THE ORANGE COUNTY MILITIA’S “VALLEY FORGE”:
DECEMBER 1776

Note: The winter conditions described are those that caused great trouble to the Continental Army at Valley Forge, as well. The same “nor’easter” had hammered them, and all of the troops were in dire straits and discouraged. These poignant letters were exchanged with the commanders not being yet informed that something good had finally happened. A few days before, Washington had crossed the Delaware and won Trenton. One can imagine the effect on the moral of all, when they finally received word.

Letter of Col. John Hathorn (Orange Co. 4th Regt. Commander) to Gen. George Clinton
Regarding Discontent Among the Militia

Taupaun, 27th December 1776

Dear Sir,

Words cannot Express the Situation that I am in here with Respect to the Regiment; there is a pretty General determination Amongst them to go home at all Events. I use every Argument, in my power, with them, to frustrate their Imprudent intention. I hope to Restrain them another day or Two in which time purpose to Execute your order, in Marching my little Regiment to Closter; my People to a Man seems to appear firm in promoteing & carrying into Execution every Command for the purposes for which we are ordered to this place.

I beg leave at the same time to Inform you, that it is distressing to a number of the militia of my Regiment, to be kept so long (in this Season) from their domestick affairs at home, together with the Great difficulties & hardships they now undergo, being almost barefooted & many nearly naked for Cloathes.

Pray sir, Use your Influence in obtaining Liberty for the people to return home. I am sorry to be obliged to declare that it will not be in my power to keep them more than three days longer. You may Rest assured that I shall Carefully Conform to every of your Orders, and have the Honour to be with greatest Esteem,

Your Obe’t Serv’t in hast,

John Hathorn Col.

[Public Papers of George Clinton. Vol. 1 No. 292]
Reply of General Clinton to Cols. Allison and Heathorn (Hathorn)

Ramepough, Decem’r 28th 1776

D’r Colonels,

I received your Letters of the 27th Instant both nearly of the same Purport. I am fully sensible of the Distress the Militia labour under by being called out and detained so long from Home in this season of the year. I early mentioned it in a Letter to Convention & have since repeated it in two others, mentioning my Fears that unless I had Leave to dismiss a Part of them that they would be disgusted & desert, from which I feared the worst of Consequences. I did not receive an Answer untill last Night, (before which Time two thirds of them have left me as I predicted); the Convention begg they conjure us to continue a few Days longer in which Case they promise to relieve at leave one half of us; in the Mean Time they consent I should dismiss such as whose Famillies are much Distressed by their Absence.

We are already to weak in numbers to do this consistent with the safety of the Country, but I have ordered home an Officer out of each Company from every Regiment to bring up the Absentees that upon their Arival I may dismiss as many as I can of those now present. This I begg you will also do, but for Heaven’s sake, for the sake of your Bleeding Country, keep your Men together a few Days longer; don’t let them basely Desert so honorable Cause & suffer our Enveterate & Cruel Enemy to plunder & distress our Friends. A Party of the Rebels were up to last Night at Pyramus took 6 or 7 of our Friends there & plundered several Famillies. I have ordered out the Militia on the south side of the Mountains in Orange County & wrote to Colo. Dye to imbody the Militia of Bergen. I am yours sincerely,

[G.C.]

[Public Papers of George Clinton Vol. 1 No. 292]