

GEN. WASHINGTON DESCRIBES THE CONTINENTAL ARMY AT VALLEY FORGE

The hardships that Washington's army faced during their winter OF 1777-78 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, are addressed in the following letter from Washington to the Continental Congress.

...I am now convinced, beyond a doubt that unless some great...change suddenly takes place...this Army must inevitably be reduced to one or other of these three things. Starve, dissolve, or disperse, in order to obtain subsistence in the best manner they can...



Yesterday afternoon...I order'd the Troops to be in readiness... when, behold! to my great mortification, I

was not only informed, but convinced, that the Men were unable to stir on Acct. of Provision, and that a dangerous Mutiny begun the Night before, and [which] with difficulty was suppressed by the spirited exertion's of some officers...This brought forth the only (cook)...in this Camp; and, (he said) that he had not a single hoof of any kind to Slaughter, and not more than 25. Barls. of Flour!...

All I could do...was, to send out a few light Parties to watch and harass the Enemy, whilst other Parties were instantly detached different ways to collect, if possible, as much Provision as would satisfy...three or four days bad weather would prove our destruction. What then is to become of the Army this Winter? and if we are as often without Provisions now, as with it [them], what is to become of us in the Spring, when our force will be collected, with the aid perhaps of Militia, to take advantage of an early Campaign before the Enemy can be reinforced? These are considerations of great magnitude, meriting the closest attention...finding that the inactivity of the Army, (due to) lack of provisions, Cloaths, or other essentials...it is time to speak (up)...Soap, Vinegar and other Articles allowed by Congress we see none of nor have [we] seen [them] I believe since the battle of Brandywine; the first indeed we have now little occasion of [for] few men having more than one Shirt...and Some none at all...in addition to which as a proof of the little benefit received...and at the same time as a further proof of the inability of an Army under the circumstances...we have, by a field return this day made no less than 2898 Men now in Camp unfit for duty because they are bare foot and otherwise naked and by the same return it appears that our whole strength in continental Troops...amount to no more than 8200 In Camp fit for duty...Our Numbers fit for duty from the hardships and

exposures they have undergone, particularly on Acct. of Blankets (numbers being [having been] obliged and [still are to] do set up all Night by fires, instead of taking comfortable rest in a natural [and common] way) have decreased near 2000 Men.

We find Gentlemen (not) knowing whether the Army was really going into Winter Quarters or not...reprobating¹ the measure...as if they thought (the soldiers) were made of...stones and...insensible² of frost and Snow...but what makes this matter still more extraordinary in my eye is, that these very gentleman who were well apprised³ of the nakedness of the Troops...advised me, near a Month ago, to postpone the execution of a Plan, I was about to adopt...for seizing clothes, under strong assurances that an ample supply would be collected in ten days...(these have) yet come...I can assure those Gentlemen that it is a much easier and less distressing thing to draw (refuge) in a comfortable room by a good fire...than to occupy a cold bleak hill and sleep under frost and Snow without Cloaths or Blankets; however, although they seem to have little feeling for the naked, and distressed Soldier...

¹ Reprobating: declining

² Insensible: senseless

³ Apprised: informed