

The American Revolution begins, April 19, 1775

On this day in history, April 19, 1775, the American Revolution begins when the first shots are fired at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. British troops had been occupying Boston for several years by this time, but their presence was increased after the Boston Tea Party in early 1773. This only angered the colonists, who began stockpiling weapons and ammunition for the anticipated fight to come.

In Boston, British General Thomas Gage received orders from London in April, 1775 to capture the rebels' arms and the leaders of the rebellion – specifically John Hancock and Samuel Adams. The patriots had already learned the British would be embarking on a major action soon. Patriot leaders fled Boston for safety. The city of Concord was warned that its weapons stash might be the target of the coming raid.

On the evening of April 18th, Dr. Joseph Warren received word from his inside spy, thought to be General Gage's wife, that the soldiers would march out that night. Their target was indeed the ammunition and weapons in Concord. Paul Revere and William Dawes were sent out late that night to warn Lexington and Concord of the impending attack.

Around 9pm that night, the soldiers were awakened and told to assemble. 700 made their way across the Charles River. As they marched to Lexington, they became aware of warning signals in the distance and realized their “surprise” had been discovered. Around 4 am on the 19th, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith sent word back to Boston that the militia was gathering and he needed reinforcements.

As the message from Paul Revere spread around the countryside, local militia groups gathered and marched toward Concord. The Lexington militia gathered early in the morning under Captain John Parker. Lexington was on the road to Concord and the army would have to pass through the town or march around it. When the British

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arrived around 5 am, about 80 men were arranged for battle, but Parker told them not to fire unless fired upon. The British marched right in to Lexington and formed a battle line. Both sides were under orders not to fire. To this day, no one knows who fired the first shot at the Battle of Lexington, but shooting soon rang out and eight Americans lie dead, while only one British soldier was injured.

The army marched on to Concord and split up to search the town. Unbeknownst to them, most of the ammunition had already been carried away. North of town, at the Olde North Bridge, a standoff developed between 95 British soldiers guarding the bridge and several hundred gathering militia. This time, a panicking British soldier fired the first shot. The overwhelmed soldiers began to run for their lives when the Americans began firing back. Several were killed or wounded on both sides at the Battle of Concord.

The fleeing soldiers joined their comrades in Concord, and began marching back to Lexington, followed by an ever growing number of Minutemen who continued firing on them. Just when these fleeing soldiers got to Lexington, they met the reinforcements of another 1,000 men under the command of Brigadier General Hugh Percy. Percy ordered the group back to Boston, but the march turned out to be a tortuous one.

By this time, a few thousand colonists had gathered and placed themselves at strategic points along the road back to Boston. The soldiers found themselves under constant fire for the next eight hours. Numerous soldiers were picked off during the march. Many thought their death was inevitable. By the time the British reached Menotomy (now Arlington) the officers had lost all control and soldiers began fleeing and committing acts of atrocity as the fighting spread from house to house. Several colonists were killed in their own homes or in taverns along the road. The fighting spread into Cambridge as the

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colonists continued the pursuit. Eventually the soldiers reached safety in Charlestown.

By morning, more than 15,000 colonists surrounded Boston. 73 British soldiers had been killed and 174 wounded the day before. 49 colonists were killed and 39 were wounded. The Continental Congress would soon appoint George Washington the Commander-in-Chief and the militia surrounding Boston would be transformed into the new Continental Army. The American Revolution had begun and would last another seven years.