



The Course of Events

By Marja Erwin

After the First World War, Russia, Ukraine, and Germany faced civil war. Central Europe and Asia Minor saw additional conflicts as rival nation-states tried to seize control of ethnically mixed territories on their borders. Central and Eastern Ukraine saw fighting between, among others, the Ukrainian People's Republic, the various Soviet/Rada Republics and Federations, and the Armed Forces of South Russia. The conflict in Central and Eastern Ukraine began with the overthrow of the Provisional Government in 1917 but continued into the summer of 1921.

After the October Revolution

After the fall of the Provisional Government, the most effective opposition to the October Revolution, and to the Bolshevik – Left Socialist-Revolutionary coalition, came from independent national and regional governments, including the Central Rada in Ukraine, the Don Krug, and the Kuban Rada. Other opponents joined the Volunteer Army in the Don. The Red Guards quickly defeated the anti-soviet forces. The Central Rada sought an alliance with the German and Austro-Hungarian governments. The Volunteer Army retreated into the Kuban Steppe.

The German and Austro-Hungarian Invasion

On February 18th, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies broke the armistice, broke through the Russian Army and Red Guards forces opposing them, and entered Kyiv on March 2nd. The Bolsheviks surrendered on the 3rd, but the German Army continued its advance in Ukraine and southern Russia.

The German government sought to extract food and resources from Ukraine and ship them to Germany, and this brought them into conflict with the Central Rada. On April 28th – 29th they overthrew the Rada, in favor of Pavel Skoropadskiy, one of the richest landowners in Ukraine. Skoropadskiy's dictatorship, the Hetmanate, waged war on the peasants, oppressed the workers, and favored Russian and German nationalism against Ukrainian independence.

In Russia, the Bolshevik surrender was the beginning of the end of their coalition with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. The Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, and the left wing of the Bolsheviks, opposed the terms and sought to renew the war. The uprising of the Czechoslovak Corps encouraged some of the militants. On July 6th, two Socialist-Revolutionaries assassinated Count Mirbach, the German ambassador, and other militants attempted a coup in Moskva. The Bolsheviks banned their former coalition partners. On August 30th, another Socialist-Revolutionary shot Vladimir Lenin but did not kill him. The Bolsheviks now turned to Red Terror.

In Ukraine, the German coup brought further resistance. A guerrilla war broke out against the Hetmanate and the occupation forces. The deteriorating position of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies on the other fronts prompted intermittent withdrawals, followed by the Austro-Hungarian surrender on November 3rd and the German surrender on November 11th. The occupation forces now sought to leave Ukraine with as little fighting as possible.

On November 13th, the Ukrainian National Union formed its own government headed by Vladimir Vinnichenko. Vinnichenko's government, the Directory, called for further uprisings against Skoropadskiy. On December 14th, abandoned by his German allies, Skoropadskiy abdicated and fled Ukraine.

On December 18th, the French Army landed a small force at Odesa. Over the next 3 ½ months, the Allied expeditionary force expanded to include French, Greek, and Polish troops, and even German troops stranded near Odesa.

The Civil War Begins in Ukraine

After Skoropadskiy abdicated, Directory troops entered Kyiv and Odesa. The Directory marginalized some rebels, and antagonized other rebels, including Makhno, an anarchist. The Kyiv garrison went over to the Directory. The Kharkiv garrison went over to the Directory, but attempted to suppress the Kharkiv Rada. Much of the Odesa garrison went over to the Whites and their commanders convinced the French to help defeat their Directory rivals. The Katerynoslav garrison went over to the Whites, but evacuated the city. Before Directory forces arrived, local Bolsheviks appealed for Makhnovist aid and their combined forces held the city from December 27th to January 1st.

The Bolsheviks were divided, but eventually turned more hostile toward the Directory. The Kyiv Bolsheviks sought to overthrow the Directory with the support of pro-Bolshevik Ukrainian rebel forces. They officially formed their own Ukrainian rada/sovyet government and formed their own Ukrainian Rada Army from the pro-Bolshevik partisan forces in the neutral zone.

On January 2nd – 3rd, after confused fighting and a pro-Bolshevik uprising in the city, the Ukrainian Rada Army took Kharkiv. As the Ukrainian Red Army approached Kyiv, the Directory split. Vinnichenko resigned. Petliura replaced Vinnichenko as chair. The regular army blocked reforms, so the partisans began to negotiate with the Bolsheviks instead of the Directory. On January 27th, combined Bolshevik and Makhnovist forces took Katerynoslav. On February 5th, Bolshevik forces occupied Kyiv.

After the Kyiv Bolsheviks had drawn their Russian allies into the conflict, Lenin pressured Pyatakov, then president of the Ukrainian rada/sovyet government, to resign in favor of Rakovski. Lenin encouraged Rakovski to bring the Borotbists and other independent revolutionary parties into the government.



The Civil War Continues in the Donets, Don, and Caucasus

At the time of the German surrender, the Don Armies still held most of the Don Host Province and threatened Bolshevik positions at Tsaritsyn. 3 Red Armies held a long cordon defense from Voronezh to Tsaritsyn. Red reserves struck toward the Donets Basin, while other Red Armies attempted to take the upper and central Don.

The Volunteer Army, with Kuban Cossack forces, held the Kuban and Stavropol. 2 more Red Armies held the northeastern Caucasus. Terek Cossack forces fought a partisan war in the southeast. In February, the Volunteers routed the Red Armies and secured the Terek.

But in December and January, the Don Armies and Volunteer Army both gathered forces to attempt to secure the Donets Basin and Rostov. The Don Armies eventually retreated behind the Donets River, where the spring thaw and its flooded rivers gave the Whites the time they needed.

The Bolshevik Regime

After the capture of Kyiv, the Ukrainian Rada Army pursued separate campaigns in every direction. They took Odesa and entered Crimea, but were overextended by attempts to relieve sovyet Hungary and to reinforce the Southern Front.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian rada/sovyet government requisitioned food for Ukrainian and Russian cities. The seizure of grain, the seizure of land for state and collective farms, and the system of poor peasants' committees angered most of the peasantry. These policies led to several revolts against the Bolshevik regime.

In May, Grigoriev rose in revolt. Although Makhno condemned Grigoriev as a traitor and a pogromist, the Bolsheviks did not

trust Makhno. In order to avoid conflict with the Bolsheviks, Makhno resigned his command in early June. Nonetheless, Trotsky ordered units to assassinate Makhno and dissolve the local sovyet congress in Hulyai Pole.

The Breakout of the Armed Forces of South Russia

In April and May 1919, the Armed Forces of South Russia reorganized their forces into the Volunteer, Don, and Caucasus Armies, and separate formations in the Crimea and the rear areas. At the same time, Entente tanks, guns, and ammunition reached these armies.

Small-scale White counterattacks expanded into large-scale White offensives; in April, in the Caucasus, and in May, in the Donets Basin. The Whites took Kharkiv and Tsaritsyn. On July 3rd, while in Tsaritsyn, Denikin ordered the Armed Forces of South Russia to continue the advance until they reached Moskva. The Red Army stripped units from the Ukrainian and Eastern Fronts to reinforce the Southern Front and try to stop the White offensive.

The Race for Kyiv

Between November 1918 and June 1919, the Polish Army had defeated the West Ukrainian People's Army, and occupied western Ukraine. In the middle of July, the West Ukrainian People's Army withdrew and joined forces with the hard-pressed Ukrainian People's Army.

After Makhno resigned his command he took refuge west of the Dnipr. Makhno contacted Grigoriev and offered an alliance. Both needed the support of other partisans, and they scheduled a meeting for July 27th. Grigoriev spoke first and proposed war with the Bolsheviks. Chubenko, one of Makhno's supporters, spoke next, and condemned Grigoriev for working with Denikin's agents, and for encouraging pogroms. Grigoriev objected, and the respective speakers withdrew out of view of the other attendees. Here, Grigoriev drew his gun on Makhno, but was killed by Chubenko.

In August, the combined Ukrainian armies and the 2nd Corps of the Volunteer Army each set their sights on Kyiv. The Red Army commanders near Odesa decided to evacuate the area and marched through the narrowing gap between the Ukrainian People's Army and the Volunteer Army. Some of the Red Army troops had already decided to go over to Makhno, and others were unwilling to join the retreat. At the beginning of September, the Makhnovists formed the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine.

On the evening of August 30th, the first units of the West Ukrainian People's Army entered Kyiv. On the 31st, more of the West Ukrainian People's Army and the first units of the Volunteer Army entered the city. The 2nd Corps of the Volunteer Army attacked. The West Ukrainian People's Army, reluctant to fight another enemy, fell back. On September 1st, they abandoned Kyiv. The retreating Red Army forces arrived too late to hold Kyiv but broke through west of the city and made contact with the rest of the 12th Army.

Tsaritsyn to Orel

In late August, the Southern Front attempted its own offensive. The 13th and 8th Armies were to tie down the Volunteer Army at Kharkiv, while the 9th and 10th Armies would defeat the Don and Caucasus Armies to retake Tsaritsyn. The holding attack failed, and the Red Army fell back toward Voronezh. The main attack fell short.

As the 8th Army fell back, the Volunteers turned on the 13th Army, taking Kursk on September 20th, and Orel on October 13th. But when the Armed Forces of South Russia advanced, they overextended themselves. It was easier for opposing units to escape encirclements and launch counterattacks against small White forces. On October 10th, the 12th Army fought their way into Kyiv. It took until the 17th for the Kiev Area to retake the city.

The Red Army continued to reinforce the Southern Front. In early October the elite Latvian Rifle Division arrived near Bryansk, and launched a counterattack which outflanked the Volunteers at Orel. On October 20th, the 13th Army retook Orel.

Opposing cavalry forces fought each other at Voronezh and Kastornaya. The Red cavalry was less effective than its White opponents, but it was effective enough to deter further large-scale raids. The White cavalry retreated after both engagements.

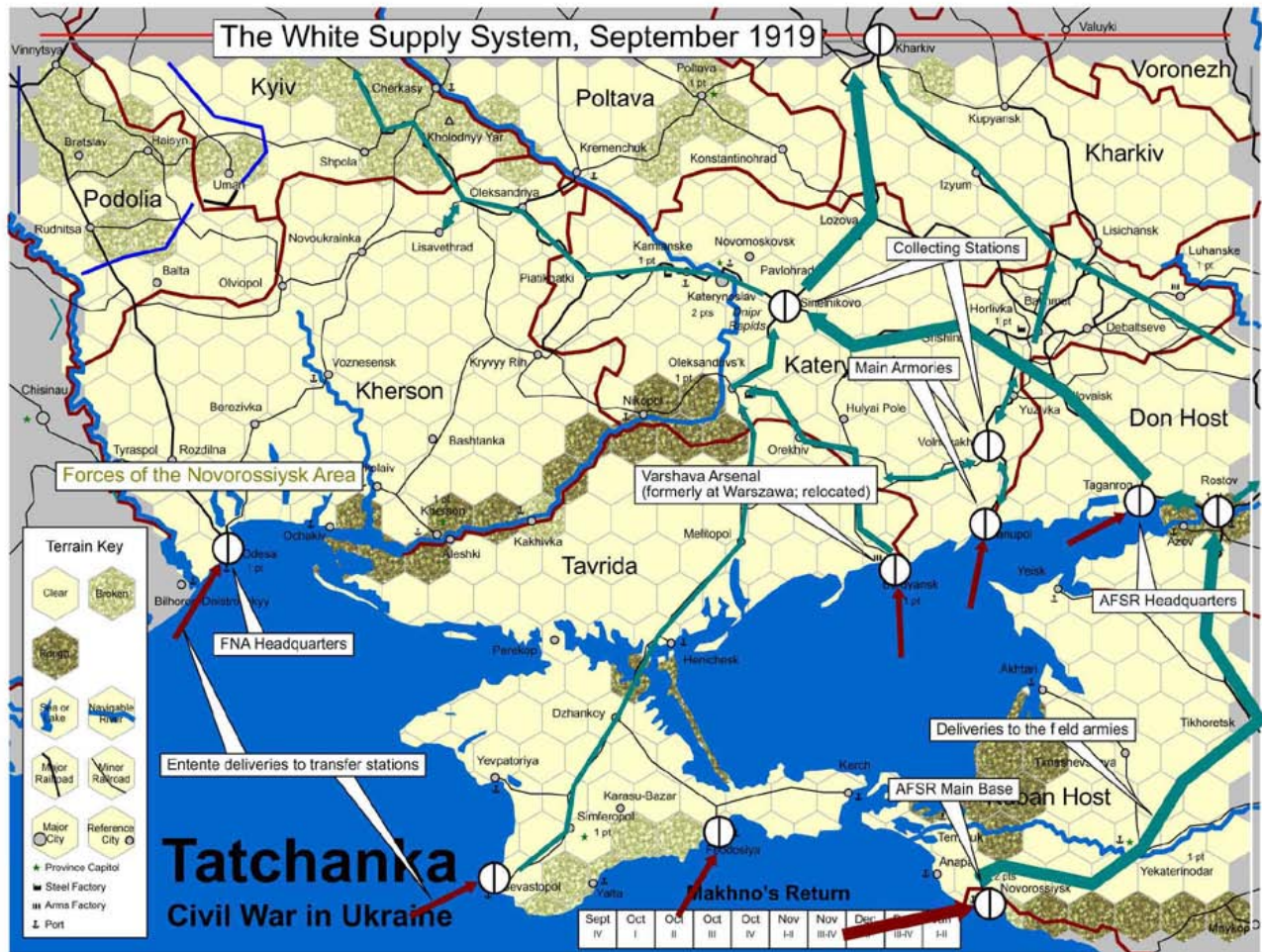
The battles on the front line had not decided the campaign. The battles on the internal front, and the political divisions within the Armed Forces of South Russia, would defeat Denikin.

The Internal Front



Denikin insisted on "Russia, One and Indivisible." His troops suppressed Ukrainian-language schools and newspapers. He refused to negotiate with Ukrainian separatists, and sought to destroy the Ukrainian People's Republic. But he welcomed negotiations with the West Ukrainian People's Republic, outside the former Russian Empire.

On September 21st, Denikin ordered an offensive against both the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine and the Ukrainian People's Army. Between September 23rd and September 27th, the White Forces of the Novorossiysk Area defeated Directory forces at Uman, while the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine overran two White regiments at Perehoniivka, and broke into the White rear areas.



After this victory, the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine raced eastward, taking Oleksandrivsk on October 4th and Taganrog on the 16th. They forced Denikin to evacuate his headquarters at Taganrog and they captured several White supply bases. The Makhnovists called for a sovyet congress in Oleksandrivsk, which began on the 20th.

At the same time, the Novorossiysk Area continued its offensive against the Ukrainian People's Army. The Directory counterattacked, but the Whites continued to advance toward Vapniarka.



After the Makhnovist breakout, Denikin pulled forces from the Novorossiysk Area and the Don Army to defeat the Makhnovists. The Whites reinforced their bases and forced the Makhnovists from the coast. As the Makhnovists retreated from the south, they launched renewed attacks to the north. On October 28th, they took Katerynoslav. In early November, the Makhnovists held Kryvyy Rih, Nikopol, Oleksandrivsk, and Katerynoslav, with the Internal Front to their east. The Whites attacked the Makhnovist positions; the Makhnovists beat back several White attacks near Oleksandrivsk but lost Katerynoslav. The Makhnovists now evacuated Oleksandrivsk in order to concentrate their forces at Katerynoslav. On November 10th, they again took Katerynoslav. The Makhnovists called for another soviet congress in Katerynoslav, but it was unable to meet.

On November 6th, the West Ukrainian People's Republic had reached its own peace with the Armed Forces of South Russia. By the 13th, the Forces of the Novorossiysk Area turned against the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army. On December 19th, the White 3rd Corps occupied Katerynoslav, but by the 25th the Makhnovists had fought their way back into the city. The White forces fell back from Katerynoslav; they soon fought their way toward the Crimea. Neither side was able to hold the city, and the Red Army soon entered.

On November 7th, Denikin ordered the suppression of the Kuban Rada. This coup alienated many of the Kuban Cossacks and many of the non-Russians in the White armies. This encouraged mass desertion among the non-Russian forces; whole divisions melted away.

Wartime conditions and frozen weather encouraged the spread of typhus. An epidemic began in November and continued to spread through December and January. In December, Makhno fell sick.

The Advance of the Red Army

The Red Army pursued the Whites into Ukraine and the Caucasus. On December 11th – 12th, the Red Army took Kharkiv. As the Volunteer Army collapsed, the White flanks had to fall back. On January 8th – 10th, they took Rostov.



The Red Army sought to break up the smaller partisan formations; they would disarm the partisans or conscript the partisans and divide them from each other. The Red Army was less aggressive toward the stronger and better-organized partisan formations. The back-and-forth fighting and the typhus epidemic made it hard for the Makhnovists to present a united front in their dealings with the Bolsheviks. On January 9th, the Bolsheviks outlawed the Makhnovists.

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