

With Chapaev on the Ural steppes

The Struggle Against the Ural and Czechoslovak Counter-Revolutions

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Pygmy Wars Introduction

Ivan Semenovitch Kutyakov was born into a peasant family in Samara province.

In WWI he became a junior non-commissioned officer. He joined the Bolsheviks in May 1917 and was immediately politically active. In 1918 he joined the new Red Army and formed a detachment which joined up with Chapaev. He stayed with the unit, rising to be *NachDiv* with Chapaev's death.

He wrote several books about time in the Civil War, not all of which followed Stalin's preferred line. He was shot in the purges.

This book is considered by historians to be extremely flattering of Chapaev, who was a friend of Kutyakov, and who was already becoming famous because of a book about him by Furmanov. Some of the details about him may well be completely imaginary.

I have put the text into English because it has some interesting detail of the tactics of the time. It is a very quick pass at translation, so readers should not depend on it for any details.

Readers not used to technical words from the Russian may wish to consult the short glossary in the Appendices.

I have translated *oblast* and *gubernia* as province and *raion* and *uezd* as district.

I have generally translated *voiska* as "host" when used in the context of Cossacks, although it can also mean "army" and "military" as they didn't distinguish between them particularly.

I have translated all ranks to their nearest Western equivalent. The Cossacks had different words for many of those ranks, which I have mostly ignored unless the context requires that it be specified as specifically Cossack.

Much of the early fighting in this book is against the Ural Cossacks. That host was named after the Ural River, not the mountains, which lie another 100 km or more east, so the references to "Ural" lands in the text are to the Cossack lands downstream of the Ural River from Ilek to the Caspian.



Original Introduction

Comrade Kutyaikov's work is of great interest to every military and political worker who studies the past of our revolutionary struggle in order to prepare himself for the severe trials of the future. Comrade Kutyaikov was a participant in the battles he describes. Now in peacetime, studying his experience in the light of military-scientific knowledge, he gives us a vital and truthful picture of what was happening in the army, on the battlefield itself: he tells us what the commander of a brigade or regiment was doing and thinking.

Against the broad background of the enormous scope of the political and strategic situation Comrade Kutyaikov gives us a number of tactical episodes. These episodes help us understand better than any loud words all the greatness and all the difficulties of the struggle of that epoch, when our civil war was just beginning, when the first foundations of the future Workers' and Peasants' Red Army were being laid. The work is dear to us and the fact that he speaks not only of "flag-waving" but includes some of the darker episodes of the struggle, gives colour to the greatness of the victory – the magnitude of the effort made.

How the Red Army was Built

The reader will find in Comrade Kutyaikov's work the most interesting descriptions of how an organised force was formed from random independent volunteer detachments. Anyone who wants to think about this question will find a wealth of material here. The study of this question on the basis of this work will be of interest to those military workers who will have to repeat in future class battles in the West the difficult stage which was passed by the Party, the working class and the poorest peasantry of the Soviet country, in the early days of the creation of their armed force. The reader will see how, under the threat of the growing danger of counter-revolution, an armed force – Red Guard detachments and armed peasant units – were spontaneously created in all the cities of our vast country. And just as spontaneously as they were created, they often also went home. Of the three-thousand-man "army", after the advance on Astrakhan, barely 150 men remained. After the campaign to Ural'sk the entire "Special Army" went home after a meeting at Ozinki because, according to rumours, the *kulaks* had risen in their villages.

A fiery speech by a commander would raise the fighting capacity of the soldiers, who were actively participating with all their hearts in the struggle for their clearly realised and ardently defended interests. But the mass lived only with the interests and dangers of "today". It did not know how to generalise its observations, its experience: it did not know how to assess the necessity of sacrifices "today" for "tomorrow's" victory. Hence the extreme issues with control, the lack of discipline, and the great impressionability of the young army, which was unorganised morally, politically and militarily. How vividly we see in these pages the need for the leadership of the Party in this period – uniting around its activists and spreading its influence over the entire mass.

As a direct consequence of the spontaneous formation of the independent detachments in the 4th Army, their military training was also very low. The characteristic features of the troops of that time were a lack of internal order, an inability to use firepower properly, an extreme susceptibility to being outflanked or enveloped, and an inability to maintain good tactical security. Thus, the Pugachev Regiment, fearing a cavalry attack by the Ural Cossacks, left its village and sat in the trenches all night, waiting for the enemy's attack. This peculiar method of protecting themselves ended up with the tired soldiers falling asleep at Balashi in the morning of 18 June, and the sleeping soldiers were then attacked by the Cossacks.

The author concludes that it wasn't necessary to attack with such troops, but to systematically teach and organise them – and only then to go on the offensive. This is an extremely interesting question about the basic behaviour of the insurrectionary proletariat and peasantry against the more organised forces of the counter-revolution. His conclusion is completely at variance with the



conclusion which all those who have studied another armed force in the period of its creation – the history of the Paris Commune – have usually drawn. That is precisely what was done there. After the seizure of power and the flight of Thiers' troops to Versailles, the Communards waited, prepared, and voted for three weeks: the result was that the three weeks was more helpful to the increasing organisation of Thiers than to the young troops of the Paris Commune. It seems to us that the main slogan of revolution wars should be Danton's words, *"de l'audace, toujours de l'audace, encore de l'audace!"*.

However, the daring campaign of the Saratov workers, Pugachev and Novouzensk peasants ended in failure. The Ural Cossacks proved to be stronger, more organised. Nevertheless, I think that the Saratov Soviet was right when it threw its forces into an offensive against the nest of the Ural counter-revolution. Kutyaakov writes that the failure of the Ural'sk offensive had a tremendous corrective effect on both soldiers and commanders, revealing the harm of independence and showing the full value of knowledge of military affairs and skilful leadership of the troops. Even the failures of the offensive were beneficial: marking time would undoubtedly have given even worse results.

Civil War Tactics

Comrade Kutyaakov's work is of great interest from the point of view of the study of modern tactics. He shows extremely vividly the importance of different densities of fire – where fronts were sparsely manned, where attacks were sudden, there one could afford the luxury of neglecting firepower – a concept still retained by many comrades to this day. But when met with the well-organised firepower of the sturdy and trained Czechoslovak units, "strong, accurate fire stopped all movement". And since our units had not yet been trained in fire tactics, and there was no trace of interaction between artillery and infantry, the only option left was using wide, free manoeuvre.

And for this there was plenty of opportunity.

Over a front of 400 kilometres the 4th Army had 23,000 bayonets, 1,000 sabres, 220 machine guns and 37 guns. Clearly there were gaps in the front, observed and even unobserved by the enemy, which gave full opportunity for dashing raids on the enemy flanks and rear.

We can still learn from the manoeuvres of this period. Fascinated by actions on narrow fronts, we unwittingly forget that such military action will be only on the main strike areas of our future battles: in addition to these areas there will still be wide fronts, where free manoeuvre will be the only solution. And in this environment of wide manoeuvre, individual command will again play a major part, just as it did in the early part of 1918.

The reader will find fine examples of initiative by commanders in the persons of Chapaev, Toporkov and others.

It is very instructive to study in the combat episodes presented by Kutyaakov the direct influence of the morale and political state of the units on the tactical methods used by them.

Thus, we know what tremendous power a firmly disciplined and well-trained unit can deliver with close-range fire. The Razin Regiment wanted to use this technique during the defence of Gusikha on 1 September 1918. But as the regiment was filled with poorly trained and politically unreliable recruits, the *Razintsy* could not withstand the impression made by the advancing enemy. Its fire was insufficiently accurate and a brilliant tactical technique, in other cases, proved to be the cause of their heavy defeat.

The Red infantry's struggle with the extremely mobile and enterprising Cossack cavalry – which would suddenly swoop in from all sides, launch mighty charges from the most unexpected directions, and make raids into the rear – is very interesting. The tactics of fighting the enemy



cavalry are of great interest to us now, because the Poles are training their cavalry to make mass cavalry strikes like those the Ural Cossacks carried out in Comrade Kuttyakov's descriptions.

Explaining the Red Army's Victory

Reading about the many shortcomings in the training of the Red troops of this period, the reader will have a question: why, despite all these shortcomings, did the Red troops defeat their more organised, better trained and better equipped enemy?

At the beginning of the struggle with the Ural Cossacks, the Red troops had a numerical advantage, which was explained by a certain reluctance by most Cossacks, who were tired of the war, to go back to the front. But at the time when the 4th Army was formed (August 1918) and when it was fighting for Pugachev, numerical superiority was on the side of the *Uraltsy* and Czechoslovaks. Indeed, against the Red 4th Army's 23,000 soldiers, of whom only some were volunteers – Red Guards – but most were mobilised peasantry, the enemy had 10,000 men of the People's Army of the Constituent Assembly,¹ 15,000 Ural Cossacks and 8,000 in the Czechoslovak Corps. All these forces were superior to the 4th Red Army in their training, and yet Samara was taken and the Whites were defeated.

Comrade Kuttyakov poses but does not give an answer to this question. But the facts which he relays will show an attentive reader, better than any long philosophising, the tremendous role that was played by the will to victory and energy of the Red soldiers – a direct result of the knowledge that this war was their war, a war for a better share to the urban and rural poor. These sentiments of the Red troops gave them an enormous advantage in offensive vigour and firmness in defence over the Czechs, who enormously disliked being dragged into the war: and even in the People's Army the peasants looked with hatred at the fact that after its victories the landlords would return to their estates. The revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses gave victory to the Red Army. Comrade Kuttyakov's tales highlight this vividly; not as an beautiful but abstract concept, but as an effective motivating power.

But it was not just the enthusiasm of the masses. Leading the army were commanders, for the most part nominated by the masses themselves: many a non-commissioned officer of the old army, a warrant officer, or even just a volunteer. Men such as Chapaev, Kuttyakov, Bubenets, Toporkov and Plyasunkov. While they might lack knowledge of military affairs, their intense will to fight, understanding of the actual situation, great common sense and readiness for selfless risk and self-sacrifice would decide the contest in their favour.

Finally, though less vividly, the reader can still see the organising influence of the working class Party directing the struggle. In the times of failure it mobilised forces, selected and supported commanders. In periods of success, it directed and concentrated the strikes, bringing them to complete victory.

The reader will read the work of Comrade Kuttyakov with great interest from beginning to end, seeing the exciting pages of the first epic battles of the Red Army on the eastern front.

A. Verkhovskiy²

¹ Usually known as KOMUCH, which is how I will refer to it. PW

² At the time a professor at the Military Academy of the Red Army. PW



Chapter One

Organisation of the Armed Forces of the Parties

Ural Host History

The Ural Cossacks are reckoned to have begun their existence in the eleventh century. The word “Cossack” (казак), according to Prof. M. N. Pokrovskiy, is of Oriental origin: it meant a free man, free from all and everything.

The Ural Cossacks in the time of Razin and Pugachev³ acted as fighters for the liberation of the peasantry. In those uprisings they played the role of the vanguard of serfs, Bashkirs and Kirghiz, tortured by poverty and unbearable oppression, leading them to storm the strongholds of the landlords and noblemen.

At that time the Cossacks in general, and the Ural Cossacks in particular, acted to oppose Tsarism – feudalism as a revolutionary force. The Tsarist government considered that and began to endeavour to bring the Cossacks closer to the throne: to make them tame, to give them material and political freedom in order to use them against the serfs at the right moment.

In 1803 a decree was issued that land along the Ural River, some 52,000 square kilometres was transferred into the ownership of the Ural Cossack Host. All the highest military posts, both in peace and in wartime, were occupied exclusively by members of the Ural Host. But the Tsarist government deceived the Cossacks and appointed the *atamans* itself, from outside the Ural Cossacks, and only the civil posts were filled on elective basis.

Approximately from that time the material situation in the Ural region began to improve gradually. This was also helped by Tsarist Russia’s conquest of Turkestan. The majority of the *Uralsy* who participated in that war called it nothing but “booty” or “trade”, as they saw it only as a way to enrich themselves at the expense of the peaceful population.

By the beginning of the 20th Century, a poor Cossack was approximately equal to a middling man in Samara province: he had two to four horses, a couple of cows, a dozen sheep and the necessary supplies for fishing. He differed from a *kulak* only in that he did not exploit other people’s labour:⁴ his family served his household. A Cossack *kulak* was a small landowner or farmer, who exploited a dozen or even more labourers. The upper bourgeoisie, the so-called Cossack aristocracy, had large land holdings, and some had fortunes of millions of roubles.

The Tsarist government’s measures had quickly had their effect. The Cossacks turned into loyal servants of the Tsar, became his *oprichnina* and in the revolution of 1905 did not let their “master” down, suppressing uprisings in the surrounding provinces.

The attitude of the Ural Host to the world war was the same as in general, i.e. an opportunity for booty.

During the manoeuvre period of the world war the regiments and *sotnias* of the Ural Cossacks participated in some battles, but their losses were small. With the onset of the positional war the Cossacks were withdrawn to the deep rear, where they performed reserve and security work and so had no losses.

³ Stenka Razin and Emel'yan Pugachëv led major revolts against the Tsars in the 1600's and 1700's, with a lot of support from the Volga area, and particularly the Ural Cossacks (then known as the Yaik Cossacks). PW

⁴ By “exploit other people’s labour” he means pay wages to a farm worker. PW



The situation was quite different in the units formed from workers and peasants. We all know that they suffered enormous losses and – despite coming from the same area – the peasant families lost their fathers, husbands and sons.

During the war, the peasants' farms fell into complete disrepair. There was a shortage of labourers, essential goods continued to become more expensive, the area sown decreased and bread prices remained very low. But these hardships did not affect the majority of the Cossack farms, because they took advantage of cheap Kirghiz labour, and so did not reduce their fields sown, continued cattle breeding, fishing and sold the surplus for a great profit.

This explains why it was that the peasantry of these regions, and not the Cossacks, first began to speak loudly about ending the war.

The February and October Revolutions in the Urals

The February Revolution at first visibly united the entire Ural population into one whole. This, so to speak, was the external look of things. Internally, the Cossacks were satisfied that now their *ataman* was to be a Ural Cossack and that they would not have to pay tribute to the Tsar for the first catch of red and black fish. But they were also afraid that they might lose their privileges.

In contrast to the Cossacks, a significant portion of the Kirghiz population, *inogorodni* labourers, artisans and other poor people expected an unconditional improvement in their economic and political situation from the revolution. The February revolution aroused their hopes for a division of the Cossack lands and an equalisation in political and other rights with the Cossacks.

As soon as the rumblings of the February Revolution spread across the Urals and red flags started flying in the *stanitsas* and farms, the Cossack *atamans* felt that it was a threat to their economic and political domination in the region. Among the Cossacks political groups quickly began to appear, and the *SRs*, as everywhere in the peasantry, played the first fiddle.

During the first months of the February Revolution the Ural Cossacks did not show any activity, as the majority of the Cossack feudal aristocracy was at the front lines of the imperialist war.

The poor were more and more firmly on the side of the Bolshevik Party, whose programme and slogans were close to its interests.

It was clear to the rich Cossacks that the revolution was expanding, leaving behind the bourgeois revolution and on the way to the proletarian revolution. The wealthy Cossacks felt that their economic and political privileges were coming to an end, and they began to unite in order to form a powerful group to fight back the growing revolutionary wave.

Soon political slogans such as: "Autonomy for the Ural region!", "Cossack government!", and "We will not give up anything we own and will not let anyone in!" appeared.

The Cossack counter-revolution was centred on the institutions surviving from Tsarist times where, although some members were replaced, the Provisional Governments' emissaries retained their spirit and atmosphere. While building up its forces, the counter-revolution carefully manoeuvred so as not to be noticed by the Ural Soviet, which by then was Bolshevik and had at its disposal the Ural Rifle Regiment (not Cossack).

Thus, by the beginning of October the Ural region was divided into two opposite camps: in the first one was the poor part of the population, led by a handful of Bolsheviks and relying on the armed force of the rifle regiment: in the second one were the Cossacks nobles, merchants, *kulaks*, and officials, together with the *SRs* and *Mensheviks*, backed by the forces of the Cossack cavalry regiment.

Both sides were secretly wary and waiting.



The organised Cossack masses were ready to fight, defending their rights and advantages, supposedly won by their ancestors.

The preponderance of forces was on the side of the counter-revolution.

The Ural steppes met the news of the fall of the Provisional Government silently, hostilely and sullenly. Power quickly passed into the hands of the Soviet in Ural'sk: the bourgeoisie did not resist, as it preferred not to fight in person and initially could not find others to fight on its behalf.

The old institution of the Office of the Military Ataman, which in the further course of events would serve as headquarters for all the counter-revolutionaries in the lower Ural, remained in Ural'sk in parallel with the Soviet. It did not operate openly in the first months after October, but became more and more active with the arrival of Cossack units from the front.

The Ural proletariat, although they got nothing from February, was convinced of the rightness of its demands after October and insisted, following the example of the workers and peasants of the surrounding provinces, on the destruction of the Cossacks' special rights and privileges.

The year 1918 came. The reserve regiment in Ural'sk decided to go home. No matter how hard people tried to hold it back, nothing came out of it, and the soldiers left. The Ural'sk Soviet had not yet had time to create its own armed force – the Red Guards. When the riflemen went home, the Soviet's orders were obeyed by the Cossack regiments in Ural'sk, seeing as they were interested in timely receipt of food and wages, as the Ural Soviet had the money with which to pay their wages.

Trains of Ural Cossacks returning to their homes from the front started reaching Ural'sk. With their arrival the counter-revolutionary forces increased, and the Ural Soviet found itself in the position of an island drowning in the midst of a raging Cossack sea.

Both the Ural and Saratov Soviets were forced to take the necessary measures against the gathering counter-revolutionary forces in the Ural region by a series of events – the Ural regiments refusing an order to surrender their arms, armed assistance to the rebellious Astrakhan Cossacks, and the friendly reception of fleeing counter-revolutionaries from the central regions of Russia.

Among the *frontoviki* who arrived there were some who called themselves Bolsheviks. The local comrades hurried to establish contact with them and at joint meetings decided to launch a slogan among the *frontoviki* – “Take a few horses and cows from the Cossacks who are fat from the war and distribute them to the poor”. The slogan was vigorously supported by almost all the front-line soldiers. The SRs and Mensheviks did not assist. The *frontoviki* demanded the sharing of horses, cattle and other livestock.

The Ural rich became afraid that their property would be confiscated. The bourgeoisie became even more agitated. The SR leaders – Kirpichnikov, Mikheev, and others – held illegal meetings and took measures not only to compromise the Soviet's power, but also that of the men arriving from the front, the so-called “levellers”.

The same groups carried out intensive work among the officers who had arrived from the front or fled from other parts of Russia, to create an officer *druzhina*, and most importantly to form a combat-ready army from the *kulaks* and Ural Cossacks.

The first Cossack congress was also being prepared with the purpose, according to hypocritical notices, to solve the questions posed by the revolution and the *frontoviki*, especially concerning the division and redistribution of wealth. In fact, the organisers of this congress – the senior Cossack officers together with the SRs – were to proclaim the independence of the Ural region and the formation of a Cossack government.

At the beginning of March 1918, the long-awaited Cossack congress finally opened in Ural'sk. As was to be expected, the Bolsheviks were in a minority at the congress, but they vigorously



demanded the implementation of revolutionary reforms. After a long and fruitless debate, the Bolsheviks were forced to leave.

The congress decided that the Ural region should be independent until the Constituent Assembly was convened, have its own military government and its own army, headed by the *ataman*.

After the Congress the host government began to show activity. It prepared an announcement of the mobilisation of the young men, allegedly for training purposes, with the corresponding indoctrination of the Cossack masses, and inflamed antagonism of the Cossacks with the *inogorodni* and Kirghiz. There were more and more frequent misunderstandings with the Soviet, whose administration staff consisted mostly of ex-Tsarist officials, adherents of the counter-revolution, engaged in sabotage and espionage.

At the end of March 1918 the Ural Soviet received a large sum of money from the centre. The military government decided to confiscate this money and arrest the Soviet. On the night of 29 March almost all the members of the Soviet were arrested and imprisoned, only a few managing to escape. At the same time, active workers in the local Soviets were also arrested in towns and villages. In a week all the prisons were full.

Creation of the White Ural Army

A few days after the arrest of the Ural Soviet an ultimatum arrived from the city of Saratov demanding the release of its members and the transfer of all power to them. The counter-revolutionary military government replied with a proclamation to the Cossacks, which was said that the Bolsheviks were encroaching on Cossack freedoms, wanting to take away the Cossack economy, to ruin their wives and children....

The Cossack masses were stirred up, meetings and gatherings again took place, but no more cries for the sharing of wealth were heard. The Cossacks demanded the Reds not be let into the host's lands. By this time the antagonism had reached its peak.

Enrolment in volunteer detachments was opened. *Frontoviki* did not join them, justifying their refusal by the fact that they had been fighting for several years and were tired of war. Older Cossacks, however, signed up willingly.

By this time White Army had four mounted regiments, with two light batteries, and two infantry detachments, one made up of officers and the other *kulaks* from Samara province. Thirty or forty officers were in each *sotnia* as common soldiers.

In addition, it was decided that in those areas where the fighting would take place, all Cossacks "from old to young" would take up arms and the newly formed *sotnia* or regiment would be named for the village, depending on the number of soldiers gathered.

The numbers in the White Army at the beginning of the Civil War, can be seen in the attached table.

Name	Sotnias	MGs	Guns	Sabres	Armoured cars	Armoured trains
1st Training Regiment, Colonel Kurin	6	2	4	640	1	1
2nd Training Regiment, Colonel Sladov	6	4	–	640	–	–
3rd Training Regiment, Colonel Kartashev	6	3	–	640	–	–



4th Training Regiment, Colonel Lyubavin	6	2	2	630	–	–
Officer <i>druzhina</i> , Colonel Martynov	6	8	–	600	–	–
Peasant <i>druzhina</i>	5	3	–	500	–	–

In total, the White Army had 2,550 sabres, 1,100 bayonets, 22 machine guns, 6 guns, one armoured car and one armoured train.

During our first campaign on Ural'sk the Red units captured ten large *stanitsas*, the Cossacks of which joined the White army and increased its strength to about 10,000 men. These reinforcements were characterised by great bravery and daring; there were moments when several hundred old men charged on horseback without sabres or revolvers,⁵ having only wooden lances in their hands.

Overall, by the beginning of the Civil War the White army, including reserves, numbered about 15,000 men.

Colonel Eremin was appointed commander of the Ural Cossack Army; a staff with Colonel Akutin at its head was organised under him. Colonel Kabanov's Ural province gendarmerie was also subordinated to the army commander.

The tasks of the counter-revolutionary Cossack troops were allocated: the field troops acted against the "external" enemy, i.e. the Red Guards; the gendarmerie against the "internal" enemy, i.e. all revolutionary elements not only in the Ural region, but also in the Kirghiz steppes, where punitive Cossack detachments were sent as needed.

The army was divided into two fronts: the first, called the Shipovka (facing Saratov) was commanded by Colonel Shadrin; the second, called Slomikhinskaya (facing Novouzensk) was under Colonel Borodin. The responsibility for the tranquillity of the rear, as we have already indicated, was entrusted to Colonel Kabanov's detachments.

Having created the army, formed the fronts and appointed the commanders, the Government did not think of observing the slogan "We shall go to no one and let no one come to us". The plan of military operations envisaged an offensive towards Saratov and, joining with the Astrakhan and Don Cossacks, to move on the cities of Pugachev and Samara. Then, joining with the Orenburg Cossacks and the Czechoslovak Corps, there would be a joint march on Moscow.

The Cossack regiments, veterans of the World War, were also excellent on foot and skilfully used their firearms, and the superiority of their tactical training was felt throughout the Civil War.

The February and October revolutions had left their mark on discipline, but the hard conditions in the rear, as well as the fact that there were officers in each *sotnia* serving as ordinary rankers, created an iron discipline in the Cossack units. The discipline was especially strict in the partisan Cossack detachments manned by volunteers – old Cossacks.

The favourite Cossack technique in battle – a mounted charge – was widely used by the Cossacks in the Civil War and made a great impression on the morale of our infantry.

The White Army had a large surplus of command staff, so they formed separate officer detachments from them.

General staff officers were in all the headquarters and many commanded formations, from corps down to regiment. This alone showed that the Ural White Army was well provided with highly qualified commanders.

⁵ At the beginning of the Civil War, some white units had a large shortage of both firearms and edged weapons.

Thanks to the large number of intellectuals loyal to the counter-revolution, the White command easily managed to replenish the losses in its command staff with short-term officer cadet schools.

Thus, it must be recognised that the White Army was provided with sufficient command staff.

However, the White Ural Army was not systematically provisioned throughout the civil war.

Food (bread, meat, forage) was taken from the local population for a corresponding payment. This method of supply gave more than enough and it was only at the end of the civil war, in the Kalmykov and Guriev areas, that a lack of bread and grain-forage began to be felt.

When the Cossacks occupied Samara province there were huge surpluses of food, which were taken without payment, including whole herds of cattle.

But although the White Army was provided with food and forage, the situation was much worse with regard to artillery supply.

In the first period of its existence (until the Czechoslovaks took Samara) the White Army was content with weapons brought home with them by *frontoviki*. But that supply of bladed weapons and firearms was certainly not enough for the growing army. The partisan Cossack detachments used weapons from Pugachev's time, as well as hunting weapons.

For these reasons, the White command had to urgently start producing their own rifle cartridges, which turned out to be ineffective. Due to the poor-quality material from which those cartridges were made, as well as the low powder charges, the bullets' range did not exceed 500 paces. This explains why, at the beginning of hostilities on the Ural front, there were more men wounded by steel weapons than by firearms.

Partisan Cossack detachments were especially short of firearms, and they had to attack our transports for the special purpose of capturing rifle cartridges with little more than whips in their hands. Of course the partisans suffered great losses in both men and horses during these attacks, and their goal was almost never achieved.

During the same period of time the Cossacks had only six canons at their disposal, and each gun fired no more than twenty shells per day due to lack of supply.

The White army also lacked aviation, but this did not last long, because at the very beginning of hostilities several of our aeroplanes flew over to their side.

During the initial military operations on the Ural front there were a number of failures for the Whites, and its command experienced many difficult days.

It was only with the capture of Samara by the Czechoslovak Corps on 8 June 1918 and the appearance of KOMUCH that the White command could breathe more freely. The Host government hastened to establish contact with the Samara politicians and for this purpose sent Colonel Martynov to Samara, accompanied by six Cossacks *sotnias*, to obtain the necessary means to fight against the Bolsheviks.

Colonel Martynov managed to obtain twelve guns, three armoured cars and a sufficient number of rifles, sabres, cartridges and shells, after which he returned to the White Army and delivered the weapons received.

From then until the Red Army occupied Samara, on 7 October 1918, the Whites did not have any shortage of arms and firearms. It was only after the Czechoslovaks and the KOMUCH troops were pushed back to the Belaya River that the artillery supply of the Ural Host deteriorated. The *Uraltsy* had to carefully allocate the firearms received from Samara.

After General Tolstov dispersed the host government and declared himself *Ataman* of the Ural Cossack Host – in other words, dictator of the Ural region – English capital offered its services. The



army's stock of gold and Embi oil was immediately handed over to the English. From that moment on English capital became the faithful and reliable bursar of General Tolstov's Ural army.⁶

From April 1919 the Whites were able to use almost twice as much ammunition and shells as the Red Army – the crisis in firearms disappeared and was not repeated until the end of the civil war.

Soon there were armoured cars and tanks (Bicherakhov's detachment),⁷ English light and heavy artillery, horse tack, aeroplanes, as well as chocolate, coffee and other things.

As for dressing the men, when the front-line soldiers returned from the world war, each of them brought from four to six sets of uniforms.⁸ In addition, during the destruction of the alcohol stores, the troops and the population looted the stocks of uniforms that were in Ural'sk, which then formed the basis of the White Ural Army's uniforms.

In winter, during the coldest days and strong storms, the state model uniforms were unsuitable, as they did not protect against frostbite or even simply the cold. Therefore, the Cossacks had to use their own sheepskin coats, warm mittens and felt boots. Dressed in that way a Cossack was combat-ready, easily and warmly dressed. In order not to lose his military appearance, each Cossack wore a *shinel'* on top of his sheepskin coat.

In the spring of 1919, when a shortage of uniforms arose, the Cossacks managed to defeat several of our rifle brigades. The almost new uniforms taken from the captives served to eliminate the shortfall. After the establishment of communication with English capital, the White Army was fully supplied with uniforms.

The only thing the Cossacks had, and which they never lacked, was saddles of their own pattern. Their simple construction and their cheapness made it possible for any Cossack to make a saddle within a few days.

With English capital, the White command had all the necessary means to wage war.

The White army's military transport was organised by mobilising camels from the Kirghiz steppes. Despite the huge length of its communication line, the White Army was well and smoothly served this way. When the Whites advanced into Samara and Saratov provinces, transport was organised using peasant carts, the collection of which usually exceeded the number required. Both the mobilisation of camels and the requisitioning of carts required the shooting and flogging of recalcitrant peasants and Kirghiz.

Organisation of the Armed Forces to Fight the White Ural Host

The area of the Ural Cossack Host borders three provinces to the west: Samara, Saratov and Astrakhan.

The Ural region has a close economic and political connection with Saratov province, thanks to the railway connecting the regional centre of Ural'sk with Saratov.

⁶ In this book Kutyakov mostly follows the standard political and historical narrative of early Soviet times, but in my opinion in these paragraphs he stops offering a different way of seeing the world and starts offering largely fantasy. England had little to no involvement with the Ural Host, as there was absolutely no line of communication at this stage. Some Ural oil was later swapped with the Volunteer Army for ammunition and equipment, but never in very large amounts because of the transport issues with a very long and tenuous link through the Caspian. PW

⁷ I have no idea what this refers to, as there were no tanks anywhere near the Ural area, nor any commander Bicherakhov. PW

⁸ The soldiers did not return with that much uniform, or the Reds would have been in the same position. PW



Samara's workers could not provide substantial support to the Ural Soviet in the struggle against the White Army as they were completely absorbed by the turmoil in Samara. There the Provincial Peasant Soviet was mostly maximalists,⁹ who managed to penetrate the ranks of the Red Guards and for a short time even seized power in the city.

Soviet power had not yet gained strength in Astrakhan – it also had to fight with the local Astrakhan Cossacks, who threatened open rebellion.

Therefore, the task of fighting the White Ural Host fell mainly to the Saratov Soviet.

From the first days of the February Revolution that city had had a very strong Bolshevik organisation, which quickly attracted all the city's workers to its side – from whom Red Guards had been created long before the October Revolution – and the entire, large, garrison.

The city of Saratov was of great strategic and political importance throughout the Civil War. From the beginning to the end it was the base for three Red Armies (4th, 9th, and 10th).

Even before October the Saratov workers were supplied with sufficient arms. Bolshevik influence spread to other nearby towns (such as Atkarsk, Kamyshin, Tsaritsyn, Astrakhan, Pugachev, Novouzensk and Ural'sk) with the dispatch of deputies, agitators and literature.

After the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies took over in Saratov the Red Guard workers returned to their machines in the factories and plants.

Only 150 Red Guards were left to protect the Soviet, organised into the 1st Flying Detachment.

After October Saratov city's armed forces consisted mainly of soldiers from the local garrison, whose duties until December 1917 included disarming General Dutov's Orenburg Horse Division and the Ural Cossacks returning from the front through the city. However they only partially fulfilled that task.

On 10 December 1917, the Presidium of the Saratov Soviet convened a military meeting under the chairmanship of Comrade Antonov-Saratovsky, which discussed the situation of the Comrade Antonov-Ovseenko's Red Ukrainian Army fighting against the *Haidamaks* and General Kornilov's *Junkers*. The meeting made a resolution to render immediate help to the Ukrainians, by means of an offensive against Tsaritsyn and, joining with the units of the 39th Rifle Division, located in Velikoknyazheskoe, jointly lead an attack on the town of Rostov-on-Don. The session hoped that this would put an end to the counter-revolution in the Ukraine and the Don.

Saratov had no rifles or cartridges, so order to put the plan into action Comrade Moldavskiy was sent as the Soviet's representative to Kharkiv, Antonov-Ovseenko's base, to report on the plan and receive weapons. Saratov's plan was approved, and Moldavskiy was given 10,000 Russian rifles and 300,000 cartridges, which arrived safely in Saratov by 20 December.

By this time the city's garrison had badly decayed and was not a real military force. In order to help the Ukrainians a new army was needed to complete the intended task.

On 25 December 1917, at a general meeting of the Saratov Soviet and representatives of factory committees and trade unions, it was decided to start organising a permanent Red Guard from the workers and soldiers of the garrison on a voluntary basis. The newly formed units were to be kept in the barracks.

The organisation of the detachments was entrusted to the head of the Red Guards, Comrade Fedorov, and to the military section of the Saratov Soviet.

⁹ Extremists to the Left. In the context it likely includes Anarchists. PW



Within a week, so by 2 January 1918, two battalions of infantry, under the command of Comrades Sukhov and Zelensky; a machine-gun detachment of 40 machine-guns under Comrade Polyakov; a light battery of six guns; some mounted scouts; a communication team; a supply train; and an engineering park were formed. In all, about 2,000 men.

The Saratov Executive Committee chose former a lieutenant, Comrade Zagumenniy, as commander of the troops, with Comrade Moldavskiy as his chief of staff and Comrade Genkin as head of the political department.¹⁰

However, the formation of the Red Guard units could not be completed quietly. A member of the Executive Committee, Comrade Mikhailov, who had arrived from Astrakhan, reported that the Astrakhan Cossacks and the Orenburg Horse Regiment under the leadership of Colonel Biryukov had revolted. The garrison, taken by surprise, was partly disarmed and partly entrenched in the fortress, which it defended.

The Saratov Soviet, having heard the report, decided to move immediately to the rescue of the Astrakhan garrison and to begin the vigorous formation of Red Guard units.

By 5 January a third battalion was formed, consisting exclusively of former inhabitants of Astrakhan, who were told that after the occupation of the city they were not to return to Saratov.

These detachments, not more than 3,000 men, were called the “Eastern Counter-revolutionary Army” and were sent to liquidate the Astrakhan uprising. After the Red Guards were successful in some battles, the Ural Cossacks, who had taken part in this uprising alongside the Orenburg Horse Regiment, which was in Astrakhan, marched across the steppe to Ural'sk.

The Astrakhan Cossacks began to break apart. The peasants of the surrounding villages and hamlets, knowing from their experiences of 1903-1905 what the Cossacks brought them, revolted on 17 February 1918 and joined the Reds. An armed detachment of the poorest peasants, numbering about 5,000 fighters, was formed in Enotaevka¹¹ and in Nikolaevka. The revolutionary headquarters of the detachment, together with its commanders, gave an ultimatum to the Cossack villages to surrender all their weapons within three days. The *stanitsas* obeyed and on 21 February 1918 surrendered all their weapons.

With the help of the peasant detachment the Red Guards managed to surround and destroy one of Colonel Biryukov units, made up exclusively of officers. In the battle, Biryukov's aide Cossack Captain Dogadin was captured. Biryukov fled with the rest of his detachment to the Astrakhan steppes. As the Red Guards had fulfilled their task, on 21 February all the units, except for one battalion which remained in Astrakhan, returned to Saratov.

The Saratov Soviet decided to not dissolve the Eastern Army. But the Red Guards, in spite of all entreaties and orders from the authorities, decided not to serve any longer. They categorically declared that they wanted to return to their machines and families since, “we have fought, and now let others go instead”.

After the demobilisation of the “Eastern Army”, only a detachment of 150 men with 10 machine guns remained at the disposal of the Soviet. The military section started to form the 1st Saratov Rifle and Cavalry Regiments, a light and a howitzer battery and an engineer battalion. By the end of March there were six companies of infantry, three squadrons of cavalry, two half-batteries (two light guns and two howitzers) and some technical detachments.

In addition, all the province's towns had armed detachments of 500 to 1,000 bayonets.

¹⁰ At that time all such positions were elected.

¹¹ This was a district administrative centre in Astrakhan province, whose inhabitants consisted mainly of peasants. Ed.



While in the cities the best and most politically aware workers were the main cadre for the Red Guards, in the villages and district towns of Samara and Saratov provinces that role was performed by the agricultural proletariat and the village poor. Pugachev's Soviet of People's Commissars¹² had had a *coup d'état* even before the October Revolution and seized power into its own hands, assisted by the 138th Reserve Rifle Regiment, led by Comrade V. I. Chapaev.

In the villages and hamlets of the Pugachev district there were Bolsheviks. The *frontoviki* rallied around them and under their leadership carried out agitation among the peasant population. In parallel with this, small but tightly-knit detachments of Red Guards were created, consisting exclusively of the poorest part of the peasant population.

In the first quarter of 1918, the Pugachev district village Red Guards were already a solid fighting force – well-organised and relatively disciplined. They had acquired some combat training in the struggle against the *kulaks*, and their ranks were developing an understanding of the necessity of support and timely assistance to neighbouring detachments. Each detachment, in fact, always acted independently, sometimes even treating the others badly, but nevertheless the feeling of mutual help was never lost.

By 1 May 1918 the detachments of the district were: 800 bayonets in Pugachev town under Comrade Chapaev, 600 bayonets in Dukhovnitskoe under Comrade Baylin, 600 bayonets in Lipovka under Comrade Shevelev, 400 bayonets in Goryainka under Comrades Stepanov and Churkin, 20 bayonets in Khebnovka under Comrade Bubenets, 200 bayonets in Novozakharkino under Comrade Kutyakov, 600 bayonets in Sudakhska under Comrades Toporkov and Plyasunkov, 200 bayonets in Studentsy under Comrade Potapov, 200 bayonets in Semenikha under Comrades Kindyukhin and Porubezhskiy, and 200 sabres under Comrade Surov, for a total of 3,700 bayonets and 200 sabres. Subsequently, these detachments were to serve as the basis of what later was to become the 25th "Chapaev" Rifle Division.

In addition, each village and hamlet had detachments of 20 to 40 men.

The organisation of the Red Guards in Novouzensk and its surroundings, where the Left-SR Sapozhkov was head of the district soviet, took place during a struggle with the Ural Cossacks, whose regiments invaded the Novouzensk district to seize the property of the Cossack landlords and return it to its former owners even before the beginning of hostilities. The poor who had taken the property were beaten by the Cossacks, and members of village and *volost* councils were shot.

In this way the Ural Cossacks forced many peasants to spontaneously join the Red Guards.

At the beginning of the civil war with the Ural Cossacks the Novouzensk district had detachments: in Novouzensk of 1,000 bayonets, consisting of soldiers and workers under the command of Sapozhkov and Ruban; in Aleksandrovsk-Gai were 400 bayonets of Austro-Hungarian POWs under the command of the former Austrian NCO Comrade Vinerman; in Kurilovka were 600 bayonets under the command of Serov (an SR); and in Krasny Kut were 600 bayonets under the command of Comrade Dumler; in all, a force of 2,600 bayonets. In the villages along the border with the Ural Cossacks, small detachments of 50 to 100 bayonets were also formed for the purpose of self-defence. They were later to be the basis of what was to become the 22nd "Krasnodar" Rifle Division.

At the beginning of the Civil War the Red Guard units were supplied with food and forage through requisitions from the *kulaks*. When those stocks were exhausted, the units were supplied with food from the rest of the peasant population. Receipts were issued for what was taken, on the basis of which the district and provincial authorities paid the appropriate amount of money.

¹² Formed at the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918 for the Pugachev district.



However, the receipts were paid inaccurately, and sometimes were cancelled completely. As a result, by the end of 1918 the sympathy of the middle peasantry for the Soviet power had somewhat weakened.

The Red Guard detachments were provided with monetary allowances from the funds collected by "contributions" (confiscations), as well as from the funds of the district military committees. Later, when the struggle with the Ural Cossacks began, money was sent from Saratov.

The detachments were armed with weapons collected after the disbandment of the old army regiments and also those brought back by the Red Guards from the front of the World War. The supply of uniforms was partly from old stocks, but in most cases the Red Guards men were outfitted with requisitioned clothes and shoes from the local population.

The fighting ability of the Red Guards fluctuated for a variety of reasons. After a well-conducted agitation or a successful speech by the commander, the mood of the men would rise, and they would become steadfast and persistent in battle. But their mood could fall equally quickly, and the combat effectiveness of the units fell to nil after any unsuccessful battle, especially in those with unpopular commanders. Only a selfless, brave, knowledgeable commander, who fully understood the psychology of the masses – or a demagogue, pandering to their low instincts – enjoyed popularity and authority.

There were cases when a decent, combat-ready detachment would lose its fighting spirit after a victory only because there was no bread, water or ammunition.

In the first two campaigns on Ural'sk, when the masses were raring to fight, they were firmly convinced that the capture of the city would bring the civil war to an end. But when they reached Ural'sk and saw that it could not be taken without weapons, the men began to discuss loudly the treason and unsuitability of the commanders, about retreat, etc.

As for the Red Guard commanders, they can be divided into two categories.

In the first category were the commanders originating from the poor peasantry, who had passed through the harsh school of the World War. They were selfless and brave, but illiterate in general and particularly with regard to military affairs. They were poorly trained and prepared tactically and could not even read topographical maps correctly. But they were loyal to Soviet power and the Communist Party.

The second category were former officers. Some served Soviet power honestly and faithfully, while others carried gold epaulettes in their inner pockets. There were repeated examples where they attributed Red victories to their knowledge and experience but blamed illiterate commanders for any defeats. When their unit was captured, they rushed to put on epaulettes. The Ural counter-revolution concentrated its attention on such commanders, recruiting them as spies and allies. Of course, they did not always succeed.

To conclude this chapter, let us look at the process of the subordination of the Red Guard detachments under a single command. This was the most painful and weakest point of the young RKKA.

Autonomy and *partisanshchina* dominated the combat life of the Red Guards for a long time. Each detachment operated wherever it pleased, but in such a way as to protect its villages, families and households from enemy attack. For example, when the Ural Cossacks were threatening, the Red Guard detachments fought them, but as soon as the Czechoslovaks attacked from Samara, they abandoned the Saratov front and arbitrarily moved towards the new problem. No threats or persuasion could influence the men, who were in a hurry to defend their farms.



The absence of a unified command over the Red Guards is explained by the fact that civilian politics was not centralised at the time either: the *volost*, district and provincial Soviets did not want to be subordinated to any higher organisations.

This disobedience was justified by the slogan of the time: "All power to the localities". It is clear that a Red Guard detachments created any in soviet was not subordinate to any other.

While the first two campaigns on Ural'sk had a unified command, there was more to it than it seems. The small district detachments were united and placed at the disposal of the Saratov command only because they lacked ammunition, artillery and such things, and the command supplied the detachments with everything they needed.

However, before giving an order, the same command would gather the commanders for a meeting, because without that there was no guarantee that the order would be executed.

The elective nature of the commanders also affected the disparate actions of the detachments. In early 1918, elections were made by a general meeting of soldiers and command staff. Having lost a *KomBat* or *KomRota*, an assembly of commanders would nominate candidates from who the *KomDiv* could select. In case of the loss of the latter, another was elected in his place, who would report to the centre upon taking office.

This situation lasted through the spring and summer of 1918, and it was only in autumn of 1918 that the units of the Ural front began to be replenished with political staff from the centre. From that time on autonomy and *partisanshchina* dropped at a rapid pace.

The Red Guards would not lose their autonomy until the whole Soviet apparatus in the field was imbued with the principle of centralisation. Then the Red Guards, renamed the Red Army, would receive a single centralised administration.

Conclusion

Comparing the forces of the parties, it must be said that before the beginning of hostilities the Red forces were weak, with no organised rear and in many ways inferior to the White armies. The Ural Cossack regiments, up to almost the end of the civil war, had no cases of mutiny or murder of their commanding officers, whereas such cases can be found in the history of any of our units.

The White Ural Army had a well-organised command structure, a reasonably organised rear and, of course, started better trained for combat than the Red Guards.



Chapter II

First Ural'sk Campaign

Causes of War and the Position of the Sides

The signal for the beginning of hostilities was the uprisings at the beginning of March 1918 in Ilets'k and at the end of March in Ural'sk, where the Council of Workers', Peasants' and Kirghiz Deputies was dispersed and some of its members were arrested.

A host government was established in Ural'sk, headed by the SR rabble-rousers Kirpichnikov, Mikheev and Fomichev. This political upheaval, the counter-revolutionary nature of which was quite clear, forced the Saratov Soviet to send an ultimatum to the newly formed host government with the following demands:

- 1) The Ural Host government must confirm in writing that it recognises the authority of the Soviet of People's Commissars as the supreme authority of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.
- 2) Immediately restore the Ural Soviet, which has been dispersed and partly arrested.
- 3) Expel the foreign element from the Ural region, such as: counter-revolutionary officers, the bourgeoisie and landlords.

The host government was slow to give a definite answer, for it did not have sufficient armed forces for an external struggle with the Soviets. Therefore it endeavoured to gain time by negotiating by direct wire, by sending a delegation to Saratov from the Provincial Congress consisting of Cossack Lieutenant Musatov and Cossack Borzikov. On their arrival in Saratov, when it became clear that the Provincial Government had not released the members of the Ural Soviet, they were arrested.

On 31 March the Saratov Soviet ordered the cessation of all railway and telegraph communication between the Ural region and Saratov, which meant the isolation of the region from the rest of Soviet Russia. By this time the Cossack provincial government was quite prepared for an armed struggle, and it sought an excuse for the beginning of hostilities – but on condition that the Cossack masses could not accuse it afterwards of being the instigator, and so breaking its slogan: “We will not go to anyone ourselves and let no one come to us”. But the Saratov Soviet was not yet prepared to support the ultimatum by armed force.

It was only on 1 April that an order was given to appoint Comrade Zagumenniy as commander of against the *Uraltsy*, with Comrade Moldavskiy as his appointed chief of staff. They were instructed to begin working out a plan for a campaign against Ural'sk and to prepare the transfer of troops to the borders of the Cossack territory. By 8 April a headquarters had been formed.

The troops at the disposal of Comrade Zagumenniy consisted of a Saratov Red Guard detachment (1,350 men), a Tambov detachment (500 bayonets, 12 MGs, 2 guns, and an armoured car), a battalion formed by the Saratov province military commissariat (600 bayonets, a battery of 2 light and two 122-mm guns), and a mounted detachment (150 sabres and 10 MGs). In all 2,450 bayonets, 150 sabres, 92 MGs, 6 guns (of which two were 122-mm) and an armoured car.

The Red command believed that this was quite enough to suppress the Ural counter-revolution.

However, not all the detachments left Saratov at the same time. As a consequence, the Red command, having arrived at Ershovo station on 14 April, had at its disposal only: 670 bayonets, 268 sabres, 6 guns, 42 MGs, five aeroplanes, an armoured car and a supply train.

The small number of men required an increase, so the Red command decided to transfer all its energies to bringing in Red Guard detachments from the counties bordering the Ural province, i.e. from the Pugachev and Novouzensk districts of Samara province. For this purpose a meeting was



convened, which was attended by the Chairman of the Pugachev Soviet, Comrade Ermoshchenko, the military commissar, Comrade A. Ulyanov, and members of the Executive Committee, Comrades Chapaev, Demidkin and Shevelev, along with the Chairman of the Novouzensk Soviet, Comrade Sapozhkov, and some of its members, Comrades Trutnev, Zhidkov and Rudin. The meeting decided to begin a hasty transfer of detachments to the border with the Ural Cossack Host.

Meanwhile the Cossack forces had had time to group themselves in the border strip, and small detachments of them were raiding the nearby villages, and especially the communards' farms.

On 18 April two detachments arrived from Pugachev at Dergachi village, the first under the command of Comrade Demidkin had 300 bayonets and the second under Comrade Shevelev had 500 bayonets. Chapaev's detachment, 600 bayonets with two guns, was already engaged in small battles with the Cossacks near Salyanki and Benerdak. The next day a combined detachment of 1,000 bayonets under Sapozhkov arrived in Dergachi from Novouzensk, and on 20 April the headquarters of the Saratov troops arrived by rail at Altata station, where it began to equip the armoured train and to supply the active units with firearms and uniforms. During this time, both we and the enemy destroyed the railway track for a distance of 30 kilometres, from Ozinki station to Shipovo station.

General Situation and the Red Plan

By 1 May the Orenburg Red Guard detachments of Comrades Blyukher, Zinoviev, Danberg, the Kashirin brothers and others were successfully fighting General Dutov's Cossack regiments near Verkhne-Ural'sk and Orenburg.

The Astrakhan Cossacks, after the February uprising and disarmament, were loyal to Soviet power.

The Ural Cossacks grouped their armed forces on the border of Samara province in two areas: the Ural'sk – Saratov line and the Slomikhinskaya – Novouzensk line. From these areas Cossack detachments raided Pugachev and Novouzensk districts and had small clashes with the border detachments of armed peasants.

Comrade Zagumenniy's Red Guard detachments, renamed the "Special Army", were located around Ozinki with the following numbers:

Name of detachment	Bayonets	Sabres	Guns	MGs	A/Cars	A/Trains	Planes
Sapozhkov	1 000	100	4	20	1	1	5
Saratov	700	-	6	30			
Tambov	500	-	2	12			
Chapaev	600	100	4	20			
Shevelev	500	100	2	20			
Saratov cavalry regiment Bredikhin ¹³				1)	-	275	-
Demidkin	300	-	-	-	5		
Total	3 600	575	18	110	1	1	5

¹³ A former hussar officer who fled to the Whites by car in August 1919, just as he was to be arrested for espionage.

The state of our rear was unstable. *Kulak* uprisings broke out in various places, which greatly unnerved our command. The local Soviets, due to the need to suppress the insurgency, could not send all their armed forces to fight the Ural Cossacks.

The plan was to seize the Saratov to Ural'sk rail line and secure the stations with garrisons. Then to take the city of Ural'sk with a quick strike, arm the workers and the non-urban population – in particular, the immigrants from the Ukraine and across the Urals – and use them to help to disarm the villages, i.e. to apply the methods of the Astrakhan campaign. The operation was expected to take one month.

Battles at Semiglaviy-Mar, Shipovo and Derkul Stations

At 13:00 on 1 May the Special Army left Ozinki station to attack Semiglaviy-Mar station. To guard communications, two squadrons of the Saratov Cavalry Regiment remained at Altata station and the Khvalynsk Infantry Company at Chalykla and Dem'yas stations,. The other detachments moved in a long line along the railway line, in the following order: on the right flank went Sapozhkov's detachment, followed by Shevelev's and Demidkin's; on the left flank moved Chapaev's detachment; in reserve at a distance of 4 to 6 kilometres, also spread in a chain, were the Saratov and Tambov detachments. The artillery and machine guns moved in the centre.

This formation was like a square and was caused by the tactics of the Cossack cavalry, who were able to manoeuvre quickly on the battlefield, to appear suddenly where they were not expected, and to attack the flanks and rear. This forced the Red Guard commanders to adopt that order of march immediately from leaving the staging point.

The convenience of the square was that it made it possible to engage enemy cavalry without delay or redeployment. But it had to move off the roads, which slowed down the march rate considerably, and so the speed of the square was no more than two or three kilometres per hour.

The detachments moved without stopping. The darkness of the night and sporadic shooting from Cossack detachments unnerved and disturbed the tired soldiers. The square stopped every minute, which slowed down the speed a lot. All this forced Chapaev to detach his unit from the square and move along the mountainous terrain through Korovin to the rear of the Cossacks' position at Semiglaviy-Mar.

Sapozhkov's detachment followed Chapaev's example and took a direction slightly to the south, which accelerated its movement.

As the Cossacks' attention was concentrated on the movement of the main forces, Chapaev made his manoeuvre without much difficulty and was only detected at the moment when he descended the mountains towards Semiglaviy-Mar. The Cossacks did not accept battle, fearing encirclement, and hastily retreated in the direction of Shipovo station. The retreating Cossacks did not have time to blow up the "American" railway bridge, which was captured by Sapozhkov's detachment. After a short rest Chapaev's detachment went in pursuit of the Cossacks and at 18:00 on 2 May occupied Karepanov after a short attack, 11 km east of Semiglaviy-Mar station.

The initiative shown by Chapaev and Sapozhkov enabled the other detachments to accelerate their movement and take Semiglaviy-Mar without combat.

In the fighting we lost five men killed and the enemy lost thirty-six.

By 18:00 on 2 May the detachments were located: Chapaev's detachment was in front occupying Karepanov; Sapozhkov's detachment occupied the "American" bridge; the main forces were at Semiglaviy-Mar station; and the army headquarters and the supply train were at Ozinki station.



The soldiers started digging trenches around the occupied points, which made it possible to repel mounted Cossack attacks from both the flank and rear. By 19:00 the trenches were ready. At that time the Cossacks appeared from the south – the 1st and 3rd Training Regiments, under the command of Colonel Kurin, attacked Semiglaviy-Mar. The attack was repulsed by artillery and machine-gun fire. The battle lasted an hour. There were no losses on our side.

Before sunset an enemy chain of about 600 bayonets with about 500 sabres appeared on the left flank of Shipovo station, and Sapozhkov's detachment came under artillery fire. The repulsed Cossack cavalry regiments, under cover of the fire of two guns, attacked Semiglaviy-Mar again. While it was still light, the enemy's attacks were repulsed by rifle and machine-gun fire, and we were successful.

The arrival of night changed the situation dramatically. Sapozhkov's detachment was surrounded, began to panic, and some enemy cavalry managed to break through our line. There was no escape from the centre of our circular trench, the soldiers fired in all directions and bullets flew into our artillery. The situation was becoming critical.

Chapaev's detachment, which was five kilometres from Sapozhkov's location, was fighting one or two Cossack cavalry *sotnias*. The latter demonstrated but did not actually charge. Chapaev figured out what was happening. Leaving a small unit against the Cossack cavalry, he moved with the rest of his men into the gap between Semiglaviy-Mar and the "American" bridge, rushing to the aid of Sapozhkov's surrounded detachment.

Chapaev managed to break through the Cossacks' line and join Sapozhkov. He threw his machine guns into the defence of Semiglaviy-Mar, and the infantry engaged the Cossacks. The enemy could not hold and began to retreat – the cavalry fled in the direction of Chizhinskiy, the infantry to Shipovo station.

Late in the night the fighting quieted down. In the battle we lost 50 killed and 20 wounded; on the enemy's side 20 men and about 200 horses were killed.

The next morning the soldiers saw that Cossack pickets were placed on all the high points around their position. What the enemy was doing and what forces were hiding behind the hills remained unknown.

No reconnaissance was made by our side, as our cavalry could not withstand the Cossack attacks.

At 10:00 on 3 May Comrade Zagumenniy ordered the detachments to attack Shipovo station. Sapozhkov moved on the right flank and Chapaev on the left. In the centre was Demidkin's detachment and at a distance of 4 to 6 km behind, covering the rear, was the Saratov detachment. Shevelev's detachment was left to garrison Semiglaviy-Mar station.

The detachments moved slowly, as Cossack detachments were always trying to attack their flanks and rear. At about 14:00, in line with Bolshaya Ichka mountain, 10 km from Shipovo station, the central detachments were met by artillery fire from the enemy's armoured train. The officer detachment opened a strong rifle and machine-gun fire from a good position. Our men stopped and lay down. A stubborn fire fight ensued. The Red soldiers attacked frontally, without attempting any manoeuvre and not protecting their flanks, putting them under the risk of direct attack by the enemy cavalry. Our left flank, occupied by Chapaev's detachment, was protected from attack by the Derkul River, but at the same time the position there was inconvenient for manoeuvre.

The right flank (Sapozhkov's detachment) was attacked by Cossack cavalry from the direction of Belenkiy, which forced the detachment to retreat, bending to the right. Several times Chapaev had to throw some of his forces across to rescue Sapozhkov.



Comrade Zagumenniy ordered all the artillery and most of the machine guns to be transferred to the defence of the right flank. Sapozhkov's detachment was ordered to hold where it was, and the Chapaev, Demidkin and Tambov detachments were to attack the officer unit. Half an hour later a friendly "ura!" rang out throughout the chain.

The soldiers charged with bayonets. The officer unit did not hold, and retreated through Shipovo station to Derkul.

Our units occupied Shipovo in pursuit of the enemy, but at that time a Cossack *lava* appeared on the flank, bearing down on the Tambov detachment. Twenty machine-guns on *tachankas* were sent towards the Cossacks, and the attack was repulsed.

Before darkness fell we occupied Kamennaya station as well as Shipovo station. The soldiers, having entrenched themselves, positioned themselves in a chain on the outskirts of the occupied points.

In this fighting we lost 30 men killed and 50 wounded; the enemy lost 10 men killed and 50 horses. The Cossack population of Kamennaya, under the influence of White agitation ("the Bolsheviks will slaughter everyone from old to young"), had left in large numbers towards Ural'sk, abandoning their property.

The next day, 3 May, the detachments were given a day's rest. In the morning and evening a mounted reconnaissance was sent in the direction of Derkul and Nizhinskaya stations, but returned without any results.

In the morning of 4 May the units moved out to occupy Derkul station and Zelenovskoe outpost. The Chapaev and Demidkin detachments marched in the vanguard. On the right flank was Sapozhkov's detachment and the Saratov detachment moved in reserve. The Tambov detachment was left as a garrison at Shipovo station.

Two hours later Sapozhkov's detachment came under enemy artillery fire from Sunduki mountain, 10 km south-west of Derkul station. Sapozhkov's battery returned fire from an open position. Sapozhkov's infantry turned to the south, with the intention of storming the mountain, but the detachment had no time to turn round and aim, as suddenly the enemy cavalry, numbering about 2,000 men,¹⁴ quickly attacked from behind the hills. The soldiers lay down and opened volley fire.

Demidkin's detachment turned right and joined Sapozhkov's left flank. From our side the fire increased, and was mainly concentrated on the centre of the Cossack *lava*, which swung to the west, i.e. into the gap to the Saratov detachment, which was also rushing to Sapozhkov's aid. The first attack was repulsed, but the retreating Cossack *lava* was put back into order, and we could see how platoons and *sotnias* were being rebuilt, preparing for a second attack.

At this time Chapaev was fighting with the enemy infantry, who were located in a favourable position, on the left flank of which was grouped a cavalry force of about 1,500 sabres. This cavalry was made up of residents (partisans) of the occupied villages.

On his right flank Chapaev sent 15 *tachankas* to guard the junction with Demidkin's detachment, while his left flank was covered by the Derkul river. The soldiers were ordered to prepare for a bayonet attack on the enemy. The men moved quickly: the platoons and companies moved closer and closer to the enemy. When the men were 800 paces from the enemy position and preparing to charge the partisans attacked the rear of Chapaev's detachment. They were armed only with lances – there were few sabres, not to mention carbines – but Chapaev's detachment lay down and again started a fire fight. The artillery and some of the machine-guns transferred their fire

¹⁴ These enemy numbers are somewhat exaggerated. Ed.



from the Cossack trenches to the attacking partisans. The latter could not hold and withdrew back into the mountains.

Comrade Zagumenniy ordered Sapozhkov to take Mount Sunduki at all costs, which he succeeded in doing, despite a repeated Cossack attack.

Chapaev, seeing Sapozhkov's successful action, attacked the officer detachment, which was unable to stand and retreated through Derkul station to Peremetnaya. The cavalry withdrew southwards to Logashkin and Astrakhankiy, probably with the aim of keeping our right flank and rear under the threat of a strike.

Towards evening our troops occupied Derkul station and the Zelenovskoe outpost; the inhabitants here also, leaving their property, left with the retreating troops.

In the battle, which lasted for eight hours, we lost 60 men killed, 40 wounded and the enemy had 150 men killed and about 200 horses. The enemy was not pursued, and we camped for the night with the Sapozhkov, Demidkin and Saratov detachments in Zelenovskoe and Chapaev's at Derkul station. Guards were posted at the occupied points. The night of 5 May passed quietly.

From 1 to 5 May the rail line was fixed in the area of Semiglaviy-Mar station and movement along it started under guard. On 5 May a train with ammunition arrived from Shipovo. The train guards had been outgunned by the enemy, and their commander, Comrade Kamerin, was wounded. The arriving soldiers said that at dawn the Cossacks had made simultaneous raids on Semiglaviy-Mar and Shipovo stations, and that both stations were now occupied by them. The train had had to break through their front. On the basis of these reports, Comrade Zagumenniy called a meeting of all detachment commanders to discuss the situation.

The meeting lasted about three hours. The Chief of Staff, Comrade Moldavskiy, insisted on a continuation of the operation, i.e. an attack on Ural'sk. Comrade Zagumenniy did not agree, arguing that it was unthinkable to attack without communication with Saratov and most of the commanders joined him. The meeting decided on retreat. The cavalry and Bogdanov armoured train were ordered to move to Shipovo station. They hardly had time to move away from Derkul station before they were attacked by Cossacks, but the attacks were not successful.

The day of 5 May passed relatively quietly. In the evening enemy infantry appeared from the east and cavalry from the south. The soldiers did not sleep at all. The mood was depressed – they felt the weakness of the Red Guards and the strength of the Cossacks. The Red Command's plan had been unsuccessful – the Cossacks had destroyed all the assumptions and hopes with one blow.

Retreat of the Red Guards

At noon on 6 May Zagumenniy issued an order from to withdraw to Shipovo station. We retreated in the following order: the Demidkin and Saratov detachments were at the front with the armoured train; Sapozhkov was on the left flank, and Chapaev was in the rearguard. The artillery was in the centre of the square, with the rest of its unit.

As soon as our units moved out the enemy rained down attacks. Chapaev's detachment was attacked by Colonel Martynov's officer detachment from the direction of Ural'sk. Chapaev slowly retreated, repulsing the attack. Heavy fire from dismounted Cossack cavalry forced the Saratov detachment to engage in a firefight and to start moving only after the enemy disappeared. Every two hours attacks were made on Sapozhkov's detachment from the south.

All day long the detachments fought hard, and it was evening before they managed to reach Shipovo station, where they joined the two companies of the Tambov detachment.



Besides the bad mood, there was some talk among the soldiers that “we are being betrayed”. The commanders lost their authority, and discipline was maintained with whips and revolvers.

When leaving Zelenovskiy, some evil hand set the houses of the rich alight. A large fire broke out. For the whole day, even at a long distance, we could see the glow and thick smoke over Derkul station. During the retreat we lost 30 men killed and 20 wounded.

At dawn on 7 May the Cossacks raided Shipovo station. Partisans from Chizhinskiy and Kamennaya *stanitsas* took part in the raid, numbering about 1,000 sabres, under the command of Colonel Gorshkov. The partisans were repulsed with heavy losses: they left 200 men dead and as many horses on the battlefield.

On the morning of 7 May an aeroplane arrived at Shipovo from Altata. The pilot transmitted a report that in the afternoon of 4 May enemy cavalry (the 1st and 3rd Cossack Training Regiments) had appeared in the vicinity of Semiglaviy-Mar. The garrison Chief of Staff, Comrade Shevelev, demanded help from Shipovo, and two companies of the Tambov detachment were given to him.

In the evening of the same day the Cossacks attacked Semiglaviy-Mar station, but were repulsed, losing 30 men killed. However, in spite of this, Comrade Shevelev gave the order to retreat to Ozinki station. The Cossacks vigorously pursued the retreating troops. On arrival at Ozinki station the enemy surrounded the detachment with mounted pickets and carried out continuous rifle fire at the entrenched soldiers. The detachment was in a panicky mood: someone spread a rumour that the Cossacks had destroyed the “Special Army”. A meeting of the commanders was called, at which it was decided to leave Ozinki station and continue to retreat to Altata station, to rest there, to put themselves in order, and then to go on the offensive to Semiglaviy-Mar.

Meanwhile, the army commander decided to stop further retreat and reinforce the main forces at Shipovo station. The HQ Chief of Staff, Comrade Moldavskiy, was ordered to take a plane to Shevelev’s detachment and force it to retake Semiglaviy-Mar.

In the evening of 7 May Comrade Moldavskiy arrived safely at Altata station, where Shevelev’s detachment had arrived by this time. A meeting of the commanders was arranged. When analysing the reasons for the retreat it was found out that the culprit was Comrade Shevelev. He was arrested by order of the Chief of Staff and Comrade Baulin was appointed in his place. Baulin had been the only one opposed to the retreat.

The next day an order was given to advance to Ozinki station and then on to Semiglaviy-Mar. At the appointed hour the Red Guards gathered for a meeting and passed a resolution – not to start the attack, to release Shevelev, and to arrest and shoot the Chief of Staff Moldavskiy and his assistant Usanov. The latter were immediately arrested, but not shot. The fighters were frightened when they received an order from Saratov signed by Comrade Antonov condemning them for their actions. Those arrested were released. In addition, the detachment agreed to commence the offensive, but under the condition that Shevelev was also released from arrest. No-one objected to Baulin’s appointment. This was because the Lipovka Red Guards decided to split off from the Dukhovnitskoe Red Guards and act, as before, as two detachments.

Thus two detachments were formed: one under the command of Baulin and the other under the command of Shevelev. On 9 May those detachments, together with two companies of the Tambov detachment, moved in the direction of Ozinki station and by evening reached had Dem'yas and Chalykla stations.

At this time the main forces of the “Special Army” were fortifying Shipovo station. The soldiers dug trenches and built wire barriers. The enemy pulled up its forces and prepared for an attack. Some brave Cossacks rode close to our positions shouting, “surrender, you Red bastards, your Saratov



Soviet has been dispersed”, and tried to further demoralise the Red Guards. A few of the daredevils managed to escape back, but most of them were killed.

In the morning of 9 May a hard battle began. Every two or three hours the Cossacks attacked on foot and horse. They were repulsed by our fire. Night came, but the fighting did not subside, becoming more and more heated. From the Cossacks’ side there was an continuous shouts of “ura!”. From our side we heard requests for support. Throughout the night the reserve companies moved from one flank to the other.

At dawn the next day it was discovered that our units only had a small supply of ammunition and shells left. There was no information from the Chief of Staff and the Shevelev detachment. Comrade Zagumenniy gave the order to retreat. At 08:00 on 10 May our detachments began to retreat, fighting off the enemy with great difficulty, and by 17:00 reached Semiglaviy-Mar. But they did not stay there long, as large forces of enemy cavalry, moving from the south to the east, threatened to encircle them. They had to quickly retreat to Ozinki. On the march a small detachment of cavalry managed to get into Sapozhkov’s and Chapaev’s detachments and cut down about 100 soldiers. Late at night the “Special Army” arrived at Ozinki station.

So by 11 May not a single Red Guard detachment was on the land of the Ural Cossack Host.

After the battles and retreat the soldiers were exhausted physically and mentally and their morale was poor. Units began to break apart and discontent with their commanders and the Army commander appeared.

Meanwhile, as the detachments of the “Special Army” were fighting at Shipovo station, Colonel Borodin’s group attacked Aleksandrov-Gai, pushing out the Vinerman detachment defending that town. It then led an attack on Novouzensk, threatening to cut off Zagumenniy’s troops from Saratov.

The soldiers of Sapozhkov’s detachment, having learnt about this, gathered a meeting and decided to move immediately to defend their villages and families. They could not be prevented. On 11 May they left Ozinki and headed through Vergazovka to Novouzensk.

At the same time news was received that a *kulak* uprising had broken out in the villages of Zhestyanka, Lyubitskoe, Vyazovka and Semenikha in Pugachev district. The insurgents killed members of the Soviet, defeated a detachment under Comrade Chekov of about 800 bayonets, took away two guns and slaughtered 120 Red Guards’ families in Semenikha.¹⁵

The Red Guards from the Pugachev district demanded that their commanders lead them to massacre the *kulaks*. The commanders requested the permission from Comrade Zagumenniy. The latter did not give his consent, but the detachments left Ozinki on the night of 12 May without it. Chapaev moved to Vyazovka, Toporkov and Baulin to Lyubitskoe, Shevelev went to Semenikha, and Demidkin’s detachment partly went home, partly joined other detachments. Only the Saratov and Tambov detachments remained at the disposal of the Army HQ at Ozinki station.

The White command, thanks to well organised intelligence, was fully aware of what was happening on our side, and, in order to help the insurgents and overthrow the Soviets’ power, sent partisan *sotnias* all over.

Our command were experiencing hard times. At dawn on 12 May enemy cavalry appeared near Ozinki station. The remaining detachments left Ozinki and retreated to Altata. Having arrived in Altata, we began to fortify it and to reorganise the detachments into companies, battalions and regiments. Voluntary recruitment of Red Guards among the local population was announced. But

¹⁵ The kulaks were so brutalised that they killed not only men but also women and children.



the commanders started to argue and Comrade Zagumenniy left for Saratov with a report for the Soviet.

Meanwhile, Sapozhkov's detachment was moving rapidly towards Novouzensk, which the Cossacks had not had time to capture. The rest of the detachments were busy suppressing the insurgency in the villages. The *kulaks* who participated in the uprising, having organised 1,000 men into the so-called "*Semenikha druzhina*", managed to escape to the safety of the Cossacks. Until the end of the Ural front this *druzhina* fought hard and steadfastly on the White side.

The *kulaks* of the Novouzensk district also organised their own fighting unit named the "*Krasnaya Rechka*", as the core of the fighters were from there, which had about 700 bayonets.

The defeat of the Red Guards first campaign to Ural'sk stirred up all the anti-Soviet elements, not only in the villages but also in the towns.

The Chief of Staff, Comrade Moldavskiy, received a telegram from the Chairman of the Soviet, Comrade Antonov, in Altata on 17 May explaining that a garrison revolt had broken out in Saratov with former officers at its head. The rebels were smashing the Soviet building with artillery fire. Comrade Moldavskiy arrived at Uvek station (just south of Saratov) on 18 May with six companies of infantry, a machine-gun detachment, an armoured car and six guns loaded into a train.

As a result of this uprising several detachments of Red Guards were sent from the central cities of the Soviet Republic to help the Saratov workers. So on 19 May the Sokolniki Battalion arrived from Moscow with 600 bayonets; a detachment of 800 bayonets arrived from Penza¹⁶ and 700 bayonets from Balashov.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the Ural Cossacks, having seized most of the territory of the Pugachev and Novouzensk districts up to the line of Bol'shaya Glushitsa, Zhestyanka and Novouzensk, began to beat and shoot the poor and members of the Soviets, together with the *kulaks*. The counter-revolutionaries thought that these measures would help them to clear the rear of revolutionary elements, to restore the *zemstvos*, to change the laws and to return to the landlords and *kulaks* the property and livestock taken from them during the confiscations. The *kulaks* were especially brutal. Armed with staves and homemade lances made from the iron of church fences, they attacked the poor in revenge for the division of the land.

The defeat of the Red Guards, as well as the widespread *kulak* and bourgeoisie uprisings, compelled not only the Communist Party but also all the poor to stand firmly in defence of their October gains. Extraordinary congresses began in all the *volosts* and districts, with one important question on the agenda: the creation of a powerful armed force.

The mobilisation the trade unions workers was soon announced, and the Communist Party sent its best representatives as rank and file fighters.

During this strenuous work the SRs here and there created obstacles, and not only in words but also in deeds. Thus, in Pugachev they threw a grenade into the house where the 5th Extraordinary Congress of the Soviets was taking place, which fortunately did not explode.

After the congress almost all the members joined the Red Guard units as simple fighters in order to raise their fighting capacity. The SRs across the countryside began to create White units from wealthy peasants, who went over to the side of the Cossacks.

¹⁶ This detachment was later to form the basis of the 190th Penza Regiment of the 22nd RD.

¹⁷ This was to form the basis of the 191st Balashov Regiment of the 22nd RD



During this whole time period – the height of the class struggle between the workers and the village poor on one side, and the Cossacks and the *kulaks* on the other – the SRs and the majority of the intelligentsia stood, as everywhere else, opposed to Soviet power.

Conclusions

1. The White command used its armed force and in particular the cavalry with great success, such as the actions into the rear of our troops which forced us to start retreating from Derkul station. The enemy countered our equipment with its manoeuvrability and activity both in the theatre and in battle. Retreating deep into its territory and leaving significant forces of mounted partisan detachments in our rear and on our flanks, the enemy kept us effectively surrounded. It knew how to make us fight in unfavourable conditions, which greatly affected the morale of the retreating detachments.

The experience of the junior and middle Cossack commanders enabled them to conduct excellent reconnaissance – their independent reconnaissance detachments would charge suddenly, which did not result in defeats, but clarified the positions of our forces, and delayed any rapid advance by the Reds.

As soon as our units reached the Ural Host lands, the White command threw mounted partisan detachments to the rear of the “Special Army”, with the aim of organising *kulak* uprisings and supporting those already rebellious. The partisans successfully fulfilled their mission and thus ensured the Ural Host territory would remain safe.

2. The operational plan adopted by the “Special Army” command was viable neither strategically nor politically, for the following reasons:

a) Our command underestimated the Cossack forces, as a result of which it incorrectly constructed both the strategic plan and its calculations. It decided to attack with small forces, not realising that the detachments sent could not reach the desired goal of Ural'sk due to their small number.

Undisciplined and unorganised detachments, political unreliability of the rear, almost openly prepared uprisings against the Soviet power – all this contributed to the lack of success of the operation.

b) Garrisons could not be left in all the settlements along the railway, if small armed detachments were to be used at all, because on approaching Ural'sk there were no forces left to take possession of it.

c) It was a mistake to count on the peasant-settlers, whose economic conditions differed little from the wealthier Cossacks: they were the same *kulaks*. As for the workers, there were few of them in Ural'sk anyway, and the terror of the Host government and the influence of the Mensheviks did not allow them to be considered a serious force in the Ural'sk region.

3. The tactical training of the Red detachments was weak, and so they attacked frontally, not knowing how to use manoeuvre on a battlefield (except for the initiative shown by Chapaev and Sapozhkov). The aviation and armoured vehicles were not used. The armoured train served exclusively to protect the Army HQ. Intelligence and reconnaissance was not conducted properly, so information about the enemy was purely incidental, coming from refugees and prisoners, whose reports were often incorrect.

In general, the defeat of the Red Guards in the first Ural'sk campaign made its participants realise that the partisan detachments needed to be reorganised into regular troops.

This conclusion was accepted by all those who took part in the first Ural'sk campaign, which ended so unsuccessfully for us.



Chapter III

Second Ural'sk Campaign

Reorganisation of the Red Guards

On 20 May, in connection with the *frontoviki* revolt, the Supreme Army Inspectorate, headed by Comrade Podvoisky, arrived at Saratov. The next day, under the chairmanship of Comrade Antonov, a meeting attended by the command of the "Special Army" and the active unit commanders and commissars. Reports were heard from Comrades Zagumenniy and Moldavskiy on the Red Guards campaign to Ural'sk. Having heard the reports, the meeting decided to resend all the detachments (after a short rest) to the Ural front to strike a decisive blow to the counter-revolutionary Cossacks.

At the suggestion of Comrade Podvoisky, the resolution was supplemented by clauses on changes to the command of the "Special Army" and that the leadership of military operations be removed from the Saratov Soviet and instead be placed with the commander of the Ural-Orenburg Front, whose headquarters were in Samara.

Comrade Rzhnevskiy was made commander of the "Special Army": a former colonel of the General Staff and by then an old man. Comrade Levin was appointed the Army commissar.

These men, who had recently arrived from Moscow, were not familiar with the particular features of the Red Guards, which initially badly affected their leadership.

Upon their taking command of the "Special Army", detachment commanders began to receive sensible operational orders for the first time. The new command also began to reorganise the detachments. They merged the detachments into regiments; the Bubenets, Stepanov, Churkin and Kutyaikov detachments were merged into Chapaev's detachment to form the 2nd Stenka Razin Rifle Regiment; the Plyasunkov, Potapov and Baulin detachments were joined with that of Toporkov, who was chosen to command the regiment new 1st Pugachev Rifle Regiment. These two regiments were brought together into a brigade.

At a meeting of the regimental command staff in Balashi, Comrade Chapaev was chosen to command the brigade. The Pugachev District Party Committee, in view of Chapaev's non-party status, appointed Comrade Belolipov as his political commissar.

The Red Guards of the Novouzensk district formed the 1st Novouzensk and 2nd Kurilovka Rifle Regiments. Sapozhkov was chosen as commander of the Novouzensk Regiment and at the same time brigade commander, and was approved in his post by the Army command.¹⁸ Serov was chosen as commander of the Kurilovka Regiment. The 1st Cavalry and 2nd Saratov Rifle Regiments were formed from the Saratov Red Guards, and the detachments arriving from outside the area were merged into the Penza and Balashov Rifle Regiments.

Though the Red Guards were re-formed into regiments that had their own numbers and names, the men took a long time to get used to the change. When asked what unit they were from, they answered that they were from Chapaev's detachment, Sapozhkov's or others.

The Whites also undertook a vigorous reorganisation of their armed forces. The military commander and Host ataman, Eremin, was replaced by Akutin, who was energetic and popular among the officers and Cossacks. The Training Horse Regiments (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th) were replenished and deployed with six *sotnias*. Mounted regiments with a standardised numbering were formed from the older mobilised Cossacks, and partisan detachments were created from the

¹⁸ At that time there were no *KomBrigs* with separate headquarters. The best regimental commander was chosen to be the brigade commander, and he was served by the headquarters of the regiment he commanded.



old volunteers, named for the *stanitsa* that contributed the largest number of soldiers. The partisans were led by Gorshkov.

The Ural Rifle Regiment was formed from the non-urban *kulak* population, bourgeoisie and officials. The *kulaks* from the Pugachev and Novouzensk districts were placed in the Semenikha and Novouzensk (Krasnaya Rechka) *druzhiny*. In addition, the Host Government replaced its old slogan "We will not go to anyone and will not let anyone in" with a new one: "Fight for victory against the thieves and godless Bolsheviks".

General situation and Plan of Attack

On 3 June the Commander-in-Chief of the Ural-Orenburg Front, Comrade Yakovlev, arrived from Samara at the headquarters of the "Special Army". The plan for the second campaign to Ural'sk was worked out with him. On 9 June the units of the "Special Army" would go on the offensive towards Ural'sk from the Altata area, while detachments of the Samara Red Guards would attack from the Buzuluk area simultaneously. They were to press the Cossacks, forcing them to retreat to Ilets, where they would be hit in the rear by the Red Guards of the Orenburg Group, under Comrade Zinoviev.

On 4 June Comrade Yakovlev left for Samara, and on the 5th the "Special Army" HQ lost contact with the Front HQ, because by this time the Czechoslovaks – having occupied Syzran' and crossed to the left bank of the Volga River – were moving towards Samara. Despite this, the "Special Army" command continued to prepare for the offensive and ordered Chapaev's and Sapozhkov's brigades to concentrate on the Ural border. Chapaev was ordered to move from the Semenikha – Vyazovka area to the Solyanka – Balashi area and Sapozhkov from Novouzensk to the Vergazovka – Altata area by 8 June.

On 8 June the Army Headquarters received news from Saratov of the defeat of the Samara Red Guards and the capture of Samara by the Czechoslovaks. No information was received from Comrade Yakovlev. Actually, from that moment on "Commander-in-Chief" Yakovlev disappeared, and nobody heard from him again.

Having taken Samara, the forward units of the Czechoslovaks began to move along the rail line through Kinel' station to Ufa. The enemy's movement eastwards strongly affected the combat effectiveness and the unity of management of the Orenburg Red Guard detachments.

With the Czech advance, the activity of General Dutov's Orenburg bandits increased, and there were uprisings in the Cossack *stanitsas*.

The command of the "Special Army" received some scanty information about the events from Communists and workers escaping from the areas of the Czechoslovak offensive. The Army headquarters had no information about the enemy or the grouping of his forces. It was believed that the Cossack forces were located along the border, i.e. in the area of Semiglaviy-Mar and Aleksandrov Gai.

While the army was reorganising and preparing for the second Ural'sk campaign, the following curious episode occurred. On 12 June Sapozhkov's brigade settled in the villages of Vergazovka and Altata. Chapaev's brigade, moving to the area indicated to it, fought some minor battles with Cossack detachments. Upon their arrival, the Razin Regiment occupied Solyanka and the Pugachev Regiment occupied Balashi. Having orientated themselves, the regiments saw that they were 80 km ahead of the main forces of the 4th Army.

The enemy moved to active operations. On the night of 13 June the Cossacks raided the location of Razin Regiment and broke into the village. The surprise caused panic. But the soldiers and



commanders knew from their experience of past battles that to retreat from the Cossacks meant death. Having no definite plan in case of a sudden attack by the enemy, they decided to fight. They opened fire from the windows of the occupied buildings and from the roofs of the barns. The fight lasted all night. The indiscriminate firing and the darkness of the night prevented separated groups of soldiers from establishing communication between themselves. Each man was his own master and each fought like a lion, defending his own life.

No-one surrendered as they knew what awaited them in Cossack captivity.

Chapaev himself, with his squadron and battery, was surrounded by Cossacks in the square near the church. During that night he repulsed more than one Cossack attack on foot and horse with cartridge and rifle fire.

At dawn the battery under the command of Comrade Peter¹⁹ began to bombard the enemy with devastating fire, literally destroying the Cossack groups.

The Cossacks raced from the streets into the alleys in panic, but even here they were met by accurate fire from the windows of houses and from the roofs of barns. The enemy fled eastwards to their border, leaving 50 men and many horses killed. In the battle we shot 200,000 rounds of ammunition. Losses on our side were 20 men were killed and 15 wounded.

After this battle, Comrade Chapaev convened a meeting of all the commanders and gave a categorical order that at night all soldiers, except for the internal guard and the sick, were to be placed in a chain. A reserve of no less than a company and machine guns were to remain in the square near the guns, for if Chapaev had not personally raced with a squadron to the square during the battle, the battery would have been captured by the enemy. Chapaev's very practical instructions were carried out accurately by all the partisan commanders. Subsequently the Cossacks repeatedly tried to find the weak points of our security, but always without success. The Red Guards were on guard and repelled the attacks with volley fire.

However, this vigilance by the guards did not extend to the whole brigade and was not always kept at a suitable level. The lesson the Razin Regiment learned did not serve as an example to the others. After a few sleepless nights spent guarding, in the early morning most of the Pugachev Regiment's men left the trenches – which were generally made in a ring along the outskirts of the occupied village.

The Cossack reconnaissance noticed this, and on the morning of 18 June the enemy raided the regiment. Before the raid it collected cattle from the nearby pastures and from various different sides, using the released animals as cover, broke into Balashi without being noticed.

Having seized four guns in the square, it opened fire on the houses. The peasants woke up the soldiers, who took their rifles and engaged in battle in their underwear. The Cossacks climbed into the houses. The fighting took on a chaotic character. The regimental commander, Comrade Toporkov, managed to get to the machine gun detachment. He gave the order to drag the machine guns onto the roofs and fire into the square to prevent the Cossacks from taking the artillery away. The machine-gun fire stopped the artillery firing: some of the crew were killed and the rest scattered. But at the same time the enemy commenced accurate rifle fire on the machine guns and many machine gunners were killed. The commander of the 1st Battalion, Comrade Plyasunkov, managed to gather 200 men around him and rushed to attack the square. The soldiers regathered their artillery, but could not withstand the enemy counter-attack and scattered to the houses.

¹⁹ The first battery commander of the Chapaev detachment, a peasant from Radnikovo, Pugachev district, was a firebrand and was very famous among the soldiers for knocking down a cross from a bell tower with his third shell.



The fighting began at 05:00 and four hours later three horsemen arrived with a report at Chapaev's headquarters in Solyanka. Having received the report, Chapaev immediately moved to the aid of Pugachev Regiment led by mounted scouts and infantry on carts. After two hours of movement the noise of disorderly fighting was clearly heard. Chapaev ordered the movement to be sped up, and he galloped off with the mounted scouts.

The Cossacks, noticing the approaching men, began to retreat to the south with some of their forces. The *Pugachevtsy* were cheered and started to attack everywhere. Hand-to-hand fighting took place on the square, where the Cossacks fiercely defended the captured artillery. However, this time the artillery was recaptured. At that time a "ura!" rang out to the east – it was Chapaev attacking with his squadron in order to cut off the enemy's retreat to the south. He was followed by infantry in carts with ten machine guns. All this forced the Cossacks, who were still fighting in the saddle, to retreat. The enemy was pursued by our cavalry, and the infantry kept up with the mounted units.

By 12:00 the battle was over. The Cossacks retreated in the direction of Semiglaviy-Mar, leaving many killed and wounded on the battlefield. On our side 80 men were killed and 20 wounded.

In the evening a general meeting of the Pugachev Regiment was organised, at which Chapaev strongly scolded the soldiers, and especially the commanders who had allowed the Cossacks to enter the village unnoticed. He ordered the guilty to be punished.

Before leaving Chapaev had a long meeting with the battalion commanders – Comrades Toporkov, Plyasunkov, Panitsky, Ryazantsev and Baulin. They looked at the actions of the Cossacks and the main forces of the 4th Army, which were stationary in Altata. Chapaev decided to write a report to Army HQ, noting that if the main forces did not occupy Ozinki station, his regiments would retreat deep into Pugachev district. He added that the inactivity by the main forces gave the Cossacks an opportunity to break the Red Guards in isolation, and that he considered such leadership by the command as criminal.

On 22 June the headquarters received a message that the units of the "Special Army" would occupy Ozinki station on 23 June.

Cossack Raid on Semiglaviy-Mar. Battles at Shipovo, Derkul, Peremetnaya and Ural'sk. Colonel Martynov's Raid

Meanwhile, the Centre decided to fight more seriously against the growing insurgency of the Orenburg and Ural Cossacks, as well as against the Czechoslovaks. The Eastern Front was formed, headed by the Commander-in-Chief.

The "Special Army" was included in this front and renamed the 4th Army. Comrade Khvesin was appointed Chief of Staff for the army. Its commissar was Comrade Zorin.

The troops were concentrated in three areas: the Vinerman Group was at Novouzensk; the main Ural Group occupied Ozinki station; and Chapaev's brigade was in Balashi – Malakhovka. The headquarters maintained communication to Vinerman by telegraph and to Chapaev by horse. The latter was very unreliable, as Cossack *sotnias* roamed everywhere. A troop of five to ten horsemen sent with a report would be destroyed by the Cossacks or, at best, return back without having fulfilled the task. Reports had to be sent with at least two platoons of cavalry, sometimes with a squadron. And all along the way there were short battles with the enemy.



At this time the combat strength of the 4th Army was follows:

Name of the unit.	Bayonets	Sabres	MGs	Guns	A/cars	A/trains	Planes
Saratov Rifle Regiment	1 500	100	40	6	2	1	6
Saratov Cavalry Regiment	–	350	5	–			
Balashov Rifle Regiment	700	50	20	4			
Penza Rifle Regiment	800	75	15	4			
Novouzensk Rifle Regiment	1 500	100	25	4			
Kurilovka Rifle Regiment	1500	100	20	4			
Pugachev Rifle Regiment	1200	100	30	4			
Razin Rifle Regiment	1 500	175	35	4	1		
Vinerman Group	1 500	100	15	4			
Ukrainian Detachment	500	–	18				
Moscow Detachment	600	–	20				
Totals	11 300	1 150	243	34	3	1	6

The headquarters kept in touch with Saratov and the Front headquarters by telegraph and radio. However, the Czechoslovak domination of Samara province, their successful advance eastwards, as well as the activity of anti-Soviet elements in the rear, changed the overall situation. The previously developed plan for the attack on Ural'sk was losing its meaning.

In spite of all this, on 26 June Commander Rzhnevskiy gave the order to concentrate the 4th Army's main forces in the area of Semiglaviy-Mar for an offensive on Ural'sk, except for the Vinerman Group, which was ordered to occupy Aleksandrov-Gai, with the further task of taking Slomikhinskaya station. The Ural group was ordered to take Semiglaviy-Mar by 28 June. By that time Chapaev's brigade was to arrive there.

At 11:00 on 28 June, the Ural Group left Ozinki for Semiglaviy-Mar. In the vanguard was Sapozhkov's brigade, on the right flank were the Ukrainian and Moscow detachments, with the Saratov regiment as cover. The troops moved in a square, as in the first campaign.

Movement was slow. The enemy reconnaissance detachments delayed from the hills and high ground, firing with rifles and machine-guns. We had to stop and fight our way forward.

Chapaev's brigade moved out at 10:00 on 28 June from Balashi – Malakhovka and covered the left flank of the Ural group. The soldiers were on carts and the regimental columns, stretching for four to five kilometres, moved in a continuous line. No sooner had those units moved ten kilometres from their starting points than the Cossacks opened fire, sheltering in the high crops. There was a commotion. Many wagons turned around, others headed to the front of the column. It was a lot of work for the commanders to re-establish order. The regiments were deployed in chains, a square was formed, with the artillery and supplies in the centre, and the brigade continued its march to Semiglaviy-Mar.

The enemy had no more than four or five hundred men acting against each regiment, but in spite of the comparatively small Cossack forces the regiments moved very slowly. The White command used their soldiers with great skill. Five to ten horsemen would occupy some height, hide their



horses in the high rye, and open fire from the flank or rear at very close range. That would continue until the Cossacks were forced out by bayonets or artillery fire. After that, having quickly jumped on their horses, they withdrew, took another convenient position and opened fire again. Such enemy groups were encountered often along the whole route and every 20 to 30 minutes firing was heard from either the flank or from the rear.

Chapaev's brigade made its march at the hottest time of the day. The regiments had no water. Machine guns would refuse to work from frequent firing due to a lack of cooling: the incessant firing gun caused the barrels to heat up. The artillery saved its shells and stopped firing at isolated groups of Cossacks. The soldiers had to fight their way themselves with their rifles. Soldiers passed out from the intense heat and thirst, and many of them died of sunstroke. During this march the armoured vehicle was of great help: it barely opened fire, but simply moved towards the stubbornly resisting enemy, turning it into a panicked flight.

The movement by Chapaev's brigade threatened the rear of the fortified Semiglaviy-Mar, so the White command regrouped its forces: the infantry was withdrawn eastwards to Shipovo station, the cavalry southwards to around the Chizhinskiy outpost.

At 16:00 the main forces of the 4th Army took Semiglaviy-Mar without fighting. Sapozhkov's brigade was located three or four kilometres from Semiglaviy-Mar in the Derkul River valley; the rest of the regiments were in Semiglaviy-Mar. At 18:00 Chapaev's brigade stopped three to five kilometres north of Semiglaviy-Mar and settled on the southern bank of the Ichka River, near the springs. During the march the brigade had lost 10 men killed, 30 wounded, and 40 dead from sun and thirst. Losses were insignificant in the main body.

During the night of 29 June the Cossacks raided Semiglaviy-Mar and some of their forces broke through the line of trenches into the centre, where the artillery and supplies were placed. At first there was panic. Some soldiers ran to escape from the trenches to the station, but they were met there by the Cossacks' sabres and had to return back to the trenches. The fight lasted all night. The shooting, noise and shouts of "ura" mingled into a general hum, and it was impossible to understand any of what was happening. Sapozhkov's and Chapaev's regiments remained where they were until dawn, only occasionally opening volley fire on individual enemy scouts who had crawled close to our trenches. Thus, the defenders of Semiglaviy-Mar were left to themselves for the whole night. The Cossacks threw themselves into repeated mounted and dismounted attacks, but were repulsed by fire each time.

As dawn broke, artillery fire commenced from the Sapozhkov and Chapaev positions, and cavalry was sent out to support the besieged fighters.

The enemy began to retreat to the south and east. The Cossacks who broke through the trench line – about 200 men – were completely destroyed. The whole area near the station was strewn with their corpses.

By 09:00 the battle was over. The whole day of 29 June passed quietly. The Army headquarters was at Ozinki station, under the cover of the Penza and Balashov Regiments.

On 30 June we received news that Comrade Vinerman's group had taken Aleksandrov Gai unopposed.

On the morning of 1 July, the men of the 1st Battalion of the Razin Regiment revolted. They were joined by other companies, with the exception of the 2nd Battalion and the foot scouts. A rally began. The soldiers demanded underwear and shoes. The brigade commissar, Comrade Belolipov, tried to persuade them, but no one listened to him. Chapaev came to the rally. He made a speech and firmly ordered the men to disperse to the trenches. Immediately shots rang out and provocative shouting began. Agitated soldiers went Chapaev's tent with rifles. Chapaev took out



his revolver and blocked the tent's entrance. The commander of the 1st Battalion, Comrade Gribanov, was on the road with a group of loyal fighters, fearing for Chapaev's life. A shot seriously wounded Gribanov.²⁰

The command staff rushed to the aid of Chapaev, who was highly agitated and threatening to start shooting. At 12:00 the soldiers left for lunch, and the incident was over. The culprit who had wounded Gribanov could not be found.

There were no Cossack attacks that day, just their detachments and pickets surrounding our units. Our reconnaissance could not penetrate through and did not return any information.

We did not have active agents in the enemy camp at that time, so we knew nothing about it other from the reports of refugees, which were random, late and of no value.

On 2 July *KomandArm-4* Rzhevskiy received a telegram from Chairman Antonov of the Saratov Soviet, which requested that he take Ural'sk within three days. Not having any instructions from the Front HQ, Comrade Rzhevsky decided to accept the Saratov Soviet's "proposal" and at 12:00 on 2 July arrived at Semiglaviy-Mar station with his staff.

In the evening a meeting was held of the command and political staff, at which the general situation was discussed, the regiments' upcoming tasks were explained, and an order was given for the Army to attack Ural'sk. That order noted our success of 29 June and pointed out that when as units approached Ural'sk, the Semiglaviy-Mar to Shipovo section of the railway line would be repaired, which would allow for uninterrupted delivery of ammunition and provisions – so the regimental commanders were requested not to take extra supplies with them.

Comrade Rzhevsky also said that our defeat in the first campaign on Ural'sk was explained by the fact that garrisons had been left at the captured stations, which weakened the main forces. In such circumstances it was naturally very difficult to capture Ural'sk.

In the morning of 3 July the 4th Army went on the offensive. Sapozhkov's brigade moved in a chain, as if in the centre of the army, along the railway line. To his right, the Ukrainian and Moscow detachments followed the chain from behind. To his left, Chapaev's brigade moved along the Derkul River valley, with the task of cutting off the retreat route of the Cossacks to Ural'sk from Shipovo. The Saratov regiment, covering the rear, was behind Sapozhkov's brigade, with the task of guarding the regimental vehicles moving in the centre of the square. The Penza and Balashov Regiments were left in reserve at Semiglaviy-Mar station, with the task of escorting the trains with food and ammunition to the active units when the railway track was restored.

As soon as the troops moved out, the Cossack pickets began to retreat, while shooting. No significant enemy forces were seen. Our cavalry was two or three kilometres in front and on the flanks of the main forces. The enemy scouts dismounted and opened fire on the cavalry, stopping it until the approach of the infantry units.

About 11:00, still five to seven kilometres away from Shipovo station, Sapozhkov's brigade found an enemy infantry chain, which opened fire from a good position, under the cover of an armoured train. Our soldiers lay down and began move by bounds, under cover of our artillery fire. But at that time enemy cavalry, numbering about 2,000 sabres, appeared from the south. Deploying into *lava*, it attacked the Moscow and Ukrainian detachments.

Sapozhkov, seeing those chains hesitating, stopped further movement forward and ordered the artillery to transfer its fire to the charging Cossack *lava*. Commander Rzhevskiy, who was in the centre of the square with the cavalry regiment, noticed the critical situation and ordered the

²⁰ Comrade Gribanov was one of Chapaev's best aides and commanded a regiment in the Chapaev Division throughout the Civil War. A Bolshevik Party member, he sustained six wounds and was awarded the Order of the Red Banner.



Saratov Riflemen to move to the right and link up with the Moscow detachment. For immediate support he sent three armoured cars towards the attacking Cossacks. Half an hour later the enemy attack was repulsed. The cavalry was repulsed south and left artillery range. There it began to group into columns, as if preparing to charge again. Sapozhkov's brigade resumed its forward movement, but sluggishly, as the men and commanders kept glancing at their right flank.

Only small detachments of Cossacks were facing Chapaev, and they did not interfere with a rapid advance by his brigade. By 13:00 it managed to reach the line of Kamennaya ravine, which is two kilometres east of Shipovo station,²¹ in the enemy rear. We could see the Cossack infantry units starting to retreat in the direction of Zelenen'kaya. We could not pursue them, as the Derkul River was impassable in the area. Our chains went close to the river bank and opened fire. However, the retreating enemy was in more favourable conditions: as it moved along the right bank, which in this place dominates over the left, it returned fire with rifles, machine guns and artillery from an armoured train. The latter silenced our artillery, and the Red brigade withdrew to the Kamennaya ravine.

The Red command had not taken into account how serious the Derkul River was as an obstacle and the Chapaev Brigade, having successfully completed its march, could still did not fulfil its mission which gave the Cossacks the opportunity to retreat safely.

The main forces of the 4th Army occupied Shipovo station and Kamennaya village. The enemy retreated in two directions: the infantry to Derkul station and the cavalry southwards to the Astrakhankiy area. Sapozhkov's brigade positioned itself at Shipovo station with the rest of the units in Kamennaya village; Chapaev's brigade, for lack of a crossing, positioned itself in the area of Kamennaya ravine. In this fighting we lost about 100 men killed and wounded.

Due to the absence of any transport, which remained with the main forces on the left bank of the Derkul River, Chapaev's brigade was left without hot food. Discontent grew among the men and Chapaev himself and the brigade command staff became distrustful of the 4th Army command after that. Tinned food and bread were delivered by boat only late in the night.

In evaluating the battle at Shipovo station, it should be said that the command did not pay attention to the nature of the Derkul River when directing Chapaev's brigade to bypass the enemy's right flank, in order to get to his rear, and did not provide the units with timely engineering means of crossing.²² So our forces were deliberately separated, and if the enemy had been more energetic, the Red Guards would have been broken into pieces.

At 06:00 on 4 July the troops left to attack Derkul and Zelenen'kaya stations. This time garrisons were not left at the stations. The order of movement was the same as before, still in a square. Cossack pickets and detachments still surrounded our movement, gradually retreating in the direction of our advance.

On approaching the Sunduki – Durt-Kul mountain, Sapozhkov's brigade was met by fire from the enemy's infantry. A skirmish began. Again a Cossack *lava* appeared, charging at the Ural and Moscow detachments. However the attackers no longer had the dash and courage that had been seen in the battle at Shipovo station. The armoured vehicles and artillery easily repulsed the Cossacks. Our soldiers attacked the infantry: the latter did stand to take a bayonet charge and began to retreat through Derkul station to Peremetnaya station.

Meanwhile Chapaev and his brigade came to the dam-bridge to the rear of Derkul station. The bridge had been dismantled by the enemy. The enemy armoured train opened machine-gun and

²¹ This is presumably the ravine from Krasnenkoe southwards. MP.

²² Which the Army command did not have at this time. Ed.

artillery fire. The soldiers lay down in a chain and waited for the occupation of Zelenen'kaya station by the main forces of the 4th Army.

About 13:00 Derkul station was occupied. After that we started to rebuild the Derkul river bridge. By evening Chapaev's brigade moved to the right bank and together with Saratov, Moscow and Ukrainian Regiments settled down for the night on the eastern outskirts of Zelenen'kaya station. The rest of the units camped at Derkul station.

Our losses totalled 15 men killed and wounded.

It should be noted that the enemy did not really want to fight at Derkul station. It fought when it had favourable conditions and, upon losing them, immediately started to retreat.

The peaceful population of the villages we occupied had left for Ural'sk, having taken all the foodstuffs with them.

At dawn on 5 July the attack on Peremetnaya station continued. Chapaev's brigade marched along the rail line, having the Razin Regiment on the left and the Pugachev Regiment to their right. Sapozhkov's brigade moved to the right of that, keeping its left flank in contact with the Pugachev Regiment. The Ukrainian and Moscow detachments marched echeloned back behind Sapozhkov. The Saratov Regiment covered the rear of the movement. The armoured cars, cavalry regiment and supply train moved in the centre of the square. The artillery moved with their units.

The incredible sweltering heat and dust made movement difficult. The soldiers, worn out by the heat, leaning on their rifles, walked slowly forward.

The enemy's reconnaissance parties were encountered on the way, but no-one paid any attention to them or to their shooting. Forming larger groups, they tried to attack the Saratov regiment from the rear and the Ukrainian and Moscow detachments from the flank. However, these attacks were easily repulsed by machine-gun and artillery fire, with the support of armoured vehicles.

Not three kilometres from the Peremetnaya station, a Cossack *lava* suddenly appeared out of the high cereal crops. It attacked Sapozhkov's brigade, which shot back while moving right and joining the Ukrainian detachment. The artillery opened fire, and strong rifle volleys were heard, which then turned into indiscriminate firing.

An enemy infantry chain, strongly-positioned in camouflaged trenches, forced the Chapaev brigade regiments to stop and lie down by its fire. The Razin Regiment began to crawl forward. At this time Chapaev galloped up to the regiment on his favourite horse from where he had been with the Pugachev Regiment, a naked sabre glittering in his hand. He shouted, "forward, with bayonets, no straggling!" Encouraged by Chapaev's appearance, the soldiers started to charge with a shout of "ura!". The enemy intensified its fire, but it did not stop them. The dishevelled fighters quickly approached the trenches, and the Cossack infantry fled, leaving behind duffel bags, boots, rifles and cartridges. The retreating men were pursued by our fire. Following just behind the Cossacks, Chapaev's brigade stormed into Peremetnaya station. Here the soldiers stopped and fought with the Cossack cavalry. After a small firefight, by 15:00 Peremetnaya station was taken. The enemy retreating to Ural'sk. The partisan Cossack units, which had been facing Sapozhkov, retreated in the direction of Krugloozernyy.

In this battle the enemy suffered heavy losses: about 200 dead men were counted just in the area of the captured trenches. On our side the losses were insignificant, and in Chapaev's brigade 60 men were killed and wounded. The low losses were explained by the fact that the Cossacks were firing homemade cartridges. The bullets could kill only at a distance of 100-200 metres: any further on and they were too slow, so the bullets fell near our soldiers without causing any damage.



As usual, no reconnaissance was sent out, and there was no information about the enemy. Neither the state of our rear nor what was happening with Comrade Vinerman's group were known. However, all this did not prevent Commander Rzhnevskiy from ordering an attack on Ural'sk, saying that the enemy was mentally defeated and had low morale after our successes, plus it was short on weapons and ammunition.

Many of the commanders and almost all the soldiers were firmly convinced of the imminent fall of Ural'sk. This created a good mood, and the fighters prepared energetically for the next stage of the campaign. Conversations were heard everywhere about where and in what order the units and headquarters would be located.

The only man who continued on pensively during these days, not speaking of the rapid fall of Ural'sk was Comrade Chapaev. Those who knew him could not but notice that throughout his military career that when he believed in the success of the undertaking, he instilled that faith in his subordinates and achieved the desired result. Now Chapaev was silent. When several commanders asked him what he thought about the upcoming campaign, his face instantly darkened and he left without answering the question.

At 13:00 on 6 July the 4th Army attacked the city of Ural'sk via Khalilov and Revunskiy. Chapaev's brigade was the vanguard of the deployed front, having a reconnaissance detachment under the command of Comrade Kutakov out in front. About five kilometres behind Chapaev was Sapozhkov's brigade. On the right flank were the Moscow and Ukrainian detachments and in cover was the Saratov Regiment. The Army field headquarters was located at Peremetnaya station along with the Saratov cavalry regiment and three armoured cars.

By 18:00 Chapaev's brigade reached Khalilov and was met by volley fire from two Cossack *sotnias*, which then retreated in the direction of Revunskiy village. The brigade continued its march. Approaching Kamykovo Lake, it turned to the north-east, having noticed a Cossack infantry chain there, of about 1000 bayonets. An exchange of fire ensued. Our chain moved forward slowly. The Cossacks gradually withdrew to the potato plantations, covering Ural'sk. Sapozhkov's brigade and the rest of the units continued to move towards Revunskiy: facing them there were dismounted enemy, who opened up a strong fire.

Night fell and further attacking stopped. Still five to ten kilometres from Ural'sk, our units settled down for the night. On the left flank, four to six kilometres from the railway line, was the Razin Regiment, followed by the Pugachev Regiment, then Sapozhkov's brigade, and the Ukrainian and Moscow detachments. On the right flank, south of Khalilov, 15 km west of Ural'sk, was the Saratov regiment. The carts were left in the Khalilov area. The artillery was with its units. The whole arrangement was a circle, with a diameter of ten to fifteen kilometres and small intervals of two or three kilometres between the units.

Until late at night, occasional rifle shots were heard along the line, sometimes even a short machine-gun burst was heard, but as dawn neared the firing stopped.

As the Red Army approached Ural'sk, the Provincial Government there had vigorously prepared to defend its independence. Voluntary conscription was announced in Ural'sk and its neighbourhood. Students, high school students and sons of *kulaks* flocked with great eagerness to the banners of volunteer detachments. By this time Colonel Martynov had sent from Samara a first batch of heavy machine guns, an armoured car (*Gorynych*) and a large quantity of firearms received from KOMUCH in Samara and the Czechoslovaks. The weapons were immediately sent to the front lines, and the volunteer detachments joined the active units.

The enemy's infantry was grouped south of the railway line, three to four kilometres in front of the Chagan River, occupying a line seven to ten kilometres long. There were two cavalry groups. The



first one was made up of the training regiments (1st to 4th) and the partisans of the Nizhyn villages, with a total strength of about 5,000 sabres, in the area of Krugloozernyy and Zheleznov. The second had the numbered Cossack regiments, about 2,000 sabres, in the area of Novo-Derkul'skiy and Zhensk Skit, six or seven kilometres north of Ural'sk.

At sunrise on 7 July the Cossacks opened up rifle and machine gun fire from a distance of 600 to 1,000 metres. They fired proper bullets, which flew true. However, this was not what surprised the fighters – instead they were struck by the fact that at least a hundred machine guns were operating on the Cossack lines. The battle took place on flat terrain, and the bullets travelled well into our rear. The kitchens and barrels of water that had arrived could not approach the chains, and anyone who tried to fetch water was killed or wounded.

A secondary order was received from Commander Rzhevskiy: the Chapaev and Sapozhkov Brigades were given the task of taking Ural'sk. The Moscow and Ukrainian detachments were to guard their flanks and the Saratov Regiment was to cover the rear and guard the wagons.

At 8:00 our units, without any manoeuvring, started the attack directly from where they were, moving by bounds. The Cossacks increased their fire. The machine-guns, which were manned exclusively by officers, were particularly accurate. We started to have many wounded and killed. We felt the enemy's resistance and persistence – qualities not observed in the previous battles. The fighting spirit of the Red soldiers started to drop, and brave commanders were no longer galloping on horseback in front of the chains. It became clear that the Cossacks had decided to give a proper battle and would fight to the last man.

Their chains were hidden behind potato beds and could not be seen. The enemy artillery, concentrated on the left flank, fired continuously at Sapozhkov's advancing chains. An armoured train shelled the left flank of the Razin Regiment. That regiment's battery transferred its fire to the manoeuvring armoured train, from the enemy's machine guns. Our artillery could not silence the White machine-guns, whose continuous fire intensified against our advancing units with every hour. The losses among our machine-gunners grew heavy, and by the middle of the day half of the machine-guns had stopped working. In addition our machine-gun fire was much less accurate than that of the Cossacks.

By 10:00 we had succeeded in advancing two or three kilometres forward. The slowness of the advance was explained by the fact that the Cossacks, having let our chains close to 150-200 metres, would place independent groups onto their flanks, which would force the attack to stop due to the enfilade fire. It was only when we got to within 75-100 metres that the Cossacks, one by one, without stopping firing, withdrew.

About 11:00 Chapaev sent a note to Sapozhkov asking him to speed up the movement of his chains and align the brigades' fronts. An hour later Sapozhkov moved to attack. We saw that in that area the Cossacks fled, but they quickly restored the situation. A *lava* appeared from Krugloozernyy area, racing to attack in the gap between Sapozhkov's brigade and the Moscow detachment. The detachment retreated to Khalilov as a result of the cavalry's onslaught. Sapozhkov stopped his attack and, under a murderous fire, bent his front back. Our artillery opened cannister fire on the cavalry but this failed to stop them. The Cossacks cut into the left flank of the Moscow detachment and threatened our artillery as well. Sapozhkov threw his last reserve at the Cossacks: two horse scout units and 15 machine guns on *tachankas*. The reserve repulsed the attack. The cavalry fled.

Alongside the cavalry attack the enemy infantry went on the offensive and forced Sapozhkov's brigade to withdraw to its initial position.

Simultaneously with Sapozhkov's attack Chapaev's brigade went on the offensive. The Razin Regiment moved towards the railway bridge and the Pugachev Regiment to the east. In some



places it came down to bayonet attacks, especially on the left flank of the Razin Regiment near the railway line. The enemy retreated, in good order, to the Chagan River.

Now, from near Novo-Derkul'skiy, Cossack cavalry appeared. Having crossed the Derkul River, it attacked the rear of Chapaev's brigade. The movement forward was halted and mounted scouts and 15 machine guns were sent to parry the attack, under cover of the fire of four guns. The enemy attack was repulsed. The Cossacks broke off and, having dismounted, opened rifle fire on the rear of the Razin Regiment. The first battalion of that regiment and the foot scouts, having bent their left flank to the south, undertook an attack – but to the north-west, not to the east. The other battalions held back the enemy to the east.

The commander of the 1st Battalion was given the task of pushing the Cossacks back to the left bank of the Derkul River, as we needed cold water for the machine guns, which refused to work thanks to so much firing during the hot day. By 15:00 the Cossacks were pushed back to the left bank, having retreated to the area of the Zhensk Skit and Novo-Derkul'skiy. We lost 15 men killed and wounded crossing the railway line plus 13 soldiers were killed as they drew water for drinking and the machine guns.

In retreating, Sapozhkov's brigade exposed the right flank of the Pugachev Regiment. The latter had to turn to the right and face with two battalions to the south. This created a gap between the Razin and Pugachev Regiments. Various enemy units, including the officer detachment moved into it and began to enfilade fire into the flank and rear of both regiments. All this forced Chapaev's brigade to withdraw and take up its original position. As we withdrew, the Cossack infantry moved forward, and by sunset the troops of the 4th Army had retreated to their initial positions.

So ended the battle of 7 July. In the Chapaev brigade alone the losses were upwards of 300 men killed and wounded and about the same losses were sustained by the other units. The conviction that Ural'sk would fall quickly had passed, and as a result the soldiers' morale dropped.

The night was an anxious time. Enemy parties crawled close to our location under the cover of darkness, firing volleys and shouting "ura" to indicate a night attack. The men were nervous and opened indiscriminate rifle and machine-gun fire, wasting a great deal of ammunition aimlessly.

At dawn on 8 July a partisan Cossack detachment, about 2,000 sabres in number, attacked our wagons located in a quadrangle near Khalilov from the Zheleznov area. The chains guarding it, made up of four companies from different regiments, were located twenty to a hundred metres around and ahead of the wagons, did not notice the Cossacks' approach. Attacked by surprise, some of the soldiers were cut down while others managed to run to the wagons. In addition to food and ammunition, there were many wounded men with rifles in the wagons. The peasant wagon drivers took the rifles from the wounded and shot the Cossacks at point-blank range, ignoring their cries of "surrender, you bastards". The shooting was heard by the advanced units and the 4th Army field staff. The armoured vehicles went to the rescue of the supply convoy and with their help we repulsed the attack by the partisans. This raid cost us 100 men killed and wounded, while the Cossacks lost about 200 men killed and the same number of horses.

With the appearance of the partisans, the field-staff moved from Peremetnaya station and encamped in the neighbourhood of the wagons. At 12:00 on 8 July the commander ordered the units to attack in the same deployment as on the previous day. Under cover of artillery fire, the main Cossack forces, that is their infantry, withdrew to the Chagan River – with the exception of small groups reinforced with machine guns, which stubbornly defended their positions. Under the onslaught of our chains those groups quietly left the trenches without any fuss, and by evening we had managed to advance three kilometres.



By this time the Razin Regiment and the foot scouts, which were on our left flank, had approached the dairy farm on the Chagan River. Behind them, the mounted scouts from the Chapaev Brigade, scattered in pickets on an escarpment along the Derkul River, guarded the flanks of the advancing units.

Towards evening the enemy, for the first time, used an armoured car. It rapidly approached the location of the Razin Regiment and opened machine-gun fire. The armoured train began to bombard the left flank of the regiment with artillery fire. The fire forced the 1st Battalion of the Razin Regiment and the infantry scouts to retreat two kilometres west of Ural'sk and to turn their left flank along the railway line.

Throughout the day both sides contested fire superiority and did not launch any charges. The field staff sent an order to allocate two companies from each regiment to guard the transports, as all the armoured vehicles had been sent to Semiglaviy-Mar station to guard the incoming transports with food and ammunition. The soldiers had no bread or tinned food, the supply of cartridges and shells had started to run out and morale had plummeted. There were loud voices about betrayal and similar ideas. The company commanders silently agreed and the regimental commanders gloomily kept quiet.

In the morning of 9 July, a meeting was held by the field staff in the presence of all the regiment and detachment commanders and commissars. *KomandArm* Rzhevskiy, reporting on the situation, categorically ordered we hold on to the occupied positions until ammunition, food and means for crossing the Chagan River arrived. The commanders did not object, with only Chapaev and Sapozhkov reporting that the brigades had 100 shells per gun and no more than a 100 rounds per soldier. Comrade Rzhevskiy confirmed that the transport convoy was ready and would set off immediately the guards arrived. That was the end of the meeting.

At noon the Cossacks attacked, and our units once more withdrew to the initial positions. The enemy tried to launch bayonet charges, but the attacks were repulsed by our fire. The Cossacks stopped further movement forward. A few hours later word spread along the front line that the radio from Saratov had reported that the Cossacks had captured the armoured vehicles sent to Derkul station that night, except for one which arrived safely at Semiglaviy-Mar station.

Colonel Martynov, with six Cossack *sotnias* had been returning from Samara with the last batch of arms received, rushing to the rescue of the besieged Ural'sk. On his arrival at Krasnen'kiy, he received orders to send the arms on with a guard of one *sotnia* and to raid the 4th Army rear with the other six *sotnias*. The Cossacks spend all 8 July marching along country roads and at midnight occupied Zelenen'kaya, where our supply vehicles were camped for the night. The drivers and guards sleeping in houses were killed by the Cossacks. Only one driver, sleeping near his car, managed to escape in time and arrive at Semiglaviy-Mar station through Shipovo.

In the morning the Cossacks set out for Shipovo and on the night of 10 June raided Semiglaviy-Mar station. The Balashov and Penza Regiments located there prepared for the meeting and repulsed the Cossacks' attacks. After that Colonel Martynov retreated back to the Shipovo station area and operated in our rear.

4th Army Retreat

In connection with this incident Chapaev and Sapozhkov arrived at the field staff. Comrade Rzhevsky was ill and lying in the infirmary. Chapaev made some angry comments about the commander and the field chief of staff, Comrade Melnikov, who insisted on carrying out the previous decision, i.e. to stay in place and wait for the arrival of the transports with ammunition and food. The brigade commanders categorically demanded a retreat, as the soldiers had already



been eating rye ears for three days, and there was hardly enough ammunition to fight their way out of the Cossack encirclement to Semiglaviy-Mar. At Chapaev and Sapozhnikov's insistence the HQ gave the order to retreat from Ural'sk on the night of 10 July.

Even before night fell our artillery opened fire on Ural'sk for the last time, finishing at 22:00. The enemy was silent during the bombardment, with no machine-gun or cannon fire from its side.

Under cover of darkness, Sapozhkov's brigade withdrew from its positions without any noise. A foot scout unit remained in the trenches, continuing with rifle and machine-gun fire.

At the junction of the Razin and Pugachev Regiments Chapaev gathered his commanders and gave final orders. The cavalry scouts were ordered to partially mine the railway in order to blow up the enemy's armoured train and thus eliminate the possibility of it pursuing the retreating units. The regiments were ordered to withdraw from their positions at exactly midnight, leaving two companies each in the trenches under the command of Comrades Plyasunkov and Kutyaikov. At the appointed time the regiments left the trenches unnoticed by the enemy and marched in the direction of Peremetnaya station, camouflaged by the darkness. The clattering and squeaking of the *tachanka* wheels were drowned out by the rapid firing by the covering companies. At daybreak the abandoned units withdrew and moved to join their units.

The Saratov Regiment and wagons moved in the front. A little behind on the left flank were the Moscow and Ukrainian detachments. Sapozhkov marched in the middle and Chapaev in the rearguard. The 4th Army forced march all night without breaks to Peremetnaya station. In the morning, having reached Chernoyarovo, the troops stopped for a three hour halt. The hungry soldiers did not look for bread: tired from the night march, they fell into a sound sleep.

Having discovered our retreat, the White command sent out in pursuit the training horse regiments, an armoured car and an armoured train. At about 09:00, when the troops had just gotten ready to leave the camp, the Chapaev brigade's security noticed the car coming at high speed. The battery opened fire. The vehicle accelerated and, manoeuvring in zigzags, opened machine-gun fire from a distance of 600 to 800 paces. There was panic among the convoys and units. The wagons galloped off. The Saratov Regiment moved without any orders, followed by the Moscow and Ukrainian detachments and the regiments of Sapozhkov's brigade. The Chapaev brigade remained where it was.

The battery continued to fire at the armoured car, but without results. Manoeuvring quickly, it did not stop its machine-gun fire on our location. The soldiers were ready to follow the example of the other units at any moment, but Chapaev appeared in front of the chains and gave an order not to retreat, explaining that the armoured car would not go away regardless. The soldiers calmed down with Chapaev's presence and, without opening rifle fire due to a lack of armour-piercing bullets, watched the fight between the artillery and the armoured car. That continued for about an hour.

Finally the platoon commander of the Razin battery, Comrade Rapetsky managed to clip its suspension and the next shell hit it in the rear wheels. It stopped. The foot scouts and the regiment's command rushed towards it. The officer crew fled, leaving its machine guns and 35 unfired ribbons intact. Three officers were killed. The armoured car's commander, Lieutenant Fokin, stopped and threw a grenade at the *KomRota* of the 4th Company, Comrade Bubenets, but it did not explode because the primer was not inserted. Comrade Bubenets seriously wounded the lieutenant in the stomach with a revolver shot. At his interrogation the prisoner reported that the armoured train sent out in pursuit had run into our dynamite charge and was blown up in at Rostovskiy Junction. The captured armoured car was burnt, and the machine guns were taken by the foot scouts.



The brigade prepared to move out, but the enemy Cossack training horse regiments, appeared on the horizon. Deploying into a *lava*, surrounded by dust, blades glittering in the sun, they attacked Chapaev's brigade. Chapaev ordered a slow retreat, without shooting, with the order to fire only on the commanders' signal. He believed that a mounted attack was easier to repel on the move than lying in trenches. As soon as the Cossacks approached to a close distance, the soldiers stopped and opened fire on the signal. The calmness and equanimity of the Chapaev brigade was transmitted to the rest of the 4th Army. Order was established and there was no further panic during our retreat.

The enemy cavalry, having surrounded our troops in a ring, fired at the retreating troops throughout the day. They no longer tried to charge. By evening the 4th Army had reached Shipovo station, where it camped for the night, in the same order as it had moved. Our cavalry occupied the northern outskirts of the village, having the task of watching the Derkul River. The uninterrupted march of 75 kilometres over the previous days had put a colossal strain on morale and physical strength. The soldiers actually starved for four days. All this depressed the mood and caused indescribable fatigue. Having heard that there would be an overnight stop in Shipovo, the men raced forward ignoring the terrain, paying no attention to the proximity of the Cossacks. The same fatigue was probably felt by the enemy, as no firing was heard along the lines when darkness fell,.

The night of 11 July passed quietly. The next day at about 07:00 the men were awakened by enemy fire. An order was received to retreat to Semiglaviy-Mar. But no one could move, as about 25% of the men could not march due to worn out legs and severe fatigue. We had to put the sick on wagons and machine-gun *tachankas*. At 12:00 we set off for Semiglaviy Mar. The units moved slowly: no more than one or two kilometres per hour. The faces of the soldiers were gloomy and emaciated, as if after a severe illness.

As the vanguard approached the line of Mount Ichka, the enemy cavalry simultaneously attacked the right flank of the Saratov Regiment from the north and the regiments of Sapozhkov's brigade from the south. Its artillery opened fire on our wagons. The latter turned at a gallop from beside the Saratov regiment towards Chapaev's brigade in total disorder. The terrain was flat and the Cossacks occupied all the hills and uplands, so the wagons had nowhere to hide. They wagons, scattered in groups, racing from the tail of the square to the head and back again. The gun fire killed many of the horses and sick men in the wagons. Those who remained hurried to dismount and take shelter in the Derkul River valley.

The fighters saved their ammunition and repelled the Cossacks with occasional rifle volleys. This battle took place some six to ten kilometres from Semiglaviy-Mar and lasted all night. The enemy tried to destroy the 4th Army units, tortured by the marching and hunger, running out of ammunition. But it did not succeed: the soldiers used up their last forces to get to Semiglaviy-Mar.

The Penza and Balashov Regiments, who had been guarding the base in Semiglaviy-Mar provided great help to the retreating troops. On their own initiative, under the command of the 4th Army Chief of Staff, Comrade Khvesin, they moved out to fire.

With their appearance the Cossacks retired to the flanks of the square and gave our units the opportunity to move towards Semiglaviy-Mar. The enemy ceased their attacks and withdrew in the direction of Shipovo station.

At 10:00 on 12 July the 4th Army arrived safely at Semiglaviy-Mar. The main forces were stationed in the village, with Chapaev's brigade on the south-western slope of the Ichka River near the springs. Here the fighters received hot food, rest and ammunition. The whole day and night of 13 July passed quietly. Small mounted Cossack pickets, stationed on a hill outside shooting range, kept a watchful eye on what was happening.



Actions of the Vinerman Group

On 30 June Comrade Vinerman's group occupied the town of Aleksandrov Gai without opposition. A further advance with the aim of occupying the of the Ural Cossacks' steppe point at Slomikhinskaya was suspended because of the lack of ammunition and food, but also due to the *partizan* tendencies in the units. All this forced Comrade Vinerman to remain in Aleksandrov Gai until 7 July, holding meetings and trying to convince those attending of the necessity of going on the offensive. A former Hungarian NCO who spoke Russian badly and had no oratorical abilities, Comrade Vinerman was simply a brave soldier and a bruiser. The soldiers loved him, but still refused to go on to the offensive.

Finally, on 7 July, ammunition was received, and the news came that the main forces of the 4th Army were storming Ural'sk. The soldiers cheered up and agreed to take Slomikhinskaya *stanitsa*. At the time it was believed that the occupation of those two main points would end the war with the Ural Cossacks and peace would follow.

The situation at that time was that the Penza and Balashov Regiments were at Semiglaviy Mar station, the Tambov Detachment was at Ozinki station, and Comrade Ruban's detachment was in Novouzensk. According to the locals, the Cossack Regiments under the command of Colonel N. I. Borodin were on the border, in the neighbourhood of Fort Berezovsky, and their detachments ranged out to Novouzensk and Aleksandrov Gai.

In the morning of 8 July the group marched to Fort Berezovsky, leaving 500 Red Guards in Aleksandrov Gai to guard the Soviet. The fighters were put on carts and moved in one column. Three to five kilometres in front was a squadron of Magyars – 150 sabres with five machine guns. After a short battle the outpost was occupied and the enemy retreated to Talovskiy settlement.

The next day the group returned to the offensive, sending forward mounted reconnaissance. When approaching the Duisha beacon?, the scouts were stopped by the fire of the enemy infantry. It was the so-called Krasnaya Rechka *druzhina*, made up of Novouzensk *kulaks*. Our detachments, moving on carts, sped up and at two kilometres from the enemy scattered into a chain. The battery opened fire on the Whites. Having approached, our chains prepared to charge. Just then about 1,500 Cossack sabres appeared from the Kara-Kul Lake area and attacked our left flank and wagons. The battery transferred its fire onto the Cossacks, but they had time to race up to the wagons and crashed into the flank company.

Panic appeared in our rear. Our attack halted and the detachments had to reorganise and bend their left flank to the Bol'shoy Uzen' River. We formed as if a ring, closed to the south by the B. Uzen'. By 16:00 the enemy was dislodged from its positions: its infantry was retreating to Talovskiy while the enemy cavalry regrouped on our left flank and sought to attack again.

By evening the group reached the Ashchesai ravine, which covers Talovskiy from the west. The enemy infantry opened fire. Our chains lay low and started to move forward by bounds. The firing continued until late at night by both sides. The soldiers were ordered to prepare for an attack but the enemy withdrew before we could – under cover of independent patrols it left Talovskiy and retreated to Slomikhinskaya. In this battle we lost 200 men killed and wounded, mostly from sabre cuts.

On 10 July the group attacked Slomikhinskaya. On the way, near the Tumpy Kalim beacon? the scouts engaged the enemy infantry. The detachments formed a square: the Magyars moved in front, the Krasny Kut detachment on the left flank, the Malouzensk detachment covering the rear. The wagons and battery moved in the centre of the formation. The Cossack cavalry attacked the left flank. Enemy artillery, concentrated on the right bank of the B. Uzen' River, together with dismounted units shelled the transports and the square. Forward movement ceased. The enemy



surrounded the square from all sides. Cavalry, having swum from the right bank of the B. Uzen' river, attacked the Malouzensk detachment from the rear. The latter retreated to the Magyars. There was panic among the soldiers, and to save the situation Comrade Vinerman rushed to counter-attack the Cossacks at the head of the Magyar squadron. The enemy accepted the attack, and the Magyars fought with the Cossacks. Vinerman was severely wounded in the fighting. Our detachments went on the attack from all sides and shot down the Cossacks, forcing them to retreat – some to the north, some to Slomikhinskaya. After Comrade Vinerman's wounding there was confusion among the soldiers, and the commanders decided to retreat.

At dawn on 11 July the group arrived at Talovskiy and, without stopping there, continued to retreat to Fort Berezovsky. There they camped for the night, and at dawn on 12 July Colonel Borodin surrounded the detachments. Fighting took place in the outpost until 08:00, when the detachments managed to break through the ring and retreated towards Aleksandrov Gai. By evening they reached that village and, without stopping, retreated to Novouzensk.

The Cossacks pursued on their heels and occupied Aleksandrov Gai. The detachments stopped in Novouzensk, with the exception of the Krasny Kut detachment which went to Krasny Kut.

This was the end of unsuccessful offensive by the Vinerman group. During the campaign it lost about 50% of its men and was completely demoralised.

A message about the defeat of the detachments was transmitted from Novouzensk by telegraph to Semiglaviy Mar. The local authorities asked Sapozhkov to bring his brigade to save Soviet power in the district. The brigade immediately prepared for the march and on 13 July went through Ozinki, Chalykla, Vergazovka and then on Novouzensk.

Commander Rzhevskiy, after recovering, retook command of the Army and after the departure of Sapozhkov's brigade ordered the withdrawal of the main forces to Ozinki station. However, rumours that there was an *kulak* uprising in Pugachev district, assisted by the Czechoslovaks, which was slaughtering the families of the Red Guards and the poor, excited the soldiers of the Chapaev brigade. Chapaev had to declare to the Army command that his brigade would not withdraw to Ozinki, but to Pugachev town. The command gave its consent but asked Chapaev to stay for a few hours in Semiglaviy-Mar to cover the retreating units of the 4th Army.

As soon as the tail of the main forces column disappeared from the horizon, Chapaev's brigade took two roads: the Pugachev Regiment moved through Rakhmanovskiy to Papov, the Razin Regiment went to the right through Korovin to Kirilovna. The enemy cavalry accompanied the regiments and also hung on the tail of the main forces.

Nearing Korovin, reconnaissance of the Razin Regiment reported that there was Cossack cavalry there, about 2,000 sabres under the command of Colonel Martynov. Chapaev decided to avoid battle and turned the regiment to the left towards the Pugachev Regiment's route. But it was too late – the enemy had already discovered the regiment. It opened up artillery fire, and the cavalry attacked the right flank of the *Razintsy* in *lava*. Unable to hold, the regiment began to retreat in disorder to the south-west. The Cossacks took advantage of the confusion and cut into the 3rd Battalion. Then Chapaev, with a handful of orderlies, rushed into the thick of the attack. The example of the brigade commander encouraged the soldiers, and the panic gradually subsided. Comrade Potekhin's machine-gun detachment rushed to the right flank and opened fire. At the same time the artillery opened cartridge fire on the Cossacks' *lava*, under cover of the foot scouts. The accurate fire of the machine guns and artillery halted the attack.

The fighting was heard by the Pugachev Regiment. Its commander, Comrade Toporkov, turned the regiment towards the sounds of the shooting, and took a squadron and a machine-gun detachment forward at a trot. He arrived at the moment when the Cossacks were attacking the left



flank of the Razin Regiment. The squadron hit the rear of the Cossacks, and the machine guns opened fire. Being shot at from all sides and attacked from the rear, the Cossacks in turn, retreated in complete disorder, northwards to the Korovin area. The enemy artillery kept up its fire and one of the shells hit the *troika* which Toporkov was riding on. Shell fragments mortally wounded him, and he died two hours later. Comrade Plyasunkov took command of the regiment.

The battle lasted for three hours, and during this time we lost 60 men killed and wounded; the enemy lost 70 men killed and as many horses.

It was already dark when the Chapaev brigade, having buried its dead, formed up in a square and moved slowly towards Tavalzhanka. Late at night the Razin Regiment that village, while the Pugachev Regiment halted at Murav'ev. There were no further attacks from the Cossacks, and the rest of the night passed quietly.

On 14 July the brigade marched to Zhestyanka, and the main forces of the 4th Army arrived at Ozinki station. On 15 July the Pugachev Regiment arrived at Semenikha, and the Razin Regiment at Vyazovka. Here they settled down for a day's rest, during which the soldiers held a meeting and made a resolution to go home for twelve days. The resolution was motivated by the need to get some work done in the fields and also to scare the *kulaks*. Chapaev's authority and threats had no effect. The fighters sincerely swore that on the 13th day they would all return to their regiments, and whoever did not return on time could be shot by Chapaev without trial.

A meeting of commanders was forced to agree with the soldiers, but demanded 300 men from each regiment to guard the artillery and machine guns. This demand was fulfilled. On 17 July 600 soldiers, artillery and command staff, with Chapaev at the head, settled down for two weeks in the villages of Rodniki and Klopikha, 10 km south-east of Pugachev.

A few days passed, and some of the dispersed soldiers returned back to the regiments. Their families and farms in the villages of Semenikha, Vyazovka, etc., which were occupied by the Cossacks. After that the Chapaev Brigade moved and on 21 July settled in Davydovka, 7 km from Pugachev. From there the 4th Battalion of the Pugachev Regiment was sent to the Lipovka area to suppress a *kulak* uprising.

So the troops of the 4th Army, after the defeat at Ural'sk, were located in the following places: Sapozhkov's brigade in Novouzensk, the main forces at Ozinki station, Chapaev's brigade in Davydovka where they faced a war on Soviet power.

While the 4th Army was attacking Ural'sk, the local authorities in the rear announced the mobilisation of eight age groups from the population to fight against the Czechoslovaks. The mobilised peasants and officers arrived at the assembly points.

Thanks to the agitation of secret agents from the Samara KOMUCH, there were revolts in Pugachev, B. Glushitsa, Mar'evka, Lipovka, Balakovo and Berezovo. The rebels dispersed the Soviets, arresting and killing their members and the families of the Red Guards also suffered. The rebels called themselves the White Guards and, under the leadership of the Czechoslovaks, declared war on Soviet power.

The terror of the White Guards forced the poor to unite even more. By this time two rifle brigades had finally been organised in Pugachev. The commanders of the brigades were the Volga long-shoreman Comrade Shkarbanov and Comrade Mikhalev;²³ the regimental commanders were Comrades Zubarev and Goryachkin. The brigades were filled up with longshoremen from the

²³ A peasant from Zlobinka, Pugachev district. A former NCO, he was killed in March 1919 in a battle near the Belaya River.



Balakovo wharf, metal workers and Red Guards from Shevelev's and Mikhalev's detachments. These troops were led by Comrade S. P. Zakharov, with his headquarters in Pugachev town.

On 26 June the White Guard, with the help of the Czechoslovaks, occupied Balakovo, and on 1 July they took Vol'sk. Detachments sent from Saratov under the command of Comrades Gorbatov and Zakharov took back those points on 11 July. The White Guard retreated to the line of Khvalynsk, Lipovka, Ivanteevka, Ivanovka, Gorelov Gai, having close communication with the advanced Cossack units in the neighbourhood of Grachev Kust and Lyubitskoe. Comrade Zakharov's troops held back the onslaught of the enemy on this line until the 4th Army returned from the Ural'sk campaign.

On 25 July an order was received to join Chapaev's brigade with Zakharov's, and the resulting unit was named the 1st Samara Rifle Division.

Conclusions.

In finishing the description of the second Ural'sk campaign, it should be noted:

1. The White Ural command correctly constructed a plan of military operations, which consisted in luring and drawing our troops deep into their territory – to Ural'sk, where they were to be destroyed.

While the rapid movement of our troops to Ural'sk forced the Cossacks to give battle, that was only to gain time to allow the civilian population and food supplies to be evacuated in peace, while also delaying the 4th Army until the arrival of arms from Samara, which was successfully done.

The Cossack infantry at Ural'sk, properly positioned, augmented by volunteers from the bourgeoisie and supplied with a large number of machine guns, acquired serious firepower and steadfastness. They showed tremendous tenacity during the three days of fighting, during which they did not retreat back a single kilometre.

The Cossacks' excellent use of their cavalry in all phases of the battle, with persistent actions on the flanks of the Army, repeatedly put the Reds in a critical position and saved the White infantry from complete defeat. The colossal activity of the cavalry forced us to use up our ammunition early, and Colonel Martynov's raid finally broke the Reds' offensive strength and forced the 4th Army to retreat from Ural'sk, if not physically defeated, then morally badly degraded.

As a result, the Cossacks pushed the 4th Army out of their borders for a long time and captured a large and rich part of the territory of Pugachev and Novouzensk districts.

During three months of fighting, the Ural Cossacks helped the *kulaks* of Samara province to finalise their armed force, the White Guards, and thus gave them the opportunity to defeat the Red troops for the first time.

2. The 4th Army command's strategic plan turned out to be worthless at the time of implementation. The Czechoslovak revolt had occupied Samara and successfully advanced to Orenburg, forcing Comrade Zinoviev's Red Guards to retreat from Orenburg and scatter in various directions. The success of the Czechs gave cause for all the anti-Soviet elements to become more active. The fight against the insurgents was hampered by the lack of armed forces, which raised the mood of the *kulak* armed force, the White Guards, and similarly lowered the morale of the poor. Because of this, the strategic plan should be considered fantasy. The offensives by both the



main forces and the Vinerman group were conducted on a whim, without any consideration of the actual situation.²⁴

3. The armoured vehicles, both during the movement and in the battles near Ural'sk, were with Commander Rzhevskiy instead of supporting the suffering infantry. Later, as a result of sending them without any cover to Semiglaviy-Mar, the vehicles were delivered into enemy hands. In addition, blind faith by the Army commander that the rail line would be fixed and the categorical order that commanders were not to take with them heavy wagons with food and ammunition, led to the troops starving during the intense fighting and marching, which greatly affected their combat effectiveness.

4. After the defeat at Ural'sk, when morale dropped, instead of inspiring the soldiers and commanders, Rzhevskiy feigned illness.²⁵ In the second campaign, the actual leader during the retreat was Chapaev, although nominally it was *Polestarm-4*.

Thanks to his energy and faith in his forces, Chapaev managed not only to lead the troops out of the encirclement, but also to inflict serious blows on the enemy (blowing up an armoured train, capturing an armoured car).

In general, the 4th Army units, although they did bring the Republic a victory, still brought great benefit by the fact that, thanks to their bravery, perseverance and endurance, they did not let themselves be destroyed. This depended, as we have seen, not on skilful leadership at the Army level, but solely on the steadfastness of the Samara poor and the Volga barge men, who sincerely wanted to overthrow the power of the landlords and the nobles.

²⁴ The editorial board does not agree with the author's assessment of the 4th Army's plan. It considers the 4th Army command's desire to occupy Uralsk – as the centre of the rebellious Cossacks– to be undoubtedly correct and it would have undoubtedly facilitated the fight against them. But such operations require serious preparation and execution, which was not done. Ed.

²⁵ This is the author's opinion, not ours. Ed.



Chapter IV

Battle for Pugachev and the Right Bank of the Volga

General situation

After the defeat at Ural'sk, and as a consequence of the *partisanshchina* prevailing in the detachments, the 4th Army was so bloodied physically that it needed not only rest, but also mental recovery. The broken units needed political training to bring steadiness in combat and to raise morale, plus reinforcements of manpower and horses, as well as with technical material. Finally the Red Guard masses needed to feel that they were not fighting alone, and that the rear was supporting their hardships. However, returning from the front, the units found nothing of the sort in the rear. The Red Guards saw ruined farms, the local authorities and those sympathetic to the Soviets driven underground, and their own families exhausted by the violence of the *kulak* sons and officers of the "People's Army".

The rear was engulfed in revolt. By the first days of August the insurgency had spread to the Kamyshin, Saratov and Atkarsk districts of Saratov province and the German villages.²⁶ From there the insurgency rolled over to the territory occupied by the troops, i.e. to the Pugachev and Novouzensk districts.

The *kulaks* felt strong, and not being embarrassed by the presence of troops, shot the poor almost in front of the Red Army. Their impudence knew no bounds, and there were cases, when foragers or small reconnaissance parties who stayed overnight in a village were destroyed by the *kulaks*.

The 4th Army found itself surrounded on all sides, with the rebellious *kulaks* in its rear and Cossack and Czechoslovak gangs in front of it. So, instead of being able to rest after a heavy retreat, the troops had to replenish their ranks under extremely difficult conditions, to fight the advancing enemy and to suppress uprisings in the rear. The announced mobilisation of the peasants served as a signal for the uprising of the *kulaks* and other elements wavering against Soviet power.

This was the moment of the highest stress in the civil war in the Saratov and Samara provinces. Brothers-in-law and fathers and sons fought each other at the front.

The announced mobilisation mainly increased the enemy army, not ours. The Red command had no opportunity to replenish the weakened units in an organised manner. The commanders of individual units periodically announced so-called mobilisations in villages and *volosts* as needed. For example, Chapaev announced a mobilisation in the villages of Porubezhka, Ivanovka and others; Baulin did the same in Lipovka and Livenka, and Sapozhkov in Orlov Gai and Kurilovka.

When mobilising, the amount of land sown, the number of labourers and such things were taken into account. After that, the local Soviets were ordered to send out a certain number of conscripts on a fixed date, among whom 25% were to be poor, 50% the middle sort and 25% *kulaks*. The order was carried out quickly if the local Soviets were in favour of Soviet power. But there were cases when the Soviets sympathised with the Samara polity and renamed themselves a *zemstvo* when the Whites arrived. A short ultimatum was usually sent to such Soviets with the words "whoever is not with us is against us". When the ultimatum expired, repressive measures were taken, after which all the demands were met and the mobilised men were put into the army. However, such "field" mobilisations sometimes had negative results. In some battles we suffered defeats because we were not attentive enough to the class composition of those mobilised, with the *kulaks* often prevailing over the middle and poor.

²⁶ Ethnic German communities had been on the Volga and in Ukraine for centuries. They were generally prosperous and run with individual farms, not the communal "mir" system. That meant they were largely anti-Bolshevik. PW.



The 4th Army command formed regiments, brigades and divisions from those mobilised, as well as from the small rural detachments available, which were then distributed to the various theatres of the war. At the same time the command fought mercilessly against *partizanshchina*. The experience of the two campaigns on Ural'sk showed the commanders the harmfulness of selfish independence, and they understood the need for centralisation. The desire for self-determination arose because the command staff and soldiers did not see good leadership from the 4th Army command. The appointment of former officers to the newly formed units caused irreconcilable enmity between them and the old commanders.

In the three months from August to October four commanders in the Ural Division and two in the Novouzensk Division were replaced. This could not but affect the success of combat operations and made those troops passive when attacking the Ural Host.²⁷

The total strength of the army was 23,306 bayonets, 1,250 sabres, 225 machine guns, 67 guns and one armoured train (see appendices). This number does not include many small rifle and mounted detachments at the disposal of the district and *volost* soviets.

The 4th Army staff was located at Urbakh station. The length of the front in a straight line was about 400 km, and the troops occupied the line Palasovka, Petropavlovka, Novouzensk, Vergazovka, Seleznikha, Ozenki and Goryainovka.

Our front line was like a ring, closed in the west by the Volga River. The occupied points, with the help of the mobilised bourgeoisie, were fortified with full profile ring trenches and surrounded by four rows of wire fences.

The enemy forces were located: in Khvalynsk – Lipovka with about 10,000 from the “People’s Army”; in Samara – Mar'ino some 8,000 Czechoslovak troops of General Chechik’s group; and at Ozinki – Aleksandrov Gai the Cossacks with 10,000 cavalry and 5,000 infantry.

The correlation of forces shows that the enemy had a numerical superiority, and had at its disposal well disciplined Czechoslovak units and excellent Ural Cossack cavalry.

On our side there was no definite plan of action. What goals the 4th Army command had set for itself, what was considered and planned out in the silence of the offices is unknown. The formation chiefs did not know any of them, and the archival materials contain nothing apart from some operational orders.

We have attached one such document – a directive sent to the commander of the Ural Division, Comrade Shtrombakh.

In addition to the reconnaissance information received from you, I inform you that the detachment of Czechoslovaks and Cossacks, in the vicinity of Irbuzovka – Nikolaevka, was defeated frontally by the regiments of the Samara Division, with 14 MGs – about 1,000 rifles and a mass of shells captured. The remnants of the defeated Czechs and Cossacks fled to the neighbourhood of Khvorostyanka – Mar'evka. In view of the fact that your division and the Novouzensk Division each separately has a considerable numerical advantage over the Cossacks operating south of the Altata – Ozenki railway, I order you and the Novouzensk Division to start a decisive offensive in order to push the Cossacks back to their border. You should immediately work out a general plan of action along with the chief of the Novouzensk Division and submit it to me for approval.

KomandArm-4 Rzhevskiy

²⁷ The author does not admit that some of the commanders were inadequate to their appointments, and sees only the ill will of the command, which hardly corresponds to reality. Ed.



Having received such a “directive”, each commander independently worked out a plan for the forthcoming actions. After its approval by *KomandArm-4*, the divisions in their areas went on the offensive, usually without any coordination between them. These attacks generally ended in vain, and the units, having lost a large number of killed and wounded, would return to their initial positions.

In the end the conviction grew that the 4th Army command did not know how to properly deal with the situation.

Battles of Local Importance

Until 17 August there were small battles and skirmishes of no significance in the sectors of the Novouzensk and Ural Divisions. At the same time regroupings and movements of units from one place to another took place along the whole front.

The enemy showed more decisive and calculated actions during this time. The Czechoslovaks and units of the “People’s Army” were fighting on the Samara Division’s sector. The Cossacks vigorously undertook partisan activity. Clearly taking into account the experience of the recent past with their cavalry – when it had taken heavy losses due to attacking with large cavalry masses but often poorly armed, with only lances – they decided to change tactics and move to guerrilla actions by small but well-armed cavalry detachments. These detachments were engaged in continuous fighting and made sudden raids on weakly fortified points or on troops poorly guarded on the march and at rest, usually at night or dawn. The Cossacks were not aiming at decisive actions when using their cavalry in this way, but achieved positive results by continually unnerving and disturbing the Red troops. Moreover, by appearing in the rear and firing up the *kulaks*, they brought them into the struggle against Soviet power.

In general, the command of the opposing side, keeping to short battles and partisan actions, was preparing for a large operation. The ultimate aims were to establish communication with the Don Cossacks, who were operating in around Tsaritsyn, and to increase the territory subordinated to KOMUCH, which was forming its “People’s Army” at an increased rate.

In order to prevent the implementation of this plan, our command decided to move more units to the north: Chapaev’s brigade of the Samara Division was ordered to move on 2 August from Davydovka and occupy Tavoľzhanka and Ivanovka.

By the evening of the same day the Pugachev Regiment, after a short skirmish, occupied Tavoľzhanka. The enemy’s scouts retreated to Ivanteevka. The Razin Regiment, led by *KomBrig* Chapaev, occupied Ivanovka without opposition. The local *zemstvo* with four officers of the “People’s Army”, who were mobilising peasants, were captured.

During interrogation of the prisoners it turned out that a few days earlier they had seized power into their own hands and killed five members of the Soviet with clubs. Thirteen were shot for the murders, by the sentence of a regimental military field court.

From Comrade Gavrilov’s 2nd Brigade the 4th Rifle Regiment marched from Seleznikha to Livenka; the 3rd Regiment from Ozenki to Ozerki; and with the Balakovo Regiment from Goryainovka through Ozerki to Livenka. About 5,000 bayonets of the “People’s Army” were concentrated there. The approach of the brigade’s units from the front and the threat of being outflanked by the Balakovo Regiment forced the enemy to abandon Ozerki and Livenka without fighting, and to withdraw in the direction of Lipovka.



By this time an enemy grouping in the Ivanteevka – Nikolaevka area was detected. On 3 August *NachDiv-Samara*, Comrade Zakharov, ordered the Balakovo Regiment to move to Bortnovka. From there it was to destroy the enemy the next day, working with Chapaev's brigade.

On 3 August the Balakovo Regiment occupied Bortnovka and the Razin Regiment occupied Chernavka – from where it knocked out two hundred Cossacks, who retreated to Nikolaevka.

The Pugachev Regiment remained where it was all day on 3 August, in B. Tivolzhanka, and reconnoitred the enemy's positions near Ivanteevka.

On 4 August the Pugachev Regiment marched to Ivanteevka while the Razin and Balakovo Regiments went to Nikolaevka. Early in the morning the Pugachev Regiment entered battle, but the enemy offered little resistance and retreated to Arbuzovka. Having detected the movement of the Balakovo Regiment to the rear, from around Bortnovka, all its forces (2,000 bayonets of the "People's Army" with 8 guns and 200 Cossacks) continued to retreat to the north-east along the Sukhoy Irgiz ravine, i.e. between Chernavka and Nikolaevka. This retreating column was met by the Razin Regiment, which was travelling on carts along the road from Chernavka. The enemy opened fire, and the first volley from his side killed the commander of the Razin Regiment, Comrade Kursakov.²⁸

The regiment became confused.

The Cossacks raced out of the ravine, deploying into a *lava*, and charged the tail of the regimental column, where the artillery was moving. However, the artillerymen were not confused: they quickly unlimbered and opened cartridge fire on the Cossacks. The *lava* stopped and, under the fire of the artillery, fled back into the ravine.

With the appearance of the Cossacks, panic broke out in the 3rd Battalion. The frightened soldiers, who were sitting in carts, turned them round and galloped off. Carts fell into ditches and others clashed wheels as they raced in the direction of Trostyanka. The mad gallop continued until their squadron was sighted. After that the soldiers stopped and, abandoning the carts, began to move towards the battery.

At the start of the battle the 1st Battalion engaged the enemy, who were positioned along the ravine, and moved to the attack, supported by their artillery. The enemy was dislodged by fire and began to retreat to Nikolaevka. The Cossacks, after their unsuccessful attack on the artillery, withdrew eastwards to Novo-Arkhangel'skoe, on their way killing several men of the Razin Regiment.

The enemy was not pursued. The regiment put itself back in order. The commander of the 1st Battalion, Comrade Kutyakov, took command of the regiment.

Having gone no more than four or five kilometres towards Nikolaevka, the enemy stopped and, having settled in a good position, began to wait for the Razin Regiment. With the approach of our chains, the enemy opened rifle and machine gun fire. The chains lay down, and a stubborn fire fight began. All our attempts to attack failed. The firepower advantage was on the enemy side.

The position of the regiment was becoming critical. A little more time and the regiment would run.

At this difficult moment the chains of the approaching Balakovo Regiment appeared on the horizon to the west. The *Razintsy* perked up. The regiment was ordered to prepare to attack. Leading the attack was acting *KomBat-1*, Comrade Radyushkin. Though wounded in the arm, he did not leave the line, and his valiant example inspired the battalion. Their actions drew in the rest of the battalions, and Razin Regiment fought with enemy at bayonet point.

²⁸ Former corporal in the Tsarist army, a great friend of Comrade Chapaev.



At the same time Comrade Chapaev and his squadron moved to bypass the enemy's left flank.

The latter, seeing its hopeless situation, rushed in panic through Nikolaevka to Mar'evka. By evening the Balakovo Regiment had occupied the western half of Nikolaevka and the Razin Regiment the eastern half, where we settled down for the night.

As a result of the battle we lost 60 men killed and 100 wounded; the enemy lost about 300 men killed and wounded. In addition, it left behind 15 machine guns, a large number of rifles, cartridges, shells and two lorries.²⁹

Simultaneously with the advance of the Razin and Balakovo Regiments, on 4 August the 3rd and 4th Regiments went on the offensive and, after a short battle, occupied Lipovka. The enemy partly retreated to Dukhovnitskoe, partly to Bogorodskoe.

In response to the report of these battles, *KomandArm-4* Rzhevskiy sent a telegram to *NachDiv* Zakharov:

I thank the glorious regiments for their brilliant exploits. I hope that they will fulfil their task to the end – “God help us”. On the right bank of the Volga we have concentrated more than two regiments and from Shirokiy Buerak have gone on the offensive towards Khvalynsk.

In connection with information received from the Mordvinovka and Seleznikha Soviets that large enemy forces were moving from the Bogorodskoe area to Seleznikha, in order to occupy the town of Pugachev, *NachDiv* Zakharov ordered Chapaev's brigade to withdraw to the Ivanteevka area.

In fulfilment of this order, the Razin Regiment occupied Zhuravlikha, Balalaevka and Seleznikha. However on 7 August, under pressure from superior Czechoslovak and “People's Army” forces, the regiments left the occupied area and withdrew: the Balakovo to B. Tivolzhanka and the Razin to Porubezhka.

On the night of 8 August a detachment of the “People's Army”, left the Dukhovnitskoe area, went down the left bank of the Volga River and occupied Ozerki.

At dawn the enemy made a sudden raid on the location of the 4th Rifle Regiment in Livenka. The guards, taken by surprise, were destroyed. The quietly resting soldiers turned to panicked flight with the appearance of the enemy, running to Seleznikha. The regiment's battery withdrew from the village in a timely manner, then opened fire on the enemy from a convenient position.

The combination of our artillery fire, the indiscriminate fire of the fleeing soldiers and the enemy volleys, created a difficult situation to understand and take firm control of the battle.

The regiment commander, Comrade Baulin, and his son were killed near the regimental headquarters building. His deputy, Comrade Shcherbakov, took command. To restore order he ordered the squadron gathered near him to stop the fleeing of the panicking men by any means. Whips and blades were used. It worked: many soldiers stopped, were brought to order and sent to counterattack. The enemy could not withstand the strike, and, leaving about 100 men dead, one gun and eight machine guns in the streets of the village, retreated back to Ozerki. On our side 44 men were killed and 70 wounded.

The next day, 9 August, reconnaissance established that the Czechoslovaks had occupied Ivanteevka and Ivanovka, while there was a concentration the “People's Army” near Ozerki. The enemy apparently intended to use them to strike through Seleznikha and B. Tivolzhanka to occupy

²⁹ *NachDiv* Zakharov reported about this battle that our side had had seven men killed, 24 wounded, and that the enemy was, allegedly, totally crushed.



the town of Pugachev. Following an order from *NachDiv* Zakharov, the 2nd Brigade occupied Seleznikha and Zlobinka in the evening of the 9th.

In the morning of 10 August a detachment of Czechoslovaks, 1,500 bayonets with 4 guns, occupied the villages of Zhuravlikha and Kamelik. *KomBrig* Chapaev understood the enemy's movement to be an attempt to turn our flank, with the purpose of a blow from the rear along the left bank of the Irgiz River towards Pugachev. He ordered the Razin Regiment to throw back the Czechs to the right bank of the Irgiz.

Obedying the order, the regiment headed on carts from Porubezhka to Kamelik.

It was a hot day. The flat terrain and a good road favoured the movement of the wagons. The regiment's mood was cheerful: there were songs and talk about the desire to face the enemy sooner.

At 12:00 the lead battalion came under artillery fire. It halted and deployed into fighting order. The other battalions followed, and the Razin Regiment, deployed in a chain, continued to move forward. The regiment's battery turned to the right off the road and, still limbered, came under enemy artillery fire.

The chains continued to move.

The enemy positioned himself along the outskirts of the village in the orchards and vegetable gardens, placing machine guns on the roofs of barns and houses. His position was very well camouflaged, the terrain in front of him was flat with good fire, and the advancing regiment had to overcome the strong defensive position of the Czechs.

As the regiment approached machine-gun range, the chains lay down and led the attack by running forward in singles. By 15:00 the regiment had succeeded in approaching to within 800 to 1,000 metres of the outskirts of the village.

However, the fire opened by the Czechs from the right flank forced the regiment to stop advancing and lie down.

The regimental commander, seeing that a frontal attack on Kamelik threatened huge losses and might end in failure, decided to attack the enemy from the flanks. *KomBat-1* was ordered to move to the right to attack from the south, *KomBat-3* to move to the left and, attacking from the north, cut off the Czechs' line of retreat over the Kamelik bridge. The 2nd Battalion remained on the frontal attack, and the squadron was ordered to stand covering the battery, in case of a Cossack raid from the south.

As the battalions moved to the new positions they suffered heavy losses, but by 16:00 the regiment was in the designated positions and prepared for a decisive attack. During our manoeuvre the Czech heavy artillery (two 108-mm guns) finally silenced the regimental battery. The latter retreated to the west away from the battle, with losses to its crews and with one gun hit. The attacking infantry was thus deprived of artillery support.

Noticing the change in our position, the enemy increased its fire. Its two light guns stopped firing at our machine guns. The regiment moved to attack, but was repulsed, drowning in its own blood. The Czechs let the chains creep up to a distance of 200-400 metres and opened extremely accurate and heavy fire from automatic rifles and machine guns. The chains stopped and froze in place. On the right flank, some foot scouts reached the trenches and charged with bayonets. However, hand grenades from the Czech riflemen repelled the blow, and the scouts fell back with heavy losses.

The strong and accurate enemy fire stopped all movement. The men lay motionless: none of them could move, and many had stopped firing. The hard ground prevented them from digging in, and the slightest movement to one side or the other made anyone a victim. Ordinarily during such



difficult engagements there were instances of unauthorised retreat from our units, but here no one thought of retreating, for every one knew that to retreat was to die.

All along the regiment's front line we heard the groans and calls for help of wounded soldiers. It was impossible to aid them though, for anyone who tried to do so was either wounded or killed himself.

The situation was becoming critical. The soldiers were ordered to lie still and cease firing until darkness fell.

During the night our battery managed to get into position and opened fire on the village with shrapnel. In a few minutes the houses and hay stacks caught fire. There was a commotion in the village and shouts were heard. Groups of men could be seen putting out the fire. The *KomPolka* ordered the 2nd Battalion to open fire and the rest to withdraw to Porubezhka. During the withdrawal from the battlefield we left 150 wounded, including many company commanders, as well as many mobilised *kulaks*, pretending to be dead.

The regiment regathered in Porubezhka. The cavalry squadron was left to observe the enemy, which, having detected a Czech retreat, occupied Kamelik without fighting. The enemy, not stopping in Zhuravlikha, retreated to Ivanovka. In the battle at Kamelik we lost 140 men killed, 150 wounded,³⁰ including three company commanders (Bubenets, Petrovsky and Otradnov) and many platoon commanders.³¹

After the clash with the Czechoslovaks, Commander Rzhevskiy sent a telegram to the divisions:

From our combat encounters with the Czechoslovaks it has become clear that they operate with comparatively small forces and to the widest extent use by-pass movements and blows to the rear, leaving quite insignificant units on the front line against us. This method has always been successful for them in combat encounters with us. I instruct you to avoid frontal strikes, to apply echeloned formations as much as possible and to have reserves in order to be able to strike in the flank against any bypassing units. We must send out the widest possible reconnaissance in order to determine in advance the direction of any bypassing enemy columns. The Czechoslovaks also have a strongly developed espionage system. For example, we had a case where Czechoslovaks, in peasant dress, freely penetrated into our detachments, organised a card game with Red Army men and thus obtained very valuable information for their intended battle. It is necessary to totally suppress any attempts at espionage, which sometimes have the most innocent appearance, and in general to stop access to our troops by unauthorised people.

At dawn on 11 August the Czechoslovaks, 2,500 bayonets with four light and as many heavy guns, marched from Ivanteevka and suddenly attacked the Pugachev Regiment in B. Tavoľzhanka. The regiment's guard, located one kilometre away on the northern outskirts of the village, was almost entirely destroyed. The Czechs stormed into the village. Our soldiers, who were sleeping quietly in the inhabitants' houses, fled in panic, almost in their underwear, managing to take only their rifles. Some went south-west to M. Tavoľzhanka and others to Porubezhka. The enemy pursued.

KomPolka Comrade Plyasunkov, who knew from experience in past battles that once the panic started in a village those fleeing could be stopped only outside the village, went on horseback to the southern edge of the village, trying to restore order. But that was not easy, because the enemy

³⁰ The author appears to be taking on faith the reports by the units of their losses and the enemy's. We believe that the characterisation of the battle and losses on both sides by *NachDiv-Samara* was undoubtedly more prudent. Ed.

³¹ In his report of 10 August *NachDiv* Zakharov characterised the battle at Kamelik as follows: "the enemy fled, and our losses were insignificant."



was pursuing, and Comrade Plyasunkov and his unit had to retreat to M. Tavalzhanka. Just as he reached there he managed to put the regiment in order and go on the counter-offensive.

The pursuing Czechoslovak detachment, which had no more than 1,000 bayonets and four light guns, could not withstand the onslaught of the *Pugachevtsy* and began to retreat slowly to B. Tavalzhanka. By 12:00 the Pugachev Regiment had reached to within three kilometres of the village, but due to strong enemy fire was forced to halt and lie down. The rifle, machine-gun and artillery fire intensified over time from both sides. The Czechs attacked several times in separate groups, but were repulsed by our fire.

During the firefight, Comrade Plyasunkov was wounded in the arm. He did not want to leave the line, but handed over direct command of the regiment to *KomBat-1*, Comrade Inyutkin.

The battle was heating up, and we could see the Czechs grouping into columns, which was a sign that they were preparing a decisive attack, which they always did in platoon columns. The *Pugachevtsy* were running out of ammunition, but the soldiers decided not to retreat, knowing that the Razin Regiment, located in Porubezhka, would hear the firing and would come to their aid.

The Razin Regiment guard did indeed hear shooting early in the morning, but as the *Pugachevtsy* retreated, the firing quieted down, and the soldiers assumed that the enemy had been repulsed. Only after a few horsemen arrived at the Razin Regiment's position, bringing a report that the Czechs were pursuing the *Pugachevtsy*, who were retreating to Pugachev, did the latter set out. Comrade Chapaev moved in front with the cavalry squadron, a battery, the foot scouts and the 1st Battalion, riding carts. The other battalions of the Razin Regiment moved out without delay, leaving one company to guard the wagons and the bridge over the Irgiz.

Having detected the movement of Comrade Chapaev's units, the Czechs transferred their fire to the approaching Reds.

The *Pugachevtsy* cheered up with the appearance of the *Razintsy* – they saw the long-awaited help coming, and on Comrade Plyasunkov's order, given with a broken arm in front of the regiment's chains, prepared to strike.

The Czech artillery fire forced Chapaev's lead detachment to lie down. The other companies of the regiment were approaching on carts and headed right, deciding to turn the enemy's location to the rear, i.e. to strike at it from the north via B. Tavalzhanka. The Czechs noticed this manoeuvre and transferred their artillery fire to the companies of the 2nd and 3rd Razin Battalions, which gave Chapaev the opportunity to start moving forward again. The newly transferred Czech fire, probably due to the unexpected appearance by the Razin Regiment, was not well aimed and the shells flew a long way overhead.

Our chains moved forward without any losses.

The whole weight of the battle and the attention of the enemy was now centred on the advance of the Razin Regiment. The Czechs, in order to cover their rear and the line of retreat, attacked to the north-east, towards Fedorovka, in order to halt the movement of our bypass column (2nd and 3rd Battalions).

KomPolka-Pugachev, Comrade Plyasunkov, seeing that the enemy was exclusively occupied with the Razin Regiment, made a bayonet charge with the *Pugachevtsy* and occupied B. Tavalzhanka before night fell. The Czechs retreated to Ivanteevka without being pursued. In this battle the Pugachev Regiment lost 67 men killed, 100 wounded and 50 missing; the Razin Regiment lost 50 men killed and wounded. The enemy's losses are unknown.

After that battle, *NachDiv* Zakharov issued an order on 13 August:



1. The commander of the 1st Brigade is to move the Pugachev Regiment to Porubezhka, from where he is to attack Ivanteevka from the right, through the villages of Gusikha, Zhuravlikha and Ivanovka. Having pushed the enemy out of Ivanteevka, he is to take Chernavka, where he is to remain until ordered, maintaining close liaison with the 3rd Rifle Regiment. The Razin Regiment is to move to the right flank in the direction of the villages of Klopikha, Korneevka, Semenovna, Klintsovka and Lyubitskoe.
2. The commander of the 2nd Brigade is to attack Ivanteevka with the 3rd Regiment, keeping close contact with the Pugachev Regiment on the right. Dislodge the enemy from Ivanteevka and occupy Nikolaevka, where it is to stay until ordered. The 4th Regiment is to move through Livenka and push the enemy out of Lipovka, then occupy Nikol'skoe, keeping a connection to the right with the 3rd Regiment and to the left with the Balakovo Regiment.
3. The commander of the Balakovo Regiment is to attack from the right through Ozerki to Lipovka and, having knocked out the enemy, take Dukhovnitskoe, where he is to remain until ordered, maintaining communication to the right with the 4th Rifle Regiment and to the left with the Volga Flotilla.
4. I appoint the start times as: 1st Balakovo and 4th Regiments at 14:00 today, 13 August; the Pugachev Regiment at 05:00 on 14 August; and the 3rd Regiment at 07:00 on 14 August.
5. I order regimental commanders to keep in close touch with the neighbouring units by posting intermediate patrols, and in no case to stay in quarters, especially at night, but leave the villages, to establish bivouacs, posting outposts and sentries.
6. The commanders of the brigades and regiments are to report as often as possible on the situation and also at the occupation of each new point.

With this order Comrade Zakharov eliminated any leadership by the brigade commanders of their respective regiments. Comrade Chapaev was extremely offended by this and left the brigade, returning back to the front only when Pugachev was threatened. The most important thing was that neither *KomandArm* Rzhevskiy nor *NachDiv* Zakharov understood the Czechs' tactics. They took their massive large fists and acted with outstretched fingers,³² i.e. they threw independent regiments in all directions, operating at a great distances from each other. In sum, this order served – after 15 days of fighting – to transfer the initiative into the enemy's hands, and so helped the Czechoslovaks to capture Pugachev.

Having received the order, the units began to obey it.

On 14 August the Razin Regiment marched from Porubezhka to Davydovka, where it spent the night. During the night regimental reconnaissance established that there was no enemy in Klopikha and Korneevka. The regiment moved on and occupied Semenikha and Vyazovka without opposition. The two Cossack *sotnias* occupying those villages retreated to Lyubitskoe. In Vyazovka the Soviet was re-established, and the captured members of the *zemstvo*, created by the Cossacks from the *kulaks*, were shot for the murder of members of the Soviet. On 16 August the regiment occupied Lyubitskoe, without resistance from the enemy, and the Cossacks withdrew to Karlovka. When the regiment took that village they retire to Rakhmanovka. Regimental reconnaissance established that the Cossack cavalry regiment had settled in Zhestyanka.

Thus, the Razin Regiment was sent out as if to carry out reconnaissance service and to check on rumours, when this job could have been successfully performed by Comrade Surov's mounted

³² The usual Soviet word for a strike group was a "fist", which helps explain the metaphor.



detachment, which at that time was idle in the Pugachev area. For several days the *Razintsy* were cut off from participation in the fighting and marched aimlessly from village to village.

To fulfil its task, on 14 August the Pugachev Regiment marched through Porubezhka, Gusikha and Zhuravlikha. By evening the regiment approached Ivanovka and here it fought with the Czechoslovaks, about 1,000 bayonets and four guns. After three hours of fighting, the enemy could not hold the regiment any longer and retreated in full order through Chernavka to Nikolaevka. Chernavka was occupied without resistance on the 16th.

At the same time the 3rd Rifle Regiment fought the Czechs at Ivanteevka, about 1,500 bayonets with seven guns. The enemy allowed the regiment's chains into the village and with the onset of darkness launched a counter-attack. The chains fell back in disorder behind the Chernavka River, where they entrenched themselves. Shooting continued all night. Enemy scouts crawled close to our trenches, taking advantage of the darkness, causing indiscriminate firing along the front line from our side. With dawn the regiment launched a frontal attack and forced the Czechs to retreat to Nikolaevka. The regiment's commander, Comrade Mikhalev, decided to give the men a two-day rest and replenish the supplies of cartridges and shells.

On 13 August the 4th Rifle Regiment occupied Livenka and Balakovo – Ozerki. The next day the regiment occupied Lipovka with light fighting. The enemy, about 2,000 bayonets, retreated to the Dukhovnitsky area. Later the 4th Regiment moved to Nikol'skoe (20 km north-east of Lipovka), where it settled down awaiting further orders from *NachDiv* Zakharov.

Simultaneously the Balakovo Regiment occupied Dukhovnitskoe. However the regiment was forced to withdraw back to Lipovka due to superior enemy forces and the news received from the head of the Vol'sk Detachment, Comrade Abroskin, that the enemy had landed on the right bank of the Volga River in the vicinity of Alekseevka and Merovka with 500 bayonets and, supported by artillery on ships, was advancing downriver threatening to take Balakovo. From Lipovka the regiment's commander, Comrade Zubarev, sent the 1st Battalion with two guns to Krasnyi Yar (which is opposite Merovka), with the task of assisting the units of the Volga Rifle Division in eliminating the enemy landing.

By 18 August all the units of the division were located in the occupied villages, waiting for new orders from *NachDiv* Zakharov.

Battles for Novouzensk and Pugachev

By 17 August the enemy's position on the 4th Army's front was as follows:

1. The Ural Cossacks, with about 5,000 bayonets and sabres and four light and heavy guns occupied the area of Aleksandrov-Gai – Nikolaevka. They also occupied the Ozinki – Chalykla area with equivalent forces, having 12 guns of different calibres there.
2. The Czechoslovaks, with about 4,000 soldiers with 10 guns and a huge number of machine guns occupied the Nikolaevka – Mar'evka area.
3. "People's Army", with about 5,000 soldiers, had settled down in the Dukhovnitskoe – Khvalynsk area.

The gaps between those groups were carefully guarded by Cossack regiments and independent mounted guerrilla detachments, which performed reconnaissance, communication service and security. Thus the enemy formed almost a continuous front line.

The units of our army were scattered in independent detachments with no well-established communications, acting separately and in different directions. Such an arrangement was



convenient for the enemy, who had a more favourable position both operationally and tactically for the upcoming battles.

In general, difficult times were coming for workers' and peasants' power in the Lower Volga region. The counter-revolutionary command had finally worked out and agreed on a plan of action for the destruction of the 4th Army, which was half-encircled. The immediate task set was for the White troops to capture the left bank of the Volga River as soon as possible, because that area – in particular the Novouzensk and Pugachev districts – was a reservoir from which the Reds drew replenishment for their units. The enemy also tried to take Saratov city, the fall of which would open access to the rear of our troops operating at Tsaritsyn, and the opportunity to connect with the White Don Cossacks.

The “*narodniki*” landing at Alekseevka and Merovka continued to successfully develop their offensive and, with the support of the White Volga Flotilla, advanced to Shirokiy Buerak and Balakovo.

The Ural Cossacks also went on the offensive. They were the first to put into practice the plan of action drawn up when, at dawn on 17 August, they opened a hurricane artillery fire on the positions of the 1st Novouzensk and Balashov Regiments, which were at Dem'yas station and Natal'ino, 7 km to the north-east of Dem'yas. Our artillery, knocked out of its positions, was forced to be silent. Then an enemy infantry chain of about 2,000 bayonets appeared from Chalykla station, covered on the flanks by cavalry. One column of cavalry, about 1,000 sabres, moved to bypass Natal'ino, while the second column, about 2,000 sabres, moved to the rear of Dem'yas station, heading in the direction to Altata station.

A battalion of the Penza regiment, which was in Natal'ino, concerned by the cavalry's flank move, quickly retreated to the water pump of Dem'yas station under the enemy's fire. The Cossack infantry attacked the Penza regiment from the front, and the cavalry made a mounted attack from the south on the chains of the Novouzensk regiment. The cavalry attack was repulsed by our fire. Lacking support from the artillery, by the end of the day our soldiers had used up their ammunition and were unable to hold back the Cossack onslaught. The commander of the Ural Division, Comrade Shtrombakh, decided to withdraw the regiments to the fortified area of Altata station and Dergachi and reported the withdrawal to HQ-4. In response he received a telegram:

I insist, whether your position is convenient or inconvenient for defence, that you defend it at all costs. Your division's task is to protect the flanks of the Novouzensk and Samara Divisions. Therefore the last position of retreat is the railway bridge at Dem'yas station, and a position can be chosen behind that bridge.

Rzhevskiy. Zorin.

The regiments remained where they were and continued to fight. As darkness fell the Cossacks threatened to completely encircle the positions we had taken. *NachDiv-Ural* sent a second report to HQ-4, reporting on the critical situation of his regiments. In reply he received a message saying that the Kurilovka Regiment was being sent to help, and ordered him to hold his ground at all costs until it arrived. Fighting continued all night as the soldiers waited for the relief, but were not prepared to hold until the arrival of the Kurilovka Regiment and retreated to Altata station, where they arrived on the morning of 18 August. The units occupied the previously dug trenches, surrounded by wire fences, and prepared for their defence. The Cossacks relentlessly attacked on foot and on horseback for the whole day, without success. By this time the garrison of the fortified area was reinforced by the Kurilovka Regiment, arriving from Dergachi.

On the same day a Muslim battalion and two squadrons of the Saratov Regiment with four guns engaged a Cossack cavalry regiment near Vergazovka. The enemy was well beaten in a short but



especially fierce battle. The battalion, formed entirely of Muslims from Vergazovka, fought heroically. They stormed the village, and the Cossacks were mercilessly destroyed – paying a bloody price for the inhuman abuse of the Muslim families and for the destruction of their farms.

On the next day, 19 August, the Cossack offensive was suspended, and only their pickets surrounded Dergachi from three sides, firing sporadically at our trenches. The Kurilovka Regiment was ordered to march from Dergachi, and the Novorepnoe Battalion was sent from Osinov Gai, with the task of occupying Altata village, 15 kilometres south of Altata station. After a brief battle the village was occupied. A few hours later the Cossacks suddenly attacked our location, but were repulsed. They retreated in the direction of Safarovka, which is eight kilometres to the north-east of Vergazovka.

Many times during both 20 and 21 August the enemy tried to go on the offensive against the Ural Division, but had no success.

In the Novouzensk Division's sector, the Cossacks conducted intensive reconnaissance until 20 August. On the morning of the next day, united in a group under the command of Colonel Borodin, a force of 3,000 mounted and foot soldiers marched from the Nikolaevka – Aleksandrov-Gai area. Under cover of their artillery they attacked Novouzensk, the defence of which was led by Sapozhkov. During the seven hours the battle lasted, the Cossacks launched multiple attacks, both foot and mounted, which were repulsed by our fire and bayonets. By evening the enemy was broken and we pursued them for 18 km, fleeing to the south-east. The Cossacks left 400 corpses on the battlefield, plus a mass of rifles, cartridges and two machine guns. Losses on our side were three killed and 16 wounded.³³

A captured Cossack said that they were ordered to take Novouzensk at any cost. However, despite the favourable conditions for the Ural Host, during the decisive offensive it not only failed to get into the 4th Army's rear at Urbakh station and cut off the way of retreat, but also to force our regiments to retreat from their positions. The persistence and heroism of the Novouzensk peasants and Saratov workers shattered the Cossacks' bravery and strategy. This was mainly due to the firm conviction of the Novouzensk peasants that if they surrendered the territory where their families and farms were located, they would face complete extermination and defeat.

Simultaneously with the Cossacks, the Czechoslovaks and units of the "People's Army" went on the offensive. The Czechs, having come from the Chernavka – Ivanteevka area, moved towards B. Tapolzhanka. The "People's Army", located in the Dukhovnitskoe area, split up into two groups – of which one group of 2,000 bayonets marched down the Volga River to Balakovo, while the other group of about 3,000 bayonets moved towards the villages of Lipovka and Livenkaka, heading towards Pugachev.

The Pugachev and 3rd Rifle Regiments retreated under the enemy onslaught: the first to the left bank of the Irgiz River at Porubezhka, the second to B. Tapolzhanka. Meanwhile, the "People's Army" units pushed the Balakovo Regiment out of Lipovka and forced it to hastily withdraw to Nikolaevka. This retreat left the 4th Rifle Regiment as if in the rear of the enemy, and it retreated to Seleznikha by forced march on the night of 20 August.

On 19 August the enemy continued to advance. The Czechs engaged the 3rd Rifle Regiment which, having positioned itself two to three kilometres north of B. Tapolzhanka, repulsed frontal attacks by the enemy for many hours. Then, due to the appearance of an outflanking Czech column, of about 1,000 bayonets, moving to the east from the direction of Gusikha, and a detachment, of about 500

³³ The official losses on our side in the report is undoubtedly understated.



bayonets, which came from the west into the rear of our position, the regiment's commander, Comrade Mikhalev, was forced to give the order to retreat south to M. Tavolzhanka.

The soldiers, holding back the enemy, waited for support from the Pugachev Regiment, but the latter could not help, because from early morning it had been engaged in a hard fight with the Czechs for the bridge over the Irgiz River near Porubezhka. Late at night, having taken heavy losses in killed and wounded, the 3rd Rifle Regiment arrived in M. Tavolzhanka.

Under the pressure of superior forces of the "People's Army", the 4th and Balashov Regiments withdrew to the neighbourhood of Krasnaya Rechka, drawing level with the units of the Volga group fighting at Shirokiy Buerak and near Natal'ino.

In the evening of the 19th a delegate, Comrade Rybakov, arrived at the Razin Regiment and gave a verbal order from the Pugachev District Committee and *NachDiv* Zakharov that the regiment was not to lose a single minute in marching to Pugachev, as it was threatened by the Czechs. The *Razintsy* set out immediately and at dawn on 20 August arrived in Rakhmanovka.

The Czechs, continuing to pursue hard on the heels of the 3rd Regiment, approached M. Tavolzhanka. The commanders and men of the regiment, as a result of the defeats suffered, had low morale. They opened rifle and machine-gun fire when the enemy chains appeared at long range. The Czechs moved forward silently, without opening rifle fire, under the cover of their artillery. This played on the psyche of the soldiers and when the Czechs were 1 500 metres out, the regiment left M. Tavolzhanka and retreated to Puzanovka. Here the soldiers were met by *NachDiv* Zakharov, who ordered the regiment to take a position on the northern outskirts of the village and defend the approaches to Pugachev to the last man.

The Czechs did not stop and at 11:00 a bayonet attack pushed out our regiment. The soldiers could not take the shock of the blow and, having had almost all the command staff killed, rushed in panic to escape to Pugachev which they passed through. They were stopped with great difficulty in the area of Kamenka and Belinka.

An hour later the Czechs took Pugachev without opposition and were enthusiastically welcomed by the bourgeoisie, who greeted the victors with bouquets of flowers. Immediately their counter-intelligence began its work. White terror reigned in the city and Communists, and all those who sympathised with Soviet power, were shot.

When HQ-4 learnt of the fall of Pugachev, an order was sent by telegram, signed by Commander Rzhnevskiy, to the Balakovo *RMS* to be passed on to the 4th Rifle Regiment, whose exact location was not known to the Staff. The regiment was ordered to move immediately to the rear of the enemy who had broken through at Pugachev, and the Balakovo Regiment was warned that it was not covered by our units from Uspenka and Seleznikha. But the telegram was received too late, and the regiment could not fulfil the task in time.

Comrade Chapaev arrived in Porubezhka, where the Pugachev Regiment was fighting with the advancing Czechoslovaks. He ordered the regiment to go on the counter-offensive and throw the enemy from the right bank of the Irgiz River to B. Tavolzhanka, securing the bridge over the Irgiz River once and for all. In the morning of 20 August the commander of the Razin Regiment received an order from Chapaev to move immediately from Rakhmanovka to Gusikha, in the rear of the advancing Czechs – who had left a side detachment with heavy artillery in B. Tavolzhanka, covering their movement towards Pugachev. The order further stated that he himself, at the head of the Pugachev Regiment, was moving out of Porubezhka and along the right bank of the Irgiz and would demonstrate until the Razin Regiment made its march into the rear of the enemy. Having received the order, the regiment set out.



An hour later the regiment's column was overtaken by *NachDiv* Zakharov. He reported that Balakovo was occupied by the "People's Army" and that the Czechs had probably already captured Pugachev. He ordered the Pugachev Regiment to move from Porubezhka along the left bank of the Irgiz through Davydovka to Pugachev, coming to the aid of the 3rd Regiment. Comrade Surov's Cavalry Regiment, located in Klopikha, would also be ordered to move to Pugachev. The Razin Regiment was ordered to change direction and follow the Pugachev Regiment. The regiment commander turned the column onto a direct road to Porubezhka, but then a messenger arrived from Chapaev with an order directing that commander Zakharov's order not be executed, and that the previous task sent was to be completed, i.e. a march through Gusikha to the rear of the Czechs in B. Tavoľzhanka. In the order Chapaev reported that the Czechs had captured Pugachev and occupied the stone dam. As their bank dominated our left bank, taking the Czechs by a frontal assault would hardly be possible, and therefore the *NachDiv's* plan was not helpful.

No-one objected to Comrade Chapaev's arguments, and the regiment moved to Gusikha. The enemy did not blow up the bridge over the Irgiz, and the regiment moved to the right bank. A Czech cavalry platoon occupying Gusikha was removed by fire. The *Razintsy* left any material not required for the battle (wagons, duffle bags etc) in the village and, thus lightened, moved on. To reduce the length of the marching column and increase the march speed, the regiment divided into three battalion columns and moved stealthily along the gullies and ravines.

At this time Chapaev was occupying the Czechs with the Pugachev Regiment, who were concentrating all their attention on him. The Razintsy completed their manoeuvre, arriving from the north to the rear of B. Tavoľzhanki, some two kilometres from a Czech heavy battery firing on the Pugachev Regiment. The soldiers scattered into a chain. The *KomPolka* decided to take advantage of the opportune moment and ordered his battery commander, Comrade Rapetskiy to open rapid fire on the enemy battery. The guns moved forward at a full gallop, unlimbered and opened direct fire with cartridge on the Czech guns.

Surprise leads to terror, panic and flight, and so it was here. The crew rushed for their covering unit. The 150 sabres of our cavalry squadron launched a mounted charge with a cry of "ura!". The covering unit did not have time to prepare for battle and were cut down alongside the gun crew. Not a single Czech escaped: the *Razintsy* did not take prisoners. The enemy's battery of two heavy field guns and two light was captured fully operational.

Groups of horsemen raced into B. Tavoľzhanka, where there was a Czechoslovak wagon convoy, causing indescribable panic.

The enthusiasm of our soldiers knew no bounds, and from a distance of almost two kilometres they ran with a shout of "ura!" – without any commands – to bayonet the Czechs who were fighting the Pugachev Regiment. As they rushed forward, they cried tears of joy.

The Czechs, dazed and terrified, did not expect such an onslaught from the Reds and whole companies surrendered, throwing down their weapons. There was no mercy for the enemy – the prisoners were stabbed with bayonets. The Czechs were paying with their lives for coming to Russia to restore the old order.

When the Razin Regiment's battery made its first volley, Comrade Chapaev went onto the attack with the Pugachev Regiment. The Czechs flinched from the blow and began to withdraw hastily to B. Tavoľzhanka. Their line of retreat was cut off by the Razin Regiment and, squeezed from two sides, the enemy was destroyed.

Our regiments occupied the village. Evening was coming. The crimson rays of the setting sun illuminated the battlefield, covered with the corpses of Czechoslovak soldiers.



As a result of the battle, in addition to the captured battery, 60 machine guns, a large number of rifles and wagons with ammunition were taken. Our losses were 75 killed and wounded in the Pugachev Regiment, and five men killed and wounded in the Razin Regiment.

The Russian carters who made up the enemy's transport were severely punished. Explanations that they had been forced by the enemy were not taken into account: angry soldiers shot some of them, and others were subjected to punishments.

In spite of the advancing night, Chapaev ordered a further move towards Pugachev. The regiments reached Puzanovka late at night. Pugachev was still ten kilometres away. However, the total darkness and isolated shooting, from near us and somewhere in the distance, forced the march to be halted until dawn. This decision was made by the regimental commanders, who were worried that a possible night battle might panic their units, and the goal – the capture of Pugachev – would not be achieved.

It took a long time to persuade Chapaev to agree with this decision. He grumbled, disagreed and finally gave in to the insistent demands of the commanders, taking their word that Pugachev would be taken at sunrise on 21 August.

The regiments moved to take up their positions. The *Pugachevtsy* turned left from the road and went along the ravine towards the Irgiz River (a kilometre south of Puzanovka). The *Razintsy* turned right and went along the same ravine. The regimental chains stopped on the other side of the ravine, having turned to face south, except the right flank of the Razin Regiment with the 3rd Battalion facing west. The artillery of both regiments positioned themselves in the ravine close to the road. The soldiers immediately fell asleep as soon as they stopped, and it was hard work for the commanders to wake up the tired men. No observation post was set up northwards towards B. Tavoizhanka, as it was thought that there was no danger from there, and also no one had thought to break the telegraph lines from Pugachev to Samara.

At 02:00 some unknown carts with armed men came down the road from Pugachev. There were about 70 of them, with white armbands on their sleeves. Our picket stopped them. A password was requested. A man in civilian clothes, but with gold epaulettes on his shoulders answered: "we, brothers, are on your side". The outpost realised what kind of "brothers" they were and immediately reported to their commander, Comrade Paponov.³⁴ The latter, together with a company of watch guards from Comrade Bubenets, quickly and stealthily surrounded the wagons from all sides, and without a single shot the unsuspecting White Guards were killed, with the exception of one surviving officer. The prisoner said that the officers travelling were former officers "mobilised" by the Czechs in Pugachev and sent by them to Samara to be at the disposal of the "People's Army".

No more than an hour passed, and the talk about the incident had not yet had time to die down, when suddenly more carts appeared from the north on the road to Pugachev. The first ones approached our guards and were stopped at a distance of no more than 50 metres from our artillery in the ravine. The company commander, Comrade Bubenets, and the head of the foot scouts, Comrade Paponov, approached the lead cart.

From there they heard the sounds of a half-asleep voice, reporting in broken Russian that its owner was a colonel of the Czech army, moving with the regiment entrusted to him to the aid of Pugachev. Bubenets stood up, clicked his heels, and saluted. He greeted the colonel this way and informed him that he would now report the arrival of the "allies" to his colonel, the commander of the volunteer detachment.

³⁴ Paponov was seriously wounded on 1 September 1918. He currently lives in Krasnaya Rechka, Pugachev district, and is engaged in agriculture.



A minute later Paponov appeared at the Razin Regiment battery, where the regimental commander and some members of the command staff were located, and reported the arrival of the Czechs. No one believed him, thinking it a joke. Only when the angry Paponov demanded immediate orders and asked them to pity Bubenets, who was struggling to chat with the Czech colonel, did the commanders stand up and leave the ravine.

In the darkness the lights of burning cigarettes flickered in the vast distance, showing the length of the Czech regiment's column. The enemy soldiers could be heard talking, evidently trying to find out the reason for the sudden night halt. The picture was startling. The commanders were a little confused and fell silent, amazed at what they saw. At last, the order was given to Paponov to go to Bubents and tell him to use all his skill and continue to talk to the colonel until a revolver shot was fired, which would be the signal for a bayonet attack.

An orderly, *KomVzvod* Kiselev, was immediately sent to the commander of the Pugachev Regiment and Chapaev to report on what was happening. Comrade Rapetskiy was ordered to point the guns at the Czechoslovak Regiment. Two battalions (1st and 3rd) were ordered to silently approach to within 100-200 metres of the Czech wagons and face eastwards. The cavalry squadron was ordered to go to the enemy's rear and, as soon as any movement was noticed with the wagons, to fire a revolver and charge on horseback.

Twenty or thirty minutes of agonising waiting passed while the battalions formed and took up their indicated positions. A messenger arrived from Bubents, who said that there was no longer any way he could keep talking to the colonel, as the Czech was getting nervous, as if figuring out what was going on.

It was impossible to delay. *KomPolka* Verkhe went to check on the positions of the chains. During the inspection it turned out that many of the soldiers in their drowsy state were facing west, with their backs to the enemy. I took quite a few minutes to explain to the soldiers in which direction they should face. At that moment a messenger arrived from Chapaev, who said not to attack before Chapaev's arrival. But time was running out, a revolver shot rang out in the darkness, and we could see that the Czechs, probably having guessed what was the problem, were moving out with their wagons.

The battalions fired several volleys. Shouting was heard from the Czech soldiers. The cavalry squadron charged; the soldiers charged with their bayonets. Everyone was mixed up: Czechs and Russian carters were stabbed. The Czechs, in mangled Russian, shouted that they were social-democrats, internationalists and so on. The soldiers, paying no attention to this, mercilessly destroyed the apparent "revolutionaries".

It began to get light. In the dim of early morning the battlefield was visible. The narrow space stretching along the road was covered with the corpses of Czechs, carters and horses.

It took three days for the peasants of Puzanovka to bury the corpses, which were beginning to decompose.

The Czechs left on the battlefield rifles, boxes of cartridges, grenades and 40 machine guns. So the Chapaev brigade now had at its disposal 100 machine guns, which served as its reserve until the end of the civil war.

Losses on our side were 60 men killed and wounded. The losses were accidental and occurred mainly because when the *Razintsy* fired their volleys the bullets that missed the Czechs hit the approaching Pugachev Regiment. The *Pugachevtsy* mistook the volleys for enemy firing and their return fire took out 30 men in the Razin Regiment. *KomBrig* Chapaev, satisfied with the victory, still scolded the regiments' commanders and did not agree with their arguments about the accidental casualties.



The regiments moved to Pugachev at sunrise under cover of artillery fire. The *Razintsy* marched to the right of the main road, the *Pugachevtsy* to the left. By 08:00 the chains of both regiments reached the northern outskirts of the town. The remnants of the Czechoslovaks and White Guards did not oppose them and dispersed to the north-west. At this time a battery of the 3rd Regiment and an armored train conducted heavy artillery fire on the city from the Belinka area, as a result of which 50 men were killed and wounded as the chains of the Chapaev brigade entered the town.

A Czech aeroplane flew over the city, dropping leaflets from the Samara KOMUCH, which called on peasants and Red Army soldiers to lay down their arms and stop the fratricidal war with the "People's Army".

With the departure of the enemy we saw shot Communists and Red Army soldiers lying in the streets. The angry *Chapaevtsy* independently, on their own accord, retaliated on the local bourgeoisie.

A third enemy group occupying Pugachev managed to escape from the Chapaev brigade. On the night of 21 August, having learnt of the defeat of their regiments at Puzanovka and B. Tavorzhanka, the Czechs cleared the town with their main forces, leaving a small unit and a detachment of White Guards. They passed by the 4th Rifle Regiment in Krasnaya Rechka undetected and retreated through Seleznikha safely towards Bogorodskoe. With the defeat of the Czechs, the units of the "People's Army" left the Balakovo area and retreated up the Volga to Khvalynsk.

In the battles around Pugachev, Comrade Chapaev's will and energy once again shone brightly. He did not throw the regiments on the left bank of the Irgiz into a frontal attack on the Czechs occupying Pugachev, contrary to *NachDiv* Zakharov's orders, and decided instead to move to the right bank to strike from the north into the rear of the invading enemy. This decision was crowned with complete success. Chapaev's victory not only saved Pugachev, but also gained back the Balakovo district.

After these battles there was a lull until 25 August. Both sides settled down for rest and reorganisation, which was particularly necessary for us.

Struggle for the Initiative

Due to defeats at Pugachev and Novouzensk, the enemy lost the initiative but we did not gain it entirely. With the end of our counter-offensive, the chances of both sides equalised operationally and politically.

By this time the *kulaks* had fully revealed their nature. The active ones, who had not made peace with Soviet power, had joined the ranks of the "People's Army". The passive ones were intimidated and did not dare revolt in the rear.

We did not learn from the mistakes made in the past battles and operations: we continued to fight with independent units in different directions as before.

It was different with the enemy. The counter-revolutionary commanders learned from their errors and corrected them. They concentrated the main forces of the "People's Army" and the Czechoslovaks on the Pugachev – Vol'sk line and thus reduced the length of its front by almost half in preparation for the coming actions.

The enemy plan's general outline was: the Ural Cossacks would strike from the Ozinki station area through Vyazovka to Rukopol' and then on to Pugachev; they would be assisted by the Czechs from the north; and the *narodniki* would attack from Vol'sk towards Saratov. The Ural Cossacks probably played an important role in this decision, as they were convinced by the experience of their previous battles that they were unable to take fortified points, such as Novouzensk, Altata, etc.,



which were well-provided for technically. Therefore, the Cossacks were attacking in the direction where there we had no such defences, and could expect to successfully achieve their goals – the capture of the Pugachev and Novouzensk districts.

On 21 August the commander of Novouzensk received an order signed by the acting *KomandArm-4*, Comrade Khvesin, and a member of the RMS, Comrade Zorin, which ordered:

Without any delay or unnecessary excuses immediately proceed to start active operations towards Aleksandrov Gai and Nikolaevka, which must be taken at all costs. We expect completion in three days. Report on progress every two hours.

The Ural Division also received the same orders to move to attack in its area. However, none of the attempts by the Novouzensk and Ural divisions to “start active operations” gave any positive results, and the units did not advance a single metre forward. This forced the Army command to send another categorical order to start active operations. Despite the second order, the divisions in question remained where they were. Their offensive actions ended in failure from the very beginning, and the divisions did not move forward from the Novouzensk – Altata line.

For a whole month, i.e. until 20 September, there was a lull in the area, occasionally interrupted by small skirmishes between reconnaissance parties.

The *NachDiv-Novouzensk*, Comrade Linde, was replaced by *NachDiv-Ural*, Comrade Shtrombakh. Strombach, was replaced in turn by Comrade Sych.

Thanks to our inaction the initiative returned to the enemy and it took a lot of time, labour and blood to get it back.

As for the 1st Samara Division, its regiments on 24 August were positioned: the Krasny Kut Regiment in Klopikha; the Balashov Regiment in Pugachev, doing garrison service; the Pugachev Regiment in M. Tavoizhanka; the Razin Regiment in Pusanovka and the Spassko-Preobrazhensky monastery (12-18 km east of Pugachev); the 4th Rifle Regiment occupied Nadezhdino (25 km east of Pugachev); the 3rd Rifle Regiment in Pestromskiy and Krapotovskiy (8-10 km south of Nadezhdino); and the Balakovo Regiment in Ozenki.

With the movement of the Czechoslovak and “People’s Army” units down the Volga to Shirokiy Buerak and Balakovo, the Samara Division moved to active operations in that area.

Having set out on the 25th from Ozenki, the Balakovo Regiment occupied Nikolaevka (25 km north of Balakovo) and engaged the enemy. The 3rd and 4th Regiments prepared to help. However the enemy was warned of their march, and on the morning of the 26th the Czechs, about 1,000 bayonets with four guns, attacked the 4th Rifle Regiment and after a three-hour battle occupied Nadezhdino.

The regiment retreated towards the location of the 3rd Rifle Regiment and, joining it in Petrovskoe, launched a combined counter-attack. The Czechs could not withstand the attack and retreated to Podshibalovka (12 km from Nadezhdino). The 3rd Regiment was left to pursue them, and the 4th Regiment marched through Ozenki to Goryainovka. With that movement by the 4th Regiment the enemy stopped fighting the Balakovo Regiment and withdrew to Goryainovka.

Meanwhile the Pugachev Regiment occupied B. Tavoizhanka, having pushed a Czechoslovak detachment of 800 men from it, which retreated to Ivanteevka.

The Krasny Kut Regiment occupied Lyubitskoe without opposition and conducted reconnaissance towards Zhestyanka and Vyazovka.

The *Razintsy* and Surov’s cavalry regiment first occupied Gusikha and then Rakhmanovka. The two Cossack *sotnias* which were there withdrew north to Gorelyi-Gai.



Reconnaissance by the Krasny Kut regiment established that 800 Cossack sabres occupied Vyazovka and Semenikha. Reporting this to HQ, the commander stated that his regiment could not attack as it had a lot of dysentery. The Balashov Regiment came from Pugachev to replace the sick soldiers. With its arrival at Klopikha the “sick” became healthy and the two regiments went on the offensive together on the 28th. After some slight resistance the Cossacks left Vyazovka and Semenikha. The *Balashovtsy* settled down in Vyazovka, the *Krasnokuttsy* in Semenikha.

On 30 August the enemy took back those two villages. Having divided its forces, of about 2,000 sabres and bayonets, he attacked the Balashov Regiment with part, pursuing it as far as Klopikha, and with the rest it moved on the Krasny Kut Regiment, which retreated to Rodniki without fighting, and then on to Pugachev.

This movement by the Cossacks threatened the Samara Division’s rear and an interruption to the Pugachev – Saratov railway line. The *nachdiv* ordered Comrade Chapaev to take a battalion each from the Pugachev and Razin Regiments and move out to eliminate the threats. The battalions, with two attached squadrons of cavalry, formed as if a separate detachment under the direct command of Chapaev. It arrived on the 31st at Rukopol', where the battered Balashov and Krasny Kut Regiments had withdrawn by then.

In the morning of 1 September Chapaev ordered an attack. At the appointed hour the regiments formed up on the road to Semenikha. After going round the ranks and explaining to the commanders the upcoming tasks, Comrade Chapaev ordered them to move. Soon the first shots were heard from around our advanced detachment. In response, gun volleys and machine-gun fire rang out. A fight ensued. The main forces deployed into combat order, and the units went in the instructed directions and opened fire on the enemy. On the left flank was a group made up of the Razin battalion, two squadrons and several Maxim machine guns, with the task of repelling any sudden attacks by the enemy cavalry and preventing it from breaking through to the rear of the advancing units.

The Cossack infantry positioned itself on the north-western outskirts of Semenikha, having on its right flank about 15 mounted *sotnias*, hoping by fire and stubborn defence to repel our attack. But inspired by Chapaev’s presence in the most dangerous places, our soldiers crept closer and closer to the trenches for a bayonet strike. Eventually some groups broke into the trenches. The enemy wavered and began to retreat to Zhestyanka. At this moment its cavalry appeared, rushing to attack our left flank. The attack was repulsed, and the cavalry took heavy losses and hid in the Vyazovka area. Chapaev left the Krasny Kut Regiment in Semenikha, and by the evening had occupied Vyazovka.

After fighting with the Balakovo and 4th Rifle Regiments, the enemy (Czechs and *Narodniki*) settled on the left bank of the Volga River, occupying Maly and Bol'shoi Krasny Yar, Dmitrievka, Dukhovnitskoe and to the east Goryainovka and Lipovka. Our units, occupying Nikolaevka, Ozenki and Lipovka, scouted towards the enemy and made an urgent “field” mobilisation, which increased the number of bayonets in the regiments to 3,000. From the 28th the Balakovo Regiment attacked from Nikolaevka to Goryainovka, the 4th from Ozenki towards Livenka – Lipovka, and the 3rd kept contact with the Czechs in the vicinity of Seleznihi. As a result, those villages were taken; the enemy retreated to Dmitrievka and Dukhovnitskoe. The *Balakovtsy* remained in Goryainovka, and the 4th Regiment, moving behind the enemy, captured Dukhovnitskoe. The regiment’s battery opened fire on Khvalynsk and the steamships carrying the retreating units to the right bank of the Volga River. Fire broke out in the town, and two of the eight ships were hit, as a result of which they reached the other bank with great difficulty.

The successful offensive apparently served as the basis for the receipt of a directive from the Commander-in-Chief, Comrade Vatsetis:



Khvalynsk is an important access point to the Syzran – Samara front. It must be taken. I entrust the overall leadership of the attack to Commander Rzhevskiy, to whom I subordinate the Volga Group of the 1st Army, the Volga Armed Flotilla and all units in the area of Khvalynsk.

In undertaking the directive, Rzhevskiy ordered Comrade Abroskin's Vol'sk group to attack from the south-east through Apalikha, Novo Apalikha and Novo Yablonka to Khvalynsk. Meanwhile the Volga Flotilla was to occupy the Dukhovnitskoe pier and ferry the 4th Regiment to Vedenyapin island, in order to cut off the enemy's retreat path to the north.

The 1st Army's Volga group had the task of leading the attack on Khvalynsk from the west. On 4 September it occupied Dubovyi Gai, Ustanovka and Akatnaya Maza, located 30 km from Khvalynsk. Having reached the Apalikha – Alekseevka line it met stubborn enemy resistance and stopped. The flotilla covering the right flank of the group also halted. The enemy went on the counter-offensive and broke through the front near Apalikha. Our Vol'sk Group began to retreat to Shirokiy Buerak and Vol'sk. This caused the retreat of the 4th Regiment to Lipovka and the 1st Army's Volga Group to the west of Khvalynsk behind the Tereshka River.

The failure was attributed to the inaction of the Vol'sk Group and its command staff. The group commander, Comrade Abroskin, was replaced by *KomBrig* of the 2nd Samara Division, Comrade Gavrilov, and some of the command staff were arrested.

The retreating units, pursued by the enemy – the “People's Army” – rolled down the Volga to Berezniki and Baronsk. The “People's Army” captured Prychernevskaya, Vol'sk and Voskresenskoe, and its advanced units were 70 km from Saratov.

With the advance of the “People's Army” towards Vol'sk, the Czechoslovaks, having concentrated 1,500 bayonets with four heavy guns in Ivanovka and 1,000 bayonets with four light guns in Ivanteevka, attacked the Razin Regiment in Gusikha and the Pugachev Regiment in B. Tavolzhanka.

On the night of 1 September the Czechs approached the trenches of the Razin Regiment without firing. The *KomPolka* ordered his men not to open fire until the Czechs attacked with bayonets. He made this decision on the assumption that close range firing at the attackers would force the men to hold firmly in their trenches, and then a counterattack it would make it easier and quicker to destroy the enemy. The decision resulted in a bloody defeat. The regiment, 3,000 men, had no more than 500 veteran fighters in its ranks – the rest were a result of the “field” mobilisation, and among them were a considerable of *kulaks*. On approaching the trenches the Czechs charged with bayonets. Instead of a clear rifle volley by our side there was indiscriminate shooting. It was the mobilised *kulaks* who opened fire, pointing their rifles not at the enemy, but at their commanders. As a result, most of the company and platoons commanders were wounded and some of them were killed, including the battalion commander, Comrade Tanyushkin.

The *kulaks*, with white handkerchiefs on their bayonets, went over in groups to the Czechs. The *KomPolka*, seeing the hopeless situation, ordered the battery to move to the left bank of the Irgiz River and he himself, at the head of the scouts, attacked. A volley was fired, which seriously wounded the commanders of the battalion and of the infantry scouts. A rumour spread that the commander was killed. Men began to panic.

There was no ford near the battlefield, and some of the soldiers, the battery and the transports rushed to the only bridge across the Irgiz. The bridge collapsed under the excessive load. The fast current of the deep river instantly swallowed up all those who had been on the bridge. The battery was drowned, except for two guns that had been transported to the left bank before the panic started. The soldiers who had not had time to get to the crossing were spectator in the pre-dawn haze to the tragic deaths of the men beside whom not so long ago they fought and marched.



Pressed against the bank of the wide river, the remaining soldiers, finding no other way out, tried to swim across. The Czechoslovaks and renegade *kulaks* shot at the swimming soldiers, and many of them died in the waves of the Irgiz. Only the 3rd Battalion, under the command of Comrade Bubenets, managed to retreat westwards along the right bank of the river to Porubezhka.

In the battle at Gusikha the *Razintsy* suffered considerable losses. There were about 800 men killed, wounded or drowned, and over 700 *kulaks* went over to the enemy's side. When the regiment gathered in Porubezhka there were 1,500 soldiers, only half with rifles. The Czechs captured 20 machine guns and a mass of rifles, suffering only minor losses.

KomPolka Kutyakov received a reprimand for his omission in mobilising the newcomers to the regiment, as number of *kulaks* prevailed over the poor and middling. In addition to that political error, the main tactical error was that the defence of the occupied village was from a poorly fortified position near a deep river with no crossings except for a half-rotted wooden bridge. In addition, the delay in opening fire gave the enemy the opportunity to reach the trenches in good order, without casualties, and attack with bayonets.

Simultaneously with the attack of the Razin Regiment, the Czechs attacked the Pugachev Regiment. Having surrounded the regiment's position from all sides, they opened fire, preparing to attack with bayonets. The Red soldiers were confused, but having received news from somewhere that the *Razintsy* were rushing to their aid, they calmed down and opened fire back. The enemy charged in separate units, apparently following their orders, first from the north, then from the east, and finally from the west. All these strikes were repulsed and the attacks ceased. A fire fight ensued, our fire proving stronger and more accurate than that of the enemy. When the regiment launched a counterattack, the Czechs began to retreat to Ivanteevka. The regiment pursued the retreating enemy, but having learnt about the defeat of the *Razintsy*, stopped advancing and returned to B. Tavoizhanka.

Having received a report of the defeat, Comrade Chapaev immediately set out from Vyazovka with a detachment and arrived in the morning of 3 September at Porubezhka. On the same day, taking with him the remnants of the Razin Regiment, he attacked Gusikha. The Czechs offered little resistance and retreated to Ivanovka. In the battle three of our machine guns were regained, and it was possible to pull the sunken guns out of the Irgiz.

For these battles Comrade Chapaev received a congratulatory telegram from HQ-4:

On behalf of the service, I offer my sincere gratitude for the dashing exploits in your battles. The Samara Division is well known to the violent White bandits. Your brigade has once again proved its valour and zeal in defeating its sworn enemy. The memory of the regiments of this glorious division will live forever in the hearts of true revolutionaries. I know that in the future you will justify the inestimable heroism of the soldiers of your brigade.

Khvesin. Zorin.

After the above battles the units of the Samara Division encamped at the following points: the Krasny Kut Regiment in Vyazovka, the cavalry regiment in Rakhmanovka, the Razin Regiment in Gusikha, the Pugachev Regiment in Ivanteevka, the 3rd Regiment in Podshibalovka, and the 4th Regiment in Livenka.

The offensive of the "People's Army" to the south-west threatened the city of Saratov. Energetic measures were taken for defence by our side, and all armed units located in Saratov were transferred to the Berezniki – Baronsk line. An International Regiment was sent from Petrovsk to Vol'sk. HQ-4 moved from Urbakh station to Pokrovsk. The Balakovo regiments were concentrated



in the area of Balakovo, under the command of *NachDiv* Zakharov, in order to prevent the enemy from landing on the left bank of the Volga.

Comrade Chapaev was placed in temporary command of the Samara Division. Reporting this to the regimental commanders, he took the opportunity to remind them of the importance of maintaining close communication with neighbouring units, the need to support each other when facing the enemy, and attempting to attack the enemy on its flanks.

The Novouzensk Regiment, which was temporarily attached to the Samara Division, was ordered to move out of Altata and occupy Bobrovka, 14 kilometres south-east of Vyazovka. On the way there, the regiment was suddenly attacked by a mounted detachment of Cossacks and was forced to return back to Altata. This attack served as the beginning of an offensive by the Cossacks, Czechoslovaks and *Narodniki* detachments, who had decided to retake the town of Pugachev. The Cossacks advanced from the east to Rukopol', and the Czechs and *Narodniki* from Bogorodskoe through Orlovka to Pugachev.

In completing their missions the Krasny Kut and Balashov Regiments went forward to occupy Lyubitsky and Rakhmanovka. On the way they met Cossacks moving to Zhestyanka, Vyazovka and Karlovka. The Red regiments, shelled and attacked by the enemy, retreated and reunited in Klopikha. The Cossacks pursued and occupied Klopikha. Our regiments withdrew to Rukopol' with heavy losses.

In the meantime the Czechs, with a force of 6,000 and 33 guns, moved on Livenka and, having pushed the 4th Rifle Regiment out of there, positioned themselves on a line from Livenka to Orlovka. The Reds retreated to Ozenki.

Comrade Chapaev decided to fight the Czechs with the 1st Brigade and the cavalry regiment concentrated in the area of Gaevka.

The decision was a response to the defeat inflicted on the Krasny Kut and Balashov Regiments. In addition, the Cossacks threatened to interrupt the Pugachev – Saratov railway line by capturing Pugachev – the rear of the troops concentrated in the area of Gaevka – and therefore a strike was required.

A meeting of all the commanders was arranged for late at night in Podshibalovka. Chapaev reported the plan of the upcoming battle and explained the tasks of their regiments to the commanders. The beginning of the battle was to be announced by a gun salvo from the battery of the 4th Rifle Regiment. That would signal the 4th Regiment to attack Livenka and the Pugachev, Razin and 3rd Regiments to attack Orlovka from the east. Comrade Surov's cavalry regiment was ordered to follow echeloned behind the right flank of the attacking units.

The enemy, had divided his forces into two of 3,000 men each and positioned them in hastily dug trenches without wire which, stretching from Livenka to Orlovka, covered about three kilometres.

Having left Ozenki the 4th Regiment approached Livenka at dawn. At the specified hour the regimental battery fired a volley at the enemy. A minute later a volley came from the eastern side, fired by the regimental batteries at the enemy in Orlovka. The houses in Livenka caught fire as a result. The glow of the fires illuminated the surrounding terrain, and the chains of the 4th Regiment could be seen advancing towards the Czech trenches. The enemy opened rifle and machine gun fire, and its artillery began shelling the regimental battery. Our battery ceased firing, and when its fire stopped the movement of our chains also stopped. The Czechs took advantage of the moment and counter-attacked. The Red soldiers fled towards Ozenki, with the Czechs pursuing. The regiment's battery, in the process of changing position, saw the fleeing soldiers and opened cartridge fire on the enemy, forcing it to stop. The regiment managed to escape total defeat, and having left the battlefield, it settled down in Novozaharkino.



The 3rd Rifle Regiment broke into a gap between the enemy trenches and attacked with two battalions from west to east, and one battalion with a battery from south to north. The Pugachev and Razin Regiments attacked from east to west. Their chains broke into Orlovka. The enemy retreated to the northern outskirts of the village. Most of the soldiers, thinking that the battle was over, went into the peasants' houses in search of bread and the leaders lost some control. In the meantime, the Czechs had sorted themselves out and, under cover of artillery fire, launched a counter-attack.

Our artillery was suppressed by the enemy fire, and the regiments were pushed out of the village. The *Pugachevtsy* and the 3rd Regiment retreated to the south and the rest to the east. Chapaev ordered the cavalry regiment to attack. Seeing the cavalry attacking, the regiments charged with bayonets. The Czechs could not hold and began to withdraw in the direction of Livenki. The Cavalry Regiment captured 250 carts with shells and eleven machine guns.

After sunset the enemy launched an attack. The regiments began to retire, fighting, in good order. When the Czechs had occupied Orlovka, Chapaev ordered a bayonet attack by all the units at the same time. As soon as the leading chains of the Czechs left the village, a loud "ura!" was heard from our side. The Cavalry Regiment attacked the enemy battery, and the soldiers ran towards the village.

The Czechs began to retreat in panic to Lipovka. All our forces were thrown into a pursuit and the enemy did not stop in Lipovka but withdrew to Brykovka.

This battle took the initiative out of the enemy's hands on the left bank of the Volga. The Czechs and *Narodniki* were defeated. From then on the mobilised peasants in the enemy ranks lost faith in the strength and ability of the leaders of the "People's Army".³⁵

The losses on both sides were enormous. The land in front of Orlovka and Livenka and the streets of those villages were strewn with the corpses of Red Army and Czechoslovak soldiers.

The Cossacks, having learnt about their allies' defeat, stopped their attack on Rukopol' and withdrew to the Zhestyanka area.

The enemy operating on the right bank of the Volga River tried a landing on the left bank in the Balakovo area. The Balakovo regiments had gone to Baronsk, leaving Balakovo under the protection of a small detachment of mobilised Communists. On Chapaev's orders the 4th Rifle Regiment moved to Balakovo, and the other regiments, stationed in Livenka, conducted intensified reconnaissance in the direction of the retreating enemy.

Capture of Vol'sk and Khvalynsk

After the enemy's defeat at Orlovka the situation changed in our favour not only on the left, but also on the right bank of the Volga. The enemy moving on Saratov stopped its offensive with the defeat of its neighbours on the left bank and in its actions became noticeably lethargic and uncertain. We succeeded in recapturing Voskresenskoe, where two Saratov detachments, one Moscow detachment, the remnants of the Volga Group and the armed flotilla were concentrated for our upcoming offensive. The International Regiment occupied Sinodskoe. All those units were consolidated into the Volga Rifle Division. Comrade Gavrilov was appointed its leader. The enemy occupied the line: Klyuchi – Shikhany – Pletnevka – Belogrodnya – Vol'sk.

On 1st September the Volga Division went on the offensive at Vol'sk. The Balakovo Regiment, supported by the flotilla, advanced on Belogrodnya, the Saratov and Moscow Regiments (formerly

³⁵ It seems to us that the importance of this battle is greatly exaggerated by the author. Ed.



detachments) advanced through Mikhailovka to Pletnevka. The International Regiment, together with the Bernakovka detachment was advancing to Parshavka – Baranovka with the task of getting behind the rear of the enemy around Vol'sk.

The Balakovo Regiment's offensive was slow as it was operating in very hilly terrain, which it had not done previously. The regiment's battery lagged behind as the regiment approached Belogrodnya. The enemy opened rifle and artillery fire and the soldiers scattered into a chain. There was no line of sight between the companies, which particularly affected further movement. For several hours there was a fire fight. The regiment did not advance, waiting for its battery. Assistance was rendered by the river flotilla, which opened fire on Belogrodnya and the positions occupied by the enemy. Disorder appeared in their rank. Our soldiers were ordered to prepare for an attack. Soon groups of Balakovo metal workers appeared from all the hills and hollows and with a loud "*ura!*" rushed at the trenches with their bayonets. The enemy flinched and left Belogrodnya, retreating to Rybnoye.

The Saratov regiment took Pletnevka after hard fighting. Further movement was halted due to heavy enemy fire from Shikhany. In spite of this the regiment was ordered to advance and relieve the International Regiment, which spent the whole day fighting for possession of Baranovka. With the onset of dusk the *Saratovtsy* took Shikhany. The enemy withdrew in disorder to the area of Klyuchi station.

At night our flotilla broke through to Vol'sk and shelled it. At the same time the White flotilla decided to break through down the Volga. But on approaching Balakovo it was shelled by a battery of the 4th Regiment and returned to Vol'sk.

On 12 September the offensive resumed. The Balakovo Regiment took Rybnoye with a sudden attack, capturing one heavy gun, four machine guns, ten telephones and an ammunition wagon. The enemy retreated to Vol'sk, pursued by the regiment. After a short battle Vol'sk was taken. The defeated enemy withdrew in panic towards Shirokiy Buerak, leaving two heavy and three light guns, a large number of rifles, shells, ammunition and several vehicles. The enemy was also driven back at other points, with the Saratov Regiment occupying Verkhnyaya Chernavka and the International Regiment Nizhnyaya Chernavka.

The next day the Volga Division vigorously pursued the defeated enemy units. The Balakovo Regiment occupied Shirokiy Buerak, the Saratov Regiment took Petropavlovskoe, the International Regiment took Yulovaya Maza. The division continued its attack on Khvalynsk: on 15 September the Saratov and International Regiments occupied Elshanka, which is 15 kilometres north-west of Khvalynsk, and Balakovo Regiment occupied Staraya Yablonka.

NachDiv Gavrilov received a telegram from HQ-1, which reported that units of the Penza Division had attacked from Konodei, which is 25 km east of Kuznetsk, south-east towards Pavlovka.³⁶ He was asked to get in communication with the Penza Division and coordinate further actions with it.

Meanwhile, the Saratov and International Regiments were ordered to attack Khvalynsk from Elshanka. The enemy did not want to fight and in the morning of 17 September evacuated Khvalynsk.

Later the Volga Division was temporarily transferred to the 1st Army, which started an operation for the possession of Syzran', while the 4th Army pushed for Samara.

It must be recorded that the Volga Division, led by Comrade Gavrilov, advanced 140 kilometres over eight days, with some serious fighting, capturing many trophies and soundly defeated the enemy Khvalynsk Group.

³⁶ Pavlovka is south of Mordovskiy Kanadei, which appears to be the "Konodei" in question.



Chapter V

Battles for Samara

After the battle at Orlovka there was a lull in the Samara Division's sector. The enemy avoided all encounters and left any points as our units approached. So on 16 September we occupied Semenikha, Vyazovka and Lyubitskoe. The 2,000 sabres and bayonets of the enemy withdrew without fighting to the Zhestyanka area.

Intelligence revealed that large forces of Czechoslovaks and *Narodniki* were concentrated in Bogorodskoe, 47 kilometres north of Pugachev. This forced Chapaev to regroup his units and move the Pugachev Regiment to Raevka, the Razin Regiment to Mavrinka, the 3rd and 4th Regiments to Livenka, and the cavalry regiment to Fedorovka. Having learnt about our grouping and thinking that it signalled an offensive, the enemy withdrew during the night of the 18th towards Khvorostyanka.

The commander of the rearranged Army was Comrade Khvesin and his chief of staff was Comrade Mezheninov. They began to energetically carry out an operation for the capture of Samara.

The 4th Army consisted of:

- 1) The Novouzensk Division, with four rifle regiments (Novouzensk, Malouzensk, Kurilovka, and Krasny Kut) and two detachments (Astrakhan and Samara). It had about 7,000 bayonets and sabres and was in the Novouzensk district;
- 2) The Ural Division, with three rifle regiments (1st Novouzensk, Moscow-Saratov, Muslim) and two cavalry regiments (1st and 2nd Saratov). It had about 4,000 bayonets and 1,000 sabres and was in the area of Altata station;
- 3) Comrade Chapaev's newly formed division, with two rifle regiments (Balashov and Penza) and the Garibaldi Horse Regiment (formed from Chapaev's escort). It had about 3,000 bayonets and 1,000 sabres and was in the Semenikha area;
- 4) The 1st Samara Division, with eight rifle regiments and one cavalry regiment. It had about 13,000 men and was in the Pugachev – Livenka – Ivanteevka area.

Thus the total strength of the 4th Army was 28,500 men.

The enemy had about 2,000 bayonets of the "People's Army" in the area of Khvorostyanka; the Czechoslovaks with some *Narodniki* (about 6,000 bayonets) in Nikolaevka-Mar'evka; and the Ural Cossacks on the line Zhestyanka – Ozenki – Aleksandrov-Gai.

In light of this grouping of enemy forces, the 4th Army command appointed the following boundary lines:

- Between the 1st Army and the Samara Division it was the line of the Volga River;
- Between the Samara and Nikolaev Divisions it was the Irgiz River from Varvarovka and further to Vyazovka, Moksha, Mikhailovka, all inclusive for the Samara Division.
- Between the Nikolaev and Ural Divisions it was from the north-west border of Rimskoe-Korsakovo, Smirnov, Karyakin, Popov, Rakhmanovsky, Kuzebayev, all inclusive for Nikolaev division;
- Between the Novouzensk and Ural Divisions it ran Novorepnoe, Vergazovka, Gorodskoye, all inclusive for the Novouzensk division.

In order to achieve the main objective, i.e. to take Samara and to facilitate the rapid advance eastwards, Tukhachevskiy's 1st Revolutionary Army initially concentrated 13,000 soldiers. About 15,000 soldiers were delegated to cover the operation from blows to the right flank and rear of the

Samara Division from the Cossacks, of which 6,000 soldiers were sent to the Samara theatre during the drive on Samara city. The strategic plan was as follows: a rapid strike would take place towards Samara, after which all the Army forces would strike Ural'sk with a combined blow from Buzuluk and Saratov. However, it was January 1919 before this plan could be completed.

Following the instructions of *KomandArm-4*, on 20 September *NachDiv* Zakharov gave an order:

- 1) The 1st Brigade is to move out on 21 September at 04:00 and occupy Nikolaevka. In order to strike the enemy, the Razin Regiment should march along the road from Ivanteevka to Nikolaevka, deploying its front to the right of the road; the Pugachev Regiment should march along the road from Raevka to Bortnovka, deploying its front to the left of the main road from Nikolaevka to Ivanteevka. After occupying Nikolaevka, the Pugachev Regiment is to remain there and the Razin Regiment is to occupy Chernavka.
- 2) The 2nd Brigade is to strike with the 4th Rifle Regiment from Chuviki to Nikolaevka. The 3rd Rifle Regiment to advance and occupy Khvorostyanka. After Nikolaevka is taken, the 4th Regiment is to withdraw and position itself in Ivanteevka.
- 3) The 3rd brigade is to leave the Balakovo Regiment in Dubovoe. The International Regiment is to advance and occupy Khvorostyanka together with the 3rd Regiment, after which the International Regiment to position itself in reserve in Chuviki.
- 4) Comrade Surov's 1st Cavalry Regiment is to occupy Mosty.
- 5) I order all these points to be taken by 14:00 on 21 September.
- 6) Report to me on the progress of the battle every two hours. The occupation of the above-mentioned points is to be reported immediately.
- 7) After occupation of the above-mentioned points I order the Cavalry Regiment to place outposts along the Mokraya-Ovsiyanka River, forward to Pestrovka, and on the sides and to the rear of the division.
- 8) The 1st Brigade is to set out an outpost from the Pugachev Regiment in Novo-Arkhangel'skoe and a mounted detachment in Barskoye (Padovka). The Razin Regiment is to set up an outposts 8 km along the road to Mar'evka, at the crossroads and a mounted detachment towards Mar'ino until it contacts the enemy.
- 9) The 2nd Brigade is to set outposts from the 3rd Regiment to the right at Ivanovka and to the left at Vornovka. Horse patrols should be sent until they contact the enemy.
- 10) The 3rd Brigade is to send outposts from the Balakovo Regiment to Sofia (on the Volga) and Abashino to contact the enemy.

The *nachdiv's* orders were not fully implemented. We relate this document as a sample of the confusion reigning. *NachDiv* Zakharov deprived the brigade and regiment commanders of independent activity with such orders, thinking that he had firm leadership of the troops.

Following their orders the regiments went on the offensive on 21 September. The Cavalry Regiment occupied Mosty, having pushed out a Cossack *sotnia*, which withdrew northwards towards Koltyban.

The advance of the Razin, Pugachev and 4th Regiments to Nikolaevka was not simultaneous. This was because the orders did not take into account the time and distances involved nor, most importantly, the prevailing weather. The roads were ruined by heavy rain, except for the large *trakt* which the Razin Regiment took, so the movement of the other regiments on the bad country roads was very slow. Therefore the Razin Regiment was the first to approach Nikolaevka and engage the



enemy. A firefight ensued, time passed, the other regiments did not arrive. Finally, the Pugachev Regiment sent a report that the enemy was acting against it with small numbers. Due to bad weather it would be late arriving. As a result of this, the commander of the Razin Regiment decided to go on to the defensive and wait for the arrival of the Pugachev Regiment.

The enemy, seeing its superiority, attacked. The Razin Regiment began to withdraw and, having marched to six kilometres south of Nikolaevka village, joined up with the approaching Pugachev Regiment. The withdrawal was halted, and the enemy stopped its attack. On the right flank the enemy had independent columns, directed at the Pugachev Regiment. The latter did not have time to deploy and, attacked by three columns of about 1,500 bayonets, was forced to withdraw to the left flank of the Razin Regiment.

At the same time, the enemy's chain in front of the Razin Regiment, resumed its forward movement. It began to get dark. A report arrived that the 4th Regiment had occupied Ishkovo.

It rained all day, becoming even more intense at nightfall. The soldiers were completely drenched.

KomBrig-1 and the regimental commanders decided not to retreat. At dawn the three regiments were to attack Nikolaevka. The Pugachev Regiment was to go to the left of the 4th Regiment in Ishkovo. Those two regiments were tasked to attack the enemy from the west while the Razin Regiment did so from the south.

At about 08:00 on 22 September the regiments started off. The mood of the soldiers was low, as for a second day they had not eaten anything, had not been able to smoke and were sopping wet from the unceasing rain. The enemy intensified its fire and forced our chains to lie down. After that it went on the counter-attack, directing its blows at the flanks of the Razin and Pugachev Regiments. The swift blow forced the regiments to quickly withdraw to the south, fleeing from total defeat. *KomBrig* Kazarin-Timonin, a recently appointed former officer, had no authority and therefore could not prevent the withdrawal. Exhausted himself by the persistent battle, he silently agreed with the decision of the regiments' commanders to retreat. The Razin Regiment retreated to Ivanteevka, where it spent the night, setting up a reinforced guard. The Pugachev and 4th Regiments retreated to Bartnovka, where they also spent the night, having posted security. The enemy, probably from fatigue and the bad weather, gave up the pursuit, remaining in Nikolaevka. Our losses in the fighting were 300 men killed and wounded.

At 16:00 on 21 September the 3rd Regiment occupied Khvorostyanka unopposed. By this time the International Regiment had occupied Chuviki.

Having learnt about the withdrawal of the regiments from Nikolaevka, *KomandArm-4* gave a directive to *NachDiv* Zakharov, with a copy to Chapaev:

I order that by 08:00 on 23 September we are to complete the task of occupying the Chernavka – Nikolaevka line. On 24 September we are to occupy Trostyanka, Mar'evka and Aleksandrovka. Reconnoitre Pestrovka, Androsovka, Kamyshenny and Studenetskoe villages. In order to capture Nikolaevka as soon as possible, form a reserve in the primary direction, pulling up the International Regiment to Nikolaevka. According to our information, the Volga Division's right flank has reached Mar'ino (on the right bank of the Volga River).

KomandArm Khvesin

However, on 23 September the regiments remained where they were, as the roads were unbearably muddy due to the rain.

On 24 September the following telegram was received from the headquarters of the Eastern Front by *KomandArm-4*:



The operations against Syzran' and Samara have taken too long. The enemy has already managed to pull up some reserves, put his broken detachments into order and gone on the offensive again. And it even managed to squeeze our units in the Simbirsk sector. This sad phenomenon can only be explained by the slow development of our operations. Therefore, the Commander-in-Chief has ordered you to immediately launch a decisive offensive against Syzran' and Samara and in the coming days to seize these cities. After that, vigorously develop your offensive to the east.

Front Chief of Staff, Maygur
RMS Member, Smirnov.

Despite the categorical demands by the Front and Army, *NachDiv* Zakharov was slow in ordering a decisive offensive to the north. This was caused purely by the fact that after the battles the best personnel had left. The soldiers noted that Chapaev, Plyasunkov and others were absent. Provocative rumours appeared, such as “we are being sold out, as we were at Ural'sk”, and the soldiers demanded Chapaev return to them. Of course, all this was not done without the knowledge of Chapaev himself and the command staff, who realised that Chapaev's appointment to a non-existent division by *KomandArm-4* was a purely political appointment.³⁷ These rumours were not refuted by anyone, rather they were supported. As a result, opponents of Soviet power raised their heads, and spread rumours of a purely counter-revolutionary character. It was said that the regiments would not go on the offensive against Samara, etc. In fact, this was not the case when 27 September came.

The division command understood the gravity of the situation and considered it necessary to take urgent measures. They demanded an authoritative commander; meaning the return of Chapaev, who *KomandArm-4* had removed from the brigade and given a “promotion” to *NachDiv* for political reasons.³⁸ The commander of the Pugachev Regiment, Comrade Plyasunkov, was badly wounded and could not return to service in less than two or three months. The commander of the Razin Regiment, Comrade Kutyaikov, was walking on crutches with a broken leg. HQ summoned him for a meeting. *NachDiv* Zakharov and RMS member Semennikov reported on the political state and morale of the 1st Brigade regiments and ordered him to go to the front and take command of the 1st Brigade in the name of the Party. The *KomPolka* agreed, but asked permission not to take command of the brigade until his wound had healed. This was accepted.

On 25 September *KomandArm-4* Khvesin and *NachDiv* Zakharov arrived at the location of the 1st Brigade in Ivanteevka. There the following order was given:

In accordance with the order of the 4th Army commander of 23 September this year regarding the occupation of the Nikolaevka – Mar'evka area and for the final destruction and complete defeat on the enemy, I order:

1) The commander of the Razin Regiment is to march from Ivanteevka at 02:00 on 27 this month along the large dirt road to Nikolaevka, deploying his front to the right of the road, capturing the valley that allows hidden access to Nikolaevka.

³⁷ The author's statement should be attributed only as a characterisation of the mood of the troops and commanders, caused by Comrade Chapaev's transfer. In reality, the 4th Army command gave excessive importance to the Samara operation, and Comrade Chapaev – who had not yet thrown off old habits of *partisanshchina* – was replaced by another commander. Chapaev was appointed commander of the Nikolaevsk Division, which had 3,500 bayonets and sabres. Ed.

³⁸ At that time Chapaev was non-party political and considered himself an anarchist.



- 2) The commander of the Pugachev Regiment is to leave Bortnevka at 04:00 of 27 this month through Kormilka, deploying his front to the right, taking the valley that has hidden access from the main road to Nikolaevka.
- 3) The commander of the 4th Rifle Regiment is to move out of Bortnevka at 04:00 of 27 this month through Ishkovo, striking the enemy from our left flank, turning his front to face the left, enveloping the enemy from the rear.
- 4) The commander of the International Regiment is to march from Chuviki at 02:00 of 27 this month to Nikolaevka, bypassing to the rear of the enemy, deploying his front to the left, in contact with the right flank with the 4th Rifle Regiment.
- 5) The cavalry regiment commander is to march at 02:00 to Nikolaevka, bypassing the right flank of the Razin Regiment, striking at the flank and rear of the enemy, crossing its path of retreat on the main road to Mar'ino.
- 6) The commander of the 3rd Rifle Regiment is to move out of Khvorostyanka, making every effort to capture the enemy's headquarters, for which purpose he is to send a mounted reconnaissance to Mikhailovka beforehand.
- 7) The commander of the Balakovo Regiment is to push the enemy out of Vasilievskoe and occupy it with an post, leaving his main forces in Ozeretskoe.
- 8) The commander of the 1st Saratov Regiment is to move in the very near future through the villages of Tavolzhanka, Raevka and Bogorodskoe and stop at my disposal in Chuviki.
- 9) In order to strike a united blow on the enemy, I order all regiments to start action at 07:00, keeping close contact with their neighbouring units.
- 10) Inform me about the progress of the fighting every hour, at my position in Ivanteevka.
- 11) After the regiments have occupied Nikolaevka – Mar'ino, they are to position themselves at the following points: 1) Pugachev Regiment in Mar'ino, 2) Razin Regiment in Krasnaya Polyana, 3) 3rd Rifle Regiment in Mikhailovka, 4) International Regiment in Nikolaevka, 5) cavalry regiment in Borovskoye and Mikhailovskoe, and 6) the 4th Rifle Regiment is to proceed through Chernavka, Gorelyi Gai, Kamelik, and Rakhmanovka to Karlovka, where it will remain until ordered.
- 12) When the regiments have occupied the above points, they are to set up posts: the Balakovo Regiment in Aleksandrovna and Lipovka, the Pugachev Regiment in Chernenkoye, the Razin Regiment in Kolokoltsovka, the cavalry regiment in Pestravka and Mosty. If the enemy retreats, the cavalry squadrons of the regiments should pursue it, keeping in contact.

This order was not carried out completely. Early in the morning of 26 September the 3rd Regiment was suddenly attacked by the enemy and pushed out of Khvorostyanka. After reordering itself, the regiment went on the offensive. The battle lasted all day. Eventually the enemy was defeated and retreated to the north. Because of the great fatigue, our regiment did not go to Mar'evka and stayed in Khvorostyanka until the 28th.

On 27 September Comrade Surov's cavalry regiment moved without opposition from Mosty to Chernavka.

The next day the Razin Regiment set off from Ivanteevka to Nikolaevka. The Pugachev Regiment also set off. The 4th Regiment and the cavalry were preparing to march. The cavalry regiment was



ordered to reconnoitre the enemy's position in Nikolaevka and report the results to the Razin Regiment.

The Razin and Pugachev Regiments only made three or four kilometres from their start points when the soldiers refused to move further due to the "heavy, muddy road". Delegates from those regiments arrived at the 4th Regiment, and its forward movement also stopped. The commanders insisted on continuing the march, but their orders were not firm enough. The soldiers refused to march. *KomBrig* Kazarin-Timonin reported what had happened to the division HQ, noting that there was nothing he could do about it.

The divisional commissar, Comrade Galaktionov, went to the soldiers. A meeting began, which lasted until 08:00. During this time Comrade Kutyakov, who did not know what was going on, rode up to the regiments. As he entered the village he saw the Razin Regiment in a line, with the soldiers smoking and talking. He was informed of the soldiers' refusal to continue the offensive. Comrade Kutyakov rode off to the regiment staff, called for the commander of the 1st Battalion and ordered him to give a command to stand at attention. That command was carried out sluggishly, or rather, nothing changed.

After that an old soldier, a company commander, a participant of the Ural'sk campaigns, was called to the HQ. Comrade Kutyakov asked him why the company refused to move. The company commander smiled as if in bewilderment, as the reasons for his company, and the regiment, refusing to march were clear to everyone. The whole regiment was attentively watching the scene, and the soldiers were astonished when Comrade Kutyakov started to shout fiercely at the company commander. Then he went to the company and ordered it to move along the road to Nikolaevka. The company set off. The men of another company, at the Kutyakov's command also started to march. Kutyakov himself went along the indicated road. The others did not wait for an order and commenced to march. After them the *Pugachevtsy* also marched; the commander, smiling, reported that the soldiers would be in a great mood up to the town of Samara.³⁹

The road was very heavy-going from the heavy rain. The artillery and wagons moved with great difficulty. About 13:00 the *Razintsy* entered enemy machine-gun range. Having come to within a distance of 800 metres the regiment's chains lay down and replied with machine-gun and rifle fire. Our artillery opened fire and the enemy replied.

The Cavalry Regiment, guarding the right flank of the regiment, was located six kilometres southeast of Nikolaevka. The Pugachev and 4th Regiments approached the battle, coming down from the hills from the direction of Ishkovo. *KomBrig-1* Kazarin-Timonin, being close to the Cavalry Regiment, ordered it to move to the enemy's rear in accordance with the orders above. A copy of that order had been received by the Pugachev Regiment and Comrade Kutyakov, who were on the left flank of the Razin Regiment.

Comrade Kutyakov realised that the moment for a decisive attack had arrived. He rode along the chains in a troika under machine-gun fire, giving the command: "to bayonets".

The Razin Regiment went onto the attack as one. The enemy could not stand and raced to flee into the village. The Cavalry Regiment launched a mounted attack on Nikolaevka from the north at the retreating enemy but was repulsed by fire. The regiment charged several times and delayed any rapid retreat by the enemy. Meanwhile, the 4th Regiment arrived in the rear and cut off the line of retreat. The enemy found itself in a pincer move. It began to retreat, taking heavy losses, to

³⁹ The Red Army archives have the following note from Chief of Staff Androsov to *KomandArm-4*.

According to a report received from the division commissar, Comrade Galaktionov, I inform you that the regiments have moved forward. The former commander of the Razin Regiment, Comrade Kutyakov, influenced the soldiers with his words and authority and made them march.



Mar'evka. We pursued until dark. The cavalry and 4th Regiments occupied Zeleny Khut, which is ten kilometres north of Nikolaevka. The other units settled in Nikolaevka. As a result of the battle the Razin Regiment captured 350 prisoners, nine machine guns and 400 rifles, and the Cavalry Regiment one gun. The enemy's had 800 men killed. Our losses were about 400 men killed and wounded.

On 28 September the *KomandArm* ordered an urgent transfer of the Malouzensk and Krasny Kut Regiments to the Army reserve in the Pugachev area.

On the same date Comrade Zakharov gave the following order:

The Cavalry Regiment is to occupy Mosty by 20:00 on the 28th, having the task of guarding the division's flank. The 4th Regiment is to occupy Borovskoe. The 1st Brigade is to move out of Nikolaevka and occupy Mar'evka. The International Regiment is to occupy Aleksandrovna, having in mind the possibility of a clash with the enemy at Lebyazh'e. The 3rd and Balakovo Regiments are to occupy Myl'naya and to be at the disposal of *KomandArm*-1.

Thus, those last two regiments were to cut the Syzran' to Samara rail line and thus cut off the enemy's retreat to the east. However, they did not fulfil the order due to its late receipt.

Having received the order, the division's units moved out. The cavalry regiment occupied Mosty on 28 September without fighting. The 4th Regiment spent the night in Trostyanka and did not risk to attacking Borovskoe in the dark of the night, as there was an enemy force of about a regiment there. On 28 September the 1st Brigade marched to Mar'evka. Its movement was slow. Still ten kilometres out from the village, we heard firing from our leading detachments on the enemy's scouts. This was followed by firing from all sides. The soldiers fired at their own detachments, taking them for the enemy. Movement came to a standstill. An order was given to resume the offensive in the morning.

The Pugachev Regiment took up a position to the east of the main road, and Razin Regiment to the west. The firing quieted down. About 03:00 on 29 September it began to rain. Then came fog. It later turned out that during the night about 100 men had been killed by their own side.

At 11:00 the Pugachev Regiment attacked the enemy to the right of the road, and Razin to the left, covering its right flank. The enemy occupied a position in a hollow and was visible as if in the palm of the hand. A good fire position presented itself to us. But, despite this, the enemy held firm and only after a bayonet attack did it began to retreat from Mar'evka.

Having retreated for four to six kilometres, the enemy stopped and reorganised itself, taking a position on the heights. Our men, having settled down in the village, began to have breakfast. Meanwhile the enemy attacked and silenced our batteries with artillery fire. The guards gradually withdrew deep into the village. Panic broke out on the left flank of the Razin Regiment, as the enemy's main blow was struck from the direction of Chernen'koe. Because of this, the Razin Regiment went onto the defensive, positioning itself on the northern outskirts of Mar'evka. Meanwhile the *Pugachevtsy* attacked through Krasnaya Polyana to hit the enemy's left flank, which was four kilometres north of Mar'evka. The Razintsy held the enemy, while the *Pugachevtsy* had already moved past its left flank. The enemy sent his reserves, which were probably intended for the Razin Regiment, towards the Pugachev Regiment. The forces of the sides were equal. No one dared to be the first to charge. A fire fight commenced.

About 10:00 on 29 September the 4th Regiment occupied Borovskoe after some light fighting and pursued the retreating enemy to Krasnaya Polyana, which was also taken. The enemy retreated to Androsovka. Hearing the noise of the other fighting, the 4th Regiment's commander sent two battalions and four guns to Chernen'koe and informed the Pugachev Regiment of them. The latter



informed the Razin Regiment. After that an order was given to all the 1st Brigade's chains to prepare for a bayonet attack. After a few minutes the soldiers attacked at the bayonet. The enemy wavered and began to retreat to Androsovka.

Our units did not pursue and positioned themselves with the Razin Regiment in Mar'evka and the *Pugachevtsy* in Krasnaya Polyana, having put out security. Our losses were about 300 men killed and wounded. The enemy lost 200 killed and 75 captured.

The International Regiment occupied Aleksandrovka with minor fighting on 29 September.

On 30 September *NachDiv* Zakharov ordered the offensive to continue. The cavalry regiment occupied Pestravka, and the 4th Regiment occupied Kolokol'tsovka. Two Cossack *sotnias* who were there retreated to Androsovka. The Pugachev and Razin Regiments, having sent forward two mounted scout units, advanced to Androsovka.

At about 16:00 the regiments came under enemy artillery fire. The *Pugachevtsy* deployed to the east of the main road, the *Razintsy* to the west of it. Our batteries opened fire. Sparse enemy chains were spread along the southern outskirts of Androsovka, in a not very favourable position. The enemy artillery occupied a position to the north of the village, and through binoculars we could see trenches dug there and men occupying them. This was not given much importance, believing that we had cover there. The enemy fired rarely but successfully. We had men wounded and killed. Our chains moved slowly, but still managed to get close and charged. The enemy left the village. Darkness fell.

Most of the soldiers, with the cessation of the shooting, dispersed to the huts. Only the 3rd Battalion was ordered to position itself as a guard on the hills to the north of the village, from where it would be easier to defend the village in the case of an attack. A battalion was also sent from the Pugachev Regiment to guard the village, which was to occupy the same hills. As that battalion approached the heights it was met with fire. The Razin Regiment sent a battalion to help the *Pugachevtsy*, but it did not have time to get close before it too was subjected to heavy fire.

It was difficult to make out the surrounding situation in the darkness. The heavy enemy fire almost eliminated the possibility of further movements. Mounted reconnaissance by the Razin Regiment established that there was a Czechoslovak detachment, about 1,500 strong with heavy artillery, in Ivanovka (8 km north-west of Androsovka) which had fired on the left flank of the Razin Regiment when it approached Androsovka.

At dawn on 1 October the enemy attacked the Pugachev Regiment, and the Czechs suddenly attacked the 1st Razin Battalion, located in the west of Androsovka. That battalion opened volley fire. The Czechs' attack was repulsed and they withdrew to the west in disorder.

The other battalions of the Razin Regiment and the Pugachev Regiment left the village during the Czech attack. The remaining battalion had to retreat to its regiment, and was fired on by mistake. Fortunately there were no casualties when the shooting stopped. The retreating regiments took up a position six to eight kilometres south of Androsovka.

The night battle had cost us heavy losses: our counts showed 600 men missing. The soldiers were in a poor mood as a result of the constant strain, fatigue and hunger. They were not energetic and had lost confidence in their strength.

In the morning of 1 October the enemy attacked again, and its chains gradually approached our position. It was necessary to make a decision: either to attack back or to withdraw. *KomBrig* Kazarin-Timonin was in favour of a battle. The commanders did not agree with him and decided to withdraw. Under the cover of rearguard battalions our units began to retreat. The abandoned battalions settled in an excellent rifle position and their fire forced the advancing enemy to suspend its forward movement. The main forces quietly retreated, and by 12:00 the Pugachev



Regiment was in Chernen'koe, and the Razin Regiment in Mar'evka. The enemy remained in Androsovka.

On 1 October the International Regiment took Kamyshtensky Khut without combat and the next day the division's units were preparing to go on the offensive again.

On 2 October *NachDiv* Zakharov gave the following order:

- 1) I order the International Regiment to move southwards out of Pokrovskoe and, going through Tatarikovo, move to the rear of the enemy occupying Ivanovka.
- 2) The Pugachev Regiment is to march north-west from Chernen'koe and by 06:00 is to take an initial position near Androsovka, its left flank touching the main road, and the right flank touching the Razin Regiment.
- 3) The Razin Regiment to march from Mar'ino and by 06:00 take up an initial position near Androsovka. The left flank should be touching the Pugachev Regiment, bending the right flank so as to reach the Chagra River, covering Androsovka from the south-east, and in touch with the 4th Regiment.
- 4) The 4th Regiment is to cross the Chagra River and by 06:00 take up an initial position on the heights north-east of Androsovka. Its left flank should be on the Chagra River and in touch with the Razin Regiment.
- 5) The Saratov Regiment is to be a divisional reserve.
- 6) I order to start the general attack to start at 06:00 on 3 October.

On 3 October the units attacked. Quick strikes took Ekaterinovka and Vasil'evska. An enemy force of 2,000 bayonets and six guns took up a position north of Androsovka and opened fire as our chains approached. The *Razintsy* neared the village, and the 4th Regiment charged. The *Pugachevtsy* moved on Ivanovka, from where the enemy was firing its heavy guns. Unable to withstand our attack, the enemy in front of Androsovka began to withdraw towards Kamennyi Brod, pursued by the 4th Regiment, which by the evening had occupied Koltyban.

The *Razintsy*, seeing that the *Pugachevtsy* could not force the Chagra, moved to their aid. The enemy threw all its forces at the *Razintsy*. Then a Pugachev battalion pushed back the enemy defending the bridge and burst into Ivanovka. The enemy retreated in panic to Bezenchuk.

After the battle our units settled in Ivanovka. We had lost about 150 men, the enemy about 200 men.

Instead of moving to the enemy rear, the International Regiment took another direction. On 3 October a delegation from the rebellious workers of the Ivashchenskovo factory had arrived at the regiment and asked for help, having fought with the factory guards. The regiment moved to their aid and occupied the Ivashchenskovo factory. The workers welcomed the soldiers with joy. The guards of the plant were eliminated and the sites at Maytuga and Sretenka stations were blown up. Two enemy trains moving to Syzran' were wrecked. By evening four trains of Czechs came up from Syzran' who, having left their wagons, decided to make their way to Samara. The International regiment, together with the workers fought the Czechs. Vasil'evka and Bezenchuk station went from one side to the other. By this time detachments of Czechs from Samara also arrived, and the retreating Czechs from Ivanovka struck at the rear of the International Regiment. The latter was forced to retreat through Tatarinov to Ivanovka. Some of the workers retreated with the regiment. The International regiment left all its artillery and machine guns on the battlefield and lost three-quarters of its manpower. The Czechs occupied Ivashchenskovo factory and mercilessly shot a number of workers.



In the night 3/4 October several peasants came to the 1st Brigade in Ivanovka, asking for help, as Cossacks and Czechs were beating and killing peasants in Kamennyi Brod. The brigade immediately set out. The Pugachev Regiment was ordered to occupy Vozdvizhenka, the Razin Regiment Kamennyi Brod. Despite it being night, the fighters moved quickly to save the peasants. The enemy left Kamennyi Brod with the approach of the *Razintsy*, some retreating east to Berezovyi Gai, some to Sretenka. The *Pugachevtsy* occupied Vozdvizhenka without fighting. The peasants met the regiments with bread and salt.

With the defeat of the International regiment, *NachDiv* Zakharov ordered the 4th Regiment to move out of Koltyban' and, joining the Saratov Regiment in Romanovka, move to Sretenka and Bezenchuk. The 3rd Rifle Regiment was ordered to march to Maytuga station. The cavalry regiment was ordered to occupy Mikhailovka and guard the right flank of the division. The reserve Pokrovo Regiment was ordered to move out of Mar'ino, where it would join the International regiment.

The enemy considered the position of the 1st Brigade in Vozdvizhenka and Kamennyi Brod as a threat to the Syzran' – Samara railway line. To deal with this, it decided to make a night march through Sretenka and Gubashevo to attack the flank of that brigade at dawn on 4 October. At about 06:00 the Czechs, 3,000 bayonets and 10 guns, suddenly attacked the sleeping Pugachev Regiment in Vozdvizhenka, destroying the guards that had been quietly sleeping. The soldiers ran in panic to the bridge over the Mocha River on the southern edge of the village. The battery and machine-gun tachankas managed to escape the village. The enemy destroyed the bridge with artillery fire. Some soldiers swam and waded to the left bank of the river. The remained fled along the right bank ran to the location of the Razin Regiment.

The commander of the Razin Regiment sent his 1st battalion with foot scouts to the right bank of the Mocha River, ordering them to move to Vozdvizhenka. This forced the Czechs to stop pursuing the *Pugachevtsy*, who withdrew behind the main road to the east and stopped eight kilometres south of Kamennyi Brod.

The enemy transferred its fire to Kamennyi Brod, and sent a detachment of 2,500 bayonets towards the battalion moving towards Vozdvizhenka. In that spot the right bank is much higher than the left bank, and so the enemy had more favourable conditions. Our battalion continued to move until receiving an order from the regimental commander to halt. The 2nd Battalion was positioned to the west side of Kamennyi Brod, and the men, having occupied the roofs of barns and houses, were ordered to prevent the enemy from entering the village. The commander of a cavalry squadron, occupying Vyazovyi-Gai, and one platoon in Kolyvan', reported that there appeared a regiment of the "People's Army" with about 1,000 bayonets, occupying Kolyvan' and trying to seize the bridge in order to cross at Vyazovyi Gai. We had to send the 3rd Battalion to the squadron.

At the same time the Czechs attacked the 1st Battalion. It began to withdraw to the bridge at Kamennyi Brod. The enemy pursued. By the time the battalion and the foot scouts reached the bridge, they had lost about 200 men killed and wounded.

The critical moment had come. The bridge, covered with straw beforehand, was doused with kerosene and set on fire, but it smoked rather than burning. A platoon of brave men volunteered to destroy the bridge. This was accomplished with the loss of fifteen men killed.

Our fire from the barn and house roofs did not stop the Czechs. The 3rd Battalion, defending the bridge and the northern outskirts of Vyazovyi Gai, asked for support, but it could not be given, as the enemy's pressure increased. Some of their units forded the river and pressed on Kamennyi Brod from the south. The commander of the Pugachev Regiment was emphatically ordered to allocate two battalions for the defence of the south and west of Kamennyi Brod, and a cavalry



squadron and the third battalion was to be sent to Vyazovyi Gai to help the 3rd Battalion of the Razin Regiment.

The order was executed. With the arrival of the *Pugachevtsy* we managed to push the Czechs back from the crossing.

With the onset of darkness the Czechs, under the cover of armoured vehicles and several trucks lined with iron, retreated. After that the regiment of the "People's Army" retreated in the direction of Dubovyy Umet.

In the morning of 5 October the 1st Brigade marched to Voskresenka and Lipyagi station. In Kamennyi Brod 300 young peasants volunteered to join our ranks, so the losses of the previous battle were partially replenished. Nine kilometres north of Kamennyi Brod the brigade was met by enemy fire. The enemy was blocking the road to Voskresenka while covering the movement of a large convoy going to Samara.

The Pugachev Regiment deployed to the west of the road, and Razin to the east. Deployment was slow because the commanders, in view of the roughness of the surrounding terrain and large forests, were afraid of being ambushed. The enemy withdrew gradually. To the left we heard firing. This was the 4th and Saratov Regiments fighting around Sretenka.

As we approached Voskresenka the enemy stopped and opened fire. The soldiers were ordered to charge. The enemy did not stand to meet us and began to retreat. The Pugachev Regiment occupied Lipyagi station and Preobrazhenka. We did not destroy the railway line, and two enemy trains raced by at breakneck speed before the regiment's eyes. The Razin Regiment encamped in Voskresenka.

On 4 October the cavalry regiment took Mikhailovka without fighting. The Saratov regiment took possession of Troitskiy. Enemy counterattacks were repulsed. The 4th Regiment took Pokrovskoe, and the 3rd took Natal'ino and Mordovka, where it spent the night.

At dawn on the 5th the regiment attacked Maytuga and Bezenchuk stations. After a short battle they were taken. The enemy retreated to the north, leaving two trains with shells and a lot of other property. By this time the 4th and Saratov Regiments had occupied Sretenka station.

In the morning of 6 October the 1st Brigade marched to Tomylovo station and, without stopping there, by evening had reached Russkiye Lipyagi station, where it camped for the night. The Saratov regiment occupied Lopatino. The next day the brigade occupied Kryazh station, sending a scouting party towards Samara. At the same time Krasny Kut Regiment occupied Dubovyy Umet and the International Regiment moved from Ivanovka to Kamennyi Brod.

On 7 October the brigade marched on Samara. It was followed by the 2nd Brigade along the railway line. The enemy, occupying the right bank of the Samara River, opened fire with the approach of the 1st Brigade. They also fielded two armoured trains, which our artillery fire concentrated on. The armoured trains moved back to the north then blew up the railway bridge and burned the wooden bridge.

The enemy, having abandoned their positions, began to withdraw to the north-east. Our soldiers entered Samara at 17:00, having crossed by boat, where small groups of workers were waiting for them. The brigade commissar, Comrade Gorbachev, greeted the workers and asked them to gather more boats and start rebuilding the bridge. Within an hour hundreds of boats ferried the soldiers across, and by the evening of 7 October the regiments had entered Samara. The 1st Brigade settled down in the city, and the 2nd in Smyshlyaevka, which is 20 kilometres north-east of Samara.

KomandArm-4 Khvesin and RMS member Lindov sent a telegram to *GlavKom*:



I inform you that the 4th Army occupied Samara at 17:00 on 7 October. The enemy is fleeing in panic.

On 8 October the cavalry regiment left Mikhailovka and occupied Domashino. The Krasny Kut Regiment occupied Spiridonovka by the evening of the same day without opposition. The Saratov Regiment occupied Chernorechye. On the same day the 3rd Rifle Regiment attacked Alekseevka, occupied by two enemy regiments under the command of General Kuznetsov. Our regiment pushed out the enemy, capturing 200 prisoners, three machine guns and one gun.

In the evening of the 8th and in the afternoon of 9 October, units of Comrade Gay's 24th Iron Division from the 1st Army also entered Samara.

This ended our actions towards Samara.

The rest of the Army fought local battles during this operation. This was explained by the fact that the Army command, undertaking its operation towards Samara, looked at them not only as support, but also as the Army reserve, from which were transferred as separate regiments (Saratov, Krasny Kut) to the main direction.

Conclusions

1. The counter-revolutionary command had as its main task the destruction of the 4th Army or at least throwing it back to the right bank of the Volga River. Then they could join with General Denikin's Don Army,⁴⁰ to jointly attack the Red Army and march on Red Moscow.

The enemy troops were better armed, had more equipment, and the combat training of Czechoslovak soldiers and Cossack cavalry surpassed ours. The enemy acted with large masses in the main directions, enveloping our flanks and striking in the rear. It managed to break through out spread out front line, as we were positioned in small units acting in different directions. It calculated correctly and gained operational and tactical success. But then the White strategy and tactics failed against the stubbornness of the workers and peasants.

2. In addition to the front line, the 4th Army was also forced during the Samara Operation to suppress *kulak* uprisings in the rear, and even in its own regiments.

In the course of the fighting the Red regiments recruited poor peasants and developed tactical skills and manoeuvrability. Their enthusiasm and persistence made it possible to finally break the enemy.

It should be noted that the units of the Novouzensk, Ural and 2nd Nikolaev Divisions also fulfilled their task perfectly, covering the flank of the troops operating towards Samara.

3. The Czechoslovaks tried to use the troops of the "People's Army" to achieve their goals, and they only threw their own troops into battle in exceptional cases. More often the Czechs were the reserve or acted as the second line.

We attacked in chains, trying to overlap the flanks and get to the rear. Before an attack the Czechs would form platoon columns and attack with bayonets. Due to our poor machine-gun fire discipline, the attacking Czechs easily broke through our chains and put them to flight. As our machine-gun fire improved, the Czechs became less eager to use their bayonets, trying to win the battles by manoeuvre.

⁴⁰ The Armed Forces of South Russia had not yet been formed, so the Don Army was in no way Denikin's at this point. PW.



4. "People's Army" was created mainly from the *kulaks*. When it took a locality it restored the power of the landlords and *kulaks*. Because of this the working peasantry refused to defend KOMUCH.

After the blows inflicted on the "People's Army" near Vol'sk and Khvalynsk, it collapsed like a house of cards. Its soldiers went home or joined our ranks, with the exception of the *kulak* element, which departed with the Czechs to Siberia.

