

Civilization 306

Chapter 306: Luring the Enemy and Inviting Battle_2

Xiulote pondered the opportune moment for waging war when suddenly he heard the scout's report.

"Your Highness, a large enemy force has appeared ten miles to the southeast, at least five thousand strong!"

Upon hearing this, Xiulote ascended to the high platform on the great boat, straining his eyes southeastward. Ten miles was nearly the limit of plain sight, and in the southeast were faintly visible several small dots in flight. Following them were a large mass of black dots and birds startled into flight from where they passed.

Xiulote was briefly stunned, then his face brightened with pleasure. He glanced again at the swarming enemy ships on the southwestern river, but the naval forces showed no sign of mobilizing. After a brief reflection, the young commander ordered two thousand club and shield warriors to land, while the elite battle group at the riverbank readied for combat. Soon after, three columns of black smoke rose on the southern bank, signaling the scattered city-state warriors to gather.

Some time later, the two thousand warriors finished disembarking, and the distant enemy army was now clearly in sight, their copper spears glinting coldly. Three to four hundred Mexica warriors rushed toward the riverbank, blowing their bone whistles. Seeing the vast scale of the river fleet and realizing the Mexica warriors were prepared for battle, the Tarasco pursuers noticeably slowed.

Xiulote listened intently for a while, discerning only the repetition of two syllables. The young commander thought briefly, then decisively set aside pondering and inquired of the head warrior beside him.

"Bertade, what is the meaning of this whistle signal?"

Bertade had been listening for quite some time. He smiled faintly, answering calmly,

"Your Highness, it means: 'Be cautious, there are many enemies.'

Xiulote was momentarily at a loss for words. Seeing that the pursuers on the southern bank had already halted, seemingly preparing to retreat, he hesitated no longer and vigorously waved the battle flag.

The sound of the attack drums burst forth abruptly. A thousand temple guards, vociferously chanting the name of the divine, made the heavens resound. They lowered their shields and raised their war clubs, charging toward the foremost Tarasco warriors. Then, warriors clashed shields, their bodies colliding, mud and water splashing all over them.

The temple guards swung their war clubs, striking at the enemy's heads, smashing their leather caps and bones inward. The Tarasco warriors lunged with their copper spears, piercing through the guards' cotton armor and deep into their soft innards. The frontal combat instantly intensified as warriors from both sides entangled and fell, their blood gradually staining the earth red.

The two thousand direct warriors split into two flanks, assaulting the enemy's left and right. They faced groups of thrusting copper spears, their opponents a militia without shields. The direct warriors, skilled and experienced, raised their shields high, shouting as they extended to the flanks, gradually forcing the opposing militia to scatter. Then, the leading veteran warriors burst out with continuous fierce shouts and bravely breached the enemy's lines. In close-quarters battle, utilizing skilled techniques, they knocked down the militiamen, one by one, their long spears in hand.

The five hundred Jaguar Warrior Brigade slightly altered their course, like nimble cheetahs, circling to the rear of the enemy. Howling to terrify, they hurled two rounds of javelins, creating two gaps in the enemy lines. Then, the elite battle group charged into the disordered and shaken militia, slaughtering them massively. The ferocious beast-shaped helmets brought an imposing terror, like pouncing predators, causing the militiamen's courage to falter. The practiced war clubs were even more lethal, and amidst the continual strikes, the ambushed enemies fell like corn stalks, blood spraying on the spot.

Xiulote watched the southern bank with calm, observantly scrutinizing the battle's progress. As the clash between warriors and militiamen unfolded, the fighting line stretched to the wings, and the huddled enemies slowly formed a long line. Only then did he fully discern the exact makeup of the enemy forces.

Directly ahead were a thousand Tarasco warriors, resisting the frenzied onslaught of the temple guards, momentarily at a disadvantage. As the flanks engaged, the military might of the Tarascos resisted for a moment before retreating in disarray; these must have been trained militiamen. When the circumventing Jaguar Warriors launched their strike, the Tarascan formation sharply caved inward, their flags askew, quickly leading to collapse... The rear ranks were definitely regular militiamen.

The three hundred city-state warriors had rested but a quarter. By the time they re-entered the fray, the Tarasco military might was on the verge of collapse. Following the messenger officer's flag commands, the city-state warriors formed an arrowhead and once more penetrated from a gap on the flanks. The Tarasco army, like a tensely stretched thread, was lightly cut by a blade and violently snapped into two, then thunderously collapsed.

Thousands of militiamen dropped their copper spears and let out a great but meaningless cry, turning south to flee. The Mexica warriors made brief resistance, then groups of militiamen knelt to surrender. The two wings of direct warriors began pursuing southward while the city-state warriors, exhausted, remained in place to oversee the surrendered militiamen.

The noble Jaguar Warrior Brigade disdained pursuing the militia. They roared again, assaulting the struggling Tarasco warriors from behind. Such an attack from the rear was the most lethal; it could entirely disrupt the rhythm of defense. In less than a quarter of an hour, a thousand Copper Spear warriors scattered and fled to the south. The Temple Guards feverishly praised the name of the divine, thanking the Chief Divine for the victory, then quickly gave chase.

Seeing victory come so swiftly, Xiulote laughed out loud, sharing the joy of battle with the other commanders. Then he lowered his gaze, lost in thought.

This Tarasco army consisted of only a thousand warriors, the rest, four to five thousand, were militia. The expected large-scale battle did not materialize, nor did the enemy's naval forces make a move. Now, the main Tarasco forces were hiding behind a series of camp enclosures and fortresses, firmly controlling the southern defensive line. He could neither ascertain the detailed mobilization of the enemy nor estimate the distribution of their forces, leaving him no choice but to continue probing cautiously, wary of potential dangers.

A strong wind brought distant thunder. Soon, the rain in the sky intensified, wetting the rain cloths on the large boats and soaking the prepared Fire Arrows.

Xiulote raised his head, allowing the raindrops to hit his face, savoring the slight pain as if he were heeding the will of the Heavenly Divine.

Before long, Balda came forward again to report. In this battle, two hundred Tarasco warriors were killed, five hundred were captured. Several hundred militia were killed, and over two thousand were taken prisoner. More than three thousand Copper Spears, long and short, were confiscated. The Mexica suffered casualties of just over a hundred warriors, most of which occurred in the direct confrontation of warriors on the battlefield. At this moment, a large number of warriors were still in pursuit.

The Young Commander nodded with a dignified expression, praising the courage of the warriors. As long as the warriors did not exhaust their strength, scatter in retreat, or be completely surrounded, casualties in direct combat would not be excessive. Once the militia scattered, they often ran faster than the warriors, making them a target not worth the risk of pursuit.

After contemplating for a moment, Xiulote commanded in a deep voice,

"Very well, Balda, you fought well! The next order is: Recall the pursuing warriors, tend to our wounded. Classify the prisoners and inquire about the enemy details!"

Balda saluted and departed on his mission.

Shortly thereafter, dozens of Messenger Officers raced in all directions, spreading the order to regroup. Subsequently, groups of prisoners, stripped of their equipment, were escorted onto the boats, shuttling back and forth, and transported in batches to the North Coast. The warriors then secured their weapons, holding their spoils of the battlefield, eagerly discussing the recent battle and excitedly boarding the large boat.

The wind howled, battle flags billowed, and continuous rain scattered in all directions. The rain diluted the blood-soaked earth and also washed over the hastily buried bodies.

Xiulote refused the proposal to build victory monuments. In the warm rainy season, bodies should be buried quickly to prevent the outbreak of diseases. With the arrival of the rainy season, enticing the enemy to battle came to an end. He did not wish to overly provoke the enemy and struggle to fight during the torrential rains.

In the end, the Young Commander looked toward the rivermouth fortress to the southwest. The enemy's small boats were still moving about, carrying the news of defeat on the banks back to the south—these were the eyes of the Tarasco people, and the rivermouth fortress was the vital support holding those eyes.

Xiulote focussed for a long time, formulating some new ideas in his contemplation. Then, the flag of the Commander pointed north, the sound of the retreat call resounded, and the Camp Captains responded loudly as sailors once again paddled the oars.

Soon after, thousands of boats swayed, and tens of thousands returned north, with the dusky sky concealing everything. The Mexica Naval Forces, laden with the spoils of victory, sailed towards the secure North Coast stronghold, leaving only the gradually fading green smoke in the drizzling rain behind.