

THE SOVIET HIGH COMMAND

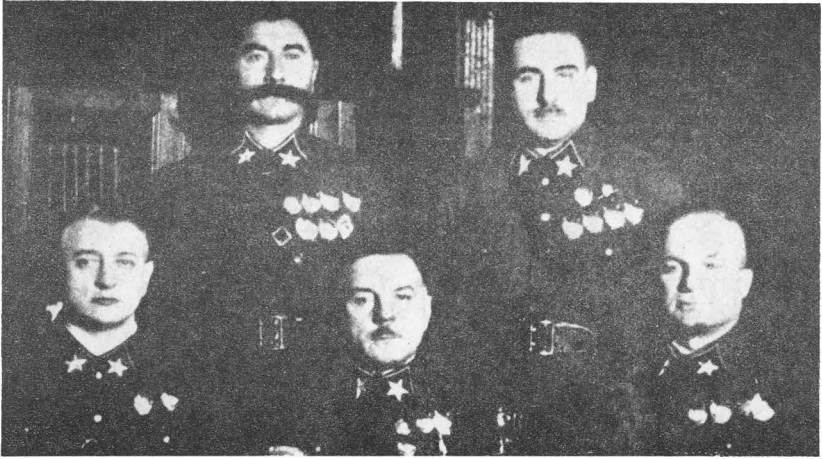
*A Military-Political
History 1918–1941*

JOHN ERICKSON



A Westview Encore Reprint

THE SOVIET
HIGH COMMAND



International News Photos

THE FIRST FIVE MARSHALS OF THE SOVIET UNION

Seated, left to right: Tukhachevsky, who was shot in 1937; Voroshilov, who died in his bed in 1969; Yegorov, who disappeared, presumably later shot, in 1939. *Standing:* Budenny, who died of natural causes in 1973; and Blyukher, who was shot in 1938.

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1918-1941

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The Socialist island will never have peaceful frontiers with the bourgeois state. That will always be a front, even though it may be in a latent form.

M. N. Tukhachevsky to G. Zinoviev, 1920.

The army of a socialist country, an army standing guard over the gains of the working masses — all experience teaches us — can only be an army led and educated by the Communist Party.

Kommunist, November 1957.



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PREFACE

BOOKS sometimes have secret lives of their own, lives dominated by a form of predestination that may owe more to Caxton than to Calvin but that nevertheless steers them and their authors along unintended and unimagined courses. Twenty-two years ago, when this book was in its original format, it was unexpectedly and unaccountably transformed into a kind of passport, which facilitated my access to the Soviet Union. There followed a series of close encounters of a military kind with a diverse array of Soviet officers, ranging from grandee marshals to stolid, veteran riflemen. What had hitherto been constricted research suddenly and startlingly came alive. The environment was made tangible and the men whose careers reached back to the infancy of the Red Army, to the early days of the Soviet military system, and to the heady triumph over the *Wehrmacht*, emerged from arid print and pallid documentary stereotypes as real personalities.

Since 1962, the picture has changed almost beyond recognition, largely because of the diligence and application of historians on both sides of the East-West divide. In brief, what was the Red Army has become much more accessible so that it is no longer necessary to scabble for information or to rely upon a curious collection of myths. Immediately evident is the convergence, however accidental, of interests shown by both Soviet and non-Soviet historians in the final, fateful days of the Red Army's precursor, the Imperial Russian Army. That interest is broadly based and runs the gamut from the high command to the common soldier.

Professor Allan K. Wildman provides a searching analysis in his major work *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldier's Revolt, March–April 1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), a study complemented by *Voenno-revolyutsionnye komitety deistvuyushchei armii* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1977). This documentary collection takes the tale up to March 1918. An astonishing and unique accumulation of archival riches, Professor M. Frenkin's monumental *Russkaya armiya i Revolyutsiya 1917–1918* (Munich: 'LOGOS' Verlag, 1978), utilises material that can only leave the reader agape. The high command and in particular those key figures the *Genshtabisty*—the General Staff officers who then, as now, could wield immense power within the machine—are treated in depth by Professor Matitihu Mayzel in *Generals and Revolutionaries, The Russian General Staff During the Revolution: A Study in the Transformation of*

Military Elites (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1979). If there is yet room for further investigation and analysis, it must lie with the Russian and Soviet General Staff, though this is not to disparage the useful outlines of institutional development provided by Colonel Kavtaradze and Colonel Danilov in an invaluable source, *Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal* (Moscow: *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 1971, no. 12, and 1977, no. 9).

Thanks to the impressive labours of Soviet historians such as V. I. Miller, L. S. Gaponenko, and many others, the ordinary Russian soldier is emerging from the cloak of anonymity history seemed to have thrown over him. In *Slavic Review* in 1971 Professor Marc Ferro draws upon Soviet archives to paint one picture of the Russian soldier—'Undisciplined, Patriotic and Revolutionary'. We can peer even more closely at him in Professor Tatyana Kuzmina's studies based on materials from the Moscow Military District, *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie soldatskikh mass Tsentra Rossii nakanune Oktyabrya* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1978). These are not just historical curiosities. One of the greatest developments of the time was the creation of the Red Army, which fused the old Imperial and the new Soviet styles. This was the search for an 'army of a new type' that would be distinctively class based and that would pursue the struggle between political requirement and military efficiency as well as the compromise between utopianism and pragmatism with the kind of ruthlessness that wins on the battlefield, where the Bolshevik regime had to survive or perish.

The dying days of the Imperial Army are indeed crucial to understanding the first stirrings of what became the Workers and Peasants Red Army (RKKKA) and the creation of a rudimentary but workable Soviet military system. This turbulent and desperately dangerous interlude is examined at length by S. M. Klyatskin in *Na zashchite Oktyabrya* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1965), which should be required reading for any student of the Soviet military system between 1917 and 1920. The bones of that book can be picked clean with profit. But the Red Army was also a composite of numerous revolutionary Red Armies. As I was writing in 1968 of the origins of the Red Army (in *Revolutionary Russia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) and looking at Richard Cobb's mighty study, *Les Armées Révolutionnaires* (Paris–The Hague: 1961) on French revolutionary armies, I was obliged to note the paucity of material on the several Soviet revolutionary armies, not to mention key fronts. That situation has been steadily rectified over time, starting with A. N. Nenarokov's *Vostochnyi front 1918* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1969) and followed by biographies (if they can be called that) of armies, divisions, and brigades. Real close-ups, however, appear in works such as A. L. Fraiman's study of the defence of Petrograd in the spring of 1918, *Revolutsionnaya zashchita Petrograda*

v fevrale-marte 1918 (Moscow-Leningrad: NAUKA, 1964). Although the Bolshevik sailor squads still receive close attention, the development of the Red Navy has been examined through a Leninist prism by B. I. Zverev in *V. I. Lenin i Flot (1918–1920)* (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1978) and A. K. Selyanichev in *V. I. Lenin i stanovlenie Sovetskovo Voennomorskovo Flota* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1979).

There has been surprisingly belated appraisal of Lenin's *military* role, as opposed to political myth-making, but Colonel N. N. Azovtsev has made some amends with his bibliography of Lenin's military writings, *Voennye voprosy v trudakh V. I. Lenina*, 2nd edition (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1972), and a formal monograph, *V. I. Lenin i sovetskaya voennaya nauka*, 2nd edition (Moscow: NAUKA, 1981). Meanwhile, the horizon of the history of the Red Army in the Civil War and the fight against 'foreign intervention' expanded appreciably with the publication of two major documentary collections: *Direktivy Glavnovo Komandovaniya Krasnoi Armii (1917–1920)* (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1969) and the four massive volumes of *Direktivy komandovaniya frontov Krasnoi Armii (1917–1922)* (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1978), the final volume being virtually a statistical handbook of the Red Army for these war years. If this material does not actually supersede the Trotskii papers, at least it vastly supplements them, for here are the very innards of the Red Army.

Though the war was won, conflict of a different order faced the Red Army and its heterogeneous command, not the least significant being the running battles over *military doctrine*—a theme fixed in its historical context but with obvious contemporary relevance. Lenin himself, who in 1917 had expressed his skepticism about some special mystique pertaining only to military affairs—*kakoe zbrechestvo!*—now warned against 'Communist swagger', since 'our military Communists are still insufficiently mature to lay claim (*pretendovat*) to the leadership of all military affairs'. The duel in the 1920s between Trotskii and Frunze, with Stalin lurking in the shadows, continues to reverberate even today. In spite of Trotskii's derisive assault on Frunze's jejune views, it is the latter who passed into Soviet military-political tradition and became a kind of military legend. Frunze's impetuosity, which prompted Lenin's remarks on the need for caution, seemed to transform him into a zealot pleading the cause of a distinctive 'proletarian military doctrine'. The symbol and the substance of this doctrine are fully explored in Walter Darnell Jacobs, *Frunze: The Soviet Clausewitz, 1885–1925* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969). Trotskii appears as the cold pragmatist cast in the dubious mould of a mere functionary—a strange transformation indeed of a man who was the fiery, ferocious phrase maker of the Civil War.

The fundamental debate on the relationship between war and politics, as well as the fashioning of a strategy best suited to the available military means, still bears further investigation. We come back to the role and importance of what ultimately became the General Staff (which did not assume this formal designation until 1935). One intriguing feature of this debate concerned the actual need for a superior staff organ. Frunze insisted on the necessity of a 'military brain' (*voennyi mozg*) to serve the entire Soviet state, but that apparently was too straightforward. The more sophisticated and convoluted premises for the emergence of 'Soviet military science' and the direction of Soviet military thought are explored by Colonel I. A. Korotkov in *Vestnik voennoi istorii* (No. 2, Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1971). A more extensive treatment is found in a detailed and indispensable monograph, *Istoriya Sovetskoi voennoi mysli Kratkii ocherk 1917–iyun 1941* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1980).

During the early 1930s the Red Army began to gulp down the first products of the industrialisation drive, launched during Stalin's Five Year Plans, that furnished the true sinews of war—tanks, guns, and aircraft. The secret collaboration with the German *Reichswehr*, many details of which remain secret to this day, had already initiated the Red Army into the mysteries of modern warfare, particularly the potential of the tank. In 1929 K. B. Kalinovskii, the chief of the infant Soviet armoured force, produced a preliminary work on tank operations, 'High speed tanks in the meeting engagement' (Moscow-Leningrad: *Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatelstvo*, 1929). In the same year the Soviet command set up its first 'mechanised regiment', a unit designed for independent operations, followed by the 'mechanised brigade' formed in May 1930. V. T. Vol'skii, who was to become the wartime commander of the formidable 5th Guards Tank Army, played a leading part in these early experiments with tank units. But more than field experimentation was afoot. Slowly but surely the idea took root that in any future war the destruction of large enemy forces would depend upon systematic and sequential successes across the entire face of the front. Operations would have to be connected not only in space but also *in time*.

Thanks to two Soviet documentary collections we can now scan the whole array of these ideas and formulations, which embraces strategy, operational art, and tactics. *Voprosy strategii i operativnogo iskusstva v sovetskikh voennykh trudakh, 1917–1940* (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1965) and *Voprosy taktiki v sovetskikh voennykh trudakh, 1917–1940* (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1970) are publications I assume owe much to Marshal Zakharov's prompting when he was restored to his post as chief of the Soviet General Staff. Those less inclined to toil through these massive

compilations can best turn to *The Soviet Art of War: Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics*, edited by Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982) or use the Soviet survey provided in *Ocherki sovetskoi voennoi istoriografii*, edited by General Zhilin (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1974). The footnotes in the latter are especially useful.

In the course of time Soviet ideas on strategy, operational art, and tactics converged to produce a coherent doctrinal position, 'the theory of operations in depth' (*teoriya glubokoi operatsii/boya*). In 1925 the first draft of the *Field Service Regulations* had begun to trace the outline of the 'combined arms' doctrine, the essence of which was to combine fire with movement; the *Regulations* of 1929 were more explicit. The combined arms concept gradually approached the notion of 'operations in depth', producing the distinctive doctrinal formulation set out in the provisional *Field Service Regulations* for 1936 (PU-36). This bears all the hallmarks of M. N. Tukhachevskii's insight and foresight. There is no better example of continuity in Soviet military thought than the fortunes of the theory of operations in depth, a theme that has been expertly explored by Professor Earl Ziemke in *Parameters* (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, June 1983). As Professor Ziemke points out, not only has this theory been rehabilitated, but it is now 'lodged in a position of high esteem in the corpus of Soviet military thought' and promises even further advances. To summarize, the operations-in-depth theory envisaged a four-echelon offensive. With air elements in the first echelon and combined-arms shock armies in the second echelon, the third echelon would consist of exploitation forces, supported by reserves in the fourth echelon. Professor Ziemke correctly notes that I was not able to make specific reference to the *theory* of operations in depth as such because it was not until 1965, in *Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal* (Nos. 1 and 3), that G. Isserson—'father' of operations in depth—produced a firsthand account of his theoretical work of the 1930s.

The spectre of operations conducted to great depth at high speed is one of NATO's nightmares, though the concept of striking in depth has also been considered as part of NATO's countervailing strategy. We observe here a form of military jujitsu that turns enemy strength back on itself by attacking the exposed echelons, moving at high speed with 'deep strike' formations, and using the most advanced weaponry. What links past, present, and future is the emphasis on the initial period of hostilities. It is here that Soviet anguish begins. In 1937 Stalin aimed his great sundering blow at the high command of the Red Army, accomplishing no less than the decapitation of the Soviet military, to use Isserson's phrase.

Even after almost half a century has passed, the military purge still retains many gruesome mysteries, though the official 'rehabilitations' have disposed of the grotesque charges of treason and other concocted infamies. But the whole muddled and bloodied spectacle of mass repression, its methods, mechanisms, and bureaucracies—the latter making it more horrible—is the essential background to the decimation of the Soviet military. A comprehensive analysis of it is supplied in Robert Conquest's massive dossier of a murder machine, *The Great Terror* (New York: Macmillan, 1968). One particularly pertinent feature, among many others, is the revision of the tally of losses from the military purge, which by Khrushchev's own admission reached even battalion and company commanders. Half the Soviet officer corps, or some 33,000 to 40,000 men, suffered either death or imprisonment. This is no exercise in statistical niceties, but rather, a bleak illustration of the impact of the losses. These losses virtually wiped out the 'high command'—three out of five marshals, fourteen of sixteen army commanders, eight out of eight admirals—and emptied the ranks of regimental commanders, whose replacements came not from the Frunze Academy but from the lowlier officer schools. Nor was the fate of the survivors wholly enviable. They were pushed up through depleted senior ranks to take over brigades and divisions, where they could only flounder and fumble until taught some terrible lessons by the German Army.

No less horrible in its impact, the strategic views and operational assessments of many of the dead commanders ironically proved to be utterly valid, not least with respect to appraisals of the German threat and the military form it might take. Perhaps by way of overcompensation, or even as a kind of idealisation of a vanished military elite, something like a cult of Tukhachevskii developed. It began formally with an edition of his selected works, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya* (Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1964, in two volumes). There were also earlier compelling firsthand accounts of Tukhachevskii's role and insights, such as Isserson's recollections of Tukhachevskii's role in the major war games of 1936 (*Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal*, 1963, No. 4). But Tukhachevskii's lessons in sound military practice were ignored, as well as his warnings of possible enemy concentration on the frontiers and his insights into shortcomings of the Red Army. Inherent military skills perished with those commanders who were executed. There is also Lieutenant General Todorskii's personal lamentation over Tukhachevskii's fate, also published in 1963. If anything, the naval command suffered even more calamitously. It was sacrificed on the altar of Stalin's 'big ship' fixation, which inhibited the short-range, defensive capabilities of the navy and led in turn to the loss of control over key sea lanes. The

further fate and fortune of the Soviet navy and air forces are treated in two quite separate works of some importance, A. V. Basov, *Flot v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945. Opyt operativno-strategicheskovo primeneniya* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1980) and M. N. Kozhevnikov, *Komandovanie i shtab VVS Sovetskoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.* (Moscow, NAUKA, 1977). The latter was translated and published under the auspices of the United States Air Force as volume 17 in the Soviet Military Thought series, entitled *The Command and Staff of the Soviet Army Air Force in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office).

There has been a steady flow of memoirs and the accumulation of official biographies of previous 'nonpersons'. This material amply confirms that these manic killings went on far beyond those first shattering blows of 1937, spilling over into 1938 and into the period leading up to and even beyond the German attack. A trickle of officers returned from the cells and cellars of the NKVD, but others were trundled off to death. Shtern, Loktionov, and Smushkevich, air defence and air force commanders, were all shot on October 28, 1941, condemned for 'treasonable activity'. Other officers, condemned for failing to hold the Germans, also faced the executioner at this time. But the role of personal whim—the jerk of Caesar's thumb—was illustrated by the fate of Pavlov, commander of the Western Front in 1941, who was listed among those shot but was rumoured to have been reprieved by Stalin himself, thus becoming a hale if less than hearty survivor. The purges generated stories both macabre and monstrous. The fate of Pavlov formed only a minute particle, while events in the Far East built up a murk that is even more durable and more difficult to penetrate. Some light is shed on these circumstances by General G. S. Lyushkov's report after his defection to the Japanese (*Most Secret. Interrogation of Lyushkov, G. S.*, London: Public Record Office, November 1938) and by Professor Alvin C. Coox in 'L'Affair Lyushkov: Anatomy of a Defector' in *Soviet Studies* (Glasgow: 1968, Vol. 19). We still do not understand what really happened in the Red Army operations at Lake Khasan and Nomon-Han in 1938 and 1939 nor do we know what Richard Sorge did or did not know and what he reported to Stalin. Sorge, a German journalist working in China and Japan and senior operative Soviet intelligence agent, warned Stalin of impending German attack in 1941 and of the Japanese plans in 1944. He was named posthumous Hero of the Soviet Union in 1964.

Thanks to the availability of captured German documents, particularly the files of *Fremde Heere Ost*, it is now possible to examine the Soviet military establishment more closely. We also have such materials as *Grosses*

Orientierungsheft Russland Stand 1.3.1939, Finnish and Rumanian intelligence materials, and the massive files dealing with *BARBAROSSA*. Soviet accounts make the most of the reorganization introduced after the poor performance of the Red Army in the 'Winter War' with Finland. The 'official histories' (the six-volume *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1961–1965, and the twelve-volume *Istoriya Vtoroi Mirovoi voiny*, Moscow: VOENIZDAT, 1973–1982) cannot disguise the fact that a vast amount remained to be done in the way of retraining and reequipping the Soviet armed forces. In *Stalin and His Generals, Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II* (1969; reprint ed., Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1984) Professor Seweryn Bialer provides an ample selection of Soviet memoir literature depicting the constrictions and contradictions that abounded in the days before June 1941. In fact, memoir literature remains the main source for any detail on the command conference held in December 1940 and the major war games that followed early in January 1941. The former was marked by confusion and indecision over the organisation of Soviet armoured forces. The latter are notable for Zhukov's map exercise in which he smashed the 'defenders' with that 'local superiority in forces' that the German Army employed with such brutal effectiveness in June 1941.

At this juncture in Soviet history, politics and current security preoccupations all seem to fuse into a single mass, shifting backwards and forwards through time but pivoting on the *survivability* of the system. In terms of historical analysis Colonel V. A. Anfifov has expanded his earlier monograph, published in 1962, into two substantial volumes, *Bessmertnyi podvig* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1971) and *Proval 'Blitzkriega'* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1974). These are important contributions to an understanding of the course of planning (or the lack of it) before June 1941. The memoirs of Marshal A. M. Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni* (Moscow: POLITIZDAT, 1975, 2nd Ed.) are more explicit, perhaps the most explicit information on war planning at that time. Together with N. F. Vatutin and G. K. Malandin, Vasilevskii worked under the direction of Marshal B. M. Shaposhnikov on a revised defence plan in the early autumn of 1940. The essence of this plan was to counter a major German concentration running northward from the mouth of the river San, necessitating Soviet deployment in strength from the Baltic to the Polesian marshes. For reasons unexplained by Vasilevskii, Stalin personally and peremptorily altered Shaposhnikov's operational draft, changing the lines of the main German thrust from a northerly to a southwesterly axis. He assumed that Hitler's objective would be the concentrations of Soviet industry, the grainlands, and the deposits of key raw materials. Marshal Zhukov, in his memoirs,

added that Stalin did provide some justification for this major change by arguing that 'without these vital resources' Hitler would be quite unable to wage a protracted war. However, the historians (and ideologues) had already fought a pitched battle ten years earlier over the issue of Stalin's responsibility and Russia's general preparedness when debating Professor A. M. Nekrich's book *1941 22 iyunya* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1965). This was a turbulent encounter with 130 participants. I was subsequently given a copy of the notes of these proceedings, which demonstrate the passions aroused and articulated. A version of this debate appears in *Survey*, No. 63, April 1967.

After three decades of discussion, debate, and not a little digression—beginning with the breaking of the Stalinist mould itself—some further answers to the crucial questions of threat assessment, war planning, the role of the surprise factor, the responsiveness of the system, and the responsibility of individuals, military and political alike, have been carefully formulated. Neither the military as a body nor Stalin as an individual escapes unscathed. Stalin blundered in dismissing, distorting, or ignoring what was known of German intentions and operational plans. But the military professionals failed to grasp the essentials of the German 'war doctrine'. The 'new methods' demonstrated by the German Army were either ignored or unrecognised. The Defence Commissariat and the General Staff assumed that a Soviet-German war would follow an orthodox pattern, with the main forces engaging only after several days of frontier battles and with similar conditions for the concentration and deployment of both German and Soviet forces. The roots of disaster—and disaster it speedily became—lay with the inability of all concerned to grasp the essence of German military doctrine in a tactical, operational sense and of the German 'war-waging doctrine' in its widest strategic framework. As a result, effective operational planning was unhinged from the start and accurate intelligence was too easily construed as disinformation.

What is interesting is how historical events have been arranged to fit present conditions. The framers of current doctrine obviously have the problem of working around the conundrum 'When is a surprise not a surprise?' Clearly, when examining German strategic intentions, Russian analysts can point to more or less correct anticipation of German moves. Cataclysmic surprise erupted with the reality of the German Army's astonishing performance and its capacity to inflict immediate, devastating, near fatal damage. Accepting the analogy that 1941 was the equivalent of a medium-size nuclear blitz, the relevance of warding off any repetition becomes all too plain. Never again those hapless, pathetic, incredible,

wailing signals: 'We are being fired on. What shall we do?' Hearing the crack of doom once and only once must be made to suffice at all costs and for all time.

John Erickson

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE Red Army, together with Soviet military leadership and its relations with the Communist Party, have been since the Russian Revolution the object of intense interest, varying degrees of scrutiny and frequent generalisation. Since 1945 Soviet military power has intruded itself directly upon Europe, and the year of Germany's defeat provided a maze of conflicting and paradoxical impressions, as the Soviet armed forces came under a wider, more immediate and sustained observation. The aim of this book is to furnish a history of the origins and development of this leadership, together with a survey of its relations with the Communist Party and the governmental apparatus, within the chronological limits of the first attempts to organise the Red Army and a military command to the near-destruction of both in the first stage of the Soviet-German War in 1941. German military and diplomatic files, become available as a result of their capture, have added one additional avenue of explanation. The other has been provided by the faster flowing tide of explanation following on the 20th Congress of the Communist Party and the reaction to the 'cult of the individual', although much remains mere confirmation of what had hitherto been adduced or astutely reconstructed.

Unlike the German Army with its celebrated General Staff, the product of continuity and tradition, the Soviet military leadership cannot be depicted in terms of a single powerful military organ, and identified with that institution. Although several senior Red Army officers held high hopes for the eventual ascendancy of the Red Army Staff, and while this did become the Red Army General Staff, these professional ambitions remained unsatisfied. Formal arrangements were made for the relationship of military and civil power, but these scarcely constituted the crux of the matter. Not infrequently the scheme of 'Army-Party relations' has been employed to characterise the operation of the Soviet system, and though having its uses, this becomes too stereotyped when what is at stake is represented by the ill-defined and shifting relationships of some fifty military-political leaders. The idea has great relevance in the earlier stages of the evolution of the military command, and at points of crises, but in itself remains too narrow a platform upon which to place the whole process of higher command. For the space of one military generation the Soviet armed forces operated under a command which lacked a physical unity, due to the presence of influential members of the officer corps of the Imperial Russian

Army within it. That dichotomy, over which furious political and personal struggles raged, requires explanation in terms of frustrated ambitions and private animosities as much as through Party decisions.

In addition, there is one dimension of command which is not a feature of more orthodox military organisation and which demands attention, the Political Administration and the military commissars. Over its origins and early form there is much dispute, and this among Soviet military-political historians also. The Red Army was founded as and remains an avowedly political army, the sword and shield of the Revolution. While the commissar was originally an instrument of control over Red Army officers whose loyalty might be questionable, at an early stage he was enticed by the appeal of command, so that there ensues an elaborate criss-crossing of functions and positions. For the reason that political command within the Soviet armed forces is both complicated in operation and questioned as to its history, more space has been allotted here to an explanation of its general working down to a comparatively low level in the command chain. The device of commissars is not new. The armies of the French Revolution knew them, and a form of commissar or political officer has been introduced into more modern armies. But the role of the Political Administration and the function of the military commissar in the Soviet armed forces can be connected with an awkward dilemma with which the Soviet command is faced even now. The requirements of political reliability and the claims of military efficiency frequently clash. As upon the occasion of the dismissal of Marshal Zhukov in 1957, the Communist Party asserts its claim to be the sole leader and educator of the Soviet armed forces. As will be seen, the problem of control and reliability is not solved when a greater proportion of the members of the Soviet forces are Party members. It is then that the watchers of the watchers come to the fore. Unitary or one-man command, over which many bitter struggles were fought, is hailed as a great achievement. The fact that it is not an inevitable feature of a Communist military organisation, for which reason its particular Russian career invites closer inspection, is borne out by the recent criticisms made of this boast by Marshal Chu Teh of the Chinese Communist armed forces.

The military factor in Soviet foreign policy can also be seen through the processes of the command, although with many obscurities as yet unclarified. In so far that a considerable element of the history of the Red Army was determined by the failure of the attempts to achieve a compromise between socialism and militarism, so in the struggle of revolutionary internationalism with Great Russian nationalism bitter dissensions arose among the military and political leaders. The idea of war as a social phenomenon produced special convolutions of theory, planning and organisation. In the contact

between the Red Army and the *Reichswehr*, however, the military leadership played a vital and unique role in an arrangement about which the Soviet Union to this day maintains an iron silence. In the Far East, in addition to lending professional help to revolution in China, Soviet senior commanders were faced with a most demanding military task after the Japanese march into Manchuria; a far from unimportant part of these tasks brought the Red Army to the battlegrounds of Lake Khasan and Khalkhin-Gol. For more than a decade after the Civil War the Soviet armed forces suffered from technical deficiencies and backwardness. The strategic aspect of industrialisation lent new features to Soviet military power and added a range of military possibilities, not least an increased defensive capacity. On Voroshilov's admission, no Soviet war plan in the accepted sense had existed before 1927.

While the Red Army, that is the ground forces, enjoyed a hegemony over the naval and air arms which is maintained even now, the development out of technical and professional obscurity of the latter is a matter of considerable interest. Although the Soviet naval command, learning its faith in the submarine from the German Navy, made slower progress, the technical achievement and performance standard of Soviet aviation came to impress contemporary Europe.

The pre-1941 climax in both those services occurred when they ran foul of Stalin's own notions of what ought to constitute an air force and a navy. The havoc wreaked on Soviet aviation in 1941, as well as the reversion by the naval command to the ideas for which their predecessors had been shot, only served to underline the incorrectness of those notions. For the formulation of military doctrine between the end of the Civil War and the military purge, it is possible to draw upon a professional literature of considerable richness, flecked at times with real imaginativeness. Of late Soviet military monographs have been directing more of their attention to these writings and their authors, as the modern Soviet Army attempts to catch up on its past, hitherto almost blotted out but for Stalin's 'military genius'.

Inevitably, any account of a Soviet institution or command group within this period becomes increasingly concerned with Stalin and the consolidation of his power. Perhaps the most intricate item of what was a brutal and tyrannous business was the affair involving the liquidation of almost the entire high command and a large segment of the officer corps, in the years 1937-8. Its murderousness notwithstanding, the purge of the armed forces remains an extraordinary episode in the history of the Red Army and the Soviet state, if for no other reason than Stalin's success in carrying out this dangerous undertaking. In insuring himself and his regime against a

threat from the military, potentially real but difficult enough to prove in fact, Stalin visited a terrible weakening on the defensive capacity of the Soviet Union. That instance, together with the total effect of his almost uninhibited personal rule, brought dire results in 1941.

While this book is much indebted to many varied sources, it might perhaps not be invidious to single out Captain N. Galay's writings on Soviet military affairs and Dr. Raymond L. Garthoff's invaluable pioneer work on Soviet strategy and military doctrine, which command the attention of the student of Red Army history, Soviet military development and military-political affairs in the Soviet Union. It is as a contribution to the objective enquiry into these matters that the present work is also directed.

A NOTE ON THE SPELLING OF NAMES

Where a generally accepted rendering of a name exists, even as a contravention of the rules of transliteration, this has been employed in order to facilitate recognition (as, for example, with Budenny, Yegorov, Tukhachevsky). Both the accepted and transliterated renderings will be supplied in the index.

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The individuals and institutions named are, however, in no way associated with the views and conclusions incorporated here, for which the responsibility is mine.

J. ERICKSON

October, 1960



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INTRODUCTION

All types of arms; such as rifles, machine-guns, armoured cars and the like have to be put at the disposal and under the control of the company and battalion committees and under no circumstances to be issued to the officers, even if they demand them.

Point 5 of *Order No. 1*.

Brothers, we beg you not to obey an order that is meant to destroy us. An offensive is planned. Take no part in it. Our old leaders have no authority now. The papers have said that there should be nowhere an offensive. Our officers want to make an end of us. They are the traitors. They are the internal enemy.

Razlozhenie Armii v 1917 godu.

But everyone knows, Russia and the army remain! In these great and difficult historical moments they need courageous, firm and experienced leadership, which would save them from complete dissolution. Remember those men, who remain at their posts, carrying out their infinitely difficult task, not complicating the situation . . .

General Novitskii to General Dukhonin. Letter, 19th November, 1917.



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CHAPTER ONE

The Origins of a New Army

In the revolutionary year 1917, by casting off authority and abandoning discipline, the Imperial Russian Army carried through a mutiny of such vast proportion that no military or political group could either control it or be held responsible for the final disintegration. The Army, Lenin was to observe somewhat cynically, voted with its legs.

During the major upheavals in March 1917, when the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies attempted to rule after the Tsar's abdication, the soldiers on the five Russian battlefronts tasted for the first time the hitherto forbidden fruits of political activity and the delights of pressing their various claims. For the majority, this expressed itself only in the crudest manner. The multi-million mass of peasant infantrymen wished to be done with a war which had exacted so fearsome a toll of Russian dead and maimed. Their attention was riveted on the land and their minds possessed with the idea of remaining alive to claim their share of the agrarian spoils. Demoralisation did not come quite so swiftly to the technical units and the artillery men, nor to the troops of the élite battalions who had distinguished themselves in a war which, even with its opening, brought catastrophe. Great Britain and France were now forced to bend their efforts to keep Russia in the war and to hold her to her solemn word, while the German High Command schemed to knock away this weakened link in the *Entente* chain.¹

The March Revolution had quickly granted the armed forces their charter of personal and political rights with the famous 'Order No. 1'. The Order itself was penned by N. D. Sokolov, surrounded by soldiers 'half-dictating and half-suggesting' the contents.² The Order authorised the election in all military units and naval formations of 'committees' drawn from the lower ranks. Representatives to the Petrograd Soviet were also to be chosen by units. Orders issued by the Duma Military Commission were to be obeyed only if they were sanctioned by the Soviet. The elected 'committees' would also assume responsibility for all arms, which were not to be issued to officers. Soldiers henceforth would enjoy all the rights of an ordinary citizen; saluting when off duty was abolished. Officers would no longer enjoy their previous exalted form of address, and rudeness to soldiers was prohibited.³ Although

the product of a considerable provocation, the Order constituted a deadly threat to the authority of the officers. In addition, from this point forth the concealed social struggle leapt into the light of day, so that officers came to be regarded only as 'the land-owner in military uniform'.⁴

All of this had been brought to pass on the streets of Petrograd, beginning on 8th March, when the factory workers had pressed themselves into the ranks of the soldiers, murmuring that brother should not fight with brother. The fraternisation of the numbed soldiers with the impassioned and hungry workers had brought the first Revolution into full flower. The Petrograd garrison had first stared sullenly at the demonstrators, then muttered and numbed away the chances of bringing them to heel by force. The peasant troops finally went over to the 'internal enemy', the workers. The rank and file of the army accepted the Revolution, looking upon it with some pride as a part of their own accomplishment. The officers were less inclined to do so, placed as they were in an impossible situation. Excesses against officers were not uncommon in the early days of insurrection, although it was the sailors of the Baltic Fleet who displayed an extreme of ferocity, hurling the more detested of their superiors beneath the ice — atrocities which wedded them irrevocably to the party of extremists, the Bolsheviki.

The Provisional Government, as yet only nominally master of the state, sent out its commissars to military units and installations, so that its will might carry some expression. An abortive attempt to undo the damage of 'Order No. 1', by issuing 'Order No. 2', and also confining the sweeping changes to the Petrograd Military District only,⁵ did not succeed in bringing about the desired effect. The soldiers would not be brought back under the authority of the officers in this manner. The problem of the front was especially difficult, for here Russian troops began to fraternise with the Germans, holding impromptu 'front-line meetings'. On such occasions, primitive gifts were exchanged, and there were shouts from the Russian lines of 'Germani nicht Feind. Feind hinten.'⁶ Although the Russian troops held their positions, opposition to any kind of offensive mounted. As the year advanced, desertion and 'loitering in the rear' assumed vast proportions. Now, as in the earlier days of the war, the infantry sold its military items, including tent canvas which was quickly made up into skirts for village women. A flourishing trade in Army boots existed. In France the Russian brigade on the Western Front raised shouts of 'Down with the war!' and proceeded to elect a soldier-committee as an expression of solidarity with the Revolution at home.⁷ As a punishment for mutiny sections of the brigade were transported to North Africa; among them was a Corporal Rodion Malinovskii,* who later made his escape.⁸

* The present Marshal Malinovskii, successor to Zhukov as Soviet Defence Minister.

In many simple minds the opposition to the war stiffened. The soldier-peasants, presenting a monotonous picture huddled in their grey army great-coats at meetings of the Petrograd Soviet, followed avidly the schemes for bringing them land. Land and peace were the outstanding issues. During the early stages of 1917 it was Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary propaganda which made its mark on the armed forces. The Bolsheviks, quite belying their name at this time, were a small extremist minority who had been as much surprised by the triumph of the swift and anonymous March Revolution as many other professional revolutionaries who had dreamed of this day. Lenin languished as yet in Switzerland, negotiating his return to Russia in the notorious 'sealed train' arranged by the German General Staff. The latter were anxious to take advantage of any measure which would draw or knock Russia out of the war. Lenin's advocacy of peace favoured him in German eyes. In Petrograd itself a temporary Bolshevik 'Military Commission' had been set up and attached to the Party Central Committee.⁹ This 'Commission' boasted three members, plus one representative from each military unit which chose so to be represented.

* * * *

Bolshevik 'Military Organisations' were set up to talk, not to fight. The Bolshevik view circulated among the disaffected or passive soldiers through three main channels, those of organisation, agitation and propaganda.¹⁰ Apart from winning influence in any section willing to listen to them, the Bolsheviks came to aim primarily at neutralising the armed forces, whereby the mass of soldiery would not be used — nor be capable of being used — to effect a thorough-going counter-revolution. As one means of propaganda a soldiers canteen flourished in the editorial premises of the Petrograd *Pravda*, where refreshment and political talks were freely dispensed.¹¹ In Moscow, soon after the March Revolution, the city Bolshevik Committee organised its own 'Military Bureau', in which some 200 Party members and sympathisers worked among the soldiers of the garrison and units from the Western Front. On the South-western Front the Bolshevik Ensign Krylenko was elected to the Committee of the XIth Army, while units of the Northern Front (centred on Petrograd) fell quickly under pronounced Bolshevik influence.

The Petrograd garrisons stood at the heart of the Revolution. The Northern XIIth Army was looked upon as 'the first line of defence of the proletarian revolution', though the overweening pride on the part of these rough and dirty soldiers at 'their' revolution repelled not a few including Sukhanov himself. The 436th Novoladozhskii Regiment set up a Bolshevik committee with close ties fastened upon Riga, where the Bolsheviks had

also opened a soldiers club called 'The IIIrd International'. The Latvian and Siberian Rifle Regiments of the XIIth Army counted for a great deal; numbering about 40,000 men, the Latvian Regiments had organised Bolshevik cells in their reserve units situated in and about Petrograd. In this manner the Latvian riflemen — the future nucleus of the first Bolshevik professional armed force — fell under Bolshevik sway at a relatively early stage of 1917 and passed under actual Bolshevik control as the year advanced.¹² In the great naval base of Kronstadt sailors of the Baltic Fleet formed a naval soviet¹³ designated *Tsentrobalt*, from which some 3,000 rebellious sailors set about defying the Provisional Government and harrying the right wing in general. In Sevastopol and Odessa the blue-jackets of the Black Sea Fleet similarly made their presence felt. Nearer to Moscow M. V. Frunze and Myasnikov raised Bolshevik cells among the soldiers of the Western Front. In this welter of committees* and disordered agitation a cavalry sergeant by the name of Budenny found himself elected to the soldiers organisation in his regiment.

The rumours of the circumstances in which Lenin finally arrived in Russia caused a certain patriotic resistance among the soldiers to Bolshevik propaganda as the work of 'German agents'. Nevertheless at the end of June 1917 the Bolsheviks held the first large-scale conference of their military members and organisations; the conference assembled in Petrograd under the name of the 'All-Russian Conference of Front and Rear Military Organisations of the RSDRP(b)'. In all, according to Soviet sources, this conference represented 26,000 Party members among the military or in 'military organisations'.¹⁴ More than that, it was here that the initial thought and preliminary planning which had gone into the business of raising or rallying a force loyal to the Bolsheviks began to show the first results. The conference, while affirming that the Bolsheviks did indeed have adherents in the armed forces, turned to considering the ways and means of armies as a whole, as well as the further work of the 'Military Organisations'. Over the question of standing armies and their relation to the State, the Bolsheviks, as well as other revolutionaries, had decided views. They abhorred the standing army, preferring the armed militia as the definitive type of proletarian military organisation. This expressed not naiveté but the deepest consideration of the military experiences of the proletariat to date — the Paris Commune or insurgent Russia fighting on the streets in 1905-6. It is the

* Major-General Sir A. Knox, the British military observer with the Russian Army, indicates the loss to the army of 'fighting men engaged in talk' with his figures of the membership of the committees of the South-western Front. Front-line, depot and rear units had no less than 84,948 officers and men engaged in this 'talk', so that there is some justification for the category of 'desertion by election' to the committees, as well as a prime illustration of the ramifications of these activities. See General Sir A. Knox, *With the Russian Army, 1914-1917*, Vol. II, pp. 699-700.

very consciousness of the purpose of these June debates which mark them out as a precise step in the Bolshevik ideas of 'their' armed force.

Not merely in theoretical questions but in organisation as a whole the June Conference provides some test of Bolshevik activity. Accepting the Soviet figure of 26,000 Party members, and assuming, as is not unlikely, that this doubled by November 1917, there were some 50,000 active Bolsheviks at work in the armed forces;¹⁵ to off-set this, a one-day census of the army in April 1917 set the strength at over nine million.¹⁶ It is therefore not in numbers but in the purposefulness and intensity of Bolshevik activity that the key to their role in the army must be sought. Out of the June Conference came the 'All-Russian Bureau of Military Organisations', whose members included men soon to be prominent as a preliminary leadership group in the Civil War — Podvoiskii, Krylenko, Nevskii, Kedrov, Cherepanov, Bubnov, Antonov-Ovseenko, Mekhonoshin. The Party's military-political experts were fast learning the business of exploiting the break-down of an army, for Podvoiskii himself made it clear that pressing for 'democratisation' as well as peace hastened that over-all incapacity within the army, which was itself insurance against the army being used to crush the Bolsheviks.

The Russian High Command was also preoccupied with the decline within the army and turned to schemes for the moral and physical regeneration of the Russian troops. By mounting an offensive it was hoped to restore some sense of purpose and discipline into the mass of troops. Kerensky's oratory whipped up a momentary enthusiasm among the soldiers. The Provisional Government would also through these actions be able to carry out Russia's obligations to her allies, themselves about to embark upon great offensive actions on the Western Front. But the Russian offensive, ordered for 29th June, flopped and fizzled away, merely sacrificing the last of the spirited and disciplined troops who acted within the army as the very final barrier to disintegration. Russian soldiers deserted *en masse*. Having taken the first line of trenches, they refused to move on. Soldiers called out to advancing comrades to halt, or else dragged away the field kitchens to prevent others moving up. The commissars of the Provisional Government reported the soldiers, now streaming away from the front, to be '... armed and unarmed, in good health and high spirits, certain they will not be punished'.¹⁷ Many took themselves and their arms home, so that the influx of deserters could not but aggravate an already seriously disturbed agrarian situation.

First opposition to the idea of an offensive and then discontent at the subsequent disaster raised fresh disturbances in Petrograd. Lenin's apprehension over the ultimate attitude of the army resulted in the Bolsheviks holding

back from an attempted seizure of power during 'the July days'.¹⁸ Bolshevik vacillation and weakness discredited them. The Government rallied, re-imposing the death-sentence in the army and replacing Brusilov by Kornilov as commander-in-chief. The Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin, went into hiding. Punitive action was taken in army units; 900 soldiers of the fractious 'Dvinsk troopers' of the Vth Army were transported to the east.¹⁹ But as General Khlembovskii had earlier observed, it was impossible to lock up the whole army — and even if it were possible, this would not go against their wishes, for the soldiers would at least emerge alive from their penal rigours.

When, however, in the first fortnight in September Kornilov launched and failed to consummate his *coup d'état*, the final breach between the officers and men in the armed forces was sealed. The latter, desperate for peace, looked upon the 'counter-revolutionary' officers as their first enemy. Desertion took another upward swing.²⁰ Soldiers commandeered trains, ordering the drivers to take them where they wished. More of the Russian Army went home from the war on foot.

The fright over Kornilov helped to raise the political stature of the Bolsheviks. The Petrograd Soviet seized upon the device of 'special defensive measures' to ward off the threats implied in the *coup*, thus setting a precedent for the creation of the 'Military-Revolutionary Committees'. The Bolsheviks in their turn lighted upon these new bodies, hastening the disintegration in the army by brushing away the relatively stable regimental committees and trying to replace them with 'provisional revolutionary committees'. The stampede was quickened with shouts for full 'democratisation' of the army, for full rights to the soldier, for the end of the war. The whole embodied the anguish and desperation of '... the huge, weary, shabby and ill-fed mob of angry men'.

Meanwhile in the streets, factories and squares of cities, in the dust and muddle of small towns and villages, the Bolsheviks went about setting up their private army, the Red Guard. During the March Revolution in Petrograd substantial quantities of arms had found their way into various hands. General Kornilov demanded later the return of 40,000 rifles to the plundered arsenals.²¹ By the end of March ten per cent of the Petrograd workers had been mobilised to form a militia for 'the defence of the revolution'.²² The temporary Bolshevik Military Commission soon occupied itself with organising its own small bands, the *Voenki*.²³ Already during the disturbances of 1905-6 Bolshevik 'combat squads' had fought on the streets. At this date, such was the weakness of the Provisional Government, that it could not prevent the formation of what were in effect private proletarian miniature armies. By the end of April 11,000 workers had been enrolled in

some kind of para-military unit. In Moscow, in Reval, in the Urals, Red Guard detachments sprang up, or had their counterpart in the 'Fighting Detachments of the People's Militia' (*BONV*).^{*} Numbers, however, were a very uneven guide to the real state of affairs.²⁴ The distribution of weapons was casual and disorganised. When rifles and revolvers failed to appear, staves and pikes took their place. The raw workers not infrequently needed training in the use of such arms as were available; sympathetic soldiers would impart the rudiments of military training to the men from the factories.

By August there existed a real need to centralise and organise the staffs of the Red Guards in Petrograd. To this end a joint staff, the *Buro Tsentralnoi Komendatury*, came into being; a little later a similar body was set up in Moscow.²⁵ In the provinces K. Voroshilov laboured on the Lugansk town-committee for 'defence against the counter-revolution'. In Minsk Frunze built up the nucleus of a pro-Bolshevik force. Nevertheless the network remained thin and fragile when viewed against the turbulence at large. The Party questionnaire to delegates to the 2nd Congress of Soviets (held in October) asked, under Item 21, about the formation of Red Guard detachments. Few reported any positive results. More often the answer ran: 'Wanted to organise. No weapons.'²⁶ In spite of the special Bolshevik attention to the 'Factory committees for munition-plants', which helped to supply arms, there was never an adequate supply. Smuggling and theft added a little to the stocks.

Yet not a few names upon the rolls of the Red Guards were to become famous in the Red Army. On the eve of the rising in Petrograd approximately 20,000 Red Guards — variously armed, if at all — could be mustered.²⁷ Less than 10,000 stood by in Moscow. Some Chinese, part of the labour imported into Imperial Russia for railway construction, took up their position in the Petrograd and Moscow Bolshevik detachments. In addition to the cosmopolitan touches, not a few rogues, ruffians and adventurers found places in the ranks of 'fighters in the class struggle'.

Riga fell to the advancing German troops in September. The Allied Military Missions continued to press for information about Russia's strengths and weaknesses,† all the while urging her to continue in the war. On the Russian side, mistrust of the Allies appeared frequently in an open and unconcealed form.²⁸ In France drastic action had been taken against the mutineers of the Russian brigade. In the Far East the Americans and the

* *BONV* forces were not raised by the local soviets but were a fighting force raised and responsible to the Communist Party, that is, the Bolsheviks alone.

† General Verkhovskii, now War Minister, reported the military strength of the Russian Army at the beginning of October to be: 1,500,000 infantry, 500,000 specialists (mostly artillery), 3,500,000 in rear establishments, 2,900,000 engaged on para-military duties, and 1,500,000 in the rear areas as a whole, of whom only 400,000 were fit for any kind of military duty.

Japanese cast frequent and anxious glances at Vladivostok, where disaffection was spreading and where also 662,000 tons of war supplies awaited shipment into European Russia along the Trans-Siberian Railway — a task manifestly beyond the capacity of the railway.²⁹ The colonies of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners lodged in the Russian east also gave the Allies cause for acute anxiety.

* * * *

By late October the issue of power was about to be decided in Petrograd, while the Bolsheviks completed many of their preparations for the seizure of power. On 20th October the Petrograd Soviet voted to form a Military-Revolutionary Committee; due to a sharp left swing, many of the soviets throughout Russia gradually slipped out of the hands of the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries and into the grasp of the Bolsheviks. Reports poured into the government about the low morale of the army; the commissars cited the prevailing chaos in supplies and the utter weariness.*

The Petrograd Military-Revolutionary Committee, soon a thoroughly Bolshevised instrument, stood out as the head-quarters of insurrection. This body proceeded to send out its own commissars to the Petrograd garrison, a complex operation which was co-ordinated by the special Bureau of Commissars. On 2nd November the actual preparations for the seizure of power were put in hand. On 4th, under the guise of a demonstration the Bolsheviks reviewed their armed man-power in Petrograd. In the Smolny, the girls' finishing school commandeered as Bolshevik head-quarters, a conference of regimental committees agreed that no unit should be sent to the front before the consent of the Petrograd Soviet had been obtained for such a transfer. General Cheremisov, the Northern Front commander, provoked a head-on clash by proposing to do this very thing. The thought of being sent to the front roused the Petrograd garrison to what fury it could muster; six months of 'holiday' in the rear had brought about a considerable decline in spirit. Such a situation did, however, place the garrison in the hands of the insurrectionists, and the Bolshevik commissars proceeded to elbow the last representatives of governmental authority out of the way.

Trotsky, Podvoiskii, Antonov-Ovseenko, Mekhonoshin and Lashevich, together with the commissars in the regiments and in installations, began

* Lieutenant Dolgopolov, Assistant Commissar Vth Army reported deterioration of morale; Richenko, Chairman of the Commissars/126th Division, Special Army, reported disintegration; Alekseyevskii, Commissar to the IVth Army, reported food and clothing supplies bad and morale sinking. The same tone was struck in the reports of Posnikov (IIIrd Army), Grodskii (IIrd Army), Tiesenhausen (Rumanian Front), Chekotilo (XIth Army).

to play their appointed parts. By brilliant oratory Trotsky won over the machine-gunners of the vital Peter and Paul fortress. The Military-Revolutionary Committee denounced the government and the General Staff for having 'broken with the Petrograd Soviet'. Colonel Polkovnikov, the Petrograd garrison commander, was warned that his orders would be invalid without the counter-signature of the Military-Revolutionary Committee. The Colonel answered, not unnaturally if a little optimistically, that he was capable of dealing with his own troops. The Government struck back by closing the Bolshevik printing presses and cutting the telephone link with the Smolny. The Bolsheviks responded by calling upon the soldiers of the garrison to re-open the presses and counter-manding the order for the cruiser *Aurora* to put to sea.³⁰

At 2 a.m., on 7th November, 1917, the Bolshevik bid for power began in all earnest. The less-spirited members of the garrison were detailed to watch the movements of the officer-training battalions and keep an eye upon the Cossack barracks. Meanwhile telephone exchanges, banks, railway stations and bridges fell with only a scanty show of resistance to the insurgents. In the evening at 9 p.m., the Winter Palace — the seat of government — was assailed by Kronstadt sailors and Red Guards from the Vyborg district of the city; they were covered by the guns of the rebel cruiser *Aurora*. An armoured car company joined in the assault, while the cruiser fired blank-shot to intimidate the defenders. In the closing scene Antonov-Ovseenko arrested the remaining ministers and escorted them through a crowd intent upon lynching them.

To take power in the capital was one thing. To register the victory throughout Russia remained another. Kerensky left for the front, hoping to rally resistance in the Army. Insurrection in Moscow met with sterner resistance; five days of heavy fighting followed upon the first rising.³¹ Artillery and armoured car units moved up to the assistance of the Bolsheviks. The Kremlin had to be stormed to clear it of its officer-cadet defenders.³² Red Guard detachments poured in from the outlying districts, though their operations were hampered by the lack of trained officers. Frunze hurried to help with a force of 500 soldiers under his command. On the morning of 15th November Lenin instructed Podvoiskii of the Petrograd Military-Revolutionary Committee to order Raskol'nikov to proceed to Moscow with his force of Baltic sailors. Finally the insurgents shattered the resistance to them, but not before both sides had incurred heavy losses.

While the fighting flared and finally faded in Moscow, the 2nd Congress of Soviets, which had assembled in Petrograd, tried to give substance to this new Soviet power. As for the force actually at their command the Bolsheviks could count the 3,000 blue-jackets who had been brought into the capital

by destroyer as reinforcement for the armed detachments. A further 1,500, with artillery, moved up to Petrograd. The Latvian Rifle Regiments of the Petrograd reserve and a Machine-Gun and Armoured Car force formed the military nucleus of the land 'army'. Otherwise the Red Guards had to bear the brunt of the responsibility, yet they were not real 'military units' either in training or armament. During the fighting at the Pulkovo Heights on 10th November, when General Krasnov tried to break into the city with his Cossacks, 20,000 people had been mobilised to dig trenches and set up defences around the city. Baltic Fleet sailors stiffened the ranks of the armed workmen and finally prevailed over Krasnov's Cossacks.³³

The sailors were indispensable, and yet at the same time they represented a strange liability to their masters; unlike the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison, who had lounged and talked for six idle months, the sailors itched for a fight, ready to vent their fury on the 'bourgeoisie'. The difficulty lay in imposing even a rudimentary external discipline on these free-booters, inflamed as they were by political phrases and lust for action. They were led by Pavel Efimovich Dybenko, head of *Tsentrobalt*. Dybenko came of a poor family in Chernigorsk; he joined the Party in 1912 and had been one of the ring-leaders of the mutiny on the battleship *Imperator Pavel I* in 1915. Early in 1917 he had occupied himself with organising sailor-squads in Helsingfors.³⁴

The new government, having taken the name of the Soviet of People's Commissars, settled to its frenzied work under the chairmanship of Lenin. The decrees on 'immediate peace' and the land question were rushed through. At the same time a Committee for Naval and Military Affairs took over the old Ministry of War.³⁵ This Committee, composed of three veteran Bolsheviks—Antonov-Ovseenko, Krylenko and Dybenko—became heir to the vast Imperial administrative machine of the War Ministry, which had far to go before it outlived its usefulness to the new incumbents. Antonov-Ovseenko, in addition to his extensive political activities, had enjoyed some military training as an officer-cadet in 1904; by now a specialist in the matters of insurrection, he had now to apply himself to more orthodox military matters. Dybenko represented the navy, while Krylenko—described by Bruce Lockhart as 'an epileptic degenerate'³⁶—changed his role as erstwhile Imperial Ensign and agitator on the South-western Front for a brief career as Bolshevik Commander-in-Chief. It was a crude jest. Podvoiskii, another of the Party's military experts, showed remarkable talent; a Party member since 1901, he had been one of the driving forces behind the Red Guards, taken a major part in directing the propaganda to the soldiers and worked on the planning of the seizure of power.

As the new Committee took stock of its position, and the Military-

Revolutionary Committee kept watch on the revolutionary actions unfolding beyond Petrograd, the 2nd Congress of Soviets addressed itself directly to the front. This body requested that 'provisional revolutionary committees' be appointed in the armies, a move which was designed to disrupt the older committees — on which various shades of political opinions were represented — and replace them with Bolshevised groups. To replace the agents of the old government, new commissars stood ready to journey to the units and military installations.³⁷ Five days after the Petrograd *coup*, the Western Front telegraphed:

. . . the 21st and 57th Infantry Divisions at combat readiness. Rifles in hand, they stand for the defence of the Soviets at the first call of the Committee. 94th and 75th Siberian Divisions [are] for the rising and the Soviets. . . .³⁸

Once again the fronts stirred and trembled with new agitation, but none as yet embodied serious and concerted threats against the new regime.*

Nevertheless the Bolsheviks came face to face with stiff resistance from time to time. In Kiev on 10th November officer-cadets attacked the local Military-Revolutionary Committee, located in the former Imperial Palace; fourteen Bolsheviks, including Yan Gamarnik, N. N. Lebedev and S. Bakinskii were arrested. Two days of heavy fighting ensued in an attempt to restore the Bolshevik fortunes. N. A. Rudnev organised the soldiers of the 30th Regiment in Kharkov into a fighting detachment which co-operated with the local Red Guards. This combined force later linked up with Voroshilov's 'fighting detachments' from Lugansk.³⁹ Sporadic fighting continued and the first shots were exchanged in what was to become a bitter and protracted civil war. Detachments were surrounded and disarmed, first by one side and then the other. 'Counter-revolutionary' officers found themselves under arrest; strong points and railway links fell into various hands, though the pro-Bolshevik forces managed to retain or recapture numerous key positions. Red and 'White' forces thus played out the first scenes of the Civil War in the Ukraine.

* * * *

The consolidation of Soviet power in the northern and central regions of Russia proceeded throughout the month of November and into December 1917. The army was in no condition to be used against the Bolsheviks. At the end of November 1917 the Chief of Staff of XIIth Army, General Posokhov, reported that '. . . the army just doesn't exist'.⁴⁰ At the same

* A not uncommon reaction, although it would be impossible to describe any stand as being typical, was demonstrated by the Army Committee of VIth Army, which demanded an end to the civil war and adopted the slogan: 'Not a single soldier for Kerensky, not one soldier for the Bolsheviks.'

time the XIIth Army held an extraordinary session of the Army Congress, when a new Executive Committee was elected; the new committee had a Bolshevik majority and a Bolshevik president, S. M. Nakhimson. On 19th November General Novitskii, Commander of the XIIth Army, wrote to General Dukhonin, seeking permission to enter into an agreement with the new government. Novitskii wrote that

I know that many will reproach me for this, but I am taking this step with the deep conviction that such a decision can weaken that anarchy which exists in the army. . . . In view of this I have decided to approach you in the name of the army which was entrusted to me, with a request to conclude an agreement with the new governmental power, so that by setting up a unity of power in the army and the country the difficult consequences, which follow disorganisation in the ranks of the soldiers, will be averted.⁴¹

From the Vth Army E. Sklyanskii, later to achieve fame as Trotsky's deputy during the Civil War, wrote that they were ready to resist the 'counter-revolutionary elements' gathering about the *Stavka*, Supreme head-quarters.

At the centre of their new-found power the Bolsheviks set about taking over the War Ministry and the existing military machinery. On 27th November Order No. 11 proclaimed that all military schools, together with their personnel, should be taken over for the purposes of the new government.⁴² Not only the buildings and administrative machinery fell to their hands, but the Bolsheviks also had at their disposal the vast stocks of war-material which had been delivered by the Allies to Russia through the northern and far eastern ports. Yet mere occupation of the War Ministry did not signify that the threat from the old General Staff had been removed. The generals represented a very definite threat in being,⁴³ for here in the actual head-quarters was a rallying point for the 'underground' ex-government and for those officers who had been associated with Kornilov in his abortive *coup d'état*.

The Bolsheviks struck first at the Commander-in-Chief, General Dukhonin. Following upon Lenin's Peace Decree, the General was ordered to begin preparations for arranging local armistices with the Germans. Dukhonin refused. In the course of a telephone conversation on the evening of 22nd November, 1917, Dukhonin was relieved of his post.⁴⁴ A radio message gave the news of the change of command, informing the soldiers that 'the work of peace is in your hands'. Ensign Krylenko assumed the position of Commander-in-Chief, with a former Imperial officer, M. D. Bonch-Bruевич, as Chief of Staff. Dukhonin remained at the *Stavka* in Moghilev until he could be replaced by his successor.

The heads of the Allied Military Missions present at the *Stavka* questioned Dukhonin about the possibility of a separate Russian peace with Germany,

reminding him that Russia had bound herself by treaty not to act in this manner. Trotsky flew at the Allies for this interference in Russia's 'internal affairs', but on neither side did threats mean much at this stage. Krylenko meanwhile advanced steadily if leisurely upon the little town of Moghilev, knotting up the cord of Soviet power as he went, using for this purpose a storm-group of Baltic sailors. The generals failed to rally the army. In Petrograd the Northern Front commander General Cheremisov frustrated the efforts to use the troops against the Bolsheviks. In Minsk General Boldyrev found himself incapable of physical resistance to Krylenko and his murderous sailors; he was placed under arrest. On the Western Front General Baluyev was forced out of his command and his place taken by a lieutenant-colonel. In the *Stavka* hapless efforts were made to rally the forces of a new anti-Bolshevik government. Chernov, the designated head of this body, retired to a couch where he remained, in Chamberlin's words, '... lying ... with a compress on his head.'⁴⁵

The brutal climax came swiftly to Moghilev. The Allied Military Mission left. Krylenko and his sailors arrived as the Moghilev soviet surrendered to the insistent demands of the Left extremists and took over the town. Dukhonin did not flee with the Socialist-Revolutionary leaders who returned to Petrograd, nor would he go with the shock-battalion who did not stay to face the sailors. A mob lynched him, although Krylenko spoke out against harming the general. According to Chamberlin, a burly sailor roused the crowd, who dragged Dukhonin out of the railway carriage, into which he had been taken with Krylenko, and killed him.⁴⁶ A 'provisional revolutionary committee' took over the running of the *Stavka*, the occupation of which finally smashed the old army into pieces. From this point on there were only those bitterly hostile anti-Bolshevik senior officers who travelled to the south, there to set about the formation of the Volunteer Army.

The Imperial Russian Army trundled out of existence with its mammoth desertions, its 'democratisations' and stood finally upon the eve of its demobilisation by the Bolsheviks. In the garrisons and the rear at large the insurrectionists' grip tightened slowly but perceptibly. In Voronezh the Bolsheviks and Left S.R.s set up a Military-Revolutionary Committee which took power into its own hands. In Samara a Bolshevik enclave was established by V. V. Kuibyshev and V. K. Blyukher. The latter it was who later developed into one of the outstanding Red military commanders during the Civil War. From Samara, units were smuggled to Chleyabinsk by Blyukher, who hurried his scratch force into railway waggons freely chalked with the words 'Demobilised troops'. These he later employed against the Cossack General Dutov.⁴⁷

On the battle-fronts local armistices heralded the approach of peace negotiations with the Central Powers. The new Soviet government had tried and failed to draw the Allies into general peace negotiations,⁴⁸ so that they were obliged to tread the road to Brest-Litovsk alone. Whatever its insurrectionary origin, the new government had to face the responsibilities connected with the armed forces and the defence of the country. On the one hand, because of political tactics and since it could not now be stopped, the process of 'democratisation' was allowed to run its full course. Yet there is evidence that the Bolshevik leaders had already begun to turn their attention to constructive measures aimed at the creation of a new armed force.⁴⁹

On 23rd November, 1917, the decree of gradual demobilisation appeared, declaring that this step would be so administered out of the interests of avoiding the disorganisation of transport and stripping the fronts too precipitately of their holding units. Doing away with the old army in such a formal manner was a necessary step towards organising a new one. At the end of December two further decrees — 'On elective command and the organisation of discipline in the army' and 'On the equalisation of rights among serving soldiers'⁵⁰— were promulgated; both were designed to convince the soldiers that the old order would be completely swept away. By the decree on command, the regimental, battery and squadron commanders were to be elected by the existing committees; higher commands were conferred by the nearest higher committee (division and army). In theory chiefs of staff could not be elected by personnel without 'specialist training', and the same reservation applied to all other specialist staff—doctors, technicians and engineers. The second decree put an end to all Tsarist insignia and distinctive orders, abolished officer-organisations and swept away the decorations awarded by the Imperial Army.

Elections to the command posts took on the aspects of farce, primitive revenges and low cunning. Rejected officers had the right to resign, for upon being stripped of their command they reverted to the ranks. The anti-Bolshevik forces in the south drew not a few embittered recruits from this substantial pool of dismissed officers. Many NCOs were elevated to the lower command positions. The principle of elective command was also applied in the Red Guard, whose members found it much to their taste. Although on the whole elections seem to have been taken seriously, enormous blunders were made. An ensign commanded the 6th Siberian Corps (though, by the same token, a former ensign was now Commander-in-Chief); a corporal reigned as Chief of Staff in the 35th Infantry Division.⁵¹ Politically acceptable and not infrequently competent officers retained their posts. Major-General Novitskii, who had earlier addressed himself to Dukhonin,

survived this time of troubles. Colonel Boris Shaposhnikov, who was tinged with a slight radicalism, not only survived but found himself promoted to the command of the Caucasian Grenadier Division with which he served.

These final consequences of a course scored out so deeply by 'Order No. 1' also formed part of the background to the All-Russian Demobilisation Congress which was assembling in Petrograd. Yet the ring of Russia's enemies tightened. In the Ukraine, anti-Russian separatism seized its chances. On a larger scene Lenin and the Central Committee of the Party were cornered between the Germans, who threatened if no peace were concluded, and the Allies, who threatened if it were. German armies stood almost at the threshold of Petrograd and Japanese troops at Russia's Far Eastern gate. Antonov-Ovseenko had already left for the Ukraine with a mixed force of some 7,000 men with the aim of destroying the anti-Bolshevik General Kaledin. With civil war becoming every day a more substantial prospect, the Bolsheviks withdrew from Kiev to the comparative safety of Kharkov, where they set up the 'Ukrainian Soviet government'. This body was duly recognised in Petrograd as the 'proper government' of the Ukraine, but such an exchange of paper rights and courtesies did not dispose of the existence of the *Rada*, the initial Ukrainian nationalist body. This would have to be reduced by force.

Against a darkening backcloth of growing strife and chaos, the Demobilisation Congress set about its work. Fedotoff White declares that shortly after the November revolution Lenin and Trotsky were deep in consideration of the question of reorganising the Russian armed forces. Lenin did indeed take a great interest in the proceedings of the Congress, which was in effect carrying out a vast inquest on the death of the army.⁵² The new government also proceeded to a quick modification of the machinery at least nominally handling the affairs of the armed forces. The Collegiate of People's Commissars for Military Affairs replaced the initial Committee for Naval and Military Affairs. The War Ministry (under its new Collegiate name) concerned itself with the demobilisation, dealing at the same time with supply problems and the storage of weapons. Staff organisations continued to function.

The rebuff administered by the Central Powers to Russia's advocacy of a just peace based on 'no annexations and indemnities' caused the idea of a guerrilla or 'revolutionary war' to possess the minds of the members of the Central Committee. Lenin was well aware of the fact that if the army would not fight for Kerensky, it would not do so for him. Yet, as if by way of devious exploration of this idea, he circulated an odd questionnaire to the delegates of the Demobilisation Congress; the final point inquired whether the army (assuming it could vote) would support an immediate

peace with drastic annexationist and economic consequences for Russia, or choose to fight the 'revolutionary war'.⁵³ It is not a little ironic that this should have been asked of a Demobilisation Congress working on the problems of disbanding an army which had been so persistently weakened by Bolshevik propaganda and agitation. 'Revolutionary war', however, gained adherents far beyond the confines of the Central Committee, and became an issue round which much bitter controversy centred.

* * * *

In addition to the work of demobilisation, the Congress began work on the formation of a new 'Socialist Army', in which only proletarians recommended by factory-committees or the affidavit of 'socialist-revolutionary parties' would be enrolled.⁵⁴ Here was the root of the short-lived experiment of the volunteer army. In addition, on 19th December, 1917, the All-Russian Collegiate for the Formation of the Red Army was elected and two days later began work at its first session on the principles of the organisation of the Red Army and the programme to be followed by the special Bureau of the Collegiate.⁵⁵ A multitude of ideas, however, flourished at this time. Not even the name of the new army had been properly fixed, for contemporary announcements refer to the 'National-Socialist Army', a 'Red Socialist Army' or just an unadorned 'Socialist Army'.⁵⁶

After the confused deliberations of late December 1917 Lenin wrote on 14th-16th January, 1918, to the Demobilisation Congress, assuring the participants that he considered 'the foundation of a socialist army an important question', and one which he believed that the Congress would successfully solve. By early January 1918 a definite programme of agitation designed to produce recruits was already being put into operation. Lenin, however, was not deceived as to the real issue. He saw with singular clarity where the real danger to the Bolsheviks lay in the matter of raising a new fighting force. To rally an army to fight a defensive war against the Germans could not fail at the same time to rally anti-Bolshevik forces throughout Russia. This most pertinent political consideration necessitated a very circumspect approach to the new army.

To add to the confusion, what had been the old *Stavka* and what was now incorporated into the Bolshevik apparatus took its own action to form new units both at the front and in the rear. Northern Front Command Signal No. 2090 of 11th January, 1918, alerted all committees in the army, from platoon upwards, to watch for volunteers for what was called 'the Red Revolutionary Army'. Army and corps commissars must submit reports each Saturday on the progress being made in this matter.⁵⁷ Krylenko on 16th January addressed a second directive to the army on the formation of

what were called 'National-Socialist Guards', which were to be set up in divisional reserve areas and units lodged near the front. Recruitment was to be on a volunteer basis. In the XIIIth Army (Northern Front) this produced the organisation of a 'congress of instructors' for the proposed new Guard, while the front-line newspaper *Okopnaya Pravda* announced the times and places where men might sign up.⁵⁸

Official opinion seemed to waver between holding the present positions with a screen of Red Guards or trusting everything to the creation of a new army. The much publicised 'Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited Masses' (17th January, 1917) referred in its fifth paragraph to a 'Socialist Red Army of workers and peasants'.⁵⁹ At the 3rd All-Russian Congress of Soviets Lenin argued the case for a 'Socialist army', hinting that Red Guard detachments alone would not suffice. Simultaneously the All-Russian Collegiate for the Formation of the Red Army intensified its activities. Local and regional organs to handle recruitment began to appear. Fighting units were re-formed, supplies and equipment came under stricter supervision.⁶⁰ The Collegiate branched out into an organisation-agitation section, and recruiting, outfitting, mobilisation, weapons, supplies, transport, medical and financial departments.⁶¹ On 29th January, 1918, 20 million roubles were put at the disposal of the Collegiate for Red Army affairs.

The retention of the previous administrative machinery had been an act dictated by necessity. In the matter of actual units and formations the Bolsheviks neither planned nor managed to receive substantial elements of the old army into the new. The complete destruction of the old was a necessary prelude to the creation of the new army. Apart from two Latvian brigades and a reserve regiment, only the 436th Novoladozhskii and the 479th Khadnikovskii Regiments passed intact into the Red Army.⁶² Nevertheless the Bolsheviks were in urgent need of men, which caused them to cast about for recruits among the prisoners of war held in the Russian interior and to examine that other untapped source of manpower, the Chinese labourers.

On 28th January, 1918, the decree signed by Lenin brought the 'Red Army' into formal existence. The new army was called 'The Workers and Peasants Red Army' (RKKA); no man younger than eighteen was to be enrolled, pay was fifty roubles per month, and a recommendation of true proletarian loyalty was required of prospective entrants.⁶³ At the date of this decree Cherepanov estimates that the Bolshevik forces — counting Red Guards, 'revolutionary sailors' and troops drawn into the early Red Army units from former Imperial Army units — amounted to 50-60,000 men.⁶⁴

A most prominent feature of the new military system was the emphasis upon decentralisation. In view of the prevailing political and economic

conditions this could scarcely have been avoided, yet it also accorded with the make-shift arrangements which were everywhere prevalent. The local soviets took the responsibility for the new units created in their area, hence the flurry of signing up in Moscow, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Saratov and elsewhere. In the case of men recruited from the ranks of soldiers as yet still not demobilised, responsibility passed to the Army and Corps Committees. In fact the first Red Army units as such formed up near Petrograd from men of the XIIth Army, when on 7th February, 1918, under Order No. 4124/1811 the 437th Sestoretsk and the 9th Siberian Regiments became the 1st and 2nd Red Army Regiments respectively.⁶⁵ Commanders were elected and not appointed. The Red regiments had each 3 battalions, 3 platoons to a battalion and 3 sections to a platoon. The platoon consisted of 150 men, giving the regiment 1,350 men. In the rear areas of XIIth Army the creation of other units was hurried along.⁶⁶ In the 1st Army 1,606 men signed up with the Red Army on 13th February and 917 from the Vth Army by 18th February. On 15th February a national unit, the 1st Tallin Red Army regiment, was organised, with 12 companies, a machine-gun detachment and light artillery.

The brunt of this decentralised activity fell on the local Military Commissariats which employed three officers. To stimulate recruiting the Red Army Collegiate's agitation section, run by L. M. Kaganovich, sent out 140 administrative assistants and 300 agitators to various parts of Russia. Nevertheless the decision in favour of a regular army, rather than complete reliance upon a militia, reflected an over-riding interest in the defence of the Party and its hold upon the newly-won power. The aim was to ensure that 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' remained a dictatorship. On 24th February Lenin warned the advocates of 'revolutionary war' that they were merely playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie; such phraseology only acted as 'a provocation to the bourgeoisie'.⁶⁷ To keep power over the state it was necessary for the Bolsheviks to create their own well-organised army rather than make an *indiscriminate* appeal to workers, peasants and other brands of revolutionaries.

The Russians stood in mortal peril. They had need to defend themselves, for the Central Powers had shown their teeth at the second meeting at Brest-Litovsk. Either the Soviet delegates must accept the dictated terms, or the German army would resume its advance into Russia. In reply to the Soviet tactics of dragging out the negotiations, the Central Powers concluded a separate peace with the Ukrainian *Rada* on 9th February. This ignored the fact that the Bolsheviks had succeeded in driving the *Rada* out of Kiev by force. On 15th the German armies stood ready with 58 divisions and 13 brigades to resume full-scale military operations against Russia. A Bolshevik

appeal to the Allies fell on unreceptive ears. As the German columns advanced, Petrograd Radio announced Russia's acceptance of the Central Powers' terms. Bitterly divided, the Central Committee finally voted to sign the peace with its devastating demands upon Russia. On 3rd March, at the signing, Russia surrendered 400,000 square miles of territory and one-third of her population to the Central Powers.⁶⁸

The decree of 21st February ('The Socialist Fatherland is in danger') had evoked no mean response of volunteers to bear arms, a demonstration that the Russians were far from being morally down-at-heel. But the 'volunteer army' proved a failure from the beginning, largely because internal political threats to the Bolshevik regime made a popular appeal politically inexpedient. Such an appeal might have been made on the platform of 'revolutionary war', for which Lenin's opponents in the Party clamoured. Those Bolsheviks who suspected that the military position had been painted in colours more sombre than the facts would justify were slow to see the consequences which would have followed from the 'provocation to the bourgeoisie'; to proclaim a defensive war would have supplied that very 'provocation'.

In the Far East, Japanese troops stood ready for the signal to move into Russia's Maritime Provinces. Already in Siberia White Cossacks had struck at the scattered Bolshevik groups, with the aim of detaching Siberia from European Russia. German troops moved deeper into the Ukraine, where anti-Bolshevik Cossacks harried the flimsy Red units. The latter, caught between the field-grey hammer and the White anvil, broke into scattered and disorganised bands without commanders and without aims save escape. At this juncture Voroshilov decided upon the bold plan of drawing his motley group of fighters away from Lugansk and across the steppes of the Don to the Volga and Tsaritsyn. Overnight, amid scenes of nightmare confusion, Voroshilov became the commanding general of the Vth Ukrainian Army, such as it was.

As one shaky and improvised Red force went to pieces in the Ukraine, while hastily formed and untried Red Army units formed up in Petrograd and at a few points on the Western Front, Trotsky exchanged his post as Commissar for Foreign Affairs for that of Commissar for War. The struggle for the creation of a real army had begun, but the effects of military anarchism still made themselves manifest in the innumerable committees, the elective commanders, the total inadequacy of the volunteer system and the chaotic decentralisation. For many, such a state of affairs represented not military inefficiency but privileges for which they had fought hard and which they intended to retain. They would fight for them against Trotsky's regimentation, but the expansion of the Civil War and the looming shadow of intervention by Russia's former allies made it imperative that definite steps

be taken to establish a centralised military machine, that some method be found to unify Red strategy and that a programme to find officers for the Red Army be devised and implemented.

Above all, the new Red Army had to be moulded in absolute subservience to the interests of the Party, so that even by its very composition it should be made to serve the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The interests of military efficiency enjoyed an inferior place against this absolute requirement. From the first obscure weeks of its existence, the Workers and Peasants Red Army was primarily a political instrument, destined to serve a specific political cause. Should the army's desire so to serve falter in any way, then it would be pressed into following this path. The Soviet state established as its aim first political reliability and only in second place came the actual efficiency of the military machine, for the former was absolute and the latter only relative. For one of the principal elements of the Red Army, the new officers of the 'command staff' (since the name 'officer' was eschewed), this fundamental bias, dictated by the circumstances of the Bolshevik political requirement, was to have sweeping and ultimately devastating effects.

PART ONE

THE REVOLUTIONARY MILITARY
COMMAND, 1918-1920

The most important task in the business of creating the army consists of the training of a new command staff, completely imbued with the ideas of the workers' and peasants' revolution.

Point 10 of the 5th Congress of Soviets (July 1918) resolution on the Red Army.

Partisanism, its vestiges, remnants and survivals, have been the cause of immeasurably greater misfortune, disintegration, defeats, disasters and losses in men and military equipment in our army and the Ukrainian army than all the betrayals of the military experts.

V. I. Lenin, *All out for the fight against Denikin* (1919).

For the good of the work, I need military powers . . . I shall myself, without any formalities, dismiss army commanders and commissars who are ruining the work . . . and, of course, not having a paper from Trotsky is not going to deter me.

J. V. Stalin, letter to V. I. Lenin, 10th July, 1918.

The psychological change-over from the destruction of the old army to the creation of a new one was achieved only at the price of continued friction and conflict.

L. Trotsky (*KVR*, Vol. 1, p. 15).



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CHAPTER TWO

The Creation of the Soviet Military Machine

Although the fundamental importance to the Bolshevik leadership of preserving the existence of their dictatorship had precluded the possibility of setting up and organising a national army to fight a defensive war, the same prior claim of self-preservation demanded that the Revolution should be able to defend itself. Within the ranks of the Party leadership itself a bitter struggle raged over the ratification of the peace treaty with the Central Powers.¹ Taking one road of desperation, tentative approaches were made to the *Entente* on the question of their attitude if the Germans resumed hostilities in Russia.

The Red Army had by this time come into nominal existence, while the bulk of what military effort there was followed the strictly decentralised course which Krylenko's directives both suggested and approved. Local soviets conceived grandiose plans for organising their own armed units, formidable paper armies, or else they relapsed into muddle or dilatoriness.² Such Red units as did exist, composed usually of enlarged Red Guard detachments sometimes stiffened with sailors, showed alarming weaknesses. In the Ukraine, Petrov's Bolshevik force numbered little more than 1,000 men. In Petrograd, nine battalions of the 1st Army Corps, with a strength of 12,000 men, made up the city garrison. No Red Army units had been organised in Siberia or deep in rural Russia. Where detachments of newly enlisted men were formed, they frequently inflicted substantial damage on the discipline of the few regular units in being, since all the lawlessness of elective command failed to settle.

The search for trained men led into the prisoner-of-war camps. In January 1918 a Prisoner of War Congress held in Samara petitioned that it might be allowed to form Red Army units. From this point forth the Soviet command did not neglect the possibilities for winning recruits to their army from this man-power pool.³ The result was the formation of the 'International Battalions' of the Red Army, as well as the Chinese Battalion, which drew its recruits from the labour reserve of Chinese in the rear areas. San Fu-Yan's Red detachment formally entered the Red Army in May 1918.⁴

The volunteer basis of the new army produced only an anarchic and badly organised force, drastically short of officers, a body enjoying a holiday from discipline. Plundering and marauding formed a conspicuous part of the activities of these ill-clad, ill-equipped and mutinously-disposed men.⁵ The new units not infrequently merged quite haphazardly with the remnants of the old army which were still in existence. Differing notions of how these contingents should be organised produced an odd assortment of establishments. Although Krylenko's directive advised that 150 men should form the basic unit, the Moscow district organisations followed a scheme designed to give them regiments consisting of 3 battalions (with a total strength of 1,200 men). In Baku the choice fell upon the basic unit of 13 men, four such 'thirteens' making up a section with a strength of 53.⁶ Many of these units went to man the holding 'screens' (*Zavesy*), the improvised or shakily organised armed detachments used to contain the Germans. The theory was that more substantial forces could be organised behind these provisional defences.

It was in connection with defence against the Germans that the first significant Bolshevik command centre was set up to deal with operational questions. This body was the Supreme Military Soviet, which was set up on 4th March, 1918, in Petrograd by *Sovnarkom* (Soviet of People's Commissars). General Bonch-Bruevich was put in command, with P. P. Prosh'yan* and K. I. Shutko as his commissars.⁷ The group was given a much more extensive frame-work at the end of the month, when the staff was made up of the Commissar for War, the Commissar for the Navy, a member of the Collegiate of the Commissariat for Military Affairs, two 'military specialists' and a 'naval specialist'.⁸ The term 'specialist', whether military or naval, has a major significance for the early history of the Soviet command at all levels, which the euphemism was designed to hide. The specialists were ex-Imperial officers, who saw no compromise to their martial or political honour in assisting in the defence of their country. Admiral Al'tfater had seen his activity in this light, and there was some justification for it. The 'screens' did provide a way whereby the ex-officers were introduced to Soviet military service, incongruous though it may have seemed, and defence against the Germans secured the services of a number of senior commanders for the regime.

The principal military adviser to the Bolsheviks at this time was Krylenko's Chief of Staff, the ex-Imperial General M. D. Bonch-Bruevich. In the Bureau of the Revolutionary Committee for the Defence of Petrograd, this

* On 18th March, at Ya. M. Sverdlov's suggestion, Left S R P. P. Prosh'yan was excluded from membership and replaced by Podvoiskii. On 10th April, however, Prosh'yan was re-appointed (announced in *Pravda*, No. 76, 16th April). Trotsky had also attempted to have this body re-named the Supreme Soviet for National Defence, but this suggestion was rejected, the date of the decision being given as 19th March, 1918.

ex-Imperial General worked with Sverdlov, M. M. Lashevich (himself an ex-Imperial NCO), Ya. M. Fishman, M. Levin, M. A. Spiridonova and M. S. Uritskii. These in turn collaborated with the Party's military experts, ex-Ensign Krylenko, Podvoiskii, K. A. Mekhonoshin, K. E. Yeremeyev (commander of the Petrograd Military District) and ex-Ensign V. M. Smirnov.⁹ Two operational centres, Moscow and Petrograd, acted as the focal points for the 'western' and 'northern' screens, and within these large zones were smaller areas or districts so constituted for ease of administration.

Manning the 'screens' frequently meant nothing more than pushing a rifle into the hands of a Red Guard coming from his factory or work-place, and sending him out with little or no formal training. Of much greater importance was the pressing need to obtain a command and administrative staff for these provisional units. That problem was to be the cause of a protracted struggle, but at least by 10th February, 1918, ten training courses for officers had started to function.¹⁰ In their own way, these first Red officer schools were quite distinctive, but their real importance emerges at a slightly later stage of the problem of officering the Red Army. Between two extremes of the completely haphazard and the attempt at some element of planning, the volunteer army did enjoy one brief moment of success. When the German troops began their advance on Petrograd on 22nd February, recruitment figures leaped up in the capital. The workers hurried to man the improvised units and a hasty mobilisation in Moscow produced an enthusiastic response.

The crisis of arms went side by side with a deepening rift in the Party itself. The 'Left Communists' had emerged during the furious debates on the peace question as the protagonists of the 'revolutionary war', which Lenin so feared as a political peril to the survival of the Bolshevik regime. Bukharin spoke out for a war waged with mobile partisan detachments (which was exactly how the Ukrainian peasants were fighting off the Germans). The guardians of the Socialist conscience hated and feared the idea of a regular military establishment, for this smacked too much of the military instrument of a state-system which they had so recently helped to destroy. At the 7th Party Congress, which met on 6th March, Lenin used the argument that newly-signed peace with the Central Powers gave the Bolsheviks a breathing-space, during which time a sense of discipline might be restored and the masses given some military training. What had now become the 'military question' took on an artificially composed aspect, as Lenin sought at all costs to deflect further conflict, and put the establishment of a regular military system in the category of a temporary measure only. This concession was to recoil upon the Red Army and its command somewhat later. Meanwhile, on 9th March, *Sovnarkom* decreed that Yu.

Danilov, V. Al'tfater and A. Aledogskii — 'experienced and knowledgeable military specialists' — should prepare not later than 15th March plans for the organisation of a military centre and army and for the creation of 'a powerful armed force on the principles of a socialist militia' and the general arming of workers and peasants.¹¹

None could place great faith in the durability of the Peace of Brest-Litovsk. Bolshevik Russia assumed the cramped and cordoned size of well-nigh the original state of Muscovy. The Bolshevik government removed the capital once more to Moscow, where Trotsky, in his new capacity of People's Commissar for War, set about his tasks. Trotsky's appointment marks a new and drastic approach to the problem of organising the Red Army and turning it into a fighting machine. From his efforts developed the centralised military and political machinery which rammed the Red forces through to victory in the Civil War, and which provided the Red Army with certain basic institutions and attributes.¹² It was an achievement which provoked many vehement protests at the manner of its execution and made many intractable enemies for Trotsky.

* * * *

The new War Commissar had never been the recipient of a formal military education. His professionalism was that of the revolutionary rather than the dedicated or specialist military man. Nevertheless, as he admits himself, he found an absorbing interest in military matters, in the mystique which held men together in the company of arms and in the detail of running an army.¹³ It would be unwise to suggest that the absence of a formal military education necessarily implied a totally untutored approach to military matters,¹⁴ or one unacquainted with ways of handling men. Out of the accident of personality Trotsky carried within himself many of the attributes for success in his new assignment. Although arrogant and inclined to over-dramatisation, he displayed a remarkable distaste for the impractical and the unreal, combined with a lashing energy and a ruthlessness which bordered on the fanatic.

He took power when volunteerism had failed at every turn. In Nizhni Novgorod only 174 men signed up. Smolensk mustered 2,000, but in Voronezh recruits found themselves without an officer to command them. Wild confusion prevailed in what purported to be the military administration. Discipline in the field had vanished, and those who tried to restore it often took their lives in their hands. Local Soviets hoarded for their own particular use every scrap of military equipment they could find. And all over Russia the Bolsheviks scabbled for men.

In the two months of April and May 1918 a stream of decrees set in motion

the first machinery which was to transform the Red Army into a substantial, cohesive and regular military force. Endangered by weakness, when the Soviet republic lay exposed to its enemies at the end of March 1918, Trotsky played with the idea of seeking Allied military help to re-organise the Russian armed forces.¹⁵ Aware that the peace would not last, it was therefore reasonable to suggest that British and French instructors should lend their assistance in re-forming the forces which would contain the Germans. In the Far East, the Japanese were ready to advance into the Russian lands at the first opportunity. 'Intervention by invitation', however, passed away as a hope but briefly entertained, and with it went all idea of Allied instructors and technical assistance being used to re-build the army.

The great storm of the Civil War, which had already partly broken over Russia, was finally unleashed, not by the immediate machinations of the 'Imperialists', but by Trotsky's own precipitate action in dealing with a body of men which the war had cast into east-central Russia. Here the Czechoslovak Legion, former prisoners of war and some 50,000 strong, struggled with the amazing scheme to make its way home via Siberia and Vladivostok. In the spring of 1918, thanks to its discipline and its fighting spirit, the Legion represented the most formidable fighting force in the whole of Russia. By May 1918 as a consequence of involved agreements with many parties, Czech troops were strung out at various points along the Trans-Siberian Railway. On 25th May Trotsky directed that these Czech troops should be disarmed. At this signal breach of faith the Legion faced no alternative but to submit, or to fight its way out of the situation, declaring simultaneously its enmity towards the Soviet regime.¹⁶ Round this tightly-knit body of sorely-trying men, who for the moment retained the full exercise of military efficiency, the Civil War blazed up as the anti-Bolshevik White forces in Siberia gathered at this juncture to seize their chance also.

Throughout this critical period the first effects of Trotsky's re-organisation made their appearance, bringing a new and coherent policy for the entire military administration, man-power, the supply of officers and the enlistment of NCO's. From the beginning Trotsky had persuaded himself that nothing could be really accomplished without calling in the professional military men; the decision of 9th March had marked a deliberate step in this fateful direction. He further disassociated himself from the ruinous and extremist propaganda which had worked such havoc in the ranks of the Imperial Russian Army. Nor was Trotsky prepared to tolerate the anarchy which existed in the lower levels of the military-administrative system.¹⁷ The early decisions of March 1918 marked out the vital processes of re-creating the Red Army, even after such a short period of life, and must have been made with Trotsky's full cognisance, if not at his insistence.

To remedy the administrative chaos the decree of 8th April, 1918, set up standardised Military Commissariats, organised at the various administrative levels throughout the territory under Soviet control. Commissariats were to follow the distribution of *Okrug* (region, corresponding to the Military District), *Guberniya* (province), *Uyezd* (district), *Volost* (small rural township) and urban commissariats. According to the Instruction of 8th April, they were to be manned by two military commissars and a 'military specialist'. The commissariats were linked in a chain of command corresponding to their distribution and connected with the local Soviets at their respective levels. The local authorities were invested with the right to promote the candidature of one of the posts for military commissar and for the post of military director in the existing commissariat.¹⁸ The speed with which these bodies were organised varied greatly, with more rapid progress being made at the upper levels than in the depths of the country. The standard of efficiency also was far from uniform, and the severe criticism which was levelled at the Petrograd Military Commissariat suggests that if a hopelessly disorganised state of affairs could exist in a major centre, then deep in the country literally anything could choose to happen — or not to happen. These commissariats at the lowest level were organised without fixed establishment and very much in the light of local conditions.

As for the organisation of military units, at the end of April the principle of elective command went on to the rubbish heap, although in practice a number of units retained it until the end of 1918. Command appointments henceforth rested with the appropriate military bodies. What is more remarkable, however, is that the elective principle crept back into the Red Army through the strangest and most unlikely crevice of all, provoking a new crisis in 1919. To one further April decree Trotsky himself attached the greatest importance, namely the measure which introduced compulsory training for the 'toiling masses'. On 22nd April, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee adopted at Trotsky's persuasion a resolution which prescribed military instruction for school-children, 'preparatory or pre-military service training' for youths of 16-18 years of age, and compulsory training for all males between 18 and 40 years.¹⁹ Not less than twelve hours of instruction, spread over eight weeks, were to be given. In this way trained reserves could be prepared on a very large scale.

The man-power situation demanded in its turn a reversal of the existing policy. Trotsky vehemently defended the 'class composition' of the Red Army, under which arms were placed only in the hands of true proletarian elements, workers and poor peasants (that is, those employing no hired labour). This was all very orthodox, a product of necessity as well as a means to coercion. But the failure of the volunteer experiment meant

introducing organised mobilisation.²⁰ The first phase of this remained, however, only a partial and selective mobilisation. On 29th May, the Central Executive Committee decreed the formal transition from a volunteer army to one of mobilisation among 'workers and poor peasants', a step dictated by the pressing need to fight 'internal and external counter-revolution' and famine, the latter dubbed 'the struggle for bread'.²¹ Trotsky had his own mobilisation plan for the 'toiling masses' introduced on 26th June. While adhering very firmly to the notion of a distinctly proletarian composition for the Red Army, he did not mean that the regime would permit 'the bourgeoisie' to escape from some form of service. Corresponding 'bourgeois' age-groups were liable for mobilisation for labour service, an astute if vicious propaganda move, which produced more personal misery and dislocation than it brought efficient labour-battalions into existence.

On 12th June *Sovnarkom* decreed the mobilisation of the workers and poor peasants in the Pri-Volga, Urals and Siberian Military Districts (those immediately threatened by armed anti-Bolsheviks).²² Separate decisions of 17th and 19th June, 1918, mobilised the Moscow and Petrograd workers, a partial call-up which paved the way for the full mobilisation of the 1893-7 age-classes. Soviet sources tend to considerable exaggeration in estimating the strength of the Red Army in the summer of 1918. Movchin, in the official history of the Civil War, admits that the first drive for volunteers produced only a limited response; by 10th May, 1918, the Red Army numbered 306,000 men drawn mostly from the urban proletariat.²³ Recently Shatagin has set these figures at 263,780 on 20th May and 362,435 by 1st July — not including Red Guards and partisans.²⁴

Superficially impressive, these statistics do not accord with the situation at large, for *trained* men counted for the real strength of the armed forces. The acute shortage of these would account for the acquisitive eyes cast upon the Czech Legion, and the high priority for prisoner-of-war recruitment. Using this yard-stick, the Soviet regime in the early summer of 1918 did not command more than 50,000 trained men (excluding parts of the old army as yet still held in the 'screens'). This was the hard core of the Red Army upon which the subsequent expansions were made. The peasants were not interested in fighting; only the youth, unacquainted with war, provided willing recruits.

Providing the men did not solve the problem of officers. Trotsky's officer-policy set him upon a course destined to bring him into violent collision with a large part of the Party rank and file, as well as provoking clashes higher up the scale. The Commissar for War resolved to bring back the ex-Imperial officers — in the guise of 'military specialists' — to man the command positions in the Red Army.²⁵ The very name 'officer' evoked

feelings of hostility and resistance on the part of the soldiers, Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik alike. The disorders of 1917 had eroded the sense of discipline, and once authority had fallen to pieces it was mocked, degraded and frittered away by the anarchistic dealings in 'elective command'. Between the Bolsheviks and the ex-officers not a shred of mutual respect remained, for the former identified the Tsarist officers with the old regime and the latter regarded the Bolsheviks as hired enemy agents and the instigators of the destruction of the old army.

The genealogy of the Soviet officer-corps cannot be traced without reference to the Imperial Russian officer-corps. The latter did not by any means present a united front. Lacking social homogeneity, in its structure the officer-corps had divided itself into the intellectual officers, the personnel of the General Staff and the field officers of diverse and often humble social background. The war-time officers represented an even greater social diversity, and the sense of division was accentuated by the discriminations practised against them as 'hostilities only' officers by the career men. The break widened in 1917 when the new officers played politics or intervened in the political movements in the Army. Already a few ex-Imperial officers had worked with the Bolsheviks in running the 'screens', and while this may have prepared them for later co-operation during the Civil War, this preliminary phase was on a very small numerical scale.

In addition Trotsky formulated a variation on his 'military specialist' policy which included the ex-NCOs of the Imperial Army; in these men he espied the future personnel of the Soviet officer-corps as such.²⁶ The average NCOs conformed more closely to the required class qualification of the Red Army, since they were often of very humble origin and yet skilled in the military arts and practised in command. Budenny, the future Soviet cavalry commander, had been an NCO in the Imperial Army, learning his trade during the Russo-Japanese War. The special inducement of being promoted into junior command positions openly appealed to these men, and Trotsky, unabashed, held this out to them.

The recognition of the seriousness of the command problem had occurred at an earlier stage, when it had been critical even under the volunteer system. For the supply and training of 'Red commanders' an Instruction of 10th February, 1918, laid down the first principles, prescribing four months of 'preparatory training' (three months for specialists). The candidates undertook to remain in the army for not less than one year upon completion of their course. The Red 'candidate-commander' should be able to read and write fluently, have a knowledge of arithmetic which covered addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The curriculum for 'preparatory training' included the Russian language, arithmetic, geometry, history and

hygiene. The specialist groups studied tactics, fortification, artillery, military topography and administration, as well as drill. A commissar nominated by the Main Directorate of Military Education supervised the administrative and political side of the pupils' life.²⁷

Over the burning question of the 'military specialists', Trotsky could command very precise arguments. The April plan for the Red Army envisaged 30 divisions, a figure expanded in May to 88; 28 first-line divisions would be raised first, followed by two groups of 30 of the second line. It was calculated that each infantry division would need 600 officers as command staff (88 divisions absorbing 52,800 officers).²⁸ Even the preliminary first-line divisions would require a minimum of 16,800 officers and the likelihood was that 18,000 would be needed. In the summer of 1918, the All-Russian Supreme Staff worked out the estimated requirement of the Red Army in officers as 55,000.²⁹ In spite of the statistics (which were worked out by ex-Imperial officers), Trotsky's opponents also mustered arguments of by no means negligible weight.³⁰ Apart from being *a priori* class enemies of a most dangerous brand, already some of the ex-Imperial officers had dealt out treason and conspiracy to the Soviet regime. An ex-Imperial lieutenant had incited the Destroyer Division of the Baltic Fleet to mutiny. On the Eastern Front, where the very existence of the regime was at stake, senior ex-officers holding responsible positions had betrayed these trusts. Even Trotsky felt the tremors of the lack of support, and threatened the ex-officers with reprisals against their families if they betrayed the strange confidence which was thrust upon them.³¹

Notwithstanding the grave risks and the excited outcry, after bringing the decision before *Sovnarkom* on 29th July, 1918, Trotsky began his general mobilisation of ex-officers with Order No. 228. By the end of November 1918, 22,315 such men had entered the Red Army. With similar orders 128,168 ex-NCOs were mobilised, as well as 2,409 of the former military-administrative personnel, whose offices had been commandeered in 1917.³² Now it was the turn of their very persons. With doctors, veterinary surgeons and auxiliary medical personnel, the first great mobilisation of ex-Imperial command and administrative staff brought — including the NCOs — 165,113 men to the Red colours.³³ For the period of the Civil War, from 12th June, 1918, to 15th August, 1920, no fewer than 48,409 ex-officers were taken into the Red Army, with 10,339 of the military-administrative staff and 214,717 ex-NCOs.³⁴

By stark comparison, in 1918 the command courses for 'Red commanders' passed out 1,753 qualified candidates (43·3 per cent infantry). For the period 1918–20 a grand total of 39,914 'Red commanders' proceeded to the Red Army. Their total did not meet even the number of ex-officers,³⁵ leaving

aside any qualitative comparisons. By December 1920 the command staff of the Red Army numbered 130,932, to which must be added 315,797 of the military-administrative staff. The total strength gained by conscripting the 'specialists' (including doctors) amounted to 314,180 — a mighty percentage of the 446,729 command and administrative staff of the Red Army at the close of the Civil War.³⁶

The quantitative argument alone justified Trotsky's policy. Yet the very fact of being right did not diminish the vigorous opposition to Trotsky for bringing back 'the old men'. Lenin showed visible surprise on being told by Trotsky that more than 30,000 ex-officers now served with the Red Army.³⁷ This was Trotsky's reply to his opponents' attempt to make political capital out of the undeniable but thinly-spread cases of treason and conspiracy.³⁸

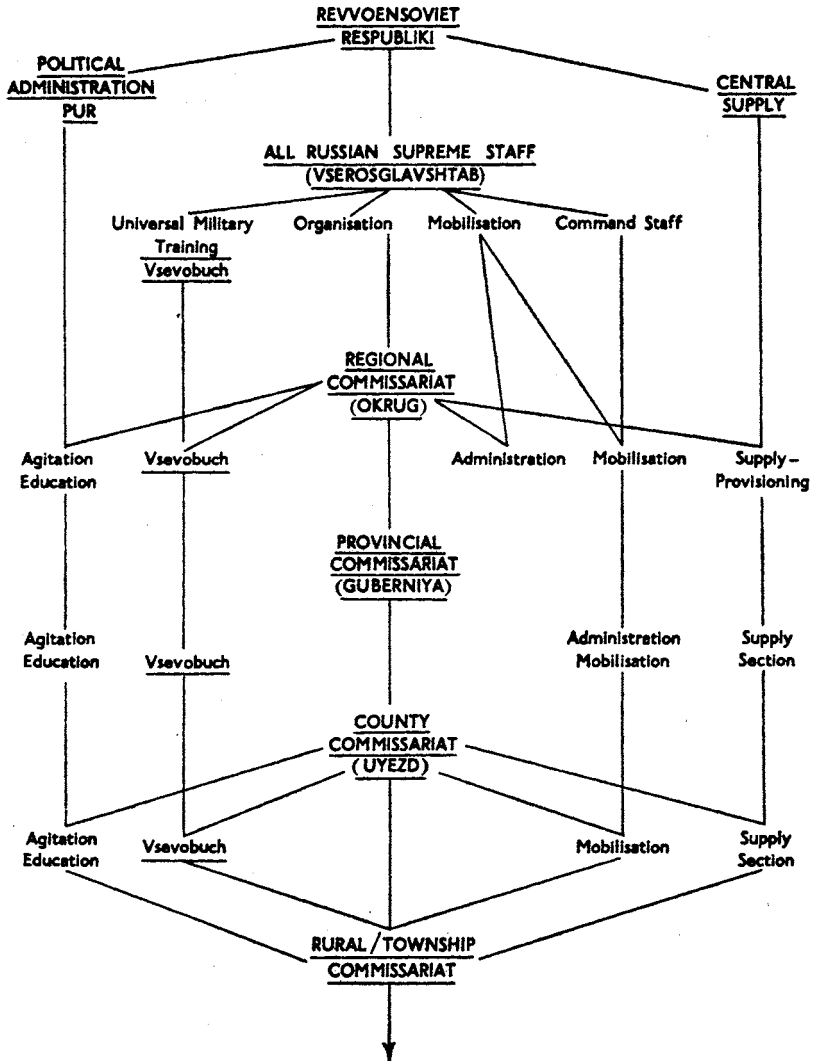
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The setting up of machinery to unify the strategic direction of the Civil War roused a no less fervid resistance. The Soviet defence effort had been originally vested in a variety of bodies — the All-Russian Collegiate for the Formation of the Red Army, the Main Directorate of the General Staff, the Supreme Military Soviet and the Commissariat for Military Education. In May a new body, the All-Russian Supreme Staff, was organised, with a chief of staff and two commissars at its head; its role was primarily one of planning and co-ordination, a task which increased as the Civil War fronts emerged and expanded. Already by 4th May, 1918, the territory under Soviet control was divided into Military Districts which had been suggested in the first place by the general divisions of areas for the 'screens'. The new districts consisted of the Northern Commune (White Sea)* Yaroslavl, Moscow, Orlov, Pri-Volga and the Urals.³⁹

Uniting the various commissariats into a single People's Commissariat for Military Affairs was the logical outcome of the very considerable extension of the work imposed upon the departments by the stress of widening war. Decreed on 19th August, 1918, the new commissariat had sections for recruiting, administration, training, arms, and the supervision of the training of reserves.⁴⁰ The most far-reaching innovation, however,

* On 8th April, 1918, A. A. Samoilo was appointed chief of staff to the White Sea Military District, arriving at Archangel towards the end of May. At the end of June, Samoilo became commander of land and naval forces, with R. Kulikov as his commissar, and Rear-Admiral Ya. E. Viktorist as flotilla commander. M. S. Kedrov had earlier been despatched at the head of a forty-man commission (with 33 Latvian riflemen) to supervise the affairs of the Archangel district. Allied fears for Murmansk led to the landing, early in March, of a small party of Royal Marines; a joint Anglo-American expedition later took part in what George F. Kennan has called 'one of the most futile and luckless of military undertakings'. Any idea of linking up the Siberian with the northern anti-Bolshevik front was doomed to failure. See George F. Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*, Ch. II, Ch. XI and Ch. XVI. M. S. Kedrov wrote up his side in *Bez bol'shevistskovo rukovodstva* (Iz istorii interventsii na Severe), Leningrad 1930.

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came with the formation of a central military executive, the *Revvoensoviet Respubliki* (Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic)* which started upon its momentous career on 6th September, 1918, following on the announcement of the Soviet Republic as 'an armed camp'. This signalled preparation for a long war.

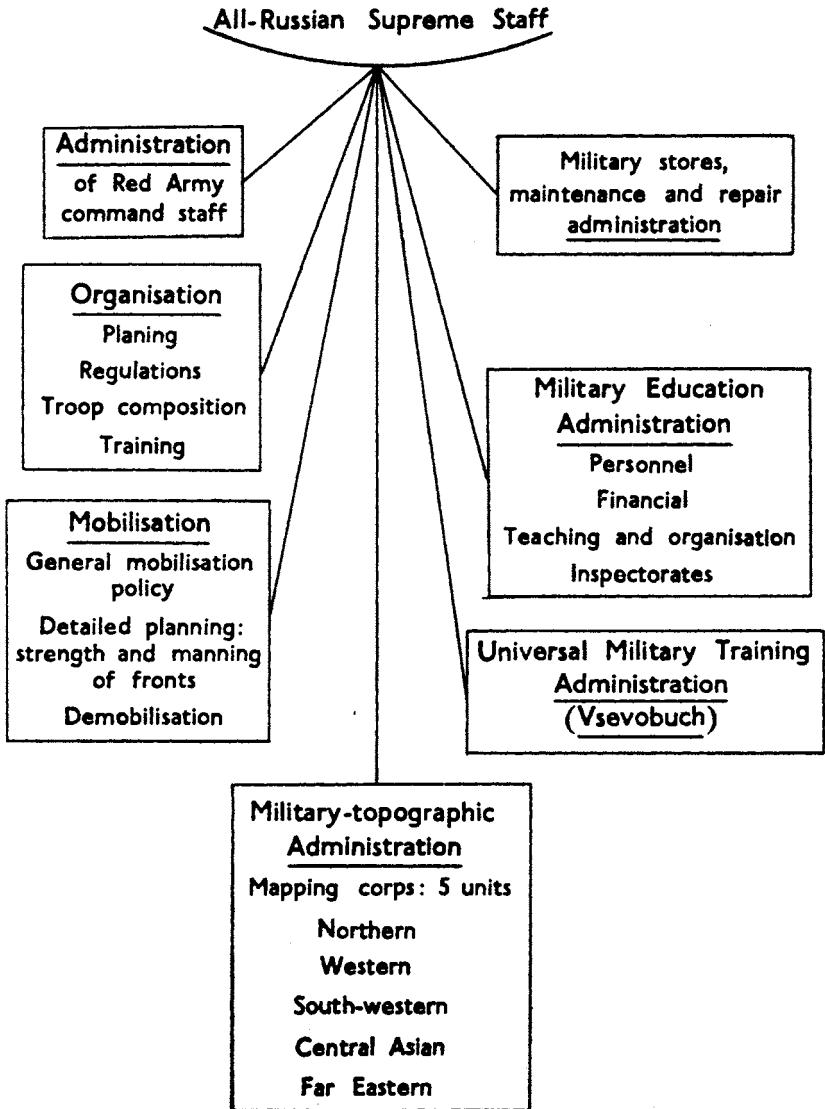
The creation of the new executive signalled the end of the Supreme Military Soviet. Control over the new body was exercised by the Central Committee of the Party, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (*VTsIK*) and *Sovnarkom*. At the same time the office of Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet armed forces was created, and was incorporated into the staff of the *Revvoensoviet*. The commander-in-chief exercised control over the land and naval forces of the Soviet republic, with competence for all 'strategic-operational questions' in respect of directives and the conduct of armies in the field. He had the right to nominate or oppose the nomination of command staff, administrative staff or other posts within the republic connected with the operation of armies. He was also to put forward candidates for the posts of army front commander and chiefs of staff of the fronts. All his orders must be signed by one member of the *Revvoensoviet* or else they were not valid.⁴¹

Trotsky assumed the post of president of the new executive, and an ex-Imperial colonel, Ioakhim Ioakhimovich Vatsetis, a native of Courland, became the first Bolshevik commander-in-chief under the revised system. Vatsetis had joined the Red troops in January 1918 and had taken part in the sporadic military actions at that time. In July he commanded the troops who shot down the rising engineered by the Left SRs in Moscow, after which triumph he was named commander of the Eastern Front. Here, raising the Vth Red army (consisting of three divisions) from the remnants of the old Siberian Army, Vatsetis fought against the Czech Legion. On 4th September, 1918, the good colonel, devoid of any outstanding ability, was nominated to his high post.⁴²

The operational work was vested in a Field Staff, which was officially brought into existence on 1st November, 1918; the core of this staff was the 'Bureau of Three' composed of Trotsky, the trusted commissar Aralov and the Commander-in-Chief. On the Field Staff B. M. Shaposhnikov and P. P. Lebedev played a major role in co-ordinating Soviet strategy, a function which was supplemented by the extensive activity of the All-Russian Supreme Staff — also under the firm hand of the senior ex-Imperial officer General A. A. Svechin. The Supreme Staff concerned itself with

* Translated as the Revolutionary Military Council or the Revolutionary War Council. The abbreviated form *Revvoensoviet* has been here retained, in the same way that there has been no substitution of 'council' for 'soviet'.

ORGANISATION OF THE ALL-RUSSIAN SUPREME STAFF
(VSEROSGLAVSHTAB)



general defence matters, recruiting, the manning of the fronts and military training (including *Vsevobuch*). To complete the chain of command the same pattern of the military executive was transferred downwards to front and army level. Fronts and armies each possessed the *Revvoensoviet*, with the basic membership of three, commander and two commissars. The entire command and administrative apparatus of a front consisted, therefore, of the front *Revvoensoviet*, a staff with operational, administrative and signal sections, a Political Department, Inspectorates of cavalry, infantry and artillery as well as military engineers, a supply administration, a military control section and a Revolutionary Tribunal (punitive). At army level, with its *Revvoensoviet*, there existed the Staff, the Political Department, engineering and artillery inspectorates, an army supply administration and the same military control and Revolutionary Tribunal organs.⁴³ As a subsidiary of the main military executives were the Revolutionary Committees (*Revkom*), whose function was defined by the Instruction of 24th October, 1917; these bodies would undertake local defence measures, organise local militias and be employed to carry out rudimentary security tasks in areas recaptured by the Red Army.⁴⁴

Supply and mobilisation were given over to other bodies, thus withdrawing certain functions from Trotsky's considerable autonomy. On 30th November, 1918, a body termed the Soviet of Workers and Peasants Defence was brought into existence, with Lenin as president and Trotsky, Nevskii, Stalin, Krassin and Brukhanov as the other five members. Acting as a kind of war-cabinet and a Ministry of Supply and Labour rolled into one, this body acted as a general co-ordinator of defence mobilisation policies.⁴⁵ For the supervision of the vital work of munitions production Krassin had been seconded to a special organisation, the Extraordinary Commission for Red Army Supply, which had been set up on 10th November. The supply question remained acute, due to the disastrous fall in production and the difficulty of setting up effective machinery; not until 1924-5 was this confusion in the Red Army command system more precisely regulated. In July 1919 a new office, that of Extraordinary Plenipotentiary of the Red Army Supply Council, was brought into being and entrusted to Rykov, whose task it was to carry out the requisitions which were nothing short of an organised plunder of the available resources of the country.

Trotsky's innovations in organisation went hand in hand with an intense policy to reduce some of the worst aspects of a military anarchism which was far from vanquished. One year of counter-propaganda against being 'partisan-minded' — *partizanshchina* — failed to still the opposition to these new-fangled Moscow innovations.⁴⁶ Trotsky adopted the slogan of 'Exhortation, organisation and reprisals' to bring a sense of cohesion and reality

into the Red Army. More often than not reprisals played the greater and more effective role, with Trotsky ostentatiously placing 'the death-penalty in the arsenal',⁴⁷ arguing that an army cannot be built without reprisals. In a printed order he promised the retribution of shooting for the commissar and the commander of any unit which retreated without orders.⁴⁸ Thus, when the 4th Lettish Regiment refused to go into action — this was mutiny in a trusted Red regiment — two members of the regimental Party collective went before the Revolutionary Tribunal. In a notorious case Trotsky personally intervened when a unit of Petrograd workers seized a steamer and ordered it to take them to Nizhni-Novgorod; an improvised gun-boat intercepted the deserters, who offered no resistance.⁴⁹ Trotsky instituted a field tribunal which passed sentence of death upon the commander, the commissar and every tenth man.⁵⁰

None of this, or indeed the whole policy, passed without violent criticism, and part of the history of the formative stage of the Soviet military machine is the appearance of a sustained and altogether highly vocal opposition to Trotsky. There was undoubtedly an opposition to the prevailing policy based on first principles, to which was added the dissensions of men seeking to attack Trotsky himself. The left-wing Utopian Communists had already demanded a military organisation more suited to the requirements laid down by Socialist principles. During 1918 Trotsky had defined their position and subsequent defiance as having centred upon a defence of elective command, hatred of the 'military specialists' and distaste for the policy of centralisation.⁵¹ The dispute also reached into the matters of military theory. 'Positional warfare' was conducted by regular orthodox armies, such as were possessed by capitalist states; the Revolution needed to fight its war with small, mobile independent detachments combining various arms. So ran one argument. Trotsky swept this aside as being merely '... the idealisation of our weakness'.⁵² He showed the greatest impatience with theoretical speculation when the actual task was to defeat the White armies in the field; he bluntly stated that if anyone cared to consider the business of teaching men how to wind on their puttees, keep their rifles clean and grease their boots as 'military doctrine', they were welcome to do so.⁵³

On the other hand, excessive opposition to the 'military specialists', manifested by handling them roughly, could seriously prejudice the operation of Trotsky's policy. Stalin lashed out repeatedly and insolently over the ex-officers. Running what amounted to a private war in Tsaritsyn in the company of Voroshilov, Stalin embodied the opposition at the front.

Sent originally upon a mission to organise food supplies for the centre, Stalin telegraphed to Lenin on 7th July, 1918, blaming the breakdown of rail communications upon '... our military "specialists" (*Cobblers!*)'.⁵⁴ The

Tsaritsyn group simply refused to comply with the new method introduced by Trotsky; on 5th October he managed to obtain the recall of Stalin,⁵⁵ at the same time threatening Voroshilov and Minin with court-martial unless they followed regular procedure over reconnaissance and battle reports. It is quite plain that Trotsky had formed a low opinion of Voroshilov's military ability, and on 14th December, 1918, he had him transferred to the Ukraine.

Nevertheless, although this was perhaps an extreme example, feeling against the ex-officers ran high. In his life of Chapayev, the brilliant partisan commander, Commissar Furmanov described Chapayev muttering under his breath about the old officers — 'Have a chair, please, General . . .' — for the man who had formerly kept him standing in the frost for twenty-four hours.⁵⁶ On the Northern Front Red regiments shot their new officers, with the result that capable Red privates or NCOs took over effective command and the ex-officers were withdrawn. Trotsky made few friends by suggesting that the complaints against the ex-officers frequently hid incompetence on the part of Communists themselves — 'frustrated Red "marshals"' — not even knowing their own jobs but propounding some witless theory which failed to work. Trotsky therefore turned over to his critics some regiments to organise as they saw fit; by their ultimately adopting the War Commissar's own methods, his point was vindicated. Yet, in the long run, this early discontent was to have a considerable effect upon the Soviet command.

* * * *

The purely operational command system was only one aspect of the structure which developed during the Civil War. Control of the widely differing and often deeply antagonistic elements was the vital issue. Even a brief survey of the whole scene would suggest the necessity for strict control; an ex-Imperial colonel and a dedicated revolutionary held command over a command staff, the overwhelming majority of which came from the derided and detested 'officer class'. The vitally important 'class composition' of the new army rested on the resilience and loyalty of a comparatively weak industrial proletariat, which, in turn, would finally lead the peasants, without whose man-power preponderance the main army could not be formed. Between the ex-officers and the ex-NCOs of the former Imperial Russian Army, now in Soviet service, there existed a certain inevitable professional rivalry over promotion, as the latter were ushered into junior command posts. Control was exercised indirectly by the selective recruitment and the avoidance of any kind of national army, that is, a Russian army. This is how Trotsky distinguished the Red Army and the Imperial Russian

Army — alike in many of their features, but set apart by the difference in their political aims. However, the agency of positive control, setting thereby the ground-work for a second great command chain, was provided by the Bolshevik Military Commissar.⁵⁷

The commissar, a term apparently produced by Menshevik Braunstein in March 1917, played a vital part in army politics under the Provisional Government.⁵⁸ The Bolsheviks freely availed themselves of this device of personalised control both during and after the seizure of power.⁵⁹ After November 1917 the functions of the commissar do not seem to have been made at all clear. Commissars there certainly were, taking part in the varied 'political activities' and the spate of army congresses. The first deliberate direction of the commissars came with the setting up of the Organisation-Agitation Bureau of the Collegiate for the Formation of the Red Army on 7th February, 1918.⁶⁰ The bulk of the work consisted of sending out agitators to help in the recruiting drive for the Red Army, for which a special course trained commissars in agitation techniques, taking 150 men at a time.⁶¹

The commissars acted as the supervisors of the 'military specialists', guarding against treasonable activity, but in this capacity they were assuming the status of agents of the government and not representatives of the Party. Nevertheless, in this supervisory capacity, they conformed even at this early date to Trotsky's subsequent picture of the 'military specialist' flanked to left and right by two commissars with revolvers in their hands. Clearly, then, supervision of a politically unreliable command staff must be connected with the first phase of the commissars' place in the Red Army. Counter-signature of orders introduced strict 'dual command', whereby the ex-officer took the responsibility for the military-operational work, and the commissar for its revolutionary probity, but without the warrant to interfere in operational matters.

On 3rd April, 1918, the All-Russian Bureau of Military Commissars was set up and began to function five days later. The Organisation-Agitation section of the Red Army Collegiate remained the same, but was attached to the new Bureau of Commissars (*Vsebuvoenkomb*). Soviet military historians did and still do dispute the origin of the military commissar as he emerged during the Civil War, and whether he owed his lineage to the early section of the Red Army Collegiate or to the Bureau of Commissars.⁶² The question is much complicated by the fact that on 2nd May, 1918, the presidium of the *VTsIK* brought out a decree authorising the creation of an All-Russian Agitational Bureau of the Red Army attached to the *VTsIK*;⁶³ this meant that commissars were to be centrally appointed and might now perhaps be regarded as more than government agents. As to

the person of the commissar, however, the resolution of the 5th Congress of Soviets referred to him only as an 'unimpeachable revolutionary' — not specifically a Party member. Yet when the commissar became the direct representative of the Party in the armed forces, this presumably demanded that he be a Party man. The actual practice contradicts this, for, of 500 commissars sent out from 1st July to 10th October, 1918, 300 were Communists, 93 Communist 'sympathisers', 35 Left SRs, 3 'Internationalists', 1 Anarchist, 1 SR-Maximalist and 68 belonged to no party whatsoever.⁶⁴

Political activity and its organisation seem to have hurried far ahead of any authorisation or regulation. Red Army men in the summer of 1918 were not in the habit of waiting for decrees, and the political temper, fanned by many months of congresses, meetings and agitation, remained hysterically high. In July 1918 Political Sections were in existence in armies and at the fronts, that is, several months before their actual authorisation. In mid-January 1919 Political Sections at divisional level were organised and it was these bodies which carried the brunt of the political work during the Civil War.

Once again it was a cardinal point of Trotsky's policy to knit up these diverse powers and functions into a more effective centralised organisation. The Republic *Revvoensoviet* had its own Political Department, but there was still a great deal of diffusion of office in the matter of the military commissar. In May 1919 the Main Political Administration (*PUR*) was set up after the 8th Party Congress, to direct the political work and the political personnel of the Soviet armed forces centrally. The distinctive feature about this organisation was that it did *not* come under the direct control of the Central Committee, although it was run by a member of the Central Committee. This very significant arrangement lasted until 1925, but during the Civil War period Trotsky had demanded and obtained the complete independence of the army political organs from control by the civilian Party machine.⁶⁵

With respect to the commissar, two questions had to be thrashed out — his status and his function. Reasons of military efficiency suggested that 'dual command' could not be regarded as a permanent arrangement. In the Red Army Disciplinary Code of January 1919 all reference to the military commissar was omitted, presumably from the conviction that he would not long remain as a feature of Red Army organisation once 'dual command' had been replaced by unity of command. Trotsky himself suggested this in his statements about the commissar, dwelling on the ideal arrangement whereby the commander would direct his attention increasingly towards an intelligent appraisal of the importance of political work and the commissar cease to be a supervisor of suspect loyalties and become a military

help-mate. This, however, obviously depended on vast developments in the command staff.

During the Civil War it would appear that the commissar came to be connected with the developing theory of *morale*, for his was the greatest test of responsibility in the final resort. Trotsky early discovered that by stiffening a weak or wavering unit with Party members, imbued with the spirit to fight and die, he could work wonders.⁶⁶ These calculated switches, plus the support derived from the commissar, saved many a perilous situation, but brought their own criticism; S. I. Gusev, writing to Stasova, the secretary of the Central Committee, commented acidly:

Trotsky sets the tone for the whole of this system. Frequent changes of the political workers and commanders, crowding the Southern Front *Revvoensoviet* with a great number of Party members and Trotsky's princely journeys along the front. . . . All this is a symptom of the system of organised panic.⁶⁷

No doubt the principle, which did away with the need to set up special shock-troops, could also be interpreted as excessive interference on the part of the centre.

Out of an apparently spontaneous generation of political will at the *lowest* levels of the Soviet armed forces there grew up one of the most intricate problems of regulation which continued to stare the Political Administration and the Communist Party in the face long after the Civil War had ceased. Among the various contestants for power in and over the political machinery in the Red Army, the Communist 'cell' (also known as the 'Party collective') was perhaps the most bizarre; the 'cell' was made up of a hard core of Communists in the regiment or military installation and had developed by mid-June 1917. It was at this time that the All-Russian Conference of Front and Rear Organisations of the RSDRP(b) laid down a form of rudimentary organisation for 'cells', which operated presumably under the aegis of the Military Organisations attached to the RSDRP(b). During the phase of construction of the Red Army on volunteer lines, many units lost their Party nuclei either through the effects of demobilisation or because very few were created to replace those in the process of disappearance or dissolution. On the other hand, the delegates of the Petrograd Conference of Soldier-Communists, which met in April 1918, devoted a great deal of attention to the question of this kind of organisation. They produced a solemn document — 'Instructions to the collectives of the RKP(b) in Red Army units, aviation units, ships and coastal commands' — which advised the immediate formation of such 'cells' and defining the function of these small but energetic bodies. They were to organise meetings in the units, guard 'revolutionary discipline', purge 'undesirable elements from the

detachment' and supervise the 'political, cultural and economic life of the detachment'.⁶⁸ This at once placed them in a position both competitive with and complementary to the military commissar, whose duties were slowly but surely evolving in a similar direction.

During the winter of 1918-19 these 'cells' seemed to have mushroomed at an enormous speed. Party mobilisations, whereby stiffening forces were sent to threatened sectors of the fronts, favoured their growth; over a period of three months Petrograd sent 2,000 Party members to the front at the end of 1918.⁶⁹ The weavers of Ivanovo-Voznesensk departed for the front as a Party cadre. By February 1919 more than 1,500 'cells' flourished in Red Army units, consisting on the average of 15-30 Party members and 40-50 sympathisers or candidate members, although on the Southern and Western Fronts the average fell slightly to 12-20 and 15-30 for the same type of adherents.⁷⁰ At this time, the same winter which had seen such phenomenal growth of 'cells', witnessed also their frequent interference in the operational and administrative life of the units to which they belonged. Not content with interference, there were cases of actual usurpation of command. Following the accepted styles of 'empire-building', these groups set about electing their members in a chain of organisation which ran up to divisional and even army level. Thus, running all the way up from detachments, through companies and regiments, to the division (or army level, in some cases), extended a rapidly-expanding, widely-ramified political organisation free from any centralised control whatsoever. In fact, it represented the very antithesis of central control.

The 'cells' exhibited other strange features. It was obvious that they complicated the functions of the military commissar. The co-existence of Party members with non-Party men in this group meant that non-Party elements participated in debates and discussions of Party affairs. The very core of the 'cell' was a small praesidium or Party committee, made up of 3-5 Communists, who not infrequently came to be the real power behind the throne of unit command. Something not unlike the pre-November 1917 conditions was beginning to creep into the Red Army afresh, threatening the disorders which had so visibly affected the Imperial Russian Army. *Partizanshchina*, which was being stamped out, re-appeared in the political sphere as 'army syndicalism'; this placed immense emphasis on the power and the integrity of the local political organs and energy in the Soviet armed forces.

This state of affairs had to be brought to an end. In January 1919 the Instruction on Party 'cells' in the Red Army severely circumscribed the powers of this kind of organisation, banning the 'cell' from any interference in operational matters and confining it to its original function, the care of

the unit's political spirit, but only in co-operation with the commissar. This step raised howls of protest, but the wide scope and intensity of the activity of the 'cells' (7,000 of them flourished by the end of the Civil War) raises the important question of whether the organisation from the top or the bottom played the decisive role in establishing the political work which was carried on in the Red Army. This is also a subject upon which Soviet military historians have found it hard to agree.⁷¹ Controlling the Party nucleus in military units provided the political administration with a very difficult task, for here lay the dilemma of wishing to effect central control of political activity in the Red Army without losing the very considerable advantages afforded by the presence of such a powerful reservoir of spirit and loyalty. Trotsky seems to have held firmly to his ideas of a strict military and political centralisation, the effective separation of the Army's political organs from the civilian Party apparatus, yet emphasising the role of the individual Communist and the Party nucleus in sustaining and hardening the will to fight in the many units where they existed. The advantage derived from moving these Communist squads to points where they were needed justified a central control of political as well as military matters; equally, groups grown too influential could be broken up and effectively dispersed.

The third chain of control and command concerned the security apparatus in the Red Army. This took the form of organising Special Sections (OO) of *Cheka* men and units to maintain army security. These agencies came under the special command of the *Cheka*, but the decree of 21st February, 1919, removed them from this authority and placed the apparatus of internal security under the Republic *Revvoensoviet*⁷²—a signal acquisition for the Red Army, which did not, however, remain permanent.

* * * *

A very pertinent if unmistakably anti-Trotsky document was produced on the operation of the military system at the beginning of 1919 when Stalin and Dzerzhinskii investigated, on behalf of the Central Committee, the catastrophe which had overtaken Soviet arms at Perm (Eastern Front) and especially the IIIrd Army. The report breathes militant detestation of the Republic *Revvoensoviet* and the organs associated with it. In the report to Lenin, the opening indictment — for it reads as nothing less — attacked the *Revvoensoviet* '... whose so-called instructions and orders disorganised the control of the front and the armies'.⁷³ The lack of co-ordination between the IInd and IIIrd armies resulted from the 'isolation of the Republic *Revvoensoviet* from the front' and the 'ill-considered instructions of the Commander-in-Chief'.

In the actual report on the defeat, the co-authors attacked the All-Russian

Supreme Staff for having neglected to form a *Red Army*, since they merely utilised the Tsarist procedure to assemble a 'popular army'.⁷⁴ Due to the negligence of the Bureau of Commissars 'whipper-snapper commissars' only were sent to the front — therefore, let the personnel of the bureau be replaced.⁷⁵ The ill-prepared directives from the centre demanded that it should be re-fashioned into a 'narrow group', consisting possibly of five persons: two experts and three supervisors of the supply administration, the General Staff and Bureau of Commissars.⁷⁶ The sting came in the tail — these men must be 'sufficiently experienced not to act arbitrarily and light-mindedly in the control of armies'. The reference to Trotsky was quite plain. This report, in addition to the ferment over the political organisation in the army, and the bitterness over the 'military specialists' formed the background to the intensive struggle which was waged over military policy at the 8th Party Congress, where Trotsky's innovations came under heavy fire.

The conflict over military policy, embodying as it did the most critical issues of the defence of the Revolution, brought about an upheaval in the leadership and then in the ranks of the Party. According to Trotsky, Lenin accorded him massive but conditional support.* This had helped to quieten one revolt over the 'military specialists', when Larin suggested that the ex-officers should be replaced by Communists. Lenin, on being assured by Trotsky that concentration camps and the acid tests of the Eastern Front guaranteed a rigorous selection, did not press the point. Similarly, nothing came of the proposal to replace Vatsetis as Commander-in-Chief by Lashevich, himself a former NCO of the Imperial Army. Beyond these much disputed details or aspects of the military policy, there were wider consequences which affected policies concerned with the regulation of the supposedly autonomous regions of the Soviet republic. Political and economic centralisation followed inevitably upon military centralisation. In April 1919 the control of the Baltic Fleet, based then on Riga, did not pass to the nominally autonomous Soviet Republic of Latvia, but was lodged with the Muscovite centre.⁷⁷ Likewise Ukrainian military units, nominally under the control of the Soviet Government of the Ukraine and the Ukrainian Communist Party, were not free to pursue military

* There is no doubt, however, of the tone of Lenin's July statement on the ex-officers. The Party was committed to opposing the '... ignorant and self-conceited belief that the working people are capable of overcoming capitalism and the bourgeois order ... without learning from bourgeois experts, ... without going through a long schooling of work side by side with them'. The known cases of treason would not themselves justify 'changing the fundamentals of our military policy'. In Lenin's phrase, 'hundreds and hundreds' of ex-officers are committing treason, but 'thousands and tens of thousands of military experts have been working for us systematically and for a long time, and without them we could not have formed the Red Army ...' (see *All out for the fight against Denikin!*).

policy dictated more by provincial interests, however extensive these might be. From this point of view, vital political interests were at stake in the struggle over the control of the military machine and the degree to which it might pursue its centralisation without inhibition.⁷⁸

The 8th Party Congress had not assembled when Kolchak's White troops broke open the Eastern Front, precipitating a grave situation. The Central Committee decided that Trotsky should straightway leave for the front and the military delegates return to their units. This raised vehement protest that Trotsky was evading the criticism which his policy so richly deserved, so that the military delegates were permitted to stay and argue in Moscow and Sokol'nikov presented Trotsky's theses in the latter's absence at the front. The opposition, which became known by the name of the Military Opposition, was compounded of Left-wing Communists and elements dissatisfied with the prevailing military policy as a whole. V. M. Smirnov led for the opposition, which demanded the widening of the scope of the responsibility of the members of the *Revvoensoviet*, attacked the retention of the 'military specialists', sought increased military power for the commissars and required a greater place for local Party organisations in the centrally directed political work of the armed forces.

On the evening of 20th and the morning of 21st March, 1919, the military delegates — numbering 85, 57 with voting rights — thrashed out policy in a particularly heated debate. Lenin intervened to justify the present policy, upholding the status of the 'military specialists' and chiding the opposition for their intransigence which disturbed the general Party line.⁷⁹ In spite of this admonition, the majority voted against the official programme by 174 votes to 95;⁸⁰ to resolve the dead-lock a special committee was established to undertake a thorough examination of the military question.

Trotsky claims that the 8th Congress was a triumph for his policy and Stalinist historiography declares it a defeat. The contradiction is comprehensible in so far that Trotsky is referring to the public vote, which finally upheld him, and the Stalinists to the defeat dealt out in secret. Stalin himself adopted a very equivocal position at the Congress, appearing to support the official line, rejecting Smirnov's arguments as dangerous for the establishment and maintenance of discipline in the army, yet apparently supporting Voroshilov in his criticism of Trotsky. Trotsky himself charged Stalin with being the leader of an organised and sustained opposition at the Congress, where he skilfully and patiently directed the Tsaritsyn group, unleashing the 'vilest kind of personal attack' on Sokol'nikov, the official spokesman for Trotsky's policy.⁸¹ Resistance to the Party line collapsed in the end; but Zinoviev took the opportunity to convey the opposition's strictures as a 'warning' to Trotsky — which the latter brushed quickly

aside.⁸² Although the opposition had to yield ground and did not succeed in altering the Party line, the 8th Congress did effect certain substantial and influential changes in the military and political establishment. Trotsky's own theses invite some inspection, for they are themselves an important commentary on the assumptions of long-term military policy at this time.

Trotsky argued that a regular standing army, centrally directed and properly disciplined, was absolutely essential to fight the battles of the Civil War — and to win them. Although the Red Army might look suspiciously like the old Imperial Russian Army, the real point was that the Red Army was serving quite different political ends. Considering the future army of the Soviet state, Trotsky pressed for the adoption of the militia form, on the basis of a huge improvement in industrial strength and the triumph of the proletariat. This force would not be trained in the standard barracks of a typical standing army, but under conditions not much divorced 'from normal working circumstances'.⁸³ He even envisaged a return to elective command, through a possible combination of elective procedure applied to trained military cadres and a wider application of the principle to the future army.⁸⁴ Over this programme, where the political logic is undeniably firm but the details of organisation inevitably obscure, a major struggle was to develop at the close of the Civil War, the conflict bursting out when the 9th Party Congress once again endorsed this scheme and even set about enlarging it. The conversion of the Red Army into a militia force caused the bitterest of many rancorous and heated debates.

For the machine, the 8th Congress requested strict class mobilisation, a powerful Party-political control — centralised and operated by the commissars — over the 'military specialists', the organisation of a system of attestation over the command staff, energetic efforts to create a proletarian command staff, the setting up of a Political Administration (*PUR*) with a member of the Central Committee at its head, the issue of military regulations and finally the regulation of the commander-commissar relationship.⁸⁵ A rider to these quite considerable proposals demanded more specific and detailed changes — a set of points suggestive of the extreme demands of the opposition and the criticisms of Stalin's report on the Perm catastrophe. The re-organisation of the Field Staff was suggested, so that it would maintain closer ties with the fronts, the work of the Republic *Revvoensoviet* was to be regulated, the All-Russian Staff overhauled in the light of deficiencies uncovered and strengthened with Party representatives, and periodic meetings with 'responsible Party workers' from the various fronts were to be arranged.⁸⁶

If public confidence had not been visibly disturbed, Trotsky's opponents in the higher echelons of the Party had the satisfaction of knowing that

Trotsky had not come out of the struggle unscathed. Nevertheless, the 8th Congress resulted in the organisation of the centralised Political Administration and the closing down of the Bureau of Commissars, when this decision went into effect in May 1919. In the same month Attestation Commissions were set up to screen officer-candidates; these operated under the control of a Higher Attestation Commission, which was made up of five members, two military commissars, two representatives acting as military experts, and the Chief of the Personnel Section of the All-Russian Staff. Similar commissions were set up at all levels from the local to the regional, and were usually made up of a small board of commissars and experts and the representative of the local Soviet. These boards played a substantial part in controlling officer-selection and continued their career after the end of the Civil War.

The tide of criticism had been unable to make any drastic modification in the operation of the military establishment, but the 8th Congress was notable as the point of the formal emergence of the Military Opposition, and the confirmation of the fundamental contradiction in this phase of Soviet military organisation. While the machinery most vitally needed for the operation of a powerful standing army was strengthened and amplified, and that distinctive political apparatus was formally centralised and buttressed against civilian or local interference, the very idea of a standing army, or even an orthodox military force, was still an open question and one liable to be opened still wider.

The problem of the organisational form of the Soviet armed forces was further complicated by the activities of the personnel and instructors of the Universal Military Training (*Vsevobuch*) command. By the summer of 1919 this training was organised to a plan which divided Soviet territory into regimental districts, corresponding to the *guberniya* or parts of it, depending upon the density of population. These areas were further divided into battalion, company and section districts, so that the unit and its particular parts corresponded to specific areas for recruitment and training. Where a *guberniya* could not be divided, due to sparseness of population, into many sub-divisions, there a militia brigade would be organised. Only very weak regular units formed the backbone of these preliminary organisations, which played a dual role — to provide the Red Army with reinforcements and a reserve of trained man-power, and to serve as the basis for the ultimate creation and emergence of the class militia.⁸⁷

At the 7th Congress of Soviets, in December 1919 Trotsky again referred to the prospect of doing away with the standing army and introducing the militia, a statement which had greater force, since his address was being delivered at a time when the question of Soviet victory in the Civil War

was no longer in doubt, although hard fighting still lay ahead. The struggle to retain the regular Red Army gradually intensified as the possibility of a transition to the militia system became more real, and less of a utopian fantasy.

Although the Military Opposition tried to shift its ground from a criticism of the form and management of the military machine to objections over matters of strategy and operational questions, the months following upon the 8th Congress were taken up with heavy fighting which occupied the forefront of all attention. In spite of this, however, what later emerged as a very distinctive doctrine began to take shape at this time, arising out of the insistence that this special revolutionary war fought by the Red Army had produced equally distinctive tactical features and strategic innovations. A handbook of the methods to be used in the revolutionary war was issued.⁸⁸ Positional warfare had given place to a war of manoeuvre; Trotsky's critics therefore suggested that the rigid social and military experience of the ex-Imperial officers rendered them fundamentally incapable of fighting a revolutionary war of manoeuvre to a successful conclusion. Trotsky swept this aside once again, largely because he discerned yet another assault upon the 'military specialists' — although in this he was partially deceived.

Certain of the new doctrinal fumbblings hit very accurately at the military essence of the Civil War. Fronts did not correspond to what had come to be understood by that term as a result of the gigantic and sustained operations of the 1914-18 War. A front began by spreading out with the advance of whichever side was momentarily victorious — a huge widening and lengthening space, with the troops living off the land, and fighting taking place along the communication lines, accompanied not infrequently by deep penetrations into the enemy rear with pulverising raids. Both Red and White cavalry scored spectacular, if brief successes after this manner. The straggling fronts, with their chaotic rear, could be crumpled by thunderbolt blows, smashing like a fist through stretched paper. Once the blow lost its momentum, however, and the forces became spread ever more thinly across a greater space, a counter-blow sent them reeling away in disorder. Weak organisation in the rear constantly hastened this process of dissolution and disintegration.

The opposition to Trotsky, fervid exponents of a growing belief in a 'proletarian' method of waging war, produced workable and valuable schemes, such as cavalry using horse-drawn artillery, mobile machine-gun units, and the *tachanka* — a light peasant cart with a machine-gun mounted upon it. The suggestions for innovations in the use of armoured-car squadrons and the employment of armoured trains (particularly effective weapons) enjoyed considerable success, although one day Trotsky would be able to

round on these unsophisticated military innovators with the charge that when the Red Army wanted to do anything in advance of the *tachanka*, it had to turn to bourgeois military science to achieve it.

Trotsky did himself untold damage by his arrogant rebuffs, for not all of his critics were fools or knaves. The Tsaritsyn group hated him for his handling of them, although they supplied endless provocation. Voroshilov no doubt smarted under the charge that he was capable of handling a regiment only, not 50,000 men.⁸⁹ After visiting Budenny's cavalry squadron in the summer of 1919, Budenny relates that Trotsky, on his return to Moscow, remarked:

Budenny's corps — a horde, and Budenny — their ataman ring-leader. . . . He is the present-day Stenka Razin. And where he leads his gang, there will they go; for the Reds to-day, to-morrow for the Whites.⁹⁰

The Red cavalry, which had been difficult to organise since Cossacks did not take willingly to the Soviet regime and industrial workers were not born to the saddle, finally combined the hardest and most spirited fighters in its ranks, well sprinkled with practised free-booters. It was not above cutting its own commissars to pieces. After the sack of Rostov in the winter of 1920, Dumenko, one of Budenny's corps commanders, shot down Commissar Mikeladze, who protested at the pillage. Trotsky fumed at reports of the disorders. When the *Cheka* finally led Dumenko out and shot him, there ended an extraordinary and turbulent career.

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In considering the formative stage of the Soviet military establishment as a whole, it is impossible not to record it as a singular achievement. Yet from the first moments of its existence, a struggle for control over this machine had begun in all earnest. The conscious and deliberate inclusion of warring and contradictory elements at all levels offset the gains in centralised organisation and increased administrative efficiency. The command system was cumbersome and its particular unwieldiness was increased by the inescapable necessity of dual command. The control organs and their directors added a whole new dimension to the emergent military-political system. The truly distinctive feature of the operation of the Soviet military system during the Civil War was that the Red Army possessed centralised, independent control of its political and security organs. It still remained, however, to provide satisfactory definitions for such matters as the role of the commissar and the commander-commissar relationship. The administration of supply was still exceedingly crude and liable to large-scale breakdown, although the finest administrative system in the world could not have improved upon the

steadily deteriorating economic situation throughout the whole of Soviet Russia.

It would appear that the Red Army was the product of expediency, and that the introduction of fundamentally opposed elements into the military system is comprehensible in the light of their being regarded as temporary features, innovations designed to bring victory in the field. Such expedients were therefore both justifiable and acceptable, in certain quarters, since a powerful control mechanism had been provided from the outset and was being steadily developed. Yet the army and the command were inexorably captured by the machine, which, by Trotsky's own admission, bore a striking resemblance to that of the old order. Socialism had as yet to try conclusions with the particular brand of militarism which the Civil War developed. For the aggravation of the inevitable tensions Trotsky cannot be absolved from a measure of the responsibility. For the deliberate perpetuation and political exploitation of these same dissensions the blame lies with the more militant of the Military Opposition. Although losing its importance as a component of Party politics towards the end of the Civil War, that group, compounded of malice, frustration, excessive idealism and undeniable talents and political skills, achieved ultimate significance as the heart of the movement within the Red Army and the command against Trotsky. Before this gathered its full momentum a host of other experiences, which further defined the several interest-groups within the Soviet command, added themselves out of the circumstances and enmities of the Civil War battle-fronts.

CHAPTER THREE

The Formation of the Soviet Command: 1918-1920

From the first days of its existence the Soviet high command was not a unified body of men, nor was it destined so to become until the passage of many years. It possessed no distinctive name of its own. The term 'officer corps' conjured up a body detested with singular intensity by military and civilian alike in the Communist camp. The contrasting terms of 'military specialist' (*Voenspets*) and 'Red commander' (*Kraskom*) set off two mutually antagonistic elements within the command group as a whole, with the latter thinning out very rapidly at the higher levels of command and planning. In the whole history of the Civil War, the ex-Imperial Russian officer occupied a strange and often tragic place. The White armies fielded an excess of officers, so that capable and fanatical 'Officer battalions' were sent into countless attacks. The Red Army found itself continually and drastically short of officers, for combat losses as well as the burden of incompetence and inferior training, not to mention treachery on several occasions, aggravated what from the outset had been an almost insurmountable drawback.

The inner-Party disputes over the form and function of the centralised military machine had been resolved at the 8th Party Congress in a manner which suggested that the cracks had only just been papered over. The bitter and inescapable struggles over strategy and the operation of the fronts, which were merely another dimension of the basic struggle over and within the military machine, took place against the background of the evolution of a number of very uncertain relationships. Among the more precarious of these was that between the higher command echelons and the senior 'military specialists'. Here conflict and rivalry had rapid and enormous consequence.

The Supreme Military Soviet acted as the first conscious command centre, where Trotsky acted as chairman, together with Podvoiskii, Sklyanskii and Danishevskii as members of the group and a staff of 'military specialists' working under the direction of the ex-Imperial General Bonch-Bruевич. Efroim Markovich Sklyanskii, then twenty-six, was an asset to the

Bolshevik cause and subsequently an extremely capable deputy to Trotsky. A Kiev medical student who had joined the Bolsheviks in 1913, became an army doctor and a member of the Bolshevik military organisation of the Imperial Russian Vth Army, Sklyanskii shouldered an ever-increasing burden during the Civil War.¹ Podvoiskii, a Bolshevik well acquainted with the problems of military organisation, had worked as the president of the Collegiate for the Formation of the Red Army. After a number of important military-political assignments to the fronts, he came to take charge of the universal military training (*Vsevobuch*) command. It was to this preliminary command group that Lenin's telegram of 1st April, 1918, assigned definite but limited tasks.²

Also in April something akin to a General Staff was re-formed with the setting up of the All-Russian Supreme Staff, which concerned itself with planning the requirements and organisation of the Red Army. Although engaged on working out the man-power and officer requirements of the new force, as well as the composition of the first proposed Red Army divisions, the ex-officers were faced with a situation in which discipline had collapsed and cohesion vanished. A regiment could not be represented merely by its number, table of ranks and establishment — a style to which the former officers had been accustomed. The new and feeble Red regiments varied widely in strength; equipment and uniforms were conspicuous by their absence, elective command encouraged anarchy, weapons combined a multitude of styles and systems — and it was thus that the regiment went off to fight its bit of a local war.

In the early summer of 1918 the revolt of the Czech Legion changed the Soviet military scene from one of haphazard muddling to a frenzy of mobilisation and the committing of Red units to life-and-death battle. The advancing summer drew with it a pestilence of violence and terrorism. The Left SRs, the one legal party left with the Bolsheviks, were desirous of bringing Russia once more into war with Germany and incidentally ending Bolshevik rule. To this end they engineered the killing of the German Ambassador, von Mirbach, and raised the standard of dubious revolt. Muralov, veteran Bolshevik and Moscow Red Guard commander, with Podvoiskii acted with despatch to crush this, assisted by Colonel Vatsetis.³ Boris Savinkov's conspirators struck separately at Yaroslavl, seizing and holding the town for two weeks. The Soviet commander of the Volga front, Colonel M. A. Muraviev — who had fought with the Bolsheviks in Petrograd and the Ukraine — turned traitor to his masters, swinging his troops round to face west and proposing an armistice with the Czechs.⁴ The manner of Muraviev's end is uncertain; it may have been suicide or summary execution, or else his plan for gathering leading Bolsheviks into the town

of Simbirsk mis-carried when he attempted to seize the person of ex-Imperial Lieutenant M. N. Tukhachevsky, 1st Red army* commander.⁵ Simbirsk, however, fell to Czech and White troops. On 16th July a Bolshevik group put to death in squalid and horrible circumstances the Russian Imperial family, lodged at that date in Ekaterinburg. On 30th July Lenin fell grievously hurt with bullets in the chest and left shoulder, fired into him by a young SR woman, Fanya Kaplan. There followed an orgy of killing in the name of Bolshevik retribution.

The critical military situation, imperilling the very existence of the Bolshevik regime, had built up furiously on the Eastern Front; treason, of which some warning had been given, speeded up the collapse.⁶ On 7th August, 1918, Trotsky left Moscow for the scene of operations, where Vatsetis had taken command, after the defection of Muraviev on the Upper Volga. On 10th July Vatsetis had been named front commander. Trotsky describes Vatsetis variously as a man 'who never lost himself in the chaos of the revolution'⁷ and elsewhere as 'irascible'.⁸ From his armoured train, which took on the character of a mobile head-quarters, Trotsky assumed personal control of the operations from Sviyazhsk, the nearest main railway station to Kazan. Red Army troops fell back from Simbirsk and Kazan, laying open the road to Moscow to the White forces. Disorder and defeatism prevailed. To Trotsky it appeared that the 'soil itself seemed to be infected with panic'. By a show of calculated brutality and by furious attention to detail, the Red units were brought up to a state of combat readiness by Trotsky and his assistants during this most critical month.⁹ At one moment Trotsky himself stood in extreme danger. A White raiding party, led by Colonel Kappel, had penetrated deep into the Red rear and was moving dangerously near to Trotsky's own HQ. It was, from the Soviet point of view, a very fortunate accident that the White colonel did not possess any accurate information about the true state of the Red defences, else he could have seized not only the HQ but the Soviet Commissar for War.

On this miniature testing ground Trotsky tried out not a little of his theory and practice of war. He saw how demoralised units could be hammered back into shape. He had evidence of how an injection of Communists, willing to fight and sacrifice themselves, could stiffen up dispirited front-line fighters eager to seek the rear. Vatsetis, after a brief consultation with Trotsky, left for Vyatka to put the same methods into operation there. Meanwhile Stalin, who at this time found himself in the south, had written to Lenin, raging at the effects which Trotsky's early

* To distinguish between 'the Red Army' (*RKKA*) and individual Red armies, and to avoid confusion between 'Red' and 'White' armies Soviet armies are shown by a roman numeral followed by 'Red army', as above. To assist translation, Soviet use of the arabic numeral for army designation after 1939 has also been retained here.

efforts were producing. It needed, wrote Stalin, a firm hand to stop Trotsky from handing out credentials to all and sundry. It must be knocked into his head — such was Stalin's tone — that appointments made must be with the knowledge of the local people. Finally, 'not having a paper from Trotsky' would not deter Stalin from arrogating the necessary military rights to himself, including dismissing army commanders and commissars.¹⁰

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Throughout the autumn the shaky Red power in the east solidified into a recognisable military force. The command organisation took shape. On 4th September, 1918, the Republic *Revvoensoviet* took over the central direction of the Red Army and its attendant affairs. Vatsetis assumed the post of Commander-in-Chief, Trotsky took the leading position in the *Revvoensoviet*, with Sklyanskii as his deputy and a staff which included I. N. Smirnov, Rosengoltz, Raskol'nikov, Muralov and Yurenev. All of these counted themselves 'Trotsky's men', and the appointments reflected the first fruits of victory, for here were its architects. These men were attached to Trotsky in a firm personal manner as well as being collaborators in the business of war. Between Trotsky and Vatsetis there existed a certain understanding; as for Vatsetis, although this ex-Imperial Colonel showed but average ability, he was ably assisted by a Field Staff which included notable talent. Boris Shaposhnikov, subsequently Stalin's military mentor, was seconded to the Operations Branch of the Staff. This ex-officer had completed the course at the General Staff Academy in 1910, holding staff appointments with a cavalry division during the World War. His official biography tends to confirm the view that since May 1918 he had been acting as one of the main props in the early Soviet Operations Branch.¹¹ In the person of P. P. Lebedev, another ex-Imperial senior officer who added his services to those of Shaposhnikov, the Soviet command gained very considerably with the acquisition of this professional talent.

The Bolshevik substitutes for senior commanders were shovelled away with rude but understandable haste as their manifest incapacity for the positions which they occupied became all too plain. Only Raskol'nikov, in the naval command, showed the requisite degree of ability, yet the reduced scale of naval operations — confined to river actions with small flotillas and using sailors as special infantry — made his task easier. To handle the ships which were left to the Bolsheviks, it was necessary to rely once again upon the ex-Imperial officer.

The Eastern Front, as well as being the crucible in which the Red Army found its shape and won its first victories, played a vital role in developing both a system of command, crude as it was, and a concentration of command

personnel. By the end of 1918 this front numbered five armies and had passed under the command of the ex-Imperial Colonel S. S. Kamenev. The first Bolshevik victories, however, owed less to military mastery and efficiency than to the operation of a natural law, as the first impetus of the White troops exhausted itself and the Reds were able to thrust them back sufficiently to avert disaster. But the new White armies, mustered under the leadership of Kolchak, proved to be a formidable enemy.

Until the White Siberian troops came into action in mid-December, the Red armies encountered little stiff resistance. Of the latter forces, the IVth Red army was commanded first by A. A. Baltiiskii and subsequently taken over by T. S. Khvesin. The IInd came under V. I. Shorin¹² (with S. I. Gusev as his commissar), Zh. K. Blyumberg commanded the Vth, M. M. Lashevich the IIIrd and M. N. Tukhachevsky the Ist. This first consolidated Eastern front command was a pertinent illustration of the role of the Imperial officer. Khvesin, Baltiiskii and Shorin came from the fold of the Imperial Army. To represent the Party and to watch for the tell-tale signs of unreliability and disaffection, Gusev held his all-important watching brief. It was not to be long before Gusev began to play a very active role in the operational as well as the political affairs of the Eastern Front. The magic and the mystique of command completely ensnared him, to the degree that he ultimately played the role of an additional, if at times somewhat irresponsible, military adviser. In the person of Lashevich,¹³ the ex-NCO was represented, the whole ensemble of pasts and varied talents producing inevitable clashes and bizarre relations. To Lashevich no greater contrast could be found than the young Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Ist Red army commander.

Tukhachevsky came of an impoverished but aristocratic family. Born in 1893 and hailing from Penza, Tukhachevsky was first a page in the Imperial Cadet Corps, and then went on to a military academy, from which he was gazetted a junior lieutenant in 1914. The military fame which Tukhachevsky avidly sought eluded him not long after the war had begun, for he was taken prisoner by the Germans on the Eastern Front in February 1915. Tukhachevsky had no intention of allowing a prisoner of war cage to hold him. Five times he attempted to escape. His captors finally lodged him in the fortress of Ingolstadt.¹⁴ In 1917 Tukhachevsky made good his escape and arrived back in Russia in the late autumn. It was to the Bolsheviks that Tukhachevsky gave his allegiance. From his work in training troops in the Moscow area Trotsky singled him out for a more responsible post. In April 1918 Tukhachevsky became a member of the Communist Party, proceeding in the early summer to the Eastern Front to take up command of a Red division. It was under the patronage of Trotsky that Tukhachevsky took

over the 1st Red army. Trotsky's opponents did not neglect to observe that the War Commissar had not been slow in appointing a former aristocrat to a responsible command post in the Red Army.

Of all the Red Army commanders in the Civil War, Tukhachevsky displayed strategic talents and tactical abilities of a conspicuously high order. In these he was matched perhaps only by his rival and fellow ex-Imperial officer Boris Shaposhnikov. His lack of years set off his military achievements in a manner all the more striking and breath-taking. Brilliant, quick of mind, with a streak of cruelty allied to an impetuosity which bordered on the rash, the young Red Army commander cultivated a certain hauteur and an arrogance which was not calculated to ease all his friendships. Although a Party member, in no accepted or acceptable sense of the word was Tukhachevsky a Marxist. Radical inclinations he may have possessed, but they were of a peculiar order. His passion was his patriotism, of such an order that he appeared to be more the opportunist than the loyal adherent. His support for the Bolshevik regime seems to have derived less from any political idea than his realisation that they were demonically active, that they would serve the fading fortunes of Russia most with their doctrine of expanding revolution. It was no accident that he laboured also to provide a military theory and a form of organisation which would fit in with the political doctrines of his new masters in the field of dynamic expansion. Reputedly a slavish admirer of Napoleon (whose style of orders he consciously imitated),¹⁵ the young ex-lieutenant took few pains to conceal his ambitions. His abilities nevertheless matched his aspirations and made him on more than one occasion the saviour of the Eastern Front. From these spectacular triumphs he moved, at the age of twenty-seven, to command of the entire Soviet forces arrayed against Poland in 1920. He thus accomplished his ambition of achieving by the age of thirty either fame or death.

In the east fortunes fluctuated wildly, reflecting the instability of the forces engaged on both sides. On 24th December, 1918, Perm fell to the White troops; it was a catastrophe produced out of faulty co-ordination among the Soviet commanders, and to make matters worse, many prisoners and considerable productive power fell into the enemy's hands. Lenin despatched Stalin and Dzerzhinskii on a fact-finding mission to the IIIrd Red army. Seizing upon this opportunity Stalin lost no chance of finding the kind of facts which were themselves a severe criticism of the centre and the Commander-in-Chief. Nevertheless, in spite of its invective aimed at Trotsky and Vatsetis, the report was a model of incisiveness in its display of the present weaknesses, and action taken in the light of these recommendations produced a noticeable strengthening of the Soviet left wing to the north.¹⁶

As a consequence of the re-shuffle in command M. V. Frunze proceeded to take command of the IVth Red army at the end of January 1919. A veteran Bolshevik, Frunze, now aged thirty-four, had a long record of political activity before 1917; during the First World War he had worked extensively among the soldiers of the Western Front, winning what influence he could. He had formed a detachment of pro-Bolshevik soldiers and during the seizure of power marched on Moscow to help the Bolshevik insurgents. In August 1918 Frunze joined F. F. Novitskii, an ex-Imperial senior officer, in organising Red Army formations for the Eastern Front from the Yaroslavl Regional (*Okruzhni*) Military Commissariat.¹⁷ Both men soon tired of rear work, and after fruitless application and finally a visit to Moscow, Frunze went to his new command, with Novitskii as his chief of staff. Frunze, who has become one of the archetypal images for the modern Soviet Army, represented the Communist Party intellectual turned soldier and succeeding at a very difficult task. He displayed considerable administrative ability, high personal courage and an iron will, though perhaps lacking in imagination. The evidence of Frunze's military career suggests that he worked most intensively to master the military trade, both in theory and practice.

Frunze found the IVth Red army in a parlous state, verging on open mutiny.¹⁸ Having re-imposed a certain discipline upon the troops, not without some difficulty, Frunze took up his station on the southern flank of the Eastern Front, while preparations went ahead for the coming offensive. It so happened that Kolchak's forces were the first to strike; with four armies, numbering some 130,000 men, with 210 guns and 1,300 machine-guns, the White blow struck out in a double direction, splitting the Soviet front. By way of comparison, and as a measure of the forces which the Soviet commanders were handling, Vatsetis's reports to Lenin on the *actual* combat strength of the Red Army and the strategic tasks assigned to it are of some value.¹⁹ In February 1919 on six fronts (including the independent VIth army), the Red Army deployed 343,100 infantry, 40,060 cavalry, 6,561 guns and 1,697 machine-guns. The Eastern Front absorbed 76,400 infantry, 8,750 cavalry and 372 guns. Vatsetis's total for the White forces on 15th February, 1919, amounted to 511,190.²⁰ An indication of the material deficiencies is given in the statement of the Artillery Inspectorate of the Field Staff, which reported a deficiency of 3,791 guns, 13,416 machine-guns and 233,378 rifles.²¹ This was measured against the establishment laid down by Directive No. 220 of 13th November, 1918, setting out the strength and equipment table for regular divisions and brigades.

The breaching of the Eastern Front presented the high command with a new crisis, the severity of which was fully recognised in Moscow. To the north the White attack faded, but in the south Ufa fell and the way to the

Combat strength on fronts and in armies for period 25 January-15 February 1919

	<i>Infantry</i>	<i>Cavalry</i>	<i>Machine-guns</i>	<i>Guns</i>
I Independent VIth Army	17,500	160	312	70
II Western Front:				
VIIth Army	22,700	830	282	309
Lettish Army	11,900	180	196	39
Western Army	43,700	2,150	548	145
Total/Western Front	78,300	3,160	1,026	493
III Ukrainian Front	43,500	3,520	606	124
IV Southern Front:				
Donets Group	12,800	400	150	26
VIIIth Army	22,700	1,250	402	62
IXth Army	31,800	6,500	730	152
Xth Army	32,100	9,500	758	220
Total/Southern Front	99,400	17,650	2,040	460
V Caspian-Caucasian Front:				
XIth Army	19,000	6,800	847	159
XIIth Army	9,000	200	259	19
Total/Caspian-Caucasian Front	28,000	7,000	1,106	178
VI Eastern Front:				
Ist Army	10,500	300	254	39
IInd Army	17,900	760	439	72
IIIrd Army	13,600	3,360	355	59
IVth Army	18,100	2,300	253	98
Vth Army	5,400	50	170	67
Turkestan Army	10,900	1,800	?	37
Total/Eastern Front	76,400	8,570	1,471	372
Combined total	343,100	40,060	6,561	1,697

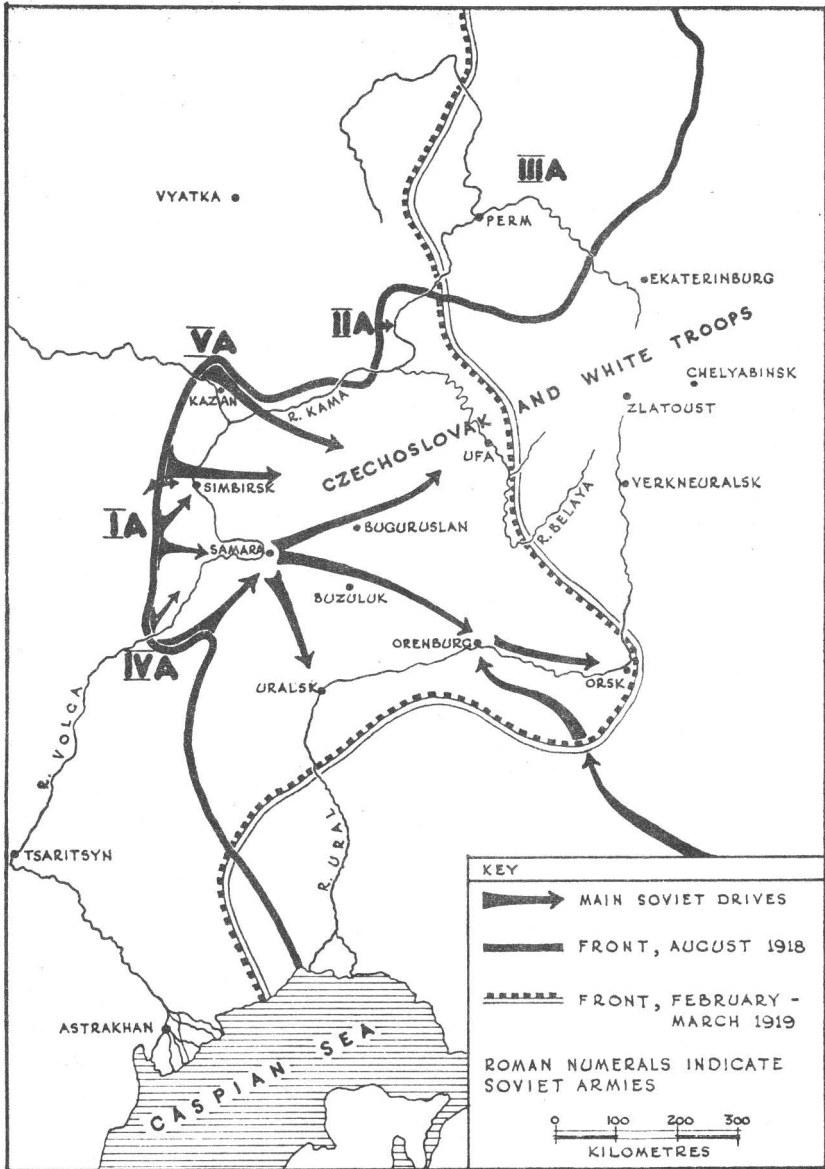
Chief Operational Directorate/Field Staff
 Military Commissar Op. Direc.
 For Chief Naval Operational Directorate

V. Mikhailov
Vasil'ev
Men'shov

Volga opened. Trotsky had left hurriedly for the front, thereby missing the 8th Party Congress where his opponents were gathering to hack away at his whole position and policy. The main problem was to prevent the collapse of the entire front and to stem the kind of panic which weak rear organisation and a relatively ineffectual command system only encouraged. The critical situation led to sharp exchanges between the front and the central command,* in which, according to Trotsky, the Communists at the front sided with S. S. Kamenev, while the commissars of the Operations Branch not unnaturally took Vatsetis's part.²² These verbal passages at arms took place at the conference of the regional with the central military organs in the east itself. Trotsky and Vatsetis re-organised the army commands; Frunze took over command of the Turkestan Red Army (previously under G. V. Zinoviev) and the IVth, G. D. Gai took the Ist, while Tukhachevsky assumed command of the Vth from Blyumberg, V. I. Shorin was sent to the IIrd and S. A. Mezheninov to the IIIrd.²³ At a joint meeting of 10th April, 1919, at Simbirsk, where Trotsky, Aralov, Vatsetis, Gusev and Kamenev participated, it was decided to divide the front into two parts, with a southern group made up of the Ist, Vth, IVth and Turkestan Armies. Command of this was invested in Frunze, with V. V. Kuibyshev and F. F. Novitskii as the members of his *Revvoensoviet*.²⁴ Frunze proceeded to work out a plan to check the White advance, basing it on the assumption that the greatest danger came from General Khanzhin's advance on Samara.²⁵

Trotsky seems to have had misgivings about entrusting the command of the southern army group to Frunze; at a meeting of the *Politburo* in the latter half of April²⁶ he proposed withdrawing the command from Frunze, on the ground of the latter's inexperience, and sending Vatsetis to take over the front so that S. S. Kamenev could control the southern group. This was defeated and Frunze proceeded to put his plan into effect. Whatever Trotsky's fears about Frunze, which proved to have no basis, the new commander enjoyed brilliant professional advice and support, and had some 71,000 men under his command. P. P. Lebedev acted as Chief of Staff for the Eastern Front, and was a 'military specialist' of considerable talent; F. F. Novitskii worked as head of Frunze's staff, while an ex-Imperial Lieutenant-Colonel of Engineers, D. M. Karbyshev, supervised the erection of defensive positions. Making careful preparation, Frunze gathered his forces near Buzuluk for his counter-offensive. On 28th April, 1919, the southern army group went over to the offensive. The heaviest fighting of the Civil War had begun.

* G. K. Eikhe (later Vth Army commander) has intervened over the history of the Eastern Front with a new monograph *Ufimskaya avantyura Kolchaka (Mart-Aprel' 1919)* (Kolchak's Ufa gamble, March-April, 1919), Moscow 1960. Based entirely on Red Army archives, this work is meant to replace the studies of Ogorodnikov (1938), Boltin (1949) and Spirin (1957).



THE EASTERN FRONT
August, 1918 - March, 1919.

Frunze's counter-offensive met with great success, coming as it did at a time when the White troops had exhausted their reserves and their momentum was waning. Tukhachevsky's Vth army, minus two divisions, was detached from Frunze's group, yet this local re-shuffle was a trifle compared with the major changes wrought in the senior ranks of the Eastern Front command. At Vatsetis's insistence,²⁷ S. S. Kamenev was replaced as front commander by A. A. Samoilo, another ex-Imperial senior officer who had commanded the VIth Red army in the Northern Commune, and organised defence against the Intervention there.²⁸ With the new commander came a new plan. To Tukhachevsky's disgust he was obliged to change his direction to the north and the north-east on to the flank of the White Siberian Army. In ten days Tukhachevsky received five directives from Samoilo, each one altering the direction of the main blow. Gusev of the Eastern Front *Revvoensoviet* protested vehemently against the activities of Samoilo, which were flinging the whole operation into confusion. To add to the general chorus of protest, Stalin chose this moment to protest from Petrograd about the behaviour of another 'military specialist', Kostyayev;²⁹ a White attack launched upon the city had succeeded in taking Yamburg on 17th May, but the drive was repulsed.* In the Ukraine Denikin's power was increasing and threatening the tenuous Soviet hold upon that area.

From Kiev, Trotsky agreed that S. S. Kamenev should be re-instated as commander of the Eastern Front, but admitted that he was ignorant of the colonel's present whereabouts. Samoilo's commissars in the north had begun to argue heatedly in favour of their former chief,³⁰ whatever the Eastern Front might think of him, but on 29th May Samoilo relinquished his command in the east. In his recent memoirs Samoilo entered a bitter note about Gusev's animosity and intrigue against his person.³¹ At the end of May, however, a general offensive of the Eastern armies had been ordered, with Frunze's forces playing a major part and the Vth army being assigned to deep penetration of the enemy rear. The drive was concentrated on Ufa, which fell on 9th June.³² This triumph, erasing all the White gains, touched off a storm of argument in the Soviet command about resuming the advance across the Urals.

Lenin had urged every effort to conquer the Urals.³³ Vatsetis opposed any extension of the line of operations across the Urals, arguing that the troops could be better employed on the Southern Front. S. S. Kamenev, supported by Smilga and Lashevich, contended that troops could be detached from

* In the middle of June, Stalin was faced with a treasonable outbreak at the Krasnaya Gorka fort, which was recaptured on 16th. Lenin referred to this incident at the opening of his July 1919 remarks on the ex-officers, calling it 'a vast conspiracy . . . whose purpose was the surrender of Petrograd'. Stalin's effort at the direction of operations to recapture the fort was later glorified as one of the first conscious and successful attempts at 'co-ordination'.

the Eastern Front and the offensive still be maintained. On 6th June Vatsetis's directive ordered that operations should be suspended at the line of the Belaya and Kama rivers and defensive positions taken up.³⁴ On 9th June the Eastern Front *Revvoensoviet* signalled its complete disagreement with this to Lenin. On the following day S. S. Kamenev sent off his personal appraisal of the situation, emphasising that the favourable situation should be exploited with all speed.³⁵

Trotsky feared this idea, suspecting that beyond the Urals the Red armies might be moving into deadly trap. There were other strategic commitments and possibilities to be considered, which reduced the safety margins very markedly. Troops were badly needed on the Southern Front, where Denikin was hammering into Soviet-held territory. At the same time Lenin was urging upon Vatsetis the idea of trying to effect a military link-up with the newly-created Soviet Republic of Hungary — which would have meant forcing the barrier of Polish-occupied territory and warring upon Rumania.³⁶ On 15th June, however, the Central Committee decided that the advance into the Urals must continue and instructions to that effect were passed to the Eastern Front on 16th.³⁷ The Eastern Front command plan was completed by 22nd and passed to the Commander-in-Chief for approval, although Vatsetis still kept up his attitude of reserve towards the proposed operations.³⁸

Tukhachevsky had already made his plans for forcing the mountain barrier. The Vth army was split into three groups, with the centre made up of I. D. Kashirin's cavalry³⁹ and infantry. By the first week in July these troops, taking a daring but arduous passage, infiltrated into the enemy rear. Benefiting from the speed and surprise of their advance, they fell upon and massacred the 12th White Division. The IIInd and IIIrd Red armies advanced in support of the Vth and by the end of the month moved down from the heights and ravines into the Western Siberian plain, consummating an important strategic and tactical victory.⁴⁰ The capture of Zlatoust yielded substantial acquisitions of military stores and control over the arms factories. The fight for Western Siberia continued through August and September, when Blyukher's 51st Division played an outstanding part.

The Red armies in the east derived considerable assistance from the various partisan groups. Divided roughly into the Western and Eastern Siberian partisan areas, these irregulars played a major part in harrying Kolchak's Siberian hinterland and have a history made up of manifold tales of horror and ferocity.⁴¹ The Urals-Siberian Bureau, run by F. I. Goloshchekin, acted as an important military-political centre and was fiercely proud of its authority. In September 1919 the 'Supreme Staff of the Partisans of the Red Army' was elected by the Siberian partisans, with the non-Party

Kaban peasant E. M. Mamontov as president of this assorted body. Zhigalin has left one of the numerous stark pictures of the Western Siberian partisan movement.⁴² With the prevailing shortage of weapons, one partisan regiment issued a single rifle between three men, and yet another one rifle to fifteen men. The 'Peasants Red Army of Western Siberia' included, in December 1919, 24 partisan regiments with signal and engineering companies; some 16,000 men had 9,000 rifles, 60 machine-guns and about 90 grenades.⁴³ Mamontov, described as 'weak in political matters', met Commissar I. N. Smirnov of the 26th Division of the Vth Red army to arrange for the subordination of the partisans to regular military command. This was formally effected by Order No. 1117 of 26th December, 1919.⁴⁴ In addition to the peasant army, from one armed detachment operating in the Urals a brilliant commander passed to the Red Army from the Eastern Front.

This man was Vasili Konstantinovich Blyukher, whose official biography declares that he was born in 1889 of a poor peasant family in the province of Yaroslavl. He started his revolutionary activity in the Mytishchinskii machine-shops in 1910 and became a Bolshevik in 1916. In 1914 Blyukher had been mobilised but was seriously wounded in 1915 and invalided out. Taking part in the revolutionary disturbances in Samara in 1917, and becoming chairman of the Chelyabinsk Soviet, Blyukher on 18th March, 1918, took command of all units fighting the White leader Dutov. On 2nd July the Red forces abandoned Orenburg, and Blyukher's force and I. D. Kashirin's Southern Detachment arrived on 11th-12th at Beloretsk. Here the two forces were combined, with the result that on 2nd August, 1918, Blyukher was chosen to command the Composite South-Urals Detachment and worked out a plan for linking up with the Red Army.⁴⁵ Blyukher repeatedly broke through White encirclement in a series of spectacular raids and finally smashed his way through to the IIIrd Red army, where his forces were re-organised into the famous 51st Division. His conspicuous military ability prompted the rumour, doubtless helped by his strange name, that he was a former German or Austrian prisoner of war gone Bolshevik.* Blyukher led the 51st to fresh triumphs against Wrangel in November 1920, after which he was transferred to the Far East; here his real career began, culminating in his long command of the Special Red Banner Army of the Far East.

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At the centre, however, intrigue and dissension brought about a radical

* In all the speculation over Blyukher's name, it has proved possible to find only one actual alternative and that was put forward by General Niessel, whose information was to the effect that Blyukher's real name was Gurov. If Blyukher did give himself this *nom de guerre*, then it indicates at least an acquaintance with military history, if also a rather bizarre personal taste.