



# **The Court-Martial of Paul Revere: A Son of Liberty and America's Forgotten Military Disaster**

*Michael M. Greenburg*

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At the height of the American Revolution in 1779, Massachusetts launched the Penobscot Expedition, a massive military and naval undertaking designed to force the British from the strategically important coast of Maine. What should have been an easy victory for the larger American force quickly descended into a quagmire of arguing, disobedience, and failed strategy. In the end, not only did the British retain their stronghold, but the entire flotilla of American vessels was lost in what became the worst American naval disaster prior to Pearl Harbor.

In the inevitable finger-pointing that followed the debacle, the already-famous Lieutenant Colonel Paul Revere, commissioned as the expedition's artillery commander, was shockingly charged by fellow officers with neglect of duty, disobeying orders, and cowardice. Though he was not formally condemned by the court of inquiry, rumors still swirled around Boston concerning his role in the disaster, and so the fiery Revere spent the next several years of his life actively pursuing a court-martial, in an effort to resuscitate the one thing he valued above all--his reputation.

The single event defining Revere to this day is his ride from Charlestown to Lexington on the night of April 18, 1775, made famous by Longfellow's poem of 1860. Greenburg's is the first book to give a full account of Revere's conduct before, during, and after the disastrous Penobscot Expedition, and of his questionable reputation at the time, which only Longfellow's poem eighty years later could rehabilitate.

Thanks to extensive research and a riveting narrative that brings the battles and courtroom drama to life, *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere* strips away the myths that surround the Sons of Liberty and reveals the humanity beneath. It is a must-read for anyone who yearns to understand the early days of our country.

## The Court-Martial of Paul Revere: A Son of Liberty and America's Forgotten Military Disaster Details

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# **From Reader Review *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere: A Son of Liberty and America's Forgotten Military Disaster* for online ebook**

## **Joy H. Lee-Story says**

I was captivated, but then I love biographical stuff. Yes, Revere was flawed, but who of us is not? I feel a need to read a couple more Paul Revere biographies. In my view three books about a person, by 3 widely different authors and preferably printed decades apart, are minimum needed to get a real picture.

Paul Revere reminded me in ways of Donald Trump, and some other folks I know and have known over time. He simply seemed unable to drop some things that would better be disregarded. He kept tearing at a sore that would heal if ignored. The idea of Paul Revere as a coward is heart breaking. But then he had no military training nor experience. Still, his conduct surely seemed like behavior of a sissy, someone afraid for himself and likely more or equally afraid to send others into harms way. I am quite glad I read this book, and do feel a need to read more about this man.

A huge disappointment was the condition of the book. Many many pages blank. I think they were pages with photos or graphics, but not certain. I would read 5 or 6 pages, then come upon a blank. Then read 20 or so and again come up with a blank. Sometimes they were single blank pages, sometimes multiple. I did learn that by reading on for a couple of pages I could surmise the essence of missing pages. But I would not accept and keep reading such a book in future. Gave me a headache. jhls

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## **Al Lock says**

How many people are aware that Paul Revere was court-martialed for failure to obey orders while serving in the Massachusetts Militia? Probably not very many. But he was. This is a fascinating book that covers Revere's history - both his being a stalwart patriot and a pretty poor soldier. Well written although a bit long. Very well researched.

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## **Dave says**

Paul Revere's midnight ride may be the stuff of legend, taught to every elementary school student in America, but rarely do the textbooks delve deeper into the life of the man or the other circumstances he was involved with during the course of the Revolutionary War. To learn more, one must seek out works such as Michael Greenburg's exhaustively researched *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere: A Son of Liberty and America's Forgotten Military Disaster*. Armed with an in-depth familiarity of previously published Revere biographies, Greenburg tackles the wealth of primary source material generated in the aftermath of a conveniently forgotten dark chapter of the American Revolution to offer up a rather contrary view of the man affectionately known as the Messenger of the Revolution.

Greenburg gives due diligence to the biographical details of Paul Revere's life, his rise to prominence as a silversmith and engraver, and his eventual involvement in the rebellious activities of Boston. Based upon Revere's own letters, and those of his peers and contemporaries, a portrait of a less idealistic and more opportunistic figure emerges as the fledgling nation embarks on a course of war with the world's greatest - at

the time - superpower.

The greatest value in Greenburg's work is to be found in the meticulously detailed account of the disastrous Penobscot Expedition, in which a superior colonial force was routed by a token British presence established within a rudimentary outpost on the Maine coast. Clearly their own worst enemy, the American forces - in which Paul Revere led a contingent of artillery - bumbled their way to defeat and humiliation, after which a lengthy and eye-opening inquest took place in Boston's Faneuil Hall. Orbiting the eye of the storm, if not firmly within the eye itself, was Paul Revere.

Delivered as an easy-to-read narrative, the facts of Paul Revere's ride, of his motivations, and of his military misadventures call into question the shining knight of Longfellow's famous work. Definitely a must-read for Revolutionary War aficionados, *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere* is also an enjoyable page-turner for those with a general interest in one of America's earliest icons of liberty.

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### **Valerie says**

This was a fascinating account to a patriot we have all grown to revere (pun intended!)! As great as Paul Revere was, he was a flawed man. But who isn't? Mr. Greenburg gives us this fascinating account on the one blemish of Mr. Revere's life. I had never heard about the Penobscot Expedition (another incident where victors write the history books!), so this was new to me. But Mr. Greenburg turns out to be a great storyteller. I don't understand why so many have criticized his writing style. I did not find it dry at all. In fact, I get the sense, based on his prose, that Mr. Greenburg was excited to tell this tale. I highly recommend this work.

Paul, you are forgiven for your transgressions in the expedition.

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### **Eric says**

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

*The Court-Martial of Paul Revere: A Son of Liberty and America's Forgotten Military Disaster* provides a different view of Paul Revere than most of us imagine - that of the revolutionary riding across the countryside to warn about the arrival of British forces - and shows a complicated, at times unsavory, character that shows the human side of this historical hero. Michael M. Greenburg provides an interesting, well-researched story outlining Revere's early contributions to the American Revolution, his military service, and his personal shortcomings.

Greenburg does not treat Revere as a hero, but rather as a man with his own personality and flaws. He provides us with an early look at one of these flaws, noting that Revere's famous engraving of the "Bloody Massacre," which shows British troops firing on colonial protesters, was both inaccurate in its depiction (likely to stoke anger) and the depiction may have been stolen from another artist. Revere comes off as an aggressive, egotistical, ladder-climbing individual, though one incredibly concerned with the liberation of the colonies and willing to do anything to see a free America. Greenburg provides a complex picture of the man.

The court martial of the title, which takes up most of the second-half of the book, is related to Revere's

actions during the Maine battle at Majabigwaduce on the Penobscot River. Revere's actions come off very poorly in Greenburg's telling and he seems to have contributed to the American loss during the battle. Afterwards he was charged with "unsoldierlike behavior during the whole expedition to Penobscot, which tends to cowardice." Revere, however, could not accept this charge to his character and worked tirelessly to clear his name.

Don't read this book if you only want the image of Revere riding through the Massachusetts countryside to warn about the British, because you'll have a much more complex picture of the man afterwards. However, do read the book if you are interested in colonial history, the American Revolution, or in having a better understanding of a revered hero.

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### **Tim says**

I will never be able to think of Paul Revere the same after reading this book. While I don't doubt the patriotism and efforts of Mr Revere in America's struggle for independence; it becomes obvious he was the epitome of the willing government contractor with his hand out. Revere seemed to be always looking for a way to be rewarded for his efforts and capitalize in any way possible for his efforts. I believe that probably much of the premise for the American Revolution was based on the hinderances that England placed on the colonists in regards to their personal wealth building practices. It is capitalism in it's finest and darkest times.

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### **Chris says**

I received this book as part of GoodReads First Reads giveaway.

Very interesting. This book starts with a general biography of Paul Revere's early life in Boston, his involvement with the early days of the American Revolution. But after Revere's famous midnight ride, we learn about what Revere spent the rest of the war doing. Apparently he first gamed and politiced for an officer commission in the Continental Army and failing that he received a commission as commander of the fort which protected Boston harbor.

Then we get into the meat of the story. During the American Revolution, the British decided to build a fort on the coast of Maine to control the lumber and to threaten American shipping in the region. So Massachusetts (at that time Maine was a part of Massachusetts) formed an expedition to push the British out. It should have been easy. There were 700 British soldiers and 3 British warships. Massachusetts sent a 40 ship fleet (including transports) and 8-900 soldiers. Apparently, victory was so certain that people actually invested in privately owned warships in order to share in the plunder.

Then things went to hell. The book gives a rather detailed account of what went on on the coast of Maine and how the expedition failed. Apparently Revere did not acquit himself very well at all. Following that, the book deals with the aftermath, the American retreat, the Massachusetts government's inquiry into the cause of the failure and Revere's efforts to clear his name.

My impressions of the book? This was an interesting, well written book and a fascinating bit of history that I was completely unaware of before reading this book. The author employs a large number of sources including court documents from the official inquest and excerpts from the journals kept by the officer's on

the expedition. And I'm always comforted to see 60 or so pages of notes and references at the end. I don't necessarily read through them but I'm glad to know they're there. Gives me confidence in the author's honesty.

And impressions about the subject. I respect Revere's contribution to the independence efforts (apparently much more extensive than one midnight ride) but I get the impression that his efforts to join the Continental Army and later the Massachusetts militia were motivated primarily by a desire to be called 'Lieutenant Colonel Revere' and for the prestige. I generally get the impression that he was a poor military officer and refused to partake in the hardships of the campaign. So, while his early contributions to the cause of independence were invaluable and his involvement in Boston after independence were noteworthy his efforts to be a military man were very much a case of trying to force himself into a role that he was unsuited for.

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## **Joshua says**

The Court Martial of Paul Revere by Michael M. Greenburg is a look at two things: the military disaster at Penobscot, Maine and what Paul Revere did after his "midnight ride" in 1775. It was interesting to see what happens to Revere and Massachusetts during the rest of the War of Independence as the major military campaigns shifted south to Mid-Atlantic and then Southern States. At the time, what was Maine was still part of Massachusetts. Maine was an important part of the economy where timber and fishing provided resources and funding. When the British threatened that by constructing a fort in Penobscot, Massachusetts sent a fleet and army north, that resulted in a disastrous campaign.

Greenburg shines a light on an interesting episode of the American Revolution that is often overlooked and for many years was ignored because of the disaster that followed and the public fighting among many of Boston's most influential citizens. Greenburg shares many of the court documents and pieces together the expedition and its aftermath, while allowing the reader to be both critical and sympathetic to Revere and others.

Where the book stumbles for me is the way it is organized. Some chapters are the length of an academic journal article, while others are a few paragraphs. And this doesn't end up feeling like a style choice as it makes it feel like the book is 4-5 academic articles roughly tied together. Each one was interesting, but it made for a very disjointed experience. Many of the basic facts and people were introduced two to three times and the repetition meant that a considerable amount of time away from progressing the narrative.

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## **William Latham says**

### **A great look at a nearly forgotten patriot**

Worth reading of the history of a great patriot. Paul Revere is more than a few lines in a poem.

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## **Terry LeBlanc says**

Poor Paul Revere. Plagiarized the image for his famous engraving of the Boston Massacre. Desperately wanted to serve his country in the revolution. Wanted recognition and fame more by serving as a military officer. Always seemed to be passed over. When he got the chance, he failed miserably as an officer in the

disastrous Penobscot expedition. Then, spent much of his life trying to clear his name after being accused of cowardice in that role. Had he only known he'd be immortalized for his midnight ride - revered by every 5th grader. Funny. Dry telling. Sometimes confusing (who is making what troop decision and where exactly?) No big narrative lessons. Kept my interest. Not "Wow!" like Hinderaker's "Boston's Massacre."

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### **Kristen says**

Full disclosure: I won a copy of this book in a Goodreads Firstreads giveaway.

*The Court-Martial of Paul Revere: A Son of Liberty and America's Forgotten Military Disaster* is the story of the ill-fated Penobscot Expedition of the Revolutionary War and Paul Revere's role in it. You probably didn't learn about this Revolutionary War Battle in school and you probably are most familiar with Paul Revere in his roles of messenger of the revolution and silversmith and engraver. This book gives a nice readable account of the battle, which included the largest American naval flotilla of the war, Revere's contribution to the attack, the aftermath, and sheds light onto Paul Revere's character. The light doesn't always cast a flattering shadow, but the book is a fascinating look at a long-forgotten chapter in American history.

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### **a catesby says**

#### **Interesting with some repetition of information**

Not a bad read on an interesting topic and period. Paid a good price and enjoyed it mainly. Some repetition later on.

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### **Lynn Smith says**

I would venture to guess most people only know Paul Revere to the extent of the Longfellow poem "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere". Last year, I was blessed to be able to visit Boston and the surrounding towns of Lexington and Concord and see many of the historical site connected with Paul Revere including his home, the Old North Church and others. This piqued my interest in learning more about the man.

There is no doubt Paul Revere was a patriot and loved his country. His patriotism, however, did not make him a great military leader. While he desired to be a great military man, his military service garnished him no fame and threatened his reputation, one which he fought valiantly to defend.

Reading this book will give you a glimpse into the military service of Paul Revere and his at best undistinguished and at worst cowardly and disastrous leadership. While there are two sides to every story, even if one is generous to Paul Revere, one would have to admit his leadership in the military arena was not to be praised.



While the Longfellow poem contains much more fiction than fact, the poem would forever give Paul Revere a lofty place in American history, and while I would not call the man misogynistic, I have no doubt he would be especially pleased with how he is remembered and not for his inglorious military career.

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### **Mfedore says**

Michael Greenburg's book examines a largely forgotten chapter from the life of Paul Revere, the disastrous Penobscot Expedition of 1779. This book provides biographical details of Revere's life then spends a good amount of time on the events on the Penobscot. This event resulted in the destruction of the largest American fleet assembled during the Revolution and demonstrated tremendous failures on the part of the expedition's leaders. This book characterizes Paul Revere as extremely self-aggrandizing and concerned largely with his own honor over all else. His middling efforts managing Castle Island and his lack of military experience did not impact his efforts to lead a successful and lucrative military career.

The actual court-martial of Paul Revere proved to be a rather minor event in the overall narrative. It was something he requested repeatedly over the course of several years. He seemed to be kind of a nuisance, and my takeaway was that Revere was very concerned with his own image and reputation over all else. The book discussed interesting events but I felt like the main focus of the book was not as earth shattering as depicted. Greenburg does a nice job of a generally unknown chapter in American history, but the story was not as exciting as I would have hoped.

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### **Graham says**

When you think of Paul Revere you think of his midnight ride. Freedom, liberty, bravery are the words that likely come to mind. After reading *The Court-Martial of Paul Revere: A Son of Liberty and America's Forgotten Military Disaster* by Michael M. Greenburg you will add dishonor, vanity, and cowardice to the list. You will learn from this book, but it probably won't bowl you over. It is well written, thoroughly researched, and organized. The main qualm I have with the writing is the lack of style. The book flows, but more like an academic paper and less like a narrative. There is nothing offensive about this, it just does not keep you riveted. Greenburg does a nice job with the events of the midnight ride, but struggles in his description of the battle at Penobscot. Perhaps it was me, but I felt as though I could not quite get a vivid picture of the events as I have had from other books detailing this time. Still, it is a worthy read if you are interested in Paul Revere, the Sons of Liberty, or the early events leading to the revolutionary war.

Full disclosure: I won a copy of this book in a Goodreads Firstreads giveaway.

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