

Tactical Lessons of the Civil War

A Study of the Tactics of the Red Army in the Struggle against Kolchak and in the Far East

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Pygmy Wars Introduction

As with all my translations, this is a quick pass to get the overall sense, and should not be relied on for exact detail.

I have left the original footnotes. Any I have added are marked "PW".

There are some issues with place names, as many have slightly different spellings from the text, either because they were wrongly recorded at the time or due to later changes, so expect minor variations between the text, the maps in the text and modern maps.

The Author

The author was born in Latvia as Johans Indriķis Mārtiņš Ēķis, or Johann Henrich Martin Eiche in the German. However he seems to have dropped the Johans, and as he is famous for his time in Russia his name generally appears in a variety of transliterations from the Cyrillic: I favour Henrikh Eikhe, but Wikipedia has him as Genrich Eiche, for example.¹

In the First World War he was drafted and sent to the Peterhof warrant officer school. After graduating in 1915, he was sent to the front. He rose to staff captain.

Already quite left-leaning, in November of 1917 he was elected a member of the Council of Soldiers' Deputies for the 10th Army and was on the board for the formation of the Red Guard. In March 1918 he volunteered for the Red Army.

In August 1919 he was sent to the Eastern Front in command of a regiment. By April 1919 he was commanding the 26th Rifle Division. He became famous for a daring raid deep into the rear of the White armies during Zlatoust Operation in June-July 1919, followed by victory over General Voytsekhovskiy.

From November 1919 to January 1920 he was commander of the 5th Army.

From March 1920 to April 1921 he was Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army of the Far Eastern Republic.

Once the last White vestiges were removed from Soviet territory he was recalled to Belarus, which was the scene of considerable unrest. After that he spent a short time in charge of operations against the Basmachi in Ferghana.

From 1923 he worked in civilian jobs, and it was then that he wrote this work, based on his personal experiences in Siberia and using documents from the 5th Army.

He was rounded up during the purge of prominent Latvians in 1938. He spent time in NKVD prison, then the Gulag, then internal exile. Rehabilitated in 1954 he returned to military historical work.

¹ Note that Henrikh is not to be confused with his more famous cousin Robert Eikhe. Robert was a political operative, rather than military. He was politically active in Russia from early in the revolutions, became a Stalin loyalist and rose to be a Politburo member. He was killed in the purge of Latvians – suitably in his case, as he had personally already sent many thousands of innocent people to their deaths.



Original Introduction

The experience of our Civil War is valuable.

Among a certain circle of military-scientific workers there is a biased attitude towards the experience of the Civil War, a lack of understanding of its significance for future conflicts. These workers consider the experience of the Western European theatre of war as almost the only one worthy of attention and study.

It goes without saying that the experience of the Imperialist First World War deserves the most careful study, since it provides examples of the mass application of modern military technology. It is also necessary to follow closely and reckon with the further tendencies in the development of the military training in the capitalist powers: it is primarily directed against the only proletarian state in the world. And in order to be able to fight the enemy, one must be well aware of its strengths, its methods of action, its military techniques and so be able to overcome them.

The successes of Socialist construction in the USSR has built a new basis for the defence of the Soviet Union, providing the military equipment and political stability of the Red Army. That army will be able to rely on advanced military technology in its defence of the Soviet state

Meanwhile, the 1918-1920 Civil War was fought with a reduced level of technology. All this, of course, speaks about the need to study the experience of the Civil War critically, but not about its low value.

The 1918-1920 Civil War was the first experience of the struggle of a proletarian state to defend its independence against the united forces of external and internal counter-revolution; the first experience of the construction of armed forces in a proletarian dictatorship. The proletarian civil wars of liberation will inevitably occur in all imperialist states, sooner or later, with their diversity of political, economic and geographical conditions. And while civil wars in such capitalist countries as Germany, France and England – with their dense network of communication routes, high population density and saturation of technology – will differ considerably from the conditions of the Civil War in the USSR, there will be many countries in which their civil war will take place in conditions tactically similar to one or another theatre of the diverse 1918-1920 Civil War (this is disregarding the political significance of the experience of the Civil War).

Not only that. Any future war of the USSR against imperialist intervention may take place in the most diverse political, economic and geographical conditions. The Chinese generals' Manchurian adventure warns us that we are threatened with war all along the immense borders of the Soviet nation. Moreover, wars of proletarian liberation against imperialism can combine with wars of national liberation and create the most bizarre interweaving of conditions of arms, training and ratios of troop strength, which can create the most diverse mix of military equipment and troops in any section of the proletarian state's liberation war. All this shows that that the purely tactical experience of the 1918-1920 Civil War is of great importance, accustoming our command staff to a flexibility in their tactical thinking.

Using our experiences, drawn from the Red Army's struggle against Kolchak, with those methods and instructions suitable for other conditions – and being aware of the controversial nature of our tactical judgements in a number of cases – we nevertheless risk offering our work to the attention of the Red Army command staff, believing that the richness of the tactical episodes will contribute to its flexibility and versatility of tactical thinking,



Scope of the Study

The aim of the study is to show how Red Army acted in the very diverse conditions of the Civil War.

That determines its scope. We did not aim to concentrate only on the unusual – the different things bound to happen to our troops for a number of objective and subjective reasons.

Those unusual situations arose, first of all, from the desire and ability of our troops to use the particular conditions they found themselves in. Thus disclosing the particularities of each military operation had to form a base of our research. Without this our actions could not only be misunderstood, but at times would appear to be deeply erroneous.

While identifying the particular nature of the situations and studying the actions of our soldiers, we did not set ourselves the task of covering the entire experience of our struggle with exhaustive completeness in all details. We limited ourselves only to identifying the essence of a particular situation and what were the basic, main, and at the same time typical, actions of our units.

Tactical actions are most vividly manifested in small combat episodes, which form the core of our study. But is realistically impossible to define any actions as typical in the Civil War solely by analysing a number of combat episodes. We had to resort to certain generalisations even before that.

That method of generalisation poses a danger to the objectivity and scientific validity of the research because of the tendency towards forming abstract schemes and formulations. This is something we have endeavoured to avoid.

The difficulties in this matter were large due to the fact that we had to work from primary sources. The weak, and often extremely poor, work by our military, especially in the lower headquarters created almost insurmountable obstacles in this respect, due to the lack of written materials on the state of the troops and their actions. Often a characteristic combat episode cannot be used for research purposes simply because the combat reports or bulletins are incomplete, hastily compiled, and – in the military sense – illiterate: not accurately recording the details of the episode.

Regardless of this, we did not consider it necessary to support each episode we used with an extract from the corresponding orders and operational or intelligence reports.

The primary document themselves require a critical attitude. So a report, which is poorly written in military respects and quite brief, received a day or two late, may reveal truly heroic deeds by our troops rather more often than the lengthy reports of some of our headquarters – which rhetorically proclaim that the enemy attacks were “uninterrupted” during the day, that the men fought “persistent” and “fierce” battles, and captured masses of prisoners.

We therefore considered it quite reasonable to abandon the principle of justifying each episode and each conclusion by reference to the relevant operational bulletin or order. We considered it more expedient and quite sufficient to confine ourselves to a precise indication of the date and place of the event and the names of the units in action. Today, while the participants of the described episodes are still alive, this provides quite sufficient evidence of the objectivity and reliability of the reported facts and the correctness of their presentation.

Our aim was not to compile a systematic book on Civil War tactics. The way has not yet been sufficiently prepared for that task: there is insufficient material on the experiences of the Civil War – both in general and in studies of individual aspects of the methods of our units.

The “Tactical Lessons of the Civil War” is merely a preliminary processing of material on the actions of the Red Army in the Civil War in the struggle against Kolchak and in the Far East.



Chapter I – Summary of Forces and Means

Our troops

Organisation

The organisation of our units was based on the regulations for rifle divisions approved by the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Republic in November 1918, commonly known as Regulation 220.

The new organisation was based on the following two main provisions.

The highest permanent unit was the rifle division. The drafters envisaged that they would replace the former corps, which were mainly strategic units. The regulations envisaged the unification of all the combat arms in a rifle division in the hands of a single commander, with enough units and with a composition that would enable it to successfully fulfil operational (strategic) tasks. It would be able to fight independently and solve tactical problems on any given battlefield.

The second basic concept was the application of the so-called “triangular” system of troop organisation. It envisaged all military units would be made up so that three lower units constituted the next higher unit.

According to Regulation 220, the rifle regiments of a division had the following structure. Three rifle platoons and one machine-gun platoon made up a company. Three companies and one machine-gun detachment² made up a battalion. There were to be three battalions in the regiment. In addition, the regiment was to have: 1) a regimental machine-gun detachment; 2) a mortar detachment; 3) a sapper detachment; 4) a foot scout detachment; 5) a mounted scout detachment; 6) a gas detachment; 7) a commander’s detachment; 8) a regimental dressing detachment; 9) an administrative unit and supply detachment; 10) a veterinary unit; 11) a music detachment; 12) a communication detachment; 13) a regimental school and, 14) a regimental headquarters detachment.

Three rifle regiments were grouped into a rifle brigade. In addition to the rifle regiments, the brigade included: 1) a light artillery *divizion*³ consisting of three batteries, each of four 3" (76-mm) guns; 2) a sapper company; and 3) a communications company.

In addition to the rifle brigades, the division was to include: 1) a cavalry *divizion* of two squadrons; 2) an armoured unit; 3) an aviation *divizion*; 4) a balloon *divizion*; 5) an engineer battalion; 6) a communications battalion; and 7) artillery, made up of (a) two howitzer *divizioni*, each of three 4-gun batteries; (b) two heavy *divizioni*, each of three 4-gun batteries; (c) a light *divizion*, of three 37-mm batteries; (d) an AA *divizion*, of four 4-gun batteries; (e) a horse battery.

The rifle divisions were subordinated directly to an Army.

According to Regulation 220, the numbers in a rifle regiment and rifle division were to be as follows:

	Commanders	Soldiers	Horses	Guns	Machine guns
Rifle Regiment	106	3 581	581	–	42
Rifle Division	1 657	56 668	24 338	116	382

² I have use “detachment” for *komanda*, sometimes translated as “team”, and generally about company size. PW.

³ A *divizion* is equivalent to a battalion for artillery, but has no exact translation when used for cavalry, so I have retained it in the transliterated form. PW.



Combat Numbers

The reorganisation of the troops of the 5th Army was to be completed according to the regulations in the second half of December 1918. The troops of the "Right-bank Group"⁴ were to form the 26th Rifle Division, and "Left-bank Group" was to become the 27th Rifle Division.

Owing to incomplete manpower and limited material, our divisions and regiments never reached the regulation figures. Their actual numbers were:

Unit	Date	Men	Horses	Machine guns	Guns
26th Rifle Division	1 May 1919	8 585	1 452	81	26
" " "	15 October 1919	11 544	4 004	140	29
" " "	20 March 1920	13 146	5 164	160	24
27th Rifle Division	15 July 1919	10 914	2 540	164	10
" " "	15 October 1919	13 015	4 463	135	24
" " "	20 March 1920	15 481	5 972	312 ⁵	24
35th Rifle Division ⁶	15 October 1919	12 981	3 300	71	16
" " "	20 March 1920	10 169	4 945	145	19

As can be seen from the table, the numbers in our units was a long way from those envisaged by the regulations. The shortfall in manpower was up to 80%, in machine guns up to 65% and in artillery up to 80%.

Obviously, with such a significant shortage of personnel, it was impossible to form even cadres for all the units and rear establishments envisaged in the structure of a rifle division. Naturally, only those units and institutions that could not be done without were created. The actual conditions of combat in practice made some redundant, and the lack of men forced us to abandon the formation of some combat units, but mainly rear units and institutions.

The regimental mortar, gas and sapper detachments were not created. Regimental schools were often absent.

In view of the limited material resources, the following were not formed at all: 1) horse batteries; 2) anti-aircraft *divisions*; 3) balloon detachments; 4) light gun *divisions* and 5) armoured units.

For the same reason (lack of material) not all divisions had the statutory number of light and heavy artillery batteries, and the batteries did not always have the statutory number of guns. Machine-gun units, i.e. machine-gun platoons for rifle companies and machine-gun detachments (battalion and regimental) were in the same situation.

To supply a full rifle division required a colossal number of rear facilities and, above all, wagons. Naturally, with an 80% shortfall there was no need for such a rear. In fact, in relation to the regulation number of men and horses, the rear was kept less well manned than the combat units of the divisions.

⁴ The reference is to the banks of the Volga River at Kazan, facing downstream, so the right bank is the southern.

⁵ The presence of 312 machine guns of the 27th Rifle Division on 20 March 1920 is not indicative of normal numbers. It is explained by the fact that when the enemy retreated from Omsk, it left a colossal number of trophies along the railway line, which were used by our troops.

⁶ The 35th RD had only two brigades.



The combat composition of our units can be seen in the following table.

	26th Rifle Division				27th Rifle Division				35th Rifle Division		
	Brigade			Div.	Brigade			Div.	Brigade		Div.
	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	1	2	Total

	at 1 May 1919				at 5 May 1919				at 1 June 1919		
Regiments	3	3	3	9	–	2	3	5	3	3	6
Companies	15	16	15	46	–	12	18	30	24	18	42
Bayonets	1 414	1 654	1 463	4 531	–	1 484	2 568	3 752	4 705	2 385	7 540
MGs	33	17	29	81	–	19	45	68	68	42	110
Guns	–	–	–	26	–	–	–	12	4	4	8
Sabres	–	–	–	113	–	–	–	200	–	–	–

	at 15 July 1919										
Regiments	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	6
Companies	18	18	21	57	18	18	18	54	9	6	15
Bayonets	1 102	1 543	1 836	4 481	1 960	3 220	2 345	7 525	3 158	1 059	4 217
MGs	37	35	40	118	50	38	72	164	67	46	113
Guns	–	–	–	27	–	–	–	10	–	–	18
Sabres	–	–	–	248	–	–	–	277	–	–	87
Airplanes	–	–	–	6	–	–	–	5	–	–	–

	at 15 October 1919										
Regiments	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	6
Companies	9	9	9	27	9	9	9	27	9	9	18
Bayonets	1 959	2 122	2 000	6 081	2 292	1 830	2 897	7 019	2 006	1 691	3 697
MGs	41	45	52	140	58	24	49	135	44	23	71
Guns	–	–	–	29	–	–	–	24	–	–	16
Sabres	–	–	–	140	–	–	–	394	–	–	148
Airplanes	–	–	–	6	–	–	–	5	–	–	–

Notes:

- 1) There is no information for the 1st Brigade of the 27th Infantry Division on 5 May.
- 2) The “Division Total” column includes machine guns from the cavalry *divisions*.



Reinforcement was done in two main ways:

- 1) March companies coming from the Army reserve regiments, formed from those mobilised, men returning from Army hospitals, and former soldiers of Kolchak's army who had surrendered to our side. The last category was a very significant percentage.
- 2) The infusion into the units of volunteers, Red partisans and mobilised men who arrived at the units directly from the assembly points.

The reinforcements did not arrive regularly, but were more frequent when we were preparing for major operations. Thus in the middle of April 1919, i.e. on the eve of the general transition of the troops of the Southern Group to the counter-offensive, the divisions received considerable numbers of march unit reinforcements sent from the internal districts of the Republic and the reserve regiments of the 5th Army. The next large replenishment was received in the first half of October 1919, i.e. again on the eve of our transition to the counter-offensive. A mobilisation carried out in the front line zone gave about 24,000 men within two weeks.

The situation with the recruitment of commanders was very bad. Until the second half of 1919 the replenishment of the command staff from the rear was done at random. Middle and senior commanders would arrive by themselves. The bulk of junior command staff (for squads and platoons) were Red Army soldiers who had had some combat experience in the world war. Their theoretical training was, of course, very weak.

Regimental schools and brigade instruction companies provided as much help as possible in training the commanders, but not all divisions had them. The middle commanders were recruited from the Red Army, as well as former NCOs and officers of the old army. The commanders of battalions, regiments and brigades and the division leaders were in most cases former officers with experience in the Russo-German war.

The composition of the staffs (regiments, brigades and divisions) was random, especially at first. People with experience of staff work in the Russo-German war (adjutants of regiments) would only rarely be found in staff positions in our divisions. People with higher military education (general staff) or with experience of staff work in division during the German war were completely absent from our Army staffs. The random men selected – untrained and often poorly suited for staff work – could not but affect the performance and quality of work of the headquarters.⁷

Even the best staffed Army headquarters was powerless to succeed if it could not rely on the lower headquarters and commanders to understand and take into account the full importance of the work the headquarters did in the preparation and conduct of operations.

In this sense our situation was very unsatisfactory. With the units constantly moving and fighting daily, it was extremely difficult to obtain from them all the information which a headquarters requires to do its work. "It is unacceptable to make excuses for the lack of paperwork and justify that by the lack of cavalry," was an order sent by one of our brigades regarding the failure to provide the units with reports, and that can serve as a characteristic of the conditions in which the headquarters had to work.

Headquarters work took on a very peculiar character. It consisted of the collection and processing of information and reports received from the units and then transmitting that information in the form of timely operational and intelligence reports to the higher headquarters. As a rule, the development of the plans and the preparations for any operation were beyond the influence of the

⁷ It should be noted that the first Red General Staff officers, who arrived at the front in the second half of April 1919, rendered our troops very valuable assistance, becoming assistant chiefs of staff for the divisions and brigades, as well as brigade chiefs of staff, and put a lot of knowledge, skill and energy into their work.



division HQ, often including issues it was directly in charge of. This method was determined by the usual situation we faced. Widely-spread units, poor communications, and rapidly changing situations forced brigade and division commanders to go forward, closer to the troops, to lead directly. They were usually accompanied by two or three staff from the HQ operational and intelligence departments, headed by one of the senior assistants to the chief of staff. This group made up the so-called field headquarters, where all the operational work was concentrated. The other staff remained in the rear and was only a transfer point between the division or brigade field HQ and the higher HQ with regard to operational matters. So one part of the headquarters (the field HQ) concentrated all operational and intelligence issues, while the other part (the HQ proper) was in charge of administrative and routine issues, as well as the rear.⁸

We will not deal here with questions of controlling the units or means of communications, since these are dealt with in detail in Chapter II, on March-Manoeuvre, and in Chapter III, on Combat.

Weapons

The rifle units were armed with 3-line rifles of the 1891 infantry pattern,⁹ most of them without bayonets. Machine gun units were armed almost exclusively with Maxim and Colt machine guns. There were a few light machine-guns;¹⁰ we had them only if we captured them.

The machine-gun units and the cavalry were armed partly with carbines, partly with dragoon rifles. Sabres were in short supply. Regiments almost always had a extra supply of rifles.

The small arms were in an unsatisfactory condition, as we used almost exclusively what was left over from the World War. The cleaning and inspection of rifles was not performed regularly and could not be done properly for a number of reasons (a lack of parts for disassembly and assembly, as well as cleaning, the lack of attention of junior commanders to this issue, the continuous nature of operations, the short durations of daily rest, etc.). There were no combat checks of rifles, nor inspections by armourers. The machine-gun teams however cared for and maintained their weapons at a incomparably better level.

Calibre	26th Rifle Division			27th Rifle Division			35th Rifle D.	
	1919			1919			1919	
	1 May	15 July	15 Oct	1 May	15 July	15 Oct	15 July	15 Oct
76 mm field gun model 1902	18	23	23	17	4	22	10	8
122-mm field howitzer	2	-	3	4	4	-	-	4
122 mm field howitzer ¹¹	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4
152-mm field gun	2	2	2	-	-	-	4	-
107-mm long-range cannon	2	2	1	-	2	2	-	-
37-mm cannon	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

⁸ There were other methods, especially in the early days, when neither the main nor field staffs were in charge of operational matters at all, since all staff work began and ended with the regimental or brigade commander's field book, which he often kept personally.

⁹ Mosin-Nagant 7.62 mm (0.3 inch). PW.

¹⁰ That is the likes of Lewis guns or Chauchat. PW.

¹¹ This is described as a *mortira*, but that word was often used for what is generally described as a short barrelled howitzer, rather than a mortar as such. This may be the Schneider 1910 model, rather than the Krupp 1909 model for the previous line. PW



The artillery, which was part of the standard rifle divisions, had the number of guns in service shown in the table above. As can be seen, the main gun was the rapid-fire 76-mm field gun 1902 model.¹²

The material of the batteries was generally satisfactory, but were some guns whose barrels were so worn out that they could not fire further than two kilometres, even when set at the maximum range.

Tactical Training and the Influence of the Experience of the Imperialist War

The Red Army emerged, grew and strengthened its power throughout the armed struggle waged by the proletariat, of which it was the instrument.

Of course there could not have been any preliminary training of the soldiers for the Civil War. The cadres of our units were made up of participants in the Russo-German war. Thanks to this, the concepts and views, techniques and skills developed during the imperialist war were to form the basis for the tactics, replacing those of the peacetime training. But those bearers of tactical ideas and skills from the imperialist war could not but be influenced and affected by the new situation and the new conditions of march, manoeuvre and combat in the Civil War. The previous experience was undoubtedly valuable, but not always applicable. The weapons were the same, but their provision and density within our units was different. The tasks and goals of the war were different. The enemy was different. Finally – and this is the main thing – the soldiers of the new army – the ‘Red Army man’ – were different.

Until May 1919, only the previous army regulations were available as a guide. At the end of May the new provisional Red Army manuals were received. This does not mean, of course, that the issues of tactical training was resolved with that receipt. The new manuals were only a more or less successful revision of the old ones; they did not and could not give practical instructions for the actions of the troops in the conditions of the Civil War.

Nevertheless, those manuals played a very prominent role. With regulations now available to the units it was no longer necessary to give long instructions in combat orders concerning elementary concepts of providing security, assaults, combat, etc. It was possible to limit oneself to the need to be familiar with certain paragraphs of the regulations, as would be required in the forthcoming actions. This kind of requirement is very often found in orders after May 1919. The consequence of this was the development of a certain unity of views and actions among our units.

We do not wish to exaggerate either the importance of the fact that the troops received new regulations or the importance that orders required that they be absorbed, but we consider it necessary to note those factors undoubtedly had a noticeable impact on the development the tactical views and techniques for our troops.

Finally, it should be noted that while searching for methods and ways of action on the battlefield, a very important role was played, especially in the early days, by purely random and subjective decisions, which depended on the views, knowledge and skills of the commander who was to perform a given task.

The Influence of Political Elements on Tactics

The role and significance of morale factors and the revolutionary spirit of the troops in the Civil War will be discussed in Chapter V. Here we will confine ourselves to pointing out how the revolutionary spirit of the troops had a bearing on the tactics of our units.

¹² The Putilov gun was the standard field artillery piece of both sides in the Civil War. PW.



There is no doubt that in the psyche of both opponents, when considered from the point of view of the known properties of men (both as individuals and as a group), was not greatly different between the sides, but there was a major difference in the general political state and morale of the opponents.

Primarily it found its expression in the recruitment of our troops and in the general construction of the Red Army. Political departments, political-military commissars, political instructors,¹³ special departments, special-purpose units¹⁴ – all these were physical manifestations of the revolutionary spirit of the class army. At the same time, the creation of these bodies was intended to maintain and strengthen the revolutionary spirit in our troops. Often not connected directly, they always influenced the creation and strengthening of our units by their exceptional purposefulness and clarity in performing given tasks. They were not only organs of political class control, but also organs of troop management, of raising the combat effectiveness, and of maintaining and strengthening the mental firmness of our troops.

Finally, the activity of these bodies was not limited only to our troops. They were also aimed at the enemy and the local population, and in this respect their influence often directly affected the situation on the battlefield.

Supply

It is most expedient to consider the questions of supply for our units from the angle of provision of the various types of allowances.

The troops received food and forage from local means, except for some types of food that could not be obtained locally and that were delivered from rear area bases. This freed the active troops from one of the most keenly felt dependencies on the rear – and at the same time the most difficult with regard to volume and urgency. Due to this, the supply bodies were able to concentrate their efforts and attention on the other supplies issues from the rear. A daily allowance was set, of course, but we know that the soldiers were provided with the bulk of their diet above that norm thanks to being quartered in rich villages. Reinforced rations were also very often issued on the eve of major operations.

The clothing supply was in the worst situation. There were no uniforms. This led (at first) to men sometimes shooting at their own side. The basic issue was not, of course, to observe a precise uniform code, but primarily to provide the troops with uniforms that were appropriate to the climate of the area and the time of year. There was a major shortage of overcoats and boots. Because of the lack of these items, some of the soldiers, especially in winter, could not take part in combat and stayed with the transport column. An important role was played by stocks of uniforms captured from the enemy and supplied to our men.

The troops were relatively better supplied with ammunition pouches and haversacks.

The supply of ammunition was often disastrous. It is impossible to talk about compliance with any norms. One day the regiment might have 200 rounds per soldier. The next day, after a long firefight, there might be a few dozen left on hand, and nothing to replenish them with. Captured stocks played an extremely important role in this matter.

The provision of telephone and telegraph equipment was more satisfactory. As a study of this issue shows, the regiments had a minimum of 25-30 kilometres of telephone wire and 10-15 telephone sets. Brigade headquarters were linked with division headquarters by telegraph (Morse machine).

¹³ The *politruks*. These are often called “commissars”, but only higher level political agents were technically such. PW.

¹⁴ Such as the *ChON* – units raised from the most politically committed, generally from a workplace – although the reference here might include any special unit. PW.



Divisional HQs had communication with the Army HQs by Morse and Hughes (teleprinter). But the state of the telephone and telegraph equipment was unsatisfactory. Resupply from the rear and maintenance was very poor: captured property was also important in this matter.

Portable tools (shovels, picks, axes) were available in insufficient quantities. Right from the very beginning they were unevenly distributed among the regiments: there were units that had a full supply of tools, while its neighbouring regiments might have been very short. No redistribution was made.

Combat Capability

The transition to Regulation 220 created the organisational model for combat capability. We could not manage the units according to the new norms, but this does not detract from the importance of the reorganisation – improvisation was replaced by the construction of an armed body of revolutionary fighters, who could march and fight in accordance with the principles and requirements of military science.¹⁵

The supply and density of the material means for combat – absolute figures of available guns, machine guns, ammunition, etc. – was very low. It was their relative importance that was more important in their influence in a given battle, determining the combat effectiveness of any given unit. The degree of tactical training was determined by personal experience. Joint actions were learned on the march and under fire. The desire to achieve victory by creating a superiority in numbers and means manifested itself very clearly.

The organisational structure allowed a more skilful use of the available material and a better use of the manpower in the units to develop.

In this respect we were (at best) on an equal footing with the enemy; our fighting capacity as measured by the strength of our resistance and our fighting ability. Our basic superiority, however, lay in the field of class politics. War in this case was the most open and most acute form of class struggle, with arms in hand.

Obviously, all other things being equal, our units showed greater combat effectiveness due to the homogenous class structure, consciousness of class interests and understanding of the tasks and goals of the war. This was realised in the conditions of each operation and each battlefield thanks to the presence of the special political bodies, which displayed itself in their purposefulness, persistence and in exceptional endurance in achieving their tasks.

Wagons

Transport was constantly in short supply – there were not enough horses or wagons. This led to the need to use peasant carts on a large scale.¹⁶ The units' own wagons were of different models; they were used mainly as the combat wagons.¹⁷ Regimental wagons of the 2nd Class, those in the brigade supply departments and divisional transports consisted almost exclusively of peasant carts. There were far from sufficient caissons, even for the batteries, let alone the artillery parks, which were made up entirely of common wagons.

The use of peasant wagons, instead of units using dedicated transports, simplified the task of supply from the rear, giving at the same time great benefits to the units in terms of freedom of

¹⁵ The editors believe that there has been considerable fantasising on organisational issues and that in practice Regulation 220 only streamlined the matter somewhat.

¹⁶ In the context this means requisitioning wagons from the local area, along with their drivers (who would often come to ensure that their wagon was eventually returned). PW.

¹⁷ That is, the wagons remaining in the front line, bringing up ammunition supplies and taking away the wounded. PW.



manoeuvre and increased mobility. We will deal with this question in more detail in the chapter on March-Manoeuvre.

Rear

The deep rear was of very little relative importance economically, in the sense of providing material supplies.

The army had to subsist on the means it could find and create locally. The only exception was the supply of artillery.

With regard to other kinds of supply, as well as manpower reinforcements, the local area we occupied was primarily used. Each district we captured from the enemy increased our possibilities in this regard. The army not only provided for itself, but it supplied the deep rear – the country – with food, metal, coal, railway rolling stock, etc. at the expense of stocks captured from the enemy and at the expense of the economic resources of the occupied districts. The army's immediate rear area played a double role in this sense, supplying on the one hand the active units, and on the other hand the deep rear.

It was important that a stable political situation was maintained in the immediate rear of the active units, providing the troops with the opportunity to concentrate their forces and means exclusively on the fulfilment of combat tasks. This task was fulfilled very successfully with political and administrative measures of a class character. During our struggle with Kolchak there was no case of a withdrawal of troops from the front to ensure the political stability of the rear.

Our Opponent

Before proceeding to a consideration of our adversaries' armed forces, it must be pointed out that the following information is based only on the material which was collected and processed by our headquarters. This came from interviews with prisoners, reports from army intelligence and agents, intercepted orders, etc. We have no information about the state of our enemy's armed forces which is based entirely on documents and written materials from the enemy itself. This forces us to recognise that the information given is only approximate. It is nevertheless sufficient for the purposes of our study.

Our adversaries referred to in this study must be subdivided in strength and absolute importance into the following two categories:

- 1) The army of the "Supreme Ruler" Admiral Kolchak (including the troops of Ataman Semenov, Kolchak's successor);
- 2) The interventionists.

Kolchak's armed forces are of primary importance for this study. Accordingly, we will dwell in more detail on his army, only limiting ourselves to a general characterisation of the other opponents.

Organisation and Composition

The troops operating against us in Kolchak's armed forces were divided into three "Armies". Each Army consisted of two or three corps (sometimes called groups instead). The corps were made up of two to three infantry divisions and one or two cavalry brigades or divisions.

A White infantry division consisted of three or four regiments of infantry, each of three battalions. A battalion had four companies. In addition, divisions usually had a Jaeger battalion (four companies) and a cavalry *division* (2 squadrons) or a cavalry regiment (most often Cossack). The divisional artillery was combined into light and heavy artillery *divisions*.



Combat forces of the White Field Army facing the Red 5th Army

Only divisions permanently operating against the 5th Army (26th, 27th and 35th RDs) are given. Independent White units operating sometimes are not shown. The 4th Ufa, 8th Kama and 12th Urals IDs also operated against us in October 1919, but there is no information about their composition.

	20 April 1919						25 June 1919						1 October 1919					
	Regiments	Battalions	Bayonets	MGs	Guns	Sabres	Regiments	Battalions	Bayonets	MGs	Guns	Sabres	Regiments	Battalions	Bayonets	MGs	Guns	Sabres
4th Ufa ID	4	12	4 600	88	14	300	4	13	2 300	46	12	200	—	—	—	—	—	—
7th Urals ID	4	11	2 900	70	10	240	4	13	1 850	40	11	200	4	9	620	23	9	160
8th Prikama ID	3	9	3 200	63	13	*	4	13	2 900	40	11	500	—	—	—	—	—	—
11th Urals ID	3	10	2 600	58	7	0	3	7	1 300	15	6	0	5	9	1 290	36	12	120
12th Urals ID	4	13	3 760	74	6	*	4	11	2 250	34	10	500	—	—	—	—	—	—
Izhevski	2	6	2 200	34	4	*	2	2	600	20	5	150	4	15	1 950	9	8	160
1st Samara ID	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	1 400	22	10	*	3	5	570	21	7	400
3rd Simbirsk ID	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	8	1 450	25	8	250	3	5	640	19	6	100
13th Siberian ID	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	8	2 000	16	4	*	3	3	410	18	5	500
13th Kazan ID	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	8	1 800	34	11	200	3	6	490	25	5	120
6th Urals ID	2	5	1 400	21	6	*	2	5	950	16	5	150	—	—	—	—	—	—
Orenburg Cossack Brigade	3	—	—	18	2	2 000	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	8	4	500
Volga Cavalry Brigade	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	14	4	850	2	—	—	6	2	300

* There is no information, but there undoubtedly was some cavalry in these divisions.



A cavalry division consisted of four regiments of four or five squadrons each. A Cossack division had four regiments of five or six *sotnias* each. In addition, the Cossack division included: 1) a *plastun* horse¹⁸ *divizion* and 2) a *plastun* regiment. Separate Cossack (cavalry) brigades were made up of two regiments of four to five *sotnias* (squadrons) each. Horse batteries were present in all large cavalry formations, but their number varied from two batteries (8 guns) for each independent brigade to one battery per division.

In addition to the regular numbered divisions and brigades, the active army had a large number of independent units (Muslim Regiment, Carpatho-Russian Regiment, crusader units,¹⁹ green crescent unit,²⁰ etc.). They were formed for agitational and political purposes.

The combat composition of the enemy divisions acting against us is shown in the previous table.

The general numbers for Kolchak's armed forces at the end of June 1919 was:

	Divisions		Bayonets	Sabres	MGs	Guns	
	Infantry	Cavalry/ Cossack				Light	Heavy
Facing the troops of the eastern front 1	31	18.5	72 000	38 500	1 295	335	65
In front-line reserve	4	0.5	24 700	870	96	32	3
In the deep rear (not all fully armed or trained)	14	2	75 800	3 500	330	74	12
On internal fronts (Semirech'e)	3	4	15 200	12 000	146	52	10
Total	52	25	187 700	54 870	1 867	493	90

Facing the 5th Army	9	3	16 800	5 450	343	85	24
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Approximate numbers of combat units	48.5	25	163 000	54 870	1 800	462	90
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The table shows that Kolchak's forces had:

- 1) only about 60% of all combat-ready infantry and just under 75% of all cavalry in the active army, including the front reserve;
- 2) was about 25% cavalry among those combat-ready, reaching 29% of the available men on the Eastern Front;
- 3) internal fronts took away about 10% per cent of the infantry and just over 20% of the cavalry, for a total of 12.5% of the combat-ready men.

¹⁸ *Plastuns* were dismounted Cossacks. The term "horse" was almost invariably used to distinguish units combining foot and cavalry. PW.

¹⁹ Such as the Militia of the Holy Cross (Дружины Святого Креста) formed by those motivated to fight the Bolsheviks primarily as a fight for Christianity. There may have been as many as 6,000, formed in many small units. PW.

²⁰ The Muslim equivalent of the Militia of the Holy Cross. PW.



Various *Entente* troops,²¹ engaged in guarding the railways and located in rear garrisons, numbered up to eight infantry and one cavalry division. Their numbers were determined to be about 65,000 bayonets and 2,000 sabres with 106 machine guns, 62 light and 12 heavy guns.

In addition, there were two Japanese corps in Eastern Siberia and the Far East, with up to five infantry and one cavalry division, with about 55,000 bayonets, 2,500 sabres, 112 machine guns, 52 light and 12 heavy guns.

The core of Kolchak's troops consisted of volunteers, mostly former officers and Cossacks. The army was abundantly supplied with commanders from among the officers and generals of the Tsarist army.

The rank and file was recruited through mobilisation. An attempt to create a class army and mobilise the petty-bourgeoisie failed.

Officer schools of all branches of the army were set up to train the command staff.

Weapons

For the most part Kolchak's troops had the same weapons that were in use by our troops. They also had large numbers of light machine-guns.

Tactical Training

Kolchak's army operated differently from ours with regard to tactics. The core element of the White units was also made up of participants of the Russo-German war, but these cadres were of greater importance both in their numbers and in the role they played. The bulk of those called up through mobilisation had been thoroughly trained in the rear.

The old regulations were compulsory. The concepts, attitudes and methods of the old army were recognised as the only correct ones. There was no understanding of the new conditions that were being faced, and adaptation to them was slow. For a general characterisation of the views that existed in the army, it is interesting to note an order from General Kanzhin (commander of Kolchak's Western Army) who stated that, "the Reds have brute force and numbers; our side has art and skill".

Political State and Morale

Politics and its morale was the weakest point of the White Army. The White Command took measures to imbue the mass of the soldiers with ideals, up to the creation of a kind of "political department" and the issue of political literature. These measures, however, did not yield positive results, for they could not eliminate the huge class contradictions between the representatives of landlords and capitalists in power and the peasantry that supplied the bulk of the soldiers. The situation in the army was nothing but a reflection of the class contradictions that were becoming more and more acute in the rear. There could be no talk of any consolidation of all the forces constituting the White Army. The ideological disintegration of the army often took very vivid external forms, manifesting itself in the form of whole units coming over to our side, sending delegates for negotiations, and also in the form of fraternisation. This unstable mass of soldiers was held together by a cadre of volunteers and officers. True, they also had no ideological cohesion, but they were at least united by a common hatred of Soviet power.²²

²¹ These units are almost entirely the Czecho-Slovak Legion, the Polish Infantry Division, the Serbian Division etc, only very nominally part of the *Entente*. In 1919 their relationship with Kolchak was very strained. PW.

²² Not the least part in this was played by the discord that reigned in the headquarters of the "Supreme Leader", surrounded by all sorts of adventurers and profiteers. The change of "governments" and Gaida, for example, undoubtedly had a very strong impact on the state of the White troops. Ed.



Supply

The White army was in the same position as us regarding the provision of food and forage from local means. It was better supplied with the kinds of food that were brought from the rear.

With regard to other supplies (clothing, artillery, engineering) the Whites were incomparably better provided than we were. This is explained by the support given to Kolchak by the former allies of Tsarist Russia.²³ These facts are generally known and it is unnecessary to dwell on them. The colossal amount of material captured by us, starting from Zlatoust, show that Kolchak was provided with enough material for him to fight against the Red Army for a long time.

It is true that the active units did not always receive what they needed in full and in time – in this respect Kolchak's army did not deviate far from the Tsarist army.

Combat Capacity

The fighting capacity of Kolchak's units was not equal. The bulk of the soldiers were unreliable. To give it stability and make it fight, it was sometimes necessary to keep Cossacks behind the infantry chains.²⁴ Fearing that the soldiers would switch to our side, the White regiments often advanced in several chains in order to keep the first under the threat of being shot from the rear and thus prevent attempts to surrender. It is evident that the fighting capacity of a unit forced to fight with such soldiers was not high. Such units usually melted away very quickly. But as the relative size of the volunteer cadre grew in them, their combat effectiveness increased. At the same time there were units that showed exceptional combat effectiveness.

The Cossack units proved to be less combat-ready than infantry. This was especially evident during the battles near Chelyabinsk and between the Tobol River and the Ishim River in September-October 1919.

In fact, the strength of Kolchak's army was based on a very strong core of volunteers and officers. When it was possible to rally some of those mobilised around this spine, the combat effectiveness of any given regiment or division increased very noticeably. Numerous combat episodes show that Kolchak's army, as a whole, was not inferior to us both in terms of tactical training, knowledge of military science and ability to act, and in terms of steadfastness and persistence in achieving its goal.

Wagons

Kolchak's army made extensive use of ordinary carts as a means of transport. There were more military-style wagons with our troops. With regard to the division of wagons into categories, as well as their deployment, there were no major differences from us.

Rear

Siberia, as the deep rear of Kolchak's army, was of very little economic importance for the conduct of the war. There was no industry in Siberia which could provide the army with the means necessary to wage war. Kolchak's army could be based only on imports from abroad.

The rear was of great importance in political terms. The fate of the "Supreme Ruler" depended on how the bulk of Siberia's population – the peasantry – felt about him. Already by the summer of 1919 its attitude had become clearly negative, and in some areas openly hostile. The causes of this

²³ The help of the Allies includes both the transfer to Kolchak of material to supply the army, which had been procured abroad by the Tsarist government and had come to Kolchak's disposal by "inheritance", and the new purchases made by Kolchak at the expense of the gold reserve captured in Kazan.

²⁴ The "chain" was the normal term for an extended rifle line, the usual attacking formation of the Civil War. PW.



phenomenon lay not only in the field of objective class contradictions. They were also created by a whole series of erroneous measures taken by the White government.

The loss of the peasantry foreshadowed the demise of Kolchak.

The internal partisan fronts most vividly expressed the process of the peasantry's withdrawal of support. After our entry into Siberia, i.e. after taking the Chelyabinsk area at the end of July 1919, the partisan movement intensified, but until the winter of 1919 its military significance was very small.

By setting the guerrillas a specific task – to target the Siberian railway line – the 5th Army Revolutionary Military Soviet sought to unite their scattered actions and direct them at the weakest points of the enemy. The sabotage and disruption of the sole railway line and the derailing of military trains were the most frequent success of the Red partisans, and at the same time those actions most severely disorganising for the rear and supply of Kolchak's army.

The attitude of the active White army towards the rear was negative and gradually turned into hostility. The army received little to no moral support from the rear. It found itself isolated from the population and left to its own devices by the rear, for whose well-being it was meant to be fighting. The rear lived for its own interests.

The army was defeated by us in open battle. Having lost its fighting capacity and begun its retreat, it found in the rear neither the support of the population nor a strong authority to provide that support.

Only the loss of the peasantry's support and the final decomposition of the White rear can explain how, despite the still enormous (in comparison with our own) material stocks for waging war and despite the vast territory (from Omsk to Vladivostok) still under Kolchak's control, and finally, despite the still large core of his army, the "Supreme Ruler" could not, after the retreat from Omsk, recreate and inspire the army, nor prolong his power.

Conclusions

Finishing this chapter, we consider it expedient to compare the principles of organisation and the state of the armed forces of the opponents to find out the main advantages and peculiarities of each of them, in order not only to facilitate the assimilation of what has been stated, but also to better prepare the reader for the study of the subsequent chapters of the work.

The organisation of the Red Army was carried out more completely and rigidly than that of Kolchak's army. By the end of 1918 the detachment-style organisation had already been completely abolished. All active units were organised into regiments, brigades or divisions.

Kolchak's situation was different. In his army there were, until its final liquidation, independent regiments, detachments and militias.²⁵ Being created for political and agitational purposes, these units not only failed to justify Kolchak's calculations in that respect, but surely weakened the army as a whole.

If a coherent, and at the same time rigidly applied, organisation of troops gives advantages over improvisation, then in the conditions of our struggle with Kolchak the advantage must have been on our side.

²⁵ *Druzhina*, a term originally applied to feudal style forces. It is also variously translated as detachment, squad, team etc. PW.



Sweeping manoeuvres were an unquestionable characteristic of the war. It might seem that under those conditions Kolchak's four regiment divisions would be more mobile and flexible than our cumbersome nine regiment divisions. It was hoped that the four regiment divisions would allow for better manoeuvre and use all the strength they possessed in battle.

The study of the battles between the Red and Kolchak's Armies does not confirm such an assumption. Our three regiment brigades were organisationally in no way inferior to the enemy's four regiment divisions, whether dealing crushing blows, in defence across a wide front, or in manoeuvre.

Moreover, our organisation gave certain advantages in terms of the cohesion of the troops and the harmony of their actions. The cohesion, mutual understanding and co-operation between the units of different divisions never reaches the degree of perfection it does within a single division. The troops of a division are one common family, living together and with the same interests. Our divisions had this inner life. While the numbers and make-up of our divisions' units, as well as the sorts of tasks performed, corresponded with Kolchak corps (or groups), there never was, and never could be, that commonality and unity between the different units of the corps (i.e. individual divisions) which existed between the units of our nine regimental divisions.

The point here is not in the name, but a complex set of psychological and emotional phenomena which derive from organisational unity and are developed in the process of long and constant relationships and interactions between the parts of one organism – the division.

We have seen how short of manpower our units were and there was no way we could fill them to the regulation numbers. It could seem that under those conditions it would have been more expedient and correct to reduce the divisions which were 60-80% under strength into brigades, and the brigades into regiments, etc. That reorganisation might give an increase in the number of fighters by reducing the rear. However, such reorganisations were not only not carried out, and the idea was not even raised. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, when organising the army it was necessary to work not only from the number of troops, but also from the particular operational requirements dictated by the situation. Secondly, the rear was not numerically bloated, and its reduction would not have significantly changed the balance of forces at the front.²⁶

In terms of the number of soldiers, the three divisions (26th, 27th and 35th) which made up the 5th Army could have been reduced to one division, and even that would not have had a regulation quota. Undoubtedly such a reorganisation would have reduced the rear somewhat, for an increase in combat strength. But it is also certain that such a division could not occupy a front of 120 to 150 kilometres, as the divisions named performed with a smaller number of men.

The essence of the matter here is not only in the ratio of the number of fighters and space, but in the operational density, i.e. in the need to have a certain number of manoeuvre units for action in a certain area.²⁷

In the matter of the preparation of the reinforcements for the front line units and the method of realising their integration the advantages were undoubtedly on the side of Kolchak. The main role in the training and preparation of reinforcements and their sending to the front was taken by the reserve regiments of the 5th Army. For a number of reasons, the reserve regiments prepared the replacement men hastily. This led to the fact that the march companies and battalions, upon

²⁶ Realising there is great interest in the numerical ratio between the front-line and rear across the units of the Civil War, we are compelled to confine ourselves to the establishment of the general situation arising from the tables cited, since precise accounting in this area was not made at the time, and there are no trustworthy figures. Note that here we are only discussing the rear up to and including the divisions, not that of the Army or Front.

²⁷ The significance of this question is clarified by us in detail in Chapter II, March-Manoeuvre.



arrival at the front, were not dispersed into the regiments, but were left at the division or brigade HQs to undergo training for improvement. In this way what amounted to reserve battalions and companies were created at the division or brigade HQs. The purpose of these non-staff reserve battalions and companies was not only to improve them before replenishment, as their presence allowed the division or brigade commander to place reinforcements within the most affected regiments, to support them both numerically and morally.

Kolchak's army was in an incomparably better position. As the table above shows, Kolchak was able to keep considerable numbers of mobilised men both in the deep rear and in the front-line reserve for training.

The replenishment of the White Army came via both march companies and new combat units. Those new formations were characterized by very low combat effectiveness. In the first half of May 1919, when our great April counter-offensive threatened the White front, Kolchak sent General Kappel's newly formed corps to the area west of Belebey from the deep rear. With the move of these troops to the front there were hopes for at least a temporary suspension of our offensive and even the possibility of a breakthrough. Those hopes were not justified. The corps was broken up piecemeal (as it entered the front line), having no effect on the situation.

At the end of July 1919, having crossed the Urals, our troops were rapidly advancing on the city of Chelyabinsk. Kolchak decided to use the offensive impulse of our units and the isolated position of the 5th Army against us. For this purpose he ordered Chelyabinsk to be surrendered without a fight, so that afterwards he could attack us from the north with a strong strike group, to repel our units, to throw them back to the south and, having cut off convenient lines of retreat to the mountain passes, to press us onto the Urals and destroy us.

A strike group of six divisions were sent to the front from the area of Omsk, three of them newly formed. In seven days of hard fighting around Chelyabinsk the White strike group was defeated. The raw, insufficiently organised Siberian divisions had low combat effectiveness in general. They were even less suitable for action in the strike group, which had the task of carrying out a very complex manoeuvre.

Both the full-strength divisions of Kappel's corps at Belebey and the three Siberian divisions at Chelyabinsk gave an impression only by their numbers. They were not comparable with Kolchak's veteran and proven divisions and as new formations had incomparably less influence on the course of military operations than if they had simply been used to fill out the existing units.

The question of the ratio of the main arms is of particular importance. An analysis of the tables shows Kolchak's enormous advantage in cavalry. This was first of all reflected in the presence of strong divisional cavalry in the White armies. Large cavalry masses only appeared for the Red Army in September 1919, but even then they did not play a great role, because there was no leader capable of using them properly.

As far as armaments were concerned, the advantages were on Kolchak's side. Firstly there was his large number of light machine-guns, of which we had almost none. No less considerable was his advantage in artillery. This provided a fire advantage to the Whites – all the more so as they were also better supplied with small arms.

If the tactical training of both opponents was judged by the presence of an active force with combat experience, as well as the ability to give better combat training to the reinforcements, it would be judged that the tactical training was higher in our enemy. Kolchak's army had a surplus of officers. Its cadres were very strong and consisted of people with better military training and more combat experience than the cadres of our troops. The reactionary Cossacks served as a rich source of replenishment that did not require long training. The ability to keep in the rear and front line



reserve up to fourteen infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions should have contributed greatly to raising the level of tactical training in the White Army.

However, in the conditions of the Civil War these advantages were not enough. The profoundly different situation from the World War forced us and our opponents to search for new methods and ways of action, adapting to the new conditions. It turned out that it was no longer enough to just know how to handle weapons and use them in action.

The old concepts and traditions of tactical truths needed to be decisively broken away from when the situation demanded it. When fighting it was necessary to reassess the tactical truths of 1914-1917 and boldly look for new principles and norms of tactics, the application of new ways and methods for using the soldiers. In this respect, the reactionary minds of the leading officers of Kolchak's army played a purely negative role with their blind adherence to the old concepts and methods.

Success in war depends not only on the tactical training of troops, but on combat effectiveness as a whole, which is a function of the materials available, tactical training, morale and the political state of the troops.

With regard to the political-morale state, the advantages were on our side. The revolutionary class character of the war was neither a slogan nor a phrase. The war ceased to be an extraneous affair for those who participated in it.

It was no longer enough to organize the masses only in accordance with the principles of the art of war. The situation required unrelenting work on the creation and maintenance of the political state and morale of the army. A whole system of party-political leadership of the armed masses was required in order to consistently concentrate their attention and aspirations on the war's political aims. The bodies created for this purpose played no less a role in the construction and maintenance of the army's combat effectiveness. They were an organising and controlling force, acting in parallel with the command backbone of the army that encompassed and supported the armed mass.

There was no sign of antagonism or stratification in our units.

The class antagonism that was contained in the very concept of the White Army was a source of the process of its decomposition and disintegration – a phenomena that played a major role in hastening its demise.

For the successful outcome of a particular manoeuvre or battle, sometimes it is quite enough to have a material advantage or superiority in the sense of military leadership of troops. But this was not enough to win the war. Drawn by the force of revolutionary events into the class armed struggle, the masses demanded political ideological leadership. Next to the military operations, and intertwined with them, there was another struggle. It captured both the opponents' armies and the populations in both the theatre of military operations and in the deep rear, for it was a class struggle.

Kolchak had purely military advantages, namely, a preponderance of artillery, automatic rifles and better militarily trained cadres, with better supplies of firearms and clothing. But these advantages were insufficient to win the war, because in the main – in the revolutionary, class situation of the war, in the political state and morale of the army – all the advantages were on our side, and because these advantages were more pronounced the wider the class struggle unfolded, the more the masses were drawn into the struggle.



Chapter II – March-Manoeuvre²⁸

General Features of a March-Manoeuvre

The Civil War of 1918-1921 is generally accepted to have been a war of exceptional manoeuvring. This is justified, first of all, by noting to the exceptional mobility of the front lines.

For the purposes of the study it is quite reasonable to compare the stability of the 1914-1918 fronts and the mobility of the 1918-1921 fronts. But we should not forget that a front line itself is nothing but an external sign, an external manifestation of the clash of forces and means of the opponents.

Based only on the distinction of such external signs, it is easy to come to erroneous conclusions.

The stable “frozen” fronts in the 1914-1918 war testify, primarily to the fact that the forces and means of the opponents acting there at the given period came to an operational equilibrium, which took the external form of positional warfare.

This does not mean, of course, that from the moment a stable front line was established that the clash ceased. On the contrary a stable front line, as a sign of operational equilibrium, can and will exist only as long as the clashes that originally created it continue – whether on this or on some neighbouring section of the front, whether in the form of a direct clash of armies or in the form of an increased and unremittingly mobilisation of all the country’s resources.

Obviously operational equilibrium is not an end to the war. It is an inevitable transitional stage of the armed struggle between the opponents on the way to the defeat and destruction of one of them by the other. Obviously it is only by upsetting this balance, overcoming the enemy’s resistance and the other negatives of the situation which cause it, will a combatant have the opportunity, whether by combat or manoeuvre, to defeat the enemy.

In Civil War, the front line also indicated the ongoing clash of forces, but in the conditions of that war, the front made very significant fluctuations and movements backwards and forwards. A study of the causes and consequences of the fluctuations in the Civil War fronts shows that they had the same importance for the creation of operational balance as the transition to positional warfare in the conditions of 1914 - 1918.

In the 1914-1918 war the operational balance was created and consolidated by the transition to the fight for fortified strips. In the 1918-1921 war an operational balance was achieved through significant movements in the front lines. Therefore, the comparison of the stability of the front in the positional war and the mobility of the front in the 1918-1921 war does not reveal a difference in their essence, but only indicates a variety of external forms in their manifestation. Thus, although the mobility of the front line was not an accidental phenomenon, it in itself it cannot serve as evidence of the exceptional manoeuvring of the Civil War.

Along with the periods of positional struggle, in the 1914-1918 war there were also periods of significant movements of the front lines. In the Civil War, as a rule, significant fluctuations of the front lines alternated often with long halts, while the front was consolidated.

Obviously, if the Civil War had an exceptionally manoeuvrable characteristic, it was form as a result of the overall military-political situation.

²⁸ This is a very Russian, and particularly Soviet, term, used to refer to the movement of large military bodies on campaign in order to occupy a favourable position, regroup, avoid a threatening situation etc. It basically combines the concepts of marching and manoeuvring. PW.



Only establishing the conditions which enabled this will allow us to determine not only the causes of the frequent manoeuvring, but also to establish the place and importance of those manoeuvres in combat.

Extent of the Theatres

The vastness of the theatre must be recognized as one of the most significant conditions in our struggle with Kolchak. (See Theatre Map)

The geographical, economic and political conditions in the regions of the Volga, Urals, Siberia and the Far East determined importance even before the struggle with Kolchak took the form of clashes between armies and a defined front line was formed.

The front line and the armies were created simultaneously in August-September 1918 on the Volga with the struggle for Kazan and Simbirsk.

In the second half of September 1918 the 5th Army was already on the eastern bank of the Volga River. In the second half of July 1919 its main forces crossed the Urals mountain ridge, descended the eastern slopes of the Urals and approached the city of Chelyabinsk – the gateway to Siberia.

In that period, i.e. within ten months, the Army had three times fought its way across the space between the Volga River and the Urals.

In the last days of July 1919 our front line was level with Chelyabinsk, and on August 18-20 the 5th Army, after seven days of hard fighting near Chelyabinsk, crossed the Tobol River.

We had crossed the space from the Tobol River to the Ishim River three times, retreating and advancing with fierce fighting.

Having defeated the enemy in those battles and reached the Ishim in the last days of October 1919, our troops by February 1920 had reached the Yenisei River, which was the effective defeat and destruction of Kolchak's army.

These moves from line to line were carried out over a wide frontage (150-200 km), except for the occupation of passes through the Urals and the offensive from the Ob' River to the Yenisei River, where geographical conditions narrowed the area of operations.

The vast scale of the theatre was further emphasized by the comparatively small numbers of troops.

Objects of the Actions

Due to the peculiarities of the military-political situation in the Civil War, our objectives were mainly the most important economic and administrative-political points.

This determined a certain dispersion of those objectives. Their number increased in those cases when they were exclusively of military importance. The consequence of this was the creation of numerous lines of operation.

These circumstances (the size of the theatre, the nature of the targets and their dispersion) could not but affect the enemy's groupings, which also forced the dispersion of its forces. A consequence of this was that even in those cases where the enemy army's manpower was the only target of the action, we too had to scatter our troops, sometimes in divergent directions. (For example the offensive after the capture of Bugul'ma and Chelyabinsk in May and July, 1919).

Width of the Front

The frontage of our units was not, of course, some predetermined and thus constant amount. The vastness of the areas, their configuration and the scattered objectives were decisive in that matter.



The next most important condition affecting the establishment of the length of the front line was the presence in the army of a certain number of permanent tactical or operational formations. The number of combat troops of those formations was relatively less important.

The Density of the Front

Normally a White infantry division faced one of our three-regiment brigades on a sector some 10-15-20 kilometres wide. Opposite the sector of one of our rifle divisions there was usually an enemy corps or group, made up of at least two infantry divisions and one Cossack or cavalry brigade.

This determined not only the balance of forces, but also the density of the front. With regard to that, it is necessary to make a sharp distinction between the concepts of operational density and tactical density.

The former means manoeuvre-march density, i.e. the ratio of the width of the sector the troop occupy (on the offensive or retreat) and the number of operational or tactical formations occupying that sector. Tactical density is the ratio of the combat composition of a given unit and the width of the frontage they hold.

The density of a brigade's frontage cannot be established by dividing the number of active bayonets, machine guns and guns it has by the number of kilometres of the width in its sector. We reject in advance any practical significance for the concentration, grouping and manoeuvring of a unit with that measure of density. Such a figure is absolutely unsuitable for judgments and conclusions about the power of any strike or resistance by any brigade, and it has no value for the study of the tactical actions of our troops in the Civil War (for more details see later).

It should also be noted that the art of command – manifested in practice in the ability to coordinate and successfully resolve the contradictions of a situation, requiring on the one hand the dispersion and stretching of forces across the front, and on the other hand obtaining a superiority of those same forces over the enemy in a decisive direction and at a decisive moment – was a factor determining both the march and tactical density of our troops.

At the beginning of the Bugul'ma operation in May 1919 the 5th Army occupied a front about 210 kilometres wide. On 8 May 1919 the strike force on the right flank of the Army, made up of the 25th and 26th Rifle Divisions, occupied a frontage of about 75 km, and so the rest of the Army's front line was about 135 km long, in which the 2nd and 27th Rifle Divisions were operating.

During the attack on Chelyabinsk in July 1919, the Army's total frontage was about 150 km. In the decisive stretch (the city and the area north of it) were parts of the 27th and 35th Rifle Divisions, occupying 70 km. So the rest of the Army's front, 80 km long, was occupied by the 26th Rifle Division with its subordinate Cossack brigade (of Comrade Kashirin).

The Mobility of Troops

The conditions related above – 1) the scale of the theatre; 2) the dispersion of the objectives, and so an inevitable dispersion of the units; 3) a relatively small number of men in terms of the number of formations and the available combat manpower; and 4) wide fields of action – created low march-manoeuve densities, which then required very high mobility from the units.

Two circumstances contributed highly to the development of that mobility: the negligible dependence of the men on food supply from the rear and the absence of dedicated transports, which needed regular rest, which meant instead that they used local carts, easily replaced by new ones as they advanced.

At the end of June 1919, two brigades of the 26th Rifle Division, performing a bypass movement in the foothills of the western slopes of the Ural Mountains in order to reach the Ufa Plateau,



marched in one column along the bank of the mountainous Yuryuzan River, almost roadless and often beside the riverbed, covered about 120 kilometres in three and a half days. There is no doubt that such a march could be accomplished only with the conditions listed above, which determined the mobility of our troops.

The enemy's troops were no less mobile. When on 10-11 May 1919 it became quite clear for the White Urals Corps, covering the Bugul'ma area, that the movement of the 5th Army threatened it with a tactical encirclement, the Corps, having collected all the peasant carts in the area, easily broke away from our units and, leapt 50-60 km to the east beyond the Ik River within a day, easily escaping the threatened encirclement thanks to the same properties of mobility.

However, this mobility can be explained not only by the material conditions applying. Reasons for it should also be sought also in the nature of the political-morale state of the troops.²⁹

Rapidity of Operations

From the time of the crossing to the eastern bank of the Volga River in September 1918 until the liquidation of Kolchak's army on the Yenisei River at the end of January 1920, i.e. in 16 months, the 5th Army travelled about 6,300 km (counting our temporary retreats). For a continuous and uniform day by day movement that averages about 12-13 km per day – and assumes too that they moved without fighting and on direct roads. The following study of the length of a day's march shows that our units usually moved at least 20 km a day. The difference was spent on rest days, pauses and overcoming various kinds of obstacles, including enemy resistance.

It should be noted that clashes between units were usually short and that in fact contributed to the rapidity of operations.

Only occasionally did the clashes, both in their intensity and in their duration, reach significant proportions, marking the turning points of the front.

That occurred during the three-week long battles in March 1919 south of Ufa, the two-week long battles at the end of April and in the first half of May of the same year during our counter-offensive, the seven-days of fighting near Chelyabinsk at the end of July 1919, the month-long battles in September 1919 during Kolchak's counter-offensive from the Ishim River, and finally the two-week long battles during our last decisive offensive from the Tobol River in the second half of October 1919.

In the other periods of the struggle with Kolchak the battles were largely clashes between marching columns and as a result did not slow operations in general to any great extent.

The absence of wide and deep lines of fortifications, even in those relatively rare cases when the opponents had halted facing each other while they accumulated forces for new operations, could also not but contribute to the speed and swiftness of the troops, due to the ease of transition from defence to offence.

The sharply revealed class character of the war made it possible to fulfil the tasks of consolidating the captured spaces and providing the army rear with political and administrative bodies, without requiring the suspension of troop movements in order to complete those tasks. On the other hand, the uprisings and internal partisan fronts arising behind enemy lines demanded a swiftness in our offensives, in order to take advantage of the enemy's difficulties and support our allies.³⁰

²⁹ The importance of morale factors in the Civil War and their influence on the actions of our troops are discussed in Chapter V.

³⁰ An example of this kind of action is the drive of the 26th Rifle Division from Omsk to Altai in December 1919.



Finally, the soldiers' own experience very convincingly confirmed to them that a forced and uninterrupted retreat, caused by the rapid advance of the enemy, ultimately causes disorder in the retreating troops, with a corresponding loss of combat effectiveness. Therefore, in the conditions of the Civil War, the rapid conduct of offensive operations was an extremely powerful way to finally finish off and destroy the enemy.

In this sense, the swiftness of operations reveals an organic connection with the political state of the troops, and there is no doubt that one of the causes of the speed should be sought in the psyche of a revolutionary army.

Concept of Manoeuvre and Techniques of Marching

The study of the general conditions of execution of the march-manoeuve must be completed by considering the question of the connection and interaction between the concept of manoeuvre and the methods of marching.

Motion in this context means the practical implementation of the principle of striking with the entire mass of troops. That is why in the conditions of the Civil War, acting with small forces over wide fronts, the crux of an operation moved from the sphere of battle to the sphere of manoeuvre.

For Moltke's period it was correct to, "manoeuvre independently, but fight together." The first part arose due to the economic factors of the time and the material requirements arising from the level of organisation and the ability to supply the troops. The second from the requirements of military art of the time.

In the Civil War similar material factors required movement apart, but that need to move apart also corresponded to the requirements for the successful conduct of operations. "Fighting together" was not understood to mean the sending to one battlefield of all the units in a group. Instead the best support to its neighbour could be provided by a column not deviating from the path it had been ordered to take: not by moving to shooting, but by persistent and rapid fulfilment of the main task assigned to it. This concept of manoeuvre is seen in the choice of offensive routes and in the organisation of individual columns, which created a very particular system of marching. Through this a system was built which received its fullest realisation in the principle of striking with the entire mass of troops, but while acting on a wide front.

The system of marching, which allowed for the troops to manoeuvre in separate columns, was not something arbitrary decided. Firstly, it corresponded to the ground conditions of march-manoeuve discussed above. It was, in a sense, an inevitable consequence of the conduct of the units in the Civil War.

It was through this march system that the idea of manoeuvre and the technique of troop movement in the Civil War found a practical realisation of its connection and its interaction.

Attacking

An offensive march should be recognized as any march movement of troops with the purpose of approaching the enemy. Depending on where the enemy was and what it was doing, the movement of our troops may have the immediate aim of occupying a certain line, of attacking a halted enemy or of fighting it on the march.

Lanes of Offence

Even superficial familiarity with the organisation of an offensive march by our troops immediately reveals one very sharply striking external feature – the marking to the units of certain lanes for the execution of the movements.



Whatever the operational design of the offensive, whatever the underlying concept of manoeuvre, its execution was conceived by the commander primarily within the framework of offensive lanes indicated to the troops.

Those lanes were created by assigning boundary lines to the troops, specified by reference to local features which lay towards the enemy zone, in front of our troops. It was particularly emphasised that these lines were not intended only to limit the rear, but were intended to give the specific unit a defined lane of action. As a rule, boundary lines were assigned only to divisions and brigades, while regiments were given only the routes (roads) for their offensive. (See Map 1.)

Due to the considerable width of the front and the comparatively small number of troops, the lanes had to be wide. Their width was based on the operational importance of that direction.

Reducing the width of the lane for a specific column, while at the same time increasing the width of those of neighbouring columns gave the commander the opportunity to create groupings such as strike groups and thus to achieve an increase in tactical density on the section of the front which required it.

In October 1919 the 5th and 26th Rifle Divisions, making up the strike group of the 5th Army, received the following zones of action: 1) the 26th Rifle Division, with 13 rifle regiments (8,325 bayonets, 410 sabres, 205 machine guns and 34 guns) and with the 2nd Brigade of the 21st Rifle Division subordinated, was given a 35-40 km wide offensive lane; 2) the 5th Rifle Division with 6 regiments (4,310 bayonets, 303 sabres, 60 machine guns and 10 guns) was given an offensive lane of 25-30 km width and was simultaneously to pass through the sector of our cavalry division (2,523 sabres and 38 machine guns), which had the task of a deep breakthrough into the rear of the enemy. The remaining sections of the Army's frontage was distributed between: 1) the 27th Rifle Division (9 rifle regiments, 7,476 bayonets, 394 sabres, 146 machine guns and 24 guns), received a section 70 kilometres wide, and 2) the 35th Rifle Division (6 rifle regiments, 4,104 bayonets, 140 sabres, 81 machine guns and 16 guns), received a section 40 kilometres wide.

It is not possible to specify any regular width for the offensive lane of a rifle division or brigade, since ultimately its width was determined at the time by the local situation and the task to be accomplished.

The following table gives some general information as to the width of the lanes actually occupied by our troops at various periods in our offensives.

Units	Date and area	Average width of the attack lane
2nd & 3rd RBs, 27th RD	1-3 July 1919, in the Urals	38 km
2nd RB, 26th RD	10-13 May 1919, south of Bugulma	10 km
1st, 2nd & 3rd RBs, 26th RD	20-30 May 1919, east of Bugulma	80 km
1st, 2nd & 3rd RBs, 27th RD	9-12 August 1919, east of Chelyabinsk	40 km
1st & 2nd RBs, 2nd RD	8-11 May 1919, south-west of Bugulma	50 km
2nd RB, 35th RD	12-13 June 1919, north bank of the Belaya	28 km
1st & 2nd, 35th RD	23-24 October 1919, west of Petropavlovsk	42 km
1st & 2nd RBs, 5th RD	23-24 October 1919, west of Petropavlovsk	25 km

A study of the situation under which these marches were carried out, and familiarisation with the tasks carried out in each case, force us to admit that the most typical were those of the 2nd and 3rd RBs of the 27th RD from 1 to 3 July, the 1st and 2nd RBs of the 35th RD on 23-24 October, and the 1st and 2nd RBs of the 2nd RD from 8 to 11 May.



The elongated width for the 26th RD from 20 to 30 May is explained by the fact that its task at that time was as a barrier. The width of the lane for the 2nd RB of the 35th RD on 12-13 June is because that brigade, being on the right bank of the Belaya River and having an active enemy in front of it, was trying to create a combat link with our neighbouring units in order to secure their flanks. The comparatively narrow bands of the 2nd RB of the 26th RD on 10-13 May and of the 1st and 2nd RBs of the 5th RD on 23-24 October are because those brigades were strike groups.

Composition of the Columns

As already noted, boundary lines were assigned only to divisions and brigades.

The brigade commander was thus able, acting within the boundaries given to him, to direct the regiments (battalions) of his brigade to those points on the enemy's front which he recognised as the most important for striking or occupying by our troops.

Given the considerable width of brigade offensive lanes, each included a more or less dense network of roads running both in the direction of the brigade's offensive and crossing that direction at one angle or another. This made it necessary for individual brigade columns to occupy at least the main roads leading to the enemy.

A consequence of this was a some dispersion of the brigade's forces in the form of separately advancing columns.

A study of the offensive marches by brigades shows that the dispersion was inconsequential, and that it was always based on an organised system.

Having received a 15-20 km wide strip for the offensive, the brigade commander decided on the size and composition of the columns – based on his allotted task, the information he had about the enemy, the composition of his brigade, and the number of roads leading towards the enemy, and their relative importance.

Experience had developed two main methods of distributing a brigade's forces on the march, namely: 1) movement in regimental columns, or 2) movement in two main columns, in which the first had two rifle regiments, and the second was the third regiment of the brigade. Intermediate roads were occupied, if necessary, by minor columns (battalions, companies) detached from the main marching columns.

The most common march column was a rifle regiment. The organisational structure of the regiment (6 to 9 companies, foot and mounted scout detachments, machine gun detachments), the presence of a relatively large number of machine guns and the addition of artillery turned it in the conditions of the Civil War into a reasonably powerful military unit, capable of fighting independently and solving various tactical problem.

A brigade attack in two main columns, of which the first had two rifle regiments, and the second the third regiment, was used when the situation required a powerful blow at a particular point on the enemy's line. In this case the second column was only to assist the advance of the brigade's main forces by fulfilling its own task. Cases when the brigade attacked as a whole in a single column were rare exceptions: they are not typical of the Civil War, and took place either due to unusual terrain or as a result of other special conditions.

The artillery assigned to the brigade was distributed among the marching columns depending on the number of guns available and the importance of the tasks assigned to the individual columns. An attacking one regiment column was usually assigned artillery ranging from a platoon (sometimes even just one gun) to a battery.



The brigade's sapper company usually remained at the disposal of the brigade headquarters, often performing purely combat tasks. The company was included in marching columns as a whole unit or divided into platoons when it was foreseen that the situation would require sapper work.

Battalions and companies allocated by the main columns of the brigade to occupy intermediate roads were called lateral detachments.³¹ Generally they did not contain artillery. They were always assigned cavalrymen for reconnaissance and communication, either from the regimental mounted scout detachment or from cavalry assigned to the brigade.

Arrangement of the Troops in the Column

With the small number of soldiers in a regiment and its attached units, the distribution of the units in a column did not cause difficulties.

On the contrary, the depth of a regimental column was so insignificant that at times it was necessary to take special measures to increase it in order to protect from the constant threat of tactical encirclement. In an order of 23 September 1919 to the troops of the 26th RD we read the following:

The main forces of the brigade, in order to avoid capture or encirclement by enemy cavalry units, should advance echeloned in depth, regiment by regiment, approximately the distance of long-range artillery fire. When battle is engaged, the reserves should be kept no closer than 4-5 kilometres from the front chains. At the beginning of the battle the wagons³² must immediately take the form of a triangle or square. Wagons with machine guns should serve as a reliable cover for the immediate rear of the active units.

The main column was arranged in the following order: 1) rifle units with their machine guns; 2) artillery; 3) rifle units (the bulk of the force) with their machine guns; 4) 1st Class transport.

As a rule, artillery moved close to the head of the column. This was to increase the strength of any first strike and also to quickly produce the greatest possible effect on enemy morale.³³

March Formation

The standard marching formation was to be either a column by sections or a column by fours. The adherence to the formation during the march depended on many incidental circumstances, in particular on the state of training of the unit, its discipline and the firmness of the command staff.

There is no doubt, however, that forced marches (and most of them were forced marches) had a negative effect on discipline and the maintenance of correct marching formation. The condition of the roads, when moving almost exclusively on country roads,³⁴ also could not but adversely affect the observance of marching formation. The movement of riflemen along the sides of the road was widely practiced, which kept the road itself free for the artillery and wagons.

The artillery followed in gun column.

³¹ These battalions and companies, while being called lateral detachments and resembling in the march scheme the movement of lateral detachments for march security, in fact they were not and could not be them. That is both because of their distance from the column that allocated them, and because of the combat tasks that they were assigned. The following combat episodes described, particularly in Chapter III, provide many examples that confirm the provisions established here on the strength and composition of march columns.

³² This is for 1st Class wagons – i.e. the combat wagons.

³³ See later, under Artillery Fire.

³⁴ Which in this context means minor dirt roads. PW.



Speed of Movement

There is an opinion that the speed of the movement in the Civil War constitutes its peculiarity.

A study of the matter shows that this opinion was created under the influence of the general impression of the rapid advances of the troops. The basis of this was not the increased speed of troop movements per hour, but the increased length of daily marches.

A regiment in column did not move faster than four kilometres per hour, i.e. that it is matched the maximum speed of the infantry – the bulk of the units in a column.

That speed increased in those cases when small columns used local carts,³⁵ which was common enough. However, even when using peasant wagons for movement, the increase in the distance travelled should be attributed mainly to the increased time spent travelling, not to an increase in the hourly rate.

The Lengths of Marches

Examples of the distance of the daily movements of our troops are given in the following table.

Unit	Dates	Length (km)	Daily average (km)	
2nd RB, 5th RD	8-10 May 1919	68	23	in combat
2nd RB, 27th RD	9-10 May 1919	48	24	in combat
1st, 2nd & 3rd RBs, 26th RD	22-24 May 1919	60	30	forced march
2nd RB, 27th RD	3 July 1919	35	35	forced march
1st & 2nd RBs, 26th RD	16-18 July 1919	60	20	in combat
1st & 2nd RBs, 27th RD	23-25 July 1919	85	28	forced march
1st & 2nd RBs, 5th RD	25 August 1919	20	20	in combat
2nd RB, 35th RD	4-6 September 1919	80	27	forced march
1st & 2nd RBs, 35th RD	23-24 October 1919	50	25	in combat

A study of the situation and conditions of marches shows that the distance travelled was mainly due to the lengthening of the marching day. A [commander's] calculation of the distance to be marched was not based on the troops' speed, but on operational considerations, which in turn were based on the principle of movement from position to position. It was for this reason that the tasks for a day's march were formulated with words such as: "at dawn you are commence a vigorous offensive and by evening you are to occupy the line "

That wording, typical for calculating the length of a day's march in the Civil War, shows that the calculations were decided so as to lengthen the marching day. If they met enemy resistance on the way, the troops would be delayed by fighting. The consequence of this was often that the troops, even while fulfilling the allotted task, only reached the specified line late in the evening or even at night, thereby increasing the marching day.

In addition, the wide use of peasant carts, not only for the transport of the soldiers' personal property (haversacks, overcoats) but also for their own transport, made it possible for infantry units to travel 50 km or more in a day.

Thus a brigade of the 27th RD advancing on Omsk on the evening of 11 November 1919 was still in the vicinity of Skobelevskiy-Shuvaev, 120 km west of Omsk, but entered that city by 20:00 on 14

³⁵ If sufficient snow had fallen the carts were replaced by peasant sleds, but exactly the same criteria apply. PW.



November. The brigade fought for three days of uninterrupted offensive, and only moved the 120 kilometres thanks to the fact that it made extensive use of peasant sleds to speed the movement.

Making an accelerated march from the area north of Vargashi, on the right flank of the 5th Army, the 5th Rifle Division averaged about 50 km per day on 4 and 5 September, transferring the troops on carts.

Moving men on carts close to the enemy was not safe, as it reduced the effectiveness of the security measures and the lowered the combat readiness of troops. As a result, the troops only travelled the least dangerous part of the way on carts and then marched on foot. For example, the marches of the 1st Brigade of the 27th RD in September 1919 and of the 26th RD in October 1918.

It should be noted that enemy's units also often used wagons for the same purpose of speeding up movement and increasing the distance travelled each day.

Calculations of Marches

With such speed of offensive operations for considerable distances on wide fronts, the calculations for that movement had to prevent, first of all, the possibility of the defeat of an isolated column that accidentally moved out of the main line of our troops. The usual measure taken to avoid that was the assignment of deadlines for the troops to reach certain milestones. In an uncomplicated situation, the Army assigned those 3-7 days in advance.

The division simplified that assignment by dividing it into several stages. The regiments usually received from their brigade a day's task. This division of the larger milestones corresponded to the requirements of the situation, as the smaller a unit was, the more quickly and easily it was at the mercy of a changing situation, and the more flexibly it had to be managed, taking into account the general situation in front of the brigade.

The calculation of the movement of troops on their axes and the assignment of offensive lanes meant that the offensive of a given division or brigade in practice took the form of a sequential, systematic mastery of the allocated areas.

This was in a sense a "mechanical" levelling of the offensive, but it did ensure the greatest effect by a simultaneous strike against the enemy by all available units.

The negative effect of this technique was to subordinate the manoeuvre of each division or brigade to the requirement of establishing a front line and covering a particular direction.³⁶

As a rule the target assigned for the troops to reach was a line of settlements lying within the boundaries of the brigade's line of action: this corresponded with considerations of food supply and better quartering for the troops. Natural boundaries were almost entirely ignored, the only exception being rivers.

Our movement from an occupied line of villages to a new line of villages caused the corresponding movement of the enemy's troops.

If we ended the day's march by occupying village A., the enemy, being forced to retreat from that village, withdrew to the village B., i.e. to the first village lying in the path of its retreat. It stopped at village B (assuming, of course, that it corresponded to the general situation and its general task) irrespective of whether the distance between the two villages was 5, 10 or 15 kilometres.³⁷

³⁶ For more details see the chapter on Combat.

³⁷ Forced to abandon a given village and retreat some distance, the enemy could occupy some tactically convenient local line in order to counterattack. Cases of this kind did occur, but usually only during the periods of intense fighting and under conditions of combat that were sharply different from those of a normal attack march.



This method of doing things not only had a massive influence on the organisation of reconnaissance and security for our troops, but also on the calculations of their movement for the next day.

Having accustomed themselves to calculating their movements based on the line of settlements assigned for the day, the troops began to consider those settlements as almost the only positions where the enemy would fight. This created very specific conditions for each battle and affected the calculations for the movement of the columns, because a brigade could determine the correct timing and aim its columns' strikes for only the first line of villages occupied by the enemy. Further movement naturally depended on the outcome of the battle at that first line.

Change of Offensive Facing

In spite of the very detailed schemes designed for an attack march, a change of offensive direction was quite often made.

A flank approach in the form of a sharp change of direction towards a significant sector of the general offensive front was very rare in the Civil War. It might be assumed that actions across wide stretched fronts under the conditions noted above should have often created situations in which an oblique approach was not only possible, but promised the greatest success. However, an examination of the conditions of such march-manoevres shows that the stretched front and the other conditions noted above not only reduced the importance of flank attacks, but turned them into a manoeuvre that could disadvantage us.

The shoulder approach as a change of direction of our offensive could have been intended for one or another task. However, quite independently of the idea, a number of questions arose on the solution of which depended on the possibility and expediency of this manoeuvre.

The most important question was who was to be entrusted with covering the direction in which the troops had previously been advancing and from which they were now turning away. Within a brigade the resolution of this question did not present much difficulty. Advancing in two or three main columns, with lateral detachments, the brigade always had the opportunity to indicate to the main columns the offensive routes and boundaries to create such a grouping, and so deploy their reserves to cover themselves from the abandoned direction.

Much more difficult was the execution of a flank approach by a division. An example of such is the offensive of the 27th Rifle Division in May 1919 on the town of Bugul'ma (Map 1).

Having started on 8 May 1919 moving from the line of Lipovka – Sidelkino, the division had to, according to the direction of *KomandArm-5*, move quickly to the area north of Bugul'ma and then:

... with its left flank try to push the enemy towards the rail line, into the bag prepared for it, and with a decisive offensive in the direction of Stary Kuvak cut off the last line of retreat.

On 12 May 1919 the orders required that by 13 May 1919 the main forces of the division occupy the area of Stary Pis'myanka – Sumarokove – Aznakaevo (20 km north of Sumarokove).

As can be seen on the map, the division could fulfil the Army's directive only by throwing its left flank significantly forward and changing the direction of its strike from north-east to south-east. In this case the situation allowed for such a manoeuvre, as there was actually no serious threat from the direction of Chistopol' (180 km north-east of Bugul'ma) or Menzelinsk (150 km north of Bugul'ma). In addition, it should be noted that the division enacting it had four rifle brigades (1/27, 2/27, 2/5 and 2/35 for a total of 7,600 bayonets, 366 sabres, 140 machine guns, and 28 guns) and therefore had plenty of opportunity to cover its manoeuvre with a reserve or by the advance of



units to the north of its left flank. However, the manoeuvre was not completed, because on 13 May it became clear that the enemy had moved from Bugul'ma eastwards to behind the Ik River.

Map 1 shows the fulfilment of the task by the brigades by stages. Looking at the paths of each brigade separately shows that the change of direction for the offensive was carried out by advancing the 2nd and 3rd Brigades of the 27th Rifle Division to the east then turning them steeply to the south on 13 May. This was shielded by the brigade on the right flank (2nd Brigade of the 5th Rifle Division). With the occupation of the position indicated on the diagram on May 13, the 27th RD had completed the manoeuvre. It then continued its attack to the northeast and east.

This method of changing direction enabled the division to always keep its forces grouped so as to allow, if necessary, either a turn sharply to the south, or to continue the offensive to the east. The movement of the main forces was covered to the north and north-east by the divisional reserve (2nd Brigade of the 35th Rifle Division) in the vicinity of the village of Nadyrova.

Oblique Movement

Oblique movement was very common in the Civil War. This a very reliable and simple manoeuvre, the aim of which was to make a consistent movement in the offensive lanes in the direction of the forthcoming offensive, without relieving the pressure on the enemy from the front and without opening either the attacker's flanks or rear.

An example of the execution of this kind of oblique movement is the offensive of the 27th Rifle Division from 17-21 July 1919 (Map 2). In this case the oblique movement of the right flank of the division covered the deployment of the units of its centre and left flank, attached to the lead brigade of the division with simultaneous execution of forward movement by all units.

Turning to the Flank (Concentrating)

The 25th Rifle Division, advancing south along the Ik River towards Bugul'ma, on the right flank of the 5th Army, occupied the area of Kyzilyarovka³⁸ and Tashla – Akbash (Map 3) on 15 May with its main forces (1st and 2nd Brigades). The 3rd Brigade covered the flank and rear of the division from the direction of Belebey, concentrated in the area of Abdulino and Stary Turaevo.

By this time it became clear that there were considerable White forces in the area of Belebey, i.e. behind the right flank of the 5th Army. Once the Bugul'ma operation was over, the Army had been tasked with breaking that enemy concentration. The commander directed on 15 May 1919:

The 25th Rifle Division is to strike the enemy in Belebey while covering itself from the north. The division is to begin the offensive on 15 May with the right flank at Belebey and on 16 May it is to reach the line Elan'-Chishma – Troitskiy – Nizhny Bashindy, strengthening its right flank. The 25th Rifle Division, before the 26th Infantry Division reaches the line indicated to it (Nizhny Bashindy exclusive – Kara-Zirik), will observe the Bugulma to Ufa railway line with a strong detachment.

The White 4th Ufa Infantry Division (about 3,500 bayonets with 10 guns) and Cossack units were operating in the area of the 1st and 2nd brigades of the 25th Rifle Division.

In order to fulfil the task set by the directive, the 25th Rifle Division had to drastically change the direction its main forces – the 1st and 2nd Brigades – were heading. On 15 May, before entering the area indicated on the map, both brigades were advancing from south to north, covering the Ik River from the east. Now they were given a task that meant advancing from where they were to the southeast and east.

³⁸ Now Kzyl-Yarskoe. PW.



The brigades are given the following specific tasks: 1) the right flank of the 3rd Brigade was to advance towards Belebey along the road from Abdulino; 2) the 1st Brigade was to force the Ik River in the vicinity of the Kyzilyarovka and Stary Chuti, and was to occupy by the evening of 16 May the vicinity of the Nizhne Troitskiy and Verkhne Troitskiy; 3) the 2nd Brigade from the occupied area to lead an offensive to the east to support the operation of the 1st and 3rd Brigades from the north and to occupy by the evening of 16 May the area of Novye Bashindy – Nizhnie Bashindy – Verkhnie Bashindy.

White units from the 4th Ufa Infantry Division were in Uyazy-Tamakova, Andreevna, Mullina and Trukmeneva.

To complete the assigned task the regiments of the 1st Brigade crossed the Ik River near St. Chuti. The 217th Rifle Regiment attacked Andreevna, which it occupied on the evening of 16 May. A cavalry *division* of the 1st Brigade (300 sabres) acted against the enemy occupying Mullina. It covered, together with the 218th Rifle Regiment advancing behind the 217th Rifle Regiment, the movement of the latter to Andreevna. The 219th Rifle Regiment, having crossed the Ik near Kyzilyarovka, struck from the north and defeated the enemy 13th Ufa Regiment in Uyazy-Tamakova and, having captured four guns and some prisoners, continued the attack on to St. Shokhova, which it occupied by the evening of 17 May. Units of the 2nd Brigade by this time had occupied the area of Apsa-lamova – Moskova, on the western bank of the Ik, 15 km north of Trukmenyeva.

The manoeuvre of changing the offensive's direction was made by moving forward and attacking the enemy located against our 1st and 2nd Brigades.

This allowed us to keep pressure on the enemy and at the same time created a group of most of our forces to solve the main task – to break the enemy's accumulation around Belebey.

Management of Troops on the March

Due to the fact that a brigade led an offensive in several columns in a wide strip, the actual management of the movement was entirely in the hands of the individual columns. So control from above during the march consisted only of coordinating the actions of neighbouring columns.

Giving preliminary orders for the forthcoming march was widely practised. These orders were usually given during negotiations between division commanders with their brigade commanders and the latter with their subordinate units by direct wire or telephone. The talks were usually held late in the evening or at night, when it was possible to identify and summarise the results for the day. Decisions were made immediately, which were then passed on to the troops through the appropriate HQ in the form of operational orders. It did not take long to get acquainted with the results of the day's march and to make a decision, quicker than the time to formalise the decision in the form of an order.

In addition to general and specific tasks, the orders specified the exact line to be occupied the next day for each given unit, the direction (paths) of movement, the grouping (main forces, side detachments), as well as the timing of the march. It should be noted that the time was often indicated by general phrases "at dawn" and so on. This led to different start times, but due to the fact that the troops were operating across wide fronts (and the distance from the line we occupied to the enemy's location was not the same everywhere, and the collision of marching columns occurred at different times) the negative aspects of the non-simultaneous advance were minimal in the usual cases.

Tasks for the preliminary reconnaissance of routes and for the repair of roads were given to the troops very rarely, only in the exceptional cases when the offensive routes led our troops into areas where the general tactical conditions of the terrain were known to be unfavourable for movement.



Liaison

It would not be an exaggeration to admit that there was scarcely a division or brigade order in which the requirement to “maintain the closest possible communication along the front and to the rear” was not reiterated in the most emphatic form. The mention of “close communication” became a kind of habit. Obviously the question comes down to how this requirement was implemented in practice.

The locations for the division HQs were specified in the Army orders, and those of brigade HQs in the division orders. When choosing one or another settlement as a base for the headquarters, the need to make it as easy as possible for it to maintain technical communication with its units, with its neighbours and with its superior HQ was taken into account. The existing railway and telegraph wires of the civilian network were used if possible. The HQs did not follow the units every day, but travelled by leaps and bounds as the troops occupied certain lines. Thanks to this, communication links could be prepared in advance for a new base.

Regiments kept in touch with brigade headquarters by telephone, either by joining the railway and telegraph wires or by running their own field lines. Regimental headquarters moved with their units. In the conditions of rapid offensives and forced marches, this resulted in the fact that only those regiments moving in the area of government and railway telegraph wires had constant technical communication with their brigade headquarters. The other regiments had telephone communication with their respective brigade headquarters only periodically, when the latter were directly to their rear. If the brigade headquarters stayed in one place for a day or two, the regiments – having moved at least 30-40 kilometres during that time – could not maintain telephone communication by their own means and, if it was impossible to use the railway or government telephone network, switched to messengers.

The messengers were mounted regimental orderlies or riflemen on carts. Divisional HQs, in addition to their orderlies, also had bikes and motorbikes.³⁹

Technical communication between neighbouring brigades was usually maintained through the division headquarters.

Neighbouring divisional HQs communicated with each other directly over government wires or through the Army headquarters.⁴⁰

As a rule, peasant carts were used for dispatches.

Distribution of Wagons and their Movement

The shortage of horses and military wagons forced the troops to make extensive use of requisitioned carts. The low load capacity of peasant carts had its consequence of increasing the number of wagons. Without doubt the ease obtaining them also led to an increase in the number of wagons.

A positive of using peasant carts was the possibility of changing tired horses. This increased the mobility of the carts and made it possible for them to make long and lengthy journeys, which was impossible for military transport.

Machine-gun and ammunition wagons, kitchens, ambulances and wagons with the soldiers' own belongings made up the 1st Class transport, which moved with the units.

³⁹ It should be noted that messengers connected regiments and brigade HQs, and between brigade and division HQs, at all times, both for the parallel transmission of operational reports and orders and for the transmission of orders on other matters of troop control.

⁴⁰ The brigades had only Morse apparatuses; the higher commands also had Hughes apparatuses.



Wagons of the 2nd Class were united in the hands of a regimental quarter-master and moved on the orders of the brigade head of supply. Moved at the brigade HQ level were the rifle and machine-gun armoury, the forward artillery store, the food store and the brigade clothing store. The movement of the wagons was usually established by a general and permanent order, which provided for the location of the 2nd Class wagons, in anticipation of battle, being not closer than one march from the front line.

Wagons were usually not provided with cover, and their protection was entrusted to teams of Red Army soldier-wagoneers, sometimes reinforced by machine guns.

Offensive March in the Mountains

In June 1919 the 26th Rifle Division received the task of forcing the Ufa River near Aydos⁴¹, and leading a rapid offensive along the valley of the Yuryuzan River to reach the Ufa Plateau and occupy the stations of Mursalimkino and Kropachevo, lying on the Samara – Zlatoust railway. This march was intended to bring our troops into the rear of the White Ufa group, fortified on the Asha – Balashevskaya line, in an area of which the terrain created such serious obstacles that it was considered an impossible task to take the position occupied by the Whites head-on.

Forcing the Ufa near Aydos and Naganskiy, the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 26th Rifle Division concentrated at Avdulina (Map 4). A side detachment consisting of the 226th Rifle Regiment was to cross the Ufa in the area south of Khoroshaeva and advance in a general direction of Trapeznikov, where it would join the division's main forces.

The enemy, who had been defending the eastern bank of the Ufa River near Aydos, withdrew under our pressure northwards to the area of B. Abyzova to Zlatoust road. Our reconnaissance found out that there were no Whites left in the area of the mouth of the Yuryuzan and that no White units had withdrawn up the river.

The division field HQ had no definite information about the possibility of an offensive along the Yuryuzan River. The Army HQ reported that workers had come to us from the Urals along that route, and according to them it was possible to traverse the river valley. A guide, promised by Army HQ, did not arrive. Our group of two brigades would not remain for unnoticed by the enemy for very long, and the success of the operation depended on our offensive being carried out secretly and quickly. The two brigades lined up in one column and left the village of Avdulina at dawn on 27 June 1919.

There were no accurate maps of the area. It was not possible to find reliable guides who knew the valley of the Yuryuzan River. Therefore, the troops were ordered to consider the Yuryuzan River as the direction of the offensive and move upstream along its northern bank. The main column consisted of the 226th, 227th, 228th, 229th, 230th and 231st Rifle Regiments, the 2nd Petrograd Cavalry Regiment and the 3rd, 4th and 7th Light Batteries (a total of 3,500 bayonets, 300 sabres, 82 MGs, 12 guns).

The order of march was regimental columns at a distance of about 0.5-1 km. The artillery was attached as cover, a battery per company. There was no permanent road in the sense of a traffic route. In some places, the transports and artillery followed the river bed, while the infantry units followed a narrow path between the river bed and the mountain spurs holding onto the valley.

Having passed a gorge, the lead units of the regiments were delayed until the whole regiment and its combat carts had made it through.

⁴¹ This village no longer exists. It was 2- 3 km west of the village of Novoyansaitovo in the Karaidel District. PW.



The speed of movement was less than 4 kilometres per hour, so the distance achieved was mainly by extending the march. The troops moved from dawn until late in the evening, when it was necessary to stop because of darkness. Communication was maintained exclusively by horseback. Supplies were kept to a minimum and followed with their units. The whole route, 120 kilometres long, was covered in three and a half days, which is 34 km per day.

Due to the secrecy and the speed of movement, the exit of the two brigades of the 26th RD onto the Ufa Plateau was a complete surprise to the enemy.

Offensive Marches in Winter

In the zone of action of the 5th Army is characterised in winter by an abundance of falling snow and severe cold. The consequence of this was a reduction in the distances travelled. It was possible to move only along roads. This led to a reduction in the width of the march formation, which caused the column to be stretched out. Even moving by fours was sometimes impossible. Any delay at the front part of the column caused the rear units of the column to stop.

The composition of the columns remained unchanged. The distribution of troops in the column changed as the leading units were reinforced by artillery. This is explained purely by combat requirements – the limited possibilities of manoeuvring (due to the deep snow) required an increase in the strength of the blow and, with a narrow front of the attack only along the road, this could be achieved only by increasing the amount of firepower.

Attacking at Night

Night attacks were widely practised, especially in winter. The absence of a continuous line of guards gave ample opportunity, taking advantage of the darkness of the night, to strike the enemy unexpectedly. Attacking at night was a means not only to conceal our movements, but also to reduce the effectiveness of the enemy's fire, which was especially important in winter, when the attack could be conducted only on the roads and any column was visible from afar as a compact and slow-moving target, on which it was easy to concentrate maximum fire.

The composition of the column did not change. The distribution of troops in the column affected only the artillery. The other guns in the column were usually moved to the rear, because the success of the attack was based not on the strength of fire, but on the secrecy of the approach and the unexpectedness of the blow. The speed of movement was naturally less than that during the day. If an attacking night march was not accidental, but was made on the order of a senior commander, the length of the march was calculated on the basis that the troops should start moving at nightfall and finish it no earlier than dawn. Numerous battles⁴² show that our troops were very skilful at marching at night.

Pursuit

Pursuit, one of the types of march movement troops undertake, is not usually singled out as an independent topic in the study of march-manoeuve. This is mainly due to the fact that pursuit is usually limited to actions on the battlefield or directly beyond it, and in any case pursuit as a march-manoeuve executed by troops over a considerable distance is a rare phenomenon. The conditions for the organisation and execution of a pursuit using a march differ so little from the ordinary attack march that a special study seemed unnecessary.

The study of Civil War operations, however, show that pursuit often acquired quite independent, paramount importance in it. The specific conditions made pursuit by march-manoeuve the surest

⁴² See later Chapters.



means of inflicting a final defeat on the enemy. All this increased the importance of the pursuit march and caused a number of peculiarities in its organisation and execution.

Essence of a Pursuit March and its Difference from an Attack March

Combat in the Civil War rarely ended with the direct defeat of the enemy. Features of the conditions of combat⁴³ allowed the enemy to escape from any attacks and, having retreated some distance, put its troops in order. Pursuit on the battlefield did not give significant results, because there were no large masses of troops, so there were no long deep columns attempting to leave the battle, which otherwise would require some rearguard to protect them. The large size of the battle areas, the small number of troops, and the shallow depth of the march columns in the Civil War simplified the task for the retreating enemy and made it easier to escape our strikes.

It was impractical to pursue past the battlefield with units deployed in battle order, since a shallow column will naturally move faster than a chain. In order to use the success achieved, we had to deploy our troops into a march column and rapidly pursue the enemy, not allowing it to stop, put its troops in order and prepare for the defence of a new line. In the Civil War there were pursuit marches initiated for other reasons as well.

In those cases, when the stubborn defence of a line could hold off our attacks, the enemy resorted (in order to recreate operational balance) to a planned and calculated retreat march, aimed at giving up space, in order to gain the time necessary to prepare a counter-attack on some line in the immediate rear of the front.

In the conditions of a well-planned enemy retreat march, our troops could not simply follow the retreating troops. For obvious reasons that would not have produced major tactical results. The task of our troops was to upset the enemy's methodical, systematic retirement, turning it into a disorderly retreat, which would not be achieved by an ordinary attack march. Hence the need for a more rapid pursuit.

Since the retirement had the purpose of gaining time, rapidly pursuing and relentlessly pressing on the enemy's troops would force them to fight back or accelerate. Both were disadvantageous for the enemy, because giving battle did not correspond to the aim of its march, and speeding up the withdrawal threatened to deprive it of any gain of time, i.e. the reason the retirement was initiated in the first place.⁴⁴

Even when fighting Kolchak, on the colossal scale of the theatre of operations, the loss of territory had a cost. Territory was the source of the enemy's forces and means, not to mention the particular importance of some individual locations, whose temporary loss in order to gain latter victory was particularly painful. Any loss of ground not justified by the operational advantages gained from the retreat, threatened disaster.

Continuous and prolonged retreats could not but affect the condition of the retreating troops, lowering their morale and undermining combat effectiveness, breaking operational and organisational links. In this sense, a rapid pursuit in the Civil War was extremely important, because in addition to increasing the loss of soldiers (as stragglers and prisoners), it led to the final collapse of the enemy army, to the decomposition of the forcibly mobilised bulk of the soldiers, who may take advantage of the general disorder to desert or pass to the enemy's side.

⁴³ See later.

⁴⁴ Regarding the disadvantages for the enemy to fight in such conditions we do not mean, of course, rearguard battles or isolated local counter-attacks. Such battles, in their idea and scope, serve the general purpose of enabling the other troops to retire in a calm and orderly manner. The pursuer must always be prepared for such encounters: they indicate of the success of the pursuit, and it depends on its skill to derive the maximum benefit from them.



Finally, a rapid pursuit deprived the enemy of the opportunity to complete the evacuation of the rear and enriched our troops with stocks of material, the capture of which not only caused damage to the Whites, but increased our ability to continue the uninterrupted pursuit without fear of breaking away from their rear, because military property was immediately used to supply our troops, especially firearms, which with the uniformity of armament of between our troops and Kolchak's facilitated the continuation of a persistent pursuit. The "theory" of the overturned rear owes its origin to this phenomenon.⁴⁵

The Direction of Pursuit Determines the Tactical Tasks of the Troops

The success of an entire pursuit operation depends on a skilful choice of the direction it will take. This does not mean, of course, that the troops starting the pursuit are free to choose the direction. The military situation in a given area or axis has in this respect an essential but not decisive importance.

The decisive factors are: the military and geographical situation in the area and the political situation, the correct understanding of which serves as a basis for establishing the main direction of any pursuit.

After the defeat at Chelyabinsk in early August 1919, Kolchak's 3rd Army began a wide retreat, pursued by the troops of our 5th Army. From Chelyabinsk to the Tobol River, our troops followed a broad front (70-100 km) south of the railway. Having crossed the Tobol and approaching the line of the Ishim River, the Army changed its direction of pursuit to the north.

On the eve of Kolchak's transition to a counter-offensive, the right flank of the Army was on the road only 30-40 km south of the railway. The change of direction did not correspond to the military-geographical and political conditions at the time. The railway line, on which both divisions of the Army were grouped after the change of the direction, led our troops to the city of Petropavlovsk and to the area immediately adjacent to it, which did not have any important operational significance. That direction was suitable only for maintaining operational communication with the neighbouring 3rd Army and conducting a frontal offensive, but did not correspond to the concept of continuing the pursuit – the main direction of which was the strip south of the railway, the road and the area south of it. Only that direction created the benefits of parallel pursuit and prevented the enemy from using the political situation (the local Cossacks hostile to us) to strengthen their position and counterattack us.⁴⁶

An example of parallel pursuit is given by the actions of the 26th Rifle Division from 1 to 11 December 1919. Kolchak's defeated armies were rolling back to the east after our capture of Omsk, preparing, according to the information we had gleaned, to go on the counter-offensive on the line of Novonikolaevsk. The military and geographical conditions of the area favoured the enemy plan. The area of Novonikolaevsk acts like a door, behind which begins a narrow corridor (along the railway line). It is covered to the south by the almost impassable mountain massif of the northern Altai (when heading west to east). To the north the corridor is covered by *taiga*.

If Kolchak had managed to put his retreating troops in order (over 150,000 men), he could have created an extremely strong grouping at the entrance to that corridor, and further on in the railway strip, and reached such a tactical density that it would have been almost impossible to break it with a frontal attack.

⁴⁵ Eikhe would later write a book on the "overturned rear" (Опрокинутый тыл) but it became an important part of Soviet military theory well before that. PW.

⁴⁶ See in detail later.



The main forces of the 5th Army, having started the offensive on 14 October 1919 from the Tobol, captured the city of Omsk on 14 November 1919 and continued the pursuit along the Omsk to Novonikolaevsk railway line (Map 5 and the Theatre Map).

For a number of reasons (fatigue, deep snow, the cold), our troops could not be moved forward at the speed required by the situation.

To the south of Novonikolaevsk, in the area of the Novonikolaevsk to Semipalatinsk railway, there were large partisan detachments acting against the Whites.

The situation put before the Army command task was to accelerate the pursuit of the enemy to prevent it from concentrating in the area of Novonikolaevsk and at the same time to support the partisans with the main forces of the Army to create a favourable situation in the Barnaul district, preventing the enemy's Novonikolaevsk operation.

The 26th RD was tasked with advancing on the right flank of the army. On 28 November 1919 it received an order to continue an accelerated movement (using sleds) and, conducting a parallel pursuit of the enemy, to reach the area of Barnaul and north of it, and then to further attack from the area of Barnaul to Taiga station. This task was fulfilled by the division by 11 December 1919.

The situation created in the area of Novonikolaevsk is shown on the map. The main forces of the 5th Army approached Novonikolaevsk on 18 December 1919, but by this time the Whites' planned operation was disrupted by an internal struggle among the top generals (Kolchak's arrest, 2nd Army HQ arrest) and the disintegration of the army's active forces, which by then was taking catastrophic form. The enemy continued to withdraw to the east.

The tactical task of the parallel pursuit is to have a constant opportunity to strike the enemy in the flank and rear, using detours and envelopments.⁴⁷ The troops performing that manoeuvre must move in line with the retreating enemy units beyond their outer flank.

Strikes to the flank and rear should be made only when the enemy tries to delay or counter-attacks to wrest the initiative from our troops attacking it from the front. For the troops carrying out a parallel pursuit, such battles are extremely disadvantageous, as they lead to diversion from the direction of the pursuit and act to delay our movement.

On the contrary, in a frontal pursuit, rapid attacks are absolutely necessary. The ideal is to strike at the junction of two neighbouring enemy units, as a breakthrough between the inner flanks of enemy units is easier and promises greater success. This is because there may be weak combat connection between the flanks and an absence on the ground of a unified tactical leadership over the neighbouring enemy units. The creation of a breakthrough allows for broad threats of outflanking and envelopment.

Strength and Composition of the Pursuit

The absence of large cavalry units in the Army that could be attached to the units, as well as the weakness of the cavalry *divisions* in the rifle divisions, had a very serious impact on the organisation of the pursuit. The missing cavalry could be replaced only by rifle units mounted on carts (sleds in winter) for the sake of speed of movement.

In terms of strength and composition of the columns in the Civil War, the pursuit was conducted by advance guards and columns themselves. We find the organisation of pursuit by advance guards in the actions of the main forces of the 5th Army in early December 1919 after the capture of Kansk.

⁴⁷ An example of a parallel pursuit bypass movement on the battlefield by the 238th RR is given later.



Divisions had to allocate strong advance guards (up to a brigade) for continuous attacks on the retreating enemy units.

The order to the 26th Rifle Division for the organisation of the pursuit of the enemy from Chelyabinsk had the following instructions:

In each brigade there are to be sufficient number of light, double harness, peasant carts for the carriage of an advance guard of up to one battalion of infantry with machine guns; light artillery should be assigned to the advance guards. *Kombrigs* are to take all measures to ensure that the pursuit is conducted rapidly and that the movement of the advanced units is as fast as possible. Do not leave combat contact with the enemy.

The vanguard pursuing the enemy on wagons or by forced march could easily, in just one or two days, break away from the main forces of the column that had sent it and suffer an isolated defeat. Seeking to avoid this, the main forces did not lag behind their rapidly advancing advance guards, and the pursuit started by the vanguards very soon turned into a pursuit by the whole column.

Along with this there was the organisation of a pursuit with the allocation of strong advanced detachments, thrown 10-15 km ahead after the main forces had already started to settle for the night. The allocation of advanced detachments was encountered during the offensives on Zlatoust and on Chelyabinsk, when they, in addition to pursuing, were assigned specific tasks: the destruction of railway lines, interception of trains, etc.

Such advanced detachments were of three to five companies, with machine guns, and an attached platoon or squadron of cavalry (from the regimental scouts or divisional cavalry). Sometimes, depending on the situation and the task at hand, one or two 76-mm guns were also included.

Speed of Movement

In an endeavour to force the pursuit, our units used local carts or sleds. This way it was possible to both increase the amount travelled each day, but also to maintain the pursuit, which is the primary condition for the success of a pursuit march. This task was usually assigned to the advanced detachments which continued the pursuit of the enemy for 10-15 km from the line where the rest of our troops stopped for the night, prevented the retreating enemy units using the night to rest, so forcing them to increase the day's travel up to 40-50 km.

During a pursuit, as during an offensive, the daily distances marched were increased by lengthening the time spent marching, rather than by accelerating the hourly movement. This was particularly the case during the pursuit of the retreating Whites from the Ob' River to the Yenisei River (Theatre Map). During this operation (Mariinsk-Krasnoyarsk) our troops travelled 760 km over 19-20 days, i.e. on average about 38 km a day, partly using peasant sleds. Taking into account the duration of the pursuit and the difficult conditions of the movement (cold, deep snow, the mountainous area and fighting), we must recognise this pursuit as exceptionally fast.

Troop Management

The difficulties of troop management during a pursuit march were in directing the movements so that the pursuit did not turn into a disorderly offensive, which would give the enemy an opportunity to smash the enthusiastic units by counter-attack, and in overcoming the difficulties arising from the continuity of our movement.

At the same time it was impossible to restrain the initiative of the pursuing troops by adhering to strict requirements of movement from line to designated line.



Taking this into account, the commander of the 5th Army during the pursuit to Bugul'ma in May 1919 ordered:

*Nachdivs*⁴⁸ are to inform all *kombrigs* and *kompolkas*⁴⁹ that they do not need to wait for orders to continue the offensive (pursuit) and should relentlessly attack the enemy until its complete destruction.

In that case, with the concentric movement of our divisions in relatively narrow strips towards Bugul'ma, the Army's instructions corresponded to the situation and the overall concept of a tactical encirclement of the enemy troops in the operation.

Another kind of phenomena was noted in operational reports of the 35th Rifle Division during the pursuit of the enemy, defeated in October 1919 on the Tobol River.

Communication with the regiments is poorly organised. It is impossible to follow them during this continuous movement. Due to this, operational orders often repeat tasks already completed.

Another summary for the same period says:

In general, the regiments are moving rapidly, often acting at cross-purposes. They do not keep in touch with each other, and as a result neighbouring regiments sometimes simultaneously complete a task.

The enemy did not use this indiscriminate pursuit by our units to launch a counter-attack. It lacked forces for a major operation and localised counter-attacks would not succeed.

Flank Marches

In the first days of April 1919, retreating from Ufa, the 3rd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division had to make a flank march, which at the same time was a retreat march (see Map 6).

The movement of the 1st Irkutsk Soviet Division in March 1920 along the road from Verkhneudinsk to Chita was an offensive flank march, because to the south of the road, 50 km away from it, on the railway line there were units of Ataman Semenov's army.

In both cases the flank march was made over a considerable length, but not along the enemy's front. The conditions of march-manoeuvre in the Civil War gave the units the opportunity to replace a movement along the enemy's front by an oblique movement or concentration to the flank.

Lanes of Action, Composition of Columns and Distribution of Units in a Column

The situation did not require lanes of action. The direction of movements was indicated in the form of lines or areas to be reached by a certain date.

The 1st Irkutsk Soviet Division moved with its main forces along the *trakt*,⁵⁰ as it was the most convenient route for marching. The 3rd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division retreated in three parallel columns, seeking to secure its movement and speed it up. The strength and composition of the columns and the distribution of troops in the column were determined to ensure this.

⁴⁸ The head of a division. It was changed soon afterwards to *KomDiv*. PW.

⁴⁹ Commander of a regiment. PW.

⁵⁰ Presumably this the Сибирский тракт or Great Siberian *trakt*, which was the main route east-west other than the railway. PW.



Having at its disposal only one road, the Irkutsk Division marched with its units echeloned in depth in the direction of the offensive. It was forced to do so by 1) the lack of convenient roads and settlements for quartering away from the *trakt*; 2) the need to create a very long communication line, which could be done only along one main direction (the *trakt*) with the available means.

The 3rd Brigade of the 26th RD was not bound by its choice of roads. It could take routes even further south to ensure itself from possible and disadvantageous clashes with the enemy on its flank march (there were no neighbours in the way). The chosen route was favourable only in the sense that it shortened the retreat and brought the brigade more quickly to the right flank of the division. Since the enemy had rushed into the gap created by the destruction of the 2nd Brigade of the 26th RD, the 3rd Brigade might encounter the enemy on the march.

With that in mind, the brigade commander chose three roads for the movement. On the northern road, which was closest to the enemy, the 232nd Rifle Regiment moved at full strength, but without their kitchens and some of the minor 1st Class wagons. On the next road south was the 233rd Rifle Regiment. Finally on the most distant road were the regimental transports, brigade headquarters and some of the artillery under the cover of a rifle company. On the second day of the march the 232nd RR, which was marching along the northern road, was replaced by the 233rd RR, which had been marching along the middle road. The change was caused by the necessity to give some rest to the 232nd RR, which had been covering the movement of the columns and was very tired from the two days of march.

Contact with the enemy Cossack units was only during the first day of the flank march. During the next two days the enemy was not detected because the brigade, having made about 40 kilometres on the first day, had left the zone of those enemy units, which, having raced into the breakthrough, were tasked with developing the offensive to the south, in the general direction of Sterlitamak.

The distribution of troops in the columns of the regiment's main forces was the usual for an offensive march, other than the mentioned changes to the columns' wagons.

The Distances of Marches, Communications and Control

The 3rd Brigade of the 26th RD marched 110 km over three days, averaging 37 km per day, with the regiments using common sleds to force the march on the 2nd and 3rd days. The march was at the beginning of April, when the condition of the roads covered with snow had noticeably deteriorated. Such a long march was extremely tense, especially as it was necessary to be in constant readiness for any enemy units. Even using peasant vehicles, the regiments could make the whole crossing in three days only by reducing to the lowest limits of possibility the time for overnight stops and breaks.

Communication between the columns was maintained by mounted orderlies. In order to level the movement, each column was ordered an exact hour of departure, the place, time and duration of the long halt, and finally the points for lodging.

The orders also required a swift attack and clearing of the way if the settlements lying in the path of advance were occupied by the enemy. Those instructions were based on the fact that large enemy forces could not have had time to intercept the brigade's path of retreat, and avoiding battle with any enemy could only lead to the march becoming disordered and the troops disorganised.

The attack of the 25th RD from the area of Buguruslan northwards to Bugul'ma in May 1919 was also a flank march. The division was on the right flank of the 5th Army and, due to the assigned direction of the offensive, had an open right flank and rear (Maps 1 and 3). From 6 to 12 May there was no real threat to the flank from the east, because the enemy acting against the division was



retreating to the north and did not make any attempts to change the direction of its retreat to the east to take a flank position in relation to the division advancing to the north.

However, the commander of the division quite correctly was concerned of the threat to its flank and rear from the direction of Belebey because of the Ik River and therefore placed the 3rd Brigade of the division echeloned back behind the right flank, assigning direct flank cover of the forward brigades to separate cavalry *divisions*, of which there were only four in the division.

Retreat March

A retreat may be only a separate task for a unit in the overall operation plan, or it may be the main task of the troops for a period of time. The conditions of the situation determine both the organisation and execution of the march in both cases.

After the unsuccessful counter-offensive at Chelyabinsk, the enemy began a broad retreat march and from 5 August 1919 to 2 September withdrew, giving us space in order to gain the time necessary to restore their forces and prepare a counter-attack in the deep rear. In September 1919 the Whites, having finished preparations for a counterattack, went on to the offensive from the Ishim River, pressed the 5th Army to the west and finally forced it to retreat to the western bank of the Tobol River in order to use the river as a frontier and prepare for a new offensive. The difference between the reasons and objectives of the retreat of the 5th Army in September 1919 and the Whites in August 1919 is obvious.

The task of the retreating troops determines the method of their march.

A retreat can be initiated and carried out under direct pressure from the enemy or deliberately ordered and serve as a means to fulfil some other task.

Both types of retreat took place in March 1919 during our withdrawal from the Urals.

Kolchak began his great and decisive counter-offensive by a strike of two divisions along the Yavgel'din – Ufa road. The 3rd Brigade of the 27th RD, operating north of Birsik, was hit and forced to withdraw to the south-west. The rest of the 5th Army forces, which were in the area north of Ufa (1st and 2nd RBs of the 27th RD, 2nd RB of the 5th RD and a combined brigade), were deeply outflanked. Having a enveloping enemy strike group to their rear, these brigades had to start retreating after unsuccessful counter-attack attempts under the direct pressure of the White's combined division (Map 6).

Having occupied the area of Sharypova, the White strike group had cut the most favourable line of retreat for our four brigades. The attacks of the strike group from the west and north-west and the rapid pursuit started by the enemy's Combined Division from the north and north-east forced our brigades to start a rapid retreat directly to the south. The enemy managed, having thrown back the main forces of the left flank of the 5th Army to the south of the Volga – Bugul'ma railway, to widen the gap between the 5th and 2nd Armies and to free the way to the towns of Bugul'ma and Simbirsk, with only the 3rd Brigade of the 27th RD in the way. The other two brigades of the same division, as well as the 2nd Brigade of the 5th RD and the Combined Brigade went to the area east of Belebey, and the 2nd Brigade of the 27th RD, the 2nd Brigade of the 5th RD and the Combined Brigade were out of action and without artillery, which they could not take with them.

On the right flank of the Army, where the 26th RD was operating, the enemy strengthened noticeably and began to push vigorously, but failed to break us. The 26th RD was ordered to retreat due to the fact that the left flank of the Army was broken and was rapidly retreating southwards, thus stripping the flank and rear of the 26th. As a consequence, that division began a systematic



withdrawal, with the aim of withdrawing it away from the concentrated blows from the front and rear and to reliably cover the route to Samara.

The difference in the tasks for the 26th RD and 27th RD determined the different ways they performed their retreat marches.

The 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 27th RD, the 2nd Brigade of the 5th RD and the Combined Brigade had to retreat as quickly as possible in order to escape from the strikes of the enemy's Combined Division, attacking from the rear, and to break through to the area of the Volga – Bugul'ma railway before the White enveloping group cut off all their possible lines of retreat to the west by occupying the area of the Chishma station. The retreat was made on carts and almost non-stop. Only the general direction was important. It was impossible to specify any lanes, boundaries, lines or rear areas. There was no overall leadership: each brigade acted on its own.

The units of the 26th RD, were given such instructions in a timely manner and in great detail, which allowed them to perform their retreat march in greater order: the division's manpower and materiel were preserved in full.

Direction of the Retreat

Having begun the retreat, the 26th RD was in a sense free to choose the direction of its withdrawal. The brigades' retreat lanes were the same width as those of an offensive. The axes of the lanes aligned with the rear communication lines of the brigades.

Having started the retreat to Ufa on 12 March 1919, the next day the left flank of the division changed its direction of withdrawal sharply to the south, as the area of Chishma station, which was in the rear of that flank of the division, by that time had already been occupied by a bypassing enemy column.⁵¹ The sharp southwards turn of the division's left flank, in order to evade battle with the White strike group, did not affect the actions of its right flank 3rd Brigade, which maintained the route had been given, retreating under strong pressure from the enemy's 12th Infantry Division.

The direction of retreat of the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 27th RD, the 2nd Brigade of the 5th RD, and the Combined Brigade did not match the line they were supposed to take. The brigades strove at first to move to the Chishma area to escape from the enemy's attacks and, keeping ahead of its bypass group, to reach the main Ufa – Simbirsk⁵² route. But the Chishma area had been occupied, and so the troops continued their rapid retreat southwards to the Belebey area.

The initial direction of the retreat was solely to withdraw the troops before the threatened tactical encirclement. Having reached the area of Chishma, the brigades⁵³ had an opportunity, without getting into serious fighting with the enemy strike group, to break through to the Ufa – Bugul'ma rail line. But by this time their actions were already affected by disorientation, a lack of overall leadership and demoralisation in some of the units: each of the brigades acted according to its needs, seeking mostly to avoid clashes with the enemy and to escape from the impending encirclement.

The 3rd Brigade of the 27th RD, having withstood the first blow by the enemy's flanking group, was forced to withdraw. Despite the brigade's isolated position and constant movement by the enemy around its left flank, it firmly covered the Ufa – Bugul'ma rail line. The 4th Ufa Infantry Division and

⁵¹ See also later.

⁵² Now Ulyanovsk (Lenin was born there). PW.

⁵³ 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 27th RD, the 2nd Brigade of the 5th RD, and the Combined Brigade



Cossack units were pressing the brigade, but they failed to dislodge it from that route at any point during the retreat, starting from the middle of March and lasting until the end of April.

Depth and Distribution of Units in the Column

The strength and composition of the columns in a retreat march generally corresponded to the strength and composition of columns on the offensive and did not exceed a regiment. The 26th RD executed its retreat march in regimental columns. Along the brigade's line of retreat, each regiment was assigned a specific route. The Combined Brigade had in its main column: the 241st RR, two companies of the 41st RR, and five guns. The 239th RR, which was also part of the brigade, retreated as a separate column.

The distribution of the troops in the column was as follows: at the head was the 1st Class transport (if it had not been sent to the rear earlier); then artillery which was close to the head of the column, except when it was designated to hold back the enemy by local counter-attacks. The rearguard was always reinforced by machine-guns.

Troop Management

Management consisted of: 1) the designation of several rear lines to be occupied successively by retreating units by a certain date or in the event of a forced withdrawal – the retreat from line to line was to serve as a constraint, keeping the withdrawal level; 2) the early indication of demarcation lines and rear areas, which allowed brigade commanders to accurately indicate to the wagons and rear establishments the forthcoming locations and routes of withdrawal.

Regimental headquarters retreated with the troops. Brigade field headquarters, and often division field headquarters, remained in place until the retreating units arrived. This meant that during the retreat division and brigade commanders were closer to their troops and had more frequent communication with them. Apart from simplifying the task of communication and control, this undoubtedly also had a morale effect, maintaining the spirit of the retreating units' commanders.

Calculation of the Movement and the Length of the March

The retreating march was not calculated on the basis of the speed of the wagons. Second Class regimental and brigade transports were mainly peasant wagons, which allowed a forced march, because there was always an opportunity to change tired horses in the villages. The 1st Class convoys were in a more difficult situation. They had more horses and wagons of their own and in general did not have to and could not go to the rear any considerable distance from their troops.

During the retreat the units used common carts widely for transporting not only property, but also people. The length of the march was increased by the reduction of the time for long stops and overnight stays. If several lines were planned, the troops tried to break away from the enemy on the first day of the retreat and for this purpose accelerated their march.

The length of marches during the retreat did not differ in general from that of marches during an offensive: up to 50-60 kilometres per day on carts and 20-25 kilometres when in march order.

The decisive factors in calculating and executing a retreat march were the overall operational situation and the intensity and directions of the pursuit, rather than protecting the rear and coordinating the speed of the retreating units with its movement.

Discipline of March and Preservation of Troop Strength

Maintaining march discipline during a retreat presents great difficulties. As we shall discuss later, prolonged retreats have a very negative effect on the political state and morale of the troops.



The main measure to preserve the troops' strength was the use of peasants' carts to transport men and equipment during long retreats.

March discipline required the exact fulfilment of orders: an adherence to the specified direction and timing of the retreat. Within a column, the task of maintaining march discipline was limited mainly to the preservation of manpower, keeping constant combat readiness and the placing of the sub-units in the column.

Retreat at Night and in the Mountains

An example of a night retreat is that of the 3rd Brigade of the 26th RD in November 1918 (Map 3). Occupying a position on the right eastern bank of the Ik River, in the area of St. Turaevo – Abdulino, the brigade was ordered to start a withdrawal at nightfall and concentrate in the area of the Dymskaya, 50 km west of St. Turaevo. In the brigade's sector were mixed units of Czechs and White Guards, which a few days before had been pushed east from the Ik.

Under the cover of rearguards, the brigade's main forces were pulled back to the west bank of the river at nightfall. The start of the retreat was scheduled so as to unite the brigade's forces in one column when the regiments passed Repyevka (Topyz), on the retreat route. The task was accomplished. Having formed one column (two rifle regiments and two batteries – 6 guns), the main forces continued along a single road in marching order with small breaks and came to the specified area about 09:00 the next morning. The 1st Class transports moved with their units. The brigade retreated overnight some 50-60 km, having retained full combat effectiveness.

An example of changing the methods of retreating in the mountains are the actions of the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 26th RD in July 1919. Having made a forced march along the Yuryuzan River and having occupied Akhunova on 1 July 1919 (Map 4), the 1st and 2nd brigades of the 26th RD found themselves in a difficult situation. Four days had passed since their departure from Abdulino; there was no news from the 27th RD or from the railway area. Prisoners from the 45th Infantry Regiment taken during the capture of Munayev showed that the 12th Urals Division was resting and had received considerable reinforcements. There was unverified information about the presence in the vicinity of Akhunova – Lakly⁵⁴ – Nisibash of other units of the White Ufa Corps as well as the 12th Ural Division. While we had been able to march along the Yuryuzan River in secret, the combat near Munayev had disclosed our forces.

The two brigades of the 26th RD had been given the task to march from Abdulino to the area of Kropachevo – Mursalimkino⁵⁵ in order to cut the line of retreat of Kappel's Corps, operating along the railway. The fact that the 12th Urals Division and other units of the Ufa Corps, being in reserve, were quietly training mobilised men, seemed to show that the position of the Whites on the railway and the *trakt* was stable.

So an offensive at Mursalimkino was towards the centre of the enemy's Ufa Corps. In that case the immediate task would be swift blow at the 12th Urals Division, using all the forces of both brigades to smash it, while covering that strike from the directions of Akhunova and Kropachevo with strong screens.

However that plan had a number of very valid considerations against it, namely: 1) a quick and decisive defeat of the 12th Urals Division was unlikely, as the enemy could evade a decisive battle and receive support from other units of the corps, located in the area of Nisibash and Lakly; 2) advancing into the centre of the corps, the brigades would be engaged in battles with superior

⁵⁴ Lakly is 15 km east of Nisibash, just off the map. PW.

⁵⁵ Mursalimkino is 35 km east of Kropachevo. The railways drops down but loops up again to pass through it. PW.



enemy forces. The outcome of the battles was uncertain, we would lose time, and the enemy, if necessary, could still withdraw Kappel's Corps to the east.

An advance in the direction of Nisibash – Mursalimkino, with the isolated position of both brigades, would have inevitably opened our flanks and rear to the enemy – first of all from the side of the road, creating a real threat of interception by the Whites on our only line of communication with the rear. We had to consider possible forced withdrawals, and for this we had neither a rear area nor roads. It was only possible to move forwards along the Yuryuzan River, and then only when done secretly. Retreat along that route under pressure from the enemy was unthinkable, especially as White partisan detachments, formed from local Bashkirs, had already started to operate in the mountains.

My⁵⁶ plan was to try to occupy the area of Kropachevo, which required a sharp turn to the south. The situation in that area was unknown. Attacking Kropachevo station would at the very least leave the whole of the Whites' 12th Urals division in our rear, and ahead of us would be unknown enemy forces. With that plan the offensive route along the Yuryuzan River would have to be abandoned and a new rear area would have to be created in case of the need for a forced withdrawal.

On the basis of those considerations and a comparative assessment of both directions (Akhunova – Mursalimkino versus Akhunova – Kropachevo), the division commander adopted the following plan: 1) the 2nd Brigade, two regiments and one battery, would cross the Yuryuzan River in the area of Akhunova, rapidly advance southwards through Ileik and seize the area of Kropachevo 2) the 1st Brigade (with one regiment of the 2nd Brigade) and two batteries would rapidly attack the 12th Urals Division, defeat it, and having thrown it back to the east, occupy the Nisibash area.

The plan had the immediate aim of securing the rear by occupying the area lying to the south of Akhunova and covered from the east by the Yuryuzan and from the west by the mountain massif of the Kara-Tau Range. The direction along the Yuryuzan River to Abdulino was abandoned as a possible line of retreat. The offensive directions ordered by the Army commander were retained, but one of these directions (Akhunova – Kropachevo) was also assessed as a possible line of retreat in case of a forced withdrawal.

After fighting in the of Nisibash area on 2 and 3 July – facing the 12th Urals Division and units of the 4th Ufa Infantry Division, as well as a Cossack brigade – the 1st Brigade was deeply outflanked and was forced to start a withdrawal. The roads from the area of Nisibash to Akhunova were intercepted by the enemy. Fighting off fierce attacks from the advancing enemy, the brigade retreated to the south-west through Kalmaklarovo.⁵⁷ Having forded the Yuryuzan River under enemy pressure, it took up a position on the left bank of the river, i.e. it withdrew to the rear area which had been prepared and provided for by the 2nd Brigade offensive's at Kropachevo station. Having a secure rear and having connected up with the reserve regiment, which also retreated to the left bank of the river near the village of Musatovo, the 1st Brigade held off the White attacks with a stubborn defence of the river line until 6 July, i.e. up to our counter-offensive, when the 12th Urals Division was defeated.

The extremely difficult situation of both brigades of the 26th RD (isolation, a lack of information about neighbouring units, the superior enemy numbers, actions from White partisans in the mountains and encirclement) did not prevent the division from carrying out its task and inflicting serious losses on the enemy (about 600 prisoners were taken) and preserving its forces.

⁵⁶ Eikhle made a rare slip here. Although mostly writing about himself in the third person, he was in fact in command of the 26th RD at this time, so the decision was his. PW.

⁵⁷ Just across the river from Maloyaz. PW.



This was possible only due to the fact that from 1 July our units were directed in such a way that, while fulfilling the task of intercepting the railway, at the same time they created and secured a rear area in the event of a forced retreat, using for that purpose one of our attacks from Akhunova and declining to retreat in that area, which was the only line connecting us to the rear.

Protection and Security of Marches

We have deliberately not so far touched upon the tasks of provisioning and guarding the troops during a march-manoeuve, and also the methods by which these tasks were solved.

The provisioning of a march is achieved by measures of operational importance, above all by using the specific conditions in order to execute the march-manoeuve.

Security, the technical aspect of guarding the troops on the march, is a purely combat element, which depends on the degree of training and skill of the men.

If a march is unsupplied then even best then security will not prevent defeat and death. Likewise, when the march is not protected in an unsatisfactory manner, then the best provisioned units will still fail.

The interaction between supply and security lies in the very essence of the activities, not in their external features.

Unity of Operation

The unity of the operation is the uniting of the overall objective of the manoeuvre, in accordance with which the individual tasks are assigned to the individual columns.

The success of the entire enterprise depends on concrete issues being correctly resolved – the study and assessment of the situation, the choice of the right direction, and the assignment of a sufficient number of troops to solve the main task.

Assigning the lanes of action and their boundaries is the main external condition required for the unity of the operation. The troops will then complete the plan, using their assigned forces, by the persistent fulfilment of their individual tasks.

In the early days of December 1918 the 26th Rifle Division (Map 3), having crossed the Ik River and overcoming enemy resistance, was rapidly advancing eastwards in the general direction of the Bugul'ma to Ufa railway line. The division was passing through the same area where two weeks earlier the 27th Rifle Division had suffered a serious defeat. The 27th, when it had been advancing eastwards along the railway, was attacked by significant White forces from the south, into its flank and rear. The division was pushed back to the north-west with heavy losses. The enemy's success was explained by the fact that, advancing along the northern edge of the forest near Z. V. Troitskiy, the right flank of the 27th RD was not operationally secured and the enemy took advantage of this. Advancing from the south, from Z. V. Troitskiy, it hit the flank and rear of the 27th and was able to inflict heavy damage to the division's units.

Lessons were learned from this experience. When the 26th RD recrossed the area in early December 1918, we suspected another attack would be launched from Z. V. Troitskiy. The measures taken were: 1) to concentrate the 1st Brigade in the area of Uspensky and Nikiforovsky, behind the right flank of the division, and 2) move from the Nurkeeva area (on the railway, 35 kilometres north-west of Nikolaevka) towards Z. V. Troitskiy a "Detachment named in honour of the



TsIK”⁵⁸ (about 250 bayonets, 35 machine guns, 87 sabres and 6 guns), which was about to be transferred to our 1st Army, which was advancing on the town of Belebey.

The enemy repeated its manoeuvre and on 6 December 1918 attacked the right flank of the 3rd Brigade with large forces, occupying Konstantinovka and Nikolaevka. Simultaneously, large Cossack forces were advancing north towards Nizhny Bashindy from Z. V. Troitskiy, intending to strike the rear of our units. The flanking White column had an encounter battle with the TsIK detachment in the forest, was repulsed to Z. V. Troitsky and, having suffered a second defeat there, hastily retreated to the east. The advance of the TsIK detachment from the area of Nizhny Bashindy to Z. V. Troitsky actively protected the flank and rear of the 26th RD, and its success determined a favourable outcome for us.

In September 1919 the 26th RD was again the Army’s flank, advancing from the Tobol River to the Ishim River. A security measure was taken of sending a lateral detachment; however, no proper operational measures were taken to secure the march. The enemy, having easily thrown back our side detachment, dealt the division a strong blow to the flank and rear. This commenced its general counter-offensive, as a result of which we were forced to retreat to behind the Tobol.⁵⁹

March Security is not Limited to Operational Activities

The geographical, economic and political conditions are of great importance, and should be taken into account for the purposes of march security. We have already seen examples of this kind: 1) the 26th RD during a parallel pursuit march; 2) the offensive of the 1st Irkutsk Division along the road to Chita; and 3) the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 26th RD during the offensive along the Yuryuzan River and from Akhunova to Kropachevo. These examples, of course, are far from being exhaustive but show that the correct assessment and skilful use of the advantages provided by geographical, economic and political conditions allow a march to be no less reliably secured than with the implementation of operational interactions between neighbouring units.

Security on the March

The normal conditions in the Civil War greatly simplified the issues of guarding troops on the march. The small size of the columns, their mobility and insignificant depth, and the lack of strong artillery fire, almost excluded the possibility of taking a column by surprise and inflicting heavy losses on it before it had time to deploy into combat order.

The absence of this danger allowed us to simplify the organisation of march security, increasing its activity.

March patrols replaced the sending of reconnaissance units. The work of reconnaissance and march security in the conditions of the Civil War were so closely intertwined that it was almost impossible to distinguish between them. Regimental detachments of mounted and foot scouts were usually assigned to the advance guards, which further increased the value of the reconnaissance units and combined the tasks of protecting and reconnaissance.

The Strength and Composition of the Security Units

In the conditions it was impossible and inexpedient to apply the previous norms of march guard organisation.

⁵⁸ The initials of the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federation, which was the governing body of the RSFSR. This early in the war there were still some independent units not yet absorbed into regular brigades and divisions, and many had quite elaborate names. PW.

⁵⁹ This will be covered in detail later.



On an attack march, the regiment had an advance guard, usually consisting of a company to a battalion with machine guns. When the brigade's main forces were moving in one column, the vanguard was a battalion or regiment in full strength, with machine guns, with an attachment of one or two guns.

When moving the two brigades of the 26th RD along the Yuryuzan River, the vanguard consisted of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the 227th Infantry Regiment with two guns. That vanguard had an attached sapper company, which was caused by the special conditions of the offensive (with almost no roads). Usually sapper units remained at the brigade headquarters and were attached as platoons to individual regimental columns in anticipation of the need to repair and build bridges.

Side detachments were very rarely sent out: with the insignificant depth of the columns, the speed of their movement and significant gaps between neighbouring columns, sending them out was both impractical and useless. Instead of lateral detachments, the column sent out outposts, patrols or scouts as needed.

The strength and composition of the lead detachment depended on the strength of the advance guard; with a small vanguard a lead detachment was not used, and the attack was covered by patrols and scouts. The rearguard in an offensive was usually entrusted to a rifle platoon.

The distance of the advance guard from the head of the main column forces depended on their strength and other situational conditions. Usually it moved some 2-3 kilometres in front of the main column.

The same methods of march protection were applied when performing a pursuit. By sending out advanced detachments simultaneously solved the problem of organising the continuity of the pursuit and the organisation of the advance guard security. The difference was that during the pursuit the advance guards often moved on peasant carts.

In winter conditions, when movement was possible only on the roads and the possibility of unexpected attacks or ambushes was reduced to a minimum, the regiment's vanguard was usually a company, allocating only one lead march patrol with scouts.

In a retreat the same variety of forces was observed as with an attack. The burden of protection during a retreat fell to the rearguard.

When a retreat march was ordered by a superior officer, the strength and composition of the rearguard corresponded to that of a vanguard, but with the addition of more machine guns. If the retreat began under pressure and the enemy continued to pursue the retreating troops, the rearguard was reinforced heavily with machine guns, on whose covering fire the retreat was based.

Artillery was in a rearguard only in exceptional cases. The artillery might cover the beginning of the retreat, as the rifle units formed into a march column, but then joined the main column.

If the retreat was made on carts, the rearguard consisted almost exclusively of machine-gun units. Those units also bore the burden of covering the retreat when, thanks to a continuous and prolonged retreat, the combat effectiveness of the rifle formations was extremely low.

The Tasks of the Security Units and their Actions

The wide fields of operation and the small number of combat troops in the march columns forced units to use their available forces very carefully and sparingly to fulfil security tasks. In those conditions, the vanguard could not limit itself only to the fulfilment of security. The main column expected it – in addition to guarding against sudden attacks or collisions with the enemy and ensuring the correct path of the advance – to perform various combat tasks. The advance guard was considered the first echelon and was obliged to reveal the location and strength of the enemy



as quickly as possible and, in direct combat, to create a favourable situation for the entry into action of the main forces.

As already mentioned, the 227th RR and the 2nd Petrograd Cavalry Regiment (420 bayonets, 150 sabres, 19 machine guns and 2 guns) under the command of Comrade Putna formed the vanguard of the two 26th RD brigades advancing along the Yuryuzan River. On reaching the Ufa Plateau the head of the vanguard received information from locals that there were White units in the nearby villages. Having gathered the regiment into a strike force and having taken measures to strengthen the lead unit, the vanguard commander continued the offensive. Soon he received a report from the forward scouts that the enemy had been discovered near Munayev, undertaking formation exercises. Obviously, the enemy did not know about our offensive.

The commander of the vanguard decided to use the favourable situation and threw his regiment into an attack. It was so swift and unexpected for the enemy that most of the White soldiers present were captured and the rest fled. Without stopping, the 227th RR developed its success and continued a rapid pursuit to the village of Bashevdyarova, a kilometre away. The enemy units occupying Bashevdyarova had time to prepare for battle, but the vanguard commander put his artillery into action, led a vigorous attack, took the village and repulsed the Whites

The advance guard's offensive developed with such rapidity that by the time the head of the main column approached the battle was over and the enemy units were fleeing eastwards. A quick and correct assessment of the situation, a hidden approach, the rapid advance and the energetic development of the success gave us 237 prisoners (including two officers) and other trophies, with negligible losses of a few men on our side.

In November 1918 the 3rd Brigade of the 26th RD was advancing along the road from Trukmeneva to Narysheva, with the task to seize the area of N., Nzh. and V. Bashindy. The brigade was in one column with the 232nd and 233rd RRs and two batteries. Information about the enemy was inconclusive, but in connection with its successes over the 27th RD north of the railway, it was assumed it would regroup to the south in order to halt our advance.

In the brigade's vanguard, three kilometres ahead, was a battalion of the 232nd RR (300 bayonets and 4 MGs). Having approached Narysheva, and not found the enemy, the vanguard continued to Zaitova. As brigade's main forces pulled up to Narysheva, it encountered the enemy's 12th Bugul'ma Regiment and an officer battalion advancing along the road from Tuimazin to Narysheva, wedged between our 3rd brigade's main forces its advance guard.

This led to an encounter battle. Neither during the battle nor during the pursuit of the defeated White units was any information received from the vanguard. It could not be contacted until late at night. It turned out that although the vanguard had heard the heavy artillery fire from Narysheva and noticed the movement of White units on the road running parallel to its advance, it had continued to move until reaching the line assigned to it, without taking measures to establish communication with the main forces or to clarify the situation in the rear.

The incorrect actions of the vanguard are obvious. Without dwelling on them, and without touching upon the issue of the missing lateral guard which was mentioned above, we emphasise this episode as a very clear proof that in the conditions of wide fronts with isolated columns it was not important to have a strong and distant advance guard, instead required a simple march guard, directly covering the movement of the main forces of the column.⁶⁰

This provision is also true with regard to rearguards. The 239th Rifle Regiment (293 men with 16 MGs) was retreating on 2 May 1919 from Bureyevka to Mencha. The regiment's rearguard was two

⁶⁰ And in this case, also a side guard - Ed.



companies of 105 bayonets and three MGs. The enemy pursuit was being led by an infantry battalion and some Cossacks. Taking advantage of the rugged terrain and outpacing the rearguard companies,⁶¹ the Cossacks got between the rearguard and the regiment's main forces, in order to cut off the rearguard. A swift blow from the rearguard repelled the Cossacks and cleared its path.

General Characteristics of a March-Manoeuvre and some Conclusions

The military and political situation in the [Eastern Theatre of the] Civil War was determined by three main conditions: the vastness of the theatre, the relatively small number of troops and the class nature of the war. Some combination of those conditions at any given moment constituted the essence of the situation. Its complexity and diversity were increased by the fact that each of these conditions was itself a complex phenomenon, the product of a number of new conditions and colliding factors, each of which in turn was the product of the collisions and crossings of a number of other factors.

The overall situation was thus a series of complex, continuously changing phenomena.

Success depended on the ability to combine specific operational tasks to upset the balance of forces in the situation, on the ability to increase the effectiveness of one units using the more favourable conditions applying.

In this interaction of the troops' efforts and the balance of the situation, sometimes invisible and imperceptible at first glance, lies the key to our march-manoeuvres.

The scattered objectives, the considerable length of the front, the rapidity of operations and the mobility of the troops were consequences of underlying conditions and their interaction.

The supply of troops with local food supplies and the use of local carts increased the manoeuvre freedom of the units.

Dividing the troops of a division or brigade into separate march columns was not just a consequence of the requirement for mobility, but was primarily caused by the need to create a known front line. Strengthening the main column and sending detachments laterally – not for protection, but for operational communication – was the main method of lessening the harmful need to divide one's forces.

Concentration of forces was achieved by changing the operational density towards a particular point, which, however, did not mean the concentration of those forces on a specific battlefield.

The speed of troop movement arose from the continuity of the actions, due to both the rapidly changing situation, and the complexity and short duration of preparations for new operations.

Pursuit after any success achieved was exceptionally developed in the Civil War. They became almost operations in their own right – both in terms of duration and rapidity of its conduct and in terms of its results.

The long distances marched did not mostly arise from any increased rate of movement per hour, but were achieved by increasing the marching day.

In its essence the march-manoeuvre in the Civil War was not just mechanical technique or a method of troop movement, it was above all the realisation of the principle of striking a simultaneous blow with all one's forces.

⁶¹ Again, no lateral guards – Ed.



The enemy experienced these strikes every day during our offensives, uninterruptedly along its 150 to 200-kilometre front, to the same extent as we experienced its strikes during our retreats.

The concept behind the offensives – managed by indicating lanes of action for the units, with movement being kept level by the indication of successive lines to be occupied, and finally with the distribution of troops in march columns – led to the creation of a march system for the Army, divisions and brigades. That system, maintaining the unity of the operation, served at the same time to allow manoeuvre.

Security of the troops on a march, as a purely military matter, did not require the allocation of significant forces. It gave the most favourable results only when the guard units were relatively close to the column that sent them out.



Chapter III – Combat

The main factors in war are 1) the assembly of all forces and means for warfare and 2) in the proper use of these forces and means in the war. Combat is one of those uses, and as such it must first of all be considered in the connection to the overall actions that take place.

The study of the actions of troops in war shows that combat and marching as if alternate, follow one after the other. Developing from battle to battle, the actions of a unit must pass through the march phase. Between march and the next march, the troops must pass through the phase of armed combat.

There is no doubt that the alternation of marching and fighting can be explained only by a certain regularity in the actions of soldiers in war. This regularity does not depend on the willingness of the troops: it comes about from the situation.

The study of the conditions in which this regularity occurs, the study of its causes and consequences gives grounds to conclude that the alternation of march and battle has a twofold meaning: on the one hand the alternation is nothing but a simple sequence of events in time and space; on the other hand the battle and march is a sequence of events that is intimately connected.

It is obvious that any battle or march can be studied and evaluated from both sides. It is also obvious that a study revealing the internal, causal relationship between march and combat is of greater significance – and is objectively more valuable for judgements and conclusions – but it is certain that the study and evaluation of any battle and the movement to it, in their causal relationship, if it assumes the objective inevitability of either phenomenon is insufficient.

Considering the battle and march in their internal causal relationship, we must first of all study and evaluate them as a result of the purposeful actions of the troops taking part, without, of course, diminishing the importance and influence of the objective situation, which acts with the inevitability and inexorability of the laws of nature.

The phenomena of Civil War battles are defined in two ways.

Offensive marches were controlled and kept level by indicating to the troops certain lines, which they were to occupy by a certain date. The boundaries to the side were usually local objects or geographical lines of importance located behind the first line of enemy resistance. To occupy the designated line, it was necessary to pass through the enemy's front line. The idea was that the troops, fulfilling their task of occupying a given position by a certain date, had to face the enemy, and since it would not voluntarily give up its position or the area it occupied, a battle was inevitable. In other words: the enemy troops were assessed only as an obstacle on the way of occupying the lines indicated to our units. Our advance became an end in itself, while the task of defeating and destroying the enemy was solved as a side effect.

The march of the 27th RD on 29-30 May 1919 can serve as an example of this kind of action. The division was on the southern bank of the Belaya River on the Menzelinsk – Birska road, 90 km from Birska, looking for a place to cross to the northern bank. By 26-27 May it had already become known that units of the Whites' 3rd Corps were acting against the left flank of the 26th RD in the Kuvashovo – Syryshbashevo area. Clearly influenced by the active operations of that corps, the Army commander decided to send the 27th RD to Birska, combining the task of covering the desired crossing from the threats of that corps with finding a convenient point for forcing it in the area of Birska. However, the task of the 27th RD in the directive of 30 May 1919 is formulated in the words:

Advance in the general direction of Birska, and by 1 June deploy at least two brigades on the line Syryshbashevo – Asanova – St. Kuvashovo. (Map 7).



The position of the White 3rd Corps was very awkward, as it had in its immediate rear the wide and deep Belaya River. We had an opportunity, starting from 28-29 May, to prepare and not later than on 30-31 May to strike it a swift blow with superior forces – the three brigades of the 27th RD and the 2nd brigade of the 5th RD, and with the active assistance of the left flank brigade of the 26th RD.

Despite this, the 27th RD was only tasked with occupying a particular line, without any instructions on how to proceed against the White's corps, or whether to seek to exploit its predicament in order to throw it into the river. Strictly speaking in the directive, any combat with the enemy would only be a consequence of the fulfilment of the task of occupying the required line by 1 June. The fight with the corps was not the concept behind the manoeuvre, but an incidental episode in the performance of the 27th RD's main task – to reach Birsik. The battles between the White corps and the units of the 27th RD marching towards its designated line, which took place on 1 June, were for the 27th RD no more than consecutive events in time and space. Their internal causal connection with the manoeuvre lies in the objective conditions applying, and were not a target given nor the purpose of the task received by the division.

The battles during Kolchak's counter-attack near Chelyabinsk and in September 1919 during his last counter-offensive from the Ishim River, as well as at the beginning of our offensive from the Tobol River in October 1919, are of a different character.

The main requirement for the troops in those battles was to defeat the enemy, because that, and not reaching any position, was the objective of their actions. The manoeuvres were not an end in themselves and only had meaning as a method, a technique for creating conditions for the best use of our forces. Purposeful combat. Thanks to that purpose, giving battle was the most decisive action for the army and acquired decisive importance for the operation.

General Conditions of Combat

In studying the conditions of the march-manoeuve we have already established a number of basic provisions influencing the development of its idea and execution.

Battles were a consequence of the marches, both in the underlying cause and purpose and in respect of the external sequence of events. The nature of the concepts and execution of the march to some extent determined the external conditions of the battle.

As already noted, the troops moved from line to line (populated areas). Geographical boundaries were also used to create a front line, but due to the conditions this role was played only by rivers (Belaya, Ufa, Tobol, etc.) that crossed the direction of our offensives.

Usually the front line was formed by the sequential occupation of lines of settlements. As a result a brigade, having received an offensive lane some 15-20 km wide, actually conducted the attack in multiple directions, coinciding with the roads leading to the enemy and to the settlements it was to occupy. This method was used not only because it gave the most convenient offensive routes, but also due to considerations of obtaining food and for the purpose of creating better rest conditions, as the troops stopped in the settlements. The choosing and occupation of a position most convenient for a defence in case of an enemy attack, but not near a populated area, was a secondary consideration.

That is why settlements attracted the attention and the forces of the marching columns: the roads led to them and they were the location of the enemy.

If followed that battles usually arose for their possession. The battlefield was the area immediately adjacent and the approaches to it, or the settlement itself.



Within a unit's lane or on its route, the settlements acquired the significance of keys tactical points, not because of the tactical peculiarities of the terrain but because of the nature of how the troops marched.

This imposed a particular effect on the nature of combat. Since the fighting only took place in specific zones of the of the advancing brigade's front, the troops had the opportunity to manoeuvre widely not only within the offensive lane, but also on the battlefield (in the area of a the target settlement).

The extensive possibilities of manoeuvre for the attacking units made it unnecessary and inexpedient for the defending troops to erect long-term field fortifications. Such fortifications could always be taken by a strike to the flank or rear, not to mention that there was usually no time to erect them.⁶² In addition, the settlements would often give the defender a relatively advantageous tactical position for a defence of the approaches and the concealed positioning of its troops, which was useful only if the artillery on both sides was weak.

In those cases when a line was chosen for defence as a result of the tactical properties it possessed, the defender would take measures to strengthen it by building wire fences and digging trenches. For example, during the battles in the lake district (between the Ishim and Tobol Rivers) both we and the enemy not only widely used the isthmuses between the lakes as positions, but dug trenches (full profile) and erected wire fences to increase the defensive strength of the positions.

The absence of strong tactical defensive positions and the manoeuvrability of the attacking troops on the battlefield resulted in rapid developments and fast-moving battles.

This can be explained by the small number of men, who required relatively little time to deploy and put into action. In particular, as the artillery was attached by platoon or battery to a rifle regiment, with relatively simple tasks and often with a choice of positions, it had the opportunity to enter the battle simultaneously with the deployment of the rifle units.

There is also no doubt that morale factors played a very significant role in the speed of the fighting.

Finally, the experience of constant fighting on the approaches to populated areas could not but lead to the creation and development of known methods of combat, which in turn also affected the pace of the battle because it allowed quick decision-making with the knowledge of repeatedly tested methods of enforcing a decision.

These circumstances shortened the individual stages of the battles and accelerated them.

During the big decisive battles (south of Ufa in March 1919, near Chelyabinsk and behind the Tobol River) the general combat conditions changed significantly.

The increased operational density led to the creation of continuous front lines. The attacks left the main roads and also included tracks. The terrain has an impact, not only in the area of the settlements, but all along the frontage of each brigade's sector. This limited the possibility of manoeuvring on the battlefield (with detours, deep flank cover) and the increased the importance of digging in. The battles lasted longer.

Due to the changed conditions, different battle plans were created from the usual (those near populated areas). The depth of resistance was increased and repeated attacks by units from reserve deep in the formation were employed.

⁶² Compare: I. Kutyakov, *With Chapaev on the Ural Steppes*, where the same conditions led to the construction of ring trenches. Ed.



Combat by Columns and Interaction of Neighbouring Columns

Fighting by individual columns was an inevitable consequence of the methods of march-manoeuve by brigades. One might assume that under those conditions that the defeat of isolated march columns must have been a frequent occurrence. However, the study of the operations does not support that: when defeats to columns did occur they were the result of accidents and had more causes merely than by being isolated.

A regiment advancing in a separate column on its own road had neighbouring columns to the right and left, at a distance that depended primarily on the direction of the regiment's advance and that of the neighbouring units. The road network was of paramount importance. Obviously it was only in very rare cases that a brigade could choose, within its given lane, roads running parallel to the enemy a short distance apart (4-5 km). In the Civil War troops operated almost exclusively on country roads, and a dense network was only found in exceptional cases, because neither the peasant economy nor the location of local administrative and economic centres gave reasons to create close parallel roads.

Under such conditions, the so-called road "nodes"⁶³ became very important. The attacking brigade had to coordinate the direction of the strikes of its main columns (at least the strongest) with movement through the most important road nodes. This ensured the advancing brigade avoided wide detours and allowed it to assist its neighbours. The enemy, having engaged one of the brigade's columns, felt the effects on their position as the neighbouring columns continued to advance. Having achieved a local success in a battle with one of the columns, it had no opportunity to develop it more widely, except of course, when it was engaged in a general counter-attack.

The nature of this march system was carefully taken into account by each separately advancing column of a brigade. Often, having discovered the superior enemy forces, a column would not engage in a decisive battle, but waited until the advance of neighbours could have an impact – but without losing contact with the enemy and while alerting their neighbours to the situation. If we remember that in the Civil War the individual march columns might be battalions, and even companies (in the least important directions), this method can be recognised as appropriate.

The study of our operations gives numerous examples of interaction between neighbouring columns in the form of direct assistance to the neighbour by advancing on the flank and rear of the enemy, as we shall see.

In conclusion, we note that the enemy fully understood and took into account the benefits that it could derive from the dispersion of our units as a result of attacking in separate columns on a wide front. In October 1919 an operational order of the White 1st Partisan Division was intercepted, in which the instructions were given:

Use the Red offensive along a broad front using separate columns, to allow you to act on their flanks and rear, in order to beat them piecemeal.

The difficulty in carrying out these instructions was that the troops of the Partisan Division were no longer free to form a tight group and to choose a specific area to defeat one of our advancing columns. It also had to create and maintain a certain front line by itself, due to the need to cover the numerous directions which necessarily arise when one is acting on a broad front.⁶⁴ The result

⁶³ Or hubs. PW.

⁶⁴ The author is not quite right. The White 1st Division was forced to stretch their forces not by our movement, but by the inability of the White command to fight on broad fronts. Compare the Polish counter-offensive on the Western Front in May 1920. Ed.



was the same single combat of columns advancing along separate roads, which is such a characteristic feature of the Civil War.

Tactical Density

There is a widespread belief that our experience of the Civil War is of low importance for future conflicts, precisely because the tactical density of the men in battle was very low.

The concept of tactical density denotes the ratio between the width of a given sector compared to the number of troops in that sector in combat order, and it is measure in the number of bayonets, machine guns, guns and other combat means to the width of the front (in kilometres) on which they operate. The artificiality of this definition is obvious. Establishing the tactical density of troops in this way for the Civil War can lead to gross errors, if you do not take into account the peculiarities of the conditions of combat.

A study of the war does not give any reason to consider the width of the deployed individual columns of a brigade was equal to the width of its overall offensive line, and therefore it is impossible to divide the number of bayonets, machine guns and guns in the brigade by the width of the offensive line to get a correct idea of the tactical density of the brigade.

The extent of a brigade's fighting order in terms of the size of the front line was determined by the deployed width of its columns. When determining the composition and strength of the columns, the desire was to give each one the forces that were best suited to its task in the given situation. Therefore, in order to properly understand combat in the Civil War it is necessary to distinguish tactical density: 1) as the number of bayonets, machine guns and guns operating on one kilometre of the front line in battle, and 2) as a ratio of the our forces relative to the enemy that was usually acting to oppose them.

Only a parallel collection of that information, clarifying the interacting relationship between them, can give a correct idea of the tactical density in the Civil War.

We have already noted above that opposing one of our three regiment brigades was generally a White infantry division, while at least two divisions of infantry and a cavalry or Cossack brigade operated on the sector of one of our divisions. Undoubtedly, this was to a certain extent due to the ratio of forces of our brigades and infantry divisions of the Whites.

The huge and constant fluctuations in the numerical composition of the units do not allow us to limit the study of this ratio to any of our particular brigades nor specific enemy division.

We therefore have given a comparison of the weakest and strongest of our brigades compared to the same for the infantry divisions of the enemy, for certain time periods.

During the struggle on the Ufa Plateau and the capture of Zlatoust:

	Our brigades	White divisions
Number of regiments	3	3 – 4
Number of battalions	6 - 9	7 – 13
Number of companies	18 - 27	28 - 52
Number of bayonets	1,059 - 3,300	1,300 - 2,900
Number of machine guns	37 - 72	15 - 50
Number of guns	3 - 9	6 - 12
Number of sabres	87 - 277	200 - 500



This table gives a general indication of what were the minimum and maximum forces for our brigades and the White divisions.

The main troop type was infantry (in rifle units). Obviously, the ratio of infantry forces played a decisive role in the battles. If we consider the ratio of enemy forces, based on the number of infantry within our individual brigades and divisions of the Whites, we get the following table:

	Our Brigades		White divisions	
	Weakest	Strongest	Weakest	Strongest
Number of regiments	3	3	3	4
Number of battalions	6	9	7	12
Number of bayonets	1,059	3,300	1,300	2,900
Number of machine guns	46	42	15	40
Number of guns	9	3	6	11
Number of sabres	87	277	200	500

This table gives the combat composition of the weakest and strongest our brigades and enemy divisions *for the infantry*. The number of machine-guns, guns, and sabres is given according to the actual composition in the respective units.

On the basis of the data given in this table, we obtain the following ratios of the combat composition, if we take the infantry forces as the basis of comparison:

	Weakest		Strongest	
	our brigade	White division	our brigade	White division
Number of regiments	3	3	3	4
Number of bayonets	1,059	1,300	3,300	2,900
Number of machine guns	46	15	42	40
Number of guns	9	6	3	11
Number of sabres	87	200	277	500

During the fighting on the Tobol River in October 1919:

The ratio of the combat strength of our brigades and the enemy divisions is shown:

	Weakest		Strongest	
	our brigade	White division	our brigade	White division
Number of regiments	3	3	3	4
Number of bayonets	1,200	410	3,530	1,950
Number of machine-guns	23	18	22	49
Number of guns	4	5	4	8
Number of sabres	0 ⁶⁵	500	0	160

A brigade's combat order was made up of its individual march columns when deployed. Each of these columns fought on a particular line, corresponding to its offensive route. Since a battlefield was usually either the approaches to a settlement or an area immediately adjacent to that settlement, the frontage of a column in battle corresponded to its deployed width, made up of some of the sub-units advancing frontally on the enemy and a strike group to act on the flank or

⁶⁵ I believe the lack of cavalry was because all the divisional cavalry had been stripped out to form a separate cavalry division just before this. PW.



rear. In combat conditions around populated areas, the deployed frontage was no more than 3 or 4 kilometres.

Since the most common march column was a rifle regiment in size, provided the brigade had all three regiments in the first line, the combat frontage would be no more than 9-12 km, across a total width for the sector of 15-20 km.

Assuming a norm that the width of the total front line of three separate columns when deployed averaged 10 km, we obtain that the following forces operated in a battle along a kilometre stretch of the front:

I. Forces per 1 km in combat during the fighting on the Ufa Plateau

	Weakest		Strongest	
	our brigade	White division	our brigade	White division
Number of bayonets	105.9	130	330	290
Number of machine guns	4.6	1.5	4.2	4.0
Number of guns	0.9	0.6	0.3	1.1
Number of sabres	8.7	20	27.7	50.0

II. Forces per 1 km in combat during the fighting on the Tobol River

	Weakest		Strongest	
	our brigade	White division	our brigade	White division
Number of bayonets	120	41	353	195
Number of Machine guns	2.3	1.8	2.2	4.9
Number of guns	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.8
Number of Sabres	0	50	0	16

Both tables are based on the smallest and largest number of bayonets for the brigade/division. The number of MGs, guns, and sabres is given based on the actual composition in the respective units.

If we do not use only the infantry component, we get the following data on the tactical density in the indicated battles for our brigades and White divisions, with no regard to what was the actual number of bayonets, machine guns, guns and sabres in any given unit.

I. Tactical density during the combat on the Ufa Plateau

	Weakest		Strongest	
	our brigade	White division	our brigade	White division
Number of bayonets	105.9	130	330	290
Number of Machine guns	3.7	1.5	7.2	5.0
Number of guns	0.3	0.6	0.9	1.2
Number of Sabres	0	20	27.7	50

I. Tactical density during the combat on the Tobol River

	Weakest		Strongest	
	our brigade	White division	our brigade	White division
Number of bayonets	120	41	353	195
Number of Machine guns	1.0	1.8	5.8	4.9
Number of guns	0.4	0.5	0.9	1.2
Number of sabres	0	16	13.5	50



The data contained in the above tables is tentative in that it gives only a general idea of the tactical density at a given period. In one case the tables have been compiled on the basis of the lowest and highest bayonet presence in our brigades/White divisions, and in the other case without reference to the number of bayonets, in order to show what was the possible tactical density in general (separately by machine guns, guns, sabres and bayonets) for the same periods.

The tables show, for example, that during the fighting on the Tobol River one of our brigades, the strongest in terms of bayonets, had on average 2.2 machine guns and 0.4 guns for every kilometre of front in battle; while for same period we had brigades which had up to 5.8 machine guns and 0.9 guns for every kilometre of battle frontage.

There is no doubt that in actual combat conditions the averages given in the tables could, and in fact were, subject to considerable change depending on: 1) the width of the sector and the width of deployment; 2) how the troops were grouped in particular columns, and 3) on the nature of the fighting, i.e. whether the battle was offensive, defensive or encounter.

We confine ourselves in this chapter to this study of tactical density and the presentation of some averages, hoping that they might serve as starting points for conclusions about the tactical density in general in the battles against Kolchak.

Infantry and Artillery Fire: Methods and Strength

The above figures, when thinking in terms of firepower, lead to the conclusion that the Civil War was predominantly a war of rifle and machine-gun fire, since the lack of artillery does not seem to have allowed it to play a significant part.

The question is whether fire in the Civil War was a means of preparation or a means of deciding the battle. For the convenience of this study we need to consider this question separately for infantry fire and artillery fire. At the moment we will establish only general features for the infantry, as we shall return later to methods of firing.

Artillery fire will be dealt with in more detail, as we shall not return to it again.

The poor state of the weapons in the rifle units, often a lack of them; interruptions in regular supply; the poor rifle training of our troops; the wide manoeuvres undertaken; the vastness and ruggedness of the battlefield; the scattered and sparse targets available; the rapidity of the battles and their short duration – these were the main reasons for the low role generally played by infantry fire.

It is quite clear that under those conditions the intensity of fire would be neither high nor constant, even during a single engagement.

Fire control was hampered by the low density and the wide frontages, which could not but affect the fire discipline. At the same time, the Civil War does give numerous examples of very skilful fire control, which testify to a high degree of development in fire tactics and its skilful use.

For the reasons noted above and the adverse conditions affecting intensity and marksmanship, the strength of fire at long range was not high.

Rifle and machine-gun fire at ranges of 1.5-2 km would not appear useful under such conditions, yet it often obtained its goal. Thus, in the first days of June 1919, the 239th RR was occupying a position on the left bank of the Belaya River and had placed a platoon of machine guns on a hill on that bank to cover a crossing by our troops. Having noticed a movement by a White column on carts on the right bank at a range of 1.5 km, the machine guns opened fire and dispersed the enemy column.



When firing at close ranges the power of fire increased, which was especially evident in defensive battles.

Both we and the enemy, in order to achieve the greatest material and morale effect, used a technique of letting the advancing chains come as close as possible without firing. Then, at a certain distance from the defensive position, a quick and accurate fire from all available machine guns and rifles dealt a strong blow.⁶⁶

On 24 May 1919 a battalion of the 240th RR occupied Gusevka, which was being attacked by superior enemy forces. Having let the advancing chains of dismounted cavalry advance to a close distance, on a command the battalion suddenly opened up an intense rifle and machine-gun fire. The Whites lay down, but their chains were quickly disorganised by our heavy and accurate fire. The battalion took advantage of this and, moving to a counter-attack, drove back the enemy with losses.

During the battle at Mount Tastyuba in July 1919 the enemy occupied a tactical position on the crest of the mountain, having a cavalry reserve behind the right flank in a gully. At first the Whites fired strongly, but as the chains of our 238th RR advanced, their fire weakened and finally ceased altogether. Believing that the cessation meant the enemy had retreated, the regiment rushed towards the White trench line, but was met by a heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. Losing about 150 men killed and wounded, the 238th RR retreated in disorder, pursued by the White cavalry attacking its flank.

Many examples can be cited where an offensive attempted by weak troops was halted and repulsed only by fire. These examples testify not only to the strength of fire often developed, but also to the skilful use of fire.⁶⁷ Of course, it cannot be said on the basis of these examples that the fire and its control were always properly done and that there were no cases of aimless and indiscriminate shooting. On the contrary, cases of indiscriminate fire were much more frequent, but they were primarily a consequence of a general lack of discipline among the troops in question and the weakness of the junior command staff. Regardless, that does not alter the main proposition, which is that even in the Civil War units could use fire as a means of winning a combat.⁶⁸

The constant lack of ammunition experienced by the troops often put a limit on the strength of firepower. Having launched a decisive counter-offensive on 14 October 1919, the 5th Army began to experience an acute shortage of ammunition within a few days. The centre only sent 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition per month for the whole Army, of about 30,000 bayonets and 550 machine guns – which is an average of 100 rounds per rifle per month, not counting machine guns.

That was not, of course, the only time when we were short of ammunition, not only for incidental fighting, but also for a major operation. There were situations when ammunition was taken from riflemen to be given to the patrols. It was this constant shortfall in ammunition that made the Army commanders periodically issue instructions to use ammunition sparingly, to open fire only at close ranges, to cease to fire when in a chain until commanded, etc. Orders alone would not have achieved the goal if the troops themselves, constantly in need of it, had not learnt to value and conserve ammunition.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Compare the battles at Gusikha in I. Kutikov's, *With Chapaev on the Ural Steppes*. This method of fire could only take place with well trained and disciplined infantry, which was hardly the case in all our brigades, and therefore hardly constitutes a "technique".

⁶⁷ For the Whites, this was also due to poor political preparation and morale. Ed.

⁶⁸ In some cases and far from all units. Ed.

⁶⁹ The author here neglects to mention ammunition captured from the Whites. Ed.



The artillery operated under somewhat different conditions, and this affected its methods and the strength of its fire.

The material condition of the artillery was generally satisfactory, but often in the same battery there would be gun barrels with very different degrees of wear. Ammunition was in short supply, which required frugal firing. Often a battery, having fired its last shell, had to cease firing until resupply from the forward artillery depots was brought up. The riflemen frequently made large demands on the artillery. Its firepower was not just a way so inflict material damage on the enemy, but also had effects on morale.

This all determined the artillery tactics. A methodical, systematic bombardment of targets was less common than short but heavy fire with brief concentration on a particular target. These short bursts were intended to dislodge the enemy from the village it occupied or to disorder its chains so that our advancing rifle units, taking advantage of the confusion, could attack to complete its defeat. Only this can explain the artillery fire in the Civil War, which was often extremely intense for the conditions.

On 30 May 1919, while advancing to the village of Buzekovo, the 230th Rifle Regiment encountered the White 43rd and 44th Infantry Regiments on the march. An encounter battle ensued, during which a light battery (four guns) with the 230th RR fired 700 shells within five hours. The report of the 230th IR's commander said:

The enemy could not withstand the fire from our artillery and withdrew to the north-east and south-east, leaving many wounded and killed.

At the battle of 6 December 1918 near the village of Nikolayevna, due to lack of bullets, the 3rd Smolensk Light Battery had to bear the brunt of repelling the attacks from General Kappel's detachment, firing up to 1,200 shells during a day of battle, on a front about 3 km wide.

On 2 March 1919, during our offensive towards Kulikovskaya – Priestan, 1,000 shells were fired during the day over an area of about 2 square kilometres.

Both we and the enemy usually attached between one gun to a battery to a rifle (infantry) regiment for its use. Of course the artillery was not always distributed in this way in across a brigade's columns and quite often there was a large concentration of artillery fire.

At 13:00 on 18 November 1919 the enemy opened fire with nine guns on our troops in Svetlaya village, and after 2.5 hours of shelling went over to the attack. Our side had four light guns and a howitzer in the battle.

On 12 November 1919 the Whites attacked Kabanyi, occupied by our units with four guns, and engaged in an intense exchange with two batteries of four guns each.

As already established above, the enemy had more artillery. This gave it the opportunity to create strong groups more often and to develop heavier fire on specific points of our positions.

The overall lack of artillery forced the troops to use howitzers and mortars,⁷⁰ as well as 107-mm long-range guns, to shoot at the enemy's chains. However, counter-batter fire also took place.

For example, on 2 June 1919 an enemy light battery started shelling the village of Sabanaevo, which we held, on the southern bank of the Belaya River. A two-gun 107-mm battery located in this area received an order to suppress the Whites' fire. Our battery opened fire, as a result of

⁷⁰ Noted that *мортиры* (*mortira*) was used by the Russians at the time for any short-barrelled, high-arc artillery piece, such as the 120 mm howitzer M1901. There were few to no infantry or trench mortars used by either side. PW.



which the enemy ceased firing, and men and wagons could be seen hastily retreating from its location.

A similar task was given to a mortar *division* of the 35th RD in the battles north of Chelyabinsk at the end of July, and also to a 107-mm battery on the Yug River north of Birsik at the beginning of June. In order to suppress the enemy's fire while forcing of the Tobol River in October 1919, in the sector of the 26th Rifle Division we concentrated a howitzer *division*, 107-mm long-range and 152-mm heavy batteries, eight guns in total. These are certainly not isolated cases, and we cite them solely for the purpose of showing that even in the conditions of the Civil War, with very meagre means, the tasks of suppressing the enemy's artillery fire arose and were solved (to the extent possible).

The assignment of artillery to independent march columns meant it became accustomed to proximity to the infantry. This had the negative consequence that the artillery was not always used correctly and was not always given feasible tasks. The attached 5th Army order of 25 May 1919, Appendix 1, was a consequence of these mis-uses and is of interest because that order established regulations for the use of field artillery in combat. Of course, not all the requirements of the order were implemented, but it does show the general views of the artillery commanders in the Army concerning the use of artillery in battle and its interaction with the infantry.

The lack of riflemen made it impossible to allocate permanent infantry cover to the artillery. That role was performed by the artillerymen themselves, armed with rifles, and the addition of one or two heavy machine guns per battery. Numerous combat episodes confirm that this method was very successful, and that morale played a significant role: the artillerymen defended "their" guns more stubbornly and courageously than any infantry attached to the battery would have done.

The artillery positions were mostly closed, and firing was carried out at extreme distances: nevertheless, the artillerymen often had to work under enemy machine-gun fire when our chains had been pushed back.

The question of communication with the infantry was solved by the fact that the senior commander of the march column usually shared a command post with the artillery commander. Observers often moved up with the infantry chain, keeping in touch with the battery commander's post by field telephone (the encounter battle at Narysheva, the battles forcing of the Tobol River) or some other method.

The question of whether to fire shrapnel or high explosive at a particular enemy chain was usually decided by the senior infantry commander. HE was favoured, as its visibility produced a greater morale effect.

Artillery fire was used as a means of preparing the attack and for supporting the infantry. The strength of the artillery fire was felt especially when defending, when intense and accurate fire could force the enemy's attacking chains to lie down, prevent them from rising, and often force them to start retiring.

For example we see this with the 3rd Smolensk Battery in the battle near Nikolaevka on 6 December 1918 and with the 8th Light Battery of the 26th RD near Dolgoderenskaya on 27 July 1919, when the accurate fire of our batteries repulsed enemy attacks and inflicted heavy losses.

Despite the small amount of artillery and a number of conditions adversely affecting it, it played a very noticeable role in Civil War fighting. The normal lack of artillery turned it, in those battles where it was available, into an exceptionally strong force. Overall the artillery fulfilled its tasks satisfactorily, acting in close connection with the infantry, constituting as it were, "artillery accompanying infantry".



Casualties

The study of troop losses in battle is important. Figures for losses sometimes give indisputable evidence for judgements about the intensity of the fighting and about the firmness and combat resilience of the troops. The losses incurred by enemy fire, killed and wounded, are clear and irrefutable evidence of the effectiveness and strength of the fire in that combat. The study of this question is of particular importance in revealing the role and significance of combat in the Civil War.

In determining losses we are faced with an almost insurmountable obstacle – the lack of not only systematised, but often any data at all. A report card for summarising casualties, prisoners, and trophies was established, but the record keeping in the units was poorly done and not given due attention. This was a common malady. A telegram from the Eastern Front headquarters is indicative:

StavOst notes that the hospital units give different figures for the casualties wounded and concussed than the reports from the combat units. Thus, the 4th Army for the whole of June shows one killed, 39 wounded, 14 concussed and 111 missing; the 2nd Army shows that from 1 June to 5 July 1919 it had lost of only 103 men.

Further in the same telegram it is emphasised that those armies had fought intense battles in June and that the units undoubtedly had suffered considerable losses.

Obviously, under these conditions we have to use the random data we have, although it is far from accurate.

Losses to fire in the Civil War battles attract our attention firstly, because they are sometimes quite insignificant, sometimes increase to catastrophic proportions. It is possible to reasonably estimate the value of the figures for losses in battle only: firstly, by considering them not absolutely, but in relation to the combat strength of a particular unit and, secondly, without losing sight of the overall conditions, the strength and significance of fire.

We have summarised the available data on the losses of our troops in combat into the following three groups: 1) the total losses to formations during particular major operations; 2) losses which may characterise the intensity of combat encounters under normal offensive conditions, and 3) losses in individual battles which allow us to judge the morale of our troops.

Table of losses during September 1919 (Kolchak's counter-offensive)

Division	Combat strength ⁷¹	Losses				Sick	Total decrease
		Killed	Wounded ⁷²	Missing	Total		
5th RD	4 000	20	296	814	1 130	500	1 630
26th RD	6 621	258	2 528	537	3 323	2 502	5 825
27th RD	6 601	214	1 719	161	2 094	2 795	4 889
35th RD	4 810	26	286	1 115	1 427	948	2 375
Total	22 032	518	4 829	2 627	7 974	6 745	14 719

⁷¹ Combat strength is the number of bayonets, as of 15 August 1919, i.e. on the eve of our first crossing of the Tobol.

⁷² Wounded includes concussed in all the tables.



Table of losses during our counter-offensive from the Tobol River to the Ishim River and the capture of Petropavlovsk, 14 October 1919 - 1 November 1919

Division	Combat strength 15/10/19	Losses				Sick	Total decrease
		Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total		
5th RD	4 613	43	19	-	462	30	492
26th RD	8 735	123	1 204	176	1 503	154	1 657
27th RD	7 870	178	1 574	225	1 977	384	2 361
35th RD	4 245	54	313	137	494	-	494
59th RD	4 784	64	227	464	755	42	797
Total	30 247	462	3 337	1 002	5 191	610	5 801

Table of casualties in conventional combat engagements:

Unit	Combat strength ⁷³	Dates	Losses				
			Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total decrease	% of Total
3rd RB, 27th RD	2 883	15 Apr-1 May 1919	28	149	148	325	11.3
26th RD	3 006	20 May-10 June 1919	48	370	265	683	10.8
1st RB, 26th RD	1,273	11-24 November 1918	27	101	82	210	16.5
27th RD	5 200	1-2 June 1919	68	110	n/i ⁷⁴	178	3.4
1st RD, 27th RD	2 200	21 July 1919	0	0	0	100	4.5
26th RD	5 690	20-26 July	n/i	0	0	211	3.7

Table of losses of our troops in long and heavy battles:

Unit	Combat strength	Dates	Losses				
			Killed	Wounded	Missing	Decrease	
3rd RB, 26th RD	1 880	6 December 1919	24	175	142	371	Enemy repulsed, position held.
26th RD	5 400	27-28 July 1919	–	46	79	525	Held front line by counter-attack
231st RR and Battalion 230th RR	1 104	17 October 1919	–	–	–	200	Enemy repulsed, position held.

⁷³ In bayonets, machine-guns and sabres.

⁷⁴ No information is given in the summary.



Table of our losses in September and in the second half of October 1919 as % of fighting strength:

	September				2nd half of October			
Unit	Killed	Wounded	Missing/ captured	Total % losses	Killed	Wounded	Missing/ captured	Total % losses
35th RD	0.5	5.9	23.2	29.6	1.3	7.4	3.2	11.9
5th RD	0.5	7.4	20.3	28.2	0.9	9.0	-	10.0
26th RD	3.9	38.3	8.0	50.2	1.4	13.8	2.0	17.2
27th RD	3.3	26.0	2.5	31.8	2.2	20.1	2.8	25.1
59th RD	-	-	-	-	1.3	4.7	9.7	15.7
Total	2.4	21.9	11.9	36.2	1.5	12.3	3.3	17.1

As can be seen, the total loss is 36.2% for September and 17.1% for the second half of October.

The casualties – killed, wounded, captured and missing – in the largest battles before the World War were:

In the wars of Frederick the Great (1741-1763)	23.5%
In Napoleon's wars (1800-1815)	19.0%
In the wars from 1828-1871	12.0%

Comparing these figures with our losses during the two operations above, we must recognise (with full account taken of the difference in the conditions of the situation: the duration of the fighting, different combat methods and armaments) that the losses of our troops testify not only to the intensity of the battles, but also to their very high combat resilience and steadfastness in battle.

This conclusion is confirmed by the table of losses of our troops in individual battles, which shows that, often suffering very heavy losses (from 10% to 20% of the available combat personnel), we nevertheless successfully repelled enemy attacks and held our positions.

Attacking

Actions of the Security Units

In normal conditions the established procedure was that the advance guard was to form the first battle line – the first echelon of the advancing column.

The tasks of the vanguard when on the offensive against a halted enemy were:

- guard the main forces of the column;
- endeavour to establish the enemy's location as early as possible;
- having located the enemy, commence a vigorous attack with the aim either to defeat it or, at least, force it to reveal its forces, artillery and flanks;
- hold the enemy in the area before the approach of the main forces, which would allow them full freedom of action in terms of deployment, choice of the direction of impact, etc.

The fulfilment of these tasks by the vanguard gave the commander of the main column an opportunity, even before deploying his column, to quickly and thoroughly familiarise himself with the situation, assess it and, having made a decision, draw up a plan for the forthcoming battle. The



column commander was free to choose the direction of his attack and could consider the main forces of the column as a strike group, hitting an enemy constrained by the actions of the vanguard.

The advance guard often had to be reinforced by units of the main column, but this did not change its primary task and the nature of its actions – to hold the enemy in front of our attack.

Battle Plan

Successful action by the advance guard gave the column commander enough time and information to make a decision and develop a battle plan, especially because he usually moved at the head of the main column and arrived at the battlefield at the time when the vanguard was starting to close with the enemy units.

The column commander could almost always observe the deployment of the vanguard into combat and personally make a reconnaissance of the upcoming battlefield. In those conditions, he could quickly and with full consideration of all conditions, as they were exhibited in the advance guard's actions, make a decision and a battle plan. As the column's units neared the battlefield he could orient their commanders on the situation, and give them individual tasks.

Personal observation by the column commander of the advance guard's combat and a reconnaissance of the upcoming battlefield created almost ideal conditions for decision making and implementation.

The enemy was detected. The advance guard engaged with it. Observing the development of the fighting, the column commander had first of all to decide the main questions – where to introduce the main forces into the battle (in the same area as the vanguard, or in another) and how to adapt the advance guard's combat. Of course, the decision made depended on the local conditions each time. Understandably decisive in that were tactical conditions of the terrain, information about the forces and grouping of the enemy, and information obtained by reconnaissance on our flanks.

However, a study of our troops in attacking battles allows us to establish certain typical solutions, which usually consisted in striking at the enemy's flank or rear while simultaneously pinning it down frontally.

The establishment of such a typical solution was influenced by the battle conditions discussed above. For an attacking battle they were supplemented by the fact that if we launched a frontal attack from a narrow frontage (a road along which the column approached an occupied settlement) we either had to condense our deployment or to leave some of the units in their original positions for the battle. Both were disadvantageous. In the first case, the likelihood of defeat increased, and we neglected to use the possibilities of wide manoeuvre (on and off the battlefield). In the second case, we would introduce the units into the battle in batches, and so weaken the strength of their strike. Taking this into account, the most appropriate solution was to adopt a divided deployment, consisting of: 1) a pinning group, usually the advance guard, reinforced if necessary by units from the main column; 2) a strike group, to turn the enemy's flank, allocated directly from the main column, and 3) a reserve.

The idea to pin the enemy came as a result of the development of the attack and combat of the vanguard, turning with the entry into battle of the main forces into one of the groupings of the deployment, that most adapted to the implementation of a frontal attack.

The idea of hitting the flank (envelopment or bypassing) was a consequence of the natural course of the main forces entering the battle in any struggle for possession of a settlement.

The advance of the main column to the vanguard's line led to the creation of a known front line for the battle. The length of the frontage of the column's deployed units was important for the battle,



not in itself, but largely in comparison with the length of the enemy's front line, relative to the facing of its position. Since the battle plan of units occupying a particular place was only concerned with the defence of the location itself, the approaches to it, and the adjacent areas, the defender was limited to a certain extent in establishing both the length of its front line and its facing.

The attacker naturally sought to ensure that its front line was longer than the defensive line: otherwise the defender, when moving to a frontal counter-attack, could easily cover its flanks. But the attacker's previous experience meant it understood the importance of a threat to the flank or rear and the difficulty of countering such threats with the broken front lines of the Civil War. This threat was easily carried out by simply lengthening the deployment so much that one or both flanks were positioned behind the ends of the enemy's position. A threat to the flank arose as a consequence of the advance of that wide frontage towards the enemy.

Sometimes striking a blow to the defender's flank or rear was given as an independent task to units allocated directly for that purpose from the column. This was quite possible and reasonable, if we bear in mind that the enemy's position had open flanks and that it was constrained frontally by the actions of the advance guard.

So a threat to the flanks could be carried out in multiple ways, depending on the particular situation.

As a rule then, the battlefield deployment, combined a strike at the flank or rear of the enemy with simultaneous pinning to the front.

The fundamentals of this attacking battle plan were taught to the troops in directives as guidelines.

The use of these flank attack methods was the main reason why the attacks of independent march columns did not have the tense character that generally characterised encounter battles and battles along a solid front.

Thanks to this method the outcome of the battle was quite often decided by manoeuvre of the advancing troops – threatening the defence with tactical encirclement and the seizure of retreat routes – despite the fact that it spread out its lines during the battle.⁷⁵ To bring the battle to a bayonet attack was clearly disadvantageous to the defender, and it would usually choose the lesser evil: it would retreat in good order, having gained time, to recover and counter-attack.

This attacking plan, as outlined, may lead to the hasty conclusion that it was not difficult to envelop the enemy's flank, since its position always had one or both flanks open. This is not quite so. The advance of a column, which had no combat link with its neighbours, turned its attack into a separate combat with the enemy forces in front of it. The battle plan in such conditions could not be just based on a preliminary calculation of material and manpower, and its successful implementation in the diverse conditions of the Civil War required very skilful use of the troops.

Deployment

Deployment began usually from the moment the column entered into the range of the enemy's fire. It is difficult to establish any constant distance for that, as it depended on many variable factors. If the defender had artillery (usually firing at the maximum distance), the advancing column would enter the range of artillery fire at 4-5 km from its position. If there was no artillery, then it was at the long-range of machine guns or rifles. The depth of the circle of fire depended, of

⁷⁵ This of course assumes: 1) that the attacker's deployment did not have vulnerable and weak points that could be exploited and 2) that the conditions did not give the possibility of active defence to break and throw back the advancing units. We will not touch upon these issues here, as we shall return to them later when discussing defensive combat.



course, not only on the eventual firing ranges. Decisive roles were also played by the tactical conditions of the terrain, the enemy's plan of action, and its ammunition supply.

The strength and composition of the columns, with their insignificant depth, allowed deployment into combat order directly from the column as the units approached the battlefield.

The troops were arranged into chains on the battlefields: company and platoon formations were rarely used. Movement in chain started from the moment of deployment.

Attacking by chain gave a number of tactical advantages: it dispersed the attention and fire of the enemy, gave the opportunity to use the terrain better, and hid the direction of the main blow. Since an attack was usually conducted against an enemy defending a settlement and its approaches, the movement brought the ends of our chain behind the open flanks of the defence, thus creating an advantageous position for covering and hitting that flank.

Attacking in chain was not merely the use of skills and techniques transferred to the Red Army by the participants in the World War.

A broad, spread out order of attack in a chain was more in keeping with the spirit of the soldiers than movement in company or platoon formations. They regarded the chain as a formation more reliable against surprise attacks than moving in march order with a weak guard. The sight of the full chain of the units stiffened their faith in their strength. A scattered formation gave him greater freedom of action and at the same time made for him a real sense of security from the flank, a sense of fellowship, with help available from a neighbour in the chain. Being in the chain, the soldier was easier to orientate, moved faster and more correctly established where the enemy was and, as a consequence, better understood his squad or platoon's task.

The early deployment and scattered formation strengthened morale – giving the feel of a fighter looking for a fight, but not by himself – but was very reactive to envelopment and bypasses.

In the 1918-1921 Civil War the scattered formation (chain) found its historical confirmation once again (after the North American Civil War and the wars of the Great French Revolution) as the formation of a revolutionary army.

Manoeuvre on the Battlefield and Shooting Positions

Manoeuvre on the battlefield is in essence the systematic, sequential solution by the advancing troops of the individual tasks facing them during the period of nearing the enemy. These tasks arise from the battle plan and therefore encompass the actions of all the components of the deployment, i.e., whether pinning the enemy to the front or in the strike group.

In those cases where both the pinning and the shock groups were advancing side by side in the form of a chain deployed in one line, manoeuvre by the advancing forces was reduced to the successive occupation of rifle positions.

In those cases, however, where a blow to the flank or rear was entrusted to a unit sent for that purpose directly from the march column, the manoeuvre of the deployed units was broken up into: 1) the occupation of rifle positions by the pinning units, and 2) the execution of a flanking movement by the shock group.

The importance of rifle positions was reduced to the fact that their successive occupation by our infantry was to aid the attack by suppressing enemy fire. Thus when selecting a rifle position, the essence was to choose a position which first of all allowed successful shooting.

The conditions for selecting a rifle position might contradict somewhat the conditions for the most successful attainment of the attack's objectives. The need to suppress the defender's fire required that the maximum of number of machine guns and men be placed in the chain. This increased



casualties inflicted and reduced the numbers required for the main strike. In addition it was only possible if there is a sufficient supply of firearms, which was not always the case.

In the Civil War, the attack did not seek to resolve this contradiction by repeated strikes from deep within the deployment, but stretched the frontage of the advancing units to cover the flanks of the defensive position.

The nature and extent of digging in during attacks in the Civil War was affected by a number of factors, including the presence or absence of entrenching tools. The main reasons for the infrequent use of digging foxholes in offensive combat were: 1) the rapidity of the battles, caused by the absence of prolonged firefighting (exceptions noted above), so that the rifle positions gradually lost their importance, since the attacking troops were forced to seek a solution by means of flank manoeuvre; 2) the presence of a sufficient number of local objects for concealment and camouflage, which was a consequence of the actions taking place on wide fronts with relatively low tactical density.

It is quite clear that under these conditions the idea that troops should always dig in was inappropriate and did not suit the nature of the combats. Trenches were widely used during long battles and during actions with solid fronts, when the pace of the battle slowed down, manoeuvre capabilities decreased, and the strength of fire increased.

Securing the Flanks and Rear

The tasks of securing the flanks and rear of the troops engaged in combat were solved depending on the situation. An attacking battle could be either one with an isolated advancing march column, or a where the troops formed a solid front. This difference determined the support tasks and the methods used.

The commander of a column, coming into contact with a halted enemy through his deployed vanguard, had to decide, before adopting a battle plan and deploying, where the main enemy forces were and from what directions to expect a counter-attack. It might turn out that the advance guard had met an enemy lateral detachment, a flank position or some other situation where the defender's main forces were to the flank of our advancing column.

Hence it is clear that, when preparing to adopt a particular battle plan, the commander had to first of all thoroughly clarify the situation on his flanks. That required knowing about and correctly assessing the importance of the roads leading to the potential battlefield, along which neighbouring enemy columns might suddenly attack our flank or rear. If the layout of the roads and the information about the possible appearance of neighbouring enemy units gave reasons to expect that we would finish the battle before any neighbouring White units could approach, the commander had to solve another question – in what directions could those enemy units which were the target of the engagement act against our column?

An isolated attack by a regiment, due to large gaps between neighbouring columns, combined with the weak forces in the column, required a very thoughtful approach to the task of support. The simplest solution – to allocate sufficiently strong reserves for this purpose – was not feasible in most cases due to the weak strength of the unit. The problem needed to be solved another way – to lead a rapid attack against the enemy units detected, not giving them time (by slowness or indecision in their actions) for counter-manoevres into the flank or rear of our troops. The swiftness of the deployment and attack was the best security for the flank and rear from neighbouring White columns, which became more likely if the battle went on for a long time.

Because of this, an independent column could take one of the following decisions: 1) deploy on a broad front and, having started a rapid attack, indicate to the flank combat units such movements and tasks that would exclude the possibility of a sudden and rapid enemy blow to our own flank, or



2) allocate minor units the task of observation and reconnaissance of dangerous directions, i.e. base the security of the rear and flanks in the battle on the rapid defeat of the known enemy units and on the timely detection of threats from new directions.

This choice was reflected in any battle plan, which had to take into account the possibility and even probability of the enemy threatening our own flank or rear, and to demand from the lateral guards that they detect any White advance as early as possible and a long way from our deployed flank. The battle plan must provide the best possible security, and that was possible only when the possibilities of countering threats of encirclement and out-flanking were built into both the approach and manoeuvre periods on the battlefield.

The actions of the right flank of the 26th Rifle Division on the eve of Kolchak's counter-attack on our approach to the Ishim River are a negative example illustrating the above.

The 2nd Brigade of the 26th RD was advancing along the road to Petropavlovsk. Having an active enemy in front of it, it covered its open flank by sending a side detachment (consisting of a battalion with machine guns) halfway south of the road. The battalion, having no time to advance, found itself face to face with a White outflanking group of two and a half divisions from the Ural Corps and was pushed back northwards, denuding the flank of the 2nd Brigade.

The 26th RD was engaged in prolonged offensive battles along the whole front it occupied. Defeated at the Matasy junction, the division's 3rd Brigade had lost about 500 men killed and wounded in two days of fighting and was buckling. The division commander feared that the Whites would break through the front at the junction of the 2nd and 3rd Brigades. Without hesitation, he moved his reserve (the 1st Brigade) on carts to the right flank of the 3rd Brigade and sent it into action. The plan was obviously to smash the enemy units facing the centre of the division with a swift attack of the fresh 1st Brigade before the open right flank and rear of the division faced a real threat. It was in connection with this battle plan that the division commander demanded that a side detachment be sent from the 2nd Brigade.

The concept of the manoeuvre was unobjectionable. But it needed seeing through to the end and to provide for concrete measures to counteract not only the possible threat, but also the real counter-attack of the Whites from the south into the flank.

Feeling its flank unsecured, the 2nd Brigade kept its forces in two columns on the road and had small units along the road towards the rear, at a distance of up to 60 kilometres, which could only warn of the enemy's appearance, but of course could not hold it. The numerically weak 66th Cavalry Regiment was also in the rear on the *trakt*. It should have been thrown into the area forward, to the south and south-east of the brigade's flanking units, for that area was not properly covered.

According to the scheme everything seemed to be right – the brigade's flank was bent back, a side detachment was sent half a march to the south of the *trakt*, and any enemy's movement to the rear of the brigade was being observed. But this turned out to be fiction, for neither the division's battle plan nor the 2nd Brigade's battle plan for 1-2 September had any concrete measures prepared in case of complications in the 2nd Brigade's sector and the appearance of large White forces in the area.

Only after the enemy struck its blow and the regiments of the 2nd Brigade, left without leadership and cut off from the rear, did the division commander take restorative measures, seeking by hasty movement of the 1st and 3rd Brigades, which were engaged in battle, to create a group which could strike a flank blow from the north on the flanking White group, who had thrown back our 2nd Brigade on its first attack to the rear of the neighbouring 1st Brigade.



This counter manoeuvre could not be executed, as the 1st and 3rd Brigades were themselves under extreme pressure. After three days the right flank of the division had been pushed back 50-60 km north of the *trakt*, which also forced the 1st and 3rd brigades to withdraw, with constant rearguard fighting, some 25-30 km. The concept of smashing the enemy frontally with a swift blow before its counterattack on the division's flank would have any effect, proved to be unworkable, because it did not correspond to the situation. The division commander's calculations that he would be able to restore the position and secure his flank by regrouping the neighbouring units and reducing the 2nd Brigade's sector were also not justified.

Plan of Attack

Every offensive plan presupposed the end of the battle with an attack. The peculiarity of the battles with Kolchak's armies was that sometimes there was no main attack point at all, if by main attack it is understood the direction of a strong group on a particular point of the enemy's location. Most often the blow was struck simultaneously by moving forward to attack with all the units of the column deployed in chain. The strength of the blow was the width of the attacking front and the swiftness of the forward movement.

The attacker's wide front caused the defender's fire to be scattered and made it impossible to guess where the reserves would be needed. This was the most valid method of attack when fighting a passive enemy on a wide front.

Under these conditions, fire preparation for the attack consisted in strengthening the artillery fire, the chains themselves firing during their forward movement.

The chains, of both the strike and pinning groups, moved forward relentlessly, firing on the move.

The attack often ended with a bayonet charge: for example, the battle of the 36th Rifle Regiment on 22 October 1919 with the Izhevski near the village of Kazennaya, the 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division near the village of Melnikov on 23 July 1919; the 242nd and 243rd Regiments near the village of Bogady on 23 March 1919. This list of examples could be extended considerably. We consider it unnecessary, because for our study it is important only to establish that even in the Civil War battles did not consist only of manoeuvre and shooting. The movement forward to attack was primarily an endeavour to strike with the bayonet and often ended in hand-to-hand combat.

Troop Control and Communication in Battle

The personal presence of the column commander on the battlefield from the very beginning of the deployment, as already noted, simplified the task of battle management. The deployment and the offensive took place in front of his eyes. In any case, he could observe the most important area, quickly receive reports from the units, coordinate their actions and set them new, specific tasks in accordance with his personal observations. Liaison with the battle commands was by message, usually mounted orderlies. The wide front, rugged terrain and low firepower favoured this. Telephones were not used in offensive combat, except when forcing rivers or advancing on a fortified enemy position. The battlefield being known in advance and the slower pace of combat made telephone communication in those cases not only possible, but also useful. There were cases of reports and orders transmitted by signalling, but this method did not become popular.

Reserves, their Place and Use

As has already been mentioned, a reserve was a part of the column's deployment. Local reserves were also at the disposal of the commander of each combat sector. But the strength, placing and use of the reserve depended on the importance attached to it by the commander who allocated it. In our army there were supporters of the view that the reserve must first of all be a means of controlling the course of the battle, that it completes the enemy's defeat. There were also



supporters of another view, in which the reserve was necessary only to counter accidents, as well as to reinforce the manpower of the fighting units. The difference between these views on the purpose of the reserve was also reflected in the battle plans.

When the reserve was considered only as a means of preventing accidents, it was no more than a superfluous insurance against the uncertainty of the situation and any surprises. One could only guess where and when the moment would arise that would require the reserve to be deployed. Whenever there were complications or delays on the battlefield a decision was required whether the reserve was required. By releasing the reserve too soon, the battle commander put the further course of the battle at the mercy of those very accidents that he feared when allocating the reserve.

On the Civil War battlefields unexpected events were very frequent and numerous. One had to reckon with the fact that, having used the reserve, one might be faced with even greater surprises and difficulties than those for which the reserve was used up. Early, hasty use of the reserve increased the danger that the battle plan, which was drawn up taking into account the inevitability of accidents and the possibility of preventing them only with the help of the reserve, would create more.

Where the reserve was valued as a means of controlling, deciding, and finishing the battle, the decisive impact of the reserve group on the situation was used to prevent accidents. This battle plan was based on the idea of maximum activity to be implemented by use of the reserve. This manoeuvre itself should become an unexpected event for the enemy, to secure for us the initiative and help to bring the attack to a successful end.

As already stated, the strength of the reserve was determined by the role assigned to it by the commander. Usually a regiment assigned to it from a company to a battalion; a division had from a regiment to a brigade; artillery was not usually assigned to the reserve, but was attached to the brigades in the first line (because of their small numbers).

The positioning of the reserve, most often on the flank, was due to the general nature of battles of independent march columns.

The also explains the desire not to support the forward chains with reserves from the rear, but to strike the enemy's flank, if it began to push us back.

In the order to the troops of the 2nd Brigade of the 26th RD of 25 April 1919 this idea was expressed very clearly:

I remind the entire command staff that if any unit is moving to support another, it is always necessary to hit the enemy's flank and try to send the most courageous Red Army men, even if only a small detachment, into the enemy's rear. The enemy, bombarded by flank fire and men to the rear, will only rarely be able to resist. In most cases it will be confused, and then our units advancing from the front, taking advantage of this, will always be able to crush it.

Development of Success

Success in offensive combat could be achieved by striking at a chosen point of the enemy position. Usually the point of impact was the enemy's flank, and the task was to crush and throw back its flank units and then develop that success to the rear of the troops occupying the forward positions. In other cases success was achieved by moving a broad front of our chains into the attack.

The development of success usually took the form of pursuit on the battlefield, which was always extremely intense. Not infrequently there were cases when the enemy had to retreat three or four



kilometres before it could reorganise into a column. No matter how small the number of troops, when retreating under enemy pressure, the gathering of stretched chains into a column presented serious difficulties.

The pursuing troops, of course, counted on the fact that they could exploit those difficulties for the retreating troop. When starting the pursuit of an enemy, not just defeated but actually retreating to escape from our attacks, the troops needed to expect counter-attacks and so protect themselves from them. For this purpose they would send forward teams of mounted scouts during a pursuit, who would taking on the pursuit of the retreating enemy and also cover the infantry from unexpected counter-attacks.

Attacking a Fortified Enemy

Fortified positions, as we have already noted, were rare in the Civil War and were not like fortified lines.⁷⁶ A Civil War fortified position consisted of one or two lines of full profile trenches with communication lines and weak wire barriers.

The strength of such fortified positions was insignificant: the importance of the positions lay in the fact that they were usually erected when there were favourable tactical conditions of the terrain and its flanks were reliably covered by some natural obstacles (lakes, rivers).

If there was a lack of artillery or shells, then a frontal attack on such a position was unprofitable. We looked for a solution on the flank, no matter how long the fortified position was.

In this respect the actions of the 26th Rifle Division in the middle of July 1919 are typical.

The division had advanced with constant fighting on the eastern slopes of the Ural Mountains. The terrain, which forced us to move in a narrow front, favoured the enemy, who created a strong group across the Zlatoust – Chelyabinsk railway. Having taken possession of the Miass factory area after a hard battle, on 17 July 1919 the division approached the line of lakes crossing the paths of its offensive, some 50 km wide (Map 8).

The enemy created a fortified position on the line of lakes (on the railway and to the north), secured from the flanks by the lakes. It was clearly unprofitable to take the narrow defiles, fortified with wire barriers and trenches, head-on, especially as our intelligence indicated that large White forces were concentrated in the vicinity of Chebarkul', in the immediate rear of the position. We also needed to take into account the two enemy armoured trains that were operating along the railway, adding to the strength of resistance on the narrow isthmus. The strong group in the Chebarkul' area indicated the likelihood of a counter-attack.

Therefore, a frontal attack on Chebarkul' was not favoured under the conditions, and the division commander looked for a solution on the flanks by means of a wide manoeuvre.

The order of 18 July 1919 he provided the following plan of action.

Comrade Kashirin's Cossack brigade was to occupy the Suleymanova – Mulzakov area (25 km south-west of St. Kundravinskaya) to cover the division's main forces from the south. The main blow was assigned to the 2nd Brigade and two regiments of the 1st Brigade, which were ordered to advance through St. Kundravinskaya and Sarafanova and seize the Mel'nikov – Malkov area. Facing the fortified position, the 1st Brigade was ordered to leave a weak but active barrier with machine guns and artillery. The 3rd Brigade was to continue the offensive with its main forces from the Verkhne Karasinskiy area to Nizhne Karasinskiy and to strike a swift blow with one regiment in the rear of the enemy through Nepryakhinsky in the general direction of Baranovskiy. That

⁷⁶ This is a reference to the type of fortified lines seen in WWI. PW.



regiment's movement was create a real threat to the rear of the White Chebarkul' group, occupying the Baranovskiy area and intercepting the enemy's retreat route along the railway.

The divisions' forces were distributed: 1) flank group of five regiments (2,400 bayonets, 63 machine guns, 14 guns); 2) flank column of the 3rd Brigade of one regiment (500 bayonets, 14 machine guns), 3) barrier against the White Chebarkul' group of one regiment (490 bayonets, 13 machine guns, 130 sabres, two armoured trains); 4) advancing on Nizhne Karasinskiy were two regiments of the 3rd Brigade (1,490 bayonets, 28 machine guns, 4 guns). Of the total of 4,880 bayonets, 118 machine guns and 20 guns the strike would be made with 2,900 bayonets, 77 machine guns and 14 guns.

The White Ufa Corps was made up of the 4th, 8th and 12th Infantry Divisions and the 1st Brigade of the 6th Infantry Division, for a total of about 5,300 bayonets and 32 guns in its sector.

By the evening of 18 July 1919. The 227th and 228th Rifle Regiments had captured the area of Kisegach and advanced units had approached the Whites' fortified position. A report of the time noted that around the rail line the Whites had a lot of light and heavy artillery which, together with two active armoured trains, fired heavily on our advancing units. The 3rd Brigade marched to the neighbourhood of Verkhne Karasinskiy, having the task of continuing its main forces towards Nizhne-Karasinskiy.

The 2nd Brigade captured the area of Petropavlovski-Kosichev. Further movement was slowed by stubborn resistance from the enemy and the actions of a White Cossack brigade against our right flank. With the approach onto its right flank by Kashirin's Cossack brigade the rifle brigade commenced a vigorous attack on St. Kundravinskaya, where about 2,000 enemy bayonets and 8 light guns were concentrated. The enemy put up fierce resistance, including fierce counterattacks. The battle lasted for a whole day and it was only at noon on 20 July, having lapped both flanks of the enemy's position, that the brigade forced it to retreat. The Whites withdrew in combat and entrenched themselves 5-6 km north-east of St. Kundravinskaya on the commanding heights near the *trakt*. Continuing a vigorous pursuit, two regiments (230th and 231st) of the 2nd RB at about 18:00 on that day took the position at the bayonet and threw the enemy back to the south-east and east. The 230th Infantry Regiment took heavy losses in this fighting. Only the regimental commander and one company commander remained in action out of the entire command staff.

Simultaneously with the offensive along the road of the 230th and 231st Rifle Regiments, the 229th Rifle Regiment turned towards Sarafanova and with a strike from the south occupied it at 18:00 on 20 July. By the same time the strike column of the 1st Brigade, bypassing Lake Chebarkul' from the south, attacked the enemy's positions 4 km south-west of Malkov, and took it after a fierce battle.

During the morning of 20 July the 3rd Brigade's flank column (233rd Rifle Regiment) pushed the enemy back to the south-east and took the village of Nepryakhinskiy after a hard struggle. The main forces of the 3rd Brigade fought intense battles with varying success in the vicinity of Nizhne Karasinskiy, where the entire White 4th Infantry Division faced our units.

The constant fighting during 19 July in the area of St. Kundravinskaya and the flank attacks by our 1st Brigade and the the 233rd Rifle Regiment revealed to the enemy the concept of our manoeuvres, as well as the direction of our main blow. Having correctly assessed the situation, on 20 July it directed the units originally grouped in the vicinity of Chebarkul' to Malkov and the heights east of St. Kundravinskaya, but was not successful. The situation created made further defence of the isthmus west and north-west of Chebarkul' not only pointless, but also dangerous. The lake line could now only be held by defeating our outflanking columns in the Malkov – Mel'nikov area and at Nepryakhinskiy.



By noon on 20 July the 228th Rifle Regiment, which was acting on the flank in the area of the railway, took the strongly fortified position on the isthmus near Chebarkul', which the enemy abandoned without a fight. During 21 and 22 July hard fighting occurred in the Mel'nikov – Pustozerskiy – Chebarkul' area, where the enemy concentrated all its forces to halt our advance. Having been forced out of the occupied position and having suffered considerable losses (about 500 prisoners alone), it was forced to retreat to the east.

The operation by the 26th Rifle Division, very uncomplicated in conception, was vindicated by its results.

The direction of the strike by our main forces was well chosen and it dramatically changed the situation in our favour.

We not only took a strong fortified position in ideal terrain without a struggle, but forced the enemy to fight us instead in an area where it had no advantage. The enemy was forced to put all its forces into action in that new area. This corresponded to the objectives of our manoeuvre – not only to seize the fortified position, but at the same time to destroy it. In four days of hard fighting, the enemy suffered serious losses, and in this sense, the manoeuvre by the division's main forces justified itself.

The 233rd Rifle Regiment, advancing through Nepryakhinskiy to Baranovskiy, did not directly participate in those battles, but its movement was nevertheless important, as it carried the threat of a deep bypass.⁷⁷

This episode can be recognised as typical for this sort of battle in the Civil War. It is interesting because it was conducted by the whole division which had a sector about 50 kilometres wide. Having chosen to strike in the flank of the enemy's fortified position on a front of about 10 km wide and concentrating there more than half of the bayonets and almost all the artillery, the division simultaneously solved two tasks: to seize the fortified position and to defeat the enemy's main forces.

More typical were the shorter fortified positions encountered in narrow sections of a division's general front. In those cases, they were of even less importance in halting our advance.

Fighting for River Crossings

Rivers in the Civil War were quite often used as lines of defence; hence fighting for crossings was very common.

We have chosen to study the forcing of the Tobol River 14-18 October 1919 by the 26th Rifle Division. This crossing is interesting for two reasons: firstly, it was the last major operation where the 5th Army forced a river against Kolchak and secondly, it was affected by the experience gained by the 26th RD in forcing the Bol'shoy Kinel', Belaya and Ufa rivers as well as crossing a dozen other narrower and less significant rivers.

After long battles between the Ishim and Tobol Rivers, the 5th Army was forced to withdraw to the western bank of the Tobol. The enemy had no forces to develop the success achieved, and both sides took positions on the river.

As a natural obstacle the Tobol River was not of great importance, because although it was from 25 to 50 metres wide, it had numerous fords which made it easily crossed. However, the presence of the river was enough for the front to consolidate.

⁷⁷ Baranovskiy was occupied by the 233rd Rifle Regiment in the morning of 22 July without fighting. The regiment failed to hold the village, and by noon it had been pushed out by the White 12th Infantry Division, who were retreating from the area of St. Chebarkul' along the railway.



Both sides took advantage of this and quickly prepared to go on the offensive. We were ahead of the Whites: on 13 October 1919 the Army was ordered to force the Tobol River with the task of breaking and destroying the enemy near the railway and to the south.

The 5th and 26th Rifle Divisions were to strike the main blow. The cavalry division was ordered to break through to the rear of the enemy through our 5th RD and capture the HQ of the White 3rd Army at Lebyazh'e.

The ratio of forces at the site of our main strike was as follows:

Our forces

26th RD and 2nd RB, 21st RD	8,325 bayonets, 34 guns
5th RD	4,310 bayonets, 10 guns
Cavalry division	2,500 sabres
Total	12,635 bayonets, 3,200 sabres, ⁷⁸ 44 guns

Enemy forces

Urals Group	8,500 bayonets and sabres
Volga Group	3,200 bayonets and sabres
Total	11,700 bayonets and sabres, 43 guns

The commander of the 26th Rifle Division, having located the inner flanks of the White Volga and Urals Groups, decided to strike at the junction between them and then at the same time develop it as deep as possible on the first day of the breakthrough,

For this purpose all three brigades of the division were echeloned on the left bank of the river from Tolsto-Veretinskaya (Map 9). The river sector to the north of this grouping, some 35 km, was transferred to the 227th Rifle Regiment with the task of demonstrating a crossing at Utyatskoe on the left flank of the division. The area south of the main forces of the 26th RD, up to the junction with the neighbouring 5th RD, was occupied by the 2nd Brigade of the 21st RD, subordinate to the commander of the 26th RD, also with a task of forcing the river.

The beginning of the crossing was set for 04:00 on 15 October 1919. By this time we had managed, having pushed back the Whites from the river line by the actions of a small detachment, to build a bridge for infantry and artillery to cross the Tobol River at Tolsto-Veretinskaya.

The brigades were assigned the following tasks:

1) The 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division, under the cover of the advanced units located at the bridge on the east bank, was to cross the Tobol River at 04:00 on 15 October using the bridge near Tolsto-Veretinskaya. A swift short strike by both regiments was to break the enemy occupying Chernavskoe, to throw it back to the east and, turning sharply to the north, rapidly advance along the road to Raskatikha with the task to seizing the area of Nagorskaya – Zaborskaya, leaving a strong barrier (up to a battalion) in the area of Chernavskoe awaiting the approach of the 3rd Brigade units. Reserves were to be kept behind the left flank.

2) The 3rd Brigade of the 26th Infantry Division was to cross the Tobol River immediately after the units of the 1st Brigade. Concentrating under the cover of the 1st Brigade's flank at Chernavskoe, it was to rapidly attack the enemy thrown back by the 1st Brigade to the east, defeat it and seize the area of Osinovka – Yaroslavskaya – Obukhova.

⁷⁸ Including divisional cavalry.



3) The 2nd Brigade of the 26th Infantry Division was to start crossing after the 3rd Brigade on the bridge near Tolsto-Veretinskaya and concentrate at Chernavskoe, remaining as divisional reserve.

4) The 2nd Brigade of the 21st Rifle Division, with the 185th Rifle Regiment, to stubbornly defend the village of Ostrovnaya, which it had captured on 14 October 1919. The other regiments were to force the Tobol River at the same time as the units of the 1st Brigade of the 26th RD, with an immediate task of seizing the line Kostylkovskaya – Vanyavina – Glyadyanskoe – Mezhsbornaya – Odina.

Forcing the Tobol River, 15-16 October 1919

Having crossed the Tobol at 04:00 on 15 October, the 226th Rifle Regiment took Chernavskoe with a dashing attack, capturing 75 prisoners, and drove the enemy back to the north-east. The 228th Rifle Regiment after a fierce battle took Raskatikha and continued with one battalion to the north. Following these regiments, the 3rd Brigade crossed with the aim of advancing through Chernavskoe to the north-east. The divisional reserve, the 2nd Brigade, had concentrated by 09:00 in the area of Tolsto-Veretinskaya. The 2nd Brigade of the 21st Rifle Division crossed at the same time as the 226th and 228th RRs and, having captured Odina, Mezhsbornaya and Polusal'skaya, met stubborn resistance from the Whites at Kostylkovskaya, Glyadyanskoe and fought hard.

By 14:00 the 1st Brigade was fighting four kilometres north-east of Chernavskoe, repulsing White counterattacks, taking 50 prisoners and three machine guns, then continued the offensive. The battalion of the 228th Rifle Regiment, attacking along the *trakt* to the north, occupied Nagorskaya. By this time the demonstrating 227th Rifle Regiment had also managed to cross the Tobol River near Utyatskoe, and it advanced two companies to Temlyakova.

The 3rd Brigade, having overcome extremely stubborn enemy resistance, took possession of Yaroslavskaya by 14:00 and continued the offensive towards Obukhova, with its right column fighting in the Osinovka area.

Stubborn enemy resistance delayed the 2nd Brigade of the 21st Rifle Division in the area of Glyadyanskoe and Kostylkovskaya and created a threat from the south for the 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 26th RD. To counter that, two regiments of the 2nd Brigade of the 26th RD were ordered to seize Davydovskoe and Patrakova, and one was to replace the units of the 2nd Brigade of the 21st RD in the Mezhsbornaya – Odina area. By 12:00 the 2nd Brigade of the 26th RD was already approaching Chernavskoe.

The 2nd Brigade of the 21st RD, after the relief of its units in the Mezhsbornaya – Odina area, was ordered to attack the enemy defending the village of Glyadyanskoye, and on the right flank work with the 37th Regiment of the 5th RD to push the Whites from Kostylkovskaya.

The defence of the bridge at Tolsto-Veretinskaya was entrusted to the 2nd Special Purpose Detachment.⁷⁹

The 1st Brigade was concentrated by the evening of 15 October in the area of Nagorskaya and Predina. At 01:00 the enemy launched a strong attack on Nagorskaya from Zaborskaya and pushed out the 228th Rifle Regiment. It took until 10:00 on 16 October to restore the position, with the assistance of the 226th Rifle Regiment, which occupied a position east of Nagorskaya near the road from Nagorskaya to Obukhova.

The brigade went on the offensive: the 227th Rifle Regiment attacked Temlyakova and 228th Rifle Regiment attacked Zaborskaya. The 226th Rifle Regiment remained where it was.

⁷⁹ This would appear to be ChON. PW.



The right column of the 3rd Brigade, after a hard fight, occupied Osinovka, taking over 100 prisoners, two heavy guns, machine guns, artillery wagons, etc. The enemy tried to entrench four kilometres east of Osinovka but was driven back. The left column after a fierce battle took Obukhova, capturing prisoners, machine guns and wagons, and pursued the enemy in the direction of Dubrovnaya.

The 229th and 231st Rifle Regiments after a fierce battle at 01:00 on 16 October occupied Davydovskoe, Odina and Patrakova. The outcome of the battle was decided by a flank movement and a blow to the rear. More than 100 prisoners, a light gun and supplies were captured. On the sector of the 230th Rifle Regiment in the area of Mezhsbornaya – Odina (which is on the road south of Chernavskoe) it was calm. (The general situation at 12:00 on 16 October is shown on Map 9.)

The 2nd Brigade of the 21st RD together with the 37th Regiment of the 5th RD at 01:00 on 16 October took Kostylkovskaya after a hard fight and continued with an attack on Vanyavina. Repeated night attacks by the 184th Rifle Regiment near Glyadyanskoye were repulsed with losses. The 187th Rifle Regiment, having occupied Dubrovka at 06:00, was advancing from the south on the flank and rear of the enemy occupying Glyadyanskoye. The 186th Rifle Regiment at dawn engaged in a stubborn battle on the heights south-west of Glyadyanskoye. We found out later that the area of Glyadyanskoye was defended by the Izhevsk Infantry Division alongside the White 4th and 5th Cossack regiments.

The joint actions of the 186th, 187th and 188th RRs were successful. By 20:00 on 16 October the *Izhevtsy* were repulsed and, pursued by the 184th and 186th RRs (2nd Brigade, 21st RD), retreated in the direction of Patrakova.

The units of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd Brigades of the 26th RD stayed in the positions they occupied. The offensive was ordered to continue at dawn on 17 October. The 2nd Brigade of the 21st RD was assigned to the divisional reserve and by the evening of 17 October was to concentrate in. Osinovka – Obukhova.

The overall success of our offensive had already been determined. By the swift blow of the three brigades of the 26th RD through Chernavskoe and occupation of the Patrakova – Obukhova. Osinovka – Obukhova – Zaborskaya line the enemy's front was broken. The attempt by the Whites to fill the gap by bringing in the group's reserve (the 1st Samara Infantry Division) and Army reserve (the 7th Urals Infantry Division) was unsuccessful. The southward shift of the 13th Siberian and 13th Kazan Divisions and the Volga Cavalry Brigade from the Volga Group to strike from the north in the flank of the 26th RD was also unsuccessful.

In the hard fighting on 17, 18, 19 October the enemy was defeated and thrown back to the railway.

The plan of the offensive battle of the 26th Infantry Division was very simple: it was the persistence in achieving the goal, the swiftness of the offensive and the manoeuvring of the brigades that deserve attention.

Having crossed the Tobol River at Tolsto-Veretinskaya at 04:00, the 1st Brigade by evening had already taken possession of Nagorskaya. Having defeated the enemy in Chernavskoe and to the north of the village, with an open right flank, the brigade in 18-20 hours of uninterrupted offensive concentrated all forces at Nagorskaya – Utyatskoe. During that time it travelled 30 km. A sharp turn was successfully made from Chernavskoe to the north. The overall success of the brigade's offensive is explained by the fact that, moving from Chernavskoe to Nagorskaya, it was always advancing into the flank of the units of the White Volga Group, who only decided to counter-attack from Zaborskaya at night.

The successful actions of the demonstrating 227th Rifle Regiment, which attracted the attention of the enemy, undoubtedly rendered some assistance. The unsuccessful actions of our neighbouring



units in Temlyakova did not allow the 1st Brigade the opportunity to develop its success with a vigorous strike of all its regiments to the north-east, but compelled it to continue along the *trakt* to the north to assist its neighbours.

The 3rd Brigade, having moved out on the night of 15 October from Kamyshinskoe, by 14:00 on 15 October had taken the Yaroslavskaya areas. That brigade's main task was to develop the breakthrough of the enemy's line to the greatest possible in depth. Meeting stubborn enemy resistance the brigade, in 12-14 hours of uninterrupted attacks, moved 30 km, completing a deep breakthrough of the White front.

The actions of these two brigades can serve as an example of persistence and daring in achieving a goal.

The situation of the 2nd Brigade of the 21st Rifle Division was different. It was crossing on a wide front, without a strike group. In addition, it was facing one of the best enemy units – the Izhevsk Division. It managed to dislodge the *Izhevtsy* from their positions near Glyadyanskoye only with the assistance of the 37th Rifle Regiment of the 5th Rifle Division and the 230th Rifle Regiment of the 2nd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division. All four regiments of the brigade took part in completing its task. The *Izhevtsy* delayed the brigade's offensive for 24 hours.

It is necessary to dwell on the use of the divisional reserve – the 2nd brigade of the 26th Rifle Division. Its purpose was not to be a means of countering unforeseen events. By 09:00 it was concentrated in Tolsto-Veretinskaya and moved to Chernavskoe, where it arrived at 12:00. By this time it became clear that the 2nd Brigade of the 21st Rifle Division could not fulfil its task by the deadline, while the offensives of the 1st and 3rd Brigades were developing successfully. The 21st RD brigade needed assistance and for this purpose the 230th Rifle Regiment replaced it on the Mezhsbornaya – Odina line. Thus released, the 184th Rifle Regiment took part in the attack on the *Izhevtsy*. The main forces of the reserve were to be used for the development of a strike, and for this purpose, the commander sent them to seize the Davydovskoe – Patrakova area, which it took after a hard fight. The brigade thus took part in striking the enemy, and developing the success achieved, secured the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 26th RD from the south.

The occupation of the Davydovskoe – Patrakova region was also important because it cut off the retreat of the *Izhevtsy*. At dawn on 17 October the Izhevsk Division and both Cossack regiments, retreating from Glyadyanskoye, approached Davydovskoe from the south-west in order to break through to the east. The 231st Rifle Regiment was occupying Davydovskoe, assisted by two battalions of the 230th Rifle Regiment, and put up stubborn resistance. The *Izhevtsy* were repulsed and, leaving about 100 men dead on the battlefield (including five officers), they hastily retreated southwards, pursued by our infantry. Having retreated for seven kilometres, the Whites turned sharply to the east and broke through to their own side at the junction of the 5th and 26th Rifle Divisions. The 231st Infantry Regiment suffered huge losses in this battle and had to be withdrawn to the reserve for reformation.

In the battles of 15 and 16 October, the 26th Rifle Division took about 1,000 prisoners, three guns, 15 machine guns, and a large number of supplies.

During 17 and 18 October the remnants of the defeated 42nd and 50th Infantry Regiments and some other small groups of Whites wandered in the forests in our rear trying to escape on their own.

The rapidity of this offensive should be recognised as a maximum for infantry in the conditions of a deep breakthrough of a front.

Our cavalry division of about 2,500 sabres took part in this operation on the Tobol River. It failed to break through to the White rear, let alone to complete its task of capturing the Whites 3rd Army



HQ. The 5th Army command recognised the inconsistency of the *NachDiv* and appointed a new one on 15 October. But better results were not achieved. This is explained not by the lack of a "cavalry leader", but by a mistake in the choice of the initial appointment.

The 2,500 sabres, which was an exceptionally strong cavalry group in Siberia at the time, could not force its own way and followed the advancing infantry of our 5th Rifle Division. Meanwhile the neighbouring 26th Rifle Division, on the first day, broke through the enemy line to a depth of 25-30 km and smashed its rear.

In the following days of 17, 18 and 19 October, units of the 26th Rifle Division had to repeatedly turn back to the west, in order to push back the remnants of the broken White regiments wandering in the rear.

The positions of the 5th and 26th Infantry Divisions on the eve of the crossing, and the orders providing for its execution and the breakthrough operation were known to Army headquarters. Their examination should have led it to the conclusion that the enemy's front would only be broken in the area of the 26th RD and that it was only there that the cavalry division would be able to reach the White rear and achieve maximum success. The Army HQ had plenty of opportunity to transfer the cavalry division to the sector of the 26th RD as early as 15 October, but it did not do so and only tried to alter the situation by a palliative (the change of commander), which of course did not bring about better results.⁸⁰

We had no pontoon units, and so the troops used boats and barges, which could be found on the spot, and rafts of their own construction. With these some advanced units were transferred to the enemy's bank, with the task of pushing away the enemy's guarding forces and, having taken up a position, covering the building of a bridge.

The places for crossing and building bridges was usually chosen from peninsulas formed by bends in the river, extending into our location. These give certain tactical advantages to the offensive, namely we could support the units who had crossed by fire from our bank, the flank of those who had crossed was anchored on the river and it made it difficult for the enemy to hit the crossing points with their fire.

This method of crossing was used by us in all those cases when the river was a significant obstacle. It was also used for the Belaya and Ufa Rivers. On the Belaya the advanced units managed to make their crossing stealthily, and it was only on moving forward that they ran into the enemy. On the Ufa River we failed. When the 1st Brigade of the 26th RD crossed at Aydos, the enemy created two tiers of trenches, using the terrain conditions, and we had to knock it out by strong artillery fire. This required a long preparation, as there was no mountain artillery and we had to drag 3" guns up the mountains.

At the site of the 27th Rifle Division the operation proceeded as follows. At 04:00 on 16 June foot scouts from the 239th and 240th Rifle Regiments crossed to the occupied left bank, using rafts made of improvised materials. The enemy 7th Urals Infantry Division opened a heavy rifle, machine gun fire and artillery fire. The rugged nature of the terrain and the small width of the Ufa River favoured our actions. Having landed on the left bank, without delay our scouts rushed

⁸⁰ We have dwelt on the question of the use of the cavalry division here in some detail because, both at that time and now in modern military literature, its unsuccessful actions are explained by the absence of a "cavalry leader". It is not doubted that, "the history of cavalry is the history of its leaders." But it should not be forgotten that this aphorism is only true in two cases: 1) when the cavalry leader is free in his actions, and 2) when the cavalry is given a task that matches the sort cavalry should undertake – but before that takes into account the conditions and the possibilities of the given situation. Neither of these was true in this case, and the blame for the division's lack of success falls here falls not least of all on the directors of the plan.



forward at the guarding White unit who occupied a position on the adjoining hills. The enemy was pushed out, and we entrenched ourselves on the same commanding heights until the approach of four companies from our regiments, after which we attacked Abyzova. At the same time we started to build a bridge from improvised materials: it was finished by 07:00 on 28 June. Our losses in the 239th Infantry Regiment were four killed and ten wounded, and in the 240th Infantry Regiment there were five killed and sixteen wounded. The success of the crossing can only be explained by the fact that the enemy maintained a passive defence and sought to delay our advance by fire, not daring to counter-attack.

On 13 June the same 239th Rifle Regiment occupied Sentyakova. Mounted reconnaissance reported that on the opposite bank of the Yug River (flowing 2 km from the village) there was a chain of Whites, about 300 men strong. The commander of the 239th infantry regiment decided to smash that enemy and secure a crossing. Having deployed two battalions, the regiment crossed a ford near Sentyakova and pushed back the Whites. The enemy withdrew to Vrkh. Konsudyarova, but with the approach of a reserve regiment it launched a counter-attack and forced us to withdraw to the south bank. The 239th Rifle Regiment in this battle had seven men killed, 32 wounded, two drowned and ten missing, which amounted to 8% of the available combat personnel. The regiment's defeat must be explained primarily by the fact that, having dashed forward, it found itself isolated on the right bank of the river and, not having any nearby target of action, stopped. This gave the enemy an opportunity to concentrate superior forces against it.

Flanking Movements and Envelopments

Under the conditions already discussed, bypass moves and envelopments were of exceptional importance. Every battle, as soon as it began to become a more or less serious clash, was finally resolved by a blow to the flank or rear, or at least the threat of one.

For example the offensive battle of the 2nd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division at St. Kundravinskaya on 18 July 1919 (Map 8). The roundabout movement of a battalion of the 229th Rifle Regiment from the north and the strike of two companies of the 231st Rifle Regiment from the south decided the battle there in our favour, whereas up to then the whole brigade had been conducting an unsuccessful attack for twenty-four hours.

Another example took place on 3 August 1919. The 238th Rifle Regiment, having occupied Georgievskoe, had the task of taking on Il'inskoe, to cut off the enemy retreating to the east from Georgievskoe. Having reached the northern shore of the Lake Medvezh'ego, the regiment noticed White units and wagons retreating along the road. With a swift attack these White units were finally defeated. Having taken 100 prisoners, two machine guns and a wagon, the regiment pushed the remnants of the Whites to the east and continued a rapid attack on the village of Il'inskoe. The village was taken at 21:00, including the capture of the unsuspecting headquarters of the 4th Orenburg Cossack Brigade.

The success was due to the fact that the 238th Rifle Regiment hit the rear of the retreating enemy. Having defeated and thrown back the Whites in another direction, the regiment did not get carried away in pursuit, but continued to fulfil the main task it had been assigned.

The well-known position that the one who flanks can easily find himself flanked, is quite confirmed by the following episode.

On 4 November 1919 the 43rd Rifle Regiment of the 5th Rifle Division, moving from Tatarskoe to Shul'gino, entered into a fight with the enemy 15th and 16th Infantry Regiments, supported by the fire of five light guns. South of the 43rd RR was a battalion of the 237th Regiment of the 27th RD. After a five hour battle the battalion of the 237th RR moved to the rear of the Whites, but was surrounded and captured. Encouraged by this success and seeking to exploit the resulting



breakthrough, the enemy in turn undertook a deep flank move on the 43rd Rifle Regiment to the south. We spotted the enemy manoeuvre in time. The bypassing column was surrounded by units of the 43rd RR and as a result of the battle 300 prisoners were taken.

A detour taken for the narrow purpose of hitting the flank of the enemy on the battlefield could sometimes very easily be turned into a parallel pursuit.

The 239th and 240th Rifle Regiments fought for and occupied Tastuba at 20:00 on 29 June 1919 (Map 10). The enemy withdrew to the east and entrenched on Tastuba mountain north-east of the village. To the south its units occupied the villages of Chertanskiy, Duvan and Mitrafanovka. In view of the commanding position of the enemy and the darkness it was decided to postpone any attack until the morning of the next day. At 02:00 the 238th Rifle Regiment, units of the 3rd Brigade of the 27th Rifle Division, light and heavy batteries arrived in Tastuba.

A plan was developed: the 3rd Brigade of the 27th RD was to go on the offensive at dawn towards Chertanskiy and Mount Tastuba. The 2nd Brigade was given the section south of Chertanskiy, having instructions to act mainly by flanking moves. The brigade had about 2,400 bayonets, 116 sabres, and 41 machine guns. Opposing the brigade were the White 21st, 22nd, 25th, 26th and 28th Infantry Regiments, totalling about 2,200 bayonets and 20 machine guns. The number of guns that took part, both on our side and on the enemy's, is not known.

About 08:00 in the morning, after the regiments had taken up their start positions, our heavy battery opened an accurate fire on the enemy's trenches in the area west of Duvan. The Whites could be seen taking cover from the fire, running from one trench to another.

The 238th Rifle Regiment operating on the right flank of the brigade, having sent out reconnaissance to the south, moved to bypass the flank of the enemy occupying a position west of Duvan, and forced that flank to withdraw. The withdrawal of the left flank immediately affected the position of the neighbouring White units. Having noticed the enemy regrouping, obviously to counteract the flank move of the 238th Rifle Regiment, our 239th and 240th regiments moved to attack. The enemy did not hold and retreated hastily. Our heavy battery shelled its wagons retreating along the road from Duvan to the east.

Noticing the enemy retreat from Duvan, the 238th Rifle Regiment moved to Mitrofanovka and occupied it at 13:00, capturing an officer and seven soldiers. Continuing a vigorous offensive in order to make a detour, the regiment moved southwards through the forest along the foothills and at 14:00 cut the road from Mikhaylovskoe to Ul'kundy, pushing out the Whites from Ul'kudinskiy.

The rapid movement of the 238th Rifle Regiment played a significant role in the situation on the road.

Duvan was occupied by the 239th and 240th Rifle Regiments at 13:20, i.e. 20 minutes after the 238th Rifle Regiment occupied Mitrofanovka, but its further advance along the *trakt* developed more slowly. By the time the 238th Rifle Regiment had knocked the enemy out of Ul'kudinskiy and pushed it back to the north-east, the 239th and 240th Rifle Regiments had engaged the enemy at Ul'kundy, where it had a fortified position (trenches and wire fences).

Under the influence of the 238th Rifle Regiment's bypassing movement the Whites did not offer any serious resistance to our units and by 15:00 they were pushed back four kilometres east of Ul'kundy.

In total, the 2nd Brigade took about 300 prisoners in the battles of 30 June 1919.

The success of the 238th Regiment's flank movement and its influence on the situation is explained not only by the fact that, moving almost on the same level with the Whites retreating from Duvan, it threatened to strike it in the flank. More important was the fact that the *trakt* from Duvan heads



to the south-east, so that the movement of the 238th Rifle Regiment always put the White units covering the *trakt* in danger of being pushed back from it to the north-east, while covering the SE direction was their main task.

Successful execution of a deep detour to strike in the rear requires precise calculation and coordination of the movement of the pinning and shock groups, because otherwise the enemy will have the opportunity to target each of the groups separately.

But the manoeuvre of a blow to the rear could not always be executed successfully.

On 6 November 1919 the 236th and 237th Rifle Regiments were on the offensive at Zaroslava. The 237th Rifle Regiment was assigned the task of attacking that village from the front, advancing from Shelyagino. The 236th Rifle Regiment was to advance through Belaya and Suvorovskiy to the rear of Zaroslava and cut off the enemy.

The 237th Rifle Regiment was delayed at Nikolaevsky, where it fought the Whites, and did not have time to attack Zaroslava frontally by the time the 236th Rifle Regiment reached the rear of the village. The village of Zaroslava was occupied by the 13th Ufa Infantry Regiment, the 4th Jaeger Battalion and Cossack units with artillery (about 800 bayonets, unknown sabres and guns).

Having noticed the detour by the 236th RR and not seeing any of our troops to their front, the enemy attacked the Soviet regiment as it moved to the rear on Zaroslava. A very difficult situation was created. The Cossacks quickly covered the flanks of the deployed leading battalion. It was obvious that it would not be possible to hold until the approach of the 237th RR if the enemy put all its forces into action. The regiment's commander directed two companies from his reserve to move to a vigorous attack on Zaroslava along the road on which the 237th RR should have been advancing. The coming dusk facilitated the execution of that manoeuvre. The energetic actions of both companies and the steadfastness of the head of the battalion, which also went on the attack, succeeded. Unable to withstand the attack and apparently mistaking the advance of both companies from the front for the appearance of our other units, the enemy hastily retreated, leaving us about 100 prisoners.

The success was due to the bold, active and decisive battle plan of the 236th Regiment. Despite the lack of information from the 237th Rifle Regiment and the plight of the leading battalion, the reserve is not brought into action to support it against the Cossacks breaking through to its rear. The two reserve companies were the strike group with which the regimental commander decided the battle.

Envelopments and detours were not only a consequence of the situation in a particular battle. In the orders from brigade commanders, and often division commanders, the troops were given very definite instructions to act not by frontal assaults, but by flank attacks. This idea is clearly expressed in the order of the commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division on 2 September 1919:

... go on a rapid offensive, having the task of pinning the enemy to the front, to get into its rear and destroy it. To ensure the operation from the south, two companies with machine guns (from Mikhaylovskoe) are to demonstrate to the north-east.

Night Fighting

Attacking battles took place quite often at night, especially in winter.

The reason for that was the general speed and decisiveness of the actions. Often troops only reached the specified target line at night and so a night attack completed the task of the day. But there was another, no less important, reason for frequent night fighting. An attack and combat at



night promised easy success due to the hidden approach (sometimes from the rear) and the suddenness of the attack. The absence of a continuous front security line favoured this.

At 04:00 on 1 November 1919 the 310th Rifle Regiment of the 35th Rifle Division approached Vyshkul'skiy from the south along the road, when the situation in the area led the enemy to expect our attacks primarily from the west. Approaching close to the enemy outposts, the regiment rushed ahead with a shout of "ura" and broke into the village. The enemy fled in panic, leaving artillery, machine-guns and supplies behind. But 30 minutes after the retreat Vyshkul'skiy the 1st and 2nd Regiments of the Izhevsk Infantry Division, two Jaeger battalions and several hundred Cossacks led a counter-attack, opening a heavy machine-gun fire. The 310th Rifle Regiment could not hold on and had to start a retreat. Having captured six light guns in full harness (with shells), three machine guns and 125 prisoners, the regiment retreated to Petropavlovsk at 08:00. The regiment lost ten command staff in the battle but the exact number of killed and wounded Red Army men is unknown. Apparently the losses were considerable, as the regiment had only 254 bayonets left, and was withdrawn to the brigade reserve for reformation and rest.

The detour and attack were skilfully executed by the 310th RR, which explains the major success, well justifying the regiment's losses.

Another example: on the night of 9 September 1919 the 2nd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division went on the offensive against the White 1st Samara Infantry Division. The 227th Regiment of our 1st Brigade had the task of intercepting the White's retreat route with a bypass movement. The manoeuvre was successful. Having intercepted the road to Kalashnikova and having located the retreating units of the enemy's division, the regiment, despite a numerical superiority to the Whites, launched an attack and dealt them a crushing blow. Five guns, prisoners and the transport remained in our hands. The enemy was forced to withdraw its division to the rear and held that section passively for the next few days.

The episodes described above relate to the night fighting by large units. A study of the actions of our troops shows that smaller, and therefore more mobile, units were used even more often at night for raids.

An interesting episode from this point of view are the actions of a company of the 240th Rifle Regiment after the capture of the village of Kuktova on 25 May 1919. A detachment of mounted scouts sent by the regiment intercepted an enemy soldier, sent as a messenger from St. Alimova to N. Alimova. From the prisoner it was learnt that St. Alimova was occupied by the White 5th Shock Regiment.

Having assessed the situation, the regiment commander decided to smash and destroy that regiment with a short strike. To do that the regiment's 2nd Company (100 bayonets) with machine guns and a squadron of the 27th Cavalry *Divizion* (subordinate to the 240th RR) were allocated. The detachment's command was united in the hands of Comrade Kulakov, the political officer. Leaving at 03:00, the company approached St. Alimova at dawn and lay down, sending scouts forward. The scouts approached the village stealthily, silently removing the White guard posts and delivered the captured prisoners to the head of the detachment. No movement was seen in the village.

Questioning the prisoners confirmed that most of the Whites were still asleep. The moment for the attack was perfect. The enemy's posts had been removed; the road was free, the enemy was asleep – but our squadron was delayed somewhere to the rear. Having correctly assessed the situation, Kulakov decided to act immediately, without waiting for the cavalry's arrival. One half-company went round the village and held the enemy's retreat route to the east. Simultaneously with the movement of that half-company to the rear, the rest of the company secretly occupied



the end of the village where the White posts had been removed. Having set up machine guns on the main street to fire along it, Comrade Kulakov ordered a light rifle fire to be opened up on the village. The unexpectedly close firing alarmed the Whites. Running out into the street, they fell to the accurate fire of our machine guns. A feeble attempt of some of the Whites to attack was unsuccessful. The appearance from the rear of our second half-company, which intercepted the most convenient line of retreat, decided the matter, and the Whites fled off the road across the field towards the village of Bogady, pursued by the fire of our machine-guns and the approaching squadron of the 27th Cavalry *Divizion*.

About 150 enemy corpses were left in the village, including two officers. We took 42 prisoners (including 20 wounded), a machine gun, 180 rifles, 30 000 cartridges and other material. From interrogation of the prisoners it was learnt that St. Alimova had been occupied by the 5th Shock Regiment with about 600 bayonets and six machine guns. We had no casualties at all.

The reasons for the success of our night actions are obvious. First of all, the secrecy of the approach, the skilful (silent) capture of the White guard posts. Then either a swift attack, if there were enough forces, or accurate fire from well chosen points followed, inflicting serious losses on the enemy. In all such cases we tried to create a situation of complete surprise with our attack as it is the main condition for success with night attacks.

Combat in Winter

The peculiarity of offensive fighting in winter was that the width of the deployment in most cases did not exceed the width of the road along which the troops were advancing. Deep snow made movement off the roads almost impossible. In those cases when, due to heavy enemy fire, the troops had to advance on a wide frontage, the battles did not give good results.

For example, in January 1919 the 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division, advancing on Kurganka, could not advance because of the strong and accurate fire from the defender and the deep snow. It proved impossible to advance by shuffling forward. The brigade's chains lay in front of the village all day and by evening had to retreat to their initial position. The brigade's losses in wounded, but mostly those frostbitten, reached several hundred men for the day.

Another example: on 2 March 1919 the 237th Rifle Regiment of the 27th Rifle Division was attacking Kulikovskaya-Pristan', which was occupied by four companies of the White Simbirsk Regiment. Deep snow hindered our troops. A deep ravine, covered with snow, encircled the village and made an attack possible only across the bridge. Our chains lay in the snow all day. The battle was fought by artillery, which fired about 1,000 shells into the village during the day. The enemy's skiers tried to operate in our flank. At nightfall, the 237th Rifle Regiment managed to break through the bridge over the ravine and take possession of the village because the enemy began to retreat, having discovered a turning movement by the same regiment's units.

The lack of opportunity to manoeuvre freely on the battlefield and to win the battle with a blow in the flank or rear using deployed chains forced the advancing troops to change the deployment, and therefore the battle plan. Conditions forced us to attack the enemy head-on, and this required a strong blow, which requires a strike group. For this reason, the distribution of troops in the columns changed. The task of seizing the villages lying in the path of our offensive was assigned to the lead unit of the column (sometimes the advance guard), made up of one to three companies. The force of the strike was built on firepower. The strike group had several machine-guns adapted to fire from sleds; in addition, one artillery piece on skis was usually attached. The battle plan was that the strike group – moving at the head of the column and having detected the enemy in a village – had to approach the enemy quickly, the machine guns opened fire on the outskirts of the



village and advanced by bounds. The gun was given the task of hitting the edge of the village at the point where the road we were advancing on entered it.

Thanks to this, a narrow section of the defender's front, adjacent to the road on which we were advancing, was covered by a strong continuous fire. Under cover of that fire the advancing troops could reach the village. If forced to scatter into a chain, which as a fighting formation was unsuitable under the conditions, the attack would fail.

In those cases where that method did not yield positive results or when it was known in advance that the enemy was fortified and would offer serious resistance, only night actions were useful.

This explains why in January, February and March 1919 the offensive battles were fought almost exclusively at night. It should also be noted that in the battles of this period the enemy had at its disposal ski units consisting of volunteer Bashkirs, who, acting on the flanks and sneaking into the rear of our advancing columns, delayed our forward movement and often forced us to retreat and give up captured villages without a fight, in order to avoid tactical encirclement.

Fighting in the Mountains

When fighting in the mountains, in view of the limited number of roads, the size of march columns increased. This led to the advancing troops operating as echelons. The terrain conditions allowed the defender to choose tactically strong positions. This, as well as the increased tactical density, due to the reduced number of retreat routes, increased the strength of enemy resistance.

The consequence of this was clashes of deep march columns. The width of the deployment remained the same as in normal attacks, as the fighting was conducted only along the road or in the area immediately adjacent to the locality in question. Deep echeloning of the units with a narrow deployed frontage led to the battles being won by striking from depth and to the creation of strong strike groups.

Taking a strong position on the uplands crossing the path of our offensive and creating a strike group in the area west of Suleya, the enemy held back the offensive of the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 26th Rifle Division, forcing us on 7 July to withdraw to our initial positions on the line of Vakiarova, Elanly and Lakly. Bypassing or enveloping proved impossible. So the 26th Division created a strong strike group, seven infantry and two cavalry regiments, uniting them in the hands of the commander of the 1st Brigade with the task to break the enemy's group with a blow from deep and to seize Suleya.

It is characteristic that in the mountains envelopment and bypassing the flanks were much less frequent on the battlefield than during offensive battles in normal terrain. The actions of our troops in the Urals in the second half of July 1919 can serve as an example. The main direction of the offensive of the 3rd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division in this period was the Ufa – Zlatoust road. The brigade was attacking with its main forces (two regiments and four guns) along the *trakt*. The enemy occupied successively a number of tactically strong positions crossing the *trakt*, moving the flank units only a very short distance away from the road. It would seem that overlapping or bypassing the flanks might have been employed quite frequently. However, the 3rd Brigade resolved its battles almost exclusively by frontal assaults, as overlaps and detours are difficult and time-consuming to execute in the terrain conditions applying. It was neither practical nor profitable to wait for the detouring units to move into the flank or rear. The enemy, not bound to any particular position, in case of a serious threat by such, preferred to retreat a few kilometres and take a new position, which was not difficult to choose in the mountain conditions. We would lose time with such methods, waiting for the execution of the cover or bypass, and would deprive ourselves of the opportunity to inflict actual attacks on the enemy. The deep march order required an equally deep fighting order. We also knew that if we succeeded in rapidly dislodging and driving



back the enemy operating on the *trakt*, its flank units away from it would not be able to withdraw so rapidly, moving without roads, and could be captured.

Defensive Combat

It is not uncommon to meet with the opinion that the weakest point of our troops in the Civil War was the defence. While paying tribute to the high fighting qualities displayed by the Red Army units in offensive battles and during the pursuit, the supporters of this opinion believe that in those cases when the situation required the suspension of an enemy advance, when it was necessary to stubbornly defend a position and to respond to the enemy's blow with a counter-attack, that our units were unsatisfactory. In confirmation of the correctness of this conclusion we are given examples of fluctuations of the front line in battle, as if testifying to the instability of our troops and their inability to conduct a persistent defence.

The reasons for this phenomenon are ultimately reduced to opinions on the revolutionary psyche of the Red Army. It is deemed that offensive combat corresponded more to the revolutionary nature of our Red Army soldiers, and the wide scope of offensive operations, the rapidity of action and mobility of the troops were largely determined by the revolutionary rise of the army as a whole. So, because the political conditions and their morale were not at the proper level, they struggled when it was necessary to meet the enemy's blow calmly and respond to it with a counter-stroke; where it was necessary to resist the onslaught, not to give in to a false fear of detours or envelopments; and where it was necessary to act with composure and a considered plan and not just with a rush forwards, which after the first failure turns into running away.

The impressionable and active nature of our troops allegedly so lowered their ability to act when stationary – not only offensively but also defensively – that battles where we defended were random events and cannot expect anything instructive from them.

Of course, one cannot disagree with the fact that defensive fighting requires from the troops very high qualities and combat training. The higher tension and the conditions of such battles are undoubtedly a more serious test of the combat and morale qualities of troops than offensive battles, when the initiative and freedom of action lies in our hands.

This opinion is certainly wrong, because during the whole period of our struggle with Kolchak the hottest battles took place precisely in those cases when we were the defending side and the Whites were on the offensive. For example: the three-week battles of the main forces of the 5th Army in the second half of March 1919 south of Ufa, the seven days of fighting in defence of the Chelyabinsk line, and the month-long battles in September-October 1919 between the Ishim and Tobol Rivers.

On the other hand, Kolchak's troops never showed such firmness, persistence and skill in defence as did our troops.

In the particular conditions of the Civil War our Red units skilfully found methods which put our defensive battles on an equal footing with the best examples of this kind of combat known to military history and art.



Purpose and Tasks of Defence

Going on the defensive is usually considered a sign of weakness, with an abandonment of the initiative and, in a certain sense, a loss of freedom of action.⁸¹

The axiom that troops and terrain complement each other is most vividly manifested in defence. The use of the tactical properties of the terrain gives the defender the opportunity to some of its forces, irrespective of whether it is meant only to reform, rest and replenish them, or to use them for actions somewhere else on the front.

The defence also creates the conditions where firepower can be turned into a more powerful factor, on which all calculations of success in battle are based.

So, the best use of the benefits of the terrain, the increasing strength and importance of firepower to turn it into a factor that decides the battle and finally – as a consequence of these two provisions – the ability to free up some of first line and the possibility of creating large reserves, are the main advantages that troops acquire by moving to the defence. The success of the defence in a given sector, and so the successful accomplishment of the task in general, depends on the intelligent use of these advantages and benefits.

However, military history provides relatively few cases of successful outcomes for defensive combat.

It is as if practice disproves theoretical conclusions about the advantages and benefits gained by going onto the defensive. Study shows that the reasons for this lie not in defence as such, but in the fact that a passive resistance, sitting still in a position has always been unsuccessful, while actively conducted defence is successful.

In the Civil War, the creation of large reserves and the development of fire power to the point of turning it into a decisive factor in battle was rare and difficult to implement. Activity is another matter.

Precisely because being active corresponded to the spirit of our troops, precisely because it constituted one of the most striking and inherent properties of a revolutionary army, our Red units grasped implicitly the nature of defensive combat, understanding the paramount importance of activity in a successful defence and strove to carry that out in practice, always and everywhere.

In addition, in some cases we were not fighting defensively because our forces were weaker than those of the enemy. While having an offensive task, but not being bound in their actions by the enemy, our troops sometimes preferred a defensive mode of action – with the aim of letting the enemy break itself on the offensive. We needed it to actually fight to be convinced that it was powerless to defeat us, and thanks to this to inflict on it (at the least) a moral defeat, so that after that we ourselves could go on the counter-offensive. Such a calculation was based on the fact that, using the advantages given by the defence, we could create a superiority of force and bring it to the possible limits. A repulsed and exhausted attack – the unsuccessful and stalled enemy offensive – marked the moment when the superiority created by the advantages of defence should and could be implemented with the greatest effect. It was the most opportune time not only for local counter-attacks, but especially for launching a general counter-offensive. The desire to create and exploit this critical position for the enemy was the main reason for the inclination of our troops to defend with an active purpose.

⁸¹ There is no doubt that defence is tactically the strongest form of combat. It gives the troops known benefits and advantages, which a defender can use to achieve a balance of forces and to hold its position as the minimum task.



The Choice of Position and its Consolidation

In considering the general conditions of combat and in particular the actions of our troops in offensive combat, we have dwelt at length on the importance and role of fortified positions in the Civil War.

The conditions which made the fortification of positions impractical and disadvantageous to the enemy applied equally to us.⁸²

As a rule, a defensive position was chosen in such a way as to be able to delay the enemy on the approaches and to ensure that the troops occupying the village would not be shelled from any commanding heights immediately adjacent to the village. Therefore a position was most often chosen on the outskirts of the occupied village. This provided a number of advantages. Cemeteries, fences, barns, etc., served as shelter from enemy observation and fire and were ready-made strongholds: it took little time and work to adapt them to the defence.

A settlement generally facilitated the concealed positioning and manoeuvring of the defender's reserves, sheltered its transports, etc. The defender usually also sought to use some lines adjacent to a given village (at least as a forward position) if they could provide some tactical advantage. Both on those lines and on the outskirts of the village the troops dug strip trenches, for firing lying down or from the knee, whenever it was possible to anticipate the enemy's advance and when we had the task of maintaining the defence.

It would be quite wrong to conclude from the above that our troops occupied continuous, long lines corresponding to the length of the outskirts of a given settlement or tactical line.

A defensive position normally consisted of a number of commanding heights or points giving oblique or flank fire to the terrain ahead. Directions to the troops to do this were very frequent in orders, and were carried out depending on the terrain.

Whether the position was along the outskirts of a village or was moved forward of it, the settlement itself was of great importance, since its loss usually led to the defender's retreat. The loss of a settlement was particularly important because, having begun to retreat, the defender did not usually stop at the next tactically advantageous positions on the way, but continued to retreat to the next settlement.

However, in those cases where our troops had narrower bands of action and created a continuous front line, positions were evaluated and selected primarily from the angle of tactical advantages. For example: the abundance of lakes between the Ishim and Tobol River turns that area into a maze of narrow defiles (isthmuses between lakes), which were used to our maximum advantage.⁸³

⁸² What has been said about the importance of choosing a position for the conduct of a battle should be considered true not only with regard to the positions that were fortified by digging trenches and building wire fences, it fully applies to any position chosen for defence. It is for this reason that troops would consciously sacrifice the benefits of permanently occupying a defensive position, preferring to stay in a settlement in order to create better conditions of food and rest.

⁸³ This area was, as it were, created for defence. If we assume that Kolchak had not been forced by the general military and political conditions to go on the counter-offensive from the Ishim River, then the choice of that area for counterattack should be considered a major mistake, as it largely determined the outcome of the entire operation in our favour. This will become more certain if we take into account that the superiority of the White forces consisted in its numerous cavalry, which could not be used to the full against the infantry occupying narrow defiles between lakes.

It is interesting to note that during the 26th RD's operations in this area it was instructed to fortify the isthmuses with portable barbed wire obstacles. This idea, however, did not prove viable, just as it proved unsuitable on the Russian-German front, where it was first tried at the end of 1916.



Similar conditions were created in battles in winter. Deep snow and cold temperatures made it impossible to manoeuvre widely off the roads and forced attackers to take the defender's position head-on. Taking this into account, both we and the enemy reinforced the outskirts of villages with trenches made of snow.

After our retreat to the western bank of the Tobol River in the first days of October 1919. The 5th Army was ordered to establish a bridgehead on the east bank of the river in order to ensure the transition to the offensive. This was done only by the 35th Rifle Division. On the right bank of the Tobol River near Zverinogolovskaya a triple semicircle of full profile trenches with machine-gun nests, communication lines and dugouts was erected. The trenches were flanked by the river and had 3-4 wire fences.

This bridgehead, however, played absolutely no role either in the defence or in the forcing of the Tobol River.

After our first crossing of the Tobol River on 18-20 August the Army headquarters decided to create a bridgehead fortification near Kurgan on the right bank of the river, in order to protect the railway bridge across the Tobol in case of a forced withdrawal. The works were carried out by the Army's rear construction team under the direction of the head of engineering. But when we were forced to retreat in the first days of October, i.e. a month and a half later, it turned out that the bridgehead fortification was not yet ready. Work had begun on such a large scale that it could not be completed until 3-4 months later.

This example may serve as a characteristic of the contradictions and difficulties encountered in the Civil War when we tried to create fortified positions. The fortifications near Kurgan was built with the expectation that the first line would be so far forward that the enemy would not be able to fire long-range heavy artillery (10-12 km) at the railway bridge and the city. At the same time, the fortification itself was to be of such a size that it would be impossible for the enemy's artillery fire to penetrate it in any direction.

As a result of this calculation, the defence line was 30 km long and one rifle division was not sufficient to occupy it. The unfinished fortifications certainly could not be occupied by the troops.

Firepower

Consideration of the question of how and where positions were chosen for defence shows that, due to the applying conditions, the importance of a strong tactical line was relatively low. The local terrain might be very favourable for the defence of one particular settlement, but since the battles were fought by independent columns in isolated areas with large gaps between neighbouring columns, even the strongest position in an area quickly lost its importance – either due to the retreat of our neighbouring columns, or due to the threats to the flank and rear, which was most often the case in the conditions that allowed wide manoeuvring across the battlefield.

This, however, did not lower the importance of firepower, which in a defence should become a deciding factor for any battle. Having already looked at the effect of fire from infantry and artillery in battle, we came to the conclusion that for a number of reasons (lack of quality firearms, poor firearms training, dispersed deployments, etc.) firepower generally ceded to manoeuvre in battle. This made it difficult for the defender to use firepower to the best advantage. Obviously, its actions would be unsuccessful if it could not create situations in which fire could be used with the greatest effect in the defence.

There were almost insurmountable contradictions between what we expected the infantry and artillery to achieve in defence by their fire, and the limited possibilities that existed in the actual conditions and situations that they had to work under.



We sought to resolve these contradictions by manoeuvring our firepower, by bringing its strength at the right moment in a particular place to a very high level.

The defensive battles of our troops give many examples in this respect.

On the second day of the battle on 13 June 1919 in the area of Nzh. Kalmash and Ver. Kalmash, units of the 35th Rifle Division occupied Nzh. Kalmash at 15:00. The enemy, having pulled up reserves, launched a counter-attack at 19:00. The attack was conducted by large forces in dense chains. Our mortar *divizion*, occupying a position near the village, opened up a concentrated fire supplemented by the fire of our machine guns, as a result of which the enemy's chains were halted and the offensive was repulsed.

On 27 April 1919 the enemy attacked the 26th Rifle Division in Podbel'skaya with dense chains: it was repulsed by our hurricane fire.

Firepower in defensive combat reached its highest development when the defender used a firepower reserve to repel attacks. For this purpose machine-gun detachments (battalion and regimental) were left in reserve, and at critical moments were rushed to the right place, where they often decided the outcome of the battle.

In the battle of Nikolaevka on 6 December 1918, the commander of the 3rd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division, forced to put all the infantry he had into action, left two battalion machine-gun detachments, of four machine guns each, in reserve. When, under the pressure of the advancing enemy, the middle of our line ran out of ammunition and began to retreat, a machine-gun detachment (four reserve machine-guns) rushed into action. It halted the White attack with accurate fire and forced the enemy chains to withdraw. However, due to the lack of machine gun belts and ammunition, the fire from our machine guns weakened, and the enemy returned to the attack. Then the last four reserve machine guns were rushed into action. They shot the attacking enemy at almost at point-blank range, with an exceptional accuracy and intensity. The attack was once again repulsed, the enemy was forced to withdraw to its previous rifle position, and our infantry had a respite for the next hour and a half.

The need, and at the same time the ability, to compensate for a lack of manpower and the relatively weak density of infantry were evident in the use of machine-gun units for this kind of counter-attack by fire.

The tactics of fire attack in defence are clearly expressed in an order of the commander of the 1st Brigade of the 27th Rifle Division of 22 February 1919:

The enemy's advance must be repelled, having disrupted it beforehand by machine-gun and rifle fire. For this purpose it is possible to allow the enemy to come closer, so as to suffer a certain defeat. Having put it to flight, immediately go on the offensive and pursue the disordered units.

Deployment of Troops in Defence

The distribution of troops for defence had some of the available forces assigned to the combat zones, while the rest were kept in reserve. The ratio of forces in the combat area to the reserve was not, of course, something that could be pre-determined.

When preparing for defence, the regiment (if acting independently) divided the intended defensive position into battalion sectors. The latter, in turn, were divided into company and further into platoon sectors. The assignment to battalions was made by the regimental commander, pointing out personally on the ground to the battalion commanders accompanying him the boundaries of the sectors and the directions from which the enemy attack was to be expected. A general battle plan was also given.



The troops usually only occupied the positions indicated to them when an alarm was sounded, when the enemy attack was detected. Prior to that the battalions stationed pickets and observers.

When allocating troops to a position, we tried to avoid occupying it with a continuous chain. Most attention was paid to the choice of the most convenient positions for machine guns in terms of oblique or crossfire. If battalion or regimental machine-gun teams were kept in reserve, they had to familiarise themselves with the positions in advance and know the direction of the enemy's advance. The artillery immediately moved with all available guns to a position selected immediately in the village or behind the village.

If the defensive position was beyond the outskirts of the village, it was immediately occupied by small infantry units (always with machine guns), which were required to hold off the enemy until the units assigned to various positions arrived. The same provision was made when there were commanding heights in the vicinity of the village, the occupation of which was provided for in the defence plan.

Security of the Flanks

The strongest and most well chosen position will be easily taken by the enemy if its flanks are not secure.

A flank that is weak due to the terrain is undoubtedly at a greater disadvantage relative to a position where there are hidden approaches to its centre and front.

When battle was ultimately for the retention of a settlement, it required readiness to repel the enemy from whichever direction it appeared. The actual flanks of the position were established during the battle. This does not mean, of course, that when choosing a position, the defender did not try to cover the flanks from the enemy's attack. The task was to assess the positions and where the enemy would most likely arrive from, then select the ends of the defensive position so that they would cover the most probable directions of attack and at the same time take advantage of the terrain.

The allocation of lines of retreat was of paramount importance. It was clear that if a position was to cover an area as a whole, then the flanks were important not only for deployment, but also to provide avenues of retreat. Therefore, when defending against an independent column, the position's flanks were chosen with the expectation of covering a path of retreat.

Obviously, the attacker could always overlap a flank of any such defensive position and therefore it could only be reliably secured by positive actions.

When part of a solid front, the flank was secured by the position of the neighbours. Any retreat by a neighbour made it necessary to bend back the flank or withdraw. We will limit ourselves to the following example of a forced withdrawal due to the retreat of neighbouring units and the stripping of the flank.

On 27 July 1919 the 236th and 237th Rifle Regiments occupied Dolgoderevenskaya, repelling repeated enemy attacks. In the evening the Whites defeated the 2nd Brigade of the 27th Rifle Division and, having pushed it to the south (to the Kasarganskaya – Kasarga area), it hit the flank of the 238th Rifle Regiment. That regiment was forced to withdraw to the south. Its withdrawal exposed the flank of the neighbouring 236th Rifle Regiment, and the latter, repelling enemy attacks from the front, had to retreat to the south and take up a position three kilometres north of Kazantseva.

In order to fill the resulting gap, the division commander put into action his last reserve – the school of the 1st Brigade and a detachment of mobilised Chelyabinsk workers. With the support of the fire of an armoured train this detachment managed to occupy Esaulskaya, establish



communication with the neighbouring units and thus secure their flanks from further enemy attacks.

Reserves, their Place and Use

The creation of strong reserves should have been the main benefit acquired by the troops as a result of the transition to defence. For the reasons noted above, neither the positioning nor the firepower in our defensive battles allowed the centre of gravity to be shifted to reserves. The main issue was the small number of independently operating columns.

Nevertheless, reserves were always available. There were no firm norms establishing their strength and composition. That was decided according to the local conditions. A regiment, operating as part of its division, had in reserve from one company up to two battalions. Most often machine-gun crews and mounted units⁸⁴ were kept in reserve, as they could be easily and quickly transferred to the necessary point, which in the conditions of fighting on a wide front and with open manoeuvring on the battlefield by the attackers was very important.

The place of the reserve was determined by the situation, but usually they were located behind the defensive position, in particular in a village, if the defensive line was not far forward.

In the battle near Nisibash on 2 July 1919, the 1st Brigade kept a reserve of a battalion behind its right flank, 1.5-2 km to the rear of the forward chains. This is explained by the fact that its flank was open and an enemy cavalry brigade was operating in that area. The reserve allocated for its own protection field sentries,⁸⁵ positioned on the edge of the woods, facing in the direction of the enemy cavalry. The brigade's left flank was also open, but no enemy had yet been detected there, and the terrain nearby gave excellent observation for 3-4 kilometres. The arrival of the enemy on that end could be detected in advance, which would have allowed time to take measures to prevent a blow to the flank.

The location of the reserve in the centre behind the defensive line was less common. This was as a result of often defending on a wide front but with open flanks. A frontal breakthrough, even if not more difficult to execute, was at any rate less dangerous than a flank sweep or bypass.

The study of our defensive battles shows that the reserves very rarely acted as a *manoeuvre* strike group, who might attack the flank of the advancing troops in order to decide the battle. The reserve was most often used to support the forward chains and to lengthen the defensive position. But at the same time it might be introduced in the direction of the enemy's flank.

The lack of desire to manoeuvre reserves widely behind the flanks of a defensive position was a characteristic feature of their use in defence. This was determined by the situation and was in accordance with the plan for the defence.

Defensive Plan

The strongest means of the offensive was manoeuvre (overlapping and bypassing). This was known to the defender from its own experience when attacking. The plan for the defence had to take this into account and provide counter-measures. The enemy's manoeuvrability had to be countered by the defender's own manoeuvrability, and not by constraining its troops to defend a certain line or point "at all costs".

When the situation was favourable, the defending troops would strike at the enemy's flank or rear. When it was impossible to count on the assistance from neighbouring units, positive activity in the

⁸⁴ If there were any in the column.

⁸⁵ Observation posts. Ed.



battle was achieved by local or general counter-attacks of the units leading the battle, most often to the front.

On the 23rd of April 1919 two enemy battalions coming from Salmoedovka outflanked Pokrovskoe (Sosnovka), occupied by the 236th Orsha Rifle Regiment (Map 11). That regiment was forced retreat to Podbel'skoe – Dmitrievskoe. To restore the position, the brigade's units made a counter manoeuvre, with the leading role played by the neighbouring 237th Rifle Regiment occupying Arkhangel'skoe (Ishutkino). Leaving a sub-unit blocking Korzhevka, six companies of the 237th marched to Pokrovskoe in two columns. The left column, moving through Salmoedovka, pushed out the Cossack outpost occupying that village and continued moving towards Pokrovskoe. The regiment's right column moved along the Arkhangel'skoe – Pokrovskoe road.

Having approached that village stealthily, both columns rushed forward with a shout of “ura” and, having seized the outskirts of the village, opened a heavy fire along the main street. The attack came as a surprise to the enemy, as its attention was attracted by the 236th RR advancing from the south and a battalion of the 235th RR in support of it from Podbel'skoe. Nevertheless, the enemy was not confused and, having turned its front round, opened heavy fire on the 237th RR with eight machine guns. Moving around Pokrovskoe the left column of the 237th Rifle Regiment created a threat to the rear lines of the Whites and decided the outcome of the battle.

The enemy fled, leaving in our hands about 500 prisoners of the 22nd Zlatoust Regiment and all eight machine guns. The blow in the flank and in the rear inflicted by the 237th RR, was so strong, the defeat was so serious that the remnants of the Zlatoust Regiment, did not stop in St. Mansurkina, but headed straight to Zav. Abdulovskiy, which is 10 km from St. Mansurkina and 18 km from the battlefield. The success achieved could not be exploited however, due to the retreat of our units defending the area to the left of the 237th Rifle Regiment.

On 2 March 1919 the Whites launched an attack on the 2nd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division, occupying a position in St. Adzitarova (the area of action is shown in Map 6). Due to deep snow movement was possible only by road. In order to assist the units occupying St. Adzitarova, neighbouring units of the 2nd Brigade launched a counter-offensive from Terengulova to Petrovka. Our occupation of Petrovka would enable us to threaten the rear of the enemy advancing on St. Adzitarova and its line of retreat. Noticing the movement of our column towards Petrovka, the Whites hurriedly turned back. Having reached Petrovka, they divided into two columns, which further continued the attack – one on Terengulova and the other on Adzitarova. The success of the counter manoeuvre, which led to a separation of the White forces and weakened the strength of the attack on St. Adzitarova can be explained by the conditions in winter. But, regardless of this, the idea of undertaking a counter-offensive in an adjacent area in order to assist the neighbouring units shows how we could be active while defending – a method we largely relied on.

In those cases where the neighbours' assistance could not be counted on, the defence plan changed accordingly.

On 18 November 1919 the 240th Rifle Regiment occupied the village of Svetlaya. At 13:00 the enemy opened heavy fire with nine guns on the village. Our light battery consisting of four guns and a howitzer replied. After two and a half hours of shelling the enemy attacked and forced us out of the village. On leaving the regiment secured a convenient position half a kilometre west of Svetlaya. The enemy continued to advance. Our artillery opened up a heavy fire on the White chains and disordered them. Noticing this, the battalion commander, Comrade Shreyer, led his men in a counterattack on his own initiative, taking with him two other battalions from the regiment. The 238th Rifle Regiment, operating to the left, also attacked.



The impetuous blow of Comrade Shreyer's battalion broke through the White chain. The battalion's blow on the flank forced the enemy to hastily retreat. The units, carried away by the success, pursued the enemy to Golovnaya (10 km south of Svetlaya), where they were halted, put in order and withdrawn to the position near Svetlaya.

In total in this battle we took 100 prisoners (including an officer) and two machine guns. Our losses were 30 men.

The enemy forces advancing on Svetlaya are unknown; but the concentration of nine guns to prepare the blow allows us to make a reasonable conclusion that those forces were not insignificant. Our success is explained by the transition to a counter-offensive at the most convenient moment.⁸⁶ The 500 metre retreat of the 240th Rifle Regiment from Svetlaya caused a rapid forward movement of the White chains, which could not but break the slenderness of their fighting order. Our artillery concentrated its fire on one of the sections of the chain and thus increased the disorder and confusion in the enemy. A bold counter-attack by one battalion started a general counterattack, as a result of which the enemy was thrown back suffering losses. The success on the battlefield, complete and undeniable, culminated in a ten kilometre pursuit.

This battle can be recognised as typical of our troops in the Civil War. If the enemy's forces were superior, we gave up our defensive position, but only then to move to a counter-attack after the retreat. We knew our enemy would had to exert itself to push us out. Attacking our position (including overlapping or bypassing it) and then pursuing would disorder its troops, reducing the strength of its resistance. This created conditions which promised success for a counter-attack, especially if it could be prepared and supported by skilful use of fire.

This was a mobile, flexible defence, combining manoeuvre and fire and very much matching the conditions and possibilities of defensive combat in the Civil War.

Local Counter-attacks

Local counter-attacks were essential for holding an occupied position and for exhausting the enemy forces (see Appendix 4, also references above).

At dawn on 28 July 1919 our strike group, consisting of the 236th, 238th and 237th (two battalions) Rifle Regiments, led a rapid attack from the south-west on Kazantsev, occupied by the enemy's 8th Kama Division and a regiment of Cossacks (Map 13). Having defeated the enemy and pushed it back from Kazantsev to the north, our strike group continued the offensive. At that time an unfavourable situation was created south of Kazantsev. One battalion of the 237th RR and 27th Cavalry *Divizion*, which was there, were forced under strong enemy pressure to withdraw to the railway bridge at the northern outskirts of Chelyabinsk. With the support of two companies of the 235th Rifle Regiment, moved from the reserve, we managed to hold on at the line of the Miass River, but the flank and rear of our strike group at Kazantsev was stripped by the withdrawal.

Seeking to use that, and obviously believing that the units that retreated to the bridge were not able to counter manoeuvre, the enemy turned to the north, heading along the river to Pershin, where there was a convenient crossing point. We noticed this manoeuvre.

Our detachment (battalion of the 237th RR, two companies of the 235th RR and 27th Cavalry *Divizion*) moved to counter-attack. The 27th Cavalry *Divizion* burst into Pershin and hit the rear of the crossing enemy units. The Whites, in panic, were pushed to the eastern bank of the Miass

⁸⁶ The fact that the initial counter-attack was launched on his own initiative by the *KomBat* Shreyer does not change the essence of the matter: Shreyer's battalion merely acted as catalyst for a general counter-attack, prepared by all the previous measures by our troops.



River. Our detachment's forces were insufficient to break the enemy, but the blow in the rear tied up the Whites and they had to stop their attack on the rear of our strike group.

Local counterattacks were the very common in our defensive battles near Chelyabinsk, south of Ufa, and behind the Tobol River. In any plans for a defence, special attention was paid to the desire to respond to every attack with a counter-attack in order to take back every position we left under enemy pressure. During the three weeks of fighting south of Ufa some villages (Kazangulova, Yakovlevka, etc.) changed hands eight to ten times. In September 1919 fighting behind the Tobol River this phenomenon was repeated. Within two days Matassy passed from hand to hand three times, and the 3rd Brigade lost 500 men, which indicates the persistence of both our men and the Whites.

Hand-to-hand fighting was also frequent. At 17:00 on 25 July 1919 superior enemy forces attacked Krugly and Churilov, occupied by our 235th Rifle Regiment.

It came down to a bayonet fight, in which we lost the regimental commander. The attack was repulsed and we took 400 prisoners. The enemy continued with fierce attacks, the regiment was forced to withdraw and take a position two kilometres west of Krugly.

On 30 July the enemy surrounded the 228th Karelian Rifle Regiment with superior forces in Korkinsky. Having lost 100 men killed and wounded, the regiment captured 200 Whites and at night bayoneted its way out to the units of its own brigade.

Withdrawal from Battle and Rearguard Action

On 2 July 1919 the 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division, deeply outflanked on its left flank and having an enemy Cossack brigade in the rear behind the right flank, was forced under heavy pressure from the front to retreat from Nisibash (Map 4). The situation was difficult. The line of retreat along the right bank of the Yuryuzan River was cut off. The ring of the enemy had almost closed. Orders were given to withdraw. The brigade's reserve battalion and a platoon of mounted scouts were the advance guard of the retreating brigade and were tasked with clearing the line of retreat. The vanguard was followed by the 1st Class transport for all the brigade's units.

Covering the exit from the battle was entrusted to the machine guns and artillery. Retreating by bounds, from line to line, they hold back the White onslaught with strong fire, thus giving their infantry the opportunity to form up and commence a withdrawal. The Cossacks deployed into *lava* and repeatedly try to destroy us with fire, but those attempts were prevented by cannister and machine-gun fire at point-blank range.

The mounted scouts in the advance guard found that a line of retreat to Kalmaklarova was free. That day we had learnt by reconnaissance and questioning of carters that there was a ford in the area of that village. The vanguard was tasked with seizing the area of the ford and providing the brigade with the possibility of crossing. The ford was not yet occupied by the enemy but we had to expect the appearance of its mounted units not only on the right bank, where we were, but also on the left bank, where we were to cross. In view of this, the advance guard allocated one company and part of the mounted scouts to occupy a position on the left bank of the river and ensure the ford from the south. The rest of the battalion's companies and mounted scouts remained on the right bank of the river, moving to the south-east of it.

The successful withdrawal from the battle was greatly helped by the coolness, endurance and skilful actions of the machine guns and light battery, which covered the retreat of the brigade's main forces. Unsuccessful attacks and heavy losses forced the Cossacks to limit themselves to pursuing our units by fire. Having travelled the approximately 10 km from Nisibash to the ford the White infantry had lagged behind and so a few machine guns were enough to cover the crossing of the 1st Brigade's main forces from the Cossacks.



The fast flow of the mountain river and the narrow strip of the ford made the crossing difficult and time-consuming but it was completed successfully. Having conserved kept strength and resources, the brigade took up a position on the left bank.

On 2 September 1919 the 239th Rifle Regiment was knocked out of Zhidki. On 3 September the regiment counter-attacked and took the village back. The enemy withdrew and entrenched 2-3 km east of the village. At 19:00 the Whites opened a heavy artillery fire on our units and attacked. The position of the 239th Rifle Regiment was poor: the howitzer battery had no shells. At 20:00 three enemy chains attacked us from the front with simultaneous overlapping of the flank by Cossacks.

The 239th Rifle Regiment was forced to start a retreat. It slowly retreated in a square,⁸⁷ repulsing the mounted attacks of the Cossacks by fire.

Seeing their attacks were unsuccessful, the Cossacks abandon the pursuit of the regiment and broke through to the rear. Thanks to this they managed to overtake the retreating wagons and hacked up most of them.

An example of a rearguard action is that of the Combined Brigade in 13 March 1919. The main forces of the column – the 241st Rifle Regiment, two companies of the 41st Rifle Regiment and five guns – at 18:00 13 March, under enemy pressure, began to withdraw from Maslovka to Pasmurovka. In the rear guard were three companies of the 241st Rifle Regiment. The enemy followed on their heels, but since movement was only possible on the road, the rear guard was able to cover the retreat. In Pasmurovka the wagons and artillery got stuck: the horses could not move as the warm weather and the large number of wagons moving ahead had chewed up the roads. The enemy overtook the rearguard and began to squeeze it. Time was needed to withdraw the artillery, so the rear guard was reinforced with two companies from main column. The enemy offensive was only held for a very short time. Under the threat of being outflanked, the rear guard was forced to begin retreating and all five of the trapped guns fell into enemy hands.

The failure is explained by the fact that the infantry did not help the artillery in time. During the artillery's efforts to get out on their own, the harnesses for all the guns broke. This minor and easily remedied issue forced the abandonment of the guns, as the rear guard began to withdraw, and the time when the infantry could have helped was past.

Defensive Crossing of a River

The defence of a crossing may be active or passive. The difference is that in active defence some of the forces hold a defensive position (bridgehead, perhaps fortified) on the enemy bank while the main forces cross. In a passive defence no units remain on the enemy's bank.

Our defence of river crossings was basically always passive. Except in isolated cases, such as the creation of a bridgehead for the 35th Rifle Division on the right bank of the Tobol River (noted above), we withdrew all our forces across the river.

An order of the commander of the 5th Army required all four of his divisions, when withdrawing behind the Tobol River, to organise a defence on the right bank, but this requirement was only met by the 35th Rifle Division.

The 26th Rifle Division on 14 October had a detachment on the right bank, covering the bridge, but that was because we were about to force a crossing. The absence of bridgehead fortifications can only be explained by the general situation when defending. The example of the unsuccessful

⁸⁷ The square (капе) or 'box' (коробочка) as it was more commonly called, was a structure used quite often in the Civil War. The possibility of its existence was due to the weak firepower of the cavalry and the almost total absence of horse artillery. Compare Kutyaov, *With Chapaev on the Ural Steppes*. Ed.



attempt to build a bridgehead fortification near Kurgan shows that there was no need to consider such things – there was neither manpower nor the technical means required.

Nor did we have the troops to create sufficiently strong detachments on the enemy's bank, which could replace sitting in fortified bridgeheads with active operations.⁸⁸

In any case, holding on to the crossing points on the enemy's bank was not important because, with wide spaces to move in, we could always find some convenient crossing points and force the river there. The reports for the time spent on the Belaya, Ufa and Tobol Rivers are full of daily reports about searches made for this purpose.

Not being able to create fortified bridgeheads, and seeing no need to cover crossing points on the enemy's bank with active groups, we tried to create the most favourable conditions for our defence by active actions of our reconnaissance parties on the enemy bank.

At the same time, any attempt of the enemy to gain a foothold on our bank was immediately and vigorously repulsed. As a consequence, during the defence of the Ufa River and the Tobol River, fierce battles were sometimes fought (Barabinskoe, Bedeeva) with the enemy units that crossed to our bank and tried to gain a foothold. Having thrown back the enemy across the river, we did not develop the success and, remaining on our bank, did not change the plan for the defence of the river.

Appendix 3 (an order for the 1st Brigade of the 27th Infantry Division) and Map 14 give an opportunity to take a look at a typical position occupied by us defending a river.

Outposts or pickets were moved to the points where the enemy might possibly cross (bends, fords, narrow stretches). Observation of the river between them was carried out by foot or mounted patrols. The artillery took up positions for shelling the proposed crossing points. The main forces were stationed in the nearest villages. Observers were placed on commanding heights. Scouts were sent across the river every day to search and raid the enemy's bank. When the movement of columns or wagon trains was detected on the enemy's bank, our artillery (or often machine-guns) endeavoured to disperse them by fire.

Outwardly, i.e. by the position of the troops, the defence we undertook was passive. But both we and the enemy endeavoured to use scouts and reconnaissance parties actively to keep the other side in constant suspense and thus to influence the situation on the opposite bank.

Encounter Battles

An encounter battle is a clash between two opponents on the march. It can be unforeseen or deliberate.

In the first case the collision would be a complete surprise to us. Neither the place nor timing of the clash could be predicted in advance. The distribution of troops in our march column was the normal one, not intended for combat from the march. The enemy forces we encountered would be completely unknown. Such circumstances could not but influence the deployment and the course of the battle, and its eventual conduct.

Deliberate encounter battles took place when, knowing of the enemy's movement, we went forward to meet it or to prevent it from occupying a particular place, or to attack it on the march. In these cases the place and time of the encounter would be calculated in advance, and

⁸⁸ "Bridgehead" was a much abused term in the Civil War. A platoon sitting in trenches were said to be occupying a bridgehead. This author is no different. Ed.



distribution of the column had to be made with due regard to being in perfect readiness for the eventual combat.

In the second half of November 1918, the enemy gained a major success in the area north of the Bugul'ma – Ufa rail line, defeating our 27th Rifle Division. To halt its offensive the 26th Rifle Division was transferred to rail line area. Its 3rd Brigade occupied St. Puti – Kyzylarovka on 30 November. According to the division's orders, the brigade was told to occupy the area of Zaitova – Narysheva by the evening of 1 December (see Map 3). There was no accurate information about the enemy. The brigade had had no contact with it during the day of 30 November. The brigade was made up of the 232nd and 233rd Rifle Regiments, the 3rd Smolensk Light Battery and the Tver Half-Battery: a total of 1,678 bayonets, 38 machine guns, 6 guns (76-mm) and two platoons of cavalry (63 sabres).

The brigade marched out on the morning of 1 December to carry out its assigned task. The advance guard was a battalion of the 232nd Rifle Regiment with its machine guns. The brigade's main column moved 3-4 km behind, with the following order: three companies of the 232nd Rifle Regiment, the 3rd Smolensk Light Battery, the 233rd Rifle Regiment (three companies) and the Tver Half-Battery. Then the 1st Class transport and a platoon of infantry as the rearguard.

At 11:00 a report was received from the vanguard that, having reached Narysheva, it had not found any enemy and, after a small halt, it continued towards Zaitova.

Having received the report, the main column continued marching and at 12:00 was approaching Narysheva. (Map 15)

When the head units of the column were about half a kilometre away from that village, frequent gunshots were heard, and our cavalrymen immediately appeared out from the village. A few minutes later we found out that our cavalry patrol, which had been half a kilometre ahead of the main column, had entered Narysheva and met the enemy.

The leading battalion of the main forces was surprised to find itself under enemy fire, who had been shooting at our mounted patrol.

The appearance of the Whites in Narysheva was a complete surprise, especially since the advance guard had reported at 11:00 that the village was unoccupied.

Apart from some vague reports from our cavalry patrol that there were enemy infantry in the village, there was no other information. So to add to the unexpectedness of the encounter we were completely ignorant of the situation there.

The Task of the Advance Guard and its Methods

Having sent out an advance guard when leaving St. Chuti, and having received reports from it, the brigade had every reason to believe that it was secured from the surprise attacks from the front. The unexpected appearance of enemy infantry in Narysheva overturned all the calculations on the cover provided by the vanguard. We could not assume that the advance guard had been destroyed, for it could not have been done quickly and silently. But there was no sign of the vanguard, nor information about it, and the enemy was in Narysheva instead of it.

The lack of information about the vanguard made the situation even more complicated.

At the moment when the first shots were fired, the situation was as follows.

The brigade was in a long column stretching for two kilometres along the road heading into Narysheva. The road was in completely open terrain (Map 15), covered with snow, devoid of any cover from the enemy's sight and fire. Half a kilometre ahead was the village of Narysheva, at the eastern edge of which could be seen a commanding hill. If the enemy took the village and



managed to occupy the commanding height, it would mean that it would have all the tactical advantages of the terrain on its side. The brigade would then find itself caught in the open within rifle, machine-gun and close artillery range, with no cover or suitable position for a rifle line.

The information received from the patrol allowed us to conclude that it had encountered infantry, but they were apparently only the lead unit of the White advance guard.

In the situation, the first and main task was to move forward and seize the tactically important points before the White forces could occupy and consolidate them.

That should have been the task of the advance guard, but it was missing, and so the leading battalion of the main column rushed forward. It had to do the advance guard's job and capture the village and commanding height to give the other units the most favourable conditions for entering the battle.

Deploying on the move into combat order, the battalion's right-flank company managed to capture the southern half of the village. The left flank company, moving to the left of the village, came under heavy fire from the Whites and lay down.

Despite the orders being given quickly and despite the battalion racing forward it reached the points to be occupied at the same time as the enemy.

The battalion entered into a battle for possession of that line when to the immediate rear of it (500 metres) was the brigade's main column. Obviously, it could not fulfil the task of the vanguard and cover it from fire.

Tactical Tasks in an Encounter Battle

The capture of the desired points by the lead battalion also served to clarify the situation. It was now obvious that the brigade was dealing with a large infantry force, as 400 bayonets and 2-3 machine guns from our battalion had to lie down. But even before he could come to that conclusion, the 3rd Brigade's commander gave a number of orders to ensure freedom of action for the rest of the column and put them into action in the most favourable conditions.

He sent a company of the 232nd RR to the road from Narysheva to Zaitova, with the tasks of establishing communication with the advance guard, by sending the mounted scouts attached to it, and remaining in reserve to cover the right flank of the brigade.

The 3rd Smolensk Battery was ordered to open fire. There were no positions for artillery nearby, so the battery galloped forward, dismounted in a space behind the cemetery and opened heavy fire on the enemy's chains. An observer from the battery advanced up to the rifle chain with a telephone to the battery commander. This was done because the buildings obscured the area behind the village where the main enemy forces were thought to be.

While all this is going on, the Whites continue to advance vigorously, apparently expecting to repel our deploying chains with a swift strike. We succeeded in pushing them back in the village and were able to advance on the right side of the village. But our chain was stationary in the stretch between the village and the hills to the west. A large force of the enemy was evidently directed there. A dense chain approached to within 200 paces to our rifle position and was preparing for a bayonet attack.

The rapid fire of the 3rd Smolensk Battery and several machine guns forced the Whites to lie down. A heavy fire fight ensued, where our artillery gave us the advantage. The enemy's attempts to advance were immediately suppressed by its fire.



The first main task in an encounter battle was fulfilled. We had stopped the enemy's advances by fire and deprived it of the opportunity to go on the offensive again. Now we had to prevent the Whites from taking full advantage of a defence.

But the situation was still not clear. No reports had been received from the advance guard. The reserve company of the 232nd Rifle Regiment sent out a detachment, but having advanced 2-3 km along the road to Zaitova still did not find it.

The nature of the enemy's forces and the direction of its main attack had not yet been revealed: it was still unknown whether it had artillery.

Nevertheless, we already had a number of advantages. The enemy's advance was halted. Strong artillery, rifle and machine-gun fire pinned it to the ground in the area to the left of the village, where apparently its main forces were operating. The commanding hill near the south-eastern edge of the village was in our hands. A machine-gun platoon was ordered to occupy that height, but, owing to the deep snow, was slow in climbing it.

The right flank of the brigade had so far been secured by one company. The left flank was open, but behind it there was the brigade reserve (three companies of the 233rd Rifle Regiment) and was thus secured against threats of bypass or encirclement.

However, this reserve was needed to force a decision in the battle, and it needed to be used to the greatest effect.

Having assessed the situation, the commander of the 3rd Brigade decided to strike with the reserve into the enemy flank, to break it and throw it back.

The three companies of the 233rd Rifle Regiment, led by the regimental commander Comrade Rakhmanov quickly moved to the foot of the hills west of the village. Having formed a chain and bending their left flank, the companies swiftly moved forward.

In the meantime an intense fire fight was going on from our chains, and the enemy's chains were noticeably strengthening. The movement of the three companies from the 233rd Rifle Regiment to overlap the Whites' flank was noticed. Taking heavy losses from the heavy fire from our artillery, rifles and machine-guns— and taking into account the threat to the flank — the enemy began to pull back its chain occupying the position between the village and the hills, covering the retreat with several machine-guns from the leading chain.

In order to prevent the enemy from carrying out that manoeuvre, the 232nd RR's chain and the three companies of the 233rd Rifle Regiment advanced, shooting the retreating Whites on the move and overlapping the right flank of their deployment.

With energy and bravery, pushing back the enemy and preventing it from gaining a new foothold, our units defeated the Whites and went on to a rapid attack. The enemy hastily retreated. We pursued it three or four kilometres along the road to Tuymazina and Karamala.

In this battle we took more than 100 prisoners (including 18 officers), discovering we had faced the 12th Bugulma Infantry Regiment and an officer shock battalion, a total of about 1,000 bayonets.⁸⁹ The enemy had no artillery. Our losses were about 30 men wounded, including the commander of

⁸⁹ The blow dealt in this battle to the White 12th Bugulma IR was so severe that for the next month the regiment remained in reserve and did not take part in further fighting against. By the time we took Ufa it had been disbanded. The Officer Shock Battalion had ceased to exist even earlier as a fighting unit.

The Tver Half-Battery did not take part in the battle. The commanding height was occupied by our machine-gunners, but too late for their fire to play any part.



the 233rd Rifle Regiment, Comrade Rakhmanov. In addition to the prisoners, we took seven machine guns and some 1st Class wagons.

Starting and conducting an encounter battle is generally characterised by a lack of clarity, but in this case it was aggravated by the fact 1) that the enemy had come between our advance guard and the main column, and 2) that the actions of our advance guard were fundamentally poor.

Our success was due to the brigade's quick and decisive action. By rapidly throwing forward the leading battalion from the column, the brigade seized an important line to ensure its deployment. Then, simultaneously with covering the right flank, the artillery was immediately put into action, thus creating a dominance in firepower. The machine guns and artillery pinned down the enemy and so held it to the front.

The situation was extremely favourable for the introduction of the reserve – the three companies of the 233rd Rifle Regiment. Their movement round the enemy's flank decided the battle. It took ninety minutes from the time of the first shots for us to win the battle at Narysheva.

But, of course, the an encounter battle did not always end so favourably for us.

On 29 May 1919 the 231st Rifle Regiment, while on the march to Syryshbasheva, encountered an enemy column consisting of a regiment of infantry (with 10 machine guns), two guns and cavalry (according to the regimental commander's report, about 1,500 sabres).

The presence of such a large cavalry force gave the enemy the opportunity to push well past the flank of the rifle regiment. It was almost surrounded and had to commence a hasty retreat, losing about 50 men wounded and leaving about 130 prisoners and some machine-guns in enemy hands.

At midday on 31 March 1919 a column of the 238th Rifle Regiment, with an attached Ufa workers' battalion and one gun, was advancing towards Mikhaylovka. While still more than three kilometres to that village, the regiment met a large White force on the march. The enemy advance guard units were defeated and thrown back. Pursuing the retreating Whites, the regiment ran into the main White forces a kilometre and a half from Mikhaylovka and were forced to lie down. A strong fire fight began, in which we could not gain any advantage over the enemy.

At 14:00 the Whites moved to the attack. A detachment of foot scouts, occupying the flank of the 238th Rifle Regiment, was forced backwards by fire. That retreat denuded the left flank of the 1st Battalion. The enemy cavalry charged, but were repulsed by fire. At the same time, the enemy began to strongly press the middle section of the regiment's 2nd Battalion. Almost without ammunition and without the support of its neighbours, the battalion was forced to withdraw. This started the general withdrawal of the regiment. The fight lasted about 90 minutes. Our losses were 20 men killed and 50 wounded. The losses of the Whites are unknown, but they did not dare pursue and let the regiment calmly withdraw to its starting positions in Kiska-Elga, 8 km west of Mikhaylovka.

The episodes discussed above were essentially accidental encounters, where a clash with the enemy on the march was neither foreseen nor expected.

The spirit of activity inherent in the Red Army meant it sought out encounter battles, because such fighting offered ample opportunities for the manifestation of resourcefulness, daring, courage and determination in battle, which were the main qualities of our troops.

During the battles near Chelyabinsk and behind the Tobol River in September 1919, we often see operational orders for an offensive, which were based on the desire for encounter battles. In both periods the attacking party was the Whites, who had launched major operations. Having halted our offensive, the enemy sought to develop its success. We could not, of course, give up the initiative so easily and go on the defensive, and we understood defence not as sitting on a fortified



position nor just as parrying blows, but as a battle that could be won only through partial or general counter-offensives or local counter-attacks. Our desire to hold the initiative, as well as wanting counter-attacks in defence, meant that deliberate counter-battles were the most appropriate method available, in accordance with our aspirations and capabilities.

However, the tactical conditions at the time made deliberate encounter battles almost impossible.

The battles near Chelyabinsk played out for seven days in a strip about 60 kilometres wide. The opponents did not lose contact with each other. Hence any march started by us, or the enemy, was immediately turned from a column into deployed combat order. The increased operational density led to the fact that neither we nor the Whites could undertake any march without it being immediately detected. In such cases, the enemy and we had already fully deployed in advance, or one of us sought (quite reasonably) to occupy a favourable tactical position with regard to the terrain. The zone of the fighting near Chelyabinsk was like one large battlefield, where there was neither space nor opportunity for counter battles.

The fighting behind the Tobol River was played out on a bridgehead, having a depth of up to 200 kilometres. But even here the conditions were not favourable to the development of deliberate encounter battles. In addition to those reasons that were noted for Chelyabinsk, there was an exceptional saturation of the area by the enemy cavalry. The Cossacks' main task was to upset our rear, acting by flank moves and envelopments. They fulfilled it very persistently and successfully. Under such conditions we could not risk of seeking deliberate encounter-battles.

In some cases the situation forced us to deploy in advance and continue the offensive in chains. On other occasions it was more advantageous to suspend the march in order to fully exploit the terrain and allow the enemy to continue its advance.

It should be noted that the inherent tendency of our troops to deploy early had a very strong influence on changing what could have been a deliberate counter-battles into situations of an ordinary offensive battle.

In the battles near Chelyabinsk and behind the Tobol River we do not find our troops seeking deliberate encounter-battles, despite the fact that some operational orders set such tasks to the troops and the general situation undoubtedly favoured the development of that type of fighting.⁹⁰

The actions of the 27th Rifle Division on 5 July 1919 can serve as an example of a deliberate counter battle that did not materialise.

Reaching the Ufa Plateau and advancing along the road to Zlatoust, the 27th Rifle Division fought fierce battles with the White Ufa Corps.

On 4 July 1919 an order of that corps was intercepted, according to which in the morning of 5 July the 4th Infantry Division (three infantry and one cavalry regiments) would attack along the road against the right flank of our division, covering itself from the south. At the same time, the enemy's 6th Infantry Division was to assist the 4th Infantry Division by advancing frontally north of the *trakt*.

The two right flank brigades of the 27th Rifle Division (2nd and 3rd) were ordered to continue their offensive on 5 July. Having received the intercepted White order, the division commander

⁹⁰ In our military literature the battles near Chelyabinsk, and more often the battles in September 1919 behind the Tobol River are usually called encounter-battles. The author saw this in a thorough study of materials covering the actions of our troops in those operations. He found no episodes that could be defined as deliberate encounter battles. This does not mean, of course, that there were none at all. But the lack of mention of them can only be explained by the fact that either they played out as described above, or the troops lumped them with offensive battles and, according to their understanding, that covered their conduct.



cancelled his order to continue the offensive, deciding to defeat the enemy in an encounter battle. Doing that, however, required regrouping both brigades to create a strike group. All three regiments of the 2nd Brigade to be used for that purpose were to concentrate in the area of Verkhnie Kigi – Kurgashelga and then attack along the road towards the enemy. The 3rd Brigade acting to the left, was to replace the 2nd Brigade units on their left flank, supporting the 2nd Brigade with one regiment, while the remaining two regiments were to continue the offensive against the enemy 6th Infantry Division.

The regrouping was not finished in time. The enemy was forewarned, and in the morning of 5 July the 238th Rifle Regiment was knocked out of Verkhnie Kigi. The regiment withdrew under enemy pressure three kilometres to the west and entrenched. Meanwhile two battalions of the 240th Rifle Regiment, who had been replaced by the 3rd Brigade and were now assigned to the strike group, approached Verkhnie Kigi from the north. A bayonet attack from them pushed the enemy out of that village to the east, with the support of the 238th RR, which also counter-attacked.

So instead of a deliberate encounter battle, a defensive battle was fought over Verkhnie Kigi, which was decided in our favour by the blow of the two battalions of the 240th Rifle Regiment to the enemy flank.

This example is indicative only with regard to the decision taken by the division commander – not to wait for the White offensive, but to go on to the offensive ourselves and smash the enemy in a (deliberate) encounter battle.

From the preliminary orders it is not possible to identify any specific preparations for the encounter battle. The strength and composition of the columns and the distribution of troops in them do not differ from what was normally done for attacking by our units. The calculation of where and when it was most favourable for us to meet the enemy had not been made. Obviously those questions had to be solved while on the attack, depending on the situation.

Some Conclusions

The action of insignificant forces on broad fronts led to clashes of two kinds.

- 1) The basic type of isolated combats between independent march columns.
- 2) From time to time there were prolonged battles in multiple sectors along a continuous front, which were decisive for the undertaken operation.

Regardless of this external distinction, the battles were in essence: either sequential events in time and space (along a march route), or where the battles had a purpose as an integral part of some march-manoeuvre.

In this latter case, the battles became a way to complete the operation successfully, regardless of whether the fighting was via the struggle of individual columns, or whether the troops fought on a continuous front for a long time in a relatively small area (both frontage and depth).

The march methods used meant that battles were usually fought around settlements. A battlefield was usually on the approaches to a settlement or in the immediate neighbourhood of it. In those situations the settlement was the tactical key to the position, regardless of the other terrain possibilities.

The early arrival of the column's senior commander at to the prospective battlefield and his personal observations not only facilitated and accelerated the decision-making (forming a battle plan), but also simplified management during the battle.



Widely spread battlefields, the scattered and sparse location of concealed targets, and the rapidity of the encounters all reduced the importance of firepower, which for a number of reasons noted above meant it had a less decisive role.

Firepower gave way to manoeuvre on the battlefield.

The offensive battle plan was based on the tactical idea that the enemy should be pinned frontally and then hit in the flank or rear.

This development of the method of attacking with separated columns over a wide area with the purpose of mastering allocated settlements, in turn further increased the importance and role of manoeuvre on the battlefield.

Battles were not won by repeated blows from inside the formation, but by the rapid forward movement of the entire body of troops. The battle order consisted either of 1) a wide chain which extended beyond the enemy flanks, or 2) a pinning unit (usually the advance guard), a strike group (sent to the flank or rear of the enemy) and a reserve.

Moving to defence in the conditions of the Civil War did not provide the advantages that usually constitute the main benefits of that mode of action: 1) the creation and defence of a fortified or tactically strong position; 2) the transformation of firepower into a decisive factor; and 3) the release from the first line of enough units to create strong reserves.

Nevertheless, we did successfully defend, due to the fact that we remained exceptionally active. The defence plan was based on local and general counterattacks and on skilful manoeuvring of fire in order to focus it to provide locations of strong fire. The best flank support was activity against the front of the advancing enemy. We tried to answer every attack with a counterattack.

The benefits of defence were seen to be the ability to make counter-attacks on an enemy who had been disordered by the attack and our fire.

This found its most vivid expression in the tendency of our troops to defend with active purpose.

In offensive combat the reserve was primarily a strike group to make the decisive blow to win the battle and then a means to remedy unexpected events. In defence the reserve served mainly to feed the fighting units with manpower. Wide manoeuvres by the reserve in defence with the aim of striking a decisive blow in the flank are met only as an exception. This did not mean, however, that the reserve served only to reinforce (back up from behind) retiring units – putting the reserve into action was used to strike at the flank or rear enemy who was pressing on our front line units.

A counter-attack did not always lead to an encounter-battle. The Red Army's inherently active nature, with rapid forward movements and persistence in achieving its goal combined with rapid deployments and bold and wide manoeuvring, made our troops exceptionally adapted to conducting counter-attacks – success in which depends on freedom of action, gaining time to operate and superior morale to an indecisive enemy.

Success in night fighting came from a strong blow and bold energetic actions, not just the hidden nature and surprise of the attack.

While there might have been wide manoeuvres, in the end a bayonet charge was the last stage of an engagement, both in terms of the battle plan and its execution.



Chapter IV – Rest

Rest is, in the broad sense of the word, a break in operations. The purpose of the pause and its causes may vary according to the situation. The time and place of rest and, above all, its external forms depend on the same situation.

It is obvious that rest, as a break in the actions for troops, puts those troops in a position where they need some time and freedom to prepare before they are once again ready to resume marching or fighting.

Hence the necessity to keep a certain degree of readiness and to take security measures during any rest.

Rest

The need for pauses is for reasons of physiology and morale. This is the reason for strict consistency and regularity in the appointment of rest stops, which meant that they were to take place after certain intervals of being on the move, i.e. after the troops have expended part of their physical and mental forces on completing tasks.

In the conditions of our marches rests for recuperation were of little importance. The movement of short columns and in loose formation (along the roadsides), the use of wagons for transporting haversacks and overcoats, the absence of needing to carry a much by way of rations and sometimes even tools, low ammunition loads – these and similar features, in various combinations, facilitated the purely physical performance of marching, requiring no great expenditure of effort.

The lack of physical fatigue meant that the fighters could show great resistance to the negative effects on morale that inevitably arise from long marches. There is also no doubt that the troops' revolutionary spirit played a major part in this.

Only this can explain the fact that our troops often went without any breaks at all, or took them only after long intervals.

Overnight Stops

The length of the day's marches were mainly explained by the reduction of time for rests and the lengthening of the marching day at the expense of the time for overnight stops. The column usually set out at dawn and continued to move until dusk, and if there was a delay on the way due to a combat encounter, even into the night.

On average 8-9 hours were set for an overnight stop, starting from the moment of entering the location and until the march recommenced. If the troops sometimes stayed longer at the place of an overnight stop, it was due to accidental reasons. During forced marches (pursuit) the time spent in lodgings was further reduced.

Advancing along the Yuryuzan River, the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 26th Rifle Division had no real overnight stops for four days, having only extended rest periods – no more than 2 hours during the day and 4-5 hours at night.

Day Rests

The intensity of the fighting made whole rest days relatively rare. A study of the circumstances under which they were given shows that the reason for assigning them was not the desire to give the troops more time to recuperate, get into order, pull up the rear, etc. Instead they depended on the operational situation, usually coinciding with the end of a particular operation or with the preparations for a new one. On 24 May 1919 the 26th Rifle Division received an order to suspend



its offensive until 28 May, i.e. for four days, using the time to prepare for a decisive offensive, which would begin on 28 May.

After the occupation of Zlatoust and taking the passes over the Urals Ridge the whole 5th Army stopped for two days. The same phenomenon took place after the deflection of the counter-attack at Chelyabinsk, after our capture of Omsk, etc.

These pauses were not by their duration (2-4 days) day stops in the normal sense of the word. But they also cannot be considered as periods of calm or preparation for a new operation, if we evaluate how they were used.

Condition in the Reserve

Deep and large Army reserves, as such, never existed. Divisions were withdrawn to deep reserve only when they were moved to other Fronts.

An example is the withdrawal to the Army reserve of some of the 5th Rifle Division and the 21st Rifle Division at the end of August 1919 north-east of Kurgan, as well as the 31st Rifle Division in June 1919 after our capture of Ufa. The core divisions of the 5th Army (26th, 27th and 35th) were never in reserve.

On 17 May 1919, at the end of the Bugul'ma Operation, the 2nd Brigade of the 5th Rifle Division was assigned to the Army reserve. The brigade was withdrawn from the reserve on 30 May, i.e. 13 days later. From 1 to 6 June the Army reserve was the 2nd Brigade of the 35th Rifle Division .

The creation of these reserves was caused not by a desire to give the troops some rest, but for considerations of operational procedure, and the period in reserve was sometimes purely nominal, because they still had the enemy in front of them and were in combat contact with it.

Divisional reserves were more common (ranging from a regiment to a brigade). According to the conditions, the purpose of the assignment as a divisional reserve could be to provide the troops with rest. This was also true of brigade reserves (from a regiment to a battalion).

Selection of Area and Place

The choice of area and place (long rest breaks and overnight stops) for march columns was determined by the operational tasks assigned to the column. Their size and composition did not require them to move off the offensive route for overnight stops, as the villages along the way provided sufficient space.

When selecting the area for the reserves to rest, operational considerations and the requirements of the situation were of course decisive.

When it was Army reserve the 2nd Brigade of the 5th Rifle Division was located for rest between the left flank of the 26th Rifle Division and the main Army force group. Moving in the wake of the advancing troops, the reserve brigade maintained that location.

The 2nd Brigade of the 35th Rifle Division was withdrawn to the reserve to cover the rear of the main Army forces on the right bank of the Belaya River. In accordance with this it was sent to an area on the bank of the Belaya River 50-60 km west of the left flank of the army.

Assigning areas for divisional and brigade reserves was done in the same way.

Location of Troops at Rest

The usual place for rests and overnight stays were settlements. Only in extreme cases, most often in the absence of any villages, did troops stay overnight in the field in the open air. The absence of any tents and considerations of better food supply, which could be obtained in villages, played an extremely important part in this.



When occupying a village for the night, the troops were located by quarters, each unit within an area allotted to it. Infantry was located closer to the outskirts, artillery usually in the central square (church square, marketplace) or on the main street.

Battalions and companies operating in the division, when occupying large population centres were concentrated in one area, usually on a main street.

The Guards – Tasks and Procedures

When positioned for a short rest, a column usually took no special security measures and only posted guards. If the terrain conditions were unfavourable for observation, patrols or field sentries were sent out.

The same measures were used to secure troops for a long rest. Quite often a long pause was used for reconnaissance of the nearest districts (villages), which lay away from the column's path.

In both cases the task of the guarding units was to detect any approach of the enemy as early as possible.

When camping or stopping for the day, the following security measures were taken. On the roads leading towards the enemy, outposts or separate field sentries with machine guns were posted. For communication and observation of the gaps between them paired sentries were sent from the company that posted the outposts. The other men of the companies sending out the outposts and sentries constituted a kind of watch reserve, and were quartered in the areas where the roads led into the village. The distance of outposts or sentries from the troops depended on the terrain, but usually this distance was not more than 500-750 metres. The number of outposts or sentries depended, as a rule, on the number of roads approaching the village. Inside the village, paired sentries were sent out at night one after another from the battalion, and during the day there were observers on any bell tower, adjacent hills, etc.

Obviously, all these measures were only for the close protection of the troops located in the settlement. There was no common line of guards between the neighbouring columns that made up the front of the brigade. Each column set up a sentry line depending on the terrain and its own forces, taking into account the location, strength and activity of the enemy.

An attempt to create a continuous line of brigade sentries was made by the 26th Rifle Division in September 1919, when Cossack detachments were prowling around our troops – sneaking into the rear, intercepting the orderlies, breaking up communications and making the gaps in the front and the lack of a continuous guard line especially painful. This attempt was embodied in an order by the commander of the 26th Rifle Division on 12 November 1919. That order is given here in full (see appendix) in order to clarify the difficulties that made the creation of a continuous guard line absolutely impossible.

Even if we assume that the brigades would keep between a quarter and a fifth of the available soldiers and machine guns in the guard line at all times, and thereby weaken their forces in the forthcoming battles, the security line created by the order does not stand up to criticism.

It is obvious that to place 14 field outposts in a string for 20-22 kilometres would not create a useful security line, even if each outpost consisted of 15 bayonets and a machine gun. The reserve half-company for the outposts would have a massive undertaking, if we take into account that its outposts would cover six kilometres of front, and that to support the outposts on either end this security reserve would have to move at least 2-3 km, with no roads. This is no way this whole fragile chain of outposts – stretched in a line for 20-22 km across the front – could be moved forwards or backwards to keep up and support the flanks in the battle.



Only one thing is certain, that any active enemy cavalry would have counted on rich trophies, breaking up and destroying each outpost one after another, dooming them to death in advance.

The unsustainability of the order's requirements is obvious, and in fact it was not carried out.

The troops endeavoured to fill significant breaks in the front by occupying intermediate villages with small units (battalions, companies, mounted pickets).

We have already touched on the methods adopted when marching in the chapter on march-manoeuvre.

A study shows that the marching column usually moved to the nearest villages within about 5-6 kilometres (forward or to the side) an independent battalion or companies or a platoons of mounted scouts. Each of these would post an independent guard, as outlined above. But in total, these small garrisons, located in front and on the sides of the main column, created a workable system of guarding the main forces. More precisely, the march system (noted in the chapter on march-manoeuvres) was transformed into a security system. The focus was on creating a reliable guard for each individual garrison. It was both impossible and inexpedient to occupy the gaps between those garrisons. Those gaps were, of course, observed, as the system of individual garrisons was supplemented by very active reconnaissance.

The enemy also stayed overnight in a village, usually the closest on line on retreat. The distance between the villages and therefore between the two opponents was random, but almost always more than 3-5 kilometres. This gave a wide scope for reconnaissance actions. Patrols were sent out as soon as a unit camped overnight: either teams of scouts or separate companies, with machine guns in both cases. If the distance to the enemy was far the patrols, having searched the area up to 4-5 km distance, returned to their parent unit.

The questioning of local inhabitants, especially carters returning from enemy requisitioning, was a very valuable and rich source of information – not only about the enemy locations and strengths, but also about their intentions, as these could often be learned from the conversations of the soldiers.

This security system should be recognised as appropriate under the conditions of the time, bearing in mind that there were very few successful surprise attacks on our units by the enemy. Obviously that is not just due to the system, but primarily to the poor enemy activity and the way the troops carried out the guard service and conducted reconnaissance.

Our combat units did not have any examples similar to those mentioned previously with regard to the enemy's security, and this shows that the units paid sufficient attention to the questions of sentries and reconnaissance and coped with the general security tasks satisfactorily.

Combat Readiness

Having a watch guard as was mentioned above, those troops had to count on the possibility of a sudden attack by the enemy. This required a certain combat readiness, for which the main difficulty was the arrangement of the troops by quarters.

The small combat numbers made it possible to gather the men relatively quickly and put them in order, if they were not scattered and the alarm was raised in time. For this reason the assignment of duty units from the main body of a column stopping overnight was practised only in exceptional cases. The calculation was that the outposts, being some 500 to 750 metres from the troops and having detected the enemy's attack, would be able to hold out for 10–15 minutes. That would give enough time for the small regiments to prepare for battle and take up positions on the outskirts of the village.



A significant role in this respect was played by the guard support company, made up of those men left over from the companies which posted pickets or sentries, who remained ready for combat. Positioned as they were, those support companies were the first to meet any advancing troops if they succeeded in quickly dislodging our outposts.

As the matter of quickly being combat ready in this system was really a question of an early general alarm and did not require the allocation of duty units, a column stopping for the night concentrated its attention mainly on ensuring that a constant watch was established both at the line of outposts and field sentries and also over what was happening inside the village itself.

The presence of guards at the machine-guns, artillery, headquarters, etc., the sentries and the sending out of patrols were sufficient for this purpose, so that the maximum number of men could use the night for rest.



Chapter V – Morale in the Civil War

Revolutionary Class Spirit

In studying our troops in the Civil War, we have up to now almost entirely failed to touch upon the significance of morale. This does not mean, of course, that we attach no importance to that as a factor. On the contrary. We consider its role to be so essential and important that it needs separate consideration. We have already noted that the Civil War was a most acute form of the class struggle with weapons in hand. This determined, on the one hand, the tasks and aims of the war, and on the other hand, determined particular traits in our troops and their actions.

The socio-economic content of the Civil War itself is beyond the scope of the present study, but we must identify its significance for the morale of our troops.

The revolutionary aims of the war could not fail to find their constant daily reflection in the reality of combat, for it was nothing but the product of an open armed clash between hostile class forces. The notion of the “political-morale” state of the troops dates back to the Civil War. It is a basic feature inherent in struggling class armies, with the element of politics playing a predominant role.

It is precisely because of these circumstances that we must, in speaking of the morale factors in the Civil War, first of all emphasise the exceptional importance of the revolutionary class ideas which constituted the essence of the struggle taking place and which at the same time imposed their imprint on the state of the troops and their actions.

The influence of the socio-economic content of the war on the events taking place was so exceptional and strong, the manifestations of the class nature of the struggle were so sharp and unconcealed, that the revolutionary class spirit acquired the significance of one of the basic elements of the conditions.

Without identifying the role and significance of this in the military situation, we would not be able either to understand the events taking place or to assess objectively and correctly their significance and influence on the course of military operations.

Without getting acquainted with the manifestations and facts characterising the political state and morale of the Red Army, without knowing the psyche of its fighters as carriers of the ideals of the revolution, we will not grasp the essence of that driving force which in many respects determined the character of our actions on the battlefield and in war in general.

The Civil War was nothing but an open armed clash between hostile classes.

The Red Army had within its ranks special class-revolutionary bodies designed to exercise class leadership and political control, actively participating in the struggle taking place.

One of the main tasks of the political organs was to attract to our side and involve in the active struggle those layers of the population which were closest to the proletariat in their socio-economic situation. It is quite clear that those tasks could be set and solved both in the theatre of war and deep in the rear of the enemy.

To organise and carry out revolutionary work in the enemy units, with the aim of causing an open class struggle in them, was the second task of these organs.

The local population could not remain indifferent spectators to the events taking place.

In the critical days at the end of July 1919, when during the hard fighting north of Chelyabinsk we were finding out the critical issues of whether we would be able to hold on and continue our offensive deep into Siberia, or whether we would be defeated and thrown back to the Urals, a



detachment of Chelyabinsk workers, formed during the twenty-four hours of fighting on the outskirts of the city, came to the aid of our troops.

That detachment played a well-known role in purely military terms (discussed previously), but its performance was more its huge significance on the morale of the fighting troops.

At the beginning of July 1919, when our troops were approaching Troitsk, a detachment of 150 armed workers came out of the town to meet us, not afraid of possible reprisals on the part of the retreating enemy against their families who remained in the town.

These cases of the active intervention on our side of our class brothers were not, of course, the only ones.

The mobilisation announced by Kolchak in August 1919 failed at the front line. The population evaded turning up, waiting for our offensive, and the mobilised snuck across to us at the front. So for example on 30 August, 500 peasants mobilised by Kolchak arrived at the 26th Rifle Division, bringing all their cattle with them.

There were peasant uprisings deep in the rear of the Whites. There were large and small partisan detachments, who not only bravely attacked isolated Kolchak garrisons and tore up the communication along the main Siberian line, but evaded capture and with dogged persistence took and held the districts of their native villages and hamlets. Such phenomena, as a consequence of the growing revolutionary class struggle, became part of the general situation.

On the other hand, there were cases of counter-revolutionary uprisings against the Red Army.

In the spring of 1919 there was a *kulak* uprising in the deep rear of the 5th Army, which was suppressed by force.

During our offensive to the Urals in January 1919, partisan groups of skiers drawn from local Bashkirs were very active for the Whites.

In June 1919, during the advance of the 26th Rifle Division across the Urals along the Yuryuzan River, partisan detachments of local Bashkirs made daring raids on our rear establishments, artillery parks, etc.

In July 1919, when we entered the area of the former Upper Urals Cossack Host, old Cossacks formed volunteer regiments and left with the retreating Whites, while the majority of young people were with us.

We have cited only some of those cases where whole groups or layers of the local population, rather than single representatives from the local population, did this, but there were many more cases of that sort.

Obviously, there is no need to prove that each of the participants sought to use both active and hidden forces from sympathetic layers and groups in the local population for their own interests.

A detailed analysis of the causes of these phenomena and all the consequences arising from them is beyond the scope of this study. We therefore consider it necessary to confine ourselves to the above, for this is enough to show that revolutionary spirit was an element at the time.

Against this background of the general political state and morale of the fighting forces, it is undoubtedly easier to notice and evaluate those phenomena which, also being manifestations of the revolutionary spirit and part of the overall situation, concern the armed masses themselves – the soldiers as such.

The war could only end with a decisive victory of one of the opponents. Any reconciliation or agreement between us and Kolchak was out of the question.



This affected the troops in the conditions of combat, most of all, by leading to exceptional ferocity. However, the fierceness was not (with some exceptions, naturally) senseless and aimless. It was aroused by class hatred, driven on with the power of class enmity and revenge. Only this can explain the phenomena of the wholesale shooting of captured Communists by the Whites and the similar cases of the massacre of captured officers by our troops.

Where the sympathy of the masses and their understanding of their interests were concerned, the advantages of the political and social order were on our side, for workers constituted the overwhelming majority of the population.

We note a number of cases of Whites sending delegates to us for negotiations. A number of cases of fraternisation are known. The exceptional significance of these phenomena can only be properly assessed if we take into account that they took place in conditions of manoeuvre warfare, when the units faced each other for short periods and, consequently, the possibilities of establishing communication and carrying on revolutionary work at the front were very small.

The class spirit of the war found its most vivid expression in the phenomena of the voluntary surrender of entire enemy units to us.

On 7 June 1919, at a critical moment for the 26th Rifle Division, when it was in danger of being thrown into the Belaya River, the transfer to our side of the 2nd Battalion of the 21st Chelyabinsk Regiment decided not only the outcome of the battle, but gave us the opportunity to develop our success far beyond its local significance.

At the beginning of October 1919 in the area of Ekaterininskiy the Whites captured almost the entire 308th Rifle Regiment of the 35th Rifle Division. Having withdrawn the command and commissar staff, the Whites sent the regiment to another section of the front to act fight against our units.

A month later the regiment returned to us almost as a whole, having crossed the front together with four Cossack regiments. These were the same Cossacks who had once taken our soldiers prisoner, and now, under the influence of their agitation, they themselves voluntarily came over to our side, surrendering their weapons, including 46 machine guns.

The transfer of whole troops to our side was far from typical of the normal condition of Kolchak's army. While there were cases of fraternisation and surrender of whole units to our side, on neighbouring sections of the front Kolchak's troops fought stubbornly and fiercely.⁹¹

In the conditions of the Civil War of 1918-1921, as it can be seen from the examples given, the revolutionary class spirit was not an abstract idea or slogan: it animated the whole struggle. It was one of the main – if not the most important – elements of the situation, evident in the activity of the local population and in the political state and morale of the enemy troops.

Discipline

The question of discipline is usually connected with studies of a theoretical, particularly psychological nature.

In those days, discipline was understood in a narrower, more specific sense.

Its essence lay in the following two basic questions: 1) what constituted discipline in the realities of combat, and 2) by what means or methods was that discipline imposed and maintained?

⁹¹ In Chapter I, while describing Kolchak's army, we have already touched upon the questions of its political state, morale and the fighting capacity of individual units. In view of this, there is no need to repeat the matter.



The basic requirement imposed on the troops was that they should obey combat orders accurately and without question.

By the end of 1918 the aspirations to discuss every order received by the unit as a whole (company, regiment) – and to refuse to execute that order if it did not correspond to the wishes of the soldiers – was already forgotten and left in the past.

We know only one case, in early 1919, when the 3rd Bugul'ma regiment of the Orenburg Brigade refused to go on the offensive, citing an exceptionally strong snowstorm. The regiment's refusal disrupted the execution of the combat orders for the appointed day, and the general offensive began a day late.

That incident was the last echo of the mood that characterised the Red Guard period.

The strengthening of the Red Army's fighting ability caused an increase in discipline and a conscious attitude to their duties. The longer the army existed, the more the combat experience it acquired and the stronger its organisation became. This was the opposite phenomenon to what the old army suffered, when every extra day of war led to a new drop in discipline and a new weakening of the army's fighting ability.

The example of the old army makes it especially clear that discipline is a question of the internal consolidation of the social forces forming the army: the trust of the Red Army soldiers in their commanders and commissars and the recognition of their authority, not only in matters of combat, but also in the political and social sphere.

Maintaining discipline in the Red Army units nevertheless required enormous efforts on the part of the commanders and political staff, and those efforts were directed almost exclusively towards ensuring that the troops did what the situation required. The need to fulfil those requirements was to a certain extent understood by the soldiers: their combat experience had confirmed to them the importance of obedience. However, the discipline of each given unit depended to a large extent on the skilful approach and persistence of the command staff. The commissars and other political organs of the army played an extremely important role in the matter of creating and maintaining discipline.

The revolutionary events had destroyed the old notions of discipline and authority. In the early days, neither the commander nor the commissar could by themselves always enforce their demands or rules. It was necessary to create a new authority – a collective one – by a skilful approach and hard work from day to day.

The influence of comradeship as part of collective authority was not understood to mean always discussing every issue between all the men of the unit. The collective way of resolving discipline issues was undoubtedly useful at first, but it had to be abandoned. Already by the end of 1918 comradeship as a way of creating and maintaining discipline was exhibited by the idea of a conscious discipline in the army, developed in combat and becoming unwritten law, and also by the views taken on actions that were incompatible with the morals of a proletarian class army.

False Impressions

Rumours and false impressions were a major factor affecting morale. The roots of this lay in the generally heightened anxiety, among the population in general, which was caused by the extraordinary nature, rapidity and intensity of revolutionary events.

During military operations, this showed itself in a heightened reaction to all kinds of unexpected events and rumours. In any new situation, the soldiers regarded everything with great caution. This caution sometimes became clearly expressed distrust. It sometimes led to an exaggeration of dangers and underestimation of the importance of any favourable elements in the situation.



During our retreat from Ufa at the beginning of April 1919 the following typical case took place. The 3rd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division started a flank march in a difficult operational situation, as we started our retreat, which threatened all kinds of surprises (see above). According to the brigade's order, the 232nd Rifle Regiment was to follow the road closest to the enemy, covering the rest of the brigade units as they marched southwards. Locations for the overnight stops were indicated based on the movement of the brigade in three parallel columns, i.e. the 232nd Rifle Regiment was to spend the night in one of the villages on the route, thus maintaining during the night its position covering the flank march of the whole brigade.

The retreat was started under pressure from the Whites. In an endeavour to break away from the enemy, particularly its Cossack units, the brigade commander assigned the units a large march distance for that day. At about 02:00, when all the columns of the brigade should have already been at their stopping places, the 232nd Rifle Regiment suddenly arrived in full strength at the village occupied by the brigade headquarters and units of the 233rd Rifle Regiment (the middle column).

It turned out that when the regiment – already late in the evening after a tiring day's march and rearguard skirmishes with Cossack units – approached the village indicated for its overnight stop, the regiment's reconnaissance reported that the village was occupied by some troops, apparently enemy units. Without taking measures to find out who actually occupied the village, the regiment commander turned off its route and, having travelled an extra 8-10 km, arrived at the lodging point of the middle column. The regiment commander not only did not consider his actions wrong, but pointed out very categorically that it was unacceptable to assign a village to the regiment for an overnight stay, which allegedly could not but be occupied by the enemy.

The regiment was allowed to stay where they were to give the men a well-deserved rest. The reconnaissance sent out in the morning found out that the village designated for the 232nd RR's overnight stop – already occupied by the enemy according to the regiment's reconnaissance – had a few of our lost wagons. Those wagons spent the night quietly. The reconnaissance sent from the brigade headquarters did not find any enemy in the area of the village.

The 232nd Rifle Regiment had not shown any signs of panic or loss of morale. Indeed, the regiment was one of the best in the brigade and its commander was deservedly considered to be restrained and reliable. However as a result of the previous combat stress, physical fatigue and an exaggerated idea of the enemy's successes and forces, a mental impression was gained that over-rode all other considerations of common sense and even trumped the responsibility to complete a specific combat order.

The above episode is certainly not the only example when excessive impressionability had a negative impact on the stability of morale, and consequently on the way our units acted.

The only means of combating this phenomenon was to make sure each soldier understood the situation in which the task assigned to him must be fulfilled. But, of course, a rote explanation of the situation and the task, an explanation merely in words, was not enough for this.

If a soldier was not prepared by previous events; if his morale was not taken into account and prepared, even before he was given a combat task; if he was led into battle unskillfully; then no verbal explanations would reach their target.

Confidence in their own abilities played a major role in this. The conviction that the commander's requirements were correct and expedient did not arise merely from recognition of his authority, but primarily the result of the soldiers' judgements. This does not mean, of course, that those judgements were always distinguished by deep analysis or knowledge of the situation, but it remains that the soldiers were not remain indifferent to the events taking place around them.



The first impression was of the utmost importance. It had to be prepared by skilful introduction of the unit into a battle without fuss, without asking too much immediately. The simpler the first task was, the easier it was to fulfil, the more understandable it was to the soldier, the better it acted as a gradual introduction of the soldier into what he had to do and so better prepared him for subsequent actions.

Only the involvement of all the soldiers in what was happening, only the preliminary preparation of their morale, can explain the excellent actions of our troops in the battles near Nikolaevka and Nisibash, where the situation required exceptional endurance and fortitude from all the units, as well as from each soldier individually.

Loss of Morale

The loss of morale – of the strength to resist – occurred as a result of the prolonged impacts on the psyche of our units from unsuccessful battles or unfavourable conditions.

In the continuous month-long battles in September 1919, the 26th Rifle Division suffered very heavy losses. Continuous demands from above finally exhausted our units. The daily breakthroughs by Cossacks into our rear and their raids shook the morale of our soldiers. In the last days of September a regrouping was undertaken with the purpose of a broad counter-offensive. But the units were, due to their shaken morale, incapable of a bold counter manoeuvre.

On 26 September 1919 the 2nd Brigade of the 26th RD was to go on the offensive at the same time as its neighbouring units. Before the task was to commence, the brigade units withdrew, even leaving their initial positions without any combat. Clarification of the reasons for the withdrawal showed the following. One and a half or two Cossack *sotnias* had moved past the brigade's right flank and threatened the rear of one of the regiments. The regiment did not face any enemy pressure from the front and therefore had full opportunity to repel the Cossacks. However, without taking any measures against the enemy, the regiment immediately began to retreat and caused the withdrawal of the neighbouring regiments of the brigade. The regiment's retreat was neither panicky nor disorderly. Subsequent events confirmed that it was due to a loss of morale and not some other unusual cause.

Similar cases occurred during our long retreat from near Ufa (in the beginning of 1919). It was enough for our units (sometimes a whole regiment) to see Cossack patrols and they would leave their resting place and continue their retreat (usually without disorder or panic).

Excessive physical and mental stress undermined the soldiers' confidence in their strength. They would be deprived of combat effectiveness for a while. However, the recovery of strength and morale was very quick. For example, a two-week pause in the spring and autumn of 1919 was sufficient to heal those wounds and restore the mental resilience of the troops.

Panic

After a battle on 2 July 1919, the 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division positioned itself at the village of Nisibash, holding off any further advance until the next day. To the rear of the position, behind its right flank there was a small forest, on the north-western edge of which were the brigade's wagons. Some 300-400 paces away the brigade's reserve battalion and the 5th Smolensk Battery were in position. On the south-eastern edge of the woods there were field sentries, in contact with the enemy Cossack units.

Deep in the night suddenly there were shouts of "ura" on the sentry line, and a lot of rifle and machine-gun shooting was heard. Apparently the Whites were conducting a night attack.

Awakened by the unexpected firing and shouting, the transport, which consisted of 150-200 peasant wagons, immediately started to dash towards the rear, throwing away their loads on the



way, breaking and abandoning carts, showing all signs of panic. The Smolensk battery also hastily withdrew from its position.

In a few minutes it became clear that the Cossack attack had been a false alert. The firing began to subside, but the panic-stricken convoy raced past our rear outpost, located on the road to the rear about a kilometre from the woods, and it was not possible to quickly return it.

It is interesting to note that during this panic the brigade's regiments, occupying positions behind Nisibash, one and half to two kilometres from the transport camp, remained completely calm, only sending mounted scouts to find out the cause of the shooting and shouting.

An example where panic ended in a major defeat for us, is the battle at the Kabaniy settlement.

We noticed the Cossack attack on the Kabaniy settlement in time. The commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 35th Rifle Division decided to retreat and, at the start of the battle, ordered the carts to withdraw. Concentrated on the western outskirts of Kabaniy, the brigade's wagons attracted the attention of the out-flanking enemy column. The Whites, having cut off the line of retreat, opened fire on the convoy with a four-gun light battery. This started a panic. Fleeing from the artillery fire, the convoy rushed along the nearest free road that still led to the rear, taking a rear outpost (a company of the 310th regiment) with it. The Cossacks rushed into the resulting gap and, although their attack was repulsed, our infantry began a rapid withdrawal. This led to the complete defeat of the 307th, 310th, 311th and 312th Regiments of the 35th Rifle Division.

Panic in this case began with the transport and was transferred to the unit, who abandoned their section of the defence. A gap in the rear of the position was formed, which allowed an attack by the Cossacks and a disorderly withdrawal of our regiments. Heavy losses among the commander staff show that they tried to keep the troops in hand and to resist the Cossacks, but failed. Panic-stricken and attacked by the Cossacks, the regiments were no longer capable of resistance.

There is no doubt that in the Civil War had a lot of features that were particularly favourable to the emergence of panic. The sparse fronts; isolated units with no communication with neighbours; the constant threats of a sudden attack and complete encirclement in the absence of long-range reconnaissance and advance guards; and finally the small number of independently operating units – were the most common of the circumstances conducive to the emergence of panic.

In spite of all this, panic in the combat units was an extremely rare. This testifies not only to the effectiveness of the purely military measures taken to prevent panic (constant clarification of the situation, vigilant security and constant combat readiness), but also to the stability and resilience of our units.

Combat Resilience

Combat resilience is the concept of the combat work of all the soldiers of a given unit – a battalion or regiment – as a whole. They may have it without taking up spectacular positions or executing brilliant manoeuvres. Resilience is shown by the actions of units when in a particular situation, it is brought under great nervous tension.

The stress of a battle must always be raised by taking increasing losses and the making of great demands on the fortitude of soldiers. In this sense, military bravery is where the mental qualities of a unit are concentrated and reflected.

Combat endurance manifests in different forms. There is exceptional steadfastness in battle, with an ability to take heavy losses and hold on in difficult conditions, but there is also the endurance and perseverance with which the troops seek to achieve their goals.



The combat episodes given before show many examples of valour in our troops. So, for example, the actions of the 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division on 2 July in the fighting at Nisibash and the retreat of that brigade on 3 July; the actions of the 228th Karelian Regiment in the battle at Korkinskiy; the actions of the 235th Rifle Regiment at Skobelevsky.

The bravery shown in these battles did not just arise from the one factor of morale. It embodied all the powers and qualities of the Red Army units – their combat resilience.

Its source was the revolutionary spirit of the troops, binding together all the soldiers of a given unit, inspiring them with class hatred, increasing their strength of resistance and the will to victory.

Initiative

The military situation seen in our marches and battles not only favoured the use of personal initiative, it made it more or less obligatory: the political and mental state of our units ensured it. In the conditions, our men frequently had to show personal initiative, which is confirmed by a number of the combat episodes cited.

Here we shall confine ourselves to the following two examples, in which initiative not just shown vividly, but which at the same time testify both to the strength of will and the absence of any fear of responsibility, the main obstacle to showing initiative.

On 23 August the 242nd Rifle Regiment, having occupied the village of Medvezhya, captured two messengers sent by the battalion commander of the enemy's 46th Isetsk Regiment with a report addressed to the commander of that regiment. The report stated that the battalion had begun its retreat and would stop for the night in Medvezhya, i.e. in the same village in which the two messengers had been captured and which we occupied at the time.

The commander of our 242nd Rifle Regiment decided to take the battalion prisoner, taking advantage of the fact that the enemy did not know that we had occupied Medvezhya. The unsuspecting battalion of the 46th Isetsk Regiment was allowed into the village, immediately surrounded and disarmed without resistance.

As a result of the initiative shown by the commander of the 242nd RR and a bold and skilfully executed ambush, 12 officers, 150 soldiers and several machine guns fell into our hands.

Due to the defeat of the left flank of the 5th Army in early March 1919 north of Ufa, the right flank of the Army's 26th Rifle Division was ordered to begin a retreat so as not to be isolated and defeated. According to the order from the commander of the 26th RD, the troops were to, having moved out on 12 March, withdraw systematically for three days south-westwards from line to line. The 3rd Brigade acting on the division's right flank to the south of Ufa started the retreat on that day, holding back the enemy 12th Infantry Division attacking it from the front. Having broken away from the White infantry units, late in the evening of 13 March the brigade stopped for the night in the area of Buzovyazy (Map 6). Bad roads and forced marches on 12 and 13 March greatly tired the brigade's units, so it was decided to continue the withdrawal from 12:00 the next day, i.e. on 14 March.

In an effort to communicate with neighbouring units, the brigade headquarters accidentally contacted by telegraph the headquarters of the 20th Rifle Division of the 1st Army, located in Sterlitamak. From the messages over the wire it became clear that the withdrawal of the 26th Rifle Division threatened units of the 20th Rifle Division with a heavy defeat. That division's units were far ahead on the western slopes of the Urals. The withdrawal of the right flank of the 5th Army not only stripped the flank of the 20th RD, but opened the way for the enemy into the deep rear at Sterlitamak.



It was impossible to disagree with the arguments of the commander of the 20th Rifle Division, but the commander of the 3rd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division had combat orders from his direct superior to withdraw.

The 3rd Brigade had no contact with either the 26th Rifle Division HQ or the 5th Army HQ. The positions of the division's other brigades unknown, and there was no communication with them either. Judging by the general order to the division for the withdrawal, the 1st and 2nd brigades should have been 8-10 km north-west of Buzovyazy. The 3rd Brigade only faced enemy Cossack at the time, but they were undoubtedly being followed by infantry.

The situation required initiative. The situation needed reassessing and a new decision made without fear of responsibility for failure to fulfil the division's combat order.

The commander of the 3rd Brigade decided to stay in the occupied position until nightfall on March 14, in order to clarify the situation and get in touch with his division's neighbouring brigades, as well as to try to contact the 5th Army HQ (through the headquarters of the 20th Rifle Division, which had a link with the 1st Army HQ), if not his division HQ. Depending on the results of the measures taken by the end of the day a decision would be made whether to continue the withdrawal or to prepare to fight the enemy to hold the position.

The neighbouring 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division was soon contacted. The commander of that brigade agreed with the arguments of the 3rd Brigade's commander and so also postponed further withdrawal of his unit until night fell on 14 March.

Thanks to this, when the commander of the 3rd Brigade received that evening (through the 1st Army HQ) an order from the Eastern Front commander cancelling the withdrawal order of 26th RD and requiring the 1st and 3rd Brigades to hold back the enemy offensive, a new front line had already been created south of Ufa.

A day later the 2nd Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division and the 1st Brigade of the 27th Rifle Division joined the line, which gave it the necessary length and increased its stability.

We held this line (about 40 km south of the city of Ufa) from 14 March to 2 April, fighting hard with the advancing enemy and repeatedly going on to the counter-offensive.

The initiative shown by the 3rd Brigade played an extremely important role both in relation to the 1st Army and in relation to the later position of the 5th Army's front line.

By delaying, on his own initiative, at Buzovyazy for 24 hours and securing the assistance of the neighbouring 1st Brigade, the commander of the 3rd Brigade started a new front line for the 5th Army (Map 6).

Thanks to the fact that we held that line firmly for 3 weeks, the 1st Army was able to: 1) transfer its reserves from below Orenburg and move its left flank in a counter-offensive to take back the Ufa area, and 2) withdraw the 20th RD without fuss from the passages of the eastern slope of the Urals Mountains, further covering itself from the threat to the rear along the Ufa – Sterlitamak road.

The consequences of the initiative shown by the 3rd Brigade had a very strong impact on the position of the 5th Army.

The front line created south of Ufa diverted the enemy's forces from Simbirsk, where only one of our brigades was operating. Having delayed it to the south of Ufa, we won back three weeks in heavy combat, the importance of which was especially clear later, when in the second half of April, unable to hold back the enemy's onslaught, we withdrew to the Volga River. We managed to remain on its eastern bank thanks to the beginning of the thaw and spring flooding of the rivers, which delayed the enemy's advance. The thaw caught us in the area of Buguruslan only because



we had held south of Ufa for three weeks. Without those battles, in April the 5th Army would undoubtedly have been thrown back to the western bank of the Volga River, thus unleashing significant White forces for action in other directions.⁹²

Purposefulness, Willpower and Determination

Purposefulness was a very pronounced trait of our units. It derived its power from the soldiers' understanding of the aims and objectives of the war and this was amplified by the revolutionary spirit of the army.

Determination and willpower were its companions.

So, for example, the actions of the 1st Brigade of the 26th Rifle Division in early September 1919.

The situation in the division's area was extremely difficult. On 2 September Kolchak's flank group dealt a very strong blow to the right flank of the division's 2nd Brigade, broke it and threw it back north of the road to Petropavlovsk. The brigade's regiments were surrounded and only broke through to the rest of the division the next day with heavy losses. This was the Whites' first major success. The brigade was no longer a serious fighting force, and so the commander of the 26th Rifle Division decided to transfer a brigade to his right flank in order to consolidate the situation and comply with the Army commander's orders. That manoeuvre failed. In the afternoon of 5 September both the 1st and 2nd Brigades were pinned by the enemy, who had taken the offensive. As a result of a whole day of fighting on 5 September, the 2nd Brigade was forced to withdraw, having lost contact with the 1st Brigade.

During 6 September and the night of 7 September the fate of the 1st Brigade was unknown. A company with machine guns sent in a roundabout way to restore communication only found the 1st Brigade in the morning of 8 September in the vicinity of Zolotoe, where it was in combat with the enemy.

The withdrawal of the 2nd Brigade in the morning of the 6th had put the 1st Brigade in a difficult situation. All day on 6 September it fought bravely, looking for contact with its neighbours and holding its position. Ammunition was running out. By the evening of 6 September it became evident that it was cut off and it needed to take advantage of the night to make its way back to its own side.

The brigade succeeded in breaking away from its enemy and, moving westwards, it came into contact with the 234th Rifle Regiment, which had also become cut off from its brigade, and now joined it. Having given the men a rest and having chosen the direction to take, the brigade commander, Comrade Ganlit, and his men came to Chebakova in the morning of 7, which lay on the line of retreat. The leading patrols reported that the village was occupied by the enemy. The strength, composition and location of the Whites were not established.

⁹² Considering the actions of the 3rd Brigade's commander to be wilful and a direct violation of his combat orders, the commander of the 26th RD set up an investigation into the *KomBrig's* actions and obtained the consent of the 5th Army commander to remove him from his post for trial. This was not immediately carried out only due to the fact that the Eastern Front ordered the 3rd Brigade of the 26th RD be placed temporarily with the 1st Army, while fighting was breaking out on the front.

A month later a new commander was appointed to the 5th Army. Not knowing the whole previous history of the issue and wishing to mark in some way the work of the previous commander of the 26th RD (who was being transferred to another Army) the new 5th Army commander issued an order in which he particularly pointed out the successes achieved by the suspension of our retreat south of Ufa, as a result of the initiative shown by the 26th RD. Thus, ironically, the 26th RD commander was commended for the very actions of his subordinate units for which he had put his 3rd Brigade commander on trial – for personally directing those actions.

(The new *KomandArm-5* was Eikhe himself. PW.)



The brigade commander had to make a very important decision. Not knowing the nature of the enemy forces in Chebakova, having had no communication with the neighbouring units for twenty-four hours, it was certainly risky to get involved in any battle, taking into account the fatigue of the men and their general morale after the intense fighting, retreat and rumours about being encircled. It seemed more expedient to try to bypass Chebakova off the road, taking advantage of the darkness of the night and the fact that the enemy apparently had not yet detected them. Avoiding battle seemed the best in the situation. An unsuccessful outcome of a night attack or a prolonged battle would have worsened the brigade's already difficult situation, as neighbouring White units could appear on its flanks and in the rear.

However, it was decided to attack Chebakova, defeat the enemy occupying it and so not only open the line of retreat, but at the same time defeat the Whites.

Quietly, without firing a shot, the deployed regiments of the 1st Brigade approached the village and rushed forward. The attack of our large force from the rear was so unexpected by the Whites, the attacking blow was so swift, that the 7th Infantry Division occupying the village had no time to offer resistance. Panic began, there was indiscriminate firing, some tried to resist, but in half an hour the village was in our hands. In another hour the brigade continued on its way, taking with it about 500 prisoners, 15 machine guns, 7 guns and the HQ office of the 7th Division – all the officers of which were killed while trying to resist. Several hundred killed and wounded enemy and 18 guns were left on the spot, after being rendered inoperative because it was impossible to take them.

Against the general background of the difficult situation of the 26th Rifle Division – which had suffered considerable losses, was pushed out of all its positions, and had no strength to stop the onslaught of the enemy, who was tearing the front into pieces – the 1st Brigade's night attack at Chebakova, can serve as a brilliant example of the purposefulness of the actions of our troops, their determination and willpower.

An equally interesting example is the actions of the 311st Rifle Regiment in November 1919. On 5 November the regiment occupied a position near Ivanovskiy. The enemy's 44th Kostanay Regiment was located seven kilometres on the road to Veselovskiy. Our units accidentally managed to find out the enemy's password. The commander of the regiment, Comrade Zelepugin, decided to use the circumstances to its maximum advantage. At the head of a small detachment (a detachment of foot scouts, a detachment of mounted scouts, two light guns and twenty cavalry) he went to the enemy occupied village. Having approached the enemy outpost and having given the password, Comrade Zelepugin moved with a few of our men to the headquarters of the 44th Regiment. Calling himself the commander of the 34th Orenburg Cossack Regiment, he arrested the entire headquarters of the 44th Regiment and then, with the help of the approaching detachment, disarmed and captured the entire enemy 44th Regiment. Everything happened without a single shot being fired. Six officers (including the regiment's commander), 706 soldiers, a gun, five machine guns and the entire regiment's transport were our trophies.

As well as the personal bravery and enterprise of the *KomPolka*, Comrade Zelepugin, this episode also shows that he found worthy support in the courage and willpower of the soldiers of our small detachment, fully worthy of attention and admiration.

In conclusion to the considerations of morale in the war, it is necessary to note the importance of the revolutionary class spirit.

A study of the Red Army solely from the angle of its purely military actions is quite possible. However the separation of military events from the socio-economic content of the war is artificial, although for narrowly specialised research purposes is permissible.



When the morale factors of the Civil War are concerned, the revolutionary class spirit of the war – as a manifestation of its socio-economic content – must be recognised as the main, if not the overwhelming factor applying.

We have seen above that the units of the Red Army were subjected to the influence of those purely psychological factors which any army will feel. However, the revolutionary and class order influences, affected not only the whole political and moral situation of the war, but also gave the mental and moral forces of the army a special character.

The army was developing its own new mentality in battle. It started with the masses, the collective – relative to which purely personal heroism, courage and bravery faded into the background.

In the Civil War, the masses though had numerous and major disadvantages.

Excessive sensitivity to events led to a loss of morale, so that the troops could not withstand the mere sight of the advancing enemy, and this in turn caused panic – the inevitable companion of a young army, which has none of the experience of war required to become battle-hardened.

At the same time, purposefulness, willpower, determination, personal initiative – in a word, military valour in all its many facets – were the hallmarks of the Red Army.

The transition from one extreme to another, from panic to self-sacrifice was sharp and sometimes unexpected. It is a characteristic feature of the morale of the troops in the period under study.

To nullify the harmful effects of negative factors on morale, to overcome them, was possible only by proper mental preparation of troops for the upcoming actions and then skilfully leading them into battle.

Only by constantly watching and taking into account the morale of the soldiers, only by preparing them with that in mind for the forthcoming battle or march, with no less thoroughness than in pure combat, was it possible to expect that the tasks assigned to a unit would be fulfilled.

That preparation was both a duty and a complex art, which every commander had to master.



Appendix 1

ORDER for the troops of the 5th Army

№ 384

25 May 1919

Recently, we have noticed repeated cases during combat of incorrect and inadmissible interference by detachment commanders, which include those in the artillery, in the technical work of the artillery unit commanders, arising from an unclear understanding of their duties in relation to artillery and the duties of artillery commander, which has led to extremely unfavourable results, such as failures to perform artillery tasks, losses of materiel and the wasting of shells.

In order to avoid a repetition of the irregular and embarrassing conditions in which the artillery is placed by such interference, and to achieve the best possible fulfilment of tasks by the artillery units, the following general provisions for the operation of field artillery in combat should be taken as strict guidelines.

1) The main purpose of artillery is to assist the unit to which it is attached (infantry, cavalry) with its fire. Therefore the artillery must act in constant conformity with the aims and intentions of the commanders of the units to which it belongs, and its combat work must be carried out in conjunction and co-ordination with the work of those troops.

2) The ultimate aim of artillery control in combat is to make the above assistance most effective, and for this purpose it is necessary to:

- a) harmonise artillery fire with the overall situation and task;
- b) make the best, most skilful use of it in each individual case.

3) The commander of the unit (division, brigade, regiment, battle group) is responsible for the efficient management of the artillery in battle and for assigning the correct tasks to it. The artillery commander (senior artillery rank directly subordinate to the detachment commander) is responsible for the correct work by the artillery and for the selection and application of methods for solving the tasks assigned to it.

4) A detachment leader, who is in charge of the tactical side of fire control, must with the artillery under his control:

- a) explain the general situation;
- b) give it a definite task, indicating the permissible and possible duration of its preparations for action, i.e. the time by which it must be ready to fire;
- c) specify to it the area in which positions are to be selected;
- d) indicate new tasks and new areas for positions necessitated by the development of the battle;
- e) give probable points of attack, the intended direction and, as much as possible, the time the main attack will start.

5) The technical side of artillery fire control belongs exclusively to the artillery commander, who must:

- a) select a position in the specified area,
- b) select a target within the limits of the given task,
- c) select the type of projectile,
- d) target and fire to destroy the enemy,



- e) establish communications and observe the battlefield,
- f) adjust the rate of fire according to the situation,
- g) redirect fire to other targets,
- h) organise resupply of shells.

6) The duties specified in Paragraph 5 are allocated among the artillery commanders according to whether the batteries are operating independently or whether they are united in the hands of one artillery commander (*NashArtDiv*,⁹³ *division* commander, battery commander) – the commander of the artillery unit attached to a detachment.

7) A unification of artillery during combat into the hands of the artillery commander is necessary when attacking fortified enemy lines, fortified points and or any general situation when the task is connected with preparatory artillery action.

8) The artillery commander of a combat group must be either with the detachment's commander or keep in continuous communication with him and personally direct the artillery's combat activities, reserving those functions listed in Paragraph 5 to himself, which provide him with the possibility of concentrating all artillery fire at a desired point and changing the strength of the fire in accordance with the situation, i.e. it is his duty to:

- a) report to the detachment commander all important information received by artillery reconnaissance;
- b) inform him periodically about the situation with the artillery and the results of its work and to inform him about decisions taken independently;
- c) keep the artillery commanders directly subordinate to him informed of the situation, the intentions of his superiors and the battle situation;
- d) direct and unite artillery reconnaissance, thus preparing both the first entry of the artillery into a battle and the resolution of new combat tasks;
- e) unite and co-ordinate the actions of the units directly subordinate to him, splitting the general task into individual tasks for them and indicate individual position areas within the general area;
- f) give his sub-units new individual tasks and new positions in accordance with the instructions received from the detachment commander; in the case of changes in the general situation to independently indicate to the artillery new tasks and related changes of positions.
- g) continuously observe and take measures to ensure that all actions by the artillery are timely and that technical considerations do not delay any required actions or support for other troops;
- h) ensure that the security of the artillery is maintained;
- i) make sure of a careful consumption of ammunition and to take measures to ensure its continued timely replenishment;
- j) see that the energies of the men and horses are prudently managed, in order to conserve them for the decisive moments of the battle, for changes of positions and for pursuit of the enemy;
- k) by the evening of each day of battle take measures to restore all artillery to full operational effectiveness as soon as possible;
- m) ensure liaison is kept between artillery units and between artillery and infantry.

⁹³ Head of Division Artillery.



9) A battery commander, when artillery is combined in the hands of the artillery commander, must:

- a) select a position in his given area,
- b) establish liaison with the artillery commander and the infantry;
- c) depending on the task, select the type of shell, when not specified by the artillery commander;
- d) target and fire to destroy the enemy,
- e) monitor the supply of shells.

10) As a general rule, communication is established from the junior commander to the senior, from the artillery to the infantry (cavalry) from the rear to the front; between equal artillery units communication is established from right to left.

11) If the battery is operating independently, all duties of technical fire control lie with the battery commander.

12) In addition to the above duties, every artillery commander must be able to take independent decisions without hesitation about the risk of responsibility, when it is required by a rapid change of situation, and show broad initiative to meet the needs of other units and the intentions of the detachment leader, requesting new orders when necessary.

All such cases must be immediately reported to the detachment commander.

13) For the successful use of artillery in battle, it is necessary for the detachment commander to set the artillery task correctly, taking into account both the situation and the means at the disposal of the artillery, and then the artillery commanders must be given full freedom of action when carrying out the technical side of fire control.

Signed:

*Revvoensoviet-5*⁹⁴ – Tukhachevskiy, Smirnov

*NashtArm-5*⁹⁵ of the General Staff – *Ermolin*

⁹⁴ RMS. Smirnov (commissar at the time) was one of the first casualties of Stalin's purges, and Tukhachevskiy (the 5th Army commander) a very high profile one soon after him. In my photocopy of the book their names are blacked out!

⁹⁵ Chief of Staff of the 5th Army.



Appendix 2

ORDER : for the 1st Brigade of the 27th Infantry Division.

(Map 10 versts to the inch)⁹⁶

№ 0151

Brigade HQ, B. Achikulskaya

1 October 1919 at 18:00

1. The enemy, having inflicted several manoeuvre attacks in the strip of the railway and north of it, has forced the units of our brigade to withdraw to the boundary of the Tobol River and entrench themselves on its western bank. In our division's sector we face units of the 4th, 8th, 12th Infantry Divisions and some regiments of the 8th Siberian Division – all supported by significant cavalry and artillery. The size of the enemy's units is generally small, but its success are explained both by it still having the initiative and that our units, exhausted and small, are increasingly influenced by the daily requirement of uninterrupted withdrawal.

2. To our right is Brigade 2/27, occupying at present the sector: Shkotskoe (exclusive) – Peredergina (inclusive).

To our left Brigade 3/27 occupies the sector: Kozmina (incl.) – Beloyarskoe (excl.).

3. The general task of our brigade – limit the movement of the enemy to the west and to the last man to defend the left bank⁹⁷ of the Tobol River in the area: Peredergina (excl.) – Kozmina (excl.).

In no case allow the enemy to force the Tobol River.

4. To fulfil the task assigned by the *NachDiv*, I order:

Right combat sector. Commander: Comrade Stepanov. Composition: 236th Orsha Regiment of nine companies, 3rd Light Battery of three guns, 2nd Heavy Battery of two guns. Total: 9 companies, 3 × 3" guns, 2 × 4.2" guns.

Occupy the area on the left bank of the Tobol River from Peredergina (excl.) to Ikovskoe (incl.) and two kilometres left of there.

Have strong outposts at the available fords and under your own responsibility take the defence of the crossing at the Ikovskoe bridge and the shallows north of there.

Break with the help of artillery and machine guns any attempts of the enemy to accumulate and consolidate against the given area.

On its own initiative to give full support to its right flank neighbour, the 239th Kursk Regiment.

Left combat sector. Commander: Comrade Kolesnikov. Composition: 237 Minsk Regiment of nine companies, a battalion of the 235th Nevel' Regiment of three companies, 1st Moscow Light Battery of three guns. Total: 12 companies, 3 × 3" guns.

Occupy the area on the left bank of the Tobol River from the left flank of the right battle area to the village of Kozmina (excl.).

Defend the available fords at Chuneevo and Istonskaya with strong outposts.

In no case allow the enemy to accumulate and consolidate on the right bank.

Provide on your own initiative full support to your neighbours, especially to the commander of the right combat section.

⁹⁶ Approximately 400,000:1 or 4 km to the cm.

⁹⁷ The Tobol flows northwards, so the left bank is the western side.



The commanders of the combat sectors should remember that in order to fulfil their assigned task it is not at all necessary to occupy the areas in solid lines. It is enough to organise a stubborn defence of the available crossings, keep a vigilant observation of the enemy, maintain close communication along the front with the neighbours and between their sectors and to allocate as strong a reserve as possible to parry any offensive movement by the enemy on the eastern bank of the Tobol River.

5. *General brigade reserve*. Commander: Comrade Kreysberg. Composition: the 235th Nevel' Regiment of six companies.

Concentrate in Gagary and be ready to move out at any moment. Maintain constant liaison with the commanders of the combat areas.

6. Commander of Artillery Brigade is Comrade Mansyrev.

See that the commanders of their batteries establish their positions as quickly and reliably as possible, and that they establish a firm, permanent telephone link with the commanders of the combat areas. Battery commanders are to open fire at the request of the commanders of the combat areas, as well as on your and my instructions. The batteries are to be allocated: 3rd Light Battery to the 236th Regiment, 1st Light Battery to the 235th Nevel' Regiment, the 2nd Heavy Battery to the 237th Minsk Regiment.

7. Commanders of combat areas are to pay particular attention to reconnaissance, bearing in mind that it is necessary to detect in time any accumulation or movement of infantry and cavalry units of the enemy, and the location of enemy batteries. For this purpose, organise reconnaissance on the right bank of the Tobol River by ferrying reconnaissance units to the that bank, with the involvement of local residents inhabiting the right bank villages.

8. Head of communications for the brigade is Comrade Baev.

Take over the organisation of the communications service in the brigade and establish communications: to the regiments – by laying independent lines from the regimental headquarters directly to the brigade headquarters. Install at least three intermediate stations on the line coming from the 236th Regiment HQ (Ikovskaya – B. Achikulskaya).

Lay a cable from Brigade HQ to Shmakova, where Brigade HQ 3/27 is located; maintain that line.

To establish communication with the headquarters (Vvedenskoe), lay a cable from our HQ to Skotinskoe, to connect with the wire to the division control station. That section of the line is to be serviced by your own means.

In addition, establish flying mail posts (on carts) for communication with the headquarters at the following points according to the attached schedule.

Post No. I. On the road halfway between B. Achikulskaya and Skotinskoe, which is where the telephonists are to sit.

Post No. II. In Skotinskoe.

Post No. III. On the road halfway between Skotinskoe and Latyshevskaya mill.

Post No. IV. At Latyshevskaya mill.

Post No. V. On the road halfway between Latyshevskaya and Bronichikhinskaya mills.

Post No. VI. At Bronichikhinskaya mill.

Post No. VII. Between Bronichikhinskaya mill and Vvedenskoe.



9. Delimitation lines: between our brigade and Brigade 2/27: B. Mokhovaya – Puzanskaya – Ilovskaya – Redutskaya – Mayakskaya for our brigade all inclusive.

Between us and Brigade 3/27: Marayskaya – Belozerskoye – Obabkova – Klipova for the 3rd Brigade inclusive.

Rear for our brigade: Belozerskoye – Obabkova – Bannikovo – Efimova – Kiselyanskaya.

10. The advance artillery park of the division is located in Ordino. The brigade's ammunition park is to be located in Mendrinskaya.

11. Medical commander for the brigade, Comrade Mityuk, is to locate the dressing unit in Mendrinskaya. Get instructions from HQ on the method of evacuation of the sick and wounded. Regimental dressing units are to be located by order of the regimental commanders.

12. 1st Class wagons are to be located by order of the regimental commanders. By order of the HQ the 2nd Class wagons are to be in Mendrinskaya and the food store and transport in Puyankova.

13. Send reports every two hours to the HQ at B. Achikulskaya.

14. My deputies: commander of the right combat sector Comrade Stepanov and the commander of the general reserve Comrade Kreytsberg.

Signing for *KomBrig 1-27 Khakhan'yan*.

Military Commissar *Karklin*.

*NaShtaBrig*⁹⁸ (signature).

Assistant Chief of Staff 1-27 for operations (signature)

⁹⁸ Brigade Chief of Staff



Appendix 3

ORDER of the 26th Rifle Division.

№ 79.

Kopayskaya 2nd.

12 September 1919 at 15:00

§ 1

A study of the circumstances of many combat encounters on the front of our division creates a definite conviction that the cause of our failures is the failure to utilise all means of mutual communication, support and relief. Repeated reminders and instructions were obviously not sufficiently learnt by the division command staff and to maintain communication it was considered sufficient to ideally establish a telephone line, and in most cases we were content with sending orderlies with a report. In the situation of the current Civil War, in the presence of White Guard agents, telephone communication is very unreliable. Sending lone orderlies often served to inform the enemy, who intercepted our reports with their cavalry patrols. Technical and messenger communication will only be adequate if the units fill the gaps between the positions with a solid line of defence. The appearance of enemy cavalry detachments in the rear of our forward units and their complete encirclement of our large formations only proves how poorly we take care of our flanks and rear. In order to put an end to this abnormal situation, the following basic tactical provisions are to be established in the 26th Division, and failure to fulfil them will be strictly punished:

- 1) A brigade carrying out an assigned task will keep at least two regiments of infantry and all its artillery concentrated on its main operational line.
- 2) One battalion with machine guns will be withdrawn to the immediate rear as the brigade reserve.
- 3) The other battalion of the same regiment will guard the front line of the brigade, for which purpose it will allocate a company each (or more, if there is a long distance to the neighbouring brigade) to the right and left of the location of the brigade's main forces (less, if the situation permits) and keeps a third company in brigade watch reserve in the most threatened area.
- (4) The guard company shall move out three field sentry posts at intervals of not more than two kilometres, thus maintaining visual, fire and hearing communications.
- 5) Each sentry post will consist of 15 bayonets (three changes of five bayonets each), one machine-gun with crew and two horses. Train the sentries in simple forms of signalling, flags and lanterns.
- 6) The posts will be located by the company commander, according to the terrain, but the rule of mutual firing must be strictly observed, i.e. if the enemy shoots away a post, the neighbours, with the fire of their machine guns, will not allow the enemy to spread and at the same time help the withdrawn guard post, with the help of the company reserve, to restore the position.
- 7) The posts are entrenched on all four sides, moving observers by day and at secret at night.
- 8) At least half a company with machine guns remains as the company guard reserve. Liaison is established with the main force and the brigade guard reserve.
- 9) The main force will move forward from itself, to the right and left, two forward posts. The brigade reserve will advance one post each towards the main force and to the rear.
- 10) The sentry posts are to be rotated by the company commander after one day. Companies are changed by order of the battalion commander after two days. Watch battalions are assigned and replaced by order of the *KomBrig*.



11) On a march, the sentry posts, maintaining their intervals, will move simultaneously with the main forces, covering the flanks and maintaining communication between columns.

12) When the main force enters battle, the field guards are to entrench, covering the flanks and stopping by machine-gun fire any attempt of the enemy to move around the flanks or to hit the rear of the main force. When retreating the field guards, in conjunction with the rearguard units, are to hold off the enemy onslaught and allow the main force to withdraw in order.

13) Sentry posts should become a powerful means of maintaining frontal communications and guarding the main forces.

14) *KomBrigs* should in turn appoint commanders with responsibility for the brigade's sentry posts, with the task of frequently checking their vigilance and the quality of their positioning.

15) *NaShtaDiv* 26 will appoint on duty members of the Operations Department to check on the implementation of this order.

16) Taking into account and calculating the brigade's front line of 20 kilometres, the number of men for the posts should be calculated as follows:

Main forces	6 posts	90 bayonets	6 MGs	12 horses
Right company guard	3 "	45 "	3 "	6 "
Right company reserve	0 "	45 "	3 "	2 "
Left company guard	3 "	45 "	3 "	6 "
Left company reserve	0 "	45 "	3 "	2 "
Brigade guard reserve	1 company	90 "	2 "	2 "
Brigade reserve	2 posts	30 "	2 "	4 "
Total in the brigade guard	14 posts	390 bayonets	22 MGs	34 horses.

i.e. from one-fourth to one-fifth of the brigade (increasing at greater distances, decreasing at shorter ones), which is confirmed by the Field Regulations, which in all other respects should be followed exactly.

§ 2

This order should be signed and sent to all *KomPolkas*, *KomBats* and *KomRotas*.

§ 3

The order is to be put into effect by telegraph.

Signing for acting *NachDiv-26 Belitskiy*.

Division Commissar *Goncharov*.

Acting Chief of Staff *Belogurov*.



Appendix 4.

Description of the Battle of the 3rd Brigade of the 26th RD on 6 December 1918

(Map 12)

On 5 December 1918 the 3rd Brigade of the 26th RD occupied the area of Nikolaevka with the 1st Battalion, 7th RR and the 3rd Smolensk Battery (4 guns); Mustafina with the 2nd Battalion, 7th RR as the brigade reserve; and Konstantinovka of the 8th RR and Tver Battery (4 guns). There was also two platoons of the 1st Latvian Cavalry Regiment attached to the brigade in Mustafina. The 7th RR had 1,100 bayonets and 22 machine guns. The 8th RR had 465 bayonets and 17 machine guns.

At 14:00 on 5 December our mounted units were pushed out of Serafimovka by a Cossack *sotnia* with machine guns. As Serafimovka was to the rear of Konstantinovka, leaving it in enemy hands posed a threat not only to the 8th RR, but also to the whole brigade. Artillery fire was opened up on the village, and our reinforced mounted units attacked.

The enemy withdrew in the direction of Z. V. Troitskiy.

At about 17:00 our outpost in Nikolaevka was shelled by an enemy detachment approaching from Znamenka, three kilometres south-west of Nikolaevka.

A reconnaissance sent to Znamenka captured two White-Guards of the 9th Stavropol Regiment. According to their evidence, the 9th Stavropol, 1st and 2nd Samara Infantry Regiments were in Takaeva (10 km south-west of Nikolaevka), preparing for an attack. During the night a peasant carter (who had returned from near Belebey) was detained and said that a Czech brigade had arrived Takaeva – Baltaeva. A similar report was received from a mounted reconnaissance sent to Baltaeva (6 km east of Nikolaevka).

During the night of 5/6 December the enemy carried out continuous reconnaissance and constantly disturbed our guard units.

At 07:00 on 6 December reconnaissance on foot and horseback sent to Znamenka from Nikolaevka came across the enemy's leading units, mainly cavalry, near that village, and under the pressure of the enemy began to retire to Nikolaevka, shooting back.

The strong wind, as well as densely falling snow into our faces, strongly interfered with our orientation, the timely clarification of the location of the enemy's main attack and observation by our artillery. As a consequence of this, and also because we were in unfavourable terrain and the proximity of the forest, all the advantages were on the enemy's side.

At about 09:00 the enemy opened a strong fire from heavy artillery on Nikolaevka and immediately launched an attack with strong chains. The 3rd Smolensk Battery, positioned in Nikolaevka came under fire from the enemy's heavy artillery immediately after its first shots. The battery was forced to change its position, and moved to the western outskirts of Mustafina. Thanks to this, the Smolensk Battery did not fire for two hours.

Taking advantage of this, the enemy brought the full force of its artillery down on the 7th RR. The attack was carried out on a front more than two kilometres long by large forces from the south-west. The first enemy attack was repulsed by the 1st Battalion, occupying Nikolaevka, which, launched a counterattack and pushed back the first enemy chain one and a half kilometres south-west of Nikolaevka. At this time one of our observers, standing on the heights north-west of Mustafina, detected the movement of strong enemy units from the north-east to the flank of our units fighting near Nikolaevka.



Immediately the 4th Company of the 7th Rifle Regiment was ordered to occupy the heights north-east of Mustafina in order to take a flank position behind the left flank of the 1st Battalion in relation to the enemy advancing from the north towards Nikolaevka.

Almost simultaneously heavy artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire was heard in the direction of Konstantinovka: as it turned out later, this was the first clash of the TsIK detachment with the Orenburg Cossacks (discussed previously).

By this time there was a request from the commander of the 7th RR to send support and especially bullets, because the enemy, having shelled Nikolaevka with consistent strong artillery fire had again gone onto the attack. It was conducted in two chains-waves (rolls). The 6th company of the 7th RR was sent from the brigade reserve and the attack was repulsed.

Meanwhile the firing from Konstantinovka quieted down, and the 8th RR in Konstantinovka was ordered to act on the flank of the enemy advancing on Nikolaevka.

The incessant enemy attacks, with constant rifle and machine-gun fire (as our artillery could not yet operate), very soon exhausted all the ammunition of the 7th RR, and the fire from our chains began to weaken.

Taking advantage of this, the enemy advanced its artillery 1,000 paces from Nikolaevka, shooting our chains at point-blank range with cannister.

A machine-gun detachment of the 1st Battalion of the 7th RR was moved from the brigade reserve. Having arrived to the right flank of the 7th RR, the MG detachment opened an effective fire with four machine-guns on the enemy's chains and artillery. The enemy's chains were thrown into confusion and were forced to lie down and its artillery withdrew.

Our right flank went on to the attack, with the object of capturing the enemy's battery.

By this time the left flank of the 7th RR had been pushed back to Nikolaevka by superior enemy forces taking advantage of the easy approach.

This posed a serious threat to the regiment's position. The 5th Company and the MG detachment of the 2nd Battalion were moved from the Brigade reserve and their fire and, with the support of the 4th Company on the heights acting on the enemy's flank, the Whites were pushed out of the village.

By this time the 3rd Smolensk Battery was again involved in the battle.

The four-hour heavy battle had finally exhausted all ammunition supplies.

As early as 11:00 a request had been sent to the 1st Brigade to send ammunition, but at 13:30 the ammunition had still not yet arrived.

At this time the neighbouring 8th RR, having received an order to move to the flank of the enemy advancing on Nikolaevka, moved out of Konstantinovka. It concentrated its reserves on the right flank, which presented the most danger to it, and moved along the northern edge of the factory forest.

Passing about 1.5 km northeast of Konstantinovka, the regiment met with the advancing enemy chains and closed to short range with them on the right flank. Having broken up the enemy's chain by fire, the right flank of the 8th RR went on the attack and began to pursue the fleeing White Guard chains. But at the same time the left flank of the 8th RR began a hasty retreat. It turned out that the enemy, under cover of a snowstorm and taking advantage of the rugged terrain, came close to the left flank and, pretending to be the Gzhatsk Regiment, i.e. the 7th RR, "coming to



support”, began to overlap the 3rd Company on the left flank. Greatly outnumbered and with the threat of being surrounded, the 3rd Company was forced to hastily retreat.

The retreat of the left flank of the regiment, left the threat of a flank attack for the entire 8th RR: in addition, the enemy returned to the attack against the right flank.

Two companies thrown to support the left flank, thanks to the deep snow and distance involved, did not arrive in time. The regiment, in order not to fall simultaneously under frontal and flank attacks, began to slowly retreat to Konstantinovka.

While this was going on, the situation for the 7th RR deteriorated considerably. Having repulsed numerous fierce enemy attacks, severely short of ammunition and being pressed by the superior enemy forces, without real support from its artillery, which was saving its last shells in anticipation of the arrival of replenishment from the 1st Brigade, the regiment suffered considerable losses and began to retreat slowly towards the village of Nikolaevka.

The situation by this time was such that the 7th RR, which was firing its last cartridges and three times launched a bayonet counterattack, was in danger of being overrun on both right and left flanks. The situation of the 7th RR was especially critical due to the fact that there was no ammunition and nowhere to get it.

Then the 4th Company, occupying the heights north-east of Nikolaevka, was ordered to vigorously attack the enemy in the flank, and the 1st Brigade, moving of its own accord to support it, was asked, having moved the 2nd RR to Kandyk-Tamakr (8 km west of Nikolaevka), to urgently provide ammunition and open fire with its battery on the south-eastern outskirts of Nikolaevka.

During this time the enemy, thanks to the weakening of our fire and emboldened by its temporary success, moved with its whole front onto a decisive attack, being shot at point-blank range by the last cartridges of our chain.

The complete lack of ammunition and heavy losses forced the 7th RR to retreat to Mustafina under heavy enemy artillery, rifle and machine-gun fire.

At this critical moment seven sleds of ammunition were received from the 1st Brigade, the arrival of which gave the 7th RR the opportunity to delay on the western outskirts of Nikolaevka.

However, the enemy, carried away by its temporary success and endeavouring to inflict a final blow to our chains, continued to attack furiously and with unprecedented persistence and courage.

Again energetic demands for ammunition were sent one after another from the commander of the 7th RR, but the 1st Brigade no longer had any supply in the area. Therefore the order was given to the 2nd RR to move four companies from Kandyk-Tamak to Mustafina, from where one battalion would lead an attack in the flank of the enemy advancing on Nikolaevka.

The enemy’s chains were clearly outlined on the hills to the south of Nikolaevka, and the 3rd Smolensk Battery opened a sharp and rapid fire on them, causing them very heavy losses.

Nevertheless, the enemy continued to rapidly attack the 7th RR’s chains which had been left without ammunition, firing heavy artillery on the north-eastern outskirts of Nikolaevka and the eastern outskirts of Mustafina (apparently assuming it was the location of our reserves) and searching for the 3rd Smolensk Battery, which was positioned to the west of Mustafina.

The battalion of the 2nd RR, having arrived but moving north of where it had been ordered, came level with the right flank of the 7th RR. Together they struck from the south into the flank of the enemy attacking Nikolaevka. At the same time the left flank of the 7th RR, together with one company of the 2nd RR, pushed the enemy out of Nikolaevka.



The enemy, having come under the effective fire of the Smolensk Battery and one platoon of the Rzhev-Novgorod Battery (1st Brigade) and flank rifle and machine-gun fire, began to retreat, pursued by our troops on their heels. Our chains pursued it for more than three kilometres to the east and south-east of Nikolaevka.

Now, on the heights to the north of Nikolaevka, the 1st RR appeared, moving from Kandry-Kuleva to the flank of the enemy advancing from the north on to Nikolaevka. The request to make this manoeuvre had been sent at 13:00, and at 15:00 a reply was received that a battalion of the 1st RR had moved even before the request was received. Nevertheless, the battalion arrived too late to deliver a flank blow to the enemy at Nikolaevka. The village was taken without its assistance.

The enemy's advance on Nikolaevka was repulsed, and the position of the brigade's left flank became strong thanks to the position of the 1st RR north of Nikolaevka.

During these actions on the left flank, the 8th RR on the right flank, as already mentioned, had to withdraw to Konstantinovka in order to avoid frontal and flank attacks, especially on its left flank.

As the brigade's left flank consolidated, fierce fighting broke out in the area of Konstantinovka. Mounted scouts were sent repeatedly to the 8th RR to clarify the situation, but could not bring accurate reports, having been met by strong White cavalry units. From the fragmentary information and judging by the direction of the battle, it was possible to conclude that the 8th RR was withdrawing to the west and north-west.

A battalion of the 2nd RR was ordered to move from Nikolaevka to Konstantinovka into the flank of the enemy which was pressing the 8th RR. This manoeuvre was not executed, because the Red Army was carried away by the pursuit from Nikolaevka to Takaeva and could not be soon moved in a new direction.

Because of this, and in view of the assumed battle moving further and further to the west, the 4th Company of the 7th RR, which by this time occupied the heights north-east of Nikolaevka, was transferred to the western outskirts of Mustafina. The platoon of the Rzhev-Novgorod Battery, positioned at the south-western edge of Mustafina, was turned towards Konstantinovka and, under cover of its fire, two companies of the 2nd RR, which had up until then been in reserve, were moved towards Konstantinovka from Mustafina. These companies occupied Konstantinovka without a fight at about 19:00. As it turned out, the enemy, having occupied Konstantinovka, had immediately hastily retreated to Takaeva.

The coming darkness put an end to the battle. It had lasted from 09:00 to 18:00.

Having suffered defeat at Nikolaevka, the enemy was pursued by our troops almost to Takaeva. It hastily retreated from there to the south behind Karamala (Gubeev), 14 km from Nikolaevka.

During the battle we fired about 200,000 rounds and about 1,200 shells.

Our losses were 24 killed, 175 wounded and 142 missing (31 from the 7th RR and 111 from the 8th RR).

Prisoners were taken from the 9th Stavropol Regiment, 24th Simbirsk Regiment, 1st Kazan Regiment and Polish Brigade. According to the answers of the prisoners, in addition to those units, the 1st and 2nd Samara Regiments, under the general command of General Kappel, had taken part in the battle. The enemy's forces were about 2,500 bayonets with a huge number of machine guns, twelve light and four heavy guns.

