

Minute Men

The American militias established in the colony of Massachusetts were based on an English militia model - every man over age sixteen was required to join and bring his own weapon to the mandatory musters (training meetings).

The Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1631 ordered that, “every man with a musket shall have ready one pound of powder, twenty bullets and two fathome of match, and that every captain shall traine (drill) his company on Saturday in every week. General training days once a month at one o'clock in the afternoon.”

In 1645, company commanders were ordered, “to appoint out and to make choice of thirty soldiers of their companies in ye hundred, who shall be ready at half an hour's warning upon any service they shall be put upon by their chief military officers.”

The organization of these emergency men was continued for generations, and later they became the famous minute men of the Revolutionary War.

Generally, minute companies were comprised of young citizen-soldiers, 30 years of age or younger, who were quick, agile,

and kept ready for deployment “in a minute’s notice.”

Like most militia forces, they were armed and equipped at their own expense.

By the 1750s during the French and Indian War, some companies began calling themselves “minute men.” While all minute men were part of the militia, not all militia troops were minute men.

Minutes of the Provincial Congress, Watertown, June 17, 1775 notes it was

“recommended to the Militia in all Parts of this Colony, to hold themselves in Readiness to march at a Minute's Warning, to the Relief of any Place that may be attacked, or to the Support of our Army”

Because they were expected to be ready quickly, “at a minute’s warning...” they became known as “minute men.”

Overall, these elite, highly mobile companies were very well trained in the art of maneuver, usually the first to arrive at the scene of action, and in the use of their flintlock weapons, mainly smoothbore muskets, and fowling pieces.



On the morning of April 19, 1775, despite the myths and fireside stories that would be passed from one generation of Americans to the next, some suggest that the truth is that there were no Lexington minute men standing on the Village Green to witness the first shots of the American Revolution.

Rather, standing on the Green with Captain Parker that fateful morning were men who made up, not a minute company, but a traditional New England training band. They were friends, neighbors, and kinsmen; they were the militia and brave men, all.

This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: www.sar.org

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