

“FORT LEE”

Fort Lee found its place in American history during the 1776 British campaign to control New York City and the Hudson River.

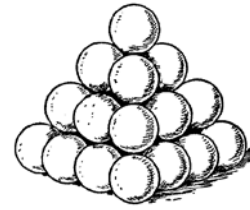
Having resisted the British siege of Boston, General Washington turned his attention to the defense of New York City and the Hudson River Valley. Besides constructing fortifications at New York and Long Island, Washington felt it imperative for the army to build and strengthen its defenses along the Hudson River.

The British plan, meanwhile, was to control the length of the Hudson with the overwhelming dominance of its Royal Navy. This plan, if successful, would split the Colonies in half—bringing an early end to the American rebellion.

In July 1776, the Americans began to fortify this site, which they first named “Fort Constitution.” The name “Fort Lee” was later adopted to honor General Charles Lee, whose army had achieved a major victory at Charleston, South Carolina, that summer. During this time, on the high ground of northern Manhattan opposite Fort Lee, work had already begun on Fort Washington. On July 12, Admiral Richard Howe sent two British ships, the *Rose* and the *Phoenix*, up the Hudson. Cannon fire from Fort Washington alone had little effect on their passage. Washington ordered work on Fort Lee to advance as quickly as possible.

At Rufus Putnam’s suggestion, obstructions were sunk in the river channel

between the forts. With these in place, and artillery fire from the twin forts, the Americans believed that no British ships would be able to sail past without sustaining severe losses.



As the summer of 1776 went on, the largest force of British ships ever to have left English shores was arriving in New York Harbor. By mid-August, Sir William Howe, British Commander-in-Chief (and brother to Admiral Howe), had assembled an army of over 31,000 British and Hessian troops on Staten Island.

On August 22, the British attacked Long Island and five days later forced the Americans to retreat to New York City (at the time, the city comprised only the southern tip of Manhattan Island). In September, the British took New York City and the rest of Manhattan—except for Fort Washington.

On November 16, Fort Washington fell to an overwhelming assault by Crown forces, which captured more than 3,000 American troops.

Washington realized that with the loss of Fort Washington, Fort Lee was of little military value. He ordered General Nathanael Greene, the commander at Fort Lee, to begin preparations to evacuate the fort. An orderly withdrawal, however, was not in store for the Americans...

On November 20, just four days after taking Fort Washington, General Howe ordered General Charles Cornwallis to convey 5,000 men across the Hudson several miles north of Fort Lee. When word of the advancing army reached Washington, he ordered an immediate retreat, before the Fort Lee troops could be cut off and captured by the British force. Most of the American supplies and artillery had to be left behind. These were indeed among the darkest days for the cause of American independence, leading Thomas Paine to pen his famous words,

“These are the times that try men’s souls...”

- *To protect our exhibits and displays...* Food, drinks, and smoking are not allowed in the building.
- *To protect the natural beauty of the park...* Litter must be placed in the proper receptacles. Do not disturb plants or wildlife. Fires are prohibited.
- *To insure the health and safety of our visitors...* Alcohol is prohibited in the Park. Pets are prohibited in the Park. Bicycles are prohibited beyond the parking area. Climbing on trees, etc. is prohibited.
- *To preserve the dignity of the historic section...* Climbing on gun batteries is prohibited. Picnicking is permitted only at the north end of the Historic Park. Ball playing, kites, etc. are not permitted.
- *To avoid confusion...* Groups of 25 or more must call in advance: 201-461-1776.

FORT LEE HISTORIC PARK



Visitor Center open Wednesday – Sunday
10 AM – 4:45 PM

Grounds open 8 AM to dusk

Metered Parking
7 days



Hudson Terrace
Fort Lee, New Jersey 07024

201 461-1776
flhp@njpalisades.org

PARK GROUNDS

On a cliff-top bluff where the Continental Army positioned its batteries over the Hudson in 1776, the 33-acre grounds of Fort Lee Historic Park blend scenic beauty and history.

At the north end of the Historic Park, two overlooks command spectacular views of the George Washington Bridge, the Hudson River, and the skyline of upper Manhattan. (Restrooms and a drinking fountain are available in season.)

In the southern portion of the Park, winding pathways lead past a reconstructed blockhouse to gun batteries and firing steps. Opposite the barbette battery, authentically recreated eighteenth-century soldiers' and officers' huts, with a well, woodshed, and baking oven, serve as the focal point for historical programs.

VISITOR CENTER

The Visitor Center is at the heart of the Historic Park, providing information on the role of Fort Lee in the American Revolution. Two floors of displays help tell the story of the tumultuous New York campaign of the fall of 1776—culminating in the Continental Army's "Retreat to Victory" across the Jerseys.

Construction of the 11,000 square-foot building began in 1974 and was completed for the American Bicentennial celebration in 1976. In addition to its historical features, the facility contains a 150-seat auditorium, a gift shop, restrooms, drinking fountain, vending machine, and information desk. The main floor is barrier-free.



PROGRAMS

SCHOOL YEAR. From September through December and March through June, schoolchildren studying the American Revolution come to Fort Lee to experience life as recruits in an eighteenth-century army. This five-hour living history program combines discussion, demonstration, and participation to give students a hands-on lesson in Colonial life. Information about fees and how to reserve for your class is available at the information desk.

SPECIAL EVENTS. Throughout the year, the Historic Park serves as a site for cultural, historical, and recreational programs. Lecture programs are held at the Visitor Center, while at the southern end of the Historic Park, staff and volunteers can be seen interpreting eighteenth-century ways. Call or stop by the Visitor Center for details, or visit us online at njpalisades.org.

