

On March 16, McDougall was named to relieve whose standing as a commander was alleged to have been destroyed by his "rash of resignation" had become a disease that men might prove mortal. It was especially severe in the cavalry and in the Virginia regiments but was so nearly pandemic that Washington estimated the number of resignations at more than two hundred within eight months.

The Count Pulaski and the Marquis de Lafayette became problems. Pulaski spoke no English, did not understand Americans and soon found himself in so much difficulty that he resigned the general command of the cavalry and successfully solicited permission to organize an independent corps, in which he was authorized by Congress to enlist deserters if Congress approved. Washington had no intention of allowing this. Commander-in-Chief consequently was surprised and provoked to learn a little later, that Pulaski had been recruiting among prisoners of war. In part because of Pulaski's mishandling of the cavalry, Washington saw little prospect of having the cavalry take the field in the spring, though there was reason to hope for good performance by young Harry Lee who was promoted to Major and entrusted with recruiting and directing independent two companies of light dragoons. Lafayette was a problem of a different sort. He was able, diligent, appreciative and almost embarrassingly patriotic. At the same time he was ambitious and so insistent on the advancement of any impairment of what he considered a high reputation that the failure of the irruption into Canada, he had to be nursed and coddled by Congress and by Washington.

When all the whims and frailties and derelictions of malcontent were added to the doubts of the campaign, Washington still found hope for America in the performance of two men that spring, one a new recruit and the other an old lieutenant with a changed assignment. On February 23 an attractive German soldier had come to Valley Forge with letters from President Laurens, who introduced him as "Baron Steuben" and explained that Congress had voted its thanks for the gentleman's tender of service as a volunteer and had directed him to report to Washington. Washington's questions elicited the admission that Friedrich von Steuben, who said he had been a Lieutenant General in the service of Frederick the Great, was interested in the training of troops and would be glad to receive the rank and pay of a Major General, though he did not desire the command of a division.

