

CIVIL WAR IN THE TAIGA

*A Story of Guerrilla Warfare in
the Forests of Eastern Siberia*

BY
I. STROD



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12
13
14
15
16

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction by Mikhalyov	7
Brief Autobiography by the Author	17
CHAPTER	
I. The March Begins	21
II. We Gain Time	33
III. An Encounter with the Enemy's Scouts	41
IV. We Arrive in Sasil-sisi	43
V. The Battle with General Vishnevsky	47
VI. The Death of a White Colonel	57
VII. The Late Repentance of a White Sergeant	60
VIII. Negotiations with Pepelyaev	64
IX. The Cunning of the Whites	71
X. Pepelyaev Launches His Grand Offensive	74
XI. A Night Attack Frustrated	79
XII. Besieged	81
XIII. Without Bread	83
XIV. The Medical Stores Run Out	85
XV. The Plight of the Wounded	89
XVI. A Conversation During the Night	92
XVII. Pepelyaev's Orders	94
XVIII. The Siege Continues	95
XIX. We Get Some Fresh News	99
XX. Our Decision	104
XXI. The Red Flag and the Accordeon	106
XXII. General Rakitin's Discomfiture	112
XXIII. The Stranglehold Tightens	117
XXIV. Death and Testament of a Red Army Man	122
XXV. A Night of Vigil	124
XXVI. The Whites are Reinforced	127
XXVII. More Negotiations	129
XXVIII. False Alarm	132
XXIX. Pepelyaev Throws up the Sponge	134
XXX. Deserters	136
XXXI. Release	139
XXXII. At the Port of Okhotsk	144
XXXIII. The Capture of Pepelyaev	146
XXXIV. Judgment by Proletarian Trial	148

INTRODUCTION

The Yakut Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic lies between the 105th and 163rd meridian east longitude and the 56th and 74th parallel north latitude. Territorially, it is the largest autonomous republic in the U.S.S.R. Its area is three million square kilometres, one-sixth of the area of the Soviet Union. In respect of density of population, it is the most thinly inhabited part of the Union, there being 313,000 people in the whole of Yakutia, not more than 0.1 person per square kilometre. The Yakuts make up the largest part of the population; there are 77.5 per cent Yakuts, 11.5 per cent Russians, 4.2 per cent Evenks, and 7.2 per cent of miscellaneous races (Yakagirs, Lamats, Tatars, etc.).

Pre-revolutionary Yakutia was a tsarist colony for political exiles. The working masses of pre-revolutionary Yakutia were held under the yoke of a two-fold exploitation: that of the Russian bourgeoisie, and that of their own native bourgeoisie, the *toyons* (tribal chiefs) and the kulaks.

The tsarist colonial policy was concerned only with obtaining the valuable furs of the region and not with the development of its productive forces. The vast wealth of the region remained latent in the earth, untouched by men. In 1917 the total value of industrial production amounted to only 700,000 rubles. All the industrial enterprises were of a semi-domestic craft character. The basic industries of this type were: one 180 kilowatt electric power station employing twenty-six workers; a saw mill with two 67 horse-power boilers employing eighteen workers; one printshop which had three presses and employed thirty-two people; and a salt works with a daily production of five hundred to eight hundred tons of salt.

The taxes, which were the chief means of colonial plunder, were a heavy burden on the poor and middle peasant masses of Yakutia. The merchants took whatever remained after the taxes were collected; they made the peasants drunk with alcohol and sold them knick-knacks and all sorts of goods at very high prices. The enormous taxes and other abuses of the tsarist colonial policy forced the poor and middle peasants into a condition of virtual slavery in relation to the local *toyons* and kulaks, who as a result acquired the land and the cattle which provided the Yakuts with the basic necessities of existence. Thus, at the time of the Revolution of 1917, 73 per cent of the population (poor and middle peasants) owned 45 per cent of the hay and grain-growing land; 6.5 per cent of all the farms were without cattle; and 75.3 per cent of the farms had only three to ten head of cattle each.

Under these conditions, the poor and middle peasantry led a semi-starved beggarly existence, feeding on unleavened bread, with meat as a rare delicacy. The poor peasant had to work for the kulak a whole month for a pood (about 36 pounds) of bread. The poor peasant had thus sunk back into slavery; he had to suffer patiently every cruelty and humiliation heaped upon him by the *toyon* and kulak. The *toyon* and kulak stood at the other pole of the social sphere. Vast areas of land sown with hay and grain and pasturing large herds of cattle were concentrated in their hands. Agricultural implements and machinery were the monopoly of the kulak. Of cultural development, nothing can be said except that the tsarist government did all it could to retard it, employing vodka, cards, and the church as its main means of anti-cultural propaganda. Before the Revolution only 2 per cent of the Yakut population were able to read or write.

In the October Revolution, the toilers of Yakutia overthrew the power of the bourgeoisie and set up the power of the Soviets. The *toyons* and kulaks resisted stubbornly, and together with the Russian whiteguards carried on an obstinate and prolonged struggle against the Soviet power.

After Kolchak's reactionary movement had been crushed, the workers of Soviet Yakutia had to wage war against the insurrectionary movement (1921-22), which was led by the Yakut *toyons* and kulaks in alliance with Russian whiteguard officers. This was followed by a struggle against the armed incursion of General Pepelyaev, and finally there was a long series of bandit uprisings, which continued until 1928 when the last of the whiteguards were dispersed.

On April 27, 1922, by a decree of the Central Executive Committee, Yakutia was declared an Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic. From that moment, a new era in the history of Yakutia began. The unskilled workers and the masses of poor and middle peasantry not only took power into their own hands, but under the leadership of the Communist Party, gained the means for creating their own republic which joined the R.S.F.S.R. as an equal member of the federation. April 27, 1932, was the tenth anniversary of the Yakut A.S.S.R.

In spite of the civil war, the banditry which followed it, and the troubles that attended the economic and cultural rehabilitation of the young republic during the first five years of its existence, the workers of Yakutia have made enormous progress on the front of socialist construction. This has been achieved thanks to the fundamentally sound guiding principles of Lenin's National Policy and under the leadership and with the material and cultural aid of the proletariat of the advanced regions of the U.S.S.R. The national economy of Yakutia has undergone a fundamental change. Socialist industry has sprung up and is now the dominant factor in the national economy of the young autonomous republic. The gold industry (Aldan) has undergone a mighty process of development and is now producing from 25 to 30 per cent of all the gold that is mined in the U.S.S.R. In addition, a number of other industrial enterprises have arisen: the coal industry, with an output of 15,000 tons yearly; two lumber mills producing 47,000 cubic metres of wood; timber and firewood cutting mills producing 248,000 cubic metres of timber and 300,000 cubic

metres of firewood; a brick factory producing 2,500,000 bricks; a leather factory with an output of 7,980,000 square decimetres of light goods and 19,000 kilograms of sole leather; one lime factory producing 1,000 tons; a printing industry consisting of five printshops with an output of 286,000,000 ems;* a salt industry yielding 3,000 tons; fisheries producing 3,000 tons; and a beer brewery producing 20,000 litres. The gross production for 1932 (excluding the Aldan gold industry) is estimated at 10,500,000 rubles plus the domestic craft industry which amounts to 11,700,000 rubles. In 1917, the total volume of production amounted to only 7,000,000 rubles. Side by side with the growth of industry, there is also the training of cadres of proletarian workers, above all from among the national proletariat. There are now 10,786 industrial workers in the region and of these 1,976 are Yakuts. In 1917, there were only 35. As a result of this marked progress in the development of industry, the position of industry in relation to the national economy has become essentially different. Industry yielded 53 per cent of the total value of goods produced in 1931, while agriculture yielded 47 per cent. Yakutia is changing from a highly agricultural region into an industrial-agrarian republic.

The Revolution gave all the hay and grain areas to the farm workers and to the poor and middle peasants. During the ten years' existence of the new republic, cattle raising, as a leading branch of farming and agriculture, has been greatly developed. In the ten years 1922-1932 the sown area has increased from 23,000 to 74,000 hectares. The number of large horned cattle and horses has increased from 561,000 in 1922 to 747,000 in 1931. The social organization of agriculture is also changing. The poor and middle peasantry of the villages have decisively and irrevocably taken the path of socialism; in 1931, 32 per cent of all the farms were collectivized, while in 1932, 48 per cent were collectivized. There is one grain Soviet farm and

* Ems—printers' unit of measurement—*Ed.*

four cattle-raising collective farms. Agriculture is not only being re-built on a socialist basis, but endowed with a new technical equipment.

There are now three machine and tractor stations with one hundred and twenty-one tractors, two mowing-machine stations, ten unmechanized creameries, stations where large-scale agricultural implements may be hired, steam flour mills, etc.

In the cultural and social sphere there has been an especially great amount of constructive work done. In 1917, there were one hundred and fifty-three elementary and higher schools, six secondary and polytechnical schools, and three preparatory schools. Now, there are four hundred and eighty-eight elementary and higher schools, fourteen secondary and polytechnical schools, and one hundred and thirty-five preparatory schools. In 1917, there were 5,500 students in all the schools; there are now 40,377. In preparatory school institutions there were 100 students and now there are 4,150. Forty per cent of the entire population is now taking part in study of some kind or other. Besides this, there are 786 Yakut students attending central universities. Yakutia for the first time has a university of its own, together with an agricultural institute and two workers' schools (agricultural and pedagogical). In 1933, a communist college and a pedagogical institute will be opened. There is a widespread network of institutions for political education in all districts.

The publishing business is also developing. There are six newspapers, of which four are in the Yakut language. Before the Revolution there were only two newspapers. Now the total newspaper circulation is 17,300, that is, one paper to four or five households. Six magazines are published, of which two are in the Yakut language. Besides this, papers are issued at every factory, Soviet farm and machine and tractor station, in many collective farms, in all schools, village reading rooms, and workers' clubs. Newspapers and books are now accessible to every peasant. Before the Revolution, only 2 per cent of the

population of Yakutia could read or write, whereas the percentage is now 70. The proletarian revolution has given wide scope to creative thought. Tens and hundreds of writers, poets, dramatists, and men of letters have appeared. In this way, a culture has been developed which is national in form and proletarian in content.

In the second Five-Year Plan, industry will be developed on an unprecedented scale. The gold industry, which will necessarily progress with the exploitation of the new districts, Indigirsk and Pimoisk, will be the chief branch of the national economy. The lumber industry is also developing on a large scale. The huge forests of the republic are for the first time being opened up to real industrial exploitation. New lumber mills, a factory to produce wooden building materials, and a wood distillation plant will be built. The production of the timber industry will be used mainly for the internal needs of the republic; a part, however, will be exported, mostly the wood distillation products.

The second Five-Year Plan opens up the real industrial exploitation of the vast natural wealth of the republic, the complete development of which in the coming years will place Yakutia among the chief districts of the Union. The second Five-Year Plan will effect an essential change in the entire economy of the republic and will initiate the development of new branches of industry such as non-ferrous and valuable ferrous metals, the chemical industry, in particular the manufacture of artificial fertilizers, wood distillation, and the food industry, above all—canneries.

Collectivization of farms and the liquidation of the kulaks as a class will be accomplished during the second Five-Year Plan. The problems of cattle raising and grain farming as branches of agriculture will be completely solved, thus ensuring that the growing demands of the workers and collective farmers will be satisfied and their material position substantially improved.

With a view to developing the national economy of the republic and strengthening the communications between the various districts, important measures are being projected for the solution of the problem of transportation.

In the field of cultural construction, the second Five-Year Plan provides for making elementary school education universal, thus completely eliminating illiteracy, and for a great spread of technical education.

In this way, the second Five-Year Plan will turn Yakutia into an industrial-agrarian cultural republic, occupying a position of importance and a definite place in the structure of the general economy of the U.S.S.R. The second Five-Year Plan will turn Yakutia into a classless socialist community. Such large-scale construction is possible only under conditions of a proletarian dictatorship. The achievements of the Yakut Republic by its tenth anniversary and its prospects of development during the second Five-Year Plan are proof of the correctness of Lenin's National Policy, and are a striking example of how backward national districts, where the patriarchal mode of life once predominated, can build a socialist society without having to pass through the capitalist stage of development.

We believe that these remarks are absolutely necessary if the reader is to obtain a clear idea of the circumstances under which the events of this book occurred. They may also enable him to understand the connection between these events and the entire course of the history of the proletarian revolution, the history of the heroic struggle of the Red Army against the Whites in all corners of the Soviet Union, and especially at that time in Yakutia.

In this book, Comrade Strod describes the struggle of the workers of Yakutia against the troops of General Pepelyaev.

The Pepelyaev adventure set itself the task of capturing the city of Yakutsk, which is the centre of the Yakut Republic, and of overthrowing the Soviet power in Yakutia as a first step towards overthrowing the Soviet power in the whole of the U.S.S.R. General Pepelyaev dreamt that after capturing

Yakutsk, he would seize the city of Irkutsk, march on through Siberia, and thence to Moscow! Pepelyaev found support in Yakutia only among the *toyons* and the kulaks. The working masses rallied around the Communist Party, and soon routed the Whites and drove them out of the country.

The Red Army and the working masses formed a united front in the struggle against the whiteguards. There was no rear in this war; it was one battle front.

In this struggle, the Red Army, under the difficult conditions of the Siberian winter, displayed great valour, heroism and devotion to the cause of the proletarian revolution. The small detachment under the command of Comrade Strod, the author of this book, displayed noteworthy heroism. Comrade Strod's detachment occupied two peasant huts in the district of Sasil-sisi, in the midst of the Siberian forest, far from the centre, cut off from their original base, without connections either with the centre at Yakutsk or with other sections of the Red Army. They had hardly any food or medical stores. Yet they withstood the siege for nineteen days against the main forces of Pepelyaev, which were better armed, which surpassed them considerably in numbers, and which consisted mainly of officers.

Comrade Strod thus held up the main forces of the enemy and gave the Red Army the chance to rally its forces and to deal the enemy a fatal blow. In this siege, the Red Army men and their commander, Comrade Strod, demonstrated exceptional heroism and a high degree of military science. Comrade Strod, who was wounded at the beginning of the battle by two bullets, did not abandon his command, setting an example of bravery and courage which inspired the Red Army men to still greater efforts.

Both Comrade Strod and "Grandpa" Kurashov, who also played a great role in the defeat of General Pepelyaev, took part in much fighting all over Yakutia. They are the most popular and beloved heroes of the workers of Yakutia and are now taking an active part in the socialist construction of the

Yakut Republic. The strength of the whiteguards was exhausted by the continual attacks on Comrade Strod's detachment in Sasil-sisi. General Pepelyaev, morally conquered and perceiving the uselessness of struggling against the Red Army and the imminence of his defeat, after the surrender of Amga, was forced to flee from Sasil-sisi and confess himself beaten. The siege of Sasil-sisi, the superhuman endurance of Comrade Strod and his detachment is unprecedented in the history of the Civil War. Only the proletarian revolution, only the Red Army, is distinguished by such heroism; only supreme devotion to the cause of the proletarian revolution brings forth heroism such as was displayed at Sasil-sisi.

Comrade Strod's book, *Civil War in the Taiga*, will undoubtedly have a wide circulation among the working masses.

Mikhalyov.



I. V. Strod, the Author



"Grandpa" Kurashev

A BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born on April 10, 1894, in the city of Lutzin, Vitebsk gubernia. My father, a poor peasant, was trained in a military school for medical orderlies. After completing his term of active service, he did not return to the village, but served as a medical orderly in the Rural District Hospital of Lutzin.

I was first taught in a parochial school and then entered the city school, but did not go higher than the fourth grade. I went straight from the schoolroom into the old army as a volunteer in 1914. I was enrolled in the ranks of the Eleventh Finland Rifle Regiment.

During the Kerensky period in 1917, I was raised to the rank of ensign for good conduct under fire, and was decorated with four crosses of St. George. I was demobilized from the old army in February 1918. In April of the same year, I volunteered for service with the Red Guards in the First Cavalry Division in the city of Irkutsk. Under N. A. Kalandarishvilly I fought against the Czechs and Semenov's White army.

After the defeat of the Soviet power in Siberia, I went from the city of Svobodny, on the Amur, to the taiga* with a group of comrades, at the head of whom was N. N. Yakovlev, President of Central Siberia. From the Amur region, we went to the Yakut region, where a number of our comrades, with Yakovlev at the head, were killed by the whiteguards. Five comrades and I had the good fortune to escape with our lives, but we were imprisoned in the city of Olekminsk. I was in jail there from November 10, 1918 to December 17, 1919. After our release, I was put in charge of a Red detachment of work-

* Taiga—the Siberian forest or jungle.—*Ed.*

ers and peasants who rebelled against Kolchak. I then went to the city of Irkutsk, where I again joined the partisan detachments of Kalandarishvilly. As commander of a squadron I took part in the battles against Semenov's army and the Japanese. Then I commanded the First Caucasian Cavalry Partisan Regiment.

In the battle of October 27, 1920, against the division of Baron Ungern, at the Verkhne-Ulkhunsk station in Zabaikal, I was commander of a partisan detachment of four hundred and twenty men. The Whites, numbering 1,500, were driven out of that village, many prisoners were taken, and the provision train was seized. I was rewarded for this with the Order of the Red Banner.

For the military operations in Yakutia against General Pepelyaev, and for withstanding the twenty days' siege in the locality of Sasil-sisi under unbelievably difficult conditions, I was rewarded with a second Order of the Red Banner in 1923.

For rounding up the marauding bands of Donsky (1923) in the Balagansk province of the Irkutsk government, I was awarded a third Order of the Red Banner. I was also awarded a silver Caucasian sword by the commander of the Twelfth Corps, Comrade Tchaikovsky.

In the city of Yakutsk, one of the streets is named after me; in Ulus, a school carries my name.

In the World War, I was twice wounded and once shell-shocked. In the Civil War, I was wounded five times, the last time in 1923, in the battle with General Pepelyaev. A bullet pierced my right lung and is still there. Because of this injury, I was demobilized from the Red Army in August, 1928, as unfit for military service in peace time and restricted to second category service in war time.

My last position in the Red Army was commander of Battalion 103, the Siberian Rifle Regiment. Now, I am in the civil service and am studying at the evening school of the Frunze Military Academy. I have been a member of the Communist Party since 1927.

- Two of my brothers, my elder brother, Joseph, and the younger, Anton, served in the Red Army as volunteers, My brother Anton fell in the ranks of the Red Army in the Crimea during the attack on Perekop.

Ivan Yakovlevich Strod

Moscow, 1932.

CHAPTER I

THE MARCH BEGINS

My detachment left Amga and advanced swiftly without encountering any of the Whites. On February 2, we halted for the night, twenty versts from Petropavlovskoye. At four in the morning of February 3, after everyone was wide awake, I gave the detachment over to Ivanishko, the commander of a platoon, and taking five horsemen with me, I rode ahead and arrived in Petropavlovskoye at dawn.

Here I was surprised at the unconcern which reigned among the garrison. The Red Army men of the battalion, billeted in all the peasant homes, had undressed and slept in their underclothes only; no company was named for duty, there was no patrol, and no mounted patrols were sent out. The entire guard of the battalion consisted of two sentry posts placed at the northern and southern extremities of the village, in spite of the fact that on three sides of the settlement, the forest reached within a hundred to a hundred and fifty paces, and that on the eastern side the high left bank of the river Aldan could effectively screen the approach of an enemy from that direction. Here, however, there were no sentries posted and no trenches dug. And this at a time when Pepelyaev's troops were already at the mouth of the river Mili and it was necessary to be ready to repulse them.

Such slackness was sickening.

I sent the five Red Army men, who were with me, on patrol, although they needed rest and were chilled to the bone. But they themselves fully grasped how serious the situation was. I myself set off to look for battalion headquarters which I quickly found thanks to the small red flag hung out on the gate.

Dmitriev had also undressed to sleep. I awakened him with difficulty, handed him a parcel from the commander, and told him what I thought about the lax disposition of the battalion. Dmitriev answered, "Never mind, they won't catch me unawares. I've got good agents, and they let me have first hand information about the movements of the Whites. And we've got trenches here too, let me tell you."

I went to have a look at those trenches—nothing but shallow ditches dug out during the autumn of the previous year, now filled with snow up to the level of the earth. It would take hours of work to clear them out.

On that same day, they set about building new barricades of *balbakhi*.*

Dmitriev started preparations for the march to Amga which was delayed by the lack of carts as there were thirteen hundred cartridges, besides grenades, provisions and so forth, to be taken along. The means of transportation for the entire base had to be mobilized at the nearest inhabited points, which held up the battalion for at least four or five days.

Dmitriev told me that Artemiev's White detachment was thirty versts east of Petropavlovskoye. I decided to make use of the delay by carrying on operations against this detachment. For this purpose, I asked Dmitriev to reinforce my detachment with one company of his battalion and with a few machine-guns. After receiving his consent, I prepared for the attack.

The commanders and especially the Red Army men in the battalion were in poor spirits. Our recent misfortunes were not forgotten; in fact, they were brought to mind daily by the sight of the bodies of our comrades who had fallen in the fighting of the past few days. The bodies—more than thirty in number—were brought to Petropavlovskoye and laid out in

* *Balbakhi*—manure frozen into slabs, more than a yard long and some nine inches thick. Placed one behind the other, they form a good shield. The bullet goes through two layers, the third is only split, the fourth is invulnerable and gives way only when machine-gun fire is concentrated on any one point. I. S.

an empty barn. The door of the barn was not locked, and the men, having much spare time on their hands and nothing to do, used to drop in here almost every day and pay visits to the dead. For hours on end they would carry on conversations with the dead bodies of their comrades, asking them if they were not cold or hungry, and so forth.

When contact was established with Amga and mail arrived, some of the men took the letters to the barn and there, in the deathly silence, read out loud the letters that were addressed to their 'dead comrades. The words re-echoed uncannily among the rafters of the old barn and as silence followed the words of the reader he would exclaim, addressing one of the dead who lay there so still: "Mitya, old chap! You waited and waited for that letter and it never came! And now you lie there fast asleep! What about the folks at home? They'll expect a reply."

You can imagine that such morbid happenings deeply affected the psychology of the Red Army men, and caused them to dwell on our recent failures. I pointed out to Dmitriev that such scenes were quite inadmissible. He explained that he had sent a report to the commander stating his intention of sending the bodies of the Red Army men killed in battle to Yakutsk, and that he was waiting for a reply.

On that day, a guard was stationed at the barn and its doors were nailed up. The peasants together with the Red Army men made a large bonfire in the village square. When the ground began to thaw, they started to dig a "Brothers' Grave." They worked the whole night, and by dinner time the next day, the grave was ready. All the corpses had been taken the night before to some peasants' houses, where they were washed and dressed in clean linen. At two o'clock in the afternoon they were buried in the grave. On the small mound that was formed over the grave, a large five-pointed star, made by a local peasant at his own initiative, was set up. As there was no real paint, red ink was used to colour it. Our farewell volleys re-echoed through the surrounding forest as the bodies of our comrades were lowered into the grave.

In the evening all the commanders met at battalion headquarters to draw up plans for renewed operations against the Whites.

Dark blue waves of tobacco and makhorka* smoke filled the room, and curled up to the ceiling. As many as ten rifles hung on the wall with their muzzles downward, with full loaded cartridge pouches at their sides. On the window sill, some Mill's grenades were lying about. In the corner near the stove stood a "Maxim" surrounded by several worn out cartridge cases tightly packed with machine-gun bands. Machine-gunners lay about on the dirty floor which was strewn with cigarette butts, the house dog, Polkan, peacefully snoring alongside of them.

The meeting of the commanders ended at five o'clock in the evening. Everything was decided. It was agreed to march twenty versts along the road, leave the baggage carts under a light guard, load the machine-guns on the horses and advance the remaining ten versts through the forest, so as to escape the enemy's sentinels and take his main body by surprise.

Everything seemed settled and the commanders wanted to move off with their platoons. But four hours before the time set for the advance, a loud knock was suddenly heard at the door. A man entered and reported that three Red Army men had just arrived at headquarters. Dmitriev got up and went into the kitchen.

He quickly returned, pale and agitated. All gathered round him in alarm.

"Comrades, Amga has been taken by Pepelyaev. Our garrison has been wiped out!"

We were all stunned at the unexpected news.

The survivors from Amga came into the room. Their faces were black and frozen, their hands swollen, their appearance ragged and haggard; they no longer resembled human beings. Their arrival had a still greater effect on those present.

These men were so exhausted that they could not give more

* Makhorka—an inferior sort of tobacco.—*Ed.*

details of the loss of Amga. They were falling off their feet as though drunk. But despite this, they were not allowed to lie down until the medical orderly had dressed their wounds and had given them hot milk to drink.

The capture of Amga by the Whites completely changed the situation. The detachment found itself two hundred versts behind the lines of the Whites and four hundred versts away from Yakutsk. The contemplated attack on Artemiev had to be abandoned. We were faced with the question—what was to be done—remain in Petropavlovskoye or try to break through to Yakutsk.

A council of war was called. There was a division of opinion among the commanders. Some considered it better to remain in Petropavlovskoye for a while until orders came from Yakutsk.*

The others insisted that we march forward immediately. The outcome was a decision to leave Petropavlovskoye and move towards Yakutsk. There remained only the question of which road to take. There were two roads: one straight to Amga and the other a roundabout route, six hundred versts long and presenting extraordinary difficulties; it was necessary first to descend to the valley of the Aldan river and go along it as far as the Okhotsk ferry (three hundred versts without a road), then to turn west along the Okhotsk highway so as to come out on the Churapchu road. This latter route was pronounced too difficult, considering the lack of horses and the weak condition of many of our comrades.

It was therefore decided to move straight on to Amga without delay. If Pepelyaev had already left for Yakutsk, the Reds would seize Amga, destroy his base and go further; if Pepelyaev was still to be found in Amga, we would engage him in battle and detain him there as long as possible.

There was one other serious question: what was to be done

* We afterwards learned that three mounted messengers were sent by Baikalov from Yakutsk to Petropavlovskoye, and although each took a different route, they were all captured.—I. S.

with the supplies? We had only seventy carts at this time, which meant we could only take reserves of ammunition and a very small quantity of food supplies. We cut down all we could in the matter of food supplies, but nevertheless ten thousand Choche automatic cartridges had to be sunk in the river Aldan and even then there remained fifteen hundred cartridges for each automatic; there were more than three hundred thousand cartridges for the rifles and a considerable supply of grenades.

As horses were needed for the machine-guns, for the carts and for the medical service, only a ten-day supply of food could be taken. The rest of our supplies we distributed among the population—more than one thousand poods* of flour, two hundred poods of butter, forty boxes of brick tea, one hundred poods of salt, etc.

Although the Whites afterwards tried, they did not succeed in confiscating the supplies left to the population by the Reds. They did not collect a tenth part of all that was distributed. On the other hand, of the cartridges sunk in the Aldan river, they succeeded in obtaining almost half, most of which missed fire.

The night passed quietly. At nine in the morning, the whole garrison, with rifles, cartridge cases and all the machine-guns, gathered for a meeting in the large house of the merchant, Yusup Galibarov. Only the guard and the mounted patrol did not attend.

The first one to speak was the Red Army man from the Amga garrison. The entire audience listened to him eagerly.

"Comrades," he began, "we ourselves, and most of all Comrade Sutorikhin, are guilty of the surrender of Amga and of our defeat. We slept in the peasant houses and were unprepared for battle; we did not wake up until the sentinels opened fire on the enemy.

"The Red Army men ran out of the houses without knowing

* A pood = 36 pounds.—*Ed.*

what to do. There were no commanders and Pepelyaev's troops advanced into the village in silence, without any noise or cheering. Their silence increased our confusion. The Whites were united while we were separated, and the fog made it difficult to distinguish our own people from the enemy.

"We heard machine-gun fire, but from which side, we could not tell. Even when the Whites came within very close range, we did not shoot, for we took them for our own people. And when we did begin to shoot, it was too late. They advanced in extended order, while we were scattered about in groups of threes and fives.

"Most of the shooting took place at Koryakin's house, where Comrade Renkus was stationed with a machine-gun. There was also much shooting near the church, where our headquarters was located. But we did not succeed in breaking through to headquarters—though we tried to several times. Wherever we came, we found the Whites waiting for us.

"When the fighting was over, we found that of the seven members of our section quartered in one small house, two were either killed or wounded—I don't know which—and the remaining five somehow escaped from the village. At first we thought of trying to reach Yakutsk, but then, on reconsideration, we decided to come here to warn you. We walked for three days along the road, seeking shelter for the night with the inhabitants, who fed us only on meat and tea—no bread. Then, on the fourth day, we saw some mounted men, and being afraid to keep to the road any longer, we took to the taiga and the pathless forest. We were soon ready to drop with exhaustion having eaten nothing but snow for two days."

In the deep sockets of the dark frost-bitten face, burned a pair of clever lively eyes. He spoke quietly, drawing his words a little, and sketched on the table with his dirty, frost-bitten, bandaged fingers.

"While we were struggling through the taiga, we were all heartened by the thought that no matter how frozen, we would somehow reach our own people. We didn't mind getting killed

in battle but we did not want to lie down and perish without a struggle.

"We stumbled along, half blind from hunger and fatigue, and our legs gave way under us.

"Two of our comrades, utterly exhausted, got within fifteen versts of Petropavlovskoye and then collapsed and froze before our eyes. We couldn't help them. We were barely alive when we got here."

The listeners wanted to toss the three heroes in the air, but their bandaged faces and hands, their looks of exhaustion, restrained us from demonstrating our pride and respect in this way.

We rose from our seats to honour the memory of our comrades who had been killed at Amga and those who fell on the road.

After this, I briefly informed the meeting of our position and outlined the task which confronted us, pointing out the need for a unified command. As a result, the battalion and my detachment were put together to form one combined detachment which would include three companies, a machine-gun section, three cavalry squadrons, and the sanitary and quartermaster section.

At this meeting, it was unanimously decided that I, Strod, should take command of the combined detachment, that Dmitriev be designated staff commander, and that Kropachev be appointed military commissar.

With this the meeting ended. All the Red Army men and commanders unanimously decided to sacrifice their lives if necessary, to hold Pepelyaev back in Amga, to inflict as much loss as possible on him, to undermine the strength of his corps both morally and materially, and do our utmost to perform our revolutionary duty to the workers.

With great enthusiasm, we began our preparations for the departure. Many of the inhabitants wanted to leave their homes and join the detachment; we did our best to keep them back, but five or six people made up their minds to follow us.

The peasants themselves voluntarily provided us with all the horses we needed.

"Take them, comrades, so the Whites don't get them. We know that the Soviet power will not let us die of starvation; the Soviets will help us to sow our fields. If only the Whites be driven away we will not be lost. We are leaving ourselves some oxen; that is enough for our wants—to bring firewood from the forest and water from the Aldan. What do they want, these Whites? They have sucked the peasants' blood and ruined the people." Thus the peasants stood by us in our hour of need. They even gave the detachment their entire reserve of baked bread.

February 7th passed quickly in feverish preparations. At eleven o'clock that night the combined detachment, consisting of two hundred and eighty-two men, left Petropavlovskoye for Amga.

The weather kept warm. The sky was overcast with clouds and there was a slight snowfall, as the detachment left the village and plunged into the forest. For a time we could hear the barking of the village dogs; but these sounds gradually died down, and the detachment was swallowed up in the vast silence of the taiga.

With the exception of those who were ill and of the first squadron, all of us were on foot. Many of the Red Army men who wore shoes fell on the smooth slippery road, but all were filled with enthusiasm and overflowing with strength and energy.

We marched until dawn without a halt and covered forty versts during the night.

We finally halted in the neighbourhood of Soordakh and the mounted squadron was sent ahead to reconnoitre. They soon returned, reporting that the camp was occupied by an unknown number of the enemy.

We quickly prepared for action. It was decided to surround the enemy. In front of us was a bare plain. The first company formed in extended order and opened a sharp rifle fire.

The enemy, forming in several lines, took cover near the huts and replied weakly to our fire.

Two squadrons and the third company moved round to the right flank, while the first squadron, the mounted one, moved over to the left.

We advanced to the attack. Seeing that they were surrounded on all sides, the Whites, after a short ten-minute exchange of shots, began to run.

We did not succeed in closing the ring. In their hurry they left two prisoners in a hut, who had been sent from Petropavlovskoye to establish communications with Amga and had been ambushed on the way.

They told us that Artemiev's detachment was here, consisting of one hundred men, all mounted, together with two of Pepelyaev's officers.

Artemiev was on his way to Petropavlovskoye expecting to take it by surprise, or if the unexpected raid was not successful, to lay siege to the garrison and detain it until Pepelyaev had occupied Yakutsk.

We had to reach Amga as quickly as possible, but the road was now blocked by Artemiev's detachment, which was going in the same direction.

The road led through the taiga all the way, so we might expect the Whites to lay ambushes at every step and avoid open battle. We had not foreseen such a state of affairs, and did not relish the idea of the delay thus occasioned. There would be ambushes and skirmishes, there would be wounded, and the detachment would be even more encumbered than it was now.

There was no hope of messengers with reports being able to break through to Yakutsk. . . .

Entering the huts, the Red Army men immediately lay down to sleep, not even waiting to get a drink of tea. Only the company on duty and the sentinels stayed awake, while the commanders sat up to discuss the situation.

There was only one alternative, the one which we had pre-

viously rejected—that of taking the longer road. True, that road led through uninhabited country; the detachment had no fodder, the soldiers' clothing was in poor condition, and there were no tents. However, there was no other choice, and it was decided to take this road.

Now there remained one more very difficult problem to be tackled: how to deceive the enemy as to our intentions and lead him astray. If we did not succeed in this, the detachment would be even worse off than before, for the Whites, who were all mounted, could quickly move over to block this road and lay ambushes along it in the same way.

For the success of the manoeuvre, we had to steal a march on the enemy by making him think we were retreating. We had to gain at least two days on him. The company and squadron commanders were summoned and briefly informed of the undertaking decided upon by the staff and the plan which was to be followed.

At twelve o'clock noon the men were awakened. In two hours' time the detachment had to leave. Soon every man had been told all that he had to do. The men wandered round the village talking and swearing in loud voices for the benefit of the inhabitants. The Yakut peasants did not understand much Russian, but they got the drift of what was being said.

"How d'you like that!" complained a Red Army man. "They've run away without giving us a fight . . . ! The only thing they can do is lie in ambush, the dirty dogs. To hell with them! If we had horses like they have, it would be another story. But as it is, we'd never be able to catch them up. . . ."

"That's a fact. Soldiers on foot can't catch mounted ones," a machine-gunner took up the story. "Why did we come here anyway? Didn't our commanders know the Whites were mounted?"

"No, that's just what they didn't know," declared a platoon commander authoritatively. "But it's no great misfortune. Little was lost and there's no harm done. We discovered the number of Whites and we rescued two of our comrades. Today we go back to Petropavlovskoye; then in three days from now, we'll

all have horses ourselves and then we'll come back and tell the Whites another story."

In order to reach the other road, be it noted, we had to go back seven versts in the direction of Petropavlovskoye; from there the road turns south in the direction of Amga.

This was convenient, for it made it appear as though we were simply retreating to Petropavlovskoye to get fresh horses. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the detachment started from Soordakh.

Snow soon began to fall, continuing all night and all the next day.

This time, luck was with us. The falling snow soon covered up the detachment's tracks and obliterated all traces of its movement.



Comrade Strod with a group of Red Army Men from a Yakut Flying Cavalry Column.

CHAPTER II

WE GAIN TIME

Now the Yakuts have one peculiar characteristic which distinguishes them from the Siberians. The Siberian peasant—up to the October Revolution, at any rate—knew the market prices well, but took little interest in social life, less in the politics of his country, and least of all in foreign affairs. But the Yakut is another pair of shoes. When a Yakut meets a teacher or any other educated person on the road, he is sure to stop and start asking questions. Is there some new order of the district police, are they expecting the arrival of political exiles, what new decrees has the governor issued? Then he asks what does President Wilson or the German kaiser think and so forth. If he is met with an answer of "I don't know" to any of his questions, the Yakut is very surprised, shakes his head, and asks in perplexity: "Why, what did you go to school for then?"

The Yakuts carefully preserve their national custom of *kepse*, as it is called. The one who is the first to learn of any important event or interesting piece of news hurries off to inform his next-door neighbour, although this neighbour may live fifty or even a hundred versts away. He mounts his horse and gallops off. Often there is no road but he goes straight ahead along some path known only to him and discernible only to his sharp-sighted eyes which are accustomed to pick a way through the forest. The season of the year, the day, the weather, present no obstacles to him. After two or three hours of fast riding, he reaches a hut. The inmates, awakened by the barking of the dog, followed by the thud of horse's hoofs, come crowding out of their hovel to meet the guest; they know at once that he is

bringing some news, otherwise why should he come at such a breakneck speed? The horseman arrives, slowly dismounts from his foam-flecked horse, ties it to a post, and greeting everyone, goes leisurely into the hut and begins to take off his things (if it is winter). The hostess takes care of his outer clothing, his cap, scarf, and mittens and hangs them all up to be dried. The guest sits down near the fire, rubs his frozen hands, says: "Icha" (which means "it is cold"), and then relapses into silence. The flames in the fireplace blaze up brightly. The armful of dry resinous wood, just thrown on the fire, crackles and sputters live sparks. The host with a skilful blow of the axe cuts off a piece of meat on a log near the fireplace, chops it into smaller pieces and puts it on a pan. The hostess pushes an empty kettle nearer the fire in a business-like manner, puts ice into it to melt, and then inhales a deep breath of smoke from a home-made cigarette, while her little son of seven or eight years old, who keeps close to his mother all the time, holds out his dirty little hand and asks her for a smoke. More people, young and old, crowd in from the neighbouring huts to hear the news. They approach the newcomer, greet him, and also remain silent. Finally one of those present, the oldest in years, turns to the guest and says "kepse," that is, "tell us." "Sokh, en kepsé"—"No, you tell," answers the other, and again relapses into silence.

In order that the news may be heard sooner, the guest is accorded special attentions and honours; he is treated to leaf tobacco, a coal from the fireplace is put into his pipe, and the hostess invites him to the table—for a cup of tea from the steaming samovar. The meat in the pan is done to a turn by now.

The taiga custom is strictly maintained. After drinking a cup of tea and eating some meat, the guest comes to the important part of his visit—he begins to tell his neighbours the latest titbit of news.

All listen to him attentively. They puff at their pipes, spit on the floor, shake their heads, and after every bit of news, they

repeat a single invariable phrase, "sep-sep," that is, "so-so." When all the news has been told, one of the listeners hurriedly puts on his coat, mounts a horse and tears off to tell everything he has heard to his next-door neighbour. If all the horses are grazing in the taiga at the time, then the messenger, in order not to lose time looking for one, sets out on foot to cover the thirty or forty versts that separate him from the nearest human habitations.

Among the Yakuts and Tunguses there are walkers who are remarkable for their speed and hardiness. There were cases, for example, when the commander of our detachment sent a package from Nelken to Port Ayan, a distance of two hundred and forty versts, along a road which was really only a path—very bad and swampy. Besides this, the Dzhugdzhurski mountain range had to be crossed. To speed up the delivery of the package, it was sealed with wax on one side and a quill was pasted on. This meant: fly like a bird and do not delay. This package was delivered with amazing speed, with the aid of what we call "*torbasah* connections" (an expression derived from the name of a home-made leather boot, *torbasah*). The same messenger came back with an answer on the fifth day.

As a result of this ancient custom, the Yakuts maintain constant contact with one another. If anything of interest happened in the taiga, the news was quickly brought to Yakutsk, where it was soon the talk of the bazaar. The city population did not keep the news to themselves, but handed it on to other districts. Every Yakut knew the latest news, both in the centre and in the outlying regions, and also what was happening abroad. The Civil War, of course, produced an especially rich crop of news. The Yakuts all come to the market place regularly and then to our headquarters to speak with our commander. "The bazaar radio—a lot of lies," we said at first. But when, after a day or so, we received a package with a report, in which we discovered that more than half of what was written as an urgent report had already been circulated by the "bazaar radio," we marvelled.

The Yakut horsemen and the "*torbasah* connection" outran our messengers.

Artemiev, the commander of the detachment of Whites, left Soordakh, and advanced fifteen versts towards Amga, halted, and lay waiting in ambush. After waiting fruitlessly the entire day, he decided that the Reds had halted for a day's rest. In the evening—he advanced five versts further with his detachment and then halted for the night.

Before dawn on February 9, he returned to his old position and again lay in ambush. He waited until dinner time, and then sent out scouts to Soordakh. Here they were informed by the inhabitants that the Reds had turned back to Petropavlovskoye the day before, since they knew they could not catch up with the Whites on foot, and that to engage them in battle it would be necessary to get horses. When Artemiev received this information from the scouts, he concentrated his forces and proceeded to Soordakh, arriving there towards evening. That same night he went on towards Petropavlovskoye which he occupied on the morning of February 10.

In this manner, we stole a march on Artemiev's detachment, for they arrived in Petropavlovskoye after we had set out from there for Amga by the longer route, and were thus left more than one hundred versts behind us. There was nothing left for him to do, but to send an urgent message to Pepelyaev that the Petropavlovskoye garrison had set out and was moving in the direction of Amga. Artemiev then started off himself to join Pepelyaev, two days behind us. Our manoeuvre had succeeded and the road to Amga was free.

...It was our fourth day on the march. According to our calculations, we would be in Amga the following day. Today, no songs were heard as on the previous days. The soldiers' faces were dirty, sooty from the smoke of campfires, wrapped in thought, and serious; in their eyes there glowed an unconquerable determination. Each knew that the encounter must take place soon, when the issue would be decided once and for

all. The suspense could not last. Every step forward brought the clash nearer. . . .

The cold northern sun glinted on our bayonets as we plodded our way through the taiga. The deep silence all around was ominous and oppressive. During the march, we did not meet a single living thing. All life had sought refuge from the cold. Just once, we saw a carrion crow, flying from west to east. Seeing us, it flew around in circles for a time, and then perched on the top of a high tree, staring gauntly at these armed people, plodding with tired heavy steps along the narrow snow-covered road. It seemed to see in us so many future corpses upon which it could feast. Then spreading its wings, it lazily flapped away in the direction of the mountains.

Sometimes, the forest did not hem in the road so closely, leaving a strip of bare plain open, with sparse bushes and stunted trees standing like lonely sentinels. The atmosphere of such places oppressed us. We felt we wanted to hurry over the open space more quickly and bury ourselves deeper in the forest. Far away on the horizon, rose the mountains, beautiful in their massive immobility. In comparison with them, the dark dots of people, crawling along on the snow, appeared like pitiful insects. Beyond the glades, the taiga closed in on us again as if unwilling to let us pass.

At noon the detachment halted for dinner. The men hastened to light fires, bustling about, rattling buckets and kettles, filling them with snow to make tea, and eating raw meat—there being no time to cook it. The horses and oxen had to go hungry, as there was nothing to feed them on. The taiga provided hardly any fodder and the minutes were too precious. If the animals were put out to graze, it would take too long to round them up again, so they stood there, hanging their heads and nibbling at the snow.

A little invigorated, the detachment advanced further. Soon a cold, sharp wind sprang up and it began to snow. Marching became more difficult. Night fell and the road was no longer visible. The long stumbling column of men melted into the

darkness. They groped their way along, tripping and falling, but they did not stop. We had to reach Amga two days later, which meant covering another ten versts that night. Finally, we halted for the night, worn out with marching. We chose a place that was not too thickly wooded, and soon we had some ten large campfires going, made with dry logs. The glow of the huge fires lit up the glade, but did not penetrate the darkness of the thicket. The men filled the kettles and pails to the brim with snow and hung them on long thin poles over the fire for the snow to melt. As it melted down, they added more with shovels or with their bare hands, until the pails were two-thirds filled with water. Then the meat was put in, and salt added. We waited as patiently as we could while the meat boiled, but few of us could wait until it was done. Most of us ate it half raw, as we were cold and half famished. "No matter so long as it's hot," said the soldiers in jest, as they wolfed down the chunks of hot bloody meat. Each platoon received its ration of loaves of rye bread, frozen hard as wood. To warm them up more quickly, we split the loaves with an axe and laid the pieces close up to the fire.

To one side under the trees, the horses, covered with blankets of snow, shook themselves and whinnied, while the hungry oxen lowed mournfully. There was no hay. We fed the animals once a day on bread, but our small reserve of food was quickly becoming exhausted. The weaker comrades settled down by the fires as soon as they were lit, making themselves pillows of their kitbags and beds of pine-twigs, and fell asleep at once, without even waiting to eat. However, when supper was ready, we woke them up and persuaded them to have a bite.

Then we all turned in for the night. From five to eight comrades grouped themselves round each fire, being careful to choose the windward side. Those who tried to stay on the leeward side which was warmer, were driven away by the smoke. The gusts of wind blew through the thicket and fanned the fire like a blacksmith's bellows; thousands of sparks were sent whirling high up into the air, and disappeared among the

tree tops. We had an especially bad night of it. Although the squadron on duty kept up the fires until dawn, we were all frozen by the cold. The side turned towards the fire kept warm enough, but the other side was exposed to the cold wind. It was impossible to sleep, as one had to keep moving round in order to warm first one side and then the other. The whole night was passed in fitful dozing without a minute of sound sleep.

The flying sparks were the last straw. They kept falling on the sleeping men. "Oh hell! Now my coat's all burned!" one was heard cursing. "Ouch!" yelled another and jumped to his feet. It appeared that the whole back of his sheepskin coat was burned to the very shirt; when the fire reached the skin, it scorched him and he awoke. Often the felt and leather shoes would be burned through, which for us was a great and irretrievable loss. On this night more sheepskins, coats and boots were burned than on all the preceding nights put together.

We presented a sorry spectacle as we prepared to take the road in the morning. There were big holes burned in the sides and backs of the sheepskin coats; the sleeves were wrinkled up and looked like dried mushrooms; the holes in the boots were stuffed with rags and bound with string.

Nevertheless, our spirits were excellent. There was no despondency, and we only poked fun at one another on account of our misfortune, as we began to march.

The men struck up a song which blended with the rattle of the sledges on which the provisions were carried. This night would be the last spent in the open. It was decided to spend it fifteen versts from Amga. Everyone was happy and looked forward to sleeping in a warm hut, if only the enemy did not interfere with our plans. Everyone was possessed with the same idea—one good night's rest under a roof, and then let come what may.

The wind, which had not ceased howling all night, died down, and the sky cleared. We came out on a plain. The sun

shone brightly, turning the snow to a sparkling brilliance which dazzled our eyes.

As the day wore on, quiet fell on the detachment. The men seemed to be listening, on the alert. Only the squeak of the sledges and occasional neigh of an emaciated horse betrayed its movements. The mounted squadron carefully felt its way across the taiga, casting about here and there, but finding nothing suspicious. On that day we hurried our march. Before dark we wanted to reach a place where we could spend the night. We halted for only half an hour, drank a mug of hot water which smelled of smoke, and then continued our march. More and more often we came to open glades, with stacks of hay in them, which made our hungry horses and oxen turn aside, only to be driven back to the column. We sensed the closeness of human dwellings. Not more than twenty-five versts now separated us from Amga.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and there remained seven versts to the place where we planned to spend the night. As a halting place for the detachment and also as a base for the attack, we had chosen the locality of Sasil-sisi (the "Fox-Glade"), where there were five huts. None of us had been there before. From the description of our guide, we could not clearly see what its merits were from a tactical point of view. True, we could have gone six versts further and stopped twenty-two versts northwest of Amga, in the Abaga school. But we had to reject this idea because our men were tired out and urgently needed a day's rest. At Abaga there were three houses besides the school, standing in an open space five to six hundred paces from the forest, but there was nothing there with which to make fortifications. We would have had to cart *bal-bakhi* from a distance of two or three versts, and digging trenches was out of the question as the earth was frozen hard as bone. In Sasil-sisi, on the other hand, there were enough *bal-bakhi* for our needs. We could not go on to Yakutsk without a halt. At least one day of rest was necessary.

CHAPTER III

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENEMY'S SCOUTS

Our guide warned me that we would soon come to a large glade, three versts across. The mounted squadron was half a verst ahead of the column. Suddenly we saw a horseman coming galloping towards us. He drew rein and quickly delivered a verbal message from the commander of the mounted squadron.

"There is a large meadow ahead. A verst from us, by a large tree on the road, thirty mounted men who were riding towards us have halted. The squadron at once scattered and took cover on the edge of the forest. I await further orders."

Having halted the detachment, I rode forward to the mounted squadron, dismounted within a hundred paces, and made my way forward to meet them on foot. From there the unknown cavalry could be discerned. Even with the aid of binoculars, however, it was impossible to make out who they were, although we did not doubt that they were Whites. We waited, hoping that they would ride on and fall into our trap. As if complying with our wishes, the enemy began to move and came towards us at a light trot. Thirty paces remained. . . . Suddenly, absolutely unexpectedly, the Whites turned their horses quickly and rode away.

We could not think of overtaking them on our exhausted horses, so I ordered our men to open fire. But the Whites were already at a good distance and were galloping at full speed. They suffered almost no losses, only one horseman was seen to fall to the ground, together with his horse. Our squadron quickly mounted, rode to the spot and brought in the prisoner, a corporal. His horse had been killed under him, while he

himself was only stunned by the fall. He was a talkative man and told us all he knew.

Pepelyaev was still in Amga, in a few days he was to start for Yakutsk. A messenger had arrived the night before from Artemiev, and informed the Whites that the Petropavlovskoye garrison was moving on to Amga. In the morning, Pepelyaev countermanded his first order and sent scouts out to meet the Red detachment, the strength of which he estimated at four hundred men and ten machine-guns. The White general, Vishnevsky, was preparing to attack somewhere, but with what forces was unknown.

Churapcha was in the hands of the Reds. General Rakitin was to go there from Okhotsk, where Pepelyaev had sent Colonel Vargasov with a small detachment of Yakuts.

What was happening in Yakutsk itself, he did not know exactly; there were rumours that the city was being fortified. In Amga, there were altogether seven hundred militiamen, six heavy and two light machine-guns, and about a hundred Yakuts. Artemiev was also going to Amga. The prisoner could report nothing more.

We had no doubt, when we received this news, that we were on the eve of a battle with General Vishnevsky. With the knowledge that Pepelyaev was still in Amga and that our arrival would interfere with the attack of the Whites on Yakutsk, the detachment was well satisfied. No one thought of the immediate danger, and the men were not depressed even by the larger number of the enemy's forces. Each one understood that now when he had reached the goal, he must fight to the last.

CHAPTER IV

WE ARRIVE IN SASIL-SISI

The day drew to a close. Twilight was setting in. We had left the road which we had been following until now, and were marching along the Amga highway. We expected to encounter Vishnevsky at any moment. The first squadron rode ahead to the right, crossing the glade up to the edge of the forest; and only after it had occupied the outskirts of the forest along that side, did the entire detachment advance. The men marched rapidly across the open space and in half an hour we had plunged into the forest again.

It was already getting dark. Our road now took us up a steep hill for a verst or so, where we would have been at a disadvantage if attacked, for the men were forced to straggle more than usual by the gradient, while the baggage-train lagged behind. The patrols rode on both flanks of the detachment, scouring the surrounding forest. We made our way with great difficulty, for the darkness and the thickness of the forest made the going hard. The enemy could have posted his men two or three hundred paces from the road and attacked us as soon as we came abreast. Two companies and two squadrons had to be marched in extended single file along both sides of the road. The first squadron reconnoitred, while one company with two machine-guns remained with the baggage-train. The horses were tired out and had to be urged on every step of the way.

At last we reached the summit and descended in the same marching order as we had climbed. The enemy did not appear, and our only loss was a few broken sledges, but we continued to advance with great caution.

Only about a verst and a half separated us from our goal.

A little later we heard the barking of a dog. Then we saw light through the trees—it was the sparks flying from the chimney of a hut. A shower of sparks like a swarm of golden bees! The very thought of warmth caused our spirits to rise, and we pressed forward quickening our steps.

The starved oxen and horses had not even seen a shred of hay for four days. Now when they caught sight of the hay stacks at the side of the road, they reared up and bolted to the food in spite of the deep snow, upsetting and breaking the sleds in their career.

"Whoa, whoa, you cattle, damn your eyes!" shouted the Red Army men as they rushed in pursuit of the carts.

The noise and uproar was extraordinary. Everyone was in a hurry to get in out of the cold and have something to eat.

Thus we reached Sasil-sisi after five days of difficult marching, with eight frozen comrades in our detachment, at ten o'clock on the night of February 2, tired, but in good spirits. Pepelyaev was eighteen versts from us.

Dmitriev took charge of the battalion and of a machine-gun detachment with three heavy machine-guns, one Lewis gun and eight automatic Choches, and distributed them in four of the huts, together with the baggage train. I was in command of a detachment of eighty-two men with two Colt machine-guns and two Choches. With these I occupied one of the huts about three hundred paces from the battalion. The first squadron was on guard. I sent a messenger to Dmitriev with an order that he come to me immediately with the company and machine-gun commanders. Soon they had all gathered in my hut. I emphasized the fact that we must be prepared for a night battle and that we would be very lucky if the Whites waited for morning to begin their attack. Further, I ordered Dmitriev to divide the fighting line into sections and assign these sections immediately to different companies and, in case of an alarm, to occupy the birch grove at the side of the road, half way between the detachment and the battalion, with one half of the company, with

the Lewis machine-gun, and two automatics. Though this small birch grove did not interfere with our seeing each other, it could be occupied by the enemy who would then be in a position to strike at both Dmitriev and me from the rear and the flank. The retention of this small bit of forest was of great tactical significance for us. The birch grove was the key-point in the position.

"Comrade commanders," I said, "today we must choose out the best Red Army men to keep guard, otherwise our guards may fall asleep. At each hut, we must also place one machine-gunner as sentry. After such a march, the men will fall sound asleep and if there is an attack we may not hear the shooting at once and thus not occupy our positions on time. Moreover, as soon as the fighting forces are assigned their posts, each company must form in line, and the same must be done with the machine-guns. It is necessary for each to know his place in action. Leave not less than half a company in reserve and keep in contact with me."

Dmitriev then went off with the commanders to his own battalion, while the squadron commanders, the commanders of the machine-gun squads and I, went off to examine the lay of the land.

My section was in a good position for temporary defence—or to put it more exactly, to resist the first onslaught. On the southeast lay the thickly wooded mountainside, the foot of which was two hundred paces away; to the north the ground was open up to the very hut occupied by the battalion, and only half a hundred paces away were two barns; on the southwest there was the birch grove a hundred and fifty paces away; on the west side was a lake extending for about a thousand paces. This lake, however, did not flank the position occupied by the battalion and here the forest approached a little closer. The first and second squadrons were in position, in extended order with the machine-guns placed. The third squadron under Comrade Adamsky was kept in reserve and guards were chosen from this squadron.

Having made these dispositions, we returned to the hut. The owner of the hut welcomed us gladly, cooked a whole cauldron of meat and gave us his entire supply of pancakes, of which there were not enough to go round. The woman of the house, together with her old mother and twelve-year-old daughter made a thick dough of barley flour, rolled it into round lumps and put it in the pan. When the dough had dried a little, it was taken off, pierced lengthwise with a spit and exposed to the fire, till first one side and then the other was toasted. In ten minutes the cake was done. We drank tea till we had emptied several large samovars and disposed of a cauldron of meat weighing one and a half poods, but we all wanted more. The inhabitants were astonished at such appetites. However, we had had enough. Stomachs became heavy, heads grew drowsy and everybody wanted to sleep. The men lay down on the floor, all huddled together, while the machine-guns were laid near the door.

The tired men with rifles in their hands, soon fell asleep. I made myself comfortable on a bench in the corner. The entire Yakut family, which had been so hospitable to us, spent the night together with us in the hut with their children and cattle. It was two o'clock in the morning when we turned in. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE WITH GENERAL VISHNEVSKY

Soon after Pepelyaev had occupied Amga, he received a report from Artemiev to the effect that the Petropavlovskoye garrison had forced its way through and was quickly advancing on Amga. Pepelyaev decided to destroy this detachment of Reds by setting ambushes in its path. For this purpose, he sent a battalion and a company of officers, two hundred and thirty men in all, under the command of Vishnevsky.

At the time when we reached Sasil-sisi, Vishnevsky was in ambush two versts to the east, in the taiga. He heard the neighing of the horses, the squeak of the sledges and the Red Army men swearing. He decided to attack at sunrise, counting on taking us by surprise. . . .

It was almost morning. The weary detachment slept soundly. The guard and Dmitriev's battalion were all fast asleep. They had striven hard, but failed to keep awake. Sleep overcame the sentinels. At first they fought against it and tried to drive it away by rubbing their eyes with snow and keeping on the move. Then they decided to sit down for a minute and rest their tired feet. The sentinel sitting on the ground, leaning against a tree with his rifle between his knees would drop off to sleep imperceptibly and was soon snoring with the rest.

Vishnevsky with his battalion and company of officers, stole up to within one verst of our position and then launched their attack. The White scouts quietly and stealthily made their way through the taiga. Noiselessly, without firing a single shot, they captured the sleeping sentries and emerged on the outskirts of the forest within a hundred and fifty paces of the position

occupied by the battalion. The commander of the White scouts, Ensign Volkov, reported to Vishnevsky:

"I have captured three posts of double guards. The Reds are located in four huts. A little smoke can be seen rising out of the chimneys, but apparently they are all asleep. The whole baggage-train is here, by the huts; the horses and oxen in the enclosure are unharnessed. I await further orders."

On receiving this report, Vishnevsky ordered his men to advance swiftly, surround the Reds and take them prisoner. Ten minutes later one hundred Whites had surrounded the huts on all sides. Some of them made their way into the yard and began to examine the load in the carts. They uttered exclamations of surprise under their breath:

"Cartridges, cartridges, all cartridges! How many cartridges have they?"

The other section of the Whites divided into groups of ten each and entered the huts. They took the sleeping Reds completely by surprise, and it was only when they threw wood into the fireplace that they awakened their prisoners. The Red Army men and their commanders awoke and began to rub their eyes in astonishment: "What the hell! These men are wearing shoulder-straps."*

The Whites seized their rifles.

"Give up yours guns, brothers, and don't stir! You are prisoners, you are surrounded and all resistance is futile! We will not harm you. It is a good thing that all has ended without bloodshed. Let's have a smoke, we have some first-class Harbin tobacco. Do you want some?"

The door was flung open; a gust of cold air blew into the

* When the corps was first organized in Harbin and Vladivostok, Pepelyaev proposed abolishing shoulder-straps with the thought that this would attain "hundred per cent democracy" in his army. His officers, however, opposed this idea and he gave in. Pepelyaev had retained the shoulder-straps but tried to "democratize" his corps, by other means. He issued a long order in which he decreed that everyone call each other "brother" not, however, forgetting the various ranks, thus: brother general, brother colonel, etc. *I. S.*

hut, bringing with it a lieutenant-colonel. The conversations stopped. He cast a cursory glance around the interior of the hut, looked at the prisoners for a few seconds and turned to his subordinates:

"Brothers. Some shooting has started to the right of us. Four of you remain here and the rest go out in the yard."

"Nonsense, brother colonel! There is only one hut there. The Communists are not there in force, only they don't like to give in without a struggle. I think brother Vishnevsky will manage without us. He has more than half of the forces, and the officers' company is with him," the lieutenant with the long moustache confidently expressed his opinion.

"True, brother lieutenant, but send three men anyhow, to establish contact with the general."

"I obey, brother colonel"—and three men left the hut.

Dmitriev was in the smallest hut, sleeping just inside the door. The Whites entered the hut and went straight to the fireplace at the other end of it, so that the exit was left free. Dmitriev, hearing the shooting, sprang up and went out. He did not even notice that there were Whites in his hut, and they in turn did not pay any attention to him, thinking it was one of their own men who had gone out.

Seeing some men loafing around the baggage-train, Dmitriev, thinking that they were Red Army men, got excited and shouted at them angrily:

"What the hell are you doing here? Get to your places!"

The Whites began to disperse. Suddenly an officer ran over to Dmitriev. They looked at each other for a second and then—

"Who are you? Hands up!"

Only after he noticed the shoulder-straps did Dmitriev grasp who it was. He promptly took to his heels. A couple of long strides—and he was vanishing into the fog. . . . One after another they dashed in pursuit firing their revolvers, but Dmitriev got away.

The adjutant of the battalion, Fyodor Yanushkovsky, also

tried to slip out of the hut, and had already crossed the threshold when he came face to face with a White officer.

"Back!" shouted the other, and a blow on the head from his revolver sent the adjutant staggering back into the hut.

"There, you Communist rascal—we will shoot all of you yet! It doesn't matter whether we take you prisoner or kill you, my darlings, there's no escape for you now," shouted the lieutenant-colonel whose nerves were on edge by now.

"Do you hear our men cheering? They are attacking. It will be all over soon."

Silence fell. Again cheering was heard.

Just then a White soldier, all out of breath, came bursting into the hut.

"Vishnevsky is retreating! Occupy the outskirts of the forest."

"What happened? Have the Reds been reinforced or what?"

Stunned by this unexpected news, the lieutenant-colonel ran out of the hut, the others following him, and they all started running in the direction of the forest, including those who had been holding the baggage-train.

The Red machine-gunners, who were thus left alone in the huts, promptly mounted two machine-guns in the windows, breaking through the ice which served the purpose of window glass, and opened fire on the fleeing enemy. The other Red Army men came running out of the huts and fell into line, while the Whites from the forest opened a fierce fire upon them.

Meanwhile what had been happening with my detachment?

The sentries whom I had posted at the outposts of our position were on the alert. Leaning on their rifles, they cast searching glances ahead in an attempt to penetrate the thick wall of snow-covered bushes. Their sensitive ears were pricked up to detect any suspicious rustle in the forest. In the stillness of the early morning fog, they would hear the indistinct mysterious sound of something running through the taiga, and then again quiet. . . .

"When does the relief come? My feet are beginning to freeze," whispered Lisitsin.

Khokhlov, his mate, replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

All was quiet. Sometimes a pine twig would detach itself from the great mossy pines and fall to the ground at their feet.

Then, suddenly, in the white frozen mist, the voice of the sentinel rang out:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

The Whites, seeing that they were discovered, tried to break their way through. The sentinels raised their guns. The first shots rang out with a dry crack like a breaking tree-trunk. . . .

The dark figures of the enemy came plunging through the snow. As they broke through the thickets of the taiga, they shot at the sentinels, who stuck to their posts and kept up a furious fire, in order to warn their comrades of the approaching danger.

Lisitsin was killed. His rifle dropped from his hands as he fell burying his face in the snow. Khokhlov received two bullet wounds. His foot and shoulder injured, he made his way limping down the mountain side, still shooting from time to time.

As soon as he heard the firing, the sentinel in the yard opened the hut door and shouted: "Comrades, they have opened fire on the outposts!"

I jumped up and started shouting orders:

"Squadron, to arms! Take up your positions! The machine-guns will give us covering fire while we distribute our forces."

There was neither panic nor confusion. Everything had been thought out beforehand. In spite of the short and insufficient rest, the men moved energetically. Not a minute passed before a machine-gun was already sputtering fire from the yard, and soon another joined it. The rifle locks clicked and shots began to ring out. The fire grew fiercer and fiercer. . . . The first and second squadron was flung into open order. The third squadron under Adamsky remained in reserve, taking cover behind the huts and peasant houses. The fight had begun at last, the fight between two irreconcilable class enemies. . . .

The Whites kept coming on steadily. They were not more than a hundred and fifty paces away, shouting at us:

"Surrender! Lay down your arms! We won't harm you!"

Then with a ringing cheer the enemy rushed to the attack, strong and confident. Our two Colts worked smoothly, while the automatic Choche jibbed a little but kept up a hot fire. The rifles rattled like the roll of a drum.

The enemy's ranks, more than knee deep in snow, came forward unchecked, leaving their dead and wounded behind them. The distance separating us grew less and less. . . .

"How they keep coming on, damn them!" grunted Turpitsin, as he re-loaded the empty magazine of his rifle. After his next shot he gave a lightning glance along the ranks of his squadron.

"Now, boys! You've nowhere to retreat! Fight to the last, eh?"

"O.K. We aren't going to run."

The Whites lay down to get their breath. They were not more than a hundred paces from us. Thirty more Whites appeared on the outskirts of the thicket. At Dmitriev's all was quiet. I did not understand what the trouble was, and the fog prevented us from seeing what was happening there.

"Adamsky, send two men to establish contact with the battalion! What in the hell are they doing there?"

Five minutes later, the man I had sent came running back.

"The Whites are there."

I was stunned, unable to believe my ears.

"Wha-at?! You didn't get there, you turned back in a fright! Tell me the truth or I'll shoot!" I pressed my rifle against the man's chest.

"Comrade commander, we did not get within a hundred paces of the huts, when we met three. . . . We . . . we thought they were our chaps but then we saw the shoulder-straps. We killed two, the third got away. There were Whites among the baggage-train; we didn't see any of our men."

"All right, I'll look into it. But not a word to anyone about it, do you hear, or there'll be panic."

I felt as if someone had suddenly thrown a bucket of cold water over me. I understood that the battalion was in trouble, but there was no way of helping them. Only one course remained. They were fighting men, old guerilla fighters, and we must die fighting with them in the crash of battle, but not surrender or desert, because then everybody would be captured. . . .

The medical orderly, Kostya Tokarev, ran up to me.

"Comrade commander, they are moving round us on our left flank!"

"Damn it." Twenty of the Whites could be seen running to occupy the birch grove, the key to the whole position, but not even a single shot could be heard coming from there—which meant that the grove was not occupied by our half company.

"Kesha!"

"Yes."

"Do you see the birch grove?"

"Yes."

"Don't let them occupy it! Otherwise we are lost! Hold them back with the squadron. Your men must hold the grove at all costs!"

"All right, trust me. . . . Come on, boys!"

Under the enemy's fire, with one killed and two wounded, Adamsky rushed the first squadron to the birch grove, and overcame the Whites with a bayonet charge, forcing them back to the barn from where they had launched their attack.

I was left without reserves. The Whites were pressing their attack vigorously. Eighty paces remained between us. Some of our men were killed, and the wounded men, groaning and leaving bloody traces on the snow, were crawling towards the hut. Turpitsin was already there, his shoulder shot through.

"The dirty bastards—wounded! Those damn skunks."

Despite his wounds, he continued fighting, volleying oaths. A few paces behind our line lay some oxen and horses which

had been killed. One of the horses was dragging his hind leg which was shot through. He trembled and snorted, the whites of his eyes gleamed and were filled with fear and he got entangled among the upturned sledges and dead bodies of animals. The horses and oxen, which had not been shot, went charging madly across the lake, on our western flank. Some of them, were overtaken by stray bullets and fell in black struggling heaps, trapped in the icy bosom of the lake. They tried to stand, their legs twitched helplessly until feebleness or death quieted them down and they lay still. . . .

The firing grew fiercer. The Whites were close up to us—only forty paces intervened. Their faces, pouring with sweat and twitching with excitement, could be clearly seen. As if to spite us, one of the Colts jammed and the other stopped working due to a bent cartridge.

The commander of the machine-gun, Petrov, was so nervous and agitated he could do nothing to fix it. With tears of rage in his eyes, he kept swearing venomously at his gun as though it were alive.

"Why don't you work, you damned whore, you!"

His mouth was contorted and he had bitten his lips till the blood streamed from them.

"Shura, don't get upset, keep cool!" I said to him. "You won't help matters in this way. Don't get excited, there is time enough."

Karachorov who had just re-charged his automatic Choche with a new full disc and had placed the butt end on his shoulder, did not succeed in firing. . . . A dum-dum bullet exploded and shattered his head. Clutching his automatic with both hands, he fell on it, spattering it with his brains. The snow, like a sponge, thirstily drank the hot steaming blood which came pouring from his terrible wound. . . .

Our position became critical. The medical orderly, Tokarev, somehow got the automatic from under the dead man's body and clapping it to his shoulder, fired off all the cartridges at close range.

I decided on a desperate move and springing to my feet, I yelled:

"Come on, boys! Let's attack!"

But at that moment, just as I wanted to raise a cheer and dash forward, I was wounded in the chest. My voice failed me and I stood rooted to the ground—my legs would no longer obey me. . . .

The Whites were getting nearer and nearer. Only about thirty paces remained. Our men, with bayonets fixed, stood their ground. I lifted my carbine to my shoulder and fired. The squadrons opened fire too, as if by command.

Suddenly, Ivan Ivanich threw up his arms and fell with a crash, like a falling tree. Dragging his rifle after him, his wounded chest wheezing, he slowly crept towards the hut. Just as he reached the door, he lost consciousness.

The Whites, for some reason or other, suddenly ceased fire, and at a command, quickly fell down in the snow.

Kaigorodtsev, who was standing next to me in the ranks, stole a glance at me and asked.

"Why are you so pale?"

"Wounded. Don't tell the others. Transmit my order: 'Lie down! Rapid fire, throw grenades!'"

Kaigorodtsev did so, and both sides opened fire again more fiercely than ever. Our hand grenades exploded with sharp bangs, with a film of black smoke and a dirty yellow flame, producing a sound like the clang of broken window glass.

Not a single Japanese grenade thrown by the Whites exploded. One such grenade struck a Red Army man right on the forehead. He swore, shook his head ruefully, and with the words, "The Japs seem to be neutral in this war," threw the grenade back at the Whites, being none the worse for his adventure except for a large bruise on the forehead.

By this time, Petrov had fixed his machine-gun and had opened fire again with it. . . .

The Whites began to waver. They could not stand the pace. . . . At first they began to fall back slowly, then they took

to their heels and fled in disorder. The entire three squadrons hurled themselves forward with a cheer.

The first squadron followed up the pursuit, the Whites fleeing into the forest without resistance.

The second and third squadrons wheeled round and smashed the left flank of the Whites who were firing on the battalion. These also did not withstand our attack and began to retreat. The whole of my detachment, together with one company of the battalion, pursued the enemy for more than a verst, and then turned back towards the huts. I myself made for the hut in a fainting condition, but lost consciousness on reaching it. When I came to, I was lying on the same bench on which I had spent the previous night.

In this battle, the squadron lost eleven men killed and fifteen wounded. The losses of the battalion were thirteen killed and seventeen wounded.

The enemy had left forty-nine killed and two wounded prisoners on the field of battle. Of the forty-nine, more than twenty were officers. They had lost in all one hundred and ten men in this battle. (These figures were verified by General Vishnevsky's report to Pepelyaev which later fell into the hands of the Reds.)

This unexpected outcome of the battle compelled Vishnevsky to refrain from repeating the attack. He temporarily retreated along the Amga road to the village of Tabulakh ("Reindeer Meadow"). We could not pursue him because of the fatigue of our men and the number of casualties among our commanding staff, for besides myself, we had lost two squadron commanders, two company commanders and several platoon commanders. There was no one to entrust with the leadership of the operations, in order to route Vishnevsky entirely. Dmitriev did not arrive until after the battle, and he naturally did not command the necessary authority at this moment. The detachment remained in its old position, posting sentries again and bringing all the dead bodies, the Whites included, into the yard.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEATH OF A WHITE COLONEL

The squadron returning from the pursuit, in making its way through the bushes, came upon the body of a colonel. Believing him to be dead, they took him by the arms in order to drag him away, but on examining him more closely, they saw that he was breathing—though wounded and unconscious. They took him with them, brought him into the hut and laid him in a corner on some hay. After a few minutes, when the medical orderly was free, he asked the Red Army men to bring the wounded man nearer to the fire. They took off his fur coat and unfastened his tunic. His shirt was all bloody. The medical orderly examined him and shrugged his shoulders hopelessly:

"He will not live a half hour; it is not worth while bandaging him."

The wounds were severe, two bullets had gone through his chest.

"Let's bandage him all the same. It's our duty to," said the other orderly, Kuprianov.

With his nimble hands, he took bandage, lint and a permanganate solution from his first-aid kit, bathed the wounds and quickly bandaged up the shattered chest.

The colonel did not move; he only shuddered now and then. Between his tightly clenched jaws, a groan escaped now and then; at times he sighed deeply and something like a gurgle could be heard in his wounded chest. The bandage was quickly soaked through with blood.

"He is dying," said the medical orderly and turned away.

Just then a White soldier, armed with a rifle, entered the hut. The Red Army men in the hut rushed to the exit thinking that the Whites had surrounded us.

The White soldier looked round him in amazement, and finally opened his mouth.

"I thought that our men had occupied the place, but there are Reds here. . . I was one of the scouts on the left flank, was cut off from the others and remained in the woods during the fighting. I heard them cheering and then the firing stopped, so I came in here and now I am caught—they will say I ran away from battle. Well, god knows! You can't tell where you are. If Russians fight Russians, there's no telling one from the other. If it were Germans, it would have been a different matter, but here, we speak the same language and swear just the same way."

The colonel with difficulty opened his eyes. With dull, unblinking glance, he gazed into the crackling fire. Slowly raising his hands and covering his face with his palms, he began to rub his perspiring forehead with his fingers. Then, with an abrupt movement, he let his hands drop, stared at the prisoner and unexpectedly said to all of us:

"How are things going, brother Uretsky? Did we lose many men? Are you wounded too?"

"No, brother colonel, I'm safe and sound, but we are both prisoners of the Reds."

"Wha-at?" the colonel raised himself with a jerk from the floor, and fell back weakly.

"Our men have retreated. Gone back to Amga I suppose," explained the soldier indifferently.

The colonel moved restlessly about on the floor. Raising himself up on his elbows, he spat venomously into the fire. The spittle hissed as it struck the live coals.

"There, Uretsky, did you see? Our whole campaign was just a flash in the pan and now it's fizzled out. Where were my eyes? Whom did I trust? 'The People's representatives'! . . . The entire region has revolted. . . The swine! Why did they retreat?"

Blood came gushing from the wounded man's mouth. His face grew deathly pale, and the pupils of his eyes became even larger. A rattling sound came from his throat and he stretched out on the floor full length, his chest rising and falling in painful throbs, his short-clipped black moustache contrasting clearly with the pallor of his strong-chinned face. He was about thirty years old, well built, apparently a good athlete. The dying man somehow made a good impression on those present.

Suddenly, as if remembering something very important which he wanted to say, he raised himself on his elbows with a super-human effort, rested on one arm and stretched out the other, as if asking for the floor at a meeting. He shouted: "Here we are, damn it. . ." and then fell back dead on the blood-sprinkled hay.

CHAPTER VII

• THE LATE REPENTANCE OF A WHITE SERGEANT

The door of the hut opened. It was impossible to see who had entered on account of the cloud of frozen air that burst in. Someone silently made his way to the fireplace, then said:

"I'm frozen! Let me get warm for a bit!"

He was given a place at the fire. We now saw that he was a very tall, powerful man wearing wide trousers and a tunic made of grey army cloth. He wore neither a fur coat nor a sheepskin. By the shoulder-strap on the tunic, it was not difficult to recognize the rank of sergeant.

"Brothers, bandage me! I am wounded all over! I was hit by the machine-gun fire. . . . I retreated together with the rest but came back, because I saw that I wouldn't be able to go on. . . . Before I die, I want to tell you what is on my mind. . . ." The muscles of his face twitched.

Some fresh logs were thrown on the fire and the flames blazed up again. The sergeant sat down on the bench, which creaked under the weight of his powerful body. Two medical orderlies came over to bandage him. When they took his shirt off, they found that he was all covered with blood; there were several open wounds on his broad powerful chest and on his strong muscular arms.

The sergeant went on speaking:

"Brothers, I was a worker at the Izhevsk factory. I have a wife and two children. I lived near the factory, had my little house and small farm—just a garden, a cow, and a few pigs—but we were fairly well off. The revolutions came, first one and then the other. The Soviet power did not last long at our

place. I did not have time to find out how it would be. Then the Whites came and they told such tales about the Bolsheviks that they made me an ardent enemy of the Soviets. They said that the Reds take everything away, that you can't have anything nor anyone of your own, all must be common property. Even your wife was not your own. Ekh! Give me a smoke, brothers."

He inhaled a deep breath of cigarette smoke, then began to cough and spat out a clot of blood.

"I believed the Whites, so I went with them. We got as far as the Volga, then we had to retreat. Why did the Bolsheviks prove stronger than we who were helped by the Japanese, the English and all the rest of them? I wanted to stay, but I was afraid because of all the terrible things that were written about the Reds in the newspapers. So I went to Manchuria and landed up in Harbin. For a long time I was unemployed, starved, worried about my family. Finally, I got work somehow at an electric power station. But I longed to be back home. All the time I kept looking forward to something, though I couldn't have said what it was. Once, while walking down the street, I met a captain with whom I had served in the same company. What he told me came as a complete surprise.

"'All through Siberia,' he said, 'there are insurrections against the Communists. Pepelyaev is preparing for a campaign. Leave your job and join his corps. This time we will not be defeated. We will free our native country from the Bolsheviks and we will see our wives and children again, if they have not been massacred by those Red devils.'

"The news took me aback and I didn't know what to say. He wrote down my address and we parted. For two days I didn't go to work but walked about as if dazed. I couldn't eat or sleep and I had but one thought—how to get back to my family and see Russia again. I was very anxious to see how things were going there. But I had my suspicions. I somehow couldn't believe what the captain had told me. What if it were all a hoax? What if they were only a gang organized to invade

Soviet territory for plunder? I had heard that it had happened before, more than once. They plundered, burned whole villages, killed those whom they captured—both Bolsheviks and those who worked for the Bolsheviks, and then they ran back across the border. I thought and thought, and did not know how to decide. There was no one whose advice I could ask. On the third day, the captain came to see me.

"'Well,' he said, 'how about it? Tomorrow we leave Harbin; the staff is crossing over to Vladivostok!'

"I consented, and that is how I came to Yakutia. I put my own head into the noose."

His strength left him. He rolled over and almost fell off the bench. They laid him on the floor near the fire where he lay quietly for about five minutes, then suddenly sat up, thrust his hands under the bandages, tore them off as if they were thread, and flung them on the ground.

"I don't need them. . . . I am dying. . . . Death is not terrible, but it hurts me to think that I did not make peace with the Soviet power before. I was like a mad wolf, raging against the Soviets. I believed what I heard from the papers and the generals. . . . Curse them! It's they who do the mischief. Forgive me, comrades! I am dying, and a worker should have died in a better cause. . . ."

With these words on his lips, the sergeant fell back, lost consciousness and died.

Meanwhile the Yakut who owned the hut, fearing the return of the Whites and a new battle, was making hasty preparations to depart. He went out into the yard to harness his oxen, while his wife snatched up the children one by one, wrapped them in dirty blankets covered with torn hare fur, and then put each little one into a large leather bag which she skilfully laced with narrow strips of soft chamois leather, until only the child's head could be seen peeping out at the top. The old mother bent down her grey tousled head as she warmed herself at the fire. She sighed deeply, moaned and mumbled something in her native tongue.

The man himself soon returned to the hut, and began collecting his household goods. Everything was thrown in one common heap: pillows, bags, pans, a fishing net, a bucket of birch bark and all kinds of skins. The air was thick with feathers and dust. The poor man was so excited that when his wife asked him to tie up the last child, he seized the samovar which was standing next to the cradle, and began thrusting it into the bag instead of the baby.

It was painful to see these people hurriedly forsaking the corner which they had so long occupied, leaving the small home which had cost them so much effort to build.

Pepelyaev's adventure did not spare anyone. The population fled before him as from the plague.

Inside the hut, children were crying and the wounded men were groaning in their pain. Outside, the forlorn cattle were bellowing, the horses that had survived the battle were whinnying, and some stray dogs had set up a tedious endless whine.

After he had finished gathering the things together, the Yakut slowly gazed for the last time at the bare walls of his hut, then for some unknown reason, stood for a moment bare-headed before the fireplace,* and turned to us to take his leave.

"Farewell, comrades!" he said, "I hope you will resist and not give way to the Whites; I hope there will be few wounded and not one killed, that you will defeat the general and return my hut to me soon, and also bring back a peaceful life to our entire region. If it were not for the family, I would remain with you, for I shoot well, but you see for yourselves, I am the only worker for seven people; there is no one else. I am leaving the samovar—we can do without it, and you need it. Farewell!" He raised his hand, hastily put on an old worn-out horse-hide cap, and went out of doors to where his family, ready for the road, stood waiting for him.

* A peasant afterwards explained to us that *al uot*, or the holy fire, which gives life and warmth to the dwellers of the taiga, was especially dear to the Yakut, and that the master of the hut was on this occasion bidding farewell to the domestic hearth. I. S.

CHAPTER VIII

NEGOTIATIONS WITH PEPELYAEV

It was clear to all of us that the detachment was in for another battle, that we would have to prepare for it immediately, and also make all preparations for a protracted defence of the position we occupied. My wound seemed to be rather serious; the bullet had pierced the right lung, and I was spitting blood and could not walk.

To leave the battalion in its old position was out of the question. We must unite all our forces under one command. So the battalion left the huts they had occupied, and came over to join us. The detachment and the squadron were merged into one company and immediately set about making fortifications under the direction of Adamsky. *Balbakhi* were dragged into the yard; hay and firewood were brought; the dead oxen and horses were piled together in a heap.

Everything was soon in its proper place. The oxen and horses were left in the centre of the yard together with all our provisions. The hut and the barn were strewn with hay, the latter being cleaned of all manure and used to house the wounded. The *balbakhi* were placed in rows four and five deep, and reinforced on the outside with snow over which we poured water brought from an opening in the ice on the lake. The frost helped us for it quickly cemented our construction. We built the fortifications in a circle, the area enclosed being about a hundred paces long and thirty to forty paces in breadth. We built special embrasures for the machine-guns—seven or eight embrasures in all—thus providing the necessary reserve embrasures to which we could rush machine-guns according to

where the danger-point lay. By evening, our fortifications were completed, and a report to Baikolov had been prepared.

As soon as darkness approached, our messenger Konstantinov, a Yakut who knew the road well, started out for the city. The report was marked "Full speed!" but alas, it was evident that the horse which bore our messenger was not capable of high speed, and that he would probably have to dismount. If he did not cover the seventy or eighty versts in the first night, he would be overtaken. And that was what actually happened. After riding about twenty versts, Konstantinov abandoned his horse, and started walking, but the Whites caught him and took him prisoner.

The entire day and night passed quietly. There was no sign of the Whites anywhere. Our scouts went about five versts, but found no one and returned with no information. It was risky to venture further, as they might be cut off and captured.

When Pepelyaev received the alarming news of Vishnevsky's misfortune, he hurried to the scene himself with the remaining forces of his corps. He intended to finish off the Red detachment in short time. But when he arrived in Sasil-sisi, he realized that it would cost many men to take the strengthened position in a frontal attack. He thought it better therefore to negotiate with the Reds and propose to them that they surrender without a battle.

On the next day, therefore, February 14, at eleven o'clock in the morning, two of Pepelyaev's soldiers, carrying a flag of truce, were seen approaching one of our sentry posts. They were former Red Army men who had been taken prisoners in the battle of Amga.

They reported that Pepelyaev with six hundred men, five heavy machine-guns and three automatic Choches, was half a verst away from us. Having delivered their message, they returned.

Pepelyaev wrote:

"You are surrounded on all sides by the Siberian volunteer corps and insurrectionary detachments. Resistance is futile. In order

to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, and in order to spare the lives of the Red Army men, I propose that you surrender. I guarantee the lives of all Red Army men, commanders and Communists. I must have your final answer by twelve o'clock noon.

"Commander of the Siberian volunteer corps and the insurrectionary detachments,

"Lieutenant-General Pepelyaev.

"Chief of Staff, Leonov."

The report was received by us at 11:15. Pepelyaev's proposal was read to the whole detachment which had gathered together for the occasion.

Everyone was of the same opinion—we must fight until the last cartridge. However, before rejecting Pepelyaev's offer, I decided to examine our fortifications myself and see that they were all in order.

A fur coat was thrown over me, and supported by two men, I went out into the yard and made a cursory inspection of our position. The results were not at all consoling. The barricades shielded us only against a frontal attack, and were open on the flank and rear. They had to be re-built, but the time allowed, which had almost expired, was too short for us to do this.

In order to gain time, we decided to use strategy, and answered Pepelyaev as follows:

"I received your proposal to surrender the detachment entrusted to me, at 11:15 o'clock, February 14. In view of the great importance of the question of surrendering the entire detachment with arms in its hands, I cannot decide it personally. It is necessary to hold a general meeting of the detachment, at which the question of your proposal will be discussed. For this we need more time than you have allowed us. I ask that the time be prolonged until 4 p.m.

"Commander of the combined detachment, I. Strod,

"Commander of the Staff, Dmitriev,

"Military Commissar, Kropachev."

Two men were chosen to deliver our reply, the platoon commander, Alexei Volkov, and the machine-gun operator, Pozhidaev. They were given this note and a stick to which was tied a dirty white handkerchief. Carrying the flag of truce, they

quickly made their way up the hillside, passed our sentinels, and, thirty paces further on, came upon the outpost of the Whites, where they found one platoon stationed with our former machine-gun commander, Renkus. Here they were called upon to halt. An officer approached, and after questioning them, demanded that their eyes be bandaged.

"Why is that necessary?"

"So that you may not see our position and our forces," answered the commander of the White outpost.

They had to agree, and with their eyes covered, were led forward by a guard of two men. On the way, they tried to start a conversation, but as the Whites refused to answer, they stopped questioning them. Their eyes were not uncovered until they had entered a hut. At first they could not see anything, and stood there blinking. Then they saw that five officers, apparently the staff, were seated round a table in the room.

"Which of you is General Pepelyaev?" asked the messengers.

"I," responded a tall black-bearded man, standing at the fireplace. He wore cloth trousers, Siberian deerskin boots, and a knitted red sweater without shoulder-straps.

He extended his hand and greeted them, the other officers following suit. They were offered seats and were treated to cigarettes. Pepelyaev took the note, read it through, and thought it over.

"Is your commander a Party member?" Pepelyaev asked Pozhidaev.

"No, he is not."

"Well then, one can at once see that he is a man of sense. Are there many Communists in your detachment?" the question was put to Volkov.

"Isn't it all the same to you?" Comrade Volkov answered.

Pepelyaev was silent for a minute. At this moment General Vishnevsky entered the hut.

Pepelyaev went over to him, and they began to deliberate in low voices. Then Pepelyaev turned to his staff and said loudly:

"Brother officers, Strod is asking for a four hour respite in order to consider at a general meeting of the detachment the difficult situation that has been created for them, and to make a final decision. What do you think—can we give them this respite? Brother Vishnevsky and I think that we can. Any objections?"

The chief of staff, Colonel Leonov, wrote out a reply then and there, and gave it to Pepelyaev. The latter signed it, and then tapping Volkov familiarly on the shoulder, he said:

"I am glad that there is to be no useless bloodshed. If we were not successful in the first battle, it was only because I allotted small forces to it. Now, resistance is useless. I have concentrated all my forces and the odds are in my favour. If for some reason, your commanders do not agree to surrender, shoot into the air when we attack. Remember, I do not shoot anyone, and your comrades who were taken prisoners are voluntarily serving in my corps. Whoever does not want to serve in my ranks, I release and let go to Yakutsk."

He gave them the message and they turned to leave. Their eyes were again bandaged until they arrived at the outposts. Renkus asked the commander of the White outpost for permission to speak a little with his former comrades. The officer granted him his request, walked about ten paces away and stood looking at them as they talked.

"Well, how are things going, comrades? How are you all?"

"All right, 'brother Renkus', we are getting on fine and awaiting better times."

"Why the devil 'brother'? I'm no more their brother than a wolf in the woods."

Renkus had spoken rather too loudly. The officer frowned, but was silent.

"My neck still hurts; that is how these 'brothers' of ours served me with their rifle-butts at Amga, but I paid them back all right. There were too few of our chaps. If only we'd have had a few more. . . ."

"Stop this conversation, Renkus, and you, brothers, must go. Don't delay, they are waiting for you there." The commander of the outpost could no longer endure the conversation.

"Well, and you Renkus, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, as you see. I command a machine-gun for them."

"What, you will fire on your own side?"

In answer, Renkus only turned his eyes towards the officer.

"They robbed me of all my rags, they took my last pair of underpants, and then they call me brother."

The commander of the outpost came up to them and sharply insisted that our men continue on their way.

The old friends bade each other farewell, and Volkov and Pozhidaev started off. Then Renkus suddenly raised his head and shouted after his comrades:

"Give my regards to all our boys! Tell them not to surrender, and to fight like hell!"

The officer began shouting furiously at him, while his two comrades made their way quickly down the hillside.

Pepelyaev's answer read:

"Agree to extend the time allotted for negotiations to 4 p.m., by our time. During this time, no hostilities are to be undertaken by either side."

Our stratagem had succeeded. We went to work with a will and by half past three the barricades had been rebuilt. By that time, too, our reply to Pepelyaev was ready. It read as follows:

"Having discussed your proposition of surrender from every point of view, the detachment entrusted to me has arrived at the following decision:

"You have defied all of Soviet Siberia and Russia.

"You were invited here by the merchant speculators and the traitor—the socialist-revolutionary, Kulikovsky. The people did not summon you. With arms in their hands, they stood ready to defend the Soviet power. Now the former rebels, together with the Red Army, have risen to defend the autonomous republic. The Yakut intellectuals have sided with the working people. Your entire adventure is a house built on sand and is doomed to inevitable ruin.

"The detachment refuses to lay down its arms, and proposes to you that you lay down your arms and surrender to the mercy of the Soviet power. Your adventure in Yakutia is at an end.

"Remember, that the people are with us, and not with the generals."

This time, Pozhidaev went alone with our reply.

"The Whites may shoot him . . ." said someone.

"I am ready to die"—was his answer—"though I'd prefer to fall in battle. . . ."

At the outpost, the procedure of bandaging the eyes was repeated. Soon he was facing Pepelyaev again in the hut.

Pepelyaev took the message. He nervously opened it. His hands trembled. Then as he read it, his face darkened in a scowl. The others were watching the general with strained attention. Finally, having read it through, he threw the paper aside and turned to the officers with amazement written on his face.

"Brother officers! He proposes that I surrender!"

All of them laughed, including Pepelyaev himself, but it was nervous laughter.

Then he turned to the messenger:

"You have most likely fortified yourselves?"

"Yes, we fixed up the barricades in a few places."

"I thought so, I thought so. . . . That means that they are all Communists. And you are also a Communist?"

"No, comrade . . . citizen general! There are Communists among us, but more of us are non-Party men. I am not a Communist, but we are all ready to die like Communists, if necessary."

"I am very sorry that blood will have to be shed unnecessarily. Once more, I advise you to shoot in the air. Resistance, in any case, is of no avail. There will only be victims on both sides for no reason."

"All right, we will see then."

Pozhidaev soon returned. Pepelyaev had written:

"We came here at the appeal of the population. I know the state of feeling among the population. It is regrettable that you do not take the opinions of the people into consideration. I consider the negotiations at a close and will commence hostilities."

CHAPTER IX

THE CUNNING OF THE WHITES

All the soldiers were at their posts—the company in the trenches, the squadron in reserve. We waited an hour, two hours—still no sign of the enemy. Night came, but still no sign. We sent out scouts in three directions. Two men were dispatched on skis to report to Yakutsk. They were Alexei Vichuzhin and the peasant Sergius Mirushnichenko from Petro-pavlovskoye who knew the taiga well and promised not to go by the road but to cut through the forest. In order not to be too heavily burdened, they left their rifles behind and were armed only with revolvers and a pair of grenades. The scouts accompanied them for about seven or eight versts, after which they turned off the road and plunged into the forest.

However, in spite of all their precautions and the fact that they started out at night, the Whites learned of their departure. Five armed men on skis followed in their tracks for a hundred versts, and on the third day almost captured them. They were saved through the kindness of a Yakut.

One of the skis broke, whereupon the two men, who were tired out, stopped at a little hamlet place to change skis, and at the same time to rest and get something hot to eat. They chose the farther hut of the two which comprised the hamlet. The owner of the hut brought out several pairs of skis as soon as he learned what the trouble was and asked them to choose whichever they liked, while his wife started getting them tea. Fifteen minutes after they had entered, five White soldiers arrived on skis at the first hut and asked the men there if two men on skis had passed.

"Of course, of course"—he answered. "I met them out in the yard not more than half an hour ago. One had a broken ski. They took my horse and sledge and drove off. They did not even stop to drink tea."

"Oh, the devil take it! We thought we would get them here. . . . Have you any horses?"

"I have, only I let them out on the taiga to graze. I will get them in the evening; only wait a bit."

"What good are your horses to us in the evening? You're crazy, you old fool! We need horses immediately, and he says—'in the evening.' Go and find out from your neighbour if he has any horses at home. And let's have some tea to drink meanwhile."

The Yakut ran over to the second hut and told the Reds everything. They quickly buckled on their skiis and made their escape. Of course, the neighbour also had no horses and the Whites gave up the pursuit. . . .

In a few hours' time our scouts returned and reported that the entire road was free, that there were no Whites to be seen within seven or eight versts around. This both pleased and puzzled us. At first we decided that our forces were approaching Amga from Yakutsk, and that Pepelyaev had hurried off to encounter them, leaving us in peace, and giving us the opportunity to move wherever we pleased. But on reconsideration, we decided that it was a stratagem of the Whites. Pepelyaev had set a trap, thinking that the Reds would go forward and abandon their fortifications and that he would then be able to smash the whole detachment as soon as they reached a convenient place. Even if we had not seen through this trick of Pepelyaev's, we would have stayed where we were. There was no reason for our moving; and besides, we were hampered by the presence of wounded men and had no contact with our own people. If we had known that our own forces were approaching, we would have risked a battle and advanced to meet them.

Meanwhile we posted more sentries and pulled down one of the barns for firewood, making a wood pile in the yard. Besides this, we sawed down about thirty trees and laid them in front of the trenches with the branches pointing towards the enemy. This formed something like an abatis; true it was only a makeshift, but to the attacking side even such a slight obstacle sometimes creates a psychological effect of seeming strong and difficult to overcome. And this actually happened in this case. The abatis we made appeared to the enemy to be a serious obstacle to their attack.

CHAPTER X

PEPELYAEV LAUNCHES HIS GRAND OFFENSIVE

It was close on twelve o'clock that night when the White scouts came in contact with our outposts. The firing continued the whole night long. The enemy's object was to tire us out before beginning the attack, not to let us sleep by keeping us always on the *qui vive*. We reinforced our guards with one platoon and two automatic Choches. One platoon was on duty in the trenches, while the others rested, turn and turn about.

At five in the morning, the White scouts withdrew and we were left in peace.

Day was dawning. The darkness of early morning was interspersed with large white patches of fog. It grew lighter and the frost became more severe. Our sentinels were frozen. They stamped their feet softly and rubbed their cheeks and noses with their mittens.

"It sure is cold!" whispered one.

"That's nothing, comrade. It's not the first time I've felt it. In 1922, it was sixty below and we had to stick it. Today it's not more than forty below."

"If we could only smoke. I'd give anything for a smoke."

"Go ahead then, smoke. The devil knows where they are! They may be quite close up, but in the forest and in this fog you can't see far."

"But they'll surely attack today?"

"Sure they will. Pepelyaev wants to hurry on to Yakutsk, and it's we who are detaining him."

"Sh, sh. . . . They are coming! D'ye hear?"

"Yes. But maybe it's our chaps, coming from Yakutsk. We should challenge them."

"Who goes there?"

Bang! Bang! Bang! Whiz—z. . . . Invisible swift bullets answered the challenge.

"Maybe, it's the scouts again?"

"To hell with the scouts! Look! It's the whole bunch of them, advancing in column. . . ."

Not more than twenty or thirty paces ahead, dark moving silhouettes of people were dimly visible advancing through the white shroud of fog.

The sentries, after firing a few rounds, abandoned their position and ran down the hill towards the hut. In a few minutes all were out in the yard.

This time, Pepelyaev himself led the attack. He hoped to win a quick victory by a violent onslaught with all his forces. The whole taiga was thronged with Whites. Their ranks extended right along the outskirts of the forest. It was six o'clock in the morning. The Whites were advancing and attacking on all sides.

The entire company and the machine-gun squad were posted at the barricades. The squadron remained in reserve in the hut, ready at any moment to lend support.

The early morning quiet was broken by the rattle of our machine-guns. From every corner of the barricades came a burst of fire in answer to the Whites. Hundreds of bullets pierced the embrasures. Those in front fell, but others took their places. From the outskirts of the forest more and more troops came running out into the glade. Paying no attention to their losses in dead and wounded, the Whites kept coming on, spurred on and encouraged by their commanders.

The groans of the wounded, the hiss of the bullets, the crack of the rifles and machine-guns, and the cheers of friend and foe, all blended together into one confused uproar.

Twice, the Whites got within thirty or forty paces of the barricades, but both times they were beaten back.

It was now broad daylight, and the figures of the advancing Whites could be clearly seen. They were forced to retreat to the edge of the forest, from whence they kept up a fierce rifle and machine-gun fire. After about forty minutes, they came on again, but again they were beaten off. They attacked intermittently until one o'clock in the afternoon—each time being beaten back. Finally they drew off and took cover in the forest and in the birch grove. Their machine-guns opened fire whenever they noticed any movement among us and a fitful rifle fire was kept up.

We now had a short respite. Those of our men who had no heavy boots, got their feet frozen. Although their bodies were hot and the sweat poured down their faces, their feet were stone cold from standing still. They had eaten nothing since morning, and the cold weather gave an edge to their hunger. Some of our men, exposing themselves to the fire of the Whites, dragged some carcasses of dead horses nearer to the barricades, chopped off pieces of frozen meat with an axe and devoured them raw. There was no bread but a supply of salt was brought out from the hut. In order to wet their parched throats, they swallowed handfuls of dirty snow, which caused them to catch cold and cough hoarsely.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, the enemy again advanced to the attack. Fresh forces were evidently being hurled into the battle. During the preceding attack the snow had been trampled down, so that the enemy could now advance more quickly. In spite of the fierceness of our fire, they neither stopped nor took cover. When only fifty paces remained between us and the enemy, our Lewis machine-gunner was hit by a bullet, the automatic Choche broke down and the Colt jammed and had to cease fire. Dmitriev called on his reserves, and the squadron came rushing out of the hut into the yard. It was only just in time. Some thirty of the Whites had rushed a section defended by the first platoon, but as a result of the timely arrival of the reserves, they were repulsed, some being

killed and the rest taking to their heels. The danger was over; this onslaught also had suffered defeat.

The squadron commander, Adamsky, was killed. He was a courageous fighter who had fought through the entire Civil War. Dmitriev had received a wound in the arm, while the chief of the machine-gun squad, Alexei Khasnutdinov, was missing. The platoon commander, Alexander Metlitsky, took over the command of the squadron; Alexandrov took over the company, and Zholnin, another platoon commander, an energetic and brave comrade, was appointed commander of the defence. The battle continued, the enemy repeating his unsuccessful attacks from time to time.

The hut and the barn formed the centre of our fortifications. During the battle, scores of bullets beat against the walls, sometimes sticking fast in them, sometimes piercing through and skimming the floor. To avoid being hit, it was necessary to lie flat on the ground. The interior of the two buildings was almost pitch dark. There were a few small windows, mere slits, cut through for air rather than for light, which were shielded with *balbakh* as a protection against the rain of bullets. All day, wounded men came crawling in from the yard. Once in the barn, they felt themselves comparatively safe and did not lie down immediately, paying no attention to the shouts of their comrades: "Lie down! Lie down!" This cost many of them their lives.

There were two medical orderlies in the trenches and two others in the barn, the latter lying on the floor near the door. The feeble light of two home-made lamps did not penetrate the surrounding darkness and formed only a small circle of light around the orderlies. At the risk of their own lives, the orderlies bandaged the wounded. When a volley of shots came, they would stop in the midst of their work, and throw themselves flat on the ground, and then, when the rain of bullets had subsided, they would again continue dressing the wounds. Evening approached, but the fighting did not cease. The dark ring of barricades was surrounded by a fiery girdle of sputter-

ing gun muzzles. The four remaining machine-guns continued to belch forth a burning tornado of shots. By now all our automatic Choches were out of action. The rifle muzzles were glowing, the locks often refused to work. The machine-guns jammed continually and caused us considerable delay.

At last the firing died down on both sides. One after another, the machine-guns fell silent and following them the rifle fire also began to slacken, and finally ceased. Somewhere a last lone rifle shot rang out and then all was quiet. It was almost midnight. Pepelyaev withdrew his forces for the time being. He had lost one hundred and fifty men killed and wounded.

Our casualties were sixty-one killed and wounded.

CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT ATTACK FRUSTRATED

The second battle, which lasted eighteen hours, had thus ended in another defeat for Pepelyaev. This battle, however, cost us dearly too. All the commanders of the detachment were hit. The barn was filled with wounded and the men at the barricades were frozen. Huge fires were lighted, and the men took turns at warming themselves at them. But all were in good spirits. Everyone understood that our losses were not in vain. Pepelyaev was now obliged to remain at Amga. He would have to wipe out our force before he could advance farther, and even if he succeeded in doing so, the strength of the Whites would be so undermined that they would no longer present any danger to Yakutsk. Moreover, the experience of the past fighting had taught the Whites that they could not capture our detachment without sustaining serious losses.

It had been a hard fight. The commander of one of the Maxim machine-guns said:

"I never shot so many rounds from a machine-gun in one day's fighting. We used up forty belts. How did that gun ever hold out, I wonder? We had one jam, but it was only a trifle, and we fired ten thousand cartridges in all."

Pepelyaev commanded General Vishnevsky to make one more attack that night, and capture Sasil-sisi at all costs.

He himself went off to Amga.

We were on the alert waiting for a new attack. The men were so tired, that half had to be released from duty to go to the hut and take a rest. The machine-guns were brought in to the hut, one at a time from the barricades, taken apart and

cleaned. In this way we cleaned and oiled them all, so that they worked smoothly again. It only remained to fix up two of the automatic Choches. The machine-gunners also took turns at resting in the hut, not more than two men from each gun being away at a time.

At three in the morning suspicious noises were heard coming from the direction of the enemy. A new attack was being prepared. The detachment had five rockets, four for illumination and a red one for signals. We had somehow forgotten about them, and only remembered them now. The noises in the forest were growing louder, coming closer. . . .

One rocket shot up from the barricades and rent the dark covering of the night; it illuminated the glade, the barricades and the outskirts of the forest. Another shot up, and for a moment the whole glade was as light as day. The two rockets fell one after the other like falling stars, emitted a dull shimmering light and a low hissing sound as they hit the earth. Thick darkness again covered the glade, the hut and the forest.

Then the Whites opened fire, and the shooting lasted until morning.

The attack did not materialize. Vishnevsky informed Pepelyaev that the Reds had a large reserve of rockets and were firing them off continually. This had a demoralizing effect on the militia, so he would await further orders from Pepelyaev.

On the night of February 16, a strong convoy arrived from Pepelyaev in the shape of several cart-loads of different sized mirrors which had been requisitioned from the inhabitants. The mirrors were intended to counter-act the effect of the rockets. A mirror placed opposite the barricades would reflect the flare of the rockets and would thus prevent our men from being able to see what lay before them.

However, the approaching moonlit nights interfered with the use of this "last word in technique."

CHAPTER XII

BESIEGED

All the following day, February 16, a spasmodic rifle fire was kept up, punctuated at intervals by bursts of machine-gun fire. The Whites did not attack again.

The night also passed off quietly. Only at times was the quiet disturbed by a short burst of rifle fire from both sides.

In the morning, Zholnin, the commander of the defence, reported that the Whites were putting up barricades of *balbakhi* around us. They had decided to starve us into submission. We were surrounded on all sides. The siege had begun!

The first difficulty we encountered was the lack of water. There was only one remedy for this, which was to use snow; but the snow lay beyond the barricades under the guns of the Whites.

During the day there was no use trying to get snow. It could only be fetched at night, and then only at the risk of one's life. The wounded were suffering from thirst, and kept asking for water constantly.

"Comrades, give me some water! I am dying! I want a drink! Give me a drop of water, for Christ's sake!"

"Comrade, be patient until evening. There is no water, there is no more ice, and snow can't be got right now—they will kill us. See, the firing hasn't died down yet! The Whites are close up; they have surrounded us."

At last the long wished for night arrived, but as luck would have it, it was a bright moonlit night. Two Red Army men of the reserve were detailed to go for snow, and the non-com-

missioned officer who was taken prisoner when we were coming to Sasil-sisi, volunteered to go with them.

The three of them took a bag, went out into the yard and stole over to the barricades. . . .

In the fitful moonlight, the black shadows of the three men crawling on the snow were clearly visible. The Whites saw them at once and opened fire. The non-commissioned officer was killed and the others wounded. They came back empty-handed. Two more went. One was wounded, the other brought back a little snow. It was put into a bucket and melted on the fire. From it we obtained a few cups of water which we distributed among those who were seriously wounded; they pressed their parched lips eagerly to the cup and took small sips, as if it were some rare delicacy. They sighed with relief after they had drunk, but in a few minutes they were again asking for water. Their thirst became more and more unendurable. What could we do? During the night, snow had to be gathered for the entire detachment; but while the moon shone, this was impossible. The enemy had taken stock of our position and they kept sleepless watch over the only path by which we could get snow. The moon would set two hours before daybreak so there would be a short interval of darkness, but in that time not much could be brought. Fortunately we had some sheets among our medical stores and from these we made long white robes. Three Red Army men, clad in white robes, crept up to the barricades, but the enemy spotted them and opened fire. We answered vigorously and a regular battle began. But the three men in their white robes lying flat on the ground, gathered up the snow in bags, filled them, dragged them back through the yard, threw the snow out in a heap, and made good their escape. And so it went on until morning. During the night they succeeded in getting so much snow that there was enough water to give each wounded man two cups, the others one each, and to cook meat once during the day.

CHAPTER XIII

WITHOUT BREAD

When we left Petropavlovskoye, we had taken only a ten-day supply of bread and as there was no hay on the road, we had to use some of this bread to feed the horses and oxen.

From the very first day of the siege, the question of provisions was an acute one. Our only resources were the killed horses and oxen, which we believed would last for a month. In spite of the frost, however, the meat spoiled, the reason being that the entrails had not been removed from the carcasses. Fortunately, we found a saw and in order to remove the entrails, we sawed up the carcasses which were frozen hard as bone. Thus, the meat was at least protected from further decay. As soon as evening approached and darkness covered the white strip that divided us from the enemy, two men crawled out into the yard to the carcasses. The work progressed slowly, but three or four carcasses were sawed up in one night. The Whites who heard the rasping of the saws, guessed what was going on and began to shoot; the bullets were shot at random and scattered through the yard. They hit the frozen earth, rebounded, and flew on. Others hit the horses and remained embedded in them, but that did little harm. The soldiers crouched for cover behind the carcasses and continued to work in comparative safety. But there was no way of washing the meat when it had been cut up into pieces—we could not spare the water. We often cooked the meat together with the skin, for it was difficult to remove and besides there was no time to remove it, for we were famished. The hair was singed off at the fire and the meat was wiped with the hem of a coat

or a piece of rag, and then put into a bucket of water. Only salt was added for seasoning.

At nine or ten o'clock in the evening, the meal was ready. Each one received a piece of meat and a little broth.

"Hey, what's this? They're giving us Harbin bean soup to-night!" exclaimed some wag, finding a bullet in his portion.

"These beans aren't well boiled, you know—they're as hard as nails. Say, kitchen police, what were you looking at? These beans are quite raw, I tell you! They must be soaked at night—then they are soft in the morning. We'll break our teeth on these."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MEDICAL STORES RUN OUT

It was almost morning. The moon had sunk behind the mountain. The thick darkness began to be suffused with the luminous blue of daybreak. In the yard, rifle shots were still ringing out. No one in the hut was sleeping, all were sitting and waiting, for hot water was soon to be distributed.

Suddenly the door was flung open but instead of a bucket of tea, which was what they expected, the men saw a wounded comrade borne in. He had just been shot. Those carrying him stopped at the threshold, and examined him for signs of life.

"How do you like that! We didn't even get a chance to bandage him. The poor fellow's stone dead already!" said one of them, shrugging his shoulders hopelessly.

The other Red Army man sighed deeply and began heaping curses on the Whites:

"The damned butchers! Haven't they killed enough poor fellows already? Why did they come here anyway?"

Then he snatched up the dead body under the arms and dragged it back to the yard.

"Why don't they clear out?" exclaimed a man lying near the door. "Killing's the only thing they can do. It's their trade. They thought they'd be met with open arms. They trusted in the ignorance of the Yakuts—that's why they came. But it didn't turn out as they expected. I remember an old fable about the wolf that the moujiks tell. The wolf came running to the village one day and asked the moujiks to hide him from the pursuers, who were persecuting him! But no one wanted to help him, because he had molested everybody—

he had killed one peasant's sheep and ripped up the cow of another. It is the same with Pepelyaev. He is not the first wolf we have had in Yakutia. In 1918, we had plenty of these white wolves here. They were all of the same Kolchak pack, and no one wanted to feel the wolf's teeth twice. The Yakut people can remember the Whites well. They know what sort of folk they are, and they're not going to be fooled by soft words."

"Yes, the Yakuts have changed now; they've come right round to our side," another soldier struck in.

"When we left Petropavlovskoye, the Yakuts bade us farewell and heaped curses on Pepelyaev. A Yakut came up to one Red Army man, extended his right hand, clenched his left fist and shook it in the direction from which the Whites were expected. It's too bad we couldn't understand what he was saying in his own language. In Russian he could only swear."

"But maybe this Yakut was swearing at us and lifting his hand for us to go," someone else put in.

"Maybe so, but he acted differently! If it were us he was cursing, would he have brought the detachment a sack full of frozen milk for the road? They keep giving us things—almost everybody gets something. Why, they gave us more than we could carry, for we had no cart."

"It's easy to see on which side the population is," interrupted the commander of a rifle section, who was cleaning a rifle lock. "Take the master of this very hut. On the morning he left, I was out in the yard—cutting up meat. The Yakut packed all his possessions together on the sledge and was ready to leave. Then he suddenly came over to me and shoved an axe into my hands. My axe was a bad one, you see, and he wanted to give me his. I refused, of course. How could I take it, when I could see that the man was ruined? Five or six of his cows had been killed in the first battle. But he insisted that I should have the axe, until I began to feel quite uncomfortable. Finally, he plunged the axe into the carcass and went back to the cart. The children were sitting on top of the baggage heaped up on the sledge—strapped in so as not

to fall. One end of the rein was tied to a small wooden ring pierced through the oxen's nostrils, the other was in his wife's hand. She tugged at the rein and the ox lumbered off. But before he left, the man went over to the bodies of the Red Army men, took his cap off and stood there a minute in silence. Then he followed after his family. As he passed me, I saw tears in his eyes. He said nothing to me, only waved his hand, quickly untied the second cart and left. The Whites have gone crazy," continued the section commander. "Everyone has turned against them, but they don't want to see that. They agitate and call upon the people to flock to their cause, but who follows them? Nobody wants to see the Whites back."

A platoon commander was dragged into the hut, wounded. The conversation stopped. The medical orderly, Kuprianov, bandaged the wounded man, then came over to me, sat down on the floor beside me, and reported an unpleasant piece of news: the medical stores were coming to an end and there was no more bandaging material.

All the detachment's medical stores were in the first aid kit of the two medical orderlies; there was nothing in reserve. That small amount of bandage, disinfectant and cauterizing material, which the detachment had, was sufficient for only a few days. We had to make dressings, but what were we to use. We had to use the old bandages which were saturated with blood and pus. They were washed again and again, until they tore into shreds. There was no way of getting fresh supplies. The wounds were festering. The bandages soaked through. At the end of the first week of the siege, we had no more bandage and not a drop of iodine or sublimate. There was nothing with which to bandage the wounded.

In the ordnance section of the detachment there was some cloth which until then we had bartered to the population in exchange for foodstuffs and fodder. We asked the quartermaster if there was any of this material left. To our good fortune, there was almost eight hundred yards of it left. The

material was made into bandages, but what substitutes could we find for iodine and other disinfectants?

The wounds had to be washed with snow water. The cloth was all dyed stuff. Before using it for bandage, it had to be boiled two or three times until no more dye came out, and even then there were several deaths from blood poisoning. Our four medical orderlies, Kuprianov, Tokarev, Volonikhin and Fogel worked under unbelievable conditions. They had to take care of almost seventy wounded men!

The life of the wounded was one long agony. In this barn, as dark as the grave, they lay utterly cut off from the rest of the world. A new day came and brought them no consolation. Today was like yesterday, and tomorrow like today.

CHAPTER XV

THE FLIGHT OF THE WOUNDED

The garrison of a first-class fort, which is in every way adapted both for defence and for siege, finds, after being surrounded for a few months, that the besieged are beginning to suffer not only from the attacks of the enemy, but even more from the insanitary conditions.

Our "fort" at Sasil-sisi consisted of one hut with a barn attached to it. The entire area of the "fort" was a hundred paces in length and thirty to forty in width. The men who had not been hit, used the hut, which was not more than sixteen or seventeen square yards in extent, while the wounded were quartered in the barn. After two battles and a few days of siege, they numbered seventy men. The area of the barn was not more than about forty yards square. It was dark both in the hut and in the barn; the windows could not be opened. The small supply of oil was used only for the lamps, which were not burned except at the time when the wounded were being bandaged. Only a microscopic speck of light was kept burning day and night near the medical orderly on duty. Its fitful shine could not penetrate the surrounding darkness. The wounded, after a few hours of restless sleep would wake up and ask:

"Comrades, is it day or night out in the yard?"

At first, as long as there was plenty of wood, we could make a fire in the fireplace, and this freshened and warmed the air a little. But it soon became necessary to economize on firewood. The fire was made up only once a day and not more

than six or seven logs were used. As a result, the air became foul and stuffy.

"It is suffocating. Open the door," a wounded man would begin to shout.

"It is cold, comrades! Close the door!" came answering shouts from the other wounded.

There was nothing with which to cover the wounded to keep them warm. It was dark and damp and our heads felt as if they were filled with lead. Our eyes hurt from the constant darkness, and there was one enemy from which we could find no escape—the millions of crawling lice. The wounded were terribly tortured by them. They crept in heaps wherever there was a wound or blood or pus—an entire living crawling mass of horror and repulsion.

The ceaseless coughing of those who had caught cold in this damp place—the heartrending cries of those who were badly wounded, whose arms, legs, or ribs were smashed—the hoarse sighs and groans—the tossing about of people in delirium—all this aggravated still more our already difficult position and had a depressing effect on those who had not yet been hit and who were still able to hold their rifles.

No one feared death; we were afraid of wounds and of having to lie for days on end in this dark barn where physical suffering was heightened by the dismal surroundings and the horrible condition in which the helpless wounded lay.

In this sombre dwelling, riddled with bullets, the suffering they endured was inhuman. The black wings of death shut out the sun, the air and the light. But above the song of death and of horror, rose the Red anthem of the October Revolution, the song of unyielding struggle and of certain victory. Neither complaints nor reproaches were heard; there was neither faint-heartedness nor despair. From every corner of this black pit, curses of deadly hatred were hurled against the enemies of the workers, the last champions of the Siberian counter-revolution who had come from Harbin.

Something stirred in the mighty heart of the taiga. The news flew from mouth to mouth. The news was carried from one inhabitant of the taiga to another. The news reached Yakutsk: The Reds were putting up a stout resistance. Pepeleyaev could not conquer them. Only starvation could break the iron will of the defenders of the Soviets!

CHAPTER XVI

A CONVERSATION DURING THE NIGHT

The hours passed very slowly. A week had passed since the arrival of the detachment at Sasil-sisi. It was nine o'clock at night, and the men at the barricades were being relieved. Those whose turn it was crawled out into the yard by ones and twos.

In one corner of the barn the fitful light of the medical orderly's lamps flickered weakly in the darkness, half choked with soot. The dying flames of the fire cast shadows on the walls. The corners of the barn were cold and draughty but they had to be used for lack of space. Only those wounded who could move about without help lay there, but it was impossible to stay long—it was too cold. Every two or three hours, the orderly on duty roused the wounded to change places, according to a list of those whose wounds were less severe.

Out of doors, it was a clear moonlit night. A light transparent haze hung on the frozen air. The glade was splashed with long black shadows. All was deathly quiet—not a sound from either side. Occasionally the frost would crack through the trees like a shot, and then again silence.

Suddenly from the black shadows of the taiga, came a voice calling:

"He—ey! List—en . . . Re—eds . . . Brothers, brothers . . . !
Let us talk!"

"Go on. . . . Let's hear what you have to say."

The echo resounded uncannily in the vast stillness all around. The Whites began propagandizing.

"Listen, brothers! What are you fighting for? Whom are you defending? What are you holding out for so stubbornly? Aren't we all Russians and don't we all pray to one God? Among us there are workers of the Izhevsk and Votkinsk factories. There are peasants from Penza, Samara and other districts. Why should we kill each other? We kill only Communists and Jews. Let us free the Russian people. Surrender. . . . You will not be hurt. Let us march together to save Russia. . . ."

Silence fell. They were waiting for their answer.

Then from our barricades the workers' answer rang out:

"We are fighting for the Soviet power, for the power of the workers of the whole world. We are defending the workers and peasants against the landowners, the bourgeoisie and the generals. We are struggling against you because you are fools! You kiss the hands of your masters, the bourgeoisie, who buy you for a few gold rubles and send you against the Soviet power, to save—not Russia, but their own factories and private possessions. Stop saving the fatherland for the landowners. Better save your own skins! Cast away your arms and surrender. The Soviet Government will pardon you for your misdeeds. . . ."

The Whites were not pleased that their propaganda had had this effect. They hurled back threats and abuse:

"In two days we will finish you off! You are all Communists there, you rogues. . . ."

The talk was cut short by a sharp burst of rifle and machine-gun fire. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

PEPELYAEV'S ORDERS

"To Major General Vishnevsky, Colonel Reingard or Alexandrov and Colonel Dragomiretsky.

"February 23, 12 o'clock.

"The enemy remain on the defensive in the fortified houses that they occupy, and continue to defend themselves stubbornly, apparently hoping for relief. Only by persistence and activity can we break their will and *morale*, and then either force them to surrender or destroy them.

"My orders are that you set to work most energetically and methodically this evening; close in on the enemy by moving your defences closer.

"I entrust Colonel Alexandrov with the direction of this work; fifteen working people from the battalion and division are to be sent under his command to the southern end of the village every day at 8 p.m.

"Colonel Dragomiretsky is to bring manure for *balakhi* day and night in accordance with the orders of Colonel Alexandrov.

"The work must be done quickly, untiringly, in order that the defences may be moved one hundred paces nearer the enemy within the next two or three days.

"I entrust the general survey of the work to Colonel Reingard, who must inform me daily of its results.

"The commanders should impress upon the volunteers that we must destroy the enemy in a short time at all costs; on this depends our further advance, and I expect untiring energy from every volunteer.

"Commander of the Siberian Volunteer Corps,

"*Lieutenant-General Pepelyaev.*"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SIEGE CONTINUES

The days dragged endlessly. Except for short intervals, the enemy's rifle and machine-gun fire continued uninterrupted. Every now and then a wounded man would come crawling into the barn. The men in the hut usually remained in a prone position, but some sat up, no longer paying any heed to the bullets that riddled the walls.

"If only we could smoke! I'd give anything for a smoke right now. Why haven't we got souls like the priests say, then I could sell mine to the devil for a fill of tobacco! If I could only find a cigarette butt, to inhale just once!"

For two days the Whites concentrated their fire systematically on the barricades, using mainly machine-gun fire, until, on the evening of the third day, they had broken down the barricades in a few places, especially in the spots where our machine-guns were placed.

The chief of the defence, Zholnin, reported to the staff that there were breaches in our barricades, that some of our men had no cover, and that if the Whites continued firing the next day as they did on this, it would go badly with us.

We had to find a way out of the situation. How were we to replace the ruined barricades and with what materials could we build new ones?

I asked Zholnin how many dead bodies there were in the yard.

"There are fifty of our people, but counting the Whites, there are more than a hundred."

The dead bodies saved us; we decided to use them to build barricades. While it was still light, we could not carry out our plan. We had to wait for darkness.

At night the Whites could be heard shouting with malicious joy:

"You will soon be left without any defences, and then we'll finish you off! Better surrender while you're still alive."

Groans were heard from the bullet-riddled bodies in the darkness of the barn. "Water, water, give us just one gulp of water!"

Two cups of water were not enough for the wounded; they were tortured by thirst.

"Comrades, there is no snow; it is all gone. Wait until evening."

"Please, just a little snow, just one gulp!"

The orderly did not hesitate; he crawled out and in half an hour returned, dragging in a bagful of snow. The wounded stretched out their hands eagerly towards the sack.

"No, wait, I'll get the samovar to boil."

"Hurry, hurry, a drink. . . ."

The samovar was ready. Cups of water were poured out. I was brought half a cup of water and was able to wet my throat, but for some reason it seemed to me that the water smelled of dead bodies. I asked the orderly where he had got the snow. It turned out that he had taken it from under the dead bodies; he had collected a whole bag full of snow mixed with blood.

I asked him if it was safe to give such water to the wounded.

"Yes, it's quite safe. All the bacteria have been killed by boiling."

I could not drink it, however. I almost vomited. The others gulped it down—it did not matter, as long as it was water. Thirst tortures—what difference does it make, even if the water smells of corpses!

The medical orderly on duty made the rounds of the wounded, asking them how they felt, and whether their bandages were soaked through. He bent over one, examined another. . . .

A single bullet smashed against the wall of the hut. Then there was a lull in the firing. No more shots.

"The bandage has shifted out of place. . . . It hurts badly. . . . Re-bandage it, please!" asked a wounded man.

The orderly came over and by the meagre light of the home-made lamp, he began to unwind the bandage, while his assistant held the wounded leg. The man was in agony—the bone was broken. He clenched his teeth, and was silent. Finally, the bandage was removed and the orderly began to wash the wound with water. At that moment a volley of shots was fired and the bullets crashed into the barn. The orderly who was holding the leg was killed. He dropped the wounded man's leg and fell on it with all his weight. The wounded man yelled wildly! The Whites had opened fire on the barn. Everyone pressed their bodies to the ground for safety. With great difficulty and at the risk of his own life, the other orderly dragged his dead assistant off and freed the wounded man's leg, but it was impossible to attempt to bandage it now. The wounded man ceased yelling, and raised himself up on his hands.

"Lie down, you'll be killed," the orderly shouted to him.

"I won't lie down—let them kill me. It is better to end it at once than to suffer such torture."

The medical orderly held the wounded man down forcibly, not paying any attention to his curses and entreaties to be freed. He held on until the enemy ceased firing on the barn. The wounded man cried and cried. . . .

The Red Army men were busy fixing up the barricades during the entire night. They dragged up the frozen bodies, rolling them over and trying to place them in rows. They placed and replaced them until the bulwark of corpses was properly jointed.

"That one is too long—it doesn't fit. Pull over a shorter one. There, take that one—I think it's Fyodorov...."

The small holes in the walls of the barricades were stopped up with horses' heads.

And when morning came, the new barricades were ready. The Whites opened a strong machine-gun fire, but all in vain. The dead bodies were hard as stone. It would take field-gun fire to destroy them.

The victims of Pepelyaev's bloody adventure, even after death, continued to serve the cause of the Revolution in the outposts of distant Yakutia. The dead served as a trustworthy protection for their living comrades, who were serving without relief at the rifle and machine-gun embrasures.

Horrible barricades of frozen dead men screening the soldiers from death! Their extended arms, as stiff as steel, threatened the enemy—"Away!"

CHAPTER XIX

WE GET SOME FRESH NEWS

It was cold and damp. The fire was being made up. The first tongues of flame dispelled the gloom that brooded over the hut. Death, like a greedy giant, was seizing one life after another in its bony fingers. One more wounded comrade died that night. He was given over to the disposal of Zholnin—for the barricades. In the place left by the one who had just been carried away, another was already lying—wounded while fetching snow. The water boiled and each was given a cup to drink. Warmed by the drink, their hunger was aroused and they wanted to eat. The meat ration had to be almost halved, for some of the dead horses had been used for the barricade. If there was only tobacco—that would keep back the hunger!

The men for the most part lay silent. They rarely talked to each other. But in the morning the military commander of the detachment, Kropachev—the soldiers called him Misha—who had been at the barricades all night, came into the barn, lay down among the wounded and began to talk, telling stories about the Civil War. A conversation sprang up. Each had something to remember. Each had been in action more than once, had seen death, had felt hunger and cold. Reminiscences started.

"In 1918, I was in the Red Guards"—Androsov began his story. "After the defeat of the Soviet power in Siberia, I fell into the hands of the Whites. They beat me unconscious. The Japanese almost killed me. I endured and bore it all. Then I succeeded in escaping. From Chita I made my way to the village of Olovyannoya and started to work at the railway depot

there. Near the station, there was a large settlement inhabited mostly by workers and clerks. I don't remember whether it was in November or December, when the frosts grew more severe, that a whole squadron of Semenov's cossacks arrived.

"Soon after their arrival, they began to arrest all who were suspected of Bolshevism. Many were arrested at their work and put into cold freight cars which were standing in a siding. They collected about a hundred people in all. By some stroke of good fortune, I was not arrested. Soon the Whites began to mete out their "justice." Some got off lightly—they were only beaten with ramrods; others were examined by the secret service. There were terrible rumours going about the torture and death of our comrades. We heard the sound of shooting during the cold nights. Our comrades were led out to their deaths—ten and fifteen at a time.

"The last terrible night, which it seems to me I will never forget, was especially cold and windy. . . . I felt such terrible despair that night, I was in such a mood that I was ready to end it all there and then. . . . I went walking about aimlessly for a long time; I don't remember how I found myself at the blown up railway bridge at the river Onon. The Whites had blown it up—Semenov's men—about seven months before their retreat to Manchuria.

"I was about to turn back to the settlement, when suddenly I heard the sound of cursing and shouts. I could not distinguish the words, the wind carried them away, but a terrible suspicion seized my mind. It was our chaps being led off to execution. . . . I fell flat on the ground, seized with panic, for I knew it was death for me to be found there. Soon, the heavy tramp of a hundred feet was audible, and then, in the darkness I discerned the vague outlines of a group of people.

"They passed a hundred paces from me. I could not count how many comrades were being led to execution—they were surrounded by cossacks. I could not understand why they had chosen this place. They always did the shooting in the forest behind the water tower. However, I now saw them go down

to the river bank, stand there a short while and then begin to go out upon the ice. They went out almost to the middle of the river and halted there. The escort banged the butts of their rifles on the ice.

" 'Undress, take your boots off!'

"The comrades sentenced to death started taking off their clothes and pulled off their boots. The cold wind cut their naked shivering bodies. At that moment the moon shone out from behind a cloud. The copper hilts of the cossacks' sabres and the steel of the rifle locks could be seen glinting in the moonlight. The Whites were shouting words of command, and confused fragments of words were brought to me on the wind.

"From the mass of nude bodies, of which there were about twenty, five or six comrades separated themselves. Each one of them had a pick in his hands. They began to break through the ice. Tuk! . . . Tuk! . . . Tuk! . . . The ice resounded to the blows of the sharp steel picks.

"All were undressed, barefoot. They shouted and ran about from the cold. They relieved their comrades who were hacking at the ice, seized the picks from their hands and hurried to open the door of their grave. The cossacks smoked, laughed, and one of them even struck up a song in a drunken voice.

"Finally, the hole in the ice was ready.

" 'Jump in,' some one, apparently the cossack officer, commanded.

"The whip was used freely. One after another, the naked men threw themselves into the black hole, which was already covered with a thin layer of ice. The falling bodies dropped, the human wails ceased. . . .

"Soon it was all over, and the cossacks marched away. . . .

"I don't know how long I lay there, but I did not get home until the morning. That day, I did not go to work.

"Murmurs were heard among the workers; they cursed the murderers. It was said that the flesh and skin of the soles of human feet had been seen on the ice of the river near the

spot where the hole was dug. After the cossacks had meted out this 'justice' to the workers and clerks of the depot and village of Olovyannoya, many workers went to the mountains to carry on guerilla warfare as Red partisans. Those who remained alive have returned from the mountains and are probably working now, but I am still fighting. The counter-revolution must be fought to the very end. . . ." Androsov concluded decisively.

Such stories left us with an indescribable sense of pain, a dull heartache; the dark barn became even more gloomy. It was painful to believe that human beings were capable of such atrocities.

"Hey, comrades!" exclaimed one of the wounded who was recovering and for several days past had been asking to be put back in the ranks behind the barricades, the medical orderly, however, refusing to give his permission until his wounds were entirely healed. "How I should like to see our Soviet workers and peasants getting busy with real constructive work, laying down their rifles and going to the factory! Before the Revolution, I used to work at a machine shop in Tula. There, everything is most likely roaring and rattling now—thick clouds of smoke coming out of the chimneys and the war quite forgotten! But here—see what a mess they've made, the cursed devils from Harbin. And what chance do they stand in the long run? They're just trying to kill an elephant with a peashooter. You can't outwit the march of history, brother. If Pepelyaev reduced all Siberia to ashes, everything would go to the dogs with him anyway. A coffin is waiting him in Yakutia! Pepelyaev is doomed. . . ."

This worker spoke a long while. The others listened to his words attentively.

At the barricades all was quiet. It was night. The men who manned the barricades were dozing. They lay curled up on the ground but they gripped their rifles tightly, none the less. Only the sentries and those on machine-gun duty did not sleep.

A breeze sprang up from somewhere. It blew over the taiga, stirring and lifting the boughs of the pine trees. . . . The guards started, pricked up their ears. A few rifle shots rang out. The machine-guns sputtered fire. The Red forces would awaken from their nap with bayonets fixed, so that the barricades bristled like the spines of a hedgehog. The outskirts of the forest were lit up by the flash of gun muzzles and the shots whizzed and flew over the heads of the soldiers.

Again it was quiet. Every two hours there was a stealthy noise in the yard. A rifle clanked as it was dropped by accident on the frozen earth, and the Red Army men swore under their breath. The relief was going on duty at the barricades. And beyond the barricades, on the enemy side, the crunch of snow under boots was audible after a similar period of time. Those at the White defences were also being relieved.

It was almost two o'clock at night. Of late we permitted no more talks with the Whites. But now, despite the lateness of the hour, the enemy urged us to talk.

Finally we could hold out no longer.

"What do you want?" the soldier on guard shouted across to the Whites.

"We want to tell you some news."

"Go on! We'll listen to the lies you have to tell!"

"We have just received a communication from brother Pepel-yev. He writes that General Rakitin captured Churapcha yesterday at three o'clock. The garrison surrendered, and he seized two field-guns. Your 'Grandpa' Kurashov and his staff succeeded in forcing their way through to Yakutsk. We congratulate you on Churapcha. We have been sent one field-gun from there, and it will soon be here. It won't take us long to finish you off then. Better surrender while you are still alive. . . ."

"All right. We will inform the commander, then you shall have our answer."

"Good! We will wait."

CHAPTER XX

OUR DECISION

The news was not pleasant. On the one hand, it was possible that the story was only a fabrication of the Whites; but on the other hand, we had no grounds for not believing them. What were we to do? With field-gun fire, they could blow us to pieces in no time. We analysed our position carefully and decided that it would be best to prepare ourselves for the worst. We understood that the destruction of our detachment was not as important to Pepelyaev as the seizure of our supply of firearms; to get arms at our expense would greatly raise the spirits of Pepelyaev's corps.

Apart from those on duty at the bulwarks, who sent their representatives, the entire detachment was present at the meeting. In order to have more light, the fire was made up and all the lamps were lit. Not much was said. There was little to say. Each one clearly understood our position, and the decision was written on the face of every Red Army man and commander. We worked out the following plan: The entire supply of cartridges and grenades was to be put in the cellar of the hut; over it we would pour nearly three poods of hunters' powder which we had; over this we would throw dry hay and shavings. Two absolutely reliable comrades were to be chosen, who at the critical moment, when the field-gun opened fire, would display a white flag. As soon as the Pepelyaevites came over to our trenches, a bonfire was to be lit and at the last moment . . . there would be an explosion and everything would fly into the air together with the Whites.

All became quiet; the groans of the wounded stopped. It seemed as if the detachment had one great heart and its beating could be heard. . . . We voted, the wounded voting too. No one was against the plan. Although we sensed the closeness of approaching death, we felt also a new strength within us. A fire of struggle and pertinacity burned in the breasts of the men. No one thought of the risks we were running. In each there lived an unshakeable belief in the justice of the general cause and a firm determination to conquer or die, but never to surrender to the White general.

The enemy had already asked twice whether there would be an answer soon. It was important to keep the Whites from shooting while the cartridges and grenades were being dragged from the yard to the hut. We informed them that a meeting was being held and that we would give them our answer in the morning. The Whites accordingly did not disturb us that night, thus leaving us four hours till day-break in which to carry out our "gun-powder plot." We brought the boxes of cartridges and grenades into the hut, tore the covers off and lowered them into the cellar. There were seventy boxes in all. Finally, we spread the powder on the hay and shavings, and covered it all with hay. The mine was laid. We were ready! Soon, all that was left of us might be a tangled heap of crippled mutilated bodies, but we would never surrender to the enemy our revolutionary banner for which we had fought and suffered so much and under which we had now decided to die!

CHAPTER XXI

THE RED FLAG AND THE ACCORDEON

The detachment decided to show the Whites that even after this bad news, its spirits had not fallen, that it did not even think of surrender, that it was ready to fight and die for the October Revolution. A long pole was made from a few shafts taken from the sleds, and to this we hoisted an old battle flag, which back in 1921 was presented on the Amur to "Grandpa" Kalandarishvilly. The morning had come and the Whites were shouting:

"Well? Have you decided? Do you surrender or not? The field-gun will be here by evening."

"Look and listen! This is our answer to you."

And above the barricade of dead bodies, the Red Flag with a picture of Lenin on it was raised on high. Lenin himself, among the faithful soldiers in their hour of need! . . . All the able-bodied Red Army men at the barricades pressed up against the embrasures to see. Zholnin sat bent over, crouching against the *balbakhi*. In his hands he held a wheezy accordeon which had somehow survived the whole campaign. For a minute he tried his voice, and then began to play.

The "International!"

Everybody was singing, singing with husky croaking voices. . . .

The effect was astounding. Even the Whites were disconcerted. Then they opened fire from all their machine-guns and rifles. The bullets hummed like angry bees, beat against dead bodies, splintered the teeth of dead horses, pierced the flag and split the staff.

But the hymn of labour, the song of revolutionary struggle, swelled higher and higher, mingled with the crack of rifle shots, and resounded with a loud echo far out into the taiga. It seemed as if the dead bodies too were ready to stand up and side with us. . . .

One corpse which was lying in a bent position, was knocked down by the machine-gun fire. It rolled down from the barricade and came to rest alongside of the accordeon player. The soldiers were singing the last verse of the song. Zholnin drew in his breath and turned to the body as it lay beside him.

"Are you hard of hearing maybe, or why do you come so close? Sit a while, old chap, and then go back to your post."

Then he played the "Varshavyanka."

General Vishnevsky, the commander of the besieging troops, reported to Pepelyaev:

"The besieged know of the capture of Churapcha, they know that a field-gun is being sent. In answer, they hung out a Red flag and played the accordeon. What shall we do?"

Pepelyaev answered:

"It is apparent that some one has forced his way through to the Reds and brought them important information. I command that the ring surrounding the enemy be closed in."

All day long, the Whites fired without a pause. They tried to knock down the flag, but it soared aloft as before, riddled with bullets. To the very end of the siege, it hung there, a symbol of the inflexible resolution of the Red Army.

Again it was night in the yard. All was quiet. Only those who crawled out to fetch snow came in for the fire of the Whites.

Every two hours the men at the barricades were relieved. They crawled in on all fours, not venturing more than two or three paces from the barricade, for beyond was almost certain death. Danger especially threatened on the eastern side, where the Whites occupied a hill and could shoot down from above. From the continual crawling on all fours, the clothing was worn threadbare to the bare skin at the elbows and knees. The

swollen arms and leg joints ached. No one had undressed for days, and the cartridge belts, worn day and night, had rubbed the shoulders and chests until they were swollen and aching.

Thoughts raced through one's mind one after another, but one could concentrate on nothing for long. Our heads were heavy as lead, the brain refused to work. The unrelieved darkness in the barn was oppressive. Our nerves were on edge and the single little light glowing beside the medical orderly was somehow an irritation. We forgot the date and even the day of the week, though we held to the calendar.

No one washed, there was no water to spare. From the gunpowder smoke, the dirt in the hut and from tending the fire, the men's faces had come to resemble smoked ham.

Outside, everything was quiet, but everyone's nerves were strained to the breaking point. Eighty-five wounded were lying in the camp straw which oozed of urine and spit-soaked dirt. Most of the wounded were enjoying the oblivion of deep sleep. Suddenly an unexpected volley broke the silence, awakening the sleepers and renewing the pains of the wounded which had temporarily been forgotten. Again groans and moans were heard.

"Oh-oh, I haven't an ounce of strength left in my body and my limbs are all growing stiff! Comrade, help me get up!"

"Will there never be an end to all this? Something must happen! Either we get rescued or we go to hell along with the Whites!"

"Comrade, turn me over on the other side. Take the bandage off. The lice have eaten me all up."

The medical orderly came over, opened the man's shirt where the wound was, unwound the dirty rag which served as a bandage, to two sides of which a living ant-hill of lice was stuck.

The medical orderly washed the wound with water, and bound it up with a clean bandage, throwing the old one out into the yard. A change of bandage helped a little, but not for long; it was physically impossible to change dressings every hour, and there was a limited supply of cloth.

We were tortured by thirst. Those who were lying near the walls of the barn stretched out their hands, scraped up the hoar frost from the boards and greedily licked it up with their tongues, getting a little moisture in this way.

Small fires were kept burning day and night at the machine-gun embrasures.

Belief in victory struggled with doubt. . . .

Could we hold out? Did we have enough strength to see it through? At that moment of inner struggle no one of us could answer these questions. In such cases, the answer always comes from without.

The temporary calm was unexpectedly broken by firing. We opened fire more often than they in order to interfere with the moving forward of their defences.

The Whites answered and the firing lasted several hours.

With the first rifle shots and the hammer of the machine-guns, all our doubts vanished. Our inner balance and steadfastness returned. The entire meaning of this struggle was once more forcibly imprinted on our minds. The detachment again became aware of the significance of our sacrifice.

Our *morale* was restored once more by the touch of reality, by the challenging music of the firing.

The steel bullets, which fell in the yard beating against the barricades and piercing the walls of the hut and the barn, were like so much fuel thrown upon the dying fire of our enthusiasm.

The men who had been relieved from duty at the barricades entered by ones and twos, knocking their rifles noisily on the threshold. The door was flung open, letting in a gust of cold air. Finally, all were in, the last one banging the door after him.

Each knew his place well, and without any trouble or noise, they settled themselves on the floor.

They fixed their cartridge belts, groaned and rubbed their cold hands. Some had mittens but these were absolutely worthless by now. They began to exchange views.

"Do you know," said one, "I think, we ought to make a sudden attack. Maybe the Whites are not as strong as we think—maybe only twenty or thirty in all—who knows—and maybe Pepelyaev is at Yakutsk with the rest of the forces."

"Well, and then what?"—someone asked him.

"Then we will leave all our wounded here in the care of the two medical orderlies and the weaker comrades, we'll destroy all the spare cartridges and grenades, burn the extra rifles that we can't carry, take a piece of horse meat for each and go to Yakutsk."

"In any case," the squadron commander, Metlitsky, struck in, "it's not a bad idea. We must put a stop to all this sitting about, and pretty quick too. I've had enough of all this crawling and living hunched up!"

"All that, comrades, is true," interrupted Alexei Volkov, the platoon commander, who had already recovered from his wound. "There's nothing dreadful about getting killed in action, especially after such a life as ours. We're lying here one on top of another—there's no tobacco and no place to spit. It's especially difficult for our wounded comrades. But supposing this plan of yours doesn't come off?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, supposing there are more Whites than we think? That is only half the misfortune, and it is not what I am driving at. What will be bad, is that we will suffer losses and have to retreat; then the Whites will take advantage of the situation, follow us up, break through our barricades and take everything. That is what I'm afraid of."

All were silent. They were thinking.

"Even if we do take this course and it turns out unfavourably for us," I put in, "in any case, there is a way out of the situation for us. In the cellar there will be the two comrades whom we appointed at the meeting, and if the enemy does make a counter-attack and occupy the yard, we will still have time to make peace with the Whites—the matches are dry and the powder hasn't got damp yet."

"I had forgotten that. I'm ready for a sally right now," Volkov announced decisively.

"We will all go," the others said.

Each was ready to leave the shelter of the barricades and to hurl himself upon the bullets and bayonets of the enemy in order to smash through the icy ring of siege which was slowly strangling us.

Preparations for the sally began.

CHAPTER XXII

GENERAL RAKITIN'S DISCOMFITURE

Meanwhile, though we did not know it, the ground was already slipping from under the feet of the Whites and at the very moment when we thought our position desperate, help was approaching.

The Whites had indeed occupied Churapcha but they had not met with the support which they expected. They came there at the invitation of a group of local kulaks, who told them that there were "900 insurgents" in the district. When, however, the White colonel Vargasov arrived there, sent by Pepelyaev on February 13 to take over the leadership of the "insurgents," he found only eighty-two persons instead of the expected 900. Forming these into two companies, he occupied the road from Churapcha to Amga, in order to prevent our comrade "Grandpa" Kurashov, from establishing contact with the besieged detachment in Sasil-sisi.

General Rakitin's detachment, consisting of 250 men, arrived in the Bagayantaiski Nasleg in the latter half of February, and camped twenty versts east of Churapcha.

The Yakut Soviet Government proposed to General Rakitin that he cease hostilities against the Soviet power, guaranteeing that all the White volunteers who would lay down their arms should be allowed to go free and unmolested. Rakitin, however, rejected the peaceful overtures.

Soon after this General Rakitin commenced hostilities. He decided to occupy the village of Myaginsk in order to break the connection between the Red forces in Churapcha and the city of Yakutsk.

Moving unobserved around the boundaries of the Myaginsk community, General Rakitin launched his attack. But as soon as the Reds opened fire, the Yakuts in his detachment, finding that they were suffering useless losses in an exposed position, lay down where they were and refused to budge.

Neither the orders nor the personal example of the Russian volunteers could prevail on the Yakuts to continue the attack.

With forty men uselessly lost in killed and wounded, General Rakitin had to withdraw his detachment from Myaginsk towards Churapcha.

After this initial failure, a mistrustful attitude towards the White generals made itself felt among the Yakuts. Accustomed to attack only from ambushes, they considered the Myaginsk attack an absurd undertaking of the Russian officers, who, it was said, were not sorry for the loss of Yakut lives.

General Rakitin then attacked Churapcha. This attempt also ended in failure and cost the Whites nearly thirty men in killed and wounded.

The commander of the Red detachment in Churapcha, "Grandpa" Kurashov, received orders to prepare for an attack on Amga, in order to rescue our detachment which was besieged in Sasil-sisi. At the same time, Baikalov was also to attack from Yakutsk.

In order to move on Amga more easily and to deceive General Rakitin, "Grandpa" Kurashov made a pretty chess move.

He issued two orders to the garrison. According to the first order, which was fictitious, the garrison was to go to Yakutsk; according to the second—the order to be acted upon—the Churapcha garrison was to depart for Amga and unite with the besieged Red detachment at Sasil-sisi.

Our messenger, who was sent from Churapcha to Yakutsk with the false order, was captured by the Whites, who naturally assumed that Kurashov was going to try to break through to Yakutsk.

That night, accordingly, General Rakitin moved round thirty-

five versts to the west, took up a position on the Yakutsk road and lay there in ambush, waiting for Kurashov.

In this way, "Grandpa" Kurashov gave Rakitin the slip. He left a small garrison in Churapcha which was well fortified, and himself marched on Amga, the only obstacle in his way now being the one detachment of Colonel Vargasov which was posted in his path. But at the approach of "Grandpa" Kurashov, this detachment of Whites turned tail and ran away.

The eighty-two "insurgents," who followed Colonel Vargasov, had objected to being moved away from their native community. Vargasov had to report to Pepelyaev that "when they learned that the detachment was to be moved to a new position, they immediately began to go about with sour looks and, most surprising to me, demanded to be demobilized, giving as their reasons, fatigue and conditions at home.

"Egor Ammosov declared that he had entered the detachment as a 'community militia man,' and that he did not want to fight.

"Only after my firmly insisting that the general had forbidden demobilization, was it possible to start for the front.

"The *morale* of the detachment was already low and its appearance was that of a mob.

"At this time the Yakuts everywhere spoke of nothing but the events in Sasil-sisi, and that strong forces of the enemy were moving from Yakutsk towards Amga."

Vargasov was unable to prevent the news from spreading and one by one his men began to desert, the kulaks returning to their native village. On February 22 he learned that Kurashov's detachment was approaching, and made desperate efforts to rally his men.

"Egor Ammosov and Protasov, in the presence of the other partisans, laid down their arms and cartridges, declaring that they would not serve any more. I arrested them, but their example proved contagious. On the next day nearly twenty-five men left the second company.

"About 10 o'clock in the morning of February 23, I was

informed that a column of about fifty horsemen had been seen dismounting. In a furious sweat, literally pulling them by the sleeve, I placed the partisans in position and opened fire, at a distance of five hundred paces, on the approaching enemy. They in turn opened fire from a Colt and a Choche.

". . . I decided to lead my men to the right flank, to a very good position. Fourteen men were held in reserve. I commanded them to follow me. Under machine-gun fire, we crossed over and took cover behind *balbakhi*.

"Then I saw that there was only one interpreter left with me, and that the rest of the Yakuts were mounting their horses and making off.

"Our retreat was already cut off by the murderous fire of the enemy; my fleeing subordinates had left no horses for us.

". . . I lay in the snow until evening, then I fled to a hut. I wanted to overtake my detachment, but I did not know where it was. The Yakuts had changed entirely. No one wanted to act as messenger; they said there were no horses, and that no one knew about the state of affairs at the front.

"I only learned by accident of the proximity of General Rakitin and managed to hire two Yakuts to deliver a letter to him, paying for their services with linen. They took me with them to Okhotsk."

After General Rakitin had waited more than twenty-four hours in ambush without results, he realized that the Reds had fooled him. He wanted to go in pursuit of "Grandpa" Kurashov, but there were rumours in his detachment that the Yakuts in general did not want to fight against the Reds, and that they intended to disarm the Whites at the first opportunity and hand them over to the Soviets.

In view of this, General Rakitin, who had previously intended to unite with Pepelyaev, had to change his plans. He dismissed all the Yakuts in his service and with twenty-six Russian volunteers, hastened off from Churapcha towards the northeast, along the old road to the city of Okhotsk. . . .

Pepelyaev was informed that a fresh strong detachment of

Red soldiers with artillery, under the command of Kurashov, was moving to join the besieged Reds at Sasil-sisi.

Leaving Artemiev's detachment and thirty Russian volunteers with Vishnevsky, Pepelyaev marched to meet Kurashov with his corps. He hastened to occupy a favourable position for the battle. On February 26, Pepelyaev met "Grandpa" Kurashov's detachment in the neighbourhood of Elasin. He received a severe setback, his casualties being nearly sixty wounded and killed.

Besides this, our comrade, Renkus, the captured Red Army man who had been forced to serve with the Whites, succeeded in making good his escape and went over to "Grandpa" Kurashov, together with eighteen of his comrades.

On February 28, the second action took place. It also ended in discomfiture for Pepelyaev's corps, they lost nearly thirty men killed and wounded, and twelve more "volunteers" (captured Red Army men) deserted to "Grandpa."

In these two battles, the losses incurred by the detachment of "Grandpa" Kurashov did not exceed forty men.

Pepelyaev then dug himself in in the neighbourhood of Arilakh, where he wished to offer battle to "Grandpa" once more, but Kurashov declined further fighting and moved off westward.

Like an old, experienced commander, "Grandpa" Kurashov did everything possible to reach Sasil-sisi as quickly as possible and avoid the enemy when they were in a strong position.

In this way, he forced the enemy to keep changing ground.

Pepelyaev began to manoeuvre indecisively in the district of Elasin and in this way a final battle between the Whites and "Grandpa" Kurashov's detachments was avoided. Kurashov continued swiftly on his way towards Sasil-sisi.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STRANGLEHOLD TIGHTENS

The entire detachment soon learned of our plan to make a sudden attack that night. We began taking the names of those who wanted to take part in the sally, but everybody wanted to, so we had to choose out the stronger comrades. The others were displeased, grumbled, and asked to be taken along too, but the barricades could not be left without defenders. Eighteen men in all were chosen for the desperate venture.

Preparations were made. It was decided not to take machine-guns, but to carry as many grenades as possible.

Although my wound was not completely healed, I could walk by now and I decided to take part in the sally.

Our men were in a desperate mood by now and though it was now broad daylight, some of them sprang up, standing upright on the barricades, threatening the Whites with their fists and shouting:

"Surrender! Come over to us! Stop this dirty business!"

The enemy opened rapid fire on these dare-devils. Two were wounded, but this did not stop the others from displaying their recklessness.

However, an order was issued to remain under cover, and this was carried out, with a few exceptions. Individual soldiers at times violated the orders of their commanders.

"The machine-gunner, Ivan Pargachev, has been wounded," the soldier on duty informed us, as he came into the hut.

"He crawled out again and began swearing at the Whites, I suppose? Oh, that Pargachev! He's afraid neither of god nor

the devil, and he's up to fresh tricks every day. How he's escaped death until now is a miracle!" Metlitsky said.

"Today Pargachev went one better," the man on duty continued. "During the firing, he ran out into the middle of the yard, sword in hand, to cut some meat from a dead horse, and singing at top of his voice the whole time. After he was wounded in the right shoulder, he went on hacking away with his left hand. His left hand was then shot through. As he fell, he shouted: 'General Pepelyaev, how far do you think you'll get? You are trapped in Yakutia—you'll never get home!'"

The wounded Pargachev, swearing but not groaning, was dragged into the hut.

"There, you scoundrels! Thought they'd miss—only for a minute, I slashed off a bit of meat. I wanted to have a bite of something. . . ."

For the first time since I was wounded, I crawled out of the hut to the yard. Khasnutdinov went with me. I was intoxicated by the fresh air, and blinded by the bright sunny daylight. I became dizzy. I lay down for about ten minutes, until I became accustomed to the outdoor world, then I felt better.

The most prolific fiery imagination could not picture all that I saw. . . .

It was a terrible picture. I wanted to impress it so strongly upon my mind that it would remain with me until the end of my life.

The snow in the yard was all stamped down and covered with blood. Animal blood could not be distinguished from the human blood with which it was mingled; a small plot of ground, red with blood. . . .

The entire small area of the yard was heaped up with dirty rags, pus-soaked bandages, bones of horses, frozen faces, tens of thousands of empty cartridge cases, rusty iron bands, ramrods, and unexploded grenades which the enemy had hurled. Broken and unbroken rifles, bent discs of the Choche gun, empty broken machine-gun bands lay in separate piles.

Under each machine-gun (three Maxims and one Colt) a small fire was kept burning. In order that the enemy might not know how many machine-guns we had, we had to keep up about ten such fires and move the guns from one embrasure to another shooting from different places.

In this way, we succeeded in deceiving the enemy; they believed we had nine machine-guns with us.

One part of our forces kept shooting from the embrasures, the others were scattered in groups around the fires, talking in undertones.

"The Whites were lying about the field-gun. It's taking it a long time to come. They're probably bringing it by oxen—flashing past the countryside at two versts an hour," argued one who was nicknamed "junk man," because he always carried a supply of "various kinds of things for the campaign" with him. If someone needed a piece of string, a nail, a small strip of leather, a bit of thread, or even a whole patch for his underpants, he went to Ushakov and always got what he wanted. He would pick up old horseshoes and other oddments and carry them with him as "reserve supplies."

"The Whites lied about the field-gun. There is no sign of it. I'll be damned if they took Churapcha either. They only wanted to catch us napping! Yes, the affair miscarried," Busurgin spoke with assurance.

Our barricades presented a frightful appearance.

In one place, two corpses—one, a machine-gunner of ours, the other, a White—were almost touching, their hands extended towards each other as if trying to touch fingers—or to grasp hands in union against the common enemy—capital.

A little further on, lay the platoon commander, Moskalenko, his eyes wide open, bloody foam frozen on his lips, his left arm extending alongside his body, his right arm half bent and thrown over his forehead as if to screen his eyes from the sun.

Two or three paces beyond lay Adamsky. His forehead was lined deep with wrinkles. His blue eyes were screwed up; they had lost their former steely sharpness and glitter. His face was

serious and preoccupied; on it was stamped an expression of iron will and determination. Even the bullet which pierced the heart of the old guerilla fighter did not rob his face of its customary expression of courage and daring.

Near him lay the Choche gunner, Karacharov—the entire back of his head torn away by a dum-dum bullet; a horrible black hole gaped in the empty skull; the arms were crossed and pressed to the chest; the hair was stuck together, frozen in a large bloody mass; the face was contorted in a grimace.

The corporal, who had received a fatal wound in the temple, had fallen in the snow, face down. As a result, his face had flattened out and caved in, and only a small elongated wart on his nose remained to identify him. Only the night before, the soldiers had dragged the dead body through the snow to the barricades on which it now lay.

The large clumsy body of the sergeant lay on top of the barricades near the Colt machine-gun, his arms flung forward; the long tangled locks of his hair lifted now and then in the light breeze. From a distance, you might have thought that he was sleeping.

The hut and the barn were enclosed by a Bloody circle of more than a hundred human corpses and dozens of dead horses heaped up pell mell together with the *balbakhi*.

Over this two by four area, the Red Flag fluttered. It reconciled the dead. Lenin with his arm extended called to the living defenders of the October Revolution to fight on. . . .

The firing increased on both sides.

The bullets cracked against the frozen corpses, tearing off fingers and particles of flesh. Heads were split open by the bullets and the grey frozen mass of brain inside was laid bare.

Sometimes a dead body would be knocked down from the barricade by the force of the shots, but our men would instantly replace it.

It seemed as though the dead could not endure the rain of blows that was showering on them and were ready to cry out in agony.

Up the mountainside among the bare tree trunks we could see the narrow paths worn by the coming and going of the White troops, running criss-cross among the trees, crossing their lines of defence and then losing themselves among the thickets.

The Whites had cut up the taiga, and covered the hill with a network of defences, hoping that in the event of rescuers attempting to approach us, their attack could thus be beaten off.

However, events that we did not know of were even then hastening on Pepelyaev's ruin—not here in Sasil-sisi, but in the battles with "Grandpa" Kurashov, and in Amga with Baikalov.

From my point of observation, the exact number of Whites could not be determined. There were about thirty in the firing line and a few more could be seen in the hut beyond.

I felt tired and chilled and returned to the hut; we needed rest to gather strength for the sally which we had decided to carry out that night. The head of the machine-gun squad, Khasnutdinov, remained at the barricades "to play a little bit with the machine-gun," he told me when I called to him.

Less than twenty minutes later, Khasnutdinov was severely wounded in the head by a bullet which found its way through a treacherous chink between the corpses.

CHAPTER XXIV

DEATH AND TESTAMENT OF A RED ARMY MAN

The Whites, in accordance with all the rules of military science proceeded towards the hut by "saps," they buried themselves in the deep snow and continually narrowed the death circle of their siege.

The catastrophe was coming nearer and nearer. On the southeastern side, there were not more than two hundred paces separating us from the enemy's defences; on the northwestern side there were one hundred and sixty three paces; only on the western side, where there was a lake, had the distance remained unchanged.

The Red detachment was dying one by one. Every day the ranks of its defenders became thinner. Every day more and more wounded died—and took their places on the barricades!

The wounded already numbered ninety. There was no longer room for them.

We were dying slowly, one by one. And help did not arrive. . . .

It was dark, close and damp. One felt an excessively sweet taste in the mouth producing a sensation of nausea. Darkness brooded over the barn and the hut.

The medical orderly, flitting to and fro like a shadow, went from one wounded man to another, bandaging the wounds.

The bullets cracked against the outer walls of the hut or piercing through with the sound of snapping violin strings, they shot across over the prostrate bodies or buried themselves in the ground. It was dangerous to stand up or even to sit.

"Comrade Strod!" called Popov, who was wounded in the stomach. His face was deathly pale; his eyes half closed. His

breath came and went in short jerks. Life was ebbing away from his body. . . .

"What is it, Comrade Popov? I am here."

His eyes opened, and he smiled happily. With a supreme effort he mastered his pain, and said:

"Will rescue come to us soon from Yakutsk?"

"By my figuring it will come in five days, at the most in a week. Three messengers were sent with the information along different roads. At least one must have broken through. Baikalov will rescue us, and of course, Pepelyaev will be defeated."

"Ivan Yakovlevich, I will not last out until rescue comes. I will die soon. I feel that every part of me is getting cold, my legs are like ice. Tell the detachment that I want to say a few words to them."

I repeated the words of the dying man. . . . All became quiet. Even the wounded stopped their groans.

"Comrades! I am dying for the Soviet power. . . . I appeal to you all to fight on to the very end. Our people are not here today—but tomorrow they will come and will rescue you. Don't surrender! If you can't hold out, do as we decided. . . . Blow everything up! Let our Red Flag fall together with us and cover our grave. Long live the Soviet power and Lenin!"

Crash! A bullet smashed through the wall, and hit me in the foot. I lay alongside of Popov. He had already stopped breathing.

The heart of the Red partisan, which had glowed with revolutionary enthusiasm and a passionate belief in victory, was silent. . . .

The sky, overcast with heavy clouds, foreboded snow. It had turned warmer out of doors.

A breeze sprang up. The green boughs of the pine forest stirred restlessly, sighing in the wind. . . .

CHAPTER XXV

A NIGHT OF VIGIL

This time, I was not wounded. The bullet had only passed through my felt shoe, and I escaped with nothing worse than a bruise. But my foot hurt, and I had to limp.

Thick snow had fallen in the yard; by 10 o'clock that night we were in the thick of a real blizzard. The storm swept over us in angry gusts. The wind shrieked and whistled through the forest.

Nothing could be seen beyond ten paces ahead.

The whole detachment was manning the barricades.

We expected the Whites to attack at any moment. They would hardly miss such a golden opportunity.

We had given up the idea of making a sally that night; we were afraid we would be separated and lose contact with one another in the storm and darkness and thus arrive at the enemy's barricades in ones and twos with our ranks broken; besides this, it would be possible in the confusion to mistake the Whites for our own men and vice versa. So we postponed the sally to the next day.

We stood there awaiting the attack of the Whites, each man summoning all his strength and courage. As this might be our last night, we were all the more strung up to acquit ourselves well.

Before us, at about sixty paces from the barricades, lay five or six picket outposts, three men in each. Some of our pickets lay alongside the Whites who had been killed in the last action and had not been taken away. Soon, all of them were covered with snow, and presented the appearance of white hummocks

on the surface of the ground. In spite of our meagre supply of wood, we kept a few large fires burning in the yard.

Suddenly we caught sight of moving figures thirty to forty paces from the barricades. Our spirits rose at once. The suspense was over. Each felt more confident and courageous.

"They can't approach without our seeing them. The pickets will warn us, the fires are lit—we will open fire just at the right time," said the men.

The machine-guns were ready for battle. At the first signs of the approaching storm, they had been set to shoot at forty to fifty paces in front of them. The rifles were loaded, the cartridge belts filled, the grenades within easy reach.

The "dynamite squad," as Volkov and Pozhidaev were now called, remained behind in the hut. They tested the matches, saw to it that the hay had not become damp, and after this was done, sat down again at the open cellar door with set faces, awaiting the signal. They swore at the bad weather.

However, the Whites did not advance. They did not even fire much and we too kept quiet on our side. Only the wailing call of our sentries on guard was heard every five to ten minutes, borne to us on the wind:

"Be-e on gu-a-ard! Lo-ok a-he-ead!"

The sound of the voice burst out loud for a moment and then sank beneath the howl of the wind, drowned by the storm.

At length the long awaited dawn broke upon us. Little by little, the storm calmed down, our vigil was at an end and our alarm subsided.

Half the detachment left the barricades and went to rest in the hut. We had recalled all our pickets a little earlier. In returning, they dragged over a few of the White corpses which they succeeded in adding to the barricades.

"Look, comrades! We've received reinforcements"—jested our men.

"Not we, but the corpses," others corrected them.

Some of the corpses on the barricades had suffered so much damage from the machine-gun fire of the enemy, that they no

longer provided protection against the bullets and had to be changed for new ones.

The Whites had used this night to move their defences forward; they had now crept thirty paces nearer. They held to their tactics of starving us out and did not attack.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WHITES ARE REINFORCED

It was now broad daylight. Our cheeks tingled in the light frost. The wind had died down and the storm was over.

The green pine woods basked under the rays of the morning sun.

Our ragged ranks crouched for cover under the barricades—the faces thin, smoke-blackened, hollow-cheeked—the fingers frozen, and the feet painfully frost-bitten.

They clinked their rifle locks, took aim and fired, keeping up a steady fire on the outskirts of the forest, on the enemy's defences, the barn, and the distant huts where the Whites would appear for a moment and hurriedly take cover again.

It seemed as if they were preparing for an attack. Our machine-guns stood ready, their steel muzzles glinting as they aimed at the enemy's defences.

With the fire of their rifles and two machine-guns, the enemy furiously battered against the hut, the barn and the barricades.

The ragged shreds of bluish smoke swirled up among the pine branches and vanished in the tree tops.

The Whites had been reinforced during the night. Artemiev's "partisan" detachment had arrived at Sasil-sisi and was now in the firing line. We could easily hear Artemiev's loud sonorous voice giving commands. The besieged soon felt the presence of a new enemy.

Among Artemiev's men there were many real taiga snipers.

As soon as one of our men thrust his head out from under cover, he would get hit by a well-aimed shot from the enemy.

The man would shudder, totter, and sink heavily to the ground, dropping his rifle, a streak of red blood trickling down his face from a little round hole in his forehead or temple.

The shooting did not quiet down the entire day.

The soldiers were fagged out. They did not cook dinner, but satisfied their hunger with raw horse meat.

"There, the rogues! If they'd only give us a little rest, just a few spare minutes for dinner. It's all right for them—they've probably eaten, but look at us!" our men raged.

The fiery disc of the sun slowly sunk behind the crest of the mountain.

Brief twilight covered the earth.

Soon, the first stars would light up the sky, and darkness would descend upon us. The evening had come at last. All breathed more easily.

CHAPTER XXVII

MORE NEGOTIATIONS

By our calculations the day was February 28. It was almost ten o'clock in the evening; the Whites began to rouse us to talk.

"Hey! Re-eds, huh, Re-eds! Hey! Why are you so quiet? Answer, can't you?"

"What do you want? Have you concocted any more false news? Has the field-gun come yet?"

"The field-gun is not far off. It should have been here today, but it overturned on the road. Something broke but they fixed it up and they'll bring it by tomorrow dinner time. We want to negotiate with you. Send one man half way, he will be met by a man from our side."

"What do you want to talk about?"

"There is something we want to talk over. Come, you'll soon hear what it is."

"We will inform the commanders."

"Good."

It was decided to enter into negotiations.

We informed the Whites that we agreed to send one Red Army man, but not until nine o'clock on the morning of the next day.

The Whites agreed and did not shoot that night, thanks to which our "snow carriers" gathered almost twice as much as they had done on the preceding nights. That night, by the dim light of the smoky lamp, we wrote the following letter:

"Generay Pepelyaev, you expected to seize Yakutsk in February, the entire autonomous republic in March, Bodaibi and

Kirensk in April, move on to Irkutsk in the Spring, then march victoriously through Siberia, and be in Moscow in 1924.

"But . . . you cannot even capture one small detachment with all your forces.

"You can now be satisfied that your defeat is imminent, and your dreams of the conquest of Soviet Russia will remain nothing but dreams. . . ."

"Do not shed blood in vain. We again propose to you to lay down your arms and surrender to the mercy of the Soviets.

"Remember that the Soviet power is strong and invincible, and those who surrender voluntarily are almost always forgiven. . . ."

At nine o'clock on the morning of March 1, the chief of defence, Zholnin, with a white band around his sleeve and the letter in his pocket, left the barricades. Midway between the two positions he met a White corporal and they shook hands.

Groups of Whites could be seen closely watching the two men who were negotiating; they were a hundred paces to the side, under the trees and at the barricades.

On our side, the men were listening, with rifles in their hands.

The machine-guns were ready for action.

"Things are very bad with you, especially with the wounded, aren't they?" asked the White corporal. "You have no bread, and what is still worse, you have nothing to make bandages with and no medical stores."

"That is nothing," Zholnin answered. "Never you mind our wounded, their wounds are re-dressed every day. We've got enough bandages and enough medical supplies. True, we have no bread, but then we've plenty of meat."

"Hm. . . . So you are not thinking of surrendering?"

"No, we are not."

"Do you expect help to arrive?"

"Yes, we do."

"But if help doesn't come and we capture Yakutsk, will you surrender then?"

"No, we're not going to surrender anyhow. We've decided that it is better to die than to surrender to your friends with the gold epaulettes. And as to Yakutsk, you can no more get to Yakutsk than you can see your own ears . . . unless you get taken here as prisoners. If that's all you had to tell us when you suggested negotiations, there was no need for you to have bothered. Tell this to his excellency, General Pepelyaev."

"Well, what?" an officer shouted from the forest, "They refuse to surrender?"

"Yes. They say that they will fight to the end."

"Well, to hell with them! We'll finish them soon, the cursed Communists! Don't talk any more. Come back."

Taking the letter, the White corporal left, while Comrade Cholnin returned to our barricades.

For ten minutes all was quiet. Apparently, the Whites were reading our letter. They did not send us an answer. Soon the firing broke out again. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

FALSE ALARM

It was March 2. Only a two or three day supply of wood remained. There was no hay. It had reached the stage when the hay under the wounded had turned to muck. We were eating the last of the horses; the rations were reduced, but even so the meat could last only four or five days more. True, there were horses on the barricades, but their bodies could not be spared. Famine was staring us in the face. What could be done. There was no way out. Death from starvation was slowly but surely coming nearer. There was only one hope—a quick rescue. Otherwise destruction was inevitable.

It was almost four o'clock in the morning. The wounded were asleep. The light of the small lamp was still flickering, but the fire had long since gone out. The medical orderly was bending over the dying Khasnutdinov, who had not regained consciousness since being wounded. He tossed about in delirium all the time, mumbling unintelligible threats and requests and uttering only one intelligible word—"comrade."

The death agony now began, and it did not last long. Soon Khasnutdinov had breathed his last.

At that moment, one of the men who was resting in the hut sprang up and shouted, "Comrades! The Whites are attacking!" and he ran out into the yard, everyone after him.

It turned out, however, that there was no attack. It was only the man's dream. He had been dreaming that the Whites had crept right up to the barricades, and that our men were all asleep and did not see them. . . .

We could hear the enemy moving about almost the whole night. We could only conjecture what the noises meant. Perhaps they were relieving the guard or perhaps reinforcements had arrived, and they were preparing for an attack; or perhaps rescue was coming to us. . . . How could we know?

Morning came. All was quiet for a time. Then suddenly a shot rang out, then another, and another. The machine-guns were hammering away. . . .

The Whites opened a fierce rifle and machine-gun fire. A hail of steel rained upon the bloody barricades of human bodies, sounding like the cracking of a hundred whips. . . .

The Reds waited. At any moment the enemy's ranks might spring out from the taiga. All were ready, gripping their rifles tightly. The machine-gunners were on the alert.

We waited and waited, but the attack did not come. On careful consideration, we concluded that the object of the shooting must have been to muffle some distant bombardment from our hearing.

And so it was. Somewhere, far, far away the guns were booming.

The besieged did not know that at that moment Baikalov was attacking Amga.

They also did not know that "Grandpa" Kurashov was only fourteen versts away now and was fighting his way to their rescue.

At twelve o'clock noon, the Whites ceased fire.

Again all was quiet. Night descended. All were on the alert. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

PEPELYAEV THROWS UP THE SPONGE

While Pepelyaev was manoeuvring without result against "Grandpa" Kurashov near the village of Elasin, General Vishnevsky remained inactive before the barricades in Sasil-sisi, and Rakitin hurriedly left for Okhotsk. The Red commander in Yakutsk, Baikalov, had gathered all the forces of the city, numbering almost six hundred men with two guns and six to eight machine-guns, and with these he had set out in the direction of Amga, where there were nearly one hundred and fifty Whites left in the garrison.

On March 2, Baikalov launched an attack on Amga. Our troops concentrated such a murderous fire on the enemy's defences that the Whites could not venture out.

The Whites were smashed by this attack, while our side suffered only insignificant losses. Some of the Whites, under the leadership of Colonel Anders, fled from Amga; others took shelter in the various houses and in the church, and sniped at our men from these hiding places. We suffered more losses in the street fighting than in the attack.

At Amga, the entire supply base with more than twenty-thousand cartridges was captured, and more than thirty prisoners were taken, among them Colonel Surov and Kulikovsky.

Kulikovsky, the inspirer of the counter-revolutionary movement, succeeded in poisoning himself with morphine at the moment when he was taken prisoner. When he was brought to our headquarters, he was already far gone and died a short while after.

Among Kulikovsky's baggage was found a travelling bag filled with all kinds of stamps and seals for the future "Yakut

Government," and visiting cards with the inscription in French:
"Governor of the Yakut Province."

Among his personal belongings were a book of psalms, some pornographic pictures, and morphine.

Colonel Anders, having made good his escape, informed Pepelyaev of what had occurred.

The news had a crushing effect on Pepelyaev. He now saw that his ruin was inevitable. He hastened to cease hostilities, and issued orders that all units of the corps concentrate immediately in the region of Sasil-sisi. When the other commanders had gathered there, Pepelyaev announced his decision to cease the struggle against the Soviet power and to lead the corps to the port of Ayan, so that the remainder of the recruited volunteers could escape abroad in the spring, when the port would be open. A message to this effect was sent to Rakitin and Mikhailovsky in the city of Okhotsk. In this message Pepelyaev wrote:

"The people and intelligentsia of Yakutia have given up the struggle against the Soviets, and have taken sides against us."

To his volunteers, Pepelyaev declared:

"I was mistaken in my calculations. It is impossible to struggle against the regular Red Army, and those who invited us to Yakutia have deceived us. Our cause is lost. Whoever can—let him come with me; whoever wants to surrender—let him surrender."

He released the remaining eight or nine Red Army prisoners, and suggested that the Yakut partisan detachment be disbanded. Then, on March 3, Pepelyaev began his departure from the Yakut Autonomous Republic.

Pepelyaev wrote in his diary:

"... This has opened our eyes to the fact that all our activities are being used not by the people, who are completely ignorant, but by the speculators.

"Not till now have we learned that the entire regional government consisted of speculators who, under our defence, were calmly busying themselves with speculation in furs and the like."

CHAPTER XXX

DESERTERS

It was March 3. The enemy kept up a straggling fire the entire day. Then as evening drew on, they fired a few volleys, gave us a burst of machine-gun fire and threw about thirty rifle-grenades. And again it was quiet. It was a suspicious quiet. Our men were on the alert. The machine-gunners tested their machines and fired off a few bands. Everything was in order; nothing had given way.

Why didn't the Whites answer? It was never so before. . . .

Suddenly, two figures emerged from the forest from the western side, by the lake. They were coming along the road, making straight for us. Who could they be? They were still at some distance from us—about eight hundred paces. The distance decreased—three hundred paces remained.

Then one of them shouted, "Don't shoot, comrades! We are deserters."

"Come on! Don't be afraid!"

In about five minutes, the unknown soldiers reached the barricades, came into the yard, laid their rifles on the ground, took off their cartridge belts and untied their bundles of grenades.

"Who are you?"

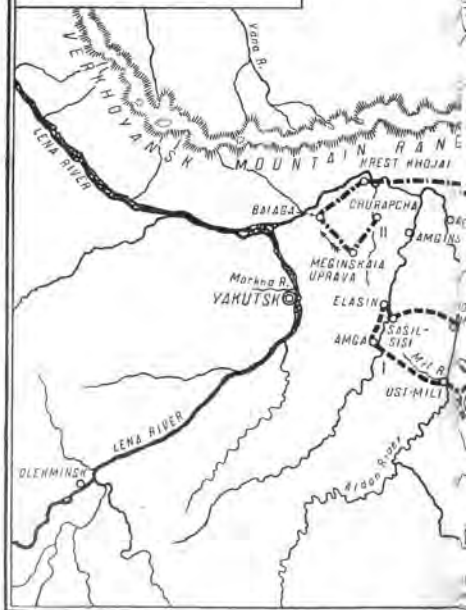
"We are Pepelyaev's Whites, ensigns of the cossack cavalry division, Serge Mikhailov and Juvenile Rovnyagin."

They informed us that Amga had been captured by Baikalov the day before, and that after an unsuccessful battle with Kurashov, Pepelyaev was fleeing along the Petropavlovskoye road. By this time, there were probably Red detachments in Abaga.



A group of commanders who saw active service against Pepelyaev and his followers. First Row (*from left to right*): "Grandpa" Kurashev, "Grandpa" Strod, Kusnetsov, Koslov (Chief of Staff), Baikalov (Army Commander), Rubin (Military Commissar), Vlasov, Roganov.

I - Route of General Pepelyaev
II - " " " Rakitin



General Map sh...



scene of operations.



A Detachment of Red Army Men.

By order of Pepelyaev, General Vishnevsky was to keep up the siege until evening and then with the approach of darkness, to follow Pepelyaev.

The news seemed too good to be true! It was all too unexpected, we could not believe it. Perhaps it was a trap?

I ordered the entire detachment to take their places at the barricades and to stand ready. Metlitsky left the hut with twenty men and went out to reconnoitre. Four Red Army men levelled their rifles at the two ensigns.

We waited strained and tense.

Metlitsky and his squad approached the outskirts of the forest. Not a sound, not a rustle could be heard from there. After a few minutes, he returned:

"The defences of the Whites are abandoned; there is no one there."

Our happiness was too much for us! It took our breath away, so that our hearts seemed to be breaking, our hands trembled, our voices quivered. . . .

Part of the detachment was sent off to fetch water from the lake; they brought hay for the wounded, and pulled down the empty barn for fuel. They made a huge bonfire in the yard and lit roaring fires in the hut and barn where the fireplaces had been cold.

Those wounded who could walk, came limping out into the yard.

The tobacco which the deserters had with them, was all smoked up in a twinkling. There was not even enough for a cigarette apiece and one cigarette had to do for two or three persons.

The remaining carcasses of the horses were chopped up; buckets were filled with meat and set to boil.

Ensign Mikhailov, the White deserter, asked to be sent off to Abaga to establish contact with the Reds. I agreed and wrote a few lines for him.

"To the Red Commander:

"On March 3, two White officers deserted to us and informed us of the occupation of Amga by Baikalov and of the proximity of 'Grandpa' Kurashov. Pepelyaev is fleeing along the Petropavlovskoye road. The enemy who surrounded us, raised the siege on the evening of March 3, and followed Pepelyaev.

"Send someone to establish contact. Send medical stores, bandages, bread and tobacco. We are located at Sasil-sisi, six versts east of Abaga."

I gave the note to the White ensign, Mikhailov; he asked to be given his rifle.

"What do you want a rifle for?" I asked.

"Some of the Whites have broken away from the corps and are roving about in groups of five or six men. If I meet them without arms, they may kill me: 'You are going to surrender,' they will say. But with a rifle, there will be no suspicion. I will limp and lag behind, and so I will get to Abaga."

We gave his rifle back to Mikhailov, together with one cartridge belt, and off he went.

CHAPTER XXXI

RELEASE

No one slept on this night. We were all too excited, in too high spirits, to sleep. The yard rang with lively conversation and bursts of laughter. In the hut and barn, blazing fires crackled, their bright flames leaping in the grates that had till now been cold and gloomy. . . .

I interrogated the deserter, Ensign Rovnyagin.

"Why did you leave Vladivostok and come to Yakutia?" I asked him.

"We knew that the Reds would take Vladivostok, and as the Japanese informed us that they were leaving, the only other choice was to go to Japan or China, neither of which we wanted to do. We were sure that we would capture Yakutia, and then proceed further through Siberia."

"That is to say, you were only passing through Yakutia?"

"Yes, we thought that from Yakutsk, we would move on to Irkutsk; we were told that there were uprisings throughout Siberia, and that they were waiting for us."

"Yes, you all thought that; but you personally, what forced you to go to Yakutia?"

"I wanted to get back to my native place, to see my own people. Besides, I am subject to tuberculosis. The climate in Vladivostok is damp, harmful for sick lungs. I heard that in Yakutia there were great frosts, that the climate was dry. So I joined the corps of Pepelyaev."

"Where is your native place?"

"In the Semirechensky region, the village of Bolshoi Tokmak."

"And from where is Mikhailov?"

"He is also from the Semirechensky region, from Bolshoi. It is near the city of Alma-Ata."

"How did you expect to make your way from Yakutsk to Semirechensky? With arms in your hands probably?"

"Yes, we hoped to overthrow the Soviet Government."

"Why did you oppose the Soviets?"

"I was against extreme parties, against the extreme Left and the extreme Right. I did not want any one party to rule."

Pepelyaev and his companions in arms were sure that they would capture the Yakut Autonomous Republic without any difficulty, that they would win an easy victory over the Red Army and go further into Siberia. They were here only "for a short time"—to come, to see, to conquer. All as in the story book. . . . And then they would take Irkutsk and Omsk and, from there march on to the Urals and the Volga.

They were dreaming of the good old Kolchak government.

The peasants and workers of Siberia "were waiting" for Pepelyaev and his Siberian volunteer corps—especially the peasants and workers whom they had flogged and mishandled!

Passing through Yakutia they wanted to visit their native place—to put it otherwise—to visit their native place with fire and sword, preaching peace and love of the golden mean, "without the extreme Right or the extreme Left."

The ensign's story of the dampness and harmfulness of the Vladivostok climate provoked an involuntary smile among the Red Army men who were listening to him. These "gentlemen" with sick lungs, who had fled from proletarian justice and who were on their way home to their native place, were now, probably, not especially pleased with the "Yakut sanatorium" now that they saw it from the inside!

The Yakuts met them coldly—not as they had expected. The Yakuts did not understand all the fine points of bourgeois culture. . . .

Morning came. . . . For a moment our misgivings returned. Were we really saved, or was it all a ruse of the Whites?

But suddenly all our doubts were dispelled. Four horsemen appeared, they came riding from the direction of the lake along the outskirts of the forest, heading straight for us. They shouted something to us and waved their rifles. Then they saw our Red Flag, and came galloping towards our barricades at full speed. Another group of horsemen emerged from the forest, and with them "Grandpa" Kurashov on his bay horse and Comrade Mizin, the divisional commander!

They all came thronging into the yard. Our own people at last! . . . Wild joy overcame us. We cheered and cheered, we embraced each other and kissed

The wounded, who remained in the barn, started singing "The International" and all of us, as one man, caught up the grand song of struggle.

Many could not sing the song to the end: their emotion got the better of them; they broke down and cried

Little by little, the wild joy calmed down.

A few carts of provisions and tobacco had been brought. These were quickly unloaded and the wounded were placed in them and taken off to the farther huts. The medical orderlies began to re-dress the wounds with fresh bandages. All the dead were taken from the barricades and laid out in the yard.

Then another convoy of carts arrived with rabbit fur blankets, deer, dog, and sheepskin coats.

"Grandpa" Kurashov and his staff entered the hut and we quickly fetched some chairs and tables from the other huts (we had used ours for firewood during the siege). We sat down, but the words would not come, and we remained speechless

One of our comrades took a tobacco pouch out of his pocket and carefully emptied all its contents on the table.

"Have a smoke! Good makhorka!"

Hands were stretched out towards the tobacco, newspapers rustled. Each rolled a huge cigarette for himself.

"Grandpa," who never parted with his pipe for an instant, sat looking at the tobacco. Then he got up, and with slow, staid movements, began groping around and rummaging in

his field bag. The expression on his face remained preoccupied. Not finding what he needed, he glanced under the table. . . .

All hastened to aid him.

"What did you lose, 'Grandpa'?"

Taking the extinguished pipe from his mouth, and spitting with a touch of unusual irritation, "Grandpa" answered in distressed tones:

"I've lost my pipe! Where could it have got to? I do so want a smoke." And he calmly put the pipe back into his mouth.

Friendly laughter burst forth, "Grandpa" joining in too, as he realized his absent-mindedness.

"That's funny! It never happened to me before. I've seen plenty of fighting in my time but nothing like this. . . . Such sights are enough to make you lose your head, let alone your pipe," he coolly concluded.

Kurashov was not more than thirty-five years old. He was of medium height, had a black beard, and black eyebrows which shaded a pair of eyes before which one could not speak an untruth.

The Red Army men called him "Grandpa" because of his slowness, wisdom, and simplicity of manner. When a man had committed an offence, he brought him to reason without raising his voice.

"My friend, you are undermining the authority of the Red Army; you are casting a stain on the whole detachment. We must respect our Red Banner; it is dyed in our blood. . . ."

And "Grandpa" always achieved his end. The Red Army men loved him, and of their own initiative maintained a conscientious comradely discipline in the detachment.

Soon, all the wounded had been sent off to Amga. The last cart had disappeared round the bend of the road. The detachment formed in line in the yard, and prepared to march away.

So we left Sasil-sisi. Here, on this glade, in the course of twenty days, the Pepelyaev adventure had been smashed. Here, the White general—a general without an army—sustained the

first blow which signalled the doom of his hare-brained project.

In this siege the detachment lost more than half of its men. Ninety-six wounded were taken to Amga, sixty-three dead comrades remained at Sasil-sisi waiting for their burial in a common grave. Only one hundred and twenty-three survivors marched off from this blood-stained spot into the forest, ready, if necessary, to enter into a new battle against the enemies of the Soviets, and to give up their lives without hesitation to the revolutionary cause. The Red Banner which floated above them was their pledge.

CHAPTER XXXII

AT THE PORT OF OKHOTSK

Pepelyaev, realizing that the game was up, fled with his remaining followers to the seaport of Ayan and waited there for ships to transport him and his men abroad. But the ships did not come and the Whites were forced to wait on, day after day.

The same thing was happening at the port of Okhotsk where other White troops, including General Rakitin, had fled. They were forced to remain there, waiting for ships, until the *morale* of the Whites began to go to pieces completely. The corruption which had already set in at the Okhotsk garrison during the winter, reached its climax when the defeated Whites began to arrive. This demoralization was especially apparent among the officers, who gave themselves up to unrestrained drunkenness. These drunken orgies often resulted in bloody occurrences; one officer shot himself, and finally the White general, Rakitin, while drunk, shot an American worker who had accidentally spoiled the motor of a naval cutter.

In order No. 135 of the Okhotsk garrison, March 30, 1923, Rakitin wrote:

"The foreman Bozov was shot by me for intentional damage to the cutter's engine, and because he insulted a general of the Russian army. I killed him with two revolver shots, as a spy and traitor."

Meanwhile, however, retribution was swiftly approaching. Two Soviet steamers carrying the men of the Fifth Red Army were coming from Vladivostok.

At four in the morning of June 5, the Reds landed twenty versts from the city. Concealed by the fog, they advanced rapidly along the seashore.

The chief of the Red expeditionary detachment, Vostretsov, approached within a few versts of the city and then with a small group of men marched straight into it, taking the Whites completely by surprise and capturing the staff of the garrison. The rest of his troops meanwhile surrounded Okhotsk on all sides.

The Whites tried to resist, but it was already too late; they could not occupy their positions, so they remained in the houses and fired on the Reds from the windows.

Vostretsov sent an officer of the captured staff to the White troops, informing them of the arrival of a powerful detachment of the regular Red Army and calling upon them to surrender.

Soon after this the firing ceased. The entire Okhotsk garrison surrendered, except for General Rakitin, who shot himself.

During the desultory fighting that had taken place, there were thirty killed and wounded on both sides.

Vostretsov interrogated the prisoners, and asked them if they thought Pepelyaev would give himself up voluntarily. The general opinion was that he would. Those who had surrendered at Okhotsk advised Vostretsov to take a letter with him from them, and also an officer, Colonel Vargasov, who knew Pepelyaev personally, in order to avoid any unnecessary bloodshed, such as had taken place at Okhotsk. Vostretsov agreed to this.

A few days later, the prisoners were put on board the steamer "Stavropol." At 12 o'clock noon, the powerful siren blew, and the steamer put out for the open sea in the direction of Vladivostok.

The other steamer, "Indigirka," with the Red detachment aboard, sailed for the port of Ayan, where Pepelyaev lay with his few remaining followers

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CAPTURE OF PEPELYAEV

The last ice floes of spring disappeared from the bay of Ayan and the sun shone out over the waves. The summer was coming—that weird northern summer with its "white nights" of amazing beauty. These nights with their magic, pale, quivering twilight, seem to transform nature and fill men with dreams of the enchantment of the North.

On one of these nights, June 17, when a thick early morning mist covered the earth, the Ayan garrison was awakened by shouts of alarm and the tramp of many feet. The Whites were sleeping peacefully in their houses and tents, not expecting any attack.

They had not yet fully awakened from their sound sleep, when they were seized by the Red detachment of Vostretsov, which had disembarked sixty versts to the north and had reached Ayan three days later, having first captured a small detachment under Ryazanski on the Nyachi river.

Pepelyaev was seized in his room among the first. Awakened by the unusual noises, he started to run out of the house into the street in order to call his men to arms. However, he was stopped at the door by Vostretsov, who called upon him to surrender, declaring in the name of the Soviet Government that the lives of all those who voluntarily surrendered would be spared.

Colonel Vargasov, who was with Vostretsov, pointed out that the entire Okhotsk garrison had already surrendered, and that he himself had met with most humane treatment on the part of the Red Army. After a moment's consideration, Pepelyaev

surrendered, advising all his subordinates on the staff to follow his example.

In this manner, seventy men besides Pepelyaev were taken prisoners, and the Reds were able to seize five machine-guns at Ayan. The chief forces of the White militia, however, lay in the village of Uika, seven versts from Ayan. When they learned of the surprise attack by the Reds, they quickly assembled and set out to rescue Pepelyaev. They advanced unimpeded to the Ayan river, and then sent out scouts along the shore of the bay.

Pepelyaev sent an order to stop the attack on Ayan, and advised that his subordinates surrender to the Red Army.

After receiving the news from Pepelyaev, the commanders ceased their attack, and proposed in their turn to their corps that they surrender voluntarily, following the example of their commanders.

All the corps thereupon laid down their arms with the exception of twenty or thirty men led by Colonel Anders, who had no faith in the humane treatment of the Red Army and withdrew to the taiga.*

The "Indigirka" steamed away to Vladivostok with the captured "Siberian volunteer militia" on board.

The waves of the Siberian sea shone an emerald green, basking in the caressing rays of the bright summer sunshine. The savage winter was over, and with it the threat of White reaction, the menace of whiteguard violence and cruelty. As though in triumph at the victory, the leaping waves beat on the rocky shores of Yakutia—now at last truly free and liberated from all oppression.

* This group decided to make its way to the Maritime Provinces and from there get across the border; however, on the road the population killed most of them, seized Anders and a few of his followers and handed them over to the Soviets. —I. S.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JUDGMENT BY PROLETARIAN TRIAL

Vladivostok.

A large group of people met the steamers arriving from the distant north. It was not a friendly crowd. The White prisoners were made to feel the hostility of the population.

Vladivostok looked fresh and clean now. It no longer reminded one of some dirty prostitute, as it did during the time when the whiteguards carried on their debauches there.

The White prisoners observed everything around them and took it all as a warning

They were taken on further. From Vladivostok to Chita is a longish journey, and here, on the road, they could observe the energetic, systematic work that was being done everywhere to restore the collapsed economy of the country. They saw the busy trading that went on, the shops and the markets. Round about them stretched the sown fields of the peasants. Crowds of satisfied, neatly dressed peasants were to be seen everywhere, and the number of co-operative stores had noticeably increased.

But they were especially surprised at the appearance and discipline of the Red Army, at the manner in which the Red Army men had developed a conscious interest in serving the working people.

Yes, the Whites saw all this, and were astonished by everything, like blind people who suddenly recover their sight.

Where was the terrible "Bolshevik domination," the "all-devouring barbarian deputies"?

"They lied about Russia abroad! Upon my word, they lied, the rogues!" was heard from the ranks of the prisoners.



Three Red Army Men. *Left to right:* Alexander Metlitsky, Andreyev and Yasha Ivanov.



Right:

General Pepelyaev.

Bottom left:

The Court in Session, showing the prisoners in the foreground.





Chita. The House where the Pepelyaev trial was conducted.
(February, 1924).

Bottom right:
Taking the White prisoners to court.





Left to right: Panishev, Masailsky (chief of a machine gun detachment), Nikolai Busurgin (platoon commander) and Khokhlov (platoon commander).

A member of the revolutionary tribunal came to see the prisoners. His face was simple and frank; his eyes were stern and tired, but not malicious. All glances followed him; he smiled gently with one corner of his mouth, but with reproach he said:

"Eh, fools! You are fools!"

He spat on the floor, turned on his heel and left.

A long time before the trial, Pepelyaev's announcement to the whiteguards beyond the borders was printed in the press.

"Refugees, and my former companions in arms, officers and soldiers: I am writing to you from imprisonment, but still from my native land. I ask that my declaration be published, in order that a frank expression of my thoughts reach the Russian people not living in Russia.

"From the beginning of the Siberian movement, I fought against the power of the Communists. I had one aim—to save my native country; not to permit the collapse and ruin of the national economy! I believed, as did the majority of the intelligentsia, that the Communist power would simply do away with all form of government and lead to savagery. A feeling of eternal love for my people and native land moved me. Therefore, at the call of the "representatives" of the Yakut region, I went to distant Yakutia with a handful of unselfish people to liberate those who, so it seemed to us, were perishing under the power of the Communists.

"Having lost half of our soldiers, we had to return to the coast. At the port of Ayan, we voluntarily surrendered without resistance to a regular detachment of the Red Army.

"After surrendering, I supposed that punishment would immediately follow. I expected derision from the victors and did not think that they would consider the reasons which had forced us to leave our families and work, and to march a long way under terribly hard conditions.

"But it did not turn out thus. We met with no hostility either from the Communists or from the Red Army men. With astonishment and great joy, I saw that malice had been laid aside, that hostilities had calmed down, and that the Russian people had again become brothers. We are prisoners now and do not know our fate. Regardless of what it will be, I want to appeal to you, brother officers and soldier refugees, who perhaps are troubling yourselves, as we did last year, about the soul of Russia, not knowing what is being done in our native land.

"That which I see around me, that which I hear and read, convinces me that there is nothing from which to save Russia. She is saved already. After the dreadful years of civil war, there is being forged a new, free Russia.

"The Soviet Government has firmly taken the path which will lead to the regeneration of the country in every respect. The people are resting from their former bloody struggle for power. Everywhere, most energetic and systematic work is being carried on. Trade is on the increase, the shops are open, as are also the fairs and the bazaars.

"Peasant farming is on the upgrade. The peasant pays only a government tax, an insignificant percentage; the rest of the products of his labour, he can dispose of as he wants.

"Co-operation has developed widely. There is a rising industry, a new technique, and the army is receiving great attention. It is becoming the military power of Russia, and Russia, now as never before, is acquiring power and significance in international relations.

"I now think that this is really the Russia of which we dreamed in our long laborious marches. I am profoundly convinced that all struggle against the Soviet Government is a struggle against Russia.

"I do not appeal to those who dream of old Russia, of the Russia of the landowners, who dream of returning to their former estates and privileges; I do not appeal to those who wanted to gain profit from civil war. I appeal only to those who, as we, dreamed of and sought for a free Russia. These people need not suffer abroad; they can come and work in peace among their native people. Let no one think that I write this under the influence of fear. I am an old soldier. I have faced death more than once in countless battles during the German and civil wars, and I do not fear responsibility. The purpose of my appeal is to warn the sincere people who love their native land, in order that they may not be led into the tragic position in which we now find ourselves."*

The case of the former general Pepelyaev was tried in the city of Chita in January 1924, before the revolutionary tribunal of the Fifth Red Army, presided over by Comrade Berkutsk. Seventy-eight members of the commanding staff were on their trial. One hundred and sixty-two officers and soldiers were exiled and nearly two hundred soldiers were freed; fifty Yakuts were turned over to the Yakut government to deal with.

Baikalov and I were called to this trial as witnesses.

My testimony was listened to with intense interest, the thousands of listeners observing perfect quiet.

After my testimony, the accused Pepelyaev asked permission to make a declaration and said:

* Newspaper *Poot*, July 31, 1923, City of Khabarovsk.

- "We, all the accused, now know of the extraordinary courage of the Red detachment under citizen Strod, and as military men, we express sincere admiration for him.

"I ask that my declaration should not be counted as an attempt to lighten our sentence."*

The trial of Pepelyaev lasted almost twenty days.

On the last day, before sentence was passed, each one of the accused, in his last words, acknowledged his guilt before the workers and the Soviet Government, repented of his crime, and asked for leniency.

Pepelyaev's last words were:

"Physical death does not frighten me; spiritual death is harder to bear. I sincerely believed that I was struggling for my native land, for the people, not against them.

"Now, to my sorrow, I am too late. Through the prison bars, I saw and understood that I was cruelly mistaken; that behind our backs and with our blood, others made money, while we were being pushed over the precipice, where I was destroyed.

"Whatever sentence is passed upon me, I consider it well deserved.

"If the Soviet Government grants me my life and entrusts arms to me in the future, I give my word that I will defend it just as stubbornly as, until now, I have struggled against it."

The proletarian court sentenced the twenty-six accused, with Pepelyaev at their head, to the highest measure of social defence—death by shooting.

The rest of the accused were sentenced to imprisonment for varying periods of time.

On petition from the Revolutionary Committee of the Far East and the defence, and at the appeal of the condemned, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union decided to grant mercy, and the sentence of death was commuted in all cases to one of ten years of imprisonment from the time of the preliminary incarceration.

* Newspaper *Dalnevostochni Poot*, January 22, 1924, City of Chita.

Thus ended the last campaign of the "Siberian Volunteer Corps" against the October Revolution and against the Soviets.

The working people and their Red Army thus destroyed the last remnants of the whiteguards, who, in 1922, strove in their blind desperation to gain territory in distant Yakutia.

In 1923, in the Yakut taiga, the last attempt at civil war in Siberia was finally crushed.

THE END

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