

**MILITARY AFFAIRS IN RUSSIA'S GREAT WAR AND
REVOLUTION, 1914–22**

**BOOK 2: THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR: CAMPAIGNS AND
OPERATIONS**

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The Advance and Defeat of Kolchak

Andrei V. Ganin

Could the Whites have won the Civil War? The Whites certainly suffered defeat at the front. The most fundamental reasons for the defeat of the Whites were the drastic imbalance of forces between themselves and the Reds, which grew over the course of the Civil War; major miscalculations in military planning and organization; and a fatal underestimation of Red strength. Despite these weaknesses, the Whites continued to fight and hope for victory. It is important to assess whether their hopes were justified. Could the Whites, under the leadership of Admiral Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kolchak, have been victorious on the Eastern Front in 1919? While the meager human and material base of Siberia certainly hindered the Whites in the east from striking a decisive blow against the Bolsheviks, the Whites' own political and military errors had a deep and pernicious influence on their chances.

The White camp experienced a resurgence in the campaigns of 1919. They had liberated and held a large area of Siberia under Kolchak, as well as the Northern Caucasus under Lieutenant General Anton Ivanovich Denikin. While the Whites did not control Russia's center, which had the highest population density and the most developed industry, they were preparing offensives to attack that center and decide the fate of Soviet Russia. In the south, Denikin, who had temporarily suppressed Cossack separatism, was able to concentrate full authority in his own hands, while Kolchak rose to power in the east. In the summer of 1919, Denikin declared himself subordinate to Kolchak, although when he did so, Kolchak's front was already falling apart and White forces on the Eastern Front were retreating to the Urals.

Kolchak's Military Leaders

The White High Command and its strategic planning bore most of the blame for the White defeat. Specifically, Kolchak's High Command consisted of officers from the prerevolutionary General Staff; they played a central role in

Kolchak's management of the war. Each of these officers had his own unique theoretical and practical experience, as well as strengths and weaknesses. The most criticized figure in the White camp, however, was Major General Dmitrii Antonovich Lebedev, a former General Staff officer who served as chief of staff of Kolchak's High Command.

Many of Lebedev's contemporaries, as well as later researchers, identified him as chiefly responsible for the failure of the offensive launched toward the Volga in spring 1919. Of course, it is unlikely that any one person, even the most incompetent, could be solely guilty for the failure of such a large-scale operation. Lebedev has become a scapegoat, blamed for every mistake and failure, including those for which he was not responsible. Blaming Lebedev alone ignores the naivety and shortsightedness of Kolchak's other commanders and the Supreme Ruler himself. Orenburg Cossack Host ataman and Separate Orenburg Army commander Aleksandr Il'ich Dutov, euphoric with the success of the White spring offensive, told journalists that the Whites would be in Moscow by August.¹ In reality, they were actually forced to retreat to western Siberia in August.

The commanders of all three of Kolchak's main armies were poorly chosen. Radola Gaida, an uncontrollable 28-year-old adventurer with experience as an Austrian medic, led the Siberian Army. His actions made the largest contribution to the spring offensive's failure. In July 1919, Gaida was removed from office, dismissed from the army, and even stripped of his general's rank after a conflict with Kolchak's High Command. Mikhail Vasil'evich Khanzhin was the head of the Western Army. Although he was an experienced officer, he had worked primarily as an artillery specialist, but commanders needed to do more than solve specific, technical problems involving artillery. The commander of the Separate Orenburg Army, Ataman Dutov, was more a politician than a military leader. He exclusively nominated Cossacks to leadership positions based on their origin, sometimes with little regard for their professional competency. Admiral Kolchak himself was a seaman and poorly versed in the tactics and strategies of ground combat. As a result, he had to rely on his own staff, headed by Lebedev, to make decisions on these matters. In contrast to the Soviet military specialists opposing them, neither Lebedev nor Kolchak had experience in directing large forces before the Civil War.

¹ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. R-952 (Russkoe telegrafnoe agentstvo pri aktsionernom obshchestve "Russkoe obshchestvo pechatnogo dela," Omsk), op. 3, d. 28, l. 2 (Dutov interview with a Siberian journalist, April 1919).

Kolchak's Strategy and Plan of Attack

Kolchak's generals' poor qualifications, the White movement's lack of a well-conceived plan of operation, and the primitive state of White strategic planning were directly connected. A meeting of army commanders, their chiefs of staff, and Kolchak himself on 11 February 1919 in Cheliabinsk was intended to decide the fundamental question of launching an offensive, but the entire meeting was an open farce. Lebedev, who had not come to the meeting, had already long since decided on his own plan; Kolchak was to force all the army commanders to accept it. The commanders, however, had their own plans of action and implemented them without adequately coordinating with neighboring armies.² Generals Aleksei Pavlovich Budberg and Mikhail Aleksandrovich Inostrantsev wrote about how careless these strategists were regarding issues of military planning.³ When the Western Army began losing at the front, the Siberian Army commander and his staff shortsightedly rejoiced at their neighbor's failure, instead of sending immediate support.⁴ Very soon, the Reds sent some of the troops freed by the defeat of the Western Army to fight against the Siberian Army, and the Siberian Army commander suffered the same sad fate as his predecessor.

To this point, the location of the Whites' main attack was still undetermined and would remain so. In spring 1919, they could have moved in two directions: using the Siberian Army to move northwest through Kazan', Viatka, and Kotlas to join forces with the White Northern Front under General Evgenii Karlovich Miller; or relying on the Western Army to advance southwest through Samara, Saratov, and Tsaritsyn to unite with Denikin's Armed Forces of Southern Russia. Based on the concentration of significant force in the Western Army, which the White commanders had already fostered, and the simple logic of the situation, the White command decided to attack the center of the front, along the railroad running west from Zlatoust to Ufa, in preparation for a further offensive through Samara. This appeared to be the most important and promising direction, and the shortest route to connect

² S. A. Shchepikhin, "Sibir' pri Kolchake: Vospominaniia" (GARF f. R-6605 [S. A. Shchepikhin], op. 1, d. 8, l. 78ob.); P. P. Petrov, *Ot Volgi do Tikhogo Okeana v riadakh belykh (1918–1922 gg.)* (Riga: Izdanie M. Didkovskogo, 1930), 76.

³ M. A. Inostrantsev, "Admiral Kolchak i ego katastrofy: Vospominaniia" (GARF f. R-5960 [M. A. Inostrantsev], op. 1, d. 8a, l. 69), published in M. A. Inostrantsev, *Vospominaniia: Konets imperii, revoliutsiia i nachalo bol'shevizma*, ed. A. V. Ganin (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2017), 779; A. P. Budberg, "Dnevnik," *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* 15 (1924): 340–41.

⁴ A. P. Budberg, "Dnevnik," *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* 14 (1924): 235; K. V. Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'* (Munich: n.p., 1923), 91.

with Denikin.⁵ Kolchak's directives at the beginning of the offensive made this clear.⁶

Despite the emphasis on the Western Army and an offensive toward the southwest to make contact with Denikin, the White command was unable to concentrate all the Western Army troops originally intended for the offensive, instead spreading them out along the front. They also did not effectively coordinate the offensive with neighboring armies.⁷ The Siberian Army, operating to the north of the Western Army, was nearly as powerful, but was largely operating toward the northwest to join forces with allies in the Arkhangel'sk region. Siberian Army commander Gaida supported this course.⁸ White military commanders believed that it was always possible to take one or two divisions out of the Siberian Army,⁹ but Gaida's attempts to act on his own in the North, instead of supporting the Western Army's offensive by attacking Sarapul and Kazan', were serious strategic errors that detracted from the success of the main operation.

White strategists enumerated the advantages of the southern option in detail, noting how important it was that they combine their forces with Denikin's, liberate the Cossack regions and other territories with anti-Bolshevik populations (including German colonists and Volga River peasants), seize regions that produced grain, coal, and oil, and also use the Volga as a means to transport these resources.¹⁰

To be sure, the immense spaces and distances involved meant that Kolchak's communications were spread thin, which could have led to failure be-

⁵ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv (RGVA) f. 39624 (Shtab Moskovskoi gruppy armii), op. 1, d. 28, l. 10 (General S. A. Shchepikhin to Colonel Z. F. Tsereteli, spring 1919); I. F. Plotnikov, "Cheliabinsk: Razrabotka strategicheskogo plana nastupleniia russkoi armii A. V. Kolchaka, uspekhi v ego osushchestvlenii i posleduii shchii proval (fevral'-mai 1919 g.)," in *Ural v sobytiakh 1917-1921 gg.: Aktual'nye problemy izucheniia*, ed. I. V. Narskii et al. (Cheliabinsk: Cheliabinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1999), 79-83.

⁶ "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii" (RGVA f. 39736 [Upravlenie sibirskoi armii], op. 1, d. 58, l. 11).

⁷ E. V. Volkov, *Sud'ba kolchakovskogo generala: Stranitsy zhizni M. V. Khanzhina* (Ekaterinburg: Ural'skii rabochii, 1999), 128.

⁸ G. K. Gins, *Sibir', soizuzniki i Kolchak* (Moscow: Kraft+, 2007), 393.

⁹ V. M. Molchanov, "Bor'ba na vostoke Rossii i v Sibiri," in *Vostochnyi front admirala Kolchaka*, ed. S. V. Volkov (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2004), 423.

¹⁰ V. G. Boldyrev, *Direktoriia, Kolchak, Interventy: Vospominaniia (Iz tsikla "Shest' let" 1917-1922 gg.)* (Novonikolaevsk: Sibkraiizdat, 1925), 60; Budberg, "Dnevnik," 14: 241; N. N. Golovin, *Rossiiskaia kontrrevoliutsiia*, pt. 4, bk. 8 (Paris: Illiustrirovannaia Rossiia, 1937), 114.

fore he joined forces with Denikin. Nonetheless, Kolchak's troops were moving into a more developed region, with a denser railroad network than in the east, and the White front was growing narrower, which freed up reserves. Coordination between Kolchak's Whites in Siberia and Denikin's in the south never fully materialized. The two White fronts' offensives nonetheless advanced without synchronization. Denikin's great successes in summer 1919 only began after Kolchak's offensive died out.

In sum, due to errors by Kolchak's High Command, his offensive, already poorly prepared and small in numbers, became a desperate slap with spread fingers, not a punch with a clenched fist. Not only did Denikin fail to coordinate with Kolchak, but Kolchak's armies themselves did not effectively cooperate with one another.

The Composition of the Kolchak Army

On top of disastrous command decisions, Kolchak faced serious problems of manpower, in terms of both officers and common soldiers. Troops were badly short of officers. Career officers—that is, those already commissioned into the tsarist army prior to the First World War—were a particular rarity. By mid-April, there were only 138 prewar officers and 2,548 wartime officers in the 63,000-strong Western Army.¹¹ On 1 March 1919, there were 83 prewar officers and 3,193 wartime officers in the Siberian Army.¹² By 15 March, this number had decreased to 70 career officers left and 3,009 wartime officers.¹³ In May, the Siberian Army did not even have enough officers to staff the headquarters of two army groups, which were manned only at the level of smaller armies.¹⁴ According to some data, Kolchak's shortage of officers had risen to 10,000 by the beginning of 1919.¹⁵ In many Orenburg Cossack regiments, the officer shortage reached double digits.¹⁶ Rear areas, on the other hand, were full of

¹¹ Order of battle for the Western Army, April 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 11ob.-12).

¹² "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 marta po 30 aprelia 1919 g." (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 58, l. 3).

¹³ *Ibid.*, l. 57.

¹⁴ "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 maia po 30 iunია 1919 g." (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 59, l. 56ob).

¹⁵ G. Kh. Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1966), 148.

¹⁶ For further details, see A. V. Ganin, *Ataman A. I. Dutov* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2006), 255–56.

officers. The Whites' harsh attitude toward captured former officers who had served in the Red ranks did not help the situation.

The masses of available officers left much to be desired, not only with regard to their training. There was virtually not a single division, corps, or army commander, to say nothing of the Cossack atamans, who had not committed disciplinary offenses under Civil War conditions. For example, on 26 May 1919, Gaida sent an ultimatum to Omsk demanding the dismissal of Chief of Staff Lebedev, whom he believed to be guilty of many failures at the front. Senior officials presented a bad example to everyone else. The absolute authority of a military order was nonexistent. In fact, any and all significant military leaders elevated their own independent authority, in essence acting as atamans toward their subordinates in these new conditions. They placed the interests of their units, detachments, divisions, corps, armies, and troops over orders from above, which they only carried out when necessary. To his subordinates the ataman was both tsar and God. They were prepared to follow him anywhere. As one contemporary remarked, "in the context of the Civil War, there was no 'unit stability,' and everything is based solely on the 'stability of individual leaders.'"¹⁷ Indeed, it was difficult to call Kolchak's army a single regular military force formed on the basis of one model, a single organizational structure, and so on. Almost every corps or detachment differed from the others, which in no way demonstrated regularity on the part of the army, as was sometimes expressed, but spoke instead to the partisan and improvisational nature of these formations.¹⁸ Military discipline in its proper understanding was absent, as was mutual cooperation. The Reds handled discipline in an entirely different manner.

White headquarters were swollen with officers who had fled the front. White soldiers lost their faith in victory as a result of seeing their own military command's complete disorganization and the enemy's impressive advances. Statements by commanders demonstrate this disappointment in the clearest terms; assessments by officers and common soldiers must have been even harsher. On the orders of the Orenburg Cossack Host Troop Headquarters, Major-General Lev Nikolaevich Domozhrov, appearing at a meeting in

¹⁷ A. V. Sulavko, *Etiudy po taktike v Grazhdanskoi voine* (Nicol'sk-Ussuriiskii: Elektrotipografiia K. I. Lepina, 1921), 19.

¹⁸ See, for example, "Zapiski Ivana Ivanovicha Sukina," in *Za spinoi Kolchaka: Dokumenty i materialy*, ed. A. V. Kvakina (Moscow: Agraf, 2005), 412.

Kizil'skaia *stanitsa* (Cossack settlement) in spring 1919, spoke to the Cossacks about the pointlessness of the struggle against the Reds.¹⁹

By the beginning of the spring offensive, the Whites on the Eastern Front had double the forces that the Reds had, including noncombatants. However, in terms of combat-ready forces, they really only had about 50 percent more troops. The Whites wasted this advantage relatively quickly. By 15 April 1919, the Western Army, which was carrying out the brunt of the attack, included 2,686 officers, 36,863 infantry, 9,242 cavalry, and 4,337 artillerymen, with a total of 63,039 officers and men.²⁰ By 10 June, the Western Army only had 24,015 infantry, 6,174 cavalry, and 1,694 soldiers without weapons.²¹ The Siberian Army, operating to the north of the Western Army, as of 1 March had 3,276 officers, 39,309 infantry, and 2,859 cavalry, while by 10 June 1919, they had a total of 60,629 fighters, including 56,649 infantry, and 3,980 cavalry.²²

By contrast, on 29 March 1919, the Separate Orenburg Army included only 3,185 infantry and 8,443 cavalry for a total of 11,628 fighters.²³ The latter had only a sixth of the manpower of Kolchak's other two armies, partly as a result of transferring its most valuable combat-ready non-Cossack units to the Western Army. The command of the Siberian Army and particularly the Western Army systematically mocked the Orenburg Cossacks for this shortfall. By 10 June 1919, the Southern Army (combining the Independent Orenburg Army and the Southern Group of the Western Army) had 15,483 infantry and 12,049 cavalry.²⁴ According to Red intelligence, the Separate Ural Army had about 13,700 troops in summer 1919. In total, at least 120,000 soldiers and officers from Kolchak's armies (not counting the Ural Cossacks, who were virtually

¹⁹ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Orenburgskoi oblasti (GAOO) f. R-1912 (Shtab Orenburgskogo voennogo okruga), op. 2, d. 32, l. 30 (document on the history of the Orenburg Cossacks' anti-Bolshevik struggle).

²⁰ Order of battle for the Western Army, April 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 87, l. 11ob.-12).

²¹ A. A. Karevskii and R. G. Gagkuev, eds., "Boevye raspisaniia armii Vostochnogo fronta, 1918-1919 gg.," in *Beloe dvizhenie na Vostoke Rossii: Belaia gvardiia. Istoricheskii al'manakh*, no. 5 (2001): 152. The document as published mistakenly converts a 10 June date to new style as 23 June; in fact, the original document reflects a new-style date, and 10 June is correct.

²² First set of figures from "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 marta po 30 apreliia 1919 g." (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 58, l. 3); second set from Karevskii and Gagkuev, ed., "Boevye raspisaniia," 148.

²³ Order of Battle for the Separate Orenburg Army, 29 March 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 13, l. 68-69).

²⁴ Karevskii and Gagkuev, "Boevye raspisaniia," 155.

autonomous) participated in the early stages of the spring offensive. By 15 February 1919, the Reds on the Eastern Front had 76,400 infantry and 8,570 cavalry.²⁵ By the beginning of May, the balance of forces on the front had evened out, and by 1 June, the Reds on the Eastern Front had 119,214 infantry and 11,184 cavalry, with 367 artillery pieces and 2,298 machine guns.²⁶

Kolchak's army suffered from an unbalanced distribution of forces and resources. The Cossack fronts experienced a severe shortage of infantry units. This made taking an important center such as Orenburg impossible, as the Cossacks lacked infantry for sieges or urban combat. Non-Cossack fronts had a shortage of cavalry. Only centralized direction could have led the Whites to victory, but the Cossack regions remained autonomous, and the Cossack atamans continued pursuing their own political agendas. In addition to tactical and strategic problems, this created moral and psychological difficulties. Soldiers and Cossacks fighting in their native regions were tempted to desert, return home, or defect to the enemy's side if their native *stanitsa* or village was on the other side of the front lines. The Bolsheviks understood this problem and attempted to deal with it. Even the legendary Izhevsk and Votkinsk workers, the only workers to side with the Whites, wanted to go home after their factories were liberated from the Reds. At the end of April 1919, in the midst of the intense battles that ultimately decided the fate of the White movement in the east, the majority of these "heroes" in the struggle against the Bolsheviks abandoned the army and left for home. General Khanzhin had earlier shortsightedly promised them that they could "return to their families." By May, only 452 original personnel remained in the Izhevsk Brigade; the new arrivals were poorly trained and of dubious loyalty.²⁷ On 10 May, General Gaida had to dismiss the Votkinsk Division soldiers and send them home.²⁸ Cossacks generally did not want to go beyond their territory, and put local

²⁵ T. F. Kariaeva and N. N. Azovtsev, eds., *Direktivny komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi armii (1917–1922 gg.)* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978), 4: 56.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁷ I. F. Plotnikov, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Urale (1917–1922 gg.): Entsiklopediia i bibliografiia* (Ekaterinburg: Bank kul'turnoi informatsii, 2007), 1: 149–50. Discipline did not improve over time: see A. V. Ganin, "Pochemu proigrali belye?! Vozzvanie ofitserov i soldat izhevtsev i votkintsev o samovol'nom ostavlenii imi riadov armii 1919 g.," in *Beloe delo: II s'ezd predstavitelei pechatnykh i elektronnykh izdaniy. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii Beloe delo v Grazhdanskoi voine v Rossii, 1917–1922 gg.*, ed. V. Zh. Tsvetkov (Moscow: Posev, 2005), 239–42.

²⁸ "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 maia po 30 iunია 1919 g." (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 59, l. 27ob.); S. I. Konstantinov, *Vooruzhennye formirovaniia protivobol'shevistskikh pravitel'stv Povolzh'ia, Urala i Sibiri v gody Grazhdanskoi voiny* (Ekaterinburg: IRA UTK, 1997), 165.

interests above national interests. The White generals noted in their memoirs that the population was indifferent to the cause of reviving Russia, which affected troop morale.

Organizing the Offensive

The Western Army began Kolchak's spring offensive in March 1919. The offensive's ultimate goal was Moscow, but the plan for interarmy cooperation during the offensive was derailed almost immediately, and they had no plan at all for action west of the Volga.²⁹ At this time, they assumed that the main areas of resistance against the Reds would be in Simbirsk and Samara.³⁰

White records demonstrate the surrealism of the offensive's planning. On 28 February, the eve of the offensive, the Siberian Army did not have a single battalion in reserve. The Siberian Army's left flank had operational tasks that did not coincide with the dividing line between the Siberian and Western armies, creating a gap through which the Reds could easily advance.³¹

When the offensive began on 4 March 1919, units of the Siberian Army's Third Steppe Corps had to retreat with heavy losses from a series of positions due to ammunition shortages.³² The Central Mid-Siberian Corps faced a similar situation from lack of cartridges or shells. After launching the offensive, units of the Central Siberian Corps found themselves on 5 March 1919 facing entrenched Red positions and more numerous Red units. The Whites sensed an enemy that outclassed them in every area: in artillery, ammunition, and even cavalry, despite Cossack support for the Whites.³³ These early confrontations showed that the Whites were unprepared for the operation.

From the very beginning, the offensive did not go according to plan. Egregious mistakes and disorganized commands were obvious even to ordinary officers and soldiers, undermining faith in their commanders. This is hardly surprising, considering that not even all the corps headquarters knew the purpose of the impending offensive.³⁴ Western Army units blundered into

²⁹ Shchepikhin, "Sibir' pri Kolchake" (GARF f. R-6605, op. 1, d. 8, l. 78).

³⁰ Operational communications of the White Army staffs, 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 27, l. 84).

³¹ "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 ianvaria po 28 fevralia 1919 g." (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 57, l. 156ob.).

³² "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 marta po 30 apreliia 1919 g." (ibid., d. 58, l. 14ob.).

³³ Ibid., l. 18ob.

³⁴ See Petrov, *Ot Volgi do Tikhogo Okeana*, 75–76.

the Siberian Army's offensive zone, where divisions of the two armies refused to assist each other, highlighting the poor coordination between the armies, and aggravating the rivalry between their leaders.

Despite these difficulties, the Whites were initially successful. On 7 March, the Siberian Army, operating on the right (northern) flank of the White offensive, captured Okhansk and then, the next day, Osa. On 13 March, the Western Army seized Ufa. Finally, on 18 March, units of the Western Army's Southern Group and the Separate Orenburg Army began a coordinated attack on the left (southern) flank. They approached Orenburg in late April, but became mired in attempts to seize the city. The Western Army captured Menzelsinsk on 22 March, Sterlitamak on 5 April, Belebei on 7 April, Bugul'ma on 10 April, and Buguruslan on 15 April. The Siberian and Western armies inflicted heavy losses on the Red Second and Fifth armies.

The White command considered it important to pursue the enemy vigorously, without breaking contact, in order to seize strategically important areas before the iced-over rivers thawed. This led to the "race to the Volga." The Whites did not succeed, however, in beating the spring *rasputitsa* (thaw), when melting snow and ice turns the roads into a sea of mud, rendering travel nearly impossible. The left flank of the Siberian Army slowed its advance on Sarapul, which it only managed to capture on 10 April. It took Votkinsk on 7 April and Izhevsk on 13 April. The troops then headed toward Kazan', Viatka, and Kotlas. They captured Elabuga on 4 May and then advanced toward the Viatka River. After this, the commander of the Siberian Army's Northern Group sent word that he would not be able to go on the offensive earlier than 20 May based on local conditions, his troops' lack of armaments, and the fact that a communication route was not yet established.³⁵ As the Western Army's offensive stalled and was then forced back, the Siberian Army's Northern Group did not undertake any combat actions for nearly two weeks.

The stalled White advance became more serious in May on the far left (southern) flank around Orenburg. The main forces of the Separate Orenburg Army (two corps) and a corps from the Western Army's Southern Group ended up committed to the city. The three White corps did not have the strength to storm the city, lacked sufficient ammunition and equipment, and had difficulty coordinating their actions as a result of poor communications and flooded rivers. The Whites could not completely contain the forces of the Soviet First Army in this sector.³⁶ Besides that, part of the Separate Orenburg

³⁵ "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 maia po 30 iunია 1919 g." (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 59, l. 18ob.).

³⁶ G. Kh. Eikhe, *Ufimskaiia avantiura Kolchaka* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1960), 221.

Army was supposed to prevent a Red advance from Turkestan. Consequently, the forces on both flanks of Kolchak's offensive did not contribute to the main effort.

The key developments took place in the central sector of the front. Here, the Whites found themselves in a difficult situation. As a result of the lack of coordination between the Western Army and its neighbors, the flanks of Kolchak's main force were left unprotected. The front stretched to a width of over 400 km, weakening the White forces. Additionally, support units lagged behind during the offensive, a supply chain had not been set up, and reserves could not be relied on. Contradictions in the command structure aggravated the situation, and the spring *rasputitsa* further complicated reorganization.

As early as 5 March 1919, the Reds established the Southern Group of the Eastern Front under the command of Mikhail Vasil'evich Frunze to attack the left flank of Kolchak's advance. On 10 April, the group was reorganized to include forces from the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Turkestan armies, creating a powerful group of nearly 42,000 troops to carry out an attack on Kolchak. Frunze launched his counterattack on 28 April, depriving Kolchak of his chance for victory. The Reds took Buguruslan and Chistopol' by 4 May, Bugul'ma by 13 May, and Belebei by 17 May. On 24 May, the Whites evacuated Sterlitamak, while the Reds arrived in Elabuga on 26 May. On 2 June, the Reds entered Sarapul and, on 7 June, Izhevsk. Eyewitness accounts of the Red attack on the Siberian Army report columns thick with Red soldiers.³⁷ The robustness of the Red armies presented a significant contrast with the thin White formations. The Siberian Army's Eighth Army Corps did not have enough strength to counter the Red attack.

On 20 May, the Northern Group of the Whites' Siberian Army began an attack on Viatka and occupied Glazov on 2 June, but this success was an exception and did not have an impact on the situation on the front or, above all, reverse the Western Army's retreat. The Siberian Army's records of the Siberian Army report their positions being shelled relentlessly by the advancing Reds.³⁸ With their inadequate supplies, the Whites could not respond in kind. In order to hold the front lines, Army Commander Gaida did not shrink from issuing the harshest orders, although some of them demonstrated he did not clearly understand the situation. He threatened, for example, to transfer the First Cavalry Division personnel to ordinary service, because they were acting halfheartedly and indecisively.³⁹ He made other threats that were sim-

³⁷ "Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 maia po 30 iunia 1919 g." (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 59, l. 45).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 136.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 148.

ilarly absurd considering the absence of reserves. The Whites abandoned Ufa on 9 June, Votkinsk on 11 June, and Glazov on 13 June. The Whites soon lost virtually all the territory they had captured during the offensive. They withdrew beyond the Urals and then were forced to retreat in bleak conditions to Siberia and Turkestan, where they suffered monstrous hardships as a result of their own leadership's shortsightedness and incompetence.

The Reserves

Whatever commanders' abilities, they cannot accomplish anything without troops. Without having reserves to exploit successes, operations only lead to failure and pointless deaths, which is precisely what happened to Kolchak's troops in spring and summer 1919. The shortage of reserves was yet another serious problem facing the Whites, and yet another circumstance that kept them from succeeding. Both Kolchak and Denikin began their offensives almost entirely devoid of reserves, which could lead only to disaster. White strategists evidently based their calculations on gradually shrinking the ring around Soviet Russia and, as a result, reducing their own frontlines. In addition to this view, they could use the liberated territories to draft reinforcements. For that to happen, the Whites needed at least to reach the more densely populated regions along the Volga and hold there, which Kolchak failed to do.

Kolchak's offensive began on the eve of the spring *rasputitsa*, when road conditions deteriorated sharply. Undermanned White units soon spent several weeks separated from White rear areas behind the Western Army and the Separate Orenburg Army. Supplies and reinforcements had not been well established beforehand and were now generally unavailable. Red commander Frunze rightly believed the spring *rasputitsa* to be a Red ally.⁴⁰ Indeed, as a result of flooded rivers, artillery, supply convoys and even infantry were unable to advance. They had to use the morning freeze to cross rivers, but as the weather warmed that became impossible. There were incidents of riders and horses drowning together. Units separated by flooding could not coordinate their action, and lost contact with one another. Simple movement in these conditions exhausted the troops, even without the burden of combat.

While the Reds retreated toward their bases and could thus recover their strength, the White troops rushed toward the Volga at full speed to outrun the spring *rasputitsa* and found themselves short of food, clothing, ammuni-

⁴⁰ S. A. Sirotinskii, *Put' Arseniia: Biograficheskii ocherk o M. V. Frunze* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1959), 140.

tion, and artillery, besides also being physically exhausted.⁴¹ Major General Nikolai Timofeevich Sukin, commander of the Sixth Ural Army Corps, asked the army command how he should proceed: should he continue the attack on Buzuluk and sacrifice the infantry, or wait out the spring *rasputitsa*, bring up supplies and artillery, and put his troops in order?⁴²

Unable to advance on the impassable roads, the Whites bogged down. With the Russian Civil War characterized by open spaces and mobile campaigns, halting movement was almost always a harbinger of retreat and defeat. Advancing troops increased their numbers, while retreating troops waned. Taking advantage of the temporary respite, the Reds moved up their reserves, seized the initiative, and then employed their advantage of controlling interior lines of communication and transport to shift reinforcements to threatened areas. By doing so, they prevented the Whites from achieving decisive victory anywhere. The Whites never received their much-needed reserves. The spring *rasputitsa* dampened the White offensive and allowed the Reds to recover and launch a counterattack from the Buzuluk-Sorochinskaia-Mikhailovskoe (Sharlyk) region using their Eastern Front's Southern Group. Despite learning about the Red attack in advance, the Whites could find nothing to counter it with, as would later happen to Denikin in the fall of 1919.⁴³ The Whites could not even make it to Buzuluk, which they had planned to capture by 26 April in order to cut the Tashkent railroad and block Orenburg's connection to the Soviet center. Lacking accurate intelligence, they were not certain where to move the White Western Army's Southern Group. Should it be deployed toward Orenburg or toward Buzuluk, or instead hold in place between these areas?⁴⁴ In retrospect, it would have been better to move the Southern Group to Buzuluk, but the Whites followed the third option instead.

The Whites desperately needed manpower; one option for recruitment was to begin a draft in the frontline zone, because White Siberia far behind the lines had an ineffective conscription system. Chief of staff of the Western Army General Sergei Aref'evich Shchepikhin noted that there were no reserves behind the Western Army's front.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the White offensive depleted already undermanned units. In the Beloretskii regiment, one of the best regiments of the Fifth Sterlitamak Army Corps, only about 200 troops

⁴¹ For further details, see A. V. Ganin, *Chernogorets na russkoi sluzhbe: General Bakich* (Moscow: Russkii put', 2004), 73–75.

⁴² General N. T. Sukin report to General M. V. Khanzhin, commander of the Western Army, 15 April 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 69, l. 109ob.).

⁴³ Petrov, *Ot Volgi do Tikhogo Okeana*, 80–81.

⁴⁴ Resolution of S. A. Shchepikhin [n.d.] (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 69, l. 126).

⁴⁵ Shchepikhin, "Sibir' pri Kolchake" (GARF f. R-6605, op. 1, d. 8, l. 71ob.).

remained by early May.⁴⁶ The regiments of the Sixth Ural Corps only had between 400–800 men by mid-April, and nearly half of them could not fight for lack of boots. Some of them wore bast shoes, which exposed soldiers to illness. Uniforms were not available for reinforcements.⁴⁷ The Ural Cossacks' situation was even worse; regiments consisted of only 200 men plus elected officers and had extremely lax discipline.⁴⁸ On 2 May, General Budberg noted in his diary that the White offensive had stalled, while the Reds had broken through the front at a very dangerous point.⁴⁹

The front demanded new forces, but the Whites were unable to scrape together troops to send to the frontline. There was no methodical work to train reinforcements. The White command transferred the strategic reserve of the High Command's First Volga Corps under Major General Vladimir Oskarovich Kappel' to the Western Army, but made a serious miscalculation when it committed that force piecemeal to the fight against the Reds. The corps—known as the Kappel'evtsy in honor of the commander—was sent to the front without proper preparation. Some of the reinforcements defected to the Red side, and those remaining were used to fill up holes on the Western Army's front. Based on information from a British military mission, nearly 10,000 troops defected to the Reds from Kappel's corps, although this figure seems inflated.⁵⁰ Another reserve, the Joint Cossack Corps, also did not play a large role in the operation.

The Siberian Army formed the Joint Siberian Shock Corps in February and March 1919 as a reserve. By mid-May, the corps was still not ready for offensive action, lacking rifles, machine guns, field kitchens, or a supply train.⁵¹ Instead of taking part in active offensive maneuvers, the corps was deployed to patch holes in the front line. The corps was sent into battle on 27 May in order to close the gap between the Western and Siberian Armies. It lost half of its fighting force in just two days of combat, caused first and foremost by men surrendering and allowing themselves to be taken prisoner. The corps was not able to demonstrate its worth in later battles either.

⁴⁶ General P. A. Belov telegram to the commander of the Western Army, 2 May 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 69, l. 68).

⁴⁷ General N. T. Sukin report to General M. V. Khanzhin, commander of the Western Army, 15 April 1919 (*ibid.*, l. 109 ob.).

⁴⁸ Ataman A. I. Dutov negotiations with Colonel N. S. Anisimov in Omsk, January 1919 (*ibid.*, l. 184).

⁴⁹ Budberg, "Dnevnik," *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, 14: 228–29.

⁵⁰ Jonathan D. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 320.

⁵¹ Negotiations of the Siberian Army staff, 1919 (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 14, l. 109).

Some units of the corps acted extremely dishonorably. For instance, the Sixth and Seventh Shock Regiments began to retreat, but the retreat quickly turned into “a flight so hasty that some soldiers cast off their weapons and boots and fled in a panic from the enemy they had been ordered to defeat.”⁵² Gaida was furious, and ordered that all deserters be shot, that any man who arrived without boots or rifles be arrested, and that the guilty be handed over for a field court martial. He ordered that his command confiscate and replace the troops’ English uniforms with old ones, and that soldiers hand their new uniforms over to army headquarters for distribution to troops more worthy of them. He ended leave time for soldiers. He also stripped regiments and the Second Siberian Shock Division of their “Siberian Shock” title. Moreover, Gaida ordered that all older soldiers who had been drafted should stay on after fulfilling their six months of compulsory service until the division could redeem itself by carrying out successful operations. The division commander was strongly reprimanded.

Units of the corps were sent into battle without appropriate training or preparation. Most of the regimental, battalion, and company commanders received their appointments only on the eve of the offensive or during the corps’ advance to the front, while the division commanders were only appointed after the corps had already been defeated. Their fighting force was sent to the frontlines without telephones, field kitchens, or supply trains, and they were not fully armed.⁵³ The mobilized non-commissioned officers did not even complete a three-week training course. The corps’ actions were not coordinated with the Western Army’s actions. There were no other large reserves in Gaida’s army, and the left flank of the army was already exhausted from heavy fighting. The threat of defeat loomed over the Siberian Army.

Supplying the Army

Soldiers’ fighting spirit depends not only on success at the front, but also on whether they are dressed, shod, fed, and provided with necessary equipment. Issues with supplying troops were a key bottleneck in Kolchak’s military machine. Only the single trunk line of the trans-Siberian railroad passed through all of Siberia, and the fate of the offensive depended largely upon its carrying capacity. Based on data for 1918, the route’s carrying capacity amounted to

⁵² “Zhurnal voennykh deistvii Sibirskoi armii za period s 1 maia po 30 iunია 1919 g.” (RGVA f. 39736, op. 1, d. 59, l. 106).

⁵³ D. G. Simonov, “K istorii Svobodnogo sibirskogo udarnogo korpusa armii admirala A. V. Kolchaka (1919 g.),” in *Sibir’ v period Grazhdanskoi voiny*, ed. S. P. Zviagin (Kemerovo: Omskaia akademiia MVD Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2007), 55–57.

six pairs of trains per day.⁵⁴ The railroad was in poor condition in 1919: there were not enough cars, and supplies were available only intermittently and unevenly. As a result, troops had to carry everything they needed with them or resort to self-supply, verging on looting, which put the local population on guard and corrupted the troops. Consequently, colossal convoys were advanced alongside fighting units, which hindered battlefield success and drew off large numbers of personnel. The Western Army's 32nd Prikamskii Regiment, for example, included more than 2,000 wagons in June 1919.⁵⁵

It was especially difficult to provide material support in areas that had no railroads, which required supply by horse-drawn transport. This was the case for the Orenburg and Ural Armies: i.e., the Whites' entire left flank. The Whites were famous for their "psychic" attacks, during which they did not fire a single shot. However, they did not employ this strategy by choice, nor simply to impress the enemy. In reality, these had little to do with psychology, and more to the fact that the Whites were short on ammunition. After abandoning the Volga in the autumn of 1918, the Whites lost their military factories and warehouses there.⁵⁶ In the Urals, munitions factories existed in Izhevsk, Perm', and Zlatoust, but there was no military industry in Siberia proper, which the Whites retained. Moreover, it was difficult for the Whites to establish production in the Urals factories they had taken.

The Whites were armed with a wide variety of weapons, including Mosin, Berdan, Arisaka, Gras, and Vetterli rifles. They also had Nagant revolvers, as well as Maxim, Colt, Hotchkiss, and Lewis machine guns.⁵⁷ Foreign models were sometimes as widespread as Russian.⁵⁸ Such variety made it difficult to provide appropriate ammunition. The Western Army lacked Russian rifles,

⁵⁴ Reports and data on the formation of the armed forces in Siberia (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 38, l. 3; f. 39597 (Voennoe ministerstvo Vserossiiskogo pravitel'stva), op. 1, d. 142, l. 12ob.).

⁵⁵ Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 111.

⁵⁶ Report of Colonel K. N. Rogul, October 1918 (RGVA f. 39617 [Upravlenie Sibirskoi armii], op. 1, d. 70, ll. 156–58ob.), published in A. V. Ganin, *Sem' "pochemu" rossiiskoi Grazhdanskoi voiny* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Pyaty Rim" [OOO "Bestseller"], 2018), 444–50.

⁵⁷ Orders of Kvarkenskii detachment, July–August 1918 (GAOO f. R-1912, op. 1, d. 12, l. 4–4ob.); data on the number of weapons in the Orenburg Cossack host formations, 1918 (*ibid.*, op. 2, d. 75, l. 8, 9ob., 12).

⁵⁸ Data on the number of weapons in the Orenburg Cossack host formations, 1918 (GAOO f. R-1912, op. 2, d. 75, l. 8, 9ob.); A. P. Abramovskii and V. S. Kobzov, *Orenburgskoe kazach'e voisko v trekh vekakh* (Cheliabinsk: Cheliabinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1999), 322.

but also lacked ammunition for its Japanese rifles.⁵⁹ By 15 April, the Western Army had a total of 667 machine guns, including 229 Maxim, 137 Lewis, 249 Colt, and 52 other models. In 44 artillery batteries, there were 85 field guns (3-inch), 2 artillery pieces (42-line/4.2 inch), 8 artillery pieces (48-line/4.8 inch), 7 other models, and 1 bomb thrower.⁶⁰ The Separate Orenburg Army lacked sufficient artillery pieces or machine guns.

All White armies had shortages of communications equipment, automobiles, armored vehicles, and fuel. For instance, the White attack by multiple corps on Orenburg in early May 1919 fell apart due to poor communications. As of 28 May 1919, up to 300 telegrams from the headquarters of the Western Army at Ufa failed to reach the headquarters of the Separate Orenburg Army at Orsk.⁶¹ At one point the White High Command lost contact with some units for several weeks.⁶² This was not only caused by faulty and inadequate technical equipment and an overextended system, but also by frequent sabotage in poorly controlled rear areas. The Whites also lacked fuel. In the middle of the 1919 spring offensive, Western Army pilots were instructed to “conserve the small amount of gasoline available for their aerial detachments ... when crossing the Volga.”⁶³

Supply problems ran deep. The beginning of the spring *rasputitsa* only exacerbated them. After the *rasputitsa* ended, though, the Siberian Army's Northern Group faced similar issues due to frequent rain. According to General Konstantin Viacheslavovich Sakharov, the Western Army's Cheliabinsk warehouses held a one-and-a-half-month reserve of food in May 1919, but the quartermaster did not understand the army's needs and did not send what the troops required.⁶⁴ Weapons and ammunition shortages were the most important problem, but the appearance of Kolchak's soldiers revealed additional problems. A few rare photographs paint a horrifying picture. In the Siberian Army's Northern Group, “people are barefoot and naked, walking in peasant coats and bast shoes.... Cavalry scouts, like 20th-century Scythians,

⁵⁹ RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 69, l. 188.

⁶⁰ Order of Battle of the Western Army, April 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 11ob.-12).

⁶¹ Information about the military wire between Ufa and Orsk, 28 May 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 186, l. 460).

⁶² “Zapiski Ivana Ivanovicha Sukina,” 417.

⁶³ RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 11, l. 21.

⁶⁴ Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 97–98.

ride without saddles."⁶⁵ In the Fifth Syzran' Regiment of the Western Army's Southern Group, "most people's boots had fallen apart, and they walked in mud up to their knees."⁶⁶ In the Western Army's Second Ufa Army Corps, reinforcements arrived without uniforms and were sent directly into battle.⁶⁷ According to General Sakharov, at the end of May 1919, soldiers in the Western Army units looked "as if these were not military units, but thousands of beggars gathered from church vestibules."⁶⁸

This image seems at odds with the enormous deliveries of supplies sent to Kolchak by the Allies, including two million pairs of boots and full uniforms for 200,000 or even 360,000 men, not to mention hundreds of thousands of shells, rifles, hundreds of millions of cartridges, and thousands of machine guns.⁶⁹ Even if all of this was in fact delivered to Vladivostok, much of it never made it to the front. As a result, one of the most significant supply sources for White troops was the trophies seized from the Reds.

Hunger, fatigue from ceaseless marches and battles, and a lack of normal clothing created fertile ground for Bolshevik agitation, which led to desertion, defecting to the other side, and the mutinous murder of officers. Drafted peasants fought reluctantly and sometimes deserted, taking their weapons with them and opening fire on their recent comrades. There were also cases of mass surrender. In the most famous case, the Taras Shevchenko First Ukrainian Kuren (a unit of Ukrainian troops) rioted on 1–2 May 1919 in the village of Kuz'kino near the Sarai-Gir railroad station. During this riot, approximately 60 officers were killed and 2,500–3,000 armed soldiers, mainly from the 11th and 12th Ural Rifle divisions of the Sixth Ural Army Corps, went over to the Reds, bringing 11 machine guns and 2 artillery pieces with them.⁷⁰

Significantly, before the revolt the 11th Ural Division had fought heroically and suffered heavy losses in April 1919. The division was practically

⁶⁵ N. D. Egorov and N. V. Pul'chenko, eds., "Rossiia pogibnet v volnakh novoi anarkhii," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 6 (1996): 81.

⁶⁶ From an oral account of participant Aleksei Filippovich Gergenreder, private communication to author from Ivan Alekseevich Gergenreder, 13 January 2004.

⁶⁷ General M. V. Khanzhin to the chief of staff of VI Corps, 2 May 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 69, l. 53).

⁶⁸ Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 102.

⁶⁹ "Zapiski Ivana Ivanovicha Sukina," 423; L. M. Spirin, *Razgrom armii Kolchaka* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1957), 89–91. For data on British supplies, see Norman Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 105.

⁷⁰ Plotnikov, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Urale*, 2: 144.

destroyed and then the newly arrived reinforcements defected to the Reds.⁷¹ Later, the 11th Sengilei Regiment and the Third Battalion of the 49th Kazan' Regiment, among others, deserted to the enemy.⁷² Similar incidents occurred on a smaller scale in the Western Army's Southern Group, in the Siberian Army, and in the Separate Orenburg Army. In June 1919, 2 battalions of the 21st Cheliabinsk Mountain Infantry Regiment killed their officers and joined the Reds. At the end of the month, the Third Dobrianka and Fourth Solikamsk Regiments surrendered without a fight near Perm'.⁷³ In total, the Reds took nearly 25,500 prisoners from the beginning of their counteroffensive until the end of the Ufa operation.⁷⁴

Since the White command was unable to create the conditions necessary for normal operations, the result of the Kolchak offensive is not surprising. On 2 May 1919, Major General Rudol'f Karlovich Bangerskii, commander of the 12th Ural Rifle Division, reported to his corps commander General Nikolai Timofeevich Sukin that

we have never had any rear. Since Ufa [the capture of Ufa on 13 March], we have not received any bread, and just eat whatever turns up. The division is unfit for action. We need to give people at least two nights' sleep or there will be a major collapse.... I would like to know in the name of what higher goal the 12th Division was sacrificed.⁷⁵

In fact, it was the whole Kolchak Army, not only Bangerskii's division, which was sacrificed. In the Western Army, the Orenburg Cossacks did not have feed for their horses. The horses starved during the constant marches, and were barely able to move.⁷⁶ The sad state of the horses deprived the army

⁷¹ Secret telegram of General N. T. Sukin to the commander of the Western Army, 30 April 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 69, l. 50).

⁷² S. G. Shushpanov, "Zabytaia diviziia," *Belaia armiiia, beloe delo*, no. 4 (1997): 44.

⁷³ B. B. Filimonov, *Belaia armiiia admirala Kolchaka* (Moscow: Reittar, 1997), 39; D. V. Filat'ev, *Katastrofa Belogo dvizheniia v Sibiri, 1918–1922: Vpechatleniia ochevidtza* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1985), 79; D. A. Lobanov, "Permskaia strelkovaia diviziia armii admirala Kolchaka, 1918–1919 gg.," *Beloe dvizhenie na Vostoke Rossii: Belaia gvardiia*, no. 5 (2001): 91.

⁷⁴ N. E. Kakurin and I. I. Vatsetis, *Grazhdanskaia voina, 1918–1921* (St. Petersburg: Poligon, 2002), 238.

⁷⁵ Bangerskii to Sukin, 2 May 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 69, ll. 62ob., 64ob.).

⁷⁶ M. F. Vorotovov, "2-i Orenburgskii kazachii polk v 1918–1920 gg. (Zapiski polkovnika Vorotovova)," Hoover Institution Archives, Colonel Vorotovov Collection, Folder VW Russia V954, l. 17, published as A. V. Ganin, "Loshadei nashikh vetrom

of its most important advantages: speed and surprise. The White cavalry, according to a participant's observations, was in no way comparable to the Red cavalry, whose horses were in excellent condition and, therefore, highly mobile. Sukin was driven to despair, and did not shy away from stationing a guard at Ufa after its capture to prevent looting.⁷⁷ At times, there were not enough of the most essential items. In July 1919 the Second Ufa Army Corps did not have vessels to boil water, resulting in gastrointestinal diseases.⁷⁸

Kolchak's Rear

The pinnacle of the monstrous state of Kolchak's military machine was its rear area, which the Whites controlled poorly. In many places, tyranny and lawlessness reigned. The entire Enisei province and part of Irkutsk were captured by partisans, who had swept up a considerable number of White forces and constantly threatened the Eastern Front's supplies, delivered by the trans-Siberian railroad. In May 1919, partisans systematically dismantled the railroad tracks (sometimes for considerable distances) on a regular basis. This disrupted transit for long periods: sabotage on the night of 8 May interrupted train services for two weeks. They also burned bridges, fired on trains, caused collisions, cut telegraph wires, and terrorized railroad personnel. There were 11 wrecks every ten days until the beginning of June, so that more than 140 trains carrying ammunition and supplies badly needed at the front were backed up east of Krasnoiarsk.⁷⁹ Disorder reigned supreme on the railroad, even without partisan interference. As a result, the supply issue became the subject of nearly daily discussions at Western Army headquarters in early 1919.

Uprisings enveloped the Turgai and Akmola regions, as well as the Altai and Tomsk provinces. Thousands of soldiers fought to suppress these revolts instead of at the front. In itself, tens of thousands of battle-ready partisans clearly indicated the failure of Kolchak's conscription in Siberia. The Far East

kachalo..." *Vospominaniia polkovnika M. F. Vorotovova o bor'be orenburgskikh kazakov s krasnymi v 1918–1922 gg.*, *Zhurnal rossiiskikh i vostochnoevropeiskikh istoricheskikh issledovanii* 1 (20) (2020): 222–81.

⁷⁷ Shchepikhin, "Sibir' pri Kolchake" (GARF f. R-6605, op. 1, d. 8, l. 62); Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 78. General Budberg wrote that the guard had no pants, but that seems unlikely (Budberg, "Dnevnik," *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, 15: 341).

⁷⁸ Report from the Second Ufa Army Corps to the staff of the Western Army, 19 July 1919 (RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 210, l. 22).

⁷⁹ Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl*, 229; P. A. Novikov, *Grazhdanskaia voina v vostochnoi Sibiri* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2005), 163.

Cossack atamans Grigorii Mikhailovich Semenov, Ivan Pavlovich Kalmykov, and Ivan Mikhailovich Gamov required a strikingly large number of troops, ostensibly to suppress Red partisans. As of 21 February 1919, on the eve of Kolchak's spring offensive, Semenov had 7,500 infantry, 4,500 cavalry, 84 machine guns, 30 artillery pieces, and 3 armored trains. Kalmykov had 300 infantry, 250 cavalry, 18 machine guns, and 12 artillery pieces. Gamov had 530 infantry, 560 cavalry, 9 machine guns, and 5 artillery pieces.⁸⁰ By no means did they need all these forces to fight the partisans, whom they ultimately did not succeed in defeating anyway. Kolchak did not have the strength to curb Cossack separatism. Consequently, the ataman separatists concentrated their efforts on their own schemes and behind-the-scenes struggle against Kolchak, instead of helping at the front. As a result of their actions, Kolchak's offensive did not receive a single military unit from the Far East at a time when reinforcements were greatly needed and, perhaps, could have turned the tide.

The Defeat of Kolchak

In June–July 1919, the Reds steadily advanced toward the Urals. From 14 June to 12 July, the Red Army's Eastern Front received only 34,200 reinforcements, which was not enough to make up for their losses. Their numbers were additionally falling as a result of reassigning troops to other fronts (from mid-May to the end of June, three rifle divisions, four rifle and two cavalry brigades with a combined strength of up to 45,000 troops, 500 machine guns, and 100 artillery pieces).⁸¹ Nevertheless, the Reds continued their offensive successfully, capturing Perm' and Kungur on 1 July, Krasnoufimsk on 4 July, and Zlatoust on 13 July. They entered Ekaterinburg on 14 July, taking Cheliabinsk and Verkhneural'sk on 24–25 July. The Whites abandoned Troitsk on 4 August. Some reports suggest only 138 soldiers were killed, 66 wounded and 89 missing from the First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Soviet armies during the first half of July.⁸² The Second and Third Soviet armies advanced 280–300 km at a speed of 18–20 km per day.

In mid-July, the White Siberian and Western Armies were reorganized into groups of combined troops: the First (under Lieutenant General Anatolii Nikolaevich Pepeliaev), the Second (Lieutenant General Nikolai Aleksandrovich Lokhvitskii), and the Third (Major General Sakharov) Armies. In the second half of July, the Whites created the post of commander in chief of the

⁸⁰ Report on the forces in Priamurskii Military District, 21 February 1919 (RGVA f. 185 [Shtab 5-i armii i Vostochno-Sibirskogo voennogo okruga], op. 6, d. 60, l. 266).

⁸¹ Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl*, 246–47.

⁸² N. E. Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas' revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990), 2: 249.

Eastern Front for Lieutenant General Mikhail Konstantinovich Diterikhs. The commander in chief's headquarters was designated the central directorate of combat operations. The commander in chief's staff was now responsible for dealing with supply, so that the army command could concentrate on combat operations. However, these changes did not yield any results due to the disorganized conditions in the rear area.

The Whites attempted to organize resistance in the Cheliabinsk region. They even tried to encircle the Reds advancing west toward the Red "Cannae" in a vast pincer. The plan for the Cheliabinsk operation was developed by Lebedev, chief of staff for Kolchak's Stavka, along with his friend, Third Army commander Sakharov. The reason for their decision to stand at Cheliabinsk and trap the pursuing Reds was the fear that their troops would perish in a continued retreat. Sakharov's leadership style was unfortunately characterized by a tendency to micromanage his subordinates. This led to conflict, especially since Sakharov's subordinates were brilliant, experienced, and ambitious, particularly Kappel', Sergei Nikolaevich Voitsekhovskii, and others. The commander in chief of all the White Eastern Front Armies, General Diterikhs, opposed the plan, but principle of hierarchy and subordination was not a priority in Kolchak's military machine. Despite outstanding military leaders—Voitsekhovskii and Kappel'—the White Northern and Southern Strike groups ultimately failed.⁸³ The White forces deployed to surround the enemy were insufficient. Although the Northern Group was sufficiently powerful, the Southern Group was much weaker. The Whites could only succeed tactically in this operation, because they had no reserves that they could use to develop any successes further. Voitsekhovskii's divisions did enjoy some success, striking at the juncture between the Red Army's 27th and 35th Rifle divisions, and threatening to cut the railroad supporting the Red advance from Zlatoust to Cheliabinsk. This was, however, the Whites' only significant success during the entire operation.

Between 80,000 and 100,000 people from both sides took part in the Cheliabinsk battle. Although the Soviet command had not expected the Whites to put up serious resistance, they were able to parry the White counterattack by the beginning of August. After a week of fighting, the Reds moved up units of their Third Army to support the Fifth Army. The Red 21st Infantry Division of the Third outflanked the White position from the north and threatened to cut off Voitsekhovskii's troops, who were nearly caught in a pincer movement.

⁸³ For further details, see I. V. Kuptsov, "Cheliabinsk, iul'-avgust 1919 goda," *Cheliabinsk neizvestnyi: Kraevedcheskii sbornik*, vol. 3 (Cheliabinsk: Kniga, 2002), 241-333.

The Reds captured 15,000 Whites. From 25 to 27 July alone, up to 3,500 soldiers from the White Northern Strike Group defected to the Reds.⁸⁴

The practice of sending out complete units to the front (prepared for combat only on paper), instead of smaller contingents to reinforce existing units, had a negative effect on the Whites. During the Cheliabinsk campaign, only a few hundred soldiers and officers remained in the veteran brigades and divisions (for example, in the Izhevsk Separate Rifle Brigade and the Seventh Ural Mountain Rifle Division), while new, untested divisions rose in size to more than 16,000 soldiers. If the White command had used new recruits to build around a veteran core, they might have obtained different results.⁸⁵

Kolchak's reserve divisions looked impressive, in part due to Allied uniforms.⁸⁶ This surface impression was, however, deceptive. Disorganized training, characterized by unprepared officers and fraternization throughout lower ranks and commanders, produced poor results. The 13th Siberian Rifle Division (nearly 13,000 men), which joined the Northern Strike Group, was made up of inexperienced recruits without combat experience or proper training. Its riflemen only conducted drill to hone their ceremonial marching, useless at the front. In addition, the troops were systematically targeted by Bolshevik agitators. As a result, during a week of fighting, more than 80 percent of the division defected to the Reds, killing or taking officers with them.⁸⁷ By the end of the operation, the division was a tenth of its previous size, and had been reduced to a regiment. A similar situation arose in the 12th Siberian Rifle Division, whose 47th Regiment defected to the Red camp. One soldier's letter opened by White military censors said "may God see fit to make all our troops fight the way the Reds fight. The conscripted Siberians do not want to fight, and when they close in on the enemy, they switch over to their side."⁸⁸

The 11th, 12th, and 13th Siberian Rifle divisions were the only White reserve forces in Siberia. It is symptomatic that this reserve was neither ready at the end of May (lacking artillery, machine guns, communications equipment, or wagons), nor at the end of July (without adequate supplies).⁸⁹ Although the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 266.

⁸⁵ Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl*, 379.

⁸⁶ A. S. Kruchinin, *Admiral Kolchak: Zhizn', podvig, pamiat'* (Moscow: AST, 2010), 391.

⁸⁷ F. F. Meibom, "Ternisty put'," in Volkov, *Vostochnyi front admirala Kolchaka*, 368–69, 376. See also Meibom, "Gibel' 13-i sibirskoi strelkovoi divizii v boiakh pod gorodom Cheliabinskom v 1919 godu," in *ibid.*, 378, 384, 387.

⁸⁸ "Obzor nastroenii naseleniia po pis'mam, 1919 g." (GARF f. R-5793 [P. I. Bulgakov], op. 1, d. 62, l. 3ob.).

⁸⁹ Budberg, "Dnevnik," *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, 14: 272, 328.

High Command had instructed the General Staff to have the three divisions ready by 1 May, they could not be sent to the front earlier than August because of bureaucratic impediments.⁹⁰ By contrast, the tsarist army in the First World War could train a manned division for combat within one month and in three months form a division from nothing. The White problem with reserves was thus not lack of time, but the absence of training and poor organization. As a result, all efforts were in vain. The defeated 11th and 12th divisions were disbanded by 17 August and only one regiment remained of the 13th Division. The Whites were still short on uniforms and weapons. Up to 3,000 of the reinforcements sent to form a striking force at the front before of the Cheliabinsk operation were unarmed.

As a result of the Cheliabinsk battle, the Reds were exhausted, which allowed the Whites to retreat east and avoid encirclement. Nonetheless, the Reds broke through along the railroad line and cut Kolchak's army in two. The Separate Ural and Southern Armies were left without railroad communication with Siberia, and lost access to their normal supply route. The main White forces had to retreat under the threat of constant outflanking maneuvers and entrapment.

Failures at the front led to personnel shakeups. Lebedev was removed as chief of staff on 10 August and as war minister on 12 August. The experienced Diterikhs took over both positions, while retaining his post as commander in chief of the Eastern Front armies. The front headquarters and the commander in chief's headquarters were merged in an attempt to simplify and improve coordination between them. Conflicts among Kolchak's leaders, however, did not stop. The new war minister, Lieutenant General Budberg, had an adversarial relationship with Diterikhs, while Diterikhs considered Sakharov a rival.

The long retreat hurt morale among Kolchak's troops, heightened by the impression of a well-organized and successful Red Army. Kolchak's soldiers expressed this in their letters, opened and read by White military censors.⁹¹ Soldiers continued to desert and defect to the enemy camp. In August 1919 alone there were several such cases. Almost the entire 42nd Troitsk Rifle Regiment surrendered to the Reds and, as a result, the Whites were forced to retreat. The Bashkir Cavalry Brigade, under the command of Staff Captain Musa Lutovich Murtazin, defected to the Reds. The Volga Cavalry Detachment, under Second Lieutenant Boris Konstantinovich Fortunatov, abandoned the front and began fighting both the Reds and the Whites. Senior commanders became disillusioned. Major General Aleksandr Petrovich Perkhurov, disap-

⁹⁰ Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 76.

⁹¹ See, for example, a 23 August 1919 report by N. K. Pavlovskii in *Direktoriia, Kolchakovshchina, 1918–1920 gg.*, ed. I. V. Uspenskii and N. E. Eliseeva (Moscow: RGVA, 1995).

pointed in Kolchak's leadership, formed his own partisan detachment and proceeded to act autonomously.⁹²

The Red Fifth Army advanced east along the trans-Siberian railroad and, after outdistancing its neighbors, reached the Tobol River on 18 August and crossed it on 20 August. By the end of August, some units had advanced 180 km east of the Tobol, approaching the Ishim River. On 4 September, units of Vasilii Konstantinovich Bliukher's 52nd Division occupied Tobol'sk. However, the Reds were exhausted from the protracted battles and the 700-km advance. Furthermore, their support services were lagging behind. Soviet commanders thus opposed vigorous pursuit. During the first half of August 1919, the commander of the Red Third Army, Sergei Aleksandrovich Mezheninov, repeatedly petitioned his front command to give his army time to rest.⁹³ As a result, the Whites regained the initiative.

A similar situation developed in the South Urals. Frunze, commander of the Red Turkestan Front, inspected the 24th Rifle Division and found it to be poorly maintained and disorganized. Moreover, a significant percentage of its commanders had been taken out of action, and the division's equipment was in a shameful state.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, at the end of August the Reds moved to eliminate remaining units of the White Southern Army, which were stuck along the Tashkent railroad and in remote areas of the southern Urals. The command tried to move this army to Turkestan for the winter, but their plan was not achievable. As a result, the army barely escaped encirclement along the railroad line. A significant portion of the army surrendered (between 30,000 and 57,000 soldiers), although some units were able to break away from the railroad and head east over open country to join the rest of Kolchak's forces, or west to join the Ural Cossacks.⁹⁵ On 13 September, the First Army and the Turkestan troops of the Aktiubinsk Front met at the Mugodzharskaia station. As a result, the Reds cleared a path to Turkestan, linking central Russia to Soviet-controlled Central Asia.

In western Siberia, as the Red pursuit of Kolchak continued, the Whites remained capable of delivering sharp counterblows, contrary to the expect-

⁹² K. Ia. Gopper, *Chetyre katastrofy: Vospominaniia* (Riga, 1933), 161.

⁹³ Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl*, 308–09.

⁹⁴ S. P. Timoshkov, "Razgrom Iuzhnoi armii Kolchaka (avgust–sentiabr' 1919 g.)," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 3 (1940): 55.

⁹⁵ Iu. N. Aleskerov, *Interventsiia i Grazhdanskaia voina v Srednei Azii* (Tashkent: Gosizdat UzSSR, 1959), 138; E. S. Elagin et al., eds., *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsiia i Grazhdanskaia voina v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane: Dokumenty i materialy* (Alma-Ata: Nauka, 1964), 2: 75; P. M. Kirillov, ed., *M. V. Frunze na frontakh Grazhdanskoi voiny: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), 211, 217; Timoshkov, "Razgrom," 51.

tations of the Red Eastern Front commander Vladimir Aleksandrovich Ol'derogge. As the Red Fifth Army advanced east from the Tobol River along the south side of the Trans-Siberian railroad toward Petropavlovsk, the White Third Army under Sakharov delivered a major counterblow to the Fifth Soviet Army. On 9 September, the White Siberian Cossack Corps surrounded four regiments of the Red Fifth and Thirty-Fifth divisions near the Siberian Cossack Host *stanitsa* Presnovskaia and decimated them. Their parent Fifth Army had to retreat back to the Tobol. After that, however, White Cossack cavalry stopped making aggressive attacks, as the hope that the Cossacks would be able to carry out deep raids into Red rear areas as the White cavalry had done in southern Russia turned out to be illusory. Instead, the Reds managed to defeat their enemy's Seventh Ural Rifle Division. By fall 1919, the Reds had also streamlined their reconnaissance efforts, enabling them to intercept enemy operational orders and telephone conversations, including negotiations between the Third White Army Headquarters and the various army groups.⁹⁶ This made it possible for them to take preventative action against any future counterattacks.

The fighting was fierce and some settlements repeatedly changed hands. By early October, the Whites had managed to push the Soviet troops back toward the Tobol River, but the Whites achieved this success at a high cost and suffered irreplaceable losses. In Sakharov's Third Army, 988 officers and 17,700 soldiers were killed or wounded.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, by 10 October the Third Army still had approximately 19,900 infantry, 6,500 cavalry, 331 machine guns, and 153 artillery pieces, while the Red Fifth Army had 31,313 infantry, 3,387 cavalry, 475 machine guns, and 99 artillery pieces.⁹⁸

By the end of the offensive, Third Army units were stretched out along the Tobol for 200 km, and 6 of its 11 divisions had to be put into reserve to allow for rest and replenishment.⁹⁹ Red Army captives were pressed into service to partially make up for the decline in numbers. From September to mid-November 1919, the Whites also tried to alleviate the manpower shortage by launching a campaign to defend the Orthodox faith, for which it created volunteer bands [*druzhiny*] of the Holy Cross. This was a slow process, however, and no more than 6,000 people joined them. They were not particularly

⁹⁶ V. F. Vorob'ev, *Tobol'sko-Petropavlovskaiia operatsiia* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1939), 40.

⁹⁷ Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 153; Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, 537.

⁹⁸ Vorob'ev, *Tobol'sko-Petropavlovskaiia operatsiia*, 46.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

valuable for combat, as their nucleus was formed of civilian refugees who were most susceptible to religious propaganda.¹⁰⁰

The White goal was to divert as many Red Army divisions as possible away from other fronts, especially away from southern Russia, in the hope that Denikin would be able to capture Moscow, even if Kolchak could not. As a result, in September and October, the Reds could not transfer troops from the Eastern Front to the Southern Front, and even recalled the Fifth Division and a brigade of the Twenty-First Division that had been sent to fight Denikin. However, the Red Eastern Front could not count on more than that, as all Red reserves were thrown into halting Denikin's offensive. Finally, in October, the Fifty-Fourth Rifle Division, formed in the Urals Military District, was sent to the Eastern Front. General Diterikhs and Admiral Kolchak had believed that they only needed to hold out until the end of October, hoping that Denikin would take Moscow by then.¹⁰¹ One can imagine how they felt when it became clear that Denikin's offensive had stalled.

On 10 October, the Third and Orenburg Armies (renamed from the Southern Army on 18 September 1919) and the Steppe Group came together to form the Moscow Army Group under Sakharov.¹⁰² This grandiose name did not produce success. Meanwhile, the weather grew colder, but the troops lacked winter uniforms.

In mid-October 1919, the Reds renewed their offensive toward Petropavlovsk. On 14 October, the Red Fifth Army recrossed the Tobol and began pursuit of the Whites, who retreated to the Ishim River, their next line of defense. On 19–20 October, the Red Third Army also attacked. Kolchak was rapidly running out of troops to stop them. As of 25 October 1919, Kolchak's armies included 40,150 infantry, 13,614 cavalry, 173 light and 19 heavy artillery pieces, and 587 machine guns.¹⁰³ On 1 November 1919, the Reds on the Eastern Front

¹⁰⁰ V. Zh. Tsvetkov, "'Legion Sviateishego Patriarkha Tikhona': Gvardiia pravoslavnoi Rusi: Iz neosushchestvlennykh proektov," *Voennaia byl'*, no. 6 (1995): 23–24; E. V. Volkov, "Pravoslavnye sviashchenniki v belykh armiakh: Liudi, idei, sud'by," *Voen-Kom: Voennyyi Kommentator*, no. 4/2 (2002): 11–12; A. V. Posadskii, "Stranitsy belogo dobrovol'chestva na vostoke Rossii," *Belaia armiia, beloe delo*, no. 11 (2002): 84–93; V. Zh. Tsvetkov, "General Diterikhs, poslednii zashchitnik imperii," in *General Diterikhs*, ed. V. Zh. Tsvetkov et al. (Moscow: Posev, 2004), 46.

¹⁰¹ Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'*, 147.

¹⁰² Orders on the formation of the Moscow Army Group (RGVA f. 39499 [Shtab verkhovnogo glavnokomanduiushchego], op. 1, d. 19, l. 98; RGVA f. 39624, op. 1, d. 135, l. 645).

¹⁰³ For further details, see A. V. Ganin, "Rekonstruktsiia boevogo raspisaniia kazach'ikh voisk Urala, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka po sostoianiiu k 25 oktiabria 1919 g.," *Belaia gvardiia: Al'manakh*, no. 8 (Moscow: Posev, 2005), 302–04.

had 91,402 infantry, 7,296 cavalry, 304 artillery pieces, and 1,211 machine guns.¹⁰⁴ On 29–30 October 1919, the Reds captured Petropavlovsk and began an almost uninterrupted pursuit of the Whites along the Trans-Siberian railroad. During the offensive against Petropavlovsk, Fifth Army units advanced at a speed of 16–18 km per day.¹⁰⁵ By the end of the Tobol'sk-Petropavlovsk operation, the Reds had broken the organized resistance of Kolchak's troops and began methodically finishing off the remains of the White Eastern Front.

An intensifying typhus epidemic and the Red onslaught made it impossible for Kolchak's troops to hold the Ishim River line. During the night of 5 November, Red Third Army units captured the city of Ishim and the Whites retreated to Omsk, 350 km to the east. Diterikhs did not believe they could hold Omsk, but for political reasons Kolchak demanded that they defend the capital of White Siberia. Diterikhs's plan was to leave a screen of strong rearguard forces at the front while forming large strategic reserves (at Tomsk, Novonikolaevsk, and Mariinsk) to prepare a counterattack.¹⁰⁶ The plan's feasibility was doubtful: Kolchak's front and rear had collapsed and his troops were unfit for battle. As the White First Army withdrew to the rear, some of its units fell under the influence of Socialist-Revolutionaries and disintegrated, leaving even fewer forces at the front. Diterikhs was forced to step down as commander in chief, and Kolchak replaced him with Sakharov, as Sakharov promised to hold Omsk. The Whites reshuffled other commanders. The Third Army was led by Kappel' and the Second by Voitsekhovskii.

On 14 November, Kolchak's forces left Omsk, which was taken by the Red Twenty-Seventh Rifle Division. Around Omsk, the Reds captured more than 30,000 people from White support units. Additionally, 31,000 rifles, 19 million cartridges, nearly 1,000 machine guns, 34 artillery pieces, and 199,000 hand grenades fell into Red hands.¹⁰⁷ According to Sukin, the surrender of Omsk marked the end of Kolchak's constructive period, and forced a desperate search for salvation.¹⁰⁸

The catastrophe of Kolchak's Eastern Front spread. Tens of thousands of soldiers and officers suffered from the errors of the White command. Fearing reprisals, thousands of civilian refugees, including the families of officers and soldiers, retreated with Kolchak's armies. After the fall of Omsk, the

¹⁰⁴ Kariaeva and Azovtsev, *Direktivny komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi armii*, 4: 111.

¹⁰⁵ Vorob'ev, *Tobol'sko-Petropavlovskaiia operatsiia*, 81.

¹⁰⁶ A. A. Petrov, "Evoliutsiia planov komandovaniia belogo Vostochnogo fronta v sentiabre–dekabre 1919 goda," in Tsvetkov, *General Diterikhs*, 308–09.

¹⁰⁷ Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl*, 336.

¹⁰⁸ "Zapiski Ivana Ivanovicha Sukina," 510.

Red Fifth Army maintained pursuit of the Whites. On 25 November, the Fifth Army was joined by the Third Army's Thirtieth and Fifty-First Rifle divisions, which increased its numbers to 200,000. They hounded the Whites at a speed of 25–30 km per day, sometimes even reaching 40 km per day. This rapid pace gave the Whites no chance to make a defensive stand.

Order disappeared from the retreating remnants of Kolchak's armies. Trying to break away from the pursuing Reds, the troops moved in columns stretching out for dozens of kilometers, with combat and support units intermixed. Because of a transportation bottleneck near Novonikolaevsk, locomotives froze, and retreating troops had to use sleighs (Kappel' and his staff had to switch to a sleigh on 22 December), or go by horseback or on foot. After leaving Omsk, Kolchak essentially lost control of the situation, and constantly vacillated in making any decisions.

The Czechoslovaks, until recently allies of the Whites, made the situation worse. They had been guarding the Trans-Siberian railroad, but now withdrew from their obligations, detained any Russian columns west of the Taiga station, and allowed only their co-nationals to pass through and head east. Taking advantage of White desperation, the Czechoslovaks acted as if in a conquered country. They confiscated functioning locomotives and rolling stock from the refugees, and even took two steam engines from Kolchak's own train in Krasnoiarsk.¹⁰⁹ In response, Kappel' challenged General Jan Syrový, commander of the Czechoslovak troops, to a duel; he received no reply.

The Whites were thus instantly cut off from their rear and received no help without Czechoslovak sanction. Trains moved along the Trans-Siberian railroad as if on a one-way conveyer belt. Consequently, neither reinforcements nor ammunition could move to the loosely defined front, even if supplies could be found. Sakharov nevertheless did not give up his schemes to launch a counteroffensive at the Ob' River. Furthermore, he made plans to reduce Pepeliaev's First Army to a mere corps, leading to unfortunate consequences for Sakharov himself.

The disintegration of the White armies progressed as the situation worsened on the front, affecting even the highest command personnel. On 17 November 1919, Gaida, the former commander of the Siberian Army who had been dismissed and stripped of his lieutenant general's rank, led a rebellion against Kolchak in Vladivostok with the support of local Socialist-Revolutionaries. After Gaida's rebellion was suppressed, he was exiled to Czechoslovakia. Major General Petr Petrovich Grivin, commander of the White Second Army's Northern Group, defied an order not to surrender ground without a fight and withdrew his troops to the city of Kainsk. On 22 November, Second

¹⁰⁹ V. O. Vyrypaev, "Kappelevtsy," in *Kappel' i Kappel'evtsy*, ed. R. G. Gagkuev, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Posev, 2007), 321.

Army commander Voitsekhovskii demanded that Grivin obey or cede command. After Grivin refused to submit, Voitsekhovskii had him shot for failure to comply.¹¹⁰ The commander of the White First Siberian Army, Lieutenant General Anatolii Nikolaevich Pepeliaev, and his brother, Kolchak's prime minister Viktor Nikolaevich Pepeliaev, grew dissatisfied with what they saw as Sakharov's inept leadership of the Eastern Front. On 9 December 1919, the brothers removed Sakharov from command and detained him at the Taiga station.¹¹¹ Kolchak, who by that point did not have any real power, was forced to accept their actions. Sakharov was released by the evening of the next day, but Kappel' had filled his post. Colonel Arkadii Ivakin, commander of the Novonikolaevsk garrison and the Second Barabinsk Regiment, attempted to arrest Sakharov in Novonikolaevsk, but, after failing to do so, tried to arrest the high command of the Second Army, led by Voitsekhovskii. This also failed, and Ivakin was himself arrested and shot. The commander of the Enisei Region and the Krasnoiarsk Garrison, Major General Bronislav Ivanovich Zinevich, also rebelled against Kolchak. On 23 December 1919, he demanded that Kolchak transfer power to a Zemskii Sobor (Assembly of the Land), after which Zinevich surrendered Krasnoiarsk to the Reds by telegraph. As a result of Zinevich's declaration, Kolchak's train was cut off from his armies, which had not yet reached Krasnoiarsk. This led ultimately to Kolchak's tragic fate. As one final example, Diterikhs received a proposal from Kolchak in December that he again take charge of the front. Diterikhs agreed, on condition that Kolchak immediately leave Siberia.

The rank and file of Kolchak's army were likewise demoralized. On 7 December, the Second Barabinsk Regiment mutinied in Novonikolaevsk, but were suppressed by the Fifth Polish Division. On 17 December, units of the First Army rebelled in Tomsk and, on 23 December (as mentioned above), a local garrison revolted in Krasnoiarsk.

The White retreat accelerated. First, the front retreated from the Tobol to the Irtysh River at a rate of 10 km per day, then from the Irtysh to the Ob' River at 12–13 km per day, and finally from the Ob' to the Tom' River at 25–28 km per day. Individual day marches reached distances of 45 km.¹¹² The Reds entered Barnaul and Semipalatinsk (formerly held by partisans) on 10 December, captured Biisk and Karkaralinsk on 13 December, Novonikolaevsk on 14

¹¹⁰ I. V. Kuptsov et al., *Belyi generalitet na vostoke Rossii v gody Grazhdanskoi voiny: Biograficheskii spravochnik* (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2011), 149.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 405–06, 485.

¹¹² F. A. Puchkov, "8-ia Kamskaia strelkovaia diviziia v sibirskom Ledianom pokhode," in *Kappel' i Kappelevtsy*, ed. R. G. Gagkuev, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Russkii put', 2010), 417.

December, and Ust'-Kamenogorsk on 15 December. Around Novonikolaevsk, the Reds captured more than 30,000 White soldiers and officers, 88 artillery pieces, and 200 motor vehicles.¹¹³

Dutov's Separate Orenburg Army was completely cut off from the rest of Kolchak's armies, and had to retreat to Semirech'e through the sparsely populated steppe to join forces with Major General Boris Vladimirovich Annenkov in what was later called the Golodnyi (Hungry) Campaign. As a result of this ill-prepared retreat, thousands died from hunger and cold, including refugees fleeing from the Volga Region and the southern Urals. Disintegration and mass surrender accompanied the retreat. The Twenty-Second and Thirty-Fifth Orenburg Cossack regiments, the First Battery of the Fifth Artillery Squadron, and other units all surrendered en masse to the Reds. Nearly all of the army's artillery was abandoned. Those who fell behind died in clashes with nomads. At the beginning of 1920, the remnants of the army, 10,000 survivors out of 20,000 in the Kokchetav area, left for Sergiopol'; the rest perished. The Semirech'e Military Administration, headed by Annenkov, was hostile toward Dutov, aggravating the situation. On 6 January 1920, the Separate Orenburg Army was reorganized into a smaller Ataman Dutov Separate Detachment under Major General Andrei Stepanovich Bakich, who joined Annenkov's Separate Semirech'e Army. In March 1920, the remnants of Dutov's troops were forced to retreat from Semirech'e into western China.¹¹⁴

The Separate Ural Army came to a similar end. When Gur'ev fell to the Fourth Soviet Army's attack on 5 January 1920, the Separate Ural Army ended up pressed against the frozen Caspian Sea. In order to avoid being encircled and destroyed, the army commander, Major General Ataman Vladimir Sergeevich Tolstov, led his Cossack troops (up to 15,000 men) south along the deserted eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. After a two-month march, no more than 3,000 of the original 15,000 reached Fort Aleksandrovskii (with perhaps 75 percent of those who made it frostbitten). The rest died of cold, typhus, and hunger during the journey. The remainder of the army was supposed to be transported to the Northern Caucasus, which was under the control of Denikin's White troops. Because Denikin's forces had had to leave Petrovsk (now Makhachkala) on the western shore of the Caspian at the end of March, only the wounded, sick, and frostbitten soldiers were taken to the Caucasus. On 5 April 1920, Soviet troops disembarked at Fort Aleksandrovskii from the Red Volga-Caspian Flotilla ships that had carried them over. The Reds demanded

¹¹³ Eikhe, *Oprokinutyi tyl*, 339.

¹¹⁴ For further details, see A. V. Ganin, *Ataman A. I. Dutov* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2006), and Ganin, *Chernogorets na russkoi sluzhbe*.

the remaining Ural units' surrender. Most of the Cossacks accepted the ultimatum, exhausted by their ordeal. Those who refused crossed into Persia.

In late 1919 and early 1920, Kolchak's main forces suffered a fate similar to that of the Ural and Orenburg Cossacks. They participated in a catastrophic "Siberian Ice March"—the retreat from Omsk to Transbaikal. The Reds reached the bank of the Ob' River by mid-December 1919, captured Tomsk without a fight on 20–21 December, and took Kuznetsk on 26 December, Mariinsk on 28 December, and Achinsk on 2 January 1920. The harsh Siberian winter and White shortages of ammunition did the Reds' work for them. The bitter cold and the typhus epidemic exacerbated the abominable conditions of the ceaseless retreat across the taiga. Most of the march participants suffered from typhus. At the headquarters of the Eighth Kama Rifle Division, 50 percent of officers and 100 percent of the soldiers were infected.¹¹⁵ The epidemic spread to the local population and, from them, to the Red Fifth Army pursuing the Whites.

The White Second and Third Armies retreated, while the remnants of the First Army, which had earlier been withdrawn into the rear, dissolved during the anti-Kolchak revolts in the Siberian garrisons. While the exit points from the taiga did present opportunities to set up defensive positions with a small number of troops and machine guns to delay the Red pursuit and win time to rally the Whites, Kappel's order to establish such defenses did not reach the headquarters of the White Third Corps.¹¹⁶ The Second Army was supposed to retreat along the Siberian Route (a historic road connecting central Russia to Siberia) and the Trans-Siberian railroad. In the meantime, the Third Army, protecting approaches to Biisk and Barnaul, was supposed to head 120 km along a cleared forest road—the Pereselencheskii Tract—almost devoid of settlements. The forest cutting was packed with three lanes of sledges carrying refugees. Travel was extremely slow, despite the frozen ground.¹¹⁷ There was no management of the convoys, no coordination of the evacuation, and no obedience to orders. People and horses froze, with little effort at mutual assistance.

While retreating along this narrow strip of cleared forest, the Whites abandoned artillery and supplies, which temporarily blocked the Reds' pursuit. Siberian partisans helped the Red Army by sabotaging the railroads and ambushing the Whites. On 29 December, the Third Army left the taiga. The White Second and Third Armies then joined forces west of Krasnoiarsk at

¹¹⁵ Puchkov, "8-ia Kamskaia strelkovaia diviziia," 469.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 422.

¹¹⁷ I. I. Serebrennikov, *Grazhdanskaia voina: Velikii otkhod* (Moscow: AST, 2003), 56.

Minino station. Kolchak's armies did not stop at this point, instead moving onward, and the Reds for the time being pressed on with their pursuit.

As a result of fighting during 4–7 January 1920, the Reds entrenched themselves around Krasnoiarsk, where 60,000 White troops surrendered. The Reds took possession of more than 200 artillery pieces. The Whites refused to attack Krasnoiarsk after seeing a single armored train on the railroad, which, as it turned out, belonged to the Poles. This demonstrates the level of White morale and readiness. The next day, despite Kappel's orders, several thousand White soldiers near Krasnoiarsk refused to get out of their sledges to shoot at the Red infantry half-company sent from the city to intercept them.¹¹⁸ The Whites were exhausted by endless, senseless retreat, and huge numbers of them surrendered to the Reds.

For some time, the White command did not know what forces they could count on and preferred not to halt their retreat, although the Reds had actually stopped pursuing them.¹¹⁹ Krasnoiarsk absorbed the Red forces, who were busy gathering the spoils of war. The Whites managed their withdrawal poorly. The remaining units of the retreating armies circled Krasnoiarsk and marched along the Enisei River to the mouth of the Kan River, its tributary. The main forces walked along the ice on the Kansk side of the river toward the Trans-Siberian railroad line. During the retreat, Kappel' fell through a hole in the ice and developed pneumonia in both lungs, as well as gangrene in his lower extremities. Kappel' transferred command to General Voitsekhovskii on 25 January, and died the next day. Meanwhile, on 15 January, the Red 30th Rifle Division captured Kansk and, on 31 January, Red Army units occupied Nizhneudinsk. On 30 January, a major battle took place near the Zima station, 150 km northwest of Irkutsk. After the battle, the remaining forces of the White armies launched an offensive to the southeast against Irkutsk, trying to open a route to flee further east.

At the end of December 1919, anti-Kolchak uprisings had begun in the cities and garrisons of eastern Siberia. There were riots in Cheremkhovo (a railroad station 60 km west of Irkutsk), in Kirensk, and in Irkutsk itself, where the Socialist-Revolutionary Center came to power between 27 December 1919 and 5 January 1920. Trapped in his train between Krasnoiarsk and Irkutsk, Kolchak transferred the powers of the Supreme Ruler of Russia to Denikin on 5 January. In effect, Kolchak had been a prisoner of the Czechs in Nizhneudinsk since the end of December 1919. On 15 January, Kolchak and Prime Minister Pepeliaev were handed over to the representatives of the Irkutsk Political Center, and imprisoned with the consent of the Allies and the commander in

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁹ Puchkov, "8-ia Kamskaia strelkovaia diviziia," 441.

chief of the Allied Forces of Siberia, French General Maurice Janin. On 22 January, the Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee took power in Irkutsk. On 7 February 1920, Kolchak and Pepeliaev were executed in accordance with orders from Moscow.

On the same day, the command of the Czechoslovak Corps at the Kuitun station struck an agreement with the Revolutionary Military Council of the Red Fifth Army on a procedure for evacuating the corps from Russia. According to this agreement, the Czechs would receive railroad vehicles and the freedom to depart the country, in exchange for the gold reserves they had seized from Kolchak.

The remaining Kappelévtsy decided not to storm Irkutsk, lacking the strength and ammunition to do so. There were no more than 8,000 fighters in the White Second and Third Armies, and only a quarter of the Second Army was combat ready, as the rest were wounded, sick, or frostbitten. The Whites had only four operating and seven disassembled artillery pieces, and between two and three functional machine guns per division.¹²⁰ They also feared that the Czechoslovaks would intervene and finish off their troops if they tried to capture the city. Bypassing Irkutsk and walking along the ice of Lake Baikal, the remnants of Kolchak's armies left for Transbaikal, controlled by Ataman Semenov. A month later, on 7 March, Red Army units finally entered Irkutsk. Meantime the surviving Kappelévtsy arrived in Transbaikal with about 27,000 people.¹²¹ The epic of Kolchak's Eastern Front was over, but the Civil War in Russia's Far East was still going on, and would not end until 1922.

Conclusion

An analysis of the state of Kolchak's armies shows that it would have been impossible for them successfully to implement the White command's plans for a 1919 offensive. The Reds almost always had superior forces as a result of their successful mass conscription system. During 1919, the Red Army grew by an average of 183,000 soldiers *per month*, which exceeded the total number of White troops on the Eastern Front.¹²² By 1 April 1919, when the Whites still hoped for success, the Red Army already had 1.5 million soldiers, and was still growing. All opponents of the Reds taken together would not have matched the Red Army's numbers.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 471.

¹²¹ Novikov, *Grazhdanskaia voina v vostochnoi Sibiri*, 206.

¹²² From N. Movchin, "Komplektovanie krasnoi armii v 1918–1921 gg.," in *Grazhdanskaia voina, 1918–1921*, ed. A. S. Bubnov et al. (Moscow: Voennyi Vestnik, 1928), 87.

The Whites' weak mobilization and policing systems and the lack of systematic approaches prevented them from assembling armed forces comparable in size to the Red Army. The Cossack troops of East Russia played a double role. The Cossacks truly fought the Reds only on their own territory, with rare exceptions. At the most critical time for the Whites, they could only rely on the Ural and Orenburg hosts. Other Cossack hosts did not actively participate in the struggle against the Bolsheviks on the Eastern Front. The Cossack hosts of the Far East were under the control of separatist-minded atamans, hostile to White authority in Omsk. White preparation of reserves in the rear was chaotic. Raw divisions were sent into battle. Soldiers lacking combat experience and essential training often defected to the Reds on reaching the front. The hopes placed on these reinforcements were in vain. The quantity of Red troops increased rapidly and, in many cases, their quality did as well. In comparison, the Whites had a relatively small number of troops which were constantly decreasing in quality.

The Reds' central position gave them access to the old Imperial Army's stores of supplies, allowed them to take advantage of Russia's industrial centers, and enabled operation on internal lines of transportation: that is, the Reds could shift forces from front to front, defeating White offensives in succession. The Whites, by contrast, acted in isolation, with only belated attempts to coordinate. There was no proper interface between the various White fronts or, at times, even between different armies within those fronts.

The Whites also could not use the experienced Cossack cavalry, which could have been concentrated in one area to lead a massive strike or a raid on Red rear areas. Mistakes by Kolchak's inexperienced generals had a negative effect on the situation. The Whites also did not fully utilize the human resources in the regions under their control. A huge mass of peasants was either involved in an insurgency in White rear areas, or managed to evade conscription. The Whites did not prepare any proper reserves, which meant that any offensive they took was a gamble. The Whites in the East did not have a developed rear area with industries that could have produced military materiel. They relied on supplies from abroad, which often did not reach the front. What weapons they did have varied greatly by model and caliber, and their supply was irregular because of poorly functioning railroads. Corruption flourished. Kolchak's administration was unable to establish basic order, and without that it was impossible to provide regular supplies to the army. Troops were constantly short on arms, ammunition, and communications equipment.

Moreover, the Whites had no answer to the powerful Bolshevik propaganda spreading among their troops. The ideology of Bolshevism was quite appealing for the bulk of Kolchak's army, who had a low level of political

consciousness, and were tired of a long war. There was no internal unity in Kolchak's camp: monarchists, Kadets, and Socialist-Revolutionaries were critically divided, and not simply by politics. Ethnic issues were a sensitive topic in peripheral regions controlled by the Whites, and Cossack and non-Cossack populations had tense relations. This was not an issue in the Soviet-controlled center of the country.

Kolchak's White armies on the Eastern Front launched a failed spring offensive that cannot be regarded as anything other than a risky venture. Only complete reorganization of White administration could have given any chance of victory.

Translated by Melissa Azari