

CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

HIS EXCELLENCY GENERAL

SIR HENRY CLINTON, K. B.

AND

LIEUTENANT GENERAL

EARL CORNWALLIS.

[New York 1781]

CORRESPONDENCE

Between His EXCELLENCY GENERAL SIR
HENRY CLINTON, K. B. and LIEUTE-
NANT GENERAL EARL CORNWALLIS.

Head-Quarters, New-York, July 8, 1781.

MY LORD,

I AM this moment honored with your Lordship's letter, by Ensign *Amiel*, of the 30th ultimo, and am happy to be informed you have had an opportunity of destroying such a quantity of arms and public stores, the loss of which must be very heavily felt by the enemy.

By your Lordship's answer to my letters of the 11th and 15th ultimo, (which are the only ones you acknowledge the receipt of, and in which I made a requisition for some of the corps serving in the Chesapeake, *if you could spare them.*) I am to understand that your Lordship does not think that, with the remainder (which would have amounted to at least four thousand, supposing even then you sent me three thousand) you could maintain the posts I had proposed to be occupied at York-Town, &c. so necessary, in every respect, to cover our fleet and give us entire command over the entrance of that Bay. I therefore think proper to mention to your Lordship

ship, that whatever my ideas may have been of the force sufficient to maintain that station, and the corresponding one on the Gloucester side, your Lordship was left the sole judge of that sufficiency to the whole amount of the corps under your immediate orders in Virginia;---nor did I mean to draw a single man from you, until you had provided for a respectable defensive, and retained a small corps for desultory water expeditions, for my requisition was made after the receipt of your Lordship's letter of the 26th May; from which I apprehended that you had no immediate operation of your own to propose, and did not think it expedient to adopt the one I had recommended to General Phillips. But I confess, I could not conceive you would require above four thousand, in a station wherein General Arnold had represented to me (upon report of Colonel Simcoe) that two thousand men would be amply sufficient; and being strongly impressed with the necessity of our holding a naval station for large ships as well as small, and judging that York-Town was of importance for securing such a one, I cannot but be concerned that your Lordship should so suddenly lose sight of it, pass James River, and retire with your army to the sickly post of Portsmouth, where your horses will, I fear, be starved, and a hundred other inconveniences will attend you; and this, my Lord, as you are pleased to say, because you were of opinion that it exceeded your power, consistent with my plans, to make safe defensive posts there and at Gloucester.--My plans, my Lord, were to draw from Chesapeak, as well for the sake of their health, as for a necessary defensive in this important post, such troops as your Lordship could
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could spare from a respectable defensive of York, Gloucester, or such other station as was proper to cover line of battle ships, and from all the other services I had recommended; but I could not possibly mean that your Lordship should for this give up the hold of a station so important for the purposes I designed, and which I think La Fayette will immediately seize and fortify the moment he hears you have repassed James River; ---for though I am to suppose the enemy will be as little able to defend it with five thousand men as your Lordship judges yourself to be, and of course may, be for the same reasons, dispossessed. I should be sorry to begin with a siege the operations I am determined to carry on in Chesapeak whenever the season will admit of them; I will therefore consult Rear Admiral Graves on this subject, and let your Lordship have our joint opinions in consequence.

WITH regard to Portsmouth, your Lordship will have seen by my former letters and the papers in your possession, that when I sent General Leslie to the Chesapeak I only wished for a station to cover our cruising frigates and other small ships: That General Officer thought proper to make choice of Portsmouth, and had, I doubt not, good reasons for so doing. But it has ever been my opinion, that if a better could be found, especially for covering line of battle ships, it ought to have the preference; and I think if Old Point Comfort will secure Hampton-Road, that is the station we ought to choose---for, if Elizabeth River is at all kept, a small post for about three hundred men at Mill Point, would, in my opinion, answer. But as to quitting the Chesapeak entirely,

entirely, I cannot entertain a thought of such a measure; but shall most probably, on the contrary, send there as soon as the season returns for acting in that climate, all the troops which can possibly be spared from the different posts under my command. I therefore flatter myself, that even although your Lordship may have quitted York, and detached troops to me, that you will have a sufficiency to re-occupy it, or that you will at least hold Old Point Comfort, if it is possible to do it without York.

By the letters brought to me from the Minister, by the last packet, I understand that three battalions, originally destined for this army, are to accompany Sir George Rodney, in case De Grasse comes on this coast; from whence I am to conclude he will be certainly followed by that Admiral. I am likewise told that nearly two thousand two hundred German recruits and auxiliary troops may be hourly expected to arrive here.

Head-Quarters, New-York, July 10, 1781.

MY LORD,

I AM just returned from having a conference with Rear Admiral Graves, in consequence of your Lordship's letter of the 30th ult. and we are both clearly of opinion that it is absolutely necessary we should hold a station in Chesapeak for ships of the line as well as frigates; and the Admiral seems to think, that should the enemy possess themselves of Old Point Comfort, Elizabeth River could no longer
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be of any use to us, as a station for the frigates : He therefore judges that Hampton Road is the fittest station for all ships, in which your Lordship will see by the papers in your possession, I likewise agree with him. It was moreover my opinion that the possession of York-Town, even though we did not possess Gloucester, might give security to the works we might have at Old Point Comfort, which I understand secures Hampton Road.

I HAD flattered myself, that, after giving me as nearly three thousand men as you could spare, your Lordship might have had a sufficiency, not only to maintain those posts, but to spare for desultory expeditions, for I had no other plans in view than to draw for the defence of this post, and operations in its neighbourhood, such troops as could be spared from your army, after leaving an ample defensive to such stations as your Lordship might judge proper to occupy, and a small moving corps for desultory water expeditions during the summer months, in which no other might be proper in that unhealthy climate. But as your Lordship seems to think that you can in no degree comply with my requisition for troops, and at the same time establish a post capable of giving protection to ships of war, and it is probable, from what you write me, that you may have repassed James River and retired to Portsmouth : I beg leave to request that you will, without loss of time, examine Old Point Comfort, and fortify it, detaining such troops as you may think necessary for that purpose, and garrisoning it afterwards. But if it should be your Lordship's opinion, that Old Point Comfort cannot be held without hav-

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ing possession of York, for in this case Gloucester may perhaps be not so material, and that the whole cannot be done with less than seven thousand men, you are at full liberty to detain all the troops now in Chesapeake, which, I believe, amounts to somewhat more than that number; which very liberal concession, will, I am persuaded, convince your Lordship of the high estimation in which I hold a naval station in Chesapeake, though my whole force in this very extensive and important post is not quite eleven thousand effectives; and how far I may be justifiable in leaving it to so reduced a garrison, time will shew.

I AM as much mortified as your Lordship can possibly be at the necessity there is, at present, for leaving you upon the defensive in Chesapeake; and your Lordship will do me the justice to observe, that I have, for some months past, been myself content with a starved defensive, from the desire I had to give your Lordship as large an army for offensive operations as I could. Therefore, until the season for re-commencing operation in the Chesapeake shall return, your Lordship, or whoever remains in the command there, must, I fear, be content with a strict defensive. And I must desire, that you will be pleased to consider this as a positive requisition to you, not to detain a greater proportion of the troops now with you than what may be absolutely wanted for defensive operations, as before mentioned.

WHEN, therefore, your Lordship has finally determined upon the force you think sufficient for such works as you shall erect at Point Comfort, and the number

number you judge requisite to cover them at York-Town, and for the other services of the Chesapeak during the unhealthy season, you will be pleased to send me the remainder. Your Lordship will observe by this, that I do not see any great necessity for holding Portsmouth while you have Old Point Comfort; for should a station on Elizabeth River be judged necessary, I think Mill Point will answer every necessary purpose of covering frigates, &c.

I have the honor to be,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient and

Most humble Servant,

H. CLINTON.

(Signed)

*Lieutenant General
Earl Cornwallis.*

Extract of a Letter from Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis to his Excellency General Sir Henry Clinton, K.B. &c. &c. &c. dated Cobham, July 8th, 1781.

I MUST again take the liberty of calling your Excellency's serious attention to the question of the utility of a defensive post in this country, which cannot have the smallest influence on the war in Carolina, and which only gives us some acres of an unhealthy swamp, and is for ever liable to become a prey to a foreign enemy, with a temporary superiority at sea. Desultory expeditions in the Chesapeak, may be undertaken from New-York, with as much

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ease, and more safety, whenever there is reason to suppose that our naval force is likely to be superior for two or three months.

Head-Quarters, New-York, July 15, 1781.

MY LORD,

UNTIL I had the honor to receive your Lordship's letter of the 8th instant, I had flattered myself that upon reconsidering the general purport of our correspondence, and General Phillips's papers in your possession, you would at least have waited for a line from me in answer to your letter of the 30th ultimo, before you finally determined upon so serious and mortifying a move, as the repassing James River, and retiring with your army to Portsmouth. And I was the more induced to hope that this would have been the case, as we both seemed to agree in our opinions, of the propriety of taking a healthy station on the neck between York and James Rivers, for the purpose of covering a proper harbour for our line of battle ships, and I am persuaded your Lordship will be sensible, that in all my letters I clearly leave you at full liberty to detain any part or even the whole of the troops I solicited you to send me, should your Lordship have determined on any solid operation of your own in Virginia, or else where, or should you have adopted the one I had recommended in the upper Chesapeake, or even should you have judged their continuance with you necessary until the stations you might think proper to take were rendered *respectably* defensive. Your letter of the 30th ultimo, in which your

Lordship

