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Huo Qingtong stationed her unit about four miles away from the enemy forces. At noon, the unit commanders came to report. She told the commander of the Green Flag's second unit: "Go with five hundred troops and take up positions along the southern bank of the Black River. The Manchu troops are not allowed to cross the river. If they attack, do not engage them head on, but rather delay them as long as possible." The commander bowed and retired.

She then turned to the commander of the White Flag's first unit. "I want you to lure the Manchu forces westwards. If your troops clash with the enemy, they are not allowed to win the engagement, but must continue to flee into the desert, the further the better. Take our four thousand head of cattle and goats with you and leave them along the road for them to seize."

"Why should we give them our livestock? I won't do it!"

Huo Qingtong's lips tightened. "Do you refuse to follow my orders?" she asked quietly.

The commander brandished his sabre. "If you tell me to win a battle. I will follow your orders. If you tell me to lose a battle, I would rather die then comply!"

"Seize him!" Huo Qingtong commanded. Four guards ran forward and grabbed the commander's arms. "The Manchu forces are oppressing us and to beat them, we must work together with one heart. Will you or will you not follow my orders?"

"No! What are you going to do about it?"

"Execute him!" she commanded, and the officer's face turned pale. The guards pushed him out of the tent and sliced off his head with one sword stroke as the other commanders quivered with fear.

Huo Qingtong promoted the assistant commander to take the dead officer's place and told him to retreat westwards before the Manchu forces until he saw smoke rising from the east, then to return as quickly as possible, avoiding battle with the Manchus. She ordered the other units to gather beside the Great Quagmire to the east.

Her work complete, she mounted her horse and drew her sword. "The first and second units of the Black Flag, follow me," she shouted.