



The Command in the Battle of Bunker Hill

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EXCERPT:

The preparation of a History of Charlestown—the occupation of leisure hours—led to large collections relative to the military events which occurred in the neighborhood of Boston at the commencement of the war of the revolution; but as a full account of them did not appropriately belong to so local a publication, and as no work had been issued containing a narrative, in much detail, of these interesting events, it was thought best to prepare the volume now before the public entitled History of the Siege of Boston. The old subject of the battle of Bunker Hill was so directly in my way that it could not be avoided; and as an apology for adding another to the narratives of this event, I determined to construct it, as much as possible, from contemporary materials.

In a faithful history of the battle, the question of command cannot properly be avoided. If it is not of the importance which many attach to it, still it is a curious question, about which there is much interest. It may be well, in the outset, to state clearly the matter at issue. The point is, was there a general officer detached to exercise a general command in the battle? There is great incongruity in the statements relative to this. It is stated (by Dr Whitney) that the detachment that fortified Breed's Hill was first put under the command of Gen. Putnam, that with it he took possession of this hill, and "ordered the battle from beginning to end;" or as another (Hon. John Lowell) states it, "General Putnam was detached for the purpose of fortifying it (Bunker Hill,) and Colonel Prescott was placed under his orders." On the other hand it is stated, that the orders to fortify Bunker Hill were given to Colonel Prescott, that the redoubt was raised by troops under his command, and that at no time during the whole affair did he act under, or receive an order from, a general officer. These statements are conflicting and cannot both be true. It is these rival claims as to Putnam and Prescott that constitute the delicacy and difficulty of the question.

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