

*John Bowater*

## The Evacuation of Boston

LETTER TO THE EARL OF DENBIGH

MARCH 1776

*Centurion*: King's Road, Boston March 25th. 1776

My Lord

I wrote to your Lordship by the *Preston*, Admiral Graves, which was the only Ship that has Sailed from hence since my Arrival in America. Neither has Any ship Arrived here since she sailed nor have I Received a line from any one since I left England. The Violence of the Winds at this Season of the Year with the extream Coldness of the Weather has prevented any ship Approaching the Coast. By a Sloop that came in Yesterday from Antigua we have an account of three men of War & Seventy sail of Transports Victualers & store Ships being drove in there & was Refitting in order to join us as soon as possible. And we are now all looking with the utmost anxiety for Vessels to Appear in sight as no one here is free from the dreadful Thought of famine as I am inform'd we have not a months provisions Remaining for either Army or Navy. Tho we have been for this week past put upon two thirds of Allowance, and I believe this was the principal Reason for our Evacuating Boston, tho many others are Assign'd. The Rebels taking Possession of Dorchester Heights, & at last made their Approaches within a Thousand Yards of the Town, it was said to be no longer Tenable. Indeed at last they Amused us with both shot and shells in every part of the Town, but did no damage to the Shipping. An other Reason Assign'd was, that by our being Embarked must puzzle the Enemy exceedingly as they wou'd not Know where to guard most—And we might go to any place that wou'd Joyn us heartily. The present orders says Halifax but that Cannot be for any time as we have exausted that Country during the Winter. Meat was rose to 10*d.* per pound all over the province two months ago. We have three & twenty Battalions embarkt with us yet we have not seven Thousand fighting men. But with Women & Children civil Officers, followers of the Army, and many of the principal Inhabitants of Boston, (who if they did not

accompany us would be either hung or sent to the mines) we are above twenty Thousand people to Receive Victuals & drink. The Transports are very much Crowded & a great many Children was Sufficated the first night and if the Weather turns Warm I am afraid the Troops will be sickly. It wou'd be a pitty to loose any of them, as I never saw a more spirited sett of fellows—and they have the greatest Confidence in their Generalls, if they Lament any thing it is that they can die but once in the service of their Country. The Cruelty Committed daily by the Rebels makes them keen for Revenge.

Mr. Feilding writes to your Lordship by this Oppertunity and will give you an Exact Account of all the millitary motions previous to the Retreat—as Every precaution was taken the same as if the Enemy meant to anoy us. But they chose to save the Town as the principal seat of their Rebellion, and we wou'd not destroy it as the principal part of it belongs to the Friends of Government, also it might be Necessary for us to retake it again for the next Winter Quarters. Tho I now think we shall go either to New York or Virginia, we have still a Regiment of light Horse with us which takes up as much Room as six Regiments of Foot and they never could be of the least service in any one of the Colonies, this with a Thousand other Absurdities which the wise heads at home have transmitted to us has laid us under the most dreadful misfortunes. Coals Porter & Potatoes have been brought out to us in great Plenty and in large Ships with twenty Guns & a hundred men. Brass Cannon, Mortars, Shells, Balls, flints, Powder &c. &c., have been sent out in small Briggs, with two & four Guns & ten or twelve men. And they have been taken by the Enemy who have beat us Very severely with our own Weapons. (The Board of Ordinance is in great disrepute with us at present.) If we are Expected to do any thing considerable we must have very great Reinforcements as the Rebels are so Numerous, they have above five & twenty Thousand Round us now & they take the utmost pains in Disciplining them, & they have got a great many Foreigners amongst them Runegadoes & partisans from all Countrys which are Very great Rascals but are generally Very Clever fellows. We have not had any late Accounts of Genl. Carleton but we are

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in hopes he will be Able to hold out at Quebec untill we can send him a Reinforcement he has perform'd Wonders already.

My best Respects attends Lady Denbigh & family. The packett going in haste obliges me to Conclude. Major Charles Stewart is well we often Converse and he desires to be Remember'd to your Lordship.

You must not Expect to hear from me often as we are so often sent out of the way when any thing is going home & it is at least a Thousand to one you do not Receive this.