

# **A Montenegrin in Russian Service: General Bakich**

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Russian Way, Moscow, 2004

ISBN 5-85887-200-X

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The book is published with the financial support of V. N. Bashkin and the non-profit foundation for perpetuating the memory of the participants of the White Movement "Memory of Honour".



## Pygmy Wars Introduction

This is a rough and ready translation, and is not to be relied upon for details.

The Russians tend to give all ranks and names in full, but for brevity I have opted to use shorter forms, so I have generally left out that officers are “of the General Staff” or Generals “of Infantry”. In the extreme, “Supreme Ruler and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of all land and sea armed forces of Russia, Admiral A. V. Kolchak” becomes simply “Admiral Kolchak”, since we all know who he was.

I have left out all the original references, as anyone wanting to read them would be reading this in the Russian anyway, leaving only explanatory footnotes. My own footnotes are indicated with “PW”. Similarly I have left out all the official order numbers, and often who issued them, as being irrelevant to my readers.

Personal names are given in the form of their home country, so Čeček not the Russian Chechek etc. An exception is General Bakich himself, rather than Bakić, given that he was serving in Russian armies throughout his whole adult life.

Ranks are given in their equivalent English versions. I have not bothered to distinguish those specifically Cossack or cavalry ranks – so *esaul*, *rotmistr* and *kapitan* are all “captain”.

I have mostly given place names in their modern form in the country they are now in, even though the original book uses Russian names. An exception has been made for some with well-known English names (Moscow, Volga River etc). I have generally indicated if the name has changed significantly since the RCW by placing the old version in brackets the first time it appears, but many others have minor spelling variations.

Chinese place and proper names are a major issue, because there are so many different ways they can be transliterated. I have tried to find the most common English version, but I could not locate some of the places. I have found a period map for Xinjiang that does show many of the places, and especially the rivers, which are otherwise very hard to locate.

Given that the emphasis is on the Russians in this story, I have not worried too hard about the Chinese and Mongolian names as their positions indicate who they are anyway.



## Original Introduction

*If we consider history as a process in which the main role is played by the activity of individuals, we have every right to see the individual as the only factor of history, in relation to which everything else, which we willingly imagine also operating in history, merely sets the conditions.*

H. I. Kareev

The name of one of the leaders of the White Movement, a Montenegrin by nationality, Lieutenant General Andrei Stepanovich Bakich is inseparably connected with the time of the Revolution and the Civil War in Russia. It reminds us not only of the bright heroic pages of the history of the White struggle, but also of the tragic period of the exodus into exile of the remnants of the eastern White armies. Despite the important role Bakich played in these events, his life and activities in relation to one of the turning points of national history have not yet been truly studied. The current historiography in some ways even prevents any objective view of Bakich, directing the reader down the wrong path.

It is safe to say that the Latin phrase *vae victus* (woe to the vanquished) applies both to Bakich's fate in his lifetime and to what was written about him after his death.

Soviet historians adopted a pejorative attitude towards Bakich. One author, I. E. Molokov, allowed himself to call him no other than:

... that stupid adventurer with the outlook of a sergeant. During the twenty years he lived here, he learnt to wear a military uniform, but did not master the Russian language. He didn't read books; he had an aversion to them. His general's uniform did not add to his intelligence.

The same author characterised Bakich's companion, the outstanding White partisan leader, General R. P. Stepanov, with:

It never occurred to him that he was just a pawn in the hands of Japanese, British and American imperialists.

Sounds impressive, but how far from reality! The same author writes that Bakich did not deny his involvement in Dutov's murder, and this fact for him is tantamount to Bakich's confession to the organisation of the murder, actually carried out by Soviet intelligence.

V. K. Shalaginov, who briefly gave a biography of Bakich, was much more sophisticated in his judgements. He was a Soviet journalist, close to the intelligence services, who in the late 1960s and early 1970s had access to the materials of Bakich's investigative case. His task was to give readers an impression of Bakich's complete mental inferiority and to discredit the general by skilfully falsifying facts, sometimes departing from reality. Only in recent years have serious studies begun to appear, including in Bakich's homeland, which contain a more balanced assessments of his activities. Unfortunately, these works devote only a few pages to him, and the facts of his biography are often mixed with assumptions.

In addition to these works, which directly touch upon Bakich's biography, I have gathered a considerable array of both general and specific studies covering the events of 1914-1922, of which Bakich was an active participant. I would like to single out the military-historical works of the 1920s to 1940s on the history of the First World War and the Civil War, which retain their scientific significance. In particular these works, when conducting detailed analysis of some of the operations of the Civil War, actively used archival documents from the White armies, which was typically not done in subsequent Soviet historiography of the Civil War. In preparing the study I also used reference publications.



As for the biographies of the commanders of the White armies of Eastern Russia, only a few works – those devoted to R. Gaida, V. O. Kappel', A. V. Kolchak, R. F. Ungern von Sternberg, and M. V. Khanzhin – can be considered serious monographic studies at the modern scientific level, both in domestic and foreign historiography, although some of these works are not free from errors. It is regrettable that very few serious works of the biographical genre appear. It seems fair to agree with one of the authors of the *Sentinel* magazine, published in exile:

Thanks to the abundance of materials and memoirs, the cause of the White struggle on the southern front is covered very thoroughly. Enough is known about it and its heroes, participants and losers to have a clear, general picture of the era and a characterisation of all its leaders. But the other fronts of the struggle, especially the Siberian one, in general do not have enough information. Apart from individual names and the general course of events, we have no clear and detailed concept of it. Our acquaintance with the prominent leaders and with the very nature of the Ural-Siberian situation is especially weak.

In addition, since the opening of access to the archival collections on the history of the White Movement, no special work covering the history of the struggle in 1919-1920, the exodus to Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) and the further fate of the units of the Independent Orenburg Army has appeared so far. This book is intended to fill these gaps to some extent.

My research is based primarily on previously unknown and, in the vast majority of cases, still unpublished archival documents. In total, 82 items from 32 folders in three central archives (the Russian State Military History Archive, the Russian State Military Archive, the State Archive of the Russian Federation), two regional archives (the State Archive of the Orenburg Region and the Centre for the Documentation of Contemporary History of the Orenburg Region), and one public archive (the Library-Foundation "Russia Abroad"). In addition, materials from the manuscript collection of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography of Chelyabinsk State University (provided by E. V. Volkov), as well as the home archives of V. N. Bashkin (Voronezh), I. A. Gergenreder (Berlin), and E. V. Zakharyina (Orenburg) were used. From published sources, paradoxically, for the first time the sole miraculously preserved copy of I. Elovsky's brochure "The Hunger Campaign of the Orenburg Army" (Beijing, 1921), is published in the appendix – thanks to the efforts of the outstanding emigrant researcher I. I. Serebrennikov. Also included are materials from the unique collection, "Orenburg Cossack", published in Harbin in 1937.

The sources used in the work can be divided into the following groups: 1) official records; 2) diplomatic and official correspondence and 3) documents of personal origin (memoirs, diaries, personal correspondence). The first group includes Bakich's service record, petitions and award documents, war logs, and orders for those Siberian rifle units in which he served during the First World War. In addition, these are orders, instructions, analytical notes, investigative materials, logs of military operations of VI Orenburg Army Corps and II Orenburg Cossack Corps, combat schedules, sketches, maps and charts of combat operations of Bakich's division and corps, other units and formations of the South-Western Army, Orders of the Supreme Ruler and the Commander-in-Chief and his Chief of Staff, orders for the Orenburg Military District, the South-Western, Independent Orenburg and Independent Semirechensk Armies, as well as records of the Red Army from the collections of the Russian State Archive of Military History and the State Archive of the Russian Federation. In addition, I used materials about the service of officers of Bakich's detachment, preserved in the personal archives of V. N. Bashkin and E. V. Zakharyin. Of particular importance for determining the political views of Bakich and his staff are Bakich's political orders for the corps, proclamations and the political programme developed by his staff in the summer of 1921. No less significant for the final stage of his struggle are the intelligence reports of the [Soviet] Turkestan Front headquarters, questionnaires and testimonies of officers



from Bakich's corps surrendering to the Reds. This group of sources also includes the minutes of the Military *Krug* of the Orenburg Cossack Host published in a separate book, publications of operational documents, the testimony of Ataman B. V. Annenkov concerning Bakich's detachment, the information reports of the ChEKa covering the state of Bakich's detachment in China, as well as materials from the trial of the Socialist-Revolutionaries with whose activities the Bolsheviks tried to link Bakich's work. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find documents covering Bakich's activities in the second half of 1917 and the first half of 1918.

Bakich's official correspondence is mostly kept in the collection of the State Archive of the Russian Federation. Primarily these are letters from Bakich himself, relating to the period of 1920-1921 and addressed to Chinese authorities, Russian diplomats and military. A number of Bakich's telegrams on operational matters from the earlier period, 1918-1919, have been preserved in the Russian State Archive of Military Affairs. Some of them reveal to some extent the complex relationships within the White command. In addition, I have used numerous telegrams and operational reports from various units and formations of the South-Western, Independent Orenburg and Southern Armies concerning events in which Bakich was involved. The published documents of diplomatic correspondence characterise the diplomatic preparations for the introduction of the Red Army units into China and Mongolia in 1921 to eliminate Bakich's troops, as well as the situation of Russian diplomatic representatives in China during his stay there.

The documents of personal origin used by me are quite diverse. One of the most valuable sources is the unpublished memoirs of Major-General of the General Staff S. A. Shchepikhin, Bakich's colleague in the People's and Southern Armies, "The Southern Army of Admiral Kolchak's Eastern Front (July-October 1919)". These memoirs are extremely interesting and informative, but at the same time extremely difficult as a source. Their author saw only negative traits in everyone around him, which says much about the morbid ego of the author himself. The psychological portraits of Shchepikhin's colleagues are especially interesting, which he placed at the end of the memoirs. He also wrote a psychological portrait of Bakich. Also very valuable is an unpublished military-historical essay of the Chief of Staff of the Independent Orenburg Cossack Platoon Division, Colonel of the General Staff A. Y. Leyburg, dedicated to the Southern Army, "The Southern Army of the Eastern Front in 1919". Leyburg's work, being of memoir-research in nature, deals primarily with military issues. The personal correspondence of Dutov and Bakich, relating to the period 1920-1921 can be used. The analysis of the letters of the two generals, which I have discovered, allows me to draw conclusions about the nature of the relationship between the leaders of the White movement in the East of Russia. The unpublished notes and diaries of Orenburg Cossack officers A. O. Pridannikov and I. V. Rogozhkin show the views of junior officers on the events that took place. The worldview of the lower ranks who fought in Bakich's troops in 1918-1919 is reflected in the memoirs of A. F. Gergenreder, recorded by his son I. A. Gergenreder and described by the latter in correspondence with the author. A curious characterisation of Bakich is contained in the manuscript of the memoirs of the village teacher F. Uteshev. The unpublished diary of the military official A. I. Efimov covers in detail the events of Bakich's corps' march through China. Of considerable interest are the published memoir-research works of generals I. G. Akulinin and N. N. Golovin, Bolshevik military and political figures G. D. Gay, N. F. Evseev and P. P. Sobennikov, Bashkir political and military figures A.-Z. Validov (Z. V. Togan) and M. L. Murtazin, the politician and scientist I. I. Serebrennikov, and V. I. Petrov, a descendant of Russian emigrants. The views of socialist-revolutionaries are reflected in the memoirs of the participants of the anti-Bolshevik movement, included in the collection "The Civil War on the Volga in 1918." Published memoirs and diaries of generals V. G. Boldyrev, A. P. Budberg, K. Y. Gopper, D. V. Filatiev, B. A. Shteyfon, Voivode J. Mishin, officers N. N. Goleevskii, N. Dutov, I. Elovskii, G. V. Enborisov, K. Noskov, S. E. Khitun, military doctor L. E. Golovin, Soviet military and political figures K. K. Baikalov, N. I. Kiryukhin, M. N.



Tukhachevsky and other participants of the events. In addition to documents of personal origin, materials from periodicals were used in writing the work.

The documents are published and quoted in accordance with the modern rules of spelling and punctuation while preserving the stylistic features of the original.

All dates up to 1 (14) February 1918 are given according to the old style.

Unfortunately, the source base for this topic is characterised by its poor preservation, fragmentation and dispersion, which naturally greatly complicates the work of researchers. This peculiarity implies a comprehensive analysis of all available materials and a wide application of the historical-comparative method.

In addition, during the period of preparation of the work I did not have access to the materials of the investigation case of Bakich, stored in the State Archive of the Novosibirsk region, because at that time the prosecutor's office of the Novosibirsk region was considering the issue of rehabilitation of those convicted. In addition, the documents about Bakich in the archival collection of the Museum of Russian Culture in San Francisco remained unavailable. Perhaps in the future I will be able to familiarise myself with these materials. In this paper, I will attempt, based solely on facts, to trace Bakich's life path from beginning to end and to show the role of this man in the history of the anti-Bolshevik movement.

I express my sincere gratitude to V. N. Bashkin, grandson of Staff Captain G. M. Naumenko, who served in General Bakich's detachment, and to the non-profit foundation for perpetuating the memory of the participants in the White Movement, "Memory of Honour", for financial support.

I consider it my duty to express my gratitude to my supervisor and editor of this book, Candidate of Historical Sciences O. R. Ayrapetov; reviewers: Candidate of Historical Sciences E. V. Volkov (Chelyabinsk) and Candidate of Historical Sciences V. Zh. Tsvetkov (Moscow); to my friends and colleagues: V. B. Kashirin, A. S. Kruchinin (Moscow) and V. G. Semënov (Orenburg), in conversations and sometimes in disputes with whom my point of view was corrected; to the staff of archives and libraries who assisted in the work on the book: T. Yu. V. Doronina, N. E. Eliseeva, L. N. Sakharova (RGVIA); N. I. Abdulaeva, T. V. Zaslavskaya, L. I. Kulagina, L. I. Petrusheva, A. A. Fedyukhin (State Archive of the Russian Federation); E. N. Akimova, I. N. Akimova, I. F. Reve, and L. A. Savina (GAOO); V. A. Shokov (CDNIOO); and P. Polanski (Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii).

I would also like to thank my dear parents for their attentive attitude to my research.

## The Years of Peace

*The Montenegrins? – Bonaparte enquired: Is it true: this evil tribe does not fear our forces?*

*A S. Pushkin*

The Bakić family, according to the Montenegrin researcher D. Martinovic, came from Zabrdje near Andrijevica. The most prominent representatives of this family were Ljubomir A. Bakić (1877-1925) – the chairman of the Great Court and Minister of Justice in the cabinet of Prime Minister of Montenegro (1913-1914) Janko Vukotić – Mitar Z. Bakić (1852-1903) – professor of the seminary in Cetinje, and later Montenegrin diplomatic representative in Constantinople – and, finally, the latter's nephew – Russian general Andrei Stepanovich Bakić.

Who were the Montenegrins in the second half of the 19th Century? By the mid-nineteenth century, Montenegro had about 130,000 inhabitants. According to the 1910 census, the population was 220,000. The country was isolated from the outside world by its mountains. The vast majority of the population lived in rural areas, farming and herding, crafts were poorly developed, and industry was virtually non-existent until the early 20th Century. Since the end of the 18th Century Russia had consistently supplied Montenegro with bread, as the Montenegrins always lived with the threat of famine.

Orthodoxy was firmly established in Montenegro, uniting the disparate Montenegrin tribes. The people believed that the cowardice of one man disgraced his entire clan. They had a strong spirit of collectivism and were proud and fearless warriors, attached to their land. The head of the family held undisputed authority. At the same time, customary law and blood feuds were widespread in the country.

In 1852 Montenegro had been proclaimed a principality. From 1860 to 1918, the country was ruled solely by a skilful and tough ruler, Prince Nikola Petrović-Njegoš (from 1900, King). Emperor Alexander III said of him on 20 May 1889: "I drink to the health of the only and sincere friend of Russia – Prince Nikola of Montenegro". The basis of Montenegro's budget was Russian subsidies. As a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 Russia's ally gained access to the Adriatic Sea and became fully independent from the Ottoman Empire. The construction of a new, united Montenegro began, and the inter-tribal discord gradually disappeared. The training of officers and combat support of the Montenegrin army was carried out by Russia. There was an extremely close connection between two countries, supported by dynastic marriages of the prince's daughters with Russian grand dukes.

On 19 (31) December<sup>1</sup> 1878 Andrija Bakić was born in Montenegro. He graduated from the primary schools in Andrijevica and six of the eight years of the 3rd King Alexander I Gymnasium in Belgrade. In the documents relating to this period of his life, the school administration mistakenly recorded him as a Serb,<sup>2</sup> but he was not destined to live in his homeland.

On 24 June 1899 there was an assassination attempt in Ivanidan on the Commander-in-Chief of the Serbian army, Milan Obrenović (1854-1901), the pro-Austrian former king of Serbia. The ex-king and his adjutant were wounded. Responsibility for the assassination attempt was attributed to the opposition Serbian People's Radical Party, whose leaders, led by Nikola Pašić, were arrested after the attempt. Their involvement in the assassination attempt was not proven, but Pašić was forced to place the blame on himself and his associates. Ex-King Milan insisted on the execution of the

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps 30 December.

<sup>2</sup> It must be said that up to the 20th Century the Montenegrins did not separate themselves from the Serbs, and such a substitution could be in the order of things.



radicals, but that punishment was strongly opposed by Russia. The actual executor of the assassination attempt, the soldier Knežević, was executed. The young Bakich was also accused of involvement in the attempt and was expelled from the country for it. Bakich travelled to Constantinople from Serbia, most likely to his uncle.

Obviously life prospects for a young ambitious Montenegrin were minimal in the capital of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th Century. So it is not surprising that he soon went to seek happiness in Russia, in Odessa. On 7 February 1900, at the age of 21, he volunteered for military service in the 4th Company of the 60th Zamosts' Infantry Regiment, enrolling in the Odessa Infantry Cadet<sup>3</sup> School.

The Odessa School was founded in 1865 as an infantry cadet school. In contrast to military schools, cadet schools admitted people with incomplete secondary education, and therefore their course of study was much easier. According to the plan of the Minister of War, General D. A. Milyutin, the cadet schools were to raise the general educational level of officers to fully meet the army's demand for officers (previously it had been the practise to promote officers from non-commissioned officers and volunteers on the basis of length of service, without any general educational qualification).

Initially, the Odessa school was supposed to train one company (200 cadets) at a time, but by the beginning of Alexander III's reign, 400 cadets were studying at the same time. The training course was designed to be two years long and consisted of two classes: junior general and senior specialist. The programme included the subjects: religion, Russian language and literature, history, geography, mathematics, drawing, physics, chemistry, tactics, fortification, regulations, weapons, military administration, military legislation, military topography and methods for teaching lower ranks.

In 1903 the school was transferred to a three-year course and was granted a flag. On 1 September 1910 it was transformed into a military school. In total from 1866 to 1902 the school graduated 4,701 students. Cadets wore white shoulder-boards<sup>4</sup> with scarlet lettering and the cipher "O. Ю.". The school holiday was celebrated on 23 April.

It should be noted that when entering the Russian service Bakich, "swore allegiance to the service, but did not take the oath of allegiance to Russia", formally remaining a Montenegrin subject. Apparently, he expected to return to his homeland when the charges against him were a matter of history, and in no way guessed that his fate would be linked with that of the distant country that sheltered him for the rest of his life.

Bakich, who had a sixth-grade gymnasium education, thus had the rights of a 1st Class Volunteer and could be enrolled in the school directly, having obtained at least seven points in the Russian language exam. The young Montenegrin was lucky, he entered the school relatively easily, whereas by 1903 people like him with sixth-grade education, due to their poor preparation, had to sit an additional entrance examination in mathematics that was introduced for the junior colleges.

The head of the school during the period of Bakich's studies was Colonel E. A. Fersman. Having entered the school during the academic year, Bakich was unable to complete the junior course and was held for a second year. Nevertheless the future officer made a fairly successful career at the school – a year or so after entering he became an NCO, and in his senior year he reached the rank

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<sup>3</sup> The Russian uses *Yunker*. PW.

<sup>4</sup> The large flat straps that carried unit and rank markings in the Russian army. As some Tsarist units also had epaulettes proper, I have translated *pogoni* as shoulder-boards. PW.



of squad leader. He graduated in the first category and was released from it on 8 August 1902 with a promotion to Ensign.<sup>5</sup>

The motto of the Odessa school read: “One for all, and all for one!” This and other similar mottos became the life credo of the graduates of the school. It is characteristic that Bakich’s life path – never abandoning his subordinates – fully corresponds to this musketeer motto.

As a First Class graduate of the school, Bakich had the right to be promoted to an officer rank regardless of the vacancy. By 5 September 1902 he was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant at the Kursk manoeuvres, which were held in front of the Tsar. The two-week manoeuvres, during which Bakich became an officer, were held in August-September 1902. They involved 154 battalions, 76 squadrons, one *sotnia*<sup>6</sup> and 348 guns. The men in these large-scale exercises were divided into two armies: the Moscow Army under the command of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich and the Southern Army headed by the Minister of War, General A. N. Kuropatkin. The Southern Army included the troops of the Odessa Military District, in which Bakich served. A composite battalion was formed from the students of the Odessa, Kiev and Chuguev schools, which became part of IX Army Corps. Cadets underwent intensive training for the exercises in camp in Darnitsya.

It was assumed that the Moscow Army would be on the offensive, while the Southern Army would retreat to Kursk – to defend the city until the approach of reinforcements, after which Kuropatkin’s troops would attack at Orel. In reality, everything was reduced to a grandiose show, which had nothing to do with the requirements of modern warfare. In particular, at the end of manoeuvres Kuropatkin attacked the fortified positions of the Moscow Army near Kastornaya, without serious artillery preparation, in dense columns, as he himself with a large entourage went ahead of his troops. Nevertheless, the victory was awarded to the Southern Army.

According to the memoirs of one of the Odessa school officers:

The weather during the manoeuvres was quite rainy, which was hard on the cadets when marching 30-35 kilometres, but there were no laggards or sick. There was a burning desire to see the Tsar. ... The penultimate day was particularly difficult. The march began at 5 a.m. We moved “with fighting” during most of the day. Only at 8 p.m. did they start to bivouac – but pitching tents and making fires was forbidden. That day we travelled about 50 kilometres. But we were not allowed to rest for long; at 3 a.m. the battalion was ordered to form up and start crossing the Seim River ford. The water was above the waist and very cold. Weapons, ammunition and overcoats had to be carried over our heads. Having safely crossed the Seim, the battalion “entered the battle”, having completely fulfilled the task assigned to it.

At 9 a.m., the manoeuvres were over, and both armies bivouacked at Makva Sokolskaya. At the end of the manoeuvres, Emperor Nicholas II rode to the Southern Army and a general parade was held. The head of the school, Colonel Fersman, was promoted to major-general. At the same time Bakich was formally promoted to officer rank. Soon the school’s students returned to Odessa.

Officer service for the future general was not easy – successful promotion was hindered by his poor health. Despite a healthy lifestyle (in particular, he did not drink alcohol at all), illness followed the young man. In 1895 he suffered from typhoid fever, in 1902 pneumonia, and in 1905

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<sup>5</sup> This is a particularly Russian rank, along with the slightly higher *praporshchik*. Although approximately Warrant Officer in level, they was generally held by juniors and not senior rankers, so I will translate it as “Ensign”. PW

<sup>6</sup> A Cossack squadron. PW

a skin disease. Eventually Bakich's health was undermined so much that he even had to leave the military, but we will come to that later.

After graduating from school, Bakich joined the 60th Zamosts' Infantry Regiment, in which he had enlisted during the period of training. He was almost immediately given temporary command of a company. In the future he had to perform various tasks: to participate in the correction of the plan for the Odessa neighbourhood, to supervise new recruits, and to be the battalion adjutant. In the summer of 1903 Bakich received a prize in the regimental shooting competition. It must be said that marksmanship was a distinctive feature of Montenegrins, and Bakich was no exception.

With the outbreak of war with Japan, the young officer was transferred to the 8th East Siberian Rifle Regiment on 14 February 1904, and all his further service up to his retirement in 1913 took place on the far eastern outskirts of the empire. A month later Bakich arrived at his new place of service and was appointed to the post of battalion adjutant. The regiment was stationed in the Primor'e<sup>7</sup> region and was part of the South Ussuri detachment, created to repel a possible Japanese landing in Primor'e. The detachment's task was to contain the enemy until the approach of Russian troops from Manchuria but, since the Japanese did not dare to land in the South Ussuri area during the war, the regiment did not directly participate in any battles.

In March 1905 Bakich was assigned to the 4th East Siberian Rifle Regiment, in which the young officer waited until the end of the war without taking part in the fighting. In the regiment the future general once more served as battalion adjutant, was in charge of the mess and was a quartermaster, as well as for some time commanding a non-combat company. He was awarded the Order of St. Stanislaus, 3rd class on 31 January 1906, by order of the Commander-in-Chief of all armed forces operating against Japan, General of Infantry N. P. Linevich, "for excellent diligent service". Soon, with the end of the war, Bakich's regiment was disbanded, and the young officer was assigned to the 8th East Siberian Rifle Regiment of the 2nd East Siberian Rifle Division, located near the Chinese border in the remote area of Barabash, Primor'e (80 km from Ussuriysk), which he left for on 9 June 1906.

There Bakich had to deal with familiar matters – he was again appointed regimental quartermaster, and in addition, was in charge of the baking. In general, until the outbreak of the First World War, Bakich's army service was mainly in such, largely secondary, economic positions. Perhaps, he himself aspired to these positions, because he possessed the necessary commercial spirit for such activity or simply a certain prudence. The period of 1906-1909 in the life of the now lieutenant (promoted on 20 November 1906) Bakich seems to me to be a time of rather routine service in various official positions: more than two years of commanding a non-combat company, as well as temporary command of various other companies during the absence of their commanders.

It was during this period that he started a family, linking his life with fiancée Olga Konstantinovna Danich, an enviable catch for an army officer and Montenegrin. The father-in-law of the young officer, Major General Konstantin Alexandrovich Danich, born on 14 September 1854, came from the nobility of St. Petersburg province. He had distinguished himself during the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 in the battle at Gorny Dubnyak on 12 October 1877, where he was wounded in the head. Despite the serious injury he continued his military service, reaching the rank of general. From 20 January 1907 he commanded the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd East Siberian Rifle Division – the one in which Bakich was serving at that time. Olga Konstantinovna gave her husband a boy, Mikhail, on 16 January 1909, then another, Vladimir, on 29 March 1911, and finally, on 2 December 1912, a daughter, Elena.

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<sup>7</sup> *Primor'e* often spelled *Primorye*, is a the name for the area officially *Primorskiy Krai*, which literally means "coastal province", and is the region around Vladivostok. The Ussuri River forms much of its western border with China. PW



As it is known, an officer's life and even that of his family depends on the orders of his superiors, so in August 1909 Bakich, his wife and seven-month-old son were forced to leave their home. He was seconded to Ussuriysk (Nicol'sk-Ussuriysk), to the location of the 5th East Siberian Rifle Regiment (from 5 August 1910, the 5th Siberian Rifle Regiment) later being transferred, which only took place on 16 January 1910. Bakich served in this unit until his retirement.

Although on 20 November 1910 he was promoted to staff-captain, little changed in his life as an officer – he still substituted for absent company commanders, without having a permanent position. For a year and a half, from February 1911, Bakich was attached to the Intendant's Office of I Siberian Army Corps. Immediately upon his return to his regiment he was seconded to study military engineering, after which he was on leave with pay for six months. The allowance received by Bakich on service during this period (as of 10 February 1913) was 1,531 roubles (948 roubles as salary, 300 roubles extra, 246 roubles for housing and 237 roubles for length of service). Having returned from leave to his regiment at the end of January 1913, Staff Captain Bakich was dismissed after a week and a half for a new leave period, "until he is discharged without pay."

The reason for these spells of leave was his serious medical condition. On 23 January 1913 Bakich was examined by a commission of doctors at the local Ussuriysk infirmary. He complained to the commission members that:

He could not hear well in the right ear after inflammation of the middle ear. Constant sore throat. Weakness, fatigues quickly, poor appetite.

Bakich attributed his painful condition, which began in the spring of 1912, to the poor conditions of service.

During the examination, the commission found:

Diet is bad. ... Face wrinkled; hair on head missing on parietal and frontal bones. All glands slightly enlarged in size, especially the cervical glands. ...

In the commission's conclusion it was noted:

His state of health does not meet the requirements for service as a line officer. He is subject to dismissal on grounds of ill health. Upon retirement he is entitled to a pension from the State Treasury. ...

Having submitted a petition to the Tsar, Bakich in June 1913 retired with enlistment in the Primor'e infantry militia<sup>8</sup> and engaged in commerce – required to support his wife and three young children. According to some sources, he spent about a year working as a travelling salesman for the Russian-Mongolian Trade Partnership. However, his retirement did not last long – as in July 1914 Russia entered the First World War.

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<sup>8</sup> The *Narodnoe opolchenie*. PW



## The German War

Due to the outbreak of war on 31 July 1914 Bakich was mobilised into the militia, in which he was enlisted. While militia status could not suit a retired career officer, the outbreak of the great European war opened up prospects for a quick promotion. So in August 1914 Bakich applied for enrolment in the 44th Siberian Rifle Regiment, stationed in Omsk, but the Omsk Military District Headquarters instead appointed him to the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment, which was formed on the basis of a cadre of the 44th Regiment. It seems that Bakich was welcomed with open arms into the regiment – in the first days of mobilisation the unit received about 6,500 lower ranks, and the shortage of regular officers was very acute.

The 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment, under the command of Colonel M. I. Fukin, was part of the 14th Siberian Rifle Division of VI Siberian Army Corps of Lieutenant-General F. N. Vasil'ev (alongside the 13th Siberian Rifle Divisions). The corps became part of the 1st Army under the command of General P. K. Rennenkampf. Formally still retired, Bakich went to the front together with the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment. On 25 November 1914, during a respite between battles, he submitted a petition to the Tsar. In the accompanying document addressed to the regiment's commander Bakich wrote:

I present herewith a petition to the Tsar, concerning my reassignment to military service. I inform you that my letter of resignation was submitted to the 44th Siberian Rifle Regiment on 22 August this year, but I was appointed to the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment by the Headquarters of the Omsk Military District.

The text of the petition itself read:

Retired Staff-Captain of the 5th Siberian Rifle Regiment Andrei Stepanovich Bakich requests the following: Having a desire to re-enter Your Imperial Majesty's military service, I ask: to this effect, that I be appointed to the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment.

25 November 1915.

To be submitted to the Commander of the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment. This petition was written from the petitioner's words by Rifleman Strygin. Staff-captain Andrei Stepanovich Bakich attached his signature to the petition.

It seems that Bakich did not know how to write Russian (one of the lower ranks also wrote his resignation request for him). As it turned out later, the petition was incorrectly drafted, and, in addition, Bakich had not actually submitted a letter of resignation.

It was only on 12 January 1915 that the Tsar allowed that, "retired Staff-Captain Bakich, a member of the foot militia, in the Primor'e region, is assigned to the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment". As a result of his resignation Bakich lost almost a year and a half of seniority at the rank of staff captain. His previous seniority at that rank was established from 1 September 1910, while the new one was established only from 25 February 1912. During the First World War, Bakich's former seniority was restored, as later documents mention the original version. For the first two months after its formation the regiment in which A. S. Bakich was enrolled served as guards on the Siberian railway. On 19 September 1914 was sent to Smolensk for further passage to the front. Subsequently, the regiment participated in combat operations on the North-Western and Northern Fronts.

The regiment left Omsk on 22 September in six trains. In the first was the 1st Battalion commander, Captain Mogilnikov, and the commander of the 2nd Company of that battalion, Staff-Captain A. S. Bakich (the battalion company commanders were three staff-captains and one lieutenant). From Smolensk the regiment was sent via Polatsk to Siedlce, where all trains arrived on 3-4 October. Upon arrival the regiment was quartered in villages in the vicinity of Siedlce. Bakich's battalion was



stationed in the village of Zelków. From 7 to 10 October, company, battalion and regimental tactical exercises were conducted, after which the regiment was transferred to the Novogeorgievsk fortress (Modlin), not going via Warsaw. It did not have to stay long there, as until the end of October the regiment was almost constantly on the march along the muddy Polish roads. On 24 October the regimental holiday was celebrated – there was a prayer service and the lower ranks were given better food. On 30 October the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment had 49 officers and 3,764 riflemen. These statistics allow us to see how horrifying the casualty rate would be in the future in the regiment.

The Łódź Operation was taking place on the North-Western Front at that time. That battle followed on from the preceding Warsaw-Ivangorod Operation, as a result of which the German 9th and Austrian 1st Armies were defeated and were forced to hastily retreat south-westwards towards Silesia. After the failure the Germans, who knew the exact disposition of the Russian troops thanks to a radio interception, had a plan for a deep strike in the flank of the advancing Russian 2nd, 4th and 5th Armies. At the same time, the Russian *Stavka*,<sup>9</sup> not understanding the actual situation at the front, was implementing its plan for a “deep invasion of the German Empire”, which was to involve four armies and more than 40 divisions. To cover the offensive from East Prussia, the 1st Army had to cross to the right bank of the Vistula River, as a result of which its connection with the 2nd Army was extremely weak. Meanwhile, the Austro-Germans deployed groups in Galicia and East Prussia (auxiliary groups of up to four corps), but their main blow was with the forces of the 9th Army, under the command of German General August von Mackensen. They struck at the weak point of the Russians, towards Kutno and Łowicz – the junction of the Russian 1st and 2nd Armies.

On 31 October the riflemen of VI Siberian Rifle Corps were deployed to support the defeated V Corps at Włocławek, which had been hit by the main blow of four German corps. Entering the front line for the first time, its units crossed the Vistula near Płock and were included in the detachment of Major-General S. P. Bylim-Kolosovskiy.

The Germans, having defeated V Corps, began to develop their success southwards in order to reach the Bzura River, where the German Commander-in-Chief in the East, General von Hindenburg intended to deploy his troops to strike at the rear of the 2nd Russian Army. The main goal of the Germans, according to the strategy laid down by von Clausewitz, was the defeat of Russian troops, not the capture of Warsaw as the Russian command assumed. Initially Bakich’s regiment was in reserve, but on 2 November it received an order to go on the offensive and took part in the battle near the town of Gostynin. Surprisingly, in the first battle Staff-Captain Bakich distinguished himself.

Unless you count the Russo-Japanese War, in which Bakich did not participate, by 1914 he still had no combat experience. However, the First World War revealed completely new and unexpected features in him. In combat conditions Bakich – whose army career had consisted almost exclusively with economic issues – showed himself to be an outstanding officer. He repeatedly and deliberately put his life in mortal danger for the sake of the successful fulfilment of his combat tasks. On the one hand, the Montenegrin Bakich may have been particularly keen on the idea of helping his fellow Serbs and Montenegrins (he later said that he was a Slavophile by conviction), or alternatively, due to his serious ill health, he had nothing to lose. Perhaps both of these factors could have combined.

The 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment and the neighbouring units had a difficult task – they were almost at the tip of Mackensen’s “battering ram” and tried to advance at the same time. So on 2 November 1914 there was a terrible counter battle in the area of Gostynin, which Bakich must have remembered for a very long time. At the beginning of the battle, his regiment took up

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<sup>9</sup> Russian Supreme HQ.



defensive positions and entrenched itself. However, the soldiers of the neighbouring 55th Siberian Rifle Regiment could not hold and began to retreat, which threatened the flank of the 56th Regiment. Bakich remained calm and rushed to stop those fleeing to the rear, managing to hold about 60 soldiers retreating from the front line and joining them to his company.

Shortly after the battalion commander, Captain Mogilnikov, went missing and as the most senior of the company officers left in the line Bakich had to take command of the battalion. The Siberian riflemen experienced a barrage of machine-gun and shrapnel fire for the first time. But Bakich kept his presence of mind and at the head of the battalion covered the withdrawal of the neighbouring units.

On 3-5 November 1914 his battalion occupied the left combat section of positions near the village of Szczawin-Kościelny near the town of Gąbin, which the enemy threatened to out-flank. For three days it repulsed all the attacks of superior German forces and managed to hold the position, for which he was later awarded a St George Sword. The regiment suffered huge losses in personnel, including officers, at this time and the sight of so many dead and wounded in the trenches made an oppressive impression on the surviving lower ranks.

On 5 November the Germans shelled the regiment's positions at night, which had a strong morale effect on the riflemen. In spite of everything, orders came from above to hold on at all costs. But the riflemen, who were at the limit of their abilities, could no longer hold their positions and retreated with heavy losses, leaving behind their wounded and two machine guns. But Bakich was not a man as to accept such failure! Having learnt about the abandonment of the machine guns, he rushed to the empty trenches and:

... with several lower ranks of the 2nd Company and the machine gun team he removed the remaining two machine guns and, having met some cows during the retreat, put the machine guns on them and thus not a single machine gun fell into enemy hands.

On the night of 4 November, the Germans began to encircle the Russian 2nd Army. At the same time the Commander of the North-Western Front, General N. V. Ruzskiy, gave an order to change the direction of the front by 90° in order to repel the onslaught of the German 9th Army by facing north. On 8-9 November 1914, during the crucial days of the Łódź operation when military fortune almost returned to our troops, Bakich commanded the regiment's 1st Battalion in a battle near Slubice on the Nida River, for two days successfully repulsing German attacks directed at his sector. In the morning of 9 November the situation was complicated by heavy fog. In total, the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment held its position near the village of Slubice for 27 hours, under continuous enemy fire. The companies suffered serious losses. After the battle, some 900 riflemen and two machine guns remained in the line.

As a result of General Ruzskiy's counter manoeuvre, on the night of 11 November the German group attempting to surround the Russians itself became encircled and began to retreat. The Germans had neglected the fighting capabilities of the Russian troops and paid for it. According to the modern Austrian scholar W. Rauscher, the Germans barely managed to avoid the "threatening disaster".

Despite his military exploits, in November Bakich was returned from commanding at battalion level to company level, being appointed commander of the regiment's 1st Company. In his new position he again managed to show himself at his best. On 18 November, during an attack on Skowroda, Bakich's company captured a German officer, fifteen soldiers and twelve horses, along with the officer's diary, maps and field manual. The company was also able to recapture about 50 soldiers from neighbouring units which had been taken by the Germans the previous day.





On the same day, after the concussion of the commander of the improvised detachment, Captain V. Zhezhelevsky, Staff Captain Bakich replaced him in that position. Bakich halted the detachment's retreat, fired at the enemy near the villages of Jadzień and Petrowo, and continued the withdrawal while fighting.

Overall in the November fighting, the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment took severe losses – by 23 November, when it was withdrawn to the rear, only five officers and 325 lower ranks with four machine guns remained in service. The 14th Siberian Rifle Division in the period up to 17 November, had lost 269 officers and 11,905 men from the ranks.

The rest period was short-lived, and already by 30 November Bakich's regiment was again taking part in combat operations.

From 18 November to 4 December, the Germans launched a new offensive, which ended in failure. On 1 December, at Karolków Rybnowski village (near Sochaczew) Bakich was wounded by shrapnel in the head and legs and was concussed, but remained in the line. Fate preserved him for future events. At a medical examination it was found that:

On the right side of the neck, on the right cheek bone are abrasions with bruises; on the right temple there is swelling and soreness; on the left shin is bruising and two abrasions, the right arm is partially paralysed.

Despite the wound, concussion and the fact that his right arm was only partly working, he continued to command the riflemen as it was suddenly noticed that on the left flank Russian soldiers had begun to cross over to the enemy and surrender. In the situation Staff-Captain Bakich, responded:

An order was passed along the chain of the first half-company of the 1st Company to shoot those who surrendered and a warning was given that any who surrendered at all would be shot.

However, such threats did not help but rather the opposite – surrendering became a mass event. Bakich then had to make a difficult but necessary decision in the situation and he ordered his 1st Company to open fire on those surrendering. At the same time he had to fire on the enemy as well.

The next day the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment was withdrawn into the reserve with four officers and 15 lower ranks with three machine guns. The entire VI Siberian Army Corps had been virtually annihilated in this fighting. From 3 to 15 December Bakich was on convalescence at the regimental base. After the Battle of Łódź, the 13th Siberian Rifle Division was replaced by the 3rd Siberian Rifle Division.

During this period Russian troops left the Łódź bridgehead and made a retreat manoeuvre to occupy defences along the Pilica, Nida, Bzura and Rawka Rivers. The fighting became positional in nature for a long time: the opponents were separated by a narrow strip of land from one hundred to six hundred paces wide. Thus, the original plan for an attack into Silesia, despite the Russian successes, was thwarted. By 10 December, the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment, whose personnel had been almost completely replaced within a month due to the huge losses, had re-formed the 1st Battalion, with Staff Captain Bakich in command. After this the regiment returned to the front line.

In January 1915 Bakich was promoted to captain. Then a whole stream of awards deservedly fell on him. So on 28 January 1915 he was awarded the Order of St. Anne, 3rd Class with Swords and Ribbon, "for distinction in the affairs against the Germans". On 19 May he was awarded the Order of St. Stanislaus, 2nd Class with Swords, and on 28 May the Order of St. Vladimir, 4th Class with Swords and Ribbon. The last of these awards Bakich received for the already mentioned battle at Slubice. In the same year, "for honour in deeds against the enemy", Bakich was awarded a St



George Sword. The grant, made as early as 9 February 1915 by the commander of the 1st Army, was for the fighting on 3-5 November 1914 and was approved by the Tsar in June.

Between January and April 1915, Bakich participated in the fighting around the villages of Humin, Wola-Szydłowiecka and Dolowatki and on the Rawka River. The Wola Szydłowiecka manor, in the area where Bakich fought, has a sad reputation in the history of the First World War on the Eastern Front. On 21 January 1915, Mackensen's troops took possession of the settlement as a demonstration. Fearing the fall of Warsaw, General Ruzskiy threw units from eleven divisions into the fight for it on 22-23 January. In the course of the operation the Russian losses amounted to over 40,000 officers and men. Later, due to mistakes by the Front command, XX Army Corps was surrounded and defeated by the Germans in the Augustów forests. In February 1915 VI Siberian Army Corps, in which Bakich served, was included in the 2nd Army. On 14 March 1915 General Alekseev was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the North-Western Front in place of General Ruzskiy, who had fallen ill. There was a lull at the front during this period, which lasted until the end of May.

In the spring of 1915, Bakich, in addition to his main position, was also chairman of the commission for the verification of regimental accounts, which in my opinion shows both great confidence in him and his personal integrity and exactingness.

On 29-31 May 1915 he once again managed to prove himself as an officer of outstanding qualities. At about 18:00 on 29 May the enemy opened heavy fire on the whole seven kilometre section occupied by the regiment. The fire was so strong that there was a continuous smoke screen from shell bursts along the sector – it was impossible to distinguish a person standing only a couple of paces away. According to Russian calculations the enemy were simultaneously firing at least 3 to 4 heavy and 8 to 10 field batteries.

All the trenches, passages and strongholds occupied by the regiment came under fire. The shelling lasted for fifteen hours without a break. Some of the trenches were destroyed and even levelled to the ground, many riflemen were buried or crushed. One officer was killed, two more were concussed. In addition, the artillery preparation destroyed liquids intended to protect against asphyxiating gases, with very serious consequences for the very next day.

On 30 May between 04:00 and 04:30 the Germans released chlorine against the regiment's sector. Our lower ranks put on masks in the trenches and opened up rifle and machine-gun fire, as it became clear that the Germans were about to go on the offensive. The masks leaked gas, and every 15 minutes they had to be wetted with a solution of hyposulphite ( $\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_3$ ) or water. In total the Germans released gas two or three times. From 06:00 onwards, the regimental headquarters began to receive reports from section chiefs with requests for support and stating that all the officers and riflemen were poisoned and that the gases were highly toxic. At 07:00 the commander of the 1st Battalion, Staff-Captain Bakich, reported that his battalion continued to hold its ground, despite the enemy attack and the poisoning of more than half of the personnel!

For his actions on this day Bakich, was mentioned in orders and in the resolution of the St. George's Council:

Being in position after the enemy had released suffocating gases and most of the officers and about half of the lower ranks had suffered from them, and when the neighbouring sector had been broken through as a result of the enemy's onslaught, whilst being under a hurricane fire of light and heavy enemy artillery as well as rifle and machine gun fire, he courageously and calmly took decisive measures to counteract the spread of the Germans and thereby halted their further advance and saved his men from the threatened danger of being overrun by the enemy.



For the fighting of 29-31 May 1915 Bakich was given the highest combat award which could be claimed by a lower ranking officer – the Order of St. George, 4th Class. The award took place in the late summer of 1916 – more than a year after the feat.

On the night of 31 May the Germans tried to attack in some areas but were repulsed. The whole next day there was an artillery firefight, and on the night of 3-4 June the regiment withdrew to the Army reserve. During 29-30 May, as a result of the gas attacks and shelling, the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment lost 21 officers and 2,922 riflemen, leaving only nine officers and 578 riflemen in service. As A. A. Kersnovskiy wrote, “the 14th Siberian Division perished almost entirely”. Bakich himself was treated for the effects of poisoning at the regimental base from 4 to 12 June.

Nevertheless, by the end of June he and his subordinate battalion again took an active part in the fighting. In particular, he attacked the enemy on 27 June at the head of the 2nd and 4th Companies in order to fill a gap between the battalions of the 53rd Siberian Rifle Regiment. Despite heavy artillery fire with shrapnel and HE, Bakich’s companies crossed an open area before they descended into a gully and lay low, thereby managing to fulfil their task of closing the gap between their units.

From 14 June 1915 Bakich was appointed temporary commander of the MG and scout detachments,<sup>10</sup> in addition to commanding the regiment’s 1st Battalion. The corps in which he served was transferred to the 4th Army in June. In July-August 1915, Captain Bakich took part in the retreat from Poland and heavy fighting at Lublin, Parczew, and on the Bystrzyca, Wieprz and Zielawa Rivers. At the same time as his combat work, he was also engaged in the usual economic issues of his previous service – in particular, in September 1915 he was chairman of the commission for the examination of boots.

In autumn 1915-winter 1916 the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment fought battles near Slonim, Baranavichy, Daugavpils, Riga, and along the banks of the Daugava River, with Bakich part of the regiment. From October 1915 VI Siberian Corps became part of the 12th Army of the Northern Front under the command of General V. N. Gorbatovskiy. The fighting took on a positional character for a long time.

An order of the 14th Siberian Rifle Division of 24 February 1916 read:

In order to equalise the staff officers of the division among the regiments, Lieutenant Colonel Bakich of the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment is temporarily attached to my regiment.<sup>11</sup> ...

On 1 March Bakich – together with his personal attendant, P. Starodubtsev, a 2nd Company rifleman – arrived at his new place of service and on 3 March was appointed commander of the 3rd Battalion. With Bakich there were five staff officers in the regiment (its commander was a colonel and the four battalion commanders were lieutenant colonels).

By 15 March he had been appointed to supervise the foot scouts and sapper detachments, as well as the service and training of grenadiers.<sup>12</sup> In the same month he became chairman of the regimental court, and the first verdict he signed was a death sentence in a case of a self-inflicted bullet wound.

On 23 April 1916 Lieutenant Colonel A. S. Bakich was formally transferred to the 53rd Siberian Rifle Regiment and was finally removed from the lists of the 56th Regiment. On 8 March VI Siberian Army Corps was thrown into an attack on German positions near Salaspils and suffered huge

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<sup>10</sup> I have translated *komando* as “detachment”, but you often see it as “team”. PW

<sup>11</sup> The 53rd Siberian Rifle Regiment, under Colonel P. P. Shramkov.

<sup>12</sup> Presumably men specifically assigned to throw grenades. PW

losses, after which General Gorbatovskiy was removed from the post of commander of the 12th Army, and command was assumed by General R. D. Radko Dmitriev.

Judging by the regimental documents, Bakich enjoyed quite a lot of authority among the regimental commander and subordinates in his new post. In a relatively short period of time he became effectively the second in command of the regiment. Together with its commander, Colonel Shramkov, he examined the training detachment, and from 8 to 26 April he even replaced Shramkov during a period of leave, by order of the 12th Army Headquarters.

On 9 July 1916 the troops of the VI Siberian Army Corps went on the offensive at Bauska, which ended in failure – the 3rd and 14th Siberian Rifle Divisions lost about 15,000 men in six days of fighting. After this failure, the previously envisaged broad offensive operation by the entire Northern Front was curtailed. In September 1916 Bakich was still in command of the 3rd Battalion, presided over the regimental court, and was simultaneously deputy commander of the regiment. It was during this period that he found he had been awarded the Order of St George, 4th Class.

On 17 December 1916 Bakich was promoted to colonel, with seniority from 14 December 1915. Soon, on 28 December, in a battle near Skudr-Ogle, he received a concussion, and the regimental order noted:

General concussion, expressed by dizziness, vomiting, shaky gait, pain in the lower back and pain in the left side of the head and hearing loss in the left ear. Remains in active service, although in need of evacuation.

Despite the need for treatment and rest, Bakich continued at his post and a month or so after being promoted to colonel, he was appointed commander of the 55th Siberian Rifle Regiment (14th Siberian Rifle Division, VI Siberian Corps, 12th Army).



## Revolutionary Upheavals

Bakich took temporary command of the 55th Siberian Rifle Regiment in the first days of January 1917 under very dramatic circumstances. On the night of 23 December General Radko Dmitriev had ordered the 12th Army to go on the offensive west of Riga without any artillery preparation. The operation was of a local nature. The Russian troops were opposed by the German 8th Army. The area chosen for the offensive was a wooded, swampy area with sand dunes on which strong German resistance nodes were located. These strongholds consisted of blockhouses, wooden entanglements, and rubble piles. The frozen peat bogs did not allow trenches to be dug, but the Germans created trenches from logs laid on the surface of the ground, covered with three rows of barbed wire.

The preparation for the operation was conducted in strict secrecy. Moreover, the German command was misled, as the Russians simulated the transfer of VI Siberian Army Corps to Romania. Meanwhile, it was that corps which was to strike the main blow in the upcoming offensive, in the direction of Jelgava.

In the 20-degree frost of the dark night of 23 December, the Siberian riflemen rushed at the unsuspecting enemy without firing a shot, having removed the bolts from their rifles. The success was complete: the LX Corps of the German 8th Army was crushed; the German 106th Division was completely defeated, losing its artillery. The trophies of the attack were over 1,000 prisoners and 33 guns (15 of which were captured by the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment of Colonel P. P. Shramkov, who was particularly distinguished). The Germans suffered countless casualties and 18 mortars and 40 machine guns were also taken. However the offensive then bogged down. The 12th Army headquarters were unable to organise it.

On 29 December the offensive was stopped. As a result of the Jelgava Operation, the Russian troops moved forward by 2-5 kilometres and the front was reduced by five kilometres, with 23,000 killed, wounded or captured.

The lack of artillery preparation at the beginning of the operation, which the soldiers would have preferred for its reassuring effect, became the reason for a mutiny in the 1st Battalion of the 17th Siberian Rifle Regiment – which on 23 December was joined by the lower ranks of other units, including a group of riflemen from the 55th Siberian Rifle Regiment. They refused to attack. The lower ranks of the regiment even threatened their commander, Colonel Popov, with bayonets. Fortunately for him revolutionary “self-consciousness” was just beginning to penetrate the soldier masses and the colonel was spared.

Treason and heroism manifested themselves almost simultaneously. On the same day the regiment’s Lieutenant Vasily Starikov died heroically, not betraying his oath, capturing a German machine gun but was then killed in a bayonet fight. He was posthumously awarded the Order of St George, 4th Class.

The regimental commander showed criminal leniency and did not punish those guilty of insubordination, and the next day did not order the execution of an agitator discovered in the regiment. The head of the 14th Siberian Rifle Division reported to the commander of VI Siberian Corps that:

In the battles near Riga on 23 and 25 December, the riflemen of some companies of the 55th Siberian Regiment refused to go into battle and threatened their officers with weapons. When the companies that remained faithful to their duty went into battle the riflemen of the disobedient companies left for the rear.



On my orders, at 15:30 hours on 25 December thirteen riflemen of the 5th and 7th Companies were shot by the riflemen of the same companies, in the presence of me and representatives from all the companies and regimental commands of the division, which were on the battle ground entrusted to me.

Order has been restored. Those shot were natives mainly of the Perm, Tomsk, Vladimir and Petrograd provinces. An investigation is under way. This incident was noted in reports to His Imperial Majesty, the Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Front and the commander of the 12th Army.

Although 1917 had arrived, the revolutionary upheavals that it brought had not yet come, so the army command took severe measures to restore discipline. The distraught Popov was dismissed from his post and sent to the reserve on the grounds of insubordination. According to wartime laws, disobedience of an order was punishable by firing squad. On 6 January 1917, a court-martial sentenced 37 of the 59 men of the regiment to death, accused of disobeying an order.

The very next morning, in the presence of the 14th Siberian Rifle Division, the sentence was carried out. A total of 92 lower ranks of II and VI Siberian Corps were executed for participation in the mutiny. On the night of 7 January, the 55th Siberian Rifle Regiment was withdrawn to the divisional reserve, where it remained until 16 January.

To restore order, Colonel Bakich, a resolute staff officer who did not shy from the harshest measures, was appointed commander of the regiment. On 19 January two more riflemen were shot. Through his actions Bakich managed to bring the Siberian riflemen back to proper order. He carefully checked the work of his subordinates and endeavoured to inspire them by personal example. In particular, during the night of 3 March 1917 Bakich himself, together with the commander of the 3rd Howitzer Battery, went on reconnaissance to find the location of the German trenches – an unorthodox act, to put it mildly, for the commander of a regiment.

The next day the regiment learnt about Nicholas II's abdication. A day later came the news of Mikhail Aleksandrovich's abdication. On 11 March the regiment swore allegiance to the Provisional Government, and on 26 March withdrew to the corps reserve in Tsenenhof. There, in early April, occurred one of those shameful and tragic events for the Russian army which, in one way or another, all units went through in the spring of 1917.

Bakich was in Riga at the time, at Army headquarters. On 9 April the regiment had not had any training since the morning. According to an entry in the regiment's war log:

At 13:15 a telephonogram was received from the 56th Siberian Rifle Regiment warning of a demonstration, the programme of which was as follows: the 56th Regiment, with music and banners was to proceed to the location of the 55th Regiment and both, to the sounds of the *Marseillaise*, were to go to the 54th Regiment, where a general meeting was to take place. Due to the fact that the companies were not told about the demonstration in time, they did not have time to organise to join their comrade demonstrators – who in full formation with banners and music, led by the Regimental Commander, to the continual sounds of the *Marseillaise* – approached the regimental headquarters. The riflemen, instead of joining the demonstrators in the parade, began to gather in separate groups, and expressed strong displeasure that they had not been informed in time about the celebration.

They also resented the absence of the officers and the regimental commander, who was currently in Riga, and after a few speeches of the comrades began to shout: "Down with the regimental commander, arrest all the officers, let Colonel Bakich stay in Riga, ask for Bakich's removal and appoint Colonel Popov in his place. ... "





Naturally, the demoralised soldiers were more satisfied with an old commander, who was cowardly and condoned disorder, than with a hard hand, as Bakich might be characterised.

After this shouting, some of the riflemen proceeded to the 54th Siberian Rifle Regiment, where a rally was held under the slogans of fighting for freedom, support for the Provisional Government and war to a victorious end. After the rally the lower ranks returned to the unit, embittered against some of the officers, and most of all against their regimental commander. The next day he returned from Riga. In the morning the riflemen began to gather in groups and discuss the question of the removal of some officers – the regimental commander, his deputy, the commander of the 3rd Battalion (Staff Captain Kravtsov, a veteran with several awards) and Ensign Shabunovich – “as undesirable officers in the regiment for their previous activities.”

At 11:30 the whole regiment gathered in one group and held a rally. One after another, speeches were made denouncing Colonel Bakich and other officers for unacceptable actions, such as physical violence, swearing and so on. The speeches were interrupted by shouts: “Down with Bakich!”, “Down with Kravtsov and Shabunovich!” Bakich himself was present at the rally and tried to refute the accusations, but he was not allowed to speak. A motion to ask Bakich, Kravtsov and Shabunovich to leave the regiment was passed. On 11 April all three officers left for Riga, never to return to the regiment again.

As one of the leaders of the recent pacification, Bakich left the regiment after his first encounter with manifestations of “revolutionary consciousness” of the lower ranks. Perhaps his decision was influenced by the atmosphere of the rally, or perhaps he recalled the massacres of 3-4 March in Helsinki and Kronstadt in which several hundred officers of the Baltic Fleet were murdered.

In any case, on the day Bakich and his fellow officer departed, the regiment held another meeting. The next day some Kronstadt sailors and representatives of the Soviet of Soldiers’ Deputies came to visit the riflemen and were warmly welcomed by the regiment. On 15 April the regimental committee decided to recognise the graves of the riflemen shot for refusing to attack on 23 December 1916 and to hold a memorial service for them. That took place on 17 April. In order to preserve the now long-lost honour of the regiment, the officers who had been forced to leave by the angry soldiers were declared sick and then later on leave. Bakich was dismissed from his post by a regimental order of 30 April 1917 and appointed to the officer reserve at Dvinsk Military District HQ.

According to some sources, he was later appointed commander of the 545th Akhtyrskiy Infantry Regiment, which was operating on the Northern Front as part of the 137th Infantry Division of XV and XXXVII Corps. However, Bakich is not mentioned in that regiment’s documents, which were only preserved for the period up to the beginning of autumn 1917, so no documentary confirmation of that could be found. In any case, Bakich’s appointment would have taken place no earlier than September 1917. In February 1918 he retired and, with the assistance of the Serbian mission, obtained a visa to return home.



## Hero of Syzran'

The period of the second half of 1917 to the first half of 1918 is one of the most mysterious pages in the general's biography. All sources agree that, having demobilised in the spring of 1918, Colonel Bakich moved to Samara, where after the overthrow of the Reds in the summer of 1918 the White Eastern Front against the Bolsheviks and Austro-Germans began to recover.

According to some sources, Bakich was even the head of the Samara garrison under the Reds, and in June 1918 he joined an underground officer organisation. In my opinion, this version of events seems rather unlikely. The fact is that by 8 June power had already passed in Samara to the SR Committee of Members of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly (КОМУЧ), with the assistance of units of the Czechoslovak Corps that had risen against the Bolsheviks, and so with the liberation of the city from the Reds the Samara officer organisations could operate quite legally. In addition, members of the Samara officer organisations immediately received positions in the People's Army that was being created after the overthrow of the Bolsheviks, while Bakich did not hold any position in the new army for more than a month.

According to another version, proposed by V. K. Shalaginov, who had access to the investigative file of the general in the early 1970s, Bakich left for Samara with the intention of returning to Serbia, but once in the Volga region, he went into commerce and later decided to stay in Russia.

There is also a version according to which Bakich was a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which explains his appearance in Samara during this period. However, this version is not documented in any way and seems to only come from E. M. Yaroslavskiy (M. I. Gubelman) who, speaking as public prosecutor at Bakich's trial in May 1922, tried to link the general's activities to that of the Socialist Revolutionaries in any possible way.

Be that as it may, soon after the establishment of КОМУЧ power in Samara, on 2 (15) July 1918 Colonel Bakich was appointed head of the People's Army units in the Syzran' district, covering Samara from the direction of Penza and Inza. On 24 July he took command of the newly formed People's Army 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division. The temporary acting chief of staff of the division from 28 July had been the thirty-three-year-old career officer, Staff Captain I. M. Finitzkiy. About five months later, on 21 December 1918, Bakich described his closest assistant:

Almost from the first days of the struggle with the Bolsheviks in the Syzran' district, Staff-Captain Finitzkiy took an active part there in the work to create the first units of the People's Army, which later became the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division. Being at the post of the Chief of Staff for the Syzran' district from 22 July, and at the same time the Chief of Staff of the 2nd Rifle Division, he put a lot of work into the organisation of the HQ itself, as well as a great deal of operational work into the defence of the Syzran' district. As an officer of the General Staff he is a good fit for the position, well versed in the combat situation and has a reasonable initiative. As Chief of Staff he has managed to pick a good staff, which had a very good effect on the productivity of the headquarters.

The People's Army was formed under the complete control of the SRs, initially on a volunteer basis, and then from the beginning of July on a conscription basis. The men mobilised were, however, extremely unreliable. A total of three rifle divisions and one brigade had been formed by mid-August 1918; by the end of August the number of divisions had doubled to six. Soldiers of the People's Army did not wear shoulder-boards and fought under the red flag. According to one assessment:

The units of the People's Army are not reliable either in combat or as a support for the authorities. There is mass desertion, facilitated by the territorial and national system of recruitment: entire villages go home. A brilliant exception are the volunteer units and



Cossacks. Only they are honourable companions of the Czechoslovaks and Russia owes the liberation of Simbirsk and Kazan to their bravery.

The history of the Syzran' Division dated back to 21 June 1918, when Captain Dymsha formed the 1st Volunteer Battalion, later renamed the 5th Syzran' Rifle Regiment. Later three more rifle regiments were formed in the division, under the command of Colonels Solov'ev and Ya. M. Rozenbaum and Captain Suslov. The division was positioned in Syzran' and Khvalynsk. The composition of the division, by the standards of the Civil War, was quite impressive –the number of artillery and technical units was particularly large. The division included: the 5th and 6th Syzran' (formerly 1st Syzran' Volunteer and 1st Syzran' Regular Regiments), the 7th Khvalynsk and 8th Vol'sk Rifle Regiments, the 2nd Syzran' Cavalry Regiment (formerly the Syzran' Cavalry Detachment), the Kuznetsk Volunteer Battalion, the Syzran' Partisan Detachment, the Defence of the Constituent Assembly Detachment, the 2nd Rifle Artillery Brigade consisting of two rifle artillery *divizioni*<sup>13</sup> (four batteries), the 2nd Field Heavy Artillery *Divizion*,<sup>14</sup> the 12th Field Heavy Artillery *Divizion*, the Syzran' Engineer Company, a searchlight platoon, a radio station, an automobile company and a platoon of the 3rd Aviation Detachment.

On 10 July Bakich's future subordinates, together with the Czechoslovaks, defeated the Reds' Penza Infantry Division, under the command of Ya. P. Gaylit, near Syzran and captured the city. It should be noted that Syzran' controlled the strategically important Kuznetsk – Syzran' and Inza – Syzran' railways, leading to the centre of Soviet Russia.

Bakich's troops formed the Central Group of the People's Army: to the north was Colonel A. P. Stepanov and to the south was Lieutenant Colonel F. E. Makhin. On 21 July 1918, Makhin was subordinated to Bakich. The total strength of their units was 6,500 bayonets, 3,300 sabres, 150 machine guns and 35-40 guns. According to other data, by the beginning of September 1918 Bakich had in the Syzran' area about 3,500 bayonets, 1,500 sabres, about 60 machine guns and about 30 guns.

The Czechoslovaks, led by the commander of the 9th Czechoslovak Regiment, Colonel Petřík, worked with Bakich in the Syzran' area. However, the relationship with the Czechs was not good. Bakich, according to one characterisation, was:

conceited, overbearing, self-important ... he was the only one of all the heads of volunteer detachments on the Volga who did not tolerate the Czechs, considering them civilians. ... As they retreated away from the Volga, he arbitrarily separated off from them in Kinel' and went to Orenburg, solely to avoid being with the Czechs. ...

Officially, from 29 August 1918, Colonel Petřík was the commander of the Syzran' combat group, so the balance of authority between him and Bakich is uncertain. Immediately on taking the post, Petřík indicated that he would be an uncompromising commander – in his second order he demanded:

Announce to all units under my command that every attempt to disobey orders, unauthorised departure from positions or leaving the units of the Syzran' combat group entrusted to me will be punished by me according to all wartime regulations, up to execution on the spot.<sup>15</sup> All guilty parties will be brought before our Czech field courts.

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<sup>13</sup> For a unit sized between a company and a regiment Russian uses *batal'on* for infantry. But for all the other arms it uses *divizion* for a unit just smaller than a regiment. Since there is no English word for a cavalry unit of that size, I have left *divizion* as it stands whenever it appears. PW

<sup>14</sup> According to other sources, the 1st Syzran' Heavy Field Artillery *Divizion*.

<sup>15</sup> Here on is underlined in the text.

Research in recent years shows that Bakich's units, formed in the Middle Volga region, were mostly peasants and small townfolk from Samara and Saratov provinces. The units had both volunteers and mobilised men. For the Syzran' district of Simbirsk province, on average about 54% of the total were conscripted, while for the greater Syzran' region it was no less than 89% conscripts. It should be noted that in the summer of 1918 Bakich's division received a lot of volunteers, mostly young people and even children. For example a gymnasium student from Kuznetsk, A. F. Gergenreder, enlisted as a private in the 5th Syzran' Rifle Regiment at the end of July 1918 at just 15 years old. He was following the example of two older brothers, who were 17 and 21. In fact the 2nd Rifle Division even had a separate volunteer battalion (five companies, including an officer company, with a total strength of 350 volunteers with four machine guns and two light guns) formed exclusively from residents of Kuznetsk.

By the beginning of July 1918, the 1st Soviet Army under Tukhachevskiy, had in total 5,420 bayonets, 122 sabres, 143 machine guns, 13 guns, 5 armoured cars and an armoured train, of which 920 bayonets, 70 sabres, 30 machine guns and three guns were facing Syzran'. An order issued in June 1918 proclaimed the aims of the Red Army's struggle with the Whites:

The revolutionary army of Russia fights on many fronts for the freedom and good of all mankind, for the equal rights of the proletariat. It bursts like a hurricane and destroys the iron fetters which are so firmly fastened by the bourgeoisie. Our idea is to take all the countries of the world, to give the poor man the opportunity to exist, and this is what makes the bourgeoisie fight so fiercely for its invented rights.

In July the 1st Army, indeed the Reds' entire Eastern Front, were still in a stage of organisation, with widespread *partisanshchina*<sup>16</sup> and a spirit of independence, so that *KomandArm-1*<sup>17</sup> could barely control the actions of his subordinates. This is evidenced by a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Front Vatsetis to Tukhachevskiy of 22 July:

You all ask for reinforcements, but meanwhile you have an inactive group on the Penza road and a group on the Inza – Simbirsk line. Make them work, advance! ...

The unauthorised abandonment of the 1st Army's front by the 4th Latvian Rifle Regiment belongs to the same period. Until autumn 1918, alcoholism and drug addiction (cocaine) were widespread in the Army, which the command began to fight mercilessly through field tribunals. As Tukhachevskiy himself later wrote, "the correct organisation [of the army] was still a long way off." Another telegram from Vatsetis, dated 26 July, is no less eloquent:

In the army's rear there are units hanging around, not attached to any Army. Such detachments are intolerable.

During this period the still-forming units of the People's Army had, if not numerical, at least organisational and morale superiority over the enemy.

The command of the People's Army in July 1918 intended to turn the area in front of Samara – Syzran', which had strategic importance, into a type of "White Verdun" by building a defence line there. In the Russian State Military Archive files of the People's Army engineer for the Syzran' district there is a hitherto unknown semi-fantastic plan for the creation of this fortification. For the project, developed by this engineer and dated 29 July 1918, it was reported that:

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<sup>16</sup> The tendency to independence and ignoring formal chains of command; wanting to preserve elements of irregular warfare, and an intense suspicion of military formalism and specialists. At its worst *partizanshchina* led to commanders disobeying orders, making their own appointments and hoarding equipment. PW

<sup>17</sup> That is, commander of the 1st Army. PW



The proposed defence line near the city of Syzran' ... for stubborn defence using the topographical conditions, in connection with tactical considerations, may well be strengthened by building a position consisting of two fortified strips, removed from each other at a distance of about 7-8 kilometres, and each of the strips can have a depth of up to a kilometre. The ruggedness of the terrain and the abundance of ravines, river valleys and isolated heights make it quite possible to base a defence on machine-gun cross-fire, with the erection of flanking buildings as fire barriers, artificial obstacles and various kinds of safe zones from enemy fire. This first strip, having a frontal extent of 50 kilometres, can be occupied by 32 battalions, if widely dispersed, with intervals between of 500-600 paces between them.

In all, it was intended to erect two defence lines, a traverse position and a 22 kilometres defence line for 15 battalions at the Alexander Bridge over the Volga. In total 230 kilometres of full profile trenches, 405 kilometres of communication routes, 345 kilometres of wire barriers, 90 kilometres of canopies and loopholes, 2300 underground dugouts, 1,150 heavy dugouts (for 40 men each), and 2,300 machine-gun and observation nests were to be built according to the plan. The work was supposed to be done within eight weeks by 46,000 workers. For comparison, the famous Kakhovka bridgehead, quite strongly fortified by the Reds in the summer-autumn of 1920, had a total length of 82 kilometres with three lines of defence, of which the defensive structures on the bridgehead were only partially built. Obviously this unrealistic plan for Syzran' could not be implemented in the summer of 1918, in the absence of money, transport, sufficient materials and labour force, and in the conditions of the successful offensive of the People's Army towards Moscow. This was recognised even by the author of the project himself! At the same time, some engineering works were still carried out in the area of Syzran'. In particular, the strategically important heights covering the Aleksander Bridge near the village of Batraki<sup>18</sup> were fortified.

The unpublished memoirs of Major-General Shchepikhin, the Field Chief of Staff of the Volga Front (from 15 August 1918), who knew Bakich from his service in the People's Army, shed some light on his activities during this period, despite the significant bias of some of the assessments:

A Serb, a Knight of St. George, an officer of the Imperial Army. Russian upbringing and culture. From the Serb comes his irascibility, determination and fervour. A natural warrior: proud and ambitious. In defiance of KOMUCH (and even its Minister of War, Galkin<sup>19</sup>) he received command of a handful of volunteers in Samara. He moved with them to the front at Syzran' and there he filled his ranks with numerous volunteers. He was very choosy about them and "natural selection" was studied and applied thoroughly.

He had an important front (defending Samara and the bridges across the Volga), but not an easy one at all: being the shortest way to Moscow, of course the enemy kept its best and most numerous units there. I would say that Bakich, at least in the first weeks of volunteer service in Samara, was one of the few who took proper account of what was going on around him and where things were headed. He was the only one of the commanders at the front who jealously guarded his units from the influx of outside elements, especially from captured Red Guards.

Bakich impresses with his appearance, his manner and behaviour, and certainly with his St George award. A stranger to politics, he is a soldier with all his soul! His tactical

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<sup>18</sup> Batraki is now inside Oktyabr'sk. The rail bridge still exists, much modernised, but is often referred to by its Soviet name of the Syzran' Bridge even though the name officially reverted. PW

<sup>19</sup> Nikolai Alexandrovich Galkin had been a Major General of the General Staff and was head of the military department of the KOMUCH government.



and strategic concepts are uncomplicated, but his abilities and practical acumen are quite sufficient on the scale applicable in a civil war. Bakich has the ideal gift of penetrating into the psychology of the ordinary fighter, and they bravely and without complaint follow their leader, with complete trust. The Civil War, especially in the first period, was characterised by simple modes of action.

Moreover, in spite of the grand names – front, army, corps – in practice the make up of the units never corresponded to the official name and Bakich, as well as the other commanders of volunteer units, in reality led units no larger in number than a battalion, sometimes a regiment in actual size. This fact simplified their management, and at the same time the commanders were always on top of the tasks assigned to them.

Colonel Bakich is by his nature and upbringing very disciplined. I only saw him twice in a state of fracture, when his exemplary calmness was broken. The first case was his clash with an irresponsible KOMUCH guest, the SR Vladimir Ivanovich Lebedev.<sup>20</sup> Having “broken through” from Moscow to the Volga, Lebedev felt in his element in Samara. For a long time his energies found no outlet – all the civil posts in KOMUCH were already taken and there was no sea (Lebedev had been Kerensky’s Minister of the Marine), but Lebedev imagined himself as a sort of Napoleon. So, taking advantage of his importance, he made trips, sorties to the front. Lebedev talked quite frankly about his exploits, but the meeting with Bakich was silent. When he reached the Syzran' sector (this may have been his first trip), Lebedev appeared in Syzran' and decided to immediately form militia units from the local elements. After five days (!) of training, this unit, marched in a parade like a mob past the “minister” and then fled (scattered) at the first shot. So Lebedev decided, for the sake of stability, to attach his rabble to Colonel Bakich’s solid, properly organised units. Naturally Bakich was indignant about this and left Syzran' in a hurry to see me in Samara with a report on the outrages committed by Lebedev. He characterised Lebedev’s destructive activities in very harsh tones, accusing him of holding rallies and hysterically shouting anti-bourgeois slogans. Bakich’s cadres, made up of bourgeoisie and young students from the Volga region, were never going to be pleased by that. The volunteers were so indignant at Lebedev’s demagoguery that it took Bakich a great deal of effort to keep them from making reprisals. Bakich trembled when he told me about it. He demanded I ask, in spite of all my respect for KOMUCH, that Colonel Čeček, Commander of the Volga Front troops, issue an instruction to recall (remove) Lebedev. This was Bakich’s ultimatum. The situation was such that we had to prioritise military commanders over ministers – the latter were overproduced in Samara, and there was a shortage of real military officers.

Not pampered, not yet poisoned by the rapid career path so inherent in the civil war, Bakich was not afraid of hard work and with the fluctuating numbers of his *Syzrantsy* easily, willingly passed from the role of company commander to the role of battalion or regiment commander and back again.

The only thing required in the etiquette of the civil war was to never to disband a unit and, regardless of the fluctuating combat numbers of the *Syzrantsy*, always called any

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<sup>20</sup> After February 1917 V. I. Lebedev returned to Russia from emigration, where he edited the Petrograd Right-SR newspaper *Volya Naroda*. In April he was appointed chairman of the Commission for Raising Discipline in the Army by the Provisional Government, and at the invitation of the Prime Minister Prince G. E. Lvov, in April he was appointed head of the Ministry of the Marine. He left the post at the end of August as a result of disagreements with the Minister of War, B.V. Savinkov.





unit that Bakich could organise a “detachment”.<sup>21</sup> A detachment could be a company, a battalion, a regiment, even up to a corps. A detachment is, however, an indication of improvisation and sounds proud enough for its leader. You will say that is a weakness! But that weakness is a positive quality in a military man – ambition, and it was necessary to play on that.

The complex relationship between Bakich and other officers and the representatives of the Samara government was expressed quite succinctly, in my opinion, by P. D. Klimushkin, the head of the KOMUCH internal affairs department and a prominent figure of the SR Party, who wrote that:

From the very beginning of the civil movement on the Volga, mutual misunderstanding was created between KOMUCH and the officers, which later led to a complete split.

By August the Soviet 1st Army had been significantly strengthened. Its total strength on 16 August was 8,110 bayonets, 491 sabres, 236 machine guns and 47 guns, with the Penza and Inza Divisions opposing Bakich having 3,410 bayonets, 159 sabres, 53 machine guns and 14 guns. Bakich's division during this period continued to fight north-west of Syzran' on the Sviyaga River. However, the battles on that front, according to one of the participants, were not particularly intense and were fought with varying success.

On 29 July 1918 the Eastern Front was declared the main front of Soviet Russia by the resolution of the Bolshevik Party's Central Committee. By August 1918 it had turned in favour of the Reds. The Bolsheviks' assessment of the situation in those days is quite vividly expressed in L. M. Reysner's essay “On the Sviyaga”:

All [the Bolsheviks] understood the situation as follows: one more step back would open for “them” the Volga to Nizhny and the way to Moscow. Further retreat would be the beginning of the end, a death sentence to the Republic of Soviets. Whether this was correct from a strategic point of view, I do not know. Perhaps the army, having retreated even further, would have gathered into a strike force at one of the countless points dotting the map, and from there carried its banners to victory, but for morale's sake it was the right thing to do. And since a retreat from the Volga would have meant complete collapse at that time – loss of the possibility of holding on, holding out, leaning against the ropes and fighting on all sides – it gave the right to real hope.

At the beginning of August the Reds attempted an offensive towards Kuznetsk. On 11 August they occupied Kanadey station, 60 kilometres west of Syzran', but they could not achieve any great results. In the Inza area the White units went on the offensive on 17 August. On the first day Russkaya Temryazan' was occupied, on the next day Izmaylovskiy Vyselok,<sup>22</sup> then on the 19th Khananeevo,<sup>23</sup> Polivanovo and Popova Mel'nitsa. The Red Inza Division was thrown back behind the Barysh River. However Bakich's units failed to advance towards Kuznetsk.

In the future the struggle for Syzran' was to reduce to a stubborn struggle between the Reds and Whites for the distant approaches to the city – in the area of Kanadey station (towards Kuznetsk) and Kuzovatovo (towards Inza). To take Syzran' the Reds needed to capture Simbirsk, which was looming over their flank. At 12:30 on 12 September that city fell to the Reds. At the same time the order was given to take possession of Syzran'. The right flank of the People's Army's Volga Front was defeated.

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<sup>21</sup> The Russian used here is *otryad*, which implies a larger sized unit. PW

<sup>22</sup> Izmaylovo?

<sup>23</sup> Shnayevo?



By 8 September Vozdvizhenskiy's Red Penza Division had 2,284 bayonets, 46 sabres, 51 machine guns, 8 guns and an armoured train. Latsis's Inza division had 1,837 bayonets, 100 sabres, 55 machine guns and 10 guns. Gay's Simbirsk Division had 5,191 bayonets, 283 sabres, 117 machine guns and 21 guns. In addition to these forces, Gavrillov's Vol'sk Division (2,350 bayonets, 300 sabres, 40 machine guns and 12 guns) had been allocated from the 4th Army to participate in the Syzran' Operation. Two forces groups were formed for that purpose: the left-flanking Northern Group (Simbirsk Division) under the command of Gay and the right-flanking "Southern Divisions Group" (Vol'sk, Penza, Inza Divisions) under the command of Engel'gardt, with headquarters in Simbirsk and Kuznetsk respectively. By 23 September the strength of the Northern Group had reached 6,671 bayonets, 263 sabres, 125 machine guns and 31 guns; the Southern Divisions Group had 6,650 bayonets, 446 sabres, 130 machine guns, 28 guns and 6 aircraft. The advancing divisions also had attached Shkarbanov's Balakovo Detachment (1,334 bayonets, 180 sabres, 8 machine guns, 4 light and 2 heavy guns) and the Volga Military Flotilla (6 armed steamships and 4 motor-boats).

The total strength of the Reds who took the offensive against Syzran' was no less than 14,655 bayonets, 889 sabres, 263 machine guns, 63 light and 2 heavy guns, 6 aeroplanes, 6 steamers and 4 boats. These forces far exceeded the total number of People's Army troops in the Syzran' area, which in the Civil War's conditions of manoeuvring rather than positional battles practically predetermined the success of the operation.

Apparently, the Reds planned that in the Syzran' – Samara Operation it would encircle and destroy almost all the People's Army units in the Syzran' – Samara area, using their huge superiority in numbers to apply the famous encompassing Kansk manoeuvre. According to G. D. Gay a "complete encirclement and defeat of the Whites" was planned. Engel'gardt's group was to advance in the direction of Syzran' – Samara. Gay's troops were, according to Tukhachevskiy, to strike the main blow, being instructed to advance from the north and cut off the White retreat routes. The Red command initially hoped to totally destroy Bakich's troops, not even giving them the opportunity to cross to the left bank of the Volga. However, they failed to realise this plan.

On 14 September 1918 the troops of the Red 1st and 4th Armies, under the command of Tukhachevskiy and Khvesin, launched a simultaneous offensive from Inza, Penza and Pugachev (Nikolaevsk) to Syzran' and then on to Samara. There was almost no communication between the advancing divisions. However, the fate of Syzran' was almost a foregone conclusion after the Reds captured Vol'sk (12/09) and Khvalynsk (17/09 and again on 29/09). By 20 September Syzran' was surrounded.

In the second half of September the People's Army defended persistently and even inflicted severe blows on the enemy, organised raids into the Red rear and made landings from the river. As a result of one of the White raids the 1st Volga Regiment panicked and had seven guns and machine guns captured. During the fighting on 26-27 September the right flank of the Inza Division was put into an extremely difficult situation and began to retreat. According to Tukhachevskiy, his enemy:

Put up a brutal resistance to this [Engel'gardt] group. Our units slowly moved forward, step by step, with persistent fighting.

On 29 September the Whites made a strong strike on the Vol'sk Division, which was forced to start a withdrawal in a demoralised state to Khvalynsk. Only the Penza Division held on. The command of the "Southern Divisions Group" asked for help.

According to the Red accounts the end of September was characterised by constant counter-attacks by the People's Army. It was only in early October that the Whites were forced to begin an evacuation of Syzran' and withdrawal to Samara when they realised that Gay's Simbirsk Division's bypass movement to Togliatti (Stavropol') and its crossing to the left bank of the Volga, meant the

threat of losing the Syzran – Samara rail line and possible complete encirclement and destruction of the People's Army on the right bank of the Volga. Colonel Makhin's units also withdrew to Syzran' from near Khvalynsk. Contrary to the claims of some authors, there was no battle for the possession of Syzran', and even less the storming of the city, because the troops of the People's Army left the city in advance (according to the Reds, a day before its occupation). Syzran' was occupied by Gay's units at midday of 3 October. In the city the Reds captured three armoured trains, 80 machine guns and 30 guns. The road to Samara was almost open.

Almost – because the Reds not only failed to encircle and destroy the units of the People's Army operating on the right bank of the Volga around Syzran' but also, despite fierce fighting on the bridgehead positions, failed to seize the bridges across the Volga. While retreating from Syzran' the Whites made a train wreck on the Aleksandr railway bridge and blew up two of its trusses on the left bank during the night of 4 October. This greatly complicated the supply of the Soviet Eastern Front up until to the end of March 1919, when traffic on the bridge was restored. The circumstances of the undermining of the bridge vary in the different sources. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the bridge was blown up after the main forces of the People's Army and the Czechoslovak Corps had crossed to the left bank of the Volga. In the official history of the Czechoslovak movement in Russia – the main task of which was to justify as far as possible all the actions of the Czechoslovaks in the period under consideration – it is noted that during the retreat to the bridge on 3 October, “due to the fault of the cowardly soldiers of the People's Army” a Bashkir battalion was destroyed, and the authors point out that “many Bashkirs, young and inexperienced, but good fighters, died in the Volga”. The fact of the Bashkir deaths is confirmed in other sources, but it was not possible to find operational documents confirming or refuting the interpretation of the events at the bridge offered by the Czech authors. Characteristically, they never mention the name of Colonel Bakich in their rather voluminous work, despite him fighting alongside the Legion for several months.

Having left Syzran', the units of the People's Army retreated along the railway line to Samara in a demoralised state. On 5 October the active defence of the KOMUCH capital was entrusted to a member of the SR Party, Colonel Makhin, in spite of a wound received shortly before. He was appointed commander of all Russian units operating in the Samara – Syzran' area and headed the Volga Front. Hitherto subordinate only to the HQ of the People's Army, Bakich's independent unit was transferred to the command of his former colleague. As Makhin had been a former subordinate in the fight on the right bank of the Volga, Bakich would not have taken it well.

Soon after leaving for the Volga region, on 5 October 1918, Bakich telegraphed the following:

Today morning, 5 October, units of the Syzran' group hold the front Kupino – Glushitsa (Tomylovo), with only a small part of the group's troops, about 500 bayonets. In spite of all the measures taken, the rest have left for the rear both on foot and mainly on passing trains. It is absolutely impossible to stop them in order to remove the soldiers, in view of the urgent need to send the trains past Samara.

The men gathered are mainly from among those left to cover the trains from the bridge, after their passage to the left bank. They marched in the rearguard and fought yesterday, 4 October, south of Maytuga station – Bezenchuk. In view of the lack of cavalry most of the wagons were loaded on the trains. Due to congestion at the stations and the need for hasty movement by the trains, it was impossible to unload anything at the stations up to Samara, so as not to hold up all the traffic. Thanks to the prolonged fighting on the bridgehead positions and then the difficult situation on the left bank, the assembled units are completely exhausted and also remain without proper food, as the wagons and kitchens have been separated from the units for a long time.



Reporting on the above, as noted in previous reports on the direct line, I consider it necessary to reform the troops outside the combat area, in order to give them at least some fighting ability. Under the present conditions and the present state of the units, they are not fit for combat and remain in position only because there is no enemy onslaught yet. This applies equally to the People's Army and the Czech units.

5 October. *NachDiv* 2nd Rifles, Colonel Bakich.

The former troops of the People's Army of the Syzran' district were in urgent need of rest and reformation, having temporarily ceased to exist as a fighting force.



## Orenburg

On 7 October Samara fell: the Samara bridge, like the Aleksandr bridge, was destroyed during the retreat. The troops withdrew to Kinel' station, beyond which the railway split into lines to Ufa and Orenburg. The main body of the army moved to Ufa. Bakich, according to General Shchepikhin, arbitrarily turned towards Orenburg. Shchepikhin wrote about this choice:

What led Bakich to the second act of indiscipline is still not clear to me. When Samara was evacuated, Bakich and his *Syzrantsy* and *Vol'tsy* retreated along the railway to Kinel' station. When he needed to turn at that station to Ufa, Bakich continued eastwards to Orenburg. My dispatcher (an officer at Kinel' station) immediately informed me that Bakich had decided to go straight ahead, despite the fact that he had been given an order to go to Ufa.

In order to save that honest soldier from future reproach, I sent him an order authorising his arbitrariness. But why did he do so? Either he was influenced by the bustle and apparent confusion at the Kinel' junction and Bakich did not want his detachment "infected", so moved away from the general direction, or<sup>24</sup> he decided to break away to Orenburg, where there was less competition – he had the largest infantry command in that area, as Dutov had mainly cavalry.

Later I received another version: the *Syzrantsy's* supplies and families were sent from Kinel' by the Czech commandant's office on an train to Orenburg. Bakich went after them. It is possible that this truly worldly reason played the most decisive role.

We can judge this incident only from the scraps of information that have survived to this day. In particular, on 9 October 1918 Bakich wrote to the commander of the troops of the Samara district, F. E. Makhin:

Upon departure of all the units of the division entrusted to me to the concentration area, I am travelling with the division staff to Buzuluk according to the instructions given by the Volga Front Headquarters.

Commander of the 2nd Rifle Division, Colonel Bakich

Based on this document, Bakich's actions two days after the abandonment of Samara were clearly guided by the orders of his superiors. Shchepikhin's decision to retroactively approve Bakich's unauthorised departure for Orenburg is not favourable to the former who, if we believe what he writes about Bakich, in that manner condoned the his subordinate's lack of discipline. At the same time, in the confusion that occurred after the abandonment of Samara, a wide variety of overlaps could have taken place. One of them could well have been the case of Bakich's "unauthorised" departure.

Without seeking to justify Bakich's violation his orders, if it actually took place, I note that further events showed the wisdom of withdrawing Bakich's infantry units to the strategically important left flank of the White's Eastern Front. Ataman Dutov's units, operating on that flank, were in dire need of reinforcement by infantry, as they were composed of Cossack cavalry. Almost three months after the events in question, on 28 December 1918, Dutov's South-Western Army had 23 battalions and 230 *sotnias*, for 10,892 bayonets and 22,449 sabres, of which 2,158 bayonets (!) and 631 sabres were in the Supreme Commander-in-Chief's reserve. Even after the reinforcement by infantry, the number of *sotnias* in the army was exactly 10 times the number of battalions!

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<sup>24</sup> The section from here is underlined in Shchepikhin's original text.



We should add that in July-September 1918, before the collapse of the People's Army Volga Front, the Buzuluk area was in the deep rear for Dutov's troops, but a front had to be organised there in a hurry in October – actually from scratch. If at least some army units had not been assigned to cover that area, the Cossacks might not have been able to hold Orenburg until 22 January 1919.

So what was the Orenburg theatre, in which Bakich was to operate for almost a year? The area of military operations was crossed by five major railway lines: the Tashkent line, the Samara – Orenburg line, the Orsk line, the Troitsk line and the Samara – Ufa – Chelyabinsk – Omsk line (the Samara – Zlatoust line and the Trans-Siberian railway). The struggle for control over these railways took place here during the Civil War.

The importance of the Tashkent line (Orenburg – Tashkent) and its continuation, the Samara – Orenburg line, can hardly be overestimated. With the Whites' abandonment of Samara, the most important rail junction for lines heading to the Asian parts of the former Russian Empire, the Whites in Orenburg lost their rail connection with Siberia. The Tashkent line was the only one connecting the centre of European Russia with Turkestan. It is not surprising that the Reds wanted to seize it. After all, the Red forces in Turkestan were cut off from Soviet Russia in 1918-1919 because part of the Tashkent line was held by the Orenburg Cossacks. The Reds repeatedly tried to establish at least an air link with Turkestan, but these attempts were ineffective. Even in periods of heavy defeat, such as in late January 1919 with the surrender of Orenburg city, Ataman Dutov demanded that the Cossacks:

At all costs retain in their possession sections of the Tashkent line ... not allowing a restoration of the communication link between Orenburg and Turkestan.

The Orsk line, connecting Orenburg to Orsk, was of considerably less importance. Control over it was important only in tactical terms. The Troitsk line, at the beginning of the Civil War, was only a small branch connecting Troitsk to Chelyabinsk (plus the line to Kostanay, to the southeast, passed through Troitsk). Three hundred kilometres of unfinished section remained between the Orsk and Troitsk lines. The Host government realised the need to complete the Orsk – Troitsk section, which would have connected a significant part of the Orenburg Cossack Host with Siberia – the base of the White movement in east Russia. By the spring of 1919 it had been possible to continue the final section for a hundred kilometres, but there were not enough rails to finish the connection.

Thus, the White forces operating on the left flank of the Eastern Front were forced to fight for a long time without a railway connection to Siberia. All supplies had to be delivered to Kartaly station (on the Troitsk line) by train then by road transport to Sary on the Orsk line. This significantly affected the efficiency of deliveries and their scale and during the spring floods non-rail transport stopped completely, which had a negative impact on the actions of the Orenburg units.

The Samara – Ufa – Chelyabinsk – Omsk railway (Samara – Zlatoust line, then the Trans-Siberian from Chelyabinsk) only ran through the territory of the Orenburg Cossack Host for a small section near Chelyabinsk, which was in the Western Army's band of action (formed 1 January 1919).

The most important roads for the Orenburg Cossack Host were the Orenburg – Ufa, Orsk – Verkhneural'sk and Verkhneural'sk – Troitsk roads. To the south of the Ural River the most important routes for the army were the roads along the Sakmara and Ural Rivers; the Orenburg – Irgiz caravan route; and the Aktobe – Orsk road. The banks of the Ural and Sakmara Rivers had a lot of Cossack villages, which greatly facilitated the movement of Cossack forces, especially in winter.

Of the rivers flowing through the lands of the Orenburg Cossack Host, the Ural River was of the greatest strategic importance, as it was serious barrier travelling from north to south but also a line of communication. It should be taken into account that the river was navigable only downstream





from Sol-Iletsk (Iletsk), i.e. only in the host's western portion. The only permanent bridge was near Orenburg, but there were several ferry crossings. The Ural, and its left tributary the Ilek, connected the Orenburg Cossack Host with the Ural Cossack Host and allowed a flow of supplies and transfer of reserves. The Ural Cossacks had two steamboats on the river, which were used to transport military supplies, but the steamboats often ran aground due to the river's changeable course and their use annoyed the Ural Cossack fishermen.

In winter troop movements by the Orenburg Cossack Army were severely hampered by deep snow and in spring by river flooding and spoiled roads. The vast steppe and forest-steppe areas of the region gave the Cossack cavalry an opportunity to operate, but there were no natural frontiers in their theatre of operations on which to gain a foothold. The centres of the Orenburg Host's military districts were important nodes for the Cossacks' movement: Orenburg, Verkhneural'sk, Troitsk and Chelyabinsk. The town of Orsk was also of great importance.

By 10 October 1918 Colonel Makhin had managed to completely evacuate Kinel' station. All the rolling stock was directed to Buguruslan, the switches were blown up and the telegraph wires were destroyed.<sup>25</sup> On the same day the Whites' former Volga Front became known as the Western Front. A line near Buzuluk was organised as a matter of urgency. The Whites needed to gain time to bring their troops there.

By 11 October Bakich had managed to establish communication with Orenburg and with the Ural Cossacks operating south-west of Buzuluk. The Orenburg Cossack Composite<sup>26</sup> Division, under the command of Major-General N. A. Polyakov, (19th, 20th, 24th and 25th Orenburg Cossack Regiments) was being formed in the area of Totskoe. Bakich's troops remained in a non-capable state since the abandonment of Syzran' and were badly affected by desertion. The shortage of artillerymen was extremely acute. In addition to organising a defence, Bakich had to reorganise his rear.

On 11 October he was appointed head of the Buzuluk garrison. The wider Buzuluk sector was commanded by Makhin from 9 October. Command of the Western Front went to the Czech general Čeček.

Dutov sent the 1st Brigade of the Orenburg Cossack Composite Division (19th and 20th Orenburg Cossack Regiments), a battalion of the 2nd Bashkir Infantry Regiment and a *division* of the Ural Cossack Regiment to the Buzuluk area. The 11th Buzuluk Rifle Regiment was in reserve in Buzuluk, and the 2nd Brigade of the Orenburg Cossack Composite Division (24th and 25th Orenburg Cossack Regiments) was stationed in Totskoe. Of course, Bakich's 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division was also included in the Buzuluk group being created. The task of the group was to cover the Kinel' – Buzuluk line and to delay the enemy's advance to the south-east, that is to Buzuluk and Orenburg.

On 12 October Bakich was ordered to reform the regiments of his division into single-battalion formations. At the same time, some motley volunteer formations from the right and left banks of the Volga (Brynovskiy partisan detachment, Vasil'evka *druzhina*,<sup>27</sup> a Lithuanian company and Nikolaevka detachment) were to be incorporated into his division, with the recommendation to distribute them between the Vol'sk and Khvalynsk Regiments. The reorganisation was to be completed by 16 October. To cover the evacuation of troops along the Buguruslan – Buzuluk line, on 13 October Dutov ordered the Buzuluk group to go on to the offensive.

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<sup>25</sup> In this regard, the assertion of the military commissar of the 214th Simbirsk Regiment, Kiryukhin, that a huge number of trophies were captured by the Red Army in Kinel' seems to be unreliable – Kiryukhin N. I. *From the diary of a military commissar: The Civil War of 1918-1919*. Moscow, 1928

<sup>26</sup> Composite units in the RCW were those formed from the remnants of old Tsarist formations. PW

<sup>27</sup> An old term for a militia unit, used widely in the RCW. PW



At 22:30 on 11 October Bakich sent a telegram from Buzuluk addressed to the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief with a copy to Ataman Dutov in Orenburg. This can only be considered an attempt to intrigue against his immediate superior. Bakich telegraphed:

From the beginning of its formation on 20 June this year and since that time the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division has been continuously in battles near Vol'sk, Khvalynsk, Syzran' and on the Syzran' – Samara – Kinel' route. The division, as far as the situation allowed, was fully formed. However while I was head of the division, I almost never commanded it in the performance of combat tasks: around Syzran', the 7th and 8th Regiments were seconded to Colonel Makhin, and the remaining 5th and 6th Regiments, scattered into smaller units, were subordinated to Colonel Petrzhik. Now, at Buzuluk, the units of the division performing combat tasks are again subordinated to Colonel Makhin.

It turns out that I, as the head of the division, responsible for its formation and combat training, am deprived of the opportunity to lead it in battle, being limited only to the economic and administrative role. Owing to this and to the interference in the leadership of the division by outsiders who have nothing to do with, the division has come to a state in which it can hardly be relied upon as a fighting force.

According to the instructions of the Volga Front HQ, after the withdrawal from Samara, my division was to concentrate in the Buzuluk district, in order to put the units in order, but the plan failed, and my units continue to remain in battle. I am again deprived of the opportunity to direct the units in all respects, as Colonel Makhin, who is not my superior, disposes of them without my knowledge.

Reporting on the above, I ask for instructions: I feel distrusted as head of the division, in the sense of its leadership in battle, and if it is considered that my service and combat qualities do not qualify me to lead it, then to appoint another person in my place, as I can no longer bear the loss of my official position; secondly, please give orders to whom I and the division are now directly subordinated; thirdly, indicate by whose order the division will be replenished with soldiers, the latter being necessary in view of the great shortage due to desertion of the conscripted men, moreover, some artillery units have almost no crew at all; fourthly, indicate whether the division will be given the opportunity to assemble to re-establish its destroyed organisation, and when and where; fifthly, how am I to deal with the demands of the Orenburg and Ural Cossacks on the transfer of various property and weapons to them; sixthly, give a directive on who is the formal combat commander at Buzuluk, as I have no instructions on this subject yet, except for the task of strengthening positions in the Buzuluk area.

*NachDiv* 2nd Rifle, Colonel Bakich.

Frankly speaking, Bakich was lying when he indicated that Makhin was not his immediate superior, but in this case the ends justified the means for him. The telegram was passed from Orenburg to General Čeček in Ufa and to Chelyabinsk, and apparently to the headquarters of the Czechoslovak Corps. The intrigue of the “offended” Bakich was a success: after a while Makin was removed and Bakich became an independent commander, but more on this below.

During the same period, probably in the headquarters of the Orenburg Military District, it was decided to build fortified positions in the Buzuluk area. The question of these fortified positions has already attracted the attention of historians. I cannot agree with the thesis that:

In the manoeuvre conditions of the civil war, which was not a positional situation, these earthworks would have been useless. The enemy could easily bypass them and

even, under certain conditions, take them frontally. Dutov's headquarters, apparently, did not understand that and had no idea about the peculiarities of the civil war.

In my opinion, the positions were created based on the experience of military operations at the time, and their construction was for both military and morale considerations – the construction was carried out on the distant approaches to the lands of the Orenburg Cossack Host. Judging by the time when those fortifications were built, which belonged to the period of White failures on the Eastern fronts, their construction on the host's borders was not a manifestation of the unwillingness its army commanders to fight the Bolsheviks outside host territory, but was solely linked to the idea of preventing the Reds from entering the host lands. Their construction was led by one of the best specialists in his field, Lieutenant-General Ipatovich-Goranskiy, head of engineering in the Orenburg Military District, emeritus professor of the Nikolaev Engineer Academy. Military engineer Dobrzhinskiy was appointed as the direct head of fortification works in the Buzuluk area.

On 12 October 1918, the head of the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division, Colonel Bakich, reported to the Army Headquarters in Orenburg:

Today I inspected along the Buzuluk River in order to choose a position there. Having acquainted myself with the terrain and assessing the importance of covering the town of Buzuluk from the west, as a political and economic centre of the district with a significant railway station, I decided to decline to strengthen the position along the Tok and Buzuluk Rivers, and to take the defensive line further west, to interdict with fortified groups the most important routes through the line of the Borovka River, Elshanska, Aleksandrovka<sup>28</sup> and Dukhonino villages. Tomorrow I will make a reconnaissance of that position and proceed to organise work, collecting workers, tools and sappers.

A day later another telegram was sent to Orenburg by Bakich concerning fortification works:

Yesterday I selected a position on the western edge of the Koltubanka forest on both sides of the railway along the Neprik River. Today sappers have been dispatched there and a breakdown [of the works needed] is being made. Digging of trenches will start on 15 October.

These documents show that the fortified area was supposed to be created directly in the area of the railway line, using the advantages of the terrain (i.e. the presence of rivers).

In the autumn of 1918 it was also planned to build a semicircle of fortified positions to cover Orenburg within a radius of 20-25 kilometres: at the stations of Novosergievka, Platovka, Kargala and near the village of Sakmara. In addition, positions were to be built towards Aktobe (Aktyubinsk): near Donguz station and Sol-Iletsk. However, these plans were not realised, and by the time of the battles at those places they remained unfinished.

Most of the positions were at best just simple lines of trenches that needed to be improved, which had to be done when the troops occupied them. A description of one of these "fortresses" is contained in the memoirs of the Orenburg Cossack officer, I. V. Rogozhkin:

The area of Donetskoe *stanitsa*<sup>29</sup> was considered by Dutov on paper to be a fortified area and was often mentioned as such in the press to calm minds, as if it were an impregnable fortress. The citizens of Orenburg, and especially the old men of the *stanitsa*, piously believed that the Bolsheviks would not overcome the fortified area ...

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<sup>28</sup> Presumably Staroaleksandrovka. PW

<sup>29</sup> A *stanitsa* was a Cossack village. PW

but in reality it was quite different: the fortified area did not differ from anywhere else, except for a wire fence covered with snow.

A map of the fortifications erected on the outskirts of Orenburg, signed by the army engineer Lieutenant Kretchmer, has survived to our days. The map shows the points where the fortified positions were to be erected, and almost all of them were located on the railway or roads. All this serves as evidence of the "railway war" character of the Civil War in the Southern Urals even in the period of 1918-1919.

The vastness of the theatre of war and the harsh climate in this region did not allow fighting away from the communication routes, so the erection of even rudimentary defensive structures on the railway line was not a waste of time at all. It could, with properly built structures, skilful use of the terrain and a persistent defence of positions, delay the enemy's advance for a long time.<sup>30</sup>

On 15 October Bakich took command of the Buzuluk Group's sector. The headquarters of the Orenburg Military District apparently realised that the Buzuluk front was the main front under the circumstances, and began to strengthen it. On 16 October 1,000 soldiers (without weapons) and 250 artillerymen were sent from Orenburg to the 2nd Division, with an order to distribute them among the units within twenty-four hours.

On 17 October 1918 the South-Western Army was formed, which included Colonel Makhin's former Buzuluk Group. Makhin was appointed commander of the Tashkent Front and commander of the Orenburg Cossack Platoon Division and left for Ak-Bulak on 20 October. Colonel Bakich, the head of the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division, took command of the Buzuluk Group. The ambitious Montenegrin, probably not without the help of his little intrigue, became an independent commander once more, and new horizons for his military career were not far off.

On 26 October Dutov ordered Bakich to:

Restrain the Reds' advance in the Zuevka – Sobolevo – Ilek and Bogorodskoe (Bulgakovo) – [Pervoe] Imangulovo strip, especially in the fortified position near the Koltubanka forest, with the aim of buying time to complete the formation of the Orenburg Cossack Composite Division.

Nevertheless, despite the strengthening of the approaches to the city, Buzuluk fell on 29 October. However the Reds did not press on to Orenburg. In all likelihood, this was due to the need to transfer parts of the 1st Soviet Army, which was still operating against Bakich, to the Southern Front. On 16 November the Inza Division was sent there.

The units in the Buzuluk sector during this period were in an extremely difficult condition. In a report dated the end of October, Bakich wrote:

The division, as a fighting unit, is not viable and has completely collapsed, both in morale and in numbers. The latter is the result of the fact that the conscripted men have almost entirely left the ranks of the units: those from Syzran' and Khvalynsk, on the right bank of the Volga, Buguruslan and Buzuluk, and Kinel'. Those remaining are almost exclusively volunteers and a small number of those conscripted from other districts. ... The volunteers who remain in the units, who now constitute the main component, are increasingly declaring that their term of service is over and they should be discharged. ... The prolonged presence of the units in a territory with definite

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<sup>30</sup> A striking example of this kind is the defence of the Aral Sea station where, in the summer of 1919, the Reds successfully held back the onslaught of units of the Southern Army. The fortified area on the one hand was between the desert on one side and by the Aral Sea on the other. Ganin A. V., *The Southern Army of the Eastern Front // History of White Siberia: Theses of the 4th Scientific Conference of 6-7 February 2001*. Kemerovo, 2001.



Bolshevik sentiments has an extremely corrosive effect on the troops, and anti-disciplinary speeches by individuals, units and commanders are becoming more frequent. ... The numerical composition of the division's regiments at present is: in the 5th Rifle Regiment there are about 200 men left, in the 6th some 60-70 men, in the 7th about 100 men.

...

The reinforcements from Orenburg, not having boots and warm clothes, cannot be taken out into the field. ... In the cavalry regiment there are men who do not know how to saddle or lead horses, let alone ride. In general, the division's units will not move from the wagons with their possessions, which often cannot even move independently – all this has to be transported by rail. ... The Cossack units assigned to the group are also badly fatigued and, moreover, for reasons unknown, are also not completing their combat tasks, leaving their positions without pressure from the enemy and without orders.

In the first half of November the command of the Soviet 1st Army was mainly engaged in the transfer of troops to the Southern Front, and until mid-November there was a relative calm on the Buzuluk front. In the second half of the month the Reds launched an attack on the capital of the Orenburg Cossacks. By the beginning of December the front was in the area of Sorochinsk.

On 5 December 1918 the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Kolchak, formed the Orenburg Army Corps, which included Bakich's division. The corps headquarters was created from the headquarters of the Buzuluk group and the Orenburg Cossack Platoon Division. Major-General Shishkin was appointed its commander, with Major-General Serov as chief of staff. Probably on Dutov's initiative, the corps received Cossack officers – both the commander and his chief of staff had served in the Orenburg Cossack units in peacetime, and Serov was a Cossack by birth. In December the command of the Buzuluk group was removed from Bakich and entrusted to Major-General Karnaukhov.

Judging by the scraps of information that have survived about this period of the anti-Bolshevik struggle, Bakich attempted a counter-offensive in December 1918. According to the data, by 28 December 1918 his division had 980 bayonets, 283 sabres, 35 machine guns and three 3-inch guns. In total the Whites had 1,659 bayonets and 5,181 sabres with 130 machine guns and 22 guns of different calibres. On 25 December 1918 the 9th Bashkir Rifle Division, of the South-Western Army, was ordered to advance along the Tok River to bypass the flank of the Reds at Buzuluk from the north and push them back to the railway line. To assist it in this, the units of the Buzuluk front were to advance to Sorochinsk.

The troops, as Bakich himself later wrote in one of his orders:

... went on the offensive at frosts of 25-30 degrees, without sheepskin coats, felt boots, fur hats and other warm clothes. Around Sorochinsk ... the troops are weak in strength but strong in spirit and dealt skilful blows and heavy damage to the regiments of the Reds' Iron Division, which included many Magyars in its ranks – a stronghold of the Commissars' powers. Many of them were killed at Baleyka, Bogolyubovka, Kiselevka, Babichev and Gumerovo.

Nevertheless, the attempts to counter-attack the Reds in December 1918 and the first half of January 1919 had no strategic success. The Buzuluk sector units went onto the defensive, and then began one by one to gradually leave the stations of the Tashkent railway, approaching Cossack territory and Orenburg itself. The situation of Dutov's South-Western Army was becoming critical.





On 28 December 1918 Kolchak divided the South-Western Army into two Independent Orenburg and Ural Armies under the command of Lieutenant Generals Dutov and Savel'ev respectively. On 3 January 1919 the Orenburg Army Corps became IV Corps.

On 14 January the Whites left Novosergievka station. The troops could not hold on at its boundary, where the fortifications had been built in the autumn of 1918. On 17 January the headquarters of IV Orenburg Corps was at Perevolotskii station, the next day it was at Kargala, the last major station before Orenburg.

Fearing reprisals from the Reds, the Cossack population hurriedly left their native villages and settlements. At the same time, some Cossack groups took a frankly two-faced position, trying to ingratiate themselves with both the advancing Reds and the departing Whites. For example, in mid-January 1919, the residents of Kapitonovskii village sent delegates to both the headquarters of the Buzuluk Group to find what they should do and to the Reds, stating that the village residents had been forcibly mobilised by the Whites. Simultaneously with these actions, the Cossacks from Kapitonovskii deserted from the 4th Orenburg Cossack Division operating within the Buzuluk Group.

The 25th Orenburg Cossack Regiment of the same division was completely unfit – it did not obey orders. At a rumour of the Reds' approach it left Novosergievka station, exposing the flank of the 7th Khvalynsk Rifle Regiment of Bakich's division.

Moreover, the Cossacks decided to retreat only as far as their own villages, and when they were occupied by the Red Army would go home with their weapons. In my opinion, these cases are typical for any territorial units (such as the Cossack formations of the South-Western and Independent Orenburg Armies), operating on their own territory. In the same way, for example, in 1918, the conscripted peasants in the People's Army units fled to their villages.

On 19 January, the commander of the 1st *Sotnia* of the 25th regiment, a Cossack from Nikol'skoe *stanitsa*, Lieutenant Rogozhkin, who had repeatedly attempted before, defected to the Reds, taking passes and secret correspondence from the regiment commander. He enlisted in the Red Army, was appointed commander of the mounted reconnaissance of the 212th Moscow Regiment of the 24th Simbirsk Iron Rifle Division. He even sent a letter across the front line to his *sotnia* with a call to defect as a body to the Reds. Subsequently this defector, in order to gain favour with the Bolsheviks, claimed an attempt to kill Ataman Dutov – which he did not carry out, allegedly because there were children nearby.

Due to the sharp deterioration of the situation at the front, the headquarters of the Independent Orenburg Army sounded the alarm. At 22:30 on 19 January Bakich received a telegraphed order from Dutov to hold out at all costs. At 23:00 the commander of IV Orenburg Corps received an urgent telegram from Major-General Vagin, Chief of Staff of the Independent Orenburg Army:

The Commander has ordered ... use all your strength to do what is indicated, not allowing anything to get in your way, because Orenburg must be defended in order to ensure its evacuation.

The Army command believed to the last in the possibility of holding the Cossack capital and failed to complete the evacuation of the city in advance. General Shishkin of IV Corps telegraphed to the Army HQ that due to Rogozhkin's treason and the successes of the Reds, the Cossacks were worried and:

The situation was becoming extremely serious. Everyone is retreating on the northern section of the front, according to reports, narrowing the exit towards Orsk. I consider the withdrawal of my detachment the only way out in this situation.

The next day in another directive from the Army Headquarters recommended:





The commanders of combat areas and combat corps must use the most decisive and ruthless measures to maintain discipline in the troops.

Nevertheless, a mass desertion of Cossacks (almost exclusively from the 24th and 25th Orenburg Cossack Regiments), as well as prisoners of war and wagons took place after that. The surrender of the host's capital of Orenburg had a particularly negative impact on the Cossacks' morale.

On 21 January the city was abandoned by the Independent Orenburg Army, and the next day it was occupied by units of the 24th Simbirsk Iron Rifle Division advancing from the west and cavalry of the Turkestan Army, which had broken through from the south. Despite this success, the Reds were unable to restore railway communication with Turkestan, as the *Orenburzhtsy* firmly held a small section of the Tashkent railway between Sol-Iletsk and Aktobe. Preventing the connection of Turkestan with Soviet Russia was one of the main strategic tasks of Dutov's army, and to the credit of the South-Western, Independent Orenburg and Southern Armies (although some modern researchers consider them almost worthless associations) this task was successfully accomplished until the end of the fighting in the southern Urals in the autumn of 1919.



## The Weight of Tribulations

In January 1919 the units of the Independent Orenburg Army, having lost contact with the Independent Ural Army, were forced to withdraw eastwards, deep into the host territory. Bakich's troops bypassed occupied Orenburg to the north and continued to withdraw along the right (northern) bank of the Sakmara River, a tributary of the Ural, in order to get away from the Reds' flank attack. A distinctive feature of the territory between the Sakmara and the Ural Rivers was that the roads there ran exclusively along the valleys of those rivers. It was possible to get a foothold only on the line of the Bol'shoy Ik, Burtya, Kasmarka, Burly and Kiyaly-Burtya Rivers, which did not represent a serious obstacle for the Reds in winter. In the opinion of Major-General Vagin, Army Chief of Staff:

These lines, intercepting all the routes from west to east and north-east, are the only defensive lines for us.

The command of the Independent Orenburg Army realised the importance of holding the Sakmara line. In a report on the situation at the front, General Vagin pointed out that

The most likely line for the main enemy action will be the roads along the Sakmara River and the Ural River, being the shortest route to our rear road hub in Orsk.

During this difficult period for the Army, Bakich's small 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division was considered one of the most reliable formations of IV Corps.

The Reds developed their success by advancing along the line of the Orsk railway. The task of the Independent Orenburg Army at the end of January was:

Temporary defence for recruitment, after which a decisive offensive to restore communication with the Ural Army.

The White units managed to organise serious resistance on the line of the Bol'shoy Ik River and held out for about three weeks, until 10 February. This fact refutes the statement of *KomBrig* Ogorodnikov that

The Whites could not organise a stubborn defence in any of the battles before Orsk.

The units of IV Corps performed one of the most difficult and responsible tasks – defending the Orsk rail line. Bakich was directly subordinated to the units of the left combat sector with a strength of 1,074 bayonets, 970 sabres, 59 machine guns and 6 guns.

And again he showed himself at his best. In a division order of 5 February 1919 Bakich noted:

I have decided to defend every line tenaciously and to allow the division's units to withdraw each time only after fighting on the lines occupied during the withdrawal.

The Army headquarters also demanded that line be held as long as possible, as there were no further natural obstacles in front of Orsk. In addition, there were settlements along the Bol'shoy Ik River where the defending troops could be quartered in the conditions of the harsh Ural winter. The only possible way to conduct a defence in such weather was to leave relatively weak outposts, scouts and observers on the front line, while concentrating significant reserves in the rear settlements to make strong strikes on the threatened sections of the front. A similar tactic of active defence was successfully used by Lieutenant General Slashchev in southern Russia.

Further retention of the position was prevented by the defection of some Bashkirs, headed by a prominent figure of the Bashkir national movement, the head of the Bashkir army administration, A.-Z. Validov. After almost three months of secret negotiations, on 18 February 1919 the Bashkirs switched to the Bolshevik side and opened a gap in the front line for them. It should be said that from December 1918 to February 1919 – even before the actual defection to the Reds – the



Bashkirs had showed insubordination to the command of the South-Western and Independent Orenburg Armies, acting independently, and the Bashkir leadership had passed secret information about the White troops to the Reds.

In my opinion, the main reason for the treason was the political leanings and ambitions of the Bashkir leadership, especially Validov himself, who was a supporter of the SRs and considered Kolchak and Dutov his worst enemies. The White command also lacked the necessary flexibility in solving the extremely painful national question. The Bolsheviks, despite their initial hesitation, hastened to meet all the Bashkirs' demands (broad autonomy) as long as the latter came to their side.

As a result of the Bashkir treachery, a gap was formed at the junction of the Western and Independent Orenburg armies, which the Reds were not slow to take advantage of, and there was an urgent need to re-establish communication between the two White armies. For this purpose the left flank of the Western Army was supposed to extend to the village of Kizil'skoe. The right flank of the Independent Orenburg Army and the connection with the Western Army was to be provided by IV Orenburg Army Corps. Subsequently, to cover the gap between the Independent Orenburg and Western Armies on the left flank of the latter, the Southern Group was formed under the command of Major-General Belov (Vittekopf).

On 16 February the commander of IV Orenburg Corps, Major-General Shishkin, received a telegram from the Army commander with an order that a new II Orenburg Cossack Corps would be formed on the basis of his unit, consisting of the 4th and 5th Orenburg Cossack Divisions, and he would command it. Some officers and officials from the IV Corps HQ were allocated to form the staff of the new corps. On the same day those men began work on the new unit.

Meanwhile IV Corps had to surrender its sector of the front to the new corps and urgently move to the Army's right flank in the area of Kizil'skoe, in connection with the deep bypass of the Reds at Baymak,<sup>31</sup> caused by the Bashkirs' defection. The advanced units of the IV Corps were to position themselves in the area of Baymak and get in touch with the Consolidated Sterlitamak Corps of the Western Army, acting to the right. The task of the Sterlitamak Corps was to move to the line of the villages of Kirdasova – Baymak in order to occupy the Ural mountain passages and provide communication with the Independent Orenburg Army.

Colonel Bakich was appointed commander of IV Orenburg Army Corps and accepted the position on 19 February. Lieutenant-Colonel Smolnin-Tervand became his chief of staff. Back in 1913 Colonel Ryabikov of the Nikolas Imperial Military Academy had described Tervand as:

Average ability. Works diligently and calmly. Independent, energetic, restrained. Tactful and disciplined.

Tervand's career was truly dizzying: a young officer of the General Staff in the years of the Russian troubles he rose to chief of staff of a corps, and at the age of thirty-two years was promoted to major-general. However, payback for satisfied ambition came quickly – Tervand remained with Bakich to the end and shared his tragic fate.

On 22 February 1919 Bakich and Smolnin-Tervand were enrolled in the Orenburg Cossack Host for "personal bravery and services rendered to the army". By a 12 January decree of the Host Government Bakich was awarded the "Ribbon of Distinction" – the highest award established to honour "zealous defenders of the Orenburg Cossack Host" in the fight against the Bolsheviks.

At 20:00 on 25 February the corps HQ arrived in Kizil'skoe, and the regrouping and concentration of the corps units were being completed. The very next day the corps units (33rd Orenburg

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<sup>31</sup> Also known as Tanalykovo-Baymak. PW

Cossack Regiment) attempted an attack and even captured some trophies. The corps' war journal reported that "the spirit of the units was excellent".

Nevertheless, the Reds continued their offensive through Cossack lands towards Verkhneural'sk, Troitsk and Chelyabinsk, seeking to seize the grain-growing areas of the III (Troitsk) and IV (Chelyabinsk) military districts of the Orenburg Cossack Host and secure the entire southern Urals. On 28 February they occupied Orsk.

Due to the withdrawal of II Corps, which had just been formed in combat conditions, to the *stanitsas* of the Verkhneural'sk Military District, Bakich was also forced to withdraw his left flank under the command of Colonel Neyzel. The fighting was conducted in a real "back of beyond",<sup>32</sup> where there were no railways at all, and movement was hampered by heavy winter snowstorms and deep snow. The new task assigned to Bakich was to protect the rear of the Independent Orenburg Army and the communication line with the Western Army.

The composition of his corps by 2 March was as follows:

Name of units	Bayonets	Sabres	MGs	Guns
<b>2nd Syzran' Rifle Division</b>				
5th Syzran' Rifle Regiment	322	–	17	–
6th Syzran' Rifle Regiment	183	–	9	–
7th Khvalynsk Rifle Regiment	157	–	6	–
8th Vol'sk Rifle Regiment	380	–	10	–
2nd Rifle Artillery <i>Divizion</i>	–		–	5
<b>5th Orenburg Rifle Division</b>				
18th Orenburg Rifle Regiment	125	–	4	–
19th Orenburg Rifle Regiment	123	–	2	–
20th Orenburg Rifle Regiment	129	–	4	–
21st Orenburg Rifle Regiment	118	–	4	–
<b>1st Independent Orenburg Cossack Brigade</b>				
1st Orenburg Cossack Regiment	–	599	4	–
4th Orenburg Cossack Regiment	–	809	12	–
<b>Composite Cossack Brigade</b>				
Tatishchevo Platoon <i>Divizion</i>	510	–	8	–
Sakmara Horse <i>Divizion</i>	–	249	–	
33rd Orenburg Cossack Regiment	–	1,050	10	–
<b>Other units</b>				
1st Mobile Artillery Park	–	–	–	–
2nd dressing unit with mobile sanitary unit		–	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,047</b>	<b>2,707</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>5</b>

<sup>32</sup> The Russian phrase is "a bear corner". PW

The table shows that it was a corps in name only, its numbers only slightly exceeded the numbers of a four-battalion WWI infantry regiment.<sup>33</sup> At the same time the corps' front was over 150 kilometres – that of an Army in WWI. Bakich had an average of only 32 bayonets and sabres per kilometre. For comparison, the Whites in the south of Russia in 1919 had same density, as 32-33 men per kilometre was usual, and a regiment of 800-1000 bayonets had to hold a line of 25-30 kilometres. Of course, 33 men could hardly hold a kilometre of front, so it seems more correct to group the defence according to the number of units in the corps (Bakich's corps had 11 regiments, horse and foot).

On 4 March IV Corps was incorporated into the Southern Army Group of the Western Army under the command of Major General Belov. Belov was a brave officer and a capable organiser but micro-managed his subordinates, which caused complete confusion in the units. For example, in the summer of 1919, while commanding the Southern Army, he intercepted a truck with boots going to one of his units and ordered the driver to go to the nearest unit to the Army HQ and began to personally distribute boots there. As it turned out, they already had boots, but lacked caps. So Belov, promised them caps and asked the boots be given to the neighbouring unit.

The corps was given new orders – to leave blocking forces along the Ural River and, maintaining communication with the right flank of the Independent Orenburg Army with the help of cavalry, concentrate most of the infantry on the right flank of the corps to cover Verkhneural'sk. The corps headquarters was ordered to move to the village of Magnitogorsk.

The strike group (5th Syzran' Rifle Regiment, two companies of the Stavka Battalion, the 4th Orenburg Cossack Regiment, the 2nd Battery of the 2nd Rifle Artillery *Divizion*), created on the right flank of the corps, was headed by the commander of the 1st Independent Orenburg Cossack Brigade, Colonel Krasnoyartsev. The plan was for the concentration to be completed by the evening of 5 March, after which the group would take up initial positions for an offensive towards Bashkiria. In fact, the fighting was conducted on the border of the Orenburg Cossack Host and the Bashkir lands at the beginning of March. The implementation of the plan was somewhat delayed.

The regrouping of corps units was completed by 18:00 on 7 March. The next day the Whites left Kizil'skoe and withdrew 10 kilometres to the east, and the corps' right flank strike group went into active operations, but did not succeed. As a result on 9 March the group HQ ordered that the corps' right flank be further strengthened. The transfer of forces to the right flank was caused by the need to support the Western Army's offensive, which was already operating by that time on the outskirts of Birsik. As a result, the corps' left flank, which co-operated with the Independent Orenburg Army, was left to itself.

Nevertheless the left flank, under Colonel Faddeev of the Composite Cossack Brigade, was quite successful. On 10 March his units, together with units of the 5th Orenburg Cossack Division of the II Orenburg Cossack Corps, under Major General Akulinin, occupied Gryaznushinskii after an hour and a half of fighting. The retreating enemy was pursued by cavalry and was driven by *sotnias* of the Sakmara Horse *Divizion* to Kizil'skoe. That Whites managed to seize the enemy's telegraph and telephone gear, as well as the operational orders for the Reds' 24th Simbirsk Iron Rifle Division. The next day Colonel Faddeev, encouraged by the previous day's success, launched an attack on Kizil'skoe, but failed – 2nd Lieutenant Kozhevnikov and ten Cossacks were wounded, one of them dying of his wounds.

On the morning of 13 March the attack of the right flank strike group began. The troops stormed Abzelilovo, where significant Red forces had entrenched (according to intelligence, two infantry

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<sup>33</sup> The composition of a wartime infantry regiment according to the 20 April 1915 regulations was: 60 officers, 8 officials and 3,267 lower ranks – Ulyanov I. E., *Regular Infantry 1855-1918*, Moscow, 1998.

regiments and a squadron, with 30 machine guns and four guns). The village was occupied and a pursuit of the enemy began, but the Whites suffered heavy losses: three officers killed, seven officers and about 50 lower ranks wounded. The Reds recaptured the settlement the same day.

The battle, by the standards of the Civil War, was extremely fierce. White losses were up to 200 killed and wounded, including 15 officers. The losses of the Reds were greater, but they found making up the damage much easier than the Whites, thanks to their established system of mass mobilisation. The fighting took place on Cossack territory, and local self-defence units began to appear in the ranks of the corps, judging by their names: the Syrtinskiy Foot, the Smelovskiy, Yangel'skoe and Magnitogorsk *Druzhina*. The corps' rifle units were also supplemented by conscripted men from Verkhneural'sk and Troitsk districts.

In early March, Lieutenant-General Khanzhin's Western Army launched an offensive, the ultimate goal of which was to occupy Moscow. Lieutenant-General Boldyrev, former Commander-in-Chief of the Ufa Directory (Provisional All-Russian Government), wrote that:

If the operation succeeded ... there would have been a huge arc encompassing the Reds, squeezing the ends of which promised the most decisive results. Moscow, moreover, would have been deprived of the reserves of the rich south, deprived of coal and liquid fuel so necessary to it.

Lieutenant-General Budberg, the Minister of War in Admiral Kolchak's government, noted that the offensive in the southern direction:

... would create, after joining with Denikin, a common front, strengthening the now separated parties, giving the opportunity to better distribute the personnel of both fronts. The offensive in that direction covered the loyal areas of the Ural and Orenburg Cossacks, creating a quiet rear, giving the opportunity to use the wealth of the Troitsk-Orsk region (grain, fodder and livestock), opening the possibility of navigation on the Caspian Sea and supply through the Caucasus.

According to the famous Russian military theorist of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Golovin,

This offensive led first to the area populated by the Volga German colonists (Saratov – Krasnyi Kut – Kamyshin), representing [sic] anti-Bolshevik peasants, and then would lead to a connection with the Don Cossacks. If the offensive were successful, a vast unbroken anti-Bolshevik territory would be created, including all the Cossacks as well as the most anti-Bolshevik-minded peasants.

In the spring of 1919 the White offensive could develop in two directions: 1) Kazan – Vyatka – Kotlas to connect with the troops of the Northern Front of Lieutenant General Miller and the Allies and 2) Samara – Saratov – Tsaritsyn to connect with the troops of Lieutenant General Denikin, acting in southern Russia.

Here is what Lieutenant General Filatiev, who later served in Admiral Kolchak's General Staff wrote:

There was another, a third option, in addition to the two mentioned: to move simultaneously to Vyatka and Samara. It led to an eccentric movement of armies, separated actions, and to the denudation in the gap between the armies. Such an action might be afforded by a commander, confident in himself and his troops and having superiority of forces, strategic reserves and a widely developed network of railroads for the transfer of troops along the front and in depth. In this case, one of the directions is chosen as the main one, and the others are essentially demonstrations to mislead the enemy. None of the above conditions were present in the Siberian Army, except for the self-confidence of the commander, so this option should have been discarded from the discussion, as leading inexorably to complete failure. The plan





chosen to crush the Bolsheviks led the Siberian armies to collapse in the end. The situation of the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1919 was such that only a miracle could save them. That happened with the adoption in Siberia of the most absurd plan of action.

Responsibility for the development of the spring offensive, and for its subsequent failure, lies with the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Major General Lebedev.

By 13 March units of the Western Army took Ufa, and the first to fight their way into the city were units of the 18th Orenburg Cossack Regiment. According to some sources, Trotsky himself was almost captured. The successes at the front of Khanzhin's army from the second half of March began to affect the position of the entire left flank of the Whites' Eastern Front. On 18 March a simultaneous offensive of the Southern Group of the Western Army and the Independent Orenburg Army began. On 19-22 March Bakich's corps fought with varying success for the villages of Syrtinskiy and Kizil'skoe.

In an order of IV Orenburg Army Corps of 19 March Bakich's personal political views are vividly expressed. He instructed his subordinates to:

Explain to the recruits by means of conversations that they are called by the exhausted mother Russia to take part in the construction and rebuilding of the reviving Motherland. That the struggle is for the restoration of the Russian national democracy, violated by various foreigners, as well as for real freedom, equality and fraternity of all citizens of Russia, ensuring the free national cultural development of the smaller nationalities in the Russian Federation, as well as for the restoration of the Russian national power over the country.

I repeat, I will demand from all commanders, up to and including NCOs, persistent and tireless work in the creation of our young and strong-hearted army, to which all honest Russian people look with hope. They must manifest skilful initiative in the management of the units entrusted to them in battle, so that the riflemen know, see and believe that their commanders lead them to victory and to the triumph of the idea of the restoration of their native country.

At the same time, I demand that all superior ranks treat their subordinates as free citizens of the Great Power with full respect for their personality, not allowing the slightest lawlessness, especially rude and humiliating treatment. But remember that regulations must be observed and an iron military discipline maintained everywhere at all times with inexorable strictness. The commanders of all ranks should set an example of honest and strict attitude to themselves and to the service, representing the embodiment of the consciousness of duty to the Motherland in the hard days of the shameful destruction – which we must, and will, put an end to. Please remember, all officers of the corps, that the Motherland expects great work from us, so let us work hard for its benefit.

The decisive break on the front of Bakich's corps took place on 23 March. According to an entry in the military operations journal of IV Corps:

After brief negotiations between the commander of the 4th Orenburg Ataman Uglitskiy Cossack Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel R. P. Stepanov, and the Commander of the 1st Bashkir Cavalry Regiment, Cornet M. L. Murtazin (the latter was with a regiment at the Reds' disposal), from 22 to 23 March, the 1st Bashkir Cavalry Regiment came over to our side in its entirety.

The reason for the transfer was, in my opinion, the decisive successes of the Western Army, as well as the fact that Murtazin's regiment had fought together with the White units on the Buzuluk

front, against which it had to fight now. In his book Murtazin, of course, distorted this episode, which was delicate for him as the Red commander. The Bashkirs who defected to the White side were guaranteed complete immunity, and only communists and commissars were withdrawn from the regiment. On their return to the Whites, the Bashkirs occupied a number of settlements, including Kizil'skoe and all the surrounding hamlets, destroyed a battalion of the 1st Smolensk Soviet Regiment, captured two guns and several machine guns. The corps military operations journal recorded:

The enemy is defeated head-on, fleeing in panic, the pursuit of the retreating enemy continues.

For about a month after 23 March, while the strategic pursuit of the Reds in the Southern Urals continued, the corps documents contain almost exclusively victorious reports. On 23 March, Bakich's troops, having surrounded the Reds in the mountainous area north of Temyasovo, captured two guns, machine guns, camp kitchens and shells, and:

The enemy left several hundred corpses at the battle site, since our embittered units took no prisoners. The remnants of the enemy were scattered over the mountains.

When Bakich occupied Kizil'skoe a map with the designation of the Reds' retreat routes was captured, which greatly facilitated the pursuit of the enemy. There was talk in the Red ranks that they would now be chased all the way to the Volga.

On 24 March the corps received the task to continue pursuit of the enemy along the whole front with the aim of seizing the Kananikol'skoe and Preobrazhenskiy factories, to take Mryasovo, and further to try to cut the Sterlitamak – Orenburg road. The task was successfully carried out. On the night of March 25-26 the Whites raided Mryasovo and pushed out the Reds, who suffered heavy losses, and the transport, telegraph and telephone equipment, camp kitchens and the office of the Red 208th Rifle Regiment were captured. The Reds continued to retreat hastily, abandoning artillery, machine guns, ammunition and a variety of property. For example, on 27 March, 24 (!) of the enemy's camp kitchens were taken as trophies. On 5 April the Reds left Baymak due to the threat of encirclement.

On the same day on order from Admiral Kolchak promoted Colonel Bakich to major-general, "for his distinction in deeds against the enemy", with seniority from 5 February 1919. Bakich was forty years old at the time. According to the attestation given by Dutov on 23 April 1919, Bakich was:

Quite healthy. Hardy. Very brave. Very popular and enjoys great respect among the soldiers and commanders. Excellent administrator and leader. Always disciplined, strict and persistent in his demands. Beliefs are firm. Decisive in combat and courageous in tasks. Well-read. Absolutely calm in battle and leads troops intelligently. Enjoys the favour of the entire population where he lives. Constantly fights the Bolsheviks. Formed the Syzran' Rifle Division and has remained with it in all its battles. Sober. Outstanding. He commands a corps well and is irreplaceable in combat in that role.

At the same time, information was received at corps headquarters that Bakich might be replaced as corps commander. To prevent his removal General Bakich mobilized personal connections. His chief of staff, Smolnin-Tervand, had before WWI been a classmate at the General Staff Academy with Major General Burlin, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. On 5 April, Tervand telegraphed Burlin in confidence:

... received a note from Shcherbakov that it is proposed to replace *KomKor-4* General Bakich. I report to you that General Bakich has already spent many months<sup>34</sup> fighting

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<sup>34</sup> The original has "8 months" crossed out.



with the corps; everyone in the corps has known him for a long time and trusts him. Recently the Orenburg Host has awarded the General the host ribbon and enlisted him into the host for his defence of its borders. There are many Cossack units in the corps who follow the General as their *stanichnik*.<sup>35</sup> Discuss the case with the *Nashtaverkh*.<sup>36</sup> I believe you will make the right decision, taking into account the information reported to you and the personal qualities of the general known to the *Nashtaverkh*. ...

Burlin's connection to the case was successful, as Bakich was not relieved of his command.

On 7 April units under Lieutenant Colonel Stepanov occupied Kananikol'skoe. The next day the advanced units of Colonel Faddeev crossed the line of the Sakmara River. On 8 April the city of Orsk was occupied in a raid of the 2nd Orenburg Cossack Division of the Independent Orenburg Army. On 10 April the 7th Khvalynsk Rifle Regiment, together with Colonel Faddeev's units, took Preobrazhenskiy. On the night of 12/13 April the corps units forced the Bol'shoy Ik River. The pursuit of the Reds was led by the cavalry. According to the record in the corps' military operations journal:

The Soviet 1st and the 5th Armies, as a result of recent operations of our troops in the area of Ufa – Sterlitamak – Orsk, were put into complete disorder. The remnants of these armies, having lost control and communication among themselves, are fleeing in panic in a general direction to the West and South-West.

While Bakich was successfully crushing the Reds in Bashkiria, his wife in Omsk experienced all the delights of Kolchak's rear. On 9 April 1919 a letter was sent to the Minister of Internal Affairs on behalf of the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief in which it was reported that

According to information received on 3 April, the wife of the Provisional Commander of the Orenburg Army Corps, Olga Konstantinovna Bakicha, was arrested this April in the restaurant *Bomond*<sup>37</sup> for no reason. When arrested, an agent of the Omsk Detective Militia put a revolver to her forehead and sent her on foot under escort with a drawn weapon to the Militia, where she was "kindly" told that a mistake had been made. In order to avoid a repetition of similar incidents, I ask for an investigation of this case and notification of what punishment will be imposed on the Militia agent from your side, as I believe that his act on the wife of a General at the front cannot go unpunished.

In a memo about this incident of 5 April, the head of the information department of the General Staff rightly noted:

If this is the way they act with the wife of a renown general, hero, defender of Syzran', the question must arise – how do the militia officers act in the rear with the wives of the front-line soldiers, who sacrifice their lives and shed their blood for our well-being? It is difficult to imagine the morale our defenders at the front will experience when they learn about the above-mentioned mistakes.

Unfortunately, I have no information at my disposal as to whether measures were taken to correct the mistake and punish the guilty, but the case is, in my opinion, very much indicative of the state of the White rear.

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<sup>35</sup> Literally a person from their *stanitsa*. PW

<sup>36</sup> An abbreviation for Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. PW

<sup>37</sup> That is, *Beau Monde*. PW



## The Salmysh

Sterlitamak was occupied by the Western Army on 4 April, Belebey on 7 April, Bugulma on 10 April and Buguruslan on 15 April. In the situation it was important for the Whites to vigorously pursue the enemy, without losing contact, in order to seize strategically important points before the melting of the rivers. Orenburg was such a point in the southern Urals.

For the Cossack psychology it was important who controlled the centre of this or that military district at any time and who held the host's capital. In many respects the Cossacks decided whether to participate in the struggle against the Bolsheviks or not depending on such things. For example, the Orenburg provincial committee of the Bolshevik Party and the provincial executive committee reported to the Central Committee that:

The false rumour of the fall of Orenburg, which is being diligently spread by our enemies, causes an influx of fresh forces from the hesitant portion of the Cossacks, who would all join Kolchak if Orenburg was to fall.

Orenburg was the Host capital, the centre of the 1st Military District and a vital railway junction, with more than 100 factories and plants. In 1912 the city's population was 146,000 people. For the local Cossacks in many ways the Civil War in the Orenburg region was the struggle for Orenburg city. Sometimes that was for holding the city (autumn-winter 1917 and 1918), in other cases it was capturing it (spring-summer 1918 and 1919).

However, the Whites failed to occupy Orenburg before the rivers flooded in spring 1919, as a result of which the left flank of the Whites' Eastern Front was firmly bogged down in fighting for the city until the end of summer 1919, when the strategic initiative passed to the Reds. Capture of Orenburg and access to Samara in the spring-summer of 1919 would have given the Whites a huge release of forces due to a significant reduction in the length of the front, significantly simplified supply (allowing supply by rail), disrupted the counter-attack prepared by the Reds from the Buzuluk – Sorochinsk – Mikhailovskiy (Sharlyk) area and given an opportunity to link with Denikin, after which a Bolshevik victory would have been impossible. Success would have made following battles in the southern Urals much easier for the Whites, as the position of the Reds in the circumstances would have been very difficult. All this shows that the struggle for Orenburg was decisive for both sides – but it was at this most difficult stage that the offensive impulse of the White Eastern Front was suspended.

Bakich's troops were forced to advance in terrible conditions over deteriorating spring roads and thawed river ice. Due to the high pace of the offensive there were problems with supply to the units and the troops were exhausted. On 14 April the corps received a new task – head along the Abdulino – Orenburg road and attack Orenburg itself. The units of the Consolidated Sterlitamak Army Corps were advancing on the right and on the left was the II Orenburg Cossack Corps of Major General Akulinin. Akulinin came to the conviction that it was necessary to break into Orenburg on the heels of the Reds, without giving the enemy a chance to come to his senses. For the Whites in that situation, that was the only correct decision.

From mid-April 1919, on the left flank of the White eastern front, a months-long struggle for Orenburg began, the beginning of which in Soviet historiography was traditionally associated with the defeat of Bakich's corps. To understand whether this defeat actually took place, it is necessary to analyse in detail the course of the Orenburg Operation itself, or the defence of Orenburg, as Soviet historians wrote. It should be noted that both in the sources and in historical studies the information on the course of the most intense fighting for Orenburg in the second half of April 1919 are very contradictory and confusing, so it is not always possible to reconstruct the course of events accurately.



On 17 April Bakich's troops reached the approaches to Orenburg from the north-east near the confluence of the Salmysh and Sakmara Rivers. South of the Sakmara, II Orenburg Cossack Corps was advancing successfully. Orenburg was defended by the units of the Soviet 1st Army under the command of Gay, who later wrote that Bakich:

... was considered an ardent opponent of the Bolsheviks and enjoyed a reputation in the White Army as a talented commander.

By this time the condition of the roads in the Orenburg area had deteriorated dramatically, the mountain rivers had overflowed, and bridges had been demolished in many places.

There was a heavy thaw. The country lanes ... were so muddy that, when it was possible the soldiers didn't walk on them, but to the sides of them, or even cross-country. Most of the soldiers' shoes were falling apart, they were walking knee-deep in mud.

The Reds retreated behind the Salmysh and shelled the IV Corps units with artillery. Bakich's troops prepared for a crossing of the Salmysh River in the conditions of the spring floods, building rafts and bridges. On 18 April the left flank units of the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division, having crossed the Sakmara near the village of Nikol'skoe, captured the villages of Verkhnie and Nizhnie Cheben'ki. On 20 April the division occupied Sakmara<sup>38</sup> and then, in the Red rear, developed their success to Tatarskaya Kargala,<sup>39</sup> to the north of Orenburg.

According to the memoirs of Private Gergenreder of the 5th Syzran' Rifle Regiment, on the day of the Salmysh crossing the soldiers lined up on the marshy bank. Soon Bakich came up to them, dismounted and walked along the line.

He looked tall, portly, dressed in an overcoat, his face was oblong, his long moustache hung down at the ends, he had no beard. Bakich announced that the regiment was to "obtain a bridgehead".

The 5th Syzran' Rifle Regiment crossed the river without artillery support, which it struggled to bring to the crossing area in time. As a result of the crossing and persistent fighting by the time Sakmara was occupied, the soldiers of the 5th Regiment, were

... exhausted ... so much so that one could no longer think at all ... some went into stables or barns, lay down on the straw and immediately fell asleep ...

The appearance of the Whites behind the Salmysh was a complete surprise to the commander of the Soviet 1st Army, Gay. But the transports of the units that captured Sakmara, were not ferried across the Salmysh, and the troops were deprived of supplies by the time of the decisive battles.

From the morning of 21 April the corps began to cross the Salmysh in the area of [Pervoe] Imangulovo, Bikkulovo and Novotroitskoe. The Whites managed to interrupt the telephone connection between Orenburg and the headquarters of the 20th Penza Rifle Division. On the same day the 6th Syzran' Rifle Regiment took the village of Mayorskoe, from where the next day it attacked towards Kargala station, to the north-west of Orenburg, which was in the deep rear of the Red Orenburg Group.

In the fighting of 21 April the inconsistency in the actions of Bakich's and Akulinin's corps was clearly shown, as a result of which the 7th Khvalynsk Rifle Regiment of Bakich's corps suspended its

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<sup>38</sup> Vorobyov, erroneously gives this as 21 April, which is very important for the assessment of the Orenburg operation. However both the IV Corps military journal and Gay's work both have 20 April.

<sup>39</sup> The text uses the very old name of Seitovskaya. It has also variously been called Kargalinskaya Sloboda and Seitov Posad. PW

offensive and returned to its initial position, and some of the riflemen went over to the Reds. There were mutual recriminations between the commanders of the units at different levels, which look strongly like a desire for self-justification and shifting the blame to the neighbouring corps. Most likely, the commander of the 7th Regiment himself was to blame for what happened. On this occasion the commander of II Corps Major-General Akulinin wrote to Bakich:

I am forwarding herewith the documents describing the unfriendly and unhelpful attitude of some members of your corps to the units of my corps. ... In view of the above, I ask Your Excellency to: 1) establish the truth – urgently arrange a strict investigation. ... 2) take measures to restore good-neighbourly relations, under which there can be only benevolent competition between our units in battle.

On 22 April IV Corps units crossed the Salmysh at Arkhipova, seven kilometres east of Sakmara.<sup>40</sup> Due to the river's rapid current and the small capacity of the ferry available there, the crossing was delayed until 23 April, as a result of which the synchronisation between the corps' divisions was broken (the 2nd Division broke through to the rear of the Reds, while the 5th Division was still unable to cross the Salmysh). Even Soviet authors admitted that:

To force the Salmysh River in spring, during the flood, with only primitive means, under fire from the opposite bank was very difficult.

For Colonel Neyzel, head of the 5th Orenburg Rifle Division, it was:

... absolutely impossible to cross the Salmysh River by boats, rafts, etc. – the very full river with a terribly fast current and whirlpools, even without any resistance from the Reds, did not allow us to control the rafts ...

On the same day, units of the 2nd Infantry Division captured a Red wagon train and more than 1,000 shells near Ekaterinovka. The division headquarters moved to Sakmara and the units continued their successful movement towards Orenburg. The Red plan, according to later Soviet authors, was to allow IV Corps to cross the Salmysh, press it to the river and destroy it. To all appearances, this was wishful thinking, since until 23 April the initiative belonged entirely to the Whites.

On 23 April the troops of IV Corps were ordered to cut the Orenburg – Samara railway line, to seize Orenburg and by 26 April to reach the line Novosergievka – Nizhneozernoe. In his orders to the corps Bakich demanded:

During the offensive troops are to make wide use of carts from the local population. Marches should be made both during the day and at night. Cavalry should not be attached to the infantry, but move forward, supported by infantry units on carts. All commanders should remember that the final destruction of the enemy and the capture of the huge military property located in the city of Orenburg will depend on the courage and determination of their actions.

At 10:00 of that day the Whites occupied Tatarskaya Kargala, which was their maximum success in the offensive on Orenburg. Near the village of Nizhnie Cheben'ki there was an encounter battle. To the north, near Imangulovo, the Reds spotted the crossing of corps units which they halted by artillery fire. Units of the 5th Infantry Division continued to cross the Salmysh River near Arkhipova, but due to the deterioration of the ferry, the transfer was extremely slow. As a result, an order was given to build bridges across the branches of the overflowing Salmysh.

On 24 April the corps was ordered to clear the Reds from the area between the Salmysh and Yangiz Rivers in order to allow units of the neighbouring 10th Verkhneural'sk Rifle Division to cross near

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<sup>40</sup> Modern Akhipovka is 9 km north-east of modern Sakmara. PW





Bulanovo. In the Arkhipova neighbourhood there was a day long battle for the crossing. The Reds attacked with large forces from Tatarskaya Kargala and Sakmara, left by the Whites the night before. The crossing of the 5th Infantry Division was suspended.

On 25 April Bakich's headquarters moved to Imangulovo, then located on the front line, to directly supervise the delayed offensive by his corps. After crossing, a column of the 5th Infantry Division began to clear the Reds from between the Salmysh and Yangiz, another column was advancing on Sakmara. The battle for the crossing near Arkhipova continued. To the north, near the crossing at Imangulovo, the Reds defended stubbornly and did not allow Bakich's units to approach the crossing. In addition, the White 7th Rifle Regiment attacked unsuccessfully in the area of Verkhnie Cheben'ki.

On 26 April the Sakmara Horse *Divizion* crossed the Salmysh at Arkhipova, despite the Reds' shelling it, to attack its native village of Sakmara. The Reds, grouped against Bakich's right flank (5th Orenburg Rifle Division), led an offensive supported by eight guns. A decisive battle took place near Arkhipova during the day. Perhaps the most intense and tragic episode of the Orenburg operation for the Whites, the battle became the basis of the plot of several works of fiction and it was vividly captured in a painting by the Soviet artist E. A. Tikhmenev.<sup>41</sup>

In the area of Arkhipova:

... the Salmysh River branched into several tributaries, separated by islands. Some tributaries were quite deep, and before reaching the main channel, one had to cross them by boat or on horseback.

By 23 April bridges had been built across the tributaries. By the evening of the 24th, with the help of the corps' engineers, a ferry was available using a steel cable, which reduced the crossing time was from 90-120 minutes to 15-20 minutes. Not only was the crossing five or six times as fast, it was now possible at night. However, a hasty retreat with only one ferry crossing was not only impossible, it was not even envisaged by the White command. Later the White leadership carried out an investigation of the circumstances of the battle of 26 April, during which the head of the 5th Rifle Division, Colonel Neyzel, answered the questions of the investigators. Regarding the return crossing he noted that:

A return crossing was not envisaged, and a retreat under the enemy's onslaught could not be anything but a disaster. Therefore I understood the order to attack as a decisive bet – either to break through the Red front and take Orenburg, or the destruction of the division.

Since the Whites failed to break through on the division's sector, the second option remained – to perish. That is what happened on 26 April.

In the morning the Whites continued to cross the Salmysh. At 14:00 the Reds, with the support of artillery, counter-attacked towards the crossing. The Whites began to fall back to the crossing, some of the riflemen went over to the enemy and opened fire on their own side. The reserves moving forward were crushed by the retreating troops and some began to surrender as well.

In this situation several officers of the 5th Division, at the head of about 150 riflemen, tried to stop the Reds, to allow the bulk of their men to cross back over the river, although no such order had been given. The Reds did not expect a repulse and began to withdraw, but just before the melee some of the riflemen wavered and surrendered to the enemy.

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<sup>41</sup> I have attached a copy of the work on the next page, as it is clearer than any of the original I could find. PW







Барабаш Г.Я. : Бой с колчаковцами на реке Салмыш

Barabash G.Y.: Battle with the *Kolchakovtsy* on the Salmysh River





Neyzel had no reserves, and the Reds approached the crossing on the heels of the 5th Division, attacked the ferry, shooting those fleeing with newly captured machine guns. A brutal fight took place. Officers and Cossacks were not taken prisoner.

According to some sources, the Whites lost up to 200 killed and wounded and about 1,500 prisoners. The Reds captured three guns, 20 machine guns and 1,000 shells. Colonel Leyburg called the battle on Salmysh "a second Stokhod".<sup>42</sup> In my opinion, this is a rather imaginative comparison, since the scale of operations of the Civil War and the First World War are hardly comparable.

The reason for the tactical defeat at Arkhipova was primarily due to the unreliability of the 5th Rifle Division's reinforcements and the traditional vices of the old Russian army inherited by the Whites. The units were poorly organised, were put into battle without proper training: the riflemen did not know their commanders, the commanders did not know their subordinates, including, most importantly, the NCOs. As a result, sometimes Bolshevik agitators were appointed positions of field officers and platoon leaders, and on their orders the riflemen surrendered to the Reds in battle.

To this should be added the problems in supply and overwork of the troops after uninterrupted crossings with battles for a whole month. In addition, the simultaneous mass crossing over of riflemen from Bakich's and Akulinin's corps to the Reds looks extremely suspicious. Most of those surrendering were lower ranks conscripted in Troitsk and Kostanay districts of Orenburg province or from Turgay.

As the commander of II Orenburg Cossack Corps, from which the Kostanay Cossacks also defected to the Reds, General Akulinin recalled later:

Before the offensive to Orenburg ... there was a conscription in the Kostanay district, in the rear of the Orenburg [South-Western] Army, where Bolshevism had taken deep roots from the very beginning of the revolution, especially among the new settler peasants. There was always ferment there, and at times armed uprisings of entire *volosts*<sup>43</sup> broke out, suppressed by the Cossacks with great difficulty and cruelty. The forcibly conscripted Kostanay locals arrived at the front embittered and in favour of the Bolsheviks.

Thus the root cause of the Kostanay people's defection to the Reds was the discontent of peasants who had moved to the Trans-Urals under the Stolypin reforms, but had not yet managed to settle properly into their new place. For them the mobilisations of the Civil War period were especially hard and were met with the most resolute response.

There were cases of *Kostanaytsy* going over to the enemy in the 6th, 7th and 42nd Troitsk Rifle Regiments. In the 6th and 18th Rifle Regiments there were even cases of officers being killed. The Kostanay gunners of the 6th Regiment clipped cartridge cases to make them burst in the barrels and put the machine guns out of action. Two machine guns were rendered inoperative in this way. From all this we can assume the existence of a united underground Bolshevik organisation among the Kostanay replenishments. All these mistakes led to the defeat of the Whites at Arkhipova.

On 26 April Bakich's troops were broken and pushed back from the right bank of the Salmysh. According to an entry in the Corps' military operations journal:

The remnants of our units in that sector swam back across the Salmysh River and withdrew to the village of Sergeevka and Sukhomlinovsky, which is 4-5 kilometres south of Sergeevka.

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<sup>42</sup> This refers to the bloody offensive of I and II Guards Infantry Corps on the Stokhod River in mid 1916. PW

<sup>43</sup> A *volost* was an administrative unit of a few villages. The nearest English word would be parish. PW



After the withdrawal of the remaining units to the rear, Colonel Faddeev's composite brigade was brought forward from the corps reserve. Having suffered the defeat, Bakich suspended the corps' active actions against Orenburg.

Subsequently, Gay arrogantly claimed that by 18:00 on 26 April Kolchak's IV Corps "no longer existed", which was far from being true, of course. In fact, Bakich had received a cruel lesson and was forced to go on the defensive in that sector of the front, but he was by no means destroyed, contrary to the claims of Soviet memoirists and researchers. The main confirmation of this is the active actions of his corps afterwards. At the same time, according to the assistant commander of the Southern Group of the Soviet Eastern Front, Novitsky, the victory on the Salmysh:

... raised the spirits of our troops and untied our hands with regard to the use of the 24th Division.

And although Bakich's corps, which was the most powerful infantry unit among those besieging the city, was not totally defeated, its advance on Orenburg was not successful.

What was the reason for Bakich's strategic failure? According to Soviet military experts, he failed to concentrate all his forces in one direction, did not have a clear plan of attack, did not coordinate his actions with the actions of the neighbouring corps, lost the initiative, and in addition, failed to keep the corps units from decomposing.

In my opinion, the reasons for the defeat of Bakich's corps at Orenburg are different. The Soviet authors knew what it was, but could not write about it. The main reason for Bakich's failure was the extremely small numbers in his corps, combined with the almost complete absence of the necessary technical means to conduct an offensive across the flooded rivers. Any coordination with neighbouring corps, separated from Bakich's corps by insurmountable water obstacles, was impossible in practice due to the absence any means of communication. While the White command was fragmented, the Reds had a single command centre in Orenburg and moved troops to threatened areas quite quickly. Bakich could not concentrate all his troops in one place – the corps could barely cope with the crossing of the Salmysh and Sakmara Rivers at multiple points. The concentration of all the troops and crossing the river at a single point was not only technically impossible, but could equally well end in complete disaster for Bakich. The situation at the front did not allow him to transfer all the troops for one decisive blow, and the corps was forced to conduct a simultaneous offensive in several directions – to the west, to the south-west and to the south.

In addition to the human factors, one of the main reasons for the failure of the White offensive was the weather conditions, which prevented the troops from forcing the water obstacles, bringing their artillery to the front in time and successfully solving the problem of supply.

On 27 April the corps headquarters moved to the rear, to the village of Novo-Nikitinskaya.<sup>44</sup> The Reds at Arkhipova began to cross to the left bank of the Salmysh and pushed back the Whites with the help of artillery and machine-gun fire. Nevertheless, they failed to develop their attack, as the Tatishchevo Platoon *Divizion* and the training detachment of the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division repulsed the crossing. On 29 April the Reds again tried to attack the crossing at Arkhipov, but the corps troops let them near the crossing and then met them with heavy fire. The Reds continued to try to cross the Salmysh River, but failed to do so. On 30 April, by order of the Southern Army Group, the corps had to go on the defensive.

In the midst of fighting, on 5 May, Bakich sent a telegram to the Military Circle of the Orenburg Cossack Host in Troitsk, in which he reported:

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<sup>44</sup> Novonikitino? PW



I and the soldiers of the Orenburg Army Corps congratulate the Military Circle on the holiday of the Orenburg Cossacks. I am happy to state to the representatives of the entire host that the work of the Cossack units of the corps is more than praiseworthy and firmly believe that through the joint efforts of the IV Corps and the Orenburg Army Corps, the host capital and all the *stanitsas* of the district will be freed from the prostitutes [sic] and again live a free peaceful life under the wise management of their elected officials.

Commander of 4th Army Corps, Major General Bakich

It was 10 May before the Reds were able to push back Bakich's units. On 13 May a directive was received from the headquarters of the Southern Group to regroup. Bakich was to concentrate his main forces not on Orenburg but towards Sterlitamak and prepare to take the offensive with his right flank. The corps was now to play only a passive role in the attack on Orenburg, simply maintaining contact with II Orenburg Cossack Corps of the Independent Orenburg Army with the help of mounted units. The regrouping of the corps forces took place on 15 May.

By the last third of May 1919 Bakich's troops were fighting on the Belaya River.



## Battle for the Ural Mountains

On 23 May 1919 Admiral Kolchak formed the Southern Army from the Independent Orenburg Army, the Orenburg Military District in the theatre of military operations and the Southern Group of the Western Army. The new Army included Bakich's corps. The army was to strike along the Orenburg – Buzuluk – Samara line to stop the Red offensive against the Western Army. Major General Belov, former commander of the Southern Group of the Western Army, was appointed its commander.

The creation of the Southern Army met with a mixed reception in military circles. The commander of II Orenburg Cossack Corps, Major General Akulinin, considered this decision erroneous. In his opinion, the disbanding of the Independent Orenburg Army at the time of decisive battles for Orenburg led to delays in the offensive and confusion, as a result of which the Cossack capital, which had an important strategic importance, was not taken. The attitude of General Akulinin, as a representative of the Orenburg Cossacks, to the disbandment of the Cossack army is understandable. Some non-Cossack officers had different feelings on the transformation. In particular, Colonel Leyburg of the Southern Army, wrote that as a result of its creation it was possible to distribute infantry and cavalry units evenly along the front line and to disband numerous headquarters and rear establishments, whose personnel reinforced the active army.

Bakich's attitude towards the Army commander, according to General Shchepikhin, was not only unfriendly, but also contemptuous, as Bakich considered himself a veteran of the White struggle. An unexpected ally of Bakich in this matter was the French military representative to the Southern Army, Colonel Pichon, who clashed with General Belov. The French officer did not miss any opportunity to speak highly of Bakich and criticise Belov's orders.

On 24 May the Whites left Sterlitamak. The situation on the right flank of the corps became more complicated. On 26 May the headquarters of IV Orenburg Army Corps moved to Mryasovo. On 31 May Bakich was ordered to defend the area between the Belaya and Sakmara rivers, and by the evening of 2 June the necessary regrouping of the corps was completed. However, despite the fact that in the conditions of the Civil War in the southern Urals the summer period allowed a wide use of manoeuvre, the corps stood passively in place in June, and there were only occasional minor reconnaissance clashes with the enemy. This, in my opinion, was due to the small numbers in the corps, the vast front that it had to defend, and also to the confusion in the White command in connection with the failure of the spring offensive. The situation was quite similar in I Orenburg Cossack Corps but the neighbouring IV Corps, which was besieging Orenburg, was huge by the standards of the Civil War (12,395 bayonets and 324 sabres).

On 9 June the committee on current affairs of the 3rd Regular Military Circle of the Orenburg Host approved the petition of the inhabitants of Magnitogorsk of the II Military District, where Bakich's headquarters had been located for some time, to enrol General Bakich, Lieutenant Colonel Smolnin-Tervand and Ensign Lyutin as honorary Cossacks in that village.

On 11 June Bakich signed another "political" order for the corps:

Valiant troops of the corps! The enemies of our Great Motherland, the communists with their commissars, are living out their last days surrounded on all sides by a ring of steel of faithful and loyal people who have risen up for the restoration of truth and order in Russia and who are sacrificing their lives in order to expel from its borders the traitors of the people, those who ruin it. The circle is strong, and in the general movement the armed crowd of Bolsheviks is being squeezed more and more, and the hour is not far off when all those who fight for the united Great Russia will unite [sic] its heart in Moscow. There finally, together with the true electors of the people, they may decide the further fate of the Motherland, stop the bloody, fratricidal war and expel





from Russia those hirelings of the Jewish International who have brought our beautiful great country to its present sad shape.

Valiant soldiers and Cossacks of the Corps! Know that you are doing great holy work and your share of the work, struggle and hardship will never be forgotten by the Motherland. Away with cowardice and hesitation – those who do not believe in the righteousness of our cause should have no place among us – let them go to the commissars, but remembering that on that Great Joyful Day, when every honest son of the Motherland will proudly say: I fought the enemies of the people for the well-being of myself and my grandchildren. The traitors, like Judas, will be punished both by God and the people. The fruits of our labours will not be for them. This is the aim and essence of our struggle, our friendly efforts are already producing excellent results, as noted above, so the slightest uncertainty is not permitted for the commanders, and in general all those who understand what we are coming to, what we are striving for.

Once again I order all corps ranks without exception to explain our aims, what has already been achieved and how bad the situation is for the commissars, who soon will have nowhere to go. I demand from the commanders of all ranks, by means of personal physical work among the soldiers who have not yet grasped the general state of things, to make it clear that it is simply foolish and shortsighted of them to expect the reign of communism and the absence of private property anywhere. It would be a realm of lazy people, drunkards and scoundrels, and not the life of an honest toiler.

You must remember that the living word of a man convinced of the righteousness of his cause is much stronger than severity and punitive measures, but without forgetting that a great cause requires great sacrifices, which is why all those who hinder our work will be mercilessly removed from our midst.

One can agree with some things in this document, and some things not, but in any case it should be remembered that this is a document of its time, reflecting Bakich's views alone.

In the second half of June, the command began a new regrouping. The left flank units of IV Corps were replaced by the XI Yaitsk<sup>45</sup> Army Corps under the command of Major General Galkin, Bakich's colleague in the People's Army. The 2nd and then the 5th Rifle Divisions were withdrawn to the Army reserve and the front of the corps was significantly reduced.

The total strength of the corps by 23 June was 3,609 bayonets, 1,586 sabres and 1,673 unarmed men with 59 machine guns and seven guns.

At the beginning of July almost the entire corps, except the 1st Orenburg Cossack Brigade of Lieutenant Colonel Stepanov, was withdrawn to the reserve near Temyasovo. Stepanov's brigade was temporarily subordinated to General Galkin (from 4 July). It was at this time that Ufa was abandoned by the Whites and there was extensive fighting on the approaches to Zlatoust. The troops of the White Eastern Front gradually left the Urals under the enemy's pressure.

On 11 July Bakich's corps fought in a new area, around Beloretsk factory. The corps included all units subordinate to Ataman Zakharov of the 2nd Military District of the Orenburg Cossack Host. Bakich's troops were entrusted<sup>45</sup> with an active defence of the road to Verkhneural'sk from the Tiryanskiy and Uzyan plants. To the right were units of I Volga Army Corps, of Major General Kappel'. On the left were units of V Sterlitamak Army Corps, of Major General Tsereteli.

Zlatoust fell on 13 July and the Reds began to develop their success towards Chelyabinsk. On 14 July Bakich arrived in Verkhneural'sk with his headquarters. Facing his corps at the front against

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<sup>45</sup> Yaitsk was an old-fashioned term for the Ural River and, by extension, the Ural Cossacks. PW



was once again the Reds' 24th Simbirsk "Iron" Rifle Division, of who an anonymous Red poet later wrote the revolutionary slogan:

The white onslaught is of no avail –  
The Iron Division  
A mind of iron, a spirit of iron,  
and a tread of iron!

Despite the fact that Bakich was opposed by one of the best Soviet divisions, he continued to defend stubbornly along the entire front of his corps (a White corps was roughly equal in numbers to a Red division, sometimes even weaker) and inflicted heavy blows to the Reds. According to General Shchepikhin:

IV Corps is the best in composition and the most reliable.<sup>46</sup> It is the backbone of the whole Army and at the most responsible sector – if the enemy pushes it back, it is just a stone's throw from the rail line (Troitsk) and can break communication, supplies and so on. Basically the whole rear was hanging by a thread, and its fate depended entirely on the valour of Bakich's corps. ... If [Bakich] had been in the General Staff, no better commander could have been found for the Southern Army, but he badly needed guidance and was always in open war with the rear. The latter trait is, however, characteristic of all the major commanders in the civil war ...

In the persistent encounter battles on the outskirts of Verkhneural'sk on 15 July, the 33rd Orenburg Cossack and 5th Syzran' Rifle Regiments dealt a heavy blow to the Red 213th Rifle Regiment. In a battle on 20 July that regiment lost almost all its command staff. The Soviet historian L. M. Spirin claims that at this time units of the Red 24th Division managed to "utterly" defeat the 5th Orenburg Rifle Division near Rakhmetovo and to take the division commander and his entire staff prisoner, but that is not mentioned in either in the corps' military operations journal or in other sources.<sup>47</sup>

In the evening of 25 July IV Orenburg Army Corps left Verkhneural'sk and withdrew to the heights four or five kilometres south of the town. On the same day the Whites left Chelyabinsk, occupied by units of the Soviet 5th Army.

The new task of Bakich's corps was to encircle and defeat the Reds in the area of Verkhneural'sk and take possession of the factory district. The corps was assigned many units and formations, including improvised ones, such as various detachments of local formation. The execution of the task began on 27 July, but due to the untrained replenishments (11th Siberian Rifle Division) the operation failed. This is General Shchepikhin's opinion of the 11th Division, formed from new recruits:

The soldiers were poorly trained and their training was interrupted – they did not even take a course in shooting. Their level of education was poor, and the officers were inexperienced and had little authority. The officers were good men, excellent physically, and probably good with their weapons, but they could not deal with the soldiers, could not get close to them. They were excellent rank-and-file soldiers and only that.

Of course, an uncoordinated unit without trained officers, in which the command staff had a widespread patronising attitude to the lower ranks, would not give good results in a combat

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<sup>46</sup> In the Southern Army.

<sup>47</sup> Given that the head of the division from 15 June to 16 August, Colonel Nikitin, later participated in the Siberian Ice March and died in 1945 in emigration in Harbin we can clearly see he was not captured.

situation. In this regard, Bakich's negative attitude towards the sending of such reinforcements is understandable.

On 29 July the corps headquarters moved to Magnitogorsk, where it stayed until 20 August. Apparently, it is to this period belongs the description of Bakich by the village teacher at Kassel'skiy, F. Uteshev. He recorded Bakich as "a tall, sinewy general with sunburned sunken cheekbones, with dark grey eyes" and noted that the general wore a "French" coat and a lambskin hat.<sup>48</sup>

The beginning of August was characterised by defensive battles by Bakich's corps and the infliction of quick but heavy blows on the enemy. In particular, as mentioned the Red 213rd Rifle Regiment suffered significant losses and was withdrawn to the rear. The corps successfully used aviation during this time. The Corps held a front over a huge length:

... in view of which in some combat areas, compared to the much more numerous enemy forces, we were relatively few.

Due to the transfer of V Corps to Orenburg, the front line of IV Corps was stretched even more. On 4 August Troitsk was abandoned. Bakich's troops found themselves in a difficult position: located on a salient ahead of the rest of the Whites' Eastern and were forced to stretch their front more and more to maintain communication with the retreating main forces. Meanwhile, some of the Soviet 5th Army, advancing eastwards along the Trans-Siberian railway, by 15 August had reached the line of the Tobol River and Bakich, acting south of the Trans-Siberian, now was in their deep rear but clearly had insufficient forces for active actions. Nevertheless, the troops of the advancing 5th Army, breaking away from their neighbours to the right and left, paid for their carelessness during the Tobolsk – Petropavl (Petropavlovsk) Operation.

General Shchepikhin, the head of Army supplies since 16 June 1919, recalled his service in the Southern Army alongside Bakich. And although some of what Shchepikhin wrote seems to be blatant slander of Bakich, in particular regarding his participation in the Orenburg Operation, I consider it my duty to give this characterisation in full. Shchepikhin wrote:

Here in the Southern Army I met Bakich again after a long break. Bakich has become well known and is accustomed to being an important man: after all, his IV Corps (based around the *Syzrantsy*), even if barely a regiment in size has been the core of Dutov's entire Southern Army<sup>49</sup> for half a year.<sup>50</sup> And even now Bakich's corps is the strongest unit in Belov's Army.

Bakich seemed broken in some way; a kind of doom radiated from him. He, apparently, repented in the depths of his soul that he had broken away from the units of the Volga Volunteer Army, which bore the incomprehensible – but appropriate to its essence and ideology – label of "People's Army". Often with either envy or with annoyance with himself, he spoke of the successes and laurels that fell to Kappel. ... "If only I had been there!" repeated Bakich. ... Yes, there, among his own people, he would have considered himself an equal, but here he had to submit to "an outsider" – as he called Belov.

Bakich worked in this region for six months, and more than once he saved the position of the entire Dutov front and Orenburg itself. He was pampered here, of course ... and

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<sup>48</sup> The term used (*barashkovaya shapka*) is that for the official Tsarist low fur hat, so presumably an Orenburg Cossack *kubanka* for Bakich. A "French" was a style of tunic favoured by WWI officers. PW

<sup>49</sup> Shchepikhin is mixing his time periods as Dutov never commanded the Southern Army. The Orenburg Operation was while Bakich was in Dutov's Independent Orenburg Army.

<sup>50</sup> The six months must be from the formation of IV Corps.



he was subordinate to Dutov, who was had a high position among the Cossacks – who formed the bulk of the units – and deep inside he thought of himself as [Dutov's] direct heir. And suddenly – such a disappointment.

From Belov I drew out only hints, but I do not dare draw conclusions from them. One thing was clear that the rift between Belov and Bakich was long in the making – since the time of the spring offensive, although in different armies.<sup>51</sup> Yes, nothing could be done about it – he was a weak man. Bakich, the new competitor was weak too. The “boy” was an eyesore for him. ... And it was not the first time that Bakich had bargained with his conscience and lost against it: there were, apparently, precedents on the Salmysh River, near Orenburg, where he watched with pleasure and gloating as he took Belov's place on the river. And, of course, it was useless to expect from Bakich a high consciousness of duty to the common cause. He might have been able to rise to such heights while still on the Volga, among his own people, when he had not yet been infected with the worm of careerism. But now that he had had a taste of it, Bakich could only drown himself. And here I witnessed how he silently, but stubbornly and calculatingly carried out his own plan, independently of the Commander and broke away from the Army, clinging to the left flank of the common Eastern Front. ...

And that Belov was the primary reason for that is evident from the fact that as soon as Dutov appeared in Atbasar (at the end of the march across the steppes by the remnants of the Southern Army), Bakich was the first to welcome him. He willingly went to join him and voluntarily shared his fate with Dutov, making an aimless, inglorious march to Semey – Sergiopol' – Tacheng (Chuguchak).

Bakich had no great scope, but in his limited sphere he was in his element. I don't think the Southern Army would have been happier under his leadership – the only plus, perhaps, would have been that (though one has to speak of it retrospectively) that Bakich's corps would not have broken away, no matter what plan Bakich put forward. But it does not matter: Bakich remained Bakich! He is a man of great will and impervious to any influence. This, given his general narrowness in military affairs, is of great importance: for a man of great stubbornness, as stubbornness is often detrimental.

And so Bakich, in his soul, decided in the early spring of '19, on the Salmysh, near Orenburg, that only Dutov was acceptable to him. ... And he followed him, leading hundreds of other people devoted to him. Bakich, selflessly, heroically, desperately ... went where Dutov went – though it is clear that his place was in those ranks where the names of Kappel', Perkhurov, Verzhbitskiy and others still shone. But stubbornness is stubbornness. ... And it always bears bitter fruit.

In his corps, at least in its cadres from the Volga, Bakich was the complete master, the administrator of its fate – this bond was laid from the Volga. Bakich felt it perfectly, and nothing could turn him from that path, the path of isolation to a certain extent. Bakich avoided by virtue of this the grave mistake that Kappel' made, diluting his cadres with all sorts of rubbish. I remember how Bakich protested when Belov sent the 11th Siberian Rifle Division, a new, Omsk formation, to him to the front. And where did so much acumen come from!

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<sup>51</sup> Shchepikhin is again confusing times. Bakich's corps participated in the spring offensive as part of Belov's Southern Group. The period of them being only neighbours refers only to the end of February and the first days of March 1919

Perhaps Shchepikhin's characterisation reflects Bakich's attitude to his superiors and fellow soldiers, but one cannot fully agree with all of the author's assessments.

However, let us return to the front line of Bakich's corps, where decisive events took place on 25 August. On that day, in connection with the successful Red offensive on the Eastern Front, Staff Captain Murtazin, who commanded the Bashkir Horse Brigade (1st and 2nd Bashkir Horse Regiments), went over to their side for the second time (!). On the same day the Bashkirs took part in the fighting against their recent colleagues. Once again, Murtazin's actions affected Bakich's fortunes, but unlike the spring of 1919 this time it was the Reds rather than the Whites who took the offensive.

The corps retreated through the Cossack territory towards the Turgay steppe. During the retreat Bakich considered it necessary to keep in touch with the White Eastern Front at all costs, and not leave to winter in Turkestan, as suggested by the commander of the Southern Army. Incidentally, the Red command planned to strike a decisive blow to Belov's troops north of Orsk – exactly where Bakich was operating. However, that plan could not be realised. Moreover when Frunze, the commander of the Turkestan Front, inspected the 24th Rifle Division he found it badly shattered and disorganised, with a significant percentage of the command staff out of action and its material in an ugly state. It seems this is to the merit of Bakich's corps, which had exhausted one of the best enemy divisions.

By the evening of 30 August the Reds reached the line Zaysan – Orsk – Bredy in front of the corps, breaking the Southern Army into two parts, one of which was Bakich's corps, cut off from the main forces of the Army. General Belov, as early as 26 August, had ordered Bakich:

If communication with Army Headquarters is lost, break through to the Aktobe – Orsk rail line, bypassing the city of Orsk to the east, covering yourself from that side with blocking forces.

The commander's plan was to withdraw the army to Turkestan for the winter. However, Bakich did not carry out that order.

According to the corps' military operations journal the withdrawal of the neighbouring XI Yaitsk Army Corps put Bakich's men in a very difficult situation. At that period IV Orenburg Army Corps held the a line:

... about 100 kilometres ahead of the main front of the army, covering Pavlovskiy, where there were warehouses abandoned by the Southern Army, some of whose stores were carried out by the Corps, which increased the distance of the Corps from the Army. In view of that, it was impossible to fulfil the directive noted above – to get through with the Corps units to the Aktobe – Orsk line, as that area was already occupied by the enemy. The lack of water, food, fodder and settlements in the areas east and southeast of Orsk, through which the corps would have to travel to follow the orders, also made it impossible for the troops to travel though there to link up with the other Army Corps.

It must be said that none of the four corps commanders obeyed Belov's order to withdraw to Turkestan. Moreover, considering Belov a war criminal, the commander of XI Yaitsk Army Corps Major General Galkin and the commander of the 21st Division from that corps, Major General Gopper, wanted to arrest him.

The army, and especially the Cossack units, did not want and even feared to "go to the sands", as a result of which mass surrenders began, leading to the complete collapse of the Southern Army. According to various estimates, from 30,000 to 57,000 men surrendered as prisoners of war to the Soviet 1st Army in September 1919.



As a result, Bakich decided to:

... withdraw the Corps soldiers, with their arms and property, away from enemy attacks coming from Troitsk, Kostanay and Orsk in order to preserve the Corps units and get in touch with the Western Army near the town of Atbasar.

The Corps commander made the retreat in two columns – a northern, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Stepanov, and a southern, under the command of Colonel Vishnevskiy. An advance guard, under Captain Zakharov, and rearguard, under Colonel Nagaev, provided cover. The northern column also covered the main forces of the corps, which moved in the southern column. Zakharov's vanguard had to destroy armed groups in the Kostanay district and the rearguard had to hold back the onslaught of the Reds. The 5th Orenburg Rifle Division, broke away from the main forces of the corps, and retreated to Embi.

On 3rd September the corps headquarters left Elizavetinka and thereby left the territory of the Orenburg Cossack Host, where it had spent almost a year of hard fighting. It was forced to wander in wild, inhospitable areas. Communication with the Army was temporarily interrupted.





## On the Steppes

Some of the corps fought as they retreated to the Tobol River and the movement across the steppe was accompanied by all sorts of surprises. The Turgay steppe was literally swarming with detachments of all sorts: there were White units that had broken away from the retreating Southern Army, and anarchist Green detachments (for example, the Volga Horse Detachment), and “Kirghiz” gangs,<sup>52</sup> robbing and killing single people. An eyewitness wrote:

The vast steppe covered with yellowing sagebrush, occasionally crossed by gullies or low hills, was spread out all around. Never before had the Turgay steppes been so animated by the clatter and creak of so many carts and wagons as in the autumn of 1919.

It is curious that the Volga Horse Detachment of the SR Fortunatov, which operated against both the Whites and the Reds in the steppe, set itself the task of:

Taking from the Southern Army ... the Volga Volunteers, who had once withdrawn from Samara to Orenburg alongside Colonel Makhin.

Even in the autumn of 1919 the SRs still did not give up the dream of recreating their own anti-Bolshevik front!

On 6 September Fortunatov’s detachment encountered Bakich’s units in the vicinity of Tufan'evskoe. And the following occurred, in my opinion naturally – having learnt about Fortunatov’s intention to head to the Volga, the soldiers of the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division decided to go with him, which greatly disturbed Bakich, who wanted to keep all his soldiers. According to the description of one of the officers of the Volga Horse Detachment, clearly hostile to the “reactionary” Whites, Bakich’s corps:

... looked like a huge gypsy wagon train ... General Bakich said that he had 20,000 people, of whom only 3,000-4,000 were fighting men. Women were abundant everywhere, up to and including corps headquarters. The soldiers were all demoralised by panic from the pressure of the Reds, their insurgency and fatigue. Leaving the front, they had abandoned valuable engineering property, weapons, shells, personal plunder of value for themselves and for sale to peasants, such as: linen, sugar, uniforms, shoes and so on. They ditched machine guns and shells in the lakes, and for lack of fuel in the steppe they burned rifles on the fire. I have never seen such decay in my life.

Taking into account this assessment, it should be noted that Bakich’s corps was at that moment still quite capable of fighting. The corps was also accompanied by a huge number of refugees who did not consider it possible to stay in the Bolshevik-held territory.

On 11 September Bakich received information about the White counter-offensive that the Eastern Front had begun during the Tobolsk – Petropavl Operation and ordered the corps to halt and take a waiting position. The corps settled in the steppe area to the south-east of Kostanay near Aksuat station.<sup>53</sup> All the refugees were to continue on towards Atbasar.

The Supreme Commander-in-Chief’s Staff directed Bakich’s corps to cover Orsk and Kostanay from Atbasar – Kokshetau and restore communication with the right flank of the Southern Army through Turgay. The partisan detachments of Generals Perkhurov and Karnaukhov were temporarily included in the corps. Perkhurov and Karnaukhov’s partisans, together with Stepanov’s cavalry,

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<sup>52</sup> In the Russian Empire, modern Kazakhs were called Kirgiz or Kirgiz-Kaisaks.

(This is partly because *kazakh* is so similar to the word for Cossack, *kazak*. PW)

<sup>53</sup> Just south of Timiryazev. PW



were to seize Kokshetau and establish communication with the Independent Steppe Group of Major General Lebedev, operating to the north.

During this period there was a reorganisation of the Army, which affected IV Corps. On 18 September 1919 Lieutenant General Diterikhs, commander-in-chief of the Eastern Front renamed the Southern Army to the Orenburg Army and placed Lieutenant General Dutov in command of it. Information that his corps was included in that army due to the reorganisation reached Bakich on 20 September, having for some time had been directly subordinate to the commander-in-chief. The total number of troops retreating in the Orenburg army was about 20,000 men.

On 20 September Bakich made a number of attempts to take Kostanay, but it turned out the city was occupied by large forces of the Reds, and attempts to capture it were halted. After that the corps was virtually inactive for the rest of the month, only occasionally engaging in minor skirmishes with the enemy's detachments and reconnaissance parties. Inactivity had a negative effect on the spirit of the troops. "Even the Cossacks could see how dazed they were from the dreary camp," noted an eyewitness. In another assessment, intensive training was going on everywhere in the corps units. "Wherever you look in the village, there are classes everywhere, commands ring out," wrote a young Orenburg Cossack officer, A. O. Pridannikov.

There is a curious testimony about his meeting with Bakich on 29 September in Sholaksay (Chuloksay), where the headquarters of the corps was stationed. Pridannikov wrote in his diary:

Finally we<sup>54</sup> saw the general walking along the street. He likewise drew his attention to us and called us to him with a wave of his hand. Having learnt from us who we were and the reason for our coming to Sholaksay, the general directed us to the chief of staff, explaining how to find him. It turned out that the general we met was the commander of IV Corps, General Bakich.

Another testimony about Bakich has been preserved:

... there were many stories about such "corps ladies" and families in Sholaksay. Even the corps commander, General Bakich himself, lived with a lady, a dentist, and this affair had been going on since the time he fought alongside the Czechs on the Volga.

Another contemporary testified that later, when in China, Bakich married a young girl. By the standards of the Civil War, it was not surprising for Bakich to have a mistress while his wife was still alive – for example, Ataman Dutov and Admiral Kolchak did the same. Bakich's favourite was Olga Fyodorovna Yakimenka, who in 1918 had served as a dentist in the garrison of Syzran', and later in the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division and at the headquarters of IV Corps. She was transferred to each new place of service at the same time as Bakich himself. In July 1920 she committed suicide during a fit of hysteria while in a camp on the Emil River in China. Details of her death will be given below.

On 30 September General Perkhurov received an order from the commander to move to General Lebedev's Steppe Group and bring Fortunatov's detachment with him, promising amnesty to all those who returned. The command did not realise that Fortunatov had already completely broken with the Whites and during this period he and his detachment were engaged in looting in the southern Urals.

In the difficult conditions of the steppe region, with problems in supplying the troops with food, the Orenburg army also switched to "self-supply". For several tens of thousands of people retreating from the territory of the Orenburg Cossack Host, this was the only way to survive.

In early October the corps was visited by Ataman Dutov. At the time a typhus epidemic had started in some units of the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division, causing many deaths. In the middle of the month it

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<sup>54</sup> A group of graduates of the Orenburg Military School.



got considerably colder, and the corps units had no winter clothing. Nevertheless, by 20 October, it was noted in the corps' military operations journal:

Despite the difficult local conditions the mood is good, in some even excellent, in the Corps' units, both officers and soldiers.

On 14 October the Soviet 5th Army again crossed the Tobol and went on the offensive. The Whites retreated to the next line, on the Ishim River. As L. Golovin, a military doctor of the 35th Orenburg Cossack Regiment, who served in Bakich's corps, wrote in his diary in those days:

The brave Kolchak does not have a war, damn it. We are now the head and tail, and the mighty body of Dutov's Independent Orenburg Army.

Golovin meant that Bakich's corps formed the backbone of Dutov's army.

In the evening of 23 October the Reds (Kokshetau Group of the 5th Army) went on the offensive against Bakich. A day later their offensive became large-scale. Dutov ordered Bakich to allocate two mounted detachments (Colonel Stepanov and Lieutenant Colonel Savel'ev) to move to the north, to the Ishim River, in order to defend the crossing, maintain communication with General Lebedev's units and cover the direction to Kokshetau. The rest of the corps had to withdraw in the direction to Atbasar. Cases of desertion from the corps became more frequent as the men retreated without proper winter clothes or bandages, with a typhus epidemic raging and a totally uncertain future as winter approached. Mostly it was Cossacks who fled, seeking to return to their native villages to take care of their households.

On 29 October 1919 the Reds occupied Petropavl and began an almost non-stop pursuit of the Whites along the Trans-Siberian railway. On the left flank of the White Eastern Front, Bakich's troops retreated to the Ishim, and by the evening of 30 October the corps headquarters arrived in Atbasar. Dutov expected to maintain a defence along the Ishim River to cover the concentration of the main Army forces. It is possible that the White command intended to make a flank attack on the troops of the 5th Army from the area of Atbasar – Kokshetau, so confidently advancing along the Trans-Siberian. As Dutov wrote to Admiral Kolchak on 31 October:

If we had warmer boots, overcoats and fur coats, then the army would have been steel. What is left in it is hardened and tested, and only clothe it, give it artillery and rifles, and it will fight to the end.

Due to a significant increase in the typhus epidemic and the Red onslaught, it was not possible to maintain a foothold on the Ishim. Dutov ordered reconnaissance units be left near the river and the main forces to continue moving towards Atbasar by forced march with the aim of completing the concentration by 8 November and to start reorganize and refit the corps. Due to the retreat the troops lost contact with the enemy.

On 6 November the news was received that the Orenburg Army had been renamed the Independent Orenburg Army by the Commander-in-Chief. On the same day the concentration of the army was suspended. Corps units took up the defence in the area of the towns of Atbasar and Kokshetau. Up to the receipt of the news of the surrender of Omsk on 19 November (abandoned by the Whites on 14 November) the Army remained stationary – it was quiet in front of Bakich's corps. Only after receiving the news of the fall of the capital of White Siberia, was the retreat continued. Moreover the Reds became active again in front of the Independent Orenburg Army. As Colonel Leyiburg wrote, out of the whole army:

... only IV Corps was still combat-ready, and in fact the whole front was held only by it and two Cossack regiments of I Orenburg Cossack Corps.



## The Hunger March

On 22 November it became known that the Reds had bypassed Atbasar to the north and north-west and were moving into the rear of Dutov's army. Bakich's headquarters remained in the town up to noon, after which they left Atbasar to avoid capture. His corps withdrew in the rearguard of the Army. To ensure the passage of the wagons from Atbasar to Astana (Akmolinsk) and to eliminate the enemy's breakthrough along the southern bank of the Ishim, detachments were sent under the overall command of Captain Zakharov. On 25 and 26 November the Reds attacked and skilfully manoeuvring by the night of 26 November had bypassed Astana to the north and took possession of it, capturing some supplies and rear units of IV Corps. Single soldiers and even small units of the corps began to desert. The Reds continued to operate in the rear of the Independent Orenburg Army and advanced towards the Army HQ in Karkaraly (Karakalinsk).

The amount of hardship suffered by Dutov's retreating units, compared to the other White armies, can only be compared with the fate of the Independent Ural Army, which almost completely perished in Turkestan in early 1920. In the full sense of the words the *Orenburzhtsy* endured a "hunger march"<sup>55</sup> – the name given to the trek of the units through the almost lifeless northern Hungry Steppe<sup>56</sup> to Semirech'e in late November and December 1919. This *anabasis* truly became the Calvary of the Independent Orenburg Army, as the troops retreated through sparsely populated, empty terrain, sleeping under the open sky.

Horses and camels were slaughtered and eaten. Everything was taken from the local population – food, forage, clothing, transport, but even this was not enough for the thousands of people. As a rule, money was paid for everything requisitioned, though not always in the proper amount. Deaths from cold and exhaustion increased, rivalling those from typhus. The severely ill were left to die in settlements, the dead not being buried in time, and burdening the locals with that sad rite. The troops made very long marches, breaking away from the enemy. The Kirghiz often attacked lone soldiers and Cossacks, and it was impossible even to find out where a man had disappeared.

The army was demoralised and the decomposition, including in Bakich's corps, assumed monstrous proportions. In the first days of December, the 22nd Orenburg Cossack Regiment (except for the 2nd Sotnia), the 35th Orenburg Cossack Regiment, the 1st Battery of the 5th Artillery *Divizion* and the commandant's HQ Detachment of Colonel V. N. Nagaev's Composite Orenburg Cossack Brigade went over to the side of the Reds. During the withdrawal from Atbasar a *sotnia* of Captain Malyatin's *divizion* and many of the corps' soldiers and Cossacks remained in the city. The *sotnia* (45 sabres) of Captain Vedernikov's *divizion*, which has suffered heavy losses, went over to the Reds with its commander. As it was reported in the corps' military operations journal:

Due to the transition of the listed units to the enemy side, the combat numbers of the corps are very small and ineffective, as the mood of soldiers and Cossacks in the remaining corps units is bad.

Parts of IV Corps retreated to Karkaraly, trying to hold on to the Spassky plant for as long as possible. When the Army approached Karkaraly, it became known that on 1 December the Reds had captured Semey (Semipalatinsk), and on 10 December they took Barnaul, leaving no chance for Dutov's troops to join the main forces of the White Eastern Front. The only possible route of

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<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately there is an error in modern Russian historiography as the works of S. V. Volkov use the term "Hunger March" erroneously for Bakich's campaign from Xinjiang to Mongolia in 1921, e.g. Volkov S. V., *White Movement in Russia: Organizational Structure*. Moscow, 2000.

<sup>56</sup> Голодная степь. PW

further withdrawal was to Semirech'e, where the Independent Semirechensk Army under the command of Major General Annenkov was operating.

On 6 December Bakich ordered that all the sick and any unnecessary carts were to be sent to Karkaraly. Communication was lost with some units of the corps. Ataman Zakharov was retreating in the rearguard. On 10 December Bakich arrived in Karkaraly, where the corps units were to concentrate for further movement to Sergiopol' to link with Ataman Annenkov. On 13 December Karkaraly was occupied by the Reds.

From 14 to 31 December the corps' was the rearguard of the Army, withdrawing in three columns to Sergiopol'. This section of the road (550 kilometres from Karkaraly to Sergiopol') was one of the most difficult for the retreating troops: in addition to all the previous troubles that plagued the Army, the winter came into its own with twenty and thirty degree frosts. In the deserted steppe terrain, unprotected from the winds, it was a deadly dangerous addition for the hungry travellers, exhausted by many days of marching. According to the testimony of a participant:

Frozen snows and storms, cold and hunger. ... The desert is deserted. ... People die and horses die by the hundreds from lack of fodder. ... Those who are still on their feet wander about with shattered memories. ... The varieties of typhus increases the severity of the campaign: the healthy carry the sick until they collapse themselves, sleeping all together in the desert, pressed up against each other, healthy and sick. ... The laggards perish.

According to one rather harsh characterisation, many adult male civilian participants from the *intelligentsia* were psychologically broken and behaved much less honourably than the women during this retreat. As one author wrote:

The most ridiculous, worthless, wretched and sometimes just plain disgusting element throughout the whole journey and life in China was the intellectual male civilian – the town dweller.

Colonel A. Y. Leyburg, a participant of the campaign, recalled:

Two pictures of that march will never be erased from my memory: the picture of a terrible snowstorm on the steppe and in it the fierce struggle of men for life. A huge snow cloud covered the whole sky, and a thick veil obscured the light. Suddenly night fell. A terrible steppe storm came: a desert wind raging across the expanse and blowing up the endless snow. A white gloom, as impenetrable as the darkness of the darkest night, enveloped everything. The snow dust blinded the eyes, took the breath away, and everything roared, whistled, howled and crackled on all sides. It was impossible to move forward, even on a road. Everyone huddled together, trying to take cover behind the wagons. And everything – people, horses and wagons, was covered with thick snow powder.

Struggling just to survive, hardened people. The second episode that struck Colonel Leyburg, however unfortunate, was characteristic of the disastrous situation in which the remnants of the Army and the numerous refugees found themselves. Having occupied a village abandoned by the inhabitants:

The head of the Independent Turkestan Rifle Brigade, old Colonel R. (commander of some sapper battalion in peacetime), entered one of the ... houses and drove everyone out, then saw an officer, a woman and a child lying in it. The officer was ill with typhus and his wife was nursing him back to health. When Colonel R. learned that the officer was not in the ranks of his brigade, he ordered them to get out of the building. And no one was indignant, no one was touched by the helplessness of the woman, child and sick



officer who had suffered so much. They had to leave on a cart. What became of them – did they live or did they die of cold and hunger in the steppe?

There were villages, winter camps and pickets with food and forage on the army's retreat route, but not in the quantity required for a mass of many thousands of people. Initially the Red cavalry pursued those fleeing, but after about halfway there was no contact with the enemy. The corps greeted the New Year in the Sergiopol' area.

During the march the commander of the 2nd Syzran' Rifle Division, Major General Vishnevskiy, died in one of the skirmishes with the enemy. The Orenburg Cossacks also suffered a heavy loss when the famous Orenburg partisan Colonel A. M. Bulgakov died. The Army also lost the commander of the 33rd Orenburg Cossack Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Savel'ev.

Information on the numbers and losses of Dutov's army during the Hunger March vary greatly. According to one, probably over-estimate, 33,000 out of 60,000 who had retreated from the southern Urals were counted upon arrival in Sergiopol'. According to other source, there were up to 40,000 men in Dutov's army, of whom only 3,000 were combat-ready. A third variant, which would appear to be the considered the closest to reality, reckons about half of the 20,000-strong army in the Kokshetau region reached Sergiopol'. Finally, in another White memoir it records about 12,000 to 14 ,000 men, of whom only 1,000 to 2,000 were combat-ready.





## Ataman Annenkov and Semirech'e<sup>57</sup>

Colonel Boris Annenkov, a 29-year-old talented organiser of White partisans, had been sent to the Semirech'e as early as December 1918 at the head of his Partisan Division to fight the rebels of Lepsinsk and Kopal districts (the so-called Cherkassy Defence). However, the pacification of the rebellion was delayed for almost a year, until October 1919. Annenkov, despite Kolchak's orders, did not want to leave Semirech'e and strengthen the White Eastern Front with his division in the crucial period of the summer of 1919 and continued to fight with the rebellious Semirechensk peasants.

In October Admiral Kolchak awarded Annenkov with the Order of St. George 4th Class and the rank of major general for his victory over the Reds. After the Cherkassy Defence was suppressed Annenkov fought the Reds on the Semirechensk front. Kopal and Zharkent were taken.

In December 1919 Kolchak formed the Independent Semirechensk Army, with 7,200 bayonets and sabres and six guns. It would not be an exaggeration to say that by the beginning of 1920 Annenkov was a local prince in Semirech'e, who obeyed the central authority if it was in his interests and acted at his own discretion if not. He tried to eliminate obvious rivals. In particular, he arrested the Ataman of the Semirech'e Cossack Host, Major General Ionov, and expelled him from the region.

The arrival in Semirech'e of the exhausted and emaciated *Dutovtsy*, 90% of whom were sick with various forms of typhus, according to Bakich, was met with hostility by the relatively well-off *Annenkovtsy*, and there were even cases of armed clashes. I will allow myself to dwell in detail on this little-known and shameful moment in the history of the White Movement.

Later, when they were in China, Bakich asked the Chinese authorities to place Annenkov's men separately from his detachment (former *Dutovtsy*). In April 1920, he wrote on that occasion:

Having in mind the uncontrollable antagonism between the units of my detachment and General Annenkov's units, caused by the violence and robberies committed by the latter in the recent December, January and February on the ranks of my detachment who were suffering from typhus epidemic at that time, I ask you to place the [Annenkov] partisans in a different area, remote from my detachment's camp on the Emil River, should they transfer to Chinese territory, so that they are at least 150 kilometres distant from my camp. Only by observing this procedure can I vouch for the fact that there will be no clashes between my soldiers and General Annenkov's partisans, which can [sic] lead to very undesirable disturbances.

In another letter, addressed to Generals Anisimov, Vagin and Semënov, Bakich noted that:

The method of command and keeping order in Ataman Annenkov's partisan units – where the basic requirements of military service are not observed and law and order are denied – allows incredible outrages and robberies, both from the civilian population of the villages and *stanitsas*, as well as from the ranks of my detachment, who are unable to stand up for themselves, due to illness. This has caused the men of my detachment to become angry at General Annenkov's partisans. Bearing in mind, however, the common goal of fighting the Bolsheviks, we had to put up with many things and took joint part in the battles along the Sergiopol' – Urzhar road. ...

Bakich wrote in September 1920 to the director of the Russian-Asian Bank,

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<sup>57</sup> The area in question has many names, all of which are derived from the concept of "Seven Rivers". Now called Zhetysu (or Jeti-Suu or similar variants) the Russians called it the Semirechensk Oblast or less formally Semirech'e, (which is often transliterated to Semirechye). PW



Not only the civilians, but also the Orenburg Army, after a difficult march from Karkaraly, having reached the area of operation of Annenkov's partisans, experienced not a little grief and deprivation from his brand of mastery over the Russian people in Russian territory – the defenders of the United Russia, "Brother Ataman" and his assistants. Sick and exhausted from the march and lack of food, my officers and soldiers were unscrupulously robbed by the Ataman's partisans and district officials. The refugees who fled with the army had literally everything, down to the last clothes, taken by the deputies of the "Brother Ataman", Captains Kozlov, Arbuzov, Vlasenko and others.

Another example given by Bakich also characterises Annenkov quite vividly. he wrote to the Governor-General of Ürümqi:

I trust that you are also not unfamiliar with the behaviour of General Annenkov and his detachment during their stay at the Chulak Pass. At that place all the officers and soldiers who wished to leave his detachment for any reason were, by order of General Annenkov, stripped almost naked and driven out of the detachment. They were followed by detachments of soldiers or Kirghiz, armed by Annenkov himself, who destroyed the unfortunates. I believe that you also know a case – unheard of in history – when, on the same Chulak Pass, Annenkov's detachment mercilessly robbed about forty families and refugees and officers of his detachment, and women and girls from seven to eighteen years old were raped and then slaughtered.

Published documents fully confirm the *Annenkovtsy* atrocities, which were published by Soviet lawyers in 1991 in the pages of *Military History Journal*, and the reliability of which previously seemed doubtful to me. The facts of the arbitrariness of the *Annenkovtsy* towards the *Dutovtsy* are also contained in other sources. One of the participants of the White Movement on the Eastern Front, who characterised himself as a simple Russian intellectual, "who by the will of fate put on Admiral Kolchak's uniform", noted that

Having listened to the stories of local residents and eyewitnesses – and judging by Annenkov's attitude to the *Orenburzhtsy* – it became clear to us that we had fallen into the place in the world with the least right after the Bolsheviks, and if some scheme comes into the ataman's mind, he will do it to us.

Annenkov himself in his order of 31 (18) March 1920 cynically wrote:

So, the two-year struggle in Semirech'e yielded sad results, thanks only to the arrival of these "traveling refugees" from Dutov. They came with ragged, hungry and naked people, bringing a lot of women, but without shells or cartridges, bringing with them typhus and collapse.

Later, at his trial, Annenkov was less harsh in his assessment and noted:

When Dutov's army entered the location of my troops, it was completely ineffective. The units had decomposed, travelling rapidly towards the Chinese border. Along with them went a decadent mood in all the units for 900 kilometres along the front. In addition, most of the men were sick with typhus. In fact, the whole army was a giant typhoid infirmary. Not a single cavalry unit was mounted, everyone travelled on sleds.

The situation was such that, if no decisive measures were taken, there would be a general decomposition and panic, everything would immediately collapse, and there would be total disaster. Much of the army was cowardly, having seen our failures on the Eastern Front, they thought that all was lost. I considered it necessary to take urgent measures to rescue the army from the catastrophic situation. ...



At the time issued an order that categorically forbade, under threat of immediate execution, the spread of panicky rumours and the waste or sale of state property and weapons. The order also stated that as commander of the Independent Semirechensk Army, I considered it my moral and official duty to consider my old subordinates and newcomers to the army as equally close to my heart, as equally giving their lives and health for the good of the Motherland, and to make no distinctions between them. I bowed before the courage, heroism and devotion to the Motherland of General Dutov's army, which had suffered a lot of hardship and deprivation on the retreat from Orenburg province.

In practice, however, the attitude of the *Annenkovtsy* to the *Dutovtsy* was far from favourable. Upon its arrival in Semirech'e on 13 January 1920, the following entry was made in the military operations journal of Bakich's corps:

In view of the collapse of the entire Eastern Front and the difficult situation of the Independent Orenburg Army, who had to bear a heavy cross, as a consequence of which the units of IV Corps, which is part of the Orenburg Army, had to travel a long way, almost uninterruptedly for half a year – first from Orenburg province to the Aral Sea, then through Irgiz, Turgay and Atbasar to the area of Kokshetau, Petropavl and Karkaraly, then to Sergiopol'. The soldiers of the dashing IV Orenburg Army Corps endured together with its commander, Major General Bakich, and Chief of Staff, Colonel Smolnin, during that long march across the desert-steppe regions all sorts of difficulties, deprivations and various hardships, which cannot be described. Only the grateful posterity of the dear Motherland Russia will appreciate the military service, toil and hardships of the true Russian people – devoted sons of their Motherland, who for the sake of saving their Great Fatherland selflessly endured all kinds of tortures and torments.

Having made a campaign unprecedented in history, having overcome all incredible difficulties, having defeated even nature itself, the dashing brave troops of IV Corps under the leadership of their combat commander arrived safely at a populated area, where they managed to rest, recover and put themselves in proper order. But in view of the unbelievably unsanitary conditions during the march through the desert-steppe regions, typhus epidemics of all kinds had become rampant and, to our great regret, many good soldiers were taken out of service. In view of the complete lack of reinforcements, the ranks of the corps units were greatly thinned and the whole combat organisation in the corps units was disrupted.

According to the testimony of I. Yelovsky, a participant of the events,

Although the Orenburg detachment held its positions, it was not yet combat-ready, as almost the whole detachment were typhus patients. The units were melting away day by day. The mortality rate was appalling. There was hardly any medicine and hardly any care. Although the Red Cross hospital admitted the sick, there was little hospital administration for the whole detachment. The medical staff made rounds of the locations of where the sick were. Sometimes two or three people among the sick would die and lie with the still sick for several days, as there was often no one to take out the dead and or give them a drink. It happened that, due to negligence, people would leave their apartments while delirious and go out barefoot and in underwear into the snow at  $-25^{\circ}$ . Special teams were appointed from each unit, who continuously dug graves continuously and carried the dead to them. Sometimes up to 25 people were buried in one grave. The inhabitants of the villages where the detachment was



stationed were also all sick; their situation was even worse, since there was no one to bury the dead or dig any graves.

The headquarters quipped that only two people did not suffer from typhus:

General Bakich, because Russian lice don't bite foreigners, (Bakich was a Serb) and the head of the automobile detachment, who was "alcoholised", thanks to constant proximity to barrels of alcohol.

At the same time, there were rumours that Bakich himself had been wounded and taken to Sergiopol'.

Nevertheless according to the enemy's assessment, Bakich's corps remained, as before, the most capable unit in Dutov's army in Semirech'e. The same assessment was made by the Whites, who considered Bakich one of the Independent Orenburg Army's best corps commanders. Meanwhile, Bakich's troops were experiencing a serious shortage of ammunition, which eventually forced them to leave Semirech'e. As Bakich himself wrote already in China,

All my requests to General Annenkov to supply my units with ammunition remained ineffective, although there was a large quantity of such ammunition, which was later delivered to the Reds in Usharal.

The *Annenkovtsy* also refused to give the *Dutovtsy* food and forage, and Annenkov himself was perfectly aware of all that was going on. In addition, as the special commissioner of the Russian Red Cross Society S. S. Aksakov wrote in his report, Annenkov's men in Urdzhar, with the knowledge of Colonel Denisov, Annenkov's chief of staff, took away much of the property (horses, medicines, etc.) of the medical personnel who came to the village. The *Annenkovtsy* themselves declared to the *Dutovtsy*:

... that they did not need us, that we should leave the Semirechensk district.

However, the situation of the Reds opposing Bakich in Semirech'e was little better. According to one Soviet author:

Until the very end of 1919, the Red Army units on the Semirechensk front lacked serious firmness and discipline, which adversely affected their combat effectiveness. Even operational issues were often resolved at Red Army meetings.

Replenishments were sent to the Semirechensk front starting from October 1919, but in fact it was not until the end of March 1920 that the Reds could achieve a break in their favour.

Lieutenant General Dutov on 6 January 1920 directed that all units, institutions and establishments of the army were to be reduced to an independent "Ataman Dutov Detachment". The Army headquarters, the Orenburg Military District headquarters, all departments of the Independent Orenburg and Southern Armies, corps headquarters and some of the divisional and brigade headquarters (3rd Orenburg Cossack Division, Independent Turkestan Rifle Brigade and 4th Cadre Brigade) were to be disbanded. The 1st and 2nd Orenburg Cossack Divisions and the Independent Syzran' Jaeger Brigade were included in the detachment, which was replenished with personnel from all the disbanded formations. All ranks of headquarters, commands, directorates and institutions attached to the headquarters were transferred to reinforce the following formations: I Orenburg Cossack Corps and 3rd Orenburg Cossack Division went to the 1st Orenburg Cossack Division; IV Orenburg Army Corps went to the 2nd Orenburg Cossack Division; the Independent Turkestan Rifle Brigade went to the Independent Syzran' Jaeger Brigade.

After re-forming, the composition of the detachment was a total of about 15,000 men, including about 7,000 bayonets and 2,000 sabres with 200 machine guns and 5 guns.



Division	Commander	Numbers
<b>1st Orenburg Cossack Division</b>	Colonel R. P. Stepanov	
1st Brigade Colonel	Colonel T. O. Savel'ev	
33rd Orenburg Cossack Regiment	Col A. I. Skornyakov <sup>58</sup>	2,000
Ataman Regiment <sup>59</sup>	Lt-Colonel V. N. Zakharov	2,000
2nd Brigade Colonel	Colonel A. S. Kolokol'tsov	1,500
1st Orenburg Cossack Regiment	Lt-Colonel K. S. Kolokol'tsov	
4th Orenburg Cossack Regiment	Colonel D. V. Kochnev	
<b>2nd Orenburg Cossack Division</b>	Maj-General A. S. Shemetov	about 3,500
1st Brigade	Maj-General Popov	about 2,000
Ataman Dutov Orenburg Cossack Regiment	Colonel Savin	
14th Orenburg Cossack regiment	Colonel Kuznetsov	
2nd Brigade		about 1,500
15th Orenburg Cossack Regiment	Colonel Glebov	
16th Orenburg Cossack Regiment	Colonel Malyukov	
2nd Orenburg Engineer Company		
Orenburg Mounted Artillery <i>Divizion</i>		
<b>Independent Syzran' Jaeger Brigade</b>	Maj-General Nikitin	about 3,000
1st Syzran' Jaeger Regiment	Colonel Chigarin	about 2,000
2nd Syzran' Jaeger Regiment	Lt-Colonel Maleev	
Horse Jaeger Regiment	Colonel Evgen'ev	
Green Banner Kirgiz Horse <i>Divizion</i>		
Syzran' Jaeger Artillery <i>Divizion</i>	Captain Polonsky	
Artillery battery	Colonel D. N. Kirkhman	
<b>Independent, technical, sanitary units and establishments</b>		
Commander's Bodyguard Detachment	Colonel Murzikov	200
Automobile detachment		
Radio station		
1st field hospital	Senior Doctor Chemodanov	
15th hospital	Senior Doctor Sergeev	
173rd hospital	Senior Doctor Lebedev	
Hospital No. 5-8	Senior Doctor Borzaboratov	

<sup>58</sup> According to some sources, Colonel A. P. Prokopyev.

<sup>59</sup> Technically the Ataman's Regiment of the 2nd Military District of the Orenburg Cossack Host. PW



The same order appointed the commander of IV Orenburg Army Corps Major-General Bakich as the head of the detachment with the rights of the commander of a non-independent corps. However, there are discrepancies in this regard. According to the IV Corps' military operations journal Bakich received the rights of the commander of an independent corps. We should add that, according to information from Ataman Dutov, stated by him only on the eve of his death in early 1921, Bakich replicated a deliberately falsified order for his own purposes, granting him the broader rights of the commander of an independent corps. Since the original order is unknown to me, and very probably has not survived at all, it is not possible yet to establish the truth in this important matter.

Dutov himself became civil governor of the Semirechensk region. Perhaps Annenkov feared competition from his more famous rival and sought to remove Dutov from the army. Ataman Dutov's detachment was incorporated into General Annenkov's Independent Semirechensk Army and subordinated to it in all respects. The headquarters of the detachment was formed from the headquarters of IV Corps and the Independent Orenburg Army. Colonel Smolnin-Tervand, loyal to Bakich, became its chief of staff. Dutov's last order to the army stated:

A heavy cross fell as the burden of the Independent Orenburg Army. By the dictates of fate the soldiers have had to make very long march, almost continuously for half a year, – first from Orenburg province to the Aral Sea, then through Irgiz, Turgay and Atbasar to the area of Kokshetau – Petropavl. From there through Astana and Karkaraly to the Sergiopol' district. All those difficulties, deprivations and various hardships, which the troops of the Orenburg Army underwent during that long march through the desert-steppe regions cannot be described. Only impartial history and grateful posterity will appreciate the military service, toil and hardships of the true Russian people, devoted sons of their Motherland, who for the sake of the salvation of their Fatherland selflessly endured all kinds of tortures and torments.

As one of the participants of the events wrote:

The task facing General [Bakich] was far from easy, because the whole army was sick and out of twelve or fourteen thousand men only about one or two thousand could bear arms, and even then with difficulty. The rebuilding of the army and its reformation went on until the new year.<sup>60</sup> The appearance of the new units was terrible: not humans, but living corpses – sometimes without any underclothing, with only a single coat and felt boots. There was almost no medical aid for lack of medicines, with terrible nutrition. Only strong Cossacks could endure something like that.

The reformation took place from 14 to 19 January.<sup>61</sup> When incorporating the *Orenburzhtsy* into the Independent Semirech'e Army, Annenkov seized their army funds, of some 90 million Siberian roubles, 24 kilograms of gold from the Orenburg Host and other valuables. Later, when in China, Dutov wrote to Bakich:

I will answer your question as to why I did not stay with the detachment. You were well aware that I could not leave the detachment and obey Annenkov. That is, I would have done it personally, if it was necessary, but the Military Ataman of the Orenburg Host, and even more so the Field Ataman of the Cossack Host could not do it – to have submitted would have been a recognition of Annenkov as Ataman, which even then was impossible. There was only one solution left: to hand over to you and leave. To stay

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<sup>60</sup> Actually after the new year.

<sup>61</sup> 1 to 6 January in the Old Style, which was used in Semirech'e by Annenkov. To avoid confusion I shall use both styles from here on.



with the detachment, for example in Bakhty, was obviously impossible. I would hinder and embarrass you, even without willing it, and Annenkov lived nearby, which did not promise to be pleasurable. So in a bad mood I went into exile in Lepsinsk, as the centre of the region. ...

Further life and work in Lepsinsk somewhat smoothed out the bitterness of my stay away from the detachment. I was not worried: firstly, the men had been bonded by the hardships of two years; secondly, they were almost all in the same place; and thirdly, I had given you the detachment. I knew what I was doing – i.e. I was sure of the discipline and preservation of the detachment. I knew that you could be a politician for the sake of the cause and would ignore your personal sympathies and habits. I was right. Being not worried about the detachment, I began the struggle against Annenkov quietly and systematically. ... The Semirechensk Cossacks hated Annenkov and willingly obeyed me.

The author of one of the characterisations relating to this period had served in Kolchak's army and first met Bakich in Semirech'e. He noted that:

General Bakich is himself from the south Slavs, speaking with a strong accent, is very simple and accessible in his dealings. He delves into everything personally and is always ready to do anything he can to help. He is always has problems and issues to solve but he looks after everything himself, like a good leader, and he does not waste energy, even though he is facing an almost hopeless task [to maintain the army]. His character is not like that of a southerner, but he soon calms down, and if something is not to his liking, he will shout about it, but will not do anything harmful. His discipline is strict, but fair. He looks after his officers, which those who have recently become released sometimes disliked him for, especially when it is those who came to him from other units. The soldiers, however, loved him and were ready to follow him anywhere. The outrages and violence, which I heard about constantly when passing through Dutov and Annenkov's armies, I have not heard of since I took a command in Bakich's detachment.

On 19 (6) January the Whites abandoned Sergiopol'. Under strong enemy pressure the units withdrew along the Sergiopol' – Tacheng road, taking positions near Narynkol. The headquarters of the detachment in 21-25 (8-12) January was in Blagodatnoe. In the evening of 28 (15) January it arrived in Urzhar. Bakich's rear was often disturbed by the so-called "mountain eagles" – Greens who operated in the Tarbagatai Mountains who fought for peasant power. However, the struggle between those guerrillas and the Whites was by no means total, reminiscent of the wars of the past. For example, on 31 (18) January several riflemen of the Independent Syzran' Jaeger Brigade were captured by the "mountain eagles" while foraging, disarmed and released after questioning.

On 2 February (20 January) Bakich was appointed commander of the units of the Northern Front of the Semirechensk Army and Annenkov's deputy. A day later he took over the front. Thus, not only units of the former Independent Orenburg Army but also units of the Independent Semirechensk Army were under his command. The next day Bakich gave an order to defend Bakhty, located four kilometres from the border with China. Even then he was probably already thinking about crossing the border with his troops and sought to avoid being cut off from the frontier, then surrounded and destroyed by the superior Red forces. However:

He did not want to move his glorious *Orenburzhtsy* across the border as mere refugees, and therefore ordered them to hold on to the last possible opportunity.

Apparently, during this period Bakich received a watch and a sabre from Annenkov as a reward.

On 8 February (26 January) Bakich wrote to Major General Zaitsev:

There are neither *Annenkovtsy* nor *Dutovtsy*, only the ranks of the united Semirechensk Army.

In a harsh letter he demanded that the former Chief of Staff of the Independent Orenburg Army obey, noting that:

The anarchy you have allowed in disbanding the HQ [of the Orenburg Army], and the departments subordinate to it, is contrary to Order No. 3, due to which valuable state property and money were plundered and disappeared. I am forced to ask the Army Commander to temporarily detain you in the area of the Semirechensk Army until the liquidation commission finds out all those guilty of the embezzlement and receives your explanations on this matter as Orenburg Chief of Staff.

Up to the end of February (New Style) the Reds did not show any activity on Bakich's front, which was due not only to their organisational and disciplinary difficulties, but also to the impossibility of advancing through the Tarbagatai Pass from Sergiopol' in winter time. Only on 4 March (20 February) did a small Red detachment occupy Karabulak. The next day they began to have some success, but were stopped and pushed back by Bakich's units. On 9 March (25 February) the Whites conducted reconnaissance towards Sergiopol', but there was no enemy up to the Kara-Kol River. It is possible that the Red command were giving an opportunity for Annenkov's troops to go to China, providing a kind of "golden bridge". However, Annenkov's units did not use that opportunity. At the same time, it was pointless to hope for a victory over the Bolsheviks and long-term residence in Semirech'e. It is difficult to say what logic guided the White command in Semirech'e during this period.



## In a Foreign Land

Starting from 16 (3) March 1920, the strengthening of the Reds against the Northern Front of the Independent Semirechensk Army became noticeable. Already by 17 (4) March Bakich's units were knocked off the mountain passes they held. The retreat began. On 21 (8) March Urzhar was surrendered and Bakich's headquarters moved to Makanchi. The soldiers, feeling the futility of resistance on a piece of land a few kilometres from the Chinese border, fought reluctantly and began to show indiscipline. In particular, Urzhar was abandoned without Bakich's permission – he had intended to give a decisive battle on its approaches. On 22 (9) March the Reds again remained passive, which cannot but cause bewilderment. On 23-24 (10/11) March they resumed their offensive and occupied Makanchi. Bakich's units now defended the last settlement on Russian territory, the village of Bakhty.

On 26 (13) March negotiations with the governor of Xinjiang<sup>62</sup> in Ürümqi about the possibility of the detachment's transfer to the Chinese territory were already underway. The negotiations were conducted by Colonel Kirkhman, Colonel Rosenbaum and Captain Polonskiy with the assistance of the Russian consul in Tacheng, Dolbezhev. A special instruction was drawn up for those authorised to negotiate, which included nine points. Negotiations were not easy, the Chinese hesitated. Trying to save the numerous refugees, Bakich asked that the governor be told that:

It is impossible to leave refugees within four or five kilometres of the border, as the Red gangs would probably destroy them, while the border guard posts are not able to prevent that.

Various options for surrendering weapons were also discussed. The Chinese were particularly interested in the machine guns. The Whites proposed surrendering the weapons in exchange for food supplies for the detachment. In addition, no one assumed that the Chinese would demand the surrender of officer weapons (revolvers and sabres).

Bakich himself hoped to cross the border, retaining all his weapons, in order to use the Tacheng – Ghulja (Kuldja) road through Chinese territory and join Annenkov's units to continue the fight and fulfil his orders as Army commander. In the end it was not possible to keep the armaments and, according to the agreement reached, all weapons were to be surrendered, except for those necessary for the protection of money boxes (four rifles per unit). After crossing the border the detachment was to camp near the Emil River 40 kilometres south-east of the Chinese border town of Tacheng, where water and forage were available. About this Bakich's chief of staff wrote in the detachment's war log:

With the unfavourable situation on the whole eastern front and particularly on the Semirechensk Army front, and the great lack of firearms supplies in the detachment and the Northern Front, in order to preserve the detachment as a living force the detachment's Commander and Chief of Staff, together with the heads of all the detachment's divisions, have decided to move the entire detachment to Chinese territory, where they will intern themselves, surrender their weapons to the Chinese border authorities and, in accordance with International Treaty,<sup>63</sup> come under the protection of the Chinese Government.

Early in the morning of 27 (14) March the detachment set out in the direction of China. Having surrendered their weapons to the Chinese border guards, the troops proceeded in columns to the area of the future camp on the Emil River. With the crossing of the border, communication between Annenkov and Dutov was lost. Bakich was one of the last to cross. A detachment under

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<sup>62</sup> Or Chinese Turkestan as it was known to the Russians. Sinkiang in older English texts. PW

<sup>63</sup> The 1907 Hague Convention on internment.



Colonel Kolokol'tsov covered the crossing and disarmament, with two artillery guns installed at a position east of Bakhty. In the evening of the same day Kolokol'tsov's detachment left Bakhty, after combat and, having surrendered its weapons, also passed into China.

According to trustworthy data from Soviet intelligence, 1,238 officers, 232 officials, 72 doctors, 78 sisters of mercy, 16 priests, 8,017 soldiers and Cossacks, 516 family members of servicemen, 8,076 horses and 1,904 wagon crossed the border. According to updated data from Bakich's staff, there were more officers and officials: 1,814 officers and officials, 8,039 soldiers and Cossacks, 785 family members and about 5,000 civilian refugees from Orenburg and Ufa provinces. So approximate numbers for the combat component of the detachment was 9,853 men.

According to the testimony of a participant, the Reds expected the detachment to surrender at the border. Having realised that this would not happen, they made an attempt to surround the retreating troops, were met by a barrage of fire from the remnants of Dutov's former army leaving for exile, and retreated. Later, Red cavalry approached the border, and:

The Reds side sang revolutionary songs, shouted of "ura!", and made mocking and threatening gestures towards those who had crossed.

The personnel of Ataman Dutov's detachment surrendered all their weapons at the frontier, both firearms and edged weapons – the officers were not allowed to even keep their weapons of honour. Giving up arms, especially steel weapons, often inherited from grandfathers, was morally extremely difficult for the Cossacks.

S.E. Khitun, the commander of the automobile detachment recalled that on the border:

A kind of gate of two Chinese banners was arranged, through which the detachment's units had to pass. Chinese authorities from the town of Tacheng were in charge of receiving the weapons, and General Bakich was present at their surrender. There were cases when Cossacks, not wanting to surrender their weapons, tried to ride around, but General Bakich was watching and brought the brave men back, forcing them to surrender their weapons.

Along the line of Chinese soldiers armed with rifles, the village residents were walking, dumping the rifles in a pile on the ground. A Chinese officer, with his fur collar up, made a note in a book with each successive clang. "Payment with Russian arms for Chinese refuge", ran through my mind.

Bakich's detachment surrendered to the Chinese authorities 4,253 rifles, 252 revolvers, 2,404 sabres, 42 daggers,<sup>64</sup> 275 hand grenades, 144 machine-guns, 4 guns, 139,522 cartridges, and 25 shells.

All the armaments were sent by the Chinese authorities to the Tacheng fortress for storage. There is evidence that the Whites managed to hide some rifles, and even machine guns, from the Chinese. Hunting and pocket weapons, intended for self-defence, were not confiscated. Bakich's personal guard also kept its weapons. It can be assumed that in order to preserve weapons during the border crossing the numbers of the guard was overstated and stated as 20 officers and 200 lower ranks. However, it was not possible to mislead the Chinese, and Bakich's guard was limited to 20 rankers.

At the same time the Ataman Regiment, under the command of Colonel Savin, crossed the Chinese border in full strength, with a banner and all its weapons. When asked to surrender his arms, Savin said that he would lay them down only on the orders of Ataman Dutov. Later this regiment arrived

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<sup>64</sup> Bebuty or kindjals were curved daggers with a double-edged blade. They were carried by NCOs of machine-gun teams and artillerymen. PW

at the camp on the Emil River, where it guarded the entire detachment. The camp site, Bakich reported to Dutov, was intended to be temporary and was to be changed in a month by agreement with the Chinese, but in the end the detachment remained on the Emil until the spring of 1921.

By 1 April (19 March) 1920 all the detachment's units were camped in the ten-kilometre area on the right bank of the Emil River. In a short period of time dugouts, huts, barracks, canteens and churches were built from improvised materials. In addition, 100 yurts were received from the Chinese authorities. A whole town with a proper layout was formed. The Chinese authorities sent a team of Chinese soldiers for supervision purposes, who were to report to the Russian commandant of the camp.

The town of Tacheng, located not far from the camp, was a centre of border trade, with about 30,000 inhabitants. According to an eyewitness:

Life in Tacheng, like any eastern town, was centred almost exclusively on trade. The unbelievable number of shops completely bewildered the refugees at first: who is buying when everyone is selling? The Chinese governor, the officials, the *bai*, the children – in general everyone who is able to sit behind a counter, in front of goods spread on the ground, or wandering along the street – is selling something. In essence, Tacheng is a huge bazaar. It conducts active trade with the steppe, from which raw materials flow to it from hundreds of kilometres away. In its turn the town supplies the steppe with *suemba*,<sup>65</sup> brick tea, leather goods, dried fruit, matches, and so on.

Bakich's relations with the Xinjiang authorities and the local population were not easy. A week after crossing the border, on 4 April (22 March), a fight took place between detachment's officers and some Chinese during the sale of revolver cartridges. The Russian participants in the fight were placed in front of a Chinese court, but at the request of the detachment's command the case was hushed up.

By agreement with the Chinese authorities, the detachment retained its organisation and management. Soon after crossing the border Bakich wrote to the Tacheng *dutun* (military governor of Tarbagatai district of Xinjiang province and head of foreign relations in Tacheng), Zhang, in response to the accusations made by the Soviet commander Saltykov:

As you know, I do not have any Kirghiz detachments and I am not going to form them on Chinese territory,<sup>66</sup> which has hospitably received us. As for the statements that I am going to fight the Bolsheviks for another 60 years – I ask you to believe, as I have repeatedly stated to you in the presence of the Russian Consul, that I personally, as well as all the detachment members, will rigorously observe all the rules relating to us as interned troops in accordance with international treaties and agreements.

I am taking all measures to ensure that no member of the detachment is allowed to leave the camp without authorisation. Those ranks who for one reason or another find themselves in Tacheng or outside the camp, I have ordered be brought back to the camp, by force if necessary.

Moreover, Bakich allowed the Chinese to punish any detachment members who left the camp without permission "without leniency".

In general, the situation of the Russian refugees in Tacheng was extremely difficult and they were practically powerless. The local Chinese authorities opposed the functioning of Russian military

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<sup>65</sup> Both Ganin and I have been unable to identify this. PW

<sup>66</sup> Some of the other Russian detachments in Xinjiang in this period were actively still crossing the border into Russia, often with units formed from local Kazakhs/Kirgiz.





field courts on their territory, although Bakich's detachment had such a court in operation. Bakich realised that the fate of the entire detachment depended solely on the attitude of the Chinese authorities towards the internees and was prepared to compromise. Under pressure from the Bolsheviks, who were interested in the issue of Bakich's detachment surrendering its weapons, the *dutun* asked Bakich and his guard to travel to Tacheng unarmed.

At first life in the camp was particularly hard. As Bakich wrote on 2 May (19 April) to the Russian consul in Tacheng, Dolbezhev:

So far the money has been spent only on the purchase of meat, counting 200 grams a day per man and the minimum amount of salt. The troops subordinate to me do not receive any other supplies and the daily menu is formed of water with meat and bread.

The lack of salt and vegetables in the diet threatened the development of scurvy. In addition, after the hardships of autumn 1919 and winter 1920, the bulk of the detachment were dressed in rags, as the troops had not received new uniforms since the beginning of 1919.

With regard to the detachment's food, Governor Zhang asked the detachment not to worry: "we will prepare everything possible". However, in practice that was not done. The detachment had eight million Siberian roubles at its disposal from the former treasury of the Northern Front of the Semirechensk Army, but only Tsarist roubles were circulating in Xinjiang, which were exchanged for Siberian roubles at the rate of 1:100. Probably as payment for food, the Chinese procured firewood using Russian Cossacks and soldiers as well using them in the work of fixing the Tacheng –Seter road on top of the Army funds at the disposal of Consul Dolbezhev. The Chinese organised the sending of food to the camp at the rate of 100 (sometimes 200) grams of mutton and 400 grams of bread per person per day. Despite the agreements and funding, the food, especially the bread, was not delivered on time, which the Chinese attributed to the small number of mills in the area and inaccurate scales. The total shortfall in deliveries by 2 May 1920 was over 20 tons of flour. Bakich wrote that in the systematic under-weighting of the flour he saw:

... clear damage to the treasury of the Russian State, which will pay the government of the Great Chinese Republic for the flour supplied to the detachment.

As it turned out later, the Chinese sold flour on the side. The increase in the amount of flour per person per day promised by the Chinese was not followed through. Some food was obtained from the stocks available to Consul Dolbezhev (8,000 sheep, 160 tons of wheat, 24 tons of rice, nearly six tons of tobacco). In addition, Bakich himself purchased another 1,500 sheep. By the summer of 1920, however, these supplies began to run low. In order to obtain the funds necessary for the detachment's existence, Bakich appealed to the Russian envoy in Beijing, Prince Kudashev, the consul in Khovd (Khovd) and Generals Anisimov, Vagin and Semënov in the spring-summer of 1920, but achieved almost nothing. Kudashev, reported that there was no money and promised to ask Paris for help. The only one who at least tried to help the detachment was Ataman Semënov.

To provide his for the detachment, in April-May 1920 Bakich confiscated all the silver of the former Independent Semirechensk Army (four tons), which was in Tacheng, and also requisitioned livestock (8,000 sheep), purchased by the Kolchak government for the needs of the army.

According to some reports, some of the funds were obtained from rich Sarts<sup>67</sup> who were Russian subjects. By these measures he considerably alleviated the detachment's situation.

Did he have the right to take such actions? I think that in the dire condition of his detachment and, moreover, considering the degree of disintegration of the army, which had retreated to China in scattered groups, Bakich had the moral right to act in this way. Moreover, it was the only possible

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<sup>67</sup> Settled peoples of the area, technically only the Turkic speaking, but the Russians tended not to distinguish. PW

way to save the men entrusted to him, who found themselves abandoned and wanted by no one. Of course, it would have been fair to divide the silver among all the detachments of the former Independent Semirechensk Army that were entitled to a part of its property. These unauthorised actions by Bakich could not but arouse the disapproval of those who considered themselves his commanders – Annenkov and Dutov. On 17 (4) June Dutov wrote to Bakich:

I thought that you, having confiscated 87 boxes of silver, some material and several thousand cattle, would at least share with us the silver in the proportions of the detachments, i.e. 1 to 10. ... I ask nothing for myself: at the moment I have three changes of linen and I am fed. But I am obliged to help the Russian people, and I must help my Cossacks, and I have about 1,000 of them. That is why I counted on you sending me a tenth of the silver. The cattle and other things, of course, cannot be sent. 160 kg of silver would have considerably defused the tense atmosphere here and would not have undermined your detachment very much. But I have not written to you about it until now, believing that you will do on your own. Or you think we don't need it. ...

Our motto remains unchanged and I am sure that there are many supporters of it, not only among the Russians and Slavs, but even foreigners. As for Annenkov, his cause is finished. The weapons he buried have been found and taken away by the Chinese. And the final thousand who were with Annenkov have thinned considerably – they have scattered; there are not more than 400 left. ...

Not having a single doctor in the detachment, it's very hard to live. Perhaps you'll find it possible to send me one. I think that's all I can tell you. Greetings to all your subordinates from privates to generals. Would you find it possible to send me your orders from time to time?

I wish you all the best.

Yours,  
A. Dutov.

In the future there would be conflict between Bakich and Dutov, primarily in connection with the question of uniting the anti-Bolshevik forces in Western China and the leader of the future unified organisation, which will be described later.

Shortly afterwards, the Russian envoy in Beijing, Prince Kudashev, and the consul in Ürümqi, Dyakov, demanded the seizure of the silver confiscated by Bakich. In their opinion, the silver was the national property of the non-existent state they represented, so they considered it to be theirs. Besides, the Chinese were already providing for Bakich's detachment, so in their opinion he did not need funds. The consul in Tacheng, Dolbezhev, seeing the situation on the ground, as it seems to me, at the time was inclined to support Bakich's actions rather than the proposals of his fellow diplomats. In response to the accusations Bakich wrote that he was only:

A Serb by surname but a General of the Russian Army. I think that in any case I love Russia more than the Little Russian<sup>68</sup> Patriot Shevchenko, who only thinks of profiting on the love for the Motherland.

The reference was to Timofey Shevchenko, the Russian government's agent in food purchases, who was engaged in the resale of the livestock which Bakich was accused of requisitioning.

Bakich was not afraid of responsibility and wrote that:

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<sup>68</sup> A term for the Ukraine which is a bit of a dig, it seems to me, about him not really being Russian either. PW.

I can always answer for all my orders, before the laws of Russia and the foreign great powers.

Besides, by the autumn of 1920 he considered himself already a fully independent leader and wrote to the Ürümqi Governor-General:

I declare to you that, regarding my much longer time in service than General Annenkov and having brought more of my knowledge and works for the benefit of the Russian people, I recognise only the lawful Russian Government, as recognised by foreign powers. Only such Government and no one else has the right to remove me from the command of the detachment or appoint a deputy. I will never retreat from this right as long as I live and I will never allow people like General Annenkov to authorise my appointment or removal.

Some of the Cossacks were still eager to continue the struggle against the Bolsheviks. The rumours about uprisings in Soviet territory and the ongoing struggle against the Reds in Southern Russia and Siberia seemed encouraging, but the half-starved and monotonous life in the camp led to the lower ranks of the detachment gradually beginning to leave the camp for Soviet Russia. It began with those soldiers of the detachment who, contrary to Bakich's orders, had settled outside the camp, in Tacheng. Bakich was powerless to prevent them there. Under the influence of these soldiers, the idea of returning to Russia spread in the camp on the Emil, which led to the unauthorised departure to Soviet Russia of some men. Bakich actively tried to fight the agitation for return to Russia, but people still left.

Having realised the impossibility of fighting the returnees, Bakich stopped preventing their movement in May 1920. It was mostly conscripted Cossacks and soldiers who left the camp. The Chinese authorities did let all those who wanted to leave to go at the same time, so people left in small groups. Those who left the camp were provided with food and horses.

The commanders of the units, as well as all those remaining in the camp, treated those leaving with due attention. Prayers of farewell were given. It was touching to part with people with whom for so long we had shared the same interests, the same sorrows and joys. Now everyone, delivered into the hands of fate, wanted the best outcome. At that time it was difficult to say whether those who went to Russia, at the mercy of yesterday's enemies, closer to his native home, or whether those who remained, undergoing various hardships in a foreign land, would be happier.

The commander of the 15th Orenburg Cossack Regiment, Colonel Glebov, when it was the turn of the Cossacks of his regiment to depart, ordered all the officers and Cossacks remaining in the camp to gather for a prayer service and farewell of those leaving. A prayer service was led by the regimental priest, after which the priest addressed a word to the departing Cossacks with a cross in his hands. He pointed out to the Cossacks their services to the Church, their defence of religion, their exploits, sacrifices and hardships, for the good of our motherland, for which they had done all they could, and therefore neither the holy Church nor the motherland would forget them. There was much crying, both among those leaving and those remaining, which drowned out the words of the priest. After the priest, Colonel Glebov addressed them. In a fine speech he said:

"I do not wish to reproach you for leaving us; we do not yet know what fate awaits those of us who remain here. But I want to remind you of the sacrifices you have made for the good of our dear fatherland and native army. I have been among you constantly for nearly two years. I have seen your sincere desire to free your fatherland from the Bolshevik domination. You have done much for this cause, many of your brother



*stanichniks* and comrades-in-arms have died a brave death on the battlefield. Thanks to the circumstances, we are here. I believe in you, as I always have. I also believe that you, leaving for Soviet Russia, where you will perhaps be conscripted by the Bolsheviks, will still remain faithful Cossacks. Godspeed! Godspeed!”

The Cossacks, listening to their favourite commander, whose appearance among them during a battle had often decided their fate, shouted through their sobs: “Come again with arms to Russia, we will be with you again, we will never be Bolsheviks!” After this the column of departing Cossacks began to move away in the direction of the Russian frontier. For a long time we looked after them, moving away towards an unknown future. None of us even thought of sending a reproach after them. No one could do so, for everyone understood those ragged, half-bearded, and exhausted people.

In general the detachment’s understanding of life in Soviet Russia was extremely vague – those who returned to their homeland were considered dead in advance. Subsequently, there were rumours in the detachment that the officers and volunteers who returned to Soviet Russia had been shot by the Reds.

In addition, there were attempts to leave the camp in other directions and for other purposes. Thus, the Cossacks of the Ataman Regiment, having received information about the transfer to China of their Military Ataman, Dutov, began to seek to go to Shuiding (Suidan) to join him. The rumour of this, initially secret, plan reached some other units, whose Cossacks also gathered to follow the *Atamantsy* to Dutov. The Cossacks believed that Dutov would lead them in a new campaign against the Bolsheviks. The command of the detachment became aware of this. Colonel Kolokol'tsov was sent to calm the Cossacks, and then the commander of the Ataman Regiment, Colonel Savin, was summoned to the detachment headquarters. After an conversation at headquarters he made no further attempts to take the regiment to Dutov.

After the departure of all those who wished to leave, less than half of those who had crossed the border, not counting refugees, remained in the camp. According to Serebrennikov, by June 1920, about 6,000 people had left the camp. Even if Serebrennikov managed to take into account the movement of civilian refugees in his calculations, it is hardly possible, in my opinion, to calculate their exact movements in China. It is only known that many civilian refugees took up all the available jobs in Tacheng ahead of the military. The calculations directly concerning the military and their families are much easier. According to Bakich’s headquarters, by 27 (14) July 1,468 officers, 3,557 soldiers, 721 military family members and 1,000 civilian refugees remained in the camp, for a total of 6,746 people. The number of those who recrossed the border from the detachment decreased the total by 346 officers, 4,482 lower ranks and 64 of military family members, for a total of 4,892 departing. As a result, the fighting strength of Bakich’s troops was halved, but at the same time Bakich increased the quality of the personnel – those who remained had no route back to Soviet Russia, and they were ready to stay with Bakich to the end.

Bakich himself in a telegram of 31 (18) May 1920 to General Anisimov in Harbin reported:

Having no communication with the East, I have decided to reduce the number of the detachment by letting the surplus element go to Soviet Russia, as a result of which about 5,000 people remain. I ask you, as a representative of the Orenburg Cossacks, who make up the majority of the detachment, and will continue to, to ask the relevant authorities to help the detachment with money in the amount of five million Tsarist roubles or other equivalent, uniforms, of which are in extreme need ... to apply for the transfer of the detachment to an area of China, from where, under changed circumstances, the detachment would be more likely to return to Russian territory. I



believe that the Khovd – Ulaanbaatar (Ulaanbaatar) road is the only route, in the current situation.

In the spring of 1920, 25,000 *lan*<sup>69</sup> was received from Anisimov. Even so, he should be held responsible for the hardships that fell to the Bakich detachment after that. In the autumn of 1920 Anisimov received over 100,000 gold roubles from Ataman Semënov to support the *Orenburzhtsy* in Xinjiang, but Bakich and Dutov received virtually no money for their detachments. Only later, as a result of an investigation into Anisimov's activities, conducted by an audit commission under the chairmanship of supervisory councillor Arkhipov, were the facts of the embezzlement of most of those funds (57,000 roubles) revealed.

Gradually, life in the camp began to return to normal. Musical instruments appeared. An amateur theatre began to work and cinema sessions were even organised. From the very first days the whole camp was divided into two groups: married and single. The first group, of course, was able to settle down better, although the representatives of the second group were much more numerous. In the very centre of the camp on the Emil were Red Cross tents, where many sisters of mercy worked. Many officers who longed for female companionship went there after the heat of the day. Some of the officers even got families – in the summer of 1920 at least ten weddings were performed. Four streets led to the Red Cross station, which received the original names: Ataman, Nevsky Prospekt, Poetry and Sadness, and the final one – Love.

On 6 May (23 April) 1920 – the military holiday of the Orenburg Cossack Host – horse racing, trick horse riding, gymnastic exercises and military games were arranged in the camp. The Russian consul and the Tacheng military governor were invited to the feast. At the departure of the governor from the Tacheng fortress three cannon shots were fired, the departure itself was also pompously organised:

To the sound of horns and trumpets, dispersing the crowd with sticks, exotic infantry appeared in incredible costumes, painted with inscriptions on the chest and back, followed by cavalry in skirts and blouses of red satin. The governor's escort was so unusually uniformed, so much of the soldiers' clothing seemed to have been taken from the costume room of an opera house, that the only thing missing for the completeness of the picture was the appearance of a tenor, instead of which a toy two-wheeled carriage pulled by six mules, from which a wrinkled yellowish face in huge round spectacles peeped out. When the Chinese governor passed by, it was customary to remove hats and bow.

The governor was very pleased with the sight the Russians had given him and promised to improve the food supply to the camp. There was an exchange of courtesies, and for the holiday the *dutun* gave the detachment 10 cattle and 100 sheep. In general, at the initial stage of the detachment's stay in China, the local authorities were extremely kind and even helped Bakich by providing him with intelligence on the Bolsheviks' activities.

Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks were closely watching Bakich's actions. Taking advantage of their proximity to the frontier, they tried to fight his detachment even on Chinese territory. For this purpose, Soviet secret agents were sent across the border, and in addition, the Reds made raids in small numbers to steal the detachment's horses. The local population was also engaged in robbery and cattle-raiding. All these phenomena complicated the detachment's stay in western China.

Despite the difficulties, Bakich found opportunities to take care of Russian civilian refugees in a foreign country. As one of the officers of the detachment later recalled:

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<sup>69</sup> A Chinese monetary unit and measure of weight equal to 37.7 grams.



The indefatigable Bakich kept up with everything. He earned the love and respect of everyone with his energy his care in improving the living conditions in the camp.

“What unit?” he asked me when he saw me riding a donkey (I couldn’t walk for a long time).

“The automobile detachment.”

“Ride gently, you’ll go farther.” His white teeth gleamed from under his black moustache and he rubbed the donkey’s ear. Suddenly serious: “Did you see some kind of circus there?” he asked, referring to the cinema sessions. And, without waiting for my answer, walked along the dugouts, standing out strongly against the dull dusty camp background with his general’s uniform and brightly polished boots.

In a letter to the Tacheng military governor on 5 May 1920 Bakich wrote:

Being recently in Tacheng, I inspected the camp of the Bakhty, Makanchi and Urzhar refugees in Chobar-Agach. I had the most depressing impression. All the refugees are in great need of food, as the 1,000 grams each of them get for a few days is certainly not enough. Many heads of families have died and women and small children are left who need help. The refugees have not yet been released from the camp, and they are unable to earn any money, as a result of which they have to sell for next to nothing their last clothes, wagons, horses and other household furnishings taken from Russia.

As a result of the above, I ask you, Your Excellency, who is so solicitous towards Russian citizens, who are in one way or another forced to seek hospitality and patronage in the territory of the Great Chinese Republic, to look into the difficult situation of the refugees in Chobar-Agach and render them the necessary assistance. I think it would be very helpful to allow the refugees to get jobs on the farms in the vicinity of Tacheng. If there are no obstacles on your part, I ask you to make appropriate orders to your subordinate officials and inform me of your decision. For my part, I could, in each individual case, give a certificate of the reliability of the refugees and a guarantee of their good behaviour.

In late May, the Chinese discovered a considerable amount of arms and ammunition buried near the border, which was grounds for distrusting Bakich. The general tried to justify himself by saying that the weapons had been buried by refugees from Semirech'e or *Annenkovtsy*, but not by his detachment. Whether the *dutun* believed his excuses, it is difficult to say. On 27 (14) June 1920, the Xinjiang civil and military governor<sup>70</sup> Yang Zengxin wrote to Bakich very diplomatically:

... I quite recognise that those soldiers who have crossed the border and are within the Chinese Republic should be guarded and the authorities should treat these troops well. I regret only that at first these troops were received without politeness, which is why I am very concerned and ashamed that you in your letters express your gratitude for the reception, which was not so sufficient [sic]. As I know that you always conduct your affairs in a peace-loving manner and that you think first of the friendship of both states above all else, in view of this I have the courage to say that the questions concerning the relations of the two friendly powers will be resolved by themselves on the basis of international law, and the relations of Russia with China will improve and strengthen from day to day.

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<sup>70</sup> Warlord, in reality. PW



Less than a year and a half later, in the autumn of 1921, the same governor in a message to the RMS<sup>71</sup> of the Siberian troops wrote:

I would like to thank you all the more, given that the liquidation did not receive much assistance from China, which I particularly regret. On my part, I sincerely congratulate you on your success. Bakich, who violated international law and threatened the tranquillity of the two neighbouring Republics, has now been eliminated.

Comparing these two letters, one can only come to the only conclusion, long known for a long time, that politics and morality are incompatible.

Once in China, Bakich also showed concern about the fate of his first family; on 21 (8) June he telegraphed Harbin about the possibility of transferring money to his wife and children. As it turned out, Olga Konstantinovna and her children were in Ussuriysk, a town with which she had memories of the first years of her life together with Bakich, before the war. At the same time, in July 1920, Bakich lost a close friend – Olga Yakimenko, a woman with whom he had travelled through the entire Civil War. By the time of the tragedy, Olga Fyodorovna was suffering from a severe nervous disorder, which caused her suicide. Immediately after the incident, rumours spread around the camp concerning the circumstances of Yakimenko's death. Since Major-General Smolnin-Tervand, the chief of staff wrote himself of the need to investigate the circumstances of this case in order to prevent further rumours, it is most likely that these rumours blamed Bakich himself for the murder of his beloved.

The official investigation conducted by the military investigator of Ataman Dutov's detachment, Lieutenant Mossevnin, allows us to understand what happened in the camp at Emil that tragic evening of 22 (9) July 1920. According to the testimony of General Bakich himself the following happened:

On 9 July this year at about 7:30 pm I arrived at the camp from Tacheng. In my tent I found Olga Fyodorovna in an agitated state, the reason for which was that she had been refused a *tarantas*<sup>72</sup> to take two tailors to the Ataman Regiment in the 2nd District. She began to complain to me about that, saying that for two hours she had been declined a *tarantas*, but was offered a cart instead. Then she began to complain in an irritated tone about the fact that no-one around her listened to her and did not comply with her requests, in particular the officers who she spoke to that day. I admonished her that she could not demand that the officers honour her requests or make any remarks to them. At the time of my arrival the *tarantas* were already by my *kibitka*,<sup>73</sup> near which were Staff Captains Leke and Lutin, who had sent the two tailors away and gone to their homes.

Afterwards I had a conversation with Olga Fyodorovna about domestic affairs. We talked about her forthcoming birthday, which was to be on 11 July. She asked me whether I had bought the things she had asked for, to which I replied that everything had been bought, and that I had brought some of them with me, and some of them were to be brought on the cart that was left behind. During this conversation she remained in an irritated state, which had not yet passed.

At this she informed me that today she had heard how our near neighbours did not speak well of her and treated her badly. At that I lay down on my bed, tired from the trip, and told her to ignore the gossip, as it was not the first time it had happened.

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<sup>71</sup> Revolutionary Military Soviet: the commander and two commissars who headed any major soviet unit. PW

<sup>72</sup> A sprung carriage, common in Siberia at the time, and far more comfortable than a cart. PW

<sup>73</sup> A style of covered wagon. PW

After this she asked me if I would eat, to which I replied that I would not, as I had just drunk some milk, and asked her to make my bed sooner, as I had to get up early the next day and make arrangements for the birthday party.

She prepared the bed and just at that time a cart of vegetables drove up with a courier. I went to watch the cart unloaded, and at that time Mikhail Smirnov, a messenger for the Chief of Staff, came to the cart and said that the Chief of Staff asked for some milk for tea. I sent him to the dugout to the servant Mana, but she was not there, and I poured him some milk from the jug which was on the table in my *kibitka*. Olga Fyodorovna, when she saw this, went back into a highly irritated state, and began to shout about why I would give Maria Ivanovna<sup>74</sup> milk when she spoke poorly of her!

“I heard it with my own ears today when I sent Kostya Ivanov to her for spoons.”

After this she began to bite her hands, fell on her bed, began to cry, and wanted to go to General Smolnin to talk to him about it. I told her that I would not let her go and that tomorrow, when she had calmed down, I would talk to her and find out. She continued to cry. To give her a chance to calm down, I left the *kibitka*, telling her to go to bed and that I would be right along. After that, I went to check on the day guards who watch the horses.

Just then I went out behind the kitchen as I heard Olga Fyodorovna shouting loudly:

“Goodbye!”

I shouted back: “What are you doing, you mad woman?”

After that I heard a second shout: “Goodbye!” and a shot.

I ran to the *kibitka* and entered it at the same time as Lieutenant Stolypin, Staff Captain Lyutin and my messenger Lubomir Buarovich, who had come running at the shot. General Smolnin also came running in. When I entered the *kibitka*, I saw Olga Fyodorovna turned over on her back with a revolver in her right hand. Her chest was bleeding profusely. At the moment of my arrival I heard her last breath. After that I remember that the Chief of Staff sent for doctor Ryabukhin, and I was taken somewhere behind the *kibitka*. ...

I always had two or three revolvers in my *kibitka*: mine was with me in my overcoat pocket, and the other was in the *kibitka* behind the drapery on the eastern side, and the deceased knew where it was, especially as she had cleaned the *kibitka* when I left for Tacheng. During her irritated state she obviously had taken it out and shot herself.

According to one of the testimonies, upon entering the tent and seeing his wife shot dead, Bakich fell at her feet and with the words: “Lord, why this, why this?” and grabbed his revolver – but the camp commandant, Staff Captain Lyutin, took the weapon off him and together with Lieutenant Stolypin took Bakich out into the fresh air. Yakimenko had suffered from hallucinations and had made previous suicide attempts, but they had ended unsuccessfully, with General Bakich himself several times discovering her suicide notes and pre-empting her attempts.

In the period of June-July 1920 Bakich was promoted to lieutenant general by Dutov’s order, which was reflected in their correspondence, unfortunately neither the order nor its date could be found. They might only be preserved in Dutov’s personal archive, the fate of which is still unknown. The correspondence between Bakich and Dutov during this period is quite eloquently characterised by a lengthy letter dated 22 (9) July, which I give in full. Dutov, still in a friendly form, wrote to Bakich:

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<sup>74</sup> Wife of General Smolnin-Tervand.



Your Excellency, Andrei Stepanovich.

I received your report No. 71/n of 14 June 1920 on 2 July this year.

You should have no doubt, as I have expressly pointed out in my previous letters to you, that the rumours and gossip you have received from various people have no basis in reality and should not give you reason to distrust me. I am particularly pleased to once again have the opportunity to express to you that my work for the glory and benefit of the one and undivided Russia goes hand in hand with yours and pursues one common goal, which I have never doubted – the salvation of the Motherland Russia from the unbridled Bolshevik power.

On this basis, however, I cannot confine myself to telling you the simple facts that we work together to achieve that goal, but must warn you, Andrei Stepanovich, about the nature of our correspondence, which, as it seems to me on the basis of your report No. 71, is not generally understood by you as I would like it to be.

First of all, I can definitely rule out the possibility of a change of heart towards you by the fact that I write to you all the time, keeping you informed of everything that is going on in front of me. I have advised you before that during the three years of our work together I have become accustomed to regard you as my most trusted and valuable assistant, and that my goodwill towards will always rule out the possibility of any situation in which you should be suspicious of me in any way. For three years have experienced together the revolutionary fracture at the front, where human relations are forged and crystallised, so there can be no intrusion by third parties and their intrigues. By the very fact of letter No. 502 to you I have emphasised this.

I see all these denunciations, gossip and reports as undoubtedly proving the existence, everywhere, but most certainly around us, of an atmosphere where conversations are interpreted, intercepted and spread by others. But I know that these denunciations are foolish and naive in that they wish to create a some antagonism between me and you. But I do not want to close my eyes to them. I consider it necessary, first of all, to make public that of our relationship is friendly, then to kill the rumours at their base, which means informing the unit commanders about them. There is nothing more dangerous than a mob, but the false rumours of a mob are also dangerous.

And you, Andrei Stepanovich, should agree with me that the method I have chosen strikes at the very gossip itself. I cannot blame those that say them, for they are newcomers. What they convey, they generally depict, is the moods and feelings with which the former Orenburg Army lives. Of course they themselves have not heard, and no one else could have heard, anything from you that would disgrace me. But there are some in the detachment who scold me and, in order to give weight to their arguments, unscrupulously rely on a more famous name, in this case yours and, sometimes, General Smolnin's. This is possible, and I think you will not deny it.

There is a certain atmosphere within a certain circle of men in the detachment that is known to be unfavourable to me, and the purpose of my letter was mainly aimed at that circle. By suggesting that the letter be read to the unit commanders and those at a similar level of authority, I ensured both that my purpose was achieved and also I made it perfectly clear that my relationship with you will not be secret and cannot be the subject of any denunciations from now on, for everything will be made public. Thus, the success of the gossip, which you seem to think I have given credence to, I believe can be turned on itself, if correctly directed, so rather than spread discord between



you, the detachment and myself, we can on the contrary use it to give greater unity, from which a common cause triumphs.

This is the starting point which, depending on the intention I have expressed above, if you keep it in mind when reading the letter, gives a completely different character to everything written in letter No. 502. The tone of that letter caught your eye. You agree that it has caused some dissonance in our relations, and you have noticed that, but I did not think that you would regard it as a personal offence to yourself. At heart it is so simple. If always we always act, even in minor things, without any change to the concept of the common cause, and always put that self-denial in the centre of things, then the possibility of mistakes to one's well-wishers will be ruled out.

I could, of course, consider the question raised by you to be completely exhausted by this, but in order to destroy even the smallest possibility of some misunderstanding between us, I will examine some sections of my letter No. 502, which may at first sight, if we look at how you understood my letter seem to contradict the tone and character of the letter, which after all I wrote, and so naturally want to explain and confirm. In explaining such sections, I will respond to your letter, i.e. I will take those places which you have chosen to discuss in your letter. This will be the best as this deal with the portions which you think are most unfavourable to me. I will leave to the side General Smolnin's report, which you submitted to me: it will have a definite significance and consequence.

I have written to you that you have enthusiastically accepted Annenkov's rule and have given orders to introduce it in the detachment. Will you kindly take my letter and re-read it: where is there a word of my opinion on this subject? Where is there even a hint of my displeasure at you having befriended Annenkov by accepting a watch and sabre from him? I told you what little I knew about him. By surrendering the Army to Annenkov, and by entrusting you with command of the detachment, with your consent, did I not show that I had entrusted what was dearest to me to your experience and discretion? I might have had my own opinions about the change of command, but you have not heard it from me, as far as I remember. Accepting Annenkov's discipline, from my point of view, was a sacrifice, but the submission of the Orenburg Army to Annenkov was also a sacrifice. Both sacrifices were made for the salvation of thousands of people who believed in us. And you had reason to believe that your sacrifice consistently flowed from mine. The purpose was the same, and you could consider yourself the successor of my idea. You and I did not do all this for your own pleasure or on a whim. Hopefully you now see that you should not have dwelt in your letter to me on the justification of what was, after all, my own idea. Both you and I put the common cause above all else. And since we came to the conclusion to entrust the Army's fate to Annenkov, we had to use every means to serve the common cause selflessly.

When the Army commander<sup>75</sup> appealed to me with a request using his authority to give him funds for the Army from the gold reserves of the evacuated [Orenburg] institutions, how could I refuse? To save 500 refugees from the 2nd District<sup>76</sup> or save the Army's gold, and thereby put at stake the existence of the whole Army, which was paying with blood for every inch of the last piece of Russian land? The matter did not call for unnecessary discussion. I personally had nothing in Lepsinsk and I have nothing in China either. It was clear to me that the refugees would be lost without the gold, and

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<sup>75</sup> i.e. Annenkov.

<sup>76</sup> The area centred on Verkhneural'sk.





the army, when we returned, would be depleted by 24 kilograms, and I gave the order. How it was done, how actually displeased the 2nd District Board is, whether it resents me, platonically as it were, because perhaps that gold would have remained unused with them until now – I do not know, but I was right morally. They may take offence, of course: it was their money and they had rights to it, but I go further. If I had known then that Annenkov was an utterly despicable man, but not a traitor, I would still have given the order. He commanded the front, he had been given command of those soldiers, and as long as he is not a traitor, I had no right not to believe him. Having full command in Semirech'e, by force of circumstances, he felt himself strong enough, experienced, knowledgeable and vigorous enough, and he had to fight. But he has no right to now say that we hindered him. No, he was helped by people who gave their whole soul selflessly for the common cause, who carried out in practice the idea of self-denial in the rear to the favour of the Army. "Everything for the army, for the front, everything for the war." And that is how far my strongest critics are from understanding me. I would advise them, before criticising, to imbue themselves with the spirit of nobility, to imbue themselves with a true understanding of the common cause for the salvation of the Motherland. Without that I cannot imagine what, apart from mere skulduggery, prevents them from returning to the Russian Soviet Federal Republic.

You want to know what my attitude towards Annenkov is now, since nothing can be deduced from letter No. 502. But after that you received the letter of 26 April, which I sent you from Jampan: it should have shown you that I know a great deal of Annenkov's shenanigans, and my view of Annenkov, as I have made clear, is shared by you and the detachment in full measure. I shall have an opportunity to send you my thoughts, which I wrote a month and a half ago, in the middle of May, about Annenkov's intrigues, from which you will draw a full measure of the schemes and networks with which Annenkov endeavoured to surround me in Lepsinsk.

You may have taken offence for yourself and for your assistants. Here I do not mean General Smolnin: you have many assistants. It is not surprising that you took offence, but for your aides rather than for yourself of course. After all I have said to you, I have given you no reason to take offence. But it is not always possible to vouch for all one's assistants in such a difficult time, as I have personally experienced. Although it is honourable and honest for a leader to trust his subordinates, forgive me for saying, it is also sometimes impossible.

You write that in the course of 21 days I have dramatically changed my view of you and the unit, and then that the tone and heading of the next letter is friendly. This surprises you, and between the lines you can read: well, how changeable the Ataman is, since his views are so different in three weeks. The whole tone and thoughts of this letter have sufficiently explained the need for letter No. 502 and its purpose that, so I will not reply regarding that comment.

Having spelled out to you, deeply respected Andrei Stepanovich, my point of view on the questions which you have involuntarily touched on at a certain level and which I did not want to raise at all, I remain completely confident that the exchange of thoughts which has taken place between us will serve for even greater mutual understanding, for a thoughtful discussion our actions and for that deep respect which characterises the relationship of people who fully believe in the nobility of the aspirations of the other.

Ataman Dutov.



So at that point Dutov's attitude towards Bakich remained generally positive, but the precursors of a future rupture between the generals were already being felt.

On 12 August (30 July) 1920 Dutov issued his order No. 141, in which he wrote:

2. In view of the scattered units of the former Orenburg Army and those who have left Ataman Annenkov's detachment, now in the Ili-Tarbagatai region of China, currently being internees, and wishing to unite them, both morally and as formations, and to direct all the units to a unity of action, discipline and order, I direct: that all military units, commands, administrations, institutions and establishments formerly belonging to the Orenburg and Semirechensk Armies and to Colonel Bryantsev's detachment, be regarded as cadres of the units of the Independent Orenburg Army.

3. As High Commander of the Semirechensk Region, I also assume my former rights as the Commander of the Independent Orenburg army.

4. The units located in the camp on the Emil River, near Tacheng, shall still be called the Ataman Dutov Detachment and its commander shall have the rights of a commander of an independent corps.

...

7. I do not authorise any separation of units, their movement or business trips to the Far East without my knowledge and order.

8. I only permit single officers, officials and lower ranks to go on missions, retirement and leave without my order to persons enjoying the rights of a corps commander.

Dutov's order was necessary in practice, but in my opinion its author exceeded his authority and did not take into account the changed circumstances, in which the commanders of the detachments in China were effectively independent of other commanders. In addition, it is important to pay attention to the appointment of Bakich as commander of an independent corps, since prior to that he was considered the commander of a non-independent corps. Dutov apparently later forgot that nuance and considered that Bakich remained his subordinate, with the rights of a commander of a non-independent corps. Bakich interpreted the order as full recognition of his independence.

In August 1920, Japanese intelligence officers Nagamini and Sato arrived at Bakich, in the guise of tourists, with whom he negotiated support for his corps. In December, a Japanese Major Tsuga arrived at the detachment to help unite the Whites in western China. As early as July, Bakich wrote of allowing the possibility of remaining in western China for an extended period of time and even wintering.

According to medical experts, "to winter where the camp stands is to condemn the men to certain death". As the cold season approached, which in practice excluded the possibility of wintering in the camp due to the strong winds and frosts in the region, a new wave of departures began.

The situation of the detachment also worsened. On 29 (16) August 1920 Bakich telegraphed to Harbin for transmission to General Anisimov:

Thanks to the intrigues of the enemies of our common cause ... the ambassador in Beijing has refused to help the detachment. The 800 grams of flour we receive from China is not enough to sustain. All our money is all gone, ask Semënov and the *zemstvo* not do decline urgent assistance to the detachment.

The monthly allowance required for the detachment after the departure of the bulk of those who wished to leave the camp was 38 tons of meat, 23 tons of rice, 6.5 tons of salt, 500 kg of tea, 1.2

tons of soap and 1.2 tons of tobacco. In addition, peppers, onions and cabbage were required. Bakich considered the weapons and ammunition surrendered to the Chinese, which were worth over 400,000 Ürümqi *lan* as collateral for the food.

As winter approached and the detachment's situation worsened, the tone of Bakich's telegrams changed. Addressing the Russian Consul in Khovd, Bakich on 27 (14) July 1920 noted:

I beg you, Mr. Consul, as far as possible, to help the faithful sons of the motherland, from the distant Volga and Orenburg regions, who preferred to live in a foreign land rather than submit to the yoke of communists and Jews.

Now, fearful of spending the winter in damp dugouts in the open air, people from the detachment left – mainly to the Far East to Ataman Semënov or to Ulaanbaatar. As early as in July Bakich appealed to Ataman Semënov and other White commanders with a request to transfer the detachment to actively fight against the Bolsheviks, In September he was already negotiating directly with the Chinese for a transfer of the detachment to the Far East. They were not allowed to leave together, so they had to travel in small groups. Hopes that the Chinese would allow the detachment to winter in villages were not fulfilled. Bakich wrote to General Anisimov:

No help from anywhere yet. I ask the head of the government of the east to help the six thousand people who are naked, barefoot, and doomed to starve to a cold death.

By this time Bakich's situation had been reported to Wrangel in the Crimea through the French mission, raising new hopes of speedy help from the Allies. On 29 (16) September 1920 Bakich telegraphed to Beijing:

Accepting Wrangel's programme and ideas, the detachment awaits his instructions on how to proceed.

In the autumn the detachment's material situation deteriorated to such an extent that, due to lack of funds, it was decided in November to sell two government cars, one of which Ataman Annenkov had earlier frivolously presented to the governor in Ürümqi *in absentia*. Bakich did not at the time release that car, which certainly did not improve his relations with either Annenkov or the Ürümqi governor. While the Chinese authorities had initially feared Bakich's detachment and had to reckon with it, as time went on the detachment's authority fell considerably in the eyes of the Tacheng governor, so that he even refused to receive Bakich personally, which was an insult to the entire detachment.

Furthermore, by decision of the President of the Republic of China, the protection of Russian citizens was entrusted to the Chinese local authorities in the autumn of 1920. The Russian ambassador and consuls ceased their functions by decree of 23 (10) September 1920. Dolbezhev left for the Far East at the same time, leaving a certain Balabanov as his deputy. Now the fate of Bakich and his detachment was entirely in the hands of the Chinese.

Judging from the surviving descriptions, Bakich tried to maintain discipline and military organisation in the detachment, although it was not easy. The sale of Chinese vodka was forbidden in the camp. As one of the Russian refugees living in Tacheng recalled,

At roll calls and during parades, men in skins, without hats, some in trousers, and some without trousers, lined up in front of the general. They stood tall, with loyal feelings on their faces, and Lieutenant General Bakich and his brilliant retinue, with the clanking of spurs, walked along the line and, with difficulty finding boots on someone's feet, threw:

"Y-you! They must be cleaned! Why don't you clean them?"



And right there, behind the long line, there were crooked roofs ready to collapse, sheepskins and felt hanging in the wind instead of doors, ragged women and weak, sick children.

According to the same author, Bakich showed little prudence and thriftiness regarding the detachment in the camp, which, given the initial nature of his military service was almost exclusively in economic matters, seems incredible and cannot be justified. The only explanation favourable to Bakich may be the general's hope of a speedy return to Russia, for which reason he was reluctant to settle seriously into the camp. According to another characterisation of him:

The ambitious general dreamed of the laurels of being the saviour of Russia from Bolshevism and made great efforts to preserve his detachment. He believed the Soviet government was fragile and was waiting for an invitation from Russia to return and help the people who rebelled against the Bolsheviks.

In the autumn of 1920, the first cases of robberies involving Russian refugees took place in Tacheng. Entire gangs began to appear, which were active across the town. This situation could not but cause serious concern to the Chinese authorities, who did not have enough forces to restore order.

In the summer of 1920, a powerful anti-Bolshevik peasant uprising broke out in Altai and Semey provinces, in which more than 15,000 people took part. In the mid-autumn of 1920, after the failure of the uprising, a detachment of rebels under the command of an officer of the Siberian Cossack Host, Captain Shishkin, numbering up to 800 men, half of whom retained their weapons, arrived in the Tacheng area through Mongolia. In the Emil camp they were considered as Bolsheviks and treated in an unfriendly manner. Shishkin, who sided with Dutov and Colonel Savin, was arrested with the assistance of Bakich in the spring of 1921 and taken to the Chinese prison in Ürümqi. His further fate unknown. By the spring of 1921 the *Shishkintsy* had dispersed as a separate group, partly reinforcing Bakich's detachment.

As of 13 November, according to the HQ of the assistant commander-in-chief of the Soviet Republic's forces in Siberia, Bakich had no more than 3,000 men left, with up to 45% being officers. According to Bakich's own data, on 27 (14) September his detachment consisted of six generals, 150 staff officers and 1,250 higher ranks, for a total of 1,406 men, not including lower ranks. According to the Turkestan Front HQ intelligence, which closely monitored the situation of the Whites in western China, by 30 December 1920 the detachment had 2,730 men with 108 rifles.

The Soviet leadership's concern about the presence of a significant organised and hardened anti-Bolshevik force near the borders of Soviet Russia is understandable, especially since the Whites themselves did not lose hope "to return home with honour", as Bakich wrote, and overthrow the Bolshevik regime. Dutov was particularly active in that regard. Soviet historiography linked the preparation of the uprising in Naryn District in November 1920 with Dutov's activities. The ataman kept in touch with the Basmachi leaders and made attempts to organise an anti-Bolshevik underground in the ranks of the Red Army. Dutov's active anti-Bolshevik activities and his unquestionable authority among the Cossacks were the reasons for his physical elimination by the Cheka on 6 February (24 January) 1921.<sup>77</sup>

In one of his last orders, of 30 (17) January 1921, Ataman Dutov wrote about Bakich in a completely different tone from previously:

Since the beginning of the internment of the detachment named after me, its commander, General Bakich, has completely neglected basic military law – to keep in

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<sup>77</sup> By a nine man squad sent across the border to Shuiding in February 1921. The original plan had been to abduct him, presumably to put him on public trial, but as access to Dutov became harder the Cheka moved to assassination.

touch with his senior, and for eight months of the stay in China has not once bothered to contact me either by post, or by telegraph, or by sending a field courier, or by sending officers, having all the means to do so. Traders and refugees come weekly from Tacheng to Gulja and Shuiding, and they would willingly take the trouble to convey letters and reports to me. Every Russian who came from Tacheng considered it his duty to come to me and introduce himself, and my question to them was always if there were any letters to me from General Bakich, and received the usual answer: no. Meanwhile General Bakich sent telegrams to Beijing, to Chita and Harbin, and received replies. He considered it unnecessary to inform me. General Bakich had silver, Romanov money and other means and more than 1,000 officers alone, which certainly gave him a full opportunity to establish proper postal relations with me, but it was obviously not favourable for him.

At the start of our time in China, at Tacheng, a rumour spread about me being shot by the Reds and my death in general. I know that the officers and Cossacks, interested in the fate of their ataman, went to the HQ and asked him about me, but the HQ and its head, together with the commander of the detachment, kept persistently silent and, without denying the rumour, did nothing to clarify it. Fate willed to preserve me, and I myself informed the detachment of my whereabouts.

The orders I sent to Tacheng were not announced to the troops, as there was no paper. This excuse is not believable, as the detachment had money for paper and there is paper in Tacheng, as proved by my purchase of it from the Tacheng traders. General Bakich, and even more so his chief of staff, should know that in military units if there is such an order it must be announced, being sent with a messenger to the units, where it is either copied or simply read out. The reason for concealing my orders will be clear from what follows – it was simply necessary to remove the name of Ataman Dutov from life and to concentrate all attention on General Bakich.

Having absolutely no means, no transportation, I was nevertheless twice able to send an officer to the camp on the Emil River and, in any case, I used the telegraph and travelling companions to communicate with the detachment. Both my officers arrived safely in Shuiding and fulfilled their assignments.

The commander of my Ataman regiment found it possible to send two of his officers with reports. I believe that the head of the detachment had more means at his disposal for communication. Exhausted by the campaign and unwell, I needed a carriage, I applied to General Bakich and was refused; whereupon the regimental commander, Colonel Savin, found a way to send me two carriages. And so it is with everything.

General Bakich writes me a letter – “Dear Military Ataman”, expressing to me his delight that I am alive, etc.; but in reality everything is the opposite. On the departure of my staff-officer, P. P. Papengut, General Bakich declared that he was ceasing all communication with me, and that Ataman Dutov had ended his activities. That General Bakich was breaking off communication was not news to me, for he had not even begun it, except for the minimum required for politeness – an answer to my letters and enquiries.

As for the cessation of my activities, that is my business and not General Bakich's. I am a Russian, not a foreigner like General Bakich, and for me the interests of Russia are dearer than anything else. I will only stop my work when I die. General Bakich and his chief of staff told my staff officer that they did not believe in the possibility of returning to Russia, and that he was doing everything to convince the commanders of the units





that it was impossible for his detachment to continue fighting. All the impulses of truly Russian men, who wished to continue the struggle for the right cause, were punished by General Bakich with imprisonment in a Chinese prison, or sent away from the detachment, as for example General Nikitin was.

The commander of the detachment and his staff are so uninterested in what is being done in the Russian borderland that reconnaissance is completely abandoned and when in July 1920, during the Altai revolt, the commanders of the units asked for funds for reconnaissance and expressed their desire to take part, General Bakich categorically refused it. The regiments themselves sent agents with their own funds. When General Anisimov expressed a desire to find out information for the detachment, General Bakich refused him 16 kg of silver for the task.

The sad story of the Red Cross leaving the camp is due to General Bakich's misunderstanding of his rights. I consider it appropriate to remind General Bakich that when I handed over the detachment to him I signed an order defining his rights as commander of a non-independent corps. Meanwhile General Bakich, in his correspondence with A. A. Bulygin, is twisting the Regulations on Field Administration, assigning himself almost the rights of a Commander-in-Chief. I know that the order where General Bakich's rights as a commander of an independent corps were indicated was deliberately incorrectly reprinted.

The winter procurement of sheep cost the detachment an average of 11 roubles per head, meanwhile any breeder from Gulja would have transported the sheep to Tacheng for half the price. A sheep in the Ili region costs 3.5 to 4 roubles. I do not see any economy in the consumption of silver, and instead of buying 5,000 head for 60,000 roubles of silver, one could buy 15,000 head and supply the detachment until 1922.

I am surprised at the fact that General Bakich took a third part of the silver from Consul Dolbezhev and the cattle from Shevchenko and thus deprived the detachment of credits from the ambassador in Beijing, but does not consider it necessary to take 13,000 sheep grazing near Tacheng, bought by the agents of the Siberian Government.

General Bakich receives 1,000 kg of flour daily, which is detrimental to the detachment, but ignores the 500 tons of wheat Annenkov purchased, which is piled up at Tacheng. I don't think this was unknown to General Bakich, since it is known to me. The reason is evidently that General Bakich has not been able to win favour with both the population and the local authorities. I know of cases of General Bakich has not been received by the local Chinese chief. This is a slap in the face to the whole unit.

I am also surprised by the fact that there is a treasury at the detachment, but the silver is kept by the commander of the detachment under his bed. What is that – an act of distrust to the sworn officers of the State Treasury, or is there is an unknown secret? In any case, it's illegal, and it is not the unit commander's business to personally issue bags of silver. There are other ways of keeping records.

I know that a transfer made by General Anisimov to the total of 25,000 *lans* has not been received up to the present time, because the head of the detachment demands that it should be given in gold, and at the same time the detachment is literally naked.

Having in the detachment all the workshops, tools, a huge number of carts and horses, a considerable stock of silver and other valuables, having a huge set of all kinds of specialists: engineers, merchants, agronomists and masters of all workshops – it is



criminal to sit for six months and not to create a workshop town. With such forces and means it would be possible to kill off all the local firms.

General Bakich's orders have reduced the military detachment to a refugee camp with a complete lack of discipline and military distinctions: everyone lives by himself and for himself. Some units are divided into settlements and meet to decide on the issues of service and duty. The measures taken by Colonel Stepanov and General Shemetov to raise discipline and order do not meet with sympathy at detachment HQ. My Ataman Regiment serves as a special thorn in the side of General Bakich, in view of the fact that it retains full military discipline. But at the same time General Bakich emphasises strongly that his detachment is a military detachment when it comes to earning money by individual ranks or organising any commercial enterprise.

Lieutenant-Colonel Papengut witnessed the arrival at Tacheng of an officer of General Bakich's favourite Syzran' Division. In 30° frost in a tattered overcoat, wearing tattered underwear and having pieces of felt on their feet instead of boots. What then is done with the Cossacks? One's hair stands on end!

An attempt to requisition a tannery established by private initiative ended in the collapse of the factory, and, instead of receiving 11,000 sheepskins obtained from the sheep eaten by 1 August, 10 badly dressed skins were given to each regiment, but the headquarters received theirs in full.

I have information that General Bakich, at the start of the internment, endeavoured to take the detachment to Beijing, about which there was an intense correspondence with the Russian ambassador. I was not at all informed about this, meanwhile, more than 80% of the detachment are Orenburg Cossacks, and their Ataman was evidently interested to know where their commander, appointed by the same Ataman, was leading them.

Getting acquainted with the life of the detachment from its orders, I see that from 108 cases sent to me that 31 orders are for judicial issues, i.e. 30% of all orders are court cases and verdicts – this is when there is no paper. How can the court correct the guilty? Mr General! You must be able to put yourself in such a way that it's not the judgement that makes you obey orders, but respect for your superior.

Arrested men are usually sent to a Chinese prison. After all, everyone knows what a Chinese prison is, and those Russians who have travelled 5,000 kilometres with great hardship, carrying with them a great love for the Motherland, are put into it. Why such a mockery of Russians, and that in a foreign country, with semi-despotic laws?! I suffer for all the Russians of Tacheng and Emil.

General Bakich, as a Serb, may not understand my motives, but I cannot allow any more abuse of Slavic Russians. I appreciated General Bakich's care for the detachment, which had been in Semirech'e and at the beginning of the internment – I thanked him in an order and made him a lieutenant general, but General Bakich forgot that by accepting the promotion from me, he thereby was entirely under my orders.

General Bakich has taken every measure to break up the detachment and keep it half-starved and naked, evidently hoping that by spring his subordinates would leave him and he could go to the Far East, having fulfilled his task, surrounded by honour. These calculations are erroneous, and the present directive has been sent by me both to the diplomatic corps in Beijing and to General Anisimov in Harbin. General Bakich has



forgotten that the detachment bears my name, and I cannot allow it to be trumpeted in vain.

General Bakich, having received my detailed reports and orders, replied to them with a brief and insubstantial paper, enclosing verses written by Annenkov. I consider such an attitude to the high cause of the liberation of Russia a mockery.

I sent a staff-officer assigned to me to the Emil river, Captain Papengut, and he reported to me that General Bakich forbade him to report on my behalf to the commanders of the detachment's units, and did not allow Captain Papengut to attend the meeting which the general had with the unit commanders Papengut's assignment, even though that officer was authorised by a certificate to speak on my behalf. I cannot understand how General Bakich, being the commander of a detachment in my name, decided not to allow my deputy to speak. This is both an insult to me and a breach of military courtesy.

To an operational order to go to Russia General Bakich replied with a complete refusal, saying that the detachment would not go to Russia, and that it was not combat-ready. To the order to issue silver for the general cause of saving Russia, transmitted personally to General Bakich by Captain Papengut, General Bakich also refused. To a my follow-up order by telegraph he put a statement, which I give as a proof of General Bakich's understanding of the Russian cause and the Russian language:

"I have read the telegram and it was discussed at the meeting of the commanders; the detachment is in very difficult conditions, and more than earlier, it was decided that there was no possibility to provide anything for the time being: officers, Cossacks and soldiers are naked and barefoot. Commander of the detachment, Lieutenant General Bakich, 23 October 1920."

Twice General Bakich failed to execute my combat orders, even if he hid behind a meeting of the *NachDivs*. Proceeding from all this, I can no longer be indifferent to the affairs of the detachment in my name on the Emil River, and for the sake of saving the Cossacks and Russian people interned at Tacheng, I am taking decisive measures. The Russian proverb says that "the fish rots from the head," and therefore I, by the power vested in me, dismiss from office the commander of the detachment in my name on the Emil River, Lieutenant-General Bakich, and his chief of staff, the accelerated graduate of the General Staff, Major-General Smolnin.

The above document does not correspond in its form to an order; rather, it is a personal confession by Dutov or even a public address to Bakich himself. In the text, along with a sincere pain for the fate of the Orenburg Cossacks, the offence of Dutov's wounded ego is palpable. At the same time, the author contradicts himself, first accusing Bakich of lack of communication, and then criticising Bakich's letters to him.

It should be noted that Bakich was not subordinate to Dutov from the beginning of 1920, but was subordinate only to Annenkov. Dutov himself became a hostage of the situation created by him and Annenkov in Semirech'e, when the Orenburg ataman removed himself from the leadership of the army. But once Annenkov discredited himself by the violence of his subordinates against the ranks of the former Independent Orenburg army, in China Bakich considered himself independent of both Annenkov and Dutov. Besides, neither the former nor the latter actually did anything to help Bakich's large detachment.

Bakich quite reasonably considered the order to march on Soviet Russia to be an adventure.



As for the order to dismiss Bakich, Dutov made several serious mistakes in the text that disavowed this order in Bakich's eyes. First of all, he allowed himself to stoop to personal insults, making Bakich look like an illiterate man and a foreigner, although it was the telegraph operator, not Bakich himself, who might have been responsible for his illiterate reply by telegraph. As for Bakich's nationality, of course, it was important in the formation of his personality and character traits, but to say that a fighting general of Russian service, a St George Knight and a hero of two wars was alien to the interests of Russia was insulting, to put it mildly.

Another of Dutov's blunders was his attack against General Smolnin, Bakich's chief of staff, who had completed not an accelerated but a full course at the General Staff Academy, and with a better result than Dutov himself.

By the same order Dutov appointed Major-General Shemetov as the commander of the detachment and Colonel Kostrov as the chief of staff. Dutov telegraphed to Prince Kudashev in Beijing:

I inform you and the diplomatic corps that I have dismissed General Bakich, the head of the detachment in Tacheng, for self-rule, illegal requisitions, violation of international laws and other acts together with the Chief of Staff.

A new commander, General Shemetov, has been appointed. On the matter of rendering assistance to the detachment, I ask you to address the money to General Shemetov. ... Dutov.

Bakich did not obey this order. He was saved from possible negative consequences by Dutov's death, only a week after the unpleasant order. In the camp, according to the testimony of the corps intendant Kokarev:

Bakich declared himself a complete dictator<sup>78</sup> and expressed in his speeches at meetings that the life of each member of the corps was entirely in his hands.

According to Kuvshinov, head of the intelligence department at the [Soviet] Turkestan Front headquarters:

The presence of White Guards in the Chinese provinces may lead to very sad consequences for China. Undoubtedly, the Chinese authorities take this into account, and if they condone the presence of unarmed Russian White Guards on their territory, they will only bear armed ones until they have an opportunity to deal with them.

These words proved prophetic.

Bakich's detachment lasted through the winter of 1920/21, although the men were constantly starving, and more than half of the horses died due to the lack of forage. During the long winter months, the camp produced three issues of the typewritten journal "In a foreign land". The spring of 1921 brought rumours of peasant uprisings throughout Russia. In the detachment's units there was hope for a return to a Russia liberated from the Bolsheviks. These hopes, however, were not fulfilled.

On 4 March (19 February) 1921 Bakich telegraphed to the French ambassador in Beijing:

Having barely lived through the winter ... due to a lack of money and income, the troops will be forced to disperse. I ask you as a representative of the Allied Powers in Beijing to talk to the missions of other states and find out whether it is possible to keep the troops in an organised form, as it is impossible to stay in where we are for a long time, nor to return to Communist Russia. I believe it would be desirable to obtain

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<sup>78</sup> Underlined in the text.

means and permission to move from western China to the east, where it would be possible to enter the Bolshevik-free territory of Russia or to settle in an area where 1,300 officers and 4,000 soldiers could find employment. Please kindly reply by telegraph as soon as possible. General Bakich.

After the conflict with Dutov and his death, Bakich, as the senior officer of the Orenburg units, renamed his detachment from that of Ataman Dutov to the Independent Orenburg Corps. Bakich's potential rival, Dutov's nominee General Shemetov, was reportedly promoted. An attempted mutiny by an active Dutov supporter, the commander of the Ataman Regiment, Colonel Savin, was foiled. The participants (Colonel Savin, Captains Ostroukhoye and Shishkin) were taken to a Chinese prison.

According to Bakich's HQ, the corps consisted of 500 officers, 4,000 Cossacks, officials and family members and 1,500 non-Cossacks. In addition, there were up to 4,000 soldiers outside the corps.

On 9 March 1921 Bakich telegraphed Anisimov:

I will remain with the Corps until an order from the recognised government. I am responsible before the people with whom I have been working for three years for the sake of the idea of a united Russia. I do not accept intrigues or squabbles ...

The situation in the Emil camp in the spring of 1921 was desperate. Famine was also rampant in Tacheng. Bakich explained the lack of assistance to Dutov's intrigues and asked Anisimov to find out urgently:

Whether my organisation is needed, because of the failure to receive any transfers and the withdrawal of all my funds, I am being forced to disband everyone. If not needed, request a transfer ... to the area where 1,300 officers, 4,500 soldiers with families can find work. A reply is needed as soon as possible to make a decision.

The repeated requests had an effect, and Anisimov transferred a sum for Bakich's detachment to a bank in Ürümqi. Nevertheless, it was not easy to get the money even in Ürümqi. Meanwhile, there were already cases of deaths by starvation in Bakich's units. In this situation, Bakich authorised the sowing of land in the camp area, but the Whites were not to harvest those crops.





## Another March

I have already written about the close attention which the Soviet military and political intelligence were paying to the anti-Bolshevik forces in Western China. However the Bolshevik leaders had almost no reliable data on the state of Bakich's detachment, its actions and plans, as can be seen from the Cheka's information reports to the highest Soviet leadership, in which fragmentary and completely untrue information about Bakich was given.

The military intelligence of the TurkFront<sup>79</sup> had more reliable information, which was used by the Front command. As early as 27 July 1920, the TurkFront staff, headed by M. V. Frunze, prepared a report to the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Republic on the need to eliminate the Whites in the border areas of China. The report stated:

According to the repeated testimony of reliable defectors, the detachments of Dutov, Annenkov, Bakich and other White Guard leaders who have crossed over to Chinese territory have not been disarmed and retain some of their organisation. A negligible portion of the weapons were handed over to the Chinese, while the bulk was buried and hidden, and so actually remains at the disposal of the White Guards.

According to the latest information, the mentioned generals have started a new organisation of the large detachments, recruiting local Russian settlers and Muslims by means of widespread bribery. A connection with the Fergana Basmachi is being established, and secret agitation is being carried out in the whole Semirech'e, where the Muslim and *kulak* parts of the population are suitable constituency for the White Guards.

The city of Ghulja is the centre of a wide-spread and planned organisation of the anti-Soviet movement for the whole of Turkestan. A special Moslem government has been formed there, planning to organise a holy war for the liberation of the peoples of Afghanistan, Persia and India, but, of course, Turkestan first of all. Those plans, which seem unlikely on such a large scale, are quite feasible with regard to Turkestan and cannot be discounted.

Attempts to eliminate these possibilities by diplomacy and to compel the local Chinese authorities to disarm the gangsters<sup>80</sup> have produced no results, and the question remains open. The Front RMS considers it necessary, in the interests of establishing complete peace in Turkestan, that this White Guard centre absolutely must be eliminated. The ways to achieve this are, firstly, to make a categorical demand to the Chinese authorities to disarm and withdraw all the White gangs along the frontier deep into China and, secondly, in case of refusal to do so, to temporarily occupy Ghulja and Tacheng.

Taking into account the particular seriousness of the matter, the Front RMS awaits the corresponding instructions from the Centre.

KomandTurk Frunze. RMS Members: Y. Ibragimov, V. Kuibyshev.

The presence of significant anti-Bolshevik forces in the Chinese borderlands would seriously hinder the Bolshevik leadership's plans to export the revolution to the East, but it should be noted that actual attempts to put these plans into practice, in relation to China, dated to the later period of 1921-1927.

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<sup>79</sup> As the Turkestan Front was abbreviated. PW

<sup>80</sup> In Soviet speak pretty much any group opposed to Red power were "gangsters" or "bandits". PW



In 1919-1920, the leadership of the Communist International (Comintern) was guided, in relation to China, by the concept of permanent revolution developed by Trotskiy. In this view, a world revolution was seen as a natural continuation of the Civil War. Up to the end of 1922, this concept was also followed by the Chinese Communists. In late 1919-1920 Lenin, seeing the difficulties of putting Trotskiy's ideas into practice, came to the conclusion that it was necessary to change tactics. Lenin's views formed the basis of the theory of anti-colonial revolutions developed by the Comintern in the summer of 1920. The new plan envisaged, first of all, the removal of foreign imperial domination of colonial and semi-colonial countries (by means of national revolutions), which its developers thought should lead to the liberation of the labouring masses. The national revolutions, led by communists, were seen as part of a world-wide proletarian revolution. At the same time, victory of these revolutions in the East was considered impossible without allying the local revolutionary forces with the Soviet republics of the developed countries.

In September 1920, a Chinese military-diplomatic mission led by General Zhang Xueliang arrived in Moscow and was received by Lenin. The negotiations resulted in an agreement to terminate the Russian diplomatic missions in China that did not recognise the Bolsheviks. However, the Chinese did not go further than this in 1920.

At the beginning of May 1921, the so-called "People's Division" or *Tokarevtsy* – about two thousand men<sup>81</sup> – arrived at the camp area on the Emil River. These were west Siberian peasant rebels who had fought against the Bolsheviks in the area of Karkaralinsk before fleeing Soviet Russia.

The *Tokarevtsy* were a relatively small portion of the participants in the West Siberian Uprising of 1921 – the largest anti-Bolshevik insurgency of the Civil War period, surpassing the famous Tambov and Kronstadt Uprisings. According to various estimates between 30,000 and 150,000 people took part in the rebellion. The Cossacks, driven to despair by the *prodrazverstka*,<sup>82</sup> took an active part in this uprising.

One of the rebel leaders, a Siberian Cossack ensign S. G. Tokarev, was serving in the department for horse registration in the Petropavl district military office on the eve of the uprising. At the end of February 1921 he commanded the 1st Siberian Cossack Division, but in the middle of March he was defeated and, together with the surviving Cossacks, had to flee Petropavl to the Kokshetau district of Omsk province under Red attacks. On 6 April 1921 his division occupied Karkaraly, where it was reorganised and named the People's Division. But soon Tokarev was forced to leave that city due to a Red offensive and head to Xinjiang through the mountain passes.

The *Tokarevtsy* who reached China carried a large number of weapons, including four machine guns. The detachment's commander, Ensign Tokarev, recognised Bakich's authority and his detachment was incorporated into the Independent Orenburg Corps as the 1st Siberian Division. The arrival of armed insurgents and rumours of a large-scale anti-Bolshevik peasant movement throughout Russia greatly increased the corps' morale. Tokarev himself was promoted by Bakich to Colonel. The *Tokarevtsy* refused to surrender their weapons to the Chinese authorities, thus causing their serious displeasure.

As a result on 17 May 1921 a treaty was signed at the border point of Bakhty between the military governor of Tarbagatai District, *Dutun* Zhang, and the Turkestan Front command (represented by Razdobreev). That provided for the introduction of Soviet troops into China to eliminate Bakich's detachment and other anti-Bolshevik formations. Soviet historiography claimed that the initiator of

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<sup>81</sup> They were in four regiments: the 1st Siberian Cossack (Colonel Mogilev), 2nd Siberian *Yermak Timofeyevich* Cossack (Captain F.L. Pogrebnykh), 3rd Infantry (Smirnov), and 4th Infantry (Lieutenant Afanasyev).

<sup>82</sup> Forced food requisitioning. Originally a WWI policy, the Bolsheviks expanded it to nearly all production. PW

the agreement was *Dutun Zhang*. According to the Whites, the governor was simply bribed. However the Chinese were uncomfortable with the presence of interned, and now also armed, people on their territory and were interested in restoring order in Xinjiang, which they could not do on their own. The Soviet leadership's interest in destroying its long-established adversary is obvious. Under the treaty's terms the Reds intended to deal with Bakich within a week's time using their own food supply, but if the operation required more time the Chinese were to provide supplies. However the Chuguchak (i.e. Tacheng) Operation, as the Reds termed their elimination of Bakich, was not as easy as they had anticipated.

In Tacheng the Chinese authorities put up notices in the governor's name informing people that due to the conclusion of the treaty between the Russian and Chinese Republics, the Russian refugees could return to their homeland with guarantees of personal and property security. Soon alarming rumours spread through the city, including murmurs of a forced eviction of refugees and the imminent occupation of the city by the Reds. Many refugees began to leave the town and head to Bakich's camp. The rumours turned out to be largely true. On 24 (11) May units of the Turkestan Front did cross the border with China and occupied Tacheng, using units from the Semey Forces Group.

After a year's peaceful respite Bakich had to take up arms again. In total up to 8,500 men marched with him, of whom less than a thousand were armed. The celebrated partisan general Stepanov proposed that the Reds be repelled and Tacheng occupied, in order to take possession of the arms surrendered to the Chinese authorities the previous year. Nevertheless, in order to not violate international laws, Bakich abandoned that idea. The decision was made to immediately decamp and withdraw across the hungry steppes of Dzungaria deep into China, away from the Soviet frontier. By the evening of 24 (11) May, according to the report of the rearguard chief Colonel Savel'ev, the Reds occupied the camp on the Emil River.

The march by hungry, almost unarmed, desperate people, burdened with families and pursued by regular army units, was both a tragedy and a feat. According to the memoirs of A. I. Efimov, a military official in Bakich's corps, on 27 (14) May two hundred Orenburg Cossacks from the 1st Orenburg Cossack Division bravely, "without firing a shot, with yelling and whistling, charged ... at the Reds, turning them into a hasty flight."

In the way of the retreating troops was the Urkashar mountain range,<sup>83</sup> where everything unnecessary was thrown away to speed up the movement. There were heartbreaking scenes when parents were forced to abandon even their children. On 30 (17) May the Reds succeeded in dislodging Bakich from the Tacheng – Ürümqi road and the detachment entered the Gobi desert.<sup>84</sup> In these days Efimov wrote:

Desert, sands, lack of water, unbearable heat ... hunger and tormenting thirst. We are doomed. ... Hunger is a terrible thing, and human nature is not squeamish – we began to turn into beasts. As soon as a horse began to show signs of fatigue and it was clear that it was no longer any help, it was pinned ... and then torn to pieces. We ate the meat without salt. I began to understand the expression "swollen with hunger". God forbid anyone should see that! Men would become as if poured full of water, becoming smooth and round, with a transparent body.

It wasn't until the evening of 1 June (19 May) that they corps' units left the sands. The next day, information was received of an ambush the Reds had organised for the detachment as it left the valley. Everyone capable of bearing arms was summoned to take part in the fight, but only those

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<sup>83</sup> At the eastern end of the Tian Shan Range, about 100 km east of Tacheng. PW

<sup>84</sup> Strictly speaking, the Gurbantünggüt Desert. The Gobi proper is quite a long way south and east. PW

without families came, totalling about 600 men, with two-thirds unarmed. On 3 June (21 May) a battalion of Reds sent from Zaysan led an attack on Bakich from the Kobuk River.<sup>85</sup> The only chance the Whites had to escape was a rapid breakthrough. Describing the battle that took place, Efimov quotes very firmly:

To break through! That was everything for us. They were terrible minutes when we had to think about it! Everyone was already both physically and mentally exhausted. Many of us fell down in exhaustion and remained lying on the ground for a long time, covering our faces with our hands; others wept. ... There were cases of suicide. ... Exhausted, hungry – most of us armed with stones, staves or whatever we could find – we charged at the Reds. Everything went well until we reached the enemy's trenches, where the Reds began to panic. ... But now up close they could see we were unarmed and they came to their senses and moved to counterattack.

“Comrades! They're unarmed, defeat them!” shouted their commissars.

We had to retreat, suffering casualties. Five times we attacked, but always without success. At 9 o'clock in the morning we put half of our men fighting onto horses, which we took from the wagons, and attacked for the sixth time. ... This time, having frightened the Reds with a flank move, we defeated them and threw them back into the river. More than half of them sank in the water. We pursued them for ten kilometres, with the hungry and tired men who still had enough strength to run after the enemy. Many of us, having reached the river, rushed to it, lay in the water and drank it till we were unconscious, paying no attention to anything. ... Large amounts of rifles, cartridges, bread and other food were taken from the Reds.

In total around 50 Red Army soldiers were captured, disarmed and released after questioning. The trophies totalled up to 6,000 rounds of ammunition and about 50 wagons of food. The victory on the Kobuk River was to give rise to the most fantastic rumours among the local population about the incredible power of Bakich's detachment which naturally worked to the general's advantage.

On 4 June (22 May), the corps took the road that led to the town of Altay (Shara-Sume) on the Kran River, trying to reach Mongolia by the shortest possible route, avoiding pursuit by Chinese and Soviet troops. As the corps marched towards that town it swept away everything in its path, the local population fleeing in an attempt to save their property from looting by the hungry, desperate men. “Hungry men can hardly reason about the correctness of their actions,” wrote an eyewitness. On 7 June (25 May) Bakich issued an order suggesting that all those who could not move on their own should return to Russia or stay where they were. This was to alleviate the plight of those who remained.

Movement along the Kobuk River valley was relatively favourable, but on 10 June (28 May) the corps once again entered the sands. Bakich's men had to make a 125 kilometre trek across the desert. The Reds continued to pursue, and hunger was a constant presence: people ate their own boots and made soup out of their clothes. The rearguard came across corpses with the calves cut out on their legs, which had been eaten by their compatriots. Near Lake Ulungur, which the corps approached late in the evening of 11 June (29 May), several dozen more men died as a result of being doused in the bitter-salt water.

On 12 June (30 May) the refugees approached the Black Irtysh River, which was a place of great drama. The Chinese had moved the ferry to the right bank of the river to make the crossing difficult for the Whites, so the latter started to build rafts.

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<sup>85</sup> Just south of modern Hoboksar. PW

On 15 (2) June a crossing failed because of the strong current.

The first raft was launched, loaded with old men, women and children. At the very middle of the river the wire on which our ferry was travelling broke, and the raft was carried downstream. Of course, the people who were on it died. No one attempted to do anything to help the unfortunates.

Then there was the state of the people when on 17 (4) June they managed to get some food.

They ate until they vomited. One Cossack had to be forcibly torn away from a cauldron of rice porridge. In one hour he ate several times. Each time he ate until he vomited and, barely finished, dragged himself back to the cauldron. To my remark that he might get too full, the Cossack replied: "It is better to die of food than of hunger."

On 20 (7) June four naked Cossacks crossed the river and, frightening the Chinese guards with their appearance, seized the ferry. Bakich with his escort and volunteers crossed the river and moved on to Altay. The Chinese were frightened by rumours of an impending vast horde of Russians, and weapons were issued to the inhabitants of the town. Now Bakich, realising that it was impossible to comply with the international laws on internment under the conditions – when they had been so rudely and cynically violated by the party that had sheltered his detachment – was forced to start fighting against the Chinese as well.

Colonel Kolokoltsov's detachment was moved forward to meet the Chinese troops retreating from Altay. However, carried away by looting and not taking precautions, the Whites were defeated. By the evening of 24 (11) June the crossing of the Black Irtysh was finished. The troops moved to the Kran River, during the crossing of which many corps officers died from Chinese fire. Nevertheless the crossing was made, and the corps moved along the right bank of the Kran directly to Altay.

Having received news of the White crossing of the Irtysh and not thinking to hold the city, the governor of the Altay district of Xinjiang province, Jowu-Su, killed himself. In the aftermath, there was panic in the city. The authorities began to evacuate the population and there were cases of looting. Only the Russians, Sarts (settled Muslims) and a small number of Chinese remained in the city to await Bakich's arrival. Shortly before Bakich reached the city, the retreating Chinese soldiers (mostly Dungans) organised a pogrom in the Russian quarter, during which more than 45 people, including women and children, were slaughtered.

However there is another interpretation of the events, according to which a mutiny broke out in the Chinese parts of Altay, which the authorities were unable suppress, the governor committed suicide and the city was easily taken by Bakich's troops. There is also a version that Bakich managed to occupy Altay only as a result of a two- or even three-week siege.

One way or another, on 26 (13) June 1921 the Xinjiang authorities, seeing the impossibility of stopping Bakich, sent a another request to the Soviet government to bring its troops into the province. Soviet-Chinese negotiations were started on the matter in Tacheng and Ürümqi, which were delayed as there were no Red forces available until autumn.

Meanwhile, on 2 July (19 June) Bakich took Altay without a fight. According to some sources, Bakich's losses in the campaign from Tacheng to Altay totalled about 4,000 men – mostly starved to death. More moderate estimates put the number at one to two thousand dead. The lowest figure – 500 starved to death – is contained in Soviet analyses of Bakich's detachment. During the march the following officers died: Lt-Colonel Donskoe, Captain Baraev (drowned in the Black Irtysh), Lieutenant Khanzhin (in battle), Lt-Colonel Bikteev, Lieutenants Kochnev and Kashirin (listed as missing) and Lieutenant Fomin (having eaten raw horse meat). And this list is far from complete.





## Peaceful Respite

Bakich did not restrain his subordinates from venting their hatred on the Chinese, who had sold them out at Altay. However, it was hardly in his power to do so. The city was plundered, and:

No-one restrained the plunderers. I saw even the corps chief of staff climbing out of the window of a Chinese shop with some bags in his hands. Soldiers and Cossacks smashed up shops and houses, mainly looking for bread and food in general. ... By evening it was difficult to find a dog or a cat in the town: those that had not managed to escape the town were eaten by the men of the detachment. All day and night, once the town was occupied, the people ate and drank, and there was plenty of *dzhunu*, i.e. Chinese vodka. The glow of fires lit up the area of the city for several kilometres. In the wagons they cooked *plov*<sup>86</sup> – rice porridge with mutton, apricots and sultanas.

The wagons were located at the farms on the Kran River near the city.

The occupation of the town allowed Bakich to arm his units, mainly with Mauser 1890 Model rifles. The corps even received artillery: four or five 37-mm automatic McClean system guns. At the same time, there was a severe shortage of three-line rifle cartridges.<sup>87</sup> The rapid success awakened long-held dreams of a campaign to Russia. For that it was urgent to get at least some information about the international situation. But Bakich was totally isolated from news by the Chinese in Xinjiang.

Besides, it was time to co-ordinate with other detachments and to search for possible allies in the up-coming hard struggle. Having taken Altay, Bakich established contact with Captain Kaigorodov's Russian-*inorodtsy*<sup>88</sup> partisan detachment operating between Khovd and Uliastai. On 8 July (25 June) Bakich sent a letter to the Mongol ruler Khatam-Bataar-Van in Khovd, offering him a chance to take advantage of Bakich's occupation of the Altay district and annex it to Mongolia by sending his troops. Bakich wrote:

I believe it is necessary to send Mongolian troops to the Altay district as soon as possible in order to secure that region for independent Mongolia. It is also necessary to take urgent measures to organise power in the district as now, with the departure of the Chinese, there is no-one ruling there. I ask you to send me the answer with your representative, who could inform me about the further plans of the Ulaanbaatar government.

On 10 July (27 June) 1921, after negotiations with the Mongols over supplies, Bakich was proclaimed a Mongol prince, although they refused to recognise his authority. However after that local rulers asked Bakich for protection.

At this time Bakich also sent several letters to Lieutenant-General Baron Ungern von Sternberg, who began his second campaign into Soviet Russia during this period. Thus, we cannot agree with the statement of the recent Moscow researcher E. A. Belov, according to whom Bakich did not respond to Ungern's letter, because:

Firstly, [Bakich] believed that he had a fairly large military force, capable of fighting Soviet power independently. Secondly, they had ideological differences: Ungern favoured the restoration of absolute monarchy in Russia, and Bakich was in favour of

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<sup>86</sup> A pilaf. PW

<sup>87</sup> The standard Russian Mosin-Nagant 7.62 mm (0.3 inch). PW

<sup>88</sup> Ethnic groups from Russia but not Slavic, so in this context Buryats, Dzungars etc. PW





convening a Constituent Assembly. Bakich did not try to establish contact with Ungern after this.

We shall spend some time on the correspondence between Bakich and Ungern later, as well as on the political programme of the former.

On 15 (2) July a group under the command of General Stepanov set out from Altay to occupy Burqin (Burchum). Stepanov's quickly occupied Burqin, whose garrison fled in the direction of Ürümqi. The Altay district was completely cleared of Chinese troops. On 25 (12) July, in order to discuss the situation in the region and decide on the direction of its further development, Bakich called a congress of all the Kirgiz and Mongol rulers of the Altay district. Up to 3,000 people gathered for the meeting, from whom Bakich selected a provisional ruler of the district. He was Beise Khanafii Mamiev, who was promoted to the rank of court counsellor.

Bakich considered himself and Ungern as liberators of Mongolia. In general, the Mongols and Kirghiz were friendly to the Russians and, as Bakich wrote to Ungern:

Bearing in mind their tribal discord, with the lack of political development even in the ruling class, one has to agree with the general opinion about the Central Asian nationalities, that they will be subordinate to the strongest power.

Thanks to the help of the local population, a huge amount of cattle was supplied to the corps. The units began to recover from the hunger and deprivation of the last march. In exchange for the livestock, the local population was supplied with manufactured goods and tea.

The idea of associating himself with the Mongols arose in Bakich's mind because of the urgent need to have a reliable base for resuming active operations against the Reds. His corps was too weak to fight simultaneously against both the Bolsheviks and the Chinese. He believed that Mongolia, once recognised as independent, would enable the Whites to take refuge from the Chinese troops for a time, to organise themselves and concentrate on their main task of fighting the Reds on a broad front. The organisational centre for further operations, in his view, was to be in Ulaanbaatar, a city through which communication could be established with the Far East, where an active struggle was still ongoing against the Reds.

Bakich recognised Ungern as the commander of the Mongolian Front and formally came under his command. He acted in line with Ungern's famous order № 15 of 21 (8) May 1921 to the Russian detachments ready to fight the Reds. Bakich regarded that order as, "a preliminary order for independent actions of the separate partisan detachments". In early 1921 Ungern sent the Orenburg Colonel Domozhirov to Bakich to organise the transfer of Bakich's troops to the Ulaanbaatar area, but a connection could not be. Ungern, according to some sources, appointed Bakich as the commander of south-western Mongolia. Bakich developed a plan of initial measures to start an active struggle against the Bolsheviks, which included:

1. Organising the authorities in the Altay district from the local population and guarding the district's borders from Chinese troops until instructions were received from Ulaanbaatar.
2. Reconnaissance and concentration of the corps units along the Black Irtysh River.

Having positioned themselves in the Kran River valley, Bakich's subordinates engaged in harvesting the wheat and millet sown in the area, with an above average harvest. During the stay, on the initiative of the Corps Intendant, six tanneries and felt workshops were set up in the Altay area, and a mill was built on the Kran River, grinding up to 90 kg of grain per day.

At the same time, as the official Efimov wrote:

Our motherland will be unhappy if we return home as we are now. ... We have become too brutalised and uncivilised.



Efimov, who clearly disliked Bakich, accused him of arbitrariness. Bakich had arrested the commander of the 1st Orenburg Cossack Regiment, Colonel Kochnev, officially for hiding material requisitioned from the Chinese, but Efimov believed it was really for refusing to share it with Bakich himself. However, it cannot be ruled out that Bakich, after several days of looting by his subordinates in Altay, began to seriously look at the discipline of the corps and started with the staff officers as an example to the others. In addition, according to one of *Tokarevtsy*, G. Z. Burlakov:

Discipline was severe in Bakich's units, maintained by corporal punishment, arrests and shootings for escape and agitation against Bakich's authority.

Another act by Bakich that provoked Efimov's condemnation was his decision to present an Orenburg Cossack uniform to Mamiev, the elected ruler of the district. Efimov wrote:

I protested about this offensive act by an unceremonious Serb. I said that the uniform of our host can be worn only by a Cossack or by a person to whom this honour can be given by the whole host for special services. Bakich himself does not have the right to wear it, yet gives it to the first person he meets.

Efimov was clearly carried away by the news – but having been accepted as a Cossack and having fought well in the defence of the host, Bakich had every right to wear a Cossack uniform. As for the granting of an official uniform, Bakich made that gesture of respect so that the local authorities would not be hostile towards his subordinates.

In general the situation of the corps was clearly stabilised until mid-August. People were able to recover and rest. Life did not stand still and, in particular, Major-General Stepanov got married in Burqin.

At this time Bakich was actively preparing for a campaign to Russia. A requisition of horses from the local population was carried out – he was able to collect around 2,500, which caused anger among the Mongols. According to one of Bakich's subordinates, even the general himself did not believe in the success of this crazy enterprise, but nevertheless continued to make serious preparations. A "People's Revolutionary Army" was formed, headed by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, which included the Independent Orenburg Corps. Unfortunately, further details of this mysterious army are unknown to me.

A flag was prepared, which was a mixture of the red and old Russian flags – a symbol of reconciliation between the old (White) and new (peasant rebel) currents in the struggle against the Bolsheviks. A political program was worked out, and appeals to the peoples of Siberia were written. Bakich's political program, which is an interesting document in terms of its content, was detailed by his chief of staff, General Smolnin, in a letter to Captain Kaigorodov dated 11 August (29 July) 1921. In addition, a somewhat different draft of the program was preserved, as well as a number of leaflets with various statements from it.

Bakich's main slogan was: "Down with the communists, long live free personal labour!"

The programme stated:

Citizens of Russia, without distinction of social status, faith and nationality!!!! You all know well enough the consequences living under the communists' power. You also know the path that will return our Motherland to prosperity and peace – there is only one way: to rid the country of communism. We must struggle until we and all of you have achieved our common immediate goal – the destruction of communism and the establishment in Russia of law and order in which people are their own masters, and not a bunch of communists. The people's power, after getting rid of communism, should be guided until the election of a ruler of the Russian land by the following:



1. To restore the Russian State, its wealth and integrity by the joint efforts of all citizens and all parties in full unity.
2. In liberating the Motherland from the yoke of the communists to rely solely on the forces of the Russian people, without the armed help of foreigners.
3. In the organisation of the people's armed forces to strive for the complete unity of the army with the people. Which is why the units should be completed by conscription, equal and universal, without the use of various partisan and volunteer units. Military ranks who have allowed any unauthorised requisitions, violence and seizures must be mercilessly punished. The local authorities are invited to detain rapists, presenting the perpetrators with relevant accusations to their superiors. The Red Army shall be disbanded, surrendering their weapons upon notification to the local *volost*, district or provincial non-communist authorities. Officers and soldiers serving in the Red Army (except Communist Party members) may voluntarily join the new army. Military units must exist, as everywhere else in the world, under strict centralisation, under existing laws and regulations, observing an iron military discipline.
4. The internal governance of the country shall be based on broad popular rule of law. Elected *zemstvos*<sup>89</sup> and city governments shall be restored. Until they are reinstated, Soviet institutions and bodies must remain in place and work, but without (party) communists. These same institutions may then be re-formed into the corresponding departments of the *zemstvos*. The elected head of a given (*volost*, district, province) *zemstvo* is the responsible leader in his area. All local authorities, including the external militia, are subordinate to him. The *zemstvo* will elect and appoint to all subordinate positions in its district. The national authorities are subordinate to their central departments, elected and appointed by the Supreme Power. Only people of knowledge and action, irrespective of party, irrespective of sex, responsible for their work before the law, shall be employed in the work of administration. Recognising that it is necessary to wage a merciless struggle against moral decay, bribery, speculation and violence, it is necessary to establish swift and merciless measures against the guilty, including those in authority, up to and including the death penalty, until the life of the country returns to normal. The right to impose the death penalty on those guilty of the above shall be granted to the heads of district and city governments and above, military authorities, division chiefs and above without trial.
5. On the land question, we stand in favour of the wide allocation of land to the working peasants and Cossacks, at the expense of landlords, office holders and others, in full ownership. No one can have more than a certain amount of land. That amount will be established by the provincial *zemstvo* for its province. The *zemstvo* will also preserve in the same size and form the farms necessary for the nation and grant land to the landless living in the province. Rented plots will become the property of the tenants, if they do not exceed the maximum. The resettlement of vacant land from other provinces shall be done afterwards by the central government.
6. In the field of finances – all notes in the hands of the population shall have the same circulation, except for those that will be recognised as cancelled by the central government in a given sequence. Of the state taxes, one – progressive income tax – shall be retained. Others will be at the discretion of the *zemstvo* and city governments.

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<sup>89</sup> The old Tsarist system, of elected local bodies. PW



7. All measures should be taken to restore the communication routes for the proper exchange of goods and passenger traffic.
8. The most favourable conditions of life, food and labour must be created for the workers. Every worker must be provided with help and bread in old age and in case of incapacity for work. Trade unions shall be preserved.
9. Trade and industry shall exist on the principles of free trade and private initiative of entrepreneurs. Co-operation shall be developed as widely as possible.
10. Public education is considered to be the basis of well-being, which is why the entire school apparatus that existed under the communists will remain in place. Initial education is in the native language, the Law of God and training in crafts are introduced. The doctrine of communism is excluded from the programme.
11. Every citizen must be ensured freedom of: conscience, speech and press; property and the home shall be inviolable; individuals shall have liberty, honour and dignity; there will be freedom for all unions and meetings. Religion, shrines and churches (no matter what kind) must be protected by the authorities from desecration.
12. Members of the Communist Party shall be subject to the courts in each locality where the communist resides. This court is elected by the local population from among themselves, its decision is final and is enforced by the society itself immediately. Communists who do not belong to the local population, as well as communists of Red Army units, are tried in the nearest military field court with the participation of a representative of the local population. The decision of the court is to be approved and enforced by an army commander, who has the right by law to establish a military field court. The trial of the communists shall not have the character of political vengeance, but shall pursue only the deliverance of Russia from a harmful and criminal element.

In the "Draft Programme of Power" Bakich proposed the following:

- The preservation and legislative consolidation of all the gains of the revolution, except in extremes;
- direct, secret and equal suffrage for all workers;
- the responsibility of the government to the people;
- all civil liberties (speech, press, assembly, association, conscience, movement) in full;
- inviolability of the person and the home;
- freedom of labour and the use of the products of labour;
- cancellation of the forcible implementation of communist principles by the authorities;
- development and expansion of co-operatives;
- nationalisation of large branches of industry and commerce;
- state restriction of the profits of private entrepreneurs;
- legislative provision of a minimum wage for every worker;
- social security for unemployment, sickness and old age;
- recognition of the post-revolutionary "black redistribution" of land;
- free land – the property of the state and a source of land for all who wish to farm;



- forests and subsoil are the property of the state;
- universal public education;
- higher education being compulsory for the most able;
- a single fixed monetary unit;
- a progressive national income tax;
- local public authorities given the right to impose local taxes to meet local needs;
- strict discipline in the army;
- any soldier out of service is a free citizen;
- the army manned solely on the basis of the territorial principle;
- the army being intended only to repel an external enemy;
- amnesty for political opponents, with only new encroachments on the people's liberty to be punished.
- national reconciliation.

It should be noted that the second version of the programme is unverified and, moreover, considerably to the left of the first, and it cannot be ruled out that the document was falsified before Bakich's trial in order to link his activities with those of the SRs, so I will concentrate on the analysis of the first version as likely closer to his views. According to some sources, the compiler of the programme was Smolnin-Tervand. The programme allows us to understand that the mistakes of the White Movement were taken into account by its drafters and how they were going to transform their slogans in accordance with the changed situation.

It is noteworthy that the compiler of the document does not touch upon the issues of foreign policy at all and that the question of supreme power in Russia was deliberately bypassed as extremely complicated – the programme only speaks about the election of “the ruler of the Russian land”, which can be interpreted very broadly, uniting both monarchists and republicans, so it is difficult to determine unambiguously where Bakich's convictions lay. However, he himself likely could not answer that question. Despite the assertions of some authors that Bakich was in favour of the Constituent Assembly, based largely on external symbols (red flag, democratic rhetoric, etc.), my belief is that the general, having been involved in a long-lasting struggle with the Bolsheviks, began to perceive that struggle as an end in itself – a permanent state outside of which he could no longer exist. And here he did not care what political slogans, excepting only Bolshevik slogans proper, were put forward. He does not seem to have perceived or understood politics at all.

In military terms Bakich realised the ineffectiveness of the volunteer method of manning units and of partisan actions and, similarly to the Red Army, he proposed general mobilisation and the introduction of a regular principle of formation.

Bakich's state-building programme was based on the principle of local *zemstvo* and urban self-government, and local elected leaders were temporarily granted the widest powers, including judicial ones, until the country calmed down. In fact to some extent their power would have resembled that of the Cossack atamans after the introduction of elective rule into the Cossack hosts in 1917, and especially during the Civil War, when atamans, although limited by the *krugs*, actually possessed full power in the regions.

In general, Bakich's programme corresponded to the political developments that had been prepared by the governments of Kolchak, Denikin and Wrangel in 1919-1920, but it also had its



own peculiarities. In particular, the *volost zemstvo*, introduced by the Provisional Government and later abolished in the White South, was retained.

The aim of this program seems to me to be populist – to unite the widest possible range of anti-Bolshevik forces for an armed struggle against the Reds. In fact, in order to put the program into practice, what was needed above all was a military victory over the Bolsheviks. Bakich himself was a career military man and, as has already been said, if politics existed at all for him it was only as a matter of secondary importance, as it was for many officers of the Russian army.

Before leaving Altay, on 1 September (19 August) 1921 Bakich wrote an order to the corps' divisional commanders:

Do not consider all the Red Army soldiers who voluntarily surrender and come to our side, even if with weapons in their hands, as our enemies. Remember that all these young Red Army soldiers are our brothers, for there have been many cases when those who surrendered found their brothers-in-law in our units, and thirty-two cases where surrendering Red Army soldiers have found their fathers in our units.

Let every commander and private clearly imagine the picture of Red Army soldiers being seen off from their father's home to the Red Army. As we were once seen off from our homes, so they, also according to the Christian custom, put a loaf of bread on the table, sat down, prayed to the same God to whom we pray.

Maybe their mothers and fathers were sobbing convulsively as they saw off to the war their children – their only support in old age and infirmity. To fight whom? Their own brothers. And they did so because they were forced to by the Jewish commissars. Did they say to their sons during the farewell: "Son, you will go to serve, defend the communist government." No, they did not, for those communists took the last animal from their yard and swept out all their stores with a broom, and gave them only two kilograms of bread a month for each mouth in return.

Are the Red Army fighting against us? Yes, because they are driven from behind by the commissars. But they always shoot high, which explains the low losses in our ranks. Remember, and explain to every private, that not a single hair should fall from a Red Army soldier's head. I order those who have surrendered to be enrolled with allowances in the units on the same rations as we receive, to be given the same accommodation as is given to our own soldiers. On pain of being shot, I forbid the looting of any belongings from Red Army soldiers who wish to join our ranks. ...

In view of the shortage of commanding officers, I authorise the Red Army commanders who defect to our side, if they express the desire, to be given command positions no higher than company commanders, under the responsibility of their immediate superiors. Keep in mind that many of those who have come over to us from the Red Army staff have proved themselves to be quite reliable commanders, even those who have graduated from the Red military schools.

Explain to those who surrender that we wear shoulder boards not to demand honour, but to distinguish our own side, and that in our ranks it is not uncommon to see the shoulder boards of a colonel with one, two or three patches, which means that the colonel serves almost as a common soldier, and a former ploughman commands him. Henceforth, when appointing to command positions, one should be guided not by rank, but by combat ability and ability to deal with people.

At the same time, I order to widely inform the troops subordinate to us that the time of the communists in Russia is over. We did not want to fight with the people until they





themselves learned what the communists were, and as a result left for China. The peasant is not a deep thinker, but his mind is not eaten by the devil. Now he understands the communists well enough.

The rebels of Omsk, Tobolsk and Chelyabinsk provinces sent the 1st Siberian People's Division to us, with their ploughman leader Tokarev at their head. Two partisan detachments from Samara, Orenburg and Turgay provinces have recently arrived and are also calling for the establishment of a new orders, under which it will be possible for a peasant to live. Those detachments bring information that the whole Volga region is burning in revolt, Western Siberia has been fighting for freedom for six months. Beyond the Volga stand the people's units of Antonov and Popov, and *Batko* Makhno has cleared the whole Ukraine.<sup>90</sup> Carts with the families of communists stretch along the *Chuyskiy Trakt*.<sup>91</sup> We will return. Let the Chinese learn what the communists really are.

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<sup>90</sup> Actually by this point both Antonov's and Makhno's main forces had been defeated.

<sup>91</sup> The historic land route from Russia into Mongolia, passing Barnaul – Biysk – Yarantay ( Mongolia ) – Ürümqi. PW



## To Russia!

I. M. Pogodin, the special representative of the RMS for the Siberia forces, and Liu Xijing, the representative of the Governor-General (*dutun*) of the Xinjiang province, signed a document authorising the re-introduction of Red Army units into Chinese territory to eliminate Bakich on 12 September (30 August) in Tacheng. The text of the agreement stated:

In view of the fact that the detachments under the command of Bakich and other Whites who crossed the Chinese border in 1920 and lived for a year within the Tacheng district have now, contrary to international laws, seized the Altay district by armed force, are dangerous to the tranquillity of the two neighbouring friendly Republics, the plenipotentiaries of the *dutun* of Xinjiang Province, represented by Liu Xijing, the Chief of Staff of the District, and the representative of the Dragoman Bao-Entu, and the special representative of the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Siberian forces of the RSFSR for negotiations on the liquidation of the White detachments in the Republic of China, Comrade I. M. Pogodin have concluded the present agreement in the town of Tacheng concerning the entry into the Altay District of the RSFSR's troops for the liquidation of the White detachments in the said district on the following conditions:

1) In order to jointly liquidate the White detachments in the Altay District, military operations shall be undertaken, in which the RSFSR troops shall conduct offensive operations from the area of the town of Zaysan at their discretion. Chinese troops will take over the protection of the rear in the areas of Bulun-Tohoi and eastwards along the Orchu (Urumuhu) River, preventing the White Guards from entering the interior of the province, i.e. the Ürümqi area.

2) For the successful conduct of the operation and coordination of actions, the field headquarters of both Chinese and Russian shall mutually exchange representatives. Note: The absence of a representative at either the Chinese or Russian field headquarters commands cannot stop operations.

3) Considering the operations against Bakich and other White Guard detachments to be a common cause of both friendly Republics, the Chinese authorities of the Xinjiang province will supply food to the active units of the RSFSR troops for one month, counting from the day of their entry into Chinese territory, for four thousand (4,000) men at the rate of 3,400 kg of flour and rice per day free of charge. Those foodstuffs shall be delivered by the Chinese authorities to the city of Bulun-Tohoi and there handed over to the command of the Red Soviet troops.

4) If required during the fighting against Bakich, the Soviet command will support the Chinese troops by supplying them with shells and ammunition free of charge.

5) During the operation, Soviet troops shall treat with care both government and private property within the Republic of China, without treating it as war booty.

6) Damage by artillery and other fire to private and state property which may be caused in the fight against Bakich in the Altay district cannot be considered as losses caused by the Red Soviet troops.

7) Any weapons taken by Bakich in the Altay district which previously belonged to the Chinese authorities, should they be repulsed by Soviet troops, are to be returned to the Chinese authorities. Note: A mixed commission of representatives of the Russian and Chinese Commands is to be set up for the acceptance and surrender of the said weapons.



8) When the Soviet troops have cleared the White gangs from one or another district of the Altay district, that district shall be handed over to the Chinese authorities.

9) The border of the Altay district shall be opened for the duration of the operation to eliminate the White gangs. At the end of the operation and after the withdrawal of the Red units, the border will be considered closed. At the end of the operation the Soviet troops will immediately leave China.

10) A commission of representatives of the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Siberian forces and the *dutun* of Xinjiang province shall immediately be set up to consider matter concerning the liquidation of the Bakich gangs in the Altay district, on the basis of the agreement concluded by the representatives of the Soviet Government and the *dutun* of the Xinjiang province in Bakhty in May 1921, and, as a follow-up to it, the extradition to the Russian Soviet government of the Russian White Guards currently in Xinjiang province.

This agreement, signed in Chinese and Russian, shall come into force from the moment of its signing. Upon the completion of the liquidation of the White gangs in the Altay district it shall become null and void.

It follows from the text of the agreement that not only the defeat of the Whites but also their extradition to the Soviet authorities was envisaged. Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR, wrote to Lenin:

An expedition from Siberia to Khovd, to fight against Bakich, is being prepared for the near future. The latter goal is the only one, this will satisfy the local Chinese authorities, with whom we must live in friendship. We do not intend to go to Ürümqi, and there is no need, as Bakich is not there; it would be dangerous, for it might promote a revolt of the local tribes, which we do not want.

It should be said that the Reds began active actions against Bakich on Chinese territory long before the signing of this document, but on what legal basis it is difficult to say. Red Army units had already occupied the initial areas for the offensive by 27 (14) August. In the morning of 1 September (19 August) Sobennikov's 13th Siberian Cavalry Division (1,350 sabres, 32 machine guns and four guns) took the Whites by surprise approaching the town of Burqin. A participant of the battle near Burqin, the commissar of the 77th Cavalry Regiment, K. P. Lavrovskiy, later a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, recalled:

The *kazara* – as we called the White Guard Cossacks – fought with the despair of the doomed. For the first time I was a witness and an active participant in a large and brutal cavalry fight in the east of the country. The stomping of hoofs, the roaring of crippled horses, the clang of steel sabres, the groans and shouts of the men – everything merged into one wild roar. At first it was frightening to launch the attack. ... Then, as it often happens, the fear was drowned out by a friendly, powerful “ura!” and I was no longer afraid of anything. Before me flashed multicoloured enemy *zipuns*<sup>92</sup> and shoulder-boards. I heard the blows of my own sabre.

The Reds attacked in two groups (a total of eight squadrons with 20 machine guns) with active use of *tachankas*. The battle of Burqin was one of the largest cavalry battles of the Civil War in eastern Russia. It lasted from 10:00 to 16:00 and at least 1,500 cavalrymen took part on both sides. It seems wrong to credit this battle exclusively to the Siberian Cossacks of the People's Division – an active, and perhaps the main, role was played by *Orenburzhtsy*, part of Stepanov's detachment.

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<sup>92</sup> A half-coat without collar. PW

Chinese troops under the command of Colonel Wing Jegou were to block the White's retreat to the south and south-east, however, the Whites were not going to retreat in that direction, which led deep into China. General Stepanov was not in Burqin, as he had left with his young wife. In his absence command was entrusted to one of the Orenburg Cossack officers, Colonel Skornyakov, who had no command abilities. Skornyakov was pushed back by the Reds to the Burqin and Black Irtysh Rivers, was forced to abandon his artillery and leave the town of Burqin. During the retreat many of the detachment's ranks drowned or died from enemy fire.

On the eve of the battle at Burqin, the Reds had captured Captain Starkov. In the battle itself, Lieutenant Poniatovsky and Second-Lieutenant Lukashev went missing, and soon after Colonel Bukharin shot himself. Before committing suicide, he said: "I cannot go further, but I cannot lag behind the Orenburg Army and stay alive either."

By 6 September (24 August) fighting was already taking place near Altay and the city was occupied by the Reds. Bakich and his forces were forced to leave the Altay district under enemy pressure, but were not defeated, expecting to continue active actions against the Bolsheviks.

On 4 September (22 August) Bakich gave the order to march to Russia. Most likely, this was a propaganda move, as in reality it was about retreating from the Reds' blows. The order read:

Valiant troops and citizens of the corps. The long-awaited hour has finally come, after a year and a half [sic] of wandering and enduring severe trials in wild inhospitable China, for us to move to our native land and prove our loyalty and love for Russia and the Russian people by our deeds. Remember that I have never had the thought of abandoning you or the righteous cause we have started. Believing in God, in our holy and righteous cause and in you, faithful sons of the Motherland and the people and trusting in the Providence of God, I firmly hope that we will break the first barrier separating us from Russia and, having entered the borders of our dear Fatherland, we will bring joy and deliverance to our fathers, brothers and mothers languishing in the claws of communism. Down with communism! Long live United Russia and its people! God and the people are with us. The order is to be read in all companies, *sotnias*, squadrons, battalions and commands. The original is signed by the Corps commander, Lieutenant-General Bakich.

On the same day Bakich ordered:

In view of the impossibility of retreating deep into the Chinese territory, due to the lack of food and the impossibility of moving the wheeled wagons, which would leave all the foot soldiers and families at the mercy of Chinese subjects: Dungans and Sarts, I have decided to go on a general offensive against the Reds, defeat them and take the entire corps to Russia. ... I order: ... To make it clear to everyone that the fate of the entire corps depends on the success of this operation and that only initial success will enable everyone to leave China, whereas in the event of further stay here everyone is threatened with death. Only by defeating the nearby enemy we can begin our main work – the liberation of Russia from the communists. There can be no retreat. We must only move forwards, even if it requires abandoning everything that cannot get through the Reds' positions.

Initially it was planned to advance to the Black Irtysh River, but not trusting in the success of the enterprise and under the influence of Bolshevik agitators who had arrived in the corps' area, the majority of the corps' ranks and refugees decided to stay near Altay. A total of three to four thousand men stayed. According to other sources, only those without horses stayed.



When Bakich left the Altay area, he received information from Captain Kaigorodov of the possibility of wintering safely in the Uryankhai region, which explains his further actions. According to some sources, on the advice of General Smolnin, Bakich abandoned the original direction and headed towards the *Chuyskiy Trakt*, with the aim of joining Kaigorodov's detachment around Khovd in western Mongolia. The movement was carried out in two columns: one (the combat troops) was led by Bakich, the other (the non-combat and supply) by General Shemetov. The composition of his corps by the beginning of the campaign was:

In the corps: Numbers (men)

1st Orenburg Cossack Division	350
2nd Orenburg Cossack Division	700
1st Siberian (People's) Division	around 500
Syzran' Division	around 500
Corps Commander's Escort	200

Total: 2,250 men, 1,000-1,200 rifles, five machine guns (nineteen according to other sources) and four or five guns.

The Reds could not or did not want to pursue Bakich, allegedly due to the closure by snow of the mountain passes in the Mongolian Altai, and on 28 (15) September returned to Altay. On 6 October (23 September) they left China. So they did not, in fact, achieve their goal of destroying Bakich. Nevertheless *Nachdiv* Sobennikov, the division's military commissar (N. F. Evseev), and some other commanders and Red Army men were awarded the Order of the Red Banner for the raid.

At 05:00 on 16 (3) September Bakich's detachment set off towards the *Chuyskiy Trakt*. Around 200 men died from cold and hunger during the march through the mountainous regions to Mongolia, and many suffered from frostbite. In addition, Bakich had to abandon all the artillery, except for one Maclean gun. On 19 (6) September, 10 kilometres from Tolbo-Nuur Lake, near the Sarul-gun monastery, his detachment joined up with Kaigorodov (about 800-900 men, with six machine guns).

Kaigorodov was besieging a combined Soviet-Mongolian detachment of 360 men with 20 machine guns under the command of K. K. Baikalov (Nekunde) in the monastery. Baikalov had intended to lure the Whites into a trap, counting on Bakich being pursued by Red units. However, as noted, the Reds had stopped pursuing, thus greatly complicating the situation for Baikalov's detachment. According to the information Baikalov received from the Mongols:

The Bakichans have many women and children. The soldiers are terribly ragged, many without guns, others are bearded (clearly from the Parade Division<sup>93</sup>) and only have pikes. There are some guns on legs and wheels, and one big gun on wheels. We found out that it is a "Maklen".

The monastery where Baikalov's detachment was entrenched was a square with sides about 200 metres (300-320 paces) long and was located in a basin surrounded by hills. In the centre there was a statue, around which yurts were set up. There was a stream and a well. The *Kaigorodovtsy* had diverted the stream from the monastery, thus aggravating the situation of the besieged. Soon some of the Mongols, led by Khasbaatar, fled Baikalov's detachment and so its numbers decreased.

The destruction of Baikalov's detachment would have allowed the Whites to take control of the whole of western Mongolia. Numerical superiority was on their side, and on 20 (7) September

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<sup>93</sup> This would appear to be a typo for People's Division.

Bakich offered terms to the Reds, saying that resistance was futile and promising immunity to all those who voluntarily laid down their arms. The Reds, for their part, responded to Bakich with a similar offer:

You yourself are surrounded, only on a larger scale. ... We offer you to surrender on the same terms you offer us.

After the Reds refused to surrender, Bakich and Kaigorodov convened a military council, at which it was decided to storm the monastery simultaneously from all sides. In order to have a psychological effect on the enemy, Bakich organised a parade of the troops, with units passing several times in full view of the Reds, creating the illusion of a large detachment. In addition, in the evening on the eve of the assault, the Whites built hundreds of bonfires around the monastery, which was also supposed to have an overwhelming effect on the besieged.

The next day at 03:00 the assault began. The assault was rather ineptly led by Kaigorodov. The shelling from the MacLean gun, in spite of accurate fire, had no result as the shells did not burst. The assault was repulsed by the Reds with the help of hand grenades. By mistake, the Whites fired on their own during the assault and lost up to 85% of those attacking (according to some sources, the White losses totalled 250 men killed and wounded). Baikalov's detachment lost 54 men (including 17 Mongols) killed and three Chauchat light machine guns with ammunition were taken by the Whites.

Despite the trophies, the catastrophic shortage of weapons continued to be a serious problem for the Whites and, on top of that, the discipline in the troops began to drop. Bakich's men began to defect to Kaigorodov's detachment, where the conditions of service seemed better. After the assault it was decided to finish off Baikalov and then march on Soviet Russia.

On 22 (9) September Kaigorodov and his detachment left for Siberia, according to some sources, carrying out Bakich's order to organise an uprising in the Altai Mountains. A platoon of volunteers from Bakich's detachment, headed by Captain Pudovkin, left with him. In a battle near Kosh-Agach Kaigorodov was defeated by the Reds, after which he left for the Altai Mountains. In this battle an Orenburg Cossack officer, Lieutenant Derlyugov, was killed. Bakich continued the siege of the monastery, making two more unsuccessful assaults, after which he decided to starve out Baikalov.

Meanwhile, the Reds celebrated their victory over Bakich in Xinjiang. 29 (16) September 1921 the special representative of the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Siberian forces Pogodin wrote to the military governor of Tarbagatai District and the representative of the governor-general of Xinjiang province:

On behalf of the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Siberian forces I greet you and with your person the glorious Chinese soldiers. I bring sincere congratulations on the defeat of the Bakich gangs – this worst enemy of the working people of both friendly Republics – and gratitude for the help and assistance of the Chinese troops and people in this operation towards our troops operating in the territory of the Chinese Republic. I dare to hope that the sincere friendship on your part towards the Russian Republic has been proved by the signing of the agreement aimed at the destruction of the Bakich gangs, and I offer no less sincere assurances of friendship on our part towards the Republic of China, especially since, in my opinion, the military and economic interests of both friendly countries are identical. I have the honour to be your respectful servant.

The equally diplomatic reply of the Chinese was as follows:

Your kind congratulations on the completion of the liquidation of the Bakich gangs have once again proved to us the friendly relations of the great Soviet Republic towards



China. In offering you my sincerest congratulations on the destruction of your last enemy, I hasten to emphasise that friendly relations between the two neighbouring Republics, which have been established since the first time the Bakich and Novikov gangs violated international laws and so put themselves into a position to threaten the tranquillity of the two neighbouring Republics, have now been definitively strengthened. The proof of this is both the presence of Soviet troops within China and the signing of the latest agreement. Now that military affairs are over, let us firmly hope that the two neighbouring Republics will march rapidly hand in hand in a close relationship towards economic prosperity.

On the night of 19 (6) October, 306 officers and Cossacks of the 1st and 2nd *Sotnias* of the 2nd Orenburg Cossack *Divizion* (formed from the 1st and 2nd Orenburg Cossack Divisions due to a significant reduction in numbers) left Bakich's detachment. At the head of the group were Colonel Kochnev and Lt-Colonel Epov. Bakich was not going to accept such a loss and sent his escort in pursuit, and there was a fight between those leaving and Bakich's escort, with killed and wounded.

In the end, only some Cossacks with Captain Rogozhkin (who they said in the corps, was shot by Bakich himself), could be intercepted. After that the general himself was almost captured while trying to stop his mutinous subordinates. Those who had escaped from Bakich from around Lake Karasu and the Khovd River joined the detachment of Kaigorodov's chief of staff, Colonel Sokolnitskiy, and surrendered to the Chinese on 8 December (25 November).



## The Final Battles

In a now tried and tested way, the Soviet leadership engaged in diplomatic formalisation of the introduction of the Red Army units into Mongolian territory to finish off Bakich. It should be said that close military co-operation between Soviet Russia and Mongolia, which played an important role in the creation of the Mongolian army,<sup>94</sup> began as early as the spring of 1921. By autumn, that cooperation was strengthened by the joint participation of the troops of the two states in an operation against Baron Ungern's detachments.

There was also no difficulty on the question of bringing Red Army units into Mongolian territory to eliminate Bakich. On 28 (15) October 1921, Chicherin addressed a note to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia by telegraph:

In response to your note of 17 October, which contains a new proposal: By joint action and the entry of Soviet units into western Mongolia to liquidate the remnants of the White bands of Ungern, Bakich, Kazantsev, and Kaigorodov concentrated there – I have the honour to inform you that the Soviet Russian Government shares the concerns expressed by you, Citizen Minister, regarding the concentration of the White bands in the area of Khovd and Ulaangom. In fulfilment of your proposal and in the interests of the security of the borders of our State, the Soviet Russian Government has at the same time ordered its troops, hand in hand with the People's Revolutionary Army of Mongolia, to deal a new crushing blow to the remnants of our common enemy – the White bandits of General Bakich, Kazantsev, Kaigorodov and others. Forced to take up arms again to guard the safety of their territories, the lives and property of their citizens from the bitter enemies of Russia and Mongolia – the robbing and plundering Whites – I have no doubt that our valiant armies will work jointly in combat to soon create the conditions of peaceful life for which both our Governments and people are persistently striving, and to the return of our troops to the limits of Russia for the transition to a state of peace. Accept the assurances of the respect due to you, Citizen Minister.

People's Commissar Chicherin.

Bakich and his remaining loyal troops (1,200-1,500 men), after an unsuccessful 44-day siege during which he lost about 400 soldiers killed and wounded, withdrew from the monastery to Ulaangom. The 185th Regiment of the 21st Perm Rifle Division and a squadron of the 59th Cavalry Regiment from the 10th Altai Cavalry Division came to Baikalov's rescue. They defeated Bakich in a battle on 26 (13) October, in which he lost 55 officers, 403 lower ranks and 59 families of soldiers as prisoners. As trophies the Reds captured 63 rifles, 8 revolvers, a Chauchat machine gun, three boxes of silver, 200,000 Tsarist roubles, 65 kilograms of tea, 1,000 metres of cloth, 300 horses, 48 camels and 3,000 head of small cattle. Baikalov was later awarded the Order of the Red Banner for his service in the battles with Bakich's detachment and other White formations in Mongolia.

On 3 November (21 October), a group of 215 men, led by the ataman of the 2nd Military District of the Orenburg Cossack Host, Zakharov, and the corps intendant, Kokarev, broke away from Bakich's corps and left to surrender to the Reds. Zakharov left with his comrades-in-arms, mostly from the 2nd Military District. It seems that Bakich had no idea what to do with the corps and had no idea how to proceed. Everything was collapsing – subordinates left the detachment one after the other and his ally Ungern had already been captured by the Reds. That is why he organised a kind of survey, requesting a list of those who wished to follow him further.

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<sup>94</sup> That is, the Red Mongolian Army of the new People's Republic formed with Soviet help. PW



And yet the general continued to act. Most of the general and staff officers of the corps remained and there were still about 1,000 soldiers and 1,200 non-combatants, including women and children, who believed in him and were ready to follow him to the end. Up to 600 men remained armed, with two machine guns and two guns, for which there were no shells. Ammunition was extremely scarce – no more than 10 rounds per rifle and no more than 100 rounds per machine gun. With these forces Bakich marched to Ulaangom with the aim of making his way to the Uryankhai region to winter there, after which he would go to the Far East.

At the same time, according to some sources, Major-General Stepanov, Colonels Kostrov, Savel'ev and Shaposhnikov were disappointed in the continuing struggle and were ready to surrender to the Reds, together with all the Cossacks, under guarantees of personal safety – included in some “letter” from the Red command. After surrendering, Lt-Colonel Zakharov and Captain Kokarev had passed information to the Soviet command (to the commander of the 185th Rifle Regiment Frolov and Baikalov). Letters for the senior officers of Bakich’s corps were prepared and sent with the Mongols. Once captured, Ataman Zakharov characterised Bakich as follows:

A brave soldier, a bad commander, a man of little mental development, with a kind sympathetic soul and a weak will. A bad organiser and politician. He worked without definite plans and goals. Strongly subordinated to the influence of others.

Whether this characterisation is true or not is left for the reader to judge.

On 11-15 November (29 October – 2 November) 1921 Bakich and his detachment arrived in the Ulaangom area and camped there. In early December they entered the Uryankhai region along the Elegest River, having crossed the Tannu-Ola ridge.<sup>95</sup> On 8-10 December (25-27 November) the detachment was met at the exit from the mountains<sup>96</sup> around Kyzyl (Belotsarsk) by local Red partisans under the command of 19-year-old S. K. Kochetov and units of the Red 26th Zlatoust Rifle Division (231st RR) and had about 300 officers and 1,200 lower ranks taken prisoner. Kochetov relates that Major-General Shemetov was also captured. While I doubt the authenticity of this spectacular episode of the surrender of General Shemetov, because he was not the chief of staff, I will nevertheless give it in full:

We saw how our opponents, tired Russian people, rejoiced – the war was over for them and their hated general [Bakich] had abandoned them. A group of officers from Bakich’s headquarters, not young men and very tired, came up in the cart where I was receiving reports. The eldest of them laid down his blade and, saluting, clearly reported:

“General Shemetov, Chief of Staff. ...”

I stood up, saluted and, not recognising my own voice, said:

“General Shemetov, I appoint you Chief of Staff of the Uryankhai Red Army. Men, give the general a sabre.”

I almost wept, seeing how his moustache shook and the old soldier shuddered, holding back a sob.

The Reds took five machine guns, a MacLean gun, a lot of rifles and the corps treasury (850 kilograms of silver). After this failure, having abandoned most of the wagons, Bakich was pursued by units of the 26th Division back into Mongolia to Kemchik<sup>97</sup> and on to Ulaangom, where he was

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<sup>95</sup> Those mountains lie just north of the border with Mongolia. PW

<sup>96</sup> The village of Atamanovka, or according to other sources, Tamalova.

<sup>97</sup> I think this might be along the Kemchik River, as that leads to one of the passes over the Tannu-Ola mountains. PW

met by Red Mongolian partisan units of the future military minister of the Mongolian People's Republic (from 1924) Khatanbaatar Magsarjav, who was operating in western Mongolia.

Finding themselves in a desperate situation, Bakich, Generals Smolnin-Tervand, Stepanov, Kirchman and other officers, together with the remnants of the corps with a total strength of about 700 men surrendered to the Mongols on 30 (17) December.

Unfortunately, we have almost no documents at our disposal concerning the circumstances of Bakich's capture, while in the historical literature there are very significant discrepancies on this issue. In particular, there is a version that Bakich's detachment was fraudulently disarmed by the Mongols and taken prisoner. According to other sources, Bakich surrendered to the Mongols on the terms of keeping his arms and becoming a Mongol subject. It is impossible not to mention a beautiful legend, confirmed by Baikalov, according to which Bakich after the defeat

... defiantly threw away his revolver and walked ahead of the column with a large wooden cross in his hands ... this in its way majestic gesture of humility ... does not seem at all theatrical against the background of the snowy Mongolian steppe.

All the corps command staff was sent by Magsarjav to Ulaanbaatar and the rest of the prisoners to Kosh-Agach. Small detachments that had broken away from his corps continued to operate in western Mongolia and in the Uryankhai region until at least the spring of 1922.

The fate of the remnants of the once powerful Independent Orenburg army was well described in his book by V. I. Petrov, the son of a participant in the exodus of the Orenburg people to China, a native of Tacheng. He wrote that the *Orenburzhtsy*:

Disappeared like sand, leaving no trace of themselves in history. The sand and the wind covered the hard path to their Golgotha, as if nothing had happened. And only occasional "encounters" reminded that they had existed. I remember well how men travelling on their carriages from Tacheng to Altay for business told me that in the desert the wind, sweeping away the sand, exposed human skeletons lying in one place or another on the roadside. Many skeletons.

The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Government decided to hand over the surrendered generals and staff officers to the Soviets on 3 February 1922 (to the commander of the 308th Rifle Regiment of the 35th Siberian Rifle Division, Sevastyanov). Bakich and nineteen of his associates were taken to Novonikolaevsk under heavy guard, where a show trial was being prepared.

Later, less important people from Bakich's units were also driven to Soviet Russia along the *Chuyskiy Trakt*. The exhausted men were killed by the escorts or simply left to die on the road. Most of the former officers of Bakich's corps, and even some of the lower ranks extradited to Soviet Russia, were subsequently executed. Those who escaped persecution in the 1920s were arrested or shot in the 1930s. Many, such as Staff Captain Naumenko, endured several arrests, years in prison and camps, a loss of rights that prevented them from getting a good job, and were eventually shot anyway.

Bakich's trial, which took place on 25 May 1922 in the theatre building in the Sosnovka garden in Novonikolaevsk, was under special control of the Sibburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b)<sup>98</sup> and was aimed at discrediting the very idea of resistance to the Bolsheviks in the eyes of the population. About 2,500 tickets were sold for the forthcoming spectacle by the Gubkom to all comers. A total of 17 people were on trial (Generals: Bakich, Smolnin-Tervand, Stepanov, Shemetov, Kirkhman and Kolokoltsov; Colonels: Kostrov, Saveliev, Sizukhin, Stepanov, Tokarev and

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<sup>98</sup> Siberian Office of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).



Troitskiy; Lieutenant-Colonels: Polynov and Evstratov; Staff-Captain Kozminykh; Cornet Shegabetdinov and the priest F. M. Georgievskiy).

The public prosecutor was the well-known Bolshevik orator E. M. Yaroslavskiy (M. I. Gubelman), who had earlier appeared in the same role at the trial of Baron Ungern (September 1921). He was trying to earn himself political capital by his public appearances at these show trials.

As already mentioned, the main task of the prosecution was to link Bakich's activities with the intrigues of the SRs. A better gift to the Bolsheviks, on the eve of the largest show trial of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party being prepared in Moscow, could not have been imagined. "We will give Bakich's trial a broad political character and link it with the trial of the SRs," Yaroslavskiy telegraphed to Stalin on 19 May 1922.

The trial opened on Thursday, 25 May 1922 at 11:00 and continued late into the night. Oparin presided, the members of the panel were Velezhev and Khromatko, and Bakich was defended by the lawyer Zelentsov. An eyewitness account of how the accused looked has been preserved:

In front was Lieutenant-General Bakich – tall, good-looking, and still with his military bearing. He is 43 years old, but he is almost completely bald, the result, probably, of a hard-lived life. ... The company is quite respectable. But in general, nothing respectable can be seen in these men, who were hastily thrown onto the crest of the White Guard adventure. Most of them are yesterday's soldiers or traders who clutched at their stores at the moment when the revolution demanded from them a precise answer: with whom they will go – whether with the workers and peasants who rose up against capitalist and general oppression, or with the mortal enemies of the workers, inspired from Paris, London, Tokyo and Prague.

Yaroslavskiy connected Bakich's work with the SR Siberian Peasant Union in every possible way. He wrote at the end of the trial:

General Bakich's cause is the cause of the SRs! The defence of the SRs is the defence of General Bakich.

The prosecution emphasised that in 1921-1922 a united anti-Bolshevik front of Ungern, Bakich and Kaigorodov, supported by France and Japan, had allegedly formed in Mongolia and China. Bakich was credited with plans for a campaign to Barnaul and Biysk and further along the Siberian railway. As journalist P. Vinokurov argued on the eve of the trial:

Bakich is one of the last links in a long chain of domestic and foreign counter-revolution. He must pay severely for his deeds.

According to another author; "no execution can be a sufficient revenge for their crimes", and Bakich himself was:

A nobody – a mixture of a general's narcissism and the dullest mediocrity, commercial cunning and the most limited skulduggery.

Journalists praised the Bolsheviks for their "tolerance" of their worst enemies, claimed that the White generals were isolated not only from proletarian Russia, but also from their subordinates, and that the process showed how the Soviet power had become stronger. The defence counsel "tried" to convince the tribunal that Bakich could not be convicted simply as a bandit because his supporters included Mensheviks and SRs from the 2nd and 3rd Internationals. Such defence tactics made the prosecution's job much easier – the SRs were then considered one of the main enemies of Soviet power.

Bakich's behaviour at the spectacle played out by the prosecution are not quite clear. Based on what Shalaginov writes, Bakich was constantly confused in his answers, rambled and held himself



uncertainly. The leaders of the Siberian insurgents, Colonels Tokarev and Sizukhin (Tokarev's chief of staff), showed the greatest persistence in their beliefs.

The court deliberated for about two hours. A sentence of execution was passed on Bakich, Smolnin-Tervand, Tokarev, Sizukhin, Kozminykh and Shegabetdinov by the Siberian branch of the military board of the Supreme Revolutionary Tribunal under the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee late at night to the thunderous applause of the audience. A petition for pardon was published in the press on behalf of all those sentenced to capital punishment, which naturally went unanswered. Shemetov, Stepanov and Savel'ev were sentenced to five years' imprisonment with forced labour, the other eight defendants were given suspended sentences of three years and released in the courtroom. The death sentence was carried out not later than 8 June, but I do not know the exact date of execution. In this way the Montenegrin subject and Russian general, hero of the First World War and the Civil War Andrei Stepanovich Bakich ended his earthly path. According to the laws of the Russian Federation, he is still considered to have been justifiably convicted.

After the fall of White Primor'e, Olga Konstantinovna Bakich and her children moved to Harbin in 1923, from where General Bakich's children travelled all over the world. The eldest son, Mikhail Andreievich Bakich, an architect and painter by profession, moved to Sydney in 1959, where he worked as an architect. After retirement, he continued painting and was awarded prizes at a number of exhibitions. He died there at the age of 93 on 15 November 2002. The general's youngest son, Vladimir Andreievich Bakich, a mechanical engineer, left China for Brazil in 1953 and settled in Rio de Janeiro. He participated in the construction of a hydroelectric power plant and died on 28 February 1986. Unfortunately, I know nothing about the fate of Olga Konstantinovna herself and Bakich's daughter, Elena Andreievna. General Bakich's grandson, a physicist by speciality, currently working at the University of Sydney, bears his grandfather's name. I was able to correspond with him during the course of my research, but he had no material on the General. I was unable to obtain any assistance from the general's granddaughter, Olga Mikhailovna Bakich, the curator of the Bakich family archive and a professor of Slavic studies at the University of Toronto, which explains the small amount of information about the Bakich family in this book.





## Conclusion

Who was General Bakich? It is not an easy question to answer, even after years of careful study of everything connected with his life. Yet I will try. For me Bakich is first of all a brave and exemplary officer of the Russian army. A man of duty, a hero who, like hundreds of thousands of other Russian officers, was plunged by fate into the abyss of revolutionary turmoil without the slightest idea of how to act in such a situation. Nevertheless, he managed to swim out and, moreover, to write his name in golden letters in the history of the White Movement. At the same time, Bakich's career path is quite characteristic of the Russian Civil War.

There were few talented military commanders in the White armies of eastern Russia – men of the general staff capable of commanding large formations. Bakich was no exception. Of course, he was not an outstanding commander, having no higher military education. His level – the level of a commander of a wartime regiment – corresponded in numbers to the corps he led. However as a corps commander in 1919, Bakich had to act on a huge front and complete strategic tasks, for which he was not ready.

Bakich was a tough boss. A real “father-commander”, stern and demanding towards his subordinates, but at the same time attentive and caring. Most likely, he did not have his own political programme, and in some respects he was even a limited person. I do not seek to justify all his actions, and even less his individual statements. But, one way or another, everything Bakich did was conditioned by the weight of the ordeal he faced. His image seems to me surprisingly sincere.

Yes, he was ambitious, hungry for glory, maybe even for the halo of the saviour of the Fatherland, but is that bad? Bakich was faithful to the end of his days to duty and his moral principles, remaining in a foreign land together with his subordinates, not abandoning them to the mercy of fate, striving to preserve the units' organisation and, having gathered strength, to return to Russia and destroy the hated regime, although that was always a mirage. He was probably an idealist.

Bakich had two homelands: one in distant Montenegro, with which his youthful years were connected, and the second in Russia, which sheltered him, with which his whole later life was connected. And this life Bakich gave for Russia!

Why did Bakich and the other opponents of the Bolsheviks fail to reach Moscow? It is impossible to answer this question unequivocally. At the same time, much has been written about the reasons for the failure by the participants of the White Movement. Thus, General Filat'ev believed that “the final outcome of the struggle depended” only military operations. According to General von Lampe:

One look at the map of Russia at the moment all the White fronts were present, shows a striking position: in the middle as a solid core were the Red forces, based on the centre of the country and its wealth – and around was a ring of White forces, having in almost every case the sea behind them. And as is well known, a central power is always advantaged over the ones on the margins. ... This strategic advantage was transferred to the Reds: it enabled them, like Germany in the European War, to fight along internal operational lines and to move their troops from one front to another by the shortest possible route in order to strike this or that pre-planned blow. And the size of the White forces were such that it was more difficult for them to squeeze than for the Reds to tear. ... The Whites had no superiority of forces to encircle on either the strategic or tactical scale.

Of course, the reasons for the Whites' failure are not only in the realm of front-line operations. It should also be noted the almost complete lack of military industry at the disposal of the Whites,



whereas the Reds made full use of the advantages of the industrial centre and the huge stocks of the old military stores there.

The assistance to the Whites from the Allies was insufficient. The development of the railway network of the east of Russia cannot be compared with the centre, which was a decisive factor in the conditions of manoeuvre warfare, when quick transfers of troops and supplies were necessary.

General von Lampe's thoughts, having participated in the White movement in the south of Russia, fully correspond to the situation that existed in the White east:

When the Reds left, the population counted with satisfaction what they had left. ... When the Whites left, the population calculated with anger what had been taken from them ... The Reds threatened, and threatened quite unambiguously, to take everything and took only a part of it – the population was deceived and ... satisfied. The Whites promised legality, took a little – and the population was embittered. ... The Whites carried the rule of law, and that is why they were given a hard time.

This is confirmed in the memoirs of General Shchepikhin, who described a case when his servant used part of a wooden box as fuel and the owner of the box caused a scandal, while he had previously given a whole carriage to the Reds without complaint. Shchepikhin was interested in this paradox, and he began to question the owner of the box about the reasons for his dissatisfaction. His reply was that Whites, in his understanding, stood for private property, whereas the Reds were guided by the slogan "Take!".

The Whites, according to von Lampe, did not have adequate methods of influence for the situation of the brutal Civil War. This also applies to the fundamentally important issue of mobilisation, which was simply impossible to implement successfully without a powerful punitive apparatus in the new, "revolutionary" conditions. The Reds had already taken that into account in 1918 and were able to create a mass army. By 1 January 1919 the Bolsheviks had 800,000 bayonets and sabres, by 1 May they had 1,700,000 and by 1 January 1920 they had 3,000,000 bayonets and sabres.

Those who assert that Russia convincingly followed the Reds and did not support the Whites are hardly right. The above examples eloquently testify to the fact that it was the Whites who were considered by the people as supporters of law and order, so any deviation from the ideal, any discrepancy between the idea and its realisation in practice, was a cause for complaint. Meanwhile the Reds, in the popular understanding, did not vary their words from their deeds, so if a firing squad was promised then it was inevitable. The Reds were supported for fear of repression or by those carried away by their demagogic appeals.

The population of peasant Russia wanted to be untouched – not mobilised to the front, not subjected to burdensome taxes, and, if possible, to have the results of the "black redistribution" recognised. Powerlessness was favourable to the peasants. We can recall the "Green" movement was directed against mobilisation into any army. The performance of Makhno, who at different periods fought against both opposing sides, as well as the peasant uprisings in Siberia, when the same counties consistently rebelled first against the Whites and then, when they were defeated, against the Reds.

At the same time, as a rule, ordinary people were not only indifferent to the Whites, but even simply uncaring. General Shchepikhin wrote about the events of the summer of 1919 in the East of Russia:

Life went on at its own pace In Orsk, People traded if they could; they sowed, reaped and mowed; they rafted timber along the Urals; one finished his house, another renewed his fence. And in the evening the whole town was having fun at the cinema,



there were dances and music in the square; young people courted; staid citizens discussed and judged their bourgeois questions. They paid attention to [the army] as far as we could see with ill-concealed impatience for us to finally get the hell out of there. I wanted to shout: "Wake up! Think about what is happening nowadays!"

But for victory the Whites needed not to shout, but to compel, given the successful experience of their enemy. It was not only the civilian population that had to be forced, but also their own troops, who lacked firm discipline. Nevertheless the Whites did not take into account the demands made by the situation of the time, which led to their eventual defeat.

The Reds resolutely denied everyone else and made the law arbitrary; the opposing Whites could not but deny the methods of arbitrariness and violence used by the Reds. ... The Whites did not or could not be fascists, who from the first moment of their existence began to fight with the enemy's methods! And perhaps it was the failed experience of the Whites that later taught the fascists?

Nor did the Whites have the necessary flexibility in the national question, which the Bolsheviks in the crucial period of the Civil War successfully solved by demagogic promises of self-determination. Then, once the main enemy was defeated, the Bolsheviks had no difficulty in dealing with the national peripheries.

General von Lampe's conclusion was as follows:

The Whites could have defeated the Reds if they themselves, in their methods, in their activities ... had become like the Reds. But it is also certain that they could only be White! Behind them remained their untarnished past, their boundless love for their homeland, their bitter experience of former failures. ... And I want to believe that they will achieve the material and political opportunities they so desperately need and, remaining themselves, win as Whites!

I have before me three photographs of Bakich that have survived to this day. In the first, he is still quite young, a swarthy junior officer with a dashing twisted moustache, his black eyes looking forward, and it is evident that he believes in his lucky star. The second photograph is from the period of the First World War. Bakich is already a senior officer, the 4th Class Order of St George is pinned on his chest. The old servant's look is still proudly directed forward, his moustache is still dashing twisted, but fatigue is already visible under the outer equanimity and combativeness. And, finally, the third photo, most likely, it is from the time of his arrest. It looks as if an old man is in front of us, although Bakich was not even forty-four years old. The general is no longer in a military uniform, he is wearing a fur coat with a pocket in the front, he has a greying beard and sideburns. His eyes look into the photo lens with longing and some kind of doom. He realises that everything is over, the joy of former victories has been replaced once and for all by the bitterness of defeat, the collapse of everything that had been so dear and familiar since his youth. The three photographs are like three different epochs, three milestones on the way to the disappearance of the Russia for which Bakich fought.

