

**George Washington to Charles Lee, January 8, 1776,
Orders, The Writings of George Washington from
the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C.
Fitzpatrick, Editor.**

***INSTRUCTIONS TO MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES LEE¹**

Head Quarters at Cambridge, January 8, 1776.

Having undoubted Intelligence of the fitting out of a Fleet at Boston, and of the Imbarkation of Troops from thence, which from the Season of the year and other Circumstances, must be destined for a Southern Expedition. And having such Information as I can rely on, that the Inhabitants, (or great part of them) on Long Island in the Colony of New York, are not only Inemical to the Rights and Liberties of America; but by their Conduct and Publick professions, have discoverd a disposition to aid and assist in the reduction of that Colony to Ministerial Tyranny: And as it is a matter of the utmost Importance to prevent the Enemy from taking Possession of the City of New York and the North River, as they will thereby Command the Country, and the communication with Canada; it is of too much consequence (since we find by his Majesty's Speech to Parliament, that, disregarding the Petition from the United Voice of America, nothing less than the total Subversion of her Rights, will satisfie him) to hazard such a Post at so alarming a crisis

You will, therefore, with such Volunteers as are willing to join you, and can be expeditiously raised, repair to the City of New York, and calling upon the Commanding Officer of the Forces of New Jersey for such Assistance as he can afford, and you shall require, you are to put that City into the best Posture of Defence which the Season and Circumstances will admit of. Disarming all such persons upon long Island and elsewhere

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(and if necessary otherwise securing them), whose conduct, and declarations have rendered them justly suspected of Designs unfriendly to the Views of Congress.

You are also to enquire into the State and Condition of the Fortifications up the North River, and, as far as shall be consistent with the Orders of Congress, or not repugnant to them, to have the Works guarded against Surprizes from a body of Men which might be transported by Water near the place, and then March'd in upon the back of them.

You will also Endeavour to have the Medicines, Shirts, and Blankets (now at New York) &c belonging to the Ministerial Troops secured, and forwarded to this Army. Captn. Sears² can give you particular Information concerning them.

In all other Matters relative to the execution of the general Plan you are going upon, your own judgment (as it is impossible with propriety to give particular direction) and the advice of those whom you have reasons to believe are hearty in the cause, must direct; keeping always in view the declar'd Intention's of Congress.

I am perswaded, I need not recommend dispatch in the Prosecution of this business; the Importance alone is a sufficient excitement. I would advise a dismissal of the Volunteers (whose necessary Expences will be borne) so soon as the Service will admit of it; and, that you endeavour as much as possible, at all times, to be in readiness to join the Army if the exigency of our Affairs here, should call for it.

General Lee had just returned from Newport, R. I., and had written to the Commander in Chief (January 5): "New York must be secured, but it will never, I am afraid, be secured by direct order of the Congress, for obvious reasons. They find themselves awkwardly situated on this head. You must step in to their relief. I am sensible that no men can be spared from the lines, in our present circumstances; but I would propose that you should detach me into Connecticut and lend your name for collecting a body of Volunteers. I am assured that I shall find no difficulty in assembling a sufficient number for the purposes wanted. This body, in conjunction (if there should appear occasion to summon them) with the Jersey Regiment, under the Command of Lord Stirling now at Elizabeth Town, will effect the security of New York, and the expulsion or suppression of that dangerous banditti of Tories, who have appeared on Long Island with the professed intention of acting against the authority of the Congress. Not to crush these Serpents, before their rattles are grown, would be ruinous....this manœuvre I not only think prudent and right, but absolutely necessary to our salvation; and if it meets, as I ardently hope it will,

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with your approbation, the sooner it is enter'd upon the better; indeed, the delay of a single day may be fatal.”
Lee's letter is in the Washington Papers.

2ossibly Thomas Sears, who was a lieutenant colonel of New York Militia in 1778–79.