

**CRITICAL
THINKING**

CHAPTER 4

**DISTINGUISHING FALSE FROM ACCURATE
IMAGES: WHO FIRED FIRST AT LEXINGTON?**

In this activity, you will examine four first-hand accounts of the Battle of Lexington and decide which one is most accurate. Read the four pieces of evidence below, evaluate them using the PRO criteria, and then write your hypothesis as to who fired the first shot at Lexington.

The official deposition 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 19th], in the morning, about one of the clock, being informed that there were a number of Regular Officers [British] riding up and down the road, stopping and insulting people as they passed the road, and also was informed that a number of regular Troops were on their march from Boston, in order to take the Province Stores at Concord, ordered our Militia to meet on the common in said Lexington, to consult what to do, and concluded not to be discovered, nor meddle or make with said Regular

Troops [if they should approach] unless they should insult us; and upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse and not to fire. Immediately said Troops made their appearance, and rushed furiously, fired upon and killed eight of our party, without receiving any provocation therefore from us.

John Parker

P (Primary or secondary source?) _____

R (Reason to distort?) _____

O (Other evidence supporting view?) _____

The personal diary of Lieutenant John Barker, a British officer:

At 5 o'clock we arrived there, and saw a number of People, I believe between 2 and 300, formed in a Common in the middle of the town; we still continued advancing, keeping prepared against an attack tho' 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' em to flight; several of them were killed, we cou'd 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.

P (Primary or secondary source?) _____

R (Reason to distort?) _____

O (Other evidence supporting view?) _____

The official report of Major Pitcairn, commander of the advanced British party that first entered Lexington Green, to General Gage, his commander in Boston:

I gave directions to the Troops to move forward, but on no account to Fire, or even attempt it without orders; when I arrived at the end of the Village, I observed drawn up on a Green near 200 of the Rebels; when I came within about One Hundred Yards of them, they began to File off towards some stone Walls on our Right Flank—The Light Infantry observing this, ran after them—I instantly called to the Soldiers not to fire, but to surround and disarm them, and after several repetitions of those positive Orders to the men, not to Fire—some of the Rebels who had jumped over the Wall, Fired Four or Five Shott at the Soldiers, which wounded a man of the Tenth, and my Horse was Wounded in two places, from some quarter or other, and at the same time several Shott were fired from a Meeting House on our Left—upon this, without any order or Regularity, the Light Infantry began a scattered Fire, and continued in that situation for some little time, contrary to the repeated orders both of me and the officers that were present—It will be needless to mention what happened after, as I suppose Col. Smith hath given a particular account of it. I am sir

Boston Camp
26th April, 1775

Your most obedt
humble Servant,
John Pitcairn

P (Primary or secondary source?) _____

R (Reason to distort?) _____

O (Other evidence supporting view?) _____

Testimony of Thomas Fessenden, a colonial onlooker, to the Justices of the Peace:

Lexington, April 23, 1775

I, Thomas Fessenden, of lawful age, testify and declare, that being in a pasture near the meeting-house at said Lexington, on Wednesday, last, at about half an 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”; on which he brandished his sword over his head three times; meanwhile the second officer, who was about two rods behind him, fired a pistol pointed at said Militia, and the Regulars kept huzzaing till he had finished brandishing his sword, and when he had thus finished brandishing his sword, he pointed it down towards said Militia, and immediately on which the said Regulars fired a volley at the Militia and then I ran off, as fast as I could, while they continued firing till I got out of their reach. I further testify, that as soon as ever 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

P (Primary or secondary source?) _____

R (Reason to distort?) _____

O (Other evidence supporting view?) _____

Who fired the first shot at Lexington? Explain your choice.