Blackbrook Cottage 29th August 1804

Private

My Lord

I have to acknowledge the honor of two letters from your Lordship one of the 22nd Inst. and the other of the 26th, the very kind tenor of both have truly gratified me and I can only add them to the numberless marks of attention with which your Lordship has so frequently flatter’d me the sentiments however that I feel meet with considerable alloy, when I reflect, that I am intruding upon you, on subjects, from which you have, unfortunately been obliged to recede for the present, and that when all business should be laid aside, I am harassing you with some not the least complicated in the County, in addition to this, I fear, the trouble I have ventured to give your Lordship must appear selfish, which makes the matter worse, and but for your flattering encouragement in wishing for my frank opinion, I should have resisted the temptation, and waited until your Lordship was perfectly recovered and at Hackwood, which I most sincerely hope as to the former will very shortly be the case. In the multiplicity of jealousies and dissensions in the Corps immediately connected with Portsmouth, I have not only endeavoured to guide myself with caution but have studiously not only attended to the old sound adage, audi alteram pastem but endeavoured to glean information from those disinterested in these points, I am however, I confess, upon delicate ground because in Military Opinions, mine, can have no weight when opposed to those of Officers more experienced than myself, although if they could balance at all they could only do so in the Volunteer Regulations, in which I have had my share of observation and practice. In my humble opinion and between your Lordship and myself only, I think the system at Portsmouth has been mistaken, and I think I can see that we do not much differ on that head. The Portsmouth Battalion of Volunteers consist of 600 Ranks and File, from one cause or another it is scarce ever possible to get together above 200, and at my Inspection last Sunday, they only mustered 166. This in great measure arises from their being no Commanding Officer, who has influence over them, Each Captain claims the command of his own Company, although they seem zealous, the zeal does not seem to extend to the Men. I have always conceived that the most popular or Conciliating Man ought to Command Corps of Volunteers, as the key stone to the whole, whether a Military Man or a County Gentleman is immaterial, provided either from property or Manners he can command due obedience and attention, in this Corps however the Captains will not submit to one of their own body, but will take a Field Officer of the Line which certainly is an alternative, and I have taken the liberty of writing to a person in London and to Mr Greenwood to enquire for such a person, to be submitted to your Lordship’s approbation.

The Gosport Battalion consisting of five Companies I have not inspected yet, but I understand that it is not a very easy matter to get these Companies to meet together at all, and having no Commanding Officer, there is no moderator if I may call it, to lead them in unanimity. I suppose they will accept a Field Officer to Command then. The Victualling Office 3 Companies of Artillery are upon another footing, but upon the general principle of the necessity of a keystone in a Commanding Officer, this is equally defective, a very respectable old officer in the Navy and one who conducts himself most properly, a Major Deacon Commands them but in point of fact only nominally, the Men are under the actual control in their Civil Capacity of Mr Reeks the Agent Victualler, who from having a superior Officer not belonging to them, cannot take upon himself and of course the whole must go on languidly, as the Major will not nor indeed can he act with that vigor he would wish from having no local authority over his Men, and the other who possesses that authority cannot exert it, however willing the Commanding Officer may be to deligate it to him: One Company belonging to a Captain Kentish Master Cooper is nearly useless although a fine active body of Men, from not be in any respect Cloathed, nor does he chose to Cloth them, the rest are compleat on that head. The Gosport Artillery under Captain Forbes are united and are a good Company, he wishes to accommodate in any way. The Portsea Battalion I have not as yet inspected. I hear however good reports of them, as they are under Major Carter who not only is a good Officer, but also a well know Family and Character among them. The Portsea Artillery the Companies, are disunited all from the same cause, they do not feel comfortable if they are Commanded by any other than their respective Captain, of course can seldom meet together and the Captains themselves do not seem to wish to act much together, I now come to the 2 Portsmouth Artillery Companies, I know I shall not offend your Lordships in giving you my opinions on that head openly and in confidence, and trust that any observation I may make, that may be overstrained, you will kindly attribute to over zeal only, for I can truly assure you, that Except one visit inform, and meeting on one days inspection, I am as much a stranger to these parties as to all the rest, not one of whom have I ever seen, or scarce ever heard of until my duty led me to know them. Your Lordship in your last letter, hinted at some letters you had done me the honor of enclosing, which most probably would have altered my ideas upon the subject, these probably were probably forgot in the hurry of folding, but from what I can understand and from a correspondence shewn to me, apparently at the commencement of the Volunteering system, this war, it appeared to me, that Mr Arnaud had applied and that it had been consented to, that he should hold a Field Officer Commission, and raise a certain number of Companies of Artillery, that in point of fact, for I saw the terms upon which the Men signed, they actually did enroll themselves to serve under the Command of Mr Arnaud, that after he proceeded at some length in fulfilling his engagement, he received and order that not more than two Companies would be wanted, and these to be independent of each other, and I understand that this determination was adopted in consequence of General jealousy, that pervaded the whole of Portsmouth etc as to rank, which occasioned a publick meeting, in which it was determined that no Civilian or Townsman, not a Military Man should hold a higher Commission than Captain. I acknowledge that the ground now is very tender, and the point delicate as in doing justice on one side, injustice may be done on the other, but the only point that strikes me, in this transaction is, that as far as it appears to me, the promise was made to Mr Arnaud, who had held the same rank in the last War, previous to the determination of the people of Portsmouth; and that upon the faith of that promise, the Men enrolled: it is often easier to find out a grievance than to apply a remedy, the hint your Lordship gave of offering to appoint him Captain Commandant might be accepted upon the plea, that no more Companies, and that the two Companies were not number sufficient to entitle them to a Field Officer, this might satisfy them for in truth they are a very nice body of Men, very steady and much attached to their Officers, and being mostly Custom House people are Men who are under better control that other bodies more loosely connected. They are also very anxious to get rid of their Pikes, and it any official representations from me to your Lordship would avail, you will of course do me the honor to command it, as this point conceded will very much tend, more so that you might imagine, to keep them in good humour. One point I shall on future day represent officially to your Lordship that these Artillery Corps have only pikes and no Swords and Accoutrements both of which I think indispensably necessary, as if the Pike breaks the Man has no defence without them. With respect to Major Garrett to whom your Lordship is kind enough Confidentially to allude, he seems to me at present to have totally detached himself from the idea of a Portsmouth Corps, he has one in a high state of discipline at Havant, the whole of this part of the business as passing in a Borough and a Commercial town is, all but in one point, [blank], I believe it an adage as old as Queen Elizabeth’s resign, that two of a trade cannot agree, this I believe to be the [blank] of all the dissensions arising from the contending Brewers, but what strikes me as extraordinary is that often that very principle of contention gives way to politics and I find these Gentlemen go hand in hand in those of the Borough in their resistance to the Corporation, I hope that your Lordship’s difficulty as to Mr George Garrett (who I do not know) may be obviated, he is at present serving as a private in his Brother’s Corps. I have succeeded in procuring Captain Crawford, who is a Captain in that Corps, to be my Brigade Major, which will occasion a vacancy, and I understand that Mr George Garrett will be proposed, though I do not know it officially to succeed Captain Crawford, so that no addition will be made to the Havant Corps by such circumstance, this however I only know from hearsay. I shall only add upon this particular part of the subject, that when I first saw Major Garrett at the last assizes after my appointment, he began to tell me a long history of his grievances, I told him that I came with a sheet of White Paper, that I had nothing to do with what had passed, but I hoped every thing would go right in the future, I therefore am not apprized of any past circumstances relative to him, and perhaps it is full as well that I should not be. To sum up the whole, I can only venture to say generally that now the Exemptions and inducements to the system are taken off, and the novelty of the business over, unless some points are arranged and a very few conceded, and that Commanding Officers are appointed who will be responsible, I fear much that however great upon paper the Establishment may be, the effective force will be very much reduced, and when I consider the extent of the lines to be defended in case of emergency and the number of men requisite to man them, I must confess that I feel much anxiety upon the subject, for I see no want of zeal, or lukewarmness, but a sort of inattention arising from the Superiors having no responsibility. In this however I must not include the Alverstoke Rifle Corps which deserves every praise and every merit I can give it, both as Soldiers and as patriots from taking all the expences themselves. My old friends the peasantry Corps are also exceptions for the nature of their dispositions and avocation lead them to be more obedient and patient in discipline. I trust I have not fatigued your Lordship, I have endeavoured confidentially to give you as clear a statement of facts as they have passed under my observation, as I could, and hazarded my opinion, I most earnestly hope, not too freely, for I should feel most truly mortified if I should lose myself in any degree in your Lordship’s opinion by either forwardness, or arrogance in giving my own, my anxiety for the good of the Service, may lead me perhaps further than I ought, but as I cannot express my apologies to your Lordship, because the liberty I have taken prevents me, from finding words, I shall relieve you from the unconscionable letter, first expressing my most sincere wish that your Lordship and the Ladies will reap every benefit from your Northern excursion, and that you will return into Hampshire in High Health and good Spirits.

I have the honor to be, etc, ect

George Porter, Brigadier General

Right Honorable Lord Bolton

P.S. by a mistake of the Postman, I missed the opportunity of sending the enclosed to your Lordship yesterday, which enables me to acknowledge the honor of the receipt of the two enclosures, the letters of Messr Arnaud and Williams, I have already intruded upon you so much at length upon that subject, that I will not trespass further, excepting to acknowledge that I certainly did disapprove upon a General Principle, the system of independent Companies and that I approve the Corps highly, lamenting that so much zeal and wish for discipline should be thrown away be any misconceptions or misunderstanding in another Cover. I have reenclosed the letters as they are a species of official document which of course are necessary for your Lordship.