

The Great Retreat: the Dispersion in Asia of the White Russian armies, 1919-1923

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Author's Note

Under the onslaught of the Reds, Admiral Kolchak's White armies began to retreat deep into Siberia, towards the borders of China and Persia. That retreat, with the depths of tragedy and drama of the events that accompanied it, can be recognised as one of the most amazing moments of the modern history of the world. Many impossible, unimaginable things happened, many legendary things happened.

Artistic depiction of the great retreat and the events that followed it, can only be in the power of literary geniuses, equal to Homer or Leo Tolstoy. The historical study of this moment of Russian history could fill dozens of volumes. Our modest task is to provide only some material for future historians of the Russian Revolution, to set some milestones for their work, and, most importantly, to publish in print some information relating to the tragic wandering of the remnants of the White armies through the endless spaces of Central Asia – information that is still little known to the general public. We have done this work with love and willingness in order to revive our heroic White past, bringing out its brilliant sides without hiding the shady ones. We hope that the reader will not take our work as a serious historical study – let it be for him only a “White textbook”, not without interest, and in some places, perhaps, even instructive.

Pygmy Wars Introduction

My copy was obtained from an OCR copy at *militera.lib.ru*.

This is a quick and quite loose “translation”. Please do not rely on it for any specific detail.

I have not included citations. Anyone wanting them would be reading this in the original anyway.

All the footnotes are mine.

As a White Russian, writing for a White Russian audience, Serebrennikov used the old Russian names for all the places and peoples. A huge number of the place names have changed in the mean-time and where that is the case I have mostly used the modern version, but included Serebrennikov's version in brackets the first time the place is mentioned, so for example: Semey (Semipalatinsk). I could not locate a few of the places, but their location is usually quite obvious in the context.

I have not changed Serebrennikov's use of some of the anachronistic names though, as it indicates how he thought. In particular, I have not changed “Russia” when the situation actually indicates the USSR, because he still thought of it as Russia, nor Semirech'e.

I have adopted standard modern transliterations of Chinese and Mongolian names, both places and people, but this is always arbitrary and care should be taken that other options for transliteration may be used in other sources.

I presume all dates are Old Style, so 13 days behind the modern Gregorian versions.

All ranks are given in modern equivalents. I have not bothered to distinguish the various different Cossack and cavalry equivalents: so Captain covers *Kapitan*, *Rotmistr* and *Esaul*.

Serebrennikov did not give his chapters titles. I have done so to aid anyone looking for a specific person or group.



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Glossary

Some of the terms used in this work can be confusing to readers new to the Russian Civil War, especially as for many their meaning have changed over time. Hopefully this guide will assist.

-tsy : a way Russian forms collective forms, in the plural, from proper nouns. So *Kappelevtsy* are the followers of Kappel' and *Izhevtsy* are people from Izhevsk.

Chuysky Trakt : the historic land route from Russia into Mongolia, passing Barnaul – Biysk – Yarantay (Mongolia) – Ürümqi. It was unpaved and quite rough.

Divizion : a unit sized between a company/squadron/battery and a regiment. Not used for infantry, because the Russians used battalion for that case.

Dungan : a specific group of Muslim, Turkic-speaking peoples, largely living in Xinjiang but spilling into the areas around. They prefer to call themselves the Hui.

A lot of the Chinese soldiers in the Xinjiang area were Dungans.

Inorodtsy : Subjects of the Tsar who were of non-Russian ethnic backgrounds and who had a slightly different legal status. In the context of this work, it means Kirghiz, Kazakhs, Altai, Yakut etc.

Kirghiz : The Russians of the time tended not to distinguish Kirghiz from Kazakh (at least in part because the Russian word for Cossack is too similar to that for Kazakh). Any reference in this work to “Kirghiz” is more likely to actually be Kazakhs.

Outer Mongolia : effectively the same area as the modern country of Mongolia. An equally large area to the south and east, has long been part of China known as Inner Mongolia.

China claimed both parts and occupied Outer Mongolia during the Russian Civil War.

Sart : is a badly defined term, but in Serebrennikov's context it seems to mean a settled Turkic-speaking Muslim of Xinjiang, as opposed to the nomadic Kirghiz etc, but does not include the Dungans. The modern equivalent is Uighur.

Semirech'e or Semirechye : The Russian name for the Jetisu area in modern Kazakhstan, between Lake Balkash and China and Kirgizstan. The related adjective is *Semirechensk*.

Primor'e or Primorye : The province around Vladivostok, extending not as far as Khabarovsk. The related adjective is *Primorsk*.

Russia : Serebrennikov uses this anachronistically for the later section of the book, extending it to places not in the Russian Soviet Federal Republic of the USSR.

Russian Turkestan : more or less the present Kazakhstan, but with the westernmost and easternmost parts shaved off. After the formation of the USSR in 1921 it becomes anachronistic, as the various Soviet Republics were formed, but it is a useful shorthand.

Taiga : the sub-arctic forested zone of Siberia, mostly pines, spruces, and larches.

Uryankhai or Uriankhai : the forested region of far northern Mongolia and parts of modern Russia just north of Mongolia. (It had all been Chinese Mongolia until 1912.)

When referring to people it means the native peoples of the Uryankhai proper, but sometimes extends to other Tuvans and Yakuts and the Mongolian-speaking Altai Uryankhai.

Zemstvo : bodies of local self-rule from Tsarist times. They were elected, although not from equal suffrage. After the revolution they were replaced by local Soviets, doing largely the same functions, until the Bolsheviks centralised everything.



Prelude

July 1919 proved to be an unhappy month for the White Russian armies of Siberia. In that month Admiral Kolchak's White troops abandoned the cities of Perm, Ekaterinburg, and Chelyabinsk along the line of the Urals. The Red hordes crossed the frontier separating Europe from Asia, and entered Siberia, pushing the Whites in front of them, causing a decomposition that soon assumed very dangerous proportions.

A new knot in the history of the world was tied: the victory of the Red forces over the Whites was in sight, and the Russian Communists began to consolidate themselves in the north of Asia, in Siberia, from where they could influence the fate of the neighbouring countries of the vast Asian continent. But at the time these events were taking place in Siberia, hardly anyone realised their significance.

There were reasons for this: the World War was still going on, absorbing the attention of all mankind. Against the background of the general military tension in the world, the Russian Revolution at first seemed an extremely unpleasant and very unfortunate, but still only an isolated, incident. Its global significance began to become clear later, but to simultaneously solve two tasks of world importance – tasks arising from the Great War and the Russian Revolution – was beyond the capacity of any statesman of the time.



Chapter I – the Ice Marches

The “Ice March” across the Siberian plains, mountains, steppes and forests began in the early days of October 1919, when several tens of thousands of soldiers, Cossacks and officers of Admiral Kolchak’s armies began their retreat from the Tobol River eastwards.

They retreated while fighting, angrily snapping at the advancing enemy. The command of the White armies intended to stop the Red advance along the Ishim River, but failed. At the end of October Petropavl (Petropavlovsk) was abandoned, and the White troops began to retreat to the Irtysh.

The question of evacuating Omsk, the White capital, became acute. It was decided to evacuate the city – then to defend it to the last soldier. In the first days of November there was a change of the higher commands of the admiral’s armies, which only increased the panic and general confusion that had begun.

By 5 November tens of thousands of carriages, hundreds of thousands of carts and numerous artillery units of the White Army had accumulated in front of the Irtysh, near Omsk. The troops retreating from the front also began to reach that point. Unfortunately, a thaw arrived and the ice drift that started on the Irtysh River tore down the bridges that had just been built across the river. Only one railway bridge remained across the Irtysh. Horses died by thousands from starvation while waiting to cross. It seemed that a catastrophe was about to break out, and the White army would be smashed by the Reds in the Irtysh. But on 9 November a strong frost suddenly struck, and the very next day the river became passable on the ice. It became clear that it would not be possible to hold positions along the Irtysh River. A hasty and extremely disorderly evacuation of Omsk began. The disaster was already unfolding.

Omsk fell on the morning of 14 November. The Bolsheviks seized colossal stocks of military equipment in the city.

Everyone now rushed eastwards. The catastrophic situation ruined all strategic plans. All who could fled from the Red beast. A fierce and unconcealed struggle for the preservation of existence began.

Pressed from behind by the advancing Red Army, while ahead might be dangerous attacks and assaults from the countless Red partisan detachments in Siberia. Dangers threatened on all sides. The behaviour of the former allies in the struggle against the Bolsheviks – Czechoslovaks, Poles, Serbs, and Romanians – who now had to get out of Siberia at all costs, became alarming.

The threat sometimes lurked within the White armies themselves – some units, in order to earn favour from the Red victors, arrested their officers or killed them, and then defected to the Bolshevik side.

No one who went on the winter march, whether military or civilian, could be sure that they would be able to escape safely from the circle of all kinds of dangers. Let us remember too that the horrors of the retreat were further increased by the brutal Siberian cold, poor nutrition and typhus – that inevitable companion of all terrible social catastrophes.

Proper railway travel was out of the question. Near Novonikolaevsk a traffic jam occurred through the fault of the Polish legions, and the trains stretched out, one after another, in a continuous stationary ribbon several hundred kilometres long. The steam locomotives froze, the wagons and carriages went unheated.

The cold mercilessly mowed down its victims.

The White Army retreating from Omsk moved eastwards in any way it could: on foot, on sleds, on horseback. It was now overloaded with non-combat elements in the form of the families of officers and soldiers and simple refugees fleeing the Bolsheviks, numbering several hundred thousand.



On the general conditions of this great retreat one of its participants, N. Khudyakov, relates:

The retreating troops had to be satisfied with local resources, as only a few units managed to obtain and carry with them food from the Omsk warehouses. Even the abundant and fertile Barabinsk steppe, with a huge peasant population, could not always feed hundreds of thousands of people and horses.

The rearguard units had a particularly hard time of it: often everything was already eaten in the villages, down to the thatched roofs, which were used to feed the horses. It was hardest of all for the units that moved along the railway; it was easier for those that made their way along the remote side roads.

During the day, when the sun warmed, it was still tolerable, but by evening the sharp steppe wind would usually rise. The cold became even more intense. Horses were frozen and shivered, soldiers were stiff with cold. Not everyone had warm clothes, not everyone had felt boots or warm mittens. Quilted cotton soldier's jackets with overcoats over them provided little protection from the Siberian cold.

Hundreds of people crowded into any warm hut for the night. Sometimes they slept there, standing on their feet or sitting on a sleeping person. But it was not always possible to count on a warm bed. Often it was necessary to spend the night in the open air, camped by a fire. Ears, noses, hands and feet froze. At the stations we had to deliver hundreds of frostbitten people to the hospital trains. If those trains stopped and did not move on, the frostbitten patients would end up freezing there – going to another, better world, which does not know the cruelties of human struggle.

On the way I came across frozen people on the road side, either alone or in groups, who had fallen asleep by an extinguished fire.

It was bad for the people, bad for the horses too, which fell by the hundreds on the way of retreat – some from fatigue, others from lack of fodder – and immediately threw themselves to the mercy of fate.

To lag behind meant death, either at the hands of the Red executioners or to the cold.

As the retreating army reached the Ob River, uprisings began in the garrisons of Novonikolaevsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk. These uprisings, and the switching of White troops to the side of the Reds, carried with them terrible new tragedies and infinitely complicated the great and difficult withdrawal of the White armies.

Here is how one participant in the White campaign to the east described his departure from Tomsk, after he had succeeded in escaping from that city, which was engulfed in the fire of internecine warfare.

Rifle fire came from the city. In the advancing twilight, the glow of the fires flickered red.

Soon we were overtaken by a bloody, wounded group of horsemen with pale, frightened faces – cavalry who had broken out of the city.

Tomsk had fallen. The Reds were celebrating their victory.

We decided to move as quickly as possible. We prepared weapons and grenades and decided to break through or die trying. We took an oath to die together.

The peasants in the villages told us about the cruelties of the [partisan] detachments of Shchetinkin, Kravchenko and Lubkov; about their attacks and robberies.



Passing around the town of Taiga, we saw two huge columns of black smoke – the burning of the Amzher mines and the blowing up of the arsenals.

On the route of the retreat we met more and more abandoned and exhausted horses, living out their last minutes. It was eerie and frightening to see the suffering of these silent animals, doomed to death – unwilling witnesses to the great human tragedy.

And were we also not doomed?

On 12 December there was a battle at Taiga station, near Tomsk, between Polish Legion troops and some Reds who had overtaken them. The Polish trains were at the front and blocked the way of Russian trains, most of them hospital ones.

The station and the town were in despair. The workers were expected to rise out any minute. The Reds approached in the evening. The 1st Polish Regiment, cavalry and armoured cars took part on the Poles' side. After two hours the battle ended unsuccessfully for the Poles: they lost two armoured trains and suffered severe losses in men. Many Russian trains could not leave and perished there. Many people rushed towards the departing Polish trains, but on every platform there were sentries who prevented anyone getting on the trains with their bayonets.

Eyewitnesses record the nightmarish scenes that played out there. An old colonel, the Poles having refused to take him and his family east, took out a revolver and killed his wife and daughter in front of everyone and then shot himself. One woman threw herself under a passing train. A wounded volunteer begged passers-by to shoot him, preferring to die than to be tortured by the Reds, because their slogan was known: "Soldiers to their homes, officers and volunteers to their coffins." An epidemic of suicides accompanied the whole White retreat to the east.

In Tomsk province the retreating army entered the *taiga* zone of Siberia, and here its suffering increased many times over. In the deep snows of the Siberian *taiga* the army buried all its guns. It seems that the *Izhevtsy* and *Votkinsty* alone, heroes of the Ice March, managed to drag their guns through to the end.

Typhus epidemics and relapsing typhus became rampant among the White troops due to the overcrowding, malnutrition and general terrible sanitary conditions, to such an extent that sometimes there were only a few dozen healthy people left in the units. Hundreds of sick, completely unconscious, were carried on sleds. The only doctor caring for those patients was the bitter Siberian cold.

The remnants of Admiral Kolchak's 3rd Army had a hard time passing through the so-called Shcheglovskiy *taiga*. That army had to pass through the forest clearings in the wild *taiga* for almost 120 kilometres with no settlements. The whole path for tens of kilometres was crowded with a continuous sea of wagons and sleds, stretched along the road in three rows. It was impossible to speed up the advance of the carts or somehow overtake them. The Reds threatened to cut them with a detour movement.

In order to save the Army, an order went out to discard all the guns, throw the wagons aside and move only on horseback. On the first day more than 6,000 wagons were thrown off the track. The movement was accelerated, but was still very slow.

The next day the desperate cart drivers themselves began to take the initiative – to cut the traces and mount the horses, leaving the sick women and children they were carrying to their fate. The moans, cries, weeping and sobbing of those abandoned did not stop the riders passing by on their exhausted horses – their own suffering dulled their sense of pity for others. No-one had the strength, Khudyakov wrote, to watch and listen to all the horror that was going on, but there was no opportunity to help the unfortunates who had been abandoned.



One of the Red commanders who participated in the attack on the Whites reported in his memoirs that the Whites abandoned about 10,000 carts, with significant military equipment, when passing through the Shcheglovskiy *taiga*. He recounted:

Our two sapper companies worked for a whole twenty-four hours just to push the wagons of the middle row to the side of the route and enable our units to advance. As we rode among that cemetery, the impression was terrible. We literally had to ride on the corpses of hundreds of dead horses and even frozen people, half-covered with the snow that fell that day.

The Third Army broke out of the Shcheglovskiy *taiga* on 29 December.

There was a new terrible disaster on that day in the city of Achinsk, already occupied by White detachments. There was an explosion at the station of a train loaded with shells – the last ones still left for the Army. Many people were killed and maimed. General Kappel', commander of the retreating armies, was in Achinsk station at the time, but survived by some miracle.

An Army officer relates:

We stayed in Achinsk for a week. All the villages were empty, with the population scattered into the *taiga*. The Red partisan detachments did not hesitate to come close to the highway and made raids and ambushes, cutting off the wagons and shooting stragglers. A whole Red Cross transport with sisters of mercy was taken away by the Reds into the *taiga*. Their fate could not be determined, but it was difficult to expect it was anything good.

In Achinsk the White command received detailed information about the *coup d'état* in Krasnoyarsk, the garrison's uprising and the formation of some *zemstvo* government. The situation was extremely difficult, almost hopeless. The courageous General Kappel', however, gave the order: "Cross the Yenisei, opening the way by force, if necessary."

At Achinsk the retreat to the east ended. An offensive began in the same direction.

It is difficult to describe all the twists and turns of the clashes between the Whites and the Reds on the outskirts of Krasnoyarsk. Those clashes might be considered to constitute the most dramatic moment in the whole history of the Ice March. Many Whites were captured there by the Reds. There were also units, frightened by all the dangers of the march, who voluntarily went to Krasnoyarsk, surrendering to the mercy of the Red victor. Not everyone could remain heroes to the end.

Nevertheless, significant White columns, under the leadership of General Kappel', managed to bypass Krasnoyarsk to the north and head down the Yenisei River to the mouth of its right tributary, the Kan. Here the army faced a formidable question: where to go, which way to get to the railway line again? The command decided to go straight along the ice of the Kan River in order to reach where that river crossed the railway, i.e. to the city of Kansk. This proposed trek along the Kan ice seemed risky to some soldiers, and they broke away from the army and went further north, along the Yenisei. The detachments of General Perkhurov and Colonel Kazagrandi took a more northerly path along the Taseyeva River, whereas General Sukin's detachment went down the Yenisei to the Angara River.

General Petrov in his book "From the Volga to the Pacific in the White ranks" tells us the following about the march along the Kan:

The River Kan says nothing to those who did not walk along it or who followed along the paved road. But it is well remembered by those from Ufa and Kama, who marched at the head of the column.



In Podporog village, where the march started, it did not seem difficult. The only fear was that somewhere the Reds might block the route.

It seems that on the afternoon of 9 January, after a rest in Podporog, the Ufa Division started to move along the Kan.

It became necessary to use a forest road to go round some rapids. We went uphill on the road, and then we start moving across uncleared land with sagebrush, woods and steep descents. People paved the way step by step, together with guides. The column stopped every few steps.

By dusk we came down to the ice: a wide frozen river with precipitous banks. There was a mighty forest along the bank, the like of which we had never seen before: spruce and larch trees of unprecedented thickness stretched their tops to the sky. The *taiga* was impenetrable. The river flowed through this mountainous forest gorge – it was a corridor along which one could only head east, unable to turn either to the right or left.

We moved safely for two or three kilometres. It was difficult only for those who were clearing the path. But further on we stopped and got alarming information: there was water on the ice. What was it? Had the ice fallen under the weight of our movement, or had the river not frozen properly? We could not tell and it is difficult to find out as it was night and there was cold darkness all around. The surroundings took on fantastic shapes.

It is impossible to move on foot through such water, even though the ice could take it. Already many people had soaked shoes. We sent mounted men forward to reconnoitre and in the meantime we waited.

A few hours of waiting seemed like an eternity.

On the banks a fire was being built in a hunting hut: General Kappel' had arrived there. He listened to the conversations swirling round: "Forward or backward?" He was almost about to send an order to Voytsekhovskiy to turn the column around, but the hope that the water on the ice was just an accident stopped him. Then we received information that it was possible to move: the water is superficial. It just required to take longer strides.

Movement resumed, but anxiety for a favourable outcome did not leave us. What will the later rapids bring? The accounts said there would be three.

Night passed into day almost imperceptibly – a dark, frosty day. The cold, which we were not used to, penetrated through all the clothes. How many noses were already frostbitten! The whole day we moved on dry ice, or with water on top, with halts.

At the stops we fed the horses, made fires, thawed the bread to eat. Then it was night again. What lay ahead was unknown. The guides promise that soon there would be some farms, but we didn't see them. We calculated that over the more than twenty-four hours, with the halts, we had travelled at least 50 kilometres: it meant that we still had a long way to go.

There was a tragedy at every stop. The sleds when travelling through the wet parts grabbed at the snow, raked it up and froze it, becoming heavy. The ice needed to be chopped off. If you had to stop on a wet place, the sled would freeze up, so that the horses could no longer drag them.



There were a lot of horses that were at the final point of exhaustion. They could hardly stand or could not stand again if they lay down. The air was full of shouting, cursing, and talking.

It was at this time that General Kappel' got his feet wet, caught a cold and became ill. Command of the army passed to General Voytsekhovskiy.

From Kansk the White Army had to attack Irkutsk. The Reds had captured the city, with the moral support of the Czechoslovaks, and were accumulating forces to cut off the White retreat to the east.

Having brutally broken several Red partisan detachments on the way, the *Kappelevtsy*, as the retreating White troops were now called, approached the rich commercial village of Tulun on 28 January 1920, now within Irkutsk province. It was in Tulun that the retreating troops learnt about the death of their heroic leader, General Kappel', who had died during the march from a severe cold he caught while travelling along the Kan River.

The Red authorities in Irkutsk, worried about the eastward movement by the Whites, sent a detachment of 4,000 fighters to Zima station – hastily formed from the most zealous supporters of the Soviet power, mainly workers of the Cheremkhovo mines. On 2 February there was a battle at Zima, in which the Reds were utterly defeated, with few surviving the cruel combat.

The way to Irkutsk was open. General Voytsekhovskiy entered into negotiations with the Red authorities in Irkutsk. He agreed to bypass the city if Admiral Kolchak, who had been betrayed by the Allies and was at that time in the Irkutsk prison, was released and placed under the protection of a foreign military unit, if some of the gold reserve which the Bolsheviks had seized in Irkutsk was be given to the White Army, and if the army received clothing and food from the Irkutsk warehouses.

The negotiations led to nothing. Soon it became known that the Czechs had put forward their own demand – that Irkutsk was not to see military action.

By the night 7 February the White troops were only one day's march from Irkutsk. Before dawn of that night Admiral Kolchak was shot by the Red executioners on the outskirts of the city. The Bolsheviks had brought forward his execution in order to take from the White army one of the main motives for occupying the capital of eastern Siberia.

On 7 and 8 February the army passed by Irkutsk. By the 9th it was already on the shores of Lake Baikal. On the morning of 10 February the second Ice March began from the village of Goloustnoe – a trek on the ice across the gloomy and at the same time majestic Baikal, the "glorious sea" of the Siberians.

A White officer wrote:

There was no road, but a storm was racing across the Baikal. One could feel that there, under the ice, the formidable sea was rushing and boiling, ready to break its icy fetters at any minute.

With great caution we pass over several cracks in the ice, over which boards were laid.

Soon one of our horses died. We lagged behind. Alone in that icy desert, we couldn't see the path – there was a sea of ice all around. It was dark.

We felt total hopelessness. Mentally and physically exhausted, freezing from the cruel cold and wind, we crawled on all fours on the ice looking for hoofprints, to find the path. Unsuccessfully. A cold, icy despair crept into my soul. How excruciatingly terrible and harsh life is!



There was only silence and desolation.

“I found them!” a voice was suddenly heard. Hoofprints stretching across the ice. We were saved.

We dragged the horses to the spot and, leading them by the reins, we slowly continued our journey.

How much further to go? When would the torment end? We met a tragic group in a cart on the ice. There were two dead horses in the harness. The cart contained some barely alive soldiers, snow-covered and half-frozen.

“Brothers, do God’s favour, shoot us! We are freezing!” We passed by in silence.

And how many of them there were on the Calvary of our long-suffering crossing of Baikal! Dark, silent icy desert all around.

And suddenly a light – far, far away.

It was Mysovaya station of the Transbaikal railway. There were Japanese there, who were the only Allies who still seemed to be friends to the Whites.

In the second half of February 1920, the retreating White Army entered Chita, the capital of Transbaikalia.

The Ice March lasted five months. Only the strongest, the most steadfast, the most enduring and the most unyielding opponents of the Communists reached Chita. These were Kappel’s men.

* * * * *

General Petrov called the march of General Sukin’s column, which broke off from General Kappel' at the mouth of the Kan River on 8 January 1920, a legendary march. That column consisted of the 3rd Barnaul Regiment, the 2nd Orenburg Cossack Regiment and a detachment of the Tomsk Horse Militia.

From the mouth of the Kan River the detachment under General Sukin had travelled down the Yenisei and then turned to its mighty right tributary, the majestic Angara River. From there they moved to the upper reaches of that river. Then they took the route of the original Cossacks who had conquered Siberia. From the mouth of the River Ilim, flowing into the Angara, the detachment crossed the watershed of the Angara and Lena basins and came out near the village of Ust'-Kut, from where Erofei Khabarov had begun his famous campaign on the Amur in 1649.

Then Sukin’s detachment went up the Lena, across wild, almost inaccessible terrain, until they came to the Baikal. The formidable Baikal was crossed on the ice, north of Olkhon Island, and the detachment arrived in Barguzin. From there it went directly to Chita, arriving on 14 March 1920.

The detachment had travelled over 2,000 kilometres through the Siberian wilds. In several places it had to fight and did not escape the troubles of the other columns, including typhus in its various forms. By the beginning of March it was more a column of the sick than a combat unit.

A participant in the legendary march, Captain Mikhailovsky, the head of the Tomsk Horse Militia detachment, once told me that he had done the whole march mounted on the same horse. He obtained the horse that rescued him on 17 December in Tomsk and dismounted from it in Chita on 14 March, having thus travelled more than 3,000 kilometres on horseback.

Unfortunately, as far as I know, no detailed descriptions of this march and memories of its participants have been published.

[A few pages of detail about the deaths of Admiral Kolchak and General Kappel' have been omitted.]



Chapter II – the Hunger Marches

Units of Admiral Kolchak's 1st, 2nd and 3rd Armies were involved in the winter retreat from Omsk to Chita, or rather the remnants of the 2nd and 3rd Armies, as the 1st Army, which had been withdrawn earlier to the rear, had almost completely decayed during the uprisings in the rear garrisons in Novonikolaevsk, Tomsk, Achinsk and Krasnoyarsk.

The 4th or Southern Army, which consisted almost exclusively of Orenburg Cossacks under the command of General Belov, was cut off from the other armies of the Siberian-Urals front in autumn of 1919 and began to retreat deep into the steppe regions of Russian Turkestan. This retreat was accompanied by confusion and disintegration: some troops abandoned the front in an attempt to return home, others went over to the enemy's side.

Travelling across the waterless sandy steppes in summer, in the intense heat, brought with it terrible deprivations and sufferings.

* * * * *

General Okulinich and the 1st Orenburg Cossack Corps left the Southern Army near the shores of the Aral Sea and went westwards to join the Ural Cossacks.

General Belov and his remaining loyal units decided to cross the Yrgyz (Irgiz) and Turgay steppes to reach the Atbasar – Kokshetau region, from where they might get in touch with Kolchak's other armies, retreating along the Siberian railway. The Orenburg Army had to cross more than 800 kilometres of the deserted and roadless steppes of the Turgay region.

In mid-September 1919 the Reds suddenly attacked Aktobe, which had units of the retreating Southern Army. With the support of advancing infantry and cavalry, they opened a heavy artillery fire. A Bolshevik aeroplane flew over the city, dropping bombs.

A terrible panic was created in the city and something incredible began to happen. Almost the whole city, if they could and had time to do so, evacuated. The whole steppe near Aktobe for tens of kilometres to the south-east was covered with people and wagons. They travelled on horseback, in carriages, on carts, on foot. The sounds of canons and machine-gun fire merged into a general rumble and chaos with shouts and groans. Soon the Red cavalry appeared, occupied the town, then in a quick raid cut off the tail of the line moving away from the town and returned with a large booty.

The military units, refugees and wagons that had scurried out of the city mixed together in general confusion, moving as mobs, with no idea of where they were heading, simply to get away from the danger of the Reds. The whole crowd reached the nearest village of Temireisky. They spent the night there and in the morning of 15 September moved towards the village of Romanovka, which they reached in two days. The retreating troops, who had now pulled themselves into order, knew that Romanovka was the last settlement after which the Turgay steppes began – where it was difficult not only to get food for the army, but even to cross.

The situation created had an oppressive effect on the exhausted soldiers and Cossacks, and many of them on arrival in Romanovka declared that they would not go further and would return home.

On the night of 19 September the officers, Cossacks and soldiers who wanted to cross the Turgay steppe to Siberia to join Admiral Kolchak managed to organise themselves into groups and left Romanovka. Some refugee families also joined them.

The author of the brochure "The Hunger March" wrote:

As we left terrible things were happening in Romanovka. Those who were returning home were burning cartridges, weapons, official papers and officers' possessions.



There was shouting, noise, shooting, music and singing. Large bonfires could be seen everywhere. The village was burning in two places.

The remnants of the army went deeper into the steppes of the Yrgyz district of the Turgay region. There was no proper transport for the army. As there were no stocks of food and forage it was announced to the people that each of them would receive two pounds of raw mutton, but no bread or other products would be given because there was none.

Owing to the diet of solely meat, many suffered gastric diseases. The death rate began to rise hugely. Fatal sunstrokes occurred frequently. In the first week of the journey many horses, especially thoroughbreds, died.

It was not uncommon to see a refugee family weeping near a fallen horse, doomed to stay in the steppe to starve to death. Who would help them in their grief and who could they turn to, when everyone was saving themselves? Maybe not today, but tomorrow they might find themselves in the same situation. Everyone lost any feeling of compassion. A dying man lay by the roadside, begging for help, stretching out his hands to passers-by, crying and moaning, but no one saw or heard him. Such scenes became commonplace. It might be a wife and children mourning a husband and father, or someone thrashing in a deadly agony, struck by sunstroke. No one paid attention to such things. Everyone was filled with only one desire: forward, forward as quickly as possible, for every minute of delay threatened death.

In the evening of 26 September the army approached the district town of Yrgyz, and a week later entered Turgay, the capital of the Turgay region, which was more like a village than a city.

In the morning of 4 October General Belov, having gathered all the remnants of the Southern Army which had managed to arrive there, spoke for the last time to the soldiers and Cossacks as commander of the Army and ordered all the groups to leave in succession for Derzhavinsk, the first Russian settlement on the line of the White retreat along the Turgay steppe.

The Army approached that settlement on 18 October. From there, in order to empty the settlement, those arriving were immediately sent to Atbasar, a district town of the Akmola region.

Upon arrival in Atbasar the Army headquarters and some units were stationed in the town, and the rest in the neighbouring villages. From there the remnants of the Southern Army were intending to head to the Siberian railway, to join the Siberian units in the area of Petropavl (Petropavlovsk), but information was received that Petropavl had already been surrendered. It was proposed that they head to Omsk, but in the meantime people had to rest, recover, and the units reform. The commander of the army, General Belov, went to Omsk, to the headquarters of the Supreme Ruler. From the remnants of the Southern Army, which still had around 20,000 men in its ranks, an Independent Orenburg Army was formed, with Lieutenant-General A. I. Dutov, ataman of the Orenburg Cossack Host, appointed to command it.

In his last letter to Admiral Kolchak, on 31 October Dutov wrote from Kokshetau:

In general, I have received a terrible inheritance from the Southern Army. But our main horror is the complete absence of clothes. It makes my heart bleed to look at the men.

It is cold. There's mud when there's snow. Settlements are few and far between.

Typhus is mowing us down left and right.

The former headquarters of the Southern Army, which is disbanded, acted in a swine-like manner – they left for Omsk in cars and carriages, and did not return anything. I am utterly without transport.



There are no [leather] boots; and there are only a few felt boots, but it is muddy now. I am requisitioning wherever I can, but I am only embittering the population, and I do not know what will come of it.

The mood in the units of the army entrusted to me is satisfactory, and even good in the 4th Corps. If we had warm boots, overcoats and fur coats, then the army would be steel. Those left in it are hardened and tested. Just clothe it, supply artillery and rifles, and it will fight to the last man.

In the whole 1st Corps I have only five guns, three of them French. Some of the guns are drawn by oxen.

I'm most embarrassed by the sick – there's already up to 3,000 men ill. All typhus. Where do I put them? There is no railway, no transport. There's nothing warm. I take what I can, but I only get dozens of items, when thousands are needed.

I believe in God and in Russian truth and honour, which gives me the strength to work. I have visited all my units, and what I am telling you is the result of that inspection.

Soon the Independent Orenburg army was ordered to move to Kokshetau and Omsk, but it was too late: Omsk fell. The Army went to Astana (Akmolinsk) and Karkaraly (Karkaralinsk) intending to make its way to Semey (Semipalatinsk), where it would be possible to join up with the Siberian units. But even this was a failure: Semey passed into Red hands as a result of an internal rebellion. The Orenburg Army was completely cut off.

The only way out was to go through Karkaraly to Sergiopol' and then to the Semirech'e, where Ataman Annenkov had his army. And so the Army again undertook a long march.

During this march the Reds became particularly active, making attempts to encircle the Whites and completely destroy them. There were sudden raids on the rear and from the flank at the centre of the retreating groups. The Reds captured a lot of men and wagons. To add to all the misfortunes of the Whites another was added: epidemics of typhus, relapsing typhus and abdominal fever appeared. Mortality in the army began to reach horrifying proportions.

At the end of December 1919 the units of the Orenburg army began to arrive in Sergiopol', in the north of the Semirech'e region.

By agreement with Ataman Annenkov, the Orenburg Army was renamed the Orenburg Detachment in Semirech'e and joined the Independent Semirechensk Army under the command of General Bakich, while Ataman Annenkov remained overall commander. Ataman Dutov was appointed military governor-general of Semirech'e.

The Orenburg Detachment took over the defence of the Uch Aral to Lepsy sector of the Semirech'e. Its combat effectiveness was severely reduced, as almost the entire detachment had contracted with typhus.

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° . 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.



In January 1920 the Bolsheviks occupied Zaysan and then Sergiopol'. The Orenburg Detachment retreated and occupied from the Tarbagatai mountains to the border of China. That contained, in a bridgehead only 100 km in depth, some small villages and three large Cossack villages: Urzhar, Makanchi and Bakhty. The Orenburg Detachment held that until the end of February 1920.

With the onset of warmer weather, in early March, the Bolsheviks crossed the Tarbagatai ridge and began to press on the detachment, which threw into the line everyone that could be recruited for defence. The Cossacks and soldiers of the former Orenburg Army, sick from typhus and not properly rested, were drawn into combat. Once again the *Orenburzhtsy* fought well and more than once beat the arrogant Reds. The latter, however, having concentrated large forces, forced the Orenburg Detachment to withdraw and, having occupied Urzhar and Makanchi, pressed it to the Chinese border.

General Bakich entered into negotiations with the Chinese authorities about the Russian detachment crossing the border. The crossing was authorised. All the hospitals, institutions and wagons were evacuated to the Chinese town of Tacheng (Chuguchak), not far from the Russian-Chinese border. On 26 March 1920, the main Orenburg detachment crossed the Chinese border and surrendered its arms to the Chinese authorities.

In the morning of 27 March the rearguard began to approach the border. The Reds, unwilling to let their enemies go, charged in mounted formation in order to encircle and delay, and perhaps even destroy the retreating troops. The Cossacks and soldiers opened up a very strong machine-gun and rifle fire, and the Red cavalry, having suffered considerable losses, retreated back.

The *Orenburzhtsy*, having spent almost all their cartridges and having done all that was in their power, with the consciousness of having fulfilled their duty to the end, crossed the frontier of their long-suffering fatherland and entered a foreign country, Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan). It was at 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning of 27 March 1920.

There were still over 10,000 soldiers when they crossed the border, plus many refugees.

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Having assumed the duties of the Governor-General of Semirech'e, the ataman of the Orenburg Host, A. I. Dutov, chose the town of Lepsinsk as his residence. He had a small detachment of about 600 men, as a personal escort plus an independent *sotnia*.

Life for Ataman Dutov and his detachment in Lepsinsk was extremely difficult. There were a lot of sick people and no food supplies. The men received hot food only twice a week. They shot pigeons in the town to feed the sick. The detachment had no medicines and no doctors.

In March 1920 the general situation was very unfavourable for the ataman – Lepsinsk was surrounded by the Reds from almost all sides. Under that pressure, Dutov's detachment left Lepsinsk on 29 March with the intention of crossing the Chinese border. Half of the men in the detachment had horses, half of them walked. In the village of Ekiasha (Pokatilovka) the detachment rested for a day and from there headed into the Alatau Mountains, to the so-called Sarkan Gap. The first night people walked knee-deep in snow, with no road, at -15° . The path sometimes ran along the river, sometimes climbed cliffs, sometimes descended into valleys completely covered in snow.

As they moved along the Sarkan Gorge, the hardships of the mountain trek increased even more. They had to make their way along mountain ledges and glaciers. There was not a single bush to make a fire and there was neither food nor water. The detachment walked like that for three days and finally came to the Kara-Saryk Pass, at a height of 4,000 metres. The road along the pass was mostly on mountain ledges, icy and snow-covered. At times both men and animals fell into the abyss. The packs were dismantled and the luggage was carried by hand. It took about a day and a



half to climb the pass. When the detachment finally climbed to the top of the pass, a storm began, and many people got frostbite.

Ataman Dutov, dressed only in an officer's overcoat, cheerfully bore all the hardships of the campaign. However, at the top of the pass he felt ill. The thin mountain air and difficult ascent up the mountain stirred up the ataman's old injuries. He lost consciousness and was lowered by Kirghiz on ropes from a high cliff to the bottom of the gorge. There, having regained consciousness, he was able to get on the horse given to him and continue his journey.

The descent from the pass lasted about 50 kilometres more, until the detachment came to the Chinese border along the Bortala River. The people arrived with almost nothing, without money, taking with them only the Tabynsk icon of the Mother of God, honoured by the Orenburg people, machine guns and rifles. After the arduous journey people did not recognise each other – everyone had lost weight, turned black, and had shrunken eyes. Near the border they managed to get some food; last year's "rags" were found for the horses. There was a forest, and it was possible to make a fire.

After descending from the pass the detachment camped along the Bortala River, not far from the Chinese place of Xiaoyingpanzhen (Zhampani), about a month.

One day a rumour spread through the Sarts that the Soviets had granted an amnesty to all the Whites who had gone abroad. This rumour was soon confirmed. A district chief from Xiaoyingpanzhen arrived at the detachment and officially confirmed that he had received a communication from Soviet Russia to inform them about the amnesty for all the Whites in Xinjiang.

Many could not immediately decide how to proceed with the news. Some thought that everything was lost and further struggle was useless. Others, on the contrary, wished to remain faithful to the White ideal until the end. Taking into account these sentiments, Ataman Dutov issued an order to the detachment, which stated:

There will be no obstacles on my part for whoever wishes to return to the Motherland, since it is impossible to specify a time when it will be possible to return freely and with honour.

It might be possible to return in a year, perhaps in two years, or perhaps only in decades.

Those who are weak in spirit, who are tired physically and mentally, can sign the list for returning to the Motherland.

I consider it my duty to warn the officers of the detachment that no one should agitate "for" or "against" – everyone should decide his own fate. I promise nothing and I cannot promise anything if you stay here, as I have no means. Here every Cossack must get his own food by personal labour.

After the order was announced, a two-day deadline was given for enrolment. During that time 240 people signed up to return. Early in the morning of 6 May 1920 the whole detachment lined up to see off the fellow Cossacks who were parting.

They held a prayer service in front of the miracle-working icon of the Tabynsk Mother of God. The ataman, saying goodbye to those leaving, gave them advice:

When returning to the homeland, do not be traitors. Do not betray your brothers for the sake of your own well-being.

When saying goodbye, those leaving and those remaining hugged each other – each of them thought that this farewell would be the last and that they would never see each other again. Both



sides had tears running down their cheeks. It was hard to part with their comrades in arms, with whom more than once they shared the risk of death on the field of battle.

Leaving the camp on the Bartalo River, Ataman Dutov and the detachment moved to the town of Shuiding (Suidin), where they were interned by the Chinese authorities.

Counting his personal escort and the independent *sotnia* at his disposal, about 600 people went with Dutov. Later some 500 more Orenburg Cossacks and some other small groups came to him from Ataman Annenkov. In total up to 1,600 men were grouped around Dutov by 1921, interned both in the town of Shuiding itself and in two Chinese villages nearby – Mazha (Mazar) and Qingshuihezhen [?] (Chempantszy), north-west of Ghulja (Kuldzha).

Somewhat strengthened by the increase in his forces, on 12 August 1920 Dutov gave an order in which he declared that he was assuming his former rights as commander of the Independent Orenburg Army. This effort to unite all the Orenburg military units interned in Xinjiang under his banner, inspired great fear in the Russian Bolsheviks, and they decided to get rid of their implacable old foe by sending a hired assassin.

Before even a complete year had passed since Dutov had crossed the frontier, a Muslim personally known to him, Chanushev, came to Shuiding, saying that he had brought a package from Russia. Trusting him, Dutov went out to meet him. Chanushev bent down, as if taking out the package from behind his boot but, instead took out a revolver and fired two shots at Dutov at point-blank range. His next shots seriously wounded an orderly and a Cossack sentry standing near the ataman. He then fled and disappeared.

At 8 a.m. on 7 February 1921 Dutov died of his wounds. The next day the orderly, Lopatin, and sentry, Maslov, also died. So in a distant foreign land the malice and hatred of Russia's enemies caught up with one of its best sons.

After the death of the ataman, Colonel Gerbov took command of his detachment in Shuiding, Mazha and Qingshuihezhen. The detachment received monetary aid from Ataman Semënov, which somewhat alleviated its difficult financial situation. During 1921 the detachment gradually drifted apart, but its military organisation was maintained until the end of that year, then in 1922 the detachment dispersed completely. The majority of its officers, soldiers and Cossacks went to the Far East, with a minority settling in various large trading cities in Xinjiang.

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At the beginning of 1920 the detachment under Ataman Annenkov, under pressure from the Reds, climbed into mountain strongholds in the Alatau Range. After four months of sitting in this "Eagle's Nest" they crossed the Russian-Chinese border in the area of the Chinese city of Ghulja on 26 May and set up a camp on the Bartalo River, which the *Annenkovtsy* called "Merry".

While he was still sitting in the "Eagle's Nest" Ataman Annenkov had disbanded a significant part of his detachment, giving the right to return home to all who wished to do so. The Orenburg Cossacks, who formed a special regiment in the detachment, left him for Ataman Dutov. This meant Annenkov crossed the Chinese frontier with a comparatively small detachment. These were people who chose for themselves all the difficulties of wandering in a foreign land rather than become slaves to a foreign power in their native country.

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On 30 November 1919, the Red troops moving along the Altai railway had entered the city of Semey, threatening an encirclement of the White troops of the Semirechensk Front, who were under the overall command of Ataman Annenkov.



To assist the regular Red troops that entered the Altai region, three Red partisan peasant armies, with a total strength of some 120,000 men, under the overall command of a certain Mamontov also operated there. Those Red partisans managed to occupy some prominent cities of the Siberian Altai, such as Barnaul, Kamen-na-Obi, etc., even before the Soviet troops approached during the period of devastation. Those White troops in the Altai who did not want to surrender to the mercy of the Red partisans or the Soviet units had to retreat partly to the north, to the Siberian railway, and partly to the south, to the Mongolian border.

The peasants of the Semey – Oskemen (Ust'-Kamenogorsk) area, fired up by Red partisans, began to settle scores with those Cossacks of the Siberian Host who had remained on their lands – burning down entire villages and killing old men and children, who were now the only inhabitants of the villages. Those who could fled, in fear for their lives, to Mongolia.

The town of Biysk, which stands off the Altai railway, being connected to it by a separate branch line, was left by the Whites on 26 November. The White troops under the command of Captain Satunin started their retreat from there deep into the Altai Mountains, along the *Chuysky Trakt*, towards the Mongolian border. On 7 December the column of retreating White troops fought Red partisans near the village of Shebalino. The Reds tried to cut off the White retreat, but failed.

There was no order among the retreating troops. Thanks to the lack of food for the men and forage for the horses, there were cases of riots and some White units switched to the enemy side. During one such revolt Satunin was killed, and command passed to a sailor, Captain Elachich. The latter was replaced at the end of January 1921 by Cossack Captain Kaigorodov, a native of the Altai, who had strong ties with the *inorodtsy* and knew the local area well.

In the mountains of the Altai the White detachments managed to hold out until the spring of 1921. Under pressure from the Reds, in April of that year some units of the Altai detachment moved to Mongolia straight over the mountains, overcoming the very difficult passes and having no food sources on the way. Other units retreated directly along the *Chuysky Trakt*, but were cut off by the Reds and could not get through to the border.

Only about 1,000 people made it to Mongolia from the area of Kosh Agach, most of whom soon returned under the influence of Bolshevik agitation.

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The withdrawal of Kolchak's armies along the Siberian railway has already become firmly known in the historical literature under the name of the Ice March and the retreat of the Southern Army is called the Hunger March, but the heroic withdrawal of the Ural Cossacks forces, after fighting the Bolsheviks for more than two years, was a real road of death.

When the Siberian front collapsed and the Ural Host rolled southwards to the city of Atyrau (Gur'ev) on the Caspian Sea, pressed by the Bolsheviks, a nightmarish situation was created in the full sense of the word. A continuation of the struggle was out of the question.

The retreating, devastated army found itself in a sparsely populated area, with little bread or forage. As well as refugees gathered from the whole Ural region there were remnants of some disorganised Orenburg Army units, further complicating and worsening the situation. Overcrowding and malnutrition caused a terrible outbreak of typhus of all kinds: the sick were everywhere.

F. Filimonov, a *Uraltsy*, tells us that only a few hundred soldiers were left in the combat units.

The rest were sick and travelled on carts, gradually dying. Some units completely ceased to exist, every man dead from fighting at the front or from typhus. On top of the misfortune, the Kirghiz Alash-Orda Regiment, which was performing reconnaissance work for the Iletsk Corps, betrayed



the *Uraltsy*. Having conspired with the Bolsheviks, the Kirghiz captured and slaughtered the corps headquarters in Kyzyl-Kug, as well as the headquarters of the 4th and 5th Divisions in a sudden treacherous night attack. In the massacre the corps commander and his chief of staff, two division commanders and all the officers who had been in the ranks were killed.

The 6th Division and Pozdnyakov's detachment decided to fight their way through the Bukeev steppe to the Volga, in the hope of linking with units of General Denikin's Volunteer Army. But all those who chose that route perished under the blows of the Red cavalry fiercely pursuing them.

In the town of Atyrau itself a revolt prepared by the Bolsheviks was brewing.

There were only two options: either surrender to the mercy of the victor, or head south to the Transcaspian desert along the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea, with no supplies and with no hope of getting any on the way.

On 1 January 1920, in the village of Sarayshyk, the ataman of the Ural Cossacks, General Tolstov, convened a military council. It was decided to go south along the sea to Persia or to the British in Mesopotamia. The first goal was to reach Fort Shevchenko (Fort Aleksandrovsk).

As it is known, the whole north-eastern coast of the Caspian Sea is an almost completely dead desert – forestless and waterless, partly sandy, partly stony and completely deserted in winter. It was into this dead desert that the *Uraltsy* set off. It was no longer an army, just refugees, in a line of wagons tens of kilometres long. The carts were full of the sick and wounded. The cold weather came, which sometimes reached -30° .

The snow storms and winds, in the absence of warm clothes, finally exhausted those marching. The number of carts decreased as they were burnt to for warmth. Everything wooden was burnt, including down to rifle stocks.

The wounded and sick were sometimes wrapped in felt and dragged on camels. After each night's stop the corpses of the dead were left where they were, as no-one had the strength to bury them. Sometimes whole groups, having stopped for a rest, did not rise again, trapped by a snowstorm, put to sleep forever by the frost. Colonel Semënov's entire detachment perished in this way.

People died of cold. Animals also froze. Most of the detachments had food supplies only sufficient for half the journey, with the most minimal portions. They had to eat camels, often raw, as there was nothing to cook the meat on – there were no fires. Very few of the many horses that left Atyrau, reached the fort, the rest dying on the way.

The nearly 1,200 kilometres was covered in 57 days. Out of the 12,000 people who had set out on the road of death from the host lands, less than 3,000 people, mostly frostbitten, reached the fort. But even there new misfortune awaited: having reached the fort, the Bolsheviks captured most of the exhausted and broken people.¹

Only a small detachment of the *Uraltsy* – 214 people, with women and children – moved further into the depths Transcaspian deserts on 4 April 1920. Led by General Tolstov, they fought off the Kirghiz and Turkmens who raided them. At the beginning of June Tolstov's party made it to Persia, and from there went to Mesopotamia, then dispersed around the world. Some of the Cossacks settled in France, near Paris, and some in distant Australia.

¹ The hope had been to get ships from the White navy and sail from the fort, but the Red Caspian flotilla got there first and the few remaining White vessels were reluctant to take them on.



Chapter III – in Chita

Having made the Ice March across Siberia, the *Kappelevtsy* arrived in Chita in the spring of 1920 numbering about 15,000 men. At that time there were still Japanese troops in Transbaikalia, supporting Ataman Semënov, to whom Admiral Kolchak had ceded full authority in the Russian Far East in a decree of 4 January 1920.

In fact the ataman's power in the spring of that year extended to only a few districts of Transbaikalia. The region was turbulent, with Red partisan detachments operating in different parts, and Ataman Semënov's own armed forces being unreliable. Some of his closest associates did whatever they wanted, regardless of what the ataman said. One such was Baron Ungern, commander of the Asiatic Horse Division, which was stationed in Dauriya on the Transbaikal Railway.

The *Semënovtsy* and *Kappelevtsy* were now subordinated to General Voytsekhovskiy, under the final control of Semënov. This method in practice gave rise to many misunderstandings, as a result of which Voytsekhovskiy left his post in April 1920. His place was taken by General Lokhvitskiy, who was later replaced by General Verzhbitskiy, but the situation did not change for the better.

Kappel's men recovered a little, rested and were reclothed in the new place, but the recovery period was not to last very long. In April they were moved to the front in the Sretensk – Nerchinsk area. There the *Kappelevtsy* showed that under such conditions they could still give examples of brilliant action in combat.

In the first half of July the Japanese announced that they were going to evacuate Transbaikalia. At that time there were already talk about the formation of a buffer [Soviet] Far Eastern Republic. The Japanese evacuation was scheduled for August. A meeting of the military commanders of White Transbaikalia concluded that to keep Chita and all eastern Transbaikalia with the borders that existed with the Japanese was impossible, as it would require a huge number of troops. Therefore it was decided to concentrate the main bulk of the troops behind the Onon River, based on Manzhouli (Manchuria Station), from where Ataman Semënov had begun his anti-Bolshevik movement in the Far East.

In mid-October 1920, Baron Ungern's Asiatic Division left its cherished base at Dauriya, on the Transbaikal railway, and moved in march order to Khalkhgol (Khalkha), in Outer Mongolia. About the same time the Reds began a decisive offensive and on 19 October they captured the station at Karymskoe, thus separating Chita from its rear.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Far Eastern Army, Ataman Semënov, and the Army commander, General Verzhbitskiy, were cut off in Chita with some of their headquarters. The commanders of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Corps, who were with their troops along the line of the Transbaikal railway, each independently began to take measures to protect their area. Overall leadership was lost.

Ataman Semënov left Chita by plane, and General Verzhbitskiy and his staff joined the main column of the Chita Forces Group, setting out into the steppes of Transbaikalia to join the rest of the army through the town of Aksha.

The armoured trains in Chita were burned, and many trains were abandoned along the railway. The army's supplies were also badly damaged.

The Ufa Group of Kappel's troops, under General Bangerskiy, left Chita to the east by railway, but could only reach Darasun railway station, from where they left their wagons and set out on foot in order to connect with the other units of the Far Eastern Army. After several marches the troops reached the Buryat steppes and by 30 October the Onon River. Here the *Ufimtsy* were given the



task of guarding the crossings of the Onon. Having established communication with Borzya station, they occupied the village of Chindant.

The Reds, in order to prevent the free withdrawal of the Chita forces group, who had left Chita southwards in march order under the command of General Verzhbitskiy, sent their cavalry to the south of the railway, and this cavalry followed General Bangerskiy. This pursuit resulted in fighting at the crossing of the Onon River. The Reds succeeded in occupying Tsasuchey, but they were repulsed from Chindant with heavy losses.

One of the participants of the battle at Chindant, an officer of the *Kappelevtsy* retreating from Transbaikalia, P. A. Savintsev, wrote in his diary:

On the night 9 November I was at the outpost. I was replaced at about eleven o'clock, returned to the hut and lay down, intending to sleep for an hour and a half and then go back to the outpost. I just had time to fall asleep on the floor among the others, who were sleeping in a pile, when the noise of people jumping up quickly from their beds made me jump up too.

Before going to bed I had taken off my overcoat and my boots and while I was dressing there was no one left in the hut. From the street came indiscriminate firing and the peculiar noise of growing panic.

I rushed out into the street. There was no one around the house. I could hear shooting from all sides, and in the darkness of the winter night it was impossible to work out where the Reds were. It was obvious, though, that the Reds had somehow broken into the village. I rushed to the outskirts, where our outpost was. I found the outpost in its place: it was still quiet on that side.

Soon the regimental commander arrived with his staff and ordered us to withdraw towards Borzya. The officer company also arrived.

Having raced out of the huts, the officers had had time to form up and were already in line when they met the Reds who had broken into the village. Shooting in volleys, the company withdrew behind the village.

Half a kilometre from the village we laid down and, under incessant rifle and machine-gun fire, lay in the snow until morning. Fortunately for us the night was comparatively warm. We concealed our whereabouts and did not fire back, but while the fire from the Reds was blind it still managed to knock out ten men from the officer company – among those killed was Lieutenant Shchekalev.

At dawn our artillery began to bombard Chindant, and at about eight o'clock a mounted group appeared from behind a hill, two kilometres to our right. It was not marching towards us but into the rear of the Reds, in the direction from where the Reds had come. This manoeuvre by the Votkinsk horse battery, as it later turned out, decided the fate of the Reds who had settled in Chindant.

Seeing the threat to their rear, they began to withdraw from the village. Our chains rose and rushed to attack. The Reds raced to escape. And the Votkinsk battery, which was in line with the Reds, crushed them with devastating flank fire.

And so we chased the Reds across the open ground to the hills, a distance of about seven kilometres. Pakulov's detachment, three thousand strong, was smashed to pieces. The whole route was strewn with Reds, killed and wounded. The victors numbered in their ranks some thousand riflemen, including the sick and wounded.



As it turned out, the Reds had silently removed one of our outposts and burst into the village quite unexpectedly. During the commotion they had captured six of our officers and several soldiers, who they took away with them.

Among the killed and wounded Red Army soldiers were many Chinese.

General Petrov says in his book:

The presence of the Reds in Tsasuchey could have complicated the exit of General Verzhbitskiy's column, which is why on 5 and 6 November General Bangerskiy's units, with the addition of the *Votkintsy*, undertook a counterattack.

The Reds were pushed out and, having suffered greatly, withdrew a long distance back, as there were no settlements within 40 or 50 kilometres. But the temporary occupation of Tsasuchey by the Reds had an effect – General Verzhbitskiy's column, heading from Ust'-Il' down the right bank of the Onon, received information about the presence of the Reds at Tsasuchey, and therefore the cavalry and the remnants of the Manchurian Division, which followed in the vanguard, were sent along the Mongolian border directly to Dauriya.

That passage – through the totally unpopulated terrain, in frost and blizzards – put out of action the remnants of the Manchurian Division, and it arrived in Dauriya on 7 and 8 November with a large number of frostbitten men.

On 6 November General Verzhbitskiy arrived at Borzya station and ordered that he would take command of the Far Eastern Army.

On 7 November the Reds launched an attack on the Borzya area from the north and west with considerable forces. Red cavalry appeared in the area of Tsagan-Olui. From 9 to 13 November battles were fought near Borzya itself, with the Reds repeatedly breaking into the village. During the same days they occupied Tsagan-Olui and some other points in the rear of the Borzya group. Two attempts to dislodge the Reds from Tsagan-Olui were unsuccessful, as they were carried out by small forces.

On 13 November the White command decided to leave Borzya. Some of the 3rd Corps began to withdraw to Dauriya station, and the 2nd Corps to move to Bilituy (Sharasun) and Matsievskaya stations.

For the date of 15 November Savintsev, who we have heard from before, wrote in his diary:

We left Chindant on the 13th, in the evening. During the night we travelled 35 kilometres to Kharanor station. We stayed a day in Kharanor settlement, and that morning, having loaded into carts, we arrived at Dauriya station. We settled down in the barracks.

It was evening, not yet dark, and in the gloom we could see everyone lying on the bunks in the officer company's second platoon's room.

After the long crossings, with overnight stays out in the open, or in huts packed to capacity, it felt cozy in the barracks room.

Dinner was finished half an hour ago. It was too early to sleep, and we didn't want to talk about anything in the evening hour – but everyone still felt the need to somehow express the calm, somewhat sad mood.

And that need was expressed in a song.



It started quietly, as if reluctantly. One voice was joined by another, a third. Even those without good voices sang, and the beautiful, unguided, but still harmonious singing shook the whole barracks.

It is impossible to express in words the beauty of a chorus sung by people who were used to looking into the eyes of death – people who had become calloused in a dehumanising war and suddenly, at such a moment away from the battle and everyday life of marching, discovering the depth of their souls.

The experience gave those songs their own, inimitable nuance. This was not a raucous song, not a dance song, but a gentle and sad song of Russia.

It is a quiet, sad tune of people resting at the moment, but knowing that there were likely still many hardships, horrors and serious, often barren, trials ahead. It came from the memories, hopes and sometimes tears of people with mangled youths, with troubled souls, hidden somewhere deep inside them and now suddenly showing their beauty.

The soul came out of its hiding place and at that moment was holy.

They sang a Siberian song – the song of the convicts. And a vision of one of our recent marches came involuntarily to my eyes.

It was a passage of 70 kilometres. There was a long black ribbon of people, limping on both legs. A cold wind blew at the back of the neck, penetrating to the bones. Turn into it and your face froze. My boots were soaked with snow, and the damp cold from my feet was an intrusive and unpleasant sensation creeping into my brain. You wanted to lie down on the snow and fall asleep with the sleep of an exhausted man. But you stopped only for a minute, because you felt your cold feet and you had to go on. You slept on the move, in your sleep you poke at the backs of those ahead of you, but you go – you can't not go.

We'd walked a lot. We could feel it in our legs: aching with pain. A bruised foot made you do different twists and turns in order to tread painlessly. And ahead, they said, was thirty kilometres more.

A halt was expected. We looked ahead with hope to see the desired fires.

There, at last, a light flashed ahead. We were getting stronger. It was soon now! We could rest by the fires. The flame was getting closer, and there we were at the fire. But it was some cavalymen, who had lagged behind the units ahead, who were warming themselves by a burning sled someone had discarded. And the camp was still further away.

We went further and reached the camping place.

Buryat *ulus*. Two or three yurts. And there were about two thousand of us.

We made dozens of fires, and at each of them there was a circle of people warming themselves. They dried their feet, boiled water and cooked meat. There had been no bread for a long time, and we lived only on meat.

From afar it looked like a huge nomad column, who had no time to put up winter yurts, so was sleeping under the open sky. But these were not nomads, accustomed to the steppes. These were people bonded by something more valuable than the life on the road. They were leaving something. They did not even know where they would eventually end up, what would happen to them at the next camp – or even whether



they would reach the next camp. Some of them probably wouldn't even make it; they'd collapse on the road and fall asleep. Or be killed by a bullet.

And for those who had endured the agony of that campaign, for the survivors, there were many, many more such fires ahead.



Chapter IV – the collapse of the White Far East

If the fall of White power in the cities of western and central Siberia, as well as the withdrawal of the White armies from there, was accompanied by countless tragic episodes, the fall of White power in the Far East, despite the presence of the Japanese, was marked by nightmarish events, testifying that there was no limit to the cruelty of the Reds.

On 31 January 1920 Vladivostok fell. Red partisans led by a certain Shevchenko descended from the hills under the neutrality of the Japanese, and a new socialist-communist government was formed. The other big cities of the Far East – Blagoveshchensk, Khabarovsk, Ussuriysk (Nikol'sk-Ussuriysk) – did not hold out for long after the fall of Vladivostok.

The White soldiers in those cities scattered. Some officers crossed the border and found refuge in Manchuria, others stayed in their homes, hoping for Japanese patronage. Ataman Kalmykov of the Ussuri Cossack Host crossed into Manchuria, but was arrested there and interned in Jilin (Girin). He was later killed by the Chinese, allegedly while trying to escape.

The situation of the Whites in the towns and localities far from the Chinese border was tragic. In particular there was a bloodbath in Nikolaevsk-na-Amur, a major centre of the Russian Far Eastern fishing industry, which was besieged and taken on 28 February 1920 by Red partisans, led by Tryapitsyn.

That city, the capital of the Sakhalin region, was governed in the name of the Russian Socialist Soviet Federative Republic² for three months, from 1 March to 2 June 1920. During that time the representatives of the Soviet power in the region shot, stabbed, slaughtered, drowned and shot all the officers of the city garrison, with the exception of one Lieutenant-Colonel Grigor'ev, who escaped by chance – along with a huge part of the *intelligentsia*, many peasants and workers, old men, women and children. They destroyed without exception the whole Japanese settlement, including the Japanese consul and expeditionary detachment, then burned and destroyed the town. In all, more than 6,000 people died in the Nikolaevsk massacre at the hands of the representatives of Leninist Socialism.³

Elsewhere in the Sakhalin region, Red partisans wiped out a small White detachment under Colonel Vitz, who had surrendered to the mercy of the victors at De-Kastri. The De-Kastri tragedy took place on 11 March 1920.

Vitz, not wishing to bear the shame of surrendering to the Reds, had committed suicide. The old colonel wrote in his suicide letter to the lighthouse keeper, Captain Ovodov:

Let them know and dare not distort the cause of my death. I am killing myself not because of cowardice or for any fault. No! I am pure and right in all regards, firm and strong in spirit, but I can no longer watch the death of my dear Motherland, Holy Russia.

Having written farewell letters to relatives and acquaintances, the colonel spread a mattress on the platform near the lighthouse, knelt on it, prayed to God and shot himself. His body was committed to the ground, but the Red partisans who occupied De-Kastri Bay dug it up and threw it from the cliff onto the rocks, ordering the lighthouse keepers not to bury it.

Predatory animals tore the corpse to shreds. Later, in July 1920, the remains of Colonel Vitz were found by the crew of the steamer *Erivan*, put in a box and buried in the ground. A cross was placed

² That is, the Bolsheviks.

³ This is, if anything, an understatement. It is possible that half the local population was killed.



over the grave with the inscription: "This is how one of many Russian officers who died in the performance of their duty ended his life."

About the same time as Colonel Vitz was ending his life, a party of over 100 Russian officers arrested by the Bolsheviks were brutally slaughtered by the Red executioners on the Khor River, in the Primor'e region.

So it was everywhere to followers of the White idea – on the Turgay steppes, on the ice of the River Kan, in the deserts of Transcaspia, inside city walls – with the Red executioners. Victims, victims without end.

In the north of Siberia, with its remote towns, so far from the railway, the White garrisons were small. When it became inevitable that Admiral Kolchak would fall, those towns passed easily over to the new power and did not resist the Red forces. Sometimes it happened that White officers and soldiers, those that were irreconcilable, formed small armed groups and went into the *taiga*, becoming White partisans.

Two years earlier, in the autumn and winter of 1918, groups of Bolsheviks who had fled the cities from the vengeance of the Whites had hidden in the same way in the Siberian *taiga*. Both sets of unwilling forest vagabonds had to undergo many misadventures. When the Red commissars fled into the forests they attracted the attention of the *taiga* hunters, for the fugitives often had considerable sums of money with them. A manhunt began – it was much more profitable to kill a man than to shoot a sable.

To ambush and shoot a group of Whites was not such a profitable trade but, if necessary, rifles, fur coats and some belongings could be taken from those killed. In the *taiga* even this was worthwhile.

It was difficult, indeed almost impossible, to escape from the north of Siberia.

My cousin, N. P. Sherlaimov, was an assistant to the regional commissar of the Yakutsk region during the Siberian government and under Admiral Kolchak – that is he was roughly filling the duties of the vice-governor of the region. After the fall of the White power in Yakutsk he fled during the winter up the Aldan River with the intention of reaching the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. He was not far from his goal when he met a gang of Bolshevik labourers, who had made their way from the Okhotsk goldfields to Yakutsk, and was mercilessly killed by them. He was still a very young man, not long out of university.

The labourers themselves (there were several dozen of them) suffered a terrible time from hunger on the way, as they had only taken a limited supply of food, which was soon exhausted. Famished, they began to eat each other. When less than half of the labourers were left, they came upon a White party wandering in the *taiga*. The Whites, having learnt that they were Bolsheviks, who also had prepared human meat as food, became indescribably furious and killed every last one of the cannibals.

Many such tragedies played out in that cruel time in the Siberian *taiga*, but only a few of them will probably ever be told to the world.

* * * * *

The actions of the Communists in the north of Siberia, particularly in the Yakutsk region, soon aroused the murmurings of the local population, foreign and Russian.

The year 1921 passed restlessly in the region. In the winter of 1921/22 White insurgent partisan demonstrations against the Bolsheviks began there. A partisan commander, Cornet Korobeynikov, came to the fore.



The Irkutsk Bolsheviks sent a partisan detachment under Kalandarishvili to the Yakutsk region for punitive purposes. That detachment had originally been dispersed in 1918 in the Tunkinsky district, but reformed in 1920 and participated with other Red partisan detachments in the attack on Chita.

However Kalandarishvili's detachment was to have no luck: moving on the ice of the Lena River, it was ambushed and almost completely destroyed by the skilful shooting of Yakut hunters. Kalandarishvili himself was killed. It seems that only two or three people survived from the whole detachment

By the summer of 1922 the *Belopovstantsy*⁴ had cleared almost the whole region of Bolsheviks, but they could not take Yakutsk, which they kept under siege. The Irkutsk authorities sent fresh military forces to the region to eliminate the White rebel movement there. A detachment from Vladivostok under General Pepelyaev landed in September on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk to help the rebels, but it was already too late.

* * * * *

During the retreat of the Southern Army through the steppe regions of Western Siberia, a significant portion of it scattered inside the country. Separate small detachments under the command of desperate officers, not wishing to surrender to the mercy of the Reds, wandered through the Turgay and Akmola provinces and the adjoining districts of Orenburg province.

Those detachments raided small towns and villages, smashed Soviet institutions and killed Communists. The local population sometimes helped them in any way they could. The anti-Bolshevik partisan detachment under the leadership of General Belov, former commander of the Southern Army, became particularly famous in the area.

At the end of January 1921, a peasant uprising against the Bolsheviks in Western Siberia broke out with spontaneous force, covering almost the entire Tobol province and some of Tomsk province and the Akmola region, spreading to the neighbouring districts of the Urals. The uprising was born out of the peasants' acute dissatisfaction with the new Soviet order.

On almost on the same day, as if by agreement, it spontaneously began across the vast territory of Tobol province. In every village and hamlet the peasants began to beat up the Communists. They killed their wives, children, relatives – chopping them with axes, cutting off their hands and feet, opening their stomachs. The peasants were especially cruel to the Soviet officials in charge of food requisitioning. The leaders of the rebels were *frontoviki*.⁵ The rebels armed themselves with whatever they could: hunting rifles, spades, axes and pitchforks.

The rebels captured Tobol, from where the Communists fled to the neighbouring town of Ayet (Taranovskoe). A Provisional Siberian Government was formed in Tobol, which managed to exist for about three months. A couple of other cities were also captured: Ishim, in Tobol province, and Petropavl in the Akmola region, where the rebel peasants joined up with Siberian Cossacks.

The Reds suppressed the rebellion by May, with exceptional cruelty. Only a few rebel detachments managed to cross the Steppe region and reach the Chinese border.

⁴ Literally White partisans.

⁵ Former front-line soldiers.



Chapter V – Baron Ungern takes Mongolia

It is thought that just before the Russian Revolution there were at least 15,000 Russians in Outer Mongolia. They were merchants, who formed colonies in Mongolia's cities and larger trading places, owners of farmsteads who extended their trade deep into the Mongolian nomad camps, and peasants beginning to introduce an agricultural culture into the region. Many Russian settlements grew in the so-called Uryankhai region. The entirely Russian town of Kyzyl (Belotsarsk) appeared.⁶

With the onset of the revolution, the number of Russians in Mongolia began to increase with refugees trying to escape the revolutionary storms and squalls. Among them were not only Russians, but also Buryats, Kirghiz and others. Leaving turbulent Transbaikalia – where in 1918 Ataman Semënov started his armed struggle against the Bolsheviks – some Buryats left for Mongolia in large groups, taking all their property.

While the number of Russians in Mongolia increased, Russian influence declined, both economically and politically, making way for a growing Chinese domination. By the autumn of 1919 the Chinese had taken a number of decisive measures to eliminate the autonomous position of Outer Mongolia and had sent their troops into the area. By taking such vigorous action, the Chinese sought to paralyse Ataman Semënov's pan-Mongolian aspirations.

Ataman Semënov and his Buryat supporters wanted to form a Great Mongolian state, which would include all those areas of China and Russia where the population spoke Mongolian dialects. That state was proposed to include Inner and Outer Mongolia, Barga⁷ and a part of Russian Transbaikalia. An interim government of the future Mongolian state was formed at Dauriya on the Transbaikal railway, where Baron Ungern resided. This government was headed by the Neise Gegen,⁸ the living god of one of the monasteries of Inner Mongolia. It also included several prominent Russian Buryats. That government had as its armed forces Ataman Semënov's so-called Asiatic Horse Division, consisting of three mounted regiments – one formed from Kharchin Mongols and two from Barga Mongols and Buryats. All three regiments were under the command of Russian officers, headed by Baron Ungern, who did not hide his intention to move to the capital of Outer Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar (Urga)⁹, which was planned to be the capital of the new state.

The Kharchins had joined Ataman Semënov's detachment back in 1918, when his detachment was being formed at Hulunbuir (Hailar) and Manzhouli stations on the Chinese Eastern Railway. They were the remnants of the Kharchin rebels who had revolted against the Chinese in one of the districts of Inner Mongolia.

Defeated by the Chinese soldiers, the Kharchin rebels had been pushed back into the interior of Mongolia, where they became roving bandits. Having got in touch with Ataman Semënov's detachment in Barga, several hundred Kharchins went into his service and formed the 3rd Khamar Regiment of Baron Ungern's division. In 1918 they fought the Bolsheviks along the line of the

⁶ Note that this is in modern Russia.

The surrounding area had been in (Chinese ruled) Mongolia until the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, when it declared its independence as the Uryankhai Republic. That republic soon after became a Russian protectorate. The Reds claimed it in 1918 for Soviet Russia, and with the collapse of Kolchak it was taken by Red forces. When the Mongolian Revolution occurred in 1921 the Mongolians did not claim it and it became the Tannu Tuva People's Republic of the USSR. The area is largely that of the modern Tuvan Autonomous Oblast.

⁷ The Barga Mongols, closely related to the Buryats, lived at the easternmost tip of Mongolia and into China. Their area in China is called the Barag Banners.

⁸ In various spellings, such as Neichi Gegeen etc. Formally he was Nichi Toin Bogd Mendbaiar of the Mergen Monastery, Urad Banner area.

⁹ The city was actually known as Khüree or Niislel Khüree by the Mongolians at the time.



Transbaikal railway and showed dashing fighting qualities. Their leader was a certain Fushenga, who kept his influence among his Kharchins even after they entered into White Russian service.

The Russians, fearing his growing influence and trying to get rid of a second source of power, accused Fushenga of being bribed by the Chinese – who it was alleged had persuaded him to return to Inner Mongolia – and plotted to arrest the Kharchin leader. Upon learning of this, Fushenga decided to go on the offensive himself, slaughtering all the Russian officers in the division.

One summer day in 1919, Fushenga revolted and a brutal battle broke out at Dauriya station, lasting almost a whole day. Russian officers and soldiers, along with Buryat Cossacks, suppressed the Kharchin rebellion. The Mongols surrendered and laid down their arms. Fushenga was killed by a shell that hit the house he was in.

After some time, however, the Kharchins were again formed into a regiment, which was later sent to Ulan-Ude (Verkhneudinsk) in order to launch an attack on Ulaanbaatar from there.

It may be said that in the years immediately before 1920 the whole of Mongolia, with the exception of the Uryankhai region, lived more or less peacefully, without much inconvenience from their troublesome neighbours of revolutionary Russia and China. In the summer of 1918, an anarchist-Bolshevik cavalry detachment of the Georgian Kalandarishvili left Transbaikalia for Mongolia, fleeing from White Russian troops and the Czechoslovaks. But that detachment travelled only along the northern edge of Mongolia, from west to east, then entered the southern Irkutsk province, in the Tunkinsky region, where it dispersed. Therefore it did not have much effect on Mongolia.

However, 1920 and 1921 brought many violent events to Mongolia, which shook the peaceful life of the Mongols themselves, as well as of the Russians and Chinese who lived there. During these two years White Russians invaded Mongolia, expelling the Chinese troops and restoring its independence. But then they themselves were pushed out by Red forces coming from Soviet Russia.

At the beginning of 1920 an episode played out in the territory of the neighbouring Transbaikalia, which ricocheted back on the situation of the Russian colonists in northern Mongolia.

The “Savage¹⁰ Brigade” of Ataman Semënov, stationed in Ulan-Ude in January 1920, had sent a punitive expedition consisting of a Mongolian cavalry regiment, a Russian company and a battery deep into the Selenge region. The Mongolian regiment consisted mainly of Kharchin Mongols under the command of Russian officers. With the expedition was also the above-mentioned Neise Gegen.

This column of the Savage Brigade met a detachment of Reds near Lake Gusinoye and defeated it. Having learnt, however, that the Reds had concentrated considerable forces near Khyakhta¹¹ (Troitskosavsk), the column turned back. On its way back the Mongols suddenly surrounded the

¹⁰ There are various alternative translations, such as “Wild Brigade”. The term, *Dikaya*, had earlier been used for the Tsarist “Savage Division” formed from Chechens, Dagestanis, Ingush and other Caucasian mountain tribes. It was used in a sense as much positive as negative.

¹¹ There were two towns of this name. The Mongolian town of (Southern) Kyakhta was mostly centred on a Chinese trading post nearby called Maimaicheng (or Maimachen etc). Northern Khyakhta, just across the border into Russia, was normally called Troitskosavsk at the time. Confusingly soon after 1921 the Mongolian Kyakhta changed its name to Altanbulag, while the Russian town changed its name to Kyakhta – or Khyagt in the local Buryat version.

Normally a difference of a few kilometres for a town would not matter, but “Kyakhta” might be in Russia or in Mongolia. Serebrennikov was not particularly consistent in the text, which adds an extra layer of confusion.

I have used Altanbulag to refer to the Mongolian town and Khyagt to refer to the Russian one.



Russian company and battery and killed almost all the Russians with their brutal fire. Only about fifty men managed to get out of the ring of fire, who then went to Babushkin (Mysovsk) on Lake Baikal, where all but a few were captured by the Reds.

Having ambushed the Russians, as if avenging the death of Fushenga, the Kharchins moved into Mongolia. Having camped in Mongolian territory, 40 kilometres from Khyagt, their leader, Neise Gegen entered into negotiations with the commander of the Chinese garrison in Altanbulag concerning the return of the Kharchins to their homeland. The head of the garrison, not having sufficient forces to destroy the Kharchin detachment, willingly conducted negotiations and suggested, as a convenient place to conduct them, that the detachment go to Maimaicheng, a trading spot located near Altanbulag.

About a hundred Kharchins did not trust the Chinese and moved south-eastwards into Mongolia, intending to sneak back to their homeland, while the rest of them moved to Altanbulag. There, on the occasion of their arrival, the head of the garrison arranged a dinner for the commanding officers and a bath for the lower ranks. During the feast the dining room was surrounded by Chinese troops and all the Kharchins were arrested.

Neise Gegen and a dozen men of the command staff were shot, and the rest of the Mongols were transferred to Ulaanbaatar, where they were put to forced labour.

Those who escaped Chinese retribution, entered the Iro River valley and passed a number of Russian camps and small gold mines. All those farms and mines were completely plundered, and their Russian and Chinese inhabitants were not spared from abuse and torture. The Russians Rassokhin, Petrov and Lizoto particularly suffered – the Mongolian bandits burning them with a hot iron and stringing them on a rack, crippling them for life.

* * * * *

At that difficult time, as Admiral Kolchak lost power in Siberia, White fugitives began to drift into Mongolia in groups and singles, often armed. These were troubling times for Mongolia.

The Uryankhai region, bordering the Yenisei and some of Irkutsk provinces of Siberia, situated between the Sayan Mountains in the north and the Tannu-Ola Range in the south, had long attracted Russian prospectors. Even before the revolution, Russian resettlement in Uryankhai began in significant numbers, which naturally caused discontent among the locals, the Soyots, a Turkic-speaking people.

The revolutionary storms of Russia did not miss this distant region, despite it being largely unknown to the world. The Russian town of Kyzyl even formed and operated a Soviet of Workers' Deputies at the beginning of the revolution.

In the first half of 1918 the embittered Soyots rebelled against the Russians and massacred the outsiders. Where the Russians were caught unawares by the catastrophe, they had a very bad time: the Russians who fell into the hands of the Soyots were mercilessly killed. Sometimes their hands and feet were tied, and they were thrown into the rivers, sparing neither the old nor the young, neither children nor women. This massacre of the Russians is now forgotten, and few people know about it.

The anti-Bolshevik *coup d'état* in Siberia in the summer of 1918 quieted the Uryankhai. The region was for a while a refuge for the Red partisans of the Minusinsk region, who fled there from persecution by the Whites.

The Yenisei Cossacks intended to open resettlement in this region. A small group of Cossacks even formed in Uryankhai, calling themselves Uryankhai Cossacks and elected a Host ataman.



Reds and Whites appeared in the Russian population of the Uryankhai region. Almost all the so-called “mountaineers” – former convicts, labourers brought there under the Tsarist government to build the Usinsk highway – sided with the Reds. At the beginning of the revolution these forced labourers were released from work and from hard labour. Some of them went to Minusinsk, others settled in the Uryankhai along the Tannu-Ola ridge and were called the *Podkhrebetintsy*.¹²

With the fall of Admiral Kolchak’s power in Siberia, small parties of White fugitives began to sneak into Uryankhai, through the Minusinsk region. From Uryankhai they moved on to the Mongolian towns of Ulaangom (Ulanom) and Uliastai (Ulyasutai), or to Ulaanbaatar.

* * * * *

In the middle of October 1920 the Chinese authorities in Ulaanbaatar received information that an unknown detachment of Russians, Buryats and Mongols was moving from the east towards that city. On 23 October a more precise report was received that Baron Ungern’s detachment – for the first time the name of the detachment’s leader was given – was 120 kilometres away from, and moving towards, Ulaanbaatar.

The capital of Mongolia, which at this time had upwards of 12,000 Chinese soldiers, was declared under siege, and traffic in its streets was allowed only until 7 o’clock in the evening. An amnesty was granted to all imprisoned Chinese, who were subsequently mobilised. Requisitioning began of hay and horses from the Russians, which soon degenerated into simple robbery. The city began to look like a military camp. Mounted soldiers galloped frantically through the streets and cars with Chinese high ranking military officers rushed back and forth.

At dawn on 26 October, the peacefully sleeping inhabitants of Ulaanbaatar were awakened by the sound of artillery fire, which announced that the Chinese military frenzy was indeed justified.

In the neighbourhood of the Chinese suburb of Ulaanbaatar, the so-called Maimaicheng,¹³ the first battle between Baron Ungern’s small detachment of troops and the Chinese took place. The advance of the detachment was repulsed by the Chinese, and by evening the artillery and gunfire had subsided.

In his article “In Besieged Urga”, Sluchanyini recalled the battle of 26 October:

It seems that, for the first time in the existence of the ancient capital of Mongolia, shots from modern cannon were fired at it. It seemed that those reverberating sounds of the firing, and the shell bursts that followed them, announced to everyone that the era of quiet, peaceful, dull and monotonous life of the boundless spaces of Mongolia had irrevocably passed. Even here – in this seemingly deliberately created silence and serenity – the quiet existence of the tired and exhausted Russian emigrants was henceforth put to an end.

The revolution had also invaded the boundless Mongolian fields and hills, and with its roar had disturbed the solemn peace of the Mongolian nomads, the vast steppe spaces and the chains of hills.

Ungern’s troops stormed Ulaanbaatar again on 30 October and fought fiercely on the outskirts of the Mongol capital until 4 November, but were unable to overcome the resistance of the Chinese and withdrew to the east. The advanced units of the detachment stopped in Ubulun, four kilometres from Ulaanbaatar, and the main forces¹⁴ went to the Sechen Khan (Tsetsenkhan¹⁴) region,

¹² Effectively, “mountaineers”.

¹³ Confusingly, the exact same name as the similar Chinese trading colony near Kyakhta/Altanbulag. The name means a place to buy and sell. Like its namesake, it was detached from the main town proper.

¹⁴ Also spelled Setsen Khan *aimag*, which was the easternmost portion of Mongolia.



where Ungern agitated among the population for the release of the supreme head of Mongolia, the living god the Bogd Gegen,¹⁵ arrested by the Chinese, and for the expulsion of the invaders from Mongolia. Ungern's ideals were readily accepted by the Sechen Mongols, who began to supply his troops with food.

It is not known exactly how many soldiers were in Baron Ungern's Asiatic Horse Division when it launched its offensive on Ulaanbaatar. It is believed that there were around 400 Russians and 2,000 Asians of all kinds: Buryats, Mongols, Tatars, Kirghiz, Bashkirs, Chinese, as well as a small number of Japanese.

Quite a lot has been written about Baron Ungern's actions in his anti-Bolshevik struggle. His name has now passed into history, but it is mixed up with tall tales and various legends which makes it difficult to now sift one from the other. Perhaps poets in future years will use those legends as subjects for ballads about the "White Baron".

The biographical sketches of Ungern-Sternberg (his full surname) indicate that his ancestors were Baltic barons and that some of them had once been rather famous there.

He himself spent most of his military service in Siberia, Manchuria, Mongolia, and within Asia in general. Presumably this is how the Baron developed a certain Asian mindset and fatalism, a love and adherence to Asian exoticism and philosophy – and a belief that the light for the world will shine from Asia.

It seems that just before the great war of 1914 the Baron lived in Khovd (Kobdo), in western Mongolia, where he was attached as a supernumerary officer to the Russian Consul's escort. One of the Russian residents of Khovd at that time told my friend that Ungern kept largely to himself there, with no close acquaintances and was almost always alone. Sometimes, for no apparent reason, at any time of day or night, he would gather up the Cossacks and, with a whoop, would rush with them through the city out into somewhere on the steppe.

Was he going to chase wolves? You wouldn't understand. And then he came back, locked himself in his room and sat alone like an owl. But, God forbid, he didn't drink; he was always sober. He didn't like to talk; he kept quiet. There was something missing in him.

One of Baron Ungern's chiefs of staff related about him:

God knows when he rested and slept. During the day he was busy with different things, travelling around the workshops, watching the training and drilling of the Cossacks. And at night he rode round to all the sentries, trying to arrive at random at the most remote and distant ones. And then suddenly in the middle of the night he would demand a report on the most obscure matters. Then you did whatever you could! After all, he was crazy, and in the heat of the moment he would lose his head, and didn't understand anything.

The people around the Baron had every reason to think that he was not quite a normal man.

His love of solitude, his secretiveness, taciturn nature, the oddities like those mentioned above, sudden outbursts of reckless anger: all spoke to an unbalanced nature. The blood of his distant crusader knight ancestors flowed in him. He believed in the supernatural, as if he belonged to

¹⁵ And many similar variant spellings, including Boḡda Gegen, Bogd Geegen etc. Bogd means "holy".

Living from 1871 to 1924, he was the eighth of the Jebtsundampa incarnations – which made him the third most senior lama in Buddhism, after the Dalai and Panchen Lamas. The religious leader of Outer Mongolia, when Mongolia gained independence in 1911 he had become its monarch, under the title Bogd Khan (or Boḡda Khaḡan, etc). I shall refer to him as Bogd Khan only from the time he was reinstalled as monarch by Ungern.



bygone centuries. He was superstitious, always consulting with lamas, soothsayers and fortune-tellers, even having them with him in his campaigns during the Civil War. In friendly conversations he often mentioned his pirate ancestors.

The baron was a romantic type, living in the grip of abstract ideas. His dream was a fantasy to restore the fallen monarchies of the world: he wanted to return the Bogd Gegen to his royal throne in Mongolia, to restore the Qing dynasty in China, the Romanovs in Russia, the Hohenzollerns in Germany. In this he swam hopelessly against the tide. If he had come forward many years later, he would probably have had a better chance of implementing his political programme.

Ungern was a bitter enemy of communists and socialists and believed that the West – Europe – possessed by the madness of revolution and deep moral failing, was corrupted from top to bottom. Ungern always sounded angry when he used the words “Bolshevik” and “commissar” and they were usually accompanied by the word “hang”. For him the first of those two words contained in them the cause of all misfortunes and evils, and their destruction would bring peace and prosperity to the earth. The Baron dreamed that a new Attila would be born, who would declare the slogan “Asia for the Asians”, would gather up the Asiatic hordes and once more pass through Europe like God’s scourge – giving it reason and enlightenment. Presumably the Baron was intending himself to be this new Attila.

Ungern was cruel in his anti-Bolshevik struggle: many people were sent by him from this world to the next. From the words of those around him, we can conclude that he had no favourites and he dealt harshly with any he thought guilty. He did not care about material benefits for himself, had simple habits, and was extremely demanding in respect of discipline, not allowing the slightest deviation from it. But he was also excessively trusting, which was sometimes abused by his associates: there were cases when totally innocent people were put to death solely on the basis of an accusation.

Those who knew Baron Ungern noted his great personal courage and daring. He was not afraid, for example, to visit the besieged Ulaanbaatar, where the Chinese would have paid dearly for his head. It happened like this. One bright, sunny winter day the baron, dressed in his usual Mongolian garb – a cherry-red robe and white fur hat, with a whip in his hands, simply rode into Ulaanbaatar down the main road, at a medium gait. He visited the palace of the chief Chinese dignitary at Ulaanbaatar, Chen-I, then, passing the consular quarter, returned to his camp. On his way back, passing the prison, he noticed a Chinese sentry sleeping peacefully at his post. This breach of discipline angered the baron. He dismounted and gave the dozing sentry several lashes of his whip. Ungern explained in Chinese to the now awakened and terrified soldier that a sentry could not sleep on guard duty and that he, Baron Ungern, had punished him for that. Then he got back on his horse and rode calmly on.

The baron’s appearance in Ulaanbaatar created a colossal sensation among the population of the city, and the Chinese soldiers were plunged into fear and despondency, believing that supernatural forces stood behind him and aided him.

In general the baron knew how to overwhelm the psyche of the Chinese soldiers – thanks to that he finally managed to expel the 15,000 strong Chinese garrison from Ulaanbaatar, while only having a small military force and a meagre amount of military supplies. His forces were quite insufficient for a full military siege of the city, as it was scattered over quite a large area; but as Ungern approached Ulaanbaatar, fear and depression at his name caused confusion in the ranks of the Chinese soldiers. At night they looked with horror at the bonfires which Ungern’s Cossacks were lighting on the sacred mountain of Bogd Khan Uul, next to Ulaanbaatar. Who was at those fires? Was it just Ungern’s Cossacks, or were evil demons present among them, preparing troubles and misfortunes for the Chinese soldiers? The siege – remarkable in its way for the fact that he



could maintain it with such a small number of besiegers, but only by using psychology – ended victoriously for him by putting the depressed and confused Chinese defenders of Ulaanbaatar to flight. The “evil demons” worked for him then, but did not save him later, when his final hour came.

Almost at the very beginning of these events, a caravan of travellers approached Ulaanbaatar. It was a trade expedition of one of the largest Russian cooperative organisations, the so-called *Tsentrosoyuz*,¹⁶ which had a number of branches in Mongolia.

The caravan arrived in Ulaanbaatar from the Uryankhai region. Whether it was a real trade expedition, it is difficult to say. It is possible that they were just political fugitives from among the employees of the *Tsentrosoyuz* in the Minusinsk region of the Yenisei province of Siberia, who had decided to leave the Soviet paradise under the guise of an expedition. The members of the expedition were, with few exceptions, political figures of a leftist hue: Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats (Mensheviks). There were also people from outside the *Tsentrosoyuz* who had joined the caravan as companions. They were taken into custody by the Chinese in the former Russian barracks in the valley of the Tuul (Tola) River, not far from Ulaanbaatar. It was thought that the *Tsentrosoyuz* members must have with them large sums of silver and other valuables, and that circumstance tragically decided the fate of the unfortunate travellers.

At night Chinese soldiers from the barracks guards brutally killed all those who had arrived, sparing neither men nor women, and the latter were abused by the brutal soldiers before their death: more than twenty died.

Among the dead were: I. B. Babushkin, a SR *zemstvo* worker of revolutionary Perm, who had spent four years in France as a political emigrant before the Russian Revolution; Lt.-Col. Zhuravsky, who had served as a volunteer in the French army during the World War, and during the honeymoon months of the Russian Revolution was Kerensky’s secretary; his wife, P. M. Zhuravskaya; A. V. Zlatin, a former teacher of German in Perm; and the doctors Nikiforov, Rakhmanov, and Dobrokhotov.

Two of the Russians managed to escape from the barracks during the massacre and sneak into Ulaanbaatar. The Russian population of the city, having learnt about the terrible death of the *Tsentrosoyuz* expedition, was deeply shocked. No one was now sure for the safety of his own life. A gloomy mood took hold over everyone.

The dead were thrown into a field, where stray dogs began to devour their bodies. It was possible to persuade the Chinese to give permission to bury the remains of the unfortunate victims only with great difficulty.

The Russians had a bad time in besieged Ulaanbaatar, where the soldiers of General Xu Shuzheng, better known in the history of modern China under the nickname of “Little Xu”, quickly turned into fierce marauders.

These soldiers first displayed their looting tendencies on 29 October. In the early morning of that day, groups of mounted Chinese soldiers began galloping through the city and committing robberies, invading mainly Russian houses and flats. Under the pretext of searching they took away clothes, bedding, jewellery and so on. Searching people, they took away money, watches, rings, bracelets.

Resistance provoked a threat to use weapons. No sooner had one marauder left the house than others arrived.

The Chinese started forcing the Russian inhabitants in Ulaanbaatar out for forced labour – to bring food to the fighting positions and load hay onto wagons and deliver it. It was a dark day for

¹⁶ *Tsentro* for central and *soyuz* for alliance/union/league etc.



national and racial dignity when several dozen Russians, most of them from intellectual trades, were exhausted loading hay under the guard of Chinese soldiers.

Arrests of Russians also followed. On 1 January [1921] the Russian inhabitants of Ulaanbaatar experienced a terrible panic in view of the rumours that on the coming night the Chinese would kill all the Russians, as accomplices of Baron Ungern.

On 2 November a detachment of 500 Chinese with a machine-gun snuck into Ulaanbaatar from Altanbulag. With the arrival of that detachment it became clear that all the settlements of Russian and Buryat colonists in the neighbourhood of the Altanbulag – Ulaanbaatar road had been plundered by Chinese soldiers. Many of those unfortunate ruined Russians from along the road appeared in Ulaanbaatar, going door to door begging for alms.

Soon the Russian houses in the city began to be forcibly turned into quarters for Chinese soldiers. On occupying the building of the Russian consulate, the Chinese soldiers looted the building and trashed the house church. Icons were thrown to the floor, broken and smashed.

After 4 November, when Baron Ungern's troops withdrew from Ulaanbaatar, it became a little easier there, and many Russians managed to get out of the capital.

Most of the arrested Russians, however, continued to stay in the prisons, which were cold, unheated buildings. They included innocent people, held only because they were Russians and a ransom could be charged for their release.

As if foreseeing their future doom in Ulaanbaatar, the Chinese soldiers and officials now tried to mock the Russians to the fullest extent, extorting money and valuables from them. "Hurry and snatch what you can", was the slogan which guided their mad deeds.

In the middle of November several Russians arrived in Ulaanbaatar from Altanbulag, saying that had been occupied by the Reds on 18 November.

One winter day, while the baron's troops were still positioned near Ulaanbaatar, a rumour spread in the city that the lord of Mongolia, the Bogd Gegen himself, the *Jebtsundamba Khutuktu*, had been arrested by the Chinese. The rumour proved to be correct, the Bogd was indeed arrested, taken from his palace with his immediate retinue to one of the empty houses in the city.

The Mongols were shocked by this arrest. Everyone was expecting some exceptional events to follow. But nothing happened. The Bogd Gegen remained under arrest and was apparently imprisoned for a long time. No one understood the purpose of the arrest. It was supposed that the Chinese generals just wanted to show their power and importance – they had arrested the living god himself, and nothing bad had happened to them – showing that the incantations of the lamas were not at all frightening.

The arrest of the Bogd Gegen ended with His Holiness being held for fifty days and then transferred back to his palace, where, however, the Chinese guards were increased to 350 men. The Chinese apparently feared that the Bogd might be kidnapped by Ungern, and therefore strengthened his guard. But nevertheless he was still kidnapped.

The organisation of the kidnapping was entrusted by Baron Ungern to a Buryat living in Ulaanbaatar, a certain Tubanov – a desperate daredevil, ready to do anything as long as there was a good profit to be made in it. Having received the appropriate instructions from Ungern, Tubanov invited about sixty Tibetans as his assistants, recruiting them from the Tibetan colony in Ulaanbaatar.

This was done very successfully. The Tibetans, were fanatical supporters of the lama. For the sake of saving the living god, also a Tibetan by birth, they would go through fire and water and perform



miracles of bravery – especially as they hated the Chinese as oppressors of Tibet and rapists of the Dalai Lama himself.

The Tibetans knew how to keep their mouths shut and maintain secrecy. Consent for the abduction was obtained from both the Bogd Gegen himself and his palace camarilla.

And so, on one of the last days of January 1921 the Tibetans, dressed as lamas, approached the Bogd's palace. A prepared signal was given. The Chinese soldiers who were guarding the inside of the palace were rushed, disarmed and tied up by the Bogd's lamas, who had been secretly armed. The Tibetans outside rushed into the palace with lightning speed, took the warmly clothed Bogd, who was blind, and carried him along a predetermined path across the Tuul River to the sacred mountain of Bogd Khan Uul, to spot where a fresh shift was already waiting for the Tibetans carrying the living god. By such shifts the Bogd Gegen was carried to Manjusri Monastery,¹⁷ where the lord of Mongolia was placed under the protection of Baron Ungern's Cossacks.

While this was taking place, some of the Tibetans, armed to the teeth, opened a heavy rifle fire on the outer guards of the palace to prevent them from pursuing the abductors. Confused by the unexpected attack, the Chinese guards fled. Alarms went up, shots were fired. But it was too late. The living god was by that time with Baron Ungern's troops.

People in Ulaanbaatar started to say that the abduction of the Bogd Gegen had required the participation of supernatural forces. The Chinese became panic-stricken. Everyone began to wait for major events. Agitated by Baron Ungern's actions and confused by rumours that the baron was getting reinforcements, the Chinese commanders decided on 3 February 1921 to leave Ulaanbaatar. They were either afraid of being cut off from the other centres of Mongolia or were afraid of a decisive attack by the Baron, probably both.

On the eve of 3 February Ungern selected from the Asiatic Horse Division a shock detachment of Bashkirs and Tatars and a small number of brave Transbaikalian Cossacks, and ordered that detachment to make a sudden, rapid attack on Maimaicheng, the Chinese suburb of the city. They were to dislodge the Chinese soldiers, and then to rush on Ulaanbaatar itself and drive the enemy out. The shock detachment was to be supported by the rest of the Baron's division. Ungern's men were running out of ammunition so the baron ordered, if it was exhausted, to attack hand-to-hand with cold steel.

The shock detachment crushed the Chinese outposts east of the city, captured Maimaicheng without difficulty, and met only some resistance at the entrance to the consular quarter,¹⁸ where the *gomins* (as the Mongols called the Chinese soldiers) desperately shot back until they were all killed. Scouts sent to Ulaanbaatar informed the baron that the Chinese garrison had already left the town and moved north along the Altanbulag road. The baron's troops immediately occupied the city. The baron himself and his staff temporarily settled in Maimaicheng, where there were plenty of empty rooms.

The baron ordered his Cossacks rushed to search for Bolsheviks and Jews in Ulaanbaatar, who were mercilessly beaten.

The day after the occupation of Ulaanbaatar, great clouds of smoke rose above the town bazaar: it was on fire. People rushed to the bazaar in droves. Lovers of easy gain appeared, looters who rushed to plunder the bazaar's shops. Excesses and murders started. Baron Ungern decisively stopped the looting by executions. It was said in the city that he personally detained four looters at the scene of the crime and hanged them on the gate of one of the Chinese shops.

¹⁷ 15 kilometres directly south of Ulaanbaatar on the southern slopes of Bogd Khan Mountain.

¹⁸ Like the Chinese suburb, the Consular quarter was detached from the main Mongolian city.



On the fifth day Baron Ungern received a delegation of citizens from Ulaanbaatar at his headquarters, headed by the director of the Mongolian Bank, D. P. Pershin. The delegation informed the Baron that the city had many suspicious people, as well as the Cossack detachment, and that robberies and violence against civilians were happening. The elders of the city's Russian colony ask the Baron's permission to organise a voluntary guard of reliable Russian residents to suppress any attempts on other people's property and personal safety.

Baron replied: "I have already given orders to my ranks to take urgent measures to stop looting and robbery and I have entrusted that duty to the commandant of the city. I cannot allow the organisation of a voluntary guard."

The head of the delegation began to speak of the beatings of the Jews.

Ungern, on hearing this, curtly and imperiously uttered only one word: "Cease!" Then, after a short pause, he asked: "And what else?"

Pershin began to speak of Dr Tsybiktarov, who had been arrested by the *Ungernovtsy* and was threatened with cruel reprisals.

"He is already dead," interrupted the Baron, and then added: "I myself heard him at a meeting in Chita arguing for the Communists and for all sorts of freedoms. And what have you got next?"

A number of minor questions followed, which the Baron quickly resolved favourably, and the audience was over.

After the capture of Ulaanbaatar, Ungern immediately sent a considerable detachment northwards along the Altanbulag road to pursue the retreating Chinese troops. Some Mongolian partisans were added to this detachment. Ungern's detachments, overtaking the Chinese, inflicted heavy damage on them.

Terror reigned in Ulaanbaatar. Ungern massacred not only Bolsheviks and Jews – whom he regarded as Bolshevik collaborators – but also White officers and soldiers who had done something wrong in his eyes. His cruelty and that of his chief executioners – Sypaylov, Bezrodny and Burdukovsky – knew no limits, surpassing all the horrors of the Middle Ages.

One of the gentler punishments was to put a guilty officer or soldier on the roof of the house where the baron's headquarters was located, in the cold air for several hours, sometimes even days. On campaigns the guilty man was put in the branches of a tree or on the edge of a cliff or ravine. For minor misdemeanours the baron personally dealt with the guilty party, treating him to blows of his whip.

While showing great severity with regard to the misdemeanours of his detachment's officials, Ungern took great care to improve their allowances and uniforms. For this purpose he ordered a steam mill to be hastily built in Ulaanbaatar and workshops were organised for tailoring, shoemaking, saddlery and such like.

The detachment prepared to march to Altanbulag, where there were Red troops.

Before the detachment's march in May 1921, Baron Ungern issued an extensive order, which stated precisely and clearly that the lord of the Russian lands should be Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich, who the detachment was sure had managed to escape from the clutches of Bolshevism and hide abroad. Baron Ungern declared in order No. 15:

The forces of my division, together with Mongolian troops, overthrew the illegal power of the Chinese Bolshevik revolutionaries in Mongolia. Their armed forces were destroyed. As much help as possible was given to unite Mongolia and the power of its legitimate sovereign, the Bogd Khan, was restored.



On the 15th day of the first spring month of the second year of the “Many Erected Era” – March 1921 in our calendar – in the “Golden-Domed Palace” of Shara Ord, in the presence of a host of Buddhist clergy dressed in brilliant yellow robes, and representatives of the Mongolian nobility, the Supreme Lord of Khalkha, the Bogd Khan, the eighth reincarnation of *Jebtsundamba Khutuktu*, the living god, was again enthroned after being deposed by the Chinese.

Baron Ungern and his aide, General Rezukhin, sat in a place of honour in the palace, among the foremost lamas. In recompense for their services to the Mongol country, both had been made by the *Khutuktu* into Mongol princes of the first degrees, and therefore sat at the celebration in the sumptuous and colourful princely robes bestowed by His Holiness.

When the newly enthroned Bogd Khan came out of the palace and appeared with his retinue in front of the soldiers of the Asiatic Division, lined up in front of the palace, there was a loud command from Ungern: “Asiatic Division! Attention! Eyes to the right! Gentlemen officers!”

The division orchestra played a greeting. Mongolian trumpets blared furiously.

On ascending the throne, the Bogd formed a government of Mongolia, consisting of the ministries of internal affairs, military and justice and the court of the Bogd Khan.

At that time few people in Ulaanbaatar knew that another new government of Outer Mongolia had already been formed and started to work in distant Altanbulag. It was a revolutionary government established with the direct assistance of Red Moscow.

Upon the capture of Ulaanbaatar, Ungern first of all announced the restoration of all the rights of the Bogd Gegen, declaring the complete separation of Mongolia from China, and published a slogan of the establishment of the Middle Kingdom of the Mongols. On his instructions a government of the highest Mongol feudal lords and theocrats was formed, headed by the *Jebtsundamba Khutuktu*.

Having become the virtually unlimited lord of Mongolia, Ungern immediately began a great deal of work on the implementation of his political programme.

His first practical task was the creation of the Middle Mongolian Kingdom with a simultaneous struggle against Bolshevism in Soviet Russia. The next stage was to be the restoration of the Manchu Qing dynasty in China and further, as a final goal, the restoration of monarchical power throughout the world. Ungern was a monarchist not only in words. He immediately began to act energetically in his chosen direction.

He entered into a lively correspondence with all the most prominent princes and theocrats of Outer and Inner Mongolia, with Chinese generals and marshals, with figures from the Kirghiz Alash Orda, etc. Ungern intensely promoted his programme in letters to the Torghut prince Palata-wan, the lordly Mongolian theocrat Yugudzyr Khutuktu, Prince Aru-Kharchin-wan and the governor of Hulunbuir, Zhang Kui Wu.

In one such letter to China, dated 20 May 1921, the Baron reported on the success of his work for the unification of Outer and Inner Mongolia and laid out his political programme of the day as follows:

At present, special attention is now being turned to the eastern Mongolian regions, which are to be a reliable bulwark against the onslaught of revolutionary China. Then measures will be taken to unite western Mongolia. According to the approved plan, the annexed provinces will not be subordinated to the authority of the Council of Ministers in Ulaanbaatar, but will maintain the independence of the *aimags*,¹⁹ their laws and

¹⁹ The word originally referred to tribes, but by this time they were effectively the provinces of Mongolia.



courts, administrative and social structure. Only in military and financial-administrative respects will they form a whole in a voluntary union under the blessing of the Bogd Khan.

The purpose of the union is twofold: on the one hand, to create a nucleus around which all peoples of Mongolian origin can unite; on the other, to form a military and moral defence against growing Western influence, which is possessed by the madness of revolution and the decline of morality in all its spiritual and physical manifestations.

I am calm about the Khovd district, as I am for the Uryankhai: they will willingly join us, having experienced either the oppression of the Chinese Republic or the heavy hand of the Chinese revolutionaries and Bolshevik communists.

The next stage of the organisational work in Asia, under the slogan "Asia for the Asians", is the creation of a Middle Mongolian Kingdom, which should include all the Mongolian peoples. I have already started relations with the Kirghiz and am sending a letter to A. N. Bukeikhanov, an influential figure of the Alash Orda, a former member of the State Duma, a very educated Kirghiz patriot, a descendant of the hereditary khans of the Bukeev Horde. You must act in this way from Beijing (Peking) towards Tibet and Xinjiang.

It should be emphasised in every respect the need to save China from revolutionary contagion by restoring the Manchu dynasty, which has done so much for the Mongols and covered itself with historical glory. The Chinese Mohammedans, for whom our connection with the Kirghiz co-religionists may serve as a real motivation for negotiation, need to be drawn into the endeavour.

As soon as I succeed in giving a strong and decisive impetus to all the detachments and people who dream of fighting the communists; as soon as I see a systematic uprising in Russia; then at the head of the movement of loyal and honest people, I will transfer my actions to Mongolia and allied areas for the final restoration of the Qing dynasty, in which I see measures to fight the world revolution.

Even when on the march from Ulaanbaatar to Khyagt, the Baron did not stop thinking about the implementation of his programme of action. From the road he sent an officer close to him to Hulunbuir to negotiate with his "dear brother", General Zhang Kui Wu. The baron, overcome with doubt, said to his officer:

I foresee that I only have a few more earthly steps to take, and I wish to make my last attempt. I am sitting in Mongolia like a spider. My army stretches from here to the Altai. It faces the Siberian railway. Twenty thousand Mongols can rise at my call. The other day, I gave orders to march on Uliastai and Khovd. Go to Hailar and tell my brother: let him immediately inform old Zhang Xun to either sit on the Chinese throne himself or put Pu Yi on it. If he does not do so, I will go to war against him.

The envoy rode off to Hulunbuir and conveyed to General Zhang Kui Wu the baron's request, but was soon arrested. However, he escaped by bribing the guards.

In his Order No. 15, Baron Ungern announced that he was subordinate to Ataman Semënov and subordinated to himself all the small White Russian detachments operating in Mongolia.

According to the order, Ungern and his Asiatic Division was to move to Altanbulag, break through the Red barriers there, and then go to the town of Babushkin on Lake Baikal and cut off communication with the Siberian railway. Colonel Kazagrandi's detachment was to approach the border of Irkutsk province, enter the Tunka basin and strike at Irkutsk. The detachment of Ataman Kazantsev of the Yenisei Cossack Host, located in Uliastai, was ordered to advance into the



Uryankhai region and from there move to the Yenisei province, towards Minusinsk and Krasnoyarsk. Kaigorodov's detachment, which was in Khovd, in western Mongolia, was to invade Western Siberia. At the same time it was supposed that Ataman Semënov, with the *Kappelevtsy* and the remnants of his own troops, would overthrow communist-socialist power in the Russian Primor'e.

As can be seen from this order, Baron Ungern's plans were broad.

He also wrote:

Russia must be built anew, piece by piece, but in the people we see disappointment and distrust. They need names, well-known names, dear and honoured. There is only one such name: the lawful master of the Russian land, the Emperor of all the Russians, Michael Alexandrovich, who saw the people wavering, and in the words of his Highest Manifesto wisely refrained from exercising his imperial rights until the time of the Russian people's remembrance and recovery.

One of the paragraphs of the order briefly read as follows:

Commissars, Communists and Jews are to be exterminated, along with their families. All their property shall be subject to confiscation.

To justify the terror, the order makes the declaration:

The old basis of justice – truth and mercy – has changed. Now truth and ruthless severity must reign. The evil that has come to the earth to destroy the divine in the human soul must be uprooted. The rage of the people against their leaders, those loyal servants of the Red doctrine, places no obstacles. Remember that before the people is a question: to be or not to be?

The order is well written. Whether it was written by Baron Ungern himself or a close collaborator is unknown. Some people familiar with Mongolian affairs of this time, claim that the author of the order was none other than the well-known Ferdinand Ossendovskiy, who wrote the sensational book: "Beasts, Men and Gods".



Chapter VI – Baron Ungern takes on the Reds

On 1 March 1921 a meeting of Mongolian and Buryat nationalists opened in Khyagt, which was later recognised as the First Constituent Congress of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party.²⁰ It resolutely adopted an orientation towards Red Moscow. The meeting was attended by around 20 people and lasted for three days.

Having adopted a draft party platform, the meeting moved on to organisational and practical matters. A bureau, consisting of Chairman Danzan and Secretary Dambadorj, was elected to lead the newly established party organisation. To liberate Mongolia from Chinese troops and White Russian detachments, the meeting designated a revolutionary headquarters consisting of Commander-in-Chief Sükhbaatar, Chief of Staff Belik-Saikhan and Commissar Choibalsan, and passed a resolution to organise partisan units.

Ironically, the ground for the successful activity of the revolutionary Mongolian nationalists was now prepared by none other than Baron Ungern himself, having destroyed the main Chinese military force in the country – the numerous Chinese garrison of Ulaanbaatar.

About 3,000 Chinese soldiers were still concentrated in the frontier town of Maimaicheng, facing Khyagt. In addition, small Chinese garrisons were still in two important commercial and administrative centres of Mongolia: the towns of Uliastai and Khovd. But these were already only the pitiful remnants of the “former greatness”.

It seemed to the Mongolian revolutionaries that it was now possible to deal with the Chinese without difficulty, but not such an easy task to expel the White Russian detachments. Defeating Baron Ungern's Asiatic Division required the assistance of Soviet Russian units. Assistance was promised, and Red units were sent to help.

On 16 March, the Mongols formed a Military Soviet, with Khyagt as its headquarters. It consisted of three Mongols, one Buryat and one Russian. About the same time the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Mongolia was formed, which would soon have its own army of some 600 sabres, reinforced by Red Army soldiers in Mongolian dress. On 18 March the Mongols launched an attack with these forces on Maimaicheng, where there was a Chinese garrison of around 2,500 men. The next day the Chinese soldiers, instead of defending the town, plundered it and left for the Orhon (Orkhon) River.

Maimaicheng caught fire after this victory and by 27 March was almost all destroyed.

During their defeat at Maimaicheng the Chinese soldiers, who had lost all discipline and turned into looters, were especially cruel to the Russian population living there: local merchants and refugees who had taken refuge from the storms of the revolution in the Chinese-Mongolian town. It is believed that at least one hundred Russians died in the massacre. Many of the Chinese population of Maimaicheng had fled to the Soviet territory of Khyagt as early as 18 March. The Chinese commanders themselves also fled there by car. A total of 8,000 Chinese were interned on Soviet territory on that day.

Having occupied Maimaicheng, or rather, what was left of it after the fire, the Mongolian revolutionary government renamed it Altanbulag, meaning Golden Key,²¹ as if this government was going to unlock the whole of Mongolia from there.

In order to organise the fight against the White Russian detachments in western Mongolia, two prominent figures of the new revolutionary government, Khasbaatar (Khas Bator) and Dambadorj,

²⁰ At this time just the Mongolian People's Party. It had started forming the year before.

²¹ Wikipedia claims it means “Golden Spring”, which seems more likely.



were sent there in early April 1921. Anticipating the struggle with Ungern, who was preparing an offensive towards Khyagt, a meeting of the revolutionary government on 10 April officially decided to ask for increased armed assistance from Soviet Russia.

About this time a Chakhar Mongol detachment under the command of Baron Ungern's associate Bairgun appeared near Altanbulag. The Chakhars easily overturned the inexperienced Mongolian soldiers of the revolutionary government and threatened to break into Altanbulag itself, but the situation was saved by the Soviet Sretensk Cavalry Brigade, which was stationed in Khyagt.

In the battle Bairgun was wounded and taken prisoner. Interrogation of the prisoners made it clear to the Bolsheviks that Ungern had launched an attack on Khyagt and the border settlements in Soviet Transbaikalia, which at that time was part of the so-called Far Eastern Republic.

Almost at the same time as Ataman Kazantsev's detachments launched an attack on Uryankhai, Baron Ungern left Ulaanbaatar with his Asiatic Division and started a march to Khyagt, the key to Soviet Transbaikalia.

The chief of staff of Kaigorodov's detachment in Khovd, Colonel V. Yu. Sokolnitskiy, made a business trip from Khovd to Ulaanbaatar in May 1921. He arrived in the Mongolian capital on 21 May, and found Baron Ungern was not there: he had left on campaign that morning.

May 1921 can be noted as a significant month for the unfolding of the events that interest us in this work. It included the beginning of active movements by White Russian detachments in Mongolia towards Soviet Siberia, as well as counter-offensives by the Red border forces. In the same month General Bakich, with a large detachment, began his long and painful march through the deserts of Dzungaria, and the *Kappelevtsy* and *Semënovtsy* made their *coup* in Primor'e.

When leaving Ulaanbaatar, Baron Ungern left his commandant's office there, headed by Syipaylov, and appointed the Buryat Zhambolon as his deputy in the capital.

On 23 May Colonel Sokolnitskiy caught up with Ungern's division by car, to meet the baron and talk to him about the affairs of Kaigorodov's detachment. In his memoirs he reports:

The car journey gave me great pleasure. The strength of the car and the dexterity of the driver were marvellous. Steep climbs and deep ravines did not stop us, and at about 8 o'clock in the evening we caught up with the column.

The troops were marching in brilliant order, and somehow my thoughts involuntarily transported me to the good old days. The ranks were as on parade. There were no laggards. A long column of cavalry and artillery marched the kilometres, going into the unknown: to win or die!

The brightly coloured clothes of the regiments – Mongolian, Chinese, Buryat – was eye catching. ...

We raced towards a yellow dot off to the side of the column, where the Baron himself was. He noticed us and galloped towards us.

Having finished his conversation about his new campaign in Transbaikalia with Colonel Sokolnitskiy, Baron Ungern said in farewell:

I am not afraid of failure. I have a little corner south-east of Ulaanbaatar. If the Bolsheviks beat me, I will go there and stay there. They'll strike me once, twice, thirty times. But sooner or later we'll strike them too. We won't be discouraged by failure.

You are far away from us. Act as you think best, but ... for Russia! I have given you everything I can. If I succeed, I'll give you more. But keep in mind my rule: take



everything you need from the battlefield! Don't forget that. There are no instructions from me, except those in my order.

Ungern's advanced units appeared in the first days of May on the line of settlements bordering the Belchir – Buluktay²² area, and after a stubborn battle, which lasted for twenty-four hours, pushed back the Soviet troops – units of the Sretensk Brigade – located there. After that Ungern's detachments moved down the Chikoi and Keranu Rivers and further on to Khyagt.

Ungern's immediate goal was to seize Khyagt, from where he would make a forced march to Lake Baikal. The baron wanted to blow up the tunnels on the Trans-Baikal railway which would interrupt railway communication between Soviet Russia and the Far East for a long time. Having secured himself for some time from strikes from the west, Ungern planned to raise the population of Transbaikalia under him in order to destroy the Reds in the Far East.

On 5 June Ungern's units bypassed Khyagt and Altanbulag to the east, through Kudarinsky Karaul, occupied the hills to the northeast, cut the road to Ust'-Kyakhta, and severed telegraph communication to Ulan-Ude and Chita.

According to Soviet sources, Ungern's forces at this time consisted of 3,500 sabres, with seven guns and a considerable number of machine guns. They covered Khyagt and Altanbulag in a semicircle up to 12 kilometres long, with a nucleus on the hills of Sudzha.

It is possible, however, that the Soviet sources exaggerated Ungern's forces slightly.

To support Baron Ungern's offensive in Transbaikalia, Colonel Kazagrandi's detachment of about 350 men was to disturb the enemy on the Soviet-Mongolian border to the west of Khyagt, and Tubanov's detachment of 100 sabres was sent to Menza (Menzinski) stanitsa of the Transbaikal Cossack Host, i.e. to the east of Khyagt.²³

Baron Ungern left a barrier detachment of around 300 sabres under the command of Nemchinov on the road from Ulaanbaatar to Khyagt, to prevent the Bolsheviks from gaining access to Ulaanbaatar if they decided to send their forces that way.

According to Soviet sources, the Red garrison in Khyagt at this time was 500 sabres and 330 bayonets, with two guns. There were also 700 *tsiriks* (Mongolian soldiers) of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Mongolia in Altanbulag. The leadership of the defence of Altanbulag was taken by the Mongol Sükhbaatar and the Transbaikal Buryat Rinchingiin Elbegdorj: that fierce Mongolian nationalist, who had not so long ago helped Ataman Semënov and Baron Ungern in their formation of a Pan-Mongolian government.

Ungern's main blows were directed at Khyagt. He put forward only small blocking units facing the Mongolian troops in Altanbulag. The Baron expected that capturing Khyagt would slam the revolutionary Mongolian troops in Altanbulag in a trap.

There was a battle, with a preponderance on the side of Baron Ungern's troops up until the evening of 6 June. That evening fresh Soviet reinforcements, a whole regiment of the 35th Division, came from Ust'-Kyakhta, having fought their way through Ungern's troops. On the morning of 7 June two more Soviet battalions and a battery broke through along the same road to the aid of the Khyagt garrison. The situation of the Soviets improved, and their units began to successfully hold back the onslaught of Ungern's troops.

²² I have struggled to place many of the places named in this section. The later context of the Chikoi river, suggests just east of Khyagt, maybe around Bol'shaya Kudara.

²³ Actually about 200 km south-east of Khyagt.



Over the two days there were stubborn, fierce battles around Khyagt. More than once there were bayonet charges. The hills changed hands several times a day. The losses in killed and wounded on both sides were quite significant.

During the night of 7/8 June there was an important change in the course of the battle: two regiments of the Reds' Sretensk Cavalry Brigade went through Altanbulag into Ungern's rear. One of the regiments occupied Kiran, the other the road that led from the hills to the south.

From 04:00 on the morning of 8 June the Reds opened a heavy artillery fire along the entire line of Ungern's troops and their transports. After the brutal bombardment, the Soviet troops launched a decisive offensive, and the resistance of Ungern's troops, frustrated by the artillery fire, was broken. Ungern, being wounded, signalled a general retreat for his units. Pursued by Soviet and Mongolian troops, the Whites came across the two Red regiments in their rear during their retreat and suffered heavy losses in the ensuing new fighting.

Ungern hid in the thick forest at Ibitsik and then withdrew to the west from there, to the Orhon and Selenge Rivers. That was the Soviet account of the multi-day battle at Khyagt, which decided the fate of the "violent baron".

One of the White participants of the battle wrote the following about the night of 7/8 June:

It was four o'clock in the morning.

In the dark gloom of the ravine where Khyagt lay, there were occasional flashes of light....

Everyone was waiting for Ungern to order a continuation of the attack on the town and free its population from the Red yoke.

Everyone's nerves were tight. There was exuberant joy in everyone's soul. No one felt tired. But for the first time the Baron took pity on his comrades and ordered them to leave the hills, to return to their initial positions, to the ravine, to the narrow mountain gap, and to go to bed.

Parygin was left on the mountains with the Chinese *divizion*. This ruined everything and led to the cruel defeat of the Asiatic Division.

It was five o'clock in the morning of 8 June. Most of Ungern's men were already asleep, some were still lying on the ground. The rest were sitting, smoking and sharing their impressions of the day's fighting.

Some of the Reds rushed out from the town, ran up the hill and charged at the Chinese shouting "Ura!" – and the Chinese ran from the mountains in panic. In a flash the Reds were at the top, placed machine guns and opened a hurricane fire on the narrow gorge. Bullets rained down like rain, digging up the ground, bouncing off the rocks with a squeal, and their ominous whistling were supplemented by the bursting of grenades. The Reds pelted the gorge with grenades.

The *Ungernovtsy* had not expected the attack. They were lying on the ground in piles, where and how they had fallen asleep. The units were not organised. The firing was so sudden that panic broke out among them. People who had seen so much – who had gone through the fiery crucible of the German and Civil Wars – lost their heads and began to run around aimlessly.

The panic became spontaneous! A lead hail fell everywhere. The horses neighed furiously and piteously as the shrapnel whistled and in the pre-morning gloom the spot in the narrow gorge seemed like Hell itself.



According to Soviet sources, Baron Ungern left the Reds' ring of fire at the battle of Khyagt with only 500 soldiers.

It seems that this figure is significantly understated. He probably still had with him forces two or three times as large as that. However the detachment's wagon train suffered greatly: it may be said to have been destroyed.

The failure at Khyagt greatly upset the baron, and he became angry and irritable. He was also very upset by the beginning of discord between him and his closest aide, General Rezukhin.

Ungern withdrew from Khyagt to the south-west, to the Selenge River and its tributary the Orhon. He stayed there for ten days, putting his forces in order and then moved once more into the Soviet Transbaikalia, along the Selenge River, towards Lake Gusinoe, where there were a considerable Red forces.

Ungern cruelly repaid the Reds as payment for his defeat at Khyagt, almost completely destroying the forces blocking him and capturing cannons, machine guns and rifles. The *Ungernovtsy* did not take prisoners in this battle, killing them. Encouraged by this success, Ungern decided to strike at Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Far Eastern Republic – the country hastily assembled by the Bolsheviks as a buffer between Soviet Russia and Japan.

The Baron's division advanced towards Ulan-Ude with fierce fighting. In one of those battles it lost more than a hundred men killed and wounded.

Knowing that numerous units of Soviet troops were still ahead of him, and having received information that he could not count on support from Ataman Semënov, Ungern cancelled his march to Ulan-Ude and decided to race to the Uryankhai region, where he hoped to meet up with and join the White detachments operating in western Mongolia.

The division now moved back into Mongolia, towards Lake Khusvgul (Kosogol), where units of the Red partisan Shchetinkin were already awaiting him.

One of the officers of his division recalled about this period:

Ungern became angry, like a fierce Cerberus.²⁴ He glared at everyone like a beast, and it was dangerous to talk to him. At any minute, instead of an answer, one might get a blow to the head from his whip or be immediately flogged.

Executions of officers became an epidemic. There were daily flogging and beatings: fear gripped the whole division. No-one was sure if this was his last hour. The officers began to fear the Baron like the plague, the black pox or Satan.

They were afraid to look at him. And, when he ordered one of the supply train officials to come to give him some information, the latter was so frightened by the impending meeting that he saddled his horse, raced off into the *taiga*, and disappeared.

The situation was becoming intolerable. People began to say that the baron was acting brutally because he wanted to go over to the Reds.

The division was overcome by gloomy thoughts and dark moods, and in such a state a campaign to the Uryankhai region was dreaded. Everyone, except the Baron, thought the only way to rescue the situation was to go to Manchuria, where it would be possible to hide from the Reds' onslaught.

This being the situation, conspiracies were hatched among the ranks of the Asiatic Division to kill Baron Ungern, General Rezukhin, and their closest associates.

²⁴ The three-headed dog that guarded Hades in Greek myth.



General Rezukhin's brigade was marching separately on the return to Mongolia, following the main column at some distance, as the general had had a major quarrel with the Baron.

A conspiracy arose independently in Rezukhin's brigade, without any connection with Ungern's column. One day a crowd of officers led by Khobotov piled into Rezukhin's tent, and told the general that the brigade would not go further, but would head to the east. They suggested that he agree to the decision of his officers and lead the brigade to Manchuria. The general calmly replied with a refusal and was shot in the chest.

One of Ungern's men recounts:

It was a terrible moment. The general staggered, but stood up proudly, pressing his hand to the spot where he had been shot, and left the tent. He went into the tent of the younger officers, believing that he would find salvation there. He was deeply mistaken: when he entered an Orenburg junior officer snatched his revolver from his holster and fired several shots at point-blank range, killing the valiant general, beloved by all.

Having finished with General Rezukhin, the brigade set out eastwards, but within a few days its ranks began to fall apart, and they scattered through the forests and steppes of Transbaikalia and Mongolia in small groups. Some of them were killed by the Reds, others surrendered themselves to the latter or went over to their side. Only a very few groups managed to reach Manchuria: to Manzhouli and Hulunbuir on the Chinese Eastern Railway. Later, some of those soldiers and officers of Rezukhin's brigade reached the Russian Primor'e, while others settled in the railway zone.

An uprising in another brigade of the division, where Ungern himself was, took place on the night of 17 July, i.e. ten days after the Mongolian provisional revolutionary government of had already entered the Mongolian capital with both Mongolian and Soviet troops. The city's name was changed from Urga to Ulan-Baatar-Khoto – the city of the Red Hero.²⁵

The conspirators shelled Ungern's tent on the agreed day, but he managed to escape. Seated on his fast horse, the baron disappeared under the cover of the evening gloom into a neighbouring forest.

Left without a leader, the whole of Ungern's camp mounted and – as if by instinct, a subconscious desire for safety – slowly moved eastwards, in the opposite direction from the Uryankhai region. Everyone's mood was anxious and tense. The conspirators were not yet sure of the success of their *coup* and now galloped along the moving column, searching for the most zealous of Ungern's executioners. They found one of them, Burdukovsky, and mercilessly hacked him to death. The original conspirators were still frightened by the thought of the Baron appearing and managing to draw the soldiers and Cossacks to him. How cruelly he would then deal with those who dared to raise a hand against him!

The coming night seemed terrible and full of mysterious eeriness. Where was the Baron now? While he was alive it was too early to think about the *coup* being a success.

Suddenly, a familiar voice shook the silence of the summer night: suddenly the Baron himself appeared on horseback in front of the division and loudly called for Burdukovsky and other close

²⁵ The actual change was in 1924.

In fact the city was formally called Niislel Khüree from the time of Mongolian Independence in 1911. (It had historically been called Örgöö, which is given as Urga in Western languages, but the Mongolians did not use that name in the 1920s.)



associates, whose loyalty he wanted to rely on now, to come to him. Hearing Ungern's voice, which had so often made people tremble, the division seemed to shudder and stop, frozen in place.

Involuntary fear seized everyone, and even the bravest of Ungern's fighters were now confused. But the conspirators did not totally lose their presence of mind and when the Baron, calling for individual leaders in the column, tried to stop its movement, they fired at him. To the whistle of bullets, he disappeared again into the darkness of the night.

It should be noted that at the very beginning of the revolt the conspirators had fired on the Mongol regiment and forced it to disperse into the neighbouring forests, as they feared that the Mongols might support the baron at the critical moment. In his wanderings away from the division the Baron came across these Mongol soldiers. He addressed the Mongol prince Bisherelt-Sunduy-Gun, who was with their detachment, with an order that the Mongols should immediately come with him, Baron Ungern, to subdue the rebellious officers of his division.

Sunduy-Gun agreed, but at the same time warned the *tsiriks* to be on standby and at his call to help him deal with the baron and tie him up.

The detachment moved forward. The baron rode at the front, next to Sunduy Gun. The prince asked the baron for some matches to smoke a pipe, and when he went into his pocket to get the matches, Sunduy Gun clasped the baron with both hands from behind, above his elbows, and fell to the ground with him.

The *tsiriks* galloped up and seized Ungern, bound him hand and foot and then, under heavy guard, took him to one of the nearby detachments of the Red partisan Shchetinkin. From there he was taken to Khyagt and handed over to the Bolsheviks, his sworn enemies. He was sent further on to Novosibirsk, the capital of Bolshevik Siberia, where he was executed, after a trial.

After Ungern's capture, his brigade, under the command first of Captain Makeev, then Colonel Ostrovskiy, began to move eastwards. At the beginning of the withdrawal it once again severely defeated the Reds, who tried to pursue the retreating *Ungernovtsy*. On the way the Mongols and Buryats who wished to go home separated from the brigade.

Finally the remnants of the Asiatic Horse Division, numbering only a few hundred soldiers, reached Manchuria. Having surrendered their weapons to the Chinese authorities, some dispersed across the Barag area and some were transported along the Chinese Eastern Railway to Russian Primor'e. And so, in the autumn of 1921, Baron Ungern's Asiatic Horse Division ended its stormy existence.



Chapter VII – Kaigorodov

In the latter part of January 1921, at the same time as Baron Ungern had increased his forces in Mongolia and was about to decisively attack Ulaanbaatar, an alarming state of affairs was spreading throughout the country.

The Chinese began to see the White Russians as their enemies. They then transferred their hatred of them towards Russians in general – including the Russian colonists who had lived for a long time in Mongolia, engaging in trade and not involved in any politics.

In Khovd (Kobdo), the commercial centre of western Mongolia, the Chinese imposed martial law in January, increasing the forces of the local garrison. On the night of the Chinese New Year, 20 February 1921, there was a pogrom of the peaceful Russian population in the town, arranged by Chinese soldiers at the instigation of the authorities.

Apparently, the Chinese decided to do away with their imaginary enemy once and for all. Quite unexpectedly, the night silence of Khovd was broken by lone rifle shots. At first one might have thought that the Chinese had decided, in spite of the martial law imposed, to celebrate the New Year, and had begun to set off fireworks.

But soon the alarming news spread through the city – the Russians were being killed!

The Russians needed to flee the city. Having abandoned all their property, taking their wives and children if they had families, and dressed in whatever they could find, they began to get out of the city along the dark alleys.

But where to? Wherever they could, just to escape death – straight onto the steppe, in the cold air. Some Russians remained in the city, hiding in basements and cellars.

Having killed up to a dozen peaceful Russian inhabitants at the beginning of the pogrom, the Chinese soldiers soon became fond of plundering the Russian's homes, and especially the rich warehouses of the *Tsentrosoyuz*, where they began to steal silver, textiles, etc. Even the city's Chinese sentries left their posts to take part in the looting. In this orgy of robbery they forgot about the Russians.

The question facing the Russians who had left Khovd was: where to go next? They could spend some time in nearby farmsteads with acquaintances, but what to then? And what if the Chinese came out to the settlements and start killing Russians there as well? Where to find protection? From whom?

Somehow, involuntarily, everybody came up with one answer: they needed to get to Ölgii (Oralgo), on the Khovd River, 160 kilometres north²⁶ of the city, because at that time Kaigorodov's small, but nevertheless armed detachment, composed mainly of loyal Altai *inorodtsy*, was there. Only there could they find shelter and save their lives.

A. P. Kaigorodov reigned supreme in the Ölgii area, but at the time of the Khovd pogrom his detachment had no more than a hundred men.

Kaigorodov was born in 1887 in the village of Abay on the Uymonskaya Steppe, in the Siberian Altai. In peacetime he had served in the police. During the Great War he was sent to the Caucasian front, distinguished himself in battle, and entered the Tiflis junior officer school, from which he graduated when the revolution had already begun in Russia.

From the outside Kaigorodov made a very favourable impression and he knew his worth with women. He had a rather handsome, masculine face, black curly hair, and

²⁶ Actually north-west.



possessed the easy gait of a mountaineer. His favourite costume was a *cherkeska*²⁷ with a dagger.

During the Civil War years in Siberia, he drank too much and started a riot at Tatarskaya station, for which he was demoted to private by order of the Supreme Ruler, Admiral Kolchak.

Having learnt about his disfavour, Kaigorodov hastened to appear in Omsk with an apology. There he managed to persuade the military ataman of the Cossack Host, A. I. Dutov, to give him permission to form an *inorodtsy* regiments in the Altai and to bring the Altai tribesmen into the Cossack class. Kaigorodov returned to Altai, where his popularity began to grow rapidly.

Taking into account his circumstances, the commander of the Altai mountain forces, Captain Satunin, brought Kaigorodov closer to himself during the devastation at the end of 1919. He restored him to the rank of junior officer and then subsequently promoted him to the rank of staff-captain, naming him to that rank²⁸ with the Altai irregular cavalry.

With the death of Satunin, Kaigorodov rose to the post of commander of the Altai Mountain forces and of the combined Russian-*inorodtsy* detachment.

After violent wanderings in 1920 within the Mongolian and Russian Altai, Kaigorodov settled with his small detachment in early 1921 in the Ölgii area along the Khovd River, near the Russian farms of Nikiforov and Maltsev. He was joined by fugitives from some other small White Russian detachments wandering in western Mongolia, such as the detachments of Smol'annikov, Shishkin, Vanyagin and others. A sort of "Altai Sich"²⁹ was formed in Ölgii. Only this time they did not ask: "Do you believe in God?" but asked: "Will you fight the Bolsheviks?"

For a while the detachment had nothing to eat. They had to obtain food supplies. Luckily for the partisans, the *Tsentrosoyuz* sent a large bunch of cattle to Soviet Russia from Khovd. Kaigorodov swooped down on it, and about a thousand cattle became the property of his detachment. Two more such "requisitions" of cattle followed, and the detachment received up to 10,000 sheep and over 1,000 head of cattle.

They lived idly in Ölgii, drinking, playing cards and carelessly using up the requisitioned cattle.

The Khovd pogrom took Ölgii completely by surprise. Every day, from 23 February until 17 March, Russians who had fled from Khovd and its surrounding farms began arriving there. According to one eyewitness, they came on foot, on horseback or on camels; armed or unarmed; fed or hungry; clothed or beggars. Everyone was given an affectionate welcome by the *Kaigorodovtsy* and a hearty table was opened to everyone.

On 15 March Colonel Sokolnitskiy arrived in Ölgii with his family, having fled from Khovd. Kaigorodov soon appointed him as chief of staff for his detachment.

If the Chinese soldiers had decided to plunder and kill the Russians in Khovd, Kaigorodov calculated that the time had come for him to turn his attention to the Chinese traders in the neighbourhood of Khovd. As a result caravans with captured Chinese goods: tea, flour, and textiles came to the Altai's "Zaporozh'e".

On 20 March the Chinese commissioner in Khovd sent a letter to the "Russian" officer Kaigorodov, in which the latter was informed that some armed Russian men had started to rob Chinese trading

²⁷ The traditional coat of the Caucasian Cossacks – and the mountain tribes they adopted it from. Not traditionally worn by Cossacks outside that region, but it may have been a nod towards the mountainous terrain of the Altai.

²⁸ *Pod-Esaul* is the same ranks as *Shtabs-Kapitan*, but in the Cossack/native naming system.

²⁹ A reference to the Zaporozh'e *Sich*, formed in the Ukraine from men escaping Tsarist Russia in the 16th Century. It became a self-governing Cossack proto-state.



firms, which “contradicts international treaties” and that these Russians should come to their senses before it was too late.

Kaigorodov replied to the Chinese commissioner that:

International treaties also did not give him a reason to abuse the defenceless Russians, who trustfully gave their lives and property to the Chinese, their high patrons and guardians, after the closure of the Russian consulates in China.

He warned that the Khovd pogrom would not go unpaid for and that he, Kaigorodov, would pay the Chinese commissioner a visit in the city of Khovd, with his detachment.

Ölgii began active preparations for a march on Khovd. But the Chinese did not wait for Kaigorodov’s visit and on the night of 26 March left the town. An orgy of looting began upon their departure.

Early in the morning of 29 March, Kaigorodov entered Khovd with twenty partisans. The town was on fire. Here, as in Ulaanbaatar, the fire began in the bazaar. Caravans of Mongols were travelling in different directions from the city with stolen property. Kaigorodov’s detachment, which arrived soon afterwards, stopped this bacchanalia of looting.

Khasbaatar and Dambadorj had been sent through Siberia on the Siberian and Altai railways to Altanbulag. These revolutionary figures of the new Mongolia then went to the Khovd district of western Mongolia in May 1921, sent by the revolutionary provisional government of Mongolia, along with a small detachment of *tsiriks* (Mongolian soldiers). The purpose of their mission was to attract the local population to the side of the revolutionary government of Mongolia, to carry out propaganda and agitation and to organise an armed struggle against the White Russian troops operating in western Mongolia.

To help them, the Russian Soviet authorities allocated a small detachment of troops under the command of the communist Baikalov, a persistent and very cautious man. The detachment’s base was the border town of Kosh-Agach.

Kaigorodov’s detachment, having settled down in Khovd, was still small in numbers by the summer of 1921. It consisted of three, incomplete, cavalry *sotnias*, a machine-gun team and an artillery platoon (with one cannon received from Baron Ungern and a small number of shells, of the wrong calibre). The detachment had a headquarters, led by Colonel Sokolnitskiy (whose memoirs I have heavily used in compiling this work), some military workshops and its own small farm. The detachment headquarters published a typewritten newspaper of an informative character, called “Our Herald”.

On 25 June Kaigorodov set out from Khovd on a campaign to Russia, towards the Siberian Altai.

Sokolnitskiy recalls in his memoirs:

It was impossible to speak seriously about a campaign to Russia. There were not even half the necessary number of rifles. Each available rifle had no more than twenty cartridges. The horses were worn out and there were no horseshoes. The men had worn out shoes. The command staff had no desire to go on the campaign.

However, Kaigorodov himself insisted on the march.

What did he expect? Probably on the strong discontent among the Siberian peasants with Soviet power, which not so long ago had already been manifested in several bloody peasant uprisings against the Bolsheviks in western Siberia. Hence it was possible to count on support for the anti-Bolshevik movement on the part of a more or less large proportion of the population.



Besides this, Baron Ungern had provided some assistance with arms, and perhaps this circumstance obliged Kaigorodov to support the Baron in his campaign to eastern Siberia.

Five days after leaving Khovd, on 30 June, Kaigorodov's detachment, then not far from Lake Tolbo (Tulba), received alarming information about the movement of the Reds towards Uliastai from the east and towards Ulaangom from the Uryankhai and about the hurried departure of Kazagrandi's detachment from the Soviet border towards Tsetserleg (Zain-Shabi).

This information had a depressing effect on the detachment, and the idea of "a campaign to Russia" was abandoned. Kaigorodov's detachment soon regrouped to defend.

At the end of July the Reds began to be active in the Khovd district, attacking White outposts, sending out reconnaissance detachments into the area, etc.

During most of July, the two sides – Kaigorodov's detachment against a mixed Soviet and Mongolian detachment under Baikalov's command – felt out each other, avoiding decisive clashes. However the initiative was almost always with the Reds.

At the end of July Kaigorodov began to move to more decisive actions, setting himself a first goal of destroying the Baikalov detachment, and then going to his native Altai in Siberia. On 9 August there was a clash at Namirin *khure*,³⁰ in which the *Kaigorodovtsy* defeated a small Red Russian-Mongolian detachment, numbering about fifty soldiers, and on 20 August there was a small clash at Bairam *khure*.

About the same time the Kaigorodov detachment enlarged itself with men from the Kazantsev detachment and, communicating with the Bakich corps, undertook a vigorous pursuit of Baikalov. The Red detachment was, after long efforts, surrounded by Kaigorodov's men and locked in the *khure* of Saryl-gun on 17 September, not far from Lake Tolbo.

The events were fated so that on the very day when Baikalov's detachment was locked in the Saryl-gun *khure*, Bakich's units, coming from the west, met up with Kaigorodov's detachment.

At a meeting of the two commanders, held on 19 September, it was decided to make a decisive attack from all sides on the monastery on the night of 21 September. A strike group was formed, which included 300 men from Kaigorodov's detachment, with one cannon and four machine guns, and 420 men from General Bakich's corps, with one cannon and seven machine guns. The command of the strike group was entrusted to Kaigorodov.

The units of General Bakich's corps approached the Saryl-gun *khure* on 20 September. The monastery was located in a hollow, pressed on two sides by mountains. It occupied an area in the form of an oval, in which there were the buildings of the Buddhist monastery itself, a dozen or two *khoshans* (earthen dwellings) and about the same number of *gers* (yurts), each with their own courtyard surrounded by a palisade.

Having settled into their improvised fortress, the around 250 soldiers of the Baikalov detachment, Russian and Mongols, had begun to entrench. By the time of the decisive attack, i.e. the night of 21 September, the trenches had reached a man's height. The Reds had also added some other fortifications.

The attacking White units moved forward without stopping or shooting, reaching almost to the enemy trenches. Having let the Whites get close, the Reds opened a heavy fire. A loud "ura" was heard from the Whites, and their units rushed from four sides.

³⁰ A *khure* or *khüree* is a Mongolian Buddhist monastery. Mongolia of the time had few permanent settlements, so isolated places had a tendency to be named for the local monastery. Their destruction by the communists has made many of them very hard to locate.



The north-western half of the *khure* and the monastery itself were taken. The Reds who could fled and fortified themselves in the south-eastern part of the *khure*. The soldiers who remained in the Red positions, mostly *tsiriks*, were speared with lances. Now some twenty Mongolians came to the aid of the *Baikalovtsy*: creeping up from the north-west side into the rear of the advancing Whites, they began to throw hand grenades. There was confusion among the Whites. Encouraged by this unexpected support, the *Baikalovtsy* made a fierce counter-attack and began to push the Whites out of the section of the *khure* they had occupied.

On the north-eastern side, the Reds let the Whites come close to the trenches and then opened a hurricane fire on the attackers. Few reached the trenches alive in this section. In the darkness of the night it was difficult to make out anything. Almost a thousand fighters were crowded together in a small comparatively small space and, attacking the *khure* from all four sides, the Whites started to hit their own side with their fire. The Whites had no proper command, as Kaigorodov was little suited to the role of a combat commander. On top of that, many of the Whites scattered into the yards in search of food, once they had occupied half of the *khure*, forgetting to keep their discipline, such was the power of their hunger.

Suddenly there were shouts among the Whites: “Our men are retreating!” – and all those still alive pulled back, pelted by a brutal gun and machine-gun fire from the Reds.

As a result of the heavy defeat, the Whites suffered major losses. After the battle, 260 wounded Whites were taken to the hospital. Many had been killed, quite a few were missing. The Reds found about 100 dead Whites in the *khure* itself and another about 40 near it. A dozen or two fighters from Bakich’s corps were captured. When questioned, the prisoners stated that Bakich’s units had approached the Saryl-gun *khure* on the eve of the battle, i.e. 20 September, and that the Bakich corps had only 2,000 men on horseback and foot and the Kaigorodov detachment had no more than 400 men, mostly without firearms.

The Reds had 63 men killed and about 20 wounded in the battle.

Saddened by the failure at the Saryl-gun *khure*, Kaigorodov decided to go to Siberia again, to the Altai, and sent his first, second and third *sotnias* on 22 September towards Kosh Agach. They were joined by two *sotnias* of the People’s Division from the Bakich corps.

Bakich’s units and Kaigorodov’s fourth *sotnia* remained behind to take the Saryl-gun *khure*. It was decided to encircle the monastery with those forces and try to take the Red fort by siege.

The Kaigorodov detachment’s headquarters and some of its auxiliary institutions remained in the town of Khovd.

The siege of the Saryl-gun *khure* continued for more than a month after Kaigorodov’s departure, until large Soviet military reinforcements sent from Siberia came to the aid of the *Baikalovtsy*.

* * * * *

Khasbaatar was a relatively young Khalkha Mongolian, about 37-38 years old, who belonged to the highest ranks of the Buddhist clergy of Mongolia. He was a lama-revolutionary – one of those young nationalists of Mongolia who were firm in their intentions to defend the separate identity of their native country, relying on the active assistance of Red Moscow. Being Buddhist clergy did not prevent him from keeping a Mauser revolver in the waistband of his robe.

During his activities in western Mongolia Khasbaatar had received support from Irkutsk, which had at that time a branch of the Far Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern especially organised for Mongolian affairs. A Mongolian printing house – where the newspaper “Mongolian Truth” and various kinds of proclamations, posters and leaflets addressed to the Mongolian people were



printed – was organised by the Comintern in that city. This propaganda literature flowed into Mongolia through Altanbulag in the east of the country and through Kosh Agach to its west.

As Khasbaatar travelled through Siberia, he and his entourage were given special attention by the Soviet authorities. He received a separate railway carriage and a number of Russian workers were put at his disposal (or, perhaps, to control him). Of course, the funds for his activities in western Mongolia came from the Soviet treasury.

Khasbaatar's official position was that of a member of the Provisional Government of the Mongolian People's Republic, sent to the Khovd district on a special assignment. His closest assistant was Dambadorj; Baikalov was the commander of the expeditionary detachment, with an assistant Ozol. A certain Natsov was the Comintern's representative with the detachment.

Having appeared in the Khovd district, Khasbaatar managed to establish ties with people of influence there and to gain their support. But his attempts to mobilise the Mongols to fight the White Russians gave him only a negligible numbers of Mongol *tsiriks*.

When Saryl-gun *khure* was besieged by Kaigorodov's detachment, Khasbaatar was among those present. On one of the first nights of the siege, Khasbaatar and several Mongolian *tsiriks* fled from the *khure* during a brief attack by the Whites. Presumably fearing the fatal consequences of a siege he simply left, without informing even his closest companions in the expeditionary detachment about his plans.

His escape proved fatal for him. Not far from Khongo³¹ Khas-Bator was arrested by a *Kaigorodovtsy* detachment. The detachment had accidentally come across three Mongolian horsemen on the route, who seemed suspicious, and detained them. The detainees showed great anxiety and began to offer to ransom themselves, but the offer was rejected. Then two of the Mongols reported to the commander, Captain Smirnov, that their third fellow in trouble is none other than Khasbaatar himself. The prisoners were then bound and taken to Khovd.

During interrogation, Khasbaatar gave a detailed account of the purpose of his mission to western Mongolia, and also stated that he had buried around 30 kg of silver, several thousand rounds of machine gun ammunition and some hundred hand grenades in the Bairam *khure* and near Ulaangom. This testimony proved to be correct: the valuables and combat equipment were found in the places mentioned. A few days after the interrogation Khasbaatar was shot.

* * * * *

Moving towards the Altai, on 25 September Kaigorodov crossed the Russian border at Tashanta. The next day he moved to Kosh Agach where, according to the information he had been given, there was a Red detachment around 500 men and eight machine guns. At dawn on 27 September the *Kaigorodovtsy* attacked the village.

The Reds were not asleep, having been warned by the Kirghiz about the enemy's approach. They responded to the Whites' loud "ura" with fierce shooting. When Kaigorodov's *sotnias* broke into the village, the Reds started a flanking movement, trying to encircle the enemy. Due to inept command the Whites were forced to retreat, suffering serious losses. Kaigorodov lost many of his best officers killed or wounded.

By 28 September the detachment had withdrawn to the Kirghiz *volost*, on Russian territory.

The failure at Kosh Agach finally broke any desire to fight among the Kaigorodov detachment. Meetings and rallies began. Almost all the officers began to refuse any further campaign deep into the Siberian Altai.

³¹ There appears to be no modern settlement there, about 40 km NW of Khovd.



Kaigorodov called for volunteers for his campaign. Mostly Altai *inorodtsy* responded to his call, counting on their ability to hide in the familiar mountains of the Altai. Only four officers joined him, and that without much willingness.

In the evening of 29 September the various parts of Kaigorodov's detachment went in different directions, never to meet each other again. Kaigorodov and a small number of his supporters went to the Siberian Altai, intending to sneak into his native Arkyt, an area on the Katun River. Kaigorodov's breakaway partisans returned to Khovd, now under the command of Colonel Sokolnitskiy.

Kaigorodov's further fate is little known. There are reports that he spent almost a year still waging a partisan struggle against the Bolsheviks in the Siberian Altai, with the tenacity of a true fanatic. Finally defeated, abandoned by almost all his associates, Kaigorodov was betrayed by his own men. He was wounded but did not wish to fall alive into Bolsheviks hands. Having fired five bullets from his revolver at the opponents trying to take him, he ended his life with the sixth bullet.

* * * * *

Bakich's units made one or two more attempts to take the Saryl-gun *khure* by assault, but were unsuccessful. The siege dragged on and caused hardship and suffering both to the besiegers themselves and to those who hid in the monastery, repelling the enemy's attacks.

For the date of 4 October one of the officers of General Bakich's detachment wrote in his diary:

It has snowed and we are naked and barefoot. We live under the shelter of the sky and the raw mother earth serves as our bed.

The Reds in the besieged *khure* quickly ran out of food supplies. By October they had only a negligible amount of butter and cheese. People began to kill and eat dogs, with boiled saddle and mixing a little butter into this stew.

There was nothing to treat sick soldiers in the *khure*.

Some of the sick, under the influence of mental disorder, wished themselves dead.

All round were the sounds of moaning, sobbing and screaming. The smell of rotting wounds prevented one from getting close to the sick. It was a terrible situation. The doctor who attended to the sick had a breakdown, shouting and sobbing with fatigue. Two or three dead men were taken out of the barracks every day. Their place was taken by new patients.

Fearing that his detachment would perish from starvation, Baikalov decided eventually to make a last effort – to sortie and leave the *khure*.

A day before the Reds were to break through the White cordon, gun shots were heard at night from behind the mountains occupied by the White detachments. Observations from the monastery showed movement beginning among the Whites. In the *khure* everyone was on their feet and carrying their weapons.

Suddenly everything quieted down behind the mountains. The besieged assumed that either help from the Reds had come, or the Whites had made a demonstration for the purpose of a trap. Baikalov's doubts were soon dispelled by a man approaching the *khure*, waving something white in his hand. Baikalov and several Mongolian *tsiriks* rushed to meet the messenger – it was a Kirghiz holding a letter in a white envelope.

It turned out that the besieged had received help from Siberia in the form of a whole Soviet regiment. This joyful event for the Reds took place around 20 October, after Baikalov's detachment had been under siege for more than 40 days.



According to an eyewitness, Baikalov and the others were so stunned by the unexpected help that they initially lost the ability to speak out of joy. *Tsiriks*, excited by the joyful event, ran around, jumping and laughing hysterically.

* * * * *

I have mentioned above that at the Kaigorodov detachment's headquarters an Information Department was organised for the purpose of agitation and propaganda of the detachment's tasks. That department published the newspaper "Our Herald" on a typewriter, and also issued flyers, proclamations, instructions, etc.

I have in my possession nine issues of the paper, the first of which is dated 3 September, and the ninth for 29 October 1921. Having carefully read those nine issues of "Our Herald", and also having familiarised myself with the political programme adopted by Kaigorodov's detachment and the proclamations emanating from it, I can state here that Kaigorodov's programme was quite democratic in character. The principles of democracy are set forth clearly and distinctly.

Not only that, it may be seen that the programme even had a socialist flavour. In any case, it would not have been to the taste of Baron Ungern. The latter would simply have ordered the author of such a political programme to be expelled from his detachment, or even shot.

Kaigorodov began his political programme with:

All the gains of the revolution must remain inviolable and enshrined in the fundamental laws. Only the extreme and exceptional provisions of the revolutionary time should be eliminated in order to give the whole population the opportunity to work freely and enjoy the products of their labour.

Based on the recognition of the usual principles of democracy, this programme even allowed for the possibility of collectivism, i.e. the nationalisation of enterprises in large branches of industry and commerce, "where it seems possible and advantageous for the national economy".

With regard to their political opponents, the Kaigorodov detachment called on everyone to abandon revenge and cruelty and to take the path of reconciliation.

Regarding the local population, the programme insisted on the necessity of an extremely attentive and careful attitude to Mongols, Kirghiz, etc.

The detachment clearly understood that the White Russians were in Mongolia only temporarily, as guests. Moreover they were a burden on the local population, and therefore in the Khovd district, more than elsewhere, they tried to establish and maintain friendly relations with the Mongols. If in this respect if there were some excesses, they were a rare exception, rather than the rule.



Chapter VIII – Bakich

After crossing the Chinese frontier and surrendering its arms, General Bakich's detachment was stationed in a military camp set up in the open air on the right bank of the Emil River, 40 kilometres from Tacheng (Chuguchak). The detachment's units were stationed over a ten kilometre distance, retaining their former administration and names.

To supervise the Russians, the Chinese established a commandant's office at the camp, which was given a unit of Chinese soldiers. Subsistence was provided by the Chinese, but at the expense of the detachment, with the calculation that for each internee would be given 100 grams of mutton and 400 grams of bread per day. On such amounts it would have been possible to exist, though hungry, but in reality the Chinese soon began to deliver less food than it had indicated.

After all the sufferings, deprivations and various illnesses endured by Russian officers and soldiers, they required increased nutrition, but they did not receive it. Some eyewitnesses who visited the camp on the Emil River were struck by the green faces, desperate thinness and terrible squalor of the clothing of the inhabitants.

The detachment's Cossacks and soldiers suffered particularly from hunger and deprivation and in general the hardship of life in a foreign land, among unfriendly foreigners. Many of them became despondent and began to express their desire to return back to Russia – home. Neither the Russian command staff nor the Chinese authorities put obstacles in the way of their return to their homeland. The Cossacks and soldiers went home in groups, mostly via Zaysan. Those who remained in the camp treated those who were leaving with touching attention: farewell prayers were served and farewell speeches were made before the departures.

By June 1920 about 6,000 people had left the Emil camp and returned to Soviet Russia. By this time the Chinese had begun to give small groups permission to leave towards the Far East. For example, Generals Shilnikov, Komarovskiy, Nikitin, Zhukov and Zaytsev were given permission. One of these groups travelling to the East, arriving in Beijing, included a young Orenburg Lieutenant, L. V. Svyatin, who later became His Grace, Victor, Bishop of Beijing and China.

Those who remained in the camp began to establish their lives in one way or another, filled with anxiety for the future. They built themselves huts from scrub, alone and in groups. The camp became a kind of town. Streets appeared in it. A Red Cross hospital was placed in the centre of the camp. From the Red Cross tents four streets stretched in different directions. The first was called Ataman Street, the second was called Nevskiy Avenue, the third was called Poetry and Sadness Street, and the fourth was called Love Street. These streets were always lively. Those who had suffered so much, but had still not lost their vigour and cheerfulness, spent their time there. It was also the place to get the latest news. Of course, the news was usually that the days of Bolshevism were numbered and that they would probably not have to languish in a foreign land for long.

Sometimes one could hear the sounds of balalaika or Russian songs in harmony. A small amateur dramatic troupe was formed, which staged plays. Life is life everywhere and the Emil River also had romances, which were sometimes secured by legal church marriage with the assistance of the camp priest.

In September 1920 General Bakich negotiated with the Chinese to send all the interned Russians to the Far East. The Chinese did not allow them to go as a group. They permitted only groups of 60 people, and the food for the journey had to be stocked ahead on the spot.

In autumn of that year a small group of insurgents against Soviet power arrived from western Siberia. This group was under the command of the searching Lt-Colonel Shishkin. It did not join Bakich's detachment and scattered to the neighbouring farms.



After autumn the winter approached and detachment had to stay in the camp. The thought of winter frightened everyone. The detachment began to flee in different directions, most of all to Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Outer Mongolia. Those that stayed in the camp had to dig dugouts – saying that they were digging their own graves. This was almost true. The barren terrain, where strong winds blow all winter, with a lack of fuel and poor nutrition, could make wintering hard to the point of impossibility. But the Russian people are strong and hardy: they endured the winter in the camp on the Emil River.

The spring of 1921 revitalised and cheered up everyone again. Once more there was talk of uprisings in European Russia and in Siberia. This time there was much truth in the talk. Indeed, a great rebellion broke out in Kronstadt, and also in western Siberia, where a wave of revolts covered vast districts of the Tobolsk province and Akmola region. However, those uprisings were brutally suppressed by the Red Army.

One of those anti-Bolshevik insurgent detachments of around 1,200 fighters under the command of Lieutenant Tokarev – the so-called People's Division – approached the town of Tacheng in April 1921. This unit had moved to the Chinese border from Petropavl through Karkaraly, via Kokshetau. The Chinese asked Tokarev to surrender his weapons and go deep into China, but the detachment's desire to connect with General Bakich's units was so strong and adamant that its connection took place regardless of the desires of the Chinese. Tokarev only surrendered his unserviceable weapons to the Chinese, having stashed away the better ones.

In May 1921, General Bakich's detachment, together with Tokarev's People's Division, had to leave the camp on the Emil River and move eastwards. The reason for this was the appearance of Red Russian troops near Tacheng, in Chinese territory. The Whites thought that the Chinese governor of Tacheng had been bribed by the Bolsheviks and so given them permission to invade China. It was more likely though that, after Baron Ungern had captured Ulaanbaatar, the Reds had begun to introduce their troops into Mongolia and Xinjiang generally, in order to eliminate all the White detachments in those places.

The headquarters of Bakich's detachment learned on 23 May that a combined Soviet and Chinese force was planning an attack on the Emil River camp. Russians who fled to the camp from Tacheng told them that an organised hunt for White officers had begun in the city: they were being arrested and sent in batches across the border to Soviet Russia.

And so, in order to avoid Soviet capture, on the morning of 24 May a column of about 8,000 people, mostly unarmed and on foot, moved eastwards from the camp, with a large amount of baggage but with a very meagre supply of food. This column intended to pass into Mongolia, to join the White detachments operating there.

By the third day of marching the fighting units were separated from the column and pulled into the rearguard, which was already being attacked by the Reds and Chinese. The column withdrew quickly, making long marches, evading battle as far as possible. The Reds pursued relentlessly.

On 29 May, i.e. on the fifth day of the march, the column covered 75 kilometres. Many were already beginning to fall from fatigue and hunger because of the lack of food, and sometimes even the complete absence of it. On that day the column needed to cross a swamp. Part of the convoy, with women and children, began to get stuck in the mire and had to get rid of the extra weight to get out of it. Thanks to the pursuit by the Reds, the column had to leave the Tacheng to Ürümqi road and enter the terrible desert of Asia, the Gobi.³²

One participant of the campaign wrote in his diary for 17 May:

³² Actually the Gurbantünggüt Desert, which is not part of the Gobi..



Desert, sands, lack of water, unbearable heat ... hunger and tormenting thirst. We are doomed. Only suffering and death await us.

Further on, for the date of 18 May, he wrote:

We are moving through the desert. Sky and sand without end. Nothing else...

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.

In the evening of 1 June reconnaissance reported that behind the nearest pass, at the exit from the gorge to the Kobuk River, Reds from Zaysan were entrenched waiting for the column, to cut off its retreat.

The column came to a halt. All those capable of bearing arms had to prepare for battle. Of the 8,000 people, however, that was no more than 600. Of those, two-thirds were unarmed, and the other third were armed with whatever they could find, most of them with the weapons they had managed to hide from the Chinese authorities when they were interned in China, either in Bakich's detachment or the People's Division.

There was now no alternative but to win or die. It seemed that they had fled so far from their enemies, to the little-known Dzungaria, but even there the Reds overtook the unfortunate wanderers, exhausted both physically and mentally: poorly clothed, hungry and unarmed.

Many of them probably asked a sad question: why did fate send the Whites such severe trials, such unbearable, inhuman suffering? And would the world ever hear about those trials, in order to commemorate with a kind word the participation of the unfortunate sufferers, who were guilty only of remaining faithful to their White ideals and in the honest fulfilment of their duty? Having bravely faced death on the fronts of the world war, on the fields of Poland, Galicia, Romania, or in the mountains of the Caucasus and then on the front lines of the Russian Civil War, those men had now fallen so far in spirit that they could not regain their former courage and fortitude. At that difficult moment many of them felt utter despair: some threw themselves on the ground in exhaustion, covering their faces with their hands, while others wept loudly. Some, resigning themselves to their inevitable fate, waved hopelessly: “what will be, will be!” Someone committed suicide with a revolver, having lost hope of preserving his life. People could not think straight and almost mortal melancholy seized everyone with the awareness of their doom. After fate had spared them on the fronts of the Great War it was too bitter and seemed some kind of evil mockery that they were now to die from the Reds' bullets or from hunger and the other deprivations of the march.

The command decided on a heroic measure: it summoned all those who still had strength in their legs to attack the enemy. The offer did not have to be repeated – the situation gave no freedom of choice. And so a combat took place, the like of which had probably never before been witnessed in history.

Colonel V. Yu. Sokolnitskiy relates:

People who had been healthy not so long ago, but who were now swollen with hunger, armed with sticks, knives, and stones, rushed on foot to the heights occupied by a well prepared enemy – the heights above the Kobuk River, which glistened in a narrow strip, promising salvation to people mad with thirst.



General Bakich and his chief of staff, Smolnin, having recruited some mounted men, began to move around the left flank. The Reds retreated into the ravines, a kilometre back.

This was already a major success, as it gave the Whites the dominant heights.

The Reds had prepared trenches in the ravines. The Whites raced to attack them. The Reds began to panic, but seeing up close that their opponents were unarmed, they came to their senses and launched a counterattack.

“Comrades! They are unarmed! Defeat them!” shouted the Bolshevik commanders.

The Whites had to retreat, but with only minor losses. Five times they attacked, and each time they were repulsed by the Reds. The battle went on for five hours, and it was still impossible to determine who would be the victors.

At 9 a.m. General Bakich moved forward to bypass the enemy to the right, intending to occupy the gorge in the rear of the Reds, and the men, gathering a last desperate effort, rushed into their sixth attack. This time the Reds could not withstand and turned to flee, causing a loud and friendly “ura” in the White ranks who, now regaining their spirits, chased the enemy all the way to the river, in the waters of which many of the Bolsheviks found their deaths. Their remnants were pursued by the Whites for a dozen kilometres, as long as they still had strength. Having reached the river, many of the fighters, leaving the fleeing enemy, ran to the water and greedily drank it, hurrying to quench their unbearable thirst.

In a search for food the famished soldiers rushed to the fleeing enemy’s camp. Terrible scenes were played out there. A group of soldiers ran to a dead horse to at least snatch a piece of meat for themselves. A Cossack bent over the body of a dying Red soldier, hands trembling with impatience, trying to take a piece of black bread from his bag. If only they could eat quickly, if only they could get rid of the unbearable torments of hunger and renew their weakened strength.

With the victory at the Kobuk River Bakich’s detachment opened a way to the east. Having spent the night on the bank of the river, the detachment once more moved on, without wasting an extra minute.

News spread very quickly among the nomads across the steppe. This was a phenomenon noted by all the White Russians who were forced to wander through the steppes and deserts of Mongolia and Xinjiang. Having received interesting news, a Mongol would jump on his horse and race to his neighbouring *gers*, sometimes dozens of kilometres away, to share his news with his neighbours and, if necessary, to consult on what to do. When a Mongol met a traveller he would inevitably ask if there was anything new and he would relate anything he had learned.

Perhaps this habit of collecting and spreading news was developed among the Asian nomads in the grey olden days, when the countless tribes and hordes of Central Asia feuded among themselves and attacked each other. Then timely awareness of current events was one of the measures of self-defence. If an enemy appeared somewhere, a nomad could migrate with his cattle somewhere far out of the way in advance and thus save his property.

Undoubtedly rumours spread about the movement of General Bakich’s column, of a size not seen for a long time in the steppes and mountains of Dzungaria, being several thousand men.

Before long Bakich began to approach the Irtysh River. The town of Altay (Shara Sume), the main administrative and commercial centre of the Mongol Altai, by now knew that a large detachment of Russians was moving towards the town.

The frightened Kirghiz passed fantastic information about the battle on the Kobuk River, talking about the huge losses suffered by the Reds, who allegedly had left behind many machine guns and



cannons. They also said that the Russians were moving in infinite numbers, the lights of their fires at night could be seen for hundreds of kilometres, and those lights were more than the stars in the sky. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood scattered in different directions at the approach of the Russians.

The Chinese authorities of Altay were extremely alarmed by these rumours. The small Russian population of this town was, of course, also excited, foreseeing that upcoming events would affect them greatly. Actually there were few Russians in Altay: most were Muslim—Tatars, Sarts and Kirghiz.

When peace negotiations between General Bakich with the Altay authorities broke down and Bakich's column, having broken through Chinese forces, crossed the Irtysh River and began to advance to the city, its governor committed suicide in fear. Panic broke out in the city. Chinese soldiers began to loot the city bazaars and leave with their loot. Chinese officials and merchants hurriedly left for the city of Burqin (Burchum).

There were reasons to fear that the Kirghiz would come down from the mountains to the defenceless Altay and plunder it. So a self-defence militia of Russians, Sarts and Tatars was formed in the town.

When the panic subsided a little, the Chinese authorities in Burqin summoned Muslim soldiers to Altay. These were the so-called Dungsans, comparatively brave soldiers and well armed. Little by little the Chinese began to return to the town. After the battle on the Kobuk River, General Bakich's detachment moved eastwards towards Lake Ulungur.

Hunger was still a problem for the unfortunate detachment. Once more they started to eat nettles, wild spinach and other herbs, killed dogs, and raced with knives to every fallen horse. It was especially hard for those who were travelling in the convoy – the sick, women and children. Almost no care was taken of them. Some foodstuffs were taken by the detachment's mobile units from the reserves of the Chinese pickets that met on the way. On 6 June the detachment managed to seize a large herd of sheep from a rich Sart.

A. I. Efimov wrote in his diary for 7 June:

A day's rest was arranged. I went to the Mongols in search of food, but unsuccessfully. Everyone in our path fled from us like the plague.

On that day General Bakich gave a monstrous order to the detachment: all those who could not move further by their own means were to go to Russia or remain here on the spot. Both were tantamount to death.

Under the dates of 10 and 11 June, the same diary records the following:

The sands began again. We had to cross 125 kilometres, without water and in the heat, which reached 50 degrees Celsius during the day.

People were terribly tormented by the heat, thirst and hunger. Many fell.

It was impossible to look at the women and children in the convoy without horror ... The Reds are somewhere, following us at a respectful distance. Apparently, the desert has exhausted them too. Our detachment is covered by two dismounted *sotnias*.

The detachment is melting away. The exhausted are left on the road to their fate. Everyone thinks only of himself now.

Some of those that lag behind fall to the Reds and some are eaten by wolves, who, like the Reds, follow our detachment.



Late in the evening of 2 June Bakich's detachment came to Lake Ulungur. Here a few dozen more men died, having drunk too much of the bitter-salty water. The lake did however have a lot of fish, which gave the detachment an opportunity to feed itself and improve somewhat.

On 14 June the detachment approached the Irtysh River, which due to a strong flood was difficult to pass. The ferry across the river was on the other bank, in the hands of a Chinese outpost. It had to be taken by force. It took almost two weeks for the detachment to cross the Irtysh; it took until 28 June.

Reconnaissance sent to Altay reported on the state of affairs in the town. The Russian colony was in great anxiety, expecting a pogrom on the part of the Dungans any day.

On 1 July the Bakich detachment led an attack on the city of Altay.

The attack went in three directions: via the mountains bypassing the enemy's right flank, directly along the Kran River and another along the mountains bypassing the enemy's left flank. The volunteers frontally advancing on Altay seized the bridges leading into the town with fighting and penetrated into the Russian settlement, where they immediately searched for food. The Dungans, taking advantage of this, went on the offensive, pushed the Russians out of the town and began to pursue them. But, carried away in the pursuit, the Dungans themselves fell under a flank attack and were cut off from the city. In a panic they began to rush to the river, and most of them died there.

The Russians then broke into the town, which they plundered. The soldiers and Cossacks, smashing up shops and houses, were mainly looking for bread and food in general.

All day and night, once the town was occupied, the people ate and drank, and there was plenty of *dzhunu*, Chinese vodka. The glow of fires lit up the area of the city for several kilometres. In the wagons they cooked *plov* – rice porridge with mutton, apricots and sultanas.

The detachment's carts did not enter the city, but settled along the River Kran, twelve kilometres from the city, in the farms.

While Bakich had been negotiating with the Chinese, the latter took out of Altay almost everything of value. The Russian settlement was plundered by the Dungans, but still there were still considerable supplies of food, which the detachment intendants tried to seize for their own disposal.

The Chinese fled from Altay in different directions: in the direction of Khovd, to the Russian border and some to Burqin. Six hundred rifles, many cartridges and eight cannon fell as spoils of war to Bakich.

On 6 July forty soldiers from Bakich's detachment took the town of Burqin, but nothing significant was left behind by the Chinese, who fled the town.

Still the situation of Bakich's detachment was now much improved. A proper issue of rations had begun, though in limited quantities. Everyone was revitalised. There was talk of a march to Russia to fight the Bolsheviks. Almost everyone was inclined to the idea of that campaign, and especially the soldiers of the People's Division.

The detachment began to requisition horses from the local population. Workshops began to manufacture saddles and lances. The Army (as Bakich's column was still proudly called) was regrouped into a corps. Outposts and reconnaissance were moved towards the Russian border. Men were sent to Khovd to liaise with Kaigorodov's detachment.



This was the end of the first march by Bakich's column. Now it was on the threshold of western Mongolia.

The move from Tacheng to Altay had come at a terrible price. Many people died of hunger and thirst: at least a thousand. A thousand corpses left on the route! A ghastly martyrologue of the Great Departure.

The survivors of the trek were very poorly dressed; most of them had shabby and torn clothes. Many had no ordinary shoes and wrapped their feet in wrappings of undressed sheepskin. Not without reason Mongols from the Chinese Altai wrote about the Russian strangers to the Uryankhai princes:

People have arrived, naked, with strange behaviour. They eat cats and dogs. There are many of them, and their intentions are unknown. The strength of their weapons is also unknown. Only that they are cruel and greatly offend everyone. We lived quietly under the Chinese soldiers, but now many of the Chinese have been killed, drowned or chased away. Misfortune has fallen on our heads. How it go in the future, we do not know, but we ask you to turn your gaze to your brothers, forgotten over the mountains.

After the hunger march, the life of the detachment in Altay passed calmly for some time, without shocks. A strong connection was established with the Kaigorodov detachment in Khovd. A delegation was also sent to Baron Ungern, but only it reached Khovd and stopped there, as there it had received information about a Red occupation not only of Ulaanbaatar, but also of Uliastai.

Having established communication with Kaigorodov, Bakich at first refused his requests to send military reinforcements to Khovd, and sent there only hungry and naked men from his detachment, who were assigned to workshops or field work in Khovd.

The quiet life of Bakich's detachment lasted until about the end of August, when it became known that the Bolsheviks, having concentrated a whole cavalry division on the border, had suddenly approached Burqin, pushed out the Whites from that place, and then moved towards Altay.

The challenge was accepted, and Bakich's column, with fighting units in front, moved out of Altay on 5 September to meet the enemy. Behind the leading combatants, armed with rifles, rode mounted men with lances and those on foot with clubs – all poorly shod and dressed in rags. At the back moved the carts loaded with various belongings and the women and children. The picture was shocking in its tragedy.

The column began to approach Qiemuer Qieke (Kemerchik), when from the mountains in front the vanguard combat units descended, which were returning back having been repulsed by the Reds. Everyone stopped and then turned back to Altay.

Here finally the cup of patience of the unhappy wanderers overflowed, and more than 3,000 people, having wasted all their reserves of mental and physical energy, having lost all hope for a better future and reaching the last limits of despair, remained there in the open field, among the croplands, in the waterless area, to surrender to the mercy of the Red victors.

This happened, however, in accordance with Bakich's order, which read:

Whoever has a means of transportation, a fortnight's provisions and believes in his strength, let him follow me. The rest stay behind. We have a snowy ridge to cross. There will be no population to meet us. The intendants will supply no one for at least two or three weeks.

The remnants of the army, still numbering about 4,000 people, marched into the mountains of the Mongol Altai. The detachment divided into two columns, right and left. The right one, under the command of General Shemetov, consisting almost exclusively of the supply train, went through the



Maigudai Pass. The left one, where the combat units were concentrated, under the command of Bakich himself, went through Urlyugayty.

Before this new campaign, for the date of 5 September, Efimov wrote in his diary:

We have barely had time to rest a little, as again we will face new torments of hunger and thirst. Complete uncertainty lies ahead.

Where to go?

Red detachments and gangs of Kirghiz, Mongols and Chinese roam around. We have no supplies. We are poorly clothed, and winter time is already approaching.

It's hard on everyone's soul. What lies ahead of us? What torments and sacrifices will fate throw at us? Where and how far will we retreat?

The hard passage through the mountains brought new disasters to the unfortunate detachment: several dozen people froze to death on the way.

On 12 September the detachment began to descend from the mountains and to go down the valley of the Khovd River. Five days later its patrols met those of Kaigorodov, and then, as I have already noted above, the two detachments came in close contact and participated together in the siege of the Red fort-*khure* of Saryl-gun.

The fruitless waiting of Bakich's detachment at Saryl-gun *khure* began to exhaust the men. The *khure* did not surrender and the Reds were advancing from everywhere. Something had to be done or they had to go somewhere. On the night of 19 October the first Orenburg Cossack *divizion*, under the command of Colonel Kochnev, and the first sotnia of the second *divizion*, 306 men in all, left Bakich. The breakaway *Orenburzhtsy* went to Khovd. Having learnt of it, Bakich immediately rushed with his personal escort to catch up with the departing men. On the way he intercepted a group of Cossacks who were travelling under the command of Captain Rogozhin to join the leaving *Orenburzhtsy*. According to the stories of some of those Cossacks, who later reached Khovd, Bakich, having caught up with the fugitives, asked Rogozhin:

"Where are you going?"

"There, to the Cossacks, away from you," Rogozhin answered him.

"So you are going to a place from which no one has ever returned!" Bakich exclaimed, then shot at point-blank range and killed Rogozhin on the spot.

Having caught up with the departing *Orenburzhtsy*, Bakich began to shout to them:

"Come back, you madmen! I will not touch you, I will only shoot your leaders."

But the Cossacks gave no reply to their former commander and continued to move on. Bakich ordered his escort to spread out in a chain and open fire on the *Orenburzhtsy*. The latter accepted the challenge, turned round and, without shooting, charged the escort. The escort could not stand, wavered and ran. Bakich himself was nearly captured by his former comrades-in-arms.

On 23 October the *Orenburzhtsy* received a notice from General Karnaukhov in Khovd that they were being taken under his patronage by Colonel Sokolnitskiy, who had replaced Kaigorodov in Khovd.

After the siege of the Saryl-gun *khure* was lifted, the remnants of the People's Division also broke away from Bakich's corps and, joined by some of General Shemetov's Orenburg Division, moved northwards towards the Russian frontier. Bakich's units, having lifted the siege of the *khure*, withdrew to Lake Olonnor, leaving the road to Khovd open from the west.

Bakich still insisted on the fulfilment of his intention to break through to Uryankhai.



In Khovd Colonel Sokolnitskiy's detachment made a firm decision to leave western Mongolia and head south, deep into Chinese Xinjiang, there to find a peaceful situation, disperse into small groups and then make their way to the Far East.

But at this time information was received that a large Mongolian detachment under the command of Khatanbaatar Magsarjav was approaching Khovd from the east and a well-armed column of Soviet Russian troops, about 700 men, was moving in from the west. Again a difficult situation was created for the Whites. They needed to leave Khovd and on 28 October an evacuation by the White detachments began.

Bakich, with the remaining men who still retained their loyalty to him, moved towards Uryankhai, pursued by Russian and Red Mongolian troops. At the approach to Uryankhai, near the town of Ulaangom, the combined forces Mongol- Russian forces fought the remnants of Bakich's corps one last time. After a desperate resistance by the Whites they were forced to surrender. By this difficult time there were only a few hundred soldiers left in it.

So in the winter of 1921, the glorious Orenburg Army, which had travelled by that time a long-suffering path of many thousands of kilometres – from Troitsk in Orenburg province to Ulaangom in Mongolia – ended its existence in the wilds of Asia.

The surrendered *Bakichevtsy* were sent under a Russian and Mongol escort to the Russian border, to Kosh Agach. On the way many of them died, unable to bear the weight of the ordeal. Some were shot on the way by their cruel escorts. Bakich himself and seventeen of his close associates were sent under heavy guard by the Bolsheviks to Ulaanbaatar. From there he and his closest comrade-in-arms, the brave General Stepanov, were taken to Khyagt, where after a Soviet trial they were shot.³³ This happened in January 1922.

The lessons of the Civil War in the Urals and Siberia did not pass without notice by General Bakich and his closest collaborators. Setting out to the east from his camp on the Emil River, with the aim of entering the borders of Siberia and restarting the struggle with the Bolsheviks, he put forward a political program of moderate democratic direction.

In his proclamation "To the tillers of the great and rich Siberia, peasants, Cossacks, Kirghiz and Tatars" he declared:

We stand for the people and democracy. Let the people themselves choose the type of government they desire.

We want all the nationalities of Great Russia to develop freely on the basis of equality and brotherhood.

I and my troops have stood, and are standing, only to guard for law and justice.

There can and must be no return to the old and the past.

Down with Communism, commissars and all violence! Long live law, justice and democracy!

The political program adopted by General Bakich declared that in a Russia liberated from the yoke of the Communists, should "rely exclusively on the forces of the Russian people, without foreign armed assistance." Clearly Bakich was against the continuation of foreign intervention in Russia.

In the land question Bakich's program declared:

³³ Ganin's biography of Bakich indicates that the 18 were sent on to Novonikolaevsk. A trial was held in May 1922.



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.

According to the program, every citizen of Russia should be ensured freedom of conscience, speech, press, unions and meetings and the inviolability of the person and the home.

Reading Bakich's political programme, one cannot but recognise its democratic character. Whether this was done sincerely is another question, but the fact remains that the moderate principles of democratism found official recognition by Bakich.

Perhaps he acted on the proverb: "Better late than never," and, not being sophisticated in matters of politics, did not realise, of course, the fact that the Russian people, at the time of the Russian Revolution, were not yet prepared to accept the principles of true democracy and understand them. If the opposite had been the case, then communism would not have triumphed in Russia, as communism is the complete negation of democracy.



Chapter IX – Kazantsev

Uliastai is the second most important trading centre in Mongolia after Ulaanbaatar.

By the autumn of 1920 the non-Mongolian population of the town consisted of about a thousand Chinese and about three hundred Russians. Among the latter were long-time resident-colonists but half were refugees, the number of whom gradually increased.

The Chinese kept a small garrison in Uliastai.

In mid-November news of Baron Ungern's attack on Ulaanbaatar was received in the town.

The Chinese population became alarmed. Martial law was imposed in the city, it was forbidden to walk in the streets after nightfall. The Chinese officials' nagging of the Russian inhabitants intensified.

When Uliastai learnt of the Khovd pogrom, all the Russian colony was greatly alarmed. In order to protect themselves, they formed a secret organisation headed by Lt-Colonel Mikhailov. That organisation ordered the collection of arms, which resulted in the collection of five rifles, six or eight grenades, eight revolvers and several shotguns. A small armed team was stationed in the main house of the former Russian consulate.

At a small meeting of the organisation it was decided to disarm the Chinese garrison. The time was favourable to that idea, as the garrison had been weakened by the withdrawal of soldiers to Khovd and Uryankhai, and only a small escort for the Chinese commissioner remained in the town.

However, it did not come to the forcible disarmament of the Chinese soldiers, and everything was settled by peaceful negotiation. A treaty was worked out at a joint meeting of representatives of the Chinese and Mongolian authorities, with the participation of representatives of the Russian colony, according to which the Chinese escort was to leave with arms in hand to Beijing, and the remaining soldiers were to surrender their weapons and stay where they were. This treaty was signed on 12 March 1921, and the Chinese escort left Uliastai.

So by the middle of March 1921, the three most important cities of Outer Mongolia – Ulaanbaatar, Uliastai and Khovd were completely cleared of Chinese soldiers.

On the departure of the latter from Uliastai the secret Russian organisation became open, and Lt-Colonel Mikhailov declared himself head of the Uliastai garrison.

In the second half of March Colonel Domozhirev arrived in Uliastai from Ulaanbaatar as the representative of Baron Ungern. However, his authority was considered dubious, and Colonel Mikhailov refused to obey him. This discord was ended by the energetic intervention of Ungern himself, who sent his confidant, Ataman Kazantsev, to Uliastai with extensive authority.

I. G. Kazantsev was a Cossack of the Yenisei Cossack Host. He had served since 1912 in the Krasnoyarsk Horse *Sotnia* in the economic office. In 1917, in the first elections of the host government, he was elected a delegate to the Kiev Congress of Cossack Hosts. Kazantsev was elected chairman of the government of the Yenisei Cossack Host by the fifth host *krug*.

The government of the Yenisei Cossacks moved from Munusinsk to Krasnoyarsk on 21 September 1919, when it was threatened by Shchetinkin's Red detachment, and from there on 17 January 1920 to Irkutsk.

In May of that year Kazantsev was arrested by the Bolsheviks and remained in Irkutsk prison until October, when he managed to escape and reach Mongolia via Tunka. Once there Kazantsev sneaked into Ulaanbaatar after its capture by Ungern. He attracted the attention of the Baron, and the latter commissioned him to organise a detachment to fight the Bolsheviks along the Yenisei River. He was given only rifles and cartridges: all the rest Kazantsev had to get for himself.



Equipped with broad powers from the Bogd Khan himself, Kazantsev arrived in Uliastai on 9 April 1921 with a small retinue, which included a member of the host board of the Yenisei Cossacks, Lavrentiev, two Cossacks and one Mongolian prince. The ataman brought 300 rifles and 10,000 cartridges with him from Ulaanbaatar.

On his arrival at Uliastai, Kazantsev assembled all the Russian officers who were in the town, and at the meeting he proposed that those who wished to remain should stay and assist him in forming a detachment for the conquest of the Uryankhai region. Those who did not wish to assist him in that endeavour might obtain a pass to Ulaanbaatar.

Lieutenant Noskov remembered:

I vividly remember the first appearance of Kazantsev on his arrival at Uliastai. He was short, broad-shouldered, with a large red beard. He appeared at the officers' meeting in a shabby short fur jacket, tightly buttoned up, in large simple boots and a Cossack fur hat.

In a calm voice, lowering his eyes down, he announced sharply:

"I have come here to do the will of the Baron. In my actions I shall answer to the baron. I am obliged to do so, and certainly will do so. I am responsible with my head for every mistake. I will therefore demand absolute obedience from all those who wish to obey me."

The assembly silently dispersed. There was a vague but heavy feeling of approaching disaster. No one wished to be a blind instrument in the hands of another man, and yet all obeyed. Why this happened I cannot say. It is a psychological riddle which I cannot solve.

Many people thought of arresting Kazantsev. It would have been easy to do so, for the terrible Baron was far away, and in fact Uliastai was outside his sphere of influence. Kazantsev was almost alone, with very few associates. And yet all recognised his authority as the inevitable call of fate.

Only a few left Uliastai and went to Ulaanbaatar, in separate parties. Among these few were: Colonel Mikhailov, Poletika, the Filippov brothers (four, all military), Zubov, Rybakov and Ossendovskiy.

None of them foresaw the terrible fate that awaited them. In Tsetserleg, on the road to Ulaanbaatar, all these fugitive groups, except for that of Ossendovskiy, were captured by the *Ungernovtsy* of Bezrodny's detachment and killed. Colonel Mikhailov's wife was killed as well. One of the Filippov brothers was taken to Ulaanbaatar, where he was executed at the entrance to Baron Ungern's tent. Rybakov and Zubov were sent to Uliastai and hanged there.

The secretive, slow-talking ataman Kazantsev made a serious impression on everyone in Uliastai. He also turned out to be a very cruel man.

His plans were as follows.

The Russians mobilised in Uliastai, its vicinity and in Khangeltzik, an insignificant trading place, would form a small detachment, consisting of a company, a *sotnia* and a machine-gun team, and would form a right column, which would be directed by way of Khangeltzik, Tarlashkyn³⁴ (Tarlakshin) and then across the Tannu-Ola ridge, to the Russian mountain villages of the Uryankhai

³⁴ The village (and modern River Tarlashkyn-Khem) is in modern Russia (just south of Samagaltay). It was part of the Mongolian Uryankhai that had broken away to Russian protection but Serebrennikov considers it as in Mongolia.



region, in the region of the Little Yenisei.³⁵ The command of this column was entrusted to Lieutenant Popolzukhin.

It was intended to make a long halt in Tarlashkyn in order to prepare the left column for the attack. Lieutenant Strigin was sent to Ulaangom to prepare it. The detachment began its departure from Uliastai to Uryankhai on the third day of Easter, and after the holiday Kazantsev went to Ulaangom himself.

The ataman obtained funds for the detachment's maintenance by "requisitioning" goods from the Russian and Chinese firms in Uliastai.

Kazantsev's left column, in its attempts to advance deep into the Uryankhai region, met stubborn resistance by the Uriankhs and, being poorly armed, was forced to return to Ulaangom. In this expedition the ataman himself almost fell into the hands of the Uriankhs.

The right column of 160 men safely reached the Tarlashkyn River, a right tributary of the Tesiin Gol (Tes River), which flows into Lake Uvs (Ubsa Nor). For about two weeks the detachment stayed there, quietly occupying itself with setting up a camp, warehouses and conducting formation drills. The detachment did not conduct reconnaissance, although the suspected Bolshevik Russian mountain villages were only 60 kilometres from the camp.

Early in the morning of 24 May, an infantry company of 40 men left the camp for firing training and the *sotnia* (80 men) was given a detail to build cover for the horses. Those not assigned tasks and the sick remained in camp. Nothing seemed to portend any disaster. But about 7 o'clock in the morning suddenly there was a volley, then another one – and a brutal rifle fire was opened up on the company which was practicing its shooting. The company was almost completely destroyed: no more than ten men escaped.

The camp heard the firing, but, believing it to be a drill, remained calm until someone shouted: "The Reds!"

The men, taken by surprise, did not lose their heads, and the Reds who had entered the camp were firmly repulsed by the *Uliastaitsy*, who managed to occupy an isolated small hill behind the river. A fight began.

Lost in the wilderness, in a barely explored foreign country, Russians – Reds and Whites – once more sought to destroy each other.

For a long time the seventy men of the Whites successfully repulsed all the enemy attacks, but then they had to withdraw, as some Red partisans had managed to get into their rear. If the mounted *sotnia* had arrived at the battle site in time, the results might have been different, but it did not appear at the right moment.

The Reds did not pursue the Whites who retreated back to Uliastai. They had lost about 80 men killed and wounded; the Reds' losses were twice as great.

After his failures on the outskirts of Uryankhai Ataman Kazantsev returned to Uliastai in a very depressed state of mind. The failure of his actions could compromise him in the eyes of Baron Ungern and ruin his entire future career. Therefore, he began to gather strength again and to prepare for a second campaign in the Uryankhai region.

At the same time Ungern's agent, Staff Captain Bezrodny, arrived in Uliastai and a reign of White terror began in the town. They sought culprits for the failures at Uryankhai and vented their anger on those who fell into their hands. It was said that under the blows of this senseless, brutal terror

³⁵ The Little Yenesei starts about Saryg-Sep and flows to Kyzyl.



that at least one-fifth of the Russian population were killed – both Whites and those they suspected of being hidden Bolsheviks or sympathisers with the Bolsheviks.

Lieutenant Noskov says in his memoirs:

It was a terrible time. No-one knew whether he would be alive by the next morning, or whether a crowd of armed men would burst into his house at night and take him away to be tried by Bezrodny and his henchmen. Everyone trembled for their fate. Spies seemed to be everywhere. Frightened people ceased to trust even their best friends.

Only when Bezrodny left Uliastai did the anxiety of Russians there calm down somewhat.

However the Russians' troubles had not ended. A regiment of Mongolian soldiers arrived from Ulaanbaatar under the command of a Buryat, Vandanov, during Uliastai's terrible times. The military minister of the Mongolian government, formed with the assistance of Baron Ungern, Mongolian prince Khatanbaatar Magsarjav, also arrived, coming to settle affairs in western Mongolia.

The town was crowded at this time with White Russian and Mongolian soldiers, so it seemed one could hardly expect any danger from the Reds there.

In the first days of July, Ataman Kazantsev's reorganised detachment set out again from Uliastai on a march to Uryankhai. Six days later he was overtaken by a messenger from Uliastai on a foaming horse, who informed him that Baron Ungern had been defeated and that the capital of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, was occupied by Red Russian and Mongolian troops.

Ataman Kazantsev hurriedly rode to Uliastai, and the next day his detachment also turned back.

In the evening of 21 July, when Kazantsev was already in Uliastai but his detachment has not yet made it back, terrible events once more played out in the city, with all their weight falling on the long-suffering White Russian population. Magsarjav, wanting to earn favour with the new Red government of Mongolia, organised a massacre of the Russians in Uliastai.

On a signal the Mongolian soldiers camped near Uliastai opened fire and began to kill their instructors – Buryat and Russian officers – then rushed to the city. A terrible panic began. At first nobody could understand any of what was happening. Many Russians thought that the Reds had attacked Uliastai and rushed towards the Mongolian soldiers' camp, to find salvation here. Instead they found their deaths. The colonists, for the most part, managed to hide in the premises of Chinese firms or left the city. The majority of the Russian refugees died, sometimes after cruel tortures and abuse.

The whole staff of the Russian hospital also perished. They had tried to evacuate towards Tsetserleg, where Colonel Kazagrani's detachment was rumoured to be stationed after its withdrawal from the Russian frontier. Uliastai's merchant leader, Bobrov, was brutally killed.

During the pogrom in Uliastai the Chinese merchants behaved heroically, trying to defend every Russian who fell into the hands of the brutal Mongolian soldiers. They succeeded, however, in saving only the women. In total about 100 Russians died in the terrible massacre.

Ataman Kazantsev and a small group of fugitives escaped from the town and went to join his detachment. Having learnt of the pogrom of the Russian population in Uliastai, he sent a reconnaissance unit there, led by Captain Novoselov, while he went in the direction of Zavkhan (Zapkhán).

The reconnaissance unit entered the town unhindered, as the Mongol soldiers, having learnt about the approach of the Russian detachment, had hurriedly left Uliastai to the north-east. The scouts did not stay long in the town and, taking the Russian women who had taken refuge in the premises



of Chinese firms with them, left Uliastai. On the way they had two skirmishes with Mongolian soldiers and at the first *urton* (post station) towards Khovd they met Kazantsev's detachment. The ataman himself was there, and his detachment moved to Khovd to join Kaigorodov's detachment.

As revenge for the pogrom Ataman Kazantsev destroyed a number of Mongolian monasteries on the way to Khovd. Innocent monks were killed at some of them. Kazantsev's actions struck terror into the peaceful Mongolian population, and along the detachment's route they scattered in different directions at his approach, taking their livestock. Meanwhile gangs of Mongolian soldiers, expanded by Mongolian volunteers, scattered across the Uliastai area and began to rob Russian farmsteads and kill likewise innocent Russian colonists.

On 22 August Ataman Kazantsev's detachment arrived in Khovd and immediately joined Captain Kaigorodov's detachment, after which the ataman was forced to write the following order:

For the benefit of the common cause in the fight against Bolshevism and in view of the current state of affairs in Mongolia, I transfer the detachment entrusted to me to the disposal of Captain Kaigorodov.

Then the ataman, saddened by all his failures, left to join General Bakich, who at that time was approaching Khovd from the west.

Much later, when Bakich's detachment finally surrendered to the mercy of the Red victors on its long-suffering way to the Uryankhai region, Ataman Kazantsev was there. According to rumours, the Bolsheviks gave him to the Mongols, who dealt cruelly with him.



Chapter X – Kazagranti

When the Soviet 5th Army occupied Irkutsk in the spring of 1920, some of its units then advanced south of Lake Baikal, into the so-called Tunka region. When the Red troops arrived there, some groups of Irkutsk Cossacks from the region fled across the border to Mongolia, where they concentrated in a place called Khanga, on the northern shore of Lake Khuvsgul (Kosogol).

There they stayed more or less quietly until the autumn of 1920, absorbing small groups of refugees who made their way across the border to Mongolia. In the autumn of that year, Colonel Koryukhov, who was in Khanga, assisted by the consular official Kuznetsov and some others, decided to give the Cossack colony on the lake a military character – organising it into a detachment with the establishment of the requisite military discipline. That decision was carried out, but the Cossacks soon found themselves dissatisfied with the new order and began to grumble.

Colonel Kazagranti,³⁶ who had recently made his way to Mongolia and was also in Khanga, took advantage of their discontent. He began to support the Cossacks in their endeavours to retain their former free life. Koryukhov arrested Kazagranti and sent him under escort along the Khuvsgul road to Shpigel's farm with an order not to return to Khanga.

About the same time the Cossacks in Khanga managed to seize a steamship with cargo and valuables, which one of the Mongolian offices of the *Tsentrosoyuz* was sending to Soviet Russia. With the appearance of the valuables in Koryukhov's detachment, troubles re-emerged, confusion set in, and discipline fell.

At this point Colonel Kazagranti reappeared among the Cossacks, aided by four accomplices, made a small *coup d'état* in Khanga, arrested Koryukhov and took command of the detachment. He succeeded in strengthening its organisation and discipline. By the end of autumn 1920, thanks to the influx of refugees, Kazagranti's detachment already numbered about 150 men, and he launched an attack on the Tunka region with it. Having easily overthrown the small Soviet border units, Kazagranti reached the village of Shimki, where he was severely repulsed and returned back to Khuvsgul.

This time he settled in the village of Hatgal (Khatkhyl) on the southern shore of the lake. In order to raise funds for the upkeep of the detachment, he ransacked the *Tsentrosoyuz* office there, taking some valuables.

As the Cossacks were still not well disciplined and in any case did not want to go far from the border, Kazagranti finally decided to get rid of them. He gave the Cossacks a good meal and made them drunk, then, taking the valuables that the detachment possessed, moved with a group of refugees (40-50 men) away from Khuvsgul to the south-east and settled at the camp of the colonist Shishkin, on the Egiin Gol (Igin-gol River).

The abandoned Cossacks, fearing a Red invasion of the Lake Khuvsgul area, went west to Darkhady (Darkhaty), where they settled at the farm of a certain Shubin. The owner of the camp managed to organise them back into a detachment, which was later dispersed by the Reds.

In the winter of 1920/21 Colonel Kazagranti's group started to disintegrate, but then it became known that Baron Ungern had taken Ulaanbaatar, and this saved the group from final destruction. Kazagranti became subordinate to the baron and received great powers from him and the Mongolian authorities, with the right to mobilise the Russian and Buryat population of Mongolia. Kazagranti's detachment was to be based in Bulgan (Van Kuren³⁷). Small groups of Russian military

³⁶ This is the same Kazagranti we met leading a column in the Ice March in Chapter 1.

³⁷ From the Daichin Wangiin Khüree monastery, around which the town was founded.



men wandering around Mongolia began to voluntarily join the detachment, and Russians from the local residents, colonists and traders were mobilised, supported by terror. The Kazagrandi detachment began to gradually increase.

After Baron Ungern captured Ulaanbaatar, some of the Chinese soldiers expelled from Mongolia, scattered into small parties across the country. These fugitive soldiers sometimes accumulated in Mongolian places in quite considerable numbers, trying to rely on the support of local Chinese resident merchants. By mid- February 1921 about 300 fugitive Chinese soldiers had gathered in Tsetserleg (Zain-Shabi), a major trading town in Central Mongolia, posing a threat to public safety in the town. The small local Russian colony, which numbered no more than 80 people, including women and children, became particularly alarmed.

The Mongols and Chinese who had friends and acquaintances among the Russians, amicably warned the latter that the Chinese soldiers were intending to slaughter the entire Russian colony of Tsetserleg during an upcoming night and take possession of its property and, most importantly, horses.

This information greatly alarmed the Russians. Something had to be done to avoid the impending danger. A meeting was called for all the Russian residents. It took place under the leadership of Captain Barsky, appointed by Baron Ungern as commandant of Tsetserleg, but who had arrived there without any armed forces. They gathered in the house the Shvetsov trading firm.

At the meeting it turned out that there were only 54 Russian men capable of bearing arms in Tsetserleg, counting both colonists and refugees. They could assemble only 15 rifles, with an insignificant quantity of cartridges, plus several revolvers, of different systems, and some shotguns. Given those weapons and forces it would have been a huge risk to take on the heavily armed Chinese soldiers, who continued to accumulate in greater and greater numbers in Tsetserleg.

The meeting decided to organise some self-defence for the time being and to send an urgent messenger to ask Colonel Kazagrandi, in Bulgan, to move his detachment to Tsetserleg to protect the Russian population from the threats of the Chinese soldiers.

Another representative was immediately sent to a Mongol prince whose headquarters was near to Tsetserleg, asking him to lend ammunition and to send *tsiriks*, Mongol soldiers, to assist them.

The Russians were determined not to sell their lives cheaply. The women, children, and more or less all the Russian inhabitants of Tsetserleg gathered together in Shvetsov's vast house, which was soon tightly barricaded with bales of wool.

On the eve of the day on which the Chinese soldiers intended to massacre them, the Russians held another meeting to decide how to defend themselves, and how to find a way out of the dire situation. At the meeting, information was received that the headquarters of the Chinese soldiers – and the storehouse for their weapons – was at the Chinese trading firm of Khara-Gungan-Puzan. The idea arose to take the initiative into their own hands: to surprise that house and disarm the Chinese.

That idea was put into execution. The next night the Russians, armed with whatever they could find, cordoned off the quarter of the headquarters of the Chinese troops. Seven brave men volunteered to enter the premises and disarm the Chinese. At the head of those brave men was Captain Barsky.

Their plan was as follows: to approach the house, knock on it as if with peaceful intentions, and when the door was opened, to take the Chinese who were there by surprise and disarm them.

However, getting inside the headquarters was not easy. The house was surrounded by a perimeter fence with a massive locked gate. They knocked for a long time, but the gate would not open, and



no one responded. One of the brave men had to climb over the fence and open the gate from the inside.

The Russians came to the door of the house. A commotion was heard in the house, quiet talk, some movement began. The assailants, with Captain Barsky in the centre, revolvers at the ready, began to knock hard on the door of the house. They knocked for a long time.

Suddenly, quite unexpectedly, the door swung open quickly and there was a deafening volley, then another: twenty Chinese with Mausers were firing at the door. Captain Barsky was hit by a dozen bullets and fell down dead; the colonist Kashin, who was next to him, also fell dead. The other five managed to get away. Baranovsky, a colonist and cattle-merchant, was wounded by a bullet.

The Chinese then opened a desperate rifle fire, but did not leave their shelter.

At dawn, the Russians gathered in Shvetsov's fort-house. Hiding behind the chimney-pipes on the roof, the self-defence members began to shoot a bit at the Chinese soldiers, who seemed very frightened, as they still did not show themselves from the house they were in. The Chinese fired frequently and indiscriminately, the Russians rarely: they were saving their cartridges.

The skirmishing continued all day. By evening the Russians' cartridges were almost exhausted.

The situation was becoming critical: but fortunately at 8 p.m. 15 *tsiriks* came to the aid of the Russians, sent by the Mongol prince who had received the call for assistance. The Mongols brought with them a box of cartridges. The Russians were encouraged somewhat, but their situation was still very difficult.

The skirmish lasted three days, during which fifty more *tsiriks* came to the aid of the Russians. On the fourth night the Chinese could not hold on any longer and left Tsetserleg. The siege was lifted.

It was ten days after the beginning of the siege that a detachment from Colonel Kazagrandi entered Tsetserleg, singing as they went.

The very next day Kazagrandi announced the mobilisation of the Russian population, which was carried out in a very simple manner. When, at the beginning of the mobilisation a few colonists who had been called up tried to tell Kazagrandi that they did not wish to serve in his detachment, they were taken away one by one and hacked to death. The other Russians, learning this, had no choice but to express to Colonel Kazagrandi their desire to join his detachment.

After mobilisation in Tsetserleg the Kazagrandi detachment, 50 men stronger, headed back to Bulgan. There the newly recruited men began to be trained.

The Kazagrandi detachment, now subordinated to Baron Ungern, became known as the Independent Asiatic Horse Brigade. Two regiments were formed: the 1st Kyakhta, of four squadrons, under the command of Captain Aryanin; and the 2nd Dzhidinskiy, of four *sotnias*, under the command of Lieutenant Petrov. A machine-gun team was also formed.

The detachment spent Easter still in Bulgan. Soon after the holiday it was ordered by Baron Ungern to move to the Siberian border, west of Khyagt, and at the end of April went on campaign. A stop of several days was made on the Egiin River, a left tributary of the Selenge, near Lake Khuvsgul. Here a base was set up.

During the halt the detachment received a supply train with equipment sent from Baron Ungern. One gun was also received: a three-inch mountain cannon.

From Egiin-gol the Kazagrandi detachment moved ahead to the border.

Its first encounter with the Reds took place in the village of Mondy (Mondo-kul), and after a short battle the Reds were pushed out of the village. The Whites took fifty prisoners and two machine guns. On the next day the detachment made a huge march, around 200 kilometres, along the



border to the west, towards the Tunka region. The detachment did not engage in fighting there: it made its presence known and moved on. After this demonstration crossing the detachment very quickly returned to Mondy, to the old road. This reconnaissance showed that there were Red detachments everywhere, in all the most important border points, well armed and supplied.

From Mondy the Kazagrandi detachment returned back to its base at Egiin-gol.

On 22 May, St Nikolas's Day, the Kazagrandi partisans celebrated here their brigade holiday and the name day of their leader. However the celebration was disturbed by the approach of several Red units towards the camp. An alarm was sounded and muster ensued. A retreat into the interior of Mongolia began. The Reds followed on their heels. The retreat carried on at pace for three days.

Finally Kazagrandi's detachment crossed the Selenge and encamped near the Buddhist monastery of Bandi-gegen-khure.³⁸ Here, while resting, it was suddenly attacked by the Reds. The Whites, however, gave a fierce response: for the first time in its battles they fired cannon. The Reds suffered heavy losses and left seven machine guns behind.

From the Bandi-gegen monastery the detachment moved to the upper reaches of the Chuluut River (Chiluti-gol), west of Tsetserleg.

Where to go next? To the left were the Reds, to the right and to the rear was the same. There seemed to be only one thing left: to head into the Gobi desert, to the south.

During the Kazagrandi detachment's stay in the upper reaches of the Chuluut River a disagreement arose among his partisans on the basic question: how to proceed? Kazagrandi himself was of the opinion that they needed to move towards the Russian frontier, this time to join Baron Ungern. The Cossacks in his detachment, mostly from the Transbaikal, also sought that: perhaps a desire was growing among them to return to their homeland and homes.

However, another cohesive group of energetic people had formed in the detachment: they did not want to hear about a movement to join Baron Ungern, considering a move that way would spell ruin for them. This group of partisans insisted on moving the detachment southwards, through the Gobi and the Chinese province of Gansu, then over the Himalayas to India – seeing that as the only way out of the difficult situation.

The mobilised colonists, in their turn, wondered if they should stay in Mongolia and disperse to their farms: if things got bad, the Mongols they knew there would help them.

Disagreements in the detachment grew. Kazagrandi was nervous and, in his attempts to preserve discipline among the partisans, often beat those who offended him with his whip and threatened them with shooting.

A conspiracy arose in the group opposed to moving towards the Russian border, with the aim of killing Kazagrandi. The conspirators believed that only such a drastic measure would realise their plan of heading south to the limits of India. The details of the plot were worked out and a day was fixed for its execution. By chance, however, Kazagrandi escaped the danger that threatened him.

Having failed, the conspirators became insistent, almost as an ultimatum, demanding Kazagrandi should lead the detachment where they wanted it to go. Kazagrandi finally accepted their arguments and agreed. An order was announced that the detachment to move deep into Mongolia, towards the Gobi. Those who did not wish to go there could stay where they were and go wherever they wished afterwards. Some colonists said that they would go to their farms. The Cossacks had not yet decided to break away from the detachment.

³⁸ This may have been near Rashaant.



So the detachment left the camp on the Chuluut River, headed south, and in two days came to the Uliastai road. Here the Cossacks, about 120 men in the detachment at that time, suddenly declared that they would not go further and would go home. They left the detachment, taking some of the supply train with them.

The remnants of the detachment, about 150 partisans with Kazagranti at their head, moved to the Gobi, intending to cross the desert south-westwards, to pass through Gansu and Xinjiang and winter in the Himalayan Mountains. They had enough transport for the journey, as well as food supplies.

The detachment travelled through the Gobi desert for four days. On the fifth day it was overtaken by two Cossacks. They reported to Colonel Kazagranti that the Cossacks had changed their minds about dispersing to their villages, as the lines of retreat to the Siberian border had been cut off by the Reds.

“Where are the rest of the Cossacks?” asked Kazagranti.

“They are following us,” replied the messengers.

Kazagranti ordered the detachment to halt and make a stop. Almost all the unoccupied men from the detachment went to the wagon train to unload the camels. A camp was set up, with a machine-gun crew and a battery inside. Soon the Cossacks arrived, travelling light without their supply train, and quickly scattered around the camp, as if with friendly intentions. Suddenly, as if on command, they took out their sabres and seized the machine-guns and cannon with lightning speed, driving the men in the camp into small groups. They arrested Kazagranti, tying his hands and feet.

In the supply train they noticed that something untoward was going on in the camp. The men there abandoned their camels, scattered into a chain and attacked their own camp. The Cossacks lay down on the ground. Bloodshed was imminent.

Prudence prevailed. They decided to find out what was the matter. Negotiations began. The Cossacks were represented by Lieutenant Sukharev, who stated that he was authorised by Baron Ungern to arrest Colonel Kazagranti for his refusal to lead his detachment to join the baron. After the arrest he was to be immediately sent to the baron’s headquarters for trial.

Nobody thought at that time to ask where Baron Ungern was at that time, or how and when he authorised Lieutenant Sukharev to arrest Kazagranti: whether he had really been given such authority. In the situation – and in the general state of Mongolia in that terrible time – Sukharev’s demands seemed plausible and natural. They felt obliged to obey, especially as Sukharev informed the detachment that Baron Ungern’s affairs were going brilliantly: that he had come out of his encirclement by the Reds on the Selenge River and was preparing to recapture Ulaanbaatar from the Reds. Under the influence of all these reports the Kazagranti detachment reconciled itself to the arrest of its former leader.

The arrested colonel was put on horseback with his hands tied and sent north by the same road from which the Cossacks had come, under the escort of a platoon of Cossacks commanded by 2nd-Lieutenant Potapov.

After the *coup* the command of the detachment was assumed by Lieutenant Sukharev.

The detachment spent the night on the spot and the next day set off on the way back.

Many of the men were unhappy about this journey. Those who had been opponents of the second campaign to the Siberian border felt bad: they feared the terrible reprisals of Baron Ungern more than death. This fear was so great that those unfortunate people decided to disappear from the



detachment the next night, throwing themselves into new unknown sufferings and wanderings in Mongolia, where danger lurked at every step.

During the night, while stationary, the detachment had an indiscriminate skirmish with some Mongols, who tried to steal part of the detachment's herd. The partisans who had decided to break away took advantage of the commotion in the night. The morning roll-call revealed that about 50 men were missing from the detachment.

The partisans, who fled in small groups, joined up with each other and formed a group of 42 people (including one woman) and went south without any maps or even a compass. On the way they were pursued by Mongols, suffering greatly from hunger and lack of water. On 23 August they reached the first Chinese military cordon, where they surrendered their weapons. A Chinese escort took them to Guihua Chen. Then they went by railway to Beijing, the capital of China, on 16 September.

The next day, after a night skirmish with the Mongols, Sukharev's detachment moved on, reaching the Uliastai road, which they took towards Ulaanbaatar. Just as the detachment passed the Egin Davaa pass (Egin-daban) it received information from the Mongols that Ulaanbaatar was still occupied by the Reds and that Baron Ungern was on the Selenge. They also learned that Colonel Kazagrandi had been shot by Potapov's platoon at Egin Davaa.

Another of the prominent figures of the White movement, who had continuously fought the Bolsheviks for more than three years, had died in a foreign country without even being committed to the earth after his death.

From Egin Davaa Sukharev's detachment went towards Tsetserleg. They camped nearby, on the banks of the Tamir-gol River. This all happened in late July.

The detachment stayed at the Tamir-gol for five days. During that time they received disappointing news about Baron Ungern. It became clear that it would be impossible for the detachment to break through to the Far East by passing between Ulaanbaatar and Altanbulag. Again the idea to go to India arose, but after a mature discussion it was abandoned.

The detachment decided to bypass Ulaanbaatar, going through the Gobi desert to the south-east, and then pass through Inner Mongolia to Manchuria. Everyone realised that there was no possibility of continuing to fight the Reds. They needed, before it was too late, to save their skins.

Before they set off it was once more announced to the detachment that those who wished to stay behind could do so. Nearly all the elderly Russian colonists who had been mobilised into the detachment took advantage of that, plus a few Buryats.

About the end of July or at the very beginning of August the former Kazagrandi detachment, now under the command of Lieutenant Sukharev, set off again. The detachment now consisted of 169 people, including ten women and two children.

Having passed east of Lamaiin gegeenii khure³⁹ (Lama-gegen-khure), the detachment headed into the Gobi desert with the intention of bypassing Ulaanbaatar by some 250 kilometres. There were no-one on foot in the detachment, all rode on horses, plus there was a big transport train of camels and a herd of cattle and horses. Some fifteen captured Red Army soldiers were used as cattle drovers, without weapons. The detachment was armed with rifles, had one three-inch gun with six hundred shells, and four machine guns: two Maxims and two Chauchats.

Cut off from the rest of the world, not knowing what was going on, the men moved without roads through the gloomy desert. Their sole desire was to escape the Red danger, by getting to

³⁹ Near Bayankhongor.



Manchuria, Harbin, where White Russians probably still had the right to exist. It moved with battle security, 25 to 35 kilometres a day – sometimes less, depending on the situation.

Sometimes the detachment came across a well, and there they had a break, sleeping under the open sky. When water was not found for a long time on the route, the riders would spread out in a long chain and start searching for life-giving moisture. If someone found a well, a shot was fired, and then the whole detachment, both men and cattle, would rush headlong to place of salvation. It was necessary to keep strict order at first around the well it, so that the people exhausted by thirst did not drink too much water.

They ate flour, butter and meat. There was no salt. They slaughtered bulls from the wagon train and killed any exhausted horses. There was no way to boil the meat: it was eaten raw, slightly smoked on a small fire made of bundles of grass, which each of the trekkers gradually stored up for themselves on the way.

The detachment met almost no people while travelling along the Gobi. Occasionally there were one or two *gers* of poor Mongols near the wells. There were almost no animals seen in the desert either: sometimes some large herds of Mongolian gazelles passed in front of the detachment.

Less than a month had passed when the detachment reached the region of the Gobi where the roads run from Ulaanbaatar to Zhangjiakou (Kalgan). Here the detachment, afraid of discovery by the Reds, redoubled its vigilance and caution and began to march only at night. About 30 kilometres from Choyren (Chorin) the detachment crossed the main Zhangjiakou road, where it interrupted the telegraphic communication between Urga and Zhangjiakou. In this area Colonel Martyn, along with his wife and son, separated from the detachment, heading for Zhangjiakou, where he had received a special assignment.

At the overnight camp near the Zhangjiakou road the cattle drivers, captured Red Army soldiers, took part of the cattle herd and headed in the direction of Ulaanbaatar. They were not pursued, as the detachment was in a hurry to get out of the danger zone.

From the road the detachment began to head east. Moving without roads or guides, it orientated itself by the sun during the day and the stars at night.

They were approaching the end of the Gobi. Some of the camels died on the way. The number of horses also decreased. The convoy decided to get rid of some excess load: during one of the halts they buried about 500 cannon shells in the ground. This was a treasure left by the White Russian wanderers as a memento to the Gobi Desert. However, they kept the gun, with about a hundred shells.

Near Yegodzyr khure Sukharev's detachment approached the Chinese border. The first place it came to inhabited by Chinese was about 150 kilometres to the west of the town of Taonan (Taonanfu) in Liaoning (Mukden) province. There was a small Chinese military outpost attached to the place.

The detachment was met by Chinese officials, who began to cautiously question the Russians. Who were they? Where were they going? Why? They answered that they were Russian refugees, going to Manchuria, to Harbin. They wanted to get to the Far East in peace.

The Chinese, of course, immediately reported the appearance of the detachment to the authorities in the town of Taonan. They advised the Russians to go to that city to sort out their situation with the authorities there. The detachment learnt from the locals that there were many *Honghuzi*⁴⁰ in the area and that it was dangerous to travel without weapons.

⁴⁰ Armed bandits.



The detachment headed for Taonan. On the way there, it began to meet Chinese villages quite often. Stopping at the villages, the men were able to buy foodstuffs, boil millet, take hot meals, and during the four days' journey to Taonan they rested and refreshed themselves considerably. Only a few kilometres out of Taonan the detachment encamped in an open field in the steppe.

From there it could be seen that the city was large, surrounded by stone walls. It could also be seen that the Chinese had already taken military precautions, closing the city gates and putting cannons on the wall.

Soon Chinese officials appeared in the Russian camp. They started questioning again. Who are you? How many of you are there? What weapons do you have? The Chinese wandered around the camp and looked at everything while questioning. At the time, of course, the Russians looked bad: they were dirty, ragged, emaciated, bearded and had long hair. After inspecting the camp, the Chinese officials left, then soon returned and told the detachment that it was on Chinese territory and therefore it must surrender its weapons.

The Russians had already decided in advance to surrender their arms to the Chinese at the first railway station they reached. So they refused to surrender their arms in Taonan.

They said to the Chinese: "There are many *Honghuzi* in the area. How can we go on without arms? Who will guarantee our safety? If you can give us an armed convoy and escort us to the railway, then we will surrender our arms to you."

The Chinese replied that they had no extra soldiers and refused the escort.

"Then we will not surrender our arms," said the Russians

In reply they heard: "Very well. You are few, and we are very many, and we will take your weapons by force."

A military council was assembled in the Russian camp to decide how to proceed.

It seems that there really were a lot of Chinese soldiers in the city, but at the meeting they still decided to ignore the Chinese military forces, not to surrender their weapons and to conduct a further march. The march was fixed for noon the next day. The detachment brought itself into full military readiness. Machine guns and cannon were prepared for action.

At the appointed time, the detachment set off in a cheerful mood, moving directly north. As soon as they did that, however, eight squadrons of Chinese cavalry, numbering about fifteen hundred soldiers, rode out of Taonan. That cavalry followed the Russian detachment. From time to time Chinese officers approached the detachment and tried to persuade Lieutenant Sukharev to halt the detachment and surrender his arms: otherwise the Chinese would take them by force.

"Try it," replied the Russian marchers. "But bear in mind that we are hardened people and accustomed to fighting."

They marched about ten kilometres.

Finally convinced that the Russians did not want to peacefully lay down their arms, the Chinese decided to act differently. Four squadrons their cavalry trotted to the right of the Russians, four to the left. The horsemen stretched out into a chain, which then closed in front of the detachment, thus taking it in a wedge. The Russians were forced to halt.

Lieutenant Sukharev summoned a platoon of Cossacks, twenty men, and commanded: "Sabres out! Attack!" And the Cossacks charged forward. The Chinese blocking the detachment's way scattered in panic, clearing the way, and then gathered again in a mass. Apparently, they had not expected such insolence on the part of the Russians. They were confused and at the same time angry.



The whole situation now showed that an engagement could not be avoided. The detachment was ordered to prepare for battle, and moved forward. The Chinese followed with the evident intention of insisting on their own position. The Russians continued to advance, searching for positions which they could defend, in order to give battle to the Chinese and force them to cease pursuing the detachment.

Some small hills appeared, the heights of which presented convenient positions, and this was sufficient to commence decisive action.

Suddenly a cannon loaded with cannister fired at the Chinese, machine guns rattled, rifle shots clicked, and all this was directly on target. The Cossacks charged, with sabres drawn. The Chinese, suffering heavy losses, were disordered. Reaching a state of panic and, having galloped off in different directions from the Russian detachment, soon disappeared from sight.

The whole battle lasted some twenty minutes, no more. The Russians did not suffer any losses, but took from the fleeing Chinese some horses, rifles and ammunition.

It was towards evening. Without stopping for a rest, the detachment moved on. During the night it put at least seventy kilometres between it and the place of battle, wishing to break away from the enemy.

They went on cheerfully, not knowing exactly where they would go, where and how many Chinese soldiers they could meet next time. The Russians probably did not actually realise that everything that was happening was being telephoned to Shenyang city (Mukden), where Marshal Zhang Zuolin may already have given strict orders for the destruction of the Russian detachment – which had allowed itself to come out so boldly against his border troops.

No-one in the detachment could imagine what would happen next.

On the day after the battle a day's halt was arranged. The detachment had a rest, put itself in order and started marching again before evening. The night passed quietly. At dawn, however, there was a skirmish with Chinese soldiers, and for the whole day the detachment moved, fighting off the soldiers who were attacking it from the right and from the left. It was evident that the Chinese intended to encircle the Russian detachment. During the night the Russians came to a river, which was not wide but deep. They arranged rafts, and all night long fought to cross the river.

All the next day the Chinese cavalry again pursued the detachment. The Chinese would race up, open fire, then disappear. Often they shot at the detachment from the villages. The Russians had wounded, who were put on carts and carried with them. People in the detachment began to wear out from fatigue and lack of sleep.

Towards evening the detachment passed a small Chinese town. It was again fired upon from it. The detachment stopped and sent one cannon shot to the town gate, after which the Chinese soldiers hurriedly disappeared from the town. The Russians entered it and spent the night there. Refreshed by a hot meal, they set off again early in the morning, northwards.

Again, from morning till evening the detachment was relentlessly pursued by the Chinese cavalry. The Cossack detachments charged the Chinese, whereupon the enemy withdrew without fighting.

The night was spent at a bivouac, in great anxiety. The detachment was again shelled, and two partisans were killed. They had to abandon the transport and camels to ease their advance.

At dawn the detachment again moved on the march and at noon stopped at a Chinese village, where they ordered their lunch: sorghum porridge. The men were terribly hungry. It was not yet lunch when the guards reported that the Chinese were advancing on the village in large numbers, perhaps several thousand soldiers.



To all appearances, a decisive battle was imminent. The Russians rode a cannon up a hill near the village and opened gun and machine-gun fire on the enemy. The Chinese, advancing in three chains, lay low and opened a murderous fire on the village and the hill where the cannon stood. All the crew and horses at the gun were soon killed and Captain Yablokov, who was directing the artillery fire, was wounded. The cannon was abandoned after one daredevil under fire from the Chinese managed to take its lock.

The Russians defended courageously, taking losses. The two Maxim machine-guns had already been rendered inoperative; only two Chauchat machine-guns now remained in operation. Things began to take a bad turn for the detachment: by evening its losses were around 15 men killed and over 20 wounded. The wounded were carried away in ambulance carts. The dead remained on the spot.

There was only one hope for the detachment's salvation: to retreat under cover of darkness towards a second Chinese village, where there seemed to be no Chinese soldiers. A field hospital with the wounded was first sent to this village under a small guard. There really was no military force in the village, and the detachment began its retreat towards it. The Chinese pursued.

During the night the Russian detachment managed to break away from the enemy and to hurry on some distance, facing a gloomy fate the next day.

At four o'clock the detachment allowed itself a brief halt, only to change the dressings for the wounded, and then set off again. The morning passed quietly. The Chinese had apparently lost sight of the detachment, but it was felt that would not last long. This time the Russians took mules and horses for themselves in Chinese villages by force. At noon the Chinese soldiers appeared again, and once more the detachment had to fight them off.

But the rail line was still nowhere to be seen, and no one knew how far away it was. The Chinese in the villages told the Russians: "A few more days and you will reach the railway."

But the Russians had no confidence in that. For three more days the detachment marched on, pursued by the Chinese, and at last the decisive and final day came – when it ceased to exist. It happened on 5 October 1921.

The detachment came to a Chinese village where it decided to stop for a short time.

It was already ten o'clock in the evening. The men had hardly slept for the last six or seven days and were now collapsing from fatigue. The two hours set for the halt had passed, and they needed to march again. But it was impossible to get men up on their feet: those who were awakened immediately fell asleep again. It was evident that everyone was dead tired. The halt had to be prolonged: they decided to spend the night.

At dawn it became known that the village had been tightly surrounded by Chinese troops during the night. An alarm was sounded; the detachment was raised. The guard posts were shooting back to the village. Chinese cavalry was attacking from everywhere.

There seemed to be a road for retreat out of the village, and the detachment raced along it in a mad rush, looking for salvation. The wagons with the wounded got stuck in the village and fell into the hands of the furious Chinese; the wounded were thrown to the ground and slaughtered on the spot.

Only two partisans escaped, including Konstantinov, a machine-gunner who was severely wounded in the chest.

The Russians that made it out of the village broke into groups and continued to offer a final resistance to the Chinese. Many lay down near the dead horses and, using them as cover, fired all their cartridges at the enemy, keeping the last bullet to end their own lives. The commander of the



detachment, Lieutenant Sukharev rode up to one group of Russians, who were making their way towards the hills, with the intention of hiding from the Chinese, and looked for his wife.

“Marusya!” he said to her, “I am badly wounded, and I will not live any longer.” The wound was in the stomach, and it was certainly fatal.

Guessing her husband’s wish, Sukharev’s wife asked the machine-gunner Konstantinov to shoot him, but he could not do it. Then Sukharev, having gathered his last strength, rode up close to his wife, kissed her and with some last parting words shot her dead with a Mauser in the temple, and with the second bullet killed himself.

Left without a leader, the group of about twenty Russian men and another woman, nevertheless moved on. They crested a hill, looked around and saw that in front of them were Chinese cavalry, as there were behind as well.

They all looked at each other and realised that they had come to their end. To resist longer would mean to be destroyed, to surrender as prisoners would lead to being slaughtered by the angry Chinese.

We decided to resist and prepared for one last battle. The horses were killed and their corpses made some cover. The Russian soldiers, who were prepared for death, lay down behind the horses in pools of blood and waited for the enemy, who surrounded them from all sides.

Suddenly from the Chinese side an officer on horseback rushed towards the Russians, waving a white handkerchief tied to a whip. Riding nearer, he stopped his horse and shouted in pure Russian:

“Surrender! You are surrounded!”

“We will not surrender,” he heard in reply.

The Chinese officer noticed a woman crying among the Russians, and again repeated his offer to surrender.

“For the sake of the woman, surrender!” he shouted: “We took you in battle and will treat you fairly, as prisoners of war.”

The Russians, however, persisted. They decided, as a last resort, to blow themselves up with grenades, but not to surrender to the Chinese.

Still, negotiations continued for some time between the Chinese officer and Russians. Followed by tense and lengthy conversations among the Russians themselves. But Colonel Matov took the floor and said:

“We must surrender. We have suffered so much when we walked across the Gobi. Followed by even more suffering when we began to be pursued by the Chinese soldiers. After all that we have endured and suffered, what more can we fear in the future? Death? We do not fear it. Torture? Can they frighten us now?”

The colonel’s speech had a pacifying effect on the physically and mentally exhausted men. The will to resist weakened, and a handful of Russians surrendered to the Chinese.

The officer waved his handkerchief. Several dozen horsemen rode up to him. The Russians piled their weapons in a heap, stepped aside and formed a group. The Chinese surrounded the prisoners and, holding their Mausers at the ready, commanded the prisoners: “Hands up!” They searched them and took away any remaining valuables. The prisoners were then put on horseback, two to a horse, and taken under the guard of a huge escort to a village where the headquarters of the Chinese troops were located. At the headquarters were another half dozen Russian prisoners.



Altogether 35 men surrendered and were taken prisoner – all that was left of Colonel Kazagrandi's former detachment. As they found out later, the detachment ended its existence only a little before reaching Qiqihar (Tsitsikar).

The prisoners were sent to the city of Changchun at the terminus of the southern branch of the Chinese Eastern Railway, where they were held for about a week, and where they were placed in the former Russian military barracks. Those of the Russian prisoners who were poorly dressed were given Chinese uniforms. Colonel Yang Zho left from Shenyang, by order of Marshal Zhang Zuolin, for Changchun to interview the prisoners and make an investigation.

After a while the prisoners learnt that the government of the Far Eastern Republic, i.e. the Reds, had begun to demand their extradition; on the other hand, the White Russian government of Primor'e was also petitioning for them.

About two months passed, and the prisoners were sent to Harbin. When they were taken there, the prisoners still did not know whether they would be sent from there to Transbaikalia, to the Reds, or to Primor'e, to the Whites. Only when the train with the prisoners moved east from Harbin did they breathe a sigh of relief. They were taken in the direction of Vladivostok and at Pogranichy station surrendered to the White Russian authorities.

Their long and harrowing journey – full of suffering, heavy losses and much heroism and courage – was over.



Chapter XI – Sokolnitskiy

After the evacuation of Khovd on 28 October, the remnants of Kaigorodov's detachment, now placed under the overall command of Colonel Sokolnitskiy, moved down the Buyant River. The first stop was at Zumya, where there was a redistribution of the detachment's valuables. The next day the detachment was joined near Khar Us Lake (Khara Usu) by the *Orenburzhtsy* who had split from General Bakich.

Altogether 670 people now set out on the march southwards, of whom 488 were soldiers, grouped into four *sotnias* and a machine-gun team. About 100 men were non-combatants or wounded, and there were about 80 women and children. The detachment had 200 rifles and carbines of various systems, 50 revolvers, three machine guns and 12,000 rounds of ammunition. When it set out on the march the detachment had 867 horses, 97 camels, 40 oxen and 323 sheep.

The question of transport worried everyone. They had to consider the acquisition of fresh, unfatigued, animals because even during their short marches the bad qualities of some of the horses and camels were discovered. This question was uppermost for the whole existence of the detachment, from the first to the last day of the campaign.

Early on in the campaign, some Mongol *tsiriks* approached the detachment and handed the command a letter from Khatanbaatar Magsarjav. The letter, written in Mongolian, was hastily translated. It turned out that the Mongols were offering the Russian detachment a chance to surrender their weapons peacefully. The letter ended with the following words:

Now that everyone has come to a peaceful agreement, do you need to go through a peaceful country with weapons in your hands? We ask you to surrender your arms and then choose whatever route you wish to take. You may return to Khovd or go eastwards along the Urton road. Your safety is guaranteed by me, the commander of the Khalkha detachment, Khatanbaatar. A thousand good wishes.

Immediately a reply was drawn up, in which the Russian command did not conceal its intention to go by the shortest way through the possessions of the Khalkha Mongols to Barköl (Barkul), located in the territory of Chinese Xinjiang. The Mongol detachment was assured that the Russian detachment would not offend the peaceful inhabitants and, if it needed cattle for food, it would buy them through mutual bargaining.

The reply was sent to its destination, and the detachment began its onward march.

The gloomy Khar Us Lake was left behind. They went towards an unknown future. Everyone was in high spirits for the moment.

The ambulance wagons with the wounded creaked. Children crying and the shouting of a mother who lost her patience in the heat of the day and the inconvenience of travelling could be heard somewhere.

On 3 November the detachment came to Dzeergene'iin khüree (Dzergen khure)⁴¹, and on 5 November had already advanced to Zakhi Bulun springs. At first the local population did not leave as the detachment advanced, but stayed in their nomad camps, and the detachment traded with them during stops. But then the nomads suddenly disappeared. Reconnaissance was sent, which found out that the Khalkhas had dispersed them and forbidden them to enter into any communication with the Russian detachment, threatening to shoot those who disobeyed.

On 8 November a second letter was received from Magsarjav, who again offered the detachment a chance to surrender its arms. Delegates from the detachment left to go to the prince to conduct

⁴¹ Just north of the Dzergen Depression.



peace negotiations. The Mongols were told that if the detachment did not receive a satisfactory answer within twenty-four hours, it would move where it wanted to. The answer was received: "If the Russians move, the Mongols will hinder them."

Of course by then the Mongols had had enough time to occupy all the mountain passes on the Russian detachment's route. On 10 November a meeting of the commanders of the detachment's units was arranged. That meeting decided to abandon the intention to get to Barköl through the Khalkha lands, in view of the hostility of the local population, and to go by the shortest route to the valley of the Bulgan (Bulugun) River,⁴² over the Gobi Altai, where Mongols who were friendly to the White Russian roamed: the Dzakhachin and Torghut.

The command gave the order to pack the animals and prepare for a further march in the intended direction. The bivouac came to life. Work began in earnest. The convoy was lined up with the carriages, ten camels in a row. The units appointed as the side guards took their places, and exactly at 12 o'clock on 10 November the column moved on its way.

It was a day that remained in the memory of all the participants of the campaign for a long time.

No sooner had the detachment travelled two kilometres than the enemy detachments appeared on the hills behind. Soon about two hundred Mongolian horsemen began to catch up with the detachment at a gallop with the purpose of blocking the way – the direction of which was, in view of the change of the detachment's route, not quite clear for the Mongols.

Aligned in ordered ranks, in deep silence, the detachment's escort and reserve *sotnias*, guarded by the screens that had moved to the sides, moved forward. In the distance was a disorderly *lava*, also for now in silence, as the Mongolian horsemen rushed, trying to cut off the detachment's path.

The huge plain on which the detachment was moving, gave an excellent field of view, and any manoeuvre by the Mongols was easily parried by advanced units of the detachment.

For nearly two hours not a single shot was heard. Manoeuvring was in progress. Despite excellent fire targets appearing multiple time, the detachment's screens did not open fire, in accordance with the orders given.

The detachment's movement was covered by a composite partisan *sotnia* and an officer half-*sotnia*.

The Mongols moved to within 150 paces of the composite *sotnia* and, covered by bushes on sandy hillocks, began to approach, scattered in a chain. The *sotnia* took up a fighting position. Finally a single shot sounded from the Mongols' side, soon followed by others. The Russian outposts began to respond, and under their fire the Mongols ran back.

Colonel Sokolnitskiy wrote:

We could observe the spectacle from the side. The column of Russians moved slowly, bristling with screens in all directions. The Mongolian horsemen rode beside, with screams, aimlessly sending bullet after bullet towards the detachment..

The column's behaviour was marvellous. Its movement was carried out in deathly silence, in complete order, aligned both in ranks and from behind.

The indiscriminate firing of the Mongols did not hit any targets. During this curious battle the detachment only had one person lightly wounded and two shell-shocked, and lost three horses.

⁴² The upper reaches of the Uluungur River, in Mongolia, are known as the Bulgan Gol.



Having seen the lack of success of their attacks, the Mongols sent the greater part of their forces against the detachment; but their right group was dispersed by a counter-attack of the third *sotnia* of the Orenburg Cossack *divizion*. That *sotnia*, having no weapons, charged at the enemy with *nagaika* whips, and the Mongols, unable to withstand the rapid Cossack onslaught, turned to flight. Using rifle and machine-gun fire, the vanguard of the detachment drove away another group of Mongols who tried to prevent the Russians from occupying the gorge they were approaching.

By evening the Mongols halted their pursuit. The detachment continued to move until two o'clock in the morning, having made a 14-hour march of about 60 kilometres. The detachment moved confidently in the darkness of the night thanks to their excellent guides.

The detachment later found out that the *tsiriks* pursuing it belonged to the same regiment which had organised a pogrom of the peaceful Russian population in Uliastai in the summer of that year.

Having had some rest on a stony plateau, early in the morning of 11 November Sokolnitskiy's detachment pulled up to the entrance of the gloomy Tsenkher (Tundu-Tsenker) valley. It was very narrow and blocked with large boulders. That spoke of the difficulties of the journey ahead.

The detachment nicknamed the valley "The road to Hell". They could move only small distances during the day time. On 12 November they received news of the appearance of Mongols where the gorge forked. On the night of 13 November the fifty man officer detachment attacked the location of the Mongolian soldiers, but was met with heavy fire, suffered losses and retreated. One officer was killed and four wounded. Of the wounded, Sergeant Novoselov of the Siberian Cossack Host soon died, and Lieutenant Noskov, wounded by a bullet through the head, lost his sight.

Afraid of being locked in the gorge by the Mongols, after attempts with fight its way through, the detachment changed its route and took a more difficult route, heading towards the Mash-Daban pass.

It was about 80 kilometres⁴³ to the pass. They were ordered to move as fast as possible, without stops. The movement started at night, with all military precautions.

The way was unusually heavy going. At two o'clock in the morning it began to rain, which in the morning turned to snow. The unfortunate travellers crawled along narrow ledges, breaking out suddenly onto black stony plateaus, bypassed some abysses, and got lost again in sandy ravines.

Few people had a clear idea of the path to follow. Only the head of the column, where the guide was, walked confidently. The rest of the column lagged many hundreds of metres behind, or huddled together. The detachment was no longer thought about the possibility of clashes with the enemy. Now it was more than enough to fight Nature.

By the morning of 14 November the detachment stopped ten kilometres away from the pass on a small plateau at the height of more than 1,500 metres. It was snowing, windy and cold.

The detachment's bivouac presented a pitiful sight. No-one had tents or suitable materials for them. Everyone huddled against the rocks of the steep cliffs, trying in vain to shelter themselves from the strong wind. We soon learnt that there was a coniferous forest on the slope to the right with dry branches. Bonfires appeared. Tea began to brew. There was no water: it was replaced by ice, of which there was an abundance.

On 14 and 15 November the detachment halted, waiting for the rearguard units, lost somewhere in the mountain valleys. Those units did, however, reach the camp safely.

⁴³ This does not seem possible: the entire Tsenkher valley is not that long.

As far as I can make out, they crossed at about 46.75° N 91.80° E.



Bad weather then prevented them from travelling over the pass. They had to wait for a clear day.

An officer platoon of volunteer scouts was sent to the top of the pass to guard it. With a small amount of food and not having warm clothes, that platoon overcame the difficulties of the ascent in a strong wind, appeared on the top of Mash-Daban and set up posts there.

The guides said that it would be its good fortune if the detachment succeeded in crossing, as the pass could not be used for travelling after snow storms.

The strong wind froze many people. Two children died because they couldn't stand the cold.

The difficulties of the forthcoming ascent of the pass in the harshness of winter alarmed some participants of the trek. They were almost exclusively Russian inhabitants of Khovd – ten of whom now decided to turn back. They were not stopped, and the detachment bade them a warm farewell.

By the evening of 15 November it was quiet. The snow had ceased to fall, and the sky was clear of clouds. The detachment was ordered to start climbing to the pass at six o'clock on the next morning. At the appointed hour, the ascent began.

Over the course of ten kilometres the detachment, overcame several insignificant ascents in good weather. The road went steadily up all the time and at last the detachment found itself before the last obstacle: 300 metres high.

The sun reflected off the icy slopes of the mountains and snow packs, blinding the eyes.

The tops of the glaciers appeared on the left, and a peculiar coldness blew from there.

Clinging to rocks, breathing heavily, people and animals climbed up the mountain, step by step. The camels often stopped and lay down. The drivers could hardly cope with the tired oxen and sheep of the detachment's herd.

The platoon of fifty officers, who were at the top of the pass for a day and a half, had to endure a lot of hardship. It seems that God protected this fifty men and they safely endured all the trials. And now they went ahead, trampling the path for those behind, sometimes falling in the deep snow.

Silently, concentrating, the detachment stubbornly advanced – forward, always forward. At last the long-awaited saddle came, and beyond it a endless snowy plateau opened up.

Another ten kilometres and the detachment found itself in a wide ravine, along which it began to descend downwards.

Dusk came. The people who were travelling at the front saw a few buildings in front of them: it was the camp of the colonist Popov. Joyfully increasing their step, they all rushed to the farm, but no one met the newcomers. As they learned later, nobody had lived there since the Mongolian unrest began. The houses at the camp were already falling apart.

The detachment stopped, people rested and looked around. It was estimated that during the crossing of the terrible Mash-Daban around 60 people were seriously frostbitten and one completely frozen to death: it was the Cossack cattle driver Boldyrev. His body was not taken for burial, as the witnesses of his death were not far from the same fate themselves.

After crossing Mash-Daban the Sokolnitskiy detachment decided to have a day's rest, and the day of 17 November was spent in bivouac near Popov's farm.



In the morning of that day the Turgut Da Lama, the ruler of the local *khoshun*,⁴⁴ arrived at the detachment's camp, accompanied by an honourable escort. He was a prominent Mongol, with a lean face, whose keen, quick-sighted eyes examined everything. He questioned the Russian commanders politely, without a sign of fear or servility, as to whether the detachment had safely made its way here. It turned out that he was perfectly aware of everything going on. As a result of the conversation, the Lama was convinced of the peacefulness of the detachment and suggested that it should cross to the mouth of the Bulgan and Khudzhirtyn (Kudzhurta) Rivers⁴⁵ and stop near his winter camp.⁴⁶ The arrival of the Lama and his calm, peaceful speech revitalised the Russian camp. People now rested properly, warmed up, ate properly and regained good spirits: cheerful Russian songs were heard.

On 18 November the detachment moved to the mouth of the Khudzhirtyn. The head of the detachment, Colonel Sokolnitskiy, paid a return visit to the Turgut Da Lama with his retinue and visited his headquarters, where he was met very kindly. He recalls in his memoirs:

At the greeting we exchanged snuff-boxes with snuff. Over a cup of tea, with sultanas, dried fruit and Chinese biscuits, a conversation about the future flowed.

The Lama, who knew the state of affairs in his district very well, offered to mediate in our negotiations with the Chinese. He promised us his full co-operation in the settlement of all matters relating to crossing the border between Mongolia and Xinjiang.

"I have lived for many years in this safe place," the Lama told us. "The caravan routes from Khovd to Qitai (Gucheng) pass through here. In recent years it has been particularly difficult. Troops have passed both ways. It took a lot of courage to meet them, stronger than us, of course, and with their weapons and their military organisation. And here I adhere to the following rule from experience: the strong is everywhere and always the master. We are not able to fight with them. To arm ourselves and wage war with everyone means to ruin the people of the *khoshun*. That is why we are always equally polite and friendly with everyone. Now you have come: you have great strength, many weapons, and young and brave soldiers. What can we do with you? We know that a kind word opens the heart, so we met you peacefully. We pity your wives, your children and the sick. We wish you all prosperity. We are ready to help what you need, and we know that you will have no anger against us, you will not offend our peaceful people.

In response to these clever and kind words of the Turgut Da Lama, Colonel Sokolnitsky once again assured the Lama that his detachment has absolutely no intention of offending the peaceful population of the *khoshun*.

On the Lama's advice he decided to select two men from his detachment to send them to open peace negotiations with the Chinese military commander in the area of Beita Mountain (Baitag Bogd),⁴⁷ where there Chinese detachment had its winter camp in Xinjiang. For his part the Lama promised to give the deputies a letter to the Chinese, which would recommend the detachment in the best possible light. He declared that he would undertake the organisation of the deputies' trip and cover all its expenses.

⁴⁴ A *koshun* was an military and administrative unit, which were generally hereditary feudal principalities at this time. A "Da Lama" is the chief lama of a monastery or an otherwise very senior lama. The Turguts are a Mongol tribe.

⁴⁵ So near Bazar K l Suma.

⁴⁶ Presumably near Jargalant (sometimes called Bulgan) and not the other nearby Bulgan.

⁴⁷ About 45.36° N, 90.57° E.



On 22 November Sokolnitskiy's detachment moved forward along the valley of the Bulgan River. At first this was difficult, especially as the frost increased quite sharply. By 25 November the detachment reached the Khargan Tokho road; two days later it stopped to camp at the confluence of the Bayan (Bain Gol) River into the Bulgan. The camp stretched along the bank of the river, spreading *ails*⁴⁸ and tents under tall trees.

In the evening of 29 November, two Chinese non-commissioned officers arrived at the camp with four armed Turgut Mongols. This was a reconnaissance. The Chinese thoroughly familiarised themselves with the camp. Soon a small detachment of Mongolian *tsiriks*, sent by the Turgut Mongolian prince Namji, also arrived for the same purpose.

While waiting for a reply from the Chinese, the detachment put itself in order in its camp on the Bayan. A special commission checked and inventoried the detachment's property; the economic part was reorganised.

At last, on 4 December, notification was received that the governor of Xinjiang had specially authorised a person to negotiate with the Russian detachment. Negotiations began, which ended in the Russian detachment surrendering its arms to the Chinese on 9 December, on agreed terms and being interned.

By lunch time everything was finished, and we exchanged the relevant documents. The Chinese pipes played merrily, and the cavalcade loaded with the detachment's, appearing for a long time between the sparse trees, crossed to the other side of the river.

The camp was silent. No-one wanted to talk. We felt abandoned to the mercy of fate.

The detachment stayed at the confluence of the Bulgan and Bayan for about 20 days, and on 18 December received permission to move another twelve kilometres down the river, to the Gaydzhuguna khure, in the Udzyur-modo area.

At the new camp site there was a rather dense forest grove. Near it stretched a rocky ridge. The detachment made a bivouac on both sides of the river: the Orenburg Cossacks settled down on the right bank, and the rest of the detachment, mostly former *Kaigorodovtsy*, on the left.

It turned out that they would have to stay at that camp for more than two months, and the detachment settled down for "winter quarters". There was work to do. Here and there roofs of dugouts rose from the ground and chimneys began to smoke. Not everyone burrowed into the ground – some of them made dwellings out of willow branches.

The Chinese kept an eye on the life of the camp and gave the Russians a small food ration.

With the appearance of some money from the sale of horses or other property, as well as the long and boring idleness, homesickness and many other reasons, people in the camp began to drink. They began to seek oblivion from the sorrows of fate in Chinese vodka. Misdemeanours became more frequent and a guardhouse was even built. Sometimes a drunken company of *Orenburzhtsy* would go to their bank and shout across the river to the *Kaigorodovtsy*:

"Hey, you! Come out on the ice!"

"Why?" was the answer from the other side.

Then the *Orenburzhtsy* would challenge the *Kaigorodovtsy* to a fist fight.

If no one came out from the other side, then the *Orenburzhtsy* would cross the river ice, pick on some random *Kaigorodovtsy* who fell into their drunken clutches, and start a fight.

⁴⁸ The local variant of *yurt*. Some resemble teepees, covered in bark or skins.



In January 1922 the camp celebrated Christmas. Church services in the detachment's church were attended willingly by worshippers. It was not without the traditional visits. The camp warden, Colonel Wang, gave the detachment a thousand kilograms of flour for the Christmas holidays. In turn, when the Chinese New Year came, the detachment presented Wang with a gold watch.

On 9 March the detachment left the camp and moved on to a new place, where again a settlement grew rapidly.

One could feel the approach of spring. The sun was already warming the earth quite visibly. The river had long since freed itself from the ice. Nature had awakened from its winter sleep. The people, who had frozen during the winter, became cheerful again. Everyone shook themselves off and began to care about the diversity of their table.

There were so many large fish in the Bulgan and the lakes close to the camp that they caught them with the most primitive of traps, 40 kilogram or more at a time. They also caught a lot of fish with rods. Soon there were smokers everywhere and thousands of fish were preserved.

Hunting and collecting goose and duck eggs began. The lucky ones who had hunting weapons took game.

With the onset of warmth life in the camp in general became much easier.

The governor of Xinjiang knew, of course, about the Russian camp on the Bulgan River but it seems that he deliberately delayed dispersing this new crowd of Russians in his territory because he was finishing a similar operation in relation to Ataman Annenkov's interned detachment at the time. Then came the Bulgan camp's turn.

On 23 March the Chinese asked the detachment commanders to make a list of the men who knew any crafts or skills, and a separate list of skilled workers. They made it clear that men with such knowledge could be sent to Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang, or the city of Qitai (Gucheng) to work in the factories and mills.

A joyous bustle began in the camp. On 29 March a farewell prayer service was held and warm farewells were said to the first batch of those leaving. 190 people left the camp, including 12 women and 8 children.

The people who remained in the camp spent the feast Easter in great spirits. The camp church was beautifully illuminated with lanterns for the holiday. A big copper basin called believers to the service in the place of a bell. Many had a large feast to break the fast: there were even cheese *pashkas*, Easter cakes and pies.

After the holidays, however, there were more agonising days of waiting.

The Chinese told the remaining Russians that since there were only a small number of camels and *alba*, i.e. carts, that travel was now impossible and they would have to delay their departure.

Colonel Sokolnitskiy wrote in his memoirs:

The whole life of that time was spent expectantly. Everything else paled before it. The most monstrous rumours grew about the expected move among the impatient, which had some basis in conversations overheard among the Chinese.

One day we were even sent a note that the Chinese authorities had nothing against us finding people willing to return to Russia or to stay there among the Mongols. We were even asked to draw up lists of people who would agree to that.

It should be noted that the proximity of the Kirghiz disturbed the Muslims in the camp, and some of the them secretly went to be with their co-religionists. So we had a new



category of people who left the detachment without permission. However, there were only eight of them.

There was a lot of talk that because of some trouble with our first party, which had allegedly started a riot, we would all be sent to Altay (Shara Sume), close to the Russian border. This seemed to be true and created panic.

It turned out that the first party, having been delayed during the Easter holidays in Qitai, had arranged a big drinking party there. That resulted in the head of that party, being arrested by the Chinese authorities and imprisoned.

Then that group had a large falling out at the Shikho coal mine. The workers, upset at the failure of the Chinese to fulfil the agreed conditions, staged a genuine riot, for which they were sent in batches to the border, to Tacheng (Chuguchak).

In May people left in groups to a new camp, at Beita Mountain. The detachment was all there by the beginning of July.

Beita was the last stage of the detachment on the way to Qitai. From 11 August it started sending people from here towards that city; the detachment headquarters left Beita on 5 September and five days later came to the walls of Qitai.

They stopped for the night near the massive city wall gate of Qitai. We must assume there were *dyan* (inns) there.

Many inscriptions on the walls, some even quite well executed, talked of the passage by Ataman Annenkov's units through the city and about the boundless love his partisans had for him. Greetings to him and wishes for well-being and a happy journey were seen all over. It is unlikely that those who wrote them could have imagined what the sad fate of their favourite ataman would be – he was already in a Chinese prison in Ürümqi.

It was very difficult to get work in Qitai. People earned 5 Ürümqi *lan* a month doing hard menial work, which was about one and a half Chinese silver dollars.

Since the situation there for the hired workers was close to hard labour, the detachment headquarters, still having some small resources left, decided to come to the aid of their men and gave small subsidies to those who worked. In this way many were able to feed themselves and even to get some clothes. Russian wood and coal drivers appeared in Qitai; a Russian bakery and its shop were established; sewing machines and shoemakers' hammers clattered; tinsmiths rattled – in short, everyone began to earn as much as they could. Some Russians opened workshops for sewing linen; there were even workshops for artistic embroidery, for which there was a demand from the Tatar and Sart women.

Soon after their arrival in Qitai the detachment headquarters had a conversation with the former Russian Consul General in Ürümqi, A. A. Dyakov, who was instructed by the Governor-General of Xinjiang to finalise the dissolution of the detachment. On 26 November 1922 the last order (No. 159) was signed by the head of the detachment, Colonel Sokolnitskiy. It stated the following regarding the disbandment of the detachment:

According to the order of the Governor-General of Xinjiang province, all Russians living in the city of Qitai and the village of Chitey are to be sent to the nearest railway station in the province at the expense of the state.

The purpose of my endeavours was to enable people to make their way from Mongolia, which had become too dangerous for us to stay, to the Far East.



At present some of our people are on their way, and the greater part of those who are left are finding the best ways of travelling on their own.

This relieves me from further concern for the Russian men and units I have brought here, and therefore I consider my duties to have been fulfilled.

The detachment, which had endured so much, is disbanded.

The news that I have led Russians not to shame, but to the benefit of our native land in the future – which, I believe, will receive us again some day as its dear sons, is my best reward.

Have a safe journey and success in the future.

By December there was a regular dispatch of parties towards inner China.

The last to leave Qitai for the east were the ranks of the hospital and the former detachment headquarters.

This took place on 27 February 1923. The former officers and partisans of Colonel Sokolnitskiy's detachment, like Ataman Annenkov's partisans, settled in China: in Beijing, Tianjin, Shenyang and some other places, mainly in North China. Many of them soon proved to be very useful workers in this foreign land and, with the conditions of peaceful life, managed to create a life of material well-being there.



Chapter XII – the White takeover of Primor'e

After lengthy negotiations, the Manchurian authorities gave permission for the Far Eastern Army, which had left Transbaikalia, to be transported by the Chinese Eastern Railway to the Russian Primor'e. The *Kaplevtsy*, who surrendered their weapons to the Chinese, as well as Semënov's units, began to load into trains.

Of course, the transfer of a whole army by rail a distance of about 1400 kilometres was not an easy matter and caused a lot of difficulties for both the Army command and the Chinese authorities. The total army strength to be moved was estimated at some 25,000 men, with their families, and some 10,000 horses also had to be shipped. At least 60 trains were required, which was estimated to take at least a month's time. The trains required food for the trip and the distribution of that food and forage at several points along the line required organisation. It was also necessary to maintain order during the train journey and at the places where the trains stopped, because alcoholic beverages could be obtained in abundance at almost all the station settlements. Being tired from their long campaigns and hard military life, the men were not averse to drinking alcohol and having a good time.

While the trains were *en route*, the Reds in Manchuria agitated among the *Kaplevtsy* for their re-evacuation and return to Russia. However, the exhortations did not produce any noticeable results. A certain number of soldiers dispersed into Manchuria, when passing through Harbin and other major settlements on the railway. These were those who were too tired of the fighting, or who had relatives, acquaintances and friends on the route who could find them shelter and refuge for the time being.

A considerable number of Transbaikal Cossacks left the trains at Hulunbuir (Hailar) Station and went to the Barag Banners (Barga), in the neighbourhood of the so-called Three Rivers. There they joined their fellow countrymen, who had crossed the Chinese frontier two or three years earlier and settled on the land, leaving their native country, which had already been shaken by the horrors of the long Civil War.

The vast majority of soldiers of the Far Eastern Army being transferred to Primor'e were from the Urals; from the banks of the Volga and Kama Rivers. They included the famous former workers of Urals factories in Izhevsk and Votkinsk, and those from along the Ufa, Kama, Volga and Ural Rivers, who had covered themselves with glory in the battles for the possession of the Urals. Much less common were soldiers from Western Siberia and there were very few natives of Central Siberia.

It was not known how the Russian Primor'e – which still had a lot of Japanese troops and was ruled by a quasi-Red socialist-communist government – would receive the uninvited White strangers. For a long time the question of the passage of White troops' trains from the Chinese Eastern railway to the Ussuriysk line was not resolved. In fact that question was never resolved: after reaching Pogradichy Station, the easternmost on the Chinese Eastern Railway, the White troops went on foot first to Grodekovo-2, then the town of Ussuriysk (Nikolsk-Ussuriysk), and then to Razdol'noe, where they occupied some empty barracks.

The headquarters of the Far East Army stayed for a long time at Pogradichy and only moved to Ussuriysk in the middle of January 1921. The last trains of the Army to Primor'e soon followed it. So the Army spent almost two months in the wagons of the Chinese Eastern Railway in its passage through Manchuria.

P. A. Savintsev wrote in his diary for 27 December:

Yesterday our hospital train moved on and this morning we arrived at Ussuriysk station. Tomorrow we will be transferred to the local military hospital. They say many wounded Red partisans lie in that hospital. I wonder what kind of relationship we will have.



Some of our units are already stationed in the city. The Second Corps will be there. Of course, they wouldn't let us in voluntarily. But there is a Japanese garrison in the city, and so the Red authorities can't do much.

Savintsev wrote for 29 December:

In our hospital ward lie two *Kappelevtsy* – me and Captain Kalegin – three *Semënovtsy*, and the rest are Red Army. The latter are all victims of the Japanese attack in April. They say that the Japanese really cracked down on the Reds.

The hospital is located on the south-western outskirts, in the area of the military camp. The massacre was especially bloody in this area. The hospital was also under fire, and the hospital doctor, whose wife is now a nurse in the same hospital, was killed in the line of duty.

There are intelligent men among the Red Army soldiers. One of them, a young man with an intelligent face, makes a particularly good impression. He has serious leg wounds. We talked to him so easily, as if we were not even enemies. And in general, our relationship with the Red Army soldiers in the ward is good.

Upon their arrival in Primor'e the Whites split into two military groups. One, quite small, included the *Semënovtsy* – supporters of Ataman Semënov – and was located in the village of Grodekovo. The other group, mainly Kappel's men, was subordinate to the Army commander, General Verzhbitskiy, and was located in Ussuriysk and the military town of Razdol'noe. Ataman Semënov, being in Lüshun (Port Arthur), materially supported the Grodekovo group. Kappel's troops, with General Verzhbitskiy at their head, were left to their own resources.

Officially the White Army, which had now acquired a volunteer character, was at the time a collection of men who were only looking for shelter and work. Unofficially, however, they retained their military organisation, and large funds were needed to feed up to 20,000 men (with their families) and about 4,000 horses.

By March the situation of the army had become critical. People were finishing the remnants of their stocks, which any military unit will try to stash for a rainy day. The command's calculations were that by using all its resources the army could only survive until the start of May.

Some way out of the difficult situation was required, and the only such way seemed to be a White *coup d'état*.

In March a congress of representatives of various non-socialist organisations from Vladivostok and Harbin gathered in Vladivostok. In spite of the obviously anti-Bolshevik character of the congress, the Red authorities had to allow it, under pressure from the Japanese. The congress outlined the programme of work for a future White government of the Russian Primor'e and elected an executive institution – the Congress Council. At the congress it became clear that Ataman Semënov had no chance of leading the government or the army in Primor'e.

Meanwhile, rumours of a White *coup* began to spread.

On 26 May 1921 the long-awaited uprising finally took place. Red power was swept away in Vladivostok, and a new White government appeared. It was almost entirely staffed from the non-socialist Congress Council. At its head was S. D. Merkulov, a local public and political figure, a Vladivostok merchant.

The new government found support from the Kappel's Forces Group of the Far Eastern Army.

It seems that the results of the coup were not in line with the plans of the Japanese. Ataman Semënov unexpectedly arrived in Vladivostok on a Japanese steamer with the intention of leading



the new White movement. However, the Merkulov government took a firm position and said that the ataman had no place in Primor'e. A power struggle began. The Grodekovo forces group decided to actively support Ataman Semënov and sent a detachment to Vladivostok. The garrison in Razdol'noe received an order to not let the detachment reach Vladivostok. The matter came to a battle, in which there were killed and wounded.

Almost the whole of June was spend in the struggle. In the end Semënov went back to Lüshun, but the enmity between the two military groups remained for a long time.

Having had a break for some time in Primor'e, the *Belopovstantsy*,⁴⁹ as the *Kappelevtsy* were sometimes called there, began to cleanse the region of Red partisans in the autumn of 1921.

I will not dwell on the details of that struggle and will touch upon it only briefly, as its history is sufficiently detailed in some solid published Russian works, for example in B. B. Filimonov's book *The Belopovstantsy*.

At the end of October a detachment was sent out to clear the Reds from the area near Lake Khanka. In November expeditions to Anuchino, Suchanskaya, Olga Bay and a little later to the Imam area followed.

The offensive operations of the White insurgents ended with the campaign of a group of White units on the city of Khabarovsk, the capital of the Russian Far East, under the brilliant command of General Molchanov. The city was occupied by the Whites on the night of 23 December, after which they advanced slightly to the west, entering the Amur region.

The Khabarovsk campaign was made under difficult conditions, in a very cold winter, with the Whites lacking sufficient military equipment and uniforms.

When General Molchanov's troops approached Khabarovsk, his two brigades had to spend the night in the village of Novotroitskoe. A participant of the Khabarovsk campaign, officer B. B. Filimonov tells in his book of the conditions the White fighters faced there:

The few huts of the village could not accommodate all the ranks. It was not possible for men to stretch out on the floor – no, the huts were packed, as they say, to the brim. They slept standing up. From time to time there were shifts – a few who had warmed up went out into the cold to give others who were freezing outside a chance to warm up a little. Some did not get into the huts at all and spent the night by the numerous fires.

During the night a heavy frost struck. Many Reds, stragglers or wounded, not wishing to surrender, left the Whites for the mountains or crawled into the forest and bushes.

The cold that struck was merciless. The freezing men grew braver and went to Novotroitskoe to surrender. There were more than 180 of them. And how many froze? On the next and following days lone Red Army soldiers came in and asked the peasants to go and fetch their frozen comrades. Several dozen corpses were found in the hills.

In their advance northwards the Whites tried to gain the sympathy of the local population. They had slogans such as:

“The White insurgents are coming to free the peasants from the Red robbers.”

“For the Whites, the will of the people comes first.”

“Nothing will be taken from the population by force. Not conscripts, not carts, not bread, not property.”

⁴⁹ Literally “White insurgents”.



“You no longer have to endure the lying and rapist commissars! They have no place among honest working people.”

“Down with the commissars! Long live free will! Long live the power of the working people!”

And it should be noted that these were not just loud words. The Whites really avoided offending the local peasant and Cossack population and thus gained their sympathy. Expressing their favour to the White Army and its tasks, the population rendered it some services, but did not join its ranks, preferring to keep a friendly neutrality.

The Red People’s Revolutionary Army⁵⁰ was two and a half times the size of the White Army in manpower. The Whites could field only 6,000 bayonets and sabres in Primor'e, facing 15,000 Reds. The Reds also had unlimited reserves that could be transferred from the west, while the White were deprived of such reserves and also did not possess any stocks of military equipment.

And yet, despite this unequal balance of forces and means, the *Kaplevtsy* once again showed all their fighting abilities in the Khabarovsk campaign.

During the period from 5 November to 25 December 1921, the Whites in Primor'e had 25 combat clashes with the enemy, not counting small skirmishes and firefights. All but two ended successfully for the Whites. Of course, they suffered losses in killed, wounded and sick, but it is impossible to establish the number of those losses at present.

The overall result of this winter campaign was that by 25 December 1921, the Whites had captured the entire Ussuriysk region, along with its major administrative and commercial centre, the city of Khabarovsk, where the victors took considerable spoils of war, including 35 guns.

It seemed that the coming year of 1922 boded well for the Whites in Primor'e. But fate would have it otherwise.

The hero and the soul of the Khabarovsk campaign was young General Molchanov – at that time he was no more than 36 years old. He had been made an officer in 1906, in Moscow. During the World War he was on the German front, where he commanded an independent engineer company of the 3rd Siberian Rifle Division.

Staff Captain Molchanov was poisoned in a German gas attack of July 1915 and evacuated to the rear, but as soon as he felt a little better he returned again to his company.

The end of the war found Molchanov as a lieutenant colonel on the Riga front. There, during the collapse of the Russian army, he was in charge of the corps’ engineers and evacuating military property. Molchanov was unexpectedly caught by the Germans at Volmar station on 20 February 1918, but did not panic and, together with one of his subordinates, opened fire on the Germans from the station building. He was wounded in both legs by a grenade thrown in through the window, receiving eight shrapnel wounds, and then taken prisoner.

Having healed from his wounds, the young lieutenant colonel escaped from captivity in April 1918 and made his way to the Kama region, in the Elabuga area, where he stayed with his brother-in-law, a justice of the peace.

In the summer of 1918 the Bolsheviks began to send armed detachments to the Kama region to collect bread. The collection was accompanied by robbery and violence, which forced the peasants to organise resistance. Peasant self-defence groups appeared. Such a detachment was organised in

⁵⁰ The name of the army of the Soviet puppet Far Eastern Republic, the NRA.



the *volost* where the Molchanov brothers lived and its command, at the suggestion of the peasants, was entrusted to Lieutenant-Colonel Molchanov.

At first the detachment had 120 peasants on foot and 35 on horseback, armed with six rifles, a small number of shotguns and pitchforks.

In its first battle this barely armed peasant detachment defeated the Reds and captured two machine guns and 22 rifles. So began Molchanov's struggle against the Bolsheviks.

Soon he became the head of all the armed anti-Bolshevik forces of Elabuga district, with about 9,000 rebels gathered under his command.

In the autumn of 1918, Molchanov was promoted to colonel for distinction in the battles against the Reds and appointed commander of the Izhevsk Brigade, made up of volunteer workers from the Izhevsk factory.

During the offensive on Ufa, and further on to the Volga, the actions of the *Izhevtsy* under his command were always characterised by swiftness and were accompanied by constant success. The Reds could not withstand a single blow of the *Izhevtsy*. Colonel Molchanov was promoted to major-general for these successful actions.

During the beginning of the withdrawal of the White armies in 1919 from the Urals to the depths of Siberia, the Izhevsk Division, with Major-General Molchanov at its head, was constantly moved to more important parts of the front. For its military merit in this time the division received a St George Banner, and its leader the Order of St George, 4th class. In the Ice Campaign the Izhevsk Division crossed Siberia in the tail of the 3rd Army, fighting rearguard battles.

When crossing Lake Baikal, General Molchanov went ahead of the army, breaking a route to Chita. The general was wounded at the village of Khariuznaya, when attacking the Reds at the head of his staff.

In November 1921 General Molchanov was entrusted with military operations against the main forces of the Reds in Primor'e. He made his famous campaign on Khabarovsk, doing everything that was within the limits of human strength and fulfilling his duty to the end. Let us not forget that he first went into combat as early as 1914, and that he fought almost without interruption until the Khabarovsk campaign. Few have been able to so brilliantly withstand the burden of so much active military service and remain strong to the end as Major-General Molchanov did.

The extensive advance of the White troops intensified the agitation of the Communists in the White rear. Red partisan raids began on the communication routes with Khabarovsk. It took a large number of men to guard those routes, as well as considerable funds to repair the railway bridges, destroyed buildings, etc. The maintenance of the army, which avoided unauthorised requisitions and paid for food and fodder purchased from the rural population, as well as for the hire of peasant carts, cost a lot of money. At the same time, the army suffered greatly from a lack of supplies, in particular, from a lack of warm clothes.

Meanwhile, the successes of the White insurgents on the Khabarovsk front greatly alarmed the Far Eastern Republic, the Reds' buffer device, and Soviet Russia behind it. Frenzied cries began in the Red camp about the Japanese imperialists and their Russian mercenaries. They began to gather everything possible to counter the Whites, especially as by this time any threat of the Whites invading Siberia from Mongolia had now completely disappeared.

In early January 1922 a strong Red group, with armoured cars, gathered against Khabarovsk under the command of Blyukher. An offensive began. There was heavy fighting near Volochaevka Station, in which the Reds suffered heavy losses. The Whites had many frostbitten men, and it became clear that their weapons supplies were becoming exhausted.



The White command faced an agonising question: what to do next? It decided to abandon Khabarovsk and try to organise a front somewhere to the south, closer to Vladivostok, if the army's dwindling resources would allow it.

The withdrawal to new positions began. The struggle was not over yet, but everyone realised that the withdrawal brought with it the collapse of the last hopes for a successful conclusion of the struggle with the Reds.

There was unrest in the White rear at the time. The Merkulov government's relationship with the military command deteriorated, blaming the latter for the heavy cost of the campaigns and an improper management of supplies. The command, on the other hand, blamed the government for minimising and even ignoring the army's concerns, and in this respect it had the support of the local quasi-parliament, the so-called People's Assembly.

The Merkulov government, looking for support against the *Kaplevtsy*, began to patronise certain factions in the army: the *Semënovtsy*, the sailors, etc.

In general, the rear became extremely unhealthy.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Japanese announced their intention to evacuate the Russian Primor'e.

By the spring of 1922 the struggle inside the government of the White Primor'e had heated up and took on extreme forms. On 1 June the People's Assembly declared Merkulov's government overthrown, but it found support among the sailors and *Semënovtsy* and continued to exist. On the same day the army commander, General Verzhbitskiy, gave an order transferring command to General Diterikhs, who had been one of Admiral Kolchak's closest associates.

After the retreat of the White armies in Siberia, Diterikhs had lived in Harbin, and was now summoned to Vladivostok. Declared overthrown, but not wanting to surrender his government, Merkulov appointed Admiral Stark commander of those military forces that remained loyal to the government. Thus, a dual power was created, detrimental to the critical situation of the moment.

On 8 June General Diterikhs arrived to Vladivostok. It was strongly hoped that his authority would settle the White turmoil in Primor'e. Diterikhs achieved the dissolution of the People's Assembly, insisting on the convocation of a *Zemsky Sobor*, preserving the Merkulov government in the region until that convocation could meet.

In the same days the Japanese Government definitively announced the withdrawal of its troops from Primor'e and published a plan of the evacuation. It was to begin at the end of August and to finish in mid-October, with a successive withdrawal of troops by zones.

The position of the Whites was now becoming completely hopeless.

On 23 July the *Zemsky Sobor* opened. While the *Zemsky Sobor* in old Russia had been a meeting of representatives of all the estates from all over the country, gathering only at the most important moments of the country's history, this *Zemsky Sobor* was a more or less deliberately selected assembly of supporters of Merkulov or Diterikhs.

For the first time in the history of the White movement in Siberia, the *Zemsky Sobor* put forward openly monarchist slogans and decided that power in Primor'e should be organised on the principle of one-man rule. In the session of 8 August Diterikhs was unanimously elected the head of Russian power in Primor'e.

Fascinated with Russian antiquity, the general declared himself the ruler of the Primor'e *Zemsky Krai* and *Voivode* of the *Zemskaya Rat*, as he renamed the White Army.



On 26 August General Diterikhs and his field staff moved to Ussuriysk to get closer to military affairs, as the Japanese had already started evacuation of the Spassky district. A group of about 3,000 troops, under the command of General Molchanov, was to take over the district evacuated by the Japanese. General Smolin's group, about 2,000 men, was moved to Grodekovo district to monitor the actions of the Red partisans. A Cossack group under General Borodin, about 1,000 men, was moved to face the Anuchino district, and General Glebov's Cossacks, about 1,500 men, faced Suchan. A militia reserve of about 700 men remained in Vladivostok.

Including border guards and a railway brigade, the White army in Primor'e thus had a maximum 10,000 men by the autumn of 1922. It was facing some 25,000 men, if we count the regular Soviet military forces and the Red partisans together. In addition, new Red reinforcements were being transferred from Transbaikalia.

There was fighting in August and September. In many cases the Whites were once more able to prevail over the Reds and, in general, defended with honour, but they could not deliver a crushing blow. The first two weeks of October were decisive for the White Army. During them the bitter necessity of putting an end to all hopes for a successful conclusion of the struggle with the Reds was finally confirmed. Now it was only a matter of withdrawing the men and getting their families out safely.

On 14 October the White command gave the order that the struggle with the Reds was aimless and impossible and that it should be stopped.

The final acts of the White Russian tragedy were approaching, since they were still on their native soil. Further on was the great ocean, China, Japan – and the horrors of uncertain wanderings in foreign lands.



Chapter XIII – the Evacuation of Primor'e

According to the evacuation plan, the Japanese were to completely abandon Vladivostok on 26 October. A plan for the evacuation of the White troops was also drawn up, and measures for its realisation had been prepared. It was more difficult to resolve the issue of the evacuation of the families of the army personnel, who were concentrated in Vladivostok. There were no reliable means to send them by sea, so General Diterikhs ordered that Japanese transports be hired. From 20 November [sic] they began to transfer the military families to Pos'et, the southernmost district of Primor'e.

After 14 October, the White troops in Primor'e began to withdraw in the planned directions. General Smolin's group began to retreat to the area of the Pogradichy station on the Chinese Eastern Railway. The army groups of Generals Molchanov and Borodin headed along the western shore of Amur Bay to Pos'et. General Glebov's Cossack column withdrew to Vladivostok. The Reds followed on heels of the retreating Whites, but did not press particularly hard.

The question of the evacuation of the sick and wounded from Vladivostok caused great difficulties. General Diterikhs tried to keep them in the city, under the protection of the American and British Red Cross, but none of them believed in any verbal guarantees of safety, and all wished to leave the city. Under incredibly difficult conditions the sick and wounded were transferred to Pos'et and then diverted to the Korean port of Wonsan (Genzan).⁵¹

On 21 October the families were unloaded from their Japanese transports in Pos'et. On 24 October General Glebov arrived there with his Cossack column. Some of his men, with their horses, were sent to Pos'et, while the rest, including the families of the Transbaikal Cossacks, were sent to Wonsan.

A day later, on 25 October, the whole of Admiral Stark's flotilla arrived at Pos'et from Vladivostok, having about seven thousand men on its vessels. This flotilla was also ordered to head to Wonsan.

On 26 October 1922 Vladivostok was finally abandoned by the Japanese, and the Russian city and port was immediately occupied by the Reds.

Pos'et and Wonsan, and then Jilin (Girin), Shanghai and Manila became the new points of accumulation for the last remnants of the White Russian armies, from where they scattered across the world.

The largest group of White troops, intending to evacuate Primor'e, crowded into Pos'et. There were about 9,000 men with 3,000 horses. That mass of people stayed in the Pos'et area and Kraskino (Novokievskoe) until the evacuation of Vladivostok was over and the last ships left Pos'et for Wonsan. For several days horse-drawn wagons were collected in Kraskino to send the families of the servicemen, as well as the sick, wounded and invalids to Hunchun, a Chinese border town. There were about 700 women, 500 children, and 4,000 sick and wounded. There was a wait for the result of the negotiations with the Chinese authorities in Hunchun, who did not know what to do with such a large number of Russians descending on them.

The Reds kept far away from the spots where the Whites accumulated, having taken a strong rebuff from their rearguard units in the Slavyanka area.

The women and children were dispatched a few days before the troops left Kraskino, but their journey to Hunchun was a very sad one. Rainy weather turned the heavily rutted roads into a sea of mud. The short journey should have taken two days, but the column of the families and the sick had to walk for more than three days, the people sleeping in the open field while it rained, as there

⁵¹ At the time Korea was occupied by the Japanese. Genzan was the Japanese name for it.



were very few settlements in the neighbourhood. There were many accidents with the children, innocent victims of the Russian civil strife. There were a lot of colds and illnesses.

In the last days of October the Chinese authorities of Hunchun accepted the evacuated troops, and on 31 October the latter set off, sending its artillery and wagons ahead. They spent the night at the customs outpost and on 1 November crossed the Russian-Chinese border, dooming themselves to the agony of wandering in a foreign, unfamiliar land.

There was no clear path ahead. Everyone was overcome by a feeling of bitterness and fear for the future.

The White soldiers surrendered their weapons to the Chinese very reluctantly. Many of them had not parted with them for more than four years, and some of them almost since the start of the World War.

It is fair to say that the local Chinese authorities and population in Hunchun treated the Russians warmly, despite the anxiety and embarrassment caused by the unexpected strangers.

In mid-December 1922, after negotiations with Liaoning, the Hunchun Russians began to move by train to the Jilin area, having reorganised for that purpose into groups based on territorial and professional lines. The Volga and Kama groups had 3,036 military men, with 208 women and 148 children; the Orenburg-Ural group had 808 military men, 37 women and 39 children; the Siberian-Yenisei group had 459 military men, 18 women and 14 children; the Transbaikal group had 280 military men; and the other groups had 2,952 military men, 390 women and 260 children. In the refugee army there were more than 1,200 people with various crafts, some 340 with some type of technical knowledge, and more than 600 people trained in various professions.

No matter how difficult the trip from Pos'et to Jilin was – through mountainous, sparsely populated terrain in a harsh winter – no matter how difficult the lodging conditions were on the way, everyone was glad to get out of the remote corner that Hunchun is in, to the rail line to Jilin, the main city of the province of the same name. Each group of refugees travelled the approximately 500 kilometres in 12 to 14 days.

By February 1923 the White movement was finished. The people in Jilin were placed in camps, which lasted until the autumn of that year. Internal order of the refugee groups in the camps was maintained by the former authorities, who were not separated from the soldiers. It was only in May that the Chinese authorities ordered Generals Diterikhs, Verzhbitskiy and Molchanov to be removed from the camps.

In the winter and spring of 1923 the Bolshevik press in Soviet Russia was full of cries about various plans by the "White Guards" in Jilin. The Bolsheviks concocted and attributed all sorts of terrible plans, each more ridiculous than the next, to the outcasts of Jilin. Fortunately, those Bolshevik alarms did not do any significant harm to the Whites there.

The whole of spring 1923 was spent in search for work for those in Jilin, but the refugees were not able to be employed in groups, with very few exceptions.

The hopelessness of the situation forced people to look for a way out. Some decided to return home to Russia, some went to America, some gradually dispersed across Manchuria and China.

* * * * *

The forces group under the command of General Smolin, about 3,000 strong, retreated to the Pogranichy station area. That was the seat of the commander of the troops of the Heilongjiang (Suining) military border district of Manchuria, General Zhang Zongchang, who was friendly to the White Russians. Therefore it seemed likely that the troops evacuated in the Pogranichy area would



face good conditions, especially as they came out directly on the railway, in a landscape that was already more or less familiar to them.

In fact, those troops found themselves in a very bad situation. A few days after crossing the border and surrendering their arms, the Russian soldiers were separated from their officers by order of General Zhang Xueliang, the commander-in-chief of the railway. In spite of all the protests and requests, they were sent by train to Manzhouli to be handed over to the Red authorities in Transbaikalia. All this was explained by the fact that the soldiers had allegedly expressed their desire to go to Soviet Russia – which was, of course, not true.

But the Chinese did not manage to take anyone to the Soviet border: despite the security on the trains, all the soldiers escaped in various ways, including breaking through the roofs of the wagons. After a long ordeal, those who had fled gradually found work in the Chinese Eastern Railway. Some of them, tired of wandering, returned to Soviet Russia voluntarily.

The officers of General Smolin's group were sent to Qiqihar (Tsitsikar), where they were interned in a camp. They remained there for some time and were then, group by group, released.

In his memoirs relating to the time, Colonel V. A. Zubets records the following:

I travelled on some of my business from Harbin to Pogranichy station. Here I was able to observe the passage through the station of General Smolin's military units. They were selling and bartering horses and various evacuated property at the station and the bazaar in the village.

I found General Smolin at the station in a small staff car. As I learnt afterwards, he was in a very depressed state during the first days of his stay at Pogranichy and feared that he would be handed over to the Reds. Members of his headquarters were busy handing over military property and equipment to representatives of the Chinese command. Clattering typewriters, prepared long lists of surrendered property, but with each day the wagons were ominously emptying.

General Smolin was held under house arrest for some time, but then had the opportunity to leave for Beijing.

* * * * *

The Korean port of Wonsan now held about 5,500 Russians. There were 2,500 military, about 1,000 non-military and some 2,000 people were women and children of evacuated families.

This group was better off than the others, thanks to the care of the Japanese authorities and foreign charities, including the American Red Cross. In December, the Japanese government took over the care of most and provided them with quite satisfactory allowances.

In the spring of 1923, some were given work in Korea, mostly those from Transbaikalia, but not for long; by summer that work had ceased.

By the winter of that year, the Wonsan refugees began to disperse rapidly throughout China and Manchuria. Some travelled by steamship to Shanghai, many went to Tianjin, Harbin, etc.

Obviously after the dispersion of the Russian refugee groups evacuated from Primor'e, many graves remained as monuments of their stay in Hunchun, Jilin and Wonsan.

The Russian Revolution left graves from untimely deaths strewn not only throughout the colossal length of Russia, from the Baltic to the Pacific Ocean, but also in all the adjacent territories of vast China – the graves of victims of a formidable storm that struck Russia.

* * * * *



Some fearful days – full of anxiety, turmoil, chaos and confusion – were experienced in Vladivostok on the eve of the White evacuation. The greatest fear was that the Red partisans would suddenly burst into the city and massacres and looting would begin.

Journalist V. N. Ivanov recalled the days of Vladivostok's evacuation:

It lasted for several days, and the most terrible was the evening of the exodus, 22 October. For days on end, hordes of people crowded around the hulk of my steamship, the Fuzan-Maru, which was listing to one side. Crowds of people rushed about with anxious faces, dragging suitcases, baskets, and all their meagre belongings.

The October sun quickly made its rounds over this motley crowd, gripped by the panic of leaving. In the evening it went dark, with no electric street lighting as the electricity station was on strike.

Who wasn't in this crowd? Fleeing from Vladivostok were officers, civil servants, priests, members of the Government, members of Parliament and of the nationalist organisations of the Far East, and finally the rank and file members of the nationalist organisations.

Everywhere was bustling and loading. Carts with families and their belongings kept arriving, rattling in the darkness

The sad picture of this exodus was not limited to our steamer. Nearby was another passenger steamer, the Nodo-Maru, which also absorbed the stew of the national movement like a sponge.

The roadstead was occupied by vessels of the Siberian Flotilla and the steamers of the Volunteer Fleet and Count Keyzerling, which had been requisitioned for one voyage. On them were loaded the families of the servicemen and the servicemen themselves – in a word, everyone that had done anything active in Primor'e in the last year and a half.

Collapse, utter collapse, catastrophe – that was what could be seen on the bewildered faces of the unhappy Russian people, once again setting off into the unknown.

In these anxious days of the evacuation of Vladivostok a group of Siberian regionalists, acting under the flag of the government of Autonomous Siberia, tried to declare their own authority, not being embarrassed by the role of "king for a day". They raised the same white-green flag, under which more than four years ago the anti-Bolshevik movement in Siberia emerged, over one of the buildings of Vladivostok. In fact, any remaining power belonged to Admiral Stark, who now became the dictator of the city, which was living out its last "White" days.

Admiral Stark's flotilla, made up of one and a half dozen small ships, left Vladivostok on 24 October and the next day was already at Pos'et Bay. Having stayed there a bit, the flotilla loaded a group of Transbaikal Cossacks and then, accompanied by two Japanese destroyers, went to Korean waters.

The flotilla's next stop was Wonsan, a Korean port. During its first days of anchorage there three steamships joined the flotilla, having received orders to sail north to Vladivostok before the evacuation. Warned *en route* by a Japanese cruiser about the Reds' occupation of Vladivostok, the ships turned south to join Admiral Stark's flotilla. They then took on some passengers to lessen the crowds on the other steamships.

The ships *Manchu* and *Okhotsk* were towed to Wonsan by the flotilla, due to malfunctions and poor engines.



They carried the main contingent of women and children from the families of Glebov's Cossacks, sleeping for lack of space in the open air and in cold heavy rain during the last storm.

There was such a scarcity of fresh water on both ships that all fifteen hundred people received only half a cup of water a day. Under these murderous conditions childhood diseases appeared. Measles and typhus appeared on the *Manchu*, and during the final crossing two children died.

Then, during the anchorage at Wonsan, deaths became more frequent among the children. Almost every day one of the ships of the flotilla had its flag at half mast, and a small coffin of simple boards was carried through the narrow streets of the Japanese city. A priest and several choirboys followed to a special "Russian" cemetery, laid outside the city, behind the long-needed pines of the Korean hills.

The Japanese realised that it was necessary to at least slightly break up the population of the flotilla, and allocated several hundred empty Customs barracks on the pier for refugees. Those rooms had no heating, with earthen floors, and were separated from the rest of the city by a strong fence with a police post.

To get past the guard required not only a pass from the flotilla headquarters, but also the goodwill of the Japanese interpreter, who issued special cards valid until four o'clock in the afternoon. After that the gates were locked and it became almost impossible to get out into the city.

The wounded were the only ones on shore in any tolerable conditions, and the spirit of Japan could be seen with them. They were taken into the care of the Japanese Red Cross.

Because Marshal Zhang Zuolin⁵² refused to take General Glebov's Cossacks into Manchuria the situation in Wonsan became extremely difficult. The flotilla dared not continue to carry into the complete unknown carrying thousands of people – there were no food supplies nor money for it. But the Japanese would not authorise the Cossacks to stay in Korea. Some way out was needed, and negotiations began between General Glebov, Admiral Stark and the Japanese authorities, which lasted almost three weeks. A compromise solution was reached: the Japanese allowed the *Glebovtsy* to stay temporarily on four ships in Wonsan and promised them some material aid.

On 21 November, having left the Volunteer Fleet steamships captured at Vladivostok in Wonsan, Admiral Stark's flotilla left for the Sea of Japan. The flagship of the flotilla was the *Baikal*. The first *divizion* included ships *Magnet*, *Explosion*, *Battery* and *Svir*'; the second *divizion* included the *Patroclus*, *Ulysses*, *Diomid*, *Ilya Muromets* and the boat *Guard*; and the third *divizion* included the *Lieutenant Dydymov*, *Ajax*, *Paris* and *Channel*.

On board the ships were servicemen of the army and fleet, their families, marine detachments, a Russian-Serbian detachment, and cadets of Omsk and Khabarovsk Corps.

The next stop of the flotilla was the Korean port of Fusan, which it reached on 23 November. There it finally became clear that the flotilla would have to go further on Shanghai, which greatly pleased the poor wanderers. Having stocked up in Fusan with water, coal and provisions for ten days, the flotilla left the port in the morning of 2 December with cheerful people.

On the way to Shanghai, it ran into a severe storm, and it was with great difficulty that it began to gather on 7 December at Wusong (Wuzung) roadstead off Shanghai. All ships of the flotilla were assembled, except for the *Lieutenant Dydymov*, which had sunk during the storm, having been

⁵² Warlord of Manchuria at the time.



carried away from the rest. Not a single person from its crew and passengers was saved. Among the dead were several dozen boys of the Khabarovsk Cadet Corps.

Upon the arrival of Admiral Stark's flotilla, the Chinese authorities of Shanghai asked the Beijing government whether the Russian refugees could be allowed to land. Beijing forbade it. However, after the flotilla had been in port for some time and the vigilance of the authorities had relaxed, some groups of passengers managed to go ashore and join the local Russian colony.

After standing off Shanghai for about four weeks and making the necessary repairs to the ships, the flotilla set sail on 4 January 1923 on a further voyage, relying on the possibility of American hospitality. Off the coast of Taiwan she endured a strong monsoon. Another ship sank, the *Ajax*, from which only a few people could be rescued.

Having experienced many difficulties on the way, the navigators finally reached Manila, the capital of the Philippines. The governor-general of Manila allowed the Russians to go ashore, and the local Red Cross took them into its care. By this time they were only about 800 people. When it became clear that the Russians would not be able to earn a living in Manila, the Governor General of the Philippines decided to send them all to the United States, on the military transport *Meritt*.

On 1 July 1923, i.e. eight months after leaving Vladivostok, the Russian emigrants from Admiral Stark's flotilla reached San Francisco, where they found sources of livelihood and could start a new, peaceful, life in the hospitable United States.

Much later, almost six months after the departure of Admiral Stark's flotilla from Shanghai, four more steamships arrived in San Francisco from Wonsan. They brought the Cossacks and soldiers under the command of General Glebov. These were the steamers *Okhotsk*, *Manchu*, *Mongugai*, and *Defender*.

In order to obtain funds to feed his men, General Glebov was forced to sell the steamers. One of them, the *Mongugai*, was forcibly seized by the Bolsheviks and taken to Vladivostok with the assistance of General Anisimov, formerly an aide to Ataman Dutov and now defecting to the Bolsheviks.

* * * * *

Among the command staff of Admiral Stark's flotilla a prominent role was played by the so-called "Mesopotamians". These were sailors of the Russian fleet, who previously belonged to the Caspian Flotilla. They had arrived in Vladivostok in the middle of September 1921, from Mesopotamia, on the steamer *Franz Ferdinand*.

All of them had been participants of the Civil War in the south of Russia. They suffered many hardships and severe trials when the war reached the shores of the Caspian Sea with its ominous breath. They had had to endure internment with the British in Enzeli, Persia.

When the Bolsheviks took that city, they were threatened with being handed over to the Red enemy. However, the sailors managed to escape from Enzeli under artillery fire from the Bolsheviks. What followed was a march, on foot, through Northern Persia, as far as Resht and Qazvin, from where, with the assistance of the British, they were trucked in groups to Mesopotamia. There they were interned near the port of Basra on the Tigris River. The "Mesopotamians" stayed for a year and a half there in unfamiliar conditions, made worse by the strong heat and tropical diseases, until they were finally sent by the British to Vladivostok.

One of the "Mesopotamians" in his memoirs of their journey from Basra to Vladivostok tells the following:

In about March 1921, the British announced to us that they would send us to Vladivostok, where there were still Bolsheviks at that time, according to our



information. Our detachment commander protested, pointing out to the British that, according to the condition agreed, they had no right to send us to the Bolsheviks. A month later, in response to our protest, we received a notice that we would be sent to Vladivostok after all.

We had to do something.

We worked out a plan to seize the steamer on which we were being carried to the Far East, in order to then take it to Manila, in the Philippines.

In May we learnt from English newspapers that events were taking place in Vladivostok, but it was impossible to understand what exactly was going on.

Finally in August 1921 the steamship *Franz Ferdinand* came to Basra to take us to Vladivostok. A platoon of Scotsmen with machine guns was placed on the steamer to guard it. It looked as if the English had got wind of our plot.

On the voyage the Scots at first performed their guard duties very strictly, but gradually their discipline lessened, and, if need be, we would have always been able to carry out our plan.

On reaching Hong Kong we endeavoured to find out something definite about Vladivostok. A Russian, the captain of a Chinese steamer, came to see us and brought us a bundle of Russian newspapers.

Only then did we finally learn what was going on in Vladivostok, currently under the anti-Bolshevik government headed by the Merkulov brothers. After that, no-one thought about capturing of the steamer, but, on the contrary, began to dream of the earliest possible arrival in Russia.

The successful evacuation of White Vladivostok by Admiral Stark's flotilla was largely due to the "Mesopotamian" sailors. Their presence in the flotilla fundamentally suppressed the possibility of any sailors acting in favour of Red power in the critical days of Vladivostok.

With no hesitation, these battle-tested, courageous men went on new voyages around the world, some on ships which were clearly not suitable for long voyages. The messenger ship *Lieutenant Dydymov*, which perished during a storm on the way to Shanghai, had a command staff belonging almost entirely of "Mesopotamians".

Having gone through many dangers of the Civil War, having preserved their lives during the most severe trials, those valiant men found an unexpected death far from their homeland, in the waves of the Pacific Ocean.



Chapter XIV – Pepelyaev

Lieutenant Pepelyaev (a native of Siberia) went to the war with Germany as a young man of 23. Assigned at first to a scout team, he at once distinguished himself with successful reconnaissance at Przasnysz (Prasnysz), Działdowo (Soldau), and other places. One dashing deed by the scout team under Lieutenant Pepelyaev's command was noted in a telegram by Tsar Nicholas II.

At the head of all the scouts of the 2nd Division and a Cossack *sotnia*, during the retreat from Poland in the summer of 1915 Pepelyaev defeated two battalions of Germans and regained lost trenches. For this feat he received the St George Cross. He later repeatedly received further battle honours.

In 1917, when the Russian army fell under the influence of Bolshevism and finally collapsed, the now Lieutenant Colonel Pepelyaev returned to his native Siberia. There he created an anti-Bolshevik officer organisation, which in the spring of 1918 joined the Czechoslovaks in the city of Tomsk. Being a Siberian regional patriot, he gathered a significant volunteer detachment under the white-green banner of autonomous Siberia, mostly made up of well-educated young Siberians: secondary schools students. This detachment, together with Czech troops under the command of General Gajda, undertook the cleansing the Bolsheviks from Siberia to the east of Tomsk, and victoriously marched through the whole of middle Siberia to Chita.

Then, at the end of 1918, Pepelyaev's detachment, now grown into an Army, was transferred to the Urals. His capture of Perm showered glory on the young Siberian general. After the capture that city he began a vigorous advance to the west, to the limits of Vyatka province.

General Pepelyaev once told me personally:

We were already moving towards the town of Vyatka. Numerous delegations of peasants from the Vyatka area came to us with promises to support our movement with local uprisings against the Bolsheviks.

The troops were raring to go. Everything was going so well that promised our complete success. And suddenly we received an order to retreat from Omsk, caused by the failures of the White units in other sectors of the Urals front. I personally was against retreat and was in favour of moving forward, to Vyatka and then to Vologda. From there, if necessary, we could move to Arkhangel' to join the Allies.

However, the military conference which I convened was in favour of carrying out Omsk's order to retreat. The retreat we started led us in the end to disaster.

I do not know, of course, whether the strategic situation would have allowed the campaign General Pepelyaev proposed by way of Vologda and Arkhangel', but if it had been realised, we would have seen in the Russian Civil War an amazing march by Siberian troops from Manchuria in the east to the waters of the White Sea in the west.

The catastrophe of late 1919 brought General Pepelyaev to Manchuria, to Harbin. He did not go there voluntarily. At the height of the December 1919 events, during the chaotic retreat by Kolchak's armies, Pepelyaev fell ill with typhus somewhere near the city of Krasnoyarsk. Having learnt about it, the Czechoslovaks placed the general in their train and, seriously ill and unconscious, he was taken to the Far East.

Living in Harbin, in the spring of 1922 General Pepelyaev entered into communication with two delegates from the population of the Yakutsk region who had rebelled against the Bolsheviks: P. A. Kulikovskiy and V. M. Popov. They had arrived in Vladivostok to seek support from the Merkulov government. However that government was not actively interested in Yakutia's affairs. The delegates then managed to interest General Pepelyaev in them and, after repeated requests and



insistence, he agreed to help the people of Yakutia in their struggle against the Communists. Having decided to organise a military expedition to that distant Siberian region, Pepelyaev moved to Vladivostok in the summer of 1922.

To procure food, uniforms and arms for the expeditionary detachment Kulikovskiy and Pepelyaev were helped by people and institutions that had nothing to do with either the Japanese or Merkulov's government. The recruitment gave the general around 700 volunteers, mostly former soldiers of his Siberian Army or *Kappelevtsy*.

On 1 September 1922, when power in Primor'e had already shifted to General Diterikhs, Pepelyaev's detachment was ready to leave Vladivostok. It was called the Siberian Volunteer *Druzhina*, and officially it was an expedition to protect the Okhotsk-Kamchatka coast. Two steamships were chartered to send the detachment to the ports on the Sea of Okhotsk.

In the first days of September after a prayer service, General Pepelyaev and part of his detachment left on the first steamship to Ayan.⁵³ The journey lasted about a week. On 20 September General Vishnevskiy sailed from Vladivostok with the rest of his detachment on the second steamer. That steamer arrived at the port of Ayan on 27 September.

Upon the expedition's arrival, it turned out that the popular anti-Soviet movement in the Yakutsk region had already been liquidated by the Bolsheviks. Some of the White partisans, fleeing pursuit, had retreated to the east, to the ports of Ayan and Okhotsk, some scattered in the *taiga*, and some dispersed to their villages and *ulus*. There were some 150 Yakut partisans in Ayan, led by Cornet Korebeinikov. Those partisans joined Pepelyaev's detachment, making up its third battalion.

According to one of the participants of the campaign, the assistance of the Siberian Volunteer *Druzhina* was at least three months too late.

General Pepelyaev was now faced with the question whether to create a new anti-Bolshevik movement in Yakutia or to return immediately to Vladivostok. A meeting was arranged with the local people, who assured Pepelyaev that it would be easy to create a new movement in the region, as there were still many partisan detachments in the *taiga*, and it would be enough to move the *druzhina* forward, as it would be quickly strengthened by new volunteers.

Even before General Vishnevskiy arrived in Ayan, General Pepelyaev and a detachment of 300 men set out for Nel'kan, to take the local Red garrison there by surprise, with its supplies of food and arms and shipping facilities. The detachment had to travel 250 kilometres through deserted terrain and on the way to cross the difficult Dzhukdzhur Mountains – which was not an easy task during the autumn thaw, with insufficient transport.

However the upcoming difficulties did not disconcert General Pepelyaev. He ordered the detachment to move out, and went forward himself on foot.

The route was, indeed, very hard. Men drowned in the rivers, which were not yet frozen, and bogged down in the swamps. Nevertheless, the passage was made and the detachment reached Nel'kan. But three defectors warned the Reds about their approach and they managed to sail away on barges on the Mae River to Aldan. Now Pepelyaev was forced to stay in Nel'kan and wait until December, when travel by reindeer began, to begin an advance towards the city of Yakutsk, the centre of the region.

Thus, the detachment was forced to winter in two places: in Nel'kan, with General Pepelyaev, and in Ayan, with General Vishnevskiy.

⁵³ Ayan is tiny. In 1922 it had 14 residential buildings and 50 residents.



The Nel'kan group had no food supplies. It was meant to get them from Ayan but due, to a temporary interruption of communication with that port, the food was not delivered. Those in Nel'kan had to endure all the horrors of starvation: all the cats and dogs in the village were eaten. People were utterly exhausted and many fell ill.

On 19 November a detachment from Ayan, headed by General Vishnevskiy, was able to reach Nel'kan and now only the *druzhina's* third battalion remained in Ayan.

Pepelyaev's detachment stayed in Nel'kan for about a month, organising its transport and gathering intelligence. Information was received about the location of Red units in the area. It turned out that there were some 350 Red fighters in Amga, and almost as many in Petropavlovsk and Churapcha. They could not determine the number of Red soldiers in the regional city of Yakutsk, but it was assumed that their main forces were there, led by the commander of all the Red detachments in the region, Baikalov.⁵⁴

As for the White partisan detachments, it was found out that a White detachment of the Yakut Artemyev operated in the area of Petropavlovsk and a detachment of 150 men, with a special military council at the head, were at Ust'-Mil village. In the second half of December, Pepelyaev's detachment moved from Nel'kan to Ust'-Mil.

On 22 January 1923 a detachment of around 400 men under the command of Colonel Renegart, with two machine guns, was sent from Ust'-Mil to take Amga. The men in the detachment were armed with mixed calibre rifles and had a limited supply of ammunition.

In six days Renegart's detachment crossed the 200 kilometres from Ust'-Mil to Amga, at -50°C .

Amga was taken after a short resistance by the Reds. The Whites lost 22 men killed but captured 13 machine guns, 150 rifles, many cartridges, grenades and 60 prisoners. On 7 February General Pepelyaev himself arrived here.

This was the first success of the Whites, but the further developments in the struggle brought them nothing but disappointment and severe disasters.

On 12 February information was received that the Red garrison of Petropavlovsk, under the command of Strodt, had withdrawn from there and was marching towards Yakutsk. General Vishnevskiy was sent to meet him with a training company and the 1st Battalion. It was to ambush and defeat the Reds while they were resting in one of the villages.

However Strodt learnt of the intended ambush and prepared to meet the enemy. The battle began on 13 February in the Yakut *ulus* of Sigalsy. The Reds strongly fortified themselves and at the same time sent messengers to Yakutsk and Churapcha for help. General Pepelyaev threw all his units against Strodt, leaving only 120 men to guard Amga.

Strodt's detachment was surrounded. Sentries were stationed around it in the woods. The Whites made an attempt to take Sigalsy by storm, but the Reds returned a devastating machine-gun fire, and the attempt was unsuccessful.

In view of the impossibility of taking the enemy by storm, the Whites decided to hold a siege until the Reds, under the pressure of hunger, surrendered themselves. On 25 February information was received that the Reds' Churapcha detachment was coming to Strodt's rescue. Pepelyaev sent part of his forces to meet this detachment, but it again failed to destroy it.

Three days later came the news that a large detachment under the command of Baikalov himself had left Yakutsk. This detachment moved directly to Amga and in the morning of 2 March opened rifle and machine-gun fire on it. The White defenders of Amga shot back at the Reds until their last

⁵⁴ Possibly the same Baikalov we met earlier, in the Khovd district of north-western Mongolia.



cartridge was used up, then some of them retreated to Ust'-Mil and some were captured by the enemy.

The situation had now changed abruptly, not in favour of the Whites.

On 3 March General Pepelyaev gave an order that his *druzhina* should retreat back to Petropavlovsk, near the mouth of the Maya River. Among other things, the order said: "Those who do not wish to retreat further, can stay at the mercy of the Reds." Sixty Russians and 150 Yakuts expressed their desire to stay.

Having experienced heavy deprivations on the road, General Pepelyaev's *druzhina* reached Nel'kan in the first days of April 1923. After the campaign to Yakutsk only about 600 men remained, including 200 Yakuts.

Having rested in Nel'kan, the detachment then went to Ayan on the shore of the Sea of Okhotsk. It was now summer 1923. Having learnt that General Pepelyaev's detachment had headed to the coast, the Red authorities in Primor'e sent a military expedition on three steamships from Vladivostok, under the command of Vostretsov.

On the night of 18 June, during strong winds from a storm at sea, the Reds landed on the coast near Ayan and approached the port unnoticed. They surrounded Pepelyaev's headquarters and his military units. Vostretsov asked Pepelyaev to surrender without a fight, warning that otherwise his detachment would be destroyed by force of arms.

There was no way out: Pepelyaev agreed to surrender and wrote a letter to all the units of his *druzhina*, where he stated, among other things, the following:

Brothers, volunteers! I hope that you will fulfil my last request – that you will not shed blood in vain and will surrender to Soviet Russia without a fight.

Seven kilometres from Ayan, in the village of Uyka, there was a detachment of around 350 men from the Siberian *Druzhina*, who were informed of the Reds' capture of Ayan, and the surrender of General Pepelyaev and his staff. That detachment, under the command of Colonel Sivtsov, moved to the rescue, but on the way it was met by Pepelyaev's letter. Some of the detachment also surrendered to the Reds, and some, about 60 men, went into the *taiga*.

Pepelyaev and his main associates were taken to Siberia, where a trial was held for them in Chita. The general himself, and ten of those taken prisoner with him, were sentenced to execution, but that sentence was later replaced by ten years in prison.⁵⁵

It was fate's will that the Siberian liberation movement was started by General Pepelyaev in central Siberia in 1918 and was finished five years later by him in the remote and deserted outskirts of the Russian Far East.

The fact that General Pepelyaev's expedition did not meet a sympathetic reception from the local population of the north-eastern edge of Siberia, can be explained by the notoriety acquired by a previous expedition under Captain Bochkarev. It had been sent by sea from Vladivostok by the White government of the Primor'e region to bring Kamchatka and the adjacent areas into submission. It landed small garrisons in the ports on the Sea of Okhotsk – Ayan and Okhotsk – and then in the autumn of 1921 occupied Petropavlovsk, the main town of Kamchatka.

Immediately upon the expedition's arrival, looting and violence began, on a scale never before seen in the region. As a result, the native population felt anger towards the Russians, who had

⁵⁵ The general did his ten years and was released in 1926. Only to be almost immediately rearrested and shot in Stalin's purges. His opponent, Strodt, was also a victim of the purges.



brought their internal strife there. In the ensuing disturbance at least 100 men, members of the detachment, including several officers, died violent deaths.

With the fall of the Primor'e government at the end of 1922, Kamchatka was occupied by local Soviet forces. Captain Bochkarev's companions scattered in the forests and *tundra* of the Okhotsk – Kamchatka region. Most perished in their wanderings.

Bochkarev himself met his death near Nayakhan, killed by embittered natives for his violence.

The bad news about the actions of Bochkarev's detachment had also gone deep into the mainland, spreading among the population of the Yakutsk region.



Chapter XV – Annenkov

Of all the atamans who rose in the arena of the Civil War in Siberia, Ataman Annenkov was perhaps the most characteristic figure.

Coming from hereditary nobility of Novgorod province, Annenkov chose a military career from a young age. In 1908 he graduated from a military school and until 1914 was in military service in one of the Siberian Cossack regiments located in Russian Turkestan.

In 1914 he found himself on the Russian-German front of the World War. He showed himself to be an exceptionally brave and courageous officer, receiving a number of military distinctions, not only Russian but also foreign: in particular the French Legion of Honour and the British Gold Medal for bravery. When the front buried itself in the Pinsk swamps, a partisan detachment was created to act at the front and behind enemy lines. Annenkov was appointed its commander, with the general approval of the regimental commanders of the Siberian Cossack Division, in which Annenkov was an officer. As commander of this partisan detachment, Annenkov remained on the German front of the war until the revolution. During this time he again showed himself as a dashing cavalry officer of outstanding courage.

After the October *coup d'état* in 1917, the army began its arbitrary demobilisation but the Annenkov partisan detachment, several hundred men strong, went fully armed to Omsk, to be placed at the disposal of the government of the Siberian Cossack Host. One might suspect that Annenkov was already a convinced opponent of the Communists and so transferred his partisan detachment to Siberia, where he could use it to begin the fight against those whom he considered the worst enemies of Russia.

On his way to Omsk there were repeated demands for the Annenkov partisan detachment to submit to the local Soviets – at Orsha, Penza and Samara – but he always refused. However in Omsk, under the pressure of the revolutionary situation, Annenkov was forced to go into temporary hiding, but without surrendering his arms. Some of his partisans left the city for the nearest Cossack villages, intending to begin an armed struggle against the Bolsheviks.

Annenkov was already outlawed by the Bolsheviks by the beginning of 1918 for his active actions against them. Soon after his transition to illegality, he began to form a volunteer anti-Bolshevik detachment. Men went to him, guided by different motives: some went for ideological reasons, considering it necessary to fight against the Bolshevik enslavers of Russia, some for reasons of revenge against the Bolsheviks, and some simply for the love of adventure and excitement.

When the Czechoslovaks arrived in Western Siberia, Ataman Annenkov's detachment had already taken part in the capture of Omsk. By this time the detachment had around a thousand men.

After the capture of Omsk, Annenkov was sent to the Verkhneuralsk front, where he stayed for about two months. Then the detachment was recalled to the rear to suppress a peasant uprising in Slavgorod district of Tomsk province. From there the *Annenkovtsy* were moved to the area of Semey (Semipalatinsk), where they remained for a relatively long time. The detachment was constantly replenished with volunteers, plus some mobilised soldiers and Cossacks. Many people were attracted to the detachment by Annenkov's personal charm, his courage and bravery, as well as his constant care and attention that the detachment was well dressed, equipped and provided with everything a soldier needed.

To replenish the detachment's funds, Annenkov did not hesitate at times to resort to measures such as forced taxation of local merchants.

At the end of 1918 his detachment was at least 10,000 men strong.



In mid-1919 the Annenkov detachment moved to the eastern edge of Russian Turkestan where, on the Semey front he won a number of victories over the local Red troops. The ataman was there, in Semirech'e, when the eastern front of the White struggle collapsed, starting with the fall of Omsk, the capital of anti-Bolshevik Siberia. That was to force Annenkov to cross the Chinese border in the spring of 1920.

Around March 1920, the Ataman Annenkov detachment, having left Semirech'e, moved to the Alatau Mountains. The trip there took almost two weeks. Not far from the Russian-Chinese border, at a considerable height in the Alatau Mountains, the detachment set up camp for a stay of about two months. The partisans of the detachment called the area the "Eagle's Nest".

Annenkov's stay in the Alatau Mountains was marked by a number of unnecessary and unjustifiable cruelties, committed by men among the ataman's close associates against individual partisans and refugees, who sometimes wandered into the detachment's location.

The detachment's numbers at the Eagle's Nest decreased considerably. During the move to the Alatau Mountains it was announced to the detachment that those who did not want to go further and cross the Chinese border could go home, i.e. return to Soviet Russia. Over 1,500 took advantage of this permission. In addition, many were allowed to move to China privately.

While in the Eagle's Nest an entire regiment of Orenburg Cossacks left Annenkov, emigrating to be with Ataman Dutov, who camped with his detachment near the Chinese town of Shuiding.

Thus the detachment's numbers gradually dwindled.

Disease and hunger then took a terrible toll on. Typhus plucked one victim after another from among the partisans. During the stay in the Eagle's Nest, several hundred people fell to that disease.

The food in the camp was poor, people almost starving: each partisan was issued only a handful of wheat grain daily. Those who had possessions and valuables could exchange them for some food with the Kirgiz, who sometimes came to the camp.

The weather was also not very favourable to the partisans: it often snowed, interspersed at times with rain. Often in the morning they had to shovel out the sick from under the snow that had fallen overnight.

The partisans of Annenkov's detachment met and spent the Easter holiday of 1920 in the Eagle's Nest. On Holy Night people did not sleep and sat by the fires, brightly burning, in the light of which swirled falling snowflakes. Exactly at midnight everyone stood around the fires and sang the Easter chant: "Christ is Risen!" For many, if not all, it was the last Easter hymn sung in the homeland.

"Christ is risen!" greetings were heard, and friendly cries were heard in return: "Truly He is risen!" And the partisans kissed each other fraternally, shaking off the constantly falling snow.

At the end of May 1920 Annenkov left the Eagle's Nest and moved eastwards to cross the Chinese border. On the appointed day in the camp was in turmoil in the morning with the rumble of carts and two-wheeled carriages, pulled by horses that had already managed to gain some weight from the spring grass.

One could read both joy and regret on the faces of the partisans. Ahead lay the "promised land" of China, where it might be possible to find bread and peaceful living conditions. Behind remained their beloved homeland and loved ones, whom they would be unlikely to see again soon, if ever.

By 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the partisans, ready to go, had climbed the last mountain pass to say goodbye to the Russian lands that were disappearing in the distance. At this moment many wept bitterly, some kissed the last piece of native soil as they were leaving. There were even fainting



spells from the weakest, those who could not bear the sad scene of farewell to the motherland – farewell, perhaps, for ever.

After crossing the border, the *Annenkovtsy* surrendered their weapons to the Chinese, who promised in return to feed the internees at their expense. The *Annenkovtsy* nevertheless stashed some of their weapons for themselves, just in case. The detachment then camped along the Bartalo River.

Their camp was nicknamed “Merry” by Annenkov’s partisans. They lived in huts, dugouts, felt yurts and small military tents. By this time there were no more than 600 people in the detachment. They were loyal to their ataman: his life-guard, cuirassiers, personal escorts, artillerymen, as well as musicians – a whole orchestra – and trumpeters.

The guerrillas stayed in the “Merry” camp through the end of May, June, July and part of August: during this time everyone had a good rest and recovered.

In the middle of August 1920, with the permission of the Governor-General of Xinjiang, General Yang Zengxin, the Ataman Annenkov detachment began to move in three groups to Ürümqi, the capital of the province. The first echelon of Annenkov’s men entered Ürümqi with an orchestra playing in front and singing Russian songs. There the partisans were housed in former Russian Cossack barracks. General Yang gave a grand banquet in honour of Annenkov.

The Russian colony did not meet the *Annenkovtsy* when they entered the city, remembering the unfortunate border incidents that played out in the area of the Eagle’s Nest.

The detachment’s partisans were forbidden to appear in the city without special permission and were not permitted to have any communication with the local Russian colony.

Annenkov’s detachment stayed in Ürümqi for about three months, then in late autumn began a further move to the east, to the city of Qitai (Gucheng). The movement was also carried out in groups.

Having reached Qitai at the end of October the detachment stopped. The partisans settled there behind the city wall, in the suburbs, in Chinese inns. The mood of the partisans was increasingly high, even when on the road eastwards. Now, in Qitai, they began to dream of how good it would be to take the weapons they had returned from their stash, go to Outer Mongolia, and from there on to Manchuria and Russian Primor’e, to once again take part in the anti-Bolshevik struggle on Russian territory. The only thing that inspired great fear and anxiety for the partisans was the question of feeding the detachment during its intended move to the east..

While in Qitai, quite unexpectedly, the Chinese announced one day to the *Annenkovtsy* that they would no longer supply the detachment with food. This statement caused great unrest among the partisans. They grabbed their weapons and made a demand to the Qitai authorities for continued food supplies. There was a small skirmish with the Chinese soldiers. The latter then hastily took refuge in the city and locked the city gates.

For three days Annenkov’s partisans held Qitai in a state of near siege. At the same time there were intense negotiations between Ataman Annenkov and the Chinese authorities. The Chinese finally agreed to give food to the partisans as before, on the condition that the detachment finally surrendered their weapons. Not liking it, this condition was accepted by Annenkov. Once again a surrender of weapons to the Chinese took place, but even this time the partisans managed to bury some.

From Qitai the detachment began to plan to move further eastwards. They intended to travel in four echelons in the order: firstly the Life-Ataman Regiment; then the Cuirassier Regiment; then



the Ataman's personal escort, his orchestra, and trumpeters; and finally the battery with the first reserve *sotnia*.

The first echelon departed safely. It was to proceed to Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province, and on to Zhangjiakou (Kalgan) and Beijing.

Some time later the second echelon also set out on the march. Ataman Annenkov and all the personnel of the third and fourth echelons, as well as detachments of Chinese soldiers, were present for its send-off.

As the second echelon disappeared from sight, the Chinese soldiers at the send-off surrounded the *Annenkovtsy*, as they had been ordered from above, and declared them detained. Annenkov was asked by the Chinese to go to the city and visit the Governor of Qitai to explain the state of affairs.

Annenkov and two escorts went to the town. Soon the partisans learnt that their ataman had been arrested in Qitai and was in custody. They wanted to rush to the rescue, but were ordered to remain calm and stay in Qitai. Two days after his arrest, Ataman Annenkov was taken under escort to Ürümqi.

The partisans returned to Qitai and camped there for a long time, awaiting the fate of the ataman. Thus three months passed, and the Chinese finally told the *Annenkovtsy* that they would not release the ataman from arrest while the detachment still remained in Qitai.

After this warning, the *Annenkovtsy* decided to move eastwards, following the example of the first and second echelons. Some of them, thirty men, went west with the aim of returning to Soviet Russia.

Ataman Annenkov was imprisoned in Ürümqi for about two years and was only released in 1923.

Seeing what results the ataman got from his peacefulness and negotiations with the Chinese, and subsequent surrender of arms, many of Annenkov's partisans later said:

We did the wrong thing. We should have crossed the Chinese border by force, and from there gone to Kashgar and then to the borders of India, where we could have surrendered to the mercy of the British.

As mentioned earlier, the first to leave Qitai eastwards were the *Leyb-Atamantsy*. They moved in march order, on horseback. The first section of the trip passed safely, crossing the Tien-Shan mountains and reaching the town of Hami. Here they stopped, because they received information of Annenkov's arrest in Qitai.

This news worried the partisans and they began to discuss measures that could lead to the release of the ataman. The Chinese authorities of Hami also became alarmed. Negotiating with the *Leyb-Atamantsy*, the Chinese began to strongly suggest them to go further to the east.

The Cuirassier Regiment also arrived at Hami. With their arrival, the question of how to proceed was put to the partisans for discussion. The Life-Atamans insisted on returning to Ürümqi to try to free the ataman by force. The cuirassiers were opposed to that, believing that such an intervention could only worsen Annenkov's situation. As a result of all these negotiations, the return march to Ürümqi did not take place.

The partisans lived in Hami for about two months, and then together, in march order, moved towards Guazhou (Anshizhou), in Gansu province. Due to a shortage of food, it was necessary to stay there for some time. At the suggestion of the Chinese authorities Annenkov's partisans moved away from the city, to the south-west, to the area of Dunhuang, and there they were quartered near the Buddhist monastery at Chenfodong, famous for its Buddhist cave temples. The



Annenkovtsy stayed in this area for about a month, and then the Chinese authorities allowed them to advance further, but only in separate small groups.

The partisans sold their horses, used the proceeds to buy a stock of food and started travelling eastwards in groups of 20-30 people on Chinese carts. They moved towards the city of Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu, and then to the cities of Yinchuan (Guihuachen) and Baotou, from where it was possible to get to Beijing and Tianjin by railway.

So the two regiments of Ataman Annenkov's detachment dispersed across China. A little later the dispersal of the other units of the detachment took place, in approximately the same order.

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After being released from arrest in Ürümqi, Ataman Annenkov and his chief of staff, General Denisov, travelled east and stayed in the mountains near the city of Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province. He brought some of his blood horses with him, intending to set up a stud farm in the new place.

Whether he wanted to move from Lanzhou to somewhere further away, it is difficult to say now. There are indications that he intended to make his way to Canada. His closest associate, General Denisov, travelled from Lanzhou around China, visiting the cities of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. General Denisov's trip seems to have been made in early 1925.

This was a time when China was torn by internal wars and power struggles for influence by various Chinese marshals and generals. Russian troops were already at that time in the service of Marshal Zhang Zongchang, an associate of the famous Marshal Zhang Zuolin, with their headquarters in the city of Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province.

Perhaps in his trip round China, General Denisov tested the waters among the entourage of the above two marshals, in the sense of finding out whether they could use the military experience and knowledge of Ataman Annenkov, and whether he could be allowed to move to the port cities of China.

As the Chinese Civil War developed, by the second half of 1925 Gansu province, and its main city of Lanzhou, found itself occupied by the troops of the celebrated Chinese "Christian" General Feng Yuxiang, who at that time kept in close contact with the Russian Communists.

So, completely unexpectedly, Ataman Annenkov found himself in the sphere of influence of Marshal Feng Yuxiang. At the instigation of the Bolsheviks, the Marshal summoned Annenkov to himself. If I'm not mistaken, Feng's headquarters was then in Shaanxi province. So Ataman Annenkov left Lanzhou, not suspecting the malicious intentions of the Marshal.

The ataman was accompanied on the trip by General Denisov. On their arrival at Feng Yuxiang's headquarters, Annenkov and Denisov were sent by him to Zhangjiakou by rail. From there they were taken by car to Ulaanbaatar and further north to Khyagt, where they were placed at the disposal of the Soviet authorities.

The circumstances of Ataman Annenkov's arrest and his extradition to Russia remained unknown to the Russian emigration in China for a long time. The Soviet press soon published Annenkov's "letters of repentance". Some of the Russian emigrants living in China considered those letters authentic and said that the ataman had voluntarily defected to the Bolsheviks. Others vehemently refuted this, doubting the authenticity of the letters, and said that Ataman Annenkov could never have made peace with his worst enemies, the Russian Communists.

In any case, in early 1926 Ataman Annenkov and General Denisov were in Siberia and in custody in a Semey prison. The Bolsheviks organised an "investigation" into the ataman's activities. There are reports that they temporarily took him to Moscow for some reason. The trial, or rather, the mock



trial of Ataman Annenkov and General Denisov took place in Semey in 1927 and lasted almost twenty days, from 25 July to 12 August of that year. Both defendants were, of course, sentenced to the highest measure of “social defence” – a firing squad.

Both met death with dignity and courage.

It is said that before being shot, Ataman Annenkov said to the Bolsheviks: “I wish that you meet my partisans once again in battle.”



Chapter XVI – the Russians in China

Before the 1917 revolution the Russian population in Harbin and the concession zone of the Chinese Eastern Railway was quite numerous – several tens of thousands of people. It included people of different nationalities: Russians proper, Jews, Poles, Latvians, Tatars, Georgians, Armenians, etc.

That population could be divided into two significant groups: 1) employees and workers of the Chinese Eastern Railway and 2) merchants and entrepreneurs in general.

As the revolution in Russia developed and deepened, Harbin began to fill with refugees and emigrants. In the spring of 1918, several armed White Russian detachments appeared in the Chinese Eastern Railway zone, the most famous of which was Ataman Semënov's detachment, stationed at Manzhouli and Hailar stations.

After the expulsion of the Bolsheviks from Siberia, the influx of Russians into Manchuria temporarily stopped until 1920, when it increased significantly.

During the first three years after the revolution, 1917-1919, the Chinese Eastern Railway was in dire straits, with political and financial difficulties, but it was still managed on the same basis as before the revolution. The Chinese Government, awaiting the result of the Russian Civil War, did not yet attempt any decisive action against the Russian interests in the railway. In 1920, when the Russian Civil War ended with the defeat of the White forces, the situation changed radically, and the Chinese went on the offensive.

They dismissed the manager, General D. L. Horvath, introducing three Chinese onto the railway board at their own discretion, disbanded the Russian railway guards and its police, closed the Russian post office, etc. These unilateral actions by the Chinese authorities caused a protest from the Russian-Asian Bank, which had significant interests in the Chinese Eastern railway. This protest was supported by the French government, and as a result, on 2 October 1920, an agreement was reached between the Russian-Asian Bank and the Chinese government, by virtue of which the railway was recognised as a mixed Russian-Chinese enterprise. Its board, elected on the new principles, appointed engineer B. V. Ostroumov as the manager. His decisive actions put the railway into order and increased its profitability in a short period of time.

This state of affairs until the spring of 1924. During this time many of the Russian emigrants and refugees were able to find employment on the railway and contributed greatly to increasing its efficiency.

On 31 May 1924 the Beijing Government concluded a new treaty with the Soviet Government on the Chinese Eastern Railway and a temporary agreement on its management. This again radically changed the situation on the railway and led to the introduction of the Bolsheviks into Manchuria. With their arrival, the White Russians were mostly dismissed from service. Some, in order to keep their pay, accepted Soviet citizenship and others chose Chinese.

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The Russian emigrants imported a great deal of knowledge and cultural skills into Manchuria. In a short time they established three higher educational institutions in Harbin and organised the best museum in Manchuria. They increased their publishing activities and greatly contributed to the scientific study of the region. A detailed description of their cultural activities in Northern Manchuria could fill a large volume or even volumes.

Some of the emigrants brought with them capital in the form of valuables of all kinds, and sometimes property. For example Russian steamship owners brought almost all the steamships from the Amur to Harbin, which led to an increase in navigation on the Songhua River.



It can be further noted that Russian emigrants often created branches of industry and trade that were completely new to Manchuria, such as butter making, cheese making, wine making, canning, etc.

They also invested some funds in the purchase of land plots inside the Chinese Eastern Railway zone and the construction of houses. House building increased significantly in Harbin, and a number of new suburbs and settlements appeared near it.

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A unique Russian agricultural corner was created in the area of the so-called Trekhrech'e, in the Barag (Barga) area, next to Russian Transbaikalia.⁵⁶ This area acquired the name, meaning “three rivers” because it is located in the valleys of three right tributaries of the Argun' River:⁵⁷ the Genhe (Gana), De'erbu'er (Derbula) and Khaula.

Russians had become acquainted with the northwestern part of the Barag long before the World War. The Transbaikal Cossacks brought their cattle there for grazing, made hay in the meadows rich in good grass, and hunted animals. During the Civil War in Siberia, the Transbaikal Cossacks and peasants, as well as the Buryats, spontaneously flocked to Barag, often transporting all their agricultural property and bringing their cattle.

At first, the wave of emigrants settled in the valleys of the Hailar River, along its right bank, then began to disperse along its tributaries and reached the Chinese Eastern Railway in the area of Yakeshi.

Having settled in these new places, the Russian population soon began peaceful agricultural activities, began ploughing and raising livestock. Over time, Russian industrial butter and cheese making began to develop successfully in Barag – new branches of industry for the region.

By 1929, there were about 800 Russian agricultural farms with a population of up to 5,000 people along the Barag river valleys. In particular, there were 21 Russian villages with 375 farms and a population of over 2,000 people settled in the Trekhrech'e region.

These Russian settlements in Barag, which successfully developed their economic activity in a foreign land, were a very instructive example. Living right next to Russian Transbaikalia, in almost identical natural and geographical conditions, but under different political systems of governance, the Trekhrechensk people lived very much more comfortably than their Transbaikal neighbours. While the Transbaikal people suffered from hunger and were constantly under the threat of Bolshevik terror, the Trekhrechensk people soon completely forgot such concerns and, through their personal efforts of free labour, created a material level of well-being, which those who could not escape from communist tutelage in their native land began to involuntarily envy.

This excellent example of tenacity and courage haunted the Transbaikal communists, who began to pay their sinister attention to the Trekhrechensk residents. They labelled them “White bandits”, alleging that they were gathering forces to attack the weak Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the Trekhrechensk residents wanted only one thing – to live and work peacefully and had nothing to do with the active White struggle against the Bolsheviks.

This peaceful life in Trekhrech'e continued until the summer of 1929, when the famous Soviet-Chinese armed conflict broke out. At the end of September and beginning of October of that year,

⁵⁶ This is in the Old Barag Banner district, 100 km to the north of Hulunbuir, right on the border.

⁵⁷ Note that the river is called the Hailar when inside China but the Argun' (Chinese Ergune) when it forms the border with Russia.



a terrible catastrophe befell the Trekhrech'e residents – the threats that had constantly rained down on them from the Transbaikal communists were made real in the confusion of the Soviet-Chinese conflict.

As was clear at the time, the bloody raid on Trekhrech'e in 1929 was not a random attack by a independent group of pogromists, Red partisans or looters, but was organised by the military units of the GPU. They crossed the Argun' River in one day, namely 28 September, and the raid was then carried out simultaneously on several settlements in Trekhrech'e.

One Red detachment of about 200 men, having crossed the Argun', encountered resistance on the Chinese bank of the river from a small Chinese border cordon stationed in the Russian village of Domasovo. In the ensuing shootout, the chief of the cordon and six soldiers were killed, and only four managed to retreat, shooting back.

The Reds then broke into the villages and began to massacre the innocent peaceful Russian population. The village of Komary was immediately subjected to destruction. Almost all of its inhabitants who did not manage to escape were brutally killed, their property was plundered, their houses were burned. The pogromists then moved to the neighbouring village of Domasovo, where a detachment of Reds demonstrated exceptional cruelty: the communists killed not only men and women, but also small children on the spot.

There were cases when brutal people grabbed children, and threw them from the high bank into the waves of the Argun'. When in one such case a maddened mother, having rushed after her child into the river, swam with him to the shore, the raiders finished off both her and the child.

The second Red detachment, about 50 men, also crossed the Argun' on 28 September, then went east of the river for about 150 kilometres and by 1 October approached the Russian-populated area, where they carried out their reprisals against its inhabitants. Here the bandits destroyed the villages of Tynekhe and Tsankyr, shooting their entire male populations with machine guns. Of all the men who lived in both of these villages, only three were saved.

On 4 October, Soviet cavalymen again broke into Tynekhe and carried out a second destruction. Having selected several women and seized the best horses, they took them with them to the Soviet border.

In total, about 150 people were killed by the Red bandits in the villages of Trekhrech'e.

The Trekhrech'e massacre caused an explosion of indignation in the Russian émigré circles of Manchuria, both right-wing and left-wing. Protest rallies were organised in Harbin, and appeals were issued to the entire civilised and cultured world. But it seems that those appeals touched few people – Russian grief had already ceased to excite a well-fed and calm humanity.

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The failure of the White movement in Russia gave rise to a series of aggressive and unilateral acts by the Chinese government in late 1919 and early 1920, directed against Russian interests in China.

In September 1920, the Chinese government refused to recognise the Russian diplomatic mission and Russian consulates that had previously existed in China. Thus Russians ceased to enjoy extraterritorial rights in that country. From 1921 to 1923, no diplomatic institutions functioned on Chinese territory, and Russian interests there were left to their own devices, no longer having representation with the Chinese and enjoying no organised protection or security.

In 1924 China recognised Soviet power and a Soviet diplomatic mission, Soviet consulates and trade missions were opened and began to operate on its territory. Those all then spent a lot of money and energy on inciting class discord in China and inciting the Chinese masses against foreigners living in the country.



Even before China recognised Soviet power, the Russian population there had increased greatly due to the influx of emigrants and refugees from Soviet Russia. By that time, they were already divided into three main groups: 1) old-timers, i.e. people who had settled and lived in China before the 1917 revolution; 2) emigrants and refugees who began arriving in China in 1918, and 3) Soviet subjects, whose numbers began to increase rapidly from the time China recognised Soviet Russia.

The main centres of emigration in China proper were its port cities such as Shanghai, Qingdao, Tianjin, etc. The foreign concessions of Shanghai and Tianjin provided peaceful havens for Russian refugees, and many of them began their new working and peaceful lives here. Many Russian refugees settled in those cities, having arrived here from Mongolia and Xinjiang – officers, Cossacks, and soldiers from the Dutov, Bakich, Annenkov, and Sokolnitskiy detachments, as well as those who arrived from Korea after the occupation of Vladivostok by Soviet troops in 1922.

I will not speak here about the successes of the Russian emigration in China on the economic front, because it would take up too much space. It should only be noted that in the general Russian emigrant mass a fairly significant number were military men with extensive combat experience, who had been through the crucible of two wars: the Great World War and the Russian Civil War. This circumstance did not go unused by the Chinese military – the nimble generals and marshals who played a decisive role in the Chinese civil strife – and already by 1923 a well-organised Russian detachment was in the service of General Zhang Zongchang, initially under the command of General Nechaev.

This detachment had up to 3,000 people in its ranks and fought well for the Fengtian Clique (Mukden military group) for several years – from 1923 to 1928.

What made White Russians join the Chinese military?

Of course the main reason was the lack of money, as many of the Russians thrown into China by the tragic course of events in their native country had no ability to do anything other than military service. Then, of some importance, was the idea of continuing the fight against the Bolsheviks, whose friends in China at that time were considered to be the famous “Christian General”, Marshal Feng Yuxiang, and the leaders of the Nationalist southern troops advancing to the North.

It should be noted that the Russian Bolsheviks, through their agent Colonel Gushchin, attempted to form a Red Russian detachment in Feng Yuxiang’s army. This detachment, numbering no more than a hundred men, did not last long and did not play any significant role in the history of the Chinese civil war.

The White Russian troops, drawn by fate into the civil war in China, suffered cruel losses in a series of bloody battles, across vast areas of China with the graves of their soldiers and officers, from Shenyang to Shanghai and from Qingdao, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, to Kaifeng, the capital of Hunan, in the centre of the country. An eloquent monument to these losses is, among other things, the vast Russian cemetery in Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province, where Russian soldiers and officers who fell in battle in the Chinese civil war are buried.

However, some of the Russians who participated in this war survived almost 15 years of continuous battles and campaigns from 1914 to 1928. It is unlikely that anyone else in the world, except the Russians, could have set such a record for the duration of military suffering.

The activities of the Russian detachment in China deserve special description. They were full of major events, bright moments, brilliant military victories, but sometimes were overshadowed by heavy defeats and catastrophes.



A description of one of these catastrophes, as a brief illustration, is given by me below from the words of V. A. Zubets, an officer of the Russians in Chinese service.

This happened in 1925 during the struggle between Marshals Zhang Zongchang and Sun Chuanfang, when fighting broke out between the troops of these two marshals in the area of the city of Xuzhou.

At the very beginning of the war, the commander of the Russian armoured trains, Colonel Kostrov, went south with the trains along the Tianjin to Pukou railway. Before reaching Fulichi Station, where the track was dismantled, the armoured trains encountered only sparse enemy fire. The Russians, having repaired the track, went further forward. Gradually, however, cannon-fire was now added to the enemy's rifle fire, and after a short period of time, two shells hit one of the armoured trains. Having accepted battle, the trains manoeuvred in a small area, successfully fighting against two or three enemy batteries.

A day passed. In the rear, the advance of Zhang Zongchang's infantry suddenly stopped. Telephone communication with the rear, however, was not interrupted. From there, the Russian armoured trains were informed of a slight delay in the general offensive, but at the same time they demanded greater activity from the trains and promised to provide support.

The night passed. From the morning of the next day the enemy artillery fire increased significantly. No less than four or five batteries fired. Their fire began to hit the rear armoured train especially hard.

Colonel Kostrov, concerned about the seriousness of the situation, ordered the rear train to go north to contact Marshal Zhang Zongchang and report to him about the difficulty of moving forward without support from his Chinese units.

Then a terrible catastrophe began.

The train, headed north and commanded by Captain Chernyavskiy, flew at full speed across a bridge span that had been secretly dismantled by the enemy. Everything collapsed, instantly mixing into a hellish picture, with the crackling and roaring of a fire that broke out and the shells that began to explode. The enemy units, who had taken up positions on both sides of the railway, began to pour machine gun fire onto this terrible jumble of train wreckage, red-hot iron, burning bodies – and soon it was all over. Of the hundred Russian crew of the lost train, only one fireman miraculously survived, and he remained an abnormal person for the rest of his life.

Then the next acts of the drama began.

The remaining three armoured trains, squeezed into a small area and now cut off from the rear, were destroyed by the enemy's brutal artillery fire. Sun Chuanfang's soldiers attacked the armoured trains several times, leaving behind mountains of their corpses, but then they lay down half a kilometre from the trains and began to target every Russian soldier who dared to show himself outside.

Colonel Kostrov waited in vain for help from the north, but they missed all the possibilities for an easier breakthrough. When the last machine gun belts on the armoured trains had been fired and several terrible cases of suicide among the wounded occurred, afraid of the prospect of being captured by the Chinese, Colonel Kostrov gave the order to abandon the trains and go on the attack to break through the enemy encirclement.

A little more than a hundred men escaped from the ring of fire, incredibly tired, exhausted, and nervously shaken.

Kostrov, Meyer, Bukas – all the senior officers of the armoured trains – remained on the battlefield. The wounded Kostrov was carried by his comrades for a long time under heavy fire. He had been



wounded in both legs at once. His bearers were knocked down, one after another. Kostrov himself was finally killed by a bullet to the head. He was laid on the ground, his face covered with a jacket.

The enemy did not leave a single person alive at the site of the battle after the massacre. Embittered by the stubborn resistance, the Chinese, one by one, stabbed, cut and shot everyone who was still alive and had not foreseen to, or were not able to, put a bullet in their forehead before.

This was one of the most tragic episodes during the entire period of Russian service in the Chinese forces.

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I have talked about the dispersal of the White Russian detachments that entered Xinjiang in the spring of 1920: these were the detachments of General Bakich and the Atamans Dutov and Annenkov.

A certain number of officers, soldiers and Cossacks from those detachments did not feel the general desire to leave for the Far East and remained where they were, i.e. Xinjiang. Small Russian colonies were formed in all the large cities of the province, if we count only Russians proper and do not take into account former Russian subjects of Turkic or Tatar origin: Kirghiz, Sarts, Tatars, etc. The largest group of Russians were living in Ghulja (Kuldja) and Ürümqi.

By 1926 the total number of Russian refugees settled in Xinjiang had reached approximately 6,000. In the following years, however, this number began to increase rapidly due to the influx of new groups of refugees leaving the "Socialist Fatherland."

In 1931–1933, due to the Muslim uprising that began in the region,⁵⁸ the situation of Russian refugees in Xinjiang became very complicated.

The uprising broke out in late 1930 in the area of the city of Hami as a result of the extremely poor governance of the region and the tyranny of the Chinese authorities – who did not recognise any control over their actions from the central authorities of China, due to the remoteness of the place. The uprising was raised by the Sarts, who were assisted at the beginning of 1931 by the rebellious Muslim general Ma Zhongying, the leader of the Dungans. With the arrival of the latter, the rebellious Dungans and Sarts switched from defence to attack and moved in the direction of Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang.

The Chinese were unable to stop the rolling Muslim mass. The Dungans and Sarts destroyed Chinese soldiers *en masse* along their route of their advance and, wherever possible, slaughtered the peaceful Chinese population. By the end of 1931, Ma Zhongying had already reached Turfan, having killed, they say, no less than 20,000 Chinese during his terrible campaign.

At Turfan, however, General Ma was repulsed by the fearless actions of a small team of White Russian machine gunners who had volunteered for Chinese military service.

The Chinese government of Xinjiang was very pleased with this turn of events, and in Ürümqi the Chinese recruited a cavalry unit of 180 White Russians and took into service Ataman Annenkov's former battery. The command of the cavalry was taken over by Lieutenant Frank and the battery by Colonel Kuznetsov. The newly formed Russian military units entered into military action, and under their pressure the Muslims were forced to retreat: the Dungans went to Gansu province and the Sarts to the mountains, where they occupied the most important mountain passes.

The Chinese, seeing that the campaign against the Muslims had progressed very successfully, decided to mobilise the White Russians in the Ili region from those officers, soldiers, and Cossacks

⁵⁸ Usually referred to in English historiography as the Kumul Rebellion, or Hami Rebellion.



who remained there from the Dutov and Annenkov detachments. The mobilisation took place with a threat: if anyone did not wish to become a soldier, he would be sent to the border within 24 hours to be handed over to the Soviet authorities. In total, up to a thousand men were mobilised in this manner. The result was a fairly significant detachment, the command of which was assumed by a former associate of Ataman Dutov, Colonel of the General Staff Papengut.

The Chinese received military equipment from the Bolsheviks in Soviet Turkestan. Of course, the Bolsheviks, by supplying the Chinese with weapons, managed to bargain with them for a number of advantageous political and economic privileges, and thereby strengthened their influence in Xinjiang.

Colonel Papengut's detachment was sent to the Hami city area but, under pressure from the Chinese authorities, he did not take decisive action against the rebellious Sarts. The region temporarily experienced relative calm.

In the autumn of 1932, the situation became complicated again.

In November of that year, three hundred mobilised Russian Cossacks marched from the Ili Valley through the Yanqizhen (Karashar) pass heading for Hami. Wanting to destroy the Cossacks, or at least block their path, the Dungans unexpectedly descended from the Barköl (Barkul) and Dunhuang (Dunkhan) area to the town of Shanshan (Pichan). In Shanshan itself, the Sarts rebelled against the Chinese. A fierce battle between Russian Cossacks and Chinese soldiers with the Muslims took place, as a result of which the latter were defeated, and the city of Shanshan itself was wiped off the face of the earth.

Then the Sarts resorted to trickery and sent a delegation from Turpan (Turfan) to the Russians, supposedly with the purpose of starting peace negotiations. The Russians, not suspecting any evil intent on the part of the Sarts, sent six people to negotiate in Turpan. These Russian envoys were all brutally tortured by the Sarts. So Russians took up arms again and left for Turpan. Another fierce battle broke out again, lasting four days and ending in a Russian victory.

Seeing the gravity of the situation, the leader of the Sarts of Hami, Khoja Niyaz, now declared a holy war against the infidels.

News of this holy war spread across the region with lightning speed, and in February 1933, the entire Muslim world was stirred up throughout Xinjiang, from Hami to Kashgar. Muslim units, some well armed, some poorly armed, were drawn from everywhere towards Ürümqi. As the Muslim troops approached that city, unexpected reinforcements arrived for the Chinese: units of the Chinese generals Ma Zhanshan and Su Bingwen, several thousand strong, who had fled from Barag to Manchuria under the onslaught of the Japanese, arrived in Ürümqi through Siberia and Soviet Turkestan. This Chinese army approached Ürümqi just in time, as units of General Ma Zhongying's troops were beginning to move from Gansu to help the Sarts.

The Muslim uprising seemed to threaten the complete extermination of all Chinese and White Russians living in the region.

At the end of February, the city of Ürümqi was closely besieged by the Sarts and Dungans. Fierce battles took place around the city for several days. At one point, the Muslims had success and even broke into the city itself, despite the resistance of the fresh Chinese soldiers who had arrived from Manchuria, and only the White Russians again saved the situation, driving the Muslims away from the city and inflicting heavy losses on them.

Meanwhile, the poor management and incompetent actions of the Chinese Governor-General, General of Xinjiang, Jin Shuren (Chin Shu-je), had aroused general discontent among the population. The Russians were also extremely dissatisfied with the actions and activities of this Chinese general, who had treated the Russian commanders with undeserved insults, led his



military operations ineptly, and had generally done many things that served only to intensify the civil strife in the region. Even the Muslims, driven away from Ürümqi, now promised to stop the war if the government of Xinjiang was changed.

As a result of this general discontent, a conspiracy was hatched against Jin Shuren in favour of a new government headed by the Chinese general Fan Zhu-ying,⁵⁹ who arrived in Ürümqi with Manchu troops.

The struggle for power in Ürümqi led to an armed clash. A battle took place in the streets of the city, which lasted the whole day. Not all the Russian military units took part in the *coup*; but they suffered considerable losses in the battle that took place. In the end, the *coup* succeeded, and power remained with Fan Zhu-ying. General Jin Shuren managed to escape from Ürümqi to Russian Turkestan, from where he went through Siberia to Nanjing. He was put on trial there.

The Russians, in assisting the *coup*, did not consider all the circumstances and went from the frying pan into the fire. The new authorities sided with the Bolsheviks and Muslims. The Russian troops were broken up into small units under various pretexts, and then disarmed and disbanded. Probably at the insistence of the Russian Bolsheviks, some Russian commanders were executed, including Colonel Papengut.

Soviet influence in Xinjiang quickly expanded and strengthened and, of course, the White Russian population could not expect anything good to happen to them.

God grant that he will be able to avoid bloody tragedies similar to those that occurred in the Trekhrech'e in Manchuria. Already far too much Russian blood has been spilled during these terrible years of revolution and civil wars in Russia and China.

⁵⁹ I haven't been able to track who this is, but it appears to be a mistake. The coup actually installed General Sheng Shicai as military governor, and hence the real power in the province. (Liu Wenlong was made civilian governor, but he had no power.)



Conclusion

My account of the “Great Retreat” of the White Russian Armies in 1919-1920 and the events that followed is now complete.

I hope that I have managed to give a general picture of this great catastrophe for the Whites, accompanied by an abundance of events that were terrible in their tragedy.

Unlike the exodus of the White Russian troops to Europe, the retreat from the Urals to the east cannot but amaze the researcher-historian with its number of victims. The “Great Retreat” within Asia brought premature death to many leaders of large and small independent military units of the White Russian Army. Let us recall the names of those who died in this brutal struggle for the Russian national idea – the Supreme Ruler Admiral Kolchak; his first minister Pepelyaev; Generals Kappel', Bakich and Baron Ungern; Atamans Dutov, Annenkov, Kalmykov and Kaigorodov; Colonel Kazagrandi and many others.

I did not devote much space in my book to the narrative of the large events that are more or less already described in the Russian literature, such as the Ice March or the liberation of Russian Primor'e. On the contrary, I often devoted comparatively greater attention to the description of less significant episodes of the “White dispersion”, such as, for example, the depiction of the tragic wanderings of individual White Russian detachments across the vast expanses of Central Asia, as they are little described in post-revolutionary Russian literature.

It seems to me that my book, despite the brevity of its presentation, will still have to add something new to the history of significant movements of humanity, which our modern era has turned out to be so rich in.

In my work, concerning the history of four countries: Russia, China, Japan and Mongolia, I used rare, hard-to-reach sources, printed materials in the form of individual books, brochures, magazine and newspaper articles, as well as a number of manuscripts kindly provided to me by their authors. I also collected a considerable amount of material here in China, through personal questioning of a number of people, participants in certain events and incidents described by me.

I express my deep gratitude to all those who have assisted me in this work.

It is possible that my book may contain some inaccuracies, even mistakes: I will gratefully take them into account if they are pointed out to me. Mistakes are possible both in dates and in the names of places, since almost fifteen years have passed since most of the events I described, and much has been forgotten and erased from the memory of the people who took part in them.

It would be a great reward for me if readers and critics were to treat my present work favourably.

