

THE CAPTAIN WHITE'S ESCAPE



[Thomas Walter White](#) was a noticeable figure in the Australian history. He was one of the first Australian pilots. Having become a POW in Turkey in 1915, he met Russians in captivity, what helped him escape to Russia, then engulfed by the Civil War, shortly before the end of the WW1. He witnessed many dramatic events, which were happening in Odessa in autumn 1918.

In 1918-1932 White was a businessman, but in 1932 he returned to the Army. Prior to that, in 1929 he had been elected as a member of the Australian Parliament, and in 1935-38 he occupied a ministerial position in the Australian government. In 1938 White visited Europe as a head of an Australian Mission headed to a conference on the issue of refugee acceptance. During this trip he visited factories and aircraft plants on the Nazi Germany and got convinced that Germany was preparing to wage a war. Nevertheless, he failed to convince the Australian Cabinet of Ministers in it and resigned. However, largely due to him, thousands of people found political asylum in Australia.



With the beginning of the WW2 White joined the RAAF again and in 1941 was sent to England, where he commanded the Bournemouth airforce base. Despite his age and breaching the regulations, he took part in several bomber raids over Germany as the second pilot. To a significant extent, due to his forced trip to Russia in 1918, White was an ardent anti-Communist. In 1943, having returned to Australia, he participated in formation of a major right political party of the country – the Liberal party, and in 1949 he became the Minister for Air and Civil Aviation. Later on he was instrumental in sending of the 77th RAAF squadron to Korea in 1950.

In 1951-56 Sir Thomas (he was knighted in 1952) was the High Commissioner in London. After his return home he died in 1957. Thomas White wrote a book about his life during the WW1. Some pages of this book are here for the attention of the site readers...

In spring 1915 White arrived in Basra (Mesopotamia) in the ranks of the Australian First Half-Flight Unit amongst 45 pilots and mechanics. Initially the pilots were involved in reconnaissance flights and aerial photography of the Turkish defense lines. Then they commenced bombardment, manually dropping two-pound bombs. In the beginning of November 1915 White distinguished himself, having found a damaged and grounded British plane and saved the General Kemball, who was in it. Under the fire of Arabs White landed, helped the General move on his aircraft and flew away.

On the 13 November White together with the British captain Yeats-Brown took off to the skies with diversion goals - he had been ordered to cut a telephone line in the outskirts of Baghdad. The most difficult was to find a landing site. Having landed on more or less smooth place, White lost control over his machine, hit a telegraph post and damaged a wing of his plane. Soon armed Arabs and Turks turned out in the vicinity. The time was running out, but Yeats-Brown managed to refuel the tanks from jerricans. And at that moment the airmen ran out of luck - the engine would not turn on.

The Arabs and Turks pulled the diversionaries from the plane and severely bashed them. Then the prisoners were taken to Baghdad, where beatings and humiliation continued. Later on, in the jail of the town of Mosul, the prisoners met with some other airmen who had been counted as MIA. The Australians, exhausted by beatings and indignation, were then moved to Turkey to a

rail road construction site. Here, in the Taurus mountains, British and Australian POWs captured at Gallipoli and in the Middle east, were working and dying of starvation, diseases and deprivation.

Ont of the POW camps White lived in was in the town of Kutieh.

Prisoners, principally aviators, arrived from various fronts, besides forty Russians who were to be strafed, because four of them had made a plucky attempt to escape from Kutieh. The Russians belonged to various fighting units. Chief among them was Colonel Prince Constantine Avaloff, a fiery little cavalryman, who had once been Captain in the Czar's bodyguard, had fought and been wounded on every Russian front, and was ultimately wounded and taken prisoner while endeavoring to reach beleaguered Kut-El-Amarah with a Russian cavalry column that crossed Persia from the Caucasus. With no beneficent societies to send them comforts, the Russians were in a sorry plight, but suffered stoically, and with the generosity that seems inborn in the educated among them, shared what little they possessed with their friends.

Football, on the occasions we were permitted to play, had a rare international touch, and soccer, as interpreted by players from Tiflis to Bombay with occasional enthusiastic Frenchmen as aggressive novices, was full of incident, the star turn being the acrobatic feat of one of the Russians, who instead of facing the ball when kicking would unexpectedly drop upon his hands and make wild donkey kicks, which, much to our surprise, were sometimes successful.

Mosloum's (the POW camp commandant) treatment of a Russian officer on account of a trifling complaint showed to what depths of barbarity he could readily descend. The Russian complained of the quarters where he was housed, at which the Turk raised his hand to strike him. In self-defense the prisoner attempted to snatch the Turk's sword, at which the guard summoned and he was marched off to Mosloun's office at the church. Having assembled the British and Russian soldier prisoners, the Commandant beat the officer in their presence. His bare feet were placed in the loops of a rifle sling twisted taut in order that Mosloun might beat the Russian with his sword on the soles of the feet, back of the calves and thighs.

As an example to the men the Russian did not cry out but became unconscious after nearly a hundred strokes. Mosloun then rested and smoked until his victim regained consciousness, after which he ordered a Chaoush and the Cypriot interpreter to continue the punishment, which they did with a heavy thong until they too were fatigued.

Attending the Commandant's office to receive some money that had been sent him, prince Avaloff asked for permission to visit the prisoner and was allowed to see him after some demur. He found his countryman crawling painfully round on hands and knees in the darkness, his face badly burnt through having lain on a heap of lime while unconscious. It required a deal of wheedling and veiled threats before Avaloff was able to induce Mosloun to allow the unfortunate wreck to be medically treated, and three months elapsed in hospital before he returned to our camp, a much changed man.

1917

In this respect [private means - VK] the Russians were the greatest sufferers. Even before the Revolution few parcels reached them, while the chaotic state that followed put an end to any comforts and communications whatever. Realizing the remoteness of being reimbursed for expenditure upon such prisoners, the Turks only reluctantly paid them their pittance. Receiving no rations, they were constantly on the verge of starvation, until an allowance of a lira was paid them by Dutch Legation, upon the Recommendation of a visiting Danish Commission. Many of these unhappy men were barefoot to save boots that they might need on their release. Others trapped sparrows, or on their walks to a creek nearby caught frogs, crabs and tortoises which they sold to the French and ourselves.

A Russian with empty peckmez boxes and stray pieces of wire made excellent balalaikas and mandolins that intensified the musical medley in the Russian quarters and helped him to wax fat; though some of his less gifted countrymen, who lacked his money-making propensities, caused some little consternation when it was discovered that in their extremity they had eaten a favorite cat belonging to the Turkish guard.

1918

(In a camp of the town of Afion - VK) Luscombe and I had devoted some time to the Russian language, for it was conceivable that escape or future war service might lead us to Russian fields. The departure of the Russian merchantmen to Kutieh brought our lessons to an untimely end, but the arrival of Avaloff's party nearly twelve months later induced us to take up the thread of its complicated conjugations again. The difficulties of their own language and their well-known linguistic abilities and mastery of French made child's play of Turkish for the Russians, and except for the accent they made good progress in English. Our lessons necessitated a knowledge of French as a means of communication, therefore serving a twofold purpose, besides giving us an insight into the Russian character.

It was through friendships formed among the Russians that I was eventually materially assisted in escaping from Turkey. Gabriel Zainchikoff was an efficient teacher though a poor scholar and a man who would go through fire for a friend. When the Bolshevik peace with Germany was signed and the Russians hoped for a speedy relief, Zainchikoff undertook to return to Afion from Russia with false passports for Luscombe and me. He would accomplish this by presenting two friends at the passport office in his native Kieff, who resembled us as nearly as possible. Armed with these, he would return to Turkey, having first advised us in code by letter of his coming, and arrived at Afion we were to look for him at a certain street corner that was visible from our house. We were to escape the following night, meeting him at a rendezvous near the station, from whence we should all make our way to Russia. Unfortunately for our plans, the Turks had no intention of releasing the Russians, and after keeping a tiny anticipatory note to the British authorities concealed for some months in his shoulder strap, Gabriel returned it to me.

Vladimir Vilkovsky was another, and later in Constantinople I was to learn his worth as an intermediary. But it was to Konstantin Kambani that was indebted for the plan which ultimately enabled me to leave Turkey.

Russian ships' officers returned to Afion from Kutieh. Their camp had been abandoned because of the Bolshevik peace with the Central Powers, which, though distasteful to them as bourgeoisie, seemed likely to bring about their release. Among our acquaintances in the newly-arrived Russian party were the brothers Kambani, who had been part owners of the erstwhile British tramp steamer *Ida*. Every island of the Levant and all the ports of call on the Black Sea were familiar to them. During the Balkan war they ran the gauntlet of the Turkish blockade, making several daring voyages for the Greeks from Odessa to Salonica.

Konstantin Kambani saw through my plot on the instant and assured me that there were no longer any Greeks in that vicinity. Recently their boats had been seized or sunk and the owners driven off by the Turks, otherwise being of Greek descent and speaking the language, he would have willingly accompanied us. "If you could reach Constantinople, Meester Wi-et," he suggested, "perhaps you could escape to one of the ships which now trade between Odessa and Constantinople. A new prisoner told me there is a ship there now. And in the café Maritza, which I knew long before the war, there is a waiter called Theodore who may help you."

The Turks sent sick POWs to heal in Constantinople. Faking a disease, White managed to get permission to be sent as well. The last weeks in Afion ran fast in study of Turkish and Russian languages and consulting with Kambani. White and two other Britishers - Rutherford and Bott - got a permission to walk by the hospital. Having bribed the guards, they finally reached the Café

Maritza and met a waiter named Theodore. He promised White to let engineers from a Russian steamer Batoum know about his intentions.

As we were leaving we encountered Prince Avaloff, the Russian Colonel we knew at Afion, and, while the guard danced with rage, we drank a bock of beer together in an adjacent beer garden. Since Austro-German armies had overrun Southern Russia after the Bolshevik peace, the Turks had released all Georgians (on the promise that they would fight the British, other Russians spitefully declared) in the fond hope that the newly founded Georgian Republic would aid the Turkish cause. Such hopes were not well founded in the case of Avaloff, for he loathed the Turks, and shortly before leaving Afion had had further reason to do so, over an incident, which occurred during the visit of a Danish Commission.

Musloun had taken care that day to lock all Britishers in their houses, but Avaloff was interviewed by to Danes who were accompanied by Mosloun and a Turkish Kaimakam. After the interview, the Kaimakam returned, and in perfect Russian accused Avaloff of attempting to pass some written communication to the Danes. Avaloff was furiously indignant and immediately challenged the Turk to a duel. The Turk declined the honour. As an alternative the Russian invited him to search for the note, and if it were found he would commit suicide, but on the contrary if it were not found the Turk was to be equally accommodating.

At Psamatia we were housed with half-a-dozen other officers and some hundreds of British, Indian, Russian, Romanian and Serbian soldiers in an Armenian theological school. Our quarters were the various teachers' rooms, but the soldiers were herded together in filthy schoolrooms and outhouses. Many of them had been there for months waiting transfer to working camps, or existing in hopes of exchange. Occasional parcels relieved the condition for Britishers and Indians, but starvation stared from hungry eyes of the ragged prisoners of other nationalities. Like caged animals Russians and Romanians looped backwards and towards across the country yard when they were allowed out of their dens twice daily to exercise. Our parcel days the Britishers would distribute a few luxuries among their more unfortunate fellow prisoners. The fighting record of the Serbs and their stoical dignity made them great favorites with the British and most of what was distributed was given them, while less fortunate Russians searched for cigarette ends or gleaned stray grains of rice from the cracks of the flagstones.

Visits to Constantinople were forbidden since the last escape. Prince Avaloff had promised to communicate any negotiations made by Theodore with the *Batoum's* engineers, but as he had evidently done nothing and was inclined to be talkative, we cast round for a more discreet intermediary.

Vladimir Vilkovsky was a Ukranian aviator of Polish descent captured in a seaplane when operating with the Russian Black Sea fleet near Trebizond. We had been close friends at Afion, and, as he spoke seven languages and had a determined effort to escape in 1916, I had a profound respect for his ability and courage. With other Russians he was quartered in a vis-à-vis with our school at Psamatia, but on some pretext had induced the guards to allow to visit us daily. Having heard, that a Ukrainian ambassador from the newly-founded republic had arrived at Constantinople, he was endeavoring on the strength of his linguistic abilities to obtain the post of secretary. To this end he frequently contrived to interview the ambassador and on my behalf called on Theodore for news.

We were to escape during the week commencing August 24th. We would make our way to a German beer garden Zur Neuen Welt in the Grand Rue de Galata. There we should meet a Russian civilian who would take us to a hiding-place. We should know him because of a cigarette behind his left ear. When the *Batoum* was ready to sail we were to go abroad as stowaways and for substantial bribes as farces to Odessa, would be concealed by the ship's engineers.

Having got a permission to visit a dentist, White and his comrade Bott headed to Constantinople under guard. Here they chanced to be miraculously fortunate - at the Koum Kapu station their

train collided with some stationary trucks and in the following stampede they managed to escape. After a long adventure White made his way to the Zur Neuen Welt beer garden.

Here was the man for whom I had waited so long! For, almost hidden by his hair and the turned-down rim of his hat, I saw a ragged cigarette. As soon as I could catch his eye I placed a cigarette behind my ear, but he ignored the signal, and did not look in my direction for some time.

I ordered two drinks and sat down beside him before he could protest and asked him in Russian if he spoke that language. He curtly replied in the affirmative. "Are you waiting for somebody?" I suggested, at the same time placing the cigarette I was smoking in the assigned position. He seemed horribly frightened, his hands rapping nervously on the table's edge. "I am one of the British officers you seek," I assured him. "But there were to be two," he muttered. "The other was caught, or you would already have met him," I replied. I told him, I would wait outside till he came out. He agreed, so we shook hands with many farewells as if our ways lay in different directions. Outside, I maneuvered around shop windows until my new-found friend appeared, whereupon with no sign of recognition I followed him about twenty yards in rear.

The Russian took White to an empty room and left him there till morning. In the morning he brought the Australian food and advised that he had met one of the engineers from Batoum, which had told him that another British officer had arrived at the ship. Since the date of departure had not been defined yet, the Britisher (which was Bott, as White had concluded) would have to get onshore and hide together with him. It was really Bott, who had been caught near the Koum Kapu station. Yet he had managed to escape, hire a boat, find Batoum and get onboard. The escapees had been hiding for about a week, after which the Russian led them to the port and moved to Batoum.

When darkness fell, the ship's officer we had seen at the waterfront took us to his cabin, where we drank glasses of sweet tea and smoked his excellent cigarettes. Ivan Michaelovich Titoff, Chief Engineer of *Batoum*, and head of the syndicate that was to smuggle us to Russia, was a round shouldered man of middle height, whose shifty piggish eyes betrayed an otherwise simple expression which was accentuated by a turned up nose.

Some days before our escape I had prepared a parcel which I gave to Vilkovsky to send to the *Batoum*. It was with pleasure therefore that we learned from Titoff that he had received it, but judge of our surprise when, instead of being given biscuits, butter, tobacco and other luxuries, he handed me a packet containing a few ounces of rice, two small pieces of chocolate and four dried apricots. I asked what had become of the remainder, but he solemnly declared, while his shifty eyes moved from one to the other of us, that he had handed us all he had received. He enquired if we had brought our money, moving his thumb and forefinger significantly as if dealing cards. We informed him that we had sufficient for our wants, at which we did not hesitate to say we were to pay him four pounds per day for our food, until the ship sailed, and he would be obliged if we would give him some of the money we had promised for our passage. His anxiety about the money was disquieting, and I informed him that we would pay him some of our passage money when the ship sailed and the remainder when we reached Odessa. He pretended to be satisfied with the arrangement and made an attempt at affability by reading some English phrases from a guide book. When he left us to bring the first mate, a spotless gallant with twirled moustachious who sang and played the balalaika, I looked in his cupboard and saw a small tin of English biscuits, unobtainable in Turkey except from British prisoners' parcels, which we felt due had belonged to me. We decided to say nothing for the present and to have our reckoning later, but the discovery confirmed our suspicions as to his character.

We soon realised that in this den of thieves Titoff was the chief. Officers and crew were alike imbued with the desire to get rich quick by any illicit means, and every member of the ship's company, except perhaps the octogenarian captain, and an interest in stowaways or contraband. Knowing the uncertainty of Russian affairs generally and the instability of the newly founded Ukrainian republic, they determined to make hay with anything marketable. Sugar, drugs, leather

and all manner of human cargo that could pay its way were smuggled aboard at all hours of the day and night. Mysterious whistling from boats that glided alongside under cover of darkness gave us an inkling of multifarious plottings of the crew. The firemen specialised in vodka and sugar stolen from another ship in the harbor, while the engineers hoped to make their fortunes with a corner in cocaine. Titoff had an interest in every scheme, and was feared and respected for his cunning.

Andreas Kuhlmann, the third mate, showed us many kindnesses and added to our comfort by purchasing, at our request, two German automatic pistols, which gave us considerable moral support. Feodor Mozny and Josef Korotky, the second and third engineers, were also friends in need. As Titoff's subordinates, they feared and mistrusted him, and Josef, whose moral courage grew in proportion to the vodka he consumed, warned us in a confidential moment, that Titoff was grossly overcharging us for our food, which he obtained from the ships supply for nothing. To Josef we were also indebted for a scheme that would take us by boat, rail and foot for a thousand miles east from Odessa to join the Allied troops in Siberia, accompanied by him, an undertaking that we would have embarked upon but for finding friends in Odessa.

Feodor did us many kindnesses, particularly during the last week of our stay, when as the most dangerous part of the ship's cargo, we were hidden in the ballast tanks. Yet both he and Josef had contraband, in the shape of cocaine, tobacco and iodine, hidden in every hook and corner, bought with money lent by the merchant who chartered the ship. When our arrangements for financial aid seemed likely to fail, Josef, Feodor and Kuhlmann offered to assist us to Russia without a copeck in payment.

One and all of the crew except the senile captain knew of our presence and guessed at our story. Some of the sailors, and the majority of the firemen and greasers had been Bolsheviks, before an Austro-German army had temporarily suppressed Bolshevism in Southern Russia.

The most interesting and friendly disposed of these gentlemen was "Bolshevik Bill". A red-headed Russian who would pass for a gigantic Highlander, opened conversation by offering me some figs - probably stolen from the cargo, which I readily accepted. Producing a Russo-French grammar, he asked if I would teach him French. I agreed to instruct him to the best of my ability and Bill proved a trusty friend and a power among the crew. He frequently called on us and brought us food, and was most liberal and fraternal when drunk. Although a Bolshevik, he confessed admiration of the British, due to having served under British naval instructors with the Baltic fleet. As a proof of his fidelity, he offered to personally conduct us to his home in Moscow, and declared that no Bolshevik would molest us, while in his company.

Unfortunately he was not a typical Bolshevik, and reformers of a different type were amongst his shipmates. One of these, a quarrelsome fireman who terrorized the stokehole when drunk and drew a knife on the slightest provocation, had been a commissar, and on the ship, acted as Titoff's conspirator-in-chief in matters of blackmail and theft. Another fireman, a former sailor of the Black Sea fleet, related with evident pleasure during a jollification in the stokehole, how they had done their officers to death during the revolution and how he personally shot two officers of his own ship. I declared that I had no sympathy with their cause and certainly none with their actions. "the officers should have been granted a fair trial and not foully murdered simply because of their rank." Bill agreed with me, but went to some lengths to explain that no such thing could ever happen in the British forces, for British officers fraternised with their men, whereas Russian officers only bullied or ignored them.

For twelve days and nights we remained hidden in the wireless room, taking turns to sleep in its solitary bunk upon old sails and lifebuoys. Our chief and unending diversion was the study of Russian from well-thumbed pocket books, with phrases from a grammar Kuhlmann had stolen from a Bolshevik commissar on a previous voyage. Throughout the three days' trip we remained in hiding. Unauthorized passengers, who were friends of the crew, appeared to live in almost very cabin and cupboard. During the second day the firemen and greasers were so occupied in affairs

with womenfolk in their charge, that the furnaces were neglected and the ship made little headway. The propeller turned slowly and more slowly and the engines threatened to stop at any moment, while the stokers drank themselves unconscious with vodka. On the night before our departure there had been a similar orgy, and the Bolshevik ex-commissar, after terrorizing the stokehole, came with a knife in search of Joseph, and was only brought to reason when a revolver was presented at his head. Borrowing my revolver, Josef again went to the stokehole, and, working throughout the night as a stoker, kept his engines going until the repentant firemen resumed work.

Upon arrival in Odessa the escapees decided to divide traffic fares the way they considered more appropriate, also having subtracted from it the money, for what Titoff had stolen from them, and the money he had overcharged them for food. Titoff was invited to their cabin and advised of it. He got furious, but the sight of a revolver lying on the table, calmed him down. In the port of Odessa the escapees saw Austrian soldiers from the boat they were rowing to the shore with Kuhlmann and Josef. An officer noticed them and ordered his soldiers to detain the boat from Batoum. The escapes managed to get through amongst other boats moving passengers from another ship onshore. Officers and most of the Batoum's crew were thrown into a jail only in several days after the arrival in Odessa. There were rumours that they had managed to sell even the anchor chains. Titoff himself was rumoured to have been killed during a Bolshevik uprising.)

The escapees had with them the address of a Russian professor Konstantinoff who used to teach in Istanbul. They found his apartment and met his mother and sister in there. The women introduced them to two Russian officers, who had recently made their way to Odessa from Petrograd and settled nearby. The Russian officers gave their passports to the escapees - thus, White became Serge Fedorovich Davidoff, and Bott - Evgeni Nesterovich von Genko. Due to these passports they began to receive food rations from the Austro-German occupation authorities.

At the time of our arrival in Odessa the whole of Ukraine and the towns of southern Russia as far east as the Caucasus were garrisoned by Austro-German forces. By financing Lenin and secretly fostering the cult of Bolshevism in Russia, Germany had succeeded in rendering Russia impotent as an enemy combatant. Lenin's coup d'etat upset the feeble Kerensky Government that had deposed Czardom, and the peace of Brest-Litovsk that quickly followed Lenin's rise to power, crowned the efforts of German diplomacy and allowed the transfer of much needed German and Austrian troops to the hard-pressed western front. The result was the German offensive on the western front, which so nearly won them the war.

But in raising the specter of Bolshevism, Germany had brought a more insidious enemy into the field. After reducing Russia to chaos and anarchy, the dual dictators of the proletariat in their crazy obsession to communize the world turned their attention to their closest neighbours, and Germany and Austria began to fear the effect of their handiwork. The excesses of the "sons of proletariat" in Great Russia had spread to the Ukraine. The mutiny of the Black Sea fleet and the massacre of officers was followed by an orgy of shooting and violence in Odessa.

The Committees of Soldiers and Workmen resolved themselves into so-called Committees of Public Safety, and under the pretext of searching for arms to prevent a counter-revolution, they robbed householders of every conceivable weapon of offence and defense, looting and killing to their heart's content. Soldiers and sailors at enmity with officers, or men who nourished grievances against others who, because of education, position, or monetary worth could be classed as bourgeois or intelligentsia, found a golden opportunity from wreaking vengeance upon them or their families. Every possible outrage was perpetrated in the name of liberty.

There were several instances of great gallantry on the part of those who prefer to die fighting rather than profess Bolshevism or to trust to the mercy of the propagators of the new freedom. A noteworthy fight was put up by a small band of officers and Cossacks in the streets of Odessa. Machine guns were mounted in streets and squares by the Bolsheviks, whose children even

flourished revolvers. The fighting lasted for some days, ending in an armistice and the withdrawal of the unconquered little band from the city. The public burial of the sixty Bolsheviks killed in the fight was the occasion for a great demonstration and procession by the Bolsheviks.

Another instance was the defense made by eight Ukrainian officers who barricaded themselves with machine guns in the railway station, and though even the guns of the ships in the harbour were brought to bear on them, the indirect fire of the drunken gunners was so ineffectual that after inflicting severe losses upon the attackers, the officers succeeded in making good their escape.

Austro-German force arrived in Odessa from Romania, quickly suppressed the Reds, and, under Hetman Skoropadsky, founded the vassal Ukrainian Republic. A force of twenty thousand Austrians and eleven thousand Germans was quartered in the city to maintain order and collect supplies. Guns were trained down the principal streets, squads of Austrians patrolled by night and day, and Ukrainian police who bristled with firearms stood at every street corner and could kill on sight any civilian possessing firearms. Shooting in side streets and sniping of Austrian sentries was nevertheless a nightly occurrence, while wholesale robbery with violence, in which Hungarian soldiery were associated with Bolsheviks was rife.

A mighty ammunition dump on the city's outskirts was blown up by Bolsheviks with incredible damage to the surrounding country, and over two hundred Austrian soldiers perished in a fire in an adjacent barracks. When visiting this spot some days after our arrival, we saw how lightly human life was regarded when the Austrian sentries opened fire at about twenty-five yards on a party of peasant women collecting cartridge cases, and sent them screaming from the scene.

We soon realised that the problem of leaving Russia was almost as difficult as that of reaching it. A British force was operating against the Bolsheviks on the Murmansk coast near Archangel, which we contemplated joining by crossing Bolshevik Russia. The reports of travelers soon convinced us of the impossibility of the task. We had previously considered the possibility of travelling east to Baku where a British force had recently landed, but the reported capture of Baku by the Turks forced us to abandon this plan also. As much of Romania was occupied by German troops, we would have been no better off than in Odessa.

The most feasible plan under the circumstances appeared to be to join the Anti-Bolshevik army, then operating in Southern Russia, and, after some service, to ask or take leave and fly eastwards to one of the Allied or Czech-Slovak ex-prisoner-of-war detachments operating in Siberia, thence - to Vladivostok. This army was known as the Volunteer Army and was largely composed of ex-officers of the Imperial Army and Kuban Cossacks, and was originally founded by the patriot Kornilov. After his death in battle the command was taken by General Alexieff, who, with headquarters in Ekaterinodar, about 250 miles north-east of Odessa, commanded a formidable force of forty-eight battalions. Recruiting for this army was openly carried in Odessa, for Germany was already beginning to fear the Frankenstein she had raised, and, though satisfied with the nation-destroying work of the Bolsheviks, she wished to draw the attention of their propagandists from Germany and Austria by engaging the fanatics in Civil War...

About two weeks after leaving the *Batoum*, Vilkovsky suddenly appeared. Having escaped and stowed away on another steamer. His father being a well-known barrister in the city and an uncle holding a responsible ministerial post in the Ukrainian Government, he had come into his own again. Being personally acquainted with the Commissar of the Volunteer Army he undertook to arrange our inclusion in one of the parties of ex-officers leaving for Novorossiisk.

Rumours of the withdrawal of the Austrian garrison caused the Bolsheviks of Odessa to raise their heads once more and the civil population to tremble. The newspapers, though heavily censored, contained daily confirmation of a great Allied advance on the Western front and the rumours of an impending armistice with Bulgaria.

Hearing that the Austrians had sanctioned the dispatch of the hospital ship *Euphrat* to Varna, to bring back released Ukrainian prisoners, we enlisted services of Louis Demy to obtain particulars, as the prospect seemed better than our chance of leaving Russia via the Volunteer army and Siberia.

A growing truculence was noticeable in the Bolshevik quarter. It became an open secret that in three days the Bolsheviks intended to rise, drive out the Austrians and continue the extermination of the bourgeoisie. The Consul of Soviet Russia was reported to have spent enormous sums in propaganda, and it was rumored that among the thousands that had flocked to Odessa as a last refuge against Bolshevism - increasing its population from five hundred thousand to over a million - were numerous well-armed Bolsheviks who were merely waiting the propitious hour to declare themselves. A raid was made on the Soviet offices and the Consul and about two hundred of his followers whose names were found on lists in his keeping were arrested, and a number executed.

We visited Ukrainian headquarters and learned of a small fort being constructed on the outskirts of the city, where, with three or four guns and insufficient rifles, a number of desperate officers were determined to fight to the last man. On the arrival of the Franco-Greek force from Salonika after the Austro-German troops were withdrawn, the bodies of a number of unidentified officers were found in a fort outside the town, where they had endeavoured to hold out against the Bolsheviks. ...

The bourgeoisie for the main part remained in unorganised inaction. At Robinar's, Franconi's and the Café Suisse, speculators who cornered commodities that ranged from tea to stolen forage and equipment bought from soldiers of the garrison, still made fortunes in a day, while ragged crowds that watched them haggling at the café tables talked of pogroms and a speedy return to Bolshevism. Consignments of goods were sold and re-sold many times before they reached the retailer. The money thus made was often spent as quickly as it was gained in endless feasting and revelry, in the hope of blotting out thoughts of tragedy of the future, which sober application and energetic organisation might have averted.

There was good reason for fear. "Yablotchkaw", a revolutionary song perpetuating the ghastly incident of the cruiser *Almaz*, could be heard in any street in the Bolshevik quarter, and a repetition of the officer hunts, indiscriminate looting and murder during the last period of Bolshevik ascendancy, could only be expected. The incident of the cruiser *Almaz* had been related to me by the ship's firemen on the *Batoum*, and after questioning both Russians and Englishmen who were in Odessa at the time, I have every reason to believe it true.

A rumour grew that a French force was marching from Bulgaria to Odessa, and it was repeatedly reported that the British Fleet had forced the Dardanelles. Crowds assembled daily on the Pushkinskaya Boulevard searching the horizon for the ships of their deliverers. Greater activity of patrols and ostentatious parades of Austro-German troops to Austria and Germany and an attempt to insulate the troops from the secret propaganda of the Bolsheviks which was already tainting the discipline of the forces.

One night we were stopped by an Austrian sentry, but rightly quieting that he would have some loot to sell I asked him what price he wanted, whereupon with a grin he produced a large box of the vilest cigarettes I have ever smoked, which I gladly purchased for twice their value. We spent the last few days before our departure in tabulating information regarding the numbers and location of the Austro-German forces, the situation of their dumps and stores, number of ships, the addresses of sympathizers, and useful data regarding the Bolsheviks.

In Varna the escapees encountered the British who had recently entered Bulgaria. One of the British units was preparing to be sent to Southern Russia, and White and Bott announced their wish to return to service and join this unit. Yet their health condition, undermined by three years of captivity, was far from good. White and Bott were sent to Salonika for recovery. There they

found out, that the British mission to Southern Russia had been cancelled, and requested the Command to send them to Britain. Thus the WW1 ended for them.

P. Adam-Smith. Prisoners of War from Gallipoli to Korea. 1992

T. W. White. Guests of the Unspeakable. 1928