

Constitution

The backstory

Israel Putnam (1718-1790)



Israel Putnam was born in Salem Village, Massachusetts on January 7, 1718 to Joseph and Elizabeth Putnam. The Putnam family was very prosperous, and were prominently opposed to the Salem Witch Trials. When Israel was 22 he moved to northeast Connecticut in order to buy land because it was easier and cheaper for young men to buy land there.

Putnam took part in the French and Indian War and was captured by the Kahnawake (Mohawk Indians) in 1758. They were going to burn him alive, but he was saved by a rain storm and a French officer.

After the French and Indian War, Putnam went back to Connecticut where he was elected to the Connecticut General Assembly during the Stamp Act crisis and was one of the founders of the state's Sons of Liberty chapter. He was opposed to British taxation.

By the time the American Revolution rolled around, Putnam had become a successful farmer and tavern keeper. The day after the Battles of Lexington and Concord began, Putnam learned of them and immediately left his plow in the field and headed to Cambridge. He was named Major General of the Army of Observation, which preceded the Continental Army. Putnam was second in command behind General Artemas Ward. He was instrumental in both the planning and realization of the Battle at Bunker Hill. Even though the famous phrase "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes" is credited to Putnam; it is really unclear who actually uttered the phrase. This was an important order because the troops were running low on ammunition. The Continental Army was established in 1775. Putnam joined it and was named colonel of the 3rd Connecticut Regiment. Putnam was the temporary commander of the American forces in New York until the commander-in-chief, George Washington, arrived in April of 1776.

Israel Putnam was forced to end his military career when he suffered a stroke in December 1779. He died May 29, 1790 in Brooklyn, Connecticut and was buried in an above ground tomb. Over time visitors damaged the headstone and tomb. Because of this his body was moved in 1888 to a new sarcophagus that was built into a memorial monument erected near the Brooklyn town green.

Upon hearing of the American Revolution, Putnam immediately left his farm and tavern to join the troops fighting against the British. What would you be willing to give up for your country?