Hackwood Park, 10th June 1804

Private

My Lord

I really lament, more than I can express the unavoidable necessity of conveying to your Lordship the Information, which the enclosed paper will communicate and which I have taken the Liberty thus for the present to mark private because I would wish of course, as I daresay your Lordship would to avoid any public enquiry, if possible, in such a case where assuredly there seem to be error at least on both sides, although I should hope sought on both sides also to be corrected.

I will detain your Lordship as shortly as possible. Political differences and other more trifling dissensions have long prevailed between parties at Portsmouth. I had flattered myself that the renewal of the War, and some favourable opportunities had given success to endeavours to remove everything of the kind from the general spirit of Voluntary exertion against the Enemy. Large bodies of Volunteers were raised in the form of Independent Companies in order to prevent jealously with the view however of having a Field Officer of the Line at the Head. A wish was afterwards entertained, in which I certainly concurred, to for them into separate Battalions but unluckily the attempt to effect this was by mistake hurried without consultation and some Officers were appointed without recommendation from the Office which your Lordship now holds. The consequence was some unpleasant difference between the Companies who were to compose the Portsmouth Battalion and the General was induced by perhaps rather too partial although sudden turn in favour of the Corporation Party to cast reflections upon the other and to impute to them a disposition to insubordination, which I most entirely believed never existed, Uneasiness followed these insinuations and I was desired to accept the resignations of the Captains of four Companies in February last. I was unwilling to lose Gentlemen really of the most respectable description, and who by themselves and Friends had during the last War at very great private expence supported a large body and then almost the only body of Volunteers, and whose loyalty and zeal have been always exemplary. I went to Portsmouth and according to all appearance succeeded in reconciling all doubts and difficulties. Battalions were agreed to and I was to look out for an Officer to Command the Portsmouth consisting of ten Companies; they were in the meantime to meet under the Brigade Major or some other occasional Commandant – but here they six Companies commonly understood to be in the interest of the Corporation objected to act with the four without any satisfactory reason and after several conferences and much correspondence General Whitelocke agreed with me that it would be best to leave the different parties to act by themselves. The Six Companies in one Corps and the Four in another. This was so settled in April last and I had heard nothing of any uneasiness in any quarter since that time, till the moment at which this awkward matter has arisen and has been very awkwardly conducted.

I wish that the three Captains now in question had at once upon such occasions agreed to fall in with the others, but I really believe that their objection was the idea of being refused by the others as they had been and their aversion now to seem to belong to them. The warmth of the General’s temper has seemed to hurry him into hasty reflections and charges and I am afraid that the proceedings exhibited in No. 10 must appear, rather imprudent, and hazardous and I really think the immediate resolution of the three Officers to act exactly in conformity to the General’s original call was than meritorious as I understand they marched to the Glacis and there offered to take any station either by themselves or mixed with other Companies. The Field Officer Commanding thought it most advisable to place them on the left of the other Companies with which they readily complied and so marched towards Portsdown, when the message from the General created a new difficulty, which was however yet over upon the same principles as had influenced these Officers before.

The General after feu de joy ordered these Companies by themselves to the Glacis and they were about to obey but were countermanded and allowed to be dismissed on their own usual Parade.

I have not heard from the General upon the subject and therefore can only represent what appears by the Documents I enclose and by some little information I have received. But I have failed in my endeavours to prevail upon the Captain’s Garrett, Greetham, and Hickley to withdraw their desire of resignation, as they state themselves to be afraid of being looked at with prejudiced eyes and of giving offence however undersigned to the General.

They desire me to assure your Lordship that they wish not to make any complaint or even defence of themselves unless obliged to do so, and only still request to be allowed to resign from apprehension of possible inconveniences and from a little specimen since issue of the order No. 10 of disorder in their ranks.

I have the honor to be

My Lord, your Lordship’s

Most obedient humble servant

Bolton

Right Honorable Lord Hawkesbury