

DR. JOHN WARREN'S SERVICE IN THE WAR

Born July 27, 1753, John Warren was the youngest of four children. He followed in the footsteps of his famous brother Joseph, older by twelve years, attending the Roxbury Latin School before enrolling in Harvard College at age 14 in July 1767. John became a good classical scholar with an interest in anatomy, and upon graduating in 1771 he commenced the study of medicine under Joseph, who had become one of the most successful physicians practicing in Boston. It is most probable that Joseph Warren gifted the shagreen amputation kit to John while his brother was under his tutelage.

Having completed a two-year course of study with Joseph, John was officially allowed to practice medicine in 1773 and he moved to Salem, Massachusetts. In that same year, he joined Colonel Timothy Pickering's militia regiment as a volunteer and was elected as an army surgeon. With Pickering's regiment, John Warren was summoned to the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. Joseph Warren and another brother, Ebenezer, were also present at the battle, and Joseph was nearly killed by a musket ball that grazed his wig. John remained encamped in Cambridge with Pickering for two weeks before returning to Salem.



The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775 by John Trumbull

On June 17th, John Warren was in Salem when news of a bloody fight at Bunker Hill began to come in. In his diary, Warren wrote, *"I was very anxious, as I was informed that great numbers had fallen on both sides, and that my brother was in all probability in the engagement. I however went home with the determination to take a few hours' sleep, and then go immediately for Cambridge, with my arms. Accordingly, in the morning about two o'clock, I prepared myself, and went off on horseback, and when I arrived at Medford, received the melancholy and distressing tidings that my brother was missing. Upon this dreadful intelligence I went immediately to Cambridge, and inquired of almost every person I saw whether they could give me any information of him. Some told me he was undoubtedly alive and well, others, that he was wounded; and others, that he fell on the field. This perplexed me almost to distraction. I went on inquiring, with a solicitude which was such a mixture of hope and fear, as none but one who has felt it can form any conception of. In this manner I passed several days, every day's information diminishing the probability of his safety."* During this chaotic period, the overzealous Warren attempted to cross into British-occupied Charlestown in search of his brother and was bayoneted by a British sentinel. It would take several days for Warren to ascertain the fact of his brother's death.

Moved by the loss of his brother, John Warren, just 22 years old, left his growing Salem practice and entered into full-time service as senior surgeon of the army hospital at Cambridge. Here he tended to the army's sick and wounded, and ensured the hospital was properly stocked with medicine. On November 22, 1775, Warren was ordered to report to Israel Putnam's detachment on Cobble Hill in Somerville, where an outbreak of fighting was expected. The order specified that he was to bring amputation kits: "*The Orderly Surgeon is hereby directed to repair immediately but with all secrecy to Cobble Hill, with five Orderly Mates, a case of amputating instruments to each person, plenty of lint, tow, and bandages, for a brisk action.*" Putnam took Cobble Hill without incident and began erecting fortifications which proved integral to the defense of the Charles River.

Warren returned to Salem for much of the British occupation of Boston, returning to the city to observe the enemy's evacuation in March 1776. The next month, he was able to claim the body of his late brother, who had been mutilated by British troops after his death and hastily buried. The identification of Joseph Warren's body was aided by Paul Revere, who recognized a false tooth he had crafted for the doctor.

While George Washington left Boston for New York immediately after the evacuation, Warren remained and tended to the wounded for a month before following on to New York. Both Washington and Warren were in New York when the Declaration of Independence was read on July 9, 1776. Warren became surgeon of the general hospital on Long Island, where he helped to deal with the carnage of the Battle of Long Island in August 1776, in which approximately 300 Americans were killed and 800 were wounded. Washington then made his celebrated retreat to Manhattan, and Warren evacuated north to East Chester, where he was stationed after the retreat.



The Battle of Long Island by Alonzo Chappel

Fighting raged on through 1776. Warren became head surgeon at the general hospital in Hackensack, New Jersey, which was expected to become the army's hospital headquarters in the region. However, Washington received word of an eminent British attack in November, and the whole of the Continental Army—Dr. John Warren included—was forced to leave Hackensack, retreating across New Jersey. Warren traveled toward Philadelphia, where he was to help organize a 'flying hospital,' or mobile surgical unit to tend to anticipated casualties. After Washington's heroic crossing of the Delaware on Christmas Day, the army pushed on to Princeton. Warren had not been notified of the movement, but upon learning of it he and his hospital staff raced to Princeton to take care of the wounded. The American troops suffered fewer than a hundred casualties, and this positive conclusion of Washington's New Jersey campaign proved to be a decisive turning point in the Revolution.

Warren soon left active combat, returning to Boston where he was named the senior surgeon of the city's general hospital. He became widely respected and helped to fill the void in the medical community left by the loss of his brother and defection of Loyalist doctors. He helped to found the Boston Medical Society in 1780, and he began to teach a course of anatomical lectures. Paul Revere engraved a certificate for graduates of the course, which featured an image of Warren at the dissecting table, scalpel in hand. In 1781 Warren was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and became a founding member of the Massachusetts Medical Society. He then became a founder of Harvard Medical School in 1782, and he was elected as the new school's first Professor of Anatomy and Surgery. He was known as an excellent teacher and eloquent lecturer, and continued his professorship at Harvard until his death in 1815.