

**George Washington to William Heath, December 21, 1776, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor.**

**To MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM HEATH**

Headquarters, at Keith's, December 21, 1776.

Dear Sir: I have been favored with yours of the 13th Instant and wish you may have succeeded in your intended Scheme to dislodge the Enemy from Hackinsack Bridge.

In my letter of the 18th I transmitted you a Copy of a Letter from the council of the Massachusetts Bay, advising that 6000 Men were coming from that State, under General Lincoln, to supply the place of the Militia which had returned Home, and of their Troops, whose time of Service will soon expire. At the time of writing, I thought it probable that their Reinforcement might be ordered to the State of Rhode Island, in case of an Invasion, and which I find has actually taken place; and there fore did not so strenuously urge that it should be sent here. In deed, I had then hopes, from the Information I had received, that a large proportion of the Eastern Troops who were marching to join Me had reenlisted; but to my great Distress and Mortification, I find the report to have been without the least foundation, and that in the course of a few days I am to be left with a handfull of Men. I therefore request, that if these troops have come on to Peeks Kill, and also the four Battallions which I am advised by Govr. Trumbull have been raised in Connecticut to serve fill the 15th of March next, that, after securing the passes and Fortifications in the Highlands, with a Sufficient number (which I should imagine need not exceed 12 or 15 Hundred Men at farthest,) besides the forces which I apprehend will be provided for the purpose by the Convention of New York you will forward on all the rest with the utmost

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Expedition to join such Troops as I may be able to collect for the defence of Philadelphia. That City is now the object of the Enemy's Designs. Let me entreat you to impress the Officers and Men with a due Sence of its Importance in the present con test for our Liberty, and that without their speedy and early arrival it may be lost. I am perswaded these considerations will be duly regarded and urge them on to every possible exertion. As yet, but few succours belonging to this State have come in, nor do I hear that many are in motion, when they hear that other States are applied to, and pushing in Aids for their defence, perhaps they will arrouse from that lethargy which now keeps them back against the most pressing calls of Interest. In a word, Sir, my Situation, and that of our Cause, is critical, and truly alarming. Without vigorous exertions and early Succours I do not see what reasonable hope there will be to preserve Philadelphia from falling into the Enemy's hands, they will attempt to possess it as soon as the Delaware is so frozen as to admit of their passage; Appearances and many concurring reports agree in this.

I have received yours of the 15th, and am happy to hear of your success at Hackinsack, the Stores you got will be of great Service.

By a letter just received from General McDougall, I find he has been much indisposed, and is now at Morristown. I intend to write him to return to Peeks Kill to conduct matters in that department with General George Clinton requesting you and General James Clinton to come on with the Eastern Troops which I have mentioned, if they have arrived at Peeks Kill, and it should be necessary for him to come. I am, etc.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>he draft is in the writing of Samuel Blatchley Webb. The letter sent, in the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison, is in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Force, in his American Archives, prints this letter as of December 22.