

MEMOIRS OF SERGEANT KELLY

A Sergeant of Australian Army John Kelly spent about a year in the British Mission Elope which arrived at the Russian North in the summer 1918. The Mission included a flotilla of 5 armed trawlers, a cruiser, a naval boat and a hydroplane carrier. There were 150 British officers and NCOs, 21 Canadian, 9 Australians (captain Richard Tarrant, captain Paul Lohan, captains Allan Brown, sergeant (later captain) Robert Graham, sergeants J. Kelly, B. Perry (see his diary on a separate page of this site), A. Von Duve, C. Hickey, C. Wyatt) and 4 New Zealanders.

Kelly wrote his memoirs in 1979 - 60 years after the end of the British intervention. Apparently, some details faded away from his memory, but, from the author's point of view, they provide an impression of atmosphere of those days. One can see in these notes the arrogant attitude of the British towards the Russians, lack of will to fight in all units of the multinational anti-Bolshevik forces, and hopelessness of the White Cause. Obviously, the Allied intervention might have ignite only one feeling amongst the Russian people - to get rid of the occupiers as soon as possible. Anyway, a reader has a chichi to come to his own conclusions and see the events of the Civil War in the North Russia by Australian eyes.

INSTEAD OF THE PREFACE

Archangel is situated 30 miles up river from its Mouth. Both banks of the river were covered with a low type o scrub and there was no sign of life or habitation anywhere. We were in fact enjoying what seemed to be nothing more than a peaceful cruise when suddenly out of the bush galloped a strong force of Cossack horsemen. My heart missed a couple of beats. It looked as if we had met the first resistance to our invasion. I silently asked myself: "How do you think you will go against these world famous fighting men?". Stuck up there on the bow of that little trawler I felt awfully naked and exposed. I kept my right forefinger well hooked around the trigger of my Lewis gun in readiness to hop in should these fellows be foolish enough to get rough. Nothing happened and after keeping us company for a mile or so they vanished as quickly as they came. We never saw them again although a few individual Cossacks joined up with some of our Legions later. One happened to join one of my units. He was the fiercest looking individual I had ever seen. Bandoleers over each shoulder filled with cartridges, a belt around the waist also filled to capacity, a rifle, pistol, sword, scimitar and dagger.

I found, there was an in-bred hatred of Cossacks in Russian people. The Cossack had been the Czar's instrument for maintaining law and order when anyone got the idea of starting a revolution. The Cossacks were at their bet when galloping into the midst of an assembly of pedestrians and wielding their knouts which cut lumps of flesh from all those unfortunate enough to be in the way. Our Cossack friend was found dead one morning shortly after he joined us - shot by someone who apparently had an old score to settle.

It was about 6.30pm hen we reached our allotted landing point at Archangel. The wharf was crowded with Russians anxious and little apprehensive, I suppose, to learn what was going on. I had barely hit the wharf when a voice from the crowd called "Hullo Aussie". I stopped dead in my tracks. I sorted out the individual and questioned him as to how he came to recognize an Australian. The answer was simple. He was a Russian seaman who in his travels had picked up a little English. His ship had traded a lot in the Mediterranean and he had seen a number of diggers in Alexandria.

We entered Archangel at one end to find the reds busily leaving at the other. The cruiser and some of the seaplane helped them along the road. A landing party, of which I was one, pursued them further along the Vologda railway. It was not long, however, before they awoke to the bluff

and realized that it was not the whole British Army in pursuit of them t all but a miserable few. They promptly set a stubborn resistance and that railway junction was never captured. The main party of the "Elope" force followed in a few days.

With the subsequent campaign, which was continued over a period of fifteen months, I do not propose to deal in detail as all this can be found in a book written by the G.O.C. but unfortunately I have forgotten the title although it was on sale here some few years ago. Suffice to say it was a campaign of failures, treachery, hardship, mutiny and dangerous experiments.

With the approach of Winter, it was very apparent ... that it would be necessary to make preparations to the continuance of the campaign through the severity of an Arctic winter. No less a personage than Sir [Ernest Shackleton](#) was allotted the task of supervising these arrangements. He personally visited Northern Russia so as to get first hand information and be able to determine what was necessary in the way of equipment. The outcome of his visit was the issue of complete polar explorer's outfit to all of us.

By this time [spring] a number of sick and wounded had been evacuated to England. It was not long before rumours got abroad as to what was happening in Northern Russia. London newspapers jumped at the opportunity of such wonderful copy. Mental pictures were drawn of a force which was in danger of suffering a fate worse than that of [General Townshend](#) and his forces at Kut, whispers of another [Dardanelles](#) and such like were in the air. Public pinion demanded our immediate withdrawal and the organization were responsible or not I do not know but steps were taken to organize the Relief Force. With the advent of spring, and the gradual return of the sun and breaking up of the ice fields, the White Sea once again became open to shipping. The first of the relief Force began to arrive towards the end of May and early in June. Of the 9 Australians in the original *Elope* Force, there were now only 5 left in Russia, myself, 2 other Sergeants and 2 Officers. We three NCO's were amongst the first troops to be relieved and we embarked from England on the 17th June 1919, exactly 12 months to the day from leaving Newcastle.

[The Mission] achieved nothing, but most tragic thing of all was the number of splendid men who lost their lives in the venture, men who, after having passed through the dangers of France, Gallipoli, and other theatres of war, deserved a better fate.

REDS BECOME WHITE

After we had established ourselves on this front, with a base at Archangel, the *Elope* party was almost overwhelmed for a few days dealing with the rush of volunteers to join what was known as the *Slavo-Britanski Legion*, all eager to assist in the overthrow of Bolshevism. Such at least was the tale fed to us by officialdom, but those of us who had to handle this crowd knew better that that. They were not attracted by any deep-rooted hatred of the Revolutionists, or with any desire to restore the Romanoffs; the attraction for them lay in the fact that this Legion was being equipped with standard British army equipment and were receiving exactly the same issues of uniform, kit and rations as a Tommy, with the added attraction of 100 roubles as pay.

No one up against it would think of allowing such an opportunity to pass, hence the rush of volunteers. With the possible exception of the French Foreign legion, the result was perhaps the most motley crowd that ever comprised a so called military force. Speaking from memory there were to my own knowledge eight nationalities in this Legion - Russians, Poles, Finns, Lithuanians, Letts, Czechs, Estonians and Chinese. Yes, even China was represented by men who, prior to the revolution, had been engaged in the mines and limber camps of Siberia. I personally was given charge of these men by a British staff officer on the assumption that I could speak Chinese. I never disabused his mind on the subject. They were about 150 in number, barely civilized, but I had less trouble in controlling those men than I had previously by that to cast any reflection on my old Digger pals, but these fellows had not yet learnt the meaning of that blessed word "initiative". They were, however, the inveterate gamblers the Chinese always have been and

almost daily I had to quell brawls and patch up a split head or two. They believed in direct action these men and would use the first thing they laid hands on as weapons to settle their differences.

I should mention here that soon after we had entered into occupation of this area, we were reinforced by the arrival of a French battalion, an American regiment, and further British troops. Even with these troops and our Legionaries there was still a shortage of men. A so called provisional Government of Northern Russia that had been set up by some of the leading local lads after we had made the place reasonably safe for them, decided to enforce conscription in order to ease the situation. The first unit raised and trained under this order, the first Archangel regiment promptly mutinied the day they were ordered to entrain for the front; but that mutiny and the drastic effective methods taken to stop it make another story. It will be seen therefore that conscription was not of much assistance in the circumstances.

We had by this time a fairly large number of red prisoners (by June 1919 - 23000 in hand) from the various Fronts and the scheme was to induce these prisoners to become part of our forces and go back and fight with us against their kin. That the response to the idea by the prisoners was spontaneous needs little explanation. Firstly, they were bound to receive better treatment as a member of the enemy's forces than they would as one of his prisoners; secondly, the inducement held out in the nature of British Army equipment, clothing and rations was far superior to anything they had previously experienced, either as a civilian, a member of the Czar's forces or the Red Army; and lastly, and perhaps the most promising feature of all was that, when they did eventually return to one of the Fronts, there was nothing to prevent them from walking straight back to their own lines and liberty.

For the success of such a scheme the first essential was naturally the selection of someone capable of putting it into effect. The choice fell on one of the Canadians whom I have previously mentioned as forming part of the original force, a Sergt. Dyer (M.M. and Bar). Dyer was a fine type, both as a soldier and a mate, and he was well liked by us all. He was given a commission with the rank of Captain, a small staff of British NCO's to assist him, and was told to get busy on what seemed to most of us a forlorn hope. Capt. Dyer soon became as well liked by his Bolshevik soldiers (now supposedly White) as he was by us and it was not long before he and his staff had under their control a well-trained and disciplined force. This unit was officially designated "Dyer's battalion". So successful had the scheme progressed up to this stage that it was decided to form a second regiment. The selection in this case fell to one of the four New Zealanders of the original *Elope* - one Sergt. Burke by name and more familiarly known to us as "Burke the Tyke" as this was his own humorous method of introducing himself. He was an Australian, a native of Adelaide, but being in New Zealand at the outbreak of war had enlisted there. A typical Digger in type he was one of the best of many good fellows that it was my privilege to meet during 4.5 years' service. He also had been given a commission with the rank of captain and set to work on his unit which was named "Burke's Battalion".

I regret to say, however, that death took a hand in the order of things. [Capt. Dyer](#) had occasion to make a journey between two villages in the area. It must be remembered that we were still in the grip of an Arctic winter and the trip had to be made by sledge. He made a fatal error in allowing himself to fall asleep during that drive and the sickness that followed it cause his death within a few days. The time came when Dyer's battalion was considered sufficiently fit to become an active unit of our forces and it was eventually dispatched to one of the fronts. They didn't proceed alone however, as in addition to their own officers and NCO's, this force, in common with all the White Russian troops, had a stiffening of British officers and NCO's in their ranks. Without the stiffening these White Russians were about as formidable as a basket of jelly fish when it came to doing a bit for themselves. Dyer's regiment had only been at their post a matter of hours when the inevitable mutiny occurred. All British personnel were massacred in cold blood. I forgot the exact number but as far as my memory recalls it was seven or eight. The first to go down was one of our well liked Aussie Officers, Capt. Brown. Before they got him though he accounted for six of the Bolshies. It would seem therefore that Capt. Dyer was doomed to die in Russia as it was highly

unlikely he would have stood by and watched this slaughter without a fight and there is no doubt in my mind the Reds would not have spared him.



British servicemen of the Elope Mission

from left to right: standing - sergeants Perry (Austr.), MacCreedy (NZ), Write and Jones (Engl.); sitting: sergeants Von Duve (Austr.), Torbett (Engl.), Bain and Dewell (Can.), Kelly (Austr.); lying: sergeants Hickey (Austr.) and Winning (a Scotsman, served as an interpreter in the Russian Army during WWI)

A SERIES OF MUTINIES

Although the expedition was originally a British undertaking I have told how it had developed into an Allied affair with the arrival of French and American reinforcements. Dismissing from mind altogether the many cases of "refusing duty" which were so frequent that they became things of only passing moment, there were five major mutinies: British, French, American, the Archangel regiment and Dyer's battalion. There was no Australian mutiny.

Fortunately for s all, each of these mutinies was a separate and distinct affair and occurred at different times. The first three named didn't therefore extend or become of any serious magnitude. In order to more fully understand the reason for this it I necessary to give a brief outline of the manner in which operations had to be carried out. The area under our control was roughly 50000 square miles in extent, but fully 90% of it required no defense at all owing to the peculiar natural features of the country which consisted of peculiar natural features of the country which consisted of pine and fir tree forests so densely timbered that it was utterly impossible for anyone to establish communication of any kind through them; there was also the additional barrier in the winter months of many feet of snow and in the summer months the melting of this snow transformed the ground surface into a squelching bog. Our defenses somewhat resembled a huge fan, with Archangel as the hub, and a force operating at the end of each of the ribs. Being completely isolated from other posts, each command acted independently, fighting its own battles and acting entirely on its own initiative. The result was that instead of continuous front line such as we knew

in Gallipoli and France, there were several fronts known as the "Railway Front", "Dvina River front", "Kotlas front" and so on. Fighting was conducted principally from blockhouses under Indian or guerilla warfare conditions. It must also be remembered that the "Syren Force" was operating under similar conditions in the Murmansk area. From this short description it should not be difficult to realize why these mutinies were individual affairs and why they did not immediately extend to or affect troops.

Right from the moment this campaign had been commenced there was an ever-present undercurrent of unrest amongst our fighting forces. While the war in France was in progress this feeling didn't manifest itself to any marked extent, but it was there, nevertheless. On the signing of the Armistice and the cessation of hostilities elsewhere things began to take a more definite and serious aspect. There appeared to be only one line of thought amongst all ranks and nationalities. On every side you heard nothing but "What are we here for?", "Can't these Ruskies do a bit for themselves?", "If they have such a good cause why can't they do their own fighting?" and so on. It was evident that such a condition of affairs could not continue, and the bubble burst when a Tommy Regiment decided to down tools; "stop-work" meetings were held and a Company even went so far as to withdraw from the post held by them. A swift move from H.Q. completely segregated these malcontents from the rest of their unit before the others had any opportunity of knowing what was brewing. The mutiny was thus quickly nipped in the bud and prevented from spreading to other posts held by the battalion. Those who kicked over the traces received awards appropriate to their offence against KRR. and in due course received mention in Battalion Routine Orders.

Taking order we will deal with our old friends the French next. I was attached to this French regiment on special duty for a few weeks when they first arrived and I can truthfully say that the "terrible Australians" had nothing on these Frenchmen; they were as wild and as rough as anything that I had ever come in contact with anywhere. They were good fellows for all that and I enjoyed my term of duty with them and it left me with nothing but the most pleasant of recollections. During the month of February, these men, who had been operating on the Railway front were withdrawn to Archangel for a rest. Upon being detailed to return to the front they also held meetings and sent word to the French Consul that they would assist in the defense of Archangel if it became necessary, but they definitely refused to take part in any offensive movement again. Although some individual members of the Battalion volunteered to return to the front and eventually did so as part of other troops, this Battalion never again functioned as a complete unit.

We come now to the revolt of the troops representing the national Army of the USA. The first blow to the morale of these men, according to themselves, came when they were diverted to Russia instead of France. They little knew what awaited them in the latter country, did they? I speak with experience of both and I venture to say that I could have got several Army Corps of volunteers in France willing to change places with these Americans. They were also oppressed by the same line of thought as the French and British about fighting other people's battles. But the greatest source of irritation to these men, however, was the fact that they were under the direction of British Officers. Although it had become more or less an Allied expedition, GHQ and Staff remained at all times wholly British. These so called Allies of ours hated England and all things English. As I was also attached to this Regiment for special duty for some weeks I had ample opportunity of gaining first hand knowledge of their feelings in this direction. No Hun ever sang his hymn of hate with grater fervour than these Yanks.

I had the good fortune to visit the USA. on my way home from the War. While there I purchased a copy of an American magazine named "Collier's - The National Weekly". By a strange coincidence this paper contained an article dealing with the mutiny and written by an American newspaper correspondent named Frazier Hunt. This is what he said amongst other things:

"American and British troopers are simply incompatible. Ask nine or ten American doughboys what they think of the Tommies and see what they say."

This was a British show straight out. They dominated every phase of it. Every order was a British order, and every command had a British Colonel at the head of it. The British had rank to waste while our troops had to get along with a single American Colonel. It's a splendid commentary on Americanism that you can't fool the average Yank doughboy very long on a proposition that is all wrong. They couldn't find a single plausible reason for fighting on after the Armistice and they wanted to go home. One day some of them came right out and said so. Company "I", finishing their rest period in the barracks at Archangel, were ordered to the Railway front where some hot action was going on. They were grumbling and there was some talk. One of the sergeants notified the Company Commander that the men were grousing. The lieutenants went to their platoons and talked to the men like the pals they were. In the meantime someone had telephoned the Colonel and he came out and reminded the boys the American soldiers never quit when there was a job to be done and that was all there was to it. There was a lot of talk and some questions asked, but these American Officers being just that, answered them simply, squarely and plainly. That finished the revolution."

Of course the official communique issued by GHQ did not read quite the same as this but we will accept the above as the correct report as that of Headquarters was biased according to Mr. Hunt who further says:

The world never heard a breath of the British revolt, a dozen times more serious than the American trouble - while the gallant 339th. Regiment that lost 99 men and 5 officers killed in action was branded as the outfit that countenanced a mutiny. Sometimes it pays to have charge of the censorship and official reports. Just ask the British H.Q. at archangel if you don't believe it."

Continuing, this same Mr. Hunt sarcastically referred to the Tommies engaged in this theatre of the war as "thin chested men from Liverpool"; yet some of these men had been in the thick of it since the days of Mons and the Marne, while America's "participation" was still limited to the sending of notes by president Wilson. As evidence of what some of these men were capable of, an English NCO set out alone and successfully accomplished a sledge journey right across the frozen wastes of Siberia in search of "Intelligence". It was a truly remarkable achievement for such a weakling as Mr. Hunt refers to and the story of that journey was an epic of the Great War.

These Yanks wee very green, had no conception of war, and, as one might expect did not possess even a rudimentary knowledge of the horror raging in France. The loudest bang they had ever heard was the popping of a champagne cork.

Devastation everywhere, massed concentration of artillery, wheel to wheel, from 18 pounders to 12 inch naval guns, bombs and grenades ranging from the little egg grenade up to 60 lb. "plum pudding", machine guns by the battalion, tanks, mud and barbed wire, chlorine and mustard gas, and most revolting of all, hordes of rats feeding on the stinking rotting corpses, lice by the million and grinning Death your constant companion. This was truly Hell on earth but more nicely referred to in official communiqués as the Western front.

In striking contrast this sideline conflict away up in Arctic regions was a bow and arrow affair to those of us who had experienced the terrors of France or Gallipoli. Like all guerilla warfare it consisted mostly of sporadic machine gun and rifle fire, some grenades and Stokes mortars, a little artillery fire which to all intents and purposes could be said to be non-existent, although on the River front the British navy had some gun-boats and other vessels. Don't be misled, tough. It takes only one bullet or fragment from a grenade to gain you honorable mention in a casualty list. The tragedy of the 400 odd who now lie buried in the frozen north bear mute testimony on it.

The U.S.A. had a total of 5,000 men spread over all the fronts. From September 1918 until April 1919, they lost 104 killed and some 500 or so wounded. Just by the way of comparison the 5th Australian Division at Fromelles in France on the 19th July 1916 in one night lost 5500 killed and wounded out of a total of about 12000. You be the judge - would you prefer France or Russia.

MUTINY IN THE FIRST ARCHANGEL REGIMENT (also described in the *diary of B. Perry*)

When the time arrived for these troops to move off for the front, every one of them suddenly developed the stupidity and stubborn qualities of an army mule. They promptly sat down on their kits with the brief explanation that fighting was not their line and was right off so far as they were concerned. After a short consultation amongst the Staff heads an ultimatum was issued to the strikers that they would be given further opportunity to think things over, and in order to assist them back to earth and a saner decision, machine guns were posted all around their barracks. They were told that the ultimatum would expire at 2pm and if they still persisted in their attitude at that hour the gunners would immediately open fire upon them. These troops, who were also picturesquely called White Russians, were quartered in what was known as the Alexander Nevsky barracks. This building was of massive proportions and the walls were constructed of solid masonry of exceptional thickness. As there was no sign of any change of mind on the part of the troops at the appointed hour all the machine guns opened fire as was threatened. The result was disappointing; machine gun fire against the walls of that great building was about as effective as pea-rifle attack on a concrete pill-box and so far the advantage was with the strikers. A further consultation was held by the Staff and it was decided to try a new line of attack. A stokes gun was mounted across the roadway from the barracks. This gun was operated by a Russian officer who had been trained in its use by us. His first shot fell short but his second was a beauty. It exploded right on the edge of a window on the second floor and those assembled in this part received practically the full force of the burst. There was an immediate stampede for safety by the mutineers. The machine guns were still in position and those gunners who were on the far side of the barracks were naturally unaware of what had happened and when they saw this rush of men from the exits on their side, misunderstood the intentions of these men and immediately opened fire on them. The mutineers quickly threw up their hands but not before a number had been wounded.

They were lined up and directed to name those responsible for the outbreak. Every man stood his ground however, and refused to divulge any information as to the ringleaders. Every tenth man was then picked out, formed into a separate squad and told that they were to face a firing party. This had the desired effect and they quickly pointed out those responsible. The same afternoon 12 men wrote "finish" to their early career. Nothing much in that though as life was held pretty cheap during this campaign and firing parties had a permanent occupation. You can easily imagine what an efficient force this Archangel regiment was when it eventually reached the front, but it was typical of all the White Russians. Imagine yourself for a moment in the place of British officers and NCO's who had to cajole, lead, drive or otherwise take these troops up the line and you will readily understand why a feeling of revolt ran through the hearts of our forces and what was the paramount cause of the mutinies amongst them. As against this, despite all the propaganda you may have read, the Red Army, instead of being composed of a Bolshevik rabble, was well equipped, well trained and its soldiers were no second-rate fighters.

One of the final tasks undertaken by me during my 12 month service with *Elope* was the organization and training of the Finnish legion. Upon completion of their "bull-ring" evolutions they were sent to take over the front at Kandalaksha on the shores of the White Sea. As I was then under orders to rerun to England by the first available ship I fortunately did not have to accompany them. On the morning of the 17th June 1919 I was proceeding to Archangel to join the S.S. Pretorian on which my passage had been booked when I met a party of men under armed guard being returned to the Base. Imagine my surprise to find that the prisoners were none other than a number of my Finnish Legionaries. Was this still yet another mutiny? It certainly looks like it but I didn't stop to enquire.

Needless to say these mutinies caused GHQ considerable alarm. So much so proclamations were issued, printed in English, Russian and French, making a rather feeble attempt to answer the question asked by all troops as to why we were in Russia. (*Herewith is one of them - VK*):

Obviously, many soldiers don't understand yet the aim of our presence in Russia and why we are fighting here in the North. Our intentions may be explained in several words: we have come to fight Bolshevism, i.e., in simple words, against anarchy. Each of you understands, that no state whose internal life is completely disorganized, industry is in disarray, rail roads don't work properly, relations with other states are not normal, cannot exist and is doomed. Look at modern Russia. The power is in the hands of a small group of people, mostly Jews, who have led this country to full chaos. Post, rail roads ceased to function normal way, justice is truculent, life is so expensive that even first need goods are unreasonable for an average person, but a human life lost any value, and nobody can feel safe. Anyone with arms in possession is the master of the situation and can take away anything owned by someone weaker. Often people kill so that not to get killed themselves. Finally there is complete wilderness of morale here. And it is no wonder as the country is in hands of adventurers and scoundrels. Bolshevism is a disease which kills with no use, like consumption.

No doubt, the external forms of life will change after the war, but these changes will not be caused by anarchy and mass murder. Germany, willing to get rid of a dangerous enemy like Russia, planted Bolshevism here. Now Bolshevism had reached such a dissemination among the ignorant masses, that Russia is ruined, helpless and is on the brink of abyss – that's why we have come to help he cure the disease which is eating it out. We have come here not to conquer Russia, and no one of us thinks of it or wants to stay here. Our sole aim is to help you and see your country resurrected, great, not miserable and helpless, in the hands of adventurers who exploit her only for their own purpose and who, to achieve their private aims, kill their rivals with no regard of their social status, sex or age. The most intelligent forces of the country, who could be used in reconstruction of your Motherland and return her dignified status amongst nations, are annihilated in this fight for power. And when we achieve this aim - resurrection of Russia, we will leave home.

General Ironside

None of us fell for this political propaganda I can assure you.

BRITISH DUPLICITY

When it became evident we were going to be caught in a campaign through an Arctic winter the War office in a fit of benevolence, authorized the payment to us of a special Arctic allowance to compensate for the rigors and hardships we were likely to undergo. This authority was duly entered in our pay-books.

When I presented my claim for the amount due at the War Office on my return to London I was bluntly informed it did not apply toJ the Australians. We were good enough to be selected for and carry out the political machinations of the British Government but when it came to payment for our services we were deemed to be no better than White Russians.

ENGLISH OFFICERS

We did not have the luck to serve with our own AIF Officers. Like we sergeants, the three of them were widely dispersed over the North. We saw little of them and I am therefore unable to record anything relating to their actual service with "Elope". I personally had not heard anything of them for many months until the tragic news of Dyer's Battalion filtered through to us and I learned of the appalling fate of Capt. Brown.

In such circumstances I was therefore always under the command or direction of English officers (we had no Scots, Irish or Welsh with us). This, I felt, made me quite competent to form and express an on the spot opinion of their efficiency.

They were al typically English officers. In their element on the barrack square. So long as the rank and file could salute correctly, march in step and present arms with precision they were

considered to be well disciplined and top quality soldiers. Whatever was in the drill manual and text book was under all conditions to be strictly adhered to.

Partly for his apathy toward saluting pip-squeak officers the Digger was regarded by Imperial Brass to be undisciplined and as a soldier would never prove to be anything but a hindrance to other forces.

Battle discipline, initiative and improvisation were the attributes that won wars. These parade ground officers were not concerned with such trifling matters.

This brings me to the point of saying that in the field I did not see one English officer whom I would place in the category of being a leader or an inspiration to men under his command.

The Digger had all above attributes in plenty and there was one British General in France who realized this. General de Lisle, Commander of an Army Corps regarded the Australian Infantry as second to none. He attached an Australian to every brigade, battalion and company of all British Units holding the line on his corps front. He replaced British instructors with Australians at his Corps School. After the capture of Monte de Merris by the 11th (West. Aust.) Battalion he called all his Senior officers together to be lectured by Australians on the method adopted. He considered that battle a perfect model of an infantry attack.

And that about sums up the difference between discipline on the parade ground and discipline on the battle field.

RANDOM OBSERVATIONS ON THE SCENE IN NORTHERN RUSSIA AS I SAW IT IN 1918-19

Russian Women

Peasants, farming and other working class women were all the standard type of Russian we were familiar with. Short, squat figures with round flat features, wearing all the year through their heavy padded winter clothing which made them appear remarkably like an animated bag of chaff with a pumpkin sitting on the top. These women worked alongside men in labour gangs, pick and shovel worker, as drivers of transport, trams and trains and in the crew of ships and other craft. This was all very strange to us. At first we were inclined to extend them simple courtesies we felt were the natural right of all women but thereby caused them so much embarrassment we quickly fell into Russian ways and treated them accordingly.

In striking contrast, some women of the aristocracy and upper stratas were amongst the most beautiful I had ever seen and by this stage I had been around quite a bit. They were stylishly dressed and possessed superb figures to go with it.

Russian men

No comment, except that they looked a bit like men.

Russian music

Russian gypsy music played on a humble home-made balalaika enchanted me. I could listen to it for hours on end.

Russian peevo (Beer)

A drink of water from an outback station dam would be more palatable and give one a greater kick

Russian soldiers (1914-1917 vintage)

I met quite a few remnants of the greatest of all Armies (in numbers at least) labeled in 1914 as the Russian steamroller. They were a pitiable sight in their threadbare uniforms and boots light enough for a boxer to use in the prize-ring. Little wonder hundreds of thousands of them became casualties with frost-bitten feet in the cruel Russian winter. Their food consisted mainly of watery soup and black bread; their pay one-halfpenny per day. Sent into battle without arms of any kind to await the death of a comrade, then strip him of rifle, bayonet or other equipment. You don't need to seek further to learn the reason for his revolt and the sowing of the first seed of Communism.

Russian tragi-comedy

I call it such as it was an incident with both tragic and comic elements. The conscription of small Russian boys aged around 10 to 12 years to act as orderlies and servants to Base-wallah British officers in Archangel was to me, at my rate, a very distressing site and reflected little credit on the officer responsible for its introduction. This in itself was pathetic enough but the situation was further exaggerated when they put these little fellows whose average height would be about 48 inches, into Tommy uniforms made for adults of heights ranging up to six feet. Can you imagine the comical appearance of a small lad with a 20 inch chest wallowing inside a tunic made for a 40 r 44 inch chest. Or in slacks which chafed him under the armpits. These youngsters could not be court-martialled for any neglect of their duties. There was another form of punishment which these gallant officers had no hesitation in handing out as a corrective - the cane. The whole thing sickened me. I had some pictures to prove all this but unfortunately over the years these have been lost. There are many blots on the pages of British military history but this was one of the dirtiest.

Commerce

Amongst the civil population there was a complete lack of processed food-stuffs but no scarcity of primary produce.

No shortage of former troubled us. So we bartered such items as jam, bully beef, sugar, tea, flour and the like for fresh vegetables, fish, game and dairy products. The locals were always anxious to make these deals and we saw that we got good value for our bartered goods. Taking it all round we enjoyed a fair standard of living as a result. It was good for morale as all we had in sight or could hope for prior to getting established in the land was refrigerated Australian rabbits topped with desiccated vegetables. A rather horrifying prospect but one we all prepared to face with stoic fortitude.

One feature about all this cross trading that never ceased to amaze me was the seemingly unlimited amounts of bank of England notes held by Russians of all classes, from the highest to the lowest, everyone seemed able to produce English currency when the need arose or to clinch a deal. How did they come by all this foreign wealth? No one had the answer to this.

The good old Mill's grenade

In my narrative covering the several mutinies experienced by us up North, I made a strong comparison of conditions as they existed in Russia when considered in the light of the holocaust that was the Western Front.

However, we faced one hazard here that you escaped in the Western Theatre.

When out of the front line in France for the rest periods or other duties you moved around quite freely without fear of attack as you were amongst friendly people.

In Russia there were Bolshevik sympathizers everywhere. They were not all serving with the Red Army and all male civilians were suspect Bolsheviks. The danger of a knife in the back or a knock on the head was ever present. So seriously did GHQ regard the situation it issued an army order to all British personnel to keep a Mill's grenade in their pocket at all times when not carrying the usual arms such as rifle and bayonet or pistol.

It seemed to me much like carrying a tiger snake in your pocket to ward off possible attack by a taipan. If the Bolshevik missed you, the blast from the Mill's wouldn't.

I was soon to learn from personal experience that the plan was not as silly as it sounded. This was when I found myself cornered and threatened by a number of hostile Russian sailors. I whipped out my Mill's, pulled out the pin and told them in my limited Russian, plus some plain English that if I want I would take some of them along with me for company. It worked. Fortunately, this was the only situation in which I had to resort to this bluff.

The material for this page was received from the Australian War Memorial