

LETTER ON ADMIRAL BYNG

Marechal-Duke de Richilieu

1756

Sir, I am very sensibly concerned for Admiral Byng; I do assure you whatever I have seen or heard of him does him honour. After having done all that man could reasonably expect from him, he ought not to be censured for suffering a defeat. When two commanders contend for victory, tho' both are equally men of honour, yet one must necessarily be worsted, and there is against Mr. Byng but his being worsted, for his whole conduct was that of an able seaman, and is justly worthy of admiration. The strength of two fleets was at least equal; the English had 13 ships and we 12, much better equipped and much cleaner. Fortune that presides over all battles, and especially those that are fought at sea, was more favourable to us than to our adversaries, by sending our balls into their ships with greater execution. I am persuaded, and it is the generally received opinion, that if the English had obstinately continued the engagement their whole fleet would have been destroyed.

In short, there can be no higher act of injustice than what is now attempted against Admiral Byng, and all men of honour, and all gentlemen of the army, are particularly interested in the event.

Peter Burke. *Celebrated Naval and Military Trials*. (London: 1866), pp. 85–86.