“The Incident in Boston, 1770”

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|  Since the British troops arrived in 1768, the life of solders in Boston was not much better than those of the citizens who they were sent to keep under control. It’s not only the hatred by the locals that made it so difficult. The redcoats were also severely mistreated by their own commanders, including severe physical punishments for every minor violation. The solider’s pay was miserable, and they weren’t even allowed to keep all of it. According to the military rules of that time the solders were charged for food and for supplies, including the very uniforms they were required to wear. The situation was so dire that many of them had to seek outside work just to make ends meet. Needless to say there were not many jobs available for them in the town so hostile their presence. It is well known that the [organizers of street mobs Samuel Adams](http://www.samuel-adams-heritage.com/) and William Molineux were trying the best to stir up anti-British sentiments. But could they have gone as far as trying to get people killed to generate the outcry needed to spark the revolution? As the events in front of the Customer house unfolded it’s plain to see that a peaceful protest was the last thing on the minds of protesters. On March 5, 1770 at approximately 9:00 pm an angry crowd approached sentry Hugh White standing on guard outside of the Customs House. By this time the agitators have already been in another street brawl were ready for action. One of the leaders, Edward Garrick started insulting private White, saying among other things that his company commander was a cheat and did not pay him for a wig. In perhaps the most critical mistake of this evening, White allowed himself to get involved in the quarrel and struck Garrick in the face with the butt of a musket. From there the situation quickly escalated. Despite the reinforcements and the actions taken by captain Preston trying to control the crowd, the angry mob was getting out of control. The seven British solders tried to take White to safety but could not reach him and were forced to defend themselves. Some of the attackers were waving clubs and throwing stones. At some point somebody yelled “You sons of bitches to fire! You can’t kill us all! Fire! Whey don’t you fire? You dare not fire!” In the next few minutes the violence reached its peak. One of the attackers threw a club at private Hugh Montgomery, knocking him off his feet. Rising, Montgomery fired a shot into the air. He was stricken again with a club and Montgomery had no choice but to point his gun at the attacker, Richard Palmes who quickly fled. At the same time another soldier Private Matthew Killroy pointed his musket at the other two attackers, Edward Langford and Samuel Gray. “God damn you, don’t fire!” Gray called out. Probably the anger and the fear of being beaten by a club like his fellow solder, private Killroy pulled the trigger mortally wounding Gray. More shots were fired and more people fell to the ground wounded or dead, leaving the aftermath of 5 civilian deaths. It was unfortunate that the innocent people were killed, but those who were shot in the Boston Massacre were as much of victims of the angry crowd as they were of the accidental shooting by the solders. For the likes of Samuel Adams, the outcome could not have been more beneficial. Quickly the incident was blown out of proportion and used for propaganda. It seemed that a chance for a fair trial in Boston was impossible. Unexpectedly two talented colonial lawyers, Josiah Quincy and John Adams took it upon themselves to defend the soldiers. The justice prevailed and the jury vindicated the British regulars. Preston and his four men were fully acquitted and the other two solders were found guilty of lesser charges and sent back to England. Even though tragic, the death of the colonists actually helped to improve relations between the King and the colony. Just a month after the incident, in April 1770 the unpopular Townshend acts were lifted and everyone in Boston started breathing better, except perhaps for Samuel Adams who was the only loosing party in this tragic event of the American history. |