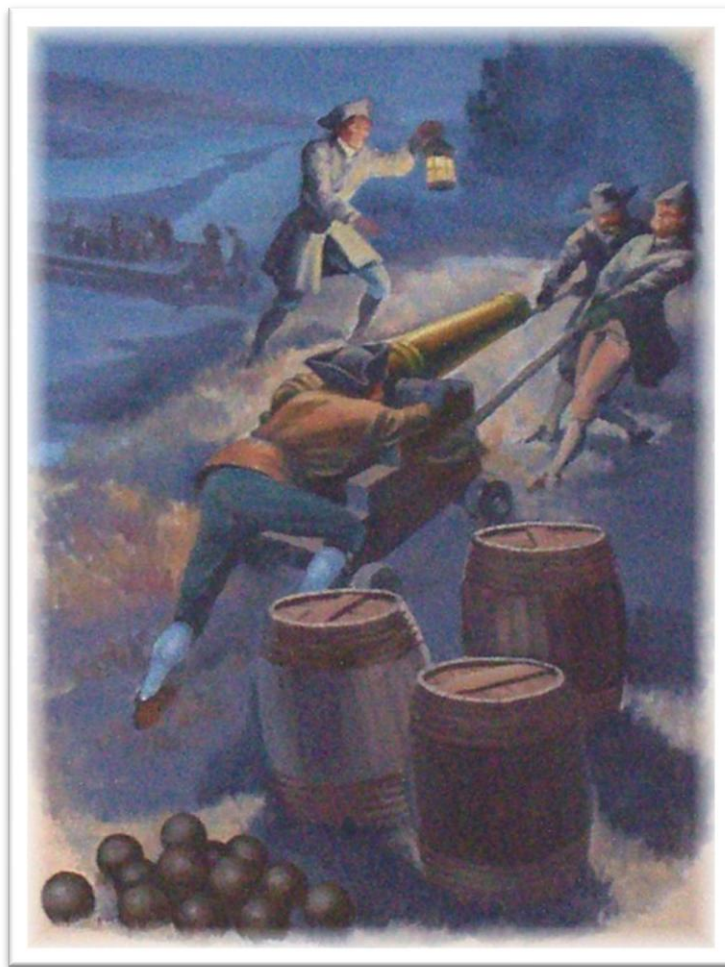


FIGURE 5 - PROCURING REVOLUTIONARY STORES

## LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

---

LOCATION:	LEXINGTON & CONCORD, MASS
DATE:	APRIL 19, 1775
ACTION:	SKIRMISH / BATTLE
MAJOR FIGURES:	
COLONIAL:	CPT JOHN PARKER (LEXINGTON) MAJ JOHN BUTTRICK (CONCORD)
BRITISH:	LTC FRANCIS SMITH (COMMANDER) MAJ JOHN PITCAIRN (MARINES)

---

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

---

Throughout the winter following the Portsmouth powder raid, other colonial militia units had been drilling – especially the newly created branch called the Minute Men. At the same time, the Massachusetts colony had been collecting barrels of powder and other military stores at Concord.

General Gage, the royal governor of Massachusetts, was ordered to search out and destroy the military stores known to be at Concord. General Gage had already successfully secured the powder at Somerville, Massachusetts, and planned a repeat action in Concord.



FIGURE 6 - "TWO IF BY SEA"

---

## APRIL 18, 1775

---

The battle movement for Lexington and Concord began on the night of April 18. With utmost secrecy, General Gage dispatched approximately 800 British troops to depart Boston “by sea” to land in Cambridge where they would begin their march, sparing them the considerably longer land route down Boston neck and around the Charles River Basin. Acting on good intelligence, Paul Revere and William Dawes began their ride to alert the minute men.



FIGURE 7 - LEXINGTON GREEN

---

## APRIL 19

---

At 5:00 in the morning on April 19, it was cool, probably foggy, and the sky was initially a dark grey. Major Pitcairn arrived at Lexington to face a meager line of militiamen whom he commanded to throw down their arms and disperse. Captain Parker initially ordered his men to hold their fire, but when the British troops came on suddenly, he quickly ordered them to disperse.

Moments later, a shot was fired, and both sides began shooting. The militia retreated to the woods while the British spent over an hour hunting down the rebels before they finally regrouped to continue their march on to Concord, leaving 8 militiamen dead.



Arriving in Concord at around 7:00 that morning, the British spread out and located several cannons, as well as powder, shot, and food supplies. With units controlling both of the town's bridges, the British began burning the powder barrels and wooden cannon frames and dumping barrels of flour and musket balls into the pond.

Two hours passed as militia units continued arriving from surrounding towns. The original landscape was open, allowing Major Buttrick to see the town of Concord from his vantage point on the hill behind the North Bridge. He mistook the bonfire for buildings burning and believed the British had set fire to the town. Based on this belief, Buttrick decided to attack the two British companies at the bridge and to proceed on to the town.



FIGURE 8 - THE SCENE IN CONCORD

The British, in meeting the oncoming militia, fired warning shots using powder only, followed by a volley that killed two militiamen. At this, Buttrick is historically credited with uttering the command "Fire, For God's sake, Fire!" This order – to fire on their own countrymen – is considered the "shot heard round the world."

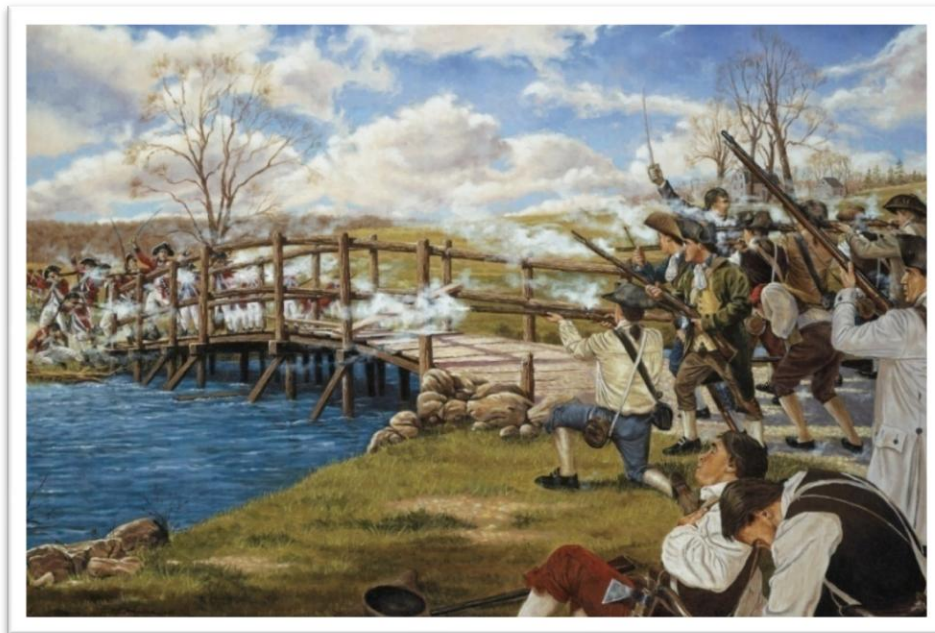


FIGURE 9 - THE NORTH BRIDGE

As surrounding militia companies continued to arrive, the British began an arduous retreat back to Boston. The militia's rules of engagement were not to fire unless fired upon and they watched tensely as the British finished their mission in Concord, ate lunch, and began their march back.

However, during their return march, the British *were* fired upon by the militia. The militia, keeping a step ahead of the retreating British, engaged them from behind trees and stone walls. They ambushing the Redcoats 11 times on their way back to Boston. The British sent flanking troops into the trees and woods to try to rout the militia, but at the end of the day, they had three times as many casualties as the Colonial Militia.

By 7:00 that evening, the exhausted British arrived to the relative safety of Charlestown. However, behind them were 20,000 militia troops from all over New England to block British land movement. The siege of Boston had begun.



FIGURE 10 – REDCOATS RETREAT TO BOSTON

---

## EPILOGUE TO LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

---

The New Hampshire connection to this battle is small, but important.

First, at least two NH town militias responded to the call for aid, Dunstable – now called Nashua – and Hollis.

Second, John Stark, according to tradition, left his log in the sawmill when hearing the news of Lexington and Concord, and rushed to Cambridge recruiting a regiment along the way. This also put him on the scene in time for the Battle of Bunker Hill where he played a prominent role.

Finally, due to the Connecticut militia enlistments expiring on Dec 10, the Dover, New Hampshire militia was mustered into federal service to replace the Connecticut troops at the siege of Boston. The 3rd Battalion 197<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery still carries the battle streamer earned at this engagement.

## INTERLUDE

---

While Boston was under siege, the British were kept supplied by farms on islands in Boston Harbor. In the Battle of Chelsea Creek, John Stark and his 1<sup>st</sup> NH Regiment raided Hog Island, herding livestock to the mainland during low tide. Another small contingent went to Noddles Island where they killed livestock and burned barns and haystacks.



FIGURE 11 - THE BATTLE OF CHELSEA CREEK, MAY 27-28, 1775

The New Hampshire troops were engaged by the British during most of this time, and by the end of the battle, they were able to capture a British vessel which had run aground at low tide and was abandoned. They carried off everything they could before setting it on fire to prevent it from falling back into British hands.

## BUNKER HILL

---

LOCATION:	CHARLESTOWN PENINSULA, MA
DATE:	JUNE 17, 1775
ACTION:	BATTLE
MAJOR FIGURES:	
COLONIAL:	COL WILLIAM PRESCOTT (MA) COL JOHN STARK (NH)
BRITISH:	MG HOWE

---

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

---

The siege of Boston prohibited British movement on land. Late in May, a month after Lexington and Concord, 6,500 British reinforcements arrived in Boston, including three Major Generals of some repute: Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne. They suggested fortifying Dorchester Heights, South of Boston as a first step in breaking out of the siege.

### JUNE 16, 1775

---

The committee of safety was the colonial ruling body politic of the time. They elected to counter the British plan on Dorchester Heights by fortifying Bunker Hill to the North of Boston. At 9:00 on the evening of the 16th, Prescott led his militia to Bunker Hill.



FIGURE 12 - SECURING BUNKER HILL



FIGURE 13 - BREEDS HILL REDOUBT

Midnight at Bunker Hill found the militia officers in heated discussion over their orders to occupy Bunker Hill and the terrain set before them. Finally settling on Breeds hill as the better location, the militia used shovels and picks to construct a 132 foot square redoubt.

## JUNE 17



FIGURE 14 - THE NARROW NECK

At 4:30 in the morning, sailors on the HMS Lively discovered the construction and opened fire on it, but after a few shots, the firing stopped.

Prescott's militia, mostly farmers, had worked hard all night and through the morning and was fairly spent before the battle even began. During the morning, Prescott requested reinforcements from Cambridge, and Colonel Stark began marching his men toward the front.

British General Howe's plan was to begin with a coordinated attack on the flank to cut off the American retreat. Charlestown, like Boston, was almost an island. A narrow neck connected it to the mainland, and the British vessels shelled this exposed main road, holding back several Massachusetts regiments who blocked the road to Breeds Hill.

Stark sent Major McClary to clear the road with the request that, "If Massachusetts didn't need to use the road just then, would they please move over and let New Hampshire through?" which they did. Stark calmly marched his men to Breed's Hill – through the shelling of the 30 foot wide Charlestown Neck – and past the hoard of Massachusetts militiamen who had halted there.

With no central command, Colonel Prescott allowed Stark to deploy his men where ever he saw fit. Stark quickly realized how easily the redoubt, and indeed, the entire peninsula, could be surrounded and taken by the British. He reinforced and manned a long left flank along a rail fence, and built a stone breastwork on the beach.

General Howe planned three separate attacks:

- A flanking maneuver along the beach and around the rail fence
- A direct attack against the rail fence following the flanking maneuver
- A final frontal attack on the redoubt itself

Colonel Stark knew the British tactic of absorbing an initial volley and then rushing in with bayonets before the enemy could reload. On the narrow beach, Stark countered this using a Ranger tactic of placing the men in three rows, but instructing only one row at a time to fire, then reload while the next row fired, then the third, keeping up a constant barrage that effectively cut down swaths of men.

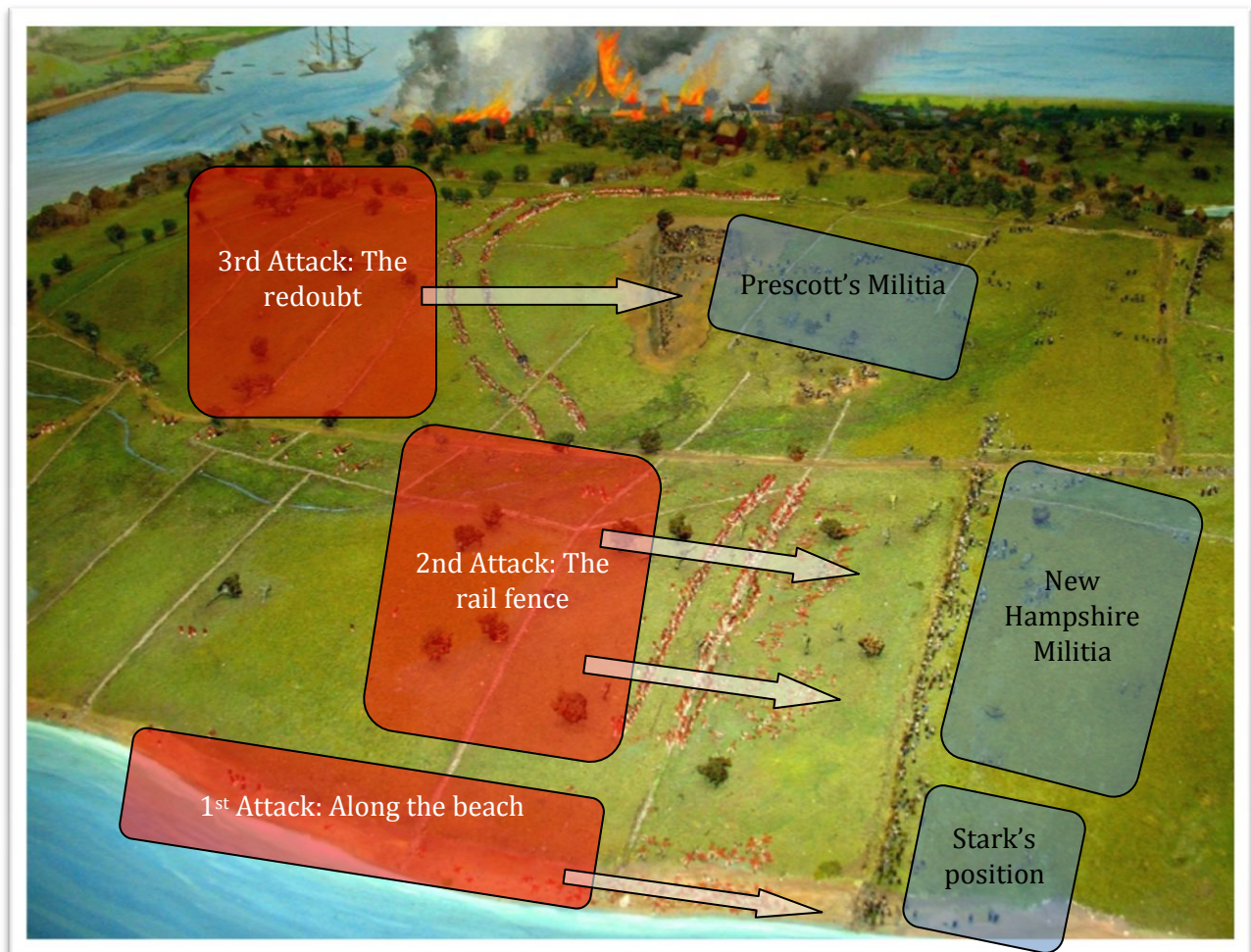


FIGURE 15 - THREE COORDINATED ATTACKS



FIGURE 16 - DEATH OF GENERAL WARREN AT BUNKER HILL

The initial British attack configuration along the beach was repulsed by Stark and his men. A second modified attack against the rail fence was also turned back.

On the third assault, Prescott knew most of his men had their last round in their guns. To ensure effectiveness, he let the British come closer than the previous two times. However, this time, due to the proximity, the British pushed on, overcoming the men in the redoubt. Stark provided covering fire, enabling an orderly retreat by Prescott and his men.

---

### EPILOGUE TO BUNKER HILL

---

Bunker Hill was a costly victory for the British, who eventually left Boston in March of 1776. Bunker Hill also showed the American colonists that they could stand up to the mightiest army in the world. New Hampshire contributed over half the fighting force at Bunker Hill, including the pivotal figure, Colonel John Stark, whose skillful leadership saved the fledgling American Army.

---

## BENNINGTON

---

LOCATION:	HOOSICK, NY <i>(8 MILES WEST OF BENNINGTON, VT)</i>
DATE:	AUGUST 16, 1777
ACTION:	BATTLE
MAJOR FIGURES:	
COLONIAL:	BG JOHN STARK (NH) COL SETH WARNER (VT)
BRITISH:	LTC FRIEDRICH BAUM COL HEINRICH BREYMANN

---

---

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

---

After Bunker Hill, Stark continued to serve in the Continental Army until learning he had been passed over for promotion, at which time he resigned his commission.

In 1777, New Hampshire learned of Burgoyne's plans to cut New England off from the rest of the colonies. Concerned for the safety of the New Hampshire grants in Vermont, the NH court voted to enlist a short term militia to counter the British threat.

John Stark accepted a commission as Brigadier General. With an independent command he refused orders to join General Schuyler near Albany and instead moved to the area of Bennington to protect the stores of food, military supplies, and horses sought by British General Burgoyne.

---

#### AUGUST 14, 1777

---

Eight miles west of Bennington, skirmishers at the leading edge of Stark's militia ran into Baum's advancing detachment. Both pulled back and began sizing each other up while sending for their reinforcements.

---

#### AUGUST 15

---

Heavy rain all day on the 15<sup>th</sup> postponed the battle. During the rain, Baum took advantage of the time and fortified his hilltop redoubt while directing the placement of two cannon redoubts. The rain and muddy roads hindered the progress of reinforcements for both sides.





FIGURE 17 - REPRODUCTION OF A CANNON REDOUBT ON THE EXACT SITE OF THE ORIGINAL

## AUGUST 16

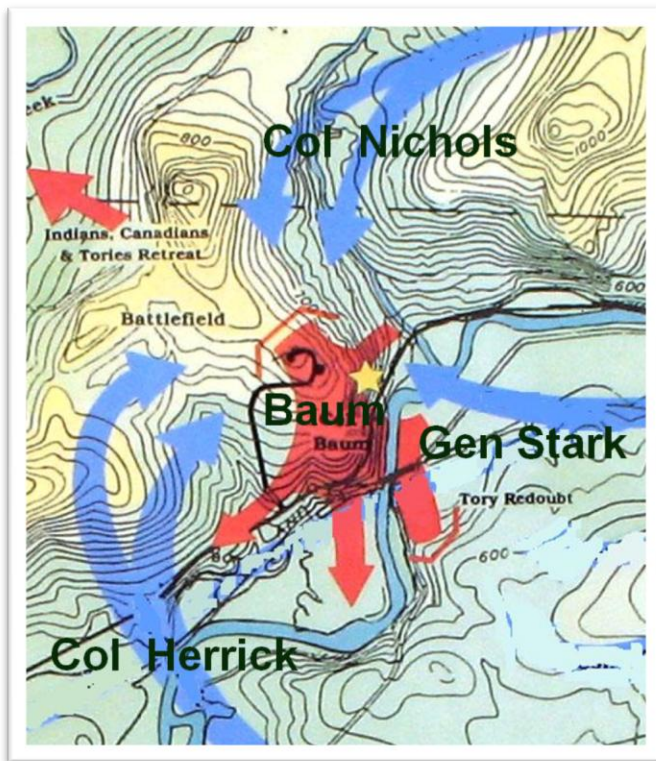


FIGURE 18 - STARK'S ATTACK

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the rain continued. Stark was somewhat impatient to press an attack as he didn't know when to expect the Hessian reinforcements.

His plan was to send two detachments around the hill, while he led his men up the center to the main force at the hilltop redoubt.

By noon of August 16<sup>th</sup>, the rain was letting up and Stark dispatched Colonels Herrick and Nichols to make their trek around to the rear of Baum's redoubt. The sound of their attack was Stark's signal to begin his frontal attack.

General Stark rallied his troops stating, *"Yonder lie the Redcoats and Tories . . . If you can't prove yourselves better men than they, then let Molly Stark sleep a widow tonight !"*

At 3:00 that afternoon, Baum's Indians and Tories had already fled as the battle finally began. Stark later remembered it as being the hottest he had ever experienced, resembling a "continuous clap of thunder." Fighting at the front, Stark was so covered with soot as to be almost unrecognizable.

After a valiant defense – with ammunition low and Baum mortally wounded – Baum’s dragoons surrendered. Following the battle, Stark’s men scattered, some chasing down escaping Hessians and tending the wounded while others began looting or drinking.

Around 5:00 in the evening, rifle fire alerted Stark’s scattered troops to the arrival of Col Breymann’s reinforcements from the west. Not all of Stark’s men were available for this second battle, and his line faltered as Breymann pushed forward. At that moment, Colonel Seth Warner and his “Green Mountain Boys” arrived to bolster Stark’s position and help push the Germans back into a rout.

Stark ended the pursuit as night fell, not wanting to further risk his men with injuries from friendly fire. He lamented for one more hour in which he could have “captured the whole lot”. Among Breymann’s captured field equipment was a cannon which soon bore the nickname “Molly Stark.”



FIGURE 19 – GENERAL STARK

## EPILOGUE TO BENNINGTON

General Stark not only denied Burgoyne the depot of supplies at Bennington, he captured additional equipment and supplies from the fleeing Hessians. His double victory set the stage for the American victory at the Battle of Saratoga two months later.

General Stark was about to be censured for insubordination until the Continental Congress learned the extent of his victory and quietly dropped the matter. Instead, he was commissioned a Brigadier General in the Continental Army.

After the battle of Bennington, General Stark returned to New Hampshire to recruit a new regiment.

Arriving back in New York, General Stark found Burgoyne's army surrounded on three sides: by the Continental Army to the South and West, and by the Hudson River to the East, leaving the retreat north to Canada, wide open.

Stark placed his cannons in the gap between the high ground and the Hudson just north of Burgoyne's position, sealing off his retreat in what historian John Brandow called, "The corking of the bottle." The surrender of Burgoyne's army at Saratoga led to French support for the American Revolution, and was the turning point of the war.

General Stark and his New Hampshire militia are thus bookends to the first great American victory in the Revolutionary War – initially setting the stage at Bennington, and finally, blocking Burgoyne's last hope of retreat leading to his surrender at Saratoga.

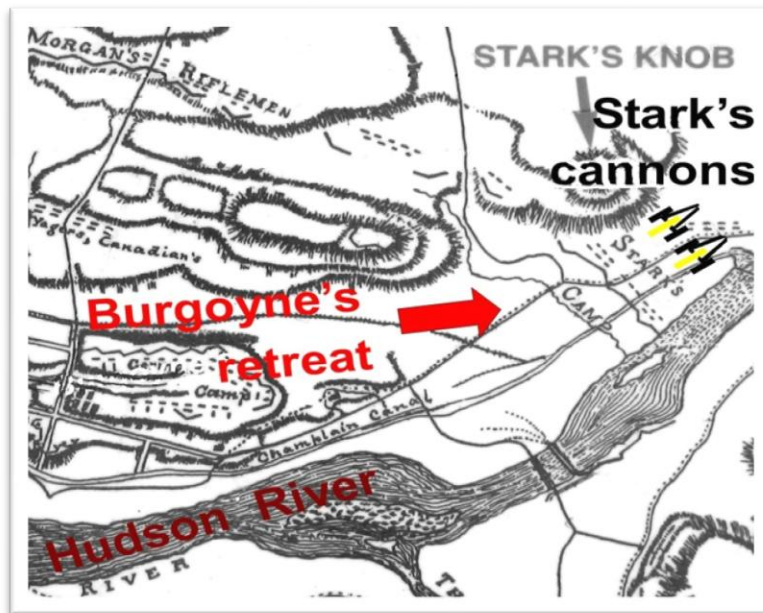


FIGURE 20 - "THE CORKING OF THE BOTTLE"

---

## REFERENCES

---

- American history appendix p 293
- [http://www.theamericanrevolution.org/battles/bat\\_lex.asp](http://www.theamericanrevolution.org/battles/bat_lex.asp)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battles\\_of\\_Lexington\\_and\\_Concord](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battles_of_Lexington_and_Concord)
- <http://www.todayinsci.com/events/Technology/GunpowderMills.htm>
- John Stark, Maverick General, Ben Z. Rose, TreeLine Press, 2007
- General John Stark, Caleb Stark, Heritage Books, 2007
- American Military History, Maurice Matloff, editor, U.S. Army, 1973
- Battles of the Revolutionary War, 1775-1781, W.J. Wood, DA Capo Press, 1995
- <http://www.historycaper.com/kids/htfah/bennington.hem>
- Battle of Bennington, Bennington Museum Inc., 2004
- Dept of Military Science, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, <http://www.wpi.edu>
- Colonel Stark and NH Troops at Bunker Hill, Howard Moore, Evans Printing Company, 1977
- Address of the Centennial of the NH Historical Society, Gordon Woodbury, 1923
- <http://www.awiatsea.com/chronology.html>
- The Seizure of His Majesty's Fort, Thomas Kehr, <http://www.nhssar.org/essays/>
- The Capture of Fort William and Mary, Charles Parsons, NH Historical Society, 1974
- New Hampshire Constitution, adopted 1784, printed 2007-2008

---

## PHOTOGRAPHY

---

All photographs are NHNG archival photographs unless otherwise listed:

- |                 |                   |  |
|-----------------|-------------------|--|
| • Fig 1         | French & Indian   | <a href="http://ngb.army.mil">http://ngb.army.mil</a>                |
| • Fig 2         | Boston Tea Party  | <a href="http://www.loc.gov">www.loc.gov</a>                         |
| • Fig 3         | Paul Revere       | <a href="http://www.cia.gov">www.cia.gov</a>                         |
| • Fig 4         | fifes & drums     | <a href="http://www.nps.gov">www.nps.gov</a>                         |
| • Fig 6, 10, 14 | Boston Map        | <a href="http://commons.wikimedia.org">httpcommons.wikimedia.org</a> |
| • Fig 7         | Lexington Green   | <a href="http://www.ngb.army.mil">www.ngb.army.mil</a>               |
| • Fig 8         | Lexington Green   | <a href="http://www.nps.gov">http://www.nps.gov</a>                  |
| • Fig 9         | North Bridge      | <a href="http://www.ngb.army.mil">www.ngb.army.mil</a>               |
| • Fig 10        | Redcoats Return   | courtesy of Merrill's Militia (reenactors)                           |
| • Fig 16        | Dr Warren death   | <a href="http://commons.wikimedia.org">commons.wikimedia.org</a>     |
| • Fig 19        | John Stark        | New Hampshire Historical Society                                     |
| • Fig 20        | Bennington Battle | <a href="http://www.ngb.army.mil">www.ngb.army.mil</a>               |