Three men rode horseback on an April night in 1775: Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Dr. Samuel Prescott. Each carried the same message: “The redcoats are coming.” You may have heard of Paul Revere, because a poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, wrote a famous poem about his ride.

Listen, my children, and you shall hear Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere, On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five; Hardly a man is now alive Who remembers that famous day and year.

Can you hear Longfellow making his words gallop, like a horse’s hoofs? Here’s more of the story, this time in prose:

The Patriots were worried. It looked as if war with Britain couldn’t be avoided. The Patriots were the colonists who wanted independence. They wanted to be free of British rule. The other colonists—the ones who wanted to stay British subjects—were called Loyalists. Some Patriots, like Samuel Adams, expected war. But most Patriots still hoped to find peaceful ways to settle their differences with England.

It was scary to think of war. England was a great power; the colonies were scattered and had little military experience.

Still, it made sense to be prepared for the worst, so New Englanders began to stockpile cannonballs and gunpowder. They piled them up in Concord, a small town about 20 miles northwest of Boston.

When the British officers heard about those munitions, they decided to get them. Paul Revere and his Boston friends learned of the
British plans. They found out that the redcoats were going to march on Concord the next morning!

Besides the gunpowder, Revere was worried about his friends Sam Adams and John Hancock. They were hiding in Lexington, right next door to Concord. The British were searching for those two troublemakers—they wanted to hang them as traitors.

Someone had to get a warning to those towns—and fast. It would help to know which way the redcoats would march.

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Who Started It?

The story of Lexington and Concord as seen in Massachusetts and in England:

The troops came in sight just before sunrise...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 [American] troops huzzaed, and immediately one or two [British] 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.

—from THE SALEM GAZETTE, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS, APRIL 25, 1775

Six companies of light infantry...at Lexington found a body of the country people under arms, on a green close to the road. And upon the King’s troops marching up to them, in order to inquire the reason of their being so assembled, they went off in great confusion. And several guns were fired upon the King’s troops from behind a stone wall, and also from the meeting house and other houses.... In consequence of this attack by the rebels, the troops returned the fire and killed several of them.

—from THE LONDON GAZETTE, LONDON, ENGLAND, JUNE 10, 1775

A green is a grassy lawn or common. Many New England villages have a green for public gatherings. To accost someone means to approach and speak to or touch him or her—but not gently.

Disperse means to break up and scatter.

Huzza is an old-fashioned word for “yell.” It's something like “hurrah.” The rebels were yelling at the British soldiers.
Lesson 18: One If by Land, Two if by Sea, pgs. 69 – 71

Map: "The Shot Heard Round The World"