Whitehall 12th October 1803

Confidential

My Lord,

The preparations of the Enemy for an Attack upon the Coasts of the Kingdom, being now in considerable state of Forwardness; it appears to be advisable to take some preparatory Measures for placing upon permanent pay and Duty, in certain Districts of Great Britain, such of the Yeomanry and Volunteer Corps as being in the most advanced state of Discipline and Equipment, may be inclined Voluntarily to assemble themselves under Arms within their respective Counties and Districts, to be in readiness to repel any attempts which may be made.

The situation of Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight requiring particular attention, and it be highly desirable that as large a Force as possible should be collected for their protection, without incurring the necessity of detaching from other points of no less importance; I think it proper to request a confidential communication of your Lordship's opinion, whether any, and which of the Yeomanry and Volunteer Corps in the County of Southampton and within a reasonable distance of Portsmouth are likely, upon His Majesty's Invitation, to assemble upon permanent pay and Duty, for the protection of that place and its Vicinity for such time and under such regulations with respect to rotation of Service and Relief as my be thought expedient.

Your Lordship will perceive, by the enclosed Copy of the Act 42. Geo. 3 c. 66. Sect. 10 that His Majesty is empowered to invite any Yeomanry or Volunteer Corps Voluntarily to assemble and march, on the Appearance of Invasion; and that all such Corps as shall Voluntarily assemble, as expressed in that clause, are entitled to pay and Quarters, and subjected to Military Discipline, during the time that they shall continue so assembled.

I take leave to call your Lordship’s attention particularly to this point, because the powers given to His Majesty to enforce the assembly and Movement of the Yeomanry and Volunteers of Great Britain, by virtue of the compulsory Clauses of the Act 43 Geo. 3. C. 96 and 43. Geo. 3. C. 121 extend only to the specified cases of Actual Invasion, or the Appearance of an Enemy in Force upon the Coast.

The present measure, which is suggested for your Lordships consideration and opinion is intended to apply only to a certain Number of Districts which from their situation demand peculiar attention; and is calculated to operate as a temporary measure of precaution for the ensuing two or three Months.

I have reason to believe, that His Royal Highness the Commander in Chief has written to the Commanding Generals in the South Western and Isle of Wight Districts upon this subject; and I flatter myself that your Lordship will have the goodness to communicate with His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, Major General Whitelocke, and Lord Cavan confidentially upon the occasion.

The mode of Relief will of course become a Matter of deliberation between your Lordship and the General Officers above mentioned. Perhaps the Total of the Corps who may be willing to assemble for the Protection of Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight might be divided into two reliefs, each to remain on Duty for a Fortnight at a time, and them to return home: but if that should be thought objectionable, the Tour of Duty might be settled within each particular Corps, by their furnishing a certain Number of their respective Members in rotation, and might be agreed upon. Upon this point, however, as well as other Details connected with this important Subject, I shall be happy to receive the Benefit of your Lordship’s opinion and local knowledge.

I hope to be favoured with your Lordship’s sentiment at your earliest convenience, accompanied by a list of such Corps as are most ready and prepared to step forward in the present conjuncture, together with a Return of their effective Numbers.

I have the honor to be

My Lord your Lordships

Most obedient humble servant

Charles Yorke

Right Honorable Lord Bolton