LEXINGTON AND CONCORD:

MORE THAN A BRITISH BLUNDER

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

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December 2012

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MORE THAN A BRITISH BLUNDER

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Abstract

Narratives about the American Revolutionary War have generally explained the British loss at Lexington and Concord as the result of several false strategic assumptions on the part of British leadership. The most frequently cited assumption is the British underestimation of the capability of the American militias and their willingness to engage the British in armed conflict. Meanwhile, historians studying the battle have tended to focus on the tactical missteps of the British expedition to Concord as the major reason for the British defeat. Neither of these explanations is false. However, this thesis has offered a third explanation. The British defeat at Lexington and Concord was rooted in the weakness of the British occupation army itself. Throughout 1774-1775, the British army stationed in Boston suffered from several problems which undermined its overall discipline, morale, and combat effectiveness. Many of these problems were unique to Boston while others affected the entire British army. This thesis has relied on several British firsthand accounts in order gain an understanding of the many hardships experienced by the British army in Boston. This thesis attempts to convey what the British soldiers and officers themselves perceived to be the problems affecting their army. The implication of this thesis is that the British soldiers who fought at Lexington and Concord were not the elite warriors of an idealized army. British soldiers were mere humans who suffered from common human problems. The cumulative effect of those problems weakened the British army. Finally, analyzing the condition of the British occupation army itself provides a more balanced narrative about what went wrong for the British at Lexington and Concord.

Introduction

"You know the rest. In the books you have read,
How the British Regulars fired and fled,
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
From behind each fence and farmyard wall,
Chasing the Redcoats down the lane,
Then crossing the fields to emerge again,
Under the trees at the turn of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load."[1]

-Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere", 1863

The above passage from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous nineteenth century poem describes the battle of Lexington and Concord. More importantly, the passage captures the traditional American perception of the first battle of the American Revolution. That the battle of Lexington and Concord was anything short of a disaster for the British is unquestionable. However, the battle of Lexington and Concord has become ingrained in the American national consciousness as a British blunder that was the result of an overconfident British army. In this narrative the British army not only overestimated its own power and capabilities, but also underestimated that of the American militia. Most general histories of the American Revolution have tended to support this narrative.[2] The British certainly overestimated their own strength as well as

[1] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere." *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863.

[2] John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29, 33; Ira D. Gruber, "The Anglo-American Military Tradition and the War for American Independence." In *Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American Military History from Colonial Times to the Present,* ed. Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 29; Don Higginbotham, *The War of American* Independence (New York: The Macmillan

underestimated the strength of the Americans and their willingness to resort to military confrontation. However this narrative simplifies the reasons for the British failure and reduces the outcome of the battle to one of wrong assumptions.

Historians such as Arthur Tourtellot, Allen French, and David Hackett Fischer have gone into more detail about this historic battle, and have provided more in depth explanations for the British defeat. Three reasons given for the British defeat are poor leadership, poor troop discipline, and poor unit cohesion.[3] All three factors certainly contributed to the British failure, and this thesis will examine how they affected the battle. However, these explanations focus on the immediate time frame of the battle of Lexington and Concord. What they do not explain is the root cause of the British failure, which was a weak British army. The British army that engaged the American militia at the battle of Lexington and Concord was not the elite army, famed, and feared throughout the world for its discipline in battle. The Battle of Lexington and Concord revealed the poor state of the British army stationed in Boston. Severe alcoholism, rampant desertion, meager pay, deep animosity between solders and colonists, poor living conditions, troop misconduct, neglect of combat training, and draconian punishment were all problems that plagued the British army in Boston during the winter of 1774-1775. These problems

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Company, 1971), 51-64; James Kirby Martin, "The Continental Army and the American Victory." In *The World Turned Upside Down: The American Victory in the War of Independence,* ed. John Ferling (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), 20-21; Charles Neimeyer, "Town Born, Town Out: Town Militias, Tories, and the Struggle for Control of the Massachusetts Backcountry." In *War and Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Fronts,* ed. John Resch and Walter Sargent (DeKalb IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 39; William Seymour, *The Price of Folly: British Blunders in the War of American Independence* (London: Brassey's, 1995), 39; Neil R. Stout, *The Perfect Crisis: The Beginning of the Revolutionary War* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 175-177.

[3] Allen French, "The British Expedition to Concord in 1775."*The Journal of the American Military History Foundation* 1 (Spring, 1937): 16, 17, 11; Arthur Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord: The Beginning of the War of the American Revolution* (New York: Norton and Company Inc., 1959), 209, 105; David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 242, 114-115.

undermined the morale and combat effectiveness of the British army which was revealed at Lexington and Concord.

To reconstruct a British narrative of the battle of Lexington and Concord as well as to examine British army conditions in Boston during 1774-1775, this thesis chiefly relies on five firsthand British accounts. The diary of Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie of the Royal Welch Fusiliers was first published by the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1890, and printed in book form in 1926. The diary provides an analysis of the battle from the perspective of a thirty year veteran. [4] A map of Concord with the marked positions of the movements of American and British forces that day was found tucked away in Mackenzie's diary. The Mackenzie map accurately "illustrates" the actions of April 19th, 1775. [5] The night of the expedition to Concord, Ensign Jeremy Lister of the 10th Foot, volunteered to fill in for a Lieutenant who had feigned sickness. In 1782, Lister wrote down his account of the battle. Published in full in 1931, the *Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister* provides a vivid account of the British retreat from Concord.[6] Published in 1924, the diary of Lieutenant John Barker of the King's Own Regiment, voices the resentment that some British soldiers and officers felt towards both General Gage and the colonists.

[4] Frederick Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston: Being the Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, Adjutant of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, January 5-April 30, 1775.* Ed. Allen French (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), v-vii.

[5] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 81.

[6] Jeremy Lister, *Concord Fight: Being so much of the Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister of the 10th Regiment of Foot as pertains to his services on the 19th of April, 1775*....[c.1782], (Cambridge, MA :Harvard University Press, 1931). 21-23, 4, 8.

The diary contains an account of the confusion at the North Bridge in Concord, and paints a picture of the deterioration of the British army over the winter of 1774-1775.[7]

Lord Hugh Earl Percy was the British commander of the First Brigade and participated in the battle of Lexington and Concord. Percy led the relief force that escorted the men of the Concord expedition back to Boston. *The Letters of Hugh Earl Percy*, published in 1902, contains Percy's account of the battle. Percy's good leadership shows through in his account of the battle.[8] This thesis also relies on the letters of Captain William Glanville Evelyn of the King's Own Regiment. Sixteen letters written to family members by Captain Evelyn were published in 1879 as *The Memoir and Letters of Captain W. Glanville Evelyn*.[9] The first seven letters deal with the Evelyn's experience in Boston from June 1774 to April 23, 1775. Captain Evelyn was thirty three years old and a fifteen year army veteran when he participated at the Battle of Lexington and Concord as part of Lord Percy's first brigade. Evelyn's account of the battle is very brief. However, the letters do provide much detail about the hostility and tension between the colonists and British soldiers during the occupation of Boston.[10]

Several documents written by General Thomas Gage have also been very helpful, particularly in their description of the buildup of British forces in Boston over 1774, as

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[7] John Barker, *The British in Boston: Being the diary of Lieutenant John Barker of the King's Own Regiment from November 15, 1774 to May 31, 1776*. Ed. Elizabeth Ellery Dana. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924).

[8] Hugh Percy, *Letters of Hugh Earl Percy from Boston and New York 1774-1776.* Ed. Charles Knowles Bolton (Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed, 1902).

[9] William Glanville Evelyn, *Memoir and Letters of Captain W. Glanville Evelyn, Of The 4th Regiment, ("King's Own,") From North America, 1774-1776.* Ed. G.D. Scull. (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1879).

[10] Evelyn, *Memoir and Letters of Captain W. Glanville Evelyn,* 6-8.

well as the strategic dilemma faced by General Gage throughout 1774-1775.[11] These include Gage's official correspondence with Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Dartmouth, as well as Gage's private correspondence with British Secretary of War, the Viscount Barrington.[12] These documents are part of the Thomas Gage papers, held in the Clements Library and published by Clarence E. Carter.[13] In May 1775, New Haven resident, Amos Doolittle traveled to Cambridge to take part in the Siege of Boston. During Doolittle's stay, he traveled to Lexington and Concord, took sketches of the town, and interviewed residents about the positions of American and British forces during the battle. Doolittle had the sketches engraved and published as four copper plates depicting the Battle of Lexington and Concord.[14] This thesis utilizes the Doolittle Engravings and the work Ian Quimby has done on them. This thesis also refers to the work of Arthur Tourtellot, Allen French, David Hackett Fischer, and Louis Birnbaum on the battle of Lexington and Concord. [15]

In analyzing the British army stationed in Boston, this thesis has relied on the work of military historian Stephen Conway.[16] The work done by Paul Kopperman on alcoholism in the British army, gives a focused analysis of the detrimental effects

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[11] Thomas Gage and Henry DeBerniere, *General Gage's Instructions of 22d February 1775.* (Boston: Gill, 1779), Early American Imprints, Series I, no. 16293 (filmed).

[12] Thomas Gage, William Legge, and Francis Smith, *Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783, Volume IX, Transcripts: 1775, January to June.* Ed. K.G. Davies (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1975); Thomas Gage, William Wildman, *Confronting Rebellion: Private Correspondence of Lord Barrington with General Gage, 1765-1775"*. Ed. John Shy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[13] Shy, *Private Correspondence of Lord Barrington with General Gage,* 7.

[14] Ian G. M., Quimby. "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord." (*Winthur Portfolio,* 4, 1968), 95.

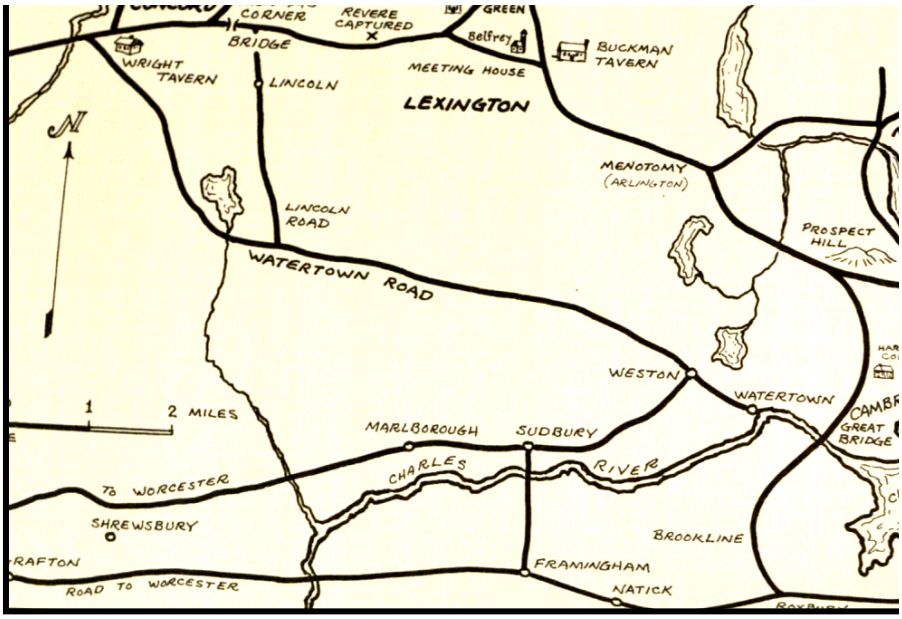
[15] Louis Birnbaum. *Red Dawn at Lexington: "If they mean to have a war, let it begin here!"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

[16] Stephen Conway, "British Mobilization in the War of American Independence." *Historical Research 72, Issue 177* (Feb., 1999): 58-76; "The Great Mischief Complain'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British soldiers in the Revolutionary War." *WMQ* 47, no.3 (July, 1990): 370-390.

alcoholism had on the discipline and morale of the British army.[17] This thesis has also relied on the work of Arthur Gilbert, John Shy, and Stephen Brumwell; all of whom are experts on the 18th century British army.[18]

[17] Paul Kopperman. "Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth Century British Army." *The Journal of Military History* 60, no.3 (July, 1996):445-470.

[18] Arthur Gilbert. "Why Men Deserted the Eighteenth Century British Army." *Armed Forces & Society* 6, no.4 (summer, 1980) 553-567; John Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Stephen Brumwell, *The British Soldier and the War in the Americas, 1755-1763* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002).



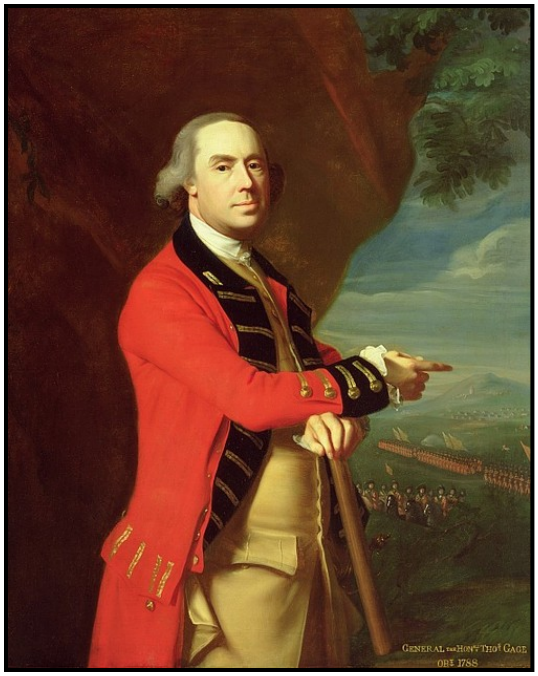
From *Red Dawn at Lexington,* by Louis Birnbaum

The British Occupation of Boston, 1774

In response to the Boston Tea Party, the British government cracked down on the Colonies and passed the Coercive Acts. Governor Thomas Hutchinson was recalled to London and Major General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-chief of British forces in North America, was appointed the new Governor of Massachusetts. Gage arrived in Boston on

General Thomas Gage (1721-1787)
1769, Collection of Colonel R.V.C. Bodley,

March 13, 1774 to enforce the punishing measures upon the city. General Gage was fifty-two years old and had served twenty years stationed in America.[19] He was a veteran of the French and Indian War, and a committed Whig. According to professor and historian David Hackett Fischer, Gage was a man of integrity and moderation.[20] However, Gage's moderation was resented by many in his army, who nicknamed him the "Old Woman".[21]



When Gage was appointed Governor, there were only fifteen battalions in North America, about 7,000 men. [22] Throughout the summer of 1774, Gage was reinforced with additional regiments. In mid-June the 4th and 43rd Regiments of Foot set up camp on Boston Common. In July the 5th and 38th Regiments arrived from Ireland. The Royal Welch Fusiliers and the 59th Regiment arrived shortly after. [23] By the end of the summer, there were eleven regiments in Boston.[24] A battalion of marines under the command of Major John Pitcairn would also arrive later in December.[25] In his correspondence with Lord Barrington, Gage confidently declared that, "Boston…will keep quiet as long as the troops are there" and that should any uprising occur, "you

[19] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington*, 33.
[20] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* xvi-xvii.
[21] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 21.
[22] Shy, *Private Correspondence of Lord Barrington with General Gage,* 3.
[23] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, July 6, 1774, 26-27.
[24] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 37.
[25] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* December 5, 1775, 10.

wou'd be able to overcome them, no doubt, in a year or two, and the affair is over and settled".[26]

Early on, General Gage settled on a plan to forestall an armed rebellion by removing the means by which armed rebellion could be waged; ammunition and gunpowder. Gage envisioned the employment of a series of small surgical operations into the countryside to seize and destroy patriot militia stockpiles that had been gathered in a few key locations. Such operations required speed, secrecy, and meticulous planning. The first such operation targeted the Provincial Powder House in Somerville, six miles northwest of Boston.

The Powder House contained the largest stock of gunpowder in all of New England. However, Massachusetts's towns had secretly withdrawn their share of the gunpowder shortly after the arrival of the British army to Boston. By August, only the provincial reserve remained. Gage was determined to prevent the colonists from seizing the remaining gunpowder. At 4:30 in the morning on September 1, 260 men under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel George Maddison of the King's Own Regiment quietly assembled on the Long Wharf in Boston. The men were picked up by the Royal Navy in thirteen longboats, and transported up the Mystic River. The detachment was dropped off at Temple's Farm. From there it was a quick, one mile march to the Powder House on Quarry Hill. The soldiers acquired the keys to the tower from the local sheriff and then seized 250 barrels of gunpowder from the Powder House. The gunpowder was put on the boats and transported to Castle William. The soldiers were back in Boston by noon. The

[26] Gage to Lord Barrington, Salem, August 27, 1774,117.

operation had ended without a shot being fired. The British detachment had achieved both speed and secrecy, which is why the operation was a smooth success.

While tactically successful, the operation actually proved to be a strategic setback for Gage. News of the raid quickly spread throughout New England and enraged the colonists. The very next day on September 2, thousands of militiamen from all over New England marched on Boston and a crowd of four thousand angry colonists gathered on Cambridge Common. The colonial response caught Gage completely by surprise. However, both Whig leaders and the British command managed to diffuse the situation. Though bloodshed was avoided and tempers gradually abated, the operation put an end to Gage's optimism and forced him to take a defensive posture.[27]

Gage fortified Boston Neck with heavy cannons and defensive works. Gage also ordered Bostonian's to relinquish their weapons.[28] To prevent an internal uprising, Gage adopted a policy of appeasement towards the colonists. The conciliatory policy agitated some within the ranks of Gage's army.[29] Lieutenant Barker of the 4th Regiment expressed his frustrations in his diary, "Is it not astonishing that the daily instances of the opposition of the People shou'd tend to make him (Gage) more earnestly attentive to them?"[30] General Gage's army was further supplemented by General Haldimand and his 47th Regiment, the 10th and 52nd from Quebec, as well as detachments from the 18th in New York, and the 65th in Newfoundland.[31] In November Gage reorganized his army into three, 1,000 man brigades, under the command of Lord Percy, General Pigot, and General

[27] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 43-50.
[28] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, October 31, 1774, 38;Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 50; Percy to Duke of Northumberland, Boston, September 12, 1774,37.
[29] Shy, *Toward Lexington*, 412.
[30] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker*, November 20, 1774, 6.
[31] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, October 31, 1774, 38.

Jones.[32] Gage informed Lord Barrington of the situation and requested for major reinforcements, "If you think ten thousand men sufficient, send twenty, if one million is thought enough, give two…."[33]

Still, Gage was determined to take action, writing to Barrington in February, "…to keep quiet in the town of Boston only, will not terminate affairs; the troops must march into the country…"[34] In February, Gage sent out a small detachment to Salem with orders to secure military stores stockpiled there. However when confronted by the colonists, the British force was unwilling to open fire and was forced to return to Boston empty-handed.[35]Rather than neutralizing rebellion, the failed Salem operation added fuel to the fires of rebellion burning in Massachusetts.

After the Salem operation Gage was still determined to carry out another raid, but he required better intelligence on the locations of militia stockpiles. Gage sought to map out the roads outside Boston, as well as gather intelligence on suspected militia stockpiles in Worchester and Concord. Captain John Brown and Ensign Henry DeBerniere of the 10th Regiment volunteered for the job. Disguised as colonists, the spies embarked on two separate missions; to Worchester in February and Concord late in March. The two completed their mission and brought back valuable intelligence to Gage. Gage concluded that Worchester was too far for a raid, being some 40 miles inland.[36] DeBerniere gave a detailed description of Concord, "…the town of Concord lies between hills that command it entirely; there is a river that runs through it, with two bridges over it…the houses are

[32] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 37.
[33] Gage to Lord Barrington, Boston, November 2, 1774, 121.
[34] Gage to Lord Barrington, Boston, February 10, 1775, 126-127.
[35] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 58-64.
[36] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 80-85

not close together but generally in little groups."[37] DeBerniere drew up a map of the town and marked the locations of all militia stockpiles. After receiving the intelligence, Gage began planning the expedition to Concord.[38]

[37] DeBerniere to Gage, March 1775, 15.
[38] DeBerniere to Gage, March 1775, 16; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 85.

The British Expedition to Concord

In April, General Gage put his plan into motion. On Saturday, April 15th, the light infantry and grenadier companies of all eleven regiments in Boston were relieved of regular duty. The pretext given was that the companies were going to learn new military exercises, though Lieutenant Barker had his suspicions, "This I suppose is by way of a blind. I dare say they have something for them to do."[39] That night the British Navy began making preparations for the expedition, which alerted patriots in Boston. In 1798, Paul Revere wrote an account of his famous ride to American historian, Jeremy Belknap. Revere wrote that on the night of April 15th, "…the boats belonging to the transports were all launched and carried under the sterns of the men-of-war…From these movements we expected something serious was to be transacted."[40]

On Sunday, April 16th Gage received a secret dispatch, dated January 27, 1775, from Lord Dartmouth, the Secretary of State for the Colonies.[41] Gage was informed that 700 Marines, three regiments of Foot, and the 17th Light Dragoons were en route to Boston. [42] Lord Dartmouth dismissed Gage's November request for 20,000 troops as unnecessary to deal with the Americans, whom Dartmouth described as, "a rude rabble, without plan, without concert, and without conduct." The dispatch urged Gage to take decisive action and reprimanded him for not having taken any. [43] Gage was also criticized for being too conciliatory towards the colonists.[44] Historian John Shy wrote that

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[39] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 15, 1775, 29; *Fischer, Paul Revere's Ride,* 314.
[40] Paul Revere, *Eyewitness to America: 500 years of American History in the words of those who saw it Happen* [c.1798]. Ed. David Colbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 79.
[41] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington*, 144; Lord Dartmouth to Gage, Whitehall, January 27, 1775, 38.
[42] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 75-76.
[43] Lord Dartmouth to Gage, Whitehall, January 27, 1775, 38-39, quote pg. 38.
[44] Lord Dartmouth to Gage, Whitehall, January 27,1775,41.

Major John Pitcairn, Royal Marines, (1722-1775)
New England Historic and Genealogical Society

officials in London had "dangerous illusions about the army" and indeed the inability of bureaucrats to understand the capabilities of the army may have doomed any attempt by Gage to pacify New England.[45]

Gage appointed twenty eight year veteran, Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Smith of the 10th Foot to lead the expedition.[46] Smith was provided with the marked map that Henry DeBerniere had drawn up and ordered to march "with utmost expedition and secrecy to Concord" to destroy militia stockpiles collected there. Major John Pitcairn of the 2nd Marine Regiment was appointed second in command for the expedition.[47] Patriot Ezra Stiles, the later president of Yale, described Pitcairn as, "a man of integrity and honor", who was "a good man in a bad cause."[48]

Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Smith, 10th Regiment of Foot, (1723-1791)
1764, British National Army Museum, Chelsea

Early Tuesday morning on April 18, General Gage sent out a mounted patrol of twenty men on the road to Concord with orders to intercept any patriot messengers coming out of

[45] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 423.
[46] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 85, 119.
[47] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord, 103*-105, quote pg. 103.
[48] Ezra Stiles, August 21, 1775, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles,* ed. F.B. Dexter (New York: Charles Scribner, 1901).

Boston in order to prevent them from alarming the countryside. Ironically, sending out the patrol had the opposite effect, and alarmed the countryside.[49] The secrecy of the operation was compromised before the expedition even left Boston.[50] That evening, Gage summoned the regimental officers and ordered them to have their companies of grenadiers and light infantry rendezvous at a remote beach on the Back Bay, "near the magazine guard" at 10 pm.[51]

The soldiers made their way to the rendezvous point, marching in small groups.[52] There were twenty one companies taking part in the operation; eleven grenadier and ten light infantry.[53] David Hackett Fischer estimated that there were 800-900 men in the expedition; almost one fourth of Gage's army of 4,000.[54] The soldiers assembled on the edge of the Back Bay and waited to be transported northwest across the Charles River to Phipps Farm.[55] It took two trips to transport the entire force.[56] Around midnight the expedition landed at Phipps Farm and from there the soldiers waded through Cambridge Marsh "where we were wet up to our knees" and made their way onto a dirt road.[57] The men had still not been informed of either their destination or the mission objective.[58]

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[49] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 89-92.
[50] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 91.
[51] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 18, 1775, 50; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 90.
[52] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 18, 1775, 51.
[53] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 104.
[54] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 314-315; French, "British Expedition to Concord", 1; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 86.
[55] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 116.
[56] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 51.
[57] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 31.
[58] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 31; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 105-107.

Smith halted his force on the dirt road and waited for provisions to be brought over from the transports and divided amongst the troops.[59] Around 2 a.m., the expedition finally began the sixteen mile march to Concord. By then, the patriots had already alerted much of the countryside, including Lexington, which sat on the road to Concord. Smith's force marched west through Cambridge on to the "great road", which winded in a northwesterly direction through the towns of Menotomy and Lexington towards Concord.[60] As they marched through the countryside, the British soldiers heard the sounds of church bells ringing and alarm guns shooting off in the distance.[61] The British seized Paul Revere and several other patriot messengers riding along the Lexington road.[62] It became apparent that neither speed nor secrecy had been achieved.

With such a late start, the expedition would not reach Concord before sunrise.[63] At Menotomy, Smith ordered Major Pitcairn to move on ahead with six light infantry companies, seize the two bridges in Concord, and hold them until the main column arrived.[64] Anticipating trouble, Smith dispatched a messenger back to Boston requesting Gage for reinforcements.[65] Pitcairn halted his detachment about half a mile from Lexington and ordered the men to load their muskets.[66] Around five in the morning, Pitcairn's force of 238 men marched into Lexington.[67]

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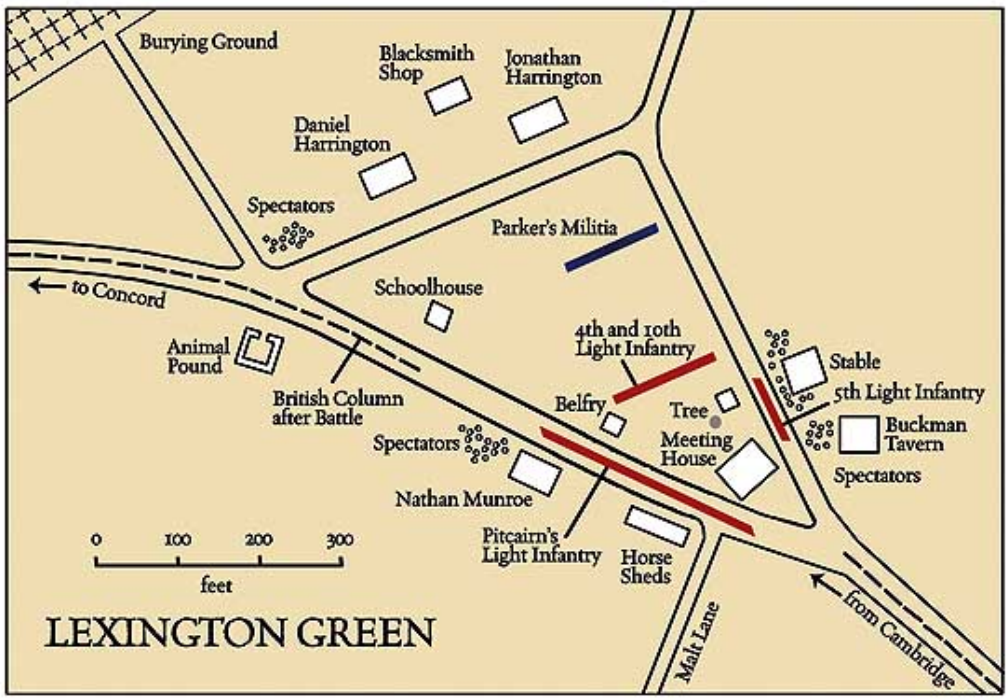
[59] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 31-32.
[60] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 125. 129, 316-317.
[61] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* Boston, April, 1775, 23.
[62] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 32; Revere, *Eyewitness to America: 500 years of American History in the words of those who saw it Happen* [c.1798], 80-82.
[63] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 127.
[64] Francis Smith, *Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783,* Smith to Gage, Boston, April 22, 1775, 103; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 127.
[65] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 128; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 115.
[66] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 160; Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* Boston, April, 1775, 23.
[67] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 189,316.

Lexington was a village of about 750 people. Lexington Common was a mostly open two acre triangle, around which were lined most of the buildings of the town. The road split at the entrance to Lexington. The road to the right formed the right side of the triangle, and veered off to the north towards Bedford. The road to the left formed the left side of the triangle and continued west to Concord. The three story meetinghouse was directly in front of the approaching British, at the right-hand corner of the triangle where the road split. On the road to the right, directly across from the meetinghouse was the Buckman Tavern, with its stables and outbuildings. In the center of the Common to the left of the meetinghouse was the Belfry. Behind the Belfry, on the far end of the Common was the schoolhouse.[68]

About seventy Lexington militiamen, led by Captain John Parker were assembled in the northwest corner of the Common, between the schoolhouse and the Belfry. Tourtellot argued that the hopelessly outnumbered militiamen were making a show of strength, rather than a suicidal stand, and had no intention of attacking the British.[69]As the British approached the Common, Marine Lieutenant Jesse Adair and his three forward companies marched around the right side of the meetinghouse, and towards the assembled militia. Pitcairn rode out on the left side of the meetinghouse and onto the Common to put himself between his men and the militia. The rest of the column halted on the Concord Road.[70] Pitcairn ordered his men not fire, but rather to surround and disarm the militiamen. Pitcairn then shouted at the militia, "Lay down your arms, you damned rebels, and disperse!" Captain Parker ordered his men to stand down and

[68] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord, 30,* 127-128, 272.
[69] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 272; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 189.
[70] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 160; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride, 188*-190.

disperse, but not everyone obeyed his command.[71] Jonas Clark, the town minister wrote that the militiamen were dispersing, but "not so speedily as they might have done."[72] None of the militiamen obeyed Pitcairn's command to lay down their arms.[73]



From *Paul Revere's Ride,* by David Hackett Fischer

Two of Adair's forward companies, the 4th and 10th Light Foot, kept advancing and were in front of the belfry, about seventy yards from the militia.[74] Lieutenant Barker, who was with the 4th, wrote in his diary that, "…we still continued advancing, keeping prepared against an attack tho' without intending to attack them…"[75] The British huzzaed as they approached the militia.[76] It is still unclear which side fired the first shot or where

[71] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 131-132, quote pg. 131.
[72] Jonas Clark, *Eyewitness to America, 82-83.*
[73] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 132.
[74] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 189-193.
[75] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 32.
[76] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 190.

it came from, but a shot was fired, which was followed by several shots, and then the eruption of a British volley.[77] The 4th and 10th light infantry companies had fired on the militia without any orders.[78]

Pitcairn shouted at the soldiers to cease fire and swung his sword down in a futile attempt to regain control of the situation, but the soldiers were "so wild they cou'd hear no orders…"[79] The volley was followed by a bayonet charge.[80] It was complete chaos, the British fired in all directions.[81] Most of the militiamen did not return fire and quickly fled in all directions.[82]Only eight militiamen are known to have fired back, but the return fire was ineffective and the British only suffered one casualty; a private of the 10th wounded in the leg. Pitcairn's horse was also shot.[83] Eight militiamen were killed and ten wounded at the battle of Lexington, which was actually a very short skirmish rather than a true battle.[84]

Colonel Smith arrived with the main column and took charge of the situation. Training had conditioned the soldiers to automatically respond to the drummer's beat to arms, and so Smith called a drummer to restore order to the British ranks. [85] Smith reorganized the men on the Common and reprimanded them for their conduct.[86] Smith finally informed his men of the mission objective and that Concord was their

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[77] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 161; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 193; French, "The British Expedition to Concord in 1775", 5-6; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 132-133.
[78] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* 32.
[79]Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 133; Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 32.
[80] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 161.
[81] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 134.
[82] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 195-198.
[83] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 24; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 134.
[84] French, "The British Expedition to Concord in 1775", 6; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 134.
[85] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 198-200.
[86] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 138.

destination.[87] Some of the junior officers attempted to persuade Smith to abandon the mission and return to Boston, but Smith would have none of it. Before leaving the town, the British soldiers fired a victory salute and gave three cheers.[88] It was about seven in the morning when the expedition resumed the march to Concord.[89]

[87] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 32.
[88] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 200.
[89] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 317.

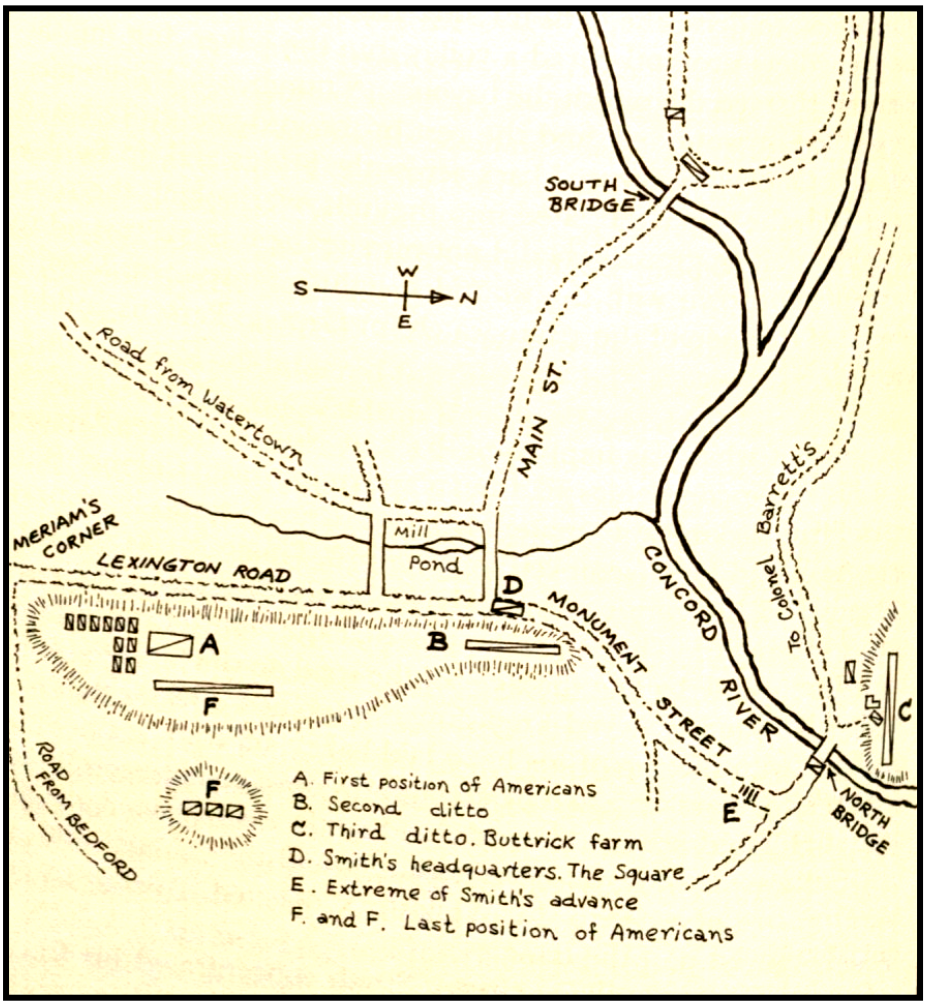
Amos Doolittle and Ralph Earl, *The Battle of Lexington, April 19th 1775.* New Haven, Conn., 1775.
(New York Public Library, Prints Division, I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection.)

Amos Doolittle, Plate II, *A View of the Town of Concord,* New Haven, Conn., *1775*
(New York Public Library, Prints Division, I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection.)

Concord was a bigger town than Lexington, with a population of about 1,500. Whereas the town of Lexington was mostly flat, Concord was dominated by hills.[90] Plate II of the Doolittle Engravings depicts the center of Concord, located west of and directly below the town graveyard, which sits at the end of a high ridge.[91] This large, downward sloping ridge, known as "Arrowhead Ridge" lined the eastern entrance to Concord.[92] Concord was bordered on the west by the Concord and Sudbury Rivers, over which spanned the North and South bridges, which were the only western entrances into the town.[93] The Mackenzie map depicts the movements of the British and American forces at Concord. As the British approached Concord they observed a band of militiamen

[90] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord, 149*-153.
[91] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 89.
[92] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 217; French, "British Expedition to Concord in 1775," 6.
[93] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* The battle in Concord at the bridge [map].

posted on the ridge.[94] Smith ordered the light infantry companies up the ridge to protect the column's flank against any ambush. Smith and the grenadiers continued marching along the main road. [95] The Mackenzie map shows ten small oblongs, representing the light infantry companies, pursuing the militia force northward up Arrowhead ridge.[96]



A sketch and interpretation of the original Mackenzie Map

[94] Mackenzie, A *British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 82.

[95] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 32; French, "British Expedition to Concord", 6.

[96] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 82.

The American militia, led by the sixty four year old Colonel James Barrett, withdrew to a second position near the graveyard, which at a height of fifty feet, overlooked the town center below.[97] However the British continued their advance towards the militia. Concord pastor, William Emerson who was with the militia, wrote "We then retreated from the hill near the Liberty Pole…"[98] Colonel Barrett led his men north along Monument Street, crossed the North Bridge, and took up a third position on Punkatasset Hill, just west of the bridge and about a mile from the center of Concord.[99] At Concord, the militia withdrew when overmatched, and always made sure to occupy positions of strength.[100] Emerson described the militia strategy, "others more prudent thought best to retreat till our strength should be equal to the enemy's by recruits from neighboring towns that were continually coming to our assistance."[101] With the militia having abandoned the town, the British marched into Concord unopposed around nine in the morning; about eleven hours after the operation had begun. [102] The light infantry rendezvoused with Smith's forces in the town center.[103]

Once in the town center, Smith further divided his forces. The light infantry were ordered to secure and hold the North and South bridges while Pitcairn, Smith, and the grenadiers searched the town for militia stockpiles. Three light infantry companies marched west along Main Street to secure the South Bridge, which was southwest of the town. Seven light infantry companies under the command of Captain Parsons marched

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[97] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 169; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 204-205; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 82.
[98] Emerson, *Eyewitness to America,* 85.
[99] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 204; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 82.
[100] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 153.
[101] Emerson, *Eyewitness to America,* 85.
[102] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 317.
[103] French, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 82.

towards the North Bridge. Captain Parsons, with Henry DeBerniere acting as his guide, was also ordered to search Colonel Barrett's farmhouse, about two miles up the road from the North Bridge. Parsons took four companies with him to the Barrett Farmhouse, leaving three to hold the bridge. These three companies were the 43rd, 10th, and 4th. The three companies were placed under the command of Captain Walter Laurie of the 43rd. The 43rd was posted at the west end of the bridge, while the 4th and 10th were positioned about a quarter mile west of the bridge on some "low hills".[104]

The militia on Punkatasset Hill and the British on the North Bridge watched each other, neither wishing to provoke the other into an attack.[105] Back in the town center, not much was found. Most of the militia stockpiles had been removed before the arrival of the expedition. The British only seized three 24 pounder cannons and knocked off their trunnions. [106] The British also destroyed several barrels of food provisions and a cache of about five hundred pounds of musket balls.[107] The grenadiers formed a pyre of the seized wooden gun carriages and set it on fire. The fire spread to the town house and although the British assisted the townspeople in putting out the fire, the militia gathered on Punkatasset Hill saw the smoke, and feared that the British were burning the town down.[108]

The militia began to march back into town to confront the British. Seeing the movement of the militia, the 4th and 10th companies pulled back from their positions and

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[104]Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 33-34; French, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 82; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 154-160.

[105] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 160.

[106] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 207.

[107] Emerson, *Eyewitness to America,* 85.

[108] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 91. ; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 207-210.

joined up with the 43rd at the North Bridge.[109] The three British companies remained on the west side of the bridge.[110] One hundred fifteen British soldiers faced off against about four hundred militiamen.[111] Laurie sent a messenger back to Smith begging for reinforcements. The militia drew closer to the bridge, marching in double file. The British finally withdrew across the bridge, towards the eastern side of the river.

Laurie attempted to execute a complex defensive maneuver known as "Street Firing".[112] Each company was to form up in eight rows of four. The front rank of men would fire, peel off to the sides, form up in the rear, and reload. The action was repeated with the following ranks and in this way a small, compact formation could sustain itself by maintaining a continuous covering fire along a narrow path, while slowly retreating.[113] However, Laurie did not have enough time to organize his men.[114] Lieutenant Barker wrote Laurie should have fallen back on the bridge sooner, "then he wou'd have had time to make a good disposition…"[115] As the militia came within firing range the British soldiers panicked and fired an incomplete, "ragged volley" that only killed two and wounded four militiamen.[116] The militia fired a volley in return, killing three privates and wounding nine; four of which were officers.[117] The British soldiers broke ranks and ran

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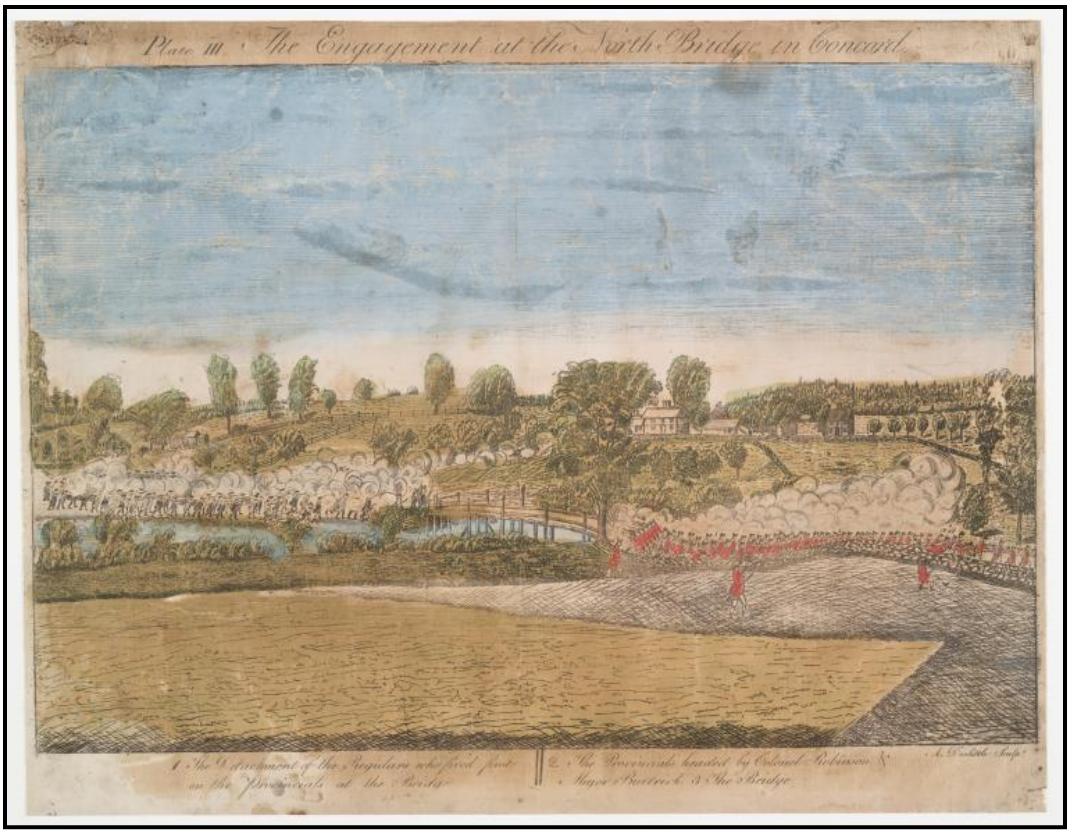
[109] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord', 91.
[110] French, "British Expedition to Concord in 1775", 7.
[111] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride, 212;* Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord', 91.
[112] French, "British Expedition to Concord in 1775, 10; Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* Boston, April, 1775, 27.
[113] Humphrey Bland*, A Treatise of Military Discipline; In which are Laid down and Explained The Duty of the Officer and Soldier, Thro' the several Branches of the Service.* Second Edition. (London, 1727), Eighteenth Century Collections Online: Range 2283, T120784 (microfilmed), 86-87; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 164.
[114] French, "British Expedition to Concord in 1775, 10.
[115] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 210-211; Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 34, quote pg 34.
[116] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 34; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 212-213.
[117] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 214.

for their lives, "…the weight of their fire was such that we was oblidg'd to give way then run with the greatest precipitance…"[118]

The fleeing British soldiers ran into Colonel Smith's oncoming reinforcements at the end of Monument Street.[119] Both sides declined further engagement; the militia withdrew west across the bridge and the British fell back to the town center.[120] Smith apparently abandoned Captain Parsons' detachment to their fate.[121] However, Parsons and his men eventually returned over the North Bridge, miraculously unmolested by the militia who could have easily cut them off. Nearly two hours after the fight at the North Bridge, the British expedition departed Concord, and began the march back to Boston. [122] It was noon.[123]

[118] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* Boston, April, 1775, 27.
[119] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 34; Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* Boston, April, 1775, 28; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 82 [Mackenzie Map].
[120] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 34; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 216.
[121] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 166.
[122] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 91;
[123] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 317.



Amos Doolittle and Ralph Earl, Plate III, *The Engagement at the North Bridge,* New Haven, Conn., 1775. (Albany Institute of History and Art.)

During the two hours Smith kept his men waiting in Concord, the militia took the northern back way out of town, and headed east across the Great Meadow, circling around Arrowhead Ridge, and back on to Lexington road to cut off Smith's retreat.[124] While the main column kept to the road, Smith sent out flanking companies onto Arrowhead Ridge on the left and in a meadow on the right.[125] About a mile from Concord, was a place called Merriam's Corner, where the road to Lexington veered right, and the Bedford road came in from the north. Arrowhead Ridge sloped down and ended at Merriam's Corner. At Merriam's Corner, as the British flankers came down off the

[124] Emerson, *Eyewitness to America,* 86; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 218.
[125] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 176.

ridge and met up with the main column to cross a small bridge, they were ambushed by the militia.[126] For the next two and half hours over the course of six miles, the British were subjected to unrelenting fire from every direction.[127]

All along the road to Lexington, Smith's men were repeatedly ambushed.[128] The mobile and dispersed militia attacked from all sides, firing from behind the cover of stone walls, trees, and buildings.[129] Lister wrote, "…it then became a general firing upon us from all quarters, from behind hedges and walls…"[130] Barker wrote in his diary that the militia used the geography of the countryside to their advantage, "…the country was an amazing strong one, full of hills, woods, stone walls…which the rebels did not fail to take advantage of..."[131] The British were completely exposed to enemy fire in the open road and were subjected to continuous crossfire from the militia, "…the numbers of the rebels increased, and the fire became more serious; several men were killed, and some officers and many men wounded."[132] Mounting casualties and fatigue steadily decreased the combat effectiveness of the British column. Meanwhile the American forces were continually replenished with fresh militiamen from neighboring towns.[133]

The British soldiers began to run out of ammunition, Colonel Smith was shot in the leg, and Major Pitcairn was unhorsed.[134] As the column neared Lexington, order

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[126] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride, 217*-220; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 176.
[127] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 317; Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 91.
[128] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 222-230.
[129] French, "British Expedition to Concord in 1775", 12; Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 91.
[130] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 29.
[131] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 35.
[132] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 66.
[133] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 91.
[134] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 35; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 179.

broke down completely and the soldiers ran for their lives. The officers put themselves in front of the retreating soldiers, and threatened to kill any deserters. The soldiers obeyed and reformed the column. Smith's force was near its breaking point.[135] The exhausted British column marched back into the Lexington around two thirty in the afternoon and was greeted by the sight of Earl Hugh Percy and his First Brigade.[136] These were the reinforcements Smith had requested for earlier. The thirty two year old Lord Percy was the son and heir of the Duke of Northumberland and a sixteen year veteran who had fought at the battles of Minden and Bergen.[137]

Percy's First Brigade consisted of three foot regiments; the 4th, 23rd, and 47th, the first battalion of Marines, and an artillery detachment with two six pounders.[138] The combined British force numbered about 1,800-1,900 men.[139] Percy set up a temporary headquarters half a mile east of Lexington Common at the Munroe Tavern.[140] Percy set up a square defensive perimeter around the tavern and placed his six pounders on two hills that flanked the road just west of the tavern.[141] Percy used his two fieldpieces to keep the militia forces at bay, while Smith's exhausted men rested up within the defensive zone around the Munroe tavern. Percy later described the action in a letter to General Gage, "The shot from the cannon had the desired effect, & stopped the rebels for a little time, who immediately dispersed…"[142] Mackenzie described the tactics of the

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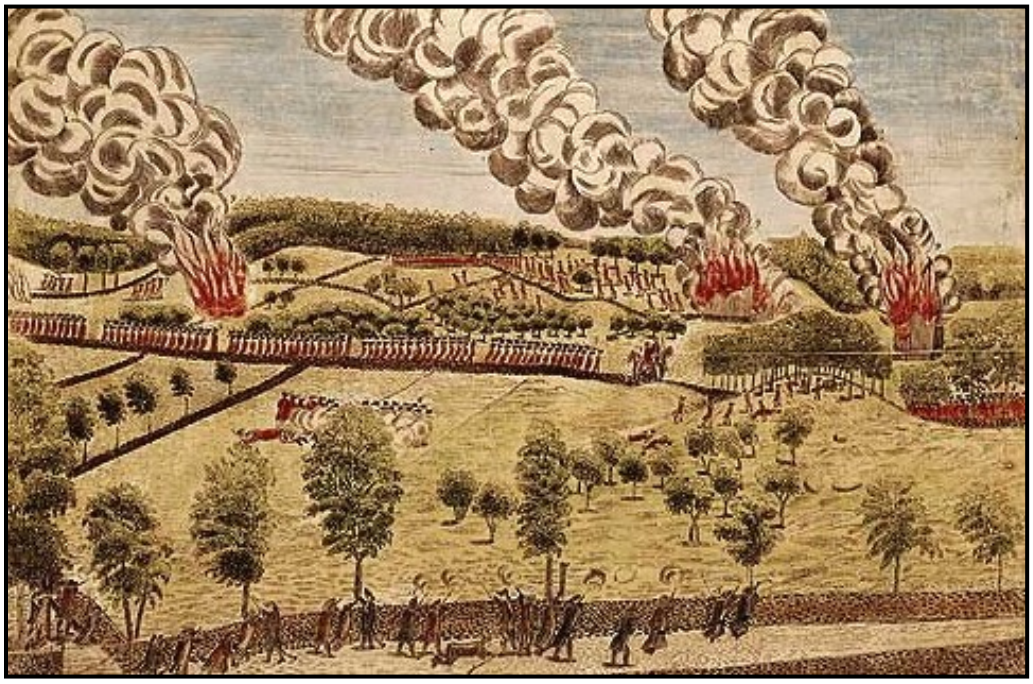
[135] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 231-232; French, "British Expedition to Concord, 13.
[136] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 30; Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 91.
[137] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 235-236; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 59; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 184.
[138] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 35.
[139] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 245
[140] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 186.
[141] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 93.
[142] Percy to Gage, Boston, April 20, 1775, 49-50; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 188.

militia, "During this time the rebels endeavored to gain our flanks, and crept into the covered ground on either side."[143] Percy sent forward a "screen" of British skirmishers to prevent any flanking movement by the militia.[144]Lord Percy ordered three houses within his defensive zone to be burned down in order to prevent the militia from using them as sniper nests.[145] Plate IV of the Doolittle Engravings accurately depicts the burning of these three houses.[146]

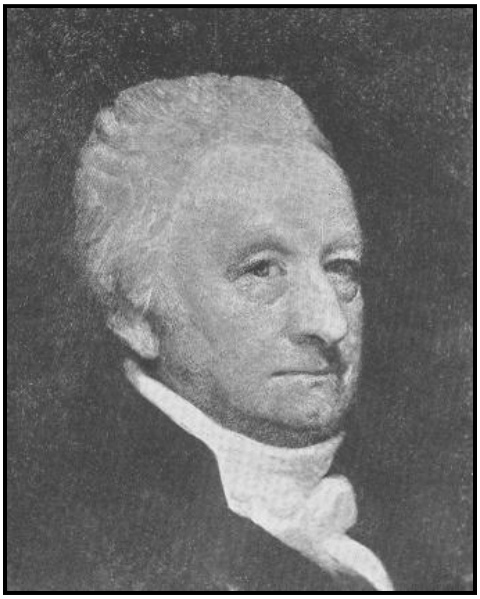


Amos Doolittle, Plate IV, *A View of the South Part of Lexington.* New Haven, Conn., 1775.
(The New York Public Library, Prints Division, I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection.)

After allowing Smith's men a half hour rest, Lord Percy reorganized the British forces for the return march to Boston. Fischer wrote that Percy's force consisted of three columns that resembled a "mobile British square". Because the militia mostly attacked

[143] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 55.
[144] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 242; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 55.
[145]Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 188-189.
[146] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 93-94.

from the flanks and rear, Percy placed Smith's exhausted men at the head of the column along with a vanguard of fifty men. Behind Smith's men were the 4th and 47th regiments.[147] The elite Royal Welch Fusiliers served as the rearguard.[148] Percy used the marine battalion as a reserve, so that they could reinforce any weak point in the column.[149] Percy also ordered out strong flanking parties to keep the militia skirmishers out of range of the main column.[150] Percy's organization of his column created "interior lines", which allowed him to quickly shift forces to weak points within the column.[151]At around 3:45 pm, the British departed Lexington and resumed the march back to Boston.[152]



Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie, Royal Welch Fusiliers, (1731-1824) Mackenzie Papers, William L. Clements Library University of Michigan

The firsthand accounts of Ensign Jeremy Lister, Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie and Lord Hugh Percy describe the action during the retreat. "Our men had few opportunities of getting good shots at the rebels, as they hardly ever fired but under cover…and the moment they had fired they lay down out of sight until they had loaded again…" wrote Mackenzie.[153] The wounded Lister wrote, "…I found the balls whistled so smartly about my ears I thought it more prudent to dismount…as the balls came thicker from one side or the other so I went from one side of the horse to the other…"[154] In a letter to General Harvey,

[147] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 189.
[148] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 55.
[149] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 245.
[150] Percy to Gage, Boston, April 22, 1775, 50.
[151] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 245.
[152] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 317.
[153] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier In Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 57.
[154] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 31-32.

Percy wrote that the militia, "like a moving circle surrounded & followed us wherever we went…"[155] Still, for the first few miles, Percy's force held up reasonably well.[156] Percy's use of strong flanking parties and his artillery prevented the British from being overwhelmed.[157] "…Whenever a cannon shot was fired at any considerable number, they (militia) instantly dispersed…" wrote Lieutenant Mackenzie.[158]

Lord Hugh Percy, Brigadier General, 5th Regiment of Foot, (1742-1817), (Fischer)

Menotomy was the scene of the bloodiest fighting that day. The town of Menotomy snaked along the Lexington Road. Several buildings full of militiamen lined both sides of the road.[159] The close proximity of the houses to the road allowed the militia to use them as pillboxes and sniper nests to decimate the British ranks. When the British column passed through the town, they were subjected to a deadly crossfire.[160] In a letter to General Harvey, Lord Percy wrote that at Menotomy several

[155] Percy to Harvey, Boston, April 20, 1775, 52.
[156] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 36.
[157] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 93.
[158] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 56.
[159] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 252-258.
[160] Mackenzie, A *British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 57-58; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 195.

militiamen "advanced within 10 yards to fire at me and other officers." Percy narrowly escaped death when a musket round knocked a button from his waistcoat.[161]

In order to protect the main column, British flankers were sent forward to clear the houses of militia, "We were now obliged to force open almost every house in the road…all that were found in the houses were put to death." The British flankers engaged in bitter hand to hand fighting. Enraged British soldiers shot and stabbed anything that moved, and any prisoners were quickly robbed and executed. A Dennison Wallis of Danvers was captured and stripped of his watch and money. Upon seeing British soldiers killing some prisoners, Wallis tried to escape but was cut down by a British volley. Despite being hit twelve times, Wallis lived to tell of his ordeal. Several other colonists were found dead with multiple stab wounds. Eleven American militiamen were found dead at the house of fifty-eight year old Jason Russell. The invalid Russell was among the dead. At the Cooper Tavern, the British had literally beaten the brains out of two non-combatants, Jason Winship and Jabez Wynman, who just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.[162] Another non-combatant was a mentally handicapped man by the name of William Marcy. Marcy, who apparently thought that the ordeal was some sort of live firing exercise, observed the carnage unfolding before him from atop a fence. Soon after, Marcy was shot and killed.[163]

In addition to the brutal nature of the fighting, British soldiers plundered Menotomy. British flanking parties ransacked several buildings, including houses,

[161] Percy to Harvey, Boston, April 20, 1775, 52-53; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 255-258.
[162] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 256-258.
[163] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 36; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 195-200.

taverns, and churches. The soldiers stole whatever they could carry in their haversacks and destroyed anything they couldn't. All through Menotomy, British soldiers killed livestock, robbed prisoners, smashed property, ransacked houses, and set fire to buildings. Even the town church's communion silver was stolen. Twenty five Americans and forty British soldiers lost their lives at Menotomy. Eighty British and nine Americans were wounded. Over half of all deaths that day occurred at Menotomy.[164] The fact that more Americans were killed than wounded signifies the overall ugliness of the fighting. Despite taking heavy casualties, Percy's column pushed through Menotomy and marched on to Boston.

As the British column neared the Great Bridge at Cambridge, Percy made a crucial decision; he chose to take the long route to Boston through Charlestown.[165] By taking the Charlestown route Percy and his men would be under the protection of the guns from the British man-of-war, the *HMS Somerset*.[166] The decision proved to be a wise one; the militia had pulled up the planks on the Great Bridge.[167] At about seven in the afternoon, Percy and his men reached the safety of Charlestown.[168] The militia refrained from pursuing any further. By midnight the British were back in Boston.[169] There were 273 British casualties; 73 killed, 174 wounded, and 26 missing.[170]An

[164] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 256-260; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord*, 196-200.
[165] Quimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord", 93.
[166] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 201.
[167] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 36; Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 186.
[168] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 317.
[169] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 32.
[170]Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 245; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 202.

estimated 3,700 Americans took part in the battle.[171] The Americans suffered 93 casualties; 49 killed, 39 wounded, and 5 missing.[172]

Smith's men had marched nearly thirty five miles in seventeen hours, and had been awake for over twenty four hours.[173] Percy's relief force saved Smith's expedition from certain destruction. Mackenzie praised Lord Percy's leadership skills, "Lord Percy behaved with great spirit…and at the same time with great coolness."[174] However, Lord Percy was impressed with the militia, "Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob, will find himself much mistaken…this country…is very advantageous for their method of fighting." Percy confessed, "I never believed…that they would have attacked the King's troops, or have had the perseverance I found in them yesterday."[175]

The expedition was a disaster. The British seized a small amount of militia stockpiles and paid a heavy price for it. The cost of the operation far outweighed its benefits. At every step of the way, the British forces were plagued by a number of problems. Historians who have done in-depth work on the battle have generally focused on three tactical problems that affected the British force during the expedition. These are poor unit cohesion, poor leadership, and poor troop discipline. It has been argued that these three factors caused the British failure and explanations have been given for the existence of each of them that day.

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[171] *Historical Dictionary of the American Revolution.* Comp. Terry M. Mays (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1999), s.v. "Lexington-Concord, Battle of."
[172] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 202.
[173] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 317.
[174] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 59-60.
[175] Percy to Harvey, Boston, April 20, 1775, 52-53.

Poor Cohesion

Poor unit cohesion was a major problem for the British during the expedition and was the result of the composition of the British force that Gage organized for the march on Concord. In April 1775, the British Army possessed an official strength of about 48,000 men, though fewer than 36,000 could be mustered for combat.[176] The regular army was made up of seventy-six regiments, including seventy regiments of foot.[177] Each regiment consisted of ten companies with an "official strength" of thirty eight men per company. The official returns of the rank and file of the Royal Welch Fusiliers indicate that the actual numbers of effectives in each company varied, but on average a company consisted of thirty five men. Of the ten companies in each regiment, eight were referred to as battalion companies. These were the companies of regular line infantry. The other two companies were known as flank companies. One flank company consisted of grenadiers, and the other light infantry. [178]

The original role of the grenadiers had been to lob heavy grenades at enemy troops. [179] By 1775, the grenadiers operated as elite shock units and consisted of the tallest and strongest men in the regiment. The grenadiers wore twelve inch tall bearskin caps meant to exaggerate their height. [180] As a flank company, the role of the grenadiers was to protect the flank of the main line of infantry. Like the grenadiers, the light infantry operated as elite flank units of regular line infantry. The role of the light infantryman required both speed and stamina. During the French and Indian War, then Lieutenant-

[176] Conway, "British Mobilization in the War of American Independence," 59.
[177] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 91-92.
[178] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary,* Boston, April 19th, 1775, 62; Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 92-98.
[179] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 114.
[180] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 93-94.

Colonel Thomas Gage of the 44th Foot had formed the first ever official regiment of light infantry in the British army. The light infantry unit had been created in response to the irregular type of warfare waged during that war. The role of light infantryman was an attempt to create a class of soldier which combined the flexibility of the American light skirmisher, with the discipline of the British regular.[181]

During the French and Indian War, temporary special battalions consisting of only grenadiers and light infantry companies had sometimes been formed for special assault operations. General Gage chose to form two such special battalions for the expedition to Concord. [182] The 800-900 men of the Concord expedition were drawn from the flank companies of each of the twelve regiments stationed in Boston. These were the 4th, 5th, 10th, 18th, 23rd, 38th, 43rd, 47th, 52nd, and 59th Foot Regiments along with the Royal Marines. The exception was the 18th Foot, which only provided its grenadier company. [183]

Gage gathered the best soldiers in his army for the expedition. In his 1727 *Treatise on Military Discipline,* the eighteenth-century military theorist Humphrey Bland wrote that because expeditions entailed venturing forth into hostile and uncontrolled territory, they had to be carried out swiftly in order to avoid being pinned down by the enemy. Because an expedition had to be carried out swiftly and because fatigue gradually diminished the battle effectiveness of infantrymen, Bland advised using cavalry for expeditions. [184] While Gage did not take Humphrey Bland's advice, historians argue that the major weakness in the force that Gage organized for the expedition was its

[181] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 92-93; Brumwell, *Redcoats,* 228-234.
[182] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 114.
[183] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 309-314.
[184] Bland, *Treatise on Military Discipline,* 37.

composition, which severely decreased both unit and the overall cohesion of the British force. Historian, Arthur Tourtellot wrote that the two specialized battalions were a "mongrel" force composed of companies from different regiments unused to working together. David Hackett Fischer argued that "the normal chain of command was broken above the company level", and that the "regimental spirit", that defined the 18th century British army clashed against the ability of such a patchwork force to work together.[185] Allen French also noted that although the soldiers of the expedition may have been Gage's best men, they were still men who had never had to perform under the pressure and confusion of combat.[186]

The engagement at the North Bridge in Concord is a prime example of how the ad hoc composition of the British force was a liability once the bullets started flying. At the bridge, the men of three different companies from three different regiments were unable to coordinate a unified response to the approach of the militia. Ensign Jeremy Lister and others attempted to pull up the planks on the bridge to prevent the militia from crossing it.[187] Had Lister succeeded he would have cut off the four companies under Parson's that had been dispatched to the Barrett Farmhouse two miles up the road. Lieutenant Sutherland of the 38th ordered men from the 43rd to follow him in an attempt to flank the militia, and only three men followed him.[188] The 43rd Regiment under Walter Laurie attempted to perform the street firing maneuver which some officers such as Ensign Lister of the 10th understood, while others such as Lieutenant Barker of the 4th were

[185] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 114-115; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 105, quote pg. 105.
[186] French, "The British Expedition to Concord", 11.
[187] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 27.
[188] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 212.

totally unfamiliar with.[189] One regiment had apparently gone over the maneuver before, while the other probably had not, and the result was confusion. At the North Bridge in Concord, "there was unnecessary confusion among the British".[190] The patchwork composition of the expedition lowered unit cohesion, which in turn magnified the pressure and confusion of combat during the battle of Lexington and Concord.

[189] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister*, 27; Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 34.
[190] H.M., *Concord Fight,* 14.

Poor Leadership

Poor leadership is the second factor which historians argue, led to the British failure. Lieutenant-Colonel Smith received most of the blame for the British failure from both historians and his own men. Concord historian Allen French argued that in a mission which required speed, subtlety, and precision, Smith was exceedingly slow and exercised consistently bad judgment, which allowed the American militias ample time to assemble, engage, and pursue the British all the way back to Boston. French provided two instances of Smith's procrastination on April 19th. One was the crucial time Smith wasted at Cambridge Marsh. The other was the time Smith idled away at Concord after the engagement at the North Bridge. [191]

Historian David Hackett Fischer did not put as much emphasis on the factor of poor leadership and refrained from disparaging the leadership of Colonel Smith. Fischer simply referred to Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Smith as a "book soldier".[192] Fischer argued that several historians, including Tourtellot and French, gave an unbalanced critique of Smith's leadership role in the battle. Fischer wrote that contrary to historical revisions, primary evidence suggests that Smith's column was anything but slow.[193] After the initial delay at Cambridge Marsh, Smith marched his men at a rapid pace to make up for lost time and averaged "a mile every sixteen minutes."[194] Fischer argued that Tourtellot and French simply chose to ignore any primary evidence that did not conform to their assumptions about Smith.[195] Fischer argued that Smith was not a caricature, but a

[191] French, "British Expedition to Concord,"1, 16.
[192] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 117.
[193] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 315-318.
[194] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 126.
[195] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 318.

seasoned officer whose quick and decisive leadership prevented further bloodshed at Lexington. When the British soldiers disobeyed their officers and broke ranks at Lexington Common, it was Colonel Smith who restored order. [196] Fischer also praised Smith for having the "wisdom" to refrain from engaging the Americans, who occupied a position of strength, at the North Bridge after Laurie's men had retreated. [197]

Contrary to Fischer, Arthur Tourtellot was very critical of Smith's leadership. Tourtellot wrote that the violent confrontation at Lexington might have been prevented had Smith arrived on the scene sooner. Tourtellot added that Smith should not be praised for stopping a riot amongst his troops, but rather condemned for not having controlled them in the first place.[198] Regardless of whether Smith's column marched faster than previously believed, it still took Smith's force eleven hours to march the sixteen miles from Lechmere Point to Concord. Tourtellot argued that because of Smith's slow movement and constant delay, neither secrecy nor speed were achieved, and therefore the original objective of the mission had been rendered irrelevant by the time the expedition marched into Concord. Tourtellot wrote that Smith should have posted himself at the North Bridge rather than in the center of Concord. Tourtellot asserted that the North Bridge was the only possible location in Concord where the British could have expected an armed confrontation with the militia. Smith should have known better than to trust his junior officers, who had already displayed such incompetence at Lexington, with the command of the bridge. [199]

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[196] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 198-200.
[197] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 216.
[198] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 137.
[199] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 153-155.

Tourtellot criticized Smith for abandoning Captain Parson's detachment. After the British gave up the North Bridge, they left Parsons and his men, who were at the Barrett Farm, to the mercy of the militia. Tourtellot wrote that the militia could have easily destroyed the bridge and isolated Parsons and his men, or ambushed them upon their return. Tourtellot also argued that Smith's two hour delay in Concord after the engagement at the North Bridge was irresponsible.[200] Smith's procrastination allowed the militia time to setup the ambush at Merriam's Corner. William Emerson's account would seem to support this assertion. Emerson observed that the British displayed, "great fickleness and inconstancy of mind, sometimes advancing, sometimes returning to their former posts."[201] While Smith waited in Concord, the militia "took the back way through the Great Field into the east quarter and…placed themselves to advantage, lying in ambush…ready to fire upon the enemy on their retreat."[202]

Some of the junior officers of the expedition also believed that Smith was not the right man for the job. Lieutenant Barker blamed the debacle on Smith's constant procrastination and incompetence. Barker focused on the two hours that Smith kept his men waiting at Cambridge Marsh for "provisions that were not wanted" and "which most of the men threw away".[203] Barker wrote that had so much time not been wasted at Cambridge Marsh, the confrontation at Lexington might have been avoided, and the militia would not have had as much time to assemble and harass the British during the return march to Boston. Barker summed up the expedition as one which, "from beginning

[200] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 153-166.
[201] Emerson, William. *Eyewitness to America: 500 years of American History in the words of those who saw it Happen* [c.1775]. Ed. David Colbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 84-86.
[202] Emerson, *Eyewitness to America,* 86.
[203] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 32, 37.

to end was as ill plan'd and ill executed as it was possible to be."[204] Even the experienced Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie of the Royal Welch Fusiliers was critical of Smith's leadership; albeit in a more balanced and less disrespectful manner than the young Lieutenant Barker. Mackenzie wrote in his diary that, "An Officer of more activity than Col. Smith should have been selected for the Command of the troops..."[205] Although there have been disagreements by some historians over the degree to which Smith's leadership is responsible for the failure of the expedition, leadership was a major factor that contributed to the British failure and the decisions of Colonel Smith did have a tangible effect on the outcome of the battle.

[204] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 37.
[205] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 20, 1775, 71-72.

Poor Troop Discipline

The third factor is poor troop discipline. Historians and British firsthand accounts are in agreement that the poor conduct of the British troops was a crucial factor in the failure of the expedition. There were four major instances during the expedition in which discipline broke down amongst the British troops; the confrontations at Lexington and Concord, during Smith's retreat to Lexington, and at Menotomy during Percy's retreat. On these four occasions, British soldiers broke ranks, disregarded the commands of their officers, and plundered houses. A British army world renowned for its discipline in battle, showed very little of it that day.

The engagement at Lexington consumed time, and ruined any chance for the British of a peaceful return to Boston. British regulars fired without orders and then broke ranks to wildly chase after the colonists. Major Pitcairn gave clear orders to his men not to fire on the colonists, but instead to surround and disarm them.[206] Pitcairn's order went unheeded, and in the confusion of the moment the soldiers took matters into their own hands. Lieutenant Barker wrote in his diary that as his company approached the militia assembled on the common, "our men without any orders rushed in upon them, fired and put em' to flight."[207]

At Concord, British discipline broke down a second time. At the North Bridge, the British responded to the approach of the militia with confusion, and so were unable to form up and mount a proper defense. The British bunched up too close together on the

[206] Francis Smith to Thomas Gage, Boston, April 22, 1775, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 103-104.
[207] Barker, *Diary Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 32.

bridge so that only the men in the front rank could fire, which limited British firepower.[208] When the British soldiers in front did fire, they fired an ineffective volley that was too high and went over the heads of the militia. After the British had fired, the militia advanced and fired an effective volley, which had the added effect of wounding most of the British officers at the bridge. With most of the British officers either dead or wounded, discipline broke down completely and the British soldiers turned and ran for their lives. [209] William Emerson was with the militia gathered on Punkatassett Hill and observed that after the engagement, the British "retreated in the greatest disorder and confusion."[210] Laurie's planned tactical retreat turned into a disastrous rout, due in large part to the poor discipline of the British troops, who failed to fire in unison, fired too high, and retreated in a disorderly fashion when fired upon.

British discipline broke down a third time during Colonel Smith's retreat from Concord. The British soldiers were not familiar with, and had not been trained to respond to the light skirmishing tactics of the militia. The British had been trained in the formal tactics of eighteenth century European armies, which emphasized pitched battles and utilized the concentration of men in large formations in order to achieve the concentration of overwhelming firepower on the enemy.[211] Since the effective range of the Brown Bess musket was about 60 yards, it was not necessary to actually aim at the enemy and there was no such command in the British army. The soldiers had been trained to "present" rather than aim, which meant pointing the musket in the general direction of the

[208] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 34.
[209] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 212-214.
[210] Emerson, *Eyewitness to America,* 84-86.
[211] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 90.

enemy.[212] Therefore, British training reduced the effectiveness of British firepower during Smith's retreat. Poor discipline magnified the problem.

Tourtellot wrote that the poor discipline of the British soldiers during the retreat nearly caused the destruction of Smith's force. The British soldiers fired aimlessly out of anger and contempt, which did little damage to the militia. With limited ammunition, and having to march through fifteen miles of hostile territory, it was obvious to British officers that ammunition would have to be conserved rather than wasted firing ineffectively at the militia.[213] Mackenzie's diary contains an account of the battle written by an unnamed officer of the Royal Welch Fusiliers.[214] The officer wrote that the soldiers, "…returned their fire, but with too much eagerness, so that at first most of it was thrown away for want of…coolness and steadiness…which the officers did not prevent as they should have done."[215] This unnamed officer wrote that he believed, "…this unsteady conduct may be attributed to…the too great eagerness of the soldiers in the first action of a war. Most of them…had been taught that everything was to be effected by a quick firing."[216]

The British had been trained to achieve a higher rate of fire against the enemy, but in a fight against the hit and run tactics of the militia, this only wasted precious ammunition. The training of the British soldiers worked to their disadvantage and the inability of the officers to control their restless men took its toll. Most of the soldiers ran

[212] Bland, *A Treatise of Military* Discipline, 87; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 195.
[213] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 179.
[214] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 62.
[215] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 65-66.
[216] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 66.

out of ammunition before Smith's column had reached Lexington.[217] The panicky British soldiers, with little ammunition and no leadership to restrain them, broke ranks and fled towards Lexington.[218] Had it not been for Percy's arrival, Smith's force would have been hard pressed to make it back to Boston.[219]

At Menotomy, the poor discipline of the British troops took on its most virulent form. The close proximity of several buildings to the road led to house to house fighting. Captain William Glanville Evelyn of the 4th Regiment described the experience in a letter to his father, "The houses along the road were all shut up as if deserted, though we afterwards found these houses were full of men…we were attacked on all sides…from every house on the roadside."[220] This along with the desperation of the British force, and their seething anger towards the colonists, caused the fight at Menotomy to be the single bloodiest engagement of the day.[221] The close quarters combat allowed the British to vent their frustrations on the militia, which explains the brutal nature of the killings.

At Menotomy, Lord Percy lost temporary control of his men, especially the flanking parties.[222] Captain Evelyn wrote that "whenever we were fired on from houses or barns, our men dashed in, and let very few of those they could find escape."[223] Sending out flankers to clear the houses of militia was the practical thing to do. However, as the fight wore on, the flanking parties sent to clear out the houses gradually devolved into

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[217] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 35; Lister, *Concord Fight,* Boston, April, 1775, 30.
[218] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 181-182; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 229-231;French, "The British Expedition to Concord", 12-13; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 179-180.
[219] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 37; Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 181.
[220] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, April 23, 1775, 54.
[221] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 256-258.
[222] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 258.
[223] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, April 23, 1775, 54.

plundering parties.[224] Lieutenant Mackenzie wrote that the plundering did more harm than good, "…I have no doubt this inflamed the rebels, and made many of them follow us farther than they otherwise would have done."[225] British troop misconduct cost many soldiers their very lives, "By all accounts some soldiers who stayed too long in the houses, were killed in the very act of plundering…"[226]

After the battle, Lord Percy issued a report condemning the conduct of the soldiers during the battle, "…the general expects on any future occasion, that they will behave with more discipline…"[227] None was more critical than Lieutenant Barker, who wrote that although the troops showed great spirit and courage, they were "so wild and irregular, that there was no keeping 'em in any order; by their eagerness and inattention they kill'd many of our own people; and the plundering was shameful…what was worse they were encouraged by some officers."[228]

Poor discipline, poor cohesion, and poor leadership were all contributing factors to the failure of the expedition. Reasons have been given for why there was poor leadership. Colonel Smith was probably not the right choice for a mission that required speed and subtlety. Poor cohesion within the expedition was rooted in its composition. General Gage's decision to take the flank companies from every regiment in Boston and form them into two special battalions disrupted the normal chain of command, created a morale problem, and placed companies who had never operated together at a regimental level, into a single force. Some explanations have been provided for the poor discipline

[224] Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord,* 199.
[225] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 19, 1775, 58.
[226] Ibid
[227]Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, April 22, 1775, 73.
[228] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, April 25, 1775, 38-39.

and combat effectiveness of the British troops. Most of them had never seen combat and their training which emphasized large volley formations did not come in handy against the light skirmishing tactics of the militia. Poor leadership and poor cohesion certainly contributed to and magnified the problems of discipline amongst the troops. Poor leadership meant that the officers were unable to keep their less experienced men in check. As for poor cohesion, the composition of the expedition created morale problems and trust issues. Soldiers who train and live together will inevitably trust one another more in a combat situation than those who don't.

Poor cohesion and poor leadership were the result of immediate decisions. Gage created the cohesion problem when he took companies from different regiments and organized them into a single expeditionary detachment. Poor leadership was the result of the conduct of a single individual throughout the expedition. The explanations given for the poor conduct of the troops do not fully explain why the most elite soldiers in Gage's army broke ranks three separate times or why they plundered at Menotomy. The battle of Lexington and Concord revealed a British army that was weaker than previously believed.[229] The British failure was the product of a weak British army. To understand why Gage's army was weak, it is necessary to analyze British army conditions in Boston during the months preceding the battle.

The British occupation army stationed in Boston suffered from four major interrelated problems which undermined the morale, discipline, and combat effectiveness of the army. The first problem was the severe alcohol abuse which plagued Gage's army throughout the occupation. The second problem was rampant and continual desertion.

[229] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 214.

The third problem was the misconduct of the British troops. Finally, the function of Gage's army was governance and enforcement, rather than military engagement, and therefore tactical training was neglected in favor of the many duties of a peacetime occupation army. While the first three problems affected the entire British army during the interwar years of 1763-1775, they were far worse in Britain's overseas contingents. The result of these four problems was an army with low morale, insufficient discipline, and underprepared to engage in combat. In other words, these four problems weakened Gage's army and it was this weakened, ineffective British army that engaged the Americans at Lexington and Concord months later.

From *Paul Revere's Ride,* by David Hackett Fischer

Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse in the eighteenth century British army undermined troop morale, discipline, and damaged civilian-military relations. Drunkenness had long been both a fact of life and a problem in the drinking culture of the British army. On one hand, British army officers considered the rum ration a necessary evil to motivate the troops, who had little else to motivate them, as well as to steady their nerves before battle.[230] Yet at the same time, the belief that drunkenness undermined discipline and caused disorderly behavior was one reason British officers justified the meager sum of money paid to their men. Officers feared extra pocket money would be wasted on alcohol.[231] While officers generally understood that pervasive and unchecked alcohol abuse undermined discipline, British army recruiting methods were not geared toward that understanding. Many soldiers were recruited in taverns, often through the deceptive methods of army recruiters. For example, according to British law, when an army recruiter placed the King's shilling onto a man's palm and he closed his hand over it, that man had legally enlisted into the army. What often occurred is that recruiters stalked taverns for inebriated men who could easily be tricked into enlisting. [232] Therefore, it is likely that a significant portion of soldiers were already heavy drinkers when they joined the British army.[233]

Although an "alcoholic culture" had always existed in the British army, the problem was exacerbated in the eighteenth century, particularly in the North American

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[230] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 446-447,467.

[231] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 450,457.

[232] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 460; Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 88.

[233] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 460.

Colonies.[234] In Boston the spartan living conditions that British soldiers lived in combined with lax messing rules, and lack of supervision by officers on the drinking habits of their men, encouraged alcohol abuse.[235] Also, in North America, the cheap cost and abundant availability of rum and other hard liquors facilitated a dramatic increase in drunkenness and alcohol abuse in the British army, which was worst in Boston.[236] Since New England was a producer of rum, it was often cheaper than milder alcoholic beverages.[237] Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie wrote in a letter to his father that a gallon of New England rum sold for one pound sterling and nine pennies, while a bottle of Madeira wine sold for two pounds sterling and eleven pennies.[238] In his diary entry for January 1st, 1775, Lieutenant Barker wrote that the only "remarkable" thing worth commenting on was the "drunkenness among the soldiers…owing to the cheapness of liquor, a man may get drunk for a copper or two."[239]The cheapness of rum worried British officers such as Mackenzie who wrote that, "Rum is so cheap that at present we find the utmost difficulty in keeping them (the soldiers) from drinking to excess; which I fear will be fatal to many of them…"[240]

Lieutenant Mackenzie's fears proved to be accurate. In addition to their rum rations, many British soldiers sought to acquire more liquor through private means. Many soldiers worked part time jobs in Boston to supplement their meager pay. Some employers chose to pay the soldiers in liquor since it was often valued as much as money

[234] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 446, 457.
[235] Shy, *Toward Lexington*, 413; Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 451.
[236] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 448; Conway, "Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War", 382.
[237] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 449.
[238]Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston*, New York, June 29th, 1773, 19.
[239] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* January 1, 1775, 18.
[240] Ibid

by soldiers.[241] A few soldiers even sold their weapons to the colonists in exchange for alcohol.[242] Lieutenant Mackenzie wrote that four soldiers were caught in such an act; one of them, a soldier in Lieutenant Barker's regiment, received five hundred lashes as punishment.[243] Sometimes the liquor paid or sold to British soldiers was improperly distilled, which could result in death.[244] At least one man in Mackenzie's Regiment; a 2nd lieutenant named John Boadil Furlow, appeared to have died of alcohol poisoning, a "consumption" as Lieutenant Barker termed it.[245]

Lieutenant Mackenzie and Lieutenant Barker recorded four alcohol related deaths in the British army stationed in Boston between December 1, 1774 and February 2, 1775.[246] However by February, Major Pitcairn had recorded seven alcohol related deaths since his arrival to Boston in December.[247] One of those deaths was that of a man from Lieutenant Barker's Regiment; a private John McDonald.[248] After two soldiers died in one night on February 2, 1775, General Gage ordered two dram shops in Boston closed for selling "poisonous liquor" to the soldiers.[249]

Alcohol abuse was recognized as a very serious problem by General Gage, who attempted to control drunkenness in the army when he became commander in chief of British forces in North America. However, beyond unsuccessful attempts to limit the supply of alcohol, such as when he ordered the two dram shops closed, and harshly

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[241] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 446, 453.
[242] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 67.
[243] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, February 4, 1775, 33.
[244] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 453.
[245] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, January 20, 1775, 21.
[246]Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker, Boston,* December 1, 1774, 9 and January 20, 1775, 21; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* February 2, 1775, 32.
[247] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 67; Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* December 5, 1775, 10.
[248] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, December 1, 1774.
[249] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 453; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* February 2, 1775, 32.

punishing drunken behavior, little was done to deal with the problem.[250] The result was a very serious epidemic of alcohol abuse within Gage's occupation army.

Alcohol abuse did more than cause the deaths of British soldiers; it also threatened civilian-military relations. Lieutenant Mackenzie wrote of an incident that occurred in January in which a bunch of drunken British officers had gotten into a street brawl with the Boston Town Watch. Afterwards, General Gage ordered his senior ranking officers to dissuade their men from, "game and drink, which lays the foundation for quarrels and riots…"[251] In fact, during the battle of Lexington and Concord, several of the soldiers in Lord Percy's retreating column helped themselves to tavern stocks along the road and "were drinking heavily", which may have played a role in the brutality and the breakdown of discipline at Menotomy.[252] The rampant alcohol abuse in Gage's army undermined the morale and discipline of the troops. The poor discipline displayed by Gage's men months later at the battle of Lexington and Concord had a clear precedent in the preceding months.

[250] Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 445,454-458.
[251] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* January 21 and 24, 1775, 30.
[252] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 257-258.

Desertion

Another major problem for Gage's occupation army was rampant desertion, which also undermined morale and discipline.[253] Desertion in the eighteenth century British army was generally the product of three factors; low payment, poor living conditions, and poor recruiting methods.[254] These factors were amplified for regiments stationed abroad, especially North America. There were also additional local factors that increased the likelihood of desertion. Two local factors that affected Gage's army were the colonial environment and alcohol abuse. Both factors enabled British troops to desert more easily than might have otherwise been the case. Finally, Gage's attempts to prevent desertion through methods such as corporal punishment, execution, and amnesty failed to stop the problem.

Desertion continually plagued the British army in Boston throughout 1774-1775.[255] Military historian Arthur Gilbert argued that desertion rates were higher for British overseas regiments. Gilbert's study focused on desertion during the French and Indian War. In 1758 desertion rates for troops stationed in England was about four percent. In 1759 the average desertion rate in the British army was around five percent.[256] For a comparison, from 1774-1775, Lieutenant Mackenzie's regiment, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, lost twenty seven men to desertion. This constitutes about a seven percent

[253] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 413.
[254]Gilbert, "Why Men Deserted from the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 554, 558.
[255] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 413.
[256] Gilbert, "Why Men Deserted from the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 557-559.

desertion rate for the most elite British regiment in Boston; certainly higher than the average desertion rate.[257]

Other regiments also suffered from frequent desertions. Lieutenant Barker recorded five desertions that took place in the space of one week in December, 1774.[258] The night of the Concord expedition, after Smith's men had landed at Cambridge Marsh, one soldier took the opportunity to desert and was given shelter by the colonists.[259] Historian, John Shy argued that junior officers often deserted by never being present for duty.[260] Lieutenant James Hamilton pulled such a move on April 19, 1775. Ensign Jeremy Lister, who filled in for Hamilton the night of the Concord expedition, wrote in his narrative of the battle that Lieutenant Hamilton feigned illness in order to avoid going on the expedition which "clearly prov'd to be the case afterwards…"[261] Cleary at least a some of the men on the expedition and in Gage's army had no stomach or motivation to fight.

Meager pay lowered morale and motivation of the British troops in Boston. Soldier salary was often further reduced through corrupt practices.[262] First Baron Thomas Erskine, an early 19th century politician, wrote a short work in 1775 in which he argued that the low salary of both officers and soldiers was the root cause of many problems and inefficiencies in the British army.[263] Erskine wrote that any "journeyman taylor, weaver,

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[257] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 67.
[258] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, December 17-24, 12-14.
[259] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 124.
[260] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 363.
[261] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 22-23.
[262] Birnbuam, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 99.
[263] Thomas Erskine, *Observations on the prevailing abuses in the British Army, arising from the corruption of civil government, with a proposal to the officers towards obtaining an addition to their pay* (London, 1775), MARCXML.

or…mechanic can live on his wages more respectably than the officer in the army."[264] Erskine also wrote that the meager wages of British soldiers, about eight pence a day, was not enough to maintain their health or well being. Erskine argued that this naturally weakened the discipline and overall strength of the army, "The characters, and capabilities of men, are not only influenced, but absolutely changed from circumstance and situation…"[265] Therefore an army paid so poorly could not be expected to be highly motivated or perform greatly when there was little material benefit to be had.

One product of low pay was that some British soldiers in Gage's army often resorted to theft. Soldiers would fence stolen items to supplement their pay. Others simply stole for scarce daily necessities such as fuel for cooking and warmth.[266] Some soldiers even sold their own army equipment. Mackenzie wrote that several soldiers had been caught selling their weapons to colonists.[267] Mackenzie only mentioned those who were caught, but it is probably safe to assume that there were more cases of soldiers selling army equipment to the colonists to supplement their low salary.

Poor living conditions also drove soldiers to desert. [268] The arrival of Gage's army to Boston drove up food prices, and fresh provisions were so hard to come by that Gage put his men on salt rations.[269] Contaminated drinking water in the reservoirs of the soldier's barracks caused an outbreak of disease (possibly typhus) and a "throat distemper", which led to the deaths of two men in the 43rd Regiment as well as Captain

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[264] Erskine, *Observations on the prevailing abuses in the British Army,* 18.
[265] Erskine, *Observations on the prevailing abuses in the British Army, 20*-21, quote pg. 21.
[266] Conway, "The Great Mischief Complain'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War", 381, 383.
[267] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, March 8, 1775, 39.
[268] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 413.
[269] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 65; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, January 14 and April 14, 1775, 28, 48.

Gabriel Maturin of the 31st Regiment, who was General Gage's personal secretary. The disease also resulted in the men of the Royal Irish being quarantined on board the transports in Boston Harbor. [270] By January the men of the 10th Regiment were "on the verge of mutiny."[271] According to the January 30, 1775 edition of the *Boston Evening Post*, Gage's army had lost 125 military and civilian personal to sickness since July, 1774.[272] The colonists made life even harder for the British soldiers by attempting to prevent merchants from supplying the army with blankets, tools, bricks for chimneys, and other daily necessities. The British army had to fight the colonists every step of the way to acquire winter quarters.[273] In the end, there were not enough places to accommodate all of the men in the army, and so the British soldiers had to build their own barracks on Boston Common.[274]

The recruiting methods used to populate the ranks of the British army also increased the likelihood of desertion. Many British soldiers had been impressed or tricked into enlisting. Arthur Gilbert argued that the proportion of soldiers impressed or tricked into enlisting per regiment was higher in overseas regiments, which meant that at least some portion of Gage's army consisted of unwilling and unmotivated soldiers.[275] Soldiers were often recruited from taverns, and many were vagabonds, drifters, and unemployed men with no other hopeful prospects but to enlist in the army which provided food, clothing, and shelter.[276]

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[270] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, December 14-16, 1774, 11.
[271] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 415.
[272] French, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* 29.
[273] Evelyn to Mrs. Leveson Gower, Boston, October 31, 1774, 34.
[274] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, October 31, 1774, 39-40.
[275] Gilbert, "Why Men Deserted from the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 558.
[276] Birnbaum, *Red Dawn at Lexington,* 88.

The colonial environment also made desertion easier for British soldiers. Desertion was easier in the North American colonies because the majority white, English speaking population provided camouflage for deserters. Deserters could simply fade into the local civilian population.[277] In 1775, the area under the control of Gage's army only extended a few miles into the countryside and so for many disillusioned soldiers, escape was not far away.[278] Some colonists even assisted deserters in their escape by rowing them across the Charles River and out of the reach of the British army. Boston Whigs constantly attempted to persuade or bribe soldiers into deserting the army and often provided those who did with shelter, clothing, and safety.[279] Whig leaders in Boston promised to give three hundred acres in New Hampshire to every soldier that deserted Gage's army.[280] Also, the affluence and high standard of living in the colonies, which was starkly contrasted by the poor living conditions of the British army, tempted many men to desert.[281] In fact, one reason British troops were transported by sea between Boston, New York, and Quebec, rather than by land on the post roads, was because it reduced the chances for men to desert.[282]

Alcohol abuse in the British army also exacerbated the problem of desertion.[283]Most soldiers had to be drunk before they gained the nerve to attempt desertion.[284] Arthur Gilbert argued that deserters in the eighteenth century British army

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[277] Gilbert, "Why Men Deserted from the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 555.
[278] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, March 28 and April 10, 1775, 44, 47.
[279] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, February 18, 1775, 52; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, February 2, 1775, 32; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 68.
[280] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 68.
[281] Conway, "The Great Mischief Compalin'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War", 379.
[282] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 67.
[283] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 413.
[284] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 362.

were more likely to desert "on the spur of the moment when fortified with drink". In thirty percent of all British army desertion trials in North America between 1757 and 1762, accused deserters claimed that they got lost or were persuaded to desert because they were drunk.[285] Since alcohol abuse was a major problem for the British army stationed at Boston, it can be reasonably assumed that drunkenness was also responsible for inducing many soldiers to desert. Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie confirmed this assertion in his diary, "numbers of them (soldiers) are intoxicated daily…when the soldiers are in a state of intoxication they are frequently induced to desert."[286]

General Gage used two tactics to deter men from deserting. One was harsh punishment, and the other amnesty. Punishment came in two forms; either harsh corporal punishment, or execution. Corporal punishment for desertion usually came in the form of flogging and was extremely harsh; deserters received several hundred lashes. However, historians John Shy and Arthur Gilbert argued that not only did harsh punishment for desertion fail to deter men from deserting, but in many cases it backfired and actually drove soldiers to desert on impulse out of fear.[287]

Recruiting soldiers was expensive, which is why the death penalty was only reserved for certain cases when officers felt it was necessary to "make an example" out of someone and other methods had failed to curb desertion rates.[288] Amnesty was the other tactic used to deter desertion. A deserter sentenced to death would be granted amnesty at the last minute in the hopes that such an action would fill the deserter and the men of his regiment with both fear and gratitude, and thereby decrease the likelihood of desertion in

[285] Gilbert, "Desertion in the Eighteenth-Century British Army", 559-565, quote pg 565.
[286] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, February 2, 1775, 32.
[287] Gilbert, "Desertion in the Eighteen-Century British Army", 555-565; Shy, Toward Lexington, *362.*
[288] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 362.

the future.[289] Both tactics seem to have failed to stop the desertion that plagued Gage's army.

By December, 1774, continual and unabated desertion drove British officers to set an example to the troops. A soldier of the 10th Regiment was executed by firing squad on December 24, "The only thing done in remembrance of Christ-Mass day." Lieutenant Barker remarked in his diary.[290] Another soldier was executed on the Common after he was caught attempting to desert for the third time. The examples had little effect and desertion continued unabated. In a letter to Arthur Lee dated March 4, 1775, Samuel Adams informed Lee that "Many have deserted. Many I believe intend to desert."[291]

Granting amnesty to a deserter previously sentenced to death also seems to have backfired. Lieutenant Mackenzie wrote that on March 4, 1775 a Robert Vaughan of the 52nd Regiment was caught attempting to desert. Vaughan was tried and sentenced to death by firing squad. On March 9 his execution was temporarily postponed and on March 13 Vaughan was granted a full pardon. However the mercy shown to Vaughan did not deter men or even Vaughan himself from deserting. Mackenzie wrote that Vaughan deserted to the rebels shortly after his pardon and that "some soldiers have deserted since that event."[292] After the Vaughan incident, Gage informed his army that in the future no more convicted deserters would be pardoned.[293]

All five of the above mentioned factors caused or increased desertion in Gage's army. Meager pay resulted in unmotivated troops. A substantial portion of the army was

[289] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, March 4-14, 1775, 36-41.
[290] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, December 24, 1774, 14.
[291] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 66-68.
[292] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, March 4-14, 1775, 36-41.
[293] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, March 14, 1775, 41.

populated with vagabonds, many of whom were tricked or impressed into service. Living conditions were miserable for soldiers and contrasted by the vastness and affluence of the Colonies, thereby increasing the temptation to desert. Drunkenness increased the likelihood for desertion as it removed the normal inhibitions that prevented soldiers from taking the risks to attempt desertion. As John Shy keenly noted, the army was "organized to expect the worst rather than elicit the best in its soldiers".[294] It should be no surprise that such an army suffered from low morale and the temptation to desert.

[294] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 363.

Troop Misconduct

Troop misconduct was the third major problem that affected the British occupation army in Boston. The acts of misconduct by the British troops at Lexington and Concord and in Boston during the winter have already been described. Drunkenness in the British army caused several acts of misconduct throughout the winter. British officers often overlooked the misconduct of their men or were simply incompetent. The recruitment and impressments of vagabonds into the British army meant that the undisciplined criminal behavior some soldiers displayed in civilian life carried over into army life. However there is a far more important factor which accounts for the acts of misconduct by British soldiers both during the winter, and in April at Menotomy. Misconduct within the ranks of the British occupation army was primarily the product of the hostile environment that the soldiers lived in.[295]

The tension and animosity between colonists and British soldiers was a constant source of trouble in pre-war America. The meager pay of the British soldiers forced many to take part time jobs, often working for less than the common wage rates. This deeply angered local laborers who had become unemployed as a result of the Boston Port Bill. Economic resentment and political hostility towards the British soldiers amplified the tension between soldiers and civilians in Boston. [296]

The conciliatory policy General Gage adopted towards Bostonians created a perception amongst many British soldiers that their own commander was biased in favor

[295] Conway, "The Great Mischief Complain'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War", 374, 386-389.

[296] Conway, "The Great Mischief Complain'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War", 376.

of the colonists.[297] Lieutenant Mackenzie wrote of an incident on January 21, 1775, where some officers had gotten into a fight with the Town Watch. Gage afterwards reprimanded the officers and took the side of the Town Watch.[298]Gage even forbade soldiers from carrying side arms when outside of their barracks.[299] Such actions angered junior officers such as Lieutenant Barker. Barker expressed indignation at how a corporal in his regiment had been confined to his quarters on the orders of Gage for "having ill treated an inhabitant."[300] Lieutenant Barker's diary entries illustrate his outright contempt for Gage, whom he believed to be weak and ineffective. Barker wrote that the colonists "…wou'd not censure one of their own vagrants, even if he attempted the life of a soldier; whereas if a soldier errs in the least, who is more ready to accuse than Tommy (Gage)? [301] Referring to Gage, a grown man, and Barker's superior officer at that, as "Tommy" was a massive insult and outright insubordination. Had Barker been caught verbally expressing such sentiments he may well have been severely punished.

British soldiers felt backed into a corner by hostile colonists who constantly provoked them. Ensign Jeremy Lister described his experience "…the worst of language was continually in our ears often dirt thrown at us they even went so far as to wound some officers with their watch crooks."[302] Evelyn vented his frustrations in a letter to his father, "…we have been hitherto restrained, and with an unparalleled degree of patience and discipline have we submitted to insults and indignities from villains who are hired to

[297] Shy, *Toward Lexington*, 412.
[298] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, January 21, 1775, 30.
[299] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, November 15, 1774, 3-4.
[300] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, November 20, 1774, 6.
[301] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, November 15, 1774, 3-4.
[302] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 19.

provoke us to something that may be termed an outrage…"[303] Throughout the winter of 1774-1775, tensions increased between the colonists and British soldiers. Captain William Glanville Evelyn described the hostility of the colonists in a letter to his father. Evelyn wrote that a colonist was arrested for attempting to murder a Colonel Cleveland of the Artillery and a Captain John Montresor of the Engineers. Another colonist was arrested for wounding a soldier with a sword.[304] Jeremy Lister wrote that one night he and other officers had to venture out into the streets of Boston to rescue Lieutenant Mires of the 38th who had been apprehended by the colonists for walking the streets alone. [305]

By March, Lister wrote that "…things begun now to draw near a crisis and we expected daily coming to blows…"[306] On Monday, March 6, 1775, the annual oration commemorating the Boston Massacre was held at the Old South Meetinghouse. Leading Boston patriots directed the event. Among the attendees was a group of British soldiers. After the oration, Samuel Adams made a fiery statement which provoked the British soldiers, "The thanks of the town should be presented to Doctor Warren for his elegant and spirited oration, and that another should be delivered on the 5th of March next, to commemorate the *bloody massacre* of the 5th of March, 1770." During the ensuing yelling back and forth, a panic swept over the crowd which hastily evacuated the building, believing that the British intended to burn it to the ground. Lieutenant Mackenzie wrote that the soldiers and the crowd nearly came to blows, "It is certain both were ripe for it, and a single blow would have occasioned the commencement of

[303] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, February 18, 1775, 51-52.
[304] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, October 31, 1774, 35.
[305] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 20.
[306] Lister, *Concord Fight: Narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister,* 21.

hostilities."[307] Such was the extreme tension and hostility that existed between British soldiers and the colonists. Later that month, a brawl broke out between a civilian and a soldier at Roxbury.[308]

Many soldiers were anxious to confront the colonists whom they deeply despised. Captain Evelyn expressed his sentiments in a letter to a relative, "Never did any nation so much deserve to be made an example of to future ages, and never were any set of men more anxious than we to be employed in so laudable a work".[309] It was a sentiment shared by more than a few in Gage's army. The intense pressures and hostility British soldiers experienced motivated some to release their anger through acts of misconduct such as plundering, destruction of property, theft, and brawling with the colonists.[310] Captain Evelyn and other soldiers did not forget what they perceived to be the many offenses the colonists had perpetrated against them, "…these are all treasured up in our memories against that hour in which we shall cry havock and let slip the dogs of war."[311]

Captain Wiliam Glanville Evelyn (1742-1776) King's Own Regiment, (Fischer)

[307] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, March 6, 1775, 36-39.
[308] Conway, "The Great Mischief Complain'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War", 375-376.
[309] Evelyn to Mrs. Leveson Gower, Boston, December 6, 1774, 42-43.
[310] Conway, "The Great Mischief Complain'd of: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War", 377.
[311] Evelyn to Rev. Doctor Evelyn, Boston, February 18, 1775, 51-52.

On April 19, British soldiers finally vented their deep frustrations and anger towards the colonists at Menotomy. The breakdown of discipline at Menotomy, the plundering, the destruction of property, and the brutal nature of the killings was the end result of the deep resentment and animosity between soldiers and the colonists that had been developing over several months. The hostility of the environment therefore exacerbated British misconduct.

The Function of the British Occupation Army

The fourth and final major problem that weakened the British occupation army is the fact that the function of the British army in Boston was governance and coercion. British Parliament sought to crack down and intimidate the Colonies into submission in order to avoid an armed revolt. Coercive diplomacy was the method Parliament employed to achieve this strategic goal. The British Army was dispatched to Boston to enforce the Coercive Acts. What mattered was the threat of force, rather than the actual use of force. Gage's army was not in Boston to do battle with the Americans; they were there to prevent an armed conflict. This reality negatively affected the combat effectiveness of Gage's army. The function of Gage's army resulted in two things. First, the British army neglected tactical training in favor of the many duties of an occupation army. Second, Gage's dual role as military commander and Governor consumed much time and energy, which prevented him from adequately dealing with the several other problems affecting his army.

Regimental officers neglected to adequately drill their men in tactical combat training. Several officers were too incompetent and inexperienced to adequately train their men. Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie wrote in his diary that many officers were unsuited to their positions; "Some of the officers who have been appointed Assistant Engineers, hardly know the names of the different parts of a fortification."[312]Another problem was that the British simply did not have enough time to train. The many duties of the occupation army in Boston; mounting guard at the Neck, patrolling the city, dealing with the population, repairing fortifications, constructing winter quarters on the

[312] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, January 8, 1775, 28.

Common, acquiring and transporting provisions, all of these tasks consumed a lot of time and energy. Many of these tasks were made more difficult by Whig opposition in Boston. As for any free time, most soldiers spent any extra time they possessed working part time jobs around Boston to supplement their meager pay. There simply wasn't time for much else. [313]

The diaries of Lieutenant Barker and Lieutenant Mackenzie mention little in the way of any coordinated training. Occasionally, regiments would march fully equipped, five or six miles into the countryside for exercise and in preparation for the Concord expedition in the spring.[314] Regiments did take some time to practice firing their weapons. Lieutenant Mackenzie wrote that soldiers would hold target practice on the Wharves of Boston. Each soldier would fire six rounds at objects floating in Boston harbor.[315] But beyond this, the duties of an occupation army prevented any further training.

During the occupation of Boston, General Gage took on the dual role of military General and civilian Governor. The administrative duties and responsibilities of Governor, along with continual politicking with the staunch Whig opposition in Boston, consumed much of Gage's time and energy. As a result, Gage was unable to adequately address the previously mentioned problems affecting the British army. Responsibility for dealing with those problems was largely left in the hands of regimental officers.[316] General Gage and regimental officers did attempt to reign in these problems through

[313] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 372.
[314] Barker, *Diary of Lt. John Barker,* Boston, November 28, 1774, 8; Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, February 3, 1775, 32.
[315] Mackenzie, *A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston,* Boston, January 15, 1775, 28-29.
[316] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 344-345.

appeasement of the colonists combined with strict regulations and harsh punishment towards the troops. However as discussed earlier, these measures failed to stop desertion, drunkenness, and troop misconduct. Ultimately Gage focused most of his energy on his duties as Governor at the expense of his duties as military commander.[317]

[317] Shy, *Toward Lexington,* 415.

Conclusion

The British defeat at Lexington and Concord was more than just a product of false strategic assumptions and tactical missteps. The battle exposed the weakness of the British occupation army itself. Much of that weakness was rooted at the individual-unit level; in the many problems and pressures affecting British soldiers which undermined discipline, morale and combat effectiveness. Failure to adequately address those problems allowed them to fester and weaken the British army. The implication of this is that Lexington and Concord was the not a battle in which humble American citizen soldiers routed an elite British army. Lexington and Concord was a battle in which disorganized bands of poorly trained but highly motivated American militiaman defeated a poorly disciplined and poorly motivated British army. Rather than being the fearless and highly disciplined automatons of an invincible British army, the soldiers of Gage's occupation army were all too human.

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