

Longevity 165

Chapter 165: Betting on Zhao Feng's Defense! King of Qin Grants Authority! (Part 2)

"Zhang Han, announce the regulations for the Penal Battalion."

"All troops, recite," Zhao Feng ordered.

"Understood."

Zhang Han replied, then walked to the edge of the Dianjiang Platform.

"I am Zhang Han, a Wanjiang under General Zhao Feng. I will now announce to you surrendered soldiers the regulations for rewards and punishments within the Penal Battalion. All troops, recite!" Zhang Han called out loudly.

The Sharp Warriors on the drill ground immediately recited Zhang Han's words.

"The regulations of the Penal Battalion were proposed to the Great King by General Zhao, who guaranteed them with his life. All surrendered soldiers may be reorganized into the army to form the Penal Battalion."

"For every enemy a member of the Penal Battalion kills, they will be freed from slavery and will receive the annual salary of a rankless soldier. After two years of service, they may choose to retire or remain in the army and will be eligible for promotion under the Great Qin's system of military merit."

"Kill five enemies, and you shall be ennobled, receiving the corresponding grants of fertile land in your hometown and the annual salary of your noble rank..." Zhang Han announced loudly.

Just like the surrendered soldiers who had been reorganized before them, these 23,000 men were all visibly shocked by the news.

Before being escorted to Wei City, they had all been subjected to hard labor. They were poorly fed and clothed, and many had even frozen to death during the harshest days of winter.

The Qin Army naturally showed little grace to slaves. But now, their situation could change the moment they arrived? How could this not rekindle hope in those who had fallen into despair?

"Once reorganized into the Penal Battalion, you may kill the enemy to earn merits and shed your status as slaves."

"However, if anyone dares to defy a superior's order after joining the Penal Battalion, they will be stripped of their position and sentenced to hard labor."

"If you turn traitor on the battlefield or kill Pao Ze, you will be executed without mercy, and your entire clan will be implicated."

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Zhang Han announced the regulations in a booming voice. Afterward, he began the process of reorganizing the surrendered soldiers. This reorganization naturally involved breaking them all up and integrating them into different units, as was standard practice.

"General, Wei City now has a hundred thousand troops, but we only have six Wanjiangs. The military structure is no longer adequate," Zhao Tuo said as he approached Zhao Feng.

"I have already made a decision on this matter," Zhao Feng stated grimly.

He then addressed the six Wanjiangs before him, "For this reorganization, we will continue to structure the army by Wanjiang camps. The six of you will each lead your respective camp. As for the remaining four, Wei Quan, Luo Hua, Liu Wang, and Zhuang Wei will take command on a temporary basis."

"They were originally Capital Commandants, but I now grant them the authority of acting Wanjiangs," Zhao Feng said in a deep voice.

Upon hearing this, the four men who had been waiting on the Dianjiang Platform showed immediate excitement.

But at that moment, Chen Tao stepped forward and said respectfully, "General, should this matter not be reported to General Li for approval before implementation?"

Zhao Feng glanced at Chen Tao and pulled a Royal Edict from his robes.

"A Royal Edict from the King of Qin."

As soon as he spoke these words, a look of reverence appeared on the faces of all the commanders on the Dianjiang Platform.

"The Great King has issued an edict," Zhao Feng announced, raising the Royal Edict for all the generals to see, "granting me full authority over the army, including the temporary power of appointment and dismissal over the Penal Battalion and the entire force."

Upon seeing the words on the Royal Edict, Chen Tao immediately fell silent. Zhao Tuo and the few other generals who had objections also instantly became compliant.

"General Chen, do you still have any doubts?" Zhao Feng asked, his gaze turning to Chen Tao.

"This commander has none," Chen Tao replied immediately.

"Good." Zhao Feng nodded, then swept his gaze over Chen Tao and the other generals. "The Great King bestowed this Royal Edict upon me to ensure I hold Wei City," he said coldly. "My authority is not limited to appointments and dismissals but also extends to matters of life and death. From this day forward, the entire army of Wei City will obey only my command. Anyone who dares to disobey will be dealt with by military law."

These words were aimed particularly at Chen Tao and Zhao Tuo.

Ever since Zhao Feng had assumed the role of Deputy General, the one who was perhaps most insubordinate was Chen Tao. Once, Zhao Feng was merely a Capital Commandant under him, but now Zhao Feng had become his direct superior—a reality that was likely difficult for Chen Tao to accept.

Of course, this wasn't limited to Chen Tao; there were probably others in the army who felt the same. When commanding an army, it's impossible for everyone to be compliant. Even the sovereign on his exalted throne faces defiance.

Seeing Zhao Feng's cold demeanor, Chen Tao was inwardly alarmed, clearly understanding that Zhao Feng was targeting him.

The generals all responded in unison, "We understand, General."

"Wei Quan, Luo Hua, Liu Wang, Zhuang Wei," Zhao Feng called out again.

"Present!" The four men immediately hurried over, their expressions filled with excitement.

"From today onward, you are all acting Wanjiangs, tasked with commanding a Wanjiang camp on my behalf. If you achieve military merit in the future, I will petition the Great King to remove the 'acting' from your title," Zhao Feng said solemnly.

"We will not disappoint you, General!" the four declared excitedly.

"Very well," Zhao Feng said with a wave of his hand. "You are all dismissed. Zhang Han and Tu Sui, stay behind."

"We will take our leave."

The other generals departed one by one.

"General," Zhang Han said angrily as soon as the others had left. "That Chen Tao is always so confrontational. It's truly infuriating."

"General, why is General Chen so hostile toward you?" Tu Sui asked, puzzled.

"Because in the past, our General was a Capital Commandant under Chen Tao's command. But due to his many military achievements, such as breaking through the Han Capital and capturing the King of Han, our General has now surpassed Chen Tao in rank. He is likely resentful," Zhang Han explained with a hint of mockery.

"In our Great Qin, official positions and noble titles are all earned through military merit. General Zhao earned his through his own capability. For Chen Tao to act like this... it just shows how petty he is," Tu Sui remarked with a sigh.

"Forget about him," Zhao Feng said coldly. "With this Royal Edict, he won't dare to act rashly. If he's displeased, I'll just let him stay displeased."

Now, Zhao Feng was his superior, a position earned through military merit. Back then, Chen Tao had wanted his own confidant to gain glory and gave the vanguard position to Liu Wu. As a result, Liu Wu was nearly killed and suffered a major defeat. He could play that game, and so could Zhao Feng. Chen Tao wanted to earn merit? Zhao Feng simply wouldn't let him. Since he chose to oppose me, I will indulge him.

"Later, tell Mr. Wei and the others to come see me at the Military Council Hall tonight," Zhao Feng told Zhang Han.

"Understood," Zhang Han immediately nodded.

"General Tu," Zhao Feng said, turning to Tu Sui. "These surrendered soldiers still need your personal attention for their reorganization. Break them up as much as possible. A major battle is approaching. We cannot afford any oversights."

"Understood," Tu Sui gladly accepted the order.

After the two generals left, Zhao Feng watched the soldiers gathering on the drill ground with a smile on his face.

An army of one hundred thousand, and five of the Wanjiangs are my men. As for Tu Sui and the other two generals—not including Chen Tao and Zhao Tuo—they follow orders by the book. That means eighty thousand troops are fully under my command.

The Royal Edict from the King of Qin had granted him full authority over military affairs, including temporary appointments. Zhao Feng naturally had to seize this great opportunity. As long as they could withstand the upcoming attack from Wei, the Wanjiang positions for Wei Quan and the others could be made permanent.

「Nightfall.」

Outside the Military Council Hall, when everyone arrived, they all knelt and paid homage to Zhao Feng. At this moment, they were not performing a military salute, but the rite of a servant to their lord.

"Rise," Zhao Feng said with a raise of his hand.

"Thank you, My Lord," everyone replied in unison, looking at Zhao Feng with reverence.

"Do you know why I've called you here?" Zhao Feng asked with a slight smile, looking at his trusted subordinates.

"Your subordinate does not know," Wei Quan replied immediately.

"You have been cultivating for half a year now. Has there been any progress?" Zhao Feng asked, surveying them.

"Reporting to My Lord," Wei Quan said excitedly. "I have now reached the Houtian Fifth Layer. Infusing my Inner Strength, I can bear a weight of five hundred catties."

"I, too, have reached the Houtian Fifth Layer," Luo Hua also said with excitement.

Liu Wang and Zhuang Wei reported the same. All had reached the Houtian Fifth Layer. Upon entering the Houtian Realm, their Dantian generated Inner Strength, which, when mobilized, allowed them to bear a force of five hundred catties.

This... was the power of Martial Arts.