



THE GUN THAT FIRED THE SHOT
HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD
1760 SCOTTISH FLINTLOCK
THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON
APRIL 19, 1775

THE COLLECTION

The Shot Nobody Owns

A replica of the pistol tied to Lexington Green, and the order nobody followed.

CHRIS VALLETTA

Replica of a 1760 Scottish flintlock
Bought at Mount Vernon

THIS ONE IS A REPLICA, and I'll say so up front. I bought it at Mount Vernon, George Washington's home. The plaque calls it "the gun that fired the shot heard 'round the world," a 1760 Scottish flintlock from the Battle of Lexington, April 19, 1775.

It's a beautiful piece. Engraved metal from end to end, a scrolled ram's-horn butt, and a thistle, Scotland's emblem, set into the grip.

The real pistols behind it belonged to Major John Pitcairn, a Scottish-born British officer who was at the head of the column at Lexington. He lost them that day on the retreat from Concord. They were given to the American general Israel Putnam, and in 1879 Putnam's family gave them to the town of Lexington.

The plaque gets two things wrong, and I think both matter.

"The shot heard round the world" comes from a poem Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1837. It is about the North Bridge in Concord, hours later that same day, not Lexington Green.

And nobody knows who fired first at Lexington. Not then, and not now.



The replica, full length.

Here is what we do know. At dawn on April 19, 1775, about seventy Lexington militiamen under Captain John Parker stood on the green as roughly seven hundred British Regulars marched in. Parker ordered his men to disperse. A British soldier remembered Pitcairn shouting, "Soldiers, don't fire, keep your ranks, form and surround them."

Then somebody fired anyway. The Regulars answered with volleys and kept firing while Pitcairn tried to stop them. When it was over, eight Lexington men were dead.

If that soldier remembered it right, both commanders on that green gave the order to hold. Neither order held.

That is the part that stays with me. In the moment that matters most, your people won't do what you shout. They'll do what you built. Fear and a crowd of nervous men with loaded guns will drown out any order given in the moment. What holds is what was trained and trusted long before.

“Students are not greater than their teacher. But the student who is fully trained will become like the teacher.”

LUKE 6:40 (NLT)

The job is the slow part. Train your people. Earn their trust. Do it on the ordinary days, so that on the worst morning they already know what to do without you.

Pitcairn was killed at Bunker Hill two months later. Historians still argue about what he shouted that morning. Nobody argues about whose watch it was.

Leadership is service, and most of it happens before anyone fires a shot.

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