

Roman Empire 81

Chapter 81: Battle of Venice

Indeed, war is fueled by financial and logistical resources, and the Kingdom of Sardinia's limited resources made it difficult for them to sustain the conflict in the long term. Securing further loans, especially from the cautious John Bull (UK's Uncle Sam basically), proved nearly impossible given the current state of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Furthermore, the Hungarian Republic was on the verge of collapse, and if they waited for the end of the internal conflict in Austria while the Battle of Venice remained unresolved, the consequences would undoubtedly be dire.

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At the frontline in Venice, at the headquarters of the Sardinian Kingdom's army, Badoglio is confidently leading the army, or rather commanding it.

For now, leaving aside the combat capabilities of both sides, at least in terms of army numbers, the Kingdom of Sardinia holds an absolute advantage.

The total Austrian forces that were deployed to the Venice battlefield was less than 100,000, while Badoglio commanded an army of 200,000. Even with some of the forces being tied up due to the Lombard rebellion, there were still 160,000 troops at his disposal.

"Marshal, there is news from our homeland. The Austrian government has dispatched 50,000 reinforcements to the Venice region and ordered us to capture Venice before the enemy reinforcements arrive!"

Upon hearing this, Badoglio was startled and anxiously asked, "When will the enemy reinforcements arrive in Venice?"

"The Austrian government has mobilized 50,000 troops from the Austrian corps, and they are currently rushing from Klagenfurt. At the latest, they will arrive within half a month, but it could be as soon as ten days."

Upon hearing this news, Badoglio directed his gaze towards the map, carefully examining it.

Launching an offensive in Venice was originally intended to put pressure on the Austrian forces, forcing them to divert their troops and relieve some pressure for the Hungarian Republic.

This plan assumes the Kingdom of Sardinia has already captured Venice, but since the battle is still ongoing, Austria adding 50,000 troops wouldn't make much difference.

If it can help save the Hungarian Republic, then the Venice battlefield was insignificant, and strategically, it was feasible.

Badoglio, however, didn't have much confidence in the Hungarian Republic. Even if Austria were to lose 50,000 troops, it wouldn't change the outcome of the war.

Without hesitation, Badoglio decisively gave the order, "We don't have much time left. Command the troops to prepare. We will launch our attack tomorrow morning at 9:30 sharp!"

General Messer, you will lead the Second and Eighth Divisions. It is imperative that you capture Trento within three days and then flank the enemy, cutting off their retreat.

General Fouqué...”

The Austrian military headquarters, under Marshal Radetzky, also received news of reinforcements earlier than the Italians.

The advance on the Hungarian battlefield went too smoothly, with the Bohemian army crossing the Danube River and encircling Budapest, while the Croatian army was less than a hundred kilometers away from the city.

At this point, the importance of the Austrian army had diminished, as they no longer required as many troops. Therefore, Franz naturally chose to reinforce the Venetian war theater.

Marshal Radetzky’s anxious heart finally settled down. Without reinforcements, even if he could win battles relying solely on the troops under his command, he would be unable to expand his achievements.

“Marshal, should we consider changing our military deployment and wait for the reinforcements before engaging the enemy in a decisive battle?” suggested General Viktor.

Marshal Radetzky shook his head and said, “No, it’s too late to change the military deployment now. Our frontline forces are likely already engaged in combat. I have already ordered the reinforcements to abandon their supply logistics and expedite their march. Under normal circumstances, they should be able to join this war in time.”

There was no doubt that the Kingdom of Sardinia had miscalculated. They did not anticipate that the Austrian reinforcements would march lightly equipped.

This is the advantage of conducting operations on home soil. In crucial moments, troops can march light equipment, relying on local governments for provisions and replenishing ammunition in Venice.

The turning point of the Austro-Sardinian War has arrived, and it all boils down to timing.

If Badoglio can defeat the Austrian forces before the Austrian reinforcements arrive, the Kingdom of Sardinia would temporarily gain a military advantage, offering the possibility of a good outcome to this war.

On the contrary, if Marshal Radetzky and the Austrian forces emerge victorious, the Kingdom of Sardinia must prepare for a defensive battle on their own soil.

On May 9, 1848, the Battle of Venice broke out, and the Tuscan troops were the first unfortunate ones to bear the brunt.

Well, Grand Duke Leopold II of Tuscany was supported by Austria and had no real intention to engage them in warfare. It was only under public pressure that he sent troops to the front.

Leopold II exhibited a certain level of political astuteness, particularly in his ability to manipulate the nationalist factions. He cleverly enticed them into joining the expeditionary force, exploiting their aspirations for political gain.

However, not everyone possessed self-awareness, as demonstrated by Mr. Macheld, the Tuscan nationalist leader. He mistakenly believed himself to be a military genius and arrogantly assumed the position of commander-in-chief, hoping to capitalize on the war for his own political agenda.

“Division Commander, the enemy has been quickly caught in our trap. Do you think there will be any issues?” Chief of Staff Feslav asked with uncertainty.

“Any issues? According to the intelligence, this enemy force is operating independently, and the nearest reinforcements are also thirty kilometers away from them.

By the time their reinforcements arrive, the battle will already be over. Can this small force of five thousand enemies possibly hold off our Sixth Division for even a day?” analyzed General Morques, the commander of the Sixth Division.

“But isn’t the enemy’s behavior too foolish? They dare to venture deep into our territory with such a small force. Do they think they’re Napoleon?” Chief of Staff Feslav furrowed his brows as he spoke.

“Why bother with all that? Our mission is simply to eliminate this insurgent force. Regardless of the enemy’s intentions, we’ll deal with the bait first before worrying about anything else. This enemy is composed of soldiers from four different states, and they have their own internal conflicts. It’s possible that this Tuscan army has been betrayed,” speculated General Morques.

After thinking for a moment, Feslav didn’t find any problems and said, “Alright, let’s attack first and then see. But let’s send out more scouts to be cautious of enemy reinforcements!”

As time passed, with the command of Morques, the sound of guns and cannons resounded, signaling the start of the Battle of Venice.

The sudden enemy attack caught the Tuscan army off guard while they were in marching formation.

Macheld was an excellent speaker and possibly a great writer, but he was definitely not a military strategist.

Macheld held a disdainful view of the decadent Tuscan aristocratic officers in the expeditionary force. He personally appointed most of the officers, the majority being patriotic young individuals.

The troops were full of vigor and dissatisfied with the sluggish marching pace of their comrades. They decided to run a little faster and inadvertently found themselves at the forefront.

Due to extensive propaganda, they held a belief that the Austrian Empire was in decline and its army was weak. The swift occupation of Lombardy by the Kingdom of Sardinia further reinforced this conviction.

Thus, when confronted with the enemy, their initial response was not panic but rather delight. Without hesitation, they issued orders to counterattack, with the young officers leading the charge at the very front.

Chapter 82: A Joke on the Battlefield

If you don't court death, you won't die. Macheld clearly ignored the fact that the Tuscan army was weak in combat, and they were immediately suppressed by the Austrian army from the start of the battle.

"Attack!"

"You bastards, quickly get up and attack!"

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Macheld angrily cursed as the young officers showed great bravery, but the soldiers behaved in a very Italian manner.

They shouted slogans loudly, yet before even seeing a trace of the enemy, they were already lying on the ground pretending to be dead. This was undoubtedly infuriating.

There was no doubt that the lower-ranking soldiers did not want to fight against Austria. Before the outbreak of the War of the First Coalition, Tuscany was still a member of the Holy Roman Empire, and their ancestors were loyal to the Habsburg family.

Even now, Austria still wielded considerable influence in Tuscany. This influence couldn't be eliminated in a short period of time. The soldiers' feelings towards Austria were complex.

This is a tragic issue. The anti-Austrian movement in the Italian region was merely initiated by the bourgeoisie for their own interests. The common people, even if they were deceived, did not experience the real pain. They may chant slogans from time to time, but asking them to sacrifice their lives is another matter.

The ones who truly aspire to defeat Austria and unify the Italian region are the capitalists, intellectuals, and nationalists.

To put it bluntly, they had been divided for thousands of years, and everyone had grown accustomed to this way of life.

Otherwise, in history, Austria would not have been able to easily defeat the allied forces of the Italian states in 1848 and regain control over Venice and Lombardy.

"General, we are facing a major offensive from the Austrian main force. Shouldn't we seek assistance from our allies?" suggested a young officer.

Not everyone has lost their clarity of mind. Even if there were some impulsive decisions made earlier, after the recent battle, everyone has come to their senses and regained their composure.

This expeditionary force from Tuscany, from top to bottom, is incompetent. The senior commanders only know how to strategize on paper, while the junior officers are like immature teenagers. They may be suitable as fearless frontline soldiers, but leading a whole army is a different matter altogether.

“Very well, immediately send someone to request assistance from Marshal Badoglio and order the troops to prepare for a strategic retreat!” Macheld quickly made the decision.

A true man knows when to yield and when to fight. If you can’t face them, you should avoid them. This has been a tradition in Italy - to retreat if overpowered, to surrender if unable to escape.

It’s unclear whether this decline in Italian combat effectiveness began several hundred years ago or more than a thousand years ago. In the era of mercenaries prevailing in continental Europe, Italian mercenaries were notoriously considered the weakest in battle, in stark contrast to their neighbor Switzerland.

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While the Tuscan army suffered casualties, General Messer, who was responsible for attacking Trento, also encountered troubles.

Of course, since they were the ones initiating the attack and had a force several times larger than the defenders they were not at risk of annihilation. But it became impossible for them to capture Trento.

“General, the enemy’s firepower is too intense. The Second Division has suffered heavy casualties. Major Will requests reinforcements!” The aide-de-camp said solemnly.

With a bang, General Messer’s cup flew out of his hand.

“Idiots! The battle has only just begun, and they have already suffered such heavy losses. Have they encountered the Austrian main force?”

This question remained unanswered, but it was certain that the opposing force couldn’t be the main Austrian army, otherwise the tide of battle would have turned.

“General Messer, perhaps we should temporarily halt the attack and launch a full-scale offensive once the artillery units arrive,” proposed Major Manstu.

Reluctantly, as he was reluctant to deplete his valuable troops, Messer said, “Very well, let’s slow down the assault. We will launch a full-scale attack when the artillery arrives tomorrow.”

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Unable to secure reinforcements, but receiving the order to temporarily halt the attack, Major Will let out a sigh of relief. The Second Division had suffered the loss of nearly a battalion’s worth of troops in just one morning, a casualty count that the division couldn’t withstand.

Watching the soldiers falling on the charging path, Major Will felt immense heartache and reluctantly gave the order, “Order the troops to retreat!”

The retreat horn sounded, and a bizarre scene unfolded on the battlefield. The Sardinian soldiers who had fallen on the charging path suddenly stopped playing dead.

Major Will, who had been devastated by the losses, now became furious. If he couldn't understand what was happening, he wouldn't be worthy of being the commander of a division.

"Damn it, these damn bastards! I'll send them all to the military court!" Major Will roared.

Major Will couldn't help but feel angry. Just moments ago, he had submitted a report to the command headquarters detailing the heavy losses. Now, seeing the soldiers stop playing dead one by one, it was a major blow to his pride.

After tallying the casualties, Major Will's heart bled. It wasn't because the losses were too great, but quite the opposite—they were too small. They had launched an attack for the entire morning, resulting in just over twenty deaths and over seventy injuries. And they called that heavy losses? This was a division, not a mere battalion!

The soldiers didn't suffer many casualties, but the loss of weapons and equipment was far from insignificant.

When they ran back, the Austrian troops didn't forget to shoot at them from behind, and as a precaution, many soldiers returned empty-handed.

Preliminary estimates showed that in just one morning, the Second Division had lost over 1,300 rifles. If it weren't for the principle of collective responsibility, Major Will would have wanted to give those damn bastards a good scolding.

Victory? Well, they had probably just depleted some of the enemy's ammunition and weapons. But they hadn't even come within a hundred meters of the enemy's positions. What kind of victory was that?

"General, most of these soldiers were recruited from the Lombardy region, and they are a bunch of cowards. It would not be like this if we replace them with our experienced veterans in the afternoon battle!" reminded a military officer.

Major Will nodded helplessly, hoping that the other soldiers could be braver. If everyone followed the example of those cowards from the morning battle, there would be no point in fighting this battle.

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Not only were they the ones frustrated, but the Austrian defenders on the other side were even more frustrated.

Colonel Gregory, responsible for defending the first line of defense, was extremely delighted as he watched the enemy fall one after another, thinking that his soldiers had turned into sharpshooters.

However, to his surprise, the situation changed by midday, and the enemy soldiers who were killed suddenly stood up, leaving him infuriated and his face turning pale with anger.

It was so close, with commendations and victory reports ready to be submitted. Fortunately, they were not sent, or else he would have faced the grave accusation of falsely claiming achievements.

The enemy's actions left Colonel Gregory puzzled. He could only speculate, "Could they be aiming to exhaust our ammunition? But their commander's tactics are rather amusing. Trento is not lacking in weapons and ammunition, after all."

"Sir, is it possible that the enemy has some hidden agenda? Perhaps they are trying to lure us out, only to launch a surprise attack and seize our position?" a young officer proposed, displaying a vivid imagination.

Chapter 83: Battlefield Survival Manual

"This is a load of nonsense! The enemy on the other side is clearly a bunch of new recruits. They charge in a disorganized manner during the attack and scatter in all directions during the retreat. I have no idea where they found such exceptional soldiers!"

Gregory quickly made his assessment. If it weren't for the lack of manpower, he would have given the order to counterattack. Opportunities like this are rare.

"Sir, I noticed that the enemy has left behind a considerable amount of weapons. Why don't we send someone to collect them? We can make a profit out of it!" suggested the young officer after some thought.

Gregory glared fiercely, his voice filled with frustration as he said, "Ambri?, sometimes I really want to split open your head and see what's inside, why you have so many shitty ideas!

You're so focused on making money, do you really think the enemy on the other side is a bunch of fools? Why don't you go up there and try it yourself, see if the enemy will spare your life?

Our task is to hold the defense line. What use is it to pick up a few useless guns?"

In this era, the treatment of soldiers in various countries was not that good, and the primary way to become wealthy was through looting and seizing spoils of war on the battlefield.

In this war, as it was fought on Austrian soil, plundering was out of the question. No matter how crazy they were, they couldn't go around plundering in their own territory. Therefore, seizing spoils of war became their primary source of income.

Of course, the promise of land rewards made by Franz was also an important factor in keeping them focused on the battle.

In the past, obtaining land rewards primarily meant becoming a noble and receiving landed estates, which was extremely difficult. Apart from a few lucky individuals, most people had no opportunity to attain such rewards.

However, Franz made a change this time. Previously, even a knight would require thousands of acres of land as fief. Now, ordinary soldiers who have distinguished themselves in battle can also receive land rewards.

(1 hectare \approx 2.5 acres = 15 mu)

However, this land does not belong to the noble estates and does not come with noble privileges. It is more like the government using land as payment for military service and rewards for valor.

Since it is not part of the noble estates, the requirements are much lower, making it easier for ordinary soldiers to obtain land. Basically, as long as they participate in a battle, they can acquire a few acres of land, and if they are lucky, they might even get several hectares.

Ambri?'s desire to make money primarily stems from his concern that his military achievements may not be sufficient. He plans to use the money to buy land, as his ultimate goal is to become a farmer.

This is a preferential treatment for soldiers. To prevent excessive land consolidation, the Austrian land redemption law stipulates that the maximum land area per person for redemption shall not exceed 2 hectares, and the rewards obtained on the battlefield are not included in the calculation.

"Uncle Gregory, as you know, I have many siblings in my family. Being the second son, I don't have the qualifications to inherit titles and wealth, so I want to take this opportunity to make some profit!" Ambri? said nonchalantly.

Gregory replied with a hint of annoyance, "Damn it, why don't you strive to earn a title for yourself? I bet that as long as you can obtain even the lowest-ranking non-hereditary knighthood, Old John would be happier than you earning a hundred thousand Rhine guilders!"

During this era, the main officers in European armies were mostly from noble families, especially the second sons who were ineligible to inherit titles. They would enter the military at a young age and strive to distinguish themselves.

These individuals received a good education and quickly stood out within the military. It was these noble-born aspirants for titles who were behind the colonial movements in various European countries.

Ambri? pondered for a moment and said, "I also want to obtain a title, but given my rank, it's extremely difficult to earn one through military achievements.

Uncle Gregory, how about we launch a surprise attack on the enemy camp tonight? If we succeed, there's a chance my goal will be realized!"

Gregory rubbed his forehead and gave up on the idea of teaching his distant nephew, Ambri?. Even if they were to conduct a night raid, they needed to consider the practical circumstances.

It was true that the enemy was quite terrible. Throughout his many years in the military, he had never seen such a poorly trained and disorganized force.

However, their sheer numbers were overwhelming. The enemy had two divisions while his own forces consisted of only one regiment, not even reaching one-fifth of their enemy's manpower. Wouldn't it certainly be giving away their lives in vain?

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In the camp of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Major Will delivered a harsh scolding to the soldiers who laid dead on the battlefield today. He selected a few unlucky individuals as examples and carried out military justice, asserting his authority.

The battle resumed. Perhaps due to the display of authority or the presence of seasoned veterans in the Sardinian army, the afternoon's fighting became much more intense and brutal.

Picking up his binoculars, Major Will observed the scene of carnage, where soldiers even managed to charge into enemy positions. Satisfied, he nodded approvingly. This was what war should be like. If they were all as foolish as those in the morning, there would be no hope!

Within the camp, undercurrents had already begun to stir.

One soldier with a dirty and disheveled appearance exclaimed excitedly, "Tom, the knowledge from the 'Battlefield Survival Manual' is really coming in handy. Did you see those idiots? They're usually all arrogant and full of themselves, but now they're foolishly rushing in and getting themselves killed. It's so satisfying!"

"Of course, this is what Signor Gualazzi spent a fortune on, buying it from an old mercenary. It's meant to help us reduce casualties on the battlefield.

Raúl, be careful not to let the Sardinians catch wind of it. They still have to fight in this war! If everyone becomes smart like us, who will go and fight the Austrians?" Tom, the middle-aged man, said cautiously.

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The "Battlefield Survival Manual" was not something an old mercenary could have written. It was specifically prepared by Franz for the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Based on his extensive research on Italian military history, Franz decided to introduce it to the Sardinian army. Since it was developed within the Italian context, there were no concerns about its suitability.

In addition, he also provided a concise guideline consisting of sixteen words: Fight if victory is possible, retreat if it is not, and surrender if retreat is impossible.

It contains various life-saving techniques on the battlefield, such as: when initiating a charge, feigning death at a favorable location halfway through.

The choice of location is crucial, neither too far from the enemy nor too close to the main camp.

It is preferable to have a cover that can shield from enemy stray bullets, while considering comfort because spending too much time lying still can cause numbness.

Similarly, when defending, it's important not to expose oneself unnecessarily. Shooting bullets randomly is sufficient, as the chances of hitting the enemy are generally low. Unless there is a matter of life and death, there's no need to risk everything.

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Franz's mischievous sense of humor led him to compile a total of thirty-six techniques, commonly known as the "Thirty-Six Strategies for Survival." They are all practical life-saving tactics specifically designed for the battlefield. What's unique about them is that they are accompanied by straightforward explanations, devoid of any literary flair, making them easily understandable to all.

Chapter 84: Betraying Allies

In the late night, cries of agony echoed through the Sardinian camp.

Misreporting military intelligence is a punishable offense, and if losses were claimed to be heavy, there must be actual losses.

No worthy leader is without ruthlessness, and one who commands troops must not be too kind-hearted. Having climbed to his position, Major Will is certainly not someone who is soft-hearted.

In order to justify the situation to his superiors, Major Will had no choice but to intensify the offensive in the afternoon.

The veterans of the Sardinian Kingdom displayed great courage, showcasing a stronger sense of nationalism compared to the Lombardians. The afternoon battle intensified and grew more brutal.

When tallying the casualties, Major Will waved his hand and added all the losses to the morning battle. Over three hundred deaths and over eight hundred injuries could barely be considered heavy casualties.

The senior officers of the Second Division, led by Major Will, managed to justify their circumstances, but the morale of the troops reached an all-time low.

There is no harm without comparison. Italians are adept at learning, especially the seasoned soldiers in the army. They quickly absorbed the advanced strategies of their comrades.

When there are more people involved, maintaining secrecy becomes challenging. The “Battlefield Survival Manual” quickly spread among the troops of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Perhaps due to the prevailing spirit of camaraderie, these soldiers enthusiastically embraced this set of tactics for surviving on the battlefield.

Even Franz’s unconventional theories gained widespread acceptance. At some point, a new sentiment emerged within the Sardinian military: “Don’t sacrifice yourself for the capitalists.”

Italy’s long history of division has led ordinary people to forget their identity as Italians. Instead, they have come to identify themselves as Sardinians, Genoese, Lombards, and so on...

What benefits does unification bring to them? It’s clear that the capitalists are the ones who profit the most, as a unified Italy provides them with a larger market for exploitation. Meanwhile, these soldiers who bleed and sacrifice for the cause of unification gain nothing!

The Kingdom of Sardinia’s nationalism has awakened, giving rise to various conflicting ideologies. Italians are adept at deep thinking, and as they ponder more, they start to consider their own interests.

Unknowingly, the military of the Kingdom of Sardinia has undergone a transformation, gradually distancing itself from its once valiant and skilled nature.

This is also a tradition in Italy, commonly referred to as the “three-minute enthusiasm.” Once they witness bloodshed and sacrifice, their passion is extinguished. “The Battlefield Survival Manual” merely provides them with a convincing rationale to justify their actions.

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Marshal Badoglio, the Supreme Commander of the Venetian-Sardinian Army, was still unaware that his troops were undergoing a remarkable transformation. He was currently troubled by the plea for help from the Tuscan forces.

He genuinely appreciates the active performance of the Tuscan army. In a war like this, enthusiastic individuals like them are needed as cannon fodder.

"A frontline report has arrived, saying that the Tuscan army is under attack by the main Austrian forces and seeking our assistance. What do you think we should do?"

A middle-aged officer furrowed his brow and said, "Lord Marshal, the Tuscan forces are approximately thirty kilometers away from us. Considering the time it takes for the message to reach us, the battle should have taken place half a day ago.

If we dispatch our troops immediately, it will still take at least a day for them to reach the battlefield. Regardless of whether we can catch up or not, it would disrupt our military deployments, making it difficult to fight subsequent battles!"

Clearly, he was not willing to rescue the Tuscan forces.

Allies, aren't they meant to be betrayed?

Besides, when did the Kingdom of Sardinia truly become allies with Tuscany?

As long as the Kingdom of Sardinia aims to unify the Italian region, it will eventually clash with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Sending them help at such a time would be aiding an enemy, wouldn't it?

"Jackson, that doesn't seem right! If we refuse to assist the Tuscan forces, it will create severe diplomatic issues. The Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples will also feel betrayed, and we will be left to fight this war alone!" another middle-aged officer objected.

"Cansandos, this war is in our home ground. These allies can't be relied upon.

The Kingdom of Naples did send an army of 40,000, but where are they? The vanguard they sent, does it even constitute a regiment?

While the Tuscan soldiers have shown enthusiasm, we all know that their commander is an arrogant fool who lacks even the slightest military knowledge.

What can we expect from such unreliable allies besides causing chaos?

And that one division from the Papal States, we all know they only have slightly over 7,000 soldiers. They have been dragging their feet along the way, do they even have the intention to fight?" Another middle-aged officer, Jackson, voiced his opposition.

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Marshal Badoglio nodded in agreement. It was clear that they couldn't rely on their allies for military support. Austria held too much influence among the Italian states, and despite pressuring other nations to join the war, they contributed very little.

Now, the situation in Italy was further complicated by the conservative factions in the Papal States and Naples seeking restoration. It was possible that their allies would withdraw from the conflict at any moment.

“Your points are valid. Let's send a message to the Tuscan forces, urging them to hold on and await reinforcements. We will dispatch our troops as soon as possible!”

Without a doubt, Marshal Badoer was betraying his allies. They said they would send troops as soon as possible, when exactly?

If they truly want to rescue the Tuscan forces, they should march day and night to deploy troops now instead of wasting time here.

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At the front line, General Macheld of Tuscany is no longer the spirited and confident leader he once was. Covered in dirt and with his soldiers, they are now undergoing a “strategic retreat.”

This battle cannot be fought. The Tuscan army's combat capability was already weak but the enemy forces were also twice their size. After a few hours of resistance, they were crushed.

General Macheld, accompanied by a group of battered and defeated soldiers, turned and fled without looking back. Losing the war is one thing and there was no shame in losing to the Austrians. But he didn't want to stay behind and become a prisoner.

As a thorn to the king, if he were to fall into the hands of the Austrians, there might be a chance for a prisoner exchange or he could end up being eliminated. Macheld would not dare to test the king's integrity.

“General Macheld, Marshal Badoglio has instructed us to hold our ground and reinforcements will be deployed as soon as possible!” a young officer exclaimed with excitement.

“Did the Sardinian forces actually set out immediately upon receiving our plea for help?” Macheld inquired anxiously.

“No, they held a military meeting for about an hour, and then they said they would deploy as soon as possible. By now, they might have already set off,” the young officer replied with uncertainty.

Macheld's expression changed drastically as he quickly reacted to the situation. He gave the order, “Command the troops to increase their pace. Our allies are on their way. Let's meet them ahead!”

Allies? It's nothing but a bunch of nonsense. Such evasive answers might deceive those naive youngsters, but it won't work on seasoned veterans like Macheld.

Speed is of the essence when it comes to rescuing people, just like putting out a fire. Would there be time for slow meetings?

Since no allies are coming, it's only natural to hurry up and get moving. Boosting morale was also essential.

Chapter 85: Dark History

Since the Austrian army laid siege to Budapest, the city has been filled with fear and unease. If it weren't for the new government holding onto the illusion of the Kingdom of Sardinia as their ally, many people would have already fled.

Of course, even those who haven't fled yet were already preparing to do so. Budapest is a sizable city, and to prevent any desperate struggles by the enemy, the Bohemian Corps strictly enforced the "three surround, one remain" strategy.

For a handful of individuals, it was still relatively easy to escape as long as they didn't move in large groups. The Austrian army was unlikely to take notice unless a significant military detachment was leaving the city.

Hungarian Republic's Minister of Army, G?rge, spoke with a troubled expression, "Mr. Kossuth, we have just received intelligence that the traitors from Croatia will join forces with the Austrian troops outside the city tomorrow.

At that time, the enemy forces besieging the city will rise to 150,000, and Budapest will be unable to hold!"

"General G?rge's words are not wrong. Budapest simply cannot withstand the enemy's powerful military force. This revolution has already failed. In order to minimize the losses and preserve Hungary as much as possible, I propose engaging in negotiations with the Austrian government!" Minister of Internal Affairs, Schemir, spoke up.

With the military setbacks, reactionary forces in Hungary began to rise.

The bourgeois aristocrats led by Schemir and Gorbachev leading the compromising faction within the military sought to negotiate with the Austrian government to safeguard their own interests.

For Kossuth, this was undoubtedly a major blow. Even before the siege by the Bohemian Corps, he advocated launching a preemptive strike while the enemy was still unstable. Unfortunately, he faced opposition from the military.

Currently, the enemy was busy outside the city, redistributing land and empowering the peasants. Through the liberation of serfs and land distribution, the Austrian army has gained the support of the local population.

Ironically, it was the Hungarian Republic that was viewed with hostility by the local population. In the eyes of the common people, the emperor in faraway Vienna was their protector, while the Hungarian government in Budapest was seen as a tool for the exploitation by the nobles and capitalists.

Minister of Education, Petofi, quickly opposed, saying, "No, if we engage in negotiations with Austria now, Hungary will be divided. The Austrian government is plotting to divide Hungary, and we will be left with just one province! Moreover, even in that one province, we won't have any autonomy. The Austrian government holds the advantage, so how can we expect them to make compromises?"

In fact, compromise was something the revolutionary party didn't mind. However, the gap between the conditions that both sides wanted was simply too vast.

The Austrian government, led by Franz, planned to divide Hungary into five provinces: Croatia, Slavonia, Vojvodina, Transylvania, and Hungary.

This was no secret. Croatia and Transylvania have already established independent provinces, while preparations were already underway for the governments of Slavonia and Vojvodina.

Once this plan succeeds, the Kingdom of Hungary will become history. Due to ethnic relations, their chances of independence will be limited to only the remaining province of Hungary, which significantly increased the difficulty.

Schemir retorted, “Mr. Petofi, the reality is that we simply cannot win the war! If we refuse to negotiate with the Austrian government, the eventual outcome will likely be even worse. They will erase Hungary from history. Throughout the course of history, countless nations have vanished. Don’t you want to prevent the disappearance of the Hungarian people?”

Kossuth exclaimed excitedly, “The great Hungarian nation will not disappear! History will prove the futility of the enemy’s conspiracies. As long as we persevere, victory will be ours! To win this war, I have invited the renowned Polish general, Henryk Dąbrowski. I believe that we can certainly emerge victorious!”

Schemir’s face darkened, but he remained silent. Despite his dislike for Kossuth’s tendency to switch into speech mode, the revolutionary party was still in power, and he didn’t intend to directly confront them at the moment.

At this stage of the war, individual efforts alone cannot bring about change.

They dared to establish the Hungarian Republic because, at that time, Hungary was united as a whole while the Austrian Empire was already on the brink of collapse. The reform measures of the Austrian government had also encroached upon their interests.

However, who could have predicted that shortly after their independence, stability would return to Austria while Hungary, under the political onslaught from the Austrian government, would fracture into pieces? The balance of power between the two sides has undergone a staggering transformation.

No one is foolish, except for the barefoot revolutionaries. The rest are all considering their options. The Austrian government has shown no mercy towards the rebels this time. For those who have families and businesses to consider, who among them are willing to risk everything?

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The lower-class population of Budapest don’t care what the high-ranking individuals think. They are more worried about having three meals a day. Since the Austrian army laid siege to the city, the transportation routes for goods between Budapest and the outside world have been cut off.

Hungary was a major producer of food in Europe, with fertile farmland surrounding Budapest. Food supplies within the city were not lacking.

However, the skyrocketing prices became unbearable. Many people prioritize money over their lives, and in this crisis, their mindset was not about weathering the storm together but rather taking advantage of the situation.

For example, the cheapest black bread has its price increased by 58% compared to before the revolution. The price of coal for cooking and heating has also doubled.

Fuel had to be conserved, forcing many households to cook together. Even so, the soaring prices made their lives increasingly difficult.

To make matters worse, the Hungarian Republic government issued republican currency and restoration vouchers, which resulted in the plundering of the people's wealth.

Since the establishment of the Hungarian Republic, the people in Budapest have not experienced a few days of peace. How can ideals of nationality, statehood, and freedom compare to the basic necessity of having three meals a day?

On April 18, 1848, a workers' movement was sparked in Budapest. Hungry workers and impoverished citizens took to the streets, demanding that the government address rising prices, take strict action against price gouging by profiteers, implement the "Labour Protection Law," and tackle the issue of unemployment.

The Hungarian Republic government, acting as the spokesperson for the bourgeoisie, naturally disregarded their demands. The Kossuth government responded with brutal repression.

On April 23, 1848, news of Austria's abolition of serfdom reached Hungary. The exploited and oppressed serfs in the small Kecel region could no longer bear it and revolted. The rebels seized the manors, killed the overseers, and divided the land among themselves.

The uprising quickly spread along the Danube River, causing great alarm among the Hungarian nobility. They turned their attention to Vienna and Budapest, seeking assistance.

Undoubtedly, the Austrian government, aiming to suppress the Hungarian nobility, refused their request on the grounds of being beyond their reach. In order to gain the support of the nobility, the Kossuth government once again found itself on the opposite side of the people.

After suppressing the workers' and peasants' movements, the Hungarian Republic government obtained support from capitalists and the nobility. The cohesion among the Hungarian nation increased, but at the same time, a rift formed between them and the lower-class population.

Chapter 86: Getting Ready to Slaughter the Sheep

Winning over hearts and minds is paramount, while capturing cities comes secondary.

Many people understand this principle, but few can truly implement it. Julius did an excellent job this time, and perhaps no one would associate him with the name Butcher General anymore.

Liberating the serfs and distributing land are effective tools for buying popular support. Even though the peasants still need to pay for the redemption of these lands, Julius gained a wave of public favor.

Once the local population learned that they could receive land for free by cooperating with the government forces to suppress the rebellion, the farmers near Budapest spontaneously turned into volunteers.

Given the Kossuth government's limited capabilities under siege-like circumstances, they were unable to effectively block the spread of information.

After news of the land distribution reached the city, many people's thoughts underwent a transformation. The nobles seethed with deep resentment, the capitalists trembled with fear, while the lower-class workers glimpsed a new ray of hope.

Since the Austrian government had already fulfilled its promise of land reform for the peasants, it naturally raised the possibility of enacting protective legislation for the working class.

In this situation, Franz's intelligence organization also sprang into action. Seeing that the sinking ship of the Hungarian Republic was about to go under, there were many who were unwilling to be buried with it.

Even if the high-ranking nobles are infuriated by the actions of the Austrian government, they now have to reluctantly accept it. They have significant estates and wealth and were not willing to risk their lives.

With the collaboration of these local powerbrokers, the intelligence organization's operations were smoothly carried out. The inexperienced Kossuth government was unaware of these developments.

Perhaps due to the extensive persecution they suffered under the secret police, once the revolutionary party assumed control, these organizations were dissolved. The security of Budapest is now upheld by the internal defense forces, which have become the hired hands of the capitalists and nobles.

If the situation continues like this, it is possible that within three to five months, Budapest could be liberated by the Austrian government without shedding a drop of blood.

Vienna.

"Your Majesty, the Croatian Corps has successfully joined forces with the Bohemian Corps in Budapest. It is time to bring an end to the Hungarian War. Continuing this conflict any longer would be highly detrimental to us!" Prince Windisch-Grätz spoke solemnly.

He did not exaggerate. The rebel forces were nothing more than a disorganized group because their uprising was rushed and they lacked proper training.

Such enemies could easily be dealt with by the regular army. However, if given enough time, these inexperienced rebels would become a formidable force to be reckoned with once they received proper training.

In history, the Hungarian Revolution consumed so much of Austria's resources that even with the assistance of Russian forces, it took significant effort to suppress it. It was the ample time for preparation given to the rebels that posed such a challenge.

"Very well, in that case, let us launch the attack. Command the troops to exercise restraint, I do not want to clean up after them!" Franz spoke with great seriousness.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Prince Windisch-Grätz replied.

"Prime Minister, how are the preparations for the aftermath coming along? Once the Hungarian Revolution is suppressed, how does the government plan to govern the Hungarian region?" Franz asked with concern.

Prime Minister Felix confidently replied, "Your Highness, considering the unique situation in Hungary, our cabinet is prepared to further divide the Hungarian Province. We will divide them into three provinces, with the Danube River and Tisza River as the boundaries.

The first is the Western Hungarian Province, located west of the Danube River, with its capital in Pécs. The second is the Central Hungarian Province, located east of the Danube River and west of the Tisza River, with its capital in Miskolc. And the third is the Eastern Hungarian Province, located east of the Tisza River, with its capital in Debrecen.

In addition to the already divided Croatian Province, Transylvania Province, Slavonia Province, and Vojvodina Province, the Kingdom of Hungary will be divided into a total of seven parts.

After the war, the gathering places of the Magyar people will also be divided into three parts. The government will allocate significant funds to local education to help the local population integrate into Austria as quickly as possible.”

Frantz nodded in satisfaction. With the division of administrative regions and the assimilation of language and culture, using this combination of strategies, Hungary would merely be reduced to a regional term decades later.

“How will the education funds be addressed?” Frantz asked with concern.

Austria’s current wartime economic system, known as planned economy, had also confiscated a significant amount of property from rebel forces, leaving no shortage of funds.

This economic model was only suitable for short-term emergencies or sudden bursts of growth. As time passed and the system became rigid, it would inevitably restrict economic development. Eventually, efforts would have to be made to restore to a normal economic model.

If they were to rely on central government funding, the financial burden on the government would be too great once the economy returns to normal. After all, there was a need for assimilation in the Hungarian region, and other regions of Austria would also require the same.

“Your Majesty, we are considering abolishing the church tithe and replacing it with a government-imposed compulsory education tax to address the funding gap!” Felix hesitated as he spoke.

Frantz’s eyes lit up. He had long wanted to abolish the church tithe but as a devout Catholic, he needed a suitable reason to do so, as abruptly abolishing it would bring him into conflict with the Church.

Now that the Prime Minister has brought it up, Frantz naturally fully supports this idea. If the Church has any objections, they can take it up with the Cabinet, as it was their proposal. Frantz cynically thought to himself.

After all, this era was no longer the Middle Ages. The Pope has been driven into exile by the revolutionary party in Naples, and the Church was ultimately no match for the government. Of course, they still have the power to tarnish someone’s reputation.

“Do we have enough funds? Significant education expenses will be required throughout the country in the coming years. Will the abolition of the tithe be sufficient?” Frantz asked, full of concern.

Felix said firmly, “Your Majesty, there is a serious moral decay among the religious personnel in our country. As devout believers in God, it is necessary for us to rectify the misconduct within the Church.

The Cabinet is prepared to conduct a thorough investigation of the clergy and impose strict punishments on those who violate the precepts. We will also seize any illegal assets held by the Church.

These funds will be allocated to the field of education, along with the obligatory education tax. I believe Austria’s educational expenses will be well covered.”

Since they have already offended the Church once, Frantz thought it best to continue targeting this lucrative source of money by breaking the jar completely.

During the mid-19th century, it was difficult to provide an accurate answer regarding the wealth of the Austrian Church. However, the Church had accumulated significant wealth over the years, much more than the Austrian government.

Though it is said, “A guilty conscience needs no accuser,” having excessive wealth may not necessarily be a good thing. Now, the Austrian government has set its sights on the Church’s riches. Franz, being a “devout Catholic,” felt obliged to cleanse the Church’s ranks in the name of God.

“The Prime Minister’s words are reasonable. The moral development of religious personnel must be strengthened. As faithful followers of God, it is our duty to help guide the wayward servants of God and lead them back onto the righteous path!”

Chapter 87: Battle of Budapest - Undercurrents

The Austrian Church was not an easy target either. Although it has declined, it has aligned itself with the local nobility. The higher echelons of the Church were also mostly composed of noble descendants.

This was also why Franz did not rush to confront the Church, as it would have far-reaching consequences. One must take things step by step, and enemies must be dealt with one by one. If it is possible to turn enemies into allies, even better.

There was no doubt that the members of the Austrian Church were not worth his efforts to win over. They were incredibly wealthy and hinder the development of Austrian society. They are true conservatives.

Prime Minister Felix spoke up, “Your Majesty, it would be best to postpone dealing with the Church. Recently, there have been changes in the Papal States. Pope Pius IX has sought refuge in Naples and has asked for our aid.

The Cabinet has decided to expedite the pacification of the rebellion, defeat the Kingdom of Sardinia, and then send troops to assist Pope Pius IX in regaining power!”

Clearly, the Cabinet was not foolish and understood that the Church cannot be rashly confronted. Since the Middle Ages, there has been a power struggle between the secular monarchy and the ecclesiastical authority. While secular power has gained the upper hand, the influence of the Church should not be underestimated.

Directly taking action against them is certainly not a wise choice. However, these clergy members are not without their adversaries. The Austrian Catholic Church was still under the leadership of the Holy See.

Now that there have been changes in the Papal States, Austria needed to extend a helping hand. After the matter is resolved, can Pope Pius IX really not reciprocate the favor?

Franz nodded in satisfaction, thinking to himself: Indeed, these old foxes in the political arena are not to be underestimated. They seize the timing perfectly.

Even the Roman Pontiff was too preoccupied in taking care of himself and was willing to sacrifice the Austrian Church for his own interests without hesitation. With the Pope supporting their cause, the pressure they will face will be significantly reduced.

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With the command from the Austrian government, the battle for Budapest began.

Lieutenant General Julius no longer had to worry. According to the Austrian government's plan, Budapest was already dispensable in the future division of administrative districts, so there was no need to worry about the war destroying the city.

In fact, Budapest was a combination of two cities, Buda and Pest. As early as the medieval era, Pest became the capital of Hungary, while Buda was a city separated by a river from Pest.

When referring to the two cities, they are usually mentioned together as Budapest or Pest-Buda.

After the establishment of the Hungarian Republic, the two cities were merged, but in the post-war period, they would be divided and governed by two separate provinces.

"Lord Governor, the Army High Command has issued the order to attack the city, requesting us to capture Budapest as soon as possible. What are your thoughts on this?" Lieutenant General Julius inquired with concern.

The Bohemian Corps and the Croatian Corps are temporarily under joint command for this assault on Budapest. Julius must consider the opinion of Governor Josip Jelačić.

"Commander, the Hungarian rebels are nothing more than insignificant turtles. Taking Budapest is not a problem; the key is whether we can eliminate them completely!"

At this moment, the Transylvanian Army has already reached the banks of the Tisza River, and the Austrian Army is advancing along the Danube River. Outside our encirclement, a larger encirclement is taking shape.

The only escape route for these rebels is to flee to the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan's government initiated major reforms as early as 1839, and they have a long history of hostility with the Empire, making it highly likely that they will shelter these rebels.

If they are allowed to join forces, it would be highly detrimental to the Empire's future rule in Hungary. Therefore, the key to this war lies in completely annihilating the enemy!"

Governor Josip Jelačić was a military politician, and he approached issues more from a political perspective. In the long run, completely eradicating the Hungarian revolutionary party holds more significance than capturing Budapest.

Lieutenant General Julius sighed and said, "That's difficult to achieve. The revolutionary party is not as brave as they boast. Once the situation turns unfavorable, they will run away faster than rabbits. I suspect they have already prepared an escape route by now. When we launch the siege of Budapest, they will flee unless we can trap them inside the city. Otherwise, it will be impossible to annihilate them."

As a loyal servant of the Habsburg family, Julius held a deep disdain for the revolutionary party. If given the opportunity, he wouldn't mind hanging every last one of them.

Franz appointed him as the Supreme Commander, primarily with the intention of unleashing a brutal crackdown and eliminating all individuals involved in or suspected of participating in the rebellion.

Regardless of whether they could achieve a clean sweep of the rebel forces, on May 24, 1848, the Austrian army still launched the siege of Budapest. In order to annihilate the leaders of the revolutionary party, Jelačić even opted for the militarily unfavorable strategy of surrounding the city from all sides.

The Hungarian Republic's external connections were completely severed, and Budapest had become an isolated city. Not being restrained by anything, the Austrian army unleashed relentless artillery fire upon the city.

Budapest.

Ever since the sound of cannons echoed through the city, this ancient city became tumultuous. The hardliners and the moderates engaged in endless arguments, while some cunning individuals started seeking for escape routes, increasing the pressure on the Kossuth government.

"Count Schemir, the revolutionary forces are still unwilling to compromise. What should we do now?" General Görge asked with a headache.

"General Görge, how many members of the National Guard are under our command?" Schemir inquired with concern.

"Kossuth has started to doubt us. Half a month ago, he transferred the military authority to Bem, and now he has brought in the renowned Polish general, Henryk Dobrowski, to oversee the city's defenses.

If we were to act now, I could command a force of 13,000 soldiers, but they are scattered among different units and cannot be effectively gathered together!" Görge replied awkwardly.

"Worthless!"

That was Schemir's immediate response. As the Minister of the Army in the provisional government, it was unbelievable that he didn't have a reliable army at his disposal.

“Over 13,000 troops? It was clearly a lie. If they still had so many loyal troops in their hands, they would have already clashed with the revolutionaries.

G?rge, as a member of the bourgeois aristocracy, was involved in the formation of the Hungarian National Guard, and had managed to sneak in quite a number of people.

But now, they have been overshadowed by the revolutionaries. Besides using the term ‘worthless’ to describe him, Schemir couldn’t think of a better word.

“General G?rge, I wasn’t asking how many people are inclined towards our side, but rather how many people you can mobilize right now without attracting external attention. I mean immediately, not how many forces can be gathered!” Schemir explained helplessly.

“Under the current circumstances and without attracting attention, I can mobilize no more than five hundred troops,” G?rge answered with a furrowed brow.

Chapter 88: Flooding the 7th Army

Selling out their allies was not that simple; the revolutionaries were not fools. How could they not be on guard against these nobles?

From the very beginning, Kossuth was refusing the involvement of the major nobles in the affairs of the interim government. Schemir and G?rge were both bourgeois aristocrats, having completed their transition from nobility to capitalists.

From the perspective of their interests, an independent Hungarian Republic was more in line with their agenda, which led to their cooperation in forming the interim government.

The Hungarian nobility has already fallen from grace; even those who have transitioned into capitalists were no exception. They could make money effortlessly, so why bother to strive further?

On the contrary, the revolutionary leaders led by Kossuth, many of whom were descendants of fallen nobility, became entrepreneurs due to poverty and harsh circumstances, and their abilities did not significantly deteriorate.

In the power struggle within the interim government, these passive noble individuals naturally lost to the bold and enterprising entrepreneurs.

Schemir was a clever man, but precisely because he was too clever, he didn’t dare to act against the interim government without certainty.

If it were the revolutionary leaders, the outcome would probably be entirely different. With just a few hundred men, they could initiate a coup. Once they controlled the leadership of the interim government, the situation would be firmly in their grasp.

“Let’s wait and see for now. We’ll find a way to bring more people over and strike when the time is right!” Shemire pondered and said.

G?rge naturally didn’t object; despite his seemingly casual tone, he was genuinely uncertain deep down.

The human heart is inscrutable, who knows if there are any among their subordinates leaning towards the revolutionary party? What if the news leaks, and the revolutionaries strike first?

“No problem, Mr. Schemir, but what about the Austrians? How do we explain it to them?” Gerge asked with concern.

Clearly, at this point, they have already entangled themselves with the Austrian government, making the same move as in history—betraying their allies.

“It doesn’t matter. The Austrians only asked that we completely eliminate the leaders of the revolutionary party. Everything else can be negotiated,” Schemir said confidently.

In Hungary, there exist left-wing and right-wing forces. The left-wing, led by Kossuth, advocates abolishing the monarchy and establishing an independent Hungarian Republic.

The right-wing forces, led by Shemir and István, advocate moderate reforms to the social system and seek close cooperation with the Habsburg monarchy.

Undoubtedly, the relationship between the Hungarian right-wing forces and the Austrian government was quite good. Even though the Austrian government abolished serfdom and touched their land, there was still land redemption money to be paid, wasn’t there?

In the end, it was all a matter of price. As long as the money was paid, there weren’t any problems.

Whether the interests of others can be guaranteed, Shemir was not sure, but he can be certain that those aligned with the Austrian government can secure their interests.

Of course, if they want to gain more benefits, they must demonstrate their value to the Austrian government.

If they do nothing and only show a political inclination towards the Austrian government, then when the Austrian troops come in, they probably wouldn’t have a place at the distribution of benefits.

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On the other side, Head of State Kossuth was busy discussing the issue of city defense with Polish veteran Henryk Dembiński. He didn’t know that the capitulators in the government were ready to exchange their heads for meritorious service.

Henryk Dembiński marked important positions on the city defense map and allocated forces according to the actual situation. Once all the work was done, he greeted Kossuth and said, “Mr. Kossuth, the defense of Budapest can only go this far. It’s not realistic to keep the enemy outside. The main task of the upcoming battle will be urban warfare.

In urban warfare, the combat effectiveness of regular troops will be greatly weakened. The National Guard, familiar with the terrain and using the cover of buildings, will have the advantage.

As long as everyone can stand united, we can hold on for at least two to three months, and the enemy may even retreat from Budapest due to heavy losses!”

Kossuth asked with anticipation, "General Henryk, you are a renowned European commander. Do we have any way to inflict heavy damage or even annihilate the enemy?"

For the Hungarian Republic to survive, it must defeat the Austrian Empire. Merely delaying the enemy for two or three months will not significantly change the overall situation.

Henryk Dembiński shook his head and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Kossuth, but even if Napoleon Bonaparte were to live again, it would be impossible to achieve that!

We have to admit that the Hungarian National Guard is far behind the Austrian Army in terms of combat effectiveness, and the gap in weaponry and equipment is immense. Even in terms of troop numbers, we are at a disadvantage.

Apart from the advantage of holding Budapest, we don't have any other leverage. In this situation, engaging the enemy in a decisive battle recklessly would be highly unwise."

Kossuth nodded in disappointment. This conclusion had been reached by the generals in the interim government as well, and it was even more pessimistic than Henryk Dembiński's perspective.

The biggest problem was that many Hungarians did not see the Austrian Army as foreign invaders; they still had strong loyalty towards the emperor, even more so than to the interim government.

If a nationwide vote were to be held, as advocated by the revolutionary party's slogan, it was likely that they would be ousted in embarrassment.

Destruction is always easier than construction. After the establishment of the Hungarian Republic, it only brought promises without actual benefits to the majority of ordinary people, except for some capitalists who profited from the national crisis.

The idea of launching a people's war was unfeasible, and the republican government was running out of time to win the hearts of the people, not to mention the lack of resources to do so.

"General Henryk Dembiński, you mentioned that holding out for too long may lead to defeat. Now that Budapest has lost contact with the outside world, if we cannot break the current situation, I'm afraid we won't be able to hold on for much longer.

Budapest has stored a large amount of food, theoretically, we can hold out for a year without any problem. However, we all know that once the enemy decides to act ruthlessly, they will find ways to conquer this city!" General Bem, the military leader of the revolutionary party, raised his concerns.

"Are you suggesting the possibility of flooding? No, that's not possible! Unless the enemy wants to turn the Hungarian plains into marshland, they wouldn't do such a thing. From the current situation, it seems the enemy has no plans to build dams upstream. As long as the Austrian government cares about public opinion, they wouldn't go that far!" Henryk Dembiński affirmed.

Upon hearing this, Kossuth's expression changed significantly. What might seem implausible to military minds could be viewed differently by politicians. If Budapest remains unconquerable for an extended period, from the Austrian Government's standpoint, might resorting to such drastic measures not be considered implausible after all?

If it were in later times, flooding Budapest wouldn't be considered a major event at all. Franz has even seen news of Budapest being flooded on several occasions.

However, if someone were to construct dams upstream on the Danube and unleash the force of the rushing waters to attack Budapest, the consequences would be severe. Budapest would be doomed, but so would the farmland and cities downstream.

If all the local Hungarian population were supporters of the revolutionary party, there would be no hesitation – the Austrian Army would have already taken such actions.

However, now that there are evidently more supporters of the Habsburg monarchy than the Hungarian Republic government, if they were to flood the city, it would result in a pyrrhic victory - causing harm to both sides.

Franz's thoughts were unknown to Kossuth, but upon hearing the news of the potential flooding of Budapest, Kossuth knew that the city could not hold on for long.

If he were to stand in the position of the Austrian Government, regardless of how severe the consequences and how heavy the cost, they would choose to crush the Hungarian Republic. This is the perspective of politicians.

“No, General Henryk Dembiński. The integrity of politicians is much lower than you can imagine. What deeds can't the corrupt Austrian Government do, after all? The plight of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian people means little to them!” Kossuth said sternly.

At least in his mind, the lives and well-being of hundreds of thousands of Hungarians were expendable chips. If achieving ultimate victory was possible, he would accept sacrifices even several times greater.

This was evident in the way the Republican government suppressed the workers' and peasants' movements. Since the establishment of the Hungarian Republic in 1848, more people have been killed in suppressing these movements than in the previous ten years of the Hungarian Kingdom.

This is almost the common trait of bourgeois governments in this era: they claim to stand for freedom and liberation of productivity, but at the same time, they wield the butcher's knife against the working people.

“Mr. Kossuth, if the enemy plans to flood Budapest, all our current efforts will be futile in the face of such overwhelming floods. Individual strength is insignificant against such a force of nature. I recommend that you immediately prepare an escape route and do your best to preserve the sacred cause of the revolution, ensuring its continuity,” General Henryk Dembiński said with a furrowed brow.

This is also the experience of the Poles; no matter what setbacks they have endured, their revolutionary spirit has never been extinguished. Of course, they were unfortunate to encounter ruthless characters when the Soviets deceived and killed them.

“Let us refrain from launching a proactive attack and concentrate our forces to break through, sparing the city’s civilians from being burdened and enduring the hardships of war!” Petőfi couldn’t help but propose.

As a passionate young man, he couldn’t bear the thought of sacrificing the entire city’s population. Unfortunately, his words wouldn’t change the situation.

Kossuth shook his head and said, “Taking the initiative would be like attacking a rock with an egg. The enemy is hoping we will walk right into their trap. Even if they plan to flood Budapest, they won’t immediately make up their minds after a failed attack. That’s when we will have a chance.

The Venice War has reached a critical moment; the Austrians are still engaged in fierce battles with the Italian states. If our allies win this war, the situation will change.

The decadent Austrian Government lacks the courage to fight till the end. When the enemy is trapped internally and externally, we can seek French mediation, and the revolutionary cause will succeed!”

Clearly, after experiencing successive failures, Kossuth no longer believed that Hungary could achieve national independence on its own. Instead, he pinned his hopes on international intervention.

Henryk Dembiński warned, "Mr. Kossuth, from a military perspective, I must remind you that the hopes of the Italian states winning this war are extremely slim. Among the four Italian states, only the Kingdom of Sardinia is actively engaged in a bloody battle with Austria, and even if they were to miraculously capture Venice, they do not have the capability to support Hungary.”

Their allies in the Italian region are unreliable, and the French are even more unreliable as they are still in the midst of their own revolution. Do they really want to intervene in Hungary’s revolution?

“No, we still have an ally. The arch-enemy of the Habsburg Dynasty, the Ottoman Empire, has just completed a systemic reform. We can ask them to intervene in this war!” Kossuth said fiercely.

He had already made up his mind; he was willing to cede Transylvania to the Ottoman Empire if it meant Hungary could gain independence. To him, accepting such a cost was bearable.

Since 1792, the Ottoman Empire had been undergoing reforms, from military restructuring to technological advancements, economic improvements, and finally political reforms.

From the perspective of that era, the Ottoman Empire was considered progressive, as they adopted European-inspired reforms, although they hadn’t fully achieved their goal of becoming a prosperous and powerful nation.

“No, the Ottoman Empire and Hungary have had a century-long blood feud. Cooperating with them would undoubtedly be inviting a wolf into the house!” Petőfi objected urgently.

When you open Hungary's history books, nearly half of the content is about the battles with the Ottoman Empire. Both sides have been at loggerheads for centuries. Now, cooperating with the Ottoman Empire would be seeking a tiger's skin—completely courting disaster.

Moreover, the accumulated hatred among the people is not something they can easily control, and religious beliefs present an insurmountable obstacle. If Hungarian soldiers were to join forces with the Ottoman army, it's likely that they would end up in internal conflicts even before the actual battle begins.

Kossuth was resolute in his stance: "For the great cause of revolution, there is nothing we cannot sacrifice. The Ottoman Empire is indeed our enemy, but when it comes to dealing with Austria, our positions are aligned. As long as Hungary can achieve independence, other issues can be resolved in the future. Then, the British, the French, and even the whole of Europe will be our allies!"

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As Kossuth prepared to form an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, there were unexpected changes on the battlefield of Venice.

The term "three-minute enthusiasm" accurately described the Italians, as their fighting spirit had been worn down after days of continuous battles.

The key point of the battle was the Battle of Trento, where Marshal Badoglio ordered the capture of Trento within three days. However, three days passed, and Trento remained in Austrian hands.

Even though artillery had arrived at the front lines, it proved to be of little use. Despite sending reinforcements of a whole division during this period, Marshal Badoglio failed to make any progress.

After exchanging survival strategies, the casualty rate of the Sardinian Army sharply decreased, with daily casualties kept under three digits.

While reducing casualties should be considered a positive development, the problem was that the decline in casualties was a result of soldiers actively avoiding combat. This was far from an ideal situation.

Chapter 90: Politics Reigns Supreme

In the headquarters of the Papal Army, the power struggle within the Papal States has now reached the frontline troops.

"Commander, the revered Holy Father has issued an order commanding us to halt our advance and immediately return to Rome to suppress the rebels!" said a middle-aged officer with a worried expression.

There was no way. Just before receiving the Holy Father's command, the Cabinet had also issued orders for them to cooperate with the Kingdom of Sardinia's army and quickly conquer Venice.

General Polkin was troubled. Should he obey the Holy Father or follow the Cabinet's orders? It was a life-altering decision, and in the realm of political struggles, one wrong step could lead to irreparable consequences.

Despite the democratic faction seemingly gaining the upper hand currently, as the exile of Pope Pius IX to Naples may have seemed like a decisive victory, but in reality, this power struggle has just begun.

As the religious leader of Europe, the Pope was also skilled in summoning allies. While he was facing challenges within the country against the bourgeoisie, he could seek assistance from outside powers. In history, both France and Austria were among those who sent troops to help him regain power.

“Commander, what should we do now? Whose orders should we follow?” an officer asked hesitantly.

Polkin shook his head helplessly; he truly didn’t know what to do. In his heart, he was leaning towards the Pope’s side, but he couldn’t guarantee the Pope’s victory in this political struggle.

Before the dilemma could last long, a young officer rushed in, breaking the tense atmosphere: “Commander, we are being ambushed by the enemy’s main force ahead, requesting reinforcements!”

Without hesitation, Polkin gave the order: “The Second Battalion will be immediately dispatched for reinforcement, and the Third Battalion will advance at a faster pace from the rear.”

Since the enemy had already attacked, there was no need to overthink; they had to focus on fighting first!

Unfortunately, the army of the Papal States had long deteriorated, even the Pope’s Guards were reluctant to rely on them, knowing their true capabilities.

The events unfolding in the country had already spread throughout the military camp. The Papal Army, lacking fighting spirit to begin with, now completely let go of any remaining desires for battle.

When morale is low and unity is lost, leading troops becomes difficult. If this were on the battlefield, the consequences would be dire.

By the time the Second Battalion caught up, the vanguard had already collapsed. In the era of muskets, courage was paramount, but unfortunately, courage was precisely what the Papal Army lacked.

Witnessing the rout of the vanguard, someone took the lead and everyone followed suit, fleeing in panic. The recently arrived Second Battalion also disintegrated without a fight. The battle hadn’t even begun, and they were already defeated in such a bewildering manner.

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Having run twenty miles at one go, as the sky gradually darkened and they confirmed that the Austrian army hadn’t pursued them, the Papal soldiers finally regained their composure. General Polkin was still in a state of confusion.

Why did they lose so haphazardly when the battle had just begun? There was no way around it; he was indeed a befuddled general leading a befuddled battle.

General Polkin had risen to his position due to his noble background and shrewd political acumen. As for military ability, when did the Papal State ever need to test that?

Observing the chaotic camp, General Polkin furrowed his brow and asked, "Have the casualties from the battle been accounted for?"

"Commander, 3,300 soldiers have returned so far, and more should be coming back one after another. We are assisting them in regrouping," Nelson replied mechanically.

Don't judge him solely based on the name 'Nelson' and assume he is a renowned European commander. In reality, it's just a mere coincidence of sharing the same name, and there are thousands of people with this name, but not all of them are famous military leaders.

"Ah, God, what kind of battle is this! Summon all officers with the rank of Major and above immediately for a meeting!" General Polkin roared.

Forgive him, though. As a noble of the Nth generation, it was his first time commanding such a large force in battle. After suffering a major defeat, not completely breaking down mentally was already a sign of good composure.

In this battle, the losses of the Papal Army were not significant. Apart from the vanguard unit being ambushed by the Austrian forces, the rear units didn't even engage the enemy in combat.

By the third day, the number of returning soldiers gradually reached over 6,300. Considering the unit's total strength of 7,000, the losses were less than ten percent.

Having experienced a defeat, General Polkin became more cautious, deciding to stay in place and wait for logistical supplies while regrouping the scattered troops, carefully observing the situation on the battlefield.

A middle-aged officer whispered, "Commander, Marshal Badoglio ordered us to launch an immediate attack on the Austrian Army and assist the Sardinian troops in flanking from the side!"

General Polkin sneered, saying, "Order us? Who does this Badoglio think he is? Since when can the Marshal of the Kingdom of Sardinia command our Papal troops?"

Does he think I'm like that idiot Macheld, a fool who blindly rushes to become their cannon fodder?

Paul, tell the Sardinians that our forces are currently engaged in a fierce battle with the enemy's main force and have no capacity to support our brother units. I trust that the brave Sardinian Army can defeat the enemy and achieve victory in this war!"

Regarding the issue of fighting against Austria, the four Italian states had nominally reached an agreement, and Badoglio was the commander-in-chief of the joint forces in name only.

However, the actual effectiveness of this joint command was anyone's guess. Originally, everyone was a competitor, and a mere verbal agreement couldn't eliminate the mutual estrangement.

The Sardinian Army could stand by while the Tuscan forces suffered defeat, and General Polkin could equally watch the Sardinian army struggle against the Austrians.

"Yes, Commander!" Paul replied.

"Order the troops to pack up their belongings; we will retreat the day after tomorrow and leave the battlefield to the Sardinians," General Polkin added.

Sabotaging one's allies, who's afraid of whom?

General Polkin had never considered the Kingdom of Sardinia as an ally. In his view, the Kingdom of Sardinia had ambitious plans to unify Italy, posing a greater threat to the Papal States than Austria.

Not betraying each other on the battlefield was already enough to be considered "allies."

On the surface, General Polkin suffered a defeat this time, and if he couldn't wash away the shame of defeat, he would undoubtedly be in trouble when he returned.

However, politically speaking, this defeat was a timely blessing, helping General Polkin overcome his political difficulties.

After the battle with the Austrians, General Polkin could provide an explanation to the Cabinet; he had followed their orders.

Losing the battle was considered normal, merely an "inevitable outcome" given the exaggerated strength of the enemy. No one expected the Papal Army to defeat Austria; their expectations were already low.

However, the Vatican would need a different narrative. For instance, they could attribute the slow retreat to the large number of casualties suffered from the Austrian attack.

As the sluggish withdrawal progressed, the domestic political struggles would likely come to an end.

History always exhibits astonishing coincidences. Due to the necessity of the situation, General Polkin made the same choice and withdrew from the war after suffering a defeat.