Our FIRST WAR *with the* RUSSIANS

For many months, American doughboys battled grimly against Red troops in Russia. Few people remember that war now, but it takes on increasing significance in the light of current events

By Maj. Gen. EDWARD E. MacMORLAND

with Lt. Col. CLARKE NEWLON

Gen. MacMorland, shown holding a Russian gun, received British Distinguished Service Order for his service in Russia. He's now commander of Aberdeen (Md.) Proving Ground.

FEW people remember our first war with Russia. Fought on Communist soil, it went on for more than a year, toward the close of World War I, and eventually involved about 15,000 American soldiers as well as many more thousands of Allied troops. The enemy was the new Bolshevik government, which had posed a threat to the Allied war effort. While the fighting lasted, the Americans and their brothers-in-arms took and held the vital ports of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk in Russian Europe, plus Vladivostok and a huge chunk of surrounding territory in Siberia.

For many months of heavy fighting, they had the well-armed forces of Russian Communism stopped cold.

Then, their mission accomplished, they pulled out, and a big barrier to the growth of Red Russia was removed. Today, we can only speculate about what might have happened—if the democracies had known then, as they do now, the full, terrible implications of the ideology they had been pitted against in Russia.

In any case, scattered throughout the United States there are many veterans of our two expeditionary forces to Russia who will attest to one thing: although they met the Reds on their home territory—a land that even then was remote, alien and mysterious—the Americans and their democratic Allies were better than a match for the soldiers of Communism.

I know, because I was there.

I was a member of the Polar Bears, the North Russian Expeditionary Force which, during the coldest part of that year, deployed more than 5,000 American soldiers over the Arkhangelsk-Murmansk sector. I was a major then, and in charge of the U.S. railroad troops which rebuilt, repaired, maintained and pushed to the south the Murmansk-Petrozavodsk rail line, under constant Bolshevik fire.

I can still remember the ugly cruelty of the country and the bitter cold of the early spring on the shores of the White Sea, with the sea itself and its tributaries bound fast by rough, corroded ice which didn't break until June. I can remember, too, the friendliness of the peasants and villagers, their disdain for Communism, and their warm, unselfish attitude toward the American doughboys.

By the same token, I will never forget the Reds I met—in the Bolshevik army or out of it, a tough, hard lot. They had never expected to encounter Allied troops in the homeland they had snatched during the convulsions of a popular revolution.

War with the Russians

Transportation was crude in the Russia of 1918-19. Snow- taxi riders are Pvts. C.A. Simpson of Grand Rapids and C. Everhardt, Detroit (rt.).

Frankly, our presence in Russia was just as much a surprise to us.

Back of the Allied occupation of Russian territory lay the extremely complicated military situation which existed in the last few months of World War I. Briefly and oversimplified, it was this:

The people of Russia, oppressed for centuries, had swept the government of Czar Nicholas out of existence in a chaotic revolution. The provisional government of Alexander Kerensky, which followed, immediately set to work to restore the nation and help the people—meanwhile recognizing Russia's obligation to continue its war against Germany on the Eastern Front.

Then, in November, 1917, the Bolsheviks, a small minority party, violently overthrew Kerensky, seized power, and busied themselves in a campaign to exterminate every Russian who smelled even vaguely of opposition. Of the greatest military importance to the Allies, moreover, was the fact that they concluded a separate peace with the Kaiser, and there were even indications that they were prepared to help him in his war against democracy.

By the summer of 1918, with Russia in a state of utter chaos, the Germans had established themselves in Finland and were pressing northward with the obvious intention of seizing the ice-free port of Murmansk and establishing it as a submarine and military base. They also had their eyes on the railroad which ran from Murmansk to Petrozavodsk and connected with the famous and strategically important Trans-Siberian railroad, the one means of communication with Vladivostok, in Siberia.

To add to this threat to the Allies, the Reds were carrying on a savage seesaw guerrilla warfare with the White Russians, and were menacing constantly the stores of Allied matériel which had been built up at Arkhangelsk and Vladivostok, and at other points along the Trans-Siberian line.

At about this time, a great, disorganized army of Czech troops, whose number has been estimated at up to 100,000, deserted from the Austrian forces and began pouring into Russia—seizing cities on the Volga and the Trans-Siberian and declaring war on German and Bolshevik alike.

It was with the dual motive of re-establishing an Eastern Front and protecting their supplies—as well as with the vague hope that their presence might inspire the Russians to set up a representative government—that the Allies determined to move into Russia. (Originally, it was believed that the Czechs would supply most of the men for this new front; the idea was later abandoned.)

Once the decision had been made, the democracies moved fast. On May 24, 1918, British-led Allied forces slipped into Murmansk under the very noses of the numerically superior Germans. Not long afterward, the U.S. War Department alerted the 27th and 31st Infantry Regiments, in the Philippines, for duty in Siberia under Major General William S. Graves, and arranged for the shipment of 5,000 additional troops from California to bring the two regiments up to full war strength.

On July 31st a multilingual, 1,400-man landing party (including 50 American sailors) appeared at Arkhangelsk under the command of a British general and drove the Bolsheviks from the city after brief resistance.

On August 15th, the first American soldiers of the Siberian Expeditionary Force, which was to reach an ultimate strength of more than 9,000, landed at Vladivostok—the first American soldiers to set foot in such numbers on Russian ground. Three weeks later, on September 4th, 4,000 doughboys—mostly from the 85th Division, which had been in England ready for shipment to France—reached Arkhangelsk under Lieutenant Colonel (later Colonel) George E. Stewart to back up the

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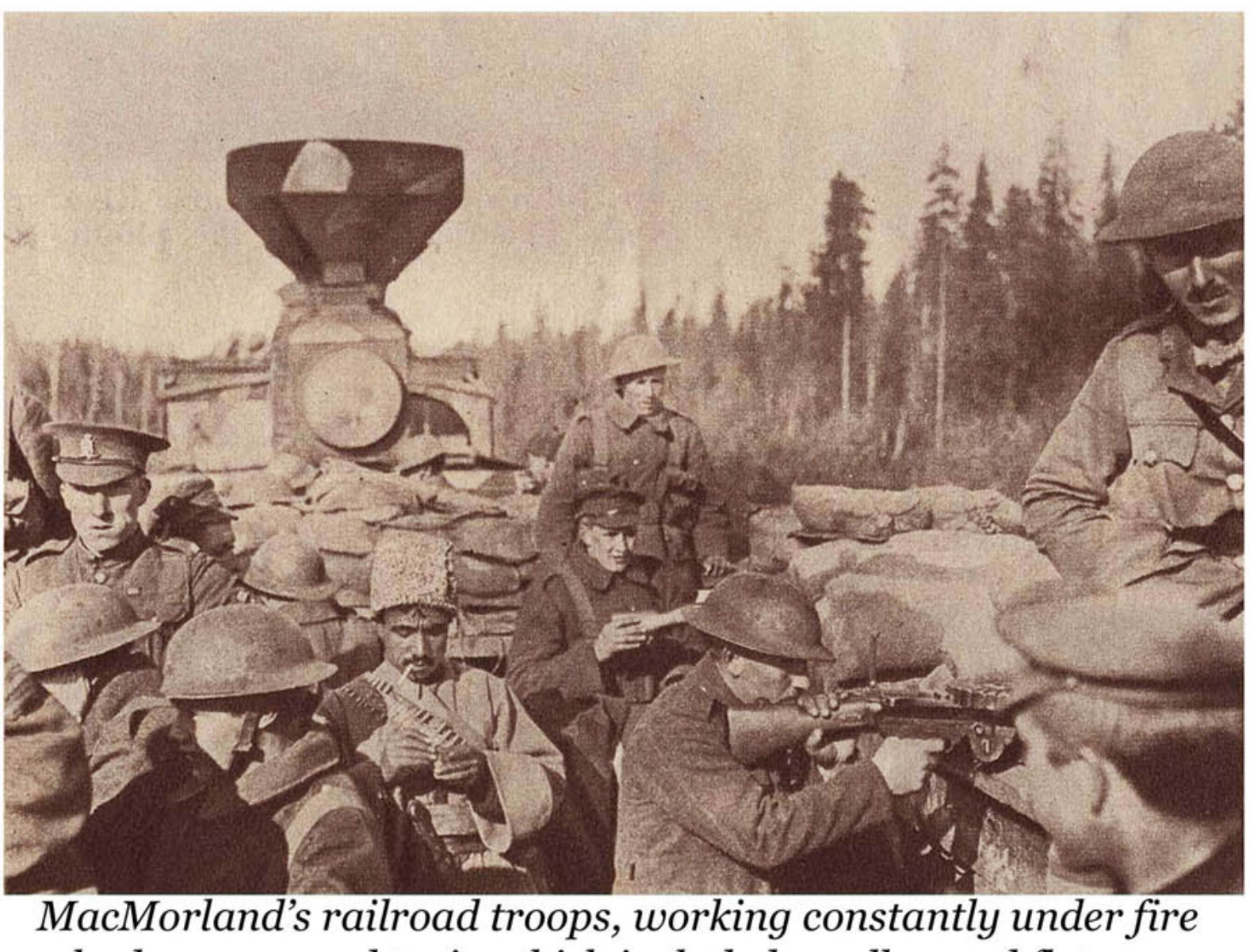

MacMorland's railroad troops, working constantly under fire had an armored train which included sandbagged flatcar. Note ancient engine in the background of the photograph.

small 11-nation contingent which had arrived there earlier. (Most of the men in this latter division were from Michigan; the 339th Regiment, which formed the backbone of the U.S. contribution to the Allied army in north Russia, was known as "Detroit's Own.")

The Allies were now established in Russia in force —and their numbers were to increase later. Ultimately, there would be some 15,000 Allied troops in Russian Europe—including an additional 1,000 Americans, a large number of British and French, and some Italians, Lithuanians, Chinese, White Russians, Poles, Finns, *(Continued on page 70)* Czechs and Estonians. Eventually, the Siberian Allies would grow in strength until the Japanese alone had an estimated 70,000 troops on the ground, plus the Americans and some French, English and Chinese contingents.

The two fronts, some 5,000 miles apart, had no direct communication, and might have been involved in entirely separate wars against the same enemy. And, indeed, they were engaged in different tasks. For the Allies in the north—including the Americans of the North Russian Expeditionary Force —the mission was to deny Murmansk and the railroad south to the Germans, save the stores at Arkhangelsk, and provide a rallying point for the Czechs.

Duties of Forces in Far East

For the forces in Siberia, the job was to guard the Trans-Siberian railroad and the Allied stores at Vladivostok and elsewhere in the area, and collect and evacuate rampaging Czechs who had worked their way east. (It is worth noting that General Graves had specific orders forbidding him to intervene or take sides in Russian politics in this area.)

Of the two fronts, the eastern one—Siberia—was the less active, and, therefore, perhaps the harder to stand. For many months, until April, 1920, homesick Americans remained in the towns and villages, guarding warehouses and German prisoners, patrolling the precious railroad in armored cars and plain flatcars and enduring cold, monotonous duty long after their compatriots in France (and northwestern Russia) had gone home. Bolshevik action in that area took the form of harassment, rather than full-scale battle: in all, 36 American soldiers were killed on that front, compared with 190 in European Russia.

In this latter region, northward across the top of the world, the U.S. troops were deployed over more than 400 miles of arctic front. The Armistice of November, 1918, caught them there, ice-locked, and for nearly a year they fought the Communists of Russia in scores of engagements, large and small.

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Even after snow cleared, conditions were tough. Here, U.S. soldiers dry clothes over fire after 17-mile advance through muddy swampland.

Pitted against an enemy as brutal and devious then as he is now, they were confronted by equally brutal climatic conditions—long, bitter hours of arctic darkness; clinging, waist-deep snow; and temperatures which often dropped as low as 20 degrees below zero. They lived for day after dreary day on canned and dried rations in their lonely outposts. Untried troops with mostly green officers, they learned as they went along, griping and swearing, but completing their mission with the respect of Allies and enemies alike.

Since this is the part of our first war against Communist Russia that I saw and felt, and know, the rest of this story will be about the Murmansk and Arkhangelsk sectors and about the men there who campaigned under the most difficult conditions against the Red armies.

It was a tough and surprisingly well-equipped enemy that our soldiers faced in this region: the 6th Bolshevik army, which —although it varied in strength from month to month (and almost from week to week) —never fell below 16,000 men, or slightly more than the Allies could muster at their peak strength. The Communists operated in small companies of about 80 men, most of them draftees (it was join or be shot, Red prisoners told us).

Not only was their equipment as good as ours, but frequently their artillery was better, numerically, anyhow. It was manned by well-trained Germans, either forced into service or serving voluntarily. On the whole, the Red morale appeared to be good. Their troops at the front were relieved every two days when the Bolsheviks could afford it; if not, whenever it was possible. Their daily ration, we learned, was a pound of black bread, two lumps of sugar, oatmeal or rice, soup and sometimes meat.

Even in those early days, the Commies revealed a pattern of operation which has since become a familiar part of their tactics. They distributed about the countryside, and dropped from airplanes, leaflets vilifying the Americans as capitalistic warmongers, and proclaiming the Bolshevik aim of "land for the peasant, bread for the worker and peace for all." Also, during the earliest part of the fighting, it was the Reds' policy to kill all prisoners, and there was evidence indicating that some of the hapless Allied captives may have been tortured at the hands of former Cossacks who were fighting on the Bolshevik side.

Later, however, apparently for propaganda purposes, the Reds switched their policy regarding prisoners and began treating our men well. We exchanged some pris-

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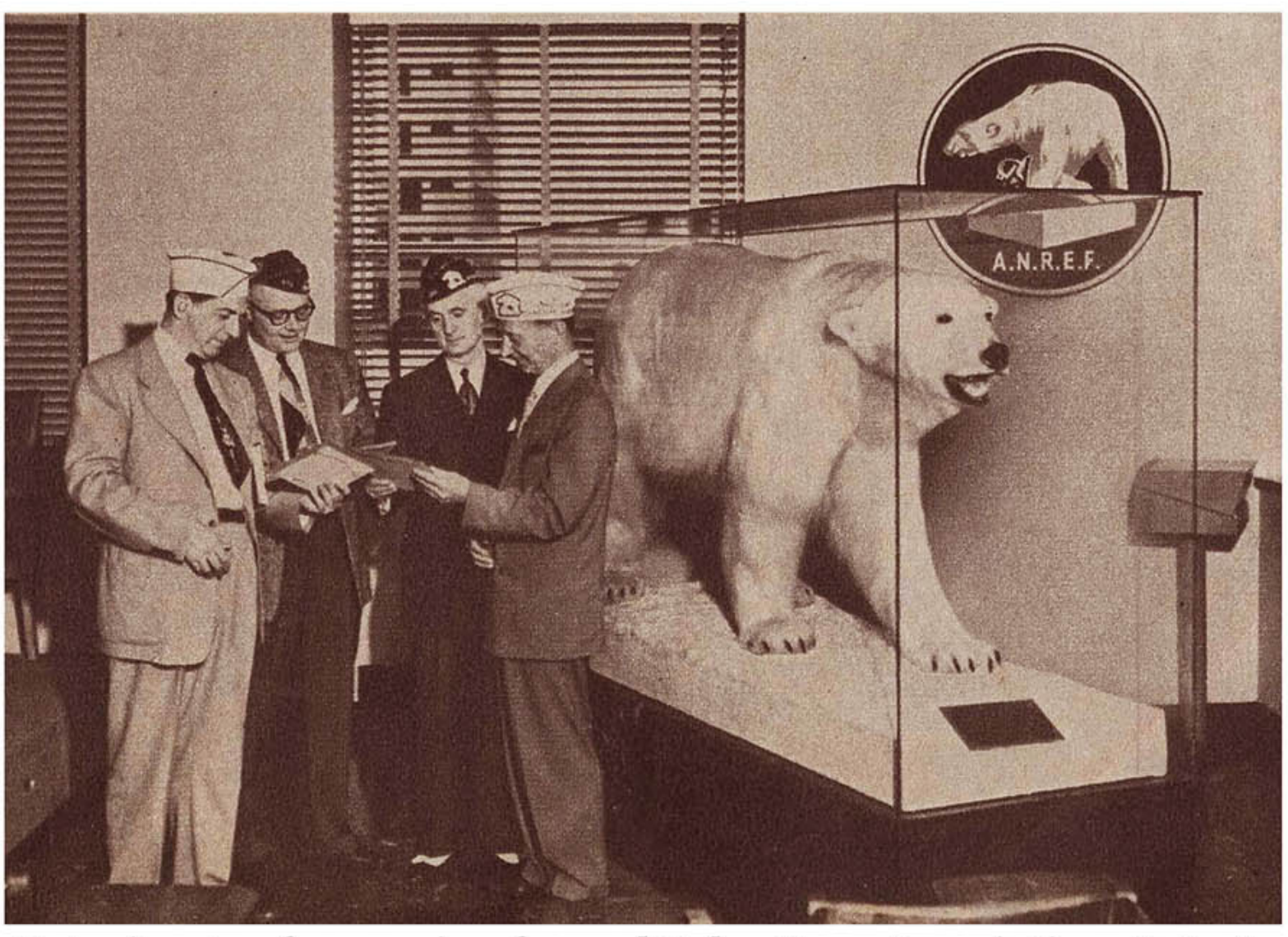

Detroit vets of campaign formed Polar Bear Association: L. to R.: president Don Shand, H. Palmer, secretary J. Curry, past president A. Anselmi

oners and learned that the Americans had been given the same medical treatment as the Red soldiers, and if uninjured had been lodged with private families, permitted to roam in whatever town they were in, and even allowed to work if they wished, for wages of from 600 to 1,000 rubles ($60 to $100) a month. Naturally, they were inundated with propaganda.

But we never knew what to expect from the Bolsheviks. I recall, for example, an event that occurred in front-line Toulgas on November 11, 1918, the day the Armistice was signed by Germany and the Allies. The Reds suddenly attacked a hospital—against no opposition but that of an orderly who, seeing them coming, had picked up a rifle and fired through a window. Storming the doors, the Bolshevik soldiers poured into the building and began to murder the patients.

Suddenly, a young Russian woman in enemy uniform entered, took command, and halted the slaughter. She posted a sentry at each door and remained during the day. Later, when the Communists withdrew, she refused to accompany them; instead, she surrendered as an Allied prisoner. She revealed that she was twenty-two and the friend of a former czarist officer. She was well educated and gave the Allies considerable information about the location and supply situation of the Red troops. I regret that I don't know her name or what became of her, for she saved many lives that day.

There were, however, tragic incidents that resulted from the actions of "friendly" Russians. On October 1st, two American platoons, plus 50 Russian volunteers and 18 Cossacks who had just joined the Allied command, moved in to attack a force of Reds, estimated at between 500 and 700 men, on the front just south of the White Sea. When the attack began, the Cossacks promptly effected a retreat—in good order, but without orders. The Russian volunteers fled. The two U.S. platoons, now heavily outnumbered, dug in; by the time they were able to pull back under cover of darkness, they had lost

cover of darkness, they had lost six killed and three wounded (and had inflicted casualties on the enemy reckoned at 30 killed and 50 wounded).

Besides the unit mentioned above, a number of other small Cossack groups attached themselves to the Allied forces, as did some Bolshevik deserters and Russian peasant volunteers. Serving under both Russian and Allied officers, many of these men were molded into good, well-trained soldiers. By and large, however, they were extremely unreliable. Some, of course, had joined us just for the clothing and food—and pay—they got.

In three cases, these units mutinied. In Arkhangelsk on December 11th, for instance, two companies of Russians refused to go to the front, and barricaded themselves in their barracks, refusing to surrender to other Russian and Allied troops. Firing broke out, but ended when a mortar shell was dropped into the Red barracks. The mutineers gave up then, and named 11 of their number as the leaders. These men were shot by a detachment of their own mutineers, and this outfit later became one of the finest Russian units serving with the Allies.

Our relations with the Russian civilians in Arkhangelsk, on the other hand, were almost universally good. As in many other parts of Russia, both the local government and the citizenry were violently out of sympathy with the Bolsheviks and the Moscow government, and they looked on the Americans and their Allies as friends. As has always happened when U.S. soldiers have been billeted on foreign soil, the kids immediately attached themselves to the Americans—and became the chief beneficiaries of the traditional American generosity. Innumerable orphaned youngsters were fed and clothed for weeks and months by U.S. units, while inspecting officers looked the other way. (It's interesting to speculate what has happened to those children since, and what they must feel toward Americans.)

The Americans were frequent visitors in the Russian homes, too, and made it a practice to share their meager candy and tobacco rations with their hosts. And, as might be expected, when they left they took many of the Russian girls with them as brides.

At the time I was there, Arkhangelsk had a population of about 100,000, including—besides the usual peacetime residents—hundreds of White Russian refugees, military officers and minor royalty. I remember, too, an inordinate number of "princes and princesses" of mysterious origin but tremendous glamor, who seemed principally interested in information.

It was strange country for all of us, and not only because of the people we met. During our stay there, Sergeant Major David L. Van Deusen, of Detroit, wrote a letter to his parents which was printed in the Detroit Free Press. It's worth reprinting here in part, because it sums up what all the Americans in Arkhangelsk must have thought of that city.

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"There is nothing here," Van Deusen wrote in some wonder, "that could properly be called a skyscraper, the highest things being the gilded domes and spires on the many churches—and the prices. The houses are all made of wood, most of them logs, unpainted on the outside but papered and warm inside. The main street is paved with cobblestones and would limber up a stiff set of auto springs in no time at all. Other streets are covered with slabs or planks . . . Open sewers run under the wooden sidewalks and flow into large cesspools . . ."

For most of the soldiers, those not in reserve or on duty at headquarters, even these refinements were lacking. The men were quartered in village huts, boxcars or log blockhouses—heated with wood stoves and lighted with candles—much like those built by the early American settlers as protection against Indians. Like the American version, the Russian blockhouses were strongly fortified, with firing ports and barricades.

The weather was a problem at all times. The Americans first arrived during the brief warm season and found themselves restricted by necessity to the villages, except for travel by rail or river. A few hundred feet from the towns and rail bed we would sink up to our knees in a wet, stinking morass, and everywhere mosquitoes hung over the ground in clouds. Even the Reds, who knew the country and its few trails, seldom attempted to move troops overland during the short summer.

Winter in northern Russia began in late October and lasted until June. By December, the rivers were solid with hard, rough ice, topped by a spotty layer of snow, sometimes waist-deep. It was at about the same time that the White Sea froze over each year. By spring, we were thoroughly fed up with the cold, harsh weather and wished for warm weather again—until we remembered the steaming swamps and swarming insects that would bedevil us when the cold left.

For a time during the winter of 1918, the Americans suffered considerably from the cold. Finally, we were issued heavy British winter clothing—fur cap, leather jerkin, long fur coat and arctic boots with thick leather soles and loosely fastened canvas tops. This was good clothing, warm and effective against the Russian winter—except that the men found the soles too slippery on ice and snow. This was remedied by studding the boots with football cleats.

Rations Inadequate

Our rations did little to alleviate the hardship of life in Russia. We got tinned pork and beans, a tinned meat and vegetable ration, margarine or lard, dried beans, oatmeal, hardtack or bread, jam, tea or coffee, dried vegetables and eggs. A terribly monotonous fare, it came to only 4,620 calories daily, which our doctors felt was too little for the physical exertion the men were undergoing in that bad climate.

Despite all they had to endure, the Americans bore up exceedingly well. On January 7, 1919, when our troops had been in the field for four months, Colonel Stew-

art, the commanding officer, cabled a report to his superiors in London following an inspection tour on which, it is interesting to note, he traveled a mere 180 miles by rail, only 50 by automobile—and 650 by horse and sleigh! The report commented that "General health, discipline and morale of troops are excellent," and added: ". . . Men have rapidly become accustomed to rigors of climate, lack of comforts and conveniences and existing primitive conditions of life and duty and have performed most valiant service."

This service, according to orders from Washington, consisted simply of a holding operation in the Murmansk-Arkhangelsk area. At no time was there any plan to push inland. However, in order to protect the two cities from attack and keep them in communication with each other, the Allied forces herded the Bolshevik troops back, in heavy fighting, some 350 miles from Arkhangelsk, in the general direction of Moscow. The most bitter battles were fought by troops operating out of the White Sea port; they advanced as far south as Toulgas and also cleared an area extending for about 100 miles on either side of the base city.

The Murmansk operation became devoted largely to holding most of the railroad line to Petrozavodsk. This was important because it connected with another line that ultimately tied in with the Trans-Siberian line. It was this front that I was concerned with; although I was an artillery officer, I was named commander of the American contingent in Murmansk (all volunteers), whose job it was to keep the railroad open. Eventually, in carrying out this task, the Allied forces—including, of course, the Americans—beat the Reds back as far as Lake Onega, roughly 400 miles from Murmansk.

Efficiency Amazes Russians

That part of the railroad which ran from Murmansk to the junction with a rough trail which skirted the White Sea from Arkhangelsk was fairly safe from Red attack, and we turned this section over to friendly Russians to operate. We worked south from the junction, and the efficiency of American methods was a constant source of amazement to the Russians.

Captain E. S. Waid was superintendent of the line. He replaced the Russian station crews with half as many Americans and immediately got the road on a regular operating schedule—the first occasion on which it had run on time. He kept empty cars rolling northward so fast that the Russians, controlling the road north of the junction, had to evacuate their own yards in self-defense. As a result, in a very short time the whole line from Murmansk south was operating smoothly.

The equipment we worked with was far from satisfactory. We found 12 locomotives barely running and 35 others decrepit and immobile. Captain C. E. McMillan, in charge of maintenance, swiftly repaired the dozen good locomotives and, by cannibalizing the others, succeeded in putting an additional 10 on the road. All 22 were wood burners, and none had brakes; the

wood burners, and none had brakes; the engineer stopped by reversing the steam. The engines broke down so often that when one engineer succeeded in operating 6,238 miles without a failure he was cited in official orders for his excellent performance.

In order to keep my headquarters completely mobile, I took over an old second-class dining car, fitted it with four tiny staterooms, an office, kitchen, dining room and sleeping quarters for the cook and orderlies, and moved in, along with my personnel officer and our chaplain. From early May to early June of 1919, I traveled 8,000 miles in that car, never remaining in one place for more than a week.

During a large part of this time, we were under fire. Our men were operating so close to the enemy that we had an armored train on the line, with four steel-sheathed gondolas, each mounting a Vickers three-pounder naval gun; four sand-bagged tenders with places for 22 machine guns; two passenger cars for the personnel; a kitchen car, and two ammunition cars. We had this train in action a few times—but usually just its presence was enough to scare off the enemy.

In April, 1919, the Allies were engaged in clearing the Bolsheviks from the southern part of the Murmansk railroad, and 85 of my men, led by Captain C. G. Jones, went along under the protection of a single flatcar on which was mounted a 75-millimeter gun. Within a couple of weeks, Jones's units had built eight bridges, laid a mile of track, repaired numerous junctions and switches and were so far along in their work that 30 men were detached from this force to aid in the attack. Two of these men were killed a couple of days later, and one was injured; about 10 days afterward, another died in action. The records indicate that these were the only battle casualties in the entire U.S. Transportation Corps during World War I.

It was at about this time that we had another demonstration of how valuable and helpful friendly Russians could be. We had found a large bridge destroyed and Jones was getting ready to repair it when a medical officer arrived and ordered me to give the men a week's rest. Certainly they deserved it, for they had been working 16-hour days for a long time and were exhausted. Just when I was wondering how I could replace them, a detachment of some 500 Russians in British uniform straggled up the track and reported to me for railroad duty.

They built the bridge—in only one week. One of our officers, a Lieutenant Kryzanosky, spoke Russian, and whenever the work slackened he could pick up the pace by threatening to take the job away from them! Since it was Captain Jones who was supervising the job, the Russians understood that the orders for speed came from him; they nicknamed him Seytchas (Hurry-up) and admired him greatly.

Jones even helped launch a miniature American naval unit during this southward drive. The attack was aimed at a town called Medvyejya Gora, on the northern edge of Lake Onega, a key strategic spot.

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The 339th Infantry Regiment en route.

But the area was menaced by some armed Red steamboats operating from the lake, so before we reached the town the decision was made to neutralize these vessels. Accordingly, Jones threw a two-mile spur from the main line through the woods to the lake, and American motor patrol boats were carried in and launched.

Medvyejya Gora was taken on May 21st, and the attack pressed on. Some 15 miles beyond this place, a large bridge was out; Jones and his men built a 1,075-foot detour at a lower level in 48 hours. It was early in July when the track men finally reached the town of Kyapeselga, the high-water mark of the Allied advance.

For us, this was the "end of the line." We were ordered out of Russia shortly thereafter. In little more than a month, we had followed the infantry 70 miles, repairing so many miles of track we couldn't count them, and building 75 bridges ranging up to 142 feet in length and 36 feet in height.

There were no major engagements involving Allied troops after this. The order had come to withdraw. The first American contingent embarked at Arkhangelsk on June 3d; the railroaders were the last to leave, on July 28th. When the men of the 85th Division returned to Michigan, they were wearing a distinctive, eye-catching shoulder patch—a lumbering polar bear. (The Polar Bear Association, formed soon afterward, still exists in Detroit, and in a nearby cemetery is the Polar Bear Plot, where lie the bodies of Detroiters who lost their lives fighting Communism.)

On the other side of Asia, Allied troops remained almost a year longer than we did in the west; it wasn't until April 1, 1920, that the last U.S. units moved out of Vladivostok.

The White Russians were the only organized opposition left in the country, and they proved unable to stand up against the well-equipped, battle-tested Bolshevik armies. They were soon defeated, and all Russia was consolidated under the tight control of the Reds. Everyone knows the rest of the story—at least, up to 1951. THE END

Just as Red dictatorship arose out of chaos, so must it perish. In a vital article in next week's Collier's, historian Allan Nevins tells why Soviet totalitarianism is doomed—by bloody upheaval, if not by peaceful means