

*New Jersey's  
Revolutionary Experience*

**25**

*The Battle  
of Monmouth*

SAMUEL S. SMITH

*New Jersey Historical Commission*

## NEW JERSEY'S REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE

Larry R. Gerlach, *Editor*

*This series of publications is dedicated to the memory of Alfred E. Driscoll, governor of New Jersey from 1947 to 1954, in grateful tribute to his lifelong support of the study and teaching of the history of New Jersey and the United States. He was a member of the New Jersey Historical Commission from 1970 until his death on March 9, 1975.*

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## Foreword

*New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience* is a Bicentennial pamphlet series published by the New Jersey Historical Commission with a grant from the New Jersey Bicentennial Commission. The twenty-six numbers and two teachers' guides are intended to acquaint secondary school students and the general public with the state's history during the era of the American Revolution. Some titles treat aspects of the Revolution in New Jersey, while others show how important themes of the colonial period developed during the revolutionary years; some bring together the results of existing scholarship, while others present the findings of original research; some are written by professional historians, and others by laymen whose investigations of Jersey history exceed avocation. Because the series is directed to a general audience, the pamphlets have no footnotes but contain bibliographical essays which offer suggestions for further reading.

*New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience* is the product of a cooperative venture by numerous individuals and agencies. On my behalf and that of the pamphlets' readers, I accord recognition and appreciation to the individual authors for their contributions to New Jersey history, to the New Jersey American Revolution Bicentennial Celebration Commission and the New Jersey Historical Commission for their support of the project, to Hank Simon, president, Trentypo, Inc., for his invaluable suggestions and cooperation in producing the series, and to the staff of the Historical Commission: Richard Waldron, Public Programs Coordinator, who as project director supervised the series from commencement to completion; Peggy Lewis, Chief of Publications and Information, and Lee R. Parks, Assistant Editor, who edited and designed each number; and William C. Wright, Associate Director, who contributed valuable suggestions at every stage of production.

Larry R. Gerlach  
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*"Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth" (1857). Painting by Emanuel Leutze (1816-1868). Courtesy Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold.*

In July 1777, after two years of fighting, mainly in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey, the British commander in chief, General William Howe, then at New York, decided to invade Pennsylvania and take Philadelphia, the American capital. After landing in Maryland near the head of Chesapeake Bay on August 25, Howe fought his way overland for a month, finally taking Philadelphia on September 26. Before the capture Congress moved to the Pennsylvania back country and established a temporary capital at York.

During the fall and early winter of 1777 General George Washington, the American commander, made several attempts to retake the capital, but he succeeded only in annoying the British. As the December cold weather set in, Washington marched his army to Valley Forge, about forty miles up the Schuylkill River from Philadelphia, where he established winter quarters on December 19.

After a bitter cold winter, full of hardship for the American army, Washington received the heartening news that on February 6, 1778 France had acknowledged the independence of the United States and had promised military help against Great Britain. When the British government learned of the intended French intervention, it decided to give up Philadelphia and consolidate its divided forces in New York, which was then held by Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton, second in command to Howe. To effect this consolidation Clinton was ordered to proceed to Philadelphia. General Howe was recalled to England.

At Valley Forge Washington soon learned of the impending British move and began preparations to disrupt any attempt to

consolidate the two British forces. He did not know whether the British would attempt to return to New York by land or water, or both. As a preliminary move he sent Brigadier General William Maxwell's New Jersey Brigade of Continental soldiers from Valley Forge to New Jersey by a roundabout northern route.

With the assistance of Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson's New Jersey militia, Maxwell was to do everything possible to hinder Clinton's march through New Jersey, if that turned out to be the British plan. These delaying tactics would give Washington, with the bulk of the American army, time to make the longer march from Valley Forge in order to intercept Clinton's line of march to New York.

Clinton arrived at Philadelphia on May 8 to take command of British forces there, and for a month and a half Washington waited for Clinton's move. On June 18 Clinton crossed the Delaware River into New Jersey at Gloucester and began a long march toward New York by way of Haddonfield, Mount Holly, Crosswicks and Allentown. Due to Maxwell's and Dickinson's harassment, the bad roads and the hot weather, it was not until June 26 that Clinton reached Freehold, New Jersey, where he found the area suitable for resting his tired army and securing provisions.

Soon after Clinton had begun to put his army across the Delaware, Washington had knowledge of it and gave orders to begin the pursuit. His rapid advance took him through Norristown, Doylestown and Buckingham in Pennsylvania. On June 21, the American army reached Coryell's Ferry (now New Hope, Pennsylvania, and Lambertville, New Jersey) where it crossed the Delaware River.

As soon as his army had made the crossing, Washington sent a small force of riflemen under Colonel Daniel Morgan to support Maxwell and Dickinson in delaying the enemy march. Washington moved his main army to Hopewell. Upon his arrival there on the twenty-third he learned that Clinton had not proceeded in the direction of Elizabethtown (modern Elizabeth) where he was expected to cross the narrow Arthur Kill to Staten Island, then held by the British, but instead had moved from Allentown toward Sandy Hook, also held by the British.

With this new information in hand, Washington met with his generals to discuss the alternatives. At this meeting Major General



Charles Lee, his second in command, stated that because of the recently concluded French alliance and the military help that would soon be coming, "what interest we can have in our present circumstances to hazard an action, somebody else must tell you, for I cannot." Major General Nathanael Greene, third in command, said "I am not for hazarding a general action unnecessarily. . . ." Brigadier General Anthony Wayne and some other generals were in favor of attacking in strength.

The council's decision was that the American army should not risk a general engagement. To this end, Brigadier General Charles Scott was sent ahead of the main army with fifteen hundred chosen troops to aid in the harassment of the enemy. They would be operating independently of, but in coordination with, the forces already lying near the enemy.

When Washington and his army reached Rocky Hill and Kingston on June 25, he sent ahead another detachment of a thousand troops under Wayne. Major General the Marquis de Lafayette was given command of the entire advance force. Lee had been offered this command but had refused it. Later, when he learned that Lafayette was to command all of the advance forces rather than just Scott's and Wayne's, he told Washington that for him to give up such an important command to a junior major general "would of course have an odd appearance," and that if he himself were not given the command he would "be disgraced." Lee had been back with the army only a short time, having been captured by the British at Basking Ridge, New Jersey, on December 13, 1776, and held prisoner in New York City. His release had been effected on April 5, 1778, in Philadelphia.

After hearing Lee's request for command, General Washington said that he would take it under consideration. Beginning in the evening of the twenty-fifth, Washington led his army to Cranbury. On his arrival there he decided to send Colonel William Grayson forward with another small force. Lee would accompany it and thereafter assume overall command of Maxwell, Dickinson, Morgan, Scott and Wayne. As Lee and Grayson marched out of camp at Cranbury, Washington sent orders to all advance detachments, except Morgan's and Dickinson's, ordering them to bring their men immediately to Englishtown to be placed under Lee's command.

By the afternoon of the twenty-seventh, all of Lee's troops had arrived at Englishtown, where they encamped outside the town on a slight rise of ground on the west bank of Weamaconk Creek (see map, pp. 14-15). The force consisted of Wayne's one thousand men and two cannon, Scott's fifteen hundred men and four cannon, Maxwell's one thousand men and two cannon, and Grayson's six hundred men. In addition to these troops Lee could call upon for support the eight hundred New Jersey militia under Dickinson who were lying close to the enemy to the north and west of Freehold and the detachment of six hundred men under Morgan who were to the south, making a total of fifty-five hundred men available to him.

It rained all day the twenty-sixth, and Washington kept his army under shelter at Cranbury. On the twenty-seventh he moved it to Ponolopon Bridge, which crossed Manalapan Brook about three miles west of Englishtown. He camped on a ridge slightly west of the bridge, with troops lying on both sides of the road leading to the bridge.

On the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh, while Lee was advancing to Englishtown, Clinton remained at Freehold, five miles east of Englishtown, where he rested his troops, replenished his supplies, and sent out reconnoitering parties to determine the position and strength of the advancing Americans.

After Washington had established camp for his troops at Ponolopon Bridge he rode the three miles to Lee's camp at Englishtown and ordered Lee to attack the enemy the next morning. Since these were verbal orders, Washington's exact orders are not known. It is certain, however, that he did not instruct Lee to engage in a full confrontation with the British, which would have been contrary to the decision of the council of war held at Hopewell. Further, he knew that the enemy force consisted of upwards of ten thousand men, about twice the size of Lee's force.

The best evidence of Washington's instructions to Lee is his letter to Congress written the morning after his meeting with Lee. He wrote, "We have a select and strong detachment more forward, under the command of Maj. Gen. Lee, with orders to attack their rear, if possible. Whether the detachment be able to come up with it is a matter of question, especially before they get into strong ground."

As soon as Washington left Lee's camp to return to Ponolopon

Bridge, Lee called Generals Lafayette, Scott, Wayne and Maxwell to a meeting at five o'clock that afternoon (June 27). All but Scott attended. That evening Lee met Scott, who explained that he had thought it had been called for 5:30. Lee then gave Scott the substance of the meeting, namely that the British were "far from being reconnoitered," making it impractical for Lee to form any specific plan of action until the next morning when he could determine their position and probable intentions.

Soon after meeting with his generals Lee sent a message to Dickinson, whose troops lay to the north and west of Freehold, ordering him to move as close to the enemy as possible, and to inform Lee as soon as they appeared to be moving out of the village. To Colonel Morgan, who was south of Freehold, Lee sent a message at about one o'clock in the morning (June 28) informing him that he intended to move against the enemy the next day and that Morgan should support his right flank in any action he might take.

At about three in the morning, Lee alerted Colonel Grayson, informing him that at dawn his detachment of six hundred men would lead the attack on the enemy's rear. He further instructed Grayson that he was not to attack until he was certain that the British were moving out of Freehold, and that when and if he did attack, Morgan would be on his right and Dickinson on his left.

The sun rose at 4:30 a.m. on June 28, and Colonel Grayson was ready to advance, but his civilian guides had not yet appeared in the village of Englishtown, where they were to join him. It was not until about six o'clock that Grayson and his men left the village and moved down the road toward Tennent Meetinghouse. At about seven o'clock the balance of Lee's force passed through the village, moving over the same road Grayson had marched. The road from Englishtown, which now ends in front of the Tennent Meetinghouse, is part of the old road to Freehold. In 1778, it skirted the church on the south, then passed through what has become a part of the church cemetery and continued on toward Freehold, roughly paralleling the present road from Englishtown to Freehold.

Grayson moved down this road in halts and starts. First, he received a message that the enemy had begun to march out of Freehold toward Middletown, whereupon he accelerated his pace. Then he received word that they had not marched, which caused

him first to halt, then to move ahead cautiously. At about 11 a.m. he received word that the enemy definitely had begun to march. By this time Lee's main force had caught up with Grayson's. They were roughly a mile beyond Tennent Meetinghouse and about to cross the causeway or bridge over the "west morass" formed by a swampy widening of Weamaconk Creek. The causeway crossed the creek about four hundred yards upstream of the present bridge.

While this stop-and-start procedure was being played out, Washington and the main American army were in march from Ponolopon Bridge. At about 8:30 a.m. Washington had received word that the enemy "had left their ground and were on their march." The order to break camp was given, and immediately thereafter he sent Lee a verbal instruction to "bring on an engagement, or attack the enemy as soon as possible, unless some very powerful circumstance forbid it."

When Washington's aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Meade, reached Lee with Washington's orders, Lee was across the causeway, and his whole force was about to cross. Shortly after receiving the message Lee saw Dickinson riding toward him. Major John Mercer, Lee's aide-de-camp, said that Dickinson brought Lee the new information that the enemy definitely had not marched from Freehold, whereupon Lee and Dickinson entered into a warm dispute.

Lee insisted that the enemy had marched, or were about to march. Dickinson said that they had not, and that if Lee crossed the causeway with his force "you are in a perilous situation," meaning that there was no way of retreat except over the narrow causeway. Lee finally informed the officers who surrounded him that he was convinced that it was the enemy's intention to march out of Freehold toward Middletown that day, and he was "determined to march on and ascertain with my own eyes, the number, order, and disposition of the enemy, and conduct myself accordingly."

Before ordering his troops to cross the causeway, Lee rearranged his order of march. In the lead he put Colonel Richard Butler's Ninth Pennsylvania Regiment; next in line came Colonel Henry Jackson's two regiments; next was Colonel Grayson's detachment, which had been in the lead all morning. This revised advance body of some one thousand troops was now placed under the command of Wayne. As Wayne moved across the causeway

with his men, Lee followed with the balance of his force.

At about noon Wayne's troops reached Freehold near the Monmouth County Courthouse, which stood on the northwest corner of what is now Main and Court Streets. They learned from the townspeople that the last of the enemy had just left the village. Lee then allowed his force to be "at ease" so that they could eat their noonday rations, but they were not to break ranks. At the same time he and some of his officers, including Wayne, rode a short distance out of town along the road to Middletown in order to reconnoiter the enemy.

As soon as Lee and his party had ridden far enough to have an unobstructed view, they saw near Briar Hill about "five or six hundred cavalry and light infantry," which Lee judged to be the rear guard of the enemy. He noted that they were moving toward Middletown. He decided that Wayne with his thousand men should attack this rear guard. He judged that Wayne would have little difficulty in accomplishing the task inasmuch as Colonel Morgan, whose six hundred men were presumably nearby, would see or hear the firing and protect Wayne's right flank.

After returning to his troops Wayne advanced rapidly to the attack. He moved some distance forward as Lee observed the impending action. Lee saw the British rear guard turn about and advance toward Wayne, who held his fire until the enemy was very close. Then Wayne's men fired, and the British retreated with their cavalry stampeding right through their own light infantry. Wayne then advanced in close pursuit.

As Lee looked to his right, expecting to see Morgan join Wayne in the pursuit, he saw instead a new enemy force coming into the action, which he judged to be about fifteen hundred to two thousand men. Knowing that Wayne could not handle this additional force, he decided to have Wayne retreat into Freehold in order to draw both enemy forces toward the village. Meanwhile, Lee would march "with great rapidity" to his left over a side road, now named Waterworks Road, in order to reach the rear of both enemy forces. This maneuver could cut them off from the main body of the enemy, which he presumed was continuing its march up Dutch Road toward Middletown.

As Lee began his flanking march he sent a rider to inform Wayne of this plan and to instruct him to withdraw toward the

village. But when the rider delivered Lee's orders Wayne replied that if one piece of cannon were sent to him, "he would engage to stop them," without having to draw them down into the town. Thus, Wayne failed to withdraw as ordered, and when Lee arrived at his new position he was astonished to find Wayne there also.

Lee's entire force was now gathered on the narrow neck of land lying between what is Lake Topanemus on his north or left and Weamaconk Creek on his south or right. Lee judged this to be a reasonably defensible position and immediately began to deploy his troops. Wayne's force was placed next to Weamaconk Creek to hold the right flank. Scott's force was placed on the rise of ground just above Lake Topanemus to hold the left flank. The balance of Lee's force occupied the center, with Maxwell's brigade to act as the second line or reserve.

After placing his men Lee rode to a nearby elevation to observe the enemy position. He saw before him not the twenty-five hundred men he had encountered earlier but an entire division, seven thousand men directly in front of him on and near Briar Hill. This was the second division of the British army under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis.

Both artilleries soon opened fire and shortly thereafter Lee saw troops retreat from Wayne's right flank. He rushed to the scene and demanded the cause of retreat. Lieutenant Colonel Eleazer Oswald, who commanded Wayne's artillery, explained that he had expended all of his round shot, having brought with him only "one ammunition waggon for both of his cannon," and he had used up considerable round shot during Wayne's earlier action. Wayne and his infantry did not withdraw but held their position without artillery support.

It was on the left of Lee's line that disaster was soon to fall. After a preliminary cannonade ceased and the British moved forward to engage Lee's force, Scott's troops gave way. Maxwell, who was in reserve back of the main line, said: "I saw his [Scott's] troops turn about and form into columns, and General Scott coming to meet me." When Scott reached Maxwell's position he told Maxwell that he saw troops on the right of the line retreating (probably Oswald's artillery), and he said, "we must get out of that place." Lee was on the right side of the line when he was told that Scott had withdrawn from his position, whereupon Lee remarked

bitterly that Scott had retired "against my inclination and without my orders."

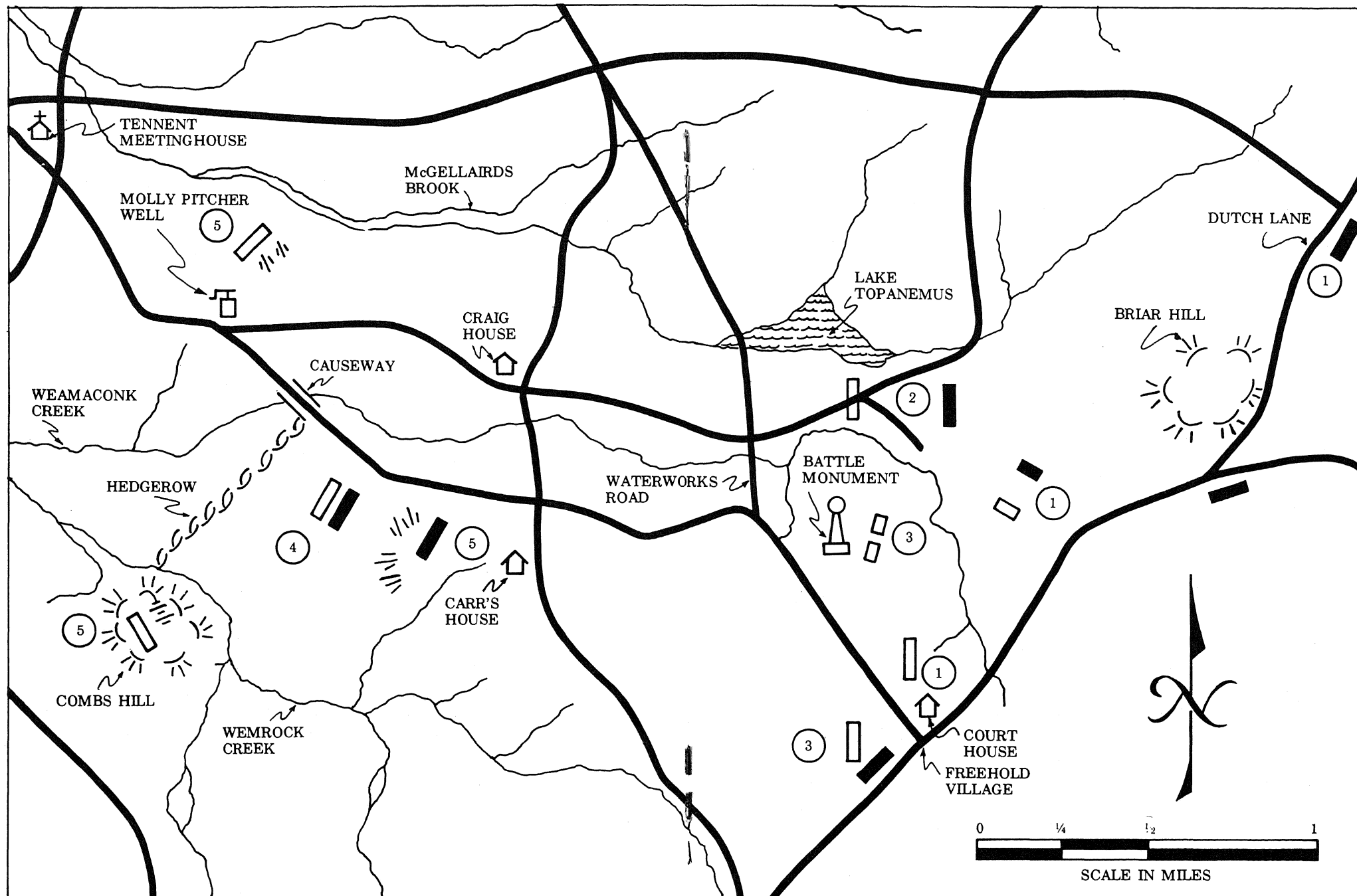
With one third of his men withdrawing from his line and his left flank exposed, Lee knew his force was in considerable danger. But before deciding what to do next he again went to his observation place and saw that a part of the enemy force seemed to be attempting to skirt Wayne's right flank position. Morgan was not in position either to halt the enemy advance or blunt the movement.

Morgan's force was not there because he had misread Lee's message, sent at 1 a.m. on the twenty-eighth, in which Lee had said he would attack the next day. Morgan interpreted this to mean the twenty-ninth, not the twenty-eighth as Lee had intended. Thus, Morgan and his force were still some four miles south of Freehold, near the present Wycoff Mills, awaiting the appointed day. Of course when he heard the cannonfire he immediately prepared to put his men in march, but there was no way he could arrive in time to prevent the enemy from driving a wedge between himself and Lee.

Lee's only alternatives lay in a hasty retreat to Tennent Meetinghouse or to Freehold, in the hope that Morgan would soon appear. The two forces could seriously damage the enemy flanks and possibly cut some off from the main body. Lee chose the latter plan, and when he approached Freehold again he saw Scott's force on the northwest outskirts of the village occupying a rise of ground at the approximate position of the present Monmouth Battle Monument.

Lee passed below and to the west of Scott's hill position, roughly over modern Waterworks Road and Avenue A, as he proceeded through the town toward the enemy line of march. It was soon observed that Wayne and his right wing force did not continue the march with Lee but took a position on the hill with Scott and his men.

As Lee and his force, now reduced by over one half, approached the enemy line of march, he saw that Morgan had not yet arrived to stop the advance. The British, surging past the courthouse, were about to push around Lee's right flank, and he decided that he must retreat to avoid being surrounded. Thus, he ordered a withdrawal a short distance in the direction of the west morass causeway, over which the Americans had crossed earlier:



The Battle of Monmouth, June 28, 1778. Numbers correspond to circled numbers on map. 1. Lee at Freehold; Cornwallis on Dutch Lane en route to Middletown and Sandy Hook; Wayne, midway between the two, attacking Cornwallis's rear guard. 2. Lee and Cornwallis at second positions; Wayne has rejoined Lee. 3. Lee's and Cornwallis's third positions,

with Cornwallis about to turn Lee's flank; Scott and Wayne near present Battle Monument. 4. Lee and Cornwallis in fight on hill before Americans are driven to hedgerow and across causeway. 5. Greene's, Stirling's and Cornwallis's positions in three-way cannonade. ■ British □ American Map by author.



From his elevated position near the present battle monument, Wayne saw the enemy sweeping through the town, and he sent a message telling Lee what he thought he should do next. At about this time a messenger from Morgan reached Wayne and asked him what instructions there were for Morgan under the circumstances. The messenger reported that Morgan was still "about two or three miles to the left." Wayne told him that he could see for himself that most of Lee's troops were in retreat and that Morgan should "govern himself accordingly."

Scott and Wayne soon became concerned that they too might be enveloped by the British. Scott made one decision and Wayne another. Scott marched his men back over what is now Waterworks Road where he "fell into the road leading to the Meetinghouse," which ran north of Weamaconk Creek and past the Craig house, thereby taking them completely out of the battle. Wayne led his force in the direction of Lee's withdrawal, which took him south of Weamaconk Creek and led him into a minor skirmish with the advancing enemy.

When Lee arrived at his next position, near "Carr's house," (the elevation immediately west of U.S. Highway#9), he found it an unsuitable place to make a stand. He then ordered another move in the direction of the west morass causeway. As he began to move off the Carr farm elevation, a local resident informed him that the first defensible ground to his rear lay on the other side of the causeway, so he ordered his troops to retreat to the causeway and to cross it.

Major John Mercer, Lee's aide-de-camp, reported: "in our retreat we were informed that General Washington had come up, and General Lee rode from the rear to see him." The two men met as Lee recrossed the causeway. Washington had a short but stinging conversation with Lee and then relieved him of his command, thus ending the first phase of the battle of Monmouth.

It seems appropriate to pause here to look back and consider a few elements of this first phase. Generals Wayne and Scott later said that the difficulty during the morning had been that "no plan of attack was ever communicated to us" by General Lee. Lee contended that the fault lay mainly with Scott in twice leaving the field of battle without orders and with Wayne in not withdrawing to Freehold as ordered. Lee admitted that his orders to Colonel

Morgan, having been misinterpreted, worked against the success of the attack. But he contended that his own part in the battle was handled brilliantly, considering the enemy's vast superiority in numbers.

Searching deeper for what went wrong, one might ask why Wayne and Scott should have disobeyed Lee's orders that morning, the latter on two occasions. Such conduct was inexcusable by normal military standards. Could Scott's failure to attend Lee's staff meeting on the eve of battle and his two acts of insubordination in the field have reflected a resentment carried over from 1776? During that period Lee and Washington had been in open disagreement over the conduct of the war, and many officers had acquired a strong dislike for Lee.

Lee had been in British military service before coming to America. In 1775 he was commissioned major general in the American army, to be second in command to Washington. During the following year and a half he was mildly critical of Washington, but after the defeats on Long Island and at Fort Mifflin in August and November 1776, Lee, who was then commander in the New York Highlands, became an outspoken critic of his commander in chief. Their growing conflict over the prosecution of the war soon spread throughout the army and into the halls of Congress. Some sided with Lee, others with Washington.

For example, to Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence, former surgeon general of the army and a member of Congress, Lee wrote on November 20, 1776:

The affair at Fort Mifflin cannot surprise you at Philadelphia more than it amazed and stunned me. I must entreat that you will keep what I say to yourself; but I foresaw, predicted, all that has happened; and argued the necessity of abandoning it. . . . Let these few lines be thrown into the fire, and in your conversations only acquit me of any share of the misfortune.

Lee wrote to Colonel Joseph Reed, adjutant general of the army, noting Washington's indecision at Fort Mifflin and virtually blaming Washington for the loss of nearly three thousand men there. Reed replied: "I have no Doubt had you been here the Garrison at Mount Mifflin would now have composed a Part

of this Army." To this Lee responded:

I receiv'd your most obliging flattering letter—lament with you that fatal indecision of mind which in war is a much greater disqualification than stupidity or even want of personal courage — accident may put a decisive Blunder in the right—but eternal defeat and miscarriage must attend the man of the best parts if curs'd with indecision.

In Reed's absence from headquarters on the day this letter arrived, Washington opened it, and a few weeks later, Reed, who had been Washington's closest adviser, resigned.

Following the fall of Fort Mifflin (November 16, 1776), as the army had been pursued across New Jersey from Fort Mifflin to Trenton, Lee was slow in acting on Washington's orders to bring the Highlands force to his rescue. After numerous delays Lee's force finally reached Morristown, at about the same time Washington was being driven across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania.

When word reached Washington that Lee had been taken by the enemy while spending the night in an inn at Basking Ridge, several miles away from his troops, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Webb, Washington's aide-de-camp, wrote: "The General is much surprised Genl. Lee should venture to lodge from Camp in a Country where he must have known we had enemies. Indeed we shall find hard work to convince many officers and soldiers that he is not a traitor." Presumably, Webb was inferring that some soldiers would believe that Lee had deliberately turned himself over to the enemy.

How much of that old bitterness against Lee was being displayed on the battlefield a year and a half later, it is impossible to measure. Washington was aware of resentment toward Lee among a segment of the officer corps, but he himself seems neither to have shared it nor to have thought that it would carry over to the battlefield. These facts, however, formed a part of the emotional background for Scott's and Wayne's battlefield conduct and for Washington's abrupt assumption of the command of Lee's troops on the other side of the west morass causeway at about 3 p.m. on June 28, 1778.

Washington had learned of Lee's retreat from a local resident, but he did not believe it until he saw Lee with some of his troops

coming across the causeway. Washington's remarks on this occasion have been the subject of much controversial discussion. The consensus, however, from men who were there, is substantially that recalled by Major John Mercer, Lee's aide-de-camp.

Washington spoke first, saying, "What is all this?" Lee hesitated a moment, and Washington asked, "what all this confusion was for and retreat?" Lee replied that he "saw no confusion but that which arose from my orders not being properly obeyed." Washington then remarked that he had been told "that it was but a small covering party of the enemy." To this Lee answered, "it might be so but they were rather stronger than I was and that I did not think it proper to risk so much." Washington stated that under the circumstances Lee "should not have undertaken it," (the command) whereupon Washington wheeled his horse and rode away toward the causeway to rally Lee's retreating troops.

Lee followed Washington across the causeway, where they observed some of Lee's troops coming down the road. As Washington approached these men he was told that the enemy was but fifteen minutes behind them. He then turned to Lee and asked him to resume command in order to give Washington time "to make a disposition of the army." While this decision was being made, the part of Lee's force that had retreated across the causeway began to file back across it, as Washington had ordered.

As these troops crossed the causeway, they left the road that skirted the base of the nearby hill and filed off to their right, up the hill. When Wayne's men, who were the last to leave Freehold, arrived near the causeway they too were ordered to the hill, where a determined stand was made.

Lee and his men stood the pressure of the enemy assault for a few minutes when he observed that a force of British dragoons was turning his right flank. He then retreated to a position below the hill and in back of a hedgerow that ran along the eastern boundary line of the Tennent parsonage farm. The hedgerow terminated on its northern end near the abutment of the west morass causeway. Along this line Lee made one last effort to halt the enemy, but when he observed an overwhelming force coming over the hill he withdrew along the hedge fence.

Lee's fight on the hill and at the hedgerow consumed half to three quarters of an hour, during which Washington had ordered

Greene, with the right wing of the main army, "to file off by the new Church [Tennent] two miles from English Town." Within a short time Greene had arrived at what was then known as Combs Hill, where he had a full view of the enemy over a deep gully and swampy area through which ran Wemrock Brook. Here Greene had "a morass on his front and left, and wood on his rear; . . . the enemy could not attack him there without apparent disadvantage to themselves, unless it was on his right, and to get there they must go three or four miles round."

While Greene was in march to his Combs Hill position, Washington ordered Major General William Alexander (the self-styled Lord Stirling), commander of the left wing of the main army, to place his cannon on the elevation overlooking the west morass causeway, on the north side of the road leading to it. This would enable Stirling's cannon to fire directly upon the causeway should the enemy attempt to cross it.

As soon as Lee had given up his defense at the hedgerow and the last of his troops had crossed back over the causeway, Greene and Stirling began a heavy cannonfire at the enemy, who were now mainly on Lee's former hill position, with some troops over the hill down by the causeway. When Stirling's cannon began firing almost point-blank at those down by the causeway, there was great confusion and apparent panic in the British ranks. Washington noted that the cannon "severely infiladed those in front."

Soon all of the enemy troops withdrew from the causeway to beyond the hill, where they emplaced cannon and began firing. With the two American and one British artillery positions forming a triangle, an artillery duel commenced at about four o'clock. In order to reach each other's positions, cannon had to be fired at "a great elevation," and it made a spectacular show.

The cannon that the British had up front were "twelve 6-pounders, two medium 12-pounders, and two howitzers." It is believed that the Americans had mainly six-pounders. The extreme range of a six-pounder was approximately fifteen hundred yards; a medium twelve-pounder, some eighteen hundred yards; a howitzer, generally the same extreme range as a six-pounder. Because of these range limitations it must be presumed that the British six-pounders and howitzers were placed no farther back than the elevation at the upper end of what is now Wemrock Road, putting



*"Molly Pitcher at the Battle of Monmouth." Engraving by J. C. Armytage from a painting by Alonzo Chappel. Courtesy National Archives.*

all three positions barely within range of the six-pounders.

During this period of cannonfire there were no major troop movements. The American troops were allowed to "sit down and rest themselves" but were occasionally disturbed and called upon to move by "balls coming too near."

According to an eyewitness, "during the heat of the cannonade" a young woman called Molly Pitcher carried water to the thirsty American cannoneers. One soldier noted that the plowed fields that day were like "the mouth of a heated oven." Inasmuch as two men in Colonel Giles Russell's Eighth Connecticut and Colonel Craig's Third Pennsylvania regiments, whose accounts have survived, saw Molly Pitcher perform her deeds and both were with General Stirling "during the heat of the cannonade," it must be assumed that she was on Stirling's hill position.

Private Joseph Plumb Martin of the Eighth Connecticut Regiment was the first to record the deeds of Molly Pitcher. He wrote:

One little incident happened during the heat of the cannonade, which I was an eyewitness to, and which I think would be unpardonable not to mention. A woman whose husband belonged to the artillery and who was then attached to a piece in the engagement, attended with her husband at the piece the whole time. While in the act of reaching a cartridge and having one of her feet as far before the other as she could step, a cannon shot from the enemy passed directly between her legs without doing any other damage than carrying away all the lower part of her petticoat.

A second eyewitness account was given by Private John Clendenen of the Third Pennsylvania Regiment. After his death his widow wrote in her pension application that he had "often mentioned to this respondent the toils and fatigues which he underwent and related particularly that he was at the Battle of Monmouth, and suffered greatly from the heat and thirst, that a woman who was called by the troops Captain Molly was busily engaged in carrying canteens of water to the famished soldiers."

It is not known for certain where Molly Pitcher drew the water for the thirsty troops. Neither of these observers noted that fact. It could have been from one of three nearby sources: McGellaird's Brook, which lay about three hundred yards to the left of Stirling's gun positions; Weamaconk Creek, about seven hundred yards

dangerously in front of those positions; or a well about four hundred yards to the right of them. The well seems the most likely source, and it would have provided refreshing water on that hot day. It is still in daily use, providing an abundant supply of cool drinking water to the occupants of the eighteenth century farmhouse standing a few feet away.

Molly Pitcher was able to relax from her two-hour chore of carrying water and helping at the cannon, when at six o'clock the American cannon quit firing. Washington had ordered the cease-fire so that he could send a new force across the west morass causeway.

Three regiments of Pennsylvania Continentals not previously in the fight went across the causeway, with Wayne in command. As they advanced they came upon a small enemy rear guard. It had remained on the fringe of the American cannonfire to protect the flank of another British force, which had crossed Weamaconk Creek to get at Stirling's flank, and their "impetuosity had engaged them too forward."

Clinton and Cornwallis, who were observing the action, saw the Americans hit the British rear guard very hard. Clinton noted that his force was "losing men very fast" and he ordered additional troops to return to the field. Soon Wayne's men were outnumbered and driven back to the hedgerow, where they made a stand that he described as one of "unparalleled bravery of these few troops." Finally, for fear of being cut off, as Lee earlier had feared, Wayne led his men along the hedgerow to the causeway and crossed it under heavy fire. When the last of them had crossed, the American cannon opened fire, quickly driving the enemy back out of range and inflicting heavy losses.

During this renewed cannonfire Washington and Stirling saw the enemy force that had crossed Weamaconk Creek and were trying to get on Stirling's flank. Stirling promptly sent a force under Brigadier General Enoch Poor to stop them. Poor soon drove the British back toward the creek. Stirling then ordered his artillery to cease firing for fear of hitting Poor's men. Poor drove the enemy across the creek and "persued until we got Possession of the field of Battle."

Stirling said that "while this was going on so Successfully on the left, I ordered two Brigades from the Right of my Wing to Ad-



vance." These were Brigadier General Lachlan MacIntosh's North Carolina Brigade and Brigadier General William Woodford's Virginia Brigade. By the time these brigades had crossed the causeway, the enemy force that had been across Weamaconk Creek on Stirling's flank were able to join the main enemy force, and their whole corps withdrew to a position "over a deep gully beyond Wm. Kerr's house [previously identified as 'Carr's house'] behind which their whole force was drawn up." The enemy, having withdrawn completely from the field of battle, Stirling, with Washington's approval, concluded that "to press the pursuit further or to go into Action on disadvantageous ground with men who were already fainting under fatigue of one of the hottest days I ever knew, was by no means advisable."

It was growing dark, the sun having set about 7:30 p.m., making an advance at that late hour very dangerous. Thus, the Americans, who had advanced as far as the Carr farm ridge, lay on their arms all night hoping to renew the fight in the morning. But at dawn, 4:30 a.m., they found the enemy gone. Washington learned from the townspeople of Freehold that the British "at about 12 o'clock at Night marched away in such silence, that tho General Poor lay extremely near them, they effected their Retreat without his Knowledge."

By the time Washington had discovered the enemy's flight they were well on their way to Middletown. He sent a large body of troops in pursuit, but they were unable to make contact and returned to Freehold. Clinton later withdrew unmolested to Sandy Hook, where his army embarked for New York.

Who won the battle of Monmouth? A few days after the conflict, Washington claimed victory. When Clinton heard of it he remarked: "Nothing surely can be more ridiculous." One generally accepted measure of victory has been, "who controlled the field of battle when the fighting was over?" Certainly Washington controlled the field where most of the fighting had taken place. But one might argue that Clinton did not want to control the field; his objective was to transport his army to New York with a minimum of casualties.

Another measure of victory has been, "who lost the greater number of men?" The total of American dead was 69 men. Clinton reported to his government that he had 124 killed. This figure,

however, does not agree with American burial reports made the day after the battle which show that 217 of the enemy were buried on the battlefield. Possibly the difference lies in the fact that Clinton's report included neither Hessian nor Loyalist casualties.

Brigadier General Henry Knox, commander of American artillery, in a letter to his wife the day after the battle, seems to have summed up the American army's feelings about its success in battle.

Indeed, upon the whole, it is very splendid. The capital army of Britain defeated and obliged to retreat before the Americans, whom they despised so much! I cannot ascertain either our or the enemy's loss, but I really think they have lost three times the number we have. I judge from the field of battle, which, to be sure, is a field of carnage and blood: three to one of British forces lie there.

It was, however, the aftermath of this battle that most deeply affected the American war effort. Even while the battle was in progress Lee had asked Washington what he meant by his remark that if Lee felt about the undertaking as he apparently did then he "should not have undertaken it." When confronted with this question Washington did not explain, and two days later Lee wrote to him stating that his remark on the battlefield "imply'd that I was guilty either of disobedience of orders, of want of conduct, or want of courage." Lee continued: "I think, Sir, I have a right to demand some reparation for the injury committed; and unless I can obtain it, I must, in justice to myself, when this campaign is closed . . . retire from a service, at the head of which is placed a man capable of offering such injuries."

Washington promptly replied by letter that he did not recall such "very singular expressions at the time of my meeting you, as you intimate." He added:

As soon as circumstances will permit, you shall have an opportunity to justify yourself to the army, to Congress, to America, and to the world in General; or of convincing them that you were guilty of a breach of orders, and of misbehavior before the enemy on the 28th Inst. in not attacking them as you had been directed and in making an unnecessary, disorderly, and shameful retreat.

This meant that he would call a court of inquiry as soon as time permitted.

Lee replied that, rather than call a court of inquiry, he preferred that Washington at once institute court-martial proceedings so that the matter could be handled without delay. To that end on June 30 Lee was "put under arrest." On July 1 Washington ordered a court-martial and appointed General Stirling as president of the proceedings.

On July 4, Major General Charles Lee was charged with three counts:

First: For disobedience of orders, in not attacking the enemy on the 28th of June, agreeable to repeated instructions.

Secondly: For misbehavior before the enemy on the same day, by making an unnecessary, disorderly, and shameful retreat.

Thirdly: For disrespect to the Commander in Chief, in two letters dated the 1st of July and the 28th of June.

When the court-martial convened, General Lee pleaded not guilty to all three counts. The court continued to receive testimony from officers and men for a month and a half, at various locations of the army. On August 12, the court found Lee guilty on all three counts, deleting in the second count the word "shameful" and adding the words "in some few instances" in front of the words "disorderly retreat." As a result, he was "suspended from any command in the armies of the United States of North America, for a term of twelve months." Congress approved the verdict on December 5.

Lee never again saw service. After his court-martial and conviction, he moved to a farm in what is now West Virginia, where he died October 2, 1782, to the end vigorously defending his actions at Monmouth.

## **Who Was Molly Pitcher?**

Molly Pitcher died in 1833, fifty-four years after her day of glory at Monmouth. Because she had buried two husbands and her only son, no one provided a monument for her. Her grave in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, remained unmarked until 1876. When a

monument to commemorate her deeds was finally placed over her grave through the efforts of a foster son, Wesley Miles, and financed by many small contributions from the spirited citizens of Carlisle, she was properly identified as the widow of John McCauly, her second husband. The monument bears the inscription: "Mollie McCauly Renowned in History as Mollie Pitcher, The Heroine of Monmouth. Died Jan. 1833 Aged 79 Years. Erected by the Citizens of Cumberland County. July 4, 1876."

It was not until seventy-two years after her death that John B. Landis of Carlisle became the first, in print, to claim that he knew the maiden name of Molly Pitcher as well as the name of her first husband whose gun she manned at Monmouth. In his book *Molly Pitcher*, published in 1905, Landis said that Molly was a German woman named Mary Ludwig and that her first husband's name was John Casper Hays. This claim, although undocumented, was generally accepted as fact for the next half century or more.

In 1971 this writer found information showing that Molly Pitcher as well as her husband had been incorrectly identified by Landis. This led to the publication in 1972 of *A Molly Pitcher Chronology*. This documented work shows that Molly Pitcher was Mary, an Irishwoman, her maiden name yet unknown, and that her first husband was not John Casper Hays, but William Hays. William was a gunner in Captain Francis Procter Jr.'s company of artillery, which was a part of Colonel Thomas Procter's Pennsylvania artillery regiment, later to be designated the Fourth Continental Artillery.

## For Further Reading

All known publications about the battle of Monmouth are included in *Monmouth County During the Revolution: A Bibliography of Published Works*, compiled by Robert F. Van Benthuyzen (West Long Branch, N.J.: Monmouth College, 1971). Similarly, known maps of the battle made during the war by American or British cartographers are listed in *American Maps and Map Makers of the Revolution* and *British Maps of the American Revolution*, by Peter J. Guthorn (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1966, 1972). An overall description and situation maps of each

phase of the battle are found in Samuel S. Smith's *The Battle of Monmouth* (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1964). The same author's *A Molly Pitcher Chronology* (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1972) offers an answer to the puzzling identity of Molly Pitcher and her role in the battle.

For accounts of the battle of Monmouth by participants, the reader is directed to Major John Andre, *Major Andre's Journal* (New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1968); William B. Willcox, ed., *The American Rebellion...*, Sir Henry Clinton's memoir of his involvement in the war (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1954); Lloyd A. Brown and Howard H. Peckham, eds., *The Revolutionary War Journal of Henry Dearborn, 1775-1783* (Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1939); Francis S. Drake, *Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox* (Boston, 1873); and *Private Yankee Doodle; a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, by Joseph Plumb Martin, edited by George F. Scheer (New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1968). In addition one may wish to investigate the published papers of General Lee: *The Lee Papers, 1754-1811* (New York: printed for the New-York Historical Society, 1872-1875).

The reader should also consult several of the other pamphlets in this series. Mark E. Lender's *The New Jersey Soldier* describes the social standing of the men who composed the Continental army and militia units which fought in battles such as Monmouth. Thomas Fleming's *The Battle of Springfield* and Kemble Widmer's *The Christmas Campaign: The Ten Days of Trenton and Princeton* portray many of the Monmouth participants in the other major battles of the war fought in New Jersey. Lewis F. Owen's *The Revolutionary Struggle in New Jersey, 1776-1783* offers an overview of military affairs in the state, and places the battle of Monmouth in the context of military operations in New Jersey. The Lender, Fleming, Widmer and Owen pamphlets were all published by the New Jersey Historical Commission in 1975.

Finally the reader who wishes additional information on George Washington's role in the battle of Monmouth should consult Douglas Southall Freeman's monumental *George Washington, A Biography*, 7 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948-1957).

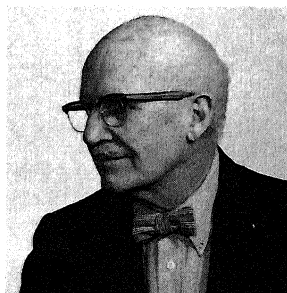
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SAMUEL STELLE SMITH is the author of several books on the American Revolution: *The Battle of Monmouth* (1964), *The Battle of Trenton* (1965), *The Battle of Princeton* (1967), and *Fight for the Delaware, 1777* (1970). Forthcoming volumes include *The Battle of Brandywine*, and *The War in the North, 1780*.



T.M.