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Title: Letter from William Irvine to Joseph Reed

Date: August 9, 1781

Location: I-Purchase-1954-31

Contact:

Archives & Special Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Carlisle August 9th 1781.

Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of Your Excellency's favour of July the 22^d. ten Days after date. This morning I received a Letter from Colonel Wood, who has the Charge of the convention prisoners, with several extracts of Letters, giving intelligence of the Enemy's movements up the Chesapeake, and expressing fears, that they may attempt rescuing the prisoners.

As Lancaster & York Town are the places allowed for feeding the Troops, and directly in the rout to the Southward and also convenient to draw them together for the purpose of covering the country; should the Enemy land either at Baltimore or the Head of Elk: I have thought it proper to order all the recruits & others, fit for Service; to march immediately to these two places. I have about 300 Stand of Arms at York Town, but neither ammunition, Sents, Knapsacks nor Canteens. I think one Field piece will also be necessary — I have wrote to the Board of War, for a supply of the above named stores, but fear they may not have them all immediately in their power, and hope the Honourable Council, may afford some assistance. We shall likewise want Shoes & Coverts very much.

I am sorry to inform Your Excellency that no person has as yet undertaken to supply the Post at York with provisions. I can not say any thing of Lancaster — I should not trouble Your Excellency now with this business. Did I not think it of the utmost importance. Indeed, I am much at a Loss how to act. There appears an absolute necessity for calling as many Men as possible to these places, and yet — to order Officers & Men to where they are not acquainted, without a Shilling in their pockets & no provisions — is certainly hard. Mr Morris's conduct appears to me very extraordinary, and how he can suppose it possible to keep Men at this rate, is really mysterious.

Carlisle Augth 9 1781 from
General Towne

Answ. Aug. 27. 1781

I should have wrote him on the subject, but do not certainly know, whether I have any thing to do with him. As his agreement has been with the State, I presume they care to see that he performs it. However, if I misapprehend the Matter, shall be very much obliged to Your Excellency to put me right. In the mean time should I find it necessary to take the Field with what few Men can be collected, I know not how they are to be fed, and fear, I shall be reduced to the disagreeable necessity of taking it by force. Should Mr. Morris ever supply the Goods he has agreed to, yet this will not do in the Field, at the Distance perhaps of 50 or 60 Miles.

The Quarter Master Departments can not afford the smallest assistance, having neither Money nor Credit.

I have the honour to be
with great respect

Sir
Your Excellency's
most obedient humble Servant

Wm Towne

P.S.

I have called on the Volunteer Troop of Horse of this County to assemble at York Town, and will go there myself to inspect. I shall remain either at York Town or Lancaster, untill the movements of the Enemy are clearly understood.

IRVINE, William. (Member of the Continental Congress; Brigadier General in the American Revolution). L. S. 2pp, folio: Carlisle, August 9, 1781. (To the Governor of Pennsylvania).

Splendid war letter of great historical interest written less than two months before the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. The letter relates to the assembling of troops at York and Lancaster for the purpose of repelling a possible invasion of the state by the British force under Cornwallis. The latter was at this time fortifying Yorktown, but it was widely believed that he might attempt to march through Delaware and Pennsylvania and across New Jersey to join Clinton at New York, which indeed the British general did think of doing after it was too late. General Irvine's letter refers to the difficulty which faces his men as a result of the lack of provisions and equipment, mentions the failure of Robert Morris to provide supplies, and declares that he will be reduced to the disagreeable necessity of obtaining provisions by force. X The letter reads in part as follows: ". . . As Lancaster and York town are the places allowed for feeding the troops, and directly in the route to the Southward and also convenient to draw them together for the purpose of covering the country, should the enemy land either at Baltimore or the Head of Elk, I have thought it proper to order all the recruits and others fit for service to march immediately to these two places, I have about 300 stand of arms at York town, but neither ammunition, tents, knapsacks nor canteens. I think one field piece will also be necessary . . .

I am sorry to inform Your Excellency that no person has as yet undertaken to supply the post at York with provisions. I can not say anything of Lancaster . . . Indeed, I am much at a loss how to act. There appears an absolute necessity for calling as many Men as possible to their places, and yet, to order Officers and Men to where they are not acquainted, without a shilling in their pockets and no provisions, is certainly hard. Mr. Morris's conduct appears to me very extraordinary, and how he can suppose it possible to keep men at this rate, is really mysterious . . . In the mean time should I find it necessary to take the field with what few men can be collected, I know not how they are to be fed, and fear I shall be reduced to the disagreeable necessity of taking it by force," etc., etc.

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