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The Yekaterinoslav March

This story is an extract from a more detailed description of the march. Although compiled from my brief notes of that time and other materials from the archives of the late B.P. Voinarski, many years have passed and much has been forgotten, so much could be involuntarily distorted. Some events may be completely unknown to me. Therefore, I ask the participants of the campaign, if they find errors or omissions, to make their own corrections.

Only this way can the goal I have set be achieved: to provide contemporaries and historians with truthful material about one of the episodes of our Civil War.

1. Before the March and the First Stage

From the end of October 1918 the situation in the Ukraine was confused. The German revolution occurred, and the occupation government¹ immediately gave up: it gradually crumbled, like a barrel with bursting hoops.

No one kept order in the city, except the powerless city council, and the whole province was restless. The spectre of anarchy increasingly loomed over southern Russia.

It quickly became clear that the Hetman had no firm support among the people.

Petliura's movement was spreading wider and wider. But it was difficult to believe in its durability, as the red banners were clearly threatening behind the Petliurists, and the Soviet authorities were preparing an invasion of the Ukraine.

Parts of the 8th Hetman Corps were located in Yekaterinoslav: two infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, a howitzer battalion (without guns), a cavalry regiment, an armour battalion, and other small formations. All of these, with few exceptions, represented only cadres, as the German command did not permit substantial formations.

As soon as the Hetman's power collapsed this corps, led by their headquarters, aligned themselves with the Volunteer Army: tricolour flags² were everywhere, the Ukrainian language (which had not always been used before) was blown away in the wind, officers and soldiers put on shoulder straps of the Russian army, and portraits of Volunteer leaders appeared on the places of honour at the assemblies.

Immediately there were defections: all the "ethnic Ukrainians" left the corps. But it was replenished with people of Russian ethnicity, who no longer wished to serve under the Hetman's standard. We even had our own motorised infantry – the so-called "screen". A volunteer squad, which was formed by the town council to protect order, and proved to be one of our most combat-ready units, also joined the corps.

As a result, there were two organized and hostile forces in the city: the 8th Corps and the Petliurists.

A clash was inevitable, and it happened on 23 November. The Petliurists attacked the upper part of the city, where the corps' units were located. After a battle that lasted almost a whole day, including artillery fire, they retreated while suffering losses.

This battle stirred up the corps and it rallied even more firmly around the tricolour banner. We felt our strength, the possibility of successful resistance, and finally felt that we a part of the White army.

Soon the obvious idea of a campaign to unite with it spread, because it was clear that by remaining in place the corps was dooming itself either to an incessant and fruitless struggle with the Petliurists, who were taking over more and more of the Ukraine, or to an inglorious disarmament and dispersal.

When the campaign was announced, it was greeted with delight – at last!

¹ The Germans and Austrians had occupied the Ukraine as part of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Yekaterinoslav was in the Austrian zone.

² The white-blue-red of Tsarist Russia.



We left the city around midnight on 27 November. As unexpected as it was – the order had been given only an hour before we left – the neighbouring residents became aware of it, and we passed silent human walls standing on both sides of the street. Many blessed us in silence. What could they say to us but a parting prayer? What could we wish them, those who remained in the power of anarchy?

The next morning, the Petliurists occupied our barracks, and the first thing they did was brutally deal to our wives and relatives, who, unaware of the corps' withdrawal, had come to the barracks to visit their husbands and loved ones.

Where were we going? There were three possible paths³. We could go to the Donbass, through the southern part of Yekaterinoslav province, or to the Crimea via Melitopol. In both of these cases we had to cross the Dnieper, which was the main obstacle, near Alexandrovsk. The third option was more distant and complicated – to go to the Crimea through Perekop. It was, as we shall see below, necessary to take this last one.

The detachment was led in the campaign by the commander of the 8th Corps, General Vasilchenko, and his chief of staff Colonel (later Quartermaster General to General Wrangel) G.I. Konovalov. It was made up of (retaining their corps names): the 43rd and 44th Infantry Regiments and the volunteer squad; for an infantry total of 500 men. There was an artillery regiment of 4 guns; the 7th Novorossiysk Horse Regiment of about 150 sabres; an armour battalion of 5 armoured cars; four trucks; a radio unit; an engineer unit; and a hospital (2 or 3 doctors, 3 or 4 nurses and orderlies). In all about a thousand people, most of them officers.

During the first night we had to blow up all the vehicles and leave them in the field, as they could not move in the mud. It was a disaster, because with the armoured cars the corps could have avoided many battles and losses. But there was no other option. The machine guns were loaded onto carts, and the armoured battalion became a reconnaissance unit, under its former name, which now sounded ironic.

Immediately upon the departure of the corps, the Petliurist command organised resistance to it, giving orders to the notorious Ataman Grigoriev to halt and destroy it.

The first fighting occurred towards the end of the second day after leaving Malashkivka (Neyenburg).

The skirmish was short, and the forces of one advanced unit of the enemy, in a trench, was dispersed. About a hundred of the Petliurists were captured and joined the corps.

From here the corps moved to Khortitsa. Several officers disguised in civilian clothes made a reconnaissance of the Kichka bridge crossing. It turned out that the whole area, and especially the bridge, were guarded by strong enemy units. The crossing would have been too risky, because the bridge was mined and if the enemy had abandoned it, it would have been blown up. So the first two options were taken away and we were left with the last one: to go along the Dnieper and, crossing somewhere lower down, turn to Perekop.

From here we went through long passages, only staying overnight in passing villages and avoiding towns and the railroad.

There was the autumn thaw, which brought mud, but then frosts came and the road turned into frozen mounds.

Everybody rode in carts, and so the detachment stretched over a huge length: leading was the reconnaissance, then the vanguard, then the main forces – infantry, artillery, headquarters, transport, infirmary – following at a distance and then a rear guard some distance further back still – all this was stretched for 5-6 *versts*⁴ and created an imposing but strange impression. It gave the impression of a migration: everyone was wrapped at the time in sheepskin coats, or in peasant wraps, or even just in blankets.

³ The Volunteer Army was in the Kuban, so the first route mentioned is that direction – but it would need to cross the front lines of the Red Army facing the Don Cossacks in order to reach the Kuban. The Crimea was not barred by substantial formations, so was a much safer destination.

⁴ A verst is just slightly more than a kilometre.



There were women on some of the wagons, since many married officers could not leave their families in the city and had to take them with them. Only the presence of rifles and machine guns – and the artillery and cavalry when it appeared – gave the impression of military strength. This elongation of the march and the two or three hundred supply wagons created favourable estimates for us. At one of the overnight stays we overheard such a conversation. A group of peasants was sitting outside. Someone asked:

“What do you think, Petro, you are a non-commissioned officer and should know – how many of them, these Kadets⁵?”

The man questioned thought about it and answered:

“There might be a thousand of them ... or even more ...”

“More, more,” the voices rumbled, “– divisions of them – allowing for infantry, then cavalry and artillery – and the others on foot ...”

We ourselves encouraged this impression and when we were questioned we said that we had three infantry regiments, a cavalry regiment, an artillery brigade and other units. And that was true, but the fact that there were a few dozen men in each unit was another matter.

As we marched a little farther, we were surprised to see that our unit had become the subject of legend: there was talk in the neighbourhood that an army of several corps was coming, beating everyone in their way and who could not be restrained. These rumours had a certain effect on the spirit of the enemy who confronted us in subsequent battles, and especially it affected them at the most vulnerable place – at the crossing, as we shall see further on.

As we went deeper into the steppe from Khortitsa we increasingly felt isolated from everything familiar. It seemed that we plunged into the Middle Ages, when there were no railroads, no newspapers or mail. Everywhere was flat, monotonous steppe and remote villages, leading an almost subsistence lifestyle due to the lack of exchange and impassable roads. No one knew what was going on further than 20-30 *versts* away. There were rumours that had been circulating in Yekaterinoslav a month ago, and others – each more ridiculous than the next. For example, an intelligent-looking lady I met on the way assured me that she had received a radio from Moscow saying that Lenin had been “baptised, repented and was calling a *Zemsky Sobor*”⁶. A venerable engineer in Khortitsa claimed that French units had arrived in Kiev and that the Hetman was forming an army to march on Moscow, and so on.

While deprived of all spiritual nourishment, such as newspapers, information, mail and communications, the villages were materially rich. True, there was a shortage of imported products, but there was more than enough bread, bacon, poultry, eggs and butter. In spring they were going to sow flax and weave linen.

We quickly established good relations with the local population. After the first minutes, when it was discovered that we were not robbing, not raping, and paying for everything⁷, tongues were loosened, and our short stays in the villages passed in good humour with the residents. Sometimes those who were richer even refused to take money: you people are short of money, and we have everything enough.

I can honestly say that I did not see a single case of robbery, or violence, or a major quarrel with the population.

In the political sense, the villages of that time did not have, and could not have, any definite ideology. All aspirations were about two things: land and order. “The land is ours now and will not be given to anyone,” the peasants said. “Whoever establishes order will rule – and we don’t need anything else.” The civil war was seen as city people’s business, which they the peasants had no interest in. The countryfolk of that time simply could not, and did not know how to connect their future with any social and political slogans, nor foresee the situation in which they found themselves two years later, under the authority of red ideology.

⁵ “Kadet” was common term for Whites, a shortened form of the name of the moderate but monarchist Constitutional Democratic Party that very many of them supported.

⁶ A medieval assembly of the estates.

⁷ The author is contrasting this to the arrival of the various other armies in the Ukraine at the time.



We noted with satisfaction one more item. Despite the separatist propaganda, the peasants in no way considered themselves enemies of a united Russia, nor did they see any need for the secession of Ukraine or object to the Russian language.

“We speak our own language,” they often said, “and we are not bothered. But the children should study in Russian and write their books in Russian too – anyone who goes to Moscow, Siberia, or the Caucasus, needs to have a common language.”

These were not sketchy or passing impressions. These thoughts and sentiments we observed throughout the vast distance from Yekaterinoslav to the Crimea. Of course, among the youth and *frontoviki*⁸ there was a certain proportion of those who were differently disposed – sympathetic to the Bolsheviks, or to Petliura, but it was a minority, most often from the parts of the population separated by the war from their village environment or work – and looking for another, easy and profitable life. Out of such people, as well as from the city populations, the Petliurist, Makhnovist and Soviet armies were formed, but the layer of really ideologically-minded people was extremely thin.

Two weeks of the journey passed quietly: no one disturbed us.

At last we reached the Dnieper floodplains⁹ and were drawn into the valley – 25 *versts* wide – between the Dnieper on the left and the railroad on the right.

It was clear that this was where the enemy would be waiting for us, blocking the way. Events played out as soon as we approached a large village, just over into Kherson province: Novo-Vorontsovka. The campaign’s week of fire had come.

2. The Week of Fire

This was the first day’s rest after leaving Khortitsa – we even stayed for two days: we needed to rest, get our weapons in order and orient ourselves.

While the corps was resting, we, that is, the armoured battalion, were sent towards the Dnieper to scout the possibility of crossing. It was late in the evening, in pouring rain, when we reached the river valley.

I can’t help but remember one episode.

We were driving along in total darkness, wet, angry, and hungry – and suddenly there was a fabulous vision: a wide courtyard full of carriages appeared in front of us, with a brightly lit house, from which we could hear music and see couples dancing past in the windows. Dumbfounded by this, we stopped, rubbing our eyes. It turned out to be a large estate of one of the Grand Dukes, whose manager, a Pole, had arranged a feast (it was the Catholic Christmas Eve). He had invited friends and acquaintances from the surrounding area. They had come in a caravan with an armed escort on horseback.

We were cordially invited to tea. It was absolutely incredible to find ourselves, after darkness, mud, rain, and a two-week trek through primitive villages, to be among rooms shining with lights, in the company of beautifully dressed men and well-dressed, perfumed ladies ...

The hour allowed by the commander flashed like a dream and then we were on the carts again, driving along the muddy road among the swampy marshes and over trembling wooden bridges, where tree branches now and then hit my face, and the rain soaked through my clothes and shoes.

In terms of protection, this would have been an ideal crossing point, as the only road through the marshes could have been guarded for a long time by even a small detachment. But when we got to the Dnieper in the morning and saw the surroundings, we realized that it was impossible, as there were no means of transportation across – not anywhere in the area.

It was not until evening that we returned to the corps, having been on the road for almost two days.

On the next day the biggest and longest battle of our campaign was fought.

⁸ Former WWI soldiers.

⁹ The word used is *plavni*, which the wide area of scrub and reeds alongside a Russian river that floods regularly.



It was set in a huge meadow 3-4 *versts* wide between the villages of Mariinskoye and Novo-Vorontsovka. The Petliurists attacked several times, but each time retreated with losses, although their forces were much larger. Headquarters praised all our units for their actions of the day.

In particular the volunteer squad, which was the vanguard that morning, took the first blow, and showed special fortitude and stamina. The artillery, ably supported the counterattacks of our infantry, also contributed much to the repulse of the enemy.

Also heavily praised was the unparalleled work of the medical staff. Nurses and medical attendants picked up the wounded under fire and the doctors worked tirelessly in the infirmary.

The fighting lasted the whole day and only towards the evening did the enemy's attacks cease.

The corps, after pausing a while, moved forward the same night.

The fighting at Vorontsovka weakened the corps physically: over 5 percent of our combat strength was lost, and the infirmary column increased greatly. Twenty men were killed.

But our spirit was not broken. The battle showed that the corps was a well-knit fighting unit.

Many years later it became known what happened that day at Apostolovo station at Grigoriev's headquarters¹⁰. During the evening and throughout the night as the wounded began to be brought in, Grigoriev was out of his mind. The whole station was already full, but they kept coming and coming. Grigoriev, clutching his head, ran around the platform yelling:

"What they can do, what they can do ... How can we fight them?"

The armoured battalion did not take part in that fight. We had been sent 12 *versts* forwards at dawn towards the railroad, between the Tok and Apostolovo railway stations, to delay enemy reinforcements. Having dismantled the rails and cut the telegraph wires, we lay down on both sides of the line, hiding our machine guns in the snow. Soon a train showed up, coming from Apostolovo. It was obvious that they noticed something, because the train stopped. We opened fire and panic broke out. The train pulled back, but a chain¹¹ of men lodged themselves behind the embankment and a firefight ensued.

Finally the commander of the detachment, Colonel Volotski, sent the attached squadron of the Novorossiysk Horse to finish the matter.

In a few minutes it was over, and the train, having got steam up, rushed back to Apostolovo. Several seriously wounded Petliurists were left on the field. They were loaded on a cart and escorted by two of our officers to the nearest hospital. That wagon disappeared without a trace. There was a rumour that the Petliurists brutally massacred the officers, despite the fact that they had brought in the wounded.

We waited until dusk, as ordered, and headed back. The shooting from Vorontsovka died down, but all of a sudden there was a boom of cannons from behind us. Apparently, an armoured train had been sent out from Apostolovo and was shelling the place where the skirmish had recently taken place. So we got out just in time.

We rode for a long time in darkness. The road got worse. Some potholes and mounds appeared. Then, the front carts stopped. There was a ravine in front of them. There was no doubt – we were lost.

We sent a cavalry unit to reconnoitre. The rest of us gathered in a circle around two railwaymen, who in their fear had escaped from the train which we had halted, and were "captured" by us.

They told how the day before Grigoriev had given the latest orders to his unit commanders and, for clarity, had drawn them positions with an sabre on the platform.

¹⁰ According to Wikipedia's article on the march, the units facing them were that of the famous Ataman Makhno, not Grigoriev. But Makhno was not yet very powerful, his base was some distance away, and he was actually *attacking* the Directory in Yekaterinoslav at the time, so that seems wildly improbable.

¹¹ A chain was a formation of infantry in a line. While superseded in WWI by better techniques, the use of strung out lines of men returned in the RCW due to lack of training and control issues.



According to the positioning, it turned out that his forces were divided into four groups. The first was to attack the corps in Novo-Vorontsovka. The second the same – but from the rear. The third from the flank. And the fourth was to block the road to the Dnieper in case anyone still managed to break through.

It followed that the corps was surrounded. If it had broken through after the battle on its previous path, there would clearly be a layer of the enemy between it and us.

My mood was gloomy. Our unit, about 100 men, was wandering by itself on the steppe at night, not really knowing how the battle had ended, not even having a clue where we were at the time. It was something to think about.

And suddenly from somewhere to the right a rocket flew up into the sky. And then another, and another, and another. The rockets flew up one after another, burst into the air, lighting up the space below us with a greenish light for a few seconds, and, scattering into hundreds of sparks, were extinguished in flight.

Huddled together we watched, as if mesmerized, this disturbingly beautiful spectacle. The moaning wind, the indistinct silhouettes of people and carts around us, the steppe, now on fire and now not. As if an invisible whirlwind were opening and throwing black veils over it all, obscuring the sense of reality, creating some fantastic picture of an apparently otherworldly world.

Finally the symphony of fire was over. We woke from our dream. But what was it? Was the corps giving us directions? Was the enemy looking for us? Who could answer that?

Soon the reconnaissance unit returned, but with the sad news that it had not found the road forward.

We drove back. After wandering all night, in the morning we reached Novo-Vorontsovka and, not stopping there, took the Beryslav road. We were just in time, because at dawn the village was occupied by the Petliurists.

We rode cautiously and with great anxiety, as in Vorontsovka we had learned that the fighting had ended in the evening and the corps had probably left for Beryslav.

Later in the morning we came across a hamlet, where there was a rear outpost from the corps. We found out that everything was all right and that we were on the right road.

It was daytime, and the ghosts of the night had faded, but immense fatigue gripped up. It was the second day we had been on the move, and we had hardly eaten anything. Our horses had done about 90 kilometres and could hardly stand.

Suddenly from somewhere the wind carried a familiar roar. Clearly cannons – and ahead of us. Could it be another battle?

In the afternoon we entered into a deep gully, climbed up the opposite slope, and reaching the top saw a battle panorama unfold right in front of us.

On the side of a hill there was a column of carts and an infirmary. Guns were firing from the hillside; on top of the hill is clearly the headquarters group, and there in the distance in front of a village, our chains dug in. On the outskirts of the village now and then there were explosions.

But then an odd thing – there was a bustle in the column, carts rushed about, everyone is running somewhere, dragging their machine guns and pointing them in our direction. At first we could not understand what was going on, but finally we worked it out: they had taken us for the enemy and were about to open fire.

We waved our handkerchiefs at them and shouted. The commander sent two riders – they went at full gallop, waving their hats.

At last everything was cleared up. It turns out that General Vasilchenko had lost all hope of our return – it had been two days that we had been gone. The staff assumed that we were all dead.

As soon as the panic subsided, the mutual questioning began. It turned out that after marching all night, in the morning the corps came across this village, where the enemy was encamped. It started tragically. According to some information that had been gathered, the village was unoccupied and calm. So, without



doing a preliminary reconnaissance, some men looking for quarters entered and within five minutes were ambushed. A murderous fire was opened upon them. Some remained there, falling on the spot; some escaped, saved by good horses.

The body of the corps came up. A fight ensued. The general wanted to remove the enemy with artillery, which had been hammering the positions since morning, as he did not want to cause unnecessary casualties by attacking. And, yes, the units were deadly tired (having fought all the day before, marching at night and fighting again). But before night fell it became necessary to launch an attack. The village was taken without much difficulty, and we settled there for the night.

The next morning we were relieved to leave this inhospitable village (named Dudchani) and travelled along the Beryslav road.

The corps was gradually coming out of the valley. We were heading toward the Dnieper, but the railroad remained far behind.

The march was hectic. During it we came across some small Makhnovist and other bands. Some managed to escape at full speed, but some were captured.

Having travelled far, by evening the corps came to a large and well-appointed monastery. The Armoured Battalion, marching as the rear guard, got stuck at the base of the mountain. The exhausted horses could not walk up the steep and muddy slope. With the general's permission, we stayed at the nearest farmhouse, about five versts from the monastery. It never occurred to anyone that a tragic awakening awaited us.

In the morning, as we were getting dressed, a desperate scream was heard: "To the guns, machine guns in position! look lively!"

A thousand paces from the orchard at the rear of the farmhouse a large group of horses loomed, having run into our guards, followed by a long line of wagons, stretching into the misty distance.

Men jumped off the approaching carts and arranged themselves into a chain, bending forward their flanks with the obvious intention of encircling the farmstead from three sides. Machine-gun and rifle fire began.

The enemy was advanced correctly using bounds under cover of machine guns. The leaders marched at the front. You could see that they were real soldiers. We were taking heavy fire, but soon a problem came to us like a blow to the head: we might not have enough cartridges, as the cart with ammunition had left in the evening for the monastery. Only a few machine guns and a dozen of the best riflemen were left in position, while the rest gathered in the house and stuffed what they had on hand into belts. We had an excellent position: a stone wall in which we had made loopholes and which was ideal as shelter. Still, there were some casualties. The first to be wounded was General Kislyi, who had accidentally got stuck at the farm and, as the most senior, had taken command.

Time was running out. The enemy advanced methodically – closer and closer, despite their losses. We could see how on the field here and there remained figures left behind by their chains. After a while we were surrounded on all sides. Some of the gunners moved their machine guns to the right and left sides of the garden and into the house.

Somehow we lost track of time. At times it felt like we made some kind of frantic jump. From the right, then rushing forward, to the side, to the right, to the left, behind, in front of us – a seething spluttering metallic vortex. Captain Kashtelyan, the commander, and Captain Dobrovolski, his aide, were rushing through the garden, encouraging and reassuring.

"A bit more - there will be reinforcements. Don't drop back!"

"Is there enough ammunition?"

"Save it. But for now there is."

"And then?"

"God willing."



Indeed, where's the Corps? Why is it so slow? Horsemen were sent there in the morning, but could they not make it? What if the Corps had already left? And how long could we hold out? These ideas wandered vaguely in my brain. It was not a coherent flow of thought, but in fits and spurts, and did not interfere with doing what needed to be done, to determine the distance, to change the sights, sometimes even to talk to a neighbour ... And time went on. The chains were approaching, you could already see the outlines of individual faces. Bursts became sharper and more vicious as if the machine guns are struggling with their last effort and in the grey field around, the lines of the enemy's chains, the crackling of gunfire and the groans of bullets, have the atmosphere of a prolonged battle – it is eternity without end or beginning; and a new sensation grew in my consciousness – some strange calm submission to fate: what will be ...

When it seemed that all hope was lost, the nearest chains were 250-300 paces away from us and some of us had already started to fit rope loops on their feet in order to depart at the appropriate moment¹², suddenly a cannon shot rang out. And to our right there was a column of smoke and a column of earth blown up on the rear chain. Another shot, and another burst. Another and another. The Corps had opened fire.

The enemy was still moving, but slower, the bounds were shorter, but they were getting closer in. Could we delay them any more? But the mood had already improved, faces were brighter, we no longer had the pale complexion and pressed lips of half an hour previously.

At last a faint sound was heard in the distance: hurrah, someone was shouting from inside the house: our cavalry is coming!

A few minutes later our infantry chains appeared. The squad with its tricolour flag was leading.

With a last effort we increased our fire even more, no longer sparing ammunition. The offensive was clearly halted. The ring, which encircled the farmstead, began to open and the flanks retreated back. After a short time the centre also wavered, and in half an hour, under the pressure of cavalry, though shooting back, the enemy fled to their carts, loaded up and disappeared into the steppe. They were not pursued far, not wishing to tire the horses.

It was only then that we noticed with surprise that evening was approaching. It meant that the battle had been going on for almost the whole day.

It turned out that the corps found out late about our encounter; so some time passed before the rescue got to us. They had hesitated to open artillery fire for a long time because it was foggy and they were afraid of hitting our position.

While the enemy's wounded were being cleaned up, we lingered at the farm. Some of them did not want to surrender here, preferring to commit suicide. They probably thought they would be treated the same way they had treated our prisoners.

We approached one of them, a large, athletic-looking man. He drew a grenade from his belt; it is hard to say whether he meant to throw it at our group or blow himself up, but it exploded in his hands, ripping his belly open.

It was getting late. The twilight field was deathly quiet. Darkness came, enveloping the still uncleared wounded, the corpses of men and horses, and the abandoned weapons. The sky seemed to be holding a mourning veil over the common grave.

We began to question the wounded. It turns out that it was a brigade facing us, the so-called "iron brigade", and there were officers and sailors in the command posts. We had lost one killed and only a few wounded – being saved by the stone wall.

An hour and a half later, we were at the monastery, where the monks greeted us with extraordinary cordiality. While dinner was being prepared, we went to the church. Vespers was under way.

¹² This would appear to be reference to preparing for suicide –which many White officers did rather than be captured. A loop around the trigger pulled from the foot allows a rifle to be fired at sufficient distance.



Sparse candles burned dimly in front of the altar, throwing glitter on the gilded icons. Slow monastic singing, an unhurried service, a half-dark church – everything was as it had been for centuries, as an undying legacy of our ancestors.

In the silence of the Russian church we felt a whiff of human truth and national tradition, in defence of which we had risen against the element of hatred. And we believed that Russia would once again become united and whole, transcending the period of fratricidal hostility. But when?

The next morning, having bid a warm farewell to the monks and leaving them machine guns and a supply of ammunition (they had a security detachment), we found ourselves back in the dreary steppe on a road marked by a row of telegraph poles.

3. The Crossing and the Last Leg

Now we were heading directly for Beryslav, and this was our last opportunity to make a crossing. We marched cautiously and not without anxiety. It seemed natural that here, somewhere, the enemy had to give a final battle. But it turned out differently.

Near Beryslav there was only a small skirmish by our advanced detachment, without the participation of the main forces. The inhabitants said that the Petliurists were so frightened by the previous battles that they loaded themselves onto steamboats prepared in advance and had sailed for Kherson. In their panic they had forgotten about or did not have time to steal two huge ferries, and now we had in our hands the perfect means of transportation, which made it possible to ferry every last carriage.

The Armour Battalion was ordered to stand in an outpost in the cemetery at the entrance to the town, and there, among the crosses and graves that gleamed in the darkness, we spent the night.

The night passed uneasily: we could not believe that the enemy, who had engaged us in the field, would miss the chance to attack now, in the most vulnerable place. But all was well. On the next day in the afternoon we began loading on the last ferry. The corps had already crossed. I was uneasy at first: we were the only people left on that shore – just us and a cavalry squadron. At last the loading was over; we were waiting for the cavalry. Here they were. The clattering of hooves on the flood-bank and the squadron came onto the ferry one by one leading the horses by their bridles.

The order was given – and the ferry slowly sailed away from the pier, sinking into a white, milky fog. We sailed through the clouds for a long time, until we saw indistinct silhouettes of trees – the shore. We were on the other side.

“Glory be to Thee, O Lord,” was heard on all sides. Many blessed themselves.

We spent the night in a small farmstead and the next morning we started along the Perekop road.

Now we marched calmly, with pauses and rest days, sending the sick and wounded ahead. On our way we met only robber bands, who did not scare us, but the inhabitants were sincerely grateful for their dispersal.

After passing through Armyansk and Perekop, the corps found itself in the Crimea – and on Christmas Day we came to Dzhankoy.

From there we were gradually transported by rail to Simferopol, which the armour battalion was the last to arrive at the end of the New Year.

We literally went from the ship to the ball. We started the evening in a large cafe, and ended it at a ball in the girls’ gymnasium.

A few days later, memorial services and a prayer service were held in the cathedral, and on Epiphany, parts of the corps took part in the Epiphany parade.

But the enemy did not go to sleep. A few days later, at the entrance to the barracks that housed the battalion along with the volunteer squad, a large iron furnace suddenly exploded one evening, scattering bricks and pieces of metal all around. Fortunately, most of us were in town. Those who had stayed were clustered at the opposite end of the room, listening to a person telling stories – no one was hurt.

This was, of course, the work of the local Bolsheviks.



After a while reforming began: the squad and two infantry regiments formed the 34th Division, taking the names of its units. The artillery became the 34th Brigade. The Novorossiysk Regiment retained its name, adopting only its former Russian Army number. The Armour Battalion split: part went to Armoured Trains 2 and 3, and were deployed in the spring of 1919 to the 5th Armour Battalion, the other part were put into a machine-gun motor unit, transferred to the Kuban, where it joined the 1st Armour Battalion.

The 34th Division later formed the basis of the 2nd Corps, whose combat history included many glorious deeds.

By a whim of fate, it and the 5th Armoured Battalion had to face old acquaintances again at the end of the summer of 1919 and participated in the final defeat of the Petliurists near Proskurov.

* * *

Looking back, it is impossible not to wonder: did the Ekaterinoslav campaign have any significance in the sense of influencing the Volunteer Army's cause?

Let historians answer that question. We shall note the following which were, at any rate, of local importance. The corps brought a significant moral boost to the small and disorganised units of what was then the "Crimean-Azov Army", and helped in the defence of the Crimea with both manpower and organisationally, which drew away from the main fronts some of the Red Army during the "Akmanai Position"¹³.

This made our army's advance on Yekaterinoslav-Kiev easier, as it had a strong detachment at Akmanai (the Kerch Regiment) in the enemy's rear, which at the right moment in June 1919, left the Crimea and hit the flank of the Red Army.

A well-known answer to the question was given by the high command, which established "in tribute to the courage and valour of the officers and soldiers of the Yekaterinoslav detachment, who made a difficult winter campaign" an insignia on the national ribbon.

A black cross with the colours of the national flag was in memory of that hard but glorious month.

¹³ The Akamanai position was across the narrow point on the Kerch peninsula. It is very easy to defend, and indeed was also used in WWII. The Whites held out there until Denikin's 1919 drive on Moscow.

