

The Anti-Bolshevik Movement in the Semirechensk Cossack Host – a Brief Historical Essay

From the “White Guard” Almanac, No. 8. *Cossacks of Russia in the White Movement*. M., Posev, 2005, pp. 225-235 .

The history of the Semirechensk Cossack resistance to the Bolsheviks is reflected only in fragmentary form in historical literature, and still awaits a researcher similar to N.V. Ledenev, the author of the fundamental "History of the Semirechensk Cossack Soldiers" (Verniy, 1909).

This essay attempts to show the main milestones in the struggle of Semirechensk Cossacks against Bolshevism during the Civil War in Russia from 1917 to 1922.



Map of 1920 Semirechye. An appendix gives the modern place names.

The year 1917 was very difficult for the Semirechensk Cossacks. In addition to extreme tensions on the Caucasian and European fronts of the World War, where the



main forces were stationed, the Semirechensk Cossacks were forced to deal with the consequences of the bloody Kirghiz Insurrection¹ of 1916 in the Semirechye. Almost every man in the Host was "called to the colours". At that time, the 3rd Semirechensk Cossack Regiment, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Semirechensk Special Cossack Sotnias², the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Semirechensk *Opolcheniye*³ Cossack Sotnias, and also the Reserve Sotnia of the Semirechensk Cossack regiment were in the Semirechensk region. In addition, the 6th Orenburg Cossack "Ataman Ugletsky" Regiment and several infantry and artillery units were located on the border with China. In July and August 1917, the Cossack detachments had to suppress the revolutionary unrest in the province, created this time by the non-Cossack Russian population.

On top of that, the Semirechensk Cossacks were not able to hold legitimate elections for their Military Ataman and so concentrate all power in one firm set of hands. *Nakaznaya* Ataman⁴ Lieutenant-General M.A. Folbaum died unexpectedly in October 1916, and after him there were two temporarily appointed chieftains, until finally, on 14 (27) July⁵, the post was given to the General Ataman of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Andrei Ivanovich Kiyashko (a Kuban Cossack by descent, the former *Nakaznaya* Ataman of the Trans-Baikal Cossack Host). He arrived in Verniy during the 2nd Semirechye Cossack Congress, and after discussing his candidacy, on 5 (18) August he was recognized as the Semirechensk Cossack *Nakaznaya* Ataman, "until the convocation of the Host *Krug*⁶".

At the same congress, a Military Council⁷ was formed and *Khorunji*⁸ A.M. Astrakhantsev was elected its chairman. This congress advocated supporting the Provisional Government and strengthening ties with other Cossack troops.

General Kiyashko was appointed commander of the region's troops and he tried to establish firm order in Semirechye, taking steps to disband the Bolshevik-minded infantry and artillery units and arrest the instigators of the unrest – but the revolutionary spirit continued to roll on uncontrollably in the region.

In the period from 28 October (10 November) to 1 (14) November, after the Petrograd Revolution, there was an armed uprising by the Bolsheviks in Tashkent, following which the Semirechensk Cossacks openly opposed Soviet power. Already by 1 (14) November, a Military Government (represented by the Military Ataman and

¹ Russians of the time were not worried to distinguish between various tribes. The "Kirghiz" insurrection included many Kazakhs and Dungsans. I have kept Kirghiz Insurrection because that is what it is always called. The insurrection is not well known in the West, but it was very large and very bloody.

² Sotnia is the name for a Cossack squadron or company.

³ Imperial Militia. These may have been men unable to serve in combat units.

⁴ This is a largely honorary position appointed by the government. The important position was Military Ataman, and that was decided by vote of the Host.

⁵ During the revolution the calendar was changed from the old Tsarist "Julian" calendar to the "Gregorian" system used by the rest of the European world. For a while the calendars operated in tandem, so two dates are given. New style dates are 13 days after the old style.

⁶ *Krug*, literally circle, was the name for the formal meeting of the Host.

⁷ The word for Council used here is "Soviet". To avoid confusion with the Bolsheviks, I shall use the word Soviet only with regards to them and their allies.

⁸ *Khorunji* is a Cossack rank of Cornet or Second Lieutenant. Appendix 2 gives a table of Cossack ranks.



Military Administration) was formed which, together with the Military Council, declared its non-recognition of the authority of the Bolsheviks established in Petrograd and Tashkent, and the Semirechensk Cossack Army seized all power in the region. Martial law was declared and the formation of volunteer horse and foot sotnias for all capable of carrying Cossack weapons was started in all villages and settlements, with the aim of maintaining order and suppression of the “Bolshevik-hooligan speech in the field, wherever it comes from”. At the end of November, the [Semirechensk] military government issued an order to withdraw all Semirechensk Cossack units from the [Russian] army, by which means it hoped to gain reliable strength to maintain order, as well as attempting to join the South-Eastern Union, through its delegates in Novocherkassk.

During this time, a Council of Soldiers' Deputies continued to operate in the region, conducting an extensive Bolshevik campaign among the population, and it was only officially dissolved on 26 December (8 January). The Council of Deputies and the representatives of the Liberals in Verniy launched a campaign against the elderly and ill General Kiyashko, accusing him of mocking the prisoners doing penal servitude in Nerchinsk, of serving Tsarism, etc. At the end of November, Kiyashko was forced to transfer his powers to the chairman of the Army Board, Colonel N.S. Shcherbakov, and go with his family to Tashkent, with the intention of getting to the Kuban by rail. Telegrams from Verniy were immediately sent to the capital of Turkestan, Kiyashko was arrested at Perovsk station, taken to Tashkent, and soon brutally murdered. On 30 November (13 December) Soviet power was established in Omsk, and on 4 (17) February also in Semipalatinsk – with the result that the Semirechye was isolated. Delivery of goods from the outside was stopped; the mail and telegraph were interrupted.

The 2nd Semirechensk Cossack Regiment arrived in Verniy from Persia on 31 January (13 February) 1918. While on the way home it had moved through areas strongly affected by Bolshevism and the regiment turned out to be strongly propagandised, such that many of them surrendered their weapons to the Samarkand Soviet. On 13 (26) February at the Military *Krug*, an election for Military Ataman took place, and the commander of the 2nd Semirechensk Cossack Regiment, Colonel of the General Staff Alexander Mikhailovich Ionov, was elected. However, on the night of 2 March (new) a revolt of Bolsheviks took place in Verniy, with the participation of the revolutionary-minded Cossacks of the 2nd Regiment, as a result of which the organs of the Provisional Government and the *Krug* were dispersed. For a while the Military Council and the Military Government tried to establish relations with the post-coup Revolutionary Military Committee, but in March they gained more reliable support than the 2nd Regiment – the 1st Semirechensk Cossack “General Kolpakovsky” Regiment, the Semirechensk platoon of the Life Guard Cossack Regiment and the 2nd Semirechensk Independent Cossack Sotnia returned from the front. Seeing the Military Ataman’s strength growing, the Semirechensk Revolutionary Military Committee arrested him and dismissed the Military Council.



The Cossack *frontoviki*, partly surrendering their weapons to the *SovDep*,⁹ went to their homes.

In mid April, a Red Guard detachment under the command of Shchukin, with artillery and machine guns, was sent to a village in the Verniy district. Its task was the requisition of bread and the disarmament of the Cossacks. This quickly sobered many. On 16 April, the Shchukin detachment was utterly defeated by Cossacks from the villages of Sofiyskaya¹⁰, Nadezhdinskaya and Malaya Almaty, with the participation of Cossacks of the 1st and 3rd Regiments. This served as a signal for the beginning of an uprising in five southern villages of Semirechye, as a result of which Verniy was besieged. The Cossacks of the Nadezhdinskaya Stanitsa, led by the *Sotnik* Bortnikov, raided the city and released Ataman Ionov from prison. Cossacks and Bolshevik, stayed facing each other on the outskirts of Verniy – the Cossacks did not dare to enter the city, and the Reds dared not go beyond it to defeat the rebels. Actions were limited to small skirmishes on the outskirts.

Seeing that they could not cope with the Cossack uprising on their own, wanting to gain the time needed to mobilise their forces in Semirechye and awaiting assistance coming from Tashkent, the SovNarKom¹¹ began peace negotiations with the Cossacks of the rebel villages and on 24 April a “peace treaty” was concluded. But on 11 May, due to the Bolsheviks not complying with the terms of that treaty, fighting around Verniy resumed. In the middle of the month the Murayev Red Guard detachment from Tashkent neared the city, with 600 bayonets and some machine guns. It immediately entered the fray near the village of Lyubovinskaya, which it soon took. After Murayev’s detachment joined with the local Bolshevik forces, on 21 May Malaya Almaty village was taken, then Sofiyskaya and Nadezhdinskaya villages and the Iliysky settlement. A merciless terror against the Cossacks, officers and intellectuals commenced. The Murayev unit carried out executions publicly in the squares of the *stanitsas*,¹² and Cossack property, cattle and equipment was requisitioned. Shootings were also carried out in the prisons of Verniy. This was only the beginning of a mass anti-Cossack terror held in Semirechye – long before the notorious circular directive letter from the Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b)¹³ of 29 January 1919 was issued.¹⁴

At the beginning of June 1918, a series of decrees concerning Semirechye Soviet power over the Cossacks was issued (2 June, the order of the Bolshevik regional commander L. Emelev for the abolition of the Military Board, all village Cossack

⁹ from Sovèt Deputatov, the local Council of Deputies. It isn’t clear if this is the Soldiers SovDep or a civilian one. The essay jumps around a bit with regards to using names for the Soviet organs of power.

¹⁰ Now called Talgar. I have retained the names of the villages of the time. Appendix 1 lists the modern name, if it has been changed and I could find it.

¹¹ Council of People’s Commissars.

¹² Stanitsa is the name for a specifically Cossack village

¹³ The Bolshevik Party

¹⁴ That directive included instructions to "carry out mass terror against wealthy Cossacks, exterminating all of them; carry out merciless mass terror against any and all Cossacks taking part in any way, directly or indirectly, in the struggle against Soviet power" and began a period of massive forced “de-Cossackisation”.



Self-Defence Committees, the position of Military Ataman, the Military Administration and other Cossack institutions and officials, with the confiscation of their property, equipment and money; on 6 June, the Semirechensk Regional Executive Committee ordered the confiscation of Cossack pension lands and removal of voting rights). Detachments of the broken and desperate *Semirekov*, led by Ataman Ionov, started to drift towards the Chinese border and northern Semirechye. On the way, they cleared the border town of Zharkent of Bolsheviks, along with the villages of Khorgos and Baskunchi and held them until 15 June, when a punitive Red detachment from Verniy under N.N. Zatylnikov forced them over the border.

In Gulja, the centre of the Ili district of Xinjiang¹⁵ province, the Russian Consulate was operating, and the consul V.F. Lyuba helped Ionov and his Cossacks with food and lodgings around the city.¹⁶ Colonel Ionov reformed the detachment, established telegraph communication with the Russian envoy in Beijing, Prince N.A. Kudashev, and the ambassadors of Great Britain, USA and Japan, and also contacted the White authorities in Omsk and Semipalatinsk, requesting them to send aid to Semirechye to save the host from total slaughter. Delegates from the Semirechensk army, Danchenko and Sharapov, made their way from Northern Semirechye to Semipalatinsk and Omsk, where they spoke at the 4th Military *Krug* of the Siberian Cossack Army. They related the events in Semirechye, asked for help from their Siberian brothers in the struggle against the Bolsheviks and collected large donations from the Siberian villages for their "younger brothers, the *Semirekov*".

Meanwhile, a large-scale civil war began to flare up in Semirechye. In order to destroy the "White Guard nests" in northern Semirechye, a Red Guard detachment under the command of I.Ye. Mamontov was sent there from Verniy, consisting of 500 bayonets with two guns and four machine guns. Moving northwards, the Mamontov detachment was replenished on the way by local peasant new settlers¹⁷, while it conducted mass terror in the Cossack villages and imposed fines on their inhabitants. Rumours about the cruelties of the Reds spread ahead of the detachment's advance and the Cossacks quickly organised themselves. In the village of Urzhar, a Committee of Salvation arose, the district council was arrested and an armed detachment was formed. This detachment went out to meet the punitive Mamontovs and on 4 July gave battle near the village of Rybach'ye on Lake Alakol – but seeing that their forces were not a match, they retreated to Urzhar.

The Russian consul in Chuguchak (Xinjiang), V.V. Dolbezhev, knowing the local situation well, telegraphed the White command in Omsk and Semipalatinsk, asking them "to do everything possible to move troops from Semipalatinsk to Sergiopol as soon as possible." At the same time, he asked the Committee of Salvation to hold the fortification of Bakhty, at the Chinese border, so that refugees from the Semirechye

¹⁵ This is the province formerly known as Sinkiang in English, but was known as Chinese Turkestan.

¹⁶ There were 30,000 or so ethnic Russians in Xinjiang, mostly of White orientation, and the consulate was quite a large organisation.

¹⁷ That is recent Russian non-Cossacks, *inogorodnie*, a group who fancied the Cossacks' lands and resented their privileges.



could cross to China. When Mamontov approached Urzhar, on 8 July, the Cossacks left that village without a fight, and, crossing the Tarbagatai ridge, some went to the village of Kokpekty (a former fort of the Siberian Cossack Host) and some to Chuguchak. On 9 July Mamontov occupied Bakhty.

By this time the vanguard of the Semirechensk detachment formed in the Western Siberian army was approaching the northern-most edge of the Semirechye at Sergiopol (now Ayaguz), having come from Semipalatinsk. It was a mounted detachment of the *Podesaul* G.P. Lucilin of the Siberian Cossack army, composed of a partisan sotnia, a composite sotnia of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment and an officer machine-gun team (totalling more than 100 sabres with two machine guns). On 16 July, this detachment broke into the streets of Sergiopol, but could not take the fortress or the barracks where the Red Army was entrenched, and so left the town. Lucilin decided to wait for the approach of the main forces of the Semirechensk detachment, which was headed by the old Semirechensk colonel, Fedor Gavrilovich Yarushin. The next day a detachment under the command of Ivanov, with 400 men and a gun, arrived to aid the Sergiopol Bolsheviks.

On 20 July, after the arrival of the reinforcements from Semipalatinsk – the automobile detachment of Captain N.D. Vinogradov, as well as the Semirechensk and Siberian Cossacks of the Urzhar, Kokpekty and Bukon' *stanitsas* – the Whites went on the offensive and on the next day freed Sergiopol. Some of the Red garrison were killed, and the rest scattered. Commander Ivanov himself fled, leaving his soldiers to the mercy of their enemy (he was later arrested and shot by order of the Red command in Verniy).

The liberation of Sergiopol from the Communists inspired hope in the Semirechensk Cossacks and was a powerful impetus in the fight against Bolshevism throughout the whole Semirechye. On 23 July, an uprising of the *Semirekov* broke out in the villages of Sarkand, Lepsinsk, Kopal, Aksu, Abakumovka, Arasan and Topolevka. On 25 July, Cossack rebels attacked the southernmost city of the Semirechensk region, Przhevalsk. In some places, Kirghiz (Kazakhs) and old-time peasants began to join the Cossacks. The seizure by the Whites of the northern areas of the region put the power of the Semirechye Soviets under threat, so on 22 July 1918, the Semirechensk Regional Executive Committee made a decision to unite under one command the Soviet detachments operating in the northern part of the region, as the Semirechensk Northern Front, which was later to become the Semirechensk Front. The regional Military Commissar, L.P. Emelev, was appointed commander of Bolshevik forces in the region..

Captain Vinogradov, having taken Sergiopol left part of the detachment there, and with the rest began move along the Urzhar – Makanchi – Bakhty road. He quickly occupied Urzhar, then Makanchi, but was killed in the morning of 29 July during an unexpected encounter with the Mamontov unit. The tyrant Ivan Mamontov was also killed during the same action. His brother, P. Mamontov, and then D. Kikhtenko, took over the leadership of the detachment. The Reds occupied Urzhar and Makanchi



once again, but soon were sandwiched by the Whites – a detachment under Colonel Yarushin coming from Sergiopol and Semirechensk Cossacks under Colonel Vyatkin and *Starshina* Bychkov, who had come from China and occupied Bakhty. After several clashes, the Mamontov-Kikhtenko squad was forced to leave the Sergiopol-Bakhty highway and go south to Uch-Aral and then to Sarkand. The White detachments of Yarushin and Vyatkin, joined together in the region of Urzhar and evicted the local Reds, then continued their attack on the south of the region, hurrying to help the rebels.

In Sergiopol, meanwhile, troops were arriving from the Siberian steppes. At the end of July, there even arrived the 1st Siberian squadron of *Starshina* S.K. Shebalin, from the 2nd Siberian Steppe Corps, intended for the development of an offensive deep into the Semirechye. Soon the Military Government of the Semirechensk Cossack Army, headed by Ataman Ionov, moved there from Xinjiang with a detachment of Semirechensk Cossacks. Previously demoralised by the suppression of the Spring uprising in Verniy and the defeat of its villages, the Semirechensk Cossacks began to revive and rally their forces. We can say that the rebirth of the army began precisely when Sergiopol fell. Determined to liberate their homeland from the Bolsheviki, the Semirechensk Cossacks formed self-defence sotnias in the liberated villages, began to arm and prepare for a decisive throw to the south to release the rest of the host.

A glorious page in the story of the struggle of the *Semirekov* against the Reds was the heroic defence of the village of Sarkand in August 1918. By this time, the Cossack uprisings in Kopal, Lepsinsk, Abakumovka and Topolevka had already been suppressed by the Bolsheviki. For this purpose, the Consolidated Verniy Detachment was formed under the command of the Assistant Regional Commissar, A.Ya. Petrenko. On 8 August, after joining in Abakumovka with the Kikhtenko detachment, retreating from Uch-Aral and Sarkand, the combined Red units under the command of Petrenko counted in its ranks about 1,000 bayonets and 500 sabres, with 6 guns and several machine guns. With these forces Petrenko approached the rebellious village of Sarkand and besieged it. In Sarkand there were 520 Cossacks from Sarkand and Kopal villages. The defence of the *stanitsa* was officially led by village policeman, Vasily Korolev, a former officer of the 2nd Siberian Cossack Regiment, but *Starshina* N. D. Kol'ts, was in fact the military leader.

The village was not just surrounded, but half captured by the Reds. Both sides were in the same streets. Despite the numerical superiority of the Reds, the Whites offered a desperate resistance. With a shortage of water and ammunition, in the sun, among the heat and stench of decomposing corpses that lay between the opposing sides, they kept up under brutal artillery and machine-gun fire, fought off violent attacks, made night raids and hoped for help from the Siberians in Sergiopol. Towards the end of the defence, people began to weaken, while on the other side of the street, the Reds shouted to them that there was no Provisional Siberian Government and they were waiting for help in vain – that they should exile or kill their leaders and surrender.



On 28 August, after the latest assault, *Starshina* Kol'ts wrote in his diary: "The Cossacks are becoming discouraged, unstable, for they are hoping for help from others, and not from themselves. The consumption of ammunition for this night is at least 4,000 cartridges. Another such furious onslaught and all the work of a two-week struggle will be reduced to naught. The ammunition supply is negligible. The people are nervous." The Cossack defenders of the *stanitsa* could only be saved by a miracle. But on 29 August a machine gun crackled from the outskirts, the Reds stopped their shelling of the village and rushed towards it, and soon began to hastily retreat to Abakumovka – a unit of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment from the Semirechensk detachment of Colonel Yarushin, who had already taken Lepsinsk, had come to their aid. There were no words to describe the joy with which the Sarkand villagers met their rescuing "Siberian brothers". In the winter of 1918, in memory of their Siberian saviours, Sarkand decided to rename itself Siberian Sarkand. The verdict of the village community was approved by Order No. 70 of the Semirechensk Cossack Host, dated 19 December 1918.

On 24 August, when it seemed that the troops Colonel Yarushin's Semirechensk detachment, was about to complete the liberation of the northern Semirechye, the commander of the 2nd Steppe Corps, General P.P. Ivanov-Rinov ordered the start of operations to capture the Ili *Krai*¹⁸ and the city of Verniy. The task of liberating the whole of the Semirechye was assigned to the 2nd Steppe Infantry Division (renamed the 5th Siberian Infantry Division on 26 August) under the command of Colonel (later Major-General) V.P. Gulidov. However Lepsinsk and Kopal districts were not yet completely clear of Bolsheviks.

Captain Ushakov's detachment, with about 600 bayonets, 2 guns and 4 machine guns, operated in that area and took Lepsinsk on 28 August. The Red garrison of the city went to the Pokatilovka village. The Ushakov detachment, having strengthened its ranks with Cossacks from Lepsinsk and Sarkand villages, laid siege to Pokatilovka on 31 August and began fighting for its possession, but on 4 September, was forced to lift the siege and retreat to Sarkand with the approach of the Petrenko detachment. During these battles the organiser of Sarkand's defence, Officer Korolev, was killed. On 6 September, the Whites were forced to leave Lepsinsk, but on 10 September it was regained and the Red units left the town for the large village of Cherkasskoye, which occupied a central position among the villages of the immigrant peasants of Lepsinsk district.

And although the next day Petrenko's Consolidated Detachment left Cherkasskoye for Gavrilovka, this was the beginning of the formation of a peasant rebel region in the rear of the Whites – the so-called Cherkasskoye defence. In Cherkasskoye and neighbouring villages of the Lepsinsk district – Petropavlovka, Osinovka, Kolpakovka, Andreyevka, Uspenovka and Glinovka lived at that time about thirty thousand peasants, mostly new settlers, who were mostly Bolshevik-minded and

¹⁸ Ili is in China, but a small part of the broader region was transferred to Russia in a 1881 treaty. It is the modern Almaty area.



sharply anti-Cossack. As they left, the Petrenko detachment left them two machine guns, several dozen rifles and several thousand cartridges. We must pay tribute to the courage of the Cherkasskoye people – despite their almost complete isolation from the main forces of the Bolsheviks, they successfully operated for more than a year in the rear of the Whites, drawing off their strength and not allowing them to strike at Verniy. Former soldiers, warrant officers and non-commissioned officers of the past World War headed the Cherkasskoye defence – A.N. Dyachenko, P.F. Kornienko, F.A. Kriva, T.G. Gorbatov, S.S. Podshivalov and P.I. Tuzov. They managed to organise a strong defence, to start their own production of weapons and ammunition, as well as to establish sporadic deliveries of weapons from the Northern Semirechensk front.

In the autumn of 1918, the Semirechensk Front stabilized roughly along Symbyl-Kum sands¹⁹ – Aksu – Abakumovka – Kopal. There was no solid front line, military units from both sides, were stationed in settlements, sending out guards and mounted patrols to the most important places. 100 kilometres north of the front line there was the besieged area of Cherkasskoye defence.²⁰

A small respite between battles allowed the Semirechensk Cossacks to arm and reform into regular military units. Instead of spontaneous insurgent *stanitsa* sotnias, militia detachments and self-defence sotnias were created (one of the first was the Sergiopol self-defence sotnia and Ataman Sotnia), and in September the 1st Semirechensk Cossack Regiment was recreated, and attached to the 5th Siberian Rifle Division. Due to the shortage of Semirechensk officers, a group of Siberian officers were appointed, headed by *Esaul* A.A. Asanov as commander of the regiment. By 13 October 1918, it had 29 officers, 910 sabres and 4 machine guns on its combat roll. Subsequently, the 1st Semirechensk Cossack Regiment was renamed as the 1st Alatau Horse Regiment of the Semirechensk Cossack Host, and two more regiments were created – later becoming part of the Independent Semirechensk Cossack Brigade, under Ataman Ionov from 14 May 1919.

In October, the 1st Semirechensk Cossack Regiment, along with two sotnias of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment and a rifle company took part in repelling the attacks of the Reds, who were trying to break through the front and unite with Cherkasskoye. Eventually the Bolsheviks pierced the Cossack line and took Abakumovka, which was regained only on 2 December, after several attacks. After this there was a temporary lull at the front.

In December 1918, the Partisan Division of Ataman B.V. Annenkov, numbering 1,800 bayonets and 1,770 sabres with 6 guns, began to arrive in Semirechye from Semipalatinsk. Annenkov was tasked by the White command with destroying the insurgent centre around Cherkasskoye, and then – acting together with the 5th Siberian Rifle Division in Semirechye, and the Semirechensk Cossack Host – attacking deep into enemy territory and with the aim of seizing the town of Verniy. In

¹⁹ I cannot find Symbyl-Kum, although there is definitely a sandy depression that has that name in Kazakhstan

²⁰ The geography that puts Cherkasskoye **north** of the front lines is extremely confusing. East maybe.



January 1919, the *Annenkovtsy* tried to take one of the rebel villages, Andreyevka, but got bogged down in the fighting and they actually remained in the Cherkasskoye region until mid-October, when they finally managed to break the resistance of the enemy and liquidate the Red rebels.

The Partisan Division of Ataman Annenkov replenished its ranks with residents of Semirechye and neighbouring regions, where its recruitment headquarters operated, taking both volunteers and those mobilised. Semirechensk Cossacks also served in Annenkov's units, mainly in the Life Ataman Regiment, but probably in other units as well. Later, the Kirghiz Horse Brigade was formed with staff partly of Russian officers and it included Semirechensk Cossack officers (it was commanded by Colonel N.D. Kol'ts).

The relationship between Colonel Annenkov with the elected Semirechensk Ataman Ionov was very poor. They had known each other for a long time – from Annenkov's service in the 1st Siberian Cossack "Yermak Timofeev" Regiment, which in peacetime was stationed in the Semirechensk city of Zharkent. At the time, Captain Ionov served as a senior adjutant of the headquarters of the troops of the Semirechensk region, and during inspection trips he often visited Zharkent and Annenkov's regiment. It is difficult to say what their relationship was at that time, but in 1919 it became strained to the limit, which of course was detrimental to the common cause of the struggle against Bolshevism.

At the end of 1918, Ionov decided to "render"²¹ the entire population of the Semirechensk region. According to him, rendering the Semirechensk peasants was needed to smooth out the contradictions between them and the Cossacks, to create a strong and well-controlled army, with which it would be possible to eradicate Bolshevism in the Semirechye. Some of the old-time peasants actually signed up for the Cossacks, thereby triggering a reciprocal hatred in the new settlers. Annenkov was sharply opposed to this rendering of the population, for which he condemned the Semirechensk Ataman.

Conflicts between the two chieftains also arose for other reasons. Some idea of their relationship can be found in Ionov's order of 7 August 1919 to the Semirechensk Cossack Army and Annenkov's response: "On 15 July this year, I drove up to Sergiopol *stanitsa* together with a member of the military administration, *Esaul* Ushakov, and an orderly, *Grazhdrantsev*, in the usual way, i.e. without an escort – which I, cherishing every soldier at the front, never take with me. A few miles out from the village, a partisan sotnia attacked, suddenly surrounding me, and took me to Uch-Aral. *Praporshchik* Volkov, who commanded the sotnia, announced that by order of Colonel Annenkov I was considered arrested. I was kept in Uch-Aral for several days, until Colonel Annenkov ordered me to be released. In my life, starting from school, I was never arrested. Only during the period of Bolshevism did I twice receive this honour. The first time I was imprisoned by the Bolsheviks, the second

²¹ Render into Cossacks, it seems.



time by these partisans. This coincidence suggests that I am for both, as Military Ataman, blocking their way. The reasons for this, and the other arrest, are unknown to me, but the goals are quite clear: there was an undoubted desire to lower me in the eyes of the Semirechensk Cossacks. Nothing has changed in my personal life; I am doing what I was appointed to do by the order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Front on 10 July. The Semirechensk Cossacks due to this event have an opportunity to understand even more clearly the confusion of relations and complexity of the situation, which reigns now in the field. Ionov.”

On 5 September, bringing the order of the Semirechensk Ataman to the troops, Annenkov found it necessary to make several amendments and sarcastic explanations to his order: “Let us firmly hope that the Commander-in-Chief appointed General Ionov according to ... the instructions of a psychiatrist in order to heal him from illness. In conclusion, I will say that the “fearless” General Ionov was driving to the front under the surname Efremov, and back from the front, “treasuring every fighter”, except that the escort took a machine gun with him.”

Major-General Nikolai Petrovich Shcherbakov, who was a Semirechensk Cossack himself, visited the Semirechye in the summer of 1919 on an inspection trip, and in a report to the Council of Ministers in Omsk positively evaluated the activities of Colonel Annenkov in the region. In his letters to the civilian governor of the Semirechensk region, Balabanov, at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Omsk, Shcherbakov wrote negatively of the activities of General Ionov with regards to the protection of order in the Semirechensk region, both as Military Ataman and the commander of the Second Steppe Corps. Eventually, in October 1919, Admiral Kolchak decided to recall Ionov to Omsk, and he was soon sent to Vladivostok as chief of staff for the Inspector of Formations of the Strategic Reserve, General B.R. Khreshchatytsky. In his place, Kolchak appointed Major-General Shcherbakov as Military Ataman, since he apparently was able to find a common language with Annenkov.

The fighting in Semirechye during the summer months of 1919 was mainly reduced to actions around the Cherkasskoye defence area (in July the Whites took most of its territory including the villages of Konstantinovka, Nadezhdinskaya, Glinovka, Kolpakovka, Osinovka and Andreyevka), and also repelling the Red forces of the Northern Semirechensk Front, which sought to break through and unite with the Cherkasskoye rebels. At this time, the *Annenkovsty* even launched several “psychic”²² attacks on the positions of the Reds.

The White command attempted meanwhile to strike at the flank of the Bolsheviks from Chinese Xinjiang, in the areas of Zharkent, Kol’zhat and Przhevalsk. The formation of White detachments in Western China was led by Lieutenant-General Kartsev, as personal representative of the Supreme Ruler Admiral Kolchak, who went from Omsk to Gulja, where he was assisted by Colonel Bryantsev and staff officers

²² Attacks designed to demoralise the enemy, not “psychological warfare” as such.



of II Steppe Corps. They were actively aided by the Russian consuls in Gulja (Lyuba) and Urumqi (Diacov). From Spring 1919, Annenkov's representative in Gulja was a former officer of the 3rd Siberian Cossack Regiment and one of the organizers of the overthrow of the Bolsheviks in the Semipalatinsk region, Colonel Pavel Ivanovich Sidorov. He managed to put together two mobile partisan detachments of 400 to 500 men each of the Semirechensk Cossacks, Alasha²³ and Taranchi²⁴. The detachments of *Esaul* Sapozhnikov and Captain Bredikhin also submitted to Sidorov. Colonel Bryantsev managed to form an "Independent Rifle Brigade" of two regiments (Tekesky²⁵ cavalry and Kol'zhat (or Semirechensk) Plastoon²⁶ Cossack Regiment).

From July to September 1919, the Sidorov and Kartsev detachments repeatedly penetrated from China into Soviet territory, destroying small Bolshevik units, besieging Przhevalsk and Zharkent, covering Cossacks and peasants leaving the Przhevalsk district for China and retaliating against the Red forces of the Northern Semirechensk Front.

After the fall of Cherkasskoye Defence, on 14 and 15 November 1919, the detachments of Colonels Sidorov and Bryantsev launched a large attack on the Red Semirechye in three directions: 1) on Zharkent from Khorgos, 2) on Dubunskaya and Podgornoye from Kol'zhat and 3) on Przhevalsk from the side of Narynkol. The Sidorov Cossacks firmly established themselves at that time in Khorgos, Baskunchi and Tyshkantau, and Bryantsev occupied Dubunskaya, Podgornoye and Chundzha, which he held until the end of January 1920. Despite the fact that they were not able to take Zharkent and Przhevalsk, the actions of the White detachments in the area constrained significant Soviet forces and constantly threatened the main forces of the Bolsheviks of the Northern Semirechensk Front with an attack on their flank.

At the end of 1919, the position of the Whites in Siberia deteriorated sharply. Under the pressure of the superior Red Army, the forces of the Admiral A.V. Kolchak were rolled back to the east and left Omsk. In December 1919 Kolchak issued an order for the consolidation of all troops operating on the Semirechye front into an Independent Semirechensk Army, under the command of Major-General Annenkov. With the fall of Semipalatinsk in December 1919, the Semirechensk Army was cut off from the main forces of the Whites.

A little help was brought by the arrival via Atbasar, Akmolinsk and Karkaraly to Sergiopol of some of the Orenburg Cossack Army under the command of its Military Ataman, Lieutenant-General A.I. Dutov. Having made it through the most difficult campaign, in severe cold across the Hungry Steppe, pursued by the Red Army, the Orenburgers poured into the Semirechye in the last days of December. This was the decaying remnants of an army: hungry, frostbitten, stricken with typhoid and demoralized. With a few exceptions they were not a fighting force – and on top of

²³ Alasha are a Kazakh tribe.

²⁴ Taranchis are the sedentary Muslim population of Xinjiang.

²⁵ Tekes is a region of Xinjiang, with a large population of Kazakhs.

²⁶ Plastoon or plastun is a Cossack infantry unit.



that, they immediately began conflicts with local Semirechensk Cossacks, so that Dutov soon had to explain himself to the Military Government of Semirechensk. It was extremely difficult to feed an additional 25,000 people in an area so lacking in food as the blockaded Semirechye. Nevertheless, Annenkov decided to resist and hold on in Semirechye until better times. On 2 January 1920, a meeting of the top commanders of both armies was held, at which it was decided that Annenkov would assume command of all armed forces, and Dutov would oversee the civilian administration of the Semirechensk territory. With that, Dutov, with his personal escort detachment of 600 sabres, departed for the city of Lepsinsk, which became his temporary residence.

Annenkov reformed his units and divided them into three groups – Northern, Central (Western) and Southern. The Northern Group, headed by General A.S. Bakich, consisted of the remnants of the Orenburg Army consisted of about 12,500 thousand soldiers. In addition, it had up to 13,000 refugees and a host of evacuated Orenburg institutions in the rear. The Central, or Western, group was directly commanded by Ataman Annenkov. It was about 9,000 men, mostly from the Partisan Division.

Major-General N.P. Shcherbakov was appointed commander of the troops of the Southern Group. It consisted of the 5th Siberian Rifle Division, the Alatau and Priiliy²⁷ Cossack Regiments, the 1st Alasha Horse Regiment, the Semirechensk Rifle Regiment, the Self-Defence Regiment, the Semirechensk Alay Horse Regiment and four batteries. Orenburg Ataman A.I. Dutov, with his squad, was also in this group. Colonel Sidorov's detachment of Semirechensk Cossacks, which was active in the Zharkent region and separated from the main forces by the mountains of the Dzungarian Alatau, also obeyed General Shcherbakov. The Southern group was associated with the recent successes of the Whites on the Semirechensk front. Thus, on 7 December 1919, the Cossacks won at Kopal and the front moved to the Ak-Ichke to Karabulak line. On 15 January 1920, a local attack was launched on Gavrilovka, through Ak-Ichke and Soldatskoye, but after two day fight the Whites withdrew to Kopal.

On 12 January the Bolshevik troops of the Kokchetav group of the Red 5th Army, breaking the resistance of the Whites, took the northernmost village of Semirechye, Sergiopol – after which a lull was established at the front. Both sides used it for rest, regrouping of forces and mobilising resources. The Semirechensk Army was completely surrounded – to the north, west and south were the Reds, and in the rear to the east was the Chinese border. With the onset of warmer weather, in March, the fighting resumed. By this time, the *Semirekov* had almost exhausted their stocks of ammunition, there was a shortage of food, and requisitions from the local population led to unrest among residents and discontent inside the Army, because many units consisted of local peasants and Cossacks. It became clear that it was no longer possible to hold the front and the choices were to go to China or to surrender.

²⁷ The Semirechensk Cavalry are named for mountain ranges. The Pri-Iliy means “this side of the Ili”.



The Reds stepped up their attacks first in the southern sector of the front, launching an offensive against Kopal. On 4 and 5 March they twice tried to take possession of the town, but both attacks ended in failure. On 22 March the attack was resumed, and by 24 March the Bolsheviks had managed to cut the road connecting Kopal with the rear. General Shcherbakov, with a Cossack detachment of some 300 sabres and a gun, tried to break into Kopal from Arasan in order to rescue the locals, but was stopped by a red cavalry brigade and surrounded – it was only thanks to a mountain snowstorm that he could escape from the encirclement and return to Arasan.

Developing their drive further, the Reds approached Arasan and on 28 March, after a three-hour battle, took the *stanitsa*. They captured 200 prisoners, 8 machine guns and 250 rifles there. General Shcherbakov, pursued by the Red cavalry, managed to leave for Abakumovka, and then to Sarkand. The Kopal garrison – led by the deputy commander of the Southern Group, commander of the Priiliy Cossack Regiment, *Starshina* Semyon Yemelyanovich Boyko – still held out, despite their complete encirclement.

Simultaneously with the attack of the Turkestan Group of the Reds, their Sergiopol Group went onto the attack. On 22 March, after stubborn fighting, it occupied the village of Urzhar, and then, pursuing the retreating units of the Orenburg detachment, began to advance along the Chuguchak road. Bakich retreated with delaying actions, and managed to evacuate all the carts, hospitals and institutions to China. On 27 March, he crossed the border at Bakhty. With him there were more than 10,000 soldiers, not counting the refugees. Alongside the Orenburg citizens, many Semirechensk Cossacks from Sergiopol and Urzhar villages left for the Tarbagatai district of Xinjiang, not wanting to remain under Communist rule.

Part of the Red 105th Infantry Brigade, after the capture of Urzhar and Makanchi, on 25 March began an attack on the village of Rybach'ye, and from there to Uch-Aral, where Annenkov's headquarters were located. The 71st and 75th Cavalry Regiments also moved there. Via Dzhuz-Agach and Romanovka they made a raid to Uch-Aral from the west. On 25 March Annenkov managed to repel the Uch-Aral attack, but seeing that resistance was useless, the Semirechensk commander gave the order to begin his departure abroad. At the same time, Annenkov transferred command of the rear units of his group to the head of supply of the Semirechensk Army, Colonel A.A. Asanov (the former commander of the 1st Semirechensk Cossack Regiment), who was to pull back all the units to Lepsinsk and, together with Dutov, retreat to the border. Asanov did not fulfil Annenkov's orders, and moreover, on 27 March he issued an order on the surrender of the remnants of the army. On 29 March, after the conclusion of a special treaty with the Bolsheviks with security guarantees and the promise of no reprisals, Kopal capitulated. A total of 1,185 officers and Cossacks surrendered in there, including the Priiliy and Alatau Cossack regiments from the Semirechensk Cossack Brigade. On the same day the village of Abakumovka was taken by the Red Army. In total, about 6,000 Cossacks and soldiers surrendered in the Semirechye. All of them, for further consideration of their fate, were sent to Verniy.



Dutov, with his detachment of 600 men, left Lepsinsk on 29 March, and after passing Pokatilovka, he plunged into the mountains of Dzhungarsky (Semirechensk) Alatau, heading into the so-called Sarkand Gap, intending to withdraw to the Chinese border along the only possible route left for him. The Semirechensk Ataman Shcherbakov also headed there from the village of Sarkand. With great difficulty, their detachments managed to cross the difficult Kara-Saryk pass and enter the Bortala valley, where they were interned by the Chinese and sent to the Gimpan area. Dutov and Shcherbakov stayed there until the beginning of May, after which they were transferred closer to Gulja, the centre of the Ili district. Dutov with his headquarters and a detachment of Orenburgers were located in the barracks of the Russian consulate in the Suidun fortress, the nearby villages of Mazar and Gimpan, and Shcherbakov was in Gulja.

The last to leave Russia was the Central Group of the Semirechensk Army, under the command of General Annenkov. His column of about 6,000 soldiers moved from Uch-Aral towards the village of Glinovka. It included the Life Ataman, 1st Orenburg “Ataman Dutov” Cossack, Cuirassier, Dragoon, Horse-Engineer and Kirghiz-Kalmyk Cavalry Regiments, as well as Annenkov’s personal escort with an orchestra and chorus of trumpet players, part of the Manchurian Horse-Jäger Regiment, a squadron of the Black Hussar Regiment, an artillery battery, the 1st Reserve Sotnia, a gendarme squadron and the remains of a number of other units, with refugees.

In the area of the village of Glinovka, Annenkov stopped the convoy, formed up all the units, travelled around them and announced that those who wished to continue the struggle could go with him into the mountains, and thence to China: those who were tired, did not want to, or could not do so, could stay and surrender to the mercy of the Bolsheviks. He said that there would be no coercion on his part to emigrate. As a result of this, about 1,500 to 2,000 people decided to stay, handed over their weapons to the departing partisans and said their goodbyes. Then the columns were divided, and turned in different directions, going their own ways.

What happened next is not clear. Later about 900 corpses were found in a isolated spot near An-Agach, and another 600 were found on Lake Alakol. The Soviet authorities claimed that these were the Annenkovites who did not want to leave Russia, hacked and shot by order of the Ataman himself. But no conclusive evidence was cited and various Soviet materials contain very confusing and contradictory data about these events. Annenkov himself never admitted his guilt to this tragedy, and at his trial in 1927, he categorically denied that he had killed his own men who did not want to go abroad. A thought creeps in – did the Bolsheviks, who were drunk with victory, met the returning Whites and not wish to burden themselves with prisoners, especially as the terrain was wild and there were no witnesses!? In any case, this question remains open today and requires further study.

With the remaining units, Annenkov plunged into the wild mountains of the Dzungarian Alatau range and camped at the Selke pass not yet over the border,. Here, in a place called by the Partisans “Eagles Nest”, the detachment stayed for about two



months, while negotiations with the Chinese authorities on the conditions of the transition were under way. After a tragic incident with the families of several Orenburg officers, in which old Annenkov Partisans were guilty, the 1st Orenburg Cossack regiment separated itself from Annenkov, and 500 of them went to China, to reconnect with Ataman Dutov. Annenkov himself crossed the border on 27 May 1920 with 4,200 people, descended into the Bortala valley and camped near Gimpan, from which Dutov and Shcherbakov had already left with their people. When crossing the border, they were forced to disarm and hand over some of their weapons to the Chinese. The Partisans hid the rest, hoping to use them in the future. The Partisans called their new camp “Cheerful,” set up tents, yurts and huts, and began to receive a small allowance from the Chinese for their surrendered weapons. Annenkov did not force his soldiers to stay there and the detachment gradually decreased – by July 1920, when they left for Urumqi, there were only 670 remaining.

The detachments of Colonels Sidorov and Bryantsev, which had operated separately from the main forces of the Semirechensk Army in the Zharkent-Przhevsk region, were supplied from the Gulja region, and their withdrawal to Chinese territory was more or less organised and painless. The Sidorov Detachment retaining a significant part of their weapons, and a base in the Ili district and did not lose their fighting capacity and the will to continue the struggle.

With the departure of some of the Independent Semirechensk Army to China and the surrender of others, the White struggle in Semirechye did not end – it simply took on other scales and forms. Of course, now there were no large-scale battles and long-term sieges of cities, villages and towns – the actions were reduced to attacks of small insurgent and partisan detachments and the underground work of officer and Cossack groups in the provinces occupied by Communists.

By the middle of 1920, several secret officers' organizations had arisen in Semirechye, which had as their goal the overthrow of Soviet power in the province. It is difficult now to determine which of these groups were really engaged in preparing for an uprising, and which were artificially created by the Semirechensk regional Cheka, with the aim of provoking, and then destroying unreliable elements. It is possible that many of these groups did not exist at all, and the stories about them were invented by Chekists, after mass repressions against Cossacks in the villages, in order to justify their actions.

The first officers' underground group about which there is information is the organisation of the former brigade commander of the Semirechye army, Colonel L.V. Molostvov in Zharkent and Verniy counties. This group was quickly uncovered by the Cheka, and its members were shot.

It seems that did really exist another underground organisation formed by *Starshina* S.E. Boyko, who had served in the regional military enlistment office, alongside a group of officers. Boyko had commanded a sotnia in the 2nd Semirechensk Cossack



Regiment in Persia, had gone to China with Ataman Ionov in 1918, and in the Northern Semirechye had commanded the Priiliy Cossack Regiment. Having surrendered to the mercy of the victors in Kopal, Boyko, along with other officers, was amnestied and as a specialist²⁸ was sent to work in the regional military registration and enlistment office. Driving around the villages of the region, Boyko saw the consequences of the destructive work of the Bolsheviks and the growing discontent with the Soviet government not only among the Cossacks, but the Russian population as well, including Red Army soldiers. The new government, after the defeat of Whites on the Northern Semirechensk Front, decided to bring to its side the *inorodtsy*²⁹ – Kirghiz, Kazakhs, Taranchi, Uighurs and Dungans.³⁰ Flirting with them, and trying to build cadres in their ranks, it confiscated land from the Russian population, as "colonialists", and handed over to the peoples "oppressed under the Tsarist regime". Many *inorodtsy* began to join the RCP(b)³¹ and were given leading posts in the region, but most of all the peasants were alarmed by an attempt to create national units from among the Muslim population. With the incessant requisitions of grain, in the now resettled villages, this served as a pretext for the Verniy garrison's revolt in June 1920. And although it was suppressed, with the aid of the very same Muslim units, the fermentation among the Russian population continued.

Under these conditions, Boyko knocked together a strong underground organisation, according to some estimates reaching a membership of 660 people. Branches operated in the *stanitsas* of Nadezhdinskaya, Talgar, Bolshoi Almaty and Zhalanash, as well as in some peasant villages. In Verniy itself, alongside Boyko, it was also headed by Captain Alexandrov, formerly of the Annenkov Black Hussar Regiment, Captain Kuvshinov, Staff Captain Voronov and Lieutenants Pokrovsky and Sergeychuk. They were able to contact Dutov in China and develop a detailed plan for the uprising in Verniy, Zharkent and the southern villages. At the same time, Dutov was to invade from Xinjiang and, together with the rebels, clear the area of the Bolsheviks.

The activities of the former Annenkovites did not go unnoticed by the Cheka. A Bolshevik agent was placed in the group, and in the autumn of 1920, on the eve of the planned rising, Boyko and his headquarters were arrested. Another wave of terror swept through the villages, during which 1,800 people were repressed. Some village squads managed to resist the Bolsheviks, but the forces were unequal and the rebellious Cossacks had to go into the mountains, or join Colonel Sidorov's detachment and go abroad. The cleansing of the villages continued until April of the following year. Boyko and his associates were taken to Tashkent and shot in June 1921.

²⁸ a reference presumably to employment as a *voenspets*, whereby the Red Army employed former Tsarist soldiers for their technical skills.

²⁹ aliens, a special legal status that existed in Tsarist Russia for some local peoples of non-Russian origin, who had different rights and were administered separately.

³⁰ A Muslim people, originally of Chinese stock.

³¹ The (Bolshevik) Party



In November 1920, a rebellion of the Red Army garrison broke out in the Naryn fort, headed by the amnestied officers Demchenko and Kiryanov. They succeeded in destroying Soviet power in Naryn and launched an attack on Bishkek, but when confronted with a Soviet Special Purpose regiment³², the rebels were forced to retreat back to Naryn and then to China. In November 1920 the local Cheka reported on the discovery of another underground organisation, that of Colonel Nilov, in the area of Lake Balkhash.

Among the Cossacks who emigrated, the most active in the struggle against the Bolsheviks were the Orenburg Ataman Dutov and the commander of the Semirechensk partisan detachment, Colonel Sidorov. Dutov, who settled in Suidun, arranged a more or less tolerable life for his squadron thanks to remittances from the Far East. He established good relations with Jen-Sheu-Shek (military governor) of the Ili District of Xinjiang, linked with underground organizations in Semirechye, contacted the Basmachi commander Irgash in Fergana, and tried to unite under his command all the White forces in Western China. His intended aim was to gather a fairly strong detachment in the area of Gulja, to somehow arm it and strike at Zharkent, while at the same time raising an uprising in the Semirechye. It is possible he was motivated by the insurrections of the Red Army garrisons in Verniy and Naryn. And who knows what the Ataman of the Orenburg Cossacks might have done if it were not for his tragic death at the hands of Red terrorists on 6 February 1921

Colonel Tkachev assumed command of the troops in Suidun, Mazar and Gimpan after Dutov's death, soon replaced by Colonel Gerbov. But neither of them were able to prevent the detachment from dispersing – some of the Cossacks went to Bakich in Chuguchak, some went to the Far East: and from those who remained in Xinjiang, leadership was assumed by Dutov's chief of staff, Colonel Pavel Petrovich Papengut. The latter was to play a prominent role in the political history of Xinjiang and the White emigration in the 1930's, and also die tragically at his post.

Colonel Sidorov, formally submitting to Annenkov, found himself in the same area as Dutov and established good business relations with him. Having a mobile, efficient and organised detachment of Semirechensk Cossacks, who knew the terrain perfectly and had close ties with the local population, he terrified the Soviet authorities in the border areas. Suddenly appearing from the mountains, or from the thickets along the Ili River, the *Sidorovets* destroyed Soviet institutions in villages and towns and attacked the units and men of the Red Army, before suddenly disappearing before the enemy had time to recover and organize a chase.

When the Cheka began a large-scale purge of the Semirechensk villages in the autumn of 1920, after the destruction of the Boyko organisation, new refugees began to appear in China, and Sidorov decided that the time had come to act. In late 1920, he headed a raid into the territory of the RSFSR³³ and, breaking through the border defences, went out to the Cossack villages. The Reds sent their most manoeuvrable

³² i.e. a ChON regiment, of confirmed Communists, one of the most reliable units the Bolsheviks could send.

³³ Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (the USSR was only formed at the end of 1922).



and reliable unit — the Dungan regiment of *KomKav*³⁴ Masanchi – against his detachment. A battle took place in the Zhalanash region. The communists threw in reinforcements to help Masanchi, and the colonel had to withdraw. On the Akkent road near Zharkent, the Bolsheviks tried to encircle and destroy the detachment, but the Cossacks broke through and were able to reach Chinese territory. Despite the fact that the campaign ended in failure, and it was not possible to fan the flames of revolt in Semirechye, the Colonel did not think of laying down arms.

In 1921 the position of the White emigrants to China deteriorated significantly. The Chinese stopped recognizing the old Russian consuls, so in May 1920 consul Lyuba, who had done so much for the Whites, left Gulja to go East and in November of the same year Consul Dolbezhev left Chuguchak, so the Russian refugees no longer had anywhere to seek protection. In 1921 trade missions of the RSFSR opened in the cities of Xinjiang, including Gulja, and Cheka agents were able to operate under their banner. The capture of Urga, and the expulsion of the Chinese from there, by Lieutenant-General Baron Ungern, made the Chinese authorities become very suspicious of the White Russians in Xinjiang. Now, in order to avoid arrest, partisans had to hide from both the Chinese authorities and Soviet agents.

It seems that initially Sidorov was subordinate to Dutov's successor, Colonel Gerbov, who tried to coordinate the actions of several White detachments of Cossacks and Alasha in the Semirechye and on the Russo-Chinese border. Gerbov in the spring of 1921 had under his command about 3,050 sabres.

A large and well-trained detachment under Colonel Belyanin, a native of Uch-Aral who knew the area well, acted in the Lepsinsk district and the Selke and Chulak passes. In his detachment, according to various estimates, were from 500 to 1,000 men, mainly local Alasha Kazakhs under the leadership of Russian officers. At one time Dutov still pinned high hopes on Belyanin's detachment. He proposed to move the Orenburg Ataman Regiment, under the command of Colonel E.D. Savin, from Chuguchak to join with it, go to the villages and raise an uprising among the Lepsinsk Cossacks, to gain a foothold and wait for the approach of the main forces of Bakich from Chuguchak and Dutov from Suidun. For various reasons, Savin did not connect with Belyanin, remaining in Chuguchak. In the valley of the Bortala River, focusing on Soviet territory, there was a 500 sabre detachment of Captain Kozlov.

Colonel Belyanin was taken by the Chekists during a campaign in Semirechye, along with several of his officers, and by May 1921 his detachment was defeated and some left for China. Belyanin himself was killed in Soviet captivity.

Throughout 1921, small detachments of the *Esauls* Ostroukhov, Martemyanov and Averyanov made raids onto the Russian side of the border. They probed the frontier, scouted and tried to hide property and weapons before withdrawing.

³⁴ Cavalry Commander



Finally, the Soviet authorities decided to do away with the White forces remaining in Xinjiang and the Siberian rebels from the People's Division, who had broken through into the Tarbagatai district of the RSFSR. In agreement with the Chinese, they moved Red Army units to Chuguchak in May 1921, under V.G. Klementyev. And although the main forces of General Bakich were able to escape to the northeast, to the Altai District, about 1,200 White Guards and refugees were taken prisoner by the Reds in Chuguchak, including two former brigade commanders, Major-General Yarushin and Colonel Vinogradsky. All of them were taken back to Soviet territory, and their subsequent fate is unknown, but it is likely many were shot. It seems that among these unfortunates there were many Semirechensk Cossacks.

After Dutov's murder (February 1921), the departure to the east and subsequent the arrest of Annenkov by the Chinese (March 1921) and the defeat of Bakich (autumn 1921), Colonel Sidorov was the only major White leader in Western China who actively tried to fight the Reds (Shcherbakov remained passive). In order to continue to conspire, he dismissed the rumours of his death and went into hiding. Under a false name, the colonel began working in a small forge in Gulja. This forge became the underground headquarters of those White Guards who did not accept the new government.

Colonel Sidorov began to develop a detailed plan for the invasion of Soviet territory from Gulja and starting an uprising of Cossacks and peasants. The situation in Semirechye inspired him with hopes of success, and although by the end of 1921 the peasant unrest in the countryside had subsided, a strong discontentment with the policies of the Soviet authorities persisted. As noted above, the Soviet policy of using local *inorodtsy* cadres rather than ethnic Russians, and the resulting increased political and economic pressure on the latter caused particular indignation. In 1921, for the sake of the *inorodtsy*, even the centre of the region was renamed from Verniy³⁵ to Alma-Ata.

A plan for a campaign in Soviet Russia finally matured with Sidorov by mid 1922. He assumed that the Chinese general Yi Taiju, the former commander of the Manchurian Brigade of the Semirechensk Army, would take part in this operation. And Taiju, a former commandant of the Kure fortress, did in fact agree to participate, and seems he even got acceptance from Annenkov, visiting him in Urumqi prison. On a signal from Sidorov, Taiju was to disarm the Chinese garrison of Kure with his men, seize the local arsenal, in which was kept all the weapons seized from the Annenkov and Dutov units (several guns, 80 machine guns, 8,000 rifles, etc.), and then use that to equip Sidorov's Cossacks. Together, they were to cross the border and take Zharkent, whose garrison was weak at the time, according to intelligence. Transforming the city into a base for the rebel army, it was intended that a campaign would be started in Semirechye, raising local Cossacks and peasants to fight. The total size of the detachment at the initial stage was estimated at about 10,000.

³⁵ Verniy can be translated as "loyal" or "faithful", so it would be particularly galling to see it changed.



However, once more the Whites underestimated the work of the Soviet special services. Kasimkhan Mukhamedov – a former *praporshchik* of his detachment who had lost confidence in the colonel, had deserted and was recruited the Cheka as early as 1920 – organised an assassination attempt. He misinformed Sidorov about the arrival in Gulja of envoys from the Fergana Basmachi leader Kurshiramat, whom the colonel been waiting for some time. At the first meeting Sidorov came with security and Mukhamedov dared not do anything. He explained the lack of Kursirymat's envoys by the fact that, having seen many people in the house, they were afraid to enter, and asked a new meeting without the security detail. Unfortunately, Sidorov trusted his former lieutenant too much and, agreeing to a new meeting, was stabbed to death in Mukhamedov's house on the night of 15 August 1922. Mukhamedov and another agent, Ersa Yusufkhodzhayev, having made certain the demise of the colonel, leapt into the saddle and fled to the border. An attempt by a group of Cossacks to overtake the murderers was not crowned with success. Having crossed the border and penetrated into Zharkent, they no longer found Mukhamedov there, as he had been hastily sent by the GRU deep into Soviet territory.

So, before he reached forty, one of the most outstanding and valiant Cossack commanders died, trying in spite of everything to fight the Communists who had seized his country. And although Sidorov was not a Cossack by birth (he came from St. Petersburg provincial nobility), it was he who was able to unite and organize the Semirechensk Cossacks during the last stage of the struggle against the Bolsheviks, to infuse them with strength and faith in victory and become their undisputed military leader. After his death, the idea of organising a major campaign in Russia faded away. Seeing that Xinjiang was inundated with agents of the GRU, and not awaiting for the fates of Dutov and Sidorov, the Semirechensk Ataman, Major-General Shcherbakov, moved eastwards with a small detachment of Cossack. Crossing the Gobi Desert, he fell ill with typhus and died in the city of Xu-Jo on 15 September 1922. Some of the Cossacks of his detachment reached Shanghai, where a small Semirechensk Cossack village was formed.

While speaking of the participation of the Semirechensk Cossacks in the Civil War, it is worthwhile to mention that some of Annenkov's Life Ataman Regiment fought in the White Primorye in 1922. It is likely that there were a lot of *Semirekov* among in the Ataman unit. This detachment, under the command of Colonel P.D. Ilariev, having crossed all of China, arrived in April 1922 in Primorye. There it fought the Reds under the name of the Annenkov *Divizion*³⁶ until November. On 2 November 1922, the *divizion* crossed the Russo-Chinese border alongside the main forces of the Zemstvo Government and was interned near the city of Hunchun. The number in the detachment was small – 287 bayonets on 1 September 1922. Additionally in Vladivostok, there were former members of the 1st Siberian Cossack Regiment, under General F.L. Glebov, which included 35 more Annenkovites, although it is difficult to say if any were *Semirekov*.

³⁶ A *divizion* is a unit larger than a squadron or company but smaller than a regiment. A battalion, in the infantry.



With Soviet power firmly on its feet in Semirechye after the elimination of all its enemies, in the early 1920's there was some "letting go of the reins". Then, with the beginning of collectivization, a ferocious process to destroy all potential enemies, real and imaginary, was resumed. In 1928, in the Zhetysu³⁷ province (in the former Semirechensk region), unrest swept through the Cossack villages, associated with the taking of grain. The arrests started again. During the period of collectivisation, not only Cossacks, but also masses of Russian peasants – the previously irreconcilable enemies of the Cossacks – were dispossessed and deported from their homeland. From Semirechye and neighbouring regions there was another exodus to Xinjiang, and in some places there were again attempts to raise the banner of rebellion. The last known attempt to defeat the Communists by armed struggle in eastern Kazakhstan was an April 1932 attack on the Matveyevski border outpost in the Altai. Some former members of General Bakich's Orenburg corps took part in this action. It is not known whether they were Orenburgers, Siberians, *Semirekov*, or simply Russian peasants who realized the whole destructiveness of the new system.

The Soviet government methodically for years destroyed even the memory of the Cossack Semirechye, erasing the original names of villages, towns and cities from geographical maps. In 1968, the last Cossack settlement which had the official name "*stanitsa*" – Issykskaya which became the city of Issyk, disappeared from the map of Semirechye. The current authorities of Kazakhstan, continuing the policy of the Communists, distort historical facts, and erase from people's memory everything connected not only with the Cossacks, but with the presence of the Russians in that land. Modern Semirechye has completely changed its ethnic look – in the former villages there is a different way of speaking, and not only fewer and fewer Cossacks but fewer Russians of any sort are found in them.

³⁷ Zheytsu and Semirechye translate as "seven rivers" in Kazakh and Russian respectively. The modern Kazakh province of Zheytsu is not the as the Tsarist Semirechye however, being slightly smaller.



Appendix 1

Many of the places have changed name since the Russian Civil War. I have left places in the original but the following list may help you find them on a modern map.

1920s

Abakumovka

Ak-Ichke

Akmolinsk

Andreyevka

Gimpan

Chuguchak

Chundzha

Gavrilovka

Glinkovka

Kolpakovka

Konstantinovka

Kopal

Kuldzha

Kure

Lepsinsk

Lyubovinskaya

Malaya Almaty

Nadezhdinskaya

Osinovka

Przhevalsk

Sergiopol

Semipalatinsk

Sofiyskaya

Suidun

Uch-Aral

Uspenovka

Verniy, Vernyy, Verny

Modern

Zhansügirov?

Tselinnoye

Astana

Kabanbay

Bole or Bortala

Tacheng or Qoqak (China)

Shonzhy

Taldy-Kurgan

Glinovka

Zhansügirov?

Konzhar

Qapal

Gulja

Huiyuan (China)

Lepsy (by the Chinese border, not the northern Lepsy)

Kaskelen

Now a suburb of Almaty city

Issyk or Esik

Terekty

Karakol (Kyrgyzstan)

Ayagoz

Semey

Talgar

Shuiding or Huocheng (China)

Usharal

Bibakan

Almaty (previously Alma-Ata)



Appendix 2

Cossack	Russian	English
	Polkovnik	Colonel
Voiskovoi Starshina	Pod-polkovnik	Lieutenant Colonel
Esaul (or Yesaul)	Kapitan	Captain
Pod-Esaul (or Pod-Yesaul)		Shtabs-Kapitan Staff Captain
Sotnik	Poruchik	Lieutenant
Khorunji	Pod-poruchik	Second lieutenant
	Kornet in cavalry	Cornet
Pod-Khurunji	Pod-Praporshchik	Warrant Officer
	Praporshchik	Ensign

Appendix 3

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