



NESTOR  
MAKHNO

THE  
UKRAINIAN  
REVOLUTION



The peasant anarchist Nestor Makhno (1888 – 1934) was a key figure of the Russian Civil War (1918 – 1921). Driven into exile at the end of the war, he produced several volumes of memoirs. Each of these works is self-contained as each deals with a separate phase of his life history. Volume 3 tells the story of the birth of a peasant army, a force which sought not merely to overthrow oppressive regimes but to institute a classless society—anarcho-communism.

Also by Nestor I. Makhno, published by Black Cat Press:

**The Russian Revolution in Ukraine** (2007)

**Under the Blows of the Counterrevolution** (2009)

**Nestor I. Makhno**

**The Ukrainian  
Revolution**

**(July - December 1918)**

**Introduction by  
Vsevelod Volin**

**Black Cat Press  
Edmonton, Alberta**

# **The Ukrainian Revolution**

(July – December 1918)

by Nestor Ivanovich Makhno

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НЕСТОР МАХНО

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КНИГА III

# УКРАИНСКАЯ РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ

(ИЮЛЬ-ДЕКАБРЬ 1918 г.)

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Под редакцией т. ВОЛИНА

и

с портретами некоторых деятелей движения

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Издание  
Комитета Н. МАХНО  
Париж  
1937





*Makhno in 1918*

## INTRODUCTION

*by Malcolm Archibald*

In early July 1918 Nestor Makhno, penniless and starving, returned to his Ukrainian homeland from which he had fled a few weeks earlier to seek political refuge in Soviet Russia. As a peasant anarchist revolutionary he was forced to live a perilous underground existence, for Ukraine was occupied by the powerful Austro-German army which had installed a reactionary regime, the *Hetmanate*<sup>[1]</sup>, based on the support of the large landowners.

With a tiny band of comrades he embarked on a guerilla campaign against the occupying forces and the rural gentry, concentrating on night raids and roadside ambushes. A substantial uprising was not possible until the harvest was finished, in late August – early September. But once the movement got rolling, the Makhnovists engaged in a total of 117 armed clashes in the fall of 1918.<sup>[2]</sup>

By the end of the year the insurgent movement headed by Makhno controlled up to 70 *raions* (counties) in southeast Ukraine and had fielded an army capable of defending the liberated zone from its formidable enemies and launching attacks on major cities. Volume 3 of his memoirs tells the amazing story of the birth of this peasant revolutionary army, a force which aimed not only to drive out the unwelcome invaders but to create a new society where class oppression was unknown.

Ukraine in the summer of 1918 was superficially stable and peaceful under its puppet ruler, the *Hetman* [Head of State] Pavel Skoropadsky. As a political entity it was a client state of the Central Powers—Germany and Austria-Hungary—which guaranteed its security, both internal and external, with an occupation army almost half a million strong. Of Ukraine's neighbouring states, Russia and Rumania had been forced to make humiliating treaties with the Central Powers, ending World War I on the Eastern Front, while the Don Republic on its eastern border was also a German client state.

1 Italicized words are found in the Glossary, p. 207.

2 Chop (1998). A full bibliography is found at page 211.

But appearances were deceiving. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was disintegrating by the end of October, while the German Army on the Western Front was no longer capable of fighting by the early fall. With the collapse of the Central Powers, their client states would also tumble, leaving Ukraine open to other invaders or to internal insurrections.

Makhno and his comrades were barely aware of these geopolitical events which were to have so much impact on their activities. The revolutionary process which they had started in 1917, described in Volume 1 of Makhno's memoirs, had been interrupted by the German invasion in the spring of 1918 which had rolled back the clock by re-establishing the owners of large estates (*pomeshchiks*). Makhno's immediate aim was to drive out the invaders, overthrow the reactionary *Hetmanate* with its hated *Varta* (Militia), and proceed to the solution of the all-important land question.

The region where this insurgent movement developed was the Ukrainian steppe, a plain originally covered with grasses and shrubs. The steppe was crossed by numerous minor rivers in shallow valleys, and one major river—the Dnieper. The soil was extremely rich (the famed black earth) and below the surface were valuable mineral deposits.

Up until early modern times this steppe was the home to nomadic warriors (Turks, Tatars, Cossacks) but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the region came under Russian suzerainty, permanent agricultural settlements sprang up. The fertile plain was ideal for the extensive cultivation of cereal crops. The network of rivers and, later, railways, as well as the proximity of deep sea ports on the Azov and Black Seas, encouraged the export of agricultural surpluses to both internal and external markets.

Serfdom had been abolished in the Russian empire in 1861, but the economic situation of the emancipated Ukrainian peasants did not improve greatly as a result. Most of the land made available to the peasants after emancipation was administered through the institution of the village commune (*obshchina*) which assigned allotments (scattered narrow strips) to individual peasants and was responsible for reimbursing the state for the cost of the land.

By 1905 half of the cropland in Yekaterinoslav *gubernia* (province), where Makhno's home town of Gulyai-Polye was located, was still in the hands of *pomeshchiks*, while most of the rest was divided into tiny communal allotments.<sup>[3]</sup> The *pomeshchiks* engaged in extensive farming using hired day labourers (*batraks*), and also rented land to individual peasants. That the rent was often paid in services rather than cash suggests that serfdom was by no means extinct. The under-capitalized and inefficient communes had to compete with the large estates, which could afford to purchase expensive farm machinery. At the same time the number of peasants living in villages in steppe Ukraine almost tripled in the period 1864–1914.<sup>[4]</sup>

One outlet for the economically repressed peasants was employment in the industrial centres which sprang up in eastern Ukraine from the 1860's on. There were many plants processing agricultural products and also a machine tool industry turning out farm equipment. The rich coal, iron ore, and manganese deposits of the Donbas and Krivy Rog districts led to the development of mining and metallurgical enterprises. By 1912 these enterprises were employing almost 250,000 workers.<sup>[5]</sup> Gulyai-Polye, although designated a "village" for administrative purposes, had a population of 17,000 in 1914 and was home to three farm implement plants employing hundreds of workers, as well as foundries, brick and tile factories, tanneries, feed mills, etc.

In 1901 a poor harvest in eastern Ukraine led to a series of peasant uprisings the following year. These were brutally suppressed by the government, which had done nothing to alleviate famine in the region. An enormous fine was also levied on the impoverished peasants to compensate landowners whose estates had been burned down by the insurgents.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Russian empire was shaken in 1905 by popular revolts which aimed to overthrow the autocracy. In Yekaterinoslav *gubernia* it was the industrial workers who set the tone with demon-

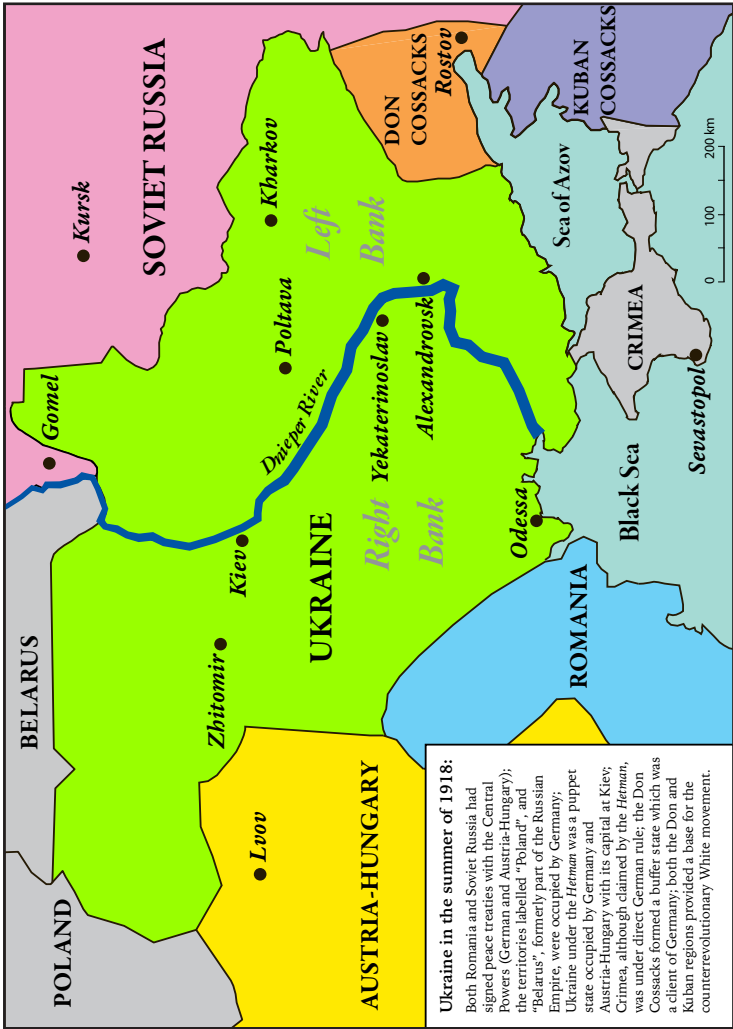
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3 Kubanin (2005), p. 39.

4 Kubanin (2005), p. 43.

5 Kubanin (2005), p. 49.

6 Karpetz (2007).



strations and strikes. In February workers at the large Kriger and Kerner plants in Gulyai-Polye went on strike for better working conditions. Among the strikers was the 17-year old *chernorabochy* [unskilled labourer] Nestor Makhno.

Here we are confronted with one of the paradoxes at the heart of the Makhnovist movement. Often described in terms of a war between the village and city, between agricultural and industrial civilization, in fact many of its leading activists were proletarians. The Makhnovists were not backward-looking rustics who romanticized the past but people whose experience of the modern world in southeastern Ukraine with its intermixture of rural and industrial life had given them a glimpse of what the future could be like with a different social system.

The labour insurgency soon spread to the countryside where the aroused peasants demanded the *pomeshchiks* give up their land. The government answered with police and Cossacks and the level of violence was such that artillery was occasionally unleashed on recalcitrant villages.

In November 1906 the tsar's prime minister, P. A. Stolypin, introduced laws designed to solve the peasant problem. Peasants were encouraged to leave the *obshchina* and set up themselves up as independent farmers. The land for these farms was to come from the *obshchinas*, not from the *pomeshchiks*. Stolypin's aim was to establish a rural middle class, heretofore lacking, which would support the monarchy. His reforms required a long time—possibly decades—to take effect. But time was not available, either for Stolypin (he was assassinated in 1911) or his reforms.

The Stolypin reforms provoked more peasant unrest throughout the empire, and nowhere more than in Yekaterinoslav *gubernia*. Few peasants were willing to take advantage of the program and those who set themselves up as *kulaks* (independent farmers) at the expense of the *obshchinas* were resented by the poor peasants. The government resorted to violence in dealing with opponents of the reforms, subjecting them to forced relocations, floggings, imprisonment, and even shootings.

It was against this background that anarcho-communist groups appeared in southeast Ukraine in the first decade of the

20<sup>th</sup> century. The organizers of these groups were often students who had gone abroad to study, usually to Switzerland, and come under the influence of Russian emigré anarchist organizations. At that time Switzerland and Great Britain were the only countries in Europe where anarchists could live openly without being subject to persecution by the authorities. Anarchism was never a legal political tendency in the Russian Empire.

The anarcho-communist groups in Ukraine recruited mostly among young working people, especially in the rapidly growing industrial cities of the southeast. For example Alexandrovsk, the city closest to Gulyai-Polye, tripled in size between 1900 and 1914,<sup>[7]</sup> mainly due to industrial expansion, and had an active anarchist group. From the historical literature one often forms the impression that Gulyai-Polye was unique in having an anarchist group in a rural setting. But this is not so, for there were anarchist groups in the nearby large villages of Pokrovskoye and Bolshe-Mikhailovka. Somewhat further away in Novospasovka, a village near the Sea of Azov, there was an important anarchist group which was to contribute several commanders to the Makhnovist Insurgent Army.

The Gulyai-Polye anarchist organization, calling itself the Union of Poor Peasants, was formed at the end of 1905. This was not a tiny collective—its membership was numbered in the hundreds. The Union was divided into two sections: a core of militants (*boeviks*) as well as a much larger group which did not engage in armed struggle. But even study circles and information-leafleting were strictly illegal. The Union was particularly active during the furor over the Stolypin reforms, launching a “Black Terror” in which a number of farms were burned. The popularity of this tactic is indicated by the fact that no one made any effort to put out these fires.<sup>[8]</sup> The *boeviks* were soon engaged in a running battle with the police (secret or uniformed), a battle in which they were handicapped by the presence of *shpiks*—informers and

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7 See, for example, [www.wikiznanie.ru/ru-wz/index.php/Запорожье](http://www.wikiznanie.ru/ru-wz/index.php/Запорожье). In 1900 the population of Alexandrovsk was just under 20,000, about one-third of whom were engaged in industrial production. By 1914 the population has increased to 63,600.

8 Makhno (2006), p. 21.

provocateurs who had infiltrated the organization. By 1910 the *boeviks* had been completely suppressed: either hanged, killed in shoot-outs, sentenced to long terms at hard labour, or driven abroad. But the Union continued to function until 1917, carrying on quiet propaganda and educational work. It is noteworthy that their leaflets were published in both Russian and Ukrainian. Makhno, although a *boevik*, seems to have come to the realization that the latter type of work was probably the more effective in the long run.

One peculiarity of the region in which the Makhnovist movement developed was ethnic diversity. Besides villages of ethnic Ukrainians, there were settlements of ethnic Germans, Jews, Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, etc. Many of these ethnic villages owed their origin to schemes of the Russian tsars to establish agricultural communities in the area starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As internationalists, the Makhnovists generally enjoyed good relations with these ethnic communities and the Makhnovist armies included Greek, Jewish, and Bulgarian units. In Chapter 10 of this volume Makhno describes a visit to Greek villages where he was well received. These people were not originally emigrants from Greece but had moved to Ukraine from ethnic-Greek villages in Crimea when the latter was under Turkish or Tatar rule. The peasants in the Jewish villages were found in a situation of equality with their ethnic Ukrainian neighbours in their relations with their common class enemies, the *pomeshchiks* and entrepreneurs. This removed any economic basis for the peasant anti-semitism which so bedevilled the Ukrainian nationalists in other regions of Ukraine.<sup>[9]</sup>

One ethnic group which did not enjoy cordial relations with the insurgents appears in Makhno's narrative as "the Germans." These were mostly Mennonites, a German-speaking Protestant sect which had settled in the region starting 150 years earlier, attracted by concessions offered by the Tsarist government (land grants, self-government, exemption from military service), often at the expense of the local inhabitants. These settlers were successful at farming and eventually branched into commercial enterprises, including factories producing the latest types of ag-

9 Kubanin (2005), p 56.



ricultural machinery. But they never assimilated with the general population and their prosperity was based on the exploitation of cheap (mainly ethnic Ukrainian) labour.

As a boy Makhno had been employed at a Mennonite colony and regarded the Mennonite estate owners as *pomeshchiks* who were not entitled to their land since they did not work it themselves but used hired labour. In a memoir of his early years he described his feelings as an 11-year old stable boy on the Jansen estate, a few miles west of Gulyai-Polye:

“At this time I began to experience anger, envy, and even hatred towards the landowner and, especially, towards his children—those young slackers who often strolled past me, sleek and healthy, well-dressed, well-groomed, and scented; while I was filthy, dressed in rags, barefoot, and reeked of manure from cleaning the calves’ barn.”<sup>[10]</sup>

The leaders of the Mennonite communities were to make some appalling, if understandable, choices during the Civil War: supporting first the *Hetmanate*, and then the Whites. Although nominally pacifists they formed their own army (the *Selbstschutz*) to fight the revolutionary forces. When Makhno discovered that German colonists had taken part in burning the anarchist stronghold of Bolshe-Mikhailovka (Chapter 10) he felt justified in applying his own scorched earth policy to the colonies. Not all the colonists were Mennonites—some were Evangelicals or Catholics—but confessional distinctions were of scant interest to the Makhnovists.

The Makhnovist leaders also had some difficult choices to make, especially after the World War ended and the Ukrainian nationalists reappeared on the scene (Chapter 14). One response by the Makhnovists was to set up their own diplomatic service (Chapter 15) so they would not have to fight all their enemies at the same time. It should be noted that the Bolsheviks (Russian or Ukrainian) do not appear in this volume because they had virtually no presence in Ukraine at the time.

One revolutionary political tendency still quite prominent in the latter half of 1918 was the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party;

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10 Makhno (2006), p. 16.

a number of the leaders of the Makhnovist movement came from this tendency. In Volume 2 of his memoirs, Makhno displays a certain affinity for the Left SRs, since their political program, especially with respect to the peasants, was close to anarchist positions. It has been suggested by a Ukrainian historian that Makhno was in fact a Left SR in the second half of 1918.<sup>[11]</sup> It could be also be argued that the momentum was in the opposite direction with many former Left SRs joining the anarchists. Certainly Makhno's anarchism was never dogmatic and he was always willing to try new ideas and reject old ones which had not proven to be effective in practice.

There is a glaring contradiction at the heart of the Makhnovist movement in that anarchism is an ideology which rejects hero worship and the sanctification of political figures. In Chapter 7 Makhno describes how he acquired the title "Batko" ["Little Father"], which means a military leader but is also an affectionate term for a paternal guardian. That he may have become the object of a cult was of some concern to Makhno himself, as he recounts in Chapter 8:

"I often asked myself: is it honourable to allow oneself to be exalted in this way by my brother-toilers? What does it mean to be the object of the grateful admiration of people who trust you implicitly because they perceive you as someone sincerely devoted to their welfare?"

Makhno was reassured by his comrades:

"The masses are following you! They gave you that name, don't reject it. We've got our hands full building our insurgent movement. Thanks to your name and our general revolutionary activity we are gaining the complete trust of the masses, and we are completely deserving of this trust. The peasants believe in you. They trust you because you are not trying to lord it over them. What we need to strive for is to use their trust to develop a revolutionary practice appropriate for our movement."

Certainly Makhno was not a leader from the usual mold. Although he commanded armed forces which often reached divisional size or larger in the Civil War, he regularly exposed

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11 Fedorovsky (2003).

himself to the risks of front line combat, being wounded (by some counts) a dozen times, and two of these wounds were very serious indeed. As a politician, his decisions were regularly overruled or modified by the movement's councils and assemblies. Even his personal life had to conform to the demands of the movement, as when his associates forced him to break off his relations with Tina Ovcharenko (mentioned in Chapter 12) on the grounds he was spending too much time with her. And in times of peace he lived the inconspicuous life of an ordinary citizen.



Having sketched, albeit in a cursory fashion, the historical, economic, and sociological background to Makhno's narrative, it seems necessary to comment on the moral landscape as well. The Civil War in which Makhno was engaged (actually a collection of separate wars) was horrific even by the standards of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in some ways set the tone for subsequent conflicts. Like other movements of the oppressed through the ages, the insurgency of the Ukrainian peasantry was always at risk of becoming a *jacquerie*, a outburst of mindless violence and destruction.

As partisans, Makhno and his comrades could expect no quarter from their enemies, nor did they offer any themselves. The personal dimension of the conflict added to the horror. Makhno's aged mother had her house burned to the ground by the German occupying forces, and his brother Emilyan, a war invalid and non-combatant, was dragged from his home and shot. Nestor's brother Carp was also dragged from his home by White Cossacks in January 1919 and beaten to death. When the Whites occupied Gulyai-Polye in the summer of 1919 and were unable to find Makhno's brother Savva, they mutilated his wife Feodora and buried her alive. A few months later Savva himself, having withdrawn from the struggle due to illness (but not before he had taken revenge on his wife's killer), was shot on his sick bed by the Reds.<sup>[12]</sup>

As a young man Makhno had spent 53 days on death row while his cell mates were taken away, one by one, to be executed. His subsequent imprisonment involved numerous periods of solitary

12 Savchenko (2005).

confinement which affected his health, both physical and mental. Many of his fellow anarchists had similar experiences.

Makhno describes a number of incidents in which the Makhnovists executed prisoners-of-war or civilians (although he is far from admitting any of these people were undeserving of their fate). In some cases these killings were the result of judgments rendered by popular assemblies, an anarchist experiment in the administration of justice which may have been seriously flawed. It perhaps should be mentioned that the Makhnovists had no means of housing prisoners (and they considered imprisonment an affront to human dignity), so shootings or release were generally the only options. And Makhno's personal reluctance to assign unpleasant jobs to others (an anarchist trait) may account for his reputation among his enemies for bloodthirstiness and cruelty.

Certainly a case can be made that the foes of the Makhnovists committed a much greater range of outrages. But, as one historian of the movement has remarked in this context, "Murdering one innocent person makes you just as much a murderer as someone who has murdered a hundred times."<sup>[13]</sup> The recourse to violence in non-combat situations was to come under attack from anarchists both inside and outside the Makhnovist movement and cast a shadow on its accomplishments. It is perhaps in response to these criticisms that Makhno in Volume 3 often depicts himself as an agent of moderation, trying to restrain his more impetuous comrades and counseling the movement against pursuing practices grounded in retribution. In fact, he refers to a report he wrote in October 1918 urging the movement not to "waste its energies in exacting gratuitous vengeance, weakening itself physically and morally in the process." (p. 151)



Volume 3 was first published posthumously in 1937 in Paris in a Russian edition prepared by Vsevolod Volin. This is the first English translation; the first French translation appeared in 2009.<sup>[14]</sup> The English version follows the original Russian edition with certain exceptions: two photos of Makhno from the 1930's

13 V. M. Chop (2006) at <http://www.makhno.ru/lit/chop/112.php>.

14 Makhno (2010).

are not reproduced, nor is a photo of Taranovsky, who is barely mentioned in the text. These photos are readily available in other works. Appendix 1, Makhno's essay on Gulyai-Polye village, was also part of the original Volume 3. According to Alexandre Skirda, the title chosen for this volume by Makhno himself was "The Revolutionary Peasant Insurrection in Ukraine."<sup>[15]</sup> Nevertheless we have chosen to retain Volin's title under which the book was originally published.

An attempt has been made in preparing this volume to provide sufficient editorial apparatus in the form of maps and notes to make the historical and geographical background of the narrative understandable. It is not surprising that toponymy, the study of place names, is a serious discipline in Eastern Europe. Many of the villages Makhno mentions underwent several name changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were merged with other settlements, or disappeared completely. The heartland where he operated has now been mainly integrated with the Donbas industrial region spreading in from the east.

But not everything has changed. Gulyai-Polye is still about the same size as in Makhno's day, having reached its apogee in 1914, and some of the buildings familiar to the Makhnovists are still standing. The village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka, an important centre of anarchist activity in 1918, still sprawls along the River Volchya with unpaved streets and homes with large, enclosed courtyards. The adjacent Dibrivki Forest, which provided a hideout for the partisans, still exists; now a nature preserve, it is about the same size as it was in 1918. The 400-year-old oak at the traditional site where Makhno was given the title "Batko" was cut down only in this century.

The events Makhno was writing about are very obscure in the historical record and only recently has an attempt been made to correlate his account with such archival evidence as exists. The Ukrainian historian carrying out this investigation compared the reports filed by the Yekaterinoslav *gubernia* government authorities with Makhno's account, and concluded: "The information of the *gubernia starosta* [governor] confirms Makhno's narrative in

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15 Makhno (2010), p. 416.

his memoirs as regards the sequence of events, but introduces corrections as to the duration of events.”<sup>[16]</sup> Makhno himself did not have access to archival materials while writing his memoirs and had to depend almost entirely on memory. Another participant of the movement in 1918 also left memoirs—Alexei Chubenko. His account is included in Appendix 2 along with some surviving documents from that period.

This translation of Volume 3 into English was a joint effort of Will Firth and Malcolm Archibald, the former having prepared the preface and first four chapters with his usual care and expertise. Will Firth also kindly checked the remainder of the book for accuracy of translation and consistency of style resulting a much improved text.

A number of words which are awkward to translate accurately into English have been left in transliterated form and explained in the glossary. These words are set in italics in the text. Most proper nouns have been transliterated from their Russian versions for no better reason than that they are usually easier to pronounce for English speakers than their Ukrainian equivalents. Makhno wrote in Russian (with the exception of some quotations of direct speech in Ukrainian) and the core region of his movement was bilingual (and is to this day).

Special thanks are due to the regulars at [www.makhno.ru](http://www.makhno.ru) for help with research, especially “Kombarov.”

The publication of this volume by no means completes the project of publishing Makhno’s memoirs in English. Two further volumes are planned: *A Rebellious Youth (1888–1917)*, and *The Makhnovshchina and its erstwhile allies—the Bolsheviks*. The former deserves to take its place alongside the classic anarchist prison memoirs of Kropotkin, Berkman, Serge, etc.; while the latter extends Makhno’s account of the Civil War beyond Volume 3, i.e. to the period 1919 – 1921.

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16 Malinovsky (2006), p. 357.



The Ukrainian *gubernias* (provinces) of the Russian Empire in 1917. The thick dotted line encloses the approximate area of influence of the Makhnovist movement (1918-1921), following Kubanin (2005): Yekaterinoslavskaiia, Khersonskaia, and Tavricheskaia *gubernias*, with parts of Kharkovskaia and Khersonskaia *gubernias*. This area corresponds roughly to steppe Ukraine, a region with open grasslands, fertile soil, and valuable mineral resources.

## PREFACE

**A**fter all I have said in the preface and the comments in Book II, there is no need to say much more about Book III.

I should mention that, in editing Book III, I have tried to preserve the language of the original to the greatest extent possible. The task was simpler here because the story abounds in lively descriptions of events, all of which are convincingly written. A sequence of vivid, colourful episodes unfolds page after page almost without interruption. The story extends up to the end of 1918.

I must repeat that this book is of exceptional interest. In particular it provides a full and consistent impression of the conception and the first, preparatory stage (July-December) of the Ukrainian “peasant war” (1918-1921) known after its inspirer and leader as the Makhno movement. But apart from its purely historical interest, the book is also packed with lively, down-to-earth, and dramatic material that captivates the reader.

Finally, let me repeat that it is a great shame that Nestor Makhno’s consistent notes end with this third volume, i.e. in late December 1918. It is above all the task of future historians of the Russian Revolution to set forth the further course of events.

There are, however, scattered notes and miscellaneous writings of Makhno’s from subsequent years. The commission for publishing Makhno’s manuscripts plans to collect these writings and publish them as a separate book together with other material he left behind—partly manuscripts, partly newspaper and magazine articles. These articles were printed in a range of anarchist publications.

If anyone is in possession of documents that may be of interest to the commission, please send the originals (which can be returned if desired) or copies by registered mail to the address: Librairie Franssen, 11, rue de Cluny, Paris (5), France. Please add “Pour Commission Makhno.”<sup>[17]</sup>

The commission makes this request most emphatically because several of its members, who were participants in the movement

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17 The commission was unable to issue any further publications and Makhno’s archive was destroyed during the Nazi occupation of France. See Makhno (1996), p. 107.



or witnessed it first hand, intend to continue the story begun by Nestor Makhno. Material of any kind would be of great assistance in carrying out this task.

March 1937

V. M. Volin

# **The Ukrainian Revolution**

**(July - December 1918)**



## Chapter I

### Under the yoke of the *Hetmanate*.

July 1918. I was back in Ukraine, in my native *raion* of Gulyai-Polye. As decided at our conference of Gulyai-Polye anarchist revolutionaries in Taganrog, I had come to work towards organizing a peasant uprising against the tyrants, the uninvited masters of the land who dominated the life and quashed the freedom of the Ukrainian workers—the Ukrainian Central *Rada*<sup>[18]</sup> and its allies, the Austro-German *junkers*. I arrived as planned and with the hope that this time I would be able to apply real organizational clarity and firmness to accomplishing the task I had undertaken and to play my role as a leading force of ideas.

By this time the notorious *Rada* had already been overthrown. In vain had it betrayed its principles in the land question to please the bourgeoisie by recognizing the right of private property in land of up to 30 – 40 *desyatins*<sup>[19]</sup>. The bourgeoisie, carried away by its temporary victories over the Revolution and the bearers of its ideas—the revolutionary workers of the countryside and the cities—was not satisfied with the *Rada*'s shameful betrayal of the toilers. Supported by the cruel *Junkers*, the bourgeoisie overthrew the *Rada* and replaced it with its own representative, *Hetman* Pavel Skoropadsky<sup>[20]</sup>.

This reinforced the powers of the old order, that of the Tsar and the *pomeshchiks*, and plunged Ukraine ever deeper into reaction. This reaction was the basis for the growth and development of the *Hetmanate*, which developed exclusively with the aid of these counter-revolutionary, punitive forces that had set their sights on the Ukrainian working masses.

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18 The Central *Rada* was Ukraine's very shaky nationalist government in 1917-1918. Its main components were socialist parties. The Central *Rada* concluded the treaty with the Central Powers which led to the occupation of Ukraine by Austro-German troops.

19 In 1917 in Yekaterinoslav *gubernia*, where Gulyai-Polye was located, 89% of peasant holdings were less than 15 *desyatins*. See Kubanin (2005), p. 45.

20 Pavel Skoropadsky (1873–1945), an aristocrat who had been a career officer in the Russian Army, became ruler of Ukraine in a German-sponsored coup on April 29, 1918. Although Ukrainian-speaking himself, his cabinet was filled with Russian monarchists.

For me as a revolutionary it was hard and painful to watch this tyranny. But at least I was in Ukraine, I consoled myself as I sat in the loft of the house of Zakhari Kleshnya, a peasant of the village of Rozhdestvenka, surrounded by peasant sincerity and peasant cares, in particular, cares about promptly delivering all my stuff to Gulyai-Polye and bringing stuff from Gulyai-Polye to me.

The local *Hetmano*-German authorities, as I have already said, were counter-revolutionary and reactionary. It was very hard to live in illegality. But the awareness that I was back in Ukraine, back in its wide steppes and cheerful villages, among the revolutionary peasantry that before the advent of the Ukrainian Central *Rada* and its mighty allies and protectors, the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary expeditionary armies, had bravely and resolutely declared its triumph over the injustice of the old Tsarist, *pomeshchik* regime and the semi-*pomeshchik* regimes of the Kerensky government<sup>[21]</sup> and the Central *Rada*—that awareness invigorated me and kindled in me a new strength and a new faith that the revolutionary peasantry would not tolerate the arbitrariness of these violent and intrusive authorities for long. I had faith that one had only to energetically ply the revolutionary peasantry and its milieu with propaganda against these authorities for it to rise up against them with an energy and a desire to smash them once and for all, with a force that the enemies of the Revolution cannot imagine.

The tyranny of the German and *Hetman* authorities seemed to me to be something temporary. I believed they would fall irrevocably at the first determined armed action of the peasants in the countryside and the workers in the cities. And there, sitting up in the loft, I thought over all the decisions of our conference in Taganrog<sup>[22]</sup> and all the duties that each of the members had taken upon himself. And I was happy that it had fallen to my lot to continue my role as a leading force of ideas in the organization of the peasant forces of the Revolution, a cause which the enemies

21 The so-called Provisional Government (March—November 1917), based in Petrograd, was widely regarded as representing bourgeois interests, although most of the members of this government, like Alexander Kerensky, were socialists.

22 The Taganrog conference of the Gulyai-Polye anarchists, described in Volume 2 of Makhno's memoirs, took place in late April 1918.

of these forces had impeded in the spring of 1918 and prevented from burgeoning into a militant, revolutionary phenomenon and reaching its full bloom.

My deep faith that the revolutionary peasantry concealed such forces within itself made me overlook that the peasants I met were emaciated, downtrodden, politically repressed in terms of expressing their thoughts and impulses, silent, and seemingly full of despair.

This faith told me that it was precisely among these withdrawn, politically and economically disenfranchised, deprived peasants that one had to seek the force to struggle against the *Hetman* regime, to revive the Revolution that could manifest itself in the Gulyai-Polye *raion* again, this time more successfully, and would become the sole force in the Zaporozhia-Azov Sea region capable of calling the toilers of the Ukrainian countryside and cities to take the path of determined action for their age-old rights to a free, independent life and to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

My cheerfulness and confidence thus stemmed from the unshakable belief that there were great, vibrant forces of the Revolution in the countryside, and there was not the slightest reason to



This map of contemporary Ukraine shows the region known as Zaporozhia, the territory of the Ukrainian Cossacks in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

fear that the German and *Hetman* authorities could demoralize them and lull them for many years. It was simply necessary to act. For only through individual action would this force stir in others and seek forms of expression.

Yes, yes! These forces dwelt in the working peasant family and had to be organized. Such were my thoughts in those days, as I strove to return to the midst of that family as soon as possible and work directly for the cause that was both mine and theirs.

Yes, yes, we must act, I told myself; this was also my message to the others who sporadically came to see me and then disappeared again.

This state of mind made me want to let all the Gulyai-Polye peasants and workers know that I was not far away and was hoping to see some of them very soon without waiting for the rest of my friends to return from Russia. This faith in the Gulyai-Polye peasants and workers drove from my mind all thoughts that things might change, that the peasants and workers might become distracted from their own direct concerns that had been spelled out in the revolutionary process, and might disregard my appeal to them. I wrote them the following letter:

*“Comrades, after two and a half months of wandering through revolutionary Russia I have returned to work jointly for the cause of expelling the Austro-German counter-revolutionary armies from Ukraine and overthrowing the power of Hetman Skoropadsky without allowing any authorities to establish themselves in its place. We will work to organize this great cause with united efforts. With united efforts we will set about destroying the system of servitude in order to tread the path of a new order together with our brothers. We will organize it according to the principles of free association, which entails that the entire population that does not exploit the labour of others can live freely and independently of the state and its officials—even those of the Reds—and can structure its entire social life in complete autonomy at the local level, close to home. I have rushed to return to my native revolutionary raion, to you, in the name*

*of this great cause. Thus we will work, comrades, in the name of the revival of the real Ukrainian Revolution in our lands, in our peasant and worker environment—a Revolution which from its first days took a healthy direction towards the full destruction of the German and Hetman authorities and their backers—the pomeshchiks and kulaks.*

*Long live our unity of peasants and workers!*

*Long live our friends and supporters—the unselfish working intelligentsia!*

*Long live the Ukrainian Social Revolution!*

*Yours, Nestor Ivanovich, July 4, 1918.*

Dozens of copies of this letter were made in Gulyai-Polye and passed from hand to hand among the peasants and workers. This heartened many of them. They did not want me to delay a day longer out in the *raion* but to come to Gulyai-Polye at once. As I later found out, this wish of some comrades led to serious discord with the others who had warned me not to come to Gulyai-Polye until they sent reliable people to collect me. These other peasants wrote:

*“Gulyai-Polye is full of spies and agents provocateurs. Nestor Ivanovich, you probably do not yet know the circumstances of the arrest of almost all the members of the Revkom and the Council of Peasants’ and Workers’ Deputies, or the recalling from the front and disarming of the anarchist detachment, during your absence on 14, 15 and 16 April—who did this and under whose leadership. These vile actions were carried out by the central Jewish company under the leadership of Commander Taranovsky and the members of the field staff I. Volk, A. Volokh, O. Solovyov, and V. Sharovsky. Jewish youths joined in this persecution. The Jewish bourgeoisie greeted these youths and did all they could to gratify the German agents Volk, Solovyov, Sharovsky, and the agronomist Dmitryenko (who, incidentally, rode around the whole raion with a cavalry detachment hunting down anarchists and Bolsheviks so as to hand them over to the German butchers for punishment). V. Sharovsky now deeply*



*regrets he was among the conspirators who committed this extreme betrayal of the toilers.*

*Taranovsky swears that Volk, Volokh and Co. would have killed him if he had not allowed the platoons of his company to arrest the members of the Revolutionary Committee and the Union. He claims that these persons acted by order of the German command.*<sup>[23]</sup>

The peasants further asked me:

*What do you advise us to do, Nestor Ivanovich? We want to kill all these good-for-nothings. But we warn you, please send a response in writing, do not come yourself, for all the more-or-less revolutionary peasants have either been thrown in prison, or they and their quarters are under constant surveillance by spies covert and overt. They will soon catch you here. We can tell you all about spies and agents provocateurs, but that must wait until we meet. For the time being we will all work towards getting you here to be among us. Please be patient and do not come without us sending for you.*

*Yours, Pavlo, Luka, Grytsko, and Yakov.*

The letter from these comrades heartened me even more. I became increasingly determined to expedite my meeting with the Gulyai-Polye comrades and get down to resolute work. However, much my peasant comrades warned me not to come to Gulyai-Polye, I thought the intention of keeping my stay in the *raion* secret was exaggerated and I did not take the warnings at all seriously. I prepared to go to Gulyai-Polye without them knowing. Therefore I did not answer the gist of their letter but only urged them not to touch any of the traitors and agents provocateurs for the time

23 Both Yefim Taranovsky (1888–1921) and Vasily Mikhailovich Sharovsky (1891–after 1929) later held responsible positions in the Makhnovist Insurgent Army. Both were veterans of World War I: Taranovsky had attained the rank of lieutenant and Sharovsky was an artillery expert. Although he led the Jewish Company in 1918, Taranovsky was an ethnic Ukrainian, not Jewish, peasant. Sharovsky was not related (at least not closely) to the traitor Peter Sharovsky executed by Makhno's Black Guard in Volume I. There are numerous instances where natives of Gulyai-Polye with the same surname found themselves on opposite sides in the Civil War.

being; and in particular not to lay a finger on any of the Jews and stir up the population against them because this could sow the seeds for the emergence of anti-semitism. Anti-semitism could prevent us from creating the vital preconditions for the Revolution and fulfilling the hope of the peasants—the hope of liberating themselves from reaction and expelling the *Hetman* with all his clique of *pomeshchiks*, of not allowing other authorities and tyrants to strangle them, and of getting on with living their own lives according to the principles of independence from all authorities of whatever hue in a free, self-determined and self-managed society.

At the same time I asked the Gulyai-Polye comrades about the numerical strength of the Austro-German troops stationed in Gulyai-Polye as well as those in the villages closest to the town, and which combat arm they were from. Were there many local spies in Gulyai-Polye in general, I asked, and among the peasants in particular?

Soon I received answers to these questions from a number of peasants. Basically there were a lot of spies and agents provocateurs, but they operated mainly in the centre of Gulyai-Polye. The most prominent of them were Prokofy Korostelyev, Soplyak (who was a detective in the Tsarist period already), and Leimonsky Jr. (a former platoon commander of the Jewish company). There were many others. “But the spies and agents provocateurs in Gulyai-Polye are to be found mainly among the rich Jews,” the peasants wrote to me. “You will find out about all this, Comrade Nestor Ivanovich, when you come to see us. We have lots to tell you and show you.”

I felt a painful anti-semitic sentiment in these notes and it was difficult for me to read them. Ever since 1905-1906 I had harboured a deep hatred of anti-semitism.

But anti-semitism had been alien to the Gulyai-Polye peasants up until 1918. This was exemplified most vividly by the events of 1905 when the thugs of the “Union of True Russians”<sup>[24]</sup> led by Shchekatikhin and Minayev rioted against the Jews in the city

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24 An extreme right-wing political organization founded in 1905, which soon changed its name to the “Union of the Russian People.” At one point the clergy belonging to this organization petitioned the government for the right to bear firearms.

of Alexandrovsk and then sent their couriers to Gulyai-Polye to organize an anti-Jewish pogrom. But at a number of their assemblies the Gulyai-Polye peasants spoke out categorically against the pogrom organizers and their vile deeds in Alexandrovsk. This made me regard these notes less harshly than they otherwise deserved. Instead of breaking off my correspondence with them, leaving Rozhdestvenka, and not responding to their call, I must say that I wrote them a letter (one letter to them all) and tried, as best I could, to destroy their unfounded ideas about the Jews. And I did this knowing full well that it had been the Jewish company, under the influence of the agents of the Ukrainian Central *Rada* and the German command, that had spearheaded the arrests of all the anarchists, all the members of the *Revkom*, and many of the members of the Union of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies in Gulyai-Polye (in April 1918). It arrested these peasant and worker revolutionaries in order to hand them over to the German command for trial. I knew the Jewish bourgeoisie was very pleased with the actions of this company. But I considered it my duty as a revolutionary to prove to the peasants that it was not only Jews who had acted so vilely towards the Revolution and revolutionaries—there were also many good-for-nothings among non-Jews who were just like the Jewish good-for-nothings the peasants had pointed out in their notes. We would look into this serious and complex question when I came to Gulyai-Polye and was among them. In my letter I asked the peasants and workers to put aside this question for the time being, not so as to neglect it, but so that we could return to it later when we had liberated ourselves from the oppression of the *Hetmanite* and German authorities. Then we would deal with the question freely, at the assemblies, and look into why it was that the Jewish company and the Jewish bourgeoisie had acted so vilely against the Revolution on behalf of the Central *Rada* and the German command.

I told the peasants and workers that Jewish working people—even those who were soldiers in this company and directly involved in the counter-revolutionary business—would themselves condemn this shameful act. The bourgeoisie that was involved in the provocative acts in Gulyai-Polye, on the other hand, would get

its just deserts, no matter what ethnic groups it was composed of. I must say that my letter had the desired effect. The peasants and workers agreed entirely with my arguments about their option of attacking the Jews and now just asked for my instructions:

“What is to be done? What should we begin with and how should we go about it, seeing as you advise us not to kill those responsible for the April events?” And finally they again underlined that I should be patient for a little while longer and not rush to Gulyai-Polye straight away.

“If you come to Gulyai-Polye,” they wrote, “your presence will soon become known at German army headquarters and will provoke even severer repression against the peasants and workers in general because the Germans and the *Hetmanites* consider all Gulyai-Polye’s peasants and workers to be your friends. And severer repression will completely prevent us from getting together.”

All of these fragmentary messages from Gulyai-Polye worried me. I began to fret and ponder whether I should answer the peasants’ request and suggest to them what they should do—or go to see them myself without answering at all.

I asked some of the Rozhdestvenka peasants around me for their advice. They spoke against me going to Gulyai-Polye without first warning the comrades there. But if I were to warn them they would again cry out that I should not come and would reassure me that they would be coming to get me soon. For a long time I was torn this way and that about whether or not to further postpone going to Gulyai-Polye. But I finally decided that I would write back once more. This was the very last time—my patience was at an end. Besides, there was no time to lose, I argued with the Rozhdestvenka peasants.

I wrote to the Gulyai-Polye comrades as follows:

*Our first task must be to distribute our people in Gulyai-Polye in such a way that there is an adequate number of them in each sotnia (district of the village)<sup>[25]</sup>. These people were*

25 The village of Gulyai-Polye was divided into eight *sotnias* or districts with well-defined boundaries: Bochanska, Guryanska, Kharsunska, Padalyanska (Podolyany), Peschanska (Pesky), Polska, Tsentralna, and Verbovska. Makhno also mentions a Yarmarkovska *sotnia*, but it has not been possible to identify this settlement defini-

*in charge of grouping as many energetic, brave, and self-sacrificing peasants around themselves as possible. From these groupings they then had to pick especially brave peasants and with them carry out attacks on Dibrivki and kulaks' estates in various places, if possible simultaneously, in order to expel the owners and the Austro-German soldiers called in to guard them. These, as is well known, are in groups of twelve fully-armed horsemen. (When sending our forces we should always reckon with at least this number of guards.) If the attacks cannot be organized in different places simultaneously, they should at least take place at brief intervals, in quick succession. These attacks must not bear any traits of robbery.*

*When our workers' revolutionary forces are sufficiently well grouped to carry out a series of such attacks, we must also mount a concerted attack on the German and Hetman garrison in Gulyai-Polye. Once we have disarmed the garrison we will take Gulyai-Polye and hold it at whatever cost until we can issue or at least print off the appeal of our Gulyai-Polye underground revolutionary-insurrectionary committee to all the peasants and workers of Ukraine. This appeal will explain the goals of our uprising and call on the peasants and workers to join us, to rise up against the oppressors in their own raions and help us to sow revolutionary spirit all across Ukraine.*

*The name of Gulyai-Polye will help us greatly on that path since it is quite well known throughout the Zaporozhia-Azov Sea region as a progressive and revolutionary village. Although the dark forces of reaction reared their head in Gulyai-Polye in the spring, the raion still considers it a progressive and revolutionary village. Many raions would respond to its call. And if we stay at our posts, i.e. if we do not succumb to the anti-revo-*

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tively. Probably it was associated with the *balka* of the same name. Bochanska was on the right (north) bank of the Gaichur River which flowed through the village; the other *sotnias* were on the south side. Each *sotnia* functioned to some extent as a separate community, a tradition stretching back to Cossack times when *sotnias* had a military significance. Their names often reflected the origins of the people who lived there. For example the Polska *sotnia* had been settled by emigrants from the Polish territories of the Russian empire following the failed Polish rebellion of 1863. However, they were probably not ethnic Poles for in the 19<sup>th</sup> century inhabitants of Western Ukraine were commonly referred to as "Poles" in steppe Ukraine. See Kniazkov (2004).

lutionary lethargy I have seen among many revolutionaries in the cities of Russia (and in the cities of Ukraine too, as we have noticed), we will organize all these raions around Gulyai-Polye and from there go on the offensive more resolutely and sternly than before against all our oppressors.

It is only necessary to resolutely hold high the black banner of our peasant anarcho-communist group, which bears the words well known to you, my friends:

**“With the oppressed against the oppressors forever!”**

“Long live the fraternal union of the rural and urban workers! “

“Long live the means of their complete liberation—the **Social Revolution!**”

A conference of the comrades displaced from Gulyai-Polye was held in the city of Taganrog in April this year in line with the positions outlined above. The participants of this conference will be arriving among you any day now. But to just sit idly and wait for them to come would be a great crime against the cause of the Revolution, a crime against the cause of the toilers of the countryside and the cities that we have begun but which our numerous enemies have prevented us from seeing through to an organized, creative stage where it can flourish and develop.

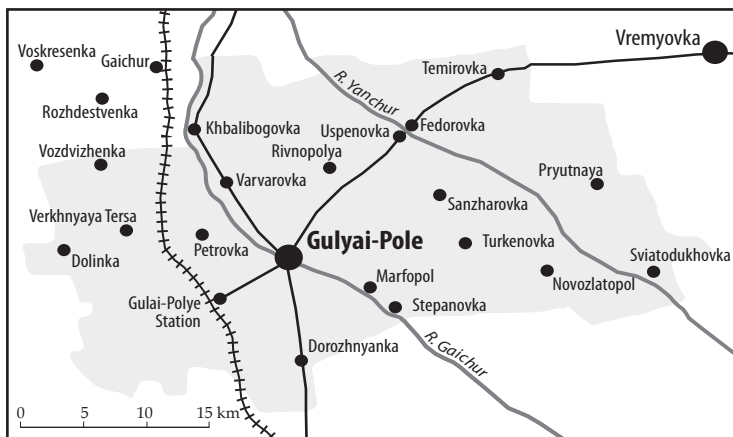
*Let us thus work for this great and crucial cause!*

Yours, **Nestor**, August 7, 1918

P. S. When you receive this letter please inform me at once what you intend to do, or indicate when would be most convenient for me to come by myself and see some of you. Time does not stand still—it is marching on, and our cause has come to a standstill and is danger of staying there.

I waited impatiently for a reply to this message. In the hope that it would satisfy me this time. While waiting for the reply I tried to reach agreement with the Rozhdestvenka peasants about all different aspects of the organization of peasant combat groups.

Thus I spent about five or six more days in Rozhdestvenka.



Gulyai-Polye raion in 1918.

Finally my old mother<sup>[26]</sup> brought me a number of letters from Gulyai-Polye. One of them was a joint letter with a number of signatures. It read:

*Dear Nestor Ivanovich!*

*We categorically warn you not to travel to Gulyai-Polye alone. What is more, we insist that you move even further away from Gulyai-Polye than Rozhdestvenka because there are persistent rumours here among the Hetmanites that Makhno has come to Gulyai-Polye and has taken up residence illegally somewhere on its outskirts. We are on the eve of a general search of all of Gulyai-Polye.*

*Do you not believe us when we say we want to have you here with us? We long for that day, perhaps even more than you do yourself! We have discussed your letter and will discuss it some more. We will begin to work in line with its positions. As soon as we see a possibility for us to meet we will come for you at once. But please do not come by yourself. You will perish and be lost to the cause. The Germans will spare no expense to have your head, and there are people around*

26 Yevdokia Matveyevna Mikhnenko (1847?–1925), born into serfdom, lost four of her five sons in the Civil War. After the suppression of the Makhnovist movement she had to go into hiding but voluntarily turned herself in at the Gulyai-Polye Communist Party office in 1921 and was granted permission to continue living in the village.

*who would betray you to get that money.*

*Signed: Yakov, Pavlo, Mikhail, Grytsko.*

This peasant group included my nephew, Mikhail Makhno<sup>[27]</sup>, who had been spared execution by firing squad (the same as my brother Savva Makhno<sup>[28]</sup>) thanks to the cowardice of the *pomeshchiks* who heard that I had returned from Russia and was illegally organizing the peasants in the villages near Gulyai-Polye. These *pomeshchiks* stood up for Mikhail against the German command. He was set free one hour before he was due to be shot. I very much trusted this friend and was on the verge of deciding to muzzle myself for a week or two and even leave Rozhdestvenka. But that was a time when thoughts can change very quickly. The next day I changed my mind. Seeing the inaction at this period in time made me feel great moral responsibility. I also decided to take a close look at life in Gulyai-Polye and the people of Gulyai-Polye. I finally decided to go there. The revolutionary peasants around me begged me not to take this risky and premature step. But to no avail. At that moment I was obstinate and I stuck to my position: I insisted that they take me by cart to the outskirts of Gulyai-Polye. From there I would make my own way to see my nearest and dearest.

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27 Mikhail Makhno, born in 1894, was the son of Nestor's brother Polycarp. He served in the Russian Army during World War I.

28 Savva Makhno (1868–1920) was the oldest of Nestor's brothers. Savva and another brother, Grigory (1886–1919), were the members of Makhno's immediate family most active in his movement. Both had acquired military experience in the Tsarist Russian Army.



## Chapter 2

### My first illegal visit to Gulyai-Polye.

One night two peasants armed with rifles took me part of the way to Gulyai-Polye. I myself had two bombs and a good Colt revolver. Three kilometres from Gulyai-Polye I sprang off the cart, called out goodbye, and hid among the knee-high stooks of rye.

By two o'clock in the morning I was already at the home of a peasant family in Podolyany (part of Gulyai-Polye). The head of the family had not returned from the war and was presumed dead; he had been reliable and observed the rules of security, and I felt completely safe at his house because his wife and children were equally dependable. The next morning I sent them out taking messages all over Gulyai-Polye. The first to come and see me, I recall, was Kharitina, the wife of my friend and comrade S. She brought me a gun and told me her husband had not yet returned from Russia.

"But I can stand in for my husband if you need a helper," she said. "I know you're going to start work against the Germans and the *Hetman's* forces, and I'll help you in any way I can."

I asked her straight away to use all her peasant's shrewdness and do everything she could to get hold of a dozen sheets of blank paper with the letterhead of the Gulyai-Polye *Zemstvo* Board and signed by the director, Grigory Chuchko. I needed these for preparing documents for a number of people from outside Gulyai-Polye.

Many other peasants came to visit me after her, but none of them were as militant and eager. Most who came to see me on my first day in Gulyai-Polye tried to persuade me to go back to Rozhdestvenka for another month or two, since the authorities would soon get wind of my stay in Gulyai-Polye and our plans would be foiled. But I decided to call on a whole number of my old friends—peasant revolutionaries who had already felt the Germans' *shompols* on their backs and now sat around sullenly, as younger friends told me.

I managed to visit many of them in the course of several nights.

I arranged two discussions with around twenty peasants about the most pressing tasks facing us, and I finally managed to get a clearer picture of the counter-revolutionary coup that had been staged in Gulyai-Polye in my absence.

This coup, I found out, had been conceived by agents of the Ukrainian Central *Rada* and the Austro-German command, vile sons of *kulaks*, who arrived here from the External Front and declared themselves to be Ukrainian SRs: Ivan Volk (now a Bolshevik commissar in Chertkovsky *raion*), Apollon Volokh and Osip Solovyov (both mixed up with Denikin's and Wrangel's gangs), Vasily Sharovsky, and the agronomist Dmitryenko.<sup>[29]</sup>

The coup was ordered and carried out by these agents conjointly with the forces of the central Jewish company. It began with the arrest of all the members of the Gulyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee and the majority of members of the Council of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies. An anarchist detachment was also called back from the front where it had been fighting the Germans and *haidamaks*, only to be disarmed en route and half of it arrested. These progressive revolutionaries from Gulyai-Polye and the surrounding *raion* were to be handed over to the Austro-German command for liquidation.

The coup succeeded and was welcomed by the bourgeoisie. Swiftly, within just a few days, it made itself master of the whole *raion* again. A wave of raids and repression was launched against revolutionary organizations.

Several events made a vivid impression on the peasants. In Gulyai-Polye, for example, the anarchists' office was destroyed in a break-in led by the "anarchist" Lev Schneider, who not only spoke Yiddish but also Ukrainian.

"Brothers," he called to the nationalist gangs in Ukrainian, "I will die with you for Mother Ukraine!"

The "anarchist" Schneider then leaped into the office and began tearing down and ripping up the black flags, grabbing the portraits

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29 Makhno, who had never spent a day in military service, depended on career officers such as Volk and Volokh to command the Gulyai-Polye Black Guard organized in the winter of 1917-1918. He was never to trust "specialists" of this type again.

of Kropotkin, Bakunin and Alexander Semenyuta<sup>[30]</sup> off the walls, smashing them and trampling on them. Even the Ukrainian nationalists didn't stoop as low as this half-baked Ukrainian patriot, witnesses told me.

This act of the Jewish "anarchist" really removed the inhibitions of the youths from the Jewish company. The bourgeoisie knew what to do at such moments and encouraged the youths to follow the example of the "anarchist." The Jewish youths, led by the agents of the Central *Rada* and the German command, now really let loose.

"Where is this Lev Schneider now?" I asked the peasants.

"He fled from Gulyai-Polye when the Germans and Austrians finally settled here. They say he's operating underground somewhere in Kharkov together with the Bolsheviks and anarchists," the peasants answered. They demanded that I give my opinion of the repugnant conduct of Schneider, the "anarchist" *Jew*; they insisted that I speak out.

What could I say? I tried to prove to them, of course, that him being a *Jew* was irrelevant and that the number of *non-Jews* who played a hostile role in the coup was immeasurably greater. I enumerated the names of this majority that the peasants themselves had mentioned. But there was no convincing them. They proposed that I go into the centre of Gulyai-Polye one evening and see for myself who was revelling in the streets and squares of the town if not the Jews. "They fought together with us in the campaign against the Counter-Revolution, but now they've joined the Counter-Revolution to dance on the grave of the Revolution," the peasants complained. They bore a real, almost palpable grudge against the Jews—malice and spite such as Gulyai-Polye had never experienced before.

I was alarmed because I saw the spectre of anti-semitism rising right in front of me. I summoned up all my strength to preempt this contagion in the peasant masses—a contagion bred by the criminal act of a few Jews and the stupidity of a few others. Any-

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30 Alexander Semenyuta (1883–1910), co-founder of the original Gulyai-Polye anarcho-communist group, the Union of Poor Peasants, was killed in a shoot-out with police and Cossacks. Today no known portrait or photo of Semenyuta exists.

way, I agreed to dress up in women's clothes and go into the centre of Gulyai-Polye to have a look around.

"Yes, Nestor Ivanovich, go and have a look, and you'll see who's strolling and frolicking there—those who wronged against the Revolution and curried favour with the Germans and the Central *Rada*," the peasants said.

So one evening I went with a number of peasants and spent a while in the centre of Gulyai-Polye. I saw with my own eyes who was sauntering there—exclusively townsfolk, and among them many Jews. People who came in from outlying districts were stopped by patrols and had their names taken before being chased away. Often the patrols arrested people and beat them with rifle butts before sending them home.

At one of the discussions with peasants, in the outlying Gulyai-Polye district of Pesky, I dwelt in detail on the Revolution, its tasks, and anti-semitism. I described the true, broad tasks of the Revolution and then underlined the real role of anti-semitic sentiments and the great danger they harboured. I reminded the peasants of their heroic struggle against the pogroms in 1905 and emphasized what the role of a genuine revolutionary anarchist should be: to strive to help the toilers unleash their creative forces freely and resolutely.

"The free and resolute display of the forces of the toiling peasantry will open the road to happiness for the whole of society," I said to my comrades. "Let us work in the name of the revival of the Revolution, that was crushed here in Ukraine, and use it as a means to arrive at happiness. This is a serious and responsible task that demands perseverance and heroic sacrifices on the road to this one goal. Every distraction will put us off track and squander our rekindled strength. It is still so feeble that it would be a grave mistake to dissipate it haphazardly. That is why I'm against taking any ill-advised action against the traitors and agents provocateurs who carried out the repugnant spring coup and are now nestled under the wing of the butchers of the Revolution."

"Nestor Ivanovich! Are you proposing that we let these agents provocateurs simply run free?" the peasants exclaimed all at once.

"No, I'm in favour of calling them to account. But only when the

time is right," I told my impatient friends. "I'm firmly convinced that we need to organize our peasant forces on a more durable basis, with concerted efforts, and drive out the Austro-German counter-revolutionary armies together with their marionette, *Hetman* Skoropadsky. Then we will put all the surviving agents provocateurs up before a people's court via assemblies and meetings of the revolutionary peasants and workers. There will be no mercy for them. These despicable agents provocateurs have to be destroyed, and we will destroy them. But now, in my view, is not the right time. It could harm, or at least has the potential of harming, the cause of our organization. Our task is to take the initiative of uniting the peasant revolutionary forces against the external and internal enemies of the Revolution, the foes of freedom who want to stop the toilers breaking free of the power of capital and its bloodstained creation—the state. "We have to take this fully into account when contemplating practical actions against known agents provocateurs," I emphasized to my friends.



The reign of tyranny of the German and *Hetmanite* forces prevented me from seeing many of my peasant friends—they had been shot or thrown into prison, from where they disappeared without a trace.

Those who remained alive had been robbed, and their homes were raided and they themselves badly beaten with rifle-butts and *shampols* almost every week.

The peasants who were still alive no longer showed the same enthusiasm, the same unity and faith in their aspirations, that they had radiated just two and a half or three months earlier. But that did not particularly concern me. I believed that as soon as the work of organizing the peasants against their oppressors began they would regain both their enthusiasm and their faith in themselves and their cause. I strove to bring about this revival of action and was particularly aware of my duty as a revolutionary anarchist, seeing that the anarchists of our time were so squeamish and aloof. And I soon became fully convinced in my meetings and discussions with the peasants that their oppressed mood and seeming indifference were just passing phenomena.



I spoke with the peasants at length on various topics. Among other things, they told me in detail about the entry of the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* detachments into Gulyai-Polye, how the bourgeoisie had greeted them, and finally how these most savage of counter-revolutionary gangs behaved in Gulyai-Polye.

First of all the occupiers felt it necessary to take revenge on me, the organizer of the revolutionary forces in the *raion*. They surrounded my old mother's farmhouse, drove her out of the house, and started throwing bombs into it. They smashed all the windows, tore the doors off their hinges, piled straw in the house, and set it on fire. They also burned down all the auxiliary buildings in the yard—the threshing shed, barn, and cow-shed.

Then they went to the home of my eldest brother, Yemelyan Makhno, who had served in World War I and was now an invalid. He had lost one eye, been badly shell-shocked and was always ill, so he didn't play an active role in the Revolution. They arrested him and led him away to the commandant's office. Then they burned down his humble house and barn, leaving his wife in the yard with their five small children to watch everything they had gained in long years of labour go up in smoke: house, barn, carriage, and all.

And so it went. These fiends from “civilized” Europe called at the farmhouses of all the peasants whose sons were active revolutionaries and had gone underground, and set fire to their houses, pillaging and raping as they went.

The provocation by the Ukrainian socialist nationalists led by the agronomist Dmitryenko was just a few days past when they caught Khaim Gorelik, a famous young revolutionary anarchist from a poor Jewish background. His was tortured brutally—they repeatedly kicked him in the testicles, spat in his eyes, forced him to open his mouth and spat in it too. And all the time they cursed him for being a Jew who was not corruptible. In the end they killed this glorious young revolutionary.

Soon my brother's fate was also decided. To humiliate him and his family all the more, the authorities decided to walk him past his burned-out farmhouse and then to shoot him so the neighbours would see. Six soldiers were sent off with him to carry out the death

sentence. When they approached the house Yemelyan's wife and children saw them. The older children burst into tears when they saw their father surrounded by bayonets. But the younger ones didn't understand what was going on and ran to meet their dad, expecting that he would pick them up like he always did, give them a kiss and tell them what he'd bought for them. But the brutish soldiers screamed at the children and threatened them hysterically with their rifles, the swine. The children were taken aback and stopped in their tracks. And when they saw the soldiers turn aside at the house and lead their dear father away, they rushed to their mother, who stood with her eldest son in the yard, literally rooted to the spot. They tugged at her dress and begged her to tell them where the Austrians were taking their dad. Their mother kissed them and they all cried together. The blindly obedient killers led Yemelyan away across the gully to Levadny's garden, where they shot him.

Moisei Kalenichenko's execution was even more shattering. Just a day or two after my brother Yemelyan was murdered, the authorities found out that Kalenichenko was in Gulyai-Polye. Kalenichenko was an anarchist from a peasant family—one of the best skilled mechanics in Gulyai-Polye and one of the most honest and peaceful people in the whole *raion*. He actively took part in the GGAK's work of organizing detachments against the expeditionary force's invasion. On one trip he fell off his horse and broke his leg. This forced him to stay in bed in Gulyai-Polye at the home of his brothers.

Now the same "Socialists" denounced him and the authorities found him. But they knew the population's indignation at the brutal execution of my brother and decided now, for the sake of appearances, to inquire what opinion people had of Kalenichenko.

"Is Kalenichenko a villain or a good Ukrainian?"<sup>[31]</sup> they asked.

Those of the working people who had not yet been arrested replied that they could vouch for Moisei Kalenichenko as a good citizen of Gulyai-Polye. The commander had not reckoned with this answer. He now asked the landowners Reznik, Tsapko, Gusenko, the Mitrovnikov merchants, and the soap-factory

31 Spoken in Ukrainian.

owner Livinski for their opinion of Kalenichenko. They denounced him: Moisei Kalenichenko was a villain, they said—a member of the Gulyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee who had assisted Nestor Makhno in organizing the mob.

The Austro-German command in Ukraine at this time instituted a law stipulating that Ukraine was German “hinterland”—the idea was to make it an integral part of their fatherland. So for the command it was convenient to agree with the landowners, *pomeshchiks* and merchants that Kalenichenko was an “evildoer.” It ordered that he be shot. Thus our comrade’s fate was sealed.

They took Kalenichenko to the Kharsun gully in Gulyai-Polye and stood him at the end of the ravine. Six soldiers in German army uniforms fired a volley at him. He fell, seriously but not mortally wounded. The peasants who had gathered nearby cursed the killers and started to run away. But soon they stopped and began to look back in horror at the scene of the crime. Kalenichenko got to his feet again.

“Come on, finish me off, you murderers!” he cried.

One of the three officers who were loafing around nearby barked a command. Another volley was fired. Kalenichenko fell again and writhed on the ground. He rolled onto one side and started to get up again. But this time one of the officers ran up to him (rumours say it was the *pomeshchik* Gusenko dressed in an officer’s uniform) and fired at point-blank range. He aimed for his temple, it seems, but the bullet hit him in the cheek. Kalenichenko fell down again but immediately struggled to his knees. He shook his fists and yelled:

“Come on and kill me, you butchers! Stop tormenting me!”

The six cold-blooded soldiers fired another two volleys—one while Kalenichenko was standing and another as he lay on the ground. His body was riddled with bullets.

Comrade Stepan Shepel also met a horrible death. He too was a peasant anarchist—you could say he was my pupil. I introduced him to my circle and then to the group. He was the son of a good, peaceable, working peasant family. After our Taganrog conference he returned to Gulyai-Polye illegally with Semyon Karetnik and my brother Savva to undertake underground organizational



work. One night Stepan went home to see his wife and children, of whom there were four, and to help weed the threshing-floor prior to threshing. Spies followed him home, and the next day he was caught there by a Austro-German night patrol as he was weeding.

As with the other Gulyai-Polye revolutionaries, the authorities had him shot in full daylight in front of the people.

Before he was executed, brave Shepel spoke to his killers in Ukrainian:

“Today you are killing me for my loyalty to my fellow workers. But the anarcho-communists will avenge my death! I die for justice and anarchy. I die at the hands of blind, despicable butchers of the Revolution. But tomorrow my comrades will strike you down.”<sup>[32]</sup>

Comrade Stepan Shepel, like Moisei Kalenichenko and my brother Savva, was exceedingly dedicated to our group's cause and participated in all its revolutionary work among the peasants, together with the peasants. I missed them badly at this terrible time when other friends and comrades were also away, many having fled to Russia.

Comrade Pavel Korostelyev (actually Khundai) was beaten unmercifully with rifle-butts and *shampols*—so severely that he died several days later.

The secretary of our group, Alexander Kalashnikov<sup>[33]</sup>, my brother Savva and many non-party revolutionary peasants were only saved from being shot because a rumour had been spread among the rich, Germans, *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks* that I had returned from Russia and was conducting intensive underground organizational work around Gulyai-Polye with the goal of staging an uprising. In a show of hypocrisy, these forces of reaction wanted to make the working people of Gulyai-Polye and its *raion* believe that they too opposed the killing of the peasant revolutionaries like Alexander Kalashnikov and my brother Savva. But the peasants saw right through their hypocrisy.

32 Spoken in Ukrainian.

33 Alexander Kalashnikov (? –1920), a native of Gulyai-Polye although born in Baku, was from a working class family. He had a junior high school education and served in World War I, achieving the rank of lieutenant. In 1917–1918 he was the secretary of the GGAK. Later he held various command posts in the Makhnovist Insurgent Army and died in battle against the Reds in June 1920.

They were not killed, it's true, but were thrown into prison together with hundreds of other peasants guilty of no crime. When the Central *Rada* was overthrown they all remained behind bars, passing on to the *Hetmanite* regime "by inheritance."

My peasant comrades wanted to tell me a lot more about the violence committed against the Revolution and its best sons. But I couldn't bear to hear any more—their stories had got me so worked up that evening and tormented my heart so much that I couldn't calm down; nor could I console the storytellers, who sat in front of me and bawled like little children. With great effort I regained my self-control, and I recall telling those gathered there:

"All of what I've told you, my friends, and all of what you've described to me, tells us that we have no right to sit idly by. We must try and regroup our forces, the forces of the broad peasant masses, on the basis of a clear message: Let us rise up against the arbitrariness of the Austro-Germans and the *Hetmanate* in this country! Let us work to revive and develop the Revolution for the full liberation of the peasants and workers, the toilers of town and country, from the power of the *pomeshchiks* and factory-owners and their servant—state power in all its forms!

In this spirit we agreed to begin organizing initiatives of three to five people in all the *raions* in Gulyai-Polye the very next day. These groups were to be completely free in their underground work of organizing the people but closely linked to each other via their representatives. And these representatives were to be directly in touch with me so that the work of all the groups could be channelled towards one goal: unifying the working masses of the *raions* around revolutionary Gulyai-Polye and raising them to a relentless struggle against the *Hetmanite* regime and the Austro-German counter-revolutionary armies.

The Gulyai-Polye peasant anarchists thus re-established the peasant revolutionary organization for the struggle against the Counter-Revolution, again under my political and organizational direction.

After reaching this decision we concluded our night-time meeting.



I had rushed back to Ukraine to reorganize revolutionary peasant detachments and volunteer battalions. The first goal was, with their aid, to seize as much weaponry as possible from the enemies of the Revolution. The second goal was to raise the whole of the working population against them—initially in Gulyai-Polye and its *raions*, then right across our Zaporozhye-Azov Sea region. According to my observations in 1917 and the spring of 1918, the working population of this region was the most rebellious and revolutionary, most capable of playing a pivotal role in a revolutionary peasant uprising of the whole of Ukraine.

This idea was at the forefront of my mind when we withdrew from Ukraine in April, when we were organizing the Taganrog conference, and at the conference itself. This is why I sent a number of comrades from Taganrog to Ukraine in all haste and also returned to Ukraine myself.

As I was getting down to the work intended, the details I had just heard about the arrest and execution of my comrades made me virtually forget the idea. Involuntarily I began searching for ways of taking revenge on the butchers who killed my friends and comrades, those simple, honest sons of the Social Revolution.

I searched for several bombs and decided to blow up the Gulyai-Polye headquarters of the Austro-German command and the *Hetman's Varta*.

Since I was unable to carry out the attack all by myself, I began making plans with two people, a man and a woman, whom I needed as helpers in preparing the act. I considered it my obligation to carry it out and readied myself for the deed.

But at that moment a new situation arose in our underground life and work that confounded my plans yet again.

One day after the meeting described above we met with peasants again in a different place. This time we were joined by representatives from Vozdvizhenka and Voskresenka. The participants from the latter village told us that they had read out to the peasants my letters that had been passed to them by comrades from Gulyai-Polye. The peasants then decided to act in accordance with my positions. This alarmed me because my letters from Rozhdestvenka were written for my closest associates alone. The peasants

had circulated them in the villages and this, of course, is how the authorities found out that I was staying near Gulyai-Polye.

It was too late now to do anything to prevent the letters from being printed and circulated. The Voskresenka peasants had already begun to act. They had organized a “Makhnovist” detachment and attacked a German punitive detachment, which they defeated, killing the commander and several of the soldiers.

After hearing the Voskresenka peasants’ report on this attack we split up again to await new developments. It was the right thing to do. The action of the Voskresenka peasants inspired the people of Gulyai-Polye. The German and *Hetmanite* authorities found out about the attack at the boundary of the Voskresenka and Gulyai-Polye lands and quickly began a campaign of searches throughout the corresponding *raions*. Again there were multiple arrests, fines, and whippings with *shompols*; peasants were tortured in an attempt to make them hand over weapons and betray the revolutionaries who had initiated actions.

I realized I couldn’t stay in Gulyai-Polye even one day longer.

I was quickly taken by cart to Rozhdestvenka. But the wave of searches and arrests swiftly spread throughout Gulyai-Polye *raion* and even reached as far as Rozhdestvenka. I was forced to leave this hospitable village and move 80 kilometres further away from Gulyai-Polye, to the village of Ternovka.

## Chapter 3

### The village of Ternovka and the plot to kill me.

In Ternovka (also known as Protopopovo) I moved in with my maternal uncle Isidor Peredery under the guise of a distant relative—a teacher from Matveyevo-Kurgan *volost* of the Taganrog district by the name of Ivan Yakovlevich Shepel. I had had corresponding identification issued for me by Zatonsky<sup>[34]</sup>, the well-known Ukrainian Bolshevik.

My relatives spread the rumour in the village that I was completely free in the summertime and had come to spend a few months with them so as to get as far away as possible from all the chaos and noise near the front. A bitter struggle was going on at that time between the revolutionary forces and the Counter-Revolution near Bataysk, 75 kilometres from Taganrog, so people believed the rumour spread by my relatives to be true. What's more, I lived on the outskirts of the village and hardly anyone saw me, which was part of the plan—I didn't want anyone to get the wrong idea.

But then the son of my uncle, the actual owner of the house, died.<sup>[35]</sup> This forced me to leave my uncle and aunt and move to stay with another family of relatives who lived virtually in the centre of the village. Here German and *Hetmanite* punitive detachments passed by frequently, and some days I had to leave the village at the drop of a hat and hide out in the meadows, the forest, or the maize and return home after dark.

This existence soon appeared strange to the young peasants, who were more or less actively involved in the Revolution. They started to regard me with suspicion and tried to find out from my relatives what was going on, who I really was, and why I only showed up in the village at night. But the young people were

34 Vladimir Zatonsky (1888–1938) was in charge of the Bolshevik underground in Ukraine in 1918. In 1921 he was to earn an Order of the Red Banner award for helping to suppress the Kronstadt Revolt.

35 It is not clear from Makhno's account whether this was his cousin M. Peredery, whom Makhno had as a school teacher 20 years previously. See Makhno (2006) – “Rebellious Youth.”

evidently not satisfied with the answers—they concluded that I was a *Hetmanite* spy.

As I later found out, the young people of the neighbourhood met for about a week and discussed how to get rid of me.

I suspected nothing and continued calling on my various cousins and relatives late in the evenings, which now made me seem ever more suspicious, even in the eyes of many older peasants. I did not know that the villagers had long been persistently asking my relatives about me.

One Sunday the young peasants pooled their money, bought beer and home-made vodka, and held a booze-up in the immediate neighbourhood that was to go until late at night; then they planned to grab me, take me out into the fields, kill me, and bury me without a trace.

That day the young peasants dug up the weapons they had hidden in different places since the Red Guards' withdrawal in the spring: revolvers, sawn-off rifles, and sabres. They had waited impatiently for this night and the savage punishment they were going to inflict on me.

And so these young people prepared themselves. Among them was the son of my first cousin. But the peasants who had decided to kill me told him nothing of their plan. Some of the young people were already tipsy and kept pestering my young relative to find out who I was and why he had never introduced me to them; they wanted to make my acquaintance, they said.

My relative ummed and ahed and came up with various excuses, but in the end he succumbed to the pressure and came to get me.

I had nothing else planned that evening and gladly accepted the invitation. It was even important for me in a way because information had come from Gulyai-Polye that I should hurry up and return. I decided to organize the forces for forming an insurrectionary avant-garde here. So I was happy to go and meet the young people.

The gathering took place just one street away from where I was staying, in a large barn in the courtyard of a peasant house. A large, low table stood in the middle of the barn and the young

peasants were sitting around it. A little further away older peasants aged thirty to forty were sitting cross-legged on a canvas on the ground. The young people were drinking and singing songs about the hardships of peasant life, while the older peasants played “Arb,” a card-game popular in Ukrainian villages especially in the winter.

My turning up at the barn disturbed some of those present and gladdened others. I didn’t yet know why, but their reactions did strike me. It was already quite dark in the barn. Someone called out—I think it was one of the older peasants:

“Lads, give the visitor some beer!”

Although I was partial to a glass of beer now and again, I felt a strange sense of alarm and refused. When they offered again I apologized and told them I was not completely well and shouldn’t drink. The older peasants asked me to sit and play cards with them. I declined this offer too and explained without mincing my words that this was a catastrophic time for peasants and workers and that they had much more serious things to think about than playing cards.

The young peasants listened intently as I said this, but I noticed that the older ones were chuckling and giving each other a nudge and a wink. I paid no particular attention to them. The talk I had begun was pulling me more and more into the role of a propagandist. I imagined straight away that these young people could serve as the basis for a solid, numerically significant circle, whose staunchest members could form a combat group and start raising the working peasant masses against the Counter-Revolution. I got carried away in my speech and didn’t notice that the young people were tense with excitement; the card-players had stopped their game and their sniggering; they now faced me, some were standing, and all were listening wide-mouthed.

Towards the end I spoke about the unwelcome masters who were the *Hetman* and the Austro-German *Junkers*. I dwelt on the dark reaction they had installed over the lives of the toilers in general and the peasants in particular, and I highlighted the authorities’ actions against the peasants in those *raions* of Ukraine where the peasants had expropriated the properties of the *po-meshchiks* and *kulaks*. When I mentioned that peasants in these

*raions* had been hung from telegraph poles and husbands and fathers shot in front of their wives and children to intimidate the working population as a whole, my young listeners could stand it no longer. Many of them jumped up from their seats and started yelling: "And all they can do here is play cards!"

"Alright, so we're old blockheads who've only learnt to play cards," the older peasants retorted, "that's sad but true. But we're not going to give it up now. You fellows—you just want to teach us to get drunk!"

A clamour of voices came from the younger peasants. Before long almost everyone, young and old alike, came up to me almost instinctively and shook my hand with a friendly smile. Some were silent, others muttered with emotion and regret.

Two of the peasants stood beside me, turned to their fellow villagers, and said:

"It turns out that this comrade is not at all who we thought he was, and we ought to tell him about this!"

"Quite right!" the peasants agreed.

The two men, Korobka and A. Yermokratyev, then took me to the corner of the barn, pulled aside the heap of clothes lying there and said:

"Look, comrade!"

There was a pile of sawn-off shotguns, rifles, revolvers, sabres and bayonets.

"We got these weapons when we were in the Red Guards in the spring," they continued. "We planned to use them against you, comrade. You see, we thought you were a spy, so we decided to grab you tonight, take you out into the fields, and hack you to death. We wanted to extract from you who you really were, and then finish you off and bury you."

At first I listened calmly, but I soon became extremely agitated and couldn't take it any longer. One moment I trembled and shuddered, the next I was afire. When I had calmed down again I asked the question which was burning in my mind:

"What on earth made you so suspicious?!"

They all avoided giving a direct answer.

"Now that we've heard your talk we're not suspicious of you



any more," they assured me. "We're just sorry that your relatives were so stupid that they feared telling us the truth about you. We could have killed you as a spy tonight, comrade."

Despite this reassurance I was completely unnerved. I took my leave of them and went back to where I was staying. The most active members of the group accompanied me to my yard and apologized for having conceived the crime against me.



Soon afterwards I wrote a proclamation to the peasants of the village and stuck up several copies on the wall of the village administration building in the lead-up to the village assembly. Almost everyone in the village read it. Several villagers suspected that I had penned it but spread the rumour that an airplane had come and landed in the fields the previous evening; later they had seen two men in sailors' uniforms in the streets of the village, they said. Only one *kulak* raised his voice at the assembly to say that that was all nonsense and that no airplane with revolutionaries could possibly have flown here. Isidor Peredery's relative, meaning me, needed to be scrutinized and the incident reported to the *Varta*; Peredery's relative was a teacher, the *kulak* said, and all teachers were subversive—the proclamation couldn't have been written without him. Many of the peasants protested at these allegations and assured the *kulak* that they had seen the two sailors with their very own eyes. And that night when the *kulak* was sleeping on his threshing-floor some peasants came, threw a canvas over him and bludgeoned him. They drilled it into him that he should not distrust innocent people. And if he ever did suspect anyone of revolutionary doings, he should hold his tongue and not denounce them.

The *kulak's* neighbours told me that after this event he started to teach his sons that if they knew about enemies of the *Hetman* they should not talk about it to anyone. A time had come, he told them, when it was hard to tell where justice lay—with the *Hetman* or with the revolutionaries.

I was glad to see the Ternovka peasants' attitude to the *Hetman* and his regime on the one hand and to the revolutionary proclamation the other. This encouraged me to strengthen my

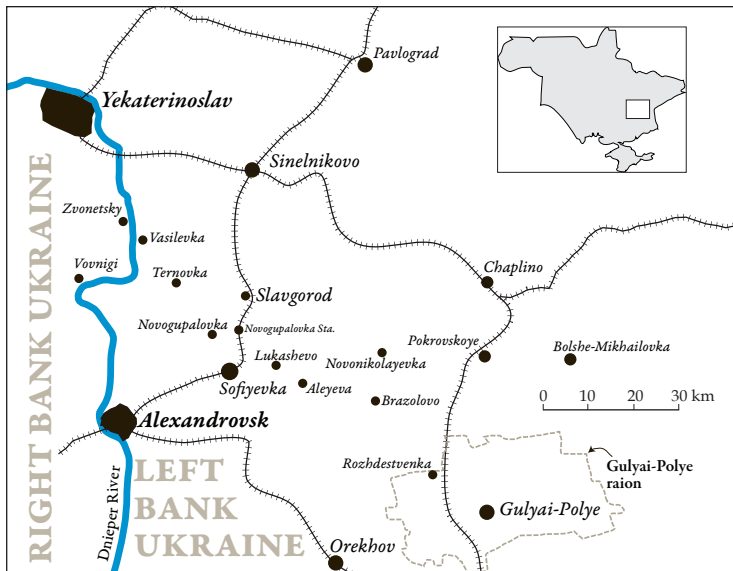
ties with them.

Now I began more positive discussions with the Ternovka peasants and organized a combat group. One of its main tasks was to be a nucleus for the peasants to organise around so that this *volost* would not lag behind the others at the crucial moment when it was time to rise up against the *Hetman's* regime and the Austro-German stranglehold in the country. But it was of equal importance that it launch continuous attacks on the Dibrivki estates, Austro-German military transports, the *Varta*, etc.—beginning right away and continuing until the uprising.

The combat group was made up of several men with their own independent views on the Counter-Revolution in Ukraine. They roused the peasants against reaction, and this animated me to take even more decisive action, all the more so because I noticed that the growing circle of young peasants surrounding me aspired to get down to business as soon as possible: to teach the *Hetmanite* and Austro-German punitive detachments to stop their wild attacks on villages, their searches, arrests, beatings and killings of recalcitrant peasants.

At one of my discussions with the peasants the young people insisted that I draw up a plan for them to ambush and destroy these punitive detachments as they travelled the countryside. But I knew that the German and *Hetmanite* authorities would then exact a toll on the whole population of the area in retribution for such operations. It was easy enough to draw up plans for ambushes and actions, I explained, but the likely acts of retribution could provoke the peasants' indignation against us, and that would weaken the forces we needed for the uprising. The young people objected, saying that the whole population was prepared to make sacrifices as long as they were not in vain—as long as they served as a signal for a general uprising of the toilers against the tyrants and exploiters.

Day after day went by with me holding discussions like this. I advised the people of Ternovka not to resort to armed actions without thoroughly weighing their objectives first and without coordinating their operations with Gulyai-Polye, where there were forces and weapons; a plan had also been worked out there



In July–August 1918 Nestor Makhno took shelter in a number of villages in both Left Bank and Right Bank Ukraine.

for the coordination of operations of the peasants and workers in the whole region.

“The revolutionary part of the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Polye has already gained experience in struggle and it enjoys authority with the inhabitants of the other *raions*,” I told the people of Ternovka. “It is essential that we stay in touch with these *raions* before launching open operations. Open operations call for good organization and also have to be worthy of the revolutionary undertaking. They demand revolutionary resolve in striving for the goal and persistence in seeing it through. We have to coordinate our ways and actions, which will allow us all—in different parts of the *raion*, the *oblast*, and the whole of Ukraine—to tirelessly and continuously send out signals calling the oppressed workers of the villages and the cities to struggle, and to set a living example in that struggle. I believe in the revolutionary part of the population of Gulyai-Polye. It will rise to face this challenge openly and boldly, proud to defend the town. Comrades, this is why I am advising you—as I have done with everyone I have talked with

before you—to keep in touch with Gulyai-Polye and coordinate your actions with them when you take the field against the tyrants.”

So we decided to stay in touch with Gulyai-Polye, and I set off for there with two comrades from Ternovka to secure this link. But we only got as far as Rozhdestvenka. Here I met my old comrades who had had to leave Gulyai-Polye themselves due to the most recent wave of repression. It began mainly because the Gulyai-Polye peasants had refused to hand over the harvest from the land they had expropriated from the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*.

The Austro-German command ordered its punitive detachments and those of the *Hetmanate* to force the peasant rebels—under threat of bayonet, prison or execution—to cart their harvest to the granaries of the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*.

This news forced me to stay for three days in Rozhdestvenka, where I attempted to confirm all the intelligence I had received. After that I headed back to Ternovka.

The young people of Ternovka were delighted at my return and I decided to operate in this *raion* for the time being. The peasant population there was already prepared for action. Therefore I immediately encouraged them to launch armed attacks on Dibrivki estates and *kulaks'* *khutors* so as to break up those nests of counter-revolutionary idlers, assorted small proprietors, and their guards.

Our slogan was “***Death to all who wield German, Austrian and haidamak bayonets and dare to rob the peasants and workers of their revolutionary conquests.***” This slogan inspired the peasants. They harnessed up their horses and carriages and, in spite of the shortage of firearms, flung themselves at the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*. German, Austrian, and *haidamak* detachments out on missions in the *raion* were also attacked.

In one of the attacks on *pomeshchik* estates we ran into a well-armed guard detachment consisting entirely of German soldiers. We finally managed to disarm them, with difficulty. But the head of the house had visitors—the officers of the guard detachment and the Sinelnikovo garrison—and these now barricaded themselves in and made ready to defend themselves. It was a real showdown. The peasants surrounded the house and demanded that the *pomeshchik* leave and give up the estate. They argued that he had fled

the estate in the days of the Revolution only to return in the days of the Counter-Revolution spearheaded by the Austro-German armies; he took away the land from the peasants with the aid of these armies, and, what was more, he flogged the peasants and had them thrown in prison. It was intolerable for the peasants that this *pomeshchik* remain living anywhere near them.

The *pomeshchik* threatened us from the safety of the house; he had just telephoned Sinelnikovo, he said, and called for the aid of a German detachment which would arrive in an hour or two. This detachment would hunt down the rebellious peasants and punish them like they had never been punished before.

The peasants charged the house, hoping to seize it together with the *pomeshchik* and his visitors. But the officers were good marksmen and beat off our attack with accurate fire. This forced me and another comrade, Kirill, to crawl up to the windows from different directions and each throw in a powerful grenade. There was a mighty explosion. The *pomeshchik* and his protectors fell silent. For the peasants the business was over—they did not plunder the estate. They spoke to the *batrak* workers:

“You are the masters here now. Go on with your threshing. It will not be long now until all of the Ukraine casts off arbitrary rule. The Revolution will reassert itself and start to deal properly with the land question and all the capital resources accumulated there. Later we’ll meet and decide together what the first steps on this path will be.”

The *batraks* listened and asked with a sigh:

“But won’t the *pomeshchik* hang us when you’ve gone?”

The answer was soon evident. Our grenades had terrified the *pomeshchik*—he quit “his” estate and fled for his life to Sinelnikovo without hanging anyone.

This was not the only landowner who left to seek safety with the armed forces of the Counter-Revolution. Quite a few *pomeshchiks* fled their estates following a series of decisive operations by the peasants. The raids of the German, Austrian and *Hetmanite* punitive detachments on the villages subsequently became less savage.

So it was that the peasants of the Ternovka *raion*, under my leadership, played the role of stern avengers against all who were

guilty before the toilers for crushing the Revolution. This role is not particularly virtuous by the canons of bourgeois and social-democratic morality, but the peasants took it on nevertheless. And I helped them fulfil it as best I could because I saw clearly the repugnant role the bourgeoisie played vis-à-vis the peasants and workers. I saw its contempt for their right to freedom and independence from the power of the *pomeshchiks*, factory-owners and their henchmen—the State. The bourgeoisie forced peasants to relinquish their rights to the land; it used soldiers as hired killers to settle accounts with those peasants who did not obey its command. I strove with all my being, often with little food and sleep, to talk to the peasants; despite living in illegality I used every opportunity to be among them and show them what I considered useful for the Revolution and to nudge them onto the path of brave and resolute action.

And so the insurrectionary initiative of Ternovka peasants for organizing an uprising in that *raion* finally took shape with the secret support of the broad working population.

But soon the authorities learned of the presence of a “visiting teacher” in Ternovka. Searches began, and this forced me to move to Slavgorod and later to Novogupalovka.

In both places I organized peasant insurrectionary initiatives with the help of peasant comrades from Ternovka. However, I did not manage to lead them in arms against the *pomeshchiks* and German-*Hetmanite* authorities. For some reason I quickly drew the suspicion of *Varta* agents. On one occasion they even tried to seize me, but fortunately I was with two comrades from Ternovka and a third, a teacher and convinced SR from Slavgorod. I had taught them how to use Mauser and Colt revolvers; we fired back at the *Varta* agents and went into hiding.

I was aided again by the peasant comrades who were true to me and the cause of the Revolution. Now I moved to the Zvonetsky and Vovnigi area on the western bank of the Dnieper River. Here I soon got in touch with the “bluecoat” *haidamaks* who had gone into hiding there; some *haidamak* divisions had been disarmed under order of the *Hetman* for having become “infected with Bolshevism,” though this one had not, nor had it even yet been

earmarked for disarmament.<sup>[36]</sup> In any case, part of the division had dispersed, keeping its weapons, and had hidden them on the little islands in the Dnieper. According to the information given to me by some of the *haidamaks*, there were over three hundred of them in that *raion*. They were all “Bolshevik-oriented,” according to information provided by local residents. But back then the enemies of the Revolution called all revolutionaries “Bolsheviks.” This state of affairs gladdened me. I imagined this group of 300 men as an impressive force with which to begin a broader campaign against the enemies of the Revolution. So I remained among them for a time.

I hid with a group of *haidamaks* on one of the islands in the Dnieper for about a week, living just on the fish we caught and immediately cooked. I spoke to the *haidamaks* a lot about the enemies of the Revolution, about how one had to fight them, and so on.

But during this preparatory work I ran into their leader. Although he claimed to be a Bolshevik he was in fact a supporter of the *Hetman's* regime—he just wanted to see it rid of German and Austrian support. He was delighted that the regime was gathering strength and he kept referring to negotiations being held between Rakovsky<sup>[37]</sup> from Moscow and Kistyakov<sup>[38]</sup>, the *Hetman's* envoy from Kiev, on the recognition of the *Hetman's* regime and a peace deal; he spoke with an air of certainty as if this had already happened.

This leader of the “bluecoat” *haidamaks* greatly hampered my efforts to infuse the *haidamaks* with the idea of a general uprising of the peasants and workers.

In the end I and a number of *haidamaks*, armed with rifles and machine-guns, left the islands in the Dnieper and moved to

36 The Bluecoat Division was formed under the regime of the Central *Rada* from Ukrainian POWs in Germany and Austria, mainly for the purpose of “internal security.” Both this division and the Sich Riflemen opposed Skoropadsky's coup and were disbanded after he took power.

37 Christian Rakovsky (1873–1941), a veteran revolutionary of Bulgarian origin, was often given diplomatic assignments by the Bolsheviks. In 1919 he became the leading figure of the Soviet government of Ukraine.

38 Makhno is referring to Ihor Kistiakivsky (1876–1940), a prominent Ukrainian lawyer and politician. He was actually assisting the head of the *Hetman's* delegation negotiating with the Bolsheviks, Sergei Shelukhin (1864–1938), also a lawyer.

the village of Ternovka. Here I left the machine-guns and some of the *ex-haidamaks* and headed for Gulyai-Polye with two others.

On the way to Gulyai-Polye we stopped for several days each in the villages of Lukashovo, Brazolovo, Novonikolayevka and Rozhdestvenka. We made good use of the fact that the peasants of these villages remembered me from my revolutionary work in 1917 and the spring of 1918; we popularized the idea of an uprising, organized initiatives among the peasants and provided each group with passwords for staying in touch with Gulyai-Polye. Finally I reached Gulyai-Polye, this time not just with one comrade but with several.



## Chapter IV

**My second secret stay in Gulyai-Polye. My meeting with old comrades and the first decisions on a number of important questions to do with organizing the peasants' and workers' uprising.**

Precisely during my second illegal stay in Gulyai-Polye my old comrades Isidor (Petya) Liuty<sup>[39]</sup> and Alexei Marchenko<sup>[40]</sup> arrived from Russia. I soon found them, and via them I also met up with Semyon Karetnik<sup>[41]</sup> again.

Meeting these comrades greatly strengthened my resolve to forge ahead and switch to open armed partisan struggle against our enemies at whatever cost.

I remember Comrade Marchenko mentioning that he had seen and spoken with many anarchists in Kursk. They were also heading for Ukraine with the aim of struggling against the Counter-Revolution, he said.

“Should we not wait for them, with their speeches and agitation? Besides, they are gathering forces together with the Bolshe-

39 Isidor (Sidor) Fedorovich Liuty (1893–1919) was born in Gulyai-Polye into a poor peasant family, and like Makhno was orphaned at an early age. He received only an elementary school education and served as a common soldier in World War I. Prior to the Revolution he had worked as a painter and decorator. He joined the Gulyai-Polye anarcho-communist organization in 1917. In the memoirs of Viktor Belash, chief-of-staff of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army, Liuty is described as “selfless, upright, good-looking, and capable.”

40 Alexei Semenovich Marchenko (1893–1921) was born in Gulyai-Polye into a poor peasant family and received only an elementary school education. An anarcho-communist from 1908, he served as a noncommissioned officer in World War I. A competent military commander, he functioned to some extent as the conscience of the Makhno's inner circle.

41 Semyon Nikitovich Karetnik (1893–1920) was born in the village of Marfopol, near Gulyai-Polye, into the family of a *batrak* and received only one year of formal schooling. Prior to the Revolution he worked as a stableman. An anarchist from the age of 15, he took part in the Gulyai-Polye “Black Guard” in 1917–1918. Physically he was tall and very strong. Makhno had great respect for his abilities and according to Arshinov he displayed “outstanding military talent.” His nickname “Nimy” (“the Moron”) suggests not every one shared these opinions. Among the enemies of the Makhnovists he acquired a reputation for brutality. His name also appears in the literature as Karetnikov; cf. Chubenko's diary, Appendix 2.

viks, who have lots of weapons,” he said.

I was up in arms against this idea. I pointed out to my comrades a whole range of examples I had seen on my trips through Russia where the majority of our city anarchist comrades did not know the peasants and had no rapport with them. What was more, they made the same colossal blunder as the Marxists in considering the peasantry a reactionary bourgeois class unable to give creative impetus to the Revolution.

“Therefore I consider it intolerable and outrageous to rely on them coming from Russia and starting the Revolution with the peasants,” I told my comrades. “The city anarchists won’t come to the villages. They’ll dig themselves in there in their cities, like they did in 1917. They’ll try and establish links with the peasants indirectly, via envoys. But the peasants treat contacts of this kind with distrust, particularly if they’re only established via pamphlets or a superficial swoop of a visiting propagandist. Peasants are realists. You need specific organizational preconditions to initiate actions with them. When it’s clear that these prerequisites are met, the peasants are prepared for anything. But our city comrades wouldn’t fulfil these prerequisites even if they were all workers from the city factories, thus being psychologically and physically linked to the interests of the toilers. After all, the peasants relate to the city workers with a degree of openness and trust. The problem which we mustn’t overlook is that there are many non-workers in the anarchist movement in the cities. Just like with many of the political parties, there are all sorts of people there who come from non-working-class backgrounds—not from the intelligentsia, unfortunately, but from the merchant class, which is foreign to culture and education. These people have been raised on the principles of speculation and pillage of every kind. They can’t generate any trust in the broad peasant masses. The experience of my work among the peasants and workers in 1917, which all the group know about, showed me quite clearly that the peasants rarely listen to our comrades from these circles, even if some of them are perhaps more committed to our ideals and to the peasant cause than many of us from a working-class family. We are prepared to give our lives in this bold undertaking of raising

the broad masses of the toiling peasantry, organizing them, and leading them into battle against enemies of every kind—those of the Revolution and those of the anarcho-communist ideal, which lights our way again and again in the Revolution.

This sobering realization about our city comrades must be taken into account and borne in mind whatever we do, wherever our cause binds us to the working masses. Partly for this reason and partly because of what I saw and experienced on my trips through revolutionary Russia I cannot, like comrade Marchenko, nourish the hope that our city comrades together with the Bolsheviks will amass their forces and move them to Ukraine so as to organize an uprising against the now entrenched German-Hetmanite Counter-Revolution. I have no confidence in these forces. I saw them in Kursk. They're ineffectual. They'll carry out the orders of the central Bolshevik leadership, to its satisfaction. Perhaps they'll even make it out here to the peasants in the villages at some stage. But the main attention of these people with their intentions of a personal or maybe even speculative nature will be focussed in the city, on the life and activity of the city workers. We can see the activity of the city workers in Ukraine here and now as they struggle for a piece of bread while calmly and peacefully working in the machinery of the butchers who crushed the Revolution, while the toiling revolutionary peasants rebel against these butchers and for this are flung into prison or even executed. We cannot therefore pin our hopes on those comrades who are allegedly coming from Kursk to Ukraine together with the Bolsheviks. The forces of the true Revolution are to be found in the toiling peasantry in the villages and the working masses of the cities (insofar as they haven't been poisoned by the venom of power and don't aim to seize it). We have fought our way through the thicket of the Counter-Revolution to reach the peasants, whose true sons know us and will join us on our path. We must seize this opportunity and not waste time on hopes that are not worthy of our attention. It's time to act. Death to all our enemies! Long live the Revolution, long live our ideals, long live the workers of the world!"

"It's true that we're weak," I emphasized to my old comrades

who doubted in our strength. “We’re taking up a magnificent and crucial cause that demands enormous and diverse intellectual powers. We don’t possess them and what’s even worse, they are virtually absent in the whole anarchist movement. This is a real shortcoming. When I was in Moscow I not only saw this but also felt it. And what I saw there gives me something of a moral right not to listen to some things and to do more myself. Really, my friends—in Moscow I met a spectrum of anarchists, some from Moscow, some from other cities. Among them were outstanding exponents of revolutionary anarchism. But the majority of them, in my view, have not found their feet in real life and are not even involved in the cause and the present struggle as I think they should be. Many of our comrades, whom I think we can all probably learn something from, hold lectures and write article after article for newspapers, but not all of these lectures are relevant to the present time. I attended a lecture by comrade Roshchin.<sup>[42]</sup> It was about Lev Tolstoy and his work if I remember correctly—a lecture about Tolstoy, in any case. Despite the notable words of introduction by comrade Alexei Borovoi, in my view the lecture was of no practical value to either the workers or the revolutionary intelligentsia in union with them. Lectures will not teach us anything about Revolution. They don’t help us with any aspects of the real situation our revolutionary movement is currently in. The lecture I attended was organized by leading activists of our movement who are both responsible and aware. In fact,, our comrades from the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups tell me that these “activists” are so very “responsible” and “aware” that they can’t tolerate the slightest mistake or deviation from ideological correctness in the federation’s daily newspaper *Anarchia*.<sup>[43]</sup> Therefore they’re not involved in it but preferred to split off into their own special Moscow Anarchist Union to occupy themselves with the ideological propaganda of anarchism. Here in Ukraine and also there in Russia, with the Revolution being smothered

42 This episode is described in Chapter 13 of Volume 2 of Makhno’s memoirs.

43 Starting as a weekly in September 1917, *Anarchia* became a daily in November 1917, and reached a circulation of 20,000 before being shut down by the Cheka in 1918. Its editorial board included Makhno’s friend Peter Arshinov. In 1919 *Anarchia* re-appeared as an underground publication.

and the authorities attempting to hamper the development of the Revolution, our movement is at a stage where there are pressing things to think about. We must force ourselves and the comrades to occupy themselves with the vital issues of the day—if only with the question of reaching and influencing the toiling masses. It is essential that we cultivate in the masses a spirit of rebellion and fundamental opposition to the attempts by the state socialists to distort the Revolution. I personally have already thought about this a lot. And it is completely clear to me that the revolutionary path we are heading down—which so far we have made good progress along in our *raion* by successfully engaging with the working masses—is the correct path. We just need the courage to stay on that path and stay true to the goals that our ideal sets before us. We are indeed weak and ill-informed in practical anarchist matters, I hear you say. How could I disagree? I acknowledge with bitterness that this is true. But the only way to gain knowledge of the postulates of our ideal is through our own direct action and that of the broad working masses, in whose name and with whose strength we have tried to forge the path of Revolution, struggling against all manner of attempts by the representatives of various parties and their governments to distort the true essence of the goals of our Revolution. The toilers must capture and distil this essence with the aid of their true friends, the anti-authoritarian revolutionaries, and do their utmost to integrate it into their lives in the course of the decisive struggle.

This struggle has already begun. Throughout Ukraine the peasants and workers are thirsting to drive out the Austro-German counter-revolutionary armies, topple the *Hetman*, and put the socialists from the Ukrainian Central *Rada* before a people's revolutionary court. It was the *Rada* that brought in these counter-revolutionary German and Austrian forces against the Revolution, and even today they are so brazen as to consider themselves friends of the Ukrainian workers! This struggle is mainly of regional importance and psychological value for the time being, but soon it will assume much broader significance and shape the course of events. Isolated actions of this kind are now occurring more and more often—the enemy is feeling our

sting. It is essential that these acts now be stepped up and at the same time be given a sound ideological footing. I spoke about this back at our Taganrog conference. Comrade Marchenko fully supported me. We presented a resolution there which I consider is still relevant today. I have worked according to its tenets up until meeting you here, comrades, and I think the time has now come to broaden this work and come out into the open. We should take the field in arms!"

Instead of answering, Comrade Marchenko cried and kissed me. Semyon Karetnik, Andrei Semenyuta, Isidor Liuty, and many other comrades agreed with me fully. But before the open armed insurgency in Gulyai-Polye began, they insisted that we kill the leaders of the spring counter-revolutionary coup: Ivan Volk, Apollon Volokh (both of them officers), Osip Solovye (a mechanic), Dmitryenko (an agronomist and fanatical Ukrainian SR), Vasily Sharovsky (Ukrainian SR), the commander of the Jewish company Taranovsky (a shop clerk who was an ensign during the war), a platoon commander of this company Leimonsky (also a salesman, ideologically a dedicated opportunist), as well as a range of spies headed by the veteran detective Soplyak, Ivan Zakarlyuk and Prokofy Korostelyev.

I agreed with this opinion of my comrades but argued that we should not touch Taranovsky, the company commander, or Vasily Sharovsky, the head of the artillery.

I was against killing Taranovsky because he had not been in charge of arresting the members of the Soviet of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies and the *Revkom*. He and his company just handed over control of the garrison when the staff of the conspirators demanded it; his adjutant was on duty for him at the time, and it was this adjutant who ordered that parts of the company be put at the disposal of the conspirators to use in actions against the Revolution.

Platoon commander Leimonsky was zealous in arresting revolutionaries, and at the time in question he also served as a spy for the German headquarters. I did not object to the idea of killing him, nor Soplyak, Ivan Zakarlyuk, Prokofy Korostelyev, Ivan Volk, Apollon Volokh, Dmitryenko, Tikhon Byk (the president of the

conspirators' delegation to the German command), or various others. Like all other comrades in the group, I too considered these men criminals who deserved death at the hand of our the revolutionary organizations.

At the same time I was rather wary of such a campaign against traitors and agents provocateurs who had subverted the Revolution. I feared it could turn into a campaign against the Jewish bourgeoisie. It goes without saying that it was not only the Jewish bourgeoisie that welcomed the actions of the Jewish company; the Russian and Ukrainian bourgeoisie also gave open and generous support, encouragement of every kind, and praised the major figures in the staff of the conspirators. But the Jewish bourgeoisie was more prominent in the eyes of the Gulyai-Polye population than the non-Jewish bourgeoisie was. A campaign against it could rapidly spread and become a pogrom against Jews as a whole.

That is why I was afraid of launching terrorist acts against agents provocateurs before we openly took the field against the arbitrariness of the Germans and *Hetmanite* forces.

As for Sharovsky, I found out that he was indignant about the coup from the very beginning. The members of the volunteer battalion had not managed to hide all the artillery pieces, machine-guns, and rifles; when the staff of the agents provocateurs was about to hand over these weapons to the German command, Sharovsky swiftly resolved to put the weapons out of commission before they were surrendered to the Germans. He removed the sights and clinometers from the heavy guns, even detaching the bolts from some, in order to hide them and hand them over to our organization at the first suitable opportunity. He conveyed this to me via the peasants as soon as he heard I was in the vicinity of Gulyai-Polye. At the same time Sharovsky tried hard not to catch my eye. He was well aware, no doubt, that he ought to pay with his life for being a member of the staff of the conspirators. The betrayal had cost the lives of several revolutionaries, who were executed by German headquarters.

At the same time it was clear to me that Sharovsky had broken with the traitors; although the staff of German command demanded that he explain where the sights, clinometers, and bolts

from the heavy guns had gone, he never told them.

I was impressed with this act of Sharovsky's. Besides, I knew Sharovsky was an outstanding artillery expert and intended to use his skills in the planned uprising.

On these grounds I insisted that Sharovsky be taken off the list of traitors to be killed. I debated long and hard with my comrades, who were in favour of immediately carrying out terrorist acts against the traitors and agents provocateurs.

After much argument my comrades finally agreed with me. As I recall, Sharovsky was removed just in time from the list of those we considered to deserve death.

A week later members of our group tracked down and killed Soplyak, the veteran detective of the former Royal Bureau of Investigation.

This killing caused considerable satisfaction among the working population of Gulyai-Polye. A series of large-scale searches ensued, which the peasants endured with a wry grin, but this clampdown impinged on our illegal discussions with the peasants and my very stay in Gulyai-Polye.

The comrades who had been in favour of immediately liquidating agents provocateurs, traitors, and spies soon saw the rightness of my opposition to terrorist acts before the peasants had been raised to open armed struggle.



After moving to the village of Marfopol close to Gulyai-Polye I used all my arguments and influence to persuade my comrades that we should organize a series of armed peasant attacks on the many *pomeshchiks* and their guards around Gulyai-Polye.

The Gulyai-Polye peasants assembled 100 armed fighters from their number. The villages of Marfopol and Stepanovka likewise. The campaign against the *pomeshchiks* and their hired guards began. Death and destruction soon reached those *pomeshchiks* who had robbed the peasants of the properties won in struggle, who had lashed and flogged the peasants half to death or ordered their Austro-German and *Hetmanite* dogs to do the dirty work.

But the authorities' counter-measures forced me and the whole core of our organization to leave the *raion* again. (The core con-



sisted of myself, Marchenko, Karetnik, Liuty, F. Ryabko, and the comrades who had come with me from the Dnieper.) We made a real effort to stay in the Gulyai-Polye area and moved to our best secret accommodation in the heart of town. But one day later the German and *Hetmanite* forces discovered us with the aid of their best spies; that morning they caught me, Marchenko, Liuty and the two Dnieper comrades while we were still in bed.

Fortunately for us, one of the members of this group of soldiers and *Varta* men had once fallen into our hands and promised to quit service in the *Varta*. But he remained in service at my insistence so that I could gain the intelligence I needed about the operations and organization of the German punitive detachments, to which the *Varta* was linked. I instructed him to convey information to me via his relatives.

This was a serious young man, a refugee from Volhynia during World War I. He found himself in Gulyai-Polye with all his family. They were unable to find work and suffered terribly from hunger. The young man joined the police force temporarily in order to help his family escape hunger and destitution. Since he knew me from revolutionary social work in the period before the Austro-German occupation of Ukraine, he swore to me and my comrades that he wanted to serve the Revolution. But he had to save his parents from starvation; under the rule of the *Hetman* he was not allowed to travel around to find work, he told us, and that is why he joined the *Varta* in Gulyai-Polye.

We supplied his family with flour and lard, but I insisted he remain at his post in the *Varta*.

This young man was the first to leap from his horse.

"Who are you sheltering in there?!" he yelled loudly to the head of the household where we were staying.

So it was that we heard his cry before the killers encircled the house. We jumped out the window on the opposite side of the house, half-dressed, even leaving several grenades by our beds in our haste.

The young *Varta* man was now the first to storm the room where we had been sleeping. He dashed up to our beds. When he saw the grenades he quickly covered them with various pieces

of clothing to make his police colleagues think he had already sifted through the clothes. By doing this he saved the head of the household from being shot for harbouring us.

We ran through a number of farmyards, snatched a peasant's horses, and fled to another village.

Many *kulaks* saw us as we fled through their farmyards, yet despite having been spotted we hoped we would still be able to hold out in the area—if not in Gulyai-Polye itself then at least in the villages close by. It was exceedingly important for the success of the undertaking that we hold our ground in the lead-up to the open uprising of the organized peasants, whose militancy and readiness we were honing. We would take almost any risk for the sake of success.

But the strength of the Counter-Revolution shattered these hopes.

On one of our moves from village to village we ran into a German-*Hetmanite* punitive detachment and two of our comrades were killed in the shoot-out. We had to flee and it was a long time before we shook off our pursuers. In the end we escaped but at the cost of abandoning the village we needed, and also leaving Gulyai-Polye far behind.

We reached a village where almost half of all the peasants were in prison—the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* “special commissions” had been at work. The situation in this village was dispiriting for us. Some of us even despaired at the prospects of organizing the planned uprising. It seemed that all our efforts had been in vain and that we were too few and too weak. We became painfully aware of our small number and powerlessness.

But at the same time all of us stubbornly refused to tolerate the outrages against the Revolution.

We prepared ourselves for the cruel struggle necessary to liberate the toilers from the power of bourgeois-capitalist society. We were in fact already fighting against that society, but our struggle remained limited in scope and scale. This was a painful realization for us. It caused some of us to become downhearted and even lose hope in the possibility of extending our group's struggle and turning it into a struggle of the broad peasant masses.

Seeing the mood my comrades were in, I insisted we return to Gulyai-Polye.

When we returned I disguised myself as a woman, with a dress and make-up—I was to be the young lady at the side of Comrade Liuty, who was dressed up as a gentleman. We strolled into the centre of the village. Here we intended to blow up the headquarters of the Austro-German command for Gulyai-Polye *raion*. This headquarters had executed too many revolutionary peasants and thrown an even larger number into prison, from where these anonymous revolutionary insurgents were taken and shot.

But we did not succeed in blowing up the headquarters.

When we first approached the headquarters there was no one in the building. Liuty and I were against throwing a bomb into the empty headquarters without punishing any of the butchers who had crushed the Revolution.

Our second approach was much more promising. The headquarters' hall seemed full of staff with something to celebrate.

The plan was as follows: Comrade Liuty would kill the sentry who paced up and down beneath the windows, I would lob a six-pound bomb into the hall, and we would slip away through the Nikushchenkos' farmyard (next to the headquarters) to the embankment, and then make for the river. This was a convenient escape route, and it would be guarded by comrades Karetnik, Marchenko, Ryabko, and others.

But when we moved closer to the headquarters, we noticed several women and children among the merry-makers in the hall. The women were sitting, while the children came up to the windows, chatting, pointing down at Council Square and giggling.

"Ready?" Comrade Liuty asked, turning from my side and heading towards the sentry.

"Stop, Petya!" I yelled in a muffled voice and demonstratively walked away from the sidewalk, towards the church fence. Liuty dashed up to me and took me under the arm.

"What's up?"

"We must not kill women and children," I warned him. "Why do they have to die together with those butchers? We'll just have to wait."

And we began walking up and down among the strolling villagers, hurling sharp words at each other as if on the verge of a violent argument. Petya insisted that we should not have consideration for anyone or anything:

“The time is right. The headquarters must be blown up!” he hissed, enraged.

I managed to persuade him that we should leave the square and head for the cinema. On the way I hurriedly explained to him the full earnest and significance of the act we had planned. As we had already discussed, it was not only to serve agitation purposes but also be a signal for the start of an open and resolute campaign by our insurrectionary organization in the whole *raion*. But if the bomb killed women, who were presumably innocent, and even children, who were definitely innocent, it could turn the mood of the local population against us. What if the people of the *raion* related to us not with sympathy but with hostility? That could prove fatal for our cause.

It took quite some time for comrade Liuty and I to reach agreement. But when he saw I was deadly serious he finally agreed. We set off towards the embankment. On the road there we met Karetnik, Marchenko and the other comrades, and I explained why we hadn't blown up the headquarters. We left the centre of Gulyai-Polye and made our way back to our illegal quarters in peasant houses on the distant outskirts.

The next day we calmly and thoroughly reconsidered our decision to blow up the headquarters of the Austro-German *raion* command. Karetnik and I arrived at the conclusion that destroying the headquarters was likely to do the uprising more harm than good. If the attack succeeded, the punitive Austro-German forces would then deprive us of any chance of working among the people of Gulyai-Polye. At present an armed revolutionary force existed only in Gulyai-Polye and the adjacent villages, and for this reason we asked the other comrades whether it would not be better for us to do one more tour of the *raion* to convince ourselves of the firmness of the revolutionary spirit of the peasants. Comrades Marchenko, Liuty, Ryabko, and others insisted on blowing up the headquarters without delay. They made a proposal and demanded

that all comrades accept it: that I (or “Ivan Yakovlevich” as they called me back then) not be let into the centre of Gulyai-Polye but that they throw the grenades themselves. If they died in the attack Ivan Yakovlevich was to take revenge on their murderers.

At a personal level I didn’t object to their proposal, but I was afraid that they would go all the way—and still be unsuccessful, such was their passionate hatred of the butchers. I felt they would kill not just the sentry but anyone who got in their way, and yet still not succeed in destroying the headquarters.

Semyon Karetnik protested outright against their proposal. If we were to destroy the headquarters, he argued, the grenade-throwing should be entrusted to Ivan Yakovlevich alone—he was the most cool and composed comrade and the one most skilled in the use of explosives.

Consequently the comrades agreed to do everything in their power to clear the path for me to the windows of the headquarters. That evening we went back into the centre of Gulyai-Polye. I could feel the enthusiasm emanating from each of the comrades as they walked there with me. But alas, on the way we ran into a *Varta* detachment and were unable to go round them. We had to stop the detachment, yell out “Hands up!” and take them prisoner.

Among our captives was the chief of the *Varta*. We ought to have lynched him in the next garden, but among these *Varta* men was also one of our people. We had already taken him prisoner once before and not killed him because he supported the Revolution; he now informed us about everything promptly and in detail. For this reason we decided not to kill anyone this time but to let them all go, alive and unharmed—including their chief.

They were all set free, but this prevented us from carrying out the attack. The commotion caused by us holding up the detachment prompted the headquarters to arrange a raid throughout Gulyai-Polye, forcing us to leave town that same night.

## Chapter 5

### Our progress through the *raions* and the environs of Gulyai-Polye.

We departed Gulyai-Polye *raion* and set out for the *raions* in the Sinelnikovo – Slavgorod region.

Because of the patrols of *Hetmano*-German-Austrian punitive detachments, our journey became so difficult that we were compelled to make our way from one village to the next in groups of two or three. And even with such precautions we lost two comrades. They were surprised by one of the German detachments and, when they refused to surrender, were shot down from a distance like partridges.

As we made our way from village to village—sometimes on horseback, sometimes on foot—we made contact with the action groups we had organized earlier and gave them instructions of a general nature.

Eventually we reached the banks of the Dnieper again, at a place where we had stashed some machine-guns and rifles. Here I issued an invitation to the peasant youth of several hamlets and the village of Vasilevka<sup>[44]</sup> to get together one more time to hear my report about the intention of our Gulyai-Polye group to escalate our struggle from underground work to open revolt against the *Hetman* and the Austro-German army.

Two or three days later the peasant youth of this region came together. And one more time, animated with unquenchable enthusiasm, I addressed them on the following theme: the launching by the Gulyai-Polyans of an open revolt against the butchers of the Revolution in Ukraine—when it was going to happen, what weapons we would use, and what ruthless methods we would be seeking to apply to these butchers and the bourgeoisie which was backing them.

This was not the first time the youth of this region had heard

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44 Vasilevka is now perched on the edge of the Dnieper Reservoir, formed in 1932 when the construction of the Dnieper Hydro-electric Station (near Alexandrovsk) was completed. The village was opposite one of the famed Dnieper Rapids, now submerged.

me talking about the fast-approaching hour when the toilers of the oppressed Ukrainian villages would take revenge on their enemies. But they had never heard me speak with as much passion and indignation against the butchers and express the hope that their ascendancy would soon come to an end—it only required decisive action on the part of all the toilers, both young and old. I was convinced of this, and these young people showed me they believed it as well when the time came for us to part. For they swore in front of each other, and in front of myself and my comrades, that when the first shot was fired in Gulyai-Polye they would rise up together, drive out the officials of the *Hetman's* government, apply themselves to disarming the Austro-German military units and, firmly grasping the banner of revolt in their work-hardened hands, unite their arms with the oppressed cities for the purpose of extending the common front of the Revolution and bringing about the triumph of the ideal of freedom and the right of working people to direct their own affairs without interference from the State.

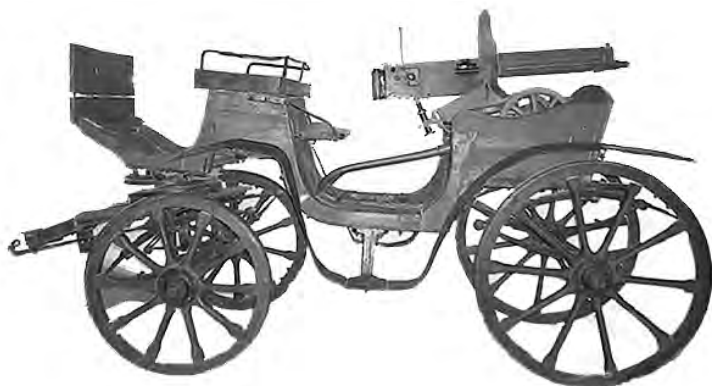
It should be noted, however, that while myself and my comrades from Gulyai-Polye were elated to find such enthusiasm among the peasant youth—an enthusiasm which also drew in older people—at the same time we had to maintain a cautious attitude, for the news from Gulyai-Polye *raion* was far from rosy.

Nevertheless there was no turning back for any of us.



On September 22, 1918, we armed ourselves with sub-machine-guns and Maxims and, taking along with us several comrades from Ternovka and Vasilevka, set out for Gulyai-Polye with the intention of covering the 90 km distance in nine hours.

Along the way near the village of Lukashovo we encountered one of the *Hetman's* cavalry detachments commanded by two officers. I was wearing a captain's uniform myself. The glitter of my epaulets apparently reassured these officers, for they approached within 70 – 80 paces of us. This gave me the opportunity to stand up at full height on the *tachanka* on which I was riding and train a machine-gun on the *Hetman's* detachment. As my *tachanka* moved forward, I ordered the detachment to halt and surrender



This tachanka can be viewed today in the Gulyai-Polye Regional Museum. It is equipped with a Maxim gun (PM M1910), a heavy machine-gun used by the Russian Army in World War I.

its weapons.

But in the blink of an eye the soldiers had unshouldered their rifles and aimed them at us.

Our Maxim began to chatter, and its bullets flew over the heads of the riders. They all dismounted and signalled they were laying down their arms.

The partisans quickly surrounded them and seized their weapons.

Interrogating the officers, we learned they were *pomeshchiks*. One of them was Lieutenant Murkovsky. Back in the spring he had organized auxiliary detachments for the Austro-German occupation of Ukraine at his own expense. Now he was leading a cavalry detachment which belonged to the Alexandrovsk *Varta*.

For our own part, we claimed to be a counter-revolutionary punitive detachment. My comrades and I introduced ourselves. I said we'd been dispatched from Kiev by the *Hetman* himself into this rebellious Alexandrovsk *uyezd* to restore order.

The commander of the disarmed detachment then explained to me where he and his detachment were from and where they were going. He was headed for his father's estate to lie up for a day or two. He told me which villages and *khutors* on my intended route were occupied by Austro-German troops; he told me their numbers, the type of weapons they had, and also pinpointed the



movements of punitive detachments which were making their way from village to village. As a matter of fact, the commander was so carried away babbling to me about the valour of his and the other punitive detachments in the struggle with the rebellious revolutionary peasantry of Zaporozhia, that he paid no attention to my nervous blinking, trembling lips, and twitching facial muscles. The commander finished his spiel by saying to me:

“Would you care to drop in at our estate for a visit? We can dine together and hunt wild duck on our pond. And tomorrow, if you have urgent business to attend to, you can take off.”

I broke into ferocious laughter and replied:

“Lieutenant, you don’t fathom me at all. I’ve committed myself to fighting that scoundrel, the *Hetman*, and his base of support—the whole counter-revolutionary swarm with the Austro-German *junkers* front and centre. Don’t you know who I am? I’m the revolutionary Makhno. My name is sufficiently well known to you, is it not? My detachment and I are dealing death to all the butchers and killers of freedom, the murderers of the working people of Ukraine, the killers of the Revolution which is the means by which working people win their own freedom but which the butchers annihilate.”

The commander fell to his knees and tried to grab my legs to kiss them. His subordinates also fell on their knees. But when I had recoiled from him a few steps, he began to pull out his hair and then, coming to his senses, proposed that I accompany him to his estate where he would give me as much money as I desired.

Similar proposals were put forward by his subordinates. The commander’s brother-in-law, also an officer (at least he was wearing an officer’s epaulets), declared to me directly:

“Whatever amount of money you want, Mr. Revolutionary Makhno, my family will pay you, but I can promise you it will be at least 20,000 rubles.”

My guys, with rifles trained on each of these pitiful specimens, couldn’t restrain themselves. They broke out laughing at these offers of bribes and shouted to me:

“Do you think we should pardon these scoundrels?”

“Well, we can’t kill them,” I said to my friends, “we don’t have

any evidence of whatever savage deeds they may have committed in struggling against the Revolution, against the toilers. Just quickly tie them up and move them off the road to some low spot 100 – 150 *sazhens* away and leave them there. No one is going to untie them after dark, so they'll have to wait till morning for shepherds or peasants passing by to release them. Meanwhile we'll be far away on the other side of the Dnieper." (I mentioned the word "Dnieper" deliberately to mislead the prisoners. In reality we were going to keep going towards Gulyai-Polye.)

But the disarmed hirelings of the *Hetmanate* suddenly started running away in all directions. We all jumped off our horses and wagons and took off after them in hot pursuit. The ones that were easy to catch we grabbed and led back to the wagons; those that were hard to catch we shot.

We captured the officers and some of the rank-and-file *Varta* troops. My guys yelled at me again:

"Are we still going to pamper this bunch?"

"No, apparently they are true servants of that scoundrel, the *Hetman*, and the Austro-German *junkers*," I said in response to their grumbling. And I added:

"Today they tried to bribe me. Tomorrow they will try to bribe someone else and it might be someone weak enough to accommodate them. No, no, there is no mercy for them! To release those who serve the butchers of the Revolution for money and help them annihilate us, the toilers—that we cannot do, especially after their attempt to escape in order to avoid being tied up and peacefully detained for a certain time somewhere off the road, while we, who never sought an encounter with them, continued on our way."

Scarcely had I uttered my decision when part of the detachment sprang into action. I could only watch while a firing squad was formed. I told them:

"Make short work of it!"

And the rest of this detachment was shot.



Now we were mounted on the horses of this detachent—fine, strong animals, for they were mostly the "property" of their former riders. That was a time when *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks* entering the

service of the *Hetman's* mounted *Varta* brought their own horses with them.

And we, now well-informed about the deployment of the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* detachments, made our way along the roads leading towards Gulyai-Polye.

We had gone half a dozen *verts* from the place where the detachment had been annihilated and were passing some old estates which were part of the lands of "*Pan Mirgorodsky*," when suddenly the chief of the Lukashovo *Varta*, also a lieutenant, emerged from one of these estates and asked:

"Do you know what the shooting was about in the direction you're coming from?"

I answered him:

"You're a *Varta* commander and you don't know what's going on in your own *raion*? We didn't hear any shooting."

The commander had a fit and told us what he thought of punitive detachments:

"All you military units get paid to ride around the country but you never know anything about anything."

I interrupted him abruptly and asked:

"And whom do you serve?"

"The State and its head, His Excellency *Pan Hetman Pavel Skoropadsky*,"<sup>[45]</sup> was the answer.

"In that case we have no time to bother with you," I told him and, turning to my comrades, added: "Disarm him and hang him, like a dog, from the highest cross in the cemetery. Leave him the way he is, just pin a placard to his chest that reads:

**Fight for the liberation of the toilers, not for the butchers and tyrants!**



The executions of Murkovsky's detachment and the commander of the Lukashovo *Varta* were minor incidents in comparison with our impending actions against the Counter-Revolution.

"Decisive actions requiring our total commitment are still in the future. We shall launch them from Gulyai-Polye and its environs," I told myself and asserted the same to all my insurgent

<sup>45</sup> Spoken in Ukrainian.

friends as we galloped through the night without halting. We passed through *khutors* and hamlets which as often as not were occupied by Austro-German troops, sound asleep except for their sentries. But it wasn't hard for us to get past the sentries because we were wearing caps with yellow bands and uniforms with epaulets and riding dock-tailed horses from the detachment we had annihilated.

On September 23, 1918, we rode into Gulyai-Polye. But it turned out to be full of Austro-German troops. We avoided disaster only because, instead of crossing the bridge leading to the centre of Gulyai-Polye, we turned left and passed quickly through the outskirts.

It was impossible to stay in Gulyai-Polye. We left behind one wagon with five partisans, because the horses couldn't go any further. Despite the fact that dawn was breaking, our Bochanska peasants (from an outlying section of Gulyai-Polye) hid this wagon along with the horses and men—all in the blink of an eye. As natives of Gulyai-Polye, it was humiliating for us that we couldn't stay in Gulyai-Polye that morning. From Bochanska we made our way to Peschanska, even further from the centre of the village, where we hoped to find suitable shelter. Indeed this was where our best secret hideaways were located. But it turned out that raids had been ongoing in this neighbourhood for a whole week and it was quite likely we would be immediately discovered. Therefore we took to the road again and headed to the village of Marfopol, some 5 to 7 *versts* from Gulyai-Polye.

When we arrived at this village, it was already broad daylight. As a result, it was impossible to hide in the village. Indeed, the homes where we intended to stay were deserted because the peasants owners had all been arrested by the Germans. They were now sitting closely guarded in Gulyai-Polye, accused of harbouring the "dangerous but hard-to-catch Makhno and his closest comrades."

This circumstance compelled us to head off-road in search of a suitable *balka*, where we would be out of sight of traffic and be able to graze our horses and catch some rest for ourselves.

Gallopig out of the village, we turned into a field and soon found ourselves at the edge of a long and deep ravine—the so-



A 19<sup>th</sup> century map of Gulyai-Polye village and its neighbourhood shows a number of *balkas* (ravines) cutting into the steppe and leading towards the shallow valley of the Gaichur River which flows northwestward through the village.

called Khundayev *Balka*. Here we halted. We set up machine-gun posts around our position, and unsaddled or unharnessed our horses and set them to grazing. Then we lay down to rest.

But we weren't able to rest for very long. Some herdsmen from Gulyai-Polye looking for cows to milk stumbled upon us. Naturally, after seeing us, these herdsmen passed on the information to others of their kind. Our nerves were already stressed to the limit, and then these herdsmen showed up out of nowhere.

I got up and decided to show myself. I walked towards the herdsmen and called them together in one place. I explained to them why we were staying in this *balka*. I convinced them not to say a word to anyone about what they had seen. I told them we had to fight against the Austro-German army, against the *Hetman* and his regime, and against the *Hetman's* laws. I told the herdsmen they should support our struggle, if only by not betraying us to the authorities or their secret agents, the so-called *shpiks*.

I explained to them that our struggle against the Germans and the *Hetman* must be transformed into an all-encompassing Ukrainian peasant revolution, and that then we, the toilers, would be victorious. I asked their opinions about what I had just said as we walked along together looking for their cows. They stopped, and stood there gaping at me, but didn't utter a word. How come?

It turned out they were scared to death by my sudden appearance. I encouraged them to speak up as true sons of the toiling peasantry. And it turned out they had been told that I had collected a lot of money from the Gulyai-Polye peasants and then run off to Moscow. There I had supposedly bought a fancy *barin's* house and lived in luxury, never even giving a thought to the peasantry.

I inquired where and from whom they had heard all this. They said:

"We heard it from our masters, and also read it in a proclamation of the Austro-German headquarters."

And right away one of them ran to his herdsman's hut and brought me this proclamation, written in both Ukrainian and Russian.

I read it and immediately began to set the story straight, showing how the bourgeoisie was deliberately lying about me in order to get the peasants to unite around them and fight against the Revolution and the revolutionaries. Upon hearing this, my listeners declared they had never taken this proclamation seriously.

"It hurt us when you left Gulyai-Polye. But now we see you have returned and this is very good,"<sup>[46]</sup> the herdsmen told me with tears in their eyes.

Then they provided me with some bread and two melons, and promised to keep quiet about seeing me. I thanked them, and our conversation ended.

I was about to leave when suddenly Liuty came dashing up between the cows. He was very angry that I had spent so much time with the herdsmen. Without bothering to find out what we had been talking about, he pulled a revolver out of his belt and addressed the herdsmen:

"You've seen Nestor Ivanovich and me. If we find out that you've been talking about this anywhere today before sundown, you will die."

The poor herdsmen were scared to death. I had to argue with Liuty a bit and then it took ten minutes to calm down the herdsmen.

I prevailed on Liuty to apologize for treating the herdsmen

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46 Spoken in Ukrainian.

like traitors, and threatening them. Liuty apologized and we all parted as friends.



It was almost noon. We had something to eat and then I proposed to my comrades that we take the horses to a pond to drink. Once the horses were saddled and harnessed, we could take a nap for about three hours.

But by three o'clock we still couldn't stir from our hiding place. There was too much traffic on the roads, and we preferred not to show ourselves to travellers.

Thus we spent a boring day in Khudayev *Balka*, feeding the horses and resting ourselves.

But towards evening the sky suddenly clouded over and pouring rain began. This was a bad situation for us. We had to make up our minds what to do. It was impossible to remain outside overnight. Every one of my wonderful friends proceeded to reproach me as if I were to blame because we were in a *balka* in pouring rain facing an unknown future. And they all seemed to think I was the only who could come up with a solution.

I was in a bad mood. I wasn't angry at anyone in particular, just at the predicament we found ourselves in. Addressing my friends, I said:

"My dear friends, if you think I'm the only one with enough brains to get us out of this situation, then we're in real trouble."

"Don't play the fool," exclaimed Marchenko and Karetnik, "we're on the threshold of serious military-revolutionary actions. You took the initiative—and we're counting on you to keep us moving forward. We'll help you, we'll even correct you if necessary, but, as always, we await your proposals. What have you got to say about our predicament?"

I burst out laughing and said:

"If you really want to know what I think we ought to do, well, my position is that we should spend the night in Stepanovka village or, if that's not possible, in Marfopol. We can figure out our next move later. And in order not to waste any more time," I added, "I shall go now with a couple of you to Stepanovka to arrange quarters for all of us. Agreed?"

All my comrades expressed their approval, and right away myself and two of them mounted horses and rode to Stepanovka.

At the village we quickly collected several peasants. I explained to them our detachment, consisting of machine-gun-equipped *tachankas* and some cavalry, was camped a few *versts* away in a field under the open sky. It couldn't stay there. By morning we would be frozen and would lose our mettle for fighting. I told the peasants I assumed they supported our struggle and understood the necessity of finding shelter in the village.

Our peasants generally don't like to waste time talking. They immediately sent some of their own to the Khundayev *Balka* and by nightfall the detachment was installed in quarters in the village.



I spent almost the whole night in discussion with the villagers, both young and old, about how they had been deceived by the *Hetman's* agents. These agents had told them:

"About this Makhno whom you respected and supported throughout 1917 and into the spring of 1918: he abandoned you and went off to Moscow, to the *katzaps*. There he bought himself a fancy house and is now living the high life. All the revolutionaries are like that—they only want to get rich at your expense."

"The *Hetman's* agents are forever trying to win us over to their side," the peasants said. "They want us to help them capture revolutionaries so they can be handed over to the German and Austrian authorities."

"And what are you going to say to them, now that you've seen me right here among you?" I inquired.

"What could we say? We've known all along that they were lying to us, but we can't tell that to their faces—they'd have us arrested and killed. But now that you're here, maybe we can go grab these provocateurs and teach them a lesson."

The Stepanovka peasants were quite serious—all I had to do was say "Yes, let's go" or "Let's go right now and wipe out the *Hetman's* agents" and they would be ready to act. But we had more important things to do than chase after those agents.

The main problem facing us was how to advance our cause to the next level where we, along with all the partisan groups we



had organized, would engage in decisive armed actions against the *Hetman's* regime and the Austro-German armed forces which were propping up this regime, defending it everywhere with their bayonets.

Every day I told my friends and comrades from the GGAK the same thing: the more boldly we acted against the Counter-Revolution and avoided any kind of doctrinal narrow-mindedness, the better the toiling peasantry would understand us and the sooner we would rouse them to take part in our struggle. The organized revolutionary peasantry would be the motive force of the Revolution, a force which would engage the working population generally in the process of setting goals for this Revolution. The Revolution in Ukraine, although a continuation of the Russian Revolution, would differ from the latter in being infused with the spirit of anti-statism. Here the conception of freedom and independence would expand spontaneously in a specifically Ukrainian manner, but in a way which would correspond to the real demands of the moment, i.e. with due consideration of unfolding events and the forces opposing these events.

And, thanks to my friends, I could indulge my thoughts in this direction and plan our organizational actions in this spirit.

The subsequent development of my thinking and the practical activities of our organization which ensued from it completely divorced me from the urban anarchism of that time. This abstract, artificial anarchism seemed to be preventing my ideological comrades in the cities from taking part in the practical matter of the Revolution.

In Stepanovka village I emphasized this opinion to my comrades for the umpteenth time. And although I received some sharp responses in return, such as "You're too hard on them," etc., to me it was increasingly clear that the development of our movement would be proceeding without any significant influence from its urban counterpart. The hothouse nature of city life was sapping the strength of our movement there and giving rise to disintegrating and disorganizing tendencies.

I carried on discussions on these matters with my friends and comrades, as well as the Stepanovka peasants, for the whole night

and into the following day. My position as head of our detachment gave me a certain influence in these discussions. It was only during the following night that, after preliminary negotiations with the peasants of Marfopol, we moved to that village.

Here we held an especially important meeting, after which I wrote out sets of instructions to be delivered by our Marfopol courier to Gulyai-Polye and to our action groups in other villages (these groups were regarded by us as branches of our main group).

We received a reply on the very same day to our inquiry to the group in Gulyai-Polye as to whether they were prepared for open rebellion: "Your presence here is indispensable, Nestor Ivanovich. In fact,, we insist you come to us this very night."

We consulted among ourselves. Marchenko and Karetnik were chosen to take my place in the detachment. During the night of September 26, I prepared to move from Marfopol to Gulyai-Polye. However, I wasn't able to. The Gulyai-Polye *Varta* and the Austro-German punitive units prevented me. These outfits were in the habit of carrying out brutal raids two or three times a week in the smaller villages, subjecting them to searches. They were looking for weapons and so-called "politically unreliable elements" among the peasants. And it so happened that very night they launched a raid on Marfopol.

In the course of this raid one of the punitive units stumbled upon our location. I was staying in a lodging with Marchenko, Petya Liuty, and a machine-gunner who had his weapon with him. Our host was panic-stricken, for he was facing certain death. So were we, but we kept our heads. Coolly and quickly we set about delivering the appropriate revolutionary response to these gangsters in uniform. Without wasting any time, I issued orders (thereby violating a basic tenet of armchair anarchism) to leave the cavalry horses at their feeding troughs, hide their saddles under straw, and then to sally forth from the courtyard with only a *tachanka* mounted with a machine-gun. I myself sat on the *tachanka* while cautioning the machine-gun operator to stay calm and fire only when I gave the order.

My devoted friends, the bravest of the brave, left everything behind in their quarters except their carbines and ammunition.

They followed the *tachanka*, in which I was standing along with the gunner and driver, as we withdrew through the courtyards and gardens.

About two dozen Germans, Austrians, and *Varta* guards came after us, shouting “Stop!” and aiming their guns in our direction. I yelled at the driver:

“Turn the horses around and head straight for these scoundrels! GAVRUSHA, PREPARE TO FIRE!”

The gunner Gavrusha crouched behind his weapon as if he was glued to it. The driver frantically turned the *tachanka* around 180 degrees, then nervously tugged on the reins as if he wanted to halt. The members of the punitive detachment were only about fifty paces away now, and their carbines were pointed directly at us.

I raised my left hand and yelled at these scoundrels:

“*Pan*, stop, don’t shoot! We’re militia.”

One of the enemies responded in a snarling voice:

“What militia?”<sup>[47]</sup>

But they ceased to aim their guns at us.

I shouted to Gavrusha: “FIRE!” while I myself also fired at the attackers. The Maxim began to chatter, not too fast but with great precision. Not one of the attackers remained upright. They were mowed down under the hail of bullets: some were killed outright, others were lightly wounded and pretended to be dead.

My comrades on foot quickly surrounded our foes and told them to get up. Those who crawled into the bushes and tried to fire on us from there were shot on the spot. Several of the wounded were collected and led away. Then we quickly got to work—some of us to fetch our horses and saddles, others to chase after the members of the raiding party who were still at large. I personally ran to the telegraph and telephone poles with three comrades and cut the lines to Gulyai-Polye.

The comrades pursuing the soldiers and guards captured some of them. The commander of the Gulyai-Polye *Varta* turned out to be among them. He was immediately shot. The soldiers and rank-and-file guardsmen were loaded on their own wagons.

“What shall we do with the dead?” The question flashed

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47 Spoken in Ukrainian.

through my brain. The *Hetman's* government and the Austro-German command would inflict reprisals on the peasants of the village. At that period whenever a German or Austrian soldier or a *Varta* guard was killed in a certain village or on the land belonging to that village, the authorities exacted revenge by shooting a fixed number of peasants and imposing a heavy fine which had to be paid within a certain time frame. Failure to pay this fine was punished with further shootings, confiscation of belongings, etc.

So I immediately ordered the peasants who came running to help us to get some shovels, gather up all the corpses, and haul them outside the village to some Dibrivki woodlot. There they could be buried or simply dumped.

This was done just as I ordered.

Now we said goodbye to the peasants and took off in the direction of Turkenovka village. Along the way we turned off the road as if to go around the village, but remained in one of the *balkas*. Here I interrogated the prisoners. Among them there turned out to be two fellows from the Austrian army who were Ukrainians from Galicia. They agreed to write a letter dictated by me to the German and Austrian soldiers in which our insurgent organization suggested they not listen to their officers, and stop murdering Ukrainian revolutionary peasants and workers. Rather than interfering with the revolutionary movement for liberation, we proposed they kill their own officers who had led them into Ukraine and made them the murderers of the best sons of the working people. They should return to their own homeland and create a revolution there to free their own oppressed brothers and sisters.

"If you don't follow this advice," the letter emphasized, "the Ukrainian revolutionary toilers under the banner of revolt against the government of your officers and their puppet Skoropadsky will be compelled to exterminate all of you without exception, along with your officers and agents of the *Hetman*, as murderers and hangmen."

Having committed this letter to the prisoners and released them, we ourselves set off in a certain direction while still in sight of the prisoners. But as soon as it was dark, we turned off to the

left, then back, and ended up 17 *versts* from Gulyai-Polye in the village of Shanzharovka<sup>[48]</sup>.

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48 This name appears in gazeteers as Sanzharovka (Ukrainian: *Sanzharivka*). Like many place names in steppe Ukraine, it is of Turkish origin (the Turkish “sanzhak” means “banner.”)

## Chapter 6

**Austro-German troops reoccupy Marfopol after we wiped out their detachment there. We make an appearance in Gulyai-Polye.**

As soon as we left Marfopol, more troops arrived. Immediately upon entering the village they shot the oldest member of the family which had put up Marchenko, Liuty, and myself for the night. Then they herded the villagers to an assembly where those peasants whose demeanor wasn't satisfactory to the ferocious officers were beaten with *shompols*. Some of the peasants were arrested and sent to Gulyai-Polye where they were interrogated under torture. And then the wildly disproportionate fine of 60,000 rubles cash was imposed upon this little village, an amount which the peasants were supposed to come up with within 24 hours and deliver to the headquarters in Gulyai-Polye.

Many of the peasant families were quite lacking in the means to pay what was demanded of them. They were beaten with rifle butts and *shompols*. Their cries soon came to our attention: news about these events spread throughout the other villages and settlements of Gulyai-Polye *raion*. But these were not cries of desperation, a circumstance which the stupid torturers failed to notice.

For neither we nor the peasants were capable of forgiving this unbridled violence towards the villagers of Marfopol on the part of the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* satraps.

On the following day, after conferring, we decided to split up: the comrades from the Dnieper riverside and those from some of the other *raions* headed back to their homes with the intention of raising in revolt all the peasants who were most committed to the Revolution, without waiting another minute. The rest of us, natives of Gulyai-Polye *raion*, headed for Gulyai-Polye village itself, currently stripped of its main Austro-German forces who were out tracking down revolutionary peasants. Remaining in the village were only one company of soldiers and their devoted flunkies, the 80-man strong *Varta* unit.

Once in Gulyai-Polye we further divided our forces, dispersing

them throughout the *raion* and leaving only seven men, myself included, for the village itself. Our Gulyai-Polye underground group, which had remained rock-solid throughout, arranged a meeting for the following night after our arrival. All our armed forces in the immediate vicinity were to assemble in an open field so I could speak to them and carry out a review.

It was quite risky for a large number of peasants to leave the village in the same direction. Nevertheless more than 400 people came. Every one of us, completely outside the law, felt inspired. We were overwhelmed with the desire to fight for freedom and independence for the toilers, for the Revolution and its ideals, and for the building of a free society of toilers based on these ideals.

I was deeply moved as I viewed the orderly columns of peasant militants. It would have been nice to have had some of my urban comrades present, the ones who were amused by my frequent pointed remarks about their groups' lack of interest in the rural folk and their lively and creative forces. I would have liked to ask them why forces like ours were not being organized throughout the country. But then I immediately realized there was no point in thinking about them.

Everybody sat down—some even lay on the ground—and we discussed the question of the moment: when and from what direction should we begin our revolutionary attack on Gulyai-Polye village, followed by the conquest of the whole *raion*.

Everyone was in favour of launching our attack the following night!

Then instructions were issued: at nightfall the people from the Peschan and Guryan districts were to block off all routes of entry and exit from Gulyai-Polye in the direction of Fedorovka, Voskresenka, and Pologi—villages where there were significant concentrations of Austro-German troops. And the people from Bochanska, Yarmarkovska, Podolyanska, and Verbovska (all districts of Gulyai-Polye) would head for the centre of Gulyai-Polye and try to seize control of the village by routing the *Varta* and the Austro-German company—possibly taking prisoners, but definitely eliminating the enemy's headquarters.

Then we quietly dispersed to our lodgings.

That night neither I nor my closest friends could get any sleep. I wrote out two proclamations in the hope that, if we captured the centre of Gulyai-Polye, they could be printed up and distributed throughout all the *raions* which our organization had undertaken to organize and raise in revolt. My comrades deliberated over our intended plan of action.

The following day another company of Austro-German troops returned to Gulyai-Polye. We found this a bit worrisome, but didn't alter our plan. In the evening all our militants in all the districts of Gulyai-Polye were ready for action, and we launched our attack. The ensuing action went smoothly (at least from our point of view) and we drove out the Austro-German soldiers and the *Varta* with a minimum of effort. Regrettably, we weren't able to capture their staff: it fled before anyone else.

As soon as we had occupied Gulyai-Polye we established our control over the post office, the telephone exchange, and the railway station. Comrade Karetnik and myself, along with the proprietors of the local print shop, spent the rest of the night and half of the following day seeing to the printing of our two leaflets. One was an appeal to the peasants to support their representatives at the revolutionary-insurgent headquarters and boldly organize their own volunteer military detachments linked to our staff. There was no time to lose if we were to rid Ukraine of these *oprichniks*, whose presence in the country was so unwanted by working people. The second leaflet explained the tasks facing the peasantry once we had got rid of all those parasites.

The peasants of Gulyai-Polye village were all astir. They arranged a meeting which was attended by whole families. Everyone expressed their views about the moment and sought my opinion, and the opinion of the GGAK, about what needed to be done first of all. They wanted to know which places should be liberated first, and which routes should be cleared of the enemy. One sensed the authentic voice of the Revolution in listening to these people who had frequently endured beatings with rifle butts and floggings with *shompols*. These ragged toilers of the Ukrainian village had been plundered and trampled on—but their spirit was unbroken.

Although we controlled Gulyai-Polye village, I knew we



couldn't neglect the rest of its *raion*. There, too, the peasants had taken heart and were setting about liberating themselves. They were poorly armed and whenever they tried to take the field, they were attacked and crushed by the *Varta* and the Austro-German punitive detachments. But the revolutionary spirit was spreading everywhere. The peasants expected that any day now the revolutionaries in Gulyai-Polye village would come to their aid and set up a solid front against their enemies, a front which would be extended to protect other villages and other *raions*. This indeed was our intention and we applied ourselves to the task at hand.

But in the meantime the Austro-German command was not dawdling. Having large sums of money at its disposal, it was able to augment its own spies with numerous workers, *kulaks*, merchants, and shopkeepers. Through this network of small fry it was kept informed of our activities, usually in a timely manner. Not content to attack Gulyai-Polye from one side, the command hurriedly regrouped its forces with the intention of encircling the village so as to bottle up the "elusive" Makhno, as they referred to me, and his associates.

This circumstance forced us patrol the area around Gulyai-Polye all night long and set up listening posts and pickets in expectation of the enemy's attack.

Suddenly one morning there were telephone calls to the *Revkom* in Gulyai-Polye from the German regional headquarters in Pologi and the Austrians in Pokrovskoye and Rozhestvenka. They were asking for "Mister" Makhno.

I jumped on a horse and galloped to the telephone exchange. We spoke. The Pologi authorities proposed that the *Revkom* or the insurgent staff authorize a battalion of Austro-German troops to enter the village. I replied that the people didn't want this. And if they decided to come anyway, we would greet them with weapons in hand.

The Austrian staff in Pokrovskoye inquired:

"Is it true the rebels have cut the throats of all the rich people in Gulyai-Polye?"

My response:

"Nonsense. All the rich people fled together with you."

The Austrians in Rozhestvenka threatened to advance on Gulyai-Polye and annihilate it along with its inhabitants if the insurgent staff refused to release their quartermaster personnel who had been taken prisoner. I replied:

“Go ahead. We’ll enjoy watching you take to your heels and scamper away. Our insurgent staff has several thousand armed peasants at its disposal. They are awaiting you.”

Telephone calls from all directions, with the same results: crude profanity from the Austro-German command’s interpreters.

While all these “heroes” from the enemy camps were carrying on negotiations with the revolutionary-insurgent staff, i.e. the *Revkom*, we cranked out two more proclamations. Part of the press run was given to our peasant couriers to distribute to every village and hamlet and, hopefully, to the urban workers of Alexandrovsk, Pavlograd, and Mariupol, as well as the Donbas miners. The other part we loaded on our wagons to take with us, for we felt that the Austro-German command would unleash a general offensive against Gulyai-Polye any day now and we would be compelled to leave the village again for a while. Then we would conduct a raid with a highly mobile, well-armed, but small detachment throughout the *raions* with the goal of carrying on agitation and distributing these proclamations.

As I recall, my friends were elated with our success and wanted to believe we could hold out in Gulyai-Polye for an extended period of time, especially since encouraging news had begun to reach us from other *raions*. Several of our insurgent groups had emerged victorious in clashes with *Hetmanite* and Austro-German punitive detachments and they intended to make their way to Gulyai-Polye. But I was cautious and convinced my friends that their enthusiasm could lead to fatal errors. If we followed our impulses, we would summon all the peasants and workers we could get to Gulyai-Polye to engage any attacking enemy forces in a decisive battle. However, we lacked the means to win such a battle. And our defeat would lead to catastrophic consequences for the subsequent development of our insurgent groups, who looked to us for both practical and ideological guidance. I said:

“In the event of a serious attack by our enemies on Gulyai-

Polye, we must immediately abandon the village. Leaving right away would make it look as if the population only tolerated us and did not render us active support.”

It should be noted that during our stay in Gulyai-Polye the local armed population was active only after dark, patrolling around the outskirts and guarding the railway station and other key points where enemy troops might show up. In the daylight hours only members of our detachment and some especially bold peasants were on duty.

“This is what we’re going to do,” I insisted to my deputies. “The moment Gulyai-Polye is attacked by enemy forces we shall abandon it, only making sure the local population carefully hides its weapons, and then carries on calmly, without panicking, so as to create the impression that our detachment was solely responsible for whatever happened here.”

My friends were very unhappy with my strategem, but not one of them protested against it. On the contrary, they now applied themselves to putting our plan into action.

Our staff discussed in detail how to implement our plan. Accordingly, A. Marchenko transmitted our decision through his military “attachés” in all the *sotnias* of Gulyai-Polye. And now the staff was no longer overloaded with local concerns and could turn its attention to other tasks.



One fine day I was again called to the telephone to take a call from the Austro-German staff in Pologi. The commander there wanted to have a talk with me: why in my appeals to Ukrainian working people did I refer to the Austro-German regular troops as “bands,” and to their commanders as “murderers,” etc. I “clarified” this for him, and our conversation went on for some time.

Instinctively I sensed that the commander was drawing out our conversation for a definite purpose, and I hastened to warn comrades Marchenko and Karetnik to be especially vigilant and make sure our observers in the bell tower and at the guard posts were alert.

“It’s apparent that enemy has decided to move on us today,” I told them, “we must find out in time what direction they are

coming from, which troops are involved, and what armaments they have.”

As for myself, I continued to stay by the telephone. During this time our staff received telephone calls from Pokrovskoye and Rozhdestvenka, but I didn't get a chance to take these calls. As matter of fact, events unfolded as I predicted. The stationmaster at Gulyai-Polye Station advised our observers that two troop *echelons* had left Pologi headed towards Gulyai-Polye. As the courier was reporting this to me (it was highly inadvisable to communicate this by telephone), I received a new message from the stationmaster:

“Nestor Ivanovich, the two *echelons* of punitive troops have halted before reaching the station and the troops are disembarking and heading in the direction of the village.”

I immediately hung up the receiver and made sure the regional telephone lines we needed were kept clear. Hurriedly, with two machine-guns and 15 or so mixed infantry and cavalry, I started out from the village to meet these vaunted, “invincible” Austro-German military units. The units were already half way to the village, but not yet deployed in columns. We let them get closer, then commenced firing accurately with our machine-guns. This forced them to hit the dirt, then spread out and form a front. They commenced firing furiously at us.

We had to laugh at the pitiful manoeuvres of our opponent, as we continued to keep our distance while firing accurately. But when we noticed a group of enemy cavalry on our flank we immediately disengaged and, falling back all the way through the village to the other side, dug in and continued to answer the frantic volleys of the enemy, which were concentrated exclusively on the bell tower and the centre of Gulyai-Polye.

While this was going on, several dozen armed peasants came to join us, wishing to share whatever fate was in store for our detachment. This left another thousand or so armed men in the village, of which three or four hundred had seen constant guard duty with us, and who were now sitting at home as per our instructions, awaiting an uncertain future.

So there we sat on the Bochanska side of Gulyai-Polye, assembling our wagon train, and trying to deprive the enemy of as

much daylight time as possible. But when enemy reinforcements showed up, we had to take off.

“Good-bye, we’ll see you again in a week or two,” we told the people of Gulyai-Polye, and left the village.

We headed towards the *raions* near Yuzovka<sup>[49]</sup> and Mariupol with the aim of expanding our field of activity. At the same time we would have to fend off our enemies who were intent on tracking us down and crushing us. Along the way we confiscated some vital supplies from *pomeshchiks*, *kulaks*, and the Austro-German troops protecting these crooks: several *tachankas*, one machine-gun, a few cavalry horses with saddles, and various types of weapons. Those *pomeshchiks* who greeted us with gunfire were annihilated, along with their mansions.

We halted only after midnight at the village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka (also known as Dibrivki), renowned for the nearby Dibrivki forest.

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49 More of an industrial complex than a city, the Russian-sounding Yuzovka was actually named after John Hughes, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Welsh capitalist who owned several mines in the area. During most of the Soviet era the city was known as Stalin or Stalino, and is now called Donetsk, after a tributary of the Don River. There is a tradition (unattested in official Soviet documents) that the city was called Trotsk for a few months in 1923.

## Chapter 7

### Our sojourn in the village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka. Our meeting with the detachment of Shchus and the merging of it with our ours.

Arriving at the village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka<sup>[46]</sup>, we decided not to enter it by crossing the bridge over the river Volchya. We sent a reconnaissance patrol across the river at a ford which prowled up and down the streets and established that the Austro-German troops had not been seen in the village for nearly three days. Then the whole detachment crossed over. We are able to pass quietly through the centre of the village and halt at the other side, which was right at the edge of the forest. It was three or four hours till dawn. The detachment settled in beside a courtyard where we needed to post sentries on only three sides. Everyone, with the exception of the sentries, lay down to sleep.

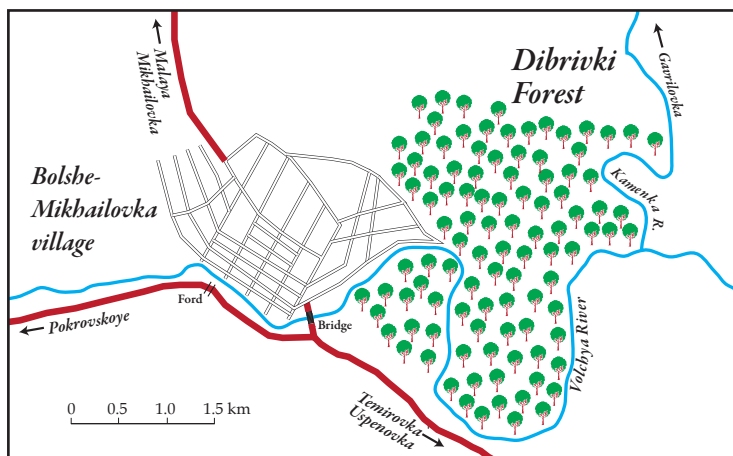
At daybreak we were inundated by a crowd of peasant children. From them we learned about the presence in the forest of the detachment of Comrade Shchus. I had heard about this detachment previously. But then it was under the command of the sailor Brova<sup>[47]</sup>, whom I didn't know. In the descriptions I had heard, this outfit had been compared to a band of Caucasian brigands. That's why its activities hadn't interested me. But now it turned out to be under the command of Shchus, whom I vaguely remembered. He had been a courageous fighter in the GGAK detachment in the spring, taking part in the struggle against the Austro-German invasion. Karetnik jogged my memory some more so that finally I recalled him as a participant in our Taganrog conference.

We were all extremely glad to learn that Shchus had passed

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46 Makhno frequently refers to this village as Dibrivki, and its inhabitants as Dibrivchans, apparently following local usage.

47 Nykyfor Brova (? – 1921), a metalworker and an anarcho-communist from 1904, took part in the Russian Revolution of 1905-06. In World War I he served in the Imperial Russian Navy. In June 1918 he organized the Dibrivki partisan detachment to fight the occupying forces and the *Hetmanate*. Seriously wounded in August 1918, leadership of the group passed to his fellow-sailor Shchus. Despite rumours that he had died from his wounds, Brova recovered to play an important military role in the Civil War in 1919 – 1921 as a commander in the Insurgent Army.



Bolshe-Mikhailovka (Dibrivki) village and its adjacent forest. In 1918 the village had a population of about 5,000. Like other Ukrainian villages of the steppe region, it covered a considerable area as most dwellings had a large yard with out-buildings. The forest, with a total area of about 1000 hectares, included oak, pine, and birch trees. The Volchya River could easily be forded by cavalry west of the bridge.

safely through the front near Taganrog. And we were also glad he wasn't sitting around idly, but was taking action.

I tried to ascertain in which part of the forest his camp was located. I sent two messengers to find this detachment and bring back one or two members of it. This task was fulfilled. Afterwards I went into the forest myself to visit the detachment.

Comrade Shchus had received my note from the messengers and agreed to meet with me. However, he wasn't sure if it was really me or one of the *Hetman's* agents. Therefore he pulled his whole detachment—50 or 60 men—out of the sturdy dugout they had built, leaving only the wounded behind. Shchus was prepared, if the meeting turned out to be a trap, to offer determined resistance.

When I entered the clearing where I was supposed to meet Comrade Shchus, I saw his detachment drawn up in a square, half of its members wearing Austro-German uniforms. Thinking that I had blundered into an ambush, I quickly turned my horse so as to slink away. But then I heard a voice:

"Comrade Makhno, it is I, Shchus."

At the same time he released one of my messengers who had re-



Fyodor Shchus in 1918, wearing his sailor's dress uniform complemented with partisan weaponry. His sailor's cap bears the name of the battleship on which he served during World War I—the *Ioann Zlatoust* [John Chrysostom], part of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. He was a wrestling champion in the Fleet, having acquired some proficiency in jiu-jitsu, unusual for that time. See Skirda (2004), p. 315.

mained with him as a hostage. This finally convinced me. I headed straight into the clearing, towards the detachment. I greeted the detachment and Shchus himself. Only now when I had a good look at Shchus, who was wearing a German hussar's uniform (which fitted him perfectly) and was armed to the teeth, did I recognize the handsome sailor whom I had known earlier. We embraced



and exchanged kisses. His detachment also made a good impression, despite its varied attire, for it was clad in German, Austrian, and Ukrainian *haidamak* uniforms, not to mention peasant work clothes. Since everyone in the detachment was also armed to the teeth, it exuded an aura of martial ardour. There was noticeably a surge of enthusiasm when Shchus and I exchanged kisses.

Then I posed a question to Shchus:

“Comrade Shchus, what have you accomplished with this detachment up to now and what do you intend to do in the future?”

His answer was brief and to the point:

“So far I have carried out attacks on *pomeshchiks* returning to repossess their land, and annihilated both them and the Austrian and German soldiers guarding them.”

“And what is your attitude towards the *Hetman’s Varta*?”

“Usually I disperse them.”

“Is that everything?”

“I’m not taking on anything else at the moment, because there are still lots of ‘reptiles’ to annihilate.”

In these curt phrases Shchus told me everything I needed to know. He had engaged in the struggle against the oppressors according to his own interpretation of the resolution agreed upon by our Gulyai-Polyans at the conference in Taganrog. Given the short time frame one could hardly expect more. However, after meeting him personally and recalling my friends’ opinions about him, I couldn’t help but regret that a person of his mettle was sort of mindlessly expending his energies in that mode of struggle which he had embraced up to that point. After a moment of thought, I proposed that I explain to him my objectives, the objectives of our whole insurgent organization, most of whose members were on hand.

I told him about the work we had been carrying on. And in conclusion I said:

“I’m asking you and your detachment to leave the forest for the steppe—go to the villages and hamlets. Appeal to the peasants, especially the younger ones, to throw themselves into the fray with definite goals which everyone can understand. The support of the peasants will bestow upon us, the revolutionaries, the right

to pick up our weapon, raise our sword of retribution, and use it against all those who, in the name of state power and privilege, have raised their own sword against the toilers, against freedom and justice, aiming to annihilate all of us. Putting ourselves in the vanguard of the working people who are struggling against the Counter-Revolution and for the Revolution, we, the true sons of the toilers, will hurl ourselves into battle against the butchers.”

As I was speaking, Comrade Shchus bowed his head and stared at the ground without interrupting. But from time to time he would glance at his partisans and ask them if they heard what I was saying. He listened until I was finished and then, when I asked if he objected to anything I had said, he quickly straightened up and, with a child-like smile, grabbed me in a bear hug and yelled:

“Yes, yes, I am with you, Comrade Makhno!”

And the voices of the detachment rang out:

“Hurrah! Hurrah!”

Now we held a little meeting—myself, Shchus, my closest friends, and his closest friends—where we discussed about pulling his detachment out of the forest and into the village where we would immediately proceed to organizing the Dibrivki peasants.

When our meeting wrapped up, Shchus went to his detachment and asked the partisans what they thought about quitting the forest and entering the village, explaining to them the intent of this manoeuvre. The partisans approved our decision. I and my friends took off for our own detachment, and Shchus began preparing to leave for the village.



When Shchus's detachment of Dibrivkans emerged from the forest it encountered our detachment of Gulyai-Polyans. The two detachments fused together into one indivisible whole. The resultant new detachment was a military formation strong in spirit and willpower. I had a clear idea of our future activities. It had occurred to me (so far this was just my own idea) that our detachment was now strong enough to carry out a raid in the direction of Yuzovka, Mariupol, and Berdyansk, passing through all the villages, hamlets, and *khutors* on the way with the goal of inciting and organizing a revolt. At the same time we would be collecting

weapons and the necessary funds to support this great project.

One thing troubled me: Shchus's detachment included several wounded men. It seemed to me we had nowhere to leave them so we would have to take them with us. I didn't know if we could look after them properly and taking them would slow us down when we were being pursued by enemy forces. But my worries were soon dispelled because it turned out most of the wounded had fiancées in the village. As soon as the detachment appeared, these women found their wounded boyfriends and tended to their needs. And those women whose boyfriends were seriously wounded immediately declared themselves insurgents who wished to share the destiny of their friends and that of the detachment in its campaigns and battles.

Now we were engulfed by a huge crowd of peasant men and women and escorted from the forest to the centre of the village. And by the time we reached the centre, we were accompanied by virtually the whole working population. Some of them asked what they should prepare to feed us. Others asked to be accepted into the detachment. Our life was becoming more stressful but at the same time more cheerful.

From the very first days of our revolt I had been opposed to feeding ourselves at the expense of the working population, if it could be at all avoided. I asked the assembled people to point out where there were *kulaks* living who had sheep and heifers, with the idea that we could possibly take two or three animals to make soup for the partisans. Then if the peasants could bring some bread to go along with the soup, the detachment would be fed.

The people pointed out the *kulaks*, some of whom immediately responded by offering one sheep each for the detachment. So the problem of feeding the partisans was solved rather quickly.

Taking advantage of the huge crowd assembled, I held a meeting on the subject of our struggle against the counter-revolutionary Austro-German and *Hetmanite* troops, as well as the White organization of General Denikin, which aimed at restoring the former regime. And since, in my opinion, the latter organization was more dangerous than the *Hetmanate*, I dwelled upon it in my speech. I noted that the Whites had formed detachments of

20 or 30 men which enjoyed the protection of the *Hetmanate* and the Austro-German command and were roaming about the countryside, terrorizing the working population and at the same time laying the groundwork for further incursions. I pointed out to the toilers how the Whites, in the person of Drozdov<sup>[48]</sup> and his detachment, had been carrying on dirty work on behalf of the *Hetmanate* in Berdyansk *uyezd*. And in Melitopol *uyezd* agents of a certain General Tillo<sup>[49]</sup> were also active, operating under the cover of the stupid, criminal *Hetmanate* to advance their reactionary agenda.

“Against the Germans, Austrians, and the *Hetman* and his regime we will raise a revolt such as has never been seen before,” I said, “and we will win. But we mustn’t lose sight of the fact that Ukraine is being watched by the *atamans* of the White Don and the Volunteer Army of General Denikin. Bandits led by experienced officers are already conducting raids into our region. Denikin’s regime and the White Don are casting greedy eyes at our *raions* which are dotted with the nests of literally thousands of *pomeshchiks*, *kulaks*, and rich German colonists—and these people are armed to the teeth, armed by the Austro-German armies brought to us by the *Rada*. The restorationist organizations—the Denikinists and Krasnovites—feel they have a potential base in our *raions*. This base is linked to them spiritually and organizationally, even though the Whites are only interested in hanging on to the Kuban and the Don while clearing a path to Moscow. They can’t manage this without a suitable base of operations, and South Ukraine fits the bill.”

“That’s why,” I emphasized to the peasants, “while we’re carrying on the struggle against the Austro-German occupation and the *Hetmanate*, we must simultaneously root out and eradicate the embryonic White organization. Everything connected with the military preparations of this organization must be wiped out.

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48 Makhno apparently means the White commander Mikhail Gordeyevich Drozdovsky (1881–1918), a fanatical monarchist. In memoir literature he is often referred to as Drozdov, possibly because his troops called themselves Drozdovists.

49 Paul Eduardovich Tillo (1872–1931) was a career officer who reached the rank of Major-General in World War I. In November – December 1918 he commanded the “Melitopol Detachment,” part of the Crimean-Azov branch of the White Volunteer Army.

For this 'organization of generals,' so to speak, being Russian-monarchist in temperament, can only be seen by us as one of the most dangerous of our enemies. The Whites have incomparably more potential than the feeble *Hetmanate* or the Austro-German butchers who are criminally toying with our rights and our lives.

"We must show no mercy to any of them!"

With this appeal I ended my speech to the Dibrivki population. And my last words resounded over and over again through the crowd: "Show them no mercy!"

But when I conferred with my friends, they came down on me for speaking so candidly to the peasants. You'll frighten them, they said, and they'll react just like the city workers by taking a wait-and-see position as regards their enemies. And all our efforts to launch the struggle for the Revolution will come to naught.

My friends' lack of understanding of the peasants, despite the fact they were peasants themselves, disturbed me. I might very well have shared their opinion at this time if I had not found myself in a leadership position. I might very well have not bothered to make a serious analysis of the current reality in Ukraine and told my friends: "You're right." Even if I didn't say so, I might have passively supported those slogans they mouthed in place of my own: "No mercy to any of our enemies!"

But my role as the prime mover and leader, first of our original organization, and now of our combined detachments, compelled me to be more circumspect, but at the same time more decisive. After reflecting on the real state of affairs, I made a firm response to my friends as follows:

"The events which are unfolding are clear for everyone to see; to avoid commenting on them on the grounds that this would intimidate the broad peasant masses is inappropriate. We should rather count on the sympathy of these broad masses towards our revolutionary initiatives and we should build on this sympathy. After all, we have already announced our slogans of revolt. In many villages peasants organized by us have already begun to revolt. Blood has already been shed beneath our banner since our inspirational call to arms: live free and build a new social life based on freedom, equality, and unfettered labour—or perish in

the struggle against those who would obstruct us in the attainment of this splendid goal. What else remains for us, the organizers of this revolt, to do other than say openly to anyone who will listen: 'Let the revolutionary tempest rage even more strongly!' And in saying this we shall throw ourselves body and soul into the struggle, guiding it and helping it find the true path."

"You're right," my friends responded finally, "and we haven't the slightest intention of changing our minds about things we decided long ago and which we have already put into practice. What got us worried was the way the meeting broke up, with the peasants—both men and women—yelling to each other: 'No mercy for our enemies!'"

Shchus had been actively applying the policy of "no mercy" for some time, but now he and Marchenko were concerned that the Dibrivki peasants would be scared off and it would be hard to get them to a meeting the next day.

Of course the worries of my friends turned out to be baseless. On the morrow the square and the streets leading to it were overflowing with peasants. Even peasants from neighbouring villages had come. Some wished to join our detachment; others were seeking weapons and instructions on what to do.

We remained in Dibrivki for another two days. Our detachment grew in size to 500 men. But three-quarters of them were without weapons. Those who had no weapons were registered, but not yet included in the ranks of the detachment proper.

On the third day I held another meeting. The peasants had elected their own soviet. Again the topic of discussion was the organizing of an all-encompassing peasant uprising against the *Hetman* and the Austro-German command. This meeting went on until late in the evening. And then I worked through the night writing up instructions and operational directives for all the detachments which were associated with our detachment and its staff. Peasant couriers were dispatched to carry these messages to all the *raions*.

As never before, I felt entirely isolated. More than ever I was seized with anger at all of my ideological comrades of the cities who, it seemed to me, were less and less worthy of the respect of

the broad peasants masses. How useful these comrades could be, how much good they could do for our movement, if only they were here among the peasants!

Now I felt a need to speak with comrades Marchenko, Karetnik, Ryabko, Shchus, and some others. But comrade Petya Liuty, who had been assigned to me as a sort of bodyguard since the start of our organization, informed me that none of them was present in the building of the district soviet where I was staying. And so I wearily sprawled on a table to catch some sleep.

Suddenly I remembered that I hadn't checked to see if guard posts had been set up at the access points to the village. I got up, armed myself, and went to find out.

Everything turned out to be in order. I took a walk around the courtyard of the soviet building where the wounded partisans from Shchus's detachment were lying. One of them, Comrade Petrenko, was heavily wounded and moaning. His girlfriend was sitting beside him, weeping. It was a shame we weren't able to put him in a hospital. But there was nothing more we could do for him.

"We need to place him on a wagon for the night," I told the people who were looking after the wounded, "for if there is an alarm it will be too late."

They assured me that everything was prepared in the case of an emergency. The wounded would be loaded quickly on the wagons. I went back into the administrative building and lay down again to sleep on the table, since there was no couch. I was given a message from Marchenko that he, Karetnik, and Shchus were stationed among the partisans. This reassured me and I dozed off.

Not for long. Liuty woke me up by banging on the door. Once awake, I heard machine-gun fire. I jumped up and in a frenzy grabbed my weapons and rushed out into the courtyard. All the partisans, with the exception of those on guard duty, were converging on our headquarters at the run. I learned that our guards at the posts in the directions of Uspenovka and Pokrovskoye had opened fire first.

"What's going on?"

"The Austrians are attacking."

These were anxious moments. From the opposite side of the

Volchya River the enemy was directing machine-gun fire at the courtyard. Some horses harnessed to the wagons for the wounded had already been killed. Shchus and Marchenko were forming up the detachment. Comrade Karetnik had gone to the guard post in the Pokrovskoye direction, where the firing was getting stronger. Some peasants came running up, asking:

“What shall we do?”

Some of the comrades were panic-stricken, which made me furious. I threw myself into their midst and ordered them in no uncertain terms to go into the courtyard, drag out all the *tachankas* by hand—regardless of whether they were empty or loaded with wounded, position them in the street where they would be in the shelter of houses, and then harness horses to them.

Marchenko and Shchus were ordered to send a squadron in the direction of the enemy machine-gun which was raking our wagon train rather effectively, and either force it to move or change its direction of fire.

Meanwhile Comrade Karetnik had brought reinforcements to the guard post at the bridge, where they repulsed a tenacious enemy attack. He noticed that among the soldiers in Austrian uniform there were also attackers in civilian dress. But he wasn't able to determine if these attackers were Austrians, *pomeshchiks*, *kulaks*, or German colonists.

When the wagons had been dragged out of the line of fire and the horses harnessed to them, we decided it would be best to get out of the village and take shelter in the forest until morning. After having withdrawn our pickets, we headed towards the forest as quietly as possible.

A terrible sight greeted us on the way to the forest. The road-way was crowded with peasants with their small children. Half-screaming, half-sobbing, they said to us:

“Don't leave us at the mercy of our oppressors. Let us help you and somehow we'll drive them off.”

It was heartbreaking to listen to their desperate cries. But without clear knowledge of the enemy's identity, strength, and ordnance, we were in no position to remain in the centre of the village until daybreak. We needed to conceal our own strength



from the enemy before engaging in battle. All of us were of this opinion. Even Comrade Shchus realized it was not possible to defend his own village. So, despite the wailing of the peasant women and their children, I yelled to our units:

“Let’s get moving!” And we set off at a trot towards the gates leading to the forest.

The enemy apparently sensed our uncertainty and fear. Instead of allowing us to retire through the gates to the forest quietly and in the dark, they set one of the peasant homesteads blazing and began firing their machine-guns and rifles in our direction.

This forced us to scramble to another part of the village where there was another set of gates leading to the forest. Here we exercised more caution. Before sending our wagon train into the forest, I ordered 30 – 35 partisans to dismount and form a skirmishing line with a hinge in the middle so one half of the line could cover the forest in the direction in which we had to advance, while the other half covered the ridge above the Uspe-novka—Bolshe-Mikhailovka (Dibrivki) road, on that side of the river Volchya from which the attack on us had first started. This would make it possible for us to proceed with our wagons and rather feeble cavalry into the forest without too much damage, so long as the firing from the front direction and into our right flank was not too strong.

But alas! Scarcely had I formed this skirmish line from partisans (from Shchus’s detachment) who knew the terrain, and yelled “Shchus, move the wagons forward!” than the forest erupted with a salvo from 15 or 20 rifles and a sub-machine-gun. Then there was a second and third burst of fire, after which the firing became random, but quite rapid, in the very direction in which I and these 30 – 35 comrades were advancing.

I yelled to them: “Get down!” and then: “Fire at will!” and immediately got off two or three shots myself with my carbine. But, unfortunately, these were the only shots taken by our side. My entire squadron had fled to take cover with the rest of our forces.

The enemy continued to lay down a barrage of fire upon our intended route into the forest.

Finding myself alone on an open patch of ground which was

still being showered with bullets, I also darted back to where our units were waiting out of the line of fire.

The partisans were becoming restless. Soon it would be dawn. All of us dreaded the coming of daylight. We knew that if the enemy turned out to be regular Austro-German troops and if their numbers were sufficient, they would attack us at dawn. No question about it if they got even a rough idea of our strength. That's why all of us (some consciously, others instinctively) realized the absolute necessity of finding shelter in the forest before dawn.

Noticing the partisans and their commanders were becoming agitated, I gave them a good talking to, then picked another 30 – 40 men. I set up a Maxim gun in one of the peasant houses and issued instructions that it was to fire continuously at the enemy at a certain time. Then I, together with the chosen partisans, slipped down into a deep ravine which led into the forest. This allowed us to gain the flank of the enemy shooters and subject them to rapid fire. The combination of firing from two directions, evidently with some accuracy, had its effect on the enemy. Those of us in the forest quickly overran the position where the enemy had been and we had to signal our machine-gun to quit firing so we wouldn't be hit.

We found two or three boxes of ammunition and eight saddled horses hitched to trees. The enemy had gone into hiding somewhere.

In short order we secured the entire route from the village into the forest and our remaining units began passing along it.

Upon examining the horses left by the enemy, we learned that our attackers, at least from this direction, were punitive detachments made up of *pomeshchiks* and *kulak* supporters of the *Hetman*. Now we needed to find out if these were the only units attacking us or if they were being reinforced by regular Austro-German troops. The clarification of this matter was insisted upon by my friends, with the exception of Comrade Shchus. He proposed rather we move to his impregnable bunker and wait there, without showing ourselves, while the enemy was present in Dibrivki village.

I understood Shchus completely. He was fearless, but he was afraid for the wounded and afraid for the village which (as we all

knew) would be subject to terrible reprisals. Because of this he took the position that we should lay low in these inaccessible holes in the ground until a more favourable moment. He had always done this prior to our arrival.

But Karetnik, Marchenko, Ryabko, Troyan<sup>[50]</sup>, Liuty, myself, the whole of our detachment, and at least half of Shchus's detachment wanted to determine the strength of our opponents and, if it was comparable to our own strength, or at least not more than five or ten times larger, engage them in a fight to the finish. We considered this feasible because the whole toiling population of the village stood behind us one hundred percent.

At this time Comrade Shchus still felt he was not bound to follow the directives of the staff of our organization. He didn't wait till the end of our meeting, but formed up part of his people and the *tachankas* with the wounded and headed into the depths of the forest, towards his bunker. The rest of us—myself, Karetnik, P. Petrenko<sup>[51]</sup> (the brother of the wounded man) and a small number of partisans—decided to make our way again to the gates where we had first attempted to enter the forest but had been turned back because of heavy fire.

Marchenko went with the remaining partisans deep into the forest, while maintaining contact both with us and with Comrade Shchus.

There was no sign of the enemy at the gates. The owner of the house which had been set on fire beside the gates told us that a half-company of Austrians had been there along with a dozen sons of *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*. The latter took advantage of the protection afforded by the Austro-German troops to annihilate any revolutionary peasants in the village and flog with *shompols* those who, while they didn't appear to be active revolutionaries, nevertheless could not conceal their hatred for the *pomeshchiks* and their authority.

50 Gavriil (Gavrusha) Troyan (?—1921) was a *batrak*, an anarcho-communist from 1917. He served as Makhno's personal adjutant in 1918–1921.

51 Peter Petrenko (1890 – 1921) came from a *batrak* family and was a native of Bolshe-Mikhailovka. As a soldier in World War I he attained the rank of lieutenant and was heavily decorated. An anarcho-communist from 1918, his military skills were extremely valuable to the Insurgent Army. He was killed in one of the last battles of the Makhnovists.

A crowd of peasant men and women from the village was also forming at the gates. Some of them reported to us about the strength of the oppressing force which had just entered the village. Others simply wanted to avoid the searches and reprisals and had left their homes and gone to the forest with the hope of returning soon when things were back to normal.

We were now aware that the force present in the village was comprised of Austrian troops at more or less battalion strength; a detachment of 80 to 100 *pomeshchiks*, German colonists, and *kulaks*; and a unit of the *Hetman's Varta* with about 100 men. We were outnumbered by far, which depressed our spirits considerably. I was not reconciled with this information, at least outwardly, and sent a pair of experienced scouts into the village: Vasily Shkabarnya and another man whose name I forget, both former border guards. Their instructions were to verify the numbers of the enemy, their weaponry, and their positions. At the same time, I sent a message to Comrade Shchus requesting him to return with his people to the gates where we were waiting. After slightly more than two hours, the scouts returned with information which corresponded more or less to what the peasants had told us.

Comrade Shchus declined to come to the gates and invited me and the other partisans to join him in his dugout where we could hunker down together until the following evening and then we could take off to wherever it seemed best to go.

Shchus's response made me boiling with rage. Somehow I found the will power to control my anger, send more scouts into the village, and another message to Shchus. It read:

*Comrade Shchus, don't behave like a scared little boy. This is not worthy of someone who is committed to the project of revolutionary insurrection and occupies an important, responsible post in the vanguard of this insurrection. Your behaviour will raise doubts about your status as a brave fighter and leader, not only among many of us, but among the ranks of your own detachment. I'm not going to mince words, I'm telling you straight up: get yourself and the partisans who are with you to the gates right now. Here we*

*will figure out how to extricate ourselves from this difficult situation.*

*—Yours, Nestor.*

This time Comrade Shchus came to the gates. Shortly afterwards our second reconnaissance scouts returned with information about the numerical strength of the enemy—confirming the earlier reports of our scouts and the peasants. But now we had more precise information about the dispositions of the enemy troops. Our opponent had set up camp in the church square, and his headquarters was in the courtyard of the Soviet.

“There’s a rumour going around that the enemy is expecting reinforcements from the village of Pokrovskoye,” our scouts reported. (Pokrovskoye is about 14 *versts* from Dibrivki.)

“Aha,” I said to my friends, “the enemy is planning to surround the forest and wipe us out completely.”

As we were holding counsel among ourselves, we were surrounded by many peasants, some of whom had their whole families with them. I sensed that most of them shared my frame of mind—indeed, they butted into the discussions of the armed insurgents, making their own suggestions. I was proposing to my closest associates, including Shchus and Petrenko, that we attack the enemy right away without waiting for him to launch an assault on the forest.

The reaction of the commanders was mixed. Comrade Shchus was absolutely against my proposal, and considered it insane.

As I recall, I replied to him that my proposal was indeed insane, but that a little insanity was a requirement for revolutionaries. And, not waiting for Shchus’s reply, I immediately launched into a speech to the partisans and the villagers standing beside them. I spoke simply and directly, without any oratorical flourishes, the way I always addressed peasant audiences. I announced that some of the comrades were hesitant about attacking our killers. I said that in my opinion these comrades had not understood all the implications of my proposal, which would only dawn on them when it already too late. Full of energy for the struggle against the executioners of the Revolution and facing a situation which was

rapidly getting worse, I considered it better to perish in unequal but resolute combat with the enemy than to sit in the forest and wait to be annihilated. Better to set an example before the eyes of the downtrodden working people, who would see how their peasant revolutionary sons were willing to die for freedom, than to wait for the sons of the bourgeoisie and their hired killers to come and exterminate us.

Many of the peasants who had escaped from the village and were now clustered around us agreed with me. As for Comrade Shchus and a few individual partisans, they had to choose between registering their disagreement and leaving us, or completely embracing my proposal like almost everyone else and taking an active part in discussions about the technical side of things.

Shchus was a dedicated and forthright fighter for the people. He could not abandon us. And he finally gave his assent for our attack.

Then all the peasants around us, both armed and unarmed, shouted: "We're with you, Comrade Makhno!"

And there in a glade in the Dibrivki Forest, I heard for the first time from all the peasants gathered there:

"From now on you are our Ukrainian Batko, and we will share your fate. Lead us against the foe!"

When the mass of peasants expressed its deep faith in me in its naive but open and honest manner it was hard not to let it go to my head; it was necessary to be a revolutionary with an anarchist orientation to avoid being carried away by this sort of exaltation. It seems I was such a person—my subsequent actions confirmed it.

We, the initiators and organizers, quickly exchanged our thoughts about how to deploy our forces in launching our "insanely" daring attack. I immediately assigned Shchus to take a few partisans and one Maxim gun and go around the enemy's flank and offer supporting fire from there when Karetnik, Marchenko, Liuty, and myself were launching a frontal attack with the remaining partisans.

## Chapter 8

### **The battle of Dibrivki. The role of the peasants in it. The consequences of this battle.**

**T**hus we would attack the counter-revolutionary troops in the village with partisans hand-picked by Karetnik, Marchenko, and Liuty from our combined detachment. And Shchus with his little group would provide support by firing on the enemy from a completely unexpected direction. This plan should result in complete success, I told myself, and tried to communicate this opinion to the partisans who had just been divided into two groups and were saying farewell to each other before going into battle.

Comrade Karetnik was gloomy, but definitely agreed with my outlook. And finally Comrade Shchus, as a parting note, said to me:

“We’re going to win no matter what! I can see it in the mood of the comrades.”

“Your opinion makes me feel good, Comrade Shchus,” I replied, and we parted: Shchus in one direction, and myself with the main force in another. In my group there were two Lewis machine-guns. They were good for street battles.

“We’ve got machine-guns, grenades, rifles, and a good supply of ammunition,” Semon Karetnik told me, “but we don’t have enough men.”

To this I made no reply. We formed a single file with the partisans and made a difficult advance through a succession of courtyards, crawling over fences and through hedgerows as we made our way through the now silent village towards the enemy. At almost each home, street, or courtyard we encountered peasants (sometimes they sent their oldest children to meet us instead) who told us with tears in their eyes:

“Where do you think you’re going? Your enemies are too nu-



The Lewis gun was a light machine-gun of pre-WWI vintage.

merous—they will destroy you.”<sup>[52]</sup>

But none of us flinched. We had already taken on the role of implacable avengers. We merely said to the peasants:

“If you fear for your lives, then leave us alone, don’t discourage us!”

And, suppressing our own anxious thoughts, we went forward step by step.

In this manner we reached the last street before the square where our enemies were camped, some of them already asleep. Suddenly a peasant woman came running up to us and screamed, pointing at a woman who was moving furtively behind us, evidently hoping to dart through our line towards the square.

“Stop that woman, quick, stop her! She’s the girlfriend of one of the *Varta* men. She’s going to tell him you’re attacking!”

Ignoring the enemy for the moment, myself, Karetnik, and some of the other comrades took after this woman. We caught her with some difficulty. But she had already begun screaming:

“Shchus’s bands are attacking! Shchus’s bands are close by!”

Comrade Marchenko couldn’t restrain himself and struck her in the head with his revolver. I yelled to my friends:

“Gag her and take her back to the detachment!”

And I grabbed Comrade Marchenko by the arm and we rushed, panting, back to our group. When I reached the foremost elements, I whispered:

“Pass the word—we must advance as quickly as possible to the courtyards of the last street before the market square! Otherwise we’ll be too late.”

Five minutes later we had all positioned ourselves in the courtyards and were studying the market square. Then some of us crept into the square itself, concealing ourselves among the stalls of the bazaar. Here I made a last appeal to my comrades:

“Well, we’re face to face with death. Only the bravest of us can fight with death and survive. Friends, we must be brave, we must be insanely brave—our cause demands it!”

Then I formed these valiant comrades into a line. Liuty and myself crept forward till we could see almost the all of the enemy

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52 Spoken in Ukrainian.



force—Austrians, *pomeshchiks*, and *kulaks*. Some of the Austrian soldiers were sitting up, but most were lying down. Their machine-guns were covered with tarps. The *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*, hunting rifles slung over their shoulders, were fussing about or strolling up and down in groups of three or five.

I crawled back under the stalls to our fighters. Waiting there was a fellow with a report from Shchus. He told me Shchus was in position with his group, which now included more peasants who wanted to help us.

I had no message to send to Shchus, since our plan was still the same. I signalled to our men waiting in the courtyards around the square to move up with me among the stalls. After checking that everyone was ready, I gave the order:

“Fire!”

Since the Austrians and the *pomeshchik* detachments were only 80 to 100 paces distant, our volley was so accurate that our uninvited guests were in no position to make an immediate response. Seeing this, I yelled:

“Attack! Hurrah!”

And we all charged at the enemy. At the same time Shchus’s detachment commenced murderous machine-gun and rifle fire at the enemy’s flank. And the enemy proceeded to flee in panic in the direction of Pokrovskoye—some along the streets, and others through the courtyards. They left behind machine-guns, a pile of rifles with a large supply of bullets, and more than 20 cavalry horses with saddles.

While running away, the enemy set fire to peasant houses and anything else in the courtyards that would burn readily. Some of the *kulaks* and *Varta* men fled towards the bank of the river Volchya. Our sub-machine-gunners forced them into the river. The scene was indescribable! These gentlemen discarded their guns and, splashing and spluttering, tried to swim across the river to safety.

Meanwhile the village had become a beehive of activity, as least as far as the working population was concerned. Arming themselves with pitchforks, shovels, axes, and rifles they rushed out of their courtyards and mercilessly struck down the panic-

stricken Austrian soldiers, *Varta* men, and *kulaks* fleeing past their homes. There were even some peasants who mounted their own horses and, armed with pitchforks or spades, tried to overtake our enemies, bar their escape routes, and steer them into the fields where our machine-gunners could easily pick them off.

The hour of retribution had arrived for these assassins. They had come to the village to punish the revolutionary toilers, to squeeze the last kopeks out of them, to crush them. They were going to seize the cattle, stuff themselves with food, and smash up everything in people's houses. And then, with faces flushed from their brutish exertions, they would break into a song of victory and move on to the next villages and hamlets to trample on the rights and lives of the toilers some more. But now a time of terror had come upon these butchers—both the deliberate ones and their unwitting accomplices. Their escape route was by no means obvious. They were trying to run in the direction of Pokrovskoye, but fetched up in completely different villages. Thus, for example, many of the Austrians and the fearsome Magyars were observed by the peasants in the vicinity of Uspenovka, as well as near Gulyai-Polye and even at Vremyovka, a place where they could hardly expect to find a warm welcome. The peasants found them to be mostly barefoot, without rifles, uniforms, or helmets. And when the peasants asked them:

“*Pan*, where are your clothes and your weapons?” they received the reply: “Back there—Makhno got it all.”

Thus, with an unexpected, sudden, and daring attack we drove these alien killers out of the village and pursued them fiercely. We wanted to demonstrate not only to them, but to those who sent them, that they could no longer count on our clemency. The most devoted sons of the revolutionary peasantry—peasant revolutionaries—were capable, on occasion, of giving in to sentimentality and believing that they were dealing with blind instruments of oppression in the ranks of their enemies. Even with conscious oppressors, the peasant revolutionaries sometimes made the error of thinking that these butchers could have a change of heart and forsake their black deeds. But sooner or later the peasant revolutionaries would discard their naive illusions and indeed exert

themselves to convince their brothers to do likewise. Then their sentimental feelings would be replaced by a more serious outlook based on the real circumstances. The revolutionary cause of the toilers fighting for their destiny and freedom had to be valued incomparably higher than the lives of butchers, even unwitting ones. This was the law of our struggle—a law for which I had prepared myself during many long years, and a law which I taught to others whose will was weaker than my own.

That's why in the battle of Dibrivki we mercilessly attacked and mercilessly pursued our enemies: the Austrian soldiers, the *Hetman's Varta*, and the various representatives of the bourgeoisie who had come together to assist them.



The battle was a great success for us. Upon returning to the village, my attention was drawn to the nine peasant homesteads set afire by the retreating enemy. It seemed these buildings had burned to the ground without anyone making an effort to put out the flames—the peasants were all too absorbed in pursuing the enemy. They had brought back to the village a bunch of prisoners—Austrians and *Varta* men—and were beating them, saying all the while:

“We’re going to finish you off, you dirty pigs.”<sup>[53]</sup>

It was a good thing I arrived on the scene in time, for about two dozen Austrians and *Varta* men had already been stripped, some of them badly beaten, and the peasants were getting ready to lynch the lot of them.

With some difficulty I managed to save these victims, miserable and pitiful as they had now become, from being lynched. I didn't then abandon them, but led them to the centre of the village. Here they were fed some supper and the wounded were bandaged. Then, escorted by mounted partisans, the Austrian soldiers were led outside the village after being warned not to oppose the Revolution in the future—or least not to fall in our hands again. Then they were released on the road to the village of Malaya Mikhailovka, which was close the Prosyanyaya railway station, where, according to the peasants, an Austrian command

53 Spoken in Ukrainian.

post was located.

A different fate awaited the *Varta* men. We had repeatedly warned them, especially the ones from a peasant or worker background, to abandon the police service and fight against the *Hetmanate*. Now it was decided to annihilate them as vile and incorrigible traitors. All the *Varta* prisoners were shot by Dibrivki partisans. The girlfriend of the the *Varta* chief who had tried to warn the enemy of the impending attack of “Shchus’s bands” was also shot.

After the battle a mass meeting was arranged for the local population and the partisans of our detachment. I addressed this gathering with more than the usual enthusiasm, calling on the peasants, especially those from other villages, to return to their homes without delay and gather together the local toilers most devoted to our cause. I told them not to fear possible failure, but to rise up right away against their enemies and oppressors.

After the meeting there was still one event on the agenda for the day. Along with Liuty, Marchenko, Karetnik, Shchus, and some others, I sat down to have supper with a number of peasants, representatives of the village. Shchus and Peter Petrenko were carried away by the success of our raid. They kept hugging me and insisting that I tell them what our tasks would be in the morning.

I don’t remember exactly what I told them. But I do recall questioning these very close, dear friends, who were well acquainted with all the approaches to the village which might be used by the enemy for a surprise attack, whether they had taken the trouble to check these access points themselves, without relying on others to do it for them.

Next, Comrade Liuty and myself went into the Soviet building and I lay down again on a table. This time I didn’t undress and didn’t take off my weapons. As soon as I lay down, I immediately fell into a dead sleep.



On the day of our partisan attack on Dibrivki there weren’t that many peasants present from the outlying areas. But on the following day the peasants began coming in from all directions. The ranks of our armed forces began to fill up incredibly fast. These

new recruits were peasants who were prepared, at a moment's notice, to leave their own districts and go with us wherever we needed to go, while conforming in all respects to the organizational and military requirements of service in our ranks.

And now the peasants, both young and old, as well as the revolutionary detachments and the inhabitants in general, got into the habit of adding the word "Batko" to my surname. For me personally it was both strange and rather disturbing to hear myself addressed by the peasants and partisans as "Batko Makhno," or even "Comrade Batko Makhno," rather than simply "Comrade Makhno." But no matter what my personal feelings, I was stuck with the epithet "Batko" ever since that fateful day in the village of Dibrivki. It was passed around by word of mouth by peasant men, peasant women, and even peasant children; and in homes, in families, on the streets, and at meetings. In the mouths of the peasant masses Batko Makhno became one word—indivisible. Those who used this name spoke it with pride and affection in a way which was scarcely comprehensible to me, but it was transmitted by the peasants from village to village throughout almost the whole of Left Bank Ukraine. The partisans seized on this name with such alacrity that "Batko Makhno detachments" were springing up, the existence of which I was not aware, at least until they informed our movement's headquarters and agreed to subordinate their units to our staff.

I often asked myself: is it honourable to allow oneself to be exalted in this way by my fellow workers? What does it mean to be the object of the grateful admiration of people who trust you implicitly because they perceive you as someone sincerely devoted to their welfare?

There were many occasions during these days, and during the following months, when I discussed this subject with my best friends in the movement. And they told me: "The masses are following you! They gave you that name, don't reject it. We've got our hands full building our insurgent movement. Thanks to your name and our general revolutionary activity we are gaining the complete trust of the masses, and we are completely deserving of this trust. The peasants believe in you. They trust you because you

are not trying to lord it over them. What we need to strive for is to use their trust to develop a revolutionary practice appropriate for our movement.” These considerations reassured me.



The next two nights and days passed quietly. Many of us, proud of being the victors in the Battle of Dibrivki, spent this period in a state of elation. And the fact that our “invincible” enemy refrained from attacking us during this period allowed some of us to entertain thoughts of launching an attack of our own.

On the third morning we decided to depart from Dibrivki. But in view of the fact that peasants were still streaming into the village to enlist in our detachment and fight the rule of the Austro-German *junker*-dom and the *Hetman*, we postponed our departure for another 24 hours. I was worried about the danger of remaining in Dibrivki (I knew our enemies were concentrating substantial forces in the *raion*). So I toured all our guard posts around the village—reinforcing some of them and in other cases setting up new ones. And then I invited the peasant Petrenko, a lieutenant in the Great War, to join me as a “military expert” in inspecting the forest and its environs for a position more or less suitable for our detachment.

This reconnaissance took about three hours. During this time, our lookouts and mounted scouts gave the alarm: the enemy was approaching from two directions. This forced me to hurry back to the village.

But on my way back to the village I ran into almost the entire detachment which, after withdrawing all its guard posts and abandoning the centre of the village, was galloping on horseback and on light *tachankas* towards the gates leading to the forest.

Now I learned the details about the enemy attack. Our cavalry—three dozen strong under Marchenko and Karetnik—supported by a machine-gun squad, had rushed out to meet the enemy, but upon gauging his strength, had turned back to the forest gates.

Now I was confronted with the sight of most of my friends suddenly downcast. I was tempted to remind them of their recently expressed wish to attack the enemy, but the rifle fire and bursting

shells erupting from the direction of the enemy deterred me. With a deep sigh, I said:

“Send everyone to the place in the forest I’ve chosen.” And I told my driver to turn his horses around and follow them.

While we were making our way through the village to the forest, the Austrian command set up another battery and started murderously shelling the village. At the same time the Austrians launched an effort to encircle the village and the forest simultaneously, using a battalion of infantry with a squadron of cavalry on one side, and on the other side another battalion of infantry with two or three cavalry squadrons.

And the Austrians were being reinforced by numerous detachments from all over the region: *pomeshchiks*, *kulaks*, and *Varta* men. These auxiliary detachments, both large and small, did not tarry in the village but headed straight towards the forest, singing triumphantly:

“We’re going to get Makhno and Shchus  
Then law and order will return!  
We’re fighting for the Hetman,  
We’re going to slash and burn!”

We all realized it was futile to resist such a superior force. Nevertheless, without losing a minute in unnecessary discussions, we occupied positions on two sides of the forest, positions from which the enemy would be unable to dislodge us. Unless, of course, we entirely ran out of bullets or just gave up defending ourselves. The other two sides of the forest were protected by two rather deep streams: the rivers Volchya and Kamenka. Consequently, we didn’t need to set up defenses on those sides, merely keep an eye on them with small reconnaissance forces.

Regular Austrian units made several attacks on the forest, trying to dislodge us from our positions. Each time they were compelled either to flee back into the village or lie glued to the ground.

The detachments of the *Varta* and the *pomeshchiks*, seeing that the regular units could not penetrate the forest, refrained from attacking our positions. They contented themselves with firing in an undisciplined fashion from a distance.

Nightfall was approaching.

A steady flow of peasant families was leaving the village: some of them on foot into the forest, others on wagons trying to escape to neighbouring villages. The Austrian troops and the *Varta* turned back some of the fleeing peasants, often confiscating their horses before releasing them. Other peasants were not so fortunate: the enemy beat them with rifle butts; forced them to lie on the ground and flogged them with *shompols* or whips; or in some cases shot them outright. From our positions we had a good view of these atrocities. We wanted to throw ourselves at these murderers but lacked the necessary strength.

We were helpless to aid our friends and brothers.

At the same time these killers were committing their black deeds against the fleeing peasants—men, women, and children—*outside* the village, there was another group of killers active *inside* the village. They roamed in groups with burning faggots in their hands, setting fire to peasant homes one after another. The village was transformed into one huge bonfire.

The sun was setting. The huge village was aflame. Now the enemy shifted the firing of one of its batteries from the village to the forest and began to probe our position with artillery fire. The firing was rapid and its range covered almost the whole forest.

When the sun finally went down and dusk set in, the enemy directed the firing of another battery towards the forest and deployed all their infantry units to close on the sides of the forest we were defending.

However, their manoeuvres failed, mainly because they were in too much of a hurry to burn the village. They had deliberately waited until dark before attempting an all-out attack our position. They had become convinced we could not be dislodged during the daytime. But even after sunset there was no darkness anywhere near Dibrivki. The village was being consumed by flames which leaped up ominously towards the sky, and everywhere around the village was illuminated just as if it were daytime. So, just as before, each attempt of the Austrian soldiers or the *pomeshchik* and *kulak* detachments to approach our positions was met with stout resistance.

But then suddenly our line was hit by a volley of shells, fol-



lowed by two more in quick succession. Some of us were torn to pieces while others were struck by shrapnel. Isidor Liuty, Shchus, and myself were all hurt. Luckily I was only slightly wounded by shrapnel; Shchus and Liuty were in more serious condition. At the insistence of Karetnik and Petrenko we concealed our wounds from the other partisans, explaining that we only had the wind knocked out of us by the explosion and were quite able to remain at our posts. However, taking our wounds into account, I consulted with Comrade Shchus about the places close to the forest where it would be easiest to cross the Kamenka River. Then I immediately gave the order to the whole detachment to withdraw from our positions—quietly, with no talking and no panic. We would emerge from the forest and make a crossing of the Kamenka at the first opportunity. Then we would proceed along its bank towards the village of Gavrilovka.

The peasants from the village, both men and women, who had escaped from the village in the daytime and were now clustered beside us, started making a fuss when they realized we were leaving the forest. They wanted us to stay put. We told them not to be discouraged, for we swore to take revenge on our enemies who had subjected Dibrivki and its inhabitants to such bloody horrors. Sooner or later we would find the means to deal with them appropriately for their actions against us and against the whole toiling population. We asked the peasants to be patient and commit themselves to supporting our organization to the full.

It was harrowing to leave them behind, these toilers from Dibrivki. Groups of them surrounded Shchus, Karetnik, Petrenko, and myself and, stretching out their hands, implored us:

“Give us weapons and we’ll go with you now. We’re totally committed to your cause and we’ll fight and die for freedom alongside you.”

We had no weapons for them. Now I was confronted starkly with the problem of acquiring weapons. With tears in our eyes we had to abandon these peasants in the forest and head into open country with our military force alone.

## Chapter 9

### Our passage through the Dibrivki area and nearby raions.

We emerged from the forest and crossed a stream, not seeing any sign of our enemies. We quickly arranged the detachment in order, getting a count of the wounded and the dead. Then we slowly advanced (both on horse and on foot) in the wake of our reconnaissance unit, which inspected every bush, every knoll, and every ditch, thereby protecting the whole detachment from ambushes and sudden attacks by our foes. The fiery glow enveloping the village of Dibrivki turned night into day, and helped our reconnaissance unit in that it was able at times to leave the road and reconnoitre through the brush alongside, all the while guiding us in the direction away from the forest and the burning village, surrounded on all sides by our enemies.

In this manner we reached the village of Gavrilovka, situated 12 – 15 *versts* from Dibrivki.

Gavrilovka was also illuminated by the Dibrivki fire, and this caused concern to its population. The inhabitants came out of their courtyards onto the streets and, gazing in the direction of Dibrivki, spoke to each other about the horror which had befallen their neighbour. And when our detachment, having learned there was no *Hetman's Varta* around, entered the village and stopped, the whole population rushed up to us and wanted to know who we were and who was responsible for the artillery fire in Dibrivki.

Before entering the village, an order had been given to the detachment to tell the villagers that we were the 1<sup>st</sup> *Gubernia State Varta*, and to inquire of the peasants if the “bands” of Makhno and Shchus had fled through their village.

This declaration on our part and our inquiries had the effect of immediately repelling the conscious labouring population of the village. On every street we received the same answer:

“We are not aware of such bands and have heard nothing about them.”

But, in answering our queries, the peasants now raised their

own questions:

“What is it that’s burning in the direction of the Dibrivki Forest? Who is responsible for this terrible conflagration? What is the shooting all about—which two sides are fighting?”

And then the partisans replied, “It is we, the *Gubernia State Varta*, and our wonderful allies, the Germans and Austrians, who have burned the village of Dibrivki and have been firing our artillery into the forest where the bands of Makhno and Shchus fled along with the miserable peasant men and women supporting them. These people have been raging against the father of all Ukraine, His Excellency the *Hetman*, and against his law,” etc., etc.”<sup>[52]</sup>

Then some of the peasants told us maliciously:

“Well, so that’s what’s happening! Probably our sons were there helping the authorities prevail over the Dibrivchans, who swarmed together and abused us because the government of the Germans and the Batko *Hetman* returned our land, livestock, and implements which were taken from us by the Revolution.”<sup>[53]</sup>

But the majority, namely the working part of the peasantry, became agitated and with heavy sighs, almost through tears, asked us with their numerous voices:

“Brothers, tell us the real truth: is it really true that they burned the whole village? And what happened to the villagers and their children? If what you say is true, then it’s outright murder.”<sup>[54]</sup>

And some of them, sobbing because of their fury and hatred, tried to tell us we were lying to them, that the evil done to the Dibrivchans had not been carried out by us.

After long discussions with them, they said to me directly:

“Well, you fine fellow, you’re not the head of the State *Varta*, you’re Batko Makhno, and that’s Comrade Shchus next to you.”<sup>[55]</sup>

It was impossible to further conceal from them the name of our detachment and my own identity. I immediately ordered the arrest of all the *kulaks* whose “kids” had gone to the Dibrivsky

52 Spoken in Ukrainian.

53 Spoken in Ukrainian.

54 Spoken in Ukrainian.

55 Spoken in Ukrainian.

Forest to help the German and *Hetmanite* authorities humiliate the revolutionary peasants. They were to be ordered to hand over their weapons, with which, as I well knew, they had been generously armed by the *Hetmanite* and, especially, the Austro-German punitive detachments. The authorities had hoped these *kulaks* would be the most reliable support for their struggle against the Revolution.

The *kulaks* were seized and ordered to turn over their weapons. Those who surrendered guns and were found to have ammunition for them were shot by the very people they had abused—their passion for revenge was so strong at the moment there was no holding them back. Some such *kulaks* were brought to the staff of our detachment, where we were gradually forming a clear picture of the role of the *kulaks* in the burning of Dibrivki (the village was still in flames and its sight served to remind us of the fate of its inhabitants—raped and murdered). Our staff had no other wish at that hour than to let our brutal foes fully realize that the time of reckoning had arrived. Our revolutionary peasant partisans did not intend to be lenient in dealing with these *kulaks*—there was no way they were going to get off scot-free for their evil-doings. The staff ordered them to be shot immediately, right in the village streets.

Death! Death! Death for the death of each revolutionary, death for each violated peasant woman must befall every German and Austrian soldier and officer, every *Hetmanite* Guard or son of a *kulak*, who takes up arms against the Revolution or hires someone else to do so.

That was our first motto in the difficult and uphill struggle against the murderous landlords who had imposed themselves on the peasants and were executing a death sentence on the Revolution, while trampling on the rights of the toilers to land, bread, and freedom.

This slogan was dictated to us not by the contemplations of armchair intellectuals, divorced from the world of practice which made mincemeat of their plans and schemes; it was dictated by the reality of facts, according to which the *pomeshchiks* and all the *kulaks*, under the leadership of the Austro-German *junkers*,

concentrated their counter-revolutionary forces against the Great Russian Revolution and the emergent Ukrainian Revolution.

There were times when it seemed we needed to take a serious look at our relationship with the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*, and their main support—the counter-revolutionary Austro-German armies. But during this night of our withdrawal from the Dibrivki region, the village of Dibrivki went up in flames, set on fire by Austrian soldiers, *pomeshchiks*, and *kulaks*. And in the village of Gavrilovka we set fire to the houses of all the *kulaks* who had either gone themselves or sent their sons to “punish” Dibrivki’s toiling peasants by burning their homes, hunting down and wiping out peasant revolutionary detachments, etc.

It just wasn’t the right time to be reviewing the relationship of our revolutionary units with those *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks* who were engaged in armed struggle against the Revolution.

We moved on from Gavrilovka and headed for the village of Ivanovka. In this village we found out who among the *kulaks* had rendered assistance to the authorities to crush the Dibrivchans, burning their homes and sneering at their attempts to liberate themselves from unwanted landlords and rulers. And then we burned their houses and barns, seizing whatever we needed in the way of horses and wagons.

Next we made our way to one of the Dibrivki estates, situated four *versts* from Ivanovka, in order to get fodder for our horses and snatch some time to confer about our subsequent movements. Furthermore, we were all exhausted, and needed a little rest.

## Chapter 10

### **Our stay at a Dibrivki estate and our subsequent journey through the *raions*. Our actions against the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks* who took part in the attack on Dibrivki.**

Drawing near to the Dibrivki manor, our cavalry surrounded it and questioned the *batrak* security guards about whether the “master” [*barin*] and his family were at home, what sort of weapons he had, whether he had taken flight during the revolutionary period, when he had returned, etc.

It turned out the owner of the manor had not run away. When his land was expropriated and his livestock and implements were partially removed, he remained in his manor and applied himself to earning a living by working. But when the Austro-German army arrived, and the rule of the *Hetman* was established, the land, livestock, and equipment were seized from the peasants by force and returned to the *pomeshchiks*. The owner accepted this and resumed the life of a landlord, living at the expense of the *batraks*.

While our reconnaissance people were gleaning this information from the security guards, a ruckus was raised inside the grounds of the estate. Some of the *barin's* loyal retainers tried to make a run for it, but they failed; our pickets detained a bunch of them, and the rest were shot down as they dashed through our cordon and refused either to halt or to respond to our challenge.

Once the reconnaissance people had finished their inquiries, and following the break-out attempt which resulted in needless but, given the situation, inevitable victims, our detachment entered the estate grounds and deployed on the site.

Naturally our entry provoked a further noisy reaction within the compound.

The owner was apprehensive. He darted out on the porch with a shotgun in his hand and began yelling peevishly for his security guards. But instead of his guards, he was confronted by Comrade Isidor Liuty, Shchus, and myself. I addressed him:

"Calm down and don't bother yelling. Your guards have shown us the barn where we can put our horses."

The owner put down his gun and, without asking who we were, announced:

"Well, welcome, Commander, sir, come on in."

Liuty and Shchus followed me behind the owner into the house. We had scarcely entered the living room when "our dear master" called to his wife, children, and maids:

"Go back to bed and sleep in peace. These are our people." And, turning to us, he asked:

"I'm not mistaken, right? You're servicemen—our own people, probably from Alexandrovsk or Mariupol, are you not?"

"No, no! We're from Yekaterinoslav, the State *Varta*," Comrade Shchus answered him hurriedly.

"Even better. We have the honour of receiving in our home the highest authority for the preservation of the State," the *barin*, half in jest, said to Shchus while rushing into an adjoining room.

In the *barin's* absence I asked Liuty to remove my shoulder straps and conceal them. When the *barin* bounded back into the room, my shoulder straps were already removed and I had taken off my overcoat. He found this somewhat disturbing. But I didn't want to wait until he regained his composure and began asking more questions. I told him to summon all the residents of the house so I could warn them about something.

The *barin* turned pale and his legs trembled. He spread his hands and said, half-screaming, half-crying:

"What's the matter, gentlemen? Do you need money? I will give you some right away, only, for God's sake, don't kill me!" And, sobbing, he sunk to his knees and bowed his head.

Comrade Shchus and myself rushed to him and, grabbing his arms, pulled him up. He was still shaking and insisted:

"I never went against the people. Believe me, if the government itself had not taken away the land, livestock, and equipment from the people, I myself would never have gone against the people."

And now he really began to cry like a small child. Comrade Liuty, grinning maliciously at the *barin* because of his pitiful cowardice, blurted out:

“Batko, don’t waste time over him. Trust me, in the same situation he wouldn’t hesitate to kill you, or at least give you a boot in the face or a rifle butt in the head.”

I gave Comrade Liuty a disapproving look, and he was silent.

With great difficulty Comrade Shchus and myself persuaded the *barin* to compose himself and gather his whole family along with all the servants in the living room so I could caution them about trying to escape from the estate, etc.

While we were dealing with the *barin*, his wife had long since got dressed and had ordered the servants to get dressed as well. This speeded up things, and the *barin* was immediately able to shepherd the whole bunch into the room. I addressed them all:

“Ladies and gentlemen, don’t be afraid and don’t get upset. Nothing bad is going to happen to you. I only request that for the duration of our stay you refrain from any attempt to escape from the estate. Otherwise the whole place will be burned, we shall drive off your cattle, and we’ll wipe out any would-be escapees, regardless of whether it’s the owner’s family or the owner’s slaves—his servants.”

The servants, with the boot-licking denseness normal to such people, listened to everything I said and snorted derisively. One of them even argued with me that she had to prepare things for “the mistress” [*barinya*] which would involve leaving the premises, etc.

The lady of the manor stared at us for a long time. After I said:

“You are all free to go now, just leave this room to us,” she said:

“Just exactly who are you, sirs?”

This gave me the opportunity to inform her briefly that we were enemies of the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*, enemies of the Tsar-Hetman, enemies of the Austro-German officers who had set him on his throne, and enemies of the soldiers who were carrying out the orders of these officers.

I finished up by addressing the lady of the manor as follows:

“We are fighting for the freedom of all those dominated and degraded by the power of your sort of people, the people who support thrones occupied by dunces like Pavel Skoropadsky, who has committed so many crimes against the working people of Ukraine. It is you and your kind who build prisons in which are



left to rot those whom your mendacity transforms into criminals and thieves. You build scaffolds to hang the very best and bravest of those who fight for the freedom of the oppressed. In fact,, it is scarcely possible to enumerate the actions of your class, which are criminal towards those by whose labour, by whose sweat and blood, you and your fellow social parasites are able to maintain your life style. And at the slightest whim you feel yourself justified in spitting in the face of your servants, dismissing them from their jobs without paying them, or at least trying to avoid paying them, for all the labour they have expended on your behalf.

The *barin* sat down and began to weep. The children and servants were no longer present. The wanted to hear more from us but when I indicated that we needed to rest (“please leave us alone in the living room”), only then did she, mumbling and blushing, get up from her armchair and start to leave. But after taking a step towards the door, she couldn’t restrain herself from asking one more question:

“So, gentlemen, do you swear by your honour that our lives are safe in your hands?”

“So long as you don’t take up weapons,” replied Liuty.

“Oh, oh, now that you mention it, what about weapons!” exclaimed Shchus, and he immediately chased after the owner and asked him to gather up all the firearms and cold steel weapons in the house and bring them to the living room.

The *barin* had broken down completely and asked Shchus to convey these instructions to his wife.

Shchus caught the mistress behind the door, listening to what we were saying to here husband, and repeated it to her.

Twenty minutes later all the weapons—sabres, daggers, and revolvers—were brought to us in the main hall. And only then were we able to retire to the courtyard in order to confer with Marchenko, Karetnik, and Petrenko about our subsequent movements.

Outside it was getting close to dawn. One group of partisans, spread out across the courtyard, were deep in sleep; another group were on guard duty; and a third group had slaughtered two of the *barin’s* heifers and were busy preparing breakfast for our detachment.

Comrade Petrenko pointed in the direction of Dibrivki and said to me:

“Oh Batko, they burned Dibrivki!”

Indeed a spectacular glow could be seen in that direction. I just glanced at it and was silent. To tell the truth, Petrenko was hoping to hear a reassuring response from me. He was rather upset at the time. But instead of responding I proposed to those around me, with the exception of Karetnik who was on duty, that we go into the house and lie down to sleep in the chamber set aside for us. We went into the house.

Previously, when Shchus, Liuty, and I had left the house, we had posted a sentry at the door of the room where the *barin's* weapons were piled up. The *barinya* couldn't restrain herself from trying to bribe him to tell her the truth: she wanted to know who we were and what we intended to do with her family.

Of course this was a lot of nonsense. But our partisan sentry shoved her in the chest with his rifle butt. She was enraged and seized a revolver, but the partisan was able to disarm her by striking her hand with his rifle. Now she was in an hysterical state.

We found all this quite irritating. The *barinya* didn't seem to be a normal woman. I immediately apologized to her for the sentry's behaviour, but in vain: the *barinya* would not be appeased and screamed:

“Get out of my house! Get away from my estate!”

Giving her up as a lost cause, we set up sentries around the house and went out in the courtyard to lie down and catch some sleep.



The sun rose. I sat up and reluctantly gazed in the direction of Dibrivki (25 *versts* distant). One could no longer see any sign of flames. There was only a column of smoke which stained the blue sky with its terrible blackness and reminded us of the events of yesterday, events which I would never forget for the rest of my life.

I lay down again and thought for a long time about yesterday's events, which caused great pain in my heart. I thought about how to react to the actions of our enemies—those who had taken part in those events. However, I was overcome with weariness. I turned

over and fell asleep again.

While the partisans and I were sleeping, our reconnaissance units on patrol captured a *tachanka* with three armed Germans, *kulaks* from the German colony of Mariental. Comrade Karetnik decided not to take responsibility for interrogating and shooting them. He woke up me and the rest of the comrades.

I was aware that the prisoners had been captured by our scouts in the name of the provincial *Varta*. That's why, when I went up to them, I asked:

"You're travelling with weapons—you must be bandits. Where were you going?"

"We're not bandits, we're bandit-killers," was the answer I received.

They proceeded to tell me they had been to Dibrivki to help the Austro-German troops capture Makhno and Shchus and teach the Dibrivki peasants a lesson for not recognizing the authority of the *Hetman* and the Austro-German command.

"And so, did you capture Makhno and Shchus?" I asked them.

"No, we weren't able to capture them because of the cowardice of the regular Austrian troops," these 'heroes' told me. "But then we burned the whole village!" exclaimed one of them.

I literally began to shake with anger. It turned out that some peasants from Dibrivki had run after us, following our trail. Comrade Shchus led them to me. They related to me that they had seen all these *kulaks* in the village, setting fire to their homes, and that the village was almost entirely destroyed.

I quit asking questions of these German *kulaks*. I also quit pretending to be an officer of the *Hetman's Varta*. I tore off my officer's epaulets and declared to them:

"There's nothing more for us to talk about, gentlemen. I am that very Makhno whom you came to Dibrivki to catch. And this—I pointed to Shchus standing beside me—is my friend, Fyodor Shchus. We're the very people you intended to catch, so you could jeer at us and then kill us along with all those peasants you regard as rebels who don't recognize the right of the *Hetman* and the Austro-German command to rule over our revolutionary land."

Hearing my words, the *kulak* colonists collapsed on the ground

and began grovelling:

“Comrade Makhno, we. . . we will join you and faithfully serve you and your cause!”

And there was still more that they blurted out, but I could no longer bear to listen to them. At their first words I put my hands to my head and burst out crying; then I rushed out of the compound away from the *kulaks* and my friends. I was no longer interested in whether the *kulaks* were to live or die. I saw them as low-life, vile scoundrels and I didn’t even want to look at them.

I burst out of the compound into the spacious farmyard of the *barin’s* estate and paced up and down this yard like a madman, every so often glancing in the direction of Dibrivki from where, as previously, a black plume of smoke was rising up and staining the sky. Then I tried to stop pacing, as some new problems occurred to me. And I did stop, but instead of concentrating on these problems, I pulled a revolver out of my pocket and, quite unconsciously, cocked the gun and pointed the barrel at my forehead. But as soon as I felt its cold touch, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of horror. Fearing for my sanity, I sought the company of those closest to me. I headed for the shed where they were resting. Many of the partisans were already getting up. I ran into Karetnik. He was coming to tell me that our scouts had captured some more *tachankas* with armed “farm owners” (*kulaks*), returning home from Dibrivki.

“And what did you do with the first three scoundrels?” I asked.

“We shot them.”

“Kill these dogs too! We shall offer no mercy from this day forward to the armed enemies of the Revolution!”

“That’s my opinion as well,” replied Karetnik, “but Marchenko is opposed.”

“We’ll have to have a talk with Marchenko. Meanwhile tell him from me to keep his sentimentality in his pocket! I believe it’s his turn to lead the detachment. Tell him to get ready to depart for Komar [a Greek town].”

And Semyon Karetnik went on his errand. I was left alone once more, but now I was no longer agitated. I thought carefully about what was to be done next. The way I saw it, we should travel as

quickly as possible through the countryside, informing the peasants about what had been done to the inhabitants of Dibrivki by the bourgeoisie together with Austro-German troops. While I was thinking about this, the detachment had drawn itself up and awaited the return of our last patrols.

I went up to the detachment, greeted the partisans, and began discussing with them our route and future actions. While my partisan friends were listening to me, our scouts brought in one more *tachanka* with three armed *kulak* colonists and a fourth person, a peasant from near Dibrivki who had been badly beaten and tied hand and foot. These *kulaks* had suspected him of revolutionary tendencies and were taking him back to their colony for torture.

I yelled at our scouts:

“Why haven’t you disarmed them?”

But the *kulaks* answered:

“We’re on your side. No need to disarm us, we got our weapons from the government.”

But we disarmed them just the same.

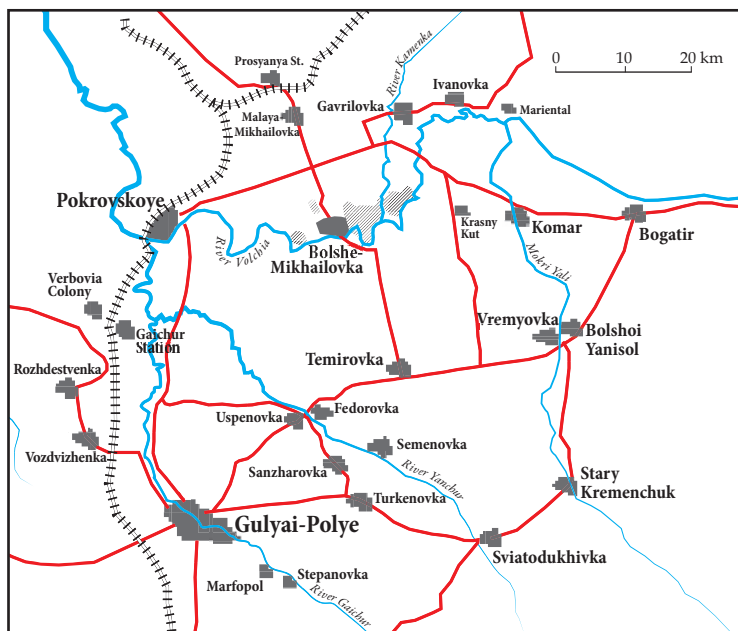
The abused peasant recognized me and burst into tears. He was untied. He told us what the butchers had been up to in Dibrivki. From him we learned that the most ferocious component of the enemy forces in the village were German-colonists from the colony of Krasny Kut.

Making a note of this colony and its location, I encouraged this peasant to give us his opinion as to what we should do with these *kulaks*, who had seized him on the road near the village, beat him unconscious, and then tied him up and were taking him back to the colony for further torture. The peasant answered me simply and clearly:

“They’re just idiots. I don’t want anything bad done to them.”

But the other peasants—his fellow-villagers who had come running after us earlier, as well as some of the armed partisans—yelled at him, calling him stupid and demanding that they be allowed to deal with the *kulaks* themselves. They grabbed these *kulaks* and chopped off their heads on the spot.

This was a distressing sight—the annihilation of the lives of *kulaks* who had committed excesses in their struggle against the



Makhno's swing through the *raions* in October 1918 took him to the Greek villages of Komar, Bogatyr, and Bolshoi Yanisol.

Revolution. But this annihilation was necessary because not only we, the vanguard elements of rebellion and revolution, but also the broad mass of Ukrainian toilers, had ceased to regard the enemies of the Revolution as representing any sort of high principles. The masses, just like us, had begun to hate them for their villainous crimes against the people and against all the good things we were striving for.

Presently our whole detachment was mustered and we set off towards Komar. When we got there, we routed the *Hetman's Varta* and called the whole population to a meeting. Comrade Marchenko and myself addressed this assembly. We informed the people about the assault of the bourgeoisie and the Austro-German troops on Dibrivki, and what had been done to the inhabitants of the village and to the village itself. Then we called upon the working population of Komar to spread the news throughout their *raion* about the evil deeds committed against the peasants of Dibrivki.

We urged them to rise up in arms against the bourgeoisie and its defenders—the Austro-German Expeditionary Army.

At Komar several young Greek peasants immediately joined our detachment, mounted on their own horses.

From there we headed to the Tatar village of Bogatyr<sup>[56]</sup> and held a large meeting there. Then we swung over to Bolshoi Yannisol (another Greek village) and Vremyovka<sup>[57]</sup>. Everywhere we inflicted mortal blows on the *Hetman's Varta* and destroyed its institutions; we also dispersed Austro-German punitive units and annihilated their officers. Then we held meetings, calling upon the peasants, workers, and working intelligentsia not to sit quietly and passively accept the oppression of the *Hetman's* regime, but to rise up resolutely against it and encourage others to do the same. We urged them to ruthlessly eradicate and annihilate anything anti-revolutionary, especially anything imposed on their hard-working lives by Austro-German bayonets.

The Vremyovka peasants were prepared to unite with us in open resistance that very day. But there weren't enough weapons to go around. Then, with no thought for tomorrow when we would be gone from the village, they proposed that we intervene on their behalf with the *kulaks* who, with the help of Austro-German troops, had rolled back the gains of the revolution, re-privatizing the previously collectivized flour mills and dairies. These enterprises were now gouging the peasants with high prices for grinding meal and making butter.

We then organized a separate meeting of the *kulaks* and other well-to-do people and proposed that they renounce their ownership of the mills and dairies in favour of social ownership; and that they become free and equal members of the new society.

The upshot of our serious and non-confrontational discussions was that we learned that the situation with regard to these enterprises was such that if the private owners tried to switch to social ownership, these enterprises would still not be available to

56 The ethnography of this region is very complex. The inhabitants of Bogatyr were of Greek origin but their ancestors had adopted the language (Urum) and culture (but not the religion) of the Crimean Tatars. See Chop (2008).

57 These two villages, of different ethnic composition, were virtually side by side.

the people. For the *Hetmanite*-Austro-German authorities would rather shut them down than allow revolutionary principles to gain ascendancy in the daily life of the peasants.

Most of the partisans, including a number of commanders, and especially the village poor of Vremyovka, insisted that we blow up or burn to the ground these public enterprises.

“The German and *Hetmanite* authorities seized these enterprises which belonged to us as conquests of the Revolution,” said the peasants, “and gave them to rich people with the warning that any attempt to socialize them would result in these businesses being closed for good. When we get rid of this government, we shall build new enterprises.”

I was somewhat disconcerted by such intentions on the part of the peasants and the partisans. Again we convened a general assembly of the peasants. This time we reached a common decision to establish minimal fees for the use of the mills and dairies. Until we could get rid of the bourgeoisie and its government, these enterprises would be left in the hands of their “owners.” At the same time we made it clear to the rich owners that if they couldn’t reconcile themselves to this decision of the toilers and tried to destroy it by resorting to force in the form of Austro-German bayonets, they were liable to pay for their actions at any time with their lives. For there was no telling when the Batko Makhno insurgent detachments could turn up.

The owners swore they would submit to the people’s decision.

It was here in Vremyovka that the partisans learned details about the Krasny Kut colony.

“It’s a German colony,<sup>[58]</sup>” said the peasants, “and the colonists are armed to the teeth. It’s a command centre for the struggle of the *kulaks* and *Hetmanites* against the revolutionary *bednyaks* [poor peasants]. A few days ago messengers arrived here from the colony. They collected the members of the *Varta* and many of the *kulaks* of this district and led them off somewhere. They still haven’t returned. We’ve heard rumors that they went to another *raion* to fight partisans.

58 The German colonists were divided along denominational lines; the Krasny Kut (literally “Pleasant Valley”) colony was Roman Catholic.



It was clear to me where these *Hetmanite* detachments had gone. They had joined regular Austro-German troops in attacking us in Dibrivki. Now they had either remained in Dibrivki for pillaging or were trying to follow our trail but were too slow to catch up to us.

I told the peasants we were thinking of disarming this colony, and inquired about its size.

"Oh, you won't be able to disarm it," the crowd of peasants cried. "It may not be big, only 60 – 70 households, but it is well-armed. The people there are deadly shooters and have a large supply of weaponry. They regularly practice with machine-guns."

"Aha, this sounds like a bunch we should take on!" a voice from the ranks was heard, "Lead us to this colony, Batko!"

And we set out from Vremyovka in the direction of this colony. On the road, I held a meeting of our commanders. We each took on an assigned role for the encirclement and capture of the colony, hopefully without casualties. At two o'clock we had surrounded it and began our attack.

The colonists had only just begun to arrive home from Dibrivki. They greeted us with strong rifle and machine-gun fire. We answered in kind. Pretty soon our cavalry, 35 – 40 strong, broke into the colony. But the inhabitants, firing accurately from their positions at loopholes specially prepared for defense, immediately killed some of our riders and drove off the rest.

The commanders ran up to me and asked whether it was worthwhile for us to capture this colony. It was well defended and probably its defenders would fight to the bitter end. We would lose many of our fighters for nothing.

Standing quietly, surrounded by my friends—my aides, I listened to them calmly, then insisted that we needed to capture this colony. It was a trove of weapons which we just had to win.

The commanders dispersed to their positions. I, along with Karetnik, Liuty, Shchus, and some other partisans, jumped over a fence from a garden into the courtyard of one of the houses. We captured the house, took five prisoners, and led them out onto the street. The firing, first on one side, then on the other, died down. Our cavalry again broke into the colony at one end. The infantry

penetrated at the other end.

In this way the colony was captured. But only four more colonists surrendered to us. Altogether it turned out we had 10 prisoners. As for the rest—some had not yet returned from their campaign against Dibrivki, and some who had returned and fought against us had now gone into hiding. However, we didn't bother looking for them. The colony was searched for weapons. Because of the concealed colonists I warned our commanders and partisans to be especially vigilant and look both ways so they wouldn't be killed in a surprise attack.

Meanwhile, as our detachment carried out its search and rounded up some fine horses we needed, our pickets around the colony arrested a bunch of colonists arriving from Dibrivki, where they had helped regular Austro-German troops drive us out of the village, had burned down most of the place, shot many of the peasants out of hand, and raped many of the women.

The returning colonists were herded into one group and led to me together with their wagons of rifles, ammunition, saddles, sabres, and various calibre German and Austrian hand grenades. These supplies were their reward from the Austro-German command for services rendered to their troops in the war against the Revolution.

These "heroes" of the struggle against the unarmed inhabitants of Dibrivki, and with the revolutionary Ukrainian population in general, were led to me coated with dust and scared to death.

I felt like laughing at these characters who had consciously or unconsciously acted as executioners. However, this was neither the time nor the place for mirth. I questioned them about one thing only:

"Why, gentlemen, are you transporting such a pile of weapons?"

"To defend ourselves from any sort of bandits," one of them answered.

"And is it really true that the population of Dibrivki are bandits?" I inquired. There was no response. All of them were silent.

"Well here's the thing, gentlemen," I said, "your evil deeds committed against the people of Dibrivki, committed against the Revolution and revolutionaries, have provoked us—revolutionary

partisans—to seek retribution against you and against your class generally, which has taken up weapons against the Revolution.”

They wanted to tell me something, but I walked away in order to issue orders to the detachment to go through the settlement and flush out the inhabitants, assemble them in a field, and then burn the colony to the ground.

After half an hour all the inhabitants and their cattle had been brought into a field, and the colony was engulfed in flames from one end to the other. A slight breeze helped things along. The colony was quickly transformed into one big bonfire.

And only now did the colony's erstwhile defenders emerge from their subterranean hideouts. But they immediately perished. Hidden in every yard, in the ricks of hay and straw, in the barns and sheds—everywhere in this colony there were large quantities of ammunition, all sorts of weapons, and grenades. In one backyard there were three-inch shells. All this stuff was now exposed to the dense flames and in almost every yard there was a powerful explosion. This prevented the partisans from jumping over the fences into the courtyards to capture its defenders, but neither did it allow the latter to escape in the opposite direction where there were no partisans. The defenders began shooting themselves and, apparently, they all died in this manner or else were killed by the very armaments they had planned to use against others.<sup>[59]</sup>

The inhabitants of Krasny Kut who were assembled in the field asked the partisans:

“Where are you taking us?”

The partisans answered:

“We're not taking you anywhere. You are free to go. The partisans who are guarding you should be withdrawn any minute now. Our advice is that you go wherever it is that the Dibrivki peasant families are going. You are now in the same situation as those peasant men, women, and children whom your fathers, husbands, and sons jeered at, and whom they subjected to beatings, rapes, and the burning of homes.”

Upon hearing this rather crude but essentially accurate re-

59 According to the official government report on this incident to the Yekaterinoslav *starosta* (governor), 18 people were killed in this incident. See Malinovsky (2009), p. 357.

sponse from the partisans, I approached the group of inhabitants, most of whom were women and, after expression regret that we had not found any grounds for leaving the colony untouched, I added my own advice:

“Yes, yes, what the partisans told you is correct. The road is open to you to join the toiling peasantry. You are going to set out on a journey which may result in suffering, at least until the Revolution triumphs. But speak frankly to those of the bourgeois class who are close to you and let them know why we burned your rich homes and killed your fathers, husbands, and sons. Tell them the truth and advise all those who are supporting the *Hetman* and the Austro-German *junkers* in their criminal actions against the toilers that their crimes will receive their due reward at the hands of the best sons of the toiling peasantry. The crimes of the bourgeoisie will call forth retaliation by the Ukrainian toilers on a level such as the world has never seen before. This will take place under our organizational direction. No one will be spared unless they come to their senses and voluntarily renounce their position of lording it over our country.”



The colonists set off towards other colonies and *kulak khutors*. It was painful to watch their straggling procession. But we had no other choice with the Krasny Kut colony. We couldn't leave it untouched. We had to destroy this colony along with those of its proprietors who, without being conscripted, had abandoned their wives, their children, and their domestic chores just so they could amuse themselves by trampling revolutionary peasants into the dust. They had taken up arms and gone to Dibrivki to help the Expeditionary Army kill its working population.

The destruction of this colony and, subsequently, a number of other *kulak khutors*, along with those proprietors who had participated directly in the burning of Dibrivki, was a necessary warning to the bourgeoisie. These owners had been responsible for crushing the villagers and murdering the finest of their youth. We had to let the bourgeoisie know that we, the revolutionary peasants, had taken up arms against it and aimed at total victory over its system and its political regimes. We wouldn't let any-

thing stop us in the pursuit of our goal; the more the bourgeoisie unleashed bloody horrors such as sending villages up in flames so they could maintain their own evil, tyrannical rule over the working people of Ukraine, the more desperately we would attack them. We would attack them from all directions and by all possible means. We would destroy them as individuals and we would destroy their estates.<sup>[60]</sup>



Thus most of the inhabitants of Krasny Kut dispersed. They went to other colonies or *khutors* in the region. Of those who were captured either during the battle or when they were intercepted by our pickets, some were released after interrogation. Others, in particular those “heroes” who were seized with weaponry and equipment received from the Austrian-German command after the Dibrivki operation, were immediately shot.

Now our detachment was strengthened with fine, fresh horses; *tachankas*, and military equipment. Our column passed around the smoking ruins and stretched out along the road heading towards the Fesunovsky *khutors*. These were *khutors* belonging to big landowners, most of whom had joined the colonists in their attack on Dibrivki. Just like the bunch from Krasny Kut, once they had captured the village they dealt savagely with its working population. Just like the colonists, they had gone from house to house putting them to the torch and burning them to the ground.

According to information supplied by colonists we had captured at Krasny Kut, the owners of these *khutors* were still in the vicinity of Dibrivki. But that was in the morning. Now evening was approaching. Probably they had all got together for a fine supper—a victory feast. Neither I, nor our staff, nor the detachment, on the basis of fresh evidence, could exclude them from the list of people subject to pitiless annihilation as retribution for their bloody actions against the peasantry.

I said to Karetnik and Shchus:

“Let’s hurry to these *khutors* so we can pay a visit to their

60 The Krasny Kut colony (its German name was Neu-Grüntal) seems to have recovered from the scorched earth policy of the Makhnovists because the population of the colony was almost 200 in 1926. See Diesendorf (2006), p. 315.

proprietors in the early evening as if we're guests. According to peasant tradition, a good proprietor never sits down to eat without guests. If we hurry, these proprietors won't be able to celebrate on this, the first evening of their return from their trip to Dibrivki. We shall destroy these foul nests which are spawning atrocities and abominations in our free country!"

"The detachment is already well on the way," replied Karetnik and summoned the partisans who were holding our horses.

All of us, as if on cue, jumped on our horses and took off down the hill after the detachment.

Suddenly we heard a cry behind us:

"Stop! Stop!"

Looking around, we saw a peasant cart. Three peasants jumped down from it after tying up the reins. They ran towards us and yelled:

"Where's Batko Makhno? We have to see Batko Makhno!"

Comrade Shchus recognized them and told me: "These guys are from Dibrivki." He hurried towards them and asked what they wanted.

"We come in peace to Batko Makhno with bread and salt," they told Shchus. Shchus led them close to me. Removing their caps, they greeted me. Then one of them came right up to my horse and handed me a seven-pound flat loaf of bread with a big hunk of salt sticking out of it.

Shchus whispered to me:

"These are Dibrivki *kulaks*."

I indicated to Shchus that I had heard him and asked the men:

"What's this about? What are you trying to tell us partisans by giving us bread and salt?"

"We came to tell you, Batko Makhno, that we, the peasants of Dibrivki, have made our peace with the Germans, the Austrians, and all the people who live in *khutors* around here [read—proprietors]. We also want peace with you."

I pondered this. Shchus and Karetnik could not restrain themselves and started swearing at the men. I asked them to apologize, which they immediately did. (However, the men treated their insults as a joke.) Then I recovered the bread and salt, which had

been handed off to Comrade Liuty, and turned to the peasants, declaring:

"I can't accept your bread and salt. I'm giving it back to you and request you tell me the truth. Who sent you to us?"

"Batko Makhno, we were sent by the priest, Father Ivan, along with the assembly of villagers."

"All the villagers?"

"No, just those at the assembly."

"Here's what you do," I told the peasants. "You go back to Dibrivki and tell your priest from me that he should stop acting like a fool. For if he doesn't, if he insists on reconciling the peasants with their direct enemies and murderers, the next time we're in Dibrivki we're going to tan his backside so badly he'll have something to show his great-grandchildren."

"Well, Batko, we can't tell the priest something like that. Give us a different message," the peasants said.

"All right, don't say anything to the priest," I responded, more calmly this time. "But tell the peasants from me they shouldn't listen to a foolish priest and instead of making peace they should prepare for the most pitiless struggle against their executioners. So go back right away and tell this to the peasants. Goodbye!..."

I extended my hand to them. They all came up and, tipping their caps, said goodbye. Then they went back to their cart.

Shchus mounted his horse and we started off. And the peasants, kneeling and crossing themselves, cried after us:

"God help you in your struggle against our common enemies!"<sup>[61]</sup>

We also removed our caps and waved them; then we spurred our horses and disappeared behind knoll where Marchenko and Petrenko, who had fallen back from the detachment, awaited us.

Hurrying forward to the detachment, I briefly told the partisans about the mission of the three *kulaks* from Dibrivki, and what I had charged them to convey to the Dibrivki peasants. I also suggested that the enemies of the Revolution would be shaking in their boots when they learned about our actions in response to their evil-doing. And I emphasized that now was not the time for

61 Spoken in Ukrainian.

hesitation, that we should seize the moment to raise the toilers in revolt against them—a revolt both widespread and determined—which would deal death and destruction to their system and the forces defending it.

The detachment listened to my speech with rapt attention and expressed their own sincere approval of my words.

The sun had already set when we surrounded the *khutors*. But there were very few inhabitants to be found, especially ones who had taken part in the storming and burning of Dibrivki. Two hours before our arrival all those who could manage had run away.

Here, at these *khutors*, our detachment took a little break to feed and water our horses.

Three hours later when we re-formed, a special squadron was assigned to set fire to all the buildings in the *khutors*, while the rest of the detachment took off across the fields in the direction of Dibrivki.

We had apparently given the slip to the enemy forces following us. Everyone in our detachment wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to swoop down on Dibrivki and see with our own eyes what had transpired in the village, the level of destruction, etc.

That's why, while the Fesunovsky *khutors* were going up in flames, our detachment headed for Dibrivki.

On our way in this dark night we blundered into the estate of the *pomeshchik* Hizo. Our mounted scouts captured Hizo himself. According to his tenants and another *pomeshchik*, a neighbour captured with him, he had only just arrived. The two *pomeshchiks* were strolling along a lane and both were armed with revolvers. Hizo turned out to have in his possession a photo of Comrade Shchus. Hizo started lying, saying he had been given the photo by a close acquaintance of Shchus's father, etc.

But Shchus proved he was lying, because this was the only existing photo of Shchus which had been a gift from him to his mother and wife. Then Hizo admitted he was present when all the *pomeshchiks* and *khutor* proprietors had searched and then burned the home of Shchus's mother. Having an interest in Shchus as an example of a fearless partisan, he had removed this photograph from the wall in the Shchus family home.



Shchus was beside himself when he heard Hizo's testimony, and many of the others present felt the same way. Karetnik and myself, and especially Comrade Marchenko, wanted to interrogate Hizo and his neighbour more thoroughly. But we weren't able to continue the interrogation. Shchus pounced on him like a lion and, in his unbridled hatred, wanted to tear him apart. Hizo broke away and ran through the courtyard. The partisans took off after him, abandoning the second *pomeshchik*, Hizo's neighbour, who stuck close to me and wouldn't budge. Twice the partisans caught Hizo, but he escaped from them on both occasions thanks to his hounds, which he had managed to unchain in time. This only infuriated everyone even more. No one had any thought about letting him get away. No, everyone wanted to seize him. His tenants helped with this. Evidently they were sick of him or maybe they were so mean as to think they would benefit from his death, not realizing that the Revolution would not allow this and would evict them from this estate just as it would evict Hizo himself, unless he was willing to work on an equal basis with the other toilers. So wherever Hizo hid, these tenants found him and pointed him out to the partisans. Catching him was physically and morally exhausting. Finally the tenants pointed to where he was clinging to the wall of a shed, and two partisans rushed at him. He broke away from them and headed straight for where I was standing with Liuty and Hizo's neighbour. I pulled out my saber and yelled: "Stop!" He tried to get past me and I struck him on the back of the head. My blow was quite weak, but he still fell down. This decided his fate.

Comrade Shchus grabbed him and lifted him up. The partisans, especially the Dibrivchans, cried:

"No mercy for him! Kill him!"

Shchus asked for my opinion. Under the circumstances, with Hizo being caught with Shchus's photograph, I couldn't pronounce in his favour. Nor could Karetnik and Marchenko. The other *pomeshchik*, his neighbour, was released and provided with an escort to conduct him past our sentries. But Hizo was sabered by Shchus and the other partisans.

Hizo's estate was not touched; we took only some cartloads of

oats for the horses.

From there we headed towards Dibrivki. Along the way, because it was dark, we turned off the road to the Serikov estate, seven *versts* from Dibrivki. Here we stayed until morning.

At the Serikov estate our scouts and messengers from the other detachments caught up with us. They brought us encouraging reports about the successes of the other detachments in a number of *raions* and *uyezds*.<sup>[62]</sup> This news cheered up all of us (and we were already feeling positive).

It was around lunchtime. I issued letters to the messengers for the commanders of the other detachments and dispatched those who needed to make a speedy return to their own *raions*.

Meanwhile Comrade Shchus, the duty commander, had assembled 30 riders and two machine-guns mounted on *tachankas*. Shchus and I jumped in the saddle and took off with this group. Leaving the road, we crossed fields and climbed a hill, heading for Dibrivki.

When we had crested the hill, the village came into view. Here and there a few houses remained intact. But the church and the forest were the only evidence that this was Dibrivki.

As we drew closer to the village we had a better view of the half-ruined walls of houses, scorched and blackened. But there were no people. Our hearts were heavy at the sight of all this. Comrade Shchus and some of the other partisans from Dibrivki stared at the village quietly and intently. Then Shchus, sobbing and wiping away the tears rolling down his face like a child, asked me:

“Batko, do you see what they have done to the village?”

And he bent over the pommel of his saddle and fell silent.

I turned around to the partisans and shouted: “Let’s move!” This forced Comrade Shchus to straighten up again. Spurring his horse, he drew even with me.

I turned to him and began to quietly scold him for losing his composure in front of the partisans. At the same time I asked his thoughts regarding our entry into the village—weren’t we in danger of falling into the clutches of the enemy?

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62 Yekaterinoslav gubernia, the main site of these events, had 8 uyezds and about 60 raions in 1918.

He was emphatically in favour of entering the village.

"Let's ride up to the bridge. If we see anyone we'll asked them if the enemy is in the village. If we don't see anyone we'll inspect the village from outside and return to the detachment," Shchus told me.

However, some of the other partisans wanted to go to their own streets and see the walls of their own homes. This forced us to turn away from the bridge and approach the village from the opposite side, which was the safest direction for flight.

On the opposite side we met several peasants. These poor people, who had lost everything, immediately rushed to meet us. But not one of them complained of their predicament. When we asked "How is your home?" or "Did you get burned out" they merely pointed to their destroyed dwellings and, shrugging their shoulders, commented:

"We've been reduced to nothing, but we still won't support the *Hetmanites* and their allies, the Germans and Austrians. We'll stand against them and we'll suffer for it, but we're going to support you."

Hearing these simple, heart-felt words from the peasants, I rejoiced. Instead of asking more questions about the village, I began to inquire about the our enemies' numbers at the time when they burned it.

"It's hard to say, Batko, we weren't able to observe them carefully, they were giving us a licking," the peasants replied. "In any case we must tell you the German and Austrian soldiers weren't much involved in setting fire to our homes. That was the work of our Ukrainian bourgeois types from the *khutors* and the German colonies."

"Do you know how many homes in the village have been burned out?"

"Six hundred eight homes," was the answer I received.

"And are there now German soldiers in the village square or in the woods nearby?"

"The soldiers and the *Varta* are all gone. They took off, as they said, to hunt you down," the peasants replied.

We, the partisans, exchanged glances. I proposed:

“Why don’t we go for a ride through the village and see the damage for ourselves?”

“Let’s go, Batko!”

Then I spoke to the peasants and encouraged them in their resolve not to submit to the lawless rule which had just been imposed on them. I told them to wait for us to provide them with weapons and a general call to launch a campaign against our common enemies. This group of peasants reacted cheerfully to our promise to supply them with weapons. We said goodbye to them and spurred our horses towards the river. Breaking into groups of five or six each, we plunged into the river and crossed into the village. There we galloped up and down the streets. But whenever we approached the wooded outskirts we instinctively reined in our horses and kept a sharp lookout for enemies.

There were almost no peasants in the village. And if there were any, they were sitting in their yards next to the collapsed walls of their huts. As we passed along the streets, one after another, we occasionally ran into dogs which barked at us forlornly as we sped past, and we also came across pigs—running around and evidently quite hungry—as well as bellowing calves.

After surveying most of the village we ended up in one of the squares which directly faced the forest. Here we were met by a priest with a group of about 20 peasants. Comrade Shchus with three partisans rode up to this group and asked where they were coming from.

It turned out the priest and his minions had found out about our presence while we were still on the other side of the river and, grabbing a cross and two church banners, had gathered together several peasant elders and set out towards the forest to meet us.

When Shchus galloped up to me and reported about this, I began to despise this priest and his nonsense more and more. I was upset and pondered what to do with him since he had already been warned not to involve himself in foolishness.

Shchus, noticing I was hesitating, suggested ordering the partisans to give the priest a thrashing.

I rejected this suggestion, declaring that was not an appropriate way to deal with him at the moment.

But the priest wanted to come closer to tell me something. I refused his request and told him through Shchus: don't ever lead those peasants to meet me and don't ever come near me with a cross in your hand.

As Comrade Shchus informed me, the priest promised not to do these things, but now he requested that I at least accept bread and salt from him and his group of peasants.

I categorically refused.

The priest led his flock back to the church. And we gathered our group and made our way gradually to a point on the river where there was a ford and our riders could cross easily without getting wet.

As we made our way to the river we began to notice more peasants. They were sitting alongside the walls of their burned-out homes. Some were alone, others were surrounded by small children whom they were talking to. When they noticed us, the peasants got up and waved their caps at us as a token of welcome. And the children ran to the street and waved to us with their little hands. But there were peasants who sat despondently staring at the ground and responded only when they were hailed by partisans who knew them.

Here the devastation was heart-rending. I was horror-stricken and couldn't utter a word for several minutes.

I was deeply touched by the scene. Ever since I had been leading detachments I had tried to maintain my composure no matter what. But now I was so overwhelmed I almost broke down and wept like Comrade Shchus and some of the other partisans.

Soon the the River Volchya came into sight and the path down to its bank. I gave the command: "Walk the horses!" We quickly entered the cold autumn waters and kept going till we reached the other side.

Then, as we climbed a hill following the road leading to the Serikov estate where the rest of detachment was waiting, we stopped to have one last look at the ruined village of Dibrivki.

Three of us had binoculars. They were passed from hand to hand. In surveying the destruction each of us was seized with violent passions of hatred and vengeance directed at our enemies.

We stood there a long time. The partisans didn't want to leave even though they were damp and shivering. Fortunately, the horses were not interested in staying there on the road. They were also freezing and getting hungry. They took off down the road as if knowing our destination was not far off and they would find food and shelter there.

Now we were moving at a frantic pace, not talking to each other, but keeping a sharp look out both ahead and to the sides so as not to rush into an enemy ambush.

When we galloped up to the Serikov estate, we found the rest of our detachment already in the saddle or loaded on wagons and stretched out along the road to Dibrivki.

"Why? What's going on?" I asked the scouts returning from the vanguard.

"Comrade Karetnik's orders," was the answer.

It turned out Karetnik, Marchenko, and Petrenko had run out of patience waiting for us. They imagined we had all been surrounded or even captured by the enemy, or perhaps chased off in another direction. So they decided to follow our trail with the whole detachment. Now the situation was clear, the whole detachment was redeployed to the estate.

Those of us who had visited Dibrivki and had been pretty well drenched in the river changed our clothes and, while warming up in our quarters, were besieged with questions by the partisans who had remained behind.

I made a report to the partisans about what the bourgeoisie and its lackeys had done to Dibrivki.

The partisans, even before this report, were quite agitated by our scraps of information about what we had seen in Dibrivki. Now, when the whole story was pulled together and presented to them, their reaction was not distress but rather belligerence.

"We need revenge, revenge, revenge! Lead us to the enemy, Batko, we shall repay!"

It should be noted that all the deeds committed by our enemies in Dibrivki could serve as the most effective propaganda for fomenting the rebellion of the masses against them. I had realized this earlier while observing their nefarious actions. But I was

also aware that psychologically a rebellion of the toiling masses must be steered in the direction of the Revolution. Watching and listening to our partisans in these minutes, I felt a deep confidence in them in the sense that should we now happen to meet up with any German or Austrian regiment, we would lay a licking on it which its commanders could never have imagined. And as for the *Hetman*, if one of his detachments were to cross our path these days, it would be totally crushed. But I well understood that our goal was not exacting merciless vengeance on our enemies. Our goal had been succinctly stated by our Gulyai-Polye GGAK: to break the physical strength of our enemies and overcome, or at least lay the framework for overcoming, the ideological foundation on which their whole system was based, along with all the falsehoods preserving it.

As someone who supported this basic policy of our group, I hastened to make use of the opportunity to introduce into the ranks of the partisans certain postulates about our general relationship to our enemies, whom we had mercilessly destroyed only yesterday along with their estates.

These postulates led to the rejection of the pursuit of *vengeance* against our enemies. The organizing of an insurrection required a change from the type of actions we had engaged in during the previous day. We needed to concentrate on disarming the bourgeoisie and arming the revolutionary toilers of the villages. In my report I explained this new emphasis as follows:

“From now on the mission of the Batko Makhno Revolutionary-Insurgent Detachment [for so the partisans were now referring to it] must include the seizure from our enemies of weapons and money to the maximum degree possible and simultaneously the raising in rebellion of the peasant masses of the *raions* where we have influence. We must unify the peasants, arm them to the teeth, and launch a broad front against the existing system and its defenders.

“We—myself, Karetnik, Liuty, Marchenko, Shchus, and Petrenko,” I said to the Insurgent rank and file, “have already discussed this question. These comrades share my opinion unanimously. Now it’s your turn, partisans, to have your say.”

Many of the partisans, I recall, were puzzled and stubbornly asked me how it could be that we would not take revenge on our enemies for destroying the village of Dibrivki, and raping and shooting its inhabitants, etc.

A careful and in-depth explanation of this question was required. And this was time-consuming.

Meanwhile the Austro-German forces were not sleeping. They found out where we were stationed and hurried to surround the area. This was reported to us by peasants from all directions and we could not ignore their information. In quick order we adopted the following resolution about our discussion:

“With the goal of speedily arming the revolutionary peasantry, the core staff of the insurgent revolutionary movement and the associated insurgent armed forces resolve:

“Starting in October 1918, to introduce into the operating procedure of our detachments the rule according to which each detachment which captures a proprietor-owned *khutor*, a German colony, or a *pomeshchik* estate must first of all call a meeting of all the owners of these properties and, after ascertaining the extent of their wealth, impose a financial levy and announce the confiscation of all weaponry and ammunition. All this must be carried out under the direct supervision of the detachment commanders, who will exercise the strictest revolutionary responsibility.

“For each rifle with fifty rounds of ammunition surrendered by wealthy proprietors, the detachments will issue three thousand rubles from the funds collected.

“If the owners are not willing to surrender weapons, the detachments must carry out careful searches (once again under the supervision and responsibility of their commanders—revolutionary honour demands it).

“If a search does not find any weapons, the owner is to be left alone, untouched. In the reverse case, if weapons are found, their owner is to be shot.

“Horses required for the wagons and cavalry of our revolutionary insurgent forces are to be acquired from the above-mentioned owners according to the rule: if the owner had more than four or five horses, one or two will be taken without compensation; if the



owner has between two and four horses, one or two will be taken in exchange for a horse or two of lesser quality.

*“Tachankas* will be taken without compensation.

*“Brichkas* [light carriages] will be taken with a substitute provided if the owner has one or two. If the owner has more than two, then two will be taken without compensation.

“All enemies of our movement and its Revolution who *actively take up arms against us* will be shot where they fought as soon as evidence concerning their actions has been gathered from the local population.

“The best method of applying revolutionary justice, which should always be practiced by all Batko Makhno detachments, is to hold a preliminary inquiry conducted by village assemblies in those localities (villages and hamlets) where the accused were active and where they were apprehended by our detachments.

“Non-compliance with this procedure will result in revolutionary sanctions up to and including the public disowning of the offending detachments as having no connection with the general staff of the revolutionary-insurgent Ukrainian movement led by Batko Makhno.”

This resolution was signed by Shchus, Karetnik, Marchenko, and a number of other partisans who had been empowered by the rank and file.

Initially there was some discontent among the rank-and-file partisans. Some of them realized they were losing any hope of taking revenge on our enemies for destroying Dibrivki. But they quickly understood that the above-cited resolution, if implemented on a consistent basis by all our detachments, would prove to be a more effective means for the triumph of our movement over the hangmen of the Revolution, than one, two, or even five defeats inflicted on the enemies who were directly responsible for the burning of Dibrivki.

No sooner had our resolution about the collection of weapons been adopted, signed, and duplicated by typewriter, than it was distributed far and wide by means of peasants and couriers from our detachments. As for ourselves, we decided to spend one more night at the Serikov estate and set out early the next day for the

*kulak khutors* and colonies of Mariupol *uyezd* on the quest for weapons.

The sun was already “sitting on the ground,” as the peasants say, when our patrols reported that the enemy was nowhere to be found. It seemed like a good time to eat and then lie down to rest, which we proceeded to do. Supper was prepared and the pickets and mounted patrols were changed quickly and efficiently.

Suddenly we heard the whining and bursting of a high-explosive shell. First one, then a second and a third. And right away, from another direction—towards Temirovka—an enemy machine-gun began to chatter, drawing a response from one of our machine-guns on the picket line.

Anxiety gave way to panic, to my complete surprise. The partisans tried to grab their horses, a tactic of which I heartily disapproved at such moments. (I always insisted that some of the partisans, regardless of the type of weapons involved, should immediately strike out to meet the enemy and take up a favourable position. Another group of partisans, maintaining rigid self-control, should prepare the wagons and horses and, after reporting to whomever necessary about this, either set out towards the partisans engaging the enemy, or proceed to a designated place of shelter to await the withdrawal of these partisans from their position.)

Fortunately, the forces attacking us turned out to be *pomeshchik* detachments. Our machine-gunners quickly dispersed them. Austrian units which had remained near Dibrivki (six or seven *versts* from



Control of Mariupol uyezd, directly east of Gulyai-Polye, was contested by the Makhnovists throughout the Civil War.

us) were uselessly firing shells in our general direction. Their shots either fell short or sailed overhead.

This foolishness by the Austrians was soon noted by our fighters and order in our ranks was re-established.

Comrade Karetnik was the detachment's duty commander during this episode and was terribly upset by the panic. He scolded the partisans long and hard for their momentary disorientation, and they naively promised him it wouldn't happen again.

It was nightfall as we set out from our resting place, protected on all sides by mounted patrols. Just then the Austrian battery began firing from a new position and their shells began hitting the estate. When shrapnel is bursting over their heads at night, even people accustomed to being under fire can be unnerved. So this bombardment was naturally quite distressing for our inexperienced detachment. Moreover, two explosive shells fell right in our midst and three balls of shrapnel burst right above us—this cost us several lives. The detachment was compelled to split up two or three times, then come together again in columns as we hastened to evade the bombardment.

## Chapter 11

### The quest for arms. New battles.

It was not an easy matter to collect or, more accurately, extract arms from the bourgeoisie, from the supporters of *Hetman* Skoropadsky, and from agents of the Austro-German command (the latter regarded Ukraine as a supply source for Germany and Austria-Hungary). However, it was extremely important—essential even—for carrying on our struggle. Disarming the bourgeoisie and other enemies of the Revolution is a precondition for the toilers to find a way of freeing themselves from political reaction. That was my thinking, and I was able to convince my closest associates of the correctness of this policy. So now we devoted ourselves totally to this matter. For the time being we spent little time in the villages. We didn't spend much time conducting meetings of the peasants. Now we paid visits mainly to *kulak khutors* or colonies and the estates of *pomeshchiks*. At these locations we would assemble the supporters of the newly-minted Ukrainian *Hetman* state, and determine on the spot wealth of each rich person, either with their personal participation or that of their authorized representatives. Then we imposed a monetary contribution and presented them with an order to provide the specified sum, along with all the firearms and other weaponry in they possessed, within two hours. We quickly received all this and then moved on to other *khutors*. And so we travelled from one *raion* to another, striking fear and terror into the bourgeoisie by turning up unexpectedly and forcefully presenting our demands, demands which were at times excessive and devoid of sentimentality. Not only the bourgeoisie was terrorized, but also its defenders—the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* soldiers, who acted out of ignorance but were nevertheless despicable because of their actions against the Revolution.

In the course of a week-and-a-half or two weeks we collected large sums of money and an enormous quantity of firearms—mainly rifles with a large supply of bullets. We were now accompanied by a large wagon train filled with this military equipment

taken from the bourgeoisie as well as from punitive *Hetmanite*, German, and Austrian detachments which we encountered in our travels.

These supply wagons, but equally the enthusiasm of the partisans and peasant drivers accompanying them, served as convincing proof to both the working and non-working population of the villages that the insurgent movement led by Makhno was not to be taken lightly by the enemies of the Revolution.

The Ukrainian and Russian bourgeoisie, having re-settled in their own estates under the protection of the Austro-German *junkers* and applied themselves to forcibly depriving the peasants of the gains of the Revolution, not only trembled before the actions of our insurgency but also hastily abandoned their usual counter-revolutionary haunts and fled to *raions* where there was a large concentration of Austro-German troops. This made it all the easier to promote our rebellion at village meetings and helped us to quickly create new action groups. When groups took the field, they followed our directions, namely the directions of the Gulyai-Polye staff, both in an ideological and an operational sense.

And so our light detachment of cavalry and *tachankas* traversed parts of Berdyansk and Pavlograd *uyezds* and the whole of Mariupol *uyezd*. We were now convinced that the peasants in these *uyezds* were on our side, so we returned directly to the environs of Gulyai-Polye in order to capture this genuinely revolutionary centre which had led the way in setting up free battalions and their auxiliary detachments for the Revolution. It was our intention that the main operational staff of the insurgent movement of the Makhnovists be based there.

As we were on our way to Gulyai-Polye and about 40 *versts* from it, we ran up against a battalion of Austrians along with a detachment of Denikinists under the command of the officer Shapoval, near the little town of Stary Kremenchuk. We proceeded to engage them. And it's no exaggeration to say that this counter-revolutionary Denikinist formation and the Austrian unit alongside it were so badly beaten by us they abandoned three machine-guns, a whole bunch of rifles, and even their wounded soldiers. Furthermore, the survivors didn't stop fleeing even when they

got to Stary Kremenchuk, which we had no intention of entering.

Our victory over these units raised our revolutionary spirits even more and was a very effective demonstration for the toiling population of this region which had not yet joined us in the battle against the counter-revolutionary forces in Ukraine. But these people followed our actions with great interest and were preparing to switch from passive to active support for us at any minute. This section of the population was already keeping close track of our enemies' movements and reporting them to us on a regular basis. This was heartening both for us, who were already engaging in revolutionary armed struggle, and the broader population.

The important thing was not to lose our heads, i.e. not to get distracted, but go forward, step by step, unflinchingly towards our intended goals.

From the environs of Stary Kremenchuk our detachment headed by way of *khutors* and German colonies to the village of Temirovka, where we intended to spend the night and then allow a day of rest for both horses and personnel. Then we proposed to make a surprise attack on Gulyai-Polye, where only a single regiment of Austro-German troops was stationed. Once we had captured Gulyai-Polye, we hoped to stay there for a more or less extended period of time, as I have already mentioned.

## Chapter 12

### **Our stay in Temirovka. The attack on us by one of the punitive detachments from the Hungarian units of the Austrian Army and its victory over us.**

Temirovka is not a big place.<sup>[63]</sup> It was a tight squeeze to fit our detachment into it, but then we set up pickets on all sides of the village. This allowed even myself, who had been sleeping all these weeks with my clothes on, to finally undress and go to sleep on a peasant pallet with peasant pillows, covered by a warm quilt woven from sheep's wool instead of a factory-made blanket. But at four a. m. I was awakened by the garrison duty officer Marchenko, who presented me with the *pomeshchik* Tsapko, whose residence was in the neighbourhood and who had been captured by our scouts not far away.

Our scouts thought it suspicious that he was prowling around near the village in the middle of the night, and so they seized him and brought him into the village.

Comrade Marchenko was familiar with the Tsapko clan of Gulyai-Polye *raion*. He knew about their vicious actions in concert with the *Varta* and Austro-German troops during the recovery from the peasants of land, implements, and livestock which had been seized from the bourgeoisie by the Revolution and transferred to peasant societies. Marchenko's first inclination was to lead this Tsapko outside the village and let him have a bullet in the forehead. But then he decided to take him to me, knowing I was with Comrades Liuty and Karetnik, so we could make a joint decision about what to do with this guy.

Tsapko seemed a clever fellow. He quickly grasped how to extricate himself from this situation and declared he had been on his way to visit Batko Makhno to get permission for a bride and groom to pass through Temirovka on their way to an early-morning wedding in the village of Sanzharovka.

63 Temirovka was actually two distinct villages—Temirovka No. 1 and Temirovka No. 2, separated by a hill. Makhno refers to them by the local names Staraya [Old] Temirovka and Malaya [Little] Temirovka. In 1918 the former had a population of just over 300, and the latter just under 100. The Makhnovists bivouacked in Temirovka No. 1.

This struck me as very suspicious right away. I quickly got dressed and issued an order to the detachment: get ready to leave. Then I stated to Citizen Tsapko that the wedding party could follow the road alongside the village if the intention was to travel to the church before daybreak. But if it set out after daybreak, then we would no longer be present in the village and his party could travel through the village. I immediately ordered the scouts to conduct Tsapko outside the village and grant him his freedom. The scouts carried out my order.

However, I myself and my comrades, who resented my releasing Tsapko (when they thought it necessary to kill him), were in a state of anxiety. Although we ordered the partisans to stand down and disperse to their quarters again until a special order about departure was issued, we didn't get undressed and didn't lie down any more. In fact,, I suggested to Comrade Marchenko, the duty officer, that he should order that our wounded partisans should remain on the *tachankas* they had been lifted onto until morning.

About 30 or 40 minutes after Tsapko had been released, a machine-gun suddenly began firing on our pickets from the direction of the Serikov estate. And next the chatter of machine-guns was heard from two other directions firing on the village. All of us who were in my quarters rushed into the courtyard. Enemy bullets were whizzing through the village.

Quickly and decisively I issued orders to all the commanders. The units closest to the gunfire were to close with the enemy, while the rest of the detachment was to draw itself up in order and proceed over the hill to Malaya Temirovka where it was to occupy a suitable position and dig in. I myself with Karetnik and Isidor Liuty ran towards the pickets who had first opened fire. Alas, it was already too late: our machine-gunner was wounded and the pickets were falling back. I looked around and saw our partisans rushing out into the street and heading up the hill, while on the opposite side of the village through the early morning mist I could see Hungarian infantrymen advancing in an orderly fashion, firing their carbines from time to time or throwing grenades ahead of themselves.

"They look like good soldiers," I said to Comrade Karetnik.



Turning to Liuty, I grabbed a machine-gun from him of the Lewis type. Liuty quickly knelt down, I set the gun on his shoulders and, sighting on the advancing column, began firing. At first it seemed as if my firing had no effect, but then the column began to break up as I went through one ammunition belt after another.

Meanwhile Marchenko advanced from the village with about 60 – 70 of our partisans and attacked the enemy. But in vain. The enemy sharpshooters were accurate and brave; they quickly repulsed our attack and captured our machine-gun. We began to fall back through courtyards to the opposite side of the village in groups of 10 to 15, barely able to drag our wounded with us.

The Hungarian riflemen were already in the village. Although they had suffered losses (just as we had) they kept advancing without respite. Their bombardiers were in the vanguard, clearing the way forward through the village with grenades.

“Look and learn, boys,” I shouted to my partisan friends, “these brave riflemen know how to take a village from the enemy.”

At the same time I tried to inspire the partisans and, taking a risk, I ran out into the streets with Shchus, Karetnik, Liuty, Petrenko, and other partisans and returned the fire of the enemy, trying to repel his attack in any way possible and bring his successful advance to a halt. We had now reached the last courtyards of the village. Beyond was an open field. One group of partisans, led by Marchenko, deployed on the ploughed field, lying in the furrows. Meanwhile one, two, three partisans acting as couriers fell dead near me. And a nurse, the fiancée of young Petrenko who had been severely wounded at Dibrivki, ran up to me and said:

“Batko, the cart with your girlfriend<sup>[64]</sup> is still in the village.”

“Never mind, it already too late to save her,” I replied, and immediately asked her:

“And where is the wounded Petrenko?”

“He’s also in the village,” was the answer I heard. I ran over to

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64 Makhno’s girlfriend from October 1918 to March 1919 was Tina Ovcharenko, a telegraph operator from Bolshe-Mikhailovka who acted at one time or another as a secret agent for the movement. Their relationship was forcibly brought to an end by the Makhnovist commanders who decided Nestor was spending too much time with her and sent Tina back to her home—a striking example of the limits of Makhno’s authority. Tina’s fate is not currently known to history, but she was still living in the region in 1930.



A group of Makhnovist commanders in 1919: in the front row, from the left: Sidor Liuty (sitting on stool), Panteleimon Bilochub, Nestor Makhno (pointing at the map with his right hand), Vasily Kurilenko, Fyodor Shchus (pointing at the map with his left hand), Yakov Ozerov, Alexei Chubenko; in the second row, from the left: Anton Olkhovik, Peter Puzanov, Ivan Novikov.

Shchus right away—he had just dragged one of our wounded partisans from the street into the courtyard which was now our last foothold in the village under the relentless attack of the Hungarian riflemen. Suddenly Comrade Shchus went down. A bullet had passed through both his legs.

“Petya,” I yelled to the elder Petrenko. “Take Shchus on your shoulders and carry him to the other side of the hill to the nearest wagon!”

I, along with some of the partisans, once more emerged onto the main street of the village and checked the advance of the enemy with machine-guns and rifles. Meanwhile the rest of our partisans were ordered to make a withdrawal beyond the hill in short spurts.

When our partisans got out into the field, they had the opportunity to get over the hill on the run unscathed. But instead they lay down in the ploughed earth, hoping to set up a covering fire which would allow myself and my companions to make an easy withdrawal from the courtyard. By doing so they did harm to themselves. The Hungarian riflemen, frustrated in their attempts to reach the field by way of the main street, somehow quickly

appeared from the opposite side and were making a determined effort with well-aimed rifle and machine-gun fire to prevent any of us from running across the field. All of those partisans who had lain down in the field were now struck by bullets.

The horror of the situation weighed heavily on my spirit. Everywhere—on the street, in the courtyard, in the field—our partisans were falling, until Comrade Podgorny collected 15 teamsters from the wagon train along with one machine-gun and unleashed a hail of bullets into the flank of the riflemen. This was our salvation. The greater part of our partisans sprinted across the hill without being hit.

All the partisans from the courtyard ran out onto the field with Liuty in charge. Only Karetnik and myself remained in the courtyard, trying to take with us three seriously wounded partisans. And we did take them, but weren't able to carry them as far as the wagons, nor were we ourselves able to make it to the wagons.

During the time we were fighting this detachment of Hungarian riflemen, they received reinforcements from all sides and now we were almost entirely surrounded. Therefore our departure from the courtyard was nightmarishly difficult, especially since we, ten people, were carrying three wounded. We couldn't have made better targets for the enemy. Comrade Karetnik was wounded right away. The nurse, who had been tending to the wounded while constantly under fire, was killed outright. A little farther along and four more partisans were killed, including two of those we were carrying. We ran a little further and only three of us plus the wounded Karetnik remained alive. Five of our partisans rushed out from behind the hill to help us to get out of the field of fire, but three of them were hit right away and fell dead. Then there were three of us left in the field, a whole *verst* distant from our forces and only 200 *sazhens* away from the attacking enemy. We took turns running a few *sazhens* and then taking cover, while bullets were whistling alongside of us. Finally one of us, Comrade Lazarenko whose home was near the Dnieper, couldn't stand the pressure any more. He put his revolver to his forehead and pulled the trigger.

I didn't want to leave his revolver for the enemy so I sprinted over to him and grabbed it. Meanwhile Karetnik was already far

ahead of me. I was all alone and couldn't run any further. I was handling the revolver, getting ready to blow my own brains out, because I could see what appeared to be the enemy both beside and in front of me. And then I heard a clear, encouraging voice:

"Batko, Batko, come here!"

It was Isidor Liuty yelling. He was with two friends, Marchenko and Petrenko. I ran towards them. They set me on a pair of rifles and carried me at the run over the hill to the wagons.

There I was laid on a *tachanka* where my girlfriend (whom the nurse had said was left behind in the village) and a bunch of commanders and partisans came to look at me. It was discovered I was wounded in the hand, and my cap and jacket had been pierced by bullets in several places. I hadn't noticed any of this.

But I soon came to myself and looked around at all the commanders who were still alive. But I didn't see Semyon Karetnik among them and this made me quite agitated. Karetnik was one of those friends whose steadfastness as a revolutionary fighter had been apparent to me from the first days of the insurgency and I felt especially close to him. I started making a fuss: "Where's Karetnik?" It seems he hadn't even stopped to bandage his wound, but ran to the remnants of the detachment, grabbed some machine-guns, and rushed towards the hill to engage the triumphant enemy.

I ordered him to abandon his position. When he came back, our detachment, leaving the enemy at Staraya Temirovka, made its way through Malaya Temirovka towards the village of Sanzharovka, without changing our intended course towards Gulyai-Polye.

Several times I pulled off to the side of our column to observe how our ranks had been thinned out. I was heartbroken and felt overcome with weariness. But I didn't lose my faith that our forces would recover and replenish themselves and that we, the toilers, would surely gain the final victory over the oppressors in the next few weeks. I convinced my partisan friends of this as well and got the impression that they cheered up a bit and resolved to do everything they could to bring this about.

In Sanzharovka we met up with the wedding party, whose passage through Staraya Temirovka the *pomeshchik* Tsapko had

wanted to arrange the previous night. From a number of the people at this festive event we learned that the detachment of Hungarian riflemen had spent the night at Tsapko's estate. The matter seemed clear. Tsapko had come to Staraya Temirovka under the pretext of seeking permission for the bride and groom and their entourage to pass through the village, but really he came as a spy.

An order was issued to the partisans to confiscate all *tachankas* with their horses from this *kulak-pomeshchik* wedding celebration. The partisans carried out this order and politely suggested to this lively bunch of *kulak-pomeshchik* types that they accompany the bride and groom home on foot, since their *tachankas* with their fine horses were required by the Insurgent Army as conveyances for our machine-guns and machine-gunners.

Moving on, the detachment headed in a circuit around Gulyai-Polye with the intention of conducting a purge of the neighbourhood's rich estates which had been reoccupied by *pomeshchiks* and well-to-do *kulaks*. In order to protect these estates, the Austro-German command had stationed their own troops there—composite cavalry-infantry detachments—and foolishly counted on their assistance in teaching the peasants to respect the right of the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks* to private property in land and the enjoyment of their parasitical privileges.

Up until the appearance of our insurgent detachment in the neighbourhood of Gulyai-Polye, the Austro-German detachments with their *Varta* auxiliaries stationed in these estates and the nearby hamlets, as well as in Gulyai-Polye itself, had always had the upper hand. For none of our numerous, but tiny, detachments was strong enough to cope with them. In armed clashes the enemy always prevailed, and this had somewhat intimidated the population of the *raion*.

This situation compelled the staff of the insurgency to take measures to ensure that Gulyai-Polye *raion* would be rid of the *pomeshchiks* and their protectors once and for all, and that they would never be able to set up shop there again.

In making this circuit around Gulyai-Polye, our detachment was delayed for several hours at each estate, as we endured counter-attacks by the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks* with the assistance of the

Austro-German soldiers. Because of this we sustained significant losses. But we couldn't retreat. And in the final reckoning we surrounded our enemies at each location and annihilated them.

These battles around Gulyai-Polye, these stubborn struggles between the insurgents and the enemies of the Revolution—the enemies of the rights of the toilers to the land and free labour, to liberty and independence; with *pomeshchiks*, *kulaks*, and the brute force of Austro-German bayonets—these battles made a strong impression on the broad masses of toiling peasantry.

The masses rapidly began to coalesce around the embryonic insurgent groups we had created. Under the direction of these groups, uprisings broke out almost simultaneously in a number of *raions*.

This utterly dumbfounded the slow-witted Austro-German and *Hetmanite* command in Yekaterinoslav province, which at first couldn't grasp what level of forces would be required in which districts in order to suppress this fast-growing, genuinely popular insurrection.

Thus, the staff of the insurgent Makhnovists executed an operation of clearing out the counter-revolutionary forces in the environs of Gulyai-Polye and thereby forced the broad toiling masses to really define their relationship to the developing movement. And when the area around Gulyai-Polye had been cleared of the counter-revolutionary forces, the masses gave us not just moral, but active support. For the time being at least, the central levers of the counter-revolutionary armed forces were paralyzed. And then the staff and the nucleus of the armed insurgent forces entered Gulyai-Polye with our clear agenda.

## Chapter 13

**Our ploy of directing an ultimatum to the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* authorities. Our first military commanders. Provocateurs and spies. Our plans for further struggle against returning *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*. My tour of the *raions*.**

**I**t was October 1918. Our detachment entered Gulyai-Polye. We convened a large meeting for the insurgents and the general population. Comrade Marchenko and myself spelled out for all the toilers the tasks facing the insurgency at the given moment. We dealt with the problem of how to disarm the bourgeoisie, and explained what our detachment had achieved so far in this regard and what needed to be done throughout Ukraine by our detachments and by the working population generally if they wanted to be free from the State—in particular, from the *Hetmanite* State.

The population of Gulyai-Polye and the insurgents unanimously endorsed the tasks of the Makhnovist insurgent movement. The general population, while not yet taking up arms, resolved to support our movement with all the material and technical means at its disposal, and assured us that all their young people would henceforth consider themselves under the command of Batko Makhno's staff.

From this time on, our underground regional action groups were transformed into recruiting organs which functioned in the open, forming revolutionary military units for the insurgency. The sympathy, vigilance, and active support of the labouring population provided the safeguard for this work. In this manner Gulyai-Polye, treacherously handed over to the Austro-German and Central *Rada* command in April, now re-established its revolutionary position in the region. And again the message began to go out from Gulyai-Polye from our peasant anarchists about the real Revolution of the toilers and how to go about destroying the old Tsarist, *pomeshchik* structure and creating in its place of a wonderful, genuinely free society of working people, a society

from which property owners and political adventurers would be excluded.

On the day we occupied Gulyai-Polye, the insurgent staff discussed the fate of our comrades who had been captured by the Austrian authorities: A. Kalashnikov, the secretary of the GGAK, and other members of this group: Savely Makhno, Philip Krat<sup>[65]</sup>, and Prokhor Korostelyev, among others. They were being held in the Alexandrovsk Prison.

We now decided to use the telegraph as a weapon against the enemies of the Revolution. We drafted a telegram to the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* authorities in Alexandrovsk, presenting our demand for the release of our comrades. In it we said:

“Having defeated and routed the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* forces from around Gulyai-Polye, the staff of the insurgency has installed itself for the time being in Gulyai-Polye, which is the most convenient place for us to demand from the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* authorities of the city of Alexandrovsk the immediate release from prison of any peasants from Gulyai-Polye *raion*. In particular, we are calling for the release to Gulyai-Polye of Savva Makhno, A. Kalashnikov, Prokhor Korostelyev, M. Shramko<sup>[66]</sup>, and Philip Krat. Non-compliance with this demand will compel the staff of the insurgency to advance with all its forces against Alexandrovsk, and then the Austro-German command and *Hetmanite* authorities will have cause to regret their decision. The people aroused will show them no mercy.”

The telegram was sent by Batko Makhno and his adjutant Shchus.

The commandant's office in the city of Alexandrovsk replied that it considered the demand of the staff of the Batko Makhno insurgent revolutionary forces quite reasonable under the circumstances but that it could not fulfill it because the release of

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65 Philip Krat (? – ?) was a Gulyai-Polye peasant and an anarcho-communist from 1907. In 1917 he was the secretary of the GGAK and in 1919 he served in the quartermaster section of the Insurgent Army.

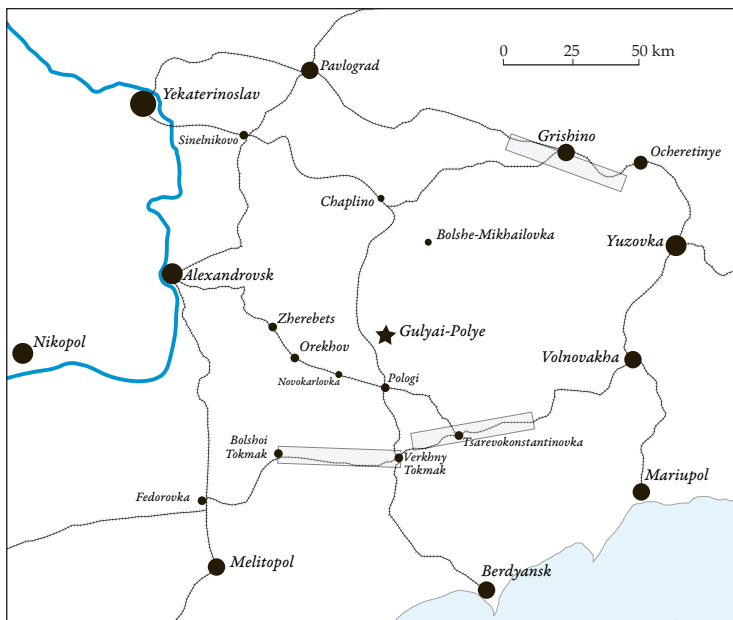
66 Maxim Shramko (? – ?), was a Gulyai-Polye peasant and former sailor who held a number of responsible positions in the revolutionary organizations of Gulyai-Polye in 1917 – 1918 before being arrested. He is described as being sympathetic to the anarcho-communists and took part in the Makhnovist movement after being released.



the persons referred to, in particular those mentioned by name, was not within the purview of its authority. The commandant could only ensure that not one hair be touched on the heads of the mentioned prisoners mentioned before a court had passed judgement on them. The commandant promised vouched for this and ordered a message to this effect to be sent to the staff of the insurgent forces in Gulyai-Polye.

The response from Alexandrovsk proved to us the degree to which the enemy was taking us seriously. This was the positive side of the response from our point of view, which we used extensively for agitational purposes. Meanwhile in Gulyai-Polye, the staff of the movement and representatives of the partisans and all our action groups listened to my report about the necessity of pulling together all of the forces already organized and engaging in open warfare with the enemies of the Revolution in the Chaplino-Grishino and Tsarevokonstaninovka-Pologi-Orekhov sectors. We needed to create well-defined partisan fronts: 1) against the Austro-German-*Hetmanite* armed Counter-Revolution; 2) against the Cossack detachments of the White Don; 3) against the Drozdovsky detachment advancing from the city of Berdyansk; and 4) against *pomeshchik-kulak* detachments advancing from Crimea under the leadership of agents of General Tillo.

"The time has arrived," I said in my official report, "to make the transition from small to large units, up to and including independent battalions of large numerical strength and high military quality which would be capable of carrying out the tasks of the Revolution in battle with the counter-revolutionaries on these fronts. The best auxiliary military units for battalions defending the Revolution at the front are partisan detachments of a mixed cavalry-infantry type with machine-guns mounted on *tachankas*—these light military units are virtually invincible. Our enemies are strong when it comes to human flesh and technology. They are setting up a front, and we must not waste a moment to create our own, revolutionary, working class front against it. Otherwise our insurrection will waste its energies in exacting gratuitous vengeance against our enemies, weakening itself physically and morally in the process, and heading down the path to ruin. A front



Railway map of the Makhnovist region in November–December 1918: the military tasks of the Makhnovists required setting up three fronts to control the railway lines north and south of Gulyai-Polye. Their main enemies were the Volunteer Army (Whites) and detachments from the German settlements in the south; and the Don Republic (White Cossacks) in the east. German-Austrian occupation forces were also still in the region. From the west they were threatened by the forces of the Ukrainian Directory which they sought to neutralize through a combination of diplomacy and subversion. Traffic continued to proceed along the railway lines which frequently crossed enemy lines!

against Krasnov; a front against Drozdovsky and Tillo—whom it is well known represent Denikin; a front against the Austro-German-*Hetmanite* forces; and last but not least a front to protect Gulyai-Polye, as the ideological and inspirational centre of our insurrection and as the organizational and general administrative centre of that insurrection—from now on this must be our slogan of the day!”

“That’s impossible, we’re too weak to carry out this plan!” resounded the voices of several comrades.

“He’s lost his mind,” said Comrade Marchenko, adding his voice against both me and my stated position about fronts.

But I was quite aware that these reactions were lacking founda-

tion, and so I was pleased for I foresaw that my positions would be adopted by our important Extraordinary Conference. And I also foresaw that Comrade Marchenko, like the genuine revolutionary he was, would throw himself into the work of explaining these positions to the broad, toiling masses and work with them to bring them to life. That's why my friends heard the following in response to their objections:

"We can't do what is beyond our strength. But what's necessary, and possible, that we must do. We must do all we can to ensure the broad, toiling masses of the villages, and hopefully of the cities as well, are moving in the same direction as we are and with the same enthusiasm for a revolutionary rebellion against the Counter-Revolution. Filled with this enthusiasm, the broad masses can engage in revolutionary actions on a wide scale and defeat their enemies. The proof of this is all around us—everywhere our detachments have shown the greatest degree of self-reliance, energy, valour, and honour in the ongoing struggle. I shall not deny that the position I have put forward about pulling our detachments together into one body and creating fronts will entail great sacrifices. I foresee everything that will be required from us in following this course. Acts of self-sacrifice will be demanded of us. You and I have known this all along and were always prepared. Really, comrades, it's only because of your sacrifices that we have been able to maintain ourselves despite being surrounded by enemies. And how we have maintained ourselves! We made our enemies tremble as soon as they received a report that we were moving against them and were not far away. The creation of a front and resolute struggle both by front-line troops and by forces operating in partisan-style can only convince our enemies of our determination to struggle against them, not with the goal of compromising with them, but with the goal of annihilating them as forces which are criminal and malignant in relation to the matter of freeing slaves from their masters. Now Comrade Marchenko is right to be concerned that since we don't have the personnel to direct front operations, we may inflict irreparable damage on our own organization in trying to engage the enemy along a front. But he is completely wrong when his fear of front

warfare causes him to suggest that I'm losing my mind. I am quite convinced that in the matter of organizing ourselves for front-warfare we will do a good job with the forces we have here at our disposal. And really, can't Comrades Petrenko, Karetnik, Marchenko himself, Moshchenko, or the younger Tykhenko—can't these comrades cope with the initial formation of larger military units from our small detachments, so they can engage in struggle along a front? Yes, my friends, and I can also pull my own weight when it comes to military organizing. Surely those of us who are full of revolutionary passion and the desire to struggle and prevail—surely we cannot refrain from applying ourselves to this extremely necessary and serious matter of direct importance to the toilers with the same faith in the correctness of our ideal—the Revolution—with the same courage and self-sacrifice with which we set about organizing partisan detachments and carrying the message of revolt and revolution to the masses?! We're going to do all right. I deeply believe in this. And as the insurgency spreads, there will emerge from the revolutionary peasantry new people, warriors, who will either take our place or will provide real help to us towards our goal. And the revolutionary fronts which we will create for the struggle, and which will be coordinated with the special assignments of our partisan detachments, will help us to carry out our tasks: to rid Ukraine of the barbarous Austro-German and *Hetmanite* hordes and not allow the possibly even worse Krasnov-Denikin counter-revolutionary formations to take their place. I have thought about this project for months. To carry it out is something we need to do right now. Our organization doesn't have the right to postpone it. Any delay could be the greatest, most unforgivable crime against the Revolution, both in Ukraine and in Russia. That's why I'm taking a personal stand that we, or rather a number of our comrades headed by Comrade Marchenko, must banish the fear that we don't have the officer material for forming large units from small ones, and get busy helping those of us who believe in ourselves. We shall join together in a common effort and will create everything which the conditions of the moment demand from us. Thus, friends, we shall apply ourselves to this great and urgent project with faith that we

will be successful in carrying out its initial stages. And then the broad masses of toilers will come, and they will finish the job.”

After me many other comrades expressed themselves in a positive way on this question.

Comrades Marchenko and Shchus abstained from taking part in the discussion, declaring that they would abide by the majority decision of our Extraordinary Conference and fulfill whatever duties were entrusted to them.

Comrade Marchenko's abstention from actively opposing the creation of fronts and combat operations along them against the enemies of the Revolution only served to ensure the outcome of this important discussion. The conference appointed acting commanders for the organization of what were the main frontline military sectors at that time: Chaplino—Grishino—Ocheretinye on one side, and Tsarevokonstantinovo—Pologi—Orekhov on the other.

As a result of the conference the following commanders were confirmed: P. Petrenko, the younger Tykhenko, and the sailor Kraskovsky. The conference issued instructions to these comrades which read more or less as follows: “The frontline sector commanders are given the power to pull together the insurgent detachments in a given area into one military group and to introduce the appropriate revolutionary discipline. In organizing these groups they must act in accord with the insurgent rank and file of the groups themselves. On the operational level they are entirely subordinate to the headquarters of the Batko Makhno insurgent forces and directly to the Batko himself.”

The commanders empowered by the Extraordinary Conference and confirmed by the staff were: Peter Petrenko—for the Chaplino-Grishino side, and the younger Tykhenko and Kraskovsky—for the Pologi—Tsarevokonstantinovka side.

The staff decided to leave open the front in the Orekhov direction for the time being, without any covering force, with the intention of handing it over in the near future to Pravda<sup>[67]</sup>, who

67 Semyon Pravda (1877 – 1921) was an anarcho-communist from 1904. He was a railway worker at Gaichur Station, but his career came to an end in 1905 when he lost both legs in a rail yard accident. Until the 1917 Revolution he survived by begging and playing the accordion. In 1918 he formed a partisan detachment, riding into battle on

was in the process of forming a group in that sector.

The newly empowered commanders Petrenko, Tykhenko, and Kraskovsky, with the very weak forces at their disposal, headed off to their designated sectors to set about the work of consolidating the insurgent action groups in these sectors. Their task involved the drawing together of small detachments to form military groups which were not only larger numerically but better prepared for combat. Then, following the directive of the main staff, they were to create well-defined front lines on insurgent territory for the struggle of the peasantry against the powers of the Austro-German command, the *Hetman* "of all Ukraine" Skoropadsky, and, as I mentioned earlier, the Krasnov-Denikin counter-revolutionary forces formations which were just making an appearance in Ukraine.

After all this, our Extraordinary Conference listened to my report about the necessity of reorganizing and renaming all our insurgent action groups into sections of the main staff of the insurgent forces. This reorganization would result, of course, in closer cohesion of the groups with the main staff. I regarded this as guaranteeing, on the one hand, the triumph of the federative principle in the everyday life of the insurgency; and on the other hand, that all our actions would be consistent with the tasks and goals of the insurgent anarcho-Makhnovist organization.

This reorganization of groups into sections was also necessary, in my view, so that the main staff could carry out its operational tasks with maximum efficiency, not only in our own military sectors but also everywhere the toiling peasantry was rising up in rebellion against the enemies of freedom and the Revolution.

The conference unanimously approved my report about reorganizing all our insurgent action groups into sections of the main staff of the insurgent forces and expressed the wish that I should occupy myself with this matter, since I was the person who enjoyed the absolute confidence of these groups and since I was someone who had taken great risks on the revolutionary path on behalf of the cause of the toilers. I promised to fulfill this assignment as

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a *tachanka*. After joining the Makhnovist movement, he was given responsibilities in the areas of recruitment and procurement.

quickly as possible.



In addition to the general measures just mentioned, our Extraordinary Conference empowered the staff, without waiting until it was installed in Gulyai-Polye, to take the necessary steps to immediately execute the agronomist Dmitryenko, Leymonsky (commander of a squadron of the Jewish Regiment of the Free Battalion in the spring of 1918), Prokofy Khundai-Korostelyev, and Tikhon Byk.

What were their crimes?

1) The agronomist Dmitryenko, who called himself an SR, because on that night in the spring when the staff of the Free Battalions for the Defense of the Revolution had to have uninterrupted contact with the command of the Red Guard Front, he gathered some young “nationalists,” went with them outside of Gulyai-Polye, and cut all the telegraph and telephone wires. This act of Dimitrienko, criminally counter-revolutionary, caused great harm. The peasant revolutionaries could not pardon him, especially since this same Dmitryenko lived in high style in Gulyai-Polye under the regime of the Germans and the *Hetmanate* at a time when all the revolutionaries were either being shot by these butchers or forced into hiding. And whose fault was that? It was this same Dmitryenko who ranged all over the *raion* at the head of a mounted detachment, hunting down the revolutionaries so he could turn them over to the Austro-German command—the ally of the Ukrainian Central *Rada*—for execution. Dmitryenko’s mission, as he put it, was to save “Ukraine from Revolution and the *katzaps*.”

2) Leymonsky, for the same reason as Dmitryenko. Leymonsky, who enjoyed the trust of the Jewish youth, used his own squad for the benefit of the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary conspirators, by carrying out attacks on the quarters of members of the Gulyai-Polye *raion Revkom* and the Soviet of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. He disarmed the members of the *Revkom* and the Soviet, then arrested them and took them to the staff of the conspirators for handing over to the hangmen of the Austro-German command and the Central *Rada*. Now he was acting as

a spy for the *raion*'s Austro-German headquarters. This provoked strong indignation among large parts of the population not only against Leymonsky, but against Jewish people in general, among whom there were individual scoundrels, such as the "anarchist" Lev Schneider. As was well known, Schneider started off by joining the *haidamaks* in breaking into the offices of the anarchists, where he ripped up banners, trampled on the portraits of Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Alexander Semenyuta, and generally helped to destroy the group's valuable library. The Extraordinary Conference decided unanimously that Leymonsky, like Schneider, could expect no mercy.

3) Prokofy Korostelyev, because he was a spy for the *Hetman*.

4) Tikhon Byk, because in the spring, at the time of the counter-revolutionary conspiracy of the Ukrainian officer-nationalists on behalf of the Central *Rada*, he was the initial organizer and chairman of a secret delegation "from the labouring population of Gulyai-Polye and its *raion*" to the high command of the Counter-Revolution. In this capacity he conducted negotiations with this command about surrendering Gulyai-Polye without a fight, about recalling the anarchist detachment from the front and disarming it, and about the wholesale disarming of the Free Battalions defending the Revolution.

I recall that the conference was especially incensed against Byk. The conference was prepared at that very moment to send two of its delegates to Byk's home to kill him.

I swore before the conference that all the traitors implicated in the course of our struggle to defend revolutionary Ukraine from the invasion by the Austro-German forces and the Central *Rada* would indeed be liquedated. But I asked the conference not to insist that the staff of the insurgency occupy itself with this matter now, when it was composed, for the time being, of only three people: A. Marchenko, Semyon Karetnik, and myself. I had my two personal adjutants, Shchus and Isidor Liuty, but was overwhelmed with problems of the utmost importance. (The remaining comrades: Petrenko, Kraskovsky, Tykhenko, and others—had already received assignments to take up command posts and could not be involved in this matter.) I asked the conference to have faith



in my promises that in the future the staff would do everything in its power to ensure that the traitors were annihilated; in the meantime the matter should be left to the discretion of the staff of the insurgency. I suggested it didn't make sense to eliminate Tikhon Byk right away, since we would be obliged to eliminate a whole bunch of scoundrels like him at the same time. And this could cause irremediable damage to the sympathy our insurgency enjoyed among the general population, since there was neither the time, nor the technical means, to explain the reasonableness—in fact the correctness—of reprisals against these scumbags.

The comrades argued among themselves long and hard and finally agreed to leave this question to the discretion of the staff.

While this was going on, our guards posted at the railway station seized Prokofy Korostelyev from one of the trains passing through and presented him to the conference. Under interrogation, he gave a full confession that he had posed as a hunter while acting as a spy for the German-*Hetmanite* authorities, had recruited new agents for a spy network, and had been well compensated for his efforts.

To the question from Foma Ryabko: "And young Leymonsky, a squadron commander in the Jewish company last spring, is he also part of your spy network?"—Korostelyev declared that it was precisely Leymonsky who had introduced him to this organization. Then Korostelyev disclosed to us a whole list of names of people involved in tracking down underground peasant-revolutionaries and carrying out provocations of various kinds. The leaders of this group were mainly outsiders, not natives of Gulyai-Polye. The group's members were concentrated in the centre of the village; as spies for the countryside they recruited itinerant Jewish traders; as spies for the workshops and suburbs they recruited workers and peasants of *kulak* origin.

In spite of Korostelyev's frank confession and his exposure of the spy organization, the revolutionary peasantry were not in the mood for clemency. He was immediately led to an offal pit for the remains of pigs, horses, etc. and there he was shot. And the conference charged the staff of the insurgency to devote its maximum attention to verifying, capturing, and mercilessly exterminating

all members of the spy network.

The staff took due note of the wishes of the conference, but considered it more important to make an immediate round of a number of *raions*, check on the activities of our action groups, and then progressively reorganize these groups into sections of the main staff of the expanding insurgent movement.

So as soon as the conference had ended, and the medical section had distributed the wounded partisans (including Shchus) to peasant *izbas* for recuperation, the staff withdrew the main strength of its detachment from Gulyai-Polye and the nearby *khutors* and directed it to certain *raions* on special assignment. From the point of view of the staff it was important for us to find out first hand what the action groups were doing and to prepare the way for reorganizing them into sections linked directly to us. Then we could more quickly and easily deal with organizing the insurgent forces on a broad scale so we could set up well-defined military fronts to oppose the armed Counter-Revolution. Only by raising our struggle to this level at this difficult time could we hope to mold our insurgent movement into a coherent revolutionary force, and create a well-defined rear area. Then we would be in a position to lay the basis for the sort of communities which working people need as a means of social action in the process of defining and creating new forms for a new, free society of toilers.

These tasks, so crucial for our movement, were too much for us to handle. That was the feeling of myself and my colleagues. But we considered it our duty, so long as the Revolution was social in character, to try to draw on the services of those revolutionaries I had encountered during my travels through Russia in April, May, and June—revolutionaries who had told me they were looking for favourable conditions to apply their knowledge and talents. We thought these revolutionaries would join us and strengthen the vibrant, healthy ideas of the insurgent movement with their energy and ideas. At that time I still couldn't admit to myself that most of them were bullshit artists.



During our tour of certain *raions* of Alexandrovsk and Pavlograd *uyezds* we were obliged to engage in large-scale battles with

numerous Austro-German and *Hetmanite* formations, as well as with various detachments from German colonies and *kulak khutors*, detachments which had been armed by the occupying forces and the former Central *Rada*. These latter detachments were the nuclei of future Denikinist military formations—there were already many of them. At each stage they harassed us and slowed our progress.

The Austro-German and *Hetmanite* troops, assisted by these detachments, were on occasion able to catch up with us and carry out successful attacks.

Our raid lasted about three weeks. In some places we were able to apply our new organizational principles to our groups. In others we were only able to meet with individual members of the groups to go over the main organizational issues. Then we set off for the Dnieper to fetch machine-guns and other armaments which had been hidden by former *haidamaks*. Some of these ex-*haidamaks* had promised to hand the weapons over to us.

In Sinelnikovo *raion* we engaged in a major battle with Austro-German troops. Our losses in killed and wounded were substantial.

The battle developed quite unexpectedly with apparently insignificant forces of the enemy. During the initial stages our detachment clearly had the upper hand. But success made us reckless and we soon found ourselves dangerously surrounded and in a desperate situation. If our other detachments had not arrived to harass the enemy from the flanks and rear, our main detachment, along with the staff of the movement, would have been wiped out by the accurate fire of Austro-German riflemen. But our other partisan detachments, numerous but comparatively small, were alerted about our predicament by the inhabitants of the villages we had just passed through. These detachments committed themselves unsparingly to attacking the enemy from all sides and forced him to flee.

The Ulyanovsky detachment, 240 – 270 strong and made up entirely of peasant ex-soldiers, distinguished itself in this engagement with its courage and maneuverability under the hail of enemy shells.

There was no limit to our gratitude when we broke out of this encirclement, drove the enemy back ten *versts*, and met up with this Ulyanovsk detachment. But the staff and the commanders as well as the rank-and-file partisans realized the gravity of our situation. Our detachments could not stay together for long. The Ulyanovsk detachment was assigned the task of proceeding to the Chaplino-Grishino area and joining the group under the elder Petrenko which was setting up a front against the Austro-German-*Hetmanite* forces on the one hand, and the White Don Cossacks on the other.

The main detachment, the one which had begun the revolt, set out for the banks of the Dnieper along with the headquarters staff. En route we were constantly running into the enemy, which we had to fight. But we also encountered our own forces, to which we gave advice about re-grouping their small units into bigger ones and proceeding to assembly areas for the organization of fronts and their military sectors.

As we were crossing the railway line between Sinelnikovo and Alexandrovsk, we came upon military *echelons* of German troops and joined battle with them.

We now had a better understanding of the German command and the German soldiers. So when we stumbled across these *echelons*, first of all we entered into negotiations. We proposed to leave each *echelon* 10 rifles and two boxes of ammunition for self-defense ; the remainder of their armaments would be turned over to us. However, despite these negotiations, we also quickly got steam up in all the locomotives available at Novogupalovka Station, in order to send them towards the *echelons* should it turn out that force was required to disarm the Germans. And our demolition squad was also making preparations. Everything was done that the situation required—not according to some abstruse strategy taught in an academy but in keeping with instinctive peasant common sense.

During the negotiations, the German command seemed to accept our demands. But once our delegation had withdrawn, troops disembarked from the *echelons* and formed a front line. This provoked a firm protest from our side. Soon a fight to the

death broke out between us. Launched simultaneously along both tracks, our locomotives had the intended effect. The German command and its troops paid dearly for their deceitful negotiations with us—for falsely agreeing to surrender their weapons without a battle. They abandoned many weapons to us (both on the field and in the main *echelon* smashed by our first locomotive) while they fled in the direction of Alexandrovsk.

When we searched the main *echelon* we found not only weapons and ammunition but also preserves, liqueurs, and fruit which the Russian bourgeoisie in Crimea had lavished on these butchers of the Ukrainian Revolution. Not to mention the numerous pairs of shoes and leather for making shoes, i.e. things which had been pillaged by German troops wherever they had the opportunity: from shops or from peasants in the course of searches, floggings, arrests, and shootings.

In order for the broad peasant masses to see what kind of stuff was in this *echelon* and think about how the Austro-German troops could have got their hands on it, I ordered the Novogupalovka partisans to invite the local peasants to come out to the *echelon* to view its contents. I also requested that such things as leather, sugar, and preserves be handed out, with priority being given to the neediest people. The entire population of the area came out to look at this plundered wealth and was deeply troubled.

We took off towards the Dnieper, to the Dnieper Rapids, where the sound of the swift and strong currents always inspire those who fight for freedom.

At the Rapids myself and a detachment of partisans boarded rafts and, under the guidance of local peasants, made our way along the Dnieper to the place where we could retrieve the machine-guns which were stashed on the bottom of the river. They had been hidden there by former blue-coated *haidamaks*, suspected by the *Hetman* and the Austro-German command of revolutionary sympathies. Some of them had been disarmed, while others had scattered throughout Ukraine with their weapons. Some of these weapons had been hidden in the Dnieper.

We fished around a bit and managed to drag out about eight machine-guns. The grease had already been washed off of them,

but they were still serviceable and suitable for either battle use or fixed placements. The riverside peasants also brought us about twenty boxes of ammunition for Russian and Austrian rifles.

But here, for the first time since we launched our open armed revolt against the enemies of the Revolution, two of our partisans (incidentally, one of them was Comrade Shchus's best friend) brought shame on our detachment. They surreptitiously imposed a contribution of 3,000 rubles on a mill and hid the money by sewing it into their headgear.

I found out about this while making a speech at a peasant assembly in the village of Vasilevka. Never in all my revolutionary activity have I ever felt so heartbroken as I did during this speech. The very idea that there were people in our detachment who would secretly carry out forbidden criminal acts gave me no peace. Our detachment did not quit the village until these persons were exposed. And then, with great sadness but without any failure of will, they were shot in this very same village. And now I, the Karetnik brothers, Marchenko, Liuty, Moshchenko, the young and truehearted Gavrusha Troyan, and others—we were all shaken by the awareness that the detachment had been infiltrated by persons motivated by personal gain and prepared to rob. We resolved not to rest until this element was eradicated without mercy from the ranks of the partisans.

We travelled around many *raions* of Pavlograd and Alexandrovsk *uyezds*, here and there reorganizing our insurgent action groups into sub-sections of the headquarters of the Batko Makhno Insurgent Forces. Then we headed back towards Gulyai-Polye, once again passing through the village and station of Novogupalovka.

During our stop in Novogupalovka we learned that a mysterious train with three or four wagons had been running almost continuously along the Sinelnikovo-Alexandrovsk line for several days already. I assumed this train had some kind of reconnaissance function; however, I did not issue an order to the dynamiters of our own mounted reconnaissance unit to set charges and blow it up. At that time our staff did not have a full-time commander—the positions of commander and chief-of-staff were both concentrated

in my hands. And the other staff members on duty at the time—the elder Karetnik and A. Marchenko—also did not see fit to issue an order to the dynamiters. The detachment was resting quietly and replenishing its ranks with fresh recruits who were streaming to us.

The enemy did not trouble us for a day. But when we pulled out of Novogupalovka and prepared to cross the railway line, our scouts who had occupied the station learned that the train with three or four wagons had just left Sofiyevka station, not far from us. We also found out that it was carrying several Russian and Ukrainian (*Hetmanite*) officers.

Our group of scouts was composed of a dozen of our best soldiers led by the younger Karetnik<sup>[68]</sup> and Vasily Shkabarnya. Most of them had been frontier guards in the old military service and were very experienced and reliable.

I sent for the younger Karetnik and gave him an order to stop this train just short of the station.

“If you think you need more backup, take 30 of the infantry and some Lewis-gunners.”

And I immediately gave an order to Comrade Klerfan to detail the necessary forces from the infantry.

But the younger Karetnik said:

“The *razvedchiks* will seize the train by themselves.”

And he galloped back to his comrades.

Our detachment crossed the railway line and seemed to be putting some distance between itself from the station. But as soon as the vanguard had disappeared behind a knoll, Commander Klerfan made a right turn with the intention of getting around behind the train and cutting off its escape route. But this manoeuvre turned out to be useless. The train came speeding up to the station and then began coming to a halt in response to the signals from the younger Karetnik, Shkabarnya, and the others who were galloping towards it. But in reality the train was slowing down so the marksmen on board could improve their aim. Without any warning, a hail of machine-gun and rifle bullets erupted from the train, mowing down Skabarnya along with four

68 Panteleimon Nikitovich Karetnik (1898–1937) was a native of Marfopol, near Gulyai-Polye, and the younger brother of Semyon Karetnik. The Karetnik brothers also appear in historical records under the name Karetnikov.

of our best fighters. The younger Karetnik was seriously wounded. Both his horse and mine were shot from under us. Spraying us with gunfire, the train accelerated and headed in the direction of Slavgorod—Sinelnikovo.

This was an error of judgment on my part and on the part of the younger Karetnik, who had landmines at his disposal and could have placed a dynamiter in front of the train. Our blunder made a deep impression on me, the younger Karetnik—who lost his left hand, and on the whole detachment. The loss in a single day of our best reconnaissance troops, fighters who were totally dedicated to the people's cause, tormented me day and night for a long time. From that point on I seriously entertained the thought of assigning a special detachment to occupy the city of Alexandrovsk and annihilate any officers found there who were known to have been in the *Hetman's* service. (In due course the reader will see how my thoughts on this question were carried out to the letter by a detachment led by Korobka.)

Gathering up our dead and wounded fighters, we left Novogupalovka station and travelled 15 *versts*. Stopping in one of the hamlets, we left our dead with some comrades to arrange for their burial by the peasants at the expense of the staff.

Next we headed for the village of Lukashovo, where there was known to be a good surgeon, in order to try to save young Karetnik's hand and provide the operations required by our other wounded partisans.<sup>[69]</sup> Happily, we met this doctor-surgeon on the road. He was just on his way home to Lukashovo from Novonikolayevka. I explained to him the situation of our wounded. He immediately boarded one of our wagons and hurried to Lukashovo. There he collected the necessary instruments (we already had lots of bandages) and arrived after nightfall at the village of Aleyeva, where I had told him I would be stopping.

For almost the whole night our wonderful doctors treated our

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69 Medical services in rural Ukraine in this era were primitive indeed. Real physicians were scarce, and the typical medical practitioner was a semi-trained paramedic called a *feldsher*, a name which suggests an earlier link with barbering. In 1900 the village of Zhrebets, not far from Gulyai-Polye, had one physician, five *feldshers*, and a hospital with eight beds to serve a regional population of 43,700. By 1912 the hospital had been expanded to 25 beds.



wounded and rendered inestimable services to all of us.

All this took place during the last ten days of November 1918. I was present all night while the operations on the wounded partisans were taking place. I was dead tired and my nerves were in tatters, but after finally getting a little rest I considered it necessary to arrange a meeting of the peasants right there in the village of Aleyeva. I went to this assembly and began to speak about the slave status of the peasants under the oppressive rule of the *Hetman* and the Austro-German *junkers* who were propping him up and who had been invited here by the Central *Rada* to live at our expense.

On that very day in this little village a telephonogram<sup>[70]</sup> from Alexandrovsk was received announcing “to one and all” that a coup had taken place in Kiev. *Hetman* Skoropadsky had been overthrown. A Ukrainian Directory had been organized under the chairmanship of V. Vinnichenko<sup>[71]</sup>. The Directory declared an amnesty for all political prisoners, etc., etc.

I recall the enthusiasm with which one of the citizens of the village, a teacher, read this telephonogram to the peasant assembly. This outstanding example of a village orator and a “true” Ukrainian to boot then delivered a passionate speech before asking me point blank:

“What is the position, Batko Makhno, of yourself and your revolutionary-insurgent forces with respect to the Ukrainian Directory, at the head of which, as you now know, stands a man who deserves not only respect, but also the complete trust of working people?”

The news about the coup d'état in Kiev was of little interest to me. It appeared to be another changing of the guard, just like the installation of *Hetman* Pavel Skoropadsky six months earlier.

But the question put to me by the teacher caught me unawares. I hadn't expected this topic to come up in an out-of-the-way vil-

70 Private telephones were practically unknown at that time in southeast Ukraine. A telephonogram message was similar to a telegraph message, dictated by one professional operator and written down by another.

71 Volodymyr Vinnichenko (1880 – 1951) was a Ukrainian novelist and playwright. In November 1918 he became president of the Ukrainian Directory. In a memoir of his early years, Makhno mentions being impressed with Vinnichenko's novel *Khochu* [I want], which was read out loud by his cellmates in Butyrki Prison. See Makhno (2006).

lage and was somewhat rattled, especially since there were a lot of partisans present at the meeting. The question about placing political trust in Vinnichenko was extremely serious: my response not only had to be truthful but had to be explained in a serious, responsible manner. I recall vividly how I began speaking while simultaneously thinking about my answer. At first I was quite nervous, speaking incoherently and stammering. I even had to stop and ask for a glass of water. In this way I bought some time, regained my composure, and then began to answer the teacher's question.

"The Ukrainian workers," I said, "haven't had much luck in the course of their struggles! Time after time they were betrayed by vassals of either the Polish gentry or the Russian tsars. Mind you, I don't know Vinnichenko personally. But I know he is a socialist—a socialist who has taken part in and is still taking part in the life and struggle of the toilers. He believes in socialism and acts with passionate energy. Anyway, that's how I see him. But trusting him politically, that's another matter. Especially right now, when working people, having just freed themselves from political slavery in 1917, are striving for a radical restructuring of social life. For there are many Vinnichenkos who would like to lead them in a rather different direction. I'm not sure what role Vinnichenko played in arranging an alliance between the Ukrainian Central *Rada* and the rulers of Germany and Austria. But I know this alliance brought into Ukraine a 600,000-strong army to crush the Revolution, an army of assassins (both conscious and unconscious ones), who have been trampling on the Ukrainian Revolution now for six or eight months, murdering tens of thousands of peasants and workers and continuing their depredations up to this day. And I know that Petlyura, war minister of the former Ukrainian Central *Rada* during the invasion of Ukraine by these hordes, was in the vanguard with *haidamak* bands, savagely making short work of any peasants and workers with revolutionary aspirations. And I also know that Vinnichenko is working hand in hand with this same Petlyura to form a new government in Ukraine. Now I ask you, comrades, where in the revolutionary Ukrainian cities and villages will you meet people so thickheaded as to believe in the

“socialism” of this Petlyura-Vinnichenko Ukrainian government, or the Directory as it styles itself? I know that for you and your friends—true patriots—Vinnichenko and Petlyura are the best representatives of the Ukrainian cause. But for me, the Ukrainian cause can only mean the toilers fighting for their own freedom, without getting mixed up with the German emperor who drove the whole German people to bloody war. That’s why I don’t think the revolutionary-insurgent movement which I direct can find a common language with this Ukrainian Directory; all the more so since we, insurgent-Makhnovists, still don’t know the program of the Directory, nor do we know who elected it. The Ukrainian revolutionary insurgency is faced today with one task: the final demoralization and destruction of the Austro-German army in Ukraine and the dismantling of the *Hetmanate*. The insurgents have already begun this great project. There’s no need for the revolutionary insurgency to switch to the tasks of the Directory. Even if it tried, the Directory has nothing vital and healthy to offer in connection with the aspirations of working people. Following the example of all liberal governments, like the ones sometimes found in republics, the Directory will soon become the champion of the rights of the bourgeoisie—the one class which is useful for rulers. The Directory will soon become entangled in bourgeois affairs and will lose that socialist-democratic character which, you believe, Vinnichenko as chairman imparts to it. As for myself and the revolutionary insurgency—we don’t believe in this farce. We will not recognize the Ukrainian Directory. And if we will not engage in armed struggle against the Directory because we are now confronted with more dangerous foes in Ukraine, that does not mean we are not already making preparations for this future struggle—we most definitely are. In my opinion the Ukrainian Directory is an unnatural phenomenon which is liable to grow and strengthen in an unnatural way, becoming a new destroyer of the real political and economic freedom of the Ukrainian toilers. The revolutionary insurgency, undeterred by the sacrifices demanded, advances fearlessly and gives up its life for genuine liberation of the toilers from the property-owning bourgeois class and its hired servant—the State. On its mission, the insurgency has encountered

a major barrier in the form of the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* armed forces. It has been smashing away at this barrier for over two months now. Our enemies are wavering, and the obstacle has begun to totter. The insurgency is dismantling this barrier and is advancing openly now against the Denikinists and the Ukrainian Directory, firm in the belief that it enjoys the support of the toilers. "Death to all the enemies of the liberation of working people!" must be the slogan of each working person of the villages and of the cities and they must act accordingly against those enemies."

The peasants of Aleyeva rewarded me with these words:

"Batko Makhno, you are our truest friend. We will all join the insurgent movement and will fight the bourgeoisie and their regime."

The person who had queried me about the Directory and the relationship of our movement to it shrugged his shoulders and said that if the Directory was really as I had described, then he would also be opposing it.

As for my friends—Alexei Marchenko in particular—they found my speech about the Ukrainian Directory so just and well-received that they were prepared to send me off with a squadron of cavalry to make a special repeat tour of all the *raions* with the aim of expounding to the broad peasant masses our insurgent point of view about the new government in Kiev. In this way the revolutionary peasantry would be acquainted with the general features of this government even before it had made a declaration of its own program.

Only Karetnik, as usual, was categorically opposed to me being absent from the main body of the insurgent forces. He generally spoke very little, but when he stated his opinion it was always well thought out. And once he had made up his mind about something he never changed it. To those who didn't know him well he seemed obstinate at first, but beneath his impassive exterior was soon revealed a person devoid of the slightest hypocrisy, a straight-shooter totally focused and devoted to the success of the movement. Now Karetnik spoke out against haste in preparing for struggle against the Ukrainian Directory. He noted that the real power of the Directory quite possibly did not extend beyond

Kiev and had no influence over the rest of Ukraine.

“In the villages the Revolution has taken on a clearly anti-authoritarian character,” emphasized Comrade Karetnik, “We must support this tendency with all our strength—indeed, we must try to accentuate it even more if possible. This is the real guarantee that the power of the Ukrainian nationalist government now being formed in Kiev will not extend beyond the Kiev city limits. The peasants will not follow it and, basing itself only on the city and already contaminated with authoritarian principles, it will not go far. That’s why I’m suggesting that the comrades abandon the notion of sending the Batko on a trip around the *raions* and that we limit ourselves to issuing flyers which set forth our explanation of the newly-minted government in Kiev and its goals. At the moment the Batko is virtually our whole staff. We need to keep this in mind and not send him off all over the place.”

The majority of comrades agreed with Karetnik and resolved that as soon as we reached Gulyai-Polye we would publish a leaflet directed against the Ukrainian Directory, not only as a statist power, but as one hostile to the interests of the Revolution.

And once we were rejoined by those partisans who had stayed behind in the hamlet N. to bury the slain cavalry scouts, the detachment started for Gulyai-Polye.

## Chapter 14

### "Makhno is dead." False rejoicing by the enemies of the Revolution.

At the time of the shoot-out at Novogupalovka Station, railway workers who had observed the outpouring of grief as the partisans gathered up the fallen cavalry scouts came to the conclusion that Batko Makhno himself was among the slain. This news quickly propagated to the enemy camp where it evoked great rejoicing. The officers on the train who had killed our scouts were lionized as heroes in the city of Alexandrovsk.

All the *kulaks* and *pomeshchiks* in military formations which had assembled in Alexandrovsk by order of senior officials of the *Hetmanate* and the Austro-German command (in anticipation of an attack on the city by our detachment) now dispersed throughout the *uyezd*. Some returned to their own colonies or *khutors*, spreading the news about the death of Makhno and the demoralization and disintegration of the main body of the insurgent forces. Everywhere our enemies celebrated the end of Makhno.

Although I didn't read it myself, I was told that a semi-official notice appeared in the Alexandrovsk press about medals presented to the officer "heroes" who had killed Makhno.

When I heard about all this I was naturally quite upset. I saw the enemies of the Revolution were raising their heads as if our insurgency was already finished. The *uyezd* was already crawling with them again.

Before leaving Aleyeva I had already received accurate intelligence about the situation in the various *khutors* and colonies and knew which enemy detachments we were likely to encounter thanks to women acting as volunteer counter-intelligence agents. These women, both married and single and receiving moral support from their husbands and families, were fanatically devoted to our cause. From all directions they made their way through enemy lines to search out the insurgent detachments and keep them informed about the current location of enemy forces, where they were headed, what routes they were taking, etc., etc.

Consequently, the movements of our detachment upon leaving Aleyeva were calculated to make an impression on our enemies who were celebrating my death and the end of the insurgency. We intended to make them pay for their criminal acts and their stupidity.

About ten *versts* from Aleyeva, at German Colony No. 4<sup>[72]</sup>, we encountered a detachment of *kulaks* commanded by the *pomeshchik* Lentz. Our first priority was to annihilate it. However, Lentz, convinced that Makhno was dead, sent a peasant to us with a letter. The letter contained a declaration by Lentz to the effect that he had no wish to fight the Makhnovists, rather he wanted peace. As proof of his sincerity he withdrew his own detachment from the colony, leaving it open to us. He intended to catch us in a crossfire between his detachment and riflemen concealed in the colony, at one stroke either annihilating completely or at least seriously crippling this dangerous Makhnovist detachment.

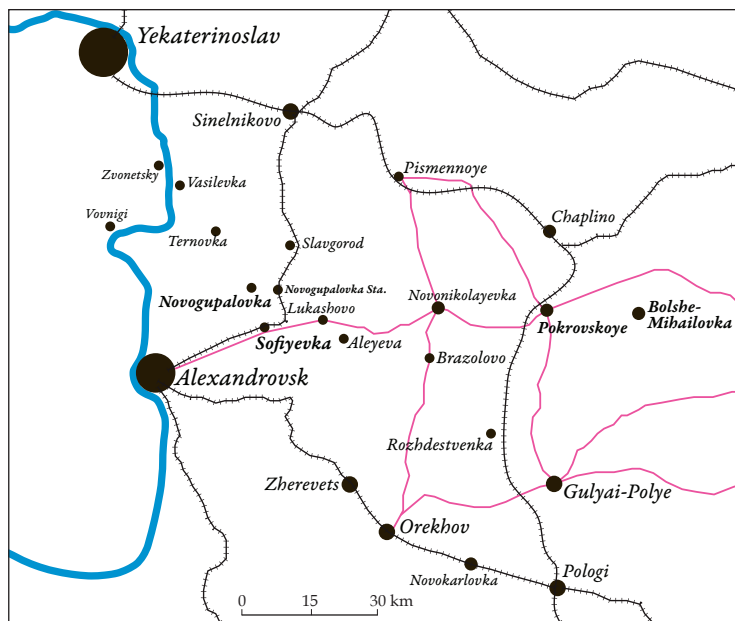
But by this time we had already learned a thing or two about partisan warfare and strategy. We surrounded the colony in such a way that Lentz's plan completely backfired and this very rich colony fell to us. Lentz himself barely managed to flee with a few riders. The rest of his associates and some of the farm owners of the colony (those who had shot at our partisans) were annihilated on the spot, and most of the colony was burned down by a special squadron.

Then, to spite our enemies, the "deceased" Makhno set the main forces of our detachment the following task:

"Commanders and partisans! The enemies of the Revolution are jeering at us, are jeering at all the toilers of the villages and cities. The moment has arrived when we must set them straight. We just had an encounter with the detachment of the *pomeshchik* Lentz. When his detachment was crushed, Lentz escaped. In order not to allow Lentz to spread the news about his defeat to other *khutors* and colonies, the main forces of our detachment must send a suitable vanguard force in his tracks. This vanguard unit,

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72 It has not been possible to identify which of several German colonies in the vicinity Makhno is referring to. Colony No. 4, Eichenfeld, scene of a massacre in 1919 attributed to the Makhnovists, is far from Aleyeva on the other side of the Dnieper.



The Makhnovist theatre of operations in November 1918.

applying fire and sword, must force its way through all the *kulak khutors* and colonies on our march route in a single day, without allowing the enemy forces to bar their progress. As we well know, all the rich people—the landowners of the *khutors* and colonies—got together near Alexandrovsk to celebrate the good news about the demise of Makhno at the hands of their mercenaries. We must shock them out of this orgy of rejoicing. The main forces of our detachment will advance with Karetnik, Liuty and myself. As for the vanguard, it will be made up of volunteer cavalry led by Comrade Alexei Marchenko. They must proceed along the roads through the *khutors* in revolutionary military order, without attempting anything besides sounding their trumpets and firing into the air. The task of confiscating horses, *tachankas*, various kinds of weapons, and cash—items necessary for our movement—will be left to other groups from the main forces which will follow in the wake of the cavalry.”

And our forces set out on this tough, but necessary, march. I



myself saw how our brave partisans led by Marchenko, advancing under a hail of enemy bullets, lost many wonderful friends. But they never wavered in their mission. They rushed to certain death, knowing that by their death or triumph they would pave the way for other partisans and other victories.

The main forces of the detachment, following the vanguard, entered the *khutors*, estates, and colonies, and were met by comparatively weak enemy fire.

These landowners could have been annihilated along with their mansions. In essence, this would have been an appropriate response for the losses sustained by the insurgents due to raids by the *pomeshchiks*. But it wasn't necessary for the insurgency to take their lives, it was more important to demoralize them and win a physical victory over them, thereby gaining the momentum in our struggle. Death, even for those who had shown no respect for the lives of others, was regarded among the insurgent-Makhnovists as an extreme measure, applicable only for individual cases, not for masses of people. Here, on our march through the *khutors*, executions could have taken on a mass character. This the insurgent-Makhnovists tried to avoid. They limited themselves, as was stated in the orders, to confiscating horses, *tachankas*, cash, and weapons (both firearms and cold steel) from the landowners. Only certain individuals were annihilated, chiefly those who had participated in detachments which had roamed about the region, fighting against the Revolution. There was no mercy for this group, for its deeds in the villages in relation to the revolutionary-minded peasants was only too well known to the insurgent-Makhnovists. Some of these *kulaks* were committed to butchering the revolutionary peasants—both men and women. In the *raions* of the Gulyai-Polye – Alexandrovsk region after one of their incursions more often than not one would find peasant women who had been repeatedly raped while their husbands had either been beaten up, dragged off to prison, or killed outright.

Our progress through the *kulak khutors* and colonies in the Lukashovo – Brazolovo – Rozhdestvenska *raions* produced a lasting impression on all the counter-revolutionary forces not only in Alexandrovsk *uyezd*, but in Left Bank Ukraine in general.



A group of Makhnovist commanders in 1920: in the front row, from the left: Alexei Marchenko, Semyon Karetnik, Grigori Vasilyevsky; in the back row, from the left: Vasil Kurilenko, Viktor Belash, Peter Petrenko, Roma, Fyodor Shchus, unknown boy.

Many of the *kulaks* and *pomeshchiks*, seeing me at the head of our detachment, were dumbfounded and it took some time for them to recover from the shock. And when they came to themselves, rather than cursing the Makhnovists, they turned on their own leaders for lying about killing the one against whom they had long struggled, arming entire *khutors* against him. Now they had fallen into his hands, lulled by the lie about his death.

Of course, the insurgent-Makhnovists weren't much concerned about such small fry. We limited ourselves to confiscating good horses and *tachankas* for mounting machine-guns (required for the infantry in composite cavalry-infantry units of the Revolutionary Army). The *khutors* were no longer burned. Their owners, stunned by the sight of Makhno, whose death they had just finished celebrating—holding feasts and praising his killers, received a serious warning instead. They were to “smarten up” and confine their activities to peaceful labour, expunging from their wooden heads any thoughts that the Austro-German army in Ukraine was invincible and that, sheltering behind it, they could entrench their former privileges and power over the toilers.

And so on this day of difficult battles with heavy losses (for both sides) our detachment made its way nearly 40 *versts* and entered the village of Rozhdestvenka, a place with revolutionary spirit, where we settled in for a well-deserved rest.

In Rozhdestvenka the peasants told us about the role of the village priest, who had collaborated with the *kulaks* and provocateurs on behalf of the *Hetmanate* and against the poor. The information of the peasants about this priest and his personal reports about the peasantry to the Austro-German and *Hetmanite* punitive detachments, information confirmed by a number of progressive peasants having been killed by these detachments, was sufficient reason for our staff to summon the priest, interrogate him, and confront him with several of the peasants.

The priest was interrogated, and then he was hanged like a dog by the peasants themselves and the insurgents.

The execution of the Rozhdestvenska priest was the second case where the insurgent-Makhnovists were involved in killing a priest because of his provocatory role in relation to the peasantry. The staff had also ordered the arrest of the Semenovka priest for similar reasons after the peasants at their own assembly had denounced him as an organizer of *kulaks* and a provocateur in relation to the poor. Some of the Semenovka peasants related how “their” priest had asked women about what their husbands were doing, etc. Soon after this the husbands of some of the women were arrested, for these “foolish women” had given in to the priest’s demand for information and told him that their husbands had criticized the *Hetman* and the Austro-German command.

News about this second instance of the execution of a priest for provocation soon spread throughout the *raion*. And the priests, who had been exercising their oratorical and provocational skills in the insurgent *raions*, quickly lost interest in these pursuits and returned to their parish duties. They restricted their twaddle to matters unrelated to the Revolution, even when some elder peasants (possibly put up to it by their sons), asked them maliciously:

“And why, Father, did you stop explaining to the people your own opinions about the *Hetman* and the Germans and Austrians who saved Ukraine from the ‘katzap-Jewish pile of shit’ known

as the Revolution?”

In response, the priests were now either completely silent, or became staunch supporters of sticking to religious matters, avoiding such questions as the above by declaring either that their clerical duties did not allow them to get involved in social and political issues, or that new instructions from the church hierarchy prohibited them from interfering in the political life of the country, etc., etc.

After resting in the village of Rozhdestvenka, the detachment returned to its home base of Gulyai-Polye.

## Chapter 15

**Gulyai-Polyans released from prison. The situation of the insurgent staff. Its fronts. The growth of the Counter-Revolution. The inadequacy of the anarchist forces. Negotiations with the Yekaterinoslav military authorities of the Directory. The Directory's announcement of mobilization. Our relations with the Directory and initial methods of struggle against it. A misunderstanding with the Austro-German command.**

The entry of our detachment into Gulyai-Polye was an especially joyous occasion, both for the partisans and for the general population. For the people of Gulyai-Polye were well aware that this main military formation of the insurgent movement had defeated the armed counter-revolutionary forces of the exploiters in a whole series of *raions*. To this rejoicing was added the delight of being welcomed by the members of the GGAK who had been just been released from the Alexandrovsk prison: A. Kalashnikov, Savva Makhno, Philip Krat, and others.

The meeting of our detachment with these comrades who had been languishing in prison in expectation of death, people who were dear to us as we were dear to them, produced an invigorating effect on each of us who had been worn down by constant fighting. We sensed in these comrades a new, formidable force and we rejoiced, and they rejoiced, that they had managed to get out of the clutches of the hangmen unharmed and could again devote themselves wholly to serving the Revolution and the tasks of our revolutionary-anarchist movement within it.

The comrades arriving from prison brought us some interesting news. They told us that the Ukrainian Directory, after carrying out its coup d'état and chasing the *Hetman* out of Kiev, had behaved like socialists (Vinnichenko, Petlyura, and Makarenko<sup>[73]</sup>

73 Andrei Makarenko (1885–1963) was a union organizer for Ukrainian railway workers. A non-party person, in November 1918 he was one of the five original members

were ostensibly socialists<sup>[74]</sup>) by decreeing the release of all political prisoners. But it did not occur to them to release the Left SR Kakhovskaya<sup>[75]</sup>, organizer of the assassination of the German Field Marshal Eichhorn, hangman of the Revolution. The Left SRs were extremely upset about this.

This action by the Ukrainian Directory reinforced even more my personal opinion, and that of all my friends, according to which there was nothing socialist, let alone revolutionary-socialist, about the Ukrainian Directory. Its criminal treatment of Comrade Kakhovskaya, as a result of which this revolutionary had to remain in prison, indicated to us that the Directory, although it had overthrown the *Hetman* in the name of the working people of Ukraine, intended to stifle everything connected with the Revolution, just like its predecessors—the Central *Rada* and *Hetman* Skoropadsky—had done.



Irina Kakhovskaya

The overwhelming majority of the people of Gulyai-Polye and its *raion* shared our point of view regarding the Kievan Directory (mistakenly calling itself “Ukrainian”).

The staff of the insurgency, in addition to performing all its basic tasks, also made efforts to ensure that the *raions* we had liberated clearly understood the Gulyai-Polye position on the Kievan Directory. Our local sections in the insurgent *raions* fulfilled this task entrusted to them by our staff in brilliant fashion. Thus, from the first days of the appearance of a central Ukrainian government in the form of the Kievan Directory, these *raions* received guidance

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of the Directory.

74 Vinnichenko and Petlyura were leading figures in the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (USDRP), a Marxist party founded in 1905. During the *Hetmanate* the USDRP had been forced underground.

75 Irina Kakhovskaya (1888–1960) was a professional revolutionary who belonged to the Left SR Party in 1918 but had earlier been a Maximalist. She helped prepare the assassination of Field Marshal von Eichhorn on July 30 1918 and intended to kill the *Hetman* as well, but was arrested on August 2 1918. The collapse of German power in Ukraine saved her life but she languished in prison under the Directory until a peasant congress demanded her release.

from us about the true path of Social Revolution.

It is regrettable that the headquarters staff of the Revolutionary-Makhnovist Insurgency did not have significant cultural resources at its disposal and was unable to publish its own newspapers on a regular basis, limiting itself to leaflets and proclamations. In fact, there were only five of us: myself, two aides (S. Karetnik and Marchenko), and two adjutants (Shchus and Liuty).



Of the comrades returning to our ranks from prison, Kalashnikov was assigned a command post, while Savva Makhno and P. Krat were given jobs managing economic matters. Karetnik, Marchenko, and myself were thus completely overworked. Only the realization that there was no one to replace us at the moment, and also the fact that none of us were conceited or interested in intrigues, sustained our efforts in the crucial and demanding work of maintaining what were now three well-defined sectors of the Front: 1) Tsarevokonstantinovka (45 *versts* from Gulyai-Polye); 2) the line from Verkhny Tokmak to Bolshoi Tokmak (40 – 45 *versts*); and 3) Grishino (65 – 70 *versts*). It's true that my personal friends among the Left SRs began to approach me, but I couldn't offer them responsible posts at a time when the revolutionary insurgency was consolidating its anti-statist position. So they either formed cultural-educational organs of their own party or took off again for the cities. Only a certain Comrade Mirgorodsky<sup>[76]</sup> agreed to work with me in accordance with the decisions and resolutions of the GGAK, and he worked exclusively in the ranks of our travelling propagandists.

This situation frequently compelled my friends and I to wonder if we would find the energy to discharge our responsibilities honourably until the end. One day A. Chubenko happened to stop in Gulyai-Polye on his way to Russia. I categorically opposed his trip and asked him to stay with our staff. He stayed and became my assistant for special assignments. Comrade Shchus was integrated into the headquarters staff as well.

76 Mirgorodsky (?–1920) was *seredniak* from Alexandrovsk *uyezd*. A member of the Left SR Party, he worked in the Cheka in the early Soviet regime. He served three terms on the Revolutionary Military Councils (Revvoyensoviets) of the Makhnovist movement but was shot in 1920 for stealing from a co-operative.

This was a tense moment in the struggle. The Austro-German command, unable to counter the attacks we launched on villages and hamlets all over the map, concentrated their own forces along the railway lines. The appropriate response was to reinforce the partisan detachments and deploy them exclusively for sabotaging railway tracks, destroying military trains, and generally disarming all hostile troops. While this was going on, General Denikin's military formations were sprouting up like mushrooms and establishing new combat zones against us.

My routine was to sit at headquarters at night and work, and in the daytime go out to one or other sectors of the Front, for of course I was both a commander and in charge of the headquarters. There were times when I rehearsed in my mind the names of all the anarchists who were holed up in the cities. But having observed them during my trip through Russia, I knew that none of them were capable of making a whole-hearted commitment to building our movement. I was firmly convinced that they were neither psychologically nor practically prepared to contribute to a revolution of the broad, toiling masses.

It caused me much grief to think that these people couldn't hear the voice of the broad masses which were trying to come to terms with the practice of Revolution, and that they weren't rushing to infuse these masses with their own ideological-revolutionary and organizational talents.

In the urban groups there were many Jewish anarchists. They were generally not suited for propaganda work in the villages at that point in the revolt. After the troops of the Austro-German Force occupied Ukraine, the Jewish merchant class all too often provided spies, traitors, and provocateurs for these troops—at least in our *raions*. Rural people observed the vile role of these individual scoundrels and began to trust Jews in general. Such a change could only be carried out quickly and successfully with the aid of Jewish revolutionary anarchists who could relate to the broad toiling masses in a non-adventuristic way. But I didn't know any Jewish comrades of this type.

Of course, the Jewish revolutionary anarchists were not to blame for the fact that the anarchist organizations were organi-



zationally emasculated when it came to work among the broad masses. It wasn't their fault that, due to traditions inherited from the founders of anarchism, the anarchists were split up into organizationally separate groups and grouplets, each of which pursued its own brand of anarchism, often poorly thought-out, with its own analysis of the revolutionary moment and the tasks required. The fault lies with philosophical conceptions which were expounded by the founders of anarchism without developing their practical consequences—conceptions instilled in anarchists long before the Revolution. According to these dictums, one should preach to the masses and incite them to take the path of Revolution, but at the same time one should refrain from leading these masses in an organized manner—refrain from taking on the responsibilities inseparably connected with the practical participation of anarchists in the course of events.

The Jewish comrades were not to blame for this state of affairs. One could not demand of them more than they had already given to the Revolution. Why should they be any better or worse than anyone else? Like the overwhelming majority of anarchists, they did not grasp the importance of this historical moment for anarchist activity, nor the practical actions it required.

All this played into the hands of those dark forces which considered anarchism, Bolshevism, and left populism as harmful phenomena which must be eradicated. These forces acted to annihilate the Revolution and replace its best ideals with the ideals of Black Hundred goons, carrying out a pogromist orgy under the banners of "democratic" White generals and republicans of the Petlyura type.

Lacking the resources which would allow it to grasp the moment and formulate a timely response to the issues of the day, anarchism was the first to fall under the blows of the dark forces and was the most affected by these blows. Meanwhile Bolshevism and left populism, resorting to all sorts of scheming, maintained a revolutionary course for a time before embarking on ways which were quite foreign to revolution in order strengthen their respective positions. In the process they struck cruelly first at anarchism, then at each other.

“So don’t count on the cities,” I said to my friends. “We need to conserve the forces at our disposal so we can lead the insurgent movement forward, keeping its ultimate vision in mind while at the same time indicating the immediate, concrete goals. As time goes on, new cadres will emerge from our ranks and will further develop our goals and plans.”

And we, the members of the GGAK, threw ourselves with renewed revolutionary enthusiasm into building the insurgent movement.

Having installed itself in Gulyai-Polye, the insurgent headquarters was able to extend the its theatre of operations. In addition to the large insurgent groups already organized, our headquarters had at its disposal numerous small detachments. These units attacked the Austro-German positions and columns, stopped military trains and disarmed them, and engaged in continuous battles over a wide area with Austro-German and *Hetmano-Denikinist* detachments. One day we stopped a train and captured an emissary from the *ataman* of the White Don, Krasnov<sup>[77]</sup>, who was trying to make his way to the Ukrainian Directory. We were able to decipher the plans of the White generals he was carrying, which allowed us to encircle several White groups and wipe them out. At this time our headquarters received two telegrams, one after the other, from *Ataman* Horobets<sup>[78]</sup>, chief of the Directory’s forces at Yekaterinoslav.

In one of these telegrams, the *ataman* proposed to our staff that we send a delegation to negotiate a coordinated struggle for a “Ukrainian state” and, of course, against the Revolution. (He did not express this last point in words, but it was certainly implied since, according to reliable information, he was one of the sponsors of the 8<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Corps being formed in the city of Yekaterinoslav. Some young Ukrainian officers under the leadership of *Ataman* Rudenko subsequently spoke out against the formation of this unit.)

77 Peter Nikolayevich Krasnov (1869–1947) was a Tsarist general who was elected *Ataman* of the Don Cossack Host in May 1918. In the second half of 1918 he commanded the Don Army, 40,000 strong, which was one component of the White forces.

78 Mykola Horobets had been an Tsarist artillery officer. He was a Ukrainized Russian, his original name being Vorobyev.

In the other telegram *Ataman* Horobets requested that the insurgent staff order the Chaplino-Grishino-Ocheretinye group of insurgent-Makhnovists to release General Krasnov's emissary, return to him everything that was taken from him, and render him whatever assistance was required to reach Yekaterinoslav and *Ataman* Horobets.

After discussing both these telegrams, the insurgent staff decided to send its own delegation to Yekaterinoslav, to the headquarters of *Ataman* Horobets. Appointed to this delegation were Alexei Chubenko and Mirgorodsky, whom I have mentioned previously.

The staff's instructions to the delegation were as follows: to clarify what Horobets wanted from us, and also to sound out the soldiers and younger officers of the Yekaterinoslav garrison to find out if there was an anti-Denikinist tendency among them. In the latter case we would conspire with this element to stage an uprising in the city against the Denikinist orientations of Horobets's staff with the goal of disarming and expelling the Austro-German troops and the nascent 8<sup>th</sup> Volunteer White Guard Corps.

At the same time I instructed Comrade Chubenko to deliver in person to *Ataman* Horobets our response to his demand that the Chaplino insurgent group release General Krasnov's emissary. He was to tell Horobets that the emissary had been carrying documents confirming the existence of underground White Guard organizations in the *gubernia* and so he could not be released. He would be shot as a conscious, active, and malevolent enemy of the Revolution and the toilers.

The delegation set off for Yekaterinoslav and sent a telegram to me in Gulyai-Polye on the very same day:

*Ataman Horobets denies he invited the Gulyai-Polye insurgents to send him a delegation. We showed copies of both telegrams to him and his staff, but he is being stubborn. We await your further instructions.*

*Chubenko and Mirgorodsky.*

*December 1918.*

When this telegram arrived I was absent from Gulyai-Polye.

The commander of the Tsarevokonstantinovka Front, Kraskovsky, had been killed and I had rushed to this sector where fierce battles were going on continuously in order to confer with the junior commanders and partisans there about his replacement. The telegram was forwarded to me from Gulyai-Polye with some delay and before I was able to answer it I was told a new telegram had arrived. I was asked whether the new telegram should be sent to me or whether I would be returning soon to Gulyai-Polye.

I replied that I would return as soon as I had inspected the front with the new commander. After carrying out this inspection and talking to the partisans along the line of the front who were defending every inch of revolutionary territory from the oppressors, I returned to Gulyai-Polye in the dead of night.

At headquarters they were waiting for me with impatience in view of the new information piling up from all the different military sectors. I didn't put off dealing with my responsibilities but immediately reviewed the incoming reports and issued the appropriate orders. Among the items awaiting me was a fresh telegram from our delegation, sent from the post office in Amur (a suburb of Yekaterinoslav). The delegates requested that they not be recalled as a number of commanders, led by *Ataman* Rudenko, were protesting against the conduct of their commander. It was the opinion of the delegates that they should remain in Yekaterinoslav two or three more days in order to clarify the nature of this protest. "We need this extra time so we can provide an accurate analysis of the counter-revolutionary forces in Yekaterinoslav," the telegram concluded.

Since my comrades at headquarters and myself had complete confidence in our delegates, I ordered that the following response be sent: "You may remain in the city for a few more days, but refrain from carrying on any official negotiations in view of the provocative activity of *Koshevoy Ataman* Horobets. It would be better to mercilessly expose his two-faced behaviour."

Thus our delegates remained in the city. Meanwhile the more democratic, socialistic elements of the Ukrainian Directory's Yekaterinoslav troops coalesced around *Ataman* Rudenko. In spite of the wishes of the *Koshevoy Ataman*, these progressive elements

organized a banquet in honour of our delegates.

At this banquet A. Chubenko, disregarding the presence in the hall of staff officers from the Austro-German command and the Russian White Guard 8<sup>th</sup> Corps, launched into a no-holds-barred account of the point of view of the Makhnovist insurgents. He spoke of the necessity of fighting the Austro-German counter-revolutionary armies and their supporters—the counter-revolutionary swine who wanted to restore the Tsarist, *pomeshchik* system. He described how we, the Makhnovists, were conducting this struggle and were simultaneously preparing ourselves for battle with the government and armed forces of the Ukrainian Directory—a clearly counter-revolutionary force hostile to the toilers.

Some of *Ataman* Horobets's officers were outraged that our delegate called their unit a counter-revolutionary force. But Chubenko's solid arguments about the collusion of Horobets with the generals forming the 8<sup>th</sup> White Guard corps, as well as with the Austro-German command in Yekaterinoslav, quelled their indignation. Rather than continuing their protest, they ended up by rising as one and announcing their repudiation of their senior commander, *Ataman* Horobets. And then they burst into a spontaneous "Glory to Batko Makhno and his staff, and glory to their insurgent movement of the broad toiling masses!"

This outburst caused quite a stir among the counter-revolutionaries present. The White Guards of the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps and the Austro-German officers had already been zealously indoctrinating their soldiers with the notion that Makhno and the Makhnovists never took any prisoners—they killed everyone without exception—therefore one must fight to the death against them. Now these same officers jumped up from their places at the banquet. Some of them, grabbing their caps, nervously scanned the banqueters, looking for the hated Makhno. Others, without bothering to look around, left the hall with such haste and anxiety that one of our delegates was moved to shout: "Batko Makhno isn't here, so the enemies of the Revolution don't have to worry about their own skins for the moment."

At the same time they were keeping an eye on everyone at-

tending the banquet, our delegates were engaged in discussions with some of Horobets's commanders for the purpose of acquiring precise information about the disposition of their troops in Yekaterinoslav, as well as the strength of the 8<sup>th</sup> White Guard Corps and the Austro-German forces.

"And once our informants had given us all the information we needed," Comrade Mirgorodsky related upon the delegation's return, "Chubenko could not restrain himself and said to them: 'Why the hell are putting up with these Russian White Guard swine? Why are you letting them assemble counter-revolutionary forces behind your back—forces which are inimical to the Ukrainian Revolution? Disarm them and drive them out of the city!'"

This started the process whereby our delegates made contact with many sympathizers among Horobets's forces. Our delegates established connections with these people before returning to Gulyai-Polye.

Two weeks later young officers of Horobets's staff, together with rank-and-file soldiers under the leadership of *Ataman* Rudenko, moved decisively against the 8<sup>th</sup> White Guard Corps being formed behind their backs.

They attacked this corps successfully before it had reached a battle-ready state. Thanks to their timely action the corps was forced to leave the city in a hurry and not return.

These actions were of great assistance to our insurgent staff, for it meant that the Directory's troops themselves had relieved us of the task of keeping a close eye on this sector of the revolutionary front. This sector was no longer as dangerous as it had been previously.

Subsequently, as my staff learned, *Ataman* Rudenko and the young officers of the Directory's Yekaterinoslav troops felt they had more freedom of action since *Ataman* Horobets had been chastened for his excessive support for the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps, not only by the action taken by his officers against this corps, but also by the central authorities. As a result he became mainly a figurehead who no longer enjoyed the respect of his subordinates.

Amongst the troops of the Ukrainian Directory in Yekaterinoslav there were people who were very much in favour of

immediate negotiations with the revolutionary-insurgent staff with the goal of establishing a common front against the Austro-German armies and against Denikin. But there was no way this was going to happen. Myself and all the other members of the revolutionary-insurgent staff perceived the Ukrainian Directory as being even worse than the Ukrainian Central *Rada*. And we had fought with great determination against the Central *Rada*, for early on we had grasped its essence, as subsequently revealed by its alliance with the German and Austrian emperors and also by its land "reform" directed against the Revolution, against the age-old aspirations of the toiling peasantry. Therefore, even if the time was not yet ripe to begin open armed struggle against Directory, nevertheless we needed to prepare ourselves for that eventuality, which was sure to come. But at the moment we had our hands full with the Denikinists menacing us on all sides and Austro-German detachments still in the field. Our tasks followed naturally from the principles which our revolutionary insurgency had embraced from the very beginning.

However, fighting the Directory, or even preparing to fight it, was beyond our means so long as our territory was surrounded and besieged by Denikinist units supported everywhere by Austro-German troops. The slightest move against us on the part of the Directory would have compelled us to withdraw a number of combat units from sectors of the front facing the Denikinist hordes, which would have been suicidal. In order to cope successfully with the Directory's forces as well as our other enemies, we would have needed a army of at least 70,000 – 100,000 well-armed partisan-insurgents. Such an army would have been required in order not only to defend liberated territory from the Cossacks and Denikinists, but also to defeat and pursue the Directory's troops concentrating at that time along the Dnieper in Alexandrovsk and Yekaterinoslav. But the insurgent staff did not dispose of such an armed force at that time, and that's why it was necessary to proceed with caution in relation to the Directory and its troops, at least for the short term.

This prudence in relation to the Directory served a useful purpose for us but was by no means sufficient to free our liberated

territory from the iron grip of our enemies—the Austro-German punitive detachments, the Denikinist Volunteer Army, and Krasnov's Don Cossacks.

The Directory was certainly not well disposed towards the growth and development of a revolutionary-insurgent peasant movement devoid of statist tendencies. In fact, the Directory declared any armed force on Ukrainian soil organized without its permission to be illegal. At the same time, the Directory hurried to announce the mobilization of new recruits, hoping, apparently, that their power in Ukraine could be consolidated with the bayonets of “young Cossacks.”

This mobilization couldn't affect our region, but it affected neighbouring regions and this placed our military fronts facing the Don Cossacks and the Volunteer Army in a very perilous situation. Our liberated territory included a number of railway lines with important junctions. All the rolling stock—engines and wagons—was under the control of railway committees. The Directory's military authorities in the capital cities of the *uyezds* needed to transport their recruits through our territory and this required the use of our railway network. The insurgent staff was faced with the question: should we allow the mobilized recruits to pass through our territory? A quick response was required. Not to allow passage meant an immediate war with the Directory, highly undesirable from purely strategic considerations given our ongoing battles with the White Don and the Denikinists. On the other hand, allowing passage of the recruits would significantly augment the forces of an enemy we would have to fight sooner or later.

My comrades and I struggled with this problem for almost a whole night, trying to analyze the correlation of forces between our revolutionary-insurgent camp and the camp of the enemies of the Revolution. None of us wanted to allow the mobilized recruits to reach the *uyezd* cities, but we realized that blocking their passage would provoke an immediate attack against us by the Directory's troops. Then the liberated zone would find itself exposed to attacks from all sides which we would be hard pressed to repulse given the state of our armaments which were mostly acquired in bitter fighting at the cost, in many cases, of the lives of our best fighters



at the fronts against the Austro-German punitive detachments, the Krasnovites, and the Denikinists.

"Our movement is at a critical juncture," I told my friends that night, "but we must find a way to prevail."

My friends and I eventually agreed on the following decision: to allow the Directory's mobilized recruits to pass through our territory, providing them with engines and wagons, if necessary. But we would enjoin the commanders of the military sectors through which these recruits would be passing, and all insurgents and military-revolutionary commandants guarding the railway stations, *to delay these trains and hold meetings with the recruits*. We would explain to them the nature of state power in general and the power of the Ukrainian Directory in particular; we would explain why this mobilization was taking place and why the Directory had proclaimed a law banning any kind of armed people's revolutionary organization which did not bear its seal of approval, etc. etc.

Accordingly, we dispatched our propagandists out along all the railway lines. These were peasants and workers mostly from Gulyai-Polye. At that time the toilers of all the *raions* were in the habit of looking to Gulyai-Polye for guidance.

*[Here there is a gap in N. Makhno's manuscript. The two following pages are lacking and, unfortunately, it has not been possible to locate them. From the subsequent text it is evident that these pages describe how, in spite of the decision adopted, the revolutionary insurgency was soon compelled to engage in open warfare with the Directory.—V. Volin]*

As a result of the decision to launch an offensive against the troops of the Directory, the centre of the insurgency—Gulyai-Polye—found itself completely surrounded by counter-revolutionary armed forces.

In order to successfully oppose these forces, it was now imperative to create an operations department, which had up till now been lacking. Up till now all intelligence information about the strength of enemy formations and their movements had been

sent by the field commanders directly to the staff, where I acted as both overall commander and chief of staff. And this setup was very difficult for me, as my associates were all peasants and workers, none of whom had received a military education. In the various situations that arose it was up to me to sort things out on my own and then issue the appropriate instructions to my friends.

Now I realized it was necessary to create an operations department from representatives of each of the military units. It would be the task of this department to collect accurate information about enemy forces on the basis of which I would be able to design plans of operation.

This department was organized. Its work was directed by my deputy I. Chuchko<sup>[79]</sup>. I was thereby somewhat less encumbered with staff work.

Chuchko carefully collated all the important data and forwarded it to me in a timely fashion. On the basis of this information I drafted operational orders and gave them to the staff; I had my own instructions to follow and so did all of the insurgents—from commander to rank-and-file partisan inclusive.

And so we were engaged in bitter fighting with the Germans and Austrians on the one hand, and Krasnov's Cossacks and the Denikinists on the other hand. But now we began a struggle against the troops of the Ukrainian Directory as well.

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79 Ivan Minovich Chuchko (1893–1938), a native of Gulyai-Polye, was a peasant who had served in World War I. He held a number of responsible posts in the Makhnovist forces in 1918–1920, became ill with typhus, and then was mobilized into the Red Army. After the Civil War he was employed as a metalworker in Gulyai-Polye but was constantly subject to repression because of his Makhnovist background, finally being shot in 1938.



## Appendix 1

### Gulyai-Polye in the Russian Revolution

The village of Gulyai-Polye is one of the largest villages in Alexandrovsk *uyezd* of Yekaterinoslav *gubernia*, and possibly one of the most popular with the toilers. This village has its own special claim to fame. In 1905 the prominent organizers of the “Black Hundreds” in Yekaterinoslav *gubernia*—the Alexandrovsk judicial investigator Maidachesky and the young spokesmen of the Alexandrovsk merchant class, Shchekatikhin and Minayev—sent their agents to Gulyai-Polye to organize pogroms against the Jews. But the toiling peasantry would not allow such pogroms to take place. In 1906—1907 this same village, thanks to the many years of propaganda work by the group of peasant anarchist-communists, sparked the struggle of peasantry against Stolypin’s policy of promoting private ownership of land. This campaign started with propaganda but soon escalated to the burning of *pomeshchik* estates and *kulak khutors*. And in 1917 it was Gulyai-Polye that gave the signal to the peasants of a broad swathe of the *raions* of Alexandrovsk, Melitopol, Berdyansk, Mariupol, and Pavlograd *uyezds* to launch a struggle against the Provisional Government, which had decided not to resolve the land question prior to convening the Constituent Assembly. The peasants were urged to not allow any alternative government, to cease paying land rent to the *pomeshchiks*, to seize land from the *pomeshchiks* and monasteries, and to seize factories from the industrialists.

In this very same Gulyai-Polye in 1917 an historical resolution was drafted and passed by a peasant congress. In accordance with this resolution, the non-exploiting peasantry (those peasants who did not employ hired workers) sent their own emissaries to the cities to negotiate with the factory workers about forming a common front which would declare land and the factories to be social property. The resolution envisaged the building of a new society on the basis of the real self-management of the toilers, unencumbered by the heavy hand of the State and its organs.

The writer of these lines was born and raised in a peasant

family in Gulyai-Polye. I was fortunate while still a youngster to fall under the influence of the anarchist-revolutionary Vladimir Antoni<sup>[80]</sup> (known in revolutionary circles as “Zarathustra”). Thanks to this revolutionary and also due to the government terror of 1906—1907 which rolled across the Russian lands directed against an aroused population, I soon fulfilled a by no means insignificant role in the militant Gulyai-Polye group of peasant anarchists, which was affiliated with the Yekaterinoslav anarcho-communist organization. I fought long and hard against the Tsarist, *pomeshchik* system, and although ultimately I was captured by the satraps of this system and condemned to death, as a result of being underage I avoided execution, which was the fate of the best of my ideological companions. In my case the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment with hard labour (*katorga*).

In the middle of the night of March 1-2 1917, the gates of Butyrki (the All-Russian Central Prison) were opened for me by the Revolution. And the revolutionary cause in Ukraine compelled me to shake the dust of Moscow off my feet and immediately head for my native Gulyai-Polye. There I threw myself into organizing the toilers for the struggle for a new, free life with the same passion I had shown nine years earlier before my imprisonment.

A meeting of large and medium landowners was convened at my initiative in Gulyai-Polye, at which their land titles were confiscated and then burned. And at the time of Kornilov's attack on Petrograd against the Provisional Government and the Revolution, Gulyai-Polye took the initiative in disarming the bourgeois sympathizers of Kornilov's revolt throughout a large swathe of southeast Ukraine. Gulyai-Polye encouraged the peasantry to organize military detachments. These detachments disarmed all the Cossack troops high-tailing it from external anti-German front and heading towards the Don to help *Ataman* Kaledin in his fight against the Revolution, for the restoration of the old regime.

Gulyai-Polye, was virtually the first town in the whole of Ukraine to socialize industrial enterprises, putting the produc-

80 Vladimir Antoni (1886-1974) was a co-founder of the Gulyai-Polye Union of Poor Peasants, an anarcho-communist group, in 1905. After the leadership of the group was decimated in battles with the Tsarist authorities, Antoni fled abroad all the way to South America, returning to Ukraine only in old age.

tion and marketing of goods under the control of the workers in these enterprises.

But then the government of Lenin, on the one hand, and the government of the Ukrainian Central *Rada*, on the other hand, signed treaties with the German and Austro-Hungarian governments. Lenin's government committed to withdrawing its revolutionary armed forces, made up of Russian workers, from Ukraine; while the Central *Rada* opened the door for German-Austro-Hungarian legions to enter Ukraine to destroy the Revolution. In this situation, it was Gulyai-Polye which set an example by organizing free battalions for the defense of the Revolution. Thanks to Gulyai-Polye, battalions of this type were created in a whole bunch of *raions*. And although in Gulyai-Polye itself the nationalists took advantage of my temporary absence (I was away for a few days on military matters) to induce certain units to betray the Revolution to the benefit of the invaders and the Central *Rada*, the main body of the Gulyai-Polyan forces and the majority of the free battalions in the *raions* remained at their revolutionary posts till the bitter end. Hundreds of their rank-and-file fighters died a hero's death in unequal battle with the tyrants and murderers bent on occupying revolutionary territory.

Such, in general terms, was the role of the village of Gulyai-Polye and its toiling population, uncontaminated by the maneuvers of political parties, before and during the Revolution—up to the end of April 1918. And how this role played out in the subsequent years of the Revolution—this readers can learn from my notes and the other material.

Paris, 1929

N. Makhno

## Appendix 2

### From the Diary of Alexei Chubenko

*The anarchist Alexei Chubenko (1889–?) was the only other Makhnovist to leave a memoir of Makhno's activities in the summer and fall of 1918. His account was written under the watchful eye of the Cheka while he was in a Soviet prison in the early 1920's. Although evidently prepared for publication, these memoirs did not come into public circulation until 2006!<sup>[81]</sup> Written with the hope of satisfying his secret police mentors, Chubenko sought to depict the movement as a positive force, with any negative aspects ascribed to its leader. Chubenko succeeded to the extent that he was released and survived until at least 1930. His ultimate fate is unknown, but all the surviving Makhnovists who could be rounded up were shot in 1937-1938. The following excerpt covers the same period as *The Ukrainian Revolution*.*

.... The first thing we did was visit a certain peasant we knew—Nikita Liuty—who told us there were some fellows who would support us and that he could summon them. When we had agreed to his proposal, he took off to parts unknown, eventually returning with five people who were among those hiding from the authorities. They were Sydor Marchenko, Alexei Karetnikov, Semyon Karetnikov, and Panteleimon and Zachary Gusar.

When we greeted them, they immediately recognized Makhno and were overjoyed. As for Makhno, when he saw these people, he said: "Now I can really do something!" And his first proposal was to go to the Reznikov estate and annihilate the whole family, since there were four Reznikov brothers, who were all officers, serving in the *Varta*. We agreed unanimously with this proposal and carried it through. In this way we obtained seven rifles, one revolver, seven horses, and two saddles.

Returning to Gulyai-Polye, Makhno proposed on the following night to go to the village of Zhrebets<sup>[82]</sup> and rob the bank there.

81 Danilov and Shanin (2006), pp. 731-767.

82 Zhrebets was a large village on the railway line from Alexandrovsk to Pologi. About half the size of Gulyai-Polye, it had a similar economy: a large peasant settlement with

We needed money because a certain peasant had offered to sell us a “Colt” machine-gun for 5,000 rubles. We totally agreed with this proposal and headed off to Zhrebets, located some 40 *versts* from Gulyai-Polye.

Arriving in Zherbets, we expropriated 28,000 rubles. We carried out the robbery at night. We woke up the bank teller, stuck a revolver under his nose, and forced him to go with us. As we were going along the street, we met two young chaps. We seized them as well since they were “witnesses” and we didn’t want them to think the teller was in cahoots with us. After we got the money, we released the teller and the two other guys. Then we headed back to Gulyai-Polye.

Arriving in Gulyai-Polye, we stayed with Gusar. We sent 5,000 rubles to a certain woman who had given us information about a machine-gun, and she sent back the “Colt” gun and 1,000 rubles change. Now that we had a machine-gun, we needed some means to transport it. We decided to raid one of the estates of a very wealthy German, Neufeld (a deaf man). We managed to seize four horses, one *tachanka*, and one cart.<sup>[83]</sup>

After the Neufeld operation we took off for the Dnieper, since we had been told that there we would find a whole bunch of people who were hiding from the authorities.

Arriving in the village of Ternovka, we linked up with six armed persons led by Alexei Yermokratyev. After wiping out the *Varta* there, we headed back to Gulyai-Polye.

As we were making our way back Gulyai-Polye, we ran into the *uyezd* chief of the *Varta*, accompanied by three rank-and-file *Varta* members. When he noticed we were all wearing shoulder straps, he approached us and began to inquire who we were. Without



The M1895 Colt-Browning machine-gun, of U. S. manufacture, was a extensively used by the Russian Army in WWI.

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significant industrialization in the form of a large factory manufacturing agricultural equipment, tanneries, foundries, woodworking and ceramic shops, etc.

83 An account of this incident can be found in the Mennonite literature where it is described as a friendly encounter between Makhno and Jacob Neufeld, who had employed Makhno as a boy on his estate. See Peters (1970), p. 32.



saying a word, Makhno immediately killed him with a rifle, while the others were disarmed and released. On the dead *uyezd* chief we discovered lots of documents, including an invitation from the *pomeshchik* Mirgorodsky. After reading this letter, Makhno told us we should go visit Mirgorodsky, "since they're holding some kind of ball today and there will be plenty of bourgeois types and officers. We can get lots of weapons there." We were all in agreement with Makhno's proposal and headed off to Mirgorodsky's estate.

As we approached the mansion, we ran into a drunken throng of bourgeois types and officers. Makhno advised us that he intended to pass himself off as the chief of the *uyezd Varta*, newly appointed by Kiev. Upon reaching the courtyard, we stationed ourselves so that no one could escape. This was done in such a way that everyone saw what we were doing and heard the order that we were to guard against a "sneak attack by bandits."

When we reached the main house we were served wine and vodka. After indulging in a little drinking and snacking, Makhno ordered: "No one move!" But the guests didn't take him seriously and started snickering. Right away Makhno killed an officer with one shot. The rest tried to escape but there was no way out. Our people had covered all the entrances and exits and as soon as anyone tried to get through, they were killed. Bottom line: we put on a "high class ball" for them. As a result we acquired 5 revolvers, 11 rifles, 8 horses, and a few saddles. When the uproar had died down we found there were seven dead, and the rest dispersed. Makhno straight away ordered the estate burned—and this was done.

We didn't go all the way to Gulyai-Polye, but veered off to the left and ended up in the village of Marfopol, seven *versts* from Gulyai-Polye. We stopped at the home of a certain peasant whose name I don't know, except that he was a relative of Karetnikov. There we learned that the son of a peasant who lived nearby had been hanged. We weren't surprised to hear this, and lay down to rest at two o'clock in the afternoon. But soon Karetnikov came running to me and said that the *Varta* was coming down the street. When I had roused myself, I saw that Makhno and Yermokratyev had dragged the machine-gun out to the wall of the courtyard, while the rest of the group had placed themselves behind this wall with

rifles. It was a stone wall and provided excellent cover for firing.

When the *Varta* and the Austrians accompanying them had approached to within about 20 *sazhens* from us, the command rang out and firing commenced from the machine-gun.

When the battle ended, we found the dead included the criminal investigator who had handled the case of the boy who had been hanged, along with the deputy commander of the Gulyai-Polye *Varta*, and three rank-and-file members of the *Varta*. We also captured one Lewis gun and took five Austrians prisoner. We released them right away after warning them not cross paths with us again. After feeding the horses and resting a bit, we set out in the evening for Gulyai-Polye.

When we arrived in Gulyai-Polye, a peasant told us that there was a new *Varta* commander in the village—a former police officer who administered terrible beatings to the peasants. Makhno immediately ordered us not to unharness the horses; instead we would make a raid on the Gulyai-Polye *Varta*. And so we did.

When we broke into the *Varta* headquarters, the commander was in his office. Makhno killed him straight off. Meanwhile the rest of our people under the command of Yermokratyev captured the guardhouse, which contained a Maxim machine-gun with 12 ammunition belts, and about 20 rifles. As soon as this operation ended successfully, we took off for Vozdvizhenka. There we stayed in a hut on the very edge of the village without telling anyone who we were. Early the next morning we left and took refuge in a grove not far from Gulyai-Polye.

We stayed in the grove until four o'clock in the afternoon, then set out for Gulyai-Polye—to an outlying part of the village. We had stopped there for about half an hour when we were suddenly approached by two women: one was the wife of our comrade Kalinichenko who had been hanged by the Austrians; the other was the wife of Seregin<sup>[84]</sup>, a member of our group. They told us Austrians had just arrived, that they were stationed at Yarmarkovaya [Market] Square, and that their billeting officers had gone to find quarters. On the spot Makhno issued the order to carry out an

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84 Gregory Ivanovich Seregin (1884 – 1938), was a Russian metalworker and an anarcho-communist from 1904. He held a number of elected positions in the Makhnovist movement.

attack on the Austrians, not even asking how many of them there were. Since he now had three machine-guns, he thought he could take on Skoropadsky's whole army.

The dispositions were made as to who was to do what: one machine-gun was to cover the road to the railway station, the second was to set up at the ravine, and the third at the flour mill.

It was almost dark when the order suddenly rang out and all three machine-guns began to fire simultaneously at the Austrians. Their rifles were stacked up, so they didn't even try to grab them, they just took off to wherever.

The results of the battle were as follows: 83 Austrian prisoners, 27 horses with saddles, two machine-guns, and two cartloads of ammunition. Among the prisoners were two officers, the rest were rank-and-file. The officers were immediately shot, and the rankers were all released and even presented with 50 rubles each and a bottle of *samogon*. Makhno, now in command of 13 armed men, declared on the spot that henceforth *Hetman* Skoropadsky was out of business and had been replaced with a "Mobile-Military Regional Revolutionary Headquarters."

Two days later a punitive detachment of Germans approached and began firing on Gulyai-Polye with artillery. We found out there were 1,500 of them, and decided to retreat to Bolshe-Mikhailovka. Along the way we were told that in the forest at Bolshe-Mikhailovka there were many people hiding—people who had been persecuted by the authorities. The leader of these people was Shchus. I had no idea what sort of person he was, but Makhno knew him and said Shchus had been with him in the "Black Guard" in 1917.

When we got near the forest at Bolshe-Mikhailovka we were told by peasants that it was impossible to enter the forest because Shchus was there and he could give us a whipping. Because we were still wearing shoulder straps, the local *kulaks* approached us and said Shchus had to be liquidated at all costs because, in their estimation, he was a bandit who had killed a lot of rich people.

We understood the situation and immediately dispatched a delegation to Shchus. At first he was skeptical, but then, when he saw Makhno and recognized him, he gathered together his own people and they came out of the forest, shouting: "Long live the

Social Revolution!”

Then all of us together entered Bolshe-Mikhailovka. There we routed the *Varta* and occupied the village. And right away we hunted down those *kulaks* who had spoken to us about Shchus and executed them.

There were six of Shchus's men who joined us right away. Shchus himself didn't want to at first, but then he changed his mind and also joined us.

We settled down for the night in Bolshe-Mikhailovka—some of us in the *volost* administration building and the rest in other quarters.

At one o'clock in the morning heavy firing broke out and the admin building was being hit. Makhno roused himself; completely undressed and drowsy, he smashed a window and jumped out, for it was impossible to use a door because they were shooting at the doors.

We all jumped out, just in our underwear but with weapons in hand, into the courtyard where the horses were standing. One of the horses had already been killed. We grabbed a *tachanka* and rolled it to the far side of the courtyard where it wasn't under fire. Then we hitched up a horse and set off for the forest where we stayed until morning.

In the morning we decided to launch an attack on foot, since we had learned that there were Austrians in the village—more than 300 of them. We were only 20; nevertheless we decided to attack. We formed a single file and advanced. A certain Jewess named Aza, whose brother served in the *Varta*, spotted us and ran to inform them of our movements, but we seized her on the road and killed her.

We approached the centre of the village where the Austrians were stationed. We immediately attacked and routed the so-called Austrians. Assembling our own people, we set out right away for Gulyai-Polye. Along the way we removed our shoulder straps, since we had learned that the Germans had vanished from Gulyai-Polye.

When we occupied Gulyai-Polye, we were joined by 43 more recruits. After we had been in Gulyai-Polye for a day, we came under artillery fire. We went back to Bolshe-Mikhailovka because

peasants had told us that the Austrians had burned down 900 homes there.

We approached Bolshe-Mikhailovka and the fighting began. The result of this battle was that they, the Austrians, retreated. We settled in there for a day. But then the Austrians received reinforcements and drove us into the forest. They received even more reinforcements and formed a cordon around the forest. They kept us cooped up there for four days. On the last night we held a meeting where Makhno was given the name "Batko," meaning "Father": "You led us in here, you will lead us out of here." The order was immediately issued that at dawn we would go on the offensive, in other words, launch an attack. And that's just what we did.

Early in the morning, just as the sky became rosy in the east, we crept close to the cordon and suddenly threw ourselves at the Austrians and the *Varta* which was supporting them. We instantly captured two machine-guns from the enemy to add to our own five machine-guns. Now all seven machine-guns began to rake the enemy lines. The enemy was routed.

We broke out of the forest and headed for Uspenovka. There we were joined by 20 new recruits. The *Varta* there was dispersed. We left for Turkenovka. In Turkenovka we also dispersed the *Varta*.

And we carried on this way throughout the whole of Yekaterinoslav *gubernia*. There were all sorts of battles which I have already forgotten. But I remember well the time we stopped in the village of Temirovka. We were taking a rest break when the Germans suddenly launched a devastating attack. They captured seven *tachankas* and killed a lot of us. Shchus was wounded. And Makhno stood in a courtyard with a revolver pointed at his forehead, for when he learned that Shchus was wounded he wanted to shoot himself. But just then a *tachanka* with a machine-gun appeared and began firing at the Germans and that was enough to save the situation. Makhno got in the *tachanka* and took the wounded Shchus with him. They took shelter behind a hill. There they rallied their people and began to fight back against the Germans. They succeeded in repelling the attack. Despite the fact that we had suffered a defeat, every day more people came to us, and our ranks were replenished. . . .

## A Report about the Liquidation of Anarchist Bands in Alexandrovsk Uyezd

*Official documents about Nestor Makhno's activities in the fall of 1918 are rare. The Hetmanate authorities regarded him as a bandit who could be dealt with by police actions. The following internal government report was sent to the Hetmanate authorities in Kiev by the top government official in Yekaterinoslav.*

20 October 1918

Classified

City of Yekaterinoslav

To the Honourable Minister of Internal Affairs

As a supplement to telegram No. 9916 of October 19 I am reporting that there are three gangs operating in Alexandrovsk uyezd:

1) In the village of Gulyai-Polye there is the gang of the anarchist Makhno. This gang has been subject to ongoing pursuit by the local *Varta*, and one prominent member—Guban—who provided shelter for the gang, has been shot.

2) In the village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka there is the gang of Tsus [*sic*]. This gang has already been weakened as during its last attack on the *Varta* four of the bandits were wounded. It has little ammunition and does not represent any great danger.

(3) In the village of Pokrovskoye a powerful gang of bandits has formed, presided over by Kiryakov<sup>[85]</sup>. This gang has a lot of weapons and bullets, despite the fact that Austrian troops were stationed in Pokrovskoye.

With the evacuation of Austrian troops from the village of Gulyai-Polye, the gang of the anarchist Makhno began to carry on agitation there openly, with weapons in hand, calling for an armed uprising against the established government in Ukraine.

On October 14 the commander of the *Varta* of the 6<sup>th</sup> District

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85 Kiryakov (?—1919) was a carpenter and a member of the Left SR Party. Alexei Chubenko in his memoirs describes how he and Kiryakov escaped from a Ukrainian nationalist execution squad by swimming across the Dnieper. (See Makhno, 2009, p. 180.)

made a proposal to representatives of the commercial-industrial class of the village to form a self-defense unit and provide support to the *Varta*. But they refused on the grounds of not having weapons, and the *Varta*, with a complement of only 15, was obliged to carry on for another day and a half until noon on October 15 when, completely exhausted, it abandoned Gulyai-Polye withdrew to the Verbovia Colony, Rozhdestvenska *Volost*<sup>[86]</sup>. There the District Commander had formed a detachment composed of 20 German colonists. At midnight on October 16, the *Varta* and the German colonists—a total of 35 men—carried out an attack on Gulyai-Polye. The battle took place in the suburbs—near the bridge and alongside the Kerner factory, where the bandit-insurgents had set up guard posts. The insurgents, having suffered three casualties, fled to the centre of the village. The *Varta* meanwhile recovered three Austrian rifles and 50 rounds of ammunition from the dead insurgents, then continued the attack towards the centre of the village. But close to the telephone exchange on Pokrovskaya Street, the *Varta* was sprayed with bullets from three machine-guns and, for lack of ammunition, was compelled to retreat to the Tikhomirov estate,  $\frac{1}{2}$  *verst* from Gulyai-Polye.

On October 16, the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> District sent a reconnaissance party of four into the village. They determined that Gulyai-Polye was occupied by a 300-strong gang of insurgent-bandits who were equipped with four machine-guns and other types of ordnance.

Having at its disposal only 15 *Varta* regulars and a very insignificant quantity of ammunition, the *Varta* of the 6<sup>th</sup> District was forced to withdraw to Gaichur Station.

Gulyai-Polye is currently occupied by Austrian troops jointly with the *Varta* of the 6<sup>th</sup> District, which has been reinforced by 20 Lezgians. These forces are doing whatever is required to liquidate any gangs of insurgents hiding in the environs of Gulyai-Polye.

The *Varta* and the self-defense auxiliaries suffered no casualties. In the immediate future a party of 200 Ossetians<sup>[87]</sup> is expected in

86 The Verbovia Colony was a settlement of German Evangelicals (Lutherans/Calvinists) near Gaichur Station, a few miles northwest of Gulyai-Polye.

87 The Lezgians and Ossetians were indigenous inhabitants of the Caucasus Mountains. They may have been part of the Russian Tsarist army, now dissolved or in the process of

Alexandrovsk, hired for duty in mounted *Varta* squadrons. With their arrival it will be possible to finally liquidate all the bandit gangs in the *uyezd*.

The results of these liquidations will be reported in the immediate future.

*Gubernia starosta* Major-General [signature illegible]

Deputy administrator Timanov

[*Danilov and Shanin (2006, p. 50).*]

## **The Makhnovists Announce Their Seizure of Gulyai-Polye**

*Telegram of Alexei Chubenko sent by order of Nestor Makhno:*

16 October 1918

To one and all!

The Gulyai-Polye *Raion Revkom* announces the occupation of Gulyai-Polye by insurgents who have established Soviet power there. We proclaim the revolt of the workers and peasants against the Austrians-Germans-*haidamaks*—oppressors and executioners of the Ukrainian Revolution.

[*Danilov and Shanin (2006), p. 51.*]

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being Ukrainized. In any case, it was traditional for owners of large estates in southern Ukraine to employ warriors from the Caucasus for security duties in the belief that such people would lack connections with the local population.



## **The Makhnovists Address the Citizens of Gulyai-Polye**

*Proclamation of the Makhnovists, undated but evidently issued around the same time as the preceding telegram.*

To the Citizens of Gulyai-Polye:

The Gulyai-Polye Military Revolutionary staff, again engaged on the path of struggle to overthrow the disgraceful, illegitimate Skoropadsky regime, calls upon all citizens to rise up as one and contribute both in mind and body to this goal. The moment has come for the German-Hungarian-Austrian bands to depart. The *Varto-haidamak*-bourgeois thugs are stepping up to take their place, in order to keep the bourgeois yoke in place over you—our friends and brothers, peasants and workers. We must oppose them with all our strength so that you, the long-suffering Ukrainian people, exhausted and bleeding, can raise up your standard of light and justice. Long live your justice, peace, and brotherhood.

Signed by the Chief Commissar of the Provisional-Military-Revolutionary Staff N. Makhno; I. Liuty and A. Marchenko.

*[Malinovsky (2009), p. 359.]*

## Glossary

- ataman** elected Cossack chieftain. See also *koshevoy ataman*.
- balka** ravine
- barin** a man belonging to the upper strata of society in pre-revolutionary Russia; virtually identical to *pomeshchik*.
- barinya** the wife of a *barin*.
- batko** a Ukrainian word meaning "military commander," it also is an affectionate term for "father," such as "dad." In a figure like Makhno, these two distinct meanings tended to be merged.
- batrak** poor peasant who was forced to hire out as a day labourer. Makhno's father was a *batrak*.
- Bolshevik** member of the radical wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, which became a separate party formally in 1912. In March 1918 the party changed its name to the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks).
- brichka** a long, spacious carriage with four wheels, with a folding top over the rear section. Intended for long trips and provided with various kinds of conveniences (beds, tables), it was the 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of a motorhome.
- Cheka** Extraordinary Commission, the original secret police organization set up by the Bolsheviks shortly after taking power. Its functionaries were known as *Chekists*.
- Cossack** member of a Russian or Ukrainian military caste which lived on the borderlands of the Russian empire and enjoyed special privileges in exchange for military services.
- desyatin** unit of land measurement in Tsarist Russia equivalent to 2.7 acres.
- droshky** A low, four-wheeled open carriage, consisting of a long bench on which the passengers ride sideways or astride, as on a saddle, with their feet on bars near the ground.
- echelon** troop train.
- GGAK** Gulyai-Polye Group of Anarcho-Communists, organized in 1917, and reorganized in early 1919 as the Gulyai-Polye Union of Anarchists (GSA) which covered a much larger geographical region (it included the anarchist strong points of *Bolshe-Mikhailovka* and *Pokrovskoye*). As a member, Nestor Makhno was obligated to adhere to the internal rules of these organizations.
- gubernia** administrative unit which can roughly be translated as "province." *Yekaterinoslav* was the administrative centre of a *gubernia* which included several *uyezds* (one of which was *Alexandrovsk uyezd*).
- haidamak** elite soldier of the Ukrainian nationalist armed forces. An archaic term which harks back to Ukrainian Cossack warriors of the 18th century.
- Hetman** traditional title for leader of Ukrainian Cossacks. The title had been dormant for 150 years before being revived by the backward-looking Skoropadsky regime in 1918. The corresponding regime was called the Hetmanate. The original Hetmanate had been an independent Cossack polity which became a client state of Russia before being completely absorbed by the Russian empire. The 1918 Hetmanate was a client state of Germany.

- izba** a traditional peasant wooden house, similar in construction to a Canadian log cabin.
- junker** Makhno uses this term to refer to members of the German officer caste. The word literally means “young lord” and refers to the Prussian aristocracy which dominated the government bureaucracy and officer corps in early modern Germany.
- katorga** hard labour prison or the regime in such a prison which was applied to convicted political prisoners in the Russian empire; these convicts were known as *katorzhniks*. Makhno served a long term in Moscow’s Butyrki Prison which had a very severe regime although its inmates were not in fact required to perform manual labour.
- katzap** Ukrainian derogatory slang for a Russian.
- khutor** a farm or rural estate, an independent economic unit in the sense that it was not subject to the traditional communal structure of the Ukrainian village. Makhno uses the term to refer to farms set up under the Stolypin reforms (1906-1916). The *khutor* included living quarters for farm workers as well as the owner’s house and thus was a small village in itself.
- koshevoy ataman** a 17<sup>th</sup> century term denoting the chief of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, revived by Ukrainian nationalists in 1918. Traditionally this ataman was elected for a one year term. Zaporozhia was a swathe of land centred on the Dnieper rapids (now submerged). See map on p. 3.
- kulak** as used by Makhno, a peasant who had left the obshchina and set up an independent farm, generally employing some hired labour. A term with negative connotations in Soviet times, in contemporary Ukraine it has acquired a positive aspect, like “farmer” in Western society.
- Left SR** member of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, formed in October 1917 from the left wing of the SR Party.
- Makhnovshchina** the Makhnovist movement. A pejorative term in Soviet historiography, it has gradually acquired a neutral hue.
- Maximalist** a member of the Maximalist Party, an early (1904) anarchism-oriented split from the SR Party. Like the anarchists, the Maximalists insisted on the immediate socialization of land and the means of production; and like the anarchists, it opposed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.
- oprichnik** member of a special military unit set up by Tsar Ivan IV (“the Terrible”) which combined the functions of secret police and death squad.
- Pan** a deferential term of address, roughly equivalent to “Sir” or “Lord”; of Polish origin, it was once reserved for hereditary noblemen.
- pomeshchik** owner of a large landed estate.
- Rada** council, the Ukrainian equivalent of “soviet.” The first nationalist government of Ukraine (1917-1918) was known as the Central Rada.
- raion** administrative unit, a subdivision of a *uyezd*. The village of Gulyai-Polye was the administrative centre of a raion (also named Gulyai-Polye) which included several other (much smaller) villages and hamlets.
- razvedchik** member of a reconnaissance (*razvedka*) unit.

- p>Revkom Revolutionary Committee. After the October Revolution of 1917 local soviets set up Revkoms to organize the military defense of the Revolution.
p>samogon home-made vodka—the literal meaning of the word is “self-distilled.”
p>sazhen an old Russian unit of length ~ 2.1 metres; by a Bolshevik government decree of September 14 1918 Russia officially went on the metric system and units like the
- sazhen*
- became obsolescent.
p>serednyak a middle peasant, i.e. an economically independent farmer but one who did not exploit the labour of others.
p>shompol flexible rod used for cleaning rifles but also used as an instrument of corporal punishment.
p>sotnia literally “a hundred,” used to designate a Cossack military squadron of 100 men. The term was applied to Cossack communities expected to supply this number of recruits and was later extended by the Tsarist government to non-Cossack communities.
p>shpik slang for plain clothes detective, a “dick.”
p>SR member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (PSR), the largest left wing party in Russia, which claimed to represent the interests of the peasantry. Socialist but non-Marxist, it was prone to factionalism and underwent a number of splits. National variants of the SR Party existed in Ukraine.
p>starosta the senior administrative official of a
- gubernia*
- a centrally appointed position under the Hetman government in 1918. Literally the word means “elder.”
p>tachanka a light farm wagon equipped with springs, with a mounted machine gun pointed toward the back, pulled by two to four horses.
p>uyezd administrative unit, a subdivision of a
- gubernia*
- . Alexandrovsk was the administrative centre of a
- uyezd*
- which included several
- raions*
- (one of which was Gulyai-Polye).
p>Varta the Hetmanite police force. Its official name was the “State Guard of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.” It was analogous to the Milice in occupied France during WWII.
p>verst unit of length: 3,500 feet or 1.06 kilometres.
p>volost administrative unit which could be the equivalent of a
- gubernia*
- ,
- uyezd*
- , or raion depending on location and historical tradition (
- volost*
- units were common in Cossack regions).
p>zemstvo an organ of local self-government in the countryside established in the latter stages of the Russian Empire. Dominated by the rural gentry, the zemstvos concerned themselves with schools, health care, agricultural innovation, road construction, etc.

## Chronology July – December 1918

- July 6. .... Makhno arrives in Rozhdestvenka, near Gulyai-Polye.
- July 6-7 .... Left SR revolt in Moscow and other cities suppressed by Bolsheviks.
- July 30 .... Field Marshal von Eichhorn, German military governor of Ukraine, assassinated in Kiev by Left SRs.
- August 8 .... Makhno's group attacks occupation forces near the village of Fedorovka, killing two Austrian officers.
- August 16 .... Austrian patrol ambushed by Makhno's group.
- September 23 ... Makhnovist detachment enters Gulyai-Polye but is forced to leave immediately due to its military weakness.
- September 26 ... Makhnovist detachment clashes with *Varta* and Austrian troops at Marfopol, near Gulyai-Polye. Austrian prisoners, who turned out to be Galician Ukrainians, are released.
- October 15 .... Makhnovist force drives the *Varta* out of Gulyai-Polye.
- October 18 .... Austro-Hungarian troops reoccupy Gulyai-Polye.
- November 3 .... Austro-Hungary capitulates in World War I, its empire dissolves into several new states.
- November 4 .... Battle of Temirovka, a heavy defeat for the Makhnovist main force at the hands of Austro-Hungarian troops; casualty figures for the insurgents range from 100 to 170. Makhno and Shchus are wounded.
- November 11 ... Germany capitulates, ending World War I; one of the conditions of the armistice is the evacuation of its troops from Ukraine.
- November 14 ... The founding of the Directory, a Ukrainian nationalist government whose leading figure is Simon Petlyura.
- November 25 ... Makhnovists capture the railway junction of Pologi.
- November 27 ... Makhnovists capture Gulyai-Polye, Orekhov, Gaichur, and Novokarlivka.
- December 14 .... *Hetman* Skoropadsky abdicates, flees abroad.
- December 20 .... Fighting against the *Hetman's* forces comes to an end in Yekaterinoslav *gubernia* with the triumph of the insurgents.

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