

Lyran Front

General Nondi Steiner, the Archon's sister and commander of Operation VALKYRIE, had every reason to be proud of the LCAF's performance, but the Lull could not come at a sooner time in her opinion. As proud as she was of the new RCT arrangement of the Line regiments, and more than pleased about the Blitz companies performance on the battlefield, there were some troubling issues rising to the surface.

One was the degradation of communications between RCT regiments. The strength of the RCT is its ability to attack and defend equally well, but these defensive capabilities are utilized best when the coordination between units is good. On Marfik, Skye, Karbala and other planets Lyran Generals had lapsed, falling back into old habits. Casualties among the conventional units were higher at the end of the second wave than they had been at the beginning. Some of this was due to stiffer Kuritan resistance, but most of it could be placed on the lack of senior leadership. As a result, several successful midlevel officers found themselves promoted, while new graduates found themselves serving in front line units.

In early May, the First Prince informed the Archon of his desire to resume operations in the latter half of June, and suggested a resumption of hostilities on both fronts. At the meeting of her High Command a week later the Archon informed her Generals of her decision to resume the attack, asking that the plans for the next wave and a possible follow up be prepared. Orders reached the frontline troops in early June, and they began preparing. However, the Combine showed it had not been idle during the lull either.

Lyons

In Mid May, a battalion of the 3rd Dieron, accompanied by several ISF security platoons, landed on Lyons in the Federation of Skye. New Freedom, a settlement founded by Combine refugees, had earned its reputation of troublemakers from their actions on Styx, in 3027 they had helped rescue Melissa Steiner-Davion with the help of the Kell Hounds. The mercenary unit had helped the refugees build the town before being ordered off planet by Duke Lestrade.

The Kuritan ISF was convinced that New Freedom was rife with agents, and that several recent uncovered plots had started in the population. When the Dieron Regulars and ISF commando's landed, they immediately began destroying the town. A cryptic distress call from the planet reached the Kell Hounds as they were preparing to jump to Ryde, three days later they returned to New Freedom and found the town destroyed, with no apparent survivors.

Taking vengeance on the ISF and Dieron Regulars across Lyons, the Kell hounds prevented one company and most of the commandos from reaching their dropship. Those Regulars that did escape lost their battalion and company commanders in the fighting.

Fourth Wave

The Archon had two directives for the upcoming planning. One was that the worlds taken in the last DCMS offensive be recaptured. Being privy to the broad outline of what the AFFS planned to do with YELLOWBIRD, she also directed that most of the LCAF's efforts in planning for an advance in the Ryde Theater as well. Encouraging her commanders to be as bold as they were in the first two waves, she then backed out the planning sessions, leaving the details to her sister and the LCAF staff.

The main effort of the renewed VALKYRIE offensive was concentrated in the Trellshire and Tamar Theaters, and during the week of July 20th, the LCAF landed on nine more planets.

Bruben

The 1st Lyran Regulars RCT and Tyr Regiment landed on Bruben, and found the 17th Rasalhauge Regulars and 5th Amphigean waiting for them. When not fighting Helmut's Hermits during the Lull as part of the Yohei no Shi, both DCMS regiments had been busy preparing defensive positions. Both DCMS units were a battalion understrength, but the lull had given them the opportunity to repair most of their equipment, and there was a decent amount of supplies on planet.

Landing unopposed, the LCAF units made their way through the Kendemere River valley to the capital city of Hunzburg, where both DCMS units had dug in. For a week, the Lyran units probed the Kuritan defensive lines, and then under cover of a rainstorm, the commander of the 1st Lyran sent his Blitz Companies out. This time however, the Combine units were ready for them. Finding a hole between two tank regiments, both Companies made quick work of the surrounding units and called for help, then moved forward. At Haldhemmar Station, they ran headlong into 1st Battalion of the 5th Amphigean. No longer surprised by the Lyran light mechs and their use, a bloody four hour battle ensued. On the front lines, the 17th Rasalhauge had plugged the gap, and despite its best efforts the mechs and tanks of the 1st Lyran could not force the line. Behind the line the Blitz companies were fighting for their own lives, unable to retreat through the DCMS units to their own lines they withdrew West, drawing of what units they could, eventually losing the Kuritans in the fog. Damaging eight and destroying six Kuritan mechs against nine losses with the remainder all damaged to a degree was not in the Lyran's favor.

After an all night march, the Tyr regiment arrived the next day, formed up in the early morning mists, and after a brief preparatory bombardment, hit the defenses of the 17th Rasalhauge in a frontal attack. In a pitched two hour battle, the weight of numbers and firepower began to tell. A timely flank attack by the 1st Lyran's Tank regiment forced the 17th to withdraw. The light mechs of the Amphigean tried to help stop the Tyr advance, but their light mechs could not slow down the heavier Rasalhauge expatriates.

As night fell, the Lyran units stopped their pursuit of the Kuritan units, who retreated back to Hunzburg, then lifted off. The 17th left two companies of mechs on the battlefield, the 5th Amphigean left slightly less, but both units managed to withdraw all their damaged units. 1st Lyran lost two companies of mechs, including those from its Blitz companies, and had several lances damaged. The Tyr regiment lost a company of mechs, and had a further three damaged.

Both units remained on Bruben to rest and refit, but the tenacity displayed by both DCMS units was a sign of things to come.

Tamar

Colonel Lloyd McGavin was a retired DCMS officer who, against all odds, formed a unit and turned it into one of the premier light units in the DCMS. Unfortunately for the Colonel, he and his troops were never high on the DCMS support and supply list, and he had to scrap a fight for every ton of armor and ammunition. Hit hard in the first wave of Operation VALKYRIE while on Basiliano, Colonel McGavin retreated to Kufstein, and waited. And kept waiting. As supplies for the 5th Sun Zhang came to Kufstein, very little came to Colonel McGavin. After months of waiting, through the Lull, and with the resumption of hostilities in June, Colonel McGavin was tired of sitting and doing nothing. He had recruited his unit with the intent of using it on the battlefield, and he was going to do just that.

Realizing that the LCAF needed to be distracted, or at least given a few more problems, with the news that the Lyrans were on the offensive, Colonel McGavin took his unit to their waiting jumpships, and left the system. Three weeks later they appeared at a Pirate Point in the Tamar system, and began a high speed drop to the planet surface. Despite being outnumbered, Colonel McGavin was confident in his mechwarriors abilities. Knowing he could not fight a standup battle, Colonel McGavin's troops instead fell back on what they did best, raiding. Landing in the massive Industrial parks outside of Tamar City, they moved towards the industrial section.

Colonel Steven Zaks of the 12th Donegal Guards was caught in a bind. An experienced officer who has served on both Marik and Kurita borders, the 12th Donegal was his first command.

His unit, having rotated to Tamar from Barcelona, was quite green, and most of his troops had never fought a unit of the Nightstalkers caliber. Adding to his troubles was the Duke of Tamar, Simon Kelswa. Appearing at the Donegal command post Nightstalkers were landing, he demanded that he be placed in command of the defense, if not by his right as a noble but as leader of the Tamar Pact. When Colonel Zaks objected to the presence of the Duke in his command post, it started an argument between the two as to who was in command. Finally losing his temper, Duke Kelswa had Colonel Zaks arrested. While the stunned officer was led off by members of the Duke's security detail, Duke Kelswa ordered the 12th to find and engage the Nightstalkers. The Nightstalkers had taken advantage of the confusion to charge into the Industrial section, destroying everything in their path. The lances and companies of the 12th moved in cautiously, the thick smoke generated by the burning buildings cut visibility, heat sensors were thrown off by the fires, magnetic sensors could not function because of the buildings.

The engagement soon became a disorganized cat and mouse battle. Lances would appear and disappear like ghosts, lasers and missiles would lance out of the murk in haphazard fashion. When the two sides did get involved in fight, the Combine troops almost always came out of top. Back at the command center, Duke Kelswa was slowly losing what control he had of the situation, issuing a stream of contradictory orders, ignoring situation reports, and generally causing more problems than solving. At one point a

lance of Nightstalker mechs had blundered its way to within a few blocks of the command post, and the air was filled with the Dukes cries for reinforcements. The fighting continued throughout the night, the Nightstalkers laying waste to much of the northern sector of the district.

The next morning Lyran reinforcements arrived. Two regiments of armor and two of infantry had made their way to the battlefield. At their head was Kommandant-General Mitch Felspar, Assistant Margrave of the Tamar Theater. When he entered the command center and saw the disorganized chaos that was going on, he asked for Colonel Zaks. When Duke Kelswa appeared and told the General what he had done, Felspar went outside for a few minutes, came back in with a LCAF security detail, and physically pulled Duke Kelswa into a room. When the Duke started to protest his treatment, General Felspar quieted him by threatening to forcibly remove him from the premises.

In the closed room, the General lit into the Duke, making pointed criticism of his conduct during the previous day, including the obvious disorganization as the result of the commands issued. The Duke was not a military man, he was not schooled in the operational arts, he needed to get out of the way and let the men and women of the LCAF do their job. Duke Kelswa was livid at this treatment, and threatened to bring Felspar up on charges, to which Felspar readily agreed to. Then he would have a public forum to lay bare the events that had occurred in the last day. At the very least the Duke would be put on trial for gross incompetence.

Declaring he was looking forward to such a trial, General Felspar made to leave the room, but Duke Kelswa, realizing he had made an error, if not the enormity of it, made quick amends. A few hours later, Colonel Zaks was back in control of the Lyran side of the battle.

Using the low lying smoke to block key positions with the armor, the 12th Donegal began a series of sweeps in the sector. When they ran into a Combine force, they retreated, often enticing the Draconis mechs into a fire sac of tank fire. When the Kuritan troops stopped falling for that ruse, larger groups of combined units began a slow but steady advance, block by block. There was little fighting, but the Night Stalkers did pull back.

Three days later, having destroyed most of the District, the Night Stalkers retreated off planet. Neither side lost much in the way of men and material, the Kuritans left behind less than two companies worth of mechs, while the 12th Donegal, which had heavier mechs than the majority of the Night Stalkers, lost less than a company of mechs destroyed, it had many more units damaged. The Night Stalkers had destroyed or damaged so much of the park that it would be cheaper and easier to destroy what was left and rebuild.

The Night Stalkers Raid on Tamar would be an event noone would forget in the near future, especially Duke Kelswa. A man whose reputation was already damaged by the war made no friends with his actions in the defense of his home planet.

Maestu

The two battalions of 9th Rasalhauge Regulars that took Maestu spent most of the lull fighting of a determined guerrilla campaign, eventually pulling back to the towns and cities around the capital city of Broilingham. When the 26th Lyran Guards RCT landed, they used their superior conventional numbers to outflank the 9th Rasalhauge, forcing the outlying units to retreat further into Broilingham. When the first few assaults on the makeshift combine lines failed, Colonel Patterson used the cover of one of the many nighttime storms to make a stealthy advance. Attacking at dawn the next day, the company of the 9th holding that particular part of the line fell back. The 26th Blitz company went through the gap and began raiding the rear areas.

The 9th pulled back into the city center, where it held out for another three weeks. Experts at city fighting, the Kuritans forced the 26th into a slow advance, contesting much of the inner city, but it was a fight that Colonel Patterson was willing to participate in, as he could rely on resupply and greater number of troops.

It took almost a month, but the remaining units of the 9th were pushed back to the spaceport, where they lifted off planet. The 9th left behind a battalions worth of mechs damaged and destroyed, but the intensity and severity of the fighting also taxed the 26th Lyran, who were forced to stay on planet to rest and rebuild.

Thannhausen

The 1st Sun Zhang Cadre had retreated to Thannhausen, but the reinforcements it received were just as raw and unprepared as the ones who had joined the unit the previous year before. When Waco's Rangers jumped in system with several LCAF conventional regiments in tow, the Cadre retreated to the Foschol Hills area, hoping to use the area a base for hit and run attacks.

Colonel Waco, using the Kuritan's own prejudices against them, released several communications to his outlying commanders, mocking the Kuritan troops for not being willing to come out and fight a bunch of mercenaries. The result was that several lances of newer recruits left the defensive positions, determined to make the mercenary pay for his

"Impertinent Words." Very few of the attackers returned to the Sun Zhang lines, and those that did often walked backed, Colonel Waco having captured them and keeping their mechs.

With the few remaining veteran officers of the Kuritan unit realized they could not contest the planet. The psychological games Colonel Waco was playing were to effective, the newer recruits fell for them time and again. Often and officer had to resort to violence to keep the younger troops in line. After a few more skirmishes, the Sun Zhang retreated to their dropships and boosted off planet.

Fatima

While the actions of the 3rd Donegal on Buckminster had done quite bit to rebuild it's reputation, and remaining doubts about the unit and its new commanding officer, Colonel James Hipper, were erased on Fatima.

Having lost four companies worth of men and machines during the Buckminster campaign, Colonel Hipper spent the Lull ruthlessly training his new replacements. At the same time, those few officer left who supported Colonel Lestrade found themselves transferred out of the unit. Eager to put what ever concerns the LCAF High Command had about him and his unit, Colonel Hipper demanded a new assignment on the resumption of VALKYRIE. General Steiner herself ordered the 3rd to retake Fatima from the 4th Proserpina Hussars. The two units had a shred history, having fought each other many times over the decades.

A small arid world, Fatima's lone continent of Akilah is dominated by the Rubaiyat Desert, which covers more than 80 percent of the land mass. The thin coastal slivers land are heavily developed, and the planet sustains itself with a large fishing industry and the export of the sand from Rubaiyat, which is favored by those in the construction business. When the 4th Proserpina came to the planet, they made a daring drop right on top of the Capital City of Lujayn, and in a short campaign had forced the surrender of the planet's small militia force in in couple of weeks.

Since then, the 4th had been a unit under siege. Raiders from somewhere in the Rubaiyat had started striking Kuritan patrols, then disappearing back into the wastelands. The first few efforts to find these raiders failed miserably, the one major attempt saw one company of mechs and men get lost in on of the massive sand storms that sweep out of the equatorial regions from time to time, lost and disoriented, only three men and machines came out of the desert ten days later, all on the verge of dying from thirst and exposure. Since then, General Nget had kept his troops closer to the city,

Colonel Hipper chose not to land near Lujayn, but at Masalrah, a smaller city southwest of Lujayn. It had a spaceport that was capable of supporting the units dropships, and provided a good base of operations. Moving out smartly, the two units met a few days later at the small seaside town of Shahal. Forced to keep some companies behind to protect his line of communications, General Nget and the 4th Proserpina resorted to what they did best, hit and run tactics. What they did not expect was the professionalism and vigor the 3rd Donegal fought back with. Accustomed to stuffed shirt Lyran's whose main tactical idea had always been "There's a wall, let me beat my head against it," the men and women of the 3rd matched the Hussars move for move, counter for counter. At the village of Parsifal a company of 3rd Donegal mechs reached the bluff dominating the area before the Hussars did, then held of a concerted attack for three hours before being relieved.

After two weeks of fighting and falling back, the 4th Proserpina was near Lujayn, when word that Steiner mechs were attacking the main depot of the Hussars reached General Nget. Surprise gave way to shock as a massive explosion was soon seen, then heard, as most of the remaining expendables of the Hussars were destroyed. The 3rd Donegals 2nd Blitz Company, accompanied by another two lances of medium mechs, had joined up with the Fatima Resistance shortly after landing. Moving mostly at night, the resistance group shepherded the mechs across the Rubaiyat. Moving through two sandstorms, and a period when the water catchers distillery failed before being fixed after four days, seventeen of the twenty mechs who had set off made it through the desert. Their appearance threw the proverbial wrench into the Kuritan's defense plans, but it was the destruction of the depot that forced the Hussars to retreat off the planet.

The Hussars left almost three companies of mechs behind, one of which gave itself in a rearguard action outside of Lujayn. 3Rd Donegal's losses were higher, but half of those loses were from the flank march, all of which had been destroyed in the depot explosion.

Shionoha

The 2nd Dieron had sent a battalion to Phalan as part of the pre Lull DCMS counterattack, and it had not returned when the Grey Death Legion landed on planet. The Dieron Commander, General Friedrich Von Galberston, was confident in his ability to hold the mercenaries off, his unit was renowned for its fighting in mountainous terrain, and with few exceptions (Hesperus) there are few planets as hilly and mountainous as Shinoha. Accompanying the legion were several Lyran conventional regiments who were well versed in mountain combat.

The first few battles were tactical draws, as the Legion made several moves towards the capital city of Fort Cyron, they were ably blocked by the 2nd Dieron. A flank attack by one Dieron company moving through a pass the Lyrans believe to be impassible destroyed a battalion of tanks before being driven back with minimal losses.

At the Dykyber Pass the 2nd Dieron encountered its first reversal, an attack by the Legion had been pushed back, with the merceraries retreating quickly. Pressing the pursuit to closely, two companies worth of Dieron mechs became seperated from the main group. At a prearranged signal from the retreating Legion Mechs, the Steiner engineers set off a series of explosions that buried most of the pursuing Dieron mechs under several tons of rock. At the nearby Gallogosh pass, three regiments of Lyran Mountain Infantry beat and drove back two defending Kuritan infantry regiments, two Lyran tank units poured through the gap and onto the plains leading to Fort Cyron. General Von Galbertson sent two of his remaining companies to help hold the Lyrans in check, but as they were on their way the rest of the Legion attacked his lines and began to force him back. A series of confused orders had the two detached companies return to the main force, then back towards the Lyran tanks, then eventually one company went each way.

Although losses on both sides were heavy, the Legion mechs with their Lyran counterparts pushed back the DCMS troops. In many cases, the inability of the Kuritan units to work well together allowed Colonel Carlisle to exploit a weakness in their defense, and push them further back. On the Casimira Plains the Kuritan troops initially halted the Lyran armored advance, but the preponderance of numbers soon began to tell. Pinned by one tank unit, the Dieron company was almost surrounded by and armor and infantry Kampfgruppe, and had to fight its way out, losing four mechs in the process.

Forced out of the mountains and onto the plains, the 2nd Dieron was harassed all the way to Fort Cyron, several mechs had to be abandoned when they were to damaged to continue the retreat. Retreating behind the city walls, the remaining four companies of the 2nd Dieron prepared for a siege, but a night operation by the Gray Death Legions Infantry company seized the main entrance and opened the gates. While on his way to help close the breach, General Von Galbertsons Shadow Hawk was brought down by the Legions anti mech infantry platoon. With his death, coordination among the 2nd Dieron fell apart, and they retreated off planet.

Gunzburg

The 14th Donegal landed on Gunzburg expecting to fight the 13th Rasalhauge Regulars, whom the LIC believed had been ordered to the planet. Instead of the 13th Rasalhauge, the 14th Donegal encountered disorganized militia that soon melted away into the many swampy regions of the planet. Since landing, the 14th has been fighting a low grade insurgency, but until they are able to get more troops equipped to deal with the terrain, in particular light hovercraft, the LCAF has been content to sit in the cities and control the spaceports on planet. A recent wave of Rasalhaugian independence has also swept the planet, which has led to a three way conflict on some of the outlying cities.

Volders

Volders had been garrisoned by the Lone Star Regiment for close to fifty years. A Mercenary unit who had served House Kurita for close to two hundred years, even they were affected by the Coordinators Death to Mercenaries order. While fighting on Sevren their supporting DCMS jumpships had left the system, stranding them. Caught in a bind, the mercenaries were forced to surrender. Meanwhile all of the families and a large number of the Lone Star support staff were still on Volders, Taken into "Protective Custody" by the Volders Militia and ISF, they had been moved to an abandoned army fort on the other side of Volders.. On Sevren, the 8th Donegal's new commander, Colonel Erich Rauss, had promised to do what he could to help the mercenaries. Six

weeks into the Lull both the Lone Star Regiment and St. Cyr Heavy Assault Group, the two mercenary units that had been stranded by the Kuritans on Sevren, had signed short term contracts with the LCAF, low in pay, heavy in support. When Operation VALKYRIE's Fourth wave was launched, both units went back to their former home base.

Accompanying the Lone Star regiment was a mech company of volunteers from the 8th Donegal, including now Colonel Rauss, and several companies of Infantry. Jumping in system, and using their familiarity with the planetary operations, the small fleet of dropships made it to orbit before the alarm was raised. Dropping while the rest of the militia was still mustering, the battalion of Lone Star troops and attached Lyrans landed just outside the camp where the mercenaries families had been gathered.

In a short firefight they dispatched the infantry guarding the camp, then held off the attacking militia as the Mules and Monarchs the mercenaries had rented from the LCAF landed at a nearby, abandoned spaceport. Escorting the dependents to the port was an easy task, but as they were loading, the Volders militia mech company, augmented by two lances of ISF mechs and a regiment of tanks and infantry, began to arrive. The space ports size presented a tactical quandary, if the Overlord and Union landed to add their firepower to the perimeter, only one or two civilian dropships could land at a time, extending the time needed for evacuation. If either the Union or the Overlord landed, more civilians could be loaded faster, but it put that dropship in greater danger of being destroyed. In the end, Colonel Granger and Rauss decided that the mechs

and infantry would escort the civilians to the dropships and protect the perimeter, and as the last civilian dropships were loading, the combat dropships would make their landing run.

The civilians boarded the dropships as fast as they could, the Lone Star mercenaries and their Lyran Allies held the line, but the cost was high. A companies worth of Lone Star mechs was damaged or destroyed, and Colonel Samuel Granger, was killed when his Banshee's autocannon ammunition exploded after his rear torso armor was penetrated by a series of missiles. At about the same time the Colonels mech was destroyed, a Buccaneer class dropship that was being used as an transport was hit by a salvo of LRM fired by a militia LRM

carrier. At first it only appeared to be badly damaged, but less than a minute later it erupted in a ball of flame. Almost 100 members of the Lone Star family were on board.

When Colonel Granger was killed, Colonel Rauss assumed command of all the Lyran affiliated forces on the ground. While holding off the militia and the mechs, the civilian dropships began lifting off. Once the landing pad was open enough, the units dropships began their descent. The fighting on the ground ended with the destruction of the militia and ISF mechs. All 20 were destroyed, although half the militia pilots did live. With word that the military dropships were on the way down, the remaining militia units retreated. Every effort was made to recover what damaged, destroyed mechs and fallen pilots the Lone Star and 8th Donegal had lost. Per a prior conversation with Colonel Rauss, Colonel Granger's remains were left on Volders.

Other Actions

Although evidence during the Lull pointed to the DCMS moving a unit to either world, both Winfield's Guards on Verthandi and 10th Donegal on Lovinac encountered nothing heavier than a militia mech unit and some conventional regiments. Both planets surrendered after a short campaign.

Diebstahl

The recent advances of the AFFS against the remaining Dieron worlds, coupled with the failure of Theodore Kurita's counterattack, left the DCMS in between the proverbial rock and hard place. Seeing the outcome of what would happen if he stayed in the area, Colonel Kurita ordered a retreat out of the region. Caught preparing for a limited advance, General Steiner and her subordinates doing what they could to take advantage of the situation. Fifteen worlds were taken, some by nothing more than a short battle group of mechs and conventional units from a parent unit. Many worlds fell without a shot being fired.

To his credit, Colonel Kurita managed to extricate not only all of his mech units, but most of the regular DCMS conventional units as well. Many redeployed to worlds in the Rasalhague District, where they dispersed and prepared to fight in the coming New Year.

Many in the LCAF called this period the "Glückliche Zeit", or "Happy Time", and for some it was. However, taking fifteen worlds at a moment's notice, often with incomplete forces and supplies, threw the LCAF support structure into chaos, as carefully planned shipping schedules were thrown completely off balance. Had the DCMS been in better shape to exploit this chaos, it's quite possible they could have successfully counterattacked and ejected the Lyran forces from many of the worlds.

As it stood, once the "Chaos had been sorted into Mayhem", and the population and military began to see what had really happened, they stopped calling the Sixth Wave the "Happy Time", and began calling it what they thought it was: Theft on the planetary scale.

NADELSTICH

The Free Worlds League was shocked by the Tikonov Offensive, so much so Janos Marik was unable to bring the member states to any sort of consensus on what to do next. A planned continuation of POLLAXE was set aside, the Free Worlds League forces concentrating on defending what it had taken. However, with the LCAF's resumption of Operation VALKYRIE, and further evidence that the lone offensive the Tikonov Republic had launched had stretched the limits of its capabilities, the FWLM began planning for a new wave, dubbed Operation CINQUEDA. Its goal was to exploit the gains already made, and to push further into the Commonwealth. Because the Captain General could not get a majority of the League members to approve and participate, Marik Militia and Mercenary units were to be the primary units involved. The goal of CINQUEDA was not territorial gain, but to tie down as much as the LCAF as possible,

As the planning for CINQUEDA proceeded, operational security concerning the plans were weak, even by Marik standards. Less than a month after planning began, the LIC had the meeting notes of the FWLM staff in hand. While planning for VALKYRIE was underway, the LCAF knew it would leave their Marik border weak. Several units had been moved to the region as part of the THOR maneuvers, and while these new dispositions provided a measure of security, the LCAF High command did worry. However, their worry was tempered by several factors in their favor. The first was that the fractured nature of the League and Janos Marik's trouble in building a consensus meant that a unified League offensive was unlikely. In fact, much of the Captain-Generals time during the Lull was occupied by the Andurien -Capellan problem. The second fact was that the Tikonov Republic offensive had indeed taken the League by surprise, and the FWLM Command was still in the process of trying to figure out if another offensive was forthcoming, or if the Republican forces had expended all their energy thus far. The third factor was that the LCAF and Archon Katrina felt they had garrisoned the worlds they could not afford to lose, and were willing to lose some while contesting others, and during the planning for VALKYRIE had also set up the outlines for several contingency plans.

When the data about CINQUEDA made its way through the LIC and into the LCAF's hands, General Regis realized that there was a window in which a series of attacks could not only disrupt the FWLM plans, but also win them back worlds that had been lost in the previous invasion. On his own authority, General Regis activated Operation NADELSTICH.

With the jump off planets for the Marik operation identified, the LCAF's goal was to hit those planets before the units on them had left. This would force the FWLM not only to fight, but expend supplies needed for continuing their operation. The over reaching goal of NADELSTICH was not territory, but stopping the FWLM from continuing its operations against the Lyran border.

Bella I

A SAFE agent posing as a merchant had left Cavanaugh II and arrived on Bella I, passing his information up the chain of command and warning the 2nd Free Worlds Guards that the Lyrans were on the way. Abandoning the loading of his unit, Colonel Kimbolton prepared for the coming attack.

When the jumpships of the 36th Lyran appeared, they expected to surprise the Marik defenders. Instead, in a reverse of what happened at Wyatt, as soon as the Lyran dropships were well enough from their jumpships they were attacked by several flights of Marik aerospace fighters. Several dropships were damaged and one Union was destroyed.

Pressing on, the Lyran RCT landed in good form outside of Damien, a small city southwest of Port Isadora, the planets capital city. It was here that most of the 2nd Free Worlds Guard was normally stationed, but encountering only conventional forces, the commander of the RCT, Colonel Emily Stevens, realized that the 2nd Free Worlds had moved to the larger spaceport to embark. Leaving behind an infantry and tank regiment to hold Damien, she moved her unit parallel to the highway that connected the two cities. At Jacob's Crossing, a small village in the hilly terrain that led to Port Isadore, the left flank of her advance was attacked by a Marik hover tank regiment and the 2nd Guards Recon Company. Knowing her opponents skill and reputation as commander, Colonel Stevens decided the proper course of action would be to slow her advance and not make any rash decisions. Sending her own Blitz Company to counter the Marik advance, Colonel Stevens awaited developments.

While knowledge of the Lyrans Blitz companies had been common since the start of the 4th Succession War, Jacob's Crossing was the first Marik encounter with the Lyran company, and they did not fair well. Surprised by the Wolfhounds, Dervishes, and more than competently handled Griffin's. Phoenix Hawk and Commandos of the Blitz Company, the Guards company of Wolverines, Hermes II and Firestarter's found itself in a fast moving slugging match that they were losing. A timely attack by some Marik Saladin hover tanks allowed the 2nd's Recon Company to disengage, leaving four mechs behind on the field of battle.

As the Battle at Jacobs Creek was winding down, two Battalions of the Guards attacked the 36th Lyrans right flank. While the medium mechs of the Guards were more maneuverable than then heavier Lyran mechs, the terrain meant they could not use their speed to full effect. Beginning a phased withdrawal back to Damien, the 36th Lyran fell back in good order, frustrating the Marik advance. A day later the 2nd Free World attacked again at Booker Heights. The Lyrans again frustrated the Marik troops by holding their ground and giving as good as they received. When a Marik company of medium and heavy mechs pushed through a screening force of infantry and tanks, their attack was turned away by the Blitz Company and another Lyran mech company that was

nearby. That evening, the 2nd Free Worlds disengaged and fell back to Jacobs Crossing.

The next day the 36ths Aerospace Wing, depleted by the fighting from the jump point to the planet, began a descent towards Jacob's Crossing. At the same time the 36th began another slow advance towards Damien. Scrambling its own Aerospace fighters to intercept, the 2nd waited at Jacob's Crossing, Colonel Kimbolton eager to take advantage of any disorder the 36th might be under. As the fighters came within engagement range of each other, a lance of Lyran Centurion ASF's broke from the main formation and headed straight towards Port Isadore at full speed. Surprised by this sudden turn of events, Marik ASF's gave chase, but were unable to catch the swifter Lyran planes. With only a few minutes of warning, Port Isadore was not ready for an aerial attack. Using the Isadore Broadcast Tower as their landmark, the two ASF's turned towards the Port Isadore Spaceport. Although met with some defensive missile and laser fire, the two planes streaked through and released their payload. Homing in on a beacon planted by a Loki agents, the bombs did not strike the heavily protected underground reaction mass fuel tanks, but the above ground pipe switching and control station. Although the resulting fire was easily dealt with (the valves at the main tanks were turned off at the source) there was now no way for the dropships, commercial and military, sitting on the pad at Port Isadore to fuel up.

Although both Lyran ASF's were shot down and destroyed after their bombing run, the damage had been done. Until the pipes and intricate valve systems were repaired, the dropships of the 2nd Free Worlds were planet bound. Although furious at his inability to stop what had happened, Colonel Kimbolton had little choice but to let the 36th retreat back to Damien and lift off planet. On planet, Mech losses on both sides were light, each mech unit had lost a little less than two companies of mechs, overall losses favored the Marik force. Conventional losses were higher on the Lyran side, as were the ASF losses, but the 36th had done what it had set out to do.

Dixie/Colfax

The Lagendorf Lancers arrived in Dixie expecting the 2nd Free Worlds Guard to be there as well. When they failed to appear, the Lancers commander was unwilling to attack. Dixie was a typical border world in many ways but one, the Castle Brian that was being used by the defending mercenaries of the Filthy Lucre as a defensive base. Outnumbered and outgunned, Major Wayne Roland had no desire to throw his unit away. After waiting a week at the nadir jump point for the 2nd Free Worlds, the Lancers returned to their home base on Colfax.

Three days after arriving back on Colfax, the 7th Lyran RCT appeared in system and began their burn towards the planet. Long considered the "Hard Luck" unit of the LCAF, the 7th was comprised of mostly second line mechs and 2nd line warriors. That they were being used in an offensive manner showed how deep into the barrel the LCAF was reaching.

Although outnumbered, Major Roland and the Lancers knew the lay of the land, and also knew the defensive positions they had improved on the planet were much improved. Very comfortable in fighting as the defenders, the Lancers waited for the 7th Lyran to bring the battle to them.

The first indication that fortune may be on the Lancers side occurred at Cordo. There, a regiment of Colfax Militia tanks and infantry not only drove off

the two infantry and tank regiments of Lyran regular forces, but also the mech company sent as their reinforcement. The next day, a mixed battlegroup of the 7th so bungled an attack at Hailfeld Gap that the defending three lances of the Lancers and their militia counterparts drove them back with heavy losses. Taking a risk, Major Roland detached his lighter lances, and had them go on several raids, hitting the Lyran unit in the flank. Although these attacks inflicted little in terms of material damage, the already shaken morale of the 7th Lyran broke, and they began to retreat back to their dropships.

Taking advantage of their disorganization, Major Roland attacked a battalion of mechs and infantry at Hothfruss Gap. Although the Lyran infantry and one mech company retreated as soon as the fighting started, the other two companies held their ground for almost three hours, fighting off several concerted attacks by the Lancers. The pivotal moment in the battle came when a Lyran Crusader, the commander of the remaining unit was brought down and destroyed in an ammo explosion. The remaining Lyran mechs soon broke off.

Three days later a thoroughly beaten and demoralized 7th Lyran left Colfax, leaving behind two companies worth of mechs, many of which the Lancers were able to salvage. The Lancer lost ten mechs, six of them at Hothfruss Gap.

Concord

Concord should have been an opportunity for the LCAF to show off what it had learned from its Davion counterparts. Instead, it was a throwback to the “Old School” style of Lyran fighting, with nearly disastrous results for the 10h Lyran Regulars.

Defending Concord was the 20th Marik Militia, one of the “Heaviest” units in the FWLM. Several lances of Awesomes, Stalkers and Orions were part of the units OOB. The conventional regiments on planet, while they had not seen much combat, had worked with the mech regiment for close to ten years. Also on planet was the Martian Cuirassiers, a mercenary unit of curious origins. Formed by the owner of a Mining Corporation for his son, the unit had spent its entire existence contracted to the FWLM, and had begged off any sort of offensive actions. Many

in the FWLM and LCAF considered the unit nothing more than a “Paper Tiger”.

The 20th Marik had been ordered to participate in Operation CINQUEDA, and was actually on its way to its jumpships when the 10th Lyran Regulars appeared in system. Quick thinking allowed many of the Marik dropships to use the systems fifth planet to slingshot back to the planet. Both units actually dropped within 100 kilometers of each other, the Militia and Regular aerospace Wings fighting several inconclusive skirmishes.

The commander of the 10th Lyran, Lieutenant-General Galway Ashbury was not one of the many “Social Generals” that had plagued the LCAF, but his thinking on all things military was firmly rooted in the past. One of the more vocal opponents of the Davion Alliance and the changes it was bringing, General Ashbury was determined to prove the “Old Way” was still the better way. The commander of the 20th Marik, Colonel Mbasi Dombwesa, was more than happy to let the Lyrans come after him. This was one of the few occasions where a Marik unit was heavier than its Lyran counterpart. Ordering the Martian Cuirassiers to attack the 10th Lyran in the flank as they approached, a job they did very well, the Lyran forces were harried as they approached. Unable or unwilling to use his Blitz Company for scouting purposes, General Ashbury used it to try and drive off the Cuirassiers. However, he failed to adequately support the Blitz Company, and at Rowanoke Crossing, the Cuirassiers used their superior numbers to attack the

Blitz company from three sides, driving it back with heavy losses.

Colonel Dombwesa moved his unit to to the outskirts of Masslingham, the planets capital city. His conventional units had harassed and harried the 10th Lyran during it's movement to the area, and at first light on October 5th, the 10th Lyran formed up and attacked. They were repulsed, then formed up, and attacked again. By the third time the LCAF forces were attacking, the Cuirassiers had arrived and hit the 10th on an open flank. When the Lyran advance on that flank faltered, the 20th Marik went forward, lending it's weight to the battle. The numbers and weight of Marik mechs soon had the advantage. General Ashbury led his command lance into the thick of battle in an effort to inspire and rally his troops, but was set upon by a Marik Lance of two Stalkers and two Awesomes, and was forced to eject after a short firefight.

Battered and broken, the 10th Lyran Regulars streamed back to their dropzones. Unable to keep up, the heavy and assault mechs of the 20th Marik Militia fell back, while the Martian Cuirassiers kept the pressure on the retreating Regulars, who left the planet three days after the disaster at Masslingham. In addition to the Generals Command lance, a battalions worth of Lyran mechs had been destroyed or captured, including most of the mech regiments senior officers. Total Marik losses were less than two companies.

When the disorganized remains of the 10th Lyran made their way back to Rahne, General Victor Joss, commander of the Wyatt Theatre, was so disgusted with General Ashby's conduct of the battle he refused to repatriate the captured Lyran officers right away.

Ford

The 21st Centauri Lancers landed on Ford expecting to face just the 14th Lyran Guards, but Gregg's Long Strider's, a LCAF mercenary unit that had fought very well on Giasar before being forced to retreat, was also on planet. SAFE had information that the Long Striders were going to be moved to Zwenkau, but the transportation assets were just not available for the Lyran mercenaries, so they remained on Ford. Ever the professional, Colonel Kusaka of the 21st considered his options.

The 14th Lyran is a classic Lyran heavy assault unit. For a variety of reasons, it had never been assigned or

developed a Blitz company of its own, instead it had additional light tank units as a scouting force. In their short time together on the planet, Colonel Barrows of the 10th and Colonel Carr had worked very well together, in several exercises the lighter, more mobile mechs of the Long Strider's were more than capable of screening the Lyran units as they moved forward. However, as many units were to find out during the war, an exercise is not the same as the real thing, and the 21st Centauri Lancers are not your average opposing force.

Moving of Edselton, the planets capital city, the 21st found their path blocked by the 14th Lyran, who had set up a defensive line in the Garomon Hills. While probing for a weak spot, a battalion of the Long Strider's hit the 21st on the left flank. While initially successful, the Marik mercenaries were able to fall back in good order, reorganize, and counterattack. Overextended and unsupported, the green mechwarriors of the Long Strider's did not hold for long against the elite warriors of the 21st. As night fell, the Long Strider's had retreated away from the field of battle. After some inconclusive skirmishing, the 21st Centauri and 14th Lyran ended the day where they started.

The next morning the Lancers began a series of spoiling attacks on the front line, distracting the 14th while two companies made a flanking maneuver through the hills. Punching through a defending Lyran tank regiment, the Lancers hit the 14th Lyran hard at Dearborn Heights, a small town in the Garomon. The

company of 14th Lyran mechs defending that flank gave ground slowly, and several attacks by reinforcing Lyran tank units blunted the mercenaries advance. An attempt to use the Lancer ASF's in a ground support role was turned aside by the 14th's Aerospace wing. Although another flank attack by the Long Striders was also turned back by the 21st Centauri, little had changed in terms of the battlespace.

Realizing that any effort to take the city, and therefore the planet, would mean losing most of his unit, Colonel Kusaka retreated off Ford and back to Nestor. Although heavy fighting had taken place, losses all around were light. The 14th Lyran lost less than a company's worth of mechs, as did the 21st. The Long Strider's lost almost two companies, but were soon able to repair about half of those for service. Conventional losses on the Lyran side were higher, but the LCAF took some solace in the performance of the 14th and Long Strider's against one of the better Mercenary units in the Inner Sphere.

Kalidasa

The Skye Rangers organization had not had a good fight. Colonel Theodore Kurita had figuratively and literally run rings around the 4th Skye on Marfik. The 17th Skye had been kept on Summer at the behest of Duke Lestrade, as paranoid as he was about being attacked he wanted a unit of unswerving loyalty to him there. The 22nd Skye had success on Camlann, but none of the other three regiments took much joy in their performance, as loyal as they were to the Archon.

When the orders for NADELSTICH were sent, not only was to the 10th Skye part of it, but their goal was to attack one of the more important worlds in the Free Worlds League, Kalidasa. The Free Worlds League and Marik Commonwealth had been fighting over the border world on and off the last three hundred years, and a large amount of trade between the two realms went through the planet. The planet had a thriving industry, and was also the home of Kali Yama mech factory, one of the largest suppliers to the League military.

Because of its location, its industries, and its history, the planet's militia was well equipped and well trained. The Kali Yama Defense force was a battalion's worth of Hunchbacks, Trebuchets and Orions that had been produced on site. Also defending the Planet were the Gryphons Regiment of the Silver Hawks Coalition. The Gryphons had a history of bravery, but because of the byzantine procurement rules in the League, it was often the most poorly equipped and trained force in the FWLM. In fact, it was one of the few units the LCAF could reliably beat on a regular basis. Eager to show how well his troops could do, Duke Lestrade sent several reporters and holo crews to document the success of the attack.

The LCAF landing on Kalidasa was unopposed, with a dozen starports on the planet there was little the Free Worlds troops could do to oppose them. Keeping the Kali Yama Defense Battalion, two infantry and tank regiments at the massive industrial complex, Colonel Martha Zuritas, the Gryphons commander, led her unit and several conventional regiments out to meet the Skye troops. The very definition of "Hard Charger", Colonel Zuritas had spent the past few years whipping the Gryphons into shape.

The 10th Skye's Blitz company encountered a Gryphon company, starting a six hour fate that saw the Gryphon recon company lead the LCAF unit away from the field of battle. Using his light tanks as a scouting force, Colonel Enders of the 10th Skye was moving forward at a moderate pace, and when word reached his Command Post, and attached reporters, that a battalion of the Gryphons had been spotted near Booker Gap, he boasted openly of driving the Marik forces back. As the conventional forces fought for key terrain, the 10th Skye charged forward.

Booker Gap is actually on relatively flat land. No one is sure how it got its name, but for the most part it was unremarkable. The Gaston river, a large, winding slow moving body of water sat on the eastern

end of the town, while the Dubauer Forest Reserve occupied the Western end of town. A Battalion of Gryphon mechs had made it's way through the town, and were strung out in a defensive line, their flank anchored on the Gaston. Turning back the initial LCAF attack of conventional units, the Marik forces slowly advanced. A few kilometers in front of the town, the two mech forces met. For a half hour the fight was equal, then Colonel Enders started feeding more companies of mechs into the fight. The Gryphons center slowly gave ground, then broke off, Marik mechs retreating in haphazard fashion through the city, the Skye Rangers mechs on their heels.

While the reporters camera's recorded, and Colonel Enders celebrated his and his units great victory, the Assault company of the Gryphons, lances of Awesomes and Stalkers, stepped out of the cover they were using in the city, and with a volley of fire staggered the Lyrans pursuit. At the same time, another battalion of Gryphon Mechs stepped out of the Dubauer, Colonel Zuritas Marauder in the lead.

What had looked like a rout turned into a disaster in the space of fifteen minutes. Two companies of 10th Skye mechs were down, the unit was surrounded on three sides, and if not for the heroic actions of the units Blitz Company, would have been surrounded. The remaining Lyrans mechs were able to extricate themselves after a hard fight. What started as a proper retreat soon turned into a rout, as Colonel Zuritas and the Gryphons kept the pressure on for the next 48 hours. It soon became a question of not when the 10th Skye might be able to retreat off planet, but if they might be able to.

The constant pressure applied by the Gryphons took a toll on both units. At Wahrfeld, an attack by the Marik mechs wasn't properly supported, and the medium company leading the attack found itself cut off and surrounded by an aggressive Ranger counterattack. Realizing her troops could not keep up such an aggressive pursuit, Colonel Zuritas pulled back, shadowing the remaining LCAF mechs as they retreated back to their landing zones and boosted off planet.

The 10th Skye had lost four companies of mechs and pilots on Kalidasa. Two companies worth were destroyed, the rest salvaged by the Marik troops. Conventional losses were also very high on the Lyrans side. For her efforts. Colonel Zuritas had lost 10 pilots and a battalions worth of mechs, of which slightly over a company could not be returned to service. However, the salvage from the 10th Skye soon put her unit back to full strength.

The failure of the Rangers attack was an embarrassment to Duke Lestrade. When his reporters came back with glowing stories about the skill of the Gryphons, and how a unit once thought of as incompetent thoroughly beat his own, he could not conceal his anger. To make matters worse, the Archon ordered that the Duke pay for his own troops reparation, an order that would leave many captured troops in limbo when Duke Lestrade was killed before paying.

