

Timeline: The Fights at Lexington and Concord, April 19, 1775

- March 1765 Stamp Act seeks to recoup small part of French and Indian War debt. Resented in America as “taxation without representation” and because disputes will be settled in Admiralty courts. Colonists see jury trials as a fundamental right of British citizens. British point of view: taxes much lighter than in Britain, colonies merely contributing to their own defense. Stamp Act repealed March 1766.
- June ‘67 Townshend Acts taxes some goods, including tea. Colonists protest, boycott, harass Royal collectors.
- Sept ‘68 British regiments are stationed in Boston as part of General Thomas Gage’s attempt to “overawe” inhabitants. Increase in violent confrontations between soldiers and Bostonians.
- 5 March ‘70 Boston Massacre. British soldiers provoked; they fire on crowd, killing five. John Adams defends soldiers, all but two acquitted. Huge propaganda coup for Sons of Liberty.
- April ‘70 Townshend Acts repealed, except for small, almost symbolic tax on tea. Parliament miscalculates colonial antipathy to tea tax.
- 9 June ‘72 Colonial smugglers burn grounded British ship, *HMS Gaspee* in Rhode Island. *Gaspee* was used in anti-smuggling efforts.
- May ‘73 Tea Act favors financially vulnerable East India Company
- 16 Dec ‘73 Boston Tea Party: raiders careful to avoid violence and limit destruction to the tea.
- June ‘74 Parliament imposes the Coercive Acts, called the Intolerable Acts in America. Boston port closed; Crown takes control of all public appointments in Massachusetts; new Quartering Act and return of British Regulars; Quebec Act protects Catholicism in former French territories and feeds fears of Catholic conspiracies. Massachusetts Charter abrogated, new courts created, imperial officers authorized to send Americans to Britain for trial. General Thomas Gage appointed royal governor of Massachusetts under martial law with orders to quell disturbances.

- Aug '74 Gage plans to avoid conflict by seizing war materiel. Supply is the most vulnerable point for provincials, since gunpowder is imported and few arms are made in New England.
- 1 Sep '74 British seize military stores at Somerville in flawless, bloodless operation. Colonists angry; militia not ready to respond. Some towns organize Minute Men.
- 5 Sep '74 First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia
- 1 Oct '74 Massachusetts Assembly, disbanded by Gage, meets in Concord and becomes the Provincial Congress, extralegal but de facto governing body of the colony. John Hancock is President
- 4 Dec '74 Paul Revere warns New Hampshire militia that Gage plans to secure guns and powder from British fort at Portsmouth; militia strikes first, firing on British soldiers and tearing down King's colors
- 16 Dec '74 Rhode Island militia seizes guns from British fort
- Jan '75 Massachusetts Committee of Safety and Supplies move arms and ammunition to Concord from vicinity of Boston
- Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for America, advises Gage from far-off London, with the clarity granted by distance
- "The violence committed by those who have taken up arms in Massachusetts have appeared to me as the acts of a rude rabble, without plan, without concert, without conduct, and therefore I think that a small force now, if put to the test, would be able to encounter them, with greater probability of success, than might be expected of a larger army, if the people should be suffered to form themselves upon a more regular plan."
- Gage wants to crush the incipient rebellion without violating the rule of law.
- 27 Feb 75 Salem residents, warned of British plan to seize materiel, move cannon and pull up drawbridge in front of British advance. Locals taunt and humiliate Regulars.
- Feb '74 Middlesex County Colonel James Barrett distributes arms to thirty private homes and farms around Concord for safe-keeping; guards stationed at bridges, Minutemen carry weapons everywhere.

Sam Adams says it is vital that British fire the first shots. "Put your enemy in the wrong, and keep him so, is a wise maxim in politics, as well as in war."

- 6 Mar '75 Bostonians mark anniversary of Boston Massacre. Tensions high. British 47th Regiment tars and feathers a Boston peddler who offered to buy uniforms and arms from soldiers.
- 13 Mar '75 Concord militia review; more than half of militia leaders are veterans of French and Indian War.
- 8 Apr '75 Prominent resistance leaders learn of British plans to arrest them; they leave Boston for Lexington. Loyalists and spies tell Gage where munitions are stored in countryside.
- Gage chooses Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith of 10th Foot to lead Concord expedition. Smith is near retirement, overweight, probably unfit for active service, but mature, prudent and trustworthy. He is ordered to seize arms and ensure soldiers do not abuse the citizens.
- 15 Apr 75 Elite flank companies (grenadiers and light infantry) taken off regular duties to prepare for expedition. Revere warns Committee of Safety. Gage knows of Revere's activities; British cannot make a move in secret.
- 18 Apr 75**
- 0900 Cannon moved from Concord
- Afternoon Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith receives orders to lead expedition, but is not told destination or assignment until departure. Revere alerted by stable boy that British officers are talking about an upcoming fight.
- 1400 Royal Navy seamen come ashore, talk about their orders to move troops in longboats across Back Bay to Cambridge. Dr. Joseph Warren, Boston physician, uses his informant high up in British establishment to confirm that Regulars are on the move, that Adams and Hancock are targets.
- 1700 British patrol of twenty men rides into countryside to block messengers. They arouse suspicion because they do not return to Boston at sundown, because they ask too many questions, especially about Hancock and Adams, and because they are armed. Alarm spreads even before Revere's ride.
- 2000 British Major Edward Mitchell's patrol passes through Lexington; militia gathers at Buckman's Tavern to safeguard Adams and Hancock.

2200 British infantry assembles on Boston Common. Confusion on crossing and landing in Cambridge. Soldiers wait, wet, hungry and ignorant of the mission.

2300 Revere rowed to Charlestown. William Dawes leaves Boston by land.

19 April '75

0030 Revere arrives in Lexington, followed by Dawes, then joined by Dr. Samuel Prescott, who had been out courting his fiancée. Revere warns militia sentries that the "Regulars are coming." Lexington bells ring.

0100-0130 Revere captured between Lexington and Concord. Prescott escapes by jumping fence; he is familiar with area and can travel at night. Revere tells British that five hundred men are gathering at Lexington. British patrol increasingly vulnerable and nervous.

Dr. Prescott alerts militia in Concord. Concord Town House bell rings alarm. Concord militia assembles at Wright Tavern under Major John Buttrick. Minutemen assemble in nearby towns and begin marching to Concord.

0200 Smith's column begins march four hours after initial assembly in Boston. Regulars are wet, tired (had not slept since previous night), hungry and unaware of where they are going or what their mission is.

One hundred and thirty men gather on Lexington Common under Captain John Parker, a 45 year old veteran of Roger's Rangers. Parker sends out scouts, then waits at Buckman's Tavern.

Colonel Smith, worried about lost time, sends Major John Pitcairn and his Marines to hurry ahead and secure bridges. Pitcairn, contemptuous of colonists, had written, "I have so despicable an opinion of the people of this country that I would not hesitate to march with the Marines I have with me to any part . . . and do whatever I was inclined. I am satisfied they will never attack Regular troops."

0230 Revere released. Bells and alert guns mark British advance toward Lexington. Colonel Smith sends request back to Boston for reinforcements. As sky lightens, British soldiers can see militia moving parallel to their advance on either side of road, west toward Lexington

0430 With British column a half-mile from Lexington, seventy Minutemen assemble on Common. Parker tells men to “let the troops pass by, and don’t molest them, without they begin first.”

0500 Pitcairn’s advance guard may have been fired on by Yankee horsemen before they get to Lexington. He orders his men to load their weapons and puts out flank protection but tells soldiers “on no account to fire, not even attempt it without orders.” He is now in a combat posture and his men are alarmed, told by Revere that 500 militia men await them in Lexington.

In lead of British column is Lieutenant Jesse Adair, a hard-charging young officer Pitcairn put out front to keep column moving at a rapid pace. On reaching the crossroads at Lexington Green, Adair can turn left toward Concord, leaving the armed Minutemen on his flank (a dangerous move in combat); or turn right and face the militia. He turns right. Pitcairn rides up and orders one of Adair’s three companies to turn toward Concord with the rest of column. Adair now has approximately eighty men moving toward militia on Common.

Pitcairn rides behind militia and orders Parker’s militia men to leave. Parker, a combat veteran who knows he cannot possibly prevail, tells his men to disperse. Most do.

First shots fired by parties unknown. British open volley fire. Eight militia men killed, nine wounded; one Regular wounded. British bayonet wounded militia men.

Smith arrives, horrified at breakdown of discipline. Pitcairn is unable to regain control of his men until Smith orders drum roll, which calls men back into ranks. Smith finally tells his officers their mission; they are unhappy at the prospect of advancing further into alarmed countryside

Daybreak in Concord

Major Buttrick’s scout returns from Lexington with reports of gunfire, but no knowledge of any casualties. Some militia men move east on the Boston Road, then turn around and retreat ahead of British column as Regulars deploy into battle formation. Concord Minutemen march away with fife and drums; both columns are in plain sight of each other.

0700 Colonel Smith's column of Regulars arrives in Concord. Provincial militia under sixty-four year old Colonel James Barrett withdraws to heights across North Bridge to await reinforcements. Barrett returns to his own nearby farm to complete removal of stores to surrounding woods and fields. Major John Buttrick and Lieutenant Joseph Hosmer, commanding Concord militia across North Bridge, can clearly see the town from the hilltop.

Several British companies dispatched to guard North Bridge while search is conducted in town. Innkeeper Ephraim Jones tries to block Major Pitcairn from entering tavern because there are three cannon hidden in adjoining yard. Pitcairn knocks him down, seizes cannon, then orders breakfast, for which he pays.

Grenadiers in town burn military supplies, including gun carriages and Liberty Pole.

At bridge, British Captain Walter Laurie has about 115 men, with his back to a narrow bridge and river; he sends Colonel Smith urgent appeal for more men. Militia, now about four hundred, see smoke and assume British are burning the town; they decide to advance on the bridge.

Militia moves in column (as opposed to battle formation) to fife music and with the same solemnity, one commander said, as in going to church.

0900 Brigadier Lord Percy's Brigade, the reinforcements Smith had requested, leaves Boston five hours late.

0930 Captain Laurie and Regulars are pinned against river; they back over bridge away from Provincials, pulling up planks behind them. Militia advances to push across. British fire warning shots, then a direct volley. Captain Isaac Davis and fifer Abner Hosmer are killed.

Return fire from militia wounds approximately a dozen British, three mortally. Provincials especially aim at officers, who wore bright scarlet (as opposed to faded red) coats. Of eight British officers at bridge, four hit in first American volley. Regulars, heavily outnumbered and with officers down, break and run to town, abandoning dead and wounded.

Militia crosses bridge and sets up behind stone wall, facing town, while Regulars regroup. Colonel Smith and detachment of Regulars, finally responding to Laurie's call for help, approaches from town. British officers

mill about in view of militia, but provincials have no orders to fire. Some militia move to ambush site near Meriams Corner.

- 1200 Smith indecisive even though he knows Provincials are maneuvering to block his retreat. He puts grenadiers and wounded on the road, light infantry along ridge north of road as flankers to clear ambushes.
- 1230 Exchange of fire at Merriam's Corner; Provincials number approximately 1100; some have marched fifteen to twenty miles since two AM.
- 1330 Smith's column under almost continuous attack as flankers are unable to keep militia at bay. Road becomes more winding and dominated by ravines, small creeks, sharp bends, perfect for ambushes. British column loses cohesion; retreat in danger of becoming a rout.
- 1430 Ambush at Fiske Hill; some Regulars break ranks and run. Smith wounded while rallying his men.
- 1500 Smith's column meets Percy's outbound brigade of 900 reinforcements a half mile east of Lexington. Percy's artillery breaks up closest Provincial formations. Percy's men have marched with only 36 rounds each; they are short of ammunition at the beginning of the fight.
- 1530 Percy begins withdrawal to Boston, burns houses used by snipers. He wrote later, "We retired for fifteen miles under an incessant fire, which like a moving circle surrounded us and followed us wherever we went."
- Brigadier William Heath of the militia orders a circle of skirmishers, "dispersed" yet "adhering" to the British square and using long range fire and mobility. Heath sends runners to units still enroute to position them in advance of British column.
- 1630 British reach Menotomy (now Arlington), scene of day's bloodiest fighting. Percy now pressed from all directions. British give no quarter to anyone fighting from houses; some militia prisoners killed by British captors.
- 1800 Militia removes bridge along escape route at Cambridge; Percy marches toward Charlestown instead.
- 1900 British reach Charlestown Peninsula; some soldiers hadn't slept for two days, had marched 40 miles, under fire all day long. It takes three hours to ferry wounded to Boston.

Gage would soon write, "The rebels are not the despicable rabble too many have supposed them to be, and I find it owing to a military spirit encouraged amongst them for a few years past, joined with an uncommon degree of zeal and enthusiasm In all their wars against the French they never showed so much conduct, attention and perseverance as they do now."

British losses near twenty percent of the approximately 1400 engaged.

Killed	73
Wounded	174
Missing	26

Provincials have approximately 4000 engaged

Killed	49
Wounded	39
Missing	4