

DIORAMA OF THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON

Late on the evening of April 18, 1775, approximately 850 British Regulars, or “Redcoats,” moved out of Boston under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith. Their secret mission was to march to Concord and seize and destroy the patriots’ supply of arms and munitions in anticipation of the rebellion. The Redcoats had been awakened by their sergeants and had moved silently out of their barracks to a point on the Charles River. Here, they were transported by longboats to a landing site on the Cambridge side near Lechmere Point. Because of problems with the tide, the troops were forced to wade ashore through the cold water. Once on the Cambridge side, they also had to ford the back waters of Willie Creek. Crossing the river was disorganized and time consuming. It was about two o’clock in the morning before they were able to begin their journey to Lexington and Concord. In the meantime, around midnight, Paul Revere, shortly followed by William Dawes, had arrived in Lexington on horseback to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock of the approaching Regulars.

When the troops reached Menotomy (Arlington), it was obvious that their movements were no longer secret. Bells were ringing, warning shots were being fired, and everywhere Militia and Minutemen were springing from their beds and moving out to join their companies. Revere, Dawes and other dispatch riders were successful in their task: the Countryside was alarmed!

Fearing his mission would be compromised, Lieutenant Colonel Smith of the British Expeditionary Force, sent Marine Major John Pitcairn forward with an advance guard of approximately 300 light infantrymen. Along the route, the Major and his column captured several Patriot scouts who had been dispatched from Lexington by Captain John Parker, Commander of the Lexington Militia.

On Lexington Common, Captain Parker had formed his men at about one o’clock on the morning of April 19th. They were responding to an alarm rung from the belfry. However, as he received no confirmation from his scouts that the Regulars were approaching, he dismissed the company with the warning that they should remain “within call of the drum.” Thaddeus Bowman, a scout sent out by Capt. Parker reported at 4:15 a.m. that the Regulars were indeed marching

towards Lexington. Parker instructed his drummer, William Diamond, to move to the Common and to beat the call to arms. The beat of his drum brought Militia from their homes and also from Buckman Tavern, where many had retired to wait out the uncertain night. Orderly Sergeant William Munroe formed the company facing east, in the direction of the meeting house. The long roll of the drum carried across the meadows on that chilly dawn to Maj. Pitcairn and his column of tired, grim men who were approaching the outskirts of Lexington. Pitcairn, who interpreted the drum beat as a challenge to do battle and who anticipated facing a much larger force of Militia, halted his troops. They were ordered to prime and load their muskets and fix bayonets. This accomplished, he moved them at a double-quick march directly towards the Common in the center of the Town.

The Regulars approached the Common where a determined Lexington Militia were standing. Three companies of Regulars, about 124 men, rushed onto the Common to confront the assembled Militia. Maj. Pitcairn then commanded the Patriots to lay down their arms and disperse. It has been stated that Capt. Parker called to his men, “Stand your ground. Don’t fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here!” Two more times Major Pitcairn repeated his order to disperse. Finally, Capt. Parker, realizing the danger of the situation, ordered his men to disperse. For the most part they obeyed, although several remained in line.

Then, as most of the Militia were leaving the Common and had their backs to the Regulars, a shot rang out from an unknown source – The first shot of the American Revolution!* Almost immediately and without orders the Redcoats began firing. One company broke ranks and ran in amongst the Patriots, shooting and bayoneting the men. Pitcairn, furious at the conduct of the army troops, rode in front of his men yelling “Cease fire!”; but the long smoldering hatred between the occupation army and the Colonists was not easily controlled once it had bathed itself in the blood of combat. The Regulars continued to press forward, charging the small band of Americans who were now returning the fire of the Regulars. On the British Regular side there were no fatalities. One red coated soldier suffered a leg wound and Pitcairn's horse was hit in two places. Major Pitcairn was later

“seen nursing a bloody finger in Concord.” On the Patriot side, eight Militiamen were killed and ten were wounded.

Finally, the drummers of the King’s Expeditionary Force were ordered to beat recall, and with numerous shouts and curses, the officers slowly regained control of their troops. Then with the firing of a few victory salutes and the customary “Three Cheers” (Huzzah!), the Regulars quickly marched off toward Concord, the music of fifes and drums ringing in the crisp morning air.

The first forcible armed resistance to the Crown had been taken. As the Regulars departed for Concord, to continue with their mission to take out the ammunition depot, a small crack was beginning to show in the armor of the empire. The idea of revolution and independence had been born in the bloody dawn at Lexington by these simple farmers, tradesmen and merchants which led to the Declaration of Independence, on July 4th, 1776 and the creation of the Republic of the “United States of America.”

The First Shot of the American Revolution vs The Shot Heard ‘Round the World.* There is a continuing friendly debate between Lexington and Concord as to who had “the**” shot on that first day of the American Revolution. Was it Lexington, where the first military skirmish happened? Eight militiamen gave their lives for the Revolution that morning, but no order to fire was given in Lexington by either side. Or was it Concord, where our militia were given the order to fire on the British troops after two minutemen had been shot? Did Ralph Waldo Emerson, writing the phrase “The shot heard ‘round the world” in his Concord Hymn written in 1837 and sung at Concord’s 100th anniversary celebration of the first day of the American Revolution, continue to “stoke the fire” between the two towns?

*In Memoriam
Major William Francis Buckley
May 30, 1928-June 3, 1985*

Principal Artisan of the Diorama in Lexington Visitors Center

Born in Medford, MA. Graduated from Stoneham High School in 1947 and then joined the United States Army. During the Korean War, Buckley served as a company commander with the 1st Cavalry Division. He was awarded the Silver Star for his service in Korea. He graduated from Boston University and was then employed with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from 1955-1957.

Mr. Buckley was the principal artisan in the creation of this diorama. The diorama was being built in 1956 and was completed in the summer of 1962. In the early 1960s, Mr. Buckley was also the Assistant Director at the Cary Library in Lexington. The Trustees accepted his resignation in late 1965 when he accepted a position with the U.S. Government.

In 1965 Buckley rejoined the CIA. While in the CIA he served in Vietnam (1965-1970), Zaire (1970-1972), Cambodia (1972), Egypt (1972-1978) and Pakistan (1978-1979).

In 1983, Buckley became Beirut Station Chief/Political Officer at the US Embassy. He was kidnapped by the Islamic group, Hezbollah, on March 16, 1984. Hezbollah smuggled Buckley to Tehran, Iran where he was tortured when they discovered he was a senior CIA officer. He died in captivity in 1985. His body was returned to the United States on December 28, 1991 and he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

His Military Awards include: Silver Star, Soldier’s Medal, Bronze Star, 2 Purple Hearts, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry w/Bronze Star.

His CIA awards include: Intelligence Star, Exceptional Service Medallion and Distinguished Intelligence Cross.

Major Buckley received the Freedom Foundation Award for the Lexington Green Diorama. According to information distributed by the CIA, Major Buckley was, “an avid reader of politics and history, and a collector and builder of miniature soldiers.” The diorama was exhibited at the World’s Fair in New York in 1964

Special thanks to Gerry Marrocco, Project Coordinator, diorama narrative revision 2017.