

History of the Ural (Yaik) Cossack Army and the Ural Region

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The uniforms of the Ural Cossacks during the Civil War

Leonid

Gentlemen! Please clarify the following question. It is widely known that in July 1919, the IUA [Independent Ural Army] became part of the AFSR [Armed Forces of South Russia], and that the Ural troops wore a “volunteer” chevron. Is the date and number of the order establishing the chevron known? Did the Urals wear any other distinctive chevrons? I would be very grateful for any information!

Guran

As far as I know, even in the AFSR, the chevron was not a distinctive mark that all military personnel were required to wear.

Shevron (Moderator)

The incorporation of the Independent Ural Army into the AFSR was purely nominal.

I have not come across any orders introducing volunteer chevrons or other distinctive insignia of the AFSR into the army.

Leonid

I have come across a mention in memoirs that the DA chevron was worn in the White East by officers of the Jäger Battalion guarding the Headquarters (Kolchak) and in the Urals. This information is, of course, unofficial. Perhaps the chevron was worn privately by some of the officers or by those who ended up in the AFSR after the campaign against Fort Aleksandrovsk? The *Uraltsy* did not have their own chevron-type insignia. Does anyone know anything about this?

Guran

You are not talking about the Ural Cossacks here, but about the ranks of the 2nd Ural Rifle Regiment, formed in April 1920 in Transbaikalia from the remnants of the 12th Ural Rifle Division. Together with the jägers, they made up the 1st Rifle Brigade. Indeed, the brigade's insignia was distinguished by a chevron in national colours pointing downwards, placed on the left sleeve.

It is very likely that someone on the staff sent to the IUA from the AFSR could have worn a chevron.

Leonid

Dear Guran! Please tell me, did the Ural Cossacks wear any unofficial chevrons, ribbons, emblems, in short, any distinctive signs of their own – after all, the Ural Army fought almost the entire war separately from the others?

Aleksander (Administrator)

It would be good if the Cossacks at least had shoulder-boards. I have not seen a single photograph of the army's rank and file, but I feel that they did not always have shoulder-boards: they did not have time to arrange them. At least during the critical stages of the struggle. But the staff officers may have had something.

However, look at the photograph of the members of the Extraordinary Conference of Representatives of the Nine Cossack Hosts of Eastern Russia. As far as I can tell, Khorosikhin and Konovalov are wearing nothing superfluous, everything is according to regulations. In general, I think there were no excesses and shoulder-boards were not always worn.

Although this conclusion is pure speculation on my part...

Shevron (Moderator)

Here is an excerpt from a summary of information about the enemy of the 4th Army for the period from 20 January to 10 February 1919.

A Soviet agent writes:

"...There has not been a single, uniform in the troops for a long time. The Cossacks do not receive uniforms from the treasury, and it is impossible to buy anything. Almost no one wears cockades or shoulder-boards...."

Chelim

In principle, there was probably no time for shoulder-boards and cockades in combat. But the parade uniforms were still lying in trunks. On holidays, it was a sacred duty to put on the uniform and traditional dress and take a photo. I have a photo from the Civil War where the Cossacks are wearing shoulder-boards, as well as the Cross of St. Michael and medals. Please be patient, I will post it soon.

Aleksander (Administrator)

Well, all the regiments were mixed together, and I suspect that in winter they fought in their everyday clothes, so what shoulder-boards are we talking about here? I think that's the main reason. When the Cossacks went to the front in the summer, uniforms could be issued from warehouses, but when winter came and, apparently, no winter uniforms had been prepared, they took whatever was at hand.

Ratnik

Commissar Boris Rents, who survived in Lbishchensk, described the Cossacks as follows: "Raspberry shoulder-boards, cockades, white armbands on the left sleeve. The officers had shoulder-boards. Raspberry banners."

According to another eyewitness, this is what the *Uralsy* looked like on 17 June 1918 during the capture of Novo-Uzensk: "I saw the Cossacks with my own eyes on a summer morning in 1918, sticking my head out of the gate onto my Nikitinskaya Street. Bearded and moustachioed, wearing caps with raspberry brims and wide trousers with raspberry stripes, they rode slowly on horseback. Their rifles hung down behind them, barrels pointing downwards. Some had their rifles

slung over their saddles. Some of them fired into the air, either to scare the residents or to cheer themselves up. Various bundles were tied to the saddles at the back. I saw two Cossacks lying on either side of one horse, tied to the saddle, probably wounded.

Guran

It should be noted that in the early summer of 1918, the Cossacks wore uniforms that they had brought with them from the 1st Military District.

White armbands were not a universal sign of distinction for the *Uralsy*. By the summer of 1918, both sides had clearly positioned themselves as “Whites” and “Reds”. From that time on, they distinguished themselves by armbands of the corresponding colours on their sleeves and diagonally placed patches on their headgear.

Leonid

From the materials at my disposal, I can add the following. A description of the uniform of IUA pilot, Captain Nikolai Paramonovich Larshina, has been preserved: “...a baggy, long-tailed cavalry-style overcoat made of old-style soldier’s cloth, decorated with long-faded raspberry buttons. ... A cap with the same raspberry brim, tattered and splattered with aircraft grease.” Captain Larshin. Essay-memoir. Our Element. Belgrade. 1923.

Shevron

As far as I remember that essay, it refers to the period when Larshin was already serving in the Armed Forces of South Russia and had left the Ural Army. So he could have been issued with new uniforms at his new place of service, but of course he could have continued to wear his old Ural ones.

Leonid

Exactly, Shevron, you are right, the description of Larshin refers to 1920, it is the Kachinsk Aviation School. But, in my opinion, the old, faded, worn-out uniforms may well indicate that it had been preserved from the Ural Front, since British uniforms were already being issued in Crimea. In addition, it is quite possible to assume that the pilots of the IUA aviation on the Ural Front were dressed in a similar manner; it is unlikely that they had flight uniforms, helmets, etc. from 1913.

Ratnik

From the book by I. S. Kutyaikov, “With Chapaev...”:

As for the equipment of the personnel, upon their return from the World War, each of the front-line soldiers brought back 4 to 6 sets of uniforms. In addition, during the destruction of the alcohol warehouse, the troops and the population looted the supplies of uniforms that were in the city of Uralsk, which formed the basis of the uniforms of the White Ural Army.

In winter, during severe frosts and strong blizzards, the standard-issue uniforms were unsuitable, as they did not protect against frostbite or even freezing. Therefore, the Cossacks had to have their own sheepskin coats, warm mittens and felt boots (pimy). In such uniforms, the Cossacks

were combat-ready, lightly and warmly dressed. In order not to lose their military appearance, each Cossack wore a greatcoat over his sheepskin coat.

In the spring of 1919, when a shortage of uniforms became apparent, the Cossacks managed to defeat several of our rifle brigades; the almost new uniforms taken from the prisoners served to eliminate the shortage. After restoring ties with English capital, the White Army was fully supplied with uniforms.

Leonid

A. I. Denikin mentions in passing the provision of British uniforms to the Ural Cossacks, but I have not personally come across any details, quantities, etc.

Here is more on the question of English uniforms sent from the AFSR and how they were distributed. From the memoirs of Ataman Vladimir Sergeevich Tolstov, "From the Red Claws into the Unknown", Constantinople, 1921. There was a telegram from General Romanovskiy to return all the uniforms of the Ural Army. There was also a telegram from Romanovskiy stating that all the supplies of the Transcaspian Army should be transferred to us, the Urals. That telegram also concerned Petrovsk, where there were supplies for the Astrakhan Brigade. I know for a fact that the 20,000 sets of warm clothing belonging to the Ural Army that arrived at the fort ... were taken and sent to the Caspian Flotilla on the orders of Ryabinin, the chief of staff of that flotilla. The 3,000 sets of uniforms in Fort... were taken from us by means of a forged telegram, supposedly from the British mission.

Shevron (moderator)

From the memoirs of General Shchepikhin regarding the mobilisation of the Urals in the spring of 1918, at the beginning of the Civil War.

"The Cossacks brought their own uniforms and everything else with them. Only the young men, not the *frontoviki*, who went on to fill the first four numbered regiments (2 cavalry and 2 infantry) received uniforms and equipment from the army's very meagre supplies..."

Thus, it is clear that at the beginning of the war, only the training regiments (1-3 cavalry and 1 infantry, and then 4th and 5th cavalry) were dressed in uniforms from the army reserves.

Leonid

More from the memoirs of Ataman V. S. Tolstov. Fort Alexandrovsk, early 1920: "...a lieutenant in an officer's autumn peacetime overcoat with infantry buttons, a khaki cap on his head, perfectly polished boots with spurs, and a sabre slung over his shoulder with a gold, albeit worn, sword belt..."

Alexander (Administrator)

I wonder if, during the mobilisation in the spring and summer of 1918, there were commissions that weeded out unsuitable horses, noted deficiencies in uniforms, etc.? It's nice that, with only small reserves of troops and their own uniforms preserved from the Great War, the Cossacks looked so good!

Shevron (Moderator)

As far as I know, the allocation commission, created to supply horses to the newly formed units of the Ural Army, was formed in October 1918. Although I do not rule out that there were similar commissions before that.

And I don't think anyone noted any shortcomings in the uniforms, there was no time for formalities back then!

Guran

I wonder if there were allocation *komands* in the IUA – rear units designed to ensure the collection, selection and training of horses for the army's cavalry units? The Don Army, for example, definitely had such units throughout 1918.

Shevron (Moderator)

I haven't heard of any. I know about an allocation commission that operated on a permanent basis, but I haven't come across any mentions of allocation *komands*. In those difficult times for the Urals, wealthy Ural Cossacks who were horse breeders themselves distributed horses from their herds for the needs of the Ural Army and Host. And our horses were valued not only in the Urals ...

Leonid

The "meagre military supplies" were often been mentioned in discussions and memoirs – but does anyone know what specific supplies of uniforms and equipment the region had at the beginning of the Civil War (or at least the Great War) , whether the Army had any production facilities on its territory for sewing uniforms and shoes, whether supplies were delivered directly by the British, bypassing the All-Russian Supreme Military Council (if we recall that a British mission from Enzeli came to Guriev, with which negotiations were conducted), etc. In short, perhaps someone has materials and information on these issues; references to sources are also desirable. And please don't forget the descriptions of the Cossacks' uniforms and equipment.

Shevron (moderator)

There was a military clothing workshop in Uralsk, but its production capacity was rather small. I think that the fabric for sewing the uniforms for that workshop came from central Russia, and with the start of the Civil War, communication with the centre by rail was interrupted.

The British supplied everything through the AFSR, as General Borodin writes. Any agreements directly between the Ural command and the British, bypassing the AFSR leadership, would have been regarded by the latter as separate negotiations. And the Ural command never suffered from separatism, unlike the Don and Kuban forces.

Leonid

As far as I know, General Borodin wrote about British supplies, giving specific figures for the delivery of weapons and ammunition, but says nothing about uniforms. Are there any accurate or

even approximate data on British supplies of clothing and equipment through the South Russian Army to the Ural Army?

Shevron (moderator)

In a letter to General V. V. Chernavin dated 10 August 1926, Borodin wrote:

“... After I recovered from my illness, the Ural Ataman offered me the position of representative of the Ural Army to the Don Ataman, where I went at the end of July 1919. I managed to obtain only 5,000 pairs of boots and 5 million roubles from the Don Host, and that was only thanks to Ataman Bogaevskiy’s friendly attitude of towards me. My deputy (at Denikin’s headquarters), Colonel Khoroshkhin, received a great deal from the Volunteer Army in terms of money and materials, but I cannot even estimate how much...”

He mentions the British briefly later in the text. All supplies went through the AFSR.

Kiev-1 Uralsky

From the testimony of Colonel I. A. Antipin about his defection to the Ural Cossacks in early July 1919:

“Heading towards the village of Arbuzovka, about a kilometre away, I saw a dismounted horseman in a cloak standing with his back to me (it was raining). Whether the horseman was Red or White was a question that I could not determine, because the situation for both sides was changing with cinematic speed at that time. Judging by the horse’s tail, he was a Cossack (the Reds’ horses had their tails cut), and by the saddle, he was a Red (the saddle was not Cossack). In fact, the rider turned out to be a Cossack.”

Shevron (moderator)

The Reds and Cossacks also wore rifles on different shoulders. This was also a distinctive feature.

Here is some more fragmentary information about the uniforms.

From the testimony of a telephone operator at the Ural military telegraph office on 20 November 1919:

“The situation with uniforms is bad, despite the fact that 2,400 sets were received from the British, but due to the lack of transport, they are not being delivered from Guriev to the units.”

From the testimony of a captured Ural officer, November 1919:

“The uniforms received from the British were distributed to the regiment in sets of 50 to 60.”

From the testimony of prisoners, former Red Army soldiers of the 22nd Rifle Division on 15 November 1919:

“British uniforms are distributed only among Cossacks and volunteers; former Reds and conscripts are not given any and are treated with suspicion.”

Shevron (Moderator)

Reconnaissance reports from the headquarters of the 25th Rifle Division. July-August 1919.

“A distinctive feature of the appearance of Pozdnyakov’s partisans (Novouzensk Partisan Detachment) is a white ribbon on their caps, where the cockade should be. Reshetnikov’s detachments (Dergachevsk Horse-Partisan Detachment) and Korzhev’s (Steppe Partisan Detachment of the Astrakhan Province) have a stamped aluminium skull and white shoulder-boards under them. Albin’s (1st Partisan Horse Regiment) has a white bandage on the right sleeve. Pozdnyakov’s detachment consists of peasants from the Klintsov and Semenov districts, while Albin’s consists of half Cossacks. Pozdnyakov used to have shoulder-boards, but now he has a white ribbon on his cap, 2 *vershoks* [88 mm] long and half a *vershock* [22mm] wide. The skulls are placed on the sleeves and shoulders.

Eryklintsev’s partisans (Dzhambeyta) around Bukhara also wear them on their sleeves. The Turkestan punitive squad wore them on their left shoulders.

Everything in brackets in my post above is my own additions. It was not mentioned in the intelligence reports. It is a pity that there are no photographs showing the officers of the Independent Ural Army in a uniform with skulls on their shoulders and sleeves. Although, to be honest, it is very difficult for me to imagine a Ural Cossack in a uniform with skulls. Probably only non-locals wore them.

Guran

This is food for thought. The white ribbon on the caps and arms seems understandable: a distinctive sign of the military personnel of the White formations in a situation where it was not possible to wear shoulder-boards and thus identify themselves from the Reds, due to their lack of availability.

The skulls are very interesting. As I understand it, the partisans wore them not on their cockades, but on their shoulder-boards. I wonder why? If we read the report literally, it does not refer to the traditional symbol of Kornilov’s shock troops, the “death’s head”, i.e. a skull with crossed bones beneath it, but to a “simple skull”, which could have a completely different meaning than the MG.

Korzhev’s detachment is identified as consisting of volunteers from the Astrakhan province, although the village of Krasnorechka seems to be in the Novouzensk district.

Shevron (Moderator)

Korzhev himself was indeed from Krasnaya Rechka, but apparently his detachment was a motley crew (from different provinces). After Korzhev’s death, the detachment was taken over by Nosaev, then it was reorganised into a regiment, but that’s another story and not relevant to this topic...

As for just skulls or a death’s head, I think that the Soviet agent didn’t really understand that and might have gotten it wrong. It is unlikely that it was Ural’s innovation, since that insignia appeared on the shoulder-boards and sleeves of the Ural Army officers in mid-1919. So I think that Denikin’s officers brought it from the south.

Leonid

Shevron! I have another question based on your information. Please tell me, were Eryklintsov’s partisan detachment and the Turkestan punitive militia Bukharan units or were they part of the IUA? What was their chain of command? I also notice that the skulls were not accompanied by

bones. I think this was due to the Reds' lack of knowledge. In any case, all the cases I know of where that emblem was used on all fronts included a skull with bones.

Shevron (Moderator)

All of the units listed were part of the Independent Ural Army. As for the "punitive militia", the agent certainly exaggerated. These were former Reds who had defected to the Cossacks.

Leonid

I have a few more questions: 1. Have you come across any references to the uniform differences between the permanent and temporary members of the Ural Ensign School? I have only come across a reference that the school had its own banner, which was saved from the Reds and taken to Fort Aleksandrovsk. If there was a banner, it is possible that the school also had uniform distinctions. 2. I have seen photos and repeatedly come across references to the fact that Cossacks, and even non-Cossack units of the IUA, often did not wear shoulder-boards at all, either on principle or because it was simply impossible to obtain them. Do you have any information on this issue – how widespread this practice was, whether the central command fought against it or turned a blind eye, etc.? I would be grateful if you could provide references if you have any information.

Shevron (Moderator)

I know nothing about uniform differences in the Ural Ensign School.

Shoulder-boards were indeed often not worn, and the command turned a blind eye to that: there was no time for shoulder-boards back then.

Interesting information on the uniforms of the Astrakhan Cossack *Divizion* is provided in O. O. Antropov's book "Astrakhan Cossacks". I would like to remind you that the *divizion* was part of the Independent Ural Army.

"In April (1919), insignia for ranks and units were introduced in the *divizion*. All Cossacks and volunteers were to wear 'on the outer side of the left sleeve of their outer clothing, 1.5 *vershoks* [66 mm] above the bend of the elbow, a 45-degree angle made of yellow material with the tip pointing downwards." In infantry units – "company flags of yellow colour in the form of an elongated triangle, with the base facing the pole". In cavalry units – "flags in accordance with the Regulations of the Cavalry Service". In addition, Serezhnikov (the division commander) ordered: "All soldiers to wear a white armband on their left sleeve during combat."

vl-vl

I think they wore shoulder-boards because the Cossacks were an army, not some rabble. But what kind?

Shevron (Moderator)

Once again, I will quote from a Red operational report for the period from 20 January to 10 February 1919.

A Soviet agent writes: "...Almost no one wears cockades or shoulder-boards....".

Leonid

And what kind of shoulder-boards, stripes, and buttonholes did the officers of the Astrakhan *Divizion* – their own Host – wear? Is anything known about this?

Shevron (Moderator)

I don't know about shoulder-boards and [greatcoat] buttonholes, but the *Astrakhantsy* definitely had yellow trouser stripes!

Guran

It's interesting that the yellow stripes and peaked caps ALREADY indicated membership of the ACH [Astrakhan Cossack Host], so why was it necessary for the Cossacks of the Astrakhan Cossack units to introduce a sleeve insignia in the form of a yellow chevron, which was not typical for Cossack units?

Shevron (Moderator)

To resemble the Volunteer Army.

Guran

In the Volunteer Army and under Kolchak, the chevron was tricolour in the national colours, not in the colours of any particular Cossack host. Again, Cossack units very rarely wore chevron insignia; as far as I can remember, only Kornilov's Kuban Cossack regiment did.

Shevron (Moderator)

Excerpt from Order No. 372 of the Ural Army to its troops, dated 30 November 1918.

"I order the units of the People's Army operating as part of the Ural Army to wear the uniform assigned during the Russo-German War - khaki shoulder-boards with insignia and unit codes, and a national white-blue-red ribbon on the cockade ...

... Cossack units shall wear their own uniforms, and all ranks shall have the shoulder-boards assigned to them on their government-issued blouses, overcoats and sheepskin coats."

Guran

It is curious that all non-Cossack formations operating as part of the Ural Army were defined as formations of the People's Army?

Shevron (Moderator)

It turns out that the order was issued by the Ural Army regarding the subversive activities of KOMUCH (read: the leadership of the People's Army) and the recognition of Admiral Kolchak as Supreme Ruler. And all non-Cossack formations were simply incorporated into the Ural Army.

Leonid (Regular participant)

An interesting excerpt from the order (special thanks for the order number and date), the essence of which is not new – I think you will agree with me that this order of the IUA is an echo of Order No. 7 of 2 October 1918 from the Chief of Staff Boldyrev on the Russian Army of the Ufa Directory (if my memory serves me correctly regarding the number and date) on the introduction of shoulder-boards, cockades in national colours, the abolition of sleeve insignia of the People's Army, etc. Thank you for the information!

And another question: who signed the order? And, perhaps a silly question, but while we're at it, what was the cipher on the shoulder-boards of the Ural units during the Great War – cavalry and artillery?

Shevron (Moderator)

The order was signed by the commander of the Ural Army, Lieutenant-General Savelyev.

The regimental number was placed on the shoulder-boards, and for the artillerymen, two crossed cannons

Leonid

So there were no letters after the regimental number, only the number? And for the artillerymen, the division number should have been under the special mark, right? Please clarify this point!

And another question right away: have you ever come across any information in memoirs or other sources about the uniforms of the army commander's personal escort or the ataman's escort? Perhaps it was the model adopted for the Ural Life Guard units of the IRA [Imperial Russian Army]?

Shevron (Moderator)

The artillerymen did indeed have the division number under the specialist markings.

I have not come across anything about the escorts; as far as I know, *Uraltsy* did not serve in the escort.

The Ataman of the IUA did not have an escort.

Leonid

Please recall that we discussed the topic of "The uniform of the Ural Cossacks during the Civil War", and you mentioned skulls in the partisan detachments on the Ural Front. Could you please provide the source, if possible!

Shevron (Moderator)

The fact that a number of military units of the Independent Ural Army wore skulls on their uniforms is mentioned in the intelligence reports of the [Red] 25th Rifle Division. Material from the RGVA [Russian State Military Archives].

I found more interesting references to the uniforms of the Independent Ural Army in the memoirs of Major General Vladimir Ivanovich Motorny:

“Supplies to the Caucasian Army began only in the first half of 1919. From there, 7,500 sets of English uniforms, 12,000 pairs of boots, money and other items arrived in Gur'ev. ... However, the difficulty of delivering all this property from Gur'ev to the front led to most of it falling into the hands of the Reds, and the army remained as undressed and unshod as it had been. The English uniforms ... were received by the rear services of the Gur'ev district.

I found a few more interesting points about the dissatisfaction of the Ural Cossacks with the lack of uniforms in the army:

For example, in August 1919, in the village of Tsaregradskoe (Bukharsk area), the Iletsk Infantry Regiment demanded new uniforms from the commander of the 2nd Iletsk Cossack Cavalry Corps and staged an armed protest. The corps headquarters commandant, Second Lieutenant Tsvetayev, was beaten by the angry Cossacks.

In early November 1919, the Gur'ev Infantry Regiment, stationed in the Yanaikino area, refused to go on to the offensive, citing a lack of uniforms and food. The leaders of the refusal were arrested, and the regiment went to rescue them. Ataman Tolstov himself arrived at the regiment and tried to persuade the Cossacks to obey the order, but to no avail; the regiment did not attack.

Later, a new intelligence report specifies that on 13 November 1919 in Yanaikino, Ataman Tolstov, together with British officers (the British military mission at the headquarters of the Ural Army), promised to clothe all regiments in British winter uniforms within two weeks and persuaded the Cossacks to hold their ground at the front, also promising reinforcements from the Orenburg region.

Military pilot Zheleznov, who defected from the Ural Army to the Reds, reported during interrogation that by the beginning of November 1919, the Independent Ural Army had received up to 15,000 sets of British uniforms.