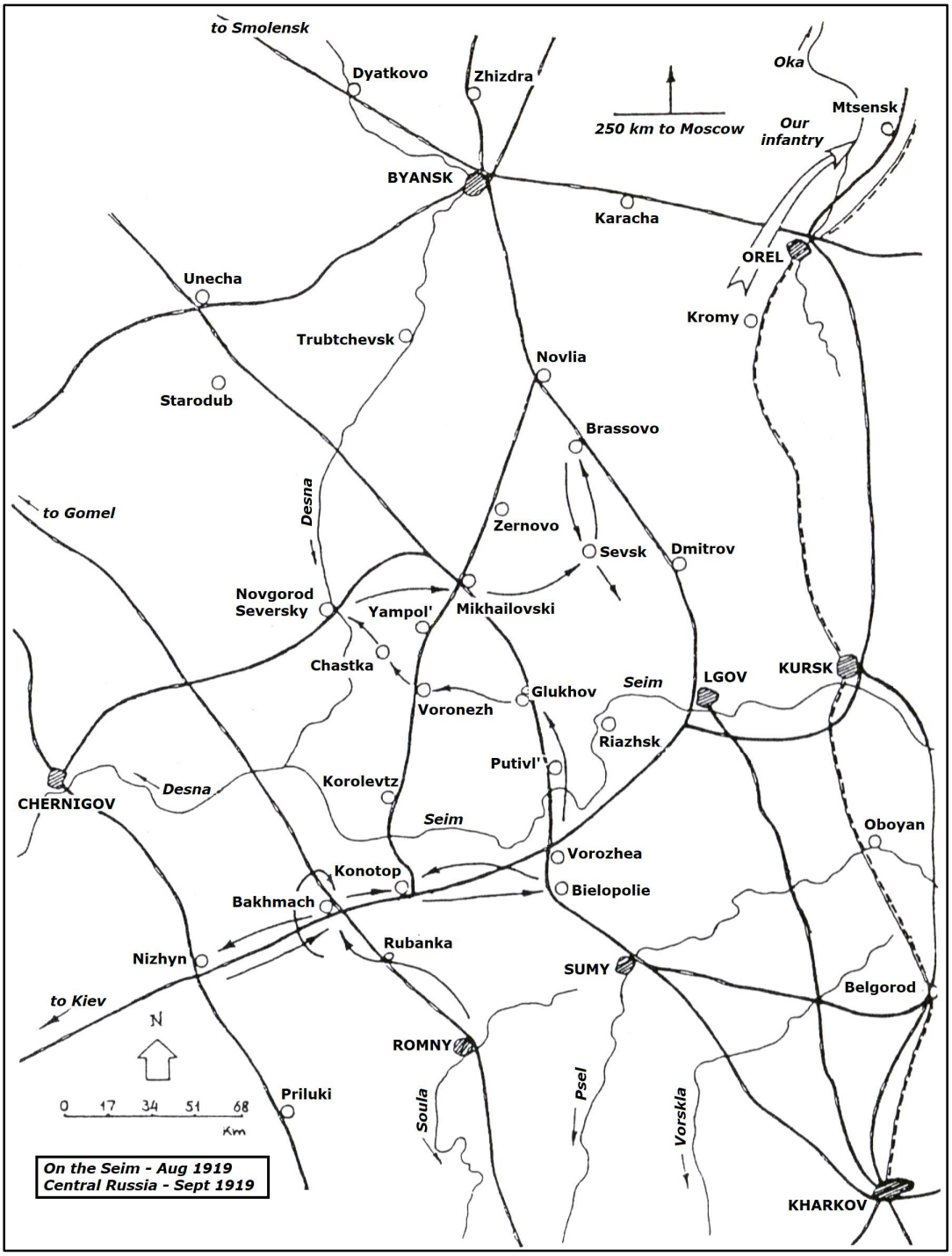
Chapter 10 – With the Regular Cavalry

Poltava

After a week's rest in Dergachi near Kharkov, both of our batteries were loaded onto a train there and sent to Poltava. Our division had been transferred from the Terek Division to the regular cavalry. We were sorry to leave the *Tertsi*, with whom we had spent so much time and with whom we worked so well. Who knew what the regular cavalry would be like?

The next morning I woke up in a boxcar.

"We have arrived in Poltava."



But the city was nowhere to be seen. A swampy river flowed nearby.

"This is a tributary of the Vorskla, and Poltava is over there, half a kilometre."

I went to look at Poltava. In the unpaved square there were one-storey houses, with a monument in the middle. Pigs and geese roamed. The impression was deeply provincial. There were no fortifications. How did Poltava withstand the siege of the Swedes? Obviously, the fortifications had been torn down.

Poltava is Ukraine itself, glorified by Gogol and famous for the nearby Battle of Poltava, between Karl XII of Sweden and Peter the Great. Indeed, during the campaigns we came across some well-preserved earthworks, but I didn't have time to see the battlefield itself.

I hurried to return to our column. The batteries were being unloaded. The head of the supply train, Colonel Lebedev, had arrived and told us about promotions. It was proposed that my brother become staff captain, but he never got that rank. I had been proposed to lieutenant, which I eventually got. Many were promoted a rank. Oboznenko was promoted to colonel – at the age of 23! – and was appointed senior officer of the battery, to popular approval as he was a fine officer. Mukalov became the platoon leader, and my brother was given command of our first gun. This was a confirmation of what had been happening in practice for some time, so nothing much changed. Some were very happy with their promotions. Mine surprised me – I had no interest in a military career.

My brother and Mukalov went on leave to Ekaterinodar. My brother took a five-hundred-rouble Romanov note from me, which I carried in a bag around my neck as an emergency reserve just in case. I gave it with displeasure. I wore it because I was thrifty, like our mother, while my brother was a spender, like our father.

The battery was unloaded and went to the assembly point, where the entire corps had been gathered. A squadron trotted past us. The dragoons were armed with lances and walked at a light trot. The squadron bouncing up and down made us laugh. We had lost the habit of the classical method. Both Kuban and Terek Cossacks, don't carry lances and don't rise when trotting.

The lance is very awkward when marching. But in the hands of a knowledgeable cavalryman it is a fine weapon. At the beginning of the 1914 war, the Don Cossack Kozma Kryuchkov received the St. George's Cross First Class for skewering eleven Germans with his lance. The liberals tried to ridicule this feat, they didn't understand how one person could do it ... But it was a fact, carefully verified and others did similarly. The reality is that working with a lance takes skill, that Kryuchkov possessed. A lance wound is almost always fatal, and always incapacitating.

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There was already a whole corps of regular cavalry, and even more. Many of the old regiments began to reform. There were drawbacks to this. Firstly, the regiments were rarely completely reconstituted. But as soon as a new squadron appeared, the train grew. I think that for each fighter there were two or more men in the rear services. The regiments at the front were 'consolidated', made up of squadrons each representing different regiments, which was also a disadvantage – it caused intrigue and competition. Each worked for their own regiment, and not for the benefit of all.

The corps commander, I recall, was Lieutenant General Yuzefovich – whom we called "the great mute". Very good looking, he was always bent over a map while twirling his long moustache, but we never heard his voice. Some nimble colonel or even a captain gave the orders, and actually commanded the corps. Fortunately many of the divisional, brigade and regimental commanders were first class. Soon, Yuzefovich disappeared and was replaced by someone who also didn't stay in my memory. Meanwhile the command of a brigade, then division, and finally the entire regular cavalry passed to General Barbovich, an excellent commander. The cavalry became a formidable force under him. All the regular cavalry in the Volunteer Army used lances, even the hussars.

Our battery always worked with the Composite Regiment of the 12th Division. It included all the regiments which had been numbered 12: the Starodub Dragoons, Belogorod Lancers and Akhtyr Hussars. The most numerous were the lancers, commanded by our old hussar acquaintance from Pologi, Colonel Psel. Some officers wore peacetime uniforms.

At first, we didn't really trust the regulars and didn't push forward. But gradually we got used to them. Of course, they didn't have the daring of the Cossacks, but they had tenacity in battle and were disciplined.

I recall seeing six horse batteries: the first and the second were of the Guards, our two – the Drozdovski – and the seventh and the eighth. I didn't see any others than our two in Poltava. But the 7th worked with a special group of cavalry across the Dnieper (my friend Aleksandrov served with them). I met the 1st Guard battery for the first time in the city of Nizhyn (the Krivosheins served with it). I met the 2nd Guards one during the retreat and crossing of the Don. We served alongside the 8th at Bryukhovetskaya. Obviously, each battery was assigned to different units, and therefore we rarely met.

In Poltava we met our immediate chief, the inspector of horse artillery, General Prince Avalov, for the first time. And received our first reprimand from him for our lack of caissons.

Towards Kremenchug

Our first operation with the regular cavalry was directed at the city of Kremenchug on the Dnieper. We fought small battles at Senzhary, Lestinovka and Kobelyaki. As far as possible we fired from hidden positions, at long range. I didn't see any prisoners or any enemy in general during that campaign. We felt that that the cavalry was sluggish. In the end, Kremenchug was captured by another cavalry group, approaching from the other side, and we returned to Poltava, having not seen the Dnieper.

The marches were easy. It was July 1919, the weather was fine and there was little rain. You could sleep outside, swim, and wash your clothes. We were almost clean. In summer, campaigning is like a promenade if you are on the victorious side. And we were the ones advancing. Winter campaigns are completely different – it is cold, there are lice, and you are always dirty. Quarters are bad, so you can't undress and wash. Diseases develop, principally typhus – which killed more of us than bullets. But I didn't develop any type of typhus.

From Poltava, the corps was divided into divisions and marched north-west in several columns. Because of this I will no longer talk about the corps, just the division.

Towards Romny

From Poltava we went north. We passed Dikanka and I remembered Gogol. At Budishche and Oposhnya we had light skirmishes with the Reds, but they immediately retreated. The first real battle took place near the small town of Zenkov. We already trusted the regulars and deployed in an open position, and this time we saw the Reds clearly. The battle reached a great intensity and then all of a sudden died down. The Reds retreated. It turned out that one of our units had got behind their flank and struck. This time there were prisoners and also those killed on the side of the road.

From Zenkov, the division went to the city of Gadyach. It is located on the right high bank of the Psel. The river there is wide and deep. Taking the city directly was unthinkable. Our division headed to the right and captured the village of Kamenka. There the river divides into several branches. Our battery pushed the Reds away from the riverbank, and parts of the 12th Regiment were able to cross it in small boats and dig in. With them shielding us, the rest of the regiment could be ferried across, and after them our battery, and then the whole division. There was a short, heated battle, but the Reds retreated. There were no Reds in the city of Gadyach.

The next day we occupied the Lipovaya Valley with a struggle. Romny, the ancient capital of the Cossacks, lay before use. But the city, like Gadyach, was on the other side of the Sula River, and in order to capture it, one regiment and our battery was sent to the left – to cross the river and take the city from the other side. It was getting dark, and we trotted to try to cross before it got dark. We found a small ferry near the village of Zhukovtsy. The squadrons swam across the Sula, and we began to transport the guns, one by one, on the ferry. It took a long time, and by the time the whole battery was on the other side, the cavalry had long since gone. The battery commander, Colonel Shapilovski, had also left with the cavalry, and taken all the scouts with him. It was like before, with the Tereks. The battery was completely by itself on the enemy bank of the river. Darkness fell. The battery went along the main road towards Romny, led by Oboznenko. We were very concerned about our situation, as we didn't even have scouts who could be sent on ahead to patrol in front of the battery. The soldiers were warned not to smoke, not to talk and, most importantly, not to address officers by rank – this would give us away to the Reds, as they had no officer ranks. The battery was defenceless as it moved along.

Just before it was completely dark, a patrol of a dozen riders approached us from the flank. We appeared unconcerned and continued to move at a walk, without speeding up. They passed about a hundred paces away from us, to the side, without speaking to us or asking which unit we were from.

Soon it was pitch black as we walked along the highway. Oboznenko and I were in front of the battery, and talked quietly about our unenviable position.

A carriage came towards us. We couldn't see it because of the darkness, but we guessed what it was from the sounds. Oboznenko and I moved aside and let it go. We heard the following conversation as it went behind us. There was an unfamiliar voice first, presumably the coachman.

"Hey you, take the left and let us through."

The lead rider of our team replied, "Move over yourself, and be quick about it. Otherwise we will push you into the ditch."

Another voice, very domineering, "I'm a front commissar! I order you to clear the road at once!"

There was a short silence in which, despite the darkness, we could feel the amazement. Then the sound of riders jumping off and their boots running on the road.

The same voice, but surprised, "Comrades, what are you doing? Comrades ..."

And nothing more. The gun didn't even stop. We continued walking in the dark. Before dawn we finally caught up with our regiment. It had stopped near the city. We were very happy to re-join it. I lay down in the buckwheat, holding Dura's rein while she grazed it. The little pink flowers smelled so wonderful. I fell into a deep sleep.

A long-range cannon shot woke me up. A battle had begun somewhere there. People got up, brushed themselves down and straightened their saddles. I went to my gun. The riders had some things that I hadn't seen before. One had a gold star on his chest, and every minute he pulled out a gold watch from his pocket. Another was dressed in a fine leather coat, and the third pulled out a beautiful gold cigarette case and offered me a cigarette.

"These are gifts from the late commissar," the riders told me, laughing.

An elegant carriage was following the battery. They had found a folder with documents in it. There was an order to prevent the Whites (us) from crossing the Sula. The location was indicated correctly, but the commissar made a mistake about the day, and that changed everything for us, and for him.

There was no battle for Romny. As soon as we heard that battle had begun on the other side, we fired two bursts of artillery with shrapnel. That turned out to be enough to get the Reds to scramble. Our cavalry, which went on ahead, didn't meet any Reds.

To enter Romny, we donned our blue pants and white shirts, for which we were rewarded with smiles and flowers from the young ladies.

In peacetime, the Izyum Hussars and two horse batteries, numbers 16 and 17, were stationed in Romny. We found warehouses with the silver trumpets of the hussars and the wonderful peacetime helmets of the horse artillerymen. Unfortunately, the other uniforms had already been plundered. We, of course, didn't give the trumpets to the hussars, but organised our own orchestra. It played in the city garden and, of course, played badly – we had no time to practice. To compensate for their poor performance, the musicians were dressed in blue trousers and the helmets. This created a sensation among the public, and about six volunteers from the city's bourgeois families entered our battery.

The Volunteers

Colonel Shapilovski called me, "We have some volunteers. Take care of them!"

"What am I supposed to do with them, Colonel?"

"What do you mean, what? Make soldiers out of them."

“Colonel, sir, you know that they came because of the helmets and blue pants. Once they realise that they won’t get to wear them, they will get sick, ask for leave and won’t return. They will desert, taking our uniforms with them. They will only be a burden to the battery, they won’t make good soldiers. Better to send them home immediately.”

“I understand that well, and I also prefer men who are familiar with a hard life ... But we cannot send away volunteers ... Go and do what you can.”

I set to work with the volunteers. I was extremely demanding and unpleasant to be rid of them as quickly as possible.

I made them clean the horses. Brushing a horse that has never been brushed is impossible in one go. It seems clean, but if you run your hand against the grain, the dirt reappears.

“They aren’t clean. Start over.”

By cleaning the horses, I drove the volunteers to despair very quickly. On the evening of the second day, one of them cleared his throat.

“Lieutenant, sir, I received a letter (from where? We had no mail service). I’m informed that my mother is ill ...”

“And you are asking for leave. Is that it?”

“Yes...”

“And do any of you others have sick family?”

“Yes, I do ... And me ... Me also ...”

“All your mothers fell ill at once, as if on command? What a strange epidemic!”

“No, you see, it is my aunt ... my cousin ... sister ...”

“Okay, okay, don’t make up stories. You aren’t soldiers yet and you can leave whenever you want.”

“We’ll be back in three days.”

“Go on. Hold on tight to your mummy’s skirt and don’t come back ... Don’t take the brushes, hand them to me.”

They all left in a hurry, only one remained.

“And you, what are you waiting for?”

“I don’t want to leave, Lieutenant, sir.”

“What?! You want to stay with the battery?”

“That’s right, lieutenant, sir.”

“Hmm, hmm ... What’s your name?”

“Medvedev, lieutenant, sir.”

“Listen, Medvedev, the service isn’t about prancing on a handsome stallion and captivating young ladies. There is fatigue, work, lice, dirt, fear, danger.”

“I know that, Lieutenant.”

“And despite this, you want to stay?”

“That’s right, sir.”

“Hmm ... Hmm ... Then I can tell you that the life of a soldier isn’t so hard after all. Go have a rest, and take the brushes and combs to the supply officer.”

Medvedev turned out to be a good soldier and remained in the battery until the end.

I went to report to Colonel Shapilovski about the result of my activity.

“Is there only one left? All the others are gone? That isn’t a great result ... How did you disperse them?”

“I made them clean horses that had never been cleaned.”

“Ha, ha, ha. And then ran your hand against the grain? Ha, ha, ha. Well, this one, the last one won’t run away?”

“I don’t think he will run away.”

We had to go through the three main left tributaries of the Dnieper: Vorskla, Psel and Sula – we were taught them while at high school. We never suspected that we might be fighting on them.

Baibarak

For some reason, during this campaign there were no Red armoured trains, which were common in previous ones. True, there were none of our ones either, but we didn’t need them.

We didn’t stay long in Romny. Our battery and regiment were sent to drive the Reds out of the surrounding villages. We went in the direction of Priluki, but didn’t get that far. Presumably another of our units was in Priluki. I don’t remember now the names of the villages and hamlets through which we passed. I didn’t write them down at the time, and I couldn’t find them on any map. There were several estates. One was burnt, and only some chimneys and pyramidal poplars were left sticking up. The other though was so quickly occupied by us that the comrades didn’t have time to destroy it. To celebrate, the manager gave us a good dinner. Duck and ice cream. We took two horses from the excellent stables. There was some fighting, but the Reds usually left once we started shelling them heavily.

In a large village I was sat at a table writing my diary. A hefty guy entered, red-haired, belt under his belly, a potato-shaped nose.

He greeted me, walked over to the table, leaned against it and asked, “Are you an officer?”

There was no impudence about him, he seemed quite natural.

“Yes, I’m an officer.”

“I want to be a gunner.”

“Why do you want to join us? You would be better off to join the Reds.”

“Yes, I was with them.”

“Good! And then?”

“No, I didn’t like it them, I deserted.”

“Will you desert from us too? We are strict.”

“That is what I like. I have an eye for that and I liked your battery right away ... The Makhnovists are a complete shambles.”

“What? You joined the Makhnovists too?”

“Of course.”

“Why don’t you just stay at home?”

“No. Too boring. My family aren’t friendly. I want to see the world.”

“And have you thought that we could lose the war. What will you do then? We will probably leave Russia.”

“Where will you go?”

“I don’t know. Abroad.”

“That’s great. I’ve always dreamed of going to America ... When are you leaving? Look, don’t forget me!”

“We haven’t lost the war yet. Indeed, everything is going well.”

“That’s a shame …”

“What’s your name?”

“Baibarak. And you?”

“OK, Baibarak, I will take you on trial with my gun. Now you have to call me “Lieutenant, sir” because I’m your commander.”

“That’s alright I have already asked the lads. They say that you aren’t bad.”

“Baibarak,” I said sternly. “You must get used to using military speech, And most importantly, take good care of the horses. Otherwise, I will send you ... to your village.”

He looked frightened, and he saluted me, but so awkwardly that I laughed involuntarily.

Neither the senior officer, Oboznenko, nor the battery commander, Shapilovski, were delighted by Baibarak, because he did some foolish things, albeit without intending ill.

“Where did you find this bandit?”

I made Baibarak a rider in the team, and he did his job well, and his horses were always in order. He didn’t defect. He left with us for Gallipoli and emigrated with some others to Brazil. They didn’t like it there. They were sent back to Gallipoli. Baibarak and Lieutenant Kazitski jumped off the ship and swam to Corsica. The steamer, of course, didn’t stop and didn’t take any measures to save them. People said that they had managed to swim to the shore.

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Having dispersed the Reds from the neighbouring villages, we returned to Romny. Approaching the city, we looked forward to a rest in comfortable surroundings. But it wasn’t to be. Entering the city, we saw the regiments lined up and the first battery, ready to march. We had to join the column and move north. We were very disappointed.

Rubanka

It was early August 1919, it was warm and there was plenty of food. Our division made short marches to the north. There were only a few battles, as the Reds were retreating.

After a short skirmish, we crossed a huge field of sugar beet and stopped in the street of Rubanka village. Not far off there was a wall with a gate, and behind it could be seen the lindens and oaks of a large park.

“Whose estate is this?” I asked a peasant.

“It was the Rachinski’s.”

I walked through the park. It hadn’t yet had time to become overgrown. The ponds and paths were still visible. The house was in comparatively good condition. Of course, it had been looted, but there were still doors and windows, and even glass in some places. I went up to the second floor, there were the ubiquitous piles of letters and photographs. I bent down to take one of them and gasped, because my aunt’s face was staring at me. I often met her at my aunt Masha Yakunchikova’s place. It was all so unexpected that I didn’t remember her name at first. I began to rummage through the photographs and found more familiar faces. Rachinski, Rachinski? .. After all, we had some Rachinski relatives.

Then machine gunner Kostya Ungern handed me a letter.

“Look, it’s from a Mamontov.”

I was thrilled. I went back to the village and found the manager after some inquiries. At first he reacted gloomily and uncooperatively and then gave me a short test. I had to list my ancestry to make sure that I was really a Mamontov. Then he threw himself on my neck and sobbed.

“Go to Moscow. Tell them what happened there. That it wasn’t my fault...”

I calmed him down, saying that all the estates were plundered and even burned down, whereas his was still in comparatively good condition.

“Come on,” he said mysteriously.

We returned to the house. He looked around, making sure we were alone, and pushed the heavy closet at the end of the corridor. There was a door behind it, which he unlocked it with a key. I gasped. There were two rooms filled with things – paintings and furniture.

“I managed to save these two rooms and gradually bring the valuable things here. Come in.”

He locked the door again.

I felt like in the last century among these miraculously preserved objects.

“In Moscow, tell them that I was able to save some things, those I could.”

“Getting to Moscow is a whole other story, and I have to stay alive doing so.”

“Well, God will help you ... What do you advise me to do with these things?”

Despite my youth, I gave him very practical advice.

“You see, you won’t be able to keep these things ... The Whites, like the Reds, loot and requisition. Wait two to three days for the soldiers to pass. Then put everything in boxes, take them to the big city, sell them and use the money to buy dollars or British pounds.”

He was outraged by my advice. He had managed the estate for thirty years, and before him his father, and before his father his grandfather. He couldn’t believe that the estates were gone and would never be back.

“How can I sell these things ?! Every thing here is precious to your family. Your grandmother usually sat in the chair in which you are sitting now ...”

He was very upset and said goodbye to me rather coldly. Especially after, using my status as a relative, I took a large and detailed map of southern Russia off the wall for myself. The map was very useful to me – good maps were rare. I don’t think the manager followed my advice. From his point of view, he was right . There are things that cannot be sold without breaking hearts, maybe it is better that they perish. So much was lost, a little more wouldn’t make much difference.

I returned to the battery, the column moved on.

Bakhmach

The first serious battle took place outside the city of Bakhmach. During it, our battery came under fire from a Red battery. Two undershoots, two overshoots, the Red battery had straddled us. We had already ducked our heads down, expecting that the next one will be on the battery. But nothing happened. It turned out that our first battery had come to our rescue very in time and silenced the Red battery. The horse mountain battery provided us with that service more than once. I remember three cases, and there were probably more. Whether we paid her back in kind, I don’t know. I can only remember one incident. When an enemy battery begins to get your range, you need to immediately leave. You do so in dispersed order, to join up later, as that is how losses are reduced. But the battery commander is usually focussed on shooting the enemy and wants to fire another round. That is when tragedy sets in, as happened to us near Novo-Korsunskaya six months later.

My brother and I had managed to find excellent draft horses and good riders for our limber. The pride of the whole battery was our playful rear pair, who were strong and light. Their rider was Yudin, an old experienced soldier. He adored his horses and never wanted to part with them and so take an easier position. Baibarak sat on the middle pair of tall red horses. The front was a pair of black horses, slightly lighter than the average. But who their driver was, for the life of me, I can’t remember. The blacks looked good alongside Dura when I rode at the front of the gun.

I remember the team at that time very well, and this is why. During the battle, the Reds had pushed the battery towards a forest. It was too late to get around it.

“We’ll have to retreat through the forest,” Oboznenko told me. “Go on ahead and find a path where the battery can pass without getting stuck.”

I rode forward, my gun following not far behind me, and the whole battery behind it. At first it was easy to find a way, but the forest began to thicken, and the moment came when I raised my hand and stopped the battery.

“We can’t go through, we need to look elsewhere.”

But the old and experienced rider Yudin turned to me.

“There’s no problem, lieutenant sir, let’s keep on going. And if we get stuck, then we will knock down a tree.”

“You are sure?”

“Yes, we needed to do it in East Prussia, and it always worked.” He turned to the team: “Hey, guys, when we get one hooked up, give it everything.”

Indeed, Yudin deftly hooked up a tree with the thick axle at the front of the team and commanded: “Let’s go!” The tree creaked and fell, uprooted. He made sure to fell the trees to the side, and not on the horses. These were pines that had a deep main root.

Having knocked over a few trees, we found a less dense area, where we crushed everything as we went. Soon we got to a forest road and were able to join our cavalry.

Despite all this, we managed to take Bakhmach and settle in it for the night.

Surprise Attack

Obviously, our security was inadequate, because at night there was shooting in the city itself. We jumped up, hastily saddled, limbered and rolled out of the city under a swarm of bullets.

Withdrawing a little, the division gathered together, waited for dawn and launched another offensive on the city. The Reds couldn’t hold and retreated. We occupied the city and settled down in our old quarters. On the square, we found the corpses of several of our men who had been captured. The corpses were horribly mutilated. They had obviously been tortured.

The next night, the same thing happened. However, this time the guards were more alert. The Reds appeared at night, and we were again forced to leave the city, but this time without panic.

Then we got angry. The division went to some village, I don’t recall which, where it stayed all day. At night we made a deep detour and at dawn were north of Bakhmach, in the Red rear. They had missed our manoeuvre, and our sudden appearance caused an incredible panic. Despite their great numbers, they were unable to organise any resistance. As a matter of fact, there was barely a fight, but rather a massacre

Massacre

As reprisal for the mutilated corpses, the order was given not to take prisoners. And as luck would have it, they hadn’t taken many anyway. Those prisoners were brought in from all sides, and shot. The Reds didn’t even think about resistance, but fled in large groups and surrendered after the first volley. They were shot. And then another group would appear.

I understand that in the heat of battle, you can shoot a prisoner, although you shouldn’t. But to shoot those surrendering systematically, barely putting up resistance, was simply disgusting. We all hoped that the divisional commander would cancel his order, but he never did. It seems that several thousand men were shot. It was pure carnage, and not natural.

Fortunately, artillery was relieved of that heinous task. But even looking on was unbearable.

At the very beginning of hostilities, a freight train suddenly appeared from behind a rise, with fleeing Reds literally clinging to it. There was a railway line very close by, which we hadn’t even thought to destroy.

“To battle!” shouted Shapilovski.

We hurriedly set up and began firing at the train. They didn’t even bother shooting back. Our shrapnel took off bunches of people from the roofs of the carriages. But we didn’t hit the locomotive itself, and the train, despite being all shot up, was able to escape.

“It doesn’t matter. They will be so scared that they will spread panic in the other Red units.”

Finally, by midnight, the executions seemed to be finished. There was no more shooting, and we calmed down. Some fell asleep, others dispersed. I lay down beside my gun and fell asleep. We had walked all night.

I woke up feeling that something was wrong, looked up and was dumbfounded. A few hundred paces away from us a whole battalion of Red infantry had emerged from a cornfield. I jumped up as if bitten by a snake.

“To battle!” I yelled.

But there was no one near the battery. With the help of the teams, I turned the gun round and fired two shells. The second landed in the middle of them and sending several men into the air. The Reds ran towards the forest, and I, seeing that they no longer had any intention of attacking us, stopped firing.

“Let them run!”

But my shots caught the attention of the cavalry, and they attacked the fleeing men. They, of course, surrendered, and they began to be shot in small groups.

A cavalry officer came up to me.

“We can’t handle the prisoners any more. Do you have anyone interested?”

“We,” I replied, “don’t want to shoot them.”

The officer smiled.

“Are you so sure of that? Let me ask your people.”

“Off you go,” I said, and stepped aside.

I was firmly convinced that no one would respond. Imagine my amazement when literally everyone followed the cavalryman with delight. Two or three stayed.

“Aren’t you ashamed?”

Those ones only stayed reluctantly, just to please me. The men had all got rifles from somewhere, which we usually couldn’t make them carry on their backs. The officer took my soldiers away and smiled at me derisively. And I had thought that I had in my unit they were all decent people, who wouldn’t hurt a fly. And I wasn’t green. During my two years of the civil war, I had seen everything. But I was young and still believed in people. Since then, that belief has been greatly shaken. I have come to the conclusion that man is a predator, and a nasty predator at that. He loves to kill his own kind, and will kill brutally.

I must mention the Armenian *sotnia*. There were about three hundred of them, well-dressed, on good horses. They had appeared suddenly and just as suddenly disappeared. I never saw them before or afterwards, and never met them in any battle. They were dressed as if for parade, not combat. Too well fed, too sleek. The Armenians took an active part in the executions. They took a small party of prisoners and released them, as if not paying attention. The prisoners hesitated, then quietly walked towards the forest, then quickened their pace, then started to run. It was then that the Armenians jumped on their horses, chased them and sabred them. It was said that they cut off their ears to brag about being killed “in battle”. But I cannot say that the Armenians were worse than the Russians – they were all animals.

This case of large-scale use of terror was unusual. During the whole civil war, I never heard of another similar case.

Terror was used by the Mongols in the 13th century as a tactical measure. Panic preceded them, and everyone fled. Terror was introduced systematically by the Communists. Bolshevism is impossible without it. Unfortunately, terror works.

After the massacre, the Reds gave up trying to capture Bakhmach. Firstly, we had largely destroyed their units, and secondly, panic then spread among the remaining troops.

Returning to the city of Bakhmach, we once again found some mutilated corpses of our men, which to some extent justified the executions.

We were in an area called the forest-steppe. In the steppes, cavalry has a clear advantage over infantry in manoeuvrability and speed of action. But in forests infantry has the advantage over cavalry, which generally cannot operate effectively in them. We would beat the Reds in the open fields, they would retire into the forests and then attack us at night.

From the Bakhmach operation, I came to three conclusions: 1) that men are bastards, 2) that terror always succeeds, 3) that cavalry cannot operate in forests. It was to become more difficult as we headed north into forested areas.

Temerchenko

An involuntary and powerless witness to the executions, Oboznenko came up to me.

“I can no longer watch this massacre. Why did you shoot? I would have let them escape.”

“I’m not happy either, but in the heat of it I thought that they were attacking us.”

“Go pick twenty men for the battery. If we don’t need them, we will give them back later, when emotions cool.”

I mounted Dura and rode into the pale, frightened crowd of prisoners. Instinctively, they realised that I represented salvation, and began to press up to me. From the height of the saddle, I peered into faces.

“You, come here ... You too ... You, no, not you, but your neighbour ...”

I chose simple, naïve faces. It may seem strange, but we had learned to recognise communists simply by their faces. The communists had a firmness, even cruelty in their eyes. All the prisoners were undressed, in the same underwear. Oddly one tall man retained a badly worn black lamb’s cap and therefore stood out. He, of course, was a communist, I figured on account of the hat. I wondered who needed their sweaty and lice-ridden clothes.

I counted those selected, there were twelve of them. I took pity on two boys and added them. They turned out to be homeless and hardened malcontents. Our soldiers flogged them almost daily for nasty tricks. They were incorrigible – like peeing in our soup! Finally our men lost patience with them and decided to shoot them. The first battery needed salt. I gave them a bag of salt on the condition that they take the boys from us and never return them to us.

The homeless children were those who families had been shot or deported, and hence were orphans. They formed bands, that like hungry wolves terrorised villages and even cities. The Bolsheviks tried to re-educate them, but then, convinced of the impossibility, they simply shot them. There were hundreds of thousands of them. When talking about the achievements of the revolution, one shouldn’t forget such an “achievement” – which the Bolsheviks naturally didn’t talk about.

But back to the prisoners.

I have already picked 16 ... 17 ... 18 ... 19 ... and so I needed only one more. They realised that their chances were diminishing, and everyone looked at me with supplication and hope.

Who to take? I was at a loss.

“You,” I pointed to the guy in the hat. He staggered with joy. And I wondered why I chose him? After all, it is clear that he was a communist. But the deed was done, and it would be cruel to change.

“Where are you taking these prisoners?” a cavalry officer asked.

“I need them for the battery.”

He shrugged and I led them away. After this the rest were hacked to death by the Armenians. I walked like a slave trader, from gun to gun, offering human goods. The third gun took the man with the hat, because he was tall. I had eight left.

“We’ll wait a bit,” said Oboznenko, “and then we’ll send them to the cavalrymen. I think that now they won’t shoot them.”

He was wrong. When we sent them away an hour later, they were immediately shot.

The commander of the third gun brought me the man with the hat.

“I don’t want him. He’s obviously a communist. Take him back! Better yet, send him to the cavalry.” And he left.

I sat on the gun carriage and was in a quandary. The man in front of me was shaking all over. What should I do with him? I didn’t know what to do. There was no question of sending him back to his death. But it was dangerous to have him in the unit – he was a Communist and might do us harm. We were both silent.

“What is your name?”

“Temerchenko.”

“ ... I’ll take you into my crew.”

They dressed him in some clothes from the dead, and I put him on the front black pair.

Baibarak, as an old hand, explained to him the subtleties of the position.

A few days later, I was outside a barn relieving myself, and accidentally overheard a conversation between my soldiers inside.

“Don’t try to fool us, Temerchenko. You’re a Communist, we can see it immediately.”

“Yes, I was a communist, but after what happened to me in Bakhmach ...”

“What? Do tell!”

“I was an unbeliever. When they took us and started shooting, I remembered about God and said to myself: ‘If God exists, then let Him reveal Himself.’ And Lieutenant Mamontov rode into our crowd and began to select people. I was stunned by that and began to pray: ‘Lord, save me, and I will believe in You.’ The lieutenant looked at me and turned away. He had already chosen nineteen people, and only one more to go. Then I began to pray with all my heart, and he pointed at me. I almost fell down because I knew the Lord had guided his hand ...”

“Yes, that is amazing,” said one of the soldiers.

“Wait, that’s not all. They took me on at the third gun. Then I thought, ‘What nonsense to believe in a miracle. It was just luck!’ And immediately the lieutenant of the third gun looked at me and said: ‘I don’t want this one – he’s a Communist.’ I realised that it was a punishment for my unbelief, and began to pray again. And Lieutenant Mamontov, although he didn’t need me, didn’t send me to the cavalry. I saw how they shot the rest of them ... And that’s how I am here.”

There was a silence, and I slowly walked away from the barn. The next day I talked to my gun’s NCO.

“Shakalov, what do you think of Temerchenko? He’s a Communist. Can he stay with us?”

“Yes, he is a Communist, but he won’t do us any harm, lieutenant, sir. I think we can leave him.”

“Is it because of Bakhmach?”

“Yes.”

“You know, I don’t really believe in gratitude. Watch him carefully.”

“Rest assured, lieutenant, sir.”

Temerchenko didn’t defect, and it would have been easy for him to do so, especially when we were retreating. He came with us in the campaigns to the north and the whole of the great retreat. He was mortally wounded in the Kuban, near Novo-Korsunskaya.

I often thought him then, and still do today. What kept him with us? Gratitude? Or was it true what I heard in the barn? It is hard to see into someone’s soul.

We occupied the city of Konotop. My brother returned from leave. In Ekaterinodar he had met our aunt Mara Konstantinovna Sverbeeva and her daughters Marina and Tanya.

Belopol’e

My brother persuaded me to take leave in Ekaterinodar. Shapilovski let me go. I had 800 roubles, and I considered myself a rich man. But the prices had gone up so much that after three days I was left without a cent and was glad to return to the battery.

“What are you doing back so soon, lieutenant, sir?”

“Well, you know, I didn’t have enough money. After all, there you have to pay for everything and it is very expensive ... And I miss you, and Dura.”

“So the battery is better?”

“So much! We are family here, all in Christ’s care.”

The regular cavalry division was taken over by General Barbovich, a good commander. The Reds launched an offensive from Putivl' towards Sumy. Our division moved from Konotop and hit them in the flank. A large battle broke out at Belopol'e. The Reds tried to attack several times. Both our batteries fired heavily and barely contained them. Bullets flew about in swarms. The fight was stubborn and long. Rytsar was wounded there. My brother unsaddled him, thinking that he was dead, but Rytsar recovered and after a few days my brother could ride him again. The shooting was so strong that I took Dura from the horse holder and sat on her, because I believed that she couldn’t be injured while I was sitting on her.

Then I was to see a terrible wound. From our front lines, a cart came out at a trot, a young volunteer dragoon sat on it. Though both of his cheeks there was a fist-sized hole, probably the result of a shell fragment. His lower jaw was broken and drooped, and his left eye dangled by a vein. He found the shaking of the cart excruciating, but he couldn’t lie down. I wonder how he didn’t lose consciousness. I still can’t think of it without getting cold all over.

Suddenly a house in Belopol'e caught fire. Either from a shrapnel burst over a dry thatched roof (the heat was intense), or from an incendiary shell. We hadn’t wanted to set fire to the village, but maybe shells were confused in the heat of the battle.

Oddly enough, this fire in the Red rear was a turning point in the battle. The Reds began to retreat, and we occupied Belopol'e, crossed the river and occupied a hamlet on the other side, where the battery spent the night.

Alarm

I was on duty on the battery. I didn’t sleep, didn’t take off my weapons, and occasionally went outside to listen for shots. That evening I went out one more time to listen. Shots! We had developed the skill of understanding the meaning of shooting. I didn’t like the sound of those ones. Although the shooting wasn’t strong, it was directed towards us. I listened again. More shots in our direction. I gave the alarm.

“Saddle up and harness!”

Colonel Shapilovski appeared on the porch. And the shooting stopped.

“Who ordered us to mount?”

“I did Colonel, sir. There is shooting.”

He listened, but the night was calm.

“So you thought. Order them to unsaddle.”

And he returned to his house.

A few minutes later, the shooting resumed and closer.

“Saddle up and harness!”

Shapilovski appeared again, in a bad mood. As if on purpose, two or three shots rang out and it then fell silent.

“What’s the matter?”

“Shooting, colonel, sir.”

“I didn’t know that you were so nervous (meaning cowardly). It is nothing. Don’t make the men nervous. Give them a break. Unsaddle!”

And he left.

After a few minutes, the shooting approached again. I saddled Dura, called the crew of my gun, and my brother. I ordered the riders to harness our gun, and we waited. We didn’t have to wait long. A burst of machine-gun fire passed over our heads, and one bullet broke the window of Shapilovski’s house. After that, everyone rushed to saddle up and harness.

A squadron of hussars at a trot nearly ran into Shapilovski.

“What are you doing here?!” shouted their squadron commander. “The Reds will be here in a minute and you are only just harnessing. You still need to cross the bridge. Get on with it!”

Yet he still stopped the hussars. We were ready. My brother commanded, “Mount! Forward, march!”

And we left without waiting for the others, who caught up to us in the field. We moved away from Belopol'e, which was already occupied by the Reds, and walked across the field. The Reds chased us with volleys for a long time. But despite the moon, they couldn’t see us and so fired at the noise our guns made on the march. We clearly heard the command: “Battalion!” (to which we all bent down) “Fire! “ There was a volley, and everyone straightened up again. I don’t think we had any losses. Bullets are harmless at night . The next day, we easily reoccupied Belopol'e and that farm. The Red offensive failed. We returned to Konotop.

Nizhyn

Good news spread: our division was marching on Kiev. I wanted to go to a big city. I was tired of the villages. The division was moved to Bakhmach.

I was sent to find quarters for our two batteries in Nizhyn. I and the others doing the same were offered a choice – we could go ahead of the division on horseback or take a freight train. A squadron of horse guards and a platoon of guards horse artillery were already stationed in Nizhyn. Our armoured train was there too. So the town had a few of our men in it. We, of course, unanimously chose the train. We settled down with two dozen cavalry officers, also sent to seek quarters, on an open platform and rode off. I had four of our soldiers and two from the first battery, plus Ensigns Milchev and Forberg had joined us. Nizhyn was sixty versts from Bakhmach, which was a long way for the division, it would only arrive in the evening, but we would be there in an hour and a half.

We arrived at Nizhyn. In the main square near the station, there were guardsmen and two guns. Our officer in charge of quartering divided up the city districts between the units. Our division got an area around a large grassy square, surrounded by pleasant houses. The lodgings were distributed, and I sent the soldiers to neighbouring villages for hay, plus one to wait for the battery on the outskirts of the city. From the map that I had taken in Rubanka it was noted that there was an arms factory in Nizhyn. Milchev and Forberg rode there in a cab, hoping to find some revolvers. I asked them to look for a new stock for my carbine. It, by the way, remained with my brother. I had my sabre, a revolver and saddlebags which I had removed from my saddle.

Everyone dispersed, and I was left alone in the square. Ladies surrounded me.

“Mister officer, come and have a cup of tea with us.”

“No, come to my place, I have some sweet cakes for tea.”

“And I have your favourite jam ...”

I didn’t know who to go to, so as not to offend others. I was the first Volunteer they had seen. But an elderly gentleman dismissed the ladies and declared authoritatively, “You must come to my place.”

“But the ladies invited me first.”

“I was a major in the Turkish War (1877), and therefore I have priority.”

“In that case, of course, Major. Forgive me, madam.”

Major's tea was terrible and there was no jam.

"You are still a young man and, probably, haven't smelled gunpowder yet. And I took part in two battles."

In order not to upset him, I kept silent about the hundreds of battles I had been in, and asked him to tell how it had been in his time. The major began to tell me, and I listened not so much to the story as to the individual shots coming from the city. The shots increased in frequency. 'What the hell?' I thought.

Suddenly a gun thumped, and somewhere in the city a shell exploded.

"Uh ... This is serious." I stood.

"What it is?" asked the concerned major.

"It seems to start to smell of gunpowder, as you expressed it. I must go and look. Please hold on to my saddle bags."

Clearly the Reds had entered the city, and I had sent away all my men and was left completely alone. What should I do? .. I would have to go to the city centre. Some of our men were there, since that is where the shooting was.

There was heavy firefight in the centre of town, but individual shots rang out all over the city. I unbuttoned the holster of my revolver in order to get it out as quickly as possible, if ... and I walked along the deserted streets, looking at the windows and rooftops for a rifleman hiding there. On one side of the street was the low wall of a cemetery. Should I jump over the wall and hide among the graves until our division arrived? No, what if the division failed to occupy the city? I'd better go look for my friends ... Eh, if I had Dura, it would be a completely different matter. Who came up with this unfortunate idea to travel by train? Without a horse was like being unarmed.

A cab was driving towards me. I stopped it, asked the client to get out and sat down in his place myself.

"To the town centre."

"But they are shooting there!"

"Go, all the same."

At a crossroads I met two other cabs with cavalry officers who had been seeking quarters. After a short meeting we rode to the centre. But the bullets flying out from there made us turn into a cross street. We decided to leave the city. Two wagons with hay were heading towards us.

"Hey!" I shouted. "Are there soldiers on board?"

The sleepy heads of my soldiers appeared.

"Turn and follow us!"

A cavalryman sat in my cab. He held me back when I wanted to shoot a guy in a black coat with a rifle in his hands.

"That is one of our hussars."

He had had time to steal a coat, and I took him for a Makhnovist. We left the city and held a council of war. There were about twenty of us. The hussars wanted to attack, but my more prudent opinion prevailed: we would go to the station, establish contact with our men and learn about the situation. Our armoured train should be there.

We scattered and went to the rail line. A train was slowly moving along it. Clearly it was the supply base of an armoured train. Seeing our loose chain, it added speed. We started shouting and waving our hands. Finally it stopped. We approached. They told us that the armoured train itself had gone to Kiev. They didn't know where the Guards cavalry squadron had gone, and they themselves refused to join us, although there were about sixty of them – the men all leaned out the windows with curiosity.

The base train, in contrast to the brave armoured train – who risked acting alone, without our troops to go 120 km to Kiev (and with success) – turned out to be timid and didn't dare act independently.

“Then go quickly and warn our division marching here about what has happened.”

But they couldn’t bring themselves to do that either. We left those cowards and went to the city. We were brave because we felt our division was marching behind us.

The shooting, meanwhile, had stopped. We walked through the suburbs without meeting anyone. Then we reached the bridge, and I suggested that we stay there and wait for the arrival of the division. The cavalrymen were apparently tired, so they agreed with me. I lay down by the road and fell fast asleep.

I woke up with the noise of the arriving division. It was completely dark. I heard the voice of Ensign Milchev, reporting to Colonel Shapilovski.

“And where did Lieutenant Mamontov and the soldiers go?”

“We never saw them again, they disappeared.”

“I’m here with my soldiers. You are the ones who disappeared,” I shouted into the darkness.

“Well, thank God, it means that everyone is here,” Shapilovski responded.

There you are,” said my brother. “Just to tell you, I moved to Dura, because Rytsar hasn’t yet recovered fully from his wound.”

I patted Dura on the neck and laughed.

Pogrom

After a while, we found out what had happened. On the side facing the River Seym, Nizhyn is bordered by swamps and shrubs. Apparently, the Guards had set up sentries along the railroad but overlooked the swamps. A band, of the same sort as the Makhnovists, had come in from that side. The guards missed them, and surprise was complete. The bandits even had a 4.8 inch howitzer, from which they fired only once. The Guardsmen were taken unawares and fled on unsaddled horses. The gunners didn’t have time to harness the guns. But the bandits disappeared as quickly as they had appeared, and didn’t even take the abandoned two guns with them. With the arrival of our division, the bandits were no longer to be found anywhere.

Despite the fairly strong fire of the Reds, the losses to the Guards weren’t so great. I think there were two killed and several wounded, plus two or three horses. Of course, it was still a very unpleasant incident for the Guards, and in the form of revenge they began to claim that the Jewish population of Nizhyn had taken part in the attack. And so they staged a pogrom.

It is likely that several local supporters of the bandits were involved, but by no means were they all Jews. I don’t think they killed any, but they plundered them. Our division wasn’t allowed into the city, but located in the suburbs. In order to keep the soldiers from looting, some said. In order to facilitate the looting, others said. It was a fact that quartered soldiers wouldn’t allow where they were to be robbed. It is clear that they robbed the well off, that is, those least inclined towards Communism.

Many officers protested against the pogrom, and General Barbovich stopped it with vigorous measures. One man was flogged and someone was even hanged – and everything stopped immediately. The division entered the city and settled down in their quarters. I went to the major for my saddlebags.

The pogrom is explained, perhaps, by the fact that at that time a significant percentage of the Red commissars were Jews and Trotski-Bronstein was the commander-in-chief.

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Kiev was taken without our participation on 30 August 1919. We remained in Nizhyn. There we were criticised by the inspector of horse artillery, General Prince Avalov. He demanded we used hitching posts. We took the horses out of the cool stables and tied them to a hitching post on the square. There was sun, heat and flies, and it was difficult to feed and water them. But what can you do against the will of the authorities?

Milchev and Forberg hadn’t found anything interesting at the factory, but they brought a new wooden stock for my carbine.

After staying a while in Nizhyn, the division moved back to Konotop. I gave my wonderful sabre to be sharpened, and when we set off there was no time to pick it up. We often returned to Konotop, and I wasn't worried. But we never did go to Konotop again, and my sword was gone. I replaced it with a dragoon one, but it wasn't the same.

Chapter 11 – In the Middle of Russia

Across the Seym

At the beginning of September 1919, the regular cavalry division under the command of General Barbovich moved from Konotop to Belopol'e and at Vorozhba crossed to the northern bank of the Seym. The Reds offered us no resistance, and we entered Putivl'. Here the division halted for two hours beside a long white wall. Obviously, our intelligence had gone ahead, and so we waited. We tried to remember “The Tale of Igor’s Campaign”: because Yaroslavna had sung her song on the walls of Putivl'.

Soon the division went north, to the city of Glukhov, where a prolonged battle took place.

With the crossing of the Seym River, the terrain had changed markedly, acquired a hilly character. The fields were interspersed with forests. Birch and black bread appeared, and the peasants spoke Russian. We had moved from the Ukraine to Russia.[37] Instead of plastered huts, there were log huts. The villages were often poorer than in the Ukraine, but there were many small places, some almost cities built around industry and factories.

The battle at Glukhov was long and hard. The Reds tried to advance several times. But in the end they had to retreat. Our battery fired a lot.

During the battle, a magnificent, dappled grey hunter approached the battery. He was seriously injured and was seeking help from people. The horse suffered in silence, but there was despair in his eyes. It was impossible to help him. I stroked him. He swayed like a drunk and fell. I had to shoot him through the ear. I felt sorry for him. I think that the owner didn’t have the courage to shoot his beloved horse.

We took the small town of Voronezh (not to be confused with the city of Voronezh). There were many small factories there. I went around the town hoping to find something useful for the battery. I didn’t find anything, but at a small factory owned by a Jew, I met our machine gunner, Lieutenant Andion. He wasn’t at all happy about me being there, and in French, so that others wouldn’t understand, he asked me not to interfere. After that, I was present at the following dialogue between Andion and the Jew.

“Buy a drive belt from me. You will need it, “Andion said.

“Show me it. How can I buy it sight unseen?” the Jew answered.

“But it is there, in front of you.”

“But this is mine!”

“You are behind the times. It was yours and mine under the tsar, but the Bolsheviks teach us that now everything is held in common. So are you buying it?”

The Jew realised what was happening and scratched behind his ear. Discussions began, with Andion praising the belt, and the Jew belittling its worth. Finally, there was a bargain. Andion put the money in his pocket.

“Now take off the drive belt,” he said.

“Listen, Andion, this is too much,” I stood up.

“Well, I knew that you would ruin everything for me.”

Some of our officers found a whole vat of alcohol at a chemical plant and brought it to the battery. Imagine our joy. But the joy was short-lived. The alcohol gave off a smell of ether and it was impossible to drink it. Even the soldiers spat it out. What should we do? You couldn’t just throw away alcohol. So they took it with us and tried at every stop to see if it had improved. After all, they say , Madeira improves from the pitching of a ship. Maybe would alcohol from the shaking of a cart ... No, you definitely couldn’t drink.

Once I gave a drink of it to the owner of a lodging. To my surprise, he drank with pleasure and even smacked his lips.

[37] They had entered Russia geographically, but the region is in the present-day Ukraine.

“What? How?”

“I’ve got used to this alcohol over time. At first we also spat it out, but gradually we got used to it.”

“And will your neighbours drink it too?”

“With great pleasure.”

“Then announce to the whole street to come with a cup.”

Twenty minutes later, the whole street was lined with queues. And half an hour later, everyone was drunk, climbed to kiss us and swore love and fidelity. We left the barrel for them. It was in the big village of Shastka.

Of course, there were battles both for Voronezh and for Shastka, but they were ordinary, nothing special, and I have forgotten them, I don’t recall them now.

Novgorod Severskiy

As I said, the inspector of horse artillery, Prince Avalov, began to try to put things in order in our two batteries. Back in Nizhyn, he had demanded a tethering post, and in Konotop he ordered caissons to be harnessed and follow the guns on the march. This lengthened the columns during the campaign, and on the bridge over the Seym there was a jam, which we unravelled with difficulty, caused by poor horses and inexperienced drivers,. In the first battle at Glukhov, when we were expected to put the caissons near the guns, there was general confusion.

“Take the caissons to the rear!” ordered Colonel Shapilovski, and he appointed me to command them.

From that time on, the caissons didn’t go with the battery march column, but separately. During a battle, I would remain somewhere sheltered and during a lull I would take the caissons up to the battery and replenish the limbers with shells. It was my duty to avoid meeting the Reds and especially Prince Avalov. This turned out to be so inconvenient that after a few days we returned to our tried and tested system with common carts. And the caissons were sent to the train. If I were to chance a meeting with Prince Avalov I had to resort to some ruses or other, telling him I that the caissons had been sent off to replenish or that I was going to water the horses. This naturally didn’t deceive Avalov, who was an experienced officer, and he began to harass me. Then I saluted and said nothing. This is how my acquaintance with him started, and it was far from being in my favour, although it wasn’t my doing – I simply carried out the orders of the battery commander. It was the same with the first battery.

When setting out from the town of Shastka, we immediately ran into some Reds. There was a heated battle, and the Reds retreated into the forest. We followed them, expecting an ambush at any minute, but we passed through the forest safely and reached the high bank of the Desna River. There were several *dachas* on it. The city of Novgorod Severskiy wasn’t yet visible to us. It was somewhere to the left, on the other side of the river. Down, running alongside the river, was a rail line. The fighting died down, the Reds couldn’t be seen and there were no shots. Both batteries and the regiments stopped at the top, near the *dachas*. Shapilovski sent my brother and our gun down to the railway, in case a Red armoured train appeared. Our battery had fired a lot that day and were short on shells. I went with the caisson to get some shells. When I neared the battery, a machine gun started up from down on the other side of the river. It wounded a horse and a rider on the caisson. I remember bullets rattling against the iron roof of the *dacha*. The wounds to the rider and the horse were insignificant, and the machine gun fell silent. We filled up with shells and rode back down to my brother’s gun. But in the distance my brother began to wave at us to not come down. I put the caisson behind the houses and waited.

This is what had happened at the bottom of the bank with my brother. He had set the gun behind a house by the rail line, and all his attention was drawn to it. When the machine gun which wounded my rider and the horse started firing, my brother turned his head to the right and was stunned. Just three hundred paces from him, in the shallows on the other side of the river, lay a company of Red infantry in battle formation with four machine guns. But obviously they hadn’t seen the gun. My brother immediately ordered all the soldiers to lie down, but the team was behind the house. Crawling, they made a shield from slabs of snow and placed it in front of the gun to hide it from the Reds’ sight. It was at that time that I had wanted to re-

join them – it was good that I understood him from the distance and stopped. My brother prepared fifteen rounds of shrapnel, setting the ranges to the right distance, and then slowly turned the gun. They aimed it through a gap in the shield and, when everything was ready, knocked over the shield and opened fire. Seven shots in a row, then five more, and after that nothing moved on the shallows.

After waiting a little, I rode up to the gun and replenished the limber with shells.

“Be careful, don’t look! There might be some still living, and they might shoot,” said my brother.

“I glanced out nevertheless. My God! I never thought that a gun could produce such devastation. The machine guns were distorted and overturned.

Several cavalrymen crossed by boat to the other side and brought back the badly damaged machine guns.

A few days later a hussar officer handed me a newspaper. It described that fight, but somewhat differently.

“Our valiant cavalry in a dashing attack on the Desna River, sabred a battalion of Red infantry to pieces and captured eight machine guns.” The details of the attack followed. Not a word about our gun and my brother, who did the whole thing by themselves. It omitted to say how the cavalry crossed the river – by swimming, obviously. The Red company had turned into a battalion, and four machine guns into eight. I hate reporters, they always misinterpret everything from beginning to end.

My brother was very lucky that the Reds didn’t notice him, and that they had opened machine-gun fire on my caisson when I was up on the ridge, which had attracted his attention. Thanks to the calmness he showed in preparing everything, he achieved brilliant results (though it is embarrassing to talk about brilliant results for that carnage). It was in a way an exam – after all, my brother was an infantry officer – could he command a gun? And he passed the exam well.

We didn’t cross the Desna, but turned and went to Mikhailovski farm, where we had crossed the border of the Ukraine when we fled from Moscow. The division stopped at some spot or other. With several soldiers, I lingered in the gun park, filling up the limbers with shells. Several Jews approached me.

“Officer, please come to my apartment.”

“No, come to me, I have a good room for you.”

“And I will have your favourite food prepared for you.”

“And I will treat you to some good wine.”

I was perplexed. Usually people tried to avoid quartering us, and then suddenly we were being snapped up. The grinning soldiers explained to me.

“They are afraid that we will come to rob them during the night. So they want you to guard them.”

I spent the night with the Jews, and everything went smoothly.

Situation on the Fronts

The beginning of September 1919 was the highpoint for the Volunteer Army. Under the command of General Denikin, the Army occupied the entire south of European Russia. We held Poltava and Kharkov. On the right flank, our infantry occupied Kursk, Orël and Mtsensk, 250 km from Moscow. On the left flank, Kiev, Zhitomir and Odessa were taken. General Wrangel and the Caucasian Kuban army captured Tsaritsyn (Stalingrad) and Kamyshin (18 June 1919).

The Bolsheviks, falsifiers of history, argued that Stalin defended Tsaritsyn. It isn’t true, Tsaritsyn was taken.[38] And Stalin’s name was completely unknown, Trotski was in command of the Reds.

The Don Host took Voronezh, and General Mamontov (my namesake) raided deep into the rear in the Tambov area.

[38] Mamontov is wrong about Tsaritsyn. It was besieged three times in the RCW. Stalin was instrumental at the second siege by the Don Cossacks, which failed. The city fell only on the third attempt, in 1919, when Stalin was not present.

It was going less well elsewhere. Admiral Kolchak's forces were being rolled back in the east. We were unable to link up with him. Later, Kolchak was betrayed by the Czechoslovaks and handed over to the Bolsheviks for the right to take away stolen Russian gold – the gold reserve from Kazan.

Kolchak was slandered not only by the Bolsheviks, but also by our left-wing émigrés, sitting in Paris and London. In fact, Kolchak was a chivalrous and honest man, and an excellent officer. Greed and intrigues, both Russian and foreign, finished him off.

Our two smaller armies - General Iudenich's Western and General Miller's Northern, were poorly supported by the 'Allies', and liquidated by the Bolsheviks. Their members weren't allowed to travel south to join us.

But despite all these setbacks, our front was moving triumphantly towards Moscow. There was a plan: to collect a strike force from the best regiments and drive straight on Moscow. I don't think the Reds could have stopped us. I think of General Mamontov's raid on Tambov, where the population greeted him with joy and replenished his ranks.

Of course, it was a major operation, and it needed to be done quickly. But it turned out to be very difficult to make the decision – everyone was discussing it. Time passed and the Reds were able to pull up forces liberated from other fronts. Our gallant regiments were worn out plugging holes: there was no continuous front, only isolated groups of troops, with no one in between. It was easy to infiltrate our line.

And then one fine day, which wasn't fine at all, the front began to roll back. We had no reserves, only the same thinning regiments. At the same time, the rear was swarming with military personnel who had never sniffed gunpowder. The city of Sevsk became the "stumbling block" for our cavalry division

Sevsk

At the end of September there were frosts in the mornings and the first snow fell near Sevsk. The division marched to the north, occupying villages and towns after combats. There were many forests. Near the Mikhailovski farm we had to walk for hours through a wonderful forest that had belonged to Count Ignatiev. Oaks up to metres in diameter, lindens, ash and maples. That forest made a great impression on our soldiers, who had never seen such a thing. I admired it too. The battle near the city of Sevsk was long and stubborn. On the one side, Sevsk nestled against the forest, and on the other side were fields. The city was small and wooden. It was frosty with snow. We defeated the Reds in the fields, and they retired into the forest. We occupied the city.

The next day the whole battery washed ourselves in a wonderful, spacious and clean bath. It wasn't only a pleasure, but also a necessity – with the cold came lice.

The next day, the division set off and marched north to Brasovo. But as soon as we left, the Reds came back out of the forest and occupied Sevsk, sowing panic in our carts. The division returned and drove the Reds out of the city. They went back into the forest again. We stayed in the city for two days, seeing no enemy. But as soon as we went north, the Reds once more came out of the forest and occupied the city. The division returned to Sevsk. But this time the Reds had concentrated large forces, and after a whole day of fighting, we couldn't move them.

It was a strange situation. The Reds and we were formed along a line running south to north. It was hard to say who was flanking who. Perhaps they were behind us. The situation was rather unpleasant for us, but it changed dramatically when the Drozdovski regiment, under the command of the famous Colonel Turkul, came to our aid. The *Drozdovtsi* very efficiently and without fuss, relieved us along the front, and the cavalry division was sent somewhere else. But our second horse battery stayed with the *Drozdovtsi*. Apparently they had come without their artillery.

Fighting broke out again in the morning. Our battery was on the extreme right flank of the *Drozdovtsi*. Even separated a bit, because none of our troops were near us. We saw a dense column of Reds and opened fire on it. The Red column immediately disappeared from sight. We unfolded the map and saw that the Reds had gone down into a ravine and they could reach our flank along it, guarded only by the battery. We became concerned, deployed a machine gun, and Colonel Shapilovski sent me to Turkul to report on the column. I took Dura, found Turkul and reported the situation to him.

“Can you show it to me on the map?”

I showed the ravine, where we had seen the Reds, and the position of the battery. Turkul thought for a minute and then began to give orders that had nothing to do with that column. I thought that he had forgotten about me, and dared to interrupt him.

“Colonel, sir, what orders should I give to the commander of the battery?”

“Oh yes. As for the flanking column ... Tell the commander of your battery that we are about to hit their centre so that they will forget any flanking moves.”

And he turned to the others with more orders. Unsatisfied with this answer, I sped to the battery.

“Well?” Shapilovski greeted me.

I relayed Turkul’s answer.

“Did you tell him exactly about the flanking?”

“I even showed it on the map, and where the battery is.”

Shapilovski and the rest of us weren’t very happy with Turkul’s answer and got ready to move out.

But everything happened as Turkul had explained. The Red centre was broken and they fled. Our flank column simply disappeared, not to be re-seen.

The path to the south was clear, and our division headed that way. This was our first retirement. Although we were victorious and considered the withdrawal to be temporary, the big withdrawal had begun. We didn’t yet consider it to be a disaster.

It got very cold. The battery left a small poor village to go into a ravine. There were scattered woods all around. Oboznenko came up to me.

“Leave Dura and go to the supply train. Get warm outfits. It is cold and the battery is badly dressed.”

I gave my carbine and Dura to my brother and watched with displeasure as the battery headed off. Then I took a cart to the rear. Being in the supply train didn’t tempt me, and I was worried about my brother.

The northernmost point the battery reached, was the village and estate of Brasovo, which had belonged to the wife of the Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich (the Tsar’s brother).

Chapter 12 – Sumy

Cartage Duty

Generally there were no quartermaster wagons for the transport of heavy material, and even when some could be found they were insufficient. Goods of all sorts were transported in private wagons. This was called cartage duty, and it was a heavy burden on the population. Quartering a soldier wasn't very burdensome, because the troops moved all the time and rarely spent two nights in the same house. More, housing a soldier guaranteed the peasants from plunder. If the troops stayed longer in a village, they were fed from a field kitchen, and the peasants ate with the soldiers. The peasants whined, but more from the habit of whining. But cartage duty was very onerous .

The battery had only a few army carts: an ambulance wagon and four clothing wagon, and everything else was transported on ordinary carts. Due to the lack of organisation in the commissariat, each squadron and each gun was a separate economic unit and took care of itself, without thought of anyone else. Units requisitioned carts in a village and made them carry their material very long distances. It was difficult to change carts and let the peasant go home – all the carts had already been taken by the Reds or us, and there was no time. When the unfortunate man was finally released, it was almost certain that another unit would intercept him and drag him even further. Sometimes, driven to despair, the peasants abandoned the cart and horses and ran away.

As we approached a village, we sometimes saw peasants running into the forest to hide carts and horses. The owner was paid nothing and rarely was he or his horses fed. It depended on the unit commander. Only under Wrangel in Crimea did things get better. They were obliged to pay the carrier by the kilometre , and this order immediately reduced the number of carts taken.

Prior to that, the volume of carts had grown terribly, despite orders to reduce them. Once General Barbovich stopped near a bridge and inspected the carts following the units. Excess loads were tossed and the delighted carter was sent home. But even these draconian measures were unreliable: soon the volume of carts grew again.

If a peasant had a good horse, it was taken away from him or, at best, exchanged for a worse one. Sometimes peasants came themselves and asked to exchange a good horse for a wounded one – they had a chance to keep the new one. But sometimes it was a trick: the peasant exchanged a horse stolen from a nearby estate so that it wouldn't be recognised.

With the constant movement of troops, the troops were immune. Soldiers did what they liked, and the peasants had virtually no opportunity to complain. Of course, if the peasant immediately turned to the commander of the unit, then an order followed to give back what was taken. But if the unit had left, how could he find the culprit?

Sumy

I ended up in the city of Sumy, where the supply wagons of our cavalry division was concentrated. The city was well-maintained, with nice houses and clean cobbled streets. The Nizhny Novgorod Dragoon Regiment had been stationed there before the war. Thanks to that, I was able to buy soldier's greatcoat cloth, and from a good tailor I had an usually long overcoat made, down to the ankles, and nice cuffs on the sleeves. Everyone envied my overcoat, and I was very proud of it.

Winter came early that year. The British had given us warehouses of their uniforms left over from the war. They had arrived in Novorossiysk a year before, but it hadn't yet reached the front. All the supply elements wore them, and they were already being sold on the black market.

All our numerous colonels, except for Oboznenko, who commanded the battery, were gathered in Sumy. And a decent number of other officers. I think that the more experienced colonels were aware that a catastrophe was in the making, and we young people, including Oboznenko, were foolish idealists. In addition, it was cold and uncomfortable, and the Army was retreating – and that always attracted the majority to the supply train.

I had just read the ‘History of the Crusades’ by Grusset. I was struck by the similarity between what happened in the 13th Century among the crusaders and here in southern Russia during the civil war. It was a mixture of idealism and mercantile egoism taking possession of, apparently, doomed societies. Because, without a doubt, our civil war was a crusade against the Bolsheviks. In the battery, at the front, there was idealism, but here, in Sumy, there was the most blatant selfishness – which also prevailed in the big cities.

To my shame, I confess, I allowed myself to be lulled by the pleasant life in Sumy. Sometimes Shapilovski invited us, young officers, to a good restaurant and treated us to an inimitable suckling pig with horseradish and, of course, icy cold vodka. I still drool thinking about it.

But my conscience tormented me. The others were out in such cold, without warm clothes, waiting for me, and I’m blissfully here!

I walked to Colonel Lebedev, the manager of the two batteries. He listened to me indifferently and yawned.

“We haven’t yet received the English uniforms (he himself was dressed in one). As soon as they arrive, I will notify you ... I can give you personally a good leather jacket. I still have one.”

“No thanks. I want outfits for the whole battery. I’ll take what I’m supposed to take, but there, not here.”

Lebedev grinned. “As you wish.”

Excited, I went to Colonel Shapilovski. He also smiled and yawned.

“Wait a little, the uniforms will eventually arrive ... And come to supper in the evening, there will be ladies.”

Of course I went to dinner. But I was still shy and blushed a lot, which amused the women greatly.

The wagon train of the two batteries even arranged a ball in a good hall with an orchestra. Colonel Lukyanov, my roommate in Sumy, introduced me to a lovely young lady, the queen of the ball.

The next day on the street, in my new greatcoat, I met her and with a trembling heart stood at ease in front of her. But the beauty raised her eyebrows and measured me with a surprised look (sincere? feigned?) and walked proudly on. I blushed and disappeared.

Once after a dinner with vodka, I was sleeping soundly. But I was given a shove. A review was scheduled in Sumy. Its purpose was to show any secretly sympathetic Reds that the troops were present and would resist if something happened. For this purpose, a platoon of soldiers and an officer was to be deployed from the wagon train of each unit.

Because of my greatcoat, I was assigned to command a platoon of artillerymen from our *divizion*. We were given the helmets taken in Romny, and as with a magic wand the tailors and shoemakers of our column were transformed into Achilles, and I myself felt no less than Hector. A helmet is a wonderful thing, it instantly changes a person and turns him into a hero. There were a lot of people in the crowd, and everyone was looking at our helmets. We were aware of this and stuck out our chests. I noticed that the strap of one of my spurs had come unfastened. It was so tight with the new overcoat, belts and a helmet that it was difficult for me to bend down. I put my boot on a pedestal ... and the crowd rushed towards me: each sought the honour of tightening the strap of my spur. Respectable gentlemen, ladies, boys and even young girls. However, an artisan pushed everyone aside, knelt down and tightened the strap. That is the effect a helmet has! It may be that the artisan didn’t sympathise with us at all, maybe he was even a communist, but he couldn’t resist the charm of the helmet. I think that it wasn’t pointless that the military used to dress in beautiful uniforms and helmets. One parade could settle all sorts of political differences: it was impossible not to fall under the spell.

My young beauty was in the crowd, and this time she deigned to recognise me and smiled sweetly at me. All because of the helmet ...

We were very proud. But when we passed the officer receiving the parade, he barked out to us, “Hello, firefighters!”

We responded badly and were offended. I think he did it on purpose out of envy.

Returning from the inspection to the baggage train, I noticed a volunteer who kept looking at me. He also admires the helmet, I thought.

But he turned to a soldier and asked, “Do you have Lieutenant Mamontov here?”

“That’s him there,” he replied.

Then I looked at him carefully.

“Lenia ?! What fate brings you here?”

It was Aleksandrov, our friend from Moscow. I didn’t even know he was in the Volunteer Army. He served in the 7th Horse Battery. We wanted to transfer to us at once, but that happened only much later, in the Crimea.

Return to the Battery

The outfits finally arrived. I immediately loaded them into a rail wagon and headed off with two soldiers to look for the battery. General Kolzakov gave me a letter for his mother in Belgorod and instructed me to evacuate her. But it turned out to be very difficult to find a battery which was moving all the time, especially as I was moving by train, and it was retreating. Nobody knew where the division was.

“The day before yesterday the division was here, but it moved on.”

“Where?”

The station commandant just shrugged his shoulders.

In the city of Lvov I heard gunfire, perhaps from our battery. But without any carts I couldn’t do anything and decided to leave there, so as not to fall into the hands of the Reds. It was difficult to insist that the wagon be hitched to departing trains. I had to resort to bribery, and once to the threat of a revolver. At the same time, to ensure that they remained hitched, I put one of the soldiers on guard so that they wouldn’t be unhooked. I travelled so many lines, and it was all wasted. I needed to go by cart if I was to achieve anything.

Once the train jerked so hard that our stove fell and the car was immediately filled with smoke. I was scared that the uniforms would catch fire, and wanted to throw the stove out. Fortunately, the soldiers didn’t let me do that. They put the stove upright, collected the scattered coals and reconnected the stove to the chimney. What would we do without a stove? It was frosty outside.

Finally I reached Belgorod and went to look for Kolzakov’s mother. I found her in a small cosy house with mahogany furniture, china in a sideboard and engravings on the walls. I handed over Kolzakov’s letter and offered my services to take her to Sumy to her son. But she told me that she had decided to stay and not to evacuate anywhere. I tried to warn her about the dangers to which she would expose herself, and persuade her to move. But she remained firm and, I confess, I liked that. Is she still alive? The chances are small, but I don’t know. She gave me a letter for her son. I returned to my wagon and we went back to Sumy. I was embarrassed that I hadn’t been able to complete my task and find the battery, but without carts it was impossible.

Sumy was being evacuated. The carts of the supply train were heading south. I gave Kolzakov the letter from his mother and told him that she had refused to evacuate. But it wasn’t too late, he could go and persuade her.

Several officers joined me to seek out the battery. Among them was Lieutenant Maltsev, whom I liked for his energy. He was an infantry officer, but older and more experienced than us. With him along I was sure that we would find the carts and battery. To my great joy, my Sumy beauty and her cousin asked to go with us in our train wagon. Of course, I was delighted, and we took them to Merefa.

In Merefa we managed to get a few carts, some of them sleds, some of them on wheels. It was snowing. We unloaded our uniforms onto them and headed north. We walked all night, and in the morning heard gunshots, which we headed towards. And there we met our retreating division. The meeting took place in Dergachi, where we been before with the Terek division. My brother was riding Dura. Both looked tired,

but they were alive, and that was the main thing. I followed the battery with my carts. We walked all day and all the next night and returned to Merefa, which we had just left.

Kharkov was surrendered without a fight. That night it began to rain, the snow melted, and the roads turned into mud. The sleds went through it with great difficulty. I had to shift my luggage from the sled to the wheeled carts. I myself was riding on the last sled, which barely dragged itself through the mud. Suddenly, at the edge of the road, I saw an emaciated, sick Drozdovski officer.

“For God’s sake, don’t leave me. I’m sick with typhus and can no longer walk.”

What to do? I put him in my sled and, in order to make it lighter and not get infected with typhus myself, I walked all the way from Kharkov to Merefa on foot through the mud. We arrived in Merefa in darkness. I was terribly tired. For two days and two nights we had nothing but walk. I put the typhus patient on a hospital train. He thanked me warmly.

My brother and several officers left with the supply train by rail. I sat on Dura, threw my carbine over my shoulder and took command over our first gun. Dura was in poor condition, but the team, especially the base pair, were in good shape. The soldiers greeted me with smiles. At one of the next stops, the uniforms were distributed and the carts were released.

Oboznenko was still the battery commander. It was early November 1919. It rained often and it was uncomfortable. We fought back while retreating. The men were gloomy. And yet I was glad to find myself again in the familiar battery environment among my people and horses. There was none of the remorse that had tormented me in Sumy because of my idleness. I was where I belonged.