

It is easy to conceive circumstances, which might justify a state in hazarding an army, for the sake of facilitating great and decisive objects. Gentlemen, conversant in military history, will recollect many examples of this principle: upon a former occasion, I stated a supposed case;* and I now entreat leave to add a real example of peremptory orders, which happened in the course of my own service. I have ever retained the impression, that the circumstance I am going to relate, made upon my mind at the time; and to those few who may still think, that in any part of my conduct, I rashly risked my peace, my interest or my fame, to forward the wishes of others, this prepossession may in some measure account for, and excuse my imprudence.

In the campaign of 1762, in Portugal, the Count La Lippe, a name, which, if it finds a due historian, will stand among the first in military fame, was placed at the head of about 6000 British troops, and a Portuguese army, the greater part of which was little better than nominal, to defend an extensive frontier against the whole force of Spain, and a large body of the veteran troops of France. The salvation of Portugal depended solely on the capacity of that great man, which united the deepest political reasoning with exquisite military address.

I had the honour to be entrusted with the defence of the most important pass upon the Tagus, and my orders were peremptory to maintain it against any numbers, and to the last man.

A select corps of the enemy, greatly superior to mine, were encamped within sight on the other side the river, and our advanced posts were within half musquet shot.

In this situation, I received intelligence from Count La Lippe, of a design of the enemy to pass the Tagus in force, about six miles above me, and to take possession of the open country in my rear, with a large corps of cavalry, by which means all communication, supply, or safe retreat, would be cut off.

Together with this intelligence, the Count's letter expressed, "That every delay to the enemy in getting possession of the pass I guarded, was so material to his other plans and operations, that it justified a deviation from systematic rules; that, therefore, after taking timely precautions to secure the retreat of my cavalry, I must abide the consequence with the infantry; that at the last extremity, I must abandon my cannon, camp, &c. and with such provision as the men could carry

* The case alluded to was put in a former debate, as follows: suppose the British army that invaded Britany in 1758, had gained a complete victory over the Duke D'Aiguillon; to have marched rapidly towards Paris, abandoning the communication with the fleet, exposing the army possibly to great want of provision, and to the impracticability of retreat, would certainly have been a measure consummately desperate and unjustifiable, if tried upon military system: yet, will any man say, that if that measure must evidently have produced such alarm and confusion in the heart of France, as to have compelled the recall of her whole force from Germany, or such part of it, as would have given uncontrolled scope to the armies under the King of Prussia and Prince Ferdinand, that the minister of England would not have been judicious, though at the palpable risk of the army, as far as capture was concerned, in ordering the general to proceed by the most vigorous exertions, and to force his way to Paris?

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