

## Through the Hell of the Russian Revolution

### Memoirs of a Midshipman 1914 – 1919

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*This is just the Russian Civil War section of the English translation (as "The Unmaking of a Russian" by Nicholas Wreden).*

*I have modernised spellings but otherwise left the text as it was.*

*Where place names differ from the original I have put the new name in [brackets] to aid location on modern maps.*

#### Chapter 21

Late in the afternoon the steamer docked in Reval, and after a brief examination by military and custom house officials I was permitted to go ashore. On my way to the commandant's office I looked with curious eyes around me. By contrast with Helsingfors [Helsinki] the narrow cobblestone streets of the Estonian capital seemed neglected. The life of the town and the people were different.

Instead of the well-dressed civilians who strolled along the sidewalks in Helsingfors, I saw a conglomeration of oddly assorted individuals, who had a down-at-the-heel appearance. The preponderance of the military was striking, but the Estonian soldiers lacked the well-groomed air of the Finns. Their uniforms and their equipment were shabby, and the men looked sullen and unkempt.

At the commandant's office I was given the address of the barracks for transients, and early next morning I reported to the captain in charge of the navy section. After I had rattled off the regulation formula, he offered me a chair, and explained to me the purpose of segregating the men who had served in the navy.

A special navy regiment consisting of naval officers and sailors was in the process of formation. This regiment was to serve as a nucleus of a larger contingent of trained men who were to man the ships of the Baltic fleet as soon as Petrograd was in White hands. I had expected to be assigned to one of the active units at the front, and the captain's words dampened my spirits considerably. Besides, the entire plan sounded premature while we were still so far from our objective. But I was in no position to voice my doubts, and the following day found me in Narva, some hundred miles nearer to the front.

A midshipman is not a commissioned officer, and I was prepared to serve as a private in the White ranks. I was therefore amazed by the opening statement of my new regimental commander.

"You arrived just in time," he said. "In the last few days we have been flooded with men, but we are short of officers. Your battalion commander will be here any minute, and he will put you to work at once."

A few minutes later I was talking to a tall lieutenant-commander with the insignia of submarine service on his coat.

"Excuse me for being so abrupt, but I am very busy today," he said. "I want you to take charge of the third company. Have you a gun?"

He disappeared in a back room, and returned immediately with a Mauser and a belt in his hand.

"I happen to have two of them, and you can use mine for the time being. Come on! I will explain your duties on our way to the barracks."

Walking down the wide, dusty streets of Narva I tried to concentrate on my instructions.

"Three days ago the navy regiment existed only on paper," the lieutenant-commander was saying. "Out of the blue sky we have received six hundred men, all of whom were taken prisoners within the last week. They will constitute the first three companies. Before you arrived I had two ensigns under me – you will meet them later.... This morning I was informed that temporarily my battalion will be used as loading and stevedoring crews. The first company is going down the river where they will unload the incoming ships on



barges. The second company will work at the Narva railroad station loading freight cars. You will have charge of the third company which will unload the barges here, at the river docks, and load the trucks going to the station. Your company is quartered in the barracks opposite the commandant's office. Take them out at six in the morning, bring them in at five, and report to regimental headquarters for additional orders afterward. I don't believe that you will have any trouble with your men, but don't forget that they were Red guards only a few days ago, and that they will bear watching until you know them better. I will go down the river with the first company, and I will be away for three or four days, but I will tell the ensign commanding the second company to be on the lookout for you tonight. One more word of advice: whatever you do, remember that you are in Estonia, and for God's sake don't get in any trouble with the goddamn Estonians! ... We simply must be on good terms with them! ..."

The lieutenant-commander returned my salute, and walked away. I remained alone facing a line of two hundred men.

Wherever I looked I saw eyes scrutinizing me with varying expressions: most were weary and suspicious, others frightened, still others curious. My throat was dry, and the muscles back of my knees were jumpy. For a second or two I had no idea where to begin. The uneasy thought came to me that only a few days ago these men were a part of the Red army, and instinctively I pressed my elbow against the holster to make sure that the gun was still in the right place.

I ordered the company to stand at ease while I went into the commandant's office to get some paper and a pencil. When I returned I walked down the line, listing each man's name, his place of birth, and his war record. By the time I reached the last man the tension was broken. The few words I had exchanged with every soldier restored my confidence.

From among the old-timers I selected a top-sergeant and several petty officers. Before the men returned to the barracks the company was divided in platoons, and next morning, on the way to the docks, it already was functioning as a military unit. I was astonished by the facility with which relations between officers and men adjusted themselves to a normal, sensible standard. The very thought of insubordination had vanished, and, though the daily work of unloading barges on the river was hard and tedious, the morale of the company remained excellent.

In the evenings, except for an occasional inspection trip to the barracks, I had nothing to do. The civil population of Narva held itself aloof from the military, few of the officers had their families with them, and social life was non-existent. Moving pictures and restaurants were luxuries which White officers could not afford. The only sources of entertainment were an improvised navy club, and the boulevard overlooking the Narva River, where everyone went for a stroll.

The ensign commanding the second company invited me to share his room, which he occupied in a private home. During a bombardment a few weeks before my arrival the old brick house had been hit by a shell. One of the walls had a hole about five feet in diameter, so that sitting in the dining room we had an unobstructed view of the river, and of the Russian shore. The house belonged to two girls in their teens, who before the revolution had led the conventional life of a small town, middle-class family. Their parents had died in a flu epidemic during the preceding year, and left them alone and unprepared to cope with the exigencies of a world gone mad. Both girls were in a perpetual state of anxiety: the possibility of another Red invasion terrified them, their contacts with the new Estonian officials made them uneasy, and the White Russians did not inspire them with any degree of confidence.

Our presence in their home worried them, and they eyed us with suspicion. But at the end of the first week, when the girls became convinced that neither my roommate nor I had any designs on them, their attitude changed. They could not do enough to make us comfortable: they cooked for us, they mended our clothes, they made shoulder stripes for our uniforms, they found ribbons and sewed the white, blue, and red insignia of volunteers on our sleeves. Whatever they were doing their faces bore an expression of implicit faith in our ability to shield them against every danger and uncertainty. This confidence was disconcerting, especially as I came to realise more and more that all was not well with the White army.

Though Estonia was the sole base of operations against the Bolsheviks, the relations between White Russians and Estonians were not friendly. The same fears and the same antagonisms which motivated

Finland in her policies were at work, but in the case of Estonia the situation was more acute. Estonian nationalism lacked the spontaneity of Finnish nationalism, and only a negligible percentage of Estonia's population had faith in their country's independent future. Separatist leaders were aware of this fundamental weakness, and they tried to overcome it by fostering a narrow, militant brand of patriotism.

Estonian independence was won a year later than that of Finland, and the new governmental machinery had not had time to adjust itself. As a result, relations between the state and the individual were unsettled, a situation which was aggravated by absence of precedent, and by a universal lack of experience in self-government.

In addition to these political handicaps Estonia was confronted with other problems. Her natural economic ties with Russia were severed, and her people found it difficult to devise means for subsistence. Strategically, too, Estonia's position was more vulnerable than that of Finland, and fears of an armed invasion played a greater part in the minds of Estonians.

As long as war against the Bolsheviks was being waged on Estonian soil Russian Whites were welcomed as military allies. But as soon as the Red army was driven beyond the Estonian borders, and the Whites assumed the offensive, Estonian public opinion began to undergo a change. The average Estonian soldier had no desire to risk his life in an attempt to overthrow the Soviet Government in Russia. He was contented with the independence he had won, he was tired of war, and he wanted to be left alone. Gradually, Estonians came to believe that their government could come to terms with Soviet Russia, if it were not for the Russian Whites. When this feeling became crystallised Estonians began to display an unmitigated hostility toward the officers and soldiers of the North-West Army.

My daily contacts in Narva soon convinced me that the Russian White command could not depend on the whole-hearted co-operation of the Estonian army. The possibility always existed that Estonia would sign a separate peace with Soviet Russia, and that the White army would be left without a base of operations. But even more disheartening were the shortcomings within the White ranks.

The organisation of the North-West Army was loosely knit, co-ordination between the various departments was inadequate, and the inefficiencies were glaring. The leaders of the White movement were military men who did not have the necessary administrative experience, and who were unable to instil a singleness of purpose in the minds of their followers.

During the weeks I spent in Narva I saw the arrival of many volunteers, but only a few of them trickled through to the fighting units at the front. The vast majority were assigned to posts behind the lines.

I could not understand why non-existent divisions required such large staffs. I thought it strange that so many men were needed to handle the supplies, and I began to wonder how many of them were anxious to take part in the active fighting against the enemy. Doubts and misgivings began to fill my mind again.

One evening while I was taking my usual stroll along the boulevard I met an officer with an ensign's insignia on his shoulders. I saluted, and was about to pass him when in the waning light I recognised an old acquaintance. We shook hands, and sat down on a bench facing the river. In answer to my questions he told me that he had been at the front for several months and that this was his first leave. I watched him while he spoke: his arm was in a sling, he looked very tired, and there was an undercurrent of bitterness in everything he said.

"What are you doing in Narva?" he asked. I explained to him my duties. He listened absent-mindedly, and when I finished an awkward pause followed.

"Amazing!" he broke the silence at last. "Every man at the front is expected to do the work of ten, but since I arrived in Narva this morning I have seen more officers in the streets than I have seen in the entire army at the front. Every one here is busy doing nothing: organisation work, supplies, staffs, and the Lord only knows what, while the combat units sit in the trenches without food, clothes, or ammunition. At times I wonder why these gentlemen came here at all."

For a second the implication in his words incensed me. "I presume that the others feel as I do, and that they are not here through any fault of their own. I arrived here, received my assignment, and took for granted that I had no choice in the matter."

The ensign studied me in silence, gave a weary sigh and said:

“Please excuse me, but I thought you knew that any one who wants to get to the front can do so. There is a standing order permitting volunteers stationed in the rear to apply for transfers to combat units. Commanding officers are instructed to grant such requests without delay, and I assure you that every new man will be received with open arms at the front. Good night!” He arose, and disappeared in the dusk.

In the cool evening breeze I felt my cheeks turn hot as though some one had slapped them. The words of a man embittered by a single day behind the lines rankled in my mind. Until then no one had mentioned to me that I had the privilege of choosing where I was to serve, and I resented deeply the misleading impression my superior officers had given me.

At the navy club I found the lieutenant-commander reading a paper. He seemed surprised when I asked him whether it was true that I could request a transfer to the front.

“Yes, you can be transferred any time you want,” he answered. “I hope you are not planning to leave us – we will miss you.”

The lieutenant-commander argued for thirty minutes. He insisted that it was foolish to rush matters, that very soon the organisation of the regiment would be completed, and that then we would be moved to the front line. But when he became convinced that my mind was made up his manner suddenly grew distant and formal.

“I will report our conversation to the captain tomorrow,” he said. “Your request is certain to be granted.”

Twenty-four hours later I was presenting my credentials to the commander in charge of the armoured train *Admiral Kolchak*. He asked me a few questions, and then introduced me to the other four officers. They were cordial, but I sensed that they were accepting me with certain reservations, and I could not overcome the feeling of being an outsider. Every few minutes I caught a pair of searching eyes studying me, as one by one, they tried to form an opinion.

The train had been undergoing repairs for three days, but on the night of my arrival it was scheduled to move up to the front. Soon after midnight we steamed out of the Yamburg [Kingisepp] station, and just before dawn stopped a few hundred feet behind the front line trenches. Only a curve in the track concealed us from the enemy.

The crew was ordered to their bunks, and the commander called me to inform me about my new duties. During the preceding week the junior gunnery officer had been wounded in action. Temporarily I was to take his place, and serve as an observer. After giving me a general idea of my work the commander turned me over for instructions to the senior gunnery officer.

My new superior was a tall, dark lieutenant with a natural dignity of bearing which was not in the least pompous, but which, on the contrary, had a reassuringly calming effect. Whenever his coal-black eyes were fixed on me I knew that he could sense the unsettled state of my mind.

“Don’t worry!” he said. “I know you have never corrected artillery fire. Keep calm, use your judgment, and everything else will take care of itself. It’s not as difficult as it seems....”

Before sending me out the lieutenant went over the map with me, and explained what he wanted me to do. As I was about to go he reached in his pocket, and handed me a thumb-worn, paperbound book.

“Take this along. After the firing stops you will have nothing to do .... Read this! ... It will give you a real idea of war.” I glanced at the title page: it was *Under Fire* by Henri Barbusse.

My first glimpse of the trenches took me by surprise. I had expected to see an intricate system of approaches, and I was prepared to experience a gradually increasing tension as I came nearer and nearer to the front line. Instead, I walked through a scraggy forest, reached a clearing, and crossed it without any effort at concealment. Before I realised that I was in plain view of the enemy, I found myself in a long shallow ditch. To the right and to the left of me was a string of reclining figures.

After a brief consultation with the infantry officer in charge I selected an observation post, and settled to wait for the telephone men who were stringing a line connecting me with the train. A broad, level field lay

ahead, and beyond it stood a typical Russian village. In vain I strained my eyes trying to detect some sign of life among the huts. Everything seemed to be lulled to sleep by the lazy, spring sun. The very idea that I was to be instrumental in shattering the peaceful scene appeared shocking and outrageous. A voice broke in on my thoughts:

“The line is in working order, sir.” I picked up the receiver, and exchanged a few words with the lieutenant. A minute later there was a distant boom, and the sound of screeching metal overhead. The first shell landed in the woods beyond the village. I made a correction. The second shell threw up a column of dirt in the field. Another correction, and this time a black geyser sprang up between the houses.

A new note rent the air when a Red battery began answering our fire. For thirty or forty minutes the air shook and trembled, then suddenly everything was quiet. The sun was shining, the village still stood in the distance, the landscape had not changed an iota. The only difference was in me: I no longer trusted the atmosphere of repose which had settled over the field.

All day long I sat in the trenches reading *Barbusse*. The feeling of uncertainty and the devastating book unnerved me. When, after dark, I unexpectedly received orders to report back to the train I was desolate. My firing bore no visible results, and I was certain that I was being recalled because I had bungled my first assignment.

Stumbling in the darkness through the woods I made my way to the train. The senior gunnery officer stood waiting for me on the platform of the officers' car. I paused on the step expecting some caustic remark, but, instead, the lieutenant smiled, and said:

“Glad to see you back .... You did a good job! ... Come in: we are about to have some tea .... “

Inside the car the other officers were sitting around a rough wooden table. When we entered they slid along the benches, and made room for us. The messman brought me a slice of bread, and a tin cup of hot tea. Some one asked me a question, and gradually I was drawn into the general conversation.

Suddenly I became conscious that the attitude of the officers toward me had changed. I was no longer on probation: they were treating me as one of the family. Instantly my black mood left me, and for the first time in months I felt comfortable and contented with my lot.

## Chapter 22

For six months I served continuously on the armoured train *Admiral Kolchak*. In modern warfare this branch of the service is usually inactive because the concentration of artillery makes it impossible for the trains to come within effective range. But in the Russian civil war artillery was comparatively scarce, and the front lines were constantly moving. Under such circumstances an armoured train with its battery of two field guns and twenty machine guns was a formidable weapon.

Our train knew no rest. We were seldom away from the front for more than a single day. During an advance, whenever the condition of the track permitted, we moved forward with the infantry. During a retreat we fought rear-guard actions, covering the movements of the troops, and destroying railroad bridges behind us. We had occasion to work with every division in the North-West Army. Whenever action was pending we were called for orders to division headquarters; at least once a week we had to travel to the base behind the lines in order to replenish our supply of ammunition. As a result of our wide range of activities we had a reasonably comprehensive picture of conditions as a whole.

In my capacity of artillery observer I visited the various regiments, and I was thrown in with every imaginable type of men. As in every other army no two individuals were alike, but in a general way the White officers could be divided in four groups which tended to become segregated. Invariably if one or two officers belonged to a certain type, the others in that particular regiment thought and behaved in the same way.

One variety of White officer was responsible more than any other for the loss of prestige which the anti-Bolshevik movement suffered in the eyes of the Russian masses. Unfortunately, as a result of five years of havoc and slaughter, this group was numerically strong. It consisted of men who had become brutalised by



the World War, the revolution, and the days of Red Terror. The vision of a reconstructed national state was obliterated in their minds by a desire for immediate revenge.

Officers of this kind discarded all scruples. They asked and gave no quarter; they robbed and terrorised civilians; they shot down war prisoners and deserters from Red ranks. For the benefit of their own men such officers assumed the Robin Hood pose of just but ruthless outlaw leaders, and to that end they affected exotic costumes and a rough-and-tumble camaraderie among themselves. Their attitude toward the high command varied, depending on circumstances, from punctual correctness to outright insubordination. Whenever I had occasion to visit one of their units I returned feeling that I had travelled through the ages to see a medieval gang of robbers.

Relations between the regular troops and these lawless bands usually culminated in open outbreaks of hostility.

A typical incident took place during one of the periodical retreats.

Irregular infantry was operating on both sides of the railroad track. Our train was holding back the enemy in order to permit our troops to withdraw. Every two or three hours we made a ten-mile run behind the lines to make sure that the track behind us was not damaged by a raiding party. On one of these runs, as we were steaming into a deserted, wayside station, we saw a crowd of about fifty soldiers some distance away from the shed. Our train pulled up to a stop, and from the observation booth on the engine the commander hailed them.

A man detached himself from the group, and came in our direction. His cap sat over one ear, his shoulders bore the insignia of a captain, a gun and a curved sabre hung on his belt, and in his hand he carried a riding crop. We knew his kind, and the commander, another officer and I jumped down from the cars to meet him. The commander returned the stranger's smart salute, and asked:

"Captain, what is taking place here?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary. We are hanging the telegraph operator." The stranger looked faintly amused by our startled expressions.

"Hanging the telegraph operator? What on earth for?"

"We caught him dismantling the telegraph apparatus."

"He was doing this in accordance with my express orders." The commander's voice acquired a novel quality. "I happen to be in charge here, and I will appreciate it if you will surrender the telegraph operator to me at once!"

The stranger lifted his eyebrows, and in a cool, insolent voice said:

"I am sorry, but I have already given orders to hang him."

"You heard my orders! " the commander raised his voice.

There was a tense moment during which nothing happened, then suddenly the commander turned to us, and his words sounded thick:

"Watch this son-of-a-bitch! If he moves, shoot him!" The lieutenant and I pulled our guns from the holsters, and covered the stranger. The commander snapped an order to the officers on the train:

"See those men over there? Have the machine guns ready for action, and if there is any trouble open fire!"

Satisfied that the necessary precautions were taken, the commander again faced the stranger:

"Now, you! Call to your men to bring the telegraph operator here at once!"

An ugly scowl disfigured the captain's face, but his composure remained unruffled. He shrugged his shoulders, clicked his heels, and bowed. A few minutes later the trembling telegraph operator was lodged safely in one of the cars, and the train pulled out leaving the empty station at the mercy of the disgruntled band.



In that instance we arrived in time to save an innocent life, but there were entire sections of the front in the hands of guerrilla troops with nothing to restrain them. Wherever the irregular divisions were supreme their crimes and atrocities knew no bounds, and the White high command had no means of holding them in check. Men at the front were too scarce to use reliable, well disciplined units for police duty, and besides, despite their failings, the outlaw regiments were for the most part good fighters. These considerations forced the White leaders to turn a deaf ear to the complaints of robbery and pillage.

If these officers who had turned robbers and murderers stood at one extreme, at the other were men whose spirit was broken completely by the events of the preceding years. Some of them reached the front from the rear not because they were motivated by a sense of duty, or by a desire to light for their convictions, but because they were not wanted anywhere else. But most of them came as prisoners: they had been drafted into the Red army where they had fought in a half-hearted manner, they had been taken by the Whites, and they had accepted the change as a matter of course. Often this transformation from Red to White was only a matter of hours.

Early in July our train was supporting the infantry line against Red attacks, when our effectiveness became seriously impaired by the appearance of an enemy battery consisting of three six-inch guns. The White army was badly in need of heavy artillery, and the temptation was irresistible. One night, after a brief consultation, the general commanding the division issued orders, and next morning a sudden attack was undertaken on a three-mile front. The Red infantry was taken by surprise, and the attacking units were soon in possession of the six-inch guns. A landing party from our train was among the first to reach them.

Four officers were in charge of the battery. They had documents to prove that they had been drafted into the Red army, they had made no effort to escape, they had not attempted to defend the guns, but neither did they evince any enthusiasm at the prospect of serving in the White army. An hour and a half after we had examined their papers there were signs that the Reds were preparing for a counterattack. The six-inch guns were turned around, the same officers were left in charge, and their firing was to a great extent responsible for repulsing the Red advance.

I was amazed at the passivity of these four men. Their apathy was not superficial: they simply had no hopes or thoughts for the future. The only reason they kept going was because to stop would have required a greater amount of spirit and exertion. Like automatons creaking in every joint they went through the motions, mechanically obeying orders and performing any duties which were assigned to them. They did not live – they existed; they did not fight – they struggled; mentally and emotionally they were dead.

The third type of White officer offered a striking contrast to the first two. This group consisted of officers who overlooked realities, and who found a comparative peace of mind by hypnotising themselves into believing that nothing had changed. Many of them were men who had managed to save something from the wreckage, and most of them were stationed behind the lines where they spent their time playing an innocuous game in which formalities and precise military behaviour counted for everything. Obviously their fool's paradise could endure only as long as other men were willing to do the fighting at the front, but this consideration did not prevent the sticklers for convention from voicing their disapproval of anyone who did not play the game in accordance with their notions.

After I had been at the front for two months I was given a one-day leave. I arrived in Narva without any money in my pockets, with my shoes and clothes in tatters, and with cooties clustering under my belt and collar, but a day of rest was too much of an occasion to care about appearances. I was on my way from the station to the navy club, where I hoped to find some one who would buy me a meal and a drink.

Suddenly I heard a voice behind me. I turned and saw a lieutenant in a spick-and-span uniform, with freshly shined boots on his feet, and with sparkling silver stripes on his shoulders.

"Why did you fail to salute me?" he asked.

"I did not see you, Lieutenant," I answered.

He looked me over with evident distaste, and in measured tones said:

"I presume that you are entitled to wear a midshipman's uniform, but I consider your appearance a disgrace! I believe I should place you under arrest until your identity is established."

Something snapped in me.

“Go to hell! I am on my way to the navy club, and if you want to arrest me you can find me there.”

The lieutenant made no move to stop me. At the club I found several old friends, and told them about my misadventure. Just as I was finishing the story we saw through the window two officers and a half-a-dozen soldiers approaching the door. Among them was the lieutenant who evidently was determined to carry out his threat. I was ushered hurriedly into a back room, while the three senior naval officers present met the patrol. I never learned exactly what they said to the lieutenant, but their arguments must have been convincing, because I heard nothing more about the incident.

In my case the clannishness of the navy officers shielded me from the consequences of reckless disrespect for senior rank. But those who had few friends behind the lines were subjected constantly to petty persecutions at the hands of self-appointed disciplinarians.

As a group the martinets in the White army were never as dangerous as the reckless, bandit element, nor were they as unreliable as the passive, resigned type. But in an indirect way they did much to stir antagonisms, and to create dissensions in the White ranks. The very sight of these paragons of correctness was maddening, especially since it was evident that they demanded most and contributed least to the success of the White cause.

But, in away, all these groups were mere hangers-on. They could not have found a common ground for action, and they could not have fought as long, if it were not for a fourth element which was the true backbone of the White movement.

Men who formed this last group were not easily classified. They represented a wide range of social strata and of political convictions. Among them were aristocrats for whom the simple credo: “for faith, for Tsar, for fatherland,” was a living philosophy; liberally inclined professional men; representatives of the landed gentry which for generations had served the state; young boys from universities and high schools whose ideals had been trampled by the Bolsheviks. But all these seeming differences were effaced by two fundamental points which they had in common: a deep love for their country, and a readiness to sacrifice everything for their principles.

As the murderous civil war progressed the men who constituted this group evolved a stern, unwritten code to which they zealously adhered. One of its cardinal features was a self-imposed discipline of the most exacting kind. Perhaps it was an unconscious reaction against the anarchy and general disorder which had followed in the wake of the revolution, but they accepted the worst hardships without grumbling or complaining, and when they received orders they attempted and accomplished the impossible.

Dismayed by the wanton destruction of property around them, and disgusted by the moral laxity of their less scrupulous brothers-in-arms, the patriotic element of the White armies adopted toward the non-combatants an attitude which bordered on knight-errantry.

In August, when the North-West Army was retreating before the concentrated forces of the enemy, the battalion to the left of us suddenly halted. Fighting became more intense and, to our consternation, without a word of warning, the White infantry went into a counter-attack. Though the objective was not clear to us, our train joined in the action in order to preclude the possibility of a breach in the lines. The Reds gave ground, and we pushed them back a mile. Then, just as suddenly, the fighting subsided, and the White infantry resumed its retreat. Every one on the train was mystified by the unexpected sally, and anxious to learn the reason.

The mystery was cleared that night. In passing through a village a White soldier had forced his way into a peasant hut, and had stolen an overcoat. By the time the officers had heard about it the village was already in the hands of the advancing enemy, but the battalion commander was determined to teach his men that marauding would not be tolerated. The company of which the offending soldier was a member was sent into a counter-attack with instructions to replace the coat in the house of its rightful owner. As soon as the orders were carried out the attacking party was recalled, but the “battle of the stolen coat” made a lasting impression on the minds of the soldiers.



Nothing inspired the men with greater confidence than the personal bravery consistently displayed by this group of White officers. Young or old, they had no thought of danger. Day in and day out they went about their tasks with reassuring calmness, and whenever an emergency arose they stood ready to meet it. Again and again I had occasion to witness the heights to which they could rise.

Watching from a high bluff overlooking the Luga River I saw White infantry storming a bridge. An unexpected thrust had dislodged the Reds from their position on the western shore, and they had retreated to the second line of trenches on the other side of the river. For a few minutes it seemed impossible that anyone should attempt to follow them across five hundred feet of planking raked with machine gun and rifle fire. Then two figures sprang from the underbrush surrounding the bridgehead: one a middle-aged navy captain, the other a seventeen-year-old midshipman. As the two men started toward the enemy the firing became so intense that it seemed hopeless to try to reach the opposite bank. A breathless minute, the younger of the two reached the centre of the bridge, and still no one else followed ... Apparently the two men were doomed, when suddenly three more figures stepped on the bridge, then another five, then more, and still more, until a torrent of humanity was pouring across. Carried away by the example of their officers the soldiers swarmed into the Red trenches, the bridge was in White hands, and the enemy in full retreat.

Fearlessness was the usual thing among these men who carried the burden of the fighting on their shoulders throughout the civil war, but there were a few among them whose names became a by-word. In the North-West Army one young colonel in particular was almost a legendary hero. Some of the feats ascribed to him were difficult to believe, and I was sceptical until I saw him in action. With machine guns rattling, and with men falling around him, the colonel towered above the field sitting lightly on his prancing black horse.

But the most striking figure I encountered was a general leading a regiment of infantry in an attack. A tall, broad-shouldered, powerful man – he strode across the field like a giant, with his light gray coat lined with bright red fluttering in the wind. Most of his men had to run to keep up with him. He moved without looking to the right or to the left, and shouted curses in a deep, rich voice. It was difficult to say whether the general was upbraiding his soldiers for being too slow, or whether his remarks were addressed to the Reds. He must have been a tempting target for the enemy, and it seemed incredible that he could last through the day. I was inclined to agree with the soldier who after the attack was over said:

“The Reds can’t shoot the general! He looks so fierce that they are afraid to lift their eyes long enough to take aim”

White officers who served their cause with such devotion were not strong numerically, but their zeal and determination made them the most important single factor of the civil war. Without them the White movement never could have gathered any momentum. They alone stood between the tottering, inefficient civil administrations and collapse; they alone enhanced the prestige of the White cause in the eyes of non-combatants; they alone lent a semblance of organisation to the other, incongruous elements within the White army; they alone barred the Red path to victory.

## **Chapter 23**

The Russian civil war was a conflict of irreconcilable principles. On one side were the Reds who had for their goal an undisputed dictatorship of the proletariat; on the other were the Whites who considered such a dictatorship a usurpation, and who were intent on destroying it. For those who saw the issue clearly there could be no middle ground, but the bulk of both armies consisted of men who had no conception of the fundamental questions at stake.

Both sides resorted to conscription, and both sides forced the peasant to fight for their respective views. Torn between the two the Russian peasant resigned himself to his lot, and served docilely in whichever army claimed his services first. The determination of the Whites and of the Reds to fight a war seemed equally objectionable to him, and he saw little choice between them. As a rule the drafted soldier felt no enmity for the enlisted man who fought against him because he considered him a victim of circumstances like himself.

When a conscript was captured by the opposing side he deeply resented it if he was treated as a prisoner of war. But if his captors permitted him to serve in their ranks, he soon became assimilated, and made as good a soldier as any other drafted men they had. Usually the capture was effected under grotesque circumstances, and the state of mind of the prisoners was incredibly naive.

During a successful attack through wooded country I once stumbled across a wounded Red soldier lying behind a tree. When he saw me he began screaming:

“Don’t kill me! Don’t kill me! I surrender! I join the White army of my own free will and volition!”

I knelt beside him, and examined his wound. The bullet had shattered the bone below his right knee, but at the moment the physical pain concerned him least. While I was looking at his leg, he kept repeating:

“Yes, sir! Yes, sir! I joined the Whites of my own free will and volition!”

In the meantime several White soldiers had joined me, and the prisoner was more anxious than ever to make a good impression. I could not resist ragging him:

“They all tell us the same story when we catch them, but I believe you are lying! You look like a communist to me!”

“No, sir! No, sir! I am a drafted man! My papers are right here in my pocket. I never wanted to serve in the damned Red army, but how could I help it, sir? And I joined the Whites of my own free will and volition! When your men attacked our company broke and ran. I ran, too, until we reached the woods. Then we turned and tried to stop you, but your soldiers kept coming, so my comrades started to run again. Just as I got up the son-of-a-bitch hit me below the knee. I begged, and I pleaded: ‘Comrades! Comrades! Don’t leave me here! The damned Whites will kill me!’ “

“But the scum were too busy saving their own hides to lend their comrade a hand. I could not move, so I lay there until you came along, and then I joined the Whites of my own free will and volition!”

The prisoner saw nothing inconsistent in his story; on the contrary, he expected me to accept it in good faith, and his face assumed a puzzled expression when he heard me laugh. Later that day I saw him lying on straw, side by side with wounded White soldiers who were waiting their turn to be moved. He seemed happy and perfectly at home.

In that instance the man’s inability to move at least partly explained his conduct. But there were cases even more absurd.

During the last week in June the landing party from our train was holding a quiet sector of the front immediately adjoining the railroad track. We were separated from the Reds by an old forest which abounded in wild berries. The food rations had been very low, and the soldiers could not resist the temptation. One by one, they asked permission to go foraging among the trees. The only man who felt that gathering berries was below his dignity was the top-sergeant, but on the third day even he succumbed, and took his turn.

After waiting for him for more than an hour I became uneasy and decided to organise a searching party when suddenly my eyes caught sight of a strange procession emerging from behind the trees. Five men were walking in single file: the first four were soldiers whom I had never seen before, and last came the top-sergeant bristling with rifles, and smoking a cigarette. Accompanied by a couple of men I went to meet them.

There was an expression of satisfaction on the sergeant’s face when he said:

“Top-sergeant reporting with four prisoners!”

After I had sent the prisoners under guard to the train, I could no longer restrain my curiosity, and asked the top-sergeant for details.

“I was gathering berries behind some bushes.” He sounded apologetic for being guilty of such unmilitary conduct. “Suddenly I heard voices. I looked up and saw four soldiers rolling cigarettes. I thought they were from a neighbouring regiment, so I walked up to them, and said: ‘Boys, how about a smoke?’ “

"They handed me a tobacco pouch, and we stood there talking until one of the sons-of-bitches called me a comrade. I looked him in the eye, and asked: 'What is your regiment, soldier?'" "

"He answered: 'Seventy-seventh Soviet infantry.'" "

"He took me by surprise, but I would not let on. Instead, I said: 'You, scum, think you are still in the Red army? Well, you're not! You're my prisoners! Come on with me!'" "

"One of them had the guts to ask: 'Why should we take orders from you?'" "

"I shook my fist at him, and said: 'No back talk, you son-of-a-bitch! You are in a real army now, and you are talking to a top-sergeant! Hand over the rifles!'" "

"They never gave me any more trouble, and came along like lambs ...." "

Later, the prisoners asked to be left on the train. We were short of men, and the commander decided to use them as replacements. Under the tutelage of the top-sergeant, who considered them as his special charges, all four became valuable additions to our crew.

As far as the individual drafted man was concerned sheer accident determined his allegiance. If circumstances necessitated a change he accepted it as a matter of course. Only once in a great while the soldiers assumed the initiative, but even then their mass self-assertion was not so much a matter of conviction, as an expression of discontent with immediate conditions under which they existed.

On a quiet summer morning the regiment on our right was aroused by the sound of firing in the enemy's trenches. When the noise subsided a group of soldiers came over carrying a white flag. They told the colonel who met them that they were acting as spokesmen for an entire Red regiment which wanted to join the White army. Their only conditions were that they would be kept together as a unit, and that they would not be treated as prisoners. The delegation was permitted to return, and an hour later they reappeared at the head of a marching column. The men brought several commissars with their hands tied behind their backs, and the entire procession was greeted with cheers as it crossed the White lines. I had numerous opportunities to talk with soldiers from that regiment, but I never could find any motive for their action, except the unpopularity of their immediate superiors.

Wholesale desertions were not unusual, and the White army lost as well as gained men in this fashion. One evening the commander returned from division headquarters with a worried look in his eyes. He immediately called the train officers together, and told us that the secret service had uncovered a conspiracy. Two battalions of White infantry holding a section of the front adjoining the track were plotting to kill their officers, and to go over to the Reds. The mutiny was scheduled to take place in the morning, and in less than thirty minutes our train was rolling toward the front.

We spent the night about a mile behind the lines. The crew knew nothing about our assignment, but they sensed that something unusual was taking place, and were restless. The officers found it difficult to appear calm. Even the surrounding darkness seemed tense with malevolent expectancy.

Two hours before dawn the commander sent me to establish contact with the other units which were to take part in the disarming of the mutineers. After wandering for an hour in the dark I located the staff colonel who had charge of the operation. He told me that eight machine guns and a rifle company were in position behind the two disaffected battalions, and that the replacements were waiting in the adjoining trenches. I reported to the commander, and we stood silently in the observation booth peering into the blackness. Uneasy thoughts were running through my mind: I wondered whether the secret service had learned the true extent of the plot, and whether the mutiny was to be the signal for a Red attack.

At last the chilly morning breeze stirred the curtain of darkness, and familiar objects, one by one, appeared in the gray mist. The commander raised his watch close to his eyes, and said:

"We will start in ten minutes. Go and tell the officers that they can explain the objective to their men. Then take charge of the second machine gun car."

After delivering the orders to every officer, I went to my post, and found the soldiers asleep, but they came to life at the sound of my first words. Briefly I told them about the task which lay ahead of us. Before they

had time to realise the danger of the situation the train jerked, and moved forward. We came to a stop only a few feet behind the trenches. I climbed on the coupling between the cars, and waited breathlessly for the first sign of action. My nerves were poised for an explosion: I expected to hear shouts, or a burst of firing from the enemy, who were certain to detect our presence any second. The cool morning air and the oppressive stillness sent chills down my back.

Suddenly there was a ripple in the trenches. I glanced quickly inside the car: the machine gunners were in their places clutching the double handles of their Maxims. Within stone's throw from us a string of men appeared, and filed into the ditch beside the track. The heaviness with which they dragged their feet bespoke that they had no thought of resistance: they knew that they were trapped, and they were obeying orders. Moving slowly along the ditch the two battalions wended their way toward the rear. Our train crept menacingly alongside with every machine gun trained on the men trudging not more than ten feet away. When we had travelled a mile the tension relaxed: the Reds had missed the opportunity, and not a shot had been fired.

An hour later we were at the division headquarters. The mutineers were disarmed, and lined up under our machine guns. Secret service men with swift precision selected the four ringleaders, and led them toward a nearby grove of trees. A few brisk movements were followed by a word of command, and the four living men were transformed into four shapeless bulks suspended from the branches. Before their comrades had time to recover the general commanding the division spoke to them. He told them that mutiny at the front was a capital offense, that the ringleaders had paid the penalty, but that their death did not absolve the others. His last words had the hollow finality of earth falling on a casket:

"... every second man in the ranks will be shot!"

I could not take my eyes away from the condemned men. Their faces had no trace of colour or expression, and they stood like a row of crudely made clay figures. Until then they had been a concrete, dangerous force, but the knowledge of their impending doom changed them into broken, lifeless bits of humanity.

Then, as though by magic, a current of hope revived the death masks in front of me. The two battalion commanders had engaged the general in an earnest conversation. Their words could not be heard, but it was evident that they were pleading for the lives of their men. For several minutes the general listened to them in silence, then he stepped forward, and again raised his voice:

"The officers, whom you intended to murder, tell me that if you are spared they are willing to be responsible for you. I will take this chance, but, if there is a single case of desertion from your ranks, your officers will answer for it with their lives!"

Before the general had finished speaking a surge of new life was pulsating in every face. Inside the car the machine gunners, who had been sitting tensely at their posts, were grinning broadly without any attempt to disguise their relief. The incident was closed, and the subsequent conduct of the reprieved men fully vindicated the general's last-minute decision.

As a rule, however, the secret service did not function so smoothly. Numerous wholesale desertions were planned and carried out, upsetting the calculations on both sides, and needlessly prolonging the struggle.

But not all the soldiers in the Russian civil war fought without conviction. Both the White and the Red armies had entire regiments consisting of men who could conceive no compromise with the enemy, and who never faltered in their allegiance. Notwithstanding the Bolshevik claim that the struggle in Russia was a class war, both sides numbered within their ranks representatives of every social, national, and economic group.

For instance, a majority of the industrial workers served loyally in the Red army, but there were many notable exceptions. Railroad workers and skilled mechanics were numerous in the White ranks. In two districts the factory workers carrying their families and their belongings retreated into Siberia before the Bolshevik advance, and formed two of the best divisions in Kolchak's army.

On the other hand, most Cossacks were definitely anti-Bolshevik in their sympathies, but many young Cossacks served with the Reds, and there were entire Cossack regiments in the Red army. Among them

each man decided the question for himself, and what proved to be the decisive factor in each individual case was difficult to determine.

The armoured train on which I served had a crew of three hundred men, most of whom had proven their loyalty to the White cause. For the most part, they were peasants from every section of Russia, representing the average educational and economic level in their districts. To satisfy my curiosity I asked them many questions, but I seldom received any definite answers about the causes which had determined their allegiance. Their reasoning was obscure, and they could not formulate their ideas, but their hostility toward the Bolsheviks was deeply rooted, and sincere. And whether their motives were a matter of self-preservation, or of principle, the force behind them was vital enough to cut through every layer of society, and to sustain the men through months of bitter fighting and unbelievable privation.

## Chapter 24

Conditions under which the Russian civil war was fought were different from the conditions under which men fought in the World War. Position warfare was the exception rather than the rule, and soldiers seldom had to endure the devastating monotony of trench life. Concentration of artillery, heavy barrages, gas attacks, mass air bombings – all these monstrous technical innovations against which the individual is so helpless were not very common. But, instead of the terrific strain which the World War placed on the nervous system of the soldier, the Russian civil war made super-human demands on his physical endurance.

Men serving in the White and in the Red armies had to be strong enough to move at a rapid pace. Without rest, without respite their lives were an unbroken succession of advances and retreats, of attacks and counter-attacks, and of deep raids into the enemy's territory. Soldiers properly equipped and in the best of physical condition would have found their strength taxed to the utmost by the mobile character of the operations. But the endurance of the men who participated in the civil war was undermined already by the rigors of the revolutionary years, while the continuous lack of essentials precluded any possibility of rebuilding their vigour.

Food shortage was the greatest problem which had to be faced. Officers and men at the front were perpetually hungry. During the early months of the war the quartermaster department of the North-West Army had scant means for buying provisions, and virtually no sources of supply. A half-a-pound of bread a day, and a half-a-pound of dried fish once or twice a week constituted the entire food allowance. If the men wanted to survive they had to devise means of providing additional nourishment.

The theatre of war was a poor farming country desolated by war and revolution. Peasants, instead of having a surplus, depended for their existence on whichever army was in possession of their village. Once in a while some enterprising soldier would uncover a sack of wormy flour, or a bin filled with rotten potatoes. But, as a rule, the cooks were forced to improvise meals out of grass, roots, water, and a handful of flour. Toward the middle of the summer considerable quantities of food began to arrive from abroad, and the condition of the White army was vastly improved. And, though the quartermaster department was poorly organised and inefficient, and though there were many hungry days at the front, generally speaking bread was more plentiful, bacon put in an appearance, and corn mush became the steady diet of the army.

Even when conditions were at their worst the high command strove desperately to feed the men, but any attempt to clothe them was a forlorn hope. Every officer and soldier wore the clothes which he had brought with him to the army, and had scant hope of getting anything else. On both sides the regulation olive and brown-grays of the old Russian army predominated, but men dressed in civilian clothes were not unusual. One of my fellow officers on the armoured train sported throughout the war a brown checkered suit and a gray cap with only the insignia of his rank sewn on his shoulders.

As long as an article of clothing could be repaired its owner worked diligently on it whenever he had a spare moment, but gradually the clothes were reduced to shreds. Many soldiers wore pants made of burlap sacks, while underwear and socks became a rare luxury. But nothing in the meagre wardrobe of the soldier was treasured any more than a pair of shoes. When a sole began to wear out it was padded with papers, and fastened to the boot with strings. A grim struggle ensued between the owner and the thin patch of leather which melted day by day. Shoes were never discarded until only the tops remained, and still the percentage of bare-footed men in the ranks was steadily increasing.





Besides the suffering from exposure which it entailed, the lack of clothing was a source of anxiety in another respect. Red and White soldiers were dressed in the same tatters, and their nondescript appearance was so similar that it was impossible to tell them apart. As a result numerous tragic incidents occurred in the course of every advance and retreat. Neighbouring regiments mistook one another for the enemy and opened fire, inflicting serious losses.

As a consequence of mistaken identity patrols exploring newly occupied territory fell easy prey to the enemy. Inability to trust one's eyes immeasurably increased the nervous tension, and created a general confusion. I received my only scratch when after an attack I hailed a man standing some thirty feet away. He looked like any other White soldier, and I discovered my error only when in answer to my call he snapped his rifle to the shoulder and fired.

During the last months of the war the clothing problem became less acute. Shipments began to arrive from the outside world, and, though the units stationed behind the lines seemed to be given preference, small lots of uniforms and shoes trickled through to the front. Usually they reached a company just in time to clothe a dozen or so men who were virtually naked, but occasionally there were exceptions. During one attack I saw four White regiments going into action, each dressed in a different uniform: the first had the brown-gray coats of the Russian army, the second – the brown-gray and the long visored caps of the British, the third – the light blue coats and the soft berets of the French chasseurs, and the fourth – the blue-gray of the Germans. The effect must have been as startling to the enemy as it was to me.

One of the most tragic aspects of the civil war was the handling of the wounded and of the sick. Trained medical personnel was scarce, and the hospital facilities were inadequate to care for the disabled men. A few field units without the proper equipment or materials struggled heroically against overwhelming odds. Entire weeks went by when the hospitals were without drugs, and wounds were dressed and operations performed without the aid of anaesthetic or antiseptics. Mortality among the wounded was appalling, but the toll exacted by the diseases was even greater.

Fully fifty per cent of the soldiers in the North-West Army died from typhus. With no change of clothes, and with no means for delousing the old ones, there was nothing to check the spread of the epidemics. Diarrhoea, the other scourge of the armies, was also rampant, and every unit suffered sporadically from its attacks. No one escaped the bleak days when virulent seizures of cramps alternated with waves of weakness. Men on the march stepped out of the ranks and leaned against the trees for support, waiting for the pains to subside. But the fear of being left behind to die on vermin-infested straw, with no one to minister to their needs, was even greater than the physical suffering. At least there was a ray of hope as long as they refused to succumb.

Food, clothes, and drugs were a matter of life and death, but the absence of other articles was felt just as acutely. Soap was not to be found anywhere near the front, and without it one never could rid oneself of the accumulation of filth and grime. Entire companies were without a single razor, and during a day of rest behind the lines soldiers tried to shave each other with the sharp edge of a broken piece of glass. But most agonizing of all was the lack of tobacco.

No provision was made to supply the smoking needs of the army; no one had any money, and, besides, tobacco could not be obtained at any price within the war zone. Every imaginable form of substitute was used. Cigarettes were rolled out of hay and a piece of old newspaper; pipes were packed with crushed birch and oak leaves. On our train a silent struggle went on between the orderly and the officers. Every morning the orderly made a new broom out of tree branches, and after sweeping the officers' car hid it in some out-of-the-way place; every evening the officers went in search of the broom, and smoked the dried leaves in their pipes as soon as they found it. No matter how hard the orderly tried to devise a new hiding place, he could not save the broom from destruction.

The tools of war at the disposal of the White soldier were not much better than the conditions under which he lived. As long as the North-West Army was fighting the Bolsheviks in Estonia, the Whites could draw on the supplies accumulated within the Estonian borders. But as soon as the war was carried into Russian territory new sources of military supplies had to be found. Artillery, ammunition, machine guns, rifles – everything was lacking.



Our train was a fair sample of the fighting equipment. Though it was known officially as an armoured train actually it did not carry a single plate of armour. The engine and the observation booth were protected by the simple device of covering them with pieces of scrap iron. The rest of the train consisted of regulation freight cars with walls reinforced with bags of cement and sand, and with openings cut in them for machine guns. Artillery cars offered the most difficult problem. In order to provide sufficient space to turn the guns, sections of the roof and walls had to be demolished, and, as a result, the gun crews were exposed to the enemy's fire whenever the train was in action.

Until the midsummer of 1919 the quickest and most dependable way of procuring supplies was by raiding the enemy. Both sides used the standard Russian army rifles, and it was merely a question of capturing ammunition in sufficient quantities. But beginning with June the long awaited shipments began to arrive from abroad. Throughout the World War the Russians had listened enviously to the tales about the technical equipment of the Western armies. When the war against Germany was over the Whites held sanguine hopes of being flooded with military supplies by the Allies, but their expectations were never realised.

Infantry received ammunition which did not fit their rifles; British rifles came in by the hundred without any ammunition; discarded guns which blew up the first time they were fired were brought all the way from France; artillery received cases of defective shells, a large percentage of which did not explode; newly arrived airplane motors did not give the number of revolutions required to lift the machines off the ground. Instead of materially improving the situation, the new equipment, and the irregular manner in which it was received, only added to the confusion.

But even worse than the uncertainties and the physical hardships were the psychological factors which introduced an element of brutality into the fighting. Atrocities are common in every war, but in the Russian civil war no pretence of observing amenities was made. Both sides viewed their enemies as criminals, and, with the exception of drafted men, no prisoners were taken. White officers and White volunteers knew what to expect when they fell into the hands of the Reds. I have seen more than once horribly mutilated bodies with shoulder stripes cut in their flesh. On the other hand, few communists ever went beyond the nearest White military intelligence officer. As soon as their party affiliation was established they were hung on the nearest tree.

## Chapter 25

In August 1919, the Red high command decided to put an end to the North-West Army, which at that time was within striking distance from Petrograd. There were signs of great activity behind the enemy's lines, and prisoners reported that fresh Red divisions were arriving daily from the other fronts. We expected the big attack every morning, and wondered where the blow would fall. But, before the Reds had time to act, we received orders from headquarters for a general retreat.

Most railroads and highways between Petrograd and the Estonian border ran straight from east to west, but for some unknown reason the army was ordered to leave the main roads, and to retire in a south-westerly direction. Only the armoured trains were forced to follow the tracks west to Yamburg, and our instructions were to hold the line open until the last unit had crossed the railroad from the north.

Nervous tension is always at its highest during a retreat, and anything is likely to happen when troop movements are diverted to country lanes, away from the familiar landmarks. As the White infantry fell back across the tracks, the right wing of the enemy advanced rapidly along the coastal highway which ran parallel with the railroad. On the second day we were still some fifty miles east of Yamburg, and faced with the possibility of being cut off from our base. The Red attacks were constantly gaining in strength; communications became very uncertain; no one knew which sections of the track were still protected by White infantry.

Early in the morning I was in the trenches correcting fire when I received word to report immediately to the train. With the telephone men slowly rolling the wire it took us two hours to cover the intervening distance. As soon as we were on board the train started to move. I took my usual place in the observation booth. The commander looked tired and worried.



“While you were away an important prisoner was brought to the train,” he said. “He is an officer, and he has valuable information about the disposition of Red troops. We will have to take him to the headquarters in Yamburg, and then we can return to the front. But this time I will leave our own posts at strategic points along the railroad so that it will not be cut by the enemy without our knowledge.”

About eight miles further west we saw a White regiment crossing the tracks. We stopped, and learned from the infantry officers that Red patrols were not far behind. After that we ran through miles of wooded country with not a sign of life anywhere. Involuntarily my eyes kept scanning the expanse of treetops to the north, wondering what they concealed from view.

At regular intervals we landed small detachments consisting of several men and a machine gun, with strict orders to keep a sharp lookout in every direction, and to hold their ground until the train returned. When we were about twelve miles from Yamburg we overtook a hand car carrying two railroad men. The commander was delighted.

“That’s the very thing!” he exclaimed, and turned to me. “The infantry needs us, and we will not go any further. I will leave the last outpost here, and go back to the front. You will take the prisoner to Yamburg in the hand car. After delivering him to headquarters return to this post, and wait for us. I am sure that the commandant in Yamburg will provide you with some means of transportation. Good luck!”

As soon as the prisoner and I climbed on the hand car the train started to back away. I stole a glance at my fellow travellers: the two railroad men looked sullen and uncomfortable in our presence, while the prisoner – a tall man in a long cavalry coat which reached to his heels – was silent and ill at ease. Though every mile brought us nearer to the army base my sense of security diminished as the distance from the train increased. But in spite of my forebodings we reached our destination without a mishap.

The sleepy country town of Yamburg was in an uproar. Streets were crowded with soldiers; long lines of country wagons carrying wounded men and boxes of ammunition were moving slowly toward the bridge across the Luga River; the wide square in front of the railroad station resembled an armed camp. I felt bewildered and lost in, the turbulent sea of humanity, and it took me hours to find the headquarters. By the time I had delivered the prisoner and returned to the station it was turning dark.

After several unsuccessful attempts I cornered the commandant in his office. He was a wiry, nervous colonel, harassed by endless requests, and striving desperately to bring some semblance of order out of chaos. When I explained to him my predicament, he raised both hands toward the ceiling, and exclaimed:

“My God! What is this: a madhouse? ... Do you realise that the enemy has been reported within ten miles from town? And here you are asking me to provide you with transportation somewhere beyond the enemy’s lines!...”

“Colonel, I know that our train is still forty miles east of here, and I have orders to rejoin it as quickly as possible.”

“Well, you can get there any way you want! I am too busy trying to straighten out this mess to bother with you!”

I pushed my way out of the crowded office, and started to walk east. The freight yard was buzzing with activity and noise. Switch engines were shifting long lines of freight cars. Their headlights blinded me, or plunged me into a coal black darkness. Leaving the hubbub behind me I followed the tracks until I reached the outskirts of town. On both sides of the railroad embankment were rows of bonfires with soldiers lying around them. The glare of the glowing logs cast a weird, red light on their faces.

When I came to the last group beyond which everything was silent darkness I paused to get some information. A young lieutenant, stretched out on the ground, answered all my questions without changing his position.

“I don’t believe you can get back to the train .... As far as I know we are the last outpost. There is no one between us and the enemy, but that’s the least of my worries: we have been walking for three days without any rest, and these new boots have rubbed such holes in my feet that I don’t give a goddam!”

For a fraction of a second I hesitated, then I climbed the embankment, and continued east: anything seemed better than the frenzied uncertainty which I left behind. I had not walked very far when the moon appeared from behind the clouds, and illuminated the countryside with an eery, silver-green light. The two steel rails running into the distance came to life with myriads of mysterious sparkles, and by contrast the dark wall of trees on both sides seemed even more forbidding.

Solitude, moonlight, and silence began to play tricks with my imagination. Sinister shadows lurked among the trees, and time and again I was certain that I saw crouching human figures only to discover some queerly shaped stump or bush when I came nearer. My mind was obsessed with the thought of the inviting target I made walking along the elevated track. I tried the woods, but there the branches caught in my clothes, and impeded my progress. Dry sticks crackled under my feet, and I was sure that in the surrounding stillness my every step could be heard for miles around. As a last resort I climbed down into the ditch beside the embankment, but I found the struggle with the mud and with the tall grass too strenuous. Once again I returned to the track, and again I was seized with panic.

But as I trudged mile after mile fatigue replaced the nervous tension. My rifle seemed to weigh more than usual, and the ammunition belts rubbed against my skin no matter how I adjusted them. Every time I approached a crossing I peered eagerly ahead hoping to detect some sign of the men from the train, but no one was there.

Misgivings assailed me: perhaps the commander had been forced to change his plans, and to remove the chain of outposts. Doubts weakened my determination, and my nocturnal expedition appeared aimless and futile. I forced myself to go on with the childish expedient of concentrating on missing every other railroad tie without losing my balance.

The end came suddenly. In front of me the woods crowded the embankment until it became a narrow gorge. Not very far was a crossing with avenues of trees leading up to the tracks, and half-hidden by one of them was the figure of a man. This time there was no mistake: he stood motionless, and his rifle resting for support on a branch was pointed at me.

A sickly feeling took possession of me, as though someone had delivered an unexpected blow in the pit of my stomach. The muscles in my legs were trembling, but I instinctively continued to move forward. I had a wild desire to take a sudden leap down the embankment, or to drop between the tracks and try to slip the rifle from behind my shoulder. But common sense warned me that the man would shoot at the first sign of action on my part. The only chance was to gain time by pretending that I had not noticed anything unusual.

The man was not more than a hundred feet away. My boots were weighted down with lead, and every nerve in my body was poised for an impact. Only fifty feet remained between us .... A voice startled me, and made my heart jump:

"Is it you, midshipman?" A soldier from the train! I had reached the outpost at last. As I came up to where he stood my knees were shaking violently. Never before had I experienced such insane, animal fear.

In a few minutes I regained my composure sufficiently to listen to the sergeant's report. The eleven men with two machine guns had spent an uneventful day. They had not seen anything of the enemy, but they had not heard a word from the train.

As soon as it turned light I went to inspect the three posts which the sergeant had placed east, west, and north of the station. The places were well chosen and the lookouts had an unobstructed view ahead.

I returned to the shed, but though I was desperately sleepy I was afraid to relax. During the preceding night the soldiers had finished their rations, and there was nothing to eat. We sat on the grass with our backs against the trees, and waited.

The first alarm came when the sun was high in the skies. Our lookout in the north came in on the run, and reported that he had seen someone moving in the woods. We rushed the two machine guns in position, and prepared for action. Very soon a line of seventy or eighty men appeared among the trees, and started walking across the clearing toward us. They wore sailors' uniforms, and we knew who they were. Our machine guns broke the silence, and the enemy line vanished in the underbrush. After several spurts of firing everything became quiet.

For two or three hours we lay flat on the ground expecting another attack, then our lookout in the east appeared with the news that men in single file were crossing the railroad some distance away from the shed. Evidently the enemy were changing their tactics, and to meet the new emergency we moved the machine guns so they faced east. This time the sailors refused to come out into the open, but they kept up a continuous rifle fire instead. Either they overestimated our strength, or they were trying to divert our attention. As the sun began to set in the west my worst fears were realised. Word came from the western outpost that we were being cut off from the road to Yamburg. By that time I was convinced that something had gone wrong with the train. To reassure the men, who were beginning to show the strain, I told them that under cover of darkness we would slip away from our position, and move south. But just as we were ready to make a dash across the track a new sound reached our ears.

We heard a distant rumble, and the high pitched singing of steel rails: the train was approaching from the east. When the cars were opposite the enemy's lines the train stopped, and the machine guns poured lead into the woods on both sides of the embankment. Another ten minutes, and we were safely aboard.

I reported to the commander who took one look at me, and said:

"We will spend the night in Yamburg .... Go, and get some rest!"

The rocking motion of the cars, combined with the suddenly regained sense of security, had a soothing effect on me. All at once I became aware that I had not closed my eyes for forty-eight hours, and that during that time I had walked at least thirty miles and had been entirely without food. I staggered through the train, found a piece of bread, took one bite, and went to sleep in my bunk.

When I came back to life I had lost all sense of time and place. The train was no longer moving, but a terrific commotion reigned outside: machine guns were firing, men were shouting, and occasionally came the crash of breaking glass. I ran to the end of the car, jumped to the ground, and instantly recognised the familiar Yamburg station. As I reached the engine the train started to move. I climbed the ladder to the observation booth, and over my shoulder saw hundreds of men running in our direction across the wide square. Some of them stumbled and fell – every machine gun on the train was in action.

In the booth I found the commander who greeted me with the terse remark:

"The Reds arrived before we expected them! ... You have been asleep for twenty-four hours .... "

Our train was the last White unit to leave Yamburg. As soon as we reached the western bank of the Luga there were several deafening explosions: the engineers had blown up the railroad bridge.

Several days later the Red army succeeded in effecting a crossing, but the momentum of their advance was spent, and the weeks which followed were an anti-climax. The fighting relapsed into inactive trench life. Only a narrow strip of land between the front line and the Estonian border remained in the possession of the North-West Army: Narva was at our backs.

## Chapter 26

Soon after the retreat General Headquarters reorganised the entire army. Commanding officers were moved, divisions and regiments merged, and new units created. In many instances personnel was also shifted, and I was not surprised when orders were received transferring me from the armoured train to a newly formed tank battalion. The parting with my fellow officers and with the crew was a sad occasion, but the prospects of serving with the tanks appealed to me. In my case two factors were responsible for the change: my navy friends who already had been assigned to the tanks and who wanted me with them, and my working knowledge of the English language.

The three large tanks and the two Whippets were the one outstanding contribution made by the Allies to the North-West Army. A brand-new weapon which until then had not been tried in Russia, the tanks were accompanied by a contingent of forty British officers and men. The understanding was that until the Russians learned how to operate the machines half-British and half-Russian crews would be used.

Merging military men of different nationalities into a single unit is a thorny problem, but in this instance the relations between the Russians and the British were uniformly good, and after the first week a sincere feeling of affection sprang up between them. Much of it was due to the wholesome influence exercised by

the two senior officers: one a South African colonel, the other a Russian navy captain, and both representing the best military traditions of their countries. The Russians held an exalted opinion of the motives which had led the British officers to volunteer their services in a campaign against the Bolsheviks, while, in their turn, the British were thoughtful and considerate of the Russians. Soon after my arrival I was given concrete proof of their friendliness.

When I joined the tank battalion my wardrobe consisted of a navy blouse, torn in many places, black pants which looked like a crazy quilt, and a pair of shoes without soles. I had no cap, no socks, and no underclothes. When the British officers invited me to their mess for dinner I declined because I was not fit to be seen anywhere. But they insisted, and when finally I accepted the invitation their cordial hospitality made me forget my appearance.

After a gala dinner accompanied by immense quantities of gin I went to sleep in a room belonging to one of my hosts. When I awoke next morning my rags had disappeared, and in their place I found a complete British outfit: tunic, knee-breeches, shoes, belt, cap, and three changes of socks and underclothes. A briefly worded presentation note was pinned to the sleeve of the tunic. The crisp, fresh clothes made me feel like a new man, and I was very grateful.

But, though the good feeling between the Russians and the British was deeply rooted, normal relations between the two unfortunately were out of the question. In spite of the fact that we lived and worked side by side, circumstances made it impossible for us to associate with one another on an equal footing. The Russians received no pay, ate bacon and bread, and never had any tobacco; the British were paid regularly in pounds sterling, ate splendid food, and had at their disposal a canteen well stocked with cigarettes and liquors. This contrast in the mode of living created a constrained atmosphere which friendly relations could not overcome.

Watching the British provided the Russian officers of the tank battalion with a standard of comparison, and made them aware how far downhill they had travelled since the revolution. The painful realisation was a blow to their national pride, and the bitterness of their position was augmented by the traditional British attitude of benevolent condescension toward foreigners. Most maddening of all were the opinions frequently expressed by the British about the World War. They held that Great Britain was responsible for the victory; if pressed they acknowledged that the French also had fought in the war, but the rest of the Allies simply did not enter their calculations.

We knew the havoc which the war had wrought in Russia; most of us had relatives and friends who had lost their lives during the three years of fighting against Germany, and we were particularly sensitive on this subject. In talking with the British we reminded them that without the Russian army in the east the Germans would have been free to concentrate their forces in the west, and that the continuous pounding on the eastern front was greatly instrumental in undermining Germany's strength. But the British remained adamant: Russia had not been in at the finish, and was not entitled to any share of the credit.

The first two discussions of this kind made me so furious that I did not know what I was saying. But on the third occasion I accidentally stumbled against an effective weapon. I said:

“If nothing before the final blow counts, then there can be only one answer: America won the war! ... “

To my great amazement my naive argument created a furore among the British. Their calm self-assurance forsook them, and they became very earnest. They explained at great length that the Americans had arrived on the scene when Germany was already defeated. Unaware of being inconsistent, the Britishers used the very words which we had used in speaking about Russia. The tables were turned, and I derived a malicious joy from their discomfiture. Whenever one of them paused I merely repeated:

“America won the war! ... “ That evening when I discovered the extent to which mere mention of America interfered with British complacency, I felt the first wave of affection for the far-away United States.

But, though we had our quarrels, and though occasionally we irritated one another, the Russian and the British crews remained staunch friends. During the training period the tank battalion made only one trial expedition to the front, where it participated in a minor attack. The rest of the time we spent in camp on



the outskirts of Narva. We worked on the motors in the daytime, and we found opportunities to amuse ourselves at night.

After the life we had led at the front our new work seemed more like a vacation.

In this respect the tank battalion was no exception: the entire North-West Army was enjoying a well earned rest. Soldiers were better clothed and fed than they had been since the beginning of the civil war. Fighting had subsided along the entire front, and the respite from continuous marching gave the men an opportunity to regain their strength. Spirits rose perceptibly; new hope was written on every face. And just as the morale reached its highest peak the entire army became electrified by the unmistakable signs of preparation for a major attack.

Detailed plans and exact dates were shrouded with mystery, but no one was in doubt about the final objective. In some inexplicable manner every man in the army sensed that the high command had decided to throw caution to the winds, and to bank everything on a sudden attack on Petrograd. As reckless as the decision seemed in the light of recent reverses, this plan of action was dictated by common sense. The rapidly advancing autumn made it imperative to move at once.

Every officer and soldier knew that the North-West Army could not live through the cold weather in the field. Men without proper clothing simply could not survive the rigors of a Russian winter. The Whites were doomed to freeze in the open, or else they had to drive the Reds out of the larger cities where shelter was available. Besides, if the population of Petrograd was to be saved from freezing and starvation, rescue had to arrive before the first snow. Faced by these grim considerations the North-West Army became permeated with new determination.

If the attack on Petrograd failed, the collapse of White hopes in Northern Russia and death for most White soldiers were a certainty. But inasmuch as the decisive test was to come, the officers and men were impatient to get under way. They instinctively subdued all thoughts of defeat which lurked in the backs of their minds, and they hypnotised themselves into believing that victory was the only possible outcome.

Cool October days seemed unbearably long while we waited for the final word. I had the sensation that all the men around me were straining at their leashes. When at last the orders came announcing the disposition of the troops, they were received with a wild outburst of enthusiasm. Doubt and uncertainties were at an end; the crucial hour was at hand.

The tank battalion was slated to take part in the frontal attack on the Red trenches in front of Yamburg. Immediately after dark we unloaded the tanks about a mile behind the lines, and moved up. The deafening roar of the engines made the usual warnings about making noise sound childish, but for some inexplicable reason the Red artillery remained idle. We worked feverishly carrying gasoline and oil from the supply train, examining every section in the caterpillar tracks, and checking the machine guns. When everything was ready we were ordered to get some rest. Unable to relax, I climbed on the roof of our tank, and became lost in thought. My eyes searched the black curtain which separated us from the enemy.

I could not help wondering whether the Reds were aware of our preparations. Would the attack come as a surprise, or were they waiting for it? Their military intelligence could not have missed the excitement of the last two weeks. And even if their headquarters were not anticipating a general advance, the Red infantry in front of us must have heard us unload. Did they realise what it meant? What steps had they taken to protect themselves?

Slowly my thoughts became diverted into another channel. Hatreds, dangers, and privations which every one had endured since the revolution passed before me in review. It seemed incredible that the next few days would bring to a climax all the events of the preceding years. With a sharp pang I wondered whether something could happen to me on the very eve of a White victory. I wanted to be alive on the day when the White troops entered Petrograd. A vision of the tanks rattling through the familiar Petrograd streets arose in my mind.

The pleasant fantasy lulled my nerves to rest. I climbed down from the roof and crawled inside the tank to get some sleep. The steel plates were cold, and there was not enough room to stretch out.



When I awoke it was still dark. Frost was on the ground. My joints were stiff and aching from sleeping in a cramped position on cold metal. I was shaking with chills and excitement. A Britisher handed me a can filled with steaming hot coffee which tasted like gasoline, but before I had time to down it the engines had started, and the crews were ordered inside.

As soon as our tank passed the front line of White infantry and took the lead, the armoured door was closed. The eight of us were isolated from the outside world.

Sitting in the front seat, next to the captain, I had no idea whether the infantry support was keeping up with us. My face was glued to a row of holes the size of a nail head drilled in the outside plates. A wide, level field was ahead, and beyond it a forest of tall trees. I saw no sign of the enemy, but I knew that they were there, and that they were firing at us. Every few seconds columns of black earth sprang up in our path. The Red artillery was laying a barrage, but inside the tank we could not hear a thing except the roar of the motor. When we were halfway across the field Red machine guns centred their fire on us. Minutes passed before I realised that the gentle, innocuous tapping came from the bullets peppering the armoured plate in front of me. The impact of steel against steel knocked tiny particles of paint and metal from the inside wall, which cut my hands and cheeks. I glanced at the captain: his tense, set face was bleeding in several places.

Suddenly my eyes caught a movement among the trees. The machine gun in my hands began to jump and sputter. At regular intervals came a heavy thud: the men at the six-pounder also had found a target.

The tank entered a narrow road leading through the woods, and slowed down. White infantry caught up with us, and left us behind. Manoeuvring to avoid the larger trees the captain brought us on high ground overlooking Yamburg and the Luga River. The tanks crawled up and down the open space firing at the thin funnels of steam which arose from the boiling, water-cooled machine guns on the opposite bank. Then the White infantry rushed the pontoon bridge, we ceased firing. Yamburg was in White hands.

On the first day of the attack the Red lines were cut to shreds all along the front. White troops were rushing toward Petrograd like a tidal wave, but almost a week elapsed before the tank battalion could resume its place in the advancing columns. The pontoon bridge across the Luga River was not strong enough for the tanks, the railroad bridge had not been repaired, and it took days to find a shallow ford. When finally we reached the other shore the fighting had rolled eighty miles further east.

Hastily the tanks were loaded on flat cars and sent after the rapidly advancing front line. Our next unloading point was Gatchina, one of the larger suburbs of Petrograd. When I stepped from the train in the Gatchina station the very air seemed different. I felt the nearness of the majestic city, and I could close my eyes and see its wide streets, the tall graceful spire on the Fortress of Peter and Paul, and the massive, stately dome of St. Isaac's. When I counted the remaining miles I could not suppress a feverish elation. A jubilant, confident White army stood at the gates of Petrograd, and nothing could stop it.

Early next morning the tanks were on the march along the highway leading toward Tsarkoye Selo. Again we went through all the stages of preparation, again the heavy, armoured door was closed, and again we were leading the infantry in an attack. But this time the Reds contested every inch of ground.

One of our objectives was a village held by Red cadets. They were determined to repulse the attack, but they were helpless against the advancing tanks. We came so close to them that I could distinguish the expressions on their faces, their frenzied eyes, and their moving lips. Singly and in groups they stood their ground, firing point-blank at us, and at the infantry behind us, until each one of them was torn to pieces by machine gun bullets.

Immediately after the first attack the tanks were shifted further south, and sent into action a second time that day. As soon as the enemy's resistance was broken at that point we were moved to a third sector. Toward dark every member of the crew was half-poisoned by the odours exuding from the motor, and by the fumes of gunpowder which had accumulated in the tank. The heat inside was terrific, and the steel near the motor scorched one's fingers. When the door was opened I stumbled outside, fell, and pressed my head against the cool, damp earth. I lay vomiting until the captain revived me by unceremoniously prodding my ribs with the toe of his boot.



Under cover of darkness the tanks crawled back to be greased and refilled with gasoline and oil. I felt and I could discern in others a vague uneasiness. In the course of the day the line had been pushed forward a few miles, but our infantry had suffered heavy losses. Unless reinforcements arrived it was apparent that the White army would be unable to stand the pace.

The following morning the attack was resumed, but as the fighting progressed it became more and more evident that the Red ranks were swelling as rapidly as the White regiments were melting away. That night a cold premonition filled our hearts, and next morning the last ounce of hope was shattered. We were confronted with dismal reality: the White plans had miscarried, there were no reserves, only one third of the soldiers and officers remained, and those who were still alive were worn threadbare by the continuous fighting. Overnight every man in the North-West Army understood that we had reached the end.

The plans for the attack on Petrograd were fairly simple. The North-West Army was to advance in three columns converging on Gatchina. From there two columns were to turn northeast and occupy the city proper; the third column was to continue east and cut the Petrograd-Moscow Railroad in order to prevent the arrival of Red reinforcements from the south. While the North-West Army was pushing forward, the Estonians were to deploy south and north as a protection against a flank counterattack. At the same time the British fleet was to create a diversion by bombarding the important forts guarding the sea approaches to Petrograd.

Until Gatchina was reached the advance developed according to schedule. Then, suddenly, every vestige of planned action disappeared. On the sea, instead of an impressive display of strength, two British gunboats appeared, and hurriedly retired as soon as the Bolshevik forts began to answer their fire. To the south the Estonian army failed to throw out the protecting screen, and left the White lines of communication exposed to Red attacks. But the fatal blunder was made by the general commanding the third column of the North-West Army. Contrary to the orders, he made no attempt to cut the Petrograd-Moscow Railroad. In the meantime Trotsky assumed personal command of the Petrograd defences, and with his usual energy took full advantage of every White mistake: the forts on the coast were reinforced, defences guarding the approaches to the city were strengthened, a flanking movement was begun around the White right wing, and the best regiments in the Red army were rushed to the front from Moscow.

The White command had no choice except to try to extricate the remnants of the North-West Army out of a desperate position. The depleted White regiments were a hundred miles from their base, and surrounded on three sides by fresh Red troops which outnumbered them four to one.

After the last ray of hope was gone the Whites held the ground around Gatchina for several days in order to permit the long wagon trains of wounded and refugees to reach safety. Daily the Red attacks became more persistent, but when orders came to retreat there was no sign of panic: slowly the White infantry fell back toward the Estonian border, fighting fierce rear guard actions against the pursuing Reds.

Less than three weeks after we had stood at the gates of Petrograd we were back in front of Narva. With unconcealed reluctance the Estonian authorities admitted the White regiments, one by one, behind the barbed wire entanglements which guarded the international frontier.

On a gray, murky day the train carrying the tanks stopped at the Narva station. My companions-in-arms and I knew that the North-West Army was no more. The Reds were victorious, and the faith which had sustained us through years of turmoil belonged in a scrap heap. Mentally crushed and physically exhausted we had no thought or wish for the future.

## Chapter 27

In every section of Russia White strongholds tumbled, and White armies went down in defeat. But it is erroneous to attribute the Red victory to the fundamental strength of the Soviet structure, or to the hold which communist ideals had on the masses. Both sides were destitute as far as resources and organisation went, and both sides enjoyed little prestige in the eyes of the Russian people, but of the two the White movement had a greater number of inherent weaknesses.

From a military point of view the central geographical location which the Red forces occupied throughout the civil war was a great advantage. The Soviet Government was in possession of the most thickly



populated districts, as well as of the administrative and railroad centres of the country. Its man power reserves were greater in proportion, and its troop movements better co-ordinated. Though the Red armies fought on several fronts they were under a unified command, and could be shifted from one section to another whenever an emergency arose.

By contrast the White armies were divided into four distinct groups: the Siberian Army under Admiral Kolchak with its base of supplies in far away Vladivostok; the Southern Army under General Denikin in possession of Crimea and of the Don and Kuban Cossack districts; the North-West Army under General Yudenich with a hostile Estonia at its back; and the Northern Army under General Miller fighting in a dismal country and entirely dependent for sustenance on the Allies. Nominally Admiral Kolchak was the White supreme ruler and Commander-in-Chief, but actually, through force of circumstances, each army commander had to rely solely on his own resources. At no time were any two White armies able to effect a junction, or to co-ordinate their operations.

Hardly less important was the changeable character of the White and Red armies. During the early stages of the civil war the White troops were definitely superior in morale, and in the standards of discipline. But much of their strength and enthusiasm was spent on desultory fighting against local bands of communists. By the time the struggle assumed the proportions of a war the White ranks were diluted by drafted men of dubious loyalty, and by various hangers-on of questionable antecedents.

While the White army standards were lowered, the quality of the Red troops was improving. The best Red soldiers were the communist factory workers from the industrial centres, the sailors, and the political refugees from neighbouring countries: Finns, Estonians, and Letts. This element appeared at the front comparatively late, and at once changed noticeably the complexion of the Red army.

The peculiar conditions under which the civil war was fought demanded special qualifications from the commanding officers. Among these resourcefulness and adaptability to circumstances were of far greater value than an orthodox military education. Unhampered by tradition or precedent, the Bolsheviks were free to select commanders conspicuous for their merits and for their devotion to the Soviet cause. In the White army, on the other hand, appointments were made carelessly and on the strength of such inconsequential grounds as seniority, friendships, and family and school affiliations. As a result White troops were frequently out-generaled and out-manoeuvred.

If the Whites were at a disadvantage in military matters, their weakness in the political field was even more pronounced. At the head of the Soviet forces stood a group of determined men, held together by bonds of a common faith, and by a definite vision of the future. The White movement was guided by a heterogeneous alliance between professional soldiers and liberals of all shades, who agreed only on the desirability of overthrowing the Bolsheviks, but who could not devise a mutually acceptable long-range constructive program. Both the Red and the White civil administrations were absurdly inefficient, but of the two the Reds had a more clearly defined end in view.

Contact with foreign countries and military assistance from abroad were the greatest advantages on the White side, but even there the isolated position of the Soviets proved in many respects a blessing. Red leaders were not hampered by considerations of a diplomatic nature, while the White leaders by accepting aid from outside sources placed themselves in a dependent position. The Reds expected no help, and laid their plans accordingly; the Whites based their expectations on factors over which they had no control, and as a result their calculations frequently miscarried.

The actual military assistance rendered by the Allies to the Whites was negligible. A certain amount of fighting between the Red and Allied troops took place in Northern Russia, and the splendid performance of the Czecho-Slovak divisions in Siberia caused many uneasy moments to the Bolsheviks. But the Allied military operations in Russia were conducted in a haphazard manner. Rivalries between the Allies, personal sympathies, and political exigencies at home affected military plans in each individual instance. At times foreign detachments volunteered to do more than their share, but a possibility always existed that aid would be withdrawn at a crucial moment, and the Russian White command never knew what to expect from one day to another.

While the presence of foreign troops did not alter materially the situation at the front, it provided the propaganda department of the Soviet Government with valuable ammunition. In all Bolshevik broadsides, proclamations, and newspapers, White soldiers were branded as hirelings of foreign capital, and though the masses accepted such statements with reservations the cumulative effect was telling. By playing on the universal hostility toward everything foreign the Red leaders succeeded in driving a wedge between the Whites and public opinion in general. Little was done to counteract this powerful psychological weapon. White leaders were soldiers of the old school who believed that wars are decided on the field of battle, and who completely discounted the value of morale behind the lines. Propaganda on a large scale was never attempted by the Whites, and no intelligent, systematic effort was made to win over the masses, or to discredit the Soviet rule in their eyes.

Another psychological factor was even more important in determining the sympathies of the people. The peasant viewed the Whites and the Reds with equal distrust, but of the two he feared the Whites more. During the turbulent revolutionary days virtually every man had committed some act of violence which preyed continually on his mind: in some cases it was a trivial infraction of a minor rule, in others – an offense of a graver nature such as looting, or, possibly, even murder. The peasant had no love for the Reds, but he believed that under them he would not be called to answer for these old crimes. On the other hand he always associated the thought of White victory with the idea of having to stand trial for past misdeeds. A sense of guilt and a fear of punishment were ever present in the peasant's mind, and made him lean toward the Red side as the lesser of two evils.

In comparing the relative strength of the two warring factions one advantage possessed by the Reds overshadowed all the others: the calibre of their leaders. Lenin's mentality coupled with his understanding of mass psychology, Trotsky's dynamic energy and fanatic zeal, and Stalin's singleness of purpose and administrative ability were in themselves elements of sufficient weight to tip the scales. Arrayed against them were Kolchak, Denikin, and Yudenich – three exceptionally able men within their own professions, but who had neither the training nor the temperamental qualifications to serve as civil administrators, or as political leaders.

Among them Kolchak was most generously endowed with the qualities and shortcomings which ultimately led to their downfall. Scrupulously honest himself, it never occurred to him to question the good faith of his lieutenants, or the promises of diplomats and politicians. Brave and patriotic, he could not conceive the notion that many people are inclined to shirk their duties, and are guided by selfish motives. A product of his generation, Kolchak was accustomed to a military form of organisation, and he had no conception how to rule by compromise, or how to accomplish his ends and carry public opinion with him.

Only two White leaders offered any promise of developing into a serious threat to Bolshevism in Russia. General Kornilov, who unluckily for his followers was killed in action early in the war, and General Baron Wrangel, who displayed both military acumen and political sagacity, but who was called to the helm when the backbone of the White armies was already broken. Whether these two men could have changed the course of events is a problem which belongs in the realm of speculation.

As matters stood, the White movement was a lost cause from the very beginning. The Whites aspired to solve Russia's problems either by re-establishing the old monarchy, or by creating a constitutional, democratic state. Both solutions were impossible: the first because of the temper of the people, the second because of their indifference and low educational level. Only an entirely new political phenomenon, such as manifested itself later in Italy and in Germany, could have won a victory over Bolshevism. But if the White movement in Russia had adopted the Fascist-Nazi formula, and had proven victorious, it is open to question whether the sum total of its achievements could have been greater than that of the Soviet Government, or whether it could have made the course of Russian history less painful.