

Chapter 9: Good Hearts, Stout Men

Only two decades after the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock in 1620, a young man named James Buncker also came ashore in the New World. Having left his parents, the teenager apparently had some means since he did not arrive as an indentured servant. He was from a family with property at his birthplace of Slapton, Devonshire, England. It is "generally believed that most of the Bunkers were originally of French derivation and were, for the most part, of the landed and propertied classes in both France and England," according to historian Josephine Walker. She found that the multiple Anglicized spellings of Buncker -- Buncker, Boncur, Bonker, Boncur, Boncoeur, etc. -- likely originated from the French *bon coeur*, which means "good heart."¹

Wherever James Buncker first landed, he migrated to Kittery, Maine, by 1646, when he was about 18 years old. Over the next several years, he lived in the home of a landlady who was probably a widow, while he worked for another widow. In his early 20s, James moved a short distance across the border to live as part of the Oyster River Plantation in New Hampshire. Through hard work, savings and according to homestead-like settlement laws of the 1600s, Buncker was deeded 236 acres between Buncker and Johnson Creeks, one named for James himself and the other for another early settler. His land was eventually included in Dover township, and in time would have its name changed to Durham, New Hampshire.²

Though a large landholder, James may not have been literate, since on a 1669 petition he could not sign his name, but marked the document with an X instead.³ Though not much more is known about Vilate Buncker's great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, James was certainly of that special breed of hardy, stout-hearted men who "tamed" the New World in the mid-1600s. From the time the English first colonized Jamestown in 1607, every Englishman heard the frightening tales of colonist's battles with the native "savages." Colonizers came to the New World with guns and expected to use them.

In the area where James Buncker settled, the greatest threat was from the native Abenaki tribes, whose territories covered northern New England from Vermont to Maine. They were the "People of the Dawnland," presiding over a kingdom where the sun rose first across the great continent. Even more than other enemy tribes, the Abenakis hated the English settlers. It was the English they blamed for the diseases that were decimating the Abenakis -- and other Atlantic Coast Indian tribes -- beginning in the 1500s. By the time Buncker settled in Abenaki ancestral territory, almost 90 percent of the original Indian population of a century before had succumbed to the epidemic European illnesses of smallpox, influenza, measles, dysentery and typhoid. The diseases were brought by the explorers, fur trappers and merchants who had come before the settlers, so that by the time immigrants like Buncker arrived, they were not colonizing virgin territory, but widowed and orphaned land.

The Abenakis established strong ties with the French long before the arrival of English colonists. Fur-trading with Frenchmen brought them greatly-treasured goods such as guns, steel for hatchets as well as French brandy and other strong drink. Even greater than the appeal of these "modern" trade goods, was the influence of the early black-robed Jesuit missionaries.

These Jesuits historically won many more converts to Christianity than the Puritans, and there were reasons for that dominance. The Black Robes earned respect among all tribes through stoic acceptance of torture and martyrdom on behalf of their faith. "When collared with necklaces of red-hot hatchet blades, or baptized with kettles of boiling water in mockery of their own rituals, the Black Robes displayed impressive courage. Such stoicism was also prized by their (Indian) tormenters; a grudging acceptance followed,"

wrote historian Stephen Brumwell.⁴ The Jesuits also allowed the Abenakis and other so-called "mission Indians" to keep their own customs and culture. The Puritans insisted that Christianity could not be overlaid upon a pagan culture. Almost naturally, then, the Abenakis imbibed the French Catholic animosity toward the Protestant English colonists like Buncker who, in turn, despised the French papists and their Abenaki allies.

Most Americans do not realize that there were actually four French and Indian wars, and not just the most famous of them called by that specific name in the pre-Revolutionary War decades -- the French and Indian War in which a British officer, Colonel George Washington, distinguished himself.

As destiny determined, the first three of Vilate Bunker's direct-line Bunker grandfathers -- James, his son and his grandson -- fought in the first three inter-colonial wars, which occurred between 1689 and 1748. The foremost threat for the Bunkers in the first two of those wars were the dreaded Abenaki tribes. During decades of sporadic warfare, Brumwell related, the Abenakis "torched countless frontier communities, killed and scalped numerous men, women and children, and herded droves of shocked and bewildered captives back to Canada. In the eyes of their prey (like the Bunkers), they were a devilish crew."⁵

Well aware of the danger, young James Buncker built for his family a large, fortified house known in that time as a "garrison" -- which was so solid that it survived until the early 1900s. (At that time, it was carefully dismantled and stored for possible future historical reconstruction.) A rectangular structure 40 1/2 feet long by 25 1/2 feet wide, it was constructed of solid, hewn hemlock logs, nine inches thick. The side-gabled roof rose to 18 1/2 feet, with the chimney in the center, so that the fireplace in the middle of the dwelling could heat both long ends equally. Around all sides, strategic holes were cut into the logs to allow defenders a porthole from which to aim and shoot colonial muskets.⁶

This mini-fortress perched on a north bank promontory over the Oyster River was the home in which James and his wife Sarah had four children -- Mary, James Jr., Joseph and John -- in rapid annual succession between 1664 and 1667, after which Sarah could have no more. Most of the family was probably still living in the large home when, in June 1689, a raiding party of 60 Abenakis attacked the Oyster River Plantation. While the Bunker family and their home emerged unscathed, one of their neighbor's homes was burned down by the raiding party who killed or took captive 18 of the settlers.⁷ This was the initial involvement for Oyster River in King William's War, the first inter-colonial conflict that pitted the French and their Indian allies against the English with their native allies.

Fortunately, the following five years of war scarcely touched the Bunkers and their Oyster River neighbors and they had every reason to feel safe until the historic and deadly morning of July 18, 1694 dawned.

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The war party of 250 Abenaki Indians that moved through the darkness of the night, concealed within forests, was out for blood. Besides their own chiefs, at the head of the party was Sebastien de Villieu, a 60-year-old French military career officer, and Father Louis-Pierre Thury, a Jesuit priest. Father Thury had previously incited other Abenaki massacres of English Protestants whom he had hatefully considered to be heretics. The Abenakis were determined to slaughter or capture all the English colonists of the New Hampshire Oyster River Plantation, then butcher their livestock and set all their dwellings on fire.

When thirteen of the Abenaki chiefs signed the 1693 Treaty of Pemaquid the previous year, the French were alarmed that they might be losing their native allies for further prosecution of their war against the English. Father Thury and other Frenchmen insidiously influenced the younger chiefs to reject what the thirteen older chiefs had decided, suggesting that they were weak-willed cowards who planned to sell tribal land to the encroaching English. The best way to insure future Abenaki loyalty, the French knew, was to induce the disaffected chiefs to mount a treaty-breaking raid against an English settlement. After that, there could be no turning back until the French made peace with the English.

Initial war councils of the young chiefs in 1694 had favored Boston as the target of their intended terror, but the Abenakis changed the site of battle to the Oyster River Plantation.

Only two days before the slaughter, the Bunkers and other settlers had gathered to belatedly hear -- and to cheer -- news of the Treaty of Pemaquid. Feeling safe from attack, the Bunkers and their neighbors let their guard down, ending the long-held night watches along both sides of the Oyster River.

The Indian war party approached from the west after sunset, and divided their forces into two divisions, one attacking along the river's south side and the other on the north side. Detachments of eight to ten Indians were then tasked to strike each of the 12 fortified garrisons and other strong-houses. In the pre-dawn hours of Wednesday, July 18, a single shot was to be fired to begin a simultaneous attack. The Indians believed that settlers in unfortified houses would rush to the garrisons for protection, only to find the Indians waiting to kill them down outside the already-besieged garrisons. As was the case all along the river-front, inside the Bunker Garrison, the families of 66-year-old James and his 29-year-old son, James Jr., were asleep, unaware of the danger descending upon them.

Around 2 a.m., west of the Bunker Garrison, a miller named John Dean rose from his bed to get an early start on a trip to Portsmouth. After kissing his wife and daughter goodby, he closed the front door and walked down the path when a shot rang out from the bushes, killing him instantly. The premature shot, which was heard all along the river, was fortunate for some, like the Bunkers. While the Abenaki squads were almost in place on the south side of the river, Chief Paquahret's Kennebec Abenakis on the north side were not fully deployed. On the south side, the slaughter began in terrible earnest. Stephen Jenkins tried to lead his family through their cornfield to safety, but an Abenaki chief struck him three times with a hatchet before bayoneting him another three times, and then cruelly tossing one of his girls into his arms, and stabbing her through the chest.

At the neighboring Drew Garrison, nine-year-old Benjamin was forced to run a gauntlet of tomahawk-wielding Indians until he was killed. One more garrison over, the Charles Adam Garrison, the Abenakis crept into the house undetected and tomahawked 14 of the household members in their beds. And so it continued.

On the north side, the people fared better in part because Chief Paquahret was not able to get his squads in place, and also because the distances between their fortified houses was much greater than those on the south side. According to a reliable history, the Bunker Garrison was awake and prepared when the assault force finally came to their door, and the Bunkers put up a determined resistance, repelling several spirited assaults without the loss of a single life. It must have been a terrible night, since the Bunkers could hear the tortured screams of the wounded, and see through the garrison's portholes the burning homes of beloved neighbors.

Before noon, the French officer Villieu urged the Abenakis to retreat before the English

could mount a counter-attack aided by possible reinforcements. The Abenakis agreed and, before leaving with 49 captives, Father Thury conducted a brief mass, praising their carnage of the heretics and asking God to reward his Indian brethren for their valiant ferocity. What was a great success for the French and Abenakis, was devastating to the Bunker family and their neighbors. Forty-five had been killed outright, many were wounded, half of the garrisons and many other dwellings were burned along with many crops. Most of the livestock was also slaughtered. Having lost a third of their population overnight, it was "the most devastating French and Indian raid in New Hampshire during King William's war," as the historical marker now at the site appropriately states.⁸

Immediately following the 1694 massacre, the British assigned 20 soldiers to protect the remaining Oyster River residents. Records show that at least three soldiers were posted "at Bunker's" and note payments "James Buncker" made to the soldiers before the first inter-colonial war ended in 1697 -- which is also the year that James Bunker died.⁹ The sacrifice and valor of the Bunkers and their neighbors was eloquently heralded by no less than leading Puritan intellectual and firebrand preacher Cotton Mather in his 1699 history, *Decennium Luctuosum*, or "Sorrowful Decade."

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James Bunker, Jr., inherited the Bunker Garrison, and was a well-regarded landholder. With others, he successfully petitioned the authorities after the raid for Oyster River to become the township of Dover. James served as the town's constable beginning in 1698.

Four years later, in 1702, the second inter-colonial war, known as Queen Anne's War, broke out and the Bunker home was constantly threatened. On May 22, 1707, Reverend John Pike recorded in his journal: "Two young girls were carried away by the Indians from Bunker's Garrison at Oyster river, viz., the daughter of Thomas Drew, near 13 years old, and the daughter of Nathan Lamos, much younger. This was the first mischief done by them (the Abenakis) in the year 1707."¹⁰ Neighbor Thomas Drew had married James Buncker's only daughter, Mary, and the older Drew girl referred to as being kidnapped was James Jr.'s niece, Marie Ann, who was actually 17. As far as is known, the family never heard from her again.

If captives survived and were strong enough, they were marched north to St. Francis, a French mission village stronghold on the St. Lawrence River near Quebec. Even when captives had an opportunity to escape in later months or years, they usually did not. Once in the villages, English captives were frequently treated well, particularly if there were French settlers mixed among the Abenakis. As time passed, and they began or were adopted into new families, many became attached and lacked the connection or interest to return to the life of their youth. Such was the case with Marie Ann Bunker Drew, as one Durham researcher discovered. Catholic church records show Marie Ann and her young companion were baptized two years after their capture in a Canadian parish near St. Francis. "Thus the two little lost girls are found," the 20th century historian happily revealed.¹¹

Only seven weeks after his niece was taken to parts then-unknown, James Jr. lost his younger brother, John, to an Abenaki attack. Reverend Pike's 1707 journal entry for July 8 records: "John Bunker & Icabod Rawlins going with a cart ... to James Bunkers for a Loom were assailed by many Indians & both slain." Noting the frequency of Abenaki raids against Oyster River settlers, an early Durham town history opined: "The Indians seem to have had a special spite against the inhabitants of Oyster River, or their attacks there were so little opposed that they returned often for easy spoils," a 1913 Durham town

history states.¹²

The Abenaki threat only ended when the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht brought to an end the 11-year inter-colonial and European Queen Anne's War. James Bunker, Jr., then, was able to die in peacetime in 1722, leaving such a sizeable estate that his seven children fought over its division for the next 37 years.¹³

Before the estate was finally settled in 1759, at least one of the seven -- third son Benjamin, who was Vilate's great-great-great grandfather -- had been to another war and returned in glory.

At 20, Benjamin married Abigail and they had three sons and a daughter before he joined the fight against the French in 1745. A courageous man, the 35-year-old knew he was going to be part of a Colonial militia that would storm the greatest French fort ever built on the continent -- the Fortress of Louisbourg. The fortress was thought to be impregnable, and the likelihood of dying in the attempt was high. But for Vilate's sake, and that of her posterity, Benjamin needed to survive. The son of Benjamin from whom they would descend was not born until the following year.

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At the close of the second inter-colonial war, in which James Jr. had lost his brother and niece, the English treaty negotiators made a serious mistake. While maintaining ownership of Nova Scotia (New Scotland), the English had ceded to the French the neighboring Cape Breton Island at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. This was "an act of incomparable folly on the part of the English plenipotentiaries who, with the map lying open before them, thus handed over to Louis the key of the St. Lawrence and of Canada," noted historian Samuel Adams Drake. "No one now doubts that the French king saw in this masterpiece of stupidity a way to retrieve all he had lost at a single stroke."¹⁴

With the right to fortify, nine-year-old French King Louis XV, on the advice of his great-uncle the Regent, decided in 1719 to begin construction of a massive fortress at what was then called "English Harbor" on Cape Breton island. The young king was into his 30s before the fortress, in the town re-named Louisbourg in his honor, was finally finished. It was so expensive, took so long to construct and was so large that the king once told his ministers that he fully expected to be able to see the Fortress of Louisbourg rising over the western horizon from his palace at Versailles. The formidable fortress became known as the "Gibraltar of the North,"¹⁵ and the boast of the French engineers that it could be defended by a garrison of women had validity at the time.

As with the previous two inter-colonial wars, the third one erupted first in Europe. It began in 1739 and was then called the "War of Jenkins' Ear" after a Spanish commander boarded the ship of British merchant captain Robert Jenkins, cut off his ear and goaded him to present it to King George. Jenkins waved the severed ear during a dramatic speech in Parliament, denouncing hostile Spanish actions. Spain and England went to war in Europe, although the Caribbean islands and the British colony of Georgia were affected in the first years of the conflict.

In early 1744, the French sided with the Spanish and declared war against England. Flanders became the European battlefield of 125,000 combatants. In the New World, the French saw a golden opportunity to recover Nova Scotia, which had been ceded to the British at the end of the previous conflict. A 350-soldier detachment from Louisbourg sailed 60 miles south that summer, attacked and destroyed Canso -- the prime seasonal New England fishery on the easternmost tip of Nova Scotia which serviced the English

fishermen working the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.¹⁶

At that time, as had happened sporadically over the previous century, the provinces of Nova Scotia and Maine generally fell under the authority of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. So it was Massachusetts Gov. William Shirley who raised 200 men to prevent the French from capturing Annapolis Royal, the sole remaining British stronghold in Nova Scotia. They barely succeeded in saving the fort against a Louisbourg force of 50 French soldiers and 230 Indian allies.

Shirley came up with a bold plan to use 4,000 mostly-untrained militia to strike at the heart of the French darkness -- the Fortress of Louisbourg and its professional soldiers. At a secret session of the Massachusetts legislature in fall 1744, he warned the legislators that if they did not take Louisbourg, Nova Scotia would fall and New England trade would be "annihilated." The conservative legislators turned him down, reasoning that there was no money to mount such a siege, and the colonists couldn't succeed against the mighty French fortress anyway.

Governor Shirley insisted the session be secret because he didn't want to forewarn the French of his intentions, but after his failure to win a vote, word leaked out -- which actually saved the plan. Drake recounted in his 1890 *The Taking of Louisburg*: "Men discussed it everywhere," Drake recounted, "and the more it was talked of, the more firmly it took hold on the popular mind. The very audacity of the thing pleased the young and adventurous spirits, of whom there were plenty in the New England of that day" -- one of whom was 35-year-old Benjamin Bunker.

Many influential leaders spoke against such a seemingly-reckless project being forwarded by young idealists. One of the conservative opponents was Benjamin Franklin, who considered Louisbourg too much of a "hard nut to crack." The Massachusetts legislature tended to agree but, by early 1745, popular sentiment had shifted a number of their votes. Governor Shirley called for a second vote on February 5 -- this time a public one. By his own count, Shirley thought he would lose this round by one vote. However, on his way to the House, one of the opposition had a bad fall and was taken to his home with a broken leg. Breaking a tie, the House Speaker sided with the governor and the plan narrowly carried by one vote.

Governor Shirley appointed a prominent merchant from Kittery, Maine, as commander. Col. William Pepperrell was also a militia officer and a well-regarded member of the Massachusetts Council. Shirley raised ten battalions for Pepperrell -- eight from Massachusetts, and one each from New Hampshire and Connecticut. Benjamin Bunker signed up on February 13 in Durham, N.H., only eight days after the Massachusetts authorizing vote. Bunker enlisted as a private in Capt. Samuel Hale's company, which was part of that 450-man New Hampshire battalion led by Col. Samuel Moore.¹⁷

The men had an evangelistic fervor for the task. Protestant clergy had promoted the expedition as a new crusade to combat Rome-based aggression, and portrayed the fortress as the "Stronghold of Satan." One minister who joined the men armed himself with a large hatchet which he said he would use to chop into kindling any papal images on the altars at Louisbourg. Certainly there were augurs aplenty to which suggested that God was on their side, from recruiting 4,000 men in a mere seven weeks, to their departure just before a smallpox epidemic raged through Boston, to the fair weather the expedition often enjoyed. The expedition standard that was held aloft to inspire Private Bunker and his comrades was an embroidered Latin motto that said: "Never despair; Christ is with us."¹⁸

In March, 4,200 soldiers and sailors set sail from Boston aboard 90 ships. April was spent reprovisioning at Canso, re-building the settlement that had been burned by the French and waiting for the ice fields to break up in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. With yet another stroke of good fortune, British Commodore Peter Warren arrived in his 60-gun *Superbe* flagship, flanked by other naval vessels, to lend his considerable support to the expedition.

On May 11, the fleet anchored in Garabus Bay and that same day, dispatched troops on transports for a landing on Cape Breton, three miles from the fortress. The landing was so rapid and eager, with many of the colonial militiamen carrying someone on their backs through the water, that the 100 French soldiers opposing them were soon repulsed. At that point, flush with the brief victory, the virtually-leaderless landing party began chasing the retreating French -- "Everyone Did what was Right in his own Eyes," recalled one. Artillery shot from the fortress soon halted the ecstatic chase, and the men returned to the beach. By nighttime, 2,000 of the expeditionary land force, undoubtedly including Private Bunker, bivouacked on the island. Precisely what Bunker did, other than his initial assignment as "clerk" is not known, but Private Bunker can be assumed to have participated in the action with Colonel Moore's New Hampshire regiment.

As challenging as the Fortress of Louisbourg appeared, the English colonists soon discovered a number of factors in their favor. First, the French had expended far more masonry and effort in the construction of the bastions facing the sea than the landward bastions. While it seemed that no naval assault could cause the fortress to fall, the troops might succeed from a ground approach. Three of the four major seaward bastions were vulnerable to bombardment at the back of the fortress where there was higher ground. And Col. Pepperrell learned from some deserting Frenchmen that the 1,500 regular French soldiers and militia in the garrison were near mutiny before the arrival of the English. The presence of a common enemy might temporarily unite them, but the poor provisions and conditions was morale-sapping.

Part of the sea defense for the fortress was the establishment of two unconnected separate batteries -- Royal Battery on the north shore and Island Battery at the harbor mouth. One of the most fanciful parts of Governor Shirley's plan was that the expeditionary force would not need to transport many cannons because they would capture and use the enemy's own artillery against them. Two days after landing, 400 men were sent to take the Royal Battery, which they did without a fight. The French had decided to abandon the isolated Royal Battery in order to use the soldiers inside the fortress. Though the departing French spiked all their artillery pieces, they didn't have time to destroy or carry away a large cache of cannonballs and mortars. Less than 24 hours after taking the battery, two dozen New England smiths had drilled the spiked cannons and were bombarding the town of Louisbourg and the fortress with their own cannon and ammunition, as Shirley had planned.

A second surprise came for the French who believed that no invader would try to cross the rough and swampy ground opposite the King's Bastion with cannon; the New Hampshire men did just that in the first week. Private Bunker and his companions didn't make much headway with the heavy artillery and ammunition at first, but then Yankee ingenuity came to the rescue. Colonel Moore's second-in-command, Lt. Col. Nathaniel Meserve, was a shipwright who directed the construction of large sledges on which the cannon were placed. It was a prodigious logistical task without benefit of horse or oxen, but now possible. "This transit being impracticable for wheel carriages," Drake wrote a century later, "sledges were constructed ... to which relays of men harnessed themselves

in turn, as they do in Arctic journeys, and in this way the cannon, mortars, and stores were slowly dragged through the spongy turf where the mud was frequently knee-deep, to the trenches before Louisbourg. None but the rugged yeomen of New England -- men inured to all sorts of outdoor labor in woods and fields -- could have successfully accomplished such a herculean task. But such severe toil as this was, soon put half the army in the hospitals."¹⁹

In mid-May, from Green Hill on which the New Hampshire men had placed their cannon, and from Royal Battery as well as other low hillocks, Colonel Pepperrell began a withering bombardment. However, true to the reputation of the Fortress of Louisbourg, the artillery assault of the 47-day siege never actually breached its walls.

At the end of May, the French suffered a terrible blow from which they could not recover. An annual supply ship -- the 60-gun French man-of-war *Vigilante* -- arrived on May 31 straight into the waiting guns of Commodore Warren's entire British fleet. After a short, desperate struggle by the 500-man crew, the *Vigilante* was forced to surrender or lose all hands. The capture of that prize, loaded with food and munitions, was a death knell for French Louisbourg. The Commodore's men soon got the battle-damaged repaired and ready to use against the fortress. Colonel Moore's New Hampshire men, including Private Bunker, were assigned to man the *Vigilante* and keep the former French ship's cannons busy by firing upon the fortress.

The French had a few bright moments, but time, and dwindling supplies, gave the advantage to Pepperrell's force. After raining down 15,000 shot and shells on the town and fortress, the French only surrendered when they finally learned the *Vigilante* had been captured and there was no chance for food or munitions replenishment. The Gibraltar of the North fell on June 26 not because the fortress itself had been breached, but because the hungry and depressed men inside felt they could not win in a long siege.

When the victorious Colonel Pepperrell entered the fortress, he was awestruck at just how strong and impregnable the fortress still was. "The Almighty, of a truth, has been with us," he declared, and wanting to end the expedition as it had begun, Pepperrell asked a favorite parson to offer a prayer of thanks as part of a blessing on the food for the officers that night. He wanted it to be memorable, and the man he chose was known for particularly proverbial prayers, so the hungry diners braced themselves as he began a grace that became a model of war-time brevity: "Good Lord! We have so many things to thank Thee for, that time will be infinitely too short to do it. We must, therefore, leave it for the work of eternity."²⁰

In more than half a century of warring, this achievement by mostly untrained New England colonists was the most devastating military blow the French had ever experienced in the New World. When the news arrived in Paris, the city was stunned. Boston, of course, was ecstatic over the success of its provincials. London was equally overjoyed, heaping praise and honor upon the victors. Commodore Warren was promoted to Rear Admiral. Pepperrell became a baronet, the first American colonist to be honored.

But King George's War dragged on. Private Bunker was likely ordered to stay behind and defend the conquered Louisbourg from the deck of the *Vigilante* -- since records show he was promoted to the rank of Ensign on August 10.²¹

More than 2,000 of the expeditionary force remained in the garrison until they were relieved by British regulars from Gibraltar the following year. The French tried to send a powerful fleet to retake the fortress and the rest of Nova Scotia, but it was destroyed by storms and disease among the sailors. With the key victory at Louisbourg, the English

won the war in America, though they lost it in Europe. With such a stalemate, there was no clear victor when the 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle was negotiated.

The English made a trade that must have left Ensign Bunker heartsick. They agreed to return Louisbourg if the French would return Madras (in India) to the British, and withdraw troops from the Low Countries.

Ensign Bunker returned from his role in the war in 1746, and became the proud father of another son -- Vilate's progenitor, Silas -- the fifth of ten children he and his wife would rear. When the war itself ended, Benjamin settled with his brother, James III, and made no further claim on his father's Dover/Durham property, including the Bunker Garrison. Benjamin moved his family to Brunswick, Maine, after which New England was embroiled in a war yet again.

Only six years after the previous one had ended, the fourth and final French and Indian War was fought between 1754 to 1763. This proved to be the last gasp of the French in the 13 colonies, and the one that cost them Canada forever. Whereas the previous three inter-colonial wars had been fought in America mostly by colonial militias and their Indian allies, this best-known "French and Indian War" involved large numbers of French and British troops, including a British colonial officer named George Washington, who gained invaluable experience for a future historic conflict.²²

Near the end of that war, Benjamin Bunker and his family became the first settlers on Maine's Great Cranberry Island. Some records suggest that they may have been the first settlers in the whole Mount Desert Island region. The large island's first two settlers did not permanently settle until the summer of 1762, at which point an early survey implies with its description of "Bunker's seawall on which Benjamin Bunker dwells" that Bunker had already settled Great Cranberry Island just southwest of much-larger Mount Desert. In 1768, Benjamin established enough ownership to deed Little Cranberry Island to his son John. When the Revolutionary War broke out, Benjamin and his family moved from their more-exposed island to a cove on the main Mount Desert Island, where he also owned property. Mount Desert is known today as the site of the beautiful Acadia National Park.

Having been born by at least 1710, Benjamin lived long enough to hear a reading of the Declaration of Independence, and at least one of the signers, Matthew Thornton, was personally known to Bunker because Thornton had served as the surgeon for Colonel Moore's regiment on the Louisbourg expedition.

Benjamin also lived to witness much more -- the Revolutionary War victory over England, the ratification of the United States Constitution, and the presidencies of Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and the beginning of James Monroe's term. The venerable pioneer settler and war veteran Benjamin Bunker died in about 1818, at the remarkable age of either 108 or 110.

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There are few more famous Revolutionary War battles than the 1775 Battle of Bunker Hill, which was named after the earliest Bunker emigrant to the New World, George Bunker. Genealogists surmise that the George Bunker and James Buncker families are connected through common ancestors in England or, more likely, France. George was a native of Nancy, France, and fled with his family to England because of Huguenot persecution. The wealthy emigrant arrived in Boston in about 1632, which was a decade before the lone, teenage James Buncker went to Maine. George is known as the patriarch

of both the Massachusetts and Nantucket (R.I.) lines of the Bunker family, while James is credited for being the progenitor of the large Dover/Durham (N.H.) branch of the Bunkers.²³

At least one of the Dover branch Bunkers -- Vilate's great-great grandfather Silas -- joined the Patriotic Cause of the Revolutionary War, though it was not likely something he bragged about. He had the misfortune of enlisting on August 2, 1779, for an expedition so ignominious that it became the most disastrous American naval defeat prior to Pearl Harbor, and was so embarrassing that its veterans rarely mentioned having participated in it. The battle took place in Penobscot Bay, at what is now Castine, Maine, and was then known as Majabagaduce Peninsula. It has alternately been called by historians the "infamous" Penobscot, Bagaduce or Castine expedition.

In June of 1779, the British began building a four-bastioned square fort on the peninsula at the mouth of Penobscot Bay, which was then part of Massachusetts territory. Warned of the incursion, the state of Massachusetts, with some support from the Continental Congress, raised an expedition to battle the British there. Under the joint command of Gen. Solomon Lovell and Commodore Dudley Saltonstall, the expedition of about 900 Massachusetts militia men and 300 Continental Marines sailed from Boston harbor on July 19. Besides three Continental Navy warships, the amphibious task force included another 16 armed ships, with 344 guns in all, and 24 transports, most of them privately owned.

The task force anchored at Penobscot Bay on July 25. Historians of the day and since agree that if Lovell and Saltonstall had attacked at once in force, the half-finished Fort George would have fallen fairly quickly. Instead, the two leaders argued. Lovell's men, directed by his able second-in-command, Brig. Gen. Peleg Wadsworth, began constructing siege works on the peninsula when Commodore Saltonstall refused to engage either the nearby small British fleet or the fort itself with his cannon, for fear of losing his ships. The ground troops, including the seven-cannon artillery force led by the well-known Lt. Col. Paul Revere, comported themselves well at first, establishing a fortified camp and a high ground position from which to fire their cannon.

But Saltonstall stalled and stalled. He agreed to fire on the British ships, which he both out-manned and out-gunned, only after Lovell and Saltonstall's men had taken the fort by themselves. After a critical week or more of hesitation, Boston sent the expedition reinforcements, including 33-year-old Private Silas Bunker (who likely came to know Paul Revere personally). Of more importance, the Continental Navy Board sent orders to their Commodore to attack immediately on receipt of their orders.

So, finally, on August 11, at least a week after Private Silas Bunker arrived, Lovell and Saltonstall agreed to launch a coordinated attack. About 250 untrained American militia troops under poor leadership left their fortified camp and approached within a quarter mile of the British fort, when only 55 British regulars racing down from the fort caused the Americans to flee after one volley. They fled back to the safety of their dirt bunker, leaving behind most of the arms and equipment.

Just as he was ready to finally take action, a large, reinforcing ten-vessel British fleet, including 64-gun ship of the line *Raisonable*, sailed into Penobscot Bay. Saltonstall panicked and fled upstream with his fleet into Penobscot River, where he was trapped. He sailed so fast in retreat with his warships that he passed the transports, leaving them entirely defenseless. The ground forces, seeing themselves abandoned, began a hurried retreat across the river. Though, in retrospect, General Wadsworth distinguished himself

rallying the land force into a more orderly withdrawal, confusion was the order of the next couple days. Instead of actually engaging the enemy, Commodore Saltonstall and his navy scuttled and burned their ships to prevent British capture.²⁴

Private Bunker and all the men were left to make their way back to their homes on their own, fleeing through the forests by night and day. Bunker mustered out of the sad force on August 15. Whether he showed personal courage, cowardice or something in between, cannot be known.

What is known is that it was a stunningly lop-sided engagement. The British lost only 13 men. The Americans suffered 474 killed, and all of their ships, cannons, guns and supplies had been lost. The cost of the expedition nearly bankrupted Massachusetts. A formal inquiry was launched by state and federal authorities with the result that Commodore Saltonstall was blamed and discharged from naval service. Generals Lovell and Wadsworth were commended, along with some of their ground troops. But Wadsworth actually brought charges against Lt. Col. Revere for disobedience and cowardice, which Paul Revere successfully fought. Though his reputation was damaged, his insistence on a public court martial trial and the lack of evidence at the trial did much to restore Revere's reputation. In a delightful historic irony, it was General Wadsworth's own grandson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who created Paul Revere's legendary status with his poem which began: "Listen, my children, and you shall hear/Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere ..." ²⁵

* * *

From father to son, and father to son, the Bunkers had served and survived four different colonial wars. James Buncker and his son James Jr. fought in the first French and Indian war, defending their family home, the Bunker Garrison, together. James Jr. fought in the second French and Indian war, losing a niece. His son Benjamin fought in the third French and Indian war, taking the Fortress of Louisbourg. Benjamin's son Silas participated in the bloody Penobscot Expedition, the only defeat of Bunker-involved battles. Finally, in the fifth generation, a Bunker would not have to go to war.

At the outset of the Revolutionary War, Silas moved from the Cranberry Isles and Mount Desert to settle for the rest of his life in Sedgwick, Maine, where he served as a surveyor of highways. He and Mary had seven children. Silas waited until his fourth son was born in 1778 to pass his Christian name on. At 83, when he was on his way home from Williamsburg, Me., the elderly Silas stopped at a house at Bluehill and spent the night. In the morning, after opening a door by mistake, he fell into the cellar, and died about ten days later.²⁶

His namesake, Silas Bunker, Jr., married Hannah Berry in 1800 and fathered nine children, moving further inland in Maine. The last of the nine, Edward, was born at Atkinson, along the Penobscot River, in 1822.²⁷

It is with the life of this sixth-generation American Bunker, Grandfather Edward -- truly a Bunker "good heart" -- that Vilate's story begins to take strong, recognizable shape.

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ENDNOTES

1. Josephine Walker, *Bunker Family History* (hereafter *BFH*), 1957, pgs. 2-4.
2. Everett S. Stackpole and Lucien Thompson, *History of the Town of Durham New Hampshire (Oyster River Plantation), Volume One: Narrative*, "Published by Vote of the Town," 1913, pg. 64.
3. Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pgs. 12-13.
4. Stephen Brumwell, *White Devil: A True Story of War, Savagery, and Vengeance in Colonial America*, Da Capo Press (2004), pgs. 34-5.
5. Brumwell, *White Devil*, pg. 31.
6. A 1910 architect's drawing made before the Bunker Garrison was dismantled, gives the dimensions. Over the previous two centuries, full-sized windows had been added, as well as two wing-like additions to the house on both sides. (Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pg. 46.)
7. Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pgs. 87-88.
8. Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pgs. 89-103; Craig J. Brown, "The Great Massacre of 1694: Understanding the Destruction of Oyster River Plantation," *Historical New Hampshire*, Fall 1998.
9. Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pg. 103; also, Edward C. Moran, *Bunker Genealogy: Volume III/Dover Branch* (hereafter *Bunker Genealogy*), 1971, pgs. 1-2.

10. May 22, 1707, entry in the *Journal of Rev. John Pike*, first published in 1709; later Cambridge edition by Press of John Wilson and Son, 1876.
11. Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pg. 104.
12. Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pgs. 103-4.
13. Moran, *Bunker Genealogy*, pgs. 3-4.
14. Samuel Adams Drake, *The Taking of Louisburg*, Lee and Shepard (1890), pgs. 30-2, 38.
15. Fred Anderson, *The War That Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War*, Viking (2005), pg. 22.
16. B.A. Balcom, "The Fortress of Louisbourg: The Siege of 1745," Louisbourg.Ca website, 2001.
17. Stackpole-Thompson, *History of Durham*, pgs. 111-12.
18. Drake, *The Taking*, pgs. 63-65.
19. Drake, *The Taking*, pgs. 94-6.
20. Drake, *The Taking*, pgs. 122-25.
21. Moran, *Bunker Genealogy*, pgs. 12-15.
22. Once again, Louisbourg had to be besieged and won, which was successfully accomplished in 1758.
23. Gene Allred Sessions, *Latter-day Patriots: Nine Mormon Families and Their Revolutionary War Heritage*, Deseret Book (1975), pgs. 105-9; Walker, *BFH*, pgs. 2-4; "Charlestown Branch" and "Topsfield-Nantucket Branch" on BunkerFamilyAssociation.Org website, 6/8/09.
24. Paul Revere's Diary, part of his court-martial deposition, as in George A. Wheeler, *History of Castine, Penobscot and Brooksville, Maine*, 1923; James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of the American Revolution*, William Morrow and Company (1991), pgs. 214-15; Barbara Ford, *Paul Revere: Rider for the Revolution*, Enslow Publishers (1997), pgs. 88-94; Jayne E. Triber, *A True Republican: The Life of Paul Revere*, University of Massachusetts (1998), pgs. 134-9; David F. Burg, *An Eyewitness History: The American Revolution*, Facts on File (2001), pg. 255; Robert Wright, Jr., "Penobscot Expedition, Maine," *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution: Library of Military History*, Charles Scribner's Sons (2006), pgs. 895-6; Gaylen Bunker, Bunker.Org, 6/8/09.
25. Eminent historian David Hackett Fisher found that it was

grandsons of men who served with Paul Revere or soldiered at Lexington and Concord who became the major literary figures of the American Renaissance -- Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The only two literary giants of that era not so sired were New Yorker Walt Whitman and southerner Edgar Allen Poe. (Fisher, *Paul Revere's Ride*, Oxford University Press (1994), pg. 289.)

26. Moran, *Bunker Genealogy*, pgs. 33-4.

27. Moran, *Bunker Genealogy*, pgs. 61-2.