An Account of the Battle of Lexington by the Provincial Congress at Watertown, Massachusetts, April 26, 1775[1]

Friends and fellow subjects, hostilities have commenced in this colony by the troops under the command of General Gage. It is therefore necessary to give a clear, early, and authentic account of that day's events. Proper warning is necessary on this alarming occasion.

By the most obvious account, it appears that on the night of 18 April 1775, the King's troops, under the command of Colonel Smith, were secretly landed at Boston. Their goal was to destroy the military depot at Concord, which was set up to provide for our defenses. On the night aforesaid, innocent travellers between Boston and Concord were stopped and greatly abused by these British troops.

Upon hearing of such news, the people of the town of Lexington formed a small militia. The British regulars marched into Lexington, whereupon the colonial militia began to disperse. Notwithstanding this [action], the British regulars rushed on with great violence and were the first to begin hostilities. They fired on the Lexington militia and killed eight men. They needlessly kept firing until the militia fled in fear. The British soldiers marched next to Concord.

Again, at Concord a colonial militia was fired upon. This time two were killed and several were wounded. The colonists fought back, however, and fighting continued throughout the day. Many more were killed during these exchanges.

It is difficult to describe with accuracy the British retreat back to Boston. Let us simply say that many houses on the road were plundered and made unfit for use. Several were burnt, with women and children driven from their beds naked onto the streets by the British soldiers. Old men peaceably in their homes were shot dead, and other acts were committed that would surely have disgraced even the most uncivilized nation.

These events clearly show us that the King's advisors have a vengeance for the people of Massachusetts because they refuse, with their sister colonists, to bow down like slaves. They have not broken us away from our loyalty to the King, however. We are still his loyal subjects and we are still ready, with our lives and fortunes, to defend his family, crown, and dignity. Nevertheless, we will not submit to the wishes of his cruel advisors. We appeal to heaven for the justice of our cause. We will be free or die.

British Account Sent to General Gage by Colonel Smith[2]

Following your Excellency's commands, I marched on the evening of the 18th with my corps of light infantry for Concord. I followed your orders with respect to destroying all ammunition and artillery collected there. We captured some equipment and rendered it useless. We marched with the utmost care and secrecy, but we found that the countryside had prior knowledge or strong suspicion of our coming. They often fired warning shots

and rang the alarm bells repeatedly. When we reached Concord we were informed that much of the ammunition had already been removed. This prevented us from having the opportunity to destroy as much as we might otherwise been have able to.

Shortly after leaving Boston, I detached a separate force to march and seize the two bridges at Concord. They reached Lexington first. To the best of my knowledge, from Major Pitcairn who was with them, they found on the Lexington Green a group of armed citizens drawn up in military order. They also had armed citizens staked out in the meetinghouse. Our troops advanced toward them, without any intention of injuring them. We only wanted to know why they had thus assembled and perhaps to disarm them. But they broke down in confusion and fled as we approached. One man fired before the rest of the group retreated. Three or four others jumped over a wall and fired from behind it. My troops returned fire and killed several of them. The men in the meetinghouse also began firing.

Some time before we reached Lexington, they also fired upon us but their weapons did not sufficiently go off. After Lexington, we marched on to Concord without any further incidents. When we reached Concord we saw many men assembled there. At one of the bridges they marched toward one of our infantry corps. When they got pretty close, one of our men fired upon them; they returned fire and an action took place, leaving several men killed. It appears that after we cleared the bridge, they scalped and ill-treated one or two of the men, who were either killed or severely wounded.

On our march back to Boston, they [armed citizens] began firing on us from behind walls, ditches, trees, etc. This continued without interruption for upwards, I believe, of eighteen miles. This was a deliberate scheme to attack the King's troops, for they could not have had such good timing and raised so many men had it not been planned out ahead of time. Notwithstanding the enemy's numbers, they were unable to take any heroic actions against us even though we were very tired. They remained behind cover the entire time.

Notes

1. The American account is adapted from "Worksheet 12, Lexington: Analyzing a Primary Source," *Teacher's Resource Handbook, The United States: A History of the Republic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984), 218.

2. The British account is adapted from James Davidson and Mark Lytle, *The United States: A History of the Republic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 109.