

Duty
on a
Lesser Front



ROB MCLAREN

Duty on a Lesser Front

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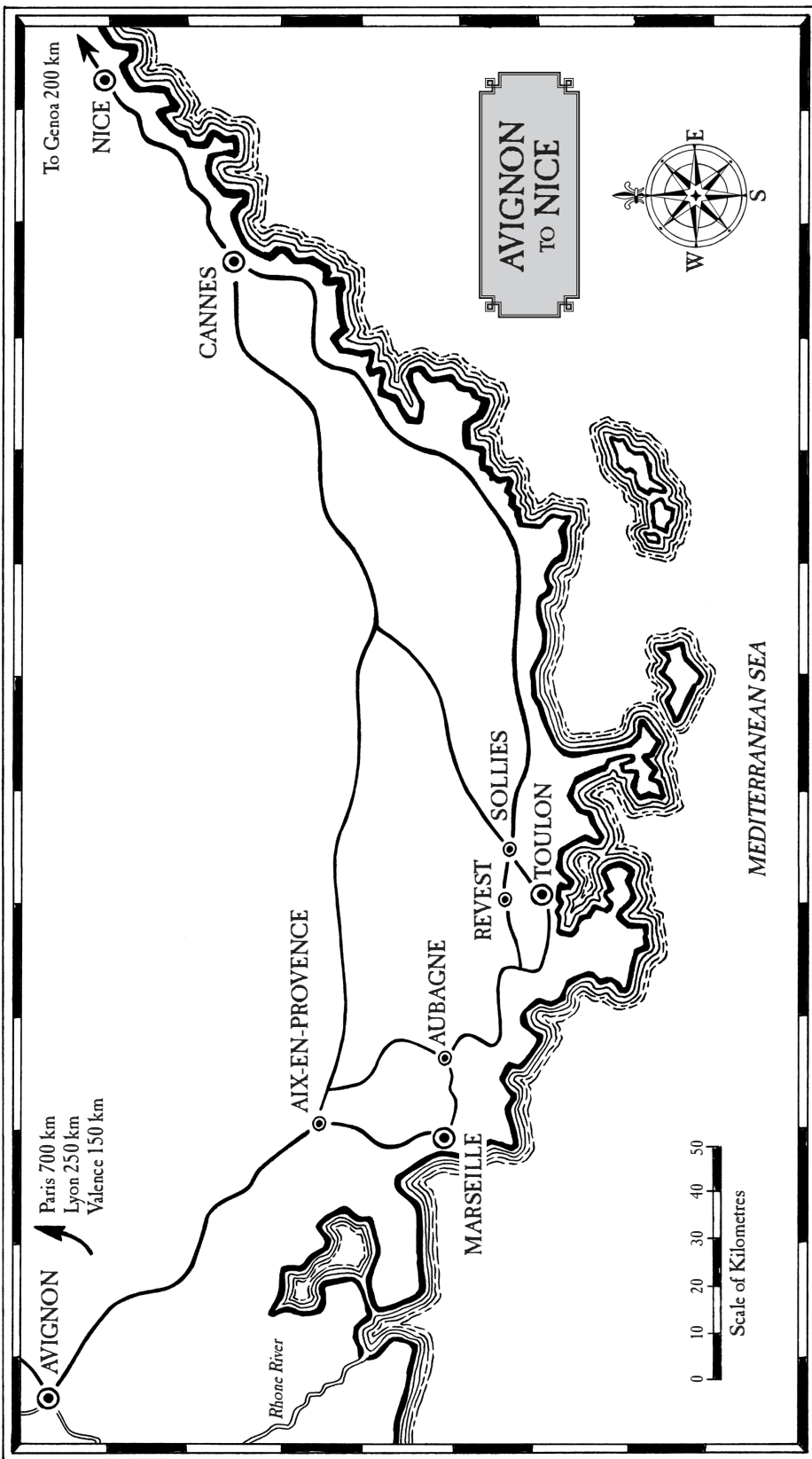
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Chapter One

January 1794, Auvergne, France



André Jobert looked up from the cairn of black rocks that marked his grandfather's fresh grave to the still, snow-covered slopes that surrounded him. The thick clouds blanketed the mountains' sides, removing any view of the western heights of the Massif Central across the Allier valley far below. Jobert's vision was restricted to the frozen granite and the snow-laden boughs within a few hundred metres.

The slowly drifting snow muted any sound. When one of the horses pawed at the crust of snow, crackling the frozen dry grass and snorting a plume of thick steam, the noise seemed overly loud in the crisp air.

Jobert looked to his companion, a man he had only ever known since childhood as Duck. Duck stared blankly towards the black, silent pines, his lower face buried in an ice-encrusted scarf. Duck returned to the present with a sigh and his eyes returned to the grave. He made the sign of the cross rapidly with the three remaining fingers of his right hand, his thick glove barely moving.

Jobert's and Duck's eyes locked for a moment. Jobert nodded solemnly before turning to mount.

A pulse of breeze rising from the valley floor whistled through the pine-needles and swirled the snow in the air. The two horsemen let their horses pick their steps down the brittle, rocky slope, away from Jacques Chauvel's grave, to the huddled farms shrouded in the mist below.



With candles placed about his papers and quill and ink ready, Yann Chauvel looked up to see the last of the dinner plates and salvers being cleared from the long, ancient table. The four remaining members of Yann's family settled into their chairs in the warm, smoky air of the dark, stone room. With extra timber piled beside the hearth and a fresh pot of coffee set upon the table, the servants retired from the room.

Yann's daughter, Michelle, a tall, slim woman in early twenties, her long hair pinned up into trusses, curls bobbing on her nape, draped a knitted blanket across the waist of her great aunt Sophie. The elderly Sophie flapped a bony hand, tut-tutting that such a fuss would be made but raised her slender arms to allow Michelle to tuck the blanket cosily.

Didier gave his younger brother, André, a wink as he poured brandy from a dark-glassed bottle into the wooden cups of Yann, Michelle, André and his own. Aunt Sophie would take a small splash of brandy in her coffee.

'The last will and testament of my father ... of Jacques Chauvel,' said Yann in German, gruffly stroking his stubbly, weathered jowl, 'directs the division of his estate into thirds. One-third to his sister Sophie, one-third to myself and one-third to the children of his daughter,' Yann looked over his wire-frame

spectacles to the faces illuminated by the flickering fire, 'And here in one room are all those beneficiaries.

'To understand Jacques' estate, we need to understand Jacques' story.

'Jacques and his brother had served as gunners in the 2nd Regiment of Foot Artillery since they were eighteen. After Fontenoy in 1745, the regiment's commander was determined to provide his regiment twenty horses a year, sufficient to provide teams for half a battery. With the Colonels' family holding three-hundred acres of steep, rocky slopes in the Auvergne, the Colonel tasked Jacques and his brother with raising twenty horses on this unproductive country. This land grant is known to our family as the Old Farm.

'The demand for horses grew when France went to war against Prussia in 1756, and the one-hundred-and-twenty-acre New Farm was granted to the brothers to double the output of horses to forty per annum, or sufficient caisson and limber teams for one battery. Following the war, the Colonel purchased the one-hundred acres we now know as the Lower Flats, pasture able to carry greater stocking levels, specifically for brood mares.

'To provide forty three-year-old horses for regimental service requires a herd of forty-five three-year-old and fifty two-year-old colts under work, a herd of fifty-five yearlings and a herd of sixty-five pregnant mares with sixty foals-at-foot, let alone stallions, cart and saddle horses.

'So, in the thirty-five years from when the herd started, until 1780 when my service with the 5th Chasseurs ended, and I took up management of the farm, Jacques and his brother had a built up a herd of two-hundred-and-eighty horses based on five-hundred-and-twenty acres.

'Over that time, a workforce of over forty men has been established; fifteen herdsman to care for mares and foals, an-

other ten herdsman to monitor the yearlings and fifteen trainers to school the colts. These herdsman and horsemen are both from local families and amputee veterans from my ...,' Yann waved his hand inclusively to Didier and André, 'our old regiment. That herd, land and workforce has been maintained until this day.'

Yann paused to savour his brandy.

'In 1790, with the changes sweeping France, the Colonel's family chose to sell the land to Jacques prior to departing abroad. Understandably, we acquired the land at a low price, but the interest rates from the lenders were high. That loan has a term of twenty years. The ownership of the land is held against the volume of the herd. The land is valued greater than the herd, so a bridging loan at an extreme rate of interest, is also held to cover the difference.

'Until the bridging loan is repaid, we cannot claim ownership of the land,' Yann continued, looking across to Michelle, as she stoked the fire, adding three small logs, 'Any financial shock, and 1793 just past, has threatened more than a few, will have our lenders pull the rug from under us.

'So, we sit precariously. Jacques' estate maintains a significant herd on significant parcels of land. The war over the last eighteen months ensures our artillery horses command a good price, but the sale of forty horses per annum barely covers the loan repayments and the needs of our workers. There is no extra for repairs to stables, let alone our grand family home,' Yann scoffed as his eyes wandered around the rough rock walls of the ancient cottage with its jumble of added rooms.

'But the farm's income is supplemented,' Yann added draining his brandy and sliding the cup towards Didier's bottle.

'Gentlemen,' Didier held his brandy aloft, toasting both Aunt Sophie and cousin Michelle, 'The ladies.'

'Indeed,' continued Yann raising his cup to his aunt, 'As a

regimental seamstress at the age of fourteen, Aunt Sophie built up a factory of local women in Clermont-Ferrand by 1748. The Prussian war enabled further workhouses in Orléans by 1757 and Paris by 1761. Michelle added a second workhouse in Paris last year. All these properties are completely owned by Sophie, in her brother's name, of course. After costs, and the investment in the new workhouse, the net profit from seamstressing contributes to the farm's loan repayments equivalent to the sale of ten extra horses per annum. Up to this point, this transfer of monies has been a long-standing arrangement between Jacques and Sophie.'

Thanking Didier for refilling his cup with a nod, Yann swirled a gulp of brandy in his mouth before continuing.

'A third venture has been undertaken in the last year. The Republic's demand for cartage to supply the armies, and the subsequent income, cannot be ignored. So, under the management of the Garnier family, we are expanding in this area based on our forty-five-odd herd of three-year-old colts.'

André reflected that the Garnier family had cared for the Chauvel family's herd for three generations, ever since his grandfather arrived in the high country. That family connection was the basis of his friendship with Duck since a small boy. Duck had made vague mention of his family's involvement in the scheme to André, but both men knew they would be fully appraised once reaching home.

'At three-and-a-half years old, our colts leave the farm each March for the artillery regiments capable of working as a pair in harness, as well as under saddle. But each March the yearling herd replaces the junior colt herd, and the junior two-year-old colts become our senior colts. Since these new senior colts are still growing, one element of their schooling is to work as a team of eight, two as wheelers on the shaft, two as leaders in traces. They alternate with the other four every second day.

By the end of the year's schooling, including their work under saddle, the colts are strong enough to pull a light load in pairs, prior to further schooling upon reaching their regiments. Thus, we require a fleet of at least twenty wagons for forty-five horses. Investing whatever can be spared grows that fleet gradually. Also, cartage places the senior colt herd on the road and relieves pressure on our pastures.'

Yann looked at the faces considering him carefully beyond the wavering candlelight.

'So, Jacques' estate, a family enterprise nearly fifty years in the making, is in a delicate financial position. The Republic provides good income through the demand for gun teams, cartage and the manufacture of uniforms, but our loan repayments leave no net profit. Should any beneficiary of Jacques' estate decide to claim their share, the land and the herd would have to be sold. That sale would repay the loans in full, with nothing left over, and have all the herdsman dismissed. A meagre dividend for us all.'

Yann shifted in his creaking chair to face his nephews, sons of his long-dead sister.

'To that end, Aunt Sophie and I propose establishing a company in which there are four shareholders. Aunt Sophie would hold one-third, a second third to my estate, and a one-sixth holding to both you boys. Should you concur, I propose to draw up company deeds whilst both of you lads are home on leave, and we have the opportunity to consider signing them in the weeks prior to your return to your regiments.'

The fire hissed and popped, causing everyone's heads to turn toward the hearth.

'When are you boys expected back?' asked Michelle softly into the fire, maintaining her grandfather's tradition of conversing in German whilst on the farm.

'I'll depart here on the 20th of February for the 1st Hussars,'

said Didier, idly tracing the rim of his cup with his finger.

'The 24th Chasseurs marches to Nice to join the Army of Italy on the 15th of February,' said André, 'So, with my regiment mustering in Avignon on the 10th, I must depart by the 5th.'

'Plan to depart on the 1st in case of heavy snow,' said Yann, 'So, where we all stand on the proposal to maintain our share of the estate within a family company is the vital discussion over the next three weeks.'

The women exchanged tight-lipped smiles, as both were well aware of the family's situation and knew Yann's comments were for the benefit of André and Didier.

'I feel comfortable initiating that discussion,' said Sophie softly, her unwavering gaze on Yann, 'My contribution to my brothers' farm has been long standing and will continue despite his passing. I endorse the raising of a company to manage Jacques' estate, and I concur with the division of shareholding that has been described. I am also pleased with the ability of our ongoing contributions to enlarge each party's individual share. Further, I shall have my will re-drawn to divide my estate. I have determined to allocate fifty percent to Michelle who has been so committed to supporting me, and the remainder between my remaining, beloved "grandchildren", if you boys will allow me that intimacy.'

As André and Didier bowed their heads solemnly at the bequest, Michelle flicked her eyes to her father. Yann lined face was momentarily downcast at a painful memory, which he attempted to hide with his brandy cup.

'There are two separate loans, yes?' asked Didier, sliding his finger slowly under his thick moustache, 'One to purchase the land and one to bridge the difference in the value of herd and land?'

'That is correct,' nodded Yann, reclining in his chair.

'You said the loan for the land has a twenty-year term, and

the bridging loan attracts an exorbitant interest rate. When will the bridging loan be repaid?' Didier asked his uncle.

'At our current repayment level, supported by expected income from seamstressing and cartage, not before 1799,' shrugged Yann, 'Both loans were drawn in 1790. After three years, very little principal has been repaid.'

'How might any further contributions be calculated?' Didier continued, looking across the table to the women by the fire, 'Especially Aunt Sophie's contribution from her seamstressing business.'

'Yes, an initial shareholding is allocated as father has described,' responded Michelle, 'but an increased shareholding can be purchased, by individual contributions as you infer.'

'I am most humbled to receive such an inheritance from my father,' Yann rasped softly, 'But I cannot contribute coin to grow my share of the company. All I can do is manage the breeding herd, the quality of training, the conduct of the cartage enterprise and continue to seek better rates of interest on our mortgage.'

'Dearest uncle,' Didier responded reassuringly, 'Your firm grip on the direction of this enterprise, our family's home, is essential for the farm to succeed.'

'I am obliged, Sir, but, as you just said, this farm is also your home,' stated Yann firmly to both young men on the other side of the dinner table, 'Should you no longer care, or be able, to stand with the colours, there is a place here for you. Always.'

Didier slumped back in his chair and turned his face to consider his younger brother.

'I have no desire for immediate cash,' said André quietly to his family, 'I live simply within my means. I have no call to take my share of the estate, and so I willingly join the proposed company as a shareholder and shall look for any opportunity to contribute what I can. Thank you for reaffirming this is our home, Uncle.'

I am proud of our family journey from itinerant drovers, and I wish to play my part in reinforcing that hard-won success.'

'Well said, brother, your sentiments are my own,' nodded Didier gruffly, 'I, too, look forward to signing the deeds once drafted.'



A day of January sunshine was a rare treat on the upper slopes of Auvergne's Massif Central.

With the cloud cover absent, the sun rose over the ridges to the east by ten o'clock. That watery sun warmed the household's spirits as it skimmed the southern horizon. After a family lunch, and before the sun should set on the western heights across the valley by mid-afternoon, the brothers decided to escort Michelle down to the stables from the ramshackle farm house.

Taking a thick coat from Mathieu, André's valet, Didier gallantly wrapped the coat about the shoulders of his pretty younger cousin.

'So, Mathieu,' gasped Michelle, as she wriggled her chin free of her scarf, 'Have you concluded your soldiering? Ready to settle into a household?'

Mathieu swept back his vibrant red forelock and resettled his spectacles on the bridge of his nose.

'No, Miss,' Mathieu could not help but blush at Michelle's smile framed by her dimpled cheeks, 'I'm very happy with 2nd Company, if the Captain will have me.'

André Jobert gave a lop-sided grin and slapped his valet on the shoulder with a gloved hand.

‘Really?’ persisted Michelle with a mock frown, ‘You’d take a soldier’s camp fire over a well-equipped kitchen?’

‘Our camp is where the men come together to rest and eat,’ shrugged Mathieu, with a sad smile, ‘A place to rejuvenate from labours past and prepare for labours future. I’m foolish enough to think I play a special part in that, and for the moment, Miss, it’s where I belong.’

‘And belong you do, I have no doubt,’ Michelle said warmly.

As the cousins turned and departed, Mathieu re-entered the smoky warmth, closing the front door to the chill sunshine. An icy wind blew steadily south as the trio crunched through the snow arm in arm. All three faces jerked up as a pistol fired from the vicinity of the stables.

‘I hate that sound,’ snarled Michelle, as another pistol fired, ‘Even if it does signal dinner-time for the horses.’

The brothers thought nothing of the standard practice for all military horses. At all feedings in stables, blank cartridges were fired close to the horses as they ate to desensitise them from the sound and the smoke.

‘And what of Duck?’ enquired Michelle of André, leaning her head on his arm, ‘Will he return to the regiment as your groom? Or will he take a place in this cartage venture his father leads?’

‘I know where Duck longs to be,’ chortled Didier.

‘Oh, stop being silly,’ Michelle butted her head onto the flanking shoulder, ‘That was a lifetime ago.’

‘Huh!’ Didier shrugged, ‘Still a naive girl, are we?’

‘Enough!’ Michelle’s face became quite stern, ‘André?’

‘I raised the matter with him, thinking I may have to find a new groom,’ André shrugged, twisting his mouth, ‘He replied maybe one day, but not at the moment. He felt the venture had enough brothers and cousins involved. I think he enjoys the place he holds in my chasseur company as a respected horseman. All the perks of a non-commissioned officer without

the responsibilities, perhaps.’

‘So, whilst inspecting colts and yearlings over the last few days,’ asked Michelle, her voice muffled in her scarf as she buried her face, ‘did you reconnect with any familiar faces?’

‘Most certainly,’ said Didier, tucking her scarf lovingly back into place with his spare hand, ‘Duck’s little brothers, other local lads, and the few injured men from the 5th Chasseurs. But, with all that has happened in the last two years, that life seems so long ago.’

The three fell silent as they negotiated a length of slippery ice.

‘So what news of the de Chabenacs?’ rasped André.

‘Who?’ enquired Didier.

‘A stunning noble woman André rescued from the Avignon revolt last year,’ Michelle said conspiratorially, ‘and her equally gorgeous mother.’

‘Is the mother widowed and rich?’ asked Didier, eyes wide with interest.

Michelle glanced askance at Didier, her eyebrows arched mockingly.

‘Like so many minor nobility, utterly destitute with the loss of land and title,’ squinted André, ‘The son commanded the junior company in my squadron before becoming a regimental aide de camp.’

‘To answer your question,’ smiled Michelle, her head resting on Didier’s shoulder, ‘Both ladies are well, considering their unfortunate situation. With the Committee of Public Safety’s new Law of Suspects, and the consequent rise in the number of executions in Paris, we all go about our lives most carefully. The de Chabenac ladies are our guests in our apartment and they devote their daily energies to our women in the workhouses. But I shall pass on your warmest regards, cousin, which I know will be appreciatively received. Valmai speaks highly of your dancing skills; skills of which I was unaware. No chance of ...?’

‘Of what? Dancing or marriage?’ André rolled his eyes.

‘Surely one leads to the other,’ Michelle winked at Didier.

‘Good grief, woman,’ André breathed steamily, ‘Take a wife on a captain’s salary in the middle of a war? You cannot be serious? I hardly stand still long enough to change my stockings, let alone fall in love.’

‘Indeed! Preposterous notion,’ Didier huffed, ‘What of you, cousin? Are you close to marrying? How does Uncle Yann feel about your escapades as a single woman in Paris?’

‘No, silliness aside,’ said Michelle, her face losing her smile, ‘Paris in the grip of the Terror is not the place to consider courtship, let alone matrimony. My father is too aware of our need to survive and places his trust in me to secure my station, as all the women in our family have over this century. No, with Aunt Sophie now seventy-five, my place is at her side. It may only be lace and braid we sew, but our production to fill contracts for military headdress is considerable. I could not bear to think losing all that to attend a husband.’

‘Aunt spoke of us as her grandchildren. I saw Yann’s reaction,’ Didier mused carefully, ‘Has anything ever been heard from Amélie?’

Michelle breathed deeply into her scarf and gripped her male cousins’ arms even tighter.

‘When the family she was with fled in 1790,’ Michelle said quietly, ‘I think my sister was having an affair with one of the sons. I’ve received a note in December of 1791 saying simply she had arrived in Dresden, but nothing since.’

André looked across Michelle’s wrapped head to Didier and shook his head to stop a conversation that would only bring sadness and do nothing to solve the mystery of their missing cousin. Didier grimaced an apology in return.

‘Michelle, instead of this trip down memory lane,’ said André soberly, ‘What can we do for the farm?’

‘Hmm,’ she eventually responded with an absent-minded murmur, ‘Stay safe. Come home.’

Michelle stopped walking, disengaged her arms to wipe tears from her eyes. The brothers exchanged furtive glances.

‘Perhaps, allocate a small stipend from our salaries to the farm,’ Didier shrugged.

‘On your major’s salary possibly. A captain’s salary would certainly not allow it,’ André shook his head.

‘Then get promoted,’ said Didier earnestly, ‘Do something recklessly brave in front of a Deputy of the People and be promoted to general. I’m very serious. All sorts of fellows are achieving it. Since 1791 our chance for rapid promotion is upon us.’

‘Shut up, idiots,’ Michelle stamped her foot, her face flushed, ‘You’re not with your hussars, or chasseurs à cheval, or what have you, now. Talk of reckless bravery somewhere else. A dead hero, cloaked in glory, won’t help the farm,’ then she paused to say reflectively, ‘Though, you might consider cartage contracts at a regimental level.’

‘Indeed,’ mused André, his thoughts summoning his close connection to Colonel Raive now posted to the headquarters of General Masséna’s division within the Army of Italy.

Michelle resettled her scarf around her freezing face, happily linking her arms into the arms of her beloved cousins and set off again for the stables.

André coughed to clear his throat. His brother and his cousin tipped their faces towards him anticipating some announcement.

‘I ... I have three-thousand francs to contribute to the farm,’ ventured André carefully, reluctant to reveal his part in an armory raid in Valence ten months previously, ‘I wish to repay my grandfather for his overly generous gifts of horses upon my promotions.’

Didier and Michelle stopped in their tracks and stared at André.

‘I beg your pardon? That’s over a year’s salary for a captain,’ exclaimed Didier in open-mouthed surprise, ‘My word, brother, you do live within your means.’

‘Darling André, that is a lot of money,’ Michelle looked incredulously into André’s stern eyes, ‘As father explained our situation, it would be most welcome, of course. But, are you sure you wish the farm to have it?’

‘We spoke of being able to increase our shareholding by contributions?’ scowled André.

‘Yes, of course,’ Michelle considered her tall cousin carefully.

The three arrived at an outer gate to the stone stables. Unlinking arms to open the gate, and usher their cousin through the muddy slush, Didier looked hard at André.

‘What did you do last year?’ Didier finally asked, still perplexed at how someone could be in possession of a year’s salary.

‘I told you,’ André shrugged, ‘I joined one of the new chasseurs à cheval regiments and raised a company. My men were blooded screening Marseille and Avignon during their revolts.’

‘But three-thousand francs, brother?’ Didier stared fixedly with brows furrowed, ‘You obviously did well from the siege at Toulon?’

‘No, not really,’ André said uncommittedly, ‘Patrols, escorts, guides, and a few scraps here and there.’

‘Huh,’ grunted Didier, looking about him, realising he wasn’t going to get an answer to where such a sum came from, ‘But no glory, eh?’

‘Not that anyone noticed.’

Chapter Two

February 1794, Avignon, France



‘Sir,’ coughed a soft voice.

The thoughts of Colonel Morin, Commanding Officer of the Republic’s 24th Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval, were far away as he watched the snow falling from the thick, grey clouds to clot heavily on the small panes of the tall windows of the regimental dining room.

‘Of course,’ Morin grunted, sitting back in the timber dining chair, allowing the young trooper to remove his soup bowl, ‘Thank you, Chasseur Tulloc.’

Breathing deeply, Morin looked up and down the long dining table, at the earnest and good-natured young faces of the regiment’s officers finishing their soup. With the level of their chatter increasing and the rate of empty bowls being removed, Morin felt it was time for his address before the lunch’s main course. Steadying a long-stemmed wine glass, he rapped a knife against the glass, so that its chime would regather the focus of his officers.

‘Gentlemen,’ Morin stood, and raised his wine glass, ‘Vive le République.’

‘Vive le République,’ boomed back the response from those assembled.

‘The 24th Chasseurs à Cheval,’ toasted Morin again, looking up and down the table to the nearly forty faces turned towards him

‘24th Chasseurs,’ shouted the chorus, patting the table with their free hands.

‘To absent brothers,’ Morin set his face grimly, changing the room’s mood in an instant.

‘Absent brothers,’ growled the young men, eyes hardening with the memories of the regiment’s first campaign prior to the New Year.

Morin paused to refill his glass once more.

‘Gentlemen,’ his baritone growl carrying easily to all within the confines of the smoky, stuffy room, ‘Welcome back to the regiment. Let us now focus on our immediate task in this New Year. With Colonel’s Raive’s promotion and his posting to General Masséna’s staff, we welcome Lieutenant Colonel Maccard as the regiment’s second-in-command.’

‘Hear! Hear!’ the chorus rapped their hands on the table top.

Jobert considered the blond, boyish good-looking second-in-command carefully as Maccard, nodded his lop-sided, mocking smile in acknowledgement, his dark eyes betraying no emotion.

‘With last year’s most fortuitous promotion of Major Cobereau to Brigadier-General,’ Morin continued, ‘and his subsequent posting to command a light cavalry brigade with the Army of the Rhine, we welcome our two new chiefs of squadron, Majors Mercier and Clemusat.’

As the crowd clapped their approval, Jobert smiled at the good fortune of his friend Mercier. Last year, Mercier’s bourgeois background and Jobert approach, as an ‘old, royal army sergeant’, was given no heed as they bonded quickly to face the challenges of preparing their respective companies for battle.

Clemusat was a man Jobert did not know well, their companies always seemed to be operating in different locations in the previous year. Clemusat was tall, slim and angular, with a thick queue running down the back of his neck, a drooping black moustache and a permanent five-o’clock shadow on his cheeks. But, in 1793, the regiment’s first year, Clemusat had worked closely with a young, artillery officer, a Captain Bonaparte, and Bonaparte’s powerful friend, Deputy of the People Saliceti. Saliceti’s influence had both Bonaparte and Cobereau promoted to general before the end of the old year.

‘With Paris reducing the regiment’s establishment to three squadrons of six companies,’ Morin boomed, ‘our erudite commanders are Captains Avriol, Villema, Jobert, Geourdai, Quillet and Doreille.’

As the others rapped their well-wishes loudly on the table, Jobert turned his head slowly down the table to receive a nod of acknowledgement from his friend Geourdai. Jobert commanded the one-hundred soldiers of the 2nd Company and Geourdai commanded the renamed 5th Company. Together the 2nd and 5th Companies formed the 2nd Squadron, with the senior captain, in this case Jobert, as the squadron commander.

On the raising of the regiment, Geourdai was initially Jobert’s second-in-command, but as another ‘royal army sergeant’ with combat experience from the campaigns of 1792, he soon secured company command. Throughout 1793, Jobert’s and Geourdai’s recruits had trained, marched and fought closely together under the uncompromising direction of their veteran company commanders. The young chasseurs had been blooded screening the uprisings within Marseille and Avignon and proved their mettle against Spanish and British regular troops at the siege of Toulon only a few months ago.

‘These well-deserved promotions are the result of uncompromised dedication from these fine officers. But I wish to

special mention of one of our brethren who has not been accorded such honours,' said Morin in gruff good humour, 'Captain Jobert!'

'Sir,' Jobert turned from filling his glass, concealing his surprise to look to his commanding officer.

'Captain Jobert, and his 2nd Company, gave excellent service to the regiment and France last year, in the face of the enemy in a number of exceptional situations,' Morin rasped, looking directly at Jobert, 'but he was not rewarded with promotion. I have chosen to acknowledge Jobert's actions with the granting of a small prize. Captain, if you will?'

Jobert stood and walked to his Colonel, as each young officer at the table eyed the small, calf-skin purse hefted in Morin's great fist.

'Thank you, Captain,' Morin shook Jobert's hand, looking directly into his blue-eyes and tanned young face, passing him the purse.

Jobert recognised the purse. It was identical to three purses he had acquired during a raid he had led to Valence last April; he expected the purse still contained fifty gold louis, equivalent to one-thousand francs, or four months wages as a cavalry captain. As the table thundered with applause, Jobert returned to his seat and placed the heavy bag of coins into an inside pocket of his double-breasted, chasseur-green tailcoat.

Jobert also understood the implications of Morin's act to the assembled officers. The message was clear; fight hard, young officers, fight hard for the 24th Chasseurs and France, and glory, promotion and gold will be yours.

'Now, gentlemen, to our pressing task,' Morin's tone settled the room, 'March the regiment three-hundred kilometres from Avignon to Nice to join General Masséna's division within the Army of Italy.

'Our route will retrace our adventures of last year. Our

friend at court, Colonel Raive, instructs us to take a path that will keep us clear of the major routes carrying vital supplies to Nice. This will benefit us as we move along roads and through villages at time of reduced forage. Our route will take us through Aix-en-Provence, Aubagne, north of Toulon to Sollies, along the coast to Cannes before arriving at a village allotted to us just out of Nice.

'The natural frontier between France and the Italy is the Maritime Alps, a range of mountains running north-south sweeping south from the Swiss Alps to the Mediterranean. With its headquarters in Nice, the Army of Italy holds the frontier. Our Piedmontese enemies garrison fortresses on the French side of this natural boundary and threaten the Republic's sovereignty.

'Until two years ago, the ancient and noble house of Savoy held the coastal province of Savoy, the inland province of Piedmont and, through purchase and marriage, the island of Sardinia. Sardinia has been long acknowledged as a kingdom, and with its acquisition, the house of Savoy took upon themselves the title of Kings of Sardinia. In 1792, France liberated the coastal province of Savoy and secured the great port of Nice. Last year, the Kingdom of Sardinia contributed troops to the siege of Toulon. These troops were confusingly referred to as Sardinian, but none originated from that island, actually all men from Piedmont. I believe the fashion at our headquarters in Nice is to refer to the Kingdom's troops as Piedmontese. And so, I shall do likewise.

'Now, getting down to the tasking of the companies. The regiment will move from Avignon with eighty wagons, or four convoys of twenty wagons. Due to the harshness of the season, the convoys will travel twenty kilometres per day, thus a trip of fifteen days. Travelling one week ahead, I shall take an advance party to Nice to report to General Masséna and prepare our new accommodation; 6th Company will accompany my ad-

vance party. Travelling one day ahead, Major Clemusat and 4th Company will act as advance guard and secure daily accommodation along the road. The remaining companies, 1st, 2nd, 5th and 3rd, shall escort a convoy of twenty wagons and travel one day apart. Lieutenant Colonel Maccard shall travel with the first convoy. Major Mercier will travel with the last convoy.

‘On our arrival outside of Nice, I foresee the companies recombining as squadrons and rotating through three key roles, on a monthly basis, within General Masséna’s division. One squadron acting as a divisional screen, one squadron as a regimental reserve and one squadron escorting supply convoys for the division.

‘With lunch about to be served, are there any pressing questions? No? I thought not. Then let us reflect over lunch, whereupon the regimental second-in-command will elaborate with further detail.’



A sudden icy, dusty gust whipped frozen strands of hay through the small kitchen’s battered timber door, as three caped horsemen entered from the tavern yard. In the cosy kitchen, that constituted the officer’s mess of the 2nd Company whilst stationed in Avignon, the fire in the hearth flared, the occupants of the room winced at the bitter blast and scabbled to cover their wooden cups of tea from the stables’ dust.

‘Gentlemen, welcome,’ coughed Lieutenant Neilage, 2nd Company’s second-in-command, inviting the three men to take one of the rickety chairs at the long wooden table. Neilage felt the surge of shit-laden dust from the tavern yard required him

to reaffirm the curl of his red-blond moustache under his slim, pointed nose.

Corporal Vocuse, the company’s farrier, immediately crouched his angular limbs by the fire and offered his gloved hands to the flames. Vocuse grinned a toothless grin to Jobert’s valet, Mathieu, who was busy flipping hotcakes on an iron grid.

‘Ooh, Mathieu that smells good,’ chortled Corporal Lombatte, the company’s quartermaster corporal, wiping moisture from his curling moustache under his snub, round nose.

‘Tea will be forthcoming, once we’re all seated,’ said Jobert looking up from a Parisian broadsheet, to acknowledge the third man, Sergeant Major Koschak, with a nod.

‘Sir,’ grunted Koschak in greeting, removing his green bonnet-de-police from his blond hair bound back in a queue, and sweeping from his powerful shoulders his woollen chasseur’s cape, so as not to catch it on his sabre’s scabbard.

‘Getting down to business, lads,’ Jobert frowned as steaming cups were distributed, ‘How are the men, Sergeant Major?’

‘Some of our local lads are downcast they’re marching so far from home and sweethearts, Sir,’ rasped Koschak, as he reached for his wooden cup of tea, ‘Thank you, Mathieu. Others with itchier feet, are keen to see more of the wider world. Of the four chasseurs who did not report back for the muster parade, we retrieved three easily enough from their mothers’ hearths.’

‘Horses, Corporal?’ said Jobert, looking through the steam of his tea as he held the cup to his face.

‘Feet are fine, Sir,’ Vocuse looked up from his first bite of hotcake, ‘I removed their shoes on return from Toulon, so they’ve had two months for hooves to grow out. Duck, young Tulloc and I are replacing front shoes now. Lieutenant Neilage had ordered manes to be hogged, and that is now complete. Standing in stables, the horses are putting on condition, especially under their new canvas rugs, so Lieutenant Neilage has ordered the

grain ration to be reduced. Sergeants have led their platoons out for exercise and for horses to pick at the winter grasses.'

'Where is the grain the company has been issued that has not been fed out?' asked Neilage looking up from his notebook.

'I'm sitting on that, Sir,' beamed Lombatte, with a wink to the impassive company second-in-command, 'Don't you have a care.'

'Hmm,' rasped Jobert, shaking his head to an offered hot-cake, 'So, did we receive a good price for manes?'

'Yes, Sir,' said Neilage, his eyes seeking approval from Jobert and Koschak, 'Company funds are in a good state.'

'We'll make a chasseur of you yet, Sir,' rumbled Koschak, barely moving his head but sliding his gaze to Neilage.

'Hmm,' Jobert nodded his approval, 'So, our four company wagons within the train are carrying what now?'

'We've adjusted our loads from what we had last year on campaign, Sir,' smiled Lombatte, retrieving the last hot-cake from Mathieu's offered platter, 'We still carry our fly-tents, horse-lines and empty water barrels, so apart from our accumulated grain ration, the load is simply the footlockers of the men containing their dress uniforms.'

'Twenty-five-odd footlockers per platoon wagon?' Jobert arched a questioning eyebrow to Koschak.

'Yes, Sir,' responded Lombatte with an assured nod, 'The load sits a little high, but without the weight of water, spare horse-shoes or ammunition, and assistance provided by troop horses with side-chains, the load is manageable.'

'Hmm,' scowled Jobert, 'Anything else, Sergeant Major?'

'No, Sir,' rasped Koschak, 'Just load up, mount up and march.'

'Would you arrange for me to inspect a platoon morning and evening in the days before we march?' said Jobert holding Koschak's eye, 'Remounts unsaddled, and firearms stripped.'

'Sir,' nodded Koschak confidently.

'I'd be obliged, second-in-command, if you might share your views on the company's current ability to march to Nice,' Jobert raised his eyes to the young man scribbling at the end of the table.

'2nd Company's situation is sound, Sir,' Neilage looked up earnestly, 'The requirement to man regimental work parties to load ledgers and stores from headquarters, and the contents of armouries and magazines, into nearly sixty regimental wagons, is what constitutes our daily juggle.'

'Hmm,' nodded Jobert slowly 'Where are our two troop commanders?'

'Lieutenant Colonel Maccard has all the second lieutenants scribing the load lists for the regimental trains, Sir,' Neilage answered.

'Huh,' Jobert rumbled, 'So, escorting the regimental trains twenty kilometres a day for the next fifteen days. How would you go about the business, Lieutenant.'

'Our company will be allocated about twenty wagons,' Neilage shrugged, eyes flicking to Koschak and Lombatte for affirmation, 'So, divide the convoy into three packets of seven, Sir, then post our four platoons fore, aft and in between.'

Neilage's face tightened as he sought Jobert's response to his solution.

'There we have it, gentlemen,' Jobert patted the table in assent, 'Lieutenant Neilage, I leave it to you command the convoy until we arrive in Nice.'

'Thank you, Sir,' Neilage's eyes widened with delight at the increased responsibility, 'I am at your service.'



By the spluttering light of pitch-soaked torches, under a freezing full-moon, the three men huddled within the warmth generated by the three warhorses that surrounded them.

‘Happy to be back on the road, Moench?’ asked Jobert, leaning across Yellow’s saddle, watching the chasseurs lead their remounts out of the Avignon barracks stable for the last time.

‘Ooh, yes, Sir,’ Trumpeter Moench responded with an easy smile to his captain’s question, ‘There’s too many husbands in this town who want to cut my cock off.’

‘Huh,’ snorted Mathieu, Jobert’s valet, with a smile, arms wrapped about his body, shuffling to warm his feet.

‘You won’t miss your hometown?’ Jobert continued, turning his head at the groan of heavily-laden wagon wheels rolling on the compact gravel of the regimental square.

‘My little brother might,’ Moench shrugged, thinking of his brother, a fellow trumpeter, who had departed with Colonel Morin for Nice six days ago, ‘But it’s time to enjoy all the pleasures that Italy has to offer.’

‘Ah, lovely,’ breathed Mathieu, pressing his spectacles back onto the bridge of his nose.

Having no part to play, but observe, Jobert watched Koschak assemble the chasseurs, and the convoy commander, Lieutenant Neilage, liaise with the wagons detailed to 2nd Company.

Red pushed his muzzle into Jobert’s ribs in an attempt to itch his bridled face. Both Jobert and Yellow shuffled to regain their balance. Jobert raised a warning finger to Red to which Red obediently dipped his nose away.

Jobert owned a string of four warhorses.

Today, Red was with Mathieu in the shafts of Jobert’s light trap, a small two-wheeled cart, that allowed Jobert to maintain a small store of water, an iron firebox and a simple command marquee close behind the tail of the company. On campaign, Mathieu would ride the horse saddled in the shafts, so as to

be in position to abandon the cart should the situation require. But this morning, for which he was most thankful, Mathieu would sit up on the cart’s seat with a thick blanket wrapped around his legs.

As Jobert’s groom, Duck would normally ride one of Jobert’s horses and lead another should his captain require it in battle, but today Duck was driving one of the company’s wagons. So, under this morning’s bracing, pre-dawn sky, Blue, pawing impatiently, with Green nuzzled beside him, both rugged in canvas, were attached to the rear of Mathieu’s cart.

At Red’s nose stood Yellow, Jobert’s mount for the day, and Moench’s grey gelding. All trumpeters rode greys allowing to them to clearly stand out from the mounted men around them. Not only was Moench’s gelding distinct, Moench wore the dark-orange jacket of a regimental trumpeter, dark-orange, or capucine, being the facing colour of the 24th Chasseurs, a complete reverse of the dark-green jackets of the remainder of the regiment. The reversed colour jacket combined with the grey horse indicated the location of the trumpeter, and more importantly, the nearby presence of the officer they served.

Responding to growled commands of their four platoon sergeants, with a jingle and clatter of bit chains, spurs, scabbards and slung musketoons, the chasseurs mounted their horses.

Moench whistled the trumpet call *To Mess*, the signature tune that 2nd Company used to signal to each other.

Jobert’s mouth creased into a wry smile, as he watched the grinning faces of his soldiers emerge from behind cape flaps and under helmet visors to whistle the trumpet call in response.



The column of bay horses, their green-clad chasseurs, and wagon-teams snorting plumes of steam squelched through the mud of the Aubagne-Toulon road on the sixth day of the regimental migration. Women hanging washing on bare branches in the cold sunshine, or mud-encrusted children with their equally muddy dogs, were the only audience to note the passing of the soldiers.

Second Lieutenant Gouvion, one of two troop commanders in the 2nd Company, stared distractedly at the passing wheels squealing and cracking under their loads. His lean, muscular frame shivered gently in his heavily braided dolman jacket, waistcoat and tight Hungarian breeches despite the appearance of the midday sun. Gouvion chose to wear his heavy linen-and-leather over-breeches and cape only when on duty during the freezing nights.

One of the two platoon commanders in Gouvion's troop, wiry Sergeant Bredieux, sitting on his broad-chested mare beside and a horse-length behind Gouvion, puffed slowly at his ever-present pipe dangling from the side of his mouth and enjoyed the tang of tobacco and whatever warmth could be gleaned from the winter sun on his back. Bredieux removed his woollen bonnet-de-police, a soft chasseur-green headdress piped with the distinctive capucine braid of the 24th Chasseurs, to scratch his head. He was happy to leave Gouvion to his sullen thoughts.

Stout Sergeant Martine, the other platoon commander in Gouvion's troop, trotted up to the pair, brought his horse to a smooth halt and saluted the young officer.

'Excuse me, Sir,' boomed the ever-jovial Martine, 'The load had been re-lashed, Sir. Will there be anything else?'

'No, thank you, Sergeant,' Gouvion exhaled and smiled, his green eyes showing no humour, 'I'll report "All's well" to Lieutenant Neilage.'

After breathing deeply again, Gouvion shortened his reins and half-heartedly squeezed his horse into movement, the horse flicking his ears to determine whether a walk or trot was required from his absent-minded rider.

'What is the burr in his blanket?' Martine watched Gouvion depart to the head of the column with a look of genuine concern, 'Was it the commemorative service yesterday in Aubagne? Remembering the affair at the village bridge when we lost our first lad and he lost his finger?'

'No, I think it's worse than that,' puffed Bredieux, speaking from the side of his mouth, 'I think its love.'

'Oh, is it that girl he writes to?' Martine arched his eyebrows, wiping his drooping black moustache with the back of his heavy, white-leathered cavalry glove, 'She's an Avignon lass, isn't she?'

Bredieux shrugged in the affirmative.

'Hasn't he found that you can buy a woman's sweet embrace by the hour?' Martine smiled sadly.



'Please, Madame,' smiled Sergeant Checuti, brushing back the thick, black hussar-plaits hanging from his temples, 'by all means, allow the children some now.'

Within the dirt-floor cottage-cum-barn, wreaking of goat urine and garlic, the filthy, sallow faces of the children trembled at the smell of the loaves. Old Quandalle lifted his watery eyes set deep in his wrinkled face from the meagre flames in the fireplace to nod his appreciation to the three soldiers.

Second Lieutenant Rodau, Sergeant Checuti's troop com-

mander, watched the woman, her thick hair wrapped back in a scarf, tear the bread into small chunks. Rodau adjusted his stance as he waited, his hand on the pommel of his sabre. He had only ever known her as Madame Quandalle, when he, Checuti and her had undertaken their subterfuge in Toulon. Rodau wondered if she had ever had a husband, or simply chose that title as a form of protection.

‘No, not now,’ Madame gently scolded the children, ‘Take your dinner into your bed.’

2nd Company had met the Quandalles in the village of Revest as the great port of Toulon was invested by the Republican forces. Quandalle senior and his grandson had contributed a great deal of local knowledge of the surrounding countryside to Jobert’s company. Madame has been instrumental supporting an undercover gambit which Rodau had led, and Deputy Saliceti and Colonel Morin had supported, which fed the Republican headquarters vital intelligence of the Spanish and British defences of Toulon.

The children, and two small dogs, raced to a bed of straw and grimy sacks, on the far side of the single room to devour their crusts. Only one child, a boy of eleven, 2nd Company’s erstwhile young scout, stood by his mother with a begrimed and defiant face.

‘The goats that remain in our herd are still too young to breed, and all our large males were taken by the army,’ Madame grimaced, wrapping the remaining loaves in a sack, and placing them high on a dark beam under the thatched eaves, ‘The army stripped us, the village and the region of everything, making for a bitter winter. Until the village goats and pigs give birth in the spring, our only way to survive as a family is to gather and sell kindling from Mount Faron. Or for me to work beyond Revest.’

Thick-set Sergeant Clenaude, the other platoon commander

in Rodau’s troop, lowered his eyes, and remembered his own harsh boyhood in a family of homeless cattle-drovers.

‘There are no opportunities in Toulon,’ Madame continued, ‘Toulon is a ghost town following the evacuation and the executions, just a great camp of tradesmen and sailors re-building the naval precinct and re-establishing the fleet. The men attract local women to whore for them, but the men are paid in promissory notes which the women are unable to exchange for bread. Toulon is a desperate place at the moment.’

In the flickering firelight, the flames reacting to an icy current penetrating the mud walls, Checuti looked nervously across to downcast Clenaude and the slim, boyish frame of Rodau.

‘Lieutenant Rodau,’ she said softly, ‘Might the boy and I accompany the 2nd Company as your cantiniere? I’ve proven my dedication to the company, and he’s a strong lad, and you know him to be diligent.’

Checuti looked to his troop commander expectantly, but a strong glare from Clenaude stopped him opening his mouth. Clenaude appraised the lad of about eleven; had he not placed himself as a soldier in the service of the late King to stop the hunger pains.

‘Will not his grandfather need him to manage the herd,’ Clenaude asked gruffly.

‘There are younger children for that,’ she replied.

Rodau’s calm, grey eyes took in the boy and his grandfather. Were the children hers? Or even related to the elderly man? It didn’t matter. As the son of a Rhône barge captain, Rodau had known a grim working life that began at the age of ten.

‘The company marches from Sollies tomorrow at six o’clock in the morning,’ Rodau spoke evenly and quietly, ‘Present yourself to Captain Jobert and Sergeant Major Koschak, and they’ll tell you one way or the other.’



A strong, cold southerly wind blew in from the Mediterranean harrying clumps of low-lying grey cloud north towards the higher coastal ranges. Branches in leafless orchards around Sollies rattled and scraped in the wind. The smoke from nearby kitchen chimneys eddied and gusted with the dust from fallow fields in which 2nd Company had camped.

Observing the company and its train of wagons assemble on parade, Jobert and Chabenac, one of Colonel Morin's aides de camp, breakfasted on Mathieu's fried bread filled with poached egg and feta cheese, as their capes whipped around their legs.

Chabenac, tall, blond, with a clean-shaven face and close-cropped hair in the latest Parisian style, scowled as he watched Duck assisting Madame Quandalle and her boy onto the back of his wagon, to which was tied a milking cow and a small steer.

'Is it for the best?' he asked, jerking his head towards the group.

Jobert turned his face seeking the source of the question.

'Huh,' Jobert shrugged, swallowing the last crust of his simple breakfast, 'My mother would have been sixteen when she followed her brother, and the chasseur soldier who would become my father, up and down the Rhineland for seven years in the last war, darning stockings, replacing buttons and removing the lace of rank from dead men's sleeves. If the regiment puts down roots on the Italian frontier for the next year or two, the company will attract a swarm of wives, brats and dogs.'

'Indeed,' said Chabenac appraising his friend, sensing the all-too-familiar surprise that struck him when he was reminded of such dissimilar backgrounds of men, such as Jobert, he now called friends and brothers.

Chabenac grimaced as his thoughts raced through his mind. His boyhood of noble privilege. The execution of his uncle, the Comte de Chabenac. The mob's vicious beating of his parents from which his father died. Deciding to remove the 'de' from his name to publicly disavow his nobility. And when all Avignon society should turn against his mother and sister in their moment of crisis and need, it was Jobert's family, a family of harness-makers and common soldiers, that would provide charity and refuge.

'I see you still have the cow you bartered from the dragoons,' Chabenac smiled, changing the subject.

'Hmm,' nodded Jobert draining a cup of tea.

'Is the calf still the guest of honour for your Easter celebrations?' asked Chabenac, brushing the crumbs from the front of his cape.

'That's the plan, I'm told, even if the observance of religious festivities is now forbidden by the National Convention,' Jobert cast the dregs of his cold tea onto the ground and tucked the wooden cup into a deep pocket of his cape, 'So, seven days' march complete and eight more days to Nice. You'll remain in Sollies until Mercier's convoy arrives?'

'Indeed,' shrugged Chabenac, smiling graciously, 'Imparting what news I have from the Colonel and the second-in-command. Knowing Mercier has reached the half-way point safely, I'll then return forward to Colonel Morin. I'll probably rejoin you near Cannes.'

'Well, pass my warm regards to Geourdai tomorrow and Mercier the day after,' said Jobert with a harsh smile, 'And if they complain that Sollies has no decent wine, tell them it was Avriol's 1st Company that drank all the stocks.'

'Hah!' laughed Chabenac into the wind, 'Mercier and Geourdai know you too well. I have no doubt, that with scroungers such as Koschak, Duck and Lombatte, given half a chance, 2nd

Company would unearth a previously undiscovered school of maidens in the heart of Toulon's naval precinct.'

'2nd Company, by platoons, TAKE POST!' Koschak's beloved command carrying clearly across the wind and stomp of nearly five hundred hooves. The four platoons of the company, over twenty horsemen in each platoon, moved forward to occupy positions on either side of the three groups of seven wagons, raising a stinging cloud of sand whipped by the morning wind.

'The wine of dear old Sollies would have evoked memories from last year's siege for your lads?' Chabenac smiled carefully.

'Hmm,' Jobert looked Chabenac in the eye, nodded, but said nothing.

The village of Sollies, ten kilometres from the port, had seen a well-laid Spanish ambush kill three good men and four fine horses and take the first prisoner-of-war from 2nd Company. On the road south of Sollies, revenge had come unexpectedly when 2nd Company was able to surround and capture two companies of Spanish fusiliers. Jobert had placed a Spanish company pennant from that affair in storage at his family's farm, as well as another souvenir, a broken cask that had once contained gunpowder. Horse rugs, rum and torching battle ships, Jobert mused of 2nd Company's experience at Toulon a few, brief months ago.

'2nd Company, will turn to the left in column of fours, walk, MARCH!'

Lieutenant Neilage's command woke Jobert from his reveries.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' said Moench bringing over the officers' horses, 'Ahh ... Captain Chabenac, Sir, have you ... ah ... had the opportunity to pay your respects at the Duhamel residence?'

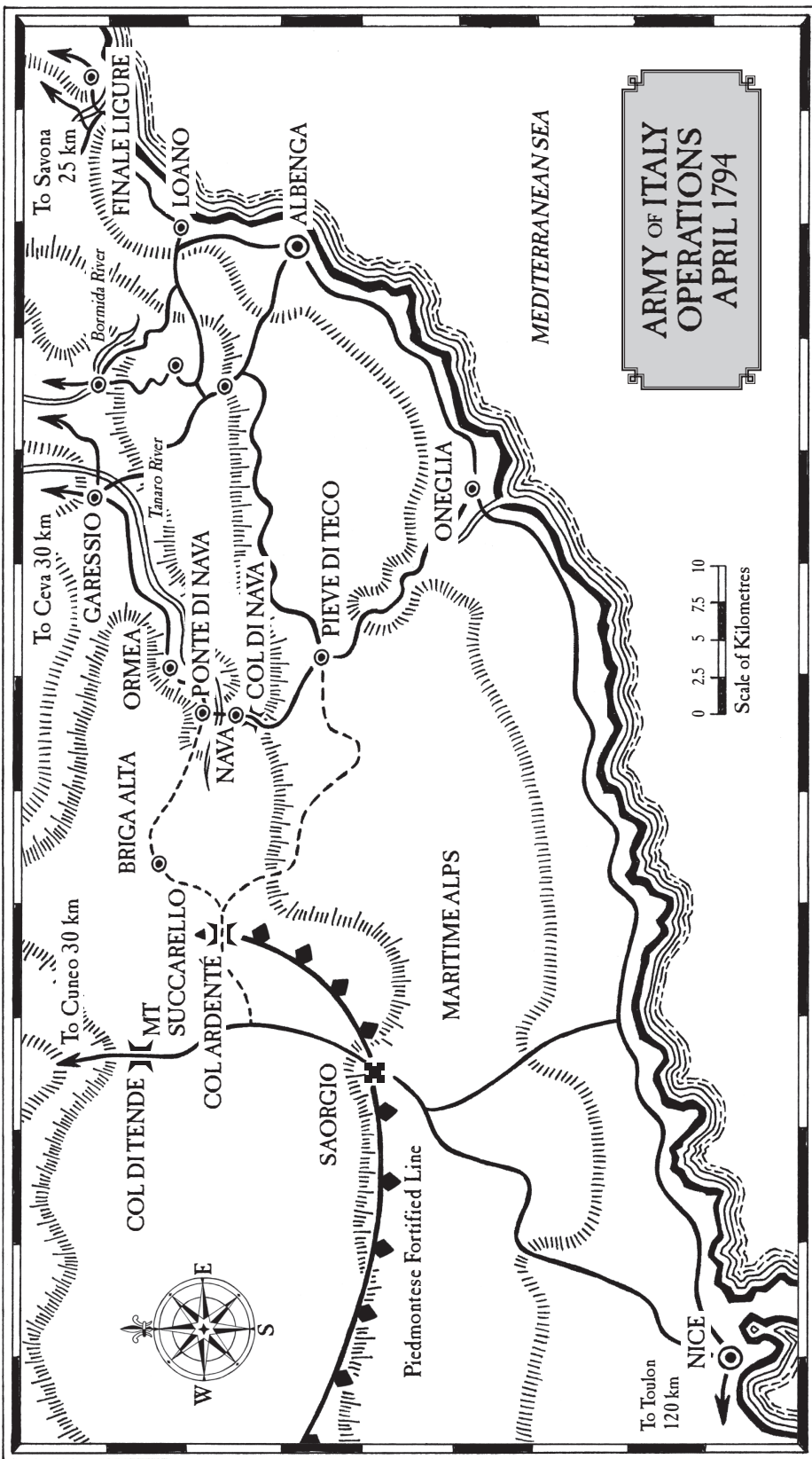
'Hah!' snorted Jobert, taking Green's reins, remembering the attractive, and welcoming, Madame Duhamel, 'Moench, you

press the ideal of 'equality' too far.'

'Oh, Sir,' Moench pouted, 'A poor soldier can only dream.'

'In response to your question, Moench,' said Chabenac with a wry grin, 'I did pay a call to the châteaux at La Garde and was delighted to find Captain Duhamel safely returned from his voyages. The Captain and his devoted wife were kind enough to invite me to a light lunch, before my duties required me elsewhere.'

'Oh, what a shame' smirked Jobert and Moench to each other, to which Chabenac smiled serenely.



Chapter Three

March 1794, Nice, France



Jobert watched his wine glass being filled from the crystal decanter. As the chasseur who attended him moved away, Jobert looked up, through the wavering candlelight, to see the young officers across the table staring eagerly towards the senior officers. Their keen eyes waited to observe the regiment's guests, and their host officers, begin their soup indicating they could begin their own meal.

Far along the table General Dumberbion lifted his spoon and took a polite sip. This signal allowed the junior men to grab spoons and slurp.

'Mmm, very good,' smiled Colonel Raive, breaking a warm, crusty bread roll over his steaming seafood bisque.

Before both men joined the 24th Chasseurs, Raive and Jobert's previous regiments had been brigaded together during the campaign in northern France in late 1792. During that campaign, Raive's squadron had been saved from an Austrian flank attack by the timely intervention of Jobert's company. The two enhanced their connection during the raising of the 24th Chasseurs last year.

‘Have you heard the news that the Austrians and Prussians have again advanced across the Rhine,’ Raive said over the laughter, chatter and clinks of cutlery on crockery.

‘Sadly so, Sir,’ shrugged Jobert.

‘Hmm,’ said Raive, tilting his face away from his meal, ‘I wrote to Cobereau with his new brigade in the Army of the Rhine. He has the same problems as we have here. Paper money is worthless. The country is afflicted with famine and supply is woeful. Carnot, the Minister of War, is making noises for France to invade beyond our boundaries simply to feed the armies.’

‘Speaking of supply, Sir,’ Jobert placed down his spoon to take up his wine glass, ‘My family is incorporating a small cartage business into the training of our colts. If I was seeking cartage contracts within the Army of Italy where might I begin?’

Raive sucked his teeth and wobbled his head as he reflected.

‘For any supply extending back to the Rhône,’ Raive began, ‘the Army’s contracts would originate in Paris. Local resupply contracts are well supported by local carters. The difficulty is when contracts are awarded, and the money paid, the material being supplied is of very poor quality, what’s more, the drivers are not paid which results in the theft of those inadequate supplies.’

Raive considered Jobert a moment.

‘But I know,’ said Raive with a twitch of his moustache, ‘General Masséna and I would be very glad of access to a small outfit with a reputation for integrity, for the movement of key items both to and from Nice. If I was to place an order for, say, wine for example, how might it be arranged?’

‘My uncle has delegated the enterprise to the Garnier family,’ said Jobert, tipping his bowl to finish his soup, ‘I’ll make Duck available to you as your agent.’

‘Duck? Excellent!’ smiled Raive, ‘Then I would be obliged, my friend. Let’s start with one load and grow it from there.’

As fresh carafes of wine were passed along the table, the young officers filled each other’s glasses whilst soldiers removed the soup bowls.

Raive leant in toward Jobert, his lively eyes darted about to see who might be listening to his conversation, ‘General Dumerbion is an interesting fellow.’

Jobert leant back in his chair to surreptitiously peer at the General seated beside Colonel Morin, the General’s host officer for this evening’s regimental dinner.

‘As the Commander of the Army of Italy,’ Raive continued, wiping his moustache with his napkin, ‘he commands a force of forty-thousand on paper, but can only effectively field twenty-thousand men. He is quite canny. Having watched many of his peers executed by the People’s Deputies, he asks the Deputies their opinion on how operations should be conducted, and then complies with their advice. You’ll remember citizen Deputy Saliceti from last year, but have you made the acquaintance of Robespierre, the Dictator’s younger brother?’

Jobert turned his face languidly in the direction of Raive’s nod from the sharp faced Deputy of the People Saliceti, sitting beside his host, Lieutenant Colonel Maccard, to the younger Robespierre in earnest conversation with Major Mercier.

‘No, I’ve not had the pleasure,’ Jobert responded quietly, ‘But it would appear, following Cobereau’s promotion from major to brigadier-general, Maccard and Mercier both hope to play that dangerous game.’

‘Dangerous, indeed,’ Raive’s eyes twinkled in the flickering light from the candelabras, ‘But where do you suppose our Deputies derive such insightful military opinion for our commander, hmm?’

Jobert shrugged as he sipped his wine.

‘None other than the Army of Italy’s Chief of Artillery, our friend Brigadier General Bonaparte,’ Raive nodded his head

over his shoulder, 'Young Bonaparte is advocating for an offensive into northern Italy to divert Austrian pressure from the Rhine.'

Jobert allowed his napkin to fall to the floor by his chair. Then he shuffled his chair to twist down to pick the napkin up, and in so doing, look across the room to the other long dining table behind him to see the slim, young General Bonaparte in animated conversation with his host, Major Clemusat.

'Hmm, interesting,' grunted Jobert, arching his eyebrows, 'Of course, Bonaparte and Clemusat are close due to Clemusat escorting Bonaparte's gun powder convoy last year.'

'Yes,' said Raive softly, 'and our Clemusat being instrumental in transporting all the guns, powder and timber for Bonaparte's Toulon batteries.'

'What of your new commander, Sir, divisional commander Masséna?' Jobert looked up the table to see the General laughing, as his host officer, Geourdai, refilled both their wine glasses. Geourdai had played a key part in guiding Masséna's brigade in the successful attacks on the outer fortresses of Toulon three months ago.

'He's a sharp fellow, and I enjoy working for him,' Raive gave a curt nod, 'Masséna hails from the coast around Nice and knows the country very well. Like us, a royal army sergeant major, he rose rapidly in the volunteer infantry battalions that sprang up in 1791. With Saliceti promoting him to divisional commander, he now commands a force of six-thousand men in two brigades of two regiments each.'

'And what is the state of your battalions?' asked Jobert.

'Reasonable,' Raive twisted his mouth, 'The Minister of War continues to drive the amalgamation within each infantry regiment of one old, royal army battalion with two patriotic volunteer battalions. That amalgamation is now occurring here in Nice.'

'Is there any artillery allocated to the division?'

'Yes, a foot battery of six four-pounder guns and two six-inch howitzers.'

'And the 24th Chasseurs?'

'Well, as Masséna is General Dumerbion's darling and leads all his operations here on the frontier, so Dumerbion has allocated Masséna's division a regiment of chasseurs. You've seen a chart of the area, have you not?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'The line Cuneo to Savona is the door to vast Po River valley that flows east, across northern Italy, from the Maritime Alps to the Adriatic. To protect that entrance to the valley our enemies hold a defensive line west of the Maritime Alps within the natural boundaries of France.'

Jobert nodded that he understood, 'And what of our enemies?'

'The Army of Italy faces four enemies,' shrugged Raive, 'Twenty-thousand Piedmontese in the mountains to the north, entrenched in a fortified line around the mountain fortress at Saorgio. Twenty-five-thousand Austrians along the coast to the east, the British Navy interdicting our coastal resupply to our south and coastal pirates, based in Oneglia, intercepting our grain resupply from Genoa.'

Both Jobert and Raive leant back as a plate of fish in a fragrant wine and lemon sauce was placed in front of them.

'France secured the province of Savoy and the port of Nice in 1792,' Raive continued, 'But we failed to secure Saorgio. With Lyon, Avignon and Marseille in revolt last year, supply to the Army of Italy disappeared, so little of consequence occurred. Early last year, the Army again attempted to take the fortress line which protects the high passes. Since the Piedmontese are better mountain troops than we are, the attack failed with disastrous results and the commanders executed. Hence

the current general's well-developed sense of caution. With the Army of Italy's focus on Toulon late last year, the Piedmontese and Austrians executed a lack-lustre counter-attack, which was easily blunted.'

'The use of cavalry in the mountains is currently a much-debated topic in the regiment,' said Jobert, indicating with his knife for Raive to try his dinner, 'What are Masséna's views on how the 24th Chasseurs might be used?'

'The challenge for cavalry is that mountain soil is poor, there is next to no forage,' said Raive waving a piece of fish on his fork, 'Also, due to the steep terrain, all movement is restricted to roads. The vital roads allow two carts to move past each other, so, at best, a battlefield frontage of a standard marching column; four horsemen or six infantrymen. But this is the exception as most roads only allow one cart, or a frontage of two horses. Any bypassing of enemy positions can only be achieved on local village foot paths. Perhaps very small groupings of horsemen can move quickly and sustain themselves in such an environment, which may gain some temporary tactical advantage, but the best use of the chasseurs is escorting artillery and resupply columns.'

'A platoon sergeant's war?'

'Due to the importance of the passes that need to be seized, perhaps platoons commanded by colonels? But the country here is nothing a lad from the Auvergne wouldn't have seen before.'

Putting down his cutlery, Jobert took his glass in both hands and reflected on Raive's comments. Raive took the opportunity to enjoy his fish.

'So what duties have engaged you since you arrived here?' said Raive finally.

'Geourdai's and my company are spending this month in reserve,' responded Jobert, returning from his reflections, 'Sabre

drills, fencing, and musketry have been the order of the day, especially mounted fencing against opponents with bayonets. Due to these late snowfalls, equitation less so, as many hours are spent grazing the remounts while the troopers cut winter grasses for extra fodder.'

'Your new canvas horse rugs are earning their place?' Raive smiled at one of Jobert's escapades during the siege of Toulon.

'Of course, Sir,' smirked Jobert with confidence, 'Next month, April, our squadron will take over as divisional outpost screen.'

'Or whatever adventure awaits when the snow in the passes allow,' Raive twitched an eyebrow mischievously, 'I suspect our friend Bonaparte has a scheme, which he'll feed Dumerbion via the People's Deputies. Then Masséna will be given his order to march, and the 24th Chasseurs will lead the way.'

A month ago, Jobert had reflected on how he might ambush and counter-ambush the twisting, snow-bound, mountain paths, as his horse had carefully descended from his grandfather's Auvergne farm down to the regimental muster at Avignon. He recognised that success in combat would depend on the initiative of the junior commanders in his company. Were his people ready, Jobert reflected, and what else could he do to get them so.

'On an evening in March five years ago, would you have believed we'd be sitting here?' said Raive, taking a deep drink from his glass, 'Colonels and senior captains, not sergeants, and dining with the brother of the man who controls France, no less.'

'Extraordinary times, indeed, Sir,' mumbled Jobert.



On the improvised drill ground in the chill, blustery wind, Sergeant Major Koschak stood rigid with a musket tucked tightly under his left arm, the weapon's hammer snug in the crook of the left elbow, in the position of 'Shoulder Arms'. With the bayonet fitted to the musket's muzzle, the firearm, with a length of one-hundred-and-thirteen-centimetres, extended to become a weapon nearly one-hundred-and-sixty-centimetres in length.

'Sergeant Major, READY!' cried Major Bidonne, the 24th Chasseurs' languid regimental fencing master, mounted on a fine black mare.

Koschak stepped forward with the left foot, grasped the waist of the musket's stock with his right hand, the barrel with his left hand and positioned himself to fire.

'Lads,' Bidonne projected his voice to the troop of fifty 2nd Company chasseurs about him, 'You'll note the fusilier is ready to fire. Sergeant Major, EN GARDE!'

Koschak adjusted his stance, with his left foot forward, his knees slightly bent, ready to thrust the bayonet if required.

'Lads,' Bidonne continued to explain, pointing to Koschak's stance with the tip of a wooden training sabre, 'Take note that the right hand will provide the thrust to the musket and the left will guide the bayonet home. With the tip of the bayonet at the eye-level of my horse, you will observe how my horse finds it difficult to approach the fusilier with his musket in this position.'

Bidonne backed his mare a few steps away from Koschak.

'Sergeant Major, at a mounted opponent, THRUST!'

Koschak lunged, his left arm outstretched, the tip of the bayonet level with his eyes.

'Lads, note the targets available to the fusilier. I spoke of the face of the horse, but the bayonet can easily be parried by the horse's thrown head, leaving the fusilier vulnerable. Of greater

value to the fusilier is the groin of the cavalryman, and just above that area, the abdomen. So, what do we have to protect the groin?'

'The saddle bow, Sir,' answered a nearby chasseur, 'with pistol holsters attached, and the horse rug and cape rolled under the shabraque.'

'Well done. The waist sash provides only limited protection to the abdomen,' smiled Bidonne, angling his mare back towards Koschak's frozen stance, 'On initial inspection it would appear, that in the outstretched arms of both opponents, the musket and bayonet is longer than the sabre.'

Bidonne side-stepped his horse so that the tip of the bayonet rested against his ribs, and the tip of his one-hundred-centimetre sabre was still a good forty-centimetres from Koschak's face.

'Observe, now, the wounding and death of the lazy chasseur who chooses to slash at the fusilier.'

With that Bidonne raised his sabre to slash Koschak. As Bidonne's arm swung the sabre above his head, Koschak leapt forward and again applied the tip of the musket to Bidonne's ribs. Bidonne then side-stepped his horse away from Koschak until only the tips of both weapons were touching.

'It is the fingers of the fusilier's hands that must be the point of aim for our strike, especially the unprotected fingers of the fusilier's outstretched left hand. As we know from our fencing, the tip of the sabre and the tip of the bayonet are equal, for it is the parry that matters. I prefer to parry from the front of my horse to the right, or rear. It avoids the sabre catching on the muzzle of the musket, and, when I recover my sabre forward after my strike, the barrel does not impede my forward movement.'

Bidonne easily nullified the threat of the bayonet with a gentle sweep of his wrist and a screech of wooden blade on metal.

‘It is the use of the horseman’s near-side, or left, heel that signals the horse to side-pass towards the fusilier, thus creating the momentum of the strike, that is the key to success. With the horse moving sideways, the bayonet tip parried, your blade should glide down the barrel to slice off the fusilier’s fingers rendering him hors de combat. As the bayonet has no cutting edge and the sabre has a knuckle-guard to deflect both bayonet and barrel, the movement is achieved with complete safety to the horseman.’

Bidonne’s horse stepped quickly sideways allowing Bidonne to rest his wooden sabre edge on the Koschak’s bare fingers.

‘Very good, lads, reform ranks and prepare to practise that stroke.’



This is all very unusual, thought Koschak, very unusual, indeed.

With Jobert having just departed the Colonel’s orders, Koschak reflected, here is Colonel Morin in the room now attending company orders. 2nd Company’s sergeant major had often observed the athletic Major Mercier, as General Masséna’s outpost commander and a close friend of Jobert’s, present with the company’s officers, but tonight, the tall, dark Major Clemusat also stood at the tavern’s fire with Lieutenants Gouvion and Rodau.

The oddness of the situation continued, Koschak felt, by Jobert requiring the corporal section commanders to attend orders. With no company non-commissioned officers to oversee the outlying vedettes and village guard, the regimental sergeant major and Mercier’s squadron sergeant major were currently

patrolling with the chasseurs in the recent heavy snow.

Further, Jobert normally avoided the dingy tavern for company meetings, preferring a corner of the barn, citing concerns of eavesdropping, and not wishing to turn the men out of the well-deserved warmth of the tavern, them having returned from long freezing hours on piquet duty. Yet here we all are in the tavern, mused Koschak, looking to Jobert.

Jobert’s mind was flicking from his notebook to a terrain model Neilage was assembling on the floor, and to a seating arrangement Trumpeter Moench was orienting to the three-dimensional map.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Jobert looked up to Koschak.

‘The men are ready, Sir,’ Koschak rasped.

‘Then have them come in, Sergeant Major,’ nodded Jobert slowly.

Koschak waved the group of four platoon sergeants and eight section corporals to enter the corner of the low-ceilinged tavern, lit by the fire and candles in the beams and on the floor around the terrain model.

‘Men,’ Jobert gained their attention, ‘Lieutenant Neilage will seat you in a particular order.’

Obeying Neilage’s direction, the company’s non-commissioned officers sat on the tavern’s benches.

With a final check of his notebook’s details, Jobert said, ‘I’d be obliged, Lieutenant Neilage, if you would invite the Colonel and his party to join us.’

As the two majors and the two second lieutenants took their seats, Jobert handed over the assembled commanders to his regimental commander, Colonel Morin.

‘2nd Company!’ Jobert brought the assembly to attention, ‘Your parade, Sir.’

‘Good afternoon, 2nd Company,’ growled Morin, his intimidating bulk dominating the corner of the tavern, ‘General

Dumerbion has orders from Paris to expel the Piedmontese from French soil. General Dumerbion has selected General Masséna to spearhead that attack.

‘The 24th Chasseurs worked closely with General Masséna at Toulon. General Masséna knows well the 24th Chasseurs’ steadfastness in battle and has reaped the rewards of our initiative enabling him to break the ring of fortresses of that port. General Masséna has requested I pass on how delighted he is that the 24th Chasseurs will lead his division into battle.

‘Every company in the regiment has a key role to play. The 2nd Company’s role is vital to the Republic’s success in this endeavour. From my close observation of you all, I believe wholeheartedly that every man, without exception, will do his best.

‘Captain Jobert, your parade,’ Morin nodded to Jobert, then took his allocated chair in Neilage’s plan.

Every eye considered Jobert as he stepped forward, his own gaze passing assuredly across each face.

‘Men,’ Jobert began his orders, ‘On this model before you, you’ll note the Mediterranean coast, and the ports of Nice, Oneglia, Loano and Savona.

‘North of the coast lies the Maritime Alps coming down from the north and curving to the east like a reversed letter J. North of the Maritime Alps is the catchment for the great River Po. Mount Succarello is a dominating local mountain around which there are three passes across the range; the Col di Tende, the Col di Nava and the Col Ardente.

‘Over the Col di Tende runs the Nice–Cuneo road; blocking that road is the fortress at Saorgio.

‘Over the Col di Nava a road runs from Oneglia into the Tanaro River valley, which includes the towns of Ormea and Garessio.

‘Finally, the Col Ardente, close to the summit of Mount Suc-

carello, which can be approached from south of the range, or north of the range via the village of Briga Alta.

‘I’ll now make comments about the enemy. By defending the Col di Tende, the Piedmontese deny any movement over the Maritime Alps, into Piedmont and the head of the great Po valley. To defend the Col di Tende, the Piedmontese hold a line of forts centred on Saorgio; the east flank of the fortified line extends to Mount Succarello. Further east of Mount Succarello has never been threatened and is lightly guarded by a string of isolated Austrian battalions from the mountain down to Savona on the coast.

‘General Dumerbion’s plan is to secure the Col di Tende for France. The General will attack with three large columns.

‘The first column, General Masséna’s division, our division, will attack along the coast to Oneglia.

‘General Masséna will then turn away from the coast and attack up and over the Col di Nava, enter the Tanaro valley on the far side of the Alps and capture the towns of Ormea and Garessio.

‘Finally, General Masséna will then advance west to Mount Succarello, break through the Piedmontese fortified line at the Col Ardente to secure the road between Saorgio and the Col di Tende, isolating the Piedmontese at Saorgio.

‘The second of General Dumerbion’s columns will advance from Nice directly against Saorgio, attacking the fortress frontally, thus pinning the Piedmontese defence and their reserves.

‘The third column will advance along the coast beyond Oneglia to Loano, threatening the Austrians at Savona and diverting their reserves from the mountains to the sea.

‘The 24th Chasseurs play a crucial role in General Masséna’s success.

‘1st Squadron, having spent the month screening the division, will rotate to escorting vital supplies to our division. 3rd Squad-

ron is poised, at Colonel Morin's signal, to launch forward as our reserve.

'Our 2nd Squadron is to lead General Masséna's division into every attack against the Austrians, with 2nd Company and 5th Company alternating as the divisional advance guard.'

The first into every fight. The mouths of the 2nd Company men listening tightened, and their eyes flickered one to the other.

'To begin with, 5th Company will lead General Masséna from Nice to Oneglia along the coast. We, 2nd Company, will lead General Masséna from Oneglia up and over the Col di Nava and into the Tanaro River valley.

'When 2nd Company does turn north, taking the lead away from the coast, we'll be immediately followed by the 16th Légère Regiment. The 16th Légère have three light infantry battalions, not line infantry; essentially, they are chasseurs like us, but on foot. It is our job to find the enemy. It is the 16th Légère's job to attack the enemy.

'So, we will face steep hillsides and poor forage. Advancing on narrow roads and tracks means only very small groups of chasseurs can patrol forward, and then only for a short time before being relieved by another very small group. A half-platoon of ten to twelve chasseurs is the ideal size for our success in the mountains. It is for that reason I have included the corporal section commanders at company orders, so they appreciate the importance of their role.'

Jobert's gaze passed intensely from one corporal to the next along the breadth of the seating. Each young commander responded with a brave and determined face.

'This attack on the passes around Mount Succarello,' said Jobert referring to his notebook, 'is so important General Masséna wants Colonel Morin to be his personal eyes and ears as far forward as possible. Colonel Morin and I intend to lead

the advance with one platoon and have Lieutenant Neilage follow with a reserve platoon. Lieutenant Gouvion, your troop will provide those two advance guard platoons. Sergeants Martine and Bredieux will alternate at the head of the column with me as ground and enemy allow.'

Gouvion, Martine and Bredieux glanced at each other and nodded grimly at their task.

'But there are other very important tasks to be completed by 2nd Company,' Jobert continued, 'It is not enough that General Masséna has broken through the Austrians and outflanked the Piedmontese fortifications. General Masséna must cut the road behind the Piedmontese holding the fortress at Saorgio. For the General's infantry to do that, we chasseurs must find a path for the division up to the Col Ardente.

'There are two options. There are possible routes on the coastal side of the range beginning south of the Col di Nava at the central village of Pieve di Teco. The Austrians and Piedmontese will be expecting such an approach. The second option is within the Austrian supply routes north of the range from the Tanaro valley twisting around Mount Succarello.

'Identifying these routes is of such importance to Colonel Morin, that he has tasked Majors Clemusat and Mercier with their achievement. Our two chiefs of squadron need 2nd Company to make that happen.

'Sergeant Checuti, you will take one of your sections and accompany Major Clemusat. Major Clemusat is seeking a route south of the Col di Nava, from Pieve di Teco up to the Piedmontese fortified line at Col Ardente.'

Checuti turned and nodded to Clemusat seated beside as per Neilage's arrangement.

'Sergeant Clenaude, you will take one of your sections and accompany Major Mercier. Major Mercier is seeking a route north of the Col di Nava, up the back slopes of Mount Succarello, via

the village of Briga Alta to the pass at Col Ardente.’

Mercier and Clenaude acknowledged their tasking with a grimace.

‘There are now two final tasks.

‘The division’s artillery battery has a critical role in the ability of the 16th Légère to swiftly defeat any enemy positions encountered. Lieutenant Rodau, you will command the other section of Sergeant Checuti’s platoon and escort the division’s foot artillery battery of six four-pounder guns and two six-inch howitzers. Each gun and its limber are pulled by a four-horse team and accompanied by another four-horse team pulling the ammunition caisson. Equip all your chasseurs with the side-chains from our wagons to assist the movement of the guns.’

Rodau nodded slowly at the gravity of his independent task.

‘Finally, Sergeant Major Koschak, ably supported by our quartermaster, Corporal Lombatte, the other section of Sergeant Clenaude’s will lead our eight pack horses, and travel immediately behind the advance guard platoons.’

Koschak cold, green eyes slid from Jobert to the tubby quartermaster.

‘Sergeant Major, you can expect the regimental surgeon and a sergeant veterinarian to travel with your group.’

Koschak gave Jobert an imperceptible nod.

Jobert released a long breath as he checked the last page of his notes. With a decisive nod of his head indicating to his audience that he was satisfied with the plan, Jobert looked to Morin for any further guidance. Morin looked up from the model laid out on the floor and gave Jobert a satisfied wink.

‘Men, today is the 4th of April,’ Jobert concluded, ‘We march before dawn on the 6th of April. We have only tonight and tomorrow to prepare. Are there any questions?’

Chapter Four

April 1794, Maritime Alps, Italy



For the last three days march to Oneglia, Jobert’s 2nd Squadron had been the van guard of Masséna’s six-thousand-man column. Geourdai’s 5th Company led and 2nd Company followed.

Jobert pressed Yellow to the side of the road, away from Geourdai’s lead platoon, and was dutifully followed by his eternal shadow, Trumpeter Moench. In column of fours, and to the beat of hooves and clink of scabbards, bit chains and slung musketoons, Geourdai’s lead platoon continued walking down the dusty coast road. Men and horses tipped their faces away from the icy northerly wind which had brought the late snow falls to the Mediterranean slopes of the Maritime Alps.

Morin rode beside Geourdai, with his aide de camp Chabenac close behind, should contact be made with the Austrian outposts. Chabenac turned his cape-wrapped face, the wind ruffling the fur-crest on top of his peaked leather helmet, to see why Jobert should step his horse to the gutter.

Jobert nodded that all was well, then took his eyes off the lead file of four chasseurs two-hundred metres ahead, twisted in

the sheepskin covered saddle to look the length of the column.

In the approved style, Geourdai had set a file to patrol ahead of his lead platoon. Two-hundred metres behind the lead platoon, the remaining three platoons of the 5th Company marched on the road, with two section flank guards weaving through the bleak farmsteads.

Within this larger group rode General Masséna, accompanied by his lead brigade commander, the lead regimental commander and the artillery battery commander.

Beyond 5th Company marched Jobert's own 2nd Company. At full strength last year 2nd Company had one-hundred-and-ten men on its roll. Following the campaign in Marseille, Avignon and Toulon, even with a few reinforcements, 2nd Company set off from Nice with ninety-five men and horses. Wrapped in flapping chasseur-green capes, Lieutenant Gouvion's troop led today, followed by the squadron's trains, the sixteen wagons of both 2nd and 5th Company, with Rodau's troop acting as rear guard.

Another five-hundred metres behind Rodau's troop marched the remainder of Masséna's advance guard, five-hundred blue-coated, bicorne-wearing light infantrymen, of one of the three battalions of the 16th Légère Regiment. Then came the divisional foot artillery battery, the gunners marching beside their horse teams, two pairs of light draught horses pulling either the slim brass four-pounder cannon or the short and stocky six-inch howitzer hitched to a two-wheeled limber, or a long ammunition caisson.

One-thousand metres beyond the advance guard Masséna's remaining eleven infantry battalions, a mixture of light and line infantry, distinguishable by either their blue or white trousers respectively, and their trains, stretching out for over ten kilometres.

Musket fire from the direction of Oneglia caused Jobert's

face to whip around. His leg pressed Yellow back onto the road, and a muscular squeeze through his saddle lifted Yellow into a canter towards Geourdai's platoon.

Morin, Geourdai and Chabenac had already cantered forward to the chasseur patrol, and Jobert and Moench sank in their saddles to bring their warhorses neatly in beside them.

'Austrians on the bridge, Sir,' the lead corporal pointed into the shallow valley in front of them.

All the officers extended their telescopes to survey the scene.

A wide, but shallow, stream raced down from the coastal hills on their left and into the grey, froth-whipped Mediterranean on their right. Over the rocky stream squatted a solid stone bridge. Beyond the bridge and a few thatch-and-timber hovels, rose the yellow and white-plastered buildings of Oneglia, chimney smoke from evening fires eddying between the brown-tiled rooves.

Above the whip of the wind, the rattle of drums sounded as the Austrians beat *To Arms*. The bridge guard, a one-hundred-man company of Austrian fusiliers in black, visorless, leather helmets, white tailcoats, white trousers and long black gaiters, assembled rapidly.

'Geourdai,' Morin ordered forcefully, collapsing his telescope 'Advance 5th Company immediately to the bridge and secure the near-side. Jobert, locate a crossing point upstream, then descend on the flank of the bridge from the far-side. Chabenac, pass my compliments to General Masséna and inform him of the situation. Pass on that I suggest the guns be brought up to secure the bridge before sunset. Go!'

Shortening his reins, Jobert saluted as he pivoted Yellow over his hocks, then pressed his bay gelding to leap from a halt to a fast canter the three-hundred metres, past 5th Company with its retinue of senior officers, to 2nd Company.

As Jobert and Moench sank to bring their horses to a neat

halt amongst Neilage, Gouvion and Rodau, Koschak was bel-
lowing '2nd Company, stow capes, musketoons ready.'

'Men,' seethed Jobert, his eyes wild and nostrils flared, 'Over the lip of the rise runs a river, a bridge and Oneglia just beyond. An Austrian company holds the bridge. 5th Company is to take the near bank. The lead infantry and the guns are being brought up. 2nd Company is to cross the river and flank the bridge. Gouvion, take your troop now and find a crossing point. GO!'

As Gouvion's fifty-man troop moved quickly onto farm paths beside the road, one of Masséna's aides de camp, the commander of the 16th Légère and the battery commander, all three now appraised of the situation by Chabenac, galloped passed 2nd Company to find their units further down the column.

'Sergeant Major,' Jobert continued gruffly, 'Clear our train off the road for the infantry and the guns. Rodau, column of fours, follow me, trot, MARCH!'

On the heels of the chasseurs, the French infantry's drums thrashed out a high tempo beat as bellowed commands prepared the five-hundred fusiliers of the advance guard battalion for the assault.

Following farm lanes directly into the miserable, dusty wind, Jobert and Rodau's troop wound their way towards the grey stream flowing swiftly in its wide, shallow bed. Ahead, Jobert could see Gouvion's troopers trotting here and there, inspecting places on the bank where horses might descend, and yelling to mates who had already crossed the freezing water and found paths up onto the far bank.

Gouvion waved his white-gloved hand to Jobert's fast approaching column of fifty horsemen.

'Gouvion,' Jobert yelled as he passed, 'Leave a platoon to hold both sides of this crossing. You bring a platoon in column to my left-rear as flank guard.'

Glancing to see Gouvion's nod of acknowledgement, Jobert

led the troop down the bank where Gouvion's guides indicated, the neat column with a frontage of four breaking into an inelegant gaggle of ones and twos. Horses dropped their heads to pick their way across the water, the icy froth splashing their bellies and swirling over the men's booted ankles, only to scramble and leap up the stony paths to the fallow fields and leafless olive groves on the far bank.

As they ascended the banks, to the snarls of the section corporals, Rodau's wide-eyed chasseurs immediately reformed in the files of four riders to recreate the 'column of fours' formation which allowed the fastest movement.

'Rodau, form column of troop, walk, MARCH!' Jobert yelled over his shoulder, whilst Moench repeated the command with hand-signals.

With Jobert's new command, repeated by Rodau and his sergeants, Clenaude and Checuti, the formation spread wider and wider to the left, from a frontage of four men to a 'column of platoon', a frontage of twelve men, all the way to 'column of troop', a frontage of over twenty horsemen in two ranks. Checuti's platoon rode with the river on their right, Clenaude's platoon had the slope rising on their left towards the eerily silent homesteads of the town.

As Jobert and Moench led the formation, Moench tucked his grey gelding just behind and to the right of Jobert. Rodau trotted his horse to the right of the line, and, as second-in-command, Neilage positioned himself behind the rear rank.

'SABRES!' bellowed Jobert, satisfied that Gouvion and his platoon had taken their post on his left-rear. Moench sucked and squeezed his lips, numb from the cold, in anticipation of the trumpet calls required, and rubbed his trumpet's mouth-piece on the ribs of his dark-orange, heavily braided dolman jacket.

Short-barrelled musketoons clattered as they were released

to swing on their cross-belt clips. Steel blades drawn from brass scabbards gave an evil hiss into the gusting wind. Thick gloved hands, nervously gripping cord-bound grips, rested the sabres' pommels onto the chasseurs' right thighs.

'Shorten your reins, lads,' snarled Clenaude, as musket fire erupted downstream, 'Up around their fucking ears.'

'Trot' was signalled along the line.

Except for a few outlying cottages obscuring his view, Jobert could now observe the length of the road from the bridge on his right to the gates of Oneglia on his left. Two Austrian fusilier companies formed a fire-line at the gate, whilst a third company marched towards the bridge to support the bridge guard.

Bounding back by half-company, the Austrian bridge guard company was retiring from the bridge in good order, as the dark green figures of 5th Company darted on the far bank. Across the river on the far slope, the lead battalion of blue-coated French light infantry descended at a fast pace towards the bridge.

Screams from the Austrian column on the road mid-way from gates to bridge, as they noted the flanking French chasseurs, swiftly became the insistent thrash of Austrian company drums. Expecting to receive a French cavalry charge, the fusilier company executed a flawless transformation from column to square.

Until alerted to the threat of French cavalry, the Austrian company had marched six fusiliers abreast. In response to their drum's insistent order, the first quarter of the company moved slowly outwards to form a three-rank frontage approximately eight men long. The middle half of the column instantly faced left and right to form the sides of the square. The final quarter of the column simultaneously pressed forward to connect the two sides with the rear side of the square, before turning to face out.

The front ranks knelt and, to create a horse-proof hedge, pressed their musket butts into the ground by their knees and

held their bayonet-tipped muskets outwards at forty-five degrees. The two ranks behind readied their muskets and prepared to fire.

Jobert was surprised when the Austrians fired a volley whilst 2nd Company was well over two-hundred metres away. He was hard pressed to hear any balls zip past at that extreme range, especially as the Austrians fired into the prevailing wind, over the deep rumble of two-hundred hooves immediately behind him.

Then Jobert understood the reason for the volley as the white-coated fusiliers reloaded.

The bridge guard was now alerted to 2nd Company's flanking threat.

The Austrian drums from the square at the mid-way point, as well as the bridge guard, pounded out the order *Form Square*.

Two-hundred metres separated 2nd Company from their target, well out of musket range but a mere twenty-seconds on a galloping horse. Only enough time to discharge one musket volley.

Jobert knew now was the time for his decision. If the bridge guard either froze due to their own indecision, or broke and ran for the mid-way square, he'd charge. If the Austrians were wise enough to form square, Jobert would hold his line.

'Moench,' Jobert yelled over his shoulder, hoping to create more pressure on his enemy, 'Sound *Advance*.'

Moench's trumpet screamed the command.

The bridge company halted and, due to the relatively small size of the unit, smoothly formed square, as had their sister company. Jobert would have felt comfortable attacking either of the two company squares with both 2nd Company and 5th Company, but not with Rodau's troop only.

'Halt' Jobert signalled with his sabre.

Non-commissioned officers yelled, men shivered with the cold winds on their backs, and horses threw their heads impatiently.

Far over on his right, Jobert could see that a 5th Company troop had trotted across the bridge, closely followed by a company of light infantry. The troop halted unsure of Jobert's movements. A square of Austrian infantry might be safe from a small group of French chasseurs à cheval, but they were extremely vulnerable to the French infantry about to cross the bridge.

Jobert took in the sun sinking rapidly toward the western skyline over his right shoulder, and knew the purpose was to secure the bridge.

'Moench,' he growled, contemplating the discipline steadiness of the Austrians, 'Sound *To Mess*.'

This time the signature tune was not an occasion for mirth for the weary troopers; they understood their captain was signalling the 5th Company troop.

'Rodau,' called Jobert, pivoting in the saddle, 'Return to Gouvion's crossing, form column of fours to the left, walk, MARCH!'

Jobert begrudgingly recognised the Austrian company, which had first formed square and alerted its sister company, required acknowledgement for its battlefield skill.

As Rodau's men executed the order, Jobert trotted forward to within one-hundred-and-fifty metres of the Austrian square. Saluting the square, Jobert brought the hilt of his sabre up to his lips in salute and then swept the blade back, his hand by his hip, the sabre's blade describing a line towards Yellow's muzzle.

An Austrian officer, the black and yellow plume of his black bicorne whipping in the breeze, pushed his way forward through the close-packed ranks. Then standing clear of his front rank, with sword drawn, reciprocated Jobert's compliment. Both men brought up their sabres to their lips in unison to complete the movement.

It was obvious to all that the leading French infantry would not be able to engage the two Austrian squares in the failing

light. With the chasseurs now turning their line away from any commitment to charge, the Austrians, remaining in square, carefully withdrew into the gates of the town.

Jobert trotted directly across to the bridge, with Moench, to Morin, Geourdai and Chabenac. Crunching gravel under their shoes, and with a clatter of muskets, water flasks and cooking pots, the exhausted light infantry surged across the bridge.

'Gentlemen,' Morin boomed, 'Well done on securing the bridge; it would appear we have arrived unexpected. General Masséna's lead brigade will assault the town tomorrow, but the 24th Chasseurs still has much to do this evening. Jobert, take 2nd Company to secure the road leading north to Col di Nava. Geourdai, have 5th Company follow 2nd Company, then press beyond Oneglia to screen the coast road running east to Albenga. And see there, an advance party of 16th Légère's quartermasters will follow you identify accommodation for their regiment.'

The junior officers saluted and gathered their reins to turn away to their duties.

'As for the 24th Chasseur's first taste of the Austrians, gentlemen' Morin added grimly, 'Again, well done.'



The following day, the 9th of April, General Masséna's lead brigade of three-thousand men assaulted the defending Austrian battalion within the privateer enclave of Oneglia. The attack was brief affair. The initial powerful cannonade was followed by a full-throated roar accompanied by the intensity of the massed French drums. The resulting musketry discharge was brief, and

the Austrians surrendered Oneglia, retreating east along the coast to Albenga.

With the one-thousand-five-hundred men of the 16th Légère blocking any Austrian retreat north up the road running from Oneglia, into the Maritime Alps over the Col di Nava, to the Piedmontese capital of Turin, 2nd Company took the opportunity to have a make-and-mend day.

In the homes they had commandeered, Neilage and Koschak ensured 2nd Company heated water to bathe and wash shirts, underdrawers and stockings, groom horses and fix loose shoes before marching north the next day.

As the cold sun set behind the dull grey clouds on the western horizon, local village men were pressed into service to gather firewood and sparse early-spring fodder. From the farms and larders of surrounding homes, the company had acquired a good number of chickens, large amounts of stored vegetables, dried herbs, cheeses, jams and flour. At Mathieu's culinary direction a roast chicken and vegetable dinner was prepared, while local women were ordered to bake loaves of bread.

As soldiers cared for horses and readied equipment for the resumption of the advance, each junior leader connected with their respective parties as per Jobert's original orders. Once the bombardment of the port was complete Rodau reported to Masséna's battery commander. Sergeants Clenaude and Checuti reported to Major Mercier and Clemusat respectively, to support those officer's reconnaissance to the Col Ardente.

Colonel Morin, Chabenac, the regimental surgeon, his assistant and a sergeant veterinarian returned from Masséna's orders to join the company for dinner.

After dinner, by candlelight, Jobert, Gouvion, Bredieux and Martine scoured maps supplied by Morin to understand what lay ahead. It appeared it would take two days to ascend the thirty kilometres to the Col di Nava. Then a day's march to

Ormea and another to Garessio.

Four days. How hard could it be?

Jobert knew the enemy would have an opinion on such progress. Even if a string of Austrian battalions could be broken through by Masséna, each of those eight-hundred-man battalions had to be beaten in battle. For the French company commanders, either chasseurs à cheval or infantry, that was no easy task.

Good men had to die to make that happen.



The cold, miserable drizzle excited Jobert. For a hunter of men, it was always the best weather to kill.

Rain kept the defender indoors. Rain outside gave rise to a fire inside and the opportunity to while away the hours cooking a cheery broth. Cooking fires created smoke which lay in the hollows and the low ground, revealing the location of the cosy prey.

Rain caused the defender's bored sentries to be uncomfortable and careless, whilst the aromatic smoke distracted their attention. The ability for a sentry to listen to the sodden world was reduced by the plips and plops from boughs and tent flaps onto capes and helmets. Rain caused hands and feet to become sodden and stiff. Rain seeped into the working mechanisms of the musket, either via the pan or down the barrel to the rammed charge, despite the best efforts of the most disciplined fusilier, increasing the likelihood of misfire.

In the rain, the hunter moved with swift stealth across the mud-softened earth and timber underfoot. Senses heightened

by cooking-fire smoke, the hunter's fear of being shot-at diminished knowing full-well wet powder would fail to warn the sentries' warm and drowsy comrades.

After only four hours in the saddle from Oneglia, Jobert tickled the base of Blue's shorn mane and looked down into the broad valley of Pieve di Tecco. In fact, it was the junction of three valleys. The main valley ran west to east guiding a small, rocky river to the sea. The minor valleys allowed snow-fed streams to join the small river, and the road from Oneglia to wind north towards the Alpine peaks shrouded in low, wispy clouds.

Around the fertile intersections of streams and river nestled a series of villages and farms, all connected to the major road by fords and bridges. Each village was cloaked in smoke, the rain pressing the smoke against the walls of the squat stone houses.

From their vantage point on the upper slopes of the valley, Jobert, Morin and Chabenac could see no movement within the villages and the farms with the naked eye. They chose not to draw their telescopes to scrutinise more carefully, knowing the lenses would only fog over.

An abrupt movement from the chasseur patrol descending the slope two-hundred metres ahead caught their attention. The chasseurs signalled 'infantry'.

'Platoon stow capes, READY!' hissed Bredieux to his platoon.

As quickly as they could with sodden gloves and frozen fingers, the platoon unbuttoned their capes and lashed them quickly to their saddle bows. Musketoons, previously clutched beneath protective capes, emerged and butts were held steady on the men's right thighs.

'Bredieux, follow me, trot, MARCH!' snarled Jobert, 'Moench, signal trot march back to Lieutenant Gouvion.'

Morin gave a brief, grim nod to Jobert as they trotted forward. Bredieux's platoon soon closed the distance to the scouts ahead.

'What do we have, Corporal Pultiere?' asked Morin.

'Austrian sentries, Sir,' said the rain-drenched soldier, pointing to about four white-clad, black-helmeted soldiers running down the road towards the village bridge. At least three more descended the slope away from the road, through the gaunt trees, to the gurgling stream well below.

'None of them fired, Sir,' said the young corporal, 'So, no signal of our arrival.'

'Jobert, if there is an Austrian battalion in the town, the main bridge will be the centre of their defences. Look to position yourself on the far bank by flanking crossing points,' said Morin calmly, 'Chabenac, would you be so kind as to inform the 16th Légère of our intent.'

'Follow me, trot, MARCH!' hissed Jobert over his shoulder to his soaked chasseurs.

Trotting is a balanced, two-beat gait which the horse can extend the stride to increase the speed. Squelching down the muddy road Jobert's troops maintained a fast trot and swiftly overtook the fleeing Austrian sentries. Faced with an uphill scramble on one side, be sabred down on the road or leap over the stone walls into the bare groves beneath, the harried Austrian fusiliers chose to depart the road downhill.

Before he leapt the wall, a fierce-looking sergeant with a bristling black moustache, bellowed in German, 'FIRE! Fire to warn the bridge company.'

'Shit!' grimaced Jobert, hearing the warning clearly, causing Gouvion to look at him.

'He wants his men to fire. He wants to warn the company on the bridge.'

'Should we follow them?'

‘No,’ Jobert threw up his right hand to signal halt, as an idea began to form in his mind, ‘Have Neilage close up with Martine’s platoon. Moench, fetch Sergeant Major Koschak to me now.’

As Bredieux’s platoon clattered to a halt, Moench peeled his grey warhorse from the column and ascended the hill at the canter.

Through the trees, muskets fired by the stream. Perhaps a half-dozen shots, each with a pause between.

‘Signalling the village, Sir?’ Gouvion glanced to Jobert

Jobert grunted.

Now lower down the slope, and within the trees lining the road, the chasseurs had lost their vantage point and could not see anything of the village or enemy ahead. But they all heard the explosion of drums beating *To Arms*.

Within moments Jobert looked up the slope to hear the French infantry cresting the hill with drums beating *Double March*.

Koschak and Moench cantered down the hill to join the company’s officers

‘Listen in, lads,’ said Jobert projecting his voice to the soldiers around him, ‘We are now Piedmontese volunteers re-joining the Austrians. Gouvion, split Martine’s platoon; place a section in front of our train and a section behind. Koschak, command Bredieux’s platoon in front. On arrival at the bridge, form line, and face back up the hill as if you are to delay the French advance. Give all your orders in German. I’ll take Martine’s platoon and train across the bridge and into the village. Nobody speak, understand?’ Jobert then stood in his stirrups to yell, ‘No French, lads, hear me, no-one speak French when we close with the Austrians. Now, follow me, trot, MARCH!’

Jobert saw Bredieux’s troopers glance left and right at their comrades, in their toe-to-toe formation, wide-eyed with alarm.

Growled expletives from their section corporals had the chasseurs gathering their reins to press their impatient remounts into the trot.

The leafless trees thinned at the base of the valley, the stream by the Oneglia road roared as it met the little river bearing east. Emerging into the open, Jobert could see two Austrian fusilier companies having formed a fire-line beyond the low stone bridge and three more companies marching to join them. An officer on horseback, the battalion commander wearing a plume-adorned bicorne and white jacket, rode at the head of the column.

‘Moench, signal walk march,’ hissed Jobert from the side of his mouth.

‘Company, walk, MARCH!’ Jobert bellowed in German, ‘Lieutenant Koschak, form line and face the French.’

Jobert gave a cheery wave towards the Austrians on the bridge, as Koschak saluted.

‘Form column of platoon, at the halt!’ roared Koschak in German, ‘About FACE!’

Neilage and Martine with the section ahead of the five company wagons and Gouvion’s section behind, maintained their silent walking column, musketoons resting on thighs, towards the now five-hundred Austrians forming an imposing three-rank line on the far bank of the river. In the centre of the fire-line squatted two three-pounder cannons, being loaded and aimed by a dozen brown-coated artillerymen and white-coated fusiliers.

Jobert squeezed Blue into a gentle canter towards the bridge and approached the Austrian battalion commander. The major blinked hard and licked his lips at the approaching cavalryman. In the cold rain, Jobert drew up to the Austrian and saluted.

‘Good morning, Sir,’ said Jobert affably, ‘Captain Checuti of the Legion of Savoy, at your service. You are aware of the

French approaching. The drums you hear are a battalion of ragged volunteers with a brigade struggling to keep up. We've been impeding their advance since before Oneglia.'

The major looked incredulously at an elderly captain beside him. The captain's suspicious eyes never left Jobert, his mouth slightly open and forehead creased in concern.

'Good morning Sir,' the battalion commander stammered, 'Major Litzer of the Purn Regiment. Do they advance with artillery?'

'Guns, Sir? Not that I've seen, Sir,' Jobert shook his head, 'How might I support you, Sir?'

'What did you say your regiment was, Sir?' the major asked tentatively.

'The Legion of Savoy, Sir. Piedmontese volunteers, Sir,' said Jobert looking downstream and pointing, 'May I suggest I place my train on the far side of the village and regather my company, cross the stream perhaps down there using the cover of the trees, and then take the French in the flank, Sir?'

'Very well,' shrugged the Major, conscious of the growing drumming and pounding of marching feet, 'Have the line break ranks to let them pass.'

Alarm showed in eyes of the old captain.

'Company, ADVANCE,' ordered Jobert in German.

As Martine's platoon and the five wagons passed close by the tall wheels of the two artillery pieces, Jobert yelled, 'Lieutenant Koschak, retire your line, Sir.'

Moench looked about wide-eyed, conscience of the simmering glare of the Austrian captain now speaking rapidly to an equally sullen sergeant major.

'At the walk, in front of the French, Sir,' Jobert admonished Koschak, playing to his audience, 'This is no place for unseemly haste. Well done the Purns. Don't let the bark of the French dogs unsettle your aim.'

As Jobert's fifty-odd horsemen departed the river bank they past the two limbers and two caissons serving the two Austrian cannons. The horse teams faced away from the gun position at the bridge towards the town. The four grey-jacketed, unarmed civilian drivers were particularly anxious as they twisted in their saddles to watch the events behind them unfold.

As the chasseurs entered the steep streets, the beat of French drums and marching feet were amplified amongst the timber buildings. Local men and women, faces strained with fear, were racing to close shutters and gather children and animals inside.

Two more Austrian companies were advancing through the village. Company officers looked up in surprise to see green-clad horsemen blocking the street.

'The French are coming,' cried Jobert to the Austrians, 'The French are coming. Form line at the bridge. Clear the streets for the Purn Regiment. Hurrah for the Purns!'

Gouvion's troop passed the infantry and pressed on at a fast walk to reach the far side of the village.

'Company, HALT!' Jobert called to his men in French, 'Duck, secure our wagons in that tavern yard. FALL OUT! Troop, ABOUT FACE! SABRES!'

Jobert nodded to Moench, as Moench rolled his lips to warm them.

'Sir, riders!' Jobert looked up the slopes at the rear of the village where Duck was pointing. Two white-coat horsemen, probably battalion aides, were galloping north with the news of the French advance.

'Sergeant Major, to the front of Bredieux's platoon,' Jobert snarled through clenched teeth, 'Gouvion, to the front of Martine's platoon. Lieutenant Neilage, to the rear, if you please. Company, column of fours, walk, MARCH!'

As the chasseurs rode their horses back down the street, the village walls distorted the cacophony of the drumming from

both the Austrian line and the approaching French column.

Taking cover behind the last of the buildings in the narrow streets before the bridge, Jobert signalled halt to observe the scene.

Two hundred metres beyond the edge of the buildings the Austrian battalion covered the bridge with two four-hundred-man fire-lines in three ranks, creating great wings over one-hundred metres long, either side of the two patient cannons levelled across the bridge.

Three-hundred metres beyond the bridge, emerging from the tree-lined slope in the pouring rain, a company of blue-coated French skirmishers were spreading out, darting swiftly towards the river banks, taking cover behind trees, shrubs, rocks and low walls.

At the entrance to the road sat mounted French officers. Jobert knew Masséna and Morin would be in that group. Jobert had seen French commanders handle French volunteers for two years now. He knew they must not hesitate to consider their options. The drum-enraged fervour must be unleashed as a battalion charge, especially in the rain where the bayonet would triumph over the volley.

But, on this occasion, no.

Three artillery limbers were being brought forward. Within sixty-seconds, the teams turned about to deliver their four-pounder cannons to face the Austrian line. Pre-loaded with canister, the French gunners stood to their guns, matches lit.

The Austrian guns were loaded with canister to counter the French infantry. They would need to unload and reload with iron balls to have any effect on the French artillery. To unload and reload at such close range to the French guns was suicide.

As for the infantry, the Austrian line could not charge the unlimbering gun teams, blocked by the river, as it only had the narrow bridge to allow any forward movement. At three-

hundred metres, the imminent fire of French canister would be devastating.

A visible ripple of fear shuddered through the Austrian battalion. The French deployment was occurring far too rapidly. The head of the French infantry column emerged from the tree line, the soldiers howling *La Marseillaise* over the sound of their thrashing drums. The mounted Austrian major looked left and right in despair and was struck by the sight of more green-clad horsemen, Geourdai's 5th Company, crossing the rain-swollen river downstream.

'Now!' thought Jobert.

'Form troop line, trot, MARCH!' he bellowed, 'Moench, sound *Advance*.'

As Moench's trumpet abruptly tore through the rain, Jobert heard a high-pitched scream and looked up to see the old infantry captain screaming expletives and shaking his fist in rage at the two ranks of horsemen, over twenty-men wide, assembling uphill between the battalion and the safety of the village's buildings.

'HALT!' yelled Jobert but kept his sabre high in the air in case he should need to drop it to order the charge. The chasseurs shortened their reins. Horses threw their heads. The Austrian gun-team drivers' eyes bulged with fearful surprise as they raised their hands to show they were unarmed. Austrian fusiliers half-turned in their packed ranks unsure if they should face the emerging threat to their rear.

The Austrian major spun his nervous horse and looked into Jobert's eyes.

The scene descended to silence, except for the spattering of rain on shoulders and faces.

The major turned to his battalion and bellowed his command.

'Battalion, open order, MARCH! Ground ARMS!'

The battalion looked to him. They looked to each other. Then feet shuffled to open the ranks followed by the clatter of muskets dropped into the mud.

‘Form column to the left, left TURN!’ continued the Austrian major, ‘Quick MARCH!’

As the Austrian battalion cleared the egress to the bridge, the major spurred his skittering horse across the bridge towards the knot of French officers by the tree-line.

General Masséna rode forward to accept the Austrian’s sword.



‘If the kaiserliks didn’t know we were coming,’ said Duck quietly as Koschak entered the village barn, ‘they certainly do now.’

‘What have you heard, Sergeant Major?’ grunted Clenaude, passing Koschak a wooden mug of hot tea.

‘Tomorrow, we have a four-hour march up to the pass,’ mumbled Koschak into the steaming cup.

‘And another kaiserlik battalion, I imagine,’ shrugged Martine, looking into the glowing coals on which the kettle boiled.

‘Huh! One, at the very least,’ scoffed Duck, kicking a piece of timber deeper into the flames.

‘Will we get our cut from yesterday’s captured battalion?’ asked Bredieux, puffing on his pipe.

‘The Captain says that the Colonel guarantees it,’ said Koschak, passing back his cup and indicating for it to be refilled, ‘Now, let’s settle down and talk pack horses.’

‘Did you know the Captain spoke German?’ asked Martine

with eyebrows arched.

‘Yes, as does Clenaude,’ shrugged Koschak, opening his notebook.

‘Do you speak German?’ Martine turned to Clenaude in surprise.

‘The Captain’s family were cattle drovers, as is my family,’ rumbled Clenaude, slightly uncomfortable, ‘All itinerant families speak a number of languages to survive.’

‘Enough,’ rasped Koschak, turning to Quartermaster Lombatte, ‘Now focus on pack horses. Checuti and one of his sections have departed with Major Clemusat east to Col Ar-dente. He has taken only one of his pack horses, yes?’

‘Yes, Sergeant Major,’ nodded Lombatte, wiping tea from his drooping moustache.

‘Did Checuti take his allocation of bulk ammunition?’

‘Yes, Sergeant Major.’

‘Clenaude, you’ll keep just one pack horse with you, ready to depart with Major Mercier for Briga Alta once we’re over the ridgeline. Yes?’

‘Yes, Sergeant Major,’ nodded the burly sergeant, his thick hussar-plaits jerking away from his pock-marked face.

‘Do you want a pack horse back with Lieutenant Rodau and the battery?’ asked Lombatte.

‘No, their hands are full enough with side-chains on the limbers and caissons, and besides,’ spat Koschak, ‘Those bastard gunners will eat the horse.’

The group of non-commissioned officers grunted a laugh.

‘Speaking of bastards eating what’s ours, Sergeant Major,’ coughed Lombatte, as Koschak slurped at his refilled tea cup, ‘I’m told the whole Pieve di Tecco valley is going to fill with Masséna’s division. I mean, I’m delighted six-thousand infantry are arriving with good money to spend on Madame’s grog, but ...’

‘Have we taken all the alcohol from the village?’ asked Koschak.

‘Yes, Sergeant Major,’ grunted Duck.

‘To answer your question, Quartermaster,’ explained Koschak, ‘Masséna must move his division out of Oneglia so that the other column of General Dumberbion’s can push through and up the coast to Loano. Masséna’s rear brigade, the one he’s saving for the assault over Mount Succarello, at Col Ardente, and then attacking in behind Saorgio, is to wait here until the forward brigade has secured Ormea and Garessio on the far side of the Col di Nava.’

‘Why here, Sergeant Major?’ asked farrier Vocuse, unfolding his long limbs from attending to the kettle on the smoky fire.

‘A river with villages means water, food and shelter.’

‘That could be another week before the depth brigade moves forward,’ Clenaude rumbled to Bredieux.

‘With you lot gone, how is Madame Quandalle, Mathieu and I going to stop them taking our cow and calf?’ squawked Lombatte, his merry grin evaporating.

‘As part of the division’s tail,’ responded Koschak, ‘Lieutenant Colonel Maccard, with 3rd Squadron in reserve, is due in from Oneglia tomorrow. So, there will be a secure camp for our wagons upon their arrival. But, Lombatte, I’ll send word back that we are returning, so have the calf butchered and dressed ready for our return.’

‘Mathieu has already removed all the herbs in the village ready for the gravy,’ smirked Martine, licking his lips.

‘Where were we?’ Koschak shook his head, ‘Yes, we reveille at four o’clock and march at five o’clock. On the man, for warmth, waistcoats, dolman jackets, waist sashes, capes, Hungarian breeches, over-breeches, helmets, boots and gloves. Spare boot soles can remain with the wagons. Each chasseur to carry sixty cartridges in his cartridge box.’

‘Excuse me, Sergeant Major,’ coughed Duck, ‘The men’s gloves will probably need attention soon.’

‘Then whatever we receive into company funds from the Austrian prisoners-of-war will mend our gloves,’ nodded Koschak, ‘Continuing. On the saddle, the chasseur’s paillasse, two blankets, our new horse rugs, two spare shoes, two full water flasks or gourds, musketoon cleaning roll in their pistol holsters, and three days of bread in their satchels. Tonight, I’ll conduct an inspection of the men’s saddle portmanteaus; spare shirt, drawers and stockings, their bonnet de police, candle and soap, and a roll of linen bandaging.’

Koschak looked to the three platoon sergeants present; they nodded confidently their men’s equipment was in good order. Koschak dropped his eyes to his notebook. One year ago, he reflected momentarily, these men were not much more than troopers on promotion.

‘On the pack horses, another sixty cartridges per man in bulk. What’s that? Six-thousand cartridges or sixty kilograms spread across eight pack horses, horse lines, our fly tents, ...’

‘Have you seen the gunner’s pissing around erecting their bell-tents,’ smirked Lombatte.

‘And the infantry sleeping beside the bell-tents wrapped in their great coats and blankets,’ scoffed Martine.

‘Ladies!’ Koschak snapped his fingers.

‘And bulk water, Sergeant Major?’ Bredieux puffed a cloud of blue smoke.

‘Always. And at least ten litres of vinegar or brandy for wounds.’

‘And my anvil and sharpening stone?’ said farrier Vocuse.

‘Any extra rations, Sergeant Major?’ asked Duck.

‘The Army’s supply trains haven’t arrived,’ Koschak shrugged, ‘so we march with what we’ve taken from the town. What does that leave in the wagons?’

‘Apart from Lieutenant Rodau’s section taking the side-chains to assist the battery,’ Lombatte rocked his head to calculate, ‘two-hundred spare horse shoes and one-and-a-half rations of grain.’

‘We’ll need all that when we see you next,’ Koschak pointed a thick finger at the quartermaster, ‘so don’t trade it.’

Lombatte reacted with a look of wounded pride.

‘If that is all,’ said Koschak snapping his notebook closed, ‘Mathieu has made brandied apricots and treacle dumplings for the Captain’s birthday lunch today, so we can’t be late.’

As the group turned and made for the barn door, Duck caught Bredieux’s eye.

‘The Captain’s birthday, huh?’ shrugged Duck, ‘Can you believe it’s been a year since Valence?’

‘Humph,’ grimaced Bredieux and shook his head.



The next day, within two kilometres of the Col di Nava, Chabenac raised the entrance flap of the white marquee to allow Jobert to enter the stuffy, canvas-smelling interior. Warmed by the watery sun, the marquee’s walls were slapped by the chill Alpine winds. At a small folding table sat General Masséna, and his lead commanders, poring over their charts.

‘Ah, here he is,’ smiled Masséna, running his fingers through his short-cut, tousled hair, ‘and how, Sir, might you enlighten us?’

‘As is shown on the chart, Sir,’ Jobert nodded to the maps on the table, ‘the Oneglia road passes through the Col di Nava from south to north. The western side of the pass lie the flanks of Mount Succarello. The east side of the pass is the flanks of

Mount Tanardo. The village of Nava lies on the northern side of the pass.’

Jobert kept his gaze on Masséna’s face. Once Masséna had digested those initial aspects, his eyes showed he was ready for more information.

‘Although my chasseur patrols have been kept well clear of the pass,’ Jobert continued, ‘we can confirm a stone wall and ditch has been erected to block the pass with at least two cannon embrasures in the wall. There is a slight rise in the road, so the wall is obscured until you are four-hundred metres from it.’

‘Canister range,’ grimaced the colonel commanding the 16th Légère.

‘Indeed, Sir,’ Jobert bobbed his head, ‘My patrols have moved up to the flanks above the pass and were pushed back by Austrian skirmishers.’

‘Line infantry, not Jaeger?’ Masséna inquired.

‘Yes, Sir, white-coats, not grey-coats,’ said Jobert, his mouth tightening, ‘I’m well acquainted with those ... gentlemen from my time in Belgium. But, Sir, this infantry battalion doesn’t have white trousers with long black gaiters, they wear tight blue breeches and short boots.’

‘Then they’re not a German regiment,’ smiled Masséna, ‘they are a Hungarian regiment.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Jobert, ‘Two such infantry forces lie in wait on both sides of the pass. There are small farms up on the ridgeline, perhaps a chapel, with surrounding fields, allowing clear fields of fire once any advance emerges from the tree line.’

‘Hmm, thank you, Captain,’ mused Masséna, ‘So, we can confirm line infantry in the woods above the pass. As I said before, if I was the enemy battalion commander, I would block the pass with guns supported by two companies, with two companies high on my west flank and two companies on my east flank and hold the final two companies in reserve back in

Nava. I would expect the French to assault my western flank to avoid the guns.'

Masséna tapped the map reflectively, the gusting wind buffeting the canvas walls, then looked up to his lead brigade commander.

'So, Brigadier, take your lead battalion forward with our battery and set a fire-line back from Jobert's rise in the road. Make a show of the guns and push the Austrian skirmishers back. And be prepared for any Austrian counter-attack from the eastern Mount Tanardo flank.'

'Yes, Sir' said the brigadier-general, eyes flicking to the commander of the 16th Légère.

'I'll take the second battalion of the 16th Légère,' said Masséna, placing pencils on the maps as fire-lines, 'and give the Austrian's what they're expecting by making a noisy flank approach across the Mount Succarello flank by last light.'

Masséna paused, his mouth tightening, as his fingers lightly skimmed the chart.

'Colonel Morin,' the general continued, 'you and Jobert need to guide the Colonel of the 16th Légère, and his third battalion, to the rear, or north, of the village of Nava for a rear attack at dawn. Jobert, where might the paths lie to provide such an approach?'

'Knowing there are farms on top of the ridge,' Jobert eyes drifted, as he pictured the terrain in his mind, 'there would be access between them and Nava. There would also be the possibilities of routes up onto the Mount Succarello flank back along the Oneglia road. But to confirm that route to the rear of Nava, being eleven o'clock now, I will need to depart with a patrol immediately.'

'Then do so, Captain.'



That afternoon the two leading battalions of the 16th Légère pushed back the Austrian skirmishers and established their bivouacs just out from the Austrian piquets. As the cold sun set, Colonel Morin could report to General Masséna and his commanders a route had been found to the rear of the village of Nava.

Through the icy, moonless night the third battalion of the 16th Légère scrambled under low-hanging branches and tripped along the rocky goat tracks, following their chasseur guides. In the foggy dark, each infantryman, clinging to the cross belt of the man in front, clinked, shuffled and swore. Finally, somewhere to the rear of the village of Nava, five-hundred exhausted men sank to the forest floor, nestled amongst the granite, wrapped in their blankets and great coats, and waited for dawn.

Well after the first grey light of day and a meagre breakfast, as the sun peeked beyond eastern heights, the eight French cannon roared, the sound of their four-pound balls ripping into the Austrians' low, stone barricade reverberated across the ridge-line. One-thousand-five-hundred French light infantry, in the three battalions, cheered in response. Following a three-hour exchange of furious musket fire, each battalion volley flensing any remaining winter foliage, the surrounded Austrian battalion surrendered.

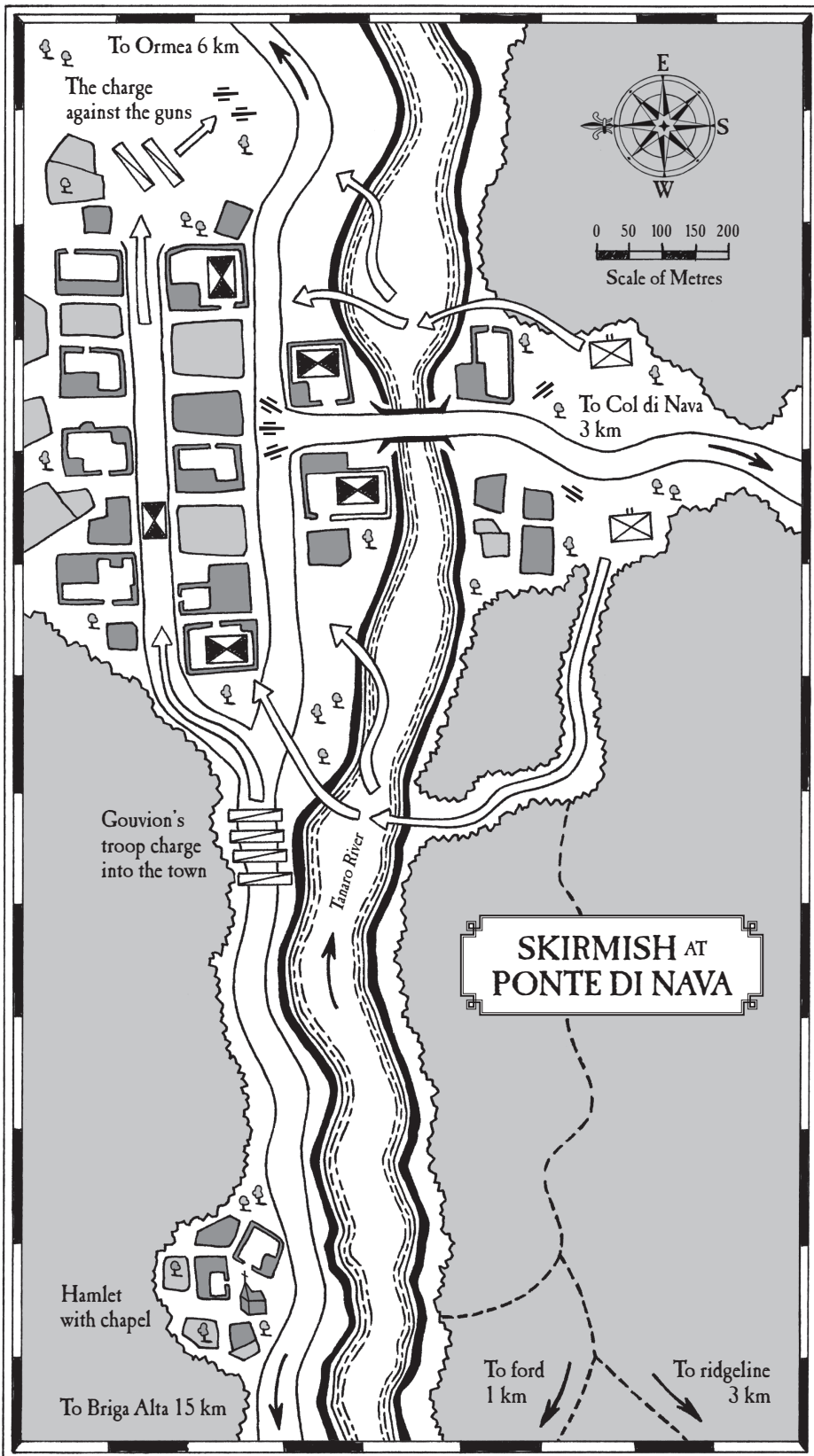
Above the pass on the flanks of Mount Succarello, Gouvion's troop took the opportunity to graze their horses in the dusty and brittle meadows on the ridgeline. Tucked out of the bitter wind under a leafless canopy, the chasseurs spent time making soup from the winter vegetables from ransacked local larders.

It was well after midday when Jobert convened his commanders.

‘The 16th Légère has secured the Col di Nava,’ he said, ‘but two-thousand men from four battalions, three French and one Austrian, now occupy a very small space. It will take the 16th Légère a day to re-organise itself and its prisoners. Tomorrow we advance the three kilometres down to Ponte di Nava and the bridge over the River Tanaro.’

Jobert looked into each man’s eyes.

‘Tomorrow we depart France and enter Piedmont.’



Chapter Five

April 1794, Ponte di Nava, Italy



A freezing northerly breeze pushed thick clouds across the face of an icy full-moon.

‘Masséna is with Colonel Morin now,’ said Chabenac, taking his hand from Jobert’s shoulder to open the farmhouse door, ‘Masséna has been waiting for you. I’ll fetch you a meal.’

Jobert nodded wearily to his friend, attempted to straighten his mud-encrusted uniform and stepped through the low doorway into the wavering firelight. Despite his exhaustion, Jobert drew himself up and saluted the senior officers in the room.

The faces of Masséna and his commanders turned unsmiling towards Jobert, their own eyes ringed with the signs of fatigue.

‘Tell me of Ponte di Nava, Captain,’ said Masséna dryly.

‘I’ve drawn a sketch in my notepad, Sir.’

‘Then sit beside me and explain what you’ve seen.’

Masséna adjusted a candle on the table, as Jobert angled a rickety wooden chair between Masséna and the commanding colonel of the 16th Légère.

‘The Tanaro River runs west to east with banks one to two

metres high, the river runs high and fast with snow melt, perhaps one metre deep and ten metres wide.

‘The slopes coming down from the Col di Nava to the southern banks of the Tanaro are very steep and become steeper lower down the slope. These slopes have vast areas of exposed rock.

‘The north-running road winds down from Nava to the bridge. The bridge is stone, wide enough for two carts and is quite high above the level of the Tanaro, perhaps three to four metres.

‘Once the road crosses the bridge it branches at a T-intersection inside the village to run six-kilometres east to Ormea and twenty-kilometres west to Briga Alta.

‘The village of Ponte di Nava lies predominantly on the northern bank. There are a number of two storey stone buildings in the village, with a few timber homes on the southern bank. There is a row of stone buildings behind the main street, perhaps accessed by a rear lane running parallel to the east-west road.

‘Beyond the town to the north a steep slope terraced with gardens and groves ascends immediately behind.’

‘Hmm,’ Masséna grunted to the 16th Légère’s Colonel, then turning to Jobert, ‘You’ve given me a good feel for the town and its environs. Now, what did you see of the enemy?’

‘A Hungarian battalion, Sir, Austrians in tight blue breeches, occupy the town,’ continued Jobert, ‘There were two companies skirmishing on the southern bank, two companies working east and west of the bridge on the far northern bank. There would be another two companies sighted on the slopes to the rear of the town.

‘In the centre of the town, at the T-intersection, there are three six-pounders, with dozens of their brown-jacketed artillerymen. The battery stands in a compressed front over one-hundred

metres beyond the bridge. All three are laid to cover the bridge.’

‘Six-pounders?’ asked Masséna, eye-brows arching, ‘You feel quite certain?’

‘I know Austrian six-pounders from Valmy and Jemappes, Sir,’ Jobert looked into the General’s eyes.

‘Then they must be a half-battery of divisional guns,’ Masséna said to the other faces in the flickering candlelight.

‘Excuse me, Sir,’ asked the battery captain of Masséna’s foot artillery of Jobert, ‘Were you able to identify the Austrian battalion’s own battery, a pair of three-pounders?’

‘No, we were not.’

‘Did you identify anywhere we might site our guns?’ asked Masséna, glancing to the artillery captain.

‘There is a small apron perhaps two hundred metres from the outer buildings, three hundred metres from the bridge that might accommodate three to four guns of the battery.’

‘Ahh,’ Masséna breathed deeply, ‘Our four-pounders might place themselves four-hundred metres directly across the bridge from their six-pounders?’

Masséna’s eyes darted across the page from Jobert’s notebook and the maps that covered the table.

‘Gentlemen,’ Masséna said to the assembled men in the smoky, stuffy room, ‘What I desire more than the bridge itself is the road east to Ormea. When I look at Jobert’s sketch I feel the 16th Légère has three options. One, to conduct a frontal assault over the bridge. Two, to assault across the river on the right, Ormea-side of the bridge. Can you describe the ground for this easterly, or north-easterly, approach?’

‘We found no paths that allow that approach, Sir,’ rasped Jobert, ‘Except to go down beneath the bridge into the river and cross immediately under the fire of the Austrian left.’

‘Very well, what of the left approach on the western, or Briga Alta side, of the bridge?’

‘There are difficult goat tracks on that side. Much of the time the tracks move under such low vegetation that crawling on hands and knees is required. Hence my state of dress. But there may be a fourth option, Sir.’

‘Indeed?’

‘We found more goats tracks going further west along the southern bank for three-hundred metres. The tracks become footpaths allowing a man to stand. The footpaths come to a simple ford allowing passage across the river near a hamlet with a chapel. The chapel would stand on the Briga Alta road about four-hundred metres west of the T-intersection.’

‘Hmm,’ Masséna considered, ‘On any other piece of ground, for a divisional flanking manoeuvre, that would be quite simple to achieve. But here? Allow me to reflect on that option, thank you, Captain.’

Dismissed, Jobert stood from his seat and stepped back into the shadows.

‘Colonel, your thoughts at this stage?’ Masséna asked his lead regimental commander, the commander of the 16th Légère.

‘I have two battalions at my disposal. My third battalion, which has the most casualties from the assault on Col di Nava, and has their hands full with prisoners, I’ll hold them here in Nava in reserve.’

‘From what’s been described, and with the intent of minimising exposure to the Austrian battery laid across the bridge, I’ll commit my first battalion to secure the south-eastern outskirts of the town, and the second battalion to secure the south-western buildings.’

‘With the southern bank secure, I’ll concentrate all the sappers from my regiment to clear these western tracks, so the second battalion might descend into the river to assault the town from the west.’

‘Once the second battalion has a foothold on the far bank,

I’ll send my first battalion holding the southern outskirts, under the bridge, as Jobert suggests, and seek a way to cross on the eastern flank.

‘Hmm,’ Masséna wobbled his head as he evaluated the plan, then looked up to his artillery captain, ‘Captain, place half of your battery at the disposal of the commander of the 16th Légère and hold the other four guns here in Nava to support the assault on Ormea in the days after. How do you see the infantry assault being supported?’

‘I, too, would be seeking to minimise the exposure of the guns to Austrian fire,’ said the gunner, ‘I’ll unlimber the three field guns to support the assault into the southern outskirts. I’ll then push the guns forward, tuck them in behind the buildings and seek to gain cross-fire across the river onto the stone buildings on the far bank to support the infantry’s movement across the river. I’ll also seek to bring my pair of howitzers into action against the rear of the village where the enemy’s reserves will be sheltering.’

‘Gentlemen, these are all good ideas,’ Masséna’s eyes twinkled with confidence, ‘We all still have time to arrive outside Ponte di Nava and consider our options once more in the clear light of day before committing our men. But prepare them this evening for the options as we understand them. The assault is to commence at midday.’

As the senior officers stood from the table, blocking the light from the fire in the hearth, Masséna sought out Colonel Morin, and his coterie of officers in the corner.

‘Colonel Morin, my lead brigade commander has his second regiment marching up to Nava and is considering how to pass that regiment through the 16th Légère and on to Ormea. I may make demands of young Geourdai and his 5th Company to facilitate that passage of lines.’

‘I am at your service, Sir,’ bowed Morin.

‘Thank you, Jobert, for your efforts,’ Masséna slapped Jobert on the upper arm, ‘We will arrive on the southern bank with a better appreciation for the steepness of terrain and the thickness of vegetation. Good night, Colonel.’

As the commanding general and his entourage departed the small room, Chabenac entered with bottles of wine and bowls of olives and dark bread.

‘Where is Gouvion’s troop now?’ asked Morin accepting a wooden cup of wine and pushing the food towards Jobert.

‘Martine’s platoon holds a dismounted outpost line up the slope from Ponte di Nava,’ said Jobert popping a few olives into his mouth, ‘One of Bredieux’s section has the horses. The horses have not drunk today. The final section had not yet returned from patrol by the time I departed.’

‘No possibility of moving horses to the far bank except for the bridge, eh?’ Morin dunked a crust of bread into his wine.

‘As I told General Masséna, Sir, Gouvion found the paths to this chapel west of the village, paths upon which men can stand and walk unimpeded and horses can be led. Gouvion reported that, unfortunately, he couldn’t find a point where the horses could cross the Tanaro at the chapel. Up until sunset, we had been investigating could these footpaths come to a ford capable of taking horses, and where else do they lead. One option we hadn’t considered was using infantry sappers to clear the paths.’

‘How else?’

‘The only other option was to lead the horses down the bare rock faces which dominate the slope. These rock surfaces face north so do not receive sunlight. The granite is either slippery with moss or is frozen until midday under an ice sheet. The discussion included removing shoes or cutting up shabraques and blankets to cover their hooves. It is a most desperate choice, Sir.’

‘I ask because the pass behind us is jammed with troops, and

if the assault on Ponte di Nava is successful, that village will become an even greater nightmare as one regiment, guns and trains all attempt to pass through whatever remains of the 16th Légère and the Austrians. I still need to get Mercier, and the section assigned to him, on the road to Briga Alta.’

The chasseur officers drank their wine and listened to the crackle of the fire in the hearth. A sudden knock caused them all to turn to see Koschak appear at the door.

‘Sir, forgive the intrusion,’ Koschak saluted, ‘I have a returning patrol with news for Captain Jobert, Sir.’

‘By all means, Sergeant Major,’ coughed Morin, ‘Send the patrol commander in.’

‘Get in here, Corporal,’ snarled Koschak, then speaking to others out in the dark, ‘Moench, get the rest of this lot down to the pack horses for a meal.’

Corporal Pultiere entered the ring of firelight and saluted.

‘We’ve found a way through, Sir,’ Pultiere said with a half-smile, his eyes lingering on the wine and food, ‘I was with Lieutenant Gouvion’s patrol that pushed further west along the southern bank. We found where the goat tracks opened up into footpaths. You can lead horses on those footpaths. We followed the footpaths to a point on the river where horses can cross. It lies one-kilometre west of the hamlet with the chapel. Lieutenant Gouvion sent me back on the footpaths to learn where did they go. They lead all the way back up to the small farms top of the flanks of Mount Succarello, the same farms at which we camped while the infantry attacked the pass. My patrol walked three hours up from the chapel to here. I was about to descend back to Ponte di Nava to tell you when we were intercepted by the Sergeant Major.’

‘Better than descending an ice sheet,’ Morin spun to face Jobert, ‘You are to bring Gouvion’s troop up from the river to the farms on the ridge, follow the footpaths down to the

chapel and assemble on the far bank. We must be there by mid-day when the infantry assault.'



Jobert, Moench, Pultiere and three chasseurs descended the paths of cold, wet sand, winding through the drooping pine branches, heavy with early morning rain. Midway down the flanks of Mount Succarello, a line of sheer granite cliffs divided the upper and lower slopes. Tight ravines allowed the ancient forest path to link the higher ridgeline with the Tanaro River below. As Jobert's foot patrol emerged into the heavily vegetated lower slopes, they could hear distinct musketry, probably the clash of the skirmishers, over fifteen-hundred metres to the east. As they continued to descend, the gurgling of the Tanaro River, increasingly heard but not yet seen, drowned out the sporadic fire.

If patrolling the Tanaro's banks yesterday had been tiring for the chasseurs, it had become an even longer night.

Morin had to obtain Masséna's permission for the venture, and then it took three long hours for the chasseurs to hand over the piquet line to a company of light infantry. A two-hour, pitch-black climb followed, in freezing light rain, back up to the village of Nava. Then, further on to the farms above the Col di Nava, the march was achieved more easily as the roads were clear of infantry. Still, there was a great deal of midnight movement within Nava, and at the pass, as the two 16th Légère battalions prepared for the morning's assault.

With less than two hours to rest before retightening girths, the chasseurs then, one-by-one, each man leading his horse, with

pack horses and remounts of the forward dismounted patrol following, stumbled along the faint footpath into the mist-enshrouded pine forest. As a general rule, where a man could walk, without requiring his hands to assist him over obstacles and traversing slopes, a horse could walk. Once a man needed to reach out to scramble over logs and boulders or climb a slope, the terrain was regarded impassable to horses. Although today's path allowed men to walk and lead horses, the progress of the single file of men and horses down the rocky, twisting slope was tediously slow.

Now, well in advance of the horse-column, the lead chasseurs signalled to Jobert that the river was in sight. Above the rushing current in the river, an intense fusillade was soon followed by the boom of artillery. Jobert opened his fob-watch to see it was twelve o'clock. He looked up to see the scouts' signal and nodded his head for them to continue.

As Pultiere's patrol descended the bank and waded into the freezing stream, musketoons and cartridge boxes held high, the individual explosions of cannon fire echoed one-and-a-half-kilometres up the valley. As the sodden troopers waved from the northern bank that all was well, the head of the horse-column emerged from the straggling thorns lining the forest edge.

It took another hour to bring the horses down the paths, allow each to drink, and cross to the other side. From the road on the northern bank, sharing a crust of bread with Morin, Chabenac and Moench, Jobert looked up the flanks of Mount Succarello they had just descended and marvelled at the thick pines and the massive cliffs they had meandered through. All through the crossing the musket fire could clearly be heard, but now the cannonade intensified.

'Our artillery has joined the chorus,' munched Morin, washing down the bread with a swig from his water-flask.

‘The troop is across, Sir,’ Neilage reported to Morin and Jobert.

‘Then, Jobert, march east to the sound of the guns,’ grunted Morin, taking the opportunity to empty his boots of river water.

‘Very good, Sir,’ said Jobert, and turned to his assembled commanders, ‘First, Martine, lead us the one-thousand metres to the chapel. Second, Sergeant Major, we’ll see if the chapel is a safe place for our pack horse section. Third, Gouvion, with four-hundred metres to the village of Ponte di Nava, we’ll take a dismounted patrol forward to assess the situation.’

‘We’ll accompany you, Jobert,’ nodded Morin to Chabenac, ‘I expect we’ll find elements of the 16th Légère on the outskirts in the process of flanking the village.’

‘Very good, Sir,’ nodded Jobert, ‘Then, Martine, mount, musketoons ready, column of fours, trot, MARCH!’

‘Yes, Sir!’ growled Martine with a maniacal grin.

The troop column moved one-thousand metres to the chapel, at the trot, in under ten minutes. The sound of gun and musket fire from the village intensified despite the clatter of over two-hundred hooves on the gravel road. The sulphurous smell of gunpowder was strong as it rose up the river bed, overcoming the mist clinging just above the roaring torrent.

The hamlet in which the small stone chapel sat was quickly secured. The few local peasants nervously discussing the fighting to the east, scurried terrified indoors when the column of horsemen entered their hamlet from the west. The fire from the village of Ponte di Nava was overwhelmingly loud, as Jobert checked his watch. Half-past-one o’clock.

‘Gouvion, Martine, dismount a section and follow me,’ yelled Jobert, drawing his sabre and taking a heavy cavalry pistol from his saddle holsters.

Creeping further down the verges of the road, the chasseurs soon connected with a company of light infantry, whereupon

they were directed to an elderly captain with a thick, drooping moustache.

‘Good afternoon, Captain,’ Morin introduced himself, ‘What is your situation? I’m keen for my chasseurs to join the fight.’

‘Indeed, Sir,’ the infantry officer saluted, ‘Our battalion is struggling to cross the river under Austrian musket fire from the village’s western buildings. Thankfully, within the river banks, we are under their guns. My company is to hold the road. I’ll take you to a position where you can observe the Austrian defence.’

‘Then be aware I have a chasseur section piquet further down the road,’ growled Morin, as the chasseur patrol moved forward to the edge of the infantry defensive perimeter hugging the tree-lined strip between road and river bank.

‘I’m most grateful, Sir,’ said the captain, kneeling amongst a knot of anxious, saturated and shivering fusiliers and indicating towards the western outskirts of Ponte di Nava, ‘As you can see, their guns cover the main road entering the town from the west. You can see their ammunition caissons tucked into the lanes between the buildings, so they are well provisioned.’

‘My sister companies throw themselves at the buildings in which the kaiserliks have their fusiliers. We are receiving cross fire from the buildings at the rear of the village. You can see down the rear lane how the Austrians are transferring more of their companies to this side of the village. My chief of battalion has sent word to our other eastern battalion that the Austrians are shifting their reserves to the west. Thus, our sister battalion might begin the assault to the Ormea-side of the bridge.’

The captain looked to Morin, Jobert, Chabenac and Gouvion considering, with their telescopes, the Austrian six-pounders firing south across the bridge, as stray musket balls zipped unseen overhead.

‘I’m not sure there is anything a body of cavalry can do here,

Sir?’ the captain concluded.

Morin, Jobert and Gouvion collapsed their glasses and exchanged glances and slight nods. Only Chabenac put away his telescope with a pensive look.

‘Surely you won’t charge the guns, Sir?’ the captain, his eyes alarmed.

‘No, but if we moved down the lane behind the road, would it threaten their guns?’ Morin said carefully as an idea began to form, then looking to Jobert, ‘Would it cause their battery to depart?’

‘But, Sir,’ cautioned the infantry captain, ‘The lane is a crush of kaiserliks moving to this end of the town. What’s more, our howitzers now have the range to the lane with their shells.’

‘My friend,’ snarled Jobert, his eyes glaring, and nostrils flared, ‘If you were marching your company in column down a tight lane, would you be happy to be charged by horse?’

‘No, not at all,’ the veteran captain looked into the grimly confident faces of Gouvion and Martine. Only Moench, dutifully trailing Jobert, continued to stare at the smoke-enveloped village with blinking trepidation.

‘Then, that’s what we’ll do,’ Jobert nodded to Morin.

‘Captain,’ Morin grunted to the infantryman, ‘I’d be obliged if your company would discharge a fusillade as we come up to provide a modicum of concealment prior to us dashing across to the rear lane.’

‘Indeed, Sir,’ the captain’s eyes began to flicker with concern.

‘There we have it, Captain,’ directed Morin, ‘Chabenac, take a message to the commander of the 16th Légère and the battery commander that I’m leading a troop of chasseurs into the rear of the town with the intent of threatening the guns. Captain, I would also be obliged if you would provide a guide to escort my aide to your battalion commander.’

Chabenac looked down into the freezing river with a grimace.

‘I’m at your service, Sir,’ mumbled the captain.

With that, Morin, Jobert and the patrol returned to the waiting chasseurs.

‘MOUNT!’ Jobert bellowed, replacing his pistol into its holster on the side of his saddle bow, and swinging into Red’s saddle, ‘Commanders in!’

‘Gouvion,’ said Jobert with fierce determination, ‘you will lead Martine’s platoon into the rear lane behind myself and the Colonel. Sergeant Major, leave the section with the pack horses here. You, Farrier Vocuse and Duck observe our progress from the light infantry position covering the road. Move forward as we advance further into the village.’

‘Regimental surgeon,’ added Morin firmly, ‘Yourself and the sergeant veterinarian are to accompany Sergeant Major Koschak and come forward when he does.’

Everybody nodded purposefully, their mouths tight as they exchanged glances.

‘SABRES!’ bellowed Jobert, gathering his reins, ‘Follow me, trot, MARCH!’

‘Give point, boys,’ Martine bellowed to his troopers as the column surged forward, ‘Parry the bayonets to slice fingers and faces. Do not slash.’

Due to the narrow road, Morin and Jobert trotted side by side. The men from the 16th Légère company scrambled to the side of the side of the road and looked up in awe as the column passed. Only as the chasseurs passed did the light infantry begin to whoop and cheer.

‘Let’s be quick about it, Jobert,’ Morin growled, pressing his horse into a canter at the gravel intersection of the rear lane to the main road.

‘Moench, sound *Charge!*’ Jobert yelled over shoulder.

The trumpet blared the insistent call.

‘Company, FIRE!’ screamed the infantry captain. The explo-

sion of muskets around the horses was deafening, and the resultant gun smoke was trapped within the roadside trees and pressed low due to restrictions of the lane in the valley.

The thunder of two-hundred hooves was distinct against the violent eruptions of musketry.

With a leap, Red extended into a gallop. Morin and Jobert covered the two hundred metres from the French lines to the smoke-engulfed village in less than fifteen seconds. Although the Austrian infantry were protected within the stone buildings, they were unable to produce any devastating volleys. In column of fours, Gouvion's fifty-man troop was less than one-hundred metres long. As the last man, Neilage entered the town ten seconds after Morin and Jobert.

Although a few Austrian muskets fired at the galloping horsemen erupting from the thick smoke, the screams of alarm spread through the town quickly enough. Behind Neilage, a full-throated roar from the blue-jacketed infantry erupted as companies struggled up the river bank to charge in the wake of the green-clad horsemen.

Once in the rear lane, Jobert let the press of a company of Austrian fusiliers check Red's stride. At the head of the column, the company commander and his drummer immediately disappeared beneath Red's flashing hooves. The column was six-men wide, each astonished face framed by the squat leather helmet and the white powdered curls above the ears, the open mouths under black moustaches.

The Austrians weren't able to bring their muskets to the en garde position before Jobert was slicing through the first face, and Red's momentum was taking him deeper into their column. Jobert screamed, teeth bared, as he held his blade steady, and Red drove the blade across ears, eyes and cheeks. Jobert leant forward in the saddle, his vulnerable groin protected by his holsters, rolled cape and canvas horse rug, covered in thick

sheepskin, with sabre arm outstretched, elbow locked, blade to the right.

Homes on high terraces, accessed by steps, were on the left side as they pressed east down the lane. Stairs descended the tight lanes between tall stone buildings on the right. The white-jacketed, blue-trousered Hungarian fusiliers roared to each other, and soon the column was disappearing down the lanes, between the buildings fronting the river, towards the main road.

Jobert's head jerked up as a demonic scream plunged into the packed ranks just ahead of him. The fusiliers bellowed again to avoid a French howitzer shell hissing at their feet. Within the shell the cut quick-match fuse found the packed powder at the shell's centre. The resulting explosion felled as many men with its blast as it did with the shell's thin iron case fragmenting into hundreds of spinning blades. Receiving the full blast, at least two files of fusiliers, over a dozen men, were scythed down in an instant. The smoke-filled gap allowed other to turn, slip on the wounded and run.

In the road below, between the buildings the grey-jacketed artillery drivers were yelling. They were slashing at their teams to move the caissons and limbers out of the infantry crush. The brown-jacketed artillerymen were limbering the guns in response. There were only three stone buildings on his right and two timber houses on his left, and soon Jobert would be clear of the lane, and on the eastern side of the village.

'Gouvion! Martine! On me! ON ME!' roared Jobert.

Another fizzing shell squealed into the horsemen somewhere behind Jobert. The explosion caused an ungodly shrieking from the wounded horses. Jobert parried a bayonet then twisted to look back on Martine's platoon. Martine and Gouvion were just behind him, with wide-eyed Moench, trumpet in hand, sabre swinging on his sword knot, sandwiched between them.

'Eyes front, Sir!' spat Martine.

Red shuddered, reared and screamed. Jobert rolled his wrist over to deliver a quick cut at a young, bewildered face. The blade bit into flesh, the weight of the falling soldier taking Jobert's blade back behind him as Red lurched forward, Jobert felt the blade come free, and he swung his sabre in a practised motion to 'give point' once more.

Red was hesitant to move forward. Jobert urged him with knees and heels, Red bounded forward into a canter with a deep groan.

The grunting and swearing of the soldiers driving the twenty-four horses of the Austrian half-battery were clear to Jobert as he passed the final laneway beside the last stone building in the village.

Then, two rapid explosions reverberated, and a cloud of gun smoke obscured the end of the rear laneway.

Who? thought Jobert, the battalion's own three-pounders? Where were they?

Jobert emerged from the last buildings on the rear lane, to look down the slope towards the roaring river. Morin reined in beside him, his blade running with blood.

Through the smoke haze, the six teams of the six-pounders defined the road as they dashed east to Ormea. Beyond the frantic gun teams, a solid-white, three-rank fire line of Austrian fusiliers on the verge of the road fired down into the river, as companies of the 16th Légère's first battalion struggled across the freezing torrent.

Two more violent explosions caused Red to throw his head and sink back on his haunches. On a terrace just above the road but below Jobert, the Austrian battalion's own two three-pounder guns fired across the river towards buildings on the southern bank.

'Now, Jobert, NOW!' roared Morin, extending his blade to-

wards the two cannon and the twenty-odd men crewing them.

'Gouvion, Martine, form column of platoon, trot, MARCH!' Jobert's voice was hoarse due to the smoke.

Incessant screaming filled the lulls between the fusillades. Jobert could see artillery drivers and Hungarian fusiliers in support of the guns pointing up towards the horsemen forming two-ranks behind him. Moench pressed his grey gelding in beside Jobert.

'Moench, sound *Charge!*'

The artillerymen were one-hundred metres from the chasseurs' line. The supporting infantry heaved to wheel the guns' trails around to face the cavalry threat above them. The gunners bawled at each other as they attempted to load their guns while the barrels were moving. The closest gun loaded ball. The farthest loaded canister. Neither barrel had time to load ball and case, so as to be 'double-shotted'.

With the crazed howl of madmen, the chasseurs spurred their agitated, resistant horses down the steep slope.

The gun commanders adjusted the rear-screws to elevate their barrels. Their barrels were too low, their targets too high.

The rocks on the slope had the horses dropping their heads to pick their way at the trot. Red was stepping short, despite Jobert's urging.

Jobert watched the first gun's firer step forward with his smouldering portfire. Jobert dropped his sword onto his sword knot and swept up his musketoon. The closest gun fired at fifty metres to the chasseurs' line. Jobert saw the black streak ricochet, covering him in stinging spray of gravel and powder, before howling past his right boot.

Cacophony. Muskets firing, hooves striking, torrent splashing. Men screaming; screaming in frustration, screaming in pain. Twenty metres.

The Austrian ventman took his finger off the vent of the

second gun, the firing tube was thrust into the breech vent. The Austrian firer touched his portfire's quick-match to the smouldering slow-match wrapped on the nearby linstock. The quick-match sputtered into life.

Jobert cocked and shouldered his musketoon. Red would not extend his trotting stride, nor change to the canter.

In his peripheral vision Jobert saw the artillery officer, bicorne, brown tail-coat, yellow waist sash, raise his pistol at Jobert.

To the side of the gun the artillery firer swung his portfire towards the powder-packed firing tube extending from the vent.

At fifteen metres, Jobert fired at the man's chest.

Instantly his face seared in excruciating pain.

The cannon roared just beyond his right stirrup.

Jobert found himself blind on a swerving horse.

Habit caused him to drop his musketoon onto his cross belt and shorten his reins. Red was moving sideways beneath him. He couldn't see, he couldn't open his eyes. In a well-practiced movement, Jobert flicked his wrist to swing the tip of his sabre onto his boot to catch the grip.

All around him there was screaming. Fire was racing down the side of his cheeks. Blood was filling his mouth. Jobert gags churned with nausea.

'Cut the fuckers down!' bawled Martine in a high-pitch shriek, 'Cut them all down!'

Gouvion screamed, 'Secure the teams.'

Red has stopped moving. Jobert was standing still in the middle of a melee and he could not open his eyes.

'Moench, sound *Rally!*' Jobert choked on blood, his jaw unable to open, 'Moench?'

He pressed his left gloved hand to his eyebrow to open his left eye. The pain was so intense he vomited down his chest.

All he could see was green-clad men, mounted and dismounted, hacking brown and white jackets and bleeding meat.

'On the Captain! On the Captain!' Was that Bredieux?

The thwack of steel crunching on bone and on steel. The grunts of labouring men, the blowing of terrified horses. The thud of bodies, man and horse, ramming each other out of the way. The panting moans of the wounded and those being carved.

'On me! ON ME!' It was Neilage. Somewhere.

Jobert dropped his sword and used both hands to open his left eye. His right eye was in extreme pain. Red stood quite still the whole time, and only took steps as he was buffeted by the movement of other horses.

'Neilage! Neilage?' Jobert cried.

Bredieux called from somewhere under him, 'He's forward, Sir.'

'Bredieux! What's happening? I can't see.'

'Stay where you are, Sir. You've been hit in the face. You're safe where you are. Our infantry are pushing through.'

Jobert pushed through the pain to open his left eye. He was able to see down the slope to the writhing bodies on the road and the river tumbling blue-jacketed bodies in pink-tinged waves as the water pulsed over the rocks beneath.

A line of mounted chasseurs stood guard on two Austrian ammunition caissons, Morin and Neilage at their head. Their immobility in direct contrast to the dismounted mayhem swirling on the road beyond them.

French infantry scrambled up the banks and onto the road. White-jacketed Austrians were firing, or scrambling along the road further down the valley, or parrying French thrusts with their bayonets.

Jobert pressed Red to pivot so he could look up the hill, but Red resisted the command. Jobert twisted in his saddle to look up the slope they had charged down.

The ground around the silent guns was strewn with blood,

shit and brown cloth. Around the guns sat, or walked, blood-soaked chasseurs, their horses standing without being held, reins hanging in the mud, shuffling together in their discomfort. Gouvion, both pistols in hand, angrily held back chasseurs keen to butcher the unarmed, grey-jacketed artillery drivers. Sergeant Martine was identifiable as one of the few still walking among the dead and wounded with his sabre. He was methodically plunging his sabre directly into every Austrian corpse with a two-handed action.

At the mouth of the guns Jobert struggled to make out a wide mound of steaming meat and brown fur. His strained vision was dizzying. Beyond the steaming mounds, lay a large grey sack covering what appeared to be horses' legs.

'Bredieux! Bredieux?' Jobert rasped a spray of blood.

'He's forward, ... fuck, Sir, dismount,' swore Duck, dismounting off Blue.

'Duck, I can't see.'

'You don't need to see to dismount.'

Jobert swung down beside Red gripping the saddle tightly.

'Sit down here,' commanded Duck.

'No, Duck, I need to piss, I can't hold it.'

'You don't need to see to piss either. Go on, I've got you.'

Jobert was barely able to reach into his underdrawers to pull himself clear of his breeches when he copiously urinated, due to the shock, down his own leg.

'Duck, who is in command?' said Jobert beginning to panic, 'What has happened to the troop? Are we safe? Where are the fucking kaiserliks? The fucking pain ... I can't think.'

'Sir, listen,' Duck gripped his shoulder, and shook him firmly, 'The enemy have gone. The infantry has formed line to hold the Ormea road. The Colonel and Neilage has Bredieux's platoon formed up to support the infantry, but it looks unnecessary. Gouvion is trying to regather Martine's platoon.'

'I just saw Martine? What,' Jobert was fading rapidly with shock, 'Duck! Duck?'

'I'm here, Sir. Red has taken a bayonet in the chest.'

Jobert peeled his left eye open to see a flap of Red's flesh, the size of two hands together, hanging from Red's chest. Duck was struggling to lift the horses' head to examine the wound.

'He must have caught it in the street,' said Jobert, sighing heavily and pressing his forehead to his horse's withers, 'He was a bastard to force into the trot down the slope.'

'Humph,' Duck grunted in response.

'Sergeant Martine, stop that bullshit immediately and come here now!' roared Koschak from somewhere nearby, 'Oh, for fuck sake man, wipe the bastard of a thing before you return it to the scabbard. Ooh, fuck, Sir! That's a nasty one.'

'Who?' panted Jobert with rising nausea, 'Me or Red? Why? What's my wound? I can't see.'

'Let's see,' grunted Koschak twisting Jobert's face in his gloved hands and removed Jobert's helmet gently. Jobert moaned as a pulse of pain surged into his right temple, now that his scalp was free of the helmet's restrictive headband.

'Your face has burst open under your right eye,' said Koschak, 'and the whole side of your head is swollen. That's why you can't see.'

Koschak hefted Jobert's bent musketoon hanging on his cross belt.

'Did it misfire?' asked Jobert, squinting to see the indent in the barrel.

'No,' said Koschak, 'the barrel has been struck by a ball.'

'I nearly had the second gun's firer. I got my shot off, but some prick's shot has gone wide, hit my barrel, kicked the musketoon into my face.'

'That will do it.'

'Those arseholes slaughtered my platoon, Sergeant Major,'

mumbled Martine, through gritted teeth, quivering with anger, tears carving patterns down his grime-encased face.

‘Shut up, Sergeant, and listen to me very carefully,’ growled Koschak threateningly, ‘One, get your men on their feet and gather your horses. Two, gather both limber and caisson teams, any loose horses and all their drivers. ALL ten drivers, do you hear me, Sergeant?’

‘Yes, Sergeant Major.’

‘I’ll remove one of your fingers for any one of those grey-jacketed pricks who fails to be in camp tonight, Martine,’ snarled Koschak pumping two thick fingers into Martine’s broad chest.

‘Yes, Sergeant Major.’

‘Now, have you searched that mess to see if there is anyone alive? Wheel the limbers around to pick up our boys and strip the horses of all saddlery and equipment. Finally, strip the kaiserslik gunners of their satchels and purses.’

Martine stumbled away to roar oaths at his stunned men.

‘Sergeant Major,’ said Jobert subdued, ‘the first gun fired shot and the second fired canister. What did we catch? Take me there?’

‘Before we go, Sir,’ Koschak turned to Duck, attempting to strap Red’s wound with a roll of bandage from the portman-teau at the rear of Jobert’s saddle, ‘Duck, is the Captain’s horse coming back or ...’

‘Absolutely yes, Sergeant Major, I’ll lead him to camp.’

‘Thank you, Duck,’ Jobert mumbled.

‘Is that the Captain’s spare? Yes?’ nodded Koschak to Blue and Yellow, ‘Help me get him up.’

Koschak remounted his bay warhorse and took one of Yellow’s reins to lead Jobert back to the muzzles of the guns. As they approached the macabre scene, Jobert, now able to keep his left eye open, watched company farrier Vocuse and the sergeant veterinarian shoot four wounded horses with their

pistols. Those horses that were standing folded with a great wheeze. The lying horses quivered momentarily after the shot, then relaxed.

‘The canister has taken about seven in the front rank, about twenty metres out from the gun’s muzzle,’ Koschak grunted, ‘It looks as if three men were taken immediately and there are four wounded being loaded onto the limbers.’

The regimental surgeon turned from supervising the lifting of the crushed and moaning bodies from beneath the peeled horse carcasses.

‘Captain Jobert, Sir,’ the surgeon peered up at Jobert’s bleeding face, ‘There a number of minor wounds such as yours, but the four here are serious. Two won’t be with us long, and I’ll return to the chapel to attend to the other three or four.’

‘If I had shot my man the gun wouldn’t have fired,’ mumbled Jobert.

‘Take him to camp, Duck,’ shrugged Koschak, ‘Follow Lieutenant Gouvion and Martine’s limbers. I’ll follow up Bredieux’s platoon.’

‘Duck, is that Moench’s horse?’ Jobert could now see the grey corpse crumpled in on itself like a pair of folded socks, the front hooves barely emerging from the headless chest.

‘It must have taken that ball in the chest,’ Duck said quietly. ‘Moench?’

‘He’s walking, but he’s hurting,’ Duck turned to look at Jobert, ‘He was probably rolled up and stepped on as everybody rode over him.’

The follow-on companies were marching into and through Ponte di Nava. Three limbered French four-pounders yelled and whipped their way forward, with an escort of Rodau’s chasseurs. As an old habit, Jobert always looked to the brands on the artillery horses left, or near-side, shoulders to see if the animal was from his grandfather’s farm. But in this afternoon’s

watery sunshine everything moved in a sickening blur.

Duck, leading Blue and Red, with Jobert following on Yellow, picked his way through the crowded main road at the tail of Martine's Austrian prisoners.

Nearly two-thousand men, Austrian and French, moved, or lay motionless, throughout Ponte di Nava. Men crumpled to sit, slouched to piss, or squatted to shit wherever they might find themselves.

The wounded writhed, whimpered and grasped. The dead were flipped over to have their possessions rifled. Water in the canteens of the dead and wounded held the greatest value.

Officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, belated in French, German or Hungarian, to overcome the stupor of the combat, to get men moving, to re-establish order, to recover the wounded, to prepare for any counter-attack.

Columns of prisoners, stripped of their jackets, shirts, satchels and shoes shuffled towards the bridge, their blue-jackets captors laughing at the spoils bulging from their backpacks. Some prisoners carried both French and Austrian wounded; the wounded slouched against the two prisoners who held two muskets as a make-shift chair.

Abandoned horses stood silently trembling noses pressed to comforting flanks. Some with broken legs swinging within the skin's envelope. Some adjusted their feet entangled in the loops of their own intestines.

Local people huddled in family groups in doorways. Light infantrymen, singly or in pairs, ducked in and out of broken doors ransacking the homes and stores. Breaking jars and bottles. Swearing. The occasional female screamed from within a building. The occasional shot was fired.

Masséna, his staff mounted behind him, rode grim-faced through the distress of Ponte di Nava. Mercier, Chabenac and Geourdai broke away from the General's staff when they

saw Jobert, Gouvion and Duck by the side of the road. They clenched their teeth in unison as they stared at the Jobert's open wound weeping serum down his neck like the fat from a burst, over-cooked sausage.

Mercier pressed his charger forward and offered his hand to Jobert.

'Good to see you, my friend,' Mercier squinted, his dark eyes emotionless, 'Where is the Colonel?'

'The Colonel and one of my platoons is just down the road outside the town, Sir,' Jobert shook his friend's hand firmly.

'What of your troop, Lieutenant?' asked Mercier turning to Gouvion.

'My troop paraded this morning with forty-six, plus eleven attached from company and regiment, Sir,' Gouvion said formally, 'I'm aware of the loss of eight men and nine horses so far. There are quite a few minor wounds.'

'Where will you be making camp this evening?'

'Four-hundred metres upstream at the hamlet with the chapel, Sir,' Gouvion pointed west.

'Jobert,' Mercier turned back to Jobert as Geourdai glanced at the General's receding retinue, '5th Company will take the lead into Ormea and Garesio. The roads are a crush of infantry moving forward from Pieve di Teco. The 16th Légère are at the end of their strength and will now occupy Ponte di Nava. The other regiment in the brigade will arrive to assault Ormea tomorrow or the day after. The division's second brigade will be hard on their heels and will press on past your chapel to Mount Succarello and the Col Ardente. It will be days before your wounded can be evacuated rearwards. So, sit tight, brother.'

'Indeed, Sir,' Jobert slurred in pain.



Jobert hissed in agony through his spasming throat. To grit his teeth was utterly unbearable.

He attempted to disperse the excruciating pain by clenching every muscle in his body. The sergeant veterinarian and the regimental surgeon adjusted their stance as Jobert shifted their weight with his straining arms. Koschak leant his muscular bulk onto Jobert's ankles as Jobert arched his spine and dug his spurs into the dirt.

Duck removed his fingers from Jobert split cheek, just under his right eye. Jobert gasped for breath and willed himself not to soil himself.

'I can feel the fractured cheekbone, Sir,' Duck looked up to the regimental surgeon, 'but I can't feel any bone splinters.'

'Well done, Duck,' said the surgeon, 'Then clean the wound and dress it.'

'I have brandy and a shaving brush,' said Duck, holding up the items.

'That will do nicely. Hold on, Jobert, this will sting like the devil.'

Choking on his scream, Jobert's eyes bulged from his eye sockets as he drove the back of his skull into the blankets on which he lay, as Duck dribbled brandy into his wound. His fingers dug deep into his thighs as the bristles of the shaving brush flicked away the embedded grit. When Duck finished, Jobert's breathing was laboured and tears ran down his cheeks.

'Excuse me, gentlemen, I need to stretch my legs,' gagged Jobert, rolling over and staggering away.

'Hurry up, Jobert, we haven't finished with you,' yelled the surgeon, as Jobert braced himself against a tree to urinate and dry retch, 'Where did you learn your skills, Duck?'

'I've always been interested in healing injured horses,' nodded Duck quietly, 'The Captain's uncle was a sergeant veterinarian and has been most adamant about vinegar, soap or brandy

when handling horses' wounds, difficult births and castration. We seem to have the best healing results in the valley.'

'There are certainly some interesting papers and anecdotes about it all,' mused the surgeon, watching Jobert return unsteadily, 'Have you considered studying the veterinary arts at Alfort?'

Duck squinted at the suggestion.

'As for your men, Jobert,' continued the surgeon, 'As you know, you lost a man on the way into the town. You have three musket ball wounds, of which only one required amputation. Whilst in the lane, your men received six minor bayonet wounds to thighs and arms. All sewn and dressed. No thrusts to the anyone's belly, which is pleasing. The howitzer shell caught only the horses.'

'The trumpeter, whose horse was felled by the ball, is badly bruised, nothing broken, but he should heal well.'

'The canister was only able to spread across seven men in the front rank. That the gun could not elevate saved the second rank. Three perished immediately. Two on either side of the three are in bad way, I'm sorry, and won't last the next two days. The two outer men received wounds to the lower arms and leg on the side closest to the muzzle. One fellow has had his arm amputated above the elbow, and I've taken his leg above the knee. The other fellow has clean fractures and has been splinted. He'll return to the company in two months.'

'Now, what happened to you?'

'I was aiming my musketoon, when I'm told I was shot at,' rasped Jobert, looking sullenly at Duck, 'My musketoon shows that it was hit in the barrel and that kicked the weapon into my face.'

'Indeed, you have a fractured cheekbone, no splintered bone we can feel, and the wound has been cleaned. Can your tongue feel any loose teeth?'

Jobert shook his head. He didn't know. He hurt so much he wasn't going to try to find out.

'How many horses have we lost?' asked Jobert looking to Koschak.

'Eleven dead, Sir, and five on light duties,' answered the sergeant veterinarian.

'Shall I apply the hashish oil and honey now, Sir?' asked Duck digging into his saddle portmanteau.

'You carry hashish and honey?'

'The captain's private stock, Sir'

'Hmm,' the surgeon seemed impressed, 'Yes, we can't suture while it is so swollen; allow the swelling to reduce for a day or two. Keep the wound covered in honey and a boiled bandage. I want to suture the wound, but I'm needed forward with 5th Company.'

'Duck can sew him, Sir,' said the sergeant veterinarian, 'You should see his needlework on the Captain's horse.'

'How many horses have you sutured, Duck?' the surgeon sucked his teeth.

'That horse is my fourth,' shrugged Duck nodding to Red recuperating in the horse lines.

'Are you happy with that, Jobert?' asked the surgeon.

Jobert shrugged.

'If you sew him, Duck, lie him down and sew him sitting above his head, otherwise if he sits while you stitch, as you would a horse, you'll pull the skin unevenly. No matter how much pain he says he is in, give him only one draft of hashish oil per night before bed, and no more.'

'I now need to brace for Duck's needlework tomorrow, yes?' asked Jobert, panting and quite pale.

'My dear fellow, the tickle from stitching is the least of your worries. Your immediate threat is fever. If Duck has cleaned your wound and applied honey, all bodes well.'



The throbbing pain in Jobert's heavily bandaged face was so intense he could not sleep. Unsettled that there was nothing he could do for Red's sutured chest, Jobert distracted himself by sitting at a campfire that Martine's platoon had built for their dying and wounded mates, with the men visiting as their duties allowed. By late into the evening only Jobert and Martine remained with the twelve other wounded.

Chasseur Arbod had been hit by the canister blast. Jobert liked young Arbod. Arbod had been one of the better horsemen upon his arrival in the regiment over a year ago. Over those thirteen months, Jobert, Arbod and a few hand-picked others had diligently worked the poorer horses to improve their movements. Now, Jobert held Arbod's hand as he died, as Duck gently poured a dribble of hashish oil mixed with goat's milk into Arbod's throat. The left side of Arbod's face and chest had been burnt and flayed. His jaw had been blown away. Arbod had been thrown so far by the cannon's blast that his spine and ribs had been broken. His breathing was shallow and difficult against the bubbles of mucous.

As the opium relaxed the injured chasseur, Duck shifted uncomfortably, hesitating to speak.

'What?' said Jobert, knowing Duck too well.

'The regimental surgeon said I might consider Alfort?' shrugged Duck, looking up slowly to observe Jobert's reaction.

'Yes, yes, of course,' rasped Jobert, meeting Duck's eyes, 'You would make an excellent veterinarian. Why ever would you not?'

‘Your uncle had said at Christmas it might be something worth considering,’ Duck wobbled his head uncertainly, as he packed away his medicines in a captured Austrian satchel, ‘He said it was a four-year course of study.’

‘I imagine, if your application was successful you wouldn’t enter the School until July or August next year,’ Jobert tucked Arbod’s blankets around his ribs, ‘Make the commitment, Duck; I know you’ll excel. Yes?’

Duck stood and looked across to the next camp-fire and the soldiers who awaited his evening ministrations.

‘I’ll submit your application to Lieutenant Colonel Maccard immediately on our return to Pieve di Teco. Yes?’

‘Yes, I suppose,’ mumbled Duck, nodding his thanks then turning slowly to amble through the intervening shadows to the next camp-fire.

By dawn the next day, Jobert jerked awake to find himself holding Arbod’s cold stiff hand, his seared eyes turned upwards behind raw, half-closed lids.

Neilage and Koschak worked the company hard through the night and the following day as the next regiment of Masséna’s lead brigade moved through Ponte di Nava for their assault on Ormea. The chasseurs and their ten Austrian prisoners collected firewood for a hot meal, they groomed their horses and polished their equipment. They sorted through the purses and satchels of the artillerymen they had massacred. At sunset, with the assistance of the priest of the chapel, they buried their five dead.

As the cold, clear stars emerged, the other dying chasseur, Saint Dizier, who had been disembowelled by a spinning canister ball, writhed and kicked in the dirt as the waves of pain washed over him.

Faure, one of the two amputees, sat up through the day and refused any soup. His pain caused his lips to quiver as he

rocked himself, and, with his left hand, he crushed a corner of the blanket that covered his lower body. Tears tracked down his cheeks through the filth on his pallid, unwashed face. His eyes flickered continuously as he stared at the place his lower right arm and lower right leg used to be.

Around midday Jobert and Martine lifted Faure onto to his one leg to help him urinate. But Faure didn’t have the strength to stand nor the ability, with his left hand, to bring himself out of his underdrawers. With a forlorn sob, he urinated down his own leg.

By sunset, Faure rocked and whimpered as he held the hand of the squirming and delirious Saint Dizier.

‘Sir, he’s my cousin,’ Faure whispered to Jobert, as Jobert and Martine returned from the burials, ‘He is only nineteen. Please, Sir, may I have a pistol? He doesn’t deserve this. We would show such mercy to our wounded horses, Sir. Please?’

Martine’s mouth sagged under his thick black moustache, as he blinked at Jobert. Jobert turned on his heel and went to find Koschak.

‘Faure wants a pistol,’ Jobert said without emotion, looking directly into Koschak’s unwavering green eyes, ‘For his cousin Saint Dizier.’

Koschak’s mouth tightened, then he turned to his bedroll, and drew a pistol from his saddle holster. He looked at the weapon, then breathing deeply, drew out the ramrod and re-packed the charge, and opened the frizzen to check the powder in the pan.

They both wandered back to the fire.

Faure was crooning and rocking himself, nursing Saint Dizier’s quivering hand. Martine watched the scene unfold with laboured breathing.

Jobert reached for Koschak’s pistol, cocked the mechanism and placed it in Faure’s lap. Before Jobert stepped back he bent

and kissed Faure's greasy scalp.

Faure calmed his breathing, lifted Saint Dizier's clammy hand and kissed it, then placed it gently on Saint Dizier's chest. After a while of staring at the fire, Faure took the pistol in his left hand. Focusing his eyes on the flames, Faure placed the muzzle in his own mouth and fired.

Some men around nearby fires looked up in alarm. Some just hung their heads and put their faces in their hands. Martine turned around and walked off into the shadows.

Saint Dizier squirmed and groaned at the pistol shot, crying out incoherently, his hand scraping at the mud to finally locate Faure's cooling hand.

'I'll stay with Saint Dizier,' said Jobert throatily, draping the chasseur's blanket over his body, as Koschak retrieved his pistol from the widening pool of blood.

'No, you will not,' hissed Koschak, spinning to confront Jobert, 'As a sergeant, yes, but not now as their captain. You lead them in battle. No, no! You go to bed, I'll sit with him.'

'I can't sleep.'

'I don't care, Sir, be gone.'

Jobert turned away into the dark.

Sometime deep in the night, when all was quiet except for the snores of exhausted men, and when the soft footfall of the sentries was farthest from him, Koschak pinched Saint Dizier's nose and clamped his hand down firmly on his mouth, until the writhing stopped.

Author's Notes

This story is a work of fiction, set within historical events. A chronology of historical events, events that are referred to within the story, is included as an appendix to this book.

During the Revolutionary period (1789-1799), the French army was in chaos. New government bodies changed the military's descriptive nomenclature with alarming regularity. This was done, not only so the army might shrug off its royal past, but also in response to the furious changes demanded in the face of prodigious enemies, both internal and external. I have deliberately chosen not to burden the reader with the dizzying array of changes to ranks and organisations. Not surprisingly, by the time Napoleon comes to power, the names used by the old, royal army were returned, names that we still use in our armies today. Acknowledging most of Jobert's audience are broadly (some intimately) aligned with the modern military structures of the United States, the British Commonwealth and Europe, I've maintained a degree of consistency to uphold the vibe of the period without irritating the reader with the changes that occurred.

I leave it to the reader to determine the overwhelming number of people, not just those of 'noble' birth, executed during the revolution, by the iconic guillotine, decapitation by more conventional means as well as being shot and hung. Maintaining a focus on the military context, in the eight-year period of revolutionary wars (1792-1799), my research indicates that seven hundred men of the rank of general were dismissed, of

which nearly four-hundred were executed. This purge removed the distrusted and 'treacherous' nobles, those who proved incompetent in the field, some 'as encouragement to others', as well as to cover the government's embarrassment for racing woefully prepared and supplied levies en masse into the enemies' volleys. Having said that, less than a third of families of noble birth emigrated from France. The overwhelming majority determined, despite suffering tremendous discrimination, to remain in France and uphold the ideals of the new Republic.

I utilised a Kickstarter.com project (www.kickstarter.com/projects/jobert) to launch the first and second books in the Jobert series, prior to making the books, in either print or e-form, available to the wider public. There were several exclusive offerings, such as signed hard-cover versions and exquisitely painted Jobert models, only available through the Kickstarter.com project. You are welcome to visit www.jobert.site to learn how you might benefit from exclusive offers during Jobert's next Kickstarter.com project.

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I also acknowledge the insights and detail provided by the Wikipedia, Google Maps and YouTube websites



Chronology of Events

The following chronology lists the historical events that are referred to within the story, with particular focus on France's Army of Italy's operations in Piedmont.

1792

- 7 Feb Urged on by French emigres to exploit the current chaos in France, Prussia, Austria and Sardinia (including Savoy and Piedmont) form an alliance, known as the First Coalition
- 20 Apr Proposed by the Republican government to galvanise and control the populace, France declares war on Prussia, Austria and Sardinia. King Louis XVI agrees, secretly plotting that the subsequent military campaign would fail, resulting in the overthrow of the government and the return of absolute monarchy
- 10 Aug With the immediate threat of Prussian invasion, the Parisian mob storm Louis' place and massacre his royal guard. The Constitution of 1791, which provided for a constitutional monarchy, is abolished, Louis is deprived of all power and universal suffrage is established
- 19 Aug In response, Prussia invades France and captures frontier fortresses
- 20 Sep In northern France, Dumouriez and Kellermann defeat the Prussians at the battle of Valmy
- 21 Sep Having been delivered from crushing defeat, the next day France is declared a republic, the monarchy is abolished, and the National Convention established

- 21-27 Sep Sardinian province of Savoy invaded and captured by French forces. The French fail to secure the fortress at Saorgio and the Col di Tende
- 6 Nov Invading Austrian Belgium, Dumouriez defeats Austria at the battle of Jemappes

1793

- 21 Jan Tried for collusion with the enemy, Louis XVI is executed. In response, Britain, the Netherlands and Spain declare war on France
- 23 Feb As the threat increases, a levee-en-masse is declared. An extra twelve chasseur à cheval regiments are raised, including the 24th Chasseur à Cheval
- 6 Apr The National Convention forms the Committee of Public Safety, sowing the seeds for the period known as 'the Terror'. The Deputies, or Representatives, of the People are established by the Committee of Public Safety
- 30 Apr Naples, Portugal and the Papal States declare war on France
- May-Dec Revolts in the cities of Marseille (29 Apr), Lyon (29 May), Avignon (25 Jun) and Toulon (27 Aug) critically disrupt supply to the Army of Italy
- 8-12 Jun French forces are defeated, attempting to capture the fortress at Saorgio, due to the Piedmontese being simply better in mountain warfare
- 27 Jul Jacobin control of the government is enhanced as Robespierre is elected to the Committee of Public Safety

- 27 Aug British and Spanish fleets secure the port of Toulon, capturing the French Mediterranean Fleet. Elements of France's Army of the Alps and Army of Italy besiege the allies holding the forts of Toulon
- 5 Sep Robespierre promulgates 'Make terror the order of the day' causing a further surge of executions of people suspected of opposing the government
- 9 Sep The National Convention enacts laws that force farmers to surrender grain
- 17 Sep The National Convention enacts the Law of Suspects, allowing anyone to be imprisoned and executed without trial
- 28 Sep Subsidised by Britain, the Kingdom of Sardinia contributes four Piedmontese battalions to support allied operations at Toulon
- 16 Oct Queen Marie Antoinette is executed, which incites Russia to declare war on France
- 7-18 Oct Attempting to capitalise on the distraction of operations around Toulon a lack-lustre Piedmontese offensive fails to recapture Savoy
- 19 Dec Republican forces enter the evacuated city of Toulon
- 1794**
- 6-28 Apr As a result of the battle of Saorgio, based on a plan devised by Bonaparte, the Army of Italy captures the strategic Col di Tende and the ports of Loano and Savona
- Apr-May The Prussians, Austrians and British advance into northern France. The allies have great difficulty coordinating their attacking forces, despite brilliant Allied cavalry actions at Villers-en-Cauchies,

- Beaumont and Willems. On the other hand, whatever success the French gain at Tourcoing and Tournai is unable to be exploited. By 30 Apr, the vital fortress of Landrecies in northern France is captured by the allies
- 1 Jun The Glorious First of June is the first and largest naval battle between the naval forces of Britain and republican France, where both sides claimed victory
- 5 Jun Based on a plan of Bonaparte's, the French Armies of the Alps and Italy capture the Col de l'Argentières. Minister of War Carnot's vetoes any further advance into Piedmont due to the precarious strategic situation in northern France
- 12-26 Jun Republican General Jourdan invests the allied fortress of Charleroi. The campaign results in the decisive battle of Fleurus (the first battle at which an aircraft, an observation balloon, is used in warfare). The battle causes Austria to withdraw from the Netherlands, Britain to withdraw their forces to Hanover and the return of Belgium once more to French rule
- 27 Jul Robespierre overthrown in coup d'état
- 6-20 Aug Bonaparte is arrested on the charge of treason by Saliceti, then released two weeks later
- 19-24 Sep In response to an Austrian move against Savona, and taking advantage of the political tumult in Paris, the commanders of the Army of Italy claim victory at the first battle of Dego and reinforce their lines prior to winter. Dumerbion is reprimanded for not advancing deeper into Piedmont
- 20 Nov Command of the Army of Italy passes from Dumerbion to Schérer

1795

- 23 Jan As part of France's capture of the Netherlands, the French 8th Hussars charge across the iced Den Helder, supported by the 15th Ligne, to capture the Dutch fleet. The fall of the Netherlands causes Prussia to withdraw from the First Coalition
- 11-14 March A French Mediterranean fleet, to which Bonaparte is attached, sails to recapture Corsica. The British Mediterranean fleet disperses the French covering fleet thus defeating the operation
- 6 Apr France and Prussia sign the Peace of Basel at which Prussia withdraws from the First Coalition
- 6 May Command of the Army of Italy passes from Schérer to Kellermann
- 22 Jun France and Spain sign the Peace of Basel at which Spain withdraws from the First Coalition
- 27 Jun-21 Jul In response to royalist uprisings in Brittany, the British support a landing of French royalist emigres. The force is defeated at Quiberon with 3,600 French royalists killed and 1,800 captured
- 29 Jun-3 Jul A swift Austrian summer offensive successfully re-captures the ports of Savona and Loano
- Aug-Oct As a result of the Peace of Basel treaties, the Army of Italy is reinforced by troops from the Rhine and the Pyrenees
- 29 Sep Command of the Army of Italy passes from Kellermann to Schérer
- 5 Oct As the Republic establishes the Directory, under Barras, monarchist uprisings in Paris are suppressed by Bonaparte

23-26
Nov

Delayed by heavy snowstorms, a French surprise winter offensive results in a resounding French victory at the battle of Loano and the recapture of Savona

1796

9 Apr

Austrian and Piedmontese forces in Piedmont and Lombardy resume the offensive against the Army of Italy



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.

Army of Italy

(Napoleonic ranks in brackets)

<u>Saliceti</u>	A Jacobin Deputy of the People assigned to observe the performance of the Army. A friend and sponsor of Napoleon Bonaparte
<u>Dumerbion</u>	The commanding general of the Army of Italy from August 1793 to November 1794
<u>Schérer</u>	The commanding general of the Army of Italy from December 1794 to April 1795, then again from October 1795 to March 1796
<u>Kellermann</u>	The commanding general of the Army of Italy from May 1795 to September 1796
<u>Bonaparte</u>	Brigadier (général de brigade) and Chief of Artillery on the headquarters of the Army of Italy. Future Napoleon I, Emperor of France
<u>Masséna</u>	Divisional commander (général de division) within the Army of Italy. Future Marshal of France under Emperor Napoleon

Raive	A staff officer on General Masséna's headquarters. Previously the regimental second-in-command of the 24 th Chasseurs à Cheval
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The 24th Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval

(Napoleonic ranks in brackets)

<u>Morin</u>	Colonel and Commanding Officer of the regiment until November 1794.
Maccard	Lieutenant Colonel (major) and second-in-command of the regiment. Assumes command of the regiment in December 1794
Clemusat	Major (chef d'escadron) who is promoted to become the regimental second-in-command
Mercier	Major (chef d'escadron). Marries Marguerite of Avignon.
Chabenac	Captain, regimental aide de camp
Avriol	Captain, commander of 1 st Company and 1 st Squadron
André Jobert	Captain, commander of 2 nd Company and 2 nd Squadron. Promoted to major (chef d'escadron) in December 1794
Quillet	Captain, commander of 3 rd Company and 3 rd Squadron

Bidonne	Major (chef d'escadron), commander of Depot Company and regimental fencing master
2nd Squadron (Napoleonic ranks in brackets)	
André Jobert	Captain, commander of 2 nd Company and 2 nd Squadron. Promoted to major (chef d'escadron) in December 1794
Koschak	Company sergeant major (marechel des logis chef). Upon Jobert's promotion, becomes 2 nd Squadron's sergeant major (adjutant major)
Moench	Jobert's trumpeter
Mathieu	Jobert's valet and cook
'Duck' Garnier	Corporal (brigadier), Jobert's groom. Departs the regiment to attend France's veterinary school at Alfort, near Paris. Duck's family manage Yann Chauvel's cartage business
Geourdai	Captain, commander of 5 th Company, the junior company within 2 nd Squadron. Upon Jobert's promotion, commands 2 nd Company, the senior company within 2 nd Squadron. Enamoured with Marie, a woman in Avignon

Neilage	Lieutenant and second-in-command of Jobert's 2 nd Company. Promoted captain to command 5 th Company within 2 nd Squadron
Gouvion	Second Lieutenant (sous lieutenant) in 2 nd Company. Promoted Lieutenant company second-in-command in Neilage's 5 th Company.
Rodau	Second Lieutenant (sous lieutenant) in 2 nd Company. Promoted Lieutenant company second-in-command in Geourdai's 2 nd Company.
Martine	Sergeant (marechel des logis) in Gouvion's troop. Promoted second-lieutenant in Neilage's 5 th Company
Bredieux	Sergeant (marechel des logis) in Gouvion's troop. Promoted company sergeant major, then second lieutenant, in Geourdai's 2 nd Company
Clenaude	Sergeant (marechel des logis) in Rodau's troop. Promoted second-lieutenant in Geourdai's 2 nd Company
Checuti	Sergeant (marechel des logis) in Rodau's troop. Promoted second-lieutenant in Neilage's 5 th Company
Peugeot	Recent graduate of the École Militaire, Paris, is a second lieutenant in Geourdai's 2 nd Company

Lombatte	Company quartermaster corporal (brigadier-fourrier)
Vocuse	Company farrier corporal (brigadier)
Tulloc	Company apprentice farrier and marksman/sniper
Dalmuz	Sergeant
Pultiere	Corporal
Duval	Chasseur and marksman/sniper
Madame Quandalle	Cantiniere of 2 nd Squadron

André Jobert's Family

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 5 th Chasseurs à Cheval, horse breeder and trainer. Runs the family farm in the high country of the Auvergne

Didier Jobert -Chauvel	André Jobert's brother. Chief of squadron in the 1 st Hussars
Michelle Chauvel	André Jobert's cousin, daughter of Yann. Seamstress. Lives in Paris with her great aunt Sophie, Madame de Chabenac and Valmai de Chabenac, mother and sister of Captain Chabenac

Avignon

Madame de Rossi	Matron of an eminent Avignon family
Madame Berland	Niece of Madame de Rossi, eminent Avignon socialite
Cobereau	Previously a chief of squadron in the 24 th Chasseurs à Cheval, now a brigade commander with the Army on the Rhine.
Inoubli	Avignon dance master
Anissa	Avignon prostitute, who moves to Nice

