

“No Unity of Policy or Command”: Canada and the Allied Occupation of Vladivostok, 1918–19

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As the last guns sounded on the Western Front, 4,000 Canadian troops assembled on Canada’s Pacific coast for deployment to Siberia and the Russian Far East. This was the country’s first foray in the Far East and its first military expedition organized independently of the British Army, as the dominion agreed to spearhead the British Empire’s intervention on revolutionary Russia’s far-eastern flank. Born at a meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet in London in July 1918, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia) (CEFS) was plagued from the outset by lack of clarity about its aims and by social unrest on the Canadian home front. The day the main body of troops embarked for Russia in December 1918, a group of French-Canadian conscripts mutinied in Victoria, the capital city of British Columbia, and were ultimately forced to board ship at the point of the bayonet. Shortly after the contingent reached Vladivostok, the order was issued from Ottawa to begin preparations for evacuation. Mounting partisan attacks on the Trans-Siberian Railroad and deep divisions among the Allies convinced the Canadian government to refuse to authorize the soldiers’ deployment “up-country” to Omsk and the Ural Front where Kolchak’s White Russian forces were battling the Red Army. Consequently, few troops in the CEFS ever saw direct fighting. A small advance party of about 50 soldiers spent the winter of 1918–19 in Omsk, while 200 other Canadians joined a short-lived inter-Allied maneuver to the village of Shkotovo, near Vladivostok, to repel a partisan advance. By June 1919, all but a handful of troops had returned to Canada.

Lacking authorization to proceed up-country, the Canadian contingent made “the least contribution to the White cause” of all the anti-Bolshevik armies in eastern Russia.¹ Largely confined to Vladivostok, and insulated from the horrors of civil war, the Canadians were unlikely “tourists” in the port city during one of the most difficult chapters in its history. They passed

¹ Steuart Beattie, “Canadian Intervention in Russia, 1918–1919” (MA thesis, McGill University, 1957), 381.

their time performing guard duty at the Canadian barracks at Gornostai Bay and Vtoraia Rechka, took leave at Vladivostok's cafes, ramparts, beaches, brothels, and bazaars, and assisted with the training of White Russian officers at a British-led school on Russian Island. Their recollections of Vladivostok during the Allied occupation therefore provide a valuable window into the city's social life, its contested social relations, and the politics of coalition warfare. "There is no unity of policy or command amongst the Allies in regard to any uprisings and disorders," Canadian general James H. Elmsley informed Allied commanders as partisan activities surged in and around Vladivostok in March 1919 amidst fears of a popular insurgency. "The chief danger of an uprising will be that the Allies, acting independently, will come into armed conflict with each other."² This frank assessment illuminates the fragility of the Allied occupation and helps to explain its ultimate unraveling.

Historians in Russia and beyond have been slow to apply the methodological insights of social history to this contested moment in Russian and world history. A chasm divides the two principal bodies of scholarship on the Russian Far East in the wake of the First World War: an international Western historiography focusing on diplomatic wrangling between the Allies, and a Soviet historiography that sanctified the October Revolution and partisans while failing to examine power relations in a non-teleological way. Bridging these bodies of scholarship, and providing a dialogue between military history, diplomatic history, and social history, this chapter revisits the story of intervention through the lens of the Canadian "tourists" and their role in the counter-insurgency campaign of spring 1919—illuminating social and geopolitical pressures that shaped the outcome of Russia's Civil War. Hindered by internal divisions, a lack of coordinated policy and command, poor morale among the troops, and mounting domestic opposition, Canada and other Allied forces were ill-equipped to respond effectively to the robust partisan movement and wider societal unrest that surged in and around Vladivostok in March 1919, revealing fissures that would culminate in defeat for the Allies and White Russians and victory for the Bolsheviks.

Why Siberia?

From the start, Canada's aims in Russia (like those of its allies) were complex, fluid, and confused. Economic opportunity, military strategy, international diplomacy, and ideology influenced the decision to intervene in the Russian Civil War. As Canadian politician Newton Rowell, president of the Privy

² Elmsley "Memorandum," 16 March 1919, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter cited as LAC), Department of Militia and Defence Records, Record Group 9, series III-D-3, vol. 5057, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), Appendix P (f).

Council, declared in September 1918, "This vast country is in a very precarious position from the standpoint of trade and commerce. She needs capital and expert guidance in the work of reconstruction.... [With] more intimate relations the greatest benefit may result both to Canada and Siberia."³ Of particular interest was the vast retail-wholesale network in the Far East vacated by the German-owned Kunst and Albers Company, an enterprise similar to that of the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada. When Russia's Provisional Government ordered that the firm be sold, a Canadian intelligence officer saw "a wonderful chance for Canada."⁴ Trade commissioners had been posted to Petrograd and Omsk in 1916, and a Russian purchasing mission was established in Canada; exports to Russia reached \$16 million, making it the seventh largest market for Canadian goods. In October 1918, as Canadian troops were mustered to Victoria, the Privy Council authorized the formation of a Canadian Siberian Economic Commission, including representatives of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and the Bank of Montreal. A Canadian military officer also intimated more immediately financial motivations, in a public meeting in Victoria: "We are going to Siberia as far as I know because Britain has loaned a great amount of money to Russia. I don't know how much, and the Bolsheviki have repudiated the loan money. This is as much ours as anybody's, and we are going there to get it."⁵

Canada's Siberian Expedition reflected its loyalty to the British Empire and a desire for greater influence. As Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden declared: "[I]t will be of some distinction to have all the British Forces in Siberia under the command of a Canadian Officer."⁶ The achievements of Canadian troops during the war had won for the country "a new place among the nations," obliging Canada to do its part on the world stage.⁷ Soviet historian M. I. Svetachev also commented on this trend: "The Canadian bourgeoisie, which became rich during the world war, tried to gain independence, especially in foreign policy. It believed that Canadian participation in the intervention would help to reach this goal."⁸ According to Gaddis Smith, the Siberian

³ "Siberia Offers Vast Opportunity," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 28 September 1918.

⁴ Robert N. Murby, "Canadian Economic Commission to Siberia, 1918–1919," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 11, 3 (1969): 374–93.

⁵ "Organized Attempt to Wreck Mass Meeting," *BC Federationist* (Vancouver), 20 December 1918.

⁶ Henry Laird Borden and Heath MacQuarrie, eds., *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 2: 146.

⁷ "Siberia Offers Vast Opportunity."

⁸ M. I. Svetachev, *Imperialisticheskaia interventsia v Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1983), 75.

Expedition was “the initial episode in Canada’s struggle for complete control of her foreign policy after World War I.”⁹

Ideology also influenced the Canadian government’s decision to deploy troops in the Siberian Intervention. In both Russia and Canada, the events of 1917 amplified divisions between the social classes, as discontent with the high cost of living, shortages of food, carnage on the battlefields, compulsory military service, and restrictions on civil liberties fueled working-class unrest. In both countries, the roots of unrest could be traced to the class system itself, to the determination of the domestic elite to engage in war, and to the efforts of sections of the working class to alter basic economic relationships. While the Canadian press described the Lenin regime as “the enthronement of anarchy at Petrograd,” sections of labor viewed it as a source of inspiration, providing tactical direction in response to the two-fold scourges of war and capitalism. “Is it not high time that the workers of the western world take action similar to that of the Russian Bolsheviki and dispose of their masters as those brave Russians are now doing?” a British Columbia labor leader asked.¹⁰ In the midst of this radical surge, Prime Minister Borden appointed a director of public safety tasked with investigating the proliferation of Bolshevik influence in Canada.

This complex array of Canadian motives—economic, military, diplomatic, and ideological—is reflected in a cryptic letter, received by the Victoria Trades and Labor Council from the deputy minister of militia and defense, Ottawa, “acknowledging a letter from the Council opposing the Siberian expedition”:

The Department does not consider Canada at war with the Russian people, but that they, the Government of Canada, are supporting certain governments in Russia, such as that organized at Omsk and Archangel, which governments are, by the way, quite socialistic. At any rate no aggression is meant by the Dom. Govnt, rather an economic development.¹¹

This official statement of Canadian policy, despite its confusing syntax, reveals not only implicit opposition to the spread of socialism but also a clear

⁹ Gaddis Smith, “Canada and the Siberian Intervention, 1918–1919,” *American Historical Review* 64, 4 (1959): 866.

¹⁰ “Lenine’s Doctrine Scares Ruling Class,” *Federationist*, 14 December 1917; “M. Lenine’s Coup D’Etat,” *Colonist*, 9 November 1917.

¹¹ Minutes, 8 January 1919, University of Victoria Special Collections (hereafter UVSC), Victoria Labour Council Fonds, acc. 80-59, box 3.

intent to alleviate labor's fear that Canada was acting on purely ideological grounds.

The Origins of the Allied Occupation

Canada deployed troops to Vladivostok in the wake of the Czech-led coup of June 1918, after the city's short-lived flirtation with Bolshevism. In December 1917, Bolsheviks had won elections to the Vladivostok Soviet, propelling 24-year-old university student (and son of a former tsarist official) Konstantin Sukhanov into the position of *de facto* ruler of Russia's Far Eastern port. Control of the world's largest state was in flux, as the chaos of revolution and world war isolated the Russian Far East from the Lenin-led Bolshevik regime in European Russia. Before the close of 1917, the central Bolshevik government had signed a ceasefire with Germany, and Chinese troops entered Russian-controlled Manchuria, a short distance from Vladivostok, the opening volley of foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War. Allied leaders viewed with alarm the quantity of war materiel at Vladivostok, which spilled out of warehouses and lay unprotected along the wharves, exposed to the elements and a hostile local population. The deterioration of the railroad had created a bottleneck for 700,000 tons of arms, ammunition, railway rolling stock, and other supplies shipped from Canada and other Allied ports to aid the tsar's flagging forces. Even prior to November 1917, the American consul at Vladivostok had wired the secretary of state in Washington, warning of Bolshevik activity and the danger of unrest in Vladivostok, suggesting that American warships pay regular visits to the port, "not in order to suppress unrest, but to prevent the possibility of unrest."¹²

As previous studies noted, Allied intervention was undermined from the outset by rivalry between Britain, the United States, and Japan, which had joined the Allies in 1914 and was in the best position to land forces at Vladivostok—untouched by the slaughter on the Western Front and a short distance from Russia across the Sea of Japan. In early January, Japan spurned overtures from Britain for joint action (despite the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in place since 1902). Asserting its right to act unilaterally, Japan deployed the naval cruisers *Iwami* and *Asahi* to Vladivostok's Golden Horn Bay. Britain responded by deploying the HMS *Suffolk* from Hong Kong and considered taking action with the Americans alone. The Japanese and British warships reached Vladivostok in mid-January 1918 and lay at anchor in the harbor, followed by the American cruiser *USS Brooklyn* in February. Under established conventions of war, the highest-ranking officer of the inter-Allied fleet—the Jap-

¹² As quoted in B. I. Mukhachev, ed., *Dal'nii Vostok Rossii v period revoliutsii 1917 goda i grazhdanskoi voiny* (Vladivostok: Dal'nauka, 2003), 135.

anese admiral commanding the *Iwami*, Katō Kanji—assumed supreme command, establishing a hierarchy that prevailed for the duration of the Siberian Intervention.

An uneasy stalemate set in, as the Bolshevik-led Vladivostok Soviet exercised de facto power in Vladivostok while foreign warships waited ominously in the city's harbor. The Soviet embarked on an aggressive plan to democratize local industry, established workers' committees to ramp up production of railway rolling stock, and retooled the city's Military Port to build and refurbish civilian ships and machines. Working-class housing was planned closer to industry to increase workers' leisure time, as the soviet opened a Peoples' University, three theaters, and two daily newspapers. Fearful of such changes, American, Japanese, British, and French diplomatic representatives fled Vladivostok for Japan in March. On 5 April 1918, a contingent of 500 Japanese marines and 50 British marines were deployed to guard the local consulates, following attacks on three Japanese nationals. "We consider the situation very serious and issue the most categorical warning to the comrades," Lenin declared in a directive from Moscow to the Vladivostok Soviet. "Do not harbor any illusions: the Japanese will certainly attack. That is inevitable. Probably all the Allies without exception will help them.... Our help is conditional on your practical success in removing rolling stock and locomotives from Vladivostok, in preparing to blow up bridges and so forth."¹³ The policies of the central Bolshevik government, including repudiation of \$13 billion rubles of foreign debt in January and conclusion of a separate peace with Germany in March, further inflamed the Allies. When the anomalous Czech Legion (marooned in Russia and desperate for statehood) seized control of the Trans-Siberian Railroad in May, the stage was set for intervention.

On 26 June 1918, Czech leaders met with Allied consuls in Vladivostok, requesting the immediate deployment of an Allied force of 100,000 troops and large quantities of arms. Three days later, on 29 June, 15,000 Czechs alongside Japanese, British, Chinese, and American marines toppled the Vladivostok Soviet and established a Provisional Government of Autonomous Siberia. Albert Rhys Williams, an American journalist who was in Vladivostok, described the Allied operation:

The Japanese seize the powder-magazine, the British the railroad station. The Americans throw a cordon around the consulate. The Chinese and others take up lesser points. The Czechs converge upon the Soviet building. They encircle it from all sides. With a loud "Hurrah,"—they rush forward, and go crashing thru the doors. The Red

¹³ "Directives to the Vladivostok Soviet," 7 April 1918, in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 27: February–July 1918 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 226.

Flag of the Socialist Republic is pulled down, and the red, white and blue flag of autocracy is run up. Vladivostok passes into the hands of the Imperialists.¹⁴

Williams's account, published in North American labor newspapers, described the revolutionists' last stand: "When the Czechoslovaks, aided by Japanese and British troops, suddenly seized the Soviet and its officers, throwing confusion and terror into the ranks of the workers, the *gruzshchiki* (longshoremen) rushed into the Red Staff building, and, though outnumbered forty to one, refused to surrender until the building was fired by an incendiary bomb."¹⁵ Local Bolsheviks were rounded up in the streets and jeered by shouting crowds. On 1 July, the Soviet People's Commissariat for the Russian Far East issued a petition stating that the "White Czechs managed to surprise the Vladivostok Soviet and reinstate the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" and called on workers, peasants, and Cossacks to take up arms "to protect the Soviets."¹⁶ Vladivostok Bolsheviks retreated north to Nikolsk-Ussuriisk, at the junction of the Chinese Eastern and Ussuri railroads, clashing with Czech forces in ugly hand-to-hand combat.

On 4 July 1918, a mass funeral was held for the fallen *gruzshchiki*. According to Williams, 17,000 Vladivostok workers joined the procession, "jamming the street not from curb to curb, but from wall to wall." At the head of the march, four men carried a red banner proclaiming: "Long Live the Soviet of Workmen's and Peasants' Deputies! Hail to the International Brotherhood of the Toilers!" One hundred girls dressed in white, carrying green wreaths from 44 unions in the city, accompanied the freshly painted red coffins of the fallen longshoremen. The music of the Red Fleet Band was drowned out by the singing of the "Internationale." A group of Czech troops offered the procession a guard of honor, but were flatly refused. In the main square, in front of the surrendered Red Staff building and "fifty feet" from the British Consulate, speakers mounted a platform on the back of a truck. Konstantin Sukhanov, the deposed president of the Vladivostok Soviet—paroled for the day by the new authorities—told the crowd: "Here before the Red Staff building where our comrade *gruzshchiki* were slain, we swear by these red coffins

¹⁴ Albert Rhys Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921), 247.

¹⁵ "The Red Funeral of Vladivostok," *Federationist*, 13 December 1918. (Reprinted from the *New Republic* [New York], 9 November 1918, 41–42).

¹⁶ B. I. Mukhachev, *Aleksandr Krasnoshchekov: Istoriko-biograficheskii ocherk* (Vladivostok: DVO RAN, 1999), 85–86; John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 123–25.

that hold them, by their wives and children that weep for them, by the red banners which float over them, that the Soviet for which they died shall be the thing for which we live—or if need be—like them, die.”¹⁷ Two days later, British, French, American, Japanese, and Czech officials placed the city under their “temporary protection.”¹⁸

It was against this backdrop that officials in Ottawa, Washington, London, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, and other capitals pledged ground troops for the Siberian Intervention. At the beginning of July, the Supreme Allied War Council had agreed to the principle of intervention as US President Woodrow Wilson authorized the deployment of 7,000 American troops (later expanded to 12,000). On 9 July, the British War Office requested Canadian forces to “restore order and a stable government” in Siberia.¹⁹ With access to the Russian Far East via its Pacific Coast, the Canadian government pledged a force of 4,200 troops and agreed to assume command of 1,500 British troops deployed from Hong Kong. On 3 August, 1,000 soldiers in Britain’s 25th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, landed at Vladivostok, “the first contingent of Allied troops to arrive,” escorted into Golden Horn Bay by two Japanese destroyers. Two days later, they moved up-country to the precarious Ussuri Front, and, alongside Japanese marines, thwarted the Bolshevik advance: “The enemy were entirely demoralized, and never made another stand east of Lake Baikal,” British Lieutenant Colonel John Ward later wrote.²⁰ On the opposite side of Russia, near the Finnish border, Allied troops landed at the port of Arkhangel’sk on 8–9 August 1918, seizing the city from 8,000 Bolsheviks and catapulting a White “Government of the North” into power. By the end of August, 15,000 of 73,000 Japanese troops had landed in Vladivostok. American soldiers sailed from the Philippines as an array of foreign armies made their way to Russia’s Far East: 2,000 Italians, 12,000 Poles, 4,000 Serbs, 4,000 Romanians, 5,000 Chinese, and 1,850 French troops, including “Annamites” from Vietnam. When combined with the Czech Legion and White Russian forces, the total Allied troop strength in Siberia approached 350,000. In late August, Czech, American, British, and Japanese troops pushed the Bolshevik fighters further north from Vladivostok, along the Ussuri River toward the city of Khabarovsk. The Bolshevik line broke on 24 August 1918 and Khabarovsk was taken by White-Allied forces on 5 September.

¹⁷ “The Red Funeral of Vladivostok,” *British Columbia Federationist* (Vancouver), 13 December 1918, 5 (Reprinted from the *New Republic*).

¹⁸ Roy MacLaren, *Canadians in Russia* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976), 134.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁰ John Ward, *With the “Die-Hards” in Siberia* (London: Cassell, 1920), 4–52.

Mobilization and Mutiny

In Canada, the Siberian Expeditionary Force was mobilized from every province and deployed to the Pacific coast for training in the cities of Victoria, New Westminster, and Coquitlam. One-third of the soldiers were conscripts, enlisted under the terms of the Military Service Act (1917). This included many French-speaking conscripts from the province of Quebec, where loyalties to the British Empire were weak and rioting had erupted in 1917 in opposition to the conscription law. Mobilization of Canada's Siberian Expedition also coincided with the onslaught of the Spanish Flu, the worldwide influenza epidemic that took tens of millions of lives globally and which resulted in hundreds of deaths in Canada. These military units were the first to show signs of the contagion, which spread westward aboard Russia-bound troop trains. Finally, the phenomenon of war-weariness took its toll on Canada's Siberian force, as the cessation of fighting in Europe in November 1918 triggered a fundamental questioning in Canada over whether the force should proceed.

As Prime Minister Borden sailed across the Atlantic en route to peace talks in Europe, his acting prime minister sent an urgent telegram from Ottawa: "All our colleagues are of the opinion that public opinion here will not sustain us in continuing to send troops, many of whom are draftees under the Military Service Act and Order in Council, now that the war is ended. We are all of the opinion that no further troops should be sent and that Canadian forces in Siberia should, as soon as situation will permit, be returned to Canada. Consider matter of serious importance."²¹ Opposition to the Siberian Expedition extended from the federal cabinet to labor and farmer organizations to the country's major pro-business daily newspaper. Borden responded to his cabinet's repeated entreaties, however, by insisting that Canada had made commitments that had to be honored, regardless of the armistice in Europe.

Opposition also extended to the Canadian contingent itself. Evidence of discontent at barracks on Canada's Pacific coast abounds. In November, before the main contingent had left the country, 87 soldiers in the Russian platoons of the 259th Battalion were removed from Victoria's Willows Camp, "these men not being anxious to proceed to Siberia." Bolshevik sympathies had developed among the men, former soldiers in the tsar's army transferred to the Canadian Corps to serve as interpreters in the Russian Far East. A loyal Canadian soldier reported confidentially that the Russians at the Willows "are all Bolsheviks"; they intended to join the Red Army if deployed to Russia and were "debating all the time the social question and predicting the downfall of

²¹ White to Borden (via Sir Edward Kemp, overseas minister), 14 November 1918, LAC, Borden Papers, MG 26, H1(a), vol. 103.

the rich": "I am not afraid to fight the enemy ahead of me ... but I don't want to be shot from behind with our own machine guns." Only eighteen of the Russian troops were deemed reliable for service in Siberia and permitted to leave Canada. Within the other units of the 259th, efforts were made to contain discontent: English-speaking troops were transferred out of "D" company (which the war diary describes as the "French-Canadian Company"), while French-Canadians were transferred from "C" company to "D" company. In the 20th Machine Gun Company, seven soldiers were declared "deserters" by a Court of Inquiry on 20 December 1918; every day, punishments were meted out for infractions ranging from "breaking out of camp" to "highly improper conduct in the ranks." A soldier wrote to his sister-in-law from the Willows Camp: "Well, things are beginning to look awful black over here. We are going to be railroaded to Siberia, and we cannot do a thing to help ourselves. They started to dish out our clothes to us the first day, and out of 78 of us 77 refused to take them."²²

And so Departure Day arrived, Saturday, 21 December 1918. It was a cold, crisp day with the wind blowing from the north. A total of 856 enlisted men in the 259th Battalion and the 20th Machine Gun Company, along with Headquarters Detachment and several smaller units, left the Willows Camp for the six-kilometer march through downtown Victoria towards the outer wharves and the troopship *SS Teesta*. They were under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Swift, along with 42 other officers. Canada's defense minister, Sydney Mewburn, had traveled to Victoria to personally inspect the troops before they embarked. The most detailed description of the events that followed appeared in a lieutenant's letter to his wife, mailed from Japan, which was published in the *British Columbia Federationist* labor newspaper and is worth quoting at length:

Yesterday morning (Saturday, December 21) we turned out at reveille, 5 a.m., and turned in all our camp equipment at quartermasters' stores. We breakfasted at 6 a.m., and marched out of camp at 7:30 a.m. for the wharf, a distance of four and a half miles. When we got half way the signal came from the rear to halt, so we stopped for about ten minutes. Then the commanding officer blew his whistle as a signal for everyone to resume his place in the column, and we jumped into our places waiting for the further signal to advance, which was an unusually long time coming.

We could not see the rest of the column, as we had turned a corner of the road—and a few minutes later a shot rang out, but still we waited

²² "There Can Be No Peace," *Federationist*, 20 December 1918.

till eventually we received word to resume the march. In the meantime it appears that our gallant ... or a number of them, had absolutely refused to fall in again when the signal blew, or to go down to the boat at all. So then the colonel drew his revolver and fired a shot over their heads—in the main street of Victoria—when some more got into line, though there were still a large number who would not, so the other two companies from Ontario were ordered to take off their belts and whip the poor devils into line, and they did it with a will, and we proceeded.

While all this was happening the general staff car was flying round with good effect, so that after marching another half mile we came to a “guard of honor” (fifty men in close formation, with rifles and fixed bayonets on either side of the road) who presented arms in the approved fashion to us—scouts, bugle band, and the Toronto company—but as soon as the other company was just nicely between them the order was given to the guard to “Outwards turn,” with the result that this company continued the march virtually at the point of the bayonet, they being far more closely guarded than any group of German prisoners I ever saw, and they were put under armed guard till we actually pulled out to sea, and even now a dozen of the ringleaders are in the cells—the two worst handcuffed together—awaiting trial.²³

It took 20 hours to herd the mutinous troops aboard. Thirty received summary sentences, ranging from seven to twenty-eight days field punishment, while the ringleaders were remanded into custody, their charges held over for Court Martial “because the evidence pointed to their being more active in the affair.”²⁴

Most faced the serious charge of: “Joining in a Mutiny in forces belonging to His Majesty’s Auxiliary Forces.” Aboard the *Teesta*, and the troopship *Protesilaus* that left Victoria four days later without disturbance, 3,000 of Canada’s 4,200 Siberian troops sailed for Russia, reaching Vladivostok in the middle of January. Over five days of hearings at the Canadian barracks at Gornostai Bay, a military tribunal found all but one of the accused guilty of mutiny, meting out sentences ranging from three months to three years imprisonment with hard labor. However, in April, as the Canadians prepared to evacuate Vladivostok and questions arose in Canada’s Parliament over the legality of

²³ “What a Muddle,” *British Columbia Federationist*, 28 February 1919.

²⁴ Testimony of Lieutenant T. J. Morin, “D” Company, “Trial of No. 3040117 Rifleman Edmond Leroux,” 28 January 1919, Vladivostok, Russia, LAC, RG 24, ser. C-1-A, vol. 1992, file H-Q-762-11-10, “Courts Martial in CEF [Siberia].”

deploying conscripts, the judge advocate received an application to release, on suspended sentence, the “men convicted of mutiny at Victoria, BC”—a request that General Elmsley authorized.²⁵

Canada and the Allied Occupation

Elmsley had reached Vladivostok with an advance party at the end of October 1918, establishing force headquarters at the stately Pushkin Theater, an action that soured relations with Vladivostok’s local elite from the start. “Warehouse space on the wharves is limited,” his war diary observed, as was “suitable accommodation.” The 60-room Versailles Hotel had been claimed by the French mission, requiring the eviction of émigré inhabitants with “nowhere to go.” The Canadian command lamented the “inequitable” distribution of accommodation, with the first Allied contingents claiming quarters that were “not occupied to their full capacity.”²⁶ White Russian military commanders were powerless to requisition civilian buildings and the White-sponsored Town Council was reluctant to supersede property rights. “There is no recognized law or force that can turn them out of their buildings,” the Canadians complained.²⁷ Responding to this shortage, Elmsley occupied the Pushkin Theater in the city center, evicting the esteemed Vladivostok Cultural-Enlightenment Society, which operated a library and music hall. At an emergency meeting on 1 November, businessmen in the Vladivostok Trade-Manufacturers’ Assembly passed a protest resolution, with a scant five opposing votes, lambasting the “trampling” of the rights of Russian citizens and demanding “the clearing of the occupied premises.”²⁸ Though staunchly anti-Bolshevik, and therefore natural allies of the Canadians, these local businessmen resented foreign incursion on property rights and culture. In an open letter published in Russian in Vladivostok’s *Dalekaia okraina* newspaper, Elmsley expressed “surprise”

²⁵ “Suspension of Sentence,” 14 April 1919, LAC, RG 9, ser. III-A-3, vol. 371, file A3, SEF Force HQ 23; “Courts Martial, CEF (Siberia),” LAC, RG 9, ser. III-A-3, vol. 378, file A3, SEF Courts Martial; Canada, *Report of Debates of the House of Commons*, 1 April 1919, 8 April 1919, 25 June 1919.

²⁶ LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S), 27 October 1918; Correspondence of Maj. George Addison McHaffie, Deputy Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport, Canadian Army Service Corps, Vladivostok, in LAC, George Addison McHaffie fonds, MG 30, E22.

²⁷ “Situation at Vladivostok under Allied occupation,” n.d. (c. 27 October 1918), LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S), October 1918, Appendix G.

²⁸ Resolution passed by Vladivostok Trade-Manufacturers’ Assembly, 1 November 1918, “K rekvizitsii Pushkinskogo Teatra,” *Dalekaia okraina* (Vladivostok), 4 November 1918.

over opposition to “the temporary employment of a place of entertainment” for forces that had “come at the necessary hour to render assistance to their country.” He pointed out that while Europe had been ravaged by four years of war, and most of Russia had been “devastated by the Bolshevik reign of terror,” Vladivostok, on account of its unique geographical location, was fortunate to suffer only Allied occupation.²⁹ The Canadian general posted guards at the entrance to the theater, which featured billiard and card rooms and hosted a concert for the troops on 3 November.³⁰

The arrival of Canada’s advance party in Vladivostok coincided with the signing of the armistice in Europe, and so the soldiers’ first official act was to join the motley Allied armies in a victory parade down Svetlanskaia, Vladivostok’s main street, on 15 November. Shops and government offices closed while buildings were adorned with Russian and foreign flags. Japanese general Ōtani Kikuzō, who had assumed supreme command of Japanese and Allied forces, inspected the troops. “At the head of the column there were American armies, then the Chinese armies, the French sailors and *Annamites*, English sailors, the Japanese armies, Canadians, Romanians, Russian sea company and the Siberian infantry. Serbs and Czecho-Slovaks brought up the rear,” the *Dalekaia okraina* reported.³¹

The colorful demonstration of solidarity concealed growing strains. Geopolitical rivalry between the major Allied powers, particularly the United States and Japan, contributed to growing supply problems along the Chinese Eastern and Trans-Siberian railroads, the sole line of communication connecting the Pacific coast to the active front against the Red Army in the Ural Mountains. The 73,000-strong Japanese contingent dwarfed all other Allied contingents and created major misgivings among the Americans, who envisioned a power struggle for land and Siberian resources. As Canada’s trade commissioner in Vladivostok noted, Japan’s presence was considered hostile to American long-term interests in China, while Japan “merely asked for such mining rights in eastern Siberia as will render Japan independent of supplies from America.” The principal American motive, therefore, was “thwarting the

²⁹ “Raz’iasnenie po povodu rekvizitsii Pushkinskogo teatra,” *Dalekaia okraina* (Vladivostok), 6 November 1918; “Otvēt Kanadskogo Komandovaniia na rezoliutsiiu protesta vynesennogo na obschem sobranii Torgovo-Promyshlennogo Obshestva,” *Primorskaiia zhizn’* (Vladivostok), 7 November 1918.

³⁰ “Program—Theater,” 3 November 1918, Edwin Stephenson Diary, Stephenson Family Collection (private collection); War Diary of Force Headquarters CEF(S), 29 and 31 October 1918.

³¹ “Parad,” *Dalekaia okraina*, 16 November 1918.

Japanese from gaining a foothold in Siberia.³² An American diplomat visited the Imperial Japanese Government in Tokyo in November 1918, protesting the size of the force and “monopoly” control in northern Manchuria and eastern Russia. Japan’s policy was predicated on establishing “peace and order as soon as possible”—carving out a sphere of influence in eastern Russia without regard to whether the Reds or Whites triumphed in European Russia. This meant refusing to deploy troops west of Lake Baikal and propping up provisional governments in “distinct districts . . . sustained by Russian troops”: supporting Dmitrii Khorvat at Harbin (who Britain’s high commissioner in Omsk “believed to be in Japanese pay”) and Cossack General Grigorii Semenov at Chita, a ruthless commander who refused to recognize Kolchak’s authority and “styles himself ‘Commander-in-Chief of the Far Eastern Front.’”³³

In December 1918, conflict between Czechs and Cossacks loyal to Semenov and White Russians loyal to Kolchak threatened to erupt into bloodshed at Irkutsk. Japan had provided “money, guns, rifles, ammunition” to Semenov, while Kolchak deployed troops to the city.³⁴ “This place will have to be abandoned until the arrival of reinforcements [from Omsk] owing to instability of locals,” a British intelligence officer warned.³⁵ A flurry of diplomatic maneuvering in Tokyo, London, Omsk, and Vladivostok eased the crisis, with Japan advising Semenov to make peace with Kolchak, but tensions remained. In January 1919, Japanese troops blocked passage of a British infantry train enroute to Omsk, fearing the British had been sent to attack Semenov’s forces. “It can now be said that transportation has completely broken down, no goods trains having left Vladivostok for [the] last ten days,” declared Colonel Archibald Jack, Britain’s railway commissioner in Siberia. “Under existing conditions I am compelled to advise you that no further British troops should be sent west from Vladivostok until allied control is reestablished.”³⁶ Moreover, instability

³² High Commissioner (Omsk) to Acting High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 15 January 1919, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S), January 1919, app. 43.

³³ Nash (Irkutsk) to High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 15 December 1918; High Commissioner (Harbin) memo, 12 December 1918; High Commissioner (Omsk) to Acting High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 30 December 1918, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S).

³⁴ High Commissioner (Harbin) memo, 12 December 1918; Nash (Irkutsk) to High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 16 December 1918, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S).

³⁵ Nash (Irkutsk) to High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 3 December 1918; Nash (Irkutsk) to H. M. Minister, 15 December 1918, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S).

³⁶ Jacks to Ward, 6 January 1919, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S), app. 17, pp. 2–3.

on the railroad was contributing to “extravagant prices” in western Siberia that were “a potent cause of disorder.”³⁷

By early 1919, the Allies’ line of communication was further compromised by the growing Red partisan movement, as irregular guerrilla units launched a robust campaign of sabotage, blowing up railway bridges, shooting at trains, and destroying sections of track. The trip from “Vladi” to Omsk—roughly ten days under “normal” conditions—stretched to four or more weeks by the spring of 1919. The epicenter of unrest was the “Enisei edge,” the area of central Siberia between Irkutsk and Taiga, where “new settlers prevailed” and cooperative societies served as loci of guerrilla activity. Winter conditions thwarted White and Allied operations against guerillas, who enlisted peasants and villagers and employed their knowledge of local terrain. As historian Sergei Shishkin explained: “The interventionists hardly had time to repair one bridge and pass to the next before the first was again destroyed. The Japanese armored trains, specially allocated for protection of the railroad, did not help to save bridges because they often got ambushed, cut off by destroyed sections of track.”³⁸ Partisan attacks forced the Allies to redeploy Czech units from active service in the Urals to Irkutsk in January 1919 “for the purpose of protecting the railway.”³⁹ In February, partisans seized the town of Bodaibo. By March, guerrilla fighters outnumbered White Russian and Allied soldiers around Taishet station, seizing towns and then cutting telegraph wires and “firing at trains.”⁴⁰ Eight military trains were wrecked near Taishet in the first four months of 1919.

A Canadian who traveled to Omsk—A. D. Braithwaite, former official of the Bank of Montreal, who met with Kolchak—counted nine bridges destroyed by partisans. Another Canadian, Lieutenant Harold Ardagh of the 259th Battalion, who commanded a munitions train from Vladivostok to the interior, observed “the great amount of friction” between the Americans and Japanese, who were “hated by all” and “have their eyes on this country and

³⁷ Memorandum (London) to Vladivostok, 20 December 1918, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S); Wilgress, *Memoirs*, 52.

³⁸ S. N. Shishkin, *Organizatsiia partizanskoi bor’by protiv interventov i belogvardeitsev na Dal’nem Vostoke v 1918–1919* (Moscow: Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR, 1957), 53–70; also P. A. Novikov, “Velikoe iskusstvo miatezha,” *Rodina*, no. 3 (March 2008), 88–92.

³⁹ Nash (Irkutsk) to High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 26 January 1919, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S), app. 79, p. 14; High Commissioner (Omsk) to Acting High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 22 January 1919, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S), app. 74, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Nash (Irkutsk) to High Commissioner (Vladivostok), 27 January 1919, LAC, War Diary Force HQ, January 1919, app. 82.

mean to fight to get it."⁴¹ Nonetheless, Britain's military attaché in Tokyo believed the Japanese presence was essential to contain Bolshevism: "Mindful of the safety of the railway, if reduced there will be an immediate recurrence of Bolshevik activities."⁴²

Owing to near-paralysis along the railroad, the Canadian government refused to authorize deployment of the main body of the force "up-country," leaving a small advance party of about 50 Canadians to spend the winter in Omsk, preparing lodging and supplies for a contingent that never arrived. In February 1919, only a few weeks after the main contingent had reached the Russian Far East, Canada decided to cancel the mission entirely and bring the troops home. As their government scrambled to find ships to bring the troops home (in the face of a global demobilization crisis), the Canadians performed guard duty while mingling with foreign troops and civilians in Vladivostok, a city of 200,000 that a Canadian policeman described as "about ninety percent Bolshevik."⁴³ As the chief port in Russia's Far East and terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Vladivostok was flooded with émigrés from the Siberian interior, "the backwash of revolution," people in desperate need of shelter, clothing, and food.⁴⁴ Violent crime and hunger were rife. The Allied presence aggravated the situation, consuming scarce lodging and supplies, while a typhus epidemic hit the city. "That was a tough place, Vladivostok," recalled Capt. Eric Elkington, a Canadian doctor. "It was wintertime and there were always people getting shot and killed in the streets."⁴⁵

Bolsheviks and Partisans

Resentment toward Allied occupation fueled a robust partisan movement in the vicinity of Vladivostok, not only among Bolsheviks who had led the short-lived Soviet but also among peasants outraged over the exercise of White power in Primor'e. Partisan bands had formed spontaneously, with little co-

⁴¹ Harold Ardagh diary, 23 March 1919, LAC, Harold Vernon Ardagh Fonds (hereafter cited as Ardagh Fonds), MG 30, E-150, file 2/3; William Rodney, "Siberia in 1919: A Canadian Banker's Impression," *Queen's Quarterly* 79, 3 (1972): 331–33.

⁴² Greene (High Commissioner, Harbin) memo, 12 December 1918, LAC, War Diary Force HQ CEF(S), December 1918, app. 13.

⁴³ G. S. Worsley Report on "B" Squadron RNWMP, 11 October 1919, LAC, RG 18, vol. 3179, file G 989-3 (vol. 2).

⁴⁴ Stuart Ramsey Tompkins, *A Canadian's Road to Russia: Letters from the Great War Decade*, ed. Doris H. Pieroth (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1989), vii.

⁴⁵ Eric Elkington interview, July 1980, UVSC, Military Oral History collection, SC 141, 170.

ordination, but over time coalesced into an effective army. The Allies conducted surveillance of dissidents and established an International Military Police Force in Vladivostok, while Allied infantry battalions provided guards for barracks, consulates, and the railway station, foreign-owned banks and firms, and war materiel along the wharves, which reached 900,000 tons by 1919. These forces were ill-suited for the irregular guerrilla tactics waged by partisans. Canada's official history of the Siberian Intervention claims that "the mass of the Siberian people, who were generally content with their ordered existence under the old regime, had little leaning towards the Bolshevik system," but Captain Wilfred Playfair offered a more nuanced perspective: "There is undoubtedly a Bolshevik element in Siberia, [but] the leading problem at present is not Bolshevism but the conflict between various types of reactionaries and the democratic element."⁴⁶ General William S. Graves, commander of the American contingent, explained how the term "Bolshevik" broadened in tandem with the partisan insurgency of winter 1918–19: "In Siberia, the word Bolshevik meant a human being who did not, by act or word, give encouragement to the restoration to power of representatives of Autocracy in Russia."⁴⁷ A Canadian policeman in the Royal North-West Mounted Police concurred: "The people of Siberia resent the presence of the Allied troops.... They regard us as intruders.... They are all Bolsheviks in the meaning of the word as it is used here. A Bolshevik, with them, is one who wants a change."⁴⁸

With the Allied overthrow of the Vladivostok Soviet in June 1918, the local Bolshevik organization had gone underground. American journalist Albert Rhys Williams, who counted Bolshevik leaders among his friends, spent his final night in Vladivostok in July 1918 with various *tovarishchi* (comrades) "in a hiding place in the hills" above the city. "The Soviet had not been destroyed. It had gone underground. In the secret retreat the leaders yet uncaptured, gathered to plan and organize."⁴⁹ The Vladivostok party was the "most important and largest Communist group" in the Russian Far East, led by "very

⁴⁶ "Canadians Had Easy Time in Siberia," *Daily Times* (Victoria), 19 April 1919; Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War*, 518; MacLaren, *Canadians in Russia*, 197.

⁴⁷ William S. Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure* (New York: Peter Smith, 1931), 101.

⁴⁸ Capt. W. E. Dunham, "The Canadians in Siberia," *Maclean's Magazine* (May 1919), 94–95.

⁴⁹ Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 272.

able young men and women in their 20s and 30s.⁵⁰ These Bolshevik leaders included Konstantin Sukhanov, the 24-year-old student who had led the Vladivostok Soviet and was killed in captivity in November 1918; I. G. Kushnarev, age 30, who had joined the party during the 1905 revolution; and 25-year-old Sergei Lazo, who joined in 1917 and rose rapidly through party ranks to become an astute military commander (before his death in Japanese captivity in 1920). The Bolsheviks distributed the newspaper *Krasnoe znamia* throughout Primor'ë, forming the nucleus of a far-flung party organization of between 3,000 and 4,000 members that developed links with emerging partisan groups as the Civil War unfolded.

Three principal bases of partisan strength took root near Vladivostok: in the town of Anuchino (in a valley 150 kilometers north of the city), at the port of Ol'ga (300 kilometers distant but accessible by boat), and around the Suchan coal mines (today called Partizansk, 100 kilometers east of Vladivostok). The Suchan miners were "generally sympathetic to the partisans and provided them with mine explosives for destroying bridges, railway tracks, and other strategic targets."⁵¹ Partisan strength in the Suchan Valley meant control over the coal supply for the railroad and Vladivostok. In December 1918, a key partisan meeting at the village of Frolovka, on the Suchan River, brought together organizers from the district, who made common cause with the underground Bolshevik organization based in Vladivostok. In the nearby town of Nikol'sk-Ussuriisk, rail workers formed the nucleus of the underground, alongside former prisoners from Kolchak's notorious "death train." At Khabarovsk, workers at the local arsenal and sailors in the Amur River Fleet spearheaded partisan groups. The partisans also enjoyed growing support among the rural peasantry in Primor'ë, who were increasingly alienated by the tactics of White Russian authorities. While the British high commissioner believed peasants were "probably anti-Bolshevik as a whole," he conceded that "they like to cut wood in Government forests and distill spirits as they choose." Those with grievances "listened to the Bolsheviks" and joined partisan bands, which came into their villages in the cold months and launched attacks on White-held towns.⁵² When Kolchak imposed a draft in December 1918 to raise troops for his New Siberian Army—a force staffed by officers

⁵⁰ Canfield F. Smith, *Vladivostok Under Red and White Rule: Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Russian Far East, 1920–1922* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 9–10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

⁵² "Comrades Workmen and Peasants," n.d., LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), April 1919, app. 38.

from the British- and Canadian-built Russian Island training school—peasant youth fled to the *taiga*.

The Primor'e partisans launched a major offensive in February and March 1919, taking the village of Vladimiro-Aleksandrovskoe at the mouth of the Suchan River on 15 February, disarming the local White Russian militia, and seizing the town's weapons arsenal. An appeal from the rebels conveyed the political mood: "We rose up because with all our heart we want to help our Soviet country to get rid of the executioner Kolchak, to reinstall Soviet power in Siberia and the Far East, and to get rid of the interventionists."⁵³ Five days later, on the night of 20–21 February, partisans attacked White positions at Ol'ga and the Tetiukhe mines, seizing control of the Tetiukhe post and telegraph office and arresting the local militia. The military-revolutionary committee of the Tetiukhe mine sent reinforcements on horseback to Ol'ga, which fell to the partisans on 4 March. Fifteen hundred guerrilla fighters repulsed White attempts to reclaim Vladimiro-Aleksandrovskoe, establishing sentry posts around the town, as rebellion spread throughout the Suchan Valley. Five hundred American troops rushed from Vladivostok to guard the mine works. However, when the Whites asked Japan to send a force to Ol'ga, Japanese commanders refused, citing "an insufficient number of troops."⁵⁴ Attempts to land troopships at Amerika (now Nakhodka) Bay, at the mouth of the Suchan River, failed, as partisans "opened fire from the hills," killing White Russian sailors capable of navigating the first ship and then repulsing a second boat. The British warship HMS *Kent* killed four partisan fighters in the *melée*. "The whole seashore from Nakhodka Bay to Emperor's Harbor was controlled by guerillas," historian Boris Mukhachev writes.⁵⁵

A Canadian intelligence officer attributed the disturbances at Suchan and Ol'ga to "the government order for the conscription of men of military age" and a second order for the surrender of arms: "The peasants say they do not like the Kolchak government or believe its democratic professions and hence do not want to fight for it." They objected to the second order since arms were "vital to their welfare against tigers, bears and robbers.... As the Kolchak men approach a village the young men clear off into the hills with their rifles and

⁵³ S. A. Ivanov, ed., *Bor'ba za vlast' Sovetov v Primor'e, 1917–1922 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov* (Vladivostok: Primorskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1955), 193, as quoted in Mukhachev, *Dal'nii Vostok Rossii*, 318.

⁵⁴ Intelligence Report Re Situation at Olga Bay, 18 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. 21.

⁵⁵ Mukhachev, *Dal'nii Vostok Rossii*, 319; Intelligence report on Situation in Vladimiro-Alexandrovka [sic], 11 April 1919; Intelligence report, 24 April 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), April 1919, app. O(2) and O(22).

large bands are reported to have collected in outlying hill villages.⁵⁶ The Allies were reluctant to aid counterinsurgency operations as reports surfaced of atrocities committed by Kolchak's troops. On the morning of 8 March, 300 White Russian and Chinese soldiers entered the village of Brovnicchi in the Suchan Valley. The youth fled to the hills while a man who had warned them was tied to the rafters of a house and beaten for four hours. The next day, the Kolchak troops entered the nearby village of Gord'evka and ordered all men to relinquish their arms. One man was taken to a house, "where he was stretched by his neck to a pin in the rafter, his hands tied, and terribly beaten about the body and head until the blood splashed even on the walls of the rooms.... He was later stood in a row at 2 o'clock p.m. and shot to death with eight others." The White troops took another man, who was an invalid, and "broke one of his arms," "cut out his finger nails," and beat him "with a rifle knocking out all his front teeth," before shooting him with the rest. As Kolchak's soldiers retreated from Gord'evka, partisans armed the villagers with rifles and "plenty of ammunition" and posted sentries on the hilltops approaching the town, vowing to slaughter any Japanese or Kolchak soldiers who returned.⁵⁷

Such was the climate as Vladivostok Bolsheviks met again with Suchan miners and other partisans at Frolovka in March 1919. This meeting, conducted under the nose of the occupying Allied armies, elected a Provisional Military-Revolutionary Staff of Partisan Detachments, commanded by the Bolshevik Sergei Lazo, with a view to re-establishing local soviets. The radicalization of the peasantry in Primor'e was directly tied to the authoritarian character of Kolchak's regime. Attempts to resolve grievances through official channels only produced further repression. When a delegation of peasants sailed from Ol'ga to Vladivostok to meet with Allied commanders and lodge an appeal against Kolchak's conscription law, they were arrested by White authorities. An American intelligence report estimated the presence of 10,000 partisan fighters between the town of Shkotovo and Suchan, "not really Bolsheviki" but rather "entirely a peasant uprising, resulting from atrocities of the Kolchak troops."⁵⁸ The Far Eastern District Committee of the Communist Party (Dalkom) issued an appeal to "Comrades, Workmen and Peasants," condemning the "mutilation and shooting of peaceful inhabitants, the burning

⁵⁶ Maj. Jason Adams, "Disturbance in Olga Bay and Suchan Mines Districts," 2 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. 7.

⁵⁷ "Report of Lt. Walter F. Resing," 17 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. P(j).

⁵⁸ Report by Lieut. O. P. Winning Stad of a Trip to Vladimir Alexandrovsky, 14 April 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), May 1919, app. 53.

down of cottages and villages." The Bolsheviks called on local civilians to not give "a single soldier" to Kolchak's White forces.⁵⁹

Under the yoke of foreign occupation, the partisans wreaked havoc on the Allies in Vladivostok and sabotaged rail operations to Suchan and points "up-country." "Quite often the lights went out and someone would say casually: 'They are trying to seize the power station,'" a British civilian recalled.⁶⁰ Insurgents cut telegraph wires and stole copper cable used to relay messages from the center of Vladivostok to outlying barracks. In a more ominous development, Bolsheviks ambushed White Russian and Allied officers on roads connecting the city to barracks at Gornostai Bay and Vtoraia Rechka, employing torture and mutilation. In March 1919, two White Russians were found crucified on the road near Pervaia Rechka, their noses, eyes, ears, and tongues cut off and their hands "nailed to their shoulder blades with six-inch spikes to serve in lieu of epaulettes."⁶¹ "We continually found the bodies of these men, bearing obscene evidence of torture before death," a Canadian recalled. "Many times through the winter, we were alerted to take action stations according to prearranged anti-riot plans, but nothing happened 'above-ground.'"⁶²

The Insurgency of March 1919

By March 1919, the situation had grown desperate, as White repression fueled partisan resistance in and around Vladivostok and the Allies lost any semblance of unity. The Vladivostok underground grew as the civilian population struggled to obtain basic foodstuffs and sustain meager social services, turning to the Bolsheviks in the face of White terror and corruption. While Khorvat had nominal authority as Kolchak's plenipotentiary in the Far East, a commander named General Pavel Ivanov-Rinov ruled the port city with a free hand, launching a wave of repression against all shades of dissent. A Canadian intelligence officer illuminates the process through which repression bred resistance: "The moderate socialists instead of standing with [Kolchak] at first wavered and then sided with the Bolsheviks, more as a *modus operandi* than from any actual sympathy. Anything was better than a return to Czar-

⁵⁹ "Comrades Workmen and Peasants," n.d. [c. 1919], LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), April 1919, app. 38.

⁶⁰ Bernard Pares, *My Russian Memoirs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 505.

⁶¹ George F. Clingan, "Siberian Sideshow: The Canadian Expeditionary Force, Siberia, 1918–1919," *Legionary* (Ottawa) 30, 1 (1955): 40.

⁶² Raymond Massey, *When I Was Young* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 206–07.

ism, which they read clearly in the tactics of Kolchak's followers."⁶³ Another Canadian recalled that the civic administration "changed twice at least during our stay."⁶⁴ Bolshevik candidates had won "an overwhelming majority" in elections to the Vladivostok town дума in late 1918, and when subsequent elections were held in the spring, a victory for promonarchist candidates was "backed up by Allied bayonets."⁶⁵

On 2 March, General Ivanov-Rinov ordered the arrest without trial of Vladivostok's mayor and five other dissidents, "not Bolsheviks but plain radicals," four of whom were spirited away to a prison on the Manchurian border, inflaming the local population. "The Bolsheviks have placarded the city calling on the working men to gather to-morrow and protest against the action," Canadian engineer Capt. Charles Hertzberg recorded in his diary.⁶⁶ On 12 March, a large demonstration celebrated the second anniversary of the Romanovs' fall. Japanese general Ōtani warned Allied commanders of a "considerable amount of unrest among the Russians in Vladivostok," suggesting "an uprising is not improbable," while consular officials—citing "political reasons"—closed the port of Vladivostok to "all Russians returning to Siberia from America."⁶⁷

The Allies mounted a confused response to the feared insurrection, reflecting the deep divisions. The Americans refused to cooperate with Ōtani, on grounds of the political arrests and torture in the countryside, while the Canadians pledged to support operations of a "non-political" nature and the British and French offered more or less unconditional support. American General Graves questioned the ability to defeat Bolshevism through military means. His memoirs trace the lines of division: "It was noticeable that, when differences occurred, the English, French, and Japanese Commanders, almost without exception, were in accord on one side, and the American, Chinese, Canadians, Czechs, and Italians were on the other side."⁶⁸ Canadian General Elmsley provided a frank assessment to the War Office in London: "I consider the only grave danger from uprising here will be from the Allies, who having

⁶³ James Mackintosh Bell, *Sidelights on the Siberian Campaign* (Toronto: Ryerson, n.d. [c. 1922]), 125.

⁶⁴ Clingan, "Siberian Sideshow," 40.

⁶⁵ "The Canadian Sheriff in Siberia," *Tribune*, 20 January 1919; "A Record Crowd Hears Pritchard," *Federationist*, 2 May 1919.

⁶⁶ LAC, War Diary 16th Inf Bde CEF(S), 12 March 1919; Hertzberg diary, 9 March 1919, LAC, Hertzberg fonds, vol. 1, file 1-18, Diary #9.

⁶⁷ Instructions in Case of Riotous Disturbances in Vladivostok Area, 15 March 1919, and Special Operation Orders, 13 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Base HQ CEF (S).

⁶⁸ Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure*, 82–84.

no unity of Policy or Command, may come into armed conflict themselves, particularly as strong Allied guards are mingled throughout Vladivostok and the feeling between American, Japanese and Russians is far from friendly.⁶⁹

The Canadian commander scrambled to mediate a solution as civilian dissent rose. On 18 March, he asked Ōtani to call a special conference of the Allies and circulated a memorandum proposing a four-point plan for joint action. Elmsley's proposal sought to reconcile the conflicting policies and avert the danger of armed conflict between the Allies (*"a situation that must be avoided at all cost"*) (emphasis in original). The strained wording betrayed the inherent contradiction of a policy of "non-interference." Commanders would "carefully" adhere to the "principle of non-interference in Russian internal affairs," yet would insist on "the maintenance of public order and protection of life and property," limiting political activity to "strictly legal proceedings as recognized by the Allies." Contingents from each national army would be placed at the disposal of the Vladivostok town mayor "for the enforcement of the above principles," while Allied commanders would place "their whole forces" at Ōtani's disposal if necessary "to establish law and order and to protect life and property." In a concession to the Americans, the final resolution called for the return and public trial of the arrested dissidents, whom Elmsley identified as "Mr. Skreezsky, Mr. Kosinsky, Mr. A. E. Hodonoff, Mr. Semeshke, Mr. Klasing, and others."⁷⁰

Allied commanders responded unevenly to the Canadian proposal. Japan's consul in Vladivostok, Matsudaira Tsuneo, agreed that no troops under Ōtani's command would be used to suppress political movements "except in so far as such movements may interfere with safety and freedom."⁷¹ American General Graves, meanwhile, forwarded an intelligence report highlighting atrocities committed by Kolchak's troops in the Suchan Valley, which the Canadian general interpreted as a formal protest against White Russian conduct. However, at a special conference at Japanese headquarters on 21 March, Allied commanders accepted Elmsley's proposals with slight modification. Graves and others agreed to the nominal leadership of Ōtani, while Ōtani agreed to send a letter to Khorvat and Ivanov-Rinov demanding the dissidents' return to Vladivostok for trial. The Allies' stance produced a modest change in the White Russian attitude. Three of the four dissidents would be

⁶⁹ Elmsley to War Office, 18 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. P (g).

⁷⁰ Elmsley to Eliot, 15 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. P (e).

⁷¹ Matsudaira to Eliot, 21 March 1919, War Office to Elmsley, 27 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. P (i).

“released immediately,” while the fourth, Skverskii, would receive an “open trial.”⁷²

The façade of Allied unity was fleeting, however. The US Army chief of staff instructed Graves “to follow the policy of non-interference,” while the War Office in London wired a sharp telegram to Elmsley lamenting the “unsatisfactory attitude of General Graves” and declaring that “British troops may of course be used for maintenance of law and order, and of course they are under the orders of General Ōtani.”⁷³ Earlier, the Canadian commander had privately confided that: “My officers and men are in sympathy with the Americans and their viewpoint. I cannot guarantee their neutrality in any disagreement between the Americans and the Japanese or Russians.”⁷⁴

As the Allies dithered, the Canadian commander issued instructions to his own men concerning the anticipated uprising in Vladivostok. A cavalry squadron from the Royal North-West Mounted Police would occupy the height of land above the Pushkin Theater, while other units would converge on the East Barracks, at the head of Golden Horn Bay, in “assault kit” with twenty-four hours’ rations. All Canadian infantry troops received training in live bombs, as 18-pound guns and ammunition were transported from Vtoraia Rechka to guard the White officers’ training school on Russian Island. In the harbor, a landing party of 120 British marines and two machine guns was placed on alert aboard the cruiser HMS *Kent*, ready to land on a half hour’s notice. Instructions were issued to all ranks against traveling alone at night and advising soldiers to carry arms at all times. The sense of apprehension was apparent when a belligerent Russian civilian appeared at the Canadian Ordnance shed at Egersheld Wharf, demanding gasoline on the grounds that “the czar was dead ... and everything was public property.” The local sentry panicked and stabbed the man in the groin with his bayonet.⁷⁵

The threatened insurrection in Vladivostok did not materialize, as partisans concentrated their offensive in the hill villages and transit points outside the city. On 11 April the town of Shkotovo, located 50 kilometers northeast of Vladivostok on the railway to Suchan, was attacked by partisans who aimed to free 700 prisoners held by the local White garrison. The insurgents had

⁷² Eliot to Elmsley, 25 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. P (n).

⁷³ War Office to Elmsley, 27 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. P (o); Graves, *America’s Siberian Adventure*, 356.

⁷⁴ Elmsley to War Office, 18 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), March 1919, app. P (g).

⁷⁵ Memorandum, 21 March 1919, LAC, War Diary Base HQ CEF (S); Ardagh diary, 23 March 1919, LAC, Harold Vernon Ardagh Fonds, file 2/3.

earlier seized a quantity of arms and arrested White police near the partisan base in the nearby village of Novorossiia. The partisans threatened to sever the Allies from their coal supply on the Suchan River, isolate American and Japanese troops in that partisan stronghold, and endanger the main rail line “up-country.” The Allied command in Vladivostok acted swiftly. General Ōtani called for detachments to defend the town. Two Japanese infantry companies of 700 troops reached Shkotovo by train on 13 April, joined by 192 Canadian, 87 French, 21 Italian, 16 Czech, and 7 Chinese troops—an inter-Allied force of more than 1,000 soldiers alongside 150 White Russians. However, by the time the Allied troops marched on Novorossiia on 19 April, the partisans had evacuated the area. Canadian doctor Captain Eric Elkington described the farcical operation: “The force marching towards this village was led by a little Italian officer on horseback, who I don’t think knew anything about horses. He ran away and attacked the village! Far ahead of anybody else, because he couldn’t stop his horse. And when we got to the village it had been evacuated.”⁷⁶ The only casualties were two soldiers, a Japanese and a Canadian, who suffered minor wounds when they were accidentally shot by a Frenchman testing his revolver. The Allies returned to Vladivostok, where they were rewarded by General Ōtani with 96 bottles of port wine, 18 bottles of whiskey, and 3 casks of sake. Canadian General Elmsley noted that “it is really rather remarkable that, at this stage of the proceedings, there should be an insurgent force 30 miles ... this side of Vladivostok.”⁷⁷ The Americans had stayed out of the affair, believing the unrest was “not of Bolshevik organization or tendency, but the natural result of people forced to gather in self-defense.”⁷⁸ An eyewitness attributed the disturbance to the shooting of a peasant by the Shkotovo garrison.

During the Shkotovo campaign, an Allied delegation had traveled to the partisan headquarters for a parley, urging the insurgents to lay down their arms and guarantee free passage along the railroad. However, the partisan commander-in-chief, a local farmer named Gavrila Shchevchenko, issued a proclamation declaring “a war to the death” on the Allies: “We will not give you one inch of the railway which we have built with our very blood.... Our aim is not only Shkotovo, but also as you may know, Vladivostok.... Just as the Allied troops left Odessa and Archangel, so also you will be forced to leave

⁷⁶ Elkington interview, July 1980, UVSC, Military Oral History Collection, SC 141, 170.

⁷⁷ Elmsley to Mewburn, 1 May 1919, LAC, RG 24, ser. C-1-A, vol. 2557, file HQC-2514 (vol. 2).

⁷⁸ Intelligence report on the American Attitude Towards the Shkotovo Expedition, 13 April 1919, LAC, War Diary Gen. Staff CEF(S), April 1919, app. O(8); Graves, *America’s Siberian Adventure*, 202–03.

Vladivostok. Until that time we will never lay down our arms.”⁷⁹ Decades later, Capt. Elkington conceded the weakness of the Allied position: “We realized it was a hopeless state of affairs really.... The Bolsheviks had taken over all the rest of the country.... We realized we weren’t going to do any good unless they had a huge force there and rushed right through Siberia and into Russia.”⁸⁰

Evacuation and Conclusion

The Canadians evacuated Vladivostok on four ships between April and June 1919. Before leaving, they commemorated a monument, carved by a Czech soldier, at the Marine Cemetery on a wooded hillside near the head of Golden Horn Bay—the final resting place of the 14 Canadian soldiers who died in the Russian Far East. Most died of disease, while one, the only Canadian officer to die in the Siberian Expedition, took his own life on the Gornostai Road amid fears of the partisan uprising in March 1919. On the heels of the Canadian contingent, the remaining Allied armies evacuated, as Kolchak’s government collapsed in Omsk and power in Vladivostok oscillated between rival White and Red authorities until 25 October 1922, when the last Japanese units evacuated and soldiers from the Far Eastern Army entered the city limits, marking the end of the Russian Civil War. “A million-bayoneted ring of steel closed in upon the Revolution,” American journalist Albert Rhys Williams noted at the time, but “one after another the armies of the Counter-Revolution crumpled up or melted away like snow in a Russian spring.”⁸¹

In the years that followed, hot and cold wars severed Vladivostok from the wider world. Canada forgot its Siberian Expedition, preferring to celebrate victories rather than remember this anticlimactic defeat in a remote theater of war, which one member of Parliament from Quebec described as “a political error, a military mistake, and a wanton extravagance.”⁸² Lacking unity of policy and command, Canada and its allies had been defeated in Siberia and the Russian Far East, and they quietly proceeded to forget this history.

⁷⁹ Communiqué No. 5, 18 April 1919, LAC, War Diary 16th Inf. Bde CEF(S), April 1919, app. 15.

⁸⁰ Elkington interview, June 1980, UVSC, Military Oral History collection, SC 141, 169.

⁸¹ Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution*, 280.

⁸² Canada, *Report of Debates of the House of Commons*, 10 June 1919, p. 3298.