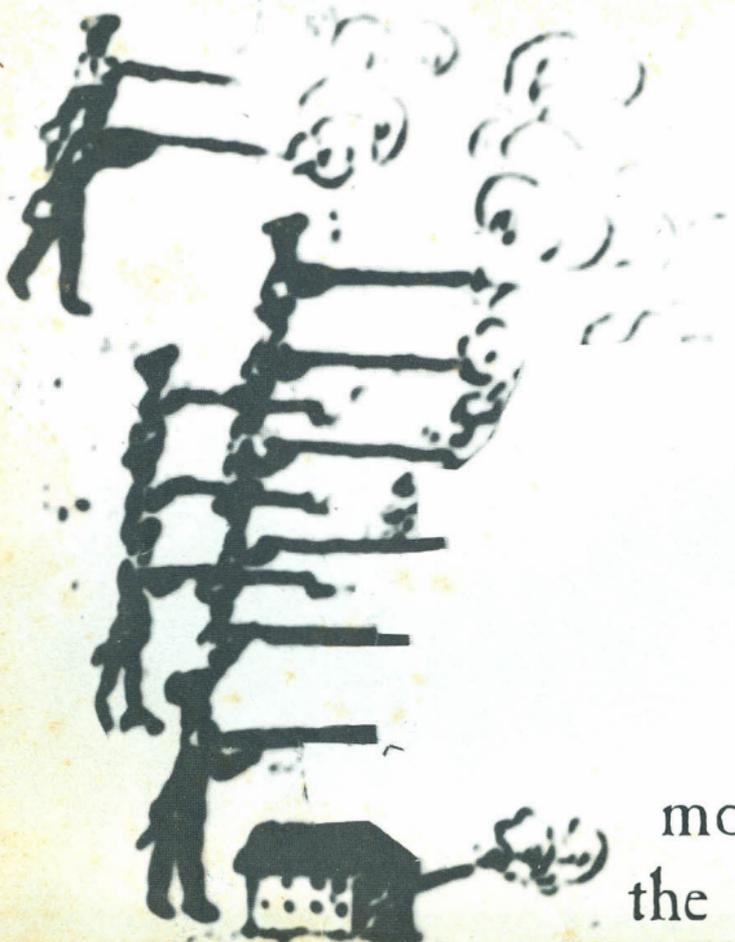


MINUTE MAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



A



thin line of
armed Americans,
drawn up across
Lexington Green on the
morning of April 19, 1775, marks
the beginning of the modern era.

TTrue, if the line had not been drawn at that time and that place, it would soon have been drawn elsewhere, for there was crisis in the air, sharper than any man on the green realized. A few Boston Whigs had hoped to lure the British regulars out into the countryside, where they could be dealt with more easily. And when he had heard of the first shots, Samuel Adams cried, "O! What a glorious morning is this." But the farmers on the green had no such expectations. When asked decades later why he had taken his musket and gone out to face the regulars, one who had turned out that day said simply, "We had always governed ourselves, and we always meant to. They didn't mean we should." That was the issue for New England. In some of the other colonies, where the farmers were Tories and the aristocrats Whigs, the conflict with the mother country arose over different issues—tinder which the sparks from the guns on Lexington Green ignited.

For six generations throughout New England, the common people had governed themselves. Each town even chose its own minister, and each church determined its own form of faith. They had always defined their liberties as "the rights of Englishmen," and now as loyal Englishmen they were determined to defend themselves against Parliament, though the British Ministry had no intention of "ruling" them.

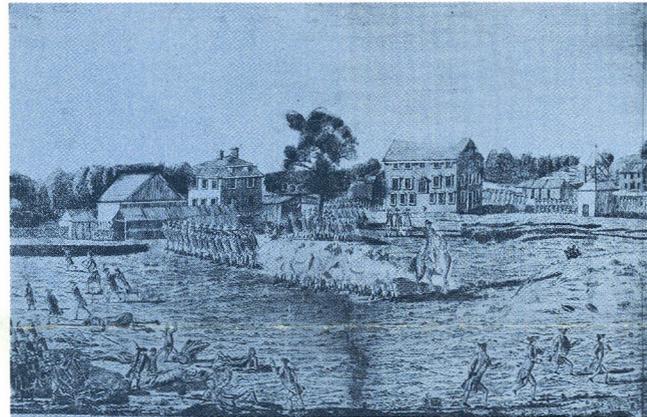
The British imperial system was, in fact, the most liberal the world had ever seen and inflicted no oppression. But the Empire had recently endured a world war (the Seven Years War, touched off by young George Washington at Fort Necessity on the frontier), and victory had brought new territory, new responsibilities, and greater expenses. The British Ministry believed not only that the American

colonies should contribute toward the cost of maintaining the western garrisons and the British fleet which protected their shipping but also that Parliament possessed the power to tax the colonists. When Lord Grenville, the King's chief minister, invited the colonists to share these costs, they protested that the proposed taxes would be unconstitutional and a dangerous precedent. The taxes finally laid by Parliament were hardly more than tokens of imperial authority,

but they were bitterly resented. To maintain order and prop up the Massachusetts Bay government, regulars were then sent to Boston, where for years the women of Loyalist families had suffered insult on the streets.

Resolving to nip revolution in the bud, the Ministry in London authorized Gen. Thomas Gage to take action. Gage knew that military stores were being gathered in Concord to oppose his authority as Governor of Massachusetts. So on the night of April

Pitcairn also called upon his men not to fire (the light infantry was now chasing the Americans) but to surround the militia. Then tragedy struck, as the provincials moved toward the crowd. A shot rang out. Other shots followed. Then, acting without orders, two platoons of the first light infantry company defiled to their left, formed triple-locked ranks, and poured a volley into the backs of the retiring militiamen. Pitcairn ordered a ceasefire, but the soldiers, their own colonels absent, ignored the major and kept up an irregular fire. There was only a light answering musketry from a few men still on the green and from behind walls and buildings around the green.



The first of four engravings by Amos Doolittle, a Connecticut militiaman, which depict the fighting at Lexington and Concord. Pitcairn's grenadiers volley at the provincials on the green (lower left).

Certain that they were being fired on from the meeting-house (the militia's munitions depot), the redcoats rushed that building. Pitcairn and Smith, who had come up, blocked the doorway, knowing that once inside the soldiers would have bayoneted everyone, as the rules of war prescribed for sniping. After furiously berating their men for disobeying orders, the British officers reformed the column and picked up the march to Concord, leaving behind 8 American dead and 10 wounded.

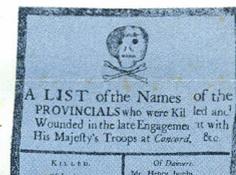
The people of Lexington hastily laid the eight dead in a common grave and piled it with pine boughs, thinking that the regulars might dig up the bodies on their return. Later the Lexington militia shouldered arms and marched after the redcoats.

After news of the skirmish reached Concord, 7 miles away, three companies from that town and two from Lincoln set off down the Lexington road until they saw the British column about a mile away. The provincials

waited as the regulars closed. Then they faced about and by marching along the ridge which parallels the road escorted the regulars into town, their fifes and drums joining those of the British in "grand musick." It was about 8 a.m. when Smith and his forces



Maj.
John Pitcairn





Gen. Thomas Gage

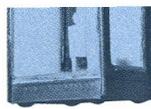
Governor of Massachusetts. So on the night of April 18, 1775, he sent some 700 regulars (the light infantry and grenadier companies of several regiments) in boats across the Charles River to begin their march on the rebels' stores. Their commanders were Lt. Col. Francis Smith, whose incompetence would be responsible for the outbreak of war, and Maj. John Pitcairn of the Royal Marines, an able soldier and a charming gentleman who was popular among the Americans.

After having lanterns hung in a church steeple to alert the waiting Whigs, Paul Revere crossed the river to Charlestown and rode out to alarm the countryside. About midnight Revere reached Lexington and warned Samuel Adams and John Hancock, who were staying at the parsonage of Jonas Clarke. The alarm also brought out Capt. John Parker and about 130 members of the Lexington militia company, but when the regulars failed to appear they were dismissed. Joined by William Dawes, another messenger who had taken a longer route from Boston, and Dr. Samuel Prescott of Concord, Revere continued his ride. A British patrol intercepted the party in Lincoln and took Revere into brief custody. Dawes was forced to turn back, but Prescott eluded capture and carried the warning on to Concord.

Moving with fatal slowness, Smith did not arrive in Lexington until daylight of the 19th. As the redcoats marched up, William Diamond beat out a drum call for the militia to reassemble. Warned earlier by a "very genteel man" in a sulky that there were 600 men determined to resist the British gathered on the green, Pitcairn, commanding the forward infantry, ordered his men to stop and load their weapons. Off the road a gun now flashed harmlessly, perhaps as a warning to the militia.

When Pitcairn and his officers reached the green, they saw to their great relief that there were only about half of the Lexington company drawn up in two ranks near the Bedford road. Other townspeople, including women and children, were gathered about the green and in nearby houses. All expected just to watch the column march by.

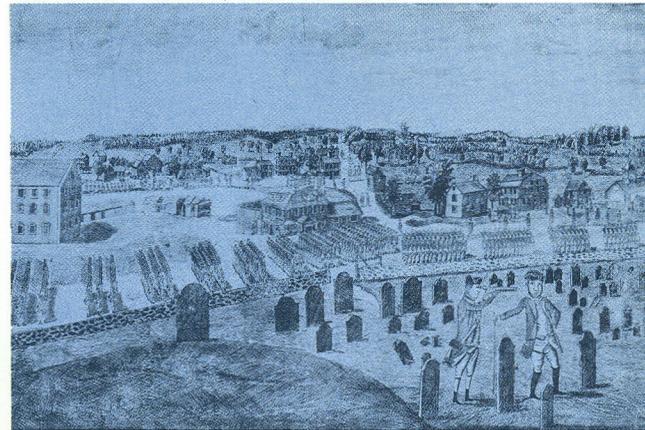
As the soldiers marched at quick time by the right side of the meetinghouse, the officers rode around the left. Parker, who never intended to block the vastly superior British force, ordered his men to disperse and not fire.



British in grand music. It was about 8 a.m. when Smith and his forces reached Concord. While one company of light infantry held the South Bridge, seven others were sent to secure the North Bridge and to destroy the military stores at Col. James Barrett's farm, which lay 2 miles beyond. In the face of this force, the militia pulled back across the North Bridge to higher ground on Punkatasset Hill, 1 mile away, where they were joined by fresh companies from neighboring towns.

Meanwhile, in Concord, the grenadiers conducted a gentlemanly and largely ineffectual search of private houses for military stores. Only tavern-keeper Ephraim Jones, who punched Pitcairn, offered resistance. After the cannon were found at the jail and rendered useless, the major asked Jones to serve him a meal, which he paid for, as did the other regulars who received a meal. For a subject to strike His Majesty's major as he performed his duties was unusual, but Pitcairn took good-natured consideration of the circumstances.

In the Concord townhouse the regulars found a large store of gun carriages, which they piled nearby and set on fire. The building also caught, and the officers might have let it burn if the townspeople had not persuaded them to put out the fire.



The British march into Concord, as Smith and Pitcairn (right foreground) survey provincials mustering on a distant hill.

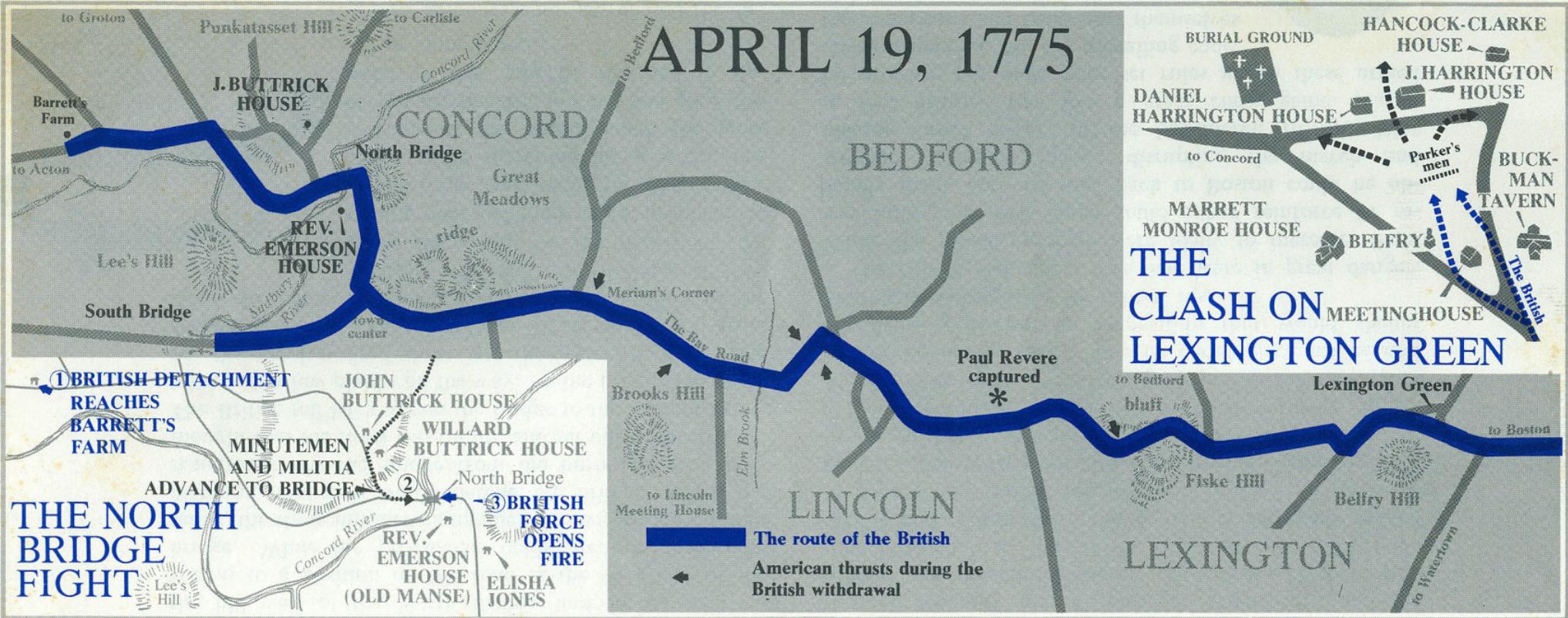
| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| KILLED. | |
| Of Lexington. | Mr. Henry Jacobs. |
| Mr. Robert Munroe. | Mr. Samuel Cook. |
| Mr. James Parker. | Mr. Ebenezer Colwell, jr. |
| Mr. Samuel Hildrey. | Mr. George Southwick. |
| Mr. John Harrington. | Mr. Stephen Dabney, jr. |
| Mr. John Harrington. | Mr. Josiah Wells. |
| Mr. Isaac Hildrey. | Mr. Andrew Parsons. |
| Mr. John Brown. | Of Swan. |
| Mr. John Raymond. | Mr. Benjamin Stone. |
| Mr. Nathaniel Wyman. | |
| Mr. Josiah Munroe. | |
| Of Melrose. | Mr. John P. G. |
| Mr. John Parle. | Of Concord. |
| Mr. John Wray. | Mr. John Bicknell. |
| Mr. John Wadsworth. | Mr. John Pidd. |
| Of Salisbury. | Mr. William Dimes. |
| Daniel Hayes. | Mr. Thomas Worthington. |
| Mr. ———— Bond. | Mr. John Gove. |
| Of Concord. | Mr. John Gove. |
| Capt. James Mills. | Mr. Ebenezer Stone. |
| Of Bedford. | Mr. Francis Stone. |
| Capt. Jonathan Wilson. | Private Lyman. |
| Of Andover. | Of Newbury. |
| Capt. John Hildrey. | Of Framingham. |
| Mr. John Howard. | Mr. ———— Hildrey. |
| Of Woburn. | Of Woburn. |
| Mr. Daniel Thompson. | Mr. George Bond. |
| Of Charlestown. | Mr. James Bacon. |
| Mr. James Miller. | Of Amesbury. |
| Capt. William Bokerlyson. | Mr. William Poley. |
| Of Rowley. | Of Lowell. |
| Har. Sucker, Esq. | Mr. John P. |
| Of Cambridge. | Mr. Timothy Moore. |
| Mr. John Hildrey. | Of Concord. |
| Mr. John Wadsworth. | Mr. Nathan Parsons. |
| Mr. William Maffey. | Mr. Joseph Wells. |
| Of Middlebury. | Of Beverly. |
| Mr. Henry Parsons. | Mr. Nathaniel Claves. |
| Of Lowell. | |
| Mr. Abner Randall. | Of Melrose. |
| Mr. Daniel Tompkins. | Mr. Samuel Pugh. |
| Mr. William Flint. | Mr. Seth Ruff. |
| Mr. Thomas Hildrey. | |

A list of provincial casualties from April 19.



The drum which called Parker's company to the green.

APRIL 19, 1775



To the north, the Americans, now reinforced, left Punkatasset Hill, marched toward the British stationed on the hill west of the North Bridge, and forced them to retreat to a position on the road at the west end of the bridge. While the provincials deliberated on their next move, the three infantry companies also waited but without planning how they would defend the bridge. When the Americans saw the smoke from the burning stores, they thought that the town was on fire and set out to investigate. The British fell back across the bridge to the Concord side, taking up a few planks on the way. As the provincials came on, the regulars fired shots into the water, then into the advancing ranks. The Americans returned the fire from along the banks and made untenable the position of the redcoats, who fled toward Concord. Pursuing them only to the first turn, the minute men and militia took up positions on the ridge overlooking the road, which Smith came marching along with reinforcements. He halted under the guns of the provincials, but no one gave the order to fire, and he returned to the village unmolested.

Pitcairn's pistols.

The colonists who had chased the infantry from the bridge now returned to the high ground on the west side of the river. Had they taken up the bridge, they could probably have cornered the detachment coming back from Barrett's farm. But the Americans only watched the regulars march by. Upon crossing the bridge, the British were horrified to find that a Concord youth had taken a hatchet to one of their wounded, and they carried to the troops in the village the story that the American savages were scalping their fallen.

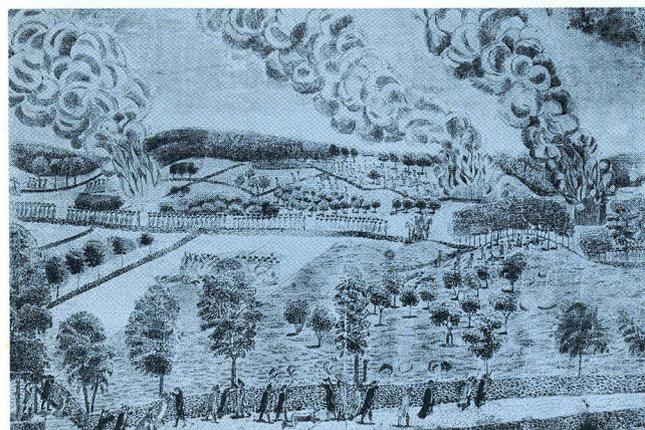
With his forces reunited and the captured stores destroyed, Colonel Smith prepared to return to Boston. The scarlet column set out about noon on the long eastward march, screened by the light infantry moving through meadows on the right and along a ridge on the left. At Meriam's Corner, the column reformed on the road to cross a bridge. As the flankers slowly descended the ridge, a minute company from Reading arrived just ahead of other companies from the towns to the north and took cover on the Meriam farm. Across the Lexington road some of the men who had chased the redcoats away from the North Bridge waited for another crack at them. Here, for the third time that day, shots were exchanged by Americans and British. The American fire was heavy, but most came from too great a distance to be damaging.

Hugh, Earl Percy left Boston that morning with 1,000 men and 2 fieldpieces. Taking the long route, he passed through Roxbury and Cambridge, where he found the bridge over the Charles (near the present Harvard Stadium) dismantled. The thrifty Yankees had neatly piled up the planks nearby, so the soldiers crossed over on the stringers and quickly repaired the bridge. At Harvard College, Percy received directions to the Concord road by one student and was joined by another whose brother, a recent graduate, had earlier marched out with Smith. Moving with swift efficiency, Percy pressed on to a point on the Lexington road where he could place his cannon effectively and establish a position that would shelter Smith's shattered army for a brief rest.

The British well knew that they were in great danger. While the rebels' numbers were likely to increase, there was little hope that Gage could either reinforce or resupply them; and the road back to Boston could be obstructed in many places, disrupting the march and making easier targets of the bewildered British. War in that century was like a great chess game, played by professionals only, with set rules which these armed civilians ignored. By the prevailing code, the Americans had conducted themselves like barbarians. Civilians firing upon any French or German army risked the murder of every man, woman, and child and the burning of every building in sight. Percy did burn three houses in Lexington from which sniping could be expected. But as his force marched back toward Boston, his officers did their best to prevent the ranks from destroying private property.

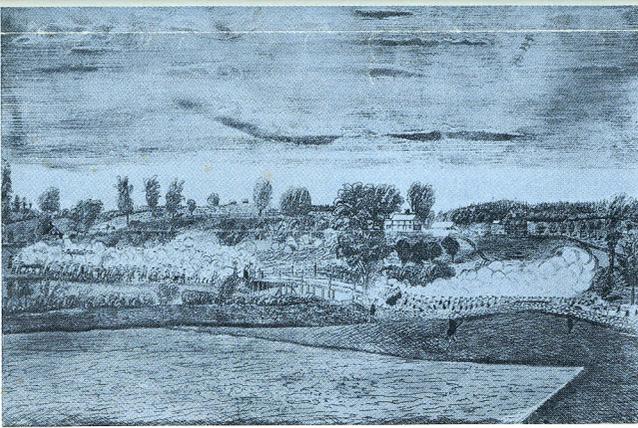


Lord Percy



The British retreat down the road to Boston while the provincials fire away behind stone walls and houses.

The skirmish at the North Bridge. At right, the British are already starting to withdraw.

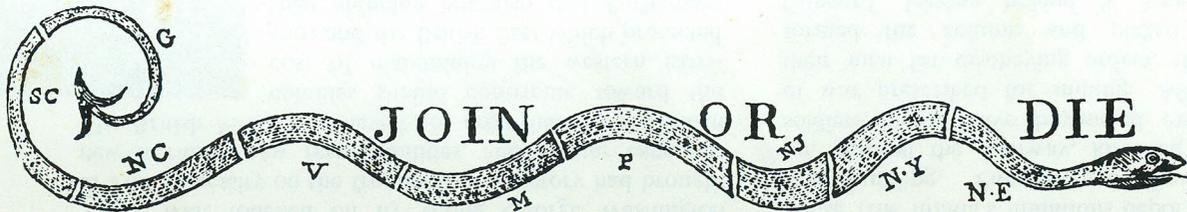


If the colonists were concerned in the morning about appearing as the aggressors, by afternoon they no longer gave it any thought. In steadily increasing numbers they took cover along the march route to shoot at the retreating redcoats, who saw now that they would have to fight all the way back to Boston. In Lincoln, about 1 mile beyond Meriam's Corner, the British had to pass through a gauntlet of fire delivered by fresh companies from Woburn in woods on the right and Americans who had cut across fields from Meriam's Corner on the left. Within one-half mile, eight redcoats were killed and three Americans were caught from behind by flankers and killed. As the British continued toward Lexington, the fire slackened but never entirely ceased. A shot hit Pitcairn's horse, which threw him and then galloped away to be captured by the Americans. Smith, when wounded in the leg, dismounted and plodded ahead lamely. Nearly out of powder and ball and with the flankers too exhausted to be effective, the regulars approached Lexington Green in a state of near panic, and the officers used the bayonet in their attempts to control them. All knew that to survive they had to receive the reinforcements which Smith had summoned earlier in the day, and these they now saw—fresh scarlet ranks drawn up near where they had loaded their guns at daylight. It was 2:30 p.m.

The most severe fighting of the day occurred as the combined British forces moved out from Lexington. At Menotomy (present Arlington), and Cambridge, many of the Americans who fired at the British from the cover of houses were caught from behind and bayoneted. (Nearly half of the Americans killed that day died in Menotomy.) At what is now Porter Square in Cambridge, the Americans tried to divert the regulars toward the partly dismantled bridge over the Charles. The British forced their way through and continued on toward Charlestown. Arriving after dark, they embarked for Boston, thoroughly shaken by their experience and its implications. They had suffered 273 casualties to 93 for the Americans, and they were certain that the next time one of their armies was caught in such a situation, not a man would escape.

Immediately after the battle, affidavits were taken from scores of participants and witnesses. None of these accused the British of atrocities, but the Whig politicians broadcast a version of events that would have made Attila blush. Thus when Maj. Issac Gardner, the highest ranking officer killed that day, fell at the head of his Brookline company while trying to ambush Percy on his return, the Whig newspapers described him as an unarmed gentleman who was pulled from his coach and murdered in cold blood. Fired by such stories, the English Whigs openly and vigorously opposed the war, in Parliament as well as in the Army and Navy, and made firm execution of it almost impossible.

When the news of Lexington and Concord reached the middle and Southern colonies, civil wars of a different pattern broke out—to merge into a single struggle and eventually end in independence for the Thirteen Colonies. Their French allies took home revolutionary ideas, and in the generations which followed most of Western civilization adopted political ideas and institutions similar to those for which the men of Lexington and Concord were fighting. Today, many observers trace the beginning of the end of the world's colonial systems back to April 19, 1775. The shots fired then still reverberate around the world.—Clifford K. Shipton



ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The North Bridge Unit is located at Concord, 19 miles northwest of Boston via Mass. 2. Fiske Hill, at the eastern end of the Battle Road Unit, is near the junction of Mass. 128 and 2A.

A substantial amount of the land within the proposed park boundaries is still privately owned. Visitors should respect private property rights.

ADMINISTRATION

Minute Man National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the great historical, natural, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of all the people.

Temporary park headquarters are on Mass. 2A in Lincoln. A superintendent, whose address is Box 160, Concord, Mass. 01742, is in immediate charge of the park.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

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