

## WHO FIRED THE FIRST SHOT?

Following the French and Indian War, colonial discontent with the motherland (England) began to escalate. With the onslaught of taxation, colonial unity and a distinct American identity emerged and resentment grew towards England. However, the colonists were not fully prepared for a war. Many colonists wanted peace and did not want to fight. Nevertheless, the scorn of anger mounted in the colonies to the breaking point. In the eyes of the world, neither side wanted to be seen as the aggressor. Both the colonists and the British accused each other of firing the first shot. **(See directions for this assignment on pg 3!)**

### A Colonist's View

It is sunrise. When the first rays shine upon the green in Lexington, they fall on fifty or sixty minutemen with a brave old soldier who has been with Wolfe at Quebec, at their head. They show dusty columns of red-coated soldiers just coming in sight along the road... "Stand your ground. Don't fire unless you are fired upon." Says Captain Parker to the minutemen; "but," and I fancy his face grows stern as he speaks, "if they want war, it may begin here." The redcoats are close at hand, with Major Pitcairn at their head. "Disperse ye rebels, disperse," he cries. The minutemen stand firm. Angrily Pitcairn repeats his command, and follows it by an order to his men to fire. They hesitate. The Major fires his own pistol. Then the muskets of the regulars ring out, and the minutemen are beginning to return the shots. But Parker orders them back – the fight is too unequal. Eight men are killed, and ten are wounded. The war has begun.

### A British Viewpoint

At daybreak of April 19 the British reached Lexington, where they were confronted by sixty minutemen. Their commander, Captain Parker, told his men: "Don't fire unless you are fired upon; but if they want a war, let it begin here." A shot was fired, but from which side is not certain; then came a volley from the British soldiers which killed eight men and wounded many others. The minutemen fell back in confusion.

### Salem Gazette, April 25, 1775

...the Commanding Officer accosted the Militia in words to this effect: "disperse, you rebels – throw down your arms and disperse;" upon which some of the Troops huzzaed, and immediately one or two officers discharged their pistols, which were instantaneously followed by the firing of four or five of the soldiers...

...But the savage barbarity exercised upon the bodies of our unfortunate brethren who fell, is incredibly; not content with shooting down the unarmed, aged and infirm, they disregarded the cries of the wounded, killing them without mercy, and mangling their bodies in the most shocking manner.

**London Gazette, June 10, 1775**

...who upon their arrival at Lexington, found a body of the country people under arms, on a green close to the road; and upon the King's Troops marching up to them, in order to inquire the reason for being so assembled, they went off in great confusion, and several guns were fired upon the King's Troops from behind a stonewall...

**Captain Parker, April 25, 1775**

...and upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse and not fire. Immediately said troops made their appearance and rushed furiously, fired upon and killed eight of our party...

**Statement Signed by 14 Colonial Men, April 25, 1775**

We were faced toward the regulars, then marching up to us, and some of our company were coming to the parade with their backs toward the troops, and others on the parade began to disperse, when the regulars fired on the company before a gun was fired by any of our company on them...

**Lieutenant Thornton Gould, April 25, 1775**

On our arrival at Lexington, we saw a body of Provincial Troops armed, to the number of about sixty or seventy men; on our arrival they dispersed, and soon after firing began; but which party fired first, I cannot say, as our troops rushed on shouting and huzzaing previous to the firing...

**Account by a British Officer in Boston**

...Major Pitcairn came up immediately and cried out to the rebels to throw down their arms and disperse, which they did not do; he called out a second time, but to no purpose; upon which he ordered our light-infantry to advance and disarm them, which they were doing, when one of the rebels fired a shot, our soldiers returned the fire and killed about fourteen...

**British Brigadier-General Percy report to General Gage**

In obedience to your Excellency's order I marched yesterday morning at 9 o' clock with the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade and 2 field pieces, in order to cover the retreat of the grenadiers and light infantry in their return from the expedition to Concord. As all the houses were shut up, and there was not the appearance of a single inhabitant, I could get no intelligence concerning them till I had passed Menotomy, when I was informed that the rebels had attacked his Majesty's troops who were retiring, overpowered by numbers, greatly exhausted and fatigued, and having expended almost all their ammunition – and at about 2 o' clock I met them retiring rough the town of Lexington – I immediately ordered the 2 field pieces to fire at the rebels, and drew up the brigade on a height.

