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INTRODUCTION

- British East Florida was governed by Patrick Tonyn. On August 21, 1776, Tonyn wrote a letter to George Germain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies of the United Kingdom.
- In the letter, Governor Tonyn states his intention of forming a militia to defend the “Province” from American rebels, a militia which would have white and black Companies.
- Tonyn’s letter projects that the black Companies would have “double or treble White Officers”¹ compared to the white companies.
- This project transcribes Gov. Tonyn’s letter and places it in historical context, so we can understand more about Florida’s little-known role in the American Revolution, as well as the contributions of black soldiers to the American Revolution.
- The letter illuminates perceptions of black soldiers in East Florida. It helps us understand how black soldiers played a part in East Florida’s defense even though it was a slave society.

METHODS

- While reading about Florida during the American Revolution in “Independence Lost” by Kathleen Duval², I became interested in black militia.
- Then, I began to search for primary sources that would provide more insight. I found Tonyn’s letter on the website titled “colonialamerica.”¹
- After analysis of the letter, I gathered secondary scholarship to provide context. I then formulated conclusions based on the data found.

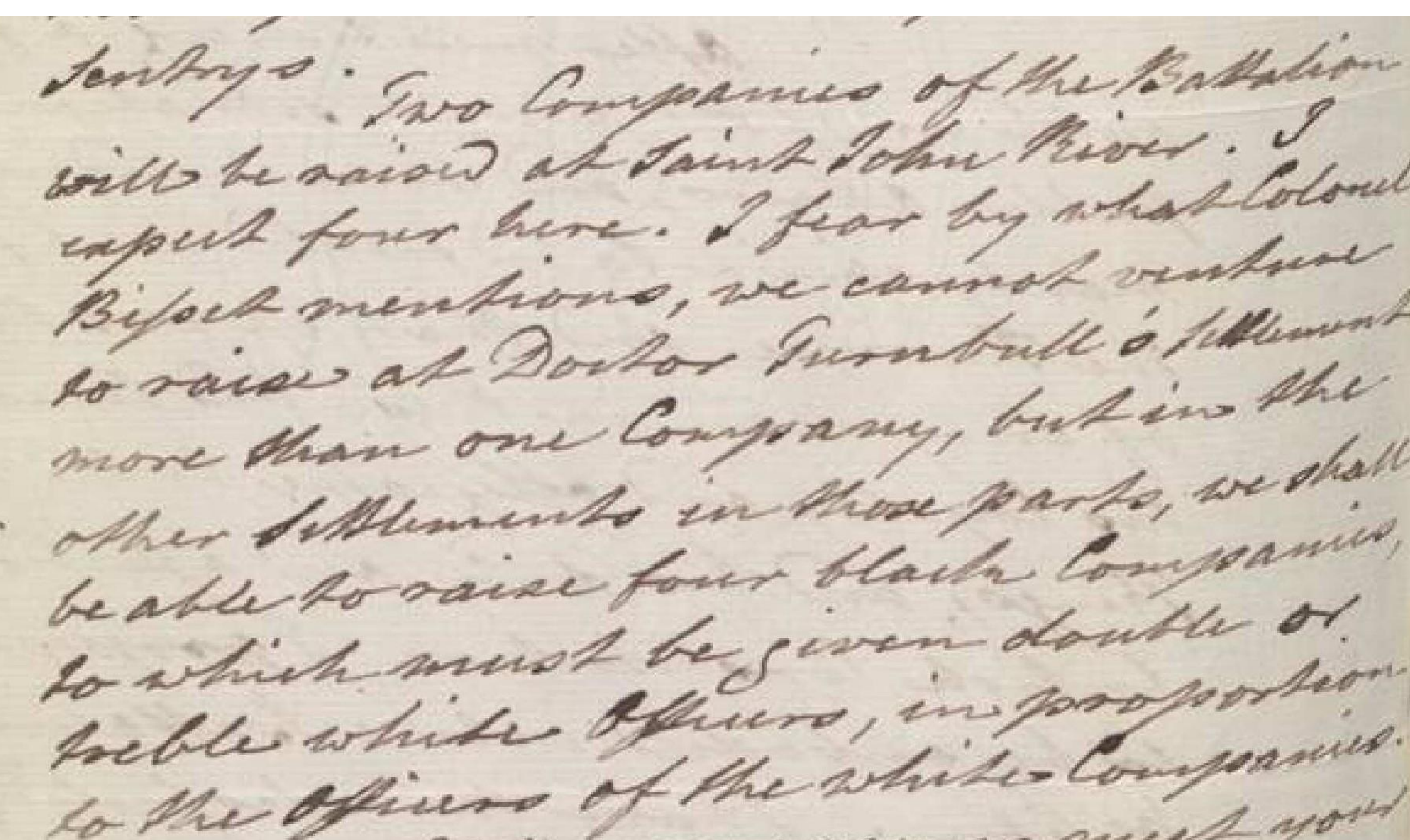


Figure 3. Map of British East Florida.

Source: Kottik, George. “Minorcans, New Smyrna, and the American Revolution in East Florida.” *Journal of the American Revolution*, Journal of the American Revolution, 1 Sept. 2020, allthingsliberty.com/2020/08/minorcans-new-smyrna-and-the-american-revolution-in-east-florida/.

CONTEXT

- In British East Florida, black residents outnumbered white residents at a ratio of 2:1.³ This letter shows black soldiers were deemed necessary if the Province had any chance of actual defense.
- White people in East Florida remained cautious about arming black people, who were mostly enslaved. This letter documents official anxiety about arming blacks. Tonyn proposes to increase supervision for black companies to ensure security.
- In British West Florida, anxiety about arming blacks outweighed fear of invasion.² West Florida never authorized black militia.
- In East Florida, there were enough able-bodied black men to create several companies. Tonyn’s letter documents the expectation of forming four companies of black militia at a crucial point in St. Augustine’s defense, immediately after British troops have been defeated in Charleston.
- We see that East Florida was not regarded as an inconsequential colony. Florida was a strategically important, loyal part of the British empire during the Revolution, and black soldiers played a pivotal role in defending St. Augustine.



TRANSCRIPTION/SOURCE

“Two Companies of the Battalion will be raised at Saint John River. I expect four here. I fear by what Colonel Bisset mentions, we cannot venture to raise at Doctor Turnbull’s Settlement more than one Company, but in the other Settlements in those parts, we shall be able to raise four black Companies, to which must be given double or treble white Officers, in proportion to the Officers of the white Companies.”

Gov. Tonyn’s letter here is one of many sent to George Germain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies of the United Kingdom, explaining what he intends to do with the people of St. Augustine. He intended to create a militia using both black and white soldiers.

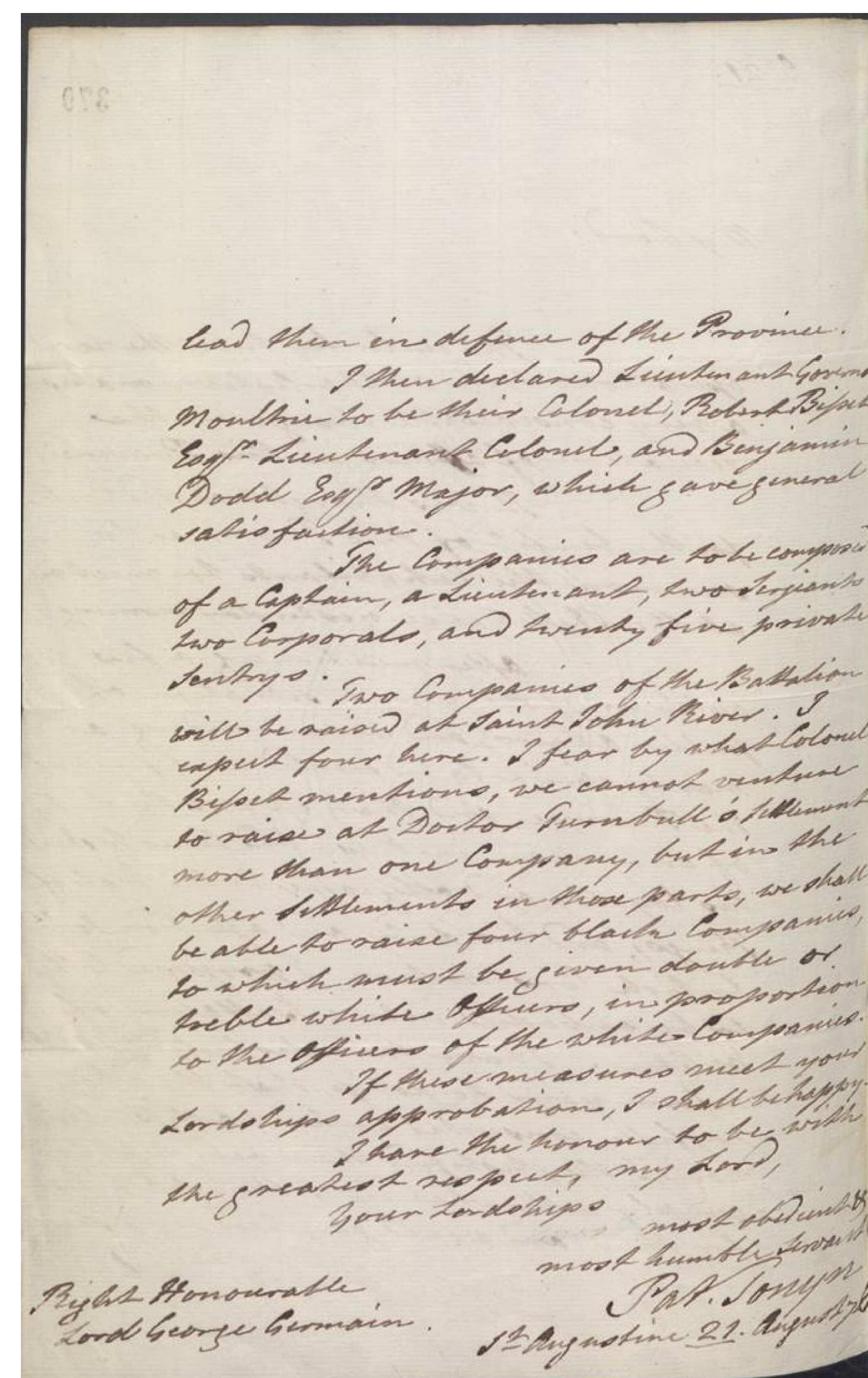
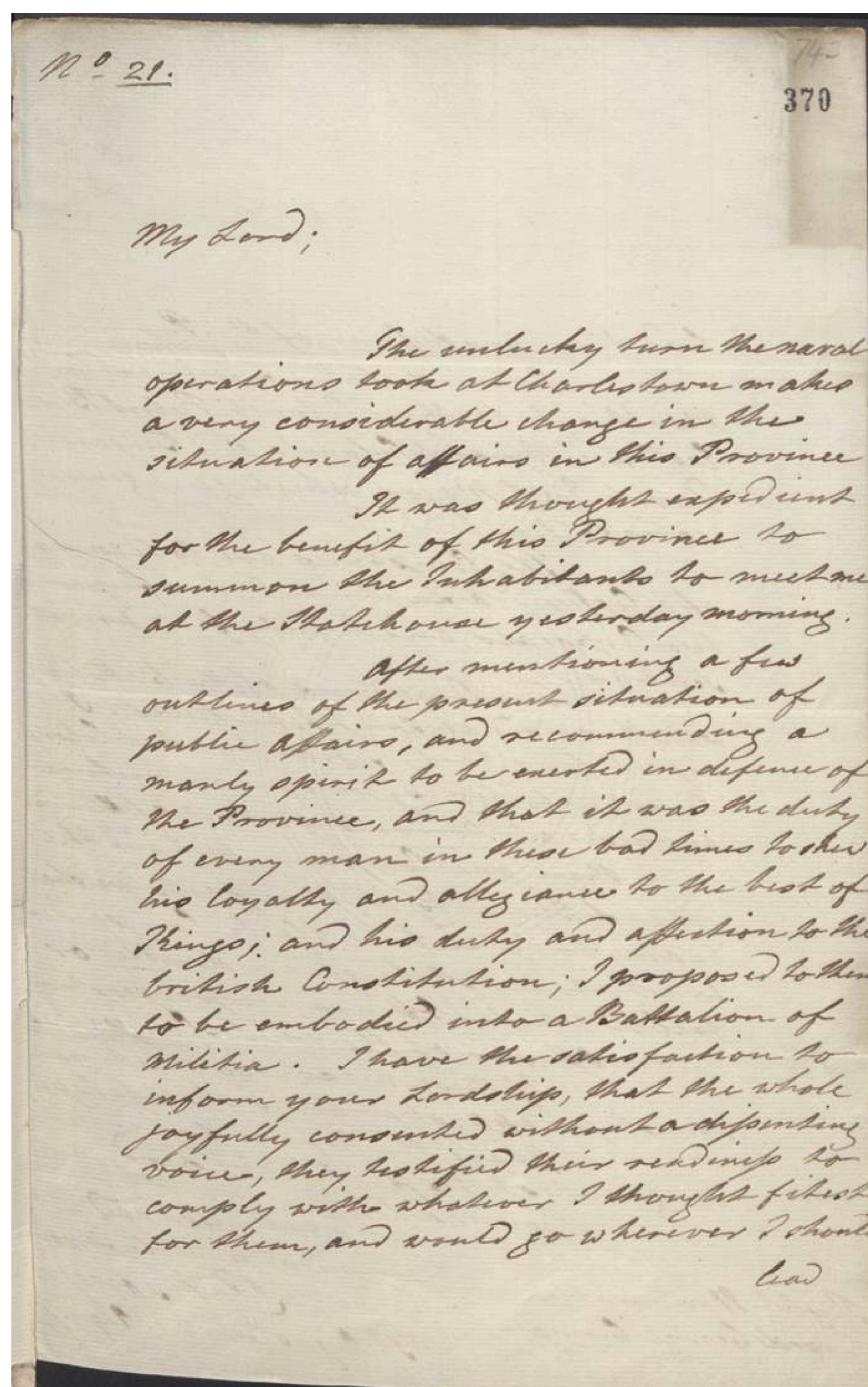


Figure 1 (Left) & Figure 2 (Right). Letter from Patrick [[Tonyn]] to George Germain (no.21) confirming the creation of a militia for the defence of the province. [[1776]]/08/21. Correspondence. The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/556. *Colonial America*. Web. <http://www.colonialamerica.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/CO_5_556_037>.

