

# Real Heroes Make a Difference

During the revolutionary war the "Continental Army or the Americans" were camped at Fort - Lee (Fort Lee, a town in northern New Jersey was named after the military fort that was erected there in revolutionary times in honor of General Charles Lee). The fort was placed on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River whereas Fort Washington was placed on the opposite side in New York. Soldiers in the two forts watched over the shipping lanes up and down the Hudson, thus providing an important strategic location for both commerce and security.

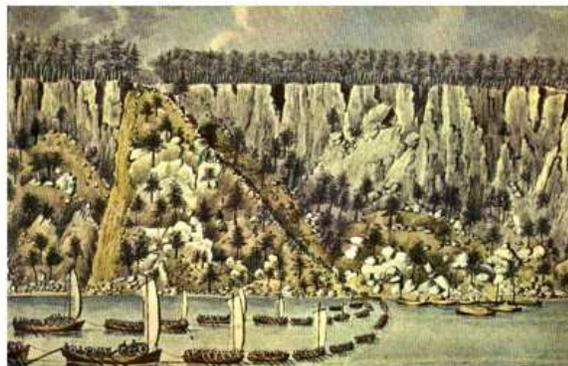
In 1776 the Americans had fought the English forces on Long Island, Manhattan, White Plains and Mount Vernon. They lost each battle and were continually pushed further and further back. Eventually they even lost Fort Washington. General Washington's troops wound up in New Jersey where they were encamped at Fort Lee considering their next move. Suddenly the English decided to launch a surprise attack with a pre dawn raid on the fort in hopes of capturing the continental army and General Washington himself.

Their plan was simple; sail across the Hudson after dark about 5 miles north of the fort, then scale the palisade cliffs, regroup at the top and sneak southward to the fort under cover of darkness attacking before daylight. It was a great plan and would have worked too; however what they did not plan on was the *lone rider* who happened to see their boats crossing in the dark. He quickly realized what might be going on and raced south to warn Washington. Washington accepted his report and made the now famous "**retreat to victory**," the longest retreat in military history...(they went all the way through New Jersey into Delaware). The small force at Fort Lee held off the English for a while, but was eventually overcome and surrendered. However, Washington and the bulk of his forces escaped and regrouped in Delaware gaining greater support and troops for the next campaign. These dark days for the continental army inspired Thomas Paine to write the immortal words; "There are the times that try men's souls." Many historians say this was the turning point in the war. Through the retreat Washington bought precious time to regroup, raise more troops, and garner greater support for the war effort; eventually launching effective counter attacks on the English, particularly the [Battle of Trenton](#) , and eventually winning the war of Independence.

*The fall of the larger and stronger Fort Washington on November 16 made the New Jersey location untenable. On November 20, more than 4,000 British soldiers under Lord [Charles Cornwallis](#) crossed the Hudson about six miles north of Fort Lee, in hopes to trap the [American army](#) between the Hackensack and Hudson rivers.*

<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1288.html>

So what of the lone "[Closter Rider](#)" (Closter is the town about 5 miles north of Fort Lee)?



Well, no one really knows as no one knows his name or identity. He simply was out one cool November night perhaps for a stroll or ride by the cliffs, to take a smoke on his corn cob pipe, possibly after having a quarrel with his wife...no one really knows...but what did happen was that he saw the ships and realized the seriousness of the moment and took action...that action turned out to be one of the most significant moments in American history, for if Washington had been captured, the future of America would have certainly turned out quite different. To this very day his identity remains a mystery; no one knows who he was, a farmer, a shopkeeper, a soldier...one thing is for sure, he was truly a hero and did a great deed that night that will never be forgotten for all history.... **real heroes make a difference!**