

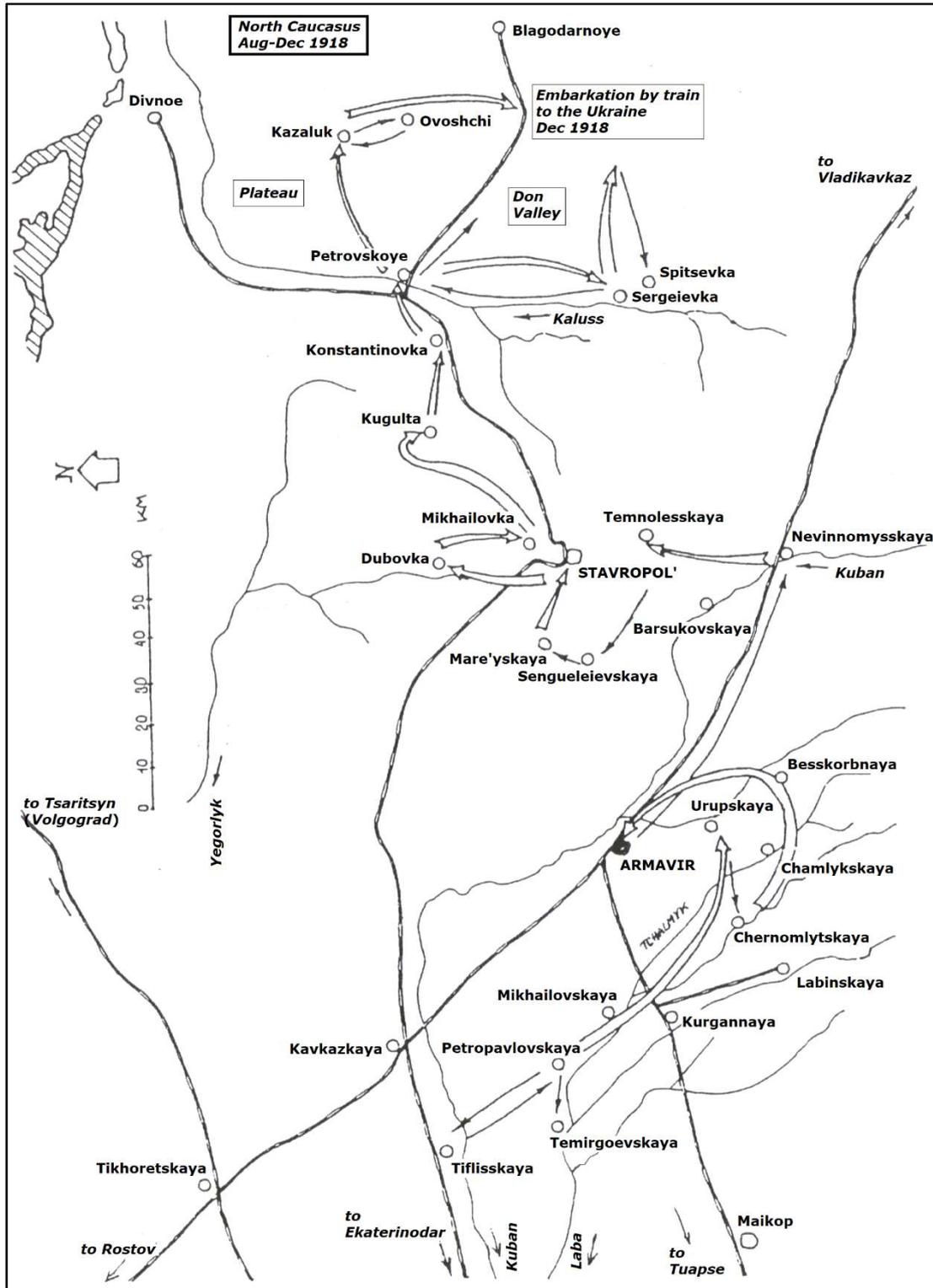
Chapter 4 – The Civil War. The North Caucasus

War is a terrible thing. And civil war is even worse.

All divine and human laws cease to operate. Arbitrariness and hatred have reign.

I want to portray everything as it really was, good and bad, trying not to exaggerate, not lie and stay impartial. It is very difficult to do. It seems somehow that everything we did was good; everything they did was bad.

Probably there will be errors and inaccuracies, but I have tried to avoid them.



The Battery

In Ekaterinodar, we finally felt safe. There was no need to hide anymore. True, we were going to war, but that was a different matter.

I went to the same captain who gave us our papers.

“We want to go to the battery. Where can we get weapons, uniforms and money?”

He looked at me in surprise and grinned. “Don’t forget that we are the Volunteer Army. We have neither funds, nor warehouses ... You must get weapons and uniforms yourself. The battery will teach you this. We have no money, and you don’t need it. The army lives off the population ... for now. Later, we will see.”

I was dumbstruck, but he was right.

“But if I need a train ticket?”

“No ticket. Get on the train and no one will ask you for a ticket. As a last resort, you show the papers I gave you.”

“Where do we find the battery?”

“It is located in the village of Petropavlovskaya. Take a train to Tiflis, and there you will meet a battery officer who is dealing with the transportation of the shells. If he isn’t there, contact the village administration and they will deliver you. Have a good trip.”

We found the battery in Petropavlovskaya. We went to the commander, Colonel Kolzakov, were enlisted on 27 August 1918 and assigned to transporting shells. I was delighted to meet Captain Kolenkovski, my former commander. There were several more officers from the 64th Brigade, but I didn’t know them, except for Abramov. The battery had a hundred officers doing soldiers’ functions and 12 soldiers in charge of the horses. It was equipped with mountain guns, three-inch calibre, with short shells. Everyone was on horseback. The battery had four guns and two machine guns for protection.

The battery operated with the newly formed 1st Kuban Cavalry Division. The 1st Ekaterinodar and 1st Kuban (Kornilov) regiments made up the 1st Brigade. The brigade commander was Colonel Toporkov. The Uman and Zaporozhye regiments made up the 2nd Brigade under the command of Colonel Babiev.

Shortly after our arrival, General Wrangel, later the Volunteer Commander-in-Chief, took over the division. Before him it was General Erdeli. Sometimes the 1st Line Regiment worked with us.

The 2nd Cavalry Division was already being formed, under the command of Colonel Ulagai.

Formal ranks didn’t play a big role in our battery. The date of admission to the battery was most important. The battery had come from Yassi in Romania, with a detachment of the Drozdovski and was called the 1st General Drozdovski Horse-mountain Battery.

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Our new role consisted of the rapid delivery of ammunition and shells to the division. We lived in Tiflis, and when the train came we loaded cartridges and shells onto carts, and one of us took them to Petropavlovskaya. As a rule, we took 10,000 cartridges and 10 shrapnel rounds. That amounted to approximately five rounds per man. You can’t really call that a war. Fortunately, the Reds also lacked ammunition. Once I took 100,000 cartridges and 100 shells – and was greeted with jubilation!

I loved those trips. First, they crossed the murky waters of the Kuban and passed a German colony. Then there was the boundless steppe for 60 km. There was nothing to see at all. In the middle of the route there was a farm with trees and a stream. The horses were watered here. The village of Petropavlovskaya was dominated by a huge *kurgan*.

We actually spent most of our time on the road. Returning with empty carts, I would meet my brother carrying cartridges halfway and would hand him a rifle in case of need. There was no front line, just independent detachments.



In Tiflis, the owner's daughter took my hand, looked and said, "You can safely go to war – you will die in old age."

Then my brother held out his hand to her. She looked and pushed her away.

"Will they kill me?"

"No, you won't be killed in the war."

She didn't want to explain more.

Indeed, my brother died in Constantinople, immediately after the evacuation. The prediction came true.

I believed her and wasn't very afraid for myself, but I was afraid for my brother.

Soon Kolenkovski died of typhus. Typhus caused us more casualties than the battles.

We had no calendars or clocks. Therefore, I can only roughly define events for some months. Sometimes I found out the date of some event afterwards.

The Army

The Volunteer Army was formed on the Don at the end of 1917 under the command of Generals Alekseev and Kornilov. When the Reds captured the Don, an army of about 3,000 fighters left for the Kuban. This was the 'Ice March'. The Volunteers were unable to take Ekaterinodar. Kornilov was killed. The command passed to General Denikin. The army went back to the Don and then learned that the Don Host had rebelled. Rostov was taken by the Volunteers, the Don Cossacks and Colonel Drozdovski's detachment, which had just come from Romania. The Volunteers and the *Drozdovtsi* joined forces and launched the second Kuban campaign, taking Ekaterinodar, where we had arrived. The Kuban Cossacks had risen up without exception. There was a large influx of volunteers. Together with the Cossacks, the Army now represented a formidable force.

Against us were the Red units of the Caucasian Front. We blocked the only railway leading from the Caucasus to Russia, in that way protecting the rear of the Don. The Don likewise protected our rear and supplied us with cartridges and shells, receiving shells via the Germans from Ukrainian warehouses. We had no relationship with the Germans, focusing on the 'Allies' of the Great War.

The Reds were always more numerous than us, but they didn't have discipline nor officers, and we always managed to defeat them. They received cartridges from the warehouses of the Caucasian Front, but didn't manage their supply train well, and they often had very few cartridges, just like us. But the Reds, being less disciplined, used up their cartridges at the beginning of the battles, while our men saved them for the end. The brutality was great: neither side took prisoners.

Sometimes whole Red units passed over to us. The Samurski Regiment and some Red Cossack units come across to our side like that.

With the capture of Novorossiysk, a port on the Black Sea, the situation with the shells improved, but not by much. The 'Allies' of the First World War pursued a policy of vacillation with regard to the Volunteer Army. One step forward, two steps back. The reasons were stupidity, short-sightedness, selfishness, and poor awareness. But we were the first to put up resistance to the Bolsheviks, and if the West had helped us then, there would have been no Bolshevism. Unfortunately, that is all forgotten.

The Germans were much better informed, but they lost the war. Without doubt they would have helped us against the Bolsheviks.

The Cossacks had an Achilles heel – the *inogorodnie*.⁸ There were about the same number of them as there were Cossacks. Most of the Cossacks backed the Whites, and the *inogorodnie* were mostly Reds. At that time, with the general upsurge for the Whites, they were silent, but as soon as the Cossacks hesitated the *inogorodnie* carried out Red propaganda.

⁸ That is, ethnic Russians or Ukrainians living in the Cossack Host lands, but who did not have the political privileges of the Cossack class.



The Volunteer Army was politically in favour of the Constituent Assembly and didn't prejudge anything. It included monarchists, socialists, and representatives of all parties. But the overwhelming majority, to which we belonged, had no concern with politics. We simply wanted to save dying Russia, as the Novgorodians had in the Time of Troubles.

The army lived off the population. In the Kuban, the Cossacks fed the soldiers willingly. Being a mobile war, units rarely stayed in the same village for more than two or three days, and so didn't represent a big burden. Later, where possible, they tried to feed the soldiers from field kitchens.

Transport duty was much more burdensome for the population. For some reason, the commissariat was never able to organise transport – and that heavy burden fell on the peasants. This spoiled our relations with the peasants quite a bit.

The main disadvantage of the White Army was, from my point of view, poor propaganda.

The Reds had more than a hundred divisions against us, and we had two or three dozen. The Reds could always fill up depleted units, but we had no replacements. We had to keep winning. At the same time, the rear was swarming with those evading service at the front. The institutions in the rear grew to an incredible extent, while the regiments thinned out. The quartermasters sent us almost nothing. We took horses, fodder and food ourselves from the population. Sometimes, but rarely, we took it from the Reds.

Horses

I have to say something about the horses that played such an important part in the civil war, seemingly the last war where horses were in the front lines. In the following wars, they were replaced by machines, and it is unlikely that people today know much about horses. I was fortunate enough to barely get out of the saddle for three years. I learned not only to ride horses, but to live with them: to feed, care for and achieve the friendship where you can read each other's thoughts.

After the excellent riding training at the School, I thought that I could ride and I knew about horses. But during the endless campaigns in the Volunteer Army, I realised that I knew absolutely nothing.

The Cossacks were quite different. That difference is mainly observed while trotting. We leaned back slightly and rode at a lightened trot, that is, with a regular rise out of the saddle, while the Cossacks on the contrary, leaned forward and rode still. Our legs were half bent in a shortened stirrup, and the Cossacks have them fully stretched out. We use a bit curb bit, but the Cossacks use a snaffle bit.⁹ And who doesn't know how to ride a horse if not the steppe people?

I think that the rising trot is completely absurd, being painful for the horse, inconvenient for the rider, extremely ugly and contributes to injuring the horse (causing wounds in the withers). The Cossacks, leaning forward, help the horse by transferring their weight to the front legs.

It is simply impossible to ride with bent legs all day – they go numb. The curb is uncomfortable for the rider (with a second pair of reins), painful for the horse and does nothing. With simple bits and spurs, you should be able to handle any horse.

People say that some horses need a curb. I haven't seen such and I doubt their existence. Even if there is such a horse, one should not use a curb bit on all horses because of an exception. A real rider will never use a curb. Cossacks don't use it. It may be that the horse is furious because of the bit.

Cossacks don't wear spurs. Spurs are a useful invention by Europeans. They free up your right hand to use a sword or lance, and at the same time you can push the horse forward with the spurs. It is more difficult to do this with the *nagaika* (whip) of the Cossacks. The English saddle and the rising trot were invented by the British, and the Italians developed shortened stirrups. But neither the British nor the Italians ever had large masses of cavalry.

⁹ This was a bit technical for me to follow with certainty. However, if you look at period photos you see that Cossacks had simple (snaffle) bits and so only one set of reins. Regular cavalry generally had curb bits, and so two pairs of reins.



Spurs must be worn with skill. Poorly worn spurs will make the experts laugh at you. You need to wear them horizontally or slightly obliquely, but never upwards. Wear them low – when worn on the ankle, you cannot spur the horse. Spurs need to be used as rarely as possible, so as not to abuse the horse, and with a wheel, and not with a star. They should be small, so as not to hurt. The speed of the ride doesn't depend on the size of the spurs. Using spurs and a riding crop is just silly, at least as stupid as wearing two ties. Previously, spurs were given to those who deserved them, but now they are simply bought and put on, quite undeservedly. And this is immediately evident.

Despite the huge amount of cavalry, the only place in Russia that sold good spurs was Saveliev's store in St. Petersburg. Stainless steel, they gave a ring like crystal. In Europe, I haven't seen good spurs, they don't ring, merely give a dull noise. Silver spurs don't work at all, and should be avoided.

You can achieve miracles from a horse, even controlling its thoughts. But for this you need to live with the horse, spend a lot of time with it, take care of it yourself. Most riders have no desire for that, no time. I would say they don't have the capacity.

They think the horse is stupid. Well, that it depends entirely on the rider: if he treats her well, then the horse is equal in intelligence to a dog, but if he is rude to her, then she will become rude and angry.

Even a horse spoiled by a poor rider can be fixed. Horses have a gentle nature and cannot resist sympathy. The horse's nervous system is highly developed. Touch a horse with a blade of grass – that whole part of the skin will tremble. Other animals don't have that reaction.

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The first stirrups are found in the steppe tombs of Asia, dating to the 4th Century. They were in the shape of a figure eight, and there was one stirrup which rested on the saddle. In the 6th Century, stirrups and bits took on their modern form. In the 8th Century, the Hungarians brought them to Europe. Prior to that, they used ropes wound around.

The first sabres¹⁰ are found among the Asiatic Turks in the tombs of the 7th Century. Massive and slightly curved. Europeans, Persians, Arabs and Egyptians adopted sabres only in the 14th Century. They used double-sided swords before that.

The best sabres, such as those of Damascus, were made in India. Good blades were rare and highly prized. Their forging was kept as a greatest secret.

In the 9th Century, the Kyrgyz began to shoe horses. The Arabs introduced horseshoes to Europe in the 11th-12th Centuries. In the Russian army, only the front legs were shod. It is enough and less dangerous if they kick.

Vanka

My first horse in the battery was a black stallion, named Vanka. I received it in a convoy, in the village of Chernomytskaya.

The master-sergeant of the convoy warned me, "Be careful. He bites and kicks."

I led him, bridled and saddled, on short reins to the courtyard of the peasant house where I was accommodated. He wasn't large, but strong. He looked sideways at me, it would seem to check me out. To open the gate, I lengthened the reins a bit. He immediately took advantage of this, quickly turned his back to me, kicked and galloped into the yard. I ran alongside, holding the reins in my left hand, and using my right against his side in order to distance myself from any kicks. He bucked several times more, knocking me down, left me holding the headpiece, and rode off into the garden. I got up, rubbing my sides, closed the gate and went with the headpiece to catch him.

He pretended to nibble the weeds, but he watched me out of the corner of his eye. He let me get three steps away, flattened his ears, kicked and ran some distance off with a contemptuous air. It took a long time, but in the end he got tired of it, and he let himself be caught. I bridled him, put on the headpiece, tied

¹⁰ Being a curved, pointed sword, with only one sharp side. All Russian cavalry swords at this time were sabres.



him to an apple tree, grabbed a rake that was just lying here, and began to beat him until I broke the rake. This is how we first met.

A naughty horse must be punished so that it knows who the owner is. But you have to hit the rump with a whip or a cane, not with a stick. I often sinned against this rule, because Vanka bit and kicked very painfully when I fed him or saddled him.

I had to stable Vanka separately from other horses, or he would start a fight. I felt sorry for the grey Rytsar,¹¹ my brother's gelding, who had a good nature but had to put up with him all the time. But in the end, Vanka got used to Rytsar and stopped bothering him. He got used to me too, and bit me only when he was dissatisfied with me. But that was much later. At first no feeding was complete without a fight. First he would try to kick me, then overturn the bucket of water and, taking advantage of the moment when I bent over to pick it up, try to bite me. But I knew his habits and, striking him in the face with my fist, sometimes avoided the bite. I was always covered in bruises.

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It was near Chernomlytskaya that I saw the entire Caucasian range in all its beauty for the only time. Usually it is obscured by haze or is visible only as a silhouette .

I was taking a train of a dozen barley carts to the battery. Sitting on the lead one, I looked back to check that the other carts were keeping up. We needed to move quickly so as not to get caught by any Red patrol and to find the battery, which moved all the time. I drove my train from the village of Kurgannaya to Chernomlytskaya.

I turned and a gasp escaped me. The entire Caucasian ridge shone for me, reaching into infinity, shimmering with all the colours of the rainbow. It was magnificent! The sun was rising. The nearest mountains were a hundred kilometres away from me and went into the distance. Never again would I see the Caucasus like that.

At my exclamation, the Cossack accompanying me perked up, grabbed his rifle and looked around with concern.

"I don't see anything."

"How, nothing? The mountains. They are so beautiful!"

"Ah, and I thought that you had spotted a Red patrol ... Yes, they are beautiful."

And, turning his back to the mountains, he began to roll a cigarette.

Care of Horses

I knew that improper feeding could kill a horse, but I didn't know how to do it right. And I didn't dare ask the advice of a veteran, for fear of ridicule. I was very young.

After a march, a hot horse should be moved slowly to cool it down, put in a stable and given hay. Two hours after the march, she is first watered, and then fed with oats or barley. You cannot feed first and then let them drink. The barley will swell and rupture the stomach, because horses are built so that they cannot vomit the excess.

She must have hay all night. Hay can be replaced with barley straw. I have never been able to distinguish between the different types of straw, but a horse brought up to a stack knows. During a march, you can water the horse if the march is going to continue. Horses sleep while standing, they only lie down for a few minutes. It is sufficient to feed a horse twice a day.

Because we were constantly on the move, we never took the horses for a walk, we fed them only when necessary, and sometimes didn't feed them at all, often not even unsaddling them. They were combed twice a year. Despite this, there were relatively few horses lost due to poor grooming. Obviously, the horses got used to the bad conditions.

¹¹ Meaning 'Knight'.



I don't think horses should be spoiled – it weakens their stamina. Blankets and heated stables, in my opinion, are harmful.

An unfed horse weakens by the end of the day, but a thirsty one after a few hours. We rarely reshod our horses, just two or three times a year.

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Near Stavropol, after a gruelling march, we stopped in the steppe. Everyone lay down on the ground and immediately fell asleep, men and horses. I was awakened to an amazing silence. I raised my head and didn't recognise anything around me. During our sleep, it had snowed and covered everyone with a white shroud. The battery seemed to have disappeared. Then I recognised Vanka, covered in snow, other horses, equipment and small mounds – under which there were people. I shook off the snow and woke everyone up. The battery had reappeared! They shook off the snow and scolded me for interrupting a good sleep. No one even had a runny nose.

Try to fall asleep in the snow, the thought of it will cause a cold.

A Cossack appeared suddenly.

“Damn you, where have you been? I've been looking for the battery for half an hour ... Orders from the division chief ...”

And all because the snow camouflaged us so well.

Accidents

A horse's mood can be seen from its ears. If ears are flattened, beware – she is aggressive. The side of a horse's groin indicates the state of his health. If it is hollow, then the horse will soon refuse to work. It will be useless to beat her, as she is exhausted. It needs rest and feed. I often unsaddled a tired horse during the campaign and rubbed its back with straw, letting it loll around. This is very refreshing for the horse.

In the famous Kuban mud – which grabs your boots so that you pull out your bare feet – horses often fell, especially the horses harnessed to the guns. A horse that falls won't try to get up by itself. You needed to raise them by force. They needed to be unharnessed first, because a horse must step forward as it stands. The mane is grabbed and the horse rolled onto its side. The front legs are released from being bent, the mane is taken again and you straighten the head. Then you pull the tail up and the horse invariably stands. She is reharnessed and will continue to work. But if you leave her in the mud, she won't move, and you will soon find her dead. I have lifted up dozens of horses personally.

Sometimes it happens that a horse's leg will fall through a bridge. First of all, don't let the horse thrash about, because that is when it will break its leg. As before, release the front legs first and give support to the horse's head, either leaning on the shoulder, or by joining the hands of two people under the horse's head. It will get up. Broken legs in a horse are relatively rare – after all, their bones are very solid.

During a big battle, near Mospin, our reserves – the Terek Cossack Cavalry Division – were brought up by train. The freight cars approached very close to the front, stopped on a high embankment, the doors of the cars opened and the horses were simply pushed out of the cars, already saddled. They fell onto the slope and rolled down, jumped up and shook themselves off like dogs. The Cossacks followed them, straightened their saddles, and the *sotnias*¹² immediately formed up and went into battle. Our battery was firing nearby, and watched it with interest. There were several broken saddles, but not a single horse was crippled – they all went into battle. A second train took the place of the first and also disembarked the same way. The unloading of two trains lasted twenty minutes. Hundreds of horses were unloaded – and with not a single broken leg. I think the slope was chosen with discernment. The horses rolled over on it, which weakened the shock.

Tolstoy says in *Anna Karenina* that Vronski, having placed the saddle badly, broke the spine of his horse. I doubt it. A saddle is designed in such a way that it doesn't touch the spine.

¹² The word for squadron in a Cossack unit.



Of course, well-groomed horses are more prone to accidents than steppe horses.

Cossacks

We sometimes hear that the Cossacks don't ride well and their position in the saddle is abnormal. But those who have seen them in action or at their horse shows won't say this. This opinion is formed from the failure of the Cossacks in equestrian events, especially show jumping, done as a sport. Maybe they are weaker than others at that. But in a serious matter, in war, they have great advantages.

Their acrobatics in a saddle, are far more difficult than simple jumping. For them the Cossacks tie the stirrups under the horse's belly and use a high pommel. The rest is based on skill. Moreover, they do so on a horse galloping straight, which is more difficult than jumping with turns.

I remember the 1st Zaporozhye Regiment, returning from battle. The singers filled the air with a dashing tune, while in front man danced standing on the saddle. The dancer was Staff Captain Pavlichenko, later a general and corps commander.

One day, in the fog, we stumbled upon Red cavalry. One Cossack was left without a horse. But another Cossack galloped up, grabbed him by the belt, put him across the saddle and, without reducing his gait, took him away literally from under the nose of the Reds.

The Don Cossacks use lances. The Kuban and Terek Cossacks don't. The Don are dressed in a cap, side-buttoned tunic and loose blue trousers with a wide red stripe. The Kuban and Terek wear *papakha* fur hats and Cherkas garb.¹³ Cossack sabres have no guard: the Don use the official model, the Kuban and Terek are black, often inlaid with silver.

Cossacks don't wear spurs, but use the *nagaika*, a supple whip. It is carried in the right hand or fixed to the front of the high Cossack saddle.

Vanka's Faults

Vanka wasn't playful. He had two good gaits: walking and stationary. I, of course, exaggerate, because when he was still it was almost always for a fight. But Vanka was hardy and undemanding. We soon got used to each other and even became friends. He didn't hit me with his neck anymore and bit me only on the odd occasions when he was unhappy with me. But before biting, he lowered his ears and emitted a snake-like hiss, which warned me, and by hitting him in the face with my fist, I generally managed to avoid the bite.

All our marches were done at a walk. In battle the normal gait is the trot. A gallop was extremely rare. Therefore, Vanka had little opportunity to show his bad trot and gallop. When the column stopped, we left the horses where they stood and gathered in groups to chat or have a snack. At first I didn't leave Vanka alone, to prevent a fight. Then, once we got used to each other, I forgot his bad character and did like the others. But quickly enough I heard noise and shouting – it was Vanka causing problems. I ran to the noise. As soon as Vanka saw me, he pretended to be innocent, as if nothing had happened. I think that because of Vanka I was appointed horse-holder and because of him they left me for a long time in that lowly role – because not a single other horse-holder would agree to look after Vanka.

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One day the boys of a village asked to be allowed to water the horses at the river. I didn't think of Vanka's bad character at all: we put the boys on the horses bareback, and they set off. Vanka returned without a rider and with a guilty look. He had hurt the boy riding him. I took it out on him and didn't entrust him to anyone else again.

¹³ Also called Circassian or Caucasian dress.

While strongly associated with the Cossacks in the modern mind, it is actually the dress of the Caucasian mountaineers, and was borrowed from their by their neighbours, the Kuban and Terek Cossacks. The only other unit to wear it was the Tsar's guard, and the image of red kaftan with fur hat comes from them, via various dance and horse troupes.



He had a disgusting habit of tearing up the bag of barley for the evening meal, which hung from the saddle. If he couldn't reach it, he went looking to tear up someone else's bag. He didn't make life easy for me, and yet I got used to him and fell in love with him.

Horse-holder

The first position I held in the battery was that of horse-holder – not particularly honourable, but very difficult.

When the battery is in position, the horse-holders take the horses from the crew and lead them to a place away from enemy observation. But not too far from the battery, so that in the event of an attack, they can bring the horses back in time.

According to the regulations, a horse holder should have three or four horses. In practice, they kept five, six, and sometimes even eight horses. When there wasn't enough crew for the guns, they took one of the horse-holders, and the rest had an larger number of horses.

Holding a lot of horses isn't easy. Especially when bullets whistle and shells burst. Horses understand what they are about, and panic easily. Leading the worked up horses to the battery was a torment. To my pride, I never lost a horse, and I didn't even have any wounded. Perhaps I was better at choosing isolated places than my comrades, who had some horses wounded.

It is painful to hold horses with bare hands in winter, since you cannot let go of reins for any reason. When we took Stavropol, I went to a huge infirmary full of wounded and sick Reds. They trembled at the sight of me. But I collected only a some pairs of mittens, which I distributed to the horse-holders and riders.

I put Vanka on the extreme right, so that I could mount him, if necessary. Then Rytsar, like a shield between Vanka and other horses. In my presence Vanka behaved well enough.

I think I served almost all the positions in the battery, and subsequently even commanded it.

But they left me as horse-holder for a long time, partly because of Vanka and because I didn't lose control of the horses and brought them up in time. Over time, as I got more experience and the horses got used to me, I started keeping more horses than my comrades.

The Offensive

As I said, the 1st Kuban Cavalry Division was taken over by General Wrangel. In September 1918, he launched an offensive. He rapidly occupied the village of Mikhailovskaya and then, following the fleeing Reds, took the villages of Kurgannaya, Chamlytskaya, Chernomytskaya and Urupskaya. My brother and I were ordered to join the battery, and we took part in the offensive.

Before that, I had eczema on my shoulder. I went to the battery doctor.

"You need to evacuate, you won't get rid of the eczema here."

"Doctor, I came to fight, not to wallow in hospitals."

"As you wish."

Indeed, the eczema grew in spite of everything I did. But then the offensive began, with great enthusiasm. I forgot about the eczema. We didn't undress for a week, as we continually advanced. Finally we got to a bathhouse.

"Where is your eczema?" asked my brother .

Then I remembered it, and ran my hand over my shoulder. The skin was smooth and the eczema had disappeared. The body did what was necessary when I didn't think about it and didn't interfere with it. In general, things worked according to the Coué method (auto-suggestion), although I had no idea about that at the time.

Urupskaya

After a battle, our division occupied the large village of Urupskaya. General Wrangel arrived by car and was greeted warmly. Wrangel stood out with his great height. He wore a Russian uniform. The village chieftain



presented him with a dagger. For a return gift, Wrangel unhooked his revolver and gave it to the chieftain. The next day, the 2nd Brigade with our 1st Platoon (1st and 2nd guns) went somewhere to the right. We, the 3rd and 4th guns, left the village with another regiment, walked three kilometres and took up a position near a mound. Our *lava*¹⁴ moved forward. The weather was fine, no shots were heard. Everything seemed calm. We settled down near the cannons, ate watermelons, some fell asleep. On that day, my brother was sent somewhere else, to find lodgings I think, and they took me from the horse-holders to the gun to replace him. Both of us were with the 4th gun.

Here I must point out one drawback of the mountain guns. The axle was not straight and had two settings: the lower one was used while moving, as otherwise the piece flipped easily when cornering, whereas the gun was levered into the higher position for firing.

Our supply train (the carts carrying our belongings) was a hundred yards behind us. The top brass gathered on the mound. Wrangel arrived by car, left it and walked with long strides to the mound. Out of curiosity, I went up the height to look at Wrangel and listen to what the leaders were saying.

One of the officers said in surprise, "Strange ... Why is our *lava* coming back?"

Everyone grabbed their binoculars.

"Yes, strange ... they are starting to trot ..."

"Their sabres gleam in the sun ..."

"Yes, these aren't our men at all ..."

"Reds! They attack!"

"To your posts!"

The Red cavalry was already not far away, and moved to a gallop. We started to panic. I rushed to the gun. We fired two cannister rounds and scattered the cavalry ahead of us, but both flanks swept past us. We hitched the gun to the limber, but didn't have time to put it on the low axle setting. The limber riders (Larionov and Ranzhiev) immediately moved off at a quick trot. For some reason, our gun had only two pairs of horses instead of three. The holders brought up the horses. I wasn't yet fully aware of the danger and was surprised by the hysterical cries of the horse holder.

"Take the horses ... Yes, take the horses, otherwise I will let them go!"

I grabbed Vanka's reins, but he began to spin like hell, preventing me from getting into the saddle. He was caught up in the general panic. Finally I managed to sit on him. I looked around. The dust from our shots hadn't yet settled. There were shots, shouts and silhouettes of horsemen galloping with sabres around. Our men had disappeared.

Then I was so scared that I almost passed out from fear.

I came to my senses almost immediately. I rode between two Red horsemen, touching them with both knees. Their faces were covered with blood, they were shouting and waving their swords, but, obviously they were in a state of stupefaction, as I had predicted, because they didn't notice me. I tried to squeeze between them, but failed. Then I restrained Vanka, let them pass and took off at an angle. My heart was beating like mad. With all my might I tried to keep my mind clear. You become easy prey if you are crazed. Nevertheless, I put Vanka into a trot in order to save his strength, in case it was needed later. I took the carbine from my back and removed the safety catch. I knew it had five rounds – cartridges were rare at the time. The presence of the carbine reassured me somewhat. I scanned around trying to find some of our men. Finally I recognised an officer. We were delighted with each other, like family. Other officers were soon found. We moved to a walk. The Red attack had stopped.

¹⁴ The traditional attack formation of Cossack cavalry, but adopted by most cavalry of the Civil War, especially if under fire. It was a loose line in a crescent, with the flanks extended forward, which would flow around strong points, to take the enemy in the flank or rear.



We scattered into a chain¹⁵ and opened fire on the Reds. My carbine clicked weakly. I opened the bolt – there were no cartridges, they had been stolen from me.

In the distance, behind us, a Circassian regiment was coming to our rescue. Ahead, the Reds were taking our two guns away.

Our 4th gun took no casualties, but our 3rd did. Their cannon, on its high axle setting, overturned. All three riders jumped off their horses and started to run. All three were hacked to death. Three more officers, who for some reason didn't have horses, were also sabred. Had their horses broken free? Did they not let them mount? Or did the horse-holders not bring them up? I never found out.

I remember it as if in a dream: Colonel Toporkov, in a cloud of dust, turned his horse around and waved his sword over a crowd of Reds, apparently robbing our dead. Few of us had thought about resistance. Everyone, like me, ran without looking back. Fortunately for us, the Red cavalry was made up of sailors. Though brave, they turned out to be bad cavalry – uncertain in the saddle and with poor technique with their sabres. That explained our low losses. If they had been real cavalrymen, we would have had a very bad time of it.

Our 4th gun also rolled over. Larionov, the lead rider, unfastened the shaft (an iron bracket to which the limber was attached) and sat down behind Ranzhiev ...

Wrangel's chauffeur started the car, it jumped and stalled. The driver jumped out of the car and started to run. Wrangel was left without a car, without a horse and without a revolver, which he had given to the chieftain of the village the day before. He ran and, fortunately, bumped into our riders.

"Soldiers, give me a horse!" He shouted.

Ranzhiev unfastened a horse at hand, and Wrangel quickly perched on it. A large man, with the gold shoulder boards and blue trousers with a red stripe of a general, he didn't escape the Reds' attention and several horsemen began to chase him. But the harness dangling behind Wrangel's horse bounced on the bumps, raising dust and scaring away the pursuing horses. So both Wrangel and our limber managed to escape.

From the next day, Wrangel began to wear a Circassian coat and ride a horse. On his side hung a Mauser, which he had never gave to anyone. Wrangel looked good in the Circassian. He reminded one a little of the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, and was popular among the Cossacks.

The commander of our platoon, Captain Shapilovski, was also left without a horse on the mound. He jumped into our machine-gun *tachanka* (a tarantass).¹⁶ But right then, a Red cavalryman who had clearly lost control of his horse rode into its horses. Standing in the tarantass, Shapilovski shot at him point-blank six times until there were no cartridges left in the revolver, but missed. Then he scolded the Red cavalryman terribly.

"Yes, you devil. Son of a" and so on.

Confused, the embarrassed cavalryman departed, and our *tachanka* was saved.

And that's not all! A sixteen-year-old Cossack appeared in Urupskaya on a peasant horse. He had been given a carbine, five rounds and assigned to the train. When the attack began, the Cossack boy got cold feet and wanted to run away, but the horse was barely broken in and wouldn't obey him. Instead it followed the cart with our personal effects, which was fleeing across the steppe. The battery commander's orderly was sitting on the cart.

He said, "A Red cavalryman caught up with the little Cossack and slashed at his head with a sabre. The Cossack was wearing a lambskin *papakha*, which deflected the blow, and he fired the carbine back without

¹⁵ A dispersed line, one deep. This was the standard infantry formation of the civil war.

¹⁶ Tarantasses were very old-fashioned at the time, but Mamontov might be using it to refer generally to a four-seater, sprung, civilian vehicle.



looking. The Red fell. The same fate befell a second and third Red cavalymen. The sheep hat saved the Cossack boy.”

The Red sailors were bad with sword-work from the saddle. The Cossack’s head was streaked with cuts, and he was so scared that he didn’t remember any of it. But when the orderly explained his exploits, he drew himself up and went to ask Wrangel for a St. George cross. I don’t know if he got it. I doubt it.

Our *lava*, on noticing the enemy, had veered to the left and avoided combat, without warning us.

This was the only time when we lost two guns in battle. It never happened again. We did have to destroy them ourselves, but we never had them taken.

The battle at Urupskaya left a most unpleasant impression on me. I was very scared during it and realised how important it is to teach a horse to not go crazy and let you mount, because to be left without a horse was certain death.

Besskorbnaya

Our breakthrough at Urupskaya made it easier for our infantry to take Armavir. The Reds created a new front line near the village of Besskorbnaya to defend the large village of Nevinnomysskaya.

The battery very quickly received two cannons to replace the lost ones. At Besskorbnaya we once again became a four gun battery. But the shells were still in catastrophically short supply. At one point the entire battery had only two shrapnel. We still went out and followed the regiment to cheer up our side and so that the Reds wouldn’t guess that we were almost unarmed. Luckily for us, the Reds also lacked ammunition. The village is divided in two by the Urup River. We occupied the southern part, the Reds had the northern part. It got to the point that the shooting stopped altogether. Both sides watched each other across the river. This went on for two days, then we received a few cartridges and shells, obviously the Reds did too, because the shooting resumed, but not a lot.

There we learned that Germany had lost the war. This gave us hope that now the ‘Allies’ would actively help us, and we shouted “Urra!” How naive we were!

~ ~ ~

Our platoon stood in position, without firing. One officer was sent for food. He brought a huge cauldron with pieces of duck. The officers rushed and, like savages, and began to grab the pieces with their hands. My brother and I were still new then, and, not wanting to imitate the hustle and bustle, stood at a distance.

Captain May, the commander of our 4th gun, said to us, “Why don’t you take some?”

We went up, but only bones remained in the cauldron. May noticed this.

“So you are left without food. And I saw how some grabbed two, or even three, pieces.”

“Thank you, we’re not hungry.”

“You are as hungry as everyone else. Only you still obey an upbringing that has disappeared from the rest.”

That was all.

In the evening, May invited my brother and me to stay in his lodgings. It was unusual for such attention to be paid to newcomers. The fact is that May enjoyed great authority in the battery. An experienced officer of the 64th Brigade, he was also an old *Drozdovtzi*, and wore golden swords on a St. George’s lanyard. He was a Latvian, tall, severe with the others and nice to us. This aroused envy.

May wanted to show my brother something. A piece of cardboard fell out of his wallet, coloured like a shoulder board.

“What it is?” I asked.

“It is the membership card of a monarchist organisation. The cross-bars indicate the rank. The more bars, the higher the rank, and the members are obliged to obey the holder.”

“Does the organisation still exist?”



“I don’t know. It was in Romania. Since then I haven’t heard anything about it.”

I later learned that May told the battery commander, Colonel Kolzakov, the story with the pieces of duck. Kolzakov, in the presence of the senior officers, complained of the decline in manners and expressed a desire that only the best officers were among the scouts who followed him, and named us as such. This became known to all the officers – except us, of course. Well! We had scarcely arrived and were already the best, but they, the veterans, were the worst? They began to boycott us. But, as I said, we didn’t know this, which allowed us to remain natural.

One day, near Spitsevka, all the colonels were on a *kurgan*. I went up to it. Suddenly Colonel Kolzakov came down from the mound and shook my hand, which embarrassed me, a simple horse holder. This happened more than once with my brother and with me.

There were, in fact, too many scouts. They followed the battery commander and were its communications service, commanded by Colonel Andrievski, being sent with messages. They were the aristocrats of the battery and had no other specific tasks.

We joined them after the capture of Stavropol.

Armavir

October had come. Our division was pulled back to Armavir for rest. Once I forgot to unsaddle Vanka. Lieutenant Abramov, who was in charge of the horses, announced this to anyone who wanted to hear. I was very embarrassed by the oversight. But my bewilderment was greater when, having arrived at the hitching post, I found Vanka still saddled. Abramov had noticed but hadn’t taken off the saddle. It was just ill will. How many times later did I have to unsaddle someone else’s horse and later report it privately to a forgetful rider? Poor Vanka stood all harnessed all night.

There were many Armenians in Armavir. We were placed in the house of an Armenian merchant. The owner, a young man, expressed his admiration for us, that we are fighting against the Bolsheviks.

“Why aren’t you fighting the Bolsheviks?”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

“You are soldiers, it is your business.”

“Do you think we were born with a gun in our hands? We were civilians and volunteered.”

“But I have a shop, business. What will become of the store if I go to fight? No I can’t.”

“If the store prevents you from fulfilling your duty, then give it to someone.”

“Are you joking?”

“If we all return on our own business, then there will be no one left to prevent the communists from looting your store, and hanging you in addition.”

After that, the owner didn’t show up again. There were many selfish cowards who praised us, but didn’t feel obliged to follow our example. It is well known that war is bad for your health.

In Armavir, I met Ensign Ushakov. He sang the works of Vertinski well and rode a wonderful black mare, Dura,¹⁷ which I often had to hold. She got her name because the very short-sighted Ushakov put the bit into her nose, not into her mouth. The horse backed away and lifted its head, and Ushakov shouted in a rage: “Fool!” So she remained a fool.

At this time, our infantry pushed the Reds back behind Nevinnomysskaya and approached Stavropol, the main city of the North Caucasus, which we had been fighting for control of for a long time. From Armavir they took us by train to Nevinnomysskaya. There we saw the Caucasus Mountains as a silhouette and saw a church which had been profaned. The saint’s lips were shot and a cigarette butt was inserted into the hole.

¹⁷ Meaning “fool”.



We watered the horses in the Kuban River. In Tiflis and Ekaterinodar it is a wide, muddy and deep river, and in Nevinnomysskaya it is a rocky transparent stream, which we could ford.

Attack on Stavropol

From Nevinnomysskaya, the division moved north. By the road we saw a corpse, apparently of an officer. His eyes were either gouged out or eaten by crows. Everyone came over to look. I was afraid of corpses (they would reappear in my dreams) and I always turned my back on them. I was struck by the morbid curiosity of the others. After all, they are never beautiful, and often have a terrible stench. We started to come across further corpses, as there had been a month of fighting there. People stopped going to look, there were too many corpses. They were all undressed, apparently robbed by the peasants. It was impossible to find out which were ours and which were Reds.

If on campaign in the steppes we saw ducks or a horse, they became our booty. This wasn't considered reprehensible. We lived at the expense of the countryside, especially since we were no longer in the Kuban, which had been sympathetic to us, but in Stavropol province, which was hostile. Bustards were often seen in the steppe. Once we noticed pigs and sent two men to take a pig for us. But the horsemen rode off, stayed only an instant and returned.

"Why didn't you take the pigs?"

"They were eating human corpses."

~ ~ ~

In the village of Temnolesskaya we found much of our infantry. Above the small remnants of what had previously been dense forest, the domes of Stavropol, and especially one very high bell tower, were visible. Our division was sent to the left, to encircle it. After a long march of sixty kilometres, in light rain, we spent the night in the village of Sengelevskaya. The hostess of our peasant hut prepared tea for us, which we didn't drink: the pot had just previously had kerosene in it, but she hadn't washed it.

The next day we moved on and entered an area of forests and ravines. It was getting cold, especially at night.

After a difficult and long march in the rain and wind, we arrived at the village of Mar'evskaya in the dark. Leading Vanka by the bit, I went to the lodgings set for the 4th gun. But Lieutenant Klinevski announced to me that the house was cramped and there was no more space, and slammed the door in my face. Unpleasantly struck by such hostility, I waited a moment and then went to look for lodging in the neighbouring houses. All the doors were locked, and my knock and request to let me in was categorically refused. Up until then I had been polite, but I soon after adopted a more brutal system that gave better results. My brother was still busy with the gun. Subsequently, I became friends with Klinevski, and he told me with a laugh that the refusal to let me in was the result of the boycott placed on us. Finally I came across a nunnery. To my knock, a nun, without opening the gate, refused to let me in.

"Is it Christian to refuse hospitality and leave a tired person in the cold outside at night?"

It worked. There were whispers, then, "We are afraid of men by themselves."

"My brother is coming soon. Don't be afraid. I'm tired and deathly hungry."

Again whispers, then the gate opened slightly. I put Vanka in the stable, entered the house, took off my cap, crossed myself in front of the icons and then greeted them. This apparently calmed the nuns who were watching me fearfully. Little by little, our relationship improved. They gave me water to wash and a towel. The table was laid, a samovar appeared. They made two beds on the floor.

When my brother came, he looked around in surprise. "You have landed well!"

We talked, and after feeding the horses I fell asleep while listening to a reading of the Apocalypse.

Feeding Horses

I fed and watered Vanka regularly. It was difficult in the evenings. After a march and battle, we collapsed from fatigue. Men put their horses in the stable, gave them hay, and immediately fell asleep themselves.



When the hostess who was preparing our food announced that it was ready, no one wanted to eat, but continued to sleep, asking the host to water and feed the horses. We ate in the morning.

We didn't undress for sleep, sometimes we took off our boots. We slept, while listening. If shots rang out, we stood up like machines and only really woke up in the stables, while saddling the horses. Delay could cost your life.

In the evening I always struggled with going to sleep and ended up getting up and going to the stable. Firstly, I had fallen in love with Vanka. Secondly, I didn't trust the peasants, perhaps they were Reds. Thirdly, my safety depended on Vanka's good condition. After all, tomorrow might always require flight, and I didn't want Vanka to give out. I can't remember a single case when I didn't feed Vanka, providing of course that it was possible. Because sometimes we remained in the field overnight, not eating ourselves or feeding the horses. Anything could happen. In those cases they were unbridled and the girths loosened. I unsaddled and rubbed the horse's back, others didn't. I went to sleep on the ground, holding the reins in my hands, and moved every half hour: in the summer so that the horse could graze, in the winter so it wouldn't freeze.

So, having conquered sleep, I went to the stable. With the help of a *kaganets* (a piece of glass full of oil with a rag twisted as a wick, giving very little light) you get water from the well, a lot of water. If the well is deep, then it was a serious job. There were no matches, no candles, no kerosene during the revolution. Nobody worked, everyone just fought.

I gave Vanka plenty of water, and of course I also gave Rytsar, my brother's horse, some. What about the other horses? They looked at me with confidence and sighed. I knew them all and kept them as a horse-holder. I swore, but I gave each one a drink. The officers noticed this and decided that they could sleep peacefully – Mamontov would water the horses. Little by little it became customary, and it wasn't unpleasant for me. Trust was established between the horses and me, and as a horse-holder, I was able to manage more horses than others. The horses no longer tried to escape. I never had only the three horses prescribed by regulations, but always more. And once I was able to lead twelve horses away from the Reds, and even with the shooting and panic.

Since I never lost the horses and brought them on time, all the officers wanted me to keep their horse. But the boycott even intervened in that business.

Once I got all the horses watered, without thinking that Captain Barski had arrived later. It wouldn't hurt the horse, it had been in the stable for an hour already. But Barski took the opportunity to make an unpleasant scene.

"If you don't know that you cannot water a hot horse, then it would be better for you to serve in the infantry. I didn't ask you to water my horse," and then he defiantly saddled his horse and rode on it.

Formally, he was right, but he had overdone it. I announced publicly that I wouldn't touch the other men's horses anymore. Water them yourselves! In fact, I kept watering them as before, except for Barski's horse, which I also refused to hold.

"I cannot take your horse, I already have a larger number than prescribed by regulations."

And then I would take another officer's horse.

I think that Barski regretted his scene, because the ban on us ended soon afterwards, and it was my turn to boycott Barski.

The poor man was killed during the landing on the Kuban in August 1920 .

Stavropol

We set out very early from Mar'evskaya and walked through the forest for an hour and a half. The battery was called to the front. We emerged from a ravine. The forest cleared and in front of us was a large field, and behind it the city of Stavropol's outskirts. The whole field was covered with cavalry, very close to us. Several red banners were fluttering. It was the Reds.



The battery immediately, on the edge of the ravine, unlimbered and began to shoot rapidly at the cavalry with cannister. The surprise was complete. The red banners disappeared, the cavalry ranks became confused and fled. Our infantry surged out of the forest and pursued. It was impossible to shoot any more, as we would hit our own men. The battery limbered up and trotted behind the regiments. At the backs of those fleeing, we entered the city.

The flank attack was a brilliant success. The Reds began to panic, and that made it easier for our infantry, who were advancing from the other side of the town.

The first building on the edge of the town was a nunnery. As we passed it, a nun jumped out of the gate, ran over to our ambulance cart, and jumped into it as it was moving. It was an officer in disguise. In a previous battle, he had been wounded and hid in a monastery. The nuns didn't surrender him. Now he was crying and laughing that he had found himself back with us.

In their pursuit the Cossacks went to the centre of the city, but cavalry don't operate well in cities. The Reds came to their senses, recovered and drove us out. They had very large forces in Stavropol.

Our battery was climbing a steep and narrow street when we met the retreating Cossacks. To turn the battery around, required unhooking the guns, turning the limber horses around and re-attaching the guns. To avoid panic, we moved on foot, and the horse-holders led the horses.

A single Red rifleman climbed a high bell tower and fired bullet after bullet at us from there. But he wasn't very good, and missed. Suddenly I heard a bullet hit something. Lieutenant Vinogradov, who was walking in front of me, turned around.

"I'm wounded, look where, somewhere on my back."

I examined his back, but I couldn't see blood anywhere. On the stock of the carbine, which was slung behind Vinogradov's back, I saw the mark of a bullet.

"It felt like a stick hitting my back."

For several days, Vinogradov's back ached, but the carbine had saved him.

We returned to the monastery and spent the night in the square in front of it. The guns took turns firing all night through the city, every quarter of an hour. It was purely psychological as it gets on the nerves. Moreover, it is better to scatter the shells without any system. So nobody knows where the next shell will fall.

~ ~ ~

I went to the monastery and knocked. The nuns refused to open. But I already knew what to say.

"You refuse to let someone in to warm up, is that Christian?"

I waited, but there was no answer. I left and settled in the tower above the gate. I lay down on the floor. The first snow fell for the year, but I was covered with the tower's roof. Suddenly a nun appeared.

"Did you knock on our door?"

"Yes."

"Please. Bring your friends. We are waiting for you."

I was surprised. Especially because she found me among so many. I invited my brother, May, Vinogradov, Mukalov and someone else to drink tea. They widened their eyes and thought I was joking, but they followed me. The table was laid, the samovar hissed, the priest was sitting, the nuns were serving.

Oh, how nice it was to drink tea in a warm and dry room. We thanked them heartily and parted. I lay down in my tower with my cap under my head. Even the shots from our battery didn't bother me. I fell fast asleep, and it seemed to me that I was sleeping in my bed in Moscow. In the morning I was surprised – I didn't know where I was.

Encirclement



The next day they decided to encircle the city even more. They sent our (4th) gun with two Cossack *sotnias* to the left. The plateau was cut by three deep ravines. Our *lava* made easy progress without meeting any resistance. The *sotnias* crossed the ravines directly, but the gun had to follow the zigzags of the road. As a result we fell behind. When we got to the crest of the third ravine, we met our retreating *lava*, under heavy fire from the Reds. We turned around and moved at a brisk trot, and sometimes at a gallop. The Cossacks were already on the other edge of the ravine, but we were still in it when the Red infantry appeared on its edge and began to shoot at us. This was the case in each ravine. The infantry ran, hoping to cut off our retreat, while we galloped as fast as we could. Finally we got out to level ground and at a fast trot were able to break away from the pursuit.

We were walking past the outer houses of the city and noticed, too late, a Cossack signalling to us with his whip. At that point, the street ended in a field. As soon as the gun went past the continuation of the street, a machine gun started from somewhere. The gun moved to a gallop and safely reached an enclosed area behind some houses.

However the gun had been right in the machine-gun's line of fire. A rider on the front pair was lightly wounded in the shoulder and his horse's ear was shot, with another small wound lower down. But most of all, my brother was lucky. Rytsar had three scratches, one on the mane and two on the rump, and my brother's fur coat had been shot through. My heart skipped a beat: while my hands were shaking ... Vanka and I had nothing.

~ ~ ~

Our division was forced to leave the city. The Reds thought we were retreating and chased us. But Wrangel had simply taken the cavalry out of the narrow streets into the fields. There we turned and met the Reds, and drove them back into the city. The result of our flanking manoeuvre were as desired. Our infantry pressed in on the other side, and the Reds left Stavropol.

The last shell jammed in our gun, and, despite our best efforts, we were unable to retrieve it. At that time, a joyful cry rang out:

"Lodging officers, to Stavropol!"

It was a joyful division that entered the city. Meanwhile Lieutenant Vinogradov received an order to take the gun and several men, including me, and go to our wagon train 25 km away. There, a technician would have the tools to remove the stuck shell. We were unpleasantly surprised by this order. It was night, we didn't know the way to the required farm and we couldn't find a guide. We decided to follow the map.

All our comrades entered the city with a smile, while we gloomily went in a different direction.

A Strange Night

It was the middle of the night, it was windy and cold. We trotted across a vast field. Sometimes the wind tore open the clouds, and the moon illuminated some white naked corpses. They were everywhere. The horses were frightened and shied away. I confess that this sight was unpleasant to me. Finally we entered a forest. The wind died down, but it began to rain. I covered my head with a sack. The darkness in the forest was total. Suddenly we saw a fire to the right. The gun stopped, and Vinogradov sent me to look and inquire about the road. I went deep into the forest. Maybe it was the scattered Reds who set the fire? I pulled my carbine from over my shoulder and unlocked the safety catch. There was a small clearing, and a fire was burning on a small hill behind a hazel grove. I pushed Vanka on and we climbed the hillock. I was at a loss – it was a stump that was burning fiercely. No one was around. I assumed that they had heard my approach and hid.

I carefully examined the grass around the stump. The grass wasn't crumpled, drops still hung on it.

Vanka whinnied and his mane stood on end. A primal fear gripped him and he passed it on to me. Vanka turned on his hind legs and galloped towards the gun. I didn't hold him back, just bent down to avoid the branches. When I heard our men's voices, I immediately came to my senses and brought Vanka to a trot.

"What's in there?"



“There’s a stump on fire, but no-one’s there.”

“You were riding so hard that we thought you were being followed.”

“Hmm...”

I still can’t understand how that stump by itself, without people, was burning in the rain. It wasn’t the phosphoric light of a rotten tree, but a clear, bright fire.

I also can’t understand how I could ride through the forest and not get caught up in the branches. The forest is very dense there. Even in daytime you can’t gallop through it.

Cholera

Late at night we nevertheless found the farm and our wagon train. The floor of the house was completely covered with sleeping soldiers: tailors, shoemakers, saddlers and coachmen. There was no free space. Except, oddly, it was clear under a window. What luck! Walking over the sleeping people, I put my head on my saddle, covered myself with my greatcoat, and immediately fell asleep. By my feet was a man who moaned all night and interfered with my sleep. I remember from a dream that the owner gave him a drink now and then. And I, to my shame, cursed him to hell.

When I woke up, it was morning, the soldiers were gone – except for the sick man who was asleep. Our officers were having tea at a table in another corner of the hut. I reached into my bags for sugar and awkwardly kicked the sleeping man. He didn’t budge. I looked at him closely – he was dead. Of course, breakfast was interrupted. They called the doctor. He pointed to the saddle and my overcoat.

“Who slept there?”

“Me.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Thank you, OK.”

“Stick out your tongue ... Don’t come near me. Do you have weakness or diarrhoea?”

“Doctor, explain yourself, what’s the problem?”

“He died of cholera, and you spent the night with him.”

There was an awkward silence. A quarter of an hour later, I became weak and developed bloody diarrhoea. The weakness increased.

The doctor demanded that I stay with the rear services.

“No way. If I’m really sick, then I need to be treated in the city. My brother is there.”

Everyone began to persuade me to stay, and I realised that they were afraid of infection and might yet force me into a barn, to get rid of me. I decided not to argue.

“Okay, I’ll stay. I’m going to take Vanka to the stable.”

This decision calmed everyone, and I was left alone. I was so weak that I couldn’t raise the saddle onto Vanka. I had to hold onto Vanka’s skin and push the saddle onto him. I was close to fainting, with a cold sweat streaming all over my body. I led Vanka not to the rear, but towards Stavropol. I could no longer get into the saddle, I had to, as in childhood, climb up a fence and cross from there into the saddle. Vanka understood that something was wrong, he stood still. We walked towards the city.

Soon our repaired gun caught up with me.

“It’s you! Why didn’t you stay in the rear?”

“To hell with your staying in the rear. That is the surest way to die. Don’t be scared. I will stay behind and won’t infect you.”

While we were at walking pace, it was bearable. But then the gun went to a trot, and I despaired that I was about to fall off. I had no strength. I grabbed Vanka’s mane and didn’t fall off.



The sun came out, the birds chirped, the riders sang together, we saw the golden domes of Stavropol, and I somehow got distracted from my illness.

In the city we were greeted with an ovation, the young ladies smiled and threw flowers at us, the crowd was like a party. One lady rushed and kissed my dirty boot. Vinogradov turned to me.

“Mamontov, catch up.”

I took my place in the formation. We dressed our ranks.

It was only when I arrived at my lodgings and unsaddled Vanka that I suddenly remembered the cholera. Immediately I felt weak, but not the same as before.

I opened the door to the house. In the middle of the room a table was laid with a white tablecloth, and there were all sorts of food and bottles. Our officers surrounded an interesting brunette in a gypsy shawl, with sitting with her legs on a sofa. She fingered the strings of the guitar and sang in a slightly rough voice:

*I live only for you,
For you alone I sing,
My darling, my beautiful,
My pretty swallow ...*

I seemed that one wouldn't get bored there.

Holding onto the jamb of the door, I said in a weak voice, “Fedya, I'm very sick.”

A friendly burst of laughter greeted my words. Captain Mukalov jumped up and poured me a full glass of vodka.

“Here is the best medicine.”

I thought, well, vodka should disinfect the intestines.

I drank it in one gulp and a pleasant warmth spread throughout my body. And when the songstress said: “Come here, I will cure you,” I forgot everything and my cholera.

Much later, I became acquainted with Coué's theories (of auto-suggestion). I realised that I had become a victim of suggestion from the doctor's stupid words. The doctor didn't know what the soldier had died of. The hut was full of people, everyone slept next to him, and the owner gave him water – but the doctor found fault only with me. I'm deeply convinced that if I had stayed in the rear, then I would have died of real cholera.

In Stavropol, my brother was lodged with a Muscovite. The family had two daughters, and both were, in my opinion, in love with him. I must point out that my brother was quite charming. He was very quickly accepted into that family, as he was in the battery. The higher officers were friendly with him. Despite the fact that he was an infantry officer, he wasn't sent to the machine-gun team, as happened to all the other infantry officers, and he wasn't appointed a horse-holder, as I was despite being an artilleryman. Soon he was transferred to the scouts – the aristocracy of the battery – and then appointed commander of a gun, although there were many artillerymen who wanted that position. I followed him in his successes. Moreover, my brother never did anything to achieve this: he didn't plead, didn't intrigue, and didn't envy others. This was probably what everyone liked about him.

Advice from a Stavropol Muscovite

“Mamontov ... Mamontov? You are Muscovites ... Are you relatives of Konstantin Vasilievich Rukavishnikov? Ah, he is your maternal grandfather. This is a strange meeting of Muscovites, in Stavropol, in the North Caucasus. I knew your grandfather well, a charming man.

So I listen to you, young people. You believe in victory and success, as it should be at your age ... Yes, yes, I know. Everything is going well and you are advancing. But remember, when playing cards or waging a war, you never know how it will end. Usually everything goes well, and then the unexpected happens ... Don't forget that communism is still very much in vogue everywhere. Of course, it is complete utopianism and based on the ignorance and stupidity of the masses. But precisely because



of this, it will be successful, because it is based on human stupidity, which is the greatest force in the world.

Allied help? .. Hmm ... Don't count on it too much. The Allies want a weak Russia to take advantage of. Of course, then they will regret not helping in time. Because they are wrong if they think the Bolsheviks will be a weak and submissive government. They are a most terrible dictatorship. The People's Soviets? Ha, ha. A decoration for fools. A dictator concentrates all power in his hands and does what he wants, and no one dares to squeak.

It would be better if you tried to win over the peasants to your side. It could be done with reforms and propaganda. Give them land. The peasants are conservative, and cooperation won't suit them. They want their land!

No, I'm not going to criticise your position at all, it's my affair too. And I don't intend to dampen your enthusiasm, that would be a shame. No, I want to give you some practical advice in memory of your grandfather. I wouldn't say anything to others, I owe you.

You all think about what you will do after you win. Don't strain yourselves! Everything will happen by itself, without your participation. Moscow, a triumphal entry, fanfare, a return of the advantages of the old guard, which, between us, would soon become unbearable ... But then again ... Everything has two sides. Have you thought what you will do if you lose the war? Of course not. But it is better to anticipate it.

Here's my advice: emigrate. Don't trust any amnesties. That is a trick to catch you. And emigrate as far as possible – to Australia or New Zealand. There are few people there, but a lot of land. There will be no revolution there. In Europe and America, however, you will never be sure that communism won't follow you. They are too overpopulated.

Now, that's all I wanted to tell you. If, God forbid, you lose the war, remember my words ... And most importantly, try not to get killed. A thinking caution is better than insane courage."

Dubrovka

From Stavropol, the Reds retreated to the north and fortified the village of Mikhailovka. After several days of rest in the city, our division headed north. There were several battles, but we were unable to take Mikhailovka. Then we changed tactics. The division set out at night and went to the left, meeting no enemy. Day broke, and suddenly several shrapnel shells flew in from behind and burst over our column.

"Our gunners are crazy, they are shooting at their own side."

"No, these aren't ours, that's the Reds firing."

"How can it be the Reds, they're behind us."

"We are in their rear. We crossed through their front during the night."

"In their rear? Hmm ... and if ... we fail, what are we going to do then?"

It was the first time we had penetrated into the Red rear and we lacked courage. But we soon became convinced that the Reds were more scared than we were.

We reached a position on a hill overlooking the village of Dubrovka, which was obviously the Reds' base. There was an incredible panic after our first salvo. Our appearance was a total surprise. Hundreds of carts rushed in different directions out of the village, along roads and off roads, they collided, they overturned. There was a traffic jam on the bridge.

Subsequently, we often broke into the Red rear, and we gained experience in profiting from the first surprise and panic. At Dubrovka we lost a lot of time with indecision. Yet it was an easy victory. Several more shells fired into the village completed the rout. We captured a lot of booty, prisoners, and most importantly, sowed panic throughout the district. Red infantry appeared to the north, but after some shrapnel was sent their way they started to run.



Returning, we entered Mikhailovka from the rear, and this time occupied it easily. Nevertheless, we were glad to establish contact with our infantry, who greeted us like heroes (rather timid heroes!).

I recall that we had no losses, or very few.

~ ~ ~

General Wrangel was given command of our cavalry corps. It included our division and that of Colonel Ulagai.

Due to some unknown patronage, Wrangel requested my brother and I serve at corps headquarters. But we had got used to the battery, its men and horses, and didn't want to leave it. We declined. The battery commander and our comrades liked that, and our boycott ended. We were finally accepted into the battery family. We were transferred to the battery scouts.

The Reborn Steppe

I chose the tallest *kurgan*. Vanka needed all his strength to climb it. From there I had a wide view of the boundless steppe, dotted with *kurgans*, evidence of its former wild times.

Long columns of cavalry crossed the steppe.

"As before, in the days of the Pechenegs and the Mongols," I thought.

I counted five columns. In the nearest, which was ours, riders in *burkas*¹⁸ and *papakhas* were visible. The noise of the carts, and occasionally the neighing of a horse, could be heard. Further on, the columns looked like dark ribbons, barely moving. Five columns, each a brigade, isn't nothing. It seemed to me that I had become a Mongol khan, transported to the 13th century. I felt the same pride and joy that the Mongols must have felt.

The columns moved northeast. The shallow snow didn't cover the dry grass everywhere. It was cold.

Kugulta

Our column arrived first at the enemy. Colonel Toporkov left the regiments in a depression, hiding them from opposition sight. He took fifty Cossacks and our battery and headed towards the enemy. In front of us were the chains of Red infantry. We sent them a few shrapnel, not so much to cause them losses, but to let the other column, which was due to take them from the rear, know about our presence. The Reds, inspired by our insignificant numbers and sparse fire, walked towards us. Their bullets began to fly past our heads more often. We were already thinking about leaving, but Toporkov didn't seem to notice anything. He looked into the distance.

"Finally!" he exclaimed. "Here they are."

Shrapnel burst far behind the Red lines. The Red chain stopped.

"This is the psychological moment. You need to attack them immediately. Our regiments are too far away ... Well, gunners, sabres out and go with God!"

Half a *sotnia* and we gunners formed a *lava*. Our trumpeter sounded the attack, and we went, first at a trot, then into a gallop. The fire from the Reds intensified. I bent down over Vanka's neck and, as in Urupskaya, lost my head.

"Why are you shouting?" a comrade asked me. "It's already over."

Embarrassed, I came to my senses. Our attack had succeeded. Sixty Reds surrendered, several were sabred, and the rest fled. We had two lightly wounded.

Our regiments trotted past us for another attack.

"Well done, artillerymen, you did a good job!" shouted the Cossacks.

My comrades answered jokingly, but I was silent.

¹⁸ Felt capes, traditional to the Caucasus mountain tribes.



~ ~ ~

A year later, in the Taurida, we were attacked by Red cavalry. Our cannister stopped them. A lone rider galloped up to the battery. He rode between the guns, shouting and waving his sabre. He was in the same state of stupefaction and became an easy target. If he hadn't lost his head, he could have easily saved himself.

Kirill and Mefodiy¹⁹

We spent the night in Kugulta. There was a bitter frost. Our hostess was out of sorts. Finally she exclaimed. "Aren't you ashamed? You sit and warm yourselves, and yet you keep your soldiers in the barn, in this frost. They will freeze out there."

Our eyes widened in surprise. Our soldiers were well-quartered three houses down from us.

"Which soldiers?"

"How do I know? There are a dozen of them in the barn."

We took our carbines and went to the barn. We found seven Reds, who had scattered the day before. They had buried themselves in the straw and we didn't even suspect their presence. If they had been bolder, they could cut us up at night or taken our horses.

We didn't know what to do with our prisoners. We had to give them to the Cossacks.

"They'll shoot them," said my brother. "Let's keep two. They can prepare our food and look after the horses."

We chose two. An elderly one called Kirill, and a younger one, who we named Mefodiy. The latter was brave and immediately assimilated into our unit. He could always be seen sitting on our wagon, next to the coachman, and always with a goose under his arm. Kirill was shy. The next day I met him on the street.

"Why don't you stay in the hut in such cold weather?"

"I love the cold. I'm taking a walk."

Suspecting something was up, I went to the soldiers and asked the reason.

"We don't want that Red pig with us."

Meanwhile Mefodiy was sitting there too, and our men had forgotten that he was also picked from among the prisoners. I took Kirill to our place. He turned out to be helpful and quite educated. Soon they were both demobilised and sent home.

This and That

It was bitterly cold, and they chose that very day to clean the gun. We cleaned the gun twice a year, when the mood struck. To clean it in the cold was just an atrocity. You couldn't touch it, because your skin would stick and peel off.

From Kugulta we went east and reoccupied Konstantinovka, which the Reds then pushed us out of twice. It happens that a small plateau dominates the village, from which the village is easily shelled. Thus we took Konstantinovka three times.

In addition to Konstantinovka, there were other battles and marches. But I didn't write down the names of the villages, and have forgotten what happened in the battles. Usually, a victory or a bad situation is remembered, and an everyday tedious battle in the drizzling rain, without a decisive attack, is easily forgotten and fades in memory to some other curious or colourful event. Thus, one day in the evening, in the rain, with a battle drawing to a close, a magnificent commissar rode up to our battery, all covered in stars and red bows. He began to scold the battery for not following his orders. We couldn't believe our eyes

¹⁹ In the usual English forms, Cyril and Methodius, like the famous "apostles to the Slavs" who invented the alphabet named after Cyril.



and were a little stunned. He had mistaken our battery for his, and noticed his mistake too late. There was a lot of money in his saddlebags.

A Cossack horse battery joined our division. Not very renowned, according to the Cossacks themselves. It worked with the other brigade and we rarely met.

Petrovskoe²⁰

There is a high plateau on the east side of the Kalaus River. It rises five hundred meters above the steppe. It is completely flat and turns into the Manych steppes. There had been a sea below. The edges of the cliffs are covered in fossilised shells. The cliffs are very steep and represent a natural fortress. The small town of Petrovskoe lies at the foot of the cliffs and where the plateau turns a corner and then heads east. The river itself has dug a deep gorge – about fifty meters down. It is impassable on horseback. You get to Petrovskoe by an iron bridge across the river. The rail line north of Stavropol goes through Petrovskoe, then heads north to Divnoe, with a spur from Petrovskoe east to Blagodarnoe.

The division remained in Konstantinovka, while the battery, under the command of Colonel Shafrov, was sent to Petrovskoe as a diversion. With us were twenty-nine Cossacks of the Kornilov Regiment in support. Ulagai's division was advancing across the plateau, and our battery was supposed to divert the Reds' attention.

We set out late and approached Petrovskoe at five o'clock in the evening. We hadn't met the enemy anywhere. On the plateau, north of Petrovskoe, there was a battle, shrapnel was bursting, and it seemed that the battle was heading to the right, that is, Ulagai was advancing. Scouts sent to Petrovskoe didn't find any Reds. We positioned ourselves on the steppe in front of the bridge.

"What should we do?" asked Colonel Shafrov. "It is getting dark, and it is snowing. I don't fancy returning twenty-four kilometres back to Konstantinovka. There is a possibility that Ulagai will take Petrovskoe. Let's spend the night there and wait for him."

It is odd that none of our experienced captains protested a decision so lightly made.

We crossed the bridge and walked along a narrow, curved street into the square. We set up our guns there, unharnessed the horses, took them to the stables, and occupied the houses around the square. The stables didn't lead onto the square, but into a street beyond the square. Mostly we settled down as if at home, without any security. True, the horses weren't unsaddled.

"I don't like this adventure at all," my brother told me.

"Why?"

"We have only one way out – a narrow curved street and a bridge. The Reds could occupy the bridge with a dozen rifles, and we would be caught, like in a mousetrap. The river is impassable, even for a man on foot. Our twenty-nine Cossacks won't be able to do anything."

"But Ulagai's whole division is on the way!"

"How do you know that it is on the way? That is only Shafrov's guess."

Our scouts settled down in a spacious house and, since it was warm in the house, they took off their shirts and, in the light of the *kaganets*, began to kill the lice, which are always present in war.

The door opened and a snow-covered figure in a burka and hat appeared. Obviously, Ulagai's man sent to find quarters. We were stripped to the waist.

"Which unit are you?" he asked.

"The battery."

"This house is assigned to division headquarters. You must leave it."

"We occupied it, we will stay in it."

²⁰ Now called Svetlograd.



“We’ll about that,” he said as he left. “The orders are to take the same lodgings as yesterday.”

And he disappeared.

We looked at each other with open mouths.

“That wasn’t one of Ulagai’s men at all, but a Red, since they want to take their previous quarters.”

We hastily began to dress and sent a message to warn Shafrov.

The battery commander ordered us to assemble at the cannons, leading ours horses by the bit. No smoking, no talking, no answering questions.

“A mousetrap,” I thought.

Gathering my things, I rushed to the stable. It was on another street. To get to the square, I had to walk two streets. I had tied Vanka’s reins with a knot, and, pulling on the reins, he had tightened the wet knot – I couldn’t untie it in any way. My comrades took their horses and left, while I was still struggling with the knot. I never again tied the reins, instead throwing a loop over something. Finally, frightened by the silence all around, I remembered the penknife in my pocket and cut the reins. I set off towards the assembly point.

I thought of a damned mousetrap. Thankfully it was dark and snowing, so that I could go unnoticed.

Suddenly my heart stopped. The silhouette of three of horsemen loomed on a corner. I needed to get past them.

Ours? Reds? ... It’s Reds. They are smoking and talking loudly. What should I do? Above all don’t stop and make them suspicious.

My heart was beating very loudly. But I continued to walk slowly staying close to the houses. The carbine on my back. Did it have rounds in it? The horsemen paid no attention to me, and I thought that I would be able to pass unnoticed, but Vanka, in passing, couldn’t help but bite one of the horses. Curses rang out.

“You should kill such a horse, and the owner with it. You can’t look after a horse! Prick ...”

In horror, I drew in my head and quickened my pace. When they left, I said quietly to Vanka, “Though you may be a hero, you are also a fool. I almost got myself into deep water because of you.”

Finally I reached the square. The silent group there was our men. The guns were already harnessed.

“Check if everyone’s here,” said Shafrov in an undertone.

“Everyone is here.”

“On a short bridle. Forward, at a walk. The Cossacks will go behind.”

A battery at walking pace, horses at the bridle, attracts little attention. We headed towards the bridge. As we entered the bends of the street, there were several shots from behind, then silence. We picked up our pace. We learned later that the Cossacks decided to profit from the situation. They approached individual riders and asked for a light. When the rider bent down, he was pulled from his saddle and stabbed with a dagger. One managed to escape, which triggered the shots. The Reds, not suspecting our small numbers, didn’t dare to pursue us in the dark.

A Red sentry had already been posted by the bridge.

“Which unit are you?” he asked.

He was met with silence.

“I asked, which unit are you?” Nobody answered.

“Have you lost your tongues, or are you deaf?”

Suddenly he understood. He tried to retreat, but there was a ravine behind him. He cowered down and fell silent. We crossed the bridge.

“Stop! Saddle! At a trot – march!”



What a joy to be back in the steppe, in the open. To get out of the mousetrap!

We went to Konstantinovka.

Worry for my Brother

Late at night we reached Konstantinovka. There was no snow, but there was ice. The moon was shining brightly. We saw geese in the field and decided to take one for food. Several people separated from the column, surrounded the geese and hacked two to death. The column had already disappeared into the village. We set off at a brisk trot to catch up with the battery. I caught it and settled into my place. Suddenly I heard a cry.

“Lieutenant Mamontov’s horse!” (my brother was a lieutenant,²¹ and I was still an ensign).

I rode out to where they were shouting, and I see a heavily breathing Rytsar, with the saddle slid down and reins torn off. I straightened up the saddle, took Rytsar and went back to look for my brother.

Obviously he had fallen. But why?

Having reached the place where they had caught the geese, I couldn’t see anyone. I returned to the lodgings – my brother wasn’t there. Very worried, I put Rytsar and Vanka in the stables and walked back along the road, knocking on all the houses and asking if they had seen an officer. Nobody knew anything. I became more and more worried.

At this time, the moon came out from behind the clouds and illuminated a torn boot on the road – my brother’s boot. I began to carefully examine the road and found a goose and several items from my brother’s pockets.

He must have fallen here, and probably hurt himself badly, since he left his boot behind.

Was he attacked? What should I do? I decided to go to the lodgings and ask someone to come with me to search the nearby houses.

Anxiety squeezed me. I began to pray fervently. Only the goose calmed me somewhat. If my brother had been shot and carried away then, of course, the goose would have been taken too.

I went to where we were staying and, joyfully, I found my brother there. Here’s what happened.

He was at a brisk trot, and while turning on some ice, Rytsar slipped and fell. He immediately jumped up, but my brother’s leg caught in the stirrup. Rytsar took fright and galloped off, dragging my brother a dozen paces. Fortunately, the boot was of poor quality, it ripped and freed my brother’s leg. The shock of falling onto, and then being dragged across, the ice was such that my brother barely came to his senses. He climbed into a passing cart and took it to our lodgings. For three days he could barely move.

Surprise Attack

We stayed in Konstantinovka for two days. The officers played cards and rarely went outside. As a result of the fall, my brother didn’t move well, and I fed Vanka and Rytsar, and often the other horses, so spending a lot of time in the stables. On the third day I was watering the horses there, when I heard a shot, then more and more. I went out into the yard, and a bullet whistled by me. There was an infantry chain at the edge of the plateau, presumably Reds. The shooting intensified. It was impossible to hesitate. I saddled all the horses, cursing our men in the huts, who didn’t hear anything. Then he burst in like a whirlwind.

“The Reds!”

Everyone jumped up, began to dress hastily and collect their things. They were very happy to see the horses already saddled. There was already shooting in the village. We rushed to the park. The riders were already limbering up. The division left Konstantinovka quicker than it had entered. Wrangel’s headquarters fled half-dressed. Several Cossacks were captured. When we occupied Konstantinovka again the next day we found their mutilated corpses. This made the men furious and all the prisoners were shot.

²¹ *Poruchik*, two ranks higher than Sergei’s *praporshchik*.



Amusement

As a scout, I was sent one night from Petrovskoe to Donskaya Balka, where our platoon was stationed, with a message. It was very unpleasant. The night was dark, I didn't know the road, and it went under a cliff which had Reds at the top. There was no front as such and there might be patrols.

I mobilised a local resident with a cart, hitched Vanka to the back and lay down on the hay in the cart with a carbine in my hands, looking intently and listening to the darkness. How I fell asleep I don't know. I woke up because the wagon stopped and a striking match illuminated the three horsemen who bent over me. Alarmed, I grabbed my carbine, rolled off the cart and darted into the bushes. It was only there that I completely woke up and belatedly realised that the match had illuminated men wearing shoulder-boards.

"Damn you, you scared me," I shouted timidly from the bushes, "I thought you were Reds."

"Ha, ha. We too got a fright when you jumped into the bushes with your carbine."

Thank God it was one of our patrols. I didn't fall asleep after that, and was happy to arrive at our platoon.

The Plateau

The Petrovskoe plateau delayed us for some time. The cliffs were very steep – from 400 to 600 meters in height. The Red infantry could defend them easily, and they were difficult for our cavalry to climb. Moreover the paths up were narrow, rare and well guarded by the Reds.

However, our regiments succeeded in climbing them. The battery climbed after the regiments. The trail was steep and winding. The draft horses were flowing with sweat. The crews had to push on the wheels all the time in order to propel the gun up especially steep spots. Even as a horse holder, it was difficult for me to lead the horses along the trail. Finally we reached the flat top and mounted our horses. But the regiments were retreating and there were swarms of bullets.

"What are you doing here?" Colonel Toporkov shouted to us. "Flee, and make it quick!"

If Toporkov said that, he could be trusted. He wasn't easily alarmed. Obviously, the situation was critical. We put the brakes tightly on the gun wheels and descended at a trot, nearly rolling the guns.

When we reached the bottom, a Cossack galloped up on a lathered horse.

"Orders from Colonel Toporkov. Battery, come up quickly. The situation has been restored. The Colonel demands you come immediately."

We grumbled and climbed up again. But as soon as we got out onto the flat, a Red machine gun sprayed us. Colonel Toporkov was just beginning to descend.

"Too late! You were needed earlier. Now leave if you don't want to lose your guns."

We rolled down again. Several Red riflemen ran to the edge of the cliff and shot where they saw the zigzag of the trail. We had two horses wounded. The ascent probably lasted about an hour and the descent 20 minutes or less. In the evening a Cossack rode up.

"Battery! Colonel's orders ..."

Again!

But the battery commander flatly refused to climb up. We stood on a hill below and sent our shells blindly over the ridge of the cliff. The Cossacks later said that our shells sometimes landed where they were needed.

We failed to occupy the plateau that time, but did take the village of Petrovskoe at their feet. The Reds remained on the cliff.

Positioning

The battery almost always fired from an open position. The North Caucasian steppes, being completely flat, it was very difficult to find a position hidden from the eyes of the enemy. Practice showed that in a mobile war there is no time to look for hidden positions – instead you need to act faster than the enemy.



We rolled out into position in full view of the enemy, unlimbered under the whistle of bullets, trimmed the guns by eye and opened fire quickly. Then the enemy's shooting, as if by magic, would fall silent, and the Reds would flee – because it is very difficult to endure the fire of guns at point-blank range. It freezes the blood and paralyses all movements. One doesn't think of shooting, but of getting away as soon as possible. The Red batteries fired badly, apparently due to the lack of officers. This allowed us the opportunity to take risks.

We also fired from hidden positions and even via a phone, but this was rare and when we were in no hurry. Normally, the commander was near to the battery and gave commands verbally. After all, we shot at short ranges (good visibility), never exceeding three kilometres, and often much less. We established that cannister gave the best results both in terms of losses caused, and in psychological terms. We never used parallel fans.²²

Spitsevka

Once General Wrangel took command of the Kuban Cavalry Corps, our successes turned into a triumphal march. But to our right, our infantry suffered a setback. The Reds gathered significant forces and struck from the east in the direction of Stavropol. They threw back our infantry near the villages of Spitsevka and Sergeevka, thus threatening Stavropol and had got into the rear of our corps. The situation was very serious.

Wrangel reacted quickly and decisively, as always. He simply removed his corps from Petrovskoe, marched all night, and the next morning struck unexpectedly at the flank with the infiltrating Red forces, destroyed them, and the next day returned us to our old positions before the Reds were able to do anything. This was how I perceived those events.

We were in Petrovskoe. At five o'clock in the afternoon they told us that the next day would be a day of rest, with no fighting and no marching. That pleased us, because every day there were battles and marches. Lieutenant Korenev and I went into the field, caught a sheep and gave it to the hostess to roast. I also gave her my laundry to be washed. But at nine o'clock in the evening, a new order came.

“Saddle up, take your ammunition. We will leave in 15 minutes.”

Some rest! We took an undercooked sheep. I stuffed my wet laundry into my saddle bags. God knew when and where I could dry it. Night fell. Subsequently, we learned that this was all done on purpose in order to deceive the Reds. The trick was a success. Warned by their agents about our rest day, the Reds decided to take one too. When they learned of our disappearance the next day, fearing an ambush, they did nothing. And the day after that we were back in the field with the news of the great victory we had won.

We walked all night in the dark, often at a trot, not knowing where we were going. Before dawn we stopped in a shallow gully. During the night we travelled 60 km.

“Don't smoke or talk!” It meant that the Reds were nearby.

It was getting light and we were amazed to see Red infantrymen walking along the ridge three hundred paces away. But it was still dark in the hollow where we were, and they didn't see us. The sun rose, and isolated shots could be heard.

“To your horses! Mount! Forward at a walk!”

And several columns of cavalry began to rise up the slope in total silence, not responding to the shots. The fire intensified, then fell silent. We didn't answer still, but moved in silence. This unexpected appearance on their flank of masses of cavalry caused panic among the Reds. They ran. We moved to a trot.

Our corps had eight, maybe even ten regiments. At 500 sabres per regiment, this made us from 4,000 to 5,000 sabres, not counting the batteries. It was a very impressive force. And most importantly, a complete surprise.

²² I believe that parallel fans were a method for calculating ranges and angles by an observer, using a grid. It would have been standard practice in the Great War.



Our battery climbed the hills behind the 1st Line Regiment, the fifth in our division. In that regiment, the Cossacks wore red *bashlyks*.²³ And since the Cossacks brought their own uniforms, no two were the same colour, they ranged from pink to deep red. On black cloaks and against a background of white snow, illuminated by the rising sun, it was an unforgettable picture. After so many years, I only have to close my eyes and I see it again.

We continued forward, paying no attention to those surrendering or the wagons. They all surrendered. We met almost no resistance. And where we met it, we happily smashed it in a few minutes, and moved on. We had to go through fields, studded with rifles, bayonets pushed into the ground. I never saw the like again. We ignored the prisoners, and chased those fleeing. So many surrendered that it became dangerous. But our psychological victory was so strong that it took away all their initiative.

After eighteen kilometres, mostly at a trot, we found ourselves in front of a low but steep chain of hills. What a position for the Reds! Here, under those hills, the remnants of the Red divisions were clustered. They had fled those eighteen kilometres and, in order to get away from us, they had to cross the hills. But they no longer had strength and breath. It was then that the real attack of the corps took place. The attack of a whole corps is indescribable – you have to witness it. Goosebumps ran down my spine with delight. The ground trembled with the clatter of hooves.

The battery, overwhelmed by general enthusiasm, galloped towards the Reds, not thinking what it would do once there. We were just euphoric.

Suddenly we saw a four-gun Red horse battery. It was moving at a trot, trying to go around the hills to the left and escape us.

“Catch me that battery!” Colonel Shapilovski yelled.

All caution was forgotten. The men and scouts went at a gallop after the battery. Several Cossacks tried to cut it off. The Red battery was now at the gallop. The first gun and the crew of the second managed to escape, but the Cossacks caught the three other guns, and triumphantly brought them and their crews to our battery. We furnished them with officers, and they followed us after that, fighting on our side.

Very few of the Reds managed to get away. The rout was complete. Several Red divisions ceased to exist.

Our regiments dispersed and drove the prisoners away like sheep. The wagons were full of collected rifles. The fight was over.

We went to the village of Sergeevka to spend the night. We locked our captured artillerymen in a barn. Too tired to watch them, we advised them not to move, or else ... They didn't move.

Terribly tired, after the march and battle, we fell asleep as if dead. But I still woke up out of habit. Vanka needed feeding. The poor beast hadn't eaten since yesterday, and had worked conscientiously. After a short struggle with sleep, I got up and went outside. Involuntarily I leapt back: the entire wide street was full of Red infantry.

“Oh right. They are prisoners.”

A Cossack dozed, leaning against the wall of our hut, holding a rifle.

“What it is?”

“Yes, prisoners.”

“Are you guarding them?”

“How can I guard them all? There are thousands of them ... But they are so scared that they remain quiet ... No problem!”

In the morning the corps went back to Petrovskoe. A huge quadrangular column of prisoners, I think a thousand people, were between each. There was a regiment, a column of prisoners, another regiment, again prisoners, and so on. When the regiments began to trot, the prisoners had to run. We needed to

²³ A traditional woollen hood, for wearing in bad weather, but otherwise draped over the back.



hurry our return to Petrovskoe. I think there were five to six thousand prisoners, perhaps even more. At this time, prisoners weren't shot, but sent to the rear and formed into White regiments, which went on to fight quite well.

Before entering the town, the regiments stopped and formed a wide square. The three Red cannons were lined up next to our four guns, having followed us. General Wrangel entered the square at a gallop. He reined in his wonderful horse, took off his cap and shouted in a loud voice:

"Thank you, eagles!"

A thunderous "Urра!" was his answer.

The lead rider of the Red gun also raised hat and yelled "urra!" Was he overwhelmed by the grandeur of the picture or wanted to be in our good graces? Who knows? I think that at Spitsevka, Wrangel won one of the most significant victories in the North Caucasus. After it, the Reds lost all their initiative and abandoned the Terek. We crossed into the Manych steppes.

That combat was one of the rare fights when I felt no fear at all.

Commanders of Cavalry

In the cavalry, everything depends on the leader. A good commander will succeed even with a mediocre unit, and a bad commander will do nothing even with great regiments. I take it upon myself to judge, because I had to serve with both the good and the bad.

Good leaders are rare. By the beginning of the First World War, Russia had the best and most numerous cavalry in the world. But among the top commanders there were no good ones, and our wonderful cavalry remained poorly utilised. Of course, there were glorious deeds, but never above the level of the division. Indeed there were some good men among the next level, but they weren't allowed freedom to operate.

A good commander has a certain instinct, he understands the situation and the mood of the troops, he is able to make a quick decision.

Our 1st Kuban Division had three excellent leaders: Wrangel, Toporkov and Babiev. To these three I would add General Barbovich, the commander of the regular cavalry, and the Don Cossack, General Mamontov (my namesake), who led the raid on Tambov in the enemy's rear. Of those five, I had had the privilege of serving under the command of the first four. What a joy to serve under the command of the good ones and a pain to be with the bad.

Each regiment and divisional headquarters had its own flag, and they could be seen from afar on the flat steppes of the North Caucasus. This greatly facilitated communications. You just had to look around to know where the unit you wanted was.

The Ekaterinodar Regiment had a light blue flag, the *Kornilovtsi* had a red and black one. We had St Vladimir's colors: black-red-black. The rest I have forgotten.

The Manych Steppes

Finally we climbed the plateau. The Reds didn't interfere with us, as it seems that Ulagai's division had pushed them aside. The battery was either in Ovoshchi or transferred to Kazaluk. There were no battles at all. It was so quiet that we began to fear a surprise night attack – we weren't used to the silence. But there were no attacks.

There were a lot of sheep there, and in Kazaluk they know how to make their skins white. Almost the entire battery ordered white sheepskin coats. They were beautiful, a bit like the horsemen of olden days. I also ordered a sheepskin coat. When I came for it and paid the tailor money, he grabbed my hand and shook it.

"You are the only one who paid me. The others took them and left."

I was very embarrassed for my comrades.

Here we learned that the Germans were leaving the Ukraine and we needed to occupy it before the Reds. But the Cossacks, intoxicated by easy successes, thought that they had finally freed themselves of the



Bolsheviks, and refused to go to the Ukraine. This was regretful and reduced our numbers. It was a pity to leave the division, we had gotten used to it. They felt sad for us too. Later we were to work together again.

We went south to some small station or other. In the morning we saw a mill, but it took until evening to reach it – the steppes are as flat as a billiard table. It was cold, but there was no snow. It was December 1918. They loaded us onto a train together with the 2nd Drozdovski Officer Cavalry Regiment. We went through Stavropol, Kavkazkaya, Tikhoretskaya, to Rostov and further to the Ukraine. The first stage of the war in the North Caucasus was over for us, the second had begun.

My Carbine

I got my carbine in Chernomytskaya, in the same place where I got Vanka. The carbine accompanied me throughout the civil war and even reached Gallipoli. I went to the supply train for my boots, which I had handed in for mending. When I got my boots repaired, I asked the shoemaker-soldier how much I owed him. He laughed and said that the train did the repairs for the battery for free. I gave him something for a drink, and he was apparently well satisfied. As I was leaving, I saw in the corner a short artillery carbine, which were highly valued because they didn't get in the way when campaigning.

"Whose carbine is this?"

"Mine," answered the shoemaker.

"Sell it to me."

"The weapon isn't for sale."

We were in the Caucasus, where buying weapons is considered shameful. They are given as presents, stolen, or taken from an enemy.

"Then lend it to me. I'm going to the battery and I have no weapon. There, at the front, I'll get myself something and give you it back."

"I can do that," and the shoemaker handed it to me.

After that, the carbine and I didn't part. However, I'm lying – twice I lost it and somehow it was supernaturally returned to me. After a while, reluctantly, I decided to give the carbine back to its owner. But when I went to the train, I learned that the shoemaker had died of typhus. I became the legal owner of the carbine.

Near Kharkov, we raided into the enemy's rear. The Reds drove us into a swamp. I had to drop the ammunition box. We unharnessed the horses, and I forgot that some of my things, in particular an overcoat and the carbine were tied to the box. The overcoat and things were lost, but the carbine made its way back. A few days later a regiment marched past us. Suddenly I rushed up to one horseman. I recognised my carbine. It is strange that I recognised it among so many similar ones, and even stranger that the rider gave him to me without dispute. How can that not make you believe in miracles?

When I parted with my brother in the northern Taurida, I insisted that he take my carbine. I remained at the front, and my brother went to the rear. I probably needed it more. But I knew its magical property was to return to me and hoped that it would bring my brother along too. Those were troubling times – just before the evacuation from the Crimea.

Lieutenant Abramov handed me the carbine in Gallipoli.

How did he get to you?

There was a crush on the pier in Feodosia. Your brother held me and tried to get on the steamer. The crowd separated us. But I saw that he got on the steamer.

I got angry with the carbine for not bringing my brother back to me, and decided to punish it – by selling it to the Turks. The Turks willingly bought weapons, as Kemal Pasha was near. We almost reached a bargain when, suddenly, the Turks fled. The carbine remained in my hands. Greek gendarmes were approaching. But there were several of us and we were armed, so the gendarmes passed by.

I left my carbine with the battery in Gallipoli.



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In war you become superstitious. Superstition, in my opinion, is still faith, but ancient, pagan.

I established a “contract” with fate. I wouldn’t be killed or wounded if I didn’t do reprehensible acts or kill without good reason. Killing for protection and when firing from guns was permitted. It didn’t count as murder. But I didn’t shoot or kill the fleeing. I have never killed anyone directly myself, and it is true – I was not injured and even the horses under me were never injured.

I felt fear, of course, as that is human nature. But when I recalled the “contract”, it seemed to me that the bullets stopped poking around me. In general, I wasn’t afraid for myself, but very much for my brother. Often I stood between the Reds and my brother to cover him with my “contract”. I would get premonitions. After a severe scrape, I always looked for the silhouette of Rytsar, with my brother on him, and sighed with relief, “Glory to you, Lord. He is alive!” And he would start talking about some little thing.

When the carbine was returned to me in Gallipoli, I realised that my brother was dead. By various stratagems, some more legal than others, including someone else’s identity, I had gone to Constantinople and looked for my brother in all the huge French hospitals. Unsuccessfully. The administration and the hospitals were in a typically French disorder.

In complete despair I walked to Pera. There was a French sister of mercy. I asked if she knew by chance?

“Ah, thousands of sick Russians. How can you remember them all?”

I bowed my head. Apparently she took pity and asked what the last name was. I said it.

“Mamontov? He died in my arms.”

How can you not believe in such a miracle? Thanks to that nurse, I found my brother’s grave.



Chapter 5 – Against Makhno in the Ukraine

To the Ukraine

From the North Caucasus, we were transferred by train to the Ukraine. At the station in Rostov, I was glad to meet up with my instructing officer from the School, Captain Zhagmen. He recognised me and remembered me, but he wasn't a happy man. For a single man things could be arranged in a satisfactory way, but he had a family.

It was December 1918, there was no snow, it rained often, it was foggy, but it wasn't cold.

The Germans were leaving the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks were coming in from the north. It was necessary to occupy as much territory as possible before their arrival. The Cossacks refused to go to war in the Ukraine, so we had few men, and we wanted to occupy the Crimea, the Taurida²⁴ and the Coal Region.

The forces of our detachment consisted of three companies of the Drozdovski Infantry Regiment, four squadrons of the 2nd Drozdovski Officer Cavalry Regiment and our battery. In the area where we were sent, the Makhnovist movement was growing. He called himself an anarchist, but he was just a bandit. He lived happily, enjoyed drinking and so was popular with the peasants. In fact, all the peasants were Makhnovists and took part in his battles. When things turned out badly for them, they fled, hid their weapons and turned into peaceful inhabitants. Therefore, fighting them was difficult. Makhno invented the slogan: "Kill the Jews, save Russia." But he didn't save anyone, just lived wildly, for his own pleasure.

We were dropped off in the large village of Volnovakha, and then marched alongside the rail line to Tokmak. We reached Tsarekonstantinovka²⁵ without encountering resistance, but felt the presence of the Makhnovists everywhere. It was impossible to move away from the column. The Makhnovists attacked any isolated person.

Our tactic was constant movement. This achieved several goals: it made it easier to stay in lodgings, as we weren't a burden for the owners. It was difficult to attack us, because we were always moving, and it was dangerous for the Makhnovists to get together — what if we suddenly appeared?

Our supply train was attacked once because it had stayed in one place for a long time. Lieutenant Ignatovich, commander of the train, bravely defended himself and was killed. Another officer got cold feet and surrendered. His body was found in a hay press.

Tsarekonstantinovka, was the start of a whole series of villages stretching over a dozen kilometres. The villages were barely separated from each other. I remember Konskie Razdory, but I forget the other names. This string ends at the small town of Pologi, and further on, about 20 km, is the village of Gulyai-Pole, the birthplace of Makhno himself.

Here for the first time we got acquainted with sawn-off shotguns. The gun's barrel and stock were cut down. The result was a huge pistol that fired inaccurately, but which was easy to hide under a sheepskin coat. Sometimes a homemade bullet whistled by – they rarely hit, but they inflicted terrible wounds. Both we and the Makhnovists were short of cartridges, which was rather an advantage for us, because there were a lot of Makhnovists.

Gaychul

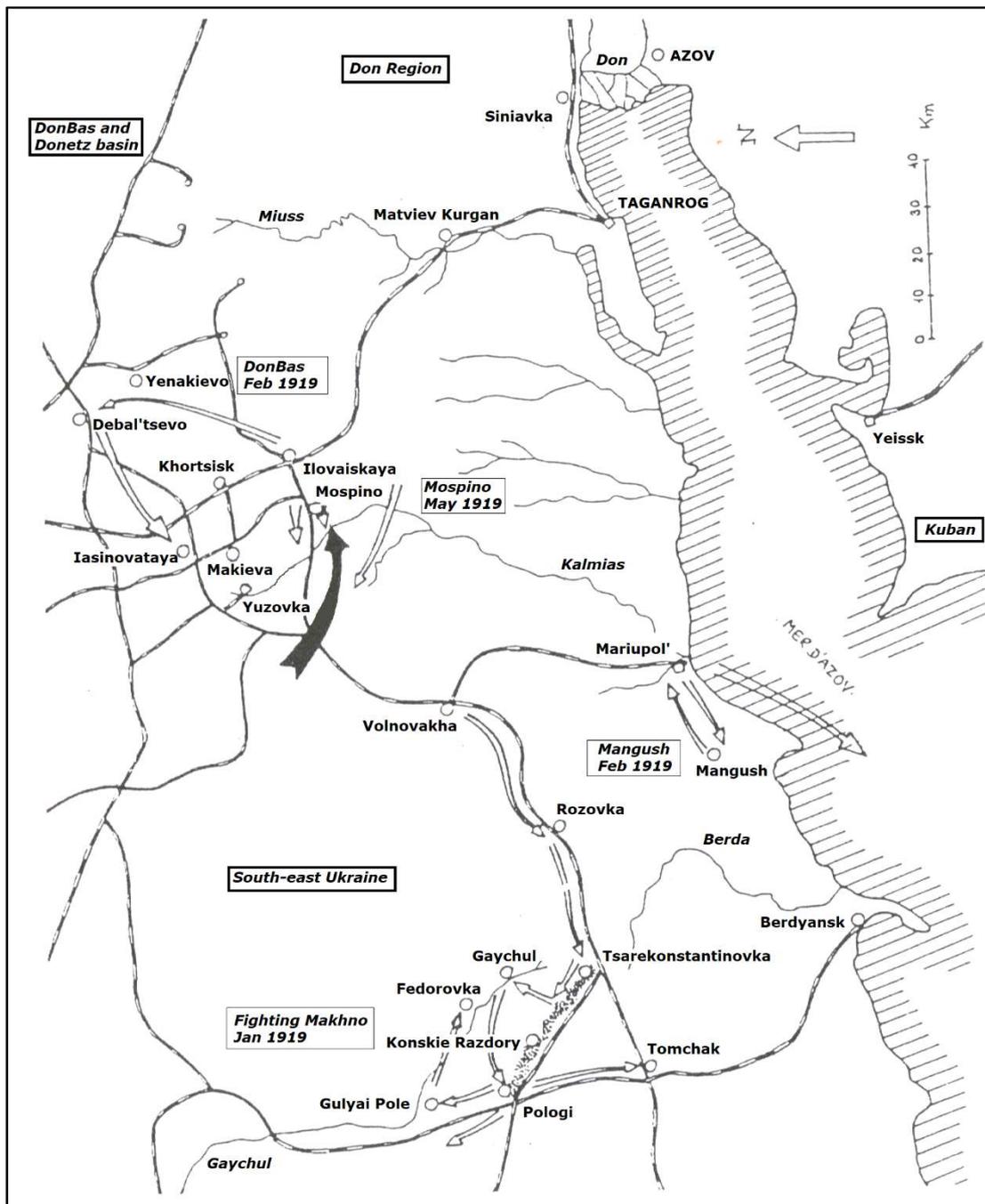
We, three scouts, have been forgotten. The battery went off without warning us. It was very cold and we had avoided going outside. Going out to visit the horses, I saw that the neighbouring yards were empty – there were no horses.

"Where have our men gone?" I asked the hostess.

²⁴ The Taurida, Russian *Tavria*, was a historical province including the Crimea and the lands immediately north of it, bounded by the lower Dnieper. Mamontov uses it quite loosely, so any area immediately above the Crimean – but excluding the peninsula itself, so what is usually referred to as the Northern Taurida.

²⁵ In the Pologovskiy province. In 1935 it was renamed Kuibyshevo, then Bilmak from 2016 to 2021. Presently it is officially Kamenka / Kam'yanka – its original name – though goodness knows how long that will last.





They had left early in the morning.

The Makhnovists could attack us at any moment. We hurriedly saddled up and walked along the village, following the tracks of the battery. My brother took my carbine from me. As an infantry officer he knew how to handle a rifle better than me. We kept a carefree air and avoided asking where our men had gone. We walked at first, but once leaving the village, we went at a trot. It had snowed and the traces of the column were clearly visible. Vanka bit my knee, he was dissatisfied with something, but there was no time to find out what. Finally we heard a cannon shot and followed that. At the village of Gaychul, we finally joined the battery.

Our units were fighting the Makhnovists, who for the first time offered open resistance. Our men had taken positions on nearby heights, while the Makhnovists were slowly retreating. Lower down was a village, whose inhabitants sided with the Makhnovists. Shooting was sparse, due to the lack of ammunition.

I remembered Vanka's displeasure and unsaddled him. Oh Lord! In my haste to saddle him the saddlecloth had got a fold in it, and I had damaged Vanka's withers. What shame for a horseman! Now he couldn't be saddled for three weeks. What would I ride? I needed to get another horse. But how?



One of our patrols descended into the village. I joined it. In the main square, I separated from it and began to inspect the stables. I was armed with a sword and a whip. The carbine was with my brother. The village seemed to be completely empty. Nobody. I flung the gates wide open, fastened Vanka's reins on them, drew my sword and knocked on the door of a house. Silence.

In a formidable voice to give myself courage, "Who's there? Come out!"

No answer. I kicked the door open my boot and quickly examined the interior of the house. Nobody. Then I ran to the stable. But there were only nags. I chose the worst one and dragged it along with me. After inspecting several stables, I had scored three nags, each one worse than the other. It is clear that the residents had left on their best horses.

Finally, in a very narrow stable, I found a handsome young bay stallion. I dismissed the nags and gave them a blow from my whip, so that they scattered back to their stables. I hooked Vanka's reins to a well and entered the stable, whistling and talking to the stallion. I tried to go to his head to untie him, but I was afraid of getting behind him, and a resulting kick. The stallion seemed delighted at the appearance of a man. He trembled at every cannon shot. I managed to slip past his rump, but then he leant on me and took me prisoner, holding me between him and the wall. It was the stupidest situation: I couldn't move. I began to stab him in the stomach with the handle of the whip. This worked, and I was able to get to his head. Patting him on the neck and talking to him, I untied him and even turned him around in the very narrow stable.

At that moment, Vanka appeared at the door, having unhooked himself from the well. The stallions sniffed at each other, and then Babylonian pandemonium ensued – which was a very dangerous situation for me. The stallions whinnied, or rather screamed, and went at each other. I huddled in a corner, covering my head with my hand, and whipping with the other whichever came close. Their hooves flashed dangerously in front of my face, and sometimes I took violent blows that weren't intended for me. Fortunately, I was wearing my sheepskin coat and a hare *papakha*, which softened the blows. Finally the stallions moved out into the yard. I began to feel myself to see if any bones were broken, but the noise of a fight made exit as well. The stallion was sitting on Vanka and dug his teeth into his withers, while Vanka bit his leg.

"Now he will gnaw Vanka and then run away himself. Then I will be left completely without a horse!"

Running in from the other side, I came to Vanka's aid, beating the stallion with all my might on the face with a whip. He didn't immediately let go, but in the end I managed to separate them. The stallion galloped off down the street. We, Vanka and I, both fairly beaten up, followed him. I saw the stallion at the end of the street. He stood and, apparently, didn't know what to do. Good. I whistled. He pricked up his ears and galloped towards us. I had to stand in front of Vanka and drive him away with the whip so that they wouldn't grapple again. He rode off at the gallop again. Thus, sometimes whistling it, sometimes chasing, I went to the square.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, one of our officers appeared. (Had he been robbing the empty houses?) I asked him to hold Vanka and tried to catch the stallion. But it wasn't a simple affair. He dodged me and attacked Vanka once more. The officer threw me Vanka's reins.

"I'm not a bullfighter or a cowboy, or worse yet a donkey, to let myself be killed by these damned stallions. Do as you like."

And he left.

Our column entered the square and at once several cavalymen rushed to catch the stallion, ignoring my shouts that it was my horse. But the stallion foiled them. Once the battery had arrived my brother and I rode him into it, and I managed to grab his headpiece. But the stallion became maddened by the sight of so many horses and began to spin, back away, rear up and upset the whole battery.

"Take that horse away," shouted Colonel Shapilovski, the senior battery officer. Colonel Kolzakov himself rarely commanded the battery.

My brother advised me to tie the stallion to the fence of the church, go to the lodgings and return for him on foot.



I put Vanka into the stable and went to fetch the stallion. He was still there, and I had the impression that he recognised me. But it turned out to be extremely difficult to get him to our lodgings. He would walk three or four paces on the ground, then rear up, carrying me into the air, then lower himself to the ground, walk again and rear again. And so on, all the way, without a break.

When a horse you are leading by the bridle rears up, you need to hang on to his headpiece. It tires him, and he returns to the ground. Your arms should be bent, not outstretched, otherwise the horse might put a hoof on your shoulder and crush you.

At the lodgings, the stallion refused to enter the barn. I had to tie him to a cart and roll it in with him. On that day, I didn't give him water and didn't give him barley, but only hay, so that he weakened a little. The next day I watered and fed him, and spent time with him so that he got used to me, but he didn't accept my advances well.

On the third day we decided to saddle him. He had, of course, never been saddled. My brother and two comrades hung onto the headpiece. Klinevski threw the saddle on his back. Meanwhile, I had to put the girth-strap around his belly. We were spun around the yard, the saddle rolled in the dust, but still we him bridled, saddled and then led him out onto the road. Our hut was at the edge of the steppe. My brother got into the saddle.

"One, two, three. Let go!"

We jumped off, and the stallion leapt and rushed away in a cloud of dust. Soon he reappeared, we rushed and grabbed the headpiece. My brother got off and I mounted.

"Let go!"

The stallion galloped off again, while I whipped him. But I felt that he was giving up. I brought him to a trot and began to talk to him. He was shivering and was covered in a lather. I took him to a walk, patted him on the neck. He pricked up his ears. He gave up. I began to explain to him the meaning of the reins. I returned at a walk, unsaddled, rubbed him with straw and fed him well that evening.

To prevent the owners from recognizing him, I cut off his tail and mane. A forelock should be left on the mane at the withers. When getting into the saddle, you need to grasp the forelock, not the pommel, so that the saddle doesn't slide out. With a shortened mane and tail, the stallion had become ugly. I called him Gaychul²⁶ after the name of the village and the river.

So I stole a horse. Stealing a horse wasn't considered reprehensible. The supply services sent us nothing, and we had no other way to get horses, especially since we were in Makhnovist country, that is a hostile area. I shod Gaychul much later, when his character was broken by daily marches, and only on his front legs. Gaychul had broad, poorly formed hooves.

For some time I couldn't stay in the ranks of the battery, because Gaychul did everything to upset them. Colonel Shapilovski let me walk alongside the battery. Here I served as an amusement for them, because Gaychul would kick, reverse up, rear, and dance about. Letting him drink from a river was pure torture. Once my heart sank, as I suddenly realised that his headpiece was frayed from the constant struggle and was literally holding on by a thread. Gaychul's specialty was rearing up to the vertical. To an on-looker this is spectacular, and it isn't dangerous if the rider holds their nerve. You need to grab the mane, let go of the reins and rise in the stirrups. I don't think a horse will tip over backwards on its own, but you can tip it if you pull on the reins, especially if there is a curb bit.

I wanted to save Vanka and heal him myself, but this turned out to be impossible because the stallions kept fighting. I gave him to the train. The wagon train was meant to cure the horses and return them to the battery. But they took very poor care of the horses, and all the horses that went there died. The wagon train had thirty to forty horses. If the well was deep, watering them was a major job. And so they were poorly watered and not fed at all – they gave them only straw or hay.

²⁶ Both now known as Gaychur / Haichur.



Parting with Vanka, I felt a heaviness in my heart, and I think he was also moved. Despite all his shortcomings, he had served me faithfully and we became friends. I never saw him again. The people gradually returned to the village, and we moved on.

Gaychul was pretty good, but he wasn't fast. And most importantly, he was stupid – he really didn't understand the meaning of the whistle of bullets and explosions of shells. All the other horses were well aware of it. Thus, I never really got attached to him. Soon the marches wore him out, and he calmed down.

Robbery

Pillaging is a terrible thing, and very harmful to an army. All the armies of the world loot, to a greater or lesser extent. It depends on the state of the army and on the ability of the commanders. If the leader doesn't know how to stop the looting, then he closes his eyes and stubbornly denies it is happening. War develops bad instincts in a person and provides him with impunity. Especially a mobile war – today here, tomorrow not – where to search for the culprit?

During the civil war, everyone pillaged – Whites, Reds and Makhnovists. And even the population itself, which emptied out the homes of the landowners.

Once in Yuzovka, which we passed through many times, I got into a conversation with a peasant.

“Who do you really support?”

“No-one. The Whites rob, the Reds rob and the Makhnovists rob. How can we be for one of them?”

He forgot to add that they themselves looted. There was a lovely estate nearby which had been plundered.

The higher authorities couldn't cope with the looting. All the soldiers, most of the officers, and even some of the leaders stole at any opportunity. It is extremely rare to possess a sufficiently strong morality to not participate in suchlike. I'm not exaggerating. I have witnessed mass plundering in Russia, Europe and Africa. When impunity arises, the vast majority of people turn into criminals. It is very rare for people to remain honest if there is no longer a police officer on the corner. Remove the gendarme and everyone becomes savages. And this is in the cultural cities of Europe, especially in the army. The same population, who suffer from the looting, will do so themselves with delight.

There is a reason that the Bolsheviks' slogan: “Loot the looters” was such a success, and is now very inconvenient for them.

I almost didn't escape this plague myself. My brother saved me. This is how it was.

Some of the officers living in our lodgings disappeared at night and returned with full sacks.

“Take me with you, I want to see it.”

“No, you will ruin everything for us. You are sentimental, you will start sermonising. To do this, you need to be firm.”

“I promise that I will be silent.”

And then one night they agreed to take me with them.

“On the condition that you do the same as we do and take something.”

We went to a distant quarter where no troops were stationed. The soldiers wouldn't let the houses they were in be robbed. The peasants knew this and so weren't opposed to quartering them.

Knocking out the door with a kick of the boot, we entered. The peasants were terrified.

“Money.”

“We have no money. Where do you think ...”

“Do you want to give in kind? Do we need to force you?”

The peasant gave us the money with shaking hands. We knocked over a chest, and its contents were scattered on the floor. We rummaged in the junk.



“You should take something too!”

I hesitated. I was disgusted. But I still took a beautiful red silk scarf. A rose was embroidered. On the one hand it was red, on the other it was the same, but in black. I remember it.

I hate to describe these outrageous scenes. Just think that all of Russia has been plundered for years!

But what was going on in my soul was extremely curious. On the one hand, I was deeply horrified and wanted to intercede for the unfortunate victims. But another, nasty feeling appeared, and it gradually intensified: the drunkenness of unlimited power. These pale, frightened people were in our complete power. We could do whatever we wanted with them. That power is more intoxicating than alcohol. “If I go with them again, I will myself become a looter,” I thought without any displeasure.

The next day, my brother went into the hut to take something from our little shared suitcase. The scarf lay on top.

“What is this?”

I blushed deeply.

“I get it ... and you aren’t ashamed?”

I was very ashamed, but I still said: “Everyone does it.”

“Let others do what they like, but not you ... No, not you ...”

He was appalled. He stood still and silent. Very quietly he said, “Are you a thief? ... A plunderer? No, Seriozha, please, don’t ... don’t ...”

“I won’t do it again,” I whispered back.

In the evening the officers asked me, “Well, are you coming with us?”

I answered in the negative. They called me a wet blanket. I said nothing.

The looting in the villages, and speculation in the cities, harmed our cause considerably.

Our Tactics

Our forces, probably a thousand men in total, were too insignificant to occupy a huge, uninterrupted long village – from Tsarekonstantinovka through Konskie Razdory and up to Pologi – tens of kilometres away. Then we decided to apply new tactics. The small forces were divided into two groups. The infantry and our two guns made up the first, and the cavalry and two other guns made up the second. My brother and I were included in the second group, as scouts for the battery. The tactics were constant movement. We went from place to place, sometimes a long way out, not only in our “occupied” villages, but also making sudden raids on the Makhnovist villages – Gaychul, Fedorovka and even Gulyai-Pole.

These tactics turned out to be good – it gave the Makhnovists the impression that there were a lot of us – we were everywhere – it kept the Makhnovists in constant fear of our appearance. It didn’t allow them to concentrate, and it was difficult to attack us, because we were forever disappearing. But of course it was exhausting. The system would have been excellent if the commander of the second group was a good cavalry commander. Unfortunately, he wasn’t. Under the command of this unlucky commander, the excellent 2nd Cavalry Regiment became cowards, unable to attack the enemy and specialising in looting.

At the first shot, they ran away and shouted, “Artillery, forward!”

It would seem normal that the cavalry should cover the cannons. But we couldn’t get away as quickly as the cavalymen, and therefore were forced to shoot. Fortunately, the Makhnovists, just ordinary peasants, couldn’t bear our cannister and fled in their turn. Then, cautiously, our squadrons returned, not to pursue and cut down the fleeing, but to be under the protection of our guns.

The First Operation

There were so many attacks and skirmishes in this area that I get confused about them. I will relate only those that I remember.



Our first operation was the capture of a huge village between our two groups. The infantry of the first group advanced along the railway from Tsarekonstantinovka, while our second group was to bypass the village via the steppe and take it from the rear. We were favoured by fog, which hid our roundabout movement from the eyes of the Makhnovist watchmen. When the fog cleared, we were exactly where we wanted to be. About a hundred paces from us there was a railway line in a deep cutting, so that the Makhnovist armoured train couldn't harm us, and 500 metres away was Pologi station, where whistles and the movement of trains could be heard. Our appearance was a complete surprise to the Makhnovists.

But the enormous advantage was spoiled by our commander's mediocrity. He couldn't make up his mind to act. We stood and did nothing. This was the first time that we had been with this commander, so we didn't know him yet and were waiting for orders. Later we acted on our own initiative, without the orders he was incapable of giving. It was clear to everyone that we needed to damage the railway track as soon as possible in order to capture the Makhnovist armoured train, which was operating against our first group, then shell the Pologi station and, if possible, capture Pologi itself. We could so easily sow panic, but we did nothing and time passed.

I went to the rail line. A peasant walked towards me, signalling wildly.

"What's the matter?"

"The Whites are over there." He had taken us for Makhnovists.

"Get out quickly, you fool! You're in the wrong place, and it could cost you your life, idiot ..."

He ran in a panic. Then I saw in the distance an armoured train heading towards us. I ran to the guns.

"Hurry, an armoured train is coming."

We rolled the cannon to the edge of the ravine and probably would have made it if our ill-fated boss hadn't intervened.

"What are you doing? .. Who ordered that? .. What armoured train? .. Where is it? .. I don't see anything ... Are you sure that it is coming this way? .. Did you see it well? ..."

The armoured train passed right by us at full speed. We spat in frustration.

Finally, we opened fire on Pologi station, but too late, the Makhnovists had managed to get all the locomotives away. They attacked us.

The squadrons, as usual, ran shouting, "Artillery, forward!"

We fired cannister, and the Makhnovists ran. The town was occupied not because of our bravery, but because the Makhnovists panicked. The armoured train, of course, had escaped and was to later cause us many problems.

Various

Once again, we scouts were forgotten! The battery had left without warning us. Where to? How to find it? The battery had left the evening before, and we slept peacefully through it in ignorance. We walked along the endless villages so as not to attract the attention of the Makhnovists. We were very lucky. In the distance we saw our little cannons and recognised some of the horses. We were very pleased and went at a trot to the battery. When I realised that we were safe, all of a sudden my legs became like spaghetti, and I had to grab onto Gaychul's mane so as not to fall.

The first group operated from Pologi, and our second from Konskie Razdory.

~ ~ ~

Lieutenant Zyrianov went on leave. He popped back in to the battery to have a look. A stray bullet hit him in the knee then went up to the bone and into the groin. He died in great suffering. Why tempt fate?

~ ~ ~

This is what happened to the machine-gunner Lieutenant Korolkov. We were walking next to him and talking. The Makhnovists were shooting from time to time. Suddenly Korolkov fell, then got up on all fours.



“I was hit in the head. See where.”

I untied the ear-flaps of his hat, expecting to see a terrible wound, but saw nothing. But there was lots of blood on his forehead. I sat him up – nothing. Strange, with a bullet to your forehead? I wiped off the blood. It turned out that the bullet had hit his forehead tangentially and deflected on. His head buzzed for a long time, while we mocked him that a bullet couldn't pierce his mule-like forehead.

~ ~ ~

I took a message to Gaychul village. I was lying in the hay of a cart, holding my carbine and dozing lightly. My stallion was hitched up behind the wagon. It was evening and dark. Suddenly the cart left the road, heading left. I roused myself and got up to find out what the matter was. Something large swayed over me. Gaychul reared up and freed the reins, and the carter burst out laughing.

It turned out that he had left the road, driven under a gallows and pulled a hanged man by the legs. Such japes! I ran to catch Gaychul and it was that which stopped me punching the driver in the face. I didn't know the hanged man. The trial was swift.

Kostia the Machine-gunner

The battery had two *tachankas* for protection. They rarely acted, due to a lack of ammunition, but the machine-gunners were good: Lieutenant Derevianchenko and especially the cadet Kostia Ungern-Sternberg, who was eighteen years old. Thanks to him, the first group often achieved success.

The first group left Pologi in the direction of Gulyai-Pole. It was snowing, and the column stopped. A column of infantry was marching towards us out of the snowy haze. For some reason, our scouts hadn't sent back any news, presumably thinking that they were ours. How so? Where could our infantry have come from? Still, their boss wasn't much better than ours. Everyone waited calmly for the approach of the column, except for Kostia, who drove off with his machine gun to the side, took off the cover and prepared the machine gun.

When the Makhnovists came close and the shooting began, Kostya fired two short bursts and it was all over. The road was teeming with dead and wounded, some surrendered, some fled at full speed.

They finished off the wounded and shot the prisoners. In a civil war, prisoners are rarely taken by either side. At first glance, it seems cruel. But neither we nor the Makhnovists had any hospitals, doctors, or medicines. We could barely heal (badly) our own wounded. What could we do with prisoners? We had no prisons nor a budget to maintain them. Let them go? They will take up arms again. The simplest thing was shooting. Of course, there was also the hatred and revenge for our mutilated corpses. Fortunately, the artillery was considered a technical weapon and was exempted from the executions, which I was very happy about. In war, there is one rule: don't notice blood or tears.

When they talk about breaking the rules of war, it makes me laugh. War is the most immoral thing, and civil war worse yet. Rules for immorality? You can maim and kill the healthy, but you can't finish off the wounded? Where is the logic in that?

Chivalrous feelings are inapplicable in wartime. That is just propaganda for fools. Crime and murder become valorous. You try to take the enemy suddenly, at night, from the rear, from an ambush, with superior numbers. You avoid the truth. What's chivalrous about that? I think that an army made up of philosophers would be a terrible army, I would prefer an army of criminals. It seems to me that it is better to tell the cruel truth than to repeat a white lie.

At Gulyai-Pole

Our second group headed for Gulyai-Pole, Makhno's base, his native village. Ahead, without security, were the squadrons of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, then our two cannons and behind us a “combat train”, augmented with looted property. It was impossible to leave the convoy in a village – the Makhnovists would have captured it. A column of infantry was marching towards us. The head of our group for some reason imagined that this was our first group, and didn't send anyone to check it out. That was especially unforgivable after what had happened to the first group under the same circumstances. But the artillery had long since learned how worthless our commander was, and took action. Our column stopped and



waited for the approach of the other. We turned the guns, unlimbered them, put them on the high axle and prepared some shrapnel. The infantry approached very close – some two hundred paces. It was only then that our commander decided to send a horseman to the new unit.

The cavalryman rode up to the infantrymen. Suddenly we saw him draw his sabre, slash with it, turn the horse and rush back towards us at full pace.

“Makhnovists!”

The Makhnovists opened fire indiscriminately. The cavalryman’s horse went down, head first. Our squadrons, of course, fled, as did the transports. It was impossible for us to run, we would have suffered heavy losses, as we were too close. But we were already prepared. We hit them with cannister at point-blank range. The situation changed immediately. The Makhnovist fire ceased, and they ran as a herd along the same road from which they had come, which intensified the effect of our fire. The cavalry returned, but didn’t attack. Lieutenant Vinogradov, brandishing his sword, shouted at the cavalrymen.

“Attack! Damn you, attack!”

A waste of breath.

“Eh, if there had been Cossacks, what a massacre they would have staged, but these ... ugh!”

Yet it was a victory. The cavalry finished off the wounded and robbed the corpses. We returned to our quarters.

The next day we went along the same road. An armed peasant we met was sabred in order to prevent the Makhnovists from learning about our approach by firing a shot. But the unfortunate man got up several times, it was a terrible sight.

“Bastards,” our riders shouted to the cavalrymen. “You no longer know how to work with a sabre. You only know how to rob and run away.”

There was a lot of truth in those words.

I thought it was a bad omen. Not good. And it turned out to be true. We approached the village of Gulyai-Pole, without encountering resistance, which surprised us a lot – after all, this is the home of Makhno. Would he give it up without a fight?

We had already started taking out the booty from the village when we saw two long lines of infantry, which were marching towards each other, to cut off our retreat. We were surrounded.

We were saved by our numerous carts. Panic-stricken, they rushed towards the remaining gap. From a distance it looked like a massive attack, and both chains of the Makhnovists stopped, leaving us a narrow passage of several hundred paces. The cavalry squadrons, of course, rushed after the carts into the passage, not thinking about resistance. They didn’t even stop once outside the encirclement.

Fortunately for us, both wings of the Makhnovists, shooting at us, were also shooting at each other, and they would have got the impression that we were shooting back. On our side no one thought about protection or about retreating through the village, apparently not occupied by anyone. Everyone ran without looking back.

It goes without saying that our two guns were in the rear-guard and in good order. We moved at a brisk trot. The squadrons didn’t even think to cover us. We scouts, followed the guns, and our machine-gun cart followed us.

Lieutenant Ptashnikov, who was with the guns, fell wounded. There was hesitation about picking him up.

“This is bad,” I thought. “Tomorrow they will hit me, and no one will stop.”

I jumped out of the saddle. Lieutenant Abramenko likewise. A third man took our horses. Abramenko and I grabbed the wounded man, ran after our *tachanka* and, while on the move, put the wounded man’s head on the running board and tipped him upside down into the carriage. Despite such a barbaric method, Ptashnikov thanked me warmly later for not abandoning him. He was wounded in the spine.



The horse holder gave us back our horses and galloped off. Gaychul, on the other hand, began to spin and dance and wouldn't let me mount. Finally I climbed into the saddle and then noticed that I had lost my whip. It was cold, so I was in felt boots and couldn't use spurs. And he, being an idiot and not understanding the situation, danced around on the spot.

Meanwhile, our men had disappeared, I was alone, and both chains of Makhnovists shot at me. I was very scared, but this time I didn't lose my head. I tore the carbine off my back and began to beat Gaychul with it, putting him into a gallop. I bent down over his neck and looking at the enemy to my right, left and forward. Because the Makhnovists were running to close the exit off. I remembered having seen one of our soldiers by his dead horse, and I thought: 'The Makhnovists won't do anything to him, he's one of their own.'

I prayed fervently, "Guardian Angel, get me out of here!"

"Go, Gaychul, run faster ..."

I was a hundred paces from the leading Makhnovist, who was running across my path. He pointed his rifle at me, I pointed my carbine at him. I succeeded in this bluff – he threw himself to the ground and didn't fire, I didn't shoot either. A little more ... more ... and it seemed to me that a miracle had happened. Thank you Guardian Angel.

There were no more Makhnovists either in front or to the side. They remained behind. Bullets still whistled past, but a small *kurgan* hid me from their eyes and shots. I brought Gaychul to a trot and bent down to see if he was wounded. It seemed not. What luck, or rather, what a miracle had occurred! A feeling of joy overwhelmed me. How wonderful it is to get out of such a mess unharmed ... But it was too early to rejoice. The danger wasn't entirely over yet.

I couldn't see our men. But a little further on I stumbled upon the gig²⁷ that carried our personal effects. The lead horse was dead. In falling, she had broken the shaft. The Kalmyk driver hovered around and whimpered. The Makhnovists were now six hundred paces behind us, and bullets began pass us.

"What are you doing here?"

"We need to fix the shaft," he replied in despair.

"Detach the other horse, get on it and leave."

"But how can I leave the carriage and all the belongings? Captain Maliavin won't be pleased. He ordered me ..."

The bullets began to rain harder.

"Get away, and quickly. I order you."

He began to reluctantly unharness the second horse. He was as stupid as Gaychul. Neither understood the situation we were in. The tarp had come off the wagon, and on top was my little suitcase. I just had to reach out to take it, without getting out of the saddle. I didn't take it. The danger hadn't yet passed. I sacrificed it for the miracle of my salvation ... It had that red silk scarf in it ... Ha, ha. And all the bags with the loot? Ha, ha. They had looted for the benefit of the Makhnovists. That thought pleased me. The soldier-driver perched on the horse, and we went at a trot.

About five hundred paces further on, we saw our cannon in the bushes. The drawbar had broken while crossing a ditch. The numbers and the riders were frantically fixing it with bits of wood and strapping. My brother was there, and the other scouts. We exchanged glances. How he would have worried about me! I stayed with them. On the hill the Makhnovists were plundering our carriage and didn't pay attention to the gun. Finally the drawbar was repaired and the gun started to move. There were four scouts. While the drawbar was being repaired, we didn't shoot at the Makhnovists, so as not to draw their attention to the faulty cannon, but now that it was gone, we decided to put up some resistance. My brother took our

²⁷ A *dvukolka*. This is a two horse, two wheeled, light carriage, probably sprung. There were both military and civilian versions.



horses, and the three of us opened fire from a small mound. A platoon of cavalymen came up to us and dismounted. The cavalry officer put us in line, and our reply began.

“One idiot is shooting short,” the officer said.

“Indeed, an imbecile, if he doesn’t even know how to aim,” I thought. But the officer, who had watched the dust raised by the bullets, pointed at me.

“It’s you. This time I clearly saw the undershot.”

Offended, I threw the carbine behind my back and rode off to the battery.

In general, we got off lightly. Our losses were minimal. At the end of the day, Camel, Lieutenant Vinogradov’s horse, was mortally wounded.

An Unpleasant Conversation

At one of the next stops of the battery, Captain X and Volunteer Y (I don’t want to name them), our main looters, accompanied by several accomplices, but of lesser magnitude, appeared before me.

“Ensign Mamontov, did you give the order to leave our wagon behind?”

“Yes.”

“By what right?”

“Right ?! What else could have been done? Bullets were raining down, the Makhnovists were only a couple of hundred paces away.”

“You should have fixed the shaft and replaced the dead horse with yours. Under the same conditions, a similar drawbar was repaired.”

“That was only possible thanks to your cart, which the Makhnovists were looting before our very eyes and so didn’t pay attention to the gun. You should be proud that your bags served a useful purpose.”

“Your insinuations are too much. You just got cold feet and ran away.”

“Look, there’s a difference between a cannon and your wagon of loot. I would never have given up Gaychul for your wagon. I came to serve, not to save plunder.”

The curious had gathered around us. The conversation was getting unpleasant. Suddenly I received support from Captain Oboznenko, the commander of the third gun and a very good officer.

“Mamontov dismounted to save a wounded man at a very dangerous moment. But I fully understand that he didn’t take a risk to save some booty. I wouldn’t do that either.”

“You forget yourself, Captain.”

“No, you forgot your sense of honour. We’re not blind.”

Everyone was getting excited and I was already thinking ... But we were separated by Colonel Andrievski, the immediate superior of X, Y and me.

“Enough, X , I heard everything and completely agree with Oboznenko. I have closed my eyes to your behaviour and that was wrong, since you yourself are causing a scene. Watch out. It will be easy with Y, since he isn’t an officer – he will be whipped in front of the troops. While you will face a military court ... Enough, I don’t want to hear any more. You are warned.”

He took Oboznenko’s arm, and they left.

The men with X and Y vanished, as if they had never been there. X gave me a look of hate. I stood it calmly.

Soon both disappeared from the battery and never returned. As for us, we moved from the completely decayed 2nd Cavalry Regiment to the newly formed, and excellent, units of the 12th Composite Regiment and the 11th Ingermanland Hussar Regiment.

The Kyrgyz



One of the battery's *tachankas* was pulled by a Kyrgyz stallion: small, auburn, shaggy and angry. When the alarm was given, he wouldn't pull the cart quickly. He was exchanged for a more compliant horse.

One day we set off, and after a while the Kyrgyz, without a headpiece, caught up with the battery, found his machine gun and walked ceremoniously beside it. In the next village he was exchanged again. The column moved on, and we frequently turned around to see if the Kyrgyz would appear. Imagine our delight when we saw him galloping after us. A piece of board dangled from the new headpiece. The cavalry wanted to catch him, but he gave them such a welcome that they preferred to leave him alone. He took his place and followed along with us. Again he was exchanged. We looked around for a long time, but he didn't come. Obviously, his new owner had guessed to close the door to the stable. But I can imagine what was happening inside.

~ ~ ~

During a march, my brother rode up to me.

"Congratulations, today is the day of your majority. You are twenty one."

"Ah, that's true. I'd forgotten."

A machine gun started up somewhere ahead. The battery went to a trot and a long and tedious battle ensued. That is how I celebrated my coming of age.

Our Departure

We, the gunners, were very unhappy with our cavalry and its commanders. Our second group was sent to the village of Fedorovka. The group commander gave us quarters on the outskirts of the village and on the enemy's side, which was against both regulations and common sense. We had established that the cavalry didn't post any security service at night. We had to post our own guards, a duty that isn't normally given to the artillery.

Colonel Shafrov, in charge our two guns, went to discuss this with the commander of the group. Shafrov got excited easily.

"I don't want to lose any guns or men because of your incompetence. I'm leaving. It is impossible to remain under such a commander."

"That would be considered disobedience, perhaps even desertion."

"I'm responsible for the lives of my gunners and for the integrity of the guns. I cannot remain under your command. You are completely incapable of commanding anything."

The group commander did nothing to hold us back. He probably thought that we wouldn't dare go through enemy territory, or rather, he was simply incapable of doing anything.

We were off. Four scouts, two on each side and at some distance from the road, walked from *kurgan* to *kurgan*. We scanned the surroundings and, if we saw people – it could only be Makhnovists – we took off our *papakha* and pointed them in the direction of the people. The battery then switched to a trot, and the scouts went on to the next *kurgan*.

We reached Pologi safely and joined the rest of the battery. The head of the second group filed a complaint, but upon consideration of the facts he was removed from his command and the 2nd Cavalry was disbanded.²⁸ We started working with other units.

With the hussars, we visited numerous small farms, scattered across the steppe. It was cold, and when it was cold less attention was paid to security. Everyone huddled up in the huts, hoping that the enemy was sitting at home in such cold weather.

One night we were awakened by gunfire right in front of the house. The Makhnovists rode into the farm in several sleighs, with music, not suspecting that we had occupied it. The adjutant of the hussar regiment came out to see who was making the noise and was mortally wounded. We captured only one Makhnovist.

²⁸ The French has that it was reformed.



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A proposal was made to us to make our own armoured train, placing our gun on a rail car. But we categorically refused. The offer of a heated wagon didn't tempt us either. There is nothing better than a horse in the steppe, and moreover the rail lines were unreliable – a simple act of sabotage and it's all over.

Pologi

We had occupied Pologi, a small town at the finish of the endless villages, and also a railway junction. There was a five-story stone mill and several cobbled streets.

The Bolsheviks were approaching from the north and had united with the Makhnovists. We awaited their attack.

A Jew came to us and informed us in a whisper that the Makhnovists had scheduled an offensive that night. We informed Shapilovski about this, and he told the group commander. The latter said that a train with Guards infantry was coming to us in Pologi and that it would probably arrive that very night. Who would be first? The Makhnovists or the guards?

Shapilovski ordered to sleep without undressing, which we had always done, increased the watch in the gun park and appointed Ensign Debu and me to be a liaison between him and the station, to inform him of the arrival of the guards.

Debu and I drew lots. I got the second part of the night – which was bad. Everything always happens just before dawn.

Debu woke me up at midnight. The guards hadn't arrived yet. I went twice on horseback to the station. Nothing new. Then I put Gaychul in the stable and went on foot. I didn't want to wear out Gaychul through the night. Plus in a town if you meet something bad, it is better to be on foot than on horseback, whereas in the steppe nothing can replace a horse. At first I was on the alert, peering into dark corners, listening and turning around, but gradually I became convinced that at that hour the streets were empty. Furthermore, it began to rain. Gradually my vigilance weakened, I threw the carbine over my shoulders, and almost dozed off ambling along the pavement.

Alongside the sidewalk was a solid fence with an overhanging roof of sorts. It formed a nook around a lantern. As I passed by the lantern, a dark figure in the nook raised a hand above my head. Blood rushed to my head. Instinctively, I grabbed the man's hand and throat. To my surprise, I felt no resistance. I raised my eyes to his hand and saw reins instead of a knife. I followed the reins and saw a drooping nag harnessed to a cart full of bricks. It wasn't an intruder, but a carter who was letting me through under the reins. And he was hiding in the nook from the rain. I was terribly embarrassed, silently let him go and walked on without turning around. What did he think of me?

The station was full of soldiers. The guards had arrived. Six hundred tall, well-equipped soldiers who had just arrived from France, where they had fought during the war. I went to Colonel Shapilovski to tell him the good news, but walked down the wrong street. I was ashamed to meet my carter again.

I fell asleep, completely reassured. Yes, six hundred tall guardsmen are a completely different matter from our incomplete squadrons. Now the Makhnovists wouldn't dare to move against us.

Knocked Out

The newly arrived guards battalion occupied the outskirts of the endless villages on the Makhnovist side and allowed us to take a well-deserved rest. We had occupied the best houses in Pologi, but those houses didn't have stables. Some of our commanders had the unfortunate idea of placing the sleighs, the wagon train and all the horses on the northern outskirts of Pologi, where there were peasant houses with stables. Thus, the battery was split in two. The horses were half a kilometre away from us and on the Makhnovist side. I didn't like this very much, which I expressed to Colonel Shapilovski. But I was only an ensign.

"I think the horses are too far away ... If anything happens ..."

"What can happen now? There are six hundred men in front. You saw them yourself."

"Yes, of course ... But still ..."



“Come now, no pessimism, now that everything is going well.”

I fell silent, but remained unconvinced.

It was late January or early February 1919. It was cold, but little snow. Our officers played cards, and did nothing else. They also smoked heavily. I didn't play cards or smoke, so I often left to take a walk and went to visit Gaychul. Once while out I heard a shot, one more, pause, then two more shots. I was on my guard. I had enough experience to know by some instinct if shots were meaningless, or were dangerous. I didn't like those ones. A few more shots from the Makhnovists. I quickened my pace. The shooting was all on the northern outskirts of Pologi, where the stables were. A bullet whistled somewhere over me. Bad things were happening. A carriage was trotting towards me. In it lay a bloody wounded man, another stood holding a rifle.

He shouted to me: “The Makhnovists!”

I ran with all my might to the soldiers' quarters, where I burst like a whirlwind. The soldiers were sitting quietly and playing cards.

“The Makhnovists are here. Take the horses. Quick!”

I rushed to the stable, saddled Gaychul and Rytsar. Then all the others. They were the horses of the scouts and the fourth gun – twelve in all. The soldiers, meanwhile, harnessed the teams and led them away at a trot. The wagons also left. All the horses needed to be taken away. I grabbed all twelve and dragged them down Pologi. This is where my experience as a horse-holder came in handy. Because it is very difficult to lead twelve horses, especially when there is shooting around and you have to leave quickly.

“What idiot thought of putting the horses so far away? He should go fuck himself ... Why are our people deaf, can't they hear the shooting? God, make someone go out to urinate and hear gunfire. I can't move fast with all these horses. The Makhnovists will catch up with me.”

I tried to move the horses at a trot, but realised that it would be impossible to hold them. I didn't see any of our men. Ah, at last, Vyssevka is running, eyes wide with fear ...

“Here, here, here is your horse ... Take a few from me, we must go quickly.”

“Phew! God bless you for getting them away from there.”

Our men came running, one at a time, and breathed a sigh of relief when they saw their saddled horses. My brother was the last to appear.

“Could you not hear that they have been shooting for a quarter of an hour now, and come earlier?” I told him sternly, handing over Rytsar's rein.

“I knew you would bring the horses,” he replied simply.

Mounted, we hastened to the square, where the harnessed guns and squadrons stood .

“It's strange,” said Klinevski with dry humour, “that Captain Barski doesn't scold you this time. After all, he didn't ask you to bring his horse, and you saddled it without permission.”

Barski turned away. We didn't have time to laugh at the joke, because a machine-gun fired at us from the roof of a multi-storey mill. Everyone rushed to the side, pressed against the wall of the same mill. The fire was poorly directed and we had no casualties.

The squadrons and the battery went south, abandoning Pologi and all the villages that we had been holding for so long and with such difficulty.

“Ensign Mamontov,” Colonel Shapilovski turned to me, “go and see if anyone had been forgotten in the quarters.”

I opened my mouth to say that the Makhnovists were already there, but he turned his horse and left. I was left in confusion on the square alone.

It would be completely stupid to put yourself into the hands of the Makhnovists ... once more. Two or three should be sent ... But a sense of duty still made me return to our street. Without getting off, I began to



knock on the windows. No answer. All around there was that silence that precedes the appearance of the enemy and the shooting.

To hell with it! Of course everyone had heard the shooting and left. It was impossible not to hear it. And I still wanted to live.

I turned Gaychul and at a light trot, so as not to attract too much attention, walked across the square, crossed the rails and moved away from Pologi. I was wearing a torn and dirty sheepskin coat, previously white, and probably from a distance I could be mistaken for a Makhnovist. They didn't shoot at me.

Three horsemen appeared on the mound. Ours or the Makhnovists? Probably ours.

I went obliquely, approaching them, but having the opportunity to bypass them if they turned out to be Makhnovists. Soon I recognised the horses and headed towards them.

Captain Lukyanov, very short-sighted, pointed his carbine at me.

“Are you out of your mind! It's me, Mamontov.”

“Oh, it's good that you shouted, as I was about to shoot. Where have you come from? Do you know the news? The soldiers who arrived from France killed their officers and went over to the Makhnovists.”

Shortly afterwards we went and sabotaged the rail line, so that their armoured train couldn't pursue us.

We went to Tokmak. I don't think the guardsmen had fought against us. They had been abroad for years and just wanted to go home. We were replaced in Tokmak by infantry, not as good looking as the guards, but loyal. And we were loaded onto a train and taken to the coal-bearing Donetsk region, to Ilovaiskaya station.

