

George Washington to Artemas Ward, et al, September 8, 1775, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor.

***To THE MAJOR AND BRIGADIER GENERALS¹**

Camp at Cambridge, September 8, 1775.

Gentlemen: As I mean to call upon you in a day or two for your opinions upon a point of a very Interesting nature to the well being of the Continent in general, and this Colony in particular; I think it proper, indeed an incumbent duty on me previous to this meeting, to intimate to the end and design of it, that you may have time to consider the matter with that deliberation and attention which the Importance of it requires.

It is to know whether, in your judgment, we cannot make a successful attack upon the Troops in Boston, by means of Boats, cooperated by an attempt upon their Lines at Roxbury. The success of such an Enterprize depends, I well know, upon the all wise disposer of Events, and is not within the reach of human wisdom to foretell the Issue; but, if the prospect is fair, the undertaking is justifiable under the following, among other reasons which might be assigned.

The Season is now fast approaching when warm, and comfortable Barracks must be erected for the Security of the Troops, against the inclemency of the Winter; large and costly provision must be made in the article of Wood, for the Supply of the Army; and after all that can be done in this way, it is but too probable that Fences, Woods, Orchards, and even Houses themselves, will fall Sacrifices to the want of Fuel, before the end of the

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Winter. A very considerable difficulty, if not expence, must accrue on acct. of Cloathing for the Men now engaged in the Service, and if they do not enlist again, this difficulty will be Increased to an almost insurmountable degree. Blankets I am inform'd are now much wanted, and not to be got, how then shall we be able to keep Soldiers to their duty, already impatient to get home, when they come to feel the Severity of Winter without proper Covering? If this Army should not Incline to engage for a longer term than the first of January, what then is to be the consequence, but that you must either be obliged to levy new Troops and thereby have two Setts (or partly so) in pay at the same time, or, by disbanding one set before you get the other, expose the Country to desolation, and the Cause perhaps to irretrievable Ruin. These things are not unknown to the Enemy, perhaps it is the very ground they are building on, if they are not waiting a reinforcement; and if they are waiting for succours, ought it not to give a Spur to the attempt? Our Powder (not much of which would be consumed in such an enterprize) without any certainty of Supply, is daily wasting. and to sum up the whole, in spite of every saving that can be made, the expence of supporting this Army will so far exceed any Idea that was form'd in Congress of it, that I do not know what will be the consequences.

These among many other reasons which might be assigned, induce me to wish a speedy finish of the dispute; but, to avoid these evils we are not to loose sight of the difficulties, the hazard, and the loss that may accompany the attempt, nor, what will be the probable consequences of a failure.

That every circumstance for and against this measure may be duely weighted, that there may be time for doing of it, and nothing of this Importance resolved on but after mature deliberation, I give this previous notice of the Intention of calling you together on Monday next, at Nine o'clock, at which time you are requested to attend at head Quarters. It is unnecessary I am perswaded, to recommend Secrecy, as the Success of the Enterprize, (if undertaken) must depend in a great measure upon the suddenness of the stroke. I am with the greatest esteem, etc.²

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1aj. Gens. Artemas Ward, Charles Lee, and Israel Putnam; Brig. Gens. John Thomas, Joseph Spencer, William Heath, John Sullivan, Nathanael Greene, and Horatio Gates.

The council of war met (September 11) and decided against the attempt. Sir William Howe wrote to Governor Legge, of Nova Scotia (September 4) in explanation of the British inactivity: "The situation of the king's troops and that of the rebels is nearly the same as when I had the honor of writing you last. They are entrenched upon every advantageous spot, and we are so strongly posted here that we wish to tempt them to attack us, which if they do not shortly do, perhaps we may try our fortune against them; but we are so well prepared upon these heights [Charlestown] that it would be imprudent to attack them before we give up their coming to us."