

On June 17, 1778 the British, who had decided to abandon Philadelphia and concentrate their forces at New York, crossed the Delaware under their new chief, Sir Henry Clinton, and started across New Jersey. Washington followed, arriving at Lambertville on the 21st, where he again stopped at the Holcombe house, which is still standing. In nearby Hopewell during an eclipse of the sun three days later Washington decided to risk a major attack on the British, though a majority of his staff voted against it. At Kingston, where he arrived June 25, he found awaiting him a magnificent white battle steed, a gift from Governor Livingston.

The campaign that was to end at the Battle of Monmouth was on. Small detachments were sent out to make rapier attacks on the enemy's flanks, and an advance force of 5,000 men was sent ahead to make the first contact, as second in command General Lee demanded that he and not Lafayette lead the advance troops in spite of the fact that he had been opposed to the action originally. Lee's intrusion, like the villain's appearance on the screen, was a signal for trouble ahead.

Washington stopped over at Cranbury in Middlesex County on the 26th, and on the same day, because of unbearably hot weather, Clinton rested at Monmouth Court House, now Freehold. His wagon-train, 11 miles long, had taken 9 days to travel 60 miles. On the 27th Washington moved to a point three miles west of Englishtown and here instructed Lee to be ready to attack Clinton's army the following day, before the British should reach a safer position in the Navesink Highlands. After midnight on the 28th Alexander Hamilton rode to Lee's headquarters with written orders to attack. Zero hour was the moment the British caravan got under way. The plan was to have Lee distract Clinton so that Washington with his main force of about 8,000 men could crush the enemy's entire resistance.

But erratic Lee never began the action. About eight o'clock on Sunday morning, June 28, 1778, after several delays, he made contact with the enemy, only to fall back at once without even attempting to put up a fight. Washington, after breakfast at the home of Dr. English in Englishtown, rode toward Freehold. Word of Lee's retreat reached him at the outskirts of the village. Spurring his horse along the sandy road in the broiling sun, he sent two of Lee's retreating regiments into the woods, where they would not be seen by his oncoming troops, and immediately dispatched two of his own regiments to check the British until he could arrange the main army in battle formation.

At this hectic moment General Lee, proud of his retreat over difficult terrain and believing that his splendid military judgment had saved his force from destruction, rode directly up to Washington. Rarely known to utter a profane word, Washington cursed Lee roundly that day. One general claimed that the commander "swore till the leaves shook on the trees...like an angel from Heaven." Lee himself later wrote: "I was disconcerted, astonished and confounded by the words and manner in which his Excellency accosted me."

But Washington had no time to argue with Lee. He ordered Lee's weary regiments to retire to Englishtown and threw the main army against Clinton's advancing troops. All day the fighting raged, with Anthony Wayne, Baron von Steuben and the legendary lady known as Molly Pitcher acquitting themselves nobly. The heat was infernal: soldiers on both sides died of sunstroke. Washington's beautiful white horse, worn out from the heat and constant running, sank beneath the weight of his master and never rose again. Leaping to another horse brought by his Negro servant, the commander dashed on to direct events in another part of the field. In late afternoon Clinton withdrew, and Washington formed new lines to continue the attack. But night made it impossible to press the advan-