

THE BATTLES OF LEXINGTON, CONCORD AND BUNKER HILL

[1] On the 19th of April, in 1775, in Lexington Massachusetts, a shot was heard around the world. No one knows who fired that shot and it wasn't physically louder than any other musket of the time but it had an effect on the whole world. That shot signified the willingness of the American colonists to defy the king of the most powerful country in the world at that time: Great Britain. Some eyewitnesses said the shot came from behind a stone wall, so it was likely an American who fired it but no one really knows.

[2] Amid the tensions that had been under the surface for many years, both the British and the Americans had the same policy: Don't fire unless fired upon. When the shot was heard, unordered firing broke out from among the British. They believed the Americans had fired upon them. The Americans nervously fired back yet all of their shots missed save one, which wounded a British soldier. With bayonets, the British drove the small group of American militiamen off Lexington Green, leaving behind 8 dead and 10 wounded colonists. The redcoats proceeded to Concord. There were rumors about stockpiles of food and gunpowder hidden there. The colonists were alerted to the British advance and managed to remove most of the supplies before the king's troops arrived.

[3] Word of the skirmish at Lexington spread like wildfire throughout Massachusetts and nearby colonies. American farmers and shopkeepers swarmed toward Concord to confront the British.

[4] As His Majesty's forces were attempting to fall back to the safety of Boston, the colonists lined both sides of the road. They used every wall, house and tree for cover. From these relatively safe positions, the Americans kept up an incessant fire on the retreating redcoats.

[5] After enduring miles of this and near panic, the dazed survivors reached Lexington where a large relief column came to their rescue. The colonists continued to fire on the British nearly all the way back to Boston.

[6] At this stage, there were many who believed that peace was still possible. It was thought that the king might yet compromise and grant some of the colonist's demands. One of the main requests of the colonials was to have representation in Parliament. To many Americans, and even to some British politicians, "No taxation without representation" seemed to be a reasonable demand. But King George the third would have none of it. It was time to teach these rebellious colonials a lesson.

[7] The king therefore launched his mighty army and navy in order to put down the rebellion of the ungrateful Massachusetts colonists.

[8] The British held Boston and the Americans were determined to drive them out of town. The British had planned to occupy and fortify the hills on the Charlestown Peninsula. The Americans found out about the British plans and were determined to beat them to the punch. American military leaders decided to fortify a high hill overlooking Boston, Bunker's Hill.

[9] But they ended up fortifying Breed's Hill instead. It was not as high a hill as Bunker's but it was closer to Boston. The idea was to place artillery on the hill to bombard the British-occupied town and to cover the harbor.

Some of the American leaders were General Israel Putnam, Joseph Warren, Colonel William Prescott, and Henry Knox. The British leaders were Generals Thomas Gage, William Howe, Robert Pigot, John Burgoyne and Major John Pitcairn.

[10] The Americans worked all night, 12 hours straight, and on the morning of June 17th, the British commander was surprised to see how much had been done. The commander-in chief in North America, Gen. Thomas Gage, was quoted as saying, "These colonials have accomplished in one night what it would have taken my army a month to do."

[11] Gage ordered his ships, under the command of Admiral Samuel Graves, to bombard the hill but the cannonade was mostly ineffective and it did not stop the Americans from strengthening their positions.

[12] At one point, a British cannon ball came bounding over and knocked the head off of one of the Americans who was working on the redoubt. This created something of a panic but the officers managed to hold most of their men in position.

[13] The British had an opportunity, suggested by Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, to land some of their forces to the north of the American fortifications at a place called the Charlestown neck. This would have cut off the Americans on Breed's and Bunker's and this action would have allowed the redcoats to starve the Americans out.

[14] Sir William Howe was to be the over-all commander of the assault. Howe outranked Clinton and he decided against that idea. Howe and Gage believed as the king did, that a show of force by his well-trained and well-equipped army would drive the rag-tag Americans off the hill like a bunch of scared rabbits. Besides, the hill was not considered to be very steep.

[15] Gen. Howe devised a 2-part plan for his infantry. After crossing 1,500 troops by boat to the southern end of the Charlestown Peninsula, he would send the light infantry to outflank the colonists on the left end of the American line. Simultaneously, he would fake an attack with his main force, meant to appear to be a direct frontal assault, straight up the hill toward the American fortifications. Howe believed that the sight of his determined redcoats, with hundreds of flashing bayonets visible, would be enough to send the undisciplined colonials scurrying.

[16] Howe noticed that there were additional forces on Bunker's Hill and requested reinforcements from Gage. The flanking unit then stopped to have lunch while awaiting the additional troops. The Americans saw the flanking force approaching and realized what the British were planning. The delay gave American General Israel Putnam time to reinforce his left flank. Firing at close range from behind rail fences, the Americans were able to drive back Howe's flanking force.

[17] Meanwhile, on Breed's Hill, where the main American fortifications were located, all was confusion. Officer's orders were often misunderstood, miscarried out, or intentionally ignored. Some colonial reinforcements refused to advance to Breed's Hill. The American's lack of training and discipline showed the consequences of inexperience.

[18] The Howe's reinforcements arrived, bringing the total of British troops to something around 2,200. At about 3 o'clock Howe decided to make the main attack for real. The British line was 4 ranks deep and perhaps 500 men across.

[19] Facing them were about half that number of Americans on Breed's Hill. Knowing that the Americans did not have much ammunition, Col. William Prescott gave the Americans a famous order: "don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes." In this way, Col. Prescott hoped to make every shot count.

[20] The Americans waited until the British were within 30 yards. The word was given to "Fire!"

[21] The British were determined to try again.

[22] Some Americans decided it was time to leave. But others thought it was time for them to stay.

[24] Despite the terrific fire the colonials had poured in on his men in the first 2 attacks, Gen. Howe believed that with one more push, his men could take the hill. He ordered them to go forward once more. This time, many first removed their heavy red coats and extra equipment. Howe told them not to stop and fire, but to use bayonets only.

[25] The Americans who still had ammunition, fired their muskets. But this time, the redcoats were able to overrun the American fortifications. Since the British troops had bayonets and most of the Americans did not, the close-quarters advantage was with the British.

[26] It was during the retreat from the fortifications that the Americans took most of their casualties.

[27] The main American force was able to make a very good retreat, taking most of their wounded with them.

[28] The Americans lost the hill and in so doing, suffered heavy casualties. About 450 colonists were killed or wounded. Howe's losses were more than twice that high, the killed and wounded totaled 1,054 men. What made matters even worse for the British, was that nearly 100 officers were casualties that day, including the famous Major Pitcairn, who had been at Lexington and Concord. Every officer on Howe's staff was either killed or wounded.

[29] The British captured about 30 colonials who were seriously injured. Most of them soon died of their wounds as prisoners.

[30] Though the British took the hill, even they knew that they had paid too high a price for it. A few more "victories" like that one and the British felt they would certainly lose the war. When word got to London, General Gage was recalled to England.

[31] The Revolutionary War was begun by accident; it is unknown who fired the first shot. The famous battle of Bunker Hill was actually fought on Breed's Hill. Even though the Americans lost, the battle made many Americans begin to believe that they could actually stand up to the greatest military power on earth and win.

[32] After the battle of Bunker Hill, all prospects for a peaceful resolution were gone. 2 weeks after the battle, George Washington was appointed commander of the American forces. The war that began in Lexington Mass. on April 19th, 1775 would continue for 8 very difficult years. Both sides suffered unimaginably. But when it was over, a new country with a new form of government was created. No longer would the kings of the world rule as they wished. Now there was a representative democracy called the United States of America.

CORRESPONDING SHOT LIST

[1] British officer yells “Disperse, ye rebels. Lay down your arms and disperse.”

Br. marching into a firing line

Nervous colonists start to slowly leave the battle line

Musket shot seen and heard fired from behind a stone wall

Br. fire without the order to fire

Some Ams fall, some return fire

[2] Br. attack with bayonets without orders, drive the Ams from the field. A Br. drummer beats assembly and the redcoats quickly return to ranks

Br. column marching

Ams moving supplies

[3] Armed Ams swarm over the countryside towards Concord

Fire on the Br. at Concord Bridge, driving the redcoats back

[4] Ams fire on Br. column, Br. take hits, return fire, continue to march

[5] Br. help their limping comrades; are cheered up when they see the reinforcements

2 Br. cannons fire on the Ams.

[6] Colonial civilians are arguing

Image of King George the 3rd.

[7] Br. ships sailing

[8] Contemporary Map of Boston and the Charlestown peninsula

[9] Ams build fortifications

Images of named leaders

[10] Ams working on the redoubt

Br. Gen. Gage observes with telescope

[11] Br. ships fire on the hill

Ams keep working

[12] Am is killed, his neighbors begin to panic

[13] Br. officers planning

Map showing Charlestown neck

[14] Br. officers planning, Howe overrules Clinton

[15] Br. army forms at the base of the hill

[16] Br. stop to eat

Am officer with telescope sees them, orders Ams to intercept, battle on a sandy beach, the Br. retreat

[17] Ams are in terrible confusion behind their fortifications

[18] Br. reinforcements arrive, join the battle line

[19] Pan the nervous colonials behind their breastworks

[20] The Br. battle line moves forward up the hill

Cut to the Ams nervously aiming their guns.

Cut to the redcoats advancing

Am officer gives the command to fire

Br. take lots of hits. Am second line moves forward to fire as first line falls back to reload. Br. halt to fire a volley, take hits, retreat quickly down the hill

[21] Br. reform for another attack

Repeat [20] except that now there are already dead redcoats covering the hillside

[22] A group of Ams try to leave but are stopped and turned around. An Am officer says to them "where do you think you're going?" when a company of Ams aim their muskets at them, they about face back to the battle line

[23] No 23, sorry

[24] Br. take care of their numerous wounded

Howe orders another attack

Some Br. soldiers remove their coats and some gear

Br. some are wounded, form up and advance again up the hill

[25] The Ams fire, some Br. take hits but the rest continue up and swarm over the ramparts. Fierce hand to hand, in which the British are prevailing, because of the bayonets.

[26] Ams try to escape in panic, take hits

[27] Ams limp away, helping the wounded

[28 and 29] Br. occupy the hill, helping the wounded

Pan the dead, both sides

Br. tend to wounded Ams

[30] Br. officers shake their heads in disgust

[31] Various battle scenes

[32] Image of George Washington

Various battle scenes

The capitol building of the U.S. with US flag