US History Chapter 5 Lesson 3

A Meeting in Philadelphia:

1774: 1st Continental Congress, notable attendees: Samuel Adams, John Adams (Mass), John Jay (NY), George Washington, Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry (two outspoken defenders of colonial rights from VA). Only Georgia didn’t send anyone.

The Delegates Vote:

They called for the repeal of the 13 acts of Parliament, they believed “the laws of nature, the principles of the English constitution, and the several charters” of the colonies were being violated. They decided on a boycott of English goods.

The Colonial Militias:

Militia members drilled and trained with other citizen soldiers, each was required to provide his own weapon and ammunition. Eventually towns began to gather and store supplies.

Fighting Begins:

Most believed if fighting occurred it would be in New England, militias held drills, made bullets, and stockpiled weapons. Some were called minutemen because they could be ready in a minute’s notice.

Great Britain Sends Troops;

The British were getting ready to fight as well. April 1775, several thousand British troops were in and around Boston with more on the way. General Thomas Gage had orders to seize weapons from the militia and arrest the leaders.

Gage learned that weapons were being stored in Concord (20 miles outside Boston). He ordered Lt. Col. Francis Smith to seize and destroy all artillery and ammunition.

The British on the Move:

April 18 1775, colonial Dr. Joseph Warren walked through Boston looking for any unusual British behavior. He saw troops leaving the city and alerted Paul Revere and William Dawes. Revere and Dawes rode to Lexington, east of Concord, to spread the word that the British were coming. Hearing the news Samuel Adams said “What a glorious morning this is!” He was ready to fight. Samuel Prescott carried the news to Concord.

Lexington and Concord:

At dawn 700 redcoats approached Lexington. They ran into about 70 minutemen led by Captain John Parker. Badly outnumbered the minutemen were about to give way when a shot was suddenly fired. Both sides let loose and 8 minutemen lay dead.

The British continued on to Concord. Some troops found and burned a few weapons, other met resistance at north bridge. In a short battle the British took heavy casualties. They began to make their way back to Boston. Along the road colonists hid behind trees and fired on the soldiers. By the time the redcoats reached Boston, 73 were dead and 174 were wounded. 60 years later Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote the Concord Hymn including the famous line “the shot heard ‘round the world.”

More Military Action

After Lexington and Concord conflict spread quickly. Benedict Arnold, a captain in the Connecticut militia raised a force of about 400 to seize Ft. Ticonderoga. This fort was rich in military supplies. Arnold joined forces with Ethan Allen and his so-called Green Mountain boys of nearby Vermont, together they took the fort by surprise. May 10 1775 the fort surrendered.

Later Arnold would become a traitor to the Patriot cause, selling military information to the British. When he was discovered he fled to New York (held by British forces) and commanded British troops against American forces in Virginia and Connecticut.

The Battle of Bunker Hill:

Following Lexington and Concord more volunteers joined the militias. Militia around Boston soon numbered 20,000 strong. The British maintained control of the city with militia camped nearby. June 16, 1775 militia commanded by Col. William Prescott set up post on Bunker Hill and Breed’s Hill across from Boston harbor.

The redcoats attacked Breed’s Hill the following day, low on ammunition, Prescott ordered “Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes.” The militia repelled the first assault and twice more the redcoats charged till eventually the colonists ran out of gunpowder and had to withdraw.

The Battle on Breed’s Hill eventually became known as the Battle of Bunker Hill and was a British victory. Yet the British suffered heavy losses of more than 1,000 dead and wounded. They were learning that defeating the Americans would not be easy.

Choosing Sides:

As news spread about these battles, colonists faced a difficult choice, join the rebels or remain loyal to England. Loyalists sided with Great Britain and did not think unfair taxes and laws justified a rebellion. Some had not suffered under English rule or were officeholders. Some thought that Britain would win the war and did not want to be on the losing side.

The Patriots supported the war. They believed that the colonists should have the right to govern themselves and were determined to fight the British until American independence was won. This was not just a war between America and Britain but also between Patriot and Loyalist.