

## Memoirs of a Caucasian Grenadier, 1914-1920

Captain Constantine Popov

*This translation is from the Russian version, checked against the French (which is basically the same, except for missing some paragraphs, and that the names are sometimes given as surnames where Popov has used first names or diminutives in the Russian).*

*I have only translated the last quarter of the book, relating to his time with the Volunteer Army.*

### Introduction

Leaving for the war in 1914, all the officers dreamed of the happy day when the war would end victoriously, and envied in advance the lucky one who would witness that day.

The longed-for end of the war came, the only difference being that it did not bring peace or happiness to Russia. Of the officers who once dreamed of that famous day there are a lot who are now missing and there are fewer and fewer of us every day. I, a week ago after the fourth operation on my wounded arm, I too almost crossed the line from which there is no return, and from which nothing can be reported. I am a "lucky one", who has not only lived through to the 'great' day that about to happen, but also experienced it ...

That gave rise to an idea to write down what I experienced during the last six years of war and revolution. Over those years I have witnessed both great hopes and their collapse, both great deeds and equally great crimes. I have tasted the sweetness of triumph and I have fully tasted the bitterness of defeat.

I have seen a sea of blood and tears ... all that humanity fears, that which it seeks to avoid ... that which is inevitable – war.

In the big events of the war I was a small grain of sand. A fleck – an ordinary rank-and-file officer. There were thousands of us, all so similar to one another. I was an officer who only knew the orders that came past me or that I heard on the telephone. I saw only as much as my sight was able to see, and so I was a "tiny cog" in the complex machinery of a modern army.

What I am writing about was experienced by me either in the ranks of the glorious 13th Erivan Grenadier 'Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich' Regiment<sup>1</sup> or in the ranks of the 'Composite Regiment of the Caucasus Grenadier Division' – the direct heir and descendant of the four regiments of the Caucasian Grenadiers.

Everything else is from events that were directly related to me.

My aim is to write down truthfully everything that seemed to me significant. To record, as best I can, the role of my regiment in the Great and Civil Wars, and to preserve for future generations of Russia the names of those who put the happiness and honour of the Motherland above their personal interests. To tell how they suffered and sacrificed their lives.

But memory does not wait, you have to hurry ... There are fewer and fewer living witnesses to what we experienced.

Captain Popov.

Pančevo (Bulgaria), 1921

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<sup>1</sup> The Erivan Grenadiers were the oldest regiment in the Russian army. The name comes from Mikhail Feodorovich Romanov, tsar from 1613 to 1645.

## Civil War

1918

With Georgia's declaration of independence, Russians found it harder and harder to live in the territory of the new republic, in every way. True, there were no bloody exterminations or mass executions of those who disagreed, as there was in Soviet Russia; but the 'Georgianisation' of all state institutions left the huge number of Russian employees, of all classes, without employment. They left in a huge wave to the Ukraine, where at that time the Hetman was in power. As for former Russian officers, the new government prohibited them from wearing their uniforms or possessing weapons.

In one of the other republics formed on the territory of Transcaucasia, Armenia, the situation for the Russian population was more favorable. The Russians were treated loyally and more cordially. Russian officers, for example, were widely accepted into service in the Armenian national army, which at that time still had good discipline.

Knowing this, some of the officers of our Erivan Regiment entered Armenian service. For example, in addition to the officers of our regiment of Armenian nationality, this included: our former regimental commander, General Vyshinskiy; my former battalion commander, Colonel Timchenko; our former adjutant, Lieutenant Colonel Schlitter; Captain Tikhonov and Lieutenant Colonel Snarskiy. According to them it went well. By the way, when General Vyshinskiy died in their service, the state paid for the funeral, and the widow was given a decent pension.

All this did not sit well with me: I was well aware that I could not serve in any army other than my native Russian army. Therefore I preferred a temporary ordeal of the Tiflis market more than a tolerable position in the Armenian army.

During this period I became friends with the staff-captain of our regiment, Pivovarov, who lived just across the street from me. Misha Pivovarov, as he was called in our regiment, was until then not well known. He had transferred to us shortly before the revolution from the 201st Poti Regiment. The transfer was while he was in state hospital, where he was being treated for a terrible wound in the abdomen, which he received on 31 May 1915 in the battle of Tukhla, in which he commanded one of the companies of the Poti Regiment. This was the same Pivovarov who had resisted the German attack on Bzura at Konsky Brod on the night of 6/7 December 1914, along with Captain Sabel. His desire to be in our regiment was so strong that when it was reported that the order for transfer had come through, he said, "Well, now I know that I will not die." And indeed when he immediately went to the regiment, he was temporarily appointed commander of a non-combatant company, given the fact that he had not yet fully recovered from his serious wounds.

"That was the only black spot on my record," Misha always said about that appointment.

In August 1918 Colonel Pil'berg arrived in Tiflis, the last commander of our Erivan Regiment, and our common friend. From him we learned that the regiment had been disbanded in Tula, all the archives had been surrendered, and the flag he had taken and put in the hands of a reliable person.

One evening Pil'berg came to see me, and reported that he was going to go to the Volunteer Army, about which he appeared to have some information. Neither Pivovarov nor I were invited to join him, and indeed he soon left.

Rumours about the formation of units of the Volunteer Army in Don territory began to spread more firmly. A vague hope grew in me, that became an obsession. One day I found out that a group of our young officers, who I did not know personally but only via connections, had left for the Volunteer Army. I talked to Misha and saw that he had the same desire as I did. We decided to go too, as soon as the first opportunity presented itself.

A few days later I met our beloved former division commander, General V.P. Shatilov, in the street. From him I learned that it was possible and necessary to enlist in the Volunteer Army, and that he would give us all the necessary information and instructions.

## Volunteer Army

1918

Exactly three weeks later, on 2 December 1918, Misha and I, having sold all our belongings – because we had to pay our own way and needed money – took a train to Poti, on the Black Sea. With us was Pivovarov's wife, a doctor, who wanted to be useful as well, treating the sick and wounded.

After two days of waiting, we finally got on the beautiful steamer *Grand Duchess Xenia*, leaving for Novorossiysk. The weather was favorable for the trip and everything would have been fine if Misha had not caught something during the loading. As soon as he reached the cabin, he immediately lay down with a fever. I thought that he had the 'Spanish flu' raging at that time in Tiflis, but it turned out that he had a chest infection.

For two days we had sailed along the coast of the 'Caucasian Riviera', admiring the beautiful views of Sokhumi, Sochi, Gagra and Tuapse. Finally outside Novorossiysk we passed by the sunken ships of our Black Sea Fleet, marked by the crosses atop the masts of the sunken destroyers sticking out of the water ...

In Novorossiysk port there were only 2 or 3 steamships; the former bustle of the large port city was gone.

During the unloading, I immediately recognised an officer who came up to our deck as the former commissar of the Shock<sup>2</sup> troops, Ensign Itkin. Seeing me, he came to ask where I wanted to go, and expressed keenness to get me into the Kornilov Regiment. Explaining that I wished to join the Grenadiers, he seemed disappointed, and he soon left.

It was not possible to disembark Misha in Novorossiysk immediately, we had to ask the captain of the steamer permission to leave the sick man in his cabin for several hours more.

When I made it ashore, I was ready to cry with joy; everything was ordered, with cheerful Russian faces, officers in uniform, men exercising in the squares, and so on. In the commandant's office sat polite and attentive clerks; the documents were issued instantly ... the whole thing was like a dream.

When I returned on board I was in uniform and brought back to my friend a coat with grenadier shoulder-straps sewn on. My joyful mood, and stories about what I had seen, revived him. Gathering all his strength he rose and got dressed, and we went to the station. The train for Ekaterinodar was to leave at midnight. There were a lot of people at the station, and the air was very stuffy. Misha endured terrible torment, not even having an opportunity to lie down.

Finally the train arrived. With great difficulty, we managed to squeeze Misha onto it. An officer, seeing his suffering, gave up his top bunk and offered it to Misha; I sat on a some suitcase on the floor. Even the corridors of the wagons were packed, with men sitting and lying down. Misha still didn't feel well; we decided that he would need to be taken to the hospital in Ekaterinodar.

We spent the night relating battle stories: it was then I first heard about the famous "Ice March", about all the horrors of the civil war, about the fact that prisoners were no longer taken, etc. When I answered someone's question that I was a grenadier and would like to find my way to that regiment, a voice from the top back immediately gave me of all the details I wanted about the grenadiers. Our young officers had got into the Markov Regiment, where they formed a section. But recently it had been decided to form a battalion from all the grenadiers, under the command of Colonel Kochkin, a Moscow Grenadier. The formation been carried out in Ekaterinodar, and now the half-formed battalion had been moved to Stavropol to complete that process. The last news was not to my taste, but there was nothing I could do about it.

In the morning we arrived in Ekaterinodar. At the railway station, I was stunned to see a gendarme, as in the old times. True, he did not have the same tidy air, with rows of medals, that majestic appearance, which distinguished the old gendarmes. No matter, it was nice it was to see this symbol of order. I lingered a bit, wanting to enjoy this almost-forgotten sight.

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<sup>2</sup> Popov had spent some time with a "Shock" unit in WWI, not seeing action.

We started unloading. Misha could hardly move his legs, we held him up by the arms. Since the city of Ekaterinodar was completely unfamiliar to the three of us, it was decided that Misha and his wife, would remain in the hall of the first class, and I would go seek information.

A tram took me to the corner of Ekaterininskaya and Krasnaya Streets. It was a bright sunny day. Krasnaya Street was busy, especially with military men; it was full of all sorts of shapes. Here I first saw the *Kornilovtsi* in their bizarre loud uniforms, *Markovtsi* in black, Shkuro's men in wolf *papakhas* with tails, Circassians with green stripes on their *papakhas*, etc. Everyone had chevrons of national ribbons on their sleeves, pointed downwards, a symbol they were a Volunteer.

I involuntarily wondered where all these uniforms came from; the unrecognisable combinations of crimson and white, black and red, the skull and bones emblems, the mixture of cavalry distinctions with badges and emblems I had never seen before. It seemed to me that everyone wore the uniform he liked best.

I hadn't even gone two blocks when I met our friend Pil'berg. His proud posture and way of walking, with considerable height and large build, immediately caught my eye. His right arm was in a sling; it turns out that on the 1 October, as assistant to the commander of a *plastun* battalion, a rifle bullet had crushed the bones in his hand. He looked, as always, young and cheerful. He was being treated in a hospital set up in an old seminary. After mutual greetings, I brought him up to date with our situation.

"I will arrange for Misha to be put in the hospital, and I will also arrange something for you ... if you want. I can introduce you to a very nice family."

I had to refuse, "Now is not the time, another time, Misha is waiting at the station" and so on.

"Well, okay, then let's go to him."

I agreed and off we went.

"Here we are," he said as he entered the entrance of a house. I automatically climbed the stairs behind him.

The house which we entered played a major role in the fate of many *Erivantsi*, and all of us who lived in it will forever preserve in our memory all the brightness and goodness of the dear owners of that house.

After brief introductions, I received an invitation to stay in an available free room with an officer who had just come from the front. Then I was informed of the hours of lunch, breakfast and tea and thus made it clear that I was a welcome guest.

"Shame on you, Gustav,<sup>3</sup> ...," I said as I stepped outside.

"It's all right, they're your people, you'll see for yourself."

In two days I saw that the N's were not only friendly, but close to being family with their care and attention to all the needs of any officer staying at their home – and there were always at least eight of them.

I went with Colonel Pil'berg to the train station to transport Misha to the hospital.

Misha was in a terrible way. He didn't speak much, and sweat flowed from his high fever. When we were ready to move, I saw the familiar face of the officer.

"Here is Kumpanienko, he has just returned from captivity," Gustav said.

Lieutenant Kumpanienko offered his assistance in getting Misha admitted to hospital, as his relative was a sister of mercy there. It was time to take him.

The hospital made a frightening impression on me. Rough beds, the same with the pillows, incomprehensibly dirty linen, and the confusion of the staff, who could not cope with the number of patients; all immediately struck my eye. There nearly 100 in the huge ward with about 40 beds. Poor Misha only asked for a pillow.

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<sup>3</sup> That is, Pil'berg.

The next day, having all my necessary documents, I came by to say goodbye to Misha and brought him a pillow. "I'm not feeling well, I didn't expect to be so ill. They diagnosed pneumonia."

A few more words and we parted for good; but I was once more to see dear Misha in circumstances that were exceptionally tragic, a description of which I will return to later in my narrative.

I had been instructed to go to Stavropol. The battalion was no longer there, as it was in position in the village of Severnaya. Only the supply train was in Stavropol.

The head of the train was Colonel Illarion Ivanovich Ivanov, an officer in the Tiflis Regiment, who had commanded a battalion in our reserve regiment. He greeted me very cordially and immediately offered me a room. There I met an old grenadier of 70, Staff-captain Mel'nitskiy, a former leader of the Nobility of Novgorod Province, and now a Volunteer. The old man carried not only a huge sword, but also a dagger, which made him look comical. I thought at first that he would not go further than a rear-area unit, but later I saw that the marvelous old man could work calmly under fire and do his job without unnecessary words, not out of fear but doing his duty. I developed a deep respect for him.

I did not know what my role would be in the Composite Grenadier Battalion, and I did not receive any orders until the arrival of Colonel Kochkin, the battalion commander.

Two days after my arrival, I received a telegram from Pil'berg informing me of Misha's death and the day of his burial.

"You know what," Illarion Ivanovich appealed to me, "go to the funeral, you were a close friend of his, and on your way back you can bring the battalion's money at the same time."

The matter was resolved in five minutes, and I left to go to Ekaterinodar.

The recent loss of a dear man, a fine officer and gentleman in the full sense of the word, weighed heavily on my heart, and I entered Misha's widow's flat with an unspeakably heavy sadness. But she was not at home, she had just left for the cemetery to dig up Misha, who had been buried the day before; because when Mrs Pivovarova had gone to the mortuary, she was not shown Misha, but an Armenian soldier who had died the same day.

Having learned about this, I rushed to the cemetery and found the following scene: a plank coffin was being taken out of the dug up grave. When the lid was removed, a completely naked dead man with a note on his chest was visible to those present: "Kevork Sarkisov, Deserter". This deserter was none other than Misha. He was lying on his side as if huddling against the cold. It was damp in the grave, and wet snow was falling. It was such a monstrous scene that I literally did not recover from it for days. I felt a horror of the grave, the cold and the evil irony of fate. Leaning over to Misha, I kissed him on his icy forehead.

Such was the end of a valiant officer.

It turned out later that when Mrs. Pivovarova had first gone to get her husband, the doctors told her that they needed to perform an autopsy, that it should be clear to her, as a doctor, that this was necessary for science, and so on. It was agreed that noon the next day he would be buried with military honors. The next day, that is, the day of my arrival, Mrs Pivovarova came at the agreed time. A guard of honour and band were waiting in the courtyard ... and suddenly, in Misha's Erivan uniform, there was a stranger. Only after careful questioning and inquiries was it possible to establish that a priest had buried the deceased yesterday with the necessary procedures. We went to the cemetery, dug up the grave, and I was there to witness the rest personally.

I stayed in Ekaterinodar for a long time, as Christmas was approaching, and I could not get the money immediately. I stayed with Pil'berg in the N's house. One day the front door was opened by Gustav himself.

"Guess who I'm going to show you! Let's go, you'll see." He said the words in a particularly mysterious way.

Knowing him, I prepared myself for a surprise, and indeed, I had barely entered our room, when I fell into the arms of Tolya Poboyevski. He had just returned from France, after being on the Salonika front when the revolution occurred. A continuous wave of stories poured out, sometimes sad, some joyful. Hopes for a better future were born.

It was decided that on 2 January we would join the Consolidated Grenadier Battalion, as Tolya desired. He did not even go home to see his relatives, whom he had not seen in many years.

We celebrated the New Year together with the Ns, who accepted Tolya under their patronage. It was great fun, because we firmly believed in the coming resurrection of our dear homeland. The challenges that lay ahead did not frighten us, and we faced them bravely.

On 2 January we went to Stavropol, in a 4th class carriage. People were literally sitting on each other. I remember that Tolya fell asleep in an unusually comical pose, his head on the back of a Cossack, who was himself asleep on Tolya's legs.

In Stavropol we received instructions to wait for special orders! Nothing had been done about enlisting us, and we could do nothing but wait. We found out that one of our officers, Lieutenant Snarski was very poorly in the hospital. We immediately went to see him. At first we took him out of the hospital, but he got worse, so we had to return him.

Captain B. , who led a somewhat strange life, was also in Stavropol. For some reason he had left his position, stayed at a hotel, and answered all our questions confusingly and vaguely.

Here we also met gunner Belyayev, with who we "sat and talked", to use his favourite expression.

Finally we received an order to catch up the battalion, moving to Mineralnye Vody station. The same day we received a piece of news about the death of my fellow officer graduate, Captain Zemlyanitsyn of the Turkestan Rifles, who was killed near the village of Severnaya. Everybody who knew him deeply regretted the grievous loss. I more than most, as I had not seen him since he was commissioned, but had heard much about him during the German War as an outstanding officer, and had been eager to see him. But that was interrupted by his death ... yet another death.

Four of us set out to the battalion: me, Captain B., Poboyevski and another warrant officer. We made slow progress.

At that time, the units of the Volunteer Army were liberating the Terek region from the Bolsheviks. Our battles were all successful, and the pace of the offensive accelerated.

When we arrived at Mineralnye Vody station we found out that our battalion had left for Georgiyevsk. We were told we had to change to a freight train. There was no train. Finally we were told that somewhere on Track 8 there was a train ready to leave. We found it and climbed in.

A huge train captured from the Bolsheviks was standing beside ours. We noticed that the Cossacks travelling with us were snooping around in the wagons, and we became interested and decided to take a look ourselves. In every carriage, loaded with various kinds of ammunition, harnesses, household furniture and what-not, there was unimaginable chaos. Everything was turned upside down, mangled and splattered with blood. Arms and legs of dead Bolsheviks were sticking out from under the rubbish, and in every carriage there were up to ten corpses. The Cossacks were prowling around among them, taking off their boots and anything that seemed useful to take away. They did it without any disgust, thoroughly and seriously. Overwhelmed by the sight, we just looked at each other and headed back to our accommodation.

At the station we got off and walked to Ekaterinogradskaya village, where our battalion was positioned.

The regimental headquarters assigned us positions: Captain B. was to form a 5th Company from Red Army prisoners; I was to be his assistant and Tolya Poboyevski was appointed staff sergeant.

Having received the assignments, we went to see our comrades.

The day was frosty, the unforgiving mud of the village was frozen, so it was easy to walk. On the edge of the village, not far from a deep ravine we saw some companies doing drill. When a few officers saw us, they immediately separated and approached us. It was here that I first met Lieutenant Boris Silayev, Cadet Belynsky, Staff Captain Zasyplin, Lieutenant Linkov and other officers of the 4th Company.

Some Bolshevik corpses were lying on the edge of the ravine. Nobody thought to pay attention to them, their minds didn't even register them.



That day, after the main meal of the day,<sup>4</sup> the men of the new 5th Company were lined up. It was an extraordinary sight. Of the 50 men assigned to the company, perhaps two of them looked passable. The others were in scraps of clothing, and most of them were barefoot, with their feet wrapped in rags. All shivered with the cold, and many of them bore clear signs of typhus. These were Red Army soldiers who had just been taken prisoner, stripped naked by the victors.

"Listen, what can we with them?" asked Tolya. "How can they fight?" And indeed, they were mere shadows of men.

Regardless, two days later we were loaded into train cars for a journey to Mozdok. Fifteen of them did not make it there. Typhus raged without cease: sick men were lying on the ground at every station, infecting the healthy ones. It was impossible to escape the bugs.

At Mozdok station we were once again faced with an unbelievably horrible scene. Two enormous trains stood on the tracks, one completely burnt out, but with the people inside it. The wagons were lined with iron beds, on which one or two charred corpses lay. The skulls gritted their teeth as if laughing.

I boarded only one 3rd Class car of the other train, which bore an inscription in Red: 'Communist Number 1'. The wagon was packed with typhoid fever inmates, more than half of whom were dead and lying naked on the floor. It was a scene in the style of the civil war, waiting for an artist to paint it.

We moved from Mozdok to the village of Voznesenskaya, where we had to subdue the rebellious Ingush.<sup>5</sup> But after two days in the first village after Mozdok we received orders to go back to Mozdok.

The counter-order was very timely, as Tolya felt unwell and I knew he had typhus. He couldn't walk, so I put him on a cart, and immediately escorted him to the hospital, helped by M. S. who was the son of one of the *Erivantsi*. That evening I began to have a terrible headache and a fever. I overcame it to go to a meeting of the battalion officers. I don't recall anything decided at that meeting; but when I asked the doctor who was there to examine me, he bluntly told me: "You don't need to be examined, you must go to the hospital – you have smallpox."

He wrote me the required note, and I went to the same hospital that I had handed Tolya over the day before. First they put me in a separate room, and the next day they moved my bed into a nearby room and put it next to Tolya's.

Tolya was unconscious. I felt a sort of relief – after all, he was next to his friend, while an obsessive thought kept creeping into my head: 'Could we get out of this? Are we really fated to die so ignominiously?' Then there was a period of oblivion. At times, when I came to, I asked them to warm my feet and asked if Tolya was alive. They gave me a hot water bottle, told me that Tolya was alive, and I fell back into oblivion.

Tolya fought the typhus with great difficulty, and they injected him constantly with camphor. My body was much stronger and I made do with my own means.

Two weeks passed; it was 15 February. Tolya spoke to me for the first time, and the crisis was over. We were dreadfully happy to have escaped such danger. Now we could see where we were and what conditions we were living in.

Our hospital was in the centre of the city opposite the church; it was very small and had only 15 to 20 beds. Only officers were accommodated there.

The equipment left much to be desired, and the food was abjectly poor. We literally starved. There was one nurse and one orderly, and doctors were replaced almost every other day for some reason. A heroine of a nurse, who had absolutely no rest, carried everything on her shoulders. Regrettably, I do not recall her name or appearance – at the time, I had muddled sight, with ringing in my ears and everything seemed to fog up.

We were desperate to leave as quickly as possible, to get away from the stuffy environment, with its groaning and mad deliriums. We had to wait for some day specific day, Friday or maybe Tuesday, and go to

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<sup>4</sup> This was the midday meal.

<sup>5</sup> Caucasian mountaineers, similar to the Chechens. They were attempting to set up independent states.

the Commissariat. The day before, we had already rehearsed standing up, but not very successfully, and I feared that it would not work on the day, and we would have to wait another week. This fear gave us strength, and we got up and dressed by the appointed time, supported one another and headed for the committee, which met three or four blocks away, also at the hospital. Our neighbor, Colonel Count Stenbock, who had risen from the dead simultaneously with us, came with us.

The hospital we arrived at was packed with typhoid patients, who, for want of beds, lay on bunk beds without sheets, or right on the floor. The impression was dismal.

Fortunately the committee did not detain us, as typhus had left its mark not only on our faces but also on our entire silhouette, and so all three of us were given two months' leave without a long deliberation. Two months leave was nice, but where and with what means could we improve our health?

Tolya and I had only five rubles from the Stavropol City Council, which had no value in Mozdok, but we were lucky and we managed to buy five bagels with it.

Seeing our predicament, Count Stenbock came to our aid and lent us 50 rubles in more useful money.

We all decided to go to Ekaterinodar. Count Stenbock knew people there, and we decided to go to our friends. During our illness, the Mozdok railway station had been put in relative order, but the buffet was poorly run and, while once abounding in snacks, now did not even have sufficient bread. We had to wait until 2 p.m. for the train to Mineralnye Vody, which turned out to be the usual freight train, which had no heaters in the cars. With great difficulty, we managed to squeeze out of the station commandant one *teplushka*,<sup>6</sup> which had no fuel in it. There was no firewood and nowhere to get it. All our searches yielded nothing. We accepted two more officers into the wagon, in exactly the same condition as we were, having just overcome typhus.

Getting into the wagon was greatly complicated and it was a collective effort; none of us could climb high enough to get into the car, which had no steps, so we all pushed the first one up from below, and then he took turns pulling the others up. Our complete helplessness showed at the first station, when we needed to open the door. The five of us tried as hard as we could, but failed. We had to call for help from outside. We banged on the door and shouted, but no one answered. Finally, footsteps and voices were heard: two Cossacks heeded our pleas and rolled the door open.

We explained to them that we were weak after typhus, and told them that we did not have enough firewood. When we heard that they were headed in the same direction, we invited them to ride with us. The Cossacks agreed with pleasure, calling over two of their friends. From there we experienced no lack of firewood nor any other inconveniences.

The problem was to get to Mineralnye Vody station, from where the required passenger trains ran to Ekaterinodar. Since we were without money, we decided to go first to our supply in Armavir, to get our meagre paychecks and pay our debts. I would not dwell on that insignificant episode were it not for an encounter at Armavir station that I recall with pleasure. After receiving our paychecks, Tolya and I decided to dine at station while waiting for the train, which would leave that night sometime.

Tolya fell asleep at the table, due to fatigue and weakness. Suddenly a general approached our table.

"What are you doing here?"

Tolya woke up, and seeing who it was, immediately brightened up. General Kuptsov was standing in front of us.

"Tell you what, come with me! I have a carriage, don't worry about the train. I will take you back in time," Alexander Nikiforovich commanded.

General Kuptsov turned out to be commander of the Armavir garrison. In the hotel where he lived, a table was laid and, to our utter amazement, a bottle of Kakhetian wine appeared. We spent three hours in friendly conversation, recalling everything we had gone through and sharing our impressions of contemporary issues, and the departure time went unnoticed. Thanks to the efforts of Alexander

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<sup>6</sup> A heating stove.



Nikiforovich, we were given every comfort, and an hour later we were fast asleep, gently rocking on two couches in a separate compartment. We were awakened by a violent shoving from the conductor. It turned out that he had forgotten to wake us up at Tikhoretskaya, and we were on our way to Sosyk. The conductor decided to correct his mistake and suggested that we get off at the next station, because an express train to Ekaterinodar was approaching. While it did not stop there, he promised to take measures to slow down the train. A difficult operation lay ahead, but our desire to get to Ekaterinodar as quickly as possible was so strong that we agreed to his risky venture. So we set off, our guide talked to everyone we needed, and we stayed behind to wait.

Soon the huge lights of the approaching train blinded us, and slowing down, but not stopping, it started to elude us. At that decisive moment someone gave Tolya a push, and he climbed on safely; I lost my balance and was about to roll out under the wheels, when someone's strong hands lifted me and threw me on as well. One by one our bags and packets fell onto my head ... Not only was I saved, but I also did not miss the train.

In the morning, two staggering, mutually-supporting figures called at the N's house.

The whole house wept with sympathy when they saw us in such a state, and drastic measures were taken to get us back on our feet as quickly as possible. Very soon those measures yielded brilliant results, and a month later, Tolya and I were already thinking of where we would go. We were not attracted to the Composite Grenadier Battalion, because everything we had seen there. Pil'berg maintained his confidence that an independent unit of Caucasus Grenadiers would soon be solved, and then he would need us. It was decided that Tolya would join a tank *divizion*, and I would join the newly opened Kuban-Sophia Military School. And that is what we did. The Kuban-Sofia Military School had its origins in one of the Kiev NCO schools, located in Sofia Square, and then evacuated to the Kuban.

Cadets of that school had taken part in the Kuban campaign, and most of them perished in the numerous bloody battles. Wishing to retain the name of such a valiant school, the Kuban government, which took the newly formed school under its care, decided to name it the Kuban-Sofia.

Unfortunately, the young school, with its own combat history, ended up in rather unsuitable hands of the Shcherbovich brothers, one of whom was the school's commander, another was a battalion commander, the third was an artillery teacher and the fourth was still waiting for the chair of history. There were two companies. The School was housed in two different locations, each in private quarters. The physical facilities were small, the equipment extremely poor, teaching aids were next to nil, and all lectures were taught by hand. The students that filled the school – Kuban Cossacks – were excellent in the combat aspects, but had extremely poor general preparation. The average educational level varied between the 4th and 5th grades of secondary school. Added to all that was the politics of the self-styled school, which made for an utterly impossible environment. It was not even known what length of training cadets would have to undergo, hence there was complete randomness in what was taught.

I wound up in the 1st Company under Colonel Putsenko, a former company commander from the Sofia NCO School in Kiev. He was a very nice man and excellent officer, but wrung his hands and said there was nothing he could do.

I had spent three months in the Academy as a training officer, when finally I received the long-awaited news that a Composite Regiment of the Caucasus Grenadier Division was being formed in Tsaritsyn. Gustav wrote to me that there was always a place for me if I wanted it. Then he listed those *Erivantsi* had arrived, those who could arrive, and other news. Tolya received a similar letter.

I left three days later. Fifteen cadets wanted to go with me, but only one of them was allowed, and even that after repeated requests.

## 2nd Grenadier Regiment at Tsaritsyn

1919

At the railway station in Tsaritsyn<sup>7</sup> I met Colonel Granitov from our old regiment, who was already enrolled in the new regiment and was now returning from a mission in Ekaterinodar; we had been on the same train and did not know it.

Tsaritsyn, a large trading city, almost dead at the time, was gradually beginning to come back to life. The Bolsheviks had put their satanic seal on the city and its inhabitants.

When I arrived, the former Composite Grenadier Battalion, which at the time had an extremely unflattering combat reputation, was being transformed into a four regiment division. It was proposed that each of the former grenadier divisions be given a battalion of its name in the corresponding new regiment. Thus, our Composite Regiment of the Caucasian Grenadier Division was to have its first battalion as Erivan, the second as Georgian, and so on.

This did not materialize in practice, as only two regiments were formed: the 1st Composite Grenadier Regiment of the Moscow Grenadiers and our 2nd Composite Grenadier Regiment. They were placed in General Pisarev's 6th Infantry Division.

The 1st Grenadier Regiment had three battalions, while ours only had one, consisting of four companies. Each company in our regiment was named after its regiment, and in size the Erivan was the strongest, followed by the Mingrelians, then the Tiflis and finally the Georgian. The latter did not have a single professional officer in their ranks.

The regiment carried the standard and one of the silver bugles of the Mingrelian Regiment, which had been brought from Tiflis by the Mingrelian officers.

The regiment was staffed as follows: Colonel Pil'berg (Er.) was the regimental commander and Colonel Ivanov (Tif.) was his aide, Staff-Captain Rychkov (Er.) was the regimental adjutant and Staff-Captain Aleksandrov (Geo.) was his assistant, Colonel Kuznetsov (Er.) commanded the Regimental Supply, and Colonel Talishe (Min.) was the Battalion Commander.

The 1st 'Erivan' Company was commanded by Colonel Granitov and his assistant was Staff-Captain Popov. Its officers were Lieutenant Boris Silayev, Lieutenant Bogach, Lieutenant Tsialkovich, Lieutenant Mokhov, Ensign Shatalov and Ensign Goncharov.

The 'Georgian' Company was commanded by Staff-Captain Zasytkin with Ensign Osadchii as his assistant. They had Ensign Abt and Ensign Zhiltsov.

The 'Tiflis' Company was commanded by Lieutenant Rhezakov, and I don't know the other officers' names.

The 'Mingrelian' Company was commanded by Staff-Captain Lepin with 2nd Lieutenant Shakh Nazarov as his assistant. I don't know the other officer.

The Machine-gun Command was led by Lieutenant Bratshau Junior, with Staff-Captain Bratshau Senior assisting. They also had Lieutenant Linkov and Lieutenant Pavlov.

The Communications command was run by Captain Gavrilov (Min.)

At the regiment's headquarters was Lieutenant Bogomolov (Min.) and Staff-Captain Mel'nitskiy.

I found the regiment being formed in a former barracks, called the 'student barracks', located on a height above the Volga. We *Erivantsi* who gathered in that distant and alien Tsaritsyn to form an officer cadre, understood that there were not enough of us: that many more could have been with us but weren't. There were many reasons why.

Some of them, shame on them as always, tried shirk their tasks to others; there were those who during the German War who never managed to take part in any battle. They were typical rear area "pigeon-holers",

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<sup>7</sup> Modern Volgograd.

who should not be given the honorable name of 'Life-Erivan'. Their names are well known to all *Erivantsi*, and I will not take the trouble to list them.

The second group includes those who could not break away from their families or service for material reasons, abandoning their posts. It is a pity they had forgotten the words of the song: "Spare nothing for glory!"

Others, returning from captivity were disoriented, and wandered off so to speak. Thus our valiant Second Lieutenants Zuyev and Dolzhenkov, the first into the 11th Don Regiment, and the second into the Life Guard Grenadier Regiment. Both of them were able to maintain the fame of the regiment there, and of course it was not their fault that they could not find us, and we could not find them.

And, finally, to the last group must be added those who died as heroes at the very beginning of the Civil War, preferring death to shame. We know and will remember the shining names of Captain Boris Gattenberger, Captain Nikolai Chetyrkin, Lieutenant Dmitri Belynskiy and Second Lieutenant Solntsev. We are proud of these names, as well as of the fact that there was not a single *Erivantsi* who make his name as a revolutionary, that there was not a single *Erivantsi* in the Red Army. This showed we were incapable of serving both God and the Devil.

We were few in number, but it is well said that it is quality that counts, not quantity. Indeed, if we take all the commanding officers from the standpoint of their military qualities, the list would turn out to be excellent. And it was no wonder that our four-company regiment, initially 500 and then 400 bayonets, did deeds which would bring honour to the history of any regiment of the old Imperial Army.

Which of the *Erivantsi* did not know the calm, steady, clever and cunning Gustav, who was not afraid of his taunting tongue. That officer took the remains of the Erivan Regiment with honour from the front, took its sacred relic, the standard, and put it in safe hands, believing in the bright future of Russia and in the resurrection of the regiment. Gustav infected the junior officers with this faith, and, showing them the way of faith, liberally and frequently showered it with his own noble blood. Such was the commander.

His assistant, Illarion Ivanovich Ivanov was an officer of the Tiflis Regiment. He was a battle-hardened soldier, shot twice in the chest in the Japanese War. Imperturbable on the battlefield, a highly humane man, with a fine understanding of the psychology of the Russian soldier. His unwitting mistakes were atoned for by his heroic death.

As for the third hero, A.G. Kuznetsov, a man with an extraordinary strength of will and spirit. I am frightened when I think that he may be no longer alive, for on him and on his name I built myself, and still hold my hopes for the future of the Regiment.

I saw Granitov, my company commander, as a combat officer for the first time in the Civil War, just as he did me. And I must admit that if Granitov had been in the regiment from the very beginning of the war, his name would have stood alongside those of Sabel, Pil'berg, Gattenberger, and Khrzhanovski, and the regiment would surely have needed more pages in its history, to make room for a description of that officer's deeds as well.

Recognising that all the other officers of the regiment were valiant and brave, as we shall see, I want to say a few words about the dear and unforgettable Boris Silayev.

We had many men around Boris's age in our regiment, sons or nephews of our former officers, but of them only Boris was a real *Erivantsi*. He felt his young blood boil first, and that pushed him along the untrodden path into the then obscure Volunteer Army. He proudly proclaimed the name of his home regiment during the numerous battles near Armavir, Stavropol, Ingushetia and Manych, which were unknown to us later arrivals, but terrible in their cruelty. His comrades-in-arms, surprised by his fearlessness and the cheerful mood that never left him, would inquire about the regiment that had raised him. He was an avenger from our regiment, who made the Russian people realise, during that particularly terrible period of the Civil War, that an officer is also a man. That he too wants to live like everyone else, and has more right to do so, because he loves his homeland even more conscientiously.

And when the traitors directed the hand of the people to strangle the officers, those like Boris did not let themselves be slaughtered like lambs, but decided to die with a gun in their hands, as befits every brave officer. Chetyrkin and Belynskiy can sleep easy ... they are avenged.

Those were the officers of the regiment. Our grenadiers, both drafted and former Red Army soldiers, did not inspire confidence in us at first sight, and many of them were more sympathetic to the Reds than to us. But even among them there were not only loyal soldiers, but also convinced opponents of the Bolsheviks. Two old Caucasian grenadiers joined us, one ex-Erivan and one ex-Tiflis, both veterans of service.

I must confess that going into our first battle with so many unknown men was quite frightening, but I hoped that after the first battle all the bad and useless would disappear. And indeed, that is what happened. So those were our men.

As for the armament, we had that novelty of the Civil War – machine guns on carriages. We had six, armed with 'Maxim' guns, and we were at least well sorted on that front.

The clothing of the officers and men was quite varied – as befitted true volunteers, you could say. Especially curious was Boris Silayev in striped civilian trousers, puttees, and feet wrapped in cloth strips. Shortly before, the Composite Grenadier Battalion's transport company had been taken by the Reds after some unsuccessful battle, and he lost his uniform. He could not buy a new one as the officers' pay was too little.

At 16:00 on 26 July we started our march from Tsaritsyn to Kamyshin, which we had already occupied. Our first night was in the village of Orlovka, which a month later became the centre of the bloody battles for the possession of Tsaritsyn. We marched along the Volga, passing in turns Erzovka, Pichuga, Dubovka, Peskovatka, Vodyanoe, Proleyka and Balakleya. Finally, on 6 August we reached Kamyshin, where we were met by our division commander, General Pisarev, who later held high posts in the Volunteer and Russian Armies.

Two companies of the Astrakhan Regiment were attached to our regiment in Kamyshin, with their team of scouts, which doubled our strength. In addition, we found out that all the Astrakhan soldiers were volunteers, who fought magnificently against the Reds, out of conscience not fear. If I am not mistaken, those two companies were a remnant of the regiment that just before our arrival heroically perished on the left bank of the Volga. The Astrakhan companies kept their organisation intact and joined our regiment as the 5th and 6th Companies.

We did not linger in Kamyshin and, after only a few hours of sleep, left the town in the direction of the Marienfeld Colony.<sup>8</sup>

I never thought I would meet another old acquaintance while walking across the steppe, but then I saw Colonel Manakin riding with an orderly. I was sincerely glad to see him, and we kissed each other goodbye. I appreciated Colonel Manakin for his amazingly quick appraisal of the situation at the crucial moments in 1917, and his subtle persuasion of the Socialist activists who trusted him. He implemented the principles of revolutionary initiative. No obstacles existed for him when he needed to do something quickly and urgently. It would seem there were no heroic measures which he would not have dared take. He was not well treated in the Volunteer Army. In November 1919 I met him in Rostov where, if I am not mistaken, he was on his way to Admiral Kolchak.

That day we were given the task of holding back the Reds at the outskirts of Baranovka village and not allowing them to cross the Ilovlya River near the same village. The battalion was given a 4 km front. It was a respectable distance.

When the companies left for their sectors, there were just a handful of us left. We positioned platoons, aimed machine guns and started to look around. There was a fight going on up ahead.

We could see our dispersed cavalry lines, retiring, then again going onto the offensive. Cannons were firing. On the right, our improvised armoured train rolled forward and shot into the distance.

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<sup>8</sup> Now Novonikolayevka, 25 km NW of Kamyshin.

It was getting late. The battlefield fell silent. And only the armoured train wouldn't be quiet. From time to time its canon would fire and the explosions would cast silhouettes from nearby trees.

In the morning the battle resumed. Artillery fired more frequently from both sides, the smoke of the shrapnel did not have time to disperse over the cavalry *lavas* before new ones appeared. The fight seemed to be getting closer.

Granitov and I crawled onto the roof of a nearby house; I could see everything as clear as day. Volodya<sup>9</sup> still had his Zeiss binoculars.

After noon the crackling sound of machine-gun fire joined in, and our cavalry *lavas* began to move back. An armoured cannon car appeared on the Reds' side, which decided the outcome of the battle. Our cavalry retired quickly. After galloping back two kilometres it couldn't hold its horses and raced past near us. Some guns and their wagons thundered over the bridge. We did not remain inert and took some measures to stop the panic. The armored car was leading the pursuit.

The situation was serious.

Then General Shchegolev, commander of a horse artillery *divizion*, who was with the retreating units, stopped one of his cannons and personally opened fire at the armoured car, forcing it to retire. The panic immediately subsided and the units began to gather, but the supply trains of our cavalry were, alas, lost.

Riders came up all through the night, asking if we knew if Red units were in the ravine. "Our wagons are stuck there," they explained, forlornly.

In the morning we received an order to move in front of the village; when we had gone through it we were moved deeper into the steppe, without stopping. We marched for a long time, until we approached the village of Oleni, where we spent the night in a field, deployed in rifle lines. In the morning we were taken another five kilometres or so to the right. It was very difficult to orient ourselves without a map, and the maps of the area were very rare, and on top of that not accurate.

The companies were split up into sectors, and once again we *Erivantsi* officers, were left alone. There was no thought of calling for telephones, as the gaps between units were too large. The company dug trenches.

Two Kuban *tachankas* approached us from the right flank and lined up with our trenches without attempting to hide. We stood like that the whole day. In the evening the sky darkened and the rain poured down. It rained the whole night and soaked us to the bone. We waited patiently.

At night the Kuban Cossacks received information from a deserter that the Reds had received reinforcements, a brigade of Don cavalry, and that the entire 28th 'Iron' Division of Comrade Azin, recently arrived from the Kolchak front, was in the nearby village. They were to carry out an attack the next day.

Granitov, who had gone to see Pil'berg, arrived back. The information he brought was not consoling. Everything the Cossacks said was confirmed.

"Apparently an order to retreat will be given," he added.

One hour later, when it began to get light, a firefight started somewhere to the right, but nobody and nothing was visible. The rain stopped. The shooting started getting stronger. Everybody looked at me and Granitov from the trench, as if asking what to do. The Kubans had already left us an hour ago.

But then a runner came up. The order was to leave immediately.

Everybody was in a nervous mood, the pace involuntarily quickened. We walked two kilometres and went down towards a village. We walked along the gardens in the valley floor.

We were all soaking wet. Panic broke out in the village when we approached it, as the carts and artillery were having difficulties getting out along the muddy road.

The Reds had an armoured vehicle with a Hotchkiss cannon, which scattered its small shells here and there, without causing any harm.

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<sup>9</sup> Vladimir, i.e. Granitov.

We were caught up in the ravines for quite a long time.<sup>10</sup> Seeing a suitable hillock, we climbed up it. When we reached the top we could see the whole panorama of the Reds' advance, and everyone's spirits dropped further. An order arrived to leave the high ground and turn left towards a dip between two high hills.

When we reached the designated position, we broke into a chain. The *tachankas* were positioned in the chains adjacent to each company, as was the Civil War tactic.

On the hill from which we had just departed, was our 1st Grenadier Regiment. Farther to the right, *plastuns* were digging in on another hill.

But then it started raining again, it got cold and dark – the clouds were coming in low. I saw a grenadier, in a torn shirt with his body showing through, shivering.

An hour later, the rain stopped, the clouds parted, and pieces of blue sky appeared. Instantaneously the shooting restarted. Dozens of machine guns were firing. The Reds resumed their offensive.

"What will happen to us if we are shelled by artillery while twiddling our thumbs, with no shelter, like sitting ducks," I said to Vladimir.

"Yes, it's a bad situation for us now. But we shall see."

Red lines started to appear. There were so many of them that their first chain alone was twice as thick and as long as our position. Behind it was another and then new ones after that.

Gustav was in the command post of our position, on a high point, and we asked him to tell our 5th Grenadier Battery to open fire. They were not firing for some reason. Meanwhile the Reds were advancing, and their *tachankas* were peppering us. The Reds' artillery was also silent.

Then we saw a horseman with a red banner. The companies open fire. The Reds did not lie down, but kept on coming.

Our artillery started up. One shell hit a *tachanka* and the machine gun was no more. Lieutenant Linkov on the nearest *tachanka* prepared to fire. Lieutenant Pavlov on the right flank *tachanka* was waiting for the command. Then all our machine-guns fired some ranging shots. Then a pause and they shot to kill. The machine-guns mowed down 3 or 4 men in a row, but their morale was strong and they kept coming. They were at 300 paces, then 200. The fire reached its maximum intensity.

Linkov had a jam; he couldn't fix it, and ran over to another machine gun. The carriage slowly climbed the slope; everyone's eyes were fixed on it.

Bullets were hitting the ground around us, we were taking heavy losses. We could see men being wounded, and here and there in the chain men would suddenly jolt and roll over, or remain immobile. They remained where they were.

The first chain of Reds had already gone down into a ravine, which ran parallel to our front. The second chain stopped, kneeled and opened fire. The situation was taking a serious turn. Neither Granitov nor I dared to launch a bayonet attack, as we had no confidence in our men. The initiative was entirely in the hands of the Reds. At the last moment Gustav, who was watching everything and experiencing the same as us, gave the signal to move off. We breathed a sigh of relief. Now we only needed to get out of the gorge. We crossed it safely. The company suffered no losses in the officers, but at least a third of the grenadiers remained in the trenches voluntarily.

Thus began our retreat, which ended only on 23 August, after a fierce battle at the fortified Tsaritsyn position. From that day on we lost faith in our strength, and the Reds pushed us all the time, even without their artillery.

Whenever we approached near the Volga River, when at least a narrow strip of river was within our sight, we were invariably hit by heavy gunfire from the Reds' Volga Flotilla.

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<sup>10</sup> This area of Russia is cut by plentiful deep ravines, *balka*, which are invisible from any distance.



We retreated along the same route that we arrived, and all the drafted grenadiers suddenly disappeared without a trace as we passed their villages. We fought a whole series of battles, and one, on 15 August almost ended in tragedy for us. Occupying our usual positions, we were suddenly attacked just before daybreak, by a landing force of sailors. Both of the machine guns we had with us 'malfunctioned' after the first shots were fired. The Reds were 100 paces from us and charged with a loud "urra!". We ran, followed by their fire for two kilometres. On the way the wounded kept falling, but only those who could keep moving were able to trail after us.

I lost all hope of getting out alive, because I was literally suffocating from the pace. My legs wouldn't obey me. The soul-shattering cries of the wounded men who were left behind followed us.

Boris Silayev, who was walking beside me, suddenly shook and turned pale.

"Tell me, please, am I wounded?" he said, taking off his cap and running his hand over his head.

"No, no. Go on. Give me your rifle," I offered.

Suddenly his eyes widened, and he showed me his cap, with a bullet hole through it. It was truly a miracle: the cap was as flat as a pancake on his head yet he was somehow saved.

But there was a ravine to save us. We went down, out of the bombardment. Our 5th Battery, parked by the road, held back the Reds with a heavy fire. The ambulance carts rolled up and started to take the wounded.

In the evening, sitting by the fire and eating the last of our watermelon, we shared our impressions. Everyone was looking at Boris's cap. He was cheerful and said, smiling.

"I thought that I had become fertilizer for Saratov Province."

In general each of us was dissatisfied with something. Granitov lost his binoculars, which was a major loss in those days; Bogach complained about all the English tinned food and bread distributed late in the previous evening and left for the morning, which we did not get to eat as it all went to the Reds, etc.

It would have been bad about the food if we were not in the realm of beautiful watermelons at the height of the season. Our kitchens had mistakenly delivered our midday meal to the Reds in the first battle, and we were left without a kitchen. Our soldier-cook, who was taken prisoner as a result, told us a hilarious tale about it all. One way or another, we did not see any hot food or meat, and lived off watermelons and bread. English canned meat had been a novelty, and we had no chance to try it. Lieutenant Bogach was inconsolable.

He was quite the character. There were times when no-one had anything, and Bogach would take out his bag.

"An old soldier must have a three-day supply in his bag," he would say, taking out a half a chicken, a leg of a duck or a few eggs and divide them equally amongst everyone.

"How many days did the old soldier have left in his bag?" we laughed. And our hunger would fade.

"Gustav, why do you think the Reds are chasing us all over?" I asked Pil'berg after another failure.

"Because you can't fight. Yes, you can't," he said with typical sarcasm. Then he added seriously: "There are large forces against us. We will stop at Tsaritsyn."

On 22 August we halted to the north of the village of Orlovka, while our cavalry moved to Erzovka village. In the night of 22/23, shooting suddenly broke out in front of us. Units to our left opened fire. Someone was approaching us, and we heard horses stomping. We held our breath and got ready.

"Friends, friends, don't shoot!" voices were heard.

Our battery fired only one shot, and a shell blew up near us. I ordered that the retreating cavalry be allowed to pass through our ranks.

Harassed, exhausted, dirty, unshaven, and in rags we passed through the wire barrier of the Tsaritsyn fortified position on the morning of 23 August 1919, having crossed over 500 km.

The trenches on both sides of the road were full of soldiers in new English uniforms; it was the Saratov Regiment.

"That's where our men all are," joked the remaining grenadiers. "That's all right, brothers. You can work now, and we'll have a little rest," the same voices continued.

Further along the road, we met General B. Zapolski with the 4th Plastun Battalion, which had just arrived from Ukraine.

"What are you doing here?" he said to me. "Where the Hell are you going?"

"We're fighting," I answered on the move. "Well, fight!" he said after me.

We came to Gorodishche village, in a deep hollow, the valley of the Mokraya Mechetka, just downstream from Razgulyayevka station. We stopped near the church. We posted our company in two nearby yards, and the officers took a nap on a stack of straw, waiting for further instructions. An hour or two passed. I remember I was the first to wake up. Artillery was thundering all around, machine-guns could be heard distinctly and rifles were crackling. I woke up Granitov. We listened. Bullets were squealing high in the air. We instantly understood without any words that something was wrong, so we woke everybody else up and ordered them to be ready; but Gustav was already coming towards us. Chains were coming down from the heights above Gorodishche.

"Good Lord, our men are retreating. They couldn't even hold that position!" involuntarily exclaimed several voices.

"It's not us, it's the Reds!" exclaimed even more astonished voices.

And indeed the Reds were bearing down on us. Carts of all sorts were dashing through Gorodishche, horsemen were galloping about, and a young girl staff-clerk appeared from somewhere, begging us to save the divisional staff records. There was confusion everywhere. And in this chaos we distinctly and clearly heard the shots of some of one of our batteries, which was 300 paces behind the church, shooting at the Reds.

Gustav walked ahead of us, and we all followed him in company columns. The Astrakhan companies joined us from neighbouring streets.

Suddenly we saw a group of commanders on the heights near Razgulyayevka station: it was General Pisarev with a part of his staff. Two horse guns were immediately positioned there and opened fire. We stopped and watched a sight of rare beauty, an attack by Colonel Skvortsov with his 4th Kuban Division on the Red infantry heading down to Gorodishche. It seemed to us, looking on from the heights, that horses were climbing a mountain; there were lines of horsemen charging everywhere. The 2nd Caucasian and 2nd Uman Regiments were there. The Reds started some indiscriminate firing. The avalanche of our cavalry *lavas* continued on; sabres glittered here and there in the sun. It was all over very quickly. No longer chains but crowds of prisoners were coming down from the hills.

We were ordered to knock the Reds out from the trenches of the Saratov Regiment, which had surrendered to the Reds as a unit, having killed its officers. The prisoners were led past us; trumpeters were playing; Cossacks were coming down from everywhere, many of them were wiping their swords.

Our four companies were sent to the place where the Saratov highway cuts through the trenches and wire barriers. The Kubans rushed to the artillery factory, where the situation was critical, even causing the appearance of the Army commander, General Wrangel, on the battlefield. He directed his last reserves into action personally. The ability of our high command showed its worth here.

Two shrapnel shells exploded at random, wounding a few grenadiers. We sped up our pace. We came out onto the Saratov highway, moved into dispersed formation and right away met with heavy machine gun fire from the Communists in the trenches. I took the extreme left flank, Granitov the right. Paying no attention to the fire and casualties, we made a headlong movement forward, but met with a strong resistance. The Reds were reinforced by new *tachankas*. We were 100-150 paces away from them when suddenly, unable to withstand the fire, we recoiled. Lieutenant Tsialkovich, pale, staggering, and bloodied

from head to foot, came up to me. He was wounded in the arm and in the chest. I supported him under the arm in order to help him to get away from the fire.

The field was littered densely with the corpses of the attackers, and the rest assembled in the nearest ravine. Brzynski was close by with his company wagon. I immediately handed over Tsialkovich and turned back.

At that critical moment, the two companies of Astrakhans in two beautiful lines, led by the assistant division commander, the brave Colonel Ikishev, came to our aid. Everyone rallied, Granitov gave the command, and we all moved forward again. This time there was a general *mêlée*. Lieutenant Bogach, of huge height and strength, bayoneted three sailors. The Reds were beaten and turned to flee. Now the field was even more densely covered with dead bodies. The Red *tachankas* were captured.

Among the bodies we found some Chinese, seamen from the *Andrei Pervozvanni*, men from the submarine *Nerpa* and a Red Cross sister. A brigade from the Native Division<sup>11</sup> was sent to pursue them. On the way they sabred two of our machine gunners, and the unfortunately men were on just saved in time.

Although the situation had been restored, it was still indecisive. Everything was so mixed up and confused, that it was impossible to make sense of it in the darkness. In the morning we began to sort things out and regather. The Saratov Regiment's training unit was sent to us with two officers, whose names, to my great regret, I do not remember. Both of them, and especially the lieutenant in command, were noted for their courage and imperturbable calmness.

When we took the roll-call of the four companies, there were only 60 of us left, with three machine guns. Colonel Granitov took command as battalion commander of the mixed detachment: the *Saratovtsi*, our remnants and the *Astrakhantsi*

We looked around and saw that we were occupying a semicircular trench. There was a gap of a kilometre to the right, where the plastuns were entrenched near the French artillery factory. To the left, the trenches of the 1st Grenadier Regiment were eight hundred paces away. Our trenches were very poorly sited. To the wire fence was no more than 30 paces, and then started a steep descent into the valley of the Mokrovaya Mekhetka river, so that attackers were visible only when they came right up to the wire fence.

On both flanks we placed a company of the Astrakhan troops and in the centre we and the remnants of Saratov troops were stationed.

The battle started at 9 a.m. on 24 August, with the Reds firing heavy artillery from their boats at our whole position. The Reds' field artillery fired shrapnel. Our trenches were dug into the soft sandy ground, which was not a serious protection against the 6-inch guns; we were rescued only by the fact that we didn't occupy the whole line, but in groups of 6-10 men. During that day our trenches were hit by over ten heavy and ten light shells, but we suffered few casualties.

The infantry combat started when Red sailors attacked the plastuns at the artillery factory, from which they were thrown out. Then an attack was made against our 1st General Grenadier Regiment and to the left as far as the earth ramparts. We were not harmed for some reason, although our observers standing on the trench's ledge could see several thick chains facing us down the slope. At noon the battle reached its climax. Finally, we saw that our neighbors on our left were also retreating. So our flanks were hanging in the air.

At this time, an artillery officer from a howitzer battery behind up came up to our company. When he learned that the enemy were massing against us in the valley, he suggested that he bombard them. It was frightful to sit in the trenches as one after another the shells thundered over my head, feeling like at any minute one night land and wipe me off the face of the earth. I involuntarily recollected the episode with my hand, but there was nothing I could do about it. The artillery fire was very effective, which we learned the next day. The shells fell right among the Reds and they lost their nerve.

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<sup>11</sup> More properly called the Composite Mountain Division at the time. They were recruited from the Caucasian mountain tribes (Ingush, Chechen, Karbadian, Dagestani etc) and were largely Muslim. The Tsarist version of the unit while formally the 'Native Division' was frequently referred to as the 'Savage Division'.

However, the situation was becoming more and more critical as time passed. We could not see the plastuns any more; the shooting went on, but out of our sight. Suddenly, our artillery to the left of our grenadiers opened a very heavy fire and the 1st Regiment counter-attacked, and soon not only regained the situation, but also pursued the fleeing Reds with fire.

By nightfall our left flank was secure.

The night passed uneasily. Granitov was worried about the gaps on our flanks, and I suggested that if we were outflanked we should form a circle, because the terrain of the place allowed us to do so without any obstacles and still keeping fire on all sides.

When I said this to the officers, Boris Silayev came up.

"Well, aren't we staying here to fertilize Saratov Province?" he said, and made a comical grimace. Everyone laughed.

At dawn powerful cries of "urra" near the French factory worried us. We heard the shouting grow, and the noise of rifles grew heavier. A telephone message soon told us that the situation had been restored on our right flank as well.

In the morning the battle resumed. The Reds led an attack along the whole front. Our sector faced the Soviets' 258th and 259th Rifle Regiments. The sentries let me know that the enemy chains were coming. I stood on the parapet and first on the right, then against our sector I saw chains rising fast. Everybody got prepared. The Reds started to rise up in front of us here and there along the wire; we opened a murderous fire.

There was a moment when we seemed to be on the verge of failing, as the Reds stood along the wire in a solid wall and hand grenades flew at us. Some Communist on horseback rode up to the wire. "Boris!" I shouted, "shoot him!" and pointed to the mounted man.

Boris Silayev's eyes gleamed with excitement, he took aim, and the rider fell off the horse. There was an unimaginable din, at times drowned out by the "urra" of another Red wave. The machine guns' bullets were digging into the ground near the wire, raising up clouds of sand, so that the attackers were in a kind of fog. Then the Reds wavered and disappeared the same way they had come. Some grenadiers, flush with victory, jumped out of the trench and rushed to the wire. "Stay back!" I shouted with all my might; the Reds fired a round of shrapnel, and three men remained lying near the wire, pierced by dozens of fragments.

The fight calmed down, but the Reds were lying down below the wire, and we could hear their commander distinctly say: "company – fire! Company – fire!" But the bullets sailed overhead and didn't cause us any harm.

I felt anguish, and a heaviness in my heart. So many sacrifices, so much valour was shown on both sides, but for what? In the name of what progress? None. We were going to fall back, destroying our power with our own hands. If only we had been able at the start of the revolution to show how it would lead to a war of such ferocity. A war where Russians fought Russians, so fiercely, and with so much bloodshed. People would have realised how much shorter and cheaper the path to peace would be by continuing to fight the Germans; rather than the immediate slogan "for peace and bread". And the war would have been won back in 1917.

Everyone had been resolutely afraid of this, even our allies, especially the British. The Germans never lost hope of defeating their enemies once Russia was removed. Our revolutionary circles feared an increase in the prestige for the Tsar and the Monarchy after winning such an extraordinary campaign. And all of them made a concerted effort to ensure that victory would not come at any cost. And so Russian power perished in internecine struggle, to the laughter of all Europe, which sneered at our simplicity. 'What a horror,' I kept repeating in my mind

But below the wire, a loud voice kept up the cry of "Company – fire! Company – fire!" Apparently some commander was zealous to please his commissar.

Night fell. A beautiful moonlit night, slightly cold.

The Reds kept shooting at us, which got on our nerves. I wanted to rest, for I was as tight as a drum, and my heart was beating so hard in my chest that I was sure others could hear it. Below the wire, someone was begging for help in a soul-crushing voice. He used all the names he once held dear.

"Crawl to us! "We won't come to you," our people shouted to him.

"I can't," came the groans.

The wire was under Red fire and there was no need to risk any more lives.

"Let me get the wounded man, his pleas are starting to really wind me up", said Warrant Officer Abt, coming up to me.

"Where are you going?" I tried to talk him out of it.

Shouts and sobs kept coming.

"Well, changed your mind?", I asked Abt, half an hour later.

"No, I'll be right back."

After five minutes, God knows how, the wounded man was brought in. He had been shot in the abdomen and his spine seemed to have been nicked, as he could not move his legs. I ordered him to be bandaged. He was crying, trying to hold my hand.

Volodya summoned me to himself to read the order he had just received.

"Well, hello. The tanks have arrived," he greeted me.

We were ordered to attack the next morning. The tanks would attack from Razgulyayevka station via Gorodishche in the direction of Orlovka. Babiev's cavalry and the 4th Kuban Division were given the task of pursuing. We were to attack directly in front of us upon receiving the signal.

So, the next day we would see the magical tanks in action. Everyone was cheered up. The night passed in nervous anticipation for this decisive battle rather than sleep.

Hardly had the first rays of dawn appeared than off to our left machine guns clattered rapidly and then artillery boomed. The battle grew hotter and was getting closer to us. Suddenly, a miracle. The whole countryside facing the 1st Regiment was covered with fleeing soldiers. The 4th Kuban Division had dashed along the Saratov road, cutting off the retreating Reds. The Kuban knights fanned out, swords gleaming ...

"Forward!" commanded Granitov, who had suddenly appeared and he crawled through the wire.

Others helped him to throw down the stakes. We descended from the wire ... right on top of the Reds.

"Stop, stop, we will shoot!" shouted the grenadiers.

Some of the Reds stopped, some of them ran away. Single shots were fired at those who fled.

"They won't get far, our cavalry will see to that."

Our cavalry was indeed already ahead of them, none were able to get away.

Gustav appeared on horseback, accompanied by an attendant. Looking at the Red Army soldiers scattered all over the terrain, he said only, "too few", and rode on. I went up to one of the dead. It was the one who had ridden up to the wire on horseback. He was young, with long red hair, dressed in officer's trousers, with a sword, covered in red ribbons. Four hand grenades hung on his red belt. A bullet had lodged in his skull, and the dried blood made his face even redder. Apparently he was one of the Reds' senior commanders.

We moved forward, searching all the numerous ravines, picking up any hiding Reds. After making a long loop of many kilometres and passing through Bolshoi Yar in dispersed order, we came to the Saratov highway. Boris lined up our captives, about 100 of them. We saw a car driving fast out of Tsaritsyn. I recognized generals Wrangel and Shatilov.

"These are the grenadiers?" Wrangel asked me.

"Indeed, Your Excellency," I replied.

"Thank you for your good work!" he shouted to the men in and raced on.

The Cossacks passed us with 13 guns they had taken.

The victory was total. The defeat of the Soviet 28th 'Iron' Division was decisive.

When the captives were lined up, I asked them whether any among them wanted to enter our ranks. Two Tatars from Ufa were the first. It turned out they were Communists, which did not prevent them from being faithful soldiers. After thinking a bit, one Russian, Motkov, followed them. Those who expressed their desire to fight by our side were given rifles, while the others were sent to the rear. Our grenadiers were especially pleased that all the English garments the Saratov regiment had been wearing were given to us. The Reds were afraid that they would be recognised as Saratov traitors from their uniforms and had thrown them all away. The route of the retreat was covered with overcoats and other English clothing. Some grenadiers managed to take four overcoats.

Our badly deteriorated regiment was ordered to return to Gorodishche. The cavalry was sent ahead, and we were given a well-deserved rest.

We arrived at Gorodishche late at night and settled into our quarters. In the morning we ceremonially buried the dead of our company, including Warrant Officer Zhiltsov, who was killed a minute before the Reds' general retreat.

On the fourth day of rest, Colonel Granitov fell ill. From the signs it was obvious that he had typhus. There was no need to think for long – a medical team was summoned and Gustav was informed. Volodya arrived just as Gustav was about to sit in the ambulance cart. After a few best wishes, they started to say their goodbyes.

"You know what, Gustav, take my gun, you don't have a revolver, you'll need it," said Volodya, handing Pil'berg his gun; the latter took it automatically.

"Now it's your turn to look after the company," said Gustav, turning to me. He left for the rear, taking the revolver with him.

So I took command of a company of 25 grenadiers.

Everyone's mood was much better after the rest. Every day, after evening prayer, I spoke with the Grenadiers about current events, and then we sat in a circle and learned regimental songs. Three days later, Gustav was astonished at how well the company was singing. Even the divisional commander, Major-General Chichinadze, an old Caucasian rifleman, came to listen to the songs. Though we were few in number, I had seen every man in action and knew that they would not fail us. The guarantee of that was the fact that everyone was cheerfully looking straight into my eyes.

Lieutenant Bogach, who had been sent to Tsaritsyn, brought back three of our deserters with him. The division commander ordered that two of them be given 15 lashes and one 20 lashes. The grenadiers did not want to flog them, no matter how much they had done wrong – but it was necessary to execute the order. At that time platoon officers whipped the guilty, to avoid giving offence. They were flogged properly, without drawing blood.

On 7 September, when I went to see Gustav, I found him lying on his bed. The next morning, he was evacuated, still ill with typhus. Colonel Ivanov took command of the regiment. The ranks started to fill out. On the 8th, at noon, we received worrying information about the Reds' impending offensive, after they had received large reinforcements.

We now had a completely different sector from Gryaznaya Balka to the Zemlyany valley. Colonel Ivanov called me in for a meal.



"You know, Kote,<sup>12</sup> I am going to give you three shots of vodka. Drink up, as you should. Then take the whole battalion and go to our sector. I will send you some wire and stakes. You need to divide the companies into sections yourself. During the night you will stay at the site, as a garrison."

"Understood. Right," I replied.

"Well, then, get going."

During two days of work we added one row of wire along the front, dug communication passages in the necessary places, put in light dugouts. On the third day we rested, while artillerymen came up to our unit to check out the position; everything was ready. Also on that day, the regimental staff moved to a dugout 400 paces from the trenches and linked all the companies by telephone. Eight Maxim machine guns and five Lewis machine guns were in place. We were ready to start.

The same day, 1 September, Captain Vashchanin came to our regiment. A career officer, very hard-working and brave. He had only one finger on his right arm. In addition, he had several very serious wounds from both wars. He was left temporarily at headquarters, as there were sufficient officers in the ranks.

The information about the Reds proved to be correct, which was borne out by the approaching sound of artillery. At three o'clock in the afternoon you could already see shrapnel landing a kilometre ahead of our position. This time we were not afraid of anything. Our company was reinforced with men from an junior officer school and we had 62 bayonets in our ranks. My company officers were Lieutenant Silayev, Lieutenant Bogach, Lieutenant Mokhov and Warrant Officer Shatalov.

I remember that we were all sitting on the parapet and eating pumpkin soup, which Brzhinski had just brought up. Suddenly I was called to the regiment's headquarters. There was an order to launch a counter-offensive and to repel the attackers.

"What a thing! After we spent all that time fortifying the position," everyone exclaimed. We were all highly annoyed.

We were ordered to go on the offensive once we receiving the appropriate message, waiting while the two Astrakhan companies could turn a flank. The companies came down from the trenches in double ranks and moved along Griaznaya Balka gully. During this I received an order to take over the battalion and lead it, in place of Lieutenant Colonel Talishe. This made no difference to me, as in fact the whole battalion was only a company strength. Before leaving the gully, I went up to have a look around. Ahead of us was a small elongated hillock about a kilometre long, which crossed our path. There was a fight going on behind it, but nothing was visible.

Heading towards the hill, the companies scattered into chains on the move. The sun was setting, so our silhouettes, if you looked from the enemy's side, were outlined on the background of the sky. A skirmish was taking place two kilometres ahead, but I was unable to determine which were our men and which were the Reds.

Two cannons from a Red battery shot at us, but unsuccessfully. Some of the companies are moving over ploughed ground, the other part was moving on land that had been left fallow. The two *tachankas* with machine guns were close to me, and the 1st Company in a good line was behind me. To the right of that company was the 4th, to the left the 2nd, and finally the 3rd. The Astrakhan companies were not yet visible. A Cossack rode towards us.

"Who is your commander?" the Cossack asked me.

"Me".

"Our 8th Battalion can't advance, the Reds have pushed back our left flank", he reported. "Our commander asked you to support him."

"Where does your left flank end?", I asked, without slowing down my pace.

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<sup>12</sup> Kote is a diminutive of Constantine in Georgian, quite common in the Caucasus.



"That's our *tachanka* over there", he pointed.

I did indeed see a *tachanka*, but nothing else was visible.

The fire was getting heavier. We headed that way with no issues, we did not have to modify anything. The companies were moving at a calm pace. As we reached the indicated *tachanka* I ordered all our *tachankas* to move forward and open fire. The two by me galloped off, and one of them immediately rolled over. The second one opened fire. Our *tachankas* opened fire from the left as well.

We were moving forward irresistibly, suffering heavy losses. The Reds' fire was literally mowing down our lines. Twice when I looked back, I saw four or five people fall at once, silently, without a moan.

I heard Bogach's voice calling me, and I looked back – he was lying on the ground.

"I am badly wounded", he said, "Give all my money and things to my wife at ..."

There was no time to lose, so I left him, ran forward in front of the remnants of the chain. There were 50 paces between the Reds and us.

"Urra!", I shouted, drawing my Mauser.

"Urra!" echoed across the line.

After a short battle the position was taken. The Reds fled. We pursued them with heavy fire.

It was getting dark. I approached Bogach; he was unconscious and in agony. Three men tried to lift him, but couldn't, and he died in our arms. The bullet had hit him in the groin and severed his artery; it had not been even 15 minutes since he was shot.

I went up to the regiment's commander, Colonel Ivanov, and reported to him on the capture of the Reds' position.

"What terrible losses," he literally groaned. "I saw Boris Silayev hit, wounded in the stomach."

"What? Boris too," I whispered, "that's hideous."

"You know, Kote, I'm on my third campaign, but I've never experienced such terrible fire. How did you make it? My nerves couldn't stand it this time, I lay down," Illarion Ivanovich confessed, and patted me amicably on the shoulder.

"Surrender the battalion to Vashchanin and go, rest and bury the dead."

Our volunteer medical orderly Mitya could not cope with the number of wounded that day – they were carried in from all over. Most of them were seriously wounded.

Bogach's body was placed on a *tachanka*.

I sat beside him and we moved off. We had not gone more than 100 metres when a weak voice came out of a ditch.

"Take me, there was no one to carry me."

I gave an order to stop and lift up the wounded man. It turned out to be Lieutenant Shakh-Nazarov, badly wounded in the chest. His face was massively swollen, twice normal size. The unfortunate man was still trying to speak and regretting that he was unable to continue to fight.

In Gorodishche, where we arrived, a dressing station was set up in a house opposite the church. Four large rooms were full of the wounded. There lay Boris, and beside him Motkov, the Red we had taken prisoner, also wounded in the stomach like Boris. Boris was conscious and asked for a lemon. The Doctor would not allow him to be touched or moved.

There was desperate moaning in the rooms. Mokhov was lying in the next room with a fractured hip while the Doctor was bandaging Shakh-Nazarov. Lieutenant Goncharov was lying here, also seriously wounded. I looked around and saw my whole company. I was in anguish ... what would happen next. Who would I have to continue to fight, arose involuntarily in my mind.

Our units continued their advance next morning and took Erzovka, suffering relatively small losses.

I went to the dressing station at dawn, and with a sinking heart opened the door to Boris's room. Boris was alive, and his neighbors were also alive. The wounded were to be loaded for shipment to the rear. Wagons were coming up one by one. Two seriously wounded were placed in each of them, filled to the brim with straw.

Boris was placed by himself. His rifle, which he had not let go of when he was wounded, was placed next to him; he did not want to part with it now, either. He had spent the entire campaign with it, it had already been soaked in his blood once at Manych, and naturally he treasured it. I said a touching farewell to Boris, with tears choking me – I had grown attached to that young man.

As the sad procession was passing by, the grenadiers were digging a mass grave in the church yard. The pickaxes dug into the rocky ground with difficulty.

I went to the company's quarters. Bogach was being washed there, and six coffins were being made for fallen grenadiers. We still could not find two bodies that had been left on the field, and a wagon was sent to pick them up. A funeral was said after dinner. The village church was full of people. Most of those present wept, while others, including myself, could not suppress their anger.

The next day, late in the evening, the remnants of the 1st Erivan Company, numbering 18 people, marched into the village of Orlovka, where our regiment was stationed, singing:

“We Erivantsi are numerous,  
The dead and the living” ...

The grenadiers had asked to sing that song themselves.

And as if to confirm these words, after dinner the next day a cart pulled up to the front porch of the regiment's headquarters, where Colonel Kuznetsov and Tolya Poboyevski were sitting. They brought glad tidings that Silayev was alive and had asked to send his regards to everybody. Meanwhile, we had heard that he was dead and were preparing to hold a memorial service in our house for him.

Tolya took over the 1st Company, and I was appointed battalion commander. The unfortunate Tolya arrived at the regiment heartbroken. He wanted to share his thoughts, as he was apparently being crushed by them. We moved out into the field, to where our outposts were located. I had guessed what he was going to talk about, but nonetheless I involuntarily burst out with a cry of surprise several times in his story.

Unsuccessful love is a hard thing to take, I thought to myself, as I made an excursion into my not-too-distant past. How maddeningly hard are the first days of losing an imaginary ideal, how one desires oblivion and death, and how time and logic later heal this seemingly fatal illness.

We were walking in the field where the battle had been fought two days previously; I soon found the place where Bogach fell. I could see his blood. And there was the ditch which served as a trench for the Bolsheviks. You could not have found a better one, it was naturally camouflaged. The machine gun locations were clearly marked with huge piles of shell casings. Swollen and blackened corpses of Red Army soldiers lay everywhere.

“What a landscape,” said Tolya. “You can shoot up to two kilometres, and even lying down there's no cover anywhere.”

In the evening we were transferred from Orlovka to Gorodishche.

Tolya and I had received an invitation from the commander of the Plastun Brigade, General Vsevolod Zapolskiy, to come to his place for dinner. He was Tolya's friend and distant relative. A few days later we took advantage of the invitation and rode to the Plastun Brigade headquarters in Orlovka. The few hours we spent there was unforgettable. There was a Cossack choir, and one song in particular touched my soul.

But we did not stay long, as we received news that the Reds had gone on the offensive. When we arrived at the regiment it was already dark. All the battalion officers were already in bed, as we felt that action would happen soon. I was awakened at one o'clock in the morning with an order to attack the enemy advancing towards Tsaritsyn, at daybreak. According to reports, enemy units were already approaching Orlovka.



By dawn of 27 September we were already approaching Orlovka. Our 5th Grenadier Battery, of Colonel Fichner, was accompanying us. Having taken our initial positions for the attack, we lay low.

A shell fragment hit our favorite student, the medical orderly Mitya, and all officers rushed to him. He was wounded in the head, the bruise is strong, but the wound itself was not serious. "A ringing in the ears," he explained.

A group of mounted men showed up. I recognised General Zapolskiy and went across to him.

"Yesterday you and Tolya were bragging about supporting my plastuns, so I came to have a look at you."

"Perfect, we'll be moving soon", I replied.

A regiment of Kuban cavalry was positioned out of sight behind us, in a ravine.

"Well, Kote, have you got everything ready?" asked Ivanov, coming over, and receiving an affirmative answer, he said: "Lead the way."

"Stand up!", I commanded.

By bad luck, four shells exploded just then around us, and the grenadiers pressed themselves even harder against the ground instead of rising.

"Gentlemen officers," I raised my voice, "don't make me repeat commands."

"Stand up," repeated Tolya.

"Get up," shouted little Ensign Shatalov.

"Get up! Get up!" came from the left flank. It was not an easy thing to achieve.

"Forward, aligned with the 1st Company!" I commanded, placing myself in front. "First platoon head towards that lone tree"

"Follow the first unit," commands were heard.

"Don't bunch up, spread out," the sergeant-major encouraged.

Heavy breathing could be heard and the beating of hearts seemed to be audible. We moved forward in two long lines. I marched beside Tolya on the right flank of the first company. The Reds' four-gun battery, in a semi-hidden position, sent us round after round, trying to straddle our position. We increased our pace.

"Run!", I commanded, when I saw a deep ravine crossing our way. A shell passed close above our heads and hit our second chain.

Pieces of bloody flesh landed around us. Former Lieutenant N., who had been demoted to the rank and file for serving with the Reds, was the one blown up. Tolya walked with his rifle behind his neck, holding it like a yoke. His thoughts were elsewhere. And maybe death was a desirable end for him at that moment.

We went down safely the ravine and exited without stopping. Our chains were clearly visible across the terrain. Success was secured.

"Well, push on!" said a voice behind us.

The rifle and machine gun fire didn't do us any harm. The Reds were firing badly that day. Suddenly it stopped, when we were 400 paces from their trenches. Some individual figures jumped out of them and ran off. Our Lewis machine gunners opened fire on them. We were close to the trenches. About a hundred men came out, throwing down their rifles. All of them had their hands in the air and were clearly afraid.

"We were conscripted. We have just returned from German captivity", they insisted. "We don't want to fight you. We shot into the air, not at you."

The declarations were entirely believable.

"Which of you want to come with us?"

"I want to," said a gaunt little peasant from Chernigov province, confidently. He was given a rifle.

The others said that they had been captive for three or four years and did not want to fight.

“And you think that we want to fight our own people?” I reassured them.

But my argument did not help, and I had no time to persuade them. The captives were taken away by Grandpa Mel’nitskiy, who had followed behind the second chain, and led to the rear. It was not the practice in our regiment to remove clothing or personal belongings, as this was strictly punished.

We moved forward again, passing by two bodies of commissars.

The village of Erzovka opened up in front of us. The first company, and I with it, walked down the main street, which stretched for at least a kilometre.

After passing through roughly half of the village, we came across a cart which had plaintive wails coming from it. I went over to take a look. A wounded young Red Army man was lying in the cart. He stared at me with pleading eyes, and repeated with stiffened lips, tears rolling down his dusty cheeks.

“Your Honour, why am I dying, I want to live. Why?”.

I did not know what to say to him, and I stepped back confused.

We stopped at the edge of the village, by two windmills. They bore numerous shrapnel marks, witnessing the battle that had taken place here on 11 September. I climbed one to look around. The view from the mill was magnificent because, apart from being quite tall, it was on a commanding point above the village.

What I saw made me take up battle formation again. I could see lines of sailors disembarking from the Volga, accompanied by a dozen machine-guns.

Near the other mill Lieutenant Bratshau was hurriedly preparing his machine guns for action. Our four *tachankas* were just waiting for the target to appear. Two companies were positioned behind a low stone fence, two of them were in a large depression. I informed headquarters of the Red counter-attack.

They were the first to open fire. Bullets arrived in swarms, splintering the boards of the mill, near where I was now standing. Bratshau Senior, a brave and calm officer, gave the signal, and first four and then six of our machine guns opened fire. Bratshau Junior, who was at a machine gun, was immediately wounded and moved to a ditch, where he was bandaged. The water in the machine gun casings was boiling and steaming. Despite that, the sailors came closer.

Suddenly six open-top light cars with machine guns drove up to our position on the road from Erzovka. Without waiting for instructions, all six lined up and opened fire. Never before in my life had I witnessed 12 machine guns firing along such a short stretch; we no longer heard any whistling of bullets or voices. The enemy’s chains dispersed, and we did not see them again.

In the evening we left Erzovka and moved forward across country in the direction of the height marked 471 on the map, on the line of the Pichuzhinskiy<sup>13</sup> farms. We spent the night on those heights in old, but excellently positioned trenches on dominating terrain. In the morning we could see a dozen kilometres ahead from our trenches. But, on the other hand, we could be clearly seen from the Volga.

The day began like this: a group of our officers, led by the regiment’s commander, Colonel Ivanov, were standing with the two battery commanders – one light and one howitzer. They were arguing about something, joking. Our batteries were right there in a dip. Someone noticed that a group of mounted horsemen were approaching from the heights in front of us.

When there was no doubt that they were Reds, estimated at half a squadron, it was decided to let them descend to the flat. The howitzer battery commander disappeared for a minute. Suddenly the first shot rang out. The shell landed successfully, but the Reds did not pay attention to it and continued moving forward. Then the whole battery started, and we were treated to a rare spectacle. The horsemen were hidden by a cloud of dust, and shells exploded with formidable black columns of dirt and smoke here and there between them. Maddened horses that had lost their riders dashed in all directions. The sight disappeared, as a more impressive one began. The whole steep and high bank of the Pichuga River was

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<sup>13</sup> Modern Pichuga.

suddenly covered with people. As far as the eye could see, one could see rows of dense chains accompanied by an endless number of *tachankas*. I counted forty and gave up counting, as more and more arrived.

On our right, a couple of hundred metres away, an observation post of some Kuban Cossack battery was positioned. Then all our batteries opened fire. We were only spectators in that terrible struggle for the Reds. Only artillery did anything. The Reds lay down, got up, got all muddled up, then retired, and our artillery continued with its devastating fire.

It was hard to say whether we should rejoice, or weep? After all, it was Russians who were being killed.

The Reds did not remain inactive either, and their ship's artillery constantly tried to help their attacking units. Our gunners took all the casualties on that day. We, we only got a fright: a shell hit one of our *tachankas*, only to not explode.

During the night we were ordered to move even more to the left and halt on 'Hill 471'. Autumn rain was drizzling; the morning was so foggy, that we could barely see 20 paces.

It turned out that the division headquarters was also located there. For a ten kilometre radius, there were no lodgings. A Cossack from the division arrived with a report. Companies huddled near stacks of straw.

Suddenly the regiment's commander called me up.

"The Chief of Staff has discovered that you are in the wrong place. You have to go in that direction," he pointed (I had no map), "and stop at the crossroads."

"Is there a crossroads there?" I asked him as I prepared to leave.

"According to the divisional HQ," said Illarion Ivanovich and, after a moment's hesitation, added: "Don't all go, it will be enough to send one company. Send Poboyevski. Let him take two cavalymen for the reports."

"Tolya, get ready," I said, repeating the order I had just received.

Tolya, silently, listened and stood up. The company was all there.

"How many have you got? Is that all of them?"

"I only have 25 men," said Tolya, and soon disappeared into the fog.

Half an hour passed. Several shots were heard from the direction Tolya had gone. I paid no attention to them; the same amount of time passed, and the rain intensified.

I climbed onto the spot where Tolya had been sitting, and automatically looked in the direction where he had gone. The silhouette of a horse loomed out of the fog, with a man was walking beside it. I noticed then that a figure was slung over the saddle, and the man beside it was holding the leg.

"They're bringing in a wounded man," someone said.

The horse drew beside me. The wounded man's face was drenched with blood.

"Call the doctor," I shouted.

The wounded man was taken down and laid on spread straw covered with tent cloth. The doctor came up and started to examine the wound. The bullet had hit his forehead and gone out below his left temple.

While this was happening, I saw my own shoulder straps on the wounded man's overcoat – which I had given to Tolya. I looked more closely into the wounded man's face, and only then did I recognize him. My heart ached with pain and bitterness. He, too, was gone ... and my legs felt like jelly. For two minutes, I could not utter a word. The news of Tolya's wound spread. Everyone came to express their sympathy, taking off their caps as they approached.

"He may still survive", the Doctor assured us, "I will send him back now".

But I was afraid to think about it. 30 km of terrible road in a cart would rattle the brains even in a healthy head. There was no doubt in my mind about the sad outcome ... it was the end for him.



It turned out that when the company had gone a kilometre or two the way was blocked by a deep ravine, which the Saratov province abounds in. Just as the unit was descending it, a volley came from some bushes on the opposite side, followed by a second one.

The second volley hit Tolya. The company at first scattered, but then recovered itself, and carried Tolya's body out. A five-man detachment was left behind, hidden in bushes.

Many fruitless attempts were made by mutual friends, Tolya's sister and me to locate his whereabouts after that. Finally, when I was wounded several weeks later and happened to be in the same sanitary train as he had been, I was told that Tolya had had a trepan, after which he seemed to feel better.

Finally, much later, it was found out that he was taken to Ekaterinodar, where he died on 8 October in the hospital at the Commercial School. All of his belongings were found and were given to his sister, but his grave could not be located despite all our efforts. All that was known was that Staff Captain Poboyevski was buried at the officers' cemetery in Ekaterinodar No. 1. He died without regaining consciousness.

At noon, when the fog cleared a little, the enemy tried to attack nervously, but was immediately repulsed by our artillery. We stood at that memorable place for three days. It got colder. My arm was beginning to torment me more and more every day, but the *denouement* was coming.



## Composite Regiment of the Caucasian Grenadier Division

1919

On the evening of 1 October 1st we were relieved by the cavalry and returned to Erzovka. The companies were restructured there and our regiment changed its name, becoming the 'Composite Regiment of the Caucasus Grenadier Division'. The Saratov and two Astrakhan companies, previously independent, were placed into the two battalions; I commanded the first, and the second was commanded by newly arrived Colonel Gofet, of the Tiflis Regiment. I had two companies labelled Erivan and two called Georgian, and he had two companies called Tiflis and two called Mingrelian.

During those days we received some English uniforms and equipment, so the companies were properly dressed and looked decent. But this idyll lasted only three days.

At midnight of 3/4 October we received an order to destroy the Reds in Dubovka, which was to be followed by an ill-defined task. We were to keep contact between the plastuns and the 1st Regiment, who were to attack. The goal of the action was the notorious Hill 471. We got up very early, then waited for a long time in formation.

Finally we set off. We walked along the course of the Sukhoy Mechetka river for a long time, then climbed its left bank and halted. Our 5th Grenadier Battery of Colonel Fichner was stationed there. We moved on together. Soon we approached the starting point. It was about 10 o'clock in the morning. There was a strong fighting to our left. Reds were hitting some haystacks with shrapnel. Our men were advancing, it seemed. The 1st Regiment also took its starting positions. The Plastuns could not be seen. I walked forward to survey the area ahead with the battery commander.

The Reds spotted the movement of the 1st Regiment and opened fire from two batteries with HE. One of the batteries of the Reds was only half hidden and their blast could be seen distinctly every time. Their shells also hit our sector.

The first regiment stood up and marched to the attack. It started heading left and ended up disappearing from view.

"What do we do now?" I said to Illarion Ivanovich. "We will not accomplish our mission. We need to move forward, or we will just suffer losses for nothing."

Colonel Ivanov hesitated, not knowing what to do.

"Well, lead on," he said, with a heavy sigh. "The second battalion will follow you".

Our battery took up a position. I gave the necessary orders. I had a total of 214 bayonets in the battalion.

Having given the orders, I gave the command to attack. As soon as we stood up, we were hit by shrapnel. This time the Reds' artillery was firing surprisingly accurately, and we continued to take casualties from it. On the move I requested one liaison man from each company. Two came from the Georgians. At first I moved in the middle of the battlefield, but the fire was so strong that the units accelerated their pace, separating further and further apart. My voice could no longer carry far enough. The bullets were buzzing in swarms. I gave the command to run, but it made things even worse. The two Erivan companies raced to the right, and I had no strength to stop them. I went with the Georgians.

A huge ravine cut our path. We went across it without even breaking our line, without resting. Our *tachankas* could not cross it and tried to go around it. When they failed, they opened up fire from the flanks. We could already see individuals scurrying along the Red trenches at the Reds, which made it easier for us to get the range. But there was another big ravine. This time we went down at a walk. Our ranks were terribly broken up. There were no more than 50 men with me. Death was hovering over the edges of the ravine, bullets were raining down. It felt like the first one who stuck his head out of the ravine would be decapitated. 'It was my job... I thought, and went up to the top. The Reds were close.

"Come on, run!" I shouted, and rushed forward. The men zealously tried to overtake me.

There were only 60 or 70 paces left. I drew my beautiful Mauser while on the run. I wanted to shout “urra” but stumbled and fell. A bullet had shattered the fibula in my right leg, just above the ankle. No more than 15 men went past me.

“The battalion commander is wounded,” exclaimed the young runners, and they both lay down beside me.

One or two more times while lying there, the Red machine-gunner aimed over our heads ... Those were hard seconds, death touched me with its wing, such coldness ... And then it moved on! Several Communists jumped out to meet our Grenadiers, but a former horseman of Her Majesty’s Lancer Regiment, now a volunteer with the Georgian Company, pierced the first one with his bayonet. Staff-captain Mikhnevich shot another, and our men finished off the rest. A short, but remarkably decisive attack ended in complete victory. No one escaped. Forty-six captives and four machine guns were taken – they had kept firing until the last moment.

When the captives saw me lying on the ground, they thought that I would order them all to be shot. How astonished they were when not only were they not shot, but they were not even stripped. When I ordered them to carry me, they were so happy they fell over themselves. Finally they decided as follows: two of them took a rifle and put me on it, while I put my arms around their necks. Two others put another rifle under my stretched left leg, and I put my wounded leg on it. They carried me at a jog.

The rest of the prisoners followed them. When one of the porters got tired, he was immediately replaced by the next one without any instructions from my side. Colonel Ivanov approached me after the second ravine. I do not know what he was feeling, but his voice trembled, and we kissed each other goodbye. Grandpa Mel’nitskiy was there too. I handed him the official binoculars and the prisoners.

“May God look after you,” he blessed me as he left.

An ambulance cart drew up and my blood soaked bandages were replaced. My neighbours in the wheelbarrow were the Tatar, taken prisoner at Tsaritsyn, and a small peasant taken at Erzovka. Both of them were weeping terribly, because they were only lightly wounded.

A last shell exploded close by with a crash.

“Get a move on!” I ordered. “I can’t wait around to be killed here.”

My sense of self-preservation and thirst for life returned. The victory we had just won calmed us and gave a sense of relief from our hearts.

The Volunteer Army was at the top of the curve of its successes. On the same day our units occupied Dubovka and captured a lot of prizes. During the battle described above, the Erivan companies also took two machine guns. Our further attempt to capture the battery was not successful, as the men had literally run out of strength and the units were utterly confused.

A new bandage was put on me in Erzovka and I was put on a cart for transport to Razgulyayevka station. The fighting had made a strong impression in Erzovka.

“What a sound today,” everyone said. “It was like during the German War.”

They took me back to Orlovka. The corps headquarters was there and its commander, General Pisarev, brought me a glass of wine and asked to give me a list of those who distinguished themselves, which I did. They took me to Razgulyayevka at night.

I lay on the stretcher for a long time, and at last they carried me to a wagon. The wagons were former cattle cars, and the muck was not even completely cleaned out. We were taken in these wagons to Gumrak station, but the wounded had to breathe the stink the whole night. Only in the morning we were taken to the sanitary train which was beside the station. We remained in Gumrak for three days. Flies and lice plagued me all the time. There was no clean linen, and I was in despair. But finally we moved off, passed through Tsaritsyn and we finally stopped at Kotelnikovo. The train stayed there for a long time; the orderly, who was accompanying me, met Silayev at the station, who, as it turned out, was hospitalised there. Boris found out that I had arrived wounded. He and Shakh-Nazarov immediately packed their things and came to me. There was no end to my joy. The two dead men had come back to life. They decided to go wherever I

was taken. As a result, the same day, all three of us arrived at Velikoknyazheskaya,<sup>14</sup> in the infirmary at the local Secondary School.

Though my wound was serious, it posed no cause for concern. I wanted to get to Ekaterinodar as soon as possible. Boris Silayev and Shakh Nazarov looked in fine form and wanted to leave with me. I was waiting for the moment, when I could stand on crutches.

Finally, that day came, but neither could go with me, and they promised to come to Ekaterinodar a few days later.

My friends lodged me in infirmary No. 17 or, as it was later called, No. 23, which was near the municipal park. It was an excellent infirmary in every way. Dr. Plotkin, the chief physician, was renowned as an excellent surgeon, and the care and even the nutrition were entirely satisfactory.

I decided to take advantage of this good coincidence and have them perform an operation on my wounded arm to remove the nerve. Dr. Plotkin performed the operation, but alas, it brought no relief. I continued to suffer from it. Since the wound on my leg had now healed and I was able to move around using a stick, I decided to leave the hospital.

On the morning of my discharge, a nurse rushed into our room and frightened me by announcing that a man was being hung in the square near our hospital. It turned out that the condemned man was Kalabukhov, sentenced to death by a field court for treason. Worrisome days were coming. General Pokrovskiy was restoring order in Ekaterinodar. I was to undergo quite a long treatment with waters and massages. I moved into the city to be with my friends. Gustav, who had now recovered from typhus, was also due to arrive in Ekaterinodar. I received a letter from him from Rostov, where he was in one of the hospitals.

Granitov had also recovered.

I, myself, was busy searching for Tolya Poboyevski's grave. I wandered around the Ekaterinodar cemetery, seeing how the corpses of those dying in the hospitals were piled into huge graves, and that it was done very simply: the naked dead were placed in coffins; several coffins were placed on a cart and the corpses were brought to the already dug graves. Here the coffins were turned over, the corpses fell down like firewood, and when the grave was full, they were buried. Maybe coffins and shrouds were expensive, but there was no justification for that in my mind or heart. No wonder I was unable to find poor Tolya's grave.

Days flew by. I went daily for a massage. My wounds healed. The medical board gave me a six-week furlough. Suddenly, on 23 November, I received a telegram that Pil'berg had died. He had shot himself, with Granitov's revolver. He took the secret of his death to his grave, and only knowing his character, his views on life, his love of life, can we surmise that his sudden death was the result of typhus he had just contracted. I could find no other apparent reason for Gustav's suicide.

Almost the next day after this event came new stunning news: our regiment, consisting of two battalions, received a combat mission north of the Pichuzhinskiy farms. Facing a strong fog that rose from the Volga, the regiment strayed from its correct direction, was shelled by some units, turned to fire and attacked the imaginary enemy. A fierce fight ensued. Being unaware of any recent defeats, the regiment rushed into the attack and took the trenches from where the enemy were shooting. The enemy fled, leaving their dead in the trenches. But what horror when it was established, from the killed and wounded that remained in the trenches, that the battle had taken place with our 9th Plastun Battalion. Losses on our side were very high, and the moral turmoil was commensurate with the tragedy of what happened.

In that state, continuing the mission, the regiment was attacked by a division of Red cavalry, which suddenly appeared out of the fog. The 1st Battalion formed a square-like formation and repulsed three strong follow-up attacks. The 2nd Battalion, attacked from the rear, had no time to form a fighting formation and was cut down, led by its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Gofet.

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<sup>14</sup> A former Cossack *stanitsa*, now known as Proletarsk.

Colonel Ivanov, hit in the chest by a bullet, fell off his horse and was cut down. The fourth wave slammed into the 1st Battalion as well. Only an adjutant of the regiment, Staff-Captain Rychkov – who was on horseback – was able to escape. From him we learned the details of the battle.

Colonel Kuznetsov, “the last of the Mohicans”, took over the regiment. All those capable of bearing arms were placed in the ranks.

Further blows followed, one after another ... I received a letter from Boris Silayev from one of the Rostov hospitals. He was to undergo complicated surgery on his abdomen. The wound had festered. I went to Rostov to visit him.

He was cheerful as always, but I could see that the operation planned for tomorrow disturbed him.

“What do you think? Will I stay here as fertilizer?” he couldn’t help but give his usual joke as we parted.

“No more of your jokes,” I said, hugging him for the last time.

On 27 November he underwent surgery. I waited anxiously for letters from him. There were none. His father, Colonel Silayev, paid me a visit on 20 December.

“How is Boris?” I asked, instead of a greeting.

“He was buried in yesterday in Kislovodsk. He died.” I heard him say, as if he were a long way away.

There was no more lightness from then on. The horizon was cloaked in menacing clouds. The grenadiers held Tsaritsyn for a long time, stubbornly. Official reports always had the word “grenadier” in them.

But there is a limit to everything. Everyone remembers how quickly our front was rolled back from Orel. The Grenadiers had to leave the blood-stained fields of Tsaritsyn without a fight. They defended slowly and obstinately down the rail line between Tsaritsyn and Tikhoretskaya, step by step. At Abganerovo station the worn out and tired grenadier units were suddenly attacked at night by a very small, but daring enemy cavalry unit. Panic broke out. Although calmed by efforts of Colonel Kuznetsov, and as a result the commander of the daring cavalry unit decorated a telegraph pole with his person, the results of the attack were painful. Our brave division commander, Major-General Chichinadze and a good number of officers and grenadiers were cut down.

There was another halt on the Manych. Its stagnant waters were destined to swallow up thousands of victims of the Civil War once more.

The January of 1920 was unusually fierce, with terrible cold. A huge number of refugees from all over southern Russia piled into Ekaterinodar. The housing density reached incredible proportions – the population density in the still unoccupied part of the Kuban area exceeded the density of the same part of China many times over. Measures were taken at the home front to evacuate the families of soldiers, in case of further failures, to abroad.

As the territories of the Armed Forces of Southern Russia diminished, the value of paper money of all denominations dropped. Front-line officers, and in particular their families, were literally destitute, because while salaries grew as well they could not keep up with the pace of life. The Volunteer Army was in agony, bleeding to death. Thousands died in vain at Bataysk and Rostov, performing legendary feats, but they could not restore the situation.

Nor was it possible to save the situation by the series of measures taken by the high command of the Volunteer Army to reinforce the officers of the combat units. Not frequent examinations of military documents, not round-ups, nor re-enlistments helped. Many officers presented themselves for re-enlistment, but because of their serious wounds, most had lost their fighting ability, and they were declined.

The people who could have been enlisted into the fighting ranks were firmly lodged in rear institutions of every denomination. Sometimes, when you entered one or another of those institutions, you could not help but see how everyone there looked so familiar, the same faces of those ‘patented dodgers’ of the Great and Civil wars.



## Agony of the Volunteer Army

1920

At the end of January the remnants of our grenadiers were holding out at Belaya Glina. The general situation was such that a departure to Novorossiysk (which we thought to defend) or even to the Crimea seemed probably. Afraid of losing contact with my regiment during a possible disorderly departure, I decided to go to the regiment, regardless of my wounds, still not fully healed.

The HQ was in Belaya Glina, but the regiment itself barely existed: the entire complement of officers and old soldiers by the time of my arrival was 60. Reinforcements of 1,000 men were sent there, from men who had been mobilised, but it was already too late.

The end came under the following circumstances. On 11 February our divisions were ordered to move to Tikhoretskaya and form up. The next morning, on a clear frosty day, we marched into Gor'kaya Balka, where we planned to have a long rest and dinner – our kitchens had been sent there. The reinforcements who had arrived were without guns, and the regiments marched in the order: cadre, reinforcements, supply train, cadre, reinforcements, supply train, etc., and thus the distance between the core units was quite considerable.

Since I could not walk well the regiment commander, without giving me any special assignment, put me on his carriage, in which I followed the regiment.

The battalion commander commanded the troops on behalf of the old Colonel Chudinov, who had just returned from his wounds – on the first day of his arrival at our regiment on 15 August 1919 he had been shot in both legs.

We had only just entered the village that had been designated for the rest when a scattered rifle shots were heard from behind a hedge. I got down from the cart and went to Colonel Kuznetsov.

"Why are you getting down? Get back on and go to the other side of the ravine," he said. "A fight may start at any moment."

Foreseeing nothing in particular, I calmly climbed into the wagon, and the driver shooed the horses. In a few minutes we had crossed the ravine, and then we saw the following scene: the whole horizon, as far as the eye could see, was covered with horsemen; we were being attacked by the Red cavalry.

Their horse battery opened fire at the marching column. Colonel Kuznetsov set up his soldiers to meet the enemy. The men of other regiments lost their heads and confusion ensued. Our men opened fire, but there were so few, that the *lava* could turn them from all sides. The Reds started to surround our troops.

Unimaginable panic rose – carts and cavalrymen galloped around, the mobilized men shouted "urra!" and prevented the soldiers from firing.

The Red cavalry, having finished with the tail of the column, began to encircle and capture the rest. And it succeeded.

Three officers had managed to get on my carriage, and we were looking back with bated breath, watching the scene. Five especially zealous fellows were chasing our cart, their swords gleaming. Our driver was driving the horses as fast as he could. The horses were strong and the road was fortunately in perfect condition. The distance between us and the riders was getting shorter, but at the same time the distance separating our pursuers from their main force, now pillaging our train, was getting wider.

I decided that so long as no Reds got in front of us, we could repel them. Taking out my automatic Mauser, I propped it in folds of my overcoat. This would be combat to the death. I prayed to God that the Mauser would not fail. Otherwise, it was the end, I thought. But the Reds slowed down, stopped, and retraced their steps. We were saved. But we wondered what became of the others.

We spent the night in the village of Tikhoretskaya, and in the morning we went to the station. There, to my great joy and amazement, I saw Colonel Kuznetsov. At the last moment, when everything was lost, his beautiful mare had carried him out.



The mood of all the survivors was extremely low, with a heavy weight resting on their souls in the form of shame and grief.

On the third day after arriving at Tikhoretskaya station, the remaining men were almost completely destroyed by a terrible explosion in a ammunition magazine, set by Bolshevik agents who, sensing success, became more daring.

When we left Tikhoretskaya and moved to Korenovskaya, eleven officers, who had disappeared without a trace in Gor'kaya Balka on 12 February, unexpectedly returned to us. They told us what had happened.

The first was Colonel Chudinov, an old military officer and a great shooter – he had won many prizes in Tsarist times. Sensing imminent death, the old man attacked an enemy commander, covered in red ribbons. His hand did not waver. The Red fell off his horse, pierced by a bullet. But at the same moment Colonel Chudinov fell into the snow, having been sabred in the head.

Our machine-gun officer Lieutenant Pavlov, who did not have time to open fire from the machine-gun, was also hit with a sabre, and half of his skull rolled under the *tachanka*.

Captain Pavlov, of the 1st Grenadier Regiment, knight of St. George's Red Banner, gave an order. Getting no response, he shot himself in the forehead.

The conscripted men shouted "urra!" and threw their hats in the air.

Those who were able to compromise with their conscience, tore off their shoulder straps and insignia of officer rank.

In half an hour it was all over. The grenadiers did not give up their officers. Then the Reds, having separated the commanding officers from the prisoners themselves, divided them into two parts. Stripped of their clothing (in 20 below zero) and one group was taken to Belaya Glina to be shot, and the other to Egorlykskaya. The returnees belonged to the latter group. It so happened that approaching Egorlykskaya the Reds were attacked by General Pavlov's cavalry. Taking advantage of the confusion they scattered, and so they made it to us – the lucky ones. But what a state they were in and what they suffered is impossible to describe.

We went from Korenovskaya to Ekaterinodar. I rode in a cart with the banner of the Mingrelian Regiment.

An uninterrupted line of carts stretched through Ekaterinodar. On the day of our arrival in Ekaterinodar Colonel Kuznetsov fell ill with typhus.

The remnants of the grenadiers were again reassembled into a battalion, which was taken over by Colonel Kochkin.

The evacuation was in full swing. We had to get Colonel Kuznetsov out of there at any cost.

It took, with great difficulty, until 3 March to put him on a departing sanitary train. But it wasn't that simple, I assigned a special officer's squad charged with monitoring the moment of the departure of the train to be certain.

Six days before leaving the final evacuation of Ekaterinodar, General Denikin made a review of the remaining grenadiers and Caucasian riflemen, lined up under the railway bridge. After the review, General Denikin was surrounded by officers, posing a whole series of questions on burning issues. In his answers, the Commander-in-Chief gave hope that we may yet have a change of heart among the masses, mentioned that at any moment we would be supported by the British fleet, and that *in extremis* we were still firmly entrenched in Crimea.

At 8 a.m. on 4 March the remaining 45 grenadiers were ordered to march to the Krymskaya station, where they were to rejoin the rest of the Volunteer Army. On that day Ekaterinodar was abandoned by our units.

Wagons were standing in a solid wall from Ekaterinenski Park to the bridge, all the adjacent streets to the bridge area were also jammed. A pedestrian could hardly make his way between them. The departing units plundered a liquor store, distributing whatever alcohol they could get their hands on.

Shelling began in the city. At noon we crossed the Kuban by the railway bridge. The same day the railway bridge across the Kuban was blown up by our units.

Half of my belongings did not manage to cross the bridge and was left on a two-wheeler in Ekaterinodar. The other half of my luggage with the 1st Company's train which had crossed the bridge the day before, and was somewhere *en route*. I was carrying a small English bag with a mug, two pounds of sugar, a bar of soap, a toothbrush and a towel. In addition I had a small package of my documents and my faithful Mauser. That was it.

On the evening of 7 March, the remaining grenadiers, led by me, arrived at Krymskaya station, where we were to receive instructions from our commander, Colonel Kochkin. 7 and 8 March passed while we waited for his arrival. In the evening of 8 March, I felt ill. I was running a fever, and I lay in one of the cars on the reserve track. Suddenly, several of our officers rushed in excitedly, and reported that the *Drozdovtsi* had arrived at the station and had arrested all the officers on the platform, including several of ours. It turned out that the *Drozdovtsi* were performing their little trick: a 'mobilisation'. In this case, of course, no force could help. Officers were undeservedly insulted and even beaten up. I stepped onto the deserted platform, and happened to bump into Colonel Turkul,<sup>15</sup> who was accompanied by an escort. We had a conversation, in which I pointed out the unacceptability of the treatment by the units subordinate to him of the officers, and asked him to release those who had been arrested.

"You must join us," he told me.

"Fine, but we have our own superiors, whose orders we carry out."

"All right, I'll get you your orders," said Colonel Turkul, and went off in the direction of the staff train. I went to my own wagon. An hour later I was summoned to the place where the *Drozdovtsi* were posted.

The last company of them were camped out by the fires in the Park, adjacent to the station buildings. The body of a hanged man was hanging from a tree some distance away. Our conscripts were sitting by a separate fire. I was asked to sign off a list of our officers. I had to sign it.

"Well, now you will fight, because you probably never fought before," the *Drozdovtsi* told me.

We became '*Drozdovets*'.

Just before dawn we received the order to go to the dock at Novorossiysk. We set off. I immediately began to feel very hot. At one of the stops I had to see the doctor.

"I'm afraid you have typhus," said the Doctor. "Have you had typhus before?"

"I have," I replied.

"I will see you again tomorrow," said the Doctor and left.

We arrived at Tonnel'naya by evening. I felt really bad. Our grenadiers took me in and put me in a class carriage at last. I asked them not to leave me in case I fainted. I was delirious the entire night. In the morning, I fell asleep for a while. At that time my new comrades-in-arms unloaded the train and left for Novorossiysk, leaving me to my fate. Fortunately, I felt better in the morning. I lay alone in the carriage.

"Well, we must leave before it is too late," I said aloud, and gathering up the last of my strength, got up and set off.

When I reached Novorossiysk I did not know who and where to look for him, but chance helped me.

"It's you, Kote," said Lieutenant Bogomolv. "Here's our maintenance depot, in this carriage. Come on, there's a place for you".

It was comfortable in the warmth of the coach. I was given tea and put to bed. In the morning Granitov came in.

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<sup>15</sup> Commander of the *Drozdovtsi*.

"You know what, there's a boat to Cyprus today. You should go and get some medical treatment. There's nothing for you to do here now anyway," he said, looking at me.

I hesitated. Traveling into complete obscurity without a penny in my pocket seemed risky. Reluctantly, I followed Vladimir.

We came to the bureau on Serebryakovskaya Street. There was a mass of people there.

"Well, get in line, and I'll be right back," said Volodya and left.

I stood in line for a while, then started to feel sick. I decided not to go. When I got back in the carriage and lay down, I was told that Granitov had just come in, and was looking for me. He did appear soon.

"Why did you not stay?" he was indignant. "Let's go together"

An hour later, having received the necessary documents, I walked to the east breakwater, where there was a whole row of huge steamships.

My papers were for the steamship *Burgomaster Schroeder*. The enormous hull of the *Schroeder* towered over the quay like a three-storey house.

Loading was going on at a fast pace with the help of teams from the British dreadnought *Emperor of India*.

They were loading cars, guns, uniforms and other cargo; winches were roaring and chains were ringing.

There was a ringing in my ears. With great difficulty, I climbed the gangway. On the bridge, they asked for my papers through an interpreter.

"Do you have any weapons with you?" followed.

"I do."

"Hand it in now, you'll get it back when you get there."

I took off my Mauser and handed it to the naval officer. Incidentally, I never saw my Mauser again; the British did not return it to me.

Then I was told which hold I had to go to. And that was the end of the loading procedure.

Hold number 2, which I was assigned to, was full. There was not a single empty spot on the floor. It took me a long time to find a place. Fortunately, I was given two blankets on the same day and an opportunity to lie down.

When I woke up, we were already in Sevastopol. It turned out I had relapsing typhus. I do not remember how many days we stood there, and I only remember that many people were worried that a committee would be called to examine those who were leaving, to see if they were fit for service. Then something took a long time to load.

"Well, gentlemen, we're leaving now," someone said.

We were leaving – I tried to collect my thoughts. We were leaving for total obscurity, relying totally on the mercy of our allies. I wanted to take another look at what we were leaving.

Gathering all my strength, I climbed the gangway to the deck. We were just out of Sevastopol.

There were a lot of people on the deck. No-one wanted to miss the moment of forced farewell from their Motherland. All the faces grew serious as the outline of the coast began to merge in the morning fog. Many were weeping, others crossed themselves.

"Goodbye, Russia," I exclaimed.