On the morning of June 17, 1775, British troops moved to secure the heights around Boston. Marching up an incline called Breeds Hill, they engaged a battered gathering of farmers and tradesmen who, the night before, had hastily constructed a defensive wall within range of the Royal Navys artillery. Richard M. Ketchum tells the story of the ensuing fight in his breathtaking Decisive Day: The Battle for Bunker Hill. Ketchum explores what made that bloody, but relatively small, action decisive by probing the deteriorating relationships between New England and Britain during the months before the battle. He forcefully argues that both the British and American commanders were still seeking ways to make peace even as the guns began to fire. After June 17, 1775, the Americans and the British could view each other only as enemies.

The author of two other books on the Revolutionary War (Saratoga and The Winter Soldiers), Ketchum has written an authoritative history of how Americans-especially the rank-and-file soldiers--won their nation through combat. In Decisive Day he argues that the remarkable transformation of American rebels into soldiers was a crucial, if intangible, episode within the battle. Indeed, as those tired and shell-shocked colonials waited on their ramparts for some of the most disciplined fighters in the world, they did not shoot haphazardly, but held their fire until they saw the whites of British eyes. --James Highfill

This is a beautifully written book, the first of three written so far by Richard Ketchum, on famous Revolutionary War battles. It tells the story of the first major military engagement of the American Revolution as does no other book I've ever read on the same subject. The author brings to life the main characters and events of the story. He briefly introduces the major figures - British Generals Thomas Gage and William Howe, and American leaders Joseph Warren, General Israel Putnam, Colonel William Prescott, and Henry Knox - and traces the story of the conflict in the Boston area in the spring of 1775. Ketchum then sets the scene of the battle by describing how the Americans, chronically short of munitions, supplies and manpower, successfully avoided British detection and entrenched themselves on Breeds Hill (mistaking it for the higher Bunker Hill), and how the British reacted once they discovered the fortifications. Drawing on letters and other first-person accounts of the battles participants and observers, both the American and British, Ketchum vividly describes the military action of June 17, 1775; I found myself almost...
able to hear the firing of guns, and smell the smoke of battle, as I read the final chapters of the book.

As an avid reader of American History, I thought I knew everything about battle of Bunker Hill; however, Ketchums powerfully written narrative introduced me to many new facts about the people and events of this, the first major battle in Americas war for independence. It is a book of outstanding scholarship, and must read for anyone interested in American history.

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