

Williamsburg Jan.y 17.1781

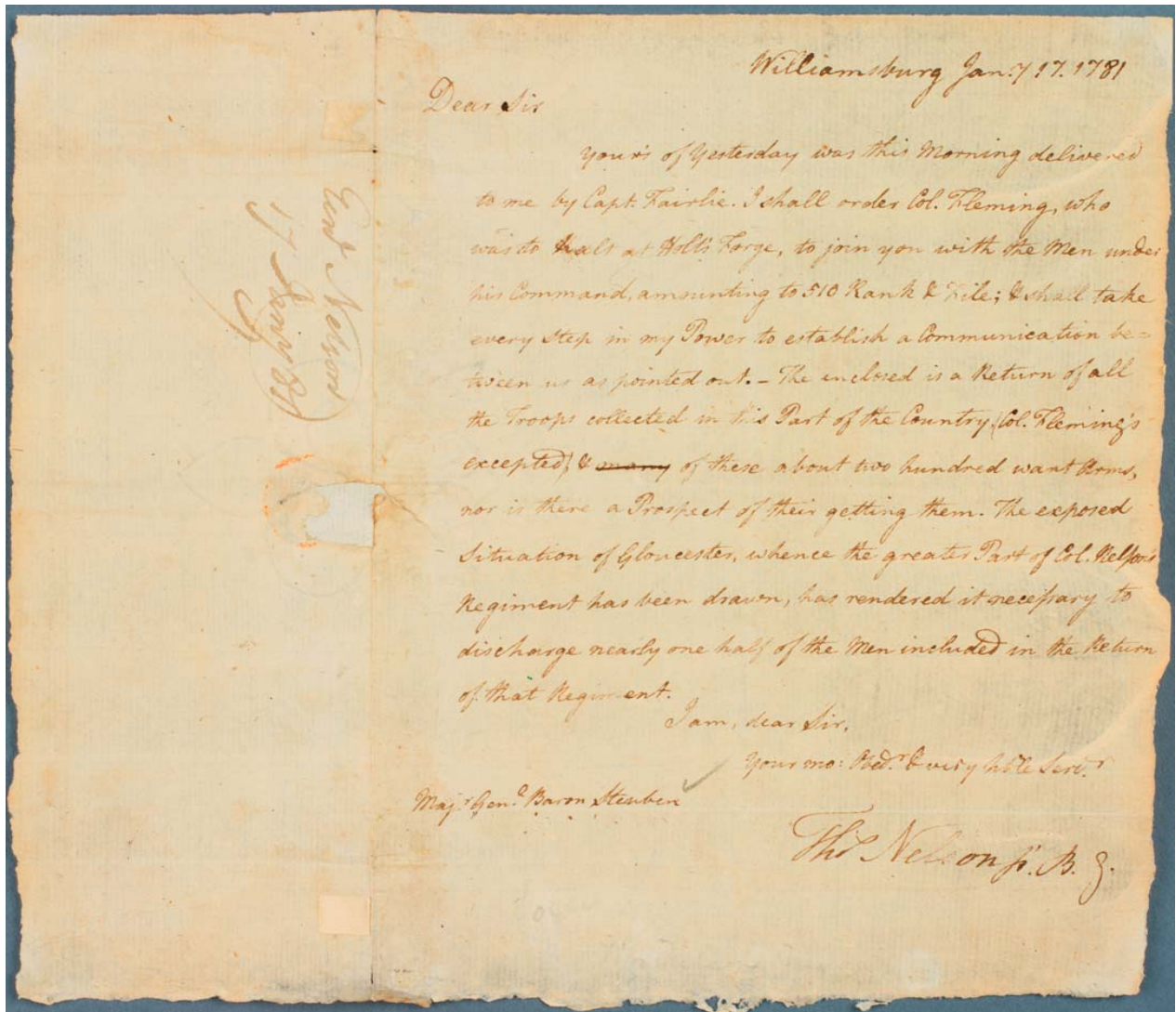
Dear Sir

Your's of yesterday was this morning delivered to me by Capt. Fairlie. I shall order Col. Fleming, who was to halt at Holt's Forge, to join you with the men under his Command, amounting to 510 Rank & File; I shall take every step in my Power to establish a Communication between us as pointed out. The enclosed is a Return of all the Troops collected in this Part of the Country, (Col. Fleming's excepted), & ~~many~~ of these about two hundred want arms, nor is there a Prospect of their getting them. The exposed Situation of Gloucester, whence the greater Part of Col. Nelson's Regiment has been drawn, has rendered it necessary to discharge nearly one half of the men included in the Return of that Regiment.

I am, dear Sir,
Your mo: Obed.t & very noble Serv.t

Major Gen.l Baron Steuben

Tho.s Nelson Jr. B.G.



What challenges did the Continental Army face?

It was a huge amount of work to supply Continental Army soldiers with what they needed. The army faced many problems with organization, money, and transportation. The Continental Army formed a special department, called the Quartermaster, to take care of getting needed items and delivering them to soldiers in the field. The Quartermaster asked each state and its people to help provide food, clothing, blankets and other items, but this did not result in having enough supplies to go around. Early in the war, the Quartermaster department wasn't very organized and had problems getting the state governments to cooperate.

There was not a lot of gold and silver in the American colonies. Paper money, or currency, became more and more worthless as the war went on. That meant that the Quartermaster could not easily purchase military supplies from Europe or food from local farmers. Equipment that usually came from Britain was no longer available to the colonies because of the war. Even when supplies did arrive, there was not a good system for transporting it to the soldiers. There were poor roads, the people in charge of delivering the supplies were not always honest, and ships had difficulties getting around British blockades. Army supplies, such as clothing and blankets, arrived late or not at all and food was often spoiled or damaged. Because of these difficulties, soldiers received much less than the promised rations and sometimes had to ask farmers for food or survive on what they could find or take for themselves.

Congress and the states were not able to raise the money needed to run the war effort. This created another hardship for soldiers. Pay rarely came on time, and when it did come, it was often in the form of increasingly worthless paper money made by the states or Congress.

At first, the Continental Army was poorly trained and did not have a standard way to drill, discipline or maneuver. This put them at a huge disadvantage when facing the well supplied, well trained British army. That all changed when in February 1778, Baron von Steuben, a Prussian military officer, offered to help General George Washington train and discipline the Continental Army. Because of von Steuben's work with the Continental Army, the soldiers greatly improved as a professional fighting force and they became more successful in battle.

What supplies did Continental soldiers receive?



When they signed up to join the army, Continental soldiers were promised that their basic needs would be met. Each man was to receive food rations that included salted meat, hard bread and dried food. Soldiers were also supposed to receive clothing, a musket, ammunition, a haversack (carrying bag), canteen and blanket. Because of supply shortages, most soldiers only received these things as they became available.

Most battles of the American Revolution were fought spring through fall. This was called the campaign season. During this time, each six-man group (called a mess) shared a tent. Shortages of canvas led to not having enough tents. This caused crowding, often with eight men to a tent. Some soldiers had to find somewhere else to sleep. Living so close together was miserable for the soldiers because it was crowded, sickness and lice spread easily, and there was little quiet and no privacy. Officers lived in nicer tents and had more room. Because soldiers often marched ahead of the supply wagons, they sometimes had to build brush shelters out of tree branches until their tents arrived. Once winter began, soldiers often built log cabins large enough for twelve men. Living conditions in the cabins were often just as unpleasant as in the tents.

Witnesses to Revolution

Jeremiah Greenman - A young soldier from Rhode Island

First-person account based closely on Jeremiah Greenman primary source documents

October 1775:

“Set out this morn very early. Left 5 sick men in the woods that was not able to march. Our provision being very short we killed a dog. I got a small piece of it...In a very miserable situation. This morn when we arose many of us so weak that we could hardly stand, we staggered about like drunken men. Very cold and snowing, marched down the river on the frozen ground bare-footed. In prison, 1776: Hear we live very discontented and quite out of hope of ever being reliv’d.”

Primary Source Document

November 1775:

In a very misrabel situation / nothing to eat but dogs / hear we killed a nother and cooked / I got Sum of that by good [luck] with the head of a Squirrll with a parsol of Candill wicks boyled up to gether wich made a very fine supe without salt /

...this morn marched down the river on the frozen ground bare footed and very Cold till at last I came to a french house ware I [blank] a pair of Seal Sil maugerson and had Sum fine Supe made out of cabage and bread / hear in this house I sleep by the fire.

Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman

Source:

Robert C. Bray and Paul E Bushnell, eds., *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783: an Annotated Edition of the Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman*. Northern Illinois University Press, 1978.