

The Third Strike (Start Music & set up Battle Road map – BBB Poster for finish)

Shooters! Circle up! I will now tell you the final chapter in the story of April 19th, 1775 – the third strike of the match that ignited our War for Independence! We left off with Col. Smith forming up the Regulars and marching out of Concord.

It is now shortly after mid day, and the Regulars are retracing their steps out of Concord and back to Boston while the Americans watch from hilltops and behind stone walls all along the way.

The Regulars are spoiling for revenge for their fellow soldiers allegedly “butchered” at the North Bridge. The Americans want justice for the slaughter on Lexington Green. Many have walked all night, and they haven’t done so just to observe. The stage is set for a fight.

Colonel Smith and his men can see *hundreds* of militia lining the hilltops above the road back to Boston. He knows that they now face an 18-mile long gauntlet with sparse ammunition. He sends out flankers to keep the Americans back, out of musket range. They have already cleared one hilltop and a few farm fields and things are going well for the first mile. Then they come to Meriam’s Corner.

About a mile east of Concord, the road turns slightly and crosses a stream by way of a narrow bridge. The flankers are forced to come down from the hills and walk along the stream to the bridge which allows the Americans to get within musket range. By now they outnumber the Redcoats by over *one thousand armed men*.

As the Regulars approach Meriam’s Corner, there are no fifes and drums to be heard; nothing but the sound of a weary infantry trudging along. All is silent on both sides. Boom! *Suddenly a shot rings out* – possibly an unintentional discharge, or maybe the Militia was just getting too close for the comfort of the Regulars in the rear. The British rear guard quickly fires a volley – a *deadly* error on their part. The militia now opens fire in earnest. Musket balls *rain down* on the Redcoats with the *fury* of revenge.

The third strike of the revolutionary match is made, and this time it *blazes forth* and *burns brightly*, lighting the fuse on a war for independence that will last 8 *bloody* years and cost *thousands* of lives. Understand the choice they have made

It is near 1 o’clock now, and the running fight to Boston has begun. From here on the British will be forced to fight their way out - one American ambush after another, often in deadly crossfire. In the smoke and confusion, Col. Smith has no way of knowing that the Militia have *grown in number to the thousands*. As the Regulars march along they continue to encounter fresh men with full cartridge boxes while they can find no rest, no shelter, not even water, and each round wasted is *precious*.

At “Brook’s Hills” and “The Bloody Angle” the Regulars take more casualties, but on they march – making it back to Boston is their *only* chance for survival now.

It’s 1:45 PM. Remember Capt. Parker? Parker and his men have *not* retired after their fight, but have regrouped and marched toward Concord also. Now they grimly kneel behind granite boulders, some in the same stiffening, bloody bandages they have worn since daybreak, waiting for the Regulars and *revenge* for their comrades many of whom was shot in the back whilst attempting to disperse earlier. Captain Parker has his men wait until the Regulars are *very* close. When Col. Smith himself rides up in front, Parker gives the order – Fire!

Parker's men rise and give two volleys before the stunned Regulars can effectively react. The road is *littered* with dead and dying Redcoats. Before Major Pitcairn gallops forth with infantry to disperse them, ***they have their revenge!*** This place is known *to this day* as "Parker's Revenge". Another solemn reminder of the price paid long ago for our Liberty.

Col. Smith is shot through the thigh in the first volley and Major Pitcairn is unhorsed but unharmed. His luck will run out a couple of months later at a place called Bunker's Hill, shot in the head by a black militiaman as he enters the fortifications there, just minutes before the battle is over. Like my daddy always said – timing is everything.

The Regulars are running low on ammunition and water. Some of the fiercest fighting occurs around wells, streams and *even muddy puddles of water*. The road is filled with dead and wounded men, horses and the accoutrements of war; knapsacks, cartridge boxes, muskets, hats, jackets, bayonets - *even* the items looted from the homes of Concord.

It is beginning to look like the end for the King's soldiers. The Regulars in the van begin to run, leaving their wounded and even their flanking parties behind. The officers *cannot* maintain order, not *even* at the point of their swords. They haven't made the 5 miles back to Lexington, and surrender seems likely, and ironically, likely on very the green in Lexington where they attacked, without orders, less than 10 hours earlier.

As the Regulars stumble into Lexington, *wild cheers* are heard from the men in front. Before them is the relief column led by Brigadier Hugh Earl Percy arranged in line of battle, with two cannon trained on the advancing Rebels. You see, General Gage planned all along to send reinforcements, but due in part to his obsession with secrecy, they marched several hours late, costing the lives of many a Regular as a result.

Percy cannot believe his eyes! A formerly proud British army staggers bleeding and beaten through his ranks, exhausted and spent. Percy places his cannon, one on each side of the road, on hills overlooking the approach to town. A shot rings out from one of the cannon and crashes through Lexington's meetinghouse, sending *huge* splinters in every direction. Miraculously, the women and children who have taken refuge there are unharmed.

Brig. Percy is still in a precarious position though. You see Percy didn't think much of the Colonist's military abilities. His column left Boston about 9AM with two cannon and only the ammunition stored in the boxes on the carriage with no reserves. This means he will have to keep up enough fire to keep the Rebels at bay, yet ration it for the long haul back to Boston. His men carry the same 36 rounds of musket ammunition that Col. Smith's troops had brought and so his men will soon be short of ammunition as well.

Percy takes stock of his situation. He realizes that he is not facing simple country people in small numbers fighting from behind trees, but a very large, well-regulated militia acting in concert and fighting in coordination with other units. He orders 3 houses in Lexington be burned to prevent their being used by sharpshooters of the militia.

What he doesn't know is that there is a man arriving on the field about this time to command the Militia, and while he has never before seen combat, he has devised a unique means of fighting the Regulars.

Brig. General William Heath is a self described “Corpulent, balding gentleman farmer” who holds a passion for military tactics. He has seen the coming conflict as inevitable and has studied on his own at Henry Knox’s bookstore in Boston - even engaging British officers in conversations on tactics. He has come up with a plan to fight under just such a situation as now presents itself.

He calls it the “Circle of Fire” and it entails a constant streaming of fresh men and supplies ahead of a moving column to keep them under constant fire from all sides. It is a difficult tactic; keeping militia units coordinated and constantly in motion with ammunition, food, water, and supplies arriving at the right places and at the right time, especially with inexperienced troops, but it will prove very successful this day.

It is interesting to note that a portion of the success of the Circle of Fire must be attributed to a bunch of young boys, whose mothers sent them with supplies to find their father’s units!

Percy’s cannon holds the Militia off long enough to give Col. Smith’s troops a much needed rest before they resume the 13 mile trek back to Boston.

It is now 3:15 and the first units of the King’s soldiers move out for Boston, reinforced and 1600 strong under the capable Brigadier Percy. Two *dangerous* cannon bring up the rear and flankers are placed to keep the Rebels out of musket range. Still, the Circle of Fire takes its toll and all along the road the Regulars fall.

By 4:30 Percy has reached Menotomy, (Present day Arlington), and the fighting becomes less open - *more* house-to-house. The fighting reaches a *murderous* pitch, with the Regulars seething to get at the rebels who will not stand and fight and also to revenge their fallen comrades allegedly butchered at the North Bridge. The militia wants revenge for the very real killings at Lexington and Concord and the burning and looting of those towns.

When the Regulars receive fire from a house, they rush it, killing near everyone within, even non-combatants. The fighting in Menotomy is terrible, as told by the numbers: 40 Redcoats dead, and over 80 wounded. 25 Colonists dead, but only nine wounded; a suspicious ratio that belies the savagery of the Regulars. A British officer wrote a letter to a friend where he..

Heath’s Circle of Fire ensures that fresh men with full cartridge boxes keep a constant fire on the Regulars who have no chance of re-supply and are nearly out of ammunition. Percy’s intended route takes him through the town of Cambridge, where stands a bridge across the Charles River, their last obstacle before Boston. Past that bridge is a large contingent of fresh militia *spoiling* for a fight.

It is now 5:30 PM. Advance units of the Regulars find that the militia has pulled up the planks of the bridge, and neatly stacked them on the near side. They simply replace them. The militia discovers this and pulls up the planks again, this time throwing them into the river beyond *any* chance of speedy retrieval.

Percy is now caught between the anvil of the bridge that he cannot cross, fresh militia, and the hammer of Heaths moving Circle of Fire.

Percy instantly makes a bold decision and turns north onto an obscure path called Kent Lane, just outside of Cambridge, and makes for Charlestown breaking through the Circle of Fire. This causes a momentary shift in the balance of power there, as the Circle has to be adjusted for the unforeseen turn. In the confusion, Percy's column breaks through and makes for the Charlestown Neck, a narrow strip of land connecting that near island to the mainland – a brilliant move that saves many lives.

The Colonials have one last chance. To the north is a militia unit under the command of Timothy Pickering, and if he moves out as he may or may not have been ordered, might be able to stop the British escape.

Pickering chooses *not* to move out, even against the protests of his own brave men, and the British escape to Charlestown under the protection of the guns of the war ship "Somerset". General Gage's battered troops at last collapse in exhaustion on a knoll known as Bunker's Hill. Brigadier Percy notes the time as just past 7:00 PM. As Percy's men enter Charlestown, behind them the sun is setting on the ruins of an empire. This will prove to be the beginning of the end of England's grip on the world.

The many British casualties are ferried across the Charles River to Boston by the Seamen of HMS Somerset. One by one, they load the wounded into longboats with the special tenderness and care that men of violence reserve *only* for their wounded comrades.

In the morning the British awake to find themselves surrounded by a *vast army of Patriot Militia* that has marched from all parts of New England. In less than 20 hours, the alarm begun by...

The raw numbers show that Gage's 1800 men suffered 73 killed, 174 wounded and 26 missing; just over 15% casualties. About 3500 militia were actually engaged and suffered 49 dead, 39 wounded, and 4 missing for a rate of about 2%.

What the statistics do not show is that one of the world's best fighting units, *picked men*, have been beaten by a bunch of determined New England farmers and shopkeepers. It is *this* determination that will see them through the long years of war and want ahead.

Brigadier Lord Hugh Earl Percy once boasted that he could subdue the entire North American continent with but 2 companies of Grenadiers, later writes: **"Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob will find himself very much mistaken. They have men among them who know very well what they are about"**.

This concludes our telling of the true events of April 19th, 1775 – the day of *"The shot heard 'round the world"*. The eight-year war that ensued was frankly too horrible for most of us here today to imagine.

So long as we remember what the Founding Generation sacrificed - so long as we maintain the Freedoms that they secured in our stead – then they are *not* gone - their noble struggle was *not* in vain. However, should we *fail* to do as they instructed and maintain our Freedom by participating in the political process handed down to us, then we do not *deserve* our Freedom and we will surely lose it. You see.... a society of sheep eventually begets a government of wolves.

Now, let's get back to preserving Freedom with another (AQT)!