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Storyteller & Co

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The Courts-Martial following the Battle of Bunker Hill (Part 3 of 3)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2012 | 1775

Following **the Battle of Bunker Hill**, Capt. Callender of the Massachusetts Artillery **was cashiered from the service for cowardice**, and a few months after, Maj. Scarborough Gridley, son of Col. Richard Gridley, that commander of the regiment, **was also court-martialed and booted from the service**. Finally, it was **Capt. Samuel Gridley's** turn.

Capt. Samuel Gridley was the cousin of Scarborough and nephew to Col. Richard Gridley.

From an appendix of my forthcoming book *1775*:

*Though he was charged with “backwardness in the execution of his duty, and for negligence in the care and discipline of his camp”, he was acquitted, the court giving the unanimous opinion that no part of the charge was supported against Capt. Gridley, dismissing the complaint, as “malicious, vexatious and groundless”.¹ Strange, considering what **we know of his conduct that day**. Meanwhile, Lt. Richard Woodward of Gridley’s company was court-martialed for “cowardice in the action upon the 17th of June last, and for mutiny.” The court unanimously convicted him of cowardice and “mutiny, and of a malicious, vexatious, and groundless accusation of Captain Gridley, at a late General Court-Martial.” Woodward was then sentenced to be “cashiered, and rendered incapable of serving in the Continental Army”.²*



The Hancock 3-pounder cannon on a replica carriage, at NPS's Minute Man National Park. However, this cannon probably did not serve at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

*Clearly then, it was Lt. Woodward that brought the charges up on his Capt. Gridley and paid the price for it. But what had Woodward done to be charged with cowardice? How is it that Capt. Gridley got off free and clear, even though we know his pieces were in the end abandoned? Why did Putnam not seem to play a role in Capt. Gridley's court-martial, as he had **in Callender's**? ... Sadly, all of these questions are unanswerable. Instead, they only remind us that any theory on the colonial cannon for this day is at best incomplete. Did Capt. Gridley nobly serve at the battle in some undocumented way? Or did familial connection come to his aid? Given Col. Gridley was hoping to leave the service, and given the courts had just days earlier dismissed his son Scarborough, one wonders if Woodward was a fall guy for Capt. Samuel Gridley, all as a political stroke to give Col. Richard Gridley a concrete reason to stay in the service: to look after his nephew. In the end, we hear nothing more of Capt. Gridley's service, and he fades with history.*

There were many other courts-martial against artillery officers in late 1775, unrelated to Bunker Hill. Perhaps these serve as proof that Col. [Richard] Gridley's selection of officers was less than ideal, and it is exactly this reason that he seems to have retired. With Col. Gridley's retirement, on Nov 17, 1775, his replacement was announced: the very able Col. Henry Knox³, a man whose experience came mostly from reading the books in his Boston bookstore.

Col. Gridley's retirement made the way for Col. Henry Knox, who would give great service to the American Cause...

1. Washington's General Orders, Oct 11, 1775, in the *Papers of George Washington*.
2. Washington's General Orders, Oct 13, 1775, in the *Papers of George Washington*.
3. Peter Force's *American Archives* Force 4:3:1921.

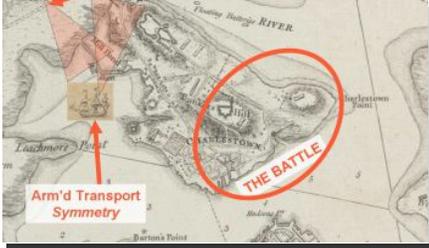


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