

Early America's Minute-Men

The terms "minutemen" and "militia" are often thought of as one and the same. However, in early America — especially in the 18th century — there was a distinct difference.

Minute-men represented a small hand-picked force selected from the ranks of local [militia companies](#) and regiments. Approximately one-third of the men in each militia unit were chosen "to be ready to march or fight at a minute's notice."

The true minute-men — always the first to appear at or await a battle — stood at Lexington Green on the morning of April 19, 1775, and led the attack on Concord Bridge. Their numbers were reinforced by the regular militia that turned out in that day's historic battles.

Actually, the concept of minute-men existed in America as early as the 17th century, while the term itself came into use in 1759 during the [French and Indian War](#).

The title "minute-men" was formally adopted the year before the American Revolution started. At that time, in October of 1774, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts voted to enroll 12,000 men under the title of Minute-Men — volunteers who would be ready at a minute's warning to take to the field with arms.

After Congress authorized a Continental Army under the command of George Washington, minutemen units eventually ceased to exist. But their contribution as a trained and battle-hardened corps of veterans was an important and significant force as patriots took up arms to oppose the British army in the Revolutionary War.





A Minuteman Prepares for War



A Minuteman's Pay Order

The men who fought early in the Revolutionary War in the Boston area were trained by a regular program of half-day training. This program had begun operations in late 1774.

Pay vouchers were later issued to the Captains who were training companies in the Colony of Connecticut.

Here is an original pay voucher dated June 5, 1775 — two months after the outbreak of hostilities between the British and the Americans. The pay order is for training that took place most probably before the War had begun, sometime between the Fall of 1774 and the Spring of 1775.

This document orders that Captain Noah Griswold of the 3rd Military Company at Windsor, Connecticut be paid the sum of "nineteen pounds eight shillings" for a program of half-day training.

Training Minute Men

An original Minute Men Pay Voucher

To John Lawrence Esq. Treasurer for the
Colony of Connecticut

Sir This is your Order to pay out of the
Colony Money in of hand to Noah Griswold Capt.
of 3^d Military Company or Trainband in Windsor
the sum of nineteen Pound eight Shillings in
Tupper bill of the Colony
it being on account of the Non-commissioners officers
and Soldiers of s^d Company Training Twelve half
Days in conformity to one Law of this Colony
passed at New Haven in October last
Windsor June 5th 1775

Joseph Bissell Just' Peace
Henry Allyn Just' Peace

"To John Lawrence Esq, Treasurer for the Colony of Connecticut.

"Sir, This is your order to pay out of the Colony Money in hand to Noah Griswold of the 3rd Military Company in Windsor the sum of nineteen Pounds Eight Shillings in paper bills of the Colony it being on account of the Non commissioned officers and Soldiers of 3rd Company Training Twelve half days in conformity to the Laws of this Colony passed at New Haven in October last.

"Windsor June 5th 1775"