

The Fox 201

Chapter 201: Counterattack

At noon, the British and Prussian forces began a temporary rest. After all, no one is made of iron, and everyone needed a little break. It was also an opportunity to bring up the recently arrived conscripts and mercenaries.

Yes, it was all for the capture of this unexpectedly formidable fortress. The British had already spent a substantial sum hiring multiple batches of mercenaries. Although they couldn't find any more mercenaries in Italy, they could still recruit some from Germany.

Initially, the British hired around ten thousand German mercenaries. However, it didn't take long for these mercenaries to accuse the British of deception, claiming they hadn't adequately explained the difficulty and danger of the task. They strongly demanded contract termination or a fivefold increase in wages.

Naturally, the British didn't want to spend too much money, so they promised that the originally hired mercenaries would not have to carry out offensive tasks. Of course, this meant cutting their wages in half. The first batch of mercenaries readily agreed.

After pacifying the first batch of mercenaries, the British went on to hire a new batch of mercenaries. This time they learned from their previous mistake. Instead of letting the mercenaries gradually adapt to the battlefield, they stationed them in rear camps where they couldn't see the frontlines. They imposed strict management and prevented them from freely coming and going to avoid excessive contact with others. When they were needed, they would be brought forward from the rear, and this time, there would be no requests for pay increases or contract terminations.

The British generously shared their experience with the Prussians. The Prussians, who had been struggling with mutiny and rebellion in their ranks, were inspired and immediately set up isolated camps a bit further away to house new conscripts. This way, the fresh recruits were sealed off to prevent them from being exposed to unnecessary information that might corrupt their thoughts and reduce their combat effectiveness.

This method also raised two issues. The first issue was that conscripts lacked training. However, in this kind of offensive warfare, the difference in mortality rates between trained and untrained soldiers wasn't that significant. So, at this moment, it wasn't a major concern.

The second issue was that the time interval between each attack by the British and Prussian forces had to be extended because they had to wait until the previous batch of consumables was exhausted before bringing in the next batch. Otherwise, allowing these armed conscripts to witness how the previous batch of consumables was used on the battlefield would likely lead to problems.

Extending the attack intervals would give the French more time to prepare, which wasn't favorable for the attackers. However, they had already cut off the First Heights and other French forces' communication, so all the Allies needed to do was to deplete their ammunition. Slowing down the pace a bit wasn't unbearable.

Thus, the battlefield experienced a temporary calm. Everyone used this time to grab a quick meal because, for many, this might be their last.

Napoleon's Grand Army, however, had already eaten and moved to the northern side of the British and Prussian alliance. The soldiers were resting in place, preparing for the decisive attack.

At this moment, the cavalry sent to contact Joseph had returned. General Mura had returned with them.

"Joseph, welcome back. How was it? Did you enjoy your time with my brother?" Napoleon asked.

"Not at all. I was nearly suffocated there," Mura replied. "General Joseph Bonaparte is undoubtedly a great military strategist, but... especially during meetings, it's just... You look at him all despondent and sighing, and you'd think the British and Prussians have us on the hook! What really gets to me is that every time someone suggests something new, he always chimes in with, 'Of course, that sounds good, but for heaven's sake, don't cause any trouble!' It's just..."

"Alright, Mura, cheer up. You're back now!" Napoleon said, clearly pleased with Mura's return.

"Yeah, by the way, how's it going over there?" After patting Mura's shoulder comfortingly, Napoleon asked again.

"General, Joseph Bonaparte had me bring you a message. As long as he...", Mura began.

Following Joseph's plan, it was his forces that initiated a full-scale counterattack. Joseph believed that his counteroffensive would surely divert the enemy's attention, allowing Napoleon to launch an attack from the flank.

"I still need him to tell me when to attack? But... this time, let's do it as he says," Napoleon finally agreed.

So, just twenty minutes after the British and Prussian forces deployed the mercenaries and conscripts, who were oblivious to the brutality of war, into combat, the defensive French troops launched a full-scale counteroffensive. The French opened fire with all their firepower, using various weapons against the Allied forces. Simultaneously, they counterattacked from multiple directions, seemingly aiming to restore their connection with the First Heights.

Initially, the British and Prussians weren't panicked by the French action because they had some preparations for a large-scale French counterattack. The importance of the First Heights couldn't be lost on the French. If they wanted to maintain their front lines and secure the fortress, they would undoubtedly try to reestablish communication with the First Heights. Moreover, it had been several days, and the French probably had a new commander by now.

So, initially, they viewed it as something to be expected. Even when they noticed the fierce intensity of the French assault, they saw it as a sign that "our French friends are getting desperate."

However, they soon realized that the strength of the French attack surpassed their expectations, and they were struggling to hold their ground. Therefore, Duke of Brunswick made a decision he would later regret he committed more forces to resist the French counterattack and, if possible, expand his control area when the French retreated.

Just as he gathered the fresh forces to launch the counterattack, a report arrived that cavalry in the north had spotted the main French army in great numbers.

This news was like a bolt of lightning to Duke of Brunswick and the other commanders. Their troops, especially the most combat-effective ones, were already engaged in defensive and

counteroffensive operations. Although they had some reserve forces, they were intended for anticipated contingencies on the current battlefield. The reserve forces couldn't be too large, as that would be a waste of their combat power. So, they wouldn't be sufficient to confront the massive Italian army that was about to rush in from the north.

At this point, they had no other choice but to quickly extract their troops from the stalled battle. Of course, this carried significant risks. Poorly organized, it might even lead to the French from the north outflanking them, and the French forces in front chasing them down, possibly causing the Allied forces to collapse. But at this moment, Duke of Brunswick had hardly any other options.

"Send the cavalry to confirm the message. In addition, instruct all units to prepare for a withdrawal from the battle. Have General Bliicher lead his cavalry to slow down the advancing French troops from the north," Duke of Brunswick ordered.

Bliicher led his cavalry towards the north, but with only around a thousand horsemen at his disposal, Duke of Brunswick had little faith in their effectiveness.

However, when attempting to retract from the battle, it was far from easy. As soon as the Allied forces hinted at a retreat, the French troops came charging. Furthermore, the French counteroffensive was organized with great flexibility, indicating experienced officers were in command.

If they weren't under pressure from Napoleon's Italian army, Duke of Brunswick might have been able to reorganize his forces and withdraw from the battle. But at the moment when Napoleon's Italian army was about to arrive, he no longer had time for that. He had to concentrate as many troops as possible and exit the battle before the Italian army arrived.

Moreover, the cavalry returning from the north had repeatedly confirmed that Napoleon's Grand Army was rapidly approaching. Brunswick assessed the situation and finally made the ultimate decision: "Order all units, abandon everything, break contact with the enemy, and retreat to the camp."

This command resulted in enormous chaos within the troops but it was unavoidable. The retreat quickly turned into a rout. Many units that had pushed too far ahead couldn't return in time and were cut off by the advancing French. Many more units were shattered in retreat, losing their cohesion and becoming disarrayed.

By the time they had followed Duke of Brunswick back to their camp, only half of their total forces remained. More troops had been killed by the French, taken as prisoners, or had vanished somewhere. Wisely, they hadn't returned to the camp, and for now, the French had other concerns to attend to.

Chapter 202: Victory

Brousshe's cavalry played only a minor role in the grand scheme of things. With just over a thousand light cavalrymen, what could they achieve against Napoleon's massive army of over sixty thousand? Brousshe attempted to disrupt Napoleon's advance by darting around with his cavalry, trying to buy some time for the Duke of Brunswick's forces on the other side. But his harassment had little effect, and on one occasion, his cavalry ventured too close, leading to a volley of musket fire from the French infantry, resulting in significant casualties.

After a few laps, Brousshe decided to halt the cavalry at a safer distance to give their horses a chance to rest. It wouldn't be wise to exhaust their mounts; if the French cavalry decided to charge at that moment, escape would be nearly impossible.

As expected, Orleans and his cavalry unit soon approached and confronted Brousshe. After a brief standoff, Brousshe decided it was time to retreat.

His adjutant inquired, "General, shall we retreat to Verdun?"

Brousshe responded firmly, "No, we can't lead the enemy's main force there. We are heading to Longwy."

As a result, Napoleon's army successfully reached Verdun.

Meanwhile, the Duke of Brunswick had managed to regroup as many troops as he could and retreated to his camp. However, the hasty withdrawal resulted in the loss of many supplies, including the British artillery, though they had the foresight to spike the cannon barrels before leaving.

The Anglo-Prussian army, while trying to establish a defensive line, was well aware that bringing all their supplies with them was impossible. They were trapped between the Northern French army and the Italian army, waiting for the inevitable encirclement.

Beyond their fragile defensive line, Napoleon, flanked by a group of his generals, walked toward Joseph, who was accompanied by his advisors.

Joseph extended his hand to Napoleon and said, "General, I now officially transfer command from the defensive to the offensive."

Their hands shook, and Napoleon inquired, "Where will you be heading next?"

"Back to the laboratory," Joseph replied.

"Ah, you always enjoy staying in the rear," Napoleon remarked.

"What about you? Where do you plan to go next?" Joseph asked.

"To Berlin!" Napoleon declared.

Joseph considered for a moment, nodded, and said, "Very well. If you're going to Berlin, I have someone here who might be quite useful. This is General Soult. He's young but capable, and I must say, most of our counterattacks today were under his command. In terms of on-the-spot decision-making, he's even better than I am."

"My goodness, praising me for on-the-spot decision-making isn't exactly an accolade," Napoleon joked, then shook hands with Soult. "Welcome, General Soult. Let's go together and raise the tricolor flag over Brandenburg Gate!"

"I'm thrilled, General. However, before we do that, perhaps we can resolve the little obstacle right in front of us," Soult suggested. "I believe we can send an emissary to request their surrender."

That afternoon, a French messenger carrying Napoleon's letter entered the camp of the Anglo-Prussian army and handed the message to the Duke of Brunswick:

"Duke of Brunswick and esteemed generals,

You find yourselves in an utterly hopeless situation. One of your allies, Russia, has already withdrawn from the war. As for your other ally, Archduke Charles of Austria, his forces are over two hundred kilometers away. Can you truly expect him to come to your aid? Does he possess the means to relieve your predicament? Do you wish to break out? My armies surround you from all sides. If you attempt an escape, my forces will pursue relentlessly, and there is no guarantee you will elude us.

Your forces have suffered heavy casualties, with over half your men taken as prisoners of war. While you have conscripted the peaceful residents of various German states into your ranks, they are ill-prepared for battle. Under our relentless attacks, they have suffered heavy casualties and have lost the will to fight. Now, you are confined to a small area no larger than a camp, making you an easy target for our artillery.

During this time, your wounded and soldiers have suffered greatly under your command. Many of your low-ranking officers and soldiers no longer wish to fight. There have even been instances of mutiny. As marshals and generals, you should consider the feelings of your subordinates, cherish their lives, and find a way out for them before making them sacrifice needlessly.

Currently, we can concentrate forces several times your number, possess firepower ten times greater, and wield advanced weaponry that surpasses your imagination. Our scientific and technological advancements have placed France at the forefront. You've witnessed our capabilities in the battles of these days, but we have even more potent weapons in our arsenal that we haven't unleashed.

If you order an immediate surrender, laying down your arms and ceasing resistance, my forces guarantee the safety of your senior officers and all enlisted men, as well as the protection of their personal property. This is your only way out. Consider it well. If you find this agreeable, act accordingly. If you still wish to fight, it is inevitable that we will deal with you."

The Duke of Brunswick accepted the French proposal and requested further discussion on the matter.

The French envoy replied, "General Napoleon Bonaparte generously grants you a twenty-four-hour period for consideration, which is more lenient than the time he was given initially. If you decide to accept our terms, you may send an envoy for negotiations."

With these matters settled, the French envoy, General Fierma, departed from the coalition camp.

On the following morning, with only two hours remaining until the deadline, the Duke of Brunswick led his surrounded force of over forty thousand soldiers to surrender to the French. He handed over his marshal's baton to Napoleon. The more than forty thousand British and Prussian soldiers accompanying him laid down their arms as well.

The news was rapidly relayed to Paris, and the "Truth of Science" newspaper immediately issued a special edition, which was distributed for free throughout the city. Soon, everyone in Paris learned of the uplifting news, and jubilation echoed throughout the entire city.

Even within the offices of the War Ministry, Carnot could clearly hear the cheers. However, instead of boosting his spirits, these cheers furrowed his brow even further.

He was aware of Joseph's manipulation of the false information. On this matter, Joseph had not deceived him. But the unexpected rebellion resulting from this fabricated news frustrated Carnot. He had thought that the Royalists were already severely weakened after the previous uprising.

Regarding Napoleon's suppression of the Royalist revolt, if asked whether Carnot supported it or not, he would undoubtedly approve. However, the way Napoleon presented the situation in the Assembly had deeply agitated Carnot, as it seemed to undermine the foundations of democracy and the republican system.

Though Lucien had assured him that neither Joseph nor Napoleon had ambitions to become dictators, Carnot remained somewhat concerned.

Carnot was certain that Joseph had no aspirations for the role of dictator, given his inclination to remain in the shadows. Joseph's life philosophy revolved around "making a fortune quietly."

As for Lucien, Carnot was equally confident that he would never consider becoming a dictator. He had watched Lucien grow up and knew him well. Lucien was more interested in fine wines, exquisite cuisine, beautiful women, and idling away his time than pursuing political power. Lucien's life idol was not Caesar or Augustus but the legendary Don Juan.

Napoleon, however, was less predictable. His personal heroes were not limited to Caesar; he also admired Alexander the Great. So, there was a possibility that he might genuinely aspire to be a dictator, or even aim to be the "First Citizen."

Nonetheless, Carnot agreed with Lucien's perspective: France was currently locked in a struggle as a single nation against the entire reactionary feudal world. In the long run, the two were incompatible. Therefore, in this critical moment, it was necessary to accept a temporary dictatorship, as long as it would ensure the fundamental intereststhe sovereignty of the people.

"In the land of freedom and democracy, in a battle against the autocratic and dark nations of Europe," Carnot mused, "from a long-term perspective, these are irreconcilable forces. We are not like the United States, which can remain isolated from the rest of the world. So, at this critical juncture, in accordance with the 'Social Contract,' the sovereignty of France naturally derives from the French people, and the government's power is derived from the people's concession. While we prefer that each person yields as little power as possible, at times, relinquishing more authority to safeguard the most fundamental intereststhe people's sovereigntyis necessary."

In the current situation, Carnot had to admit that France required a clean and efficient government, one capable of making swift decisions and unwaveringly implementing them. Many of the figures who had previously manipulated events in the political arena had been proven either lacking in ability or marred by moral shortcomings. Therefore, for now, they had to accept a temporary dictatorship.

Chapter 203: The Determination of Archduke Karl

After forcing the surrender of the Brunswickian army, Napoleon swiftly led his forces towards their next target. Currently, they were stationed in Longwy, facing the Austrian army commanded by Archduke Karl.

Throughout this war, Austria's primary focus had always been Italy. Consequently, the majority of their forces were deployed to the Italian theater of war. Even after the Russo-Prussian coalition's defeat in Italy and Russia's subsequent betrayal, Austria remained committed to the Italian front.

Especially when Napoleon, leading the main forces of the French army in Italy, returned to France to confront the British, Austria immediately shifted most of its resources towards Italy.

Despite the departure of the Russian coalition, only a few French troops remained in Italy, mostly Italian auxiliaries. The Austrians believed these would be easy targets since the French had shifted most of their military production capabilities to support the northern front. Joseph's style of warfare was indeed resource-intensive. It was rumored that Napoleon once commented on military commanders of the past and present, saying, "What does Joseph know about fighting? He only knows how to fight with money!"

At first, the Italians had won a few impressive battles, but as their supplies dwindled, their combat effectiveness sharply declined. They quickly found themselves on equal footing with the better-supplied Austrians, gradually losing ground.

Consequently, the Emperor had urgently written to Archduke Karl, requesting additional supplies. Still, he delayed sending all those letters and instead rerouted the supplies and troops to Italy. If it wasn't for the fact that replacing Archduke Karl would be an insult to the Habsburgs, the Emperor might have considered detaining him and redirecting his forces to Italy.

Thus, Archduke Karl's army was neither elite nor well-supplied, putting them at a disadvantage. Archduke Karl was aware of his army's condition and, in previous battles, avoided engaging in direct combat, instead trailing behind the British and Prussians to seize territory and gain advantages.

When the Anglo-Prussian coalition became trapped at Verdun, they had initially requested Archduke Karl's reinforcements. However, Archduke Karl, sensing something amiss from Brunswick's messages, offered various excuses to delay his march to Verdun. It was only after Napoleon sent a letter urging surrender to Brunswick that Archduke Karl finally arrived in Longwy.

Archduke Karl's reconnaissance cavalry ranged far and wide, even keeping an eye on the Verdun area. So, when Napoleon decisively defeated the Anglo-Prussian coalition at Verdun and wiped out their main forces, Archduke Karl received this news rather quickly.

Now, Archduke Karl understood that after the coalition's defeat under Brunswick, his army would surely become a thorn in Napoleon's side. If he didn't eliminate this army, Napoleon, whether heading for Hanover or Austria, would find his army positioned to threaten his flank.

Archduke Karl was now facing a critical choice: retreat immediately, withdraw from Longwy, and clear the path for Napoleon towards Hanover and Berlin. Or, fall back to Luxembourg, using its easily defensible terrain to delay Napoleon and gain time for the allied forces to react, or at least, to initiate peace negotiations.

"After the Battle of Verdun, the French have effectively won this war. The only question left is how this war will conclude. If the French easily conquer Hanover or crush Prussia, Austria will be in grave danger. At that point, even if we wish to negotiate with the French, we won't get favorable terms. So, even if we aim for negotiations, we must be the first nation to reach a peaceful agreement with the French. To achieve that, I intend to immediately retreat to Luxembourg. What are your thoughts on this?" Archduke Karl asked General Nostitz.

Luxembourg was a crucial location, sitting on the path from France to the German states. Its complex geography and natural defenses made it a formidable position. Over the centuries, it had

been a hotly contested area, earning nicknames like the "Land of a Thousand Castles" and the "Gibraltar of the North."

Previously, the French had briefly controlled this region, but due to a series of failures by the Northern Army, it had been abandoned. The British and Prussian forces were temporarily occupied elsewhere, allowing the Austrians to seize this strategic location.

Occupying Luxembourg and forcing the French to offer more favorable terms for Austria's withdrawal from the war was the reason Archduke Karl had brought his main force near Verdun after sensing something amiss from Brunswick's messages.

Archduke Karl had barely formed his troops near Luxembourg when General Brissot arrived with a few hundred cavalry. From General Brissot, Archduke Karl gained a deeper understanding of the events at Verdun. He kept General Brissot and his subordinate officers for several more days to learn about the French's new defensive techniques.

However, General Brissot couldn't linger here for long. He left several of his officers behind with Archduke Karl before hastily departing.

Three days after General Brissot's departure, French cavalry began appearing near Luxembourg. That afternoon, the vanguard of the French army, led by Davout, reached Luxembourg.

By now, Napoleon's army had swelled to 120,000 strong, including the original elite Italian legions, over 60,000 strong, more than 40,000 battle-hardened French soldiers from the Verdun campaign, and over 10,000 German mercenaries that the British hadn't yet employed. They had all surrendered to the coalition. Considering the shortage of manpower in many areas, especially a lack of people familiar with the German region's terrain and customs, Napoleon inquired if their leader, Barbou, would accept employment under his command, with a ransom as payment for their freedom.

Barbou keenly sensed that this could be his chance to climb the social ladder and agreed immediately. Thus, these mercenaries, who were on the brink of being discarded, became subordinates of Napoleon.

Of course, Napoleon didn't believe these mercenaries would be of great use on the battlefield. He didn't anticipate needing one-time-use troops like the British did. These mercenaries were mostly dispersed for scouting and similar purposes. This also allowed them to receive some education in revolutionary ideals while with the French army.

"If we want to secure a foothold in the German region, we must implement the same land revolution policies we executed in Italy," Napoleon instructed Joseph before leaving Verdun. He believed that German-speaking mercenaries could be useful at this time.

Initially, Napoleon thought that Archduke Karl would make way for his army, retreating towards Kaiserslautern. In that case, Napoleon planned to leave a diversionary force in Luxembourg while moving the main army toward Prussia. Seizing the opportunity while Prussia was still reeling from its recent defeat, he intended to crush Prussia.

To his surprise, Archduke Karl was resolute and positioned his army in Luxembourg, causing trouble for Napoleon.

Napoleon was confident of defeating Archduke Karl. His army was larger, better equipped, more motivated, better trained, and far more advanced. Archduke Karl had only about 60,000 troops,

mainly raw recruits, with few cavalry. Their equipment was relatively outdated over half their rifles were still muzzleloaders. Moreover, they lacked sufficient artillery.

Given this disparity in forces, Napoleon believed he could overcome Archduke Karl, even if he held the formidable position of Luxembourg. However, he acknowledged that capturing Luxembourg, with its advantageous terrain and fortifications, would still consume considerable time.

Furthermore, Napoleon faced logistical supply issues. This was primarily due to the excessive expenditure of ammunition by Joseph during the Verdun battle, resulting in a severe shortage. The siege warfare ahead would further deplete ammunition stores. Although French arms factories were operating around the clock, they struggled to keep up with the war's demand. Waiting for these supplies to be produced and transported would allow Prussia to raise a large army.

Just as Napoleon was grappling with these concerns, someone arrived with news that the Austrians had sent an envoy.

Chapter 204: Negotiations

After receiving the message that Archduke Charles had sent a military envoy, Napoleon turned to General Soult, who was accompanying him, and asked, "General Soult, what do you think the Austrian envoy is here for?"

"Most likely to negotiate a peace agreement," Soult replied after a moment's thought.

"Go on," Napoleon said. His recent interactions with Soult had left him quite satisfied. He found this new subordinate to be tactically sound and sharp-minded, making him curious to hear Soult's opinion.

"Your Excellency, we can certainly defeat the Austrians, and I believe Archduke Charles understands that. However, he also knows how precious time is for us at the moment. He probably wants to use this time to bargain with us."

"So, what do you think our approach should be?" Napoleon asked.

"It depends on the conditions they propose, Your Excellency," Soult replied.

"Very well," Napoleon nodded. "Bring the envoy here and, on the way, let him see the cannons we've captured."

In Verdun, when the British and Prussian armies retreated into their camps, they left behind a significant number of cannons, especially the British, who abandoned many large naval cannons. While military discipline required the firing mechanisms to be disabled when abandoning cannons (to prevent their immediate use without repairs), due to the sheer quantity and limited time, about half of the cannons had functional firing mechanisms.

Thanks to the recent dry weather and the additional labor force from German mercenaries, along with the capture of many draft horses (virtually all of the British artillery horses had been taken prisoner, and with nearly half of the cannons rendered unusable, there was a surplus of these horses), the captured cannons were barely keeping up with Napoleon's marching speed. However, in the context of ammunition shortages, the presence of these cannons only added to the logistical stress.

Nevertheless, these cannons were quite effective at intimidating the enemy, and the Austrians were unlikely to be aware of the limited ammunition at Napoleon's disposal. (Of course, before the invention of synthetic ammonia, few countries had ample gunpowder.)

Soult escorted Archduke Charles's envoy to meet Napoleon.

Although the Austrian envoy had been waiting for quite a while, he remained composed and courteous. This demeanor impressed Soult, and he felt somewhat favorably disposed toward the envoy.

"I regret to inform you, General Bonaparte is not here," Soult said. "However, I have been tasked with taking you to meet him. I'm sorry, but we don't have suitable carriages, so you will have to ride with us to the general's location."

"That's not a problem; when can we depart?" the young Austrian envoy asked.

"Immediately, sir. As you know, we don't have much time to spare," Soult replied.

The envoy mounted his horse and, under the escort of a cavalry unit, they left the village that was under French control, heading towards another village along the road.

The journey was challenging due to the crowded roads filled with French troops, horses, and vehicles. At one intersection, they were halted by a passing artillery column. These artillery units, towing heavy cannons, did not slow down or stop easily due to the immense inertia of the cannons. Stopping abruptly or slowing down could lead to various complications and accidents.

Particularly, this artillery column was equipped with captured British naval 24-pound cannons. The army typically didn't field such heavy cannons in this era, and if they did, they were primarily used in fortifications. The artillery used in field battles was generally not heavier than 8 pounds and often made of relatively lightweight bronze. However, these cannons were heavy iron pieces, and each cannon was drawn by sixteen draft horses. The long, bulky, dark green barrels pointed diagonally towards the sky as the carriages rumbled along, and there were countless cannons in this column.

Soult and his party waited with their horses as they observed the envoy's reaction to the passing artillery column. Unfortunately, Soult couldn't discern much change in the envoy's expression.

Throughout the journey, Soult paid close attention to the envoy. From his control of the horse and his slender, fair hands, Soult deduced that this man likely had limited military experience. Perhaps due to this, he might not fully comprehend the significance of transporting so many heavy cannons to this location within the current time constraints.

They waited for the artillery column to pass, which took a considerable amount of time. Afterward, Soult and the Austrian envoy continued riding towards another village.

The village held a rather decent manor, which likely belonged to some noble. However, it had been requisitioned by the French and now served as Napoleon's temporary headquarters.

Napoleon received the young envoy in the manor's small sitting room. The envoy introduced himself as Clemens Wenzel von Metternich.

Unbeknownst to Napoleon, the young man standing before him would have become Austria's prime minister in the original timeline, creating the influential Metternich system that would shape Europe for decades.

Napoleon gestured for Metternich to take a seat and then casually asked, "I heard you are Archduke Charles's envoy. Our two nations are currently at war, so I'm curious, what brings Archduke Charles to send you at this time?"

"Of course, it's for the sake of European peace," Metternich replied.

"European peace? Isn't that your country's responsibility?" Napoleon retorted with a hint of sarcasm. "Last time, we reached an agreement regarding peace. Yet, not long ago, it was your country that tore the peace treaty to shreds and initiated war. And now you're calling for peace again?"

In the face of Napoleon's accusation, Metternich remained calm. He smiled and said, "General Bonaparte, the question of who is responsible for breaking the last peace is not the main issue here. Different countries have different perspectives on this matter. If we were to engage in a debate on this issue, each nation's stance would differ. Such a discussion wouldn't serve much purpose for the current problem, would it?"

"Very well," Napoleon conceded. "I don't want to waste time on such tedious matters. First, I'd like to know if you, as Archduke Charles's envoy, believe your status is sufficient to discuss matters of peace between our nations."

Metternich nodded with a smile, "Our Emperor has always been a kind and peaceful monarch, so, when the war began, he considered that the disputes between our nations ultimately should be resolved through peaceful negotiations..."

"But your Emperor would prefer to hold the talks in Paris, right?" Napoleon couldn't help but add a touch of sarcasm.

"That is not the main issue, General," Metternich replied. "Due to such considerations, His Imperial Majesty has authorized Archduke Charles and France to engage in peace negotiations at the outbreak of the war. I carry here the Imperial Majesty's authorization, which certifies my negotiating credentials."

As he spoke, Metternich reached for a document bag that had already been inspected by Napoleon's guards to prevent any potential assassination attempts. Such incidents were rare, but Joseph had always been cautious, so Napoleon's guards had received specialized training organized by Joseph.

Metternich opened the bag and handed a document to Napoleon. Upon inspection, it indeed was a valid authorization. It seemed that the Austrian Emperor had planned for negotiations in case the situation turned unfavorable, unlike the Russians who had agreed to conditions but needed nearly a month to send a proper peace envoy.

"Very well," Napoleon nodded. "While I may not have full authorization, I am one of the rulers of the French Republic now. I believe I can represent France in deciding matters of war and peace with your country. Now, Mr. Metternich, what are the conditions Austria hopes to achieve for peace?"

"We hope to return to the state of peace before it was broken. Furthermore, this peace should also include the issue of peace between our nation and the Cisalpine Republic," Metternich said.

Napoleon smiled, "So, your country unilaterally tore up the peace agreement, and now you hope to restore peace without any consequences?"

"We can offer you assistance," Metternich replied.

"Oh? What kind of assistance can your country provide?" Napoleon inquired.

"We can cede Luxembourg, allowing you to save valuable time for your eastern advance," Metternich said.

"We can capture it ourselves," Mura interjected at Napoleon's side.

"But it will take time," Metternich responded. "General, even though I haven't served in the military, when I arrived here, Archduke Charles told me that your army has the capability to take Luxembourg. However, he believes that he can hold out for at least two months. After your brilliant victory in Verdun, both Hanover and Prussia are now vulnerable. But if you don't exploit their vulnerability promptly, the value of your victory in Verdun will diminish. Every second is precious right now. Our country can help you save this invaluable time. Why can't you be more generous to our nation, General?"

Chapter 205: The Pit

"You're here to haggle with my time," Napoleon said.

Metternich remained silent, effectively agreeing.

"But this offer is not good enough," Napoleon shook his head. "This alone won't secure you such a favorable peace."

"So, General, what do you suggest?" Metternich inquired. He had prepared for bribing Napoleon, knowing that the General Napoleon Bonaparte had a penchant for money, as the various Italian states had disclosed.

"Mr. Metternich, do you remember how Spain exited the war?" Napoleon asked with a smile.

Metternich was initially surprised, then a glimmer of hope flickered.

Spain had left the war on the condition of allying with France, thus escaping territorial concessions. So, if they followed this path, especially given the recent Franco-Russian entente, how could the French make such demands?

"Of course, you can't expect to get the same terms as Spain. Our Russian friends wouldn't appreciate it," Napoleon's next words shattered Metternich's illusions, proving that Napoleon's wits were still razor-sharp.

"What do you mean then?" Metternich felt the negotiations had veered beyond his expectations, taking an unpredictable turn. This left him somewhat flustered, as this unexpected turn of events signaled a loss of control in the negotiations.

"We cannot achieve lasting peace based solely on a piece of paper. You see, agreements are often unreliable. Both our nations have had their fair share of violations after signing agreements. Let's not rush to defend your country; after signing agreements, both of our nations have been guilty of transgressions. Such incidents are hard to avoid, and their accumulation can utterly ruin the relationship between two countries, rendering the peace agreement a mere scrap of paper. If we want to discuss peace today, we should work to prevent this outcome as much as possible."

With these words, Napoleon leaned back in his chair, his smile reflecting his anticipation of Metternich's interpretation of his statement.

Had this been the seasoned Prime Minister Metternich of the history books or even the Ambassador Metternich of a few years later, they might have discerned hidden nuances in Napoleon's words. But the young and naive Metternich of this moment was unable to truly grasp the hidden daggers concealed within Napoleon's smile. All he could do was offer a generic response, "As long as our nations maintain their love..."

"No, Mr. Metternich, I'm afraid you haven't fully grasped my point," Napoleon sat up, resting his elbows on the table, his head cradled in clasped hands. "Good intentions and promises guarantee nothing, at least nothing lasting, because these things are inherently short-lived. Therefore, 'don't swear by the moon' something dependable, something that can genuinely unite us and strengthen our friendship over time is our common interest. You see, ever since we achieved peace with Spain, our friendship has grown because both sides benefited. The agreement we reached with Spain has elements we can mutually borrow."

"What exactly do you mean?" Metternich asked.

"Our mutual trade agreement with Spain," Napoleon replied.

This trade agreement established a common market between France and Spain, granting each other "most-favored-nation treatment" in equal measure. According to this agreement, except for specific goods, both sides exempted or reduced tariffs on each other's products. The tariffs imposed on goods by either party should not exceed half of the tariffs on similar products of non-signatory countries. Both sides agreed to grant citizens of the other country equal rights to reside, conduct business, and engage in other lawful activities in their respective territories and territories. There were also specific provisions concerning the protection of intellectual property rights.

In summary, this agreement was highly egalitarian both in principle and practice, a shining example of mutual benefit. After signing this agreement, businessmen from both Spain and France reaped increased profits.

However, as Joseph explained, this equilibrium was merely temporary. Soon, this equitable trade agreement would become an unequal treaty. The "Zeus Plan" had made significant progress, and another plan, the "Hephaestus Plan," was advancing steadily. All that was needed now were stable sources of coal and iron, and French production capacity would experience explosive growth.

In such a scenario, this equal trade agreement would eventually resemble the later "Treaty of Wangxia," a nominally equal but practically unequal treaty, tantamount to full colonization. So, when signing this treaty with Spain, the French intentionally extended its duration to twenty-five years, with an automatic renewal clause in case of no objections.

This type of agreement was essentially a colossal trap. What was even more frightening was that once this agreement was executed, dismantling it in the future would be extraordinarily difficult. Not to mention how powerful the French army would be after the Industrial Revolution, even within Spain. The rise of a comprador class of Spanish citizens who had grown wealthy from selling French goods would quell any opposition. In certain circumstances, Spain could transform from an economic vassal into a political one, and once trapped, escaping would be nearly impossible.

A few days earlier, following their meeting in Verdun, Joseph had foreseen that it wouldn't be long before the Austrians and Prussians would seek peace with France. He had emphasized to Napoleon the necessity of finalizing the trade agreement, telling him that everything else was negotiable, but the trade agreement must be secured.

This trap, built on the foundation of future technological revolutions, was incredibly discreet. Not even a more seasoned and cunning individual, like a sly fox such as Talleyrand, could truly comprehend its intricacies.

So, Metternich hadn't fully grasped what was happening, but at this point, he couldn't afford to continue hesitating. Napoleon spoke once more:

"Regarding this matter, I have the relevant documents for the trade agreement between France and Spain. These documents are public, and I believe that you can easily find them if you wish. However, it would take time, and right now, time is the most precious commodity. You can take these documents back and discuss them with Archduke Charles. But, speed is essential because, as you know, the most valuable asset in your negotiation terms is time. Every second lost chips away at your leverage, and naturally, I will demand more compensation. If I haven't received your response by noon tomorrow, I will have to commence military action."

Metternich excused himself, his mind preoccupied with thoughts about the trade agreement. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he almost forgot to bring the documents on the Franco-Spanish trade agreement handed to him by Napoleon.

Metternich rushed back, and by the time he met Archduke Charles, it was already dark. Metternich couldn't care less about fatigue and hunger, swiftly recounting the contact he had with Napoleon.

Listening, Archduke Charles pondered for a moment and then asked, "Did General Bonaparte make any other requests?"

"No, he only said that time is precious now. After discussing these matters, he asked me to come back and consult with you immediately," Metternich replied.

Archduke Charles nodded. "It's clear that General Bonaparte places great importance on this trade agreement. Mr. Metternich, do you have any insights into this trade agreement between the Spanish and the French?"

Metternich shook his head. "I know very little about this agreement. But it seems the Spanish don't have many complaints about it. From this perspective, the agreement appears to be relatively problem-free. Also, Your Highness, I thought of something on my way back. You see, the Bonaparte family is France's nouveau riche and famous for being wealthy. They are involved in various businesses, from arms trade to shipbuilding, navigation, mining, and more. Many say they are already the wealthiest family in France. I believe they might hope to benefit from this agreement..."

"That's a possibility," Archduke Charles nodded. "I've heard some rumors about General Napoleon Bonaparte's conduct in Italy, and many accuse him of greed. It's said he amassed several million francs solely from the Papal States, most of which ended up in his pockets. Perhaps what you're saying is one of the reasons."

"Your Highness, the Bonaparte family is certain to hold a very significant position in France in the future. They might even become the true rulers of France. If we can secure a share of their wealth for our nation, our country might indeed become much safer. Furthermore, I think we can also include additional conditions..." Metternich added.

Early the next morning, before the sun had even risen, Metternich arrived at the French military camp. He was escorted by a group of French cavalry and once again found himself in Napoleon's headquarters, where the general was having breakfast.

"You're here quite early," Napoleon said with a smile.

"That's because I'm on your time now, General. I have to make the most of it," Metternich replied, tipping his hat and taking a seat at Napoleon's table.

"Why don't you join me for breakfast? We can talk while we eat," Napoleon suggested.

"Thank you," Metternich replied. A diligent soldier brought him a plate of breakfast.

"Mr. Metternich, coming here so early, I assume you have some good news for me regarding the peace conditions?" Napoleon inquired.

"In principle, both the Grand Duke and I are not opposed to the peace conditions you've proposed. However, we have some additional requests that we'd like to discuss with you," Metternich replied, sitting up straight.

Napoleon raised an eyebrow, seemingly uninterested, and checked his pocket watch. "I hope you're not here to waste my time with endless back-and-forth negotiations, one proposal, one counter-proposal, and so on, only to end up wasting my time."

"General, I assure you, our proposals align with your demands," Metternich said.

"Let's hear it then," Napoleon said, not appearing too interested and nonchalantly examining his watch.

"General, your country's technological advancements are unmatched worldwide, and we would like to purchase certain technologies from your nation. We also wish to have the same rights as your citizens in terms of technology patents," Metternich explained.

"We have patent laws in my country. If you want to acquire patented technologies, you can negotiate with the patent holders," Napoleon replied, seemingly unconcerned.

"But most of the patents we are interested in acquiring are in your possession," Metternich continued.

"In principle, that shouldn't be a problem. As for the specifics, you can discuss this with my brother, Joseph Bonaparte. If he's willing to sell, he will; if not, he won't," Napoleon said, handing off the matter to Joseph. If Joseph refused to sell, their request would be denied.

"Besides, we hope that your country can impose certain restrictions on the export of weapons," Metternich added.

"No, that's not possible," Napoleon immediately responded. "That would harm our commercial interests. It's out of the question."

"We can guarantee that government orders from our country can compensate for any potential loss, and your country's related enterprises will even gain greater profits," Metternich countered.

"It's not a matter of money. It involves our business reputation and our political integrity. Our business reputation and political integrity are worth much more than just a sum of money," Napoleon stated firmly.

"But this would constitute interference in our domestic affairs, which goes against the principle of 'respecting each other's territories and sovereignty, and not interfering in each other's internal affairs,' as outlined in the peace treaty between your country and the Kingdom of Spain. I believe these two principles should hold more importance for our political integrity," Metternich argued.

"You're right, we must adhere to these two principles. However, these principles are of lower legal status than the 'Declaration of Human Rights,' and the principle that 'human rights supersede sovereignty' derived from it. We are concerned that if we prohibit the civilian arms trade, it may lead to humanitarian crises in some regions. I hope your government can understand our legitimate concerns," Napoleon explained.

The two engaged in a heated debate over this issue. Finally, Napoleon proposed, "How about this? In the spirit of compromise, let's set aside this dispute for now. We can issue a joint statement in which we pledge that France will not seek to implement a long-term policy of selling weapons to certain areas in your country. The weapons we sell to these regions will not exceed the performance and quantity levels supplied in recent years following the peace agreement. We will also be prepared to gradually reduce arms sales to these regions, eventually leading to a final resolution. What do you think? This is the most significant concession I can offer."

"General Bonaparte, we have one more request," Metternich continued.

"What's the request?"

"Some influential figures in our country would like to have the opportunity to invest in the 'Military-Industrial Consortium,'" Metternich replied without a hint of emotion.

Napoleon pondered for a moment and replied, "The Military-Industrial Consortium is an enterprise alliance, but there isn't an entity called the 'Military-Industrial Consortium' or its stocks. You can invest in some of the companies within the consortium, as long as you obtain the consent of the other shareholders. That shouldn't be a problem."

"Aren't your family the largest shareholders?" Metternich asked.

"In some of the companies, yes, but our share in the entire consortium isn't exceptionally high," Napoleon explained, then asked, "So, can we consider that we've essentially reached an agreement?"

"Yes, General," Metternich replied.

Napoleon checked his watch and said, "Because this negotiation consumed more of my time, I now need more compensation, both for France and personally..."

And so, on that very day, Archduke Charles and General Napoleon Bonaparte signed an agreement on the peace between their two nations. According to this agreement, both countries would reestablish peace and forge closer trade relations. Meanwhile, the Austrian forces would withdraw from all French and allied territories, offering profound apologies to the people who had suffered during the war. Austria also pledged not to allow anyone or any group to engage in activities threatening the security and stability of France using Austrian soil.

Releasing Austria in this manner and signing a treaty without territorial concessions or indemnities naturally stirred some controversy within France. However, *Le Monde de la Science*, a newspaper that had been well-prepared for this outcome, swiftly published articles analyzing the current

military situation. They pointed out that getting Austria to leave the war as quickly as possible was of great significance to France's ultimate victory. Furthermore, France didn't leave empty-handed; at the very least, the royalists hiding in Austria would now need to find another refuge.

If anyone else had signed this treaty, they might have been labeled a traitor, despite *Le Monde de la Science*'s efforts to defend them. However, considering that the signatory was none other than General Napoleon Bonaparte, a military hero who had just achieved a great victory and repeatedly saved the Republic, there was little anyone could say. Some might whisper in hushed tones that General Bonaparte might need more guidance in diplomatic matters, even though his general direction appeared sound.

After signing the treaty, Archduke Charles promptly led his army out of Luxembourg, retreating to Kaiserslautern. Meanwhile, Napoleon left all the British cannons and over 10,000 experienced Northern Army soldiers under General Soult in Luxembourg to maintain vigilance over Austria. He then led the rest of his forces toward Prussia.

A week later, Napoleon's army neared Cologne, where the Cologne garrison surrendered without a fight. Napoleon stayed in Cologne for a day, where he met the first batch of Prussian envoys seeking peace. However, the Prussians' sincerity for peace didn't move Napoleon. Consequently, he continued his eastward march, advancing with unstoppable momentum. Half a month later, his forces reached the vicinity of Hanover and encountered a newly assembled British and Prussian coalition army led by Field Marshal von Mollendorf.

The coalition army had roughly 100,000 soldiers, but due to their recent loss of elite troops in the Battle of Verdun, most of them were untrained recruits who also lacked weaponry. They were even in short supply of the new Mini rifles, and old-style smoothbore muskets were scarce. Their cannon numbers were far fewer than Napoleon's. The outlook for this battle was indeed grim for the British and Prussians.

That very afternoon, Prussian envoys arrived in Napoleon's camp, bearing the authorization of King Frederick William III. However, Napoleon's peace terms had grown even harsher since his time in Cologne. He began by demanding the Prussians pay 150 million francs, acknowledge France's control over the Rhine River basin, including Hanover, and immediately declare war on Britain.

The last demand, declaring war on Britain, was something the Prussians would have readily agreed to without blinking. Recognizing France's control over the Rhine River basin was also not an issue. However, the 150 million franc indemnity was impossible for the Prussians to pay, even if they sold all their possessions. The truth was, their agreement with the British had been largely influenced by financial crisis at home.

The Prussian envoys pleaded with Napoleon to show leniency and explained that they simply couldn't afford such a sum. In response, Napoleon offered a solution: France would lend the money to Prussia, with all their national taxes as collateral. In essence, all financial power would be transferred to the French.

Finance is the foundation of all governance, and without it, a nation was essentially crippled. The Prussians had no choice but to refuse such terms. In a fit of anger, Napoleon shouted, "Let the cannons and rifles debate with you!" He promptly dismissed the Prussian envoys.

Chapter 207: The Flash of Lightning

As Napoleon launched his attack against the Prussian army, Joseph had already returned to Paris. He relinquished his position as the commander of the Northern Corps to Carnot and engaged in a lengthy conversation with him. Following their discussion, Joseph promptly left Paris, riding a carriage towards the south.

When the news of Joseph's injury by a bullet reached them, a group of researchers led by Lavasia had already left Paris, heading south. This event had been used to fuel the false narrative that Paris was on the brink of falling, and the "Military-Industrial Consortium" was evacuating in advance.

Although "The Journal of Science and Truth" tried to vehemently deny this by claiming that the relocation of these individuals was due to "work requirements," hardly anyone believed them, not even their own journalists and editors. In fact, within the editorial department of "The Journal of Science and Truth," numerous reporters and editors took unplanned leaves.

But many years later, the famous French writer Alexandre Dumas referenced a remark made by Lucien Bonaparte's confidante during a soire: "One day, during a gathering with Lucien and his other paramours, the question arose: 'What is the mark of a truly cunning deceiver?'"

The women laughed heartily, each taking turns to describe the qualities of the "greatest liar in the world, who never utters a word of truth."

Lucien eventually burst into laughter and said, "Ladies, you have no idea what a truly cunning deceiver is like. You're only talking about small-time con artists. The real masters of deception don't need to lie. They speak the truth, but when they need you to believe, you'll believe. And when they don't need your belief, they turn into a Cassandra (the princess of Troy, cursed by Apollo with the gift of prophecy, but no one believed her). The more they emphasize something's true, the more you'll think it's false. And when the truth finally reveals itself, you'll still believe they're trustworthy."

This comment drew laughter and mockery from the group, accusing Lucien of making it up. Only young Miss Marguerite uttered, "Oh my, isn't that just like 'The Journal of Science and Truth'?"

"Always telling the truth but deceptively using the truth," was purportedly one of "The Journal of Science and Truth's" fundamental principles.

Lucien's team had traveled to the south because a critical project, originally overseen by Joseph, was now at a crucial stage the Paulina Hydroelectric Plant, a core component of the "Zeus Plan."

The Paulina Hydroelectric Plant was built on a tributary of the Loire River, an obscure waterway that originated on the western side of the Alps, near the border of France and Italy. It flowed westward into the Loire River, which eventually emptied into the Mediterranean Sea. This small river, or more accurately, brook, had limited flow, significant elevation changes, and its course mainly passed through woodlands and valleys. It was unsuitable for navigation and irrigation, to the extent that the locals didn't even bother to give it a name.

However, this brook suited Joseph's needs perfectly, with its substantial elevation drop and proximity to a road. Thus, it was chosen as the location for the first hydroelectric plant. A year prior, engineers and workers had diverted the brook in a nearby valley and constructed a dam, creating a small and picturesque artificial lake. At that time, Joseph had even visited with his family, naming the artificial lake after his sister, Paulina.

Now, after a year of construction, the world's first hydroelectric generating unit was finally assembled. A matching artillery factory was also completed in a nearby small, flat basin. It was time to conduct a test run of power generation, and Joseph needed to be present to oversee this groundbreaking endeavor.

In reality, prior to Joseph's arrival, Lavasie, who had been in charge of the work, had carried out dozens of "test runs." During these tests, several previously unforeseen technical glitches were addressed. Furthermore, the accompanying artillery factory had already produced numerous "prototype" units. Originally, according to the plan, the power plant should have commenced operation much earlier, but Joseph had been tied up in Verdun. It wasn't practical to halt the entire testing process just to wait for him. That would be a waste of money!

Nonetheless, overseeing the inauguration of the world's first power plant was a momentous feat that would go down in history, so Joseph imposed a strict rule: all power generation tests would be called "small-scale tests." Only when he personally oversaw the power generation, it would be referred to as "official power generation."

Thus, on the day before the official power generation ceremony, the Paulina Hydroelectric Plant concluded its final extended "test run." It then spent an entire day thoroughly inspecting all components, replacing any worn or potentially damaged parts with new ones, in anticipation of Joseph's arrival.

Since the hydroelectric plant was named the "Paulina Hydroelectric Plant," the Saint Paulina of Tarsus naturally had to be present. And if Paulina was coming, all the brothers and sisters had to join in the fun. With so many siblings, big and small, even Mother had to come along. Therefore, the Bonaparte family, except for Napoleon, who was still at war, and Lucien, who was in Paris, all gathered here.

At nine in the morning, the "official power generation inauguration ceremony" officially commenced. On the already erected dais, Joseph began his speech. He started by expressing his gratitude to the diligent workers of the "Military-Industrial Consortium," then went on to extol the profound significance of this work, and so on...

Finally, at half-past eleven, Joseph's speech, as planned, came to a timely end. According to the program, Paulina was to close the switch, and the entire generator unit would start running, allowing everyone to have lunch.

Paulina pushed the switch up, but the adjacent electric water pump remained motionless.

This was entirely normal, for the switch Paulina pushed was merely symbolic. Moreover, for safety reasons, this switch was not connected to any circuit, with both ends of the wires grounded. In other words, whether Paulina closed the switch or not, there would be no electric current flowing through it.

However, the motionlessness of the electric water pump was unreasonable. Because before Paulina closed the faux switch, the power plant was already operational. When Paulina closed this switch, another person should have pushed a real switch to activate the electric water pump.

But perhaps due to the lengthy nature of Joseph's speech, combined with the beautiful weather that made it an excellent time for a nap, the staff responsible for pushing the real switch had actually fallen asleep.

Paulina believed that by pushing the switch, the water pumps on both sides would start, creating a water curtain on either side of the dais. However, after closing the switch, there was no reaction. Paulina did not know that the switch she had pushed was merely a decoy, a detail Joseph thought was unnecessary to explain.

After some hesitation, she reopened the switch, thinking of trying it again. But just as she pulled the switch back, the dozing worker on the other side finally realized what was happening. He quickly pushed the real switch, and water spurted out.

"So, the switch has to be pushed up before it works. That's different from what Joseph told me," Paulina was momentarily perplexed.

The electric water pump had a crucial role, not only for irrigation and agriculture but primarily in industrial production. In a nearby artillery factory, electrically driven drills began to operate, boring the barrels of the first batch of "official production" 12-pounder cannons.

In addition to electric drills, there were also electric hammers and other electrical equipment. The use of these devices significantly improved the production efficiency of this factory. With full adoption of electricity, the factory's production capacity was expected to increase five to ten times its original capacity, according to calculations.

This was just the beginning, and the utility of electricity extended beyond military industries. Almost every business and industry, whether heavy or light, could benefit from it. Just as Joseph had expounded in his lengthy speech, the realization of the Zeus Plan would profoundly change the course of this era.

On the same day that the "Paulina Hydroelectric Plant" officially began generating power, Napoleon launched an assault on the Anglo-Prussian coalition in Hanover. With two thousand casualties, he once again defeated the Anglo-Prussian forces. The coalition commander, Field Marshal von Mollendorf, was killed by a cannon-fired shell during the battle. The entire Anglo-Prussian army, numbering one hundred thousand, suffered massive casualties, and the French army smoothly captured the city of Hanover.

After a brief stop in Hanover, Napoleon continued his advance, arriving at the gates of Berlin ten days later. At this point, Prussia had no remaining troops to deploy, so King Frederick William III left an envoy behind to negotiate with Napoleon while he retreated towards the direction of Blücherberg.

Chapter 208: Peace

Napoleon's army stormed into Berlin, with the man himself leading the way through the Brandenburg Gate, savoring the moment of grandeur.

During this era, when an army entered an enemy city, it often resulted in looting, killing, and unfortunate fates for young maidens. However, Napoleon's French forces behaved with remarkable civility. There were no widespread plundering or evidence suggesting that the virtue of Berlin's women deteriorated after the French arrival.

Strictly speaking, the discipline of Napoleon's troops was not rooted in a sense of class or military honor; it was primarily due to their substantial combat allowances. After victorious campaigns, Napoleon's troops received combat allowances that sometimes exceeded their annual regular pay. This naturally incentivized soldiers, especially after a victory, to maintain discipline.

The fundamental reason for these high allowances was Napoleon's knack for acquiring funds efficiently after each triumph. His most common method involved cracking down on aristocrats and suppressing counter-revolutionaries.

In fact, if King Frederick William III of Prussia had understood this trait of the French army and noticed that this time there were no mass looting or land redistribution, he should have realized that Napoleon did not intend to annihilate Prussia at this point.

Napoleon would never engage in a losing transaction. These allowances would undoubtedly be paid by the Prussians, but the manner in which they were collected mattered. The first method would focus the animosity of the Fritzens on the French, providing Prussian nobility with the opportunity to instill nationalism in the people and motivate them to fight for their cause. In contrast, the second approach, despite the intermediaries' profit margins, spread out the animosity among them and led them to repress nationalism to maintain their rule.

This was especially relevant to Prussia at present. With Berlin lost, most of the remaining territory still under King Frederick William III's rule was formerly Polish land. The population now predominantly consisted of Poles, and Prussia was rapidly transitioning from a German nation to a Polish one. Given this scenario, Prussian rulers, predominantly German nobility, dared not foster nationalism.

For this reason, after capturing Berlin, Napoleon chose not to pursue Frederick William III but to wait in Berlin for the next Prussian envoy for negotiations.

On the other hand, when Archduke Charles returned to Austria with the agreement, Emperor Francis I initially felt that the terms that required his forces to completely withdraw from Italy were unfavorable. By this point, his troops had seized several Italian cities, including advancing towards Milan, where the logistical support of the Italians could not keep up.

Moreover, the issue of security for the adjacent regions of Italy was not resolved effectively in the agreement. The phrase "gradually reduce arms sales to these areas and reach a final resolution after some time" left the duration of "some time" ambiguous.

Emperor Francis I was initially displeased and even had doubts about Archduke Charles's competence. He was reluctant to sign the agreement immediately. However, when Napoleon swept through Prussia with swift and decisive victories, Emperor Francis I quickly changed his attitude. He apologized to Archduke Charles and openly praised Metternich, who had put in significant efforts to make the agreement happen, as a promising talent. He even intended to appoint Metternich as the ambassador to France.

Metternich then proposed that, before assuming the role of ambassador, he should serve as a special envoy to mediate the war between France and Prussia.

"Your Majesty, if Prussia is excessively weakened, it will not be beneficial for our country," Metternich argued.

So, this time, in Berlin, Napoleon waited not only for Prussian envoys but also for Metternich, who came with the Prussian representatives.

Napoleon received the two envoys and, during the negotiations, initially insisted on a reparation of 150 million francs. However, thanks to Metternich's persuasive skills, Napoleon eventually

expressed goodwill and made some concessions. Consequently, both sides signed the "Treaty of Berlin."

The "Treaty of Berlin" stipulated that Prussia must compensate France with a one-time payment of one billion francs. If Prussia needed a loan, it could only borrow from banks specified by the French government. The collateral for these loans would be Prussia's customs duties.

In addition to the reparations, Prussia granted France unilateral most-favored-nation treatment, as well as unilateral market access and national treatment. French citizens could freely move and engage in any occupation in Prussia without government interference. Once French goods entered Prussian territory, they were subject to tariffs (the tariff rate was determined by the alliance of French government-specified lending banks), and the Prussian government was prohibited from imposing any other taxes on these French products.

Prussia had to cede all territory west of the Elbe. These lands would not be annexed into France but would join the newly established Rhenish Confederation, a confederation under French protection. After losing the territory west of the Elbe, Prussia had effectively become a nation with a majority of Polish inhabitants.

This was almost an unequal treaty that would lead to the demise of Prussia. But this was not all the trouble that King Frederick William III had to face. Encouraged by the Prussians' disastrous defeat, Polish nobility once again supported "independence enthusiasts" in an uprising. At this point, Prussia had no power to suppress them, and it seemed that Prussia was about to lose more than half of its land and population.

At this juncture, Prussia's friendly neighbors, Russia and Austria, came to Prussia's aid. They both expressed their willingness to send troops to help Prussia quell the rebellion.

The attitudes of the Russians and Austrians were easy to understand. They had both participated in the partition of Poland. If the Poles created a new Poland within Prussian territory, it would also adversely affect their controlled areas. Therefore, their assistance had a certain level of sincerity.

However, Prussia dared not accept their goodwill so easily. Who knew if their intervention would lead to the suppression of the Polish uprising but also result in Polish territory becoming Russian and Austrian land?

So, King Frederick William III opted for a straightforward approach selling out. He returned to Berlin with Queen Louise and hosted General Napoleon Bonaparte at the palace. During the banquet, both sides engaged in a very warm and friendly conversation. The king and the beautiful Queen Louise left a profound impression on Napoleon. Especially when the king left the banquet early due to health issues, Queen Louise, acting as the host, displayed her grace, kindness, and attentiveness, which captivated Napoleon.

Drawing from a description in a novel written by the renowned author Alexandre Dumas, when Lucien proudly showcased the various mermaids he had captured and displayed to Napoleon, the latter dismissively said, "Your trophies are nothing special. None of them can compare to Queen Louise. She is a true natural wonder."

After this banquet, Napoleon visited the Prussian palace, still under French protection, several times and quickly reached an agreement with Prussia. They arranged a loan agreement titled "Loan Agreement on Post-war Reconstruction of the Country" or simply "Reconstruction Loan

Agreement." The agreement included a sum of 30 million francs, but France did not need to provide actual gold or silver; instead, the Prussian captives, officers, and some seized weaponry were converted into money and handed over to the Prussians.

After the agreement was reached, the French army gradually withdrew from Prussia, and the Prussian soldiers and officers, once captives, started returning to the service of King Frederick William III. They prepared to quell the domestic uprisings.

As for Napoleon, after leaving Berthier in charge of the withdrawal process, he hastily headed to Luxembourg. Now, he was on his way to Paris to claim his most significant war trophy.

Utilizing a combination of frequent changes of horses and resting in carriages along the route, Napoleon managed to return to Luxembourg from Berlin in just a week. Subsequently, he traveled with a cavalry escort to Paris, bearing the array of military flags captured during these battles. It took him five days to finally reach the French capital.

On that morning, amid the cheers of the Parisian citizens, Napoleon rode a white horse, flanked by the battle-hardened soldiers. They headed to the French Parliament, where Napoleon would report his triumphs.

The soldiers proudly cast the captured military flags on the steps leading to the Parliament building. Napoleon, wearing a satisfied smile, dismounted from his horse and stepped on these flags as he walked toward the entrance, escorted by an elite guard.

Chapter 209: Napoleon's Speech

Napoleon, with the flags of Britain and Prussia underfoot and surrounded by his guards, strode into the parliamentary building, his head held high, much like a proud rooster entering a henhouse. As he stepped into the grand chamber, all the members of parliament rose and applauded. Some whispered, "Doesn't it feel like Caesar entering the Senate?"

"Unfortunately, we lack a Brutus among us," someone muttered under their breath.

Regardless of some grumbling, the new Caesar had confidently approached the lectern. Unlike his historical counterpart, this new Caesar had already made up his mind that upon entering the National Assembly, not the Senate, he would bring a formidable army to quell any resistance from the assembly members.

Napoleon ascended the lectern, looked out over the audience, and then pulled out his prepared speech, scanning it briefly before beginning.

"Ladies and gentlemen, today I bring you news of victory. Our armies in Italy, Verdun, the Rhine, Hanover, and Berlin have struck heavy blows against those reactionary feudal rulers. The shameful banners of the aggressors are now abandoned on the steps of the National Assembly, a testament to our great triumph.

Our victory compels even those feudal aristocrats to admit that the freedom and independence of France are as solid as the Alps, unshakable by parasites and clowns. Faced with our formidable armies, those who once spewed threats against France, promised to return the so-called 'legitimate king' to rule us, oppress us, and even spoke of slaughtering our people and shedding blood in our glorious city, now find themselves in chains, holding the keys to their cities, humbly apologizing to France.

Gentlemen, we can cheer because the freedom and independence of France are secured, and the long-awaited era of peace for the French people is at hand!"

Whether they supported Napoleon or just pretended to, the members of parliament enthusiastically applauded. Notably, when they noticed that the Minister of Police, Joseph Fouch, was also attending the meeting and casting ominous glances at others, the applause intensified. However, a significant problem arose: when would the applause stop? Everyone was determined not to be the first to cease clapping.

The continuous applause even made Napoleon uncomfortable, and he had to make a gesture to halt the ovation. When the applause finally subsided, he continued:

"Ladies and gentlemen, quelling domestic rebellions and defeating foreign interventions does not mark the end of the French Revolution; it's only the beginning, the first step on the revolutionary path.

So, what's next for France, gentlemen? To answer this question, we must first ask another: Why did the French people revolt in the first place?

I know some friends will say it's for freedom, democracy, equality, and many other things, and they're correct. But the most fundamental reason is something else."

Napoleon paused, gazing at the assembly below, before answering:

"The most fundamental reason is that the people of France sought to attain a life of prosperity and happiness. They had the right to such a life, and they could no longer allow greedy feudal rulers to trample upon it.

In 1792, before Prussian General Brunswick issued that arrogant and disgraceful proclamation to 'bleed Paris,' a maid in my household, Aunt Sophie, once complained, 'Before the revolution, we had no bread. After the revolution, we still have no bread. Did the revolution serve any purpose?'

It was this Aunt Sophie who, when the invading Prussian army was closing in on Verdun, courageously sent her husband and two sons to join the volunteers. In Valmy, they, with undaunted courage and colossal strength, defeated the enemies of the revolution, saving France and the revolutionary cause. At the time, as a regular soldier, I fought alongside them amidst enemy artillery fire. It was the most glorious moment of my life.

Since 1789, when the French people stormed the Bastille, the symbol of feudal despotism, we have been besieged by internal and external reactionaries. The revolution has faced countless perils, as fragile as a candle in the wind. But it is those nameless heroes, who, having once had no bread, still had no bread but, with unyielding determination, their blood, and lives, repeatedly rescued France and the revolution in its most perilous hours.

Ladies and gentlemen, I firmly believe that though their names may be unknown, their legacy will be immortal!"

The parliamentarians once again broke into applause.

After the applause gradually subsided, Napoleon continued:

"Ladies and gentlemen, why did these nameless heroes, who 'had no bread before the revolution and still had no bread after the revolution,' willingly sacrifice their blood and lives to defend the

revolution? It's because they understood that 'no bread before the revolution' and 'no bread after the revolution' are fundamentally different. The lack of bread before the revolution was because the bread that rightfully belonged to the people was plundered by those feudal rulers. The absence of bread during the revolution was due to the necessity of austerity to resist the counterattacks of domestic and foreign reactionaries. However, as long as we defeat them, our people, our descendants, will all enjoy bread.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us be grateful to our people! The people of France are the greatest and most reasonable people in the world. They can comprehend the difficulties that temporarily arise during the revolution and are willing to endure the hardships that most cannot bear. So, even if they couldn't have a full meal after the revolution, they were still willing to defend their country and the revolution with their blood and lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, the people of France are the real heroes of the French Revolution. I suggest we all stand and pay tribute to them, cheer for them Long live the people!"

The parliamentarians quickly rose and joined in the applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen, now that domestic and foreign reactionaries have been defeated, the prospects of the revolution have never been brighter. It is time to fulfill the promises we made to our people before the revolution.

We solemnly promised our people that they would have the right to a life free from want and fear, a life of happiness and prosperity. Now is the time to fulfill that promise.

If, on this day, after nine years have passed since the 1789 Revolution, when all the reactionary forces have been defeated, and when there is no immediate threat to France's security, we fail to fulfill our promises and allow our people to lament, 'Did the revolution serve any purpose?' Then we are not only answerable to the people of France, but also to the entire world. Our revolutionary government would be no different from a feudal one, and I, along with all of you, would be no different from Louis XVI!

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a feeling that our work will be inscribed in the annals of humanity because it points the way for people worldwide who love freedom.

Our revolutionary work is far from over, and the movement is still progressing. We must continue to strive. Those foreign feudal lords and our domestic reactionaries will not accept defeat willingly, and they will struggle when they see an opportunity. They will use every means to disrupt and subvert; they will attempt to restore feudal despotism in France daily and hourly. This is inevitable, without a doubt. We must not relax our vigilance.

Our democratic system is a powerful weapon to safeguard the achievements of the revolution and to counteract the machinations of internal and external enemies. We must firmly grasp this weapon. On the international stage, we must unite with all nations and people who cherish peace and freedom, ensuring that our struggle to protect the revolutionary achievements and resist the restoration conspiracies of domestic and foreign enemies does not remain isolated. As long as we uphold democracy and stand united with international friends, we will remain invincible.

Ladies and gentlemen, the restoration and development of the national economy lie before us. Yes, we face numerous challenges, but we are confident that the indomitable efforts of all the people of France will overcome every obstacle. The French people have an abundant wealth of experience in

conquering difficulties. If we can endure extended periods of extreme hardship and defeat powerful domestic and foreign reactionaries, why can't we build a prosperous and thriving nation after victory? As long as we remain united and uphold democracy, liberated from the shackles of feudalism, we will swiftly achieve victory on the economic front.

Ladies and gentlemen, our defense will be strengthened, and foreign invaders will no longer threaten our homeland. Building upon the courageous and proven French army, we must preserve and expand our armed forces. We will not only have a mighty army but also a powerful navy.

Let the reactionaries tremble before us; let them criticize and doubt us. Let them say we cannot achieve this or that. The unwavering efforts of the people of France will steadily achieve their goals.

Long live the people of France!"

Amid thunderous applause, Napoleon presented his long-prepared political reform proposal to the parliament for deliberation. The "Journal of Scientific Truth" published the full text of Napoleon's speech, along with his political reform and welfare plans. In this plan, Napoleon promised to lead the French people in eradicating poverty and want, just as they had defeated their enemies on the battlefield.

"Long live General Bonaparte!" echoed once again throughout the streets and alleys of Paris.

Chapter 210: The First Consul

A few days later, after extensive deliberation, the National Assembly was about to vote on Napoleon's political reform plan. The people of Paris, spontaneously (truly spontaneously) gathered near the Assembly building, celebrating the imminent passage of the new laws. They sang revolutionary songs, waved rifles, spears, and even models of guillotines, symbolizing the spirit of the revolution. This was all in support of the National Assembly and the joy of victory.

Many soldiers also joined in the festivities, bringing cannons for musical accompaniment. The square in front of the Assembly became a sea of merriment.

Amid this joyful atmosphere, the National Assembly began to deliberate on Napoleon's plan. All the assembly members cast their votes in favor without hesitation, chanting, "It will be fine, it will be fine, the counter-revolutionaries are hanging from lampposts," and so Napoleon's plan smoothly passed.

According to this plan, the French government would undergo comprehensive reform. The highest executive body in France would be called the Consulate. It consisted of three consuls, with different responsibilities: the second consul for domestic affairs, the third consul for military and foreign affairs, and they all reported directly to the first consul. The first consul oversaw all executive matters and served as the Commander-in-Chief of the French army.

The first consul was directly elected, with a five-year term, and as the head of state, he didn't have to answer to the legislature. The second and third consuls were nominated by the first consul and approved by the legislature.

Under the Consulate, various ministries were established, including the Ministry of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Industry, War, Public Safety, and Truth. The ministers of these departments were appointed by the first consul and reported directly to him.

As for the National Assembly, it underwent reforms and was divided into four parts: the Council of State, the Council of the People, the Legislative Council, and the Senate. The Council of State proposed laws, the Council of the People discussed and suggested amendments, the Legislative Council voted on amended laws, and the Senate reviewed them before the first consul implemented them.

Among these four councils, only the Council of State had the authority to propose laws, but the laws had to go through the other three bodies for approval. This significantly reduced the power of the legislature.

On the other hand, according to the new plan, a portion of the council members in these four bodies was appointed by the first consul, and the rest were indirectly elected through a relatively complex procedure. This made the elections susceptible to the influence of the first consul. After this plan was passed, the National Assembly truly became a Senate, as Dickens would later say.

After this law was passed, with swift preparation, one month later, France held its first nationwide election. As the sole candidate, Napoleon received almost all votes, except for a few spoiled ballots due to technical issues.

Thanks to this election result, when he later arrogantly declared in the Senate why he had suspended the execution of a certain law, he could say, "I was elected by every single French citizen! My legitimacy far surpasses any legislature; therefore, the legitimacy of my commands far exceeds the so-called laws enacted by the legislature! Suspending the execution of laws that do not align with the will of the French people is an undeniable power bestowed upon me by the people of France!"

Today, although Napoleon didn't hold the title of Dictator, in reality, he had the powers of one. The only person who could frustrate him now was Joseph.

"Good Lord! Napoleon, you idiot! It's such a straightforward design, and you can't even grasp it. You want to shamelessly infiltrate the Academy of Sciences! Let me tell you! Even if the Academy increased its number of academicians by ten, or even a hundred, it wouldn't be your turn! Don't think you can use your worldly power to taint the sanctity of the Acadmie Franaise. I'm telling you, it won't happen! As long as I'm the President of the French Academy of Sciences, your blatant abuse of power won't be tolerated! Unless..." Joseph ranted, spitting venom.

"Unless what?" Napoleon asked.

"Unless you can prove any of the questions at the end of this book!" Joseph casually pulled a book from the shelf and tossed it in front of Napoleon.

The book was Joseph's "Foundations of Mathematics." Despite its name, there was nothing foundational about the contents. Even centuries later, it remained a source of agony for countless science and engineering students. Joseph had unapologetically borrowed significant mathematical creations from the great mathematicians of the original timeline, replacing them to become the bane of students in this era.

In the final section of the book, Joseph had thrown in a series of challenging math problems, including Fermat's Conjecture (now known as Fermat's Last Theorem), the Goldbach Conjecture, and the Four-Color Problem, among others.

"This is unfair!" Napoleon protested. "Even Laplace couldn't solve these problems!"

"Very well, then," Joseph replied. "Prove some scientific law we didn't know before, or I can lower the difficulty to match the last problems in this book."

"Hmph! Just you wait!" Napoleon angrily picked up the application with signatures from notable figures like Lavoisier and Laplace and left Joseph's laboratory in a huff. As he walked, he thought, "I must make Laplace produce a high-quality paper for me as soon as possible! It must be groundbreaking, innovative, highly discussable, of extreme significance, and marketable!"

Of course, this was just a minor issue between the brothers. Both were quite busy at the moment. Napoleon was busy establishing his government framework, and Carnot, a trusted associate, became the Third Consul while doubling as the Minister of War. Barras, who joined the "Military-Industrial Complex" at a crucial moment, became the Second Consul and secured the position of Minister of the Interior.

Lucien became the first Minister of the newly established Ministry of Truth and also served as the President of the Council of the People. Fouché continued as the Minister of Public Safety, and the other ministerial positions were allocated to individuals who were aligned with the interests of the Bonaparte family. In short, Napoleon's government was essentially set up.

It was said that during a gathering after the government was officially established, the young First Consul raised his glass to everyone and said, "Gentlemen, many of us have witnessed how the Directory lost the people's trust, how they were abandoned. The main reasons for their fall were two: incompetence and corruption.

Gentlemen, in fact, those in the Directory weren't truly foolish. Each of them was individually competent, and some were remarkably talented. But why did they leave an impression of incompetence? I believe the reason is simple: their intelligence and capability were squandered in internal disputes. Their constant infighting was due to the absence of shared interests.

Gentlemen, in this regard, we are fundamentally different. We all share a common interest ensuring the efficient operation of this government is in everyone's best interest. We can compete among ourselves, but this competition must have limits and not degenerate into internal strife.

As for the second point, corruption. I don't want to preach lofty principles, I'll say only this: many of us have our own businesses. Making these businesses profitable is far more reliable than seeking wealth through corruption. Don't let minor gains lead to significant losses. For those who have yet to secure their position and profits in our 'Military-Industrial Complex,' I can tell you that we've established a role of 'Enterprise Consultant.' As long as you perform well in the government, upon your departure, this position can bring you much more than you'd gain through corrupt practices..."

On Joseph's side, since the "Zeus Plan" had achieved substantial success, his primary focus was now on the "Hephaestus Plan."

In Greek mythology, Hephaestus was the god of fire and the blacksmith. This plan primarily involved iron and steel smelting. In this era, crucible steelmaking had emerged, allowing humans to achieve temperatures higher than the melting point of pure iron. This resulted in the creation of liquid steel. It was the most advanced steelmaking technology of the time. However, it was still relatively costly and had limited production capacity. This method didn't meet Joseph's requirements.

In the original timeline, it would take several decades for Henry Bessemer to invent the Bessemer converter, marking the first large-scale, low-cost production of steel. However, Joseph wasn't a metallurgist by trade, and he only had a basic understanding of steelmaking. He knew that both the Bessemer converter and the open-hearth process essentially relied on blowing oxygen into molten pig iron to remove excess carbon, resulting in the production of steel. But his knowledge was limited to this. Once it came to technical details, he was completely in the dark.

Nevertheless, even these broad strokes without technical details held immense value. They pointed in the right direction, and as long as the direction was correct and the technology tree wasn't skewed, the technical details could be worked out through experimentation. Moreover, Joseph had the greatest chemist of this era at his side.