

LIEUTENANT COLONEL THOMAS KNOWLTON US Army (Deceased)



Born in 1740, Thomas Knowlton became a military man early in his life. He accompanied his brother Daniel, a famous scout and revered military officer himself, on several scouting missions before and during the French and Indian War. Following the war, he farmed and became prominent in civil affairs, but in 1774, he assumed command of a company of the Ashford Connecticut Volunteers, and by June 1775, Knowlton commanded 200 men. On 16 June 1775, his soldiers followed him onto Breed's Hill where they were assigned to defend a position seemingly impossible to defend. Exposed

to the enemy and vulnerable from both land and sea, Knowlton quickly assessed the situation and began to improve the odds. Calculating how the British Commander, General Howe, would attack the Americans, Knowlton formulated a plan which used a series of fences and other obstacles to slow the British advance and gave the Americans a chance to survive the oncoming slaughter. By the day's end, British casualties were over 1,000 compared to the total American casualties of 449. Only three men from Knowlton's company died in the battle.

The Battle of Breed's Hill (also known as Bunker Hill) gained Knowlton the trust and admiration of GEN George Washington. In September 1776, Knowlton was given command of a group of select men from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts who became known as "Knowlton's Rangers." Directed by GEN Washington, the combat unit conducted tactical reconnaissance and gathered information about enemy forces.

On the morning of 16 September 1776, at the Battle of Harlem Heights, Knowlton's Rangers patrolled a small field near a British camp. Spotted by a British outpost, the Rangers soon found themselves in a firefight. Lightly armed for the ease of conducting reconnaissance, Knowlton's Rangers fought valiantly and were able to stall the assault. When the attackers tried to encircle Knowlton, he ordered a retreat and brought his troops back to safety with few casualties.

Eager for a victory over the British, Washington devised a plan to cut off the British troops using Knowlton's Rangers. However, shots were fired prematurely into the right flank of the British, and Knowlton had to rally his troops to continue the attack. Shot in the small of his back, Knowlton fell mortally wounded within minutes of the failed encirclement.

In 1984, the Military Intelligence Corps Association (MICA) named LTC Thomas Knowlton as the MI Corps hero in recognition of the reconnaissance function Knowlton's Rangers carried out for the Continental Army. MICA further designed the Knowlton Award to be given to those MI professionals who had made a significant contribution to the Corps.

LTC Thomas Knowlton was inducted into the MI Hall of Fame in 1995.



Statue of LTC Thomas Knowlton at the State Capitol,
Hartford, Connecticut



The MI Corps Association's
Knowlton Award

The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill, by John Trumbull, 1786. LTC Thomas Knowlton is depicted on the left center (standing in white shirt holding musket). The original painting is located in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

