

This article originally appeared in the Journal of the Royal United Services Institute.

THE ANTI-BOLSHEVIK MOVEMENT IN SOUTH RUSSIA, 1917-1920.

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I have endeavoured, in the present paper, to fulfil a twofold object – firstly, to write, in outline, the story of the Anti-Bolshevik movement in South Russia from its inception in 1917 up till its close in 1920, and, secondly, to set down some record of personal impressions gathered during a year's service with the British Military Mission which was attached to the armies of Denikin and Wrangel.

It should be explained at the outset that the political has intentionally been subordinated to the military aspect of the subject, and has necessarily been dealt with in a somewhat cursory fashion. In view of this, it should be stated here that much of the adverse criticism which has been levelled against British policy in Russia during the period under review is unfounded and unjust. When the full history of the Anti-Bolshevik movement comes to be written, it will be seen that our situation as a foreign Power intervening in a Russian civil war was an extremely difficult one. The problems with which we were faced were by no means simple, and our actions can be properly judged only in the light of circumstances and events which are not yet generally known.

I would here acknowledge my indebtedness to the following sources of information:—

Official Despatches.

The publications of the Russian Relief Committee.

“With the Russian Armies, 1914-1917,” by Major General Sir Alfred Knox.

The opinions expressed in this article are, of course, personal.

Some months before the end of Kerenski's regime it had become apparent that Russia would conclude a separate peace with Germany.

The Soviets which had sprung into existence all over the country were undermining the power of the Government and, as a result of their influence, the Army had become disorganised. The notorious “Order No. 1” will be remembered, which deprived officers of their authority and set up committees of soldiers in their place. In consequence of this and similar measures, discipline ceased to exist and, during the summer of 1917, the Army melted rapidly away, the soldiers deserting and returning to their homes by the thousand.

Germany was meanwhile doing everything in her power, by propaganda and other means, to assist the processes of disintegration.

In short, by the autumn of 1917, when Lenin seized the reins of government, Russia had practically ceased to exist as a military Power.

It was at this stage that the Anti-Bolshevik movement in South Russia was initiated.

The movement owed its inception to General Alexiev, a soldier whose sterling qualities had led to his appointment in 1915 as Chief-of-Staff to the Czar and virtual Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies. After the 2nd Revolution, Alexiev had been thrown into prison by the Bolsheviks; but in November, 1917, he escaped and succeeded in making his way to Novochoerkassk, in the territory of the Don Cossacks. Realising that the situation of his country was rapidly becoming desperate, he there set himself to organise an army with which to oppose the rise of Bolshevism and continue the war against Germany.

His first step was to form what was known as the “Party of Collection.” He was aided in this work by Generals Kornilov and Denikin, and by a number of ex-Ministers, amongst whom was Rodzianko, late President of the Duma.

The Cossacks of the Don were at first in sympathy with Alexiev's movement. Unlike the peasants in other parts of Russia, they owned their land in return for military service, and the Bolshevik cry of “State-ownership of all land” did not appeal to them.

Their sympathy, however, was not long-lived, for they were seduced after some months by Bolshevik propaganda. Lenin promised that, if they would join him, they would be allowed to keep their land and would be freed from their old obligations as political police. In February, 1918, the Cossacks agreed to these conditions, and, having accepted a large bribe from the Bolshevik Government, they turned against Alexiev and forced him to evacuate Rostov and Novochoerkassk and take to the steppes.

Alexiev's force was, at this time, some 3,500 strong, and it was composed almost entirely of officers of the old Army.

Alexiev now determined to march southward on Ekaterinodar, the capital of the Kuban, believing (erroneously as it turned out) that the Kuban Cossacks would rally to his banner. He also hoped to effect a junction with the British forces in the Caucasus and on the Caspian.



It has been said that the First Kuban campaign of the Volunteer Army, as Alexiev's force had been christened, would compare with anything in history for sheer gallantry.

The Volunteers were insufficiently equipped and, for arms and ammunition, they had to depend entirely upon what they could capture from the enemy. In spite of these disadvantages they fought their way, in the face of considerable opposition and in the dead of winter, from the Don to the Kuban River, a distance of some 200 miles. There were three engagements of a desperate character, but the fighting was, for the most part, of a guerrilla type. Casualties on both sides were severe and Alexiev's men also suffered heavy losses from an outbreak of typhus.

The Volunteers arrived before Ekaterinodar on 26th March, 1918, by which date their numbers had been reduced to 700, and they proceeded to attack the town. The defenders, however, outnumbered them by three to one and were strongly entrenched, so that they had no difficulty in beating off the assaults of the Volunteers.

In one of these assaults General Kornilov, who had been acting as military Commander-in-Chief under Alexiev, was killed by a stray shell, and General Denikin was appointed to succeed him in the command. The latter decided to give up the attempt to capture the town and to extricate what remained of his force. He thereupon withdrew, with great skill, to the northward, and, taking his wounded with him, he reached Sredni Egorlak, on the border of the Don territory, by the middle of April. Here reorganisation was undertaken.

By this time the Germans, having forced the Treaty of Brest Litovsk upon the Bolsheviks and signed a separate peace with the Ukraine, were in military occupation of the Crimea, the Ukraine, and the important industrial area of the Donetz basin.

The Don Cossacks were now beginning to tire of Bolshevism. Perceiving this, the Germans came forward with an offer of assistance towards forming a separate Cossack State. This offer was accepted, and German arms and money were at once poured into the Don.

In pursuance of their policy of "Drang nach Osten" the Germans next attempted to come to terms with Alexiev, whose force was now the only obstacle to the opening up of a corridor to the East. Alexiev, however, refused to deal with them and held firmly to his watchwords of "No separate peace with Germany, no compromise with Bolshevism, a united and indivisible Russia." Alexiev's constancy to the Allied cause is the more to be admired in that Germany's prestige was, for the moment, very high in Russia owing to her successful spring offensive in France and her recent defeat of Rumania.

By the month of June, 1918, Alexiev had reorganised his force and, with 11,000 men, he once more took the field. He decided to make a second attempt to clear the Kuban of Bolsheviks and to establish a base on the Black Sea.

The Second Kuban Campaign was a very different affair from the first, for it was almost in the nature of a triumphal progress. A wave of reaction against Bolshevism had passed over the country and, not only the Kuban Cossacks, but large numbers of the regular Bolshevik forces as well, came over freely to join Alexiev.

By November, 1918, the Volunteer Army had increased to some 50,000 men; enormous quantities of military stores had fallen into their hands; and a base had been established on the Black Sea at Novorossisk.

Alexiev died on 25th September, and so he did not see the fruits of his labours.

General Denikin, who up till this time, had been military commander only, now succeeded to the leadership of the movement and was given supreme political power. Denikin had had a distinguished career in the Russian Army. He had been a successful Corps Commander against the Germans and later he had served as Chief-of-Staff at G.H.Q.

The collapse of Germany in November, 1918, naturally had a most inspiring effect upon Denikin's Army.

The Dardanelles having been thrown open, the Allies were at last able to get into touch with him, and a British Military Mission arrived at his Headquarters in the Kuban in December. On receiving the report of this Mission, the British Government undertook to send out arms and equipment sufficient for 250,000 men and the French also promised help.

Under pressure from the British Military Mission the Don Cossacks now relinquished their separatist ideas and acknowledged Denikin as Commander-in-Chief of all the Anti-Bolshevik forces in South Russia – which was a great step forward. The forces under Denikin's command were thereupon re-christened the "Armed Forces of South Russia."

Supplies began to arrive in the spring of 1919 and the work of re-arming Denikin's troops was begun.

The effect of British assistance, both moral and material, was magical. The Bolsheviks were driven back everywhere, and Denikin's Army swept forward through the Donetz basin and into the Ukraine.

By the middle of June Denikin's forces had been organised in four armies, comprising in all some 200,000 men. These were disposed as follows:–

The Terek and Daghestan Army (General Erdeli) advancing to strike the Volga north of Astrakhan, the Caucasian Army (General Wrangel) advancing on Tsaritsin, the Don Army (General Sidorin) advancing on Voronezh, and the Volunteer Army (General Mai-Maievski) directed upon Kharkov.



The line at this time is shown on Map "A".

Denikin now attempted to push forward his right wing to the line Saratov–Tambov–Voronezh, pivoting on the River Dnieper, and he hoped to join hands with Kolchak, who was advancing from Siberia. His hopes, however, were never realised.

By the late summer of 1919 the Armies were extended on a front over 1,000 miles long, and a policy of consolidation was recommended to Denikin by his advisers. He did not feel secure enough, however, to adopt this course. There was much discontent amongst the civilian population behind the Army, owing to the fact that the commercial life of the country had not been re-established, and many adverse political influences were also at work. Having this situation in view, Denikin felt that it was only by continuing the offensive that his army would hang together. In this appreciation of the case he was justified by the previous experience of Admiral Kolchak, whose attempt to halt long enough to train fresh levies before continuing his advance in Siberia had ended so disastrously.

At this period I paid a visit to the front of the Volunteer Army, and some account of my experiences may be of interest.

I had been assigned for duty to the 1st Corps of the Volunteer Army, which was operating at this time in the vicinity of Kursk.

On my way up to the front I spent a few days with the Corps Headquarters at Kharkov, where I made the acquaintance of General Kutiepov (the Corps Commander) and his staff. The Headquarters Staff struck me as being very much out of touch with the troops at the front. They were, in fact, over 100 miles behind the line at this time, and from such a distance it must have been impossible to co-ordinate the action of their command. Visits to the fighting troops seemed to be almost unheard of.

Whilst at Kharkov I was invited to accompany the Inspector-General of Artillery on a formal inspection of a battery which had just been armed with British 6-inch howitzers. The Inspector General was attended on this occasion by his adjutant and a bodyguard of half-a-score of wild-looking Cossacks armed with lances. When the usual salutations had been exchanged, the battery wheeled into column and cantered past the saluting base with much flourishing of swords and shouting. The gun teams consisted each of ten wretched little Cossack ponies and it was amazing to see them move the heavy howitzers at such a pace. We next saw some drill which was remarkably smart. The General then ordered his bodyguard to make a sham cavalry charge upon the battery and, as the Cossacks galloped down upon it, the guns were unlimbered and brought into action very creditably.

After the inspection we partook of a barbaric meal with the battery officers, at the conclusion of which we were all, the General included, tossed in the air several times in accordance with the Russian custom. This, by the way, cannot be recommended as an aid to digestion!

On 26th September I set off for Kursk, which had been captured some days before.

During the journey to Kursk, as on my previous journey to Kharkov, I remarked an extraordinary congestion of passenger traffic on the railways. Not only was every railway carriage and truck crowded almost to the point of suffocation, but passengers also travelled on the roofs and footboards of the trains. At the larger railway stations it was only with considerable difficulty that one could make one's way through the waiting rooms and across the platforms, for these were crowded with hundreds of peasants who were camping out there whilst awaiting the arrival of trains. These peasants were travelling between the country districts and the towns in order to sell flour, which they carried with them in sacks. As may well be imagined, this primitive method of trading entailed a very uneconomical use of rolling stock, and reacted seriously upon the system of military transportation. The reason for the retail traffic in flour was that the local governments in South Russia would not approve of the movement of grain in bulk outside their own boundaries, partly because supplies were nowhere abundant and partly because prices were too unstable for regular trade. This state of affairs was one of many indications that Denikin's administrative measures were inadequate.

I spent some days at Kursk in order to visit units in the vicinity.

Here I heard some details of General Mamontov's famous Cavalry raid of the preceding August. Mamontov (who, by the way, was said to have been a keen hunting man before the war and master of a pack of hounds at Moscow) broke through the Bolshevik front at Makarovo with a Cavalry Corps of Don Cossacks and penetrated many miles into enemy country to Tambov, which was the main supply depot of the Bolshevik Southern front. He captured 10,000 prisoners, disarmed double that number of Bolshevik conscripts, and recruited two infantry divisions which he added to his force. Being hard pressed on one occasion he buried his guns and converted the drivers into cavalymen. These guns were subsequently dug up again when the Army advanced. Altogether Mamontov was behind the enemy's lines for about a month; but this operation, which might have achieved considerable results, degenerated into a looting expedition. Mamontov failed to carry out his mission, which was to destroy the enemy's communications, and in particular those of the 8th Bolshevik Army. This Army, owing to Mamontov's disobedience, was able to make an advance on Kupiansk which seriously hampered Denikin's offensive. The conduct of the Cossacks on this occasion had a considerable influence in alienating the people from Denikin's cause.

At Kursk I met General Shkourov, a young cavalry leader who had achieved considerable distinction by his reckless daring in the earlier stages of the campaign. In appearance he was like a shaggy little peasant. His conversation was somewhat amusing – he spoke, for instance, of "building up a new Russia on the stinking corpses of the Bolsheviks"; he also remarked that he had heard there were some Communists in England and that he would like to come here after the



war was finished and show us how his Cossacks could deal with them. As a Cavalry Corps Commander he degenerated rapidly and fell into dissolute habits. He encouraged looting in order to retain his popularity – with the usual results. Finally he was dismissed from his command and disappeared into obscurity.

I left Kursk on 9th October and, having travelled by motor-car a distance of some 60 miles along the Moscow road, I arrived late at night at the little village of Kozlovka.

It was by the merest chance that I discovered this village to be almost in the front line, for, as we were passing through it in the moonlight, I caught sight of some guns in an orchard and, on enquiry, I found that I was in the most advanced positions of the 2nd Kornilov Regiment. But for this we might have driven unchallenged into the enemy's lines, for I had been unable, before leaving Kursk, to get exact information as to the position of the troops.

I was given quarters in a cottage and turned in at once on learning that the advance was to be resumed at an early hour next day. An artillery Colonel billeted in my cottage insisted upon my taking the only available bed, whilst he slept upon straw scattered on the floor.

On going out just before dawn next morning I observed that most of the men had been sleeping on the ground all night without any covering beyond their great coats, although the temperature was at this time several degrees below freezing point. They were now bestirring themselves and crowding round great bonfires to warm their stiffened limbs.

By 5.30 a.m. the light was sufficiently good for observation, and I rode up to the crest of a neighbouring ridge in order to see the enemy's position. This consisted of a line of rifle pits dug along the further side of the valley and at right angles to the road. The country was open, rolling steppe-land, a very small portion of which was cultivated, and there was little or no cover anywhere. It was ideal country for military operations, being everywhere passable to all arms.

Our artillery had already opened fire, five batteries being engaged, viz. one 6-inch howitzer and two 60-pr batteries, sited in the vicinity of Kozlovka, and two 18-pr batteries in position further out on the flanks. The bombardment was continued at a slow rate for some two hours without any enemy movement being observed. At about 8 a.m., however, a score or so of the enemy's infantry bolted from their pits into the open and several of them were shot down by our machine guns which were posted on the slope below.

The enemy's artillery now made some reply and a howitzer of 6-inch calibre or thereabouts began to drop shells at a slow rate on the road near us. A battery of field guns was also active, searching and sweeping around the village.

At 9 a.m. a body of enemy cavalry, about 150 strong, appeared on the ridge in front of Dobrynye, about a thousand yards off, and galloped towards us extended in two long lines. Behind them followed a droshky. On enquiry I was told that a droshky was the usual means of locomotion of the Commanding Officer on such occasions. Our 6-inch howitzer battery opened fire and the first round fell just short of them. After a few more well-directed rounds had been fired, the Bolshevik Cavalry changed direction, rode off to the left and disappeared again behind the ridge, the droshky following at full gallop.

It appeared evident by 10 a.m. that we were faced by a small rearguard only and that the enemy's main body had withdrawn. An advance was, therefore, ordered and our little column was soon on the move.

First a small advanced guard moved ahead consisting of two armoured cars and a troop of 30 cavalry scouts.

A mile or so behind the advanced guard came the main body, the order of march being as follows – three "officer companies" of the 2nd Kornilov Regt (These companies were entirely composed of officers of the Old Army and were amongst Denikin's best fighting troops. – J.N.K.), the 60-pr and 6-inch batteries, and then the transport, which consisted of several hundreds of country carts loaded with sheep and geese and driven by peasants. These country carts, I learned, were requisitioned in the villages and usually accompanied the troops for two or three days' march, after which they were replaced by others and sent home again. They were preferred by the Russians to limbered wagons for transport of artillery ammunition, for they were more mobile. The ordinary peasant's cart drawn by one horse will take 12 complete rounds of 60-pr or 30 rounds of 18-pr ammunition.

Behind the transport there followed a small rearguard of infantry.

About 2 miles out on either flank were flank guards consisting each of two companies of Infantry and one 18-pr battery.

The fighting strength of the column was about 2,000.

Between our column and the nearest troops operating on either flank there was an interval of about 20 miles.

After we had proceeded about 1 mile our advanced guard was checked by the enemy rearguard, which was holding a trench on the crest of a hill which commanded the road. The leading company of infantry deployed and rushed it and the occupants of the trench were bayoneted. Their bodies were quickly stripped of clothing, of which our men were in need, and they were then left lying naked on the ground.

We now got a view of the Bolshevik force streaming away across country about three miles off. It seemed to be of about equal strength to our own, but, unfortunately, we were too weak in cavalry to take advantage of the situation. Their retreat was being covered by a 3-inch battery which had come into action against us in the open. A few rounds from one of our 6-inch howitzers caused it to limber up and gallop off.



At 5 p.m. the little town of Kromi was occupied and here some 200 prisoners were taken. These prisoners, who were mostly of the peasant class, were immediately sent as reinforcements to the batteries. I gathered that they were indifferent for the most part as to the side for which they fought. During the evening outposts were pushed out some two miles to the north of Kromi and the bulk of our force was billeted in the town.

As the only bridge across the River Kroma had been demolished, the artillery was parked in the little village of Zakromskoie on the southern bank.

Food supplies in the town were found to be scanty, bread being very scarce and such common articles as salt being practically unknown. There were numbers of geese, however, and these formed the staple food of the troops.

The inhabitants of Kromi and Zakromskoie received us well and manifested great delight at the departure of the Bolsheviks. The questions put to us by the peasants indicated an intense interest in Denikin's agrarian aims; but these questions, I noticed, could not be answered very satisfactorily, for Denikin had not promulgated a definite land policy. This lack of policy was a grave error, for the idea naturally gained ground that he intended to restore their properties to the former landlords and to reduce the peasants once more to a state of serfdom. The consequent hostility of the peasants was a considerable factor in Denikin's downfall. There was a very evident need for propaganda amongst the peasant class as a counter to that of the Bolsheviks, but, although this need was repeatedly pointed out by British officers, no effective steps were ever taken to meet it. The absence of a due expression of the case for Denikin was much felt.

Evening reports showed that our total casualties in killed and wounded amounted to 50. These casualties had been incurred for the most part in street fighting in Kromi.

The peasants worked all night to build a timber bridge across the river and early next morning (11th October) the guns were able to cross. This work of bridge construction was always very efficiently and quickly done by the peasants under the direction of the village carpenters. The bridges were of the ordinary crib-pier type.

No advance was made on the 11th as the division on our left had not come up sufficiently to protect our flank. In the evening, however, we heard their guns and learned that they were pushing forward, although stiff opposition was being encountered.

On the 12th we resumed the advance, but we did not establish touch with the enemy until the evening, when we came up with him near the village of Kotovka. He had taken up a position here along a wooded crest. There was an exchange of artillery fire, but nothing further occurred before darkness fell.

On the 13th the Bolsheviks again fell back and we pressed close on their heels. On reaching Yakovka we found the bridge across the river in flames. The peasants were still actually engaged in bringing up straw to keep it alight, as they had been ordered to do; but, on seeing us, they hastened to bring water to extinguish the fire.

The infantry were thrown across by a footbridge and in the course of a few hours the peasants had made a bridge to take the guns.

A mile or so north of this village we obtained our first view of the town of Orel (Orel has a population of some 80,000 inhabitants. – J.N.K.), which was our objective. The River Tzon, which flows round the southern outskirts of the town, was strongly held by the enemy and a sharp action was already in progress when I arrived.

The enemy's position was a strong one and had evidently been prepared with care, for it was entrenched and well wired. It was sited along a wooded ridge on the further bank of the river.

When I arrived the Commander of the 2nd Kornilov Regt was driving about in an old droshky, amongst his most advanced troops. A map was spread upon his knees and he seemed to be quite oblivious of the shells which fell around him and of the machine gun bullets which whistled over his head.

A reconnaissance revealed what appeared to be a considerable gap in the enemy's wire entanglement at a point some 2,000 yards west of the main road and it was decided to attack here. Four companies of infantry, selected for the assault, were moved to the cover of a wood opposite the gap. Our field batteries presently opened fire on the enemy's position, the 60-prs being employed on more distant targets, such as the railway station in the town itself. The 6-inch howitzer battery was moved up to support the main attack. I remarked that only one large scale map was available on this occasion and this had to be passed round to the infantry and artillery officers, who made sketches from it for their own use.

Whilst these preparations were still in progress a Cossack galloped up with a message from the 1st Kornilov Regt, which had been advancing along the railway on our right. This message requested us to stop our 60-pr guns firing, as the 1st Kornilov Regt was making an encircling movement round the north of the town and hoped to enter from that side. Half an hour later this movement began to take effect and the enemy was seen to be evacuating his position along the river bank. But they were too late, for the 1st Kornilovs were already in their rear. Three thousand prisoners were captured, and four 3-inch guns were also taken. As regards the prisoners taken in Orel, the men were disarmed, deprived of their great coats and set free; the officers, I was told by the Commander of the 1st Kornilov Regt, would be shot, but I had no opportunity of verifying this.



Fighting continued in the suburbs of the town all night, but by 9 a.m. on the 14th Orel had been completely cleared of the enemy.

The capture of Orel had remarkable effect upon the morale of the Kornilov Brigade and indeed upon that of the whole of the Volunteer Army. Orel was regarded as one of the bastions of Moscow (it had been founded in the 16th century by Ivan the Terrible for the defence of the Grand Duchy against the Tartars), and now it seemed only a matter of days before Denikin's troops would march into the Bolshevik capital.

I was much struck by the cowed and broken appearance of the inhabitants of Orel, who had evidently suffered much during the Bolshevik regime,

A number of Jews and others, who were denounced as Bolshevik commissars, were summarily shot in the streets. Their bodies were left to lie on the pavements for days and were gradually stripped of clothing by the passers-by.

A certain amount of pillaging took place, but this was not general, and the behaviour of the Volunteer troops was good on the whole.

It was decided not to continue the advance next day as the Kornilov Brigade was now in a dangerously advanced position owing to the troops on either flank having been held up. A strong line of outposts was therefore, pushed out all round the town.

On the 14th October I attended a review of the Kornilov Brigade, which was held in the town square. The troops on parade were the 1st and 2nd Kornilov Regts (the 3rd Regt being on outpost duty), and four batteries of field artillery. Col. Skobelin, the brigade commander, had already arrived and was galloping up and down the line on a spirited horse shouting greetings to the men and receiving a chorus of deep-voiced answers. These preliminaries concluded, he addressed them and congratulated them upon the capture of Orel. A procession of robed priests now filed out of the Cathedral bearing banners and standards, and the chief priest proceeded to read a prayer for the continued success of Denikin's arms. (For this, I may remark in passing, he was executed by the Bolsheviks when they recaptured the town a few days later.) He then proceeded to pronounce a benediction, sprinkling holy water over the bared heads of the officers as they crowded round. A march past concluded the proceedings.

In Orel there was a certain building which had been used by the Bolshevik "Cheresvecheka" as a prison and torture house. In the courtyard of this building we found the bodies of fifteen well-known civilians, who had been carried off as hostages by the Bolsheviks from Kharkov and other towns in South Russia. These unfortunate people had been shot just before our arrival in the town. Amongst them was Professor Besegen of Kharkov University, whose son was accompanying me as interpreter. In the prison were fifteen more hostages still alive – amongst them two ladies. They were in a pitiable state of prostration as a result of the privations they had suffered. These survivors told us that they owed their lives only to the timely advent of the Volunteer troops, for orders had been given to shoot them all.

I was dining with the officers of the Brigade Headquarters on the evening of the 14th when a mud-stained horseman arrived with somewhat alarming news. He was a gun-team driver of a section of 18-prs which had been delayed for some reason the day before and had been left to follow a few miles in the rear of the column. His news was that a force of Bolshevik cavalry, estimated at 2,000 sabres, had swept round our left flank, and had occupied Kromi, thus placing themselves astride our line of retreat. The two 18-prs had been captured and he alone had escaped. In consequence of this information the 2nd Kornilov Regt, with a battery of 6-inch howitzers, was given orders to march on Kromi at dawn the following morning with the object of re-opening communications. On the next day this Regiment marched to Kromi without encountering the enemy. The town was found to be unoccupied and the hostile cavalry was reported to have moved off in an easterly direction in the morning. Later it was ascertained that the manoeuvre had been in the nature of a raid only and that the Bolshevik cavalry had ridden right round us and back into their own lines.

This completes an account of my visit to the Orel front, for I left on the evening of the 16th for Kursk.

With the capture of Orel the high-water mark of Denikin's advance had been reached. Bolshevik resistance now began to stiffen and he was held up all along the line.

There now followed a very critical time for the Anti-Bolshevik forces. The discontent of the civilian population was augmented by the continued weakness of Denikin's administration and by the failure of his efforts to enlist foreign assistance in the economic reconstruction of the country. Denikin at this time had little real authority over the various local governments in South Russia, and these governments were hopelessly corrupt and inefficient. Conditions of life under them were little better than they had been under the Bolsheviks.

Many armed risings took place in his rear, one of the most dangerous of which was that headed by a peasant called Makhno, who attracted a very large following of malcontents and became a serious menace to the lines of communication. His cries of "Land for the peasants, no compensation for the owners, abolition of all authority;" and "Down with the Jews" were very popular amongst a certain class. In the Ukraine, Petliura continued to foster hostility to Denikin, and agents of the Soviet Government were active everywhere in spreading seditious propaganda. Discontent had spread to the Army and signs of disaffection were apparent. The ranks had been filled with conscripted peasants who were unwilling to fight and with large numbers of prisoners captured from the Bolsheviks. The Cossacks, who had never fought with much enthusiasm outside their own borders, were getting tired of the war and they deserted in large



numbers and went off to their homes to get the harvest in. Further, the situation had been aggravated by the Allies' evacuation of North Russia and by certain signs of an inevitable change of Russian policy in Allied countries.

This was the state of affairs when the Bolsheviks launched their counter-offensive towards the end of October, 1919. For this counter-offensive they had concentrated large numbers of troops, which had been withdrawn from the Polish and Siberian theatres, and they greatly out-numbered Denikin. Their plan was to deliver a heavy blow against each of his flanks at Kiev and Tsaritsin, to be followed by a main attack in the centre about Orel.

Denikin's army, being extended on such a wide front, was peculiarly vulnerable to these concentrated attacks. The attacks on the flanks were successfully beaten off at first, but, when the main effort developed against the centre, Denikin's situation became serious. This attack on the centre was made by two main groups – a cavalry group under Budenni in the Voronezh sector and a group of all arms operating from the direction of Briansk. The *rôle* of the cavalry group was to separate the Don and Volunteer armies and open the way for an advance to the Donetz coalfields.

Denikin hurriedly concentrated some six divisions to meet the threat, but it was too late and his efforts were unavailing. He had been out-generalled and his troops were forced to fall back everywhere. Demoralisation set in and the retreat, once begun, could not be stopped.

By the 8th of January Denikin had been driven back to the line Sea of Azov–River Don–Astrakhan.

The complete separation of the Don and Volunteer armies was avoided only with difficulty, one corps of the latter succeeding in retiring on Rostov, while the remaining four divisions fell back on the Crimea.

Towards the middle of January a thaw set in which made all movement of troops impossible and delayed the end for some weeks. At its conclusion, however, the Bolsheviks again pressed their attack and broke through between the Caucasian and Don Armies.

Denikin's difficulties were increased by the defection of the Cossacks, some of whom, with characteristic perfidy, opened negotiations with the Bolsheviks, whilst others, although refusing to submit to Soviet rule, would no longer fight against it.

A Bolshevik contingent now crossed the frozen Sea of Azov and threatened Denikin's left south of Yeisk, whilst Budenni, appearing on his right flank with some 15,000 sabres, attacked and drove his army back on the sea at Novorossisk. Here it arrived completely disorganised and little better than a rabble.

Denikin considered it futile to attempt to hold the naturally strong positions in the hills which surround Novorossisk in view of the utter demoralisation of his men. The task of evacuating what remained of his armies had, therefore, to be faced. This task was undertaken by the Allied Missions. All merchant ships sailing in the Black Sea under Russian and Allied flags were collected at Novorossisk and these, together with our own fleet under Admiral Seymour, took off some 35,000 troops on the 26th and 27th March, 1920. The embarkation was covered by the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, who had been sent from Constantinople for the purpose.

The Crimea was still holding out, and the troops evacuated from Novorossisk were landed at Theodosia and Sevastopol.

A large contingent which was cut off from Novorossisk attempted to cross into the Crimea at Kertch, but the Bolsheviks had taken measures to block this line of retreat and they were surrounded and captured.

Considerable numbers of troops were driven into the Caucasus Mountains, where they continued the fight for many weeks, destroyers sent by us down the coast failing to gain touch with them. The majority of these eventually found their way into Georgia.

Some troops had also been evacuated from Odessa, which fell on 7th February, but the whole garrison could not be got away owing to the fact that the harbour was frozen. Those who were not evacuated made their way along the coast with the intention of crossing the Rumanian frontier; but the Rumanians, fearing they would stir up trouble in Bessarabia, refused to receive them, and they had to surrender.

The bulk of the Ural Army and a large body of refugees (mostly women and children) were cut off at Gurev. Attempts to embark them in boats of the Caspian flotilla failed owing to the presence of pack ice in the vicinity of the mouth of the river Ural, and they set out to march down the Eastern side of the Caspian to Fort Alexandroysk, a distance of 500 miles. They suffered terrible hardships on the march from alternate blizzards and sandstorms, they were ravaged with typhus, and stragglers were cut off by the nomadic Kirghiz. Out of 5,000 who set out some 2,000 only reached their destination, and of these but a small number were able to cross the Caspian to safety.

It was now apparent to Denikin that he had lost the confidence of the Army, and he therefore relinquished the command in favour of General Wrangel on 4th April, 1920. He then left with his Chief-of-Staff, General Romanovski, for Constantinople. Here the latter was shot dead by a Russian officer half an hour after his arrival.

Although Denikin's efforts had ended so dismally, it is evident that he was at one time very near to success – to temporary success at least. How near we may judge from the report of a speech made by Trotski in September at a session of the Revolutionary Committee. In this speech he spoke of growing unrest and discontent amongst the peasants and stated that he feared a complete collapse of the Bolshevik Army.



Had Denikin's economic position been sound, his military operations could hardly have failed, in view of the superiority which the backing of the Allies had given him. His failure is yet another example of the fact that an Army must depend for its very existence upon a sound civil administration. It would have been a miracle had he achieved a lasting success, having regard to the chaotic state of affairs in that portion of Russia which was governed by him.

Whether he could have long maintained his position had he defeated the Red Armies and entered Moscow is open to considerable doubt.

Denikin himself was a great and single-minded patriot, but his gallant and devoted efforts were brought to nought by the corruption and inefficiency of a large proportion of his entourage. His council and his staff included many Russians who could not realise that the old regime had passed away for ever and who did everything in their power to obstruct all efforts at democratic reform.

Baron Peter Wrangel, who now became Commander-in-Chief of the A.F.S.R., was not a professional soldier. During the war against Germany, however, he had gained great distinction as a cavalry leader, and later, under Denikin, he had shown high qualities of generalship. He was by far the most capable of Denikin's Army Commanders, and he possessed the full confidence of the troops.

He now proceeded to reorganise what remained of the army in the Crimea, and he accomplished wonders in a very short time.

Repeated attacks were made by the Bolsheviks on the Isthmus of Perekop, but these were beaten off. It was not such a simple matter to defend this Isthmus as might appear from a study of the map. A great part of the Sea of Azov is still frozen at this period of the year and, on the western side, the Gulf of Perekop is so shallow as to be easily fordable in many places.

At this juncture the Allies attempted to mediate between Wrangel and the Bolsheviks with a view to getting the Crimea recognised as a separate State, but the negotiations came to nothing.

In April Wrangel undertook an advance into the cornlands of South Russia in order to secure supplies, for the resources of the Crimea had been exhausted by the needs of the Army and of the enormous numbers of refugees who swelled the population.

In the opening stages of the operations which now took place I paid a second visit to the front, of which a short account follows.

That part of the advance which I witnessed was in the island of Chongar, by which the railway crosses from the Crimea to the mainland. An interesting feature of the fighting was the use of armoured trains. As a result of what I saw I feel convinced that armoured trains have considerable potentialities in irregular warfare against an ill-armed enemy and that the method of their employment would, therefore, seem to merit some attention.

The force operating in Chongar Island consisted of some 500 infantry, three batteries of field artillery and two armoured trains, one of which was armed with two 18-pr guns and the other with a 60-pr. The trains were made up as follows: first a truck, upon which spare sections of railway line were carried, next the armoured gun trucks, and, behind these, the engine, also armoured.

The Bolshevik force was estimated at 800, but it was weaker in artillery and their armoured trains, of which they also had two, were armed with 3-inch guns only.

There was little or no fighting by the infantry, who advanced, as a rule, in line formation astride the railway in rear of the armoured trains. It was chiefly an affair of duels between the trains. Our armoured trains moved slowly ahead, keeping up a rapid fire on the Bolshevik trains, and engaging the enemy's infantry and field batteries whenever a favourable target presented itself. At times the trains on both sides were hit, but I never saw one derailed or severely damaged.

I was interested to observe the great moral effect exerted by the trains. It was evidently felt that field artillery was helpless against them. The country was flat and there was practically no cover of any description, so that whenever a battery came into action it formed a good target for the trains and was soon neutralised. It never seemed to strike the Russian gunners that the best way for a battery to attack an armoured train is to scatter the guns over a wide front and direct a converging fire upon it. The guns of the trains will then have more targets than they can deal with simultaneously and those targets will be small.

At one place a trench was held by the enemy on a low ridge which crossed the line of the railway at right angles. Our leading armoured train steamed up and opened enfilade fire along it at point blank range, with the result that a number of the enemy's infantry were killed or wounded and the remainder took to flight.

Just after this trench had been taken a rather amusing incident occurred. A halt had been ordered and the troops had lain down to rest, and several of us British officers (who were there merely as spectators) had walked out a short distance beyond the most advanced line of infantry in order to get a better view from some high ground in front. There seemed to



be no danger, for we could see the enemy's column moving away in the distance and no shooting was taking place. We were, therefore, somewhat startled when all at once a machine gun opened fire upon us at close quarters. A Bolshevik armoured train had suddenly appeared from behind the buildings at the little railway station of Chongar near by, where it had been lying hidden, and was now steaming rapidly towards us. The eyes of all were upon us, and we felt we could not run, although we should have liked to do so, for the machine gun bullets were whistling unpleasantly close over our heads and there was no cover at hand. We, therefore, began to walk back in as dignified a manner as possible. At this moment, fortunately for us, our own armoured train sallied forth to our assistance and proceeded to shell the enemy train and drive it back. Before this encounter I had had rather a contempt for armoured trains, but I must now confess to a certain amount of respect for them!

By 18th April a bridgehead had been gained on the mainland round Salkovo, and here a line of trenches was dug which was to be held until the railway could be repaired.

On the 19th we walked round the front. From the men in the trenches we learned that during the preceding forty-eight hours they had had one hot meal only and, beyond this, they had had no food except raw salt herrings. In spite of this miserable treatment, which was entirely due to the inefficiency of the administrative staff, these men fought well that night and beat off a heavy counter-attack. The powers of endurance of the Russian soldier are truly marvellous.

During the operations we more than once saw General Slashchev, the Corps Commander. Slashchev was extremely popular with the troops owing to his great personal courage, but, unfortunately, his habits, like those of so many Russian officers, were dissolute, and he was addicted to drink. He was invariably accompanied on his visits to the front by one of his "lady orderlies" in male costume.

The British Mission was withdrawn from the Crimea at the end of June, 1920. Its functions had been to train and to advise, to inspect units armed with British equipment at the front, to keep the War Office informed of Denikin's requirements, and, latterly, to supervise the supply of all stores and equipment to the fighting troops.

After our departure Wrangel made a considerable advance into South Russia, but in November the Bolsheviks concentrated against him and overran the Crimea.

The remnants of his Army were evacuated from Sebastopol to Constantinople, and so ended the Anti-Bolshevik movement in South Russia.

The main characteristic of the operations was their extraordinary mobility. The plains of South Russia favour free movement of troops everywhere, although there are but few metalled roads. Owing to the difficulties of supply, however, the main operations were confined as a rule to the vicinity of the railways.

The tactics employed have a certain interest when the operations are considered in the light of irregular warfare against an ill-armed enemy such as may recur in the small wars of the future.

It is a curious fact that, although the Russians have always been particularly strong in cavalry, and although the nature of their country favours mounted action, yet they have never mastered the principles of the employment of this arm. During the Great War it will be remembered that there were constant instances of the misuse of cavalry by the Russian commanders, perhaps the most striking example of this occurring in Galicia in 1916, when the Russian cavalry were offered and failed to seize an opportunity, such as comes but seldom in war, of decisive action against the demoralised and broken Austrian army.

The operations in South Russia were but a repetition of history so far as the cavalry was concerned. Cavalry, properly handled, would have been of the utmost value in cutting communications, for instance; but Denikin's cavalry was not properly handled and its power was largely wasted in raids which had no bearing on the main operations.

Golden opportunities for minor cavalry actions constantly occurred, but cavalry were seldom available to take advantage of them. This was chiefly due to the fact that infantry divisions were assigned an inadequate proportion of cavalry – insufficient even for scouting purposes. It would seem that for a campaign in a country such as Russia there should be, in addition to large cavalry formations, a greater proportion of cavalry in the division of all arms and in the army corps.

Russian cavalry tactics are antiquated. For instance, they never, to my knowledge at least, fought dismounted, although the necessity for dismounted action might well have been impressed upon the Russians in the late war, if not by their previous experience in the Russo-Japanese War. There is no doubt that the Cossack despises dismounted action, and his value as a cavalryman is thus considerably decreased. The Cossacks, too, are robbers by instinct, and it seems unlikely that they could ever be trained up to the standard of first-class European cavalry. They are undoubtedly good horsemen and fine swordsmen and they have great powers of endurance, but they are easily depressed, and unreliable when things are not going well.

The Tartars, of whom a considerable number were fighting for Denikin, have perhaps greater potentialities as cavalrymen. They are just as hardy, they are good fighting men, and they are more amenable to discipline.



A number of Mongols were also serving with Denikin's cavalry. They are especially hardy, and are said to be able to subsist entirely upon mares' milk, which is more nutritious than cows'. They are, therefore, independent of supplies and can move through uninhabited country with freedom.

As regards the Kirghiz, I understand from officers with a knowledge of India that they would probably equal our finest native mounted troops if led by white officers.

The artillery of the A.F.S.R. comprised an extraordinary variety of armament, of German, British and Russian manufacture. Of the field guns the Russian 3-inch gun proved the most satisfactory weapon, and it withstood the wear and tear of the campaign better than the British 18-pr, which was constantly going out of action owing to the rough handling which it received. The carelessness with which the Russians handled their equipment was striking. Trifling defects were constantly disregarded and guns were kept in action until serious damage had developed. There was an enormous demand for buffer springs, the reason for this being that the batteries were frequently in action at extreme ranges. The normal reserve supply of springs proved to be quite inadequate. In a country like Russia, where targets constantly present themselves at long ranges, a gun with a longer range than the old type of 18-pr, is clearly desirable.

Horse-drawn medium artillery was generally able to keep pace with other arms in operations, but the 6-inch howitzer proved to be greatly superior in mobility to the 60-pr owing to its smaller weight. Medium guns and howitzers, when drawn by tractors, were found not to be sufficiently mobile. They were always held up at river crossings until heavy bridges could be constructed, with the result that they were seldom up in time to take part in the fighting. In retreat tractor-drawn guns were generally abandoned, even when there were no obstacles to movement, owing to their slow pace.

As regards horses, it may be noted that there is some difficulty in Russia in obtaining animals of a sufficiently heavy type for artillery. The ordinary Russian horses are small and the harness and shoes used in our Service were found to be much too large for them.

I was impressed by the advantages offered by the Russian system of grouping batteries in "divisions", which consisted, as a rule, of two batteries each. A number of "divisions" composed a brigade. For close co-operation with infantry in rapid movement this seems an ideal arrangement, and it would appear to lend itself equally well to co-ordinated artillery action in deliberate operations. [Note: here he is translating the Russian *divizion* as "division" where "battalion" would be better; the Russian for "division" is *diviziya*.]

An interesting point which arose was the unsuitability for use in Russia of the buffer oil employed in the British service. This oil is liable to thicken and freeze in the winter to such an extent as to be quite useless.

The infantry tactics employed in these operations were behind the times. The Russians seem to have stood still in the last war, while the Allies were developing new tactical methods, and they seem to have learnt little or nothing from their experiences on the German front.

Attacks were generally carried out in line formation with little or no depth, and in defence it was also evident that the modern idea of depth was not realised. At the same time it will be generally admitted that the depth of infantry dispositions may be considerably modified in less highly organised forms of warfare.

In attack infantry were often moved forward against the enemy in horse-drawn carts, under cover of artillery fire.

The quality of the infantry regiments in Denikin's army varied enormously. Some were composed of peasants who had been mobilised against their will and who were unintelligent and untrained in war. They were naturally poor. Others, such as the Kornilov Regt, consisted largely of officers of the old army who fought in the ranks, and these were as fine as any infantry in the world.

As regards machine guns, it may be noted that, in order to make them sufficiently mobile to keep up with fast-moving infantry and cavalry they were often lashed on light carts drawn each by four horses, and they were fired from this position. This expedient achieved its object.

The country is peculiarly suited to the unrestricted movement of tanks, for, with the exception of the rivers, there are no obstacles to movement south of the forest belt.

The tanks supplied to the A.F.S.R. were of the older patterns. Their moral effect was so great as to be almost magical, but lighter tanks, such as the "Whippet", would have been of greater value.

It is probable, however, that an enemy more accustomed to these weapons than the Bolshevik of that period would have been able to make an effective resistance to tanks by resolute handling of his artillery, because the complete absence of natural cover places the former at a considerable disadvantage.

Armoured cars were of great value and could have been effectively employed in far greater numbers. Armoured cars and cavalry were found to be an ideal combination which proved as efficacious as it did in somewhat similar circumstances during General Ironside's recent operations in Persia.

As has already been stated, experience in South Russia would seem to indicate that armoured trains have a considerable value in irregular warfare. Denikin also used them to some extent for the protection of his lines of communication, and it seems probable that for operations in a hostile country this should be a normal *rôle*.



The Air Force of the A.F.S.R. was perforce inadequate, and such work as was carried out was done, for the most part, by British personnel.

The aeroplane has undoubtedly tremendous potentialities as a weapon of offence on the open steppes and there were numerous instances of effective low-flying action against troops on the ground, the most interesting occurring, perhaps, during the defence of Tsaritsin in the autumn of 1919, when repeated cavalry attacks were driven off by aeroplanes.

Aeroplanes and cavalry might have co-operated more closely. In this connection the failure to keep touch during Mamontov's raid may be quoted. On this occasion touch was eventually regained with Mamontov at Voronezh by means of De Havillands, but his whereabouts had been unknown for some weeks before.

The shortcomings of the staff were attributable not only to the poor quality of the average Russian Staff Officer, but also, in great measure, to the fact that the command was very much out of touch with the fighting troops. Headquarters were, as a rule, too far from the front – for instance, Corps Headquarters were sometimes 140 miles and Divisional Headquarters 80 miles behind the line.

I was constantly impressed by the good fighting qualities and powers of endurance of the Russian soldier even at this time when the national morale was at a low ebb.

It is of interest to note that Lord Wolseley, writing of his service in the Crimean War, referred to the Russians as “about the finest infantry in the world – in fact fully as brave as our own”; and, again, as “the most stubborn of fighting men”.

General Sir Alfred Knox, in his recently published book, “With the Russian Army, 1914-1917”, makes some instructive observations on the Russian people as a fighting race. He points out that, although Russian peasants lack individuality and natural initiative owing to centuries of serfdom and low mental development, no attempts were made in the pre-revolution army to remedy these defects and to raise their morale by instilling into their minds a thinking patriotism. He emphasises the fact that the men are splendid material and that, owing to the rigour of the climate and his lower standard of civilisation, the Russian soldier is well fitted to stand privation and, with proper training, should be exceptionally capable of standing the nerve-strain of war.

One of the weakest points in the post-revolution armies, as in the Old Russian army (although it was not fully realised before the war) was the officer element. The majority of the Russian officers proved themselves to be corrupt and inefficient. They lacked a sense of duty and they took no interest in the welfare of their men. Their attitude is illuminated by the following reference to one of his men made by an officer in my hearing: “He is a peasant – he is nothing!” Another advised me to treat my Cossack servant “like a dog” in order to get good work out of him.

Not until Russia can produce a good officer class or can call in officers of the right stamp from a foreign nation, will she, in my opinion, become a great military power. No soldier responds more readily than the Russian to good treatment and good leading. Led by good officers the Russians would be accounted amongst the best troops in the world.

