

Betan was roused for officer's call well before dawn. There she found that overnight she had become a Yellow Army celebrity. Reigh said that General Pautark looked forward to reading her report and after morning orders she was besieged by questioning officers. She could only answer feebly that it was the rifles and marksmanship training before breaking for the mouth of the tent.

The camp was coming alive in the dark. Normally matters waited until dawn, but the dragoons' shooting and (especially) bombing had interrupted sleep anyway. Plus, the army was still outnumbered.

The jagers were already mostly awake, although they were mostly still laying down. The sergeants and corporals were already up, standing in a circle and arguing in low tones.

"Something the matter?" Betan asked, stepping in close. They were silent like caught children as the circle opened to admit her.

"Captain, the squad with orderly duties is on pickets." Amol said. Betan's stomach broke into gale force howling at the mere thought of breakfast.

"My squad has the next turn, but they just returned from half the night on pickets." Another sergeant followed. Betan didn't like exaggeration at a good moment and now that she was hungry it was very bad. "Some of those men probably aren't back to sleep yet."

"And the squad with the turn after that?" Betan asked. No one said anything but eyes shifted to one sergeant in particular. He was silent. He was clearly the source of the problem, although the sergeant who felt his men needed a nap wasn't entirely innocent. "Whose squad's turn is after next?" Betan insisted. If this wasn't resolved soon, her stomach just might order someone flogged.

"Mine, Captain." The sergeant everyone was peeking at replied impassively. He had a stony gaze, the look of somewhat who felt wronged.

"Have your men had picket duty, Sergeant?"

"They were second up, Captain."

"Practically a whole night's sleep, and no more than anyone else. Rouse your squad, it's trading places with the squad with the present orderly duty."

"Yes, Captain. By your leave, Captain." The sergeant turned and left the circle. Betan thought she detected a bit of a sigh in the jagers who remained. Betan didn't know either the obstinate nor the exaggerating sergeant very well. Their names were Kren and Todel, but further facts eluded her. She didn't know any of her men as well as a commander of jagers should.

Amol spoke up. "We'll have tea ready shortly, Captain, if you'd like some."

Tea would not help her now fully enraged stomach. "I'll wait until breakfast, thank you, Sergeant. I must update the company diary." Betan turned away, then stopped and turned back. "Also, today has already had an early start, but we will be advancing the schedule even greater soon. Someone tell First Sergeant to conduct morning formation and break camp."

"Yes, Captain." Amol said. Betan retired to her tent and dug out the bag she kept her field rations in. Half a biscuit quieted her hunger to where she could hear over it. Then she started on the company diary.

She could hear the noises of the company cooker being set up. Soon after the smell of the grains issued by the Yellow Army for porridge being cooked came to her. She finished her brief entry describing the previous day's engagement, detailed the

ammunition concerns and casualties and put the diary back in the lock box that contained her supply of spells and the company records and payroll.

She emerged from her tent to find her folding table set up and the men cycling through getting their porridge, dried fruit and tea. “How’s the morning’s goop, Sergeant?” Betan asked Todel.

“It’s quite goopy, Captain. We’re running somewhat low on the flavorings Lieutenant Dem purchased in Nreet.”

“Well, that’s not good.” *That’s damn bad.*

“The goop just doesn’t compare to sweetgrain, does it, Captain?” Dem said from behind her.

“Indeed not, Lieutenant. Did you hear what Sergeant Todel said about our porridge flavorings?”

“I did, Captain. I will perhaps inquire with someone on Brigadier’s staff about seeing what may be obtained from the Chassels. However, western Dorway has little to offer us, I fear.” Dem paused. “If I may, Captain?” Betan looked at him and he angled his head in the way that in the civilian world often hinted that a woman should follow a man someplace secluded. Betan blinked several times, trying to get that image out of her head. Dem was simply asking for a private conversation. Betan walked with him a bit away from the cooks.

“I just finished a more precise count of ammunition, Captain. The men have thirty-nine or forty rounds each right now. With the casualties accounted for we have thirty-two rounds per man in the wagon. I issued an extra twenty to the each of the men on pickets, but only fifteen men were out at a time. If we redistribute that we will only have eighty rounds per man.”

This just keeps getting worse.

“Hm. This not good. Go to Brigadier and inform him that we’re lower on ammunition than we originally thought.”

“Yes, Captain.” Dem left for where the horses were tied

“Captain.” Amol said behind Betan. “Your breakfast is ready. Sergeant Lokar will be sitting with yourself and the Lieutenant today. Ah, is that the Lieutenant galloping away, sir?”

“It is, Sergeant.” Betan turned and started walking to her table. “Let’s keep his breakfast in a kettle so he can eat goop instead of paste.”

At least letting them see me eat this shit is good for morale.

“Sergeants will report to my tent for orders.” Betan called after finishing the last spoonful.

“Yes, Captain.” Alman replied.

Betan left her seat and walked to the mouth of her tent while Alman and the sergeants, save for Amol who was more of a company steward than a leader, gathered.

“The force will be forming lines on the same field as yesterday.” Betan informed them. “Brigadier Reigh had the dragoons harassing the Oldsters all last night, as I’m sure you all heard, so we know they haven’t gone anywhere and hopefully haven’t gotten much sleep.

“We are to be used as sharpshooters, which means there will be no one to guard the force’s flank. Brigadier thinks we did enough damage to the Oldster light troops yesterday that this is a risk worth taking. He’s sending two fresh line battalions across the

kingsway to attack the Oldster camp, you can see them marching out now. We will be held in reserve until Brigadier calls for us.

“I’m sure you all realize that we’re running low on ammunition. Encourage your men to aim carefully. I know it’s tempting to save work on massed targets like infantry of the line, but we must get as much value for our ammunition as we can.

“As for yesterday, by all accounts we hurt the enemy about as much as we thought we did. Brigadier informed us at officer’s call that we faced battalions from two Brigades, one of a recently reactivated division, which is mostly composed of conscripts with some recalled veterans. The other is an elite Brigade, the Retatan. Those of you in First Sergeant’s detachment yesterday faced the Retatans. Unfortunately for us the Oldsters that Colonels Puyhora and Ordolar mauled so terribly were the conscripts.”

“So we still have most of a full Brigade of elite Oldster soldiers out there, with two battalions of conscripts and the remnants of one other. We’re still outnumbered and these Retatans are probably better drilled than our infantry of the line.” *Somehow it all sounded less gloomy when Reigh said it.*

“Any questions?” None. “Then clean up and fall in. You are dismissed.” The sergeants left and began shouting for their squads to clean up from breakfast.

“Yes, Captain.” Alman left and Betan was again abandoned to waiting. She looked around at the force. The two battalions that had not engaged yesterday were already marching to the field, Reigh hoped to surprise the Oldsters still encamped. Gunfire could still be heard from the dragoon skirmishing. The jagers had savaged both Brigade’s light troops, hopefully that had helped them, and would help whichever Yellow battalion found itself with its flank in the air.

Colonels Bransim and Ordolar had gotten their head start by not breaking camp. Reigh was pushing his force thin to gain advantage on the Retatans. Betan couldn’t disapprove, *something* had to be done, but it was risky.

“Captain.” Alman was in front of her suddenly. “The company is formed.”

“Very well, First Sergeant.” Betan walked over to her men.

“Men, today should settle the outcome here. We are still outnumbered and facing an enemy probably superior to those we serve with. But not superior to us. Brigadier Reigh was well pleased with your performance yesterday and it is time to impress him further.

“Today you will act as sharpshooters for the Yellow line. Brigadier Reigh is counting on you to weaken a section of the Oldster line for artillery to open up. We are being reserved for the first phase of the fight, so I don’t know yet how you’ll be used. But I trust you will perform well no matter what.

“Aim carefully. If we are split up, don’t let anyone goad you into firing faster. We are running low on ammunition. We should have at least enough to replicate what we did yesterday, but make each round count.”

“First Sergeant.”

“Captain.”

“Issue ammunition and march the company to the marshaling grounds. I’m riding ahead to the Brigadier.”

“Yes, Captain.”

Amol brought Arkor to her, she mounted and rode away at a trot.

Gunfire erupted on her way to Reigh's wagon. It was set up in front of the stand of trees on the right that Betan had begun the previous day's fight in. Betan couldn't see where the fire was, the trees lining the kingsway were blocking her view.

Reigh and Aelion stood on the elevated platform with a few signalers and others, using their lookers. Derver and a few other staff officers stood behind it. Derver saw Betan arrive.

"Captain." His voice was neutral.

"Major. My company is marching to the marshaling area."

"Very good, Captain. The Brigadier will inform you as to when your company will be deployed." Derver turned forward again.

"Ah."

Derver turned around again. Betan gulped, she hadn't meant to say that aloud.

"How went the dragoons' efforts during the night?" She asked hurriedly.

"Judging from the amount of fire across the kingsway, I would guess that the Retatans managed to cope with them. We'll find out for certain by seeing how long they stay awake." Derver turned away and said something in a low voice. In a moment an aide came to take Arkor's bridle. Relieved at having not been dismissed like a child, Betan dismounted and walked to Derver, who was talking to someone on the platform.

Betan joined Derver. "Bransim's and Ordolan's battalions were just engaged, not too long after they crossed the kingsway." Derver said. "We think the Retatans were waiting for them. Hopefully Major Rilmoran's efforts have prevented them from getting much rest. He's still harassing the enemy's flanks and keeping an eye on the Second Tryan battalions that were fortunate enough to escape your wrath."

"Have you any idea how my company is to be deployed?"

"No more than you, Captain. I believe the Brigadier is going to see what the Oldsters do before deciding." Derver fell silent and Betan followed suit. Sergeant Plian came what seemed like an eternity later to report that the company was at the marshaling area.

"Did I hear our Beddisaeon friend down there?" Reigh's voice could be heard. Someone looked over the rail of the scaffolding and reported that he was correct.

"Send her up."

Derver pointed to a rope ladder and Betan set to climbing it, trying not to knock her hat off in the process. She clambered over the railing and reported to Reigh. Other than her commander and Aelion she only recognized the brigade witch, whose name she didn't know. His scrying bowl was set on a table next to Reigh, the witch standing beside it in a daze.

"Captain, you see here our predicament." Reigh pointed at the water. The image was swirling as the bird flew circles around the battlefield, but Betan could see the two Yellow battalions in a line bent where they came together, pressed back against the kingsway with an equal number of Oldsters facing them and a third maneuvering in the Oldster rear. Bransim's flank was pressed against the kingsway, so they couldn't be enfiladed, but the other Oldsters could side step to allow the extra firepower to pound the Yellow line.

"Colonels Bransim and Ordolan found the Retatans rather ready for them. Major Rilmoran was unable to reduce their numbers much, and judging from the uniformity of their volleys they are little troubled by lack of rest.

“Colonel Puymora’s battalion will march across the kingsway in column well off Colonel Bransim’s left to attempt to engage this battalion in the flank or rear. While he is in column he is vulnerable, so your company will provide covering fire on either side of him. Once Puymora is up in line, gather your company to provide sharpshooters for him. I believe your type of infantry prefers to fire from one side of a line?”

“Yes, sir. I’d form an echelon of two ranks on Colonel Puymora’s left wing, I have wind charms to keep firesmoke from building up and obscuring my men’s sight.”

“Well enough. I just received reports that Puymora’s battalion is near the marshaling area. You should go.”

“Yes, Brigadier.” Betan took a step back and for a second was torn as to who should salute who, but Reigh snapped her one and with relief she returned it before fleeing the platform.

Puymora’s battalion was already marching towards the kingsway, cutting across the field of yesterday’s fight, where dropped muskets and pikes marked the Yellow lines, the same along with bodies marked the Oldster lines.

Betan sent half of her company with Alman on the left of Puymora’s column while she took the rest on the right. One Retatan battalion and the last two Second Tryan battalions had been standing in reserve, but the Oldsters surely had birds up to observe Yellow movement. If they could get a firing line in position, Bransim would be delivering himself into enfilade fire. Betan’s orders to Alman had the company on the quick march to the kingsway, where clear any scouts there and cross, leaving a few men to watch the road lest the Oldsters try to attack along it.

The tree lined road was close, probably a hundred yards. “Detachment, to walk!” Betan called. One hand went to the butt of a pistol and she found herself walking in a slight crouch. She flinched as a flash marked someone shooting from the kingsway. A few more came but none were even close to her and none of her men were hit. Certain of her jagers knelt and returned fire while the rest continued to advance, an altogether looser drill than practiced by infantry of the line, but no less precise.

Betan had to force herself to keep her hands still. She drew a pistol, but it wouldn’t be useful for some time yet. At this range the Oldsters couldn’t aim with any reliability. Still, at any moment a piece of Oldster metal could crash into her body, splattering into some random shape and tearing bone and flesh just as yesterday her men had done to them. Betan cringed as her detachment gained the road, but the fire had stopped by then. She cocked her pistol as she reached a tree and poked her head and the muzzle of her pistol around the corner. She fired and ducked back as an Oldster’s musketooneer crashed a dozen feet away, jagers also fired into the road. “Onto the road!” Betan yelled. She whipped her sword out and charged along with her men. Someone tripped over a body, more shots blasted at blue and white coats and Betan reached the opposite row of trees, looking out to see several musketooneers running away.

“Fire!” Betan ordered and a swarm of rounds cut them down.

“Reload!” Betan poked her sword into the dirt between some roots and set about reloading the pistol she’d fired. When she finished, she looked around, pointed at some men. “All of you, stay on the road and watch for attacks coming along it. The rest—” Betan stepped sideways to see back the way they came. There was Puymora’s battalion. “The rest out the other side, fall into two ranks at angle to the road. Let’s go.” Betan picked up her sword and led her men out.

Bransim's left flank was beyond musket shot to Betan's right. Perhaps 1,000 yards distant. This was her first time getting a good look at the ground beyond the kingsway. It was flat to the front and left, but to the right at some distant was the same sloping ridge line she'd been posted on to guard Puymora's flank the previous day. Here was where the Kingsway began to curve away to find a gentler slope for the road to negotiate.

Ahead of her was a field covered in short grass, with no Oldster force waiting to pounce on Bransim's battalion. There was a unit some distance across the field, but they looked disordered. She could see sergeants and officers running around trying to get their troops organized.

"First Sergeant, to me!"

"Captain?"

"Send a patrol down the Kingsway, no more than a quarter mile to keep the Oldsters from marching a flank attack down it."

"Yes, Captain." Alman left. The company had automatically assumed an inverted V, Betan returned to the kingsway to see what Puymora's battalion was doing.

"Captain?" It was Puymora, on foot. Neither of them saluted.

"Colonel. The field is clear in front of your battalion."

"Very well. I'll be extending Colonel Bransim's line."

"Yes, Colonel. I've sent a patrol down the kingsway."

"Very good. Are there any Oldsters out here?" He stepped to the forward edge of the Kingsway.

"There is a unit some distance away. It looks disorganized." Betan answered. Puymora took out his looker and examined the unit.

"It's the Second Battalion of the Second Tryan." Puymora answered. "And yes, they are quite disorganized." He swept the field with his looker, along the boundary on the left that the Kingsway formed, then across the open plain to the distant farming villages and to the ridge line that was the right boundary.

"I daresay that the Second Tryan Two won't be much of a threat. May I suggest, Captain, that you take up position between my battalion and Colonel Bransim's? From that position you could deliver supporting fires in either direction and it's not too far to redeploy if there is action on the flank that requires your attention. I will send some of my men to relief your party guarding the Kingsway."

"Very well, Colonel." Betan hesitated. "If you feel your flank is secure."

"The Kingsway will suffice to protect my flank, Captain. If you'll redeploy your men, I'll bring my battalion through."

"Yes, Colonel." She and Puymora called to their first sergeants simultaneously, which forced her to turn away lest she giggle in front of the Colonel.

"Captain?" Alman said.

"We're redeploying. Two ranks between Colonels Puymora's and Bransim's battalions."

"Yes, Captain?" Alman's voice held an unspoken question. Betan felt a thrill of pride that she'd anticipated it.

"Colonel Puymora will dispatch men to relieve our party down the Kingsway."

"Yes, Captain." Alman moved away, hollering orders to the jagers. At double time it only took a few minutes to reach Bransim's left flank. The Second of the Fourth was fully engaged with a Retatan battalion, volleys were exchanged with clockwork

regularity. Ranks counter marched to rotate through, each rank delivering an orchestrated wave of fire into the enemy. The smoke from the fire scorched nostrils and throat, made eyes water. Betan coughed a few times as her company took position to one side of it.

“Shall we engage, Captain?” Alman asked.

“We will. Aimed slow fire into the right of the Oldsters here. If the Oldsters attempt to lengthen their line, we will shift fire, possibly by ranks. We’ll decide if that happens.”

“Yes, Captain.” Betan stepped back and let Alman relay the orders to the men. Slow fire was one round per minute. That gave the force just short an hour and a half of aimed fire. It was unlikely that any one engagement would last that long but her men might get shifted to different parts of the fight if a serious contest emerged.

The shooting began. Betan used her looker to see through the silvery haze. Judging from the pikes left upright, Bransim’s battalion was not having the better end of the engagement, which wasn’t surprising if the Retatan was the elite of the Brannan army. But the Oldsters looked to have been beaten down somewhat. She turned her attention to the right of the Retatan battalion, where her men were applying their lethal attention. She moved to the left of her company to get a clear look. The aimed fire was already telling, musketeers and pikemen were falling. She watched a sergeant collapse, which threw his squad into a confusion for a moment, allowing Bransim to slip an unanswered volley in.

Betan couldn’t see into the rear of the Oldster line with any detail, but she knew that there were swordsmen at the rear, to be used if or when a decisive moment came. With large pavise shields they could force their way through the hedge of enemy pikes and break their line if the musketeers had been thinned enough. “First Sergeant!”

Alman appeared, coughing slightly from the smoke. “Captain?”

“Could we drop fire into the rear of the Oldster line?”

Alman looked across the field of battle. “The swordsmen, sir?”

“Yes.” she took a step toward Alman, although the din of shots would mask her next statement. “I imagine the Retatan swordsmen are rather better than Bransim’s. I can see that their musketeers have the advantage in this fight and should think that the difference would be even more telling at melee.”

“Good point, Captain. Still, it’s risky. It’s hard to tell where they are.”

“Yes, of course.”

“Can I borrow your looker, Captain?” Betan handed it to him and Alman began searching the Retatans.

“Captain Lebornier?”

Betan spun, hand going to her sword to see a Yellow captain she didn’t know.

“Yes.”

“There’s another Oldster battalion approaching.”

Betan turned back to the fight. The officer was correct, a battalion flying the Retatan standard was moving out from behind the unit Bransim was engaged with.

“I see. I will shift some fire onto it.”

“Ah, yes, of course. But I was going to suggest that you move to the rear of the company. We’re about to open fire.”

Betan looked around. She was standing a few yards ahead of her front rank of jagers, completely vulnerable to Oldster fire. Her stomach quailed at the realization.

“Ah, yes. Well, I’ll, clear your field of fire, Captain. First Sergeant?” Betan nodded to the Captain and skulked behind her lines, Alman trailing.

“Shift fire, Captain?”

“Yes. Split the company in half, to maintain fire on each Oldster battalion.”

“Yes, Captain. Your looker, Captain.”

“Thank you, First Sergeant.”

Fire halted in the moment it took for Alman to put the company into a wedge when it started up, the volume directed to each Retatan battalion was less than the original amount directed at Bransim’s opponent, but it was still accurate. Most shots told with an enemy casualty and the better shots were felling sergeants and officers. The company that had taken the brunt of the jager’s undivided efforts was in tatters. Betan thought that her men had reduced it by half in twenty minutes or so.

“Captain Lebornier!” Betan turned to see a subaltern, faced flushed from running.

“Yes, sir?”

“Brigadiers orders, Captain.” He took a deep breath. “Fall back.”

“Fall back, sir?”

“Yes, sir. Brigadier wishes to preserve your company from volley attacks. The Captain is to redeploy to Colonel Puymora’s left flank to bring fire to this new battalion.”

“But Colonel Bransim needs support!”

“Brigadier was most adamant that your company not be exposed to volleys.”

Betan took a breath to still herself. “Very well.” Betan turned, not deigning to thank the messenger. Her men were soldiers, there was no reason to shield them from harm and this was the best position for them to inflict the most injury on the Oldsters. “Jagers, cease fire! Fall back! Fall back!” It would be battlefield luck to take a volley just as the order to retreat was given, so Betan wanted her men out immediately if that was what they were to do. The jagers began streaming out of line, jogging away from the fight. Betan let them sweep past her, still fuming at the coddling Reigh was giving her men. She wasn’t eager to see them killed and wounded in number, but they were here to do their part and running from enemy fire was not that.

“Captain?” It was Alman.

“Yes?”

“The company is withdrawn.”

“Very good.”

“Captain, you need to go with them.” Alman insisted, laying a hand on her arm. Betan looked across the field, again she was exposed to direct fire. *Damn, I’ve got to stop doing this.* “Very well.” she said as she walked away. “Fall the men in, we’re marching to Colonel Puymora’s left wing.”

“Yes, Captain.” Alman stayed with her, apparently afraid that Betan might wander back to the front. When they both arrived where the men were standing in squad clumps, Alman began ordering the men and in a moment they were marching down the line behind Puymora’s Third Battalion. Betan jogged ahead to check the field where they would be placed. She barely noticed passing Puymora and his staff but the first volley from the 3/4 YB made her pick up her pace. She was breathing rather heavily when she got to Puymora’s left wing. She wasn’t distracted as she stepped up to a clear view, she knew exactly how exposed she was at this moment, standing alone ahead of the firing line, her sword clearly marking her as an officer. The second Oldster battalion was still marching, Puymora was pouring volleys into it by company as it made its way. Her company was almost in position to give enfilade fire. If she placed them ahead of the

Third and at oblique to the Yellow line, she should be able to wreak a great deal of havoc on the advancing Retatans before they could effectively return fire into Puymora.

“Captain, orders?” Alman shouted over the Third’s fire.

“Company will form oblique lines for enfilade fire on the enemy!” she shouted back. Alman began ordering the men, yelling at them to run. Three lines, men staggered, would only take a minute but the Retatans were now almost in position.

“Jagers, ready!” Betan shouted, drawing her sword and holding it up. A few men scrambled to load, but most simply cocked their rifles. Betan jogged to their left. “AIM!” Rifles swung up, then leveled. One.. .two... thr-”**FIRE!**” She lifted her looker in time to see the last of the effects of the volley. It had torn into the front of the column along its width at relative short range, felling dozens of Oldsters. A moment later the 3/4 fired, scattering more casualties along the length of the Retatan column.

Alman took up the orders from there, delivering a second volley at rapid fire, twenty seconds between shots. Then another volley, negating its progress since the Durannians engaged. The third volley pushed back the effective beginning of the column nearly to half the width of the Third of the Fourth.

“Captain!” Alman shook her. She lowered the looker and turned.

“What?”

“The smoke!” The repeated volleys had laid down a heavy bank of silver fume. Betan cursed at herself and put her looker away, jogging behind the company to its right and spending a wind charm to blow the smoke away from the Yellow line. The breeze revealed the full effect of the rifle fire, hundreds of blue and white lumps marked fallen Oldsters that the rest of the battalion was stepping over without pause. They held their pikes at a high vertical so the butts could clear the obstacles. The Durannians laid into them again, sending another several score to the ground. Betan watched in fascinated revulsion as the elite Oldsters marched straight into her company’s fire, also harried from the side by Puymora’s men. The range was long for muskets but the line was still dropping enemy soldiers. Which reminded her, *Damn, where’s that other battalion, the disorganized one.* She ran to the left again, sweeping her looker across the field.

It was empty. A dozen or so bodies marked the battalion’s old position, along with what looked to be a pile of discarded arms. That was the battalion of mostly conscripts, they’d had a clear view of the fate of the Retatan battalion and had apparently decided they wanted no part of it.

Or they were marching behind the Kingsway, having murdered some of the reluctant soldiers. Her looker revealed no signs of such a move on the kingsway itself, but she ordered Alman to send a squad to check behind the it.

“Captain Lebornier!” a voice shouted at her. She found a line subaltern approaching her. “Colonel Puymora says you may preserve your ammunition, the Retatan battalion is no longer a threat.” Betan looked, probably barely a company remained, but it stood its ground. “Very well, thank you, Lieutenant. Company, cease fire! CEASE FIRE!”

“Captain.” Alman called.

“First Sergeant?”

“There is no Oldster infantry opposite the kingsway.” he reported. Betan turned to see he was standing with the party he’d dispatched to scout. “But there is a cavalry fight, sir.”

“Indeed? Must be a sight.” Betan looked back to Puymora’s fight. The remnant of Retatans was down to half a company, but they were returning fire into the Yellow battalion. “The Brigadier might want us back to protect headquarters, First Sergeant. Make sure rifles are loaded and that the men are watering.”

“Yes, Captain.” he muttered to the sergeant of the scout party, who returned his men to the body of the company. Betan watched the last of the Retatans fall. Not one of them retreated. Betan thought that was stupid rather than impressive. They could have been useful another day instead of dying in what was becoming an impressive Yellow victory. Unless the cavalry managed to- Hoof beats. “Captain Lebornier?”

There it is. Betan turned to see a staff officer on a panting horse. “Yes, sir?”

“Brigadier orders your company back to headquarters for security.”

“Very good, thank you, sir. First Sergeant?”

“At quick time, Captain?”

“Yes, First Sergeant. And fix bayonets.” She turned back to the staffer. “Sir, will you inform Colonels Puymora and Bransim that we are being withdrawn?”

“I will, Captain.” he trotted his horse away. Betan walked to the rear as Alman marched the company out of line, then turned it on its flank so it was in column and turned the jagers out into quick time.

“First Sergeant, we’ll cross the kingsway closer to headquarters.” Betan ordered. “Don’t want to get caught between the horsemen.” Alman shouted an acknowledgment between breaths.

The company crossed the kingsway in spaced files, rifles at port arms, alert for intruders. They found Yellow line soldiers protecting Reigh’s scaffold wagon, hardly a satisfactory situation. *Although they probably have plenty of ammunition.* Betan mused.

“Captain, good of you to come.” Reigh shouted. “I need a detail of sharpshooter to supplement the boys from the Eighth and rear pickets, sir.”

“Yes, Brigadier.” Betan replied. “First Sergeant, detail a squad for sharpshooters.”

“Yes, Captain.” Alman told off a squad which departed the column that had never stopped marching.

Betan snapped Reigh a salute as her company drew even with Reigh’s wagon. “By your leave, Brigadier?” She asked.

Reigh laughed and returned the salute. “By all means.”

The view of the camp was unobstructed, Betan couldn’t imagine why Reigh had ordered pickets. The weather was too clear for fog or mist to be used to cloak an attack and as far as the eye could see the field was empty. If the Oldsters had sorcerers they could conjure some obsfucation but Betan hoped it wasn't conceit that convinced her they'd have already used that against her company if they had.

Betan could still hear the fight. If the Second Tryan had really quit the field, and both Alman's and Betan's observations suggested it had, that left three battalions of Retatans, one of which had been slightly reduced in yesterday’s fight. She’d helped to destroy one and had the other was now outnumbered by the three line battalions Reigh had deployed. Plus there were the Yellow lancers that Betan didn't think had entered the fight yet.

Best not to continue that line of thinking. Optimism wasn't a very desirable quality in a military officer.

In ten minutes the company was dispersed as pickets and sharpshooters. Betan had recovered Arkor. She decided that in the future she would remain mounted in open

field engagements, she'd spent entirely too much time running around today. She was using him to keep tabs on her jagers. Alman and Dem were observing the pickets, the First Sergeant on foot, Dem on his horse.

The fight across the kingsway was still going. Callers were bleating out orders, supplemented by shouts, there were screams from the wounded and the occasional horse screech. At intervals it was all drowned by a great crash of gunfire as a volley was delivered. The smoke from the guns had risen above the trees of the kingsway, relaying flashes from the explosions of powder. But Betan couldn't see anything.

Apart from the noises of battle the area was silent. No animals had remained when the armies came marching through, the locals had all shuttered themselves in their houses or fled. Neither of the two towns could be seen from Betan's vantage point. They weren't important to the Yellow army, Reigh's orders were to return to camp as soon as the Oldster force had been routed or destroyed. Betan imagined General Pautark would order the towns bypassed. The reformation depended on the acquiescence of the population, if not their active support. The Yellow army planned on feeding and housing itself for the entirety of the campaign. Only the worst of the bad king's supporters would find themselves dispossessed in the new order.

Betan wandered Arkor around the rear. Between the kingsway and the tree stands that had sheltered the Durannians on the first day of the battle it was fairly flat, with only sloping ridge line on the right of the line obstructing any view. If the Oldsters had mortars they could bombard the Yellow rear, but the bad king's force didn't seem well equipped with artillery.

An aide found Betan. "Captain, Brigadier wishes to see you at your earliest convenience."

Betan instinctively took one more look around the field. "No reason to keep Brigadier waiting, sir." She and the aide cantered back to Reigh's scaffold. The aide announced her presence.

"Come up, Captain." Reigh called down. "The Oldsters are almost finished, I thought you'd want to see the victory you helped bring about."

"Thank you, sir." Betan called. She dismounted and handed Arkor's reins to a groom before mounting the rope ladder and climbing up to the platform. Reigh gestured to the scrying dish, but Betan could also see over the kingsway. Between the two of them she watched the last elements of the Retatan caught in a cross fire. No pikes were left, all of the Oldster soldiers were plying muskets, even the armored battlers normally reserved for closing with the enemy. There were no more than thirty left and each volley reduced that number substantially. The answering fire was largely ineffective. The merciless, mechanical working of the Yellow line took only a few minutes to eradicate the enemy force.

"Master Felpor, find my dragoons." Reigh ordered. The witch picked up his feather focus and the image in the bowl blurred and turned blue as the bird turned his gaze to the sky.

"He's hungry, sir. I'll have to bring him back soon." Felpor said in a ragged monotone.

"I'll only need him for a few more moments." Reigh said. He turned to Betan. "Congratulations, Captain. I believe your company made the difference in this engagement."

"Thank you, sir."

“We'll camp for the night here once Major Rilmoran confirms the Second Tryan has ran. Send word to me when your company is mustered so I may address them.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What were your casualties today?”

“None, sir.”

Someone had been speaking softly when she made her report, but it was all suddenly silent. Reigh was positively gaping.

“None, Captain?”

“Yes, Brigadier. Your orders kept us from being exposed from fire.”

“But. Well. Ah.” Reigh sputtered. He turned back to the view and composed himself. “Very good, Captain.” he finally said. “No casualties. That’s, *very* impressive. You should expect more orders to limit your exposure to fire. Your men are easily worth four times their number in musketeers. Thank you, Captain. You may return to your company.” Reigh said. Betan saluted and climbed down the rope ladder.

“Captain.” Major Derver was waiting below. “Your shot molds have been sent back to the army camp along with reports on the day's engagement.” he told her. “Hopefully your men will be resupplied upon our return .”

Betan thanked him and mounted Arkor.

The force made camp, the men's spirits were high. Dem took a detachment to escort a party to buy fresh food from Grudachassel for a feast after the Yellow army's baptism of fire, and to refresh his stock of flavorings. Betan stayed in her tent most of the night, examining her performance.