

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION



BOSTON, 1765-75 By Paul Leach

In the years after Britain had spent a great deal of time, effort, and money defending her American colonies against the predations of the French, Parliament decided that it was time the colonists started to pay their share of the debt that had been incurred, and the cost of new army garrisons. The British lords could little imagine the way that decision would ultimately play out.

The American War of Independence began as a slow boil in the years immediately following the conclusion of the French and Indian War in 1763. The roots of the coming conflict grew out of the confluence of arguments that were political, philosophical, economic, and even spiritual in nature. Maybe the greatest underlying cause

was that the American colonies had enjoyed something close to self-rule for nearly 100 years, which changed with Parliament's decision to levy upon them what it felt was a fair share of the nation's tax burden. Colonial resistance to these measures and England's determination to enforce them created a ratcheting spiral of antipathy that would escalate

into bloodshed by the beginning of the next decade. Boston, the third largest town in the colonies, soon proved itself a cornerstone of organized revolutionary sentiment, rhetoric, and action. All eyes watched events unfold in the Calvinist port town and the Massachusetts Colony at large as the Crown applied increasing pressure to bring them into line with imperial policy. By the spring of 1775, all parties tumbled past the last breaking points of their uneasy peace and found themselves at war.

This month's theme will take readers on a tour of some of the most iconic imagery of the American Revolutionary War: the Boston Massacre, The Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere's Midnight Ride, the "Shot heard around the world" at Lexington, the Battle of Breed's Hill/Bunker Hill, and the siege of Boston itself. We will delve into the heart of the colonial rebellion, taking a little time to review the men and elements that defined resistance to Crown and Parliamentary authority as well as the men tasked with squashing it. Readers will find plenty of tabletop action as the first militant, yet tentative, steps to revolution turn into a very real and bloody war.

ROOTS OF REVOLUTION

"Young man, what we meant in going for those Redcoats was this: we always had governed ourselves and we always meant to. They didn't mean we should."

~ Captain Levi Preston of Danvers
(Militia)

America's revolutionary movement was a product of the French and Indian War, in a roundabout way. When Parliament initiated a series of tax programs aimed at paying off the war and maintaining a standing army of 10,000 troops on American soil, the colonies readily chafed. When the matter finally came to blows ten years later, many of the American veterans of the last conflict would turn against the Crown. The Loyalists (or Tories) – possibly a third of the colonial population – believed the rebels had turned against their country. The revolutionaries believed they fought





More British regiments arrive to quell the rebellious colonists. Figures by Foundry and Perry Miniatures

for the only home they and several generations of their forebears had ever known.

In a nutshell, the conflict was a clash of cultures. The art of the covenant permeated colonial life, defining the rights and duties of men to one another and their communities at large. The town hall meeting held a nigh-sacred place in their hearts and minds. It was a practical institution that reinforced their sense of liberty and freedom, but not in the modern sense. Eighteenth Century colonials believed in the spirit of personal duty and collective freedom; those sentiments are reversed today. Neither did they innately hate government itself; they hated what they saw as a violation of their constitutional rights by the English government. Their slogan “No taxation without representation” succinctly addressed their core grievance.

Parliament passed the Stamp Acts in 1765, which gathered revenue on paper used for most published works and legal documents, such as newspapers, licenses, and playing cards. They were repealed after encountering stiff resistance, but Parliament soon replaced them with other unpopular initiatives: the Townshend Acts of 1767. These measures sought to pay for Royal governors and other officers through special taxes placed upon imported paper, glass, lead, and tea. This would remove key colonial authorities from dependency on their provincial assemblies. The acts also ordered the suspension of the New York legislature and placed the customs headquarters within Boston.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL THE HONOURABLE THOMAS GAGE

“[The] strictest orders have been given, to treat the inhabitants on all occasions, with leniency, moderation and justice; that they shall..be permitted to enjoy unmolested the common rights of mankind.”

“[Lenient] measures, and the cautious and legal exertion of the coercive powers of government, have served only to render them more daring and licentious.”



~ Lieutenant General the Honourable Thomas Gage

Thomas Gage (1720-1787) was no doubt a man of good character despite all the abuse heaped upon him during (and long after...) his tenure as England’s commander-in-chief in America. However, it would be hard to argue that he didn’t make critical mistakes in estimating the provincials’ response to the measures he enforced to ensure their compliance with lawful authority. Regardless of his errors, he hardly assumed the tyrannical role assigned to him by early Patriot propaganda. Gage found himself stuck between upholding Sovereign rule and safekeeping the rights of the provincial population. America’s commander-in-chief never came down on Boston and New England as hard as he could have; he wasn’t even keen on arresting known troublemakers such as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere.

An aristocratic military man with over 20 years of hard-earned experience by the time he assumed the role of America’s commander-in-chief, Gage had already lived in the colonies since the early years of the French and Indian War. He married Margaret Kemble, granddaughter of a New York governor and supporter of provincial constitutional rights, a few years prior to taking command of all British forces in the New World. His sympathy for the provincials might have been influenced by his long tenure in the colonies, even if he could not reconcile the argument shared between them and the Crown. On a short-lived return trip to England in the early 1770s, he remarked feeling a little bit alienated by the changes that had taken place there as well. He had to feel like a man living between two worlds at times. One wonders if anyone else could have really done a better job in Gage’s place.



BOSTON'S REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

"America is a mere bully, from one end to the other, and the Bostonians by far the greatest bullies."

~Lieutenant General the Honourable
Thomas Gage

History tends to focus on Boston statesman and political philosopher Samuel Adams as the heart and soul of the American Revolution; Adams' friend, John Hancock, an immensely wealthy merchant takes a close second place. However, we should perceive the Revolutionary Movement as a having a pluralist nature instead of one that revolved around Adams and Hancock. Boston's revolutionaries had leaders, but no man really controlled all aspects of the loose brotherhood comprised of intellectuals, professionals, merchants, and craftsmen. These few hundred men who formed the core opposition to England's tax initiatives were not a single body of Revolutionaries. They were

Whigs (so named after British politicians opposed to unconstitutional monarchical authority), the Sons of Liberty, Masons, and other politically and community-driven associations. Few men belonged to more than one or two of these groups.

Regardless of his position within the movement, Adams certainly had a knack for drawing a lively crowd to oppose government policies at times. Furthermore, the revolutionary cause surely benefited from its affiliation with the Boston Gazette, whose publisher Benjamin Edes hosted meetings for his like-minded political comrades. The revolutionaries, even if they acted within the law, certainly posed more than a mere hindrance to Lieutenant General the Honourable Thomas Gage, England's commander-in-chief in North America. Simply put, their activities would thoroughly undermine his authority as each side tested and pushed the other.

Gage at first believed his opposition was a façade of populist dissent driven by a few mad and/or corrupt elites,

typically lawyers closely supported by the merchants and craftsmen. He later came to the conclusion that "the inferior people" (ie. the lower classes) were not merely dupes of the colonial upper crust, but instead had been conditioned to a dangerous growth of despotic democracy through such institutions as the town hall meetings. Just as bad, in Gage's opinion, was that law and justice were perverted in the hands of local lawyers and judges. How would he deal with this problem?

DEATH AND TAXES

"I must confess to you, Sir, that during these commotions in North America, I have never been more at a loss how to act."

~Lieutenant General the Honourable
Thomas Gage

Gage found himself in a recurring crisis with the colonies between 1765 and 1775, and he struggled to understand why. To his credit, he also struggled to protect the individual rights of the American provincials even as he tried to implement

Boston patriots (or rebels!) gather and drill, ready for action. Figures by Perry Miniatures.



imperial policy. The colonists claimed that the Crown had enslaved them and subjected them to unfair taxation; they espoused their law-abiding loyalty even as they threatened Royal officers. Did they not understand that they paid less in taxes than other European citizens and that Englishmen across the sea even shouldered a heavier burden? Did they not understand they already had quite a lot of liberties when compared to any other nation? Unfortunately, Gage would fail to truly grasp the deep-rooted nature of the colonial rebuke and only seek to suppress or dismantle their tools (ie. political assemblies and weapons) in the end.

It took Gage three years to bring in troops to quell the rebellious spirits of Boston, who proved willing to rebuff any of Parliament's taxes, tariffs, or levies placed upon them without their consent. When the Massachusetts legislature drafted a Circular Letter calling for the all the colonies to resist the 1767 Townshend Acts as one, they apparently

PAUL REVERE

*"Noise! You'll have noise enough before long!
The Regulars are coming out!"*

**~Paul Revere to Sergeant William Munroe
in Lexington (after being hushed)**

Paul Revere (1735-1818) is readily consigned to a bit of Revolutionary mythology that relegates him to the role of the countryside rider warning of the Regulars' march on Lexington in the spring of 1775. History sometimes portrays him as a simple silversmith who played Boston's messenger to the Whig assemblies in New York and Philadelphia prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. The mythology has been derided and his historical significance has been truly understated.



Revere, named after his French Huguenot father*, was a Boston native that grew up inside his mother's family, the respectable Hitchborns. The silversmith came of age in a world that allowed him to achieve gentlemanly status despite his artisan calling and nurtured his covenant-based view of self and community. Revere was a man of many associations, orders, and clubs and this placed him in a unique position within the revolutionary network. Along with Dr. Joseph Warren, another prominent Boston Whig, Revere belonged to five of the seven groups that defined the decentralized leadership of the Boston Patriot movement.

Revere was also a man of action who managed to put himself in where he was needed most. He and his association of Boston mechanics did a bit of snooping about "to find out what was acting" with the British Regulars during the months preceding the war. He rode about Massachusetts and beyond many times on behalf of the Patriots – not to just deliver messages, but to coordinate political and military initiatives. He made works and engravings to promote Patriotic messages. Revere and his activities were so well known that Gage simply referred to him by his initials in correspondence with ministers back in England. Statesmen like Samuel Adams and Thomas Jefferson have become the faces of the Revolution, but Revere was one of the greatest facilitators the Revolution would ever have.

**Apollos Rivoire changed his name to Paul Revere shortly after immigrating to Boston "merely on account that the bumpkins pronounce it easier," according to his Patriot son.*

went too far. King George III ordered the letter rescinded, but got nowhere. On 30 September, 1768, a Royal Navy fleet encircled the Boston waterfront with their guns trained. Two regiments of Regulars – the "insolent parade" of a Paul Revere copper engraving of the event – disembarked and began their duty of garrisoning the town.

Gage's decision to bring in the 29th Foot was a poor one. The regiment had a reputation for poor discipline and a record of conflict with civilians in Canada and New York. In a town where the soldiers were more often the victims of assaults than the civilians, the 29th would be sorely tested. The shaky balance tipped on the evening of 5 March, 1770, when a group of eight of the regiment's men opened fire without orders on a belligerent crowd of 300-400 people who pelted them while they stood in defense of the customs office. Six people died as a result of the incident and the soldiers were held for trial.

The Whigs made every effort to provide a fair trial for the accused. Patriot (and

future President of the United States) John Adams agreed to defend the men and Paul Revere helped their case with illustrated evidence showing the positions of the troops and the townfolk. The jury acquitted all but two of the soldiers of murder charges. However, this isn't the memory of "The Boston Massacre" that swiftly achieved legendary status once in the capable hands of the Whigs. Paul Revere's engraving of a Henry Pelham depiction of the event shows an orderly line of Regulars firing a volley - at an officer's command - into a crowd of about 20 civilians. This widely-distributed work was nothing less than a public relations coup for the Patriots and a nightmare for Gage and the Crown.

The ensuing peace of sorts did not really undermine the resolve of either the Patriots or the Crown, really. The Townshend Acts were only partly repealed, notably leaving a small tax on tea intact. While the colonial militias were not quite ready to march against the Regulars stationed in America, the thought would become more and more believable in a few short years.

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

We must take a serious look beyond the popular mythology of the Revolutionary War to get a true appreciation of the men who served in the colonial militias and Regular army formations at the outbreak of hostilities. The imagery of British troops fumbling around the countryside while “Yankee Doodles” picked them off at leisure hardly tells the whole story of the underlying realities of the fighting men who would finally end the nervous peace between England and her American colonies. The following section reviews the qualities, experiences, and attitudes of the soldiers who would fire the first shots of a war that neither side seemed over-eager to begin.



British redcoats in action near Boston. Figures by Foundry.

THE REDCOATS

“One active campaign, a smart action, and burning two or three of their towns will set everything to rights.”

~Major John Pitcairn, Marines

The British Regular Army became an increasing presence within the confines of Boston as the relationship between England and the town continued to deteriorate. In Gage’s own words, the soldiers had one purpose: to “overawe” the sullen inhabitants. Many of the regiments had the kind of experience needed for the job, especially if the townsfolk or other Massachusetts provincials got out of hand. Several of them had previously confronted rioters, rebels, and tea smugglers throughout the British Isles, including Cornwall, East Anglia, and Ireland. The army had chalked up quite a number of what we might call “police actions” in England

alone, where they suppressed many of the 159 – yes, 159 – major riots recorded there between 1740 and 1775. The point to underscore here is that the employment of Regulars for the task of leaning on grumbling Englishmen was nothing really new, despite the outrage it caused when executed within the colonies.

Gage, however, did his best to ensure his troops respected the rights of civilians who made no secret of their distaste for them. This placed a heavy and double-edged burden on the Regulars. While not everyday put the soldiers in the face of screaming mobs, they no doubt faced a discipline-sapping combination of provocation and temptation with no sign of relief. Drunkenness and desertion took its toll on the Boston garrison as surely as any disease that prowled their ranks. Their frustration sometimes gave way to uncontrolled anger and regrettable

incidents that would only inflate sympathy for the Whig cause. Many of Gage’s officers and their soldiers grew to despise not only the colonists, but their commander-in-chief.

When the Concord expedition came under the first unexpected fire of battle in the Massachusetts countryside on 19 April 1775, the Regulars had to show their mettle and training. Many of them displayed poor musketry, often firing high. Even worse, the officers sometimes lost control of their men, who gave in to impetuous charges or retreats. However, no one could honestly say they behaved stupidly or cowardly. No matter how little “real combat” experience Gage’s troops had, they retained enough drill and cohesion to prevent their disintegration in the face of the rebellion’s first ugly hours on 20 miles of deadly road between Concord and Boston.

MASSACHUSETTS MILITIA

"In all their wars against the French they never showed so much conduct, attention and perseverance as they do now."

~ Lieutenant General the Honourable Thomas Gage (June 25, 1775)

New England's militia of the third quarter of the 18th Century had an enduring precedent going back to the foundation of the colonies over a hundred years earlier. Each locale's militia, or 'training band', existed as a voluntary collective of able-bodied men (clergy, academics, and conscientious objectors were exempt) who made a covenant with one another and elected their own leaders; its democratic nature was akin to the New Englander's beloved town hall meeting. They fought in four European wars that had intruded upon the New World between 1689 and 1763, in which they served best when defending their homes and under the aegis of their own leaders. British officers disparaged militia formations during the French and Indian

War and hardly figured the training bands had improved in the intervening years.

The militias of Massachusetts would undergo a bit of transformation at the urging of the Provincial Congress in the fall of 1774. They called for all men aged 16 to 50 years to join the training bands and for older men up to 70 to join the 'alarm list', an emergency reserve. Furthermore, the Provincial Congress requested that a quarter of each militia formation should serve as 'minute companies' – another familiar institution about as old as the colonial training band - who could be ready to fight on short notice. The militias also benefited from a significant number of French and Indian War veterans, who may have accounted for up to a third of the men and often served in leading positions in their companies and regiments. Mobilization and marksmanship proved decisive strengths.

The colonial militia did not act like the easily-dispersed irregular mobs that the

British Regulars expected to encounter in the bloody, yet tentative, start of the war at Concord in the April 1775. Neither did they behave like the rambunctious sniping supermen of American legend, with each man determined to wage a one-man war against their oppressors. They embraced skirmishing tactics given the chance, but proved capable of regular line drill when necessary. However, the decentralized nature of their command structure made it difficult to coordinate efforts beyond the regimental level. The evolution into the Continental Army would come quickly and with no few growing pains.

SOURCES

David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

Brendan Morrissey, *Boston 1775 (CAM37)*, Osprey, 1995.



American militia stand firm in the face of the oncoming British. Figures by Perry Miniatures.

Wargame Scenario:

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

*“Friends! Brethren! Countrymen! – That worse of plagues,
the detested tea, shipped for this port by the East India Company,
is now arrived in the harbor...”*

~Boston handbill announcing the arrival of tea (29 Nov 1773)

*Rally Mohawks! Bring out your axes,
And tell King George we’ll pay no taxes
On his foreign tea...*

“Rallying of the Tea Party” (Boston street ballad)

On the evening of 16 December 1773, a group of 24 to 60 Patriots, some of them painted and dressed as Mohawk Indians (symbolic of 18th Century American freedom), marched down Griffin’s Wharf on Boston’s waterfront and boarded three ships. Over the next three hours they dumped 342 chests of East India Company tea into the harbor in protest of a despised special tax on tea that would be levied on the cargo once it came ashore. While many were armed with tomahawks and pistols, no injury was done to the crews or the ships, except for a broken lock, which was replaced.

In the simmering years after the Boston Massacre, the remaining Townshend Acts and the Tea Act of 1773 again ignited the fervor of the Patriots. While the symptom at hand was a special (and rather small) tax on tea, the real issue was the colonies’ assertion that Parliament had no right to burden them with any tax without their consent. Boston catapulted itself into the forefront of the revolutionary movement and the top of England’s blacklist after its Patriots performed their piece of political activism in high style that December.

GAMING THE BOSTON TEA PARTY: A ‘WHAT IF’ SCENARIO

Boston’s Governor Thomas Hutchinson did not post a guard on the tea-carrying ships, instead relying on a naval blockade to prevent their leaving. By the time news of the Tea Party reached him at his mansion outside of town, it was too late to call out any troops, even if he was willing to risk a riot.

We, however, can make a game of high adventure based on what might have happened if troops had been ordered keep the tea under protective surveillance. The scenario army lists and rules are generic, but they can be readily interpreted for play with popular sets such as Warhammer Historical’s *Legends of the High Seas* or Iron Ivan Games’ *This Very Ground*.

MINIATURES

This game just begs to do something out of the ordinary with the semi-disguised Sons of Liberty. French and Indian War ranges probably have what anyone would need to get the kind of mix one imagines

the conspirators might have looked like: Northeast Indians; colonial rangers and frontiersmen; even the odd French marine in native dress.

TABLETOP SIZE

The scenario may be played on table large enough to hold a model of an 18th Century ship and associated terrain.

TERRAIN

You need a ship at minimum. A wharf or dock is optional, but would certainly make the game look nicer. The battle could also be fought over an area used to represent the deck of a merchant ship

SPECIAL RULES

Non-Lethal Melee: Melee combat is assumed to be non-lethal; kills are treated as wounded or subdued.

First Fire: The Regulars and the Sons of Liberty will avoid firing their weapons if at all possible (all are assumed to be loaded). Each player must make a command check when his side takes a casualty from melee; a failure means the player’s side will shoot their firearms on their next turn if able. Once any firearm has been fired by any side, both sides may fire at will. See Victory Points section regarding how **First Fire** affects player scores.

DEPLOYMENT

The Sons of Liberty began play aboard the ship. The Regulars begin play within one move of the ship’s deck and will have to make a boarding action.



Boston patriots, dressed as Indians, prepare to board a ship in Boston Harbor. Figures are converted Conquest Miniatures.

The patriots make for the tea chests!



Wargames Illustrated's in-house painter, Matt Parkes, created these Patriots masquerading as Mowhawk Indians -

"I sorted through a few packs of figures from Conquest Miniatures' 500 Nations range, and pulled out several individuals which would make good conversions. I was looking for figures which could be made to look stereotypically 'Red Indian'. I did a spot of clipping, pinning and glueing to get the tomahawk wielding rebels I was after and then got out my paint brush. Of course I kept the white skin, and choose to exaggerate the warpaint - giving them an almost 'children's illustration' look. Look out for the guy who everyone forgot to tell to get dressed up!"

ORDERS OF BATTLE

THE SONS OF LIBERTY ("MOHAWKS")

The Americans should have three leaders and 9-12 followers. Their combat ability should be rated no better than militia, but they do have high morale. Leaders should each have a tomahawk and two pistols; followers should each carry a tomahawk.

BRITISH REGULARS

The Regulars should number 6-8 privates, one sergeant, and one officer. They should have good morale and have training/experience rated just above militia. The privates and sergeant should be armed with muskets and bayonets; the officer should carry a sword and two pistols.

WHO GOES FIRST

The English Regulars go first.

END OF GAME

The game lasts until one side breaks or 8 turns have been played, whichever comes first.

OBJECTIVES

The British Regulars seek to subdue or rout all the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty seek to defend the ship from the Regulars. However, each side must achieve their objective without firearms if they can – no one wants bad publicity coming out of the incident.

VICTORY POINTS

The Regulars earn 5 points for each Patriot follower they subdue in combat or otherwise break/rout off the ship (10 points for each leader). The Regulars earn no points for any Patriot casualty resulting from musket or pistol shot unless the Sons of Liberty fired their weapons first (See **First Fire** in Special Rules).

The Sons of Liberty earn 5 points for each follower and 10 points for each leader remaining on board the ship at the end of the game.

If the British give **First Fire** they lose 20 points. If the Sons of Liberty give "First Fire" they lose 10 points. Sorry, Regulars – it will be worse for you than the middle-aged gentlemen political activists.

TWEAKING THE GAME

It's probably easiest to adjust Victory Point awards for one side or the other than anything else. Increase the army sizes by 50% or more if the ship model won't be cramped.

SOURCES

The Boston Tea Party
Historical Society
www.boston-tea-party.org

David Hackett Fischer,
Paul Revere's Ride,
Oxford University Press, 1994.