



Thord in the uniform of high-ranking officer in the White Russian Army.

CHAPTER IX – RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR

To the fall of Vladivostok, July 1919 to February 1920

TRANSFER TO THE SECOND ARMY

‘I WITHDREW my unit from the line of fire two days ago,’ wrote Thord on 24 July 1919 from Tiumen, 201 miles east of Ekaterinburg.

‘We have been fighting a rearguard action night and day and it seems like years since I got any sleep. There is a small number of good men with me and I am now doing all I can to guard the rest of the army – and keep a protective eye on all these poor people on the roads that are in the grip of the wandering, plundering, and thieving bands of soldiers.

‘We are in a bad situation. Our soldiers, it seems, do not have the strength for battle any longer, even if there is a ray of light here and there that might give a certain incentive to continue. More than half of the army has thrown down their weapons and ammunition. The report “the Reds are coming” set a whole brigade in movement without any attempt by either the officers or others to take a look and see if it was true. The whole army is in an appalling condition; typhoid and dysentery are spreading fast. The whole of Russia seems to be on the move towards the east. Every road is blocked by wagons, carriages, horses, cattle, and people – all in a state of panic. The soldiers in front of the army – meaning the ones that run faster than the others – have in practice turned criminal. They steal, plunder, and murder – and sometimes young girls are taken by these cowards that do not dare to fight. I am afraid that we are turning the whole population against us to the advantage of the enemy. For sure the enemy would not be able to treat them worse. All discipline is lost. A large number of officers have disappeared and we believe they have been killed by their own men.’

Thord submitted a report of these conditions to the Supreme Commander, General Dietrich, on 30 July, ending with the following: ‘I send this report because I find the question extremely serious from a political point of view. I am not

being critical except with regard to the injustice against the civilian population.’ Some comments in his diary from these days are noteworthy. On 9 July 1919 he took two Red prisoners to act as his servants. Otherwise, they would surely have been executed. Later on these two, Matfee and Ivan, came to be of great help to Thord. Possibly there was rivalry between them and the cavalryman, Fagan, who had until now seemingly followed Thord and been his interpreter. On 25 July Thord wrote that Fagan had let him down even though he had been given countless opportunities to prove himself worthy of a position of responsibility. On this day when Thord asked him if he wanted to follow Thord or go back to the division immediately, Fagan replied: ‘If I have to use my hands in any way in your service, I do not wish to follow you.’ According to Thord this referred to the many times Fagan had been given the job of feeding and watering the horses. Fagan was therefore surprised when Thord ordered him to simply remove his belongings from the wagon they were being transported in. He had thought himself irreplaceable.

At Usi ‘Colonel Thord-Gray set an example of military bravery’ that prevented encirclement of his division and enabled it to withdraw.

On 27 July Thord wrote from Elotervosk, 249 miles east of Ekaterinburg. After reorganisation he had been posted to Second Army Headquarters. The military forces at the front were now divided into three armies. The First Army in the north held the area bordered in the south by the railroad through Tiumen. The Second Army continued southwards from this railroad to the one that goes from Omsk to Chelyabinsk. The Third Army continued from there south and southwest to a point near Kurgan. The Southern Army had a front in the south and was deployed around fifty miles north of the town Vernoye in Semirechinsk. The Orenburg Cossacks were independent in the southwest. The new organisation did not stop the retreat but it was an improvement. Thord got orders to go to Ishim and Omsk to visit the chief of the general staff and Admiral Kolchak at army headquarters to report on the conditions at the front.

The same day he was awarded the Knight Commander of the Order of St Anna 2nd class with sword. The chief of Second Army, General Lashvitsky, had implied that Thord had more distinctions waiting. There were several mentions of making him major-general – but he did not want to become a Russian subject, as they required. It was the former chief of division, Colonel Labuntsov, who had nominated Thord for the St Anna Order with the following recommendation:

‘Colonel Thord-Gray was my deputy during the battles on 25 and 26 May 1919 south of the River Belaya. He often positioned himself in front of the artillery. He often personally scouted to find out where the Reds were deployed, which made it possible for the division to successfully perform their tasks – to advance southwards to the Red’s rear and take the Sarapul-Birsk Road. On 27 May when the Reds began an attack with superior force and the division near the village of Usi was under threat of being surrounded, Colonel Thord-Gray set an example of military bravery. By his reconnaissance and skilful orders the encirclement was prevented and that made it possible for the division to withdraw in time and stop the panic that had begun.’ The further distinctions to follow were for actions described in another report from Labuntsov: ‘Colonel Thord-Gray, my deputy during the battles on 3–10 June 1919, indefatigably carried out scouting

of the Reds' position, informed me in time, and therefore made it possible to issue necessary orders.... Colonel Thord-Gray's personal bravery was demonstrated several times under the Reds' fire and illustrates his war experience and ability to understand the situation. He played an important part in enabling the division, which consisted of about two thousand men, to manoeuvre on a front of 40–45 miles and to hold it as well by counterattacks to paralyse the advance of the Reds' superior forces.'



By 1 August 1919, the next time Thord wrote, he had arrived at the large army headquarters in Ishim, 383 miles east of Ekaterinburg. The supreme commander was sick in bed but was able to inform Thord that he had been awarded Knight of the Order of St Vladimir 4th class with sword and ribbon.

'Through this distinction I am now a Russian noble.' According to his diary, it was General Tomashevski who presented the decoration. 'I continue to Omsk tonight. The news from the front is not good. I came here almost with the intention of giving up on it all, but have for the tenth time been persuaded with promises of reforms. Let us see what a conversation with the general staff and Kolchak can bring. My confidence in these people has been more than shaken but somehow they fascinate me – the peasant class in particular.'

When the opportunity arose Thord asked what people remembered of the Swedish prisoners that had been captured at Poltava and taken to Siberia. Among other things he tried to interpret the inscriptions they had made on the walls in their prison. By pure coincidence, in an antique shop in Omsk he happened to spot a painting portraying Carl XII and the Cossack Ataman Mazeppa, which he bought and had renovated. It is now in Sweden.

On 7 August in Omsk, Thord visited General Ivanoff-Renoff who, in the presence of General Blair, offered to help Thord set up three Cossack divisions, each one to include one infantry and three cavalry regiments.

Ivanoff-Renoff promised 25 000 sets of underwear, 2 000 blankets, 5 000 pair of socks, and 10 000 sweaters. The following day Thord was presented by Ivanoff-Renoff to his staff. One general, the station commander, and some other officers were expected to be shot on that same day because they had sold railroad carriages and taken enormous bribes.

August 10 was a great day for the Cossacks. Ivanoff-Renoff was promoted by Kolchak to Lieutenant-General. The Cossacks had bought an old gold sword decorated with diamonds and rubies said to have belonged to a Polish king. It had cost 100 000 rubles. The sword and a flag were presented to the general in a solemn ceremony. Kolchak, Sir Charles Elliot, the Mexican ambassador, General Graves, and the French chief of mission were among those present. A few days later, with great pomp and circumstance, General Ivanoff-Renoff, in his capacity as Siberian Cossack Ataman, made Thord an honorary Siberian Cossack.



ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

ON 15 AUGUST Thord was in the American Hospital in Omsk. He wrote in his diary: ‘When I went home last night at nine-thirty, I passed the Cossack cathedral at the Ataman’s staff quarters. The orchestra was playing in the cemetery and hundreds of people were walking around inside the fence.

‘About two yards away, in the dark, I noticed a Cossack guard posted in the middle of the street. He shot right at me but the weapon misfired.

‘I stopped and asked why he was shooting (I had no weapon myself). He answered that he had called me and as I did not stop he had to shoot.

‘Once again he aimed at me and I saw that he intended to shoot. Luckily I was turning to the right and the bullet – instead of going through my heart – went through my left upper arm, continued through the chest on the left side just above the heart and came out again in the middle of the chest.

‘He was planning to shoot a third time but I told him that if he fired again I intended to beat his brains out....

‘He lowered the revolver again and went inside. I went in to General Ivanoff-Renoff’s staff to report the incident. I was bandaged up and sent off to the American Hospital instead of a Russian hospital.’

In a letter home on 29 August 1919 the description of the shooting differs in some of the details. After the weapon had misfired, the Cossack looked at his weapon and swore at it. He had an unsheathed sabre in his other hand. Thord was very tempted to kick the revolver out of his hand but thought it unlikely that the Cossack was about to shoot again when it became clear to him who Thord was. There was also a chance that he was drunk and therefore it was better to handle him in a calm way. According to the letter version the exchange of words was somewhat more extensive:

‘While he was covering me with his revolver and looking agitated, he began to question me and examine me all over without giving me a chance to move. “Where are you coming from? Where are you going? What are you doing in this country? Why do you not stay in England?”

‘Each and every one was answered, but I noticed that he was working himself up. Suddenly he seemed to surprise himself by saying: “I am going to kill you,” just as he fired the gun.... When I tottered after being hit, my back was turned to the man and because I was curious about what he planned to do next. I quickly turned around and there was the monster standing close to me with his weapon intending to break my skull from behind.

‘It is remarkable what a flow of good Russian a man can produce in such a moment. I told him I was going to shoot him stone dead if he came any closer. The man turned and ran down the street. When I was left alone the orchestra was still playing only fifty yards away.

‘The man that shot me is apparently locked up awaiting my testimony.... My two Bolshevick servants that I took from the execution platoon a while ago, were

extremely good. Barely had I reached home in order to be taken to hospital in the Ataman's carriage – and they had received my news of what had happened – when they asked permission to go into town on an important errand. When I asked what it was they asked me not to worry about them but go to the hospital as soon as possible, as I was bleeding too much. They disappeared after helping me into the carriage.



‘They came to visit me after two days. With great glee they told me that they had taken two of my revolvers and in secrecy visited the Bolshevik headquarters in Omsk demanding to know if they were the ones that had set up the assassination. The Bolsheviks denied any part in it but said they knew that the German-Russian Imperial Party had arranged the attempt. My men then turned to several of their friends. They were searching for two days and nights and in the end they found the man.

‘They did not kill him because they wanted me to know that he still was alive so that the revenge should be more complete.

‘When I asked if there had been any difficulties in the search they answered: “No, not much.” Only once they happened to encounter a gang of Imperialists who shot at them, which is why it was necessary to return fire. Two from the other side were killed.

‘I still do not know what is going to happen to me. The American Hospital will probably evacuate from Omsk within ten days to some place eastwards, possibly Vladivostok. They want to take me along, but I cannot make up my mind.

‘There are signs of an abscess beginning to form in the wound and it is too early to make plans. The doctors say that I ought to travel to America or England for real rest and care.

‘The political and military situation is abysmal. The enemy has crossed the River Tobol in several places between Elotervosk and Kurgan and advanced around 53 miles eastwards. Nevertheless the enemy has slowed his advance possibly due to lack of transport and our quick retreat.

‘The Siberian Cossacks have again asked me to help them organise five Cossack divisions for immediate service at the front. I am restless in bed but believe there is a lot of sympathy in their actions.

‘On 15 August the Minister of the Interior asked a question in the chamber of counsel to get an explanation for the attempt on the life of Colonel Thord-Gray, who was the only foreign officer that had given physical help to their cause.

“This crime has shaken the whole foundation... of our ideals and it is a stain on our honour and knighthood. Most of us cannot understand the seriousness in the developing situation and the results if this officer were to feel forced to work against us. Through this man's influence the Russian Army and the hospitals have received materials and medicines valued at hundreds of millions – free without any expenses or duties on our government's behalf. This man has come to our capital to solve questions of great significance for our army at the front after having

participated in the battles during the retreat over more than 650 miles – and we shoot him in the street. I ask to convey this government’s sympathy to Colonel Thord-Gray in his misfortune and at the same time convey our appreciation for all he has done for the army and the Russian people.”

‘This statement was sent to me here in the hospital on 16 August. Besides this I received a letter from General Ivanoff-Renoff, the Siberian Cossack Ataman, regarding the same matter.

‘How we are to get out of Siberia I do not know. Maybe it is best to wait for colder weather and walk over the Pacific Ocean on the ice. Do not worry about me. I am getting stronger and feel good.’

Thord’s diary note made on 25 August 1919 from the American Red Cross Hospital: ‘Today came the news that the Reds had taken the river boats that go from here down to the mouth of Ob to meet the seafaring ships that go to England and Sweden. They were taken at Tobolsk. Mr Pearse, an Englishman who used to give lessons in Russian, was one of the captured.’

Diary note, 28 August, the American Red Cross Hospital: ‘Admiral Kolchak came close to being captured on the Makushino station 250 miles west of Omsk. He was out in a car and a company of Reds broke through our lines somewhere west of this station. When the admiral returned he found the station empty – his train had gone. Suspecting that something was wrong he continued past the station and caught up with his train further ahead. It is said that the station has been recaptured.’

Diary note, 29 August 1919, the American Red Cross Hospital: ‘Moved at my own request away from the American Hospital today. Both chest wounds are still open. One looks anything but good.

‘I am going back to the front to see to my troops, who are in bad condition. I’m taking with me one railroad carriage with medical supplies and two with “a little of everything” for the troops. The train departs at seven tonight. I don’t feel well. The chest troubles me because of the wounds.’

Diary note, 30 August, Omsk: ‘The train changed direction suddenly and went to Ishim instead of Petropavlovsk where I wanted to go. I removed my carriages and belongings at the last second. Returned to the town and taken in at 10 Novaya at Lieut-Gen.’

Diary note, 1 September: ‘Today came the intelligence that 3rd Regiment, 1st Army, mutinied yesterday, killed all their officers, and marched towards the general staff. They got within five hundred yards before the staff found out, turned some machine guns on them and mowed most of them down. The 1st Army troops were caught in an ambush and we still do not know if they got out of it. A Red regiment was almost swept away by us yesterday.’

Diary note, 3 September: ‘Departed to Petropavlovsk. Boarded the train seven o’clock in the evening. Karl Hoffman came with me to the front as my guest. The wounds are open and I do not feel too good. The men’s nerves seem affected. Have five wagons, one for horses, three with warm clothing for the army as free gifts: 1 100 sweaters, 10 000 pairs of socks, 1 000 pairs of gloves, 1 000 blankets, 5 000

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flannel shirts, and 400 pilot vests. Took the two black horses and the Victoria carriage. The horseman Fishman from the 1st Cavalry Division came along as interpreter and orderly Matfee as servant.’



Thord was now once more on his way to the front but in a rather pitiful condition. The explanation for this dangerous decision is to be found in his letter home on 30 September 1919.

‘On 29 August an officer came from the front with reports from my division and told of the continuous battles, of the retreat, and of the army’s terrible plight. The weather was awful, the people badly provided for with food and drink, poorly dressed and very tired. All personnel had lost courage and were psychologically and physically worn out after retreating more than one thousand miles. The plan to create a halt at the River Ishim will have to be carried out. The River Ishim flows from south to the north around 170 miles west of Omsk. If this front were breached, Omsk would be lost and the fall of the government a certainty. “To make decisions to hold the Ishim front,” said the officer, “is well and good but what shall we do when soldiers simply refuse to stay because they do not trust the higher staff? The 1st Assault Division is asking for your return as a proof that you are still alive. If you do not come soon they intend to come here on a forced march and clean out all of Omsk. The best part of the army will follow them. There is a rumour that you have been shot in Omsk and they cannot understand that. Two elected non-commissioned officers and two orderlies will visit you tomorrow. They have been chosen as representatives for the units at the front to find out your opinion and to make sure you are alive and whether you are in hospital or in prison, which has been reported as well.”

‘The following day the deputation of my most trustworthy soldiers arrived. One of them had once given me his horse and we had gotten away together when we were close to being captured during one of the toughest battles of the war. The other one had been with me on several scouting missions and never recoiled when the situation seemed hopeless. They were two men that I never shall forget – the bravest of the brave.

‘In their very simple but hearty way they explained what the troop thought of the conditions at the front and asked if it was possible for me to show myself before them if only for a minute to calm the men down. Whatever the 1st Assault Division did the others would follow suit. The division had lost faith and insisted that I should return as a proof that things were all right.

‘I now asked the doctor in the hospital when I could be considered ready for the front again and his answer was that it needed another two months in hospital and then a six-month trip to America or Europe to get complete rest. This was on 30 August. My wounds were still open but did not hurt much, except when they removed the bandages that were smeared with pus every day. I felt weak but very clear in the head. During the last fourteen days I had lost one third of my blood, leaving me a bit light-headed at times.

‘It was impossible to tell the men that I could not return to the front. I promised therefore that I would think about it until the evening. As soon as they left me I sent for the head nurse, Miss Helen Demerchikoff, who had cared for me so excellently, and said that I wanted to leave the hospital and explained the reasons for it. She thought me a bit crazy but she helped me with all arrangements. When the chief surgeon understood what was going on, he refused to sign the usual discharge papers but wrote the following:

“This is given to Colonel I Thord-Gray from the Siberian Army’s 1st Assault Division. He was admitted to the American Red Cross Hospital in Omsk at eleven o’clock on 14 August shot through the left upper arm and the left side of the chest. He is being discharged upon his own request on 30 August to return to the front but his chest wounds have not yet healed.”

‘I transferred down to the town and my own barracks and made my arrangements. I could only move slowly on foot and only indoors at first. Outside I was forced to use a carriage with large rubber wheels but even when being transported in it I felt severe pain and a stretcher was made for me.

‘The deputation met with me for a few minutes in the evening, but it was impossible to keep them any longer. They wanted to hurry back to the front with the message that I intended to return. They mentioned that the troops had no underwear. It would be good if I could bring some with me. The poor souls in their absolute faith in me could not understand that it is impossible to provide a whole army with underwear in a few moments. Nevertheless I was lucky and arranged to take with me 40 000 underwear items, 40 000 thick woollen socks, 40 000 woollen sweaters, 40 large cases of medicines and bandages, and 40 000 woollen balaclavas and scarves, all from the American Red Cross Civil Relief Department. In the evening on 1 September all these supplies were loaded onto railway carriages. The following morning my carriage was ready, the horses were prepared and we were all set for the front.’

A LAST VISIT TO THE FRONT

THORD’S EXPLOITS during the following fourteen days are briefly described in his diary and in more detail in letters home on 30 September 1919. The information does not always concur. The diary version of events has been given preference here.

After their arrival in Petropavlovsk they took out the horses to drive into town with Hoffman. When they had driven three miles on the road the horses suddenly spotted a dead horse, shied away, and tried to bolt.

The Victorian carriage fell off the roadside into a ditch. The left shaft broke and the horses kicked the rest to pieces before disappearing into the field among the bushes. Hoffman got a broken tooth and was black and blue all over. Thord jumped at the last minute and landed on his back before rolling round and injuring a knee. The wounds reopened. Matfee was injured in the side. The Cossack was

sent after the horses and carriage. (The letter home described the incident as taking place a few days later.) The trip was continued by car to the Second Army's staff at Kasanskoje, six miles north on the left bank of the River Ishim, where Thord

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On the following day (7 September) before continuing his journey to the front with two gigs and two pairs of horses, Thord witnessed the execution of a second-lieutenant. He was shot because he had seduced a female schoolteacher and forced her, under the threat of exposing her, to act as a Bolshevik agent. He had other crimes to his account. Hoffman was shocked but Thord thought it was a good sign. He appreciated Lashvitsky for his firmness and had a long discussion with him about the operational plan.

On 8 September he arrived at the front at Butirino. The 1st Assault Division, now renamed Ekaterinburg Division, had taken the position from the Reds two days earlier. Here too was the Krasnofimsk Brigade with General Volkov as commander. Thord wanted to go out and follow his old division but Hoffman opposed the idea as there were too many Reds running loose in the bushes. When the Ekaterinburg Division advanced that same evening he nevertheless joined them.

The account continues in his letter of 30 September:

'We went out at once and established an advanced staff headquarters close behind a small hill where the 1st Regiment was deployed. The staff grumbled a little in the background about the foolish positioning of a staff of division, and they did not seem to understand my reason for this. I heard someone say that I was out of my mind because of my wounds and ought to be forced to withdraw. After I had arrested the man I brought him before a court martial.

'This took a total of ten minutes from the time he had the nerve to make the statement. I formed a new staff consisting mainly of fighting men I knew and those recommended by them. The officer was sentenced to be shot, but I let him go as he was new and did not know me or my methods.

'I wanted him to wake up and also wanted to affect the general discipline and the officers' bad morale.

'I found the soldiers far calmer and worthier under fire than the officers. When the troops heard that the division staff was only a few hundred yards behind them, as the counterattack was about to be launched, they cheered and the whole line went to attack against a great number of machine guns.

'The troops' good morale had returned simply because they knew that their officers were with them and that the goal could only be won with the help of the bayonet. The enemy retreated all over as I had hoped they would.

'There were three main attacks that took two days. Thereafter the difficult part of the battle was over for a few days. All this time I had to be carried on a stretcher and my wounds became worse. Ugly matter began to run from them. The doctor told me that I had an abscess in the whole wound and wanted to

operate immediately. The force of necessity delayed the operation as I did not want to be away right at that time. It was good because the operation was not necessary. [Here Thord noted the incident with the bolting horses and the opening of the wounds, which thereafter healed better.]

‘I found out that I Army north of us had not been able to stop the enemy’s advance but were still retreating. For the moment they were positioned in front of – and were intending to evacuate – the town of Ishim. This town was of great strategic importance and lay directly east of my division. Therefore it was possible for the enemy to be at our backs within a short time.

‘This would be a minor issue from a tactical point of view compared to how the soldiers would react to it.

‘The situation was serious enough but if the troop found out that the enemy was directly behind them they would turn and run with the rest of the army, just when they thought that things were improving.

‘It was touch and go whether the I Army would be annihilated or not. Therefore II Army turned northwards and succeeded in breaking through at the enemy’s main position in front of Ishim, thanks to a serious effort by every man.

‘They took many stations on the railroad as well as prisoners, among them a brigade chief and his staff. The most significant station taken was Medvedso twenty miles west of Ishim.

‘The Reds, unaware of our horrible condition, were forced to retreat northwards, which is how the pressure on I Army was removed and they got an opportunity to catch their breath and... to gather their shaky forces.

‘Our advance was more than risky but very interesting. It was touch and go at times whether the goal would be reached, as both my flanks were exposed for several days and the enemy’s cavalry was right behind us all the time – and even captured some gear. The odds against us were more than ten to one but the enemy did not know that there was not a single man in reserve between us and Omsk, a stretch of around two hundred miles.

‘My last battle took place on 11 September. It forced me to evacuate the battle line against my will. Boosted by our troop’s temporary successes, the officers began their usual bl..dy habits and became a bit careless.

‘The 1st Regiment got orders to attack a village that had earlier been reported to be fortified. The commander sent out an unreliable officer to scout the enemy position. The officer was scared and did not go but met someone who told him that the position had been abandoned by the enemy.

‘Of course, he forwarded this news to his chief of regiment, who was a very clever soldier and wanted to show what his regiment could do. He marched with the whole unit in closed formation out on the field towards the village that he was to take and that unbeknown to him, was still fortified.

‘I did not doubt that he would capture the place if he did what he had been taught – but he did not. His task after taking the village was to continue westwards and perform a flank attack on another position that was more than usually fortified. The later attack I had intended to lead myself. I gave him plenty of time and we

parted with high hopes for the day's mission. A thick fog appeared just before daybreak, and one of the battalions went a bit too far to the south, which delayed them for more than two hours after the attack had begun. The 1st Regiment did not show up at all. One battalion strayed too far away and was lost in the fog. Here I was about to make a frontal attack without any support on the flanks. As I was more or less used to this in the Russian army, I had kept a small troop as special reserve and with this – a battalion – we attacked the enemy on one of his flanks.

'I took charge myself as all depended on this attempt being successful. In the middle of it all, as we passed an open field in front of the enemy, the fog lifted for a few moments and we stood there in full sight of the machine-gun batteries less than 100 yards away. We had a bit of luck because the fog returned quickly, although not fast enough. The enemy took advantage of the opportunity and opened fire in our direction with every machine gun they could aim. It was rather unpleasant for some minutes.

'All this time I was being carried around on a stretcher and I could feel the bearers' desire to throw it down and run with the rest. Naturally the whole battalion had run to take cover otherwise they would all have fallen.

'Two of the bearers were hit but, as I had my faithful Matfee and Ivan with me, I soon got other bearers.

'The situation was rather critical so I sent Ivan, the most reliable man I could spare, with instructions to the 1st Regiment to go toward this point and attack the enemy without delay on his northern flank, which was the target the 1st Regiment had initially been given. As soon as Ivan had left I had to send another message to the commander of the cavalry. I chose Matfee for the mission, which needed a dependable man. Less than ten minutes later the enemy counter-attacked and behind them followed their cavalry. We then retreated to a forested area. In the initial attack one of my bearers was killed and the others, feeling the stretcher tilt to one side and hearing the approach of enemy cavalry, threw me into the bushes and ran. I have often wondered since then what would have happened if my two reliable friends Ivan and Matfee had been there. I do not think that the bearers would have run for long without being shot.

'Realising that I was in a pretty difficult situation, I pulled in the stretcher and hid it among the bushes but left the dead bearer where he lay. The fall had shaken me thoroughly but the excitement kept me going.

'I thought of all kinds of things. I especially remembered how pleasant it would have been to sit at home with schnapps and talk with the family instead of lying here in the bushes far away on the steppe, abandoned by my men, frozen and miserable with the enemy all around.

'Two Red cavalymen stopped and looked at the dead bearer not more than three yards from where I lay. One of them dismounted, went through the man's pockets and found a bit of tobacco and some Siberian roubles.

'The firing of the retreating troops and yelling of the cavalry gradually faded away. At that time I had given up all hope of getting out of this fix. Two hours passed without any sign that our troops were rallying. I could see scattered

Bolshevik soldiers turning back from the battle. Some were wounded and some left apparently without any special reason.

‘Suddenly the place turned livelier. The stragglers from the enemy cavalry and others seemed upset. Some orderlies galloped past at more than usual speed. A few moments later some downhearted soldiers came in disarray and shortly after that some enemy cavalry and our own clashed in battle.

‘High above all others I sighted my giant Ivan riding on my old warhorse in the lead, slashing out at the enemy and shouting out orders. It was a great and joyful show to see this officer’s servant lead an Imperial cavalry regiment.

‘Less eye-catching but smarter, Matfee could be seen here and there looking for something. I was so surprised that I almost forgot to reveal myself when I saw Matfee galloping toward the place straight ahead of me, leading a spare horse by the reins. In the saddle I saw one of my latest stretcher bearers, clearly frightened to death. I was so fascinated by what was taking place between these two men that I could not move and I wanted to see what they were up to. When they arrived at the dead bearer’s body, both dismounted and Matfee barked one question after the other at the poor man.

‘As this took place only four yards from me I could hear every word.

“‘So this is the place where you filthy devils left him to die the moment I turned my back,” Matfee said, among other things. “Just wait and see what is going to happen to you, my good sir, if he is not found or recaptured by nightfall. I shall not kill you. No – I shall make you dumb and blind by a few simple operations with this knife.” When he spoke he was waving a long carving knife in front of the poor man, who nearly fainted.

‘That Matfee would have carried out his threat I did not doubt, but he was so happy to see me come out of the bushes that he forgot about the man, who immediately ran away when Matfee ran forward and started to pet me as he would a small child.

‘Ivan had long since disappeared in the cavalry charge. I tried to mount my horse to follow and see if anything could be done to take advantage of the wonderful manoeuvre of my dear Ivan and Matfee, but it was impossible.

‘All my limbs were stiff from the cold and the wet and my chest pained me a lot. Matfee prepared my stretcher and we were soon on our way northwards to try to gather the scattered forces. It did not take long before we met Ivan, as he had returned with a very large group of my men. Somebody had followed them and told them I had been found.

‘As almost all in the enemy force had been killed or taken prisoner, they had turned back again to get new orders and I was very grateful for that.

‘In a few words I was informed of what had taken place. Ivan had delivered his message quicker than expected and was on his way back when he met Matfee, who had also just carried out his task. Together on their way back they met our fleeing battalion. It did not take them long to realise that I had been abandoned – one man said that I had been shot and was dead. Without a moment’s delay they both turned around, galloped to the cavalry regiment, and gave orders as if they

were from me to immediately attack the position they pointed at. The cavalry had been inactive the whole morning and were happy to follow these known officer's servants. In this way they not only led them to my salvation but turned the defeat into a very decisive and important victory.

'The 1st Regiment had marched in closed formation out into open terrain in the belief that the enemy was not there and had suffered serious losses. When the lead came within fifty yards of the hidden Bolshevik positions, the enemy opened fire with several machine-gun batteries and its infantry. The troop scattered and ran, but one battalion hit a ditch and made it into a trench around 150 yards from the enemy. The others ran around 800 yards backwards and took cover in sloping terrain with trees and thickets.

'After one hour's hard battle the unfortunate idiots in the ditch called for more ammunition. To their surprise they found themselves completely out of supplies. The enemy noticed that something was wrong, of course, and attacked with success. The battalion abandoned their position and retreated towards the rest of the regiment, but many of them fell under the heavy enemy fire. The time that had been allocated to take the village had elapsed, and yet the chief did not even try to report to me what had happened.

'Anyway, it seems our luck was still holding because the 1st Regiment managed to hold their position and got a message through to me just at the moment I had gathered the cavalry and the initially lost battalion.

'With the 3rd Regiment in reserve, we now succeeded in going round the enemy to attack him from three directions and made short work of the affair. Their cavalry, which had been so successful against us due to the tactical situation, was forced to retreat in such a direction that the main Bolshevik forces did not learn of this defeat caused by Ivan and Matfee. They simply remained in their position, because they had received the news of their earlier complete success. The lack of communications proved to be significant for their entire force. We had suffered bad losses that day but modest in comparison with the enemy. This was totally due to my faithful servants, Ivan and Matfee. Not even in my most foolhardy moment would I have dared such an attack as they made in the fog after the whole division had been divided and scattered by the enemy.

'The enemy was now in a state of panic, retreating along the entire line. Army staff announced that the operation had been a complete success with only minor exceptions. The Ekaterinburg Division was especially honoured for forcing the enemy from his main position.

'By this time I was a very sick man. My chest tormented me and required treatment. The wound was seeping and smelled awful. My left arm was paralysed. The army doctor told me that I had to go immediately to Omsk or lose my arm. Gangrene had begun in the chest wound.

'When I realised that something had to be done I gathered the troop for my last farewell at five o'clock in the afternoon on 11 September. Only forty officers remained and of them only twelve from the original division. The men were broken and worn out and looked half-starved, but I was very proud of them. I was

carried on the stretcher along the line and through the different regiments to say goodbye. I had not had tears in my eyes for a long time, but it was hard to control my emotions when old veterans and young boys rushed forward. Some kissed my cheeks, others my hand or foot, while others just touched me. It was difficult to leave and if it were not for the increasing pain in arm and chest I would have delayed my departure and stayed with them.

‘There was the Russian soldier that I liked and trusted and that I hated to part from while, on the other hand, I had lots of very bad experiences with the officer class. One out of ten of the officers were as good as one would find anywhere else, but God forbid that I should ever again have anything to do with the others when it comes to fighting. It was with a heavy heart that your son left this splendid group of men. It was even worse as the bugles played the general muster for the last time and the division did a march past. It was all like being in a fog and I was incapable of saying one word, but the men understood.

‘At that moment I felt someone touch my hand. It was Matfee that stood by my side as usual and whispered to me: “I know that you like us but the reason you have to leave is mainly because you are too sick to move and secondly because we are all going to die if you stay. If you travel again, all these men will become Bolsheviks before the end of the month.”

‘I knew exactly what the dear lad had in mind. He was trying to make it easier for me to leave, as it would save their lives. In general Matfee was right and I am ashamed to admit that his words did comfort me a bit.

‘A few moments later I gave the order for departure. After taking farewell of the chief my small company left in a southeasterly direction to get to Petropavlovsk. There I stayed for one day to make the final arrangements with the various army units regarding the underwear, other supplies they had received, the hospitals, and the front regarding the medical supplies.

‘My horses had been found and the carriage repaired thanks to the efforts of Ivan and Matfee.’

On 18 September 1919 Thord returned to Omsk.



CONVALESCENCE AND PROMOTION

FROM THIS time in Omsk there are only sporadic notes in the diary to draw on. On 24 September 1919 Thord was granted six months' leave for medical care of his wounds in the USA. He arranged a passport, money, and letters of introduction to the Russian ambassador in Washington. Among other things, he bought \$200 from Carl von Hoffman for 16 000 roubles. He sold the two light brown horses and the carriage for 40 000 roubles. Apparently he was planning to return because he left his British riding horse named Revolution with a British saddle and a black mare with the Cossacks 'to keep till my return'.

On 28 September Thord received a visit from General Michailoff, Chief of Staff of all Siberian Cossacks. He presented Thord with a photo of General Ivanoff-Renoff along with a letter of gratitude from the Cossacks and the army. The letter stated that Thord had shown bravery and calm. With his help to the Siberian Cossack warriors, he had awakened a feeling of brotherly respect from the Cossacks and their sincere gratitude.

General Michailoff returned on 5 October and informed Thord that his appointment as major-general had been recommended to the supreme commander. The minister of war and the adjutant-general had approved.

On 7 October Kolchak travelled by boat to Tobolsk. Fire broke out onboard. Treachery involving petrol was suspected.

Lieutenant-Colonel Steel, Royal Field Artillery, who had been an instructor at Thord's 2nd Division (Brigade Haubitser), died of flu on 17 October 1919. On 18 October the news was bad; all the fronts were falling back. On 19 October Steel was buried with great honours. The next day Thord caught flu as well. On 24 October he got up, even though he felt bad and became worse, with a 40° fever. On 28 October he was back on his feet again. Also on 28 October the III Army staff evacuated Petropavlovsk.

I Army was in a very bad state. III Army did not fight much but they did as much as they could. II Army was performing better than the others.

On 29 October Petropavlovsk fell. A regiment of Magyars – composed of Austrian ex-prisoners who had not wanted to be mobilised – had mutinied a few days earlier, killing all their officers, and gone over to the Reds. The enemy had crossed the River Ishim south of Petropavlovsk.

An order for the general evacuation of Omsk was given in the evening and created great agitation even the following day.

In confidence it was reported on 31 October that the Ishevskaya Division, which had fought well a few days earlier, had then bivouacked for the night. Everyone had gone to sleep without any kind of protection. The Reds had advanced during the night and taken all their artillery, comprising twelve field guns, before killing all the officers.

On 2 November 1919 Thord visited Carl von Hoffman's home to have a look at a beautiful sword, but Hoffman was out.

‘While I was looking at the sword, Major Slaughter, US Army, came in. He was drunk and very insolent and asked for Hoffman. The female servant came out when we left. He told her to tell Hoffman that if he did not travel to Vladivostok without delay, Slaughter would send a soldier to arrest him and send him in irons to the west. Admiral Kolchak was also mentioned as the one that had given the order. The American called me “a d...d shit” and came close to cutting me with his sword. Slaughter repeated himself several times – but could barely stand on his feet. I have known Major Slaughter for [many] years and have no grudge against him. Therefore I cannot understand his behaviour towards me,’ wrote Thord in the affidavit requested by the American Consul-General, Mr EL Harris, on 4 November 1919.

**‘Germany has sent
innumerable agents
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reactionary Imperialists,
to maintain close ties
with all parties.’**

On 3 November Thord was interviewed by the adjutant-general, who informed him that the prospect of his appointment as general looked favourable. The same day Thord secured a compartment in Colonel Botenko’s train. (He had been commanding officer at the Vladivostok fortress.)

The time spent convalescing and the wait for a train passage in Omsk gave Thord time to reflect once again on pro-German sentiment among the Russians.

‘There is a very obvious inclination among many in the so-called higher classes and among the Bolsheviks to wish for an alliance with Germany. The planned Russian-German-Japanese Alliance is almost a known fact, though it is secret. This has resulted to a great extent in the hocus-pocus in politics that some of the representatives of the Allies have been up to. Every now and then they interfere in questions that are none of their business or that they do not understand. It is a fact that the Russians do not know where they stand in the relationship with the Allies, while Germany again makes all kinds of attempts to get closer and is the only power that has successfully given Russia physical help against the Bolsheviks. Contrary to what the Allies believe, Germany has sent innumerable agents to Russia, both to the Soviets and to the reactionary Imperialists, to maintain close ties with all parties. They have thousands of officers and soldiers fighting on both sides, so as to be on the winning side and make sure the Russian people remain pro-German. All this is of course Germany’s own business and it is her duty to her own people to look to the future. I am not complaining about that. It is just interesting to know.

‘I have been present at more than one conference where we have spoken in detail about “the next war”. General von der Goltz and his 20 000 German soldiers joining the White army against the Bolsheviks is a clear example of their double-handed ways, when one thinks about the many thousands of officers that joined the Red army as “Hungarian Slaves”.

‘A certain part of the ruling elite is pro-Allied, but I am afraid that we are quickly pushing them into the Germans’ arms. The Russians want an alliance with Germany for several reasons:

‘The first reason is their wish for the monarchy to be restored. They believe Germany to be the only country that would expend much energy to help because it would thereby help itself.

‘The second reason is purely emotional: Indignation has spread throughout the whole nation at the way Russia is being treated by the Allies. (I am giving the Russian point of view.)

‘The third reason is geographical unification for military and economic purposes. The privileged class understands that the Germans could organise the Russian millions on a steady foundation (something the Russians cannot do themselves), and if the Allies intend to take vengeance they ought to be careful. I have in my own way learned to like Russia. The country’s national character is very fascinating.’

In his diary Thord has listed a number of persons (mainly of Baltic origin) that he considers to be influenced by the Germans.



In the light of Thord’s later collaboration with the Ataman Semenov, it may be of interest to look at some of his comments about him. Gregory Semenov was born in 1890 and was therefore 29 years old at the time. His father was a Russian Cossack in Trans-Baikal. His mother was a Buriat. Until the age of sixteen he lived with his father and helped him on the farm. Already as a child he spoke perfect Mongolian, showed great eagerness to learn, and sacrificed all leisure time to study. He read all the books available on history, politics, and theology and studied Buddhism in depth.

After secondary school examinations he went to Orenburg Cossack School in the autumn of 1908 and left in 1911 as *churungu* (first lieutenant) in the Verkneudinsk Regiment. As an expert in the Mongolian language, he was sent to Mongolia for topographic work. At the start of the First World War he was transferred to the Nerchinsky Regiment. For his striking bravery he was decorated on several occasions, receiving the St George’s Sword and, for operations in Gaicien, the St George’s Cross.

At the beginning of the revolution, when the demoralisation began at the front, he was sent to Siberia by the temporary government to set up Buriat ‘assault battalions’ in Irkutsk, where the wave of Bolshevism had finally arrived. Semenov realised the seriousness of the general situation. He changed his plans and began to organise a volunteer corps to fight the Bolsheviks. With his corps, Semenov went to Manchuria and from there decided to help form the Chita Regiment with men returning from the front. His aim was to fight the Bolsheviks, but he was temporarily prevented from doing so by the Trans-Baikal Cossack Government.

Finally in January 1918 he attacked the Bolsheviks with only 100 rifles at the Adrianovka Station. He could not resist their counter-attack and was forced to withdraw to China. His temporary occupation of the Trans-Baikal Railroad proved to be useful: Many volunteers from the population joined his corps as thousands of refugees escaped the Reds into Manchuria. During the interval in China the

number in Semenov's corps increased to around five thousand men and the Allies began to support him with ammunition and money. The British supposedly gave him around £10 000 per month to pay his troops.

In April 1918 Semenov began a large offensive against the Reds on the Dauria front. The Bolsheviks soon realised that Semenov was dangerous. They concentrated large forces against him from different areas of Russia and western Siberia, amounting to around thirty thousand men. This gathering of Red forces against Semenov helped the Czechs escape and occupy territory from Pensa to Vladivostok. He showed great talent as leader of men during the continuous battles at the Mazievskaya station, and created the opportunity for the Czechs to clear the road from Verkneudinsk to Chita and in this way connect a long stretch of the Siberian railway with Vladivostok. It was because of this that he initially came to be popular with the Cossacks.

At this time Semenov was appointed 'Ataman' by the Cossacks. When eastern and central Siberia were cleared of the Reds he was appointed to colonel. The provisional Siberian Government recognised him with this rank and he was given command over the Manchurian corps. The Cossacks' appreciation of Semenov increased to such an extent that in October 1918 he was elected 'Field-Ataman' by the Amur- and Ussuri-Cossacks. The Trans-Baikal Cossacks followed suit in April 1919. Semenov was then 'Field-Ataman' for all the Cossack troops of the Russian Far East. On 1 July 1919 Admiral Kolchak acknowledged Semenov's position as 'Field-Ataman' for the Far East Cossacks and promoted him to the rank of major-general with the positions of deputy chief for the Priamur military area and governor-general in the Trans-Baikal district.

However, rumours were circulating about revolutions in the Far Eastern provinces. 'There are two Atamans in the eastern Cossack territories. One is General Semenov in Trans-Baikal and the other is General Kalmikoff in Ussuri. The former is at least ten times stronger politically and in troop numbers than the latter, but they work together under Japanese leadership and support, which of course straight away makes them anti-American. These two were reported by the Americans – and others – to be involved in piracy and to behave like common criminals, a danger to society.

'All these reports are somewhat exaggerated, especially those concerning the Ataman Semenov. The present government was against him because he was the only one who dared to speak out when reform was needed and because he did not recognise Admiral Kolchak immediately when he took the power from the people's elected parliament. If we had more of Semenov's kind, the war would have been won by now.

'Some time ago it was reported that Semenov was fed up with everything and was making plans for a new monarchy independent of all other Russian governments. This kingdom would include northern Mongolia and the eastern province in Siberia. The crown would be worn by Tuchun Chang-Tso-Ling, who would be maintained there by the Ataman Semenov with Japanese approval and support. It was said that Semenov would succeed Tuchun as king on the latter's

death and that he had already been made prince of Mongolia. Would Tuchun survive for long?

‘The release of northern Mongolia and its unification in a state with eastern Siberia would of course mean problems with China, although China would not be capable of doing much about it if the whole thing was supported by Japan. Whatever happens, there are many who believe that in the current struggle for independence in the eastern provinces, Semenov and Kalmikoff will take power in eastern Siberia and declare all the land between Baikal and the Pacific Ocean as independent Cossack country under the protection of Japan. It has also been said that the presence of smaller American units in some places at the railroad near Verkneudinsk had something to do with this plan not being set in motion. The Americans have not participated in any battles apart from a brawl here and there near Vladivostok when some Social Revolutionaries attacked the railway.’

In this regard Thord wrote of conflicts between Americans and Russians.

‘Many unpleasant smaller – and some serious – conflicts have taken place between Semenov-Kalmikoff’s men and the Americans. Semenov regards himself as being in command in his area and at present does as he pleases regardless of the presence of an American troop. He stops all trains and takes what he wishes in materials and money. He is very fair on many occasions and stops the terrible speculation and war-profiteering by Jews and others who unlawfully take advantage of the poor people during the chaotic situation in Russia. The Americans look on both atamans as pure bandits, and it may be true. Without wanting to take any part in the cause of these two generals, I have to say that they have serious reasons from their point of view for disliking the Americans. This feeling has been incited by a certain amount of patriotism and national resentment – mixed with rather a lot of vanity and personal ambition for some kind of power as well. I would rather deal with Semenov than with 99 percent of the other Russian officers.’

On 4 November 1919 Ishim fell. I Army retreated in a state of dissolution back to Tatarskoye. On 5 November General Dietrich was granted leave. General Sacharoff was appointed to replace him as supreme commander over all armies with General Ivanoff-Renoff as deputy. Kolchak made pro-German speeches in the ministry. Panic prevailed in the town on this and the following day. On 7 November the American train departed. The British mission was moved to the station. Thord interviewed General Ivanoff-Renoff. The enemy was now around 53 miles east of the Ishim River and continuing his advance. On 8 November he reached Isil-Kul, which was expected to fall. The British departed.

On 9 November Thord’s train was supposed to depart but was delayed. On 10 November General Sacharoff was no longer commander-in-chief. On 11 November Thord departed. He passed through Novo Nikolaievsk on 15 November, Krasnoyarsk on 19 November, and Irkutsk on 22 November. He arrived in Chita on 26 November. During the trip intelligence came in that Omsk had fallen on 14 November.

On 16 November a coup d’etat was attempted in Vladivostok with Gaida in the lead together with the former president of the Siberian Duma, Yakosheff, and ex-

minister of war in the Derber government, Krakavetski. The upheaval was crushed by General Rosenoff and Gaida and his staff were captured at the station after a battle. Thord was naturally interested in this event due to his earlier service under Gaida, and he wrote in another context:

‘At a meeting in November 1919 in Vladivostok the following four men decided to overthrow the Russian Government and appoint themselves thus: Governor-General of Far East, General Rosenoff, as dictator; Klaigin as minister of trade; General Somonoff-Merlin as foreign minister; and Captain Krashnikoff as ministry secretary.

‘General Gaida was resident in Vladivostok at this time – after he had lost his position as Russian supreme commander – and was in reality the central figure in the plan. The Americans had promised secret help but Rosenoff played a double game, persuaded the Japanese not to assist Gaida, and conspired instead to have him crushed so that he, Rosenoff, would afterwards have a free hand without any opposition. Gaida was well liked by all the working class and by the socialists and therefore Rosenoff was scared that he could possibly take over the whole country and put Rosenoff aside. It was the usual jealousy between Russians and it ended as it always did – badly. Gaida was promised the position of supreme commander of the army or Minister of War.’

PROMOTION TO MAJOR-GENERAL

THORD stayed in Chita until 30 November 1919. There he had an interview with Ataman Semenov, who offered him the rank of general and the post of diplomatic representative at the Allied governments’ commission in Vladivostok. He dined in the Ataman’s home and heard his political views.

‘He seems rather sound. He wants to summon an elected assembly in Siberia – not the political parties but the different nationalities that live in Siberia like Buriats, Mongols, and Russians, etc.’

On 29 November, Thord got his commission as major-general in the Russian army from Semenov, who informed Thord that he wished for peace with the foreigners and that he was not pro-Japanese.

On 30 November the journey continued. After stops in Manchuria, Khailar, and Harbin, Thord arrived in Vladivostok on the morning of 6 December after almost nine months’ absence. During his visit to Vladivostok, which lasted until 3 February 1920, Thord lived in his railroad carriage at the station. The diplomatic mission obliged him to visit the foreign legations and he had repeated meetings with their leaders. Already on the day of his arrival he met with Admiral Rodgers; on 8 December with General Graves; on 11 December he visited the British Consulate and the British High Commission; on 12 December General Osi, the Japanese leader; on 16 December the American Consul; on 17 December General Cherek, Czech mission; and on 18 December General Lavergne, French mission (‘a very charming man’).



Major-General Ivor Thord-Gray of the White Russian Army. This portrait in oils, reproduced in full colour inside the front cover, was completed in 1978 by Howard Chandler Christy. Depicted on Thord's left sleeve is the skull and crossbones – the renowned insignia for his division, which also adorns the banner to his right.

He socialised with his Swedish friends: Sjöstedt, Ullgren, Christenson, and the Ahlbom brothers. Naturally he also met with Russians like the Ataman Yonoff from Semerchinsk, who offered Thord the post of chief commander of Turkistan: ‘The plan seems possible: \$30 000 is needed for the transport of officers from here.’ But all was not peaceful and quiet. Businessmen complained that Semenov had confiscated their goods and this required extensive correspondence and careful handling.

On 17 December Thord heard that a Major McClaren at the American Red Cross had said that Thord was a thief and an impostor and had never seen the front. Thord reported the matter to the American head of staff.

He also heard that General Knox had tried to make the newspapers write that Thord was not an Englishman but a Swede.

‘What an idiot he must be. Nobody is prouder than I am of my Viking origins – and I always say so,’ was Thord’s comment.

Knox left for Britain on 27 December and was replaced by General Blair.

On New Year’s Eve the British Consul, Mr Preston, said that he (Thord) was likely to be shot because he was seen as being too much of a Tsarist general and favored Semenov too much. ‘It’s remarkable that the assassination attempt was made on Captain Webb... [of the] Canadian Highlanders and me on the same evening. They missed me but hit Webb through the coat first and then the hand at very close range.’

Among intelligence briefs from the battle area it was reported on 16 December that trains were standing frozen in a row one behind the other for many miles west of Krasnoyarsk.

On Christmas Eve an order came from the regent Kolchak announcing his intention to unite all the armed forces in the Far East and Irkutsk military districts with the aim of maintaining the administrative system and order behind the army. He ordered the chief of the Trans-Baikal military district, Major-General Semenov, to take over the command of all the troops in Trans-Baikal, Priamur, and Irkutsk military districts and gave him the power as supreme commander over the chiefs of the units in these districts.

These somewhat fragmentary comments and observations are what we learn from the diary. But Thord also made separate notes of more dramatic events in the later part of January and beginning of February 1920.



THE FALL OF VLADIVOSTOK

‘ON 20 JANUARY [1920] a large number of Russian units were deployed in and around Vladivostok: The Jaeger-Battalion was in the trade school in the town centre, the 35th Regiment at the railroad around ten miles away, and the 33rd and 34th Regiments in Nikolsk, the railway intersection with the Ussuri railroad around sixty miles from Vladivostok.

‘On Sunday 25 January there were rumours of a revolt among the soldiers outside the town. The same morning a train left Vladivostok with General Romanovski and his family as well as the Ataman and General Yonoff of the Semerchinsk Cossacks. I was supposed to go with them to meet with the supreme commander in Chita. The train passed through Nikolsk and it was the last train – all the others had been stopped. On Monday morning we found that all three regiments had gone over to the Reds.

**On 25 January 1920
the Jaeger Battalion
at the trade school
mutinied. The next
day the battalion
came out of the
school to take the
town but met with
deadly fire**

‘The 35th Regiment tried to march into Vladivostok but some Japanese units were able to run them out and the regiment went peacefully up into the mountains instead. They did not trouble anyone apart from taking a few wagons from some farmers and flour from a factory in the vicinity. The regiment passed by Gösta Ahlbom’s house without touching anything.

‘The two regiments at Nikolsk (the 33rd and 34th) also went into the mountains, but returned and took up positions at the station after a skirmish or two with Japanese troops. The same day several locations along the railroad to Chabarovsk were taken by our soldiers who had gone over to the Reds.

‘Around five o’clock in the evening of the 25th the Jaeger Battalion at the trade school mutinied. First reports said that all the officers had been killed but that was not true. After the mutiny the battalion remained in the schoolhouse the whole night although they held the town in their grip and could have done whatever they wanted.

During the night the school was surrounded by a group of officers helped by units of the officer- and the marine-cadet schools. It amounted to a substantial number of men well supported by machine guns and field guns.

‘Close to seven o’clock the following morning the Jaeger-Battalion opened heavy fire from the school and came out into the open to take the town. To their surprise they were met by deadly machine-gun, artillery, and infantry fire. The cacophony was quite powerful for some time and the mutineers were forced to retreat back to the school building. It did not take long before the artillery sent some projectiles through the schoolhouse, and soon enough a hoisted white flag could be seen. At eight o’clock in the morning the show was over and the mutineers were prisoners. All the officers were found to be alive and on very good terms with the men.

‘There was something reminiscent of a comedy about the entire situation. The officers could largely be blamed for the event. It had been made known that

General Rosenoff, responding to pressure from certain quarters, had requisitioned the school for purposes other than billeting troops. Consequently he ordered that the battalion be transferred to Russian Island just outside Vladivostok. Apparently the officers did not want to move to this somewhat remote place and neither did the men. The younger officers talked to each other about not wanting to move. The men, who were unwilling to leave the comfortable building in the middle of the town, heard this and decided to refuse to leave. When the transfer order came through they refused to obey.

‘The chief of the regiment did not know what he was up against and went to the governor-general to report that the troops were refusing to move. General Rosenoff sent him to the Fortress Commandant, General Veriga, a very capable officer who told the colonel that if he could not show enough authority over his men to move them from one place to another, then he like his men would be arrested for lack of discipline and incompetence.

‘The very concerned colonel returned to the school. He gathered all personnel and informed them that he was forced to use violence and would arrest all that refused to move. A spokesman for the battalion stepped forward and informed the colonel in a very colourful speech with due respect and politeness that the battalion did not consider a move to Russian Island suitable because the soldiers were having such a good time and were comfortable in the town centre among their friends. He admitted that the colonel’s position was difficult and wished him well in attempting to carry out his instructions. To prevent all further misunderstandings and to solve the difficulties, the colonel and the officers should be kind enough to consider themselves prisoners.

‘None of the officers made any attempt to escape and stayed until they were freed the following morning. Only two men were killed and seven injured in the battalion in this little attempt to play their own game.

‘Within one hour of the capitulation, the battalion was on its way to Russian Island under escort.

‘By this stage the Jaeger-Battalion had become Bolsheviks and showed all the signs of this, but were very polite and quiet about it. Colonel Preskoff, chief of the officers’ school on the island, asked the governor-general not to send this rebellious company (as he called the battalion) to the loyal cadets and infect them. General Rosenoff maintained that the troop should transfer to the island to show them and others that orders must be obeyed. In this case the governor-general was completely naïve. Within two days the Red flag was fluttering on the island and Colonel Preskoff was a prisoner. These soldiers immediately set up a Soviet government and most of the officers joined them.

‘Our position in Vladivostok was now odd, to say the least, and in reality quite desperate. All of the soldiers, with the exception of a few servants and some Cossacks, had gone over to the Reds and a large number of officers with them. The governor-general called for a general meeting of all officers on 27 January. It was mandatory for every officer to participate. Absence would be seen as a criminal offence with serious punishment for those found to be missing. The number of

officers in Vladivostok at the time was assumed to be more than 1 200, but in spite of the critical order only around 600 turned up. Those present swore allegiance to the government and decided to form an officers' alliance for the defence of the town, women and children.

'These officers made a very picturesque and noble crowd when they pledged oath of loyalty and were quite inspiring, even though we knew that half of them did not mean what they said.

'The same evening some officers that I knew from the front came to see me and declared that they had been delegated to represent a great number of officers who were inviting me to go with them to Nikolsk to unite and organise with the Reds for the attack on Vladivostok.

'A new meeting was called on 28 January in the trade school with the intention of dividing up the officers for the defence of the various parts of the town and the fortress. Almost immediately after the meeting another officers' committee approached me outside the school and demanded that I should go with them when they left the same evening for Nikolsk to join the Reds. I explained to them that as a foreign officer I could hardly do what they required. As all the soldiers and nearly half of the officers had already gone over to the Reds, I wished them well on their journey.

'It was now only a matter of how many days it would take before the Reds reached Vladivostok. I began to count on it and wondered what the Japanese would do when they came. The Japanese had bragged to me many times that they would be able to keep the Reds at bay without any difficulty.

'In the evening of 30 January I was warned by another officer committee that had turned Red that I should leave for another country without delay or else join the Red organisation. I was in a peculiar mood and told them that I would wait and see what the Reds would do with me when they came.

'I could not leave my post as long as the Japanese and the Americans remained to take care of the few surviving officers and as long as the brave officer corps kept their organisation active.

'All this I said as a joke – and they knew that I knew that the Reds would be in the town very soon, whether the Japanese were there or not.



'My faithful servant Matfee, friend and Red prisoner of war, came and told me on 25 January that the railroad workers in Vladivostok had come to see me and he asked that I should do what they wished.

'A deputation of about six men sneaked into my railway carriage late that evening and asked me to organise the railroad workers into a fighting unit and take command of them. They had at their disposal four carriages of weapons, two of ammunition, four small French armoured cars, one with petrol, one armoured train, and four of the largest and best locomotives in the whole railroad system. With their own men and their friends they could recruit ten thousand men within ten days outside Vladivostok and at the same time stop the whole railway by their

absence. The men were deadly serious and poor Matfee was as nervous as a young girl while he was waiting for my answer.

‘I must admit that the offer was tempting, because I had always harboured sympathy for the railroad workers. They had been treated like dogs. But I asked them to forgive me when I said that it was unwise of them to try such a coup now that the Japanese and the Americans had guaranteed payment of all the workers’ salaries. They would never get paid if anything like they had suggested happened. Their spokesman then told me that they did not give a rotten penny for the American or Japanese money but wished to have their freedom and the right to exist. They asked me not to say anything about their plan and when I refused to take up their offer we parted as best of friends.

‘Matfee advised that I should not abandon the town because all would be OK with the Bolsheviks when they came. He had arranged that. There has never been a more loyal and better friend than he.

‘In the evening of 28 January when I was walking through Svetlandskaya towards the station at around eight o’clock, I was met by a Japanese patrol of around ten men, all with fixed bayonets. The commanding officer came up to me and in a very offensive way pulled open my fur collar and spoke to me in Japanese. I answered him in English and asked what he wanted. The man knew me, I think, because he answered in rather good English, “Run, General, and run fast.” As I did not really understand why he wanted me to run and as the Japanese soldiers were standing close to me sneering, I felt entitled to ask, “Why should I run?” The cheeky little Japanese then informed me then that no-one had permission to be out that late especially not bloody Americans and if I did not run, a bayonet or two would soon force me.

‘And therewith he gave an order to his men and they approached with their bayonets unsheathed. They looked rather unpleasant. I was not really sure what to do until I noticed another patrol approaching – it could be my own troops. Luckily it was. When they saw it, the Japanese changed their tactics. The officer approached me and said that he was sorry – that he had made an error as he had mistaken me for an American: I asked him then how he knew that I was a general, but he did not reply and simply left the place with his men. When I arrived home I found that my coat had several holes in the back and on one side from the bayonets that they had pushed so close to me during the last minute.

‘The coat had no epaulettes or other sign of my rank that could indicate to the Japanese who I was.

‘The town was in a state of anxiety with all kinds of rumours circulating. It caused some of us to look around and pay attention to every attempt at violence or disturbance by wandering soldiers. A number of thefts took place but not as many as would have been expected.

‘When I was riding down to the station at one o’clock in the morning on 31 January, I passed several officers with wagons loaded with goods. Some had Chinese coolies carrying their belongings. Alone with a coolie went Berg, a civil servant whom I knew rather well. I asked him why this move was taking place

so early in the morning. He then informed me that their house was not safe and they were moving now because they were afraid to wait. There was a chance that the new apartments he and his friend had obtained would be requisitioned by the Japanese the following day. I had met Berg, who was Russian, several times in Omsk and he now asked when I was intending to leave Vladivostok. I told him I was to leave in a day or two but that I was not sure. To this he answered, “I hope you have a pleasant journey.” He went on his way while I returned home to my train at the station.

‘I thought his laughter and his general attitude were a bit odd at the time but it was not until seven o’clock that I understood what it all meant.

‘At seven o’clock on 31 January 1920 Matfee woke me up by shaking me and asked me not to light a match or to talk. I had been out very late every evening for several weeks to keep an eye on things in general. I was therefore tired and rather indignant at having been woken, but Matfee soon informed me of the situation. What he had predicted two days earlier was about to come true.

‘The Red troops were right outside the town and would be in at eight o’clock. How this servant who never left my side or the train knew all these details is still a mystery to me.

‘Nevertheless he told me that the revolutionary troops had worked their way forward around the Japanese forward positions and would soon be in the town.

‘He also told me that the American troops would not participate in the town’s defence against the revolutionaries, and instead they might even help them. He asked me to dress but not to leave the train before the Reds had taken the town. He pointed out that the town could not be defended, as all the soldiers had gone over to the Reds and all the officers had departed during the night on a large steamer destined for Japan. It was hard to believe this but I trusted Matfee, as he had never lied to me.

‘When I had dressed and readied myself, Matfee returned and told me to prepare for a shock. It was now around eight o’clock. He requested that I look out, which I did, and to my surprise I found large red banners hanging all over my train. Matfee soon explained that I was right in the middle of the Bolshevik propaganda department and that I had to stay put until the fighting was over and the new commandant had taken control. It was easy to understand what the boy meant. I went back in and had a good breakfast.

‘At that time the firing had begun in the town and Bolshevik units could be seen advancing to the station from the hill and along the railroad track. They passed my train and entered every compartment but mine. I soon found that I had a bodyguard who looked very smart in full uniform with a red bow attached to his chest. It was the Bolshevik sign and password for the attacking Reds to pass. None of them even tried to enter my compartment.

‘The guard outside my carriage stood under the now prominent Matfee, who got the whole crowd to present arms to me when I jumped out a while after the Reds had passed. They were men whom he had gathered. I had seen them several times before in the servant’s carriage in the past few days. On Matfee’s

recommendation they had been helped with food and clothes and had permission to sleep in the kitchen during the cold nights.

‘At roughly nine o’clock the entire town was in the hands of the Reds. It was almost too peaceful but everyone was waiting for something to happen all the time. What Matfee had told me early that morning about the Russian officers was true. At four o’clock in the morning around four thousand officers and some women had boarded the Russian government ships, the *Areal* and the *Yakut* and sailed out of the harbour towards Japan.... About one hundred officers had run to the Japanese headquarters in search of protection, among them Governor-General Rosenoff. Most of the officers had left and there were only fifteen left in uniform. The rest had run away and left us in the lurch to become prisoners of the enemy. Hesitant, conflicting orders and a general lack of authority on the part of the governor-general of the Far East had much to do with his fall and the taking of Vladivostok by the revolutionaries this day.

‘Around nine o’clock Matfee suggested (simply as a matter of protocol) that I should go to congratulate Colonel Krakovetsky, the new leader. I had seen him before but could not remember where.

‘Krakovetsky stood up and met me with both hands outstretched. He thanked me for the kind and humane attitude I always had shown the poor prisoners of war that I had taken and others that I had helped.

“You have the strength to come here in the uniform of the Imperialists,” he said to me, “but I am pleased that we still have a few men that are not afraid to carry the uniform of the army they belong to instead of removing it and wearing civilian clothing, so than we cannot know if they are friends or foe.” He also asked me if I felt like taking a command in the new government’s army. I promised to think about it.

‘Colonel Krakovetsky urged me to visit the president of the Somstvo, Mr M Medvedeff, whom I found to be a very pleasant old gentleman who was very kind toward me.



‘A guard was placed at my train and an order was given that none of my belongings were to be touched. This man, similar to a chief of unit, informed me that Matfee had told them a lot about me. They hoped that I would continue the same good work for them. It appeared that Matfee had spiced up much of what I had done to win a sympathetic attitude towards me from these men. There has never been a more faithful-unto-death friend who did not fear the consequences for himself than this boy, Matfee.

‘The capture of Vladivostok was a tactical coup by the revolutionaries against the Japanese. If they had not had American sympathy, they would never have been able to see it through, I am sure of that. But they did perform the task with great tact and care. The Japanese troops had been placed outside the town to meet the expected attack. On the evening of 30 January the Reds led a very good mock attack against the Japanese positions.

‘The Japanese used all the troops they could and held their position and they were expecting – thanks to intelligence received from well-planned Bolshevik propaganda – new attacks the following day.

‘The American units that were responsible for the right part of the front did not take things very seriously. In fact they had a very sympathetic attitude towards the revolutionaries and I think they were in with them on this. There was a certain amount of collaboration among some senior officers in the American force and the Socialist Revolutionaries. Without a doubt some promises had been made.

‘Whether it really was so or not remains to be proven but the fact remains that the revolutionary forces marched into Vladivostok through the locations where the Americans should have been. In that way they came into the town only four hundred men strong and occupied the fortress and the government.

‘All the time fifteen thousand Japanese lay at the edge of the town waiting for an attack. The whole thing was like a bombshell to the Japanese. Within a very short time they rushed to bring forty machine guns and several battalions into the town. They positioned these weapons in strategically important locations and prepared to open fire on the new revolutionary troops that began to enter the town at around ten o’clock in the morning.

‘The Reds came along Svetlanskaya in closed formation and formed a grand target for the Japanese pieces. A Japanese officer went out into the street that was packed with people. He had a large escort with him and in the windows and on the roofs the Japanese had positioned machine-guns.

‘At the critical moment two American officers stepped forward out of the crowd of spectators only two yards from where I stood and told the Japanese officer that if they opened fire on the Red troops, then they, the American troops, would go against the Japanese to help the revolutionaries.

‘They were Lieutenant-Colonel Blankenberger, the leading intelligence officer in the American army, and Major Graves, son of Major-General William S Graves, chief of the American forces in Siberia.

‘The situation was very tense for a minute or so and the Japanese were not sure what to think or do. The Americans then told the officer to get out of the way as the revolutionary troops were close by and it would not take much for a battle to begin. The Colonel told him to remove his troops without delay and the Japanese thought it best to comply and with ill-concealed resentment ordered his men to withdraw. This sequence of events lasted only about three minutes. I really admired the two American officers for their performance. It has to be taken into consideration that the Japanese had more than a thousand men on the street and in the different houses overlooking the area and another fifteen thousand men close to Vladivostok. The Americans had only one small patrol in the street of not more than ten men and only 8 500 men in all of Siberia against 75 000 Japanese. During this event Matfee asked me repeatedly what they were saying and wanted me to stop the advancing revolutionary troops before it was too late. The Japanese officer did not initially strike me as a man that could act independently, so I let the event develop, but it was rather risky.

‘When it was all over, Matfee turned to me and said:

“‘The Japanese tried to make you run the other evening and cut your clothes with their bayonets. They have been abusing the poor Russian people for a long time but our day is getting too near for the Japanese liking.’ I more or less understood what he meant but in the evening I realised the full implication of his words when hordes of poor people with the help of officers hunted down Japanese soldiers and officers like rabbits in the streets. It continued for several evenings and in the end the Japanese never went outside unless in a crowd of ten or more. The same afternoon one of the Japanese officers met a young sixteen-year-old revolutionary soldier in the street not far from the American Red Cross at Svetlandskaya. The officer deliberately pushed the boy aside which led the boy to call him a Japanese donkey. Without further ado, the officer drew his sword and stuck it into the poor boy’s stomach, leaving him dying in the street. Many witnessed the event.

‘They rushed after the officer and tore him into pieces, limb from limb. When I arrived at the scene after witnessing the incident at not more than 200 yards, the officer was unrecognisable. He did not have one whole bone in his body. I have never seen a crowd of men turn so furiously and quickly as these. The officer deserved what he got. The boy died shortly after.

‘On the evening of 31 January I was again in the commandant’s office and he told me that we had met in Ekaterinburg when I was with General Gaida. He was then with Gaida as well and later on participated in the revolt that Gaida started against Kolchak’s regime in Vladivostok on 18 November, which failed due to fraud and lies among some of those who had pretended to participate. I had asked the revolutionary commandant if I could leave Siberia, as I wanted to go to England or America to have my wounds treated. They had not answered this immediately but on 2 February I was told that I could travel with the first ship available. However, as there were no boats leaving, my prospects of departure did not look very promising and I told them so. They quickly ordered the large steamer, the *Penza*, docked in the harbour, to prepare for departure the following day. I was invited for dinner that evening and the revolutionaries offered me a high command in their army, which, out of principle, I had to decline. On the morning of 3 February I transferred to my cabin on the *Penza* and I thought all my troubles had disappeared and a few weeks at sea lay ahead. Anyway, I was called out and subjected to an intimate and thorough interrogation regarding the “staff” I had brought with me. When I informed them that I had not even taken with me my officer’s servant Matfee, they told me that a number of imperial officers had been found on the *Penza* and they claimed that they belonged to my staff. If these fools had come to me I might have been able to arrange something for them. But to try to hide on a ship in this way without saying anything to me was idiotic and I could not do anything for them. Three officers were disembarked and two were shot the same evening. These two had played a prominent role in the many illegal and unjust executions in Vladivostok after the Gaida revolt.

‘The *Penza* sailed at five o’clock in the afternoon on 3 February, destined for Tsaruga in Japan, and arrived there on 5 February at eight o’clock in the morning.

The Russian ships the *Areal* and the *Yakut*, which had left Vladivostok, abandoning other officers and me in the hands of the revolutionary troops, lay docked in the harbour. On my arrival, the Japanese informed me that the Russians were not allowed to disembark and that they lacked money and food. I was asked to visit the *Areal* to try to arrange something. It was with mixed feelings that I went onboard the *Areal* from one of the Japanese yachts that had been placed at my disposal for this purpose. In the large lounge I was met by an unpleasant sight. The place was packed with people and clothes. The atmosphere was so foul that it could kill a healthy person. All the older officers had gathered in a corner to meet me. Their leader was Lieutenant-General Kartzoff. It became evident that they had little to eat and that the food would only last for another twenty-four hours. There were around four hundred people, maybe more, who needed to be fed. The Japanese authorities would not allow anyone to go ashore without a passport: There were only four passport-holders among them and no money.

I promised to travel to Tokyo to deal with the issue and arrange for food with the Japanese authorities in Tsaruga. I did so, and food for a week was approved pending my meeting with the Russian minister and the Japanese Government in Tokyo. Among others on the *Areal* I found Berg, the man I had spoken to when he was transporting his clothes to the ship to get away from the revolutionaries and who did not have the decency to tell me about the opportunity of escaping. As it turned out I was glad he had not done so.

‘The Princess Galitzen and the Prince were also on the *Areal* and asked me to do everything I could to get them ashore.

‘Among other things that I told the officers was my opinion of those who had left me in the hands of the revolutionaries. I offered a free trip to Harbin for all officers who wanted to reunite with the army but only three out of 350 applied. I also offered a trip through China for the officers that wanted to go to Turkistan but no one applied, which is why I left them without further offers. Many asked to borrow money to stay in Japan. Others wished to go to Paris or London – only three wanted to go back to their army.

‘General Rosenoff was in his residence when the revolutionary troops came up Svetlandskaya early in the morning on 31 January. The Cossack guard at his home fired one or two shots and withdrew but stopped the revolutionists long enough for the governor-general to escape to the Japanese headquarters from a rear exit, wearing a Japanese officer’s coat. He remained there with around one hundred other officers until transport to Japan was arranged.’



RETROSPECT

AFTER HE left Siberia Thord officially recorded his version of the events he had experienced there on at least two occasions. The first time was after his arrival in Japan in the course of a speech reported in *The Japan Advertiser* about the fall of Vladivostok. This provoked a reply in the same newspaper on 18 February 1920 by Lieutenant-General Kartzoff. The second occasion was in the USA where he wrote an article in *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper* on 24 April 1929 with the title 'The Red Success in Russia'.

Kartzoff was of the opinion that Thord had served too short a time in the Russian Army to make a truly fair judgment. Primarily he turned against Thord for accusing a number of officers of perjury. It concerned those who had asked Thord to join the Reds even though they had pledged to defend the town. Kartzoff, who had been in Vladivostok at the time, had never heard anything about it. When it comes to assessing these officers' behaviour, it is important to remember how some of their appointments had come about.

During 1914 and 1915 many of the Imperial Army's officers had been killed in the war with Germany and Austro-Hungary. The revolutionaries had murdered thousands more of the surviving officers. One of the Siberian Army's weaknesses was the great number of adventurers that acted as so-called officers. It could have been some of these who had approached Thord, but they would never have dared to make such a suggestion to a general belonging to the old army.

Kartzoff did not believe anyone capable of giving a correct and neutral description of the recent events in Siberia. The unprecedented treachery of handing Kolchak over to the enemy remained to be explained as well as many other important facts. He could surely claim that the battle was not yet over. The Reds' reticence about what was taking place in the interior of Siberia hid a lot of unpleasantness. He was sure that General Rosenoff was capable of defending his own reputation. But as he was absent, Kartzoff wanted to appear in his defence, because Thord had accused Rosenoff of ruthless cruelty in the suppression of Gaida's revolt. In fact a total of only fifteen men were sentenced by martial law and shot. The most important traitors were allowed to find protection in 'friendly' homes from which they, like Krakovetsky, had worked themselves back into positions of influence. Gaida was not a Russian and there was no excuse for his revolt. Kartzoff did not want to criticise anyone but he could not allow an unproven opinion to go unchallenged concerning men who were at that very moment fighting against enormous odds and would surely win or fight to the end trying. The article in *Leslie's* was a summary of Thord's experience. It did not convey any new information compared with what Thord had written in letters and his diary, etc. In some instances, however, the résumé gives a somewhat different picture of what took place and ought therefore to be documented here.

The tug-of-war power struggle between Kolchak and Semenov illustrated to Thord that the latter – apparently doubtful that a former admiral was capable of

leading a war on land – had sent an ultimatum to Kolchak and demanded that within twenty four hours he must surrender command to either General Horvat, General Denikin, or General Dutov and promised that he, Semenov, would do the same. If Kolchak refused, Semenov threatened to declare eastern Siberia an independent state.

The treatment of Gaida was described slightly differently from before:

‘When Gaida was in charge of the Russian front in May and June 1919, General Lebedev was chief of Kolchak’s general staff in Omsk. He began working to remove Gaida and take his position.

‘He poisoned Kolchak’s mind by accusing Gaida of planning to overthrow Kolchak and make himself supreme ruler. Kolchak and Gaida had been very good friends, and the latter had helped to make the dictator what he was. Even though Gaida had more democratic inclination than the men around Kolchak in general, his actions were misunderstood when he paid attention to people’s complaints and tried to help them in their distress. This humanistic attitude in Gaida was seen as a tendency to socialist revolutionary ideas, which is why the imperialists decided that he had to be removed.

‘As Kolchak did not want to believe Lebedev immediately, he cut off all support to Gaida’s army, thereby forcing Gaida’s victorious troops to retreat due to the lack of officers, ammunition, and supplies. Lebedev was smart enough to cover his own tracks by sending millions of cartridges and hundreds of machine-guns to Perm and Ekaterinburg. All these depots were hidden from Gaida by officers who were collaborating with the chief of the general staff and thereby freed him from responsibility.’

But was it treachery or was it merely the inability to create and manage an efficient support and logistics system?

That enormous amounts of war material fell into enemy hands when Ekaterinburg fell is well known.

‘In the station stood more than a thousand goods wagons loaded with all kind of provisions and goods, even guns, ammunition, and machine-guns,’ Thord wrote. ‘All went to the Reds that night and it seemed to me as if it was given to them on purpose. There was no reason why these goods wagons with much-needed material should not have been evacuated instead of the many train loads of very cheap furniture. It looked like a “put-up job”. Nothing can convince me otherwise. I demanded therefore a special investigation into the matter but the government of Omsk was afraid to do one.’

That corrupt behavior was not unusual is made clear by Thord’s visit to the Russian intelligence department in Omsk to get information about the situation at the front: ‘I found to my surprise that the front line was marked almost 150 miles further westwards than it was in reality. When I pointed this out to one of the officers, the fellow only smiled and took me to a back room where there was another map displaying the troops’ correct deployment. I was then informed that the map in the outer room was only for the Allies’ military representatives and certain Russian politicians.’

The British High Commissioner, Sir Charles Elliot, had also clearly been misled. The same day that Thord visited him, he had been assured by the Kolchak government that all was well. He therefore did not want to believe Thord and ‘almost ridiculed statements that Ekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk were in danger or that the soldiers were throwing down their weapons, retreating in panic and going over to the enemy in droves’.

‘The fall of Omsk on 14 November 1919 was a scandalous story. It was the final battle that broke Kolchak’s power and demolished the imperialists’ hope. Omsk was given to the Reds without a battle by the pro-German party.

‘At Omsk we lost approximately 10 generals, 1 000 officers, 40 000 men, 60 field guns, 400 machine-guns, 55 000 rifles, 18 tanks, 80 locomotives, 3 000 goods-wagons, around 25 000 000 cartridges, 90 000 tons of flour and depots packed with all kinds of uniforms and other equipment to the value of over \$100 000 000.’

Thord summarises the reasons for the failure by the Kolchak government:

‘The major factors in the government’s fall were its failure to collaborate with – and its terrible persecution of – the *Semstvos* (popularly elected assemblies), its failure to distribute the promised government land to the peasants, and the economical situation that was created by the never-ending profiteering and the total plundering of the people by the few.

‘Other reasons for the defeat were jealousy, treachery, corruption, lack of collaboration, and what is generally called “cold feet” among officers and civilian administrators – as well as their constant persecution of the working class. Ninety percent of the officers were absolutely useless as soldiers and unsuitable as leaders.

‘To an outsider they displayed the veneer of fine soldiers. Their bragging, sabre-rattling and jingling spurs recalled the “musketeers” of old. But tested in times of hardship they seemed to lack soul. Nevertheless they gave wonderful speeches about their heroism in lounges and cafés.

‘Needless to say, the army had a number of excellent and prominent men among the officers, but they were outnumbered by the great majority, who seemed to think that mistreatment and starvation was the only way to create respect and discipline among soldiers and civilians. The minority sacrificed themselves willingly and fought like men for what they believed to be the right cause. Most of them were left behind, fallen in unknown places, often by a hired assassin’s bullet, murdered or betrayed by their officer friends and political opponents’ jealousy and deceit.’

Thord also tried to explain why the Bolsheviks won:

‘The Bolsheviks began with abominable atrocities. They were so awful that the very word Bolshevik automatically conjured up thoughts of mass murder and arson. In 1918 the majority of Russians supported the intervention and wanted to join anyone who was fighting the Bolsheviks. This soon became known to its leaders and a decisive change in their politics began. The methods of the revolution improved for the better.

‘Ninety percent of the population today are Bolsheviks (1920). Maybe they should be called nationalists because the old bloodthirsty Bolshevik is seldom

found in Russia any more. The mass executions of political offenders can hardly be attributed exclusively to Bolshevism. If that were the case, then Kolchak's government would be more Bolshevik than the Soviets, because it executed, or should I say, murdered in comparison twice as many as the Soviets during the last eighteen months.

'It is remarkable that two-thirds of the Imperialist general staff were always sympathetic to the Reds. Very few of them (the Reds) ever came over to our side. General Evett, who held command over the Red Army that captured Omsk, was one of the old regime's generals. After he had taken Kolchak's capital, General Evett issued a proclamation in more or less the following words: "I wish to make clear to all the people that I am not fighting and leading the Red Army for the sake of Bolshevism but simply because Bolshevism is the voice of the majority of the Russian people. To make the majority heard, I believe, is the only way to find a quick peace as well as a contented Russia. Our country's foes want us to have a civil war because that would weaken us and strengthen our enemy."

'A few days after the capture of Omsk, Trotsky arrived. He spoke to the captured officers and offered to take in all those who wanted to join his army. To those who wished to return to Kolchak, he was willing to give free passage and 2 000 roubles each. Not many wanted to return to Kolchak but those who did were sent off in a special train and handed over to the army's rearguard.

'This was one of Trotsky's masterly moves. After these officers had returned the news spread like fire. Within a few weeks the entire army had more or less melted away to the Reds.

'Once the masses had been freed from the Tsar's miserable rule, Bolshevism was the natural result. The imperialists under Kolchak and other leaders, representing the old order, would have compounded Russia's problem permanently. The people who initially wavered between the Whites and the Reds were in the end forced to go over to the Reds, hoping that the situation would not deteriorate but would turn to something better.

'When the mass of people had become Bolsheviks, the Whites had become an outlawed minority. In this way the hope that the imperialists would reintroduce the old government disappeared. The proletarian republic took first place and that is where it will remain until it is modified to a less radical form or until some other interior or exterior power can overthrow it.' In connection with this Thord said in another context: 'Peace and satisfaction can be returned to Russia and – everywhere else possibly – through trade and employment. These factors have a decisive calming effect on people owing to the prosperity and general contentment they bring. It is a delusion to believe that the Bolsheviks are incapable of organising a mighty army or performing an invasion. The constitutional crises throughout Central Europe and the general working class unrest in all countries have to be given more consideration by national leaders. To try to run a country without the collaboration of a real representation of the people would instantly lead to the overthrow of such a government. The natural result would be that a Soviet system was introduced.'

No retrospective can be complete without describing the fates of Kolchak and Semenov: After the Soviet-aligned Social Revolutionary Party captured Irkutsk, a kind of ceasefire was agreed upon between the Czechs and Soviets. The ceasefire condition prescribed a neutral zone between the Czech rearguard and Soviet vanguard. The Soviets were to supply the Czechs with coal for their trains and the Czechs were to return the gold they had been guarding in Irkutsk. They were not to help the Whites any more. This agreement was made on 20 January 1920 in Kainsk, some days after Admiral Kolchak had been handed over by the Czechs to the Reds in Irkutsk. He was executed the following day.

Kolchak himself seemed to have been the secret decisive factor for the ceasefire between the Czechs and the Soviets. Thord considered the handing over of Kolchak to the Red Army to be an act of incomparable betrayal and a permanent stain on the name of those involved. The Czechs had done a good job in Siberia and Russia in 1918. Although they had been opposed to Kolchak for a long time, it was impossible to condone this treacherous act.

In fact, General Janin of the French mission advised the Czechs to surrender Kolchak (when he was supposed to be under the protection of the Allies). Of all the Allies the French had given most support to the Czech cause. The French believed that delivering Kolchak to the Reds would save the Czech troops from annihilation. And subsequent events proved them right. After this ceasefire the Czechs collaborated fairly peacefully with the Bolsheviks to evacuate the Czech troops quickly from Siberia.

At the end of the Second World War, when it was evident that Japan was about to surrender, Stalin made an opportunistic last-minute declaration of war on Japan to allow Soviet forces to invade the Japanese sector of Sakhalin Island.

During these ten days of war against Japan, Semenov was captured and executed by the Soviets.



A replica of the photo on page 220. This one bears an inscription to Thord's mother Hilda dated 1920, the year he left Siberia.

