

John Trumbull Issue Depicts Peter Salem

Peter Salem

Little is known of Peter's early life. It is known that he was born as a slave in Framingham, Massachusetts sometime around the year 1750. Peter's original owner was Jeremiah Belknap. Jeremiah sold Peter to Lawson Buckminster who allowed Salem to enlist in the Massachusetts Minutemen (militia). In exchange for enlisting in the army, Peter received his freedom. Peter served in the Colonial Army until the end of the war. He also fought at Concord and at Saratoga.

Peter Salem has been credited with killing Major Pitcairn the leader of the British forces storming the hill. According to the story, the colonial troops were near defeat, and British Major John Pitcairn ordered them to surrender. Salem then stepped forward and shot

Pitcairn. The British were temporarily stunned, and the Americans were able to retreat. Pitcairn later died of the wound.

After the war Peter Salem made a living weaving baskets. He died in 1816.

The image on the stamp was taken from lower right hand corner of a painting by John Trumbull titled, "[The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill](#)"

The Battle of Bunker Hill

One of the most important colonial victories early in the U.S. War of Independence was the Battle of Bunker Hill, which was fought on June 17, 1775.

Shortly after the battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, colonial troops from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island assembled in the vicinity of Boston to stop a British army of 5,000 or more stationed there. General Ward, Commander-in-Chief of the Massachusetts Militia served as the overall commander of the New England troops.

There were two obvious points from which Boston was vulnerable to artillery fire: Dorchester Heights, and two hills located in Charleston; Bunker's and Breed's. (Charleston is now part of Boston.) They are both located about a quarter of a mile across the Charles River from the north shore of Boston. By the middle of June, hearing that the British general, Thomas Gage was about to occupy one of the hills, the colonials decided to fortify it. Colonel William Prescott and his men completed and strengthened a redoubt atop Breed's Hill despite a cannonade from British ships in the harbor and from a battery across the river in north Boston.

Prescott had instructions to establish his position on Bunker's Hill. For reasons that are still unclear, he constructed his fortifications on nearby Breed's Hill.)

General Gage dispatched about 2,300 troops under Major General William Howe against Prescott. Landing without opposition under artillery protection, the British were stopped by heavy fire from the

colonial troops barricaded behind rail fences that had been stuffed with grass, hay, and brush. On the second or third advance, however, the attackers carried the redoubt and forced the surviving defenders, mostly exhausted and weaponless, to flee. The British lost over 1000 soldiers in the battle compared to the American losses of 450 troops.

The British did not follow up on their costly victory at Breed's Hill and subsequently after General Washington took over the colonial command in Boston two weeks later, he fortified Dorchester Heights and compelled the British to evacuate Boston.

Source:

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#)