

“To Put Themselves in a Position of Defense Against Their Enemies” - Primary Source Evidence of Captain John Parker’s Company Drilling in Preparation for War (1774-1775)

1. On November 3, 1774, the town assembled to plan “military discipline and to put themselves in a position of defense against their Enemies.”¹
2. “Votede . . . That seven persons be appointed as a committee of inspections to see that the plans of the Continental and Provincial Congresses are faithfully carried into executione. . . [seven people listed, including John Parker]”²
3. According to the Reverend Jonas Clarke, the Lexington militia were “training” and “showing arms” as early as September 15, 1774. Other dates Clarke records the militia drilling are October 5, 1774 and March 13, 1775.³ Town records also confirm the company was drilling on December 12 and December 28, 1774.
4. Likewise, Lieutenant William Tidd asserted the company met often and drilled regularly. “I, William Tidd, of Lexington, in the county of Middlesex, do testify and declare, that I was a Lieutenant in the company of Lexington militia, commanded by Capt. John Parker, in the year 1775; that, previous to the 19th of April of that year, it was expected the British would soon commence hostilities upon the then Provincials; that said company frequently met for exercise, the better to be prepared for defense; that, on the evening previous to the 19th a number of the militia met at my house for the above purpose.”⁴
5. “I, John Munroe, of Lexington, a collector of tolls for the Middlesex Turnpike, being in the seventy- seventh year of my age, on oath do depose and say, that I was a corporal in the Lexington company of militia, which was commanded by the late Capt. John Parker, in the year 1775 ; that,for some weeks previous to the 19th of April of that year, the company was frequently called out for exercise, and desired to furnish ourselves with arms and ammunition, and to be in constant readiness for action.”⁵
6. “In the obedience to your Excellency's commands, I marched on the evening of the 18th inst. with the corps of grenadiers and light infantry for Concord, to execute your Excellency's orders with respect to destroying all ammunition, artillery, tents, &c, collected there. I think it proper to observe, that when I had got some miles on the march from Boston, I detached six light infantry companies to march with all expedition to seize the two bridges on different roads beyond Concord. On these companies' arrival at Lexington, I understand, from the report of Major Pitcairn, who was with them, and from

¹ Declarations and Resolves, Town of Lexington, November 3, 1774.

² Declaration and Resolves, Town of Lexington, December 27, 1774.

³ Journal of the Reverend Jonas Clarke, September 15, 1774, October 5, 1774 and March 13, 1775.

⁴ Deposition of William Tidd, December 29, 1824. Emphasis added by author.

⁵ Deposition of John Munroe, December 28, 1824.

many officers, that they found on a green close to the road a body of the country people drawn up in military order, with arms and accoutrement, and, as appeared after, loaded.”⁶

7. Ensign Henry De Berniere of the 10th Foot, described the Lexington men drawn up in two “divisions”, with a company-wide space between the two.⁷
8. Ensign Jeremy Lister recalled “It was at Lexington when we saw one of their Comps drawn up in regular order Major Pitcairn of the Marines second in Command called to then, to disperse, but their not seeming willing he desired us to mind our space which we did when they gave us a fire then run of[f] to get behind a wall.”⁸
9. Major John Pitcairn described Captain Parker’s Company performing a disciplined field maneuver by retiring from the field in files. “[When] we were advanced within about two miles of Lexington, intelligence was received that about 500 men in arms were assembled, determined to oppose the Kings troops, and retard them in their march . . . when I arrived at the end of the Village, I observed drawn up upon a Green near 200 rebels; when I came within about 100 yards of them, they began to file off towards some stone walls on our right flank.”⁹

⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Smith's to General Gage, April 22, 1775. The 18th Century military term “accouterments” included, but was not limited to, items such as cartridge boxes, edged weapons, musket tools, belting, knapsacks, canteens and ammunition. See R.R. Gale’s *A Soldier Like Way: The Material Culture of the British Infantry 1751 - 1768*, (2007).

⁷ Henry De Berniere, *Narrative of Occurrences*, 1775, (Boston, 1779).

⁸ Ensign Jeremy Lister, *Concord fight: Being so much of the narrative of Ensign Jeremy Lister of the 10th Regiment of Foot as pertains to his services on 19 April 1775*, (England, 1832).

⁹ Major John Pitcairn to General Thomas Gage, April 26, 1775.