



Minutemen of the New Millennium

by Vincent M. Newfield

READY—ready at a minute’s notice to stand, protect and fight for family, friends and faith. That was the heart of the minutemen of renown. Their oath: “We trust in God, that should the state of our affairs require it, we shall be ready to sacrifice our estates and everything dear in life, yea, and life itself, in support of the common cause.”¹

Minutemen were made up of volunteer citizens from all walks of life, including farmers, fishermen and tradesmen—many of which were loyal Christians from local churches. Historical accounts sometimes use the terms minutemen and militia interchangeably, but it is important to note that there was a difference.

A Picture from the Past

To understand *when* the idea of minutemen originated and *why*, we need to go back to the mid 1600s and the early settlers. The countryside was very different then than it is today. Pioneering neighbors lived farther apart, homes were built mainly of lumber hand cut from local forests, and wild animals roamed freely and were plentiful.²

When homes or communities were threatened, it was often by a group bigger than the homes’ dwellers. It didn’t take long for people to see the vital need for a cooperative support among settlers to provide assistance and protection for one another. It was during this time that militias were formed. Militias were groups of men from the local communities that pledged to help their neighbors and protect their towns from enemy invasion, animal attacks, and so forth.³

From these militias, many of the minutemen were chosen. Minutemen were typically twenty-five years old or younger. They were usually selected by the commanding officer of the militia for their enthusiasm, reliability and physical strength.⁴ When emergencies arose, minutemen were the “first responders,” being responsible to get to the scene promptly, work to stabilize the situation and maintain order until the main body of the militia arrived.⁵ Anywhere from one quarter to one third of the militia served as minutemen.

What You May NOT Know About Minutemen

Minutemen were often men from local churches. In fact, the editor of the *Boston Post* wrote, “On days of drill citizen soldiers sometimes went from the parade-ground to the church, where they listened to exhortation and prayer.” Frequently, the church deacon or pastor would lead the drill.⁶ They proclaimed, “Our cause is just,” and believed it was their duty to defend it.

Without a doubt, the clergy were a motivating force behind the organization of militia and minutemen for military defense. Although many textbooks still include the story of the minutemen, most omit the fact that the leader of the minutemen at the Battle of Lexington was Rev. Jonas Clark. Similarly, it is also not acknowledged that the key leader of the military forces in New Jersey was Rev. James Caldwell, and that Rev. Peter Muhlenberg was one of George Washington’s most trusted generals.⁷

The Provincial Congress of Massachusetts charged the minutemen: “You are placed by Providence [God] in the post of honor because it is the post of danger: and while struggling for the noblest objects, the liberties of your country, the happiness of posterity and the rights of human nature, the eyes not only of North America and the whole British empire, but of all Europe, are upon you. Let us be therefore altogether

solicitous that no disorderly behavior, nothing unbecoming our characters as Americans, as citizens, and *Christians*, be justly chargeable to us.”⁸

The Most Memorable Band of Minutemen

The most memorable minutemen in history are those of the Revolutionary War. On December 13, 1773, the men of Lexington, Massachusetts, officially formed one of the first minutemen units—a unit that continues to be preserved today.⁹ Their purpose was to protect themselves from the British who were “so thirsty for the blood of this innocent people.”¹⁰

This historic band of minutemen was led by Deacon Parker under the guidance of Rev. Jonas Clark. Clark was the pastor of a church in Lexington, Massachusetts, and had become the town’s principle leader. His home was a frequent meeting place for people like Samuel Adams and John Hancock. Such was the situation the night of April 18, 1775—the day before the infamous Lexington battle that catapulted the colonies into war with England.¹¹

The Shot Heard Round the World

Samuel Adams and John Hancock were visiting at Rev. Clark’s house that night, unaware of the plans of the British to send troops to Lexington to try and capture them and destroy the town’s military supplies. The official notice of the approaching attack came around midnight from Paul Revere. Minutemen and militia responded to Revere’s cry. Many assembled, were divided into groups and dispatched to key locations around the town and in outlying areas.¹²

As dawn began to break, drumbeats from British soldiers could be heard in the distance. A horseman quickly notified the local minutemen. About seventy men assembled on the green near the meeting house (which was actually the church).¹³ Deacon Parker gave the order not to fire unless fired upon. But when he saw the hundreds of British soldiers marching, he gave the order to scatter into the countryside. Parker knew their only hope of winning was to join the other militia and minutemen near Concord.¹⁴

However, when the British saw the minutemen disperse, they broke ranks and charged at them across the green. Disregarding the British commanding officer’s orders, a number of British soldiers fired first on the colonists. The minutemen fired back but had little effect. The British then fired a second time, killing eight minutemen and wounding ten. In less than fifteen minutes, the battle was over.¹⁵

The British continued their march, and 700 of them reached Concord by late morning. From there, search parties were sent out to find the minutemen and a squad of 100 soldiers was stationed to guard the bridge. What the British were unaware of was the large column of minutemen lining the countryside in the woods. These patriotic soldiers stalked the British at every turn, ambushing them all along the way. The British couldn’t fight what they couldn’t see.¹⁶

What turned into a nightmare for the British became a dream come true for the Americans. The colonists celebrated a great victory. They had stood up to the greatest military power on earth. Ministers everywhere reminded the patriots whom they should thank—the God of heaven. They preached, “As long as we keep our hearts right, God will shower His blessings on us. We cannot take pride in our own strength.”¹⁷

There were many battles ahead, and not all of them would turn out the way this one did. But with this God-honoring focus, minutemen, militia and the colonists alike forged forward in their fight for freedom. Independence was declared, and the rest is history.

Back to the Future

Just like the early revolutionaries, there are many battles to be fought in the days ahead—in courtrooms, classrooms and communities from coast to coast. They're not battles to be fought with muskets and bayonets. The weapons of the day are prayer and the power of God's Spirit leading us to godly action. The question is, will YOU be a minuteman of the new millennium? Will you prepare and be ready at a minute's notice to pray . . . to stand up for what's right and to oppose what's wrong . . . to give a reason for the hope that is within you? The enemy is ready, and we must be too. So put on your unseen armor, set your face like flint and tap in to the unending power source of God's grace. It is *He* who led and gave victory then, and it is *He* who will lead and give victory now!

(1) The Lexington Minutemen, Inc. P.O. Box 1775, Lexington, MA 02420 (www.lexingtonminutemen.com). (2) See note 1. (3) See note 1. (4) *Who Were the Minutemen?* Brandywine Battlefield (www.ushistory.org/brandywine; obtained 3/24/06). (5) See note 1. (6) David Barton, *Original Intent: The Courts, The Constitution, and Religion* (Aledo, TX: WallBuilder Press, 2000), p. 94. (7) *God: Missing in Action from American History*, WallBuilders (www.wallbuilders.com/resources/search; obtained 3/24/06). (8) See note 6, p. 95. (9) See note 1. (10) See note 6, p. 94. (11) Mark A. Beliles & Stephen K. McDowell, *America's Providential History* (Charlottesville, VA: Providence Foundation, 1989), p.137. (12) See note 11, pp. 138-139. (13) See note 11, p. 139. (14) Peter Marshall and David Manuel with Anna Wilson Fishel, *The Light and the Glory for Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), pp.124-125. (15) See note 14, p. 125. (16) See note 14, pp. 125-127. (17) See note 14, p. 127.

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