

The Shot Still Echoes

April 19th marks the 220th anniversary of a pivotal event in America's history, when our forefathers gathered on the Lexington Green and at Concord Bridge to defend their God-given liberties. These early American patriots — farmer, craftsman, laborer, father, and son — stood shoulder-to-shoulder on the principle of freedom as blood was drawn for the first time between colonial and British troops.

By early 1775, following years of injustice and tyranny, the mood of the American colonies had turned openly hostile to British rule. The previous year, in response to the colonial tax revolt known as the Boston Tea Party, the English Parliament had given up all pretense of representing colonial interests by passing the Intolerable Acts. This measure outlawed unsanctioned public meetings in the 13 colonies, closed the Boston harbor, and forced Americans to house and feed the British troops.

In September 1774, 12 of the 13 colonies convened a "Continental Congress" to discuss common action against British rule, and by October 14th had produced a "Declaration of Rights."

The tension between Britain and the colonies exploded into battle on April 19, 1775 when British soldiers marched on Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts in an attempt to confiscate the rebels' cache of "illegal" weapons and, if possible, to capture Samuel Adams and John Hancock, the men held largely responsible for the growing tide of dissent in the colonies. When leaving Boston the British troops counted on the element of surprise, but their movements alerted Paul Revere and William Dawes, who immediately mounted horses and rode through the Massachusetts countryside warning fellow patriots of the impending attack.

When the British force arrived in Lexington, a small but courageous force of about 50 colonial "minutemen" had gathered under the leadership of Captain John Parker. Tradition has it that one of the colonial volunteers said to

Parker, "There are so few of us, it is folly to stand here." But Parker bolstered his men and told them to "Stand your ground! Don't fire unless fired upon! But if they want to have a war, let it begin here!" The commander of the forward British unit, Major John Pitcairn, ordered the colonials to disperse, but the minutemen stood fast.

A shot rang out, a skirmish ensued, and when the smoke had cleared, eight colonial soldiers were dead, ten

with the battle at Lexington, it is uncertain who fired first at Concord. But this time British blood flowed, and the elite British soldiers, forced to give up the bridge, made a hasty retreat back to Boston. All along their 15-mile march to Boston the British were harassed by patriots firing from behind trees, rocks, and fences. One British officer recalled, "We retired for 15 miles under an incessant fire, which like a moving circle surrounded and followed us wherever we went."

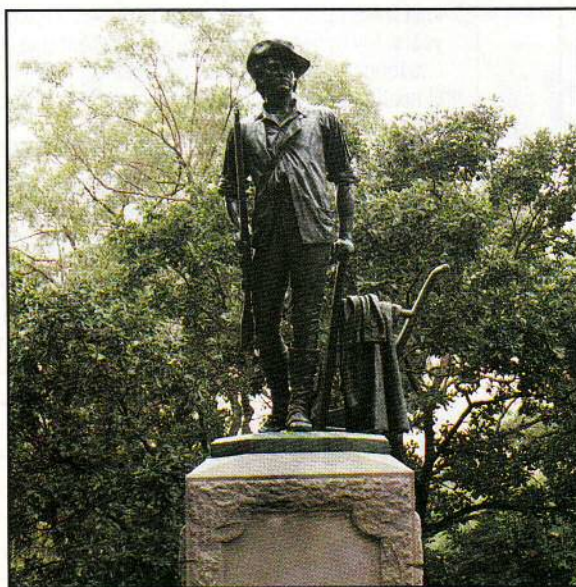
In all, the British plan to strike a blow at the budding colonial rebellion was a dismal failure: The British lost 300 men, managed to confiscate only a few weapons, and failed to capture John Hancock and Samuel Adams. While 30 American patriots also lost their lives, their deaths were not in vain: Their sacrifice stands as a solemn remembrance of the awesome price paid to defend our God-given liberties.

Following the battles of Lexington and Concord, our colonial forefathers never looked back, but vowed to fight — to the death if necessary — for their unalienable rights. Within a month, a call went out to the colonies for a second Continental Congress. During

the Congress, an organized and unified "Continental Army" was formed, with George Washington as commander in chief. Fourteen months later, on July 4, 1776, 56 American patriots, including the elusive Samuel Adams and John Hancock, signed the Declaration of Independence which formally severed the ties binding the colonies to England.

After the long struggle for independence was won, our Founding Fathers sought to guarantee that no more blood would be shed over "the right of the people to keep and bear arms." In 1791, the Second Amendment to the Constitution was ratified with the hope that no longer would citizens be controlled through a government monopoly of arms. ■

— THOMAS A. BURZYNSKI



A vigilant patriot stands ready at Concord Bridge.

Thomas R. Eddleien

wounded. The remaining colonials retreated while the British marched on to Concord.

The residents of Concord had been forewarned of the advancing British troops and had removed most of their supply of weapons and ammunition by the time the British reached the town. The British troops promptly burned the few munitions they discovered. Area residents, alerted by the smoke from the fire started by the soldiers, faced off against the British at the Concord bridge. In sight of the bridge, Concord's Major John Buttrick, standing on land owned by his family for over 130 years, made a call to arms. Under Buttrick and Colonel Amos Barrett, the colonial volunteers advanced on the enemy troops in what one British soldier later described as "a very military manner." As