

6. NORTH BATTERY/BRISTOL VIEW

THIS IS ONE OF THE OLDEST AREAS OF THE FORT. IT HAS A COMMANDING VIEW OF BRISTOL FERRY AND THE MARITIME TRAFFIC ON NARRAGANSETT BAY.

LAFAYETTE AND ROCHAMBEAU CONSIDERED THIS POINT TO BE CRUCIAL TO COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE MAINLAND.

7. MAIN GATE: FRENCH CONSTRUCTION

THE FORTIFICATIONS AT BUTTS HILL WERE CALLED "WORKS" FROM 1776 TO 1779 WHEN THE BRITISH ABANDONED AQUIDNECK ISLAND. A FORT HAS TO BE FULLY ENCLOSED AND THAT DID NOT HAPPEN AT BUTTS HILL UNTIL THE FRENCH COMBINED THE SEPARATE WORKS FACING THE NORTH AND FACING THE SOUTH INTO ONE ENCLOSURE. THE WORK WAS A COMBINED EFFORT OF FRENCH ENGINEERS, AMERICAN MILITIA AND THE FIRST RHODE ISLAND REGIMENT.

8. BUTTS HILL FORT GREEN: RODERICK TERRY PRESERVES THE FORT

IN 1782 THE CANNONS AND OTHER FORTIFICATIONS WERE MOVED TO OTHER SITES. THE EARTHWORKS REMAINED BECAUSE THE GROUND WAS NOT SUITABLE FOR FARMING. IN THE 1920S THERE WERE PLANS TO LEVEL THE FORT FOR HOUSE LOTS. DR. RODERICK TERRY BOUGHT THE PROPERTY AND TURNED IT OVER TO THE NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOR PRESERVATION.

TODAY THE PROPERTY IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE TOWN OF PORTSMOUTH. THE BUTTS HILL FORT RESTORATION COMMITTEE AIMS TO FULFILL REV. TERRY'S MANDATE TO PRESERVE, KEEP AND MAINTAIN THE PROPERTY AS A MONUMENT TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

TIMELINE

1776 - 1779: BRITISH OCCUPATION OF ISLAND.

AUGUST 9, 1778: BRITISH TROOPS RETREAT FROM BUTTS HILL (WINDMILL HILL).

AUGUST 11, 1778: AMERICAN TROOPS AT BUTTS HILL.

AUGUST 29 - 30, 1778: BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND GEN. SULLIVAN USES BUTTS HILL AS HEADQUARTERS.

AUGUST 31, 1778: BRITISH RETURN TO "WINDMILL HILL" (BUTTS HILL).

OCTOBER 1779: BUTTS HILL RETURNED TO AMERICAN CONTROL.

JULY 1780: COL. GREENE'S 1ST RI REGIMENT AS PART OF THE "RHODE ISLAND SIX MONTHS CONTINENTAL BATTALION," WORKED WITH FRENCH MASONS AND MASSACHUSETTS MILITIAS TO COMPLETE FORT STRUCTURE.

NOV. 1780: COL. GREENE'S RI 1ST REGIMENT REMAINED AT BUTTS HILL TO WORK ON THE FORT AFTER THE REMAINDER OF THE CONTINENTAL BATTALION JOINED FRENCH TROOPS IN MARCHING TO JOIN WASHINGTON'S ARMY.

AUGUST 25, 1781: PROPOSAL MADE TO TRANSFER CANNONS, CARRIAGES AND AMMUNITION FROM BUTTS HILL FORT TO OTHER RHODE ISLAND FORTIFICATIONS.

1782 BUTTS HILL FORT WAS ABANDONED.

1900 HOUSE LOTS FIRST OFFERED FOR SALE.

1920s -1930s. – RODERICK TERRY CONVEYED PROPERTY TO NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

1968: FORT CONVEYED TO TOWN OF PORTSMOUTH

BUTTS HILL FORT TOUR

2025



Berthier Map 1780-81

AN INTRODUCTION:

WE WELCOME YOU TO BUTTS HILL FORT. THE GOAL OF THIS GUIDE IS TO HELP VISITORS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY SEE WHEN THEY COME TO THE FORT. BUTTS HILL EVOLVED OVER TIME. THE BRITISH CALLED THIS AREA WINDMILL HILL BECAUSE IT WAS A TRADITIONAL SITE FOR A WINDMILL. THE AMERICANS CALLED THIS AREA "BUTTS HILL" AFTER THE JOHN BUTTS FAMILY THAT HELD THE LAND WHEN THE WAR BEGAN. THE OUTLINES WE SEE NOW DATE FROM THE IMPROVEMENTS MADE BY THE FRENCH (WITH THE HELP OF AMERICANS) IN 1780-1781.

1. SITE OF BRITISH BARRACKS:

IN DECEMBER OF 1776, THE BRITISH OCCUPIED AQUIDNECK ISLAND AND TOOK CONTROL OF THE HILL. IN RESPONSE TO AMERICAN THREATS, BRITISH GENERAL PIGOT ORDERED THE CONSTRUCTION OF VARIOUS EARTHWORKS. PORTSMOUTH RESIDENTS WERE PRESSED INTO SERVICE BUILDING THE BARRACKS THAT WENT WITH THE BATTERY.

2. SW CORNER:

ON AUGUST 9, 1778 THE RHODE ISLAND CAMPAIGN TO TAKE AQUIDNECK ISLAND BACK FROM THE BRITISH BEGAN WITH THE AMERICANS TAKING CONTROL OF FORTIFICATIONS IN NORTH PORTSMOUTH. MAJOR GENERAL JOHN SULLIVAN USED BUTTS HILL AS HIS COMMAND POST.

3. SW BATTERY GREEN

THE AMERICANS FORTIFIED THE SOUTH SO THEY COULD DEFEND AGAINST THE BRITISH COMING FROM NEWPORT. SULLIVAN COULD MONITOR ACTIVITY UP EAST AND WEST MAIN ROADS DURING THE BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND ON AUGUST 29, 1778.

4. VIEW OF SOUTHERN BATTERY

FROM THIS POINT YOU CAN VIEW THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SOUTHERN RAMPART AND THE DITCH AROUND THE FORT AND BASTIONS. THIS PIECE OF THE RAMPARTS REMAINS UNCHANGED FROM WHAT WAS CONSTRUCTED BY THE BRITISH.

5. INSIDE EASTERN SIDE OF FORT

FROM HERE THE BRITISH AND AMERICANS HAD AN EXCELLENT VIEW OF ACTION COMING FROM TIVERTON VIA HOWLAND FERRY. AUGUST 30, 1778 THE AMERICANS MADE A SUCCESSFUL RETREAT ACROSS HOWLAND FERRY.

BUTTS HILL FORT 1776-1782

Maj Gen Sullivan's HQ
Battle of RI, Aug 1778



1. SITE OF BRITISH BARRACKS: BRITISH OCCUPATION
2. SE CORNER: RHODE ISLAND CAMPAIGN
3. SOUTHERN BATTERY GREEN: BATTLE OF RI
4. S.BATTERY GREEN VIEWING EARTHWORKS
5. EASTERN CORNER: HOWLAND VIEW/RETREAT
6. NORTH BATTERY: BRISTOL FERRY VIEW/MARITIME
7. FRONT GATE: FRENCH ENGINEERING, RI 1ST, MILITIA
8. BUTTS HILL GREEN: TERRY PRESERVATION