

HSI: History Scene Investigation: Who shot first at Lexington?

Document A

It is sunrise. When the first rays shine upon the **green** in **Lexington**, they fall on fifty or sixty minute men, with a brave old soldier who has been with Wolfe at Quebec, at their head. They show dusty columns of red-coated soldiers just coming in sight along the road... "Stand your ground. Don't fire unless you are fired upon," says Captain Parker to the minute men; "but," and his face grows stern as he speaks, "if they want war, it may as well begin here." The redcoats are close at hand, with Major Pitcairn at their head. "Disperse, ye rebels, disperse," he cries. The minutemen stand firm. Angrily, Pitcairn repeats his command, and follows it by an order to his men to fire. They hesitate. The Major fire^s his own pistol. Then the muskets of the regulars ring out and the minutemen are beginning to return the shots. But Parker orders them back—the fight is to unequal. Eight men are killed, and ten are wounded. The war has begun.

-U.S. History Book #1

Document B

At daybreak of April 19 the British reached **Lexington**, where they were confronted by about sixty minutemen. Their commander, Captain Parker, told his men: "Don't fire unless you are fired upon; but if they want war let it begin here." A shot was fired but from which side is not certain; then came a volley from British soldiers, which killed eight men and wounded many others. The minutemen fell back in confusion. -U.S. History Book #2

Document C

...the commanding officer accosted the Militia in words to this effect: "Disperse, you rebels—throw down your arms and disperse;" upon which some of the troops huzzaed, and immediately one or two officers discharge their pistols, which were instantaneously followed by firing of four or five of the soldiers...

...But the savage barbarity exercised upon the bodies of our unfortunate brethren who fell, is almost incredible; not content with shooting down unarmed, aged and infirm, the discarded the cries of the wounded, killing them without mercy, and mangling their bodies in the most shocking manner. -Salem "Gazette," April 25, 1775

Document D

...Who upon their arrival at **Lexington**, found a body of the country people at arms, on a **green** close to the road; and upon the King's Troops marching up to them, in order to inquire the reason for their being so assembled, they went off in great confusion, and several guns ere fired upon the King's Troops from behind a stone wall... -"London Gazette," June 10, 1775

Document E

...and upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse and not to fire. Immediately said troops made their appearance, and rushed furiously, fired upon eight of our party... -Captain Parker, April 25, 1775

Document F

We were faced toward the regulars, marching up to us, and some of our company was coming to the parade with their backs toward the troops, and others on the parade began to disperse, when the regulars fired on the company before a gun was fired by any of our company on them... -Statement signed by fourteen men, April 25, 1775

Document G

On our arrival at **Lexington**, we saw a body of Provincial Troops armed, to the number of about sixty or seventy men; on our arrival they dispersed, and soon after firing began; but which party fired first, I cannot exactly say, as our troops rushed on the shouting and huzzaing previous to the firing... -**Lieutenant Thornton Gould, April 25, 1775**

Document H

... Major Pitcairn came up immediately and cried out to the rebels to throw down their arms and disperse, which they did not do; he called out a second time but to no purpose; upon which he ordered our light-infantry to advance and disarm them, which they were doing, when one of the rebels fired a shot, our soldiers returned the fire and killed about fourteen...-**Account by a British Officer found in Boston**



Document I—Drawing from colonial artist showing “the battle” from Colonial perspective.



Document J—
Drawing from
British artist of the
Revolutionary War
Era

