

Letter from Nathanael Greene to George Washington, August 28-31, 1778

Camp near Newport August 28 1778

Sir

Your Excellencys favor of the 21st came to hand the evening of the 25th.

In my last I communicated to your Excellency the departure of the Count de Estaing with his fleet for Boston. This disagreeable event, has as I apprehended ruined all our operations. It struck such a panic among the Militia and Volunteers that they began to desert by Shoals. The fleet no sooner set sail than they began to be alarm'd for their safety. This misfortune damp'd the hopes of our Army and gave new Spirits to that of the Enemy.

We had a very respectable force as to numbers between Eight and Nine thousand rank & file upon the ground. Out of these we attempted to select a particular Corps to possess our selves of the Enemies Lines partly by force and partly by stratagem; but we could not make up the necessary number that was thought sufficient to warrant the attempt which was 5000 including the Continental & State Troops. This body was to consist of men that had been in actual service before not less than Nine months. However the men were not to be had; and if they could have been found there was more against it than for it. Col. Laurens was to have opened the passage by landing within the Enemies Lines and getting possession of a Redoubt at the head of Eastons beach. If we had failed in the attempt the whole party must have fallen a sacrifice for their situation would have been such that there was no possibility of getting off.

I shall inclose your Excellency a plan of the Enemies Works & of their strength from the best accounts we are able to get. They have never been out of their Lines since the siege began till Night before last. Col. Bruce came out with 150 men to take off a small Piquet of ours Posted at the neck of Eastons beach, he partly succeeded in the attempt by the carelessness of the old guard, he came over after dark and lay in Ambush that when the new guard went down to take their post the Enemy came upon their backs before they discovered them it being very dark. We lost 24 privates & two Subs.—Ten of the Piquet got off.

Our strength is now reduced from 9000 to between 4 and 5000. All our heavy Cannon on garrison carriages heavy & superfluous Stores of every kind are removed to the Main & to the North end of the Island where we intend to entrench and attempt to hold it and wait the chance of events. General Hancock is gone to Boston to forward the repairs of the fleet and to prepare the mind of the Count for a speedy return. How far he will succeed I cannot pretend to say. I think it a matter of some doubt yet whether the enemy will reinforce or take off this Garrison. If they expect a superior fleet from Europe they will reinforce, but if not they will remove the Garrison.

Your Excellency may rest assured that I have done every thing in my power to cultivate and promote a good understanding both with the Count and the Marquis and flatter myself that I am upon very good terms with them both. The Marquis's great thirst for glory and National attachment often runs him into errors. However he did everything to prevail on the Admiral to cooperate with us that man could do. People censure the Admiral with great freedom and many are imprudent enough to reproach the Nation through the Admiral. General Sullivan very imprudently issued something like a censure in General Orders, indeed it was an absolute censure. It opened the Mouths of the Army in very clamorous strains. The Gen^l was obliged to explain it away in a few days—The fermentation seems to be now subsiding and all things appear as if they would go smoothly on. The Marquis is going to Boston also to hasten the Count's return and if possible to get the French Troops to join the Land forces here which will more effectually interest the Count in the success of the expedition.

Five sail of British Ships has got into Newport within two Days past we have heard nor seen nothing of the Fleet of Transports your Excellency mentioned in your Letter to General Sullivan of the 23^d. If they arrive with a large reinforcement our Expedition is at an end. Unless it is by way of blockade and that will depend upon the French fleets being superior to that of the British.

General Sullivan has done every thing that could be expected and had the fleet cooperated with us as was at first intended and agreeable to the original plan of the expedition we must have been successful. I wish it was in my power to confirm General Sullivan's prediction of the 17th but I can not flatter myself with such an agreeable issue I

am sensible he is in common very sanguine but his expectations were not ill founded in the present case. We had every reason to hope for success from our numbers and from the enemies fears. Indeed General Pigot was heard to say the Garrison must fall unless they were speedily relieved by a British fleet. If we could have made a landing upon the South part of the Town two Days would have put us in compleat possession of it. Nothing was wanting to effect this but the cooperation of the fleet & french forces. The disappointment is vexatious and truly mortifying. The Garrison was so important and the reduction so certain, that I cannot with patience think of the event. The French Ship that was missing has got into Boston, the rest of the Fleet have not got there yet or at least we have no accounts of their Arrival.

We are very anxious to learn the condition of Lord Hows Fleet the French 74 that has got into Boston had an Engagement with a British 64. The Capt. & Lieut. of the former were both wounded one lost a Leg & the other an Arm.

Our Troops are in pretty good health and well furnished with Provisions and every thing necessary for carrying on the Expedition.

Our approaches were pushed on with great spirit while we had any hopes of the fleets cooperateng with us; but the People lost all relish for diging after that.

People are very anxious to hear the issue of General Lees tryal various are the conjectures; but every body agrees he is not acquitted.

Augt 31—Camp Tivertown

I wrote the foregoing and intended to have sent it by the express that went off in the morning but while I was writing I was inform'd the Express was gone and the change of situation and round of events that have since taken place, has prevented my forwarding what I had wrote as matters seemd to be coming to a crisis.

On the evening of the 29th the Army fell back to the North end of the Island. The next morning the enemy advanced upon us in two Columns upon the East & west road. Our Light Troops commanded by Col Livingston & Col Laurens attacked the heads of the Columns about 7 oClock in the morning, but were beat back, they were reenforced with a Regiment upon each road. The Enemy still provd too strong. General Sullivan formd the

Army in order of battle and resolvd to wait their approach upon the ground we were encamped on, and sent orders to the Light troops to fall back. The Enemy came up & formd upon Quaker Hill a very strong piece of ground within about one mile & a $\frac{1}{4}$ of our Line. We were well Posted with strong works in our rear and a strong redoubt in front partly upon the right of the Line. In this position a warm Cannonade commenced and lasted for several hours with continual Skirmishes on front of both Lines. About 2 oClock the Enemy began to advance in force upon our right as if they intended to dislodge us from the advance Redoubt. I had the command of the Right Wing after advanceing four Reg^{ts} and finding the enemy still gaining ground I advanced with two more Regiments of regular Troops and a Brigade of Militia and at the same time Gen. Sullivan orderd Col. Livingston with the Light Troops under his command to advance. We soon put the Enemy to the rout and I had the pleasure to see them run in worse disorder than they did at the battle of Monmouth. Our Troops behavd with great spirit and the brigade of Militia under the command of General Lovel advanced with great resolution and in good order and stood the fire of the Enemy with great firmness Lt Col. Livingston, Col. Jackson & Col. Henry B. Livingston did themselves great honor in the transactions of the Day but its not in my power to do justice to Col. Laurens who acted both the General & the Partizan. His command of regular Troops was small but he did every thing possible to be done by their numbers. He had two most Excellent Officers with him Lt Col. Fleury & Major Talbot.

The enemy fell back to their strong ground and the Day terminated with a Cannonade & Skirmishes. Both Armies continued in their position all Day yesterday Cannonadeing each every now and then. Last Night we effected a very good retreat without the loss of men or Stores.

We have not collected an account of the kild and wounded, but we judge our loss amounts to between two & three hundred and that of the Enemies to much more.

We are going to be Posted all round the Shores as a guard upon them & in that state to wait for the return of the Fleet, which by the by I think will not be in a hurry.

It is asserted that Lord How arrivd last Night with his fleet & the reenforcement mentioned in your Excellencys Letter to General Sullivan. If the report is true we got off the Island in very good season.

The Marquis went to Boston the Day before the Action and did not return until last night just as we were leaving the Island. He went to wait upon the Admiral, to learn his further intentions and to get him to return again and compleat the expedition if possible.

I observe your Excellency thinks the enemy design to evacuate Newyork. If they should I think they will Newport also; but I am perswaded they will not neither for the present.

I would write your Excellency a more particular account of the battle & retreat, but I immagin General Sullivan & Col. Laurens has done it already. and I am myself very much unwell have had no sleep for three Night & Days; being severely afflicted with the Asthma.

I am with great respect

Your Excellencys

Most obedient

humble Servt

Nath Greene

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