

# The War in Russia and Siberia

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## CHAPTER VII

### With the Japanese Troops in Siberia

#### 1. – Cossack Rebellion

The advance of the Soviet armies into Siberia inspired fresh hopes and a new impetus to the regional insurrections in the Transbaikal province. All along the Amur railroad, bridges and workshops were burning. In the interior of the country the *coups de main* were often superbly executed, and assassinations of Semenov's officials and officers became more and more frequent. Factories and mines were abandoned, transportation was impeded, security was compromised, feelings of loyalty to the government were disturbed, dubious elements were encouraged.

The central organization of the rebels had settled near the Chinese border, in three villages: Bogdatskoe, Berenski and Zerenski, on the Uryumkan River. The leader, Zhuravlëv, a former captain under the Tsar, and his "staff" directed all the insurrections in the region.

The Russian and Japanese commands have decided to destroy this nest with an envelopment operation that will be executed by 9 cavalry regiments and 9 infantry battalions with 13 field pieces of the *Semenovtsi*, and 14 infantry companies with 6 guns of the Japanese. The Semenov Cossacks refusing – as always – to fight alone, the Japanese troops were distributed among them at the rate of one or two companies per Russian regiment.

Invited to attend this operation, I went to Sretensk, where General Suzuki, commander of the 5th Japanese division, and General Semenov (uncle of the ataman), commander of the "Manchurian detachments", were to direct the manoeuvre. Delayed by disorder on the railroads, I only arrived there on 1 October, after the departure of the last column for the interior. To venture alone on these lonely roads between the *stanitsas* divided by the civil war would be to head towards certain death. I am in a country of hunters, accustomed to watching patiently, hidden in the brush, for passing game. Two Japanese soldiers who were part of a detachment and who were marching in the ranks were wounded yesterday by isolated rifle shots and the culprits easily escaped into the taiga.

For the time therefore I could only await the reports, which soon reached us. The independent Cossacks, surrounded by eight Russian-Japanese columns, had been defeated. 600 corpses were counted on the battlefields, two cannons and 300 carts filled with foodstuffs were taken, and the three villages razed to the ground. That was the result of the operation. Zhuravlëv, accompanied by a few loyalists, managed to escape to Manchuria. The remnants of the six regiments he had disposed of were left wandering through the region.

Discord reigned between the commanders. General Semenov and his chief of staff, Colonel Zubkovski, complained that General Suzuki had withdrawn from cooperation from the Russian troops. The head of the Japanese 5th Division explained to me his sudden abstention: the Ataman's Cossacks had shamelessly fled in every place. Therefore each time the tiny Japanese detachments, as usual placed in the rear-guard, who were abandoned by their allies but too proud to give in, faced the furious assault of an enemy twenty times superior in number and made desperate by the fear of encirclement.

For example, a column, made up of two Cossack regiments, with a Japanese company in reserve, from the Nerchinsk-Zavod *stanitsa*, ran into three independent Cossack regiments near Bogdatskoe, determined to break through the cordon surrounding them. The captain commanding the Japanese company had advanced, with a lieutenant, an NCO and a section, to observe the situation. At the moment of the attack, Semenov's Cossacks took off and left the 40 Japanese planted in the middle of the road, at a difficult place to defend, and they were soon overrun by 1,500 cavalrymen. The Japanese withdrew to a high point of the road, where they waited, stood firm, for a hand-to-hand combat. The rest of the company, which had run to the sound of the shooting, found 13 wounded and the bodies of the two officers, the NCO and 18 men. Around the bodies of the two officers, pierced by several sabre blows, lay seven Cossacks killed by them with cold steel: two of them had their heads split open up to the neck.



Similar incidents, with the very high and unnecessarily cruel losses suffered by some Japanese companies, exasperated the troops and their leaders. General Suzuki ostentatiously left Sretensk. The Japanese units engaged in the last fighting were returned to their regiments. Major Nakatani, from the staff of the 5th Division, remained in Sretensk to regroup the Japanese troops towards Blagoveshchensk.

I decided to wait for the development of military events.

## **2. - A Major Siberian Artery, the Shilka.**

On the Shilka River, 9 October 1919

The previous night, Major Nakatani had me warned that Lieutenant Kikiyo would carry an order this day to a Japanese detachment operating towards the North. I accompanied the young officer.

At about one o'clock in the morning, he came to pick me up from my car and took me to one of the small steamships that were part of the old "Amur Flotilla" commandeered by the Japanese army. The ship had the same look of abandonment and poverty that characterized all means of transport through which the revolution had passed. No furniture, no carpets, no curtains or household goods. The destruction was so complete and spontaneous everywhere, that the smallest corner of Siberia presented in its destitution an image of the distress of the great Empire.

The lanterns of the boat illuminated a sphere in the night and the fog which narrowed or widened. Vague shapes of trees or outlines of rocks entered it from time to time and then got lost in the darkness. Upon the meeting of another ship, there were meticulous calls in Japanese: we had to make sure that we did not miss Colonel Umeda with his men, already on their way to the winter quarters, with a new order sending them back to the North.

Still, we had to hurry. The thick fog we were passing through was an omen of the heavy frost that was approaching. Already, the small tributaries of the Shilka were slowing down and in ten days or so, the main river would also begin to close. All the ships of the Amur flotilla would then have to be returned to Sretensk, or they would fall into the hands of the Reds.

On several occasions, our boat entered a particularly dense fog zone, and we dropped anchor. At such places, there was invariably a tributary flowing into the main river. The current was fast and dangerous, and we waited for a gust of wind to disperse the fog that the clash of two air currents had created before venturing between the enormous sandbanks.

It is only in the afternoon that an unhealthy sun pierced the clouds. A fresh and suddenly violent wind chased away the fog with long trails and big flakes up the valleys, and we slowly discovered the wild landscape of the Amur.

In this valley which bends continuously and keeps running up against rocks forming obstacles, the continuous enclosures and diversions give the river the illusion of an immobile lake, which lengthens, narrows and deforms itself between landscapes running off to infinity. From time to time it suddenly widens: a new tributary adds the clear mass of its fast waters to the turbulent current of the Shilka.

For hours and hours, there was nothing but virgin rock, on which brown mosses and purple heathers stood out. Here and there, at the bottom of a wide valley, the water brought strong layers of alluvium, sometimes ten meters thick, and where it had at a later time once more dug a bed in its prodigal work. All over were abandoned watercourses, works of erosion a long time since intercepted by other labours of nature, and sandbanks and small islands, where some bouquets of greenery bloomed. But in general there were no trees, except for some stubborn birch trees that clung to a crack in the rock and whose last leaves were shaken by the wind.

In a few places, the steep slope of the hills softened, and a flat strip of arable land formed on the shore. A few dozen poor thatched houses, worker's or fisherman's huts, surrounded two or three clean white houses of small officials.

There was no trace of human labour, except some gold or silver mines behind the hills in the interior. Flour had to come from somewhere else, from the Chita region to the south or from the vicinity of Blagoveshchensk to the north, But its transport was stopped and the last provisions were exhausted. The approaching hunger emptied the region and drove the population into the arms of the Bolsheviks.



Near Ust-Chornaya, where the river makes an enormous S-bend, the prodigious mass of its waters twice rushed against the high rocks and breaks deep, foaming cuts into them. After many ships had sunk in the whirlpools and against the rocks on the banks, a barrier of beams had been built in the river, to protect the boats from the current that would throw against the side.

Further on near Gorbitsa, at the time when Semenov's troops were taking advantage of the Czech and Japanese victories to seize power, the Reds had sunk a large transport ship, after laying it across the river to block navigation. But the current took care of clearing it and gently, but irresistibly, pushed the obstacle aside.

During our journey Japanese sentries watched both banks, from where rifle shots were often fired at passing ships. A month previously, six passengers of the boat carrying us were wounded by bullets from Red detachments firing from the shore. A Semenov officer, who risked this dangerous journey to find his relatives in Blagoveshchensk, killed himself with a hand grenade when the Reds were about to stop him.

The captain and the civilian staff of the ship, all Russians and completely neutral in this civil war, passively obeying the authorities of the moment, were hiding on the deck behind enormous iron sheets reinforced by beams. Two machine guns were continuously pointed at the banks.

Towards evening we saw a group of peasants waiting for the ferry that would take them to the opposite bank, with fifteen or so harnessed carts. Reaching voice range, we learned that their carts had been requisitioned by a detachment of independent Cossacks, in flight towards the regions of the North-West.

In the evening, two large transports appeared from behind a bend in the river, going upstream. We stopped them: they were Colonel Umeda's soldiers. I am assigned me a cabin and an orderly who will share it with me.

Here is the purpose of the new operation: The burning of all the bridges on the Amur railroad over a stretch of 250 kilometres has isolated the small Japanese garrison of Mogocho. After three weeks of silence, it had just been learned that it was surrounded by a large enemy band which was exhausting itself in efforts to destroy them. Eighty men had locked themselves into a building at the station and were under repeated attack. We would go to their rescue.

The Amur Railway, built parallel to the river, is linked by short stretches of track to small transshipment ports on the river. We disembarked at one of the last ones, Chessovinskaya, and began our march there.

### **3. - Desolate landscapes**

Chessovinskaya, 10 October

Our boat moored at one o'clock in the morning. At about 2:30 a.m. I found the troops preparing their departure near the small station on the bank. Provisions were amassed on the shore. Horses whinnied somewhere in the night. Everywhere there were comings and goings of small Japanese shadows passing in front of the many lit fires. Near a gigantic log barn, I joined Colonel Umeda, whose short and stocky silhouette I had glimpsed. We had hardly exchanged a few courteous words, when he gave the signal for the departure ceremony.

The colonel advanced alone in front of the troops, lined up by sections and companies. Lieutenant Miano, carrying the flag of the 71st Regiment, made a long detour followed by its guard for a theatrical entrance on the top of a small hill, in front of the lined-up troops. He unfolded the rising sun symbol and, holding the flag from above, descended towards the troops until very close to the colonel.

It seemed to me to relive the classical times of humanity. The colonel gave a fiery speech, his eyes raised towards the flag, exhorting officers and soldiers to do their duty and assigning to each leader his task. The company commanders, and then the non-commissioned officer commanding the scouting group, responded, repeating the given order in a loud voice. Trumpets burst out, the flag bearer put the flag back in its bag, Colonel Umeda sheathed his sword, and the column set off along the railroad.

This track, which connects the Amur railroad to the Amur river, goes through the valley of the Chessovaya, a stream that winds around the line, rolling its transparent waters on a bed covered with rocks and pebbles.

There was no farming anywhere, except for a tiny vegetable garden around a railroad guard's house, abandoned since the last skirmishes. Furniture and household goods lay on the ground. Here and there, beams had been taken from the roof to make bivouac fires. In one of the buildings lay a large poodle in distress, between the debris of the furniture, muzzle on the ground and not even looking up at our approach, awaiting its master who might not return.



The hills rise to a height of a few hundred meters and often widen, forming large bare plateaus. There was nothing but bushes everywhere, or small trees poorly established in a light layer of earth. There was no path in this arid and inhospitable landscape. No human work, since the Creation, has neutralized the sterility of the soil, the harshness of the climate or the shortness of the summers.

Every infantry detachment operating in this region is exposed to two kinds of difficulties. If it follows the railroad in the valley, which is the only practicable route, it is threatened by surprise attacks from Bolshevik partisans hiding behind the ridges above. If guided purely by tactical considerations, and so following the ridges, troops would have to make their way through the barely penetrable brush, which often unnecessarily delays them.

A year ago, two companies were destroyed on identical terrain near Loufta, west of Uchumun. The forward guard of the detachment, while pursuing some mounted enemy who seemed to be fleeing, was drawn into an ambush, and was exterminated by six companies of "independent" Cossacks hidden behind the ridge. The two companies, hearing the shooting, madly rushed to the aid of their comrades, neglecting all precautionary measures, and succumbed completely. No one surrendered. Officers and men, animated by equal bravery, fought to the point of that rarity – hand-to-hand combat. The wounded committed suicide. All the corpses were later found horribly mutilated. The Bolsheviks themselves appreciated this simple and unanimous heroism, which the imprudence of the leader had made so tragically useless. Only the Japanese newspapers refused to mention it, and hid from their people a bravery in which the oldest glory of their race was reflected.

In the choice between speed and safety, Colonel Umeda decided to follow the railroad, after having made arrangements to deploy, at the slightest warning, part of the troop on both sides towards the ridges. The colonel – whom I accompanied – advanced at the head of 40 mounted scouts. Then came small detachments of infantry of 10 to 20 men each, the bulk of the troops, to the strength of six companies, the sappers, the machine guns, the ammunition boxes, and, finally, two small 87-mm guns.

In Taptugari, where we stopped in the house of a railway guard, we learned that two Japanese companies, called by an previous order to ours, had driven out the Red band, after sustained fire. A small group of workers gathered around the foreign uniform that I wore. While the mistress of the house served us milk and eggs, the men complain about the Bolsheviks who "infect" the region. Knowing that our stay will be short, I advised them to limit themselves to a strictly neutral attitude, in their own interests.

The so-called "Bolshevik" band operating in these regions was made up of 600 men, 60% of whom are Chinese (Hunguz<sup>1</sup> brigands). The Russian members were, for the most part, Siberian convicts released by the revolution, the rest being poor peasants attracted by a life at the expense of the bourgeois. They applied revolutionary principles, replacing the old stationmasters, engineers and foremen with workers, and disinheriting the bourgeoisie, but they generally left the poor alone. They only attacked the stocks of foreign merchants, and especially the provisions of flour and household articles, which the old regime had with its common foresight amassed for the inhabitants of a country that produced neither cereals nor other articles of first necessity. They declared as "bourgeois", and thus doomed to social reprisals, anyone who wore the hat of a public service: such as doctors and station and workshop managers, whose cellars and wardrobes they then empty. I don't need to add that the village atamans, representatives of a power that these brigands pretended to fight, are always put to death with the utmost cruelty.

#### **4. – The Mogocho Garrison – A wreck of the old regime**

Taptugari, 11 October 1919

A few kilometres further on, we were stopped by a curious obstacle. The Reds, after having blown up a bridge, pushed the train they had been living in for a few months into the river. The tail of the train, suspended above it, rested on the locomotive and some cars below among the rubble of the bridge.

The garrison of Mogocho, rescued by two fresh companies, and having been provided with food and ammunition, was out of danger after having lived for weeks in anguish. The enemy, having dismounted, had crawled under the protection of darkness, to the vicinity of the building where the 80 Japanese with their lieutenant had locked themselves in. All attacks were repulsed. Not being able to overcome the brave little band, the Reds tried to depress them morally. Having deliberately left the telephone in good condition, they

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<sup>1</sup> These bands had been around for decades. There are many alternative spellings: Grondijs uses the term "Khoungouze" which is sometimes used in English as Khunguz.



employed a young Siberian fluent in Japanese to send sinister rumours to the besieged men, hoping to take away all hope of deliverance. They claimed that Irkutsk had been taken by the Soviet armies, Semenov and his people had been executed by the exasperated population, and that the Japanese troops were beaten and routed, abandoning the garrison of Mogocho, which they believed destroyed. The young commander did not deign to answer the proposals to surrender. But ammunition was running out, the rice supply had long since been exhausted, and it was beginning to be very difficult to obtain bread from the population, which was frightened by the threats of the masters of the situation.

The young commander, after having listened silently to these long exhortations, had deigned to answer: "Come and take us. The last survivors will commit *harakiri!*"

Having nothing more to do in those parts, we took the road back to our boats, after having spent the night at the stationmaster's house. I talked at length with him and his family about his unfortunate country. With his apparent neutrality in the horrible civil war, he is a typical example of the Siberian civil servant, so singularly fallen since the revolution.

He still stood straight in his service frock coat, with the eagles of the golden buttons shining on the shabby fabric. After having been copiously plundered and scolded in his own house, he had retained from the old regime that air of authority, though much softened, against which the envy and vengeance of the fourth estate are directed, rather than against "capital". He no longer pronounced any political sympathies or affinities. His confidence in a healthy restoration and in a national reaction against Bolshevism had slowly withered away. The troops of Semenov, which he saw at work, had to his eyes nothing that recalled the power, grandeur and the prestige of the old regime. He had learned to yearn only for a little order for the railroad, of which he is a humble servant, and a little security for his people, who are pushed into his empty apartments by both *Semenovtsi* and Red brigands. A former believer in Tsarism, he was ready after a thousand setbacks, to submit and conform to any power that could settle itself definitively. And sullen and hopeless in front of the long night that was approaching, like a good watchdog he lingered, dazed and without knowing why, in his masters' abandoned house.

## 5. - With the Japanese on the Amur Railway

Sretensk, 16 October 1919

Colonel Umeda had hoped to be able to return with his troops to the 71st Regiment's winter quarters in Nerchinsk. But a new order from General Suzuki sent them back to the north.

The Shilka-Amur was covered with a shiny and transparent membrane of ice. Before six days passed it would be completely closed until April. It was a question of bringing back the Mogocho garrison, which needed rest, of depositing some small garrisons along the railroad, and of reorganizing communications with the northern regions, before the deep snows made the campaign too perilous.

Half a battalion of railroad troops accompanied us to the north, to repair the innumerable bridges that the Reds had destroyed. The Mogocho garrison, reinforced by two companies and a company of engineers were to come from the Northeast. The two columns tried to catch the enemy bands in a crossfire, intending to meet at Urium station.

Between Ukurey and Bushuley, October 18, 1919.

Four trains went up the Amur railroad: that of Sub-captain Chesinski, the train of Colonel Umeda to which I had my wagon attached, a train with civil servants and railroad workers and finally a Japanese one. So we followed exactly the protocol of foreign intervention in Siberia: native troops in the front line, foreign troops in rear-guard formation and only intervening in cases of extreme danger.

The Chesinski detachment, which preceded us, had just been chased out of Bushuley in the typical circumstances that we will read about, and whose account will give the reader an idea of the military forces involved.

The garrison of Bushuley was composed of two *sotnias* of Cossacks from the Transbaikal (regional *druzhina*), under Sotnik Liskovski, and the 120 infantrymen of Sub-captain Chesinski, occupying a train at the station. The evening before, after a few shots were fired from the crest of the hills overlooking the station, Liskovski decided to push the enemy towards the track by a wide turning movement. He and his two hundred Cossacks set off perpendicularly towards the track, and he was never seen again. Did his Cossacks refuse to charge at



the enemy, among whom they would have recognized Cossacks from neighbouring *stanitsas*?<sup>2</sup> Or did he simply hesitate in front of an unknown number of assailants?<sup>3</sup> However, towards nightfall the shooting started again. Lieutenant Stanievich, commanding the machine-gun detachment, brought NCO Zuiev with two men and a machine gun down to the building's porch, from where they sprayed bullets at the vague shadows that could hardly be made out in the gloom. No sooner had they opened fire, than with the enemy shouting "Urra!" Chesinski immediately gave the order to leave. Lieutenant Stanievich leaned out of the window and shouted to the three men who were left like that: "Shoot, shoot, for God's sake!" The unfortunate men fired a few more rounds but the enemy Cossacks, hiding behind piles of wood, threw hand grenades. Zouiev had just enough time to remove the closing piece of the machine gun, which he abandoned to the Reds with 2,000 cartridges. The three men were lucky enough to hide in the attic of a station building, where they escaped the search by the enemy Cossacks.

Chesinski returned to the enemy this day, to retake Bushuley. Late in the evening I visited old colonel Umeda. He was the adjutant of Minister Terauchi and had been in Siberia for only two and a half months. He seemed to be very embarrassed to cooperate with such strange soldiers, and asked me:

"Tell me, please, do you believe that these Russians might betray us?"

"Be successful, and they will most likely remain loyal to you."

"But how to work with them?"

"You are obviously in the wrong place, between such friends and such enemies. You are less sure of the former than of the latter. So you'd better count only on the Bolsheviks. If Semenov's soldiers insist – and that seems unlikely to me – do not let them follow you, but arrange matters as if you are the only ones fighting. Do not give them any part in a general plan. Don't take orders. By operating just with your own soldiers, even in small numbers, you will risk their lives less."

I then told him, in support of my thesis, about my experiences as a fighter under Kornilov, whose manoeuvres were constantly compromised by Cossack treachery.

Near Bushuley, 19 October 1919

Our train passively followed that of Sub-Captain Chesinski, who was in some sense in command of the combined trains. Colonel Umeda, Lieutenant-Colonel Kato and the flag bearer Miano were travelling in my car. They were surprised, as I was, by the frequent stops and the slow and hesitant running of the trains. Fearing an attempt at sabotage by our engineer, Umeda sent an armed soldier to push him to be a little more zealous. This soldier returns to report to us:

"The Russian commander has ordered his train to stop as soon as the distance between it and ours exceeds fifty metres." The officers, seated at the windows, did not want to lose sight of our train, which on this track is all spirals and meanders.

So Colonel Umeda, amused, let it happen. Three kilometres from the station, we learned that the enemy had fled at our approach. The scouts that Chesinski sent to Bushuley refused to follow the railroad. Twenty men marched to the hill on the left, forty to the hill on the right of the track, when they were more than a kilometre from the station. After waiting in vain for an hour, Colonel Umeda sent a Japanese lieutenant with two soldiers on a small rail car. They returned after half an hour: the track was clear.

## 6. – The Action Begins – Social Morality of the Reds

Bushuley, 19 October 1919

The enemy fled in the direction of Adamski. A company of infantry and a section of scouts left tonight to chase him onwards. Around dawn, Lieutenant-Colonel Kato left with two companies to protect the work of the sapper detachment.

The 120 "Red" Cossacks who had chased away Liskovski's 200 Cossacks of the regional *druzhina* and Chesinski's 120 soldiers came, for the most part, from Gazimourskaya *stanitsa* and Adamski village. Their actions, motivated in the beginning by desires for independence and revenge against the harsh regime of

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<sup>2</sup> This is what Liskovski claimed later.

<sup>3</sup> About one hundred and twenty "independent" Cossacks.



Semenov, had as a result of their life as defeated rebels and outlaws, taken the form of brigandage. However, in their exploits there is some reminiscence of the humanitarian principles that they evoked to explain the beginning of their actions. It is true that they stole from the inhabitants of the village Bushuley, not excepting the poorest ones, the very last *papakhas*, boots and fur coats. From the railroad cooperative store, which almost alone provides for the needs of a region without grain, they took all the flour (197 *poud*) that Semenov's officers had left.

But at the orphanage, where they showed up with the same intentions, they bowed to the weakness of this colony of children. I saw barns with provisions intact there. The director of the institution, who had been appointed by the Tsarist government, had continued his duties under all the successive regimes that had subsequently tormented Russia and this village, even had to refuse flour that the band offered to him for his young.

## 7. – Warrior Democracy – Samurai Ideals

Bushuley, 19 October 1919

Not wanting to risk my wagon in the encounters we expected to have the next day, I sent it back to Kuenga. I took my place, together with the Russian soldier whom Ataman Semenov had placed at my disposal, in the 3rd class wagon occupied by the Japanese officers.

There was a striking contrast between the kind of life that the other Allies – among them the Czechs – led in their sometimes comfortable, even luxurious wagons, and the extremely simple, sober and comfortless life that the Japanese officers led here. All the benches had been removed from the car. We were all lying on the floor, one next to the other, along the entire length of the car, on the abundant blankets that the Japanese authorities put at the disposal of the soldiers without distinction. Personal luggage was forbidden. In the homes of these officers, who are sometimes great lords, there is no object that even remotely reminds one of luxury. I remember a visit I made to brigade commander General Hosono in Manchuria. The hotel room where the old warrior received me was extremely clean, but contained only one small suitcase, and his toiletries were exactly the same as those of any soldier. This real samurai often led reconnaissance missions at the head of his scouts.

In our wagon, the orderlies lay at our feet, next to the stove, always heated red in this Siberian cold. They constantly put new pots, teapots and pans on the stove, where the same canned meat and vegetables were always boiling. Officers and soldiers ate exactly the same dishes, prepared according to an identical method, in the identical aluminium tins.

Relations between the soldiers and their superiors surprised me with their cordiality and simplicity. The much vaunted Japanese discipline has this remarkable feature: it works without noise nor effort. A soldier who enters makes a ceremonial bow, which he repeats on his way out. He speaks to the officer in a somewhat artificial voice and with a harshly masculine tone, which is surprising in such young men. This way of speaking, with the neck stretched and the voice coming out of the throat in carefully articulated sentences, is a legacy of the old samurai, in the happy times when military obligations filled hundreds of thousands of existences, from morning to evening. The Japanese peasant, so shy when he enters the service, nevertheless learns it easily.

Officer gives orders without ever raising their voice, and the silent soldier, striving to understand the command, obeys religiously. The contrast with the Russian army is striking, where the innate taste for insubordination in the peasantry, corrected under the old regime with the stick, broke the cohesion of the ranks from the first days of the revolution.

In Japan, loyalty to the leader has been one of the most venerable virtues for centuries, and the astonishing obedience of the soldier is only a mental preparation for unheard-of sacrifices and duties, the merits of which are taught by the current morality of the country. The feudal spirit has with its powerful hands shaped the nation for a thousand years, uniting its practical teaching with the age-old traditions, creating that unity of interest, that brotherhood in the face of danger and death, which no democracy can attain. In Japan the military spirit inherited from feudalism, impregnates both the officers and the ranks with a surprising gravity and an inexhaustible correctness. This strikes a pleasant note, in contrast with the traces of dissolution which one sees in certain other expeditionary corps in Siberia. And don't be mistaken: these soldiers, so perfectly submissive to their officers, so orderly and correct in the streets, are not slaves at all. Extremely proud, they seem to listen at every moment to some imperious precept. They seem always ready to punish every lack of politeness towards them, to which they are exposed by the intolerable insolence of certain foreigners, from



whom they are distinguished by a much older and deeper culture. If they greeted me with cordiality, the reason is that they have first observed the good relations I maintained with their officers and the respect I showed to their institutions.

A general on campaign, as well as his orderly who tends to his effects and tends to his horse, enter into the same confraternity of warriors, where only the importance of the outcome dictates the necessities of command and submission. There are no degrees in comfort, food or danger. During the Bogdatskoe affair, General Hosono, commander of the Manchurian Brigade, went forward at the head of his troops, taking fire from the enemy as they did. All of them, officers and soldiers, received exactly the same food in the field – each one the same ration of rice, *mande* and dried or canned fish. Officers, like soldiers, have it prepared according to the traditional way of the country, in exactly the same aluminium tins. Every time the military machine starts to move, one is struck by the monotony of the uniformity, until upon reflection we remember its greatness.

In the evening, after the work was done, we sat down in a large group around the teapots (which were constantly being filled) and the national cakes. The soldiers, further away, listened in respectful silence. I would have ended up forgetting them, if I had not liked to observe in their still faces the tension of their bright eyes, directed in an untiring effort of attention on their leaders.

Each of the officers had learned at least one foreign language, which he usually spoke imperfectly. So the two colonels, a major and some junior officers, used Lieutenant Miano, who spoke German perfectly, as the intermediary in our conversation. We talked about military matters especially, and particularly about the duties of an officer. My interlocutors emphasized the difference between Japanese and European conceptions. Nothing is more astonishing for them than the ease with which entire regiments surrendered to the enemy during the Great War. Millions of prisoners of war, and fortresses that surrendered with thousands, even tens of thousands of combatants, intact cannons and casemates filled with ammunition, are incomprehensible to them. They admit that the surrender of Port Arthur and, more recently, of Jiaozhou surprised them. They reminded me of the case of the Japanese soldiers taken prisoner during the Russo-Japanese war, condemned to ignominy on their return, snubbed by their neighbours, and obliged by the unanimous contempt to leave the fatherland. They told me the story of a Japanese naval officer, shipwrecked on a vessel that Admiral Togo had sent to block the entrance to the port of Port Arthur, and that the Russians had torpedoed. The rest of the crew had perished. He alone was pulled out of the water and held in captivity for the duration of the war. Back in his country, he was condemned by the military tribunal established to judge officers and men who had surrendered to the enemy. He was reproached for not having committed suicide, to avoid the dishonour of falling into the hands of the enemy. Sentenced to death, then pardoned but dishonourably discharged from service, he ended his life.

Always surrounded by our orderlies, who took a passionate interest in our conversations, we spent the evening exchanging questions, stories and discussions in which my friends always observed perfect tact and impeccable courtesy. They spoke in an animated tone with great facility of speech and wit, abandoning the cold and suspicious attitude which often characterizes them and which is only the effect of a long education in caution. They rarely left military subjects, in which they are deeply interested. I have great success with the following problem:

“Two enemy detachments, of 300 and 500 men respectively, are fighting. They have equal warrior value in the combatants, identical armament and equipment. There is no terrain advantage. It is obvious that the second detachment will win. How many men will it have when the other, reduced to 20 men, surrenders?”

An easy calculation gives: 404 men (without decimals).

To tell the truth, with a few exceptions these young officers are not nourished by humanities and *belles-lettres*. But I never cease to notice in them that perpetual concern for honour, moderation, sobriety, proud poverty, and contempt for the merchant, which are the basis of all true aristocracies, whether of sword, dress or intelligence. So we see them leaving for Japan as they came, without luggage, proud of their uniforms, untouched by commercial contacts, and representing, among the waste of European mercantilists in which Siberia abounds, among the thousands of European officers who live off the mess, a noble and elevated disinterestedness.

In the evening, a Russian officer entered the wagon. He is a *sotnik*, sent by General Matseievski, commander – a fiction only – of the Allied forces on the Amur front. The general asked Colonel Umeda for a complete enumeration of the Russian and Japanese forces, as well as an estimate of the enemy forces; he intended to





place two Cossack regiments at Colonel Umeda's disposal. Our chief, flattered and grateful, dismissed the emissary with the usual formulas of perfect politeness.

## 8. - Furtive Contacts with the Reds

Between Buchuley and Zilovo, 20 October

In the morning, Lieutenant Miano woke me:

“The enemy is firing at the bridge. The colonel will examine the situation and invites you to accompany him.”

The Chorga bridge, made of iron arches on cement bases with beams, had just been set on fire that night for the third time. The Japanese engineers we interviewed complained about their Sisyphean work.

Everywhere in this country of low hills and abundant rivers, the sudden and sometimes terrible cold of late October narrows and dries up the streams, whereas the spring melt widens them to fill the valleys. We could see a thin trickle of water flowing across the flat, level ground, extending to the near hills. To the right a few Reds, visible with glasses when they looked up, were shooting at the approaches to the bridge to prevent its repair. Thick smoke rose from the charred beams, and the bridge sank deeper and deeper.

As soon as we approached it, the enemy increased the violence of their fire. The engineers, sheltering behind a locomotive, looked at us with a naïve attitude. They seemed to say: “Obviously, it is your duty to expose yourselves.” After a few minutes of being subjected to the poorly regulated fire of the enemy, the rail on which we stood was suddenly stained white for a length of 2 metres by a bullet. The Reds seemed to have found the range; it was time to leave. But who would give the signal to retreat? Them? No, that's impossible, they are samurai, albeit under fire for the first time. Umeda invites me to follow, but I am almost a samurai myself: they won't take me. So we stayed a few more minutes, arms crossed, exchanging remarks on the apparent number of enemies, who continued to shoot, with luck clumsily. Umeda invited me, with a wide gesture of the arm, to return:

“You are our guest.”

I refuse with indignation: “Never in my life, since you are higher in rank.”

We remained thus a bit longer in talk. But then a bullet disappeared with a whistle in the grass of the embankment next to us, and another ricocheted against the frame of the bridge. Slowly and regretfully – not for those negligible bullets of course – Umeda retreated, followed by Miano and me. Further on, between the locomotive and the next train, was an interval of fifty metres: the enemy, now nervous, fired at the top of his strength. Umeda stopped, straightened and very nonchalantly turned around one last time to talk. A few more meters, and phew! it's over.

We were going to dislodge the enemy, whose strength lay in their ease of movement. All mounted, the Reds would tie up their horses in the woods behind the ridge where they were going to set up their ambush, and – as soon as the adversary prepared for the assault – jump in the saddle, to reappear at another place.

To fight such an enemy, really needed detachments equipped like him, operating with the same speed and using the same tricks, well guided by leaders who know the region, and ready to intimidate the terror of the adversary with a merciless application of the law of retaliation.

Instead, Colonel Umeda's two battalions lined up on both sides of the road, under the trees. The NCOs officers carefully inspected the rifles and bags. Then the company commanders harangued the lined-up troops at length, like the centurions and tribunes in classical times. Obviously, we prepared ourselves as if for a pitched battle against an enemy who also observed the classical rules of tactics, while we found ourselves facing an adversary whose strength consisted in not obeying any system, in being everywhere, and in resisting nowhere.

Fortunately for us, the forests that cover the country had thinned out, and guerrilla warfare became less effective. Once the troops were properly inspected, when the instructions had been repeated, the detachment moved off. In front, the old colonel whom I accompanied, then the flag and its guard, some senior officers, and the troops. A section was sent to the right, to reconnoitre. Our soldiers spread out, forming a broad front of attack, capable of enveloping the enemy forces. All this smelled like a training field, and the overly meticulous use of recognised tactics. But on the other hand, it was pleasant to observe that the leader did not belong to those old officers who exaggerate the value of their military experience, and feared that their death would leave the troops defenceless.



Still at the head of the detachment, Umeda climbed the hill, leaving the flag behind on the slope so as not to expose it to a surprise from the enemy. As soon as we reached the top, a magnificent panorama opened up over three valleys. We observed about fifty horsemen fleeing across an open meadow. Our soldiers opened fire and a rider fell, who was later picked up, dying.

### 9. – Cavalcade in the Night – Scenes from Inhabitants' Homes

The main part of the enemy bands had withdrawn to Zilovo. Our troops would return to this village, on foot; the trains would join us later.

I rode with an officer and two soldiers, behind our ranks. The Bolsheviks had not been defeated, and the silence that reigned at dusk was made mysterious and threatening by the danger that seemed to hover over us. On our right, some rare scrub rose to the crest, where the last leaves shone, like golden spangles. On the left, beyond the plain that the spring currents had dug, was a slight height over which the red sunset poured large jets of broken light, in very pure air.

All the houses of the railroad guards were abandoned, containing only broken furniture and the straw where the Reds had spent the night.

We soon joined the machine-gun crews, who had been dressed in Russian outfits: sheep fur coats and high *papakhas*, which fit them well, and which make them seem – since they walk very straight and martially – taller than they really are.

A *praporshchik* with ten Cossacks joined our column. The Japanese, who are suspicious of the inexplicable conduct of some Russian leaders, carefully kept them away.

The sun had set. In the dark mass of the large hills, which the same brilliant light covered earlier, successive planes are now discovered, spreading out to infinity. Nothing but blue, darker for each more distant plane, and detaching itself, in the depths of the horizon, in a pure ultramarine, against the dying gleams of the clouds.

In deep darkness we followed the only road that has been traced in these wild plains, and that is the railroad. After removing the rails over great distances, and destroying the bridges, the Reds sent the last available locomotives, at full speed, into the ravines, where they crashed against the rocks, and into the sand, where they dug deep ruts.

I finally joined colonel Umeda with his officers in a "*kazarma*" (railroad worker dwelling) 6 kilometres from Zilovo station. Six Japanese officers took their places around the *samovar*, in the middle of one of those scenes of human misery which are repeated with such monotony that one ends up getting used to them. An old man with trembling arms, a rather young woman trying to be pleasant in her brightly coloured rags, and a silly young girl who observed us with a look that was sometimes naïve, sometimes scrutinizing, but – no doubt sensing the danger in this meeting of military men – only answered questions with evasive gestures. There were no family ties between these three individuals, no community, except that of common work in this deserted corner. The last of the provisions were coming to an end. Plundered in turn by the "Whites" and the "Reds" they waited, arms crossed, for the approaching famine.

While our officers discussed the information they have just received on the map, the *praporshchik* who had insisted on accompanying us entered. Silence greeted him. When he sat down next to us near the teapot, a soldier, an orderly of a captain, asked to him to leave.

The *praporshchik* shouted: "I have the right to sit here, I am an officer!"

The Japanese officers suspended their council of war, and looked at the Russian with a cold and indifferent air. The latter had hardly drunk a cup of tea when a second lieutenant interpreter touched him on the arm: "As soon as you have finished, please leave; we have to talk."

Not understanding what it is about, he lets himself be taken outside, then sees the door closed in his face. One hears him shouting for some time: "I have the right to enter, I am an officer!"

After waiting two hours in the *kazarma*, we continued our march, arriving at Zilovo at an hour after midnight. The Reds had left the station an hour and a half previously.



## 10. – Village Emptied by Fear – A Policy of Conciliation

Zilovo, 21 October

When the Reds entered Zilovo, the local authorities, station and depot chiefs, and the administrative organisations fled, leaving their houses and furniture in the care of an old wife or grandmother.

On the other hand the poor households fled during the night, fearing falling into the hands of Semenov's officers, who would soon join us.

During my walk, two workers approached me fearfully. I reassured them and stopped their political confessions, to which I did not attach any faith. One of them asked: Would it be possible for you to intercede with the Japanese on behalf of about forty comrades who have fled, for fear of Semenov's armoured trains? They are hiding, partly in the *priiski* (gold mines) which are located 6 kilometres from here, partly even further away in the *taiga*, where they have lit large fires to warm themselves, their wives and babies. They are neutrals in the civil war. Would the Japanese, who are allies of the *Semenovtzi*, protect our comrades if they came back?"

I took them to Colonel Umeda, who immediately ordered the chairman of the *Zemskaya Uprava*<sup>4</sup> to issue the following proclamation:

"The Japanese Command announces to all those whom this concerns, that the inhabitants of the Alexeievskaya sector must return from the *taiga* and the mountains to their homes and resume their work.

Zilovo, 21 October

(Signed) Sediakin,

Chairman of the *Zemskaya Uprava*."

The two workers left immediately to announce the good news to the fugitives. By that evening, they brought back some comrades; the others came back in the night.

After the "social demands" of the Bolsheviks, and the stupid reprisals of the *Semenovtzi*, this was a new sound, which brought back confidence in the future into the heart of the citizens. Umeda announced to President Sediakin the new policy that would be followed in the regions freed by Japanese efforts. From then on, every neutral citizen would receive protection and help from Japanese arms against either the Reds or the Whites. And those combatants who surrendered their arms, and submitted to the Japanese authorities, would be amnestied and protected like the others.

To understand the significance of this new policy of conciliation, I would highlight the two forces which were fighting each other, and between which the people, indifferent to the political regimes and wanting economic peace at all costs, led a life paralyzed by fear.

## 11. – A Confederation of Insurgents

The front where Umeda's troops were fighting was part of the "world front of the war against capitalism." It was titled: the 3rd District of the Eastern Front. Thanks to Kolchak's excellent police, there were no prominent Bolshevik commissars east of Irkutsk capable of organizing a Red Army. The hatred against Semenov, which was for largely just the hatred against the current authority, gathered fighters animated by emotions and pushed by completely different motives.

Groups of Cossacks, perhaps awakened by the desire to restore the former quasi-independence of the *stanitzas*, but especially revolted against Ataman Semenov's officers, formed the core of the popular resistance. Belonging mainly to the *stanitzas* of Iomovski, Kurlichenski and Undiensi, and having taken part in the great war, they worked under their officers, whose leader is lieutenant Chvetsov. They warned everyone that they had come to "liberate", and not to confuse them with the Bolsheviks, whose doctrines they repudiated but whose cooperation they momentarily accepted. They seemed to commit more atrocities than the Red Guards, claiming to have to avenge unforgivable insults.

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<sup>4</sup> The board of the district council, which represented all the population including peasants but was weighted heavily towards the wealthier classes.



A second category is driven by vague revolutionary principles and composed of poor people, with energetic leaders forming the soul of the group. There was no attempt at constructive work. They were still in the “*Nimm-und-Essrecht*”<sup>5</sup> of the early days of Marat and Lenin. The bourgeoisie that had been worth plundering were those who had accumulated provisions for winter, bad weather, old age. But since the bourgeois were all driven out or impoverished, these Red Guards, unable to continue their idle life except by requisitioning, extended the financial and social limits of this class, and took from the Cossacks, from the peasants, from the well-to-do workers, and finally from the poor themselves.

Their religion is not to shave or to blow their noses. To a poor clerk of the Zilovo cooperative store, who pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket, an important Red Guard remarked with a voice full of threat: “I believe, my boy, that you are simply a bourgeois!”

So during each Red interregnum you could see lightly cultured people spitting loudly on the ground, clapping their hands on their thighs, shouting, and talking insolently.

The leaders were two convicts, Parfionov and Namakonov. The first was tall, robust, energetic and brave: in short a terrible brute, with a mouth constantly filled with loud talk that he did not seem to understand. Namakonov was a former convict for breach of trust, called himself an anarchist, had milder morals, and was opposed to atrocities. These two nearly illiterate men could not have managed without the intelligent help of three brothers: Abram, Salomon and Khaïm Lichman. These were never seen in battle. Nor did they bring the fierce energy of Boanerges<sup>6</sup> to the meetings, or that love of proselytising which characterized Parfionov. They instead lent to a movement that would have swallowed them up at the slightest resistance, their good will, intelligence and habit of business. And while enduring the hardships of a wandering life, they could save and increase their fortune.

The third group was composed of brigands: 150 Hunguz that the Russian Abram Boika went to recruit in the hills of Chinese Manchuria, with who knows what money. They were well dressed and armed. The leader, of strong stature, walked around in a long flaming red coat with a wide silver belt. Was he pursuing a political goal or did he feel attracted, like his brigands, by the prospect of booty?

These three groups of insurgents represented in front of the – already! – powerless feudal system of the *Semenovtsi*, the three tendencies of primitive times, slipping from the claws of the dying nations’ Eagle: the independence of small communes, the anarchic *bellam omnium contra omnes*,<sup>7</sup> and the eternal invasion of the foreigner.

## 12. – A Mixed Orthodox-Revolutionary Funeral Service

Parfionov's troop was composed of 40 men when it entered Zilovo on 10 September, and it quickly grew to a hundred. Two days later, there was an encounter with the Japanese near the famous Chorga bridge. Parfionov lost six killed and two wounded, who soon died in the hospital of Zilovo. On the 15th, the funeral took place, which gave rise to grotesque scenes.

Even for the Bolsheviks, the new atheists and rabid priest-eaters, Christianity imposes its spiritual benefits on the three fundamental events of life: birth, marriage and death. We live swearing and struggling like devils, but we refuse to die like dogs.

The funeral procession formed at the hospital. The coffins, draped in red, were carried in a considerable procession, which no inhabitant dared to miss. An immense number of red flags fluttered in the wind. Four sturdy men carried a huge scarlet banner, which read in white characters: “Eternal remembrance for the fighters for Liberty.”

Under this flaming red roof walked the priest nationalised by order of Parfionov, covered with his priestly vestments, which the Reds – after long discussions – had allowed him to keep.

This priest, assisted by his deacon, a bass renowned through the whole region, intoned the litanies of the dead. They had hardly begun, when the Red band, under the presidency of the convicts Parfionov and Namakonov, and the commissars Salomon, Khaïm and Abram Lichman, began to shout the *Marseillaise*, then *L’Internationale*, then the *Marseillaise*, and so on. The deacon, famous for the volume of his voice, tried to

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<sup>5</sup> Effectively “eat the rich”.

<sup>6</sup> A biblical reference to a vociferous preacher or orator.

<sup>7</sup> Literally, “the war of all against all”, a state of utter anarchy in Hobbes’ Leviathan.



save his reputation, but his voice and that of the priest were lost in the tumultuous chorus of the dreadful bandits. The majestic melodies of the plainchant were heard only during the pauses between the revolutionary songs.

Nevertheless, everyone entered the church, where they went around the nave as usual. Counterfeiters, murderers, and new unbelievers followed the priest, with a candle in their hands just as they had done in the past when they prayed as innocent children, with a grave and serious air, before the coffin of a relative whose death they could not yet understand. Then they began to sing again, the priest and the deacon their litanies, the Reds the *Marseillaise* and the *L'Internationale*. The *panikhides* ended in this horrible and grotesque hurricane of voices.

Then the procession reformed and slowly, but not solemnly, went to the cemetery. The priest opened the series of speeches with a preaching adapted to the tragic circumstances of the moment. He reminded these brigands of the fragility of human life, the charms and even the advantages of virtue. He touched with a prudent and delicate finger their many crimes, crimes joyfully committed, for which he hardly dared to demand repentance. He honoured them with the name of warriors, he praised the strength of their arms, but prudently invited them to rest.

“Exchange the sword for the plough”, he shouted at them! “Resume the useful work of the fields, plant olive trees and laurels in your gardens, make peace with God and with your enemies!”

But Parfionov’s terrible eyes and the mocking glances of the Lichman brothers remained fixed on him. He was interrupted by furious grumbling. The speaker tried to continue, but his legs gave way, and he abruptly stopped his preaching before the exordium. Parfionov’s voice thundered: “Everything you said there is stupid and inane. We will continue the war against the big capitalists, we will destroy the palaces, we will hang the kings, we will shoot the bourgeois,” etc.

### 13. – Small Pre-Feudal Lords and Armoured Trains

There reigned in Siberia a specific disorder which characterizes times of transition. The old regime has been preserved only in the customs. All eyes seek to find in the current society the skeleton of the old order: there is a central government, with delegates in the provinces and regions, troops garrisoned everywhere, and consulting guilds representative of the populace. But all this organisation is only appearance and simulacrum.

In reality, there is only the anarchy that the arbitrary use of force engenders. Central government, opposed by regional governors, has only local power. Officers, while repeating the gestures and customs of the old discipline, did exactly what they wanted. The *zemstvos* were rarely listened to. The brutal reign of the sword was prolonged beyond measure. A whole new class of officers was formed, whose initiation into the noble military profession was done in guerrilla warfare and bloody repressions, so painful to every man of honour.

Even the officers of the old regime, whom the chance of the revolution threw into this furnace, were not united by any link to the Siberian population. They were strangers to the country, where they reintroduced outdated political conceptions. They took as emulators, not the great colonizers such as Muraviev, Prevalski, or Semenov-Tian-Chanski, those pure representatives of Russian genius, but the *conquistadores*, without political motives, founding brutal and temporary reigns.

This reign of the sword took its most dangerous form in the organisation of armoured trains, real rolling fortresses, whose lords exercised all the rights of high and low justice, and especially that of levying taxes.

To baptize these terrible instruments, the words of a Semenov worshipper's poem were chosen:

Ataman Semenov,	Ataman Semenov,
Grozny Mstitel,	Cruel avenger,
Besposhchadnyy Pobeditel',	Merciless victor,
Spravedlivyy Usmiritel', Etc.	Just peacemaker, Etc.

Young colonel Stepanov, a comrade-in-arms of the ataman from his Siberian beginnings, commanded the “armoured train *division*” and made it an instrument of revenge. But he overdid it. It was only natural that examples should have been made from Bolshevik fighters who were caught with their weapons in their hands, or among the commissars or instigators, if one considers that generosity would be misunderstood by the adversary. There is in the horrible reprisals of civil wars an element of justice that the popular soul



understands and approves. But it is necessary that the application of this *jus talionis*<sup>8</sup> be dictated by the vigilant, that it be regulated in some way by public opinion, and that its excesses be motivated – more or less sincerely – by a concern for the public good. It was necessary that the executions were made with fanfare, but with measure and prudence, and that they remained exceptions. The opposite happened.

The armoured train headquarters, Adrianovka station, was for more than a year the scene of atrocious and unnecessary massacres. As an example, I will just quote the testimony of a Russian officer, *Porchik N...*, belonging to the Adrianovka group:

In July 1919, a train of 348 civilians arrived from Verkhneudinsk directorate, among them several women and children aged 15 to 16, all of whom were arrested for vague reasons. They were sent to Chita, where no one knew what to do with them, and then to Adrianovka, where they were never embarrassed to find prompt and effective remedies. Colonel Stepanov, who – my interlocutor said – did not have enough food to feed the large group, took Colonel Popov and the Makoveyeva garrison Cossacks in the armoured train “Semenovets” and led the trainload towards the field of execution, the “*Tarskaya Pady*” some three km from the station. The unfortunates were pushed out of the cars by the Cossacks and ran for their lives, but were mowed down by machine guns. After half an hour, the armoured train and soldiers returned to Adrianovka, to let the express train from Omsk pass, and then went back to *Tarskaya Pady* to finish the terrible job. The same evening, the Cossacks publicly sold the bloody clothes of the victims.

These clumsy horrors were committed by a small minority and were severely criticized by the more moderate and far-sighted officers. Unfortunately, colonels Stepanov, Popov, Freiberg and Aparovich, captains Sidorov and Skriabin, Lieutenant Merov and others had been given unlimited powers by the ataman. Doctors Zimin and Tishinov, and a Lieutenant Manchurov, who had dared to raise their voices against Adrianovka's executions, were shot on Stepanov's orders – for Bolshevism of course.

They were monsters. Sub-captain Skriabin, among others, had a didactic article inserted in a magazine for armoured train crews, teaching less experienced officers how to attract honest women to their trains and then abuse them. I had the article in front of me; it was signed: “Pielka Orlini Glaz”, the Skriabin's pseudonym. I also have evidence that Skriabin, who came from an honourable family and was admired by the ladies for his good manners, and his friends used these methods with the wives, sisters and fiancées of their comrades. At first it was difficult for me to understand why these young brutes had christened them the “Italian way”. Then I remembered a certain passage in Casanova's *Memoirs*, probably the only kind of literature that these barbarians valued.

I would add, incidentally, that Kalmykov's officers can be accused of similar crimes committed with equally little concern. In November 1918 they executed a Swedish doctor, a representative of the Swedish Red Cross in Khabarovsk, whose name I cannot find. Apart from some quite ridiculous grievances against this scientist, who was in charge of the prisoners of war in the Maritime Province, he was accused of a heinous crime: of having wanted to spread typhus among the population. In December 1918, during my passage to Vladivostok, I was shown the exhibits: they were tubes containing serum against typhoid fever!

#### **14. – The *Semenovtsi* Policy of Violence – Investigation in Zilovo – Murder of Neutrals**

Zilovo, 22 October 1919

The crews of the armoured trains obtained the food that Chita did not provide them by requisitioning. The officers, who were not subject to any control, could not always escape the temptation to enrich themselves at the expense of the country. My friend Sediakin, president of the regional *Zemskaya Uprava*, a former officer and as anti-Bolshevik as anyone could be, today showed me the following dispatch which he is going to send to the ataman:

“Confirming the dispatch of the refugees (N.B. townsfolk who had fled at the approach of the Reds!), I beg you to give an urgent order to the troops to return flour, clothing and all other articles. The troops do not recognize any local authority. For almost a month they have been eating on the account of the villagers, without ever paying. Such acts cause new discontent among the inhabitants. I beg you to order an investigation with the help of the government representatives.

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<sup>8</sup> The law of “an eye for an eye”.



“Chairman of the *Zemskaya Uprava*: (Signed) Sediakin.”<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand to what degree the actions of the armoured trains were harming their cause, it is enough to recall a fact which characterizes all civil wars: an enormous majority, naturally neutral and hoping for the return of order, sit between two small minorities leading the struggle, and submit to the victor of the moment. In that majority are found all the elements that will assure the country of tomorrow the resumption of the interrupted work and the continuity of moral life. The most elementary wisdom dictates a duty to remove them from the adversary and to win them over.<sup>10</sup> Semenov’s officers, on the contrary, have taken the habit of punishing the inhabitants of the villages that the Reds have occupied, for “connivance” with the enemy. Here is an example:

On 1 September 1919, after the “White” garrison had fled, about 40 Reds entered Zilovo village. They left the village eight days later in the face of the Japanese threat. A hundred poor inhabitants followed them; the others, happy to see them leave, prepared to cheer the victors. The Japanese troops entered on 18 September; the armoured train “Mstitel”, led by colonels Stepanov and Popov and captain Skriabin, the next day. A deputation, which came to offer them bread and salt, was arrested and shot a few days later, together with a dozen other inhabitants. An inquiry among the Russian and Japanese authorities has taught me that we are facing here barbaric, and what is worse, useless and stupid assassinations.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, some *Semenovtsi* commit all sorts of horrors with young women in their mobile fortresses. They will be arrested in the evening, under some pretext.

“You went for a walk with a commissar!”

“You pinned a red cockade on their jackets!”

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<sup>9</sup> Needless to say the investigation by a young colonel, a friend of the accused officers, carried out on order of the ataman, did not lead to anything.

<sup>10</sup> A tacit agreement between Kolchak's troops and Soviet troops, confirmed by the admiral's instructions, ensured that the railroad officials – mainly mechanics – workers of the communal services, etc., were free to serve the masters of the place, without being worried later by the successors in power.

<sup>11</sup> Here are some names and details:

Kovalov, reputedly wealthy owner of the communal bathhouse and enemy of the Bolsheviks, was killed for depositing his rifle at the Red police station, which he seems to have hidden when the White guards had come. This rifle was a Berdan, of which half of the barrel had been sawn off, and which was only used to kill rabbits. Kovalov left a wife and eight children.

Podapregori, a mechanic with 26 years of service on the railroad, a “*bezpartieni*,” a quiet and phlegmatic man, was shot for having left on 10 September to go to Urium station with his locomotive, and for having brought back the 40 Reds under the convicts Parfionov and Namakonov. Witnesses tell me that they saw three Reds armed with rifles at his side on the locomotive. He left a wife and three children.

Alexandrov, a small clerk at the station was shot for having made threats to the “bourgeois” a year ago, in August 1918 under Czech rule.

Andriev, a switchman and notorious drunkard, was shot for having attached his little red flag for signals above his door, when the 40 Reds entered Zilovo.

Taranenko, a small bourgeois “*bezpartieni*”, was shot for having bought two shotguns from the commissar Lichman, who had confiscated them in another commune.

Sapozhnikov, a Jewish merchant and brother-in-law of the Lichmans, was shot for having kept goods that the Lichman commissars had “requisitioned”.

Chougay, a 17 years old mechanic worker, was shot for having walked around with a rifle during the stay of the Reds. And so on and so forth.

It is said in the village that the crews of the armoured trains not only shoot their victims, but also chop them into pieces. I made efforts to have the corpses dug up, collected and buried in the cemetery, but no one dared to work with me. They were awaiting for the arrival of the *Semenovtsi*, after the Japanese had purged the region of Reds.

On their way out of Zilovo to shoot 16 prisoners in a forest, the *Semenovtsi* met 12 Chinese workers working for the Railway Company on the railroad track. Knowing that there were Chinese (or rather Hunghez) among the Reds, and wanting – in the Persian fashion – to make a salutary example, they took these harmless people and shot them at the same time.



“You repaired their suits!”

“You slept with them!”, etc., etc.

These women are usually embarrassed to confess what has happened to them (I have experienced this twice), and this modesty is an asset in the game of the White Guards. To a young girl from Nerchinsk, Sub-captain Skriabin said: “If you say a single word about what happened, they will find you under a tombstone.”

### 15. – A Testimony of Gang Rape

The document we are about to read was written and signed in my presence by the woman Dovgal,<sup>12</sup> whom Sediakin has known for a long time. I quote this terrible testimony without changing anything:

“The first undersigned, Domna Alexeievna Dovgal, declares in the presence of the other two undersigned, Vasil Mikhaelovich Sediakin, former officer in the Russian army and president of the *Zemskaya Uprava* of Zilovo, and Captain Ludovic Hermanovich Grondijs, as follows:

My husband was arrested by the local Zilovo militia on 28 October 1918, and was sentenced to eleven months in prison for having been mobilised in a Red band, which he accompanied without carrying weapons. I have six children, one of whom came out of the gymnasium. After the arrest of my husband, my life was painful, and in particular it was difficult to ensure that two of my children continued their studies at the gymnasium.

On 19 September 1919 about 20 Bolsheviks, under the dangerous leader Parfionov, entered Zilovo, and all the villagers came out to offer them bread. The Bolsheviks brought me clothing material and ordered me to make costumes out of it. I obeyed, as did all the women assigned to this task.

On 18 September the vanguard of Cossacks and Japanese troops entered, and the next day the armoured train “Mstitel”, to make some arrests. The names of all those who had worked for the Bolsheviks had been communicated to Semenov’s officers.

In the afternoon of the 19th, my daughter, aged 19, was arrested, together with two other girls. One of these, Miss Sediakin, daughter of the second undersigned, was released almost immediately on the demand of her mother. Concerning the two others, a violent discussion arose between two officers, one of whom wanted to keep them in the car, but they were finally sent home with orders to return the next morning around 8 o'clock. But the same evening, at 11 o'clock, two soldiers entered our house to take my daughter to the train. Fortunately, by chance, one of them, Soldatenko, had been a classmate of my son in the gymnasium and knew my daughter. He was ashamed to carry out his orders and left our house, to go and arrest some other girl.

The miserable pretext used by the *Semenovtsi* to arrest these girls was that they had walked with Reds, which for my daughter, and for that of the second undersigned, is notoriously false.

On 20 September at 10 o'clock in the morning, two soldiers came to arrest me, claiming that I had stolen the cloth that the Bolsheviks had brought me to make outfits from Dr. Maximov. I fainted on the way, and then continued my way leaning on the arms of the soldiers. There I received treatment from the *feldscher* Tribus, in the *provodnik's* coupé of a third-class carriage. As soon as my condition improved somewhat, I was pushed into an apartment in the same car, where I found three other women: Marusya ..., 25 years old, and two little ones, doctor Maximov’s maid, 14 years old, and the station buffet maid, 15 or 16 years old.

Soon a young officer entered, an ordinary man, short, blond, his face and his whole head shaved. He examined us, made a face when he saw me, and left. Immediately afterwards, a soldier came to get the oldest girl, and took her away after ordering Marusya to wait in the office where Tribus had treated me.

Half an hour or so passed, and I heard the following conversations between the soldiers:

“The captain also allowed me.”

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<sup>12</sup> She was 45 years old.





"With which one?"

"With this one" (pointing to Tribus's office).

They chuckled together, then the first one remarked:

"And these whores, after having them well ..... I will shoot them all myself."

"Another one came up."

"I will do it too."

A fourth interrupted:

"Not at all, you won't do it, you're sick."

Vehement discussion. Finally he was reassured:

"Well, you will go too, but after all the others."

The girl returned, all pale and crying. The officer followed her and locked himself in Tribus's office with the young woman who had been waiting there. He stayed there for about fifteen minutes and then went away. As soon as he left, the soldiers became noisy and joyful. Tribus pushed me into the second apartment of the wagon and closed the door between the two apartments. About ten soldiers were in the young women's apartment. More were beginning to pour in from all sides. They immediately wanted to enter, but were pushed back by those in front of them.

I then heard the cries of one of the young girls, probably the smallest:

"Go away, don't touch me!"

And then violent sobs and moans. Horrible swearing answered, cries: "Shut up!" and then the dirtiest expressions of the famous vocabulary of the Russian soldier. At last the girl fell silent, and after that I did not hear either of the women.

Soon a soldier came out of the first apartment, looking satisfied, and shouted to those in the second apartment (where I was): 'You may all come in, if you have no disease on your ...' And, one by one, they all entered, shouting to the first ones to hurry up. After, once the door opened fully, I saw that they had, in the room where these ignoble things took place, surrounded with a curtain the part where the young women were standing. A soldier came from outside and asked:

"What is going on here?"

They looked at him laughing.

"Ah, I see, we've arranged a little brothel."

"Here you are, but we don't ask for a name."

There came the young soldier Soldatenko, who took his place in the line of soldiers. I asked him:

"May I speak to you for a moment?"

"Certainly."

And he took me a little further away.

"Here, my child, I see what's going on. Kill me. I don't want anyone to do the same to me."

"Are you really afraid?"

"Yes, my boy, kill me!"

"Don't worry, sweetheart, they won't do anything to you."

Then he led me to sit down a little farther away, from where I could see nothing of what was happening next door.

Three soldiers were washing themselves in the apartment where I was sitting. One was shaving. Another approached:



“Hurry up, and go too, you!”

The first one answered:

“I don't feel like it. If it were evening, if I had a nice girl near me, alone with me, ah, it would be quite different.”

But suddenly, throwing away his razor, he ran to the door, and shouted to those who are next door, busy: “Hurry, I have just had a strong desire!”

But this went on for some time, and after shouting and ranting, he suddenly walked away, cursing like all the devils.

“Hell, look what those bastards have done. His work is so slow, my desire has passed.”

Most of the young boys had their turn, too, except for one child who refused, when he was urged to do as the others did:

“I did not come for this at all, but for anything else. And how could I, after that, look into my mother's eyes?”

About forty soldiers passed through the wagon, of whom less than a dozen refused to participate in the brutalities. Among those who were waiting, one behind the other, one said out loud and with the approval of the others:

“If we stay here a few more days, all the wives, sisters and daughters of the Reds will go through.”

Those who came out of the next room still had their pants open, showing their nakedness and arranging their clothes in my presence, all slowly, either out of carelessness, or because they had run out of time, or out of insolence.

After these scenes had lasted about three hours, the same officer who had started this game, came back laughing:

“Well, did it work?”

The soldiers boasted:

“Me, I have ...”

Another one:

“That's nothing, I ...”

And so on. The jokes do not stop. Officer and soldiers laughed out loud. Then the officer commanded:

“That's good! And now follow my orders, and wash your hands!”

Then soon came the order:

“Gunnery to the platform!”

And everyone dispersed.

The armoured train moved in the direction of Urium and stopped 5 or 6 km further on, opposite the gold mines. Fourteen shells were fired at those mines. There was no response to this fire, and we returned to Zilovo.

They put me in the wagon intended for arrests, but after ten minutes they released me. I was free. As soon as I returned to my family, a violent illness broke out, accompanied by a complete paralysis of the left arm, a partial paralysis of the right shoulder and of the tongue. I am not yet completely cured at this time.

The Mstisl left Zilovo that day from, and returned two days later. On the morning of the 22nd or 23rd of September, two officers of her crew came early to my house for tea. They talked freely on various subjects, examined my library which is rather well supplied, etc. In the afternoon of the same day, one of them came back, but this time to arrest me. I was in bed, paralyzed and



could not get up. The officer placed two soldiers with bayonets fixed by my bedside in case my condition improved. Dr. Maximov, who still believed in my guilt, refused to come at first, and did not come until very late in the evening. After having shouted at and reproached me, to which it was almost impossible for me to answer, he delivered me a certificate, with which the soldiers reluctantly withdrew. I have since been set free, but I still fear that they will take me back.

I saw the two mistreated girls again later. They asked me not to tell anyone. For me, I believe it is a dishonour to be raped under such circumstances. And this is certainly also the reason why the multiple arrests of young women by the armoured trains are shrouded in mystery. One woman from Zilovo,<sup>13</sup> taken by the crew, died *en route*. Another woman, mistreated like her, is now sick in the prison of Nerchinsk. Both were young, and no one here has exact details about them.

This time the three victims of the Mstitel crew left with the Reds, followed by all the young relatives of the Bolsheviks and other young women from Zilovo village.

Domna Alexeievna Dovgal,  
Ludovic Hermanovich Grondijs  
Vasil Mikhailovich Sediakin”

## 16. – Japanese Troops Warmly Welcomed by the Population

Zilovo, 28 October 1919

Colonel Umeda made a speech today in front of the inhabitants, whom Sediakin had gathered at the station. The populace, among whom the chairman of the *Zemskaya Uprava* points out to me several workers who after having run away for fear of the armoured trains have returned at the call of the Japanese commander, is favourably impressed by the following promise that Umeda has just repeated publicly:

“All Bolsheviks, fighters included, who freely surrender their weapons, are protected against anyone, by my troops, to whom I have given the strictest orders. They will be able to resume their work, without being bothered.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> She was a young nurse, attached to the hospital of Zilovo. The *feldscher*, an intelligent and level-headed person, assures me that her youth and freshness were the only reasons for her arrest.

<sup>14</sup> One reads with interest the strong words that Colonel Umeda addressed to the populace, in a proclamation posted in all the communes of the Amur districts:

Toward the end of the world war, revolution broke out in Russia, and that country was forced to conclude a separate peace with Austria and Germany. Thus Russia, after a bloody and heroic war of four years, could not take part in the peace conference and did not receive, like her former allies, any share in the victory. The Bolsheviks reign in her country. Everywhere is disorder. The great Empire is scattered into a great number of independent provinces, and the spectacle of this fall inspires us with unspeakable pity.

There are people who believe that Bolshevism has had the merit of freeing the country from the burden of Tsarism, but in reality Bolshevism has done nothing but destroy the order of government and lead the people to the edge of the abyss. Not only the Allies, but also Germany and Austria consider Bolshevism a great danger to all nations. The conditions of life have become so difficult in all countries, that the disorder in Russia may spread to other nations. For this reason, the Allies want a strong government to be established in Russia as soon as possible.

Allied troops have been sent to Siberia to rescue the Czechoslovakians, with whose help they continue to restore order. Japan has already been on good terms with her Russian neighbour for many years. We feel sympathy for Russia and great pity for the collapsed Empire. We hope that order will be restored as soon as possible, and we are sending our soldiers to help her. There is still much to be done. The Siberian Bolsheviks have no army, they have only bands of thieves and murderers, who assemble as easily as they disperse. The war with them is like a hunt for flies. These Bolsheviks live in the places where we fight, they know the other inhabitants and the topographical details of the country. For us, on the contrary, it is difficult to get along with the population, to get exact information from them. For this reason our work is not finished, and it will continue for some time. But you know us, we Japanese, the fear of dying will not stop us, before our goal is reached.

We are working for the good of Russia, and, in spite of this, a part of the population is helping the Bolshevik murderers. It is like putting boots on the head and hat on the feet (a Japanese proverb). Perhaps one is afraid of the Bolsheviks and thinks that one is very clever. But think about it. Shouldn't man be governed by a strong, unshakeable will and by moral principles? The Japanese army is the best doctor for Siberia. It is your duty to help us, and even, if necessary, to sacrifice your life for the motherland. If you, the Russians, give in to events without resistance, the situation will soon become untenable. 'How, in Siberia, thirty times larger than Japan, are there not enough patriots to save the fatherland?



Here was a new sound for citizens accustomed to the spectacle of so many relatives whipped and shot for having been, more than a year ago, part of a Red committee or band. The Russians, generally of very tall stature, look with astonishment at the little Japanese soldiers, whom we had become accustomed to fearing as allies of the terrible *Semenovtsi*, and whom we see entering, perfectly disciplined, measured and correct. Their presence in these villages is acclaimed first of all by the bourgeoisie, happy for the protection that they grant against the Reds, by the poor, who feel guaranteed against the horrible armoured trains, finally by the world of the small tradesmen, tired of the useless and interminable civil war which only leads to the destruction of the communications and the trade and to the increase in the price of the life. All classes addressed, either through Sediakin or directly, the Japanese command with their complaints and desires.

The Japanese soldiers have received the strictest orders. I often observe them, when they enter private houses to get bread (which they often prefer to rice) or poultry. To leave no doubt about their good intentions, which they rarely manage to express in the local language, they hold a half-yen bill at the end of their arm stretched out in front. The inhabitants welcome them well and often invite them to take tea with them by the *samovar*; these soldiers refuse such excessive intimacy.

This effort of the Japanese troops to make themselves bearable and agreeable to the inhabitants does not exclude a great prudence in front of the multiple dangers that they run among a population that has fed whole bands of Reds. On each house of the commune, the Japanese command has inscribed, in Japanese characters, the number of men, women and children who live there and the political party to which the chief belongs, if he is absent. Every evening, from 8 o'clock onwards, the inhabitants were forbidden to walk around. The patrols entered a few houses at random to make sure that the family was complete.

The only complaint against a Japanese soldier that I was able to collect from the inhabitants was the theft of some eggs. The result of my little investigation is quite amusing. A sentry, placed on the roof of a house, to observe the surroundings, was walking there in the cold of 10 degrees, when his bored eye fell on a huge collection of eggs that the inhabitant – as usual – had hidden on his roof, for fear of *Semenovtsi* requisitions. The soldier took some of them, heated them in his pocket and swallowed them. This is the only complaint, for a year, after repeated stays in the area.

The Japanese officers lock themselves up in their homes. When I visit them, I find them sitting on rush mats that they have procured to build very nice Japanese interiors of a sober and severe taste, as befits warriors. They drink their green tea with the Japanese sweets provided by the paternal foresight of the stewards, and smoke their excellent cigarettes, in the midst of respectfully obedient soldiers, on guard night and day, and willing to release this incessant tension only when they receive the order from above. One appreciates their lack of desire to interfere in family life, their coldly correct attitude and the perfect honourability that distinguishes them from those around them.

### 17. – Bodies of the Tortured – Japanese *Sang-froid*

Near Urium, 26 October 1919

The tracks and bridges had all been repaired by the Japanese engineers. This morning we got back on our train and continued our journey. About forty km north of Zilovo, a naked corpse was reported to us, lying in the

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“The Japanese armies are guided by chivalrous principles and will never kill a Bolshevik who has not taken up arms, or who has surrendered on the battlefield. I have given very strict instructions in that direction.

The relations between Japanese and Siberians are improving. I beg you to help us. Never forget that our soldiers are doing their duty to their motherland, and then help you. If they sometimes behave towards you differently than you would expect, do not forget that they come from a different civilization. Bolshevism has an influence only in your unfortunate country; it does not even exist in other countries. To excite you against us, it is claimed that we want to annex Siberian territories. These are lies. The solidarity between nations is such that no power could, without the consent of the other governments, make annexations. It is also said that the Japanese are behaving badly. We will not defend ourselves. You will judge for yourselves.

“Suppose, now, that we leave Siberia. The most terrible disorder would ensue, and decent people would be forced to leave the country. The happiness of a people rests on the order that allows the inhabitants a diligent and free work. Siberians, help us with all your strength, to destroy Bolshevism. After the oppression by Tsarism, you must now live under the more terrible yoke of Bolshevism. If God makes you suffer so much, you, the Russians, by remaining inactive, are responsible. Make it possible for us to help you, regardless of the differences of race and nationality that exist among us. Help us so that tranquillity and simple human happiness may return to you I

Colonel Umeda.”



snow very close to the rails. A few hundred metres further on there was another one, and so on: seven poor mutilated bodies. We recognise four of them: they are Cossacks sent on reconnaissance by Colonel Umeda near Bushuley, and have fallen into the hands of the Reds.

The first was an old man, none other than Sediakin's father, a 64 year old Cossack; a quiet man of simple morals, who had never taken part in political conflicts and could only have been killed for being a "bourgeois". The Reds treated him without leniency: after having enlarged his mouth with a knife, they cut off half his neck and then killed him with bayonets, one of which pierced his heart.

The other six must have suffered horribly before they died.

In all of them, the body and legs are covered with innumerable scars from *nagaika* blows, and on some of them were multiple superficial incisions made with a knife in the skin of the arm and the leg. As cartridges were scarce among the Reds, they killed them with knives. On one body, that of a Cossack, I counted 34 bayonet wounds. In of the three faces the eyes were gouged out, the face was chopped up with small wounds, and the lips and tongue were torn out. There were sabre blows to the arms, shoulders, skull and neck. On one old Cossack, there had been an attempt to cut the neck slowly, the flesh of the chest was removed in long slices, and the sabre or the knife repeatedly slipped under the skin of the throat.

All the corpses are naked and had their arms bent upwards and backwards, as if during the long torture people had sat on them to make the bodies immobile. The cold of 20 degrees had frozen in these corpses all the horrible details of the scene, their martyred attitude, the convulsions and jerks of the limbs, the suffering in the features of the faces and like the screams in the twisted mouths that seem to go on screaming or moaning.

The Reds wanted to frighten us by this curious display of corpses along the railway line; they only succeeded in exasperating the troops.

From a distance we hear the sound of irregular firing: our troops are once again in combat with the enemy. A few hours later, reports reached us: a company, advancing through the valley, was caught under fire from a very large Red column, hidden behind the ridges which at this point are close to the railway. The Japanese commander ordered his men to hide in the folds of the ground, and to fire only at visible targets and never at random. The Japanese and Reds dug in for more than two hours, during which time it was impossible for the Japanese to get up and attack the Cossacks above. Soon the Reds received a train with reinforcements, but on our side a detachment put the enemy to flight by an enveloping movement. Three bodies were found on the ridge, among them that of the Reds' leader. On the last of these were letters from Parfionov, with details of the Red bands in the vicinity.

During this skirmish, the expenditure of ammunition on the Japanese side was only seven rounds per man.

## 8. – Scenes of Distress and Panikhides

Zilovo, 27 October 1919

The seven corpses were brought back and identified. I witnessed some very painful scenes when the widows and orphans saw them. There were no tears in those faces, which remained almost motionless, but with piercing cries and howls of wild beasts, great gestures of the arms, a pain that is all exterior and not very communicative. I found myself in front of a different psychology, as far from the Western soul, which allows itself only the most discreet signs of its feelings, as from that of the East, which is all dignity and self-control. In the face of misfortune and suffering, these poor women found only the gestures of submission and adoration that the Church has taught them: they prostrate themselves before the torn corpses, with the same signs of the cross, the same bending of the body as if they were venerating, dismayed, the Word become flesh.

Zilovo, 28 October 1919

When I arrived at the house of the chairman of the regional council of *Zemstvo*, Sediakin, I found a whole crowd, mostly women. After a short wait, two Japanese officers representing Colonel Umeda arrived, and we went to a nearby room, where beer had been placed on a long white wooden table. The cruel wounds of the dead man had been successfully hidden under wreaths of flowers and garlands of green leaves. Even the expression of suffering, which the dead man had retained, had disappeared and the lifeless face, from which the traces of the crime have been removed, almost breathed rest. A "victor's crown", a flat band adorned with images of saints, hid the cut made by a sabre blow to the forehead. The hands were crossed over the chest, where the bayonets had been turned into their deep wounds.



We lined up, standing around the coffin. At the head of the dead man, the priest stood between two large candlesticks where large copper spots showed from under the light silver varnish. The priestly vestments, made of rough brocade and of a simple design, preserve, underneath the poverty and negligence, a little of that primitive and touching beauty of the cult of the humble.

There were almost no men in the audience. They would not dare to be seen in this environment where, under the apparatus of respect, piety and adoration, there was already a creeping sense of betrayal, and where the torture which the flowers had covered but which imagination brought to life, seemed to become contagious. The women, on the other hand, seemed overexcited by this contact with useless and bestial cruelty and brought closer to religious ecstasies. The priest spoke as a man who knows his people and is used to directing their thoughts.

“What was the purpose of this revolution? What hopes has it awakened, and what has it given us, if not this disorder which devours the remnants of our well-being, dissolves our morals and pours an incessant fear into our souls? We kill each other aimlessly, we slaughter little children and old people. Did old Sediakin hope and deserve anything other than to die quietly among his children and grandchildren, who would recite the prayers of the dying and cross his arms over his chest? Russia is suffocating in the blood of her children. Leave the fighting, leave the party struggle, go to church and pray in tears that God will help you and make this useless war cease, etc., etc.”

Lighted candles were placed in our clasped hands, and the *panikhides* began. The deacon, dressed in an old coat that reached up to his neck to hide his rags, accompanied the priest's melodious chanting with a thunderous voice. With the service over, the pain broke free. The widow, an old woman bent by age, seemed sometimes annihilated by grief, sometimes she rushed towards the corpse to kiss it frantically. The son, at first resigned, burst into tears with his head in his hands. The Japanese captain, who has been standing very stiffly during the service and, like me, a bit of a stranger to the scene, turns to me: “I am very sorry for him,”<sup>15</sup> and looked again at the lit candle he is holding in his clenched hand.

The priest withdrew with the deacon, and the scene of the “farewell to the dead” began. The widow, seized by a spasm of pain or by the imperious desire to display it to those around, began to dance as if in a panic, close to her husband's head, singing unintelligible phrases. An old maid, moved by the example, started to scream and made demented gestures, and everything possible was done to calm her down. Then the members of the family and then the others parade before the dead man for the farewell kiss. Sediakin, crying, kissed him on the mouth: “Ah, the Reds who killed you!” A little girl, who is pushed towards the mouth of the corpse, made a small movement with her lips, but without wanting to touch the dead man. The other children, for whom their grandfather had definitely ceased to exist, avoided touching him, but place light kisses on the “victor's crown” and on the helpless amulet that the old father had worn at the time of the torture.

How much more vigorous was the scene at the funeral which I have described above.<sup>16</sup> In this assembly of bourgeois and officers, provoked by an abominable murder, no one uttered a cry of vengeance or anger. Between these two *panikhides*, the same distance separates victorious Bolshevism from the fallen “*intelligentsia*”. How nice it would have been – and how little danger – to swear for punishment of the executioners before the bloody corpse of the victim! But the son, a former officer, and the other spectators wept fruitless tears, accepted the misfortune and resigned themselves to the injustice. How hypocritical and inhuman their response to the priest's Christian prayer seemed to be, in men so young and with so much to lose! The two Japanese questioned me with a scrutinising look: it is theirs who will take the revenge!

The procession headed for the cemetery, and then the quasi-public meal of the *panikhide* began in the afternoon. At nightfall, the inhabitants of the village gathered around the house: there was *samagonka*, and thirst won over the fear of being associated with this funeral ceremony, on which the bloody hand of the Red Guards still weighs, a hundred kilometres away.

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<sup>15</sup> The quoted piece is in English in the original.

<sup>16</sup> See this chapter, No. 12.



## 19. – Epilogue – The Extraordinary Court of the Ataman in Secret Session

Chita, 3 November 1919

As soon as I got back to Chita, I went to see Ataman Semenov, with whom I maintained friendly relations. I spoke to him more or less as follows:

“People are sometimes surprised at the obstinacy of the rebellions in the districts which your soldiers occupy. Let me ask you whether you feel that your troops are fighting the Red bands properly? Are your armoured trains engaging in combat with the rebels?”

“I know that the *Grozny* recently had to turn back from a Bolshevik armoured train which was greatly outnumbered.”

“The truth is that the Bolsheviks have never had armoured trains, that most of them have only Berdan rifles, that they have come to the point of having to manufacture their cartridges in the station workshops. Nevertheless, their bands more often than not succeed in putting your Cossacks and your armoured trains to flight. Did you know that a company under Captain Chesinski, attacked by an outnumbered band of rebels, left a machine gun in their hands?”

“No, I did not know that.”

And Semenov wrote down the details and the names.

“The population hates you, quite unjustly so. Do you know that your troops only follow the Japanese – who are the only ones who risk themselves – to kill and pillage? Have you noticed that, apart from the profiteers,<sup>17</sup> almost the entire population, equally opposed to the Red regime and the armoured train regime, would prefer Japanese rule?<sup>18</sup> If you often lack the support of the people, who is to blame but your armoured *divizion*?”

“No, it is the defeat of Kolchak and the approach of the Soviet armies that give rise to insurrections everywhere.”

“Excuse me, why has the majority of the bourgeoisie become insensitive and indifferent to the political struggle? Why have the Cossacks of the Nerchinsk region, of who you are the elected chief, long since taken up arms against you? It is well known to you, who are a Cossack, that it is a quite different crime to rape a worker's daughter or a Cossack's daughter!”

“I have been told about this nonsense for a long time. I have repeatedly appointed a commission of enquiry into these reported horrors, and nothing has ever been found. A fortnight ago, an American vice-consul came to me with complaints about this. I asked him for his evidence. He could only provide hearsay. I then asked him to leave this city.”

I then showed the ataman the Dovgal woman's deposition<sup>19</sup> and other reports. He looked through them carefully. I continued:

“This deposition is obviously not a proof. But I ask you to call this Dovgal woman here, whose safety you would guarantee, and to confront her with the crew of the armoured train. Then I can tell you of other witnesses who would be useful to hear.”<sup>20</sup>

“No, I'll do better. Here is a paper submitted for my signature which is a decree of indictment of two officers whom you are charging, Colonel Popov and Sub-Captain Skriabin. You will receive an invitation to attend the

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<sup>17</sup> The international band of profiteers who rushed into Eastern Siberia spoke out daily against the military occupation of the Allies – through the ignoble press of Vladivostok, Harbin, etc., – and particularly the Japanese and Czechs. Unfortunately this campaign was encouraged by certain missions.

<sup>18</sup> The fact that I am pointing out seems to contradict the penetrating action of the Siberian press, which – as elsewhere – represents not the desire or interest of the country, but the views of a small group of financiers. I want to quote only the – unwise and exaggerated – words of an archpriest of Nerchinsk, Father N... The whole country is tired of the Reds and the *Semenovtsi*. God grant that soon the Japanese emperor will be the master here!

<sup>19</sup> See this chapter, No. 15.

<sup>20</sup> It would have been impossible for the ataman to accept my proposal, which would have deprived him of the initiative for reform; which would have given substance to the vague accusations of the foreign missions, and which would have obliged him – by the proximity of the foreign representatives – to punish a hundred of his officers.



proceedings. I ask you to go there and bring your reports and depositions which you will be willing to submit to the court.”

“Don't you think it would be useful to change the entire personnel of the armoured trains, officers and soldiers? The men who have acquired such habits will not be able to change them.”

“I will act against the officers in particular. I will have them shot. I had tried various means of punishment: simple loss of rank, sending them to a workers' battalion, but all that was useless. Some of them must be killed. These scandals have lasted too long. You will see that I want this to end!”

Chita, 22 November 1919

Today, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I went to the staff office of the “Manchurian Division”, where the extraordinary tribunal was to meet. The eldest of the four officers of which it is composed is 26 years old and has the rank of colonel. The function of public prosecutor is fulfilled by Captain Grant, of sad reputation.<sup>21</sup> Immediately after our arrival, the defendants, Colonel Popov and Captain Skriabin, were brought in under military escort. For a moment I thought it was a comedy, but I began to doubt as I listened to the indictment *prikaz*. There was no mention of atrocities. The only thing the two officers were accused of was armed resistance to an arrest order. This is what had happened:

Semenov had been persuaded that a change of command for the armoured trains was necessary. The young Colonel Stepanov, responsible for the disorder in that *division*, was sent on a mission to Japan. General Bogomolich, an officer of the old regime, who succeeded him, was determined to take strong measures. A week ago the two accused, while drunk, had introduced Popov's fiancée into the carriage where the officers' wives lived. She was violated by the two individuals and screamed loudly, to which complaints were added by the others. Popov and Skriabin threatened to force their way into their homes. It was a great scandal. General Bogomolich sent an officer with orders to arrest them, but these gentlemen, whom Stepanov had accustomed to unlimited freedom, drawing their pistols jumped into the Mstitel armoured train and ordered the engineer to leave Chita for an unknown purpose. General Bogomolich had the train stopped and the recalcitrant men driven away.

After the indictment was read, Popov, long, thin, arrogant, replied with hauteur; Skriabin, shorter, with piercing eyes in a dumb face, simply denied everything. When Grant read the Dovgal woman's statement, Skriabin snapped out of his stupor and gave me a persistent, angry look. He added in a confident voice: “Lies!” As for the executions, which another deposition I had just given accused him of, he acknowledged them:

“As to the executions, everything is correct. I had a number of inhabitants shot at Zilovo (nonchalantly), I don't remember, three or four women and about twenty men.”

The judges did not answer; this seemed natural to them. The accused had no lawyers, they had been allowed to speak only for form's sake; the session was therefore adjourned, and the judges went to deliberate. They returned after five minutes: the act of condemnation, typewritten, had been prepared a long time ago, and all they had to do was sign it.

The defendants were brought back and the sentence was read to them: execution that evening. Popov, very upright and inflexible, asked: “May I make an observation?”

The president of the court: “No.”

The two officers turned back and were taken to the town commander. Grant asked me to wait for him and went out to present the judgment to the ataman. Half an hour later he showed it to me, with his signature. He again offered me the opportunity to attend the execution. I refused, as bullets sometimes obey strange laws in the night.

Grant assured me that the two condemned men would be dishonourably discharged at 8 o'clock in front of the front of a company, and with their hands tied behind their backs taken to the counter-espionage service, which would henceforth take charge of them. At 10 a.m., after having had the opportunity to confess, they would be transported in a motor truck to the execution field, situated about ten km from the town.

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<sup>21</sup> This Captain Grant is the same one who, in co-operation with Colonel Sipailov and Captain Godlevski, drowned the 31 Irkutsk hostages in Lake Baikal on 5 January 1920.





Their friends and relatives would not be allowed to bury their corpses in consecrated ground. The melting snow would uncover their bleached bones among the tens of thousands of skeletons that lie on this deserted field, whose location the inhabitants of Chita can guess from the vast clouds of crows they see swirling over the hills.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The revolting carelessness with which the rights of the accused were trampled underfoot during this mock trial, indicates the habits of a court accustomed to judging political enemies. This moral disorder characterises revolutions, and one cannot help smiling when one hears them invoked as necessary for the restoration of justice. This disdain of revolutions for law and justice was never more clearly defined than by the decree of 22 Prairial, voted by the almost unanimous applause of the 760 members of the Convention:

“Every citizen has the right to seize and bring before the magistrates, conspirators and counter-revolutionaries: he is obliged to denounce them as soon as he knows them.”

“The formality of prior interrogation is abolished as superfluous.”

“If there is evidence, either material or moral, no witnesses will be heard, unless this formality appears necessary to discover accomplices.”

“The only rule of judgements: the conscience of the jurors enlightened by the love of the fatherland.”

“No defenders: the law grants none to conspirators.”

“Only one punishment: death.”

The Soviet Cheka seems to be only an application – perhaps softened – of this law.

