

Nonfiction Excerpt 4: “The Battle of Lexington” (as told by Jonas Clark)

Between the hours of twelve and one, on the morning of the nineteenth of April, we received intelligence by express from the Hon. Joseph Warren, Esq., at Boston that a large body of the King’s troops were embarked in boats from Boston. They were supposed to be a brigade of about twelve or fifteen hundred. They were said to have gone over to land on Lechmere’s Point, in Cambridge.

It was shrewdly suspected that they were ordered to seize and destroy the stores, belonging to the colony, and then deposited at Concord. This was in consequence of General Gage’s unjustifiable seizure of the provincial magazine of powder at Medford, and other colony stores at several other places.

Upon this intelligence, as also upon information of the conduct of the officers as above mentioned, the militia of this town were alarmed, and ordered to meet on the usual place of parade. This was not with any design of commencing hostilities upon the King’s troops, but to consult what might be done for our own and the people’s safety.

This was in order to be ready for whatever service Providence might call us out to, upon this alarming occasion, in case overt acts of violence or open hostilities should be committed.

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

The militia met according to order, and awaited the return of the messengers, that they might order their measures as occasion should require. Between three and four o’clock, one of the expresses returned, reporting that there was no appearance of the troops on the roads, either from Cambridge or Charlestown. It was supposed that the movements in the army the evening before were only a feint to alarm the people.

Thereupon therefore the militia company were dismissed for the present. But they had orders to be within call of the drum waiting the return of the other messenger. He was expected in about an hour, or sooner, if any discovery should be made of the motions of the troops.

He was prevented by their silent and sudden arrival at the place where he was waiting for intelligence. So that after all this precaution, we had no notice of their

approach until the brigade was actually in the town, and upon a quick march within about a mile of the meeting house and place of parade.

However the commanding officer thought best to call the company together. He had no intention of opposing so superior a force, much less of commencing hostilities. It was done only with a view to determine what to do, when and where to meet, and to dismiss and disperse.

Accordingly, about half after four o'clock alarm guns were fired, and the drums beat to arms; and the militia were collected together. Some, to the number of fifty or sixty, or possibly more, were on the parade, others were coming towards it. In the meantime the troops, having thus stolen a march upon us, and to prevent any intelligence of their approach, seized and held prisoners several persons whom they met unarmed upon the road.

They seemed to come determined for murder and bloodshed; and that whether provoked to it or not! When within about half a quarter of a mile of the meeting house, they halted. The command was given to prime and load. This being done they marched on until they came up to the east end of the meeting house in sight of our militia.

Immediately upon their appearing so suddenly, and so nigh, Captain Parker who commanded the militia company, ordered the men to disperse and take care of themselves; and not to fire. Upon this our men dispersed. But many of them not so speedily as they might have done, not having the most distant idea of such brutal barbarity and more than savage cruelty, from the troops of a British King as they immediately experienced!

For no sooner did they come in sight of our company, but one of them, supposed to be an officer of rank, was heard to say to his troops, "Now we will have them!"— Upon which the troops shouted aloud, huzzaed, and rushed furiously towards our men.

About the same time three officers advanced on horseback to the front of the body, and coming within five or six rods of the militia, one of them cried out, "Ye villains, ye rebels, disperse; disperse!" or words to this effect. One of them (whether the same or not is not easily determined) said, "Lay down your arms; why don't you lay down your arms!"

The second of these officers about this time fired a pistol towards the militia, as they were dispersing. The foremost, who was within a few yards of our men, brandished his sword and then pointed towards them. With a loud voice he said, "Fire!" which was instantly followed by a discharge of arms from the troops.

This was succeeded by a heavy and close fire upon our party, dispersing so long as any of them were within reach. Eight were left dead upon the ground! Ten were wounded. The rest of the company, through divine goodness, were, by a miracle, preserved unhurt in this murderous action!