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On the Yekaterinoslav March

In No. 102 of May 1960 the memoirs of G.G. Sakovich on the Yekaterinoslav campaign were printed. I too was a participant of this campaign, as a part of the 3rd Novorossiysk Dragoon Regiment of Her Imperial Highness Grand Duchess Elena Vladimirovna, and was very pleased to see a soldier remembering this heroic page from the history of the White struggle.

Many years have passed since that day when the detachment under command of General Vasilchenko started to march from Yekaterinoslav to join the Volunteer Army, so it is not surprising that inaccuracies have crept into G. G. Sakovich's memoirs, which in some cases have changed the facts and some important details.

I will not dwell on the description of the general situation on the territory of Southern Russia after the occupation by the German-AustroHungarian forces, but I must remind you that in the summer of 1918 the Ukraine was not a republic, but a monarchy headed by Hetman Skoropadski, a descendant of the Hetman Skoropadski appointed by Peter the Great after Mazepa's betrayal. The choice of Hetman Pavel Skoropadski, a former aide-de-camp of the Emperor Nicholas Alexandrovich and a descendant of the Hetman of Ukraine appointed by Emperor Peter the Great, symbolised the loyalty of the Ukrainian population to a united Russia and their adherence to the monarchical system. And the main goal of all those who in one way or another participated in the creation of this new monarchical state was to form a strong and healthy bridgehead to fight against rampant communism in Central Russia and to protect that part of Russia from being overrun by communists.

Throughout the territory of the new Ukrainian state, with the consent of Hetman Pavel Skoropadski, were centres of the Volunteer Army, and these centres formed volunteer squads²⁴ in all the cities of the Ukraine. The practical formation of these squads into combat units began in early November 1918. That is, by the time it became quite clear that Germany and Austro-Hungary had lost the war and would soon have to depart from the territory of the Ukraine, leaving it to its fate.

It is hard to know how many officers and those of military rank were in the territory of the Ukraine at that moment. I only know that more than eleven thousand officers were registered by the occupation authorities in Yekaterinoslav.

On 7 November 1918, Old Style²⁵, the chief of the Yekaterinoslav Volunteer Army Centre, Colonel Ostrovski, ordered all volunteers to arrive to the barracks of the 133rd Simferopol Regiment to start combat service.

The ranks of the 3rd Novorossiysk Dragoon Regiment were replenished with a newly formed squadron under the command of Colonel Volotski of the 12th Akhtyrski Hussar Regiment.

On 23 November the enemy surrounded the barracks where the units of the 8th Corps and its headquarters, the 3rd Novorossiysk Dragoon Regiment and the newly formed Volunteer Squad were located.

The barracks garrison valiantly repelled the enemy's attack on 23, 24 and 25 November the 3rd Novorossiysk Dragoon Regiment and armoured units broke through to the Bryansk factory, where they stocked up on gasoline and from the former exhibition grounds confiscated the horse repair equipment of a Hungarian Hussar regiment, abandoned by the Hungarian army.

At dawn on 28 November, the 3rd Squadron of the Novorossiysk Regiment made a reconnaissance of the roads to Alexandrovsk-Nikopol.

In the afternoon of 28 November, General Vasilchikov²⁶ organised a general meeting of all garrison members at their request. Colonel Gusev, commander of the Novorossiysk Regiment, ordered the ranks of

²⁴ The word used is *druzhina*.

²⁵ So 20 November in the modern calendar. The Whites generally used the Julian calendar Old Style, whereas the Soviets moved to the Gregorian New Style, with leap years, in early 1918.

²⁶ From this point on the article has Vasilchenko's name wrong.



the regiment not to participate in the meeting, but sent regimental adjutant Lieutenant Shevchukov to report back.

The meeting lasted a long time. General Vasilchikov tried to persuade it that joining the Volunteer Army was the only decent way out of the current situation. Colonel Konovalov of the General Staff, on the contrary, thought that attempting to do so would be reckless and suggested that everyone disperse back to their place of residence.

On receiving this information from Lieutenant Shevchukov, Colonel Gusev ordered the regiment to saddle the horses, and led the dismounted 1st Squadron into the assembly hall. Leaving them at the exit to the hall, he ascended the podium, and said, "I am leading my regiment to join the Volunteer Army. Whoever wants to die honestly and with glory, let him join the Novorossiysk Regiment. Whoever wants to die dishonestly in the cellars of the Cheka, let him leave the barracks immediately. The meeting is over."

Very few "warriors" dared leave then, but afterwards a great many fled secretly from the barracks and were missing.

Late at night a squadron was sent out to cut off telephone communications between Yekaterinoslav and the detachment's expected destination.

Colonel Konovalov was assigned a guard immediately after the meeting, who in turns accompanied him throughout the entire march.

(At the end of the Civil War and the evacuation abroad Colonel Konovalov, at one time the Quartermaster General of General Wrangel's staff, left for the USSR²⁷.)

At dawn on 29 November the detachment set out on its march. Deep snow made it impossible for our aviation to take to the air. The heavy weapons were removed from them and the planes were destroyed. In the evening there was the first action against an insignificant enemy force near the village of Malashevka, Yekaterinoslav Governorate.

The very deep snow and the continuing blizzard made further movement of our armoured vehicles completely impossible. The order went out to remove the weapons from the armoured cars and blow them up. In this way an armour battalion on carts was created, later to play a decisive role against the enemy on several occasions.

On 10 December there was a serious battle near the village of Mariinskoye, in Kherson province. We had mixed success and were not able to move further south. From the questioning of prisoners, it was discovered that the enemy was waiting for reinforcements from Apostolovo station. At night a squadron of dragoons under the command of Colonel Volotski and the armour battalion on carts were sent deep into the rear of the enemy to the rail line, where an ambush was set. Explosive charges were laid approximately the length of three trains apart, and the armoured battalions positioned itself in cover, in complete darkness, facing opposite that point. Two enemy trains entered the targeted area. The rail line was blown up in front and behind and about 25 machine guns simultaneously opened fire on the train carriages. The enemy had no time to return fire, and when the cavalry approached the train there was nothing left to do. Everything was destroyed. This raid eased the position of the main detachment near Maryinsky, and the enemy hastily withdrew by morning.

On 11 December there was a battle near the village of Dutchino with enemy units that had bypassed us to the south during the battle near Maryinsky. The enemy was defeated and pursued by cavalry.

On 12 December the detachment hoped to cross the Dnieper at the Bezyukov Monastery in Kherson province. The main detachment advanced to the monastery and an outpost, part of the armoured battalion and half-platoon of dragoon for communications were left at the Zilber postal station.

At night the outpost was surrounded, and at dawn was attacked on all sides by a large enemy force. The small garrison defended itself heroically, hoping that the main forces would come to their aid and rescue the situation, but after two hours of fighting no help had arrived. The chief of the outpost then ordered

²⁷ This is untrue.

three dragoons, 200 paces apart, to gallop with a report to General Vasilchikov. The first to set off, Cornet Rubanov, was wounded in the leg; the second rode and rode to the monastery on a horse wounded in the neck by two bullets; the third, Cadet Tatarko, having lost his horse under him, fired back until the Novorossiysk Dragoons drove the enemy away from him with a dashing attack.

On 21 December, at the time of our crossing of the Dnieper the enemy tried to attack the pontoon bridge from a steamer, but was turned back under the fire of our machine guns. On 22 December a squadron of Novorossiysk Dragoons approached Perekop, the border of the Crimean Republic. A few Crimean Tatars and one ancient cannon were all that defended the new republic.

The Perekop garrison let the aggressor into its territory with embarrassment.

An agreement was signed with the Crimean government, under which General Vasilchikov's detachment took over guarding the Crimea, and the Crimean government, led by their President, undertook to support us. Soon, by order of General Denikin, the government was overthrown, and Mr. President left the borders of his state.

When our advance units arrived in the Crimea there were no Volunteer Army units there. There was only the head of the Volunteer Army centre in Simferopol with a list of known volunteers. Only after a half-squadron of the Novorossiysk entered Simferopol, followed by the main forces of General Vasilchikov's detachment, were small units of volunteer detachments actually formed. The practical defence of the Crimea from the enemy, outside and inside, lay entirely with the forces General Vasilchikov's detachment when they arrived, and for the first few months on the 3rd Novorossiysk Dragoon Regiment – which defended the approaches to the Crimea and eliminated communist uprisings in the peninsular (campaigns in January at Alibunar and Evpatoria), etc.

In early March 1919, units of Colonel Ilyin's volunteer detachment, Markov units, etc., also arrived at Perekop.

On 23 March 1919, Old Style, we fought a bloody battle near Yushunya, alongside Greek troops. The Bolsheviks broke our defences by crossing the Sivash²⁸ and attacking us on the right flank and rear, while the front had a successful defence. Our units withdrew to the Akmanai positions. The 3rd Novorossiysk Regiment was ordered to detain the enemy in the area of Karasubazar, which we did. Our other units, supported by the British fleet, fortified their Akmanai positions. The Novorossiysk Regiment and a squadron of Alexandria Hussars, retreating on completion of their task, were ambushed in the mountains near Islamterek and suffered heavy losses, including the valiant regimental commander Colonel Gusev, and the adjutant of the time, Shevchukov. The commander of the squadron of Alexandria Hussars, Colonel Kartsov, was seriously wounded and a few days later reached our outposts only half alive.

On Easter night around one o'clock in the morning we approached Theodosia, already abandoned by our units. There was an Orthodox church a few versts from Theodosia towards the Akmanai positions. We rode up to the temple and entered its dark vestibule. There were no people praying in the temple. Only a very elderly priest was conducting a service. After all we had been through, that Easter service in an almost unlit church made an unforgettable impression on the weary soldiers, especially when the priest turned to face the dark and empty church and said "Christ is risen" and a hundred voices answered enthusiastically "Truly risen"! I will never forget the expression on the face of that astonished priest.

I have gone beyond the epic, described by G.G. Sakovich, which ended with the Ekaterinoslav campaign, and included the incorporation of the Crimea into the territory of the Volunteer Army and its defence until the arrival of the Volunteer Army, because I wanted to emphasise the role played by Colonel Gusev – who died a heros death – creating the possibility for heroism by the Ekaterinoslav campaign's participants.

Note. All information about the day and place of the battles was taken by me from the appendix to my service record, given to me at the end of the campaign. So I was unable to talk about those battles in which I did not personally participate.

²⁸ The Sivash is the set of lagoons between the Crimea and the mainland. Although they are marked as sea in most maps, they are frequently shallow enough to wade.

