

## CHAPTER XVII

### RUSSIA AND SIBERIA

**T**HE treaty of peace, framed at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 between Germany and the Russian Revolutionary Government, was a very serious matter for the Allies. That front contained large enemy forces of whom it was highly important that the fewest possible number should be set free to fight elsewhere. In the past Russia had been supplied with munitions by the Allies and it was decided to continue aid to such portions of the Russian armies as were prepared to continue the struggle.

Moreover a substantial body of Czecho-Slovaks had taken the opportunity of the war to throw off the hated Austrian yoke and desert to Russia, where they were now joined by many fellow countrymen hitherto prisoners of war. These elected to form themselves into a Czecho-Slovak army and fight for the Allies, with a view to establishing their nationality as a Kingdom independent of Austria. Such was the distracted state of the Russian Empire at the moment that this comparatively small body actually controlled a large part of Siberia, and it was necessary to give it moral and material support.

Apart from individuals however, to act as instructors, few men could be spared while the war was raging. When it was over the Allied Peace Council at Paris decided to continue the fight against the poison of Bolshevism, a negation of all that modern systems of civilization stood for—one that repudiated not only all religion, but liability for external loans and concessions to foreign capitalists entered into by the former rulers of Russia. But the statesmen of the various Powers, great and small, gathered together at Paris to form a League of Nations, set the world aright and establish universal peace, had too much else to think about to trouble their heads greatly about Russia; and the war-weary conscript could not be expected to remain under arms on foreign soil to support a cause that interested him not in the least. The only policy pursued with real vigour lay in continuing

the supply of munitions of which there was then such a superabundance.

All these efforts were in vain. The revolutionary virus had penetrated far too deeply among the uneducated masses of Russia to yield to such treatment. The moujiks, among whom the vast estates of the Russian nobility were to be divided, hoped to benefit by becoming land-owners; the town-workers looked forward to improved conditions of life, higher wages and shorter working hours under a communistic regime. Not till later were these bright prospects of what was expected from a policy of confiscation discovered to be an empty mirage.

Russian officers, again, as a rule did not take their profession seriously. Corruption had always been rife, discipline was undermined by the revolution and they neglected their men. There was no cohesion in the forces we were at pains to outfit and no heart in the conscript peasant who turned "White" or "Red" according as he thought would serve him best at the moment, and deserted at the first convenient opportunity. From north, south, east and west we sent missions, munitions and supplies of every kind, but one after another the anti-revolutionary armies became tainted and melted away almost as quickly as they were formed.

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In August 1918 a Military Mission was sent to Siberia accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel C. J. T. Robertson with two men of the A.O.C. from Hong Kong. A depot was established at Vladivostock and eventually the strength of the Corps in Siberia rose to 5 officers and 68 other ranks. Storeships began to come out in October and during the ensuing twelve months 79 vessels arrived bringing 97,000 tons of arms, ammunition, stores and clothing. In addition large Russian stocks of equipment, boots and clothing were taken over in various parts of Siberia, and fur clothing and under-clothes were purchased on the spot.

In all it may be said that an army of 200,000 men was fully equipped, clothed and provided with rifles, machine

guns, field artillery, wireless, telegraph, and signal stores, transport wagons, harness and saddlery; in fact everything needed to enable it to take the field. Among the items handled were 346 million rounds of small arm ammunition, 435,000 blankets, 210,000 sets of clothing, 400,000 sets of Russian under-clothes, 300,000 pairs of boots, one million hand-grenades, 725,000 field dressings, 44,000 sets of harness and saddlery and 1,200,000 pairs of horse-shoes.

Depots were opened at many points along the Siberian railway, of which the most important were at Omsk, Kurgan, Tomsk, Ekaterinburg and Irkutsk; but these were little more than transit stations which transferred to Russian custody what was sent up from Vladivostock.

There were many difficulties to be contended with—the extreme rigour of the winter when the thermometer would drop to 40 degrees below zero, insufficiency of storage accommodation, the heterogeneous nature of the labour employed, much of it composed of prisoners of war and each nationality speaking a different language, labour and railway strikes and shortage of rolling stock. Russian officials too were as a rule incompetent and apathetic, if not actively obstructive; and were apt to look on our stores as a useful means of getting anything they fancied for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Order from the Head of the Staff of the Commander-in-Chief and Minister of War.*

No. 914.

*August 27th, 1919.*

OMSK.

Acting commander of the 2nd motor transport division, Staff Captain Samoilovitch, forwarded to the Kurgan district Ordnance Store in the military zone an indent dated 10th August, 1919, No. 3085 for the supply of sundry stores for officers and civil employees of the above mentioned division. Among the supplies asked for were 295 yards batiste, cigars 350, candy 58 lbs., ladies' stockings 5 dozen, cloth for ladies' dresses 30 yards, scented soap 85 tablets, eau-de-Cologne 27 bottles and scents 29 bottles. The signers of the indent, commander of the 2nd motor transport division, Staff Captain Samoilovitch and his assistant, Lieut. Oripoff, to be removed from their appointments and returned to their

Promises were made only to be broken, and looting was common up and down the line. During a two-day revolution at Vladivostock in November 1919, many of the revolutionaries were found to be dressed in our uniforms and armed with our rifles, among whom were even recognized men employed under the British Mission.

By this time the Bolsheviks held such a mastery over the country that it began to be realized that more harm than good resulted from sending consignments up the railway, the probability being that the goods would be looted and a few find their way into the hands of friendly Russians. It was therefore decided to withdraw the Mission. The majority of the Ordnance detachment left in November, and Robertson followed in January 1920. Such arms, clothing and equipment as remained in stock were handed over to the Russians at Vladivostock and other oddments disposed of by sale. The mainstay of the depot at this time, curiously enough, consisted of German and Austrian officers who, together with a number of Czecho-Slovaks, had been working for us. Despite language difficulties, ignorance of our methods, nomenclature and so forth, these officers worked splendidly as clerks, foremen, guards, etc., and their services during the evacuation were invaluable.

When the Soviet finally captured Vladivostock in February 1920, its troops were clothed in our uniform, armed with the rifles we had supplied and its field guns had painted on them the Union Jack.

On March 6th, 1919, there landed at Novorossisk, a port on the Black Sea east of the Crimea, Lieutenant Colonel De Wolff, A.O.C., with an Ordnance mechanical engineering officer and another for ammunition duties, one armament artificer, one armourer, one clerk and one storeman, as part of a Mission sent to assist General

regiments; the countersignee of the indent Military Clerk Putschkoff to be removed from his appointment and if of conscript age to be enlisted, or if over age to be dismissed the service.

Lt General of the General Staff, Deidericks.

Orderly General, Maj-General Kondrashoff.

Denekin, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian anti-revolutionary forces of the South.

As in Siberia, this nucleus was intended only to advise the Russians and aid them in their dealings with British equipment, but here likewise it had to undertake a whole range of executive work ; for, although warning had been sent that quantities of stores of all sorts might be expected almost immediately, the Russian staff had made no arrangements to deal with the goods when they arrived.

Other branches of the Mission proceeded up country to Denekin's headquarters, and De Wolff was left to cope with the situation at Novorossisk as best he could with the assistance of the British Consul, through whose good offices an excellent set of sheds and railway sidings belonging to one of the largest granaries of South Russia were acquired as a depot. But that was as far as he could help. The site was three-quarters of a mile from the docks and neither labour nor transport were forthcoming in anything like sufficient quantity to handle and convey to the depot goods, of which 19,000 tons arrived during the next six weeks, the figure eventually rising to 77,000.

Large numbers of railway trucks had been captured from the Red army, but instead of being set aside for their legitimate work, they were used by officers and refugees to house their families, who could apparently not be made to stir. Whenever some official from Denekin's headquarters came down to investigate a complaint, the railway staff would produce a goodly show ; but as soon as his back was turned the wagons vanished again.

Such able-bodied men as had not been drafted into the army, even if not Bolshevik at heart, showed no inclination to work for Denekin who, with no men to spare, had been unable to garrison Novorossisk, put the town under martial law and commandeer labour. The only real keenness displayed by the Russian labourer was when handling clothes or boots. When told to load a truck with ammunition he would, as like as not, walk off. Guards were posted, but they were useless ; the Russian sentries frankly owned they were afraid to arrest a thief lest they

be murdered. Meanwhile store-ships had to be cleared to fetch fresh cargoes ; and their contents, very valuable to the civil populace, were strewn about the quays ; the inhabitants removing such loot as they fancied and were able to carry off.

Nevertheless, by dint of hard work on the part of this minute Ordnance detachment, increased from time to time by a few individuals, matters were gradually straightened out ; but it was not till the following December, when a strong reinforcement arrived which brought the strength up to 18 officers and 101 other ranks, that the numbers were really sufficient ; and by then the back of the work was broken.

Any attempt to keep written records in the accepted sense had been out of the question with a clerical staff of one, and arrangements were made with the Russian authorities whereby they accepted responsibility for everything consigned to them on our assurance that it had been handed over.

It is satisfactory to be able to record that the results achieved by this small body were appreciated. Major General Sir W. Rycroft, Quartermaster General of the Army of the Black Sea, who visited the depot and quays in April reported : " I wish to place on record the exceptionally good work that has been done by so small a staff at Novorossisk. The Ordnance staff have done their best to reduce order out of chaos " ; and General Denekin, after an inspection in June that lasted three hours, congratulated the personnel of the Corps on the satisfactory way in which his troops were being supplied with clothing, guns and ammunition.

To take over on the quays and house the goods had indeed been only the first part of the programme ; they had next to be got into the hands of the Russian troops, and to effect this, the plan first tried was to use as a medium the Russian Intendance whose regular duty it was to clothe and equip the soldier. But this body proved to be bureaucratic to an extent only approached by our own similar semi-military officials at the Crimean War. They would come to the depot represented by a Commis.

sion of fourteen headed by a major general; and to obtain goods from their warehouses a Russian regiment had to get the signatures of five or six different officials, who were never to be found on the spot all at the same time.

One of the first issues made to the Intendance comprised several thousand pairs of boots. The fourteen arrived, the stacks of packing cases were pointed out to them and they proceeded to smash open each case to count its contents.

The futility of such action was pointed out but apparently to no purpose. Shortly after there was a cry for horse-shoes which had been handed over to the Intendance all nicely packed in cases, each with a tin containing the right quantity and size of nails for the shoes it held. On this occasion a Russian staff officer went with De Wolff to see what was the matter and why the horse-shoes could not be got. There in the centre of the Intendance warehouse was found a mountain of loose horse-shoes and the boxes broken to pieces in a heap in one corner. They were laboriously counting the shoes and stringing them together in tens; while in the next shed they had tipped out all the nails from the tins, had counted them one by one, and tied them up in bundles of 50. This was the reason why cavalry horses were unshod and immobile.

These instances are typical; it was impossible to get practical results out of such a hopelessly incompetent set of functionaries, and it was next decided to try and reach regiments direct. Under this scheme, complete sets of various classes of articles were made up, and in particular of clothing. Thousands upon thousands of Russian troops were suffering from typhus, and the only chance of getting rid of the lice that carried the disease was for the man to strip from head to foot and, after discarding his rags and disinfecting his person, to clothe himself entirely anew. When so many sets of clothing or equipment were ready, Denekin's staff was informed and settled the allotment among his various forces—Volunteers, Kuban Cossacks, the Ural Army, the Don Army

or that of the Caucasus. A representative from each force then came and drew his quota from the depot at Novorossisk, finding his own transport and labour.

But still much failed to find its way into the hands of the troops owing to looting and delay *en route*, so scheme number three was evolved—the only one that worked satisfactorily. Complete train-loads were made up for each army, filled from all services—R.E., A.S.C., Ordnance and Medical—and sent forward in charge of a British officer who saw that the contents actually reached their destination and were delivered to those for whom intended. In all something like 350,000 men were clothed and equipped in this way besides 12,000 hospital beds.

Guns of all kinds were handed over to a Russian artillery depot situated alongside the quays at Novorossisk. It was found, however, that the Russian artillery officers, although very keen to understand the working of our guns, were hopelessly at sea and got everything into confusion. They mixed up all the gun components and the harness and saddlery. Some British gunners were accordingly stationed at the artillery depot to help in assembling the equipments. An armament sergeant major A.O.C. was also attached and overhauled the guns before they were despatched to the front, with such assistance as could be given by the Ordnance depot. This worked well, and batteries, complete with their harness and spare parts, were sent up country all ready for action. Something like a thousand guns of all calibres, from 18-pounder to eight-inch howitzer, were handed over in this way.

It was the same with machine guns, of which the Russians confused the parts of the Vickers and Lewis, until a machine gun school was formed under the superintendence of the British Mission. Several thousand of both sorts of machine gun were issued to this school, which taught the Russians how to use them.

Ammunition was the most difficult problem of all. The Russians knew practically nothing about British munitions and the task of teaching them was not easy. But Major Donovan, the ammunition officer, one of the



original Ordnance contingent, worked heroically and things gradually took shape. It was hoped at first to form a base ammunition depot at Novorossisk, but the temper of the populace and loyalty of the troops there were uncertain; and, from motives of mistrust, Denekin decided to scatter the ammunition up and down the country. It was loaded up at the quay side; but the railways were disorganized and no one seemed to have any definite idea where any particular lot was destined to go to. Civilians seeking a ride clambered on to the loaded wagons, and among this dangerous freighting the Russian military escorts lay on straw, lit fires and smoked.

No fewer than fourteen permanent ammunition depots were formed, besides temporary ones; and these Donovan had to visit, to try and enforce some elementary precautions against damage. They were as a rule dangerously overcrowded, and the only cover was furnished by Nature—three or four feet of snow in winter, nothing in summer. Dunnage was seldom provided to keep packages from contact with the damp ground, while there were few if any fire-appliances. However, by means of lectures delivered through the mouth of an interpreter, and pamphlets, Donovan gradually established better order.

A light mobile workshop arrived from Salonika at the end of March 1919, but months passed before it was sent up country, actually because the Russian staff would not allot it to any particular army for fear lest the others be jealous. It was only in June, when two more (a medium and a light) arrived, that the three went forward. One was then established at Rostov on the Don, while the other two, mounted on railway trucks, had their headquarters respectively at Kharkov and Tzaritzin. Besides their British personnel, the staff of these shops included some 60 to 120 Russian workmen under a Russian colonel, who did the less highly skilled repairs; and they had to deal with a great diversity of work, armoured trains and mechanized tractors mounting Russian guns in addition to British equipments.

For a time fortune smiled on Denekin. Good English

clothing and the expectation of food and loot were no doubt powerful magnets in attracting the half-starved peasantry to his standard ; but the further he advanced, the more his troops became scattered and disintegrated. With no real fighting spirit and no leadership, they began to think there was nothing more to be gained by staying with him and deserted, either joining the Bolshevik forces or going to their homes. The pressure of the Red armies was thus automatically increased ; and during the winter of 1919-20 the remnants of Denekin's army were forced to retreat into the Crimea, accompanied by some hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Novorossisk was finally abandoned on March 26th, 1920, just a year after its first occupation. At that time the depot held 1500 tons and there were besides over 4000 tons, mainly of ammunition, on board two ships that had just arrived. In anticipation of a move to the Crimea the most valuable goods had already been taken to the quay-side ready for any ships that might be available ; but much of the rest, and a large quantity of ammunition handed over to the Russian artillery for despatch up country, was lost, there being no means of getting it to the quays. Much anxiety was felt on account of one of the mobile workshops which, fortunately, arrived just in time for its personnel to be evacuated though its equipment could not be saved.

After leaving Novorossisk the Ordnance established themselves at the ancient Crimean city of Theodosia. Some 500 tons were off-loaded, when on April 8th orders were received to transfer the depot to Sevastopol which was reached two days later.

Here, under instructions from the British Mission, the original scheme for supplying the troops was reverted to, and everything sent out for their use handed over to the Russians in bulk to deal with as best they might. It was doubtless felt that, in view of the military situation, we should not commit ourselves further. But the plan proved disastrous for ammunition. In spite of a number of protests pointing out the danger, it was left to accumulate on the quay where it had been transferred to Russian

custody and eventually exploded with the loss of the whole 4000 tons.

A large reduction was made in the strength of the Corps after leaving Novorossisk, for there was now little work to be done beyond handing over such goods as continued to arrive, a dwindling quantity. Though hostilities dragged on for a few months longer, the futility of attempting to bolster up a losing cause became ever more evident until finally, at the end of June 1920, the Mission was broken up and the last of the Ordnance personnel, now reduced to fourteen all told, sailed for home, leaving behind what stores remained for the Russians to make such use of as they could.

In the Baltic our efforts were confined to handing over goods at the ports of entry—Reval for the newly formed State of Esthonia and the Russian army of the north-west under General Yudenich, and Riga for the States of Latvia and Lithuania, all of which were at war with the Bolsheviks. At each place a depot was formed under an Ordnance officer with a few A.O.C. and A.S.C. men who gave what arrived to representatives of the various forces. Upwards of 100,000 sets of equipment and clothing were in all distributed from these two depots together with rifles, machine guns, guns ranging from 18-pr. to six-inch howitzer and ammunition.

But it was all to no purpose. Riga was attacked, the depot came under the enemy's fire, the remaining rifles and ammunition were issued to the local forces to aid in the defence of the town, and the rest of the stores removed to a temporary depot at Wolmar while Riga was being bombarded.

Thus ended our attempt to comfort the anti-Soviet movement in the Baltic.

The North Russia Expeditionary Force, which sailed from Newcastle in June 1918, was on a more ambitious scale. In this all the Allies participated to some extent, sending troops which, sweeping southwards, were to

establish contact with other loyal Russians and strike at the heart of Bolshevism.

This expedition was based on Archangel, the main Russian port on the Arctic Ocean, situated on the White Sea at the mouth of the River Dvina. The entrance to the White Sea, however, is narrow and blocked by ice throughout the winter and during the war Russia had built a thousand-mile railway to Murmansk on the Murman coast, an ice-free port, so as to obtain supplies throughout the year. It was feared that Germany might establish a submarine base at Murmansk, which was within easy striking distance of Scapa Flow, the headquarters of our battle fleet, and a semi-independent expedition was, therefore, sent there at the same time.

It would seem that we were badly served by our intelligence service for the situation proved very different from what was anticipated. In place of rallying round the standard, the sympathies of the inhabitants were in reality Bolshevik ; they were only nominally friendly so long as it enabled them to carry on their business in peace. Some of the regiments we raised, equipped and clothed, mutinied and went over to the enemy after murdering their officers. There were even overt attempts at mutiny in Archangel itself, only overawed by the presence of our own troops. In place of receiving an ovation, we came near to having to make a forced landing. The inhabitants acted as spies, our friends of one day might be our foes of the next, and the psychological atmosphere was so surcharged as to make the situation very difficult.

It was understood that we should find large resources of munitions supplied in the past to Russia, with an abundant staff of loyal Russians only too willing to help ; and that nothing would be wanted from home beyond a small supervisory Ordnance staff to act as instructors, with certain supplies of special equipment and clothing. Thus Colonel C. T. Fisher, who was detailed for the Archangel Force, was accompanied by only three officers, one warrant officer and 19 sergeants including men of various trades, with certain stores : while Lieutenant

Colonel Hickson, detailed for Murmansk, had with him one officer, 11 other ranks and no stores.

These expectations were not fulfilled. The Bolsheviks, who evacuated Archangel on the eve of our arrival, certainly left behind a collection of goods that they were unable to remove, but nothing like what was wanted to equip an army. Apart from manual labour, we had to depend on our own resources. The expedition first touched at Murmansk, where it was found necessary to land much that was intended for Archangel, and the very first step that had to be taken when the latter port was reached was to despatch home large demands for stores of all sorts and personnel to deal with them, so as to ensure arrival before the winter set in.<sup>1</sup>

The expedition (writes Colonel Fisher) comprised a great variety of nationalities—British, French, Americans, Italians, Russians, Poles, Finns, Serbs and Czechoslovaks. This made Ordnance services particularly difficult to administer; for though the French, Americans and Italians brought out their own supplies, we often had to provide for their needs.

As a rule stores were demanded by, and supplied to, a force which comprised a large number of very small units of several nationalities, and it was impossible to keep any proper control or adequately check the demands made on us.

G.H.Q., together with the offices of all directorates, established themselves at Archangel, on the right bank of the River Dvina; the Ordnance base depot being at Bakaritzza, some four miles further up the river on the left bank. In September and October 1918, ships began to arrive with stores and drafts of Ordnance personnel from England consisting of 15 officers and 108 other ranks, reinforcements which were badly wanted owing to the

<sup>1</sup> A point worth noting from a departmental point of view is the confusion caused by the Archangel force being allotted the code word "Elope" and Murmansk "Develope." Packages were marked accordingly, and when marks became obliterated it was easy to mistake one word for the other. So much trouble did this similarity cause that the code word Syren was substituted for Develope.

expansion of the campaign. Besides strengthening the staff at the base depot, this influx enabled forward depots to be established at Bereznik, Yemetskoe, Kholmogori and Onega, a matter of no little moment in view of the approach of winter. The three first named were all on the River Dvina—Bereznik, the farthest afield, being 200 miles from Archangel; while Onega was on the coast and reached by sea.

The importance of opening and filling these advanced depots will be readily appreciated when the conditions of transport in North Russia are realized. In the summer stores could be transported to the up-river depots by barge in bulk, though there was a persistent shortage of tugs and barges; but during the winter, when the rivers were icebound, sleigh traffic, in view of the very small capacity of the sleigh, was wholly inadequate for the conveyance of large quantities.

Towards the middle of October the general distribution of winter clothing took place; a kit designed by Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Antarctic explorer, which, with one exception, proved extremely serviceable. The articles consisted of blouse, hood and trousers of a light-coloured burberry material, moccasins for use with snowshoes, fur caps, sheep-skin lined coats, mufflers, sweaters, mitts with gauntlet cuffs, Canadian lumberman's stockings, thick socks, snow-goggles and boots with no iron in their construction. But the boots had a smooth leather sole, making it very difficult to walk on beaten snow and quite impossible to run, and they would not bear comparison with the Valinki boot worn by the Russians (a fact also reported by our Mission in Siberia). This was a knee-boot made entirely of blocked felt, thickened at the sole. Properly cared for it was extremely warm, comfortable and durable. The snow being always dry and powdery could be easily shaken off and, provided they were not worn indoors, a good pair of Valinki boots would last a whole season.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, impossible

<sup>1</sup> Scott also speaks highly of the Russian felt boot during his stay in the Antarctic. "For ship wear there are some warm, comfortable slippers provided for both officers and men, but many prefer to remain

to get enough for our troops as well as for the Russians and eventually leather or felt strips had to be nailed to the sole of the Shackleton boot, destroying its special feature by introducing a metal heat-conductor and making it essential to use a felt inner sole or sennegrass as a safeguard against frostbite.

With so many depots to be stocked, and the difficulty of foreseeing what troops would be supplied from each during the coming winter, stock margins were very small, especially for winter clothing, ammunition and the means of lighting during the long hours of darkness, for the sun rose at 11.30 a.m. and set about 2 p.m. in mid-winter. Happily there was a thaw after the first freezing of the upper reaches and it was not until the early part of November that the river finally froze over at Archangel. It is worthy of note that the only shortage that caused an enormous outcry was that of padlocks to prevent local pilfering which, up and down the country, was one of the greatest troubles we had to contend with.

Sleigh routes were then most ably organized by D.D.S.T. (Colonel R. P. Crawley), affording a daily lift of about ten tons from the base for all services exclusive of food supplies.

During the winter, thanks to the particular type of Russian stove which is built between each pair of rooms, and to the fact that all windows are double with an intervening air space of some six inches, no discomfort from the cold was experienced indoors; indeed the majority of houses were almost too warm. The extreme cold expected was about 40 degrees below zero but 30 degrees below was experienced only twice, and that for only

in their Russian felt boots. These were specially obtained from Russia at a very small cost, and are perhaps the most satisfactory footwear we possess for general purposes, now that we have modified them to suit our requirements. The modification consists in adding a sennet sole made from ordinary spun yarn and secured to canvas which is closely fitted and sewn to the boot; by this device the felt of the boot is protected from wear, and our people are able to do a great deal of work both inside and outside the ship in this comfortable footwear." *The Voyage of the Discovery*, Vol. I, p. 243 *et seq.*

two or three days on each occasion, the average temperature being about 10 degrees below zero. Preparation had to be made in the storehouses for the rigours of winter. Owing to the shortage of R.E. personnel, this work was mostly done by the Russian natives under Ordnance direction. A portion of each shed was double-lined with wood, the space between filled with sawdust, and small stoves put in these compartments. This enabled clerks to work and storemen to pack.

Workshops were established at the base and at Bereznik, where a barge was fitted up with machine tools. Large numbers of skis and sleigh-runners were made and the armament to be attended to was of the most varied nature, comprising British, French, Italian, Russian, American, Austrian and Japanese guns, all of which we had at times to overhaul and repair, besides attending to their ammunition.

During the winter, difficulty was experienced with the non-freezing buffer liquid supplied from England, the tins holding this liquid being found to contain lumps of solid matter. Mixtures of oil and turpentine were tried, and a mixture of two parts of oil and one of turpentine was found not to freeze at minus 76 degrees and gave the most satisfactory results as a buffer liquid. For lubricating purposes, a mixture of one part of oil and one part of turpentine was found to be more satisfactory than the lubricating oil received from home. The low temperature also had its effect on cordite; ranges were greatly reduced owing to the nitro-glycerine exuding and experiments were made with warmed charges which mitigated this defect to some extent.

In the autumn, four 60-pounders were ordered from England. With the greatest difficulty the ship which brought the guns was got through the ice and the guns off-loaded, but the dial-sights for these equipments could not be found. The ship carrying the ammunition was never heard of again after leaving England, and it was presumed the sights were shipped in her with other components and spare parts. A further supply of ammunition arrived in replacement, but no dial-sights. Hence,

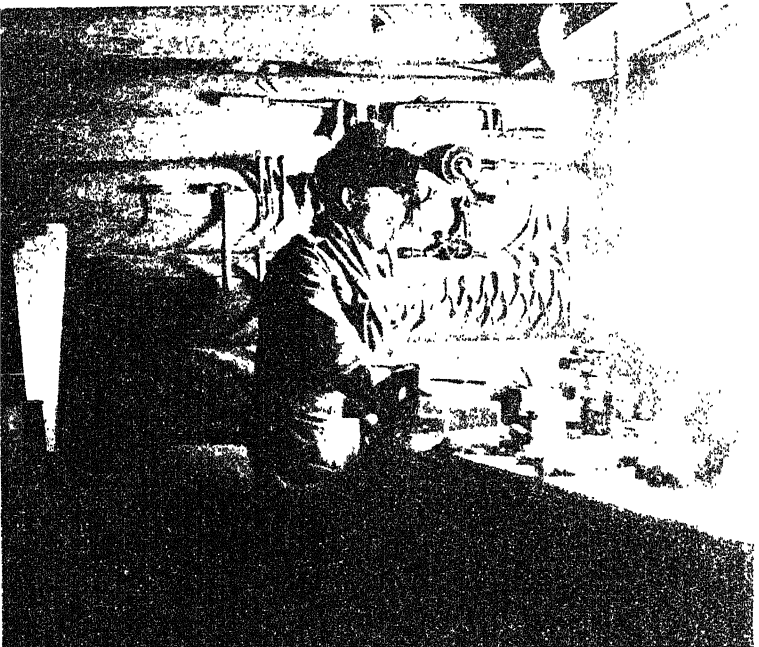






SLEIGHS LEAVING ORDNANCE  
DEPOT FOR THE FRONT

AMMUNITION SHED, OREGA



MAKING IMPROVISED DIAL SIGHTS DURING AN ARCTIC WINTER

when these guns, which were badly wanted for use against the enemy's long range artillery, were at length got up to Bereznik by sleigh, the sights for them had not come to hand. The D.A.D.O.S. Dvina Force, Major Croydon, with much ingenuity designed an emergency sight for these guns, constructed from parts of other sights. The sight was made up by Armament Staff Sergeant Hadley A.O.C. with such success that, on trial, a direct hit was obtained on a target. To carry out the work, Hadley had only a bench in a local hut and a very meagre supply of tools. For this achievement he was granted an immediate award of the M.S.M.

Owing to the river above Bereznik becoming free from ice about a fortnight before traffic would be possible from Archangel, it was proposed to build at Bereznik two rafts, on each of which was to be mounted a 155mm. howitzer to be ready in case of attack by the Bolshevist flotilla on the breaking up of the ice in the upper part of the river. The rafts were designed by a Russian engineer and the materials—planks, iron work and turntables for the guns which were mounted on field carriages—were made at Archangel and sent up to Bereznik by sleigh route for assembly. The rafts were completed and the guns mounted to time, but the rafts did not prove a success from a towing point of view.

There was desultory fighting south of Bereznik during the winter, but in the spring the country became quite impassable owing to the melting snow and ice. The intention had been, when it became once more traversable, to undertake a big offensive against the Bolshevists on the Dvina front. Denekin was making good progress at this time and it was hoped to make contact with other troops under Admiral Kolchak who were advancing from the east.

Administration of the districts right and left of the river was transferred to the Russians who took over our depots at Yemetskoe, Kholmogori and Onega, while we retained Archangel and Bereznik. G.H.Q. moved up to Bereznik which became the centre of activity, the

Ordnance depot there was expanded and rifles and ammunition were collected for the use of Kolchak.

But the fates decided otherwise. Denekin's bolt was soon shot and Kolchak, instead of advancing, had to beat a retreat. The whole of the Onega district went over to the Bolsheviks, exposing that flank, while the other threatened to follow suit.<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Allied Council recognized the futility of further action in this quarter and ordered the complete evacuation of North Russia. Bereznik was abandoned in July. G.H.Q. returned to Archangel and the expedition, with its munitions, sailed for home in September 1919.

Meanwhile the course of events at Murmansk had been very similar. Immediately after our arrival, writes Hickson, small forces were sent south, one to Kem and one to Kandalaska, and a small Ordnance detachment was sent to Kandalaska to supply these two forces. Along the northern coast of Russia, westward, there is a small inlet almost on the Swedish frontier, and in this inlet is situated the town of Petchenga, fifteen hours distant from Murmansk by sea. It was considered necessary to garrison this town, which would have been a very suitable place for a German submarine base, and some of the Murmansk infantry were accordingly sent there.

An Ordnance depot was opened to supply the infantry and other Russian and local units who formed part of the garrison, the stores being sent from Murmansk in small coasting vessels which could not go up the river

<sup>1</sup> The Ordnance detachment at Onega had some exciting experiences. On the 21st July, the depot was attacked by the Bolsheviks during the night, and Captain Fox, Ordnance officer in charge, finding resistance against overpowering odds useless, surrendered after Sergeant Doggett A.O.C. had been mortally wounded. The British garrison was confined in one filthy and verminous cell and two days later was marched off on the way to Moscow under escort together with a party of loyal Russians. Then a British Monitor came up the river, threatened to bombard Onega, landed a party of marines and bluejackets and rescued the party.

On the 20th July the British at an outlying spot at the front, Chevuko, including Sub-conductor Triggs A.O.C., were overpowered and, after six days confinement in the local gaol, were sent under escort to Moscow and confined there. They were eventually set free by diplomatic action.

where the garrison was stationed, so that two transshipments had to be made before the stores could be landed at the quay side.

The question of workshops for the force was a difficult one for some time until a large repair ship, the *Xma*, which had been commissioned for the use of the Russian fleet, was found. This was commandeered, Ordnance artisans were put on board, and they worked at repairs side by side with the Russians. This ship was fully equipped for general engineering with foundry, lathes, milling and drilling machines, etc. A workshop repair train was also formed which had five or six shops for carpenters, armament artificers, tailors and shoemakers, and plied up and down the railway line between Kem and Murmansk, doing repairs where required.

Towards the end of 1918 some Italian infantry, an Italian ski-ing unit and more French troops arrived, all of whom drew stores from us; and it was necessary to be very well equipped with interpreters to understand some of the extraordinary demands of these foreign units, who were spread out over the field of operations and indented on our depots wherever they happened to be.

Large numbers of Russian rifles and machine guns were captured during July and early August, and on the 11th August the whole force was served out with Russian rifles, machine guns and .762 ammunition. This was done as it was hoped to join up with Kolchak whose troops had these rifles and ammunition; and it was thought that confusion might arise if two calibres were used in one theatre of operations.

Large quantities of Roumanian gun ammunition, acquired in various parts of the area of action, were sent to Murmansk, and it was a great puzzle to know what to do with the truck loads that arrived. Eventually an ammunition dump was formed on the hill outside Murmansk on the main railway line. Sidings were constructed so that these trucks could be unloaded, and Russian labour was used for handling the big gun ammunition.

Some of the means of conveying stores from place to place were novel and possibly had not been used in civilized warfare before. In some parts reindeer and dogs were used in conjunction with sledges, and after the first three months there was very little transport except by sledge.

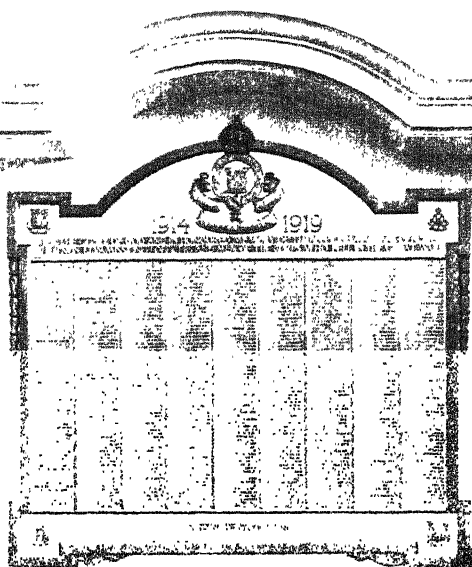
During February and March 1919 the forces gradually moved south, Kem became general headquarters with Medvegia Gora as advanced headquarters, and the main Ordnance depot was formed at Popoff, which is the port of Kem on the White Sea. Stores still arrived at Murmansk, and were forwarded generally by rail via Kem, though sometimes by water. An advanced Ordnance depot on a small scale was also opened at Medvegia Gora, south of Kem.

But here also, as on the Dvina, there was failure to make connection with the loyalists whom it had been hoped to join, and the 'White' troops mutinied and turned 'Red.' By August 1919 we had withdrawn our outlying stations to Murmansk and during October our troops sailed for home, taking with them all British arms and ammunition, and leaving behind other stores and clothing in the hope that they might be of some service to such anti-revolutionary Russians as might be prepared to continue the struggle.

\* \* \* \* \*

So ended these attempts to fight the Russian revolution. The sole material result of all our efforts was to provide the Soviet Republic with what it most lacked—ample resources of first-rate munitions, military equipment of every kind and splendid clothing for its soldiers. The moral effect of the failure was to provide the Bolsheviks with abundant and effective propaganda.





TO THE GLORIOUS DEAD

