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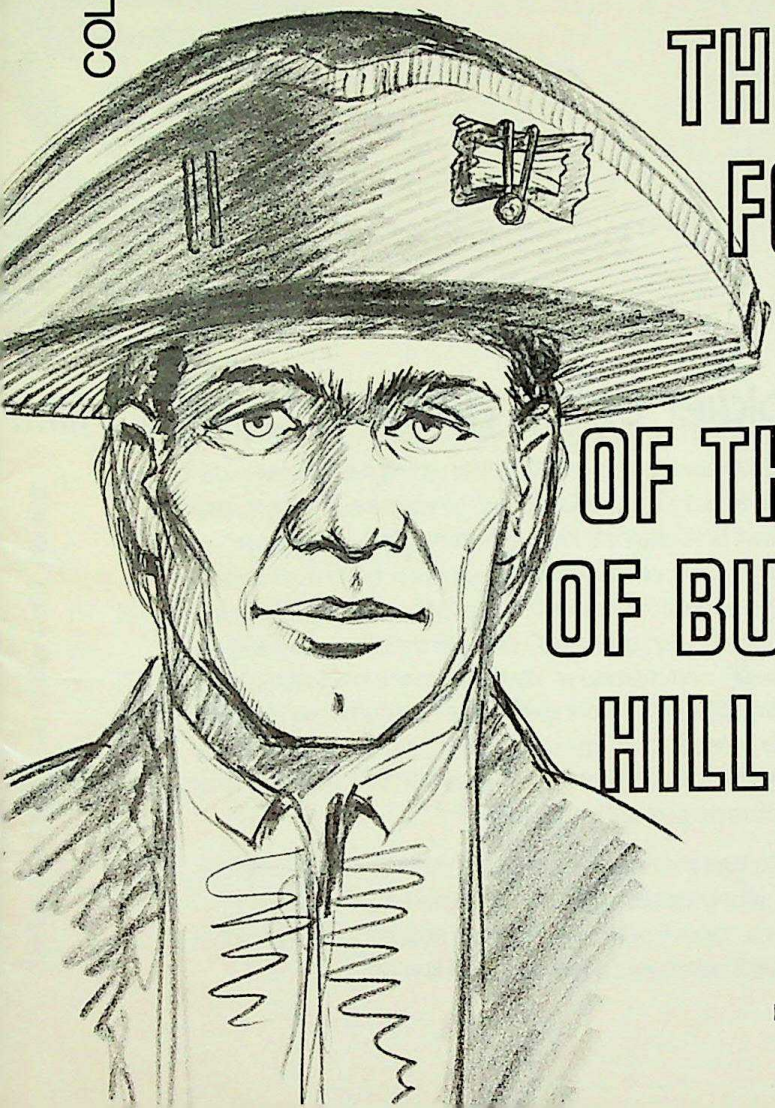
MAY 1975

COLONEL RICHARD GRIDLEY, FIRST CHIEF ENGINEER



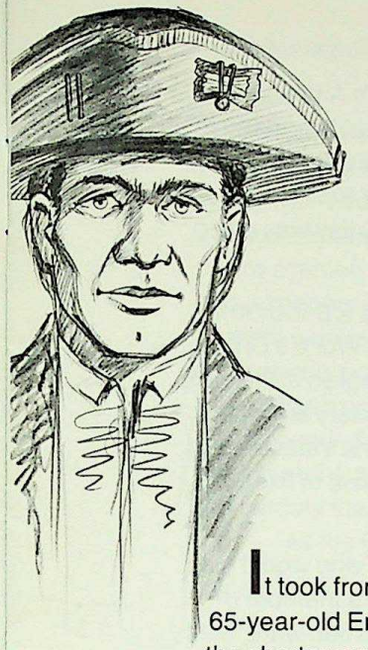
THE FORGOTTEN SOLDIER OF THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL...

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BICENTENNIAL INFORMATION PACKET

The Forgotten Soldier of the Battle of Bunker Hill...

THERE IS A CASTLE IN YOUR PAST SERIES



It took from dusk to dawn the night of 16-17 June 1775 at Breed's Hill for a 65-year-old Engineer and Artillery officer veteran of three colonial wars to prepare the charter members of the infant Army Corps of Engineers for their baptism under fire and to establish their proud tradition and heritage as fighters and builders. The veteran was Colonel Richard Gridley, retired from the British Army on half-pay, a major general of Massachusetts Volunteers, and selected by General George Washington to be the first Chief Engineer of the Colonial Army. He was tall, of commanding presence, with "a constitution like iron." He was "honest, truthful, temperate, and free from every vice." Called by Washington "One of the greatest engineers of the age," he was a man of curious contrasts. He has been described as cosmopolitan and provincial; a King's servant and rebel; a scholar and ironmonger; and a pacifist and swordbearer.

Destiny chose Gridley to have an important part of his career centered on Boston. He began his military engineering studies under the British officer planning the fortifications of Boston Harbor before the French and Indian Wars. It was information he would put to good use at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

The military action that brought him fame on two continents—North America and Europe—was the siege of Louisburg, France's American Gibraltar at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. The British and Colonial forces won, and Gridley was rewarded with several honors, including a captaincy in the regular British Army. When the French were thought to retaliate by attacking Boston, Gridley was given the mission of fortifying Boston.

Gridley rose in rank during the wars of the mid-1700s and retired as a British Army Colonel of Engineers, after taking key roles in three wars. He was Wolfe's Chief Engineer at the fall of Quebec. His tutoring by the outstanding English military engineer of the Vauban school allowed Gridley to test the French military engineer's theories at the siege of Louisburg, and Gridley became proficient in the Vauban art of mapping and planning military construction for attack and defense of fixed fortified places.

He had the opportunity also to meet and work with Colonial patriots who would play important roles in the Revolution. For instance, Paul Revere was a member of Gridley's regiment in the French and Indian Wars. Gridley also, between wars, built several civil works projects, beginning with the famed Boston's Long Wharf. He added to the tradition of the working military engineer by driving the first pilings.

British Prime Minister William Pitt the Elder made Gridley the Chief Engineer of Wolfe's Army attacking Quebec, and when Gridley retired Pitt honored him for his outstanding services by granting him the Magdelen Islands, with a valuable seal and cod fishery, half-pay as a British officer, and 3,000 acres of land in New Hampshire. It would be expected that with such honors and fortune at stake he would join the Tories in Massachusetts when the break came with George III, as did so many of his contemporaries. But he early joined the Patriot forces, with the rank of Major General. His agent in England wrote, asking which side he would fight for. Gridley replied: "I shall fight for justice and my country." He thus lost all his British honors.

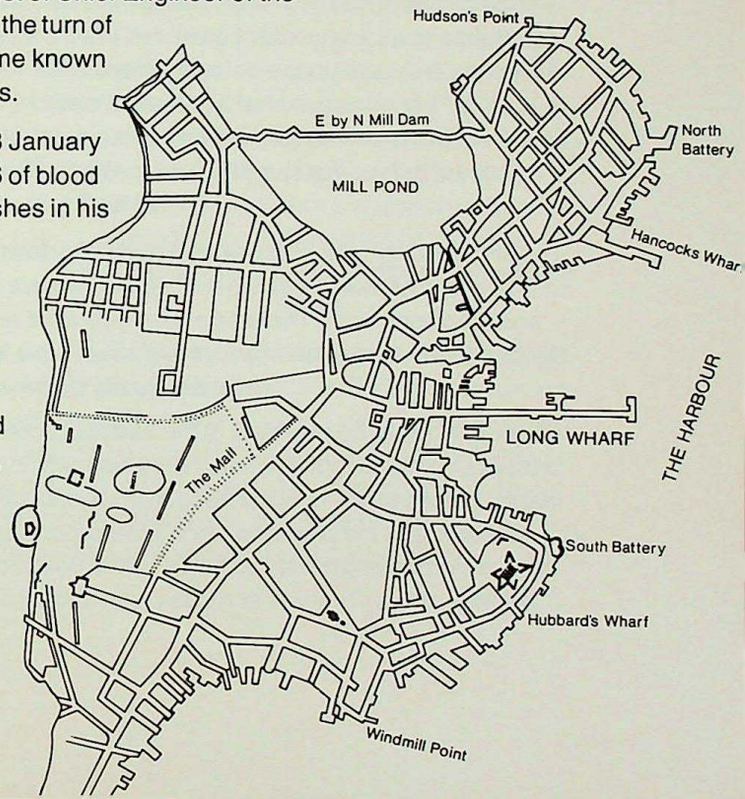
Before the Revolution Gridley also produced Ordnance for the Colonial Army for the French and Indian Wars. He started the New Forge at Hardware, Massachusetts, in the Masspoag Pond, from which he procured iron to cast the first cannon and mortars produced in this country.

When the Revolutionary War started, the colonies were singularly deficient in military engineers. Except for the few individuals who had served at Louisburg, Lake George, Ticonderoga, Crown Point, and Quebec, and had thus gained some practical experience in the construction, attack, and defense of fortified places, there were scarcely any engineering skills or talents in the colonies. Of those that had this experience, most turned Tory. Thus. for the Patriots, there were only two soldiers with outstanding military engineering experience: George Washington, and Gridley. When Washington was chosen as commander-in-chief, he recommended Gridley for the post of Chief Engineer of the Continental Army. It was not until the turn of the century that this office became known as the Chief of Engineers.

Gridley was born in Boston on 3 January 1710 and he died 21 June 1796 of blood poisoning from the cutting of bushes in his garden.

In May 1775 when Gridley was made a Major General of Massachusetts Artillery he said that he had never seen an army so overstocked with generals and so poorly provided with privates,

THE TOWN OF
BOSTON



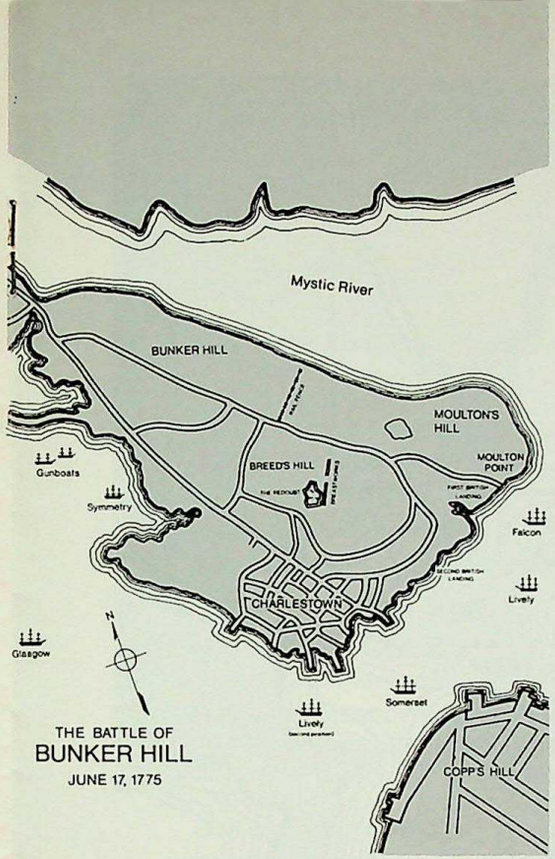
and he refused the general officer's commission. Congress authorized an adjutant at $125 a month, a commissary general, a quartermaster general, and a paymaster general at $80 a month, and a Chief Engineer at $60 a month.

At Bunker Hill, Gridley had some regrets that it was he who, 20 years before, planned the fortifications at Castle William in Boston Harbor that the British made their rallying point for attacking Breed's and Bunker Hills.

On the 16th of June 1775 Gridley, with characteristic verve, took command of the fortifications on Breed's Hill, despite the arguments of many of the other officers, none of whom had any engineering experience, and few who had any military experience at all. He quickly convinced them that with the situation as it was, there was only one course open—to fortify Breed's Hill. He personally, in the dark, after the Patriots' forces assembled in the area, stretched a white tape 10 rods long on Breed's Hill to mark the forward wall of the redoubt. The terminals he reversed, one turned to face the shoreline of the Mystic River, the other looking toward Charles Town.

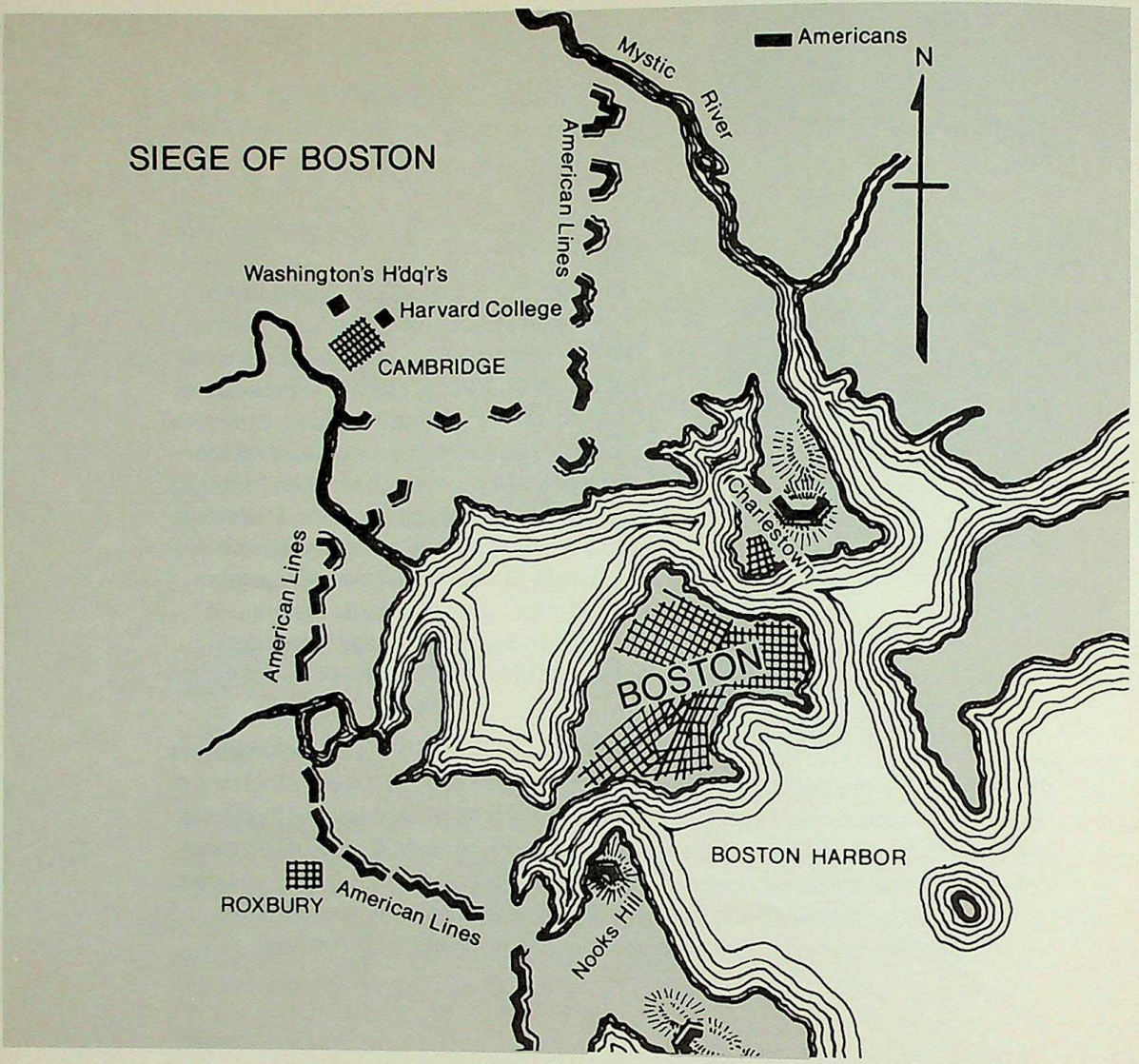
The engineering instructions were simple: Go down about four feet, pile spoil forward of the tape to make the parapet. Then there were the embrasures, gun platforms, and emplacements. The soldiers—there were no Engineer enlisted men in the Revolutionary Army—all infantrymen, would have to work fast, in relays, to make the defenses ready before dawn.

In the darkness the colonials at the redoubt could not see the British ships in the water below them, but it seemed they had only to stretch out a hand to touch their masts. Voices of ship's watches rose from just over the growing parapet. But there was no alarm, and the sweating colonial reliefs changed regularly without slacking the pace of the building to the "all's well" of the British decks, who thus kept time for the colonial reliefs. Timbers and guns were brought up and placed in the redoubt.



At dawn, the British ships became visible, then, as the British saw what happened on Breed's Hill, the British ships began to fire at the raw earth. A flurry of colonials broke out of the redoubt—all who had not been under fire before—but Gridley ran the length of the parapet shouting assurances, with Prescott and the other officers, at his heels. There were no casualties among the colonials, and as they saw Gridley calmly walk the parapet under fire, confidence was restored. In another day, Gridley would have been considered for a Medal of Honor for this exploit alone.

The British landed their troops a half-mile from the redoubt. As they began moving up the slope and the earth at Gridley's feet began to fly in little puffs, Gridley waited until the British were 20 yards away and then gave the order to fire the artillery, which was also under his command. The British attack collapsed. It was customary in the state of the art of war at the time for the engineer also to be the artillerist, and the result of the British attack demonstrated the feasibility of making Gridley both Chief Engineer and Chief Artillerist.



In the second attack Gridley was wounded in the leg, as he went along the Colonial line, and he was taken from the battle zone.

Gridley, despite his advanced age, and slow to recover from the wound, despite his "iron constitution," advised General Washington on the possibility of forcing the British to give up Boston. Washington gave the job of turning the British out to Gridley. Eleven months later Gridley stood on Nook's Hill and watched the British regulars in their immaculate formations evacuate Boston with their 11,000-man army.

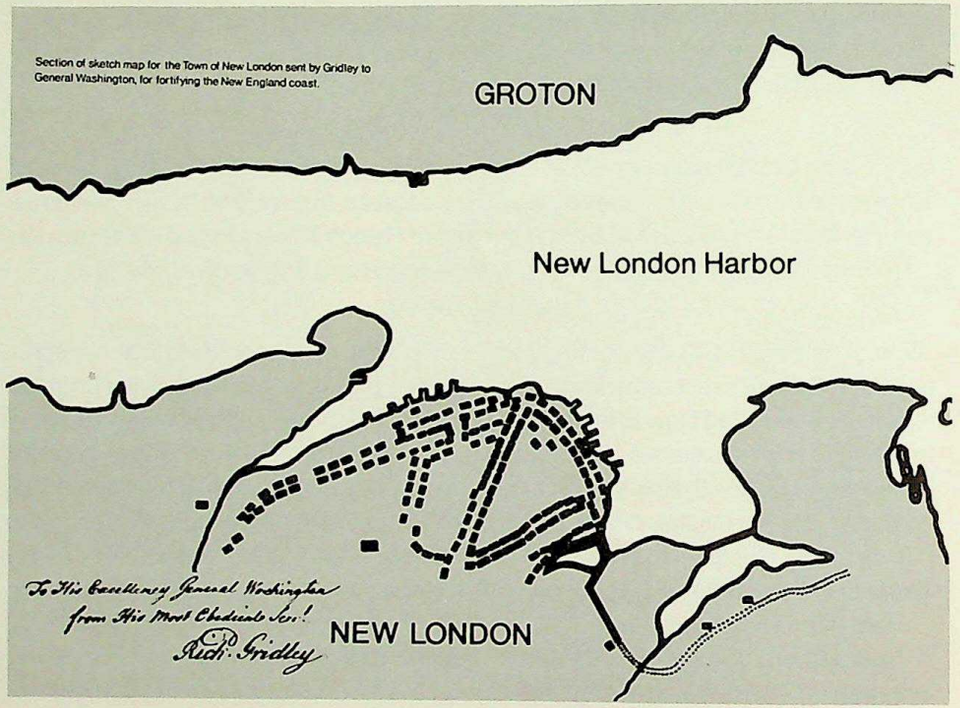
By the time Gridley died in 1796 at 85 years of age, he had seen the Army Corps of Engineers formally established by the U.S. Congress, in the form of a staff and three companies of sappers and miners. A number of French officers joined to serve in the Engineers, bringing with them the experience and education acquired in European armies.

One of Gridley's last tasks for the Continental Army, at the advice of Washington, based on Gridley's recommendations, was to build fortifications on the New England coast. These saved New England and probably guaranteed American success by bringing French assistance after Saratoga. Gridley's reputation as an Engineer may have influenced the British against making a major assault on New England from the Atlantic; for the Gridley-directed fortifications which forced the retirement of the British from Boston had created as much astonishment in London as his earlier exploits at Louisburg and Quebec. A British report on Boston said the British Army had been imprisoned in Boston after Bunker Hill, and described the Patriot's "extraordinary works" and the "fire of their batteries which rendered the place untenable." The batteries were placed by Gridley, in his capacity as Chief Artillerist.

British General Howe, commanding at Boston, said: "The Rebels have done more in one night than my whole army would have done in a month."

Aside from such reports and incidental comments in histories of the period, there is no published work on the career of Colonel Richard Gridley. Of all the heroes of the Revolution of similar stature, Gridley is the only one of whom a pictorial likeness does not exist.

Truly, he is the forgotten soldier of the Revolution. . . .



New London Harbor

I Richard Gridley ——— do acknowledge the United States of *America* to be free, independent and sovereign States, and declare that the People thereof owe no Allegiance to *George* the Third, King of *Great-Britain*; and I renounce, refuse and abjure any Allegiance or Obedience to him; and I do swear, that I will, to the Utmost of my Power, support, maintain and defend the said United States, against the said King *George* the Third, his Heirs and Successors, and his and their Abettors, Assistants and Adherents, and will serve the said United States in the Office of Chief Engineer which I now hold, with Fidelity, according to the best of my Skill and Understanding. So help me God.

Richd. Gridley

Head-Quarters, Boston Mar. 7. 1776

PERSONALLY appeared Richard Gridley Esqr. Chief Engineer in the Army of the United States and took the above Oath by him subscribed,

Before me,

W Heath