

VI EMPIRE OR INDEPENDENCE

if all was Peace: but who will reap the Harvest is yet uncertain. . . .
With the most affectionate Regards,

I am Dr. Sir
Yours

CHAS. PETTIT

1. The reference is probably to the growing radical influence in the Continental Congress as well as its action in instructing the colonies which had not already done so to replace royal government with revolutionary regimes.

2. Since the fall of 1775 the ministry of Lord North had discussed sending peace commissioners to America to negotiate directly with the colonies. Differences over terms and personnel delayed formation of the commission until May 1776, at which time the brothers Howe (General Sir William and Admiral Lord Richard), commanders of British military and naval forces in North America, were designated peace commissioners. Lord Richard arrived in the colonies in June, at a time when American independence was all but declared.

3. The American Prohibitory Act of December 22, 1775, which placed a commercial embargo against the rebellious colonies.

4. William Tryon, governor of New York. On March 16, 1775, brazenly calling upon the "deluded" rebels to return to their proper allegiance to the king, he pledged strong support for the Loyalists. His empty remarks were widely ridiculed.

5. A packet was a vessel which carried mail in addition to passengers and cargo; it usually sailed according to a fixed schedule.

6. On June 24, 1775, the assembly of Nova Scotia petitioned the king and both houses of Parliament, professing loyalty to the British government, announcing a position of neutrality toward the rebellious colonies to the south, and appealing for an Anglo-American reconciliation. With regard to the latter point, the petition proposed to solve the taxation quandary by means of a duty (to be adjusted every decade) on all products except salt imported to America from outside the British Empire.

6 [Ebenezer Elmer?], Valedictory Address to Captain Joseph Bloomfield's Company of Continental Forces

[Appended to the "Plain Dealer," Alexander Library, Rutgers University.]

Military service was an important, perhaps the most important, impetus to

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

independence. Enlistment in the militia or the Continental army was at base a political act that converted not only the soldier but also countless of his kin and friends to the cause of secession. Moreover, the emergencies attendant on actual warfare necessarily radicalized political thought and action. Then, too, there was almost a crusading zeal associated with joining the army and going off to do battle with the enemy; the martial life became *de rigueur* for every young male patriot, and the martial spirit moved many on the home front to support the severance of ties with Britain.

To Joseph Bloomfield¹ Esqr. Capt. and to the other Officers of the first Company of Continental Forces belonging to the third New-Jersey Battallian, raised in Cumberland County, this short and imperfect address, as a small token of his Zeal for the cause of Liberty, and respect for you & the Company under your command, is humbly inscribed by

The Author.²

March 26th 1776

Friends, Countrymen, and Soldiers.

As most of you were born and brought up in this place with me, I feel myself greatly interested in your welfare & success. Permit me then, my dear friends, to take my Serious *farewell* of you, with a Short address.

Words cannot express the satisfaction I feel, on seeing such a number of respectable persons, voluntarily sacrificing their Ease and present Interest, for the sake of serving their country; & generously offering, at this critical Juncture, to hazard their lives on the high places of the field, in order to defend those rights & priviledges, which our cruel and unnatural enemies, are endeavouring to wrest from us, with the points of their Bayonets. The Sun, my friends, never shone on a contest more just, nor does the History of mankind afford a single instance of a people engaged in a cause more important, than that in which you are now engaged. . . . In short, the fate of millions, of a whole Continent of people, depends on the event of the present unhappy dispute. And since the irrevocable blow is struck, and our adversaries have left the merits of their cause to the Decision of the sword, nothing but a resolute and manly resistance, can save our devoted Land, from inevitable ruin. Go on then my brave friends, in the glorious cause you have undertaken; let no difficulties however great: let not obstacles however discouraging, hinder you from persisting in what you have begun.

As the military life you are now entering upon is new to most of you, give me leave to recommend it to you, as my parting advice, to live sober, temperate, & regular, & carefully gaurd against all those vices & irregularities, that are too common in Camps & Armies, particularly profane Swearing and the excessive use of spirituous liquor. These will injure your health, blast your reputation, & unfit you for the service of your country. Should you be called into the field of Action, it is more than probable, that some of you will loose your lives in Battle. For your comfort & encouragement I would remind you, that, should it be the fate of any of you to fall there, you will die gloriously; you will expire in the defence of your country, and suffer martyrdom in the cause of Liberty.

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Remember the illustrious *Hampdon*³ who fell in the cause of Liberty in the cruel & arbitrary reign of Charles the 1st. Remember *Doctr. Warren*,⁴ the *Hampdon* of America, who fell at the battle on Bunkers Hill, in the still more cruel, & arbitrary reign of George the 3d. Remember the brave General *Montgomery*,⁵ the spirited *McPherson*,⁶ the gallant Capt. *Cheeseman*⁷ & many other of our brave countrymen (as well Soldiers as Officers) who have boldly sacrificed their lives, in the glorious cause of Liberty, in which you are now engaged. Imitate their noble example. Let the same patriotic spirit that glowed in their breasts, animate yours also. Ascend the summit of military honour, by acts of bravery & heroism like theirs. Let not the faithful pages of some future historian, be sullied with the recital of a single cowardly or inglorious action which any of you may be guilty of; but may you conduct so, as to gain immortal honour to yourselves, & be a credit to the place to which you belong. May you all serve your Country with courage & fidelity. May you go forth, to oppose your cruel Enemy, in the name of "the Lord of Hosts, the God of Armies." Trusting in him, may you always prove victorious. May he preserve you in safety, in the midst of the greatest danger. And, having by your valour and activity, procured peace and tranquility to your oppressed & bleeding country, may you all return home to your friends, loaded with trophies of victory, & crowned with wreaths of unfading *Laurels*. May you then all prove victorious & useful citizens, untill you have compleated the measure of your days. And having faithfully served your Country in your day & generation, according to the will of Heaven, may you all die like *Christians*.

With these my sincere wishes, & ardent prayers, for your success, welfare, & safe return home, I now take my leave of you, and with the feelings of humanity, & affection of a friend, I bid you one and all—Farewell.

1. Joseph Bloomfield (1753-1823), young Bridgeton lawyer, served with distinction during the war and later rendered service as governor of New Jersey (1801-1812).

2. The author is unknown, but the address corresponds closely to other writings of Ebenezer Elmer, Cumberland County physician.

3. John Hampden, Buckinghamshire gentleman who helped popularize discontent with the rule of Charles I by refusing to pay the ship money tax. Hampden ranked with the famous John Pym as one of the leaders in the House of Commons who opposed the king.

4. Dr. Joseph Warren of Boston who, along with Samuel Adams, was at the forefront of the leadership ranks of the radical organization in Massachusetts.

5. Brigadier General Richard Montgomery, who was killed in the ill-fated assault on Quebec in December 1775.

6. Captain John MacPherson, Jr., of Philadelphia, aide-de-camp to Montgomery; he was also killed at Quebec.

7. Captain Jacob Cheeseman of the First New York Regiment, aide-de-camp to General Montgomery; he fell with his commander at the battle for Quebec.