

Sergei Mamontov
Campaigns and Horses

Everything is forgotten very quickly.

I was lucky – I still have my diary, and I survived. Therefore, I consider it my duty to depict everything I saw.

Perhaps it will be useful to future historians.

Translation Notes

This is taken from both the Russian original and French translation of the book. They mostly differ only slightly in the choice of wording and minor details, but sometimes a sentence, or even paragraph, will appear in one but not the other, so I assume the translation is from original notes. The translators were his nephew and niece.

Not being a horse person, my translation of the various parts of a horse and its tack cannot be relied upon.

I have tried to get the ranks right, but I didn't take the same effort with the various cadet and under-officer ranks at the school. The Cossacks and Russian cavalry had different names for many of their ranks, but I have not bothered to differentiate them, so *Kapitan* (infantry), *Rotmistr* (cavalry) and *Esau* (Cossacks) are all translated as "Captain".

I have left the place names in the original Russian forms Mamontov used.

Mamontov, as common for the White Army didn't change over to the Gregorian calendar in early 1918. His "old style" dates are therefore 13 days earlier than the Bolshevik and Western Europe dates for the same events.

Other Notes

I have mostly not commented on errors of fact in the text. Suffice it to say that all statements of fact that relate to areas outside his direct knowledge should be verified independently.



Chapter 1 – Military School

First Riding Lesson

Half of our squad was lined up in the “little arena” (it was huge) for the first riding lesson. There were sixteen of us. We were worried because we thought horse riding was the most important subject.

Our instructing officer, Captain of the General Staff Zhagmen, walked in front of us. At the back of the arena, soldiers were holding horses by their bridles. Initial training took place on huge, rough draught horses, and that turned out to be a very good thing. After training on those mastodons, the battle horses were toys for us.

“Those who know how to ride – take three steps forward,” said Zhagmen.

Some officer cadets, from the volunteers who had already been in the batteries, stepped forward. The rest were students. I was sure that I could ride and, overcoming my shyness, I stepped forward. It seemed to me that they would set us up as an example to others and would be given spurs that we hadn't yet earned the right to wear.

But Zhagmen looked at us with boredom, turned to the NCO and said, “Give the worst horses to them and put them at the end of the column. They will be the hardest to retrain.”

All my enthusiasm drained away, and moving at a trot, without stirrups on a rude mastodon, I realised that I couldn't ride.

For many months of the training, we were subjected to that hateful trotting without stirrups. You need to learn to hold on with just your knees, remaining in the saddle, making your body flexible. At first we flapped about wildly, bodies aching – tormenting both ourselves and the horse. After the rides, we were bow-legged, and the older cadets mocked our gait.

But gradually we got used to it and could even ride a light trot without stirrups. We began to feel at home in the saddle and dreamed of cantering and jumps. But Zhagmen stubbornly continued with the march trot without stirrups. Only later did I appreciate his excellent system.

When he first commanded: “To the gal–lop!” (the order was stretched out so that the horse had time to change gait), there was an unimaginable mess. Only a few riders continued along the arena's wall. Most of the cadets lost control of their horses and galloped about in all directions. Zhagmen, in the middle of the arena, defended his life, distributing blows to the horses and the cadets with a long whip.

Me, I was galloping along the wall when Cadet Wenzel, on a huge horse, crashed perpendicularly into my horse and threw us against the wall. While I hit the wall, I remained in the saddle and was surprised that the collision didn't cause me or my horse any harm. In fact, I don't remember any accidents in our department during the entire training period.

Of course we soon learned not to go crazy at the canter, and then to calmly jump obstacles without stirrups.

There was one exception. Cadet Smirnov turned pale every time he heard the command: “Change of direction to the obstacle! For–ward!” Arriving there, he invariably let go of the reins and grabbed the saddle pommel with both hands. The horse would jump, and Smirnov, spreading his arms and legs like an airplane, flew over the horse and landed face down in the sand of the arena. Neither persuasion nor punishment could wean him from grabbing the pommel. Although we felt sorry for him, we looked forward to the sight, because it was so funny. For him, getting on a horse was a torment.

We loved vaulting into the saddle most of all. The horse was led on a line. It was equipped with a girth strap with two handles. The cadets took turns running up to the horse from inside the circle, grabbing the handles, leaping off the ground and getting into the saddle. Then they jumped down on the outside of the circle, leapt back and sat down again, which was more difficult. This was done several times. And then they gave their place to the next cadet. At first, no-one could do it. But you needed to understand the rhythm of the thing, which was regulated by the stride of the horse.



The science of anatomy and diseases of the horse was also popular. They led in a black horse, and the lecturer drew its insides on it with chalk.

He began all his lectures (on purpose, of course) with the phrase, "A horse is divided into three unequal halves: head, torso and legs."

We learned a thing or two there.

The theory was very well delivered. The professor of artillery, Colonel Gelbikh, was especially brilliant. We listened with interest to the theory of probability.

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The school had two batteries and two classes of instruction. The senior, the 9th accelerated course, consisted of cadets and was highly disciplined. Ours, the junior 10th, was a little afraid, because we were students. But we were also disciplined, and during the revolution the under-officers were able to preserve order, guiding the more undisciplined soldiers and maintain our camp area in Duderhof. Not all schools showed such cohesion.

We had almost no bullying, although we treated the senior cadets with respect. When we became seniors, I once reprimanded a young cadet who didn't give up his place on a tram to a wounded officer. I was a junior officer with two stripes.

Each battery had 10 sections of 32 men, making four platoons per battery. Two senior platoons and two junior platoons. There were 640 cadets in all, 150 soldiers and 35 officers.

I ended up in the second battery, in the 8th section, number 258.

Both batteries were housed in a huge and beautiful white room overlooking Zabalkanski Avenue, with a garden overlooked the Fontanka. The first battery walked at a measured pace, while we, the second, took smaller steps.

Later, so that the "comrades" didn't take possession of the building, we cadets slept in the white room.

We were fed well and taught well. I still remember the school with fondness.

The Revolution

I entered the School on 21 February 1917. On 28 February I sat on the windowsill in the white room and crammed, with utter despair, the prerogatives of the entire Romanov family. This was to be my first exam, and I was afraid of getting a bad grade. I didn't even know my own name day for certain, and the Romanov family was very numerous, and the matter seemed hopeless to me. Remembering all the dates was simply unthinkable. And getting a good mark on the first exam was important – after all, the rest of the professors would base themselves on it.

It was 5 pm. Suddenly, a strange truck drove along the street ... and another one full of various soldiers. Very strange. The public on the sidewalks also watched them. A cadet came up and said in a whisper that there were riots in the city. After a while, another said that instead of dispersing them the Cossacks fraternised with the demonstrators. Then people with red bows appeared on the street. Shots were heard in some places in the city.

My first feeling was concern. Was it really a revolution? People had talked about it for a long time, but nevertheless it happened unexpectedly. I could no longer revise. A thought flashed through my mind: if there is a revolution, then the exam wouldn't take place. Because of that, I began to hope for a revolution. How petty and selfish are human impulses!

My neighbour in bed, Cadet Radzievich, a Georgian, revealed himself to be a Bolshevik, but he couldn't explain the essence of Bolshevism to me. He was a bit limited. I don't know how it happened, but he was sent to represent the school in the Duma. But he didn't relay the cadets' thoughts at all, and was kicked out of the school.

On the second or third day of the revolution, an armed and agitated crowd demanded the cadets be dismissed. I remember the head of the School, General Butyrkin, was shaking while I left with a happy



smile, because I had received unexpected leave. But my smile and my delight soon disappeared. A revolution seems a good idea only in books, and much later on, but not on the street when it happens. There were robberies here and there, shops were looted, and there were beatings for unknown reasons. The streets were full of the scum of the earth and soldiers who had lost all their humanity. Everyone was looking for something they could use, steal, or even just despoil. The common people, the peasants, didn't participate in the revolution. There were demagogic speeches at every corner. Just verbal diarrhoea, with the most shameless lies and base flattery. Dirt, stench, stupidity, anger and boundless rudeness. All the worst feelings spilled out as soon as the policeman disappeared from the corner and there was impunity. Later it was said that the revolution was half made by socialists, out of stupidity, and half by agents of the Central Powers, with whom we were at war. The Russian revolution cost the Germans dearly, but the Allies also gave money towards it.

We were standing on the corner of a street when some windows shattered above us. The crowd scattered, while we cadets continued to stand there, not understanding anything that was going on. It was a machine gun burst. Some thought we were brave, but we were just idiots.

Later I went to my uncle Fyodor Nikolaievich Mamontov's apartment and spent three days there. Of course we were often on the streets to see everything that was happening. I saw a lot: murders, robberies, arson and most of all sheer vulgarity. I never saw anything beautiful and heroic. I think all the wonderful episodes described in the books are invented.

I returned to the School much less revolutionary than I had left it three days before. What a wonderful thing order is! You only begin to appreciate it when it is no longer there. Nevertheless, those three days were of considerable benefit to me – no propaganda will take me in any more. I saw the revolution with my own eyes, in all its "splendour".

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My fate was to be such that I never swore allegiance to anyone. Not the Tsar, not the Provisional Government, and not the Bolsheviks. Others were to swear allegiance to all three. I have never belonged to a political party or voted. There is no more disgusting thing than politics.

And this is why I didn't make any oath. On the day assigned for it, I was assigned to guard the school's cash, in a place some distance from the building. I had three cadets as sentries. The school commander's adjutant came, gave the password and ordered me to take the guards with me.

"I have work to do here," he said.

We were in the next room. I noticed that a lot of time had passed, but the adjutant still didn't call me back. I went to take a look and gasped. The office door was open, there was no one in the room, and the cash drawer was open.

I took two sentries and placed them in the open doors, forbidding anyone to enter the room. I ran to the officer on duty, my direct superior, reported what had happened and then ran back to my guards. I was worried that money or documents were missing from the drawer. Soon the adjutant reappeared and locked the money box. There was no issue to worry about, thank God. As for the oath of allegiance, the four of us were simply forgotten. We didn't protest.

General Mamontov

The first exam was on defensive works. It was important to get a good score.

"Mamontov ... Mamontov ... Are you a relative of General Mamontov, the artillery inspector?" I was asked by the captain examining us.

I knew that I was not a relative, but a general as a relative, and even more an artillery inspector, might be useful to have at School. Inspector General was, in fact, the highest grade in the Artillery.

"Yes Captain, sir", I answered without hesitation.

"How are you related?"

"Great uncle, sir."



“Where is his eldest son?”

Where could he be, the general’s son?

“At the front, Captain, sir.”

“And the second son?”

Beads of sweat appeared on my forehead. What if he asked what their names were. What would I answer?

“Also at the front, sir.”

The sweat continued to grow my forehead. I was standing at attention and couldn’t wipe it off.

“And the third son?”

Lord, how many were there? Sweat began to drip from my nose.

“I don’t know, Captain, sir.”

Seeing the dripping sweat, the captain stopped questioning and moved on to the exam.

I got a 12, the highest grade.

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At Easter I got a few days’ leave to go to Moscow. On Arbat Square I heard military music. They were burying someone on a gun carriage. I was interested in how a coffin is attached to the carriage. After all, once I became an artilleryman, they would also bury me that way. I joined those following the coffin and gradually began to move forward. But it was difficult to see, because the coffin was covered with wreaths. I moved to the first row, next to the widow. I deliberately dropped my glove and, lifting it, tried to look from down there at how the coffin was attached? At that time, the wind unfolded the ribbon on the wreath, and I read: “General Mamontov”. I couldn’t believe my eyes. The thought flickered, did I get to my own funeral in some occult way? I looked closely at the widow and those around me – I didn’t recognise anyone. I moved back and questioned someone in the back rows.

“Please, tell me who is being buried?”

“General Mamontov, the artillery inspector, from Grodno.”

Then I remembered the exam on the defensive works, went ahead and stood on the sidewalk to salute the general who had given me involuntary protection.

Failed Coup

The utter mediocrity of the ministers of the Provisional Government soon became clear. They gave speeches but did nothing. They were far worse than the previous ministers, whom they criticised so strongly. Russia the Great entrusted its fate to Kerenski, a small talkative lawyer. The devastation increased. Against this backdrop of nonentities, General Kornilov suddenly appeared, escaping from captivity. All hopes turned to him. He was appointed head of the Petrograd military district.

On 13 March 1917, I was on guard duty, with a sabre at my side and in a dress cap, walking along the endless corridors of the School. An officer was walking towards me. It wasn’t an officer of the School. He was in khaki greatcoat and a grey hat. My heart trembled – I recognised General Kornilov from the photographs of him. I stood to attention.

“You are in formal dress, cadet?”

“That’s right, Your Excellency!” (Not “General, sir”.)

“Tell the cadets to leave the cannon room, I need it.”

The two rooms with model guns served as smoking rooms and were always full of cadets. A thought flashed up: he must have graduated from our School, since he knew about the gun chamber. I dashed in.

“All out. General Kornilov is here and wants the room for himself.”

Everyone burst out laughing, thinking it was a joke.



“Don’t play the fool. He’s in the hallway, see for yourselves.”

Some looked and left, while others continued to laugh. But Kornilov entered, and they jumped to attention.

“Stay in front of the door and drive away the curious. I’m waiting for the officers.”

The head of the School, General Butyrkin, rushed in, buttoning up his uniform. I was about to report to him, but he waved it off and repeated Kornilov’s order. The officers began to arrive one by one. Generals and colonels. There were 25 to 30 of them. It was clear that some important meeting was taking place in our room. There weren’t even enough chairs there, people sat on carriages and window sills. The meeting lasted about twenty minutes, then they went out by ones and twos. Kornilov also left, not paying attention to me. I looked into the room, it was empty.

The next day, 14 March 1917, in the morning, the senior course harnessed both of our batteries, while we, the 10th year, marched in formation as we went down the streets. At that time it was fashionable to parade around the city, and it didn’t surprise anyone.

But as we passed the Vladimir Infantry School, we saw that their cadets, with rifles on their shoulders, had left the School and were following us. And when we approached the Pavlov Infantry School, we saw the entire body already lined up on the street. They were waiting for our arrival and immediately joined in. We pricked up our ears at this – there must be a reason for this. A very impressive column of the three schools was formed: Pavlov, ours and Vladimir. We went to the vast square in front of the Winter Palace. Several cadet schools were already lined up there. We settled in. New columns of trainee officers approached and lined up. Eventually all the military schools of Petrograd and the surrounding area were gathered here. From friends in the various Schools, and we soon learned that everyone was armed and had ammunition. According to our calculations, there were 14,000 of us, the best troops in Russia at that time: disciplined, young, brave and ready to follow orders. Kornilov had managed to gather such a force in the centre of the city, and collect it in secret. There was no doubt: there would be a coup. We were delighted. There was no force in Petrograd capable of resisting us. The regiments had lost their discipline, all sense of order and their officers, and many of whom were likely to join us.

We were in a belligerent mood.

But precious time passed, and Kornilov still didn’t appear.

The advantage of surprise was lost. The Reds managed to take action, and we languished from inaction. Our ardour dropped.

As we learned later, Kerenski tried to persuade Kornilov in the Winter Palace to not move against the government and ... succeeded. The only one who showed indecision was Kornilov himself. Unforgivably he missed a favourable moment.

Finally Kornilov appeared on the balcony of the Winter Palace. We moved off. He led us through as if on inspection and instead of ordering us to act, he spoke ...

We didn’t listen to the speech, everyone was already fed up with speeches.

We were led off in separate columns around the city. (Scattered so that we could be more easily dealt with if we tried anything.)

We marched badly, we were hungry, the snow wet our feet, and most importantly, there was an annoying feeling of a missed coup. There was no more militancy. Late in the evening we returned to the School hungry, wet and angry.

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Kornilov, of course, was moved a long way from Petrograd. The cadet schools were placed under Red supervision so that they could no longer come together. When Kornilov did move against Petrograd in September with General Krymov’s corps of, it was too late. The Cossacks held demonstrations, but the schools wouldn’t come to the rescue, and the composition of the cadets was different. General Krymov shot himself. Kornilov was arrested in Bykhov. He fled south, organised and led the White Movement on



the Don. He was a good general and organiser. Kornilov was killed near Ekaterinodar. To those that knew him, it isn't clear how he could have shown such weakness on 14 March 1917.

In the Big Arena

The senior class, the 9th, went to the camps in Duderhof to prevent the "comrades" from occupying them. We, the 10th, were transferred from the small to the large riding arena. Here we got well-trained combat horses, saddles with stirrups, and bridles with a curb bit (in the small one there were only snaffle bits).

I must say that I was so used to riding in the small arena without stirrups that I didn't need them and they prevented me from sitting firmly in the saddle. How many times Zhagmen shouted at me, "Cadet, take the stirrups!" Only then would I notice that the stirrups were dangling somewhere.

Obviously, I rode decently by then because Zhagmen put Cadet Nareiko at the head of the column, and me at the rear. Nareiko was a natural cavalryman. He went in front, and the whole column followed him. After turning about, I was at the head of the column for a few minutes.

The arena was huge, with a very strong echo, and as I was at the end of the column I couldn't make out the words of command. I let my horse perform the movements for me. The horses knew the commands very well and had fine hearing and, if they weren't interfered with, performed much better than the cadets.

If I learned a lot in the small arena on the roughest horses, without stirrups, then I made very little progress in the big arena on well-trained combat horses who could do everything for themselves, and better than I could. It took skill to get the rough draft horses to change gait to a gallop, or to get it to take a jump without spurs and stirrups. But the combat horses did everything by themselves and sometimes corrected the cadet's mistakes. What was so difficult about riding them?

How surprised and delighted I was when I found myself one of the three cadets summoned to the front to receive my spurs. Others didn't yet have the right to wear them. I was very proud, the cadets envied me.

Of course, I had a secret. I never chose a horse, just taking the one in front of me. And I even tried to change horses. If a cadet complained about his horse, I suggested that we exchange.

Thanks to that, I had to ride all kinds of horses. There were calm ones, but others were angry and naughty – rearing up, backing up, even lying down. Some refused to jump, would bite or had kidney problems. I learned to keep a close eye on the horse and recognise its character, strengths and weaknesses, and handle it accordingly. I accumulated more experience than the cadets who always tried to get the horses they thought were best.

I mentioned horses with kidney problems. There are a lot of them. The first time in the large arena, we received horses we didn't know. Nareiko, a fine rider, was at the head of the column on Pearl. After the command: "One by one to the right!", Nareiko touched Pearl with his spur. Pearl bent his head, gave two shakes and bucked. Not expecting this, Nareiko flew head over heels over Pearl's head and somersaulted onto the sand. The riders roared with laughter. It turned out that Pearl had kidney problems and he couldn't stand the feel of spurs. The same thing happened with every new rider on Pearl. Nareiko immediately jumped up and remounted Pearl. He always rode him and told me that he never used spurs or even leant in the saddle. In other respects Pearl was a magnificent horse.

The Exam

The constant change of horses gave me experience, but sometimes it gave me unpleasant surprises. The riding exam was approaching. The cadets were worried: what kind of horse would they get? They bribed the soldier-grooms, changed places in the ranks and marvelled at my indifference.

On the day of the exam, the head of the School, General Butyrkin, the commander of the battery, Colonel Klyucharev, and other officers were present in the large arena. We stood in formation, as the soldiers held the horses opposite us.

"To the horses!"

We went to the horses, and each taking the one in front of him. The soldier holding mine whispered:

"Watch out, she ... "



He didn't have time to finish. The command was shouted:

"Attention!"

We froze, the soldiers disappeared.

"Mount!"

I was intrigued by the soldier's unfinished warning. I stroked the kidneys with a habitual gesture – no reaction. I touched the mare with a spur – nothing again.

"To the right, single file, two horse lengths between riders ..."

We moved off. I was on the alert and expected something nasty from my mare. But having subjected her to all kinds of manipulations, I became convinced that she was a very good, calm horse. Everything was going as well as possible, and I calmed down. Maybe the soldier wanted to play a trick on me, to scare me? At the end of the exam, we had to take an obstacle. On command, my mare, without my participation, but by itself, went at a gallop with her left foot, as it was supposed to. I was the last in the column and decided to show off. I restrained the mare, increasing the distance between me and the penultimate rider, and then started her in a good field gallop, hoping that I would be at the required distance when I got to the obstacle. As expected, I took the position of "attention", turning my head towards the commander of the School, but squinting with one eye at the obstacle.

Then what the soldier wanted to warn me about happened.

My mare refused the obstacle. That is, instead of jumping, she remained all four feet on the ground, lowered her head and tried to veer to the right. I felt with horror that I was coming out of the saddle. Desperately, I drove my spurs in. The spurs and the speed we were moving at forced the horse to jump. But we did so separately from each other. I flew above the mare, still at attention. On the other side of the obstacle, I landed on the bowed neck of the horse. Throwing me back with a heave of her head, I went back into the saddle. During the entire time of the incident, I didn't move, remaining at attention.

The cadets were ahead of me and didn't see my shame, but the officers ... !

I was desperate, believing that I had failed the exam.

Imagine my amazement when they read the scores, and I heard that I received 12 – the highest score – and was promoted to a two-stripe under-officer.

I went to Zhagmen, whom we truly loved, and asked if it was a mistake? He had seen what had happened to me.

"No, it wasn't a mistake. You were given 12 for giving your horse the spurs and making it jump. For the fact that you didn't let go of the reins, and that you remained in the saddle ... A horse can throw any rider. And Danae, your mare, is known in the School for throwing people. Cadets rarely manage to make her jump, even during the exam.

Although by age I was the youngest in my section, I was placed in command of it. Senior harness-cadet Nazarov commanded our platoon (three sections). Many were jealous of me. It seems that only Nazarov, also a Muscovite, didn't envy me.

Duderhof

It was nice in the camps in Duderhof. Our barracks were very well equipped. The cadets slept on bunks with mattresses on planks, but in view of my seniority I had a proper bed. There were lawns and flower beds everywhere. The land descended to a small lake, with sailing boats. In front of the camp was our artillery park and further on was a huge training field.

The neighbouring camps of other schools were occupied by soldiers (without permission). Our senior course had managed to defend our camp, for which it was held in esteem. I don't remember any issues with the soldiers. They were impressed by our discipline.



We had a lot of things to do, and the cadets were constantly hungry. When I was appointed to be on duty in the kitchen, I thought that I'd fill up. But to my disappointment, I couldn't eat the second cutlet. The food was well calculated, and my body was so accustomed to it that it couldn't take in any more.

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During a firing exercise, I and two other cadets were sent on horseback to block the traffic on the road. Our patrol met some young ladies, and began to flirt. One of the cadets bent down from the saddle. But at that exact time a cannon fired nearby. The horse was startled, the young lady screamed, and the cadet ended up curled up at the young lady's feet. The horse ran back to the stable. The poor cadet, besides being embarrassed, had to walk 12 km on foot and try to avoid his superiors. Curiously, none of us thought to catch his horse or put him on the back and take him to the camp. Experience comes over the years.

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Once, during another firing exercise, the breach of a cannon opened for some unknown reason, and let a jet of burning gas escape. The under-officer serving the piece as firer was hit, luckily not on the face, but on the chest, and his shirt was totally burnt. He was immediately sent to the medical post.

Ride during a Parade

In the camps, the day had come for a review. We harnessed both our batteries and the howitzer platoon. The cadets were the limber riders and the gun crews. Nazarov was responsible for our gun, and I was for the caisson. We were both on horseback. Lots of officers gathered for the review, including the new head of the Petrograd military district, generals and colonels as well as our officers.

We were put through various exercises at different gaits. One of the most difficult was wheeling a deployed line of batteries. In order to maintain alignment while turning, so as to not break the line, the first gun barely moves, the second a little faster, and each next one a little faster until the last one is fair flying.

All the exercises went well, and the review would have come off splendidly had it not been for an unfortunate incident.

It happened to me, and this is how: as we moved at a fast trot past the authorities we crossed some ditches without slowing down. The howitzer which I was following with my caisson, hit hard against the edge of the trench, and the leather case covering the gun barrel gun fell to the ground.

The authorities, a hundred paces to the right, could see the loss of the case.

I immediately began to think what to do: pick up the case, or pretend that I didn't see, and pick it up after the manoeuvres? Nazarov was in front and hadn't seen the case fall. I was the only one who could pick it up, because I was on horseback. After a brief hesitation, I yelled to the carriage: "Follow the gun!" Which, of course, they would have done without my command.

I turned my horse around, jumped down and picked up the case.

I wanted to remount but my horse, seeing the battery leaving at a trot, pricked up its ears, whinnied and began spinning like a devil, preventing me from getting into the saddle. All the generals looked at me. Then I decided to look good and mount by leaping into the saddle. This is a spectacular yet easy way to mount by jumping. It is done like this: your left hand holds the horse's reins and mane, you stand with your back to its head, push off with your left foot, throw your right leg and arm, hang on with your left and you find yourself in the saddle. I had done it skilfully in the arena. But this time I failed to swing properly, because my damned horse was spinning. I found myself belly on the saddle, legs on one side, body on the other. I could no longer hold the horse, and the beast rushed at a gallop after the departing battery, jumping over the trenches. Meanwhile I was desperately struggling to remain balanced on the saddle, feeling with horror that I was about to fall off. In such an unpresentable form, I raced past the authorities, until I finally managed to throw my leg across and sit in the saddle properly. I took my place with the caisson.

After the manoeuvres, I went back to Zhagmen.

"Captain, did I do the right thing, picking up the case?"

Zhagmen didn't immediately answer.



“Opinions were divided ... But judging by what is in the manual, you are responsible for the material of the battery, and so you should have picked it up.”

He fell silent again.

“Of course, it would have been better if you had mounted correctly ... But it’s good that you didn’t fall ... “

“Ha-ha,” he suddenly laughed. “That bit was funny. They were even betting on whether you would fall off or not! I went for holding on and won.”

“Thank you for your trust, Captain, but you were very close to losing.”

“I know, I saw it.”

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There was one shortcoming in the school. We weren’t taught the practical care of horses: to feed them, water them, clean them and to walk them. The soldiers did that. We were taught to mount and ride. We only learned about their care from books, and that isn’t enough.



Chapter 2 – War

To Moscow

On 15 August 1917, I was promoted to ensign¹ – the lowest officer rank during the war. It was a pity to leave the Konstantinov Artillery School, which I had got used to and of which I have the fondest memories.

But I really liked the new uniform, shoulder boards, sabre, revolver and spurs and I was eager to show off all of them in Moscow.

I graduated from the School well, being placed 25th. I could even have chosen the horse artillery. But, as I promised my mother, I picked the Reserve Artillery Brigade in Moscow. My principle was: ‘Don’t refuse to serve, don’t ask to serve.’

That same evening I went by train to Moscow, spending part of the night admiring my uniform reflected in the dark window of the carriage. I was 19 years old.

Service in Moscow

After a short vacation, I appeared at the Reserve Artillery Brigade in Moscow on 5 September, at Khodynka Field. I was assigned to the 1st Platoon of the 2nd Battery. The platoon commander turned out to be a former senior of our 9th year at the School.

I was unpleasantly struck by the disorder in the brigade. There were thousands of soldiers. They looked loose. Obviously, they were no longer being sent to the front and weren’t taught anything. There were 56 officers in one of our batteries. The regulation was 5 officers and 120 soldiers. I found it all incomprehensible and hostile.

The platoon commander, instead of explaining the situation to me, said, “Glad to have you in my platoon. Here is the class schedule. Write it down carefully. We’ll start classes tomorrow at 7 o’clock. Go home today.”

I went to the officers’ mess, where I met many acquaintances.

~ ~ ~

The next day I left very early in order to get to the barracks in time. I arrived a few minutes before seven o’clock. But everyone was still asleep in the barracks. Sometimes a sleepy soldier went outside with a pressing need. It was already past seven.

Maybe I was in the wrong place?

I went to the soldiers’ barracks, but there was no movement there either. I returned to the office. A soldier was sweeping a staircase.

“Where are all the officers?” I asked him.

“They don’t come this early.”

Weird. What should I do? Wait? But the platoon commander said it was good to write out the class schedule, and at the School I was taught to show initiative. I thought I should call the roll since I was there. Other officers would come along. In the end, I was an officer and I must decide for myself, and not wait for someone to decide for me.

I went to the soldiers’ barracks. I was dressed formally, with a sabre and a revolver, in an overcoat with shoulder-boards on.

“Get me the platoon NCO,” I said to one soldier.

The platoon NCO appeared in no hurry, dressed messily.

“Are these the barracks of the 1st Platoon of the 2nd Battery?”

¹ That is, *praporshchik*. Often translated as ‘warrant officer’ or ‘sergeant-major’, it was a commissioned rank, which is why I have preferred ‘ensign’. The equivalent rank no longer exists in most armies.



“Yes.”

“Are you in charge of the platoon?”

“Yes.”

“Button up your shirt, tighten your belt!”

He obeyed.

“Salute as required.”

He did so.

“Have you called the roll?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“The soldiers are still sleeping.”

Just having left school, it drove me wild for me to hear that.

“What? Get them up immediately!”

He walked through the barracks, shouting, “Roll call, everyone out.”

Nobody budged. The soldiers were lying on bunks, looking at me with curiosity, but didn’t move. The platoon commander returned.

“They don’t want to.”

I turned pale.

“Get all the NCOs here! Get the soldiers up!”

I stood in the wide-open doors of the barracks. The room was long and there was a second door at the other end. The non-commissioned officers ran about shouting, but it seemed to me that when they weren’t facing me that they were making grimaces, because the soldiers were laughing looking at them.

What am I going to do? I asked myself.

One soldier, lying on the top bunk directly opposite me, grinned at me, “This one is still young. He thinks we will obey him ... “

He didn’t finish, as the blood went to my head. I snatched the broom away from the orderly and pushed it into his face. Then, in a rage, I walked down the barracks, distributing blows with the broom to left and right.

The effect was amazing. The soldiers rolled off the bunks as if on cue and, pulling on their boots and trousers on the go, ran to form up.

Trembling with excitement, I followed them. The NCOs, properly dressed and without grimaces, were in command.

The doors of other barracks were thrown open, and more streams of soldiers started to form up. There was no end to them. New ones arrived all the time. When at last everyone was lined up, I was in front of a huge line, probably up to two thousand people. Whether it was the battery or the entire brigade, I didn’t know. There were too many of them for me alone.

The platoon commander commanded: “Battery, attention!” and came up to me with a report. This time he showed a military bearing.

“Take the roll call.”

The roll was called, but of course I couldn’t check. Once over, I pulled out the class schedule. It said it was training with the cannons.



“Section leader, take our platoon to the guns.”

The column passed in front of me. I silently and carefully examined the men and followed them. They formed groups around the guns. The senior NCOs were explaining the various parts. I walked up and down, pausing to listen.

I was surprised that not one of the fifty-six officers showed up, even though it was already over eight o'clock.

A soldier came running.

“Ensign, the commander wants to see you.”

“I'm going now. Section leaders, continue your studies.” (Everybody probably left as soon as I disappeared around the corner.)

~ ~ ~

“What have you done?” said the platoon commander.

I didn't understand what he was talking about and pulled out the timetable.

“Classes with the guns from 8 to 9 ... “

“No, I'm not talking about that. You hit a soldier!”

“Oh yes. But it doesn't matter, because he deserved it ... However, I think I hit several.”

“Hush, for God's sake, don't speak so loudly ... Go to the battery commander.”

The captain let me into his office, sent the clerk away, closed the door himself and turned to me.

“What have you done, Ensign?”

“What's the matter, Captain?”

“You hit a soldier.”

“That's right, Captain, sir. What was I to do when he mocked me?”

“Whatever you do, don't hit him.”

“Yes I know. I should have used my weapon, but ...”

“Be silent, be silent ... They can hear us ... Go to the brigade commander.”

“Hmm ... Hmm ... Ensign, what happened so that you hit a soldier?”

Tears came to my eyes.

“Colonel, what have I done that is criminal? I did what every officer would do in my place if a soldier makes fun of him.”

“Hmm ... Hmm ... Yes, of course ... No, of course, you are wrong. Times have changed. You don't understand that we have a revolution and we need to handle the soldiers with care.”

“Colonel, I assure you that it did them good. You should have seen how they ran to form and suddenly became soldiers again. If all the officers were firm, the army would be saved.”

“Shut up, shut up ... Hmm ... of course ... Don't go back to the battery. Go to the mess, I'll send an adjutant in a few minutes.”

In the mess, I sat down at a table which had many acquaintances. But they all fell silent and dispersed one by one. I was left alone. Even the adjacent tables were empty. I realised that the incident was already common news and they were afraid to associate with me, because they were afraid of the soldiers.

The adjutant came in and handed me a piece of paper. It was an order to go to the front.



“The colonel doesn’t require a farewell visit to him and the battery commander. And I advise you to leave here as soon as possible. The soldiers might kill you. Don’t go to the tram stop, take a different direction. I wish you success.”

What can I say – my service in Moscow was short-lived.

~ ~ ~

I think that the duplicity and cowardice of the authorities was the reason for the disintegration of the army. Soldiers are like children. If they are let loose, they become unbearable and then dangerous. It’s hard to sort them out afterwards. After my time with the Reserve Brigade, I understand why so few officers came out against the Bolsheviks in October. Most of them were scared and tried to hide. As if you could hide! Well, they ended up in prisons and camps. And they themselves were to blame.

At the Front

I was assigned to the Southwestern Front. The front headquarters was in Zhitomir, from there I was sent to the army headquarters in Berdichev and then to the headquarters of the 12th Corps in Proskurov. At each I asked to be assigned to the 64th Light Artillery Brigade, because it worked with the 64th Infantry Division, in which my brother served, in the Perekop Regiment. I went through Kazatin to Zhmerinka. But the trains didn’t go past there for some reason, and the commandant suggested that I go by carriage, which I accepted with joy. Thus, I saw new places and spent the night in a purely Jewish village, where I was treated to “piboy-fish” (stuffed pike, delicious). Finally, I drove up to the large village of Pyatnichany, where the headquarters of the 64th Division and Artillery Brigade was located. I was assigned to the 2nd Battery. At the division headquarters, my brother’s orderly was waiting for me and took me to Burty, a small village, where the 1st and 2nd Batteries were stationed and the *division* commander (3 batteries) was stationed. Approaching Burty, I kept asking the orderly, where the front was.

“Well, there,” he waved into space.

“Far?”

“What for? At the moment, behind this hill.”

“Why can’t you hear the shots?”

“They don’t shoot like that during the day, only at night.”

“And where is my brother’s regiment?”

“In that village there, just beside the river.” (The Zbruch River, the old border.)

“Tell him that I will introduce myself to my commander, and then I will come to see him.”

“It is better to walk on the main road. There is a quicker way but the Austrians will even shoot at a single person with artillery.”

I introduced myself to the commander of the battery, Captain Kolenkovski, was warmly received by the officers and fit in with them in the same hut.

Baptism of Fire

I was eager to visit my brother, see the trenches, our infantry, the wire and, of course, the enemy. I asked for some leave from Kolenkovski.

“Be careful. Follow the main road, it is a small detour, but they rarely shoot at the highway. It would be foolish to be injured immediately upon arrival.”

I went straight across the field, of course. The village was visible about two km away. In the middle of the field was a small cemetery with trees. I had to pass by it, but was still some distance off. Suddenly something hissed in the air, an Austrian shell exploded near the cemetery. I didn’t hear the shot. My first shell!

It must be a long-range 105 mm, I thought as a specialist.



Another shell burst in the cemetery itself, and a cross flew into the air.

I thought, they shot in vain, they must have a lot of shells.

The shooting stopped. I thought about detouring the cemetery, but calmed down and walked past.

Then it started.

The Austrians had simply fired some ranging shots, then waited for me to approach the targeted place. One, two, three shells burst about sixty paces away, and suddenly one fell at my very feet, went deep into the ground – but there was only smoke.

A camouflet, thank God, flashed through my head, and belatedly I fell to my knees. Two soldiers appeared from somewhere. I jumped up and ran towards them.

“How lucky you are. Right at your feet and it didn’t burst.”

For some reason, the Austrians stopped shooting.

I was really scared only in the evening, when I realised that I had behaved stupidly. I had invited the Austrians to fire. I was damned lucky that everything ended well. I was proud though, to survive my baptism of fire.

A camouflet is a projectile flying from a distance that burrows deep into the ground, as it falls almost vertically. The explosion has no power to lift the ground, and only smoke appears. Camouflets are rare, so I was really lucky.

The Trenches

I found my brother in the village. He hadn’t yet seen me in uniform. Our infantry losses were great. There were only two officers in the battalion: the battalion commander and my brother. That was instead of twenty-two officers according to the regulations. And at that time in Moscow there were fifty-six idlers in one battery.

I absolutely wanted to go through the trenches. My brother didn’t want that, but the battalion commander, seeing my youthful zeal, decided to go with me and show the enemy’s trenches.

“Be careful,” asked my brother, “bend over and don’t stick out.”

The position was firm. Fine, deep trenches with communication trenches. There was a lot of wire, the Zbruch river, and on the other side there was the Austrian wire and their trenches. We stopped at one place, and the battalion commander showed me something through an gap in the protection, which was probably 20 by 20 centimetres in size. He tilted his head, and at that very moment a bullet went through the gap and into a post supporting the cover.

“Wow,” he said simply. “They shoot well. To put a bullet into such a small hole at nine hundred paces! They have excellent Mannlicher guns with telescopic sights and probably a support.” Not a word that he had just escaped death.

The communication route went in zigzags.

“We need to go quickly here. They’re firing at us from over there. However, you can rest in the next one.”

A soldier was walking towards us, carrying a soldier wounded in the chest, covered in blood. The wounded man was very pale. I had to hug the wall to let them pass. I confess that I felt sick and wanted to go home.

For the first time, the thought flashed that they could kill me here.

Batteries under Enemy Fire

At the front the situation was much better than in the rear. There was still discipline and the officers were respected. Orders were carried out. During my time I had only two small disagreements. The officers took me with them to train me and show me what to do. Once we were with Lieutenant Voinov at the battery and we were firing sporadically. Captain Kolenkovski was at the observation post. Orders were passed on to us by telephone. An Austrian plane appeared. Voinov fired two more shots with displeasure. What he



feared happened. The plane began to revolve above us, and a heavy projectile flew in. Another. Clearly, the plane was adjusting their fire. Voinov ordered the soldiers to disperse from the battery. Suddenly all hell broke loose. Three heavy Austrian batteries fired hurricane fire for 20 minutes. Then there was a break. Voinov didn't allow the soldiers to go back to the battery. He was right: the shelling resumed twice more, for five minutes each, with the expectation that people would come running to watch. Then everything was silent.

"Now you can go. It's good that with the Germans that everything is done according to the rules. They will no longer shoot now and won't shoot to the sides, where the curious have crowded. We would have fired without rules and, probably would have inflicted losses, but thanks to the German rules, we have had no losses.

The battery looked terrible. Everything had been thrown around. Three guns had received direct hits, one gun was overturned. One barrel was shot off, the other had a warped carriage, and the third had a wheel broken. A projectile had hit the ammunition stocks, but they didn't detonate as one would have expected, but they were scattered all around.

I was very surprised when, after examining everything, Voinov reported by telephone to Kolenkovski that the damage was insignificant. They immediately put everything in order. Out of the three damaged guns, they made one good one,² and the seven-gun battery was transported at night to a pre-selected position. Originally batteries were eight-guns, but they were later reduced to six, which was much more convenient.

The Battle

After changing the position of the battery, we needed to range it against various targets. Kolenkovski did this and took me with him to show me how. The battery had three observation posts in the second line of trenches. We made sure that the Austrians didn't find them. We walked only in the trenches and never showed ourselves during the day. There were two dugouts: a small one for officers and a large one for telephone operators. As a rule, officers were on duty at the observation post for the whole day. We went to our main observation post at the bend of the river, where the trenches crossed it. There were two great Zeiss binoculars. Kolenkovski used one, I the other.

He shot at several targets, which the battery had numbered. So it was enough to order the battery: "Target number is such-and-such. Fire!", and we could shoot at targets at even at night.

Just before dark, Kolenkovski suddenly remembered that he hadn't shot the isthmus. He fired some shrapnel, then commanded the cease fire.

We spent the night in the dugout.

An hour before dawn, all of the Austrian batteries suddenly opened up at once. Everyone was shouting into the phone – no sense could be made of it. Finally the infantry informed us that the Germans had emerged from the trenches on the isthmus.

"Germans?!" Kolenkovski was surprised. "It's good that we shot at the isthmus yesterday." And he ordered sporadic fire at it.

"Why intermittent," I was concerned.

"It's dark, you can't see anything. Shooting blind isn't to be recommended. I am only firing to maintain the morale of our men in the trenches."

"The flash of the shots won't give away the position of the battery?" I wanted to know everything.

"Not at all. The Austrian artillery is firing and it is impossible to distinguish our flashes from their explosions."

The enemy fired at our trenches and at the rear. They couldn't see our observation post or battery. So we could shoot calmly.

² The French version has that the three damaged guns were made into two good ones, which makes more sense for the number going from eight to seven.



Kolenkovski's calmness was transmitted to me and to the soldiers operating the telephones. Meanwhile panic reigned all around. At last it was getting light. Kolenkovski looked through the binoculars.

"Indeed, the Germans. Do you see them?"

I looked but I couldn't see anything.

"Well, of course, on the isthmus. They walk in good order, and they're not shooting."

"I haven't seen them yet."

There, lit up by a howitzer shell, there were two figures.

"Ah, I see."

It became brighter and I saw them clearly.

Kolenkovski began to shoot rapid fire with low bursts of shrapnel.

"Ah, they start shooting, so they are worried."

He ordered combined shrapnel and HE fire.

"Although shrapnel causes more losses, the HE gets on your nerves," he explained.

Indeed, the Germans lay down. The second chain came out of the trenches and the first was about to rise, but, met by heavy fire, hesitated again, lay down and then retreated into the trenches.

"That's it," said Kolenkovski.

Of course, for another hour machine guns continued to fire, artillery roared, and the telephone raged, but the battle was over.

Our infantry couldn't withstand the Austrian shelling and abandoned the trenches. Only officers and scout teams remained in them. The wounded and non-wounded passed by us. This was the only and small battle that I experienced at the front.

All became calm, and soon after the fraternisations began.

~ ~ ~

One fine day, an Austrian long-range battery fired at Burty with new double-action shells. These shells were completely ineffective. The shrapnel was retained by a huge shell head which had no destructive force, and the head flew off and didn't explode.

I was appointed adjutant to the battalion commander, a rather picky colonel. But he went to headquarters to replace the brigade commander, General Nevadovski, who had gone on leave. So I lived alone in the hut and languished with nothing to do. To pass the time, I did duty at the observation post of the 2nd Battery.

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I then did a stupid thing: I placed the unexploded head of an Austrian shell on the table, even though I knew it was dangerous. A young officer from the 1st Battery came to visit and started playing with it.

"Leave that, it's very dangerous!"

"Are you afraid?" And the idiot began to hit the shell with something.

I saw that he was a fool. Something distracted his attention, and he left. I undressed and wanted to lie down when I remembered the shell. I had to remove it immediately, otherwise a fool like that would cause trouble.

It was bitterly cold outside. 'I'll take it tomorrow ... No, now. It can explode at any minute.'

I put on my shoes and overcoat, and took the shell outside. I wanted to bury it, but the earth was like stone, being frozen solid. I put the shell in a ditch and covered it with rubbish. I quickly returned to the warm hut.

The next day I went on duty at the observation post. My batman came with dinner.



“Listen, Pëtr, only the day before yesterday I gave you a new tunic, and it has already been torn.”

“It was from an Austrian shell. A splinter tore it.”

“What are you saying? The Austrians didn’t shoot today.”

“True. But the children found an old shell and began to play with it. I was just walking by the hut when it burst and killed three of them. Two were of our host.”

When he left, I thought, “Probably my shell.”

And so it turned out.

~ ~ ~

My brother went on leave to Moscow.

The Bolsheviks seized power in October. But their power only reached our distant front in November, and then only gradually. I was very worried about my brother – surely he took part in the battles in Moscow, but there was no news. Finally his orderly appeared. My brother had been wounded in the leg in the fighting in Moscow. The orderly came for his things and brought me receipts so that I could receive my brother’s salary.

Blizzard

After graduating from artillery school, I had received an excellent saddle and now tried to ride as often as possible. I often went to the dentist at the HQ of the 3rd Battery, where I got to meet various officers, including Lieutenant Abramov. But at the time I didn’t pay particular attention to him.

Once I had to ride a sleigh with a pair of divisional horses to the headquarters of the Perekop Regiment, in order to receive my brother’s salary. We, the soldier driving and I, left very early. The road was very good and there wasn’t much snow. But we had to travel sixty kilometres until we found the regiment headquarters. As usual, no one knew exactly where it was. Having received the money, we set off back, and when we reached the town of Petnichani, it began to get dark. The officers of the headquarters asked me to spend the night with them, but I barely knew them, and it seemed to me that we could easily drive the twelve kilometres that remained to Burty. So we drove off.

While we were in a valley, everything went well, but once we were on flat, it became completely dark and a blizzard came up. Poles with telephone wires ran along the road. But in the dark they were hard to see. We reached a large haystack and took the direction to Burty. But soon the poles disappeared, and we reached the haystack once again. Again we took the direction and ... again we arrived at the haystack.

“What the hell! Apparently, a goblin is teasing us.”

We took the turn again and tried not to deviate left. But soon everything disappeared into the blizzard – both the direction, and the road, and the poles. It was impossible to navigate using the wind – first it blew in our faces, then in our backs. The horses were exhausted and started to slow down. Now I would have been glad to return to the haystack – I could spend the night buried in the straw. My driver began to whimper and lament that we would die here, freeze to death. I was at a loss and was silent.

Suddenly we stumbled upon something. It was a trench, with even a ramp for the horses. I decided to spend the night there. The horses were unhitched, led down and we barred the exit with the sled. I piled up some of the straw, climbed into a corner, took off my greatcoat and wrapped myself in it. Despite the cold, I fell asleep.

When I woke up, the sun was shining, twenty paces from us was the highway that we had been looking for yesterday. And Burty was a kilometre away. I woke the soldier, left him to harness the horses, and I ran to Burty, to my warm hut, where I drank tea with pleasure. I hadn’t yet begun to drink vodka.

The Bolsheviks’ First Measures

The army was gradually falling apart. First there was silence, and then fraternisation. The Bolsheviks hoped to achieve peace in that way. But it played into the hands of the Austrians – they could use their reserves elsewhere. It was a strange state: not peace and not war.



One of the first measures taken by the soldiers committees was to take the orderlies away from the officers. My orderly didn't want to return to service in the battery, and I didn't intend to send him away. I gave him leave and had him take care of my things and saddle. Then I phoned him and told him not to return to the battery but to go to his village. He took my things home faithfully. Nothing at all prevented him from stealing them from me, but friendships arose between the orderlies and the officers, and they were mostly loyal.

The disappearance of my batman didn't please the soldiers committees.

My houseowner took a modest fee to heat the stove, sweep the hut and wash my linen. I foresaw that sooner or later I would have to leave the front, and therefore I kept only left one suitcase and a camp bed.

Abandoning the Front

Returning one morning from the observation post, I took off my shoes and lay down on the bed. A battalion NCO entered, coming from Petnichani, where the battalion's wagon train was located. In Burty there were me, three message runners and a stable hand with a couple of horses. All the other men and horses of the division were in the rear, 12 km away. The NCO greeted me rather casually and remained standing at the door. I asked what news he had brought from the train. He spoke about the people and horses of the train and, assuming a defiant posture, reported on the elections of commanders that had taken place – the latest fashion of the Bolsheviks. Most of the old officers were kept in their old posts, but not the younger ones.

"You will also have to leave these lodgings. The division's new adjutant has been selected."

"Who is it?"

"Me."

I dashed to my revolver, which was hanging from my belt above the bed. There was no revolver. Apparently, my act had been predicted and it had been stolen in advance. But there was a sabre. I snatched it from its scabbard. The NCO instantly disappeared. I tried to put my shoes on my bare feet, but I was excited and only got one. So, with one bare foot, I rushed after the NCO.

The street was empty. I ran to the runners' hut. There was snow and ice, but I didn't feel anything. I burst into the house like a whirlwind. The soldiers stood ready with carbines in their hands. I paid no attention to them, pushed the carbines aside with my hand and went to look behind the large stove. There was no one there (fortunately, I think now).

Trembling with excitement, I turned to the soldiers. Their carbines, were directed at first against me, then lowered very slowly. The butts touched the floor, and the soldiers were in the "attention" pose. But I realised this only after. At that moment, I was too excited. In a broken voice I said:

"The NCO announced ... that he was elected ... I tell you this ... that nothing will change ... while I'm here ... Understand?"

"Yes, Ensign!"

At that time, I looked down and was surprised to see a naked sabre in my hand and a bare foot. This embarrassed me, and without adding anything further, I went back to my room. This time it was very cold and painful to walk in the snow with bare feet.

~ ~ ~

I went to report the incident to Captain Kolenkovski. He listened to me carefully.

"As your boss, I don't approve what you did." Then, after a pause, "But I would probably have done the same if I were in your place and at your age." He paused again. "Let's try to turn it into a joke, because I'm afraid there will be consequences."

Despite the excitement, fatigue took its toll, and, returning to my room, I fell asleep. The phone woke me up. I heard my name. At that time, the phones didn't turn off and all conversations could be listened in to. I



picked up the phone, froze and listened. Because the voice of my NCO said, "Comrade Commissar, I ask you to arrest Ensign Mamontov."

"What did he do, this ensign?"

"He opposed the election of the commanders, and chased me with a naked sword."

"Well, arrest him."

"Hmm ... I would prefer you to do that. I doubt that our soldiers will obey my orders. It's hard to arrest your own officers. You know ..."

"All right, comrade, I will send twelve horsemen to Burty. I hope that is enough?"

"Of course, quite. Goodbye, comrade."

The conversation was over.

I went to Kolenkovski and found him alone.

"You're in luck. You are warned. The horsemen will be here in two hours. You need to disappear before they come. Write yourself a leave permission and attach the divisional seal. I will sign for the commander, you put the signature of someone for the commissar. Your soldiers are probably tasked with keeping an eye on you. Send them one by one as far as possible with very important messages. Then send the stableman to shoe the horses. When you are convinced that they have really gone, ask the owner of the house to harness their horses, take your suitcase, cover it with straw and wait for you at the crossroads. Then you go to him, but pretending to go for a stroll, making a long detour. Leave for Kamyanets-Podolski and then to Moscow. There is no need to say anything to the other officers, I will tell them later. Go ahead, waste no time. And may God help you."

Everything happened as he said. I made an agreement with the house owner, threw my sabre into the well, put my overcoat over my shoulders and, whistling and waving a stick, went in the other direction. Away from the village, I looked to see if they were following me. Soldiers were standing in the street and looking in my direction. I started throwing snowballs. This innocent occupation, apparently, calmed them down, and they entered the houses.

I continued my walk. When I reached a small hill, I turned around – the street was empty. Then, using the hill as cover, I changed direction and went to the highway, where the owner was waiting for me. I got into the sleigh and he drove the horses.

Kamyanets-Podolski

When I got to Kamyanets, 25 km from Burty, I felt safe. "The horsemen won't chase me, and the NCO will be glad to get rid of me."

Now to get to Moscow, which wasn't easy. The army had demobilised without any plan, simply by desertion. The crowds of armed men disorganised all the transport. Trains with only goods wagons rarely ran, and without any timetable. They were stormed at every station. Huge crowds of brutal soldiers easily succumbed to the Bolsheviks' demagogic propaganda. Officers were killed, thrown out of the cars on the move. Changes at junction stations were especially frightening, as they were mostly full of soldiers. Getting on a train was almost unthinkable. People sometimes waited for weeks.

As soon as I got into the hotel room, there was a knock on the door. A smiling Jew entered.

"Hello, officer, how are you? Is there anything you need? I can get you whatever you want."

"Thank you, I don't need anything."

"Don't say that. You probably need something. Girl? Passport? Weapon? Civilian suit? No? Well, rest then. I'll check in tomorrow."

He came the next day.

"Hello officer, how can I help?"



“You talked about weapons. I would like to buy a revolver.”

“Good timing. Trust me. You’d better not go outside. The city is full of soldiers harassing officers. Tell me what you need, and I’ll bring it here ... A revolver. What type? And ammunition?”

He sold me a revolver, bread, sausages, bacon and flour. He took me and my suitcase to the station, squeezing into an overcrowded carriage. He had connections and people of his own everywhere.

“Here,” he said smiling, “and you said that you didn’t need anything.”

“I was wrong. Without you, I doubt I could have left. Thank you.”

“Have a nice trip.”

To Moscow

At night, the train arrived at Shepetivka, a junction station. It didn’t go further. I got out of the carriage, not knowing what to do. In the distance, the station was noisy with a crowd. A railroad employee passed by.

“Tell me, how can I get to Moscow?”

“You’re in luck. This train goes straight to Moscow and will soon leave ... Don’t go to the station, there are a lot of soldiers there.”

I climbed into a dark compartment. The bunks were full, but there was still a spot there. I sat down on a wooden bench in front of the stove, with my back to the door. The train did indeed set off soon after. Through the pocket of my greatcoat, in which I had cut a whole, I put my hand on the revolver in my trouser pocket and fell asleep while sitting upright.

When I woke, it was day. I opened my eyes and immediately closed them again, pretending to be asleep. I fumbled for the revolver in my pocket. If only it didn’t catch when I pulled it out! Soldiers were standing around me and excitedly discussing my person.

“Of course, he is an officer. Look at the leather suitcase and piped trousers.”

And I had thought that by taking off my shoulder boards,³ cockade and spurs, I would become unrecognisable.

The voices grew increasingly agitated. I thought: ‘The door is ajar, and the train seems to be moving slowly. If it comes to that, then I shoot and jump out of the train. The main thing is to avoid catching the trigger.’

But there was one reconciling voice.

“You can see that he is an artilleryman (the black buttonholes). The gunners all look like officers ... Why are you worrying about him? You’d be better off thinking about the Ukrainians who rob the trains going to Moscow under the pretext of looking for weapons.”

This distracted attention from me, and everyone began to heatedly discuss the Ukrainian issue. Gradually, passions seemed to subside, and I considered it possible to wake up.

In order not to participate in conversations and so not betray my bourgeois origins by my accent, I sat down in the open doors of a freight car, feet out. A soldier leant on the lintel above me. He made some general comments about the weather.

“Are you an officer?” he asked quietly, out of the blue.

I looked at him, hesitated for a second. “Yes.”

“Me too. But you disguised yourself badly. Don’t leave the carriage. They will gradually get used to you. If you need anything, over there in the corner, the one who is looking at us is my orderly, contact him, but not me. I won’t talk to you anymore.” And he went away and lay down on the bunk.

³ These are the *pogoni* of Tsarist Russia – wide, solid unit and rank markings worn on the shoulders. The wearing of *pogoni* was to be one of the defining characteristics of “White” allegiance, as revolutionaries never wore them.

I have translated them as shoulder boards, but many in the civil war period were less solid than previously.



“Ah,” I thought, “I have allies here. This is comforting. So it was him who distracted the soldiers’ attention from me.”

Soon the officer in disguise moved to another carriage. Probably frightened of his frankness.

The journey to Moscow lasted eleven days and was a complete nightmare. At each station I was afraid that new men would enter and start to talk about officers again. But the population of the car was united by the desire not to let new people in. Little by little they got used to me. I had bread and sausage with me, but there was no water, and I was afraid to go to the water supply at the stations.

Once a soldier offered me tea.

“No thanks.”

“Why not? Take it. I can see that you have nothing to drink. You ate snow this morning. Take it and drink it.”

I took it and drank it with delight, because I was really suffering from thirst. The train was approaching a large station. Then, in order not to let in new people, the door was opened slightly, and everyone crowded at the entrance. The impression was that the car was full to capacity. A huge crowd awaited the train. My comrades swore and pushed, but didn’t let anyone in.

One sailor, fierce looking and armed to the teeth, was angry that he wasn’t allowed in. He shouted to the crowd around him on the platform:

“Comrades, step back a little. I will give a gift to these bastards who don’t let us into the carriage!”

And he began to unfasten a hand grenade from his belt. The crowd fled, and the door’s defenders also rushed into the carriage, leaving the door open.

I rushed to the door, slammed it shut and, holding the handle, shouted, “Close the windows!”

Both upper windows opening onto the platform were instantly closed. There was a deathly silence in anticipation of an explosion.

The train started again and picked up speed. There was no explosion.

“Look at that,” a voice said in the darkness. “You all say, an officer, an officer ... And he saved us. Sometimes an officer is needed.”

“True. If he hadn’t slammed the door, that bastard would certainly have thrown the grenade.”

“Sailors are like animals, they don’t hesitate to commit a crime.”

After that I was left alone. I was given food and tea and no-one mentioned officers anymore .

Finally we reached Moscow. The train arrived at two in the morning. Two soldiers carried my suitcase to the cab. We shook hands and wished each other happiness.

“We now realise that you are an officer. An officer was thrown out of a nearby carriage while on the move. But we aren’t like that. We treated you well. After all, not all officers are bad, there are good ones.”

~ ~ ~

I had spent only five and a half months at the front, but what an incomparable feeling to come home!

It was night, the streets were empty. But it seemed that every house, every tree greeted me. This was my home. I took the lift to the fourth floor. The door to our apartment was open and the light was on. Mother was on the doorstep.

“I felt that it was you.”

Remembering my flight from the front, I’m simply amazed at the coincidence of favourable circumstances. I have one explanation – my mother’s prayers.

It was February 1918. I had spent the day of my twentieth birthday in the wagon.



Chapter 3 – Moscow

My Arrival Home

Despite the eleven days of travel on the train, without undressing, where you could sleep only while sitting upright – and all the time on the lookout – having arrived home at night, I felt such joy and excitement that I didn't want to sleep.

We boiled tea and fried the bread and bacon that I brought. I was especially interested in my older brother's injury.

"What happened?"

He explained. It was very simple.

Mitya Tuchkov, who was also on leave in October 1917, came round.

"We will do it?"

"We will."

We began to ring our relatives and fellow officers. But everyone started to make excuses. They turned out to be cowardly rubbish. It was necessary to intimidate them, not persuade them. So we went to the Aleksander Military School on Arbat Square. There were cadets, volunteers and students there. About three hundred officers. A little over a thousand fighters. Perhaps there were other groups in other parts of Moscow, but the total number of officers turning up didn't exceed seven hundred. Well, in Moscow there were thousands of them. They didn't do their duty and paid dearly for that. The Red side was made up of soldiers from the reserve regiments and workers. The town residents and the peasants didn't participate.

There were no real battles, just shootings and clashes. We occupied the Kremlin. We ate dinner with Nikolai Fyodorovich, who lived opposite the Kremlin, and spent the night at the Aleksander School.

In the evening of the next day, they were looking for volunteers to drive to the telephone exchange occupied by our men, but surrounded by the Reds. The commander was Tuchkov. Late in the evening we went by car, just five officers. With the lights extinguished, we managed to pass several Red outposts. But at one crossroads we came under heavy gun fire. The engine stalled, the naval officer driving the car was killed, and my knee was shot. The rest jumped out and hid.

I got out of the car and hobbled off, looking for somewhere to hide. But all the doors and gates were locked. A group of Reds approached. I got into a nook, but they noticed me.

"Hands up!"

I put my hands in my pockets, took all the cartridges in a handful and, raising my hands, put the cartridges on the windowsill, praying to God that they wouldn't fall. They didn't fall. The Reds searched me.

"Aha, a revolver!"

"Of course," I said as calmly as possible. "I'm an officer, I'm on leave from the front. The revolver is part of the uniform."

This seemed to convince them, but they took the revolver. Another group came up.

"An officer? Why are you talking to him!"

One soldier rushed at me with a bayonet. Somehow I managed to beat off the bayonet with my hand and it broke on the stone of the house. This puzzled them.

"What are you doing here?"

"I was on my way home when the shooting started and I was wounded by a stray bullet." I threw back my greatcoat. Someone struck a match. There was a lot of blood.

"Take me to the infirmary."



They hesitated, but still one helped me walk. Fortunately, there was an infirmary nearby. They put me on a stretcher and the soldiers left. But another crowd appeared in their place.

“Where is the officer here?”

The doctor objected strongly.

“Comrades, go away. You are interfering with my work.” Despite their excitement, he managed to get them out. The doctor came up to me.

“They will return, and I cannot protect you. Go through this door, go down to the courtyard and give this note to the chauffeur. Hurry, go now.”

My leg was swollen, and I almost couldn't walk, my head was clouded. I gathered all my strength and wandered off. The most difficult thing was the stairs. I almost fainted. A Red Cross truck was parked in the yard. I handed a note to the chauffeur. He didn't ask any questions and helped me get in.

“Where can I take you?”

I gave the address of my grandmother's surgical hospital, on Nikitskaya, and passed out. At times I came to my senses. We crossed several lines. They were either White or Red. Everyone stopped us. The driver said:

“I'm taking a seriously wounded man.”

People got into the truck, lit matches, and since there was a lot of blood, they let us through.

Finally at the hospital. I was carried to the operating room. Grandma said to Dr. Aleksinsky:

“Do what you can, but save his leg.”

And now, you see, I'm barely limping.

~ ~ ~

The position of the former officers was very uncertain. We were as if outlawed. But we were young and carefree. The theatres were full of officers in uniform, with shoulder-boards, despite the threat of execution. They flirted and had fun. I returned to the Railway Institute and passed my first year exams, except for integral calculus. Descriptive geometry was easy for me and chemistry was difficult.

Wine

Life in Moscow in 1918 was strange. On the one hand, people ate roach,⁴ but on the other, they often spent a lot of money, as they felt that everything was lost. Bolshevik power hasn't yet been fully established. Nobody was sure of the future.

A typical example. A decree was issued: the punishment for the storage of alcoholic beverages was execution. Then many Muscovites remembered their cellars. At the beginning of the war in 1914 alcohol had been banned, and they had walled up the entrances to their wine cellars out of patriotism. They didn't even remember what they had in them.

My father and three others made up a company that bought such cellars 'blind'. They drew lots for who got what – so one would get a cellar full of the finest wines, the other got spoiled seltzer water.

A bricklayer would break through the door, carters quickly loaded the wine onto vehicles and, covering the bottles with straw, everything was instantly taken away. Both the bricklayer and the carters received wine for their work and appreciated it very much. They worked quickly and in silence.

Father brought his share to the apartment of Fyodor Nikolaevich Mamontov – about two hundred bottles each time. He carefully examined them and selected a dozen bottles. Then he called the cook and ordered a gorgeous matching dinner for the wine.

I was somehow present for this one day, and couldn't believe my ears.

⁴ Not the insect, but the Caspian fish of the same name, which is low quality.



“For this wine you need Roquefort, and for this one deer saddle with Paris mushrooms ... *Paté de foie gras* certainly, with truffles. Of course, coffee ...” and that sort of thing.

This is when people were starving all around and there was nothing to buy. But anything could be obtained in exchange for wine. The cook, showing no surprise, wrote it all down and took away the rest of the wine as medium of exchange.

My father had worked in horse breeding and earned good money. He invited four or five people – connoisseurs – and then so that the wine all disappeared (after all, someone could have denounced him), four young people. My brother and I always featured. We were called the “trash heap,” and it was our duty to drink all the wine after supper. There was no question of pouring it away. The table was beautifully set, with multiple glasses at each place. Father warned us at first not to gulp, but to sip, so as not to lose the taste.

“Pay attention,” he said, “this is a real Benedictine, made in a monastery, not in a factory.”

“Unique! ... And this is a century-old cognac, you won’t get to drink this again in your lifetime ... “

“But this is a Burgundy, a Chambertin. Dumas wrote that d’Artagnan drank it with ham. Dumas knew nothing about wine. It was for Chambertin that they created *paté de foie gras* with truffles – try it!”

Father didn’t drink at all himself, he had diseased kidneys ... But he knew wine, which means he had drunk a lot before, otherwise how would he know? At the end of the dinner, he would give the command.

“Well, trash cans, get it down you!” And we drank it from full glasses.

“Eh,” said one of the older ones. “This Chambertin ought to be drunk on your knees, and they are gulping whole glasses full. Wild times!”

There were only empty bottles left, and they were carried away. The times were indeed wild. It was feasting in a time of plague.

Registration

We were drawn to the Don,⁵ of course, but we had to overcome inertia. This was helped by the Bolsheviks themselves, who announced that all officers were to be registered.

Those who didn’t show up for registration would be considered enemies of the people, and those who showed up would be arrested. A difficult choice, like a hero at a crossroads.

The registration took place at the former Alekseev military school in Lefortovo. We went to see what was happening.

There was a huge crowd in the vast field. The line was in eight rows and stretched for a kilometre. People crowded to the gates of the School, like rams for the slaughter. They argued over their place in the queue. It was said that there were 56,000 officers here, and from what I have saw, it is possible. I have to add that out of this huge army, only 700 people took part in the battles in October 1917. If everyone had appeared, then the Reds would certainly have been defeated and there would have been no revolution. It was annoying to look at the gathering of those cowards. It was they who ended up in the Gulag and Lubyanka. Let them not complain.

We saw many acquaintances there. We gathered a meeting. What should we do?

First, they decided to find out what was happening in the School’s courtyard, which was surrounded by a wall. Talk to someone there who had been questioned. This mission fell to me and Kolya Grakov, who had graduated from this very same School. We walked around the building and made sure that no one was leaving it. There were shell holes in the courtyard wall. Through one of the holes, we could talk to an officer who was inside the courtyard.

“Don’t enter here, we are detained as prisoners ...”

⁵ Where the first White armies in the west of Russia were assembling. They coalesced into the Volunteer Army.



A Red cadet, a sentry, approached us.

“It is forbidden to talk to the arrested.”

He had a nice look about him.

“Tell me, what are they doing with the officers?”

He hesitated, looked all about and said, “What do you think awaits you? Do you want to be taken?” And he walked away quickly.

He had said enough. We returned and related what we had seen and heard. We decided to leave, and not register. But before that, sow panic among the crowd so that everyone scattered. It wasn't difficult to do, because everyone was reluctant to go anyway. We walked along the rows. When we saw a friend, and this happened often, we said loudly so that everyone could hear:

“Get out soon. We walked around the building – no one is coming out. And soon there will be a round-up.”

People became agitated and began to leave the ranks. A man grabbed my arm.

“What are you saying? Follow me.”

But I pushed him away roughly.

“Ah, you reptile, a Red spy!”

People crowded around him, threatening him violence. He chose to hide.

We had achieved our goal, the links were unsettled, the crowd was agitated.

“Now, let's leave ourselves.”

As we crossed the bridge, armed sailors appeared. At the sight of them, the crowd of officers scattered. We moved along small streets.

Officers were outlawed. Many left for the south. Friends and acquaintances began to avoid us.

To the Ukraine

We became convinced of the complete inability of various organisations to help us go south. I doubt whether any such organisations even existed, and if they did, were they just *agents provocateurs*? They couldn't do anything useful. Better to just rely on your own strength.

“Are we going?” my brother asked one day in a corridor.

“Let's go! When?”

“Now. Why wait?”

“Okay, let's go.”

That was it.

Mother silently packed a very small suitcase between us. My father saw me off to the Bryansk railway station, gave me money, and blessed me. We parted forever. He died of typhus in 1920.

The railwayman took us and put us in a freight car. The train moved south into the unknown.

The next day we arrived at the last Bolshevik station, Zernovo. Further on was the Ukraine, occupied by the Germans.

We were lucky – there was no control in Zernovo. I stayed at the station, and my brother went to the market. I found a peasant from the Ukraine who undertook to take us in for 100 roubles. In the meantime, he advised us to leave the town, lie down in the wheat and wait for the evening and he would come for us along the road. Which is what we did.



When the peasant's carriage came by in the evening, a whole flock was following him. His wife, a grumpy woman, sat beside him and then there were bagmen⁶ going for flour, a bourgeois family and three German prisoners of war. An irony of fate is that we Russian officers trusted the Germans, our recent enemies, most of all – because they were obviously fleeing from the Bolsheviks. We knew a little German. We followed the peasant's cart for a long time. It was a moonlit night.

The first Bolshevik post was located in a village. We went around the village in a big arc. So it went on for another hour.

Then the second post. We went around it too.

"In this village, which we are bypassing, is the third and last post. This is the worst because it sends out patrols."

For some time now, the peasant's wife had been angry. She had had to make way on the cart for the father of the family and the child, who could no longer walk. The husband hadn't bought her a new dress and she began to find fault with him in a loud, angry voice. In the stillness of the night her voice could be heard from far away by the Bolsheviks.

"Shut up, witch!" the father of the family shouted at her. "You will bring us trouble."

"You, yourself, are the devil," the woman yelled back.

"If you don't shut up, I'll stab you." And he pulled out a knife.

"Ah well? Well, you will see what will happen. Help! Help! He's going to stab me!"

"What can I do with a crazy woman?" said the frightened peasant. "Run quickly, the Reds will surely come now. Take this road to the right, then the ravine, then to the left, then take the second road to the right, and there the border isn't far away."

The Germans and the two of us ran. We turned right, and there was a ravine, but the road turned to the right, not to the left.

"The first thing is to not get lost, it's better to wait."

We walked a hundred paces away from the road and lay down in the grass. Soon our peasant drove by. We waited to make sure he wasn't being followed and then tailed him at some distance.

I made a mistake in stopping for a pressing need. The Germans and my brother went on ahead. As I ran to catch up with them, soldiers rose up from the wheat on the road side and put bayonets to my chest.

"Stop!"

The thought flashed: "should I run? What about my brother?" I stayed. Well, if we had been together, we would have run away. The Germans, they took off. And my brother stayed because of me.

The soldiers took me to where our entire group had been assembled, apart from the Germans. I stood at a distance from my brother.

There was a Bolshevik commissar and about forty soldiers. There were five horsemen.

"Where are you going, and why?"

Everyone, including us, said that we were going to the Ukraine for flour, since there was famine in Moscow. The Commissar announced:

"You can all go, except you and you," he pointed to my brother and me.

"Why do you want to detain us, comrade commissar. We are a single collective."

"Is that correct?" he asked the others.

⁶ These were men going to the rural districts to buy up food, to sell in the starving cities of central Russia. As small entrepreneurs they were hated by the Bolsheviks, so had to operate clandestinely.



To our relief, they replied, “Yes.”

“And yet, you, will remain.”

The rest left happily.

“But why are you delaying us?”

“Do you want to know? Well, I’ll tell you: your teeth are white.”

The matter was going badly, he had sussed us out. We denied it, of course.

“I’ll take you to headquarters, they will decide what to do with you.”

We had no desire to go to headquarters –they would shoot us there, of course. We weren’t searched. We walked in a group, talking.

Then my brother whispered, “The letters. Watch what I do.”

We had been supplied with letters of recommendation to all possible White generals. What imprudence and stupidity! Each of those letters was a death sentence for us. We had shared the letters between us, some for him and some for me.

My brother began to scratch, which was normal at the time. There were lice in the wagons. He put his hand into his inside pocket, and I heard the sound of crumpled paper. I started talking incessantly to divert attention away. My brother clenched the letters in his fist, put them in his mouth and began to chew, tearing off small pieces that could be thrown away unnoticed. Throwing away a large piece was impossible because of the moon – it would have been noticed. And so he looked as if he was chewing a blade of grass in thought. I spoke incessantly. Finally, my brother spoke up – he had freed himself of the letters. Now it was my turn. I remembered that the letters were in my wallet. I had to open my wallet in my pocket to get them. The paper was solid, and when I clenched them in my fist, it seemed to me that the crackling of the paper was heard all around the world. Seizing the moment when my brother was distracting them, I stuffed the letters into my mouth. I couldn’t chew them as I did have enough saliva, tears ran from my eyes, I felt sick. With an effort of will, I forced myself to chew slowly. Everything turned out fine. Having freed ourselves from the terrible evidence, we ourselves suggested that the commissar search us. He didn’t want to.

We walked along the road to the headquarters. My brother looked at one of the soldiers.

“I know you, but I can’t remember where we met. Where are you from?”

“Vladimir province.”

“Which village?”

“Nikitovka.”

“Nikitovka?! I know it well, I spent a holiday there two years ago.”

I was on my guard. My brother was up to something, because he didn’t know either Vladimir or Nikitovka.

“You know Nikitovka?” the soldier was surprised.

“Of course, I must have seen you there ... Of course you know the old woman, how is she? ... Aunt Anna, bent over, almost hunchbacked?”

“Anna? .. No ... Oh, you are thinking of Aunt Marya.”

“Of course, Aunt Marya. How I confused it. Aunt Anna is in a completely different place ... How is old, dear Aunt Marya, oh, such a grumbler. Do you know her?”

“How can I not know her, she’s my aunt.”

“Well, I be! It means that you and I are kin. It’s strange in life – we meet when we least expect.”



My brother inquired in detail about the news from Nikitovka, about Pëtr's family, our new relative, about Aunt Marya. Pëtr was glad to find a fellow countryman and talked willingly. Then my brother told him the same things, varying them slightly. So we gained a friend and even a "relative" among our guards.

Another soldier, Pavel, likewise ended up in the same regiment and took part in the same battles as my brother. Or rather, my brother had been where he had been.

They recalled the battles in which they had taken part (all battles are alike), and moved by the reminiscences, the soldier gave my brother a cigarette. Although my brother didn't normally smoke, he did so with obvious pleasure. The other soldiers listened sympathetically. My brother managed to create a benevolent atmosphere among our guards.

Then my brother offered to arrange a vote about us, which was the trendy thing to do at the time, and, without waiting for the consent of the crowd, he took the organisation of the vote into his own hands.

"You, Pëtr," he turned to our new relative, "what do you say? Let us go or not?"

Pëtr was confused. Finally he said, "I don't know ... I will go with the opinion of the majority."

The formula has been found.

"So, one for release," my brother said. "And you, Pavel?"

Pavel repeated the formula.

"Two for release. And you? .. You? .. You, comrade? .. You?"

Everyone repeated the formula, except for the commissar, who was asked last. He said: "And my decision is to take you to the headquarters."

"What is it, comrades?" exclaimed my brother. "Forty-two votes that said to let go, and one only against and he wants to do it his own way, not paying attention to your vote. This is an abuse of power. Where is equality and justice, I ask you, comrades? He thinks he is a gold-striped officer and can do what he wants. No, comrade, those times are over. Now everyone is equal before the law. We must respect the will of the people, the opinion of the majority. Comrades, can you really tolerate such an attitude towards you? He acts like a bourgeois, despising the opinion of the people. Am I right, comrades?"

This little speech was a success. The back rows were agitated. There were exclamations:

"You know, he is right."

"What do you think, Commissar, that you are better than us?"

"For such things, you can be smacked in the face."

Apparently, the commissar wasn't much loved. He was confused. But he soon regained control of himself.

"Comrades, these are cunning counter-revolutionaries, they are deceiving you."

The crowd fell silent. The mood turned bad again. But the commissar himself wasn't sure of his men. He decided to get rid of us.

"Go ahead along this road," he said. "We will catch up with you."

But we didn't want to, because that was when they shot you in the back of the head.

"We don't know the way, give us two guides."

My brother pulled out our new friends by the arm. We moved away a little. The commissar began to speak in a low voice, gathering people into a circle.

"Petya,⁷ my friend, you can arrange it. I really don't want to go to headquarters," said my brother.

"You are absolutely right. They shoot there, without questioning first."

⁷ Now using the informal variant of Pëtr.



"I see. Go talk to the Commissar nicely. What does he want? I agree to pay him a bottle of vodka."

"Ah, that's a good idea. Wait for me here, I'll talk to him."

He returned very soon.

"The Commissar agrees."

"Good man. How much is the bottle here?"

"One hundred roubles."

"One hundred roubles! How expensive. In Moscow, you can get one for forty. Well, okay. One hundred, so one hundred it is."

He counted it out in loose change. You didn't want to look rich. What would stop our friends from robbing us?

"Here's a hundred roubles and three more for you to have a drink."

The deal had been made, but it was shaky. Would the commissar want to carry it out? He probably didn't agree to it voluntarily – so did he intend to shoot us at the last moment? The most difficult thing was to leave our new friends. We went back to the others. The commissar was saying something quietly, and as we approached, he fell silent. My brother shook his hand with feeling.

"We got excited and said a bit too much, please don't take offence. Peace is always better than a dispute."

My brother stayed with the commissar, not giving him the opportunity to come to an agreement with his henchmen (to finish us off). We sat down in a circle and were offered cigarettes. We didn't usually smoke, but we took them, and told them of the news from Moscow.

My brother looked at the moon. My nerves were so tense that I understood without words. A rather large cloud was approaching the moon. It would get dark in a few minutes. We had to take advantage of the darkness to leave. In the dark we would have a better chance of hiding from bullets and pursuit. A cloud covered the moon. We got up.

"It is very pleasant to talk to you, but we must hurry to find our companions. Otherwise, they will leave and take our money to buy flour," (all an invention to facilitate leaving).

"When we return, please don't delay us and, most importantly, don't take away our flour ... Goodbye, Pëtr. Bow to Aunt Marya for me ... Goodbye, Pavel, I was glad to meet with you, old chap. You and I have experienced things that aren't forgotten. Goodbye friends. I'll see you again. Thank you for your good, humane attitude."

We shook hands with everyone.

"Wait a little longer," the commissar tried to detain us.

"No, no, it's impossible. We have already been delayed too much. Our friends will leave and we will be unable to find them."

It was dark. We turned and walked with a long strides. The commissar began to whisper with his satellites. We were almost out of their sight.

"Run on tip toe," my brother whispered (so that no steps can be heard).

We ran as fast as we could, to get as far away from them as possible.

"To the right, in the wheat, run in zigzags and lie down."

We ran into high wheat and ran separately in zigzags so as not to leave a visible trace, and then fell to the ground, covering our faces with our sleeves (a face lit by the moon is visible), and remained motionless.

The horsemen were already galloping along the road, looking for us. They rode off, then returned, and entered the wheat. Muffled voices and the rustling of horses could be heard. Then everything was quiet. We didn't move – they might ambush us.



An infinitely long time passed. How do you measure time in such cases? I heard a very light rustle of straw. It wasn't a man. I looked cautiously – it was a hare.

Since the hare was about, then there were probably no people.

I took off my cap and, without rising above the level of the wheat, looked carefully around. I listened – nothing. Then I whistled softly, as we used to whistle on the hunt. My brother answered. We met up.

“Not on the road. Let's go through the wheat.”

After an hour of walking, we saw several huts. One had a faint light. An old woman was baking bread. She gave us milk and showed us the border. It was a small river.

We took two horses from the herd and crossed the river with them.

We were in the Ukraine. We lay in the bushes and fell asleep. That night we had walked more than 60 km and our feet were blistered.

In the evening we reached Yampol, where we met our three Germans. They got us a pass from the German commandant.

A bottle of vodka for two lives is inexpensive. Since then, vodka has become like living water to me – I owe it my life.

I remember the resourcefulness and composure of my brother with admiration. He brought us out of a completely hopeless situation.

To the Volunteer Army

In Kharkov, I fell ill with the Spanish flu, which delayed our departure to the Don. My friend's fiancée, Miss Ruktshel, found us and brought a doctor who put me back on my feet.

From Rostov we went to Ekaterinodar, which had just been occupied by the Volunteer Army. The gentleman who was traveling with us turned to us.

“You are going to the Army. But keep in mind that the bitterness is terrible. I advise you to destroy all documents related to the Bolsheviks. Otherwise, if they find them, you will be considered Soviet spies and shot on the spot. I'm not kidding.”

Sitting at the station in Ekaterinodar, we didn't know what to do. My brother knew General Erdeli, but he had ended up in Tiflis. To enter the cavalry, you had to have a horse and a saddle.

And we really didn't want to join the infantry. Without acquaintances, without connections and almost without money, our situation seemed to us unenviable.

Suddenly a tanned officer with a carbine over his shoulders looked at me attentively.

“Mamontov? I'm Lieutenant Abramov, 64th Brigade. My train is about to leave. Listen to me carefully. Go to General Nevadovski, the former commander of the 64th. He is now the inspector of the horse artillery. Ask him for a position in the 1st Horse-mountain Battery. It has several officers of the 64th in it. Goodbye, otherwise my train will leave.”

He appeared like a delivering angel. And I hadn't recognised him. I immediately went to General Nevadovski.

“Your Excellency, Ensign Mamontov of the 64th Brigade. I'm here because of my arrival in the city of Ekaterinodar.”

“But, ensign, where is your uniform?”

“Your Excellency, I have just come from Moscow.”

“Ah, then that's another matter.”

And turning to his officers, “Here are my men of the 64th – everyone is going together.”

Again to me. “Of course, you can go in our 1st Horse-mountain Battery.”



“Thank you, Your Excellency. I have a favour to ask you.”

“What’s the matter?” He frowned, “Is it money?”

“I have come with my brother. Although he is an infantry officer, he knows how to ride and we would like to stay together.”

He frowned some more, and my heart skipped a beat. Then, “I cannot refuse an officer of the 64th. Okay ... Captain, give them the proper papers ... Goodbye, Ensign, and I wish you the best.”

I returned triumphantly to the station and handed the papers to my brother.

“This is fantastic! It is better than anyone could have dreamed of. Horse artillery, a wonderful kind of weapon.”

“Now where to stay for a few days, before leaving for the battery?”

An officer whom my brother met at the station said, “Call at any house and you will be given a room and fed. Come on, I’ll show you how it’s done.”

Indeed, we were greeted with open arms.

“Volunteers? Come in soon, we’re just sitting down at the table.”

