

ARC OF FIRE

Chapter 7: First Encounter with Divine Arrow

What does it feel like to take a direct hit from a 381mm shell up close?

At any rate, Wang Zhong's thoughts were severed in an instant.

For the ten or so seconds after the shell landed, it was impossible to think at all; his whole head buzzed violently, as if ten thousand church bell towers were tolling simultaneously right beside his ears.

In a daze, Wang Zhong's subconscious convinced him that he was surely deaf, because apart from the buzzing noise his brain conjured up from the shock, he couldn't hear anything else.

But he wasn't deaf, and with a sharp ringing in his ears, about eighty percent of his hearing returned; he could faintly hear screams coming from not too far away.

Wang Zhong—Lieutenant Colonel Aleksei Konstantinovich Rokossovsky struggled to rise from the ground, glancing at what remained of the command post building.

More than half of the entire sacristy had collapsed, and the remaining structure bore obvious cracks.

The fallen ceiling buried nearly all of the telephones and telegraph machines, and the communications troops, as well as the staff officers who supervised them, were almost entirely wiped out.

The telegraph sounds that had filled his ears just moments ago were replaced by screams.

Dazed by the blast, when Wang Zhong saw a staff officer desperately scraping his severed hand out of the rubble, he sharply realized he should check for injuries on himself.

It seemed he wasn't injured—apart from the arm that was already wounded.

Wang Zhong was astonished; at that moment, his brain finally seemed to function again, and cold sweat belatedly trickled down.

Did he just narrowly dodge the Grim Reaper's scythe?

He looked beside him and saw the duke, pressed down by two guards, lying on the ground.

The guards must have been sacrificed, covered in blood.

Staggering over, Wang Zhong pulled the guards aside and found the duke beneath them, his head bleeding and at his last gasp.

"Duke Vladimir!" Wang Zhong shouted loudly, "I'll find a medic for you right away!"

"Don't bother, hurry up and go!" The duke managed a few words before wincing in pain, it took him a long while to continue, "If the battleship can shell us, it means... it means the navy didn't stop the enemy, this city... is indefensible!"

With that, the duke's head slumped, and he passed out.

Just then, the medic finally arrived. He was a burly soldier, who roughly pushed Wang Zhong aside and checked the duke's pulse.

"I need to perform cardiac massage on His Grace, the duke, right here!"

Wang Zhong took a step back, giving space to the medic.

That's when he heard someone calling him: "Lieutenant Colonel! What do we do next?"

Wang Zhong turned in confusion, looking at the person who had spoken.

The man had one less stripe on his epaulette than Wang Zhong, a captain with reddish-linen hair—Wang Zhong might have been stunned by the blast, because the thought that popped into his mind was that in Japanese games, this hair color mostly belonged to the protagonist. 小説

The red-haired captain repeated his earlier words: “Lieutenant Colonel! What do we do next?”

Wang Zhong pointed at himself, “You’re asking me?”

Captain: “Yes, you’re the highest-ranking officer I’ve found!”

Wang Zhong’s gaze instinctively shifted to the duke, observing the sturdy medic performing CPR on him, seemingly with no hope of revival yet.

He turned back and said, “Look for someone else, there must still be survivors.”

Captain: “I’ve already looked! I’ve been searching ever since the shelling, for twenty minutes now.”

Wang Zhong frowned, finally realizing he hadn’t been dazed for just a minute, but had been unconscious for at least twenty minutes. No wonder the duke was already in bad shape when he came to; he had been lying under the two guards, bleeding out for so long.

Wang Zhong: “Uh, I’m a bit dazed, let’s clarify the situation. How many people have you gathered so far?”

In truth, what Wang Zhong most wanted to ask was “What’s the name of our country,” which should have been on his ID, but he had forgotten to look, preoccupied with finding out his own name and neglecting the name of the country.

It wasn't a good time to pull out the ID to check now—given the urgent circumstance.

The captain answered, "I've rallied the staff for logistics and the field hospital. Most of the guard battalion has fled; the communications company too, we can't get in touch with any assigned units at the moment."

Wang Zhong frowned: "The guard battalion fled?"

Captain: "The battalion commander of the guard battalion is probably killed by the blast; I haven't found any other officers, given the current situation... "

Just then, the medic trying to save the duke gave up the resuscitation and stood up, shaking his head to the sergeant beside him.

The sergeant exclaimed, "All is lost, the duke is dead, all the senior officers have been wiped out! Now only the Duchess's male pet and the Crown Prince's piss brother are left! Run for it!"

Wang Zhong, not sure where his decisiveness came from, bellowed, "Catch him, execute by shooting!"

The soldiers nearby instinctively followed Wang Zhong's order, but hesitated after capturing the man.

The sergeant kept shouting, "Are you crazy! What I'm saying is the only way out! Look at the lieutenant colonel's pants, he's pissed himself! Let's capture these high-ranking twats and surrender to the Prussians!"

Wang Zhong even looked down specifically to make sure that he hadn't "opened the gates" during the bombardment.

The sergeant was still clamoring, and the soldiers holding him were clearly hesitant.

Wang Zhong suddenly realized that if he did not make a swift and decisive statement, the troops might disband.

Once the troops were gone, his fate would be in others' hands; he could only control his destiny if he had the troops.

Drawing his pistol, his shoulder wound began to ache.

He could only clench his teeth, raising the pistol at the still-shouting sergeant.

Before firing, he didn't hesitate at all, but his first shot went awry, only knocking the sergeant's hat off. He fired a second shot, but it only hit a distant wall.

Apparently, shooting at the head from this distance was too difficult for someone attempting to fire a pistol for the first time—especially with an injured shoulder.

So Wang Zhong took a few steps forward, closing the distance while he shifted his aim to the chest, and at a distance less than three meters, he fired three shots in succession, abruptly silencing the shouts of the officer.

When he had blown up that truck full of Prussians, Wang Zhong hadn't personally pulled the trigger. This was the first time that Wang Zhong had fired at a person, and also his first kill.

Wang Zhong felt unexpectedly calm, perhaps because he had seen too many dead and had grown accustomed to it?

He lowered his gun and said to the soldiers who had restrained the officer, "You did well. I will take over the command and lead everyone home."

One of the two soldiers said, "My home is here, in this city."

Wang Zhong was startled for a moment before he remembered that these people were defending their homeland. He didn't even know the name of the country yet.

If he had only wanted to save himself, he could have just taken off his uniform and hidden away as an ordinary person.

After all, he wasn't an officer, nor was he from this country; he had no obligation to fight for it.

While Wang Zhong was thinking this way, he suddenly remembered Ludmila.

If he ran away and this troop fell apart, what would become of Ludmila?

Wang Zhong had no loyalty to a country whose name he didn't even know, but he knew Ludmila, and the girl was still fighting.

He wanted to see Ludmila again, to tell her he wasn't a coward, to wash away the negative impression left by his pre-transmigration cowardice.

Thus, Wang Zhong made up his mind, and he said to the local soldier, "You're right, this is our home. The German devils—the Prosen devils want to take it from us, and we will never agree!"

Nima, that was a close call almost saying "German devils"; those Prussians in their black uniforms did indeed have a Germanic vibe.

Wang Zhong turned to the captain and asked, "What's your name?"

"Sergei Nikolayevich Romanov."

Wang Zhong asked subconsciously, "Are you from the royal family?"

The captain looked puzzled, "No. The surname of the royal family is Antonov."

Wang Zhong, "I know. It's just that the artillery has left me deaf, and my hearing isn't too good."

He made a random excuse and continued on the real issue, "Try to restore communication with the front line, organize personnel to replace the positions of the guard battalion, gather soldiers who are willing to continue fighting."

Perhaps because Wang Zhong's voice was a bit loud, a fair amount of debris and dust fell from the ceiling.

Wang Zhong looked up at the sky and asked, "This place isn't safe anymore, is there a more robust building nearby?"

Sergey, "There is a bank building nearby made of concrete, and it's still relatively intact."

Wang Zhong, "Let's move there."

After saying that, he strode away from the swaying sacristy.

The chapel outside was also bombed into a mess; the colorful stained glass that had impressed Wang Zhong before the bombardment was now shattered on the ground.

The bank building was already empty; the guard battalion had set up machine gun positions here, but no one was manning them.

Wang Zhong looked back at the two soldiers following him and ordered, "Set up the machine guns."

The two soldiers immediately went to do so.

At that moment, intense gunfire came from a distance, signalling that the Prussians were attacking.

Wang Zhong, "I'm going to the roof."

No sooner had he spoken than he sprinted up the stairs, taking them two or three at a time straight to the rooftop.

Since there were no railings on the roof, Wang Zhong had to lie down near the edge and raise his binoculars to observe. He was actually just pretending to use the binoculars; changing his viewpoint to an overhead view was much clearer!

First he verified the troop markers on the interface, and found that there was only one new marker labeled “Remnants,” hovering his attention over it revealed the following explanation:

A mob consisting of the field hospital’s doctors and nurses, logistical department menials, as well as Honor Guards and the military band, who had never seen a battlefield, might be more adept at blowing trumpets than fighting.

Wang Zhong clicked his tongue.

Even though they were just remnants, Wang Zhong still gained their field of vision, but all the views were superimposed together without any specific indication of who they came from.

As for control, he didn’t have any way at all; even for Sergey right beside him, he couldn’t issue commands by thought alone; he had to speak them aloud.

However, with the external aid, Wang Zhong could clearly see the battle unfolding just a block away.

The Prussians were advancing along the main east-west thoroughfare of the city. The khaki soldiers were resisting by relying on a sturdy five-story building—yes, the very same building Wang Zhong had seen during their escape.

The sergeant who had brought Wang Zhong to command must be in some building on the south side of that structure.

He didn’t know where Ludmila was—

Just as Wang Zhong had this thought, he witnessed a scene that took him completely by surprise: a rocket fired from a window of a two-story building, trailing a long plume of smoke, crossed the entire street and hit a Prosen Tank that had just come into view.

The tank immediately stopped moving, flames spewed from the top hatch, followed by tank crew members engulfed in flames jumping out and rolling on the ground to extinguish the fire.

Subsequently, the tank's ammunition detonated, throwing the turret high into the air.

Bazooka? RPG?

Wang Zhong checked the distance and felt something was off; the rocket had flown over a thousand meters. With this distance, aside from whether rockets like the Bazooka could shoot that far, just aiming was a big issue.

From this distance, the tank was just a small point, especially in a complex urban environment.

At that moment, a word came to Wang Zhong's mind: Divine Arrow.

The Divine Arrow was actually a missile?

And "Prayer Hand" was actually a radio operator?