

PRESIDENT GENERAL'S PATRIOTS DAY MESSAGE

by Edward F. Butler, SR.

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Officially, Patriots Day was declared by Congress to be on September 11th to remember the horrible terrorists attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Other states celebrate a "Patriots Day" to commemorate some significant historical event. Notwithstanding those other designations, most SAR members recognize "Patriots Day" as April 19th, and agree to celebrate with our compatriots in Massachusetts and Maine the heroic actions of our patriot ancestors at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. My San Antonio SAR chapter was chartered on April 19, 1930.

The battles of Lexington and Concord were the first military engagements of the American Revolutionary War. They were fought on April 19, 1775. These battles marked the outbreak of open hostilities between England and its 13 colonies in North America.

Unrest in the Boston Bay area began with the tax imposed on tea by England in 1773. Colonists, dressed like Indians, boarded a tea laden ship in Boston Harbor on Dec. 16, 1773, and threw the tea into the harbor. Thus, the Boston Tea Party was the first act of open rebellion in Massachusetts. As a result, England beefed up its military presence in the area. This caused the colonists to build up secret stockpiles of weapons, ammunition and other supplies.

In mid April about 700 redcoats were given orders to destroy these stockpiles of military supplies stored at Concord. The patriots learned of this plan and moved most of them elsewhere.

The first shots were fired just as the sun was rising at Lexington. The militia was outnumbered and fell back, and the regulars proceeded on to Concord, where they searched for the supplies. At the North Bridge in Concord, several hundred militiamen defeated three companies of English soldiers. Additional minutemen inflicted injuries on the soldiers as they retreated. After reinforcement, about 1,700 English soldiers, under the command of Lt. Gen. Hugh Percy, marched back to Boston under heavy fire.

Ralph Waldo Emerson incorrectly described the first shot fired by the patriots at the North Bridge as the "shot heard 'round the world". That shot was actually fired at Lexington a few hours earlier.

Today, we honor the memory of our brave ancestors who took up arms to defend their homes and families against an aggressive government. What should be remembered here is that the patriots had been good at intelligence gathering; that they correctly studied the warning signs from the English; they had prepared themselves for the eventual confrontation with the English soldiers; and that when the time came, they were up to the task.

That shot heard around the world in 1775 can still be heard today. It reminds us to be ever vigilant against oppression. I will have the honor of participating in the Patriots Day ceremonies with the Massachusetts SAR Society in Concord on April 17-19, 2010.