

I. Dynasty 668

Chapter 668

“Grand General, barbarian cavalry and barbarian slave soldiers have appeared on the grassland.”

As Niu Ben and the other generals were observing Prince Zhao’s army, a general suddenly came from the north city of Juyong Pass.

“This time, Prince Zhao and Zheng Chengwen are indeed planning to attack Juyong Pass simultaneously from both inside and outside.” Niu Ben frowned. He said to Lu Fei, “Let’s go to the North Gate and see. What’s arrived of Prince Zhao’s forces is merely the vanguard. They won’t attack the city for now; they will surely wait until the rest of the soldiers and provisions arrive.”

Lu Fei nodded. This time, he was responsible for the North Gate.

Leaving Ye Qingyun to watch Prince Zhao’s forces, Niu Ben and his group arrived at the north wall of Juyong Pass. At this moment, dense swarms of barbarian troops on the grassland were approaching the pass.

At 500 meters outside the city, the barbarian army stopped. At this time, the slave soldiers held up their shields in front. They had learned from their battles with Prince Qi’s army and dared not rashly approach the city wall this time, lest they be bombarded by cannons again.

Soon after the barbarian army halted, a cavalryman suddenly galloped forward and shouted to the defenders on the city wall, “You audacious madmen! How dare you occupy Juyong Pass? Wuzhu Gu Taiji said that if you hand over Juyong Pass, he will spare your lives. If you refuse, after the city falls, you will

surely be slaughtered!" Niu Ben's expression was stern. Prince Zhao and the barbarians attacking Juyong Pass simultaneously showed how important Juyong Pass was. Otherwise, the barbarians would have to detour 800 li to invade the Great Yu Empire from Prince Zhao's fiefdom.

And if that were the case, the barbarian supply lines would become even longer and constantly face the danger of being intercepted.

So, for Niu Ben, this battle was a must for both sides.

"Fighting a war with so much nonsense." Lu Fei was not in the mood for a war of words with the barbarians. He patted an artilleryman's shoulder, pointed at Zheng Chengwen, who was surrounded by barbarian soldiers, and said, "Give that traitor who recognizes a thief as his father a shot."

"Yes." The artilleryman nodded, and the soldier responsible for that cannon immediately began to load.

For Lu Fei, he wasn't worried about this battle. As before, the hope for victory against the barbarians this time lay in their unfamiliarity with hot weapons. They would never have imagined that the things set up on the city wall now had an effective range of three to four li, and that firearms were more powerful than before.

The cavalry yelled provocatively in front of the city gate for a while and then returned.

Seeing that the cavalry's words received no response, Zheng Chengwen showed an impatient expression. He said to the barbarian general beside him, "General Duolong, according to our agreement with Prince Zhao's army, today is the day to attack the city."

“Understood.” Duolong revealed a sinister smile. He had a cavalryman blow the horn of attack. At this moment, the barbarian cavalry quickly cleared a path, and barbarian slave soldiers, carrying scaling ladders, immediately charged towards the city wall.

At the same time, Niu Ben saw the barbarian cannons hidden among the slave soldiers. While these slave soldiers attacked the city, these cannons took the opportunity to move forward.

The sudden barbarian attack caught Niu Ben and Lu Fei off guard. Coming to their senses, they immediately had their soldiers prepare for defense.

“Immediately have the artillery bombard the barbarian cannons! They must not be allowed to breach the city wall!” Niu Ben’s expression was grim. If the city gate were breached, 100,000 men pouring into the city would be a disaster.

At this moment, Niu Ben suddenly felt an unprecedented pressure.

“Kill!”

The slave soldiers shouted, braving the cannon fire. Densely packed slave soldiers charged towards Juyong Pass.

“Bang, bang, bang...” Facing the barbarian slave soldiers surging forward like army ants, the musketeers began to spray fire relentlessly. The barbarian slave soldiers in the front ranks fell like cut rice, one after another. But even so, the slave soldiers behind them charged desperately towards Juyong Pass.

At this moment, the barbarians once again displayed their fearlessness of death.

For this battle, Niu Ben had deployed most of his soldiers to other city gates, because the north wall of Juyong Pass was the most treacherous and difficult to attack.

However, the south city wall of Juyong Pass was very weak. They had initially taken Shanhai pass from the inside, so they were very familiar with this weakness.

So, with this deployment, the number of soldiers in the north city was only about six thousand, but these six thousand men were all armed with rifled guns.

Barbarian slave soldiers who charged from a great distance would be shot dead.

Duolong also clearly noticed this point: Prince Qi's soldiers could kill their slave soldiers from a great distance.

But even so, they still couldn't stop the over 70,000 slave soldiers from climbing the city wall.

Soon, some slave soldiers who climbed up the scaling ladders engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the defending soldiers.

Lu Fei, holding a long sword, continuously cut down the charging slave soldiers, while other soldiers formed a protective circle around the artillerymen to prevent them from being killed by the slave soldiers.

Niu Ben watched all this with them. At this moment, everyone's expression was grim. War was never an easy thing.

As the slave soldiers surged onto the city wall, Duolong ordered the slave soldiers to push the cannons towards the Juyong Pass city gate.

"Prepare to fire on the cannons!" Niu Ben's voice held a hint of anxiety.

The artillerymen, one by one, looked solemn but were not flustered. More than a year of war had enabled them to remain calm in battle. They aimed at the barbarian cannons and quickly fired. If they couldn't stop the barbarian cannons from breaching the city gate, they would very likely lose this war.

Once firearms lost their long-range advantage, numbers would become the barbarians' advantage, and even if they fought ten to one, they would not win.

Cannonballs continuously flew towards the barbarian artillery. Some shells accurately hit the barbarian artillery, causing panic among the barbarian artillerymen. Some artillerymen even scattered in all directions, fleeing to avoid the cannon attacks. Many barbarian artillerymen were tragically killed by cannon fire in the chaos.

More and more barbarian slave soldiers appeared on the city wall. Niu Ben, while commanding the artillery, also felt anxious. He also drew his saber and joined the battle for the city wall, leaving behind the command to “continue hitting the barbarian artillery.”

Lu Fei’s body was almost soaked with the blood of slave soldiers. After throwing another slave soldier off the city wall, he looked at the situation outside the city.

At this time, the barbarian artillery, startled by the bombardment, fell into disarray. However, the cannons’ focused bombardment on the barbarian artillery allowed even more slave soldiers to ascend the city wall. More and more soldiers now abandoned firing and engaged in close combat with the slave soldiers using bayonets.

“General, we need reinforcements here, otherwise we won’t be able to hold out!” The situation was growing increasingly grim. Only now did Lu Fei realize that he had greatly overestimated the combat power of firearms. Compared to the armies of Prince Yan and Prince Liang, the barbarians were clearly much harder to deal with.

As his voice fell, a faint drumming sound suddenly came from the South City. Niu Ben’s face changed. He said, “Oh no! Prince Zhao’s army is attacking! This Deng Yuan indeed never fights by the rules! Fortunately, this general left most of my forces to defend the South City, otherwise it would have been over.”

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Deng Yuan looked at Juyong Pass with a complex expression.

Half a month ago, he was still in Bashu leading his army in battle against the King of Shu, and in the blink of an eye, he was under the walls of Juyong Pass.

However, after understanding the current situation, he knew that Prince Zhao could no longer afford to continue attacking the King of Shu, because if Prince Qi's army was not stopped now, Zhao might also be annihilated in the blink of an eye.

"Dong dong dong..."

War drums pounded. Soldiers, having received the order, continuously charged towards Juyong Pass with scaling ladders.

To rashly engage in battle before subsequent troops and supplies arrived was a major taboo in warfare. Deng Yuan knew this well. However, when the sound of cannons came from north of Juyong Pass, he still chose to attack the city, because at this moment, the barbarians must have launched an attack.

He had heard of Prince Qi's army's reputation even when he was in Bashu. In his opinion, neither he nor the limited troops provided by the barbarians at this time could defeat Xiao Ming alone.

Only a pincer attack from north and south could offer some chance of victory. So, his choice to attack the city was not to breach it, but to pin down some of Juyong Pass's forces, preventing them from timely responding to the barbarian attack. Of course, if they could breach the city in one fell swoop as a result, that would be even better.

"I never thought that one day this general would have to attack Prince Qi's forces with the barbarians. It's truly laughable and pathetic." Deng Yuan's eyes held a hint of sorrow and indignation.

Beside Deng Fei stood his deputy, Cao Kun. Hearing his words, Cao Kun said, "The barbarians are ambitious and ruthless. Assisting them in taking Juyong Pass this time is akin to helping a tyrant do evil. However, imperial orders are hard to defy, so we can only obey Prince Zhao's command."

Deng Fei sighed. He had always supported Prince Zhao and was extremely loyal to him. This grumbling was merely his dissatisfaction with Prince Zhao's alliance with the barbarians.

After all, he had fought the barbarians several times, and his generals and soldiers had suffered many casualties in battles against them.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

Amidst the pounding of war drums, a roar suddenly erupted from the city wall of Juyong Pass. In flashes of fire and smoke, black cannonballs flew towards the soldiers charging Juyong Pass.

The cannonballs landed and rolled like lightning. Where they bounced, Prince Zhao's soldiers screamed. Dozens of soldiers were killed or wounded in a straight line.

Seeing this scene, Deng Yuan's face turned ashen. Just this one volley caused hundreds of soldiers to be killed or wounded.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

The cannons fired again, and the ground was once again a bloody storm.

Cao Kun then said, "General, Prince Qi's army has always excelled in firearms. If this continues, more soldiers will only die."

Deng Yuan's expression was cold. He said, "Which war doesn't require filling it with lives? This is the only way to deal with Prince Qi's army. This siege, while pinning down the city's forces, is also to consume their gunpowder and cannonballs. Prince Qi's army has fought all the way from Yunzhou to Qingzhou, so their ammunition and provisions will certainly not be plentiful. Coupled with the massive consumption of ammunition in Qingzhou, there must not be much ammunition stored in Juyong Pass now. Once their cannons run out of shells, and their muskets run out of gunpowder and bullets, taking Juyong Pass will be as easy as turning over one's hand."

"General's foresight is indeed remarkable. This subordinate had not thought of this point," Cao Kun laughed heartily.

Deng Yuan narrowed his eyes slightly. Soldiers were charging towards Juyong Pass one after another. One wave was repelled, the second wave continued to charge forward, followed by the third wave...

North City, more and more barbarian slave soldiers ascended the city wall. Niu Ben and Lu Fei grew increasingly anxious. If this continued, it was only a matter of time before the North City was taken.

Just as he was growing anxious, a large group of cavalry soldiers in silver cuirasses suddenly charged towards the city wall.

Qi Guangyi appeared in everyone's sight at this moment. He said to Niu Ben, "General, the Qingzhou cavalry are here to reinforce!"

“Why are your cavalry joining in the fun? This is a battlefield,” Niu Ben said, frowning.

Qi Guangyi said displeasedly, “General, our cavalry are also soldiers. We are cavalry on horseback, and we are no less than musketeers when dismounted.”

“How dare you act so foolishly? How long does it take to train a cavalryman? If you all get wiped out, will His Imperial Majesty spare us?” Lu Fei also said.

Qi Guangyi said, “What time is it now? If Juyong Pass falls, no one will escape the blade over their head. This subordinate is not a coward, nor are this subordinate’s soldiers cowards. If His Imperial Majesty assigns blame later, this subordinate will bear it alone.”

“If anyone is to bear it, it will naturally be this general.” Niu Ben looked at Qi Guangyi with satisfaction. The generals of the Qingzhou Army were all courageous men. “Charge!”

Qi Guangyi was immediately overjoyed. He said to his soldiers, “Kill them! Let the musketeers see the prowess of our Qingzhou cavalry!”

“Kill!” With Qi Guangyi’s angry roar, 20,000 Qingzhou cuirassiers surged onto the city wall, and the situation on the city wall immediately began to reverse.

The barbarian slave soldiers who had ascended the city wall continuously fell under the sabers.

Facing the increasing number of soldiers in silver cuirasses, the barbarians temporarily halted their assault after leaving three to four thousand corpses in another round of attack.

And at this time, the sun was already setting. From morning till evening, both sides had been fighting fiercely for almost an entire day.

Wiping the blood from his face, Lu Fei said, "General, the Zhao army in the South City has also stopped its attack."

Niu Ben finally breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing this. He said to Lu Fei, "Strengthen the defenses to prevent the barbarians from playing dirty tricks."

"Yes, General," Lu Fei responded.

After a pause, Niu Ben continued, "Immediately have the soldiers and artillerymen check the ammunition."

After giving these instructions, Niu Ben went to the Juyong Pass Grand Camp. After a while, all the generals returned.

"Fortunately, the General brought ammunition supplies this time, otherwise, the ammunition carried would have been exhausted today alone."

Luo Xin said as he entered the tent.

Ye Qingyun said, "But if this continues, the ammunition the General brought this time probably won't last for more than a few days either."

Niu Ben nodded, "Most of the ammunition produced by the military machinery department this time has been brought here. Originally, this batch of ammunition was meant to take down Prince Zhao in one fell swoop, but unexpectedly, such a complication arose."

"Most of the ammunition is only this much?" Luo Xin was dumbfounded.

Niu Ben sighed, "You don't know the cost of living if you haven't managed a household. Now, the supply of saltpeter, iron, and lead cannot keep up, and ammunition is consumed too quickly. You all need to be more frugal now."

Lu Fei and the other generals were only responsible for fighting; they had never considered the issue of ammunition shortages.

With a bitter smile, Luo Hong said, "I've said it before: fighting with muskets and cannons is expensive. The silver His Imperial Majesty spent on establishing the firearms division back then almost emptied the treasury. No matter how wealthy Qingzhou is, it has also become poor after these two years of war."

Niu Ben looked at Luo Hong with appreciation. This Luo Hong had once been the commander of the firearms division, so he naturally knew about the cost of buying ammunition.

“No wonder His Imperial Majesty is eager to end the war in the north. So that’s the reason,” Lu Fei said. “If we continue fighting like this, the muskets in the soldiers’ hands will all turn into burnt sticks.”

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“No ivory from a dog’s mouth, what ‘burnt sticks’!”

Niu Ben glared at Lu Fei.

Lu Fei immediately shuddered, chuckled twice, and dared not speak again.

Niu Ben surveyed the generals and said, “Juyong Pass cannot fall, and given the current battle, we will not save on ammunition.”

All the generals nodded upon hearing this. At this point, Ye Qingyun said, “General, most of the Western expeditionary soldiers were left in Qingzhou City. If they come to reinforce us, this crisis can certainly be resolved.”

“What you can think of, Deng Yuan will certainly think of. Now, Qingzhou City will surely have Prince Zhao’s forces pinning them down. This time, only Prince Yong’s and the Prince of Huainan’s forces can break the deadlock?”

“The Prince of Huainan?” The generals asked, surprised. They fought alongside Prince Yong’s forces, but why would the Prince of Huainan attack Chang’an with them?

Niu Ben explained, "After the Prince of Huainan eliminated Prince Yan this time, he requested to join the Western Expeditionary Army in attacking Prince Zhao. When this general set off, they must have also been rushing towards Qingzhou."

All the generals nodded. Lu Fei said, "Chen Xinran's forces are stationed in Yanzhou, but it will take three days to reach here from Yanzhou."

"Seven days. That is the duration of this defense. If we can hold out for these seven days, it will be the time of Zhao's demise," Niu Ben said, narrowing his eyes.

The generals' expressions became resolute. Unifying the north was at hand; as long as Prince Zhao's forces were defeated at Juyong Pass, capturing Chang'an would become much simpler.

The next day, the barbarians and Deng Yuan attacked the city simultaneously from both north and south as usual, seemingly determined not to give up until Juyong Pass fell.

At this time, the Prince of Huainan's forces had already reached Qingzhou.

"Your Highness, we have discovered a large number of cavalry patrolling ahead. They appear to be Prince Zhao's Black Armored Iron Cavalry," a returning cavalry patrolman said.

"How could the Black Armored Iron Cavalry appear in Qingzhou?" The Prince of Huainan was startled.

They had received news of the Western Expeditionary Army taking Qingzhou halfway through their journey, so he headed straight for Qingzhou, preparing to merge with the Western Expeditionary Army and attack Chang'an.

Cui Shang'an said, "Imperial Father, the appearance of the Black Armored Iron Cavalry is certainly not good. We should now combine forces with the Western Expeditionary Army in Qingzhou City to defeat this cavalry unit."

"What you said is right. With Qingzhou City under siege, we cannot stand idly by, otherwise, it will become a handle for someone to sow discord before His Imperial Majesty."

The Prince of Huainan nodded and said slowly, "Have the cavalry prepare and immediately advance."

"Yes, Imperial Father." Cui Shang'an immediately led the large army to set off for Qingzhou City.

The appearance of the Prince of Huainan's grand army quickly alarmed the Black Armored Iron Cavalry outside Qingzhou City. The leading cavalry general immediately dispatched 20,000 cavalry towards the Prince of Huainan's grand army.

The Huainan army's scouts continuously observed the movements of the Black Armored Iron Cavalry. Upon seeing 20,000 cavalry heading directly towards them, the scout immediately relayed this news to the Prince of Huainan.

"Imperial Father, the Black Armored Iron Cavalry are Prince Zhao's most elite cavalry. Their dispatch of 20,000 men this time must be to test our strength."

The Prince of Huainan, energized by his crushing defeat of the Yan army, laughed heartily. “Then let them taste the power of cannons!”

With that, he immediately had the army heading to Qingzhou form ranks. He was well aware of the predicament of infantry encountering cavalry on the plains: a major defeat if they lost, a minor victory if they won.

The Black Armored Iron Cavalry soon appeared in the Prince of Huainan’s sight, a black torrent of steel exuding immense pressure.

After the Black Armored Iron Cavalry entered firing range, the Prince of Huainan, marching with cannons, shouted, “Fire!”

The Black Armored Iron Cavalry apparently also noticed the Huainan King’s formation, and immediately split into two groups, preparing to outflank them. The Huainan King, noticing this, immediately ordered the cannons to open fire, and shells whistled through the air.

“Boom, boom, boom...” The galloping Black Armored Iron Cavalry immediately had men and horses fall, and cannonballs landed, scattering dirt. The hit Black Armored Iron Cavalry were instantly shattered, men and horses alike, and Black Armored Iron Cavalry in a straight line suffered heavy casualties.

However, this did not cause any fear among the Black Armored Iron Cavalry. They continued to charge towards the Prince of Huainan’s position.

“As expected, the fearless Black Armored Iron Cavalry.” Amidst the cannon fire, the Black Armored Iron Cavalry’s formation showed no panic, still executing the outflanking order.

Several rounds of cannon fire inflicted considerable casualties on the Black Armored Iron Cavalry. Some cavalry with shattered legs and cavalry on the ground were trampled to death by subsequent cavalry before they could even groan. They like black waves, made the Prince of Huainan feel a hint of alarm.

A few hundred meters' distance was a very short time for them. In the blink of an eye, they had charged right up to the Huainan army.

Upon entering firing range, the sound of arrows intensified, and a sky full of arrows, like dark clouds, shot towards the charging Black Armored Iron Cavalry.

The charging cavalry continuously fell, but the Black Armored Iron Cavalry's pace still did not stop. At this moment, Cui Shang'an immediately had the pikemen quickly form a pike square in front to prevent the cavalry's direct charge on the infantry.

The moment the pikemen raised their pikes, the Black Armored Iron Cavalry and the Huainan King's army formally engaged. The cavalry collided head-on with the pike square. After the sound of flesh being pierced by pikes, the cavalry, wielding sabers, crossed the pike square and charged into the formation.

Both sides immediately plunged into a melee.

Relying on the flexibility of their horses, the Black Armored Iron Cavalry charged left and right through the formation, quickly tearing open a gap. The Prince of Huainan, seeing this, his expression grim, realized that these enemy showed naked contempt for them. In the future, 20,000 men could defeat them.

“Immediately close the gap! Don’t let them break through the formation!” the Prince of Huainan roared.

Cui Shang’an nodded. He personally donned his armor and led his mere 8,000 cavalry to charge at the Black Armored Iron Cavalry.

A portion of the Black Armored Iron Cavalry, seeing Cui Shang’an leading cavalry, not only did not retreat but instead dispatched a portion of their cavalry to charge directly at the Huainan army’s cavalry.

The two sides immediately crashed into each other, men colliding with men, horses colliding with horses, and the sounds of fierce fighting echoed across the battlefield.

Just then, bursts of gunfire suddenly came from the direction of Qingzhou City.

Faint shouts of “Kill!” also rose from within the city, and the sound of gunfire grew closer and closer to the Prince of Huainan’s army.

It turned out that the defenders of Qingzhou City, upon discovering the Prince of Huainan’s army outside the city, immediately surged out from within the city. After forming a chariot formation, they charged directly towards the Prince of Huainan’s position, attempting to converge with the Prince of Huainan’s army.

Hearing this sound, the Prince of Huainan's spirits were greatly boosted. He roared, "Soldiers, the Western Expeditionary Army soldiers are right ahead! Together with this king, kill these pawns of Prince Zhao!"

At this time, the Prince of Huainan's blood surged. Although cannons and arrows had inflicted some casualties on the Black Armored Iron Cavalry, the impact of them had caused him to lose even more soldiers.

These cavalry came and went like the wind, and his soldiers with two legs simply couldn't outrun them. Even though his soldiers outnumbered the Black Armored Iron Cavalry greatly, they still couldn't pose a threat to them. Perhaps only musketeers could deal with these tiger-like soldiers.