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CHAPTER XXXII.

Admiral Byron's usual good fortune did not desert him, as the weather at last permitted his fleet to reach St. Lucie on the 6th of January, 1779, just eight days after Comte d'Estaing's fleet had sailed. It is probable that if the weather had not detained the British fleet at Newport fourteen days after it was ready to sail, it would have encountered the French fleet and a general engagement resulted, which would have had the effect of deciding the issue of the war. There could have been little doubt of the issue, and it would compel the French Court to look to the defences of their own coast, preventing them sending military or naval succor to the United States. It would have also prevented the formation of that league called the *armed neutrality* which required the action off the Dogger beak and Rodney's victory to break up. The arrival of Admiral Byron's fleet made the British force superior in the West Indies, and the French were confined to the harbor of Fort Royal at Martinique. Both fleets were reinforced during the winter, that of d'Estaing's by a squadron under Count de Grasse and Byron's by one under Commodore Rowley. For six months the former remained in port with the latter watching his manœuvres, yet no attempt was made to dislodge the enemy from his position, and, as a consequence, when on the 6th of June Byron sailed for St. Christopher to collect and convoy the West Indian fleet d'Estaing sailed for St. Vincent, which was captured on the 16th without resistance, by which seven companies of the 60th regiment became prisoners of war without firing a shot. Grenada was attacked on the 2nd of July, and after a brave resistance from 150 men of the 48th regiment was obliged to surrender at discretion, (as it appears d'Estaing, enraged at being repulsed with a loss of nearly 400

men by such a small force, attempted to impose dishonorable conditions) on the 4th of July.

Having escorted the West Indian fleet a safe distance on their homeward voyage Admiral Byron returned to St. Lucie on the 1st of July where he learned the capture of St. Vincent, and sailed to attempt its recapture. On the passage he received intelligence of the attack on Grenada and at once bore up for its relief—under the impression that the French fleet was inferior to his own when it consisted of 22 line-of-battle ships, three 50-gun ships and ten frigates; the British of 21 line-of-battle ships without frigates and a fleet of transports with troops on board. At daylight on the 6th of July the French fleet were descried getting under weigh from their anchorage in St. George's Bay, with a light breeze, and the British Admiral threw out a signal for a general chase, each ship to engage as she came up, detaching Admiral Rowley with three ships of the line to guard the transports to the windward. The leading British ships close hauled on the larboard tack led by Admiral Barrington in the Prince of Wales were fired upon at seven o'clock by the enemy, who had just then got the sea breeze and bearing away on the starboard tack across the bows of the British and formed their line to leeward. It was here that Admiral Byron discovered the strength of the enemy, and notwithstanding made the signal for close action, which was commenced by the van under Barrington at 7.30 a.m. and immediately became general. As the French passed to leeward along the whole line steering north-west, the larboard division of the British fleet being to leeward of their stations suffered severely, and one of them, the Monmouth, having bore up to close their van was completely disabled. It is probable that had the whole fleet followed her example a decisive action might have been brought on. But Rodney had yet to illustrate the true principle of naval tactics by a *happy* accident and the opportunity was lost. At 10 a.m., the French having cleared the English fleet, came about on the port tack and shewed an inclination to

cut off the disabled ships and transports. To frustrate this the British Admiral tacked to the starboard and bore up to their support, while d'Estaing, whose tactics appears to have been to *fight a little* and sail a great deal, bore up and steered to the windward. The British loss in this action was 183 killed and 346 wounded; the loss of the French, who had returned to their anchorage in St. George's Bay, Grenada, was stated at 1,200 killed and 1,500 wounded, which can only be accounted for by the habit of overmaning their fleet common to the French navy. This further loss so enraged d'Estaing that he treated the people of Grenada with gross severity.

The loss of Dominica, St. Vincent and Grenada was not compensated by the capture of St. Lucia, and as other conquests were contemplated much relief was experienced when the French fleet bore away for Cape Francois in the island of Hispaniola as the hurricane season was approaching.

In Georgia the campaign was carried on during the early part of the year 1779 with great vigor. Gen. Prescott, who commanded in East Florida, had been ordered to co-operate with Col. Campbell in Georgia, but had been obliged to adopt an unusual mode of transportation for artillery, ammunition, provisions and stores,—these were embarked in open boats, perfectly defenceless, and while navigating that network of bay, creek, river, and bayou, so common in Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas, were frequently obliged to make wide detours to avoid capture by armed galleys of the enemy. The troops, marching along the coast, were frequently for days together without any provisions but such shell fish as they could pick up. About the beginning of January they penetrated into Georgia and reached the town of Sunbury and immediately invested the fort, which surrendered on the 9th of January at discretion; the British lost one man killed and three wounded, the loss of the garrison was equally trifling. Immediately after this capture Col. Campbell sent an expedition to Augusta, the second town in Georgia and 150 miles from the mouth of the Savannah River.