



Fatal Sunday: George Washington, the Monmouth Campaign, and the Politics of Battle by Mark Edward Lender and Garry Wheeler Stone.

Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2016. Pp. xxi, 600. ISBN 978-0-8061-5335-3.

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There are several existing books on the Revolutionary War Battle of Monmouth, fought in New Jersey on 28 June 1778. All have added something to our understanding of the engagement, the conflicts that surrounded it, and its effects. None, however, is as comprehensive as *Fatal Sunday*, by historians Mark Edward Lender (Kean Univ.) and Garry Wheeler Stone.¹ It is now the definitive study of the battle. The authors skillfully synthesize a vast quantity of documentary evidence and recent archaeological analyses of the battlefield. Besides producing a detailed description of the battle itself, they situate it within the larger context of contemporary events, demonstrating that its causes and results were far more important than previously recognized. Among other claims, the authors argue that the battle solidified George Washington's position as commander in chief of the Continental Army for the remainder of the war.

Chapters 1-5 (of a total of nineteen) describe the circumstances that led to the battle, including British General Sir William Howe's 1777 campaign, which captured Philadelphia but failed to clinch a British victory, and the American triumph at Saratoga, which brought France into the war on the patriot side. This drastic shift in British fortunes led officials in London to order Howe's replacement, Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, to abandon Philadelphia and concentrate his forces at New York to meet the new strategic threat posed by the French.

The authors next turn to the perilous American military situation, particularly the beleaguered position of General Washington. After his defeats in the 1777 Pennsylvania campaign and amid the struggles of the Continental Army at Valley Forge, many members of Congress and some army officers began to doubt Washington's capabilities as commander in chief and privately considered replacing him with the victor of Saratoga, Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates. This alleged "Conway Cabal" (named after Maj. Gen. Thomas Conway, one of Washington's critics),² in the authors' opinion, never existed in a formal sense. Still, they note that Washington, his devoted aides, and loyal generals firmly believed there was indeed a plot to remove him. While Washington succeeded in navigating these dangerous political waters, he also recognized that he must defeat the enemy on the battlefield to prove his effectiveness as a commander. Thus, when the British army withdrew from Philadelphia, he welcomed the chance to engage the royal forces and silence his critics.

On the British side, Lender and Stone also assess the difficult position of Clinton, who had to evacuate the troops at Philadelphia, along with many loyalists and all the army's supplies and equipment. Clinton would welcome a battle during his retreat in the hope that defeating at least part of the Continental Army might restore British morale, besides weakening his opponent.

The authors evaluate the rival armies' numbers, equipment, and doctrine. They give special attention to Inspector General Friedrich von Steuben's training of the American soldiers at Valley Forge. In

1. Stone formerly worked for the Monmouth Battlefield State Park.

2. The authors identify Pennsylvania congressman Maj. Gen. Thomas Mifflin as the leading advocate of replacing Washington.

addition, they discuss the debate among American commanders over the best response to the British evacuation: some generals urged an attack on Philadelphia before the British withdrawal, others argued for a rapid march and attack on New York, and a few overoptimistically proposed striking at both cities. Washington, with his characteristic blend of caution and eagerness to fight under advantageous conditions, preferred attacking the British Army during its retreat across New Jersey.

Although the militia often gets short shrift in accounts of the Monmouth campaign, the present book gives due credit to Maj. Gen. Philemon Dickinson and his New Jersey militia. Tracing in detail the movements of both armies in the days before the battle, the authors highlight Dickinson's efforts to cooperate with the Continental Army by deploying his militiamen to harass and hamper the British march.

Chapter 5 concerns the battle's most controversial figure, American Maj. Gen. Charles Lee, Washington's second in command. Lee had been captured by the British in December 1776 and only recently exchanged. Although some historians claim Lee became a traitor during his captivity, Lender and Stone dismiss the claim; they admit Lee composed a document expressing his views on how the British could suppress the rebellion, but maintain that he never actually passed that document to his captors and probably wrote it simply to occupy his time. They see Lee as an experienced and highly capable officer who suffered from a lack of political savvy and a propensity for careless talk, often involving criticism of his army colleagues. This trait naturally angered Washington at a time when he was rightly sensitive about threats to his position.

The next section of the volume, chapters 6–15, concentrates on the events immediately before the battle itself. The authors discuss the difficulties encountered by the British: intense heat, poor roads, and the need to move a large baggage train a distance of ninety miles. Clinton managed the march with skill, despite failing to prevent some of his troops from plundering and burning rebel property. Lender and Stone also discuss Clinton's decision to proceed to Sandy Hook instead of South Amboy, whence his army would be transported to New York. They believe Clinton's choice of route and his order to halt the army at Monmouth Court House on 26 June were justified, since he wished to rest his soldiers and induce Washington to attack him on good defensive ground.

Unencumbered by a long baggage train and not faced with delaying actions, the American army outmarched the British, though Washington had to guess Clinton's route. To impede the British and provide additional Continental troops if he found an opportunity to attack, Washington dispatched a force under Col. Daniel Morgan to cooperate with the militia. By 27 June, Washington decided to seek battle if conditions were favorable; he gave Lee command of the Continental vanguard with discretionary orders to attack. The very next day, Lee found himself facing a British counterattack on difficult terrain. When some of his troops withdrew without orders, he initiated a retreat to a more defensible position. During this maneuver, Washington arrived on the field and admonished Lee for withdrawing; the authors stress, however, that the encounter, while heated, was not the harsh confrontation historians frequently describe. Moreover, they note, Washington actually ordered Lee to conduct a delaying action while the main army deployed, which he did very effectively.

The authors devote several chapters to a detailed account of the battle itself. The Continental Army occupied the high ground where Lee had intended to place his troops and there withstood British attacks. Troop movements, the effects of terrain, and the lengthy artillery bombardment are all covered. There is also an interesting vignette about the frenetic actions of Washington's aide, Alexander Hamilton. In their battle narrative and throughout the volume, the authors present events from the perspective of both sides, unlike other, typically American-focused battle histories.

Chapters 16–19 concern the consequences of the battle for both sides. The authors argue that, though the fighting ended in a tactical draw, Washington's aides and supporters succeeded in portray-

ing Monmouth as an American victory, thus restoring his reputation and ensuring his retention of command. Lee's subsequent court-martial and eventual dismissal from the army further strengthened Washington's position. The authors treat Lee with commendable fairness, asserting that his performance during the battle was competent. They attribute his troubles to his quarrelsome personality and quest for vindication from an officer corps that disliked him personally. For General Clinton, the battle was, of course, a major disappointment. While he managed to move his supply train to New York unscathed, his army suffered significant casualties in failing to defeat the Continentals. The morale of both his troops and the British public sank yet lower.

The authors delve into several other aspects of the battle, finding, for instance, that evidence for any good effects of von Steuben's training is inconclusive. They also note that, while American forces performed well in the fighting at Monmouth, their battlefield communications and staff work were deficient, as demonstrated by the fact that Morgan's detached force could not be brought into action. Further, the Continentals suffered from a lack of cavalry and Washington was slow in bringing up his troops on the morning of the battle, though his tactical management of the actual fighting was otherwise highly competent.

Moving beyond an account of the combat, the authors explore the "Molly Pitcher" legend, concluding that very likely several women heroically assisted American artillery crews at Monmouth. They also point out that the battle was not, as commonly believed, the last major engagement in the northern theater, a distinction that belongs to the battles at Connecticut Farms and Springfield, New Jersey, in June 1780. The book's epilogue focuses on the memory and commemoration of the Battle of Monmouth by the American public and historians in the two centuries since the event.

The book does have a few blemishes. The information on the strength of British infantry companies is inaccurate and the estimate of British casualties relies heavily on American sources and thus may well be overstated. There is no mention of Lt. Col. Henry Lee's defense of (no relation) Charles Lee's conduct at Monmouth in his memoirs, which would have strengthened the authors' own assessment of the general. These minutiae are unlikely to be noticed except by a handful of specialists in the field.

Fatal Sunday is a thorough, engrossing, and expertly contextualized account, highlighting both the military and the political aspects of the Monmouth campaign. It deserves a place on the bookshelves of both general readers and scholars interested in the American Revolution.