

## Semirechensk Front in 1918: White Formations

02/12/2007 Simonov D.G.

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After the October Revolution of 1917, Russia began to be drawn into a large-scale civil war. The violent seizure of power by the Bolsheviks provoked a counter-revolutionary reaction in many regions of the country. Several centres of armed struggle emerged on the territory of [modern day] Kazakhstan, one of which was the Semirechensk Front. Combat operations on this front are covered in the work of S.N. Pokrovski. However, following the Soviet historiographic tradition, the author did not pay due attention to the issues of the composition and size of the anti-Bolshevik armed forces operating at the front. In this article, we will try to fill this gap in relation to the events of 1918.

The formation of anti-Bolshevik military organizations in Siberia and adjacent regions of eastern Russia began in early 1918. Most of them were created under the auspices of the Provisional Siberian Government, formed in Tomsk at an illegal meeting of members of the Siberian Regional Duma in late January 1918. In the steppes, the centre of these organizations was Omsk, in the area of which there were about 1,500 underground members led by the former commander of the 1st Siberian Cossack Brigade, Colonel P.P. Ivanov-Rinov.

The anti-Bolshevik underground in Petropavlovsk, organized by Ivanov-Rinov, operated with a direct connection to the Omsk organization. After his departure to Omsk, the organization was headed by the Lieutenant-Colonel<sup>1</sup> V. I. Volkov. According to Lieutenant B. B. Filimonov, the Petropavlovsk organization numbered about 60 to 70 people, mostly Cossack and infantry officers. Researchers V.D. Vegman and N. S. Larkov determined the size of the organization at 300 people.

At first, the anti-Bolshevik organization in Pavlodar operated semi-legally under the guise of the Union for the Protection of the Economic Interests of Officers of the Former Tsarist Army. The leading position in the Union was occupied by the former Pavlodar district military chief of the army, Lieutenant-Colonel P.I. Vinogradski, the acting chairman, Ensign M.S. Chernov, Staff Captain P.I. Snegirev, and others. The organisation numbered about thirty people. Lieutenant Gorbunov worked in contact with the officers' organization. In the Cossack villages of the Pavlodar district, he managed to unite up to 150 people.

In Semipalatinsk<sup>2</sup>, the organizer of the anti-Bolshevik underground was Lieutenant I.A. Zubarev-Davydov, who arrived from Barnaul as a representative of the Provisional Siberian Government. He organized local officers under the command of Captain I. Kharchenko (pseudonym Alskii). At the same time, Zubarev-Davydov organised a commission of civilians consisting of the chairman of the Semipalatinsk town Duma F. K. Stankevich, public men of the Duma N.V. Weiser, A.I. Nikolsky, P.V. Klepatsky, V.P. Koltypin and a candidate for public council I.I. Ginyat.

This commission was instructed, first, to develop a scheme of civil administration of the region for the period until the establishment of the power of the Provisional Siberian Government and, second, to find funds for an underground military organization. As money came in Zubarev-Davydov began recruiting officers and volunteers. Recruiting to the organisation was done by staffing cells, of 8 people each. Members of the organization received from 100 to 300 roubles per month, depending on their financial situation. According to Zubarev-Davydov, the recruitment of volunteers was rather slow. People signed up rather reluctantly, and were attracted mainly by the monetary promises. Nevertheless, by the beginning of June 1918 there were about 200 people in the ranks of the Semipalatinsk underground organization. Communication was also established with the Cossacks of Semipalatinsk and representatives from the Kyrgyz, who promised to support the organization when it opposed Soviet power.

In Ust-Kamenogorsk, the first officer detachment was formed back in December 1917. It was attached to the Public Security Committee, organised on the initiative of the City Duma, district *zemstvo* and public organisations "in order to save the city from pogroms." The detachment, headed by Lieutenant A. Antonov, numbered about forty men. After the establishment of Soviet power in Ust-Kamenogorsk in March 1918, the detachment broke up – some of the officers ended up in prison, some left the city. In April Vinogradski arrived in Ust-Kamenogorsk from Pavlodar, and he led the preparation of an anti-Bolshevik coup in the district.

An active role in the organisation of the Cossack forces was played by Cornet P.I. Tolmachev, who worked in the Ust-Kamenogorsk district on the instructions of the Semipalatinsk military headquarters.

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<sup>1</sup> Like many of the men in this article, his rank is a purely Cossack one – in this case a *Voiskovoi Starshina*, rather than the equivalent *Pod-Polkovnik* of the normal army. I have not bothered to distinguish the Cossack from non-Cossacks.

<sup>2</sup> Now called Semey.

The underground activity intensified in late May and early June 1918, in connection with the anti-Bolshevik uprising of the Czechoslovak Corps, whose trains were located at the stations of the Trans-Siberian Railway from Penza to Vladivostok.

On the night of 31 May the Czechoslovaks, led by Captain M. Zhakov, together with the organisation of the Lt-Col Volkov, overthrew Soviet power in Petropavlovsk. At midnight the Czechoslovaks captured the railway station and launched an attack against the cannery. At the same time, members of the secret organization took possession of the city. By one o'clock in the morning, Petropavlovsk was completely cleared of the Bolsheviks. The losses of the rebels amounted to 4 or 5 people killed and several wounded. After the overthrow of Soviet power in the city, Volkov declared himself head of the Petropavlovsk region. He appointed Lieutenant-Colonel P.I. Blokhin as chief of staff, Staff Captain F.I. Porotikov as head of the mobilisation department and Lieutenant-Colonel A.P. Pankratov as commander of the city.

On 1 June a Cossack gathering in Kokchetav decided to remove Soviet power from the village. On the instructions of the assembly, Captain N.A. Asanov set about organising a Cossack *druzhina*<sup>3</sup> to arrest the local Bolsheviks. The Cossacks began to take decisive action only on the following day, when an automobile detachment sent from Petropavlovsk by Volkov arrived in Kokchetav. With a joint effort the rebels disarmed the local Red Guards. At the head of the new government, which extended its influence over the entire Kokchetav district, was Lieutenant-Colonel I.M. Pelymski.

Volkov sent a short telegram to Atbasar,: "Citizens of Atbasar! The power of the rapists has gone. I ask you to organise a zemstvo council." The Cossacks immediately responded. Under the leadership of their village ataman M. Volosnikov, they took the building of the Soviet of Deputies and disarmed the Red Guard detachment located in the city without a fight. Colonel A.I. Belov became the military commander of the city and district of Atbasar. Immediately, two combat detachments were formed – an automobile (50 men) and horse (30 men), with which Atbasar district was soon cleared of active supporters of Soviet power.

When the news of the Czechoslovak action reached Pavlodar, the local anti-Bolshevik organization decided to immediately overthrow the Soviet regime in the city. At dawn on 2 June about 150 Cossacks, two thirds armed with rifles, led by Lieutenant Gorbunov were concentrated to the northeast of the city of Pavlodar. They were from the villages of Peschanka, Chernoretskoe, Grigorievskaya and Chernoyarskaya, which are closest to the city. The Red garrison was located in the barracks on the outskirts of the city; 70 soldiers with two Colt machine guns.

At about three o'clock in the morning, the Cossacks attacked the barracks in mounted formation. About thirty Cossacks took part in the attack, while the rest, bypassing Pavlodar from the eastern side, broke into the Cossack section and by four o'clock occupied almost every important point in the city. Being surrounded on all sides, having lost up to 20 people killed and wounded, the Red troops surrendered on that evening. Six people were killed and four were wounded from the rebels. Three people were accidentally killed among the civilian population. All power in Pavlodar passed into the hands of the military commissar, Gorbunov. The formation of an armed militia began, which was originally called the "White Guard".

At this time, the Semipalatinsk military organization also intensified its activities. The main problem for the underground was the almost complete lack of weapons, without which a coup could not hope to be successful. There were weapons in the Red Army arsenal though. The head of the arsenal, former lieutenant Pashkovski, was not a member of a secret organisation, but for the appropriate bribe promised to transfer two hundred rifles and ten thousand cartridges to the conspirators. On the agreed date of 3 June a small group of officers led by Lieutenant A.P. Pravdenko arrived with carts at the warehouse. Here Red Army men warned by Pashkovski were waiting for them. They opened fire with rifles and scattered the officers' detachment. Pravdenko was seriously wounded and, not wanting to be taken prisoner, shot himself. The result of this incident was the introduction of a state of siege in Semipalatinsk. There were mass arrests of officers and civilians. Having lost hope of an uprising in the city, Zubarev-Davydov left with thirty officers for the steppe, intending to organize the Kazakhs.

On 10 June the Soviet leadership of Semipalatinsk, not having sufficient strength to retain power and feeling the precariousness of its position, decided to evacuate to Barnaul. The next day, an underground organisation headed by Captains P.I. Sidorov and N.D. Vinogradov made its appearance in the city. Its active core consisted of 15 officers and 25 Cossacks. All military power in Semipalatinsk was concentrated in the military headquarters, headed by Sidorov. It began to form volunteer detachments, and at the same time announced a general mobilisation of officers, military officials and cadets between the ages of 18 and 43. According an order of 15 June by Sidorov, the mobilisation was to be completed by 18 June. All those who did not appear by the specified date were declared deserters, subject to a

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<sup>3</sup> Militia.

court-martial. All Czechoslovaks living in Semipalatinsk were invited to volunteer to join the detachment formed at the military headquarters by Ludwig Kalvoda.

On the night of 11 June 11 officers and Cossacks of Ust-Kamenogorsk opposed the Soviet regime. At midnight Cossacks of Menovski village began to cross the Irtysh River by ferry, intending to link up with the officers in the city. The Soviet food militia, who were near the pier on the city bank at the time, opened fire on the crossing Cossacks. Hearing the shots, an Officer and Cossack detachment of 20 bayonets headed from the city to the pier. After a short skirmish, some of the Bolsheviks were killed and others fled, having discarded their weapons, fled. In this battle, the whites lost Cornet P.I. Tolmachev killed.

Having finished crossing, the Cossacks linked with the officers and headed to the market square, where the Red Army barracks were located, but it turned out that the Red Army men had fled to the fortress. The siege of the building was short-lived. Lt-Col. Vinogradski, who was in charge of the uprising, suggested to the besieged that they surrender – to which they agreed on condition that their lives be spared. During the negotiations, part of the Red Army tried to escape over the Ulba River beside the fortress. The Cossacks killed the fugitives with rifle fire. By five o'clock in the morning, order was established across the city. At the head of the local government was the commissar of the Provisional Siberian Government, Vinogradski.

Within two to three weeks after the Czechoslovaks' intervention, military detachments were formed in most large settlements, which became the basis for the formation of regular units of the armed forces of the Provisional Siberian Government, which was to be called the Siberian Army. All the detachments that arose on the territory of the former Steppe General Governorship became part of the Siberian Steppe Corps, whose headquarters were located in Omsk. The commander of this corps was Colonel Ivanov-Rinov, soon promoted to Major-General.

So from 17 June there were 200 armed and 200 unarmed volunteers were in full combat readiness in Semipalatinsk. In addition, there was a 200 man foot combat detachment of officers, officials and cadets, a 150 man detachment of mobilised Cossacks, a 50 man Cossack partisan squadron, a 63 man Czechoslovak unit and a 20 man Polish unit. They were armed with two machine guns, 600 rifles of various types and 41,500 cartridges. On 18 June the head of the Alash-Orda<sup>4</sup> A. Bukeikhanov and Lieutenant Zubarev-Davydov arrived in Semipalatinsk. They had a Kyrgyz detachment, consisting of 300 fighters with 35 Russian officer-instructors. Considering his mission accomplished, Zubarev-Davydov did not dispute the right to leadership over the more highly ranked Captain Sidorov. On 28 June Sidorov was appointed to the newly established position of Commander of the Troops of the Semipalatinsk Region with the rights of a division commander, by order of the Steppe Siberian Corps.

In Petropavlovsk by 17 June there were instructor and volunteer companies formed, as well as a Cossack Squadron, of 150 soldiers each. In addition, 605 people were in the emerging Siberian Cossack *divizion* and 18 people in the foot machine-gun team.

In addition to the above detachments, by 21-22 June in the area of the Siberian Steppe Corps the following had been formed: in Pavlodar, a combined partisan squadron (2 command personnel, 26 bayonets, 108 sabres) and a detachment of the Siberian Provisional Government (100 bayonets); in Kokchetav, a volunteer company (73 bayonets), a Kyrgyz squad (80 unarmed people) and 4 squadrons of Cossacks (22 command personnel, 247 bayonets, 403 sabres); in Akmolinsk, a Cossack squadron (3 command personnel, 50 sabres, 8 unarmed people) and a foot squad (5 command personnel, 47 bayonets and 101 unarmed men). The garrison of Atbasar consisted of 17 command staff, 78 bayonets and 39 unarmed men.

At the same time, a mobilisation of the Cossacks was announced on the territory of the Siberian Cossack Host, and the formation of a three regiment cavalry division began. Units of the division, volunteers and those mobilised, were dispersed throughout the territory of the host. At the end of June 1918, squadrons of the 1st Regiment were located in Kokchetav and Presnovskaya village, the 2nd was in Petropavlovsk, and the 3rd in Semipalatinsk, Pavlodar and Omsk. A horse-artillery battalion was being formed in Omsk.

The 5th and 7th Siberian Steppe Rifle Regiments were formed from non-Cossack volunteer detachments. The formation of the 5th Steppe Regiment was entrusted to the commander of the troops of the Semipalatinsk region. To staff the regiment, it was proposed to use mobilised officers and military officials, as well as volunteers, from the cities and districts of Semipalatinsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Zaisan, Sergiopol<sup>5</sup> and Zmeinogorsk. Colonel Glushkov was allowed to command the regiment, located in Semipalatinsk, on 28 June. It included a volunteer detachment and a combat detachment of the Provisional Siberian Government who were located there. On 13 July a group of 36 officers, 5 cadets, 9 officials and 4 volunteers, who had arrived from Zmeinogorsk, joined the 5th Steppe Regiment; and on 14 July another 16 officers, 2 officials and 2 volunteers from Ust-Kamenogorsk.

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<sup>4</sup> an independent Kazakh government, which was aligned with the Whites.

<sup>5</sup> now Ayagoz.

The formation of the 7th Steppe Regiment was entrusted to the head of the Petropavlovsk region, Lt-Col Volkov. Mobilised officers and military officials, as well as volunteers from the cities and districts of Petropavlovsk, Kokchetav, Atbasar, Akmolinsk and Kurgan, were used to staff the regiment. It included the Kokchetav and Akmolinsk infantry squads, the Atbasar detachment, the Kurgan garrison, as well as the Petropavlovsk instructor and volunteer companies. Colonel Voidylo was appointed commander of the regiment on 30 June.

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In early July 1918, units of the Siberian Steppe Corps launched an offensive towards Semirechensk. In the summer of 1918, after the overthrow of Soviet power in the Volga region, the Urals and Siberia, Turkestan found itself isolated from Soviet Russia. Despite this, the local Bolsheviks managed to maintain their positions there and organized a rebuffer to the enemy advancing from the north.

It should be noted that from the end of 1917 the Semirechensk region had had an almost continuous contest between the Red Guard detachments and the armed units of the Semirechensk Cossack Host. By the end of May, Soviet troops finished off the counter-revolutionary centres in the Cossack villages adjacent to the town of Verniy<sup>6</sup>. But some rebel groups managed to hide in China or broke through to the North Semirechye.

For the final suppression of the "counter-revolution" in the Northern Semirechye a Red Guard detachment of 1,200 sabres under I.E. Mamontov was sent from Verniy in early June. Local Cossacks and representatives of the Alash-Orda in the village of Urdzhar formed a Committee for Salvation, which made an attempt to organize resistance to the advancing enemy.

On 29 June 1918, members of the Committee for Salvation, Alzhanov and Sumenkov, sent a telegram to the headquarters of the Siberian Steppe Corps, the Semirechensk Ataman and the Alash-Orda: "In the Verniy district, the villages of Malaya Bolshaya<sup>7</sup>, Kaskelen, Tastak<sup>8</sup>, and some traditional Kyrgyz villages have been completely destroyed. Much of the population, regardless of sex or age, has been massacred by the Bolsheviks. Refugees are shot on the road. Cossacks have been deprived of their title, land and public rights by the decree of the regional council and the Kyrgyz' rights have been restricted". They asked for urgent assistance to counter Mamontov's detachment moving on Urdzhar.

Communication with the Committee for Salvation was maintained through the Russian consul in Chuguchak<sup>9</sup>, V. Dolbezhev. On 2 July he confirmed the request to send a detachment to Sergiopol, as well as weapons and ammunition in connection with the Red attack on Makanchi and Bakhty, since the Committee for Salvation could not hold back their onslaught on its own.

Mamontov's detachment, 800 fighters with two guns and two machine guns, occupied Makanchi on 6 July, Urdzhar on 8 July, and Bakhty on 9 July. The entire population of these places, together with the detachment of the Committee for Salvation, was forced to leave for the Chinese border.

The closest units of the Siberian army at that time were far to the north – in Semipalatinsk – and were still in the process of forming. By 3 July the White Guard garrison of Semipalatinsk numbered 1,278 men with two machine guns and one mortar, including 59 command personnel, 661 bayonets, 258 sabres and 300 unarmed men

- 5th Steppe regiment – 540 bayonets, 2 machine guns, 1 mortar,
- 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment and separate Cossack squadron – 15 command personnel and 258 sabres,
- Kyrgyz detachment – 35 command personnel, 100 bayonets and 300 unarmed men,
- Polish detachment - 9 commanders and 21 bayonets.

The commander of the Siberian Army assigned units of the Siberian Steppe Corps to immediately come to the aid of the Semirechye Cossacks. On 7 July a Semipalatinsk cavalry detachment under the command of Staff Captain G.P. Lyusilin, was sent towards Sergiopol. The detachment consisted of one squadron of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment, fifty Cossack partisans and a medical detachment, a total of 6 officers and 175 Cossacks with 2 machine guns and one car.

On 6 July corps commander Ivanov-Rinov ordered Colonel F.G. Yarushin to leave for Semipalatinsk and find the results of the reconnaissance of the Semipalatinsk detachment sent to Sergiopol. Then, in accordance with the size of the task ahead, organise a detachment of no more than one or two companies of the 5th Steppe Regiment, one squadron of

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<sup>6</sup> Now Almaty.

<sup>7</sup> Now a suburb of Almaty.

<sup>8</sup> Also now inside Almaty.

<sup>9</sup> Just inside China, either Tacheng or Qoqak.

the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment, the separate company of Captain Ushakov, 19 trucks and 2 cars. With these forces, Yarushin was to occupy Sergiopol and contact the detachments located in the Urdzhar-Bakhty region and the Russian consulate in Chuguchak. Yarushin was also to transfer 700 Berdan rifles and 42,000 cartridges to Urdzhar and Bakhty. The ultimate goal was to capture the cities of Lepsinsk<sup>10</sup> and Kopal and form a front against the Bolshevik forces in the middle and southern Semirechye.

In the evening of 6 July Yarushin set off from Omsk on the steamer "Tobolyak" to Semipalatinsk. With him was a special detachment of the Siberian Steppe Corps, of 18 officers, one official and 29 volunteers – 44 men in total, with 2 Colt machine guns – under the command of Captain Ushakov. In the hold of the steamer were loaded 1,000 Berdan rifles with 60,000 rounds and 500 Mosin-Nagants with 59,000 rounds. On 8 July a detachment of Ensign M.S. Chernov, consisting of 15 officers and 32 volunteers with 2 Colt machine guns, embarked on board the "Tobolyak" from Pavlodar. With the "Tobolyak" was the steamer "Heiress", on board of which there was an automobile detachment (19 trucks) under the command of Ensign Belyaev. The "Tobolyak" arrived in Semipalatinsk on 11 July. The steamer "Heiress", having run aground, was delayed on the way and arrived in Semipalatinsk only on 14 July.

On 15 July Colonel Yarushin completed the organisation of the Semirechensk detachment. At his disposal were

- Two companies of the 5th Steppe Regiment – 158 bayonets;
- Captain Ushakov's Separate Company – 50 bayonets;
- Ensign Chernov's Pavlodar detachment (from the 4th Steppe Regiment) – 42 bayonets;
- 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment – 50 partisans, 457 sabres, 4 machine guns;
- 2nd Separate Steppe Light Battery – one gun.

In total - 54 command personnel, 250 bayonets, 457 sabres, one gun, 4 machine guns and 20 cars.

In the evening of the same day, Colonel Yarushin, together with his chief of staff, Lieutenant Colonel I.I. Likhanov, drove by car to the Altyn-Kulat picket (26 versts north of Sergiopol), designated as the concentration point for the Semirechensk detachment. The offensive against Sergiopol was supposed to begin on the morning of 16 July.

Meanwhile, the detachment of Staff Captain G.P. Lyusilin, previously directed towards Sergiopol, took the city "by raid" on the evening of 15 July 1918. The Soviet garrison, numbering only 40 men, set themselves in the fortress and waited for reinforcements – 700 men with 2 machine guns and one gun – under the command of the former Second Lieutenant Ivanov. The Lyusilin detachment, due to its small number, retreated to Altyn-Kulat *stanitsa*. Soon Cossacks of the Kokpekti and Urdzhar squadrons joined them.

The advanced guard of the Semirechensk detachment, with the car column and Ensign Chernov's Pavlodar detachment, started off towards Sergiopol. The overall leadership of this combat group was carried out by Captain N. D. Vinogradov. The first successes of the White Guards on the Semirechye front are associated with that officer.

In the evening of 18 July the advanced guard, led by Vinogradov, reached the Altyn-Kulat picket, where it joined up with Lyusilin's detachment and the Cossacks of the Kokpekti and Urdzhar villages. Taking command of all the detachments on his own initiative, Vinogradov reorganised the Cossack forces on the morning of 19 July, appointing commanders to the detachments, platoons and squadrons. In total, 423 men were at his disposal, including 150 in Kokpekti, 150 in Urdzhar, 60 in the Combined and 53 in the Partisan squadrons. The main forces, Colonel Yarushin's detachment, were at the Arkad picket on the evening of 19 July.

The enemy at that time occupied positions on the hills six versts north of Sergiopol. The Reds numbered 600 men, with one cannon of the old model and three Maxim machine guns. The Red Army men were armed with Berdans with unlimited ammunition [37].

On 20 July Vinogradov launched an attack against the enemy's forward positions. The battle lasted 36 hours and on the night of 21 July ended with a complete victory for the Whites. The Red Guard detachment defending the city lost about 200 people dead. The remaining 400 men, some abandoning their weapons, left towards Urdzhar. One cannon and three Maxim machine guns became White trophies. Their losses amounted to 7 people killed, 20 wounded and shell-shocked. The demoralisation of the Reds was increased by the fact that in the midst of the battle their commander, Ivanov, abandoned his soldiers and fled to Verniy. The Whites did not take prisoners, and this explains the large number of those killed of the Reds. Cossacks of the Urdzhar Squadron, led by Sergeant-Major Kostin, killed another 50 Red Guards the next day while pursuing the enemy.

On 26 July Vinogradov's detachment took the village of Urdzhar and, continuing the offensive, on 28 July arrived for the night in the village of Makanchi. On the morning of the 29th, Mamontov's Red Guard detachment attacked

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<sup>10</sup> now Lepsy (the northern one, by the lake)

Makanchi unexpectedly. In the course of a fierce battle, the Whites had about 40 people killed, including Captain Vinogradov mortally wounded. The Reds lost about 100 men killed, including their commander I. E. Mamontov. Vinogradov's Partisan detachment, led after his death by his brother, Staff Captain Vinogradov, retreated to the northeast of Makanchi village towards Chuguchak. The Urdzhar Cossack squadron, which had been with the detachment, moved to the edge of Bakhty.

The capture of Sergiopol by the Whites was the signal for an anti-Bolshevik uprising in the Cossack villages of northern Semirechye. On 23 June armed demonstrations began in the villages of Kapal, Sarkand, Topolevka, Lepsinsk, Urdzhar and others, supported by the Alash Orda.

Having united under the command of Colonel N. N. Vyatkin, at the end of July the Semirechye Cossacks captured the border fortification of Bakhty. On 2 August Vyatkin's detachment, numbering 450 armed and 120 unarmed soldiers with 4 machine guns, set out from Bakhty, and in the evening of that day occupied Makanchi. The village was almost completely burned down by the departing Red Guards.

Part of Vyatkin's detachment, 125 men with 2 machine guns under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Bychkov, moved from Bakhty to meet Colonel Yarushin's detachment. Near the village of Blagodatnoye it was attacked in the flank by the Reds. At that time a partisan squadron of Yarushin's detachment approached the village, after which the White detachments themselves went onto the offensive, and drove the Reds out of Blagodatnoye. The enemy, having lost about ten killed, retreated to the village of Nekrasovo, ten miles southeast of Blagodatnoye. The White losses were two seriously and five lightly wounded.

The anti-Bolshevik uprising in the Cossack villages of the Northern Semirechye and the White offensive from Semipalatinsk forced the Soviet leadership in Verniy to take vigorous measures against them. At the end of July, the Bolsheviks formed the Verniy Composite Detachment. On 1 August this set out from the village of Karabulak, and the next day drove the rebels out of Kapal. Having replenished their forces, the Reds launched an offensive on the villages of Arasan, Abakumovka<sup>11</sup> and Sarkand. The first two places were taken without a fight. But in Sarkand the Reds failed to achieve success.

Colonel Yarushin sent Lieutenant Colonel N.D. Kolts to Sarkand to lead the insurgent Semirechye Cossacks. He arrived at his destination on 7 August. On the morning of 9 August the Reds launched an offensive and broke into the village. The Cossacks wavered and began to cross the Sarkand River in panic, hoping to find safety in the mountains. Kolts, with a revolver in his hand, stopped some of the fleeing. With the help of several other officers he created a nucleus out of them, to which others began to join. The battle lasted 84 hours and ended on 12 August. The Cossacks lost 16 killed and 11 wounded.

By 13 August the village was completely surrounded. The Reds methodically shelled the village with artillery and launched determined, but unsuccessful, attacks until the end of August. The Reds were "richly supplied with alcohol" and "attacked eagerly". According to Kolts, the soul of the defence was Sergeant-Major Vasily Alekseevich Korolev, who dashed to the most dangerous places of the battle and encouraged the faint of heart by his personal example.

After a two-week siege, the position of the defenders of Sarkand became critical. Lt-Col. N. D. Kolts wrote in his diary:

*"22 August ... The Cossacks and population lost hope for the approach of the Sergiopol detachment. Voices were heard that we are being deceived and that there is no Provisional Siberian Government. Under the influence of the Reds (the lines were on opposite sides of the same street), who advise them to betray or finish off me and Korolev (the chief of defence), the fighter's spirit drops.*

*August 23 ... People begin to weaken; the stuffiness, sunshine and the stench from the corpses lying between us and the Reds.*

*August 28 ... The Cossacks have declined in spirit and stability, for they are now relying on other people's help rather than themselves. No less than 4,000 cartridges were used last night. Another such frenzied onslaught – and our labours, and the victims of the two-week struggle will be reduced to zero. The stock of cartridges is negligible. People are nervous."*

At this time, Colonel Yarushin's Semirechensk Detachment continued to advance deep into the Semirechye. The immediate tasks were: the capture of the Kopal area for the right column of Captain Darkshevich and the capture of the Lepsinsk area for the left column of Captain Ushakov.

The Reds left Lepsinsk under the onslaught of Ushakov's column on 29 August and retreated to the village of Pokatilovka. The Whites, without stopping in the city, moved to pursue the enemy in the direction of Topolevka–Pokatilovka. Having received news of the fall of Lepsinsk, the units of the Verniy Soviet Composite Detachment lifted

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<sup>11</sup> now Zhansugirov.

the siege of Sarkand on 30 August and retreated in three directions: to Abakumovka, Pokatilovka and Antonovka. This allowed Captain Darkshevich's column to unite, without any special obstacles, with Lt-Col Koltz's detachment in Sarkand. At 7 o'clock on the morning of 1 September, Darkshevich's detachment (a company of the 5th Steppe Regiment, a squadron of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment, the 3rd Sergiopol Ataman squadron, the 2nd Light Battery and 3 machine guns) set out from Aksa and at 16 o'clock arrived in Sarkand.

Captain Ushakov's detachment, moving from the Lepsinsk area approached the village of Pokatilovka, located between the villages of Sarkand and Topolevka on 31 August. However they could not take it, as the locals defended it stoutly. On 2 September the Reds' Verniy Composite Detachment arrived at Pokatilovka, as a result of which the Ushakov detachment was forced to lift the siege of the village and retreat.

Leaving part of their forces in Pokatilovka, the Reds launched an offensive on Lepsinsk, and drove the White Guards out of it on 6 September. However, having received news of the approach of additional White forces, the Verniy detachment command decided to leave Lepsinsk, and on 10 September began a withdrawal to the area of Cherkassk village, which occupied a central position among the migrant settlements of the Lepsinsk district. A Red Army detachment from Pokatilovka arrived there soon after.

According to researcher S. N. Pokrovski, the forces concentrated in the Cherkassk area were quite significant. The Verniy Composite Detachment had the opportunity to continue a successful struggle against the White Guards using local resources. However, on 11 September the detachment commander, A. Petrenko, ordered a withdraw from Cherkassk to Gavrilovka<sup>12</sup>, where he arrived on 17 September 1918.

Meanwhile, the commander of the Siberian Steppe Corps, General Ivanov-Rinov, on 24 August 1918, ordered the start of an operation to capture the Ili region and the city of Verniy. Direction of the operation was entrusted to the head of the 2nd Siberian Steppe Rifle Division, Colonel V.P. Gulidov. At his disposal were all the units in Colonel Yarushin's detachment as well as the first four squadrons of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment. The 6th and 8th Steppe Regiments of the division were at that time on the Yekaterinburg front, being attached to the 1st Siberian Steppe Rifle Division of General G.A. Verzhbitski. As a result, Gulidov only had the 5th and 7th Steppe Regiments of the division.

The 5th Steppe Regiment was already operating on the Semirechensk front. The 7th Steppe Regiment, formed in Petropavlovsk, was redeployed to Omsk on 7 August and from 11 August was in the reserve of the Siberian Army. At this time, it included 440 officers and volunteers, 16 horses, 10 carts and 3 field kitchens. On 25 August the regiment set out from Omsk to Semipalatinsk, and on 26 August the headquarters of the 2nd Siberian Steppe Rifle Division followed. The regiment and division headquarters arrived in Semipalatinsk on 30 August.

Here Gulidov's division was reinforced with new units. In September 1918 the formation of a six squadron 1st Semirechensk Cossack regiment had began in the village of Sarkand. The regiment included Cossacks of the Kapal and Sarkand villages, as well as two squadrons under the command of Lt-Col. Bychkov and Ensign Kozmin, manned by Cossacks of the southern villages of the Semirechensk Cossack Host. The organiser of the regiment was the head of the Sarkand partisan detachment, Lt-Col. Kolts. However, his candidacy for the post of regimental commander did not suit the ataman of the Semirechensk Cossack Host, Colonel A. M. Ionov. As a result, A. A. Asanov, a captain in the Siberian Cossack Host, was appointed commander of the 1st Semirechensk Cossack Regiment. An order of the II Siberian Steppe Corps of 21 September placed the regiment in the 5th Siberian Rifle Division.

Kazakh volunteers provided significant (in the local conditions) support to the Whites. In June 1918, the 1st Alash Cavalry Regiment (Steppe Detachment) was created in Semipalatinsk, of 400 men, led by Captain G. N. Tokhtamyshev. The three squadrons that were part of the regiment were commanded by Staff Captains S. G. Vysotski, M.A. Rybin and E.G. Popov. On 21 October the Alash regiment was included in the corps as the Kyrgyz Cavalry Regiment units, as part of the 5th Siberian Rifle Division. In addition to the regiment, several separate Kyrgyz horse squadrons and teams operated with the White Guard units of the Semirechensk Front.

As well as the units of the 5th Siberian Rifle Division, Ataman B.V. Annenkov's partisan detachment was sent to Semirechye. This detachment appeared at the beginning of 1918, and was from the Omsk region anti-Bolshevik organisation. After leaving the underground at the beginning of June, Annenkov had about two hundred men under him. From 24 June to 18 August 1918, his partisan detachment was at the disposal of the Czechoslovak corps and operated with units of the Ural Corps of the Siberian army in the Troitsk and Verkhne-Uralsk regions.

The structure of the Annenkov detachment changed several times. According to a 30 July order of the Steppe Corps Captain Annenkov was allowed to have in his detachment no more than two infantry companies, two cavalry squadrons and two artillery batteries, and to co-ordinate the activities of the detachment's units, a headquarters of five men, including the detachment commander, chief of staff, adjutant, clerk and treasurer. With the army commander's permission on 28 September 1918, the corps commander gave permission for Annenkov to have a

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<sup>12</sup> now Taldy-Kurgan.

Partisan Regiment of three battalions, with artillery and cavalry as before. The actual structure of Annenkov's partisan detachment differed from that which was established officially: according to the Annenkov, by August 1918 he already had in his detachment the 1st Orenburg Cossack Regiment, the Siberian Cossack Regiment, the Partisan Rifle Regiment, the 1st Jaeger Infantry, an artillery *divizion* and several auxiliary units.

During an inspection of the troops of the Semirechye Front on 19 October 1918, the commander of II Siberian Steppe Corps, Major-General A.F. Matkovski, inspected the units of Annenkov's Partisan detachment:

*"An excellent bearing, a brilliant appearance, an orderliness of manoeuvre shows that in reliable and skilful hands the Russian Cossack and soldier could remain a real warrior, despite all the devastation Russia experienced. I was especially pleased with the recruits recently taken from the Slavgorod district, who had to be taken by force. These young soldiers, not yet fully outfitted, nevertheless, have already managed to be imbued with the spirit and demands of their commander ...", Matkovski noted in the order of the corps of 23 October.*

By the same order, the Annenkov detachment was deployed as a Partisan Division, consisting of an infantry brigade (two three-battalion regiments), a horse brigade (two four-squadron regiments), an artillery *divizion* (three batteries) and an engineering company. The division's commander, Colonel B.V. Annenkov, was officially allowed to call himself the "Ataman of the Partisan Division".

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From autumn 1918, the operations of II Siberian Steppe Corps in Semirechye met with difficulty. The cessation of the White offensive was caused by the fact that in the immediate rear of the White Semirechensk Front, in an area that covered several resettlement villages north of Lepsinsk, there remained a strong grouping of Soviet forces (the so-called "Cherkassk Defence"), which threatened the rear communications of the Whites. The territory of the Cherkassk Defence was settled by mid-September 1918. In its western part were the villages of Antonovka, Cherkassk and Petropavlovsk, in which the main forces of the Reds were concentrated; in the northern part were Andreevka<sup>13</sup>, Osinovka<sup>14</sup> and Kolpakovka; in the east was Glinovka, and in the southeast was Konstantinovka<sup>15</sup>. The named villages were strongholds, with four to five thousand soldiers. The overall leadership of the Cherkassk defence was carried out by the Military Council, headed by the Bolshevik A. N. Dyachenko.

At the headquarters of the Siberian Army, the reasons for the failures were inclined to be explained by the lack of forces in comparison with the enemy.

By 13 October 1918, the Whites had on the Semirechensk front 886 bayonets, 2,183 sabres, 2 guns and 22 machine guns (see table next page).

The enemy's forces, according to the headquarters of the Siberian Army, had reached by this point 7,000 bayonets, 1,200 sabres, 15 guns and 35 machine guns.

Annenkov's detachment (780 bayonets, 1,225 sabres, 8 guns, 25 machine guns) was on its way to the Semirechensk front, but even with his arrival the Whites could not get numerical superiority. In any case, Annenkov's detachment did not participate in combat operations until the end of December 1918, being in the rear reorganising.

Chief of Staff of the Siberian Army, General P. P. Belov, wrote to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, General V. G. Boldyrev:

*"In order for II Steppe Corps to complete the tasks assigned to it – to capture the Ili region and the city of Verniy – urgently requires strengthening the Corps operating in Semirechye. Otherwise, not only can we not count on a successful advance in Semirechye, but there is a risk that if the enemy undertakes an active operation, the Semirechye Cossacks will be doomed to death.*

*The enemy, taking advantage of the Bolshevik mood in the adjacent Altai province, will threaten our rear and the Siberian Railway. "*

To strengthen the front, General Belov proposed returning the 18th Tobol and 20th Tyumen Regiments to the 5th Siberian Division. However, the difficult operational situation on the Western Front, where they were located, did not allow the implementation of his proposal.

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<sup>13</sup> now Kabanbay.

<sup>14</sup> now Terekty.

<sup>15</sup> now Konzhar.

By order of the Siberian Army of August 26, 1918, the 2nd Steppe Siberian Rifle Division had been renamed as the 5th Siberian Rifle Division, and the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Steppe Regiments that were part of it began to be called respectively the 17th Semipalatinsk, 18th Tobolsk, 19th Petropavlovsk and 20th Tyumen Siberian Riflemen.

| <b>Table 1. Units of the 5th Siberian Rifle Division on the Semirechensk Front on 13 October 1918</b> |            |            |              |           |           |          |          |
|---|------------|------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|
|   | Officers   | Bayonets   | Sabres       | Tech.     | MGs       | Guns     | Cars     |
| At the front  |            |            |              |           |           |          |          |
| 17th Semipalatinsk Regiment   | 32         | 494        | -            | -         | 12        | -        | -        |
| 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment:  |            |            |              |           |           |          |          |
| – in the Semirechensk detachment  | 9          | -          | 231          | -         | -         | -        | -        |
| – on the way to Sergiopol   | 2          | -          | 375          | -         | 2         | -        | -        |
| 1st Semirechensk Cossack Regiment   | 29         | -          | 910          | -         | 4         | -        | -        |
| Alash-Orda Squadrons  | 6          | -          | 381          | -         | -         | -        | -        |
| Partisan Cossack Squadrons  | 11         | 35         | 286          | -         | -         | -        | -        |
| 2nd Separate Light Battery  | -          | -          | -            | -         | -         | 2        | -        |
| Field telegraph office  | 1          | -          | -            | 10        | -         | -        | -        |
| 1st Siberian Squadron   | -          | -          | -            | -         | -         | -        | 2        |
| <b>Total at the Front</b>   | <b>108</b> | <b>529</b> | <b>2 183</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>2</b> |
| In the rear   |            |            |              |           |           |          |          |
| 19th Petropavlovsk Regiment   | 34         | 357        | -            | -         | 4         | -        | -        |
| HQ Cable Section  | 2          | -          | -            | 52        | -         | -        | -        |
| <b>Total in the Rear</b>  | <b>36</b>  | <b>357</b> | -            | <b>52</b> | <b>4</b>  | -        | -        |
| <b>Overall Total</b>  | <b>144</b> | <b>886</b> | <b>2 183</b> | <b>62</b> | <b>22</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>2</b> |
| The Alash-Orda squadrons were those of: Urdzhar, Makanchi, Bakhty and Sergiopol.                      |            |            |              |           |           |          |          |
| The Partisan squadrons were those of: Sergiopol and Urdzhar.  |            |            |              |           |           |          |          |

At the end of October 1918, Soviet troops launched an operation to capture the villages of Abakumovka and Aksu. On 20 October Red detachments, operating from the villages of Kyzyl-Agash and Kapal, overturned the Cossack defences and approached Abakumovka. On 23 October the Whites were forced to leave that village.

On 24 October 1918 Colonel Gulidov signed operational order No. 001 for the 5th Siberian Rifle Division. To counter the offensive of the Reds towards Abakumovka and to prevent its connection with the Soviet group operating north of Lepsinsk, the division chief assigned his units the following combat missions:

- a) the Northern group of Lieutenant-Colonel Kopeikin (the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> squadrons of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment and the 4th company of the 17th Semipalatinsk Rifle Regiment) to concentrate in the area of Usharal by 29 October; to conduct reconnaissance towards of Andreevka, Osinovka and Kolpakovka. Regiment headquarters in the village of Usharal.
- b) the Western group of Colonel Glushkov (the 1st and 3<sup>rd</sup> Companies and the reconnaissance team of the 17th Semipalatinsk Rifle Regiment, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Companies of the 19th Petropavlovsk Rifle Regiment, the 4<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment, the Aksu Alash Horse Squadron and the Alash Horse *Divizion*, and the 2nd Separate Light Battery), acting simultaneously in mutual communication with the southern group of Captain Asanov on the rear and the left flank of the Reds, stop the advance from Abakumovka and prevent unification with the northern group of the Reds. Surveillance on the Cherkassk - Saratovsk - Andreevka front, keeping in touch with the northern group. Regiment headquarters in Aksu *stanitsa*.

- c) the southern group of Captain Asanov (the 1st Semirechensk Cossack Regiment, the 2nd Company of the 17th Semipalatinsk Rifle Regiment and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment) to counteract the advance of the Reds from Abakumovka, acting in mutual connection with the western group of Colonel Glushkov; in the event of an attack by superior forces of the Reds, concentrating in Sarkand, defend the village until the approach of the 19th Regiment. Regiment headquarters in Sarkand.

The divisional reserve consisted of six companies of the 19th Petropavlovsk Rifle Regiment and two squadrons of the 1st Kyrgyz Cavalry Regiment. By the time the order was issued, they were on the march to Semirechye. The headquarters of the 19th regiment was located in Sergiopol, the headquarters of the Kyrgyz regiment was in Semipalatinsk.

The counterattack of Abakumovka, undertaken by the whites on 27 October from Sarkand and Aksu was not crowned with success. The repeated offensive on Abakumovka on 18 November was also repulsed by the Red Army. The Soviet troops were still unable to fully complete their task – they failed to take the village of Aksu, defended by the units of Colonel Glushkov. The village of Abakumovka remained in the hands of the Reds for a little over a month. On 2 December it was retaken by the Whites.

The White Guard command was forced to temporarily abandon the offensive on Verniy. As can be seen from Order No. 001, the tasks assigned to the units of the 5th Siberian Rifle Division were limited to maintaining the operational situation on the Semirechensk front that had developed by that time. As the events of the following months showed, this situation was quite satisfactory for the Soviet command. The sparsely populated theatre of operations, the lack of reliable communications and the onset of cold weather led to a temporary lull at the front.

The social and political situation in this region was not favourable for the Whites. Captain A. L. Simonov, in a report addressed to the Quartermaster General of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief Headquarters, wrote: "Among the Cossacks (the richest part of the population), who considered themselves the owners of the region, there was propaganda for the destruction of the entire non-Cossack population. This is known throughout the region. Therefore, now the Bolsheviks respond to all calls to lay down their arms with:

*"We have nowhere to retreat, because we do not want to abandon our lands, we cannot surrender, because we will be killed unarmed."*

The Soviet troops of the Semirechye Front consisted mainly of peasants – former Turkestan riflemen who had experience of the world war and were not inferior in quality to the White Guards. According to A. L. Simonov, the situation of the struggle was such that the White troops had to "fight for every step, for every house".

The main task facing the units of II Siberian Steppe Corps in Semirechye – the capture of Verniy – in 1918 remained uncompleted. Until the beginning of 1920, the white troops of the Semirechye Front remained approximately on the same lines as in the autumn of 1918. The White Command had no opportunity to create a numerical advantage over the enemy here, since all the free reserves of the Siberian Army were sent to the strategically main Ural Front.

The Kazakh population of the Northern Semirechye was inclined to support the White Guards. However, the Siberian Army command did not fully use this contingent to increase its forces in Semirechye. There were some reasons for that. The Soviet troops in Semirechye were mainly Russian peasant settlers. The involvement of a large number of Kazakhs in the armed struggle, given the small number of Russian White Guard troops, would have inevitably led to a situation where the civil war in Semirechye would result in a confrontation between the indigenous Kazakh population and the Russians. Given the autonomist tendencies in Alash-Orda policy, the Provisional Siberian and then Russian governments were very wary of such a scenario. In this regard, it should be recognized that the common slogan of the White movement to restore "one and indivisible Russia" in this case was in conflict with its main goal – the elimination of Bolshevism

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