

maneuvers required to successfully pull it off. In addition, several other factors combined to thwart Washington's attempt to annihilate the enemy. Sullivan's Division was an hour late in leaving camp; they had only reached Chestnut Hill by the time the sun began to rise, thus eliminating a surprise attack. Even if they had reached their destination on time, British patrols had discovered the American advance at 3 a.m., and Howe, though uncertain of the number of Americans moving toward the town had alerted his troops. A guide for one of the divisions lost his way; Smallwood, as noted above, could not follow Washington's instructions on how to reach the town. A heavy fog enveloped the town just as the Americans approached, which, with the addition of smoke from cannon and gun fire, reduced visibility so greatly that troops under Anthony Wayne and Adam Stephen, exchanged several rounds firing at each other, causing both units to flee in panic. This occurred just at the time Washington was about to order a forced march toward Philadelphia, because despite the fog, late arrival of the troops, and stiff resistance by the enemy, Washington believed the British were in retreat across the Schuylkill. Before he could issue the order, he was faced by his own frantic troops fleeing in uncontrolled retreat. Some were holding empty cartouche boxes--each man had been allowed only forty rounds of ammunition--as a silent, but salient, explanation for their flight. Others screamed that Stephen had ordered the retreat, some said they had been outflanked by the British. Washington and his officers tried in vain to halt the retreat, but as he later reported to Congress "The troops began suddenly to retreat, and entirely left the field in spite of every effort that could be made to rally them." Incredibly, the whole attack was over shortly after 10 a.m., and Washington did not know why. His panicked men continued their flight, and the general had difficulty reorganizing them. When Washington once more had his men under control, he marched them back to Pennypacker's Mill, where, as one captain wrote: "Here we old soldiers had marched forty miles. We eat nothing and drank nothing but water on the tour."

What had caused the panic when, in Washington's opinion, the Americans were virtually at the point of breaking through the center of British resistance? Most cited the dense fog and smoke, which made it virtually impossible to distinguish friend from foe as the cause. Tench Tilghman, for example, wrote his father on October 6, that "everything was in our hands," and that fog was what caused the exchange of fire between Wayne's and Stephen's men, thus leading to the rout. Thomas Paine claimed that many of the Americans were wearing red uniforms, thus compounding the problem of distinguishing the red-coated enemy from fellow comrades. General