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# ACCOUNT

OF THE

**BATTLE OF BUNKER'S-HILL;**

BY H. DEARBORN,

MAJOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES' ARMY.

WITH

A LETTER

TO

**MAJ. GEN. DEARBORN,**

REPELLING HIS UNPROVOKED ATTACK ON THE CHARACTER OF

**THE LATE MAJ. GEN. ISRAEL PUTNAM.**

BY

DANIEL PUTNAM, Esq.

BOSTON :

PUBLISHED BY MUNROE & FRANCIS, NO. 4, CORNHILL.

1818.



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## BATTLE OF BUNKER'S-HILL.

ON the 16th of June, 1775, it was determined that a fortified post should be established at or near Bunker's Hill.

A detachment of the army was ordered to advance early in the evening of that day, and commence the erection of a strong work on the heights in the rear of Charlestown, at that time called Breed's Hill, but from its proximity to Bunker Hill, the battle has taken its name from the latter eminence, which overlooks it.

The work was commenced and carried on under the direction of such engineers as we were able to procure at that time. It was a square redoubt, the curtains of which were about 60 or 70 feet in extent, with an intrenchment, or breast work, extending 50 or 60 feet from the northern angle, towards Mystic river.

In the course of the night the ramparts had been raised to the height of 6 or 7 feet, with a small ditch at their base, but it was in yet a rude and imperfect state. Being in full view from the northern heights of Boston, it was discovered by the enemy, as soon as day-light appeared, and a determination was immediately formed by General Gage, for dislodging our troops from this new and alarming position. Arrangements were promptly made for effecting this important object. The movements of the British troops indicating an attack, were soon discovered; in consequence of which, orders were immediately issued for the march of a considerable part of our army to reinforce the detachment at the redoubts on Breed's Hill; but such was the imperfect state of discipline, the want of knowledge in military science, and the deficiency of the materials of war, that the movement of the troops was extremely irregular and devoid of every thing like concert—each regiment advancing according to the opinions, feelings or caprice of its commander.

Colonel Stark's\* regiment was quartered in Medford, distant about four miles from the point of anticipated attack. It then consisted of thirteen companies, and was probably the largest regiment in the army. About ten o'clock in the morning he received orders to march. The regiment being destitute of ammunition, it was formed in front of a house occupied as an arsenal, where each man received a gill cup full of powder, fifteen balls and one flint.

The several captains were then ordered to march their companies to their respective quarters, and make up their powder and ball into cartridges, with the greatest possible dispatch. As there were scarcely two muskets in a company of equal caliber, it was necessary to reduce the size of the balls for many of them; and as but a small proportion of the men had cartridge boxes, the remainder made use of powder horns and ball pouches.

After completing the necessary preparations for action, the regiment formed, and marched about 1 o'clock. When it reached Charles-

\* This distinguished veteran is still alive, in the ninety-first year of his age, and resides in the state of New-Hampshire. He is one of the only three surviving general officers of the revolutionary war. The other two are Major Gen. St. Clair, who lives in the interior of Pennsylvania, and Brig. Gen. Huntington, of Connecticut.



town Neck we found two regiments, halted, in consequence of a heavy enfilading fire thrown across it, of round, bar, and chain shot, from the *Lively* frigate, and floating batteries anchored in Charles river, and a floating battery lying in the river Mystic.—Major *McClary* went forward, and observed to the commanders, if they did not intend to move on, he wished them to open and let our regiment pass; the latter was immediately done. My company being in front, I marched by the side of Col. *Stark*, who, moving with a very deliberate pace, I suggested the propriety of quickening the march of the regiment, that it might sooner be relieved from the galling cross fire of the enemy.—With a look peculiar to himself, he fixed his eyes upon me, and observed with great composure, “*Dearborn, one fresh man in action, is worth ten fatigued ones,*” and continued to advance in the same cool and collected manner. When we reached the top of Bunker’s Hill, where Gen. *Putnam* had taken his station, the regiment halted for a few moments for the rear to come up.

Soon after, the enemy were discovered to have landed on the shore, of Morton’s point in front of Breed’s Hill, under cover of a tremendous fire of shot and shells from a battery on Copp’s Hill, in Boston, which had opened on the redoubt at day break.

Major General *Howe*, and Brigadier General *Pigot*, were the commanders of the British forces which first landed, consisting of four battalions of infantry, ten companies of grenadiers, and ten of light infantry, with a train of field artillery. They formed as they disembarked, but remained in that position, until they were reinforced by another detachment.

At this moment the veteran and gallant Colonel *Stark* harangued his regiment in a short but animated address; then directed them to give three cheers, and make a rapid movement to the rail fence which ran from the left, and about 40 yards in the rear of the redoubt towards Mystic river. Part of the grass having been recently cut, lay in winnows and cocks on the field. Another fence was taken up—the rails run through the one in front, and the hay, mown in the vicinity, suspended upon them, from the bottom to the top, which had the appearance of a breast work, but was in fact, no real cover to the men; it however, served as a deception on the enemy. This was done by the direction of the “*committee of safety,*” of which James Winthrop, Esq. who then, and now lives in Cambridge, was one, as he has within a few years informed me. Mr. Winthrop himself acted as a volunteer on that day, and was wounded in the battle.

At the moment our regiment was formed in the rear of the rail fence, with one other small regiment from New-Hampshire, under the command of Colonel *Reed*, the fire commenced between the left wing of the British army, commanded by General *Howe*, and the troops in the redoubt under Col. *Prescott*, while a column of the enemy was advancing on our left, on the shore of Mystic river, with an evident intention of turning our left wing, and that veteran and most excellent regiment of Welsh fusileers, so distinguished for its gallant conduct in the battle of Minden, advanced in column directly on the rail fence; when within 80 or an 100 yards, displayed into line, with the precision and firmness of troops on parade, and opened a brisk but regular fire by platoons, which was returned by a well directed, rapid, and fatal discharge from our whole line.



The action soon became general, and very heavy from right to left. In the course of ten or fifteen minutes the enemy gave way at all points, and retreated in great disorder, leaving a large number of dead and wounded on the field.

The firing ceased for a short time, until the enemy again formed, advanced and recommenced a spirited fire from his whole line. Several attempts were again made to turn our left, but the troops having thrown up a slight stone wall on the bank of the river and laying down behind it, gave such a deadly fire, as cut down almost every man of the party opposed to them; while the fire from the redoubt and the *rail fence* was so well directed and so fatal, especially to the British officers, that the whole army was compelled a second time to retreat with precipitation and great confusion. At this time the ground occupied by the enemy was covered with his dead and wounded. Only a few small detached parties again advanced, which kept up a distant ineffectual scattering fire, until a strong reinforcement arrived from Boston which advanced on the southern declivity of the hill, in the rear of Charlestown. When this column arrived opposite that angle of the redoubt which faced Charlestown, it wheeled by platoons to the right and advanced directly upon the redoubt without firing a gun. By this time our ammunition was exhausted. A few men only had a charge left.

The advancing column made an attempt to carry the redoubt by assault, but at the first onset every man that mounted the parapet was cut down, by the troops within, who had formed on the opposite side, not being prepared with bayonets to meet a charge.

The column wavered for a moment, but soon formed again; when a forward movement was made with such spirit and intrepidity as to render the feeble efforts of a handful of men, without the means of defence, unavailing, and they fled through an open space in the rear of the redoubt, which had been left for a gate-way. At this moment the rear of the British column advanced round the angle of the redoubt and threw in a galling flank fire upon our troops, as they rushed from it, which killed and wounded a greater number than had fallen before during the action.—The whole of our line immediately after gave way and retreated with rapidity and disorder towards Bunker Hill; carrying off as many of the wounded as possible, so that only thirty six or seven fell into the hands of the enemy, among whom were Lt. Colonel *Parker* and two or three other officers who fell in or near the redoubt.

When the troops arrived at the summit of Bunker Hill, we found Gen. Putnam with nearly as many men as had been engaged in the battle; notwithstanding which no measure had been taken for reinforcing us, nor was there a shot fired to cover our retreat, or any movement made to check the advance of the enemy to this height, but on the contrary, Gen. Putnam rode off, with a number of *spades and pick axes in his hands*, and the troops that had remained with him *inactive* during the whole of the action, although within a few hundred yards of the battle ground and no obstacle to impede their movement but *musket balls*.

The whole of the troops now descended the northwestern declivity of Bunker Hill, and recrossed the neck. Those of the New-Hampshire line retired towards Winter Hill, and the others on to Prospect Hill.

Some slight works were thrown up in the course of the evening—



strong advance pickets were posted on the roads leading to Charlestown, and the troops anticipating an attack, rested on their arms.

It is a most extraordinary fact that the British did not make a single charge during the battle, which, if attempted, would have been decisive and fatal to the Americans, as they did not carry into the field fifty bayonets. In my company there was but one.

Soon after the commencement of the action, a detachment from the British force in Boston was landed in Charlestown, and within a few moments the whole town appeared in a blaze. A dense column of smoke rose to a great height, and there being a gentle breeze from the southwest, it hung like a thunder cloud over the contending armies. A very few houses escaped the dreadful conflagration of this devoted town.

From similar mistakes, the fixed ammunition furnished for the field pieces was calculated for guns of a larger calibre, which prevented the use of field artillery, on both sides. There was no cavalry in either army. From the ships of war and a large battery on Copp's Hill, a heavy cannonade was kept up upon our line and redoubt, from the commencement to the close of the action, and during the retreat; but with very little effect, except that of killing the brave Major Andrew M'Clary of Col. Stark's regiment soon after we retired from Bunker Hill. He was among the first officers of the army.—Possessing a sound judgment, of undaunted bravery, enterprising, ardent and zealous, both as a patriot and soldier. His loss was severely felt by his compatriots in arms, while his country was deprived of the services of one of her most promising and distinguished champions of liberty.

After leaving the field of battle I met him and drank some spirit and water with him. He was animated and sanguine in the result of the conflict for Independence, from the glorious display of valor which had distinguished his countrymen on that memorable day.

He soon observed that the British troops on Bunker Hill appeared in motion, and said he would go and reconnoitre them, to see whether they were coming out over the neck, at the same time directing me to march my company down the road towards Charlestown. We were then at Tufts' house near Ploughed Hill. I immediately made a forward movement to the position he directed me to take, and halted while he proceeded to the old pound, which stood on the site now occupied as a tavern-house not far from the entrance to the neck. After he had satisfied himself that the enemy did not intend to leave their strong posts on the heights, he was returning towards me, and when within twelve or fifteen rods of where I stood, with my company, a random cannon shot, from one of the frigates lying near where the centre of Craigie's bridge now is, passed directly through his body and put to flight one of the most heroic souls that ever animated man.

He leaped two or three feet from the ground, pitched forward, and fell dead upon his face. I had him carried to Medford, where he was interred, with all the respect and honors we could exhibit to the manes of a great and good man. He was my bosom friend; we had grown up together on terms of the greatest intimacy, and I loved him as a brother.

My position in the battle, more the result of accident than any regu-



larity of formation, was on the right of the line at the rail fence, which afforded me a fair view of the whole scene of action.

Our men were intent on cutting down every officer whom they could distinguish in the British line. When any of them discovered one he would instantly exclaim "*there,*" "*see that officer,*" "*let us have a shot at him,*" when two or three would fire at the same moment; and as our soldiers were excellent marksmen and rested their muskets over the fence, they were sure of their object. An officer was discovered to mount near the position of Gen. Howe, on the left of the British line, and ride towards our left; which a column was endeavouring to turn. This was the only officer on horseback during the day, and as he approached the rail fence, I heard a number of our men observe, "*there,*" "*there,*"—"see that officer on horseback"—"let us fire," "no, not yet,"—"wait until he gets to that little knoll,"—"now"—when they fired and he instantly fell dead from his horse. It proved to be Major Pitcairn, a distinguished officer.—The fire of the enemy was so badly directed, I should presume that forty-nine balls out of fifty passed from one to six feet over our head, for I noticed an apple tree, some paces in the rear, which had scarcely a ball in it from the ground as high as a man's head, while the trunk and branches above were literally cut to pieces.

I commanded a full company in action and had only one man killed and five wounded, which was a full average of the loss we sustained, excepting those who fell while sallying from the redoubt, when it was stormed by the British column.

Our total loss in killed was eighty-eight, and as well as I can recollect upwards of two hundred wounded. Our platoon officers carried fuses.

In the course of the action, after firing away what ammunition I had, I walked to the higher ground to the right, in rear of the redoubt, with an expectation of procuring from some of the dead or wounded men who lay there, a supply. While in that situation I saw at some distance a dead man lying near a small locust tree. As he appeared to be much better dressed than our men generally were, I asked a man who was passing me, if he knew who it was. He replied "*it is Dr. Warren.*"

I did not personally know Doctor Warren, but was well acquainted with his public character. He had been recently appointed a General in our service, but had not taken command. He was President of the Provincial Congress then sitting in Watertown, and having heard that there would probably be an action, had come to share in whatever might happen, in the character of a volunteer, and was unfortunatly killed early in the action. His death was a severe misfortune to his friends and country. Posterity will appreciate his worth and do honour to his memory. He is immortalized as a patriot, who gloriously fell in the defence of freedom.

The number of our troops in action as near as I was able to ascertain did not exceed fifteen hundred. The force of the British, at the commencement of the action, was estimated at about the same number, but they were frequently reinforced.

Had our ammunition held out, or had we been supplied with only fifteen or twenty rounds, I have no doubt but that we should have killed and wounded the greatest part of their army, and compelled the remainder to have laid down their arms; for it was with the greatest difficulty that they were brought up the last time. Our fire was so



deadly, particularly to the officers, that it would have been impossible to have resisted it, but for a short time longer.

I did not see a man quit his post during the action, and do not believe a single soldier, who was brought into the field, fled, until the whole army was obliged to retreat, for want of powder and ball.

The total loss of the British was about twelve hundred; upwards of five hundred killed and between six and seven hundred wounded. The Welsh fusileers suffered most severely; they came into action five hundred strong, and all were killed or wounded but eighty-three.

I will mention an extraordinary circumstance to show how far the temporary reputation of a man may effect the minds of all classes of society.

General Putnam had entered our army at the commencement of the revolutionary war, with such an universal popularity as can scarcely now be conceived, even by those who *then* felt the whole force of it, and no one can at this time offer any satisfactory reasons why he was held in such high estimation.

In the battle of Bunker Hill he took post *on the declivity towards Charlestown Neck*, where I saw him on horseback as we passed on to Breed's Hill, with Col. Gerrish by his side. I heard the gallant Col. Prescott (who commanded in the redoubt) observe, after the war, at the table of his Excellency James Bowdoin, then Governor of this Commonwealth, "that he sent three messengers during the battle to Gen. Putnam, requesting him to come forward and take the command, there being no general officer present, and the relative rank of the Colonel not having been settled; but that he received no answer, and his whole conduct was such, both during the action and the retreat, that he ought to have been shot." He remained at or near the top of Bunker Hill until the retreat, with Col. Gerrish by his side; I saw them together when we retreated. He not only continued at that distance himself during the whole of the action, but had a force with him nearly as large as that engaged. No reinforcement of men or ammunition was sent to our assistance; and, instead of attempting to cover the retreat of those who had expended their last shot in the face of the enemy, he retreated in company with Col. Gerrish, and his whole force, without discharging a single musket; but what is still more astonishing, Col. Gerrish was *arrested for cowardice, tried, cashiered, and universally execrated*; while not a word was said against the conduct of Gen. Putnam, whose *extraordinary popularity* alone saved him, not only from *trial*, but even from *censure*. Col. Gerrish commanded a regiment, and should have been at its head. His regiment was not in action although ordered—but as he was in the suit of the General, and appeared to be in the situation of adjutant general, why was he not directed by Putnam to join it, or the regiment sent into action under the senior officer present with it.

When Gen. Putnam's ephemeral and unaccountable popularity subsided or faded away, and the minds of the people were released from the shackles of a delusive trance, the circumstances relating to Bunker Hill were *viewed and talked of in a very different light*, and the selection of the unfortunate Col. Gerrish as a *scape-goat* considered as a *mysterious and inexplicable event*.

I have no private feeling to gratify by making this statement in relation to Gen. Putnam, as I never had any intercourse with him, and was only in the army where he was present, for a few months;



but at this late period, I conceive it a duty to give a fair and impartial account of one of the most important battles during the war of independence, and all the circumstances connected with it so far as I had the means of being correctly informed.

It is a duty I owe to posterity, and the character of those brave officers who bore a share in the hardships of the revolution.

Nothing like discipline had entered our army at that time. Gen. *Ward*, then commander in chief, *remained at his quarters in Cambridge*, and apparently took no *interest or part* in the transactions of the day.

No general officer, except *Putnam*, appeared in sight, nor did any officer assume the command, undertake to form the troops, or give any orders, in the course of the action, that I heard, except Col. *Stark*, who directed his regiment to reserve their fire on the retreat of the enemy, until they advanced again.

Every platoon officer was engaged in discharging his own musket, and left his men to fire as they pleased, but never without a sure aim at some particular object, which was more destructive than any mode which could have been adopted with troops who were not inured to discipline, and never had been in battle, but were still familiar with the use of arms, from boyhood, and each having his peculiar manner of loading and firing, which had been practised upon for years, with the same gun, any attempt to control them by uniformity and system, would have rendered their fires infinitely less fatal to the enemy. Not an officer or soldier of the continental troops *engaged* was in uniform, but were in the plain and ordinary dress of citizens; nor was there an officer on horseback. (Signed) H. DEARBORN.



A

**LETTER**

TO

**MAJOR-GENERAL DEARBORN,**

REPELLING

HIS UNPROVOKED ATTACK ON THE CHARACTER

OF THE LATE

**MAJOR-GENERAL PUTNAM ;**

AND CONTAINING

SOME ANECDOTES RELATING TO

THE

**BATTLE OF BUNKER-HILL,**

NOT GENERALLY KNOWN.

=====

BY

**DANIEL PUTNAM, Esq.**

=====

....." Nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice."

BOSTON :

PUBLISHED BY MUNROE & FRANCIS, NO. 4, CORNHILL.

.....  
1818.



TO

## MAJOR-GENERAL DEARBORN.

SIR,

**I**T was not until the 29th of April, that I saw a publication, entitled, "An Account of the Battle of Bunker-Hill ; written for the Portfolio, at the request of the Editor, by H. Dearborn, Major-General U. S. Army."

This production, as unworthy of the rank you bear, as it is void of truth in some of its most prominent parts, I have read with mingled emotions of indignation and contempt.

What, Sir, could tempt you at this distant period to disturb the ashes of the dead, and thus, in the face of truth, to impose on the public such a miserable libel on the fair fame of a man who "exhausted his bodily strength, and expended the vigor of a youthful constitution in the service of his country"? What, above all things, could induce you to assail the character of *General Putnam*, in a point most of all others, perhaps, unassailable ; and to impeach with cowardice, a man always foremost in danger ? a man, of whom it was proverbially said, as well by British as Provincial officers, that, in a service of great peril and hardship, from 1755 to 1763, "*He dared to lead where any dared to follow?*"

It was from a full conviction of this *truth* in the public mind, and from a confidence in his experience, patriotism, and fidelity to his country, that "*General Putnam entered our army at the commencement of the revolutionary war with such an universal popularity as can scarcely now be conceived, even by those who then felt the whole force of it.*" But, however "*universal,*" however "*extraordinary,*" however "*unaccountable*" may have been this "*popularity*" to a mind jaundiced by envy, and smarting under the sting of popular odium, even while loaded with Executive favor, it was not quite so "*ephemeral,*" nor did it so soon "*fade away,*" as you would now fain make the public believe. On the contrary, it was his lot, while in service, generally to have the post of danger and importance assigned him.

When the British army left Boston, in the spring of 1776, he was ordered to New-York, for the defence of that city ; Major General Lee, who had been sent there the January preceding, having gone on to South-Carolina. I am unwilling to swell this letter by introducing any thing not directly in point ; but, since it can hardly be supposed that the "*extraordinary popularity*" of General Putnam should have so entirely imposed on the discriminating mind of WASHINGTON, after a daily and most familiar intercourse from July to March, as to have led him to commit the defence of that important post to the Coward of Bunker-Hill, I take the liberty of inserting the following



*“ Orders and Instructions for Major-General Putnam.*

“ As there are the best reasons to believe that the Enemy’s fleet and army, which left Nantasket road last Wednesday evening, are bound to New-York, to endeavour to possess that important post, and, if possible, to secure the communication by Hudson’s river to Canada ; it must be our care to prevent them from accomplishing their designs. To that end, I have detached Brigadier-General Heath, with the whole body of Riflemen, and five battalions of the Continental army, by way of Norwich in Connecticut, to New-York. These, by an express arrived yesterday from General Heath, I have reason to believe are in New-York. Six more battalions, under General Sullivan, march this morning by the same route, and will, I hope, arrive there in eight or ten days at the farthest. The rest of the army will immediately follow in divisions, leaving only a convenient space between each division to prevent confusion and want of accommodation upon their march.

“ You will, no doubt, make the best dispatch in getting to New-York. Upon your arrival there, you will assume the command, and immediately proceed in continuing to execute the *plan*, proposed by Major-General Lee, for fortifying that city, and securing the passes of the East and North rivers. If, upon consultation with the Brigadier-Generals and Engineers, any alteration in that *plan* is thought necessary, you are at liberty to make it, cautiously avoiding to break in too much upon his main design, unless where it may be apparently necessary so to do, and that, by the general voice and opinion of the gentlemen abovementioned.

“ You will meet the Quarter-Master-General, Colonel Mifflin, and Commissary-General, [Colonel Trumbull,] at New-York. As these are both men of excellent talents in their different departments, you will do well to give them all the authority and assistance they require : and should a Council of War be necessary, it is my direction they assist at it.

“ Your *long service and experience*, will, better than my particular directions at this distance, point out to you the works most proper to be first raised, and your *perseverance, activity, and zeal*, will lead you (without my recommending it,) to exert every *nerve* to disappoint the enemy’s designs.

“ Devoutly praying that the POWER which has hitherto sustained the American arms, may continue to bless them with the Divine protection, I bid you, Farewell.

“ Given at Head-quarters, in Cambridge, this 29th of March, 1776.  
“ GEO. WASHINGTON.”

The faithful execution of the duties here enjoined were acknowledged by the Commander in Chief after his arrival in New-York, and his thanks were publicly expressed in general orders.

Two days before the Battle of Flat-Bush, in consequence of the sickness of that excellent officer, Major-General Greene, who had commanded on Long-Island, General Putnam was ordered to the command of that post, and assisted in the arduous and complicated difficulties of that masterly retreat.

In the memorable and distressing *flight* of the American army through New-Jersey in 1776, General Putnam was always near—always the friend, the supporter, and confidant of his beloved Chief ; and the moment after reaching the western bank of the Delaware



with the rear of the army, he was ordered to Philadelphia, to fortify and defend that city, against a meditated attack ; concerning which, General Washington thus expresses himself in a letter to General Putnam, dated 23d December, 1776. “ If I had not been well convinced before of the Enemy’s intention to possess themselves of Philadelphia, as soon as the frost should form ice strong enough to support them and their artillery across the Delaware, I have now obtained an intercepted letter, which places the matter beyond a doubt.”

On the evening preceding the surprize of the Hessians at Trenton and while the army was paraded for that object, the *writer* was dispatched by the Commander-in-Chief, with a confidential message to General Putnam, apprizing him of the pending event, and requiring him to be in perfect readiness to move at a moment’s warning wherever directed ; and immediately after the action at *Princeton*, he was ordered to pass the Delaware with what force he had, to *Cros-wix*, and, soon after, to repair to *Princeton*, where he continued thro’ the winter, within sixteen miles of the head-quarters of Lord Cornwallis, and covering a large extent of country with but a handful of men ; and those almost entirely composed of New-Jersey militia, who had but a short time previous, in despair at the aspect of public affairs, received written *protections* from the enemy, which they were now required by proclamation of WASHINGTON to give up, and subscribe allegiance to the United States. It is a fact, that during one whole week of this time, General Putnam had no military force with him at *Princeton*, but a fine independent company from Baltimore, under Captain Yates.

In the spring of 1777 the important post of the Highlands on the Hudson was committed to the defence of General Putnam ; and though the loss of Fort Montgomery was among the disasters of that campaign, yet a court of enquiry, upon mature deliberation, and with a full knowledge of the facts, reported “ *the loss to have been occasioned by want of men, and not by any fault in the commander.*” It evidently was not productive of any diminution of confidence in WASHINGTON ; for the correspondence between him and General Putnam had been diffuse on the subject, in which it was expressly declared by the latter, “ that he would not hold himself responsible for the post committed to his care, with the small number of men left for its defence ;” and when he had determined to erect another fortification for the defence of the river, he left it wholly to the judgment of General Putnam to fix the spot, who decided in favor of *West-Point* ; and, as his Biographer has remarked, “ It is no vulgar praise to say, that to him belongs the glory of having chosen this rock of our military salvation.”

When the *three armies*, which had the preceding year acted separately, united at White Plains under WASHINGTON, Gen. Putnam was called to the command of the right wing.

But why need instances be multiplied to shew, that *he*, who now held the *second* rank in the American army, retained the confidence of *him* who in all points was deservedly acknowledged the *first* ? I forbear to draw a comparison between *his* standing in the estimation of the American Chief, and that of *your’s* in the War department, through a succession of Secretaries, who directed the military operations of the late war. If a retrospect of facts and events, bring not a blush to your cheek, it must be that you are *below* shame.

It has been reserved for you, Sir, after a lapse of *forty-three* years,



and when you probably supposed the grave had closed on all who would contradict your bold assertions, that you have thus, like an assassin in the dark, cowardly meditated this insidious blow, against a character as much above your level, as your basè calumny is beneath a Gentleman and an Officer.

There yet lives one, who not only feels indignant at such unmerited abuse of his father's name, but who has, also, a personal knowledge of most of the military concerns of General Putnam through the revolutionary war, having been the greater part of that time attached to his family, and in possession of his confidence. Regardless of consequences, he will not shun to declare the truth, though it may bear hard on the licentious assertions of Major-General Dearborn.

You commence your work by saying that "*On the 16th of June, 1773, it was determined that a fortified post should be established at, or near Bunker-Hill.*" This determination was made in a Council of War at which General Putnam assisted; and (without asserting what cannot *now* be proved, that the proposition for occupying that post originated with him)—he it was, who went on with the first detachment, and commenced the work—he was the principal agent or "*Engineer,*" who traced the lines of the redoubt, and he continued most, if not all the night with the workmen: at any rate he was on the spot before sun-rising in the morning, and had "*taken his station,*" as you say, "*on the top of Bunker-Hill, where the regiment of Colonel Stark halted a few moments for the rear to come up.*" Here, you roundly assert, he "*remained during the whole action, with nearly as many men as had been engaged in the battle; notwithstanding which, no measures had been taken for reinforcing us, nor was there a shot fired to cover our retreat, nor any movement made to check the advance of the enemy; but on the contrary, General Putnam rode off WITH A NUMBER OF SPADES AND PICK-AXES IN HIS HANDS, AND THE TROOPS THAT HAD REMAINED WITH HIM INACTIVE.*"

When a man undertakes to deviate from *truth*, he should endeavour to veil *falsehood* with at least some *appearance* of probability. Was it, then, *cowardice*, or *treachery*, that kept General Putnam in this disgraceful situation during the battle? If the former, can it be conceived, that under the galling fire of a pursuing enemy, he would thus encumber himself with such a load? "*A NUMBER of spades and pick axes*" would be no very convenient appendage for a flying coward, who had to pass the same "*galling cross fire of the enemy,*" which caused the dauntless Captain Dearborn, but a few hours before to urge Colonel Stark "*to quicken his march.*" If treachery were the cause, is it not surprizing, that he should have retained the confidence of his Country and Commander to the close of the war.

My object, Sir, is to elicit *truth*, and to correct misrepresentation; and if in the course of this investigation it shall be found, that General Putnam was not "*inactive during the whole of the action*" at Bunker-Hill, but that he participated in the *danger* as well as the *glory* of that day—I hope it will detract nothing from your *courage*, whatever it may do from your *veracity*.

It would seem from your statement, that little was done in that action, but by the regiments of Stark and Reed;—that it was these *alone* which lined the "*rail fence,*" and repelled the repeated assaults of British veterans.



But where was the brave Captain Knowlton, with a detachment under his command, who first took possession of the ground—who worked all night in raising the redoubt, and to whom as large a share of glory as to any other force of equal number is justly due? The Honorable Judge Grosvenor, who was a wounded officer of that detachment—who entered the service one grade below you—who left it at the Peace of 1783, your *senior* in rank—and whose character as a citizen or an Officer will never suffer in comparison with your's shall be heard on this subject.

“ *Pomfret, April 30th, 1818.*

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ IN conformity to your request, I now state what came under my observation at the battle of Bunker-Hill, at the commencement of the revolutionary war, and with as much precision as possible, at the distance of time that has intervened.

“ Being under the command of General Putnam, part of our regiment, and a much larger number of Massachusetts troops under Col. Prescott, were ordered to march on the evening of the 16th of June, 1775, to Breed's-Hill, where, under the immediate superintendance of General Putnam, ground was broken and a redoubt formed. On the following day, the 17th, dispositions were made to deter the advance of the enemy, as there was reason to believe an immediate attack was intended. General Putnam during the period was extremely active, and directed principally the operations. All were animated, and their general inspired confidence by his example. The British army, having made dispositions for landing at Morton's-Point, were covered by the fire of shot and shells from Copp's Hill in Boston, which it had opened on our redoubt early in the morning, and continued the greatest part of the day. At this moment a detachment of four lieutenants (of which I was one) and one hundred and twenty men, selected the preceding day from General Putnam's regiment \* under *Capt. Knowlton*, were, by the general ordered to take post at a rail-fence on the left of the breast-work, that ran north from the redoubt to the bottom of Breed's-Hill. This order was promptly executed, and our detachment in advancing to the post, took up one rail-fence and placed it against another, (as a partial cover) nearly parallel with the line of the breast-work, and extended our left nearly to Mystic river. Each man was furnished with *one pound* of *gun-powder* and *forty-eight balls*. This ammunition was received, however, prior to marching to Breed's Hill.

“ In this position our detachment remained until a second division of British troops landed, when they commenced a fire of their *field artillery* of several rounds, and particularly against the rail-fence; then formed in columns, advanced to the attack, displayed in line at about the distance of musket shot, and commenced firing. At this instant our whole lined opened upon the enemy, and so precise and fatal was our fire, that in the course of a short time they gave way and retired in disorder out of musket shot, leaving before us many killed and wounded.

\* The General Officers from Connecticut, in the campaign of 1775, had each a regiment, with lieutenant-colonels under them.



“ There was but a short respite on the part of the British, as their lines were soon filled up and led against us ; when they were met as before, and forced back with great loss.

“ On reinforcements joining the enemy, they made a direct advance on the redoubt, and being successful, which our brave Capt. Knowlton perceiving, ordered a retreat of his men, *in which he was sustained by two companies under the command of Captains Clark and Chester.*

“ The loss in our detachment I presume was nearly equal. Of my own immediate command of *thirty men* and one subaltern, there were *eleven killed and wounded* ; among the latter was myself, though not so severely as to prevent my retiring.

“ *At the “ rail-fence ” there WAS NOT posted any corps save our own under Knowlton, at the time the firing commenced ; nor did I hear of any other being there, till long after the action.* Other troops, it was said, were ordered to join us, but refused doing so.

“ Of the officers on the ground, the most active within my observation were Gen. Putnam, Col. Prescott, and Capt. Knowlton ; but no doubt there were many more equally brave and meritorious, who must naturally have escaped the eye of one attending to his own immediate command.

“ Thus you have a brief statement of my knowledge of the action, without descending to minute particulars. To conclude, it is matter of surprize, even of astonishment to me, my dear Sir, that I am called on to state my opinion of the character of your honored father, Gen. Putnam ; who was ever the first in public life, at the post of honor, and danger ; and who, in his private conduct was excelled by none. Look but at his services in the French and Indian wars from 1755 to 63, and finally at those of the revolution, and you will need no proof to refute the calumny of common defamers.

“ With respect, I am, yours truly,

“ THOS : GROSVENOR.

“ *Colonel Daniel Putnam.*”

This statement from a gentleman of truth and honor, differs *essentially* in many points from that made by you. It contradicts your assertion that there was no *field artillery*, used by the British army. It contradicts the assertion, which to military men would hardly need contradiction, that the position at the “ *rail-fence was taken by the direction of the committee of safety.*” It makes void the insinuation that Stark’s and Reed’s regiments were the only troops posted at the “ *rail-fence ;*” and it even makes it *doubtful* if they were there at all. That they *were not*, when the firing commenced, Col. Grosvenor states clearly, and those who know the modest unassuming deportment of this respectable man, and his cautious character, will be sure that he says nothing positively, but what he knows *fully* and recollects *distinctly*. It shews too, and that pretty clearly, that either Captain Dearborn with his “ *full company*” (consisting at that time of ninety-six) were very fortunate in escaping the British fire, or that they were less exposed to it than Knowlton’s detachment, which had about one third of their number killed and wounded, while of Captain Dearborn’s only *six* were hurt. It shews, if *you were* on the ground, and had the knowledge of facts which you claim to have, that you have done injustice, not only to *Gen. Put-*



nam, but to the companies of *Clark* and *Chester*, both of whom were known to suffer loss in covering the retreat from the "rail-fence." It shews, that orders were given, and dispositions for defence made, by other officers than Col. Stark and Capt. Dearborn. It shews, in fine, that nearly your whole statement of the transactions of that memorable day must have resulted either from *ignorance* or *misrepresentation*.

Let nothing, which is here or elsewhere said, be construed into a wish of the writer, to detract, in any way whatever, from the merits of the veteran Gen. Stark. He honors his name, his patriotism, and his important services to his country, in that war which gave it *Freedom* and *Independence*; and is thankful to that BEING who has given him a heart to rejoice in the honest fame of others, without *coveting* one jot or tittle of their merited applause. He hopes this aged and long devoted servant of the public may be permitted to descend to his grave in peace and honor; and that no ruthless hand may be found, after a rest of more than forty years, to drag before the tribunal of a succeeding generation, and to couple with infamy and dishonor, a NAME so long renowned for valour!

I beg pardon, sir, for this digression—it was an apostrophe not to be resisted, and I now proceed to lay before you further evidence on the subject—for I had scarce gone through the reading of your *ridiculous tale*, before a letter was put into my hand, by Charles H. Hall, Esq. from Col. John Trumbull, of New-York,—an officer of distinction in the revolutionary war, and now a celebrated historical painter, employed in his profession by the government of the United States.

As this letter affords some evidence of the "station" of Gen. Putnam, during the action; and does not *fully* coincide with your account of the death of the immortal WARREN, I shall, by his permission, make use of it in this place.

" *New-York, 30th March, 1818.*

" DEAR SIR,

" Mr. Hall has just shewn me the Port-Folio of last month, containing an account of the Battle of Bunker Hill, which appears to have been written for the mere purpose of introducing a most unjustifiable attack upon the memory of your excellent father.

" It is strange that men cannot be contented with their own honest share of fame, without attempting to detract from that of others:—but, after the attempts which have been made to diminish the immortal reputation of WASHINGTON, who shall be surprized, or who repine at this enviable attendant on human greatness.

" In all cases like this, perhaps, the most unquestionable testimony is that which is given by an enemy.

" In the summer of 1786 I became acquainted in London, with Col. *John Small*, of the British army, who had served in America many years, and had known General Putnam intimately during the war of Canada from 1756 to 1763. From him, I had the two following anecdotes respecting the battle of Bunker Hill;—I shall nearly repeat his words:—Looking at the Picture which I had then almost completed, he said: ' *I don't like the situation in which you have placed my old friend PUTNAM; you have not done him justice. I wish you*



would alter that part of your Picture, and introduce a circumstance which actually happened, and which I can never forget. When the British troops advanced the second time to the attack of the redoubt, I, with the other officers, was in front of the line to encourage the men: we had advanced very near the works undisturbed, when an irregular fire, like a feu-de-joie was poured in upon us; it was cruelly fatal. The troops fell back, and when I looked to the right and left, I saw not one officer standing;—I glanced my eye to the enemy, and saw several young men levelling their pieces at me; I knew their excellence as marksmen, and considered myself gone. At that moment my old friend PUTNAM rushed forward, and striking up the muzzles of their pieces with his sword, cried out, “For God’s sake, my lads, don’t fire at that man—I love him as I do my brother.” We were so near each other that I heard his words distinctly. He was obeyed; I bowed, thanked him, and walked away unmolested.

“The other anecdote relates to the death of General Warren.

“At the moment when the troops succeeded in carrying the redoubt, and the Americans were in full retreat, Gen. Howe (who had been hurt by a spent ball which bruised his ankle,) was leaning on my arm. He called suddenly to me: “Do you see that elegant young man who has just fallen? Do you know him?” I looked to the spot towards which he pointed—“Good God, Sir, I believe it is my friend WARREN.” “Leave ME then instantly—run—keep off the troops, save him if possible.”—I flew to the spot, “My dear friend,” I said to him, “I hope you are not badly hurt:”—he looked up, seemed to recollect me, smiled and died! A musket-ball had passed through the upper part of his head.”

“Col. Small had the character of an honorable upright man, and could have no conceivable motive for deviating from truth in relating these circumstances to me; I therefore believe them to be true.

“You remember, my dear Sir, the viper biting the file. The character of your father for courage, humanity, generosity, and integrity is too firmly established, by the testimony of those who *did know him*, to be tarnished by the breath of one who confesses that he *did not*.

“Accept, my dear Sir, this feeble tribute to your father’s memory, from one who *knew him, respected him, loved him*—and who wishes health and prosperity to you and all the good man’s posterity.

“JOHN TRUMBULL.

“Daniel Putnam, Esq.”

I shall make no comment on the first anecdote by Col. Small, except that the circumstances were related by General Putnam without any essential alteration, soon after the Battle; and that there was an interview of the parties on the lines between Prospect and Bunker-Hill, at the request of Col. Small, not long afterwards.

Respecting the death of WARREN, there is a trifling disagreement. In the one case, we are to understand, that, after having expended your ammunition—during the height of conflict, and while the redoubt was still possessed by the Americans, you left your post, and deliberately traversed the field of slaughter, to rifle the dying and the dead



of such portion of their "gill-cup" of powder, as they had not been spared to use, when—you saw Warren *dead* by a small locust tree!

In the other case, it is asserted, (with something like the appearance of truth indeed,) that he fell at the *moment* the redoubt was gained by the British—that he was seen by Gen. Howe to fall, and was yet *alive* when spoken to by Col. Small, *after* the retreat of the Americans.

Both statements *cannot* be true. You, perhaps, better than I, *know* to which the truth belongs.

You have undertaken, sir, to inform *many* who never saw Gen. Putnam, and *some* probably, who never before heard his name, of the public estimation in which he was held at the "*commencement of the revolutionary war*"; and it is no trivial consolation to the writer, after the unworthy means you have used to defame his character, that he is able to shew from an authentic source, in what light he was viewed at the *close of that war*, by HIM who had the best means of *knowing*, and, of all other men, the best talents for judging of the merits and services of officers under his command.

Let the "FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY" be heard—for tho' dead, he yet speaketh, and his testimony will be respected when the *name* and *character* of the subject of this address, shall be no longer remembered.

"Head-Quarters, 2d June, 1783.

"DEAR SIR,

"Your favor of the 20th of May, I received with much pleasure. For I can assure you, that, among the many worthy and meritorious officers with whom I have had the happiness to be connected in service through the course of this war, and from whose cheerful assistance in the various and trying vicissitudes of a complicated contest, *the name of a PUTNAM* is not forgotten; nor will it be, but with that stroke of time which shall obliterate from my mind the remembrance of all those toils and fatigues through which we have struggled, for the preservation and establishment of the rights, liberties, and independence of our country.

"Your congratulations on the happy prospect of peace and independent security, with their attendant blessings to the United States, I receive with great satisfaction; and beg you will accept a return of my congratulations to you, on this auspicious event—an event, in which, great as it is in itself, and glorious as it will probably be in its consequences, you have a right to *participate largely*, from the distinguished part you have contributed towards its attainment.

"But, while I contemplate the greatness of the object for which we have contended, and felicitate you on the happy issue of our toils and labours, which have terminated with such general satisfaction; I lament that you should feel the ungrateful returns of a country \* in whose service you have exhausted your bodily strength, and expended the vigor of a youthful constitution. I wish, however, that your expectations of returning liberality may be verified. I have a hope they may; but should they not, your case will not be a singular one. Ingratitude has been experienced in all ages, and *republics* in particular have ever been famed for the exercise of that unnatural and *sordid vice*.

\* Alluding to the public dissatisfaction in Connecticut, and the clamor about half pay and commutation.



“The secretary at war, who is now here, informs me that you have ever been considered as entitled to full pay since your absence from the field, † and that you will be considered in that light till the close of the war; at which period you will be equally entitled to the same emoluments of half pay or commutation as other officers of your rank. The same opinion is also given by the paymaster-general, who is now with the army, empowered by Mr. Morris for the settlement of all their accounts, and who will attend to your’s whenever you shall think proper to send on for that purpose; which it will probably be best for you to do in a short time.

“I anticipate with pleasure the day, (and I trust not far off,) when I shall quit the busy scenes of military employment, and retire to the more tranquil walks of domestic life. In that, or whatever other situation Providence may dispose of my future days, THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE MANY FRIENDSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS I HAVE HAD THE HAPPINESS TO CONTRACT WITH THE GENTLEMEN OF THE ARMY, WILL BE ONE OF MY MOST GRATEFUL REFLECTIONS.

“Under this contemplation, and impressed with the sentiments of benevolence and regard, I commend you, my dear Sir, my other friends, and, with them, the interests and happiness of our dear country, to the KEEPING AND PROTECTION OF ALMIGHTY GOD.

“I have the honour to be, &c. &c.

“GEORGE WASHINGTON.

“To the Hon. Major-General Putnam.”

Here, Sir, is unequivocal evidence, either that WASHINGTON was a man of *guile*, who said what he believed not, and commended whom he approved not; or that, penetrating as his mind was, it still remained fettered with “*the shackles of a delusive trance*,” which “*the PEOPLE were released from, when General Putnam’s ephemeral and unaccountable popularity subsided, or faded away*” !!

But when did this happen? When were “*the minds of the People released from the shackles of this delusive trance*”? When were “*the circumstances relating to Bunker-Hill VIEWED and TALKED of in a very different light*”? When was “*the unfortunate Colonel Gerrish*” considered “*as the scape-goat*” on whose head was laid the cowardice of General Putnam? His name has rested in peace and honour <sup>now</sup> thirty years, undisturbed by the sacrilegious pen of calumny; and till your “*mysterious and inexplicable account of the Battle of Bunker-Hill*” found its way into the *Port-folio*, was the public sentiment changed concerning him. Why else, was this publication so imperiously called for, that it became a “*DUTY YOU OWED TO POSTERITY AND THE CHARACTER OF THE BRAVE OFFICERS WHO BORE A SHARE IN THE HARDSHIPS OF THE REVOLUTION*,” to publish such a disgraceful libel, and that too, “*without any private feelings to gratify*”?

Sir—this veil is too thin to hide the malignity of your heart, or the selfishness of your views. The *truth*, however you may strive to disguise it, is this:—As “*Commander in Chief*,” your “*bed*” of military honor “*is shorter, than that a man can stretch himself on it*”—and

† General Putnam had a paralytic stroke in the year 1780, (occasioned by long exposure to extreme cold weather,) which disabled him from service ever after.



the "covering" for disgrace, "narrower than that you can wrap yourself in it."—Hence, resort has been had to a fictitious tale of the Battle of Bunker Hill, coupled with which, it is questionable if Captain Dearborn's name was ever found, till you made yourself the hero of your own romance.

You might have sounded the trumpet of your own fame undisturbed by me, till you had wearied yourself with the blast.—But 'tis the command of GOD that we honor our Father, and "while I live, I'll speak," when any shall wantonly, and maliciously, endeavour to cast dishonor on his name.

That you have done so, is the sole cause of drawing this letter from one, who lives in retirement, without any immediate concern in public affairs, nor any wish regarding them, but that the country of his birth and best affections may long continue to enjoy the blessing of HEAVEN in such wise and virtuous councils, as will, by a just dispensation of the benefits of a free government, ultimately unite all hearts in its support:—from one, who has no personal knowledge of you; and who, though constantly with the army of the revolution from 1775 to '80, hardly recollects to have heard your name, till announced at the head of the war department. His impressions of your character from that time to the present, have been drawn from *public opinion*, and not from *party prejudice* or *private unimosity*. It was not necessary in this letter, to state these impressions *fully*; nor has it in any case been done, but by comparison with the character you have unjustly assailed, and in seeking a motive for the cruel assault.

If, in doing this, any thing has escaped his pen bordering on severity, the *provocation* must be his excuse;—and where *that* is impartially weighed, the blame, if any, will rest, not on him, but on yourself.

There is yet one more passage to notice, and I have done. I allude to the declaration which you ascribe to Col. Prescott, as having been made "at the table of the late Governor Bowdoin."

It is not possible for me to *prove* that Colonel Prescott did not make such a declaration. But I *have proved*, that what you allege to have been said by him *could not be true*. It is well known that Colonel Prescott sustained a high and honourable reputation; and that he was well acquainted with General Putnam, and must have known the opinions which the distinguished men of the revolution entertained of his individual and military character. It must, therefore, be left to the *public* to decide, whether it is most probable that Col. Prescott made the assertion which you have imputed to him; or whether, like many other representations you have made, it has no foundation in fact.

Many other mis-statements in your *book* might be noticed and refuted; but I am weary and disgusted with the pollution of its pages, and, as my sole object has been to vindicate a slandered character, I hasten to give you the name of

DANIEL PUTNAM.

Brooklyn, Connecticut, 4th May, 1818.









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