
OPERATION DRAGOON

THE WEIGHT OF MY BAG PRESSES INTO MY SHOULDER, AND MY UNIFORM IS WET AND STICKY FROM SWEAT AND THE NUMBER OF DAYS I'VE HAD TO WEAR IT. MY LOWER BACK ACHES BECAUSE OF THE DRILLS, AND MY CALVES ARE HURTING REALLY BADLY. EACH STEP SENDS AN AWFUL ACHE THROUGH MY ENTIRE BODY.

I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF EVERYTHING. I TRY TO FOCUS ON MY BREATHING, TO STEADY IT, BUT THE CHAOS AND SOUNDS AROUND ME ARE MAKING IT HARD. THE AIR IS THICK WITH A MIX OF SALT, EXHAUST FUMES AND SWEAT.

I GLANCE TOWARD THE HORIZON AND THE DISTANT HILLS OF PROVENCE. THEY REMIND ME OF THE COUNTRYSIDE BACK HOME, BUT THERE IS NO TIME TO DWELL ON THAT THOUGHT. WE ARE HERE FOR WAR. ALL AROUND ME, SOLDIERS ARE MOVING, EXECUTING SHOUTED ORDERS.

FOR A MOMENT, I STARE AT A MAN NEAR THE SUPPLY STACK. HE IS SITTING, HIS HEAD BOWED AS IF THE WEIGHT OF THE WAR HAS CRUSHED HIM. I KNOW THAT FEELING, IT HITS YOU WHEN THE ADRENALINE WEARS OFF. BUT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR WEAKNESS; YOU HAVE TO KEEP MOVING, EVEN IF YOUR LEGS ARE SHAKY.

THE ENEMY IS NEAR, IT IS NOT A DRILL ANYMORE. I MUST THINK ABOUT MY TRAINING BUT THE ONLY THING I CAN THINK OF IS STAYING ALIVE. THE CHAOS UNFOLDS AROUND ME AS I FORCE MYSELF TO FOCUS. I SQUARE MY SHOULDERS, TAKE A DEEP BREATH, AND GET GOING, HOPING TO FIND COURAGE.

LAURA C.

