

## The First Strike (Start Music)

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Ladies and gentlemen, gather 'round – bring chairs. Come in close so you can all hear every word. You see - the story I am about to tell you, deserves nothing less.

Hereditary Rule: Kings and Queens and Guillotines

Before I begin the 1<sup>st</sup> Strike, I want to cover some of the events that led up to our War for Independence from England. The trouble began during the F & I wars, which lasted from 1754-1763. The French were in Canada with an eye on the rest of North America and they had enlisted the help of the indigenous peoples. King George had other plans, and sent troops to repel the invaders. He soon realized that it would take a larger force in order to succeed.

The king ordered the colonists to form militia units to assist his Regular troops and the colonists obliged. All went fairly well until the French began sending raiding parties in to burn towns while the militia were out fighting. The men of the various militias realized that they needed to remain in their towns in order to protect their families. The king disagreed and proclaimed that he had the right to *bind the colonists in all cases whatsoever*. This single act planted the seeds of what would become a full on rebellion.

As soon as the war was over, the king proclaimed no further westward expansion would be allowed, in order to appease the Indians. The colonists had other plans. In 1765 came the Stamp Act, which required the king's mark on everything from marriage licenses to real estate deeds. Then the Quartering Act, which required that any colonist upon "request", offer room and board to traveling soldiers. 8:PM – a knock at the door .....3<sup>rd</sup> Amendment

From 1766 to 1773 came more acts seeking to impose the king's will upon the colonies and in 1773, the famed Boston Tea Party, in which Paul Revere took part. In 1774 came what was referred to as the "Intolerable Acts". By now the king is insisting that the people of Boston pay for the tea they had destroyed and decrees their alternative to be death by starvation.

This brings us up to April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1775. In Boston, troops are forming up for something big and the residents are much alarmed. They know something is afoot and rumors abound.....

I will now tell you the *true* story of the beginning of our war for independence from England - the first of three parts that we call "The Three Strikes of the Match". I would like to take you back, more than 240 years, to April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1775. The time - just after midnight.

Paul Revere is in a small boat being rowed across the Charles River toward Charlestown and he is doing so right under the powerful guns of the imposing war ship HMS Somerset. A low, but full moon casts a shadow upon his tiny craft – shielding him from the view of the Somerset's night watch. He is dressed in riding gear, but carries no arms, thinking it will not be prudent if he is caught. This simple decision saves Paul Revere's life.

Earlier this evening, Revere has been to the home of Dr. Joseph Warren where he has received information vital to his cause. Dr. Warren has found out that General Gage, the new military governor of Boston, is planning to send troops across the bay to confiscate powder and ball from the Colonists in order to disarm them. The king has also ordered General Gage to arrest John Hancock and Samuel Adams so that they can be sent back to England to be hung as traitors for conspiring against the King. It is possible that Gage's own American wife is the source of this information.

Paul Revere now proceeds to the home of Robert Newman. He tells young Newman and two friends to take two lanterns to the top of the steeple of the Old North Church and display them to alert another rider already in Charlestown. Shortly after 10:PM, the famous signal is given. Can anyone tell me why *two* lanterns? (One of two things learnt in school that is true! The other being that he did in fact ride a horse. The rest is mostly fantasy.)

When the men of Charlestown see the signal, they spring into action. Some move down to the water's edge to look out for Revere, while others fetch him a fine, fast mare named Brown Beauty from Deacon Larkin. Paul Revere says a few final words to his friends and races off into the night to warn Hancock and Adams in Lexington. Now in truth, General Gage has decided to employ...

Meanwhile, Major John Pitcairn of the Royal Marines is slogging through freezing muck and water up to his waist along with his men because General Gage is *determined* to keep the movement of the Regulars a secret. They have rowed across Back Bay in 20 small Navy long boats that barely float under their weight. They land at a place that is little more than a swamp called Lechmere's Point. They are ordered to wait there for provisions, soaking wet and shivering from the cold New England air. When the Navy finally arrives with the provisions, they are found to be infested with worms and are swiftly discarded. Now, these Royal Marines are a surly lot to begin with and the night's events have done *nothing* to improve their demeanor.

Finally, Paul Revere arrives in Lexington at the Home of the Rev. Jonas Clark where Hancock and Adams are sleeping. Sgt. Munroe, a local tavern owner, is guarding the house along with several militiamen. The Sgt. tells Revere: "Cease making so much noise, as surely you will awaken everyone in the house!" Revere bellows: "You'll have enough noise before long sir! The Regulars are coming out!"

Sam Adams, now awakened, throws open a window and recognizing Revere; invites him inside. Revere warns Hancock and Adams to move to safety and gallops off with another alarm rider named William Dawes. Their mission is to alarm the town of Concord – they will not succeed.

Contrary to what you have been taught, Paul Revere did *not* work alone, nor did he ride about hollering the "British are coming!" That would have been ridiculous, as he considered himself to *be* British; all of the Colonists did. This was a well planned and carefully executed *network*, of riders, alarm fires, church bells, and musket reports worked out months in advance as the result of three previous attempts by the King's standing army to disarm the Colonists. No, the Revolutionary war was not started over taxation without representation as you have been told– it began over the confiscation of powder and ball. *That* is where our Forefathers drew the line. They knew well the difference between Freeman and slaves is the right to keep and bear arms.

Along the road to Concord, Revere and Dawes meet young Dr. Samuel Prescott, who has been out courting his fiancé this very evening. Dr. Prescott readily agrees to help with the alarm as he knows the roads and the people well and is himself a staunch Whig from a family of Whigs. Understand the choice this young man has made. In an instant his life will change dramatically ...

The three men ride headlong into one of the many patrols that General Gage sent out to stop such riders. Dawes is unhorsed, but escapes and Dr. Prescott gallops away to safety, but Paul Revere is trapped and ordered to dismount. The Regulars are abusing him badly until an officer steps in and addresses him politely: "Sir, may I crave your name?" I am Paul Revere .....

With pistols pointed at his head, Paul Revere begins to speak in a matter of fact tone that infuriates the King's soldiers. He obviously knows more about their mission than they do! He calmly goes on to explain that there are better than 500 armed Militia waiting in Lexington and to go there will mean certain death for his captors – a “little white lie” designed to protect Hancock and Adams.

The Officer is skeptical until he hears a volley of musket fire coming from Lexington. Revere is relieved of his fine brown mare and released. Brown Beauty is given to a portly Sgt, who rides her to death. Revere makes his way back, across the old burial grounds, to the Clark parsonage just to be certain that Hancock and Adams have heeded his warning and left for safer quarters.

When he enters Rev. Clark's home he is horrified to find the two important men still debating furiously, right where he had left them three hours before. John Hancock is the wealthiest man in all of Massachusetts Bay, but he is filled with passion for the Revolution. He's polishing his sword, cleaning his pistol and lamenting that he left his musket back in Boston – he means to fight! Revere and Adams need to make Hancock understand that he is too important to the Revolution to be lost in battle. Finally, around daybreak, Hancock and Adams get into Hancock's heavy carriage and leave for Woburn. (Now Winchester, MA)

Revere returns to the Clark parsonage to rest a bit, until yet *another* crisis is forced upon him. A young man named John Lowell, Hancock's confidential clerk, bursts in and informs him that Hancock has left a large trunk full of very incriminating papers behind. Revere follows Lowell to the Buckman Tavern to assist him with the arduous task of dragging the heavy trunk downstairs. They plan to take it deep into the woods to keep it from falling into the hands of General Gage.

When Revere and Lowell enter the tavern they find a large crowd. Confusion and rumors abound amongst the men of Lexington. You see these prudent Yankee farmers wanted to verify Revere's alarm and so they sent out two riders to look for Regulars. One of these scouts returned three hours later saying: There are no Regulars about. The alarm is a false one!

On the strength of this report, Capt. John Parker dismissed his men, telling them to remain within the sound of the muster drum. Many of his men decided to reinforce themselves with a pint of ale at the tavern and prior to entering, discharged their loaded muskets, as is the tradition of the day. You see 18<sup>th</sup> Century firearms are not nearly so dependable as our modern versions. This is the very same volley that was heard by Revere's captors.

Suddenly, the second rider gallops into Lexington and shouts – “the Regulars are not only coming on, but they are already past the rock!” – a landmark not thirty minutes from town. And so, despite Paul Revere's timely warning, the town of Lexington is still essentially caught by surprise.

Capt. Parker immediately sets about mustering his company again by musket fire and alarm bells. He even has 19-year-old William Diamond sound the muster drum. His men stream out of the tavern toward the green, whilst Revere and Lowell head upstairs to retrieve the heavy trunk.

\*\*\*Breathe\*\*\*

John Parker is a tall, gaunt man of 46 years and a seasoned veteran of the French and Indian Wars. His fellow townsmen have elected him to lead them and they have chosen well. John Parker is the kind of man to be counted upon in times of crisis. He is also a very sick fellow, in the later stages of “Consumption” (AKA: TB), but this does not deter him from his duty. In six months John Parker will be dead, but on the afternoon of April 19<sup>th</sup>, he is a force to be reckoned with.

Many of the men in Parker's "Training Band", as they are called, are related – all are local residents. They have all trained hard for many months and today their mettle will be put to the test.

Capt. Parker's men are now forming up in battalia order directly in line with the approaching Regulars. There are but 60 to 70 men now mustered on the common. Revere and Lowell are dragging their heavy load right past these men toward the trees to safety. Revere writes later that he heard Capt. Parker tell his men, in the old Yankee dialect: "Let da trups puss by. Dunn molest dem, without day beun fust".

The Regulars come into view. While there may be as few as 300 or so, it appears to the men on the common to be *many* more. They are stretched out a quarter of a mile into the distance, like a long red serpent – a fearsome sight to a bunch of farmers, most of whom have never seen battle before. One man turns to Capt. Parker: "There are so few of us, tis folly to stand here", but Capt. Parker has decided that the time for debate has passed. He turns to his men: "The fust man who offas ta run'll be shut down. Stand yer ground! Da nut fiya unless fiy'd upon, but if dey wun a war, den let it begin hee!" Think for just a moment about this scene in your mind's eye. 70 farmers facing 300 professional soldiers – all with 17" polished steel bayonets! (prop here)

The Regulars draw closer and time itself seems to slow as it often does in the face of mortal danger. As a result of the report from Revere's captors, the Regulars have stopped to load their muskets and fix bayonets. They are ready for a fight, but not especially concerned. You see, these arrogant men in the red coats hold a very low opinion of the Colonists. Major Pitcairn once said: "Americans are *useless* in military terms, fit only to carry provisions, or cut timber and build fortifications for *real* soldiers". He will learn a very hard lesson later this day.

A young, hard-charging Lieutenant named Jessie Adair is in charge of the van and when he comes to a fork in the road rashly decides to take the route that leads the three forward companies directly into Parker's men.

Major Pitcairn is in the rear, but he sees what is happening and spurs his mount forward. He rides out in front of the remaining companies and diverts them to the left fork, around the meeting house, stopping them at Concord road. Lt. Adair leads the van to within 70 yards of Parker's men and orders them to form up in line of battle. The Regulars then begin the deep-throated shout that is their fearsome trademark – "Huzaah! Huzaah! Huzaah!" One of the British officers later writes "the sound was deafening".

Major Pitcairn rides up to join several other officers less than six rods from the Militia – about 99'. With a pistol in his hand, it may be Pitcairn himself that shouts: "Disperse Ye Rebels! Ye Villains! Lay down yer arms and disperse ye damned Rebels!

Faced with overwhelming odds, Capt. Parker turns to his men and issues new orders – "deesperse and da not fiya". Most of his men begin to disperse, but not so quickly as they might. Some do not hear the new command over the shouts of the Regulars, standing their ground as ordered and some, I suspect refused to leave, enraged that the King would send armed troops into their town.

Boof! Suddenly, a shot rings out – likey from a pistol. Instantly, the Regulars begin firing without orders. At first you can hear the individual reports, then it becomes a tearing sound, like the ripping of fabric. The Regulars fire high and in the first volley, no one is hit. Some even think the

Regulars are not firing ball, but simply powder as a warning. They quickly reload, as they are trained, and with the second volley, Parker's men begin to fall. Many are shot in the back as they try to leave. The Regulars fire several volleys in quick succession.

The men in Parker's company who stand their ground and return fire, are the older veterans who have seen battle before. Many recall Capt. Parker's kinsman, Jonas Parker, standing with flints and balls in his hat between his feet, declaring: "I will never run". He is killed in the second volley. Ebenezer Munroe shouts as he fires back - "I'll give em the guts of me gun!" Robert Munroe dies on the very spot he has mustered. Jonathon Harrington is mortally wounded returning to his home – shot in the back. He falls not far from his house, as his wife and son look on in horror. He crawls to his home, inch by agonizing inch, to die on his own doorstep – another recipient of the King's benevolence.

The Regulars, now in a killing mood, are chasing Militiamen into buildings and firing at will. The Dogs of War have slipped their chains. Joshua Simonds races into the meetinghouse with several Regulars in pursuit. He runs upstairs to where the town's powder is stored and plunges his loaded musket into a barrel of powder awaiting his pursuers. He will *not* let them take the powder; not even if it means his own horrible death.

At this moment, Col. Francis Smith arrives on the field. He is mortified at the carnage he finds. There are dead and wounded Militia strewn about the bloody grass of the common. His famed British infantry, known for their discipline on the battlefield, are running wildly; their officers unable to control them.

Col. Smith is a seasoned soldier and knows exactly what to do. He summons his drummer and orders him to beat the call to arms. The Regulars have heard this call countless times on their training field and slowly they begin to heed its throbbing rhythm.

Reluctantly, the Regulars cease all firing and begin to form up as Col. Smith has ordered. When the white smoke of hundreds of musket shots clears, eight Militiamen lay dead or dying, with another nine wounded. Of the eight sets of fathers and sons in Capt. Parker's company, five are separated by death this day. The King's men suffer only one minor casualty – a private has been shot through the thigh, but not so badly that he cannot continue to march.

As his troops fall slowly back into their ranks, Col. Smith calls his officers to his side and for the first time, tells them the nature of their mission. Upon hearing that they are expected to continue on to Concord, with *no* chance of surprise, through miles of hostile countryside, several junior officers voice their "resistance" to the mission at great peril to their careers. But, Col. Smith has his orders and he means to carry them out.

In order to placate his men and to empty their muskets, he allows them to fire a victory volley, followed by three "Huzaahs! As the Regulars are cheering their "victory", the Colonists begin to count their dead. The once peaceful grass of Lexington's Common is now drenched in the blood of their kin.

Can you imagine how our ancestors felt about these soldiers who came into their town and without provocation, slaughtered and maimed 17 men – neighbors, brothers, uncles, fathers and sons?

Col. Smith's brigade resumes their march toward Concord to confiscate the town's powder.

The first attempt to strike the match of revolution has been made. There is a flash, some smoke, and then nothing as the match goes out. Had nothing else happened, there would have been inquiries, hearings, hangings, and promotions, and the revolution might well have died then and there.

However, 5 miles away in Concord, armed men are stirring and the second match is being readied to strike.

This concludes the first strike of the match. At lunchtime today, we will tell you the story that we call, the Second Strike of the match. Now, let's get to honoring these brave souls, long dead, by maintaining one of their fine traditions - Marksmanship!