

*Sparks' Washington's Writings* (p. 352-354): This is a circular letter from General Washington dated January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1781 pleading with the governors of various states to take better care of their soldiers, lest the recent mutiny should spread to the rest of the Continental Army.

TO MESHECH WEARE, PRESIDENT OF  
NEW HAMPSHIRE.

New Windsor, 5 January, 1781.

SIR,

It is with extreme anxiety and pain of mind I find myself constrained to inform your Excellency, that the event I have long apprehended would be the consequence of the complicated distresses of the army, has at length taken place. On the night of the 1st instant, a mutiny was excited by the non-commissioned officers and privates of the Pennsylvania line, which soon became so universal as to defy all opposition. In attempting to quell this tumult in the first instance, some officers were killed, others wounded, and the lives of several common soldiers lost. Deaf to the arguments, entreaties, and utmost efforts of all their officers to stop them, they moved off from Morristown, the place of their cantonment, with their arms and six pieces of artillery. And, from accounts just received by General Wayne's aid-de-camp, they were still in a body on their march to Philadelphia to demand a redress of their grievances. At what point this defection will stop, or how extensive it may prove, God only knows. At present the troops at the important posts in this vicinity remain quiet, not being acquainted with this alarming and unhappy affair; but how long they will remain so cannot be ascertained, as they labor under some of the same pressing hardships as the troops who have revolted.

The aggravated calamities and distresses that have resulted from the total want of pay for nearly twelve months, the want of clothing at a severe season, and not unfrequently the want of provisions, are beyond description. The circumstances will now point out

much more forcibly what ought to be done, than any thing that can possibly be said by me on the subject.

It is not within the sphere of my duty to make requisitions, without the authority of Congress, from individual States; but at such a crisis as this, and circumstanced as we are, my own heart will acquit me, and Congress and the States eastward of this, which, for the sake of despatch, I address, I am persuaded will excuse me, when once for all I give it decidedly as my opinion, that it is vain to think an army can be kept together much longer under such a variety of sufferings as ours has experienced, and that unless some immediate and spirited measures are adopted to furnish at least three months' pay to the troops in money, which will be of some value to them, and at the same time ways and means are devised to clothe and feed them better (more regularly I mean) than they have been, the worst that can befall us may be expected.

I have transmitted to Congress a copy of this letter, and have in the most pressing manner requested them to adopt the measure, which I have above recommended, or something similar to it; and as I will not doubt of their compliance, I have thought proper to give you this previous notice, that you may be prepared to answer the requisition.

As I have used every endeavour in my power to avert the evil, that has come upon us, so will I continue to exert every means I am possessed of to prevent an extension of the mischief; but I can neither foretell nor be answerable for the issue.

That you may have every information that an officer of rank and abilities can give of the true situation of our affairs, and the condition and temper of the troops, I have prevailed upon Brigadier-General Knox to be the bearer of this letter. To him I beg leave to

refer your Excellency for many matters, which would be too tedious for a letter. I have the honor to be, with great esteem and respect, &c.\*

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TO BRIGADIER-GENERAL KNOX.

New Windsor, 7 January, 1781.

DEAR SIR,

You will proceed with the despatches, with which you are charged, to the governors of the States of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and to the president of New Hampshire. You are acquainted with the subject of those despatches, in which the gentlemen to whom they are addressed are referred to you for a more particular account of the situation of the army, the causes of discontent in it, and the probable means of giving satisfaction to the soldiery. Upon the first two heads, you have no need of any instructions. What seems to me most essentially necessary to answer the end of the third, is an immediate supply of money and clothing; that is, of the former a sum equal to three months' pay at least of the new emission, or some other of equal value; of the latter a complete suit of clothes, not only for the men now in service, but for the number of recruits who are to join the army.

That you may be able to speak fully upon the article

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\* This letter was sent as a circular to the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. A letter was also written to Governor Clinton, requesting him to be prepared to call out the militia, in case the infection should extend to the troops in the neighbourhood of West Point, and the enemy should take advantage of this state of things, and come up the river in force, which could be done with the less difficulty, as the river was free from ice.