

Stop 1: The Stone Wall - An Introduction.

Butts Hill Fort (or Windmill Hill Fort) evolved along the way. 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 are seeing date from the improvements made by the French (with the help of Americans) in 1780-1781.

Some of the basic parts of the fort that we see today are:

North battery ramparts: The oldest portion of the fort. It is intact except for its south wall which opens to the parade.

Glacis: Slope from rampart to moat.

South battery ramparts: The north, south and east faces of this battery's ramparts are basically intact. The West ramparts were removed during the expansion of the fort when the French and Americans modified it (1780-1781).

Parade ground: In the center of the fort. This parade ground is maintained and mowed on a regular basis, and has been used for events and re-enactments.

Stop 2 at the North/East rampart and moat. Butts Hill in British Hands

If what we see today at Butts Hill Fort is the outline of the modifications made by the French and Americans, what was the fort like just before the Battle of Rhode Island?

If we start the tour with the oldest section - the North ramparts. The Rebels had fortifications across in Bristol and they would often direct fire at the troops stationed by the Aquidneck Island side of the Bristol Ferry crossing. The British were beginning construction to enlarge the American fortifications. Portsmouth residents were used as forced labor to construct fortifications for the British. A fortified barracks was constructed on Windmill hill for 200 men.



Stop 3: SE Ramparts: Butts Hill and Siege of Newport.

When the French fleet arrived, British forces abandoned Butts Hill, so American forces crossed over to Aquidneck and occupied the high fortifications.

*August 12-13: A storm caused the French Navy to abandon attack in Newport.

*August 16: As the Americans built earthworks and dug trenches toward Newport, American reserves and the sick who were healthy enough to do garrison work remained at Butts Hill which served as Sullivan's headquarters.

*August 26: Americans now know that the British fleet is coming and that the French were not coming back. They begin to send their heavy cannon back to northern locations like Butts Hill. General Sullivan began to prepare for a retreat.

*August 28th: Sullivan details the positions of his forces on the evening of August 28, 1778. "On the evening of the 28th we moved with our stores and baggage, which had not been previously sent forward, and about two in the morning encamped on Butts's Hill, with our right extending to the west road, and left to the east road; the flanking and covering parties ...further towards the west road on the right and left."

Stop 4: SW Ramparts: Butts Hill in the Battle of Rhode Island

From his command center on Butts Hill, General Sullivan directed the action down East Main and West Main Road. Sullivan ordered the units fighting on Quaker Hill to retreat back to the mainline around the Fort. The British attempted to attack Butts Hill Fort but the 18 pound cannons from the fort kept the British from advancing.

Overnight between August 30 and 31st the retreat was complete In Sullivan's words: "The heavy baggage and stores were falling back and crossing through the day; at dark, the tents were struck, the light baggage and troops passed down, and before twelve o'clock the main army had crossed with the stores and baggage."

Stop 5: At the parade grounds: Butts Hill in French and American hands.

In December of 1779 the British finally departed from Aquidneck Island. The Americans regained possession of Butts Hill. The French arrived on Aquidneck Island on July 11, 1780 and the island was again occupied by troops. In October of 1780 one American militiaman would report in a letter:

"...there are about 7500 Men on the Island at the Several ports, 5000 of which are French, at Newport, 2000 Three Months Men, at this place and 500 Continentals, under Col. Greene of this state."



The allied French and American forces felt secure, but they continued to prepare to defend the island. On Butts Hill there were American troops assigned to support the work of the French troops in restoring the fortifications. Through the summer and fall of 1780, Butts Hill was actively being enclosed and made into a fort by the Americans and their French allies. This is the fort shape we recognize today. Fort building was hard work. One entry records that the American wagons are bringing loads of stone to the works at Butts Hill Fort. They were building a "sally port" which is a secure, controlled entry way to an enclosure like a fort.. Members of the Black Regiment continued the "works" at Butts Hill Fort once the Massachusetts



militias departed.

When Did Butts Hill become a Fort?

The fortifications there were called 'works' from 1775/6 to 1780. There was never a 'Windmill Hill Fort' because the Fort did not exist until the French combined the separate works in 1780/81 and by that time the hill was called Butts Hill.



A fort is a fully enclosed earthwork; a fortified building, enclosure, or strategic position.

The British works at "Windmill Hill" were fortifications. When they arrived on the island they took over an American militia made natural (hill top) defensive position that was a temporary construction of wood and soil.

When the Americans and French forces left to head south in 1781, Butts Hill was a fully enclosed fort.

Stop 6: At the memorial

"Butts Hill Fort. These fortifications erected by the British 1777 were occupied by the Americans 1778 becoming the island base of the Continental Army under General Sullivan in the Battle of Rhode Island. They are consecrated to the immortal memory of those brave men who upon August 29, 1778 withstood the assaults of the more numerous highly trained British Army under General Pigot. Dedicated to posterity by the Newport Historical Society, August 29, 1923."

This memorial stone was dedicated with some fanfare. There were speeches and battle reenactments, marching bands and the blast of cannons. This sacred piece of land was saved from being a housing development by the then President of the Newport Historical Society, Rev. Roderick Terry. He personally bought the property (and Fort Barton as well) and gave them to the Society. This gift came with some restrictions: It would always be called Butts Hill Fort and it would be dedicated to the memory of those who fought and died here.

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. The Committee is working on a land management plan to restore the fort and create an open space area of walking trails and informational signage. The three acres of land with the fort provide ample space for major reenactments.

20 MINUTE TOUR OF BUTTS HILL FORT



The Butts Hill Fort Restoration Committee and the Battle of Rhode Island Association welcomes you to Butts Hill Fort. We hope this brochure helps to explain what you see at the fort.

