

"The British Are Coming!"

by Louis Wolfe

Nobody knew better than Paul Revere the dangers that lay ahead on that spring night of 1775. All along the road lurked British redcoats, waiting to waylay him. If he were captured on this mission, he could be



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sent to England, tried for high treason—and hanged.

But Paul Revere was grimly determined to get his important message to Lexington. He must warn the citizens, especially the Minute Men, those patriots who were ready to do battle on a minute's notice. He patted his horse and adjusted the stirrups, then climbed into the saddle and rode off into a night bristling with menace.

Why was Revere risking his life? To him it was for the best reason of all—freedom.

In his hometown of Boston, the streets rumbled with the tramp of soldiers' boots and talk of war. It had been so ever since the Boston Tea Party. After that famous act of rebellion, King George III of England had raged at the colonies like a wounded lion. He vowed to make the people of Boston pay for the tea, even if he had to starve them into yielding. He blockaded the harbor with warships and sent three thousand troops under General Thomas Gage to occupy the city.

But instead of making the colonials give in, King George's terroristic measures made them scappier than ever. And no colonial fought more vigorously for the cause of freedom than the dark-eyed, stockily built silversmith, Paul Revere. He worked and plotted day and night to help crush British tyranny. He was one of the Sons of Liberty, a secret organization dedicated to the cause of freedom. He was also one of the "Indians" who had heaved the tea into Boston harbor.

But most important of all, Revere was the speedy and reliable messenger of the Revolution, a crack rider picked by the leaders to carry the most pressing dispatches. Again and

again he rode from Boston to New York, Philadelphia, and other parts of the colonies. The colonials used to say, "If you really want to get a message through, send Paul Revere."

And now the leaders had learned that the British planned to move out from Boston and make a surprise attack on the nearby town of Lexington. Again they called on Paul Revere, this time to warn the citizens of Lexington that the British were coming.

By the shortest route it was only twelve miles to Lexington, and Revere knew those miles of roads, marshlands, and clay pits almost as well as he knew his own back yard. But he also knew that at any turn he might find British officers lurking in ambush behind a tree or a stone wall.

For the first few miles he jogged along very cautiously, keeping his eyes and ears alert for any movement or sound. For five or six miles, all went well, but then as he was turning a bend in the road, he spotted two mounted figures waiting in the shadow of a tree. They were so near that he could see their cockades and pistols and identify them as British officers.

One officer charged past him, while the other moved swiftly up the road, trapping the patriot between them—though not for long. Revere quickly swung his horse to one side, hurtled over a stone wall, and galloped headlong across an open field. The surprised redcoats charged after him, not far behind, and at any moment he expected a bullet in his back. He leaned low over his mount's neck, giving her free rein, and the fleet-footed mare streaked across the open field as if pursued by a mountain lion.

Although he was slowly drawing away from his pursuers, Revere decided to resort to trickery to shake them off completely. He galloped straight toward a partly hidden clay pit, then turned sharply in another direction. The redcoats stormed after him, but failed to make the turn, and a few seconds later their horses plunged knee deep in the gummy clay and came to a standstill—exactly as their quarry had planned it!

Having shaken off his pursuers, Revere decided it would be best to take a different route to Lexington, so he galloped across the field to a little-used road, looked carefully up and down, then continued on toward a plank bridge that crossed the Mystic River. Still keenly alert for an ambush, he trotted ahead cautiously until at last he reached his destination.

Once there, however, he threw all caution aside. He dashed to the home of the captain of the Minute Men, pulled up to a clattering stop, banged with his fist on the door, and thundered, "Wake up! Wake up! The British are coming!"

Almost instantaneously a candle flickered in the house. A window flew up and a head was thrust out. Revere repeated his warning. Soon the house next door buzzed with action, then the next and the next, as Minute Men poured out of their homes to battle the oncoming enemy.

Leaving a trail of aroused patriots behind him, Revere galloped through the town, pounding on doors, and calling out, "The British are coming! The British are coming!"

Like a torchbearer, he set the whole town aflame. Women gathered their children about them and fled to safe hiding places. Drums rumbled, church bells clanged, muskets were shot off, and beacon fires blazed as signals. Boys, young men, and old men galloped in all directions to spread the alarm. Minute Men with powderhorns and muskets rushed to their appointed places, not only ready but eager to fight the redcoats.

The British plan to pull a surprise attack on the citizens of Lexington had failed completely—thanks to Paul Revere, hero of the American Revolution.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. Paul Revere knew that if he was captured he might be
 - A sent to England
 - B hanged
 - C Both A and B
2. Revere's hometown was
 - A Lexington
 - B Boston
 - C New York
3. The harbor blockade was in retaliation for the
 - A Concord riots
 - B Boston Tea Party
 - C Philadelphia massacre
4. King George's blockade of the harbor made the colonists more
 - A frightened
 - B considerate
 - C rebellious
5. The secret organization that Revere belonged to was called the
 - A Minute Men
 - B Sons of Liberty
 - C Neither A nor B
6. Revere was most often useful as a
 - A messenger
 - B orator
 - C spy
7. The distance Revere had to travel from Boston to Lexington was
 - A twelve miles
 - B fifty-three miles
 - C ninety-six miles
8. Revere escaped his pursuers by leading them into a
 - A clay pit
 - B swamp
 - C forest
9. Once Revere reached Lexington, he notified the Minute Men by
 - A blowing a horn
 - B lighting a fire
 - C Neither A nor B
10. As soon as the citizens learned of the coming British attack, they
 - A abandoned Lexington
 - B prepared to fight
 - C built a barricade

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