

World War I

From the movie Paths of Glory. Used with permission.

Sergeant, where's B Company?

I don't know sir!

Where in heaven's name are they? What is this?! It's zero plus one and they're still in the trenches...they're not advancing! The stupid little cowards! They're not advancing...the barrage is getting away from them! They're still in the trenches!

Captain Nichols?

Yes sir?

Order the 75s to commence firing on our own positions...Captain, do you fail to comprehend the meaning of my order?

No sir, but I...respectfully ask the –

Captain, do you fail to comprehend the meaning of my order?

No sir.

Then carry it out, Captain.

Yes sir.

Hello, Polygon? This is the Bishop. Batteries one and two commence firing on coordinates 32-58-78.

Batteries one and two to commence firing on coordinates 32-58-78, over.

General, the battery commander reports those are our own positions. He says it must be a mistake.

Confirm the order, Captain.

Yes sir...there is no mistake, the order is confirmed.

The battery commander respectfully reports he cannot execute such an order unless it is in writing and signed by the General, over.

General, the battery commander respectfully reports he cannot execute such an order unless it is in writing and signed by the General.

Give me that phone! General Mireau speaking!

Battery commander speaking, sir.

The troops are mutinying, refusing to advance – fire as ordered until further notice!

With all respect, sir, you have no right to order me to shoot down my own men unless you are willing to take full and undivided responsibility for it.

Captain Rousseau, are you going to obey my order?

I must have a written order before I can execute such a command, sir. Supposing you were killed – then where will I be?

You'll be in front of a firing squad tomorrow morning, that's where you'll be! Hand over your command and report yourself under arrest to my headquarters!

Roget! Lieutenant Roget, why are your men still in here!

It's impossible, sir. The Major bringing the order's dead.

Get these men out of the trenches! Come on! Let's get ready for another try! Get these men out of here!

I tried three times – look at all the casualties!

All right, let's give it another try! Come on – let's give it another try!

It's impossible sir, all the men are falling back! Sir, I respectfully submit to the Colonel that your remarks to me were very unfair, sir...it's just impossible...it's just impossible!

General, according to first reports, the attack has failed all along the line. The men are falling back to our own trenches.

Major Saint-Auban, arrange for the immediate relief of the 701st Regiment. Have them sent to the chateau today. Have Colonel Dax report to my headquarters. Major Coudec, assemble a general court martial. Have them ready to meet at three o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Those little sweethearts won't face German bullets – they'll face French ones!

You wanted to see me, sir?

Oh, yes...come in Colonel...come in and sit down.

Colonel Dax, your men died very well.

Would you like some coffee, Colonel?

No thank you, sir.

By the way Paul, it's been brought to my attention that you ordered your artillery to fire on your own men during the attack on the Ant Hill.

I did what? Who told you that?

Colonel Dax came to me last night with the story.

Colonel Dax, I've always known that you were a disloyal officer, but I never dreamed that you would stoop to anything so low as this.

There are sworn statements from Captain Nichols, your artillery spotter, and Captain Rousseau, the battery commander who refused your order.

I think it's infamous – absolutely infamous.

Then there's no truth at all to the charge made by Colonel Dax?

I don't see how you can even ask me that.

You cannot imagine how glad I am to hear that, Paul. I'm certain you'll come through it all right.

I'll come through what?

There will have to be an inquiry.

An inquiry?

But it won't amount to much – those things never do. The public forgets.

Public?

You've got to have the right to clear your name. You cannot allow such violent insinuations against your character to go undenied.

So that's it – you're making me the goat? The only completely innocent man in this whole affair. I have only one last thing to say to you, George. The man you stabbed in the back is a soldier.

Well, it had to be done. France cannot afford to have fools guiding her military destiny. I'm grateful to you Dax, for having brought this matter to my attention. Colonel Dax, how would you like General Mireau's job?

His what, sir?

His job.

Let me get this straight, sir – you're offering me General Mireau's command?

Come, come Colonel Dax, don't overdo the surprise. You've been after the job from the start. We all know that, my boy.

I may be many things, sir, but I am not your boy.

Well I certainly didn't mean to imply any biological relationship.

I'm not your boy in any sense.

You trying to road me, Colonel?

Why should I want to do that, sir?

Exactly. It would be a pity to lose your promotion before you get it, a promotion you have so very carefully planned for.

Sir, would you like me to suggest what you can do with that promotion?

Colonel Dax! You will apologize at once or I shall have you placed under arrest!

I apologize for not being entirely honest with you. I apologize for not revealing my true feelings. I apologize, sir, for not telling you sooner that you're a degenerate, sadistic old man – and you can go to hell before I apologize to you now or ever again!