

The Fox 91

Chapter 91: The Mutiny (2)

Curses couldn't solve anything. The most crucial task at hand was to regain control over the army. The sound of gathering soldiers outside reached their ears. Dumouriez adjusted his military cap, straightened his sword, and turned to Duke Chartres, asking, "Your Royal Highness, would you like to accompany me in addressing the soldiers?"

Duke Chartres hesitated for a moment, still shaken by the recent turmoil. Observing the Duke's pale face, Dumouriez sighed and refrained from insisting on his company. It would do more harm than good for the soldiers to see the Duke in his current state.

The Duke had received credit for many victories in previous reports, but many of these achievements had been orchestrated by Dumouriez himself.

"Your Highness, watch over the officers who refuse to yield. Don't stir up any more trouble," Dumouriez told the Duke before leaving with the officers who had signed their support.

"At least I have these officers under my control. I still hold a significant advantage," Dumouriez thought.

The soldiers had gathered in the courtyard. Dumouriez ascended the reviewing stand and addressed them. In his speech, he began by blaming the National Assembly and the government for not providing sufficient military pay. He then criticized the extreme corruption in the National Assembly and the cruelty of the Paris Commune. Finally, he suggested that a republic was unsuitable for France, and the best system to bring peace and prosperity to the nation was a constitutional monarchy based on the 1791 Constitution. He announced his plan to return to Paris with them to rebuild a stable, peaceful, and prosperous French Kingdom.

Dumouriez had prepared this speech carefully, believing it would sway the soldiers. With his prestige and this compelling speech, he expected them to follow him wholeheartedly.

However, the speech did not have the desired effect. Most soldiers appeared bewildered rather than cheering for him.

Dumouriez sighed and was about to say more when a voice rang out loudly, "Soldiers, comrades, have you forgotten why we left our beloved homeland to come here and fight against the Austrians, Prussians, and various turncoat traitors?"

Amidst the cheers, a man jumped onto a cannon beside the parade ground. He waved to the crowd and continued, "We remember how Brunswick threatened us. They said that if we didn't willingly make ourselves slaves to Louis XVI, they would march to Paris, raze it to the ground, and slaughter its people, our parents, brothers, wives, and children. We didn't come here for anything else, not for military pay, not for glory, and certainly not for General Dumouriez. We're here for one reason"

"To defend Paris!"

"For our families!"

"For my little Pierre and little Franois!"

The soldiers chanted.

Dumouriez's face turned pale. He knew the situation was slipping out of his control, especially when that accursed name, "Brunswick," was mentioned.

"Damn Brunswick! Damn Joseph Bonaparte!" Dumouriez cursed internally, then turned to the captain of his guard and asked, "Hankson, can you hit him from here?"

"General, it's too far. It's almost impossible to hit at this range, unless we use a rifled hunting gun. Besides, I don't think it's the right moment to start shooting now," Lieutenant Hankson replied.

Dumouriez understood Hankson's implication. Opening fire at this moment could trigger an immediate counterattack from the entire army, which was too dangerous. But admitting defeat? No way!

"Soldiers, Brunswick, the Duke of Brunswick, has retracted his statements. As long as we can restore the French Kingdom" Dumouriez began, hoping that another effort might still sway the soldiers. It was like being a hopeless suitor who entered a sacred church, desperately trying to win back the affection of his beloved. Life was full of illusions; otherwise, how could those poor souls endure it?

However, like all forlorn suitors, the words that touched his heart had no effect on the goddess. Instead, Joseph Bonaparte across from him chuckled and said loudly, "Do you all remember what our General told us at Valmy? Either he lied then or he's lying now. Do you believe a liar?"

The crowd remembered. "No!"

"Then do you remember, when we charged the enemy's positions, who was leading us, the one who vowed to charge with us?" Joseph asked.

"Not Dumouriez!"

"Definitely not Dumouriez!"

"In front of us, carrying the flag, it was Napoleon!"

"The Bonaparte brothers led us!"

The soldiers chanted.

"So, tell me, my comrades, do you trust the ones who carried the flag, brandished their swords, and charged into enemy fire alongside you, risking their lives as brothers? Or do you trust a general who has grown rich but left us hungry?" Joseph declared.

"We trust you, Joseph, my brother!"

"Of course, we trust you!"

"We trust you!"

The soldiers' cheers echoed.

Although the situation seemed increasingly hopeless, Dumouriez refused to give up. He wanted to say more, like a backup plan or a last-ditch effort to win over the soldiers. But his chief of staff, Hankson, stopped him, saying, "General, we must leave immediately. Look over there!"

Dumouriez glanced in the direction indicated and saw a group of soldiers in red uniforms escorting several civilians on horseback, heading their way.

Dumouriez knew these were envoys rescued by the Red Army. If the soldiers were swayed by Joseph due to their fear of Brunswick's threats, these envoys from Paris held even more authoritative power.

"It's over," Dumouriez sighed. Even if he didn't want to, the bride had donned her pristine gown, the handsome groom had taken her hand, and the rings had been exchanged. There was no room for hope. So he could only cast one final, wistful look at the army that had once been his and said to those around him, "Let's go!"

The group left the reviewing stand, mounted their horses, and rode towards the command post.

Seeing Dumouriez leaving, Joseph couldn't contain his relief, but anger soon replaced it. "Damn Napoleon! Why hasn't he arrived yet?"

As Dumouriez hurried back to the command post, he found Duke Chartres awaiting him with a worried expression. "General, the situation..."

"It's out of control. We must leave immediately, for Austria," Dumouriez said without stopping, urging the Duke to prepare and leave everything behind. Time was running out.

"Alright," the Duke said, suddenly awakened.

"Take all the officers with you," Dumouriez instructed. Surrendering to Austria would require a substantial offering. If the army lost so many officers, it would be almost impossible to fight. Dumouriez's gift should be of value to Austria.

Soon, Dumouriez's German mercenaries and Duke Chartres' volunteer troops were in motion. They led the officers they had as hostages and ran towards the direction of the Austrian army. Until they encountered a unit of cavalry wearing red uniforms.

"It's General Bonaparte and his Red Cavalry!" The mercenaries slowed down their horses and stopped at a distance. They had learned from their past encounters that Napoleon was skilled at hiding cannons in unexpected places. After the defeats at Valmy and the recent retreats, the sight of Napoleon made them vigilant, scanning their surroundings for hidden cannons.

Seeing the soldiers halt, Napoleon turned to Bourrienne, who was riding alongside him, and said, "Monsieur, it seems we've intercepted the traitor."

Dumouriez, likewise, had no idea where Napoleon had hidden his cannons, and he didn't dare charge forward. In the past, he had seen Napoleon ambush others with cannons, and he didn't want to become a victim himself.

"General, what do we do? They don't have many men. Should we charge at them?" Duke Chartres asked.

"No, it's Napoleon. He's very clever, and charging headlong would be disastrous," Dumouriez shook his head.

"So, what's the plan?" Duke Chartres was running out of ideas.

"Let's talk to him. We have hostages, and most of the junior officers are under our control. Tell him that we have hostages, and we'd like to negotiate for safe passage. If he allows us to pass, we'll hand over half of the officers," Dumouriez proposed.

"You're dreaming! You and your treacherous general have only one road, and that's to hang from the lampposts!" Bourrienne retorted angrily.

"Unless you leave all the officers here, we won't let you through," Napoleon stated.

"That's impossible. If we..." Hankson began.

"I have a proposal. Hand over Duke Chartres to us and half of the officers, and we'll let you pass. Then we'll release the remaining hostages on both sides. If you can't decide, go back and discuss it with Dumouriez," Napoleon suggested.

Hankson returned to his group with the offer. "What should we do?" Duke Chartres inquired.

"Send Hankson to negotiate," Dumouriez instructed.

So, Hankson approached the enemy slowly, dismounted, and raised his hands to show he was unarmed. He walked closer cautiously, and then spoke, "General Dumouriez has sent me to convey his message. He has hostages, and he wishes to negotiate for safe passage. He proposes to hand over half of the officers if you allow us to pass. We can also release the remaining hostages from both sides. If you can't make the decision, you can return and discuss it with Dumouriez."

"Colonel Dumouriez and his traitor general want to talk to us?!" Bourrienne responded with disbelief.

"Hankson?" Napoleon asked.

"I am responsible for the vanguard. I suggest we accept their proposal," Hankson replied.

"Colonel, how can you...", Bourrienne started.

"Mr. Bourrienne, if we lose this many officers all at once, we will lose our combat capability for the short term. Between the Austrians and Paris, there are no other armies but us. We must consider the safety of Paris," Napoleon said.

Chapter 92: The Mutiny (3)

Bourlonville was well aware of the importance of junior officers in an army. However, his mission wasn't to command the troops; it was to bring the traitor Dumouriez back to Paris for the people's judgment. Allowing Dumouriez to escape would mean failure, and even though he didn't have a strange wristwatch on his arm or a voice reminding him of the consequences of failure, he knew that the outcome of failing the mission might not be much different.

But now, the short lieutenant colonel in front of him seemed more concerned about the safety of the bound junior officers than catching the traitor. Bourlonville understood that from a broader perspective, this lieutenant colonel's considerations aligned better with the interests of France. However, if anyone should be concerned about the bigger picture, it should be him, Bourlonville, as the special envoy. Despite the fact that this same lieutenant colonel had rescued him not long ago, any gratitude he had felt evaporated in an instant. He even felt that this short officer wasn't steadfast enough in the revolution. At the same time, he used a euphemism to describe his own behavior "uncompromising."

However, even if Bourlonville wanted to be "uncompromising," he didn't have the luxury at the moment. The soldiers around him weren't firmly aligned with the revolution, and to his surprise, they had joined the side of the short lieutenant with the name Bonaparte.

After the envoy from the traitor returned and discussed with them, he came back once more.

"General agrees to your proposal," Hankson said. "But he has some conditions."

"Go on," Napoleon replied.

"The general requests that your hidden troops come out so we can ensure you haven't set an ambush ahead of us," Hankson continued. "Additionally, the general doesn't agree to handing Duke of Chartres as a hostage to you, but he proposes to be the hostage himself."

Napoleon pondered for a moment and responded, "I can bring out the main force of our troops, but Dumouriez must come to me first. He should know we don't have the advantage in numbers. Without the element of surprise from our hidden troops, you might attack us directly, and that would be detrimental to us. You can convey my terms to Dumouriez, and this is the final condition. If he agrees, he can come over himself. If not, we'll settle the matter with cannons and bayonets."

Hankson immediately went back. He needed to save time because the pursuers might be arriving soon.

In a short while, Hankson and Dumouriez arrived. When they reached Napoleon's soldiers, he ordered his hidden troops to reveal themselves and cleared a path after releasing half of the hostages. The rebels quickly passed the ambush and stopped, preparing for the second phase of the hostage exchange.

"We can't let this traitor go!" Bourlonville suddenly exclaimed. "We should send this traitor back to Paris and hang him on a lamppost!"

"There will be many who would die with me," Dumouriez replied.

"They'll have died for the revolution, and our homeland will remember them," Bourlonville said.

"No," Napoleon intervened. "They are our brothers, and we can never abandon them, no matter the circumstances."

Then he glanced at Dumouriez and added, "The life of ten thousand traitors doesn't compare to one loyal soldier for the revolution."

"Lieutenant Colonel Bonaparte, obey orders!" Bourlonville shouted.

"Sir, I cannot obey your orders until I receive valid identification documents proving your authority," Napoleon said calmly, casting a glance at this special envoy.

When Bourlonville and others were rescued, they didn't have their identification documents on them, so Napoleon used this as an excuse to reject him.

"Very well," Bourlonville's face turned grim.

"Hahaha!" Dumouriez burst into laughter, pointing at Napoleon and then at Bourlonville.

"Bonaparte, have you ever thought that after all your efforts, you saved something like this? Are you fighting for something like this?"

Then he spoke in a more serious tone, "Bonaparte, you're of noble birth, and with your talent, why would you mix with the likes of this? Come with us; with your talents, you can surely become someone of great importance."

His words seemed sincere, as if he didn't blame Bonaparte for ruining his cause. Of course, Napoleon didn't buy into his sweet talk. He had seen enough of people who spoke nicely but turned hostile behind one's back.

"We're all fighting for the ideals of the revolution," Napoleon said. "Even if we have disagreements and differing views, it's all for France. We can't betray our motherland."

Napoleon had become skilled at speaking convincingly, and when he mentioned "Motherland France," he did so fluently.

"Motherland France?" Dumouriez scoffed, looking at Napoleon mockingly. "You, a Corsican, whose father was once a rebel, dare to talk to me about loving France?"

"Corsica is an integral part of France since time immemorial, and every Corsican is a citizen of the French Republic. They all have a sacred duty to defend the unity of the homeland," Napoleon confidently stated.

"Bonaparte, you will succeed!" Dumouriez said in conclusion.

The rest of the hostage exchange proceeded smoothly. Although Bourlonville wanted to disrupt everything, he was practically ignored by everyone. This also deepened his hatred for Napoleon, even more than Dumouriez.

With the suppression of the mutiny, Joseph and Napoleon had at least temporarily gained control of this army. The special envoys who failed their mission, after confirming their identities, didn't get the command. They were eager to return to Paris before another round of failure, although they didn't admit it. Their official reason was, "We must quickly inform Paris about the dire situation here to prepare for your support. Additionally, due to the traitor's actions, your army is critically short on supplies, and this must be reported to the National Convention immediately."

So, the special envoys departed quickly.

However, they didn't leave empty-handed. Because they rushed to leave, the Duke of Chartres forgot an important letter in the camp. This letter was written by Philippe galit to his son. It was quickly discovered, becoming the most significant acquisition for these special envoys. They might not have captured the traitor Dumouriez, but they had successfully identified another traitor within the revolutionary ranks. It was considered an accomplishment, no matter what.

The Duke of Chartres, having narrowly escaped, sought refuge in the Austrian camp and stayed there temporarily. General Cobourg had many questions for him, and they spent a full three days in the camp before being allowed to leave. The Duke of Chartres knew that as an exiled royalist, his hatred for the Jacobins might be as fierce as his hatred for the "rebels." Thus, he decided not to stay in Austria, where royalists were widespread, and instead, he planned to head to England. However, on that day, he realized he had left his father's letter back in the French camp. By now, the special envoys had returned to Paris, reported Dumouriez's betrayal to the National Convention, and presented evidence of the Duke of Orleans' involvement in the rebellion, attempting to restore the monarchy.

After Dumouriez's desertion, the Montagnards had launched an attack on the Girondins, leading to accusations flying in the Convention, with each side labeling the other as traitors to the Republic. Seizing this opportunity, Danton once again proposed the Revolutionary Tribunal and the Committee of Public Safety. This time, the Girondin deputies dared not oppose the proposal, for to

do so would be seen as confirming the Montagnards' accusation of their own treachery. Therefore, the most vital institution of the French Revolution the Committee of Public Safety was swiftly established, becoming the true center of power in the French Republic.

Danton naturally became a part of this committee, and given the importance of the military, Carnot was selected as a committee member responsible for military matters.

The Revolutionary Tribunal quickly swung into action, and the guillotine was erected once more. This time, it claimed the head of Philippe Galit.

Chapter 93: Crisis (1)

The National Convention quickly appointed a man named Camacho to take command of the Northern Army. Camacho was a regular attendee at the Roland couple's salon, which is to say he was a Brissotin. It was said that he had participated in the Seven Years' War and had held positions like a sergeant during the war. Later, after the revolution, he had also served in the army and recently led troops to suppress a church rebellion in Brittany.

With such a background, he was not really suited for the position of Northern Army commander. Carnot even thought that it would be better to let Napoleon or Joseph take the role directly. However, the Brissotins strongly opposed this idea. They believed that the Bonaparte brothers had too much of a Jacobin flavor, and if one of them became the Northern Army commander, it wouldn't be good for the Brissotins. Their main reasons included: first, the Bonaparte brothers were too young; second, they had a close relationship with Carnot. If they took on such an important role, Carnot might have the opportunity to become a dictator in the future. Perhaps the series of recent failures were all part of Carnot's conspiracy; third, the Bonaparte brothers had released Dumouriez, casting doubt on their loyalty to the revolution.

On the other hand, Danion also supported the Brissotins. This was strange because the Brissotins had attacked Danion for not detecting signs of Dumouriez's betrayal when he had personally visited Belgium. This was probably due to Danion taking money from Dumouriez. But Danion surprisingly supported them. Some believed that Danion wanted to compromise with the Brissotins, while others thought that Danion saw the Northern situation as dire, with the next failure being unavoidable, and so he agreed to let a Brissotin take command.

In any case, this guy named Camacho became the commander of the Northern Army. This appointment left Carnot very dissatisfied because he thought that the reasons against having the Bonaparte brothers as Northern Army commanders were baseless.

First, the Bonaparte brothers were indeed young, but command in warfare didn't depend on age. How old was Alexander the Great when he led his army into Persia? Younger than Napoleon is now. As for the Bonaparte brothers releasing Dumouriez, it was necessary for the overall situation. If the Northern Army lost those mid-level officers, it would have collapsed. It was Napoleon's decisive action that saved the entire Northern Army.

As for the notion that he would become a dictator, it was an insult to his character. Hot-tempered Carnot couldn't take it anymore and threw his glove at a guy named Galiot who made these accusations, and said to him, "Choose between a pistol, a sword, or a dagger; if you're a real man, resolve this matter like one."

However, Galiot immediately backed down, apologized, and claimed he didn't mean it that way. Even worse, after his apology, he turned his back, and when people mocked him for being cowardly, he said, "Mr. Carnot is from a military background, and he's an expert in all sorts of duel techniques. Challenging him to a duel, no matter what weapon, is unfair, and even amounts to murder..."

Carnot was about to lose his temper, "Tomorrow, I will propose that I tie one hand behind my back and duel him!"

"Mr. Carnot, I don't think you should duel someone like that. Dueling is an honorable thing, at least in the eyes of us Corsicans. If you challenge him to a duel, it will only give him honor. But does he really deserve the honor of a duel? I don't think he does! He deserves a good whipping, like a lazy donkey that the master flogs!" As soon as Carnot said this, Lucien, who was always ready for chaos, dropped the mathematics problem he was working on in his study and rushed out.

"Tomorrow morning, Mr. Carnot, take me with you to the doors of the National Convention, and I'll hold two pistols to stop others while you give him a good beating, whip him hard with a horsewhip!"

Carnot's anger left Lucien increasingly incoherent, and he asked, "Lucien, are you done with your homework? Show it to me."

"Not yet, just a little bit left. It'll be done soon. I'm going to finish my homework now." Lucien immediately rushed back to the study.

Lucien went into the study and seemed to work on his homework diligently, or at least it looked like that. But after Carnot sat down and contemplated, he found Lucien's words made sense and were quite feasible. He couldn't sit still any longer, stood up, took his coat and hat, and prepared to leave.

"Lazare, dinner will be ready soon. Where are you going?" his wife hurriedly asked.

"I have urgent business. Don't wait for me," Carnot said as he headed for the door.

Early the next morning, Carnot, accompanied by two friends, Deputy Espa and another Deputy Deron, blocked Galiot at the doors of the National Convention. Carnot didn't waste any words and struck him with a punch right on the nose, causing blood to gush, making it look like a sauce shop had just opened, with flavors of salt, sourness, and spiciness all pouring out.

Galiot screamed loudly, staggered backward, clutching his nose with one hand and pointing at Carnot with his other, speaking incoherently, "Carnot, you... you can't be so... so brutal... we should talk... properly..."

Carnot was unfazed and moved forward again, landing another punch on Galiot's eye socket, causing his eye to swell and burst like a fireworks display, displaying shades of red, green, and purple.

Galiot lost his balance, fell backward, and sat on the ground.

The surrounding Brissotin deputies wanted to come to Galiot's aid, but at that moment, a gunshot rang out. Espa held a smoking pistol pointed to the sky with one hand while Deron had drawn two pistols and placed them between the deputies and Carnot and Galiot.

"Everyone, this is a personal matter. I hope you don't interfere," Espa politely said, holding his pistols.

Perhaps because Espa's words were quite persuasive, even the Brissotin deputies were convinced. They stood by and made comments like, "Oh, Mr. Carnot, can't we talk this out nicely?" and "Oh, don't do this..."

After beating Galiot for a while, and after one punch too many, Carnot accidentally hit too hard, causing the whip to snap. He withdrew his hand and pointed at Galiot's nose, saying, "If you dare to spread rumors behind my back again, I'll hit you every time I see you. Remember that!"

Galiot curled up on the ground, answering repeatedly, "I remember, I remember..."

"Hmph!" Carnot dropped the broken horsewhip and walked away.

Once Carnot left, Espa twirled the pistols on his fingers and then put them away, saying to the onlooking deputies, "Thanks for your cooperation."

Then, together with Deron, he followed Carnot and left.

"Such a barbarian, really... too barbaric!" the shocked Brissotin deputies exclaimed.

"Good job, Carnot! Scum like him should be beaten to a pulp!" the Mountain faction deputies, especially those from 'The People's Friend,' cheered.

Carnot didn't care about the consequences. He may have lost his rank and had his pay cut, but it didn't bother him. Lowering his rank didn't change his job, and restoring the rank wouldn't take long. As for the lost pay during this period, it was a small price to pay for peace of mind. Even his motivation for work seemed to have increased.

After a day of work, Carnot returned home. He hung up his coat and hat, and his wife and Lucien greeted him.

"Mr. Carnot, many people sent you gifts today," Lucien called out to Carnot.

"Gifts for me? Today is not my birthday. What's going on?" Carnot asked.

"Lazare..." His wife's expression was strange. "It's a pile of horsewhips."

Chapter 94: Crisis (2)

Carnot worked tirelessly, attempting to send more personnel and supplies to the north. However, the northern army did not immediately receive sufficient personnel and provisions. The reason was simple: a massive rebellion had erupted in the Vende region.

Vende was a region full of hills and forests, one of the most traditional, backward, and isolated areas in all of France. The way of life there had changed very little over the centuries.

However, this closed-off and backward Vende was not a stronghold of the monarchy. The peasants there didn't have much affection for the king, which was quite normal. Just like the peasants in the Eastern Great Eats, as sung in the "Rice-Pounding Song": "We work at sunrise, rest at sunset. We dig wells to drink, plow fields to eat. What does the emperor's power matter to us?" So, to the peasants in Vende, what did the king matter to them?

The revolutionary government had beheaded a fellow named Louis XVI, which wasn't a big deal for the peasants in Vende. As long as their crops were growing, what did they care about the king?

And as for the nobles who had their heads on the line, the peasants in Vende didn't care about them either. If the nobles were hung from lampposts, it had nothing to do with them. As long as their crops were growing... So, with a constitutional monarchy, Vende was stable; with the king's execution, Vende remained peaceful.

But recently, the peasants in Vende had begun to feel that the current revolutionary government was causing some problems.

The government's first annoying move was their attempt to expel the clergy. After the revolution, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was passed, which required priests to swear allegiance to the government, leading to a split in the church in France. But in Vende, the priests who had not sworn allegiance to the government continued to operate their churches, perform their religious duties, and hold the keys to heaven for every poor peasant. The French government in Paris couldn't really reach these remote places. So, the impact of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy on Vende was limited.

But after the king was beheaded, the situation changed. Many of the priests who refused to swear allegiance to the government became the backbone of the rebellions in various regions. Therefore, the National Assembly passed a law declaring that all priests who had not sworn allegiance to the government should be expelled from the country.

According to this new law, all priests who had not sworn allegiance to the government had to leave France within a certain time frame. Any priest found in France after the deadline, without having sworn allegiance to the government, would be considered a rebel and could be sentenced to death without trial.

Some priests in Vende initiated some rebellions after the king's execution. Initially, these rebellions seemed no different from those in other regions. Most of the peasants in Vende maintained their "What does the emperor's power matter to us?" attitude and didn't actively participate. So, these rebellions were quickly suppressed.

However, the subsequent action of expelling "unlicensed" priests created significant discontent among the Vende peasants. In the closed-off region of Vende, there were virtually no "licensed" priests. Therefore, the government's actions in Vende were, in a sense, an attempt to eradicate Christianity from Vende.

If the priests' rebellions did not receive much support from the peasants, the government's expulsion of priests escalated the anger throughout Vende.

But if it were just this issue, the Vende rebellions might not have become so severe. Because of the crisis in the north, the revolutionary government passed a conscription law proposed by Carnot, calling for a nationwide draft. Special envoys were sent to various regions to enforce conscription and taxation.

Due to limitations in their production methods, generally, rural populations were reluctant to leave their hometowns. Vende peasants were no different. In fact, even the National Guard in the cities was generally unwilling to leave their cities to fight in distant regions. Add to that the priests, nobles, and foreigners inciting the situation, and the Vende rebellion quickly escalated.

The revolutionary government mobilized some National Guard troops to suppress the rebellion, thinking they could easily crush the disorganized and uncooperative rebels. However, the situation

in Vende was entirely different from what they had imagined. The Vende peasants proved to be incredibly brave when defending their homeland, not inferior to the National Guard. Moreover, their leaders were former high-ranking officers in the French army.

Vende was located near the sea, and the English noticed that during the early stages of the rebellion, providing an excellent opportunity to strike at the French. So, they recruited individuals from the French exile nobility who both despised the republic and had military experience, gathered them in England, organized them, and then transported them to the Vende coastline by warships. With the guidance of local church members, they formed separate units and took charge. The Marquis de Lantenac in Victor Hugo's final novel, "Ninety-Three," was one such person who set foot on Vende's soil.

As a result, when the poorly experienced National Guard generals from the revolutionary government, leading their troops into Vende, thought they would easily suppress the peasant uprising, they were met with a true army. Vende peasants displayed the same high morale, better leadership, better coordination, and more soldiers as they did.

The outcome of the battles was self-evident. The government forces were defeated by the peasant army, and the entire Vende region fell. At that time, most of France's military forces had been sent north to confront the coalition of Prussia and Austria, leaving the entire south vulnerable. If the rebels took advantage of this situation and headed north, the republic would find itself in a perilous two-front war.

Since joining the ranks opposing France, the English had yet to deploy even a single infantry battalion on the ground. Nevertheless, in terms of the threats and losses inflicted on France, they were no less formidable than Austria and Prussia, who had mobilized tens of thousands of troops. Quite the legend of stirring the pot!

Of course, being a master of stirring the pot could lead to other problems, such as relying too much on others to play the game of "fighting fire with fire" and being unwilling to invest a single penny of your own strength. With France implementing a nationwide draft and continuous mobilization by Austria and Prussia, the English even managed to trim a quarter of the army, thus saving costs.

This brought up another problem, namely, while the leaders of the Vende rebellion and the English hoped that the English army would land in Vende and join forces with them to march north and defeat the rebels, restoring the Bourbons, the English refused to send a single soldier and hoped the rebels could solve the problem on their own. The English calculated that if the Vende rebels were to strike north at this time, it would be enough to achieve their goal.

However, an unexpected situation arose that neither the English nor the Bourbon supporters had anticipated: the Vende peasants weren't really loyal to the monarchy.

In fact, just like the urban National Guard troops who were reluctant to leave their hometowns to fight in distant regions, the Vende peasants were similarly unwilling to leave their villages and farmlands. Their attachment to their hometowns even exceeded that of the city dwellers.

Once the urbanites who had forcibly dragged them hundreds of miles away to fight were expelled, the peasants dispersed, each returning to their homes, leaving the nobles and a few cats and dogs behind.

Watching these scattered peasants, whether from the republican side, the Bourbon side, or other foreigners, they were all dumbfounded, feeling like their eyes were playing tricks on them.

So, the northern march to Paris was naturally off the table, and the peasants were just too... too honest, weren't they?

But leaving Vende unattended was not an option either. What if, what if the British army really came from that direction? The British had not sent troops so far, but who could guarantee that they wouldn't send troops in the future? If they were engaged in a heated battle with Austria and Prussia in the north, and the British stabbed them in the back, it would be a disaster...

So, the revolutionary government had no choice but to hope to hold the north, then transfer the troops sent to the north back south to resolve the Vende issue. Fortunately, Austria and Prussia were relatively cooperative, especially Austria. They saw the pressure on the battlefield ease a bit and immediately remembered that the queen had eaten such a big piece of meat but only let them smell its aroma. So, they turned their heads and got entangled in the special interests of the Holy Roman Empire in Poland.

In addition, Austria thought that if they fought too hard in the north now, it would only attract more French troops, and in the end, they would lose all their gains to the British and the Spanish. If it turned out that way, they would be left sniffing the aroma from the other side, wouldn't they?

As for Prussia, they also thought it was better to wait and let the French fight amongst themselves. It would be even better if the French fought the British, and then they could take action to maximize their gains.

As a result, the little schemes of two kings and one emperor created a temporary calm on the decisive northern battlefield. The French were given a rare chance to catch their breath.

During this lull, Carnot quickly recalled Joseph and Napoleon, as well as the Red Army. One of his ideas was to have them deal with the Vende rebellion. However, when he mentioned this to Joseph, Joseph strongly opposed it.

"The situation in Vende is not a military problem but a political one. If political problems have to be solved militarily, Lazar, then I have to say, you have prepared too few troops."

Chapter 95: Crisis (3)

"What do you mean?" Carnot furrowed his brow.

"Lazare, to defeat our enemies, we must understand them. Only by comprehending our enemy's situation can we effectively counter them. Some of our officers, however, are going into battle without any knowledge of the enemy, even of themselves. Lazare, this is not warfare; it's sending our soldiers to their deaths, or even a crime against the Republic! I've always believed there should be a principle in the military: never fight an unprepared battle," Joseph said.

"Your principle is sound, but the current situation is dire, and we can't ignore Vende," Carnot replied.

"Lazare, why do you think Vende's peasants revolted? What made those honest farmers take up arms? What are the characteristics and weaknesses of the rebels in Vende?" Joseph inquired further.

"Why?" Carnot pondered, "They were probably incited by priests and manipulated by the aristocracy."

"No, that's not it," Joseph shook his head, "When we beheaded Louis XVI, they had no reaction; when we ordered the expulsion of the clergy, their rebellion was limited. But when we called for conscription, they launched a large-scale revolt. It was conscription that made them rise. Only conscription damaged their interests significantly and drove them to unite against us."

"But we can't forgo conscription or turn a blind eye to Vende," Carnot replied.

"Of course," Joseph said, "I'm pointing this out to illustrate a specific trait of our enemy, the Vende rebels. Lazare, do you remember how most of the National Guard in Paris refused to leave the city?"

"I certainly do... Joseph, are you suggesting they..." Carnot began to realize.

"They are, in essence, like our own National Guard, unwilling to leave their homeland, with the courage to defend their homes and lives. If we fight in Vende, they are like the immovable Atlas, nearly invincible. If we approach this problem solely with military means, we won't achieve true victory unless we completely eradicate Vende's land. To do that, Lazare, I must say the number of troops you've prepared is far too few. I believe we need at least ten times as many."

"Joseph, if I had that many troops at my disposal, why would we even go to Vende? Why not head straight to Vienna?" Carnot questioned.

"So, a direct military solution is a pipe dream! Dealing with Vende must involve both military and political approaches," Joseph stated.

"It seems you've been planning this for a while, Joseph!" Carnot said, "Tell me, how do we combine both approaches?"

"Let's start with the military aspect. Political matters are beyond our control," Joseph began, "Militarily, I don't have a complete plan yet, but I can offer a direction. We need to find a way to lure Atlas away from his land. The Vende peasants will certainly not leave their soil willingly, but the nobles leading them, along with the English backing them, won't let them stay idle in Vende. They'll try to get them to come out and attack us. If we can entice them somehow, they'll come out faster. Then, on a battlefield outside Vende, we'll find an opportunity to deliver a decisive blow, eliminating their elite troops beyond Vende. This will make many things easier in the future."

"Hmm," Carnot nodded, "This direction is intriguing. Now, what about the political aspect?"

"Politically..." Joseph's pace slowed, "Politically, it comes down to the distribution of interests. Lazare, why are Vende's peasants rebelling against us? Because we've harmed their interests, right? If we can offer them a suitable, even very attractive compensation, we might completely resolve the Vende issue."

Carnot listened but then shook his head in disappointment. "Joseph, if we had enough to compensate them for their losses, why would we need conscription? Why not simply recruit volunteers? What can we offer them? We can't print more banknotes for them; they're not fools. Even fools today know not to trust banknotes."

"Have you ever read Machiavelli's 'The Prince'?" Joseph asked.

"The Italian schemer?" Carnot responded.

"His views can be uncomfortable, but some of his techniques are interesting. Honestly, if our previous king had possessed Machiavellian skills, France might still be a kingdom today," Joseph remarked.

"I've read that book before, but I've forgotten many things. Joseph, just tell me what you mean," Carnot urged.

"We don't need to compensate them with our resources. As Machiavelli said, a shrewd ruler should excel at 'milking the generosity of others,'" Joseph explained.

"Oh, I remember this part. Alexander the Great, Caesar, and Augustus had a reputation for generosity, but they were actually generously distributing others' belongings to their soldiers... Is that what you mean?" Carnot recalled.

"Yes, Lazare, think about what those peasants desire most. It's their land, isn't it? We'll entice the nobles first, bring them out of Vende, defeat them there, and ensure their descendants flee. Then, we'll confiscate their land and redistribute it to local peasants, with the best plots going to those willing to serve as soldiers for us. If we can really do this, Lazare, I believe the Vende rebellion isn't insurmountable, and the Vende region might become a strong base of support for us in the future," Joseph concluded.

"This approach seems feasible, but such a significant decision must be approved by the National Convention," Carnot hesitated. "Today, passing such a resolution in the Convention will surely face opposition."

"Why? We won't be spending anything," Joseph questioned.

"Because... because the Convention has already confiscated the land of Vende's nobles as collateral and issued banknotes," Carnot hesitated but replied.

"What? They've done that too?" Joseph was taken aback.

"But your earlier military advice is good. Joseph, I think entrusting you with this task is a good choice," Carnot once again tried to assign Joseph the responsibility.

"I'm not being modest, nor do I shy away from serving France. If it benefits France, I don't mind risking my life. Why would I push the responsibility aside for personal gain? However, designing such a strategy is quite different from the improvisational command on the front lines. Don't be fooled by my words here; facing the enemy in actual command might lead to unpredictable problems. In reality, Lazare, you and I are more alike, both better suited for service within the War Ministry. Well, not exactly... you're more suitable for working in the War Ministry than I am. My true place is in the laboratory. Damn, it's been so long since I left the laboratory."

"In truth, I also prefer the laboratory," Carnot patted Joseph's shoulder and said, "I understand you. However, we must both work for France now. If you can't go, how about sending Napoleon? I think he's quite competent in tactics."

Joseph didn't oppose this appointment, but he had two requests, "If you want Napoleon to take on this responsibility, I don't object. He's indeed better suited. However, I have two requests. First, you should help him strengthen the middle-level commanders among his subordinates. Second, if Napoleon makes any special moves, I hope everyone will trust his command."

"I understand," Carnot said, "Although my influence is limited, I won't let ignorant meddling into military command."

And so, Napoleon quickly became the overall commander of the anti-rebel forces. Though the anti-rebel forces were limited in number, consisting of only one division, this marked the beginning of his emergence as a true leader.

As for Joseph, he returned once again to Carnot's side, becoming his deputy. He also took charge of a new institution, the "Tactical Research Institute." Carnot had briefly considered convincing him to join the Committee of Public Safety, but Joseph politely declined. Nevertheless, Joseph remained a harmless but highly valuable asset to the Republic.

As Joseph had predicted, the Vende nobles couldn't bear staying idle in the rural backwaters of Vende. They used their accumulated wealth from generations to raise an army of over 40,000 men through recruitment and began moving northward. Facing them were only Napoleon's newly formed division of around 5,000 troops and some local National Guard units.

Based on the combat capability shown by the peasant army in previous battles, General Francois Athanase de Charette believed they could defeat the French forces in front of them and advance on Paris.

Of course, Charette also knew that with such a small force and weak logistics, he couldn't actually conquer Paris. But he believed that if he achieved one or two victories and threatened Paris, the northern front would come alive, and the Republic would be surrounded, facing threats from all sides.

Chapter 96: Crisis (4)

In order to bluff, General Delacroix announced that he had an army of up to a hundred thousand soldiers under his command. He hoped to use this number to intimidate his enemies and, at the very least, dent their morale. But Napoleon was not one to be easily intimidated. In fact, when he heard that number and saw the terrified expressions on his subordinates' faces, he couldn't help but chuckle.

"Why are you laughing, General?" a slightly graying young officer named Louis-Nicolas Davout asked.

Davout was a year younger than Napoleon, but due to his brave actions in battle, he had already risen to the rank of captain. He was one of the "stronger" mid-level commanders specially assigned to Napoleon by Joseph and Carnot.

Napoleon smiled and replied, "Davout, Vandzia is one of the poorest regions in all of France. How can it support an army of a hundred thousand? If Delacroix really had a hundred thousand soldiers, we wouldn't need to prepare for battle like this. Everyone should go back to sleep. Because before his army reaches us, they'll have starved to death without food."

Although this answer didn't completely ease the tension among his officers, it did alleviate it somewhat.

"So, General, how many rebels do you think Delacroix has?" Davout asked again.

"Ah, that's a good question," Napoleon said, crossing his arms and pacing. "If I were Delacroix, I would bring at most twenty thousand men that's already the limit Vandzia can support. If there were

more, they might hold up for a short while, but in the long run, their logistics would fail. And if they ventured too far, their supply lines would become a problem. But from the intelligence I've received, that fool has brought forty thousand men."

"Forty thousand? General, we only have five thousand men, and from previous battles, the rebel forces have proven to be formidable," another lieutenant named Charles Orlans spoke up.

"Orlans, you're right. At least in Vandzia, the rebels have shown good combat capabilities. They're like our own guerillas, fiercely brave when fighting in their home territories. But if they leave their homes, it's a different story. Moreover, they have some clear and hard-to-overcome weaknesses."

Napoleon surveyed the room before continuing, "The rebels' training level is far below ours. In previous battles, they've mostly been able to engage in ambushes and skirmishes. Their equipment is limited, lacking in cannons and qualified artillery. This means their ability to break through fortifications is quite limited. Their supply lines are insufficient, so as long as we hold key positions and constantly harass their supply lines, defeating the rebels is only a matter of time."

"What if the British support them?" Orlans asked.

"The British would find it hard to assist them because although Vandzia is near the sea, it lacks any decent ports. With only those little fishing ports in Vandzia that can accommodate small boats, how much can the British really bring ashore? Of course, troops can land, but the more troops land, the more strained their supplies become. So, we are certain to hold them off here in Angers."

This analysis boosted the morale of the officers. Napoleon then arranged the defensive preparations and adjourned the meeting.

After the meeting, the officers returned to their respective units to prepare for the defense, while Napoleon kept Davout and Orlans behind.

"Davout, Orlans, you both did well today," Napoleon said with a smile. It was clear that today's conversation had been planned between the three of them.

"General, the Constitutional Friends' Club reports that royalist activities in the city are increasing. To counter external enemies, we must ensure internal stability. With the enemy forces approaching, should we first clear out the royalists in the city?" Davout brought up another matter.

"Let the municipal council handle such matters; we are a fighting force and should not get involved in these affairs," Napoleon shook his head.

Davout furrowed his brow slightly, thinking, "If the Constitutional Friends can control the municipal council and address this matter, why involve the military? There are probably many royalist sympathizers in Angers. But, with the General's intelligence, he must understand this. Why is he taking this approach?"

Davout was still young and as he pondered, his expression changed unintentionally.

Napoleon, though young, was astute. He saw Davout's suspicious look and then said, "Davout, Orlans, come and look at the map."

Napoleon led the two to the map, pointing to it, and asked, "From a purely military perspective, where do you think we can strike the enemy to inflict the most damage?"

Davout and Orlans were momentarily stunned. What did this mean? Hadn't they agreed to defend Angers?

However, Davout quickly understood and thought, "This guy is really audacious, and... cunning!"

Angers was too close to Vandzia, and even if they held off the enemy here, a well-organized retreat was possible. But if the rebels continued to advance north and were halted around Le Mans, they might not have a safe retreat. If the battle went poorly, relentless pursuit might leave the enemy with very few survivors.

But to lure the rebels north to Le Mans, Angers had to be sacrificed. Politically, that was almost unacceptable. Davout immediately grasped the reason for Napoleon's decision to allow royalist activities to continue in the city.

"General, are you suggesting we abandon Angers?" Davout asked after thinking it through.

Napoleon did not answer but continued, "Our troops are still in the city; the royalists won't dare to act recklessly. We'll rely on the city's defenses for a while, and when our supplies are running low, we'll hand over the city's defense to the National Guard. We'll move outside the city, preparing to launch a counterattack. It's at that point that who knows what might happen...

Then our army will turn towards Le Mans. The enemy will have some cannons due to the capture of Angers, which might give them a false sense of 'we have siege capabilities.' Capturing Angers alone isn't enough to alter the overall situation, so they'll likely continue moving north.

Then we can confront them here, defeat them, and pursue them relentlessly, leaving them with no way to return!"

"General, will higher authorities approve such an operation?" Orlans asked with wide eyes.

"This plan has been personally approved by General Carnot but must remain strictly confidential. Furthermore, there are many royalists in Angers. Let them show their true colors first. Besides, there are many royalist sympathizers in the city. Think about it; once the rebels suffering from logistic shortages enter the city, what might they do? Let them experience royalist education and the care from the Bourbon family, isn't that a good thing? So General Carnot fully supports this plan," Napoleon said, spouting a series of nonsense.

If Carnot knew what Napoleon was up to, he would probably rush over overnight and give Napoleon a stern lecture. Even Joseph, who was technically his superior, didn't anticipate Napoleon's maneuver. He'd be thinking, "You're no longer a staff officer, why are you more scheming than when I was a staff officer?"

However, both Davout and Orlans were just mid-level officers, unaware of Napoleon's fake royal order. Instead, they felt a strong sense of determination from Paris to completely resolve the Vandzia rebellion. Simultaneously, they felt an inexplicable satisfaction and happiness knowing that their superior was just as audacious as they were.

A few days later, General Delacroix's large army approached Angers, and the battle erupted. In the initial skirmishes outside the city, the rebel forces pushed back the defense led by Napoleon, gradually advancing towards Angers.

Although the rebels suffered heavier losses in the outside battles, thanks to the intelligence provided by the royalists within the city, Delacroix learned that the government forces numbered only

slightly over five thousand and their supplies were dwindling. So, despite the minor setbacks outside the city, he wasn't too concerned.

However, the subsequent siege of Angers posed a challenge for Delacroix. Part of the defending forces was stationed within the city, while the rest was on a small hill outside. Both positions were well-fortified and could support each other. The presence of these forces prevented a complete encirclement of Angers, meaning that even if his assaults succeeded, the enemy would probably manage to escape. Given the marching capabilities of his troops, pursuing a retreating enemy would be challenging.

"These rebels are cowards. We haven't even fought much, and they've prepared such a secure escape route!" Delacroix couldn't help but complain. He also realized that, with an enemy force several times his own, no one would disregard securing a retreat.

The other challenge was the poor siege capabilities of his troops. Delacroix lacked sufficient artillery, and his soldiers were poorly trained for siege warfare (in fact, they had hardly received any training at all). In contrast, the government's blue-coated forces had an abundance of artillery and fired as if gunpowder were free. Therefore, despite their low hit rates, his troops had suffered losses in the past few days, while their progress was limited.

"Keep fighting like this for a few more days, and their gunpowder will run out. A poorly trained army tends to waste ammunition recklessly. Maybe while I'm complaining about the training of our troops, their little kid general is also complaining about the poor marksmanship of his troops," Delacroix thought.

Inexplicably, General Delacroix began to feel a strange sense of camaraderie with Napoleon.

Chapter 97: Joseph, the Special Envoy

Joseph was awakened in his bed by a messenger.

"Colonel Bonaparte, Colonel Bonaparte, General Carnot requests your immediate presence at the War Department. There's trouble in the south," the messenger urgently conveyed.

"What? Trouble in the south?" Joseph leaped out of bed like a coiled spring. He hastily donned his uniform, carelessly plopped a hat on his head, and followed the messenger out the door, mounted his horse, and raced towards the War Department.

On the way, Joseph couldn't help but wonder, "Could something have happened to Napoleon? Could my time travel have altered the course of history, leading to Napoleon's downfall?" After all, events on the battlefield often relied on luck. Napoleon had a penchant for leading from the front, and one stray cannonball

As Joseph's anxiety grew, his hands trembled to the point where he could barely hold onto the reins. Fortunately, his residence wasn't far from the War Department, and within moments, he arrived.

Leaping off his horse, Joseph went straight to Carnot's office.

"Lazare, what's going on?" Joseph immediately asked upon entering.

"Angers has fallen," Carnot replied.

Joseph let out a long sigh, then widened his eyes. "What? Angers has fallen? What did Napoleon have to say about this?"

"Napoleon hasn't sent a report; the news came from the Jacobin Club in Angers," Carnot explained. "I apologize for waking you at this hour, but I was just woken up as well. Catch your breath, and I'll fill you in on the situation."

Carnot then gave Joseph a brief overview of what he knew. The situation was as follows:

In the days leading up to the recent battles, Napoleon had successfully repelled rebel attacks. Just two days ago, Napoleon had declared that he noticed a drop in enemy morale and a weakening of their attacks. In response, he decided to launch a full-scale counteroffensive and had withdrawn his main force from the city.

However, the moment his forces left, royalist sympathizers within the city initiated a revolt. Some of the National Guard troops had been infiltrated by these royalists. As a result, the royalists swiftly seized key positions within the city, leading to the fall of Angers. Napoleon tried to counterattack, but it didn't go well, and he had to retreat.

"Well, it seems the blame might not solely rest on Napoleon's shoulders in this case," Joseph immediately began strategizing, hoping to deflect responsibility away from Napoleon.

"Carnot, regardless, this is a severe setback. I suspect that by dawn, Paris will be in an uproar. I might be called to testify before the Parliament. But rest assured, if you examine the situation closely, although Angers has fallen, it hasn't changed the overall picture significantly. I can handle it in Parliament."

"General, indeed..." Joseph started.

"Wrong, I'm still a colonel for now," Carnot chuckled. "I'll probably have to wait until Napoleon emerges victorious before I can be promoted again. Well, Joseph, let's work through the situation together."

"Very well," Joseph agreed. "I wonder when that idiot Napoleon will finally send the battle report."

"That might take a day," Carnot said. "We just don't know about his casualties."

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When daylight came, Carnot was indeed summoned to Parliament. It was reported that a certain Gallio had been causing a commotion, accusing Napoleon of treason and suspecting collusion between Carnot and Napoleon. In response, Carnot gave Gallio a withering glare, causing him to unexpectedly lose control of his bladder.

"Nevertheless, Joseph, you should know that some in Parliament are panicking. Dealing with these irrational individuals and discussing issues rationally can be quite challenging. Ultimately, they passed a resolution to send a special envoy to Napoleon."

Joseph had anticipated this outcome and inquired, "So, who are they sending?"

"I initially wanted to send Congressman Saint-Just. He's young but courageous and willing to learn. He doesn't meddle in matters he doesn't understand, and he's had experience with these kinds of missions. Unfortunately, due to the delicate situation in Paris, he can't leave. So, we had to look for an alternative."

"So, who are they sending in the end?" Joseph asked.

"A man named Joseph Fouché, much like you, but with the surname Fouché," Carnot replied.

"Joseph Fouche, the one who initially had good relations with Robespierre, then followed La Fayette, later aligned with Brissot, and now supports Marat?" Joseph inquired.

"Yes, that unscrupulous fellow," Carnot scoffed. "He's even more radical than Marat himself."

Though Carnot leaned toward the Mountain faction, he was disdainful of the fervent radicals like Marat and Fouche.

"Fanatics change allegiances when they join a new group. To gain recognition, they have to be more radical than the others. But could this person interfere with military command once he's in the army?" Joseph wondered.

"I spoke with Fouche, and he assured me that his role is to document Napoleon's commands for Parliament to determine if he's been negligent. He won't meddle in military operations," Carnot reassured.

"I hope that's true," Joseph said. "General, Napoleon's battle report has arrived, and I have a feeling that he might be up to something behind our backs..."

...

When Joseph Fouche arrived with approximately two hundred militiamen at Napoleon's camp, Napoleon had retreated to near Le Mans. Le Mans, in modern times, was known for racing, but at this time, there were no automobiles, only horse-drawn carriages shuttling to and fro.

Le Mans was strategically advantageous for Napoleon's decisive battle. Firstly, Le Mans had excellent land and water transport, allowing supplies from Paris to reach Le Mans directly through the canals connecting the Seine and the Loir rivers.

Secondly, Le Mans had formidable city walls, a legacy from the Hundred Years' War, making it a much-favored prize in the constant struggles between the English and French armies. These well-preserved walls were slightly outdated with the advent of widespread artillery, but they were still better than having no defenses. Considering the mediocre quality of the enemy forces, these walls played an important role. For General Delacroix, taking Le Mans was the key to cutting off water routes and truly threatening Paris.

"Welcome to my camp, Mr. Fouche," Napoleon greeted him along with his officers. "I'm glad to see you here. I've been informed of your mission to assist me."

"Very pleased to meet you, General Bonaparte," Fouche replied. "I've been assigned to witness this battle, for which I only need my eyes and ears. As for my other task... I've been instructed to root out hidden rebels within Le Mans. It seems that their subversive activities led to the fall of Angers, which is unacceptable in Le Mans. If necessary, General Bonaparte, I hope to have the support of your troops."

"That won't be a problem," Napoleon assured him.

Fouche had been honest; although he attended many of Napoleon's military meetings, he never uttered a word. Most of his time was spent running through Le Mans, though his exact activities remained a mystery.

On the last day of May, another revolution erupted in Paris, driven by popular discontent over the economy. The sans-culottes rose in rebellion again, holding certain parliamentarians responsible for

the dire situation. They surrounded the National Convention and demanded the surrender of those they deemed "traitors." The Convention capitulated once more, leading to the arrest of over twenty members. From that night on, the balance within the Convention shifted. The Montagnards gained the upper hand, and their dominance was evident in most debates.

Subsequently, many moderate parliamentarians left Paris. During Convention sessions, often over a third of its members were absent.

Overall, Paris always led the provinces in the course of the Revolution. When Paris advocated for constitutional monarchy, the provinces hoped for the king's benevolence. When Paris embraced the republic, most provinces were just beginning to accept constitutional monarchy. And when Paris chose the more radical Montagnards, most provinces leaned towards the Girondins. This deepened the divide between the provinces and Paris.

As a result, the power of the Republic declined, and royalists sparked new revolts in other regions. As the Vendan rebels approached, rumors ran rampant in Le Mans.

The more credible rumors suggested that the Vendan rebels numbered in the thousands, with well-equipped, trained British and Spanish troops among them. They were said to be formidable, and they believed that Napoleon, with his mere division of 5,000 men and a shortage of cannons due to his earlier retreat, stood no chance.

While these rumors were half-true, they baffled those with more discerning minds. For instance, it was true that Napoleon had lost some cannons during his retreat, but he had intentionally left those cannons behind to encourage the enemy's advance. In fact, he had stockpiled a substantial number of cannons in Le Mans, with the support of his brother, who favored him.

As for the less credible rumors, they were absurd. Stories circulated that the twelve Paladins of Charlemagne had risen from the dead, wielding divine thunder, to aid the royalist army. These rumors held no sway over those with a more educated perspective but successfully misled many less-educated individuals. Thus, in Le Mans, tensions began to simmer.

Chapter 98: Night of Blood and Fire

On June 5th, the Vende rebels were closing in on Le Mans, just a day's journey away. It was on this fateful afternoon that Fouch appeared before Napoleon.

"General Bonaparte, I need the cooperation of your army," Fouch stated.

"Tell me, how can I assist you?" Napoleon responded promptly.

Fouch retrieved a map of Le Mans from his coat and spread it on the table.

"General Bonaparte, do you see these residences marked with red crosses?" Fouch inquired.

"Are these the houses of the rebels?" Napoleon asked.

"Yes," Fouch confirmed, "they are conspiring to launch a rebellion, joining forces with the Vende insurgents."

"Do you want me to arrest them?" Napoleon asked.

"No, you don't need to worry about arrests," Fouch revealed a predatory smile, "You and your officers are not locals, and apprehending suspects might not be your strong suit. Your task is to secure these critical locations and enforce a strict curfew in the city. You can issue orders that

anyone seen on the streets after dark, except our own people, can be shot. Le Mans is an ideal place; it has intact city walls. As long as you watch over these key areas, none of these traitors can escape!"

Napoleon lowered his head and studied the map carefully before saying, "Where do you anticipate the fiercest resistance from the rebels?"

"It would be here," Fouch pointed out. "I know they've hidden a cache of weapons and gathered around a hundred men."

"The streets in that area are narrow and winding. Engaging there would result in unnecessary losses," Napoleon supported his chin with his hand, gazing at the map. "I suggest you strike here first. They will certainly be alerted, and they'll have two choices. One is to reinforce this area."

Napoleon pointed at a spot on the map, "I'll station a company and two cannons here. If they come to support, they'll have to pass through this spot, and that's where we'll eliminate them. Alternatively, they might choose to flee, and they'd go this way."

Napoleon's finger traced the streets on the map, then stopped at a bend in the road, "Here. I'll station two more cannons and twenty cavalry here. As they turn the corner and move forward, they'll suddenly be hit from behind... heh heh."

"Excellent, General Bonaparte, that's the plan!" Fouch agreed.

After nightfall, Le Mans quickly fell into silence. Due to the imminent war, the city had already imposed a curfew, and people were forbidden from being outdoors after dark.

Around 1 o'clock, the sound of footsteps and the creaking wheels of wagons suddenly echoed through the streets. Many residents by the street were awakened by these noises and peered outside, witnessing soldiers carrying torches running along the roads.

"What's happening?" they wondered, calling their families and preparing for the worst.

Mayor Constantine de Lorne, too, was startled by the noises outside and had just sat up in bed. A commotion ensued outside the front door, followed by an urgent knock on his bedroom door.

"Sir, it's Commissioner Fouch. He's with a detachment of soldiers and requests your presence to lead the operation against the rebellious insurgents."

Lorne was taken aback. He had sympathies leaning toward the Girondists. The recent events in Paris had left him anxious, and now this sudden crisis left him bewildered about how to respond.

"Sir, Commissioner Fouch is waiting downstairs," the servant repeated when the master didn't respond.

"Ah, tell him I'll be down shortly. Ask him to wait," Lorne regained his senses and hastily replied.

The servant left, and Lorne got out of bed. His wife quickly helped him dress.

"Constantine, will everything be alright?" his wife asked.

"Julie, don't worry; everything will be fine," Lorne reassured her, giving her a kiss on the forehead. He then opened the door and descended the stairs.

In the living room, he saw Fouch and a detachment of soldiers waiting.

"Mr. Mayor, I apologize for the inconvenience at this hour," Fouch said, though his tone and expression did not reflect any remorse.

"It's an urgent situation; some traitors are planning a rebellion, and we must take action to stop them. Now, please come with me to the town hall to oversee the situation."

"Well, what about...?" Lorne began to ask.

"Mr. Mayor, I will leave a detachment of soldiers to protect your family. Now, please, come with me. Our time is precious," Fouch urged.

The two men left the house. Just as they stepped outside, there was a gunshot from the direction of the city. A volley of gunshots followed.

Lorne was startled, but Fouch seemed completely unperturbed. He opened the carriage door with a smile and said, "Mr. Mayor, please get in. Don't worry; my coachman is very experienced, and this carriage won't tip over."

When they arrived at the town hall, gunfire had erupted all around. Looking out of the town hall's second-floor window, they could see flames rising in the west.

"Is that...?" Lorne pointed to the west.

"Yes, that's some of the wealthiest folks in the city. The people of France granted them a good life, but they still weren't satisfied and even dreamed of keeping the French people under their feet. So, they conspired with the royalists. It's quite laughable, wouldn't you say, Mr. Mayor? The rich are always unreliable."

"Mr. Commissioner, do you have evidence?" Lorne inquired.

"We have some evidence, though it's not enough to build a complete case, it's sufficient to raise suspicions. We will have more evidence soon. And in times like these..." Fouch smiled, "in times like these, do we really need evidence? For the sake of protecting the interests of the people of France, isn't suspicion enough?"

"But aren't those people also part of the people of France?" Lorne mustered his courage to ask.

"Are they the people of France?" Fouch smiled and shook his head slowly. "Mr. Mayor, you have a misunderstanding of the term 'the people.' The revolution is for the people, and the people should not be understood as a class that, due to its wealth, possesses privileges and enjoys all the pleasures of life and all the social wealth. The people are the sum of all the citizens of France, but first and foremost, they defend our country's borders with their lives and sustain the toiling masses of society with their labor. Our revolution, if it only cares about the wealth of a few hundreds while leaving two and a half million in poverty, would be a political and moral atrocity the greatest in the world! We must correct this atrocity and use revolutionary means when necessary. Do you understand? We are now correcting this atrocity with our own means."

Seemingly in line with Fouch's rhetoric, a series of cannon shots suddenly sounded from outside.

"What's happening? Do we need artillery for the arrests?" Lorne's face turned as pale as a corpse.

"Don't you understand yet? This isn't about arrests; it's a war, a war between one class and another!" Fouch revealed a chilling smile. "In essence, the wealthy will never become true revolutionaries or true republicans. The foundation of the republic is the equality of citizens, and those wealthy

individuals will always consider themselves a special class. No citizen should possess more wealth than their survival requires. If someone with such wealth were a true republican, they would donate it to the state to fight the enemies of the people."

At this point, Fouch paused and then said to Lorne, "Mr. Mayor, do you understand now? You must know that the rich are unreliable; many of them, in pursuit of excessive wealth, are in contact with our enemies. The wealthy also tend to stick together, with numerous connections among them. That includes connections with you, Mr. Mayor. But now, you must choose to stand with us or with them."

At this moment, several cannon shots were heard from outside, but the sounds seemed to come from a different direction.

"The rebellion has been crushed!" Fouch said with a smile. "I'll personally interrogate those traitors shortly. These shameless individuals often indulge in idle talk you must make your choice as soon as possible."

"I..." Lorne swayed and seemed on the verge of collapsing. He reached out to support himself against a nearby table to prevent himself from falling. His face alternated between pale and red, but at last, he seemed to have made a firm decision. He lifted his head and said to Fouch, "I am loyal to the republican system."

"Very well, I'm glad to see you make the right choice," Fouch said with a gentle smile.

The next morning, the town hall's bell rang, summoning the citizens who had endured a night of terror. Fouch delivered an enthusiastic speech, and then in the town square, erected a contraption improved by His Majesty the King. One by one, he severed over a hundred noble heads, reuniting many families.

Inspired by Fouch's speech and led by Mayor Lorne, a group of wealthy individuals loyal to the republic donated their excess wealth and aided Fouch in uncovering more hidden riches belonging to the insurgents. Using a fraction of these riches, Fouch rapidly organized a militia in Le Mans, with a force of up to five thousand men.

Chapter 99: Siege Looming

The actions of the rebels were rather sluggish. It had been over two weeks since Napoleon had reached Le Mans, and General Delacroix's army had only just arrived near Le Mans. It wasn't that General Delacroix intentionally delayed, but he simply couldn't move rapidly.

Firstly, what held him back was the dwindling morale of his troops. To persuade those peasants to leave their homes and join the rebellion, Delacroix had promised them generous pay. However, this left him with very little money to procure supplies.

General Delacroix had hoped to capture some resources once they entered Le Mans. However, upon taking the city, he discovered that the situation wasn't as promising as he'd imagined. They did capture several cannons, but essentials like food and gunpowder were in short supply.

The lack of supplies naturally led to a breakdown in discipline. The rebel forces initially managed to control themselves for the first couple of days in Le Mans. However, before long, discipline started to crumble. The streets were filled with rebels engaging in theft and extortion. Some even

broke into the homes of the city's more prominent figures, including those who had played a significant role in the recent events, and looted extensively.

The composition of the rebels that General Delacroix had recruited had shifted significantly compared to the original group that had defeated the government forces in Vende. The initial rebels were mostly honest, simple farmers. However, the current composition had fewer farmers and more troublemakers.

This was natural, as most of the honest farmers had returned home to tend to their fields. Those who were willing to leave their homes for the nobles' paychecks weren't necessarily the most upstanding citizens. Thus, enforcing discipline became even more challenging. These individuals not only invaded homes and stole money but also committed unspeakable acts against the women in those households. It was almost as if the Huns had stormed into Rome.

General Delacroix took extreme measures against those who had gone too far, especially those who had invaded the homes of nobles and committed heinous acts. He had them hanged in the town square, finally putting a stop to this wave of lawlessness. However, what he didn't anticipate was that as discipline was restored, it led to new problems.

The first problem was desertion. Some soldiers fled because they longed for home, while others fled because they couldn't freely engage in looting under supervision. Once desertion occurred, it often involved not just one individual but groups from the same village or region. As a result, General Delacroix had to implement strict measures, hanging any soldier who attempted to desert.

Such harsh measures led to another problem: soldier rebellion. In less than two days, three military judges were assassinated, losing their lives. One of them was even General Delacroix's nephew. He realized that applying pressure through the gallows had reached its limit, and continuing the hangings could lead to a volatile situation.

At this point, discipline was completely unenforceable, and the only thing General Delacroix could do was to restrain the soldiers from harming the nobles and respectable citizens. Eventually, even this became impossible, and his only remaining order was to prevent the soldiers from harming the personal safety of the nobles. As for commoners, there was really nothing he could do.

Violence sometimes became addictive, much like drinking. Initially, the rebels' violence was for sustenance, but now, it had evolved into a more profound level of enjoyment - for pleasure.

The respectable people of Le Mans could no longer bear this situation. They sent representatives to find General Delacroix, offering to donate supplies to support the royalist cause and get rid of these "plague carriers" who were ruining their city. In simpler terms, they were willing to pay to get rid of the troublemakers.

If this had happened a few days earlier, the rebels would have gladly accepted the generous offer and moved towards Le Mans. However, by now, they had evolved into a force with higher aspirations, intending to thoroughly enjoy themselves in Le Mans before leaving.

"Today, I planned to visit the innkeeper's daughter and try some new moves. How can we leave now?"

"His brother is quite good-looking too, and their mother... We planned to have a family celebration with them. How can we leave now?"

"Yes, yes!"

As a result, the generous offer was rejected, and the "Royalist and Divine Army" chose to stay in Le Mans and continue their revelry for a few more days.

The people of Le Mans, pushed to their limits, decided to resist. One night, some citizens suddenly launched an attack on the "Royalist and Divine Army." The result was a devastating fire that consumed Le Mans in one night.

One nobleman who managed to escape the flames later recalled in his memoirs,

"...Before their arrival, the Republic had already taken away my privileges, but I still had money, property, land, and my family. Now, I have nothing left..."

After the inferno, the "Royalist and Divine Army" had no choice but to move on, leaving Le Mans. Due to their disorderly discipline and the slower pace caused by these events, they only reached the vicinity of Le Mans at this point.

With the morale at an all-time low, General Delacroix decided to announce a three-day leave to boost their spirits.

When Napoleon heard this news, he could hardly contain his amusement. He called upon his division and brigade commanders to start planning for the battle.

Under the encouragement of the "three-day leave," the rebels managed to muster some spirit and launched an attack towards Le Mans. However, their stories of "revelry" in Le Mans and their plans for a "three-day leave" were widely known among the population of Le Mans, thanks to the efforts of Mayor Fouch and Ren.

So, when it came to defending the city, the people of Le Mans showed exceptional determination. Nobody wanted to "revel" with those outsiders. As a result, the Le Mans National Guard fought valiantly. In comparison, the enemy, perhaps because they wanted to preserve their lives to enjoy the upcoming vacation, withdrew as soon as they faced resistance. After a day of fighting, the rebels had made no progress.

Napoleon had entrusted almost all of the defense tasks to Fouch's National Guard. While their military training was lacking, their high morale came from protecting their homeland. When faced with the enemy's advances, they managed to counterattack using bayonets, easily pushing back the rebels.

As for Napoleon's main forces, they remained hidden and behind the National Guard, ready to plug any gaps or launch a counterattack.

Meanwhile, under Davout's command, Napoleon's cavalry continuously struck at the rebel's supply lines. The rebels indeed had a numerical advantage, but it only extended to their infantry. They had few cavalry, making it challenging to counter Davout's actions effectively.

As a result, the rebels had to dispatch more troops, establish more stations along their supply lines, and allocate more soldiers to ensure their safety.

While this strategy did secure their supply lines, it significantly reduced the number of troops available for frontline combat. Even though General Delacroix initially had over 40,000 troops, after the battles in Le Mans and deploying significant forces to protect the supply lines, the number

of troops available for the main offensive had dropped to around 20,000.

Napoleon's forces, aside from his own division of over 5,000, included Fouch's National Guard of over 5,000, and at this point, the numerical difference between the two sides wasn't as significant as General Delacroix believed. Plus, the defensive fortifications gave the Le Mans defenders an advantage, making it almost impossible for the rebels to capture Le Mans.

However, since Napoleon had concealed his main forces and hadn't used them in battle, General Delacroix had no idea about the actual size of the enemy army. Based on his previous intelligence and the recent battles, he estimated that the enemy couldn't have more than 6,000 or 7,000 troops. He thought he could still give it a shot. Considering the difficulties in logistics and the declining morale of his troops, he decided, "Tomorrow morning, after a good meal, we'll launch a full-scale assault!"

Chapter 100: The Final Assault

Early the next morning, just as the sun began to rise, General Delacroix's troops had finished their breakfast and were forming up for battle. Meanwhile, Napoleon, on his part, had already learned of the enemy's movements and was observing them closely from a vantage point using a spyglass.

This vantage point was a castle just outside the city of Le Mans, a relic from the Hundred Years' War, where French knights may have once clashed with English longbowmen many years ago. Although the castle had long fallen into disrepair, its sturdy stone walls were still standing, offering a commanding view of the surroundings. Napoleon had chosen it as his command post because of the excellent visibility it provided.

"It seems the rebels are preparing for a final assault today," Napoleon remarked as he handed the spyglass to a nearby aide, speaking to himself.

Then, he looked towards the direction of the front lines and muttered, "Today should be our turn to launch the final assault."

At that moment, a glint of light could be seen in the distance on the rebels' side. It was the rebels firing artillery towards Le Mans.

In this era, cannons primarily used solid projectiles, and their firepower was far less threatening than in later centuries. The rebel artillery was mainly aimed at the temporary defensive earthworks and obstacles constructed outside Le Mans. If these earthworks and obstacles were not sufficiently damaged, it would put Napoleon's troops at a disadvantage when they advanced.

The artillery bombardment continued for a considerable time, indicating that the rebels were truly committed to this battle, even under challenging logistical conditions.

By around eight o'clock, the rebel defenses the earthworks and obstacles outside Le Mans had been significantly damaged. The rebel soldiers began to advance.

One notable feature of the French army after the revolution was their extensive use of skirmishers. This was due to two main factors. First, the post-revolution French army had inadequate training, leading to a poor ability to execute complex formations on the battlefield. The other factor was the generally high morale of their soldiers.

The first factor meant that they had difficulty forming orderly lines, so they opted for smaller, more flexible formations. The second factor ensured that even without strict formations, their soldiers

wouldn't scatter and run off the battlefield as soldiers from some other countries did (looking at you, Austria). While Archduke Charles recognized the advantages of skirmishers early on, the Austrian skirmishers often scattered to the winds.

In the earlier days of the Vende rebellion, when rebel morale was high, they primarily relied on skirmishers as well. However, in recent days, it became apparent that the Vende rebels no longer had such high morale. Once they scattered, they disappeared from the battlefield. You couldn't count on seeing them again until mealtime.

Therefore, in this final assault, General Delacroix had to abandon skirmish tactics due to inadequate training and transition to more traditional linear formations. At least, with soldiers in line formations, anyone trying to run could be disciplined immediately.

However, due to their limited training, the rebel formations were far from neat. They marched in long horizontal lines, not straight, creating a wavering front. Often, the line would break due to varying walking speeds.

These horizontal formations were evolved from square formations, changing from squares to rectangles and gradually elongating while narrowing. This transition was made to reduce the casualties from cannon fire and increase firepower when firing in volleys. However, in the current situation, the rebel formations showed a tendency to revert to a thicker formation, with a depth of up to six ranks.

This was done out of necessity. Thinner formations meant longer lines, making formation control more difficult. Furthermore, thicker formations prevented soldiers in the middle from easily fleeing or feigning death in battle, as the crowd behind would trample them.

However, this came at the cost of higher casualties when hit by artillery fire. Indeed, as they approached within 300 meters of the outermost fortifications, they started to take artillery fire. Unlike in previous battles, the artillery fire from the defenders was not only intense but also surprisingly accurate. The defender's artillery positions were seven to eight hundred paces behind them, yet this volley of fire was hitting the rebel formation accurately.

Except for a few shots, most cannonballs created bouncing shrapnel that pierced through the six layers of the rebel formation. In just one round of artillery fire, hundreds of rebels were killed or wounded. Such precision had not been seen in previous battles.

This was not a stroke of luck in favor of Napoleon, but a result of careful preparation. In previous days, the cannons were operated by National Guard artillerymen, whom Napoleon had prohibited from entering the battle to hide his true strength.

Certainly, even under Napoleon's command, the better-trained artillerymen could hardly achieve such precision in normal conditions. But this was not a normal situation. The battlefield had been carefully mapped out, and the cannon positions and firing angles had been precisely calibrated. So, even in the first volley, this level of accuracy was attainable.

The rebel forces were thrown into confusion by this first artillery barrage. Some attempted to reform their lines, some tried to charge forward, and others turned to flee, leading to chaos in their ranks.

Amid this chaos, a second round of artillery fire accurately struck dozens of cannonballs into the heart of the rebel formation. Now, the rebel formation was in complete disarray, with soldiers

scattering, most turning to run back towards their camp. With the control over the formation lost, rebel officers were unable to restore order, and many soldiers retreated uncontrollably.

"It's time," Napoleon had already left his command post and was now on the front lines. Near the fortifications, he watched the disorganized rebels fleeing and then turned to a nearby messenger, saying, "Go inform Colonel Orelot to lead his troops out immediately!"

Napoleon then mounted his horse, accompanied by a few guards, and quickly arrived at the nearby National Guard units. General Fouch was waiting there.

"Commissioner Fouch," Napoleon said, "I'm taking command of the National Guard now."

"You are the supreme military authority, and you may issue orders at any time," Fouch replied.

"Very well," Napoleon said.

He then mounted his horse, addressing the National Guard troops. "You all know what happened in Angers," he began. "Now, the beasts that threatened Angers are right in front of you. Tell me, why did they come here? To have a picnic? No, they came to loot the fruits of our labor, to take our wives and children from our arms. Can we let them succeed?"

"No! We can't!"

"Let them die!"

"Kill them all!"

The soldiers shouted in response.

Napoleon continued, "Soldiers, because of our valiant resistance in recent days, they now want to run away. Can we let them escape, so they can return to their lairs, heal their wounds, and threaten our families again?"

"No!"

"No!"

"That's right, we can't let them escape like this," Napoleon declared. "Soldiers, are you willing to follow me to eliminate these snakes and beasts so they can't harm our loved ones in the future?"

"We are willing!"

"We are willing!"

The soldiers' voices became a chorus of determination.

Napoleon was satisfied as he looked at the troops. He then imitated Dumas' stance, a move he had practiced privately for a long time, and with a tug of the reins, his horse reared up on its hind legs, lifting him into the air. He shouted, "Soldiers, follow me, onward!"

As the retreating rebels left General Delacroix in astonishment, he soon realized that things were taking a dire turn. The disorganized rebels were rushing back towards their camp, and the enemy was seizing the opportunity to chase them down. What was even more alarming was that the enemy's numbers exceeded his expectations. He understood that the situation was critical. If he couldn't halt the retreating troops, and the enemy breached the camp, his army would collapse entirely.

"Retract the drawbridge, open fire on the routed troops, drive them to the side!" General Delacroix shouted.

Soldiers frantically withdrew the drawbridge and took cover behind the breastwork. Rebel soldiers who had retreated to the trench were frantically pleading to be let in, while their comrades inside the camp raised their guns to allow them entry. Some jumped into the trench, attempting to enter the camp.

"Fire! Fire!" General Delacroix ordered.

Bang! Bang!... Gunshots filled the air, and thick blue-gray gun smoke quickly enveloped the area. In no time, visibility became severely limited.

Bang! Bang!... Rebel forces outside the walls also opened fire, and several rebels fell to the ground with agonizing cries.

Moments ago, these people had been comrades, but now, they were blindly shooting at each other in the chaos of the gun smoke. After a while, the gunshots gradually subsided.

"Have those outside run away?" General Delacroix thought, squinting as he tried to peer through the dense gun smoke to see what was happening. But there was no wind on the battlefield to disperse the thick smoke, and he couldn't make out what was beyond it. However, he suddenly felt the ground shaking, and the rapid sound of galloping hooves reached his ears.

"It's cavalry," General Delacroix yelled, "Prepare..."

At that moment, a spirited horse burst through the gun smoke, leaping over the trench and then the breastwork. The rider raised his sword and expertly cut down a dumbfounded rebel soldier.