

Apollon Davidson
Irina Filatova

The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War
1899-1902

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Human & Rousseau
Cape Town Pretoria Johannesburg

ISBN 0 7981 3804 1

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To the memory of those Russians who came to South Africa a hundred years ago to fight for their ideals in a war which they thought to be theirs.
And to those Russians and South Africans who kept this memory alive through all the upheavals of the tormented century that followed.

This book would have appeared much sooner were it not for the persistent efforts of several colleagues, friends and relatives to delay the publication. Some offered ideas which were difficult to ignore. Others took too long to proofread the manuscript. One went as far as to convert our Russian English into language which he claims English speakers would understand better. We apologize to our readers for whatever depredations these no doubt well-meaning people made on our work. Nevertheless, we are tremendously grateful to all who helped us so much.

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(Y.R.T.Wood)*

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A Note to the Reader

We are aware of the political connotations of the terms "the Anglo-Boer War" and "the South African War". We mainly use the first of these terms - though without attaching any ideological meaning to it. We do so for the simple reason that it is only under this name that the war is known in Russia and has remained in Russian historical memory.

We transliterate Russian names and titles of books, articles and periodicals, adding translations of the titles in the case of books and articles. At the beginning of the century Russia was still using the Julian calendar (or "Old Style") calendar according to which dates in the nineteenth century were twelve days behind, and in the twentieth century thirteen days behind the corresponding dates of the Gregorian calendar (or "New Style" calendar) used in the other European countries. From 31 January 1918 Russia switched to the Gregorian calendar and only the Russian Orthodox Church continued to use the Julian calendar. The authors of our documents of the beginning of the century often used both calendars, particularly when abroad, without indicating which one applied. Wherever we could verify the dates we give both or indicate which calendar was used.

PROLOGUE

SEARCHING AND FINDING

We have found all the questions that can be found. It is time we gave up looking for questions and began looking for answers.

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

Authors usually know where and how their books begin: there's an idea, a meeting, a document, an event - all easily identifiable and dated. It is different with this book. It is not the first study of the Russian involvement in the Anglo-Boer War,¹ but it is mainly based on unique archival and other rare sources, previously unavailable to researchers. The search for these materials took not years but decades. Perhaps this is the reason why it is not clear, even to us, when this book began.

In October 1949 at the Faculty of History of Leningrad (now St Petersburg) State University, Apollon Davidson, one of the authors of this book, was waiting, together with other history students, for a defence of a thesis on South Africa. The thesis, *Russia and the Anglo-Boer War* by Alexander Vitukhnovsky, was the first Russian academic work about Russian involvement in the South African war.

That defence was a memorable event in the Faculty. At the end of the 1940s a new wave of Stalinist repression had struck Leningrad and many historians, both professors and students, were arrested. Such naive questions as "why?", or "for what?", or "what has he done?" were never asked. Nobody was ever given any reasons; people just disappeared one after another. Nobody knew who was going to be the next victim.

1. Alexander L. Vitukhnovsky. *Rossia i anglo-burskaia voina* (Russia and the Anglo-Boer War). Ph.D. thesis. Leningrad, 1949; Elisaveta Kandyba-Foxcroft. *Russia and the Anglo-Boer War. 1899-1902*. Cum Books, Roodepoort, 1981. Rufina R. Viatkina collected many archival documents about Russian involvement in the Anglo-Boer War for *A Documentary History of Ties between Russia and Africa* which is being prepared for publication in Russian. During the 1960s-1970s several MA theses were written on Russian involvement in the Anglo-Boer War by students at the University of Petrozavodsk under the tutorship of A. L. Vitukhnovsky who worked there as an associate professor. An MA thesis on the same topic was written a few years ago by Gennady V. Shubin. When this book was already at the publishers, we received a short version of a Ph.D. thesis on the same topic which was defended in Moscow in 1995 by Tatiana V. Shapovalova.

This wave of repression not only scarred or even ended many individual lives, but intellectually speaking it also dealt a severe blow to Russian studies of African history. The first thesis on African history to be submitted after the war (at the beginning of 1949), *Uprisings in the German Colonies in Africa in 1904-1908* was declared "ideologically harmful". At first the Academic Council of Leningrad University's Faculty of History awarded a doctoral degree to the author, Veniamin Golant. A week later, apparently after political intervention at a very high level, the Council was reconvened to reverse its decision. The author was accused of failing to show the "beastly predatory face" of American imperialism and its role in the suppression of the uprisings of the peoples of Namibia.

Members of the Academic Council were perfectly aware that Namibian rebels had not been killed on American orders and that America's place in world politics in that epoch was, in any case, very different from what it later became. But Stalin considered American imperialism to be his main enemy and this meant that it had to be denounced irrespective of any historical circumstances. Fearing repression, the Academic Council thus deprived Golant of the degree which it had awarded him only a week earlier.

Vitukhnovsky's thesis defence was to take place on 4 October 1949. Some time before the defence Vitukhnovsky's supervisor, Dr Mikhail Borisovich Rabinovich, was arrested. Rabinovich was also a specialist in South African history and author of the thesis, *Jameson's Raid.*, which he defended in 1941. Fellow historians felt certain that Vitukhnovsky's defence would be cancelled. Remarkably, not only did the defence take place, but the supervisor's reference, written before the arrest and confiscated during the search of his flat, was allowed to feature as an official document - a quite unheard of circumstance.

Virtually all early Russian specialists on South Africa were repressed one way or another. This was merely a coincidence - no specific charges were laid against African studies as such and, indeed, much the same wave of repression scarred and strangled all the other humanities in Stalin's Russia. The list of Africanists affected was sadly symptomatic.

Igor Leontievich Snegiriov who in 1937 published a book of Russian translations of Zulu fairy tales and of the song "Mayibuye" was sentenced for being a prisoner of war and most probably shot soon after the war ended.

Veniamin Golant was exiled in the mid-30s before he began to study Africa. Then, in 1949, as we have seen, his thesis was declared "ideologically harmful". He finally got his degree years later.

Mikhail Rabinovich spent four years in prison and was released only after Stalin's death. He was, however, banned from Leningrad University and never returned there.

Vitukhnovsky, though not arrested, did not get a job in Leningrad. He was sent to Petrozavodsk, a town in the far north of Russia. This effectively crippled his career in African studies - there were no materials on Africa in the Petrozavodsk libraries; indeed, there were no historical archives there at all.

Even Ivan Izosimovich Potekhin, popularly perceived in academic circles as the Party boss from Moscow, was at one stage reprimanded by the Soviet authorities, lost his job at the Communist University of Eastern Toilers and remained unemployed for three years.

None of the early theses on South Africa was published. Only two copies of each of these theses still exist, one in St Petersburg University, and one in the Russian State Library in Moscow (until recently, the Lenin Library).

Vitukhnovsky's thesis was the only one that was thoroughly used, though not in an academically happy manner. A South African author of Russian origin, Elisaveta Kandyba-Foxcroft, visited Russia six times and used Vitukhnovsky's materials extensively for her book under exactly the same title as that of his thesis, *Russia and the Anglo-Boer War*. Her book was published in Pretoria in 1981. Regrettably, she never mentioned Vitukhnovsky's name except in her bibliography, and no quotations were indicated. Vitukhnovsky was still alive at that time and would have been pleased to learn that his work had been recognised in South Africa.

Vitukhnovsky, Golant and Rabinovich were Apollon Davidson's older friends. From his first years as a student he was exposed to their ideas about South Africa and spent much time in discussion of South African history with them. In a way this book began then.

In August 1967 in the small Zambian town of Kitwe a casual conversation took place over an uneventful dinner at the restaurant in the Edinburgh Hotel between an English mining engineer and a Russian historian. A thick novel lay on the table in front of the Englishman. Apollon (for he was the Russian) read the title: *Rags of Glory*. The Englishman caught his glance and moved the book towards him.

"Have a look. It's about the Boer War. My father was there."

Apollon ran through the pages while his companion smoked. A Russian name occurred, that of a pro-Boer volunteer, Colonel Maximov. Here Apollon read for the first time the episode of Maximov's surprise attack against the Gordon Highlanders and the dramatic scene of Maximov and the English Captain Towse shooting

at one another at point-blank range, with Maximov killed and Towse blinded and later on being awarded the Victoria Cross for his heroic behaviour.

Maximov was not a fictitious figure. Apollon had come across his name before although only in passing. But surely the romantic story of the heroic death on the battlefield was invented?

Strangely enough it was Stuart Cloete's novel that got Apollon seriously interested in Maximov. Next day he bought the novel and took it back to Moscow with him. You could also say this book began then.

Neither the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* nor the *Soviet Historical Encyclopaedia* had anything on Maximov. Only the largest and the most authoritative Russian prerevolutionary encyclopaedia published by Brockhaus and Efron had a small article about him.

Maximov, Yevgeny Yakovlevich. Writer, military correspondent, born here, studied there. Was an officer of the Cuirassier Regiment. Fought in Serbia and against the Turks in the Russo-Turkish War, was in the Middle East and Abyssinia. Was commander of the European legion in the Transvaal. Killed in the Russo-Japanese War.

What a life! A wonderful personality which Apollon Davidson, then professor at Moscow State University, could not but weave into his lectures on South African history, much to the pleasure of his students, Irina Filatova among them. Yet this was too little even to start a serious search.

As the years went by information about Maximov - and other volunteers - accumulated. Not that we collected it systematically. It just came bit by bit. An episode here, a few paragraphs there. More romantic details - and more gaps in Maximov's biography. The image of the Russian colonel remained evasive and obscure.

And then there came a breakthrough, in February 1977 in Leningrad, while we were working in the beautiful eighteenth-century building of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. This museum was founded by Peter the Great and for this reason is still popularly called Peter's Kunst Kamera (Cabinet of Curiosities). The two authors were looking through the documentation of the African collections of the museum and suddenly saw under No. 5377: "Collection of weaponry and decorations, brought from Ethiopia by Ye. Ya. Maximov in 1897 and sold to MAE in February 1936 by Maria Nikolaievna Maximova." And the address: "Apt. 7, No. 7, Svechnoi Lane."

The address was in the centre of old St Petersburg, in Dostoyevsky's area - and not too far from Kunst Kamera. Most probably it was the wrong Maximov - but should we try to pop in there? Useless, of course, but still . . . Maximova, whoever she was, must have died a long time

back. The year 1936 was forty years ago - and what years they had been: Stalin's purges, the Second World War, the siege of Leningrad, a new wave of repression . . . Doubtless, we would find nothing. Yet we had to look.

We went around the decrepit but obviously once impressive block of flats into a small dark narrow courtyard surrounded by the tall grey walls of the multistorey building. It must, at the end of the nineteenth century, have been a luxury apartment block; now it had all been rebuilt so as to subdivide the big apartments into smaller units, and was badly in need of repair. Apartment 7, as it had been in 1936, did not exist. Yet, incredibly, we found Maximova's neighbours. One neighbour, Yelena Panteleievna Belousova, had known Maximova from 1921. Another, Antonina Ivanovna Vedenina, born in 1925, knew her from her early childhood.

The two ladies spoke about Maximova warmly. "A wonderful person. She didn't disdain us ordinary people, although she herself was of noble stock. We used to listen to her in the house. Everything she said was always to the point."

The neighbours called her "the general's wife", or "the general's widow". In the early 1930s, when the government was issuing Soviet passports, Maximova did not conceal her anxiety from her neighbours. Everybody knew that she was from the "have beens", she might not get a passport, and then ... A life without a passport in the Soviet Union was impossible; it was something that could not be. A person without a passport was perceived and treated as a runaway criminal. Not to get a passport amounted to losing all one's civil rights. But it seems that the neighbours did not betray her, and she got the precious document.

The neighbours told us that Maximova had had two sons. The younger was killed during the war, and she had died soon after that, unable to cope with her loss. The elder might still be alive. He might be in Leningrad: he was teaching something, perhaps at the University. He left his apartment in this block a long time ago, and they know nothing about him. What was his name? Sasha; that is, Alexander.

This was so much - and so little. Why would Maximova call herself a "general's widow"? Maximov the volunteer was not even a colonel, just a lieutenant colonel. Surely she wouldn't try to elevate her husband's military rank and boast about it at a time when it was so dangerous? And what about the museum collections from Ethiopia, where "our" Maximov had supposedly been? It didn't prove anything. Many Russians visited Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century. The whole Cossack unit was there, and Maximov is a very common name in Russia. And then again, why would somebody with a young wife and two

children rush to the other end of the globe to fight for an alien cause and generally risk his life? Surely it couldn't be "our" Maximov's family?

We were going to make enquiries at the University, but why not try the easiest first? We dialled 09, telephone enquiries, from a public phone in Nevsky Prospect. The enquiries service keeps information about the age of their subscribers, enabling us to get the numbers of several Alexander Maximovs born at the turn of the century. We dialled the first number.

An elderly voice answered the call.

"Sorry, we are looking for Alexander Maximov, who lived in Svechnoi Lane."

"That's me."

"Yes . . . But we are looking for a Maximov who was related to Yevgeny Yakovlevich Maximov, who was in South Africa in 1900."

"I am his son."

Wow!

"Can we see you?"

"Yes, of course. You can come today or tomorrow. Vasilievsky, First Line . . ."

Next morning, nervous and excited, we were there, at the First Line that's how streets are called on the Vasilievsky Island in St Petersburg to meet the person whom we had never dreamed of finding. The door opened, and we saw a small old St Petersburg apartment stuffed to the ceiling with an incredible mixture of old and new, real antiques amidst the cheapest possible contemporary things. There were several cats and dogs, some wounded or crippled, and at least one bird - a big black crow with a broken leg. The crow's huge cage hung over an enormous antique concert piano in a tiny poky dining room. A typical Leningrad household of an old St Petersburg family . . .

The host was amiable and friendly, with a pleasing appearance and healthy looks.

"Alexander Yevgenievich Maximov, Professor of the Mining Institute, at your service. Did you have any breakfast? Then we'll have tea later. And now have a look, I have selected some materials for you."

There was a pile of old documents on the dinner table. The very first of them, on top of the pile, was a letter from Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal, to "Mr Colonel Eugene Maximov, St Petersburg". The letter was in Dutch, but the Russian translation was also there, written in a beautiful copperplate handwriting. The translation had obviously been made at the time when the letter was received, for it used the ornate and high-flown official Russian language of the beginning of the century:

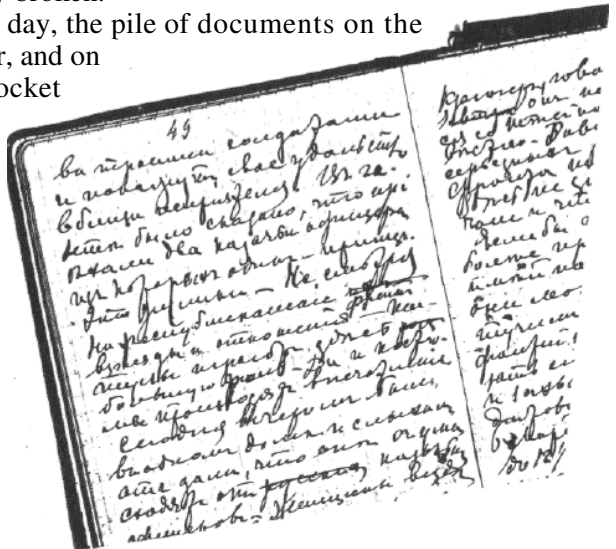
. . . Your services to my Fatherland were of extraordinary importance and deserving of great respect. Motivated by the absolutely selfless impulse of your soul, you have fulfilled your duty . . . May everything that you have done during your lifetime be the source of great moral satisfaction for you . . .

Under the letter there were Kruger's visiting card and his signed photograph - a present to Maximov. There were dozens of photographs from the South African war: Boer soldiers and generals, battlefields, hospitals, cities and towns, Africans, mostly Zulus. Three boxes of "misty pictures" - slides of the time. There were also several letters together with Maximov's articles, signed E.M. and Max., in both Russian and Latin script. There, too, were Maximov's portraits from newspapers and award documents from different military campaigns.

We feverishly copied whatever we could by hand. Then, over tea, we started to ask Alexander Yevgenievich endless questions. He asked us some questions as well. Why were we interested in Maximov? Ah, we study Africa . . . Do we happen to know Dima Olderogge? Isn't he in African studies as well? He asks because he and Dima were in the same group at the First Cadet Corps. They studied together for five years before the Bolshevik revolution . . .

Of course we knew Dmitry Alexeievich Olderogge, the patriarch of Russian African studies. Yes, we'd heard that he'd studied in the Cadet Corps, that privileged military school for children of the Russian nobility. Of course we would give Maximov Olderogge's telephone number and address. We discovered some other common acquaintances, and the ice, if there was any in the first place, was completely broken.

When we returned the next day, the pile of documents on the dinner table was much bigger, and on top of it we found a brown pocket book - Maximov's South African diary.



The South African diary of the Russian volunteer, Lieutenant Colonel Yevgeny Maximov.

Later on we met Natalia Alexandrovna, Maximov's granddaughter and the main custodian of her grandfather's archive and memory. The family proved to be invariably well disposed and most helpful. Alexander Yevgenievich helped us to decipher his father's diary, written in the most difficult handwriting. Indeed, we now know more about Maximov than his family did at that time, but we feel deeply grateful and obliged to Alexander Yevgenievich and Natalia Alexandrovna.

Maximov's archive was the first big discovery in our quest for materials about the Russian participation in the Anglo-Boer War. Elated by this unexpected success we rushed into the search. Many other discoveries lay ahead, as also many disappointments.

"Rushed into the search" is a euphemism for "rushed to the libraries and archives", of course. We would dearly love to convey the spirit of Russian libraries and archives of the Soviet era to the Western reader -but would he understand? First, you have to imagine the shabby and stuffy corridors, corners and smoking rooms of once beautiful, but gradually deteriorating eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings, where young academics, generation after generation, got their unofficial schooling, no less important, perhaps, than the official university lectures.

These places were home to a whole subculture, which revolved not so much around the books and manuscripts of those book depositories as around the people who were employed or came to work there. Libraries were places of socialisation and substitutes for discussion clubs for politically incorrect intellectuals. Those, who were for different reasons thrown out of the mainstream of Soviet academia and were thus deprived of any chance of an academic career, but remained alive and free, often found jobs or at least good company in the libraries. Some were the best, albeit unknown, specialists in their fields and virtually lived by and at their work. And those who were not employed in a library came every day and spent all their time there, from morning till evening, reading and speaking to their colleagues. This was their real home.

It was also ours, the authors of this book. Belonging to different generations, coming from different backgrounds and different cities, we too lived in this library subculture. We were proud denizens of this library atmosphere, an atmosphere you could find in many academic libraries of Soviet Russia, although the libraries might differ.

It was there, in the Moscow and Leningrad libraries and archives, that we found our materials about Russian volunteers and Russian involvement in the Anglo-Boer War: the Archives of Military History, the Navy Archives, the Manuscript divisions of St Petersburg Public Library and the Russian State Library, the Library of the Academy of Sciences, the

Archives of the Foreign Ministry of Russia . . . Day after day, week after week we read official publications, newspaper articles, memoirs, diaries. *y/e* copied them by hand because in those days photocopying was usually a very complicated and difficult procedure with numerous limitations. The Lenin Library, for example, prohibited photocopying materials in the Russian language. In the archives photocopying was prohibited altogether.

What did we find there? Several service records of Russian volunteers and their official and private letters, official correspondence in connection with the events in South Africa and relations between Russia and South Africa, official correspondence about two Russian medical detachments sent to the theatre of war, the official documentation of these detachments, correspondence and documentation in connection with the sending of Russian military observers to the English and the Boer sides and their official reports, the South African diaries of the volunteers, military observers, doctors and nurses - some of them published but forgotten, some in manuscript form. Many of these documents are so interesting that they deserve not just to be quoted but published in full.

Take, for example, the manuscripts by Mikhail Antonovich Ziger-Korn, the Russian military observer attached to the Boer troops. One of these manuscripts, beautifully written and luxuriously bound, belonged to the Russian Emperor Nicholas II and is now housed in the Manuscript Department of the Russian State Library. An interesting, albeit too polished a document, well deserving of being published. The other document, two ordinary yellowish notebooks in faded ink and absolutely unreadable handwriting, bears no name or title, just the inscriptions "Notebook 2" and "Notebook 3". These were the second and third notebooks of Ziger-Korn's South African diary, housed in the Manuscript Department of St Petersburg Public Library. God only knows how the librarians established the identity of the author. Judging by the passages that we managed to decipher, it is one of the most interesting accounts of the Anglo-Boer war, particularly since Ziger-Korn wrote it at the time of major defeats for the Boers when the majority of foreigners had already left the country, and when such accounts by observers are correspondingly rare.

The archive and library materials were more than sufficient to write a detailed survey of Russian participation and involvement in the Anglo-Boer War. But our good luck with Maximov's personal archive led us to believe that more treasures might be hidden somewhere in the closets and attics of old apartments in Moscow and St Petersburg. So the search went on . . .

At the Battlefields

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!

ROBERT BROWNING

"What made me, headlong, leave my country and my service, and forget the wise saying

Jerome, Jerome

Why don't you stay home?

"What made me set off for the Transvaal to war, to fight for an alien people, for an alien cause? I would not undertake to answer. Was it a fit of self-sacrifice a la Karamazov, or perhaps just a wish to experience danger and risk, to feel delight at the possibility of playing roulette with my life?"¹

At some stage every Russian volunteer who came to South Africa to fight for the Boers must have asked himself this question. Probably few would have been able to give a clear answer, though the urge that had taken them there was undeniably powerful.

Russian newspapers wrote that already in the first few days of the war "many people" requested information "both in writing, and in person as to how they could get attached to volunteer regiments heading for the Transvaal".² "People from all ranks of society, everyone dying to join the Boers", rushed to the Reverend Hendrik Gillot, minister to the Dutch colony in St Petersburg.³

It was easier said than done. The journey to South Africa from Russia was long; longer than from any other European country. Volunteers had first to get to St Petersburg, then to Marseilles or another European port from which they could travel to South Africa by ship. It was an expensive voyage and the necessity of buying special clothes and equipment made it still costlier. Volunteers had to take all the risks involved in their undertaking: financial, political, practical and otherwise. There was also the problem of communication since few Russians, even among the educated elite, spoke Dutch. Many lacked experience of foreign travel: in those days not many Russians had any chance to travel.

1. Yevgeny R Augustus. *Vospominaniia uchasmika anglo-burskoi voiny 1899-1900 gg.* (Memoirs of a Participant in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1900). Warsaw, Bristol Printers, 1902, p. 25.

2. *Rossiiia*, No. 170, 27 (15). October 1899.

3. *Moskovskie Vedomosti*, No. 293, 5 November (24 October) 1899.

Yet many made it to South Africa. Some died there, several were wounded, many took part in bloody battles, sharing with the Boers the excitement of victory and the despair of defeat. Some saw comrades and friends die before their eyes and many went through the horrors of imprisonment in jails and concentration camps. When they returned home - and the majority did finally make the long return journey - only one published proper memoirs about the epic they had all lived through.

This sole exception was Yevgeny Fiodorovich Augustus, a military journalist and a lieutenant in the Russian army. It was he who began his memoirs with the words with which this chapter begins.

Many of the Dutch, French, German, Italian and American volunteers who fought in the South African war or were merely in South Africa at that time published memoirs about it, as, of course, did many of the Boers and the British themselves. Yet those who came there from Moscow and St Petersburg, from the banks of the Volga and the Dnieper rivers, did not. Why?

There were, doubtless, many reasons, but one sticks out with bitter clarity. Memoirs are usually written in old age and the Russian veterans of the Anglo-Boer War did not make it to that age. They were swept away by the winds of war, winds that nowhere blew more harshly than in their country.

Soon after the Anglo-Boer War came the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 and in 1905 the first Russian Revolution took place. This was followed by the First World War, in which Russia suffered casualties on its usual colossal scale, the two revolutions of 1917, February and October, the "Red Terror", the civil war and, with it, famine. The few hardy souls who somehow survived these multiple disasters faced a future shaped by Stalin's purges and the almost thirty million dead of the Second World War. Of course, neither history nor feelings are a matter of a mere body count, but the sheer scale of Russia's tragedy overwhelmed all lesser experiences so that, to those few pro-Boer volunteers who survived, the Transvaal became a touching, naive, romantic, but half-forgotten episode of their early youth.

Yevgeny Augustus wrote quickly and well. He had kept a diary in South Africa and published his diary-based memoirs first in the *Paris Revue Hebdomadaire*. A Polish translation appeared as a booklet under the title *On the Tugela. Personal Memoirs of Lieutenant Augustus from the Transvaal War*⁴ Another booklet, *Memoirs of a Participant in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1900*, appeared in Russian immediately after his return

4. We are grateful for this information to the Polish historian Dr A. Zukowski.

to Russia, in 1902, while the war was still going on.⁵ Simultaneously he published a set of essays of different content but with the same title in the Russian language *Varshavsky Voenny Zhurnal*⁶ an extremely glossy periodical that has since become a rarity. It was in these essays, rather than in his book, that Augustus provided the best picture of the Russian volunteers. His last essay, published in the sixth volume of the journal for 1902, ended with the words "to be continued", but the journal ceased publication at this point and all our attempts to find the continuation of Augustus's essays elsewhere failed.

We know little about Augustus beyond these publications. We found neither his family nor much information about him in the Russian archives. This was a considerable disappointment since Augustus, though a typical product of his time in some ways, was clearly a gifted and colourful personality. All that we know is that before the Anglo-Boer War he had served in the 192nd Infantry Reserve Warsaw Regiment and before that in the 139th Infantry Belgorod Regiment and that he may have lived somewhere in Poland (then part of the Russian Empire) - the city of Cracow is mentioned nostalgically in his memoirs.

We discovered that after the war, in 1901, he was still a lieutenant of the same Warsaw Regiment but studied Oriental Languages in St Petersburg.⁷ In 1903 Augustus worked as a correspondent for the magazine *Zori*, and his pseudonyms included "A-s" and "Ye. F." In 1908-1909 he was in Mongolia and Tuva with the reconnaissance unit of the Siberian Regiment, and in 1914 he published some essays about this in *The Voenny Sbornik*.

"Augustus" is not a typical Russian name - he might have been a Pole or rather a Lithuanian - yet he wrote in a beautiful native Russian and spoke of himself as a Russian. He was, in fact, a Russian nationalist and monarchist. In 1914 Augustus was still only a staff captain. Clearly, despite his literary talents, his numerous military adventures and his orthodox monarchist views, his career had not gone too well.

5. Ye. F. Augustus. *Vospominaniia uchasmika anglo-burskoi voiny 1899-1902 gg.*

6. Ye. F. Augustus. *Vospominaniia uchasmika anglo-burskoi voiny 1899-1902 gg.* (Memoirs of a Participant in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902). *Varshavsky Voenny Zhurnal*, 1900, Nos. 11,12; 1901, Nos. 1, 3, 7, 9; 1902, Nos.1, 3, 6. Later we shall refer to the journal and not to the title of this publication, to distinguish it from Augustus's memoirs under the same title.

7. [Augustus, Ye. F.] *Obshchestvo revnitelei voennykh znany. 20 oktiabria 1901 g., No. 49. Soobshcheniie slushatelia kursov vostochnykh yazykov poruchka 192 pekhomogo rezervnogo Varshavskogo polka Ye. F. Augustus (The Society of the Zealots for Military Knowledge. 20 October 1901, No. 49. Report by a student of the Courses in Oriental Languages, Lieutenant of the 192nd Infantry Reserve, Warsaw Regiment Ye. F. Augustus).* [Np, nd]

A Long Way to the Tugela River

Augustus left Russia by train with several other Russian volunteers and, after a long trip through Germany, France and Belgium, arrived in Brussels.

They were received in Brussels by Dr Willem Leyds, Ambassador-at-Large for the Transvaal to several European countries, including Russia, and by F.A. van der Hoeven, Second Secretary of his legation. The Russians were invited "prendre une tasse de the russe" while the diplomats tried to introduce them to the particulars of the political and military situation in South Africa and to inform them about the military organisation of the Boers. On 15 December 1899 the group sailed on board the French ship La Gironde to Lourenco Marques and, after many trials with ' the Portuguese customs officials, the Russians finally reached Pretoria.

"Crowds of volunteers were hanging around the Parliament building there," wrote Augustus. "Some had already changed their tropical travel helmets for wide-brimmed Boer hats, decorated with a four-colour Transvaal ribbon. I, too," he went on, "hurried to register my wish to join the ranks of the valiant Boers as a volunteer . . . The procedure was, in fact, very simple. There was no order or system. Those who were prepared to wait visited State Secretary Reitz, a respectable and polite old man. Those who did not want to queue up in his waiting room went straight to the Department van de Comandant-General where [De] Souza, the acting War Minister, was swearing in volunteers. Hastily and with a catch in his voice he read to us the oath to defend the independence of the Republic and to obey the superiors who were bestowed upon us. 'Zoo waarlijk helpe mij God!' We repeated these final words of the oath after him and then signed in a big book with pages laced together. In spite of the commotion, in spite of the fact that secretaries were bustling around and shouting at the next table, their comprehension of the significance of the moment could be seen in the faces of the volunteers ..."

Augustus was excited and moved, yet disappointments and problems began almost immediately: "Right there, in one of the rooms of the 'ministry' rifles lay about, mostly old single-loading Martini-Henrys without bayonets, as well as cartridges, saddles, bridles and stirrups ... It was a terrible mess. The officials and [De] Souza himself, not knowing any languages other than Dutch and English, became desperate trying to find interpreters, and explaining to the discontented volunteers that there were no Mauser rifles left, and that old saddles and bridles were being issued because there were no new ones, for the stocks were exhausted." Finally Augustus and his Russian friends decided to go to the front line without rapid-firing rifles and new saddles in the hope of acquiring

both at the battlefield. With their Martini-Henrys they were not worse off than many others. Most important, Augustus got good horses for himself and his comrades, "inconspicuous, but strong and enduring, branded with letters Z.A.R." Each volunteer was also given a waterproof coat, a blanket, a couple of saddlebags, a water flask, and 120 cartridges.

Augustus and his three fellow travellers chose perhaps the most dangerous front, on the Tugela River. They decided against joining any of the foreign volunteer units and instead joined one of the Boer commandos, although they had been warned that there they could only serve as rank and file. They must have felt very proud of this decision because, as Augustus discovered almost immediately, not all volunteers had come there to risk their lives.

"It turned out that our hotel bills were paid by the state, and that we could choose the unit and time of departure ourselves," he wrote. "This tactfulness on the part of the government led to the fact that many so-called volunteers carried on living in the first-class hotels for months, theoretically 'forming units', but in reality preferring to sit at the table d'hôte instead of subjecting their precious lives to danger in the open country ..."

Augustus quickly realised that the place and the situation had in fact created "a paradise for adventurers and rogues of all kinds, who exploited the trust of the government; the opportunities were there, if you just kept your eyes open . . ." "There were, for example "gentlemen . . . who, jingling their spurs, came time and again to the Department van de Comandant-General and, having changed only their hairstyles, demanded new horses, arms and ammunition for themselves and for 'five comrades', and invariably got everything and then organised unofficial auctions . . ."⁸

Who were the other three Russians who, together with Augustus, chose the honest and more difficult way? Augustus, perhaps for reasons of security, never called any of them by their full names. He referred to one of his comrades, as "Lieutenant N-n". We thought that this was Lieutenant Nikitin known from other sources. But there were two Nikitins among the Russian volunteers, Ivan and Vasily, both lieutenants, and it took us a long time and much effort to find out that the one who joined Augustus was Vasily Nikitin, lieutenant of the 37th Yekaterinburg Regiment. Augustus's second companion, "Ensign in Reserve D-v", was most probably Alexei Nikolaievich Diatropov.

8. Ye. F. Augustus. *Vospominaniia uchastnika anglo-burskoi voiny 1899-1902 gg.* ch. I.

His third companion is even more obscure. Augustus mentioned "R-t", "R", "R-v" and "Pavlusha R." but we do not know whether "R", "R-t" and

"R-v" were different people or one and the same person and which of them was "Pavlusha". Augustus wrote only that Pavlusha was a nice, though frivolous young man who had come to South Africa with his good-looking girlfriend and wanted to settle down in the country after the war.

In his Polish memoirs Augustus mentions the full names of his three companions: Reserve Lieutenant Dashkov, Infantry Lieutenant Nakozhin and "Ripert with mistress (nurse of the Red Cross)".⁹ The military ranks and descriptions of these people coincide with those mentioned in the Russian memoirs and their names fit into Augustus's abbreviations. This does not, however, help to resolve the riddle; rather the opposite, for none of these men is mentioned in any other sources, while there is at least some scanty information elsewhere to confirm our deciphering of the abbreviations. Our guess is that these three names were, in fact, pseudonyms which Augustus used with the same purpose in mind, i.e. security. After all, at least two of his companions were officers of the Russian army who were not supposed to fight for any foreign power. Why Augustus did not bother about his own security is a different question for which we have no answer.

The four Russians arrived at Modderspruit, the last station on the Pretoria-Durban railway line occupied by the Boers, and went straight to the Commander in Chief, Piet Joubert. He asked them why they did not want to stay in the vicinity of Ladysmith. They replied that they wanted to see some action and that after the attempted assault of 6 January 1900 they did not expect the Boers to attack Ladysmith again. Joubert answered that he was, indeed, not going to attack the town because the English would surrender without any need for such an attack. He said something like: "*Jammer om de manckaften.*" Augustus evidently wrote down the Dutch words the way he heard them, not understanding their meaning. The general probably meant that he did not want to sacrifice his men in an attack. Joubert sent the Russians on their way with a letter to General Lukas Meyer, Commander of the troops on the Tugela River.

On their way to the Tugela front Augustus and his friends crossed the Kliprivier valley. They met two compatriots there, "Sh-o" - Alexander Shulzhenko, the Junior Captain of a mining company from Odessa province, and Dr Zigel from the University of Derpt (now Tartu),

9. Dr A. Zukowski's letter of 5 December 1995 to A.B. Davidson.

Estonia. Dr Zigel came to work at a hospital but ended up taking part in military action. Both were with the German Corps.

Shulzhenko invited the whole group to his tent and over drinks they

discussed the military campaign, the Boers and their tactics, and other volunteers. Shulzhenko thought that the siege of Ladysmith was too slow and passive. His opinion of volunteers in general, and of his fellow Germans in particular, was very low: "Almost half of all these gentlemen .. are adventurers, who have been brought here either by a poorly concealed instinct for robbery and pillage or by a dirty story back home."¹⁰ He must have found an understanding interlocutor in Augustus, whose opinion of the majority of volunteers was much the same.

Lucas Meyer received the Russians in his tent on the northern slope of "Groblerskloof".¹¹ His aide, "Assistenz-General" A. Kock, who had studied at Leyden and Oxford Universities and spoke good German and English, introduced them to the situation. He advised them to join the Krugersdorp Commando, camped near Colenso.

Right there, near Meyer's staff, the Russians witnessed the execution of a "Kaffir". He had been caught in one of the local kraals, where he was intending to spend the night, and although he had nothing suspicious with him, in fact nothing at all except a stick, he had become suspect for the simple reason that he could not give the names of any local Boer farmers to his interrogators.

The African had already been badly beaten by the time his captors brought him to Meyer's tent and he just kept on repeating: "Baas, Baas." To make him speak one of his interrogators struck him with his own stick. The stick broke and a small rolled piece of paper fell on the ground. It was a plan of Boer fortifications on the two nearby hills.

"This is not the first time that we have caught Kaffir spies," Kock explained to the Russians. "They deliver the most exact data about our positions to the British. These rogues have almost established postal communication between Buller and White for a handful of gold."

"Shoot him," he said casually to the Boers.

The African was shot instantly on the spot, rather to the Russians' embarrassment.

"Good luck!" said Kock. "If you get bored in the camp you are always welcome here. I get newspapers and magazines."

"Will you kill any more ill-fated Negroes?"

Kock frowned. "The English killed my father and two brothers.

10. *Varshavsky Voennoy Zhurnal*, December 1900, no. 12, p. 1103; Shulzhenko's name was established on the basis of Ye. F. Augustus. *Vospominaniia uchasmika anglo-burskoi voyny 1899-1902 gg.*, p. 54.

11. Augustus meant Grobbelaar's Kloof.

Should I stand on ceremony with these scoundrels who have been! bought with English gold?"¹² There was not much to say to that.

The Commander of the Krugersdorp Commando, Van Wyk, ordered! the Russians to join twenty other foreigners who had already joined his I unit. There were several Austrians and Germans, one Swiss and one Bulgarian, Lieutenant Buzukov. Buzukov's dream was of a democratic I Balkan Federation. He had fought against the Turks in Macedonia, had been taken prisoner and sentenced to death, and had then managed to escape to Russia - to Odessa - and from there came to South Africa. Such extraordinary pilgrimages passed, in the circumstances, as commonplace.

Spion Kop

Soon after their arrival, on 23-25 January 1900, the Russians participated in one of the bloodiest battles of the Anglo-Boer War - the battle of Spion Kop. Augustus left a graphic and emotional description of this event.

There are few other volunteer accounts of this - or, indeed, any other - battle of the Anglo-Boer War. Augustus was in the unique position of relating the experiences of the usually silent category of "rank and file soldiers" in this war because he was in the Boer army as a soldier, not an officer, but at the same time was a man of letters, capable of relating his emotions and feelings. Despite - or possibly because of - these strange circumstances, Augustus's memoirs are an outstanding source on the Anglo-Boer War in general and on the battle of Spion Kop in particular.

"*Komm an, kerls!*" roars somebody's husky voice behind my back. Figures of the Boers appear for a moment amongst the green grass, then disappear behind sharp edges of the rocks. I, too, am gripped by this same irrepressible urge forward. As if under the effect of hypnosis, deafened by the devilish crash, dazzled by the bright sun, I strain ahead. Right up - to the peak of the mountain, crowned with several crooked mimosas, to the shapeless barricades with the British behind them . . .

"The Boers fall prone at the level of the stones. As if hardened, they melt into the out-juttings of the soil, hiding them from the enemies' volleys. Without bustle or emotion they squeeze the butts of their rifles and wait, like predatory kites, for a glare of a yellow helmet or the glitter of a bayonet. From the right, rapid rifle shots start to crackle, cartridge cases and clips glitter; my throat tickles because of the pungent powder

12. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, December 1900, No. 12, pp. 1104; January 1901, No. 1, pp. 51-53.

fumes. Innumerable shrapnel shots burst above the barricades and the smoke

of the shells slowly melts in the air, shading bright sunlight with a bloody shroud.

"The English are only a hundred or a hundred and fifty paces from us. In the crowd of yellow-helmeted men one can see some confusion, movements of the hands which have no point.

"And I, I neither feel any bloodthirstiness nor am in any kind of an 'epic mood', so often described by the poets, but I have already emptied all the bullet pouches of my bandolier in the chaotic momentum of this merciless carnage . . ."

A dirty white cloth appears above the English positions. The Boers stop firing, jump up overjoyed, run forward. "Suddenly the white flag disappears and the shooting starts again, more fiercely than ever."

All of a sudden a crowd of the English appeared in front of the Boers. "Staggering along, falling on the ground, they run towards us. What is this? A sally? A bayonet charge? We have almost run out of cartridges, and we do not have any bayonets. Indeed, the Boers, scattered all over the slope, would not be able to deal with a good bayonet attack. But what is this? The British, throwing away their rifles, run straight towards us, holding their hands up. They are running straight into captivity . . . Here is one, with blackened face and inflamed eyes, rushing towards me like a wild beast. Instinctively, I brandish the butt of my rifle at him, but he falls down at my water flask with a kind of a wild wheeze and convulsively gulps the water like someone dying of thirst.

"Both the Boers and the English, who have been killing one another with the bloodthirstiness of crazed cannibals a minute ago, crowd together, blackened with soot, bespattered with the blood and brains of their fallen comrades in arms. Weary, indeed exhausted by twelve hours of battle, they share a flask of water, and the last dried crust like brothers."¹³

The Russians were deeply impressed by the tactics of the Boers during this battle, particularly by their long, thin firing lines and the power of their rifle fire.

"A truce was set for the next day," Augustus went on. "White flags were flying on both sides. British medical orderlies with stretchers walked up the hill in measured steps, while groups of the Boers wandered around yesterday's battlefield and, smiling kindly at the orderlies, toed to speak to them. But the orderlies were gloomy and silent as they anxiously scurried between the heaps of dead bodies in search of the wounded still showing signs of life.

13. Op. cit., January 1901, No. 1, pp. 53, 55.

"One has to have the emotions of a butcher to look on indifferently at this soul-jarring picture of the battlefield. Even now, when I think of it, it chills my heart. I see the heaped bodies of the English who had tried to hide behind the boulders from the devastating fire of the Boers . . . The unbearable stench and the repulsive sight of dead bodies being stripped and looted, made me leave the battlefield ..."

The majority of the dead were British. According to Augustus, because of their skilful tactics and their intimate knowledge of the terrain, the Boers lost only 35 men, with another 78 wounded.

This victory inspired not only the Boers but the Russian volunteers as well. Augustus wrote: "At that moment none of us doubted the success of our campaign. We were all sure that we would march into Durban as conquerors, hats cocked, after crushing this despicable sea-going race, the people who had invented boxing, and now lyddite¹⁴ and the dum dum bullet on top of it."¹⁵

War memoirs might seem to be all about military action but, strangely enough, many authors cope with truce better than with war. Augustus is equally entertaining writing about either. His accounts of cooking "borsch" made out of hyacinth roots and his endless tea- and coffee-drinking sessions with the Boers convey the unconscious humour of these occasions.

"We would be invited for a cup of coffee to the tent of an honourable Boer," Augustus writes, "and he would ask us:

'Do you people have cows in Russia?'

'Yes, we do.'

'And what about sheep?'

'We have them as well.'

'And what about railways?'

'Yes, we have railways too!'"

Russia must have seemed a strange and exotic country to the Boers, yet Augustus was under the impression that they "treated us, the Russians, with more attention and deference than other foreigners".

There was certainly a lively interest in how these exotic foreigners from this gigantic and distant land came to be alongside the Boers. The Johannesburg newspaper, *The Standard and Diggers' News*, often published information, or rather misinformation, about Russian military preparations, the mobilisation of troops in the Caucasian and Turkestan military regions, the movement of the Russians to Herat, and so on. Such news was read with rapt attention and provoked animated debate

14. A form of high explosive.

15. *Varshavsky Voennyi Zhurnal*, January 1901, No. 1, pp. 57-61; March 1901, No. 2, pp. 248-251.

among both the Boers and the Russians. The Boers were intensely excited at the possibility of Russian intervention in the war and would repeatedly ask the Russians about this prospect.

The Russian volunteers thought this eventuality somewhat unlikely but, cut off from the news, they could not be absolutely sure. They were favourable to the notion of Russian intervention but had no real answer to the question that naturally followed; if it indeed happened, what would they do?

Judging from Augustus's account, the Russian volunteers at the Tugela front got on well together, with a great deal of friendly joshing, but their political views differed drastically, and these political differences surfaced most clearly in these discussions about what they should do if war broke out between Russia and Britain. Augustus felt that he should not, in such an eventuality, be so far from his fatherland, and he should certainly not be a private soldier in a foreign army, for that would do no good for his service record. Lieutenant Nikitin, on the other hand, thought that the most important thing was to fight against Britain, no matter where. Diatropov declared that in South Africa he was fighting for human rights, freedom and equality, and that he would never participate in an imperialist war for foreign territories between Britain and Russia. Young Pavlusha R. did not think about these things at all.

At that point a new Russian volunteer joined Augustus and his friends. This was Fiodor Ivanovich Guchkov, Lieutenant (Sotnik) of the Kuban Cossack Regiment, the son of one of the wealthiest commercial families in Moscow. His brother, Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov, later to become one of the most famous Russian politicians of the early twentieth century, was in South Africa as well, though in a different locality.

Guchkov brought an elderly batman with him from Moscow, Ivan Petrovich. This loyal servant became an object of mirth not only among the Russians and the Boers, but also among the Africans. In spite of the intolerable heat he always wore boots, a red shirt with long sleeves and a warm waistcoat. Ivan Petrovich spoke Russian even to the African servants, rejecting any offers of assistance with interpretation. He refused to call them by their names, substituting these with "Vaniusha" and "Petrusha" (pet names for Ivan and Peter). He was sure that they would understand him - and ultimately they did. Ivan Petrovich cooked food with a deep feeling of self-importance, prefacing his labours with the refrain: "You fight there, and in the meantime I'll cook a beefsteak or a cutlet for you in the best manner."

Such conversations and events filled the long lull in military actions which followed the battle of Spion Kop. The Russian volunteers felt that the Boers had made a major error in not taking full advantage of their

victory and felt disappointed in the strategic abilities of the Boer commanders. Besides, waiting in camp was difficult. "The intolerable heat, the unbearable stench of the intestines of slaughtered cattle and the remains of the food scattered around and, worse than anything else, the swarms of importunate flies: nothing helped against this, neither the smoke of strong Transvaal tobacco, nor the shade of the tents, nor a swim in the river," wrote Augustus.

The Krugersdorp Commando took part in the battle of Vaalkrans on 5-7 February, but its participation was minimal. A few people were sent to help to raise a huge cannon, "Long Tom", to the top of Doornkloof. The rest were kept busy widening and deepening their trenches. And in this, at least, the Russians' admiration for the Boers' skills was unbounded.

"One couldn't even begin to think," wrote Augustus, "of showing off one's knowledge of fortification, no matter how brilliant, before the Boers. Led by an instinctive feeling, they unerringly chose the firing line. The outline of the breastworks was incorporated into the local terrain to such a degree that even after a few steps one could not possibly guess the position of the firing lines of trenches behind the contours and mishaps of the terrain, with its scattered stones and fragments of rocks."¹⁶

From 15 February on the Krugersdorp Commando slept in the trenches, expecting an attack by the British troops from Colenso. But everything stayed quiet. The Krugersdorpers got no news about Roberts's movements on the western front, nor about the lifting of the siege of Kimberley. Then, "all of a sudden, around lunch time on 18 February," wrote Augustus, "General Lukas Meyer galloped towards us at full speed. He quickly summoned our Commandant and Field Cornets, and we heard shouts of: 'Mount the horses! Mount the horses!'"

"The effect was to throw the camp into complete turmoil. The Boers, who had been snoring peacefully a minute before, came running from their tents and dugouts, hastily putting on their rifles and bandoliers, and began driving their horses together. Field Cornets ran around frantically, calling and hurrying the men. The ground shook under the hooves of the horses, driven by Kaffirs from the pasture. Those who had already managed to mount their horses galloped off along the road, whooping as they went, until they disappeared in clouds of red dust. The British noticed the sudden commotion in our camp and opened a rapid fire at our mountain."

16. Op. cit., March 1901, No. 2, pp. 251, 256, 259-261.

finally somebody explained to the Russians that the left flank of the Boer positions had been broken, that the British had reached the Tugela River, and that General Louis Botha had appealed to the Krugers-dorpers for help. This actually heartened the Russian volunteers. Lieutenant Nikitin, who had been pining at the lack of military action, rejoiced: "An offensive at last! Let's go, gentlemen!" Soon, however, they discovered that things were not quite what they had expected. Crossing the Tugela by pontoon bridge, the Russians were shocked by the picture of defeat which lay unfolded before them.

The Battle of Tugela Heights¹⁷

"... Masses of people were crowding on the other bank of the river. Here were our Krugersdorpers among the others. The well-built figure of General Botha on a big white horse dominated the crowd. He was saying something to the crowd, waving his wide-brimmed hat, but his voice was drowned by the incessant howl of animals and the shouts and din of lost men . . .

"The crowd of armed men seemed to be seized by panic and, indeed, a shocking picture of wild and confused flight unfolded before our very eyes . . . This flight from impregnable positions was provoked not by any victory of the English, nor even by their approach, but by fatal news: that Roberts's countless troops had penetrated the Orange Free State, and that Cronje, the great support and buttress of the Boers, 'the Lion of the Transvaal', was thinking of betraying them."

This rumour spread among the Free Staters with the speed of lightning. The result was devastating. The Boers left their trenches, taking the unit transport and cannons, and set off home to defend their farms and families.

In vain did Botha try to persuade and urge them back. They were not listening; his words were interrupted by indignant remarks: "Easy for you to speak, General! Your family is safe. We have women and children there!"

"Both Cronje and Joubert, and all of you are traitors!" roared an old Boer, shaking his sinewy fist. "You have betrayed us to the British!"

Then, Augustus continued, "frequent shooting began in the mountains. The familiar sound of rifle volleys from the British infantry could be clearly heard.

17. According to Mr George A. Chadwick, expert in the military history of Natal, Augustus described the battles of Green Hill and Hart's Hill. We are grateful to Mr Chadwick for this identification, for showing us exactly where some of the events described by Augustus took place and for other assistance.

"Daar kom de khaki! de khaki!". . .

"This mad cry of panic broke out amongst what now seemed thoroughly terrified men - men who, until that moment, had been quite fearless in repulsing one attack after another from an enemy ten times stronger than themselves . . .

"More crowds of retreating Free State Boers came running down from the mountains. Botha's imperious voice began to thunder out again, and the Transvaalers started to rally around him. Here were our Krugers- dorpers and men from the units of Ermelo, Winburg, Carolina, Boksburg and many other districts; even some Free State Boers joined them. The commotion eased a bit. Botha started to speak again. He spoke passionately, self-confidently; his face breathed valour. 'Lead us, General,' hundreds of voices thundered in reply ... And I, a foreigner among these people, felt and understood that gust of inspiration with which a soldier goes I to his death at one nod from his leader.

"I felt somebody's hand on my shoulder. I turned my head and saw my comrades; I saw the same glare in their eyes. We pressed each others' hands in silence.

"Kom an! an!" shouted our Commandant, old Van Wyk, waving his coloured umbrella, with which he never parted, whether on march, or even in battle. We've been told that they'll lead us around the mountains which the British are occupying."

The Krugersdorp Commando did indeed manage to dislodge the British from one of the nearby mountains, but soon they received the I order to retreat.

"I well remember the battle of 24 February," Augustus recalled, "when one column after another, agitating and swaying, advanced upon us in a crescent along the slope of the mountain occupied by the Krugersdorp Commando. The accurate fire of our rapid repeater rifles tore down whole rows from the English columns, but the columns closed up and thickened again, with a host of new men pressing up from behind. It seemed that this terrible avalanche would sweep everything out of its way and crush the handful of bold spirits planted before them in their hastily dug trenches. But these men, bespattered with blood and mud as they were, awaited the British assault quite fearlessly.

"As the attacking enemy mass came within rifle range, they were met with such a hail of fire that the whole mountain was covered with dead bodies. But the untamed torrent of our ferocious enemy did not stop and fresh battalions began to ascend the mountain. The bravest of them came so close that one could see their red faces covered with sweat and their bayonets gleaming in the sun. But once again it never came to hand-to-hand combat: all the efforts of the Irish Brigade were wasted before the

steadfastness of the Boers. The regiment that had attacked our lodgements, the Royal Inniskilling, alone lost more than 300 men, and Buller was forced to seek a truce to recover the killed and wounded. The view of the battlefield was even more terrifying than on Spion Kop ..."

Without food or sleep the Boers, and the Russians with them, held out for four more days. Finally Augustus became so torpid that he was "falling asleep right there under the most withering fire, in a trench heaped with ugly, swollen dead bodies, already growing blue. There was nobody to bury them and there was no need to. Flocks of kites hovered in the sky above and at night one could hear the blood-chilling howl of jackals. In the rare moments of lull we just threw the dead bodies over the breastworks."

Of the 420 Boers who had joined Commander Van Wyk at the Tugela, not more than eighty or ninety remained. Many had been killed but the majority simply dispersed, considering the situation lost.

It was at this point that Pavlusha R. was killed. Augustus wrote that he "died the death of a hero. A lyddite bomb fell right into the trench and mutilated him beyond recognition. His blood and brains splashed onto his comrades, who were lying close by."

Diatropov was wounded and sent to a hospital in Glencoe. Augustus was lightly shell-shocked. Guchkov fell ill.

"On 27 February our last battle began," wrote Augustus. "The mountains shook and groaned with the rumble of bombardment. We lay with our noses in the crumbled rampart of the trenches, suffocating from the pungent smell of lyddite. Sand and fragments of stones and shells poured in on us, furrowing the ground in all directions. We lay crouched like that until the evening, when suddenly the round helmets of the British appeared on the mountains to the left of us, occupied by the Boksburgers. We were outflanked on both sides . . .

"Here and there the Boers fought hand to hand, beating back their attackers with their rifle butts and fists. Some white handkerchiefs appeared. All this lasted for no more than ten minutes. I felt as if I had been drugged ... I do not remember how I tore myself away from the enemy crowd, dizzy with their victory - I had only a rifle butt in my hands. Only seventeen out of eighty Boers got away, N-in and Buzukov among them, saved by some miracle."

Augustus was an honest chronicler. His description of the disorderly retreat and despair of the remains of the Krugersdorp Commando, the Russians among them, is no less detailed and open than his picture of Boer victories.¹⁸

18. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, July 1901, No. 7, pp. 659, 662-663, 669-671.

The end of Augustus's story still left him room for optimism. "It was only in the vicinity of Glencoe that the retreating Boer units halted. Having learnt by phone of the Boer defeat on the Tugela, President Kruger immediately set out by special train from Pretoria to Glencoe. Here, in the open air, he spoke ardently to his men, who crowded closely around him. The passionate words of the venerable old man were not lost upon them and the Boers, who had already begun to recover from the initial shock of their recent defeat, regained their courage."¹⁹

The Russian Krugersdorpers, together with other Russians who had arrived at Glencoe, some from other battlefronts, some from Russia, resolved to go on fighting and organised a Russian detachment there. But that is a different story.

"To Help the Boers a Little"

At war's end pro-Boer volunteers, Russians among them, often got a bad press. They were accused of many sins, including dishonesty, profiteering and general uselessness. It was often noted that few of them had taken part in military action. There were, in truth, some grounds for these allegations. Some volunteers who came to South Africa inspired either by the romantic idea of fighting for freedom, or by compassion for the Boers, were simply scared when faced by the bloody realities of war and, using various pretexts, delayed their departure to the front. Inevitably, perhaps, this odd collection of adventurers included some outright crooks.

Many Russian volunteers, including Augustus, were scathing about the disgraceful behaviour of some of those whom they considered their comrades in arms. Others simply felt that the volunteers served little purpose. "In my opinion," wrote the Russian doctor Anton Sadovsky, for example, "volunteers, with the exception of artillery men, were not particularly useful, and did not deserve any particular gratitude,"²⁰ while another volunteer, a technician called Gringof, used the provincial paper *Saratovsky Dnevnik* to accuse his compatriots in South Africa of drinking, brawling and a general lack of discipline.

Asked how his compatriots had behaved in South Africa, Gringof replied, "Not very well, really not very well! To begin with, on their arrival in the Transvaal they got horses and rifles from the Boers, but the

19. Op. cit., September 1901, No. 9, p. 881.

20. Anton I. Sadovsky. "Vospominaniia o Transvaale i putievyye vpechatleniia. Chitano v Gelsingforskom voiennom sobranii" (Memoirs of the Transvaal and Impressions of Travel There. Presented to the Helsingfors Military Society). *Voienno-meditsinsky Zhurnal*, St Petersburg, May 1902, p. 1518.

very next day these horses were squandered on drink. The same thing would clearly have happened with their rifles, but for the fact that these were not acceptable currency in the pubs . . . Generally speaking, discipline and order among our volunteers were completely lacking. This was understandable - a Russian is used to having formidable bosses and there were none there . . .

"But didn't the Russians fight in battles?"

"Oh, yes, in several, but ultimately their lack of discipline produced a situation in which the Boers simply stopped taking the Russians with them to fight."^{20a}

Lieutenant Colonel Pavel Alexandrovich Stakhovich, a Russian military attache in South Africa, wrote about a young volunteer, Cornet Viskupsky: "An alcoholic. Took hardly any part in military action,"²¹

Another volunteer, Lieutenant Colonel Maximov, replied to similar accusations with his customary grandiloquence on the pages of the St Petersburg *Novoie Vremia*: "Not all Russian volunteers were up to the sacred task of struggling for the great cause of truth and justice. But those few who weren't wisely settled in safe quarters far from the battlefields and, although not seeking glory or pursuing high ideals, they behaved modestly and decently (with two exceptions, and I shall disclose the names of these two when it is necessary to do so). The majority did not disgrace Russia in far-off Africa."²²

This was not the whole truth. Among the volunteers there was, for instance, one Nikolaiev, listed as a civil engineer in the roll call of the volunteers compiled by the Russian Military Attache, Gurko. He was known as a generous and hospitable person and was much admired for bringing a whole unit of Chernogorians (Montenegrians) out to South Africa.

But Nikolaiev was not what he seemed. "Who would have supposed then," wrote Augustus with some bitterness, "that this fighter for the cause who seemed to have money to burn, was actually just a clerk from a commercial institution in Kiev, who had been infatuated by the Boers to such a degree that he had secretly escaped to the Transvaal, carrying somebody else's passport and, as one might expect of such a bold and energetic cashier, a large sum of (stolen) money. Nikolaiev later returned to Russia, and has recently been prosecuted in the Kiev Regional Court."²³

However, on the whole and compared to other volunteer groups, the Russian speakers did not give a bad account of themselves. More than

20a. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, March 1902, No. 3, pp. 217-219.

21. GVIARF. Fund 401, inventory 5, file 308, document 41.

22. *Novoie Vremia*, 6 March 1901.

23. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, January 1902, No. 1, p. 12.

half (125 out of 225) fought in the Boer commandos, which was, of course, the most difficult choice. According to estimates prepared by the British and American correspondents, the majority of the French, Dutch, Scandinavian and German volunteers preferred to enlist in their national units. The Italians and the Americans were divided fifty-fifty between their national units and the Boer units, while the Irish fought only in their national units.²⁴

And Russian casualties were high. Elisaveta Kandyba-Foxcroft mentions just four Russians as having been killed in South Africa, Captains Leo Pokrovsky, Petrov and Duplov and Lieutenant Alexei Ganetsky, Commander of the Russian Corps.²⁵ The latter was, in fact, wounded but not killed. But this list is certainly incomplete.

Of the five Russians who fought with the Krugersdorp commando, for example, three were wounded and one, Pavlusha R., killed. Of the four Russians who served with DanieTheron's Corps of Scouts²⁶ two, Alexander Shulzhenko and Alexander Guchkov, were wounded, the fate of one is unknown and the fourth, Navy Lieutenant Strolman, was killed in battle in July 1900. Strolman's mother wrote from her Moscow suburban home to ask the Transvaal authorities to transfer her son's remains to the old cemetery in Pretoria and her wish was finally carried out in 1905. In 1988 a new memorial was erected on this grave. If we are to believe Colonel Stakhovich (for he was a military attaché with the British and not with the Boer troops) Lieutenant Nikitin of the 16th Miugrel Regiment was killed in a battle near Johannesburg.²⁷

Several Russian Jews were also killed in the war. We know, for example, that Field Cornet Herman Judelowitz was killed near Prieska and that Lukas Heyman died near Ladysmith, and that Commandant Isaac Herman was killed near Colesberg in 1901.²⁸ Quoting data from *The Spectator* (London), one South African author wrote that "the percentage of Jewish soldiers who lost their lives in the war was relatively the highest of all races".²⁹ Given the large number of Russian Jews then flooding into South Africa, it seems likely that quite a few of these Jewish casualties were from this group.

24. Howard C. Hillegas. *With the Boer Forces*. London, Methuen, 1900, p. 257.

25. E. Kandyba-Foxcroft. Op. cit., p. 219.

26. Sophie Izedinova. *A Few Months with the Boers, The War Reminiscences of a Russian Nursing Sister*. Johannesburg, Perskor Publishers, 1977, p. II. We quote from this South African translation of the book.

27. GVIARF. Fund 401, inventory 5, file 308, document 41.

28. Nathan Berger. *Chapters from South African History, Jewish and General*. Johannesburg, Kayor Publishers, 1982, p. 53.

29. Marcia Gitlin. *The Vision Amazing*. Johannesburg, 1950, p. 38.

We only have an account of the deeds and death of one of the Russians killed in South Africa, Leo Pokrovsky.³⁰ Pokrovsky, a twenty-seven-year-old officer of the Warsaw Regiment, is said to have come to South Africa together with a Russian military attaché "to study the tactics of guerrilla warfare as fought by the Boers". He was so impressed by the bravery and steadfastness of the Boers that he made their cause his own. His comrades in arms said that "he had the welfare and the progress of the Boers closer to his heart than many Boers themselves" and that he intended to stay on in the Transvaal should he survive the war "with the people whom he chose and loved more than his own".

Pokrovsky stayed with the Boers after the departure of the majority of volunteers, saying in his broken Afrikaans "*Ek jammer vir bietjie, ek help die bietjie.*" - I am sorry for the *bietjie*, I help the *bietjie*. According to his comrade, Colonel J.F. Jordaan, by the "*bietjie*" Pokrovsky meant the Boers; it was a play on words: "I am sorry for the little (the Boers), I help a little (or the Boers)." Some sources mention that Pokrovsky joined the South Eastern Transvaal Commando where, exceptionally, he was promoted to the rank of captain. Colonel Jordaan, however, stressed that Pokrovsky "did not belong to any particular commando but was always able to find a sufficient number of volunteers for any action he intended to undertake". He was referred to by the Boers as "captain" and sometimes, despite his youth, as "the old Russian captain".³¹ In part this was probably a tribute to his undoubted bravery and selflessness. But it was also because he was a tough professional soldier who did not tolerate any nonsense. According to Jordaan, he would tell his Boers: "You not do what I say, I shoot you dead right now," his revolver already out of the holster.

Many decades later legends about Pokrovsky's bravery and devotion to the Boer cause were still alive. Jordaan recalled how at some point Pokrovsky decided to destroy the railway line near Doringberg, west of Dundee. With only eleven volunteers he captured Waschbank station and made the stationmaster surrender. The same happened with the driver and stoker of the goods train which was at that time pulling into the

30. Our information about Leo Pokrovsky comes mostly from a document, *Kaptain Leo Pokrowsky*, written by Ella Neethling on the basis of the account of Pokrovsky's comrade in arms, Col. J.F. Jordaan and housed at the Utrecht Museum. The document is dated 24 July 1984 but it is not clear what this date pertains to. We are grateful to Professor Johan Boshoff and Mr George Chadwick who provided us with a copy of this document and a photograph of Pokrovsky's monument in Utrecht. Some information on Pokrovsky and the circumstances of his death are contained in E. Kandyba-Foxcroft. Op. cit., pp. 219, 235-236. He is mentioned in *The Times History of the War in South Africa*. Edited by L.S. Amery. London, 1907, vol. 5, p. 118; Hero Tilemann. *Tagebuch eines Deutsche Arztes aus dem Burenkriege*. München, 1908, pp. 154, 161, 185-187; Ian Uys. *South African Military Who'sWho, 1452-1992*. Germiston, Fortress Publishers, 1992, pp. 183-184.

31. Neethling's document states that in the Russian army Pokrovsky was a major. According to our sources he was a lieutenant.

station. Pokrovsky then single-handedly uncoupled the tender, loaded the locomotive with coal and jumped off, leaving it to steam away at full speed. He was hoping that the locomotive would derail the armoured train loaded with British troops which, he knew, was approaching the station. This did not happen, for the runaway locomotive overturned at a sharp corner and there was no time to destroy the line. Before escaping, Pokrovsky and his men managed to capture good horses from a third train (which arrived at the station moments before the troop train) and, adding insult to injury, set fire to the officers' baggage as well.

According to another legend Pokrovsky was once offered a pound by a lady who, upset by the sight of his shabby clothes and worn-out shoes, asked that he buy some clothing for himself with the money. He did not take the present, saying that she had no right to give him money for his private needs; she should use it only for her country's cause. On his sorties Pokrovsky was said to care first for his horses, then for his men's food and accommodation, and only then for himself.

Pokrovsky was killed in a battle of his own devising. He had planned a surprise night attack on the British garrison at Utrecht on Christmas Eve, 1900. The Boers executed the attack with great courage and captured the first stronghold. The British had, however, been forewarned and welcomed the attackers with a hail of bullets. Pokrovsky was somewhere between the first and second strongholds when, as he knelt to fire, a bullet struck him, badly wounding him in the lower part of his body. "I am dying," he said to Jordaan who happened to be next to him, but followed immediately by saying: "No, not dying but badly wounded. Everyone, come back!" The Boers carried him away under heavy fire to a nearby farm, Paardepoort. He died there at 3.45 p.m. on Christmas Day. In his last hours he was nursed by Mrs Gezina Uys, a registered Red Cross nurse, and wife of a local farmer, "Vaal Piet" Uys. A doctor was summoned but Pokrovsky died before he could arrive. Pokrovsky was buried on Uys's farm, Uitzoek.

For many years a group of Pokrovsky's comrades in arms collected money for his memorial. On 10 April 1938 they installed a marble plate for him on the war memorial in the church square at Utrecht and reburied his remains under it. The inscription reads:

To the memory of Capt. Leo Pokrovsky, born in Warsaw, Russia,
fallen at Utrecht 25 December 1900.

He willingly gave his life for our oppressed nation
No one hath greater love than this, that he lay down
his life for his friends.

John, XV, 13.

Erected by his comrades in arms.

Two other Russians, Captains Petrov and Duplov, are said to have died at Utrecht on the same day, 25 December 1900, both casualties of the same battle. However, Pokrovsky's personality must have completely overshadowed his contemporaries' memory of these two compatriots, for nothing is known of them or the circumstances of their death.

Pokrovsky's memory proved to be enduring in South Africa. In 1997 the KwaZulu-Natal Committee for the Commemoration of the Anglo-Boer War suggested that a commemoration dedicated to the foreigners who were involved in the war be held in Utrecht in December 2000 to coincide with the centenary of Pokrovsky's death.³² In Russia Pokrovsky is completely forgotten. Moreover, the only information about him that reached his motherland from South Africa (at least the only information we have found) was highly disapproving of him. Stakhovich wrote in his report to War Minister Alexei Nikolaievich Kuropatkin: "Lieutenant Prokovsky of 189 Belgorod Regiment. Took little part in military action. Reports about him were unfavourable. It seems to me that he has not returned to Russia."³³

Information about the wounded is equally scanty. Kandyba-Foxcroft found only twelve names in the Pretoria State Archives (we spell them according to the contemporary norms of transliteration): Yevgeny Augustus, age 24; Alexander Shulzhenko, age 30; Alexei Diatropov, age 30; Mikhail Yengalychev, age 28; Ivan Nikitin, age 28; Vladimir Semionov, age 25; Vladimir Rubanov, age 25; Fiodor Guchkov, age 38; Victor Busch, age 28; Piotr Kumantsov, age 38; Yevgeny Maximov, age 50; and Sergei Dreyer, age 25.³⁴

But this list, too, is incomplete. Suffice it to mention Alexander Guchkov, who was wounded in July 1900, in the same battle in which Lieutenant Strolman was killed. Guchkov remained lame for the rest of his life.

Several Russians continued to fight on after the outcome of the war had become clear to everyone, and some took part in the guerrilla warfare which characterised the war's drawn-out and bitter end. Captain Shulzhenko, one of the first to come to South Africa, fought for eighteen months, first in the German Detachment, then in De Wet's commando. He was taken prisoner only on 6 April 1901.³⁵

Many Russian volunteers shared the fate of the Boers not only on the battlefields, but in defeat. For some, Alexander Guchkov, Alexander

32. Professor J. G. Boshoff's letter of 15 April 1997 to I. Filatova.

33. GVIARF. Fund 401, inventory 5, file 308, document 41.

34. E. Kandyba-Foxcroft. *Op. cit.*, p. 219.

35. AVPRI. Sredneaziatsky stol (Central Asian Department). File 915, list 96.

Shulzhenko, Yevgeny Augustus, Nikolai Bagration and Otto Bauman among others, this meant incarceration in British prisoner-of-war camps.

One of the Russian military observers, Captain Ziger-Korn, who arrived in South Africa only after the majority of Russian volunteers had already left, heard much about their courage. Colonel Camillo Ricciardi, commander of one of the volunteer units, told him: "Everyone will think about the Russian participation in this war with great respect."³⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Maximov was, as we have seen, far more defensive about the honour of the Russian volunteers, and this means that the record of their military glory in South Africa was chequered. But even the dreadful disasters which lay in wait for those who survived need not blind one to the poignancy of the fate of those Russians who fought hard, fell and even died in this far and foreign field.

36. [Mikhail A, Ziger-Korn]. [*Voina burskaia*] ([The Boer War]) Notebook 2: from 19 August 1900; Notebook 3 from 30 September 1900 to 25 May 1901. Manuscript. State Public Library, St Petersburg Manuscript Department. Fund 1000, Notebook 2, p. 89.

The Volunteers

*What is he looking for in this far-off country
What has he left in his native land? . . .*

MIKHAIL LERMONTOV

Given the excitement which the Anglo-Boer War generated in Russia, it comes as a surprise to discover that it is extremely difficult to find out how many Russian volunteers fought for the Boers in South Africa and who they were.

According to the commonly accepted estimate (by three British and American correspondents) 225 Russian volunteers fought for the Boers. This figure is considered to be the most reliable and is quoted in several authoritative publications.¹

If we are to believe this figure, the Russians constituted approximately one tenth of 2 500 foreign volunteers in South Africa, made up of (in round figures) 650 Dutch, 550 Germans, 400 French, 300 Americans, 225 Russians, 200 Italians, 200 Irish and 150 Scandinavians.²

With very few exceptions the more than two hundred Russians who survived the war must have returned home. Given the extent of pro-Boer sentiment amongst the Russian public and the strength of popular emotion over the war, one might have supposed that these two hundred would become public figures, even heroes, that they would be interviewed and invited to give lectures, and that they would write many books and memoirs about their experiences. At the very least one might expect that there would somewhere exist a list of the names of the volunteers.

In fact this was not the case. There is no complete list of Russian volunteers. Only about four dozen names are mentioned in all sources put together, and little or no information exists even about these men. The rest remain nameless. We simply do not know who they were and what happened to them. It seems odd that they should have disappeared so quietly into oblivion on their return from their heroic adventure.

Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that those historians in South

1. H.C. Hillegas. Op. cit., p. 257; *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol. 7, p. 89; *Voina anglichan s burami. Redaktirovano 2-m biuro frantsuzskogo generalnogo shtaba* (The War between the British and the Boers. Edited by the second Bureau of the French General Staff). Translated from French. St Petersburg, nd [1905], p. 65.

2. H.C. Hillegas. Op. cit., p. 257.

Africa and Russia who have written about the Russian volunteers did not ask themselves who their heroes were, and why the majority of them have disappeared so mysteriously. We have for a long time tried to resolve this mystery and think that we have found at least some answers.

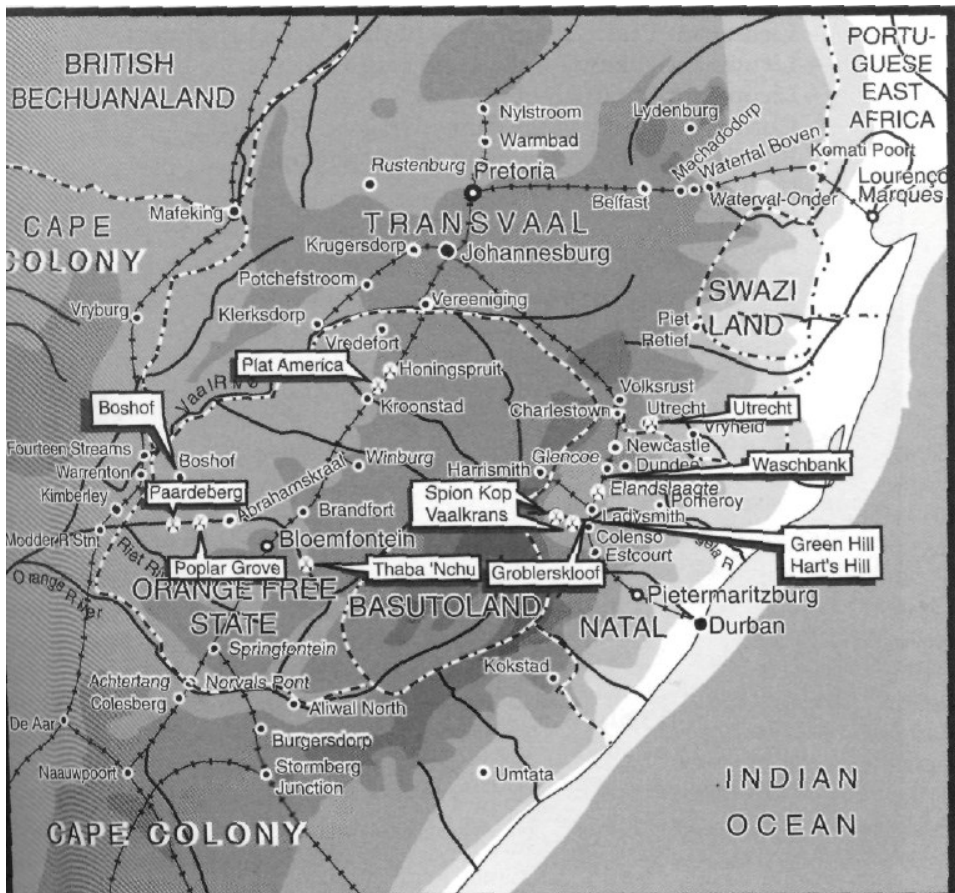
The Mystery of the Russian Volunteers

The main source of information about the Russian volunteers is the report by the Russian Military Attaché to the Boer republics, Vasily Iosifovich Romeiko-Gurko, written after his return from South Africa. The report is very long (340 pages), but the volunteers feature as little more than a footnote in it. Gurko was supposed to collect data on any useful new developments in military strategy, tactics and technology. He did not consider it his job to collect information about the volunteers and only 25 of their names appear in his list, mostly of officers. Gurko lists their surnames only and makes almost no comment about them.³

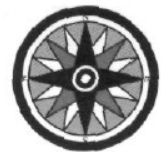
Here is his list:

- Lieutenant Shulzhenko of a mine-laying company;
- Second Lieutenant Arnoldov of the Buzuluk Reserve Battalion;
- Captain Yedrikhin, graduate of the Academy of the General Staff;
- Lieutenant Augustov (Augustus) of the Warsaw Reserve Regiment;
- Lieutenant Pokrovsky of the same regiment;
- Captain F. Guchkov of the Kuban Cossack Forces on special furlough from his regiment;
- Lieutenant (V.) Nikitin of the 37th Yekaterinburg Regiment;
- Lieutenant Dreyer of the 38th Tomsk Regiment;
- Lieutenant Ganetsky of the Imperial Life Guards (in reserve);
- Captain Kraft of the Imperial Life Guards;
- (Count) Komarovsky of His Imperial Majesty's Mounted Life Guards Regiment;
- Colonel Maximov, retired;

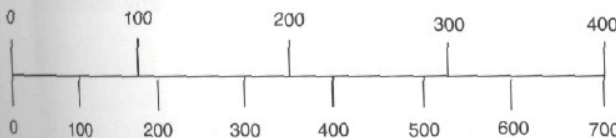
3. Vasily I. [Romeiko] Gurko. *Voina Anglii s Yuzhnoafrikanskimi respublikami. Otchet kowandirovannogo ... k voiskam Yuzhnoafrikanskikh respublik. Voенно-uchenyy komitet Glavnogo Shtaba* (The War Between England and the South African Republics. Report of the commissioned . . . to the troops of the South African Republics. Military Academic Committee of the Main Staff), Sankt-Peterburg, 1901, pp. 63, 303 (Supplement 8).



Russian Volunteers in South Africa 1899-1900



★ = battle



- Lieutenant Prince Yengalychev of the Mingrel Regiment;

- Lieutenant Nikitin, of the same regiment;
- Lieutenant Strolman of the Navy;
- Cornet Viskupsky of the Sumy Dragoon Regiment;
- Ensign in reserve Avtokratov, civil topographer;
- Civil engineer Nikolaiev;
- Dr Shill;
- Prince Bagration-Mukhransky;
- Sandjakov;
- Semionov;
- Rukert;
- A. Guchkov (brother of the captain);
- Nadborsky, district inspector of the St Petersburg Police;
- Savich, member of the Saratov City Court.

It proved extremely difficult to get very far beyond this mere list. In the Archives of Military History we found the service records of some of the officers mentioned by Gurko. We found out, for example, that Alexander Guchkov was an officer of the Life Guards Grenadier Yekaterinoslav Regiment; that Arnoldov's first names were Fiodor Fiodorovich and Yedrikhin's, Alexei Yefimovich; and that the latter served in the 117th Infantry Yaroslav Regiment. We established that Pokrovsky and Augustus had served in the 139th Infantry Belgorod Regiment before they were moved to the Warsaw Regiment, and that in South Africa Augustus was finally taken prisoner by the British. There are several hundred files of Lieutenants Nikitin in the archive, but we finally found out which two of them had been mentioned by Gurko and then which one of these two had been in the Krugersdorp Commando with Augustus. This turned out to have been Vasily Nikitin who had served in the 37th Infantry Yekaterinburg Regiment, while the other Nikitin, Ivan, had served in the 16th Mingrel Regiment together with Prince Yengalychev. We also discovered for the first time a new name among the Russian military observers in South Africa, Captain Shcheglov, military engineer from the Engineering Academy.⁴

These facts, however, were not of much use, most of them pertaining to the period before the Anglo-Boer War, when the officers in question had retired. Maximov's service record, for example, ends in 1884, that of Fiodor Ivanovich Guchkov in 1891, and the one of Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov in 1887. Moreover, service records seldom gave any information beyond promotions, leaves and retirements.

4. GVIARF. Fund 488, inventory 1, file 1451; fund 401, inventory 5, file 308, etc.



1. Captain Towse shoots at Lt Col Maximov at point-blank range
(courtesy of Africana Library in Johannesburg).



2. A poster of the exhibition "Transvaal, Transvaal, My Country" devoted to the historical ties between Russia and Southern Africa and named after the first words of a popular Russian song from the beginning of this century. The majority of the exhibits came from Apollon Davidson's private collection and library. Most of our illustrations also originate from this source.



3. A famous picture of the British trench on Spion Kop taken on the morning after the battle.



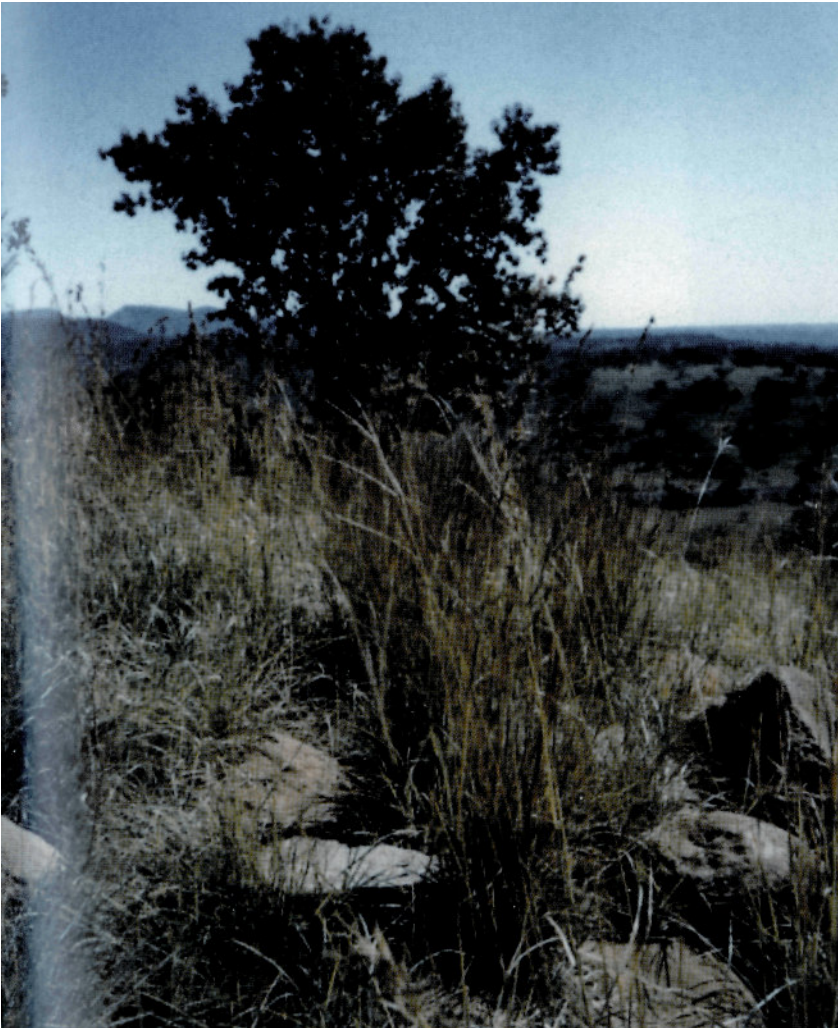
4. The same place now, turned into a memorial.



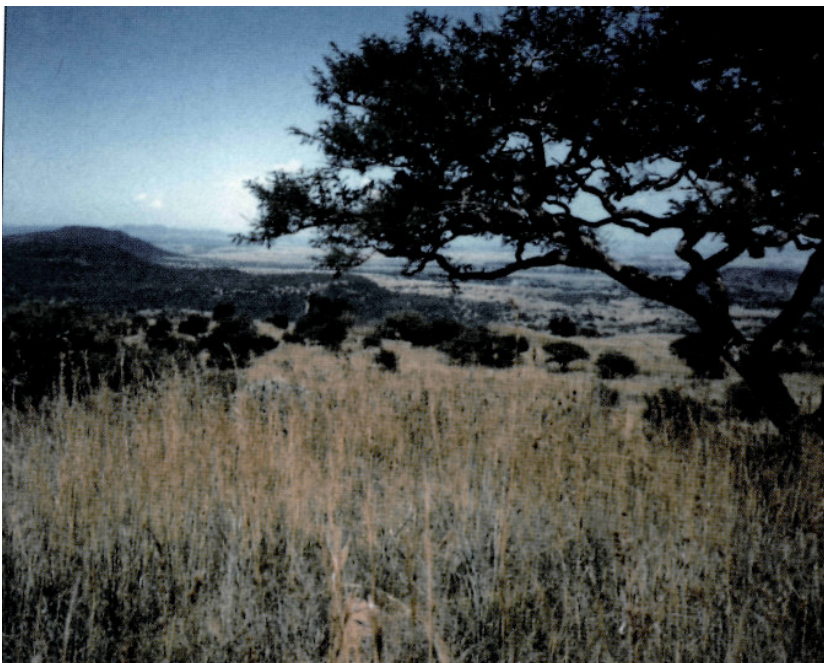
5. "The British are only a hundred or a hundred and fifty paces from us. In the crowd of yellow-helmeted men one can see some confusion . . ." The end of the British trench on Spion Kop closest to the Boers. According to Mr George Chadwick, expert in military history of KwaZulu-Natal, it is this particular spot that is described by a Russian volunteer Lieutenant Yevgeny Augustus. The Boers attacked from where the bushes are in the picture.



6. Mr George Chadwick shows us the direction of the advance of the British troops on Hart's Hill



7. "...One column after another, agitating and swaying, advanced upon us in a crescent along the slope of the mountain occupied by the Krugersdorp Commando. . . It seemed that this terrible avalanche would sweep everything out of its way and crush the handful of bold spirits planted before them in their hastily dug trenches ..." A Boer trench at the top of Hart's Hill - the spot where, according to Mr Chadwick, the battle, wrongly described by Yevgeny Augustus as the battle of Pieter's Hill, took place. One can still see the traces of shrapnel on the stones.



8. A view from the Boer positions at the top of Hart's Hill onto its slope along which the British troops advanced. This is what Yevgeny Augustus and other Russian volunteers from the Krugersdorp Commando must have been looking at during the attack (except for the trees).

9. A marble plate commemorating a Russian volunteer Captain Leo Pokrowsky. It was installed by his comrades in arms on the war memorial in Utrecht.





10. The memorial on the grave of a Russian volunteer, Navy Lieutenant Boris Strolman at the old cemetery in Pretoria. Near the memorial are Professors CJ. (Johan) Barnard and A.J. (At) van Wyk who gave us this photograph.



11. The Russian Boer general Lt Col Yevgeny Maximov on his return from the Anglo-Boer War, in the uniform of his own design.

Memoirs also turned out not to be very helpful. As we have already mentioned, only one Russian volunteer, Lieutenant Augustus, published detailed memoirs. Another, Vladimir Rubanov, published a small pamphlet.⁵ Captain V.T. Aip also wrote a pamphlet about the war, but it does not contain any personal impressions or observations.⁶ A small booklet, *How I Was a Volunteer in the Transvaal*, was published pseudonymously in Kiev by "Maria Z."⁷

In addition one comes across several - usually very brief - volunteers' memoirs in newspapers and magazines of the time. The magazine *Priroda i Liudi* published two pages of the war memoirs of Prince Mikhail Nikolaievich Yengalychev, for example.⁸ But there were thousands of newspapers and magazines in Russia at that time, published not only in St Petersburg and Moscow but in provincial cities and towns as well. It would be impossible even to try to look through any meaningful part of them at random.

Elisaveta Foxcroft found two lists of names of Russian volunteers in the State Archives in Pretoria and one more in another source, but only eight names in these lists are not already in Gurko's list (Piotr Kumantsov, Vladimir Rubanov, Captain Aip, Victor Nertavsky, Konstantin Lapidevsky, Adam Savetsky, Captain Petrov and Captain Duplov.⁹ This poor harvest is not surprising; the administration of the Boer republics registered volunteers only during the first two months of the war. One volunteer, Count Pavel Alexandrovich Bobrinsky, a descendant of Catherine the Great, joined the Russian Red Cross Detachment.¹⁰ There is yet another list of volunteers in the Russian Archives, that of Colonel Stakhovich, but it contains only fifteen names, none of them new.¹¹

Who were the remaining 190 volunteers?

We traced several categories of Russian volunteers who did not get into any records. Vladimir Rubanov mentions in his pamphlet that 'there were Russian peasants' in the Russian detachment, "who had settled in South Africa long before the war".¹² Augustus also reports that the Russian detachment included several Lithuanian émigrés, peasants

5. Vladimir Rubanov. *Ot Peterburga do Pretorii* (From Petersburg to Pretoria). St Petersburg, Printers of the *Stroitel* magazine, 1900.

6. V.T. Aip. *Voina Anglii s burami*. (War of England with the Boers). St Petersburg, 1901.

7. Maria Z. *Kak ia byla dobrovol'tsem v Transvaale* (How I Was a Volunteer in the Transvaal). Kiev, Progress Printers, 1901.

8. *Priroda i Liudi*. 1900, No. 48. Reprint from the publication in the newspaper *Rossia*.

9. E. Kandyba-Foxcroft. Op. cit., pp. 218-219.

10. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., p. 5.

11. GVIARF.Fund 401, inventory 5, file 308, document 41.

12. V. Rubanov. Op. cit, p. 39.

from the environs of Kovno (now Kaunas), who had settled in South Africa two or three years before the war.¹³ It is not clear whether the two authors meant one and the same group of people, or two different groups, and whether all these peasants were Russians, Lithuanians, or perhaps Lithuanian Jews. Whoever they were these peasants were not registered anywhere and remained - with, perhaps, one exception - nameless,

One of the main problems with the statistics of Russian volunteers was, of course, the term "Russians". This was interpreted differently by British and American journalists on the one hand, and by Russian officials on the other. For the journalists "Russians" were not only those volunteers who came to the theatre of war directly from Russia, but also émigrés from the Russian Empire, particularly those who had settled in South Africa not long before the war. The approach of the British authorities was very much the same. They deported back to Russia recent émigrés who had assisted the Boers.¹⁴ The absolute majority of these émigrés were Jews.

Russian Jews generally felt equally alien to the Boers and the British. During the war about three thousand of them went back to Russia and about ten thousand moved to safer areas of South Africa.¹⁵ But there were some who joined the British forces and many fought for the Boers (the majority in the Boer commandos) or helped them as much as they could in other ways. It is worth noting, given the later history of Afrikaner antisemitism, that these people had fled to South Africa from the pogroms in Russia and that in assisting the Boer cause they ran the risk of being deported to the country from which they had fled.

The Russian bureaucracy did not recognise Jewish émigrés as compatriots. A South African author wrote: "While other nationals had the protection of their respective governments, the Russian Jews in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State Republics had no one to whom to turn. The Tsarist government refused to protect their Jewish nationals."¹⁶

Some Russian Jews would have liked to join the detachment formed by Russian volunteers under Lieutenant Ganetsky, but they were not

13. *Varshavsky Voeny Zhurnal*, January 1902, No. 1, p. 13.

14. See, for example: "Russian Residents in South Africa During the South African War" (quotations from the Criminal Investigations Department, Pretoria 22/02/1901, and from the List of Deportation Orders, January - May 1901, Vol. 295, pp. 71-77). Foxcroft archive, Manuscript Department, UNISA Library; N. Berger. *Op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

15. N. Berger. *Op. cit.*, p. 44-45.

16. *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

admitted. The Russian Commando "was careful to exclude" what it called the "Russian Border Israelites".¹⁷

Those Russian Jews who fought in Boer commandos were not included in any Russian reports or lists of volunteers. However, other volunteers, foreign observers and the Boers themselves considered them to be Russian and classified them as such. When in 1943 Jan Smuts spoke to the Soviet Consul General N.Ya. Demianov he mentioned that some Russians who had fought in the ranks of the Boer army during the Anglo-Boer War spoke to the Boers in their own language.¹⁸ These could have been none other than Russian Jewish émigrés - or else Russian citizens of Dutch origin.

Little is known about the Russian Jewish volunteers and our information about them is scanty. We came across the odd name and a story here and there but nothing systematic. Here are some of these names and stories.

- Herman Judelowitz, promoted to the rank of field cornet;
- Sasha Snyman, known to the Boers just as "Jan Snyman die Jood" (the Jew);
- Commandant Isaac Herman;
- Lukas Heyman;
- Otto Bauman of Bloemfontein;
- I. Golding, who fought at Derdepoort;
- Ivan Levisieur;
- Solomon Sorsky and Aaron Pinkus, who were with the Winburg Commando;
- Commandant Kaplan from the Northern Transvaal;
- J. Frankel and Louis Egnos from Pretoria;
- Markus Judell from Johannesburg.

A number of Russian Jews served in the Netherlands Commando, participating in one of the earliest and bloodiest battles of the war, at Elandsplaagte.

"Jackals" and "Wolf" - sixteen-year-old Josef Segal and his friend Wolf Jacobson (both had come from the same little town of Pilten in Lithuania) - became a legendary pair when they served as scouts under

17. Dian Cammack. *The Rand at War 1899-1902, The Witwatersrand and the Anglo-Boer War*. London, James Currey etc., 1990, p. 55.

18. Diary of the Consul General Cd. N. Ya. Demianov. Cape Town. Entry of 9 March 1943. No. 37. AMIDRF. Fund 06, inventory 6, file 58, dossier 801, lists 1-2. We are grateful to the Moscow Africanist Rufina Viatkina for drawing our attention to this quotation and for other invaluable assistance.

Generals Hertzog and Christiaan de Wet, Segal accompanying Hertzog on his famous raid into the Cape Colony. "Because of his skill, the General picked Joseph for many secret tasks, and before long he became an important aide of General De Wet," wrote one observer. After the war De Wet wrote a certificate for the "Jackals": "This is to certify that I know young Mr Joseph Segal well and that during the recent war he performed his duty as a burgher faithfully and bravely."¹⁹

Despite the decision of the Russian detachment not to allow the Jews to join, Russian Jews treated the other Russians who came to fight for the Boers as their compatriots and tried to assist them in every possible way. Augustus mentioned, for instance, that on leaving Pretoria he and his friends had "met several intelligent Jews at the railway station, who spoke Russian well. They were sincerely glad, having recognised us as I their former compatriots, and wished us to return with victory. When we I entered the train, we found baskets in our seats with juicy peaches, bananas and oranges, and several boxes of fine cigars."²⁰

The person most useful to the Russian group in the Krugersdorp Commando was a Russian Jew who had left Russia about ten years earlier. "Now, as a naturalised Boer, he was defending his new motherland," wrote Augustus. This Russian speaker knew the situation well and spoke good Dutch. He often explained to Augustus and his friends what was going on.²¹ I

A Russian Jew, Griunshtein, was the son of a wealthy trader from Libava who had left his family and high school several years before the war. Inspired by the novels of Mayne Reid and Fenimore Cooper, he ran away to America in the hold of a British ship. After sailing for three years as a ship's boy, he deserted ship in Cape Town and arrived penniless in Johannesburg. There he found a job in the mines and made a comfortable living but, once the war was declared, became one of the first to join the I German Corps. In Glencoe he met a group of Russians and, in spite of the I ban on Jews, became one of the founders of the Russian Corps, though he I continued to dream of making a million and returning to Libava.²²

Another prominent Russian Jewish pro-Boer was Benzion Aaron, a wealthy man and Paul Kruger's personal friend. During the war he formed the Jewish Ambulance Corps which served on the front line at Elandsplaagte and on many other battlefields, helping the wounded on both Boer and British sides.²³ "Mr Aaron was one of the most notable 1

19. N. Berger. Op. cit., pp. 49, 50, 53.

20. Ye. F. Augustus. *Vospominaniia uchasmika anglo-burskoi voiny 1899-1900 gg.*, p. 38.

21. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, January 1901, No. 1, p. 55.

22. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, September 1901, No. 9, pp. 884-885; January 1902, No. 1, p. 11.

23. N. Berger. Op. cit., pp. 38, 40, 49-50, 53-54.

members of the Red Cross," wrote the Russian nursing sister Sophia Izedinova, "and, using his vast fortune, he established whole depots of material necessary to the Boers, as well as equipping ambulances." He showed much warmth to Russian doctors and nurses. "Towards us," wrote Izedinova, "Mr Aaron was the embodiment of kindness."²⁴

It is sad that we know so little about these Russian Jewish pro-Boers who were clearly a considerable phenomenon, but at least we have rescued this whole category from being left out of the ranks of Russian volunteers. However, it was not only the Jews who are not mentioned in any reports or academic writing. For different reasons several other groups of Russian volunteers were either silenced or forgotten.

One shadowy group consisted of those volunteers who did not return to Russia from South Africa, but either stayed there or went on to other countries. Given the conditions of the time in Russia and the adventurous disposition of the volunteers, it could be a sizable category. One such person mentioned by the South African writer Eric Rosenthal was Lewe, born in the early 1880s in the suburbs of Kovno in Lithuania. Leopold Lewe spent his early childhood in Koenigsberg, Germany, and then lived in the old Russian town of Oryol. His father, Herman Lewe, was a well-known banker who bore the hereditary title of "Honourable", at that time of considerable importance, and was a partner in the famous banking firm of Poliakov in the German city of Memel. His uncle on his mother's side, surnamed Lipschitz, was also a banker in Oryol and he too bore the title of "Honourable". "We belonged to the little 'aristocracy' among the Russian Jewry," Leopold Lewe noted wryly, "who, though others might suffer, enjoyed the privileges of wealth."

At the age of sixteen Leopold was admitted to the Cadet Corps, after which he became a lieutenant in one of the privileged Hussar detachments. Lewe and his fellow hussars were utterly gripped by the unfolding struggle between the Boer republics and England and they devoured all the news they could get. At the same time their instructors were stressing the military significance of the battles of Elandslaagte, Colenso and Stormberg. Many of the young cadets - Lewe amongst them - became restless and eager to enlist with the Boers.

Together with two other young officers Lewe managed to get leave on the pretext of visiting the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris and headed straight to South Africa in what, for him, passed as disguise. "I did not look at all soldierly with my coat and hat, walking stick and gloves," recalled Lewe. At a small station in Natal they met a Dutch builder who

24 S. Izedinova. *Op. cit.*, p. 170.

helped them through the Boer lines. "All three enlisted," wrote Rosenthal, "but lost sight of each other in the confusion of war, Lewe going with his commando through the Free State and later on through the Transvaal. The burgers treated him as one of themselves." Lewe's commando frequently held up British trains and confiscated their ammunition.²⁵

After the war Lewe stayed on in South Africa. He enjoyed unusually propitious circumstances, for his sister had already settled down in the Cape Colony before the war. Leopold stayed with her and her husband in Graaff-Reinet, then went to the Transvaal and began prospecting. In 1927 he formed a syndicate, African Diamonds Ltd., with a capital of £55 000. He went on to make a fortune through diamond mining in the Vaal valley, finally returning back to Cape Town, where Eric Rosenthal drew a word picture of him in his later years. "If you know Cape Town, then you have probably seen him, a dignified elderly gentleman, tall and stiff-collared. Year after year he has occupied the same office in St George's Street. Leopold Lewe is familiar among diamond seekers, treasure seekers, philatelists, art dealers and theosophists."²⁶

Lewe's decision to stay on was not unique. Evidently, it was easy for volunteers to get citizenship or resident status. "During their stay in Pretoria my comrades in arms made full use of the Government's proposal," noted Augustus, not without irony. "They found the office of the Pretoria Landdrost and fulfilled all the necessary formalities. With one stroke of a pen they became owners of the fateful Stemmrecht that Chamberlain had been working for since 1895 and that served as a pretext for war."²⁷

But we do not know how many followed this route - there are mere hints dropped here and there in our sources, such as the medical assistant of the Russian Red Cross detachment who announced to his colleagues that he was not going home with them, but returning to the Transvaal where he had been offered a job as a doctor.²⁸

Another notable figure among this group of Russian volunteers was Nikolai Yevgrafovich Popov, a well-known pilot and the subject of a fullscale (1983) biography. Popov was an intriguing figure. Originally a graduate of the Agricultural Institute, he never farmed and was a wan-

25. Eric Rosenthal. *River of Diamonds*. Cape Town, Howard Timmins, [nd], pp. 93-95, 105-109.

26. E. Rosenthal. Op. cit., pp. 93-95, 105-109.

27. *Varshavsky Voennoy Zhurnal*, June 1902, No. 6, p. 553.

28. Sergei Ya. Chistovich. "Meditsynskaia pomoshch v Transvaale." Doklad, chitanny na torzhestvennom zasedanii v pamiat N.I. Pirogova 23 noiabria 1900 g. - Otdelnyy ottisk (Medical Aid in the Transvaal. Paper presented at the meeting in commemoration of N. I. Pirogov on 23 November 1900 - Reprint). *Bolnichnaia gazeia Boitkina*, St Petersburg, M. Stasiulevich, 1901, p. 7.

derer, even an adventurer. His biographer wrote that Popov's "participation in the Anglo-Boer War was a kind of a visiting card for him, opening all doors and winning him high prestige". His South African military experience helped him to get a position as correspondent of the St Petersburg newspaper *Rus* on the battlefronts of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.²⁹ He took samples of khaki fabric with him there and showed them to the Commander in Chief of the Russian army, General Kuropatkin.

Popov did not go to South Africa directly from Russia. He had had problems with the Russian authorities and left for Europe before the Anglo-Boer War broke out. After the war he went to France and Switzerland and only then back to Russia. He stayed there for four years only, from 1904 to 1908, and then went to study aeronautics in France. In 1929 he committed suicide in Cannes. Together with other foreign citizens who lived in Russia and volunteered to go to South Africa, Popov was omitted from all records.

There were some foreigners among those who went to fight in South Africa from Russia. One of them was, we know, John Edward Rodmore, later known as Millins. His father was the British Consul in St Petersburg and the representative of a London jewellery firm which supplied the Russian royal family. Rodmore-Millins spent his childhood and youth in Russia and considered it to be his country. He did not, however, share the Russian infatuation with the Boers and fought on the side of the British. In his reminiscences of the war he often refers to his Russian experience.³⁰

We had thought that other foreign citizens permanently residing in Russia or Russian citizens of German and Dutch origin might have volunteered to fight on the side of the Boers, but there had been no proof of this until we discovered two lists, one English and one Russian, of the Russian prisoners of war in the British camps. Significantly, the English list obscurely refers to the prisoners as "belonging to the Russian Empire", not as Russians, while the Russian list mentions just "prisoners" without any definitions.

Here is the combined list: on St Helena - Yakov Yakovlevich Prede, Ernst Ewert Lindberg, Johannes Rank, Jacob Johanson, Mats Nielson, Johan Nilas Wiklund, Simon Backman (or Buchman), J. Mikkelson, Jan Nyman, Isak Erikson, Herman Johanson, Eric Johanson, Prince Nikolai

29. V.N. Sashonko. *Kolomiazhsky ippodrom* (Kolomiagi Hippodrome). Leningrad, Leningrad Publishing House, 1983, p. 16.

30. M.D. Bingham. *John Rodmore Goes Abroad*. Manuscript. Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

Bagrations-Mukhransky; in Ceylon - Yudel Pline, Ilya Rubinshtein, Mikhail Sheinker, Hirsh Yavshits, Vasily Rukert (the latter is marked as "returned to Russia under his own steam"); in Cape Town - Mirovich, Geiman, M.G. Vainer, S. Vainer, Abram Nurok, Matyn Dravnek (or Johan Yanson); in India - Alexander Nikolaievich Shulzhenko; in Predeport (this spelling from the original text could be a mistake for Vredefort) road camp - Mordecai Pinkhusovich Fridgut; on the Bermuda islands - five prisoners (no names are mentioned except one, yet another Vainer, who had gone mad).³¹

This list is of course far from complete, but we think that it may be more representative of the collective image of a Russian volunteer than Gurko's list. Only three names from this list are mentioned in other sources, those of Bagration, Shulzhenko and Rukert. All the names except Bagration and Shulzhenko are Jewish, German and Scandinavian, which confirms our interpretation of the mystery of the majority of the "missing" Russian volunteers.

Finally, there were a number of East Europeans among the volunteers who were sometimes erroneously regarded as Russians by the Boers because of their tendency to congregate with the Russians and socialise with them. Thus our Bulgarian colleagues have provided us with the letters of a Bulgarian volunteer called Kolarov who, together with several Russians, fought at Ladysmith and then, together with them and another Bulgarian, Buzukov, found himself at Glencoe. Augustus met these Bulgarians there and mentions them in his memoirs.³² They were among those Russians who discussed the formation of a Russian Detachment. Kolarov wrote to a friend in Sofia who gave his letters to the editors ; of a Sofia newspaper, *Narodnoprava*. For some reason Kolarov's first letter was banned by the censors but the rest were published. Whatever a romantic illusions Kolarov may have started with, his letters make it quite clear that these had soon been dispelled: "War is an awful thing," he wrote in his second letter. "In the environs of Ladysmith when it was quiet at nights I could not sleep and all the horrors of war, all the misfortunes that it brings passed in front of my eyes . . . But as the fight begins I lose all humanity, my eyes burn and I strain to be in the attack."³³

Statistics in Russia have never been particularly good, so it is not really surprising that in the case of Russian volunteers in the Anglo-Boer ; War there was no serious attempt to maintain any kind of records.

31. AVPRI. Fund II Department, I-5, 1895, inventory 929, file 12, lists 4, 161.

32. *Varshavsky Voenny Zhurnal*, September 1901, No. 9, p. 886.

33. *Narodni Prava* (Sofia), 20 June 1900, No. 68.

Government officials were interested mainly in officers and representatives of other "useful" professions such as "civil engineers", "civil topographers" and so on; thus the contents of Gurko's list. Jewish and other émigrés from Russia, foreigners who went to South Africa from Russia, as well as Russians who went there from other countries or did not return do not appear on any official lists. They were useless to the state and thus ignored. Some names filtered through only in the lists of prisoners of war, the reason, no doubt, being that the original lists were made by the British and not by the Russian officials.

Anton Chekhov wrote, "Russia is a bureaucratic country" - and this explains a lot. The majority of volunteers were not sent to the South African war by any official body and did not fit into the Procrustean bed of bureaucratic records. Those who could not be classified failed to feature in official lists.

Our vigorous search for the identities of these nameless volunteers sometimes resulted in long and juicy stories, sometimes in fragments of information without either a beginning or an end, but in most cases only in an odd name without any story behind it at all. Samples of our findings will introduce the reader to some of the shadowy figures among the Russian volunteers and help to form a more colourful picture of our search.

A long time ago we came across a booklet, *From Petersburg to Pretoria*, published by one Rubanov in 1900 and featuring various buildings and street scenes of Johannesburg and Pretoria but with almost no mention of the war. The booklet begins: "On 1 January engineer V.N. Semionov and I set off from Petersburg" - but there is, after that, no more information either about the author or about Semionov. Semionov (Semenov) was also mentioned by Gurko but there were neither his first names nor initials nor any further data about him. The trail stopped there until one day an acquaintance told us that he knew Semionov's family. This led us to Semionov's daughter, Svetlana Vladimirovna Belousova, who told us that her father, Vladimir Nikolaievich Semionov, had indeed been in the Transvaal with Rubanov whose first name, it transpired - it had not been mentioned in his book - was also Vladimir.

Rubanov, it emerged, became mentally ill and died back in 1910, but Semionov had outlived his friend by half a century, only dying in 1960 at the age of 86. In the early 1930s he had been Moscow's main architect, later heading the General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow and the Greater Moscow Project. For many years he was Professor of Architecture at various Moscow tertiary institutions and in his later years Academician of the Academy of Architecture and Director of the Institute of Urban Planning. Semionov had, in fact, been a moderately famous man. As early as 1904 he had won an architectural competition

for the construction of the opera and ballet theatre in Yekaterinoslav - a beautiful building which still stands. Indeed, Semionov's name was found in various Soviet encyclopaedias, but his South African connection was effectively omitted.

Augustus mentions Semionov in his memoirs but only in passing (he was among the founders of the Russian Detachment) and Semionov's family was not much help in describing his participation in military actions. However, two episodes from their father's South African adventures stuck in their memory. We relate these as they were told to us and for what they are worth. The family told us that on his arrival in the Transvaal Semionov swapped his rifle for a good horse, called it "Pugach" (toy pistol in Russian) and trained it. Pugach proved very useful but, improbably, was stolen during the ball which the British organised for the Boers after the signing of the peace and which, even more improbably, Semionov attended. Semionov told his family that he saw Winston Churchill there. I

After this Semionov and Rubanov went "to hunt the lions", their undertaking ending up without much success since the lions obviously avoided them and they only heard the howl of jackals. Meanwhile, their group of volunteers returned home. Their colleagues from the Institute of Civil Engineering decided that they had been killed (Semionov's grandson had a newspaper cutting announcing this news) and "honoured their memory by standing". Their return, Semionov used to laugh, was "honoured by lying": the party in their honour got completely drunk.

Perhaps it was not by chance that Semionov satisfied his children's and grandchildren's curiosity with such jokes. The political climate of Stalin's era was not particularly healthy for a very senior Soviet official to boast about his military adventures in a foreign country at the service of one "imperialist" nation against another, side by side with tsarist officers. Semionov was not a coward having even quarrelled with Stalin's main ideologue, Zhdanov, losing, as a result, some of his highest positions, but the Transvaal story was a bit too dangerous and the risk was unnecessary. He could not conceal the fact that he was in South Africa, but might have consciously preferred to speak about lions, horses and nature, avoiding any discussion of what he actually did there. Many Soviets, even ordinary citizens, let alone high-ranking officials, had such "blank spots" in their biographies.

Svetlana Vladimirovna told us that in spite of his full and interesting life Semionov never forgot his youthful adventures in the Transvaal. "Even if he had wanted to forget the Transvaal," said Svetlana Vladimirovna, "we, the children, wouldn't let him. Even on the eve of the First World War we were still singing:

Mummy, buy me a cannon,
Daddy, buy me a drum.
I'll go and join the Boers
To vanquish the British."

Even on his golden wedding anniversary, when an amateur play about his life was staged by friends, several scenes were devised of his adventures in the Transvaal. And when in 1947 a captured German film *The Transvaal in Flames*³⁴ was shown, he immediately went to watch it with his grandson.

Another story came from the memoirs of the popular Russian writer Konstantin Paustovsky who described his uncle and godfather, Iosif Grigorievich Vysochansky, a veteran of the Anglo-Boer War. Vysochansky used to regale the enraptured children of the family, Paustovsky among them, with stories of his dramatic experiences in South Africa. He was obviously a bold spirit and it comes as no surprise to learn that he got involved in the 1905 Russian Revolution on the side of the workers and had to leave the country.³⁵ Vysochansky was a lieutenant and we looked for his service record, but could not find it.

From a rare contemporary publication about the First Russian State Duma (Parliament) we found out that one of the deputies, Ivan Kirillovich Zabolotny, "participated in the Boer war as a volunteer".³⁶ Zabolotny was a peasant from the Ukraine and may well have been one of the Russian volunteers mentioned by Rubanov. Another name, that of Alexander Magnusovich Essen, was mentioned to us by old Bolsheviks.

In 1966 the Urals writer Oleg Koriakov published a novel *Strange General* about Piotr Kovaliov and his friend Dmitry Borozdin, both of whom, according to the author, were volunteers in the Anglo-Boer War. The author wrote that the idea of the novel was prompted to him by one A.S. Miakishev who told him that he had seen Kovaliov's South African diary, made notes from it and in 1955 published a story on the basis of it. Miakishev then returned the diary to the owner who donated it to the local archives. Koriakov found Miakishev's publication in which South Africa occupied one and a half pages but did not find any trace of the diary either in the local archives or in the private archive of the owner

34. German film *Oom Kruger*, one of many seized by the Soviet troops in Germany at the end of World War II and shown in Russia after the war.

35. Konstantin Paustovsky. *Dalekie gody. Povest o detstve i yunosti* (Remote Years. A Story of My Childhood and Youth). Moscow-Leningrad, 1946, pp. 42-47.

36. *Pervaiia Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia дума* (The First Russian State Duma). Ed. by N. Pruzhansky, St Petersburg, 1906, p. 152.

who had by that time died. Did the diary exist? Mjakishev's story leaves the impression of being based on an authentic source.³⁷

When the Good Hope Society was formed in Moscow in 1991 to promote ties between Russian and South African academics it stirred up enough interest to produce several letters to us about the volunteers. Sometimes, even in very remote Russian towns, people had heard about the volunteers or met them. Thus, for example, one Valery Olegovich Sevriukov wrote from Izhevsk in Udmurtia that in June 1962 he had met an old Boer war volunteer in his native town. The old man had shown him a picture of himself as a volunteer, making a great impression on Sevriukov, then a twelve-year-old boy. Sadly, he remembered only his hero's first names, Mikhail Nikolaievich. His surname, he thought, might have been Shchepotiev, but he was not sure.³⁸ This could have been Yengalychev - or yet another volunteer unknown to us.

One Cause but Different Dreams

One might have imagined that all the volunteers were united by a single overriding motivation, but this was not so. The reasons that brought them to South Africa to fight for the Boers were actually quite varied.

Some volunteers, as we have noted, were émigrés from Russia who had come to South Africa before the war. They had already become part of the local situation and knew perfectly well why and for what they were fighting. Their motivations and interests, nonetheless, may have differed from those of the Boers, but they were defined by local realities.

Those who came directly from Russia had different ideas and ideals, none of which had much to do with South Africa. They were, inevitably, motivated by Russian realities and by Russian circumstances and Russian perceptions of world events rather than by what was going on in South Africa, a situation about which they actually knew very little.

To be sure the majority of the Russian volunteers were young men who sincerely wanted to support what they considered a righteous cause, but many also felt a romantic desire for military glory, hoped for fame, wanted to test and assert their courage, and simply to experience the exotic adventure of "wild Africa", so much spoken about in Europe.

For some Africa was understandably also an escape from the dreary routine of military drill, from the domineering spirit of Russian bureaucracy, and the strains, tensions and unattractiveness of a rapidly growing

37. Oleg Koriakov. "Stranny general" (Strange general). *Ural*, Nos. 6 and 7, 1966. The story of his searching is on p. 59 of No. 7.

38. Valery O. Sevriukov's letter to the Good Hope Society (Moscow). 10 February 1992.

Russian capitalism. The Boer society was romanticised as representing the virtues of a "natural peasant democracy", as opposed to the evils of capitalism, imperialism and authoritarianism.

The clash between such dreams and South African realities often confused and baffled the young men. Many of them thought that they had already achieved hero status just because they had offered to shed their blood for a foreign people, and expected to be greeted like heroes upon their arrival. The Boers, however, had little time or inclination to accord them such a reception, especially since they suspected, often rightly, that the volunteers could render little real practical assistance. Augustus wrote: "From their point of view the Boers were, of course, justified in not trusting the mixture of rabble that filled the hotels and boarding houses of Pretoria, offering their services free as self-styled saviours."

Moreover, the Boers had doubts of a more general nature. "The simple mentality of an ordinary Boer," Augustus went on, "could not resolve this incomprehensible riddle: how was it that people so different from him in language and appearance, and owning neither farms, nor cows, nor sheep in the Transvaal, had sailed to join him from far beyond the seas in order to fight and die in battle. Already at the Tugela I was often asked: 'What have you come for? We do not need uitlander teachers: we shall cope with the British ourselves.'"³⁹

Leopold Lewe had a similar experience. He recalled that it was not easy for him and his comrades to explain to the Boers where they came from, and why they wanted to fight for their cause. "Excuse me, are you Hollanders or Germans?" they would often be asked. Their interlocutors were frequently baffled to hear that Lewe and his friends came from a country they had never even heard of.⁴⁰

There was very little mutual understanding and not just because of the language barrier. The Boers were fighting a hard and bloody war which was far less romantic and orderly than the volunteers had imagined from afar. To the irritation and frustration of the volunteers, the war was waged and the troops organised according to the norms and traditions of Boer society, and not by the rules of European armies. There was a great deal of confusion such that even the Boers themselves did not always understand what was going on, and which left the volunteers utterly mystified. Moreover, although the volunteers continued to see the Boers in a heroic light, the view from close up

39. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, June 1902, No. 6, p. 551.

40. E. Rosenthal. *Op. cit.*, pp. 93-95, 105-109.

revealed them to have all the usual human failings. A layer of iconic reverence fell away.

There were other frustrations and disappointments, the worst coming at the end of the campaign. Morally and physically exhausted, the volunteers were more in need of compassion than of glory. "No one was given any financial remuneration . . . ", a Russian doctor wrote, "thus life was difficult. When it came to leaving the Transvaal, the situation became desperate. Many left as sailors and scullions on ships, many had to be assisted by their comrades who shared their fares. Many gave in to the British."⁴¹

Volunteers saw themselves as fighters for a just cause, for freedom and independence against imperialism and aggression, a motivation we can still admire today. However, at both a social and personal level they were products of their time - and exemplified many of its prejudices, achievements and limitations. The most famous volunteer of all, Colonel Count George De Villebois-Mareuil, who was elected *veggeneraal* (combat general) by the Boers, became Commander of the volunteer European Legion and finally died for the Boers, was, as his posthumously published notes show, very fiercely prejudiced against the blacks.

This sort of racism was widely shared. Augustus relates without a trace of shame or regret a similar episode of his own. During the retreat from the Ladysmith area his horse was killed, so that he remained alone while everyone else rode off. Suddenly "a Kaffir on the back of a bay appeared on a hill. I recognised him. He was from our unit and always carried saddlebags with provisions and a kettle for his master."

"Let me take his horse, he can carry the bags himself!" I thought. But the darkie seemed to guess my intention to get him off the horse and, spurring the horse with his bare heels he went off at a gallop. I tore off my rifle and took aim but could not get myself to knock off the Kaffir." He then regretted his indecisiveness: "Why did I not shoot the Kaffir!"⁴²

This could be just bravado - after all, Augustus felt embarrassed when the Boers really shot an African in front of him and on no other occasion in his detailed memoirs did he seem bloodthirsty - but even so the bravado was characteristic.

Sometimes popular prejudice was more esoteric. One French officer from Villebois-Mareuil's unit explained to a Belgian nurse why he had come to South Africa:

41. A.I. Sadovsky. Op. cit, p. 1518.

42. *Varshavsky Voeny Zhurnal*, July 1901, No. 7, pp. 660-661.

"I have come here chiefly because this is an anti-Semitic war."

"And because you don't like the English, I suppose?"

"No, indeed; it's because I hate the Jews."

"I beg your pardon," I replied, "but I don't quite understand."

"Why," he said, "the Jews are trying to seize the Transvaal gold mines."

"Well, well, you astonish me," I replied. "I thought the person chiefly responsible for the war was Chamberlain, who is Protestant, and I don't quite see what the Jews have to do with it."

"A great deal, I assure you," he rejoined.

It turned out that it was all very simple. The officer told the nurse that "the War was the work of the Rothchilds. The Prince of Wales owed them a certain number of millions, and they said, 'If we don't have the Transvaal, we will make you a bankrupt,' which compelled the Prince to say to Chamberlain, 'If you don't declare war, you will be turned out'"⁴³

Many Russian volunteers, particularly the officers, shared these prejudices. They would remark on the hospitality of the Jewish émigrés from Russia, yet they would treat with arrogance and contempt even the very Jews with whom they fought side by side in the same commando and who helped them to understand what was going on. To Augustus, who normally referred to his fellow volunteers at least by their initials or the first letters of their surnames, all Jews were just "a Jew", or "the Jew". Only one of them, Leiba Karnan from the Russian Commando, did he favour by calling him by name.

Russia, like all major countries at the time, harboured imperialist aspirations which were mirrored by strong pro-imperialist sentiment at popular level. Many Russian volunteers came to South Africa on the assumption that they needed to gain experience for an inevitable future war with Britain. Such a war was perceived as simply a natural political development.

"... Sooner or later we shall have to confront the British face to face," wrote Augustus. For him the reason was India: he dreamed of the time when "the banks of Indian rivers would resound with the neigh and thud of Cossack horses". And why not? After all, the horses of Alexander of Macedonia had drunk water from those rivers and Britain was surely the only obstacle on the way to the fulfilment of this wonderful dream. Who amongst the Russians does not realise and fully comprehend that the vanguard of the British army is in the way of the age-long yearning

43. Alice Bron. *Diary of a Nurse in South Africa, being a Narrative of Experiences in the Boer and English Hospital Service*. London, Chapman and Hall, 1901, p. 103.

of Russia for the warm seas, for India?" asked Augustus, adding the quite uncontroversial Russian judgement of the time that "all British policy towards Russia from time immemorial has been based on hatred and perfidiousness."

This was the era in which Americans spoke without embarrassment of their "manifest destiny" and the French and the British of their "imperial mission". Russia's long southward and eastward expansion had, if anything, been nurtured by an even stronger sense of its "manifest destiny". "Our task in Asia," wrote Augustus, "is to fulfil the plans of our great Tsars. What Peter the Great and Catherine II dreamed of, what the aim of our policy was from Alexander I on, has only been partially accomplished. We have asserted ourselves strongly on the borders of Afghanistan and in the Pamirs, but to stop at that would mean to recognise our impotence, and to give up the accomplishment of our mission."

This mission had nothing to do with low politics, but was predestined and mysterious: "Russia's movement ahead does not stem from political ideas and combinations. This movement is spontaneous and ordained by fate. It is provoked by the same unknown but irrevocable laws which define the life and historical evolution of every people."

Augustus was convinced that the Indians subconsciously longed for a Russian invasion even if they did not realise it themselves. Deep in their hearts, he wrote, "a vague dream is hidden that the time will come when a prophesy of an unknown oracle will come true: "The warriors of a White Tsar will come from the North to liberate us from the foreign yoke!"⁴⁴

Such feelings run deep in Russia. Almost a hundred years later the Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy thought it appropriate to say: "I dream of Russian soldiers washing their boots in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean" in the hope of gaining greater popularity.⁴⁵ The uncanny similarity with Augustus's dream of Indian rivers "resounding with the neigh and thud of Cossack horses" shows how deeply rooted the imperialist sentiment is within certain layers of Russian society.

Sharing many of the prejudices and sentiments of their day, the Russian volunteers often held sharply differing political views which, two decades later, would have placed them on different sides in a murderous civil war.

There were certainly several opponents of the Tsarist regime among

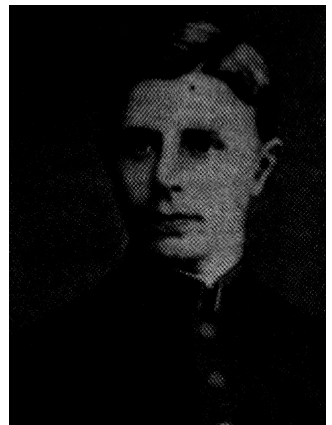
44. *Varshavskiy Voennoy Zhurnal*, January 1902, No. 13pp. 226-227.

45. *Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Posledny brosovok na Yug (The Final Spurt to the South)*. Moscow, Moscow Printers No, 13, 1993, p. 66.



12. A (\pm 1900) photograph of a Russian volunteer Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov, who later became Chairman of the Russian Parliament, Duma, and after the fall of tsarism, War Minister in the Provisional Government. Guchkov was wounded in the Anglo-Boer War and remained lame for the rest of his life.

13. A Russian volunteer, Vladimir Semionov, as a student at the St Petersburg Institute of Civil Engineers, a year or two before the Anglo-Boer War. He was later to become a prominent Soviet architect (the main architect of Moscow).





14. Lieutenant Colonel Maximov in South Africa with General Kolbe.

the volunteers. One was "D-ov", Alexei Nikolaievich Diatropov, mentioned by Augustus in a slightly mocking and contemptuous tone as a "liberal". Diatropov saw the Russian and the South African struggles in the same light, and proudly declared that he had come to fight for the Boers so as "to learn how to die for freedom".⁴⁶

Diatropov was extremely frightened when he heard a rumour that one of his fellow volunteers had been sent to South Africa by the Russian Secret Service to report on the views and behaviour of his comrades in arms. When Lieutenant Colonel Maximov - rumoured to be the spy in question - appeared among the volunteers, Diatropov pleaded with Augustus, a faithful and convinced monarchist, to stand up for him. "Please, tell him, dear Augustus, that I have come to an understanding of the advantages of monarchy through my own experience. My father spent his best years in Siberia and I don't want to go there," he kept on repeating through the better part of a long night, nearly driving Augustus mad.⁴⁷

Diatropov was not overreacting. Long before the KGB earned notoriety for such activities the Russian Secret Service sent its agents to other countries to report on the Russian communities there (the agent Rachkovsky who became famous not only for authoring the falsified *Protocols of the Elders of Sion* but also for his dirty deals in France, was but one of the examples). And Russian communities abroad, always alert to such a possibility, would turn in on themselves, trying to identify the spy in their midst, often blaming innocent people, besmirching reputations and doing great human damage to relationships.

Diatropov was, doubtless, naive. When he witnessed the execution of the "Kaffir spy" by the Boers, he was shocked to the depths of his soul. "The death penalty, the death penalty in a republic!" he kept on repeating in disbelief and disgust.⁴⁸ Diatropov sounds as if he was a somewhat timid soul, but there is no doubt that some of the volunteers had more radical dreams.

Another opponent of the Tsarist government among the volunteers was the above-mentioned Ivan Kirillovich Zabolotny, later one of the leaders of the Trudovik (Labour) Party and member of the First State Duma formed during the 1905 revolution. The First Duma was far too radical for Nicholas II and in July 1906 he dissolved it. Zabolotny was among the 180 parliamentarians who, after the Duma was dissolved, signed the famous Vyborg Appeal *To the People from the People's*

46. *Varshavsky Voenny Zhurnal*, November 1900, No. 11, p. 10.

47. *Op. cit.*, January 1902, No. 1, p. 22.

48. *Op. cit.*, January 1901, No. 1, pp. 52-53.

*Deputies.*⁴⁹ Those who signed it were arrested, sentenced to three months imprisonment and deprived not only of their parliamentary mandates but even of their voting rights as citizens.

Little is known about the members of the First Duma, for they were well aware that by seeking to assert the power of parliament in the face of Tsarist absolutism they were taking a large personal risk. A contemporary who wrote about them complained: "To tell the truth, Russians are awfully unaccustomed to popularity yet. It was a difficult task to make a deputy pay a visit to a decent photographer to get his picture taken, even free of charge. There were even some who were so eccentric that they would not allow pictures of them to be taken at all. It is possible, of course, that the fear the Russians have about publicity is justified. It is much better and easier to be unnoticed and lost in the crowd. Those who attract, for whatever reason, attention to themselves suffer."⁵⁰

As it turned out, the fears of the parliamentarians were well justified. After the dissolution of the Duma many of its members became outcasts. It became dangerous not only to be associated with them in any way, but even to show any interest in their life stories. Nonetheless, two pamphlets about the deputies of the First Duma were published, one containing sketchy biographical data about the deputies, Zabolotny among them. Clearly a brave man, Zabolotny doubtless had many occasions after 1905 to reflect on the irony of his having sought risk and s adventure abroad when so much of them were in store for him back home in Russia.

Perhaps the two most remarkable and romantic figures among the Russian volunteers were Alexander Magnusovich Essen (1880-1930) and Prince Mikhail Nikolaievich Yengalychev, the first also never mentioned in any records. Both were aristocrats who not only went over to the revolutionary cause in Russia but prefaced this action by rallying to Kruger's cause, doubtless on left-wing grounds.

Essen came from a renowned military aristocratic family (one of his relatives was a well-known admiral), but in 1899 at the age of nineteen he joined the Russian Social Democratic Party, and in 1905 he was actively involved in the first Russian Revolution. In the revolutionary underground in Kiev his alias was "the Boer". Under the Soviet regime

49. L. Kupriianova. *Deputaty pervogo prizyva posle rospuska Gosudarstvennoi Dumy* (The Deputies of the First State Duma after Its Dissolution). *Byloe*. St Peterburg, February 1907, Nos. 2-14, pp. 25, 32.

50. M.M. Boiovich. *Chleny Gosudarstvennoi Dumy (portrety i biografii). Pervyj sozv. 1906-1911* (Members of the State Duma [portraits and biographies]. The First State Duma, Np, nd; *Pervaia Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia дума*. (The First Russian State Duma), p. 134.

he became a top economic administrator and during the twenties was Deputy Chairman of the State Planning Committee of the Russian Federation.⁵¹

Prince Yengalychev, a descendant of a rich aristocratic Tatar family which traced its roots to the fifteenth century, was mentioned by Gurko, but we learnt of his later adventures only in 1992 when we received a letter citing a document from the Saratov State Archives.⁵² Yengalychev, it emerged, had had to resign his post as lieutenant of the Mingrel Grenadier Detachment in order to enlist with the Boers. He too had returned to fight a tough struggle in Russia. "In 1907," the document noted, the Prince "was persecuted for an attempt to form a terrorist organisation among the local peasants to conspire against the Emperor with the purpose of establishing a republic in Russia like that in the Transvaal. The charge was not proved but he remained under police surveillance."⁵³

It is difficult to imagine that radicals like Essen, Zabolotny or Yengalychev could have found it very congenial to fight alongside such Russian nationalists and monarchists as Augustus and Maximov. It is possible, of course, that the Anglo-Boer War contributed to their political evolution - though Essen, at least, had been a revolutionary even before he left. In South Africa Zabolotny and Essen could have kept their identities and views to themselves, avoiding publicity and thus failing to get into the records; equally they could remain anonymous just by chance.

The questions remain. We felt a sense of triumph about uncovering what we have of the hitherto lost volunteer histories, but in the end we remain more tantalisingly aware than ever how much more there is to know.

51. I.K. Mukhanov. *Chetvert veka podpolshchika* (A Quarter of a Century Underground). Moscow, 1957, p.147. We wrote to Essen's relatives but did not get any other information.

52. Saratovsky gosudarstvenny arkhiv (Saratov State Archives). Fund 53, inventory 6, file 372, GZhU.

53. Letter by Cirill Serebrenitsky to the Good Hope Society (Moscow), 1992. We are grateful to the author for this information.

The Russian Boer General

"Your services to my Fatherland were of extraordinary importance."

FROM PRESIDENT KRUGER'S LETTER TO YEVGENY MAXIMOV

One of the most remarkable among the Russian volunteers was Lieutenant Colonel Yevgeny Yakovlevich Maximov. He was a friend of several famous Boer leaders, adviser to the presidents of the Boer republics, a person of immense bravery, and somebody who might have had a secret mission in South Africa. His fate was particularly fascinating, and in a way particularly sad.

The Deputy Commander

"The colonel, in fact, is a man of action, and his manners savour somewhat of the camp. He is a believer in the poetry of war, and says he likes nothing better than to hear the whistling of bullets and the thunder of cannon; and, in fact, when he indulges in recollections of his service with Skobelev, the handsome 'white cuirassier', his face lights up, and he becomes a poet inspired by the noise of war.

"... He was brave even to rashness, as all his men told me, while he delighted in relating incidents which showed the indomitable bravery of his Dutch followers. One instance will show that there was no exaggeration on either side. At —* the colonel ordered his men to attack a position. They hesitated, thinking that the attempt was sure to fail. The colonel, exclaiming, 'You'll see I am right,' dashed forward, and his men followed him. The colonel was wounded in four places: in the foot, shoulder, ear and temple.

"... This fourth wound, on the temple, was by far the most serious, and when he received it, the colonel fell like a log, while his men gathered round him, and sharply opened fire to protect him. The incident shows the high qualities of the officer as well as those of his men."

This was how a Belgian, Alice Bron, wrote about Maximov. She worked in South Africa from February to May 1900 as a nurse of the ambulance sent out by the Dutch and Belgian Red Cross Association.

Alice Bron called herself "Colonel Maximoff's sister of charity (his own expression) and sometimes his secretary".¹ She spent only a few

1. A. Bron. Op. tit., pp. 188-189, 208.

days with Maximov, but those days in May 1900 were critical for the Boers and everybody who stood for them, and in such circumstances people get to know one another quickly.

Not many documents and not much information about Maximov have come down to us, yet we know more about him than about any other Russian volunteer. His short biography was included in the *New Encyclopaedia*, edited by Brockhaus and Efron. Published many decades ago, before the Bolshevik revolution, this encyclopaedia remains the best Russian encyclopaedia ever.² Maximov's name was mentioned in several books about the Anglo-Boer War. His service record is housed in the Russian Archives of Military History. A small archive document about him was published in Russia in 1940.

We looked for documents about Maximov in the South African archives as well. The inventories contained a number of entries on Maximov, such as, for example, *Colonel Maximoff Kroonstad: Verzoekt toezending van alle vreemdelingen naar Kroonstad* (30 January 1900); *Maximof Kroonstad: vraagt revolvers, zadels enz* (11 April 1900); *Colonel Maximov Pretoria - rekening \$72-6* (15 May 1900).³ However, the documents themselves for some reason were not in the archives.

The most important source for us was Maximov's personal archive, and the most valuable document in this archive was a small brown pocket notebook, Maximov's South African diary - 138 pages.

It was very difficult to read this diary. Maximov wrote it for himself and did not watch his handwriting. His notes were scrappy, often consisting of one or two words - hints to remind the author later on of this or that episode. It is difficult and in many cases impossible to understand what these words implied. Maximov's handwriting was generally difficult to read, but it was made worse by the fact that he often wrote while riding, or travelling by train.

We were unable to decipher the whole text. Maximov's son, Alexander Yevgenievich Maximov, helped us. The notes were more or less detailed from the end of February 1900 to the end of March 1900; in other words from the time when Maximov decided to exchange the pen of a war correspondent (he came to South Africa as a correspondent of the Russian paper *Novoie Vremia*) for the revolver and the sabre, to the moment when he went into action.

On 27 February he wrote from Pretoria: "I am giving way to my old

2. Maksimov Ye.Ya. In: *Novy entsyklopedichesky slovar* (New Encyclopaedia). Vol. 25, pp. 471-472.

3. TAD. Staatsekretaris, Buitelandse Sake (1894-1900), Ref. RA 1966/00, Part 1; TAD. Kommandant-Generaal (1880-1900), Ref. CR 4055/00, Part 1; TAD, Kommandant-Generaal (1880-1900), Ref. CR 6158/00, Part 1.

instincts. Today I decided to raise a corps and set off for the fight. In one day I found eighteen volunteers willing to come under my command. Ganetsky, Captain,⁴ wants to join even as a soldier. I think I'll have two captains there, my aides (Ganetsky and Lieutenant . . .), and four lieutenants, elected by soldiers and approved by me. I shall try to arm them with sabres and revolvers and begin raids to the flanks and the rear of the enemy. Tomorrow I shall speak with Reitz."

The next day he reflected: "... I think that the Boers will not sustain the big war for more than two months, and will then resort to guerrilla war. Kruger went to Ladysmith, which means that it was bad there. The Boers were beaten in the environs of Colesberg yesterday. Cronje has not been released yet... Steyn decided to fight till the end to defend the Orange Republic."

Maximov failed to form his own corps. Another Russian volunteer, Lieutenant Ganetsky, had started to form the Russian Detachment without him. And the European Legion was already being formed by the French Colonel De Villebois-Mareuil, who had come to South Africa before Maximov.

On 23 March Villebois met Maximov and offered him the deputy command of the European Legion. Maximov wrote about this meeting:

"Visited Villebois with ... Short, with grey moustache, wearing imperial [cap - A.D., I.F.]. He was glad and offered me the second command and the organisation of the detachment. He has thirty Fr[ench] and an unknown number of Dutch."

Villebois and Maximov visited Chief Justice Hertzog together, but otherwise Maximov had little time to speak with Villebois. On that very day, 23 March, Villebois was going to take the field at the head of a large detachment of the Foreign Legion. He wanted to occupy the town of Boshof and to cut the railway line between Kimberley and the Cape. In fact he only left on the next evening, but even this extra day left him too little time for anything, except writing instructions for Maximov and several other officers.

Later, Maximov gave permission to publish the French original and a Russian translation in St Petersburg. Since it remains unknown outside Russia, we quote the whole text.

Instructions for the Formation of the European Legion

In the absence of General De Villebois-Mareuil Colonel Maximov

4. Alexei Ganetsky was a lieutenant, not a captain.

Instructions pour le
formateur de la Légion européenne

En l'absence des C^o de Villebois M. le
Colonel Maxime prendra le commandement
de cette unité et l'organisateur des
par suivants :

- 1^o Rester le rassemblement des hommes à
moins tard en s'adressant à Pretoria à
M. le secrétaire d'Etat Grobler et au Colonel
Dierckx à M. le Général Louis Botha
à Bloemfontein. Faire passer ces copies au
présent compte et à quelle date.
- 2^o Former la légion par nationalités en faisant
des groupes commerciaux. Honorer les officiers
en leur tout ou respectant les droits ac-
quis par les années de service consécutives.
Faire examiner et empêcher les doubles cases
à l'hôtel.
- 3^o Placer les isolés aux unités qui leur conviendront
comme nationalités ou à des unités
qu'importe, s'il est impossible de leur donner
d'obtenir un engagement définitif.
- 4^o Conserver les listes en vue de distribuer le dépôt
mobile de remonte. Laisser voir le reste des
matériaux 60 chevaux, on en a touché 23, pour
assurer l'obtention de ce qui reste à toucher.
- 5^o En dehors de ce dépôt mobile distribuer aux
cavaliers de réserve pour servir au service à
la remonte de la légion et à son entretien
pour empêcher par les progrès de guerre et les
autres au service plus beaucoup d'assurances
dans l'installation qui se comporte plus la
situation générale.
- 6^o Il n'y a ni 9^o au palatin français et le
ministre des affaires hollandais. Des Hollandais sont
attendus avec O. Wangel, des Français avec
le Capitaine Gallois, aucune nouvelle des autres
copies.
- 7^o En cas de retraite pendant l'absence des généraux,
faire charger les sapeurs, les placer avec la colonne
et les installer au chef-lieu de la détachement
de raid repindra toujours et doit traverser ses
travers.

The letter of instructions written by the Commander of the European Legion,
French Colonel De Villebois-Mareuil, to his deputy, Lt Col Maximov.

will take over the command and continue with its organisation, on the following lines:

- 1) Hasten to gather the Europeans at Kroonstadt while making contact in Pretoria with the Secretary of State Grobler and, if need be, directly with General Louis Botha at Glencoe so as to find out how many men we can count on and by what date.
- 2) Form the Legion by nationalities into platoons, and then into squadrons. Appoint officers as needed while respecting the ranks already acquired by the leaders of the units already constituted. Make them camp and prevent them from staying at hotels.
- 3) Place isolated men into units which suit their nationality or, if that is impossible on account of their numbers, into whichever units are necessary for a tactical grouping.
- 4) Conserve the mobile supply depot left here and give out nothing from it. Sixty horses were asked for and we have rounded up only 23. Continue to pursue the acquisition of the remaining number.
- 5) Besides this mobile depot destined for the raiding cavalry, provide as well as possible for the supply of the Legion and its equipment, relying on the means of war, leaving as a lower priority a lot of the improvements to accommodation which no longer have a bearing on the general situation.
- 6) There is only one French Platoon here and half the Dutch contingent. Some Germans are expected with Lieutenant Vrangel, some French with Lieutenant Galopaud. No news of other contingents.
- 7) In case of retreat during the General's absence, load the wagons, arrange them in a column and get them into the *hooflaager* where the raiding detachment will always rejoin them and ought to find its wagons.

23 March 1900, Kroonstad
General Villebois."⁵

Villebois did not make a particularly good impression on Maximov. He wrote: "Villebois complains that he has been working for eight days, and

5. A.N. Vinogradsky. *Angla-burskaia voina v Yuzhnoi Afrike* (The Anglo-Boer War in South Africa). Vol. 2, St Petersburg, 1902, Supplement No. 13, pp. 263-264.

couldn't do anything. Clumsy. Fawns on the authorities. Spoke with Hertzog standing. I seated him." Maximov was definitely irritated by the fact that Villebois gave instructions not only to him, but to other officers as well. "A lover of giving instructions. Did not let me in."

Why did Villebois decide to appoint Maximov as his second in command? There could be several reasons for this. There seem to have been no other officers of Maximov's rank among the foreign volunteers. Besides, Maximov had made a name for himself as a brilliant rider and an expert shot. Among the Boers such a reputation was not easy to get. Maximov gained it by shooting a springbok at a distance of 800 metres from a moving train (he was travelling from Pretoria to Bloemfontein) and later by handling a very restive horse. Besides, Villebois was interested in the Russian army and had even studied it. In 1888 a book of his about it, entitled *L'Armee Russe et Ses Chefs en 1888*, was published in Paris. Perhaps he wanted to learn more and to use the experience of a Russian officer.

Moreover, Villebois could not be unaware of the fact that this recent Russian arrival had made the most astonishing contacts with the Boer political leaders, suggesting that he was a person of unusual influence. On 4 March Maximov was received by President Marthinus Steyn. Not only did the interview turn out to be rather lengthy, but after that the Russian revisited Steyn on several occasions. On 13 March he was introduced to President Kruger. Maximov also often met with Abraham Fischer, the second most important person in the Republic of the Orange Free State, the State Secretary of the Orange Republic Blignaut, the State Secretary of the Transvaal Reitz and General De la Rey. On 17 March he spoke with Louis Botha, and on 22 March he was introduced to Chief Justice Hertzog. From then on he saw Hertzog almost daily.

During his first meeting with Steyn Maximov put to him the idea of appealing to the great continental powers (first of all to Russia) for assistance in order to stop the war. On 6 March, a day after his meeting with Steyn, Maximov wrote in his diary: "My conversation with Steyn had a very serious result. St[eyn] decided to speak with Kr[uger] and to send letters; however, not the way I offered, but rather with a deputation of five people with Fischer at the head. Two burghers from each Republic. First, as I said, to Russia, then to Germany, and last, to Paris and the Hague to the Queen of the Netherlands. I've approved of this project, but I am afraid that such a big deputation will attract the attention of the British, and [they] may, perhaps, wreck it."

There is another document about the same event, Maximov's report to the Military Academic Committee of the general staff. It is dated 7 (20) March. Maximov wrote:

"On 4 March I was introduced to President Steyn. I was with him for more than two hours and spoke with him as a journalist.

"Thanks to the English sources South Africans had an absolutely false impression of Russia. I gave explanations on all questions, including Finland. Obviously, my sincere talk made a due impression on those present.

"Steyn was so lost that he was prepared to sign a separate peace treaty. But I proved to him the disadvantages of this and gave him the idea to send a mission to Europe: first to the Tsar, [then] to Berlin, Paris and the Hague. A dispatch was sent to Salisbury: 'Why go on with the war. Time to finish; we would have offered earlier, but you suffered defeats. Now success, military honour is restored, we offer peace. If you do not agree, we shall stand up for our freedom till the end.' They are waiting for the answer, then will send the mission. We are on the eve of peace."⁶

It is difficult to say whether Maximov's long conversation with Steyn was in any way connected with the fact that a few days later, after receiving Salisbury's negative reply, the Boer republics sent a request about mediation to the European powers. There is no doubt, however, that Maximov's message was timely. His proposal finally materialised in the mission led by Fischer. Whether good or bad, the idea did not bear fruit, since the mission was prepared so slowly and sent so late that by the time it finally arrived in Europe, all possibilities for the continental powers to interfere had been lost.

Why was Maximov so influential? Other Russian volunteers speculated darkly that he had come to South Africa with a secret mission from St Petersburg.

On 29 March Maximov saw General De la Rey. The next day, wrote Maximov, De la Rey was "leaving for Brandfort, where he supposes to begin fighting on the weekend. Will send me a telegram, telling me where to go."

The last coherent entry in the notebook was made on Friday, 30 March, At six a.m. Maximov was busy training the Dutch detachment of the European Legion. "Hertzog promised 53 horses on Monday . . . Nothing heard of Villebois . . . How dull that we can't move . . . We look forward to the fight. Indeed we can hardly wait for it."⁷

6. Maximov's letter to the administrative manager of the Military Academic Committee of 7 (20) March 1900. *Krasnyy arkhiv. Istorichesky Zhurnal*, 1940, vol. 6, No. 103, p. 148.

7. Yevgeny Ya. Maximov. *Zapiska knishka 1900 g.* (1900 Notebook). Manuscript, pp. 2-5, 16, 38-44, 55-56, 61, 68, 71, 80, 92, 94, 98-100, 105. AM.

The Battles

Villebois intended to be away for a week and to return on 31 March. Maximov did not want to wait. He was already longing to be on the battlefield when he spoke with Villebois before the latter departed. This is, perhaps, what Villebois meant when he gave instructions to one of his aides and wrote in his diary: "I trust he [this aide - A.D., I.F.] will act as a restraining influence on Maximov."⁸

However, it turned out that Villebois was very impatient himself, perhaps even more so than Maximov. He did not prepare his raid well and his movements were not carefully thought through. In the beginning he even lost his way. It was very hot - 38 °C - and Villebois felt very bad. Even the notes in his diary became barely intelligible.⁹

His detachment (the best trained part of the European Legion, about 125 men) was beaten by Lord Methuen's troops. On 5 April the detachment was unexpectedly attacked by the British. Villebois was killed. Among those who were taken prisoner were Lieutenant Nikitin (who had refused to join Ganetsky's Russian detachment), Georgian Prince Bagration-Mukhransky and his friend Count De Breda, commander of the French part of the detachment. Lieutenant Nikitin told the story of this ill-fated raid to the Russian doctors and nurses, with whom he returned home by ship after his imprisonment.¹⁰

Maximov knew nothing of this and was impatiently waiting for Villebois to return while trying to prepare the European Legion for future battles, introducing regular field training and military discipline. He spared no effort in providing his men with weapons and ammunition, and on 3 April requested 150 carbines and 3 000 cartridges from the Transvaal authorities.¹¹ Finally, still not having heard from Villebois, Maximov got De la Rey's permission to set off for Brandfort and led the majority of the Legion there. However, the day after their arrival Maximov's position drastically changed.

The Boer authorities received the news of Villebois's death and the fate of his detachment, and President Steyn sent Maximov a telegram, appointing him as commander of the European Legion. But the commanders of several detachments, including the Russian Corps, refused to have Maximov as their commander. Every problem that Villebois had when he was forming the Legion resurfaced and worsened.

8. Roy Macnab. *The French Colonel Villebois-Mareuil and the Boers, 1899-1900*. Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 180.

9. Op. cit., p. 193.

10. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., p. 120.

11. TAD. Kommandant-Generaal (1888-1900), Vol. O, Ref. CR 3803/00, Part 1.

Maximov tried to defuse the crisis by suggesting that De la Rey appoint his (De la Key's) brother as commander. This De la Rey did, but his order never came into effect, for the Legion was not a unit of a regular army, but rather a loose collection of volunteer detachments, and the commander of each of them tried hard to preserve their independence.

Maximov remained commander of only one of these detachments, albeit a big one, the Hollander Corps. Even there he did not avoid problems. Only a small minority in the Corps were professional soldiers. The rest were not used to army discipline and required a great deal of training. The first days of training in Brandfort already brought complaints and protests against the strictness of the discipline. Maximov accordingly announced his resignation as commander. The troublemakers then apologised and requested Maximov to stay on. Moreover, several individuals of other nationalities showed their appreciation of his leadership by joining his Corps.

Maximov's reputation among the Boers and that of his Corps was high, precisely because it was more disciplined than other volunteer detachments. Moreover, Maximov led several raids to rescue Boer families from the farms captured by the British. While this did not result in any significant military advantage, it won Maximov still more respect and gratitude from the Boers.

On 11 April Maximov suggested to the Military Council that an attack should be launched against Plaatz Amerika. The idea was to seize unoccupied hills and to sever the railway line beyond them. Maximov thought that this would effectively separate the British units operating between Brandfort and Plaatz Amerika.

"According to this plan," wrote Sophia Izedinova, "the Freestaters under General Kolbe and Maximov's Hollander Corps were to mount a surprise attack by night and capture the British outposts on the hills around Plaatz Amerika. On the same night General Philip Botha was to occupy the nearer of the two hills, unmanned by the British, and to move at dawn onto the hill in line with the British positions. They would thus be in a position to provide crossfire to cover the assault on the railway line by Kolbe and Maximov. As a diversion for the British reserves General De la Rey was to simulate an offensive movement in front of their main positions on Tafelkop."¹²

This carefully worked-out plan failed, for the three participants could not co-ordinate their actions. Maximov and Kolbe did what they

12. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., p. 129.

were supposed to do, but Philip Botha's troops never moved. Maximov put this down to Botha's dislike of night operations - a new tactic for the Boers.

Maximov's biggest battle took place in the environs of Thaba Nchu to the east of Bloemfontein. At the end of April Generals Philip Botha and Kolbe with several volunteer detachments decided to reunite General De Wet with the main Boer forces, from whom he had been cut off by the British operating between Bloemfontein, Wepener and Thaba Nchu.

The resulting battle took place on 30 April. The Hollander Corps managed to seize the greater part of Tubakop without a large number of casualties. Maximov's men who took part in the battle numbered 150, and only two were killed and five seriously wounded. Unfortunately, one of the wounded was Maximov himself.

The dramatic battle of Thaba Nchu was described in *The Times History of the War in South Africa*.

"As they came over the plateau they saw Captain Towse's party and bore down upon them with the intention of surrounding them. The whole movement was visible from the English position in the plain below, but the foreigners advanced so steadily and in such good alignment that they were taken to be a party of British soldiers. Captain Towse, who was moving forward at the time, did not see them till they were within hailing distance, when Maximoff called upon him to surrender. Hastily getting his men under cover of some stones, Captain Towse answered by a volley at point-blank range; at this point the English gunners below realised the position. Luckily they had the range, and were able to help Captain Towse's little band by pouring shrapnel into Colonel Maximoff's ranks. The party of thirteen held their ground, answering volley for volley, and though seven of them were killed or wounded, with the assistance of the guns they drove their assailants off into the cover of the rocks behind. Maximoff was wounded by a shot from Captain Towse, but Captain Towse himself paid dearly for his gallantry and for the V.C., which rewarded it, by a bullet which took away the sight of both his eyes."¹³

The award to Towse of a Victoria Cross by Queen Victoria herself naturally brought this incident to the attention of a large international public.

At first the British thought that Maximov had been killed - a version reflected in Stuart Cloete's novel *Rags of Glory*.¹⁴ A painting in the Africana Museum in Johannesburg depicts Captain Towse firing at Maximov at Point-blank range.

13. *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, vol. 6, 1906, pp. 98-99.

14. Stuart Cloete. *Rags of Glory*. London and Glasgow, Collins, 1967, p. 352.

Maximov did not die, but the fate of his now leaderless Hollander Corps was indeed tragic, for the next day the Corps suffered heavy casualties and its new commander was killed. In the next important encounter at the Vet River the Hollanders were almost completely wiped out. Only some fifteen or twenty survivors made it to Kroonstad where the government of the Orange Free State had moved.

Maximov was also brought to Kroonstad. It was there that the Belgian nurse Alice Bron found him on 12 May, several hours before the British troops entered the town.

Alice Bron decided to join Maximov after she found out about Villebois's death. She wrote:

"I was told that Colonel Maximoff, who had come from Russia to fight for the Boers, had taken over the command of General De Villebois's Foreign Legion; that he wanted a small field ambulance to follow the Legion wherever it went; and that an offer to form such an ambulance had been made to a foreign medical man, but declined. I requested our consul, who knew Colonel Maximoff, to write to him on my behalf. The colonel replied at once through his secretary that I could come, and that I was to make arrangements with a doctor of the Russian ambulance to follow him to the front. The colonel himself was under treatment at the Russian and Dutch hospital at Kroonstadt for four wounds he had received only a few days before. The Medical Committee approved of my plan, gave me a pass, and authorised me to telegraph to them for any supplies I might require. I obtained my passport, and started at 8 p.m., arriving at Kroonstadt the next morning at eleven. I went to the hospital, expecting to find my wounded officer, but he had left for Pretoria!"

Alice came to Kroonstad on the eve of its seizure by the British. She expected to find Maximov on a hospital bed, but he was not there. He was trying to go on with his service. Alice saw him only at six in the evening, because at seven in the morning he had ridden to Pretoria and spent the whole day with President Steyn. When he returned to Kroonstad the Boers had already left the town and blown up the bridge. The nurse told Maximov that it was time to leave. She related her argument with him as follows:

He exclaimed: "Never, never have I run away from an enemy."

"It's not running away," I replied; "it's going away. Do you want the English to have the pleasure of taking you prisoner?"

"I don't care. A few resolute men - "

"It is all very well to talk about resolute men," I rejoined, "but you are the only man left in the place. All the others are running away."

At length we decided to go, but the getting off was not so easy. I cannot here relate all the annoying, though laughable, incidents that occurred.

About eight o'clock, an hour and a quarter before the English arrived, we started, the colonel on horseback, his secretary, his 'boy', and myself in a kind of dog-cart, into which we had thrown an incalculable number of packages."

Soon, when they were already on their way, they saw an immense sheet of flames shoot up towards the clouds on the horizon behind them. This grew and spread put into a furious sea of fire. Something was burning in Kroonstad.

"The colonel's wounds are causing him great pain, which he cannot hide in spite of his pluck," wrote Alice Bron. "On we go. The cold is becoming intense. At midnight we sight a camp fire, and ask ourselves the same old question - Boers or English? Maximoff, in spite of our remonstrances, rides off to investigate, calling to us to wait for him . . . "Look at the colonel," I continued, "he is going straight for those people. There is no doubt about it, he is as bold as a lion, though he's as obstinate as a mule."

Maximov was lucky. The soldiers around the fire turned out to be German volunteers. By that time Maximov was completely exhausted and in pain. Soon he could not ride and had to be driven in a cart. Alice wrote that the Boers, whom they met on their way, repeated Maximov's name to keep it in mind, saying that he had fought well.

Finally, Alice Bron brought Maximov to Pretoria. She wrote: "His wounds were slow to heal, and, as I told him after my first inspection of them, proved so severe as to prevent him from taking any further part in the campaign. He was compelled, much against his will, to give up."¹⁵

It was in fact, amazing that he withstood so long. The telegram from the battlefield stated that his injuries were not serious. However, Izedinova wrote that he had a splintered shoulder, a badly damaged shoulder blade and a temple wound injuring the skull. Moreover the wound to the temple cracked and splintered the bone.¹⁶ Had he stayed in bed he could perhaps have hoped to return to the battlefields in time. As it were, he was unfit for active military service, particularly in the conditions of guerrilla warfare - for that is what it was soon to become. Maximov could not fail to understand this.

15. A. Bron. Op. cit., pp. 162-163, 188-189, 192-193, 196-198, 204, 207-208.

16. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., pp. 132, 177.

The Glory

Maximov received a hero's welcome in Pretoria. After Thaba Nchu *De Volksstem* wrote: "He is a very brave officer, and faced the enemy at twenty paces."¹⁷

According to Izedinova, Mrs Louis Botha told her: "From my husband I know that your Colonel Maximov is the bravest man in the Transvaal and a gifted leader. You are living in the same hotel as he and will see him today. Please tell him that we all want to be under his command, the bravest of those who are fighting for us."¹⁸

Izedinova wrote that State Secretary Reitz spoke of Maximov very highly as well: "You know, sister . . . that I am not greatly impressed by all these foreigners who come offering us their services, but concerning your countryman, I am happy to say that we were both mistaken in our caution. All our commandos who have come into contact with Colonel Maximov, praise his bravery, his ability to discipline men and the value of his advice. General Louis Botha said that although he is no coward himself and has seen many brave men, he not only never saw, but never imagined anything like the bravery of this Russian colonel. And one of the Dutch who served under him, said that one couldn't but follow him, a he is a real leader."

Soon after his arrival to Pretoria, in May, Maximov was elected combat general.¹⁹

Izedinova related: "Six commandants and several hundred burgers from various units proclaimed Maximov a *veggeneraal*, an honour accorded to him alone among all the European volunteers." She considered that Maximov was more honoured by the Boers, than Villebois, who became *veggeneraal* (combat general) by appointment, not by election.²⁰

It took Maximov some time to realise how bad his wounds really were. In Pretoria he tried to carry on as usual. On 15 May he requested that Pretoria arsenal replace twenty of his detachment's Martini-Henry rifles with the more advanced Mauser rifles. Gone were the days when Maximov had to wait for the ammunition. His request was fulfilled the next day. Besides, Maximov got 3 000 cartridges for the new rifles.²¹

Maximov's notice with this request shows that he was still hoping to return to the battlefield. However, it soon became clear to him that he

17. *DeVolksstem*, 3 May 1900.

18. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., p. 185.

19. I. Uys. Op. cit., p. 148.

20. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., pp. 176, 184.

21. TAD. Kommandant-Generaal (1888-1900), Vol. O, Ref. CR 6156/00, Part 1.

would have to leave, and he finally handed over the command to P. Blignaut, son of the state secretary of the Republic of the Orange Free State.

The official ceremony of handing over was held on 22 May 1900 in the Hollandia Hotel in Pretoria. *De Volksstem* reported:

"... Since Colonel Maximov was prevented by his wounds from re-assuming his command it has been decided that Mr P. Blignaut should be elected *veggeneraal*. This proposal was accepted with acclaim. Then, appreciation was expressed for the services of Colonel Maximov, who in his turn praised the bravery of the European Legion in general and the Hollander Corps in particular. Referring to Mr Blignaut he singled out his courage and his ability as a tactician. When Colonel Maximov had finished speaking, three cheers were raised."²²

Izedinova wrote: "The Corps which was handed over by Maximov to Blignaut was not the original Hollander Corps but a body of several hundred not only Dutch but Europeans of various nationalities, predominantly Germans and Frenchmen and even Boers attracted by the Corps' reputation."²³

Before his departure Maximov attended the last session of the Transvaal Volksraad. According to Alice Bron two special chairs for guests of honour were brought into the hall. They were occupied by "the Irish publicist and patriot Michael Davitt with his long beard and still young face and the wounded and profusely bandaged General Maximov. Before the entry of President Kruger there occurred a small incident which it gladdens me to be able to record. The chairman, General Lukas Meyer, had already taken his seat, when General Smuts went to him and drew his attention to something in the hall. Then he got up, descended from his elevated seat and approaching General Maximov, publicly thanked him on his own behalf and that of all his comrades, for his services to their country and for the blood he had shed in its defence. Still weak from his wounds, Maximov was confused and, partially rising, murmured something about the insignificance of his services."²⁴

Maximov left the Transvaal at the end of May 1900, several days before the fall of Johannesburg and Pretoria. The majority of foreigners were leaving South Africa at this point, many feeling disappointed in the Boers, for whom they had come to fight. Not Maximov, however. Alice

22. *De Volksstem*, 23 May 1900.

23. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., p. 133.

24. A. Bron. Op. cit., pp. 188-189.

Bron, one of the disappointed, stressed that Maximov did not share her feelings. He spoke warmly about the Boers as a nation, and enthusiastically about many of their leaders. President Steyn was one of his most admired heroes.

"What the colonel told me of Steyn, his sufferings and his alternation of hope and despair, was absolutely painful," wrote Alice Bron. "Steyn is the noblest, finest, and most disinterested figure in the Transvaal war. He is the incarnation of bravery, self-sacrifice, and stainless honesty. He, at any rate, has not filled his pockets with bribes from the country he is now fighting. His conscience is clear, his hands are clean; he is *a savant*, his heart is in the right place, and he is as brave as a lion."

Maximov must have been very eloquent, and Alice must have held his opinions very high, if she could write without even seeing the President: "The name of Steyn will always remain in my mind as a symbol of everything noble and great."²⁵

Izedinova wrote more about Maximov's adventures in South Africa than any other author. She interviewed Maximov himself, as well as the people who knew him. She was in a good position to do so, since they returned to Russia on the same ship. But how reliable was her information?

Villebois's biographer wrote about Izedinova's memoirs: "Sister Izedinova ... had a highly chauvinistic attitude towards the foreign volunteers - except for the splendid Russians, the volunteers were mostly bad."²⁶

This was not true. Izedinova certainly did not admire all the Russians, and her picture of Ganetsky was very unfavourable. As far as her admiration for Maximov is concerned, her memoirs leave little doubt that the nurse was in love with him. She may have been biased in favour of her hero, which does not necessarily mean that everything she wrote about him was wrong. Several other people, who seemed to have no personal interest in Maximov, particularly among the Boers and other foreigners, were equally fond of the Russian colonel.

The Mission

Why was it, then, that in spite of all his admirable qualities Maximov did not manage to lead the whole of the European Legion? One reason was that, of course, few volunteers liked the strict military discipline that he tried to introduce, and still fewer were willing to risk their lives as readily as he did.

25. Ibid.

26. R. Macnab. Op. dr., p. 180.

But Maximov was also not an easy person at all, and he did not always get on well with people. Alice Bron knew what she was talking about, when she wrote: "He is as bold as a lion, though he's as obstinate as a mule." Maximov was quick to show his temper, and, often, a streak of authoritarianism. His notes about other volunteers were arrogant and sometimes rude. His notebook is full of such remarks: "A chick. Snub him, when an opportunity offers," "I'll introduce proper order." When he was angry, Maximov could sound directly threatening. He also talked of "bringing men to book", along with others needing to be "severely reprimanded".

After Maximov's departure one of the French volunteers spoke about him with the Russian military observer Zigern-Korn. He admired Maximov's courage and considered him to be a good field officer. However, Zigern-Korn wrote, "his opinion about Maximov's military education was not very high".²⁷ It is not clear what such opinions were based on, but they were of course detrimental to Maximov's reputation. However, there was something else. Many Russian volunteers did not trust Maximov. Volunteer Diatropov considered Maximov to be a police ("gendarme") officer. He had also heard that Maximov was "a secret agent of our [Russian - A.D., I.F.] government, that he has the widest power, and, among other things, he is ordered to report in detail about the activities and behaviour of the Russian volunteers in the Transvaal."²⁸

Were there any grounds for these suspicions and rumours? At one point in his career Maximov did serve as a gendarme officer. In 1881, when the Narodnik terrorists assassinated Tsar Alexander II, Maximov, among many other Russians, outraged by the acts of terror, offered his services to the Gendarme Department. Maximov was a staunch and passionate monarchist and he wanted to serve the cause in which he believed. He was sent to the Caucasus, but after a few years realised that the gendarme service did not agree with him. He sent in his resignation, which was readily granted.²⁹

The fact of Maximov's gendarme service could not pass unnoticed among the Russian volunteers in South Africa: the Gendarme Corps was very unpopular among liberal circles of Russian society. The more

27. [M.A. Zigern-Korn]. Op. cit., Notebook 2, p. 89.

28. *Varshavsky Voennoy Zhurnal*, January 1902, No. 1, p. 22.

29. *Posluzhnoi spisok shtab-rotmistra 13 Gusanskogo Narvskogo Yego Imperatorskogo Vysochestva Velikogo Kniazia Konstantina Nikolaievicha polka Maximova* (Service List of Staff Captain Maximov of the 13th Hussar Narva Regiment of His Imperial Highness Grand Duke Nikolai Konstantinovich). GVIARF. Fund 400, 4 Department, 3 Bureau, file 567; Fund 400, 13 Department, 1 Bureau, file 80.

liberally minded among the Russian volunteers also did not like the fact that Maximov had come over to South Africa as a correspondent of the *Novoie Vremia*, a very conservative nationalist paper, and this too doubtless prompted suspicions that he could be serving reactionary ends.

The Russian volunteers knew that at first Maximov had been sent to South Africa as a correspondent of the War Ministry, but that Britain did not allow Russia to have an official military correspondent at this war. Maximov still went, already as a correspondent of the *Novoie Vremia* and two other papers, the *Sankt-Peterburgskiiie Vedomosti* and the *Rossiiia*. He was, in fact, the only Russian journalist to be sent to South Africa, although there certainly was no lack of those who wished to be there. The British had tried to prevent Maximov from getting to South Africa even in that capacity. He then sailed to Alexandria by a Russian ship, intending to go further on board the *Kanzler* together with the Russian doctors and nurses. The British did not allow him on board. He went to Port Said by train, and from there to Lourenço Marques by sea via Djibouti, Zanzibar and Madagascar. He came to Lourenço Marques three to four weeks after the arrival of the *Kanzler*.³⁰

Whatever Maximov's compatriots in South Africa knew about him, it was less harmful to his reputation than what they did not know but were trying to guess. Even those of them who were not prejudiced against Maximov thought that his activities were suspicious. Lieutenant Augustus wrote: "By ways known only to him he earned the confidence of the Transvaal authorities, began to visit President Kruger without ceremony, became quite at home with old Reitz, entered into relations with Steyn... To us ordinary mortals who never even dreamed of the honour to have tea with Kruger or Reitz, his activities seemed highly mysterious."³¹

Alice Bron wrote that she "could relate many interesting incidents and execute sketches, that would represent certain Boer personages in a far from flattering light", but that her conscience compelled her "to observe the strictest secrecy".³² Was there anything serious to hide? Did Maximov really come to South Africa with a special mission or special powers? If so, what could these have been?

Maximov's reports to the general staff could have helped to resolve this mystery. Unfortunately, we found the text of only one such report, about his meeting with Steyn. We have already quoted this document. It does not prove anything. Yes, Maximov did discuss the political situation and problems with the Boer leaders and then wrote about it to Russia.

30. S. Izedinova. Op. cit., p. 9.

31. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, June 1902, No. 1, p. 22.

32. A. Bron. Op. cit., p. 208.

Moreover, there is a phrase in the document which might seem as corroborating the worst fears of the Russian volunteers that Maximov was there to report on them: "Colonel Gurko came here on 27 February in the evening, and having been introduced the next day to the President, left for De Wet's troops on the Modder River on 2 March."³³ But all of these could be just general talk about the events of the day.

Yet in all probability Maximov did have a task from the Russian War Ministry. Maximov retired about a quarter of a century before the Boer War, yet the top military officials considered his mission in South Africa so important that before his departure Head of the Main Staff V. Sakharov sent a letter about him to the Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Nikolaievich Lamsdorf, asking "to provide Mr Maximov with some kind of certificate" and to warn the British and the Transvaal governments of his visit.³⁴ This special attention may have been exactly the reason that made the British authorities suspicious of Maximov.

Maximov the journalist did not publish much in the papers that he was supposed to work for. We are aware of only one substantial article which he published in the *Novoie Vremia*³⁵ and even this was published two years after he had left South Africa. Maximov the officer did send his reports to the Military Academic Committee of the Russian General Staff.

All this, however, does not sufficiently explain the attention of the Russian, the South African, and the British officials towards Maximov, for several other Russian officers among the volunteers wrote reports to the Russian General Staff as well. All these reports were received with the utmost attention, and their authors enjoyed a hearty welcome and special treatment from the military authorities later on, although all seemed to have left Russia for South Africa unofficially. However, none of the volunteers, except Maximov, received any special attention before they left, or at least we do not know about it.

Even if Maximov did not have a secret mission in South Africa, he certainly behaved in a way that made those around him think that he did. If he did have such a mission, his instructions must have been given to him orally. We could not trace any documents with such instructions in the archives, thus we can only guess what these instructions might have been. Maximov's idea about letters to European powers might have been his own, but it might have been prompted to him by some Russian

33. Maximov's letter to the Administrative Manager of the Military Academic Committee of 7 (20) March 1900. *Krasny arkhiv. Istorichesky Zhurnal*, 1940, vol. 6, No. 103, p. 148.

34. AVPRI. Fund II, Department 1-5, 1895, inventory 929, file 7, list 15.

35. Ye. Maximov. "De La Rey." *Novoie Vremia*, 14 (27) March 1902. Maximov published this article on the eve of the court hearing of his duel case (see next chapter), perhaps as a protective publicity measure: he stressed not only the admirable qualities of the Boer general but also his own closeness to him.

military officials as well. Otherwise why would he try to assure the Boer leadership of the positive reaction of the Russian government to such letters? The Russian government might have sent Maximov to South Africa to advise the Boer authorities on their European or at least Russian policy with the ultimate goal of facilitating the coalition of continental powers against Britain. Or else, the Russian authorities might have tried to exaggerate the meaning of Maximov's mission in an attempt to demonstrate that Russia was doing something for South Africa, while in fact it could hardly do anything at all.

Whatever Maximov's mission was, the Russian volunteers did not like what they saw, or guessed about it, and as a result did not accept Maximov as their commander. From them unfavourable rumours about him spread to other volunteer corps.

The belief that Maximov was a police officer was widely held, wrote a well-known Irish political activist, Michael Davitt.³⁶ Villebois-Mareuil's biographer repeated the same story.³⁷ A French volunteer, Le Coy de la Marche, wrote about Maximov's attempts to command the European Legion: "In spite of the support, a little hike-warm it is true, of President Steyn, despite the written orders, he could not succeed in the task. It demanded, in effect, a moral authority which everyone accorded the General, but which was then unanimously refused Colonel Maximov, in particular by the Russians who could not pardon his position as a police officer and even professed a certain contempt for him."³⁸

Maximov's ill-wishers used these rumours against him. Augustus, who did join Ganetsky's detachment, wrote that the rumours deprived Maximov "of any hope of occupying among us the position which he definitely deserved both by his battle reputation and personal qualities".³⁹

Maximov was bitterly conscious of these rumours and sometimes flared up. Augustus quoted an incident when Maximov shouted at his compatriots: "So Gentlemen! I shall expose your tricks. Now I don't want to discuss who of the Russian volunteers spread the rumours that I am a gendarme and a secret agent, we shall discuss it another time!"⁴⁰ Such outbursts could only make things worse for him.

Some volunteers changed their opinion about Maximov later. Augustus, for example, became Maximov's ardent admirer. He wrote:

"Received according to the dress, seen off according to the wit' - M-v

36. Michael Davitt. *The Boer Fight for Freedom*. New York and London, 1902, p. 335.

37. R. Macnab. Op. cit., p. 170.

38. Le Coy de la Marche. *Souvenirs de la guerre du Transvaal: journal d'un volontaire*. Paris, 1901, p. 25.

39. *Varshavsky Voienny Zhurnal*, March 1902, No. 3, p. 217.

40. Op. cit., p. 216.

perfectly fits into this saying. Shortish, dried up, stringy, with characteristic sharp features, in a worn-out Austrian-style jacket and high boots - I can't say that at first sight, at first meeting, he makes an enchanting impression. But it was enough to speak with him for an hour or two, catch his slightly mocking expression, his look, somehow piercing his companion, a look of a person who often saw the terrible spectre of death face to face, hear his sharp and passionate voice, see the movement of his facial muscles. His whole appearance conveyed the spirit of something primordial. One could feel that he is a person of gusto, of strong passions and adamant energy. Such people can not sustain the tight framework of ordinary peaceful daily routine, they yearn for the open spaces, for freedom, people of his type leave their trace in history as fearless travellers, who discover new unknown lands, as navigators, warriors, popular leaders at the time of great upheavals, or catastrophes. Their names stand out in line with the names of Dezhnev, Przhivalsky and Stenka Razin. Or else they become victims of human stupidity and indifference, and with their wings clipped suffocate somewhere on the outskirts of the universe in the rank of a retired captain . . .

"M-v was obviously in his forties, but his eyes lit up as those of a youth, his nostrils dilated and trembled when he spoke about his past, or about his plans in the Transvaal."

Augustus thought very highly of Maximov, more highly than of any other volunteer. He wrote: "He came to the Transvaal now not only to experience the delight of playing with his life, as all the rest of us sinners, but because he was hoping to serve the great cause of protecting the weak and oppressed, and not as an ordinary soldier - he had more far-reaching plans."⁴¹

For Augustus, as for Izedinova, Maximov was a special case, for at least partially his admiration for Maximov could stem from the fact that both were monarchists, Maximov even a more devoted one than Augustus. But Augustus was a sharp observer and his opinions deserve attention. If one leaves aside Maximov's political views and his somewhat difficult temper, he remains an outstanding personality, one of the most interesting and brilliant among all the volunteers.

President Kruger expressed his gratitude to him. On 13 February 1902 Kruger sent Maximov his portrait and a letter from Utrecht, where he was exiled:

" . . . Your services to my Fatherland were extraordinarily important and deserve great respect.

41. Op. cit., January 1902, No. 1, pp. 24-25.

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 Wegens de vele aangelegene oprechte wensch.
 om stukken, versien van
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 der leide Afkeusche
 Republiek

President Kruger's letter to Maximov.

"Motivated by the absolutely selfless impulse of your soul, you have fulfilled your duty as an able and fearless representative of the Volunteer Commando under your leadership, - and I am convinced that if it were not for the inevitable circumstances that made you leave, you would have still continued to fight for the sacred cause of liberty and justice, which you so nobly considered to be your duty. Let everything that you have done during your lifetime be the source of great moral satisfaction for you, and let happiness and prosperity be your destiny. This is my sincere wish."⁴²