

Lexington and Concord

¹ When news of the Continental Congress reached England, King George III was very angry. By 1775, the British government decided they would no longer ignore the events in the American colonies. They were beginning to think that, perhaps, the colonists were a serious threat. In April of 1775, English Secretary of State Dartmouth ordered Lt. General Thomas Gage to seize the colonists' weapons and arrest the leaders of the rebel uprising. His timing could have been a bit better. If the order had been received one day earlier, the entire Massachusetts Congress would have been in session, and all members could have been easily arrested. As it was, the members had **adjourned** and were on their way to their homes. John Hancock and Samuel Adams, two of the leaders in Massachusetts, had been advised to leave town immediately after the Congress adjourned. They decided to make their way to the home of Reverend Clarke in Lexington, Massachusetts.



² The members of the congress were scattered throughout the countryside, so General Gage decided to seize and destroy the weapons and ammunition he had heard were being stored near Concord, Massachusetts. He realized that every move the British army made in the colonies was being watched carefully. He decided that the best way to carry out his plan would be to keep the plans secret to everyone, even his own soldiers. He told only one man, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith. At 9:00 P.M. the night of April 18, 1775, Gage ordered his troops to assemble and made ready to leave Boston. He ordered Lord Percy to follow six hours later with his troops. By 9:30 P.M. the secret was already out. Word had spread to the colonists that the army was on the move. William Dawes was already on his way by land to find and warn John Hancock and Samuel Adams. By 10:00 P.M., Paul Revere was on his way across the Charles River with the same messages.

³ Around midnight, Revere arrived at the home of Rev. Clarke. He reported the news to John Hancock and Rev. Clarke sent for the minutemen of Lexington. William Dawes arrived a short time later and then both Revere and Dawes left for Concord. A resident of Concord, Dr. Samuel Prescott joined them in their ride. Around 1:00 A.M., the three riders were stopped by British officers. Dawes and Prescott were able to escape capture, but Revere was held for a couple of hours.

⁴ During this time, the colonists had been busy preparing for the British forces. At dawn, Major Pitcairn and his British troops arrived at Lexington Green. What they found was a group of militia men standing in formation. Pitcairn ordered his men to surround and disarm the militia. Rather than fight, the militia was ordered to **disperse**. Someone, however, fired a shot. No one knows whether it was a militiaman or a British soldier, but the British started shooting. They killed eight colonists and wounded ten more.

⁵ After the **skirmish** at Lexington, the British headed toward Concord. They still had a mission to accomplish. They wanted to seize and destroy all the weapons they could find at Concord. As they approached the North Bridge in Concord, they again found a group

of armed militia. This time, the colonists fought back. They made a stand at the North Bridge and militiamen fired at the British from all sides. The battle was short, and the British were **routed**. The defeat of the British at Concord was called "The Shot Heard Round the World" by people throughout the colonies and the world. The fight for freedom had begun. Even as the British retreated back to Boston, they were attacked by militiamen. The colonists had a small taste of victory and the desire for more. Finally, Lord Percy arrived in Lexington with the main British force to help fight off the rebels and aid in the retreat back to Boston. The Revolutionary War had begun.
