

**Failed campaign to India:  
Ataman Boris Vladimirovich Annenkov and his detachment in Xinjiang.**

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The article is devoted to the life and fate of Lieutenant-General B.V. Annenkov, one of the leaders of the White Guard movement in Siberia. It focuses on the little-known pages of his life in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China. Having suffered defeat in the Russian Civil War, Annenkov's White troops found themselves in a China torn apart by a bloody civil war. It was not easy to understand the alien customs and political situation. China in those years was divided by the Civil War front lines into many regions, with their own marshals and "supreme rulers". Many wanted to use Annenkov and his detachment for their own purposes, which had nothing to do with Russian national interests. In southern China and Xinjiang, the influence of the Communists and Soviet military advisers and volunteers was strong. It was this circumstance that largely determined the tragic fate of B. V. Annenkov. One of the heroes of the White movement, Ataman Annenkov spent about three years in a Chinese prison, and later was handed over by the Chinese authorities to Soviet agents and secretly taken to the USSR, where he was shot in August 1927.

*"I have seen many Russian leaders, some even great men, but I have never seen a man like you, so I'm sorry when such a man suddenly makes a mistake and gets caught out..."*

From Li-Shou-Qing's letter to B.V. Annenkov

In recent years, we have learned a great deal about the Russian emigration in China. But most of the sources known to us, archival documents and publications are devoted to Russian Harbin, Shanghai, and the activities of their most prominent representatives: writers, poets, architects, artists, etc. As before, the history of the Russian emigration in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) remains little studied. This applies also to the fate of B.V. Annenkov and his detachment in Xinjiang.

The documents of the State Archive of the Russian Federation, deposited as part of the foundation of the philosopher and publicist, chairman of the Carpathian-Russian National Committee in New York, Dmitry Nikolaevich Vergun, can help researchers. Until 1945, Vergun's documents were kept in the Russian Foreign Historical Archive in Prague. After the end of World War II on 13 June 1945, the government of Czechoslovakia adopted a resolution to the transfer of the archive as a gift to the USSR Academy of Sciences. On 13 December 1945 it was sent from Prague to Moscow by military transport in nine cars. The documents arrived in Moscow on 3 January 1946. In January 1946, a meeting of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences was held, at which it was decided, in view of the special value of the documents, that they be deposited with the USSR State Agrarian Research and Social Council. Documents placed in the basement of the Central Archives in Building 5, Bolshaya Pirogovskaya Street. In this way Vergun's archives reached the Russian Federation. The archive is of interest for researchers of the Russian emigration in China. Annenkov appears in only one box, number 73, entitled "Documents on the stay of Ataman Boris Vladimirovich Annenkov in the Xinjiang Province of China" with authentic correspondence, orders, notes and other materials. In it are letters Annenkov sent to the Chinese military and civil authorities, letters sent to Annenkov, orders given by Annenkov, a map of the initial deployment of his detachment on Chinese territory with explanations, drawings and poems by Annenkov, business cards and other documents.

Of great interest are the photos of Annenkov, his partisans, Chinese troops, and others. It was the documents of this box that served as the source material for the preparation of this article. It should be added that it remains a mystery how these documents appeared in the Vergun's personal archive, as he had nothing to do with either China or Annenkov.

Boris Vladimirovich Annenkov (1889-1927) is one of the brightest and most tragic figures in the history of the Civil War in Russia. After graduating in 1906 from the Odessa Cadet Corps, then in 1908 from the



Moscow Alexander School, he was appointed to the rank of cornet in the 1st Siberian Cossack "Ermak Timofeevich" Regiment, commanded a *sotnia*, and then served with a Cossack Regiment in Kokchetav.

Annenkov served during the First World War in the 4th Siberian Cossack Regiment. In 1915-1917 he successfully commanded an independent partisan detachment, created to carry out reconnaissance and sabotage tasks in the enemy rear. Military operations, Boris Annenkov graduated with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He was decorated with domestic and foreign orders, including two St George's Crosses and a golden St George's Sword for bravery.

The October Revolution caught Annenkov and his unit in Belarus. The Bolshevik command ordered the detachment to move to Omsk and disband. Following the order, Annenkov and the unit arrived in Omsk in December 1917, where by that time a large number of Cossack units had been concentrated. But he did not obey the instructions of the Soviet of Cossack Deputies on demobilisation and was outlawed.

By the spring of 1918, the Ataman's detachment increased to 1,000 men. Well organized and disciplined, it became one of the active anti-Bolshevik forces in Siberia. In the middle of May 1918, Annenkov's Cossack detachments, together with Gaida's Czechoslovak units, with the support of the White underground, launched active hostilities against the Bolsheviks. The Soviet government was overthrown in Omsk on 7 June 1918. In October 1918, the detachment was transformed into the "partisan division named for Annenkov", which was originally part of the 2nd Steppe Corps. But Annenkov always maintained his partisan independence, often not following the orders of commanders.

The ataman sought a kind of military democracy in his units. It was possible to become an officer only after passing through all the ranks, starting with the private. There were other rules in his detachment. The formal "*gospodin*" was replaced by "*brother*". A greeting was answered with "greetings!", a thank you with "old chap", and a congratulation with "thank you". The detachment's banner was inscribed the motto "God With Us" and had embroidered their emblem in the form of a human skull with two crossbones.

Many were attracted by the ataman's personality: he did not play cards and other games of chance, did not smoke, did not drink alcohol, was not involved in scandalous love affairs – all of which distinguished him favourably from many commanders of the Civil War era. Alcohol was forbidden in his partisan division, and drunks were banished. One of the newspapers of the time reported

"The ataman has no staff and retinue, only a typist and messengers. Profanity for the third time results in expulsion. There is exemplary discipline, good equipment, all three arms, and it is dominated by educated youth, the Cossacks and Kirghiz.

Lieutenant-General A. P. Budberg, head of the Siberian Government's Military Ministry described Annenkov:

This ataman is a rare exception among other Siberian varieties of that rank; his detachment has an iron discipline, the units are well trained and perform heavy combat service, and the ataman himself is a model of bravery, fulfilment of duty and soldier's simplicity of life.

On 15 October 1919, Admiral A.V. Kolchak promoted him to Major-General in a decree which added:

Ataman Annenkov for his military distinction and exceptional bravery, shown in the battles of 12-14 October, is awarded the Order of the Holy Great Martyr George of the 4th degree.

Boris Annenkov's military and personal fate is connected with the events on the Semirechensk front. In early December 1918, his division participated in the liberation of the south-eastern part of modern Kazakhstan from the Bolsheviks. Soon Major-General Annenkov was appointed commander of the Independent Semirechensk Army. His army's main task was to eliminate the Cherkassk Defence – the resistance around the villages of Lepsinsk and Kopalsk, held by the Red forces. In the occupied settlements Annenkov acted both by persuasion and coercion. On 10 January 1919 he issued an order to the population of the occupied Urzhar district, which read:

The detachment entrusted to me has arrived in Semirech'e to fight against Bolsheviks, to establish law and order, peace and quiet. With regard to the population we will keep absolutely equally impartial, whether it is a Cossack, peasant or Kirghiz. I have put an end to



the old order, as many of us were, thanks to our darkness, in error. Only those who deliberately led you to this ruin will be punished. But in the future, I warn you, anyone who is again found guilty of offences against the existing state order, violence, robbery and other crimes, will be severely punished.

The sale of alcoholic beverages was prohibited in the districts occupied by Annenkov's troops. Those guilty of making and selling them were brought to court-martial. Annenkov ordered drunkards to be arrested for 14 days and imposed a fine of one thousand roubles on them. Annenkov had a peculiar attitude towards prisoners of war: he attracted many to serve in his troops. As he wrote, Red Army soldiers were accepted into his units to atone for their guilt with blood. Even the ataman's personal escort, consisting of 30 Cossacks, had half who were former Red Army prisoners who had distinguished themselves by special courage in battles.

By June 1919 the White troops were able to organise an offensive, achieving temporary successes by August. However, the turning point in favour of the Red Army, which occurred in the summer of 1919 along the entire Eastern Front, also affected the situation in the Semirech'e. The main stronghold of the Whites – the city of Semey (Semipalatinsk) – was occupied by the Red Army units on 10 December. The White command tried to organise resistance with its scattered units, but they could not change the situation in their favour. On 29 February 1920 the Red Army command gave Annenkov an ultimatum to lay down arms, but he declined.

As a result of an offensive of the Bolshevik Turkestan Front, by the end of April the main settlements of Semirech'e were occupied. The White troops by this time, having overcome the Dzungarian Gate Pass, had concentrated in Ataman Annenkov's headquarters in the "Eagle's Nest". Major-General Annenkov and his representatives personally and by correspondence conducted intensive negotiations with the authorities of the Chinese province of Xinjiang about the possibility of an organised transition of White military units to China. Consent was obtained on condition of complete disarmament by Annenkov's detachments with the retention only of the officers' personal weapons and rifles for his personal escort for, "guarding the money box and headquarters". Annenkov managed to negotiate the possibility of selling spare arms and surplus medical supplies to the Chinese government.

The negotiations nearly ended in failure when some Russian units crossed the Chinese border without permission. After Annenkov's apology and the arrest of the guilty parties, permission from the Chinese authorities to cross the border was nevertheless obtained. As a gesture of goodwill, the Chinese side provided Annenkov with oxen to transport the artillery and other heavy cargo. Ataman Annenkov wrote to General Yang-Fu-Sia, who ensured the transition of Russian troops to China:

After more than two years of heavy civil war, due to the current military circumstances, I with my units had to leave the occupied area and move to the Chinese border for the transition to China. Yesterday I had an opportunity to be with you personally and to talk to you regarding questions concerning the transition. Your attitude towards me and my partisans shows that you understand our situation and realise that it is painful and difficult for us, who fought and shed our blood for the Motherland, to leave it behind. On behalf of all officers and partisans I bring my sincere gratitude for the reception and help given to us.

The organised crossing of Ataman Annenkov's units across the Chinese border began on 28 April 1920.

Annenkov depicted the history of his detachment, then an army, in a poem:

When the people of Russia were languishing under the oppression of Bolshevism,  
Our little detachment rose up in revolt.  
We went into battle, leaving our wives, homes and mothers,  
We fought the Reds, wishing to gain peace ...  
For two years we fought the dark power, losing hundreds of men.  
Many died bravely, to the devils' bullets.  
Alas, capricious fate is stronger than us,  
The foolishness of the people has not passed, the hour of victory has not come.  
And Kolchak himself, the chosen one of the rich, was shot in Irkutsk at the hands of executioners.



We fought for a long time in Semirech'e, on five fronts,  
But it seems that the sentence of the Almighty was upon us.  
We had to leave everything behind and go to the Selkinski peaks, taking shells, cannons and carts.  
Without bread, without shelter, it was a terrible journey,  
Weary on the road, shivering in the snow all night.  
So retreating step by step, we made our way to the border.  
We calmly repelled the Reds' attempts to attack us.

The White troops retreating to China found themselves in a difficult position. In May-June 1920, a significant portion of the troops (about 5,000, including soldiers from Lieutenant-General A.I. Dutov's detachment<sup>1</sup>) returned to Soviet Russia, with the consent of the Ürümqi Governor-General.

At the request of the Chinese authorities, Annenkov's units were forced to disarm, which they only did partially. The issues of food and financial supply for the troops and the followers that came with Annenkov to Xinjiang became acute. Annenkov's units had to engage in unauthorised requisitions, and even robberies, to relieve the food problem. Meanwhile, Ataman Annenkov secretly bought arms and ammunition from the Chinese authorities, trying to make up for the lack of weapons after their surrender to the Chinese authorities.

By the time of the border crossing, Annenkov's army included many volunteers – Chinese, Kirghiz, Kazakhs and Taranchis. This was to cause a problem in relations with the Chinese authorities. Soon after crossing the border a independent Manchurian regiment from Annenkov's army, which was made up of Chinese citizens, was from him without his consent and re-subordinated to Lieutenant-General Yang-Fu-Xia, the commander of the Ili district. In reply to Annenkov's protest, the latter replied rather sharply that the Manchurian regiment was Russian only up to the moment of crossing the frontier, and that once over the border the whole regiment consisted of Chinese citizens. General Yang-Fu-Xia attacked Annenkov personally in his reply, writing:

You write that your soldiers are not engaged in robbery. But not only are your soldiers engaged in robbery, but you too at the head of them. I have heard a lot about you, and about your bravery as the commander of the Semirechensk army, and suddenly you are engaged in robbery. You write that you have telegraphed to Beijing and Ürümqi – that is your prerogative, you can telegraph anywhere.

Later there followed another sharp letter to Annenkov from the general, in which the latter insisted:

I ask you to answer urgently on what basis and for what reason your last action was initiated. Since there has been no message from you. If there is no reason, why are you engaged in robbery?

These actions by Annenkov and his detachments created an extremely tense atmosphere of conflict between Annenkov and the Chinese authorities. The commander of the Xinjiang province of China and the Governor-General of Xinjiang, Yang Zengxin, in particular wrote:

The province of Xinjiang is part of the Chinese state, under the law of all civilised nations. By international law, any foreign military detachment entering the territory of a foreign state and seeking refuge there, must fully obey the laws of the state – which the foreign detachment entered – strictly. Such a detachment must obey with the conditions on the basis of which it was admitted to the foreign territory. Such a detachment has no right to unauthorised entry, and even less should such a detachment have a secret stock of arms and covertly acquire arms. Such a detachment is entirely subordinate to the supreme commander of the region into whose territory it is admitted ...

The poor attitude of the Kalmyks to the horses from Annenkov's herds did not assist in the normalisation of relations. The Chinese representatives, in response to Annenkov's, complaints wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Dutov was ataman of the Orenburg Host. He had retreated with some of his men to the Semirech'e, and fought alongside Annenkov. He crossed to China at the same time, but his forces were separate.



The Kalmyks are a wild people, with whom one should act skilfully, because threats and the like will make them even worse. It is their custom to ride on other people's horses and they do not even consider the horses of their own authorities. And they think this a feat. Therefore it is necessary to not have a harsh attitude with them, but on the contrary, to lure them with compliments or small rewards of money, which would be better.

Initially, Annenkov's detachment was stationed at the "Vesely" camp on the Beretala River, where it waited about a month for the Chinese authorities to decide on its fate. Annenkov wrote:

At present, the detachment is camped on the Beretala River, without any indication as to what lies ahead.

It should be noted that all the ataman's actions were closely monitored by Soviet intelligence who had good information about him. Here is how the detachment's initial period of stay in China is characterised by a Soviet agent who was in the detachment:

Annenkov came from Eagle's Nest with a detachment of 350-400 men, and bringing with him a lot of all kinds of property, up to and including cars. He had a large amount in gold and property. With a very vigorous commercial ability, Annenkov from the first days dwelling on the Beretala began to carry out all kinds of financial transactions with both Chinese and Russian merchants. He became especially closely associated with the Chinese military authorities, who, as is well known, are never averse to speculation.

While working as a merchant, he at the same time did not abandon his ambitious aspirations for conquest. His unit gradually grew to 1,000 men. He took care of the horses. He purchased and sewed uniforms for his partisans. He began to communicate with Sidorov and Shcherbakov. In short, he prepared his detachment for a possible action, as well as looking for allies and like-minded people.

But for some reason the attitude of the Chinese military authorities to him changed. Friction began between Annenkov and Jen-Shou-Shi. The Manchurian regiment, which had previously served with Annenkov and then switched to Chinese service, was taken away from Beretala and quartered in the Ili Valley. The fact was that although the Chinese had placated the commander of the Manchurian regiment, Tai Ju, the Manchurian partisans had always gravitated towards Annenkov and there was a danger of them openly defecting to his detachment. Thus, Annenkov was deprived of reliable support, as he himself did not have many weapons.

Then 1,000 horses, which had been given to the Kalmyks to herd on the order of the Chinese authorities, via the Kalmyk prince Seth, were detained in the mountains, so almost the whole Annenkov's detachment was without horses. These and many other facts showed Annenkov that his song was sung, and that the Chinese, having worsened his conditions, were now complete masters of the situation.

Rumours began spread of his desire to go to Kashgar, then of him going across the border. In short, the man seemed to be floundering, trying to preserve his prestige and position. He was becoming more and more dependent in relation to the Chinese authorities, and it became clear even to him that he would have to obey all Jen-Shou-Shi's demands. When it became obvious that he must change his position and move to the Ili Oasis, Annenkov the conqueror disappeared, and Annenkov the merchant remained

Leaving the Beretala camp, Annenkov and his detachment redeployed to the Iliya region, to Jimpan. On 15 August 1920, the detachment began a march to the provincial capital of Ürümqi, where it remained until early September. With the permission of the Chinese authorities, the detachment relocated to the town of Qitai (Gucheng), where a camp was set up. There was another conflict while in Qitai between Annenkov and the Governor-General of Xinjiang, Yang Zengxin, who pointed out to the ataman that it was unacceptable to close the Qitai city gates and install machine guns on them. The governor-general also unequivocally threatened:





We, the Xinjiang authorities, have taken all measures, having prepared everything necessary for self-defence. Therefore, Russian people, I suggest that you surrender to our officials all your military weapons, ammunition, machine-guns, lances and so on ...

Annenkov maintained strict discipline in his unit. He wrote:

... we, the interned troops, should keep ourselves as strict as possible, so that all the dirty accusations and lies that are being made against us will not be confirmed.

Annenkov wanted to keep his detachment and to take it on a march to India. He wrote to the deputy of the Upper Chamber of the Xinjiang Province Li-Shou-Tsin:

It will be very difficult and even impossible for us, a small handful of people, to continue the struggle. We will die, but then our names will be mentioned in the future, in history – as people who died for truth and order, and not people who lived idly at a time when there is a struggle with the Bolsheviks in many parts of Russia. I consider a march to India will be very difficult, even unprecedented in history, but you know very well that if a man wants to do a thing, he will do it, even if faced with incredible difficulties. Perhaps many of us are not destined to reach the goal, and to die on the way, but that is fate, and that is God's will. We believe in God and put our destiny in his hands ...

The Chinese authorities tried to prevent Annenkov's detachment from remaining as a combat-ready unit and sought to prevent any march to India. His friend, the deputy Li-Shou-Qing, tried to persuade Annenkov to disband the detachment and leave for Beijing. He wrote:

I advise you to personally go to Beijing, where you can get meet with the embassies, and then you can firm up your case. I hope that then you will have more privileges, as well as be known to all the powers, which also allow you to justify yourself and remove all the slander, which spoils your reputation quite a lot.

Li-Shou-Qing discouraged Annenkov from going to India:

Therefore, frankly from the bottom of my heart, I advise you once again to listen to me as your friend, disband the partisans and go to Beijing. At least you are known, and it will make you known again to all the powers there, so that in the event of changes in Soviet Russia, you can again achieve your goal without any obstacles. Do not think that you leaving the detachment, will leave you an unknown stranger – if you think so, you are mistaken. Your present circumstances not only force you to leave the detachment, but in the future remaining with the detachment, may deprive you of your life. This situation and the circumstances around them mean you must leave your unit, or part with them, just as great men have been forced to abandon their troops, as Napoleon, etc.

And if you cannot separate from you detachment and instead head with it to India via Kashgar, the question is whether you will achieve your goal or not. Will your troop endure that difficult trek or not? And what will you achieve then? There are many complaints already against you from refugees, even from your former partisans, and the embassies of all the powers in Beijing think of you as a robber and plunderer. Why then not chose fame (for fame's sake), but enter into the submission of a nation like England – have you forgotten their attitude to Russia two years ago?

Frankly, I tell you that you now complain about the treatment of the Chinese, Kalmyks and so on, but I am sure that once you are on English territory, will only remember the kind and hospitable attitude of our people towards you. But, alas, it will be too late then. After the march through Kashgar to India with your insignificant partisans, and reaching India, you will be under the thumb of the English. They will keep you in their sights and will not be bothered by international treaties and agreements, and so you would be their pawns. Of this, I assure you, there have been quite a few examples.

And your government would look at you as a bandit who fled with his gang to India, as a result of which you would not be a hero and a defender of the Motherland, but an anarchist. The



heroic feats and labours which you rendered for your country for 6 years, from the beginning of the European war, through the civil war and up to the transition to China, would be wasted.

And also do not forget your own words – that they kissed your feet and met you with bread and salt, then the same people started shooting you in the back. Also do not forget your assistant, in whom you believed and trusted, Mr Asanov, who cheated you due to the situation. Consider that everyone is the same, and anyone can change due to different circumstances. Frankly speaking, I have seen many Russian leaders, some even great men, but I have never seen a man like you, so I'm sorry when such a man suddenly makes a mistake and gets caught out.

Annenkov ruled out for himself the possibility, even on the most favourable terms, of leaving his detachment – of abandoning the people who had entrusted him with their fate. On 17 June 1920 he wrote from the "Vesely" camp

How could I abandon the people who fought with me for six years, to almost certain death? I can't do that, it's beyond me, it's beyond me. I think that if we have no means of subsistence and are not allowed to move to England, the Chinese Government will allow us to engage in peaceful labour, and we will find a way of working to earn our keep. While we have laboured for six years with arms, it does not mean that we cannot work as ordinary citizens.

Annenkov's attempts to find a compromise with the Chinese authorities were unsuccessful. This was largely due to the growing Soviet influence in Xinjiang at that time. In March 1921, he was arrested by the Chinese authorities and imprisoned in Urumqi. Only the repeated appeals to the Chinese authorities by the former chief of staff of the Semirechensk Army, and Annenkov's best friend, Major-General N.A. Denisov, as well as to the envoys of the Entente countries, was Annenkov released in February 1924.

He decided to completely withdraw from participation in the White Guard movement and to engage in breeding pedigree horses. After his release from prison, Annenkov, together with Denisov and a small group that had remained loyal to him and waited for his release, headed deep into China. The small Cossack community settled near the town of Lanzhou, where they organised a horse farm.

At the same time, various influential forces did not abandon their attempts to use Annenkov and his authority for their own purposes. Immediately after his release he received numerous offers to join the activities of anti-Soviet organisations, to unite and lead various military groups and detachments. Annenkov avoided active activity in every possible way and planned to move with his loyal Cossacks to Canada, where he intended to continue the business he had started – breeding thoroughbred horses. Unfortunately, they failed to obtain permission from the Canadian authorities to enter that country.

In the end, Annenkov accepted the offer to join his detachment to the Russian grouping of Chinese troops under the command of General Zhang Zuolin. Annenkov wrote:

Gathering the partisans and their organisation is my cherished dream, which has remained with me for five years ... And I will take up doing so with great pleasure ... Judging from the numerous letters I receive from my partisans, they will assemble at the first call. All this gives me the hope of assembling a considerable detachment of loyal, brave and tried men in a fairly short time. And this detachment should be one of the cadres around which future units will be formed. I paid the most important attention to the area of Gulja, where there is a rather large, well-organised group, which – despite the proximity of the SovDep – has not fallen down, and holds firm.

Annenkov's plans were not destined to be realised. The commander of the Chinese 1st People's Army, Marshal Feng Yuxiang, who fought against Zhang Zuolin was close to the Bolsheviks: with the help of Soviet military advisers, was able to seize Generals Annenkov and Denisov by trickery in April 1926 – for a large cash reward. Both generals were handed over to Chekists operating in China, after which they were taken to the USSR via Mongolia.

The trial of Annenkov and Denisov began on 25 July 1927 in Semey. Their accusation read:



Since the October Revolution, being at the head of armed detachments they had organised, from 1917 to 1920 they systematically conducted an armed struggle against Soviet power with the aim of overthrowing it.

Both defendants held themselves with remarkable courage and dignity during the trial. They refuted many accusations convincingly. In particular, the accusation that Annenkov had shot soldiers from his detachments who wished to return to Soviet Russia was not substantiated. The indictment stated:

We judge Annenkov for monarchism in thought, concretely manifested in actions, for his extremely dangerous actions to restore the Tsarist regime.

By the verdict of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, on 24 August 1927 Generals Annenkov and Denisov were shot.

