

The following are accounts of the encounter between the British Redcoats and the American Patriots at Lexington and Concord. Each is taken from a different source. Read them carefully, then use the questions which follow to compare them.

From Textbook 1:

It is sunrise. When the first rays shine upon the green in Lexington, they fall on fifty or sixty minutemen, with the brave old soldier who had 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 a war, it may as well begin here." The redcoats are close at hand, with Major Pitcairn at their head. "Disperse ye rebels; disperse," he cried. 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.

From Textbook 3:

At daybreak of April 19 the British reached Lexington, where they were confronted by about 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. Unable to oppose a force that outnumbered them ten to one, the minutemen fell back in confusion.

From Textbook 2:

Samuel Adams and Hancock made their escape before the British reached Lexington. Other Americans, however, were on the village common awaiting the British. About seventy minutemen were ready to dispute the passage of the British soldiers. They did not withdraw until they were fired upon and eight of their number killed. Thus began the War of American Independence.

From Textbook 4:

Pitcairn reached Lexington at sunrise and found himself confronted by some forty minutemen under Captain John Parker. With an oath he called upon them to disperse, but they stood as motionless as a wall, and he ordered his men to fire. (Note: there are different statements as to the opening shots.) The volley laid seven of the patriots dead and ten wounded upon the village green. Parker was greatly outnumbered, said after making a feeble resistance, ordered his men to retire.

Source 5: Salem Gazette Salem Massachusetts, April 25th, 1775

At Lexington, six miles below Concord, a company militia, of about one hundred men, mustered near the Meeting-House; the Troops came in sight of them just before sunrise; and running within a few rods of them, the Commanding Officer accosted the Militia in words to this affect: “Disperse you rebels – throw down your arms and disperse”; upon which the Troops huzzaed, and immediately one or two officers discharged their pistols, which were instantaneously followed by the firing of four or five soldiers, and then there seemed to be a general discharge from the whole body; eight of our men were killed and nine wounded....

In Lexington, the enemy set fire to Deacon Joseph Loring’s house and barn, Mrs. Mullikin’s house and shop, and Mr. Joshua Bond’s house and shop which were all consumed.... They pillaged almost every house and passed by, breaking and destroying doors, windows, glasses, etc., and carrying off clothing and other valuable brethren who fell, is almost incredible; 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.

We have the pleasure to say, that, notwithstanding the highest provocations given by the enemy, not one instance of cruelty, that we have heard of, was committed by our victorious militia...

Source 6: John Robbins

Captain Parker’s company being drawn upon the green before sunrise, and I being in the front rank, there suddenly appeared a number of the King’s Troops, about a thousand, as I thought, at the distance of about sixty or seventy yards from us, huzzaing and on a quick pace towards us: the foremost of which cried, “Throw down your arms, ye villains, ye rebels”, upon which the said company dispersing, the foremost of the three officers ordered their men saying, “fire, by God, fire”; at which moment we received a very heavy and close fire from them; at which instant, being wounded, I fell, and several of our men were shot dead by one volley. Captain Parker’s men, I believe had not then fired a gun.
Statement of John Robbins April 24th, 1775

Source 7: Statement of Captain John Parker, April 25. 1775
I, John Parker, of lawful age, and commander of the Militia in Lexington, do testify and declare, that on the nineteenth (of April), being informed.... That a number of British troops were on the march from Boston... ordered our militia to meet on the Common in said Lexington, to consult what to do, and concluded not to... meddle or make with the said troops (if they should approach) unless they should insult us; and upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse and not to fire. Immediately said troops made their appearance, and rushed furiously, fired upon and killed eight of our party, without receiving any provocation therefore from us.

Source 8:

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.

Statement signed by fourteen men, April 25, 1775

Source 9:

British continued their march toward us when an officer on horseback, Lt. Col. Smith, who rode in front of the troops exclaimed, law down your arms and disperse, you rebels! Finding our company kept their ground, Col. Smith ordered his troops to fire.

Statement of John Monroe (An eyewitness of the battle, 1825)

Questions:

- 1) How many minutemen were at Lexington?
- 2) What did Captain Parker say?
- 3) What did Major Pitcairn say?
- 4) Who fired the first shot?
- 5) How many casualties were there? Ouchie!
- 6) Which account do you believe is the most reliable?

Source 10:

From the Diary of another British Officer, Lieutenant John Barker, April 19, 1775, telling how the troops approached Lexington:

At 5 o'clock we arrived there and saw a number of people. I believe between 200 and 300, formed in a common in the middle of the town; we still continued advancing, keeping prepared against attack tho' without intending to attack them; but on our coming near 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, we could not tell how many, because they got behind walls and into the woods; nobody else hurt. We then formed on the Common, but with some difficulty, the men were so wild they could hear no orders....

On the retreat we were now obliged to force almost every house on the road, for the rebels had taken possession of them and galled us exceedingly; but they suffered for their temerity, for all that were found in the houses were put to death....

April 25. Our soldiers the other day, tho' they showed no want of courage yet were so wild and irregular, that there was no keeping 'em in order; by their eagerness and inattention they kill'd many of our own people, and the plundering was shamefull; many hardly thought of anything else; what was worse, they were encouraged by some officers.