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## LESSON 17 Who Fired First at Lexington Green?

### Background Information

On April 19, 1775, a group of British soldiers marched into Lexington on their way to seize some colonial military supplies stored in Concord. They were met on Lexington Green by colonial militia led by Captain John Parker. In the next few moments shooting started and several colonists were killed. One question that has arisen about this event is “Who fired first?”

Why do you think it is important in a war to know who fired the first shot? Look at the map below and the evidence on the following pages. Write the strengths and weaknesses of each piece of evidence on the worksheet, then make up your mind who you think fired first. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation were modernized throughout the evidence presented.

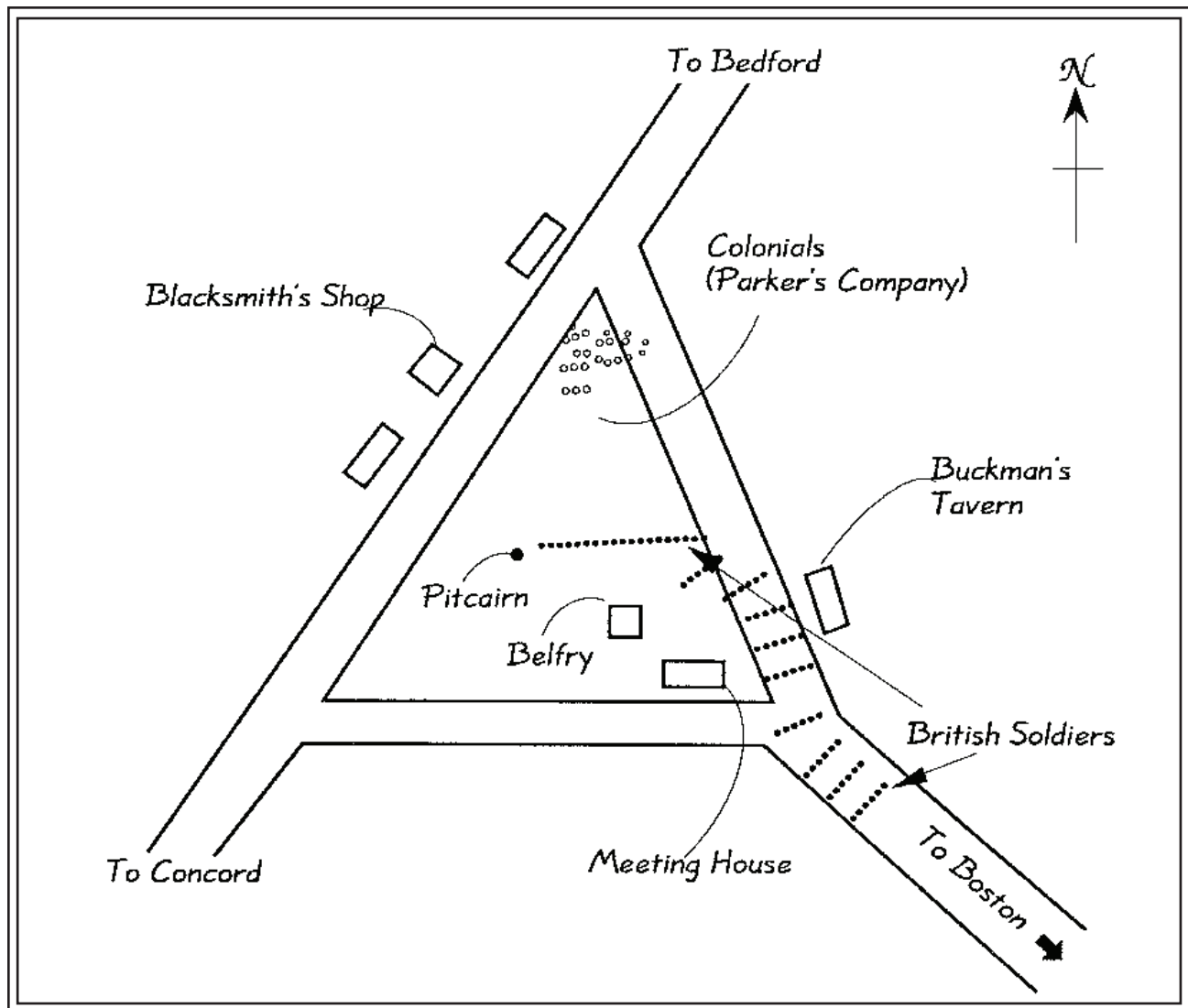


Figure 6: Map of Lexington Green, April 19, 1775.

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1. Official deposition (testimony written down under oath) of John Parker, commander of the colonial militia.

I, John Parker, of lawful age, and commander of the Militia in Lexington, do testify and declare, that on the nineteenth instant [April 19], [about one o'clock] in the morning..., being informed that there were a number of Regular (British) officers riding up and down the road, stopping and insulting people as they passed, and also...that a number of regular troops were on the march from Boston in order to take the Province Stores at Concord, ordered our Militia to meet on the [Lexington] Common.. to consult what to do. [We] concluded not to be discovered, nor meddle or make with said Regular Troops, if they should approach, unless they should insult us. Upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse and not to fire. Immediately said Troops made their appearance, ...rushed furiously, fired upon and killed eight of our party without receiving any provocation therefore from us.

2. Personal diary of Lieutenant John Barker, a British officer.

19th. At 5 o'clock we arrived there and saw a number of people, I believe between two- and three-hundred, formed in a Common in the middle of the town; we still continued advancing, keeping prepared against an attack although without intending to attack them, but on our coming near them they fired one or two shots, upon which our men without any orders, rushed in upon them, fired and put them to flight; several of them were killed, we could not tell how many, because they got behind walls and into the woods. We had a man of the 10th Light Infantry wounded, nobody else hurt.-

3. Sworn testimony of Thomas Fessenden, a colonial onlooker, to the Justices of the Peace in Middlesex County.

*Lexington, April 23, 1775.* I, Thomas Fessenden..., testify and declare, that I being in a pasture near the meeting-house at said Lexington on [last] Wednesday at about a half-hour before sunrise,...I saw three officers on horseback advance to the front of said Regulars, when one of them, being within six rods of the said Militia, cried out, "Disperse, you rebels, immediately," [and] brandished his sword over his head three times. Meanwhile the second officer, ...about two rods behind him, fired a pistol pointed at said Militia, and the Regulars kept huzzaing (yelling) until he had finished brandishing his sword, and when he had thus finished..., he pointed it down towards said Militia, and immediately...the said Regulars fired a volley at the Militia and then I ran off, as fast as I could, while they continued firing until I got out of their reach. I further testify that as soon as the officer cried "Disperse, you rebels," the said Company of Militia dispersed every way as fast as they could, and while they were dispersing the Regulars kept firing at them incessantly, and further saith not.

*Thomas Fessenden*

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