

Americans In Russia Were Outnumbered 10 to 1 By Bolshevik Forces, Says Omaha Officer Back From Arctic Fighting Front

Reds Bombarded Yankees With Ammunition Bearing Trade-mark "Made in U. S."--Allies Drafted Civilians to Fight Bolsheviki

Lieut. Albert E. May Says American Soldiers, Conscripted at Home in June and After Spending More Than Month on Sea, in Beginning of September Fought Reds Under Most Adverse Weather Conditions, Felt Deserted by Own People Who Declined to Tell Them Why They Were Fighting—Yankees Live on British Rations, British Equipment and Were Commanded by British Officers—When American Was Ranking Officer of Outfit, British Promoted Second Lieutenant to Higher Rank Than American in Order to Put British in Command—What the Boys Had to Stand for in Frozen North.

By ALBERT E. MAY, Omaha.

Formerly First Lieutenant, Company I, 339th Infantry, American Forces in Russia.

The writer of this most interesting article is Albert E. May, Omaha attorney, who served the United States in the frozen north of the Archangel district. None of his men ever knew why he was in Russia, what he was fighting for, and what object the United States had to war on Russia without a declaration of war by the duly elected authorities of this nation.

Mr. May was born in Brainard, Neb., educated at the York High school and the State University of Nebraska and practiced law for two years prior to America's entry into the war. He and his law partner here, L. R. Newkirk, were members of the second officers' training corps at Fort Snelling and, after Mr. May was commissioned first lieutenant November 27, 1917, he was detailed to the 85th division, then stationed at Camp Custer, Mich. Later he was appointed senior first lieutenant of Company I, 339th Infantry, which was sent to Russia. Exaggerated reports of mutiny in this company were sent to the United States last March.

MUTINY REPORT FALSE.

"This mutiny report was absolutely false," said Mr. May. "The armistice had been signed for several months and the morale of the entire allied troops in Russia was rather low. The men were there but did not know what they were fighting for. Suddenly the British, French and Russian (anti-bolshevik) troops refused to go to the front to engage with the reds. We were ordered to take their places. On March 31 our men suddenly asked why they had to take over the front of the associate armies, after they had been in the front line trenches all the time. The men were mostly foreigners, who prior to their induction into the army had worked in the automobile factories of Detroit.

"Col. E. W. Stewart, the commander of the regiment, addressed the men and was asked why the Americans were there and why they had to fight the bolsheviki when their country was not actually engaged in war against Russia.

FIGHT OR DIE.

"I don't know why we are here," the colonel said. "I have as much information regarding this expedition from the War department as you have, in other words—none. All I know is that we are here and that we are in great danger of being driven into the sea. All the reason for the continuance of the fighting I can give you, is that we are fighting for our very lives. It's either choosing between fighting the bolsheviki, or being driven into the sea. Is that answer enough to you?"

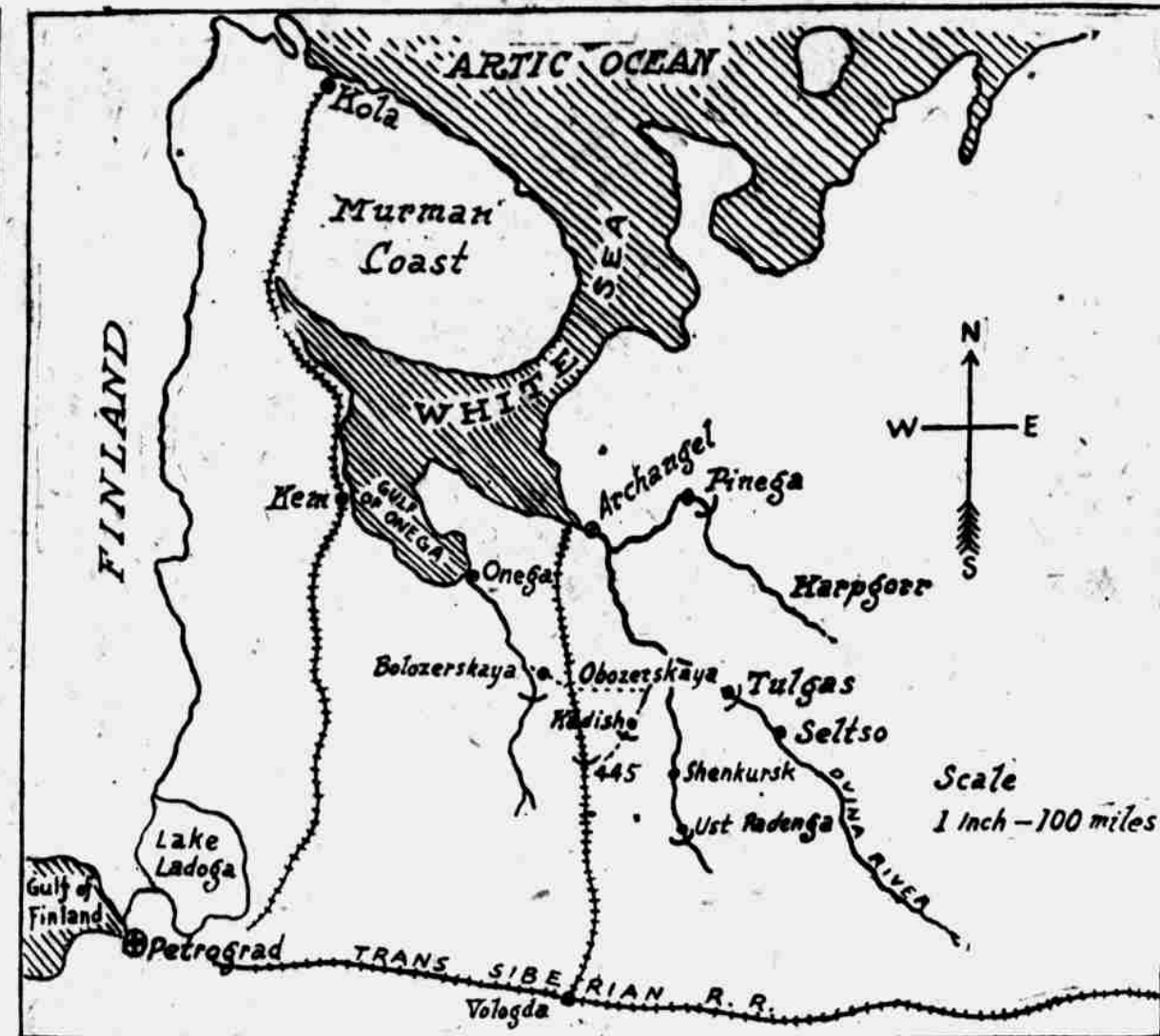
"The men said it was enough answer for them, for they fully realized the colonel's explanation. That was all there was to that mutiny affair.

"One time Captain Martin of the military mission stationed in Russia came to us and explained to us that time after time he had wired the War department for reinforcement, but that he did not even receive an answer to his cablegrams.

OTHER NEBRASKANS THERE.

"Besides me there were two other Nebraskans in that outfit fighting Russia's reds, Lt. Roy Phillips, a young Falls City, Neb., attorney, who was killed in the latter part of last March (1919) and who was a member of Company H of the same regiment with which I served, and Captain Laird, of Blue Hill, Neb., a doctor. Captain Laird joined our outfit several months after our arrival in Russia."

The American expedition in Russia has always been more or less of a Chinese puzzle to the people of America. In the following article Mr. May tells the readers of The Bee, just what terrible hardships this handful of Americans in frozen Russia had to overcome and how brave they were fighting, fighting without knowing why they were fighting, apparently deserted by all, even their own people.



legions of Russia in the Manchurian lakes region in the early days of the war. Except along the streams, the country was very sparsely populated. Here and there one finds a small clearing, inhabited by a few wood cutters or trappers, or a few peasants. It is indeed a forest primeval, with untapped treasures beyond the dreams of man.

Revolt Prevented.

Immediately after the bolsheviki departed from Archangel, a provincial government was established, which was practically the same as had existed under the Kerensky regime. A few days after the Americans arrived this provincial government was kidnapped by a Russian colonel named Chaplin, bodily taken aboard a boat, and shipped out into the White sea. This coup d'etat was really engineered by the British, who were finding some trouble in getting the government to do just what they wished them to do, and they desired to establish one more to their own liking. In the meantime the street car employees went on a strike in protest, and the British immediately ordered the American engineers' work running the street cars to break the strike. At this un-American act, our ambassador, David R. Francis, editor of The St. Louis Republic, protested in words both forceful and full of meaning and "toot sweet" forced Chaplin to return the government and those who had been in charge to work. Thus the first revolution was nipped in the bud before it really got a good start. Other attempts were made to overthrow the government, but met with no better success.

It seemed to be an impression among those who had been in Russia the longest, that the mere sight of the allies, with their presence and food, would cause the Russians to wildly scramble over one another in a magnificent rush to arms against the mob that was

strangling their country, and who, it was stated, were being urged on by Germans and by German propaganda. Such evidently had been the report of these first comers to the supreme allied command in France. But the Russians did not flock to arms. No, there was not the slightest scramble noticeable.

The English had sent up probably 500 officers and as many non-coms to organize this vast Russian army that was supposed to spring to arms at the sight of the allies—and to govern the rest of the empire of Russia had just made another wild guess.

The truth is that the average Russian was pretty well "fed up" on fighting. He'd been through the war on the eastern front and a couple of revolutions thrown in, and he couldn't see where he had benefited materially, and he wasn't exactly what you could call enthusiastic. This new-found freedom, with its utter chaos, was something he couldn't just understand. It was too different from what he'd been used to. What he wanted was enough grub to live on and no work to do. Wasn't that the bolshevik promise? Then again, the Russian had a misgiving as to just why the allies were in Russia. He had been sold out so many times in the last couple of years that he wasn't quite sure just who he could trust, and was reluctant to take chances.

Rumors were rampant that the allies were in Russia to get a slice of it; to enforce payment of loans made by the allies to the old imperial government. In fact, some British officers openly remarked about the wealth of the country and its ability to recompense them in amounts far in excess of Russia's obligation. The allies had stated that they did not intend to bother the government in any way; that they were there only to assist it and not to meddle in local affairs. The words were barely spoken when they proceeded to establish martial

law and to regulate government, private and personal affairs. Naturally the Russians—"the ignorant Russians"—didn't warm up to the British or the allies as they were supposed to do. The British were "running the show," as the saying goes, and as the Americans were directly under the British command, naturally the Russians also mistrusted the Americans. And so the Russians didn't spring to arms—no, they simply didn't spring to arms.

With these explanations you will realize that if the bolsheviki were to be kept out of the Archangel district and our original mission carried out the Americans were going to have to jump right into the fight, and do it quickly—and that's about the way the British high command had it figured out.

Men Start Fighting.

My battalion, the Third, was the first to embark. We were loaded on a train of small Russian boxcars that were waiting on the dock, humped along all night, and at dawn the next morning we took over the railroad front from the French, who had just captured and were occupying Obozerskaya. My company pushed ahead and established a front line about six versts (a verst is about two-thirds of a mile) south of Obozerskaya. Three days later, we had our first fight with the Bolos.

Another company of the battalion, in the meantime, had been sent to the left flank to rescue Colonel Hazelton and a party of about 300 English, Scots, Russians and American sailors, who had been reported as having been surrounded and cut off. About 10 miles from Obozerskaya they came upon Hazelton's empty wagon train, saw much evidence of recent battle, but found no one. Hazelton's party had been surrounded, but under cover of darkness and with the aid of Russian guides, had slipped through the enemy lines into the woods, and, after hiking for three days by compass, finally reached our lines. This company continued to the left some 80 miles, joined up with a platoon of Scots and a few French machine gunners and established what later became known as the "kadish" front.

The first battalion was dispatched down the Dvina and Vaga rivers, while Company H was hurried to Obozerskaya and immediately started south. On September 24, 1918, they

met and defeated the enemy at Cherkuevo.

Later, in November, a company was sent to Pinega. With about 300 Russian partisans they advanced about 80 versts southeast to Karpagora, but were forced to retreat later to Pelegora, just a short way from Pinega.

Thus six fronts were established, forming a semi-circle around Archangel, with a circumference of about 500 miles and a radius of from 150 to 400 miles. The country between these fronts was all forest and swamp, and was protected only by isolated posts wherever a trail cut through the woods. Some of these posts were located 30 miles in the deep woods.

Locate these fronts on your map, as I shall refer to them later as follows: Omega, Railroad, Kadish, Vaga, Dvina, Pinega.

Besides the Americans on these fronts there were Russians, French, Polish, British and Canadian troops in small numbers. The total troops on all fronts in Russia at this time did not exceed 8,000, with possibly 2,000 more at the bases and on the service of supply. In October 2,000 British reinforcements arrived, coming some 400 miles across country from Murmansk with reindeer teams.

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Coming into the beautiful Archangel harbor that splendid September afternoon we passed a French battleship and an English gunboat, so at least there was a feeling that we were among friends. These ships, together with others, carrying a battalion of Royal Scots and a battalion of French and a few American sailors, had arrived about a month before. On their coming the bolsheviki fled from the city, after first looting it; taking with them practically everything of value that they were able to carry off. All of the military stores that were supposed to be there, and which we were to guard, were gone. There was nothing left. The whole story had the appearance of having been gone through thoroughly by a large gang of professional burglars. All boats, railroad rolling stock, ammunition, guns, food, supplies, hardware, etc., which could possibly be dragged away, had vanished. All that was left was the weather-beaten hulk of a devastated city.

Allies Pursue Bolos.
The Scots and French, assisted by about 60 United States sailors from the United States ship Olympia, which was then at Murmansk, lost no time in pursuing the fleeing bolsheviki. At that time the bolsheviki were very poorly organized, and, though the allies succeeded in pushing them back about 100 miles, it was not without some severe losses. So when we arrived in Archangel it might be said that there were two fronts, one on the Dvina river and the other on the Archangel-Vologda railroad; both very thinly held by a handful of troops who had been fighting for a month without relief, who were worn out, tired, and without power to continue further or to hold on without reinforcements.

Archangel is the greatest lumber port in the world. In peace times it boasted from 50,000 to 75,000 inhabitants. When we arrived it was flooded with some 75,000 refugees, who had already tired of bolshevik tyranny or had been driven from their homes by that lawless band. Business had practically ceased. A few shops were open, but offered scarcely anything for sale. There was no food except fish or fish products. Ten pounds of sugar or a sack of flour would buy a silver fox fur worth \$500 in the United States. But the question was where to get the sugar or flour.

Money Has No Value.
The people were virtually starving—living mostly on fish, black straw bread and tea. There was no coin money. Paper money of the wall paper variety and multitudinous makes, from old Nicholai prints and Kerensky issues to the provincial greenback of Archangel, was plentiful, but it would buy nothing, as there was nothing to buy. A rouble was worth about 10 cents. There was no work of any kind going on, and all the people had to do was to walk the streets and figure out some way to start or to stop a revolution. The country surrounding Archangel is one vast expanse of forest and swamp—and swamp of the variety that sucked up those lost

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