

## **“The Shot Heard Round the World”**

Britain’s 13 American colonies were founded in the 17th and early 18th centuries. They ran along the eastern coastline from Massachusetts in the north to Georgia in the south. Most of the colonists were doing well as the American economy was thriving. They had the highest standard of living and lowest taxes in the western world.

Each colony was administered by a royal governor, his council and an elective colonial assembly. The governors also controlled the troops in their colonies. These policed the towns and ports and defended the settlers from border attacks by Native Americans and the French.

British victory in the Seven Years War (1756-63) sowed the seeds of the American revolt. It freed the colonists from the need for protection against the French threat on their frontier. It also gave free rein to the forces working for independence.

The British wanted to increase taxes and make the colonies pay for their defense. The colonists argued that only their own assemblies, and not the British parliament, had a right to levy taxes. (British National Army Museum)

In 1775 there were about 7,000 British redcoats in America, with around 4,000 in Massachusetts itself. The royally appointed governor, Thomas Gage, had been granted broadly expanded powers.

Rebellion was in the air – on February 6, 1775, the Journal of the British House of Commons notes,

Resolved, That it is the opinion of this Committee, That an humble Address be presented to his Majesty, to return His Majesty our most humble thanks, for having been graciously pleased to communicate to this House, the several papers relating to the present state of the British Colonies in America ...

which, by His Majesty’s commands, have been laid before this House, and from which, after taking them into our most serious consideration, we find, that a part of His Majesty’s subjects in the province of the Massachusetts Bay have proceeded so far to resist the authority of the supreme legislature ...

that a rebellion at this time actually exists within the said province - that we beg leave, in the most solemn manner, to assure His Majesty, that it is our fixed resolution, at the hazard of our lives and properties, to stand by His Majesty, against all rebellious attempts, in the maintenance of the just rights of His Majesty and the Two Houses of Parliament.”

Acting on intelligence that the militia were stockpiling weapons, Gage ordered British Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Smith to march to Concord and seize the arms. Smith commanded the 800-strong force, drawn from several regiments, that was sent to seize the arms. An officer with 12 years’ colonial experience, Smith had served in America since 1767.

The rebel intelligence network suggested that the British aim in Lexington was to capture Samuel Adams and John Hancock, two of the most prominent Patriot leaders, but the size of the British army force was large enough to suggest they had bigger goals in mind.

The British soldiers and rebel militiamen raced to Lexington during the night; they confronted each other at Lexington Green - a village common area - just as the sun was rising on the morning of April 19. Captain John Parker, a veteran of the Seven Years' War, led a contingent of 80 Lexington militiamen, known as Minute Men because they had to be ready to fight at a minute's notice.

Most of the militiamen were farmers or tradesmen. Non-uniformed, they were armed with a variety of firearms including muskets and fowling pieces. (British National Army Museum)

Years later, one of the participants recalled Parker's words right before the deadly skirmish: "Stand your ground; don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here."

On April 19, 1775, initial skirmishes between British regulars and American Patriots marked the beginning of the American Revolution.

... at 5 o'clock we arrived there and saw a number of People, I believe between 2 and 300  
... we still continued advancing, keeping prepared against an attack tho' without intending to attack them ...

... they fired one or two shots, upon which our Men without any orders rushed in upon them, fired and put 'em to flight; several of them were killed. (Diary of Lt. John Barker, Library of Congress)



It is unclear who fired the first shot.

A skirmish ensued, during which eight militiamen were killed and only one British soldier wounded.

After order was restored, the British soldiers began the march to Concord, where militias from Concord and the nearby town of Lincoln were waiting. After the British found and destroyed rebel weapons caches, they squared off against the colonial forces at the North Bridge. Outnumbered and outmaneuvered, the British soldiers broke rank and fled, handing the stunned colonists a victory. (Khan Academy)

The march back to Boston was a genuine ordeal for the British, with Americans continually firing on them from behind roadside houses, barns, trees, and stone walls. This experience established guerrilla warfare as the colonists' best defense strategy against the British.

Total losses were British 273, American 95. The Battles of Lexington and Concord confirmed the alienation between the majority of colonists and the mother country, and it roused New Englanders to join forces and begin the Siege of Boston, resulting in its evacuation by the British the following March. (Britannica)

Within a week, 16,000 men from the four New England colonies formed a siege army outside British-occupied Boston. In June, the Continental Congress took over the New England army, creating a national force, the Continental Army. Thereafter, men throughout America took up arms. It seemed to the British regulars that every able-bodied American male had become a soldier. (Smithsonian, Ferling)

Following this, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence and it was signed by 56-members of the Congress (1776.)

The next eight years (1775-1783) war was waged on the eastern side of the continent. The main result was an American victory and European recognition of the independence of the United States.

Some 100,000 men served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Probably twice that number soldiered as militiamen, for the most part defending the home front, functioning as a police force and occasionally engaging in enemy surveillance. (Smithsonian, Ferling) Though never more than 48,000 served at a time. (Military-com, Stilwell)

Fighting on the patriot side were allied Indian tribes as well as French military forces, who supported the rebel cause both in the United States and in Europe by engaging the British in a colonial fight for independence that ultimately became worldwide in scope. (Veterans Museum)

The formal end of the war did not occur until the Treaty of Paris and the Treaties of Versailles were signed on September 3, 1783 and recognized the sovereignty of the United States over the territory bounded roughly by what is now Canada to the north, Florida to the south, and the Mississippi River to the west.

The last British troops left New York City on November 25, 1783, and the US Congress of the Confederation ratified the Paris treaty on January 14, 1784.

Between 25,000 and 70,000 American Patriots died during active military service. Of these, approximately 6,800 were killed in battle, while at least 17,000 died from disease. The majority of the latter died while prisoners of war of the British, mostly in the prison ships in New York Harbor. (Veterans Museum)

Lexington was not a serious military defeat, but it was politically disastrous for the British. Smith's expedition managed to seize few weapons and caused the very fighting it was intended to prevent. The violence turned a colonial revolt against British policy into a fight for political independence.

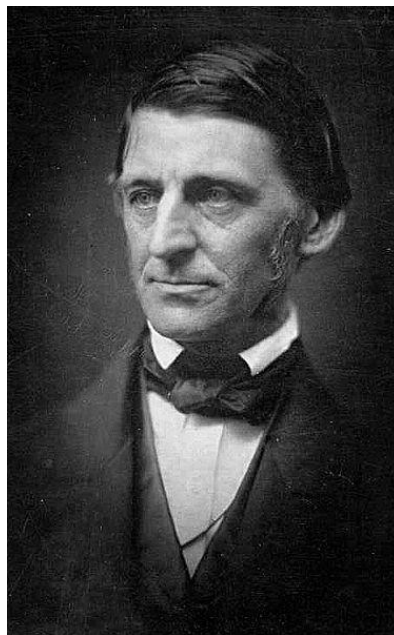
Lexington and Concord led many Americans to support the 'revolution'. For John Adams, these battles were the moment 'the Die was cast, the Rubicon crossed'. They also showed that American citizen soldiers could stand up to redcoats; something previously doubted by many on both sides.

It was the turning point in the future of the continent and an everlasting change in what would become the United States.

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It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who coined the phrase 'Shot Heard Round the World' and used it in his 1837 poem, 'Concord Hymn,' that he wrote for the dedication of a battle monument at the site of the North Bridge.

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,  
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,  
Here once the embattled farmers stood,  
And fired the shot heard round the world.  
The foe long since in silence slept;  
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;  
And Time the ruined bridge has swept  
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.  
On this green bank, by this soft stream,  
We set to-day a votive stone;  
That memory may their deed redeem,  
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.  
Spirit, that made those heroes dare  
To die, and leave their children free,  
Bid Time and Nature gently spare  
The shaft we raise to them and thee.



Information here is primarily from Veterans Museum; Khan Academy, Britannica; British National Army Museum; British House of Commons Journal; Smithsonian, Ferling; Library of Congress

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young