



The American Revolution

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Sons of the American Revolution

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Battles of Lexington and Concord, 1775

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At this point British Captain Laurie made a tactical blunder. He ordered his men to form a box formation for street fighting, which meant 3/4 of the British were not facing the Patriot force, but poised to fire into the town and streets. British Lieutenant Sutherland saw the error, and ordered flankers to be sent out. Only three men obeyed him. Meanwhile, Colonel Barrett's men were advancing on the bridge in column formation, so only the front row was actually facing the enemy. What happened next was predictable. An exhausted British soldier in the rear of the box discharged his weapon, and two others followed with their shots dropping into the river. Those British actually facing the Patriots thought the order to fire had been given and gave a volley aimed at the Patriots.

Patriot Private, Abner Hosmer and Captain Isaac Davis of the Acton Minutemen were killed instantly. Major Buttrick of the militia yelled out, "Fire, for God's sake, fellow soldiers, fire!" The militia column was perpendicular to the river, therefore most of the men had to fire over the heads of their comrades. Still, the militia volley found its target; four of the eight British field officers facing the militia went down with wounds. At least three British Privates were killed and nine other British were wounded.

If you were a British soldier, you had to be thinking, I am trapped, we have been outmaneuvered, and we are certainly outnumbered. Their spirits were shattered and for most this was their first combat, so they turned and ran. The colonists were stunned by their success, and they had believed that neither side would fire upon the other. Colonel Barrett mustered his men to occupy the center of town, North Bridge, and the hills north of the bridge. British reinforcements entered the town, but immediately collided with their own retreating units. At this point the British officers were frantically trying to restore order, while just on the other side of a nearby stone wall, hidden from view, crouched Colonel Barrett's militia army. One of the minutemen behind this wall would later remark, "If we had fired, I believe we could have killed almost every officer in the British force. No orders to fire were given, so this fatal opportunity passed.

On the British side of the wall, this army was organizing itself. British units in other parts of the town continued to search for clandestine war materials, but both armies at the stone wall were poised for action and now facing one another. During this tense standoff, a mentally ill local man, Elias Brown, wandered and ambled about, mingling first among the British troops, then easing through the militia, and all of this time peddling hard cider to both armies.

By noon on 19 April 1775, the 700 man British force gathered itself together and departed Concord. The British marched east out of town seeking the protection of a ridge line. The ridge ended near Meriam's Corner, a crossroads about a mile out of Concord, and here the road narrowed to accommodate the bridge over a stream. The British closed ranks to a column by three in order to march over the bridge, and this is

when the first of many Patriot ambushes occurred. The colonials struck in force, attacking with over 1,000 men and their volleys proved effective. The British lost two regulars killed and six wounded, but they continued on back toward Boston. This trip back to Boston was to be Governor General Gage's worst nightmare, as he had planned a secret night time exercise to avoid just such a daytime concentration of militia troops.