

THE SHOT NOT  
HEARD AROUND  
THE WORLD

CHARLIE DAMITZ

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P.O. Box 399  
41 First Avenue  
Unionville, NY 10988-0399  
(845) 726-4444  
fax: (845) 726-3824  
email: [mail@rflwp.com](mailto:mail@rflwp.com)  
website: [rflwp.com](http://rflwp.com)



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# CHAPTER 1

## CONFRONTING THE ENEMY

It's strange that you should ask if I remember what started my long career in medicine, for, despite the years, I can remember it as though it were yesterday. Those were tumultuous times. It was no secret that the British were aware of colonial unrest. The now-famous ride of Paul Revere had served to warn the Minutemen that the British Army would march to Concord to seize guns and ammunition. The zealous Minutemen, of course, would have none of that, and they made hasty plans to ensure their right to bear arms. These were the circumstances that led me into a medical career, and it all started on April 19, 1775. Even now I can close my eyes and see my mother in our kitchen....

Her eyes welled up with unshed tears as she announced, "It's time, Jeremy. Grab your musket and be gone." She quickly turned her back to me, and as I ran from the house, musket in hand, I could hear her sobbing into her apron.

The plan was set and had been rehearsed over and over again so that it was second nature for me. Although I was only fourteen, I was already a good marksman, for I had hunted rabbit and squirrel many times with my father in the woods by our farm. This was different, though: the Redcoats were coming. Now I

would become both the hunter and the hunted at the same time, and the animal I was to hunt was neither squirrel nor rabbit but British soldier.

I moved quickly into position behind the stone wall that marked the end of our property. Being located on a hill just outside of Lexington on the route to Concord, my family's farm was an ideal spot from which to view and engage the enemy, should they pass directly by. I was thoroughly prepared for that very possibility. My hunting experience had taught me the importance of being armed and ready. I had preloaded and packed my musket, knowing that the noise of muzzle loading could betray me. I had hidden myself well and was disposed to wait all day if need be. My concentration was keen, and at first my youthful impatience made time pass slowly. As the minutes ticked by, however, I was able to relax and enjoy my natural surroundings.

It was unseasonably warm for mid-April. The sun threw beams of dust-filled light between the tall hemlocks, and initially the forest seemed quiet and still. The only evidence of life, it seemed to me, was the drumming of a distant woodpecker echoing through the woods. Once I was comfortably settled behind the stone wall, however, I began noticing bustling activity all around me. The trees were filled with birds. Brown creepers moved down tree trunks from the top, almost colliding with chickadees moving up from the bottom. A tufted titmouse, sitting silently on a nearby branch, seemed to join me as a spectator. Little red squirrels ran back and forth in front of me, while bigger gray squirrels ran and stopped as if they were straining to hear something important. On the stone wall itself, small red ants quickly moved back and forth, while spiders sat seemingly motionless in their webs. I smiled.

Despite its inherent violence and tragedy, there is a harmony and beauty in nature.

After what seemed an eternity of waiting, I heard a clamor and looked away from nature's showplace. My eyes followed the sound down the long sloping hill to the road from Lexington. My heart started pounding, for there I saw a group of British soldiers heading my way. Their bright red coats made them as visible as a group of cardinals in a snow-covered hemlock. *What a foolish way to fight wars*, I thought. But I knew nothing of war college or strategic planning; I knew only the facts of the moment and how vulnerable the enemy appeared compared to a camouflaged rabbit, which could move swiftly and in unpredictable directions once detected.

A lone scout was dispatched from the group, and he started up the slope toward me. If I could fell this one soldier and quickly retreat, I would lead the enemy up the hill and into open pasture, where my father and several other Minutemen would ambush the entire company. That was our plan. I was about to become a hero.

I watched the scout's every step. Because muskets aren't as accurate as one would wish, I cautioned myself to wait until I could see the expression on his face before firing. I remembered my father's warning: "You will have but one shot, Jeremy, and it must be true to its mark."

As the scout came closer, I could see that he was annoyed by the fallen trees that seemed forever in his way. *Even the woods are cooperating with our plan*, I mused.

At last the scout was within the range of musket fire. He was a young man, perhaps in his mid- to late twenties, although he had

the air of someone much older. There were creases in the skin around his eyes and mouth. I tightened my grip on my musket.

Suddenly the Redcoat turned in my direction, and our eyes met. In that instant, I saw not an enemy but a father—not my father but someone’s father. My inner voice asked, *If you can’t kill your own father, how can you kill someone else’s father?* The moment seemed to last forever, but I finally answered my inner voice by relaxing my grip on my musket.

The Redcoat had shouldered his rifle with amazing speed, and he was still aiming it at me. I closed my eyes, not wanting to see the puff of smoke that would signal my death, but the shot did not come. I can’t explain why. Perhaps this man saw in me not an enemy but a son—not his son but someone’s son. Perhaps his inner voice had asked him, *If you can’t kill your own son, how can you kill someone else’s son?* I opened my eyes to see him answer his inner voice by relaxing his grip and dropping his rifle to his side.

I saw a faint smile cross the scout’s lips, and I smiled back an understanding that transcended any spoken word. Then he turned and headed back down the hill. At that moment, two unsung heroes had been called to inaction, and bloodshed was averted.

## CHAPTER 2

# INNER VOICES

I sat behind the stone wall in silence for a long time. Had I betrayed my father and the other Minutemen? Even if I had, I couldn't betray my inner voice, and I knew it. Several hours passed, and I hoped that my father would come soon, calling me back to the farmhouse.

Finally shouts of excitement broke the silence. Upon hearing them, I began running toward my house. I could see other men running as well, muskets in hand, toward the road to Concord. My heart pounded as I wondered if my inaction had led to tragedy. My father called to me, but I couldn't hear his words, so I headed toward him. As I reached him, out of breath and frightened, he told me that there had been a battle at the Concord bridge and that the Minutemen had routed the British. The Redcoats were retreating to Boston along the road, and everyone was going down to have a shot at them from behind the stone walls.

Relief washed over me as we ran to join them. When we reached the walls, I could see the Minutemen celebrating. Their joy in victory was enormous.

But as relieved as I was that I had not been the cause of a massacre, I now had to live with the secret that the Redcoats had passed by my father's farm, and I had failed at the plan. In

their patriotic zeal, the Minutemen would never understand my encounter, and I knew it, so I kept quiet.

The next few days were difficult for me. I became sullen and introverted. It was as though I had entered a cave and could not emerge until I was at peace with myself. One moment I felt like a coward, the next like a traitor. Lone walks in solitude dominated my free time. The weather continued to be unseasonably warm and muggy, making such walks even more burdensome. But it was during those walks that I came to a realization about myself: I was incapable of violence, despite my patriotic spirit. I kept seeing the eyes of the scout, and I knew that I couldn't kill another human being.

With time, I emerged from my cave with a solution: I decided to put my efforts and energy into helping the injured, thus avoiding the killing part of war. I hoped that in that way, I could be brave without violating my inner voice.

Once I made that decision, I felt revived and relieved, although I had no idea how to accomplish my goal. But I was anxious to prove my reshaped courage to the rest of the world—and, more importantly, to myself. I was given the opportunity almost immediately.

I returned home from that walk to learn from my mother that a group of Minutemen had come to our farm. “Your father is out patrolling the knoll with them,” she informed me. “They’re looking for wounded Redcoats who might be hiding in the woods after their defeat at Concord.”

I flew from the house and headed across the pasture at full speed. My mother's plea to be careful fell on deaf ears, for I

wanted only a chance to prove my bravery. I deliberately left my loaded musket, knowing that I wouldn't use it anyway.

I arrived sweaty and out of breath at the knoll, and the men allowed me to join in the search of the property. It was a slow and tedious process, for there were rumors that some of the wounded British had been left behind and could be dangerous, and we needed to search the area thoroughly. As I wandered through the edge of the woods, I thought about my earlier encounter with a Redcoat, and I prayed silently that I would not have another.

Halfway up the slope, I noted a splash of red among some of the underbrush around a fallen birch. My heart pounded; I hoped it was my imagination. I froze like a cat stalking a bird and looked more closely. There was no doubt that it was one of the enemy, but there was no movement. I approached stealthily, keeping one eye on the soldier and the other on the ground to avoid stepping on a twig or tripping on an exposed tree root. As I got closer and still there was no movement, I thought that perhaps I had found a fallen Redcoat who had crawled into the brush to die. I quickened my pace, anxious to confirm my findings and reveal my discovery to the rest of the men—a first step toward winning their approval and confidence.

When I arrived at the feet of the fallen soldier, my heart suddenly raced again, for I noted that the man was breathing. I was overcome with compassion: before me was not a dead Redcoat but a wounded man. Standing over the man's body, I could hear a strange, faint noise, like he was smacking his lips. At first I thought he was trying to speak, but as I knelt down to listen, I could see that he wasn't moving. He was in a daze. His glassy stare made him look like a life-size toy soldier, as if his very soul