

## British Perspective: Firsthand account

The following entries from the *Atlantic Monthly* (Volume 39, Issue 234, April 1877) are from a diary kept by a British Army officer. 19th. [April 1775] Last night between 10 and 11 o'clock all the Grenadiers and Light Infantry of the Army, making about 600 Men, (under the command of Lt. Coll. Smith of the 10th and Major Pitcairn of the Marines), embarked and were landed upon the opposite shore on Cambridge Marsh; few but the Commandg. Officers knew what expedition we were going upon. After getting over the Marsh, where we were wet up to the knees, we were halted in a dirty road and stood there 'till two o'clock in the morning, waiting for provisions to be brought from the boats and to be divided, and which most of the Men threw away, having carried some with 'em. At 2 o'clock we began our March by wading through a very long ford up to our Middles: after going a few miles we took 3 or 4 People who were going off to give intelligence; about 5 miles on this side of a Town called Lexington, which lay in our road, we heard there were some hundreds of People collected together intending to oppose us and stop our going on; 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 were got behind Walls and into the Woods; We had a Man of the 10th light Infantry wounded, nobody else hurt.

We then formed with Scott on the Common, but with some difficulty, the Men were so wild they cou'd hear no orders; we waited a considerable time there, and at length proceeded on our way to Concord, which we then learnt was our destination, in order to destroy a Magazine of Stores collected there. We met with no interruption till within a mile or two of the Town, where the Country People had occupied a hill which commanded the road; the light Infantry were order'd away to the right and ascended the height in one line, upon which the Yankies quitte it without firing, which they did likewise for one or two more successively. They then crossed the River beyond the Town, and we march'd into the Town after taking possession of a Hill with a Liberty Pole on it and a flag flying, which was cut down; the Yankies had that Hill but left it to us; we expected they wou'd have made a stand there, but they did not chuse it. While the Grenadiers remained in the Town, destroying 3 pieces of Cannon, several Gun Carriages, and about 100 barrels of flour, with Harness and other things, the Light Companies were detached beyond the River to examine some Houses for more stores; 1 of these Compys. was left at the Bridge, another on a Hill some distance from it, and another on a hill 1/4 of a mile from that; the other 3 went forward 2 or 3 miles to seek for some Cannon which had been there but had been taken away that morning. During this time the People were gathering together in great numbers, and, taking advantage of our scatter'd disposition, seemed as if they were going to cut off the communication with the Bridge, upon which the two Companies joined and went to the Bridge to support that Company.

The three Compys. drew up in the road the far side the Bridge and the Rebels on the Hill above, coverd by a Wall; in that situation they remained a long time, Very near an hour, the three companies expecting to be attacked by the rebels, who were about 1000 strong. Captn. Lawrie, who commanded these three Companies, sent to Coll. Smith begging he would send more Troops to his Assistance and informing him of his situation; the Coll. order'd 2 or 3 Compys. but put himself at their head, by which means stopt em from being time enough, for being a very fat heavy Man he wou'd not have reached the Bridge in half an hour, tho it was not half a mile to it; in the mean time the Rebels marched into the Road and were coming down upon us, when Capn. Lee made his Men retire to this side the Bridge (which by the bye he ought to have done at first, and then he wou'd have had time to make a good disposition, but at this time he had not, for the Rebels were got so near him that his people were obliged to form the best way they cou'd); as soon as they were over the Bridge the three companies got one behind the other so that only the front one cou'd fire; the Rebels when they got near the Bridge halted and fronted, filling the road from the top to the bottom.

The fire soon began from a dropping shot on our side, when they anti the front Compy. fired almost at the same instant, there being nobody to support the front Compy. The others not firing the whole were forced to quit the Bridge and return toward Concord; some of the Grenadiers met 'em in the road and then advanced to meet the Rebels, who had got this side the Bridge and on a good height, but seeing the manoeuvre they thought proper to retire again over the Bridge; the whole then went into Concord, drew up in the Town, and waited for the 3 Companies that were gone on, which arrived in about an hour; 4 Officers of 8 who were at the Bridge were wounded; 3 Men killed; 1 Sergt. and several Men wounded; after getting as good conveniences for the wounded as we cou'd, and having done the business we were sent upon, We set out upon our return; before the whole had quitted the Town we were fired on from Houses and behind Trees, and before we had gone a mile we were fired on from all sides, but mostly from the Rear, where People had hid themselves in houses till we had passed, and then fired; the Country was an amazing strong one, full of Hills, Woods, stone Walls, & c., which the Rebels did not fail to take advantage of, for they were all lined with People who kept an incessant fire upon us, as we did too upon them, but not with the same advantage, for they were so concealed there was hardly any seeing them: in this way we marched between 9 and 10 miles, their numbers increasing from all parts, while ours was reducing by deaths, wounds, and fatigue; and we were totally surrounded with such an incessant fire as it is impossible to conceive; our ammunition was likewise near expended.

In this critical situation we perceived the 1st Brigade coming to our assistance: it consisted of the 4th, 23d, and 47th Regts., and the Battalion of Marines, with two field pieces, 6 pounders; we had been flatter'd ever since the morning with expectations of the Brigade coming out, but at this time had given up all hopes of it, as it was so late. I since heard it was owing to a mistake of the orders, or the Brigade wou'd have been with us 2 hours sooner. As soon as the Rebels saw this reinforcement, and tasted the field pieces, they retired, and we formed on a rising ground and rested ourselves a little while, which was extremely necessary for our Men, who were almost exhausted with fatigue; in about an hour we marched again, and some of the Brigade taking the flanking parties we marched pretty quiet for about 2 miles; they then began to pepper us again from the same sort of places, but at rather a greater distance. We were now obliged to force almost every house in the road, for the Rebels had taken possession of them and galled us exceedingly; but they suffered for their temerity, for all that were found in the houses were put to death.

When we got to Menotomy there was a very heavy fire; after that we took the short cut into the Charles Town road, very luckily for us too, for the Rebels thinking we should endeavour to return by Cambridge had broken down the Bridge and had a great number of Men to line the road and to receive us there; however we threw them and went on to Charles Town without any great interruption. We got there between 7 and 8 o'clock at night, took possession of the hill above the Town, and waited for the Boats to carry us over, which came some time after; the Rebels did not chuse to follow us to the Hill, as they must have fought us on open ground and that they did not like. The Piquets of the Army were sent over to Charles Town and 200 of the 64th to keep that ground; they threw up a work to secure themselves, and we embarked and got home very late in the night. . .

Thus ended this Expedition, which from beginning to end was as ill plan'd and ill executed as it was possible to be; had we not idled away three hours on Cambridge Marsh waiting for provisions that were not wanted, we shou'd have had no interruption at Lexington, but by our stay the Country People had got intelligence and time to assemble. We shou'd have reached Concord soon after day break, before they cou'd have heard of us, by which we shoud have destroyed more Cannon and Stores, which they had had time enough to convey away before our arrival; we might also have got easier back and not been so much harrassed, as they would not have had time to assemble so many People; even the People of Salem and Marblehead, above 20 miles off, had intelligence and time enough to march and meet us on our return; they met us somewhere about Menotomy, but they lost a good many for their pains. Thus for a few trifling Stores the Grenrs. and Lt. Infantry had a march of about 50 Miles (going and returning) through an Enemy's Country, and in all human probability must every Man have been cut off if the Brigade had not fortunately come to their Assistance; for when the Brigade joined us there were very few Men had any ammunition left, and so fatigued that we cou'd not keep flanking parties out, so that we must soon have laid down our Arms, or been picked off by the Rebels at their pleasure.