



# 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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From the beginning, the British operations that our history books have described as Lexington and Concord were confused, disorganized, and a series of costly, tragic mistakes. British Colonel Smith, the leader of this expedition, arrived late for his assignment, and discovered there was no organized boat-loading operation, nor was any officer actually assigned the responsibility for this operation. The “boats” were actually naval barges, which were packed with men and allowed standing room only. All of the British troops had to wade in waist-deep water at midnight in order to get aboard and ashore. After making land in Cambridge, there followed more confusion and delay of disembarkation. Finally, after delay in the unloading of gear, the main body of regulars began their 17 mile march to Concord at around 2:00 AM. The British did not carry knapsacks as they were not encamping, but they did carry haversacks, canteens, muskets, and various assortments of necessities. They marched off in wet, muddy boots and soggy wool uniforms. The few officers, who were informed about their orders, were alarmed when the countryside began to awaken with alarms, shouts and lights. They realized the element of surprise had been sacrificed. At about 4:00 AM the forward column was ordered to a halt and instructed to load their weapons. It was at this point that Colonel Smith sent a messenger back to Boston requesting reinforcements.

At sunrise on 19 April 1775, the advanced guard of British Major Pitcairn entered the township of Lexington, Massachusetts. They were met across the village common by 80 Lexington Minutemen and spectators. Captain John Parker, an American French and Indian War veteran, knowing he was clearly out matched, rasped his tubercular voice and said to his men, "Stand your ground; don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." Obviously, the first shot of this war was fired at Lexington by Americans.

On-the-scene accounts indicated that the British column, without orders, advanced on the crowd, precipitating gunfire from the Americans in the form of two unordered shots. Once again, without orders, the British column advanced with bayonets, and opened a volley of fire on the Patriots, who dispersed and fled. Eight Lexington Minutemen were killed and 10 were wounded. One of the wounded Americans was a black slave serving in the Lexington Militia. This lack of military discipline and control by both parties, would play a key role in the escalation of violence surrounding this day.

Chaos prevailed and order was not restored in Lexington until British Colonel Smith arrived with a company of grenadiers, and he ordered the drummer to sound "the assembly." Once order among his men was restored, the light infantry were permitted to fire a victory volley. The Column was reformed and marched off in the direction of Concord, Massachusetts.

Simultaneous to these events, the Concord Militiamen were gathering in that community, and militiamen from other areas were pouring into the town. Confusion

prevailed among the Patriots. One militia unit of about 250 men marched down the road to meet the British, while another unit moved east of town for better terrain, and still others reformed in town for its protection. The 250 militiaman column marching out of Concord encountered the 700 man British column advancing on that town, and the militia prudently performed a rear march back into Concord ahead of the Brits.