**Conflicting Version of the Outbreak of The American Revolution (1775)**

Background Information: *On April 19th, 1775 British troops that were stationed in Boston clashed with colonists at Lexington and then at Concord, while the British were seeking secret military stores and presumably rebel leaders. The ‘Battle of Lexington and Concord’ is considered to be the first bloodshed of the American Revolution but to this day scholars have not been able to prove who fired the first shot. The following excerpts represent the American version and the official British version. Read both excerpts, using the vocabulary on the right to clarify the readings, and answer the questions provided.*

American Version

Mustered – to call (troops) together, to gather

accosted – to stop somebody in order to speak to them, especially in an aggressive, insistent way

militia - an army of soldiers who are civilians but complete military training and can serve full-time during emergencies

Disperse – to cause something to scatter in different directions

Discharged – to fire a weapon or missile

pillaged - to rob a place using force, especially during war

brethren **–** members of the same group, or community

At Lexington … a company of militia … **mustered** near the meeting house. The [British] troops came in sight of them just before sunrise; and running within a few rods of them, the Commanding Officer **accosted** the **militia** in words to this effect: “**Disperse**, you rebels – damn you, throw down your arms and disperse”; upon which the troops cheered, and immediately one or two officers **discharged** their pistols, which were instantaneously followed by the firing of four or five of the soldiers, and then there seemed to be a general discharge from the whole body. Eight of our men were killed and nine wounded.

In Lexington [the British] … also set fire to several houses … They **pillaged** almost every house they passed… But the savage barbarity exercised upon the bodies of our unfortunate **brethren** who fell is almost incredible. Not contented with shooting down the unarmed, aged, and infirm, they disregarded the cries of the wounded, killing them without mercy, and mangling their bodies in the most shocking manner.

Reading Questions: (use the exact wording from the source to explain your answer)

1. According to the American source, how did the British troops act at Lexington?
2. According to the American source, how did the British troops treat civilians?

British Version

…. Six companies of [British] light **infantry** … at Lexington found a body of the country people **under** **arms**, on a green close to the road. The King’s troops marched up to them, in order to inquire the reason of their being so **assembled**, and upon this they [the colonists] went off in great confusion. And several guns were fired upon the King’s troops from behind a stone wall, and also from the meetinghouse and other houses, by which one man was wounded, and Major Pitcairn’s horse shot in two places. In **consequence** of this attack by the rebels, the troops returned the fire and killed several of the…

Infantry – soldiers who are trained to fight on foot

Under Arms – equipped with weapons

Assembled – gathered together in one place

Consequence – something that follows as a result

Scattering – a small amount or number of things spread over a large area

Barbarity – a cruel, uncivilized act

Scalped – skin the top of head as a trophy

On the return of the troops from Concord, the [the rebels] … began to fire upon them from behind stone walls and houses, and kept up in that manner of **scattering** fire during the whole of their march of fifteen miles, by which means several were killed and wounded. And such was the cruelty and **barbarity** of the rebels that they **scalped** and cut off the ears of some of the wounded men who fell into their hands.

Reading Questions:

1. According to the British, who fired the first shots at Lexington?

1. According to the British, how did the Americans treat the British wounded?

Comprehension Questions:

1. What undisputed and what probable facts emerge from these accounts?
2. How can historians extract truth from conflicting contemporary testimony?