



The American Revolution



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The Minutemen

Article 1 of 1

Need is truly the mother of most invention. The minutemen were absolutely the invention of rural colonial America's profound need for safety, security and stability in the face of a hostile Native American Threat. In the previous articles, the reader learned about how militia units were formed, armed and operated. Still, there was a need beyond the militia unit, and that need was for an aggressive, highly mobile and well informed, alert, attack force. A force that could be assembled according to prearranged plans and on a moment's notice.

Prior to 1774, every township, county, ecclesiastical domain, and tax district had its own muster roll of eligible males between 16 and 60, which constituted the militia pool. It took days, sometimes weeks to assemble a force and begin action against an Indian depredation. Militia efficiency was not sufficient to meet colonial security needs. Therefore, the colonials determined to invent an attack force, which could better serve the security needs. An attack force, which could be ready to strike on a moment's notice, ergo, the name minuteman. Select individuals were hand-picked from the militia muster rolls of the various colonies. Young, strong, healthy men were needed for duty and each was required to have adequate transportation. Colonial minutemen were between 16 and 30 years of age. Young men were also selected for their leadership qualities, local

popularity and their positive, assertive attitudes.

During colonial times, America was profoundly rural and this remoteness required methods of communication, and prearranged plans of action to aide the minutemen in their performance of duty. In Massachusetts, as well as Virginia, systems of alarm were instituted in the case of attacks. Bells were rung, guns fired, bonfires set and messengers on horseback sent out in order to alert the countryside as to hostile intentions. Prearranged gathering places were determined, and all citizens were made aware of their location. In Fairfax County, Virginia, John Hollis' Tavern and Inn was one such rendezvous as was the Hoyt farm house in rural Amesbury, Massachusetts.

This system allowed [1] the populace to be alerted and informed, and [2] the concentration of families in designated strong points. Native Americans were very opportunistic by nature and experience. An Indian war party of 20 braves would not hesitate to take down a lone horseman. That same war party would look upon 12 families assembled at a strong point and hesitate. Reasoning that there were enough men and boys to fire guns, and enough women and girls reloading to make the enterprise very risky. If the war party decided to persist in the attack, it would not be long before minutemen would arrive.

By 1774, colonial America had more towns and the towns were better connected with improved roads and trails. Communications between towns and areas surrounding them had improved dramatically, because of stage travel, newspapers, and mail delivery. Likewise, military intelligence flowed through the "shadow government," because of

spies and minutemen couriers like Revere and Dawes in Boston. The Committees for Correspondence were quick to seize upon and efficiently use the organization skills of the minutemen.

In the coming article, the reader will discover how the militias and minutemen figured prominently in the conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies.