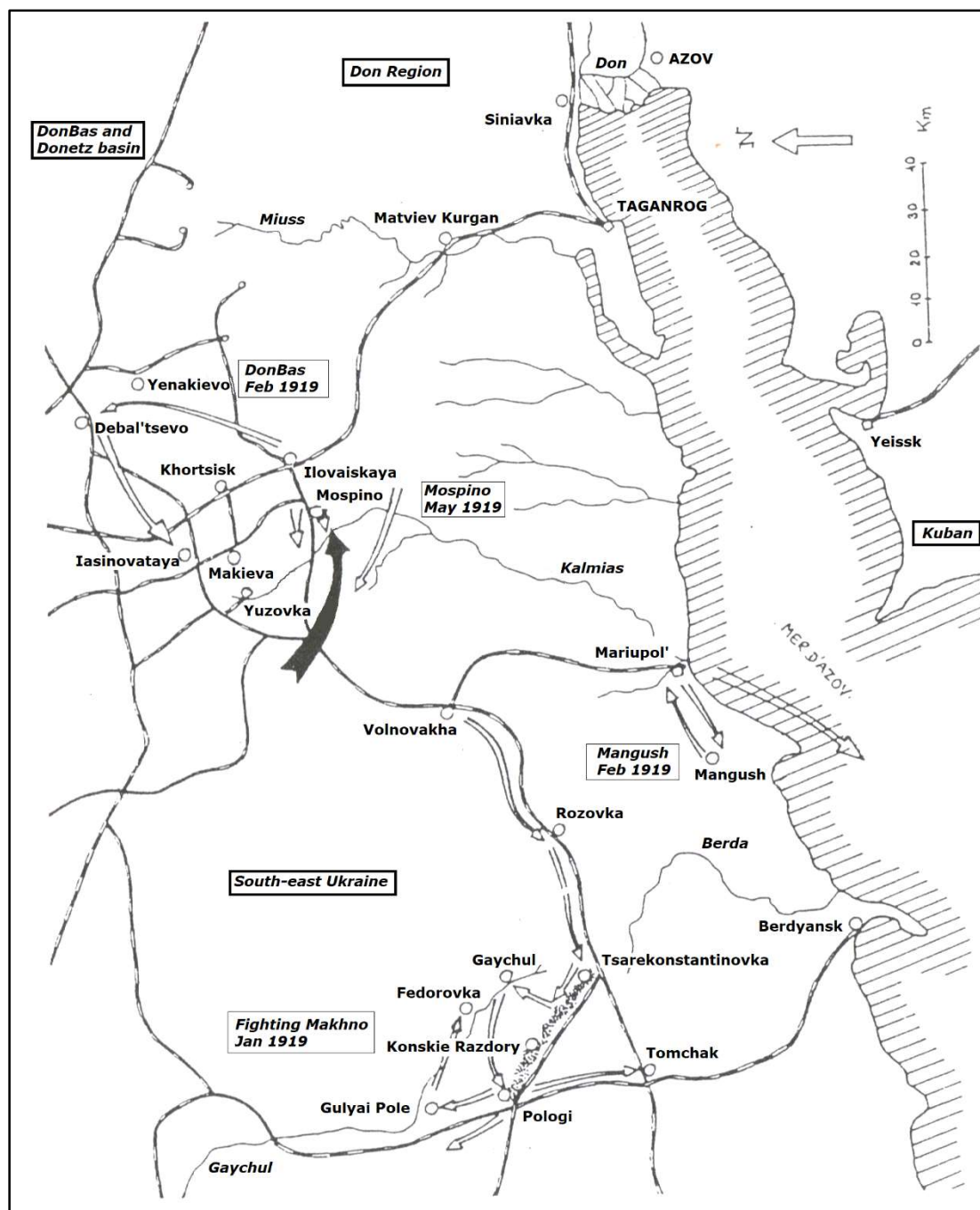


## Chapter 6 – In the Donbas



### In the Train

A long train of boxcars moved slowly across the steppe. We were loaded up alongside the cavalry in Tokmak and taken ... Actually, we didn't know where they were taking us, and we weren't very interested. Of course, we were being taken to fight somewhere, but at the time we felt good. Transportation by rail represented a rest for us, replacing constant campaigns and battles. We were warned that an attack by the Makhnovists was possible, and ordered to be on the alert. We were always ready, but no one attacked us.

There were eight horses in the car, four on each side, heads inward. The reins were tied to a board that was placed in front of the horses' heads. In the middle there was a space for hay and room for several people. Horses quickly get used to it and behave calmly, especially if there are people with them ...

The wheels beat out evenly. In the darkness, speakers weren't visible, and therefore what was said took on an abstract character.

"Why is the majority of the population hostile to us?"



"Communism is a new idea, attractive to ordinary people, and the Bolsheviks are conducting good propaganda ..."

"Exactly. With short, understandable slogans. 'Loot the looters' – who can resist that? And our propaganda is complex and incomprehensible to the peasant ..."

"The peasants will turn their back on communism when they get to know it. They are slow-witted and, perhaps, it will be too late – we will no longer be there to help them ..."

"Our pillaging hurts our cause!"

"They looted my house. I don't see why I shouldn't loot their house."

"Humanity has created only three moral laws. The savage's law: 'I stole it – that's good. They stole it from me – that's bad.' A long time passed, and Moses gave his law: 'An eye for an eye.' Logical and understandable. Centuries passed and Christ said: 'Love your neighbour.' A very lofty law, but incomprehensible."

"How can you love fellow citizens or a whole nation? I can love those I know – neighbours, relatives, acquaintances. Love them for their positive qualities. But to abstractly love a whole people, whose qualities I don't know, is, in my opinion, just nonsense ..."

"Yes, in wartime all laws are turned upside down: kill, do as much harm as possible and don't tell the truth ... The Law of Moses is more understandable than the Law of Christ."

"It is quite logical. Christ did not wear a uniform, and Moses fought all the time."

"The laws of war are cynical. You are allowed to turn men into corpses in this way, but this other way is considered incorrect. Ha, ha. If it's a war, then all methods are good."

"It is necessary to distinguish between what is useful and what is not. Previously, they simply massacred the population, but in modern wars you try to attract the population to your side. Propaganda is very important."

"Continuous lies and demagoguery are your propaganda."

"I don't claim it isn't. Propaganda is based on the stupidity and ignorance of people. But we mustn't forget that stupidity is the greatest force in the world. The masses are stupid and amenable to propaganda. There's no need to tell the truth, but repeat a lie ten thousand times, and the masses will take the lie for the truth. Lenin said that, and he is a specialist in lies and propaganda."

"The revolution was made by the clever propaganda of the left."

"Hmm ... Not everything they said was a lie. The government and the tsar did a lot of stupid things."

"You see, you fell for propaganda. Of course, there were mistakes, as elsewhere, but no more than in France or England. The propaganda, on the other hand, exaggerated the mistakes and hushed up the successes. The impression was of rot. And in vain. In general, things weren't going so badly. Russia has developed in giant strides."

"Actually, it was to stop the development that Germany declared war on us. In ten years, Russia would have become invincible. Our products had begun to displace German products from Asian markets ..."

"The tsar was weak, of course, it would have been better to have had Aleksander III with his iron fist. But the tsar atoned for his mistakes with his death."

"I think that there were only two possibilities for the tsar: on the throne or in his coffin. Imagine a tsar in exile – that would be terrible ..."

"Russia has industrialised. We had Mendeleev, Sikorski, Stolypin and many other outstanding people."

"Tell me, what did Stolypin do? You often hear about him, but I don't know exactly what he did."



“Hamlets and single farms. Reforms in favour of the peasants. The peasant could stand outside the *mir*<sup>29</sup> and receive the land as personal property.

“How, weren’t the peasants already the owners of the land?”

“No. The land belonged to the *mir*. It was redistributed every five to seven years, depending on population growth. Lots were drawn for each parcel. The peasant wasn’t sure that he would receive the same allotment again, and had no interest in improving the land. Stolypin’s law made him the hereditary owner of the land, but without the right to sell, in order to protect him from speculators. The peasant’s dream is to be the owner of the land. The revolutionaries were against this reform. They realised that peasant owners wouldn’t want a revolution ... Then Stolypin created peasant banks with the construction of granaries throughout the country.”

“I don’t understand why granaries ...”

“Here’s why. The peasants needed money in the spring to sow. Previously speculators gave him money at huge interest rates and at the same time negotiated a low price for grain in the fall. Now the banks gave the peasants loans on favourable terms, and the peasants could sell grain at the granary at prices set by the state. The state always had a supply of grain for the army, or for a possible famine year or for sale abroad. This latter didn’t please the large landowners, who used to sell grain abroad, and they linked up with the revolutionaries and killed Stolypin.”

“In addition, emigration to Siberia has been very well organised lately – there were almost no returnees. This was done by the *zemstvo*, that is, the population itself. So the peasant’s three main dreams came true: he became the owner of the land, was protected from want and, if the family grew, he could get more land in Siberia. The population of Siberia has grown tremendously due to the reforms.”

“This was the solution to the issue. Stolypin’s death and the war stopped the implementation of this plan.”

“Note that the revolutionaries recognised the plan as good, but wanted the peasants to receive land not from the government, but from them, after the revolution. After all, the main thing for them was ministerial posts, and if the government distributed land, their ministerial posts were worthless. They made the revolution, but failed to keep power. The Bolsheviks seized power and dispossessed the farmers, that is, the hardest-working peasants. That is why they have a constant grain crisis ...”

“You can’t rely on the help of the Allies. They have their own policy. Perhaps we will be able to cope with the Bolsheviks on our own. It would be better ...”

“Industry and railways were under construction ...”

“Our higher education wasn’t bad. Our engineers weren’t inferior to foreign ones. Our justice system was good: Justices of the Peace for small cases, and juries for large ones. Most importantly, the Ministry didn’t make the accusations, but had control over the legal proceedings. In that we were ahead of many countries ...”

The pauses grew longer. Apparently some of us fell asleep. I pushed Gaychul some hay and checked if my carbine was loaded.

“Our rouble was accepted all over the world.”

“There was a law – the borders were automatically closed against the exportation of grain as soon as famine was declared in a province. Merchants immediately sent grain there in order to reopen the border for themselves. In this simple way, hunger was eliminated, even without government action.”

“There were almost no illiteracy among the youth ...”

“Russian science had many world names. In literature, music and theatre, we were ...”

The wheels sang rhythmically: tra-ta-ta, tra-ta-ta. I turned on my side and fell asleep.

## The “Officer”

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<sup>29</sup> The village collective.



We were unloaded at Ilovaiskaya. The Donetsk basin left a bad impression on me. It was February 1919. It was cold and damp, with constant fogs. The population – the miners – were hostile to us. The houses were small and completely unsuitable as military quarters. There were no stables and no barns. Provisioning was difficult and there was no fodder.

The Donetsk basin is covered with a dense network of railways, and the Reds launched several armoured trains against us, which were difficult to deal with and disturbed our squadrons. Each battle involved one, two, and sometimes even three Red armoured trains. At first, there were no armoured trains on our side, but then they sent us several and some balance was restored.

We often had to fight armoured trains, but our battery never managed to knock out a single one. To stop an armoured train, you hit its locomotive or cause a derailment by hitting a wheel or a rail.

Once a Red armoured train appeared unexpectedly, out of goodness knows where, and passed not far from the battery. We fired all the shells we could at it. We probably hit it, but it was still able to escape.

Another time, near Debaltsevo, we had a real duel with an armoured train. It was about two kilometres from us. The flashes of its shots were clearly visible, and through binoculars we could see the sailors serving the guns. As soon as we saw their flashes, we threw ourselves to the ground, and their shells flew with a whistle over our heads and exploded immediately behind the battery. Then everyone jumped up, rushed to the guns and fired. There were flashes again and everyone dived under the gun. An explosion – and everyone rushed to the gun again. This went on for endless minutes. The armoured train couldn't take it, started to smoke and left. Maybe we landed a shell on it. We were sincerely surprised that we got off without loss.

The first armoured train that came to our aid was the famous "Officer". Its commander was a real headcase, but unfortunately I don't remember his name. His behaviour left us stunned. In the evening he always took it to the same bend, covered by bushes, staying there silently with the locomotive smoking lightly, taking no part in the fight.

But one day a very modern Red armoured train, all stream-lined in shape, came too close to the place where the Officer was hiding. The Officer's locomotive fired up, and it rushed forward, firing with all its guns. This caught the Reds by surprise, and they had no time to retreat. The Officer's shells hit the enemy locomotive. The White train ran into the Red one with a bang, hooked him up – while sitting among the chains of the Red infantry – and dragged it back to our lines.

Our chains greeted the Officer's feat with a shout of "Urra!", and the Reds fled. We could see men jumping from the Red train and running, but the cavalrymen arrived in time to chop them down.

The psychological success was so strong that we occupied Debaltsevo easily, despite not being able to take before. But we were too few in number to make full use of the success, and we had to halt there. Unfortunately, I wasn't present at the feat myself, because I had fallen ill.

After that, as soon as the Officer appeared, the enemy retreated, both the infantry and armoured trains. The Red infantry, while numerous, consisted of miners and wasn't staunch.

### **Olkhovatka**

There was a thick fog – nothing could be seen more than a few paces away. We entered Olkhovatka farm. The squadrons and the battery stopped at the only street in the farm. On one side of the street were houses, on the other just barns.

I hooked Gaychul's reins to a fence and entered a hut. There was only one old woman inside, who didn't answer either my greeting or my questions.

"Deaf and dumb," I thought.

There was a jug of milk on the table. I took it and began to drink. A shot rang out outside. I froze with the jar in my hand and listened. A few more shots. The old woman who was watching me burst into demonic laughter, looking at me with hatred. Even the hair on my head rose with fear. I threw the jar on the floor and ran out.



Gaychul reared up, and on the other side of the fence, a man, barely visible in the fog, fired. I tore the reins off the fence, jumped into the saddle and joined the battery, which was at a trot to get out of the farm. A few dozen paces away, they shot at us from behind a fence. We were half hidden by the fog but the gunner Ranzhiev was killed and another soldier was wounded. Someone's horse fell. The battery didn't stop.

"I'm injured," said Captain May, who was riding beside me.

I rode up to support him, but he stayed in the saddle.

Finally we left the farm. The shooting stopped. I jumped to the ground and walked over to May. He slid into my arms. He was dead, killed by two bullets. The squadrons and the battery dismounted and, with carbines in their hands and anger in their hearts, went back to the farm. We met no resistance – it was only the inhabitants who had ambushed us. The men ran away, and those who we caught were shot right there. In the hut where I drank milk, a peasant in a hat was lying and groaning. The old woman assured me that he was ill. The blanket was ripped off – a rifle lay next to him. The roofs of some huts were doused with kerosene from lamps and lit. But the wet straw didn't catch fire, just smouldered.

Some time later, the battery spent the night in the same farm. The inhabitants, of course, didn't recognise us and told us about the atrocities, but they were silent about the reason. The death of Captain May was a great loss for the battery – he was an excellent officer. For me personally he was a model, and often helped me with advice.

I fell ill and the doctor sent me, Cadet Mokasey-Shibinski and our Jewish tailor to Mariupol, to our which is where the supply train of our second reserve was.

I gave Gaychul to Lieutenant Lagutin. The carbine remained with my brother.



## Chapter 7 – Mariupol and Feodosia

### Mariupol

We arrived in Mariupol by rail. It turned out that our reserve wagon train had left for Taganrog a few days previously. The Jewish tailor immediately found some acquaintances and separated from us – we never saw him again.

With Mokasey-Shibinskiy, I walked along the main street, not knowing what to do when we saw the newly opened infirmary. We entered it and were received, it seems, as the first patients. What a luxury! Clean, spacious, warm and light. Real beds with sheets, pillowcases, attentive doctors, pretty sisters. We were in heaven. What a bliss to wash in a bathroom, dress in clean clothes, get rid of lice, sleep in a clean bed, not be afraid to be woken up by gunshots.

Mokasey had a relapse of typhus, I had pleurisy, and they used suction on me.

Soon the infirmary was filled with patients. A “club” was formed from the first patients, which was held on the beds of me and my neighbour, a Muscovite called Smirnov who was a volunteer in the Ingermanland Hussars. The sisters were friendly with us and attended our club.

The doctors and nurses sometimes resorted to the help of our club to establish order among the new arrivals. I remember one incident. A cadet of the Guards Regiment arrived and didn't want to give up his rifle, wanting to put it on the bed next to him. The chief doctor, an old man, tried in vain to grab it from him. The cadet didn't give it up, and the whole room was laughing at this indecent spectacle.

Then I got up, went to him and said in a quiet but resolute voice: “Cadet, I'm an officer and I order you to obey the rules of the infirmary.”

The *junker* reached out and handed me the rifle. The laughter ceased and the doctor took the rifle away. I, blushing deeply, went to my room.

After that I stood at the window. A sick man approached me, apparently an officer.

“You don't know me, but I know you. I saw you and your brother at Tikhoretskaya station (when we were transferred to the Ukraine from the North Caucasus). Do you know what this is?”

He showed me in the crook of his hand a cardboard strip like Captain May had showed me. Only on his, instead of two, had four transverse stripes, which meant a high rank in the monarchist organisation.

“Yes, I know.”

He hid the cardboard in his pocket.

“Don't come to me, don't talk. Perhaps we will need you.”

He walked away, leaving me at a loss. I wanted to explain that I didn't belong to that organisation, but he had already left. After that I was afraid of him, but fortunately, he didn't need me.

There was no officer section in the infirmary; everyone was mixed together. And I think it was a good thing. There was no privilege, and so no envy. Of course, men grouped themselves by affinities: Cossacks together, soldiers in one corner, officers in another. The food was good, there were books. I didn't feel sick – I was very young and well trained from hunting (during the hunt I often got wet, and tired, and had to walk a lot).

But happiness, as you know, doesn't last. The Makhnovists approached the city, which had no troops in it – only men of the reserve train, whose personnel, it was well known, are worthless soldiers. Mokasey and I began to think about what to do. Smirnov came and in great secrecy said that during the night the Ingermanland wagon train would leave for Taganrog and they would take us with him.

In dangerous moments, it is better to be with soldiers.

We were discharged from the infirmary, although the doctor said it was early and spent the night in the Ingermanland wagon train. It didn't leave, and in the morning all the hussars were given rifles and cartridges. We went out into the street again at a loss as to what to do. Suddenly we saw a poster for a



mobilisation and decided to go there. There were about three hundred people, of various trash: fat businessmen, bureaucrats afraid of guns, and high school students in their last year. With great difficulty, they managed to form two lines from the crowd. We were given French triple-shot rifles and a hundred rounds of ammunition.

“We will advance against the Makhnovists. Volunteers – three steps forward.”

My principle was: ‘Don’t ask for service, don’t refuse service.’ I didn’t have time to grab Mokasey by the overcoat but he had already stepped forward. All the young, that is, the best, were in the front, there was only cripples left behind. Then I stepped forward. But the commander of our laughable company, an artillery lieutenant, grabbed me by my sheepskin coat.

“What am I going to do with them by myself? Stay, for God’s sake. So there will be at least two of us.”

I stayed. The lieutenant brought hand grenades, but none of our men wanted to take them, just dismissed them with horror. I had to share them with the lieutenant. The attack was scheduled for midnight, and until that time we were dismissed to our homes. Festooned with grenades, with a rifle, in a dirty and tattered sheepskin coat, with a ludicrously crooked *papakha* (otherwise it wouldn’t stay on to my head, it was too big), I looked more like a Makhnovist, and people moved away from me on the sidewalk. We went to the infirmary, where we were fed, and we took a nap.

### **Mangush**

We arrived at the assembly point before midnight. Not all of them showed up – some got cold feet and hid. We formed two companies. The first of the young and the second, ours, was truly something to laugh at.

“There is to be an attack on Mangush – the centre of the Makhnovists. Other units, formed from the regimental trains, are advancing along the sea coast,” the commander explained to us. “We, on the right flank, are marching against the village of Mangush, and our goal is to not allow reinforcements to approach the Makhnovists from the right. Since the first company is the best, it will remain in reserve. The second (that is, ours) will lead the attack.”

They put us on carts. Nobody wanted to sit on the one where I sat because of the grenades on my belt. But there weren’t enough seats, and some had to join me. They huddled away from me. Nevertheless, during the journey (18 km) I managed to persuade my fellow travellers to take a grenade from me. (I myself was scared to death of them.) And the last one, I put under the straw of the cart while dismounting.

It was just getting light when we got off the carts at Mangush. We stopped at a knoll. The land descended down into a ravine and climbed on the other side towards the village. Smoke rose from the huts of Mangush a kilometre away in front of us. After much effort, the lieutenant managed to scatter us into a chain. Everyone tried to herd together. We set off in the direction of the village. It wasn’t cold, but overcast, there was no snow. I think it was at the end of February or at the very beginning of March 1919.

Ahead, at the bottom of the hollow, stood a patrol of three of our hussars. The Makhnovists weren’t visible. Suddenly a machine gun fired, and one of the hussars was wounded. His comrades put him back in the saddle and took him to the rear, supporting him on both sides.

At the first shot of the machine gun, our company started running forward. I was very surprised. Was I wrong about them? They turned out to be brave! But then I realised that their desire was to hide in the ravine, where they considered themselves safe. I followed them slowly. So we sat in the ravine. I went up to the lieutenant.

“You can’t stay here. You can’t see anything here. The Makhnovists can come close.”

“You’re right. I will send a scout. You,” he pointed at me, “and ... (all the rest immediately turned away) and I will go with you. Wait a bit before following me.”

He climbed out of the ravine, and I immediately heard a shot. Then I jumped out too. The lieutenant was on one knee and aiming at three horsemen forty paces from us.

“Wait, don’t shoot, maybe they’re ours.”



Without answering me, he fired and one rider fell. Then I killed one of the horses. Its rider grabbed the tail of the horse of the last rider, who set to whipping it. We won a victory, but, turning around, we saw our company in flight.

“Stay here, I will return the bastards,” said the lieutenant, and with terrible abuse he set off after the fleeing men.

I saw no danger and stayed. I even took aim at the last rider, but didn’t shoot. The thing is, I hated killing unnecessarily. During the entire war, I didn’t kill anyone. Of course, while firing a cannon I killed some. But that was another matter, that was a collective weapon, it doesn’t count. Being only at forty metres, I could have easily killed the rider, but I shot at the horse.

I watched with curiosity the Makhnovist who was holding on to the tail of the horse. The horse was galloping, and he pushed off the ground and made giant leaps. I thought, “I need to remember that method, maybe it will come in handy for me.” It came in handy for me that day, and again much later.

Eventually I was convinced that the lieutenant wouldn’t be able to stop the fleeing men and slowly followed him. I thought they would stop at the knoll, but no, they ran to the carts to leave. Then I was afraid that they would leave me, and started to run. Bullets started pounding around me. I turned around – a long chain of Makhnovists emerged from Mangush. I estimated it at six hundred men. They were far away – about six hundred paces from me, but the bullets landed well, as could be seen from the dust. Strangely, the Makhnovists looked more like soldiers than peasants. They were all in khaki, perfectly aligned and shot well.

Meanwhile, our men ran to the carts, sat down and left. I managed to stop the last cart, threatening to kill the horse if it didn’t stop. I had just sat down on it when the horse was killed by a Makhnovist bullet. They all jumped off and ran to the other carts. Because of the pleurisy, I didn’t have enough breath, and I couldn’t run. I was left alone with a respectable gentleman with a large belly in a heavy fox fur coat. He was suffocating.

“I can’t take it anymore, I have a bad heart ...”

“Take off your fur coat, it will be easier for you,” I advised.

He looked at me angrily, decided that I wanted to take his fur coat, picked up its hem, and started to run very briskly behind the knoll. It was so funny that I burst out laughing despite my dangerous situation.

All our units turned out to be incapable of fighting. All fled at the very first shots, leaving two howitzers to the Makhnovists. They didn’t even remove the bolts and sights from them. But the Makhnovists, also terrible artillerymen, used them poorly and scattered shells uselessly across the steppe. The gunboat, which was supposed to support us from the sea, couldn’t leave port because of the ice. The first company, which I had hoped would lead the attack on the enemy, was taken away as the most reliable unit to cover the evacuation of the city.

My position was bad. Because of my pleurisy, I was short of breath, and I couldn’t run for any time. Our men left me and drove away. I walked, climbed the knoll and hoped to see our chains behind it – no one. There was no one behind the next hill either. And so on many, many times. Once I crossed the hill, the Makhnovists stopped firing – they couldn’t see me. But I was afraid that their three horsemen would be able to get to my flank or rear. I started running downhill. Then the chain of Makhnovists appeared again, and the shooting resumed. To catch my breath, I stopped and fired a clip at them. Of course my bullets didn’t harm them, but I think their whistle held them back especially the zealous ones, showing that I would defend myself.

It didn’t occur to me to get rid of my ammunition to lighten my load. I walked, ran, stopped and fired, walked again, ran again, fired again, and so on endlessly among a swarm of bullets. The taste of blood appeared in my mouth. The horizon began to waver. Of course, it was me who was swaying, not the horizon.

‘You need to breathe deeply. Just don’t fall down and land in their hands alive.’





This time, strangely, I wasn't particularly afraid, although I was fully aware of the hopelessness of my situation. I didn't lose my mind even for a minute, as had happened previous times. I thought clearly and intensely the whole time.

My ears were buzzing, and I didn't hear the shots, but I saw the dust from the bullets. Sometimes I saw a trail of machine-gun dust in front of me. It started from the left, approached me ... 'Now, a blow in my back, and everything will be over. Please just kill me, not wound and then torture me,' I thought almost indifferently ... The dust passed to the right, returned and passed to the left.

I was caught between two thoughts. My mind said, 'It's over this time. You won't be able to get out. Better to do it yourself. Take off your shoes, put the muzzle of the gun in your mouth and press the trigger with your big toe – your skull will fly to pieces.' But for that I needed to stop, sit down, take off my shoes – a waste of time.

Another voice – the life instinct – shouted: 'Don't weaken and don't give up until the last moment. You need to try everything to save your life. Maybe something will happen. Guardian angel, help and intercede.' And once more I walked, ran, shot. And they followed me, shot and got closer. I kept hoping that they would fall behind. It seemed idiotic to pursue one man with a whole regiment. As it turned out later, it was a counterattack by the Makhnovists, my misfortune was that I was in their way.

The sun began to tilt towards the west. "My God! How many hours does this nightmare last? It started before dawn! Lord, send me a horse, no matter how bad, but a horse.

I stopped to catch my breath and release a clip at the Makhnovists. I couldn't aim correctly, because the horizon was swinging about. I leant over and waited for their chain to come into my sight. I shot over their heads because of the distance. I was shooting in the direction of the horsemen – I was afraid of them. But they didn't try to get behind me. Presumably our morning meeting had left an unpleasant memory for them. I fired all three rounds and turned.

Blood went to my head. Two horsemen stood twenty paces behind me. I grabbed a new clip and began to frantically load, but, of course, the clip jammed. Only then did I see the shoulder boards they were wearing.

Ours!!!

How I loved them, these unfamiliar horsemen!

"What are you doing here?" the captain asked me.

"As you can see, I'm fighting the enemy. My men abandoned me. I couldn't run as fast as they did because I'm sick."

"I knew that our troops weren't here, and so the shooting intrigued me. I came to see what was up."

"For which I'm forever grateful to you, because I'm at my last strength."

"Jokes aside, you need to get out of here."

"Take my rifle, I'll take your horse's tail. Go at a trot."

The captain sent his orderly to fetch a cart for me. For some time I trailed behind the tail of the horse. But I became weak, my legs became soft, and could no longer push off.

"No, I can't. Give me a stirrup, I'll sit behind you and give you the stirrup back."

"You will pull me off the saddle," said the captain with concern.

Apparently, the Makhnovists intensified their fire at us. I didn't hear the shots – my ears were buzzing.

"Don't worry – I'm a horse artilleryman."

I sat down behind him. What bliss it was to feel a horse underneath me! The captain went at a light gallop, and soon we went over a hill. The Makhnovist shooting ceased. I was saved!

A cart was rolling towards us, accompanied by the orderly. I got on the cart and warmly thanked my saviour, Captain Kublitski.



My nightmare, in which death was my faithful companion, was over. I found myself in a kind of apathetic stupor. Of course, there was joy, but mostly apathy.

### **By Steamer**

I went to our company. The lieutenant was confused.

“Why didn’t you take a cart and try to rescue me? After all, you could hear the shooting!”

“I couldn’t leave the company – they would have fled. And, after all, there was no one to send – they are all cowards. They wouldn’t have gone to you.”

“I don’t want to be stay with such a jerks. I’m totally ill.”

The Makhnovist counterattack didn’t take place. I think they wasted all their ammunition firing at me.

An officer drove by in a cab. His face was familiar to me.

“Aren’t you Colonel Ilyenko?”

“Yes, what’s your name?”

“Ensign Mamontov. Son of Ivan Fedorovich.”

“Oh! Sit down. I was friends with your parents. Where are you going?”

“Into town. To the infirmary. I have pleurisy.”

“The city has been evacuated. The infirmary is on the steamer now. I’ll take you there. I’m the harbour master.”

On the boat, the sisters and the club greeted me with an ovation. I lay down in a back corner and immediately fell asleep, completely exhausted.

### **Evacuation**

I thought I was going to get sicker as a result of the previous day’s incidents, but when I woke up I was pleasantly amazed that I felt excellent. I thought that I had completely recovered. I was very hungry.

“There is nothing,” said sister Olya, “we were evacuated so hastily that we didn’t take anything with us. I wonder how long we will be on the steamer without food and blankets, because we will freeze.”

I suggested that the club members go and get everything we needed from the infirmary, unless it had already been plundered. The members of the club were hungry and enthusiastically agreed. Mokasey came along.

We mobilised several carts. It was easy to do. Carters, for a lot of money, were bringing townsfolk down to the pier. And it was them that we requisitioned. To our delight, the infirmary hadn’t been looted. We left two armed men at the gates. They were to warn us if suspicious people or Makhnovists appeared, and not let the carters scatter.

First, we loaded all the food, pots, and dishes from the lower floor. A barbaric but quick method was used to evacuate the top floor. We spread blankets in front of the wardrobes, opened them and tipped them onto the blankets. Then we removed the wardrobes, knotted up the blankets containing the contents and threw it out into the yard. From there they were loaded onto a cart. Blankets and linen endured this simple method without much harm, instruments less so, and medicines not particularly successfully. But we got everything out quickly and we triumphantly returned to the ship. The food and blankets saved us from hunger and cold on the trip.

The Sea of Azov was free of ice in the middle, but the edges were ice-locked, and the steamers couldn’t leave the harbour. They telegraphed Taganrog, asking them to send an ice breaker, but for some reason it didn’t come. We were worried that the Makhnovists would capture us in the port.

But then the wind changed, and the ice moved away from the coast, freeing the steamers. We immediately withdrew to Kerch. We stayed in Kerch for a day, because there was a storm on the Black Sea.



## Feodosia

On leaving the Kerch Strait, we saw the masts of a sunken ship.

“Bumped into a mine,” the captain explained. “A lot of them are around still after the war.”

We became uncomfortable, and we asked the captain not to move too far from shore.

We were unloaded in Feodosia and put in a half-empty house. In the courtyard lived a warlike donkey, from which we escaped via a high porch.

The French gave us green coffee beans but we didn't have a mill. I took them and went to the neighbours. In the kitchen and I asked the cook to roast and grind the coffee. The smell attracted the hostess into the kitchen, and she turned out to be a Muscovite, Princess Gagarina.

When she learned that I was a Muscovite, she said, “The bodies of several officers of the Horse Guards were brought here to the cathedral, among them there are Muscovites ...”

“Who?” I exclaimed, anticipating bad news.

“Obolenski, Tuchkov, Kozlovski ...”

“Which Tuchkov?”

“Dmitry Pavlovich. Did you know him?”

“He was my first cousin ... I didn't even know that Sasha and Mitya<sup>30</sup> were in the Volunteer Army.”

There were several coffins in the cathedral. An officer accompanying us told us what had happened.

“On 20 February 1919, during a cavalry attack at Blagodatnaya, Captain Tuchkov was killed by a bullet to the heart. The attack was successful, but all the officers were killed (I think four).”

Much later, another officer, after listening to my story, grunted.

“You are repeating the official version. What sort of successful attack has all the best officers killed? Clearly, this was one of the first attacks, the soldiers were still green and held their horses back, so all the officers were exposed out front.”

I often asked for more details, but the Horse Guards officers were very reluctant to talk about that attack.

Later, Mitya Tuchkov's mother came to Feodosia, and I went with her to Mitya's grave.

Our medical train was in Feodosia for a while.

## Memories

In Feodosia there was an estate that once belonged to my grandfather Rukavishnikov. As a child, we spent a very happy summer at it. Then my older brother fell ill with appendicitis, which they didn't know how to operate on yet. For a long time, my brother was between life and death. We, the rest of the children, were driven out into the garden so that we wouldn't make noise. The garden was large, and the vineyards then went all the way to the sea.

I went looking for old memories. The Moorish-style house was intact. It housed an infirmary. Subsequently, I went there to visit Captain Kanatov, a horse-mountain artillery officer, who died of a wound to the stomach. Strange, he was lying in the same room and in the same place as my brother many years previously.

The vineyards and park no longer existed. In their place were streets and houses. The mysterious grotto had disappeared, and the Gothic chapel, in which the mysterious “white woman” lived – past which we wouldn't have gone in the evening for any price – stood alone on the edge of the street.

It was sad, and I didn't even ask who owned the house.

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<sup>30</sup> Mitya being a diminutive for Dmitry.



## Return to the Unit

Our infirmary had been abolished. The patients were assigned to other hospitals, and we, the healthy ones, were offered a place in the infantry units to protect the Crimea. The defence of the Crimea was entrusted to General Slashchev. He used draconian measures, including executions, and he was very much feared. The Reds pressed hard, but Slashchev defended the peninsula.

The members of our club were mostly hussars, and Mokasey and I absolutely refused to serve in the infantry, especially after Mangush. We tried by all means to get to our unit again, that is, to desert from the Crimea to the Caucasus. It wasn't easy to accomplish – patrols grabbed everyone capable of carrying weapons and sent them to the infantry.

We left Feodosia for Kerch and got lucky there. A large French transport, the "Violetta", arrived with cartridges. It was going on to Novorossiysk. We pretended to be dockers, put boxes on our shoulders, climbed onto the steamer and hid in the hold.

Early in the morning from the deck we admired the outlines of the Caucasus Mountains and two dolphins playing in the bow wave.

In Novorossiysk, no one could tell us where our unit was, but they gave us rations as if we were returning from the hospital. We went to Rostov. The Don was in spate and flooded all the way up to Bataysk.

In Rostov, I met an officer from our battery, who refused to lend me 200 roubles, but instead said that the battery was in a German colony near Matveyev Kurgan. It was in the Army's reserve, that is, having a rest. Mokasey and I went there by train and, with great relief, found the battery wagons at the Matveyev Kurgan station. Finally we were home. Our tribulations were over.



## Chapter 8 – The Big Offensive

### Dura

What a joy it was to return to our battery, as if to your home, to your family. Our troubles were over. The officers and soldiers greeted me cordially, and my brother shook my hand with a sigh of relief.

“Finally! And I really thought you were dead. Well, thank God. Now everything is fine again. Where have you been?”

I told him about my misadventures, and about the death of Mitya Tuchkov.

The battery was in the Army’s reserve – that is, on leave – in a rich German colony three kilometres from Matveyev Kurgan. The rooms were spacious and clean, food was plentiful and forage plentiful.

In my absence, Gaychul had been killed under Lieutenant Lagutin, who had been looking after him. This news didn’t upset me very much – I had never really got attached to him.

All the officers went to the equipment train to choose a horse for me. There was a terrible assortment of nags. Clearly, the train didn’t take care of the horses. Probably not fed and watered poorly. This was the fault of the commander of the convoy, who couldn’t be bothered. I didn’t know what to do, when the sergeant of the convoy pointed to one of the nags.

“Take this one. This is Dura.”

“What? Dura? In that state!”

Dura had been a beautiful black mare with a white mark on her forehead, strong and lively. I often had to hold her as a horse holder in the North Caucasus. Lieutenant Ushakov rode her. He had left the battery and disappeared. Dura had been placed into the train and nearly died from poor care.

I examined her carefully. Her legs were intact, but everything else ... it was a pity just to look at her. She was no longer black, but rather brown and scabby. Her eyes were lifeless. All her ribs protruded, and her thinness was frightening. She could barely walk on trembling legs.

I took Dura, led her to the stable of my quarters and began to look after her. I spent all my time with her. She was watered, fed, cleaned and washed with tar soap. She had forgotten how to drink and eat. She barely ate. I didn’t insist at first, but fed her three times a day. She always had hay. I cleaned her every day and washed her every three days. She apparently liked it. Very quickly, my work gave results. Dura became more cheerful, began to drink and eat well. Her hide began to grow back, the scabs disappeared. Dura became black again. A lively expression appeared in her eyes. I noticed that she loved sunflower oil cakes, which I crushed for her in water. I thought that the rations that I received for Dura from the train weren’t enough, and I stole oats from the peasants.

Dura was resurrected, she grew round and cheerful. This meant that she had had no disease, but had only been exhausted from lack of food. I found a meadow with good grass under the trees and began to let Dura graze.

Finally the day, or rather the evening, came when I couldn’t catch Dura in order to take her back from the pasture to the stable. She ran away, escaping my hands. It made me angry and happy. It meant that she had recovered. I found my brother.

“You know what, I can’t catch Dura. Come help me.”

“Oh! Really? That means she has recovered now.”

She evaded us, but we drove her into the stable. My brother was amazed.

“How did you manage to heal her so quickly?! Now you have a beautiful horse. Fabulous!”

No one had seen the resurrected Dura, except for my brother. But everyone had seen, two weeks ago, her skeleton form when I led her to my stable.

Driving Dura from the pasture – she ran in front of me, not letting me take her bridle – I decided to saddle her. I hadn’t saddled her yet.



I rode out to the outskirts of the village and brought Dura to a trot. I bent down a little – she increased the trot. I bent down still more – the trot increased still, more and more. It was an intoxicating feeling, it seemed that her agility had no limits. I put her into a gallop and then pushed her to the limit. She flew like the wind. But I came to my senses and lowered her back to a walk, to take her home. Enough for the first time. It was dangerous to tire her too much on the first try. Every day, morning and evening, I began to ride the Dura and train her, gradually increasing the distance. She was very playful.

It was then that the battery officers decided to arrange some races. There were two favourites. Captain Malov's Laura and Captain Bazilevski's Don stallion. Other horses also took part.

Once in the mess I was offered a bet on one of the favourites. I declined.

"Why?"

"I want to take part in the races myself."

"But on which horse?"

"On Dura."

Everyone burst out laughing.

"What's with you? The horses will push her, she will fall and die."

I said nothing. But when, on the day of the races, I rode out in a well-cleaned Dura with oiled hooves and a combed mane, everyone gasped.

"Where did you get that horse?"

"This is Dura."

"It can't be!"

But they recognised her by the white spot on her forehead. Nobody laughed anymore. The colonels came over to look and also gasped.

"It's plain witchcraft, Mamontov," exclaimed Shapilovski.

"I plump for Dura and especially for Mamontov," said Colonel Kuzmin.

I gave him a grateful glance – he was a connoisseur and lover of horses.

"Congratulations," said Colonel Kolzakov, the battery commander. "Dura looks great."

I was beaming. My brother tried to appear indifferent, but he was proud of us.

Still, I had concerns. I knew that Dura was still weak and hadn't trained enough. Her advantage was in her agility, which wouldn't last long. Fortunately, the distance wasn't particularly great. I decided to immediately break free and go with might and main, not saving any strength for the end. That was the only way Dura could win. And she had to win in order to conclude the triumph of her resurrection. I felt that she would win.

At the signal, Dura took the start well and took the lead. I heard nothing behind me for three quarters of the way, and Dura flew like an arrow. This meant that my plan was succeeding – Dura had left them far behind. But soon behind my back the heavy snorting of the horses began to grow louder. Dura lowered her ears and pushed, but began to grow weak. The favourites moved on from both sides. Their heads reached my knees. At then we passed the finish line. Dura had won.

I jumped off, unsaddled her, rubbed her back and legs with straw, saddled her again and began to ride slowly so that she gradually returned to normal temperature. I had a fear that I was putting too much stress on her. But Dura endured the race well, there were no ill consequences.

The competitors, of course, shouted that I had won because I broke free early, that the distance was too short, and offered to repeat the race. I refused: it would have killed Dura. We decided to arrange another race in a few days. It didn't take place, because we were sent to the front.



## Disadvantages of Dura

I now had a lovely horse, the best I had had till then. But Dura had flaws. She was a “stargazer”, having escaped she wouldn’t let me take the bridle again, and when I got into the saddle, she twisted and was nervous. After Urupskaya and Gulyai-Pole, where Vanka and Gaychul prevented me from getting into the saddle at the most dangerous moments of an attack, I knew that this disadvantage could cost me my life.

I decided to train Dura. First, to teach her not to run away from me, and then to teach her to stand still while I was getting into the saddle. Note that I had never trained a horse to do that, nor seen anyone else do it. On the contrary, everyone said that it was impossible. I came up with everything myself, and my system was crowned with complete success. This is how I did it.

I never beat Dura, on the contrary, I was kind to her. I didn’t eat the sugar from my rations (very little, and infrequently), but gave it to Dura. I gave her a piece and showed her the rest. I walked away and called her. She came for the sugar. Again I walked away and called her. In the end, she answered my call with a slight neigh and followed me even without the sugar. She also greatly liked black bread with salt. She realised that she hadn’t anything to fear from me, and followed me like a dog, without me holding the bridle. Gradually, a friendship was established between us – that wonderful contact when we read each other’s thoughts.

Then I started the second part – to teach Dura to stand still while I mounted. Even if there was panic all around.

I have never seen a horse that doesn’t succumb to the panic of a herd. And everyone told me that I wanted the impossible. But I had no doubt that Dura would learn it. When the battery was at a trot, I rode off to the side, stopped and got off. Dura was nervous, she wanted to join the other horses. I waited for her to stop spinning and made as if to mount her. She started to spin. I took my leg out of the stirrup and waited. When she calmed down, I again put my leg into the stirrup, she spun again, I took out my leg, and I did this many, many times, until she realised that I would mount only if she stood motionless. It lasted a long time, but Dura understood me. There was no need to be annoyed – it is difficult, it takes a lot of patience. You can’t forget that you are dealing with a horse that thinks differently from you and me. Then I asked my brother and friends to jump, shout and even shoot in the air – to feign panic. Dura learned to stand motionless, while I slowly mounted, sat down, took the reins, bent down to her head and said: “Go Dura!” And only then did she start galloping. Dura was an intelligent horse, she understood me completely and made my task very easy. She was well versed in the situation, knew when to get away with all her effort.

Curiously enough, literally everyone admired Dura’s ability to stand still in times of panic, but no one followed my example, not even my brother.

“Rytsar is calm. I can always saddle him.”

“All horses are calm when there is no panic. But when there is the most pressing need to get away quickly, you will see that he won’t let you mount.”

Indeed, there was a panic near Kharkov. Two armoured vehicles were chasing us. Rytsar became crazed, tried to break free and didn’t allow my brother to get on. And Dura stood like a rock in the midst of the confusion.

## Stargazer

A stargazer is a horse that when you try to stop by pulling on the reins, continues to run, and throws its head almost into your lap. This is a very unpleasant flaw. There is a martingale – a harness system that prevents the horse from throwing his head back. But I didn’t have a martingale, and besides, it would complicate the set-up. When Dura did it, I would separate the reins and pull down forcefully with both hands, which wasn’t normal or ideal. And all this because Dura was a stargazer. When she lifted her head, she gave the impression that she was counting the stars. This shortcoming bothered me and was extremely tiresome.

Once in Mospin I was quartered with a Don Cossack. He surveyed Dura with the knowing eyes of a connoisseur.



"You have a kind mare. Excellent!"

"Yes, but she is stargazer."

"It's easy to fix. Take two raw eggs. Go to the steppe. Make her run and then stop. When she pulls her head back, hit her forehead with force with the eggs and let them flow. Then get down and talk to her as if she were injured and take her back holding the bridle. Don't peel off the eggs for two days. They will dry out and pull the fur on her forehead. She will think that her brains are flowing out and will carry her head down. Do this twice, and she will get lose the trait forever.

Cossacks know horses. I remembered Leskov's 'The Enchanted Wanderer', which gives approximately the same idea, but with a pot of dough. I decided to try it.

The result was amazing. One go with the eggs turned out to be enough – Dura was freed from stargazing forever. The whole battery laughed at me because of Dura's smeared forehead. I endured the ridicule patiently.

As a rule, everyone took their horse to his own stable. But from time to time General Prince Avalov, inspector of horse artillery, obliged us to put our horses on a tethering post, as required by the regulations. Two or more iron stakes were pushed into the ground and a rope was pulled between them. The horses were tied to the rope and hay is placed under it. An orderly watches the horses.

At night, all horses seem black, and in case of alarm it is easy to confuse a horse and saddle a neighbour's one. But it was enough for me to call Dura – she would turn her head and whinny slightly. As if she were saying, "Here, here I am."

Dura was a wonderful horse in all respects, and I appreciated her. I never had better. What a difference between Vanka, Gaychul and Dura! Both stallions were country horses, whereas Dura was an army horse, probably of the Kuban breed. I never hit Dura and only once, and then by mistake, spurred her. She took off like an arrow, and I apologised for a long time for my mistake. She didn't need spurs, she willingly added speed. It was enough for me to think of it and she fulfilled my desire.

### **Not Normal**

At complete rest, we not only put the horses in the stables, but also put our cannons in their yard. Doing this meant we avoided sentry duty, but of course it was against regulations. Upon my arrival at the battery near Matveyev Kurgan, my brother and I were once more enlisted in the gun crews, with a view to a restructure.

Once, Captain Mukalov, the head of our fourth gun, found a German peasant moving the bolt of our gun.

"What are you doing here?"

"What do you care what I do?"

"Get out, you bastard!"

"Bastard yourself!"

Mukalov shouted at us through the window.

"Come out quickly, with weapons."

Lieutenant Klinevski and I grabbed carbines and ran out into the yard.

"Arrest this man and bring him to the battery commander."

Colonel Shapilovski listened to Mukalov's report and said, "We've heard the facts, well, we will shoot him. Klinevski and Mamontov with carbines? That's fine."

My legs gave way, and I had to lean against the wall of the house. I had never shot anyone, and I loathed the idea. Shapilovski and Mukalov entered the house. The three of us remained outside, pale and silent. "I will shoot into the air ... And if Klinevski also shoots into the air? .. Lord, save me from this horror!"





A crowd of curious people gathered. An elderly peasant, without addressing anyone, said, "We know him ... He's not normal. He has fits of insanity."

I grabbed the speaker and dragged him to the door.

"You'll say the same thing inside."

Then I opened the door and pushed him inside.

"A witness, Mr. Colonel, wants to make a statement," and slammed the door.

Shapilovski appeared. "Since he's crazy, we'll whip him. I have sent for the grooms."

Phew! Glory to you, Lord! All three of us breathed a sigh of relief.

The grooms walked in with whips, grinning. We took the arrested person to the back of the house.

"Take off your pants," ordered Klinevski.

"Jokes aside," the arrested man suddenly said impudently. "I won't allow myself to be flogged. I'm going home."

And he really made a move to leave. His self-confidence made an impression on Klinevski and on the soldiers – they stood with open mouths. But thanks to this bastard, I had experienced such fear that I sincerely hated him. I threw myself at him, knocked him to the ground and tore off his pants, so that the buttons flew.

"Give it to him, guys – and add some more from me!"

He was whipped and he began to cry. We left him there and went home with relief.

A peasant watching came up to me.

"It's good that you whipped him, he deserves it. He is a dangerous person."

"Why didn't you whip him yourselves in the village, if he deserved it?"

"We can't. He could burn down a barn in revenge. But you are another matter. You are the power, and you can't joke with power. He will be careful now. And we had nothing to do with it. I give you thanks from the whole village."

### **The Restructure**

In April 1919, while at Matveyev Kurgan, our battery provided officers for several Cossack horse batteries – Don, Kuban and Terek. Colonel Smirnov was asked to form a Ural horse battery and offered my brother and me positions as junior officers. We declined, preferring to remain as soldiers in our old battery. We got along with the people and horses, the battery had become a family. I couldn't part with Dura.

But our battery was now made into a two-battery *divizion*. From the personnel of the 2nd Platoon, a new 2nd Horse Battery was formed with normal, not mountain, guns. At first with only two guns. Colonel Shapilovski was in command of the new battery. The first gun was commanded by Captain Oboznenko, and the second by Captain Mukalov. My brother and I went with Mukalov.

The battery changed its number several times: it was both the 8th and 10th Horse, but in the end it became (and remained) the 2nd General Drozdovski Horse Battery. It always worked beside the 1st Horse-mountain. From that time on, both batteries stopped having crews that were entirely officers and become a mix of officers and soldiers. We were lucky – our gun was crewed by men of a Kuban Cossack line regiment, who were splendid. I was sent to the station to retrieve and bring back two three-inch guns. I set off with two sets of horses, examined, accepted, unloaded, limbered and brought two cannons to the German colony, which laid the foundation for the existence of the valiant 2nd Horse Battery.

Shapilovski was small, red-haired, squinted, and resembled a buccaneer, but he was appreciated – he was brave, thoughtful and commanded respect. Oboznenko was very young, but an excellent officer – a true knight. Mukalov was nice enough, but a drug addict.



Very soon the battery became four-gun. Oboznenko and Mukalov began to command the platoons, and my brother was given command of our fourth gun. The weapon itself became our family. When my brother wasn't there, I commanded it.

If we needed a horse or soldiers, we got them ourselves, without reporting to anyone. We picked up some excellent horses, especially for the team, and likely because of that the 4th Gun became the first, that is, it went at the head of the column.

The *division*, two batteries, was commanded by Kolzakov, who was promoted to major-general. The first battery was commanded by Colonel Aliabiev.

At this time they were forming a lot of cavalry regiments. Soon a corps was formed, and later even two. Our regular cavalry became a formidable force under the command of General Barbovich.

But the main forces of the Army were the four infantry regiments: named for Kornilov, Markov, Alekseev and Drozdovski. This was our guard. In the summer they were expanded into divisions, but in the autumn, due to losses, they were again reduced to regiments. We worked with all four and were always successful. At first, these were solely officer regiments, then due to losses, they became soldier regiments: but the good traditions were preserved.

### **Dagger, Horse and Woman**

In the past many guests visited my grandmother's estate. Among them was an officer of the Terek Cossacks. He wore a Circassian coat with a dagger. At first he didn't ride, but then he brought his Cossack saddle and turned out to be a good rider.

"Why didn't you want to ride before?"

"I didn't want to sit on a civilian saddle."

The 'civilian' was spoken with contempt, and it was a good English saddle.

The men said of him that he was a savage, almost a bandit – in his absence of course. The ladies, on the contrary, said he was a knight without fear or reproach. The grooms called him a '*Dzhigit*'<sup>31</sup>, and their opinion was decisive for me, since I was only seven years old.

He noticed my adoration.

"Can you show me your dagger?"

I had been warned not to say that I liked it, because according to the Caucasian custom, he would have to give it to me. It was a beautiful tradition that got lost because people abused it.

To adults, he said, "This is not a toy or for fun, but a weapon. You can take it out only to strike."

The others moved away. But he smiled at me, pulled the dagger from its scabbard.

"Take a good look. You will rarely see a blade like this. This is Kara-Taban, an old and rare blade."

The steel was dark with waves.

"Where did you buy it?"

He flashed his eyes and he sheathed the dagger.

"I'm not an Armenian that would buy a weapon."

I realised that I had said something tactlessness, and blushed. He noticed it and took my hands.

"Remember for the rest of your life: you don't buy weapons, you get them."

"How?"

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<sup>31</sup> A Caucasian rider, with connotations of bravery and particular skill on horseback.



"They can be inherited, given as a gift, stolen, taken from the enemy in battle, but never bought. It would be shameful."

"Isn't it shameful to steal?"

"No. Stealing a horse, weapon or woman isn't at all shameful. On the contrary ... but you are too young yet ... Go play and leave me alone."

He got up to leave.

"And a horse, how do you get a horse?"

He sat down again.

"A horse? .. You can get it from your father as a gift. You can even buy it. Yes, they do ... You can even buy a wife. It happens often. But you can also steal or exchange for it. For a good horse, you can get a real Persian carpet or even a decent sabre ... But the best way to get a horse is, of course, to take it in battle ... I took one Kabardian stallion, handsome, red. His name was Shaitan. When I sat on him, there was a feeling that wings were growing ..."

He fell silent, disappearing into memories, staring at the horizon.

"And what happened to him? Do you still have him?"

He didn't budge. I thought he hadn't hear me. But after a silence, with a look into blank space, he reluctantly told me.

"I don't have him ... I exchanged him."

"For what?" I was amazed.

"A woman."

He got up and went. Suddenly he returned, took my hands, his eyes burning.

"If you ever have to choose between a woman and a horse, take the horse."

He walked away, leaving me spellbound.

I didn't say a word of it to my parents. I knew by instinct that it had been a significant conversation, one that I would remember for a lifetime.

During the civil war, in Nizhyn, I went on a date one evening on my wonderful Dura. The three of us listened to the nightingales. She, Dura and me. She brought her star-reflecting eyes closer to mine.

"If you love me, give me Dura."

She knew that I loved Dura. I shuddered.

You are silent?

I was silent. I stroked Dura and thought, "Don't be afraid, Dura, I won't give you up for any price." And I immediately remembered the Terek officer.

At our request, the ataman of Matveyev Kurgan collected old sabres for us. They included some old and very valuable ones. I chose a Don sabre of 1877. Long, heavy and curved. An excellent weapon. I never had to use it on anyone, but it was amazing how its presence gave me confidence. Strangely, I sabred better to the left than to the right.

### **Departure for the Front**

We had a very good rest in Matveyev Kurgan. But our happiness was over. One fine morning the bugler sounded the call to march, and both batteries lined up on the street of the colony and for the first time, a *division* (that is, two batteries) moved to the station for loading. We were unloaded at Ilovaiskaya station. From there we joined the cavalry for small actions in the coal region between Makeyevka and Mospino. Then they split us up. The first battery worked with the Izyum and Ingermanland Hussars in the Makeyevka area, and the second battery went with a company of *Markovtsi*, fifty or sixty men, to Mospino.



I met up with several Ingermanland Hussars and asked about volunteer Smirnov, with who I was in the infirmary in Mariupol.

“He was killed near Makeyevka yesterday, a shrapnel shell took him in the chest.”

### **Important Position**

Before us was the large industrial centre of Yuzovka.<sup>32</sup> Here the viscous Kalmius river flows. This is a historical river, as it used to be called Kalka, which is where the Russians met the Tatars for the first time in 1223 and were defeated by them.

Just at this time, the Red command decided to conduct a large encircling operation. One wing was directed from the east towards Novocherkassk, and the second to Mospino, just where we were. The wings were supposed to join and surround the Don and Volunteer Armies.

In complete ignorance of the crucial role that fell on our small forces, we crossed the bridge and placed our two guns five hundred paces to the left of the bridge, by the river. Before us were low hills, which were occupied by the *Markovtsi*. The weather was wonderful, no shots were heard, and we lay down on the grass. I let Dura graze. Kolzakov and Shapilovski were on a hill in front of the battery. They were connected to the battery by a chain of scouts to transmit commands.

Everything seemed peaceful and quiet, but 4.8 inch (122 mm) shells began to fly in and burst near the battery. The Reds couldn't see us, but guessed where we were. Initially we were unconcerned and even played an infantile game: we would take a lump of earth and wait, then when a shell landed nearby we would throw it at a sleeping man, who would jump up in fright, thinking that he had been wounded.

But more and more Red shells flew in, and we no longer laughed. They were shooting from a distance, because we couldn't hear the guns firing.

Then suddenly four armoured cars with machine-guns appeared.

Our infantry lay down in the tall grass and let the armoured cars pass. They headed towards us. We opened fire on them at close range. They shot at us with machine guns. It lasted ten long minutes or more. But despite the close distance, we were unable to knock any of them out and they inflicted no losses on us – nervous people don't shoot well.

One of the armoured cars chased our commanders – Kolzakov and Shapilovski, who fled from it around the hill. While shooting at it, we almost killed our own commanders. The armoured cars left, having not dislodged us from our position. There was a break. Black chains of Reds appeared, one after the other and elbow to elbow, obviously miners, because the chains were black, not khaki. We could see three chains, and the infantry said there were nine chains. We were surprised by such a huge use of force against our two cannons and fifty or sixty *Markovtsi*. We opened a very heavy fire on the chains, and in all directions, because the Reds tried to outflank us and push the guns up against the small but muddy and impassable river. We were especially careful to not let the Reds occupy the bridge – our only escape route.

The commanders reported that our shrapnel was poorly set. I glanced at the soldier setting the range. He was watching the Reds with wide, fearful eyes and was turning the fuses without looking at what he was doing. I pushed him away and began to set the required distance myself. You need to work with concentration and attention, which is difficult under fire – your hands tremble. While doing this the gun was turned almost at a right angle and fired right over my head. I received a massive shock to my ear. I went deaf, and blood oozed out of my ear. But there was no time to pay attention to such trifles, we needed to keep up our fire.

Our thin chain of *Markovtsi* didn't flinch – their machine gun did excellent work. Our shrapnel tore great holes in the Red chains. The first two lines hesitated, but the third came up and pushed them forwards. They began to approach the bridge. We had to go. The infantry crossed the river over a fallen tree, but the

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<sup>32</sup> Mamontov noted that it had been named after its founder, Hughes – hence Hughesovka = Yuzovka, but had changed name to Stalino by the time he was writing. Presently it is Donetsk. Many Whites of the Civil War period referred to it as Aleksandrovka.



battery needed to cross at the bridge. While one gun fired directly at short range, the second galloped alongside the river out of sight of the Reds, taking a position a hundred and fifty paces further on. Then it opened fire at close range while the first gun was limbered up and galloped further on, that is closer to the bridge. It then unlimbered and fired while the second one was advanced again. Using this relay system, the battery was able to cross the bridge.

That was the battery, but my circumstances were completely different. I had let Dura graze and was unable to get her because we were fighting. When the battery left, I ran to Dura. She hadn't yet been tamed and ran away from me in the direction of the Reds. I chased her in despair, afraid of losing her. Fortunately, the departing *Markovtsi* turned Dura around, and by some miracle I managed to catch her. All this took place under heavy fire from the Reds. The battery was firing near the bridge. The infantry crossed the river using the fallen tree. What was I to do? The river was impassable, Dura would be taken. Go to the bridge? Was it too late? I still had to try.

"Go, Dura, as fast as you can! Go!

And she went. At the start we went alongside the river itself, which took us out of the Reds' sight. Then taking the higher ground, Dura went like an arrow, across the front of the Red chain, which saw her off with "salvo of honour". At a full gallop I turned right and Dura's hooves clattered across the bridge.

"Phew! Thank God we got out. Well done, Dura. You did well ... But still you are a naughty bitch: you run from me. We need to teach you to obey as soon as possible."

I caught up with the battery. I examined Dura and shrugged my shoulders. It seems that neither she nor I were injured. We were lucky, as there were a lot of bullets.

### **Under Howitzer Fire**

We thought we were safe once on the other side of the river, but the battle continued. The Reds also crossed the river, we couldn't stop them. We had to retreat. Gloomily, we retreated until just over a hill we saw a crowded mass of infantry: a Kuban plastun battalion, which arrived to our aid just in time. Its appearance made a strong impression on both us and the Reds. The attackers hesitated, and the *Markovtsi* counter-attacked immediately. We rode out into an open position and opened fire at short range. The Reds hastily retreated across the river in disorder.

Suddenly, shells began to fall on the battery. The same howitzer battery was firing at us, but this time their observer could see us, because the shells exploded right on us. It is lucky that the howitzers fired from a distance and so their shells fell directly down, because they buried deep in the wet black soil near the river and exploded upwards, and not horizontally.

"Take the horses, take Dura away," I shouted to a stunned horse holder.

Our soldiers, as happened in difficult cases, disappeared. The gun was left with the volunteer Nyagu, my brother and me. We needed to attach it to the team, but it is difficult for three men to pull a gun across wet and heavy earth. Straining with all our might, we pulled. Suddenly the growing whistle of a falling shell. We threw ourselves to the ground. There was an explosion, clods of earth fell on us, and we were already back up pulling the gun. But during the explosion, the horses took fright and the team moved away a bit. More whistling. We drop. The explosion. We jump up and pull. And so on several times in a row. Finally we got it hitched up. The horses took the gun away at the trot, and we ran for shelter. The other gun was in the same position, but they had managed to get away.

It wasn't great for the riders of the teams either. With every whistle of a shell, they would drop between the horses of the team and then resurface from there. We even left behind some cases of shells. But no-one was killed or even injured.

In the evening we returned to the same place for our abandoned shells and counted thirty-two craters in some three hundred square meters. The craters often overlapped each other.

"How did we stay alive?" said Nyagu, scratching behind his ear.

"Hmm, yes ... The soft black earth saved us. The shells buried deep and burst upward."



“Me, I think our time hasn’t yet come!”

The bombardment probably lasted only a few minutes, but to us they seemed like an eternity. After that mess, the battery became much more careful.

The Reds were repulsed. That night, to our surprise, passed calmly, with the singing of nightingales.

Thanks to the stubborn resistance of the *Markovtsi* and the good work of the battery, the Red advance was delayed. That gave the command time to assess the situation and bring up reserves.

### **A Large Battle**

At dawn, the fighting broke out again. The Reds brought in large numbers. Their armoured trains appeared, and all the time new formations entered the dance. We saw our first battery and hussars arrive. The *Markovtsi* and plastuns were forced to retreat, step by step. We had to abandon Mospino station. Our armoured train operating on the Makeyevka line risked being cut off. It appeared from behind a bend, a man jumped off near a switching point, the train went forward to the Red chains that were entering the station, fired at them with its machine-guns and then reversed back to Ilovaiskaya. The man on the switch jumped on the train as it passed.

The battle was growing all the time. New units and batteries were introduced on both sides. The rumble of artillery fire merged into a continuous roar. It was impossible to make out individual shots. The front of the battle was expanding to the right, towards Makeyevka. We ended up on the left flank.

At this moment a Terek cavalry division arrived as reinforcements. The saddled horses were simply pushed out of the carriages, they rolled downhill, the Cossacks followed them, straightened their saddles, the *sotnias* lined up, and went into battle.

Then the heavy armoured train “United Russia” arrived. It pushed back a platform with a smaller calibre and lifted up the mighty barrel of its naval gun with a calibre of six or even eight inches (152 – 200 mm) which made a noise so loud that even our horses jumped, despite them being accustomed to artillery. This huge weapon drove the Red armoured trains twenty kilometres back, excluding them from the battle.

An unusually stubborn battle raged across dozens of kilometres. It was difficult to make out any of what was happening. Twice we sent back for more shells.

Towards evening we saw on our left a long column of cavalry: it was General Shefner-Markevich’s Kuban cavalry division, attempting to turn the right flank of the Reds, which clearly convinced the Red command of the failure of their offensive, because the battle immediately died down with the onset of darkness. There was complete silence, except for the buzzing in my ears. To our surprise, the night passed calmly again.

The next morning there were no Reds in front of us. They had retreated. It was one of the biggest battles I took part in.

The Don Cossacks managed to break the second Red wing near Novocherkassk. From that moment our great offensive began.

Both our batteries were attached to the 1st Terek Cossack Cavalry Division, whose regiments were the 1st Terek and 1st, 2nd and 3rd Volga. The division was commanded by our old acquaintance Major General Toporkov, a good commander with whom we had worked in the North Caucasus.

The division and batteries went north, pursuing the Reds. I received an order to go to the supply train for barley. The division was heading into the coal-mining area, where fodder was difficult to get. I entrusted Dura to my brother and got on the train.

It was only once on the train that I learned the importance of our victory. The officer read aloud the report of our general staff and the description of the battle on our left flank. The last phrase explained everything to me.

“It happened on 5 May 1919 at Mospino.”

“I’ve just come from Mospino!” I exclaimed.



All eyes turned to me, and I was embarrassed.

### **Colonel Kuzmin**

Colonel Kuzmin was with the battery. A true knight. He rode well, loved horses, and was always elegant and good-humoured. Since there was no use for him in the battery, he was assigned to be our representative to the general, the commander of the regular cavalry. He was did well in the general's staff.

In the battle at Mospino, a Red armoured train was harassing our cavalry greatly. Their observer was probably in a small turret on the train. The general rode up to the first battery and ordered it shoot at the turret. One of our best artillerymen, Captain Kanatov, was engaged with the train. But as often happens in artillery, his shells exploded all around, but didn't hit the target.

The general frowned.

"I ordered you to shoot down the turret, not to shoot around it," and turning to Kuzmin, "Here are your gunners. When it comes to quarters, they are the first in, but with regards to shooting ..."

Kuzmin silently dismounted from his horse and went up to the gun.

"Will you give me permission, Captain?"

"Please, Mr. Colonel."

Kuzmin didn't change the position of the gun at all, just put binoculars to his eyes and commanded: "Fire!"

The shell hit the turret, which shattered into pieces.

Kuzmin approached the general and reported: "Done, Your Excellency," as if he hadn't been watching too. Kuzmin mounted his horse, nodded to Kanatov and followed the general. Our gunners were left with open mouths.

"Lucky shit! Now all the cavalry will think that only Kuzmin can shoot a cannon."

Somehow a squadron commander in the hussars was killed, and they wavered and ran. The general himself was in danger. But Kuzmin dashed forward, arbitrarily took command of the squadron, turned the men around, attacked the Reds and restored the position. He was lightly wounded in the leg with a bayonet.

At the next opportunity, Kuzmin was given command of the 1st Officer Cavalry Regiment and turned out to be an excellent commander – brave, decisive and successful. Under his command, the regiment became one of the best.

### **Provisions of Barley**

Arriving at the colony near Matveyev Kurgan, I approached the head of the train, Ensign Prikhodko, for barley for the battery.

"I don't have barley, and I cannot get you any. They have just sown, and what is left has been requisitioned for the Don army. We are moving into Russian territory. Here we are in the Don region, and the Cossacks accuse us of eating all their bread.

I already knew from experience the inability of the rear agencies to do useful work. The wagon train itself lived beautifully, and its action stopped there.

I went to Matveyev Kurgan and turned to the village chieftain, a Don Cossack. He listened to me politely, but coldly. Then I mentioned that our two batteries were part of the Terek Cossack division. This changed the situation immediately.

"Ah, General Toporkov ... I need to help you. There isn't much barley in our area. But perhaps you will find some sacks ... Osipov! You will go with the second lieutenant and try to find some barley."

We went on a cart and, despite the fact that we travelled to many farmsteads, we found only two sacks of barley. We rode up to a farm.

"Ataman Platov's farm," said Osipov.



“Platov? The hero of 1812?”

“The exact one. Who turned the retreat of the French into flight.”

It was a small modest house and small park. I said, “Let’s go to requisition somewhere else. We should respect his memory.”

Osipov liked this, and in a short time our cart was filled with sacks. They even had to requisition a second cart, and that too was filled. Our train had already moved on. I found it in a Russian village to the west.

### **Looking for the Battery**

Two officers and two soldiers joined me in the train, and we decided to go in search of the battery.

“I don’t understand your haste,” said the head of the train. “You could still have a small holiday. But you are going to march, get tired, fight ... Stay with us for a few days’ rest. You will always have time later to get injured or killed. Stay.”

But we went anyway. It is always difficult to find your unit, especially in a mobile war. No one can really tell you anything.

“They were at that place yesterday. And where they went and where they are, only Allah knows.”

We wandered around for a long time at random, until we met some Cossacks, who gave us the approximate direction. Then we heard cannon shots in the distance and headed towards them. We weren’t wrong. Towards evening we met the Terek Division, which was returning from an indecisive battle near the village of Konstantinovka. We stopped at the edge of the road. Regiments passed, then the first battery. We exchange greetings. Finally, our battery appeared. Now it had four guns. Looking for my brother, I saw a saddled Rytsar, who was being led by the bridle, but my brother isn’t there. My heart shrank. And suddenly I saw him on Dura. Phew, I was relieved. Both he and Dura are alive. Thank God! The column stopped. I called Dura. My brother got off her and walked away. Dura pricked up her ears and whinnied slightly. Then, step by step, she came up to me: she recognised me.

“You can mount, it is your saddle,” said my brother. We arrived just in time, because the division set off and marched all through the night.

### **Through the Front**

In the morning we came to a village, which I spent a long time looking for on the map, and found quite by accident. But the village was deep in the rear of the Reds, near Konstantinovka. Concerned about this discovery, I went to Colonel Shapilovski. I reported to him about my arrival with the barley and then, showing the map, asked if it was a mistake.

“No, it’s not a mistake. We passed through the front during the night. Our task is to create disorder and cause panic in the rear of the enemy.”

To tell the truth, I was the one in a panic at the time.

“Ah ... Hmm ... What are we going to do if? ...”

“Now look, what are you worried about? We are strong. An entire division with a good leader. We have the advantage – we can avoid fights that we don’t like the look of and force the Reds to fight whenever we want. We can retreat in all four directions, and the Reds will be paralyzed by our sudden appearance ... Go have a glass of vodka.”

The vodka certainly gave me a little courage. But I slept badly, woke up, listened. I was afraid to undress, to unsaddle Dura. But I soon became convinced that Shapilovski was right. Our raid on the rear was very easy. Panic preceded us, and it was enough for us to appear and release two shrapnel shells and they would all run without looking back.

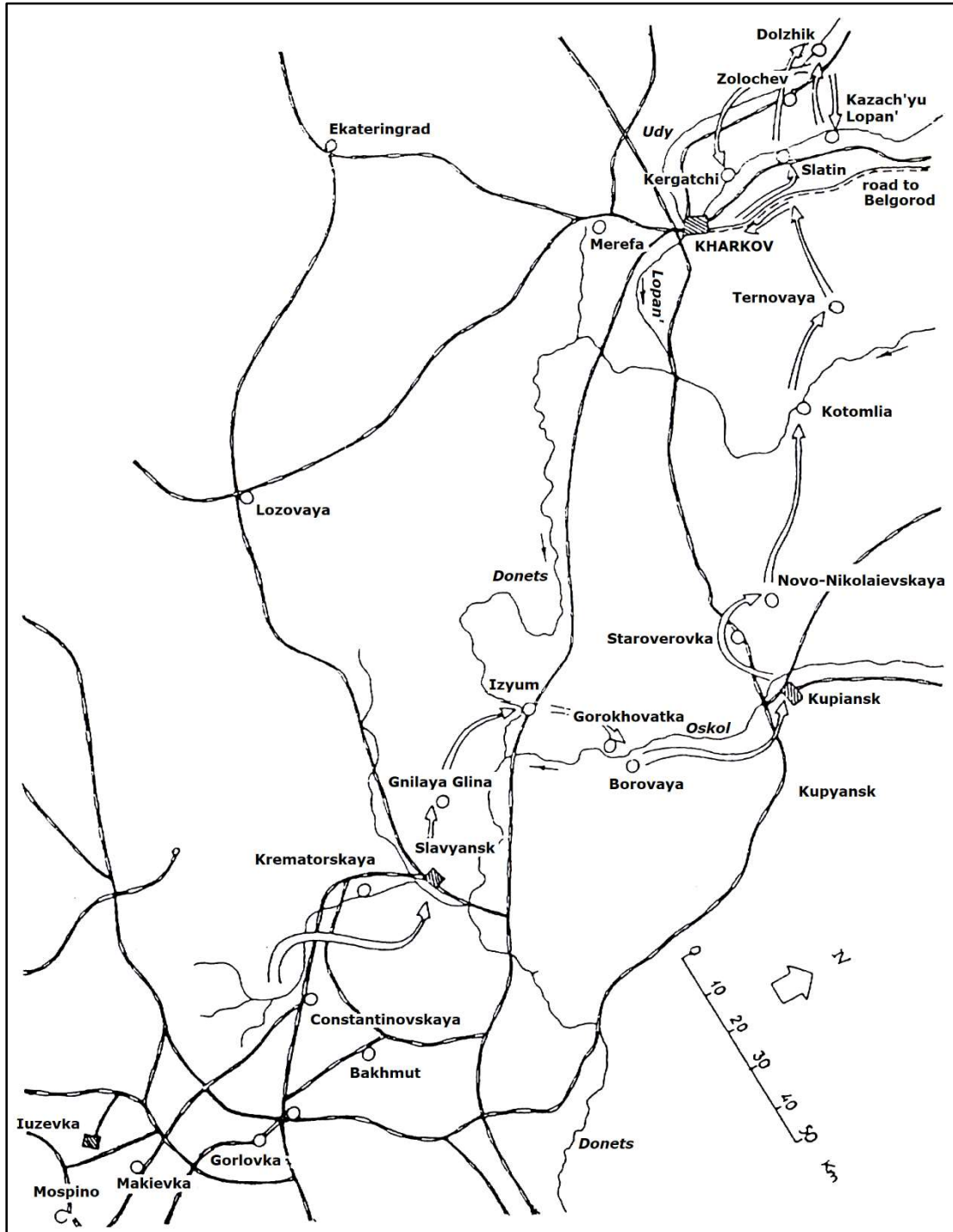




## Chapter 9 – Raid into the Red Rear

### Behind the Red Lines

The Red front had been reinforced. To attack them head-on would have caused heavy losses. Our command decided to put the Terek Cossack Cavalry Division into the Red rear, disorganise their supply, ruin the railways and communications and sow panic. General Toporkov accomplished this task perfectly, making it easier for our infantry to advance and take Kharkov. The division marched a total of about 500-600 km in the enemy rear without any difficulties. There were only two unpleasant moments during our stay and those were our fault. We avoided big battles, instead conducting many sudden raids. The successful raid by the Terek division preceded the famous raid of the Don under General Mamontov to the area of Tambov. Mamontov's raid was larger scale, but ours was also a brilliant operation, which gave good results and cost very few losses.



At first, finding ourselves in the rear of the Reds, we were scared. However, we soon became convinced that panic preceded us and the Reds were much more afraid of us than we were of them. Eventually the raid proved so easy that we fell into the other extreme – carelessness – which twice got us into trouble. The raid consisted of constant movement, to make sudden surprise attacks, and Toporkov knew how to use surprise.

It wasn't without tragicomic incidents. A patrol and those in charge of finding quarters entered a large village. At the outskirts they had asked the villagers if there were any Red troops in it.

"No troops. And in the square an orator from Kharkov is making propaganda against you," the peasant replied with a smile. Apparently the population, having experienced the Bolsheviks, was no longer sympathetic to them.

The Cossacks dismounted and stealthily moved into the crowd of listeners in the square. The speaker, in a burst of eloquence, noticed nothing. He was ranting at the White bandits, "those creeps, scoundrels, traitors, that rotten thing we are going to crush..." He hesitated, because a Cossack officer was standing right in front of his podium with his hands at his sides and the peasants around him were chuckling.

"Very interesting, comrade, what you were saying. Go on!"

But the comrade suddenly lost his tongue.

Another night, a Red battalion in carts came into the village we had occupied. The commissar started banging on the window of the "soviet", demanding lodgings. An officer looked out and understood what was going on.

"I'll get dressed and do what needs doing. Wait a little while."

He went out the back door. Some machine guns were placed, then he ordered the battalion to drop their weapons, which they did. The battalion was lined up in the morning and ordered to sing the *Internationale*. Toporkov said hello to them.

"Hello, bastards."

They responded beautifully.

"Hello, Your Excellency!"

The soldiers were sent to the rear, the commissar was interrogated.

They had been ordered to trap the White bandits, that is to say, us.

The population welcomed us cordially, but when they heard that we would be moving on the next day, they tried to remain neutral, fearing reprisals.

## Slaviansk

We went deeper and deeper into the Red rear. In front of us was the town of Slaviansk, with its salt lakes, salt production and spa. We tried to take the town by surprise, but failed. The Reds were waiting for us and had made preparations. The battle took a long time. I thought Toporkov wanted to move away from the city and go in another direction, at any rate, I saw him leaning over the map.

But Slaviansk was still taken and it was thanks to the flair of our machine gunner Lieutenant Andion.

"Say what you like, but it smells like alcohol," he said, wiggling his big nose with a wart.

He disappeared and suddenly reappeared with a splendid *troika* pulled by white horses.

"Where did you get them?"

"From the firemen, of course. But look what's here."

In the machine-gun carriage were several cases of bottles of vodka.

"My nose was right. There's huge stores of liquor, but the Reds are close by."



Our eyes opened wide. The news spread like lightning among the Cossacks. They attacked like lions and seized the town and the warehouses and prevented the Reds from setting them on fire. The warehouses turned out to be enormous, as they say, inexhaustible. I should add that from the beginning of the war (in 1914) the sale of vodka had been prohibited. The factories stored their products in places which were kept strictly secret. Of course, vodka was available during the war, but only from private warehouses and in limited quantities. The men were so hungry for vodka that one Cossack even fell into a cistern in his hurry and died instantly.

We threw away everything except ammunition and shells and loaded boxes of vodka wherever possible. We mobilised the carts of all the surrounding villages, and this time the peasants themselves showed up with the carts, because they were paid in vodka. By the way, Colonel Shapilovski ordered Andion to return the horses to the fire brigade. Andion wasn't very upset.

"I don't like the white horses, you can see them from a long way away, and all the Reds will start shooting at them."

### **The Mission**

Unsurprisingly, after the capture of Sloviansk, most of the men were drunk. I wasn't drunk and so I was called to Colonel Shapilovski.

"You will go to General Toporkov, he needs an officer who isn't drunk and looks decent. All the Cossacks are drunk."

I immediately went to General Toporkov. "Pass this package to the Army Chief of Staff, into his own hands. HQ is in Gorlovka, more than a 100 km away. The Reds seem to have withdrawn, and the way is clear. Take a steam locomotive and some wagons and go. Here are your travel orders. I've asked the staff for ammunition and shells. You will load as much as you can and bring it here. The division leaves tomorrow morning. You will follow the division with the shells and ammunition. Understood?"

"Yes, Your Excellency, but..."

"No buts. That's an order. Hurry up. We don't have much ammunition left. Your mission is of the highest importance."

I bowed out and walked out in the worst possible mood. Hmm... What if the way isn't clear? He doesn't want to risk a Cossack. I can't believe everyone is drunk. That's what happens when you're not drunk. I'd rather be drunk – they'd send someone else.

I wasn't smiling at all about travelling by train. You might encounter a Red patrol, or a ruined track, or run into a mine. But there was nothing to be done. I entrusted Dura and my carbine to my brother, took with me a old Cossack who didn't drink and two cases of vodka, and set off for the station.

Leaving the vodka in the custody of my non-drinking Cossack, I presented myself to the commandant of the station, a captain apparently mobilised from the locals.

The captain, reading my posting, yawned, stretched himself and told me to come back in a few days. My departure wasn't possible at that time.

"I must leave now in order to return before the division leaves."

Instead of answering, he shrugged his shoulders.

"If you cannot or won't help me in my mission, I will organise it without you."

My youth apparently didn't appeal to him. He looked at me with a smile.

"Go ahead, young man."

It was clear that he was mocking me. He hadn't yet had time to get into the spirit of the Volunteer Army and was performing his post with coolness. I was seething, but restrained myself, turned and went to the station master.

"I can't. I assure you. All the locomotives are ..."



"Look at this," I said to him. "Here's a pass to make an exception for me."

And I showed him two bottles of vodka.

"They will be yours, if I can leave in an hour."

His eyes twinkled, and he licked his lips and scratched behind his ear.

"That's the thing. I'll do my best, but I doubt ..."

He lowered his voice and turned towards the door.

"The crew, and especially the stokers are unreliable ... They could sabotage ..."

"Can I talk to them?"

An engineer appeared. His whole posture indicated that he was full of ill will and probably a communist.

"How long will it take you to get your locomotive up and running?"

"The machine is out of order. It needs to be overhauled and some parts replaced that we don't have here. And then ..."

"I want to go in twenty minutes."

He grinned indulgently and didn't even dignify me with a reply.

"And this?"

I showed him two bottles of vodka.

His grin disappeared. His eyes widened.

He muttered, "A locomotive indeed ... I don't know, really ..."

"If we leave in twenty minutes, the bottles are yours. If not, I'll look for another train."

"Don't fool around, Nikita," said the station master. "Take advantage of the opportunity. All our bottles depend on you."

"I'll see what I can do." He held out his hands for the bottles. I took them away.

"Promised? In twenty minutes?"

"Yes." I held out the bottles to him. He hesitated.

"We'll have to give one to the stoker."

"He'll get it. Leave your bottles here. I've got others for the road. Just bring shot glasses."

He ran. There was nothing left of the hostility.

Everything changed like magic. Suddenly everyone was smiling at me, trying to oblige. With vodka everything went like clockwork.

"You are a sorcerer," said the station master.

"Let's go to the telephonist."

We went.

"Hello. Do me a favour, please... Here's your bottle. You must know all the telephonists at the other stations?"

"Of course, I know them all."

"Talk to them and find out, without making it obvious, if there are Reds at their stations. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly."



On the wall was a map of the railway with the names of the stations. He called and chatted with his colleagues and I listened beside him and pointed to the next station. It was as if the Reds were nowhere to be found.

At this time the machinist and the stoker appeared.

“The engine is ready at the platform.”

I felt like a dictator. I gave an order and everyone rushed to carry it out. True, one box of vodka was emptied. A watchman, a greaser, a switchman, a trailer-man, a gendarme, a sweeper, a porter, an assistant (I don't know whose), and a disabled railwayman – all appeared in my way, stretched out and saluted, while I sprinkled a fortune like from the horn of plenty.

“Hook up one wagon ... Give orders to all the stations to keep the line straight, so we don't have to stop ... Run quickly, get bread, cucumbers, tomatoes and salt ... You didn't forget the shot glasses ...? Load the crate ...”

I had the pleasure of going to the Captain Commandant's room. His room faced the street and he was evidently unaware of what was going on.

“Ah-ah,” he laughed when he saw me. “How is it that you are still here? I thought you were at least in London. Ha-ha-ha.”

I waited motionless and silent for him to finish.

“The train is at the platform, and I'm leaving now.”

The laughter broke off and his eyes bulged.

“... I must say that you are either incompetent or a saboteur. You haven't helped me in any way with my emergency assignment. Look out! If on my return you don't have ten carts to load ammunition ready, I will report you to General Toporkov, who isn't in the habit of joking.”

He gulped.

“When do you think you'll be back?”

“Tonight.”

“Where will I find the carts?”

“That's your business,” I saluted and left.

Of course, good organisers are rare. But that one! He sat and read a book and did unnecessary paperwork. The stokers and machinists did what they wanted, and he didn't give a damn. What a scoundrel. I wished I could hang him by one leg ...

~ ~ ~

The locomotive started moving and picked up speed. My Cossack and I climbed onto the train, and I opened the first bottle. We passed stations without stopping and I threw away the empty bottles. I became more and more fraternal with the driver and the stoker. We had already sworn an eternal friendship, but I still didn't trust them and asked them to explain the operation to me. It is very simple: lever one way – forward, the other – backward. The more you tilt the lever, the quicker it goes.

“The main thing is not to stop whatever happens.”

I tried to avoid drinking it, whenever possible throwing a shot over the side. Still, I had to drink a lot. But I was well trained in the sport, young and healthy and could keep a clear head for a long time. Nevertheless, towards evening I dozed off. I woke up because the steam train started to brake and stopped.

There was a log on the tracks ahead of us, and soldiers were running towards us on both sides.

“Damn it! That's it!” I grabbed my revolver.

“Get down!” ordered the first one.



I didn't answer, but breathed a sigh of relief and holstered my revolver. He was wearing an officer's shoulder boards.

I showed him my mission orders, the package for the Army Chief of Staff, but he still didn't want to believe that there were no more Reds as far as Slavyansk, and decided to take me to the battalion headquarters in the village. I wanted to avoid that at all costs – it would have been a major waste of time, and one never knew what would happen with a unit other than one's own ...

"Besides, I have an emergency pass."

"Emergency pass? Let me see it."

I handed him two bottles. He bloomed.

"Ah ... Um ... I see your papers are in order and you're good to go ... Hey, there. Get that log off the line! Have a safe trip."

~ ~ ~

We arrived in Gorlovka at two o'clock in the morning. I went to wake up the officer on duty. The captain opened his sleepy eyes and glanced at the wall clock.

"I have a very urgent package for his Excellency, the Army Chief of Staff."

"Come back tomorrow morning."

"I must get the package into his hands at once. It's very important!"

"Are you crazy, Lieutenant? At two o'clock in the morning?"

"This is General Toporkov's report. We've taken Slavyansk. I've come from there."

He shrugged his shoulders in annoyance.

"We've captured some good booty too, look," I held out the bottle to him.

Immediately he was completely awake and buttoned up his uniform.

"Surely this is important news. I'll go and try," he locked the bottle in a cupboard. "Hmm... Do you have any booty for the general?"

"Yes."

"Then I can wake him."

Twenty minutes later his Excellency, the Army Chief of Staff himself (I don't remember who it was, was it – perhaps Shatilov?) appeared on the platform. I reported and handed over the package.

He questioned me about the capture of Slavyansk, about the free railway line and hesitated.

"I heard that ..."

"That's right, Your Excellency."

I ran to my wagon and brought four bottles (a general, after all!). I conveyed Toporkov's request for shells and ammunition.

"When do you want to go?"

"As soon as I've loaded the ammunition."

"All right. I'll give you a hundred thousand cartridges and a hundred shells. That's all I can give you at the moment. But tell General Toporkov I'll send him what he needs. You'll have my reply to General Toporkov ... Captain, take care of loading shells and ammunition immediately. Goodbye, Lieutenant, and thank you."

Our locomotive and carriage was moved to another track for loading. I think that the vodka was still having an effect on the driver, because a moving armoured train ran into our carriage and knocked it off the track. Both drivers poured out streams of abuse. I leant out of the locomotive. An officer also leant out of the armoured train.



“Lagutin!”

“Mamontov! .. Come to me, get in here ... Hey, there ... Enough cursing. Get off and put the wagon back in place.”

Lagutin had been an officer of our battery – I had given Gaychul to him.

“What are you doing on this armoured train?”

“I command it. And you? Are you still serving as a simple soldier in the battery? What’s new?”

I told and said what brought me to Gorlovka.

“It’s still strange,” said Lagutin. “I’m in command of an armoured train, which is quite an important position. But never in my life will I have to speak to the Army Chief of Staff. And you are in the position of a simple soldier, yet you wake him up in the middle of the night, and he comes to talk to you. It’s odd.”

“You forget the magical effect of vodka.”

I left a few bottles with Lagutin, and he gave me twenty shells.

### **The Return**

We returned. I slept in the carriage all the way back. We arrived in Slavyansk in the morning. The division has already left. The commandant-captain, of course, hadn’t found the carts, and probably hadn’t tried. Loser! The vodka crates were empty. I went out to the square, and with the help of my Cossack, we immediately mobilised three carts, onto which we loaded shells. I was in a hurry to get to the battery and therefore didn’t look for a supply train. I was afraid that the division would go a long way and it would be difficult to find it, and it would be dangerous to be alone in the rear of the Reds. I left the cartridges with the commandant, who swore to me that he would find carts and would send them with a faithful man to follow the division.

We rode off. The division’s path was marked by an endless column of vodka carts. Everyone was drunk – both the drivers and the escorts. Seeing a sober officer, every now and then the drivers would attempt to justify themselves, showing a broken bottle seal – it broke, they said, by accident. But they couldn’t explain why they were drunk. The whole column was unusually cheerful.

Towards evening we found the division stationed in the village of Gnilaya Glina. I went to General Toporkov, who was just having dinner. I reported and handed over the package.

“Have you brought the shells and cartridges?”

Yes sir. Shells for both batteries with me. One hundred of them. I left one hundred thousand cartridges with the commandant at the Slavyansk station. Send someone quickly for them. The commandant is no good. Shells and cartridges will be later.

“You completed the assignment quickly.”

“With vodka everything is possible, your Excellency, even the impossible.”

“Ha, ha. This is true.”

And Toporkov poured me a whole tea glass of vodka. I drank it without stopping. *Noblesse oblige!*

“What can I do for you? You have done well on you mission.”

“A cucumber for a snack, Your Excellency!”

They all laughed. I was shown the location of the battery quarters, and I hurried to leave, because I felt that I was getting drunk.

I walked down the street, with the carts following me. Through an open window, I heard familiar voices. I stepped through the window into the hut and sat down on a bench among our officers, who were having supper. They weren’t a bit surprised, because for two days they had been living in a state of drunkenness.

I turned to Colonel Shapilovski.



"Forgive me, Colonel, for not reporting, but General Toporkov got me drunk, and I can't get off the bench ... I brought shells for us and for the horse-mountain battery. Send someone sober to take them and let the carters go."

"Was Toporkov satisfied with you?"

"Seemed to be, yes."

### Izyum

The town of Izyum is fortified by both nature and man. It was once the main stronghold of the "line" against the raids of the Tatars. The Donets River bends there in a large bow with steep banks, in the middle of which there is a huge hill dominating the banks of the river. The bridge is located behind the mound, and the city is on the other side.

Our division entered the bow and stopped. Due to the steepness, it was impossible to go round the sides. To storm the hill head-on, even with cavalry, would cause heavy losses, because the Reds were well entrenched. But the city was taken thanks to the same vodka.

Assessing the situation, Toporkov bent over the map, looking for places where he could cross the Donets. He raised his head and examined the hill once more through binoculars.

"Who are those five horsemen who are moving towards the hill?"

The embarrassed adjutant explained.

"Those are some officers who drank too much and decided that the five of them would take it themselves. Madness! But off they went."

"That's scandalous! Such a lack of discipline. I don't have officers to sacrifice in vain. Return them and slap them in five days arrest."

"It's too late, Your Excellency. They are already at the hill."

Suddenly Toporkov calmed down.

"Who is it?"

Names were given to him.

"All foolhardy idiots. Well, maybe they can achieve something ... Quickly, send a *sotnia* along the right flank, by the river. They should attack as soon as it starts ... Batteries, get ready to cover the hill with shells once you hear the first shot ... Hard luck if you kill those madmen ... The regiment will attack at the gallop immediately the order is given ... Got it? Is everyone ready?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

The Reds didn't even shoot at the five horsemen walking towards them. They were so sure of the inaccessibility of their position that they thought they were coming to parley. They came out of the trenches in a crowd to meet the horsemen. After all, they couldn't threaten them. There was no shooting.

Everyone, both White and Red, with watched tensely as the five men, still at a walk, climbed the hill. This made it possible for a *sotnia* to go down to the river itself and move in single file, along the bank, under a cliff, and approach the hill itself. No one paid any attention to them.

Everyone froze in anticipation. Our guns were directed and loaded. The regiment was deployed to attack. And the five of them still slowly climbed up. A few dozen steps remained between them and a crowd of Reds. They went a bit further, then grabbed their sabres and ran into the enemy. There were screams, some distant noise and shots. Both batteries fired a volley with all their guns and then opened a continuous fire, so that the hillside was covered with impacts. On the right, the *sotnia* was galloping up the mound, swords gleaming in the sun. The regiment was heading in the same direction. And we continued to fire without restraint. We ceased fire only when the hill was covered with our cavalry. It was all over in a few minutes. The Red machine guns, while well placed, didn't have time to open fire. A Red battery on the other side of the river sent a few shells towards us, without conviction, and then fell silent.





Our men immediately occupied the bridge and the city.

Some Reds were sabred and some killed by our fire, but the vast majority surrendered.

We found the mutilated bodies of the five men, covered in wounds. Two were still alive. One opened his eyes and whispered.

“And yet ... we took it.” And then he died.

Another, with twelve wounds, survived. Cossacks are tenacious.

We recovered so many cartridges that we didn't send back to Slavyansk for the ones there.

### **Old Woman**

There was no food or fodder in Izyum. We were placed in the small house of a factory master. The family consisted of the master, his wife, and an old woman who had lost her mind, who didn't leave her chair.

I uncorked a bottle of vodka. The *zakuski*<sup>33</sup> was terribly meagre. I remember drinking to the ringing of bells and a lump of sugar.

I poured a drink for the owner's whole family and as I began to pour one for the old woman.

“No, no,” said the owner. “It could hurt her.”

“You know, in her state, it doesn't matter. The main thing is that it pleases her.”

“I suppose you are right. Give her a glass.”

The old woman didn't understand our words, but she perfectly understood the meaning of the glass. She knocked it back and handed it to me, demanding more. We laughed.

“She's not feeble-minded at all, she knows what's good.”

Our officers left for somewhere, the foreman went to the factory to see what was going on there, and his wife went to the market. I stayed with the old woman and we continued to drink. I bent down to fill her glass and was surprised it was gone. I looked up and backed away in horror. The old witch with dishevelled hair stared at me with burning eyes and walked towards me, stretching out her bony claws, with a terrible smile on her face. It was a nightmare.

I was so scared that I felt my hair stand up. I dropped the bottle and barked, “You're crazy! Go away!”

It had no effect. With great agility she began to chase me around the table, sometimes suddenly changing direction. I was so worried that I took out my revolver, but it didn't work on her either. And I didn't dare shoot, not even upwards. They would say: ‘the officer got drunk and shot at the old woman’. So we ran around the table, until finally I managed to jump out into the yard, with the old woman at my heels. In the courtyard, a ladder was leaning against the roof of a shed. With monkey-like dexterity, I climbed up onto the roof, threw down the ladder and sat on the ridge of the roof. Phew! Saved! What a sorceress!

The old woman was humming something downstairs in the courtyard, dancing and beckoning to me with her crooked finger. In the middle of the courtyard was a round flower bed.

“What are you doing on the roof with a revolver in your hand?”

Lieutenant Arsen'ev was addressing me from the street side. I was embarrassed, put the revolver into its holster and explained the situation.

“Ha, ha, ha. An officer who got scared of an old woman and climbed onto the roof! Ha, ha, ha. But no one will believe it.”

“If you are as brave as you say, then enter the courtyard. The entrance is around the corner.”

Arsen'ev puffed out his chest and boldly entered the courtyard. But the old woman immediately chased after him – and now my hero ran away from her, around the flower bed. I, feeling safe on the roof, laughed

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<sup>33</sup> Traditional appetisers served to guests at the beginning of a meal, often alongside vodka.



bitterly. Finally Arsen'ev managed to leave through the gate and departed, cursing me and the old woman, pursued by my laughter.

Fortunately, the master soon returned. At the sight of him, the old woman immediately calmed down. He locked her up and helped me off the roof.

I took my things and went to other lodgings.

### **Patrols**

I was assigned with three soldiers to patrol on the outskirts of the city, near the battery. The neighbouring regiments also sent out patrols, and my task was to walk from one Cossack patrol to another.

It was extremely dangerous, because the Cossacks, completely drunk, mistook us each time for Reds and prepared to open fire. It took a lot of work to convince them that we were their artillerymen. Once convinced of their mistake, the Cossacks wanted to give us warm vodka, which was also disagreeable.

Cold vodka – with *zakuski* – is a divine thing. On the contrary, drinking it warm and at the wrong time is disgusting. But try and convince drunks of that!

When my patrol finally ended, I had the feeling of avoiding mortal danger from our own drunks.

We left Izyum without regret. Dura because of the lack of food, and I because of the old woman and the patrols. Besides, there was nothing to eat in Izyum. In such cases, the solution was to tighten one's belt.

### **On to Kupyansk**

We spent the night in Borovaya. The next morning we moved on, in the direction of Kupyansk. The terrain was undulating, the road going continually up and down. So Toporkov, using the terrain, set the column up in an extraordinary manner. Toporkov himself, fifty Cossacks and both our batteries made up the vanguard. Three Cossacks trotted in front from hill to hill and carefully looked over the ridge: if there was no one in the next valley, they trotted on towards the next hill. On the right and on the left, at the edge of the forest, marched two Cossacks – that was our lateral security. The regiments were half a kilometre behind.

At ten o'clock in the morning, a Cossack out in front took off his hat. That was a conventional sign that he had seen the enemy. Another Cossack was already galloping towards Toporkov.

"A large column of infantry is moving towards us. It is very close."

Toporkov sent off to tell the regiments to get ready, then ordered our two batteries to deploy spread out and move forward. He himself galloped up and looked out from behind the ridge and then returned to us.

"Go at the gallop, get as close as possible and then cannister them. Disorder them as much as possible, I'm attacking with all the regiments. Go with God!"

We started at a trot and then went into a gallop. Arriving at the crest we found ourselves beside some Red scouts, who we ignored, but who not knowing what to do, hesitated.

In front of us in the valley was a huge column of infantry, artillery and carts. They didn't immediately realise who we were, so we were able to get very close to them, about two hundred paces distance. Then they began to shoot in a disorganised way. We stopped only when our horses began to be killed.

"To the left, turn! In position! Prepare to fire! Cannister. Three rounds. Fire!"

The shooting intensified, but died down after our volley. They started running, mixing up the units and getting in each other's way. And our buckshot ripped holes in the panic-stricken crowd. There was no question of any organised resistance. The regiments passed us at a trot and plunged into the mess. They all surrendered. It barely lasted more than ten minutes.

The Red unit no longer existed. There were endless columns of prisoners, artillery that hadn't fired a single shot, and wagons full of cartridges and ammunition boxes with shells. The prisoners, guns and carts were sent under escort to the rear, while the ammunition boxes and cartridges were left with us. Probably remembering my mission, Toporkov appointed me to command the column of prisoners and wagons. I



wasn't very happy with that, and I expressed this to Captain Oboznenko, our senior officer, who sent Ensign Forberg to replace me. And I was able to return to our gun.

Our losses, if we had any, were minimal. Our victory was easy and very tangible. We took a whole regiment of Reds with a battery, and this was solely due to Toporkov's ability to use the terrain.

### **Another Battle**

The division soon ran into the Reds again. But this time the Reds were entrenched and waiting for us. A tedious fight ensued. A Red armoured train, which had come from Kharkov, began to fire at us from the rear and forced us into a rather hasty retreat. The train particularly focussed on our battery. We even had to dismount and go into some tall wheat to avoid its well-targeted shells. The wheat hid us, and the shelling stopped. Shakalov's campaign pack, on the back of his saddle, was cut to pieces by a shell, but neither he nor the horse was hurt. The armoured train was invisible, and its observer was hidden somewhere in the wheat. At a bend in the road along which we were retreating we become visible to the observer again, because as soon as we reached it two shrapnel immediately burst overhead. The first gun galloped across the danger zone and was able to reach a point where the observer of the armoured train could no longer see it. Two shrapnel burst behind them as they did it. Then the second gun immediately galloped off. Again two shrapnel. The third set off at full speed in turn. Then the observer decided to feint. He paused. Mukalov, not realising this, took off, and a shell fragment fell at the feet of his horse. The horse reared, and Mukalov fell off. I galloped up, grabbed Mukalov by the arm and dragged him out of the danger zone. Two more shrapnel burst behind us, and our fourth gun rode across unharmed. Mukalov and the horse were merely shaken. The observer was, of course, an officer and aimed well.

"Where are you going?"

"Retreating, Your Excellency."

"In error. The situation has changed, and we are advancing. I have sent men to undermine the track so that the armoured train won't bother you. Go forward!"

This is one of the extraordinary things about the Cossacks. Following a rapid retirement, they are quite capable of leading a solid attack. Indeed, the Reds were retreating.

I don't know why, but I was leading the lead gun, and so the entire battery, to the place of the battle that had just ended. My brother or Mukalov would normally have been in my place. I was some distance ahead of the cannons. The field was covered with individual trenches and there were several dead Red infantrymen. Among them lay a commissar, wearing binoculars and a revolver –very valuable things. But I didn't stop Dura and walked past. Behind me, the soldiers jumped down and robbed the commissar's corpse, even taking off his boots.

"Why didn't you take the revolver and binoculars?" the officers asked me later.

"I hate robbing corpses."

"What misplaced sentimentality."

I just shrugged.

"I quite understand," said my brother. "You did well not to take anything!"

The soldiers were also surprised, and after a long discussion, they brought the binoculars to me. I declined to take them.

The next day we entered the city of Kupyansk. There were no Reds. We swam in the Oskol River.

### **Trouble**

The residents told us that during the evacuation of the city there had been a panic. One of the trains had derailed and blocked the tracks.

"There, across the river, are a lot of wagons. And they are full of abandoned stuff."

I went to Colonel Shapilovski.



“Well then. Take two carts and a few soldiers and go see if you can find something useful for the battery.”

Ensigns Astaf'ev and Forberg joined me. We met several Cossacks on the way. One of them held under his arm a large bundle of uncut *kerenki*<sup>34</sup> – sheets of 800 and 1600 roubles – and was handing out the sheets to people he met. I refused a sheet, but Astaf'ev, Forberg and the soldiers grabbed them.

All our expectations were exceeded. Trains stood one after another into the distance. All filled with different goods. I was confused. What should I take?

Already there were Cossacks and private individuals darting between the cars.

First we loaded linen into the carts. But then there was a carriage with artillery harnesses. Some of the linen was thrown off and a harness was loaded. Suddenly we discovered new artillery fittings. We scratched our heads, threw out the rest of the linen and loaded the fittings. There was no more room in the carts. But suddenly we found some saddles, and new ones at that. Another discussion. We had to take saddles. We could throw out some of the harnesses and load some saddles. It seemed to us that we couldn't do any better, we'd have to return. But suddenly there was a carriage with new saddlebags for saddles. How to refuse those? We threw away some of the fittings and loaded the bags.

“Bugger! We won't find anything better, and besides, I'm tired of loading and unloading. Wait for me here, I will go through to make sure that there is nothing further on.”

The carts and soldiers stayed, while Astaf'ev and I went along the carriages. One contained some boxes. I tore off the lid and gasped. In the boxes were bolts of fabric, some blue and some black. Every cavalryman dreamed of blue trousers, but it was impossible to get blue cloth. I quickly covered the torn-off lid so that a wandering Cossack wouldn't see, and whispered to Astaf'ev.

“Run as quickly as possible and bring the carts, and most importantly, the men.

He ran. But the Cossacks, attracted by some kind of predatory scent, descended on the carriage. I had to lie on the boxes to protect them from being stolen. Fortunately, our soldiers showed up and we extracted some boxes before it turned into a fight. With a pain in my heart, we threw out a few saddles and loaded the boxes.

It was already getting dark, and we were pretty tired. We set off home. Despite the darkness, we collected the entire battery and distributed the booty fairly among all the officers and soldiers, on the sole condition that they must sew blue trousers for themselves, right there in Kupyansk, and not send the fabric back to the Kuban, as is customary among the Cossacks.

A few days later, an inspection was held, and the battery stood out with new saddles, blue pants and white shirts. We looked immaculate.

Those blue trousers gave rise to envy in the 1st Horse-mountain Battery, and I had to listen to complaints that I didn't give any cloth to them. Would they have given any to us? I doubt it.

In the wagons Astaf'ev found a lot of money and Forberg a bag which contained some diamonds. Contrary to custom, they didn't share them out, but kept them for themselves. But Astaf'ev lost everything at cards, and Forberg bought some land in Sochi, and then shot himself.

The next day, we set off with carts and soldiers to pick up what we had thrown away and look for other things. But this turned out to be naive on our part. Crowds of looters had been everywhere, and only the most uninteresting things remained in the trains, that no one wanted.

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In the civil war, there were no decorations for bravery, and that was good. We would have had to reward everyone without exception. Only soldiers were given the St George Cross. Officers couldn't get it. Our horse artillery *divizion* (two batteries) received silver trumpets and a St Vladimir badge for our good work.

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<sup>34</sup> That is notes issued by the Provisional Government of Kerenski, which was overthrown by the Bolsheviks. At the time they would still have been accepted by people, although at a discount to their face value.



With the exception of two or three men in the battery, everyone was brave. Or rather, everyone was afraid, but we had got used to not showing it.

### Easy Campaigning

Marching in the Red rear was simple. We encountered no serious resistance. There were no large battles. The Red command tried to hide the presence of our division in its rear. So our appearance always caused complete surprise, panic and then flight. It wasn't odd: the Reds were expecting to meet a band of rebellious, poorly armed peasants, and then suddenly a whole cavalry division appeared, complete with artillery.

The population sympathised with us, the food was plentiful, the forage was sufficient. It was summer, warm, you could sleep outside and swim. We got rid of our lice. The marches were like pleasant walks for your health. The batteries were on duty on alternate days. If Toporkov needed guns, then the battery on duty went into the line, the other going only in case of especial need.

Near the village of Staroverovka, we sabotaged the railway track in a novel way. We rounded up the entire population and put them along the line. On the command, they grabbed the rails and pulled them down the slope – along with the sleepers. Then they were moved on and did the same again. This ruined the line for a long time, and that meant we didn't have to blow up the bridges. We wanted to keep them, because we thought that our own troops would soon occupy the region.

We crossed the Northern Donets River on a primitive bridge without railings. The river wasn't wide.

We destroyed telegraph and telephone communications. Sometimes we insulted the commissars, who for a long time couldn't understand why their men were being so rude to them. Once we overheard a conversation between a village commissar and the military commissar of Kharkov.

"Comrade, what do you intend to do against the Whites in our rear?"

"Ah, those gangs ... It's not that important."

"Gangs?! A corps of good cavalry with artillery passed by my windows this morning. I could see them. Trust me, I wasn't mistaken, I'm an old cavalryman."

We regretted not correcting the old cavalryman for the comrade commissar, but quietly hung up the phone, because he was doing good propaganda work for us, increasing our forces. Obviously, fear made him see double. We were one division, and he saw a corps, that is, two divisions.

With the onset of the warm weather, the 1st Terek Regiment changed their hats to wide-brimmed felt ones. It made the *Tertsy* look like Mexican cowboys. The only thing missing was the lassos.

### Kharkov

The main goal of our raid was to disorganise the rear services around Kharkov. Kharkov was the centre of Red resistance and the largest city in the south of Russia.

Our raid was going so easily that General Toporkov decided to try to capture Kharkov by storm. The plan was certainly insane, given the number of Red troops concentrated in and around the city. But a diversion was supposed to cause uncertainty in the Red command.

Instead of crossing the Kharkov-Belgorod highway, we headed along it towards Kharkov. Ahead of us we sent a patrol that detained everyone else traveling along the highway.

But a car managed to escape and raised the alarm in the city. The advantage of surprise was lost to us. In addition, the main road passed through a forest and our cavalry couldn't deploy in front of the city.

Some armoured cars were sent from Kharkov to oppose us. They would appear on the highway, shoot at us, then disappear again. The horse-mountain battery placed two guns on the highway, one behind the other, which drove off the armoured cars.

To our left, Red infantry approached through a forest, but was spotted in time. Several dismounted *sotnias* were sent against it, and shooting immediately broke out, but began to move away. The Reds were repelled.



Toporkov decided that he needed to abandon his mad plan to capture the city and instead we would destroy the railways north of Kharkov, as initially planned. But before continuing the campaign, he decided to give the division a rest.

So on the edge of the highway, there were picnics with tablecloths, samovars and girls from the neighbouring *dachas*. There was no fighting. Everything seemed calm.

### **Panic**

Our battery was ordered to replace the horse-mountain guns on the highway, and our gun was sent. In doing so, they made two unforgivable mistakes. First, they didn't put a second gun behind us. Secondly, Captain Mukalov – invited to one of the *dachas* – placed our gun not on a crest in the road, but opposite the *dacha* where he staying, that is, at the bottom of a large dip, from where we couldn't see anything. And Mukalov himself then disappeared.

Our gun crews lay in the shade and fell asleep.

Concerned about our poor position, I mounted Dura and rode to a ridge of the highway, which was a hundred yards away from us.

On the ridge were Colonel Agoev, the commander of the 1st Terek Regiment, and a bit further on, the horse-mountain *tachanka* with Kostya Ungern. His feet were sore, and despite the summer, he was in felt boots. Ahead, a kilometre away, were our scouts.

What I feared then happened. In the distance, two dark squares appeared on the highway.

“Armoured cars,” Agoev told me. “Shoot, or my savages will scatter.”

The scouts on the road ahead had already disappeared into the woods. I glanced at the armoured cars to account for their speed, and took into account the slight bend in the highway. Very worried, I galloped to the gun.

“To battle! With HE. Sight 30.”

I myself pointed the gun slightly to the right. Unfortunately, at that very moment Mukalov appeared, and instead of leaving me to act, he yelled:

“With He! Sight 100. Fire!”

It was nonsense, of course. The sight of 100 is equal to four kilometres, and the armoured cars were nearby. The gunner looked at me. I shrugged. We lost a few more valuable seconds changing the scope.

Finally sent our shell flew into space, and the armoured cars were already on the ridge, and their machine-gun fire hit the gun's shield. The gun was loaded again. Mukalov and the soldiers evaporated and fled. I rushed to the gun, lowered the barrel, twirling the handle, and fired a second shell. As Kostya Ungern told me later, my second shell burst between his machine gun and an armoured car.

The three of us (Nyagu, my brother and I) grabbed the gun and ran – it was easy down the slope of the slope – we caught up with the limber that was already leaving and attached the gun.

It is difficult to describe what was happening around. The armoured cars fired their machine guns without interruption. The Cossack holders let go of the horses, so horses galloped without riders, while the Cossacks ran on foot. Our horse holder still gave us our horses. I grabbed Dura's reins and pressed against her to avoid the machine-gun fire, then jumped on her. She stood like a rock. I leaned over to her.

“Well, Dura, let's go!”

Only then did she run and bumped into a Cossack, who hadn't yet had time to fall: I literally saw the bullet hit him in the head. A small fountain gushed out of his head, and the hat slid off. He pivoted on one leg, and it was then Dura knocked him down. After that, she give it everything.

I bent down and rode. My brother was running ahead of me, holding Rytsar's reins. Rytsar was distraught with panic and wouldn't let my brother mount. I restrained Dura and rode twenty paces behind my brother to help in case of need.



“What an advertisement for Doctor Aleksinski,” I thought (Aleksinski had operated on my brother’s leg). “My brother runs so fast that I don’t come close to him.”

Fortunately, there was a turn in the highway, where the forest hid us from the armoured cars. Immediately after the disorderly flight, we found put ourselves into order. The gun moved from a trot to a walk, Mukalov and the soldiers appeared from somewhere and took their places, and even my brother was on Rytsar.

Our sudden appearance spoiled the picnic idyll, and the division moved on, this time placing not two, but three cannons one after the other on the highway.

The armoured cars didn’t dare to follow us around the turn of the highway. But if they had found the courage, they would have ended up in the picnics: there was nothing to stop them.

All the panic and losses were caused by Mukalov. He was a drug addict and completely incapable of commanding anything.

The division withdrew three kilometres along the highway and turned right onto a forest road. This time there were horse-mountain guns on the highway. The guns let the entire division enter the forest, and one after the other withdrew and followed. The last gun was about to leave the road when the armoured cars reappeared. The gun fired several shells at the armoured cars, took off and galloped towards the forest, where the armoured cars couldn’t follow because of the narrow sandy road.

But in turning rapidly the gun’s wheel broke off the axle and rolled up the road, so the axle crashed into the ground. The armoured cars began to shoot. The crew unhooked the gun, and the team went into the forest. Three officers grabbed the mountain cannon and loaded it onto an passing cart. The cart galloped two hundred paces and then broke under the weight of the weapon. But by now a turn of the road in the forest hid the gun from direct observation by the armoured cars. All this happened very quickly and under the heavy fire of armoured cars. To take the gun off the broken wagon needed the strength of twelve people. But only three to put it on! In dangerous moments, the strength of people multiplies.

And it would have been easy to cut down a few trees and use them to block the highway from the armoured cars. But we only thought of that the next day.

Of course, the armoured cars inflicted losses on us, they had fired a lot. But our losses weren’t at all that great, it seems, two killed, four wounded and two horses. There was more panic than loss of life. We had gotten too used to easy successes and become careless. Everyone succumbed to panic. Only Kostya Ungern and Dura retained their dignity.

## **Zolochev**

We spent the night in a forest village, and the Reds left us alone. In the morning our column went to the railway station at Zolochev about 60 km north of Kharkov. Our battery was on duty.

They shouted down the length of the column: “Battery to the front! Trot!”

Toporkov gave the order. We left the column and moved off at a lively trot. Toporkov was on a hill. He set the task:

“Our scouts are in Zolochev, there. They have sabotaged the rail line. They were told that there was a special train of the *Cheka* with important commissars coming. There it is in front of us to the left. It suspects something is up and has stopped. Don’t let it return to Kharkov. Go!”

We unlimbered, and our shells began to burst on the tracks behind the train. The train raced off, to Zolochev. On the bridge near the station, the locomotive ran off the tracks and the wagons piled up in the air. A distant rumble from the catastrophe reached us.

We hastily limbered and rushed to the crash site. We were too late. The Cossacks were already there and had taken wonderful binoculars, revolvers, wallets, rings, cigarette cases, watches, leather jackets and boots.

About fifty senior commissars were captured. Torn party cards were scattered everywhere. The commissars were shot. A hundred soldiers accompanying them were released. Obviously, Toporkov didn’t want to



create the impression that we were shooting indiscriminately. A few soldiers managed to escape back to Kharkov under fire to bring news and panic.

There were several carriages of candy, sugar and figs on the train. We took what we could. There was still a lot left. Immediately an endless line of peasants with sacks appeared to take the sugar and make sure with their own eyes that this time it was the commissars' turn to be shot. The peasants laughed.

Toporkov allowed them to take whatever they want. The division moved on.

Our diversion against Kharkov, while unsuccessful, was more than paid off by capturing such a number of commissars in Zolochiv. They had no longer felt safe in Kharkov, so they decided to run early, and were caught. Rats are the first to leave the sinking ship.

## Dolzhik

We went north to the village of Dolzhik.<sup>35</sup> We sabotaged the rail line and went from Dolzhik east to Kazach'yu Lopan',<sup>36</sup> where we also ruined the tracks. There were minor skirmishes here. The Reds scattered. The division returned to Dolzhik.

No matter how much we strained our ears were, we didn't hear artillery fire to the south. Either we had gone a long way from our units, or our attack, thanks to our raid, didn't need artillery, that is, the Reds had retreated everywhere.

We were also surprised that the Reds didn't bother us, and we lived quite peacefully in Dolzhik.

We were placed in a rather tidy house. My gaze fell on a French book with an antique leather cover. This meant that there was an estate somewhere nearby. The hostess watched me when I took the book. When I asked if there was an estate nearby, she said she didn't know, but I wasn't fooled.

I went outside and asked the first person I met, "How do I get to the *ekonomia*?" (The name that estates are called in the south.)

"The main entrance is over there, and there is a gap in the wall there."

The estate was thoroughly plundered, with the senseless malice that takes hold of looters. Everything that they couldn't carry was broken, broken. Since I can't use it, no-one else can either.

The first thing that struck me was a grand piano cut by an axe. The parquet floor with ebony patterns was ripped up and discarded – they were looking for treasure! The doors, which were too large for a peasant hut, had been taken to with an axe, some of the windows had been carried off, some broken. Small furniture had disappeared. Large furniture – wardrobes and sideboards – were chopped up. Pictures were cut. The portraits, and among them there were surely some valuable ones, all had their eyes poked out and their bellies ripped open. The porcelain was broken ...

It wasn't just pillage, but brutal destruction. The house was a huge, rather ancient palace. There are some rules about looting. I saw about fifty estates, and all were plundered according to the same system.

Upstairs, in what would have been the bedrooms, there were always letters and photographs scattered about. The chest of drawers containing them were taken, and the letters were dumped. I took one of the letters and, read it, looking at the photographs. In that letter, some girl was describing a holiday to a friend or sister: it must have been a birthday or a name day. "A wire was stretched between the oak trees and multi-coloured lanterns hung on it" ... Those oak trees out there perhaps ... "Beyond the pond, fireworks were set off ..." There was a pond ... "I danced with Andrei and Vasili ..." "Which of the brilliant young officers in the photographs was Andrei, and which was Vasili? Ah, this one will be the prince himself, and this is the princess.

I walked down a massive double stone staircase into a huge hall. To my surprise, in some places there were still huge and beautiful tapestries. They were old, and here and there the fabric had decayed. Obviously,

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<sup>35</sup> Modern Dovzhyk is just south of Zolochiv, but is otherwise the right size and on the rail line. Either Mamontov has his directions confused here or he has the name of the town wrong.

<sup>36</sup> Kozacha Lopan', which is east of Zolochiv, north-east of Dovzhyk.





the looters didn't consider them worthy of attention: 'The fabric is rotten, you can't sew anything worthwhile out of them.'

There was a library somewhere upstairs. Piles of books had been discarded and lay on the floor. People had walked on them. Books in old leather bindings were of no interest to anyone. The mahogany cabinets were chopped up for firewood and taken away.

I began to rummage through the books. A soft cough caught my attention. An old servant of the estate was standing there. I felt embarrassed. He probably mistook me for another looter. I greeted him and asked whose estate it was. He eagerly got into conversation.

"This was the famous 'Veprik' estate, which for centuries had belonged to the Golitsyn princes. It was robbed many times after the revolution, but it was finally destroyed three weeks ago. Would you like to take a look at the stables? All the horses and cows were taken away, and the birds were slaughtered. Here are the agricultural machines – they had been broken. There was an orchard there – now only stumps are left. Here is the greenhouse. The princess loved it very much and often went there. Rare plants, peaches and orchids grew. Now everything is broken, the glasses is all shattered ..."

With a heavy heart, I went home, that is, to the house of a peasant who had taken part in that looting. The French book bore witness to it. The hostess watched my expression carefully and fed us very well. My comrades were surprised. I explained that it was to pay off the robbery. I didn't feel any love for the Russian people. High culture and civilisation had been senselessly destroyed. They would probably make slippers from the tapestries.

I suggested to Colonel Shapilovski that we go find the princely horses for our battery. It would be easy to do. Find one, and then everyone else would betray each other: "If they are going to take mine, then they can have Pëtr's too ..."

That would be nice. But at the time we were in the enemy's rear, and we weren't to irritate the population. At the moment they are telling us about the Reds, but they could equally start informing the Reds about us.

### **A Trap**

The Reds didn't bother us in Dolzhik – on the contrary, from there we went out to damage the railways and telegraphs in the vicinity. We were so accustomed to easy successes that we fell back into criminal insouciance.

One day the peasants brought us the news that the Reds were leaving Kharkov.

Oddly enough, none of our commanders thought that this was a very dangerous moment for us, although we were in the way of the retreat of large Red forces.

In a carefree manner and without any security, the division moved towards Kharkov. Worse, General Toporkov wasn't with the division, but went on ahead. The road ran along the lowlands beside the rail line. The division halted, and everyone dispersed to neighbouring farms for food.

Out of need, I rode away from the column to a small hill. A bullet whistled me, another one. Pricks with their idiotic jokes! More bullets whizzed past. Suddenly a Cossack gallops by and shouted to me.

"Reds!"

I jumped on Dura and rode to my unit. What should we do? They had all dispersed. We needed to collect them as soon as possible. I would fire the cannon. It would bring them all back.

There was no one on the guns, of course. With the help of the riders from the team – who couldn't leave, I fired some shrapnel in the direction of the Reds, who I hadn't seen yet. It was a good move. As soon as gunshots were fired, riders began to gallop in from all sides, and the regiments began to form up.

A Red chain appeared on the hillock where I had been before. The battery opened fire at them. A fight ensued. We had stumbled upon large Red forces moving away from Kharkov. The Reds had the advantage of strength, surprise and the situation. They were on the heights and we were down below. We began to retreat, but there was a swamp behind us. Our position was terrible. I was in charge of the munitions caisson, drawn by bad horses. They were quickly exhausted by dragging the vehicle along the edge of the



swamp. Oboznenko authorised me to leave the caisson. We unharnessed the horses, and in the confusion I didn't think to take my overcoat, belongings and the carbine that were tied to the box. I re-joined my cannon. It was moving with difficulty along the soggy outskirts of the swamp. At one point, a ditch of black water crossed the path.

"The gun will get stuck," I thought.

We threw several boxes of figs into the ditch, which we had been carrying since Zolochov, and put two planks from the shell boxes on top. Over this makeshift bridge, the gun crossed the ditch.

We walked along the very edge of the swamp. On the right next to us was a high railroad embankment that hid us from the Reds. On the left was a huge swamp. There was a feeling of being trapped – that there was no way out. All the same we walked, as there was nothing else for it. The horses were straining all their strength. It sloshed under my feet. Suddenly the path turned into the swamp itself. What to do? We decided to take it. The water rose higher and higher. There were tall reeds all around. They definitely wobbled as we passed.

We moved the gun on another two hundred paces. There was something like a bridge. The gun was completely stuck on it. Further on the path disappeared under water.

An impatient Cossack wanted to bypass the gun blocking the path. He tried to go around it and immediately disappeared into the quagmire. They managed to pull him out, but the horse remained.

"Cut the traces," ordered Colonel Shapilovski. (The thought flashed that this was an extremely rare command – the traces could be unfastened.) We removed the bolt and sights, and abandoned the gun. Only then did we realise that no one else was following us. Where did the rest of the column go?

"Lieutenant Mamontov, go and see what happened to the rest of them."

Shapilovski, Mukalov, the gun and team crews, and about a dozen Cossacks went further along the path, while I turned Dura. Evening came and it got dark. I was left entirely alone. There were no sounds of fighting, just darkness. I was very worried about my brother. I moved carefully, listening. Dura's hooves squelched in the water.

Not far in front of me I heard a muffled voice. I stopped Dura. And suddenly, right in front of me, the command: "Ba-ta-lion ... Fire!" – and a volley tore apart the darkness right in front of me a few dozen steps away. Fortunately, the Red chain was on a high railroad embankment, and all the bullets flew over my head. The darkness and reeds hid me from them. I froze, waited, then quietly turned Dura and headed into the swamp. When Dura's hooves made noises in the water – and this was inevitable – the Reds began to shoot, and I stopped. They calmed down, I continued walking, they began to shoot. So many times. Finally I moved away from them, the shooting stopped.

A nightingale began to sing.

### **In the Swamp**

I asked myself, what happened to the other guns, to my brother, to the whole division? Killed? Scattered? Did they take a different route? And what were we going to do? Would we be able to find the division or get back to our own men near Kharkov? After all, there were retreating Reds on all the roads. We were trapped, and all because we were careless, it was our own fault.

I got back to our stuck gun. There was no path further on. Just black water, which reflected the moon and the reeds that swayed with Dura's every step. There was silence apart from the nightingale.

Where was the path? How to find it? If only there was a dog barking on the other side to navigate by. It would be foolish to die in a quagmire, as that Cossack almost did just now. A shiver went through me. Suddenly I changed my mind. I was not alone. Dura was with me, and she would lead me out. Just don't bother her. Let her do it. I stroked her:

"You are clever, you will find the way. Walk carefully, slowly. Where other horses have been."

I was sure that Dura understood me. I gave her a long rein, took my feet out of the stirrups and mentally repeated, "You are smart, you will find the way."



I felt that she was reading my thoughts and they were helping her.

Dura quietly entered the black water. At first, the water reached her knees, then it began to rise higher and higher and reached her chest. Dura stretched out her neck, sniffed the water on all sides and walked on with small steps. And the neighbouring reeds swayed evenly with her every step. She stopped, sniffed the water again, turned right and walked. Then she turned right again, walked some distance, stopped, went left. The water seemed to begin to subside. But I was still afraid to rejoice. I kept encouraging Dura mentally:

“Go carefully. You know where to go ...”

The water definitely began to subside, and soon the reeds stopped swaying. Dura went more confidently. She walked along a hard bottom and soon reached the shore of the swamp.

“Thank you, sweetheart. You did that very well. I myself would never have gotten out of the swamp. It’s good that I got the idea to let you find your own way.”

There was a small farm in which I found Shapilovski with our men, and two or three dozen Cossacks. That was all. Nobody knew where the rest had gone. Out of caution, we slept on the street in order to keep together, not in the huts.

In such cases, the Cossacks are wonderful. Descendants of bandits, they adapt to the circumstances. There was no useless chat, no panic, no confusion. They were gloomily silent, but just that.

I could only give Dura a little straw and, of course, didn’t unsaddle her. That night was rather cold. It was only then that I realised that my greatcoat, belongings and carbine were there, on the caisson. I had a map in a leather case on my belt. I took out a map of southern Russia and wrapped myself in it. I lay down beside Dura and, in spite of the circumstances, fell into a deep sleep.

I dreamed of black water with the reflection of the moon and the swaying of reeds all around ... and shivered.

### **Looking for the Division**

At dawn, Colonel Shapilovski ordered us to try to pull out the abandoned gun. He himself stayed with the Cossacks, and he sent us – Mukalov, me and our men on that absurd task. After all, he had walked through the swamp himself, and it should have been clear to him that there was no way the gun could be pulled out through the swamp. It’s amazing how people think, but Shapilovski wasn’t a fool.

I protested fervently, trying to explain to Mukalov that it was impossible to pull it out, and that we could always find another gun. We would simply waste time, and the Cossacks would leave without us. What would we do by ourselves? Our men don’t even have rifles. We needed to unite, not separate. What we were doing was completely absurd and stupid. Even if we could rescue the cannon, what then? Give it to the Reds?

But all my eloquence bounced off Mukalov like peas from a wall. Likely he’d taken some cocaine. Also the senior officers (Shapilovski and Mukalov) still adhered to the old view that a weapon is like a unit standard and that men should be sacrificed in order to keep it. I saw it differently. I was completely desperate because what we were doing was mad.

But, fortunately, the Reds came to my aid. Yes, the Reds. They were still on the railroad embankment on the other side, and when they saw us, they opened heavy fire on our group. We turned around and returned to the farm. The Cossacks had already left. Shapilovski too – he sent us to a probable death, and then left with the Cossacks. It would have been another matter if he had also gone with us.

Soon we caught up with our Cossacks. We didn’t know where to head, but we had to keep moving in order in order to avoid being surrounded. I don’t know which of the Cossack officers led us, but he did so perfectly. All the roads were full of retreating Red columns. We needed to manoeuvre between them.

Each Red column fired at us, but when we retired away from them and their path was free, they preferred to carry on rather than chase us. The next column would fire at us, and we again headed away on a tangent. It was a retreat of zigzags.



Sometimes we were fired at by artillery, which even helped us, because it let the Cossacks scattered around know of our presence. Cossacks appeared from everywhere – from under bridges, from the forests, from the bushes and even from the river. The cannon shots aided the collection of individual fugitives. In the morning there were sixty of us, at noon a hundred, in the evening three hundred. In the morning we had moved like as a gaggle, but in the evening we were lined up in ranks, which indicated the energy of our leader. We, the gunners, dangled in the rear of our column because we had no rifles. I don't remember where and how we slept, and whether we slept or continued to march. But the next morning we met a patrol sent from the division to look for us. It had also found us thanks to the gunshots.

You can imagine our joy! It turned out that the division had gone by another route and was once again in Dolzhik, where we immediately headed. What a sigh of relief escaped us when we saw the entire division and both batteries.

When my brother and I met we didn't say anything, although we were full of emotion. All our worries and doubts were over.

### **We Leave**

Now the division's goal was much more modest: to quietly defend itself until all the Red columns had passed. It was good that we had thoroughly damaged the railway at Dolzhik earlier. There the Reds abandoned an artillery convoy with guns and shells, as if specially prepared for us. We immediately took a gun from a rail car and harnessed it in place of the one we had left in the swamp. Our battery was again complete. At the end of the train was a wagon with shells. We placed the battery guns near this carriage, and as soon as a Red column or chain appeared, we fired as fast as we could, since the shells were there and we couldn't take them all away with us anyway. We shot to the point that the barrels became hot and it was impossible to touch them. We had to hold our fire until they cooled down.

The Reds tried to sneak up on us several times, but the reception was such that they hurriedly left, and in the end avoided us. So we stood calmly among a sea of retreating Red troops. Our battery was constantly on duty at the carriage with the shells, and the horse-mounted one got to rest. They had shells with a shorter case and the ones on the train weren't suitable.

"Ah," said the Cossacks, "if only you could always shoot like that, how that would simplify our job!"

Thinking about our trek with such a small group, among the enormous masses of the retreating enemy, I cannot understand how they let us get by. It seems that they lacked cavalry and they were totally occupied with their retreat and didn't want to chase us. Still, honour and glory to that unknown Cossack officer, who was able to collect up those fleeing men and lead us to the division without loss.

During our retreat, I felt Dura weakening. I hadn't fed her for two days because of the fighting. So, in spite of the Red fire, I unsaddled her, let her roll on the ground, rubbed her back with straw and quickly saddled her again. That is very helpful for horses. The march was considerable – I find it difficult to guess how far we wandered, dodging the Reds. I did the whole trip on foot, leading Dura by the bridle, and getting into the saddle only when we moved to a trot. Thanks to that, she endured this marching and the lack of food relatively well.

### **Dergachi**

Two days later we were sure that all the Red units were north of us. Our patrols no longer met them anywhere. The road to Kharkov was obviously clear. This time, with great apprehension and security, we moved south.

I was among those sent off to find quarters. Together with a large group of scouts, we trotted in a merry cavalcade. The senior officer didn't line us up in any order.

Suddenly, a similar cavalcade appeared in front of us from behind the bend. On their heads they wore caps with unfamiliar pinkish red crowns. Both detachments stopped and even backed away. After conversing we found out that it was a detachment of mounted scouts from the Drozdovski Division, sent from Kharkov. They found had cloth in Kharkov and sewed themselves crimson caps with white bands.

"You can go back, there are no Reds up to Dolzhik. Our division is following us."



They decided to move on to at least the division.

“Look out that they don’t shoot at you! They don’t know about your red caps.”

The gunfire near Dolzhik had been heard clearly in Kharkov, and they had wondered what it meant. Incredible! After all, the army staff knew that the Terek division was in the Red rear. They heard the cannonade and did nothing to help us. After all, heavy firing indicated combat, and even a decent battle – and they stayed put. Some incredible selfishness, and mediocre command.

To our great disappointment, our division wasn’t allowed into Kharkov, but was placed in the village of Dergachi fifteen kilometres north of Kharkov. Of course, it was better for fodder and more comfortable, but we wanted to be in the big city. However, they let us go there on leave and once brought in the entire division for a parade. Our battery, of course, put on our blue trousers.

We found the Rukteshels and the doctor who had treated me for the Spanish flu. My colleague Astrov had died of typhus. My brother consoled the young lady Rukteshel, his fiancée, and I thought that an affair was brewing. The doctor, however, received us coldly. It seemed to me that there must be something between him and the White government, but I don’t know what.

There I stole a revolver from Kostya Ungern. A relative of his had been appointed commandant of the city, and Kostya showed us several revolvers that had been recovered. I put one in my pocket and left with it. Soon afterwards a party was being held in the city. Nyagu, my brother and I remained on duty in Dergachi, while the rest of the officers left for the city. Colonel Shafrov’s revolver was given to us for safe keeping, since Shafrov was dangerous with weapons when he got drunk. I exchanged his revolver for the stolen one. Kostya suspected me and checked my revolver number, but to his surprise, it turned out to be completely different. And Shafrov didn’t notice anything either. Later, in the Crimea, he shot himself with my stolen one.

So I became the owner of a revolver, something that was indispensable. But theft remains theft, and I felt uneasy.

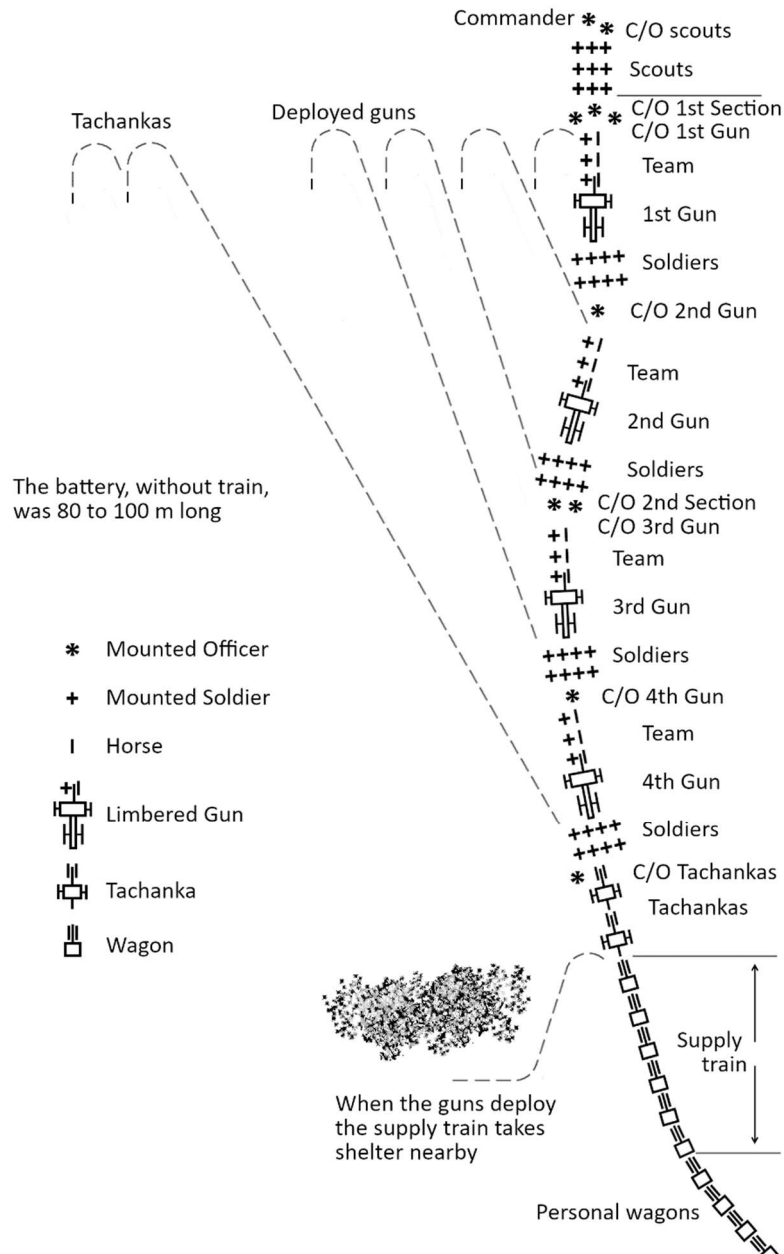
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A little later, the Caucasian Army, together with the Don Host, took the city of Tsaritsyn (later Stalingrad) and then, further north, Kamyshin.

But Admiral Kolchak’s Siberian Army began to withdraw. We failed to form a united front with it. Kolchak was recognised as the Commander-in-Chief of all four White armies: 1) the Siberian, 2) the Volunteer Army in the south, 3) the Army of General Yudenich, near Petrograd, and 4) the Army of General Miller in Arkhangel. The last two weren’t very large and were soon eliminated by the Red forces. But the Volunteer and Siberian Armies posed a very real danger to the Reds. The Western powers and America didn’t support either us or Kolchak, which was to save Communism.



## The Battery while Moving



Here the battery is shown at the effective maximum. It has 10 officers, 48 soldiers, 9 scouts, 75 horses plus the wagon drivers.

The minimum strength was 3 officers, 20 soldiers, 12 wagon drivers, 1 tachanka, two large wagons and four small ones.

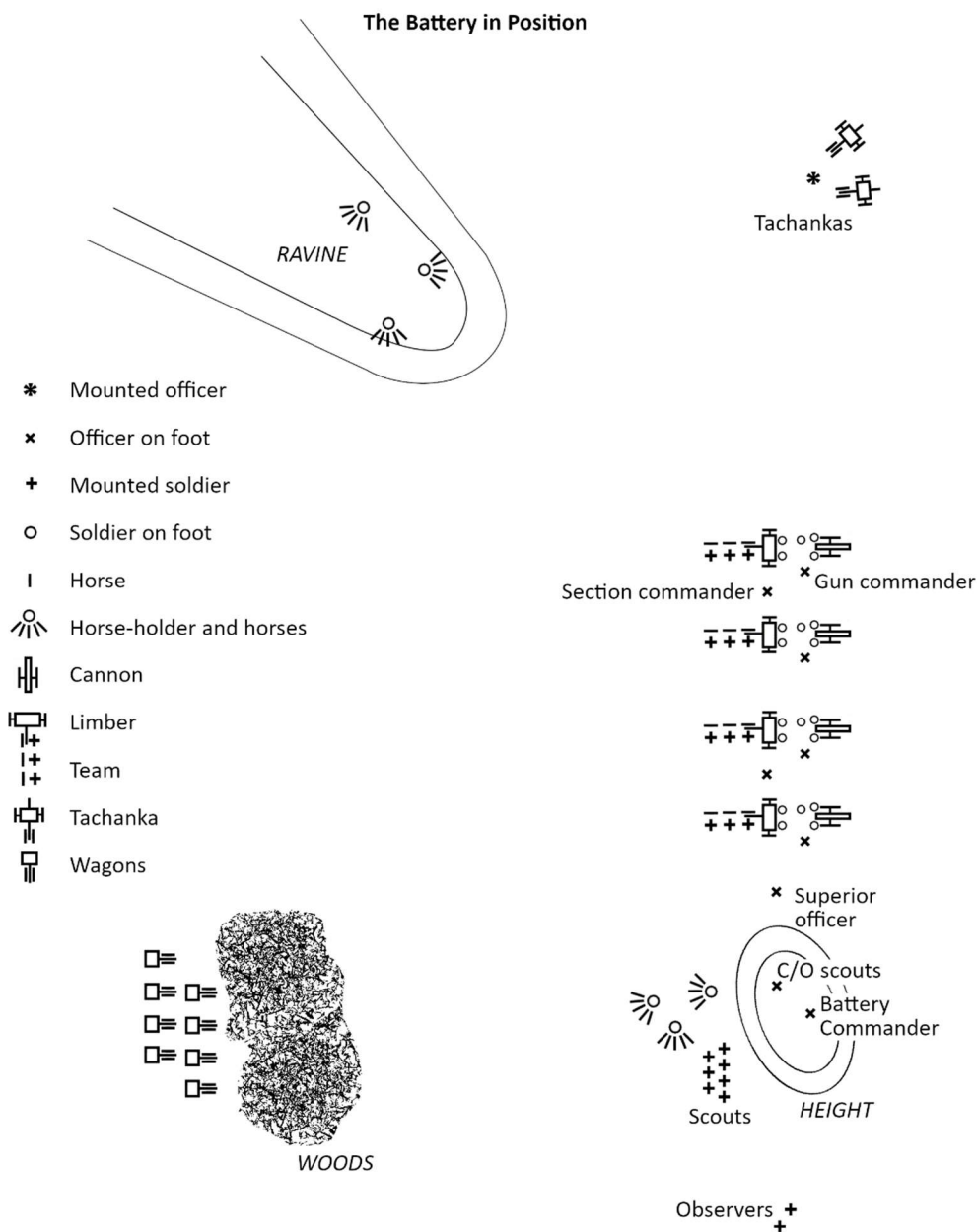
## The Battery in Combat

Through practice and experience the batteries – the horse-mountain and ours – developed some methods which were contrary to the regulations of the previous war. The first change was the lack of caissons. Initially, thanks to the shortage of shells, we could carry them all with the limbered gun. Then we noticed that without caissons, the battery became more mobile, its was half as long on the march and losses were reduced, especially in horses. The reserve of shells began to be transported on normal carts we had requisitioned, in a “combat train”, a little behind the battery. We fired shells carried by the limber. When it was calm for a moment, a cart would come up to the battery and replenished the supply.

A battery was four guns, not six. Previously the smallest unit was a platoon, that is, two guns. We had each gun commanded by an officer and often operated independently. The gun also arranged its own supply.



The battery almost always fired from an open position. Initially it was difficult to find a hidden position on the flat Kuban steppes, and afterwards because you need to act quickly in a war of movement. There was no time to search for good positions. Finally, we found that fire at close range was more effective, both in terms of causing losses and the psychological effect. It was necessary to deploy faster than the enemy's battery. In the beginning, the Reds had batteries without officers and fired poorly, which allowed us to take risks. If a battery came under fire, it was often rescued by another battery, which silenced the enemy, or it abandoned the position, often moving in a dispersed formation to reduce losses.



The battery had a *tachanka*, sometimes two, for cover. When the battery deployed, the head of the machine-gun team chose a place on one of the flanks.

The combat train consisted of an ambulance wagon and the carts for personal belongings, one per gun. These were the carriages that belonged to the battery. In addition, there were a certain number of requisitioned carts, in which we carried shells, barley, flour, salt etc. We only had a mobile kitchen rarely, there was no time to cook because of the repeated movement. The combat train followed directly behind



the battery, so as to not get lost. During a battle, it went to a hidden spot nearby. If there were a lot of carts, an officer was appointed to command them.

A train with the tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths etc was about a hundred kilometres to the rear. Officers and soldiers went there for treatment and rest.

The effectives of the battery varied a lot. There were always more people when on the offensive than when we retreated. More in summer, less in winter. It was roughly between fifty and eighty men.

At night, the guns were placed in a 'park', on a square or in a street. A guard wasn't always posted. Each man took his horses to the stable attached to the house he was staying at. We didn't like hitching posts and rarely used them.

We didn't take any roll calls, make reports, or have any paperwork. Doubtless the rolls of effectives were with train in the rear, and incorrect.

We fired shells taken from the limber. They were placed three paces from the guns. Taking the limbers away any distance was unthinkable in a war of movement. In the event of an attack, we would never have had time to limber up.

While General Nevadovski, formerly of the 64th Brigade, was the inspector of horse artillery, everything went well. But after his death, General Prince Avalov, an actual horse artilleryman, became the inspector of horse artillery. And then trouble began. This was facilitated by two circumstances. Firstly, there were few true horse artillerymen among the officers of our batteries. There were light gunners like me and even infantry officers like my brother. The inspectorate couldn't stomach this. In the past, the horse artillery had been like a caste, which Avalov had belonged to. Secondly, all that I mention above wasn't consistent with regulations.

Avalov rarely visited the front lines and couldn't understand that our innovations were more practical. He was convinced it was negligence, and insisted on the exact application of regulations, not wanting to admit that they were outdated, that different rules are needed in a mobile war than in a positional one.

### **Disagreement**

A very strange situation was created. Our immediate superiors – the inspector of horse artillery – didn't like us and tried to dissolve our unit. On the contrary the cavalry commanders appreciated us a great deal, and Avalov had to reckon with this. In addition, the mountain horse battery was the first horse battery in the Volunteer Army, founded by Kolzakov. Avalov remembered this and didn't particularly go after them, but he pursued our 2nd Horse, wherever he could.

There was a disagreement. In Khortsisk, in the coal-mining area, the inspectorate sent two officers to the two batteries to test the officers' knowledge of artillery. This after two years of continuous battles and campaigns! This enraged us. We agreed that we would tell the examiners that we had no idea of either shooting or artillery. The examiners complained to the battery commander, Colonel Kolzakov.

"You see," Kolzakov replied, "I formed the battery in Jassi, in Romania, at the beginning of 1918, in the most difficult circumstances. Nobody supported me, and everyone predicted our demise ... At the time we were glad of every volunteer and didn't test their knowledge. There weren't many of them. There were only five volunteers from the horse artillery, so I had to take light artillerymen and even infantrymen. Despite this, the battery isn't bad. Two years of constant campaigns and battles have shown that. Where were the horse artillerymen when we started? Why do they only appear now, once we have done all the work? I haven't seen them under fire, but they seek to test the knowledge of experienced men. I consider that to be deadening bureaucracy and tactless. My salutations to you."

We were delighted with this speech. And the embarrassed examiners left. I can imagine how furious Avalov would have been! The inspectorate kept silent, but held their grudge and were just waiting for the opportunity to disband us.

It was presented with two opportunities.





During a long retreat across the Kuban, near Novo-Korsunskaya, a Red battery completely destroyed ours. Our commander, Captain Nikitin, was mortally wounded, and almost all crew and horses were wounded. Only two very young officers remained. But Avalov didn't take into account the energy of Ensign Kazitski, 20 years old, and me, a second lieutenant, 22 years old. We worked tirelessly and created a three-gun battery from what remained, which we put in position. And that's in less than an hour. There was no reason to disband the existing battery. But instead of gratitude, Avalov was disparaging and left dissatisfied.

The second case presented itself after the evacuation from Novorossiysk. We had neither guns nor horses. True, Avalov had been killed by that time, but the new inspector of horse artillery didn't favour us either. But on that occasion we found that one of our platoons, which had been working separately from the battery under the command of Captain Kovalevski, had made it to the Crimea. There was no question of dissolving an existing battery.

For some reason I was sent to this new inspector of horse artillery (whose name I don't remember, it sounded Greek).

"You are like cats – you always fall to your feet, even after Novorossiysk. I'm amazed at your energy ... If another battery was in the same disorder as yours, then I would say that it was falling apart, and feel it necessary to dissolve it. But how can I do that with you? You are one of my oldest and most combat ready batteries! ... But I won't hide from you that I often think about it."

That reprimand gave me great pleasure. Yet he gave us our due. Shortly afterwards, General Wrangel presented our *division* with silver trumpets and the badge of St Vladimir for our good work.

I must say that General Prince Avalov was an excellent officer. But there were constantly intrigues around him.

