

Brothers
of the
Capucine



ROB MCLAREN

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www.matthewlin.com.au

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To Dylan

My brother who ensured I made it home
- every time

Brothers of the Capucine

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A rich lifetime of good friends, whose memorable individuality has inspired me to bring my story greater depth by casting them in the roles of the characters.

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Maps

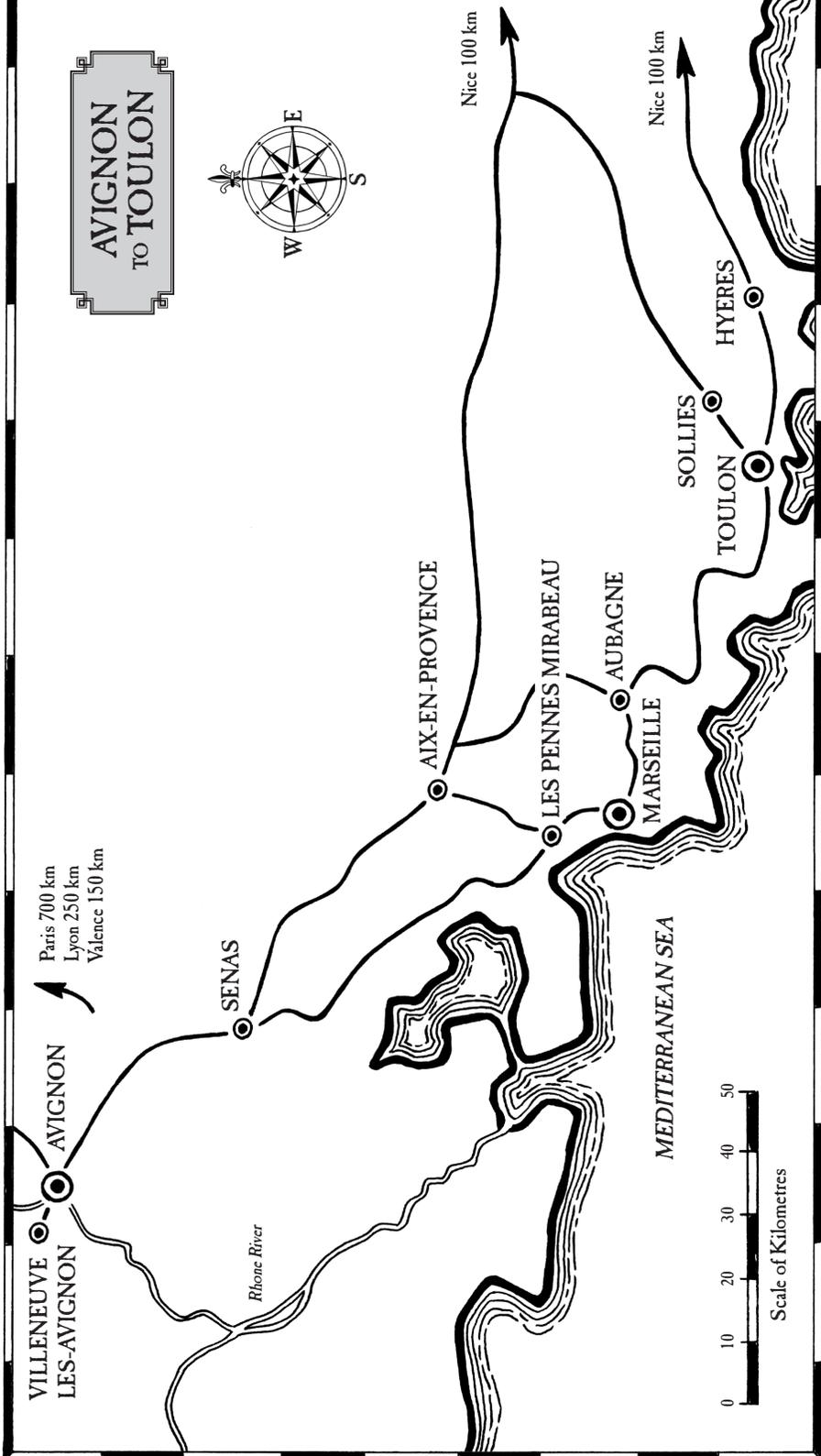
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AVIGNON TO TOULON



Chapter One

March 1793, Avignon, France



‘Excuse me, gentlemen. Captain André Jobert.’

The big man stepped into the room, and the doors closed behind him. Jobert’s eyes adjusted to the morning light now streaming through the tall windows, the dust motes rising on the air currents as the room warmed. The room smelt of fire smoke, furniture polish and parchment. His stern gaze swept the room, identifying three men; the regimental colonel, a lieutenant colonel and a major. Jobert’s eyes hesitated as he recognised the lieutenant colonel, but he remained focused on the commanding officer.

‘Good morning, Sir,’ Jobert saluted crisply.

The senior officers rose from their chairs around the colonel’s desk.

‘Jobert, very good to see you again,’ the lieutenant colonel, a short officer with brisk movements, his sparkling eyes set between a trimmed moustache and a balding pate, stepped forward and shook hands, ‘May I introduce Colonel Morin?’

Colonel Morin, a barrel-chested giant with bristling eyebrows, stepped around his desk. ‘Welcome to the 24th Chasseurs à Cheval, Captain Jobert.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Jobert, looking Morin in the eye, ‘It is indeed a pleasure to serve you and the regiment.’

Morin tilted his head to assess Jobert, taking in his tanned face and broad shoulders, noting the latest Parisian fashion choices of Jobert’s upper lip being clean shaven and hair cut short and brushed forward.

‘I was only informed in the last day that you and Lieutenant Colonel Raive are known to each other,’ Morin continued, ‘Were you aware that Lieutenant Colonel Raive was the regimental second-in-command?’

‘No Sir, I was not aware of Lieutenant Colonel Raive’s posting to the 24th,’ then turning to address Raive, ‘Very good to see you also, Sir, and congratulations on your promotion.’

Jobert took in the extra lace on Raive’s coat sleeves, as well as the new facings of the 24th regiment on his coat and trousers. Indeed, all three men were dressed in the correct uniform of the new regiment. Jobert made the mental note to have all his old regimental uniforms changed over to the new facings.

Morin turned to indicate the major, a well-built man with a thick black moustache, his hair tightly bound back into a thick, black queue, ‘May I also introduce your chief of squadron, Major Cobereau.’

The grim man with intense eyes greeted Jobert with a simple, ‘Welcome.’

‘Would you care for tea?’ Morin indicated a chair, as a fresh pot was brought into the room.

As Jobert adjusted his sabre and sabretache to sit, Raive, who had remained standing, said to Morin, ‘Sir, I must away,’ then patting Jobert on the shoulder, ‘Again, good to have you with us, Jobert, but correspondence awaits. I’ll have your company 2IC summoned to meet you, and he’ll have with him your regimental plumes. The Colonel is meeting with all the captains at lunch, so see you there.’

Raive nodded to Morin, ‘Excuse me, Sir.’

Morin nodded to the departing Raive as he returned to his desk.

‘I have your letter of introduction,’ said Morin, pushing a number of documents on the desk in front of him, ‘Also a most agreeable letter of recommendation from your previous commanding officer. Lieutenant Colonel Raive speaks highly of your service together under General Dumouriez in the north recently.’

Jobert maintained his stern face and nodded attentively to the Colonel.

‘I understand you began your service with the 5th Chasseurs,’ then, reclining with his cup of tea, Morin enquired, ‘May I ask what influenced you to depart the 5th and join the 24th?’

Leaning forward, keeping his voice low and measured, Jobert introduced himself to his seniors. ‘Not only did I begin my service with the 5th Chasseurs, Sir, I began my life in that regiment. My father was a troop sergeant. My mother was a regimental seamstress. I have served with the 5th since starting as a regimental groom at the age of twelve. I was in uniform at the age of fifteen.’

Jobert paused to regard both men.

‘I felt it natural to remain with the regiment as the upheavals of the last three years depleted our ranks,’ he continued, ‘On the regiment’s return from Austrian Belgium last November, my commanding officer made me aware of the War Committee’s intent to double the number of chasseur regiments, the attendant opportunities for promotion,’ and pausing for a slow smile to crease one side of his face, ‘and the potential for further action against Austria. To be frank, Sir, there is much to recommend joining a regiment far from Paris.’

Jobert concluded with a sip of tea, his gaze not leaving the Colonel’s face.

Morin grunted a laugh, and looking across to Cobereau, ‘Hmm... I assure you Jobert, the gentle and steady guidance of Paris will soon be with us here, but more of that later. Have you found accommodation?’

‘I arrived yesterday evening on the outskirts of the city. I await your requirements, Sir, before setting my camp.’

‘Hmm ...’ Morin again sipped at his tea, ‘With the recent execution of His Majesty,’ Morin paused seeking any reaction; Jobert blue eyes blinked, but his face remained stern, ‘and with the recent declaration of war by the British and the Dutch, the constant climate of both civil war and foreign invasion has heightened to an alarming degree.’

Pausing to lean forward, Morin continued in a menacing voice, ‘I am absolutely committed to raising a regiment ready for war in the coming weeks, Jobert. I will only accept utterly focused men to make this happen.’

Morin’s intensity swept Cobereau as well. Cobereau nodded slowly and swivelled his grim face back to Jobert.

‘I will not accept verbal assurances from my officers,’ said Morin, raising a finger, ‘I will only accept resolute action.’ With that he stabbed the raised finger into the desk.

Morin again paused to sip his tea and regarded them both. Cobereau and Jobert maintained their gaze on the Colonel and their silence. Morin sat straighter, but while the cadence of his voice quickened, the menace was maintained.

‘My staff and I arrived ten days ago. To raise the 24th, the regiment will be based on the five-hundred sabres of the recently disbanded Chasseurs Volontaires Regiment, of which I was elected commanding officer the year before last. I am now ordered to raise a regiment of six squadrons,’ Morin rolled his eyes at Cobereau who grimaced in return.

Six squadrons. Jobert could not help but react with eyebrows raised and mouth tightening. The old regiments had a war establishment of four squadrons yet could barely man three.

‘Over one-thousand, two-hundred men and horse,’ Morin continued, ‘And I have access to a barracks built for eight-hundred. In the current spirit of patriotism and with the War Committee’s

recent levee en masse for three-hundred-thousand men, the districts will have our seven-hundred recruits here within days. Somewhere out of the current chaos issuing from Paris, I am informed trains of equipment and supplies will arrive within weeks. With the current enthusiasm and flood of promissory notes, it would appear every village in the land is sewing breeches, weaving blankets, hunting hares for hat felt, and melting church bells for cannon.'

Then Morin grimaced, 'Except of course, for those towns in open revolt.'

'So, Lieutenant Colonel Raive and his staff are busy as a result,' Morin glowered at Jobert, 'With His Majesty's execution, manning the regiment, equipping the regiment and training the regiment cannot occur quickly enough.'

Morin reclined back into his chair and finished his tea.

'Jobert, with you having served on campaign as a company commander,' said Morin finally placing down his cup and saucer, 'And with your previous regimental commander and Lieutenant Colonel Raive as your referees, I'm entrusting command of 2nd Company to you.'

Within the mantra of 'man, equip and train', with one-hundred recruits under his direct command for impending war, training was clearly his immediate responsibility. Jobert nodded gravely, 'Thank you, Sir, I am at your service.'

'Hmm ...,' considered Morin, 'With command of a senior company you automatically become squadron commander of following junior company. From our past of three squadrons, or four squadrons if you were lucky, the three of us would assume the other company would be the 5th or 6th Company.'

Morin closed his eyes, at the thought of a ridiculously over-sized twelve-company regiment, then breathed deeply, 'But you will have command of 8th Company on campaign.'

'Sir,' was Jobert's attentive response. With the assignment of a squadron the Colonel had just given Jobert two-hundred sabres to

command in battle.

‘Major Cobereau will be the Chief of Squadron for the first, second and third squadrons.’

Jobert swivelled his gaze to Cobereau and acknowledged his authority with a nod and curt, ‘Sir.’

‘Hmm ...,’ Morin continued to consider him, ‘As the regimental 2IC said, I am meeting with all the company commanders today at lunch. Are you also available to dine with the regimental officers this evening?’

‘I would be honoured, Sir.’

With that, Morin stood, and the other two stood and saluted.

‘Then gentlemen, until lunch.’

As Morin sat, looking up under his bristling brows, ‘Again, welcome to the 24th Chasseurs, Jobert.’



As the door closed to Colonel Morin’s office, Cobereau turned to Jobert, drawing out his fob watch, his grim eyes fixed on Jobert.

‘Lieutenant Colonel Raive described to us what you achieved against the Austrians at Jemappes. I will be demanding you bring that level of élan to your new company, and your squadron.’

‘Sir,’ Jobert maintained Cobereau’s gaze, his face immobile.

‘Ah!’ Cobereau’s face changed to an unexpected comradely smile, ‘Here is your company’s second-in-command, Lieutenant Geourdai.’

A short, stocky man stepped forward and saluted the two officers.

‘Good morning, Sir,’ he addressed Cobereau with a lop-sided smile.

Then the smile disappeared from his face, his intense brown eyes drilling into Jobert. ‘Good morning, Sir. Welcome to the regiment,’

Geourdai said briskly.

Cobereau smiled widely as he introduced a second man, ‘And Jobert, your company sergeant major, Sergeant Major Koschak.’

‘Welcome to the 24th, Sir,’ Koschak rasped. As blond as Lieutenant Geourdai, Koschak had a muscular neck, deep chest and powerful arms, which flexed within his jacket as he saluted.

As he put his watch away in his waistcoat pocket and noting the presence in the headquarters’ ante-room of a dragoon captain, Cobereau said, ‘Gentlemen, it is now eight o’clock. The captains’ lunch with the Commanding Officer is at twelve o’clock. Until then, excuse me.’

Jobert, Geourdai and Koschak braced to attention as Cobereau moved quickly across to the waiting officer. As Cobereau took the captain into the Colonel’s office, Jobert turned to face Geourdai and Koschak, noting that both uniforms were in the correct regimental facings. He gazed into both men’s eyes in turn. They looked directly back, faces impassive.

‘Colonel Morin informs me there is much to do. I am keen to start immediately. Where can we talk?’

As the senior man, Geourdai responded, ‘There are two places of immediate interest, Sir, that I might suggest we visit.’

‘Very well.’

‘Before we go, Sir, the regimental 2IC gave me a regimental plume and a company pompom for your headdress.’

‘Very well’ Jobert took the thirty-centimetre plume of bound feathers, the lower three-quarters dyed chasseur green and the top quarter dark-orange, the facing colour of the 24th Chasseurs à Cheval. At the base of the plume, just above a small brass spike which fitted into the chosen headdress, was a woven-wool sky-blue pompom, an indicator that the wearer was of the 2nd Company. Jobert placed the plume into his sabretache, the stiff, embroidered pouch which swung off his sword belt, beside his sabre.

‘Would you accompany me, Sir?’ Geourdai said, indicating a set

of stone stairs. As Jobert moved toward the stairs, Geourdai fell in, or took his place, on Jobert's left. Koschak followed the pair, quickly shuffling to fall into step with Jobert.

'For a regiment that did not exist ten days ago, I'm told, I note you are all in the new uniform. What is the dress of the day?' asked Jobert as they arrived on the floor above.

'The Colonel is adamant the regiment maintains a common dress,' responded Geourdai, 'to bind both members of previous regiments with the daily influx of recruits, and in the face of uniform supply shortages. To that end, linen pants over boots worn with your number-two tailcoat. Officers are to wear bicornes with plume, so the recruits know who to salute. Non-commissioned officers are to wear helmets with plume, again to orient the recruits. All troopers, either old hands or new recruits, are to wear bonnets-de-police. Until more uniform stocks arrive in the unit, that is dress of the day.'

'Very well. Lieutenant, then you and I need to speak of my accommodation and how I might get my current uniforms changed over to these new dark-orange facings.'

'Capucine, Sir.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'The dark-orange colour, we are informed, is called capucine, Sir. And yes, I intend to address the issue of your possible accommodation.'

Standing on the floor of the building one level above the ground, in a stone corridor flanked by small-paned windows, Jobert looked about him, 'So where next?'

Geourdai indicated a large room through an open door.

'In here we have our company orderly room, Sir. On this side, our company's desks and the desks of our sister 8th Company, within our squadron.'

Surrounded by four plain wooden chairs, the two silent 2nd Company's desks had a few pots of ink, a box of stylus pens and two neat piles of folios, weighed down with old horse shoes. At the

nearby 8th Company desks, a second lieutenant compiled a document with the assistance of two corporals referring to their notebooks.

‘On the other side of the room, Sir, the same arrangement for 1st Squadron’s 1st and 7th Companies.’

Jobert acknowledged more desks, more chatter and more lists.

‘Stepping back out into the corridor, Sir, from here, you can see our company barracks.’

The headquarter building Jobert was currently in, stood at the head of a very large rectangular space of compacted gravel. This morning half the area was being utilised as a parade ground for the drilling of a one-hundred-man company; the other half was being used to issue clothing and equipment to another company, the recruits in long lines queuing up to trestle tables set out in the morning sun.

On the two long sides of the regimental ‘square’, were four three-storey accommodation buildings. At the far end of the ‘square’ was a three-storey gate-house, in which was built a central stone passage way, the barracks’ entrance, wide enough for five or six mounted men to ride abreast. The stout wooden gates of the entrance stood open, and wagons and foot traffic moved through the passage, observed by three armed chasseurs.

Jobert oriented his gaze in the direction of Geourdai’s pointing finger, to a barracks building immediately beside the current headquarters building. Geourdai continued his brief, ‘On the ground level, stables for a squadron’s two-hundred horses, and the two floors above for the two companies of the squadron.’

Geourdai threw a long glance towards Koschak, who remain silent and maintained his gaze out the window at the barracks.

‘So, four squadron buildings for a four-squadron regiment,’ Geourdai’s face twisted.

‘But no longer four squadrons, the Colonel informs me,’ Jobert rasped.

‘Indeed, Sir, with the increase in size of the regiment, our company men will have one troop squeezed into the end of the first floor with 1st Company and the other troop squeezed into the end of the floor above with 7th company, accessed by the stairs at that end. Our horses are to be pegged outside the front of the stables on the ground floor.’

‘One-hundred and fifty men on a dormitory floor designed for one-hundred’ said Jobert.

‘Yes, Sir.’

Jobert’s jaw muscles clenched. ‘So where are you and the non-commissioned officers accommodated, Sergeant Major?’

Koschak pointed to the long building at the base of the parade ground, the Gate House.

‘Myself, the company’s quartermaster corporal, trumpeter, farrier and the four platoon sergeants have been allocated three rooms.’

Jobert would have expected the company’s senior men to be accommodated in separate rooms from the main dormitory, to keep a close watch on their troopers. Obviously, this was not the case in this over-crowded situation, so Jobert glanced at Koschak’s face to see how Koschak felt about the arrangement, but there was no response from the man’s steady green eyes.

‘Where next?’ he grunted.

‘You asked for a place to speak, Sir, may I suggest the stables, as there are no horses in now, so we’ll be free of interruption. From there, you might consider where you might base yourself. Myself and our two troop commanders have taken rooms in a nearby tavern, just a short walk from the barracks entrance. We could visit that establishment, if you’re agreeable,’ Geourdai tilted his head to gauge how his new commander might take his suggestion.

‘A fine plan, Lieutenant, and I’m conscious of both my need to inform my servants of the dinner this evening, and the Colonel’s lunch, so let us proceed.’

With the senior person on the right, on this occasion Jobert, and

on his left, Geourdai, and on Geourdai's left, Koschak, the senior person would give and receive salutes as they moved around the drill being conducted on the square enclosed by the barracks. Thus, Jobert accepted the salutes of the non-commissioned officers observing the drilling of the new company. Geourdai and Koschak in step with him, spur rowels and metal-capped heels making a harsh military beat on the gravel.

Once within the chill air of the long, empty stables, among rows of recently stacked wooden crates and hessian-wrapped bales, shielded from the noise of bellowed orders and crunching gravel emanating from the drill lessons, Jobert stopped abruptly and turned purposefully toward the other two. Geourdai and Koschak stopped and faced him.

'Let me introduce myself,' said Jobert holding their gaze, 'My father was a regimental sergeant major of the 5th Chasseurs, and I was a regimental brat. I was a chasseur at fifteen. In 1790, whilst I was a sergeant, when the regiment mutinied, and the old officers departed, I was elected company second-in-command.

'When the volunteer legions were raised mid-1791, and more men departed, I was elected company commander. When the Austrians and Prussians invaded last year, the 5th Chasseurs fought at Valmy, and Jemappes last November, with General Dumouriez. During the invasion, the 5th were brigaded with the 3rd Chasseurs, and thus I'm reasonably acquainted with Lieutenant Colonel Raive. And now I'm here. That's me. Who are you?'

Jobert stared grimly at Geourdai. Geourdai shuffled his feet as he summoned his thoughts. He raised his face to Jobert, his jowl clenching as he spoke.

'Sir, I'm from the 7th Chasseurs,' Geourdai stood stiffly, feet apart, non-sword hand held behind his back, 'When the old officers departed, I was elected from sergeant to second lieutenant troop commander. At that time, Major Cobereau was my old company sergeant major, who became my new company commander. We

both joined the 24th Chasseurs a week ago on promotion. My troop saw action with the Army of the Rhine last year.'

Jobert held his gaze and nodded slowly. 'Excellent,' he proclaimed, and turning his face slowly to Koschak, 'And you, Sergeant Major?'

Koschak breathed out, squinting at Jobert, rocking his head from side to side, considering his response.

'I had the honour, Sir, of serving with Company Sergeant Major Raive in the 3rd Chasseurs. Major Raive was my squadron commander at Jemappes last year. I have skewered, and shot, Austrians and Prussians, on foot and in the saddle, under gun limbers and under tables. I arrived with Lieutenant Colonel Raive, we two also on promotion, ten days ago.'

Koschak shifted his stance, continuing, 'I also have the clear memory, Sir, of charging the Austrian trains beyond Jemappes on the right of the line immediately behind, then, Major Raive. I remember looking over my right shoulder and observing the Austrian hussars about to hit us in the right flank, and those hussars looking over their left shoulders as you, Sir, and your company of 5th Chasseurs butchered your way through their left flank. And for that, Sir, I am much obliged,' Koschak concluded grimly.

Jobert lowered his gaze from the stony face and nodded, 'Very well, gentlemen,' pausing to look at the marching men and the shouting non-commissioned officers, conscious of the strong smell of musty fodder hanging from the old spider webs on the grimy walls, 'We all have campaign experience that bodes well for our new company.'

With that Jobert indicated the closed crates and bales, stored just inside the stables' doors, upon which they might sit.

'The Colonel is intent on manning, equipping and training the regiment as quickly as possible. So, focusing on our own 2nd Company, would you update me on manning?'

Geourdai cleared his throat, exchanging glances with Koschak before proceeding.

‘Company headquarters is not yet complete. There is the three of us, but we haven’t been allocated a trumpeter, a farrier or a quartermaster corporal. There are only two trumpeters in the regiment, Sir. The other trumpeters have yet to be trained.’

‘All the regiment’s farriers are away with the regiment’s remount group,’ added Koschak, ‘All quartermaster staff are brigaded under Lieutenant Colonel Raive until all the recruits have arrived and their equipment issued.’

‘At troop command level, Sir,’ continued Geourdai, crossing his legs at the ankles as he spoke ‘we have two second lieutenants. Lieutenant Neilage is a fellow who joined the Chasseurs Volontaires and was elected company sergeant major. He’s very level-headed, well-respected and known to Colonel Morin. The Colonel promoted him to second lieutenant. Neilage is away with the regimental remount group.’

‘The other troop commander?’ asked Jobert.

‘Second Lieutenant Gouvion arrived yesterday from the École Militaire in Paris. His class graduated early to fill the new regiments.’

‘Any service prior to the School?’

‘No, Sir.’

‘Where is he now?’

‘Today he’s duty aide to the regimental 2IC. You’ll meet him tonight at the Colonel’s dinner.’

‘Very well. Platoon sergeants, Sergeant Major?’

Leaning back against a bale of wrapped blankets on the crates, Koschak said, ‘Lieutenant Neilage has Sergeant Martine, an ex-dragoon corporal, who came across to the Chasseurs Volontaires. Martine, I believe, has experience only in subduing civil disorder. Martine’s half-section are on duty today with maintenance of wagons and harness of the regimental trains, and Martine, himself, is working in the armoury.’

Jobert nodded for him to proceed.

‘Lieutenant Neilage’s other platoon commander is Sergeant

Bredieux. Bredieux is an ex-chasseur trooper, who is also a Chasseurs Volontaires man. He's a cunning little bastard. I'm unsure of prior experience. Bredieux, one corporal from each platoon and Bredieux's half-section are away with Lieutenant Neilage and our company farrier with the remount group.'

Jobert nodded, 'Gouvion's troop?'

'Lieutenant Gouvion's platoon sergeants are Clenaude and Rodau. Sergeant Clenaude is ex-heavy cavalry, ex-Chasseurs Volontaires, and he and four corporals from each platoon are away collecting our recruits. Sergeant Rodau is also working in the armoury, and his half-section is on kitchen duty today.'

Koschak paused to look at Jobert if there might be any questions. Jobert nodded to indicate he was ready to continue.

'Rodau is an ex-chasseur trooper, who also came across from the Chasseur Volontaires. Very sharp man, Sir, I'd back him for troop commander, he's that sharp.'

Jobert considered Koschak following that comment, and noted Geourdai's shrug, and then nod in agreement.

'So, one of our troop commanders and all of our sergeants know each other from the disbanded Volontaires. Hmm ...,' reflected Jobert, adjusting his seat on the wooden crate, then looking quizzically to Koschak, 'You said "half-section" with each platoon sergeant.'

'Yes, Sir,' Koschak continued, 'We have all eight section commanders for our company. Every one of them was a trooper with the Chasseurs Volontaires raised in mid-1791 and have no prior regimental experience. So, I foresee a range of difficulties springing from corporals who have eighteen months experience in a gentleman's riding club which has not yet seen active service.'

Koschak looked at Geourdai. Geourdai met his gaze and grimly nodded.

'Yes, Sergeant Major,' rasped Jobert, 'The whole French Army appears to be on promotion with little or no experience for the roles they hold. The three of us are no exception. But we have sur-

vived our first battle, and we are all that France has. So, press on.'

'Yes, Sir. Of the company's eight sections, we have manned our sections with three ex-ChasseurVolontaires and the other eight men will be recruits. That's the same for all companies.'

'Shit, the company is three-quarters recruits and we could be at war with Austria once the Alpine passes thaw in the next four to six weeks,' Jobert grimly shook his head and blew out his breath, 'So where are these recruits? Who do we see drilling on the square?'

'Lieutenant Colonel Raive is bringing in a company of sixty recruits from the districts every day. Those are the 1st and the 7th companies' recruits drilling. We expect Sergeant Clenaude and his team, of one corporal from each of the four platoons, to bring in our recruits tomorrow.'

'Hmm,' said Jobert, 'Uniforms and equipment, 2IC?'

'Boots, jackets, headdress and bedding are Lieutenant Colonel Raive's priorities. The town's cobblers and tailors are working overtime on boots and jackets. Which reminds me, Sir, the Colonel wants us in our new facings within two days of arrival. I'll get your jackets changed over if I could have them, please?'

'Certainly. We'll speak more on that subject once we have a look at this tavern of yours,' said Jobert, 'Back to uniforms, though. Headdress; there are three forms on any one day. Is that correct, Sergeant Major?'

'Yes, Sir,' Koschak replied, 'Until helmets arrive from wherever helmets are right now, the town's milliners are working around the clock creating one-thousand felt bicornes with pompoms and plumes, as our regiment's headdress. Right now, rabbit soup is on every tavern menu.'

Jobert smiled at the rabbit soup he had at last night's supper.

Koschak added, 'So, whilst milliners make felt for the bicornes, tailors are sewing bonnets-de-police with the regiment's dark-orange trim at a rate of one-hundred a day for the troopers, until bicornes arrive.'

‘Has the 1st and the 7th companies been supplied with these items without any concerns?’

Geourdai replied, ‘Yes, Sir, the regimental 2IC’s supply system is working well so far.’

Nodding to Geourdai’s response, then looking to Koschak, ‘Good. How is the food?’

‘The kitchen appears to be handling the load now, ... but twelve-hundred men in the coming days, Sir?’ Koschak shrugged.

Jobert screwed up his face as a distant memory of overcrowding overtook him.

‘Indeed, ... indeed. So, 2IC, let’s talk horses,’ Jobert nodded to the two-hundred empty stalls in the dim light that flanked them.

‘The plan is the three-hundred horses of the three companies on the floors above, will be rotated daily between the two-hundred stalls in the building and a pegged line immediately along the front of the building,’ said Geourdai taking up the new topic, and indicating an area with a wave of his hand towards the gravel outside the stables’ doors, ‘So, our current horse strength is forty, with seventeen absent on duty, and currently located in a different building prior to the remounts arriving.’

‘Sorry to butt in, Sir,’ Koschak interrupted, ‘but I saw how the infantry in Belgium lived in their shit up to their elbows and then dropped like flies. I’m fucked if I’m going to let that happen to my men and horses. Sir, I can control the stable’s cleanliness but, shit, Sir, we have to drive the other companies to maintain their hygiene.’ Koschak’s jaw clenched following his outburst.

Quickly noting how Geourdai reacted to the Sergeant Major’s comment, Jobert let his gaze drift out into the parade ground activity, nodding slowly. Geourdai had lowered his face, and looked at Jobert up under his brows, with a tight mouth. Jobert acknowledged that these two men had been working in the regiment together for the past week and would have similar views on 2nd Company’s impending situation.

At length, he replied ‘You and I are of the same mind, Sergeant Major. Together we will find a way.’

Koschak nodded acknowledgement to Jobert’s response.

After a moment, Jobert resumed the conversation with Geour dai.

‘So, when do we receive our horses?’

‘Remounts are being purchased locally in the surrounding towns. Lieutenant Colonel Raive’s plan is to issue sixty horses to the companies after four days in barracks.’

‘Do you know if the old tradition of the second squadron on bays will be maintained?’

‘I don’t know, Sir, but with the 1st Company’s horses coming in a day or so, and if they’re all blacks, that’s a good indicator.’

‘Quite so. Now, our 2nd Company’s sixty recruits arrive tomorrow for issues and then drill dismounted for four days, so we’re not expecting our sixty remounts for another five days.’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Fodder?’

‘Currently last year’s hay is still available from the villages beyond the city. Our current troopers, the old hands, take the horses out for green pick daily, but with the ground only now thawing, and ploughing only just beginning, we’ll have twelve-hundred hungry horses before next harvest.’

‘Or twelve-hundred dead horses and us in the infantry. Saddlery?’

‘Same as uniforms, Sir, the regimental plan is to issue the day before the remounts arrive. The town saddlers, blacksmiths and harness makers are falling through their arses making saddles at the moment, as the word from Paris is we’ll receive none from the depot stores.’

‘Yes, there is a lot of money being thrown about to make this new army happen. Not just here but in hundreds of regiments and hundreds of towns across France.’ Jobert reflected on the intensity of the activity when he visited his grandfather’s farm on his journey south.

‘So, we’ve covered the men, their accommodation, food and

equipment, and horses with their accommodation, food and equipment. What can you tell me about weapons?’

‘The regiment still awaits its sabres,’ Geourdai said uncomfortably, wriggling on his crate. With a snort, Jobert looked about him, incredulous.

‘Sword belts and cartridge belts are in the same category as saddlery, still being manufactured.’ Geourdai continued, ‘Corporals and above are issued the sabres we do have. Chasseurs on guard duty, and away from barracks, such as our recruit and remount patrols, are issued sabres. Drills have up to now been conducted with wooden swords.’

‘Hmm,’ Jobert screwed up his face, ‘Very well. Firearms?’

‘The regiment has received its issue of firearms, and it is a mixed blessing. The regimental 2IC is not impressed. The armoury has just received two-thousand examples of every calibre of musket, rifle, musketoen, carbine, and pistol imaginable, from every war France and her enemies have fought for the last hundred years. So regimental work parties are still sorting through a veritable nightmare.’

‘Cartridges?’

‘No ammunition has arrived yet, Sir.’

Jobert faced Geourdai, raised his eyebrows and breathed out slowly.

‘Man the regiment, equip the regiment, and now train the regiment,’ Jobert said slowly.

‘With your permission, Sir, might we hold that topic?’ Geourdai hesitated to interrupt, ‘Might I invite you to look over the tavern’s rooms, as I said that is where myself, Neilage and Gouvion have decided to base ourselves. Should you care to, Sir, you might also choose this establishment. You might wish to organise your own accommodation, and still arrive back for lunch in good time?’

‘Well, excuse me, gentlemen,’ said Koschak, standing up, ‘Lunch for the soldiers’ approaches, and I wish to speak with the sergeants. I’ll step away and allow you both to discuss gentlemen’s lodgings.’

Do you have any immediate requirements for me, Sir?’

‘Yes, Sergeant Major,’ nodded Jobert, ‘I wish to speak to Gouvion and the sergeants as soon as possible. I wish to address and inspect however many troops and their mounts at the soonest opportunity. I’d be obliged if you would inform me of when that would be with the least interruption to the regimental 2IC’s routine.’

‘Certainly, Sir,’ Koschak acknowledged, ‘Lieutenant Gouvion, Sergeants Martine and Rodau will attend you once the Colonel’s lunch is complete. With Sergeants Clenaude’s return tomorrow with our recruits, we’ll have all the company except the remount section. Is that satisfactory, Sir?’

‘Excellent, Sergeant Major,’ said Jobert, then determinedly, looking both men in the eye, ‘And may I say, between us three, I truly believe we are going to build an invincible company of chasseurs.’

Koschak’s eyes softened as he saluted Jobert.

‘Yes, Sir, so do I.’



‘So, you see, Sir, here in the corner of the tavern there is this suite of rooms,’ Geourdai opened the ancient timber door, and stepped back to allow Jobert to enter a grey walled kitchen, smelling of rancid lard and cat piss, dominated by a long timber table and eight mismatched wooden chairs.

Geourdai followed, continuing, ‘This kitchen has a two-sided fire place providing heat into a rear washroom.’

Geourdai opened another warped and unpainted door to the outside, and indicated through it, ‘The kitchen has access out onto the yard, the stables and the pump head. The shit-pot is at this end of the stable, so, not far to go.’

Jobert took in these salient features of the tavern yard, covered in straw, horse shit and chickens. Jobert could see out through the tavern gates the lane that led to the market place immediately in front of the barrack entrance.

‘And here, Sir, from the kitchen, there are these two reasonable rooms, alas without fireplaces,’ Geourdai opened two doors, on the same wall, into two dusty rooms, one slightly larger than the other.

‘Hmm,’ Jobert responded looking at the work required to clean up the grime, ‘Four stretchers. Who is the other fellow?’

‘Ah, my valet. Here he is now, Sir. May I introduce Corporal Amy?’

Corporal Amy was a wizened, stooped man in a heavily-braided, but threadbare and patched, green chasseur dolman jacket, an ancient sabre cut across the right of his leathery face, his right eye socket covered by a patch, the right side of his mouth lifted into a permanent scarred sneer. On seeing Jobert, Amy put down the basket of vegetables, limped to attention and saluted with four fingers, his right thumb missing.

‘When I joined my regiment as a trooper, Corporal Amy was in my company as a driver. Upon my promotion to second lieutenant, he has served as my valet, and now he supports Neilage, Gouvion and myself.’

‘Good morning, Corporal,’ said Jobert assessing the man.

‘Sir,’ Amy grunted, remaining at attention.

Turning to Geourdai, Jobert said carefully ‘So, if I wanted to join your lodging, and I have myself and two attendants, how might sleeping arrangements work?’

‘I might suggest the Corporal, here, and your two fellows sleep in the washroom, which has access to the double-sided fire. The two troop commanders and I will take one room and you take the other, whichever you choose.’

‘Hmm,’ Jobert said, ‘I accept your suggestion, and I’d be obliged if you would allow me the smaller room with the window closest

to the yard. With Gouvion fresh from the *École Militaire*, he would make an excellent messing officer. Corporal, would you fetch a local lad so I may send a message to my fellows to bring my baggage here.'

'Most certainly, Sir' Amy responded, and turned to summon a boy from the yard.

'And Corporal, my fellows will have precedence,' Jobert growled, 'One of them is a currently serving *chasseur* corporal. What they say on standards of cleanliness and service is the rule. Do you understand me?'

'Most certainly, Sir,' Amy tipped his head to the side, 'Begging your forgiveness, Sir, but may I say, life is ... difficult for an old soldier. So, I'm so thankful, very, very thankful, for Lieutenant Geourdai's kindness and this opportunity. You won't have any trouble with me, Sir. I'm just pleased to be back with regimental brothers.' Amy's deep tone wavered.

'Whenever I have met a man from the 7th Chasseurs, Corporal,' said Jobert, gripping Amy's shoulder hard, 'I have only ever met the best of soldiers. Now fetch that lad, please.'

As Amy stepped out through the back door, Jobert turned to Geourdai, and nodded after Amy, 'While we are on the subject, enter my groom, known to all as Duck, on the company roll as a company wagon driver. Enter Amy also as a company driver. Have three regimental jackets and bonnets made up; two jackets with corporal's rank and a trooper's jacket for my valet and cook, Mathieu.'

'Certainly, Sir'

'Also, I have four horses and a cart for the stalls here.'

'Yes, Sir,' Geourdai smiled his lop-sided grin, 'Here is a lad to take your message, Sir. Then we should be heading back for the Colonel's lunch.'

Jobert took a moment to step into the small room allocated to him. Out of sight of the others, the slightest smile curled one side

of his face, as he breathed deeply. A room of his own. He thought of how his grandfather might react when he reads of such promotion.



‘Captain Jobert, join us if you would,’ Major Cobereau motioned across the dining room, in which a long table was set for lunch, and troopers, probably old hands from 2nd Company, Jobert thought, were leaving tureens of soup, bowls of apples, platters of bread and carafes of wine on buffets at the side of the room under the tall windows.

Jobert weaved his way through half a dozen other captains until he joined Cobereau and his group. Cobereau waved Jobert into the circle of officers.

‘Before the Colonel joins us, a quick introduction all round. As you would be aware, Colonel Morin has appointed the command of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Squadrons to me. So, gentlemen, Captain Mercier, 1st Company, 1st Squadron.’

With an athletic frame enhanced by a well-tailored uniform, with correct 24th Chasseur facings, Mercier regarded them all with dark curls in the latest style, a well-curled moustache and emotionless, dark eyes.

‘Gentlemen,’ he nodded.

‘Captain Avriol, 7th Company, 1st Squadron.’

Avriol appeared as a boyish rascal with sandy hair swept back into a queue, with hussar plaits hanging down from his temples, and freckles. He swayed from foot to foot and shifted his shoulders as if he was readying himself for a fistfight.

‘Gentlemen,’ he nodded.

‘Captain Jobert, 2nd Company, 2nd Squadron.’

‘Gentlemen,’ Jobert nodded to the rest.

‘Captain de Chabenac, 8th Company, 2nd Squadron.’

A tall, slim, blond man, with fashionable short, swept forward hair, with clear blue eyes lowered his head slowly. ‘I am at your service, gentlemen.’

Nobility!

The group froze their expressions as both Cobereau and de Chabenac sought a reaction. When de Chabenac’s gaze settled on Jobert, his squadron commander, de Chabenac again smiled and acknowledged Jobert with a slow nod. Jobert narrowed his eyes, smiled and reciprocated the acknowledgment.

‘Captain Clemusat, 3rd Company, 3rd Squadron is away with the remount group, but his sister squadron company commander is here, Captain Quillet, 9th Company, 3rd Squadron.’

‘Good afternoon,’ Quillet greeted them all.

‘Gentlemen, the Colonel approaches,’ declared Cobereau, ‘We’ll gather at this end of the table. May I ask you to sit in your squadron pairs. We’ll meet the other company commanders at dinner tonight.’

‘Gentlemen, Colonel Morin,’ boomed a captain standing by the door, identifiable as a regimental aide de camp to Colonel Morin. The officers stood to attention. Morin and his second-in-command, Raive, entered the room.

Morin paused as he surveyed the room.

‘Please sit,’ he waved at the dining table, ‘Allow me to say a few remarks before we dine.’

All eyes were on Morin as he paced heavily to a central position in the room. Then stepping forward to the table, poured himself a glass of wine.

‘Gentlemen. As you know, last month the National Convention declared war on Britain and the Netherlands. I have just this morning been informed that, first, France has now declared war on Spain.’

The creaking of chairs was pronounced as fifteen silent officers adjusted their weight to accommodate the news.

‘Second, France’s gains in Austrian Belgium, in the last few months, have just been lost with our defeat at Aix-la-Chapelle, last week, with the loss of three-and-a-half-thousand casualties and one-and-a-half-thousand captured.’

The audience collectively breathed out in astonishment and slumped deeper into their chairs.

‘Gentlemen, today France is in anarchy.

‘In the last four years the energies and emotions of our fellow countrymen remain unsettled, as we all seek a common understanding of liberty, equality and fraternity. Four years of fear and greed dominate the lives of ourselves, our families, our communities, and our soldiers. Should we, as brothers, disagree, the waste of civil war threatens every home, every day.

‘Ancient families who rule the people of neighbouring nations are terrified of the simple idea that the people of France can determine their own path. It terrifies these noble houses that their own people may erupt with the same energies and emotion and choose to determine their own path.

‘Fear and greed. Fear and greed.’ Morin sipped his wine.

‘Acknowledging there are many who disagree within our nation, and without, the National Convention is the current legitimate government of France. The National Convention raises taxes from the people of France to create this regiment. The National Convention causes this regiment to exist on behalf of the people of France, to protect the people of France.

‘On this very day, hundreds of regiments are forming and preparing for war. Civil war and foreign war.

‘On this very day, hundreds of thousands of energised young Frenchmen are being sent with cheers, and tears, to join such regiments to protect the terrifying values France now embodies.

‘On this very day, millions of men and women labour ceaselessly across the length and breadth of this land to supply not only their menfolk but all the accoutrements of war.

‘So, here we all are, all sons of France, my regimental brothers, on this very day, raising a regiment of one-thousand, two-hundred men and horse, and on this very day, preparing for war tomorrow.’

Morin paused, walked to the table, and poured himself another glass of wine and took a long sip.

‘Why, might we ask, has France ordered another levee en masse of three-hundred-thousand men, in which the Army doubles the number of chasseurs à cheval regiments, increasing regimental establishments from four to six squadrons, in essence, tripling the Army’s number of chasseur squadrons?’

‘A number of possibilities emerge. To create a nation-wide manufacture through nation-wide expenditure. To harness the energies of the young men of France. To demonstrate to all French people if you wish to maintain liberty, equality, and fraternity, then you need to participate to ensure such values are sustained.

‘Another military possibility exists. That in light of our experiences from the last war against Europe, thirty years ago, and in recent campaigns, that France can only succeed by overwhelming her enemies with so many bodies that her enemy’s arms and ammunition are exhausted by our weight of numbers. In the end, whichever few French soldiers survive, become the core of a most fearsome legion.

Morin drank, and then refilled his glass.

‘Although tasked with raising six squadrons, I choose not to create a regiment of quantity. I choose to strive to my utmost to create a regiment of the most disciplined, of the most hardest, quality.

‘To that end, I demand your best efforts. France demands your best. Your soldiers demand your best. I daresay it, your horses demand your best. If you cannot or will not give your best, you will be sent quickly from this place.’

Morin paused to drink again.

‘In the twelve months following the fall of the Bastille, one-third of the officers remained in the regiments. On the raising of the vol-

unteer legions, halfway through 1791, one-sixth of the experienced officers continued to remain in the regiments. The majority of these officers promoted far beyond their experience. I am an example of such promotion.

‘But a new generation of officers filled the void, originally sergeant majors and sergeants. As sergeant majors were promoted to officers, our sergeants became the fresh new sergeant majors. Our corporals became the fresh new sergeants. Our best chasseurs became the fresh new corporals. New blood, new ideas, new energies.

‘But now our squadron strength has tripled, a new void has been created. Now, our sergeants are yesterday’s troopers, our corporals are yesterday’s volunteers in the hastily-created legions, of which I was elected commanding officer, barely eighteen months ago.

‘And over the next few weeks, over seven-hundred raw recruits will be placed in the hands of such non-commissioned officers. Civil war, foreign invasion, and now, as the recent defeat at Aix-la-Chapelle reminds us, the threat of severe regimental inexperience.

‘Not only am I calling on you to do your best as captains, you must do your best as corporals.’

Morin paused to consider his glass of wine.

‘Man a regiment, equip a regiment, train a regiment. Let us speak of training a regiment.

‘Myself and the two chiefs of squadron will focus our training efforts on you, captains. Lieutenant Colonel Raive will focus on the lieutenants. The regimental sergeant major will focus on the company sergeant majors.

‘You will focus on the second lieutenant troop commanders. Your seconds-in-command will focus on the sergeants. Your company sergeant majors will focus on the corporals. Your second lieutenants and your sergeants will focus on the troopers.

‘Man a regiment, equip a regiment, train a regiment. Any idiot can train a trooper to charge. He need only sit on the back of a galloping horse, wave his sword in the air and scream his silly head

off. The lesser training challenge is to identify those who will, at the end of executing a charge, remain in the saddle without bleeding, and think clearly. The greater challenge is getting twelve-hundred men and twelve-hundred horses, who are forced to eat and sleep in their own shit, to avoid the sisters of disease and desertion, and to arrive at that point of charge.

‘On my honour, I swear to you now, I will give my best to overcome these challenges. If you are willing to give your best to the regiment, and to France, I welcome you by my side, and by the side of my chasseurs.’

Morin breathed slowly, surveyed the room, and for a minute held each man in his fierce gaze. Then abruptly Morin called, ‘2IC!’

‘Sir!’ Raive responded.

‘Your parade,’ Morin ordered.

Raive called ‘Gentlemen.’

With that, the officers stood, and the Colonel departed.

Chapter Two

March 1793, Avignon, France



Over a dozen silent men file quietly out of the dining room, each man keeping his own counsel. Jobert turned aside into a corner and organised his thoughts.

Imminent war.

Inexperienced non-commissioned officers.

Train the troop commanders.

Do your best.

‘Sir?’ Geourdai interrupted. Jobert returned to the present.

‘Sir, you wished to meet these men?’ Geourdai indicated three men standing with Koschak.

‘Indeed,’ Jobert stepped across to the group.

‘How do you do, men? I am Captain André Jobert, Commander of the 2nd Company.’

‘How do you do, Sir? Second Lieutenant Gouvion,’ Gouvion braced to attention and saluted. A man of average height and build, his brown, queued hair and freckles framing his green eyes.

‘Hello, Sir, Sergeant Martine. Good to meet you,’ boomed Martine, tall and thick-set, saluted Jobert with a wide grin under a heavy

moustache with his mischievous dark eyes sparkling.

‘Sir. Sergeant Rodau,’ a quietly-spoken Rodau saluted. The ex-chasseur, despite having the build of a skinny, petulant teenager, evaluated Jobert with calm, grey eyes.

‘Men, I know I keep you from your duties,’ said Jobert, ‘Thank you for this time to introduce myself, but I have a few quick questions before I let you return to work. Sergeant Rodau, what duties occupy you today?’

Considering his response, Rodau answered quietly, ‘Sergeant Martine and I are working in the armoury grouping and counting firearms.’

‘Indeed. What is the state of the men in your platoon?’

‘I have only nine currently in my platoon, the rest arrive tomorrow, we are told,’ looking to Koschak, ‘All my men are known to me from when we served in the Chasseurs Volontaires. They sleep and eat well, but they are aware that the conditions will deteriorate rapidly with the expected overcrowding,’ he concluded dourly.

‘Hmm, quite. When the recruits arrive tomorrow, what do you feel is most important for them in their first week in the regiment?’

Maintaining Jobert’s gaze steadily, Rodau summoned his answer, ‘Their patriotic fervour must not be dimmed. They need to know that they all belong here with us. They are safer, better with 2nd Company than anywhere else.’

‘Hmm, indeed,’ Jobert turned his face slowly to Martine, ‘Today your duties have you in the armoury. What is the state of your horses in your platoon?’

Sergeant Martine, grinning faced swivelled to include all in the conversation, ‘I’d probably say I’m working today in a firearms museum, Sir.’

While the others remained impassive, obviously inured to Martine’s comedic approach, Jobert smiled briefly.

‘As for horses, Sir, I have only nine in my platoon. The horses are getting fat from no work, a bit like me,’ he chortled grabbing his

gut between waistcoat and sword belt, 'But the lads take them down to the river for green pick daily. Shoes are loose, otherwise we trim the feet when the shoes come off. There's only one farrier in barracks, the others are with the remount group. There are three that could have their teeth filed, but otherwise all good, Sir.'

'Thank you, Sergeant,' Jobert nodded to the report, 'And when the recruits arrive tomorrow, what do you feel they require most in their first week?'

Martine's grin subsided, and he looked into the faces of the others for his answer, 'Three men to a bed, three-hundred men in a two-hundred-man dormitory. I'd be absolutely focused on whatever routine is required to minimise the sisters, Sir'

'The sisters?' Jobert looked at Koschak with eyebrows raised.

Martine chuckled, 'Colonel Morin often speaks of the sisters, disease and desertion.'

'Oh, I see. So, focus on routine to minimise disease and desertion. Thank you for your thoughts, men. I'll let you get on.'

Martine and Rodau braced, took one step backwards, saluted, turned and departed out of the headquarters ante-room.

Jobert slowly turned to Gouvion, 'And you, Lieutenant? What duties do you have today?'

Bracing to attention, chin up, with serious green eyes, aware he was under the scrutiny of Geourdai and Koschak as well.

'Duty aide for Lieutenant Colonel Raive, Sir. I've just returned from the recruit column under Sergeant Clenaude coming in from the western districts, and can confirm their arrival tomorrow, Sir.'

'Good news. I'm aware you only arrived yesterday, nevertheless how would you describe the state of the men in your troop?'

'They seem happy, Sir,' Gouvion swallowed and blinked but he did not relax from the attention position, 'They know each other from before in the Chasseurs Volontaires. They know where they are, as this is their old barracks. They strut about as old hands in front of the new recruits just in. They seem at their ease, Sir.'

Gouvion's eyes flickered aside to Geourdai to see if this answer was sufficient.

'Hmm,' Jobert responded, 'When the recruits arrive tomorrow, and the company grows from two sections to seven, what do you feel the corporals need to focus on in the first week?'

Gouvion blinked while staring at a point on the wall just over Jobert's thick shoulders.

'Set a proper example, Sir. Yes, combining all that the sergeants said, set an example that shows we value them. Set an example how to avoid sickness, and,' he hesitated to look at Koschak, 'set an example that stops them deserting, Sir.'

Jobert concluded that Gouvion's recent gentleman-cadet experience at the Paris school may well be at play here.

'Thank you, Lieutenant. Before I let you get back to the regimental 2IC, let's speak of mess arrangements. Lieutenant Geourdai has invited me to join you at your rooms at the tavern, to which I have gratefully accepted. There will be seven of us in those four rooms, four officers and three servants. I wish to appoint you as the messing officer of our little group. What say you?'

'I'm at your service, Sir,' Gouvion nodded seriously.

'Then I'm obliged, Sir. We'll discuss the particulars later. Will we all be attending the Colonel's dinner?'

'Yes, Sir,' nodded Geourdai.

'Might we all sit together? Indeed, walk across together from the tavern.'

'Of course, Sir.'

'Then, Gouvion, until this evening.'

'Thank you, Sir,' Gouvion took one step back, saluted, and departed.

Geourdai and Koschak stood quietly as Jobert turned to them, consulting the tall clock in the ante-room.

'What duties demand your attention now, gentlemen?' Jobert asked.

‘We are at your service, Sir,’ Geour dai responded

‘No, I have no pressing need of your services unless there is some aspect that you are aware of. I wish to settle myself into the tavern.’

‘Then Sergeant Major and I need to prepare for the receipt of sixty recruits tomorrow, Sir, bedding, uniforms, lists,’ Geour dai sighed.

‘Indeed. 2IC, arrive back at the tavern early enough to brief me on the timings for tomorrow, and the opportunity to introduce myself to the company, inspect the old hands with their horses unsaddled. Having said that, I do not wish to interrupt the recruits schedule. I also will seek time with you both to discuss the company training until the remounts arrive.’

‘Certainly, Sir,’ responded Geour dai.

‘Easily done, Sir,’ added Koschak.

‘Then, thank you gentlemen.’ Jobert stepped back, Geour dai saluted, and Koschak braced up. Jobert returned the salute and departed for the tavern.



‘Here’s trouble.’

The two men sat at the trestle table in the afternoon sun and watched Jobert approach the tavern on horseback, at a fast walk. The man in the uniform of a corporal of the 5th Chasseurs signalled Jobert by extending his little finger and thumb from a clenched left fist, and flicked his wrist to indicate a drink, then followed with a thumbs-up.

Jobert nodded to Duck as he approached. Duck turned and raised three fingers to someone within the dimness of the tavern. Jobert dismounted and wrapped his reins over a hitching ring. His

horse tried to rub his head on Jobert's leg, itchy from his bridle. As Jobert rubbed the horse's face, Duck spoke quickly to a lad who had appeared from within the tavern. Giving the reins over to the boy to take the horse to the stables, Jobert joined the men at the table as the three beers arrived.

'Lads,' Jobert greeted the two, adjusting his sabre as he swung his leg over the bench seat. After removing his fur-crested and feather-plumed helmet, the three took up their fresh beer steins.

'The 24th Chasseurs,' Jobert toasted and drank deeply.

Awaiting news, Duck leant on the table, his powerful shoulders and thick arms bulging. His drooping, sandy moustache imitating his permanently weary, sad eyes. He chased a fly from the earless hole on the right side of his head, behind his hussar's plaits, with the three remaining fingers of his right hand.

As Duck leaned forward, so his table companion, Mathieu, lent back against the tavern wall, propping his beer against his slight belly and characteristically pressing his eyeglasses up onto the bridge of his nose, then sweeping his vibrant red fringe from his forehead in one movement. Nonetheless, the fringe flopped back onto his freckled forehead once the manoeuvre was complete.

'How was your morning, lads?' Jobert wiped his mouth with a gloved hand.

'Easy, Sir,' Duck shrugged, 'I replaced the front shoes on Red, adjusted that breast plate on Green, took everybody out for green pick and gave them all a good rub down.'

Looking over the rim of his stein, Jobert raised his eyebrows at Mathieu.

'I arranged our laundry, Sir,' said Mathieu cheerily, 'Then I took the opportunity to have a good look around the local streets; markets, tailors, and boot makers. This new regiment is stirring a lot of activity in town, and everybody is tripping over themselves to supply the gentlemen officers. This place for instance,' jerking a thumb into the tavern, 'I've already negotiated a better rate on the rooms you've

taken,' Mathieu grinned.

'But shit, Sir, those rooms will take a bit of work,' Duck shook his head looking askance at Mathieu.

'I hear you, but let me provide more information,' said Jobert 'By the way, have you met old Amy yet?'

'Yes Sir,' said Mathieu, 'I sent him out for vegetables, candles, and soap.'

'When I met Amy this morning, he had a basket of vegetables.'

'Yes, and one of the pigs died eating them. The rest just turned up their noses.'

'I see,' Jobert winked at Duck. 'Where was I? Yes. The company's officers, 2nd Company,' he emphasised to Duck, 'are quartered at this tavern, with the barracks just down there.' Jobert pivoted around and waved his beer in the direction.

'The rooms are for seven of us,' Jobert continued. 'The plan is you both and old Amy in the rear room with the fire, the company 2IC and two second lieutenants in the room closest to the hallway, and myself in the small room closest to the yard.'

'Can we get a work party to scrub the place out and whitewash it?' enquired Duck raising one eyebrow.

'I'll make a request of the sergeant major,' nodded Jobert. Then suddenly remembering, 'Duck, remember when the regiment was brigaded with the 3rd Chasseurs in Belgium?'

Duck shrugged and nodded, 'Sir'

'Obviously you remember our company taking the Austrian hussar flank attack in the flank,' Jobert said in a subdued tone.

'Yes Sir,' Duck said through gritted teeth, gently rubbing the livid pink scar where his right ring finger and his little finger used to be only four months ago.

'Mathieu,' Jobert clicked his fingers, 'Do you remember how we received a case of Malbec after the battle as thanks from the Colonel of the 3rd and his flanking squadron?'

'Yes, Sir,' Mathieu mused, 'I did a horse beef bourguignon with

some of the Malbec, but where did I get the mushrooms?’ Mathieu looked aside into the middle distance.

‘No matter,’ Duck tapped the table wishing the riddle would end, ‘We remember, Sir, and?’

Jobert drained his beer.

‘The 3rd Chasseurs’ flanking squadron commander on that day is now our new regimental 2IC.’ Duck’s eyebrows slowly raised and nodded to the significance of the connection.

‘What’s more, one of the 3rd’s sergeants that we saved from the Austrian hussars that day, is now my company sergeant major.’

‘Well that does bode well, Sir,’ Duck leant back folding his thick arms across his barrel chest.

Mathieu shrugged, and repositioned his glasses and fringe, ‘Another, Sir?’

‘Why not?’

With that response, so Mathieu signalled, then asked, ‘Dinner, Sir?’

‘No, Mathieu,’ Jobert shook his head, ‘Two of the three young officers and I will dine with the Colonel this evening. One young officer is out of town on duty and is not expected back for another five days. The other of the second lieutenants is fresh out of the École Militaire, so I’ve appointed him our messing officer. I foresee the seven of us will chat at breakfast as to the days requirements. Otherwise, tomorrow, I’m expecting a normal lunch and dinner for the three officers and no guests. As for dinner tonight, Mathieu, is a fresh shirt and brushed dolman jacket available?’

‘Absolutely, Sir.’

‘Mathieu, Duck and I need to have our uniform facings changed, and bonnets-de-police in regimental colours.’

‘Jackets are arranged with a local tailor tomorrow, Sir, capucine collar, green cuffs and capucine piping. I’ll make inquiries about the bonnets. What’s more, Sir, you need a pair of dress boots.’

‘Capucine?’ quizzed Duck.

‘Dark-orange, you’ll see,’ shrugged Jobert, and then returning to Mathieu, ‘What do you mean dress boots? I’ve not been paid in a month. How much will that cost?’

‘Oh, ye of little faith, Sir. I have found a boot maker who has promised me dress boots at cost, if you’ll refer the other officers his way. The man will take your fitting at breakfast tomorrow, Sir.’

Jobert directed a stunned look at Duck and held out his palms upward seeking help. Duck shrugged, shook his head, and let his eyes follow an attractive woman walking past pushing a barrow.

Mathieu’s gaze followed Duck’s gaze, and repositioning glasses and fringe, breathed, ‘Hmm, lovely.’

Duck looked sideways at Mathieu and then to Jobert, ‘Will you ride to dinner this evening, Sir? Either way, I want to put a brush over your boots and make sure Blue gets settled. How did Blue go today?’

Finishing his beer, Jobert said, ‘No, Duck, I’ll walk, and thank you for the boots. Blue was fine. He stood all day in the regimental stalls unsaddled. But now,’ Jobert clapped his hands, ‘Let us view the extent of our new chateâu.’

With the sun beginning to set, the companions drained their beers, rose, and entered the dark tavern.



‘Take two,’ Jobert insisted.

Geourdai and Gouvion took two sherries each from the soldier with a tray of aperitifs at the dining room door.

‘2nd Company,’ Jobert toasted, and looking Geourdai and Gouvion square in the eye consumed the glass of sherry in a gulp.

‘2nd Company,’ toasted the pair in return, then placing their empty glasses back on the tray.

‘Thank you, Chasseur,’ smiled Jobert at the soldier, ‘Which company?’

‘Umm ... 4th Company, Sir,’ stammered the lad.

Jobert raised his glass to the soldier, ‘You’re doing a good job. Well done.’

Then the three strolled deeper into the room with their other sherry.

The dining room was filling quickly with officers. At four officers to a company and twelve companies in the new regiment, Jobert calculated, there will be approximately fifty to sixty officers, including regimental headquarters, at dinner this evening.

With the officers not yet having their uniforms amended, it was quite a variety of French cavalry uniforms on display. Predominantly chasseur à cheval uniforms, especially those of the recently disbanded Chasseur Volontaires. Nevertheless, there were a number of dragoon and heavy cavalry uniforms, and indeed, at least two hussar uniforms within the crowd.

Finding a free position by the door, Jobert turned to Geour dai and Gouvion. With the look of experiencing a sudden unpleasant taste he said, ‘I’ve experienced overcrowding on troop ships, and I do not want to deliberately do that to our men. How the hell are we going to crush one-hundred men into a third of that dormitory?’

Gouvion was keen to contribute, ‘First it won’t be all eight sections, Sir. The sergeants are accommodated elsewhere, and the corporals are accommodated in the rooms usually allocated to company headquarters, and a section will be on regimental guard occasionally.’

‘I have some problems with that, Lieutenant,’ Jobert shook his head slowly, ‘Regimental guard will only occur once every twelve days. So, on each floor, one troop, two platoons, four sections, allowing four corporals, and one duty sergeant, in the separate rooms, that still leaves forty-four troopers three to a bed. Have you placed, what, fifteen beds in that space? What about the men’s equipment?’

Where do they store it all? How does a troop access their forty odd foot lockers? I know it's not yours, Raive's, or anybody's fault, 2IC, but there has to be a better solution.'

'Well, Sir,' Geourdai shrugged, 'The 2IC has spoken of living as if we were all on campaign, as we assume we will be in a matter of weeks. The soldiers will keep their portmanteaus and bedrolls with them, and sleep on the floor.'

'Sir?' Geourdai turned to look where Jobert was staring with his mouth slightly open. Gouvion too followed his gaze over Geourdai's shoulder.

'On campaign, 2IC, now there's something,' Jobert said. They both turned back, recognising he had been struck with a thought.

'Check my idea, 2IC. One duty troop in town would easily fit comfortably into our assigned barracks area. One field troop training under canvas, supplied by the regimental train. We could rotate sections or platoons between the two locations. The field troop could be supplied daily by the regimental train. We must have wagons allocated to company tentage and baggage surely, but where would we bivouac? What say you, Geourdai?'

'Umm,' stammered Geourdai trying to take it all in, 'I can't think of a reason not to. I don't know where we might locate these field troops. I suggest, Sir, you corner Lieutenant Colonel Raive with this one,' nodding towards the Colonel and his 2IC being announced into the room.

As the officers stood and silenced descended immediately, the Colonel boomed, 'Gentlemen, thank you. What a pleasure to have us all here together at last. May I ask you to charge your glasses?'

Glasses, with varying levels of sherry, were snatched up from tables and trays.

'Gentlemen, the 24th Chasseurs à Cheval.'

'The 24th Chasseurs!' boomed back the chorus.

'I look forward to speaking with each of you and listening to your thoughts. Carry on.'

The room returned instantly to noisy conversation.

As Jobert turned back to Geourdai and Gouvion, Captain Mercier, commander of 1st Company, caught his eye across the room. Mercier's emotionless dark eyes drilled into Jobert before nodding acknowledgement. Jobert returned the nod, and as Jobert raised his head, Mercier raised a finger to catch Jobert's attention and then started to cross the room towards the three 2nd Company officers.

As Mercier passed Captain Avriol of the 7th Company, Mercier tapped him on the shoulder and indicated with his head to follow. Avriol broke from the group he was with and followed Mercier to Jobert's location. Once the five had introduced each to the other, Mercier's impassive face turned to Jobert.

'Sir, Avriol's and my companies share the dormitory with your company. The overcrowding of the men is unworkable. It was so immediately my men took up their assigned area and increased to an alarming degree with the arrival of our sister company,' nodding to Avriol.

Jobert recognised from his style and speech that Mercier was an officer of common, or bourgeois, extraction, neither nobility nor up from the ranks.

'Not only do I refer to the floor space,' Mercier continued, 'but 1st and 7th Companies utilise the same stairway to the latrines within the stables below. With the other two dormitories filling with their companies at a commensurate rate, you may be aware, Sir, buildings share pumps and it is imaginable by the end of the week, six-hundred men will attempt to secure water for their ablutions from the one pump between the barracks. And then, with nowhere other to heat their water to bathe and shave, they'll light fires in the hay-filled stables below their accommodation. I predict a veritable recipe for disaster. With the 2nd Company at full strength tomorrow, in our shared dormitory alone, I sense a pressing conundrum. It is my ardent desire to "do my best" in such a situation,' nodding towards the Colonel, and referring to Morin's lunchtime call for

each captain to do his best.

‘Acknowledging you’ve only just arrived today,’ Mercier returned to Jobert, ‘May I prevail on you, Sir, for your initial thoughts on the matter?’

Having held Mercier’s steady gaze to this point, Jobert looked in the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Raive.

‘Thank you, Sir, for sharing your thoughts. I was just expressing to my company officers that I have experienced the suffering that accompanies overcrowding, and my determination is that this acute misery should not be visited on my men. Raive’s and my regiments fought together in Belgium last autumn, so I feel comfortable approaching him on this matter.’

‘We were just discussing,’ Jobert continued, nodding towards Geourdai and Gouvion, ‘the advantages and disadvantages of placing one of the troops on rotation in the field, under canvas.’

Jobert sipped at his sherry. An unexpected handsome smile lifted Mercier’s curled moustache as he turned to Avriol, whose eyebrows had shot up.

‘One troop from each company under canvas would halve the regiment in barracks from twelve-hundred to six-hundred,’ Mercier restated Jobert’s proposal to Avriol.

Turning back to Jobert, Avriol asked, ‘How will the men be fed, Sir?’

Mercier answered for Jobert, ‘With each company being allocated a section of the regimental train, Sir, food could be centrally prepared in the barracks kitchens and transported thus.’

His dark eyes flickered across the group as he sought complications with this approach.

Jobert tilted his head to Mercier and asked, ‘Where would one site twelve troops? Individually or together? I don’t know the country hereabouts.’

‘I do, gentlemen,’ breathed an urbane voice.

The group turned to see Captain de Chabenac, Command-

er 8th Company, the junior company commander within Jobert's 2nd Squadron, gracefully bowing to them all.

'Forgive my intrusion, gentlemen, but your topic is at the forefront of everyone's mind, apart from, of course, Madame de Rossi's impending ball. To overhear potential solutions to an approaching calamity demonstrates I have placed good manners aside. But then to be given the opportunity to step forward and offer the smallest contribution to your project, I simply could not resist, although it may blacken my name amongst my esteemed regimental brothers. Gentlemen, I beg your forgiveness,' bowed de Chabenac again, his face gently affable, but still quite serious.

'Any man who declares for the 24th Chasseurs, would do his best and knows what capucine is, I call him my brother, and thus beyond reproach,' said Jobert with a wry grin.

Then Jobert's smile melted to a stern squint, 'You heard our scheme, brother. Do you have information which might strengthen our hand? It is my intent to raise the topic with the 2IC.'

'My family is from this area, although my family's influence has passed,' smiled de Chabenac, 'my father, until recently the Comte de Chabenac, still enjoys the company of the major land owners around the city. I have hunted the surrounding countryside since a boy. I can think of many sites which would accommodate the numbers you have in mind. My family owes a debt of honour to Colonel Morin, so in facilitating the potential location of your scheme, Sir, I am at your service.'

Mercier's emotionless dark eyes returned, as he contributed 'May I suggest, gentlemen, we continue to consider the proposal until we meet at lunch tomorrow to discuss, and a small deputation represent our thoughts to 2IC after lunch.'

'I certainly concur,' Jobert stated, and there were nods all around.

As the room was informed to take their places for dinner, Avriol shuffled in beside Jobert.

'Captain Jobert, Sir. Am I informed correctly you have been

promoted from the ranks, as so many gentlemen here tonight have been?’ Avriol inquired carefully, a blush forming across his freckles.

‘Captain Avriol, Sir, you are indeed correct,’ Jobert considered the man who continued to look about him.

‘Well, Sir, so am I,’ then looking about, ‘Would you have heard of the coming ball to which the officers of the regiment are invited? Madame de Rossi’s ball?’

‘Forgive me, Sir, I only arrived today and though I have received much information upon which to consider, that particular piece of news I have not yet received.’

‘Then forgive me, Sir, but yes, a ball will be hosted in about ten days, but to the heart of the matter, Sir, as an ex-sergeant, can you dance?’ Avriol asked with alarm.

‘No, Sir, I cannot dance,’ Jobert guffawed with surprise, ‘Well, certainly not the steps required at a society ball, and, I take it, neither can you,’ Jobert grinned then lent closer and whispered, ‘If we can put our men under canvas and out of harm’s way, surely as brothers of the capucine, we can do our best, and secretly instruct ex-sergeants to dance.’

Jobert winked and clapping Avriol on the shoulder, took his seat between Geourdai and Gouvion.

Jobert lent towards Geourdai, ‘This de Rossi ball? Can you dance?’

Geourdai grimaced, ‘Shit no, Sir. I do believe I’ll be choosing to charge the Austrian Army single-handedly on that particular evening.’

Jobert nodded gravely, then lent the other way, towards Gouvion, ‘Are you aware that a society lady, Madame de Rossi, is hosting a ball to which the regiment’s officers are invited?’

Gouvion’s eyes widened, and with a furtive glance, ‘Yes, Sir. The regimental aides are most excited.’

‘So as a School man, can you dance?’ Jobert interrogated.

‘No, Sir. Perhaps there was dance instruction before, but certainly not now. No.’

‘I inquire not to determine the nature of the syllabus of the esteemed school, Sir, but to determine if you, Sir, a gentleman of good breeding, education, and connection, can dance,’ Jobert raised his eyebrows at Gouvion’s continuing seriousness.

‘I’m capable of a few routines, Sir. But I do not profess to be proficient.’

‘Gouvion, in the eyes of an ex-sergeant, any man capable of dancing a few routines in Paris is a bona-fide dance master in Avignon.’

Finally, Gouvion blushed and smiled.

‘Second Lieutenant Gouvion, as the messing officer of the Tavern of the ... the ... the Sky-blue Pompom, you are to secure the services of a local dancing instructor. Is your mission clear?’

With mock seriousness, Gouvion replied, ‘I am at your service, Sir.’

‘Then I am obliged, Sir.’

The ringing of a small bell quietened the room, before the announcement, ‘Gentlemen, Colonel Morin.’

With that announcement, the gentlemen patted the table in applause, and a chorus of, ‘Hear! Hear!’

‘Thank you, gentlemen, brothers of the 24th,’ said Morin, getting to his feet, from his dining position centrally in the room.

Again, a round of table patting, ‘Hear! Hear!’ applause which the Colonel smilingly subdued by waving his hands.

‘It has been a long, exhausting ten days for us all. Whether by the extraordinary administration required of many of you, or by those who have journeyed from afar to join us. Such effort will be rewarded. Such exhaustion will pale in comparison to what lies ahead. Nevertheless, let us relax in each other’s good company for one brief evening.’

A further chorus of table patting ensued, the candelabra on the table shaking and the dim light in the room wavering as a result of the movement.

‘Before we relax, allow me to make a few comments pertinent to

officers, as my regimental policy.

‘First, the ancient custom of the Colonel’s open table will be amended under my stewardship. I shall host an open table for all officers only four nights a week. The 2IC will promulgate the days. Not that I’m claiming that I do not have the family resources to maintain the custom seven nights a week, as those who have gone before,’ theatrical hisses issued from a few wags, Morin continued, ‘But I am beset by correspondence and I beg time to fulfil my responsibilities.’

‘Indeed, indeed,’ tapped the table chorus.

‘I’m assured the two chiefs of squadron will host an open table on two of the other nights of the week for company officers assigned to those majors. One night a week, second lieutenants will starve, or learn the location of the local taverns.’

‘Hurrah!’ thumped the chorus.

‘Second, as of tomorrow, I require the officers to muster in the square following the sounding of *Reveille*, at five o’clock. Whilst the regiment attends to stables and breakfast, following the roll call, the officers will accompany myself and Captain Bidonne, Commander 6th Company, 6th Squadron, in fencing.’

Amid the table thumping, a languid, slow-smiling captain, in his late thirties, stood up on top of his chair and sword-saluted all with his soup spoon. The humdrum died down and Morin continued.

‘Fencing will occupy the officers for the hour between regimental roll call until just prior to the regimental parade.’

Again, amid ‘hurrahs’ all round, Jobert noticed more than a few worried eyes.

‘2IC!’ Colonel Morin called.

‘Sir!’ Raive called back, sitting halfway down the table.

‘Take note to halve the sherry allocation at our next dinner.’

Raive’s ‘Sir’ was drowned as the chorus hissed and stomped on the floor. Colonel Morin waved for silence, then paused even longer.

‘I wish to make two further points before ending on a sombre

note. I ask that the senior gentlemen to subdue younger spirits in their vicinity.'

Men like Cobereau, Mercier and Jobert looked about them at their dining companions with steely determination, promising by the severity of their gaze to enforce the Colonel's requirements.

'Third, whilst tailors, throughout the city, race to complete the tailcoats and bonnet-de-police in the regiment's facings, for our troopers, there are a number of quality tailors offering, at reduced prices, for officers to change their facings and have bonnets made. On parade, two days from tomorrow, all officers will parade in correct regimental dress, which includes bonnets. I'm enforcing the wearing of the regiment's bonnet for the simple reason helmets have not yet been received. The city's milliners are still crafting one-thousand bicornes for the soldiers. As bonnets are quickly created by tailors. We as a regiment can appear dressed alike, vital in the forming bonds with our new soldiers.'

Many senior officers looked about them with a soft, 'Hear, hear'.

'Fourth, although a matter of good cheer,' Colonel Morin sipped his wine, 'I wish to make a serious point to all. An accomplished lady of some standing in the city, Madame de Rossi, has invited the officers of the regiment to a ball. Steady, gentlemen,' Morin warned as the table tapping tentatively began and abruptly stopped.

'Yes, by rights, an item of news of good cheer and the erudite 2IC will issue details soon, but,' Morin rapped the table with the butt of a knife, 'In the broader climate of impending war for the regiment, I remind all officers that each, and everyone, of you require my written permission to marry. Am I understood?'

Many officers shifted uncomfortably, and all responded, 'Yes, Sir' with appropriate gravity.

'I repeat to all, you require my written permission to marry.

'Finally, gentleman. I will not accept duelling.'

If the room was utterly silent prior to the Colonel speaking, if it were possible, it was even quieter now.

‘If I learn that any officer of this regiment has engaged in a duel with another officer of this regiment, and any officer of this regiment acts as their second, then all combatants and all seconds will be cashiered immediately from the service of France.

‘If I learn that any officer of this regiment has engaged in a duel, or acted as a second, against any officer of another regiment, then such combatants and seconds from this regiment will be instantly dismissed from this regiment and may serve France elsewhere.’

Morin surveyed the room.

‘Those gentlemen who served as officers before, and have in great part departed, were noblemen, either aristocracy or minor nobility.’

Jobert looked across and down the table to de Chabenac. De Chabenac sat gracefully upright, his gentle, affable smile fixed on his face.

‘Men of these ancient houses took upon themselves to defend the honour of their family’s name. My observations, whilst in my previous regiment prior to 1789, of most of such breaches of honour, occurred because of drunken late-night card games. With the legal abolition of noble privilege, none of us can claim the right to defend the honour of our name.

‘On the other hand, you are responsible to defend the honour of the regiment, but that can only be achieved on the battlefield against the enemies of France. Not in card salons, nor taverns, nor bordellos, against a fellow you consider a cad or a bounder because one owes money to the other. If you are pressed by a fellow from without the 24th Chasseurs, refer the matter immediately to either myself, or the two chiefs of squadron, Majors Cobereau and Maccard.’

Men flicked glances one to the other.

‘Enough from me, and now for the soup.’

Tentative table patting ensued, initiated by Raive and Cobereau.

‘I am aware of the wave of rabbit soup flooding the city, as milliners seek felt for our bicornes. I have sent out a proclamation for the top ten lads who bring in the most rabbits, and I’ll enlist them immediately.’

‘Hear! Hear!’ the tapping chorus grew braver.

‘But no rabbit soup tonight!’ Morin concluded. The chorus resumed its previous raucousness; good cheer had been restored.

‘Tonight, I am assured, it is hare soup.’

The hurrahs and table thumping released any remaining tension, and the wine flowed as the soldiers brought in the soup.



At one point during the meal, Geourdai turned to Jobert and filled both men’s wine glasses.

‘Sir?’ ventured Geourdai.

Jobert slumped back in his chair and smiled at Geourdai.

‘You mentioned a few times you had experienced overcrowding,’ said Geourdai with his lop-sided smile, seeking Jobert’s eye.

Geourdai saw that the smile had disappeared from the slumped man’s face and that his eyes were downcast. Without moving his face, Jobert slid his eyes to look at Geourdai. Geourdai glanced at Gouvion, who had turned to hear Jobert’s response.

Jobert noticed that Cobereau was listening obliquely across from Geourdai; a key dinner skill is able to look and listen to one’s companion, but listen to at least one other conversation across, or beside, your own.

‘I have,’ said Jobert with a shrug.

‘You mentioned troopships, Sir,’ slurred Geourdai, allowing his consumption of alcohol to carry his matter of fact tone, ‘Can I ask when you sailed in a troopship?’

Jobert shook his head at the memory. He knew that the wine was allowing him to confess.

‘1780, eight weeks to America,’ he rasped.

That answer brought Cobereau's face fully around. Gouvion's mouth opened, hoping in some way that would increase his understanding of what Jobert had just said. Geourdai nodded with wine-induced sagacity at the answer.

The candle light flickered in Cobereau's intense eyes as his focus skewered Jobert and he asked directly across the table, 'You sailed to America in 1780?'

'Yes Sir,' rasped Jobert, 'My regimental 2IC at the time, the officer to whom I was a groom, had a family connection to General de Rochambeau. De Rochambeau sought this officer as an aide on his staff for the expedition. I had served Comte de Lameth since I was twelve. At fifteen I was given a chasseur's uniform, and shipped to Rhode Island with de Lameth's and de Rochambeau's horses. I spent eight weeks on an overcrowded troopship crossing the Atlantic to America, and then seven weeks in an overcrowded troopship coming back across the Atlantic eighteen months later.'

Without looking from Cobereau, 'Does that satisfy your curiosity, Lieutenant?'

'Yes Sir,' Geourdai continued to drunkenly nod, 'Thank you, Sir.'

Cobereau and Jobert held each other's gaze impassively until Jobert swallowed the last of his wine.

Chapter Three

March 1793, Avignon, France



‘Gentlemen, salute.’

With heels together, the six ranks of nine to ten officers, each two ranks facing each other, each officer in linen trousers over his boots, waistcoat and shirt, saluted the man opposite with his wooden sabre.

Staring his opponent in the eye, each officer brought his sword hand up to his chin, the sword hilt at lip level, the action based on ancient custom of Christian knights kissing the crucifix. Then the sabre hand was brought smoothly back to just past the hip, the sabre held low, the blade tip at ankle level from the ground. This elegant sweep of blade originated from the Crusades, as the Muslim warriors would draw back their lance tips as a form of salute. Halting momentarily in this lowered position, the sabre hilt would then be swept back up to the lips before returning to the carry position, where the upper arm hung naturally against the ribs, the forearm perpendicular to the ground, the blade balanced directly over the wrist.

‘Gentlemen, en garde.’

The sun had not yet penetrated over the barrack rooftops. With dust, from the movement of horses as stables were mucked out, and smoke, from the kitchen fires, hanging across the chilly morning square, the officers immediately prepared themselves for action.

The balanced pose they assumed, into which the left foot sliding rearward taking the body weight for any forward launch and twisting their torsos, so their heart was furthest from their opponent's sabre tip. Their right hand holding the sabre, lowered to mid-thigh level, allowed their sabre tips to align at their opponent's upper abdomen, centrally ready for offensive or defensive movement, higher or lower, left or right.

Captain Bidonne, commander of 6th Company, languidly strolled between the ranks with his calm eyes and permanent grin, his fencing foil reclining on his right shoulder.

'Gentlemen, I remind you, with Major Cobereau with the 1st and 2nd Squadrons, Colonel Morin with the 3rd and 4th Squadrons, and Major Maccard with the 5th and 6th Squadrons, your actions will be closely observed. Now, listen carefully, gentlemen.

'Odd-numbered squadrons, salute.'

Three ranks saluted again.

'You gentlemen will make four attacking strokes on your opponent and then prepare to parry. Once you have completed the five actions, step one opponent to your left and repeat without hesitation until you return to your original partner.

'Gentlemen, en garde.'

The three ranks of officers returned to a position of balance.

'Now, gentlemen, even-numbered squadrons, salute,' Bidonne ordered.

The other three ranks, including Jobert, saluted.

'You gentlemen will make four parries against the attacking strokes, and then immediately counter-attack with a cut of your own once your opponent completes his fourth stroke. Be prepared to hold your ground as a new opponent engages you from your left

with the repeated pattern.

‘Gentlemen, en garde.

‘Gentlemen, ATTACK!’

The near instantaneous crack of sixty wooden blades colliding, each blade purposely designed to weigh heavier than the standard issue sabre, was heard clearly throughout the barracks. Soldiers and non-commissioned officers raced to the dormitory windows and stable doors to observe the spirited melee in the centre of the square.

Within the time of the first four cuts being delivered, a simultaneous roar of sergeant’s invective for men to return to their duties caught some duelling officers by surprise, and a few wooden sabres found their mark on the thighs, ribs, and arms of the distracted young gentlemen.

Each rank was given the opportunity of each exercise and many others beside. Colonel Morin and his two chiefs of squadron fought, as did the rest, and added quick feedback to each man they met. Captain Bidonne would gently make suggestions, but then not so gently whip, with his foil, the target areas on the bodies to those he directed his suggestions.

Some of the younger fellows were forced to vomit quickly between the rain of blows, swearing silently to themselves, and at themselves, for their over-indulgence in spirits from the night before.

Bidonne concluded the activity, thanked the aching and sweating duellists, and informing one and all that, first, their heavy leather, long-cuffed riding gloves would be mandatory for all future fencing. Second, once dressed, all troop commanders will attend parade, and all company commanders and seconds-in-command would attend a briefing by the regimental 2IC in the dining room.

With that, two regimental trumpeters blew *Assembly*, and the officers were dismissed to dress with the second lieutenants to stack a hand-cart with sabres. More than a few decidedly green individuals quickly wiped up their own vomit from the square.



Seated in squadron order down both sides of the dining table, Jobert sat between Geourdai and de Chabenac, and drew a notebook and pencil from an inside pocket of his tailcoat. De Chabenac smiled in bemusement at the notion of having to take notes and was passed sheets of paper by his company second-in-command. As the 2IC fumbled in his pocket for a spare pencil, Jobert drew out a spare pencil from his jacket and slid it to de Chabenac.

‘Merry Christmas,’ Jobert frowned and shook his head.

‘Thank you, Sir,’ de Chabenac bowed his head.

‘Good morning, gentlemen.’

Accompanied by the two majors, Lieutenant Colonel Raive strode to the head of the table, and the group hushed and focused. The two chiefs of squadron strode to the far end of the table and sat.

‘Well done to all on a most pleasant evening last night,’ Raive continued, ‘Thank you also to Captain Bidonne, as our resident fencing master, for this morning’s purging of last evening’s sherry. Let’s get down to business. Please take a regimental programme each and pass the rest on.’

Subdued hisses and boos from some towards Bidonne, as the papers were passed down the long table. Bidonne smiled and gently said, ‘I look forward to your company tomorrow, gentlemen.’

‘Man the regiment, equip the regiment, train the regiment,’ Raive continued, ‘The 24th Chasseurs is based on the recently disbanded Chasseurs Volontaires. Thus, the regiment has been manned down to the section commander level, with approximately three previously enlisted troopers, old hands as opposed to our new recruits, in each section. Depending on your arrival over the last ten days, you will have met, by now, your troop commanders and troop non-commissioned officers. Company trumpeters are still to

be selected and trained. Company farriers are with the remount group. Company quartermaster corporals have been brigaded with me until equipment is completely issued. Are there any questions on manning or regimental roles based on the Chasseurs Volontaires?

‘No? Good. Moving on to recruits. Our recruiting group, commanded by Commander 5th Company, assisted by Major Maccard’s squadron sergeant major and a second lieutenant from each squadron, is based in the medieval papal fortress, now National Guard barracks, the Palais des Papes, in central Avignon, where all recruits are being marched, from the surrounding districts, by local gendarmes. In Avignon, they are medically assessed and assigned to the regiments being raised around the city. Within our recruiting group is, for every company, one platoon sergeant and four section corporals from each platoon.’

Jobert nodded as Geourdai turned his head and whispered, ‘Sergeant Clenaude from Gouvion’s troop.’ Jobert wrote “Clenaude” on the regimental programme against today’s receipt of sixty men for 2nd Company.

‘On receipt of his approximately sixty recruits, that sergeant marches his column to our barracks. Sixty recruits a day for twelve days for twelve companies. On your regimental programme, you will note the third batch of recruits arrive today for 2nd Company.’ Raive looked down the table to Jobert, smiled, and winked.

‘Are there any questions on manning the regiment with the recruits?’

‘Excuse me, Sir,’ a question from further down the table, ‘You said the men were being medically assessed. By whom, please?’

‘Good question,’ Raive responded, ‘As part of the national levee en masse, Paris has directed a team of Avignon physicians be engaged to screen the recruits. Our own regimental surgeon is with the recruiting group, and his assistant remains here in barracks. Does that answer your question?’

‘Thank you, Sir.’

‘Any more questions? No? Good. Moving on to horses.

‘Our remount group, commanded by Commander 3rd Company, assisted by Major Cobereau’s squadron sergeant major and a squadron second lieutenant, is also based in Avignon.’

Geourdai again turned and whispered to Jobert, ‘Second Lieutenant Neilage.’

‘The War Committee requires horses to gather in major towns to be inspected by touring regimental representatives, as opposed to being mustered in Avignon, as per the recruit group. The remount group has, for every company, one platoon sergeant, one farrier, four corporals for each platoon and six troopers.’

As Geourdai turned to Jobert, Jobert nodded and whispered, ‘Sergeant Bredieux, got it,’ and scribbled the names on the regimental programme.

‘The initial delivery of sixty horses for 1st Company begins the day after tomorrow. Again, sixty horses a day for twelve days, the programme, again, indicating your company’s issue date.’

Beginning today, four days of dismounted recruit training, before receiving remounts, noted Jobert.

‘In line with previous questions on medical screening, one of the two regimental sergeant veterinarians is with the remount group, the other being here in barracks with two regimental farriers. There will be no issue of horses for company baggage trains. I’ll speak of that in a moment. Any questions on horses?’

‘Yes, Sir,’ again from down the table, ‘Will the squadrons be allocated the same coloured horses as per a four-squadron regiment?’

‘Generally, yes. 1st and 4th Squadron on blacks, 2nd and 5rd Squadrons on bays, 3rd and 6th Squadron on chestnuts. The regimental aides de camp and all trumpeters will be on greys.

‘Any more questions? No? Good. Moving on to equipment.

‘On arrival each morning, recruits will be entered on the regimental roll and receive an initial issue of one linen satchel, with mug, bowl, towel, knife, fork, spoon, soap, candle, and uniforms. Two

shirts, two underdrawers, two stockings, one set of linen parade breeches, one set of hemp stable breeches, one pair boots, one pair stable clogs, one summer waistcoat, one stable jacket, one tailcoat, note that this tailcoat will be the simpler, undress version, one cape, one bonnet-de-police, one paillasse, one blanket and one saddle portmanteau to carry it all in. That will allow them to sleep their first night. I confirm the following has not yet been received for issue; a second pair of boots, winter waistcoats, full-dress tailcoats, dolman jackets, sashes, full-dress Hungarian breeches, over-breeches nor helmets.

‘Which reminds me, all company officers are to have their new bonnets and regimental tailcoats amended by the parade tomorrow.

‘Back to recruits. After lunch, they’ll be allocated to their section corporals, scrub and wash their sleeping areas, and bathe before dinner.

‘Sword belts, cross belts, and cartridge pouches to be issued the first morning in barracks, and the recruits can begin whitening with pipe clay that day. I’m expecting bicornes any day. Bicornes with regimental plumes and company pompoms will be issued in due course at the Colonel’s discretion as a mark of regimental achievement. Otherwise all officers are to wear bicornes, with plumes, so recruits know who to salute. Non-commissioned officers will wear helmets with plumes; I do not know when helmets will be arriving for the troopers. Following the cleaning of stables, recruits will be issued saddlery the day before their remounts arrive.

‘Any questions on equipment? No? Good. Moving on to weapons.

‘The regiment is short nine-hundred sabres. There has not yet been an indication as to their arrival. There is a limited number of wooden sabres available for drill. Some of the reenlisted Chasseurs Volontaires should already be issued with their previous sabres from the existing armoury.

‘Two-thousand firearms have been received, and we are still working through what is possible to issue. I’ll provide further infor-

mation when there is clarity on what is available.

‘Cartridges have not yet arrived. There is a limited issue of musketoons and cartridges for regimental guard duties, and these are only being carried by those previously enlisted.

‘Any questions on weapons? No? Good.

‘Before I move on to training, allow me to address a concern on everyone’s minds.

‘Twelve-hundred men and horses in a barracks built for eight-hundred. In the past ten days, men, horses and equipment, and the consequent connection with the War Committee, city administrators and local suppliers, has been the focus of the headquarters. As the flow of men, horses and equipment has begun, Colonel Morin, assisted by the two chiefs of squadron, have been focused on creating a locally situated regimental field camp for six-hundred men.’

This caused many in the audience to either sit up in their chairs, look to each other, and mutter. Jobert and de Chabenac turned to each other and shrugged, then looked along the table to receive a surprised look from Mercier.

‘Indeed, indeed,’ rapped Raive, regathering the officers’ focus.

‘This has been possible with the arrival of the regiment’s tentage stores yesterday. I might say the regiment is most grateful to the family of Captain de Chabenac, here, in facilitating the project by identifying and securing potential campsites.’

The table chorus patted the table with a resounding, ‘Hear, hear.’

De Chabenac responded to all by looking up and down the table and nodding with his gracious smile to the cheer but indicated to Jobert his evident surprise, ‘My parents, perhaps?’

‘Tomorrow,’ Raive continued, ‘before remounts arrive the day after, the Colonel will lead a training ride to the campsite, where the requirements of a site will be discussed. From there a plan will be devised, orders given as to the programme of occupation and rotation, and we foresee the six-hundred-man camp opening in about four days’ time.’

Jobert calculated that would be the day 2nd Company horses arrived.

‘With our thoughts on the camp being barely drafted, I’ll hold questions until another time. This includes the allocation of regimental trains to company level. But after parade tomorrow, all officers shall ride together to the site of the new camp for a training tutorial led by the Colonel.

‘Are there any questions of a general nature before I hand over? No? Good.

‘Allow me to hand over to Major Cobereau, who will address training in some depth. Sir, your parade.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ Cobereau’s low voice caused all to pivot in their seats and focus on the iron-hard, nonplussed visages of the two chiefs of squadron at the other end of the long table.

Jobert had not yet met Major Maccard, who lounged back in his chair, his blond, boyish good looks undermined by emotionless, dark eyes and a permanent mocking sneer as he regarded them all.

Cobereau’s mouth tightened as his fierce eyes locked on to each young face in turn.

‘Gentlemen, the Colonel made it most clear at yesterday’s lunch what drives our momentum,’ Cobereau’s gruff whisper caused all to lean in attentively.

‘The Colonel identified that rapid individual promotion and rapid regimental expansion in the last three years has created critical areas of inexperience as much as it has allowed fresh ideas to form. The Colonel also outlined his training focus at each rank level and the training responsibility for each level. Let us review the Colonel’s requirements in some further detail.

‘The Colonel and we two chiefs of squadron will focus on the needs of the company commanders.’

Jobert prepared his pencil for notes.

‘The Colonel and ourselves are in no doubt as the twelve company commanders are most capable at troop-level detail, stemming

from previous troop roles and the campaign experience many of you have recently experienced. But the regiment is only four musket balls, or four cannon balls, or four sabre slashes away from having one of you fellows command the regiment. To that end, there will be an effort to engage company commanders in regimental command requirements, alongside infantry and artillery, under the command of a divisional general. More information on that course of study in due course, but for now, the needs of recruits, remounts, and the new camp has precedence.

‘The regimental 2IC will focus on the needs of the lieutenants. The focus here will be on regimental administration, not necessarily preparing the company 2ICs for company command. Having said that, the company 2ICs, through his administrative duties, will be acutely aware of the resources available and the risks to any scheme for battle due to any shortcomings in men, horses, equipment, weapons, ammunition, water and rations. Participation in the raising of the regiment from its very first day, collating troop and platoon returns, and breaking down in turn regimental issues of men, horses, equipment, et cetera, is a daily education of the highest order.

‘The Colonel has directed the Regimental Sergeant Major and the two squadron sergeant majors to guide our twelve company sergeant majors. Here the Colonel feels most comfortable. Here is where rapid promotion of fresh ideas with solid regimental experience is at its best. I commend to you, young gentlemen, making yourself known to the three senior sergeant majors, and seek their guidance on any issues, before they make themselves known to you in the correction of your mistakes. As I know, there are many ex-sergeant majors and ex-sergeants in the room. You know full well the authority and experience with which our sergeant majors act.

‘The Colonel has directed that you, the company commanders, will focus on the needs of the troop commanders. Our troop commanders have a wide range of prior experience. Either senior non-commissioned officers up from the ranks, gentlemen-cadets

graduated from the various military schools and charismatic, experienced fellows elected to those positions by their fellow volunteers. Our troop commanders undertake their daily tasks via the conduit of platoon sergeants and section corporals, who may or may not have the experience, but all will certainly have the attitude. Be ready! Constant supervision and guidance will be sought by the Colonel from the company commanders for the troop commanders.

‘Are there any questions from the company commanders on their training focus?’ Cobereau paused and scanned the faces at the table.

‘Moving on, the Colonel has directed the lieutenants, as company 2ICs, to focus on the platoon sergeants. Here is another area where rapid promotion of fresh ideas from a solid experience in the lieutenants will address the potential lack of experience in our sergeants. The daily administration of our regiment will be the base for this exchange and experience.

‘Are there any questions from the company 2ICs on their training focus?’

Jobert glanced back to Geourdai, and both nodded together, as they both could see a topic of future discussion.

‘I can only repeat my last comments,’ Cobereau continued, ‘when we undertake the requirements of company sergeant majors addressing the alarming lack of experience in our section corporals.

‘Finally, the Colonel’s directive that troop commanders and platoon sergeants will focus on the chasseurs. Here is the grist for the mill. In sustained and focused conversations with company commander, company second-in-command and company sergeant major, with troop commanders and sergeants, concerning corporals and troopers, is how that experience will be transferred. With focussed conversations allowing that transfer of experience, mutual trust and understanding will become well embedded within your companies.

‘Gentlemen, are there any initial questions on the Colonel’s requirement for your training?’

‘No?’

‘Is it clear to all the requirement for your correct regimental dress from tomorrow morning’s parade until further orders?’

The chorus responded, ‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Is it also clear, following tomorrow morning’s parade, all officers shall ride out with the Colonel on a training activity to discuss the proposed regimental camp?’

Again, the chorus responded, ‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Is it also clear that the regimental officers have been invited to a ball hosted by an eminent family, the de Rossi, in over a week’s time? If you are unable to attend the ball, you are to make your excuses directly to the Colonel. Is that understood?’

Again, the chorus responded, ‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Now, am I correct, Captain Jobert, you wish to make a quick remark upon the subject?’

‘Yes, Sir,’ said Jobert, sitting up straight, ‘I would indeed, if this is an appropriate moment.’

Cobereau indicated with a sweep of his hand that the floor was his, so Jobert rose from his chair and addressed the group.

All eyes were upon him and, considering the serious nature of the topics thus far, there was a certain hesitancy at the table as to what could one of their peers contribute further.

‘Thank you, Sir, for this opportunity,’ initially bowing his head to Cobereau, then looking up and down both sides of the table, Jobert continued.

‘Gentlemen, I shall not detain you long, as your duties await. For my regimental brothers in the 4th, 5th and 6th Squadrons, of whom I’ve not had the pleasure of being introduced, I am Captain André Jobert, commander 2nd Company.’

With that, Jobert bowed his head to those officers on the opposite side of the table. Some nodded back. Jobert noted the fencing master, Captain Bidonne, rest his chin upon his hand with the elbow on the table, squinting with his permanently fixed relaxed smile.

‘Our Colonel and senior regimental gentlemen maintain our fo-

cus on the perils of military operations that lie in the days ahead. For many of us, our experience in such intensive manoeuvres is scant. We would also be aware of the threat to our success in the shape of foreign and domestic agents and spies. To that end, I am forced to make my following remarks with discretion and in code.'

Some at the table carefully looked askance to the senior officers at either ends of the table to enlighten their growing confusion. Some noticed Geourdai leaning back, his lop-sided smile in place, watching the others at the table. To those prescient, something was afoot.

'I refer particularly to the loss of honour, let alone personal suffering, that will ensue should we fail in an impending regimental operation, to which I can refer in present company as ...,' at that, Jobert looked over both shoulders to the closed doors of the room, then leant in to loudly whisper, 'Madame de Rossi's ball, and the risk and subsequent misery that lie within "dancing".'

His theatrical emphasis on "dancing" allowed many faces at the table to acknowledge to each other the light-hearted nature of Jobert's approach.

'I have no wish to slight your honour, gentlemen,' throwing up his hands, Jobert declared, 'I am not saying that any man present is inexperienced in ... "dancing", but you may be aware of other brother officers, who may need instruction in the brutal art of "dancing".'

At this, Geourdai led a growing chorus, who, seeking the cue, chimed in with, "dancing" themselves.

'Are you saying, Sir,' abruptly breaking the mood, the grim Major Cobereau stood and addressed Jobert in a menacing whisper, 'that you are aware of whispers desiring instruction in ... "dancing"?''

The chorus picked up the cue, as Cobereau waved in their participation.

'My own agents, Sir,' Jobert whispered, 'have made me aware of regimental limitations in ... "dancing".'

The chorus, enjoying the distraction from the serious responsibilities before them, all whispered, “dancing,” to each other.

Cobereau folded his arms, his fierce moustache twitching, ‘I have bitter experience from this form of military operation, Sir, and I’m aware that any instruction of “dancing” would require a master of such dark arts in attendance. Are your agents aware of a master of “dancing” in our midst?’

Various ‘ooh’ and ‘ah’ emitted from those present.

‘I am informed, Sir, that such fellows can be found for a price.’

Cobereau, although his face held no humour at all, ‘Again, from harsh experience, Sir, I am aware that ...’

‘Dancing,’ anticipated those seated.

‘Or similar military operations require a large, open area, a veritable Champ de Mars, on which to practise the dreadful drill of ...’

‘Dancing,’ being more loudly declared on each occasion.

‘Are your agents aware of such a location?’ Cobereau leaned on the table with both hands.

Jobert mirrored him, and leaning onto the table, ‘Of this location I do not know, Sir, but I am aware of its code name. I believe this terrible location, referred to, I am told, as ...,’ he paused to check if all was clear, ‘the Tavern of the Sky-blue Pompom.’

A drawn-out ‘ooh’ was shared from the chorus at this information.

Cobereau rapped the table. ‘This is a most serious situation, gentlemen, and a situation I know to be doomed to failure unless ...’

‘Ooh,’ went some.

Looking about him, Cobereau continued, ‘Unless there is a captive enemy force on which to practise such wicked evolutions. Is there, Sir, captive enemy at this prepared terrain to which you refer, that other officers might complete manoeuvres in “dancing”?’

Now many leant forward, keen to commit if the right answer was provided.

‘At this dreadful place, yes, Sir,’ Jobert continued, ‘my agents inform me there are those of whom you suggest.’

Not just 'ooh', but knowing half-smiles were shared at the table.

Cobereau again rapping on the table until all was silent, 'Then may I suggest, gentlemen, since no man here would admit himself deficient in the wicked art of,' Cobereau put a finger to his lips to soften the chorus, "'dancing", that there is no more to discuss. And with that, I dismiss you all to your duties.'

The officers stood. Raive, Cobereau and Maccard departed. The entire group all followed with silly grins on their faces.

As he fell into step with Jobert, Geourdai asked, 'What enemy force?'

'Duck tells me there is a suite of obliging ladies across the lane,' Jobert confided.

'Oh, them,' Geourdai raised his eyebrows, 'Well, our messing officer will be busy with his negotiations.'

'Not to worry,' confidentially Jobert winked and grinned, 'My agents in the shadows will observe his progress. Now let us find Koschak and see if we have a company to train.'



It was a scene of riotous gaiety.

The laughing young men with tri-colour cockades and ribbons in their hats and caps, some with tri-colour sashes, some with sloshing beer steins, strolled the length of the regimental parade ground as if entering a town fair during a harvest holiday. Two young fellows, one with fiddle and one with fife, even had a merry, dusty dance cavorting in the centre of the ramble.

Although a few mounted corporals could be seen to shepherd the men along, proceedings were undone as a few 'old hand' troopers from the company, being men from the local districts, entered the

fray and greeted friends and family. Around them, the recruits of 7th Company, having arrived yesterday, stopped drilling to cheer the happy crowd, and non-commissioned officers stepped in to ensure the drill lessons continued uninterrupted.

Sergeant Major Koschak sat on his war horse like a pillar with a bemused grin, and watched the shambolic merriment enter through the stone entrance to the barracks. Beside him, mounted on a grey horse, sat a headquarters' sergeant carrying the tri-colour regimental standard.

Finally, Koschak spied a mounted sergeant, 2nd Company's own Sergeant Clenaude, a heavy man on a big horse, pass through the stone entrance and wave to him, indicating he was the last man in the column.

'Who wants lunch?' bellowed Clenaude, 'Gather around the tri-colour, lads.'

With a cheer, the revelry gathered in a circle around Koschak and the standard bearer. Koschak waved the crowd to silence and the mounted corporals urged, 'Quiet, lads, listen in to the Sergeant Major.'

When silence descended, Koschak bellowed, 'Vive la République.'

The square boomed with response from the recruits, as well as those drilling. The two horses in the centre of the crowd skittered at the roar, causing those closest to press back quickly. The standard bearer held the regimental standard aloft and wafted its silken folds.

As the crowd and horses settled, Koschak bellowed again, 'Welcome, to the 24th Chasseurs à Cheval.'

Again, the young men cheered loudly, and again, the embroidered regimental flag was waved above their heads by the mounted bearer.

Then Koschak lent on his saddle bow, looked into the smiling faces about him and said intimately, 'Who wants lunch?'

That question resulted in a deafening roar.

Waving his audience to silence, Koschak addressed them, 'Lads,

listen, listen carefully. We want to get you to lunch, but there are a few tasks to be done to make that happen. I need your help. Keep quiet, listen carefully, do as I ask quickly, and a hearty soup, fresh bread and wine will be yours before long.'

Many in the crowd began to cheer, but quite a few others, and the accompanying corporals, looked about their companions and motioned for silence.

'You,' Koschak pointed at one of the young musicians, 'Yes, you with the fife. What is the loudest, shrillest note you can play?'

The young musician blew a loud squeal, and everyone recoiled and groaned.

'Excellent. Listen, friends, that is our signal for silence. Lad, if I point at you, you split our ear drums. Understand?' The boy grinned and nodded.

'My name is Sergeant Major Koschak, and you will address me as Sergeant Major. Over there you will see one of your corporals you arrived with. I'm going to request that you all line up, beside that corporal, in your village groups, friends and family assembling together, with your recruit paperwork in your hands. All right, off we go.'

Having dismounted and given their horses to a few old hands, Sergeant Clenaude and the corporals who accompanied the men for the last twenty-four hours gently, and with good humour, pressed the chattering crowd into a single rank facing the Sergeant Major.

Koschak pointed to his piper and winked, and the piper produced a piercing blast.

'Men, you are all members of the 2nd Company. Yes, the 2nd Company. Thank you for assembling so quickly. A long line of fellows facing in this direction, shoulder to shoulder, is called a rank. In this formation, I look at you now and I know the Austrians are trembling in their boots.'

This caused a spirited, 'Hurrah!' from all.

Koschak grinned, waved for silence and then pointed to his piper. With the signal, all stood silent.

‘Excellent!’ boomed Koschak, ‘Now when I give you the command, you are all going to turn to the right towards those tables. Wait for it, wait for it, wait for my command, 2nd Company. When you are in the new formation, facing the back of the next man’s head, or file, you will move forward and receive your new uniforms. Now ...

‘2nd Company, will move to the right in file. Right TURN!’

As the company’s first drill movement, the resultant chaotic shuffle caused deep breaths, rolled eyes, and wry grins from all uniformed personnel watching.

‘Well done, 2nd Company,’ laughed Koschak.

He and the standard bearer dismounted, handing over their horses, and strode down the file of recruits to a series of trestle tables, besides which waited laden, unlimbered wagons.

Upon the tables were laid out all the items that the new soldiers were to receive. Old hand troopers stood nearby, between tables and wagons, ready to assist the process.

Two corporals managed the head of the file, checking the recruits’ documents. Then, one by one, a recruit moved forward to one of the two trestle tables where Sergeant Martine, two corporals and a few old hands were waiting.

Martine was clearly in his element; to each man he greeted, ‘Welcome, lad, to the 2nd Company of the 24th Chasseurs à Cheval. The corporal will read out an item on the table, and you will put that item into either your satchel, your paillasse, or your saddle port-manteau.’

As the recruit packed away his equipment on one table, the other table was laid out by an attendant old hand from the nearby wagons ready for the next man.

‘Well done, young fellow, well done. Now, go to the next table and hand over your paperwork,’ Martine directed

‘What’s this, Sir?’ a recruit might ask.

‘Don’t call me “Sir”, I work for a living,’ Martine grinned, ‘That,

my lad, is your paillasse. It's a mattress cover you fill with straw, so you may sleep each evening like a babe at your mother's breast and awaken each morning ready for a new adventure. Now keep moving, well done.'

A further twenty paces away from Martine's equipment table, Second Lieutenant Gouvion and Sergeant Rodau were seated at a table, beside which the standard hung in the morning air. Jobert and Geourdai took up spare chairs upon their arrival from across the square. As each recruit approached the table beside which Gouvion receipted the man's documents from the central recruiting office and entered each man's name on a growing roll.

Rodau then took the equipment issue paperwork and passed the recruit a slip of paper upon which was written his name, company, troop, platoon, and section.

Rodau looked each man in the eye and clearly stated, 'Keep this piece of paper on you at all times. Produce it whenever you are asked. You need this piece of paper to eat and be paid. Lose it and you will be punished. Do you understand?'

From each man, Rodau received a sober, 'Yes, Sir.'

'Now wait here until summoned by the Sergeant Major. Do you understand?' Rodau drilled into each man with grey, unblinking eyes. Again, a hesitant nod or a muted 'yes' and each man's face showed a foretaste of the days to come.

Koshack called over, 'Next man. Yes, you lad, over you come. Bring your kit with you, lad, the Republic has gone to great expense to provide you the best equipment in Europe, and you lose it the first time you put it down.'

Beyond the tables, Koshack was laying out a seated formation, building up the company one section of twelve men at a time. Four men were to sit in a rank abreast on their paillasses on the ground, with a further two ranks behind them, the section corporal and the three old hands marking out the seating arrangement.

Ever so slowly, one section became two sections, or a platoon.

Then a further two sections became a second platoon, or troop.

As the initial long file diminished, each recruit receiving equipment and handing over documents, the second troop slowly filled out to become the full 2nd Company.

Because of their original groupings of friends, the recruits came across from Rodau's table to sit with known village friends or family members. The section corporal and the troopers welcomed each fellow to his seating position in the mid-morning sun, and kept the new recruits from wandering off, and not to spread out their new equipment in the dirt. As laden wagons were emptied, troopers would push them to a parking area beside the stable's walls, then join Koshack in completing the increasing company formation.

Jobert kept a keen eye on each parcel of equipment, watching if sufficient stock was on hand for each man. Jobert was impressed how Koshack commanded the chaotic process with good humour and regimental dignity. With about a dozen members of the company absent on duty with the remount group, Jobert calculated that left approximately thirty members of the 2nd Company to manage and integrate the arrival of the new men. Jobert acknowledged that a new company sergeant major was managing this each day for twelve days and that the firm hand of Lieutenant Colonel Raive guided all.

Jobert had experienced the introduction of eight to ten recruits into an entire regiment before, but never over sixty men into a company of one-hundred odd. Even with a dozen men absent, there were still one-hundred people, all his responsibility, seated, or in the process of being seated. In his previous experience, both in barracks and on campaign, the strength state of his previous company had never exceeded seventy personnel.

Finally, the last man was being processed, accompanied by Sergeant Clenaude.

Jobert watched the heavy man, dark hair swept back into a queue, with thick Hussar plaits against each temple, a full, drooping moustache covering acne-pocked skin. Jobert marked Clenaude down

as rogue until proven otherwise. Martine greeted Clenaude at his table with his usual good-natured jibes, but Clenaude grimaced, nodded and passed by with his young charge. At the document table, Clenaude executed a crisp salute and uttered, 'Sir, Sir, Sir,' as he observed Gouvion, Geourdai and Jobert in turn.

Jobert stood. 'Captain Jobert, commander 2nd Company,' his eyes drilled into Clenaude without smiling.

Clenaude hesitated, then chose to salute again, 'Umm, hello, Sir. Sergeant Clenaude,' flickering eyes under thick black eyebrows gauged their new commander.

As Clenaude handed Gouvion the consolidated recruit list from the Avignon centre, Jobert said, 'Well done on bringing in the men, Sergeant. I am aware we have our hands full today, but I look forward to speaking with you soon.'

As the last man filled his allocated position, and trestle tables and chairs were cleared into empty wagons, Koshack signalled to his piper, and the shrill squeal created silence.

'Men of the 2nd Company, well done on achieving that task so well. Each of you now sits in your sections. Ensure, right now, you know the face of one of your friends in your section, one old hand, and your section commander.'

The invitation to look about them caused another sharp note from the fife.

'Men of 2nd Company, your sections are grouped into platoons. These three men,' Koschak indicated Clenaude, Rodau, and Martine, and myself, will guide you as platoon sergeants over the coming days. You note your section corporals, platoon sergeants and myself, as the Company Sergeant Major, wear helmets. If you are addressed by any person in a helmet over the next few weeks, you are to listen respectfully and act immediately. Being eagle-eyed chasseurs, you will have noticed the sky-blue pompom on each of our plumes. That sky-blue pompom indicates a man of the 2nd Company, and therefore a man who is concerned with your welfare.

‘Now, I want to introduce some very important people within our company, also with sky-blue pompoms on their plumes. The commissioned officers of the 2nd Company, the men that will lead us to victory in battle against the Austrians.’

Jobert, Geourdai and Gouvion stepped forward.

‘You will note these gentlemen wear bicornes. When any person wearing a bicorne enters a room, you must cease what you are doing, remain silent and listen respectfully.’

All eyes watched the three officers with a mix of suspicion, confusion and awe, as Koshack nodded to Jobert.

Jobert stepped forward into a central position, surveyed the company in three ranks with a frontage of over thirty men

‘My name is Jobert,’ said Jobert loudly, ‘I started my service as you are today, as a trooper, thirteen years ago, and now I’m a captain. I am the Commander of 2nd Company. Welcome to the 2nd Company of the 24th Chasseur à Cheval Regiment.’

‘The War Committee of the National Convention has tasked the Sergeant Major and I to prepare us all for victory on the battlefield. The Sergeant Major and I take such responsibility very seriously. I echo the Sergeant Major’s previous statement, in that as I look at you all on our first day together, I despair for the Republic’s enemies. Sergeant Major, carry on.’

‘Sir!’ Koschak saluted.

Returning the salute, Jobert turned, ‘Gentlemen, shall we?’

Geourdai and Gouvion turned and departed with Jobert, leaving the senior non-commissioned officers to their work.

Koshack turned to face the company and bellowed, ‘Who’s ready for lunch?’ to which a ravenous chorus cheered.



Back in their kitchen at the tavern, Mathieu had laid out bottles of wine, wooden platters of hard sausage, fresh baguettes, cloves of roast garlic, rounds of soft cheese and apples on the bare, but scrubbed, kitchen table.

‘2nd Company,’ Jobert toasted.

‘2nd Company,’ sighed Geourdai, sipping his wine, ‘I’ll only take a little wine today.’ He was still obviously hung over from the evening before.

‘2nd Company, gentleman,’ responded Gouvion quietly, ‘Between the wooden sabre and the quill this morning I can barely raise my right arm. I prided myself on my fencing at the School, but those fellows from 1st Squadron we opposed this morning were brutal.’

Hesitating to say more between gritted teeth, the other two could see he was hurting.

‘Bidonne, the fencing master, is an old 7th Chasseur hand,’ Geourdai toyed with a piece of cheese, ‘Major Cobereau and I know him well. If you think 1st Squadron is uncompromising, wait and see what Bidonne has in the coming mornings.’

‘But we didn’t stop to refine our actions. It was blow after blow for an hour,’ Gouvion shook his head.

‘In battle, combat will be over in minutes,’ munched Jobert, pointing a baguette at Gouvion, ‘You’ll barely trade more than three cuts with each face you see in a melee, but that is not the point of the morning’s fencing. You, as an officer, need to know, deep in your bones, that you are good for a fight. This sense of hard-earned confidence must emanate from each movement, look, and word prior to an action. The men will look to you for this confidence. Their white-knuckled grips on sabres and reins, vomit in the back of their throats, hearts pounding out of their chests, and every eye on you. And there you are, knowing your enemy can not match the hours of suffering produced by Captain Bidonne.’

Gouvion picked up some bread and cheese and winced when Geourdai slapped his shoulder.

‘There will be people,’ chortled Geourdai, ‘At the bathhouse down by the river in the old city, who will massage your shoulders and arms.’

Gouvion looked to both senior men, ‘Sir, might I be excused this afternoon to both take up this suggestion, and, also seek a dancing master?’

‘Yes, indeed,’ Jobert’s eye-brows shooting up, with a wink to Geourdai, ‘The “dancing” is scheduled for the night after next. Ensure our tavern master knows of the extra guests and provides a suitable dance floor.’

‘Yes, Sir,’ Gouvion nibbling on the cheese half-heartedly.

‘So, what does Koschak have planned for the company this afternoon?’ Jobert enquired of Geourdai.

‘After lunch, introduce the men to the barracks, walk them through the fire drill, scrub out and white-wash their accommodation and fill their paillasses with straw. Then, tonight, put all the men through a hot bath, before fitting them out in their new uniforms and getting polish into their boots for tomorrow’s parade.’

‘And they’re all sleeping on their paillasses on the floor?’ Jobert poured more wine.

‘Yes, Sir. It is the only way they will all fit in our third of the dormitory,’ said Geourdai, finding his appetite, smearing hot garlic onto pieces of baguette, ‘The only men in beds are the section corporals; two to a bed in one small room and the duty sergeant in the other.’

‘And the agenda for tomorrow?’ said Jobert washing down sausage and cheese with wine.

‘Fencing with gloves,’ started Geourdai.

‘Excuse me, Sir? Why gloves?’ interrupted Gouvion, wincing as he reached for his cup.

‘Because the sabre is harder to grip with gloves,’ said Geourdai with lop-sided smile spreading wide, ‘If you think your forearm aches now, wait until this time tomorrow. I promise you, it will get worse.’

‘Where was I? Fencing. Yes. Then dismounted parade in our new uniforms. We will all be in our new regimental tailcoats and bonnets, as will the senior non-commissioned officers. Mathieu and Amy will have your two jackets all prepared by this evening, I’m assured.

‘Then the officers depart on the Colonel’s excursion to the new bivouac site. The men will boil their old civilian clothes, be issued with sword belts, cross belts, and cartridge pouches, then scrub out and white-wash out these tavern rooms, the non-commissioned officers’ rooms, and our orderly room.’

‘Any drill?’ enquired Jobert, reaching for more sausage.

‘Indeed, Sir, sufficient drill to form column of fours by tomorrow evening,’ concluded Geourdai.

Jobert nodded.

Column of fours was the standard formation of four horsemen abreast, used for road movement, the fastest formation for moving across country and the elementary building block for wider battle formations. Viewed from side on, 2nd Company’s column would be twenty-four ranks long, mounted or dismounted, and when on their horses at the regulation twelve metres from horse nose to horse nose, the company column would be over three-hundred metres long.

‘And your duties this afternoon?’ Jobert noticed crumbs on his jacket as he leant in for an apple.

‘Sergeant Rodau and I will consolidate the entries in the company register and present it to headquarters,’ sighed Geourdai.

‘If that’s the case, then Duck and I will take the horses out, have a look about the town and meet you back here for dinner.’

As the officers stood up from the lunch table, Jobert winked at Duck and Mathieu as they both predicted his intended destination in the city that afternoon.

‘Hmm, lovely,’ grinned Mathieu as he swept back his fringe.

Chapter Nine

April 1793, Valence, France



Jobert studied the three faces staring at him and was unable to gauge their reactions. Turning in their seats as they had, shadows covered their faces from the wavering firelight from the fireplace. Jobert deliberately kept his own face emotionless in the circumstance.

Morin broke the silence by drawing deeply on his cigar.

‘So, you’re saying,’ Morin said slowly, as he blew a long stream of smoke to the darkened ceiling, ‘that someone has told you that there are four-thousand sabres in an armoury three days ride from here?’

‘Yes, Sir,’ rasped Jobert.

‘Jobert,’ began Raive, choosing his words carefully, ‘how might the reliability of this information be assessed?’

Jobert breathed deeply and placed both hands on his knees in an effort to keep his reply focussed.

‘The contents of all armouries in the vicinity of Lyon, which includes this small armoury in Valence, are compiled in a report dated the first day of the month. This report is received in Paris five days later. A review of the Lyon armoury returns for the 1st November 1792, the 1st December 1792 and the 1st January 1793 shows that

Valence report was always included in the combined Lyon return.'

Jobert paused as Cobereau slowly raised a hand, and looked across to Raive, then back to Jobert.

'You are saying your informant has access to the reports of the National Convention's War Committee.'

'I do not know that, Sir,' swallowed Jobert, 'but I would assume, as you possibly have, that it is so.'

Cobereau breathed out slowly, then leant back in his armchair, drained his brandy and reached for the nearby crystal decanter.

'Those Valence reports up to the 1st January 1793,' Jobert continued, 'listed only edged-weapons, and they consistently reported the Valence armoury contained four-thousand cavalry sabres, four-thousand cavalry swords, four-thousand infantry swords, four-thousand infantry briquets and four-thousand bayonets.'

Morin swayed in his chair, his mouth twisted as he caught himself from swearing. 'Enough for four regiments of chasseurs or hussars, and four regiments of dragoons or heavy cavalry, and two regiments of infantry,' he coughed. Morin blew out his breath, then grunted, 'Cobereau, the brandy. Go on, Jobert.'

Waiting until Morin has splashed brandy into his balloon, Jobert continued, 'The Valence return is completely absent from within the Lyon report for the 1st February 1793. Perhaps a coincidence, it is worth noting that His ..., the King was executed on the 21st January 1793. Again, on the 1st March 1793, the Lyon report does not include the Valence return. The War Committee has only become aware of this irregularity in the last ten days. The message was couriered to me within a day or two of revelation. I received the letter today during the uniform parade.'

Jobert concluded, by breathing slowly and staring directly at Raive.

'How exactly,' Raive asked stroking his moustache, 'is it known by whom the weapons are held, and for whom they are intended to be issued?'

‘The letter I have received informs me, Sir,’ said Jobert, ‘it is the War Committee themselves who have assumed the Republic’s weapons, held in a Republican armoury, and being withheld by anti-Republican agents for issue to anti-Republican forces.’

‘I’m imagining such weaponry being delivered to the forces erupting in civil war in the Vendee,’ mused Morin grimly.

Raive shrugged his eyebrows at Jobert, without smiling, and then taking up his pencil and notebook, then addressing Morin, ‘Should Jobert depart at first light, Sir, he’ll arrive at the armoury within two weeks of the anomaly’s discovery. It is reasonable to assume Paris will have arrived there before, but it would do no harm to know.’

‘But to confirm the allegation, Jobert would need to gain entry,’ Morin sucked on his cigar, ‘How, Captain, would you gain entry into an armoury, presumably held by our enemies?’

‘If my party was to depart at first light, we would arrive at Valence before sundown three days hence,’ Jobert said carefully, ‘We would observe the armoury, its environs and the routines of its staff, that afternoon, through that night, all the next, or fourth, day, and the next night if required. Based on our observations, we would enter the armoury the fourth night or the fifth day.’

Cobereau turned his face back to Morin, to which Morin shrugged. Cobereau turned back to Jobert and asked grimly, ‘Who would you include in your party?’

‘Mercier, de Chabenac, two sergeants and two corporals from my company, Sir.’

‘Why those?’

‘I’ve come to trust Mercier’s judgement. De Chabenac’s past may be able to open doors that Mercier’s and mine cannot. I value the cunning and initiative of the two company sergeants. The two corporals are well known to me; one is my groom and the other is Geourdai’s valet.’

‘Huh,’ grunted Cobereau, his fierce eyes not leaving Jobert, as he took a mouthful of brandy, ‘By Geourdai’s valet, do mean old Amy?’

‘Yes, Sir’

‘He was a corporal driver when I was a recruit in the 7th Chasseurs,’ Cobereau turned to explain to Morin, ‘He caught an English sabre in the face, as a lad, at Warburg in 1760. He’s stood fast in the 7th ever since. He’s a good man.’

‘Indeed,’ growled Morin, turning back to face the flames in the hearth, ‘So, Jobert, you walk through the front gate, bid the keepers “How do you do?”, and confirm the weapons are all there on the racks. Then what?’

‘Sir,’ said Jobert, ‘I would send a message to the raiding force, who I would position less than one hour south of Valence.’

‘And there we have it,’ nodded Morin, tapping his cigar ash into the fire, and raising his thick eyebrows to Raive.

‘It would be possible,’ mused Raive, into his notebook, ‘to compose a raiding force and set it on the road to Valence behind this reconnaissance party. The raiding force would need to be larger than one squadron, at least two, with an appropriate commander,’ Raive nodded to Cobereau, ‘and include a number of wagons from the regimental train. Those empty wagons would certainly slow the column’s progress. But then, with Jobert’s advance party using the fourth day in surveillance, the raiding force could well arrive at the armoury by dawn of day five.’

Cobereau again looked back to Morin, but as the fire held Morin’s attention, Cobereau turned to Jobert, and jutting out his chin, asked, ‘Have you informed any members of the suggested reconnaissance party of the proposed scheme?’

‘No, Sir,’ Jobert shook his head.

‘Is there anything particular you might need,’ Raive asked, looking up from his notes.

‘Civilian clothing and pistols, which we have, Sir’ said Jobert, ‘and civilian saddles and ball cartridges, which we do not.’

‘We’ll find you enough officer’s saddles,’ mused Morin into the fire.

‘Rope? Powder? Fuse?’ Raive suggested.

‘Rope, perhaps, Sir,’ Jobert nodded, ‘But I don’t feel powder will be necessary for the advance party.’

‘How will we know when to send the raiding force into Valence?’ Cobereau rasped gruffly.

‘My intent, Sir,’ said Jobert turning to his chief of squadron, ‘was to leave Corporal Amy at a point south of Valence, a place known to my corporal groom, and a place where the raiding force could be intercepted and accommodated. Upon the signal from inside the armoury, my groom would cover the distance, with either of the simple messages “Enter Valence immediately” or “Remain where you are”. If appropriate, then my man would guide the force into the town to the armoury.’

Raive looked up to the dark face of an ornate clock on the mantelpiece.

‘With your permission, Sir,’ Raive said, ‘Being nine o’clock now, we might release Jobert to raise his advance party.’

‘Indeed,’ grunted Morin.

‘Then, Jobert,’ said Raive, ‘you and your party attend me at four o’clock tomorrow morning for a final briefing and be prepared to depart for Valence at five o’clock. I’ll have rope and saddles over in the next hour,’ then turning to Morin, ‘Anything else, Sir?’

‘Ensure you and your party get some sleep, Jobert,’ said Morin sliding his eyes grimly to Jobert, ‘now get about your duties.’



Four evenings later in Valence, the sound of a scuffed boot sole, on the wooden stairs outside, jerked Jobert’s head as he brought himself back from half-sleep. He picked up the two cocked pistols

by his side, firmly shoved Duck's boot with his own, without taking his eyes of the dim outline of the door. Duck woke with a grunt, rolled over to sit up from his sleeping position on the floor, and took up his loaded and cocked pistols.

In the pitch-black Valence tavern corridor, beyond the door, a wooden bucket, deliberately placed, was heard to scrape on the timber floor, its metal handle clanking on its side as it moved.

On this side of the door, the room was warm and silent, the coals in the hearth providing a weak glow, outlining de Chabenac and Bredieux breathing deeply under their blankets.

The bucket scraped again on the corridor floor beyond the door.

With that signal, Duck placed his pistols on the floor, shook out his blanket and returned to sleep.

Jobert stood, slid back the door bolt allowing Mercier and Rodau to enter, then moved to the fire to place on the kettle and a few small logs.

Mercier and Rodau were cold from their midnight prowling. Mercier hung his wet cape on a wall peg, sat on a stool by the hearth and extended his hands to the growing flames. Locking the door behind him, Rodau draped his coat over the back of a chair, sat and pulled off his sodden boots.

'Tea? Bread?' whispered Jobert, conscious of the sleeping men around the small room.

'Yes, please' nodded Mercier.

'No, thanks, Sir,' said Rodau quietly, 'I'll get my head down.' With that he reached over and poked the snoring bundle of Bredieux on a nearby cot.

'Shift your skinny arse, Bredieux,' Rodau rasped.

The poke caused a wet, hacking cough from Bredieux, which seemed to dislodge something in his lungs that he noisily swallowed. Bredieux rolled over on the cot releasing a long, odious fart.

'Oh, delightful,' grimaced Rodau, pulling his blanket and cape about him and lying down on the cot beside Bredieux.

Mercier tipped his head toward Rodau and mouthed silently to Jobert ‘Good man’.

‘What is the time?’ said Jobert, nodding in acknowledgement, and pouring a mug of black tea.

‘Just after one o’clock,’ whispered Mercier into the steaming mug ‘Anything to report?’ asked Jobert once Mercier had taken a few sips.

‘Nothing. No feet, no hooves, no wheels have moved through the armoury’s far gate since we laid the sand across the road before dawn. You?’

‘The local guards on the main gate in the lane changed at midnight, again confirming their six-hour shifts,’ said Jobert stoking the embers, ‘But no-one has entered or departed through the gate since the fat man at seven o’clock this morning. Perched high in the old cathedral, de Chabenac and Bredieux confirmed smoke coming from the left-most chimney all day, but nothing from the right-most chimney.’

Mercier screwed up his face, breathed deeply and dunked a crust of bread into his tea. ‘These gate guards,’ he said, ‘Are they loyal National Guardsmen unknowingly protecting a traitorous secret, or enemy in disguise and thus part of the conspiracy?’

‘They’ll have their skulls cracked and hands hog-tied, no matter what. I’ll open their throats, if I have to,’ said Jobert grimly, ‘But I do have some good news. At the evening change of guards on the main gate, Bredieux attempted to deliver a barrow of firewood to the armoury. He was told to return in the morning when bread was collected.’

‘Ah,’ brightened Mercier, as he ate his hot, soggy bread, ‘So, our fat man, who emerged at seven o’clock this morning, ought to re-emerge again?’

‘Indeed,’ nodded Jobert, ‘So, one way in, only at seven o’clock, with five hours before the guard changes.’

‘Hmm,’ sipped Mercier, looking into the flames, ‘Cobereau would

have our squadrons with Amy by now. Once the signal is given, you feel confident Duck and Amy will connect within the hour?’

‘Yes. Absolutely,’ said Jobert, then, with a half-grin, ‘How about you? Ready to shave off your glorious moustache?’

‘That is not a question that a gentleman should ask a lady,’ sniffed Mercier.

‘Oh, I beg your forgiveness, Madame,’ whispered Jobert.

‘Oh, insult upon insult, Mademoiselle, please.’

‘Indeed, Miss, then you had best arrange a fine fellow to defend your honour.’

‘I was hoping my brave chevalier might attend me at seven o’clock tomorrow morning.’

The friends smiled into the flames.

‘So,’ said Mercier, as he swallowed the last of his tea, ‘this Valence stunt and the convoy ambushes. What is the source of your penchant for deception?’

‘Perhaps a topic for a different fire on a different night,’ smiled Jobert, ‘You need to sleep before we reveille at four o’clock,’ pointing to the vacant cot in the dim light, then turning to look Mercier in the eye, ‘But, in short, what would you do, how far would you go, to get the edge over your enemies?’



Just after seven o’clock, three deep, hollow clicks of internal metal bolts being withdrawn heralded the creaking opening of a metal-rimmed wooden door, set into one of the two iron-embossed timber gates of the main entrance way of the armoury. The door opened, and the two scruffy, unshaven National Guardsmen sentries turned from the embers of their small brazier. A portly young man

squeezed through the door, out into the dripping dimness of the armoury lane, and locked the door behind him.

From his curled sleeping position in the gutter, Duck sat up stiffly. This was the signal to the others. Duck wrapped his vile blanket, saturated with stale urine and rancid wine, about his shoulders and waited. He had lain in that position in the entrance to the armoury lane for over two hours, and now his hips and knees ached incredibly. Nevertheless, Duck ground his teeth together and pushed into his pain to stay focussed on his vital role.

The thirty-metre long armoury lane, wide enough for two wagons, formed a T-intersection off the crooked Valence street, now filling with Valence citizens. Enclosed by high stone walls, above the lane was a timber-shingle roof, badly in need of repair, through which too much rain dribbled, and not enough light crept.

Seeing Duck sit up in his position just inside the armoury lane leg of the T, Mercier and Bredieux, out in the street, stopped sweeping and moved their barrows of dung, pottery shards and leaves towards the junction. Disguised as peasant women, Mercier and Bredieux had been sweeping the street for over two hours as well, ensuring they were noticed and ignored whilst the guards changed shifts one hour ago. Their moving of the barrow was the signal to the final three men who could not see Duck from their concealed positions.

With a large woven-cane basket over his arm, the fat young man from the armoury waddled down the dim lane, skipping around the puddles, cape billowing, golden curls poking out from beneath his green felt hat.

In the dark corner of the lane, a near-fingerless hand extended from a putrid bundle of rags and said, 'Sir, a sou for an old soldier?' The boy skirted the arm and the stench and entered the street.

Amidst the morning throng, heads bent in the drizzle, the young man whistled a merry tune, side-stepped a dung barrow and a pipe-smoking street sweeper, and proceeded up the street towards the bakery. He paused on the bakery's front step to admire the cut of

a rather smart jacket, the fabric of the jacket matching the hatband, worn by a tall, well-dressed young man leading a limping horse.

He then entered the bakery, and its cloud of delicious fresh-baked goods, for today's provisions.

De Chabenac continued to lead a limping Green down the street. He halted Green across from the dim armoury lane and bent to pick up a hoof to examine it carefully. As Green had his hoof checked, one street sweeper moved to the far side of the T-intersection, whilst the other smaller sweeper entered the dripping lane, frozen fingers tucked under her armpits and broom held in the crook of her elbow, to sweep leaves from the gutters and puddles.

One guard at the gate, sat on a small, three-legged stool by the brazier's dull coals, wrapped his threadbare blue jacket about him and puffed at his pipe. The other fellow pissed against the iron gate's hinge and watched the comings and goings in the rainy street, framed by the walls of the lane.

A tall, portly gentleman, with an old-fashioned coat, walking cane, battered tricorne and grey, powdered wig wandered into the lit frame, and struck up a conversation with the well-dressed toff with the lame horse. Old Powder Wig, as the guard nicknamed him, guided Young Mr Toff and his horse out of the middle of the busy, wet street and, within the relatively sheltered entrance of the lane, inspected the horse's feet. The elderly gentleman bent over stiffly, with the aid of his cane, and ran his fingers up and down each of the horse's legs. The horse, not well-bred, but well-muscled and in good condition the guardsman thought, stood patiently during the examination, and lifted his hooves willingly.

Then Young Mr Toff attempted to lead the horse in the middle of the street and lane junction so Old Powder Wig could observe the gait of the horse. Old Powder Wig was unable to move quickly enough to position himself to observe the horse's foot fall, so the drunkard was roused from his rancid slumber, induced with a few coins to lead the horse, which allowed Old Powder Wig and Young

Mr Toff to evaluate the horse's lameness.

Avoiding the circling horse, one of the street sweeper hags had crossed the street to join her mate who was smoking her pipe in the shelter of the lane. The sweeper had found an old cigar butt in the gutter and was wiping mud off it. The two women placed their brooms against the wall, and with a small flint, attempted to coax the wet cigar butt to life.

At that moment, the podgy boy from the armoury ducked out of the rain of the street, avoiding the lame horse, led by the putrid beggar, and the two crones fussing over their flint.

The guards smiled widely when they saw a young trollop on his arm. The skinny hipped girl, not much more than sixteen, was giggling, tucked up under the young man's cape, kissing him on the cheek and tickling his crotch with her fingers. For his part, his eyes were wide with surprise, perhaps alarm, but a rictus grin was plastered across his face, despite the wavering squeaks of discomfort.

'Oh, my beautiful boy, don't you lose it before I've had you,' purred Rodau, approaching the guards with his beau, fluttering his mascaraed eyes from beneath the brow of his tattered bonnet.

'Now, my sweetheart, get out your key so you can stick it in my key hole,' Rodau winked at the guards, and rubbed his inner thighs through his gown suggestively. The four of them clustered at the small door set into the gate, within the cloud of Rodau's cheap perfume. The guards laughed, the portly young man grunted with pain from the wrist-lock Rodau had applied within the folds of the cape.

'No matter if you lose it, my darling, I'll soon revive you when you see what I can do with this here hard sausage,' Rodau giggled, nodding to the sausages and baguettes poking from the cane basket, 'Where does a girl get satisfaction these days?'

'Here, my handsome man,' continued Rodau, stroking the chest of the guardsman inside his lapels of his jacket, 'please hold the basket so he can get in and ... get in.'

As one soldier took the basket, the lad from the armoury unlocked the door amidst grunts of, it was assumed, anticipatory eagerness. Rodau pressed his awkward bulk through the door into the blackness beyond.

‘Basket, please?’ Rodau giggled. As the National Guardsman passed the groceries to the girl, a force lifted him from behind, his forehead cracking the door jamb and he was bodily thrust through the door. His musket, with bayonet fixed, slung over his shoulder, got caught in the door frame and, wrenched his shoulder painfully.

Inside the door the soldier spun off balance, only to see the dark outline of Old Powder Wig, framed in the doorway, bringing the butt of a heavy cavalry pistol down upon the bridge of his nose.

The second Guardsman, shocked by his comrade and Old Powder Wig hurtling through the door, followed swiftly thereafter by Young Mr Toff with two pistols in hand, found he was suddenly pinned with force to the gate by the two street sweepers and four pistol barrels in his face and throat.

‘Silence or die,’ rasped one sweeper with pipe firmly clenched between ‘her’ teeth, ‘Though the door. Now!’

The Guardsman ducked his head through the small door sufficiently low enough so as to get his slung musket through as well. As he made out the prostrate form of his colleague, white cross belts gleaming dully from the external light, he heard the swoosh of the pistol, somewhere above and behind him in the inky blackness, just prior to it connecting with the junction of his skull and spine.

Mercier, pistols in hand, lifted the hem of his skirt and apron, and stepped into the black, cold opening. Bredieux followed, turning inside the doorway to nod his bonnet to Duck. Duck, standing with Green across the lane’s entrance, nodded in return. Bredieux stepped back into the gloom, closed the armoury door and shot the internal bolts.



Cobereau checked his fob watch. Seven o'clock. He then adjusted his cape around his thighs and saddle, as the morning's cold drizzle seemed to increase in intensity. Cobereau's horse stepped to push his hindquarters into the rain and dropped his head to minimise the discomfort of the cold water.

The thick grey clouds barely skimmed the surface of the Rhône valley, and certainly reduced observation to a fleeting maximum of one-thousand metres. Even on top of the slight undulations along the river, Cobereau's view was restricted more than he would have liked. Hence, he had ordered each company to provide in turn two-man vedettes along the road north to Valence. The intent was to intercept any messages from Jobert's party in the armoury, and transmit the message, from vedette to vedette, to the hamlet ten kilometres south of Valence, where the raiding force was waiting.

Cobereau could see Avriol shepherding his soggy 7th Company column south, now that their vedette duties had been relieved by 2nd Company. Having posted the new pairs of mounted sentries, Geourdai and Koschak cantered up the slight slope to join their chief of squadron. Both 2nd Company men sat deep in their saddles, raised their rein hand slightly, and their horses transitioned from a canter to halt within two strides.

'2nd Company's outposts set, Sir,' saluted Geourdai.

'Hmm,' Cobereau grunted, 'I must pay 2nd Company my compliments on two counts.'

Cobereau's compliments were rare. Geourdai looked quickly to Koschak, as Koschak's eyes narrowed.

'I had my doubts about you insisting on bringing your four-wagon train as part of your column,' said Cobereau gruffly, 'Indeed, that 8th Company has imitated the 2nd Squadron's senior company's

approach has certainly paid dividends.’

‘Thank you, Sir’ said Geourdai carefully, not quite sure of the compliment being received.

‘Indeed, maintaining a wagon per platoon for tentage and water has been most invaluable. First, by the weight being strictly kept so low to allow the wagons to keep up with the company column. Second, the speed of your company drills in setting and breaking camp have been impressive. Top marks to you all.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Geourdai elated, ‘I’ll pass your comments on to the men. The low weight is based on leaving the wagons behind, should terrain dictate, and pressing forward with one horse packing the fifty litres of water, and the other packing the packing the four, simple fly-tents, not the large, heavy bell-tents, required by the platoon. What’s more, it costs only one chasseur out of the platoon line to lead or drive those horses.’

‘As I said, quite commendable,’ rasped Cobereau, ‘I was particularly intrigued how you set your company camp using the four wagons to anchor each corner of a “square” of tent lines. Very smartly done.’

‘Yes, Sir,’ said Koschak directly, ‘We’ve been practising setting and breaking camp drills nearly daily for over two weeks we’ve been in the camp and have been breaking camp prior to dawn for nearly a week. It certainly focusses the men on getting their shit all in one stocking.’

‘I noticed,’ nodded Cobereau, ‘Upon sounding *Reveille* for the last three mornings, 2nd Company has consistently broken camp and been in the saddle, before 1st and 7th Companies could roll out of their capes, stand up and saddle. To their credit, 8th Company was mounted, having enjoyed another dry sleep, very soon after. No, well done, I say.’

‘Well, Sir,’ Geourdai offered, ‘having now experienced this approach, the disparity between a company in camp and a company in bivouac seems a little incongruous. In camp, the amount of wagons,

material and effort it requires to establish a semi-permanent town of row upon row of individual bell-tents made no sense. Alternatively, to bivouac by unsaddling and sleeping at your horse's feet, wrapped in your cape, especially in the incessant Belgian rain, seemed ludicrous in the extreme. This simple, mid-way solution appears to be the best of both worlds.'

'And now we're being well paid for our innovation,' grinned Koschak.

'How so, Sergeant Major?' asked Cobereau.

'Because 1st and 7th Companies chose to bivouac in the mud for the last three nights on this ride to Valence, they are now paying good coin to be under canvas, either ours or 8th Company's, while we wait for Duck.'

'Hah! Well done,' chortled Cobereau, 'As I understand it, you've bought water gourds for your men with your shorn horse manes and dance classes. Quite entrepreneurial. What's your next purchase?'

'Probably weapon oil, Sir,' said Koschak grimly, looking to the low clouds.



At first, in the pitch-black interior of the armoury, the five chas-seurs strained to hear any sounds other than the portly young man's whimpering from Rodau's wrist-lock, the wings of pigeons high up in the eaves and the graceful, muted tune of a well-played violin. As the startled pigeons exited the roof through broken shingles, so the dull light of the rainy day outside leaked in, and everyone's eyes adjusted to the gloom.

They soon made out that they all stood at the base of an empty stone loading dock, in an area large enough for a wagon and team

to turn alongside. Should the gates be opened immediately behind them, one wagon would be able to load or unload from the dock, turn out into the lane to let the next wagon in the lane into the dock.

At either end of the raised dock, two short sets of stairs led up to two heavy timber doors, on the dock, into which a small metal grille, at face height, was embedded. The door on the right was dark and silent. Remembering de Chabenac's vigil from the Valence cathedral yesterday, Jobert connected the door with the smokeless right-most chimney.

From the door and the grille on the left leaked warm light, a hint of smoke and the music.

'Sentries, take post,' hissed Jobert, realising there was no-one else in the loading bay but themselves.

Mercier sprang to Rodau's side and shoved the fat youth to his knees, wrenched back his head by a handful of curly locks, and held a dagger so firmly to his throat that it pierced the skin, causing blood to run quickly down the boy's pallid neck.

'Shut up, fat boy,' grunted Mercier, as the former began to squeal.

Jobert, de Chabenac and Bredieux tucked or placed their pistols aside. Jobert threw off his jacket, tricorne and wig, and released the long rope wrapped under his waistcoat. Released from sweeping and prostitute duties, Bredieux and Rodau discarded their bonnets, capes, aprons, clogs and gowns. With the assistance of de Chabenac and Jobert, Bredieux and Rodau changed into the jackets, cross-belts and bonnet-de-police of the unconscious Guardsmen. As Bredieux and Rodau readied their uniforms and muskets, Jobert gagged and tied the soldiers with strips of linen and leather thongs, tucked inside his jacket for that purpose.

Then de Chabenac unbolted the door and the two new Guardsmen, muskets slung over shoulders, stepped back out into the dim, dripping laneway. Duck signalled all was well from the entrance to the street, which Bredieux relayed to de Chabenac. The door closed

and was bolted from the inside.

‘Mozart?’ questioned Jobert as the darkness and silence, apart from the violin, returned to the loading bay.

‘Tsk! Haydn,’ corrected de Chabenac, as they crossed to bonneted Mercier and his captive.

‘Up the steps. Let’s go!’ commanded Jobert. The young man was hefted to his feet at the base of the loading dock and pushed up the stairs. As they mounted the stairs, Jobert took a handful of the lad’s golden curls and rammed his face into the stone wall. The boy moaned loudly and gurgled blood through split lips, as he was pressed to the left-hand door on the dock.

The music ceased.

‘Is that you, lad?’ said a gentle, male voice from within. Footsteps crossed to the door.

Jobert grabbed a jacket cuff of the boy’s, pressed the boy’s pudgy hand to the door, fingers out spread, and producing a small dagger from his waistcoat, Jobert swiftly cut off the tip of the boy’s little finger at the last joint.

The young man screamed as the grille opened. His bleeding, blubbery face was pressed to the grille by Mercier. Jobert, out of sight, held up the hand with the amputated stump of the little finger to the grille’s view.

‘UNCLE! NO! NO! PLEASE, NO!’ bellowed the youth.

‘My lord, boy, what has happened?’

The inner man stepped back from the grille, unlocked the door and drew the bolt. With that, Jobert crouched and threw his shoulder at the door. The door recoiled under his force, and Jobert tumbled forward into the inner-guard room.

The person on the other side of the door was flung backwards to sprawl on the floor. A heavy ring of keys flew from his grip and hit a writing desk with a loud clang.

‘On me! De Chabenac, on me!’ bellowed Jobert.

De Chabenac sprang through the door, pistols extended and

searched the guard room. Kitchen fire, kitchen table, two armchairs, violin, writing desk, pantry cupboard, lanterns on a peg, another locked door beyond, but no-one else.

Following de Chabenac immediately, Mercier threw the moaning young man inside the room, closed and bolted the door, then proceeded to remove his sodden disguise of filthy bonnet, clogs, shawl and apron.

Jobert quickly regained his feet and leapt upon the violin player, a quite elderly fellow, flipped him over, trussed and gagged him. Jobert then stepped across to the wailing boy, who had lost control due to the severe pain of his finger's amputation and wet his pants, then trussed and gagged him as well.

'Only this door and that door,' panted de Chabenac, pointing his pistols at the door they had just barged through and the padlocked door on the far-side of the room.

'His keys!' rasped Mercier, nodding to the key ring at the base of the desk, stepping from his skirt, in his underdrawers, then taking up his pistols and cocking them.

Jobert picked up the key ring. It had six keys. He stepped to the door they had just forced and confirmed one lock and key. Jobert turned to the locked door and unlocked it with a second key. The door opened onto musty blackness beyond.

'Lanterns, please, de Chabenac,' said Jobert as he stepped into the icy cold warehouse.

Even before de Chabenac brought the lantern, the firelight from the guard room flickered upon rows and rows and rows of silent, gently glimmering scabbards.

'Good grief! They are here,' burst out Mercier, and his words echoed in the vault.

As de Chabenac joined them and lifted the lantern higher, the vastness of the storeroom became obvious, and in that vastness hundreds and hundreds of swords and sabres were standing in their metal scabbards in wooden racks.

‘As we agreed, search for any other access points that would allow counter-attack,’ cried Jobert, snapping back from the trance of the glimmering metal, ‘I’ll tell Duck.’

With that he turned from the warehouse and strode away. Grabbing a lantern from a wall-peg and lighting it with a taper from the fireplace, he noted a mantelpiece clock said half-past seven.

Unbolting the guard room door, Jobert moved quickly out onto the landing dock. He descended the stairs, and opened the grille embedded in the gate door.

Peering through the grille, all Jobert could see was Duck and Green’s dark outlines framed in the misty light in the street.

‘Lads?’ Jobert rasped.

‘Sir?’ said Rodau, stepping to the door and into Jobert’s vision.

‘The sabres are here. Send for Cobereau’s squadrons immediately.’

‘Yes, Sir.’

Jobert didn’t see Rodau’s signal, but he did see Duck mount Green and trot away, limp miraculously healed, into the foot traffic in the street, and out of view.

Jobert closed and locked the grille, and by the light of the lantern confirmed the third key locked the gate door. Checking the unconscious Guardsmen were both breathing and their bindings secure, Jobert bounded up the right-most step with his lantern and pistol and unlocked the right-most door with the fourth key.

He entered an identical guard room as the left-most room, but it was dark, silent and dusty. Jobert confirmed the hearth was cold. His lantern highlighted the door to the right storeroom in the same place as the other room. The fifth key opened the door.

Within this second warehouse, the lantern illuminated more swords and the innumerable leather scabbards containing bayonets and the short, broad infantry swords, the briquets.

Jobert returned out through the right-hand guard room and strode across the loading dock to find Mercier and de Chabenac in the warm, smoky left-hand guard room.

Jobert looked at the captives. The elderly man lay trussed face down on the floor, and was rocking himself, sobbing quietly. The young man moaned, writhed on the ground, his face pale beneath the bleeding scrapes and bruises, clenching and unclenching the hand that had lost the finger-tip. The blood continued to pulse from the open wound with every clench of his fist.

‘We searched the walls right around,’ reported Mercier, ‘There are no external doors. I don’t know where the far gate we found yesterday leads, but it doesn’t connect with this storeroom,’ then pointing to the left-most guard room door, ‘That is the only way in or out of this storeroom.’

‘Ah, on this level, yes,’ cautioned de Chabenac, ‘but we did find a locked trapdoor in the floor. It was deliberately hidden underneath timber pallets and old weapon racks. It is locked from this side, so no-one will be coming through from the other side.’

‘Well done,’ nodded Jobert, pointing to the clock, ‘I passed the message to Duck at half-past seven. I calculate trotting and cantering the ten kilometres to Amy will take him to just after eight o’clock. I predict Cobereau will be here as late as nine o’clock. I’ve opened the right-most store and it contains predominantly infantry edged-weapons. Let’s now search that storeroom together for counter-attack access points.’

‘So, you’ve accounted for all six keys?’ asked Mercier.

‘No, five only,’ Jobert shook his head, ‘The sixth is possibly the trapdoor, but let’s confirm we’ve secured all access points before we investigate the trap door. Agreed?’

Having searched the right warehouse by lantern light and confirmed no other access doors existed, Jobert noted the clock read quarter-past eight as the three chasseur captains passed through the left-most guard room on their way to the trap door.

At the broad timber trap door set into the floor of the left-most warehouse, Jobert knelt and tried the sixth key in the padlock. The key did not fit.

‘We have a key without a lock, and a lock without a key. A pretty riddle,’ Jobert looked up to the others holding the lanterns, ‘Let us have a gentle chat with our new friends.’

Jobert strode into the guard room, and in the flickering light of the fireplace, considered the two men lying on the floor. His eyes drifted about the room and rested on the pokers in the hearth.

Then Jobert smiled grimly. ‘I can do better than branding’, he thought.

Jobert flipped the old man over on his back. The old man cried out at the stiffness in his joints from lying on the cold stone floor, and that his hands were now crushed beneath his buttocks, arching him uncomfortably. Jobert grabbed the man under his jaw with both hands and dragged him over to the prostrate, blubbering youth. The old man choked from Jobert’s hold on his throat.

‘Sir,’ Jobert hissed, bending over the uncle, ‘I have two questions. What does this sixth key unlock? And where is the key to the trap door? But, please, do not bother yourself to answer! You’ll only waste both of our time by lying.’

With that, Jobert rolled the young man over and then face down on top of the old man. The old man cried out under the weight of the younger, his bound hands being crushed under him. Jobert produced his small dagger and cut the young man’s ties. Leaning his full weight on the boy, Jobert grabbed his mutilated hand and placed the bleeding outstretched fingers on the older man’s face. The old man, choking from the crushing weight, wriggled to be free of the bloodied hand, but Jobert held it firmly in place over his mouth and nose.

‘Tell me, son,’ Jobert rasped in the boy’s ear, plastered with wet curls, ‘Have you ever cupped the soft breasts of a pretty girl with this hand?’

‘What ... What?’ stammered the young man, his face turning green.

‘It’s a simple question,’ said Jobert, ‘Have you ever cupped your

lover's sweet breasts with this hand?

'Uh, no, no, ... please, no, please, Uncle,' wailed the boy.

'What? Not ever pulled her nipples gently with these fingers?' Jobert asked, squeezing the tip of the amputated finger.

'NO! NO! NO! ... please, Uncle, please,' screamed the boy.

'So, Uncle,' said Jobert addressing the wheezing older man beneath, 'Your lad has never felt a young woman's breasts. Never? What a shame. Because the last feeling he will ever receive through this hand will be your face.'

With that, Jobert grabbed the young man's middle finger, lifted his right hand slightly and opened the skin deftly around the wrist in preparation to amputate the hand.

The boy screamed as the blood ran freely. The old man bellowed as he choked on the blood running into his open mouth.

'Look at your hand, boy,' Jobert bellowed, 'This is the last touch you will ever enjoy. Your uncle's face, while he denies me the truth to my questions.'

'NO! NO! PLEASE, UNCLE, PLEASE!' bellowed the boy.

'OH, STOP! STOP! PLEASE STOP!' screamed the older man.

'Oh, hush now, Uncle,' rasped Jobert, 'I know you're a man who has held a woman's breast. The boy doesn't have to cup them for himself, you'll be able to tell him what it's like.'

Jobert positioned the knife to cut through the outer tendons.

'PLEASE! PLEASE!' screamed the boy, his face nearly purple.

'STOP, JOBERT!' screamed de Chabenac, 'I order you to stop.'

Jobert rolled sideways and looked up to see de Chabenac's distraught face.

'Stop! These ... these ... these are our people,' stammered de Chabenac, 'These men are faithful and loyal servants of His Most Gracious Majesty. They cannot be treated thus.'

'WE ARE!' bellowed the choking man at the base of the pile, 'My lord, I beg you.'

The young man was simply issuing a bestial, high-pitched,

incoherent scream.

‘Do not stop, Jobert’ said Mercier calmly, kneeling beside Jobert, ‘I know Jacobin scum when I smell it. Deprive the Republican spawn the sweet, young breasts of France this instant.’

‘No, these good, good men are our Royalist brothers,’ yelled de Chabenac, his face a deep red, ‘I command you, with all that is holy and sacred, in the name of our beloved sovereign lord and master, to stop this foul outrage.’

‘Jacobin or Royalist, it doesn’t matter,’ bellowed Jobert, ‘They’ll tell us nothing. I have started now, it won’t take much, and the hand will be another for my collection.’

‘The desk! Please my dear, sweet lord, the desk! The desk!’ groaned the old man beginning to expire.

‘To hell with the desk,’ smiled Mercier quietly, ‘This fat, little bastard probably doesn’t want to feel a woman.’

‘NO! IT’S IN THE DESK, MY LORD’ gasped the elder man.

‘Where? Where, my good man? Speak quickly!’ rasped de Chabenac.

‘The ink well.’

De Chabenac lifted the ink pot from the well on the writing desk. ‘What about the ink well?’ he bellowed and pounded the desk with his fists, splashing ink on every surface within two metres.

Jobert inserted the blade into the tendons at the back of the wrist and lifted them clear of the skin. The boy thrashed at the pain. The old man, face blue, groaned under the shifting weight.

‘The hole in the bottom of the ink well. Insert a quill, my gracious Lord. Make your butcher stop.’

De Chabenac fought tears of frustration, and fumbled to insert a writing quill, with fingers slick with black ink, into the small hole in the bottom of the ink well. Something clicked. A panel swung open on the side of the desk.

‘STOP, JOBERT!’ de Chabenac screamed, ‘Please, stop. He has revealed a hidden panel. There’s a locked box within.’

Mercier leapt to the side of the desk with the key ring.

‘The sixth key opens the box,’ Mercier grunted, then, as the box opened, sat back holding up a small brass key.

‘Well done all,’ he smiled, ‘Behold! The key to the trap door.’



A column of four-hundred chasseurs and a train of ten empty wagons absorbed about a fifteen-hundred metre length of road space. As a horse walks at five kilometres per hour, the column would take less than twenty minutes to pass a stationary observer. But as the column was easily maintaining the balanced gait of the trot, the column moved twice as fast.

Duck was invited to lead the column and was riding Blue two-hundred metres in front. Having left his blanket, steeped in stale urine and wine, in the armoury lane, Duck still exuded a foul odour, hence the invitation to ride well forward. Well mounted on Blue, having swapped Green with Amy at the raiding force rendezvous point, Duck easily held his advance position.

At the head of the column rode Morin, Cobereau, two trumpeters, and the five commanders of the force’s sub-elements.

Commanded by Geourdai, 2nd Company, in column of fours, followed the command group. 2nd Company had been tasked to secure the southern entry and exit point of Valence for the convoy. Young chasseurs shortened their rein lengths, and took firmer grips on their unloaded musketoons, butts resting on their thighs, as the word passed back down the column that the southern outskirts of Valence were visible through the drizzle.

Commanded by Avriol, 7th Company was next in line behind 2nd Company. Once 2nd Company had peeled off to secure the exit

to the town, Avriol had been tasked to pass on through, following Duck and the command group, to secure the streets immediately around the armoury's main gate.

Behind 7th Company splashed 1st Company, under command of Mercier's 2IC. Under Cobereau direction, 1st Company would pass through the armoury location held by 7th Company and, as an outer cordon, secure vital crossroads deeper into Valence.

8th Company followed 1st Company, but without their musketoons. The one-hundred men of 8th Company were the armoury work party. Once inside the 7th Company's secure perimeter, one troop would hold the other troop's horses, while the fifty dismounted chasseurs were to wrap ten sabres into a blanket bundle, and then load two bundles each into the waiting wagons.

At the end of the raiding force's column, the ten empty wagons following 8th Company, commanded by fencing-master Bidonne, were tasked with departing Valence, once receiving ten bundles in each wagon.

On the outskirts of Valence, Duck crossed a canal over a low stone bridge, and pivoted Blue in the middle of the crossroads. He waved back to the column to indicate the vital exit point. Upon seeing Duck's signal, Cobereau ordered Geourdai and his company of chasseurs to the canter.

As 2nd Company pounded past the command group, Cobereau ordered his trumpeters to sound *Assembly*. Men and women milling at the crossroads raced to gather children and barrows, dogs scampered, as thundering hooves and screaming trumpets shattered the grey drizzle.



The three approached the trap door carefully.

‘Cover the lanterns,’ whispered Jobert, ‘and have your pistols ready.’ Placing the coiled rope beside the lanterns, Jobert continued, ‘Mercier, unlock the door then open the trapdoor just slightly.’

Jobert lay on the floor and extended his face towards the door. Mercier unlocked the padlock with a smooth click and withdrew the lock from the hasp. Mercier then gently lifted the door, shielding himself behind the hinge. As Mercier did so, Jobert could be heard breathing deeply through his nose, savouring the air coming from the hole in the floor.

‘Open fully,’ Jobert grunted.

Mercier swung back the trap door and the three listened. A faint gurgling of water could be discerned, as well as a strong stench of sewerage.

‘A lantern, de Chabenac, if you would be so kind,’ requested Jobert.

‘What were you expecting to smell?’ de Chabenac asked as he approached the black hole with a lantern.

‘People. Stale breath, body odour, garlic, weapon oil and smoke, either wood smoke, gun smoke or tobacco smoke,’ answered Jobert.

De Chabenac lit the entrance, and the lantern revealed a steep timber staircase descending a floor three metres below.

Jobert, with cocked pistols readied, descended the steps. Once he arrived at the bottom of the stairs, he made one pistol safe, tucked it into his waistband and asked for the lantern. Taking the lantern passed down to him, Jobert disappeared from the others’ view, pistol extended, deeper into the room beneath.

Mercier made ready to descend with pistol and lantern, when de Chabenac coughed to clear his throat.

‘In there,’ de Chabenac nodded to the guard room, ‘Is that what it takes to be a soldier?’

‘No,’ said Mercier, stopped at the entrance, to consider de Chabenac carefully with his unblinking dark eyes, ‘No. To secure fraternity,

we require equality. To secure equality, we require liberty. To secure liberty, it takes that.'

'Oh, really? Would you have done that?'

'Dear Sir, we were all part of "that" to gain the key.'

'No, I mean amputate a man's hand, without a tourniquet, as a form of torture.'

'Then no. I have neither the skills nor the conviction. But if I knew someone who did, such as he,' Mercier nodded to the room below, 'then I would certainly sanction it.'

'Do you believe Jobert would have taken the boy's hand?'

'Well, Jobert took the boy's finger, and someone else will soon take the boy's head,' Mercier shrugged, 'As for the hand, ask Jobert yourself.'

The light flickered in the room below, and Jobert appeared at the base of the stairs.

'Gentlemen, I was unaware you both require formal, written invitations to join me,' said Jobert in frustration, between gritted teeth.

Doubting de Chabenac momentarily, Mercier stepped back from the entrance, 'After you, Sir.'

In the lantern light, Mercier's dark eyes betrayed no emotion, so de Chabenac descended into the room.

'The room is as large as the guard room above, and full of shelving,' said Jobert, as the other two joined him, 'I've searched this wall for access and found none.'

'What is the water gurgling?' asked de Chabenac.

'The city's sewerage,' answered Jobert, 'but only accessible through floor grates you could barely squeeze your hand. So, no, no entry point.'

'What about the size of the room?' asked Mercier, holding up his lantern to search the ceiling, 'Does any part extend beyond the warehouse above, thus allowing access through the ceiling?'

'Good thinking, though I've seen no other stairs leading upwards, but I will check the ceiling,' responded Jobert.

The three searched the floors, walls and ceilings for any other entrances.

‘Jobert, come and look here,’ Mercier called.

Jobert moved to his lantern light and found Mercier, holding up a silken Royalist standard embroidered with the Bourbon fleur-de-lys.

‘There must be over one-hundred standards, rolled on their staffs, waiting to be rallied to,’ said Mercier in a dead voice

‘Indeed,’ said Jobert, his face and voice hardening in the presence of the hated symbol, ‘Also the shelving over there contain hundreds of maps and charts. Quite a treasure. Where is our man, de Chabenac?’

‘Be aware, Jobert,’ Mercier held up a hand in warning, ‘de Chabenac is quite upset by the stunt you pulled with the boy’s hand.’

Jobert remained quite still and regarded Mercier. In the darkness and shifting lantern light, Mercier could not see Jobert’s expression.

De Chabenac stood at a high bench, his lantern revealing three opened iron-bound chests, as he stared at the contents without moving. The bench was long, and on top and on the shelves underneath, were many such boxes disappearing into the darkness. As Jobert and Mercier arrived across the bench, it was clear the three opened chests were full of small calf-skin purses tied at the necks.

‘I’ve opened and counted five purses,’ whispered de Chabenac, not looking up from the neat piles glinting in the lantern light, ‘and each contains fifty gold louis so far.’

‘Fifty louis is one-thousand francs, or nearly six months’ pay for a captain in each purse,’ rasped Mercier.

‘Well, then,’ said Jobert, without hesitation distributing purses from one of the opened chests, ‘Three sacks each makes at least one year’s pay for us all. An extra purse each for company funds, including Avriol’s company, Mercier. Two sacks to be divided between Duck and Amy. Three sacks to be divided between Rodau and Bredieux.’

The three looked at each other.

‘Well, ... I suppose we have ...,’ de Chabenac started, eyes flicking quickly between the other two.

‘Stop,’ said Mercier, looking de Chabenac in the eye, ‘Do not waste time justifying it, just take it.’

Jobert stepped back into the gloom, and soon after the others heard the ripping of cloth followed by lengths of timber poles hitting the floor. Jobert re-emerged into the lantern light with three shredded Royalist standards.

‘Appropriate, don’t you think?’ Jobert then wrapped his nine purses into the white embroidered cloth.

‘Do you still have the key?’ Jobert asked Mercier, as he hoisted the now considerable weight onto his shoulder.

‘Yes’ said Mercier.

‘Well, why not? You found it,’ smiled Jobert, and taking his lantern, he turned and made his way to the stairs.

Mercier bundled his five purses, then as he hefted his load, he passed de Chabenac the small key to the basement’s trap door.

‘You found the trap door,’ he said, and departed after Jobert.

‘They’re here,’ shouted Jobert out of the darkness, ‘I can hear trumpets and banging on the gates. Last man out might consider locking the trap door.’



Colonel Morin, Captain Bidonne and Corporal Duck pressed their horses under the relative shelter of the broken roof of the armoury lane. With a troop of 7th Company pushing further up the street from the T-intersection, Cobereau and 1st Company thundered past the lane way entrance to secure intersections further out from the armoury.

Then 8th Company lined the streets, half the soldiers holding horses, whilst the other half dismounted and, directed by the bellows of their non-commissioned officers, facilitated the passage of empty wagons up the street to the lane's entrance.

'May I say, Corporal Duck,' coughed Morin, 'Your disguise is convincingly powerful. Do you have a spare change of clothes?'

'No, Sir,' grimaced Duck.

'Here is ten francs. Secure new clothes before we depart Valence. See to it you bathe thoroughly, in any form you can, by nightfall.'

'Yes, Sir. If I may, Amy and I will gather the officer's belongings and horses from a nearby tavern.'

'Very well,' said Morin, dismissing Duck, then turning to Bidonne, 'Bidonne, with 8th Company under your wing, I'll leave it to you to arrange these wagons to be loaded and depart immediately.'

'Most certainly, Sir,' smiled the lanky Captain.

'Good grief,' said Morin with a pained look, unaware of Duck's discarded blankets in the shadows at his horse's feet 'Duck has removed himself and I can still smell his hide. Is it known how he was blessed with the name "Duck"?''

'I, for one, do not know, Sir,' shrugged Bidonne.

Morin and Bidonne dismounted, and handing their horses to a dismounted chasseur, moved down the lane towards the dark, forbidding armoury gates. The iron-embossed gates were secured by two short, skinny National Guardsmen. Upon Morin's approach the two sentries saluted their commanding officer with their muskets.

'Bredieux, Rodau, thank you,' Morin returned the salute, 'Are we able to enter?'

'No, Sir,' Bredieux shook his head, 'We're waiting for those inside to arrive back at the gate, and then I must give the signal for all clear.'

'Indeed,' Morin's thick eyebrows shrugged.

At that moment, the grille in the door within the gate opened, although no face appeared. Morin could only make out a deeper darkness within from his position in the dim lit lane.

‘Sir,’ Bredieux removed his pipe from his mouth to project his voice into the blackness beyond the grille, ‘I have with me, and have so far seen, Colonel Morin, 24th Chasseurs, Captain Bidonne, 6th Company, Captain de Chabenac’s 8th Company, Captain Avriol, 7th Company, and Major Cobereau, Sir.’

‘Well done. Opening the gates,’ said a muted voice from within.

‘Is that your cologne making my eyes water, Sergeant Rodau?’ winced Morin.

‘Ah, . . . , yes, Sir.’

‘Then let’s have you promoted as soon as we can, so you might afford a scent of better quality.’

The gates screeched on rusted hinges as Mercier and Jobert swung them inwards. Morin’s eyebrows raised and Bidonne’s grin widened at the spectacle before them. Mercier stood in his underdrawers, shirtsleeves, in bare feet and his top lip freshly shaven. In a begrimed waist coat and trousers, Jobert stood with his hands on his hips, his shirt sleeves soaked in blood to the elbows. De Chabenac, up on the loading dock, would have been considered presentably dressed if not for his ink-soaked jacket, waist coat and face.

‘Gentlemen, what an interesting morning you appear to have had,’ said Morin.

‘Indeed, Sir,’ said de Chabenac through clenched teeth, ‘The cavalry sabres and swords are in this store,’ indicating the left-most door, ‘The door over there, on the right, leads to infantry edged-weapons.’

‘It is not my intent to ruin our good fortune today by being greedy. One-thousand sabres will suffice,’ said Morin, noticing the bodies lying behind the opened gates. As Morin glanced down at the two trussed and groaning men, in only shirt sleeves, their faces in pools of blood and vomit.

‘Sergeant,’ Morin said to an 8th Company sergeant entering the dock with his men, ‘would you please arrange for those fellows to be untied, placed under close guard and fetch the regimental surgeon to them.’

As de Chabenac invited Morin into the left-most guard room, Morin stepped over the face-down bodies of the armoury keepers. The distinctly fatter of the two was emitting groans, between laboured breathing, his right hand and the back of his wet trousers, where his hands were tied, covered in congealing blood. The strong odour coming from the wounded man clearly indicated he had recently voided his bowels. The elder of the two, labouring with a wheezing breath, rolled his red-rimmed eyes down towards the floor stones, away from Morin's pitiless gaze.

Stepping through an inner door into a vast, cold, silent storeroom, Morin smiled as de Chabenac held up a lantern to the thousands of glimmering hilts and scabbards. Morin reached for the nearest scabbard and drew the sabre.

'Ah, Klingenthal,' he smiled at the glint of the high-quality blade, 'Excellent. Captain Bidonne, your parade. Not more than one-thousand past this door. Carry on.'

'Certainly, Sir,' said Bidonne, languidly turning to the 8th Company soldiers, with his instructions for bundling sabres and loading wagons.

'Anything else in particular you wish to report, gentlemen?' asked Morin, eyebrows arching.

'No, Sir,' the three captains replied.

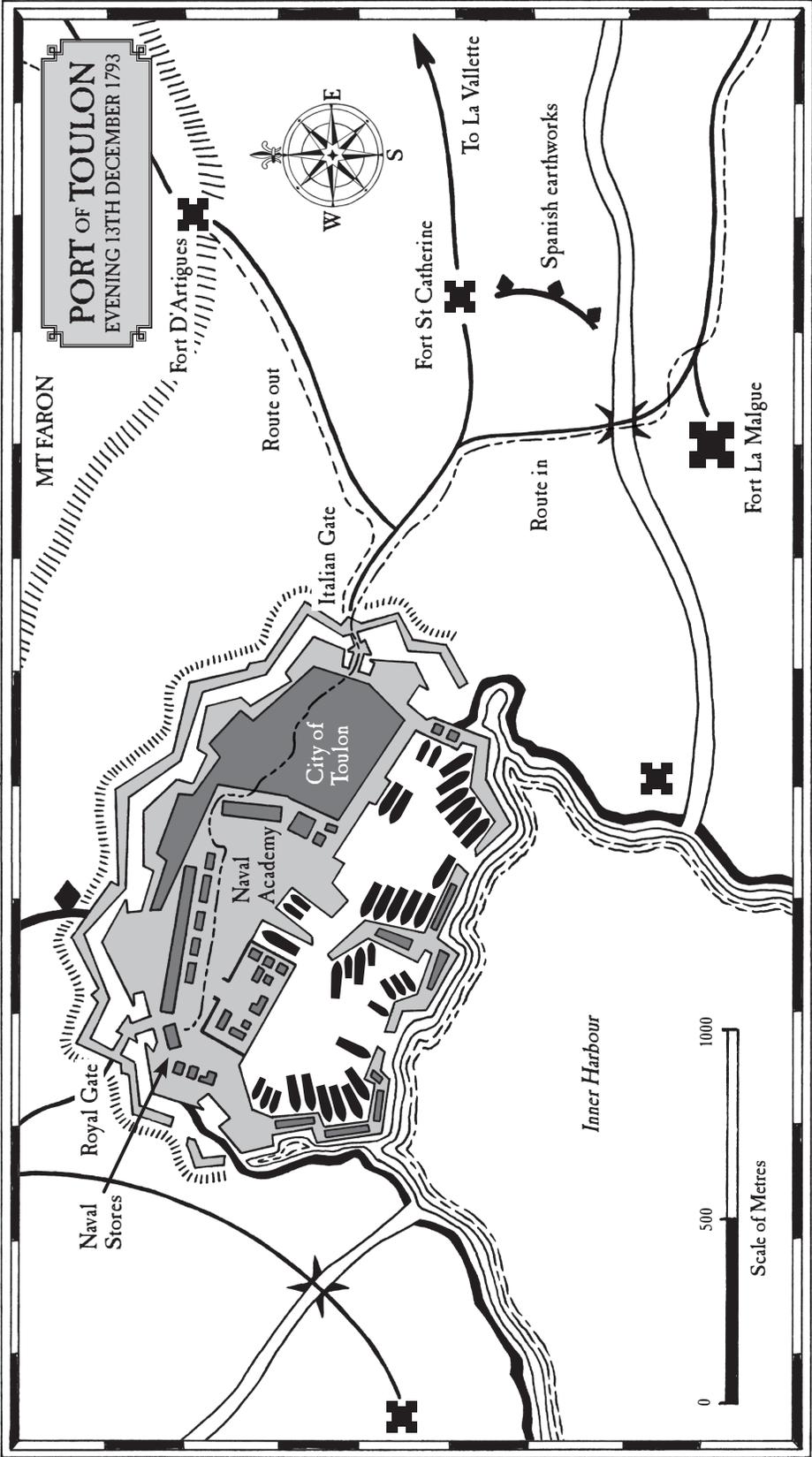
'No?' Morin jutted out his chin, 'Then, Mercier and Jobert, retire to your lodgings and collect your horses and effects, and make ready for an immediate departure to Avignon.'

'Yes, Sir,' said Mercier hoisting a heavy, woven basket overflowing with filthy dresses and bonnets.

'Captain de Chabenac, perhaps you might guide me on a tour of the facility?' asked Morin, then turning, 'Oh, and Jobert ...'

'Yes, Sir,' said Jobert heaving a heavy satchel and a coiled rope onto his shoulder.

'Happy 28th birthday.'



Chapter Seventeen

December 1793, Toulon, France



‘I have inspected the company,’ said Koschak, stirring his potato and onion soup with his bread crust, ‘And I can confirm everyone in the company now has, at least, two shirts, two pairs of under-drawers two pairs of stockings and two blankets, and each item serviceable for the coming winter.’

‘But the company purse is near empty,’ said Neilage, looking across the camp fire to Lombatte.

‘What?’ Jobert’s head jerked up from his meal, ‘We’ve spent all the money from the prisoner’s purses and the sale of their clothing to Suchet?’

‘I purchased only what Sergeant Major had on his list, Sir,’ coughed Lombatte, his cheery grin plastered under his drooping moustache, ‘Only enough clothing to make good that which was unserviceable. Marseille is in a very grim state, so I pressed on to Aix-en-Provence to find what was needed, and prices were steep, despite the volumes being sought.’

‘Hmm,’ mused Neilage, staring into the evening’s fire, ‘We need to be aware of any opportunity to refill the company coffers.’

‘Could we sell horse shoes to the artillery batteries?’ suggested Bredieux, wiping his bowl with his bread.

Vocuse swivelled his face across to Jobert, only to see Jobert respond with an enquiring look.

‘Sir,’ Vocuse responded, ‘We arrived in Toulon having accumulated three full sets of shoes, or twelve-hundred individual shoes. We sold four-hundred new and two-hundred worn shoes to the 15th Dragoons. I’m not including the two-hundred worn shoes of 8th Company we sold the dragoons. Tulloc, Duck and I reshod two-hundred back onto our remounts and the chasseurs hold two-hundred spare within their saddle frames. So, I have two-hundred spare in my stocks.’

‘One-hundred pairs,’ nodded Jobert, then looking to Neilage, ‘Do not touch them; keep them for winter.’

The fire blazed resinous smoke from a pine branch catching alight.

‘Winter, Sir,’ rasped Koschak, ‘Knowing that rugging a horse at night is as good as feeding it a ration of grain, as they say. How might we go about gaining horse rugs like yours, Sir, for the company?’

‘It is a very good idea,’ shrugged Jobert, ‘We have no money, but I’m happy to think it through.’

‘Most chasseurs have three blankets,’ revealed Lombatte, ‘One from their initial regimental issue and two taken from the Spanish outside Sollies. Nearly all the chasseurs have sewn a double blanket and the other, if they have it and it’s serviceable, is used as a horse blanket.’

‘But blankets are no good in the rain,’ coughed Vocuse, puffing to start his after-dinner pipe, ‘They need to be under canvas, like the Captain’s.’

‘How much canvas?’ asked Neilage.

‘Two metres by two metres,’ said Vocuse, rocking his head.

‘Where would we find canvas?’ asked Neilage, turning to Lombatte.

‘The fishing fleet in Marseille?’ shrugged Lombatte, ‘But we don’t

have money for canvas.'

'How we might we get money?' mused Koschak into the flames.

'Well, there's canvas in Toulon,' Lombatte clicked his thick fingers, 'Naval stores have sails.'

'You won't get anywhere near sails,' said Bredieux, passing back Vocuse's tobacco pouch, 'Like powder, sails, masts and rope stores demand the heaviest naval guards.'

'Tents?' suggested Gouvion.

'In the navy?' asked Neilage quizzically.

'No, Sir,' responded Gouvion, 'Spanish and British tents, Sir.'

'Those tents currently full of Spanish and British soldiers, Sir?' asked Koschak rhetorically.

'Unlike the rectangular tent-flies we sleep under, tents are made up of triangular pieces to create the bell shape,' said Vocuse reflectively, intent on the glow in his pipe bowl, 'There would be a lot of unpicking and resewing to make a rectangular horse rug.'

'Hammocks,' puffed Bredieux, exhaling blue tobacco smoke into the heat of the fire, 'The navy would have hundreds of hammocks, and hammocks are kept in general stores, which don't require a guard.'

Everyone paused and looked at Bredieux to consider this source of canvas.

'A hammock would be two metres long,' said Neilage, 'But would it be two metres wide.'

'Indeed', shrugged Bredieux, 'We'll probably need one-and-a-half hammocks per horse.'

'One-hundred-and-fifty hammocks,' concluded Koschak.

'How are hammocks stored?' Jobert asked Lombatte.

'Probably like blankets, Sir,' Lombatte answered, 'Folded in bales of ten, trussed with twine.'

'How heavy would they be to lift?' continued Jobert.

'One man could lift a bale,' said Lombatte confidently.

'Could one man carry a bale from Toulon to Revest?' asked

Jobert, arching his brows.

‘Ah, no, Sir,’ said Lombatte, his mouth tightening, ‘In that case, no, two men or a wagon.’

‘How many wagons?’ Neilage took up the interrogation.

‘Fifteen bales, one wagon,’ answered the company’s quartermaster.

‘In Toulon, we know draught horses and bullocks would be under tighter guard than powder,’ countered Koschak, ‘We’d do well to find donkeys.’

‘So, seven bales a wagon, two wagons, four donkeys,’ calculated Lombatte, his hussar plaits swaying as he rocked his head.

‘A wagon, not a cart,’ said Neilage, squinting as the fire’s smoke drifted across his face, ‘So, fifteen bales, three wagons, six donkeys.’

Everyone looked at each other across the fire, knowing finding six draught animals in Toulon would be near impossible.

‘Then, thirty men to carry fifteen bales,’ offered Vocese, nodding his head across the yard to the other platoon fires.

‘How would you get thirty men in?’ asked Koschak.

‘Patrol?’ winced Neilage.

‘Thirty uniforms? Language?’ Koschak could see the problem with the option.

‘The Royal Louis Battalion wear old royal army white, like the line battalions,’ posited Bredieux seeking a solution to the question of uniforms, at least.

‘Risking the loss of thirty men, three sections from eight, is unacceptable,’ stated Jobert firmly, ‘How else?’

2nd Company’s command group, less Rodau and Checuti with the ‘Spanish water-cart’ and Clenaude and Martine currently commanding patrols on Mount Faron, paused to regard the fire.

‘Find thirty men in Toulon,’ ventured Lombatte tentatively.

‘Who?’ asked Koschak, looking up from under his brows.

‘De Beaussancourt’s company,’ said Duck softly, as he moved around the outside of the group gathering the empty soup bowls.

Everyone exchanged glances at Duck’s suggestion.

‘Where are they kept?’ asked Koschak, packing tobacco into his pipe.

‘Or have they been transported out?’ Neilage looked through the campfire’s smoke, explaining, ‘Like the five-thousand Republican sailors removed from Toulon by the British.’

‘Our Spanish water-cart needs to answer that,’ said Jobert.

‘How long have they been there?’ asked Vocuse.

‘De Beaussancourt’s company?’ answered Neilage, ‘Since the 1st of October; two-and-a-half months.’

‘If they are there,’ added Koschak, ‘They would be very sick, if not dead.’

‘If we freed sixty of them,’ shrugged Lombatte, ‘Then we could alternate the portorage.’

‘So how many of us would it take to free them?’ Koschak asked the fire, ‘Five? Ten?’

‘How do you get five to ten men in?’ responded Neilage.

‘As a lost Spanish patrol via the British at Fort La Malue,’ ventured Gouvion.

Every face turned to him at the suggestion.

‘Major Cobereau and I discussed it once,’ stammered Gouvion, looking up to see he was the centre of everyone’s gaze.

‘No, good suggestion, well done,’ said Jobert considering Gouvion a moment, ‘So, a patrol of one Spanish officer, one Spanish NCO and four men.’

‘Uniforms?’ asked Neilage.

‘Spanish prisoners’ jackets are easy to come by,’ said Lombatte.

‘Which can then be switched into Royal Louis militia, if we had to,’ added Koschak.

‘And a naval officer,’ said Bredieux.

‘Why?’ asked Neilage.

‘Someone with the appropriate authority to request the release of naval items from the naval general stores, Sir,’ Bredieux winked in response.

‘Naval uniform?’ questioned Neilage.

‘Captain Duhamel might have a spare uniform at home,’ grinned Koschak.

‘A trip to Chateâu Duhamel, Sir?’ Vocuse smirked to Jobert.

‘If you’re too busy, Sir,’ coughed Koschak with mock gruffness, ‘I could manage that.’

‘Why would a naval officer take one-hundred-and-fifty hammocks out of the city?’ asked Jobert, staring into the fire, ignoring the innuendo.

‘Naval gunners at the forts,’ suggested Koschak, his seriousness returning.

‘In the middle of the night?’ asked Neilage, taking up the line of reasoning.

‘Deception?’ offered Bredieux, ‘It’s important the French don’t see what they’re transporting.’

‘To screen preparations of freshly dug gun positions in forward redoubts,’ offered Koschak.

‘So, a Royal Louis prisoner escort takes the bales to the outer forts,’ summarised Jobert, ‘So, in through La Malue and out through where?’

‘Fort Sainte-Catherine?’ grimaced Koschak.

‘Fort D’Artigues is smaller,’ said Neilage to Koschak across the flames, ‘And not far up Mount Faron’s slopes.’

‘Isn’t La Valette in enemy hands?’ asked Gouvion, knowing the proximity of the village to the lower forts, ‘Won’t it be difficult moving down the slopes of D’Artigues, past La Valette to Revest?’

‘You are correct, Sir,’ shrugged Koschak reflectively, ‘A mounted troop would be needed, at least, to get anywhere near Fort D’Artigues.’

‘We still have to go in and out through the Toulon’s eastern gate,’ mused Lombatte, ‘The Italian Gate.’

‘Go in before, and go out after, the guard changes,’ puffed Vocuse.

‘Who?’ asked Jobert.

Again, the crackles of pine-cones in the flames, filled the silence.

‘Me,’ stated Jobert finally, ‘Which excludes the 2IC and the Sergeant Major.’

Neilage exchanged glances and shrugs with Koschak, both understanding that 2nd Company would require the appropriate level of command experience in the face of the possible loss of their company commander.

‘Lieutenant Rodau or Sergeant Checuti as the Spanish officer,’ said Koschak.

‘Sergeant Bredieux as the naval officer,’ said Neilage.

‘Slow down,’ Jobert held up a hand, ‘If Rodau is the Spanish officer and Bredieux is the naval officer, then that excludes any other officers or sergeants.’

Gouvion slumped at his exclusion.

‘Four troopers, one per platoon,’ said Neilage.

‘Make one chasseur Pebbles Duval,’ stated Jobert, ‘But that excludes Duval’s snipers-mate and Tulloc.’

‘That’s seven men, Sir,’ stated Koschak.

‘I am risking the loss of seven men to maintain our horses through winter,’ said Jobert grimly, looking around the faces at the fire, ‘Let us say yes, at this stage. So, when?’

‘There is another brigade marching in from Nice to join Lapoype on the 14th of December, Sir,’ said Neilage, ‘So, we would do well to complete this raid before there are any adjustments to Lapoype’s line.’

Jobert nodded his head in agreement.

‘Then that gives us two nights,’ calculated Koschak, ‘Tomorrow night or the night after.’

‘The night after, the evening of 13th of December,’ said Jobert clearly, ‘We need to gain information from the ‘Spanish water cart’ as to where the prisoners are being held, if they exist at all.’

‘We also need Lieutenant Rodau back with us,’ suggested Lomatte, ‘To have him ready as a Spanish officer.’

‘With Chateâu Duhamel being our only source of naval uniform

and the base for our lost Spanish patrol,' grimaced Koschak with a wink to Lombatte, 'I'll also need tomorrow to support Madame Duhamel becoming 'abreast' of our plan, and allowing her to fully 'grasp' our 'firm' intent of 'inserting' our ...'

'Yes, thank you, Sergeant Major,' cut-in Jobert, attempting to be stern despite his half-smile, 'So, let us talk through the plan again, seeking any risks, and listing what we need.'



Two nights later, at eight o'clock, with thick, low rain clouds covering the moon, Rodau's lost patrol 'saluted' Martine's chasseur platoon with a blank volley.

Having escorted the lost patrol from Madame Duhamel's farm, near La Garde, to a position amongst the outposts of the two armies, Martine's platoon played their part by turning and trotting back to Chateâu Duhamel.

The intermittent, soft splats of heavy raindrops on the clods in the abandoned fields around Fort La Malue, accompanied the careful footfalls of Rodau's silent patrol as they approached the low hill on which sat one of the largest fortresses in Toulon's defences. As the patrol moved forward to the dull glow of torchlight on La Malue's ramparts, Jobert could identify the torchlight of parties moving on both sides of the stream which separated the British Fort La Malue and the Spanish breastworks eight-hundred metres distant. Although the breastworks were not discernible at this range in this light, Jobert could clearly make out the lit tents at the stream's crossing point, which acted as a point of coordination for the two forces.

Two torches flickering in the increasing breeze were clearly moving down the slope from La Malue towards the lost patrol

cloaked in the darkness. The rhythmic sound of clanking, ever present with a body of marching troops, no matter the size, could soon be heard approaching above the wind.

‘Ready, lads,’ growled Jobert, ‘Here we go.’

‘*Quien va alla?*’ challenged Rodau loudly, as the patrol kneeled on the cold, bare earth and loudly cocked their muskets.

‘*Britanico, amigo, ingles, ingles,*’ came the shrill response, as the rattling marching became urgent whispered commands, and muskets being brought to the ready.

‘*Ingles amigo, ingles amigo,*’ called Rodau, ‘Do you speak French?’

‘Most certainly, Sir,’ called a figure silhouetted by the torchlight.

‘This is His Hispanic Majesty’s Mallorca Regiment,’ said Rodau, stepping quietly to change his position in the darkness, ‘Who goes there?’

‘His Britannic Majesty’s 30th Regiment of Foot, Sir,’ called the young voice, ‘I would be obliged, Sir, if your party approach our torchlight, please.’

‘I have a patrol of myself and six men, and I shall approach you now,’ said Rodau above the increasing gusts of the coming storm.

Rodau, followed by his patrol, moved carefully across the field, until they were outlined in the gloom ten metres apart. Jobert counted the British officer with an NCO beside him, two torchbearers and four other soldiers.

‘I am Major don Carlos Valdes, Sir, and I am at your service,’ bowed Rodau, performing an admirable imitation of Chabenac.

‘Sir,’ bowed the British patrol commander, ‘I am Ensign Charles Torkington, and I am at your service.’

‘Make safe,’ ordered Rodau in Provencal, turning to the Spanish patrol.

‘Sir, are you aware you are within the British area of responsibility?’ asked a surprisingly young man, possibly in his late teens, ‘Did you not cross over the stream from the Spanish redoubt?’

‘No, we have come along the shoreline from Cap Brun,’ answered

Rodau, and offering a hip flask, 'Would you care for some brandy?'

'How very kind, thank you,' coughed Torkington, taking a gulp of liquor, 'Just the thing for a night such as this. Was that your patrol firing?'

'Yes, we saw off a French vedette,' said Rodau, returning his hip flask to his tailcoat pocket.

'Are you making for La Malue, Sir?'

'No, Fort Sainte-Catherine. I have with me a messenger I need to deliver to that fort,' said Rodau, stepping back to introduce a naval officer in a befeathered bicorne, dark jacket, dark waist sash, white trousers, and tall, cuffed riding boots, 'May I introduce Captain don Jeromino Moreno Frias, Sir, of His Hispanic Majesty's Royal Navy.'

'I am at your service, Sir,' Bredieux said bluntly, bowing low and clutching at his wind-ruffled hat.

'And I at yours, Sir,' Torkington responded, 'Then, Major, may I assist you and the Captain by escorting you to our coordination point with your countrymen at the stream.'

'You are too kind, but I must get to Sainte-Catherine as quickly as possible,' said Rodau without any undue haste.

'But the shortest route to Sainte-Catherine is via that redoubt, Sir,' smiled Torkington.

'I'm embarrassed to admit, Sir,' whispered Rodau confidentially, as the rains drops started a gentle patter, 'The commanding colonel of the earthworks will insist on us joining him to dine, however attractive that might seem, sadly, it will cause much delay on a such a night. The nature of the Captain's dispatch demands alacrity.'

'Then the only other path, Sir, is through Fort La Malue,' mused the young English officer.

'Hmm,' said Rodau turning to Jobert, 'Sargento, La Malue o murallas?'

'La Malue, senior,' answered Jobert, guessing at the nature of the question.

‘Excellent, then we will escort you,’ stated Torkington, ‘My Colonel speaks Spanish and would be delighted to receive you as guests. He is tired of the simpering French frauds within the Royal Louis battalion posted to the fort.’

‘Your generous offer is too kind, Sir,’ Rodau bowed his head, projecting his voice over the rumble of approaching thunder, ‘But we have no wish to inconvenience your good selves. Another time, perhaps?’

The British sergeant made a small coughing noise to attract his officer’s attention. Torkington turned and spoke curtly to his sergeant. The British NCO spoke quickly in response, his face turning to the increasing cold rain. Torkington cut him short. Jobert could see the man’s face quivering, then he ventured a final response. Jobert thought he heard the sergeant emphasise the word ‘colonel’.

Whatever the sergeant had said, Torkington squirmed with indecision.

Jobert looked at the two Englishmen under the spluttering torchlight, and memories of hatred flooded back. Jobert remembered how he, as a non-commissioned officer in his previous regiment, had pandered to the banalities of teenage nobility, at the expense of the assigned task and without any concern for the men. If Jobert mistrusted the methods of the governing Jacobins, then this exchange removed those doubts and hardened his resolve to defend the Republic against her enemies, French or foreign.

Torkington spat out a quick command without looking at his sergeant, then resumed his mask of gentility.

‘Yes, gentlemen, the rain has become most insistent, and I too have duties that await,’ said Torkington with a disappointed smile, ‘But may I provide two fusiliers and a torch to escort you to my Colonel?’

‘Your kindness in this matter, Sir, is deeply appreciated,’ said Rodau gently, bowing his head sharply, ‘I shall certainly commend you to your Colonel informing him of your generosity and dedication to duty.’

Finally, after parting pleasantries were exchanged, the two patrols stepped off once again. The ‘Spanish’ patrol followed the two British soldiers, one with a spluttering torch, up a slight track towards the forbidding outline of Fort La Malgue.

The rain began to come down heavily not far from the La Malgue’s eastern gate. The walls soared above the group. From under lean-to shelters across each gun embrasure and each window in the stories above the ramparts, candle and torch light illuminated the fortress, hinting at the shadowy paths under the walls and around the fort to its western gate.

Such paths were immediately preferred by Rodau and Jobert rather than present their patrol within the fort.

Rodau asked the British fusiliers whether they spoke French or Spanish; they spoke neither. Rodau used sign language to indicate he wished to take the paths around the fort. The soldiers, becoming more and more agitated in the pouring rain, insisted on moving inside the gate. Jobert considered the options and withdrew his dagger from his cuff. Saved by Rodau, the two fusiliers were presented a heavy purse, the soldiers relented, accepted the purse, their duty discharged and turned for the gate. Before they had gone too far, Rodau moved swiftly to exchange his hip flask for their pitch-soaked torch.

As the soldiers ran from the increasing deluge, clutching their muskets to their shoulders, Jobert took the torch, hissing and spitting in the rain, and hurriedly led the patrol under the walls, around Fort La Malgue to the road leading to Toulon.



Hunched in their saturated tailcoats, the patrol pressed through

the Toulon's western portal, the Italian Gate. The Italian Gate was a series of barriers leading to a major internal checkpoint. The sentries at the main gate were French, British, Neapolitan and Spanish. The Spanish sentries were satisfied that the patrol was escorting a Spanish naval officer to the docks, and, heavily influenced by the stakes at risk with their next hand of cards in the guard room by the fire, allowed the patrol of their countrymen to pass.

Moving quickly through the gate, into the city, whistles and calls from tattered whores, braving the freezing rain, greeted the patrol.

'Our Madame Quandalle. Her disguises are Mount Faron cantiniere by day, whore of Toulon by night,' said Rodau to Jobert, tipping his hat to the unseen woman in the cold shadows, 'She watches our exit. Her signal states all is clear so far.'

The patrol moved quickly through the dark, empty, muddy streets, their torch now extinguished, blustering past idle French loyalist sentries, into the naval precinct.

At the bleak, rain-streaked entrance to the Naval Academy's chapel, the patrol removed their Spanish bicornes and donned their bonnets-de-police from deep within their warm, but increasingly sopping wet, waistcoats.

Rodau marched the patrol across the small courtyard in front of the chapel, then stepped forward up the broad stairs and pounded on the thick wooden door.

The chapel door opened inward to reveal a respectably dressed, middle-aged man, completely unremarkable except for an ugly, bored sneer that twisted his mouth and caused his eyes to appear hooded.

'I am Lieutenant Rodau, Royal Louis battalion,' Rodau introduced himself bluntly, 'I have here orders requiring me to escort naval stores to Fort Sainte-Catherine.'

'This isn't the naval stores,' shrugged the gaoler, closing the heavy door.

'I know that,' snarled Rodau, stepping forward and placing his

hand on the door, 'I have an authority to collect a prison work party of seventy to carry the stores.'

'We don't have seventy,' shrugged the gaoler, again attempting to shut the door.

'You attempt to shut this door on me again, and I'll remove your hand,' Rodau took up the hilt of his sword, 'I'm wet to the skin and I'm in no mood for bullshit.'

The gaoler shifted his stance, and his malevolent eyes looked Rodau up and down, before he pouted, shrugged and stepped back from the open door into the vestibule.

'I'm told the prisoners captured on Mount Faron are capable of portorage,' growled Rodau.

'Them?' the gaoler breathed heavily, 'There's only sixty, at least ten are too ill to walk.'

'I need seventy,' said Rodau, pushing the door back, 'Let me see how sick they are. Sergeant, with me. The rest of you wait here until called.'

Jobert smiled as Rodau had evidently disposed of his 'de Chabernac' persona, and now had assumed an uncanny likeness to Koschak.

Inside the chapel vestibule, a thick odour of shit, vomit and rotting meat struck Rodau and Jobert. As Rodau and Jobert coughed at the stench and attempted to control their breathing, the gaoler let out a mocking laugh.

'Oh, my delicate petal,' scoffed the gaoler at Jobert, then turning to Rodau, 'May I see that your authority is correct, Sir?'

Rodau took out the damp parchment from a sodden leather satchel and passed it across to the gaoler.

The gaoler walked to a tall, writing lectern on which stood a candle, where he examined the document.

'Hmm,' was the response, and the gaoler regarded Rodau carefully, 'I'll need to keep this until the work party has been returned.'

Rodau shrugged.

The gaoler turned, and with a heavy set of iron keys, unlocked an

inner door to the nave and took a lit torch from a bracket mounted in the wall.

‘Where is the company commander?’ asked Rodau forcefully, once inside the black stench of the nave of the chapel, lit only by the torch in the gaoler’s hand.

‘There,’ the gaoler pointed, ‘As I told you, too sick to stand.’

‘Where is the next senior man?’ snarled Rodau.

‘Sergeant!’ bellowed the gaoler and kicked the groaning bodies huddled together on the slimy, cold stone floor.

The torchlight faded as Rodau and the gaoler turned into a transept, seeking the senior, still capable person in the prison. Jobert knelt beside de Beaussancourt in the darkness of the chapel.

‘Can you hear me, Sir?’ whispered Jobert hoarsely.

‘Yes,’ was the response from the shadowy lump on the floor.

‘Do you remember the battle of Mount Faron?’

‘Yes.’

‘On Mount Faron you were guided by chasseurs à cheval. Do you recognise my voice?’

‘Ah, yes, . . . , ah, Jobert, 24th Chasseurs, wasn’t it?’ croaked de Beaussancourt, grasping at Jobert’s face with a clammy hand.

‘Very good, Captain de Beaussancourt,’ smiled Jobert into the darkness, squeezing the hand, ‘It is I, Captain Jobert. I am here to make good your escape. I need you and your men on your feet and prepare to be disguised as a work party.’

‘Sergeant!’ cried de Beaussancourt feebly, ‘Assemble the men for the work party.’

‘Wait!’ snapped the gaoler, wading among the bodies emerging from shadows on the floor, ‘Chain them first.’

‘Chains?’ queried Rodau, ‘These cadavers can’t walk to Fort Sainte-Catherine in chains.’

‘My prisoners are not walking out of this cage without leg-irons,’ sneered the gaoler, hands on hips.

‘Team them in four even gangs,’ called Jobert.

‘I beg your pardon, Sergeant,’ snarled the gaoler, turning to confront Jobert, ‘You’re to chain them, not me,’ then kicking at the prisoners struggling to their feet, ‘Leave your blankets, you’ll be back soon enough.’

With Bredieux waiting in the chapel’s vestibule, Jobert had his soldiers sling their muskets, press the prisoners into four gangs of about sixteen men each and fit the leg-irons to emaciated legs, nearly all with festering, rancid wounds. What was occurring was whispered from prisoner to prisoner, causing fevered eyes to glow with a reignited determination.

‘Hmm,’ said the gaoler, hoisting his torch, ‘There’s none sick on the floor now. My, my, the dead can walk.’

‘I would imagine the storm tonight would be their first bath and first fresh water in ten weeks,’ grunted Rodau.

The guttural murmur of assent came from the ragged soldiers about him.

‘So, Royal Louis battalion, eh?’ the gaoler leant against a pillar and, with the aid of the torchlight, ran his hooded eyes over each of the soldiers in the escort.

‘Yes,’ grunted Rodau.

‘I’ve never seen green chasseur bonnets-de-police before in the battalion,’ said the gaoler scornfully, ‘Why are you wearing green bonnets?’

‘That was all there was left in the clothing store,’ said Rodau.

‘What company do you belong to?’ scoffed the gaoler

‘Battalion headquarters,’ said Rodau, ‘These men are clerks.’

‘He’s not a clerk,’ said the gaoler venomously, pointing to Jobert.

‘The sergeant is new,’ responded Rodau calmly, ‘He’s just escaped from Marseille.’

‘And ‘he’ is a sergeant,’ snarled Jobert, ‘So, watch your mouth, gaoler.’

‘Ooh! Very Jacobin, thank you very much,’ pouted the gaoler, ‘You’re absolutely convinced of his loyalty, Sir.’

The soldiers stood from their task of chaining legs, their faces grimacing from the stale stench of the chapel. Jobert posted the four guards at key points around the prisoners before moving them out into the rain.

‘That’s a rifle,’ snapped the gaoler, pointing to Duval’s weapon, ‘Let me see that.’

‘No,’ grunted Duval, stepping back from the reaching hand.

‘A clerk doesn’t need a rifle,’ mocked the gaoler, stepping forward, hand outstretched for the weapon, ‘Give it to me now’.

Jobert stood up and swung a spare leg chain in an ominously, low arc.

‘Leave my men alone as we’re a little busy,’ growled Jobert, evaluating the reclining gaoler, ‘But I can always make time to cuff one more leg.’

‘Do it,’ breathed sixty voices in the darkness.

The gaoler made a strangled squeal as he stood up straight as Jobert advanced threateningly.

‘That’s enough, Sergeant,’ snapped Rodau, ‘Our duty awaits.’

With Rodau’s reprieve, the gaoler’s ugly sneer and malevolent eyes returned and fixed on Jobert.

‘I’ll take the keys,’ Rodau stuck out his hand.

‘Keys?’ coughed the gaoler, ‘Huh! I don’t think so. You can un-chain them on their return.’

‘And if they collapse in chains?’ growled Rodau.

‘They can carry themselves,’ shrugged the gaoler, ‘Or you can remove the limb.’

Rodau regarded the man with contempt.

‘Let’s get these prisoners moving,’ Rodau commanded finally.

Jobert approached the gaoler menacingly, reaching out towards his face with the cold, wet torch. As the gaoler cringed against the wall, Jobert wiped wet pitch-soot down the front of the gaoler’s clean jacket, then dropped the used torch at his feet and took a spare, unlit torch from a wall bracket.



‘One-hundred-and-fifty hammocks at this time of night, Sir?’ the blinking French naval quartermaster sighed.

Bredieux spread his arms wide, showing the pool of water he stood in, that dripped down from his coat, then slowly turned to the sixty-odd chained, wretched prisoners and the squad of soaked, shivering guards standing in the pouring rain.

‘Sergeant, we are not doing this as a joke,’ said Bredieux, ‘Not on a bastard of a night like this.’

The quartermaster squinted again at the damp parchment request, with its smudged ink, in the flickering candlelight.

‘Could I ask why, Sir?’ he winced.

‘Of course, you may, son,’ nodded Bredieux, then explained slowly, ‘The stores are for the sappers and gunners at Fort Sainte-Catherine. The sappers are taking advantage of the rain to prepare extra earthworks for our naval guns. The canvas, when covered in mud and grass, conceals the new gun emplacements from the Republican patrols. We are moving the stores by night to deny the information to the enemy.’

‘Huh, Army!’ sighed the quartermaster, shaking his head, taking an oil-lamp from his desk, ‘Come with me, gentlemen.’

Bredieux, Rodau and Jobert followed the quartermaster and his lamp into the naval stores warehouse, a long, high vaulted room, divided into timber stalls, not unlike stables in a barn.

‘There are your hammocks, Sir,’ the quartermaster raised the lamp to show a wide stall, stacked with hundreds of bales of hammocks, ‘Sergeant, I’ll count out fifteen, if you stack the bales.’

Quickly enough, Jobert lifted out fifteen bales into the aisle between the stalls of supplies, as the two ‘officers’ looked on.

‘My gangs are in teams of sixteen, may I bring in two gangs to carry the bales out?’ asked Jobert.

‘Certainly, but you ought to wrap the bales,’ advised the quartermaster, ‘in old, waste canvas in that bin, to reduce the bales becoming sodden with rain.’

‘Thank you, quartermaster,’ nodded Jobert, unsure of who outranked whom.

As the quartermaster moved the lamp to illuminate the canvas waste bin for Jobert, the soft light glowed briefly upon a stall full of large kegs and several small casks. Bredieux and Rodau exchanged glances in the gloom.

‘What’s in the kegs, quartermaster?’ asked Bredieux, when Jobert had departed to bring in two of the prison gangs.

‘British rum from the Caribbean, Sir.’

‘Mmm, I haven’t had rum since my squadron was last in Guadeloupe,’ said Bredieux salivating.

‘It tastes like shit, Sir, I don’t know how you drink it.’

‘Ooh, with banana juice, of course.’

Rodau converted his unexpected snort into a cough. ‘What would an ex-fisherman from Saint Nazaire know of tropical fruit?’ he thought.

‘I’ve heard of them,’ shrugged the quartermaster, ‘but I’ve never had a banana.’

‘Would it be possible for a small sip of that liquid sunshine to warm my bones?’

Rodau looked at Bredieux with a frown.

‘I’m sorry, Sir,’ apologised the quartermaster.

‘Not possible at all, quartermaster?’ queried Bredieux, his hands on his hips, ‘On a miserable night like this? Just a sip?’

‘I can’t get the bung out, Sir’ whined the quartermaster, spreading his hands.

‘Quartermaster, you’re speaking with a naval captain,’ Bredieux’s tone became slightly harsh, ‘Really? No cooper’s tools in a naval store?’

‘We have what we came for, Sir’ cautioned Rodau gently.

‘Now, now,’ Bredieux dismissed Rodau with a raised finger, ‘I’m making a genuine request.’ With that he produced a heavy purse from an inner pocket of his waistcoat and hefted it in his right hand.

‘That’s not necessary, Sir,’ the quartermaster’s eyes glinted at the purse in the faint light.

‘Absolutely not,’ Bredieux gently scolded, ‘From one sea-mate to another, I appreciate your succour on a stormy night. But quick now, grab those tools.’

The quartermaster rocked his head indecisively, turned around thinking where the tools might be.

Suddenly, Bredieux swung his purse in a swift, low arc and brought it up hard on the quartermaster’s skull just under the ear. The sailor collapsed.

‘Sergeant Bredieux,’ exclaimed Rodau through gritted teeth, ‘What the fuck are you doing?’

‘Ten little casks of rum, Sir,’ Bredieux pleaded, ‘We could raise money for company funds, Sir.’

‘Sergeant Bredieux, stop this bullshit, or we’ll all end up in the naval chapel,’ Rodau hissed as Jobert’s thirty-odd prisoners approached, following his lamp, chains clanking across the stone floor, ‘We have what we need, now let’s go.’

‘What ...’ started Jobert when he discerned the body on the floor.

‘Sir, someone’s coming,’ hissed a few prisoners.

‘Quickly,’ commanded Rodau to the prisoners, pointing to the unconscious sailor, ‘Cover him in bales,’ then turning to Jobert, ‘Please, Sir, quickly wrap the bales so we can get moving.’

‘Good evening there, what are you people doing?’ a high-pitched voice called out from behind the glow of a lamp.

‘Oh! Good evening, Sir,’ an elderly, bespectacled French naval lieutenant stammered upon seeing Bredieux’s rank, ‘Where is the quartermaster? How may I help you, Sir?’

The lieutenant looked about him with concern, placing his hand to his nose due to the unwashed and rotting stench of the prisoners,

wrapping bales of hammocks and then, with some difficulty, hoisting one bale between two prisoners.

‘Good evening to you, Sir,’ bemoaned a gruff and impatient Bredieux, waving his arms, ‘I’m required to take fifteen bales of hammocks and ten casks of gin out to Fort Sainte-Catherine. The quartermaster has gone off somewhere looking for coopers’ tools.’

‘Sir, that’s not gin,’ corrected the lieutenant, ‘That’s rum.’

‘I don’t want rum, Sir,’ snarled Bredieux, flapping his authorisation documents, ‘My requisition says gin.’

‘But we don’t have any gin, Sir.’

‘But I must take to gin to Admiral Hood’s dinner,’ yelled a strident Bredieux, punching his fist into his palm.

‘If I had gin, Sir, you would be most welcome to it, but I simply don’t.’

‘Then what am I going to do?’ yelled Bredieux throwing up his hands.

The lieutenant recoiled at the ghastly appearance and stench of the prisoners around him.

‘Perhaps we might take the rum, Sir,’ said Rodau calmly.

‘Don’t be an idiot, man,’ growled Bredieux, ‘The Admiral specifically stated gin.’

‘Should you take the rum, Sir,’ Rodau remaining calm, shaking his head imperceptibly to an alarmed Jobert, ‘If the Admiral doesn’t care for it then we’ll bring it back.’

‘What? Bring it back tonight?’ bristled Bredieux, ‘Are you mad, Sir?’

‘I’ll bring it back tomorrow, Sir,’ Rodau bowed his head, exchanging looks of alarm with the naval lieutenant.

‘Have you tasted the rum, Sir,’ the naval lieutenant winced, ‘It is an acquired taste?’

‘You have a point,’ grimaced Bredieux, ‘Oh, I don’t know what to do.’

‘Please, Sir, your men need to clear my warehouse,’ coughed the

lieutenant, 'Please take the rum.'

'Oh, very well,' slumped a dejected Bredieux, 'If you insist.'

'How will we carry the casks, Sir,' said Jobert through gritted teeth.

'Bloody landlubbers,' Bredieux rolled his eyes to the stores lieutenant, 'In a sling of waste canvas, of course. Do you have a bin of waste canvas?'

'We do indeed, Sir, just there.'

'Get on with it, Sergeant,' snarled Bredieux, 'I don't have all night.'

Jobert paused to contain himself. Then he nodded, turned to create ten slings, hung them around the necks of the stronger prisoners and nestled a small cask into the folds of the sling. With the twenty litre casks weighing about twenty-five kilograms, Jobert knew his soldiers, not the prisoners, would need to carry such a load.

'Now here, the requisition forms,' Bredieux flicked the papers at the lieutenant, 'I'm not happy, Sir. I insist on signing a separate form that I was forced to take rum from the store and not gin.'

'I can arrange that quite quickly, Sir, if you follow me to the front counter,' sighed the lieutenant, turning up his nose at the wet parchment and smudged ink.



The storm clouds appeared snagged on Mount Faron, unable to move further inland. The lightening illuminating the mountain's slopes, the thunder booming down from the shadowed valleys, yet the freezing December rain emptied on the town.

For the laden column of prisoners and guards, trudging back through the slippery cobbled streets to the Italian Gate, the discomfort of saturated woollen tailcoats for the lucky, or simply shirt-sleeves for the majority, was bearable in comparison to the thought

of returning to the naval chapel.

A shrill whistle sounded sharply from the shadows.

‘Halt!’ commanded Rodau.

A slim, barefoot feminine figure, dressed in rags, wrapped heavily with a scarf about her head and a tattered blanket about her shoulders, swept quickly out from a dark lane.

‘They’re looking for you,’ hissed Madame Quandalle, her face framed with wet curls, in the torchlight, ‘A British patrol has just come in from La Malue and reported to the Italian Gate sentries. They seek a Spanish patrol with a slim, aristocratic officer, a naval officer, and a big sergeant. The sentries have shut the Italian Gate, and the patrol has pressed onto the wharves.’

‘Then we need to eliminate who they’re looking for,’ rasped Jobert.

‘I’m able to remain here in the town,’ spoke Rodau decisively, ‘Bredieux, take my uniform and command the column.’

‘What about you, Sir?’ grunted Bredieux as he struggled to shrug off his saturated woollen naval jacket.

‘Give my sergeant’s tailcoat to one of the soldiers, I’ll strip to my drawers and join a gang,’ grunted Jobert, fumbling with the buckles of his knee-high gaiters with his numb fingers, ‘We also need a way to pick the locks of these leg-irons.’

‘I can pick locks,’ whispered Madame Quandalle, looking to the clinking chains on shadowy legs ‘Do you need to unchain them now?’

‘No, not now,’ hissed Bredieux, as he shrugged on Rodau’s tailcoat heavy with water, ‘We have to get outside first.’

‘You can’t be seen taking a woman out through the gates,’ grimaced Rodau, folding his arms across his slim chest since being reduced to his shirtsleeves.

‘We could take a sergeant,’ snarled Jobert, holding out up his recently discarded tailcoat.

The four figures paused in the rain, fighting the cold and tiredness that was overwhelming their minds.

‘Queue my hair,’ commanded Quandalle, passing her blanket and scarf to Rodau, ‘Use Rodau’s ribbon.’

Jobert ground his teeth as he willed his fingers to undo Rodau’s queue ribbon, and then braid Quandalle’s thick, wet hair.

Once complete, and with Jobert having taken his place between some prisoners, Quandalle slapped Jobert’s buttocks and squeezed hard.

‘You’ll pay a pretty fee for my extra services, my lovely lad,’ Quandalle laughed, as the surrounding prisoners whistled suggestively, but softly.

The column adjusted their hold on their burdens and groaned forward through the slimy puddles and the dripping eaves towards the Italian Gate. The light and the laughter spilling from the guard room guided their shuffling, clinking steps.

‘Can we pass?’ grunted Bredieux, to the eight raucous men at the card table by the fire.

The two British and two Spanish sentries looked up at the sodden Royal Louis subaltern in the doorway.

‘Coming, Sir,’ called a French sentry, a militiaman in plain clothes with a white, Royalist cockade on his bicorne, who pushed himself back from the table, and crossed the warmth of the room.

Bredieux stepped back out under covered gateway and fumbled with his flint as he attempted to light his pipe.

‘Good evening, Sir,’ nodded the middle-aged sentry, ‘Bastard of a night.’

‘Hmm,’ snarled Bredieux, adjusting a heavy weight slung about his chest, ‘Wet flint.’

‘We can’t have that, Sir,’ said the militiaman, producing his pipe-flint, ‘Here, Sir, allow me?’

‘Thank you, my friend,’ said Bredieux gratefully, ‘Here, have the tobacco.’

‘Well, thank you, Sir,’ replied the sentry, ‘Now, how can I help, Sir?’

'I have bales of canvas for the sappers at Fort Sainte-Catherine,' said Bredieux, jerking his head at the morose, shivering prisoners, and drawing deeply on his pipe.

'Your papers, please, Sir.'

'I gave my requisition for prisoners to the gaoler, my requisition for stores to the navy. I have no other paperwork,' shrugged Bredieux.

One of the two British sentries, a corporal, stepped out from the guard room, into the chill, wet breeze racing through the gateway.

'Who is in your party, Sir?' asked the British soldier in halting French.

'This lot,' grunted Bredieux.

The Briton exchanged a pleading look with the French sentry.

'Do you have a Spanish naval officer travelling with you, Sir?' asked the militiaman.

'I beg your pardon?' said an incredulous Bredieux, 'Not unless he is in chains.'

'Do you have any sergeants in your escort, Sir?' the militiaman shook his head to the British corporal.

'Sergeant!' Bredieux called down the column.

'Sir!' called a deep, rough voice in response.

The sentries looked the length of the column, and a short, portly sergeant waved from between the chain gangs.

The corporal snorted a laugh and returned into the heat of guard room.

'Sorry, about that, Sir,' grimaced the French sentry.

Bredieux sneered contempt at the departing redcoat.

'But, Sir, I really ought to see your passes,' winced the sentry, 'I could send a runner to the Royal Louis duty officer?'

'What? To battalion headquarters in Fort La Malgue?' groaned Bredieux imploringly, 'These miserable Republican bastards will be dead by then.'

The sentry sucked his teeth as he looked at the wasted men in

chains in the shadows of the gatehouse. A call from behind him, urging him back to the card game, caused him to turn to the guard room's glow.

'Have you lost your money to these foreigners?' asked Bredieux.

'Yes,' shrugged the sentry despondently.

'Maybe the Royal Navy can help us both to have their canvas delivered?' whispered Bredieux conspiratorially, 'Here, I have stores for Admiral Hood's dinner party,' pulling back the edge of the canvas sling to reveal the iron-bound cask.

'Caribbean rum,' winked Bredieux, 'As you said, it is a bastard of a night for it, and I have to deliver these stores then get these poor mongrels back to their shit-hole.'

'Very good, Sir,' said the sentry, looking quickly over his shoulder, 'But we'll confirm your passes on your way back, Sir, yes?'

'Of course, my friend,' smiled Bredieux, struggling out of the sling and passing the barrel to the sentry.

The sentry placed the barrel in the shadows behind an overflowing rain butt, stepped to the gate, and unlocked the mechanism which allowed the gate's heavy bar to be withdrawn.

The gates opened.

With their loads hefted back upon aching arms and shoulders, the grim column shuffled through a series of outer gates, over Toulon's defensive ditch until finally they had set foot on the Fort Sainte-Catherine road.

After half-an-hour of marching, without torchlight, to the insistent hissed whispers of encouragement throughout the column to the weary, the rain finally slackened to a light drizzle.

'Here is the road up to Fort D'Artigues,' Bredieux said to Jobert and Quandalle.

'Then press up the slope until we are well off the Toulon-Sainte-Catherine road,' commanded Jobert, looking back down the pitch-black Toulon road, 'Then we'll remove the chains.'

Very soon after, the prisoners exhaled a thankful moan as they

collapsed on their wrapped bales and unslung the heavy casks from their chests. The sodden escort were dispatched into the darkness as pairs of sentries, as Quandalle patiently unpicked over sixty chain locks.

‘Captain Jobert,’ hissed the prisoners voices in the cloudy night, as a sentry sought his captain.

‘Here!’ said Jobert forcefully into the gloom, ‘Pebbles, is that you?’

‘Yes, Sir. There is someone out there in the dark, Sir,’ grunted Duval, stifling a laugh, ‘They’re whistling the trumpet call *To Mess.*’

Author's Notes

Making up a story and then sharing it is marvellous fun. Especially when the characters that are created can sneak into a corner of history, taking upon themselves the colours and flavours of that period. How do I have any idea of those colours and flavours? I know because I could take advantage of years and years and years of patient, painstaking research of dedicated, professional historians. Thus, I owe a significant debt of gratitude to those historians, whom I have listed in a bibliographical appendix, not only for assembling the facts, but explaining their analyses so clearly.

What is real and what is not? I have included a Chronology of Events as an appendix. After thirty years of crippling debt, France spiralled into anarchy. The chronology describes that descent, lists the historical events referred to within the story, and gives some sense of the chaos impacting on the characters during 1793.

The 24th Chasseurs à Cheval, an actual regiment in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies, was raised in March 1793 from a regiment of patriotic volunteers, the Chasseurs Volontaires. During the Revolutionary period, the 24th Chasseurs à Cheval saw service across southern France in both the Army of the Western Pyrenees and the Army of Italy. With artistic license, I have borrowed this fine regiment to support the story of André Jobert.

Who is real and who is not? A list of characters, the *Dramatis Personae*, is also included as an appendix. Characters within the list with their names underlined actually existed, such as Colonel Morin, the 24th Chasseurs à Cheval's founding commanding officer.

If the character's name is not underlined, such as André Jobert, then the character was invented.

There are two other appendices to assist the reader. For those unsure of metric measurements and their conversion, a very down-and-dirty guide is provided. For those unfamiliar with military organisations and ranks, again, a very simple guide is included.

In conclusion, I hope you enjoyed Jobert's first adventure as much as I had writing it. Jobert's adventures, in 1794 and 1795, continue in *Duty on a Lesser Front*. I would welcome your feedback on Jobert's website (www.jobert.site), or even a quick note just to say 'Hi!'.

Rob McLaren

Veresdale, Queensland
January 2019



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I also acknowledge the insights and detail provided by the Wikipedia, Google Maps and You Tube websites



Chronology of Events

The following chronology list the historical events that are referred to within the story:

1789

- 5 May King Louis XVI convenes States General to find a solution to the severe financial crisis facing France
- 17 Jun A break away government, the National Assembly, is formed
- 14 Jul The creation of the National Guard and the fall of the Bastille
- Aug-Sep The Declaration of the Rights of Man, cessation of noble privilege and medieval guilds

1792

- 20 Apr France declares war on Prussia and Austria
- 20 Sep In northern France, the French defeat Prussia at the Battle of Valmy
- 21 Sep France is declared a Republic and the National Convention established
- 6 Nov In northern France, the French defeat Austria at the Battle of Jemappes

1793

- 21 Jan King Louis XVI of France executed
- 1 Feb Britain and the United Provinces (the Netherlands) declare war on France
- 23 Feb Declaration of levee-en-masse
- 1 Mar Twelve chasseur à cheval regiments raised, including the 24th Chasseur à Cheval

- 3 Mar In northern France, the French are defeated at the Battle of Aix-la-Chapelle
- 7 Mar Spain declares war on France
- 10 Mar The National Convention forms the Revolutionary Tribunal
- 18 Mar French forces capture Mainz, on the Rhine, and declare the Mainz Republic formed
- 18 Mar In northern France, the French are defeated at the Battle of Neerwinden, near Liege
- Mar Uprisings in the Vendee
- 30 Mar Austria and Prussia lay siege to Mainz
- 5 Apr Successful and popular commander, General Dumouriez, defects to the Austrians
- 6 Apr The National Convention forms the Committee of Public Safety, thus beginning the period known as ‘the Terror’
- Apr The Deputies, or Representatives, of the People are established by the Committee of Public Safety
- 29 Apr Marseilles revolts against the Republic
- 30 Apr Naples, Portugal, and the Papal States declare war on France
- May Concentration of military force under General Carteaux at Valence
- 5-24 May In western France, Republican forces face a series of defeats in the Vendee
- 23 May In northern France, the French defeat at the Battle of Famars is followed by the siege of Valenciennes
- 29 May Lyon revolts against the Republic
- 31 May-2 Jun The National Convention enacts severe legislation against opposition

- 10 Jun The Jacobins control the Committee of Public Safety as a ‘revolutionary dictatorship’
- 24 Jun The Constitution of the Republic of France is adopted
- 25 Jun Avignon revolts against the Republic
- 6–8 Jul Federalist forces from Marseille enter Avignon to support the uprising
- 20 Jul General Carteaux departs Valence. Bonaparte abandons powder convoy and joins Carteaux’s staff
- 24–27 Jul Republican forces recapture Avignon. Bonaparte writes a propaganda essay, *Le Souper de Beaucaire*, which attracts the attention of Robespierre
- 23 Jul On the Rhine, Mainz recaptured by Austria and Prussia
- 27 Jul Robespierre elected to the Committee of Public Safety
- 29 Jul In the north, Valenciennes captured by the Austria, Prussia and Britain
- 8 Aug General Carteaux departs Avignon for Marseille
- 14 Aug Carnot joins the Committee of Public Safety as the Minister of War
- 17–23 Aug Carnot declares another levee-en-masse
- 18 Aug In northern France, the French are defeated at the Battle of Lincelles
- 24 Aug–
8 Sep In northern France, the British lay siege to Dunkerque
- 25 Aug Republican forces recapture Marseille. Bonaparte re-joins powder convoy

Siege of Toulon

- 27 Aug Toulon revolts against the Republic, and invites British and Spanish fleets to secure the port
- 30 Aug Outside Toulon, General Carteaux arrives at the head of the Ollioules defile
- 5 Sep Promulgation of ‘Make terror the order of the day’
- 6-15 Sep In northern France, the French raise the British siege of Dunkerque with victory at the Battle of Hondschoote, defeat the Dutch at the Battle of Boxtel, but are defeated by the Austrians at the Battles of Menin and Courtrai
- 7 Sep Toulon invested by Generals Carteaux and Lapoype
- 9 Sep The National Convention enacts laws that force farmers to surrender grain without payment
- 12 Sep In northern France, the French are defeated by the Austrians at the Battle of Avesnes-le-Sec
- 16 Sep At Toulon, Bonaparte re-joins General Carteaux’s headquarters
- 17 Sep The National Convention enacts the Law of Suspects
- 20 Sep Bonaparte initiates a bombardment of the British fleet
- 30 Sep-
1 Oct At Toulon, Lapoype attacks the fortresses on Mount Faron
- 9 Oct Republican forces recapture Lyon, releasing reinforcements for Toulon
- 10 Oct The kingdoms of Naples and Sardinia reinforce the defence of Toulon
- 15-16 Oct French victory at the Battle of Wattignies relieves the siege of Mauberge and alleviates the threat to Paris

- 15-17 Oct Vendean forces are defeated by the Republic at Cholet and Le Mans
- 16 Oct Queen Marie Antoinette is executed, upon which Russia declares war on France
- 18 Oct At Toulon, Bonaparte is promoted to the rank of major having established eleven batteries focused on the allies' western defences
- 18 Oct Austria and Prussia attack across the Rhine into Alsace
- 22-29 Oct French lay siege to Nieuport held by the British
- 23 Oct At Toulon, General Carteaux is replaced by General Doppet
- 13-16 Nov At Toulon, General Doppet is replaced by General Dugommier
- 25 Nov General Dugommier holds a Council of War a which Bonaparte's plan for the attack on Toulon is adopted
- 27-30 Nov In Alsace, French are defeated at the Battle of Kaiserlauten
- 30 Nov At Toulon, an allied sortie from the western Fort Malbousquet results in a decisive counter-attack by the French
- 8-22 Dec Republican forces defeat the Vendean uprising at the Battles of Angers and Sarenay
- 14 Dec At Toulon, as General Masséna's brigade arrives, Bonaparte initiates the bombardment of the allies' western Fort Mulgrave
- 17 Dec French forces simultaneously attack Fort Mulgrave to the west of the Inner Harbour under General Dugommier, and the fortresses on Mount Faron under General Lapoype
- 18 Dec After three failed attempts to capture Fort Faron, General Masséna succeeds in securing Fort D'Artigues

- 18 Dec With Fort Mulgrave secure, Bonaparte bombards the port of Toulon across the Inner Harbour, forcing the allies to evacuate the city
- 18 Dec British and Spanish demolition parties re-enter Toulon to undertake the destruction of French naval ships and stores remaining in the port. Only sixteen of forty-one vessels are burnt to varying degrees
- 19 Dec Republican forces enter the evacuated city of Toulon
- 22 Dec Masséna promoted to major-general, Bonaparte and Victor promoted to brigadier-general



Ready Reference – Military Organisations

A very quick and simple overview of military organisations:

Squad/File/Patrol – Cavalry soldiers were grouped together in threes or fours to patrol, cook and sleep together as well as ride together in larger formations.

Section – Twelve men, when at full-strength, or three squads/files, commanded by a corporal.

Platoon – Two sections, twenty-four men at full-strength, commanded by a sergeant.

Troop – Two platoons, fifty men at full strength, commanded by a second-lieutenant.

Company – Two troops, one hundred men at full strength, commanded by a captain.

Squadron – Two companies, commanded by the senior captain of the two companies

Regiment – Three or more squadrons, commanded by a colonel. The regimental commander had two chiefs of squadron who could assist him by commanding one to three squadrons on independent tasks.

Brigade – Two or more regiments of infantry or cavalry, with supporting artillery, engineers and logistic support, commanded by a brigadier (a rank of general).

Division – Two or more brigades, with associated support, commanded by a major general.

Corps – Two or more divisions, capable of significant independent operations, commanded by a lieutenant general

Army, or Army Wing – Two or more corps, commanded by a general



Ready Reference – Measurement Conversion

A very approximate conversion of metric measurements:

One inch is approximately two-and-a-half centimetres.

One metre is approximately one yard, or three feet.

One thousand metres, or one kilometre, is approximately two-thirds of a mile (five-eighths). One mile is approximately one-and-a-half kilometres.

One kilogram is approximately two pounds.

One litre, or **one kilogram of water**, is approximately two pints.

Dramatis Personae

This story is a work of fiction within a historical setting. In the list of characters below, those with their names underlined actually existed, otherwise the character is a creation of the author's.

The 24th Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval

(Napoleonic ranks in brackets)

- Morin** Colonel and Commanding Officer of the regiment. Ex-commanding officer of the recently disbanded Chasseurs Volontaires
- Raive** Lieutenant Colonel (major) and Second-in-command of the regiment. Ex-chief of squadron of the 3rd Chasseurs à Cheval, previously served with Koschak. Met Jobert following the Battle of Jemappes (November 1792)
- Cobereau** Major (adjutant or chef d'escadron) and Chief of Squadron of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Squadrons. Ex-company commander of the 7th Chasseurs à Cheval, previously served with Geourdai and Bidonne
- Maccard** Major (adjutant or chef d'escadron) and Chief of Squadron of 4th, 5th and 6th Squadrons
- Mercier** Captain, commander of 1st Company and 1st Squadron
- Avriol** Captain, commander of 7th Company, junior company of 1st Squadron
- André Jobert** Captain, commander of 2nd Company and 2nd Squadron

- De Chabenac** Captain, commander of 8th Company, junior company of 2nd Squadron. Posted Regimental Aide de camp
- Bidonne** Captain, commander of 6th Company and 6th Squadron Regimental fencing master. Ex-company commander of the 7th Chasseurs à Cheval, previously served with Cobereau and Geour dai

2nd Company, 24th Chasseurs à Cheval

(Napoleonic ranks in brackets)

- André Jobert** Captain, commander of 2nd Company and 2nd Squadron. Ex-company commander of 5th Chasseurs à Cheval
- Geour dai** Lieutenant and Second-in-command. Ex-troop commander of 7th Chasseurs à Cheval, previously served with Cobereau and Bidonne. Promoted to Captain, company commander of 8th Company
- Koschak** Company sergeant major (marechel des logis chef). Ex-troop sergeant of 3rd Chasseurs à Cheval, previously served with Raive
- Lombatte** Company quartermaster corporal (brigadier-fourrier)
- Vocuse** Company farrier corporal (brigadier)
- Tulloc** Chasseur, company apprentice farrier and marksman/sniper
- Moench** Chasseur and company trumpeter

Neilage	Second lieutenant (sous lieutenant) and troop commander. Originally a volunteer in the recently disbanded Chasseurs Volontaires. Promoted to First Lieutenant, second-in-command of 2 nd Company
Martine	Sergeant (marechel des logis) and platoon commander in Neilage's troop
Bredieux	Sergeant (marechel des logis) and platoon commander in Neilage's troop
Gouvion	Second lieutenant (sous lieutenant) and troop commander. Recent graduate of the École Militaire, Paris
Clenaude	Sergeant (marechel des logis) and platoon commander in Gouvion's troop
Rodau	Sergeant (marechel des logis) and platoon commander in Gouvion's troop. Promoted to Second Lieutenant, troop commander in 2 nd Company
Checuti	Sergeant (marechel des logis) and platoon commander in Gouvion's troop. Promoted to sergeant as a result of Rodau's promotion
Duval	Chasseur and marksman/sniper
Dalmuz	Chasseur in Checuti's platoon. Promoted to section corporal in Clenaude's platoon
Pultiere	Chasseur
Millone	Chasseur in Clenaude's platoon. Is taken prisoner during the siege of Toulon

- Duck** Corporal (brigadier) and Jobert's groom. Fought April–November 1792 in northern France and Austrian Belgium at the battles of Valmy and Jemappes with Jobert. Wounded at Jemappes
- Mathieu** Jobert's valet and cook
- Amy** Corporal (brigadier) and Geour dai's valet

André Jobert's Family

- Herbert Chauvel** André Jobert's great grandfather. Cattle drover, saddler. Served at the Battles of Blenheim (1704) and Malplaquet (1709)
- Jacques Chauvel** André Jobert's grandfather and son of Herbert. Artilleryman, horse breeder and trainer Served at the Battles of Dettingen (1743) and Fontenoy (1745)
- Sophie Chauvel** André Jobert's great aunt and sister of Jacques. Seamstress. Lives with Michelle in Paris
- Yann Chauvel** André Jobert's uncle and son of Jacques. Veteran of the Seven Years War (1756–1763). Sergeant–veterinarian 5th Chasseurs à Cheval, horse breeder and trainer. Runs the family farm in the high country of the Auvergne
- Marie Chauvel** André Jobert's mother, daughter of Jacques, sister of Yann, wife of Marc. Seamstress, 5th Chasseurs à Cheval

Marc Jobert	André Jobert's father. Veteran of the Seven Years War (1756-1763). Regimental Sergeant Major 5 th Chasseurs à Cheval
Didier Jobert-Chauvel	André Jobert's brother. Ex-troop commander 5 th Chasseurs à Cheval. Chief of Squadron, volunteer legion
Michelle Chauvel	André Jobert's cousin, daughter of Yann. Seamstress. Lives in Paris with her great aunt Sophie.

Avignon

Madame de Rossi	Matron of an eminent Avignon family
Inoubli	Avignon dance master
Anissa	Avignon prostitute
Madame de Chabenac	Mother of Captain de Chabenac. Wife of the Comte de Chabenac
Valmai de Chabenac	Sister of Captain de Chabenac
Marguerite	Young lady present at Madame de Rossi's ball. Has a relationship with Mercier
Marie	Young lady present at Madame de Rossi's ball. Has a relationship with Geour dai.
<u>General Mouret</u>	A Lyon-based brigade commander who commands forces in the Rhône valley.

Siege of Toulon

- Saliceti** A Jacobin Deputy of the People, assigned to observe the performance of the Army. A friend and sponsor of Napoleon Bonaparte
- Barras** A Jacobin Deputy of the People assigned to observe the performance of the Army. Future leader of France's 'Directory' government 1795-1799
- General Carteux** A General who assumes of command of Republican forces to end the revolts within southern cities, such as Avignon, Marseille and Toulon
- General Lapoype** A General within the Army of Italy tasked with assaulting the captured port of Toulon from the east
- General Dugommier** The commanding general of the French forces which eventually raised the siege of Toulon
- General Masséna** Brigade commander from the Army of Italy. promoted based on his performance at Toulon. Future Marshal of France under Emperor Napoleon
- Admiral Brueys d'Aigalliers** French naval officer attached to General Dugommier's headquarters
- Captain Sir William Sydney Smith** British naval officer directed to destroy the vessels and the supplies within Toulon upon the evacuation of the British and Spanish forces

**Captain
Saint-Joséph**

Naval staff officer to Admiral Brueys

**Lieutenant
Paul-Rianne**

Naval staff officer to Admiral Brueys

Major Suchet

Commander of the 4th Battalion, Volontaires l'Ardeche at the siege of Toulon. Future Marshal of France under Emperor Napoleon

Major Victor

Commander of the 5th Battalion, Volontaires Bouches-du-Rhône at the siege of Toulon. Future Marshal of France under Emperor Napoleon

**Captain
Bonaparte**

Artillery officer. Promoted Brigadier General as a result of his performance at Toulon. Future Napoleon I, Emperor of France

