

Lesson 4 - Handout #2

Revolutionary War Letters

Letter excerpts referring to uniforms:

1.) George Washington to [The Convention of New Hampshire] Valley Forge, [Pennsylvania], December 29, 1777. (Gilder Lehrman Collection)

“There is one thing more to which I would take the liberty of soliciting your most serious and constant attention; to wit, the cloathing of your Troops, and the procuring of every possible supply in your power from time to time for that end. If the several States exert themselves in future in this instance, and I think they will, I hope that the Supplies they will be able to furnish in aid of those, which Congress may immediately import themselves, will be equal and competent to every demand. If they do not, I fear, I am satisfied the Troops will never be in a situation to answer the public expectation and perform the duties required of them. No pains, no efforts on the part of the States can be too great for this purpose. It is not easy to give you a just and accurate idea of the sufferings of the Army at large – of the loss of men on this account. Were they to be minutely detailed, your feelings would be wounded, and the relation would probably be not received without a degree of doubt & discredit. We had in Camp, on the 23rd Inst. by a Field Return then taken, not less than 2898 men unfit for duty, by reason of their being barefoot and otherwise naked.

“Besides this number, sufficiently distressing of itself, [4] there are many Others detained in Hospitals and crowded in Farmers Houses for the same causes. In a most particular manner, the I flatter myself the care and attention of the States will be directed to supply of Shoes, Stockings and Blankets, as their expenditure from the common operations and accidents of War is far greater than of any other articles. In a word, the United and respective exertions of the States cannot be too great, too vigorous in this interesting work, and we shall never have a fair and just prospect for success till our Troops (Officers & Men) are better appointed and provided than they are or have been. We have taken post here for the Winter, as a place best calculated to cover the Country from the Ravages of the Enemy and are now busily employed in erecting Huts for the Troops. This circumstance renders it the more material that the Supplies should be greater and more immediate than if the men were in comfortable Quarters.”

2.) Joseph Plumb Martin. *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier: Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of Joseph Plumb Martin*. New York: Signet Classics, 2001. Reprint.

1777, The Gulf (a stop-over on the army's way to Valley Forge)

“The army was now not only starved but naked. The greatest part was not only being shirtless and barefoot, but destitute of all other clothing, especially blankets. I procured a small piece of raw cowhide and made myself a pair of moccasins, which kept my feet (while they lasted) from the frozen ground, although, as I well remember, the hard edges so galled my ankles, while on a march, that it was with much difficulty and pain that I could wear them afterwards. The only alternative I had was to endure this inconvenience or to go barefoot, as hundreds of my companions had to...”



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Letter excerpts referring to food and rations:**3.) Martin James Sullivan. *The Adventures of A Revolutionary Soldier: A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier Interspersed with Anecdotes of incidents that occurred within His Own Observation. London: Glazier, Masters & Co., 1830.***

We got settled in our winter-quarters at the commencement of the new year and went on in our old continental line of starving and freezing. We now and then got a little bad bread and salt beef, (I believe chiefly horse-beef, for it was generally thought to be such at the time.) The month of January was very stormy, a good deal of snow fell, and in such weather it was a mere chance if we got any thing at all to eat. Our condition, at length, became insupportable. We concluded that we *could* not or *would* not bear it any longer;—we were now in our own State, and were determined that if our officers would not see some of our grievances redressed, the State should. Accordingly, one evening after roll-calling, the men generally turned out, (but without their arms,) and paraded in front of their huts. We had no need of informing the officers, we well knew that they would hear of our muster without our troubling ourselves to inform them. We had hardly got paraded before all our officers, with the Colonel at their head, came in front of the regiment, expressing a deal of sorrow for the hardships we were compelled to undergo, but much more for what they were pleased to call our mutinous conduct; this latter expression of their sorrow only served to exasperate the men, which the officers observing, changed their tone and endeavoured to sooth the Yankee temper they had excited, and, with an abundance of fair promises, persuaded us to return to our quarters again. But hunger was not to be so easily pacified, and would not suffer many of us to sleep, we were therefore determined that none others should sleep.

**4.) Horatio Gates to Col. H. Hollingsworth, Valley Forge, February 25, 1778.
(Gilder Lehrman Collection)**

The measures they will take we should hope would be adequate to the necessary supply of flour. The board therefore wish you for the present to forbear purchasing or contracting for wheat & flour, and confine yourself to procuring corn, rye, oats & spelts for forage, & beef & pork, these to be got & sent on to camp with the utmost dispatch. Should you contract for large quantities of wheat & flour they most probably cannot be removed in season & consequently will be in danger of falling into the enemy's hands. For the same reason we would not wish you engage or collect more forage than you can in a reasonable time either transport to the army, or remove to the western side of Susquehanna or other place of safety. But the board are anxious to have you purchase, and if that should not avail, they authorize you to Seize all cattle & swine fit for slaughter, & all salted beef and pork, not necessary for the subsistence of the families to which they belong, within your reach; but first of all the peninsula should be drained, and of the peninsula the parts on the [insert: sea] coasts claim your earliest attention.

The Board have ordered 20,000 dollars to be delivered to the Bearer of your letter, when you send again, a full supply we hope will be furnished to you.

Inclosed you have another letter from the board respecting the putting up a large quantity of herrings. We wish to receive your answer on the subject as soon as you make up your judgment of the matter. You will at the same time be pleased to furnish us with some estimate of the forage & provisions probably in your power to obtain, their prices, what quantities you can transport to camp, what form into magazines, and your opinion of the most eligible place or places at which to fix the magazines. Every aid you shall need in these matters, the board will gladly afford you.

I am sir, your most Able Servant
Horatio Gates,
President.

Col H. Hollingsworth