

# Section 8 - Lexington and Concord



King George had made many mistakes in his decisions about the colonies. The First Continental Congress listed all these mistakes in its message to the king. Now he made another one.

Rather than consider the colonists' complaints, King George refused even to answer their message. "The New England governments are in a state of rebellion," he said. "Blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent." In Boston, General Gage, the king's commander of British troops in America, got ready to deliver those blows.

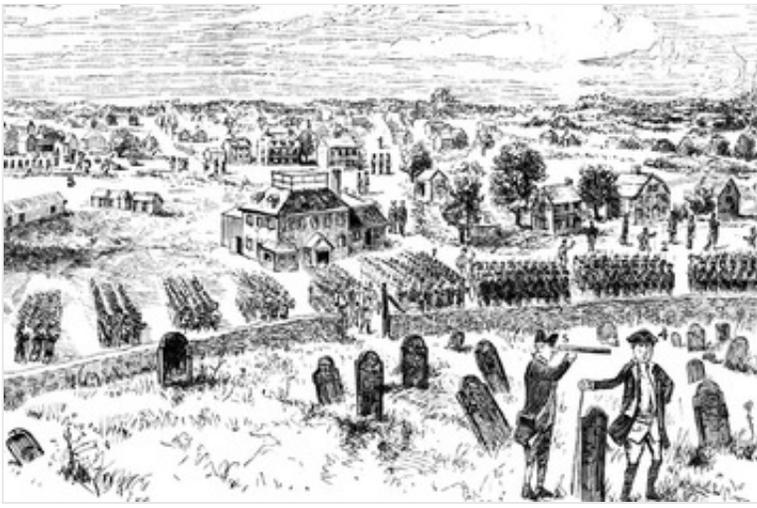
**The First Blow at Lexington** In April 1775, a spy told General Gage that the colonists were hiding a large

supply of gunpowder and weapons in the nearby village of Concord. General Gage decided to strike at once.

The general ordered 700 of his best troops to march to Concord and seize the weapons. To keep the colonists from moving the weapons, the attack had to be a surprise. So Gage had his troops march the 20 miles to Concord at night.

The colonists had their own spies. When Gage's troops slipped out of Boston on April 18, 1775, Patriots were watching their every move. Soon Paul Revere and others were galloping through the countryside, warning colonists that the British soldiers were coming.

The news reached Lexington, a town on the road to Concord, in the early hours of April 19. Led by Captain John Parker, a small band of Minutemen gathered nervously in the chilly night air.



At dawn, the British troops reached the town green. “Stand your ground,” ordered Parker. “Don’t fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here.” As the Minuteman faced the British troops, a shot rang out—from where, no one knew for certain. Without orders, the soldiers rushed forward, shooting wildly. A few Minutemen managed to return fire.

When the firing stopped, eight colonists lay dead or dying. Another ten were limping to safety with painful wounds. The British troops gave three cheers for victory and marched on to Concord.

**The Second Blow at Concord** By breakfast time, the British were in Concord, searching for gunpowder and weapons. But the colonists had hidden them. In frustration, the soldiers piled up a few wooden tools,

tents, and gun carriages and set them on fire.

On a ridge outside the city, militiamen from the surrounding countryside watched the smoke rise. “Will you let them burn the town down?” shouted one man. Captain Isaac Davis replied, “I haven’t a man that’s afraid to go.” Davis marched his volunteers down the hill. As they approached Concord’s North Bridge, the British troops opened fire. Davis fell dead, a bullet through his heart.

The British expected the Americans to break and run. To their surprise, the Minutemen stood their ground and fired back. Two minutes later, it was the redcoats who were running away in panic.

The retreat back to Boston was a nightmare for the British. More than 4,000 armed and angry Minutemen lined their route, shooting at every redcoat they saw. By the end of the day, 74 British soldiers were dead and another 200 were wounded or missing. The colonists counted their own losses as 49 dead and 41 wounded. A British officer described what it was like to face the colonists’ fury that day. “Whoever looks upon them as an

irregular mob,” the officer said, “will find himself much mistaken.”

Indeed, since the French and Indian War, the British had been mistaken about the colonists again and again. Their biggest mistake was in thinking that ordinary people—farmers, merchants, workers, and housewives—would not fight for the rights that they held dear. At Lexington and Concord, Americans proved they were not only willing to fight for their rights. They were even willing to die for them.