

The Fox 81

Chapter 81: Valmy (2)

On August 29th, the Prussian-Austrian coalition surrounded the gates of Paris at Valmy. By the morning of September 2nd, royalists in Valmy launched a rebellion, killing the commander of the city's defenses. Valmy surrendered to the Prussian-Austrian coalition, and the gates of Paris were opened.

The fall of Valmy due to the rebellion took the French completely by surprise. In their plans, Valmy, with its formidable terrain, was supposed to serve as an unbreakable anvil, with the French army as a heavy hammer. They would cooperate, smashing the enemy to pieces. However, Valmy, this anvil, was easily captured due to internal traitors. This infuriated and terrified the French, as they began to fear that there might be traitors around them ready to betray their homeland.

The National Assembly quickly reacted, and their first important task now was to suppress the counter-revolution. Danton, recently a wanted criminal and now the Minister of Justice in the new government, led the efforts to eliminate traitors. In the National Assembly that afternoon, he delivered a famous speech, "Be Brave, Be Brave, Be Brave!" and began overseeing the repression of counter-revolutionaries in Paris.

Many nobles, or those with connections to nobility, or suspected of sympathizing with the king and nobles, were imprisoned "preventively" without any investigation or trial.

If this were the extent of it, it wouldn't be too extreme. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in later times, even the beacon nation imprisoned Japanese-Americans in concentration camps.

In the midst of fear and anger, this "preventive" arrest policy naturally followed the principle of "guilty until proven innocent," with the motto of "better to arrest a thousand wrongfully than let one escape." Parisian prisons quickly filled up, and more "traitor" suspects were being brought in.

At this point, a rumor started circulating. According to this rumor, royalists would launch a rebellion, storm the prisons, free the "traitors," and join forces with the nearby Prussian-Austrian coalition to suppress the Parisian revolution. The Austrians had already declared their intention to cleanse the streets of Paris with blood in retaliation for their perceived humiliation of the king.

The people of Paris quickly armed themselves, prepared to counter a royalist uprising. But at this point, the royalists were either imprisoned or had escaped Paris, making a rebellion unlikely. However, an unexpected event would soon spiral out of control.

One prison became overcrowded, so the National Guard decided to transfer the "suspects" to another prison with more space. When they left the prison, some citizens saw them. Nervous citizens, thinking they were royalists attempting to free the "traitors," began shouting. Parisians armed with various weapons surrounded them.

The National Guard had no desire to confront the "traitors" for the sake of these hated individuals, so they simply abandoned them.

The citizens couldn't catch up with the National Guard, but they at least stopped the "suspects" who attempted to flee. In their anger and excitement, the citizens killed them all. Someone shouted, "Why keep these traitors locked up? They all deserve to die!"

The crowd then moved on to other prisons, storming in and killing everyone held within, regardless of whether they were "traitors." Queen Marie Antoinette's confidante, Princess de Lamballe, was killed by the enraged mob, her head severed and placed on a pike, paraded outside the tower where the king and queen were imprisoned. People shouted towards the tower, "You will end up like this one day!"

Some Girondin deputies approached Justice Minister Danton and proposed restoring order and stopping the massacres. But while Danton didn't openly oppose the idea of restoring order, he took no action.

"We can't stand against the people," Danton later explained.

Many Girondin deputies believed Danton was intentionally allowing this behavior to mobilize all of Paris against the Prussian-Austrian coalition. By eliminating potential threats in one fell swoop, Paris could then commit more forces to the fight against the foreign intervention.

Indeed, after this frenzy of killing, the government rapidly mobilized 20,000 volunteers to support the front lines.

Following Napoleon's advice, General Dumouriez positioned his army near the Valmy heights of Sainte-Menehould. This location was not on the main road from Valmy to Paris. However, if the Prussian-Austrian coalition dared to advance directly toward Paris, Dumouriez's army could easily cut off their retreat from this position.

Napoleon estimated that, due to continuous rain, the coalition's logistics must have been strained. Once their retreat was cut off, they would surely collapse. Therefore, before eliminating the threat from Valmy's French forces, they wouldn't dare to advance on Paris.

"Our army is courageous but lacks training, making complex offensive operations difficult. Defense, on the other hand, is relatively easier when taking advantage of the terrain," Joseph supported his brother's plan. "In most cases, defense is a more effective strategy than offense. If the enemy initiates an attack, we will surely defeat them in a defensive battle."

Things were playing out just as Napoleon had judged. The coalition did not dare to march on Paris before removing the threat to their retreat. However, they knew that the longer they delayed, the more favorable it would be for France. Every minute, every second, the French army was growing in size and becoming more organized.

So, Duke of Brunswick decided to concentrate his forces first, crush General Dumouriez's army, and then push towards Paris.

On September 17th, the Prussian-Austrian coalition approached Valmy. Initially, Duke of Brunswick hoped to force the French to retreat by threatening their supply route, Vitry Road. However, before this, the revolutionary government had managed to gather significant provisions for General Dumouriez's army through price controls. So, at least for a considerable time, Dumouriez was not concerned about his supply line being cut. On the contrary, the coalition's own supply line was vulnerable due to constant attacks from French volunteers.

This situation forced Duke of Brunswick to violate military principles and launch a direct assault on the larger enemy force.

Most of the French army consisted of volunteers. These volunteers were poorly trained, unable to form a proper formation, and thus could only fight in a scattered manner. However, their high morale and fierce combativeness made them useful as skirmishers.

Generally, during this era, skirmish formations were not the primary force because they would easily crumble against heavy cavalry. Heavy cavalry theoretically could effortlessly break these formations and decimate them in pursuit.

But in these preliminary skirmishes, the French volunteers' skirmishing abilities surprised the Austrians and Prussians. When they found that the French didn't maintain strict formations and had limited cavalry (since many nobles were in the cavalry, which was not considered very reliable, and the volunteer infantry wasn't yet skilled enough for this kind of work), they naturally sent in their cavalry. They believed their cavalry could easily scatter and destroy these rabble in blue uniforms, who they didn't even consider a proper army. However, during the attack, they were astonished to discover that the French troops, despite their loose formation, lack of a traditional square formation used against cavalry, and the absence of much cavalry, stood their ground, advanced boldly against the cavalry, and began firing at them instead of fleeing as expected.

Although the accuracy of these musket shots was not high, they still inflicted casualties on the Prussian cavalry. The infantry nevertheless rushed forward, as in most cases, the enemy should have dropped their weapons and fled, allowing the cavalry to easily catch and kill them from behind. But these volunteers didn't retreat; they stood their ground, brandishing bayonets, and charged at the cavalry.

Warhorses could easily knock over infantry in a charge, but such collisions still injured the horses, especially when the infantry was armed with bayonet-equipped muskets. The cavalry, although prevailing in such melee combat, still suffered considerable losses. While it took killing four or five of these blue-clad rabble for one cavalryman to die, this exchange rate was causing considerable heartache to Duke of Brunswick.

It's important to note that the French had conscripted these blue-clad rabble for a fraction of the cost compared to their own cavalry. Such exchanges, in terms of manpower, favored the Prussian-Austrian coalition, but in terms of cost, it was a heavy loss. Don't forget that even the horses themselves were more valuable than these French rabble.

Nonetheless, Duke of Brunswick believed that his well-trained infantry would destroy the French rabble's lines.

After repelling the French skirmishers, the Prussian-Austrian coalition's artillery began to pound the French positions relentlessly. Following a brief but intense bombardment, the coalition's infantry lines started advancing towards the French positions.

Napoleon stood behind a trench, watching the approaching coalition forces, and muttered, "They've come charging after just a few shots. It seems their supply lines indeed have significant issues."

Chapter 82: Valmy (3)

The first to launch an attack were the Austrian infantry. They marched in neat formation, following the rhythmic beats of their drums, steadily advancing towards the French positions.

The French cannons began to fire. Shells rained down on the Austrian lines, creating small gaps in their formation. However, the Austrian soldiers quickly filled the gaps, and the line was restored in

the blink of an eye. The artillery barrage seemed like tossing a few pebbles into a pond, creating ripples but not significantly altering the landscape.

"General, it seems the enemy doesn't have many cannons," a young officer in his twenties remarked to the Duke of Brunswick, lowering his spyglass.

"Ah, Karl, you've noticed that too," the Duke of Brunswick nodded. "In theory, the French should not lack cannons, but their army is plagued by desertions, and the technical branches are no different. They might not lack cannons but well-trained gunners."

By this time, the Austrian infantry was closing in on the French trenches. The French, in response, started firing haphazardly. Their shooting was uncoordinated and inefficient.

"Their range is too far, and they can't maintain a proper volley. It's clear they lack training," the Duke of Brunswick commented. "The French army, loyal to the monarchy, is reluctant to engage with us. They rely on these mobs, and while these commoners may have courage, war requires more than just bravery. Well-trained gentlemen can easily defeat these disorganized masses, even in greater numbers. Your country's army might achieve a good result with this attack."

The French gunfire wasn't enough to halt the Austrian advance. In fact, their ineffectual counter-fire only emboldened the Austrian troops. Eager to get closer to the French and fire before them, they quickened their march, following the rhythm of the drums.

"Perhaps we'll get there before the French can fire another round," the young Karl muttered as he strained to see ahead from his horse.

However, at that moment, he saw a sudden flash on the French lines, like stars had descended to the ground. Then, he witnessed numerous large gaps appearing in the advancing Austrian formations. This was no longer a matter of tossing pebbles into a pond; it was like a group of shooting stars falling into the water.

"What's happening? What's going on?" Karl was taken aback, struggling to comprehend the situation.

The Duke of Brunswick quickly raised his spyglass and looked in the direction of the recent flash.

The places that had just flashed were now veiled in thick smoke. Judging from the shape of the smoke, the seasoned Duke of Brunswick could tell that it was canister shot being fired from cannons. From the location of the smoke to the Austrian lines, the distance was no more than sixty or seventy meters. The French had concealed these cannons so well that the Austrians hadn't noticed them until they fired.

Napoleon watched the Austrian forces, thrown into chaos by the simultaneous volley of his dozens of cannons, with excitement. Then, he muttered to himself:

"Amazing! This is truly... magnificent! War, how beautiful you are! Compared to you, all other human arts seem pale. Minerva, you are the most beautiful goddess! I can't understand why anyone would refuse to award you the golden apple!"

At this moment, Napoleon indulged his inner romantic in the midst of the battle, as at least for the time being, his artillery's mission was accomplished.

Napoleon's cannons were not placed directly on the ground. They had dug deep trenches where the cannons were concealed. All the components were hidden underground. From the front, nothing was visible. In front of the cannons, there was a sloping earth mound. When the enemy approached, gunners pushed the cannons, loaded with shells, up the slope. This revealed the cannon barrels, allowing them to fire at the enemy. After firing, the cannons would recoil and disappear from view due to the recoil. In fact, if needed, they could keep firing in this manner.

In this battle, Napoleon's cannons only needed to fire one synchronized volley. This was also a signal. After this volley, the French volunteers in blue uniforms would charge, bayonets fixed, and launch a full-scale counterattack against the enemy. They took advantage of the enemy's disarray, aiming to crush them completely.

The fog of war created by the synchronized volley of cannons had yet to clear when a tide of blue surged forth from the French trenches. Chaotic and relentless, it charged headlong toward the Austrians.

The French volunteers lacked training, and in a disciplined firefight, they might not have been a match for the Austrians. However, seizing the opportunity while the Austrian lines were in disarray, they surged forward. In the heat of the moment, tactics and formations no longer mattered; courage and numbers ruled the battlefield. The volunteers, with numerical and courageous superiority, almost instantly overwhelmed the Austrians. Those Austrians who were slower were skewered with bayonets, while those more agile dropped their weapons and fled. The French pursued them relentlessly, only stopping when Prussian cavalry arrived to rescue the Austrians.

The Prussian cavalry, after their previous skirmishes with the French irregulars, were hesitant to pursue the French any further. When they saw the French give up the chase, they quickly retreated.

This attack left the coalition forces in a dire situation. Their attack had faltered, and the Austrians, in particular, had suffered heavy losses. In just this round of fighting, they left over six hundred corpses on the battlefield. Their morale was shattered, and for the entire day, they were unable to launch any more attacks.

The Duke of Brunswick now found himself in a dilemma. His army was no longer capable of driving the French away through an offensive action. The Austrians were demoralized, and the Prussians were not much better. Although the Prussians had not suffered significant losses in this battle, they had witnessed the Austrian defeat in front of the French lines. They knew they might not fare any better. So, they were also hesitant to engage in battle.

In addition to the difficult marches and supply issues they had faced, the soldiers were hungry and fatigued. Their morale had held up due to consistent victories and minimal losses in previous engagements, as well as the anticipation of plundering the reputedly rich city of Paris after capturing it.

However, now that they had suffered heavy losses and couldn't defeat the French in front of them, the prospect of entering Paris seemed uncertain. In this situation, their army was barely holding together. The Duke of Brunswick even wondered if forcing his soldiers to continue the offensive might lead to a mutiny.

On the other hand, he couldn't afford to continue facing the French in a standoff. His supply lines had always been a major issue. Adverse weather conditions, mud, and constant harassment from French irregulars had made logistical support increasingly difficult.

Rationally, the best option for the coalition forces was to retreat. However, retreating in the face of the enemy was a more challenging and dangerous endeavor in warfare than launching an attack. A poorly executed retreat could turn into a rout, and then it could lead to complete disaster. Recent history offered examples, such as the French defeat in Belgium not long ago or the Battle of Fei River in ancient China.

So, the Duke of Brunswick was also hesitant to order a retreat. The Prussian-Austrian coalition found itself in an extremely perilous situation, even teetering on the brink of destruction.

But on the other side, General Dumouriez, who had just won a defensive victory, faced his own dilemmas. The victory in a defensive battle had ignited the people of Paris. They were eager to see the invading army driven out of France. They sent continuous requests for immediate action, as if a mere command from Dumouriez could eliminate the German invaders entirely.

"Unbelievable! Do these Parisians have any sense at all?" Dumouriez couldn't help but complain to Joseph. "I have troops who can't even march in formation, and they expect me to launch an attack against a similarly sized enemy force! It's nothing short of a suicide mission!"

"Paris has shown restraint so far," Joseph replied. "They've sent requests and suggestions, not orders. That's already quite remarkable."

"I know," Dumouriez said, "Some of them just want to see me make a fool of myself. They're worried... If it weren't for Carnot restraining them, who knows what foolish things they might do! Well, Joseph, do you have any suggestions for the current situation?"

Joseph did have a solution, but he chose not to reveal it to Dumouriez. He knew that, for political reasons, Paris needed to see the invaders expelled from France, and the Prussian-Austrian coalition was actually quite willing to retreat. There was room for negotiation. However, this was politically incorrect, so why should Joseph tell Dumouriez?

"General, in this situation, there's not much I can do. We're facing not just the enemy, but also our own government and parliament they're much more challenging to deal with than the Austrians and Prussians," Joseph replied.

"You're right, Joseph," Dumouriez furrowed his brow. "But I must come up with a solution."

Chapter 83: The Battle of Jemappes

Although Joseph hadn't given Dumouriez any advice, Dumouriez was a clever man. He quickly realized that his current goals were similar to those of the Duke of Brunswick across from him. So he began secret discussions with the Duke of Brunswick about the withdrawal of the Prussian and Austrian coalition forces.

Afterward, the Duke of Brunswick began a slow retreat, and Dumouriez followed discreetly, almost escorting them from Verdun to Valenciennes.

The recapture of Valenciennes was another great achievement, and for this, Dumouriez received high praise from the government and the assembly. His reputation was now rivaling that of the infamous Lafayette from years past.

The Duke of Brunswick, on the other hand, swiftly withdrew his Prussian forces to Coblenz. It was said that young Duke Charles had suggested to the Duke of Brunswick that redirecting their forces in that direction would give the Austrians in Belgium more freedom of action. Still, the Duke of

Brunswick did not adopt his advice. Because if they followed Charles's suggestion, while it might provide more help to the Austrian forces in Belgium, it would also expose the Prussian army to greater risks. After all, the Duke was a Prussian general, and he had to prioritize Prussian interests.

Following the retreat of the Duke of Brunswick's army, Dumouriez allowed his forces two days to rest and then prepared to join the battle in Belgium. Everyone took the opportunity to rest.

Napoleon, never one to sit still, had been studying maps for hours, and he sought out Joseph to discuss his insights. However, when he entered Joseph's temporary residence, he saw Joseph's grim expression, as if something had upset him.

"What's wrong? Has something happened?" Napoleon asked. He noticed a letter on Joseph's desk and added, "Did Lucien get himself into trouble again? Did he cause some mischief?"

Joseph shot Napoleon a sideways glance and thought to himself, "Lucien causing trouble? Isn't that your doing? You taught him to 'be bold and act decisively' every day. His behavior is your influence, isn't it?"

"In my opinion, Joseph, you turned Lucien into a troublemaker. You know he's mischievous, and you've taught him a bunch of skills. It's no wonder he causes trouble..." Napoleon didn't care about Joseph's thoughts and went on the offensive, shifting the blame beautifully to Joseph.

"Lucien is fine," Joseph replied, shaking his head. "Mr. Carnot promised to watch over him, and I trust he'll do a good job."

"True, with Lucien's foolishness and Mr. Carnot's guidance, there's no need to worry," Napoleon admitted. He had great respect for Carnot's abilities and character.

"Then why are you not happy?" Napoleon inquired further.

"Clavier has taken advantage of the Austrian occupation of Valenciennes to repeat his tricks and make some more money, while we're not in Paris, and Mr. Carnot is too busy to catch a ride..." Joseph grumbled.

Napoleon knew about Joseph and Carnot hitching rides with Clavier on his public carriage for profit. He knew how much they could earn. He frowned and said, "That heartless guy. He didn't even wait for us to catch the ride... One day, I'll put his head on a lamppost!"

Two days of rest later, Dumouriez led his army towards Belgium. With high morale, the French army made rapid progress, entering Belgium in late October. By early November, they reached the vicinity of the primary Austrian defensive position at Jemappes Heights. Capturing this strategic high ground would secure all of Belgium for the French.

At this point, the Austrian forces defending the high ground numbered around 25,000 troops, supported by over 40 pieces of artillery. Dumouriez had approximately 45,000 troops available for the assault, accounting for those used elsewhere. The French outnumbered the Austrians and had more artillery.

However, these advantages didn't guarantee victory. As Joseph put it, "In most cases, defense is a more powerful strategy than offense."

The French army, particularly the volunteer forces, had high morale but lacked training. Their military skills were far from impressive, bordering on dreadful. Maintaining formation while

advancing was a challenge. If they followed the conventional approach, they would need to stop and reform ranks every twenty to thirty paces, slowing down their advance. In a situation with limited artillery and musket fire, this might be acceptable, but here, it exposed them to more rounds of cannon and musket fire and greater casualties.

During their march towards Belgium, Joseph, Napoleon, and Dumouriez proposed a new tactical approach known as "column assault."

Column assault involved advancing in multiple columns rather than a single line. Maintaining columns was simpler than lines, even for poorly trained volunteer forces. Columns presented a smaller target area for enemy fire, making them less vulnerable to cannon and musket fire.

Nevertheless, the column assault required a high level of morale because the lead soldiers were almost certain to die. In this tactic, the lead soldiers bore the brunt of enemy fire, making their courage and determination essential for the entire assault to succeed. Joseph, Napoleon, and Dumouriez didn't reveal the extreme danger of being a lead soldier, and they emphasized the glory of being at the forefront for the fatherland.

For the French of that time, it wasn't a significant issue. The volunteer forces already had high morale, and their ignorance of the risks involved in leading a column made it easier for them to volunteer for this task. Joseph, Napoleon, and Dumouriez had no intention of enlightening them. Moreover, they highlighted the expectations of the fatherland and the honor of leading the column.

Of course, immediately forming columns and charging forward wasn't the answer. Such an all-or-nothing approach required perfect timing.

"We must deliver the decisive blow when the enemy is relatively exhausted," Dumouriez told Joseph as he prepared a force of 4,000 for the assault.

The next morning, the French launched one attack after another against the Austrian forces on the high ground. But thanks to the terrain and well-positioned artillery, by around 2 p.m., they had repelled five or six consecutive French attacks.

"Joseph, have you tallied the number of shots fired and the frequency of fire for each of the enemy's cannons?" Dumouriez asked as he sat on a large stone, gazing at the Austrian defenses, addressing Joseph.

"I have taken a count. If they haven't concealed some of their cannons, they should have around 45 cannons. By now, each cannon has fired many times. The lowest count is 20 shots, and the highest is 43. All their cannons are firing at a slower rate now," Joseph reported.

"They've fired so many times; their barrels should be overheating. It's time," Dumouriez declared, rising from his seat. His guards brought him his horse.

Dumouriez mounted the horse and rode to the front of the assault force. He delivered a speech to the troops.

"Children of the fatherland, children of France, before you stands the army of Europe's most despicable feudal lords. They fear that the winds of French freedom will reach their lands, and they dread their people saying, 'Why can't we be as free and equal as the French?' So these wretched men have united, saying, 'Let's destroy France, let's crush their revolution, let's make them slaves again,

let this world remain in perpetual servitude!' My children, they want to subdue us, destroy us, trample us underfoot, take our labor's fruits, and steal our wives and children! Can we allow that?"

"No!"

"No!"

"Down with the feudal lords, down with all tyrants!"

First, the drummer, a child placed among the soldiers, shouted loudly. Then, the soldiers followed suit, chanting enthusiastically.

Dumouriez waited for the chants to subside a bit before continuing, "So, children, children of France! For France and for the freedom of all French people, for the wives and children of all French people, I command you, France commands you, march with me, follow the seasoned French soldier before you."

With those words, Dumouriez spurred his horse forward and raised his sword. "Advance! Advance!"

Chapter 84: France, Onward!

Dumouriez rode at the forefront, with Joseph and Napoleon on horseback, brandishing their swords and leading the soldiers towards the smoke-covered heights of Jemappes.

Perhaps due to exhaustion or the obscurity of the battlefield, the Austrians did not react immediately. Dumouriez took the opportunity to press forward with his soldiers.

As the troops neared the range of the Austrian cannons, Dumouriez shouted "Forward!" and waved his command sword. The soldiers picked up the pace, but Dumouriez slowed his horse, falling to the rear.

Joseph followed suit, recognizing that the earlier show of bravery was merely to boost morale. Actual battle wasn't about commanders charging forward like in "Three Kingdoms" or knight duels from chivalry novels; that wasn't how it worked.

However, as Joseph looked around, he realized that Napoleon was missing. Where had he gone? He was right behind them a moment ago, and they hadn't crossed a river. How could he disappear?

Anxiously, Joseph scanned the surroundings and spotted a figure riding a horse at the front, brandishing a gleaming sword, leading the charge. "Damn, this guy's over the top!" Joseph muttered to himself.

"Joseph, how did your brother end up in the front? He's so small, yet incredibly brave!" Dumouriez also noticed Napoleon had raced ahead.

"Brave my foot! He's completely out of his mind!" Joseph cursed, determined to give that troublemaker a good talking-to when they got back, so he'd understand why things were the way they were.

Austrian forces began to react, and their cannons opened fire. The cannonballs of that era moved slowly, and Joseph could almost see the small black dots rising into the air, seeming to pause briefly at their apex before rapidly descending, kicking up dust on impact, rebounding like bouncy rabbits. One of them whizzed dangerously close to Joseph, nearly making him shrink into his own body.

"Napoleon is even closer, and therefore in more danger, this damned troublemaker!" Joseph thought.

"I can't let him be alone in that place!" Joseph shouted to Dumouriez. He whipped his horse and galloped after Napoleon.

"Ah, Joseph, you, usually so bookish, are surprisingly brave," Dumouriez shook his head. He didn't chase after them; he was the commander, and he needed to oversee the big picture.

Joseph, fueled by anxiety, caught up and grabbed Napoleon's reins. "You idiot, are you out of your mind? I called you here just to show your face to the soldiers. Why did you run off? You can't just run around! Get back with me quickly!"

Napoleon turned around, giving Joseph a peculiar look. "Joseph, is there something wrong with your head? We've come this far; we can't turn back now, can we?"

Joseph was momentarily perplexed, but then he understood what Napoleon meant. Dumouriez had boosted morale with his show of bravery earlier, but now he had fallen behind the formation. If Joseph and Napoleon turned back, it could demoralize the troops.

"You rascal!" As Joseph grasped the situation, his anger grew. He now had to accompany this troublemaker into the heat of battle.

"Haha... Maybe I should be touched that you came all this way for my safety. Really!" Napoleon teased.

"Touched, my foot! You're not a woman!" Joseph retorted but relaxed his grip on the reins.

A cannonball struck nearby, hitting a small detachment. The flag bearer at the front was obliterated, and the flagpole split in two, causing the flag to soar into the air, then tumble down. A hand reached out and caught the falling flagpole, raising the tricolour flag high. It was Napoleon, who had caught the plummeting flag and raised it high, then jumped off his horse, shouting to the stunned soldiers, "French soldiers, for our homeland, charge!"

The soldiers, inspired by his actions, followed his lead, shouting and advancing.

Joseph gritted his teeth, drew his sword, and urged his horse onward. "Idiot! Get off your horse! You're too conspicuous, like a magnet for bullets!" He scolded Napoleon while pulling him off his horse.

Joseph felt a strange mixture of emotions. He had never imagined that he would be charging into battle alongside his younger brother. Yet, in a matter of moments, he had gone from cursing Napoleon to feeling moved by his courage.

"Joseph, you've shown more bravery than I ever expected from you," Napoleon said, taking in Joseph's iron-willed determination. He chuckled, his usual mischievous self showing.

"You dare to call me a coward, you troublemaker!" Joseph replied, but at that moment, another cannonball whizzed by. Joseph realized that his life had taken a wild turn.

In this battle, the French suffered over 600 casualties, with more than 1,300 wounded, totaling around 2,000 casualties. The Austrians, on the other hand, had approximately 300 killed, over 500 wounded, and about 600 taken prisoner, totaling roughly 1,500 casualties. If you only considered the numbers, it seemed like the Austrians had a slight advantage.

However, this was a defensive battle that relied on terrain and fortifications. The French were mostly inexperienced volunteer soldiers. Even with these factors against them, the Austrians couldn't hold their ground against the French assault. Without the terrain advantage and fortifications, they would have been even more vulnerable.

This battle demonstrated that even with less-experienced French troops, the Austrians were still vulnerable to various forms of French warfare.

Chapter 85: The Accursed Safe

After the victorious Battle of Rheims, the Austrian defenses in the region of Belgium crumbled. The Austrian forces fled in haste, and the French effortlessly occupied Aachen, moving swiftly towards the River Roer. Due to this string of victories, Dumas had risen to the status of a hero, a savior of France. However, at this very moment, unsettling news arrived that soured his mood.

The source of his displeasure, even hatred, was Carnot. After the Battle of Valmy, Carnot had been instrumental in shielding Dumas from unnecessary Parisian meddling. At that time, Dumas held Carnot in high regard. Yet, as he led his army into Belgium, he began to find Carnot increasingly irksome.

Now, his supply lines had grown longer, requiring goods to be transported from France via roads, a less efficient method compared to local procurement. So, according to the customary practice, the French government merely had to send him the funds, while Dumas would handle the supply purchases.

Even a fool would understand the immense profit potential in supplying nearly a hundred thousand troops. Dumas exploited this opportunity by inflating the numbers of troops, exaggerating their consumption rates, and engaging in corrupt practices such as overpriced, subpar supplies. He had amassed significant wealth through such means.

This method was common in later times as well. For instance, not long ago, Blanc purchased 13 sets of MK-45 127mm naval guns from the Bald Eagle for a staggering \$1 billion. Everyone knew these guns were among the worst-performing 127mm naval guns worldwide, notably inferior to Italy's Otto 127 guns. There was no comparison, as there were numerous disparities in performance. Apart from being relatively lightweight, these guns had no other merits. Their lightweight nature was due to skimping on every possible aspect, to the point that their sustained firing rate was on par with the army's goods. When selling to other nations, these guns were relatively inexpensive, but when Blanc was buying, they demanded exorbitant prices. The reason was quite simple: if the price wasn't high, how could Blanc's procurement personnel pocket kickbacks?

Dumas was thriving with his newfound wealth when Carnot presented a so-called "military reform plan," which included a vital point: stripping frontline commanders of their financial authority and having specialized personnel sent by the War Department handle procurement. They even considered establishing a committee to scrutinize procurement bills. Carnot argued that this would help reduce costs and strengthen the government's control over the military. But this... it was tantamount to killing his parents!

Yet Carnot's absurd proposal, contrary to France's noble traditions, garnered widespread support in the parliament. This was understandable; it was a major source of wealth, and who in the parliament wouldn't want to control that power?

However, Dumas soon discovered that this was merely a minor inconvenience. The real crisis was King Louis XVI's treacherous safe!

Just a few days ago, a remarkably intricate safe was discovered in the Tuileries Palace. After violent attempts to crack it open, a trove of letters was found inside, exchanged between the queen, her brother (the Holy Roman Emperor), and her nephew (the current Emperor of Austria). These letters conclusively proved that the royal family had been conspiring with foreign powers. Even after the war began, they had been providing Austria with intelligence about France.

Furthermore, it was discovered that some individuals who had previously seemed like revolutionaries were, in fact, royal agents. For instance, Mirabeau, who had suggested the king escape Paris and incite a civil war, was revealed to be one of the king's informants. Outraged citizens dragged Mirabeau's corpse from the Pantheon and tossed it into the garbage heap.

Dumas was deeply troubled by this news, as he knew that Mirabeau had written letters to the queen recommending him as a loyal and valorous patriot, suggesting he could replace Lafayette. Even when he proposed the king leave Paris and launch an internal war, it was he who recommended the commander for the military. It was rumored that on August 10, during the Parisian revolutionary upheaval, the king and queen had hastily burned a portion of documents. But...

"Damn these imbeciles! Can't even burn documents properly! If they wanted to keep them, why not just keep them? Did they think their personally designed lock mechanism could withstand violent tampering? Do they want to meet the guillotine? And to lock them in a safe, as if your specially crafted lock could thwart a break-in? You want to die, don't drag me into it!" Upon hearing this news, Dumas immediately pushed Carnot's problems aside and worried about this more perilous issue.

However, Dumas did not yet know if Mirabeau's recommendation letters were among the recovered documents. After all, many documents had been burned. Dumas could only pray that these letters had been incinerated.

"If I had known this would happen, maybe it would have been better to let the Austrians march into Paris," Dumas thought, unable to contain his apprehension.

At this point, the people of Paris were oblivious to Dumas still being in Belgium. Revolving around the contents of Louis XVI's safe, a new political struggle had erupted.

After the August 10 Revolution, the Brissotins appointed Danton as Minister of Justice to win the support of the lower classes. This position was originally intended for Roland. As a result, Roland and his wife (the one who would later proclaim 'liberty, oh liberty, how many crimes are committed in thy name' on the guillotine) bore a deep grudge against Danton.

Following the resolution of the crisis in Paris, the Rolands launched an all-out attack against Danton. With the safety of Paris now secured, the people were repelled by the terror and accused Danton of being responsible for the September Massacres. They compelled Danton to resign as Minister of Justice.

Danton still desired reconciliation with the Brissotins, particularly the Rolands. To achieve this, he publicly opposed the "Land Law" on September 25 and, on October 4, proposed ending the state of emergency in parliament. Ending the state of emergency also implied a gradual removal of price controls. Subsequently, when speaking with Lamarche, he even suggested that, for the sake of

peace, he was willing to continue a constitutional monarchy, replacing the king with the Duke of Chartres (the son of the Duke of Orleans). In theory, this should have led to reconciliation with the Brissotins.

However, for some reason, Madame Roland had a peculiar loathing for Danton. They had no intention of letting Danton off the hook. They were adamant about persecuting Danton. They first accused Danton of embezzlement, demanding an audit of his accounts. However, Danton couldn't produce detailed accounts.

They then charged Danton with stealing royal assets during the upheaval of August 10 when the palace was in chaos. To safeguard himself, Danton had to lean towards Robespierre.

But Robespierre, too, was under attack from the Brissotins. They accused Robespierre of inciting violence during the August 10 revolution. In response to this allegation, Robespierre delivered a speech in parliament, asserting that the legitimacy of the current government and parliament was derived from the events of August 10. Any denial of the August 10 uprising amounted to a denial of the Republic itself. This accusation ironically elevated Robespierre's prestige.

So they changed their approach, accusing Robespierre of being responsible for the September Massacres and attacking him for attempting to become a dictator or even a usurper.

However, at this crucial juncture, on November 20, the safe incident erupted. The documents found in the safe undeniably proved the king and queen's treason, as well as some complicity of certain Brissotins with the king.

Armed with this evidence, Robespierre and his allies immediately went on the offensive, demanding the punishment of the king and other traitors for high treason.

Chapter 86: The Vote (1)

The Brissotists were not ones to sit idle. Their proposal, in response to the events unfolding in France, was to expel all members of the Bourbon family from the country.

This plan wasn't solely aimed at Louis XVI; it was more focused on the Duke of Orleans, who had renamed himself Philippe galit, and his son, the Duke of Chartres. They were currently aligned with the Robespierre faction. In the eyes of the Brissotists, Robespierre would undoubtedly support them, allowing them to label the Duke of Orleans and his son as "royalists" or "conspirators against the Republic."

However, times had changed, and the Duke of Orleans' standing in the Jacobin Club had significantly dwindled. Though he had changed his name, the current leaders of the club knew that his true aim was not a republic but the Orleans monarchy. Even though they stood together now, they were not on the same path. Robespierre and his faction were unwilling to go to great lengths to defend them.

The Duke of Orleans was aware of his declining position. To increase his influence, he sent his son, the Duke of Chartres (who was originally the only king in the historical Orleans monarchy, Louis Philippe I), with a group of armed volunteers he funded to join the forces of Danton. The Duke of Chartres performed well in the army, and in the reports returned by Danton, his name was frequently mentioned. However, some envious individuals suggested it was only because Danton took his money.

The Duke of Orleans, or rather, "Philippe galit," as he was now called, could not afford another exile. The previous exile had inflicted heavy losses on him. The Brisotists, realizing that Robespierre and his faction wouldn't speak on their behalf, took the initiative to propose the trial of King Louis XVI, or rather, the trial of Louis of Bourbon for treason. This way, while Louis XVI would likely lose his head, he wouldn't be expelled.

The Brisotists were well aware that the evidence was overwhelming, making it almost impossible for the King to be acquitted once he was put on trial. And if he were found guilty, the punishment for treason was only one: the guillotine.

The question of whether to behead Louis XVI was not their primary concern, but they knew that such an action would lead to even more intense conflicts. The monarchies of Europe might unite to attack France, and within France, there would be no room for compromise between the conservatives and the republicans. Once the struggle escalated, so-called "moderates" or "centrists" would be abandoned. Thus, from the Brisotists' perspective, sending the King to the guillotine was equivalent to placing the radical Mountain faction or the conservative royalists on the throne of power.

Since the Duke of Orleans couldn't hold back the Mountain faction, the Brisotists had no choice but to involve all of Europe, potentially leading to a prolonged war to avoid the trial of the King.

But as soon as this reason was brought up, the Robespierrians ridiculed it. After all, it was the Brisotists who had been pushing for war from the beginning, and now they suddenly cherished peace? Moreover, the earlier wars had demonstrated that the armies of the European feudal lords were not as formidable as they seemed. If they dared to intervene in France, it would only trigger a revolutionary response, leading to their downfall. By the way, that was something Brisot himself had said!

In any case, Robespierre used Brisot's own words to criticize him mercilessly. Typically, a politician's most durable part is their face, and having their face tarnished doesn't have much impact.

However, the truly fatal consequence was the storm that arose in the Paris Commune.

Since the departure of the Girondins from City Hall, the Paris Commune had fallen into the hands of the republicans. After the uprising on August 10th, the Mountain faction gained overwhelming dominance within the Paris Commune. During the September Massacres, many members of the Commune were somehow involved, and some even directly instigated and organized these acts of violence.

After their victories on the front lines, the constitutional monarchists were defeated, and the Girondins intended to purge their former allies, the radical Mountain faction. One of their focal points was the Paris Commune because many members of the Commune could be implicated in the September Massacres.

However, with the exposure of the "Safe Box" incident, the situation took a complete U-turn. Parisians had initially believed, through propaganda, that they or others had been overly zealous during the September Massacres. But as soon as these documents were revealed, their attitude shifted to, "If we hadn't acted decisively, the Republic would have been lost!"

Amidst such sentiments, the Girondins were immediately seen as royalists, trying to subvert the Republic by supporting a lenient approach and advocating clemency for the King. If the King were not put on trial, the Paris Commune might rise up again, with the citizens and National Guard joining another rebellion.

In this situation, the National Convention had no choice but to decide on the trial of the King.

On December 11th, Louis XVI appeared in court for the first time. He denied all the charges brought against him.

Louis XVI's defense lawyer, Desechets, questioned the National Convention's authority, saying, "According to the Constitution, the National Convention has no right to try the King, as the Constitution stipulates that the King's person is inviolable. If we insist on trying the King, it will lead to a problem. The issue is one of the legitimacy of the trial. Law is the foundation we must respect and rely on. If we violate the law today for this reason, we will violate it again tomorrow, and the law will become a dead letter. Our legal rights, including yours and mine, will no longer be protected..."

This argument indeed resonated with some people, and they applauded him warmly.

After the applause died down, a young man stepped forward. He asked the host, "May I say a few words?"

"Citizen, your name?" the host inquired.

"Louis Antoine Lon Florel de Saint-Just, representing the department of Aisne," the young man replied with an air of grace.

"Very well!" the host said. "Citizen Saint-Just, please come to the platform..."

Saint-Just ascended the platform, surveyed the crowd, and began speaking:

"The gentleman who spoke earlier gave a brilliant speech on legal matters. However, I believe he may have misunderstood the essence of this matter. Indeed, in terms of the law, the King cannot be tried. But what we are currently engaged in is not a legal case; it is a political event. Louis of Bourbon is not a defendant; he is an enemy. There is only one law that can be applied to him, and that is the law between nations, or in other words, the law of war. Louis was at war with the people. He has been conquered. He is a barbarian captive taken by us. He is a foreign prisoner of war! You already know of his treacherous schemes, you have seen his armies! He is the one who orchestrated the massacres at the Bastille, Nancy, the Champ de Mars, Tuileries, and Duillier, among others. Who else, what other enemy, what foreigner has caused you more harm?

Certainly, in the eyes of the law, the King is inviolable, and the law, being of utmost importance, safeguards the rights of each and every one of us. Therefore, it must not be broken. However, esteemed gentlemen, do not forget that in the eyes of the law, there is another entity even more inviolable than the King, one that is supreme: the people of France! When Louis of Bourbon conspired with foreigners, when he plotted those horrifying betrayals and massacres that we all know of, he violated the supreme, inviolable entity the people of France. From the moment Louis of Bourbon committed this violation against the people of France, he ceased to be a king and became an enemy, an enemy of all of France..."

Saint-Just walked down from the platform amid the applause of the Mountain faction's deputies and took his seat beside Robespierre.

"Louis, your speech was excellent," Robespierre said, "and it has given me a lot of inspiration."

"Well done, that was an amazing speech!" Danton added, "It's hard to believe this is your first public address."

"But my speech hasn't changed their attitude," Saint-Just said, glancing to his right and continued, "They can't defend the King because the people are not on their side."

"Them? They can't defend the King because the people are not on their side," Robespierre said confidently.

In the following days, the National Convention engaged in several rounds of debate on how to handle the King. Robespierre delivered his famous speech, "Louis must die because the nation must live." His speech was immediately printed and widely circulated by the Paris Commune. More and more people, spontaneously, gathered around the National Convention. When a deputy who supported sending the King to the guillotine passed by, the people cheered. When a deputy advocated clemency and mercy for the King, the crowd hissed and threw garbage at them.

Time passed day by day, and the day of the vote finally arrived.

"Joseph, how are you planning to vote?" one of the Brisotist deputies, the renowned philosopher Condorcet, asked Joseph Fouch, another deputy from their faction, as they both sat in a carriage on their way to the National Convention.

"I will definitely vote for clemency," Fouch replied without hesitation. His gaze shifted through the carriage window, where a group of citizens had already erected a 1:1 scale model of a guillotine along the road leading to the National Convention...

Chapter 87: The Vote (2)

With Paris preoccupied by the trial of the king, nobody had time to trouble Dumouriez for now. Even the dispatch of officials responsible for military supplies had been delayed. But Dumouriez sensed that trouble was brewing and that he needed to seize this last opportunity. Whether or not the king's trial would implicate him in the end, having more money on hand was always helpful. Take Talleraud, for instance; if he didn't have money, how could he possibly escape to England?

Adopting the mindset of "use your power or lose it," Dumouriez became more creative in his military procurement schemes, filling his coffers. However, this came at the expense of the soldiers under his command, as their supplies dwindled. Dumouriez deflected blame onto Paris, telling his troops that the folks there were too embroiled in infighting to tend to their needs, which is why they faced shortages. While this explanation temporarily pacified his soldiers, it inevitably led to a decline in their morale.

Besides the supply issues, another problem significantly contributed to low morale the core of Dumouriez's army was the National Guard. Their high spirits had originally stemmed from a sense of duty to defend their homeland. They were local militias who had never intended to leave their homes; they only joined the army to save the nation. They had continuously defeated the Prussian-Austrian coalition, driving them out of the French borders. In the eyes of these National Guard soldiers, the homeland's crisis was resolved, so they believed they should return home. However,

the government kept them abroad, battling the Austrians and Prussians. This situation further dampened their spirits.

Lack of supplies and a loss of a clear mission led to a sharp decline in morale for Dumouriez's army. Their once unyielding courage and determination faded away. And this army...

"Now we must prepare for defeat," Napoleon told Joseph. "You know, our army is quite lacking in military quality, to the point that aside from morale, we're almost empty-handed. Now that even morale is gone, losing battles should come as no surprise. Joseph, I'm about to lead us into Austrian Netherlands. I think we'll have a tough time there. When we're in battle, you should be cautious and not recklessly charge into the front lines."

"Huh?" Joseph exclaimed, wide-eyed. "You... You just stole my line, didn't you? Shouldn't I be the one saying that to you?"

"Because I'm more clever than you on the battlefield. I should be the one to remind you," Napoleon smugly said. "But... never mind, it's better for you to stick close to me. This Dumouriez guy is quite self-centered; he might sell out his comrades to save himself."

Following the mischievous Napoleon around like a puppy? That was a blow to Joseph's self-esteem. But after some contemplation, he realized that he was nowhere near as skilled as Napoleon in battle, so he decided to put his ego aside.

"Alright, when it gets real, I'll stick with you."

But, he added, "I need to keep an eye on you and prevent you from causing more trouble."

Meanwhile, another man named Joseph was facing a critical decision in his life. In the National Convention, the voting that would determine the fate of Louis XVI had begun. Outside the Convention's chambers, crowds surrounded the building, their chants audible even inside:

"Off with Louis's head!"

"Eliminate the enemies of the homeland!"

"Anyone who protects Louis, we'll destroy them!"

To protect the safety of the National Convention, the Paris Commune dispatched a unit of National Guard troops with cannons. However, their arrival only increased the sense of insecurity for many.

Joseph Fouché was equally uneasy, but he had a later voting slot, giving him a chance to assess the situation first. In the Jacobin Club elections, Robespierre had supported secret voting, but when it came to voting on Louis XVI's fate, he insisted on a public vote.

"You were elected by the people of Paris or other regions in France. You're not voting for yourself but representing the citizens who elected you. They have the right to know how you voted," he argued.

This reasoning was compelling, and the Girondins retreated again. The voting process now involved each deputy taking the stand, stating their decision, and having it recorded by a clerk, who would then hand it to the deputy for their signature and print it for public view.

The first to step up to vote was Pierre-Victorien Vergniaud, one of the leaders of the Girondins and the President of the National Convention. The night before, he had called on everyone to resist the pressure and pardon the king. He even announced that he would use this opportunity to deliver a

speech calling for tolerance and reconciliation. Yet, his actions were unusually slow, his head lowered, unable to meet the eyes of the others. In a nearly inaudible voice, he uttered a single word. The recording clerk couldn't even make it out and asked him to repeat it.

"La mort..." (Death penalty), he said in a hushed tone.

Although his voice was barely audible, it was clear enough for everyone to hear. The clerk recorded his vote and handed the record to him for his signature. Vergniaud signed and slinked off the stage like a defeated dog.

"A good start," Robespierre applauded and commented to Danton, who was sitting beside him.

"Vergniaud likes to play the hero, but I know that this guy's courage is as big as a rabbit's. A few people with pikes, shouting slogans outside his residence, would be enough to intimidate him," Danton said, with a hint of disdain. Since the Girondins had rejected his offer of reconciliation, they would have to face his hostility.

With this beginning, the Girondins' resolve was beginning to crumble. Fortunately, Condorcet followed, and with his lead, other Girondin deputies began voting for clemency.

However, the next few voters were Jacobins, and their stance was unwavering. Without hesitation, they loudly proclaimed, "La mort!"

The vote tally seesawed back and forth, with only a few votes separating the two sides at most. Time passed, and it was evening, yet the crowd outside had not dispersed. On the contrary, more people had joined after finishing their work. They lit torches and surrounded the Convention, alternating between cheering and cursing, singing songs like the "Song of the Slaves" and the recent hit from the September Massacres called "Everything Will Be Fine."

In this cacophony, the voting continued, with only a few deputies left to vote. The difference in the number of votes favoring the death penalty had widened slightly, but there were still more Girondin deputies left to vote. If these remaining deputies voted for clemency, the balance might shift.

Fouche pondered the current vote count and the remaining deputies on both sides. The outcome remained uncertain. However, he couldn't wait much longer; his turn to vote was coming up soon.

He knew he had betrayed Robespierre, who wasn't known for his forgiveness. He had also offended Danton, as most of the information against Danton and the Roland couple had come from his investigations. Danton undoubtedly held a deep grudge against him. But...

Fouche surveyed the hesitating Girondin deputies who still had time to vote and saw their pale faces and wavering expressions. He knew these people were on the brink, unable to withstand the pressure from outside.

"Ten people are hesitating, and at least half of them will betray the cause. With every one out, one in, Louis's fate is sealed," he concluded, observing the wavering deputies.

"Joseph Fouche," the presiding officer called his name.

Fouche stood up, smiled as he glanced at his former allies, and confidently made his way to the platform. Without hesitation, he loudly declared, "La mort!"

Chapter 88: Crisis

With Fouche's vote, the fate of Louis XVI was essentially sealed. Fouche cast the three hundred and fifty-fifth vote in favor of the death penalty, only six votes away from the three hundred and sixty-one needed to behead Louis XVI. And behind Fouche, there were still many Montagnards who had not yet voted, and their resolve was almost unwavering. The remaining Brissotins, on the other hand, were less predictable. The die was cast. Shortly thereafter, some new turncoats among the Brissotin deputies appeared behind Fouche. In the end, out of the seven hundred and twenty votes, three hundred and eighty-seven were in favor of the death penalty, and three hundred and thirty-three were in favor of clemency. Louis XVI's death sentence was approved, making him the second European monarch to be sentenced to death.

In fact, there were economic reasons for trying the king. As the king was sentenced to death, the property of the exiled nobles was immediately confiscated and used as collateral to issue more assignats. Under normal circumstances, these lands and assets would provide France's finances with a significant buffer. However, in any era, war is a financial abyss, and the war between France and Austria and Prussia had not yet ended.

...

After taking over Belgium, the French army began to reorganize. Joseph, with time on his hands, strolled through the streets of Aachen with his brother.

Though they were merely strolling, both brothers noticed different things. Napoleon meticulously observed the layout of the streets of Aachen, mentally simulating urban warfare strategies over and over again. As for Joseph, he made a simple observation: the prices in Aachen had significantly increased, and shopkeepers seemed reluctant to deal with the French, especially those in military uniforms. For instance, when Joseph and Napoleon went to a small tavern without their uniforms, Joseph asked in German, "Do you have brandy?" The innkeeper immediately replied, "Yes, we do. Will you pay with marks?" The innkeeper's face lit up.

"Isn't a livre acceptable?" Joseph continued.

"A livre? Silver, right? Silver is also acceptable, but we don't accept assignats," the innkeeper replied.

"Silver," Joseph said while placing a few silver coins on the counter.

"Very well," the innkeeper, seeing the silver, cheerfully responded, "One livre for a glass."

"What? Wasn't it two livres for a glass before?" Joseph asked in surprise.

"That was before the French arrived," a voice chimed in from the side. Joseph turned to see a red-haired young man holding a foamy beer. He raised his glass with a slight smile when he met Joseph's gaze.

"Yes, that was before the French arrived. Ever since the French came, everything has gone up in price," the innkeeper added.

It was a normal occurrence. Soldiers, living with uncertainty, were often willing to spend their money. Whenever a large group of soldiers arrived in an area, it would often lead to booming businesses in certain sectors, such as alcohol and other less reputable trades, causing prices to rise.

"So, innkeeper, you must be making quite a bit of money," Joseph said with a smile.

"Not really," the innkeeper shook his head. "At first, it was okay, but now, they come with these small pieces of paper and demand drinks. Isn't that cheating? Of course, I refused, and they even threatened to hang me from a lamppost, calling me a counter-revolutionary. Nowadays, we can't afford not to accept their paper, but we have to hide the good stuff in advance so they don't see it."

In France, to ensure the acceptance of assignats, the National Convention had issued laws prohibiting shopkeepers from refusing them. Those who insisted on rejecting assignats could face consequences, including being hanged. However, this wasn't France.

Soldiers had no choice but to come out and relax, spending their money.

Initially, in times of great peril on the frontlines, to boost soldiers' morale, the French government paid them in real metallic currency. But after the Battle of Valmy, assignats began to appear in soldiers' pay, and after the victory at Jemappes, assignats replaced metallic currency in their payments. By the time Louis XVI was beheaded, there was no metallic currency left in their pay.

Of course, this was Danton's version of events, and there was another account suggesting that, even in this special moment, to maintain stability, the government continued to pay the troops in metallic currency. However, General Dampierre had allegedly exchanged this metallic currency for assignats himself before distributing it to the soldiers.

Rumors abounded that some soldiers were engaging in a particular type of trade near the French military camps, exchanging coins for assignats. This exchange rate was even more favorable than the one in France. Unwilling to be exploited, a group of irate soldiers not only beat up a merchant but also took around two hundred silver livres from him, giving him four hundred paper livres in return.

General Dampierre, who typically paid little attention to such matters, was furious and declared that such lawless behavior was unforgivable and stirred up public resentment. He asserted that these practices were heinous crimes, arousing public anger to the point where the people were calling for the miscreants' execution. As a result, the soldiers who had committed the theft were hanged, setting a precedent for military discipline.

Many soldiers suspected that the reason General Dampierre had reacted so strongly was because he was allegedly connected to the merchants involved in the coin-to-assignat exchange. These unsubstantiated speculations quickly spread throughout the entire army, further dampening troop morale.

Joseph tossed two livres to the innkeeper and took two glasses of brandy. He continued to scan the street outside, contemplating how to set up an ambush there with a cannon and blast Napoleon to hell. He sat down by the street-side window.

As the two brothers had just taken their seats and sipped their brandy, chaos erupted outside. There was shouting, followed by gunshots, cries, and screams, all mingled together in a tumultuous cacophony.

"What's happening?" Joseph stood up and looked outside.

A man rushed in, his face pale, and shouted, "The French are robbing and killing people!"

...

In a short span of time, the French had lost the support of the people in Belgium. Initially, most ordinary Belgians welcomed the arrival of the French army. However, the French army's actions turned their dreams into nightmares. Many individuals who had once flirted with the French while under Austrian rule now found themselves cooperating with the Austrians again. It was even conceivable that once Austria launched a counteroffensive, the entire of Belgium might rise against the French.

Yet, to address their financial difficulties and prepare for the looming second wave of intervention, which was costly, France needed more funds from Belgium.

The National Convention dispatched a host of envoys to Belgium with the aim of extracting additional funds from these regions.

Revolutionary measures were expected to accompany any military campaign. These measures called for the confiscation of all property belonging to those who despised the revolution, including the church, nobility, and their loyalists, to be used for the revolutionary cause, primarily as collateral for assignats. Furthermore, all taxes and seigniorial rights in liberated areas were to be abolished, with old tax systems replaced by levies on local wealthy individuals. Administrative systems in these liberated areas were to be reformed, and only those who pledged allegiance to liberty and renounced their privileges would have the right to vote and be elected. To prevent coins from flowing into these areas and out of France, the use of metallic currency in these regions would be prohibited, and assignats would be enforced.

The leaders of the National Convention believed that these measures would create a division between the lower classes and the aristocracy in the occupied regions.

The delegate who proposed this plan, Cambon, declared, "Fire on the palace, peace to the cottages. This way, we can stand our ground anywhere."

Most of the Convention deputies supported this proposal, and it was swiftly approved. However, Robespierre privately expressed his concerns to Danton, saying, "Cambon's idea sounds beautiful, but I worry that it might go awry in practice. We lack the means to ensure this law is enforced as intended. I fear this seemingly beautiful law could become a nightmare in execution. Furthermore, even in France, not many people are willing to accept assignats."

"The road to hell is often paved with good intentions," Danton replied. "But for now, we have no choice."

To effectively implement this law, the Convention sent thirty envoys to Belgium. Cambon, who had proposed the plan, was among them.

However, as Robespierre had feared, policies often transformed significantly when executed. Many times, when policies were translated into action, they took on a different form. These envoys wielded considerable authority and could make unilateral decisions on most matters, exceeding the power of previous intendants. But not every envoy was as incorruptible as Robespierre feared. In fact, the vast majority of these envoys were exploiting the situation for personal gain.

In just a few months, Cambon's envoys alone raised as much as sixty-four million livres for the Republic in the Belgian regions. However, the entire of Belgium, including those living in "cottages" whom the French sought to win over, harbored deep resentment towards the French.

No matter how much the envoys sent to Belgium had made the Belgians despise France, they had at least accomplished one thing: they had helped the French government acquire much-needed funds. This led to the dispatch of more envoys to other regions within France where the revolutionary fervor had not yet fully taken root, but where the potential for funding was abundant.

Time was of the essence. In France, the royalists and constitutionalists who had been overthrown were gaining momentum in the provinces. Internationally, with the fall of Louis XVI's head, the hatred of France by the monarchies of Europe deepened further. The actions of France in Belgium and the Austrian Netherlands also raised concerns among the British.

The British had initially hoped that Austria and Prussia would engage France in a lively battle on the continent, allowing Britain to stand on the sidelines, watching the drama unfold and seizing any French colonies that were left unguarded. If France suffered severe defeats, Britain might even reclaim New York, stringing up the American rebels on the gallows. However, much to the surprise of British Prime Minister Pitt, the Austro-Prussian forces proved to be ineffective. Instead of advancing into France, they were pushed back into Belgium, threatening the Netherlands.

Britain also had territorial interests on the European continent, notably in Hanover, which was ruled by the Hanoverian dynasty, the same dynasty that governed Britain. Moreover, after their victory in the Anglo-Dutch War, the Dutch had become a crucial gateway for British industrial goods to enter the European market. Thus, British interests were greatly threatened. Additionally, the influence of French revolutionary ideas had begun to take root within Britain, leading to the emergence of groups like the "Equality Society," causing anxiety among British aristocrats and dignitaries. Consequently, what was once a "neutral" stance quickly changed as Britain severed diplomatic ties with France when Louis XVI's head rolled.

Now, France faced its most dangerous adversary: Britain.

Although the British army was small and posed no immediate threat to the French mainland, Britain was the wealthiest country in Europe at the time and excelled in forming alliances. Without Britain's diplomacy, many of the anti-French nations in Europe would likely have turned on each other rather than focus on France. With Britain's involvement, a formidable coalition was starting to take shape.

On March 1st, General Dumouriez led his army into the Netherlands, but not long after his forces entered, the enemy breached his rear. The enemy quickly crossed the River Roer and swiftly captured Lige, threatening Dumouriez's army from the rear.

To address the crisis, Danton personally inspected the situation in Belgium. He found that Belgium was in dire straits, so he hurriedly returned to Paris, urging an urgent mobilization.

However, at that moment, Danton's comrades in the trench, Marat and Brissot, made a point. They reminded Danton that the successful mobilization in September 1792 had a prerequisite: before sending out a large number of volunteers, Paris had to eliminate internal "traitors."

Marat spoke first, "If we can't act decisively as we did in September last year, eliminating all potential enemies, Paris can't send out large numbers of volunteers. Because as soon as we leave, those folks will launch a rebellion in Paris. So, unless there's another bloody September, we won't agree to send out volunteers."

"Our enemies are already at the gates of France," Danton said.

"No, our enemies have already infiltrated Paris, and some are even hiding in the assembly!" Marat replied.

"Do you have any evidence?" Danton asked.

"No concrete evidence, but my friend Joseph has noticed many unusual activities. Some people are even getting too cozy with that Austrian woman!" br said.

The "Austrian woman" referred to the imprisoned Queen Marie Antoinette, and "Joseph" was undoubtedly Joseph Fouch.

Ever since he had cast his vote in favor of the execution of the king in the previous vote, Joseph Fouch had unhesitatingly taken a seat on the left side. However, Robespierre had not forgotten that Fouch had betrayed him once. Moreover, Fouch's betrayal this time, especially considering Robespierre's moral rigor, had left him disdainful. So, Robespierre maintained a cold attitude toward him. Danton knew that Robespierre disliked Fouch, and he wasn't too fond of him either.

To secure his position among the Mountain faction, Fouch had acted more radical than most of the Mountain's members on certain issues. In some matters, even Marat and br couldn't match his radicalism. This allowed him to establish a connection with Marat and br.

Upon hearing that the information came from Fouch, Danton fell silent for a moment. He knew that, despite Fouch's lack of scruples, he had an exceptional ability to gather information. Even though Fouch was unreliable, he didn't spread falsehoods. He always used genuine information to manipulate his enemies.

After a moment, Danton spoke, "France needs order; we can't afford another September like last year. It may hurt our enemies, but it will also harm us. Let's establish a Revolutionary Tribunal to handle these matters, but we can't allow unchecked anarchy."

"Why should we trust your Revolutionary Tribunal?" br asked.

"This tribunal will be accountable to a committee," Danton said. "We'll form a 'Committee of Public Safety,' and its members will be staunch patriots. You can see..."

Danton's warning in the Assembly didn't receive much attention. Some Girondins even suspected that Danton's alarming statements were merely a ploy to secure more power for the Mountain. After all, the situation had significantly improved compared to the events of '92. Danton's proposal to create a "Committee of Public Safety" only solidified their suspicions, causing chaos in the Assembly.

However, the subsequent developments took nearly everyone by surprise. On March 18th, Dumouriez's army suffered defeats by the smaller Austrian forces, first at Neerwinden and then at Louvain on March 21st. His retreat almost led to the loss of all of Belgium.

Someone had to be held accountable for such failures. In the National Convention, various pieces of incriminating information regarding Dumouriez were revealed: embezzlement of army funds, exploitation of soldiers, and conspiring with the king against the revolution.

Yes, the letters found in the king's safe were brought to light, containing various conspiracies involving Dumouriez and the king. Although the evidence was limited and vague, some had seen these letters a few months earlier. However, at that time, Dumouriez was on a winning streak,

becoming a hero defending the republic, so everyone had silently ignored these letters. Nevertheless, they had not been entirely forgotten, and now they resurfaced.

The Girondins blamed the Mountain, especially Danton, for supporting Dumouriez and held them responsible for the situation. The Mountain, in turn, accused the Girondins of opposing the creation of the "Committee of Public Safety" and the national mobilization, which had led to the current crisis.

During the debates, the newly elected Mountain deputy, Carnot, provided a detailed analysis of the military situation, concluding that if France didn't achieve comprehensive and efficient nationwide mobilization, it would inevitably fail in the ongoing war.

Although the Girondins opposed the Mountain's motions, they were aware of Carnot's military expertise and his impeccable character. This made them appear increasingly passive when countering the proposals.

To salvage the situation, the National Convention decided to send a delegation of five members, led by Borlve, to Dumouriez's army. They were to inquire about certain matters, and if necessary, arrest him and bring him to Paris for trial.

Philippe galit, formerly the Duke of Orlans, left the National Convention and returned to his home. The changes in the situation had completely deviated from his initial expectations when he initially joined the revolution. At first, he had hoped to overthrow the Bourbon dynasty and establish an Orlans monarchy. However, while the Bourbon dynasty had indeed been overthrown, the Orlans monarchy had vanished without a trace. In fact, not only the Orlans monarchy but even the Orlans family's ducal titles had been abolished by the revolutionary government. For self-preservation, he had even adopted a rather ridiculous new name.

But now, the former Duke, with a sheet of paper before him, gazed at a map for a long while. He then entered his study and busied himself for a good half-hour before emerging with a sealed letter in hand. He pulled a cord beside his desk, ringing a bell outside. A servant came in and asked, "Your Highness, is there something you require?"

"Philippe, there's a task I'd like you to undertake," the former Duke said.

"Assisting Your Highness is an honor," Philippe replied.

"I need you to personally visit Louis and deliver this letter to him," the former Duke said. "Act quickly, discreetly, and ensure this letter doesn't fall into the wrong hands. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Your Highness. You can rest assured; I will ensure that this letter reaches the Duke of Chartres's hands in a timely manner," Philippe replied.

Chapter 90: The Mutiny (1)

After putting the artillerymen through a rigorous exercise, the newly-promoted Major Napoleon walked towards his tent with a stern face. To his surprise, he found Joseph waiting for him there.

"Joseph, what are you doing here?" Napoleon's mood was already soured by the string of defeats they had experienced. While these losses were expected, they still weighed heavily on his mind.

"I need to talk to you. Let's take a walk," Joseph said.

Napoleon glanced at Joseph, realizing that something important must have come up. He nodded and replied, "Alright, let's go for a walk."

Both of them were currently residing in the military camp, and while tents provided some privacy, they didn't muffle sound well. So, if they had any secrets to discuss, it was better done outside where they wouldn't risk being overheard.

They walked towards a small hillock nearby. Along the way, they encountered several lazy soldiers who half-heartedly saluted them. It was clear that the current situation had sapped the soldiers' spirits. The lowered morale was evident in the relaxed discipline and courtesy. Soldiers offering salutes was a sign of respect, given the circumstances. Some officers received no acknowledgment from the soldiers, but at such a time, they were hesitant to discipline the men for their lack of etiquette.

Although the soldiers' salutes lacked enthusiasm, Napoleon and Joseph returned the salutes crisply and correctly. Napoleon even extended his hand to pat one of the soldiers on the shoulder. "Pierre, you're a fine warrior. You were very brave in the last battle," he encouraged. "Julien, buck up! We will surely prevail."

They reached a quieter spot, and Joseph began, "Napoleon, you're remarkable. I've noticed you can recall the names of almost every soldier and share something related to them. It's an impressive quality, and it makes the soldiers willing to fight for you. I can't compete with you on this."

Napoleon was taken aback and stared at Joseph for a moment. "Are those words really coming from you, Joseph? It's like a one-eyed giant singing a song about mermaids. Are you not mocking me or plotting something?"

Joseph chuckled and replied, "Napoleon, you should know that strong people never hesitate to praise others. Think of it this way: we all genuinely praise a child for being smart and cute, without any jealousy or ulterior motives."

"You rascal, you're making me sound like a child!" Napoleon retorted.

"Do you want to say, 'I'm not a child anymore?'" the mischievous Joseph inquired.

"Enough of this nonsense. Let's get to the point. Why did you come looking for me?" Napoleon kicked at the grass that had just sprouted.

"Very well," Joseph said. "Have you noticed...?" He glanced around and lowered his voice. "Have you noticed some unusual actions on General's part?"

"Unusual actions from the General?" Napoleon was surprised.

"Yes, he replaced his entire guard with German mercenaries. The French guards have been gradually reassigned to other units. Moreover, did you notice he relocated the Duke of Chartres' men near the command headquarters?"

Napoleon paused, pondering. "Joseph, are you being overly cautious? The General can't be that foolish. How could this happen? Even Lafayette couldn't do such a thing..."

"Who knows? But considering the situation in Paris, can you imagine how long Paris can tolerate him? It's like we all know that goats would die if they jumped off a cliff. But if a pack of goats is

being chased by hunters and runs to the edge of the cliff, they might take the risk of jumping off. If one goat jumps, and another jumps onto its back, they might jump over the cliff, right?"

"Nonsense. If goats had that kind of intelligence and discipline, they could form a line like Frederick the Great and make hunters consider jumping over them one by one. But... I understand what you're getting at. You mean the General is running out of options?"

"He might not be entirely out of options, but he's certainly at a point where he needs to take risks," Joseph explained. "Napoleon, if something unexpected happens, can your soldiers follow your orders?"

"Those from the Red Army background surely can. They just need to be gathered. That's quite easy because they should have returned to the Red Army after the war. Maintaining contact with them is entirely reasonable," Napoleon said. "The Red Army still has over three hundred soldiers. The General's German mercenaries number a hundred, and the Duke of Chartres' volunteers amount to five hundred. But they lack artillery. If it comes to a fight, I can easily defeat them!" Napoleon replied in a hushed tone, excitement written all over his face.

"Carnot has written to me, mentioning that he might send some envoys to the army to inquire with the General about certain matters. He's worried this could lead to complications. Additionally, if the General seeks you in these coming days, be cautious. Our ties with Carnot are widely known, so we'll be perceived as staunch republicans and Montagnards. If I were the General, I'd first want to control these two destabilizing factors before doing anything," Joseph cautioned.

"Our General is a proud man. He has unrealistic self-assessments of his charisma. I don't think he'd take such actions. But I understand the need for caution, and you should be careful as well. After all, I'm an artillery officer, and you're a staff officer, making it more convenient for him to approach you," Napoleon thought for a moment.

"The envoys haven't arrived yet, but be ready to establish contact with the Red Army at any moment," Joseph concluded.

Interestingly, the actions of the envoys were far slower than those of the messengers. After Carnot's messenger delivered the letter to Joseph, it took another two days for the Parisian envoys to reach the army. This was expected, as sending envoys required the proper parliamentary process. Messengers were dispatched before these processes were completed.

After receiving news that the envoys had reached the camp, General Dumouriez immediately ordered some of the officers to gather for their inquiries. However, the messengers sent to find Napoleon and Joseph were unable to locate them. It was reported that they had both left their posts, their whereabouts unknown.

This news made General Dumouriez uneasy, but he had no time to take further action because the envoys from Paris had reached the camp's entrance. He had to attend to them promptly.

Several envoys entered the office, but before they could speak, General Dumouriez launched into accusations. He first blamed Paris for not providing sufficient support at the front. After a rebuttal from the envoys, he declared that the current government was an illegal rebel regime and that he and his army considered it necessary to restore the 1791 constitution and return France to a constitutional monarchy.

The envoys immediately issued orders in the name of the Revolutionary Government and the National Convention to arrest General Dumouriez. However, this wasn't Paris, and they hadn't brought a significant number of National Guards with them. In contrast, Dumouriez's German mercenaries swarmed forward upon his command and immediately restrained the five envoys.

"Traitors! You won't get away with this!" one of the envoys cursed.

"Muffle their mouths!" General Dumouriez ordered.

A few German mercenaries hurried forward and stuffed cloths into their mouths, silencing them.

"General, what do we do next?" the Duke of Chartres inquired.

"We'll send some men to deliver them to the Austrians," Dumouriez said.

A group of German mercenaries then dragged the envoys out of the room.

Dumouriez proceeded to garner support from the officers who were taken aback by the sudden turn of events. He required them to sign a proclamation against the Republic and in favor of restoring a constitutional monarchy, as well as ensuring Dumouriez's leadership. Some officers who hesitated to sign were immediately placed under arrest.

"Once we control the officers, we can control the army," Dumouriez told the Duke of Chartres.

"Your Highness, trust me; we will succeed."

After receiving the Parisian envoys and preparing to arrest himself, Dumouriez and the Duke of Chartres made contact with the Austrians. Initially, they hoped that the Austrians would accept the Duke of Chartres as the King of France and provide their support. However, the Austrians rejected this proposal, insisting that Louis XVII should ascend the throne. Consequently, the Duke of Chartres' role shifted from king to regent.

"I'm just worried that the Bonaparte brothers are absent," the Duke of Chartres remarked.

"We control most of the officers; that should suffice," Dumouriez said. "Now, let's gather the soldiers."

A few messengers rushed out. However, as soon as they left, gunfire and shouts erupted in the distance.

"What's happening?" the Duke of Chartres asked.

"Greene, take a few men and check it out," Dumouriez ordered his captain.

Greene quickly saluted and led a few men outside. Shortly after, the sound of galloping hooves indicated that they had mounted horses and ridden toward the source of the gunfire.

"Viella, go ring the bell and gather the soldiers. I need to address them," Dumouriez knew there was no time for hesitation. The gunshots had come from the road leading to the Austrian camp. The distance of the sound suggested an ambush. Perhaps the envoys had already been rescued, and now, he needed to quickly regain control of the situation.

Lieutenant Viella acknowledged and headed out.

Some time passed, and the sound of galloping horses reached them again. Several German mercenaries rushed in, one of them with a wounded shoulder.

"What's going on, Fritz?" Dumouriez recognized the injured man, a captain of the German mercenaries' cavalry unit. He inquired urgently.

"General, we were ambushed," Fritz replied.

"Who attacked you? What about the envoys?" Dumouriez asked.

"It was the Red Army. The Red Army ambushed us, and they've rescued the envoys!" Fritz reported.

The Red Army, responsible for simulating foreign forces, hadn't been provided with the regular blue or white uniforms of the former French Kingdom. They still wore their distinctive red uniforms, making them easily identifiable.

"The Red Army? Damn the Bonaparte brothers!" Dumouriez gritted his teeth.