

Lexington and Concord

Jonas Clark



OVERVIEW

In the spring of 1775, Paul Revere and William Dawes warned American colonial minutemen that the British were coming to destroy a store of arms at Concord, Massachusetts (near Boston). The minutemen assembled at Lexington, several miles east of Concord. The actions that followed marked the beginning of the American Revolution, and were recorded by Jonas Clark, a minister from Lexington.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- Why was this massacre particularly appalling according to the author?
 - How does Clark describe the battle's end?
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Between the hours of twelve and one, on the morning of the nineteenth of April, we received intelligence, by express, from the Honorable Joseph Warren Esq; at Boston, "that a large body of the king's troops (supposed to be a brigade of about 12, or 1500) were embarked in boats from Boston, and gone over to land on Lechmere's-Point (so called) in Cambridge: And that it was shrewdly suspected, that they were ordered to seize and destroy the stores, belonging to the colony, then deposited at Concord." . . .

Upon this intelligence, . . . the militia of this town were alarmed, and ordered to meet on the usual place of parade; not with any design of commencing hostilities upon the king's troops, but to consult what might be done for our own and the people's safety. . . .

About the same time, two persons were sent express to Cambridge, if possible, to gain intelligence of the motions of the troops, and what route they took.

The militia met according to order; and waited the return of the messengers, that they might order their measures as occasion should require. Between 3 and 4 o'clock, one of the expresses returned, informing, that there was no appearance of the troops, on the roads, either from Cambridge or Charlestown; and that it was supposed that the movements in the army the evening before, were only a feint to alarm the people. Upon this, therefore, the militia company were dismissed for the present, but with orders to be within call of the drum,—waiting the return of the other messenger, who was expected in about an hour, or sooner, if any discovery should be made of the motions of the troops.—But he was prevented by their silent and sudden arrival at the place where he was, waiting for intelligence. So that, after all this

precaution, we had no notice of their approach, 'till the brigade was actually in the town. . . .

However, the commanding officer thought best to call the company together. . . .

Accordingly, about half an hour after four o'clock, alarm guns were fired, and the drums beat to arms; and the militia were collecting together.—Some, to the number of about 50, or 60, or possibly more, were on the parade, others were coming towards it.—In the mean time, the troops, having thus stolen a march upon us, and to prevent any intelligence of their approach, having seized and held prisoners several persons whom they met unarmed upon the road, seemed to come determined for murder and bloodshed; and that whether provoked to it, or not!—When within about half a quarter of a mile of the meeting-house, they halted, and the command was given to prime and load; which being done, they marched on 'till they came up to the east end of said meeting-house, in sight of our militia. . . .

No sooner did they come in sight of our company, but one of them, supposed to be an officer of rank, was heard to say to the troops, "Damn them; we will have them!"—Upon which the troops shouted aloud, huzza'd, and rushed furiously towards our men. . . . The foremost, who was within a few yards of our men, brandishing his sword, and then pointing towards them, with a loud voice said, to the troops, "Fire!—By God, fire!"—which was instantly followed by a discharge of arms from the said troops, succeeded by a very heavy and close fire upon our party, dispersing, so long as any of them were within reach.—Eight were left dead upon the ground! Ten were wounded.—The rest of the company, through divine goodness, were (to a miracle) preserved unhurt in this murderous action!

. . . Having thus vanquished the party in Lexington, the troops marched on for Concord, to execute their orders, in destroying the stores belonging to the colony, deposited there.—They met with no interruption in their march to Concord.—But by . . . the stop of the troops at Lexington, many thousands were saved to the colony, and they were, in a great measure, frustrated in their design.

When the troops made their approach to the easterly part of the town, the provincials of Concord and some neighbouring towns, were collected and collecting in an advantageous post, . . . first to a hill about 80 rods further north, and then over the north-bridge (so called) about a mile from the town. . . .

In the mean time, the British detachment marched into the center of the town. . . .

. . . 100 men, under Capt. Lawrie, were left to guard the bridge. The provincials, who were in sight of the bridge, observing the troops attempting to take up the planks of said bridge, thought it necessary to dislodge them, and gain possession of the bridge.—They accordingly marched, but with express orders not to fire, unless first fired upon by the king's troops. Upon their approach towards the bridge, Capt. Lawrie's party fired upon them, killed

Capt. Davis and another man dead upon the spot, and wounded several others. Upon this our militia rushed on, with a spirit becoming free-born Americans, returned the fire upon the enemy, killed 2, wounded several and drove them from the bridge, and pursued them towards the town, 'till they were covered by a reinforcement from the main body. The provincials then took post on a hill, at some distance, north of the town. . . .

In the mean time, the king's troops collected; and having dressed their wounded, destroyed what stores they could find, and insulted and plundered a number of the inhabitants, prepared for a retreat. . . .

The troops began a hasty retreat about the middle of the day: and were no sooner out of the town, but they began to meet the effects of the just resentments of this injured people. The provincials fired upon them from various quarters, and pursued them (though without any military order) with a firmness and intrepidity, beyond what could have been expected, on the first onset, and in such a day of confusion and distress!—The fire was returned, for a time, with great fury, by the troops as they retreated, though (through divine goodness) with but little execution.—This scene continued, with but little intermission, till they returned to Lexington; when it was evident, that, having lost numbers in killed, wounded, and prisoners that fell into our hands, they began to be, not only fatigued, but greatly disheartened. And it is supposed they must have soon surrendered at discretion, had they not been reinforced.