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K. E. VOROSHILOV



STALIN
AND THE RED ARMY

1939

K. E. VOROSHILOV . STALIN AND THE RED ARMY

STALIN AND THE RED ARMY

BY
K.E. VOROSHILOV



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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
TSARITSYN	11
PERM	21
PETROGRAD	27
THE SOUTHERN FRONT	31

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STALIN IN 1918.

THE period of peaceful construction in our history is replete with events of tremendous importance. Rivers and oceans of water have flown under the bridges in recent years. Great changes have taken place around us, our perspectives are different from what they were, and accepted ideas of scale and volume have been completely upset. Inseparably linked with all these events is the teeming and manifold revolutionary activity of Comrade Stalin. During the last five or six years Comrade Stalin has been in the centre of the developing and surging struggle. Only these circumstances can explain why the role of Comrade Stalin

as one of the most outstanding organizers of the victories of the Civil War has to some extent remained in the shade and has not yet received due appreciation.

Today, on our friend's fiftieth birthday, I should like partially, at least, to make good this omission.*

Needless to say, in a newspaper article I can hardly claim to give a full account of Comrade Stalin's military work. I shall merely try to call to comrades' minds some facts from the recent past, and publish certain little-known documents, thus using the plain testimony of facts to show the truly remarkable role played by Comrade Stalin at tense moments during the Civil War.

In the period from 1918 to 1920 Comrade Stalin was probably the only person whom the Central Committee shifted about from front to front, selecting the most vulnerable spots, the places where the threat to the revolution was most imminent. Stalin was never to be found where things were comparatively quiet and going smoothly, where success was attending our arms. But wherever, for various reasons, the Red Army suffered reverses, wherever the counter-revolutionary forces, pressing their successes, threatened the very existence of Soviet power, wherever alarm and panic might at any moment develop into helplessness and catastrophe—there Comrade Stalin was always sure to appear. During endless nights, foregoing sleep, he organized things, took the reins of leadership into his own firm hands, and ruthlessly broke down all obstructions. He was unsparing and achieved the necessary change and improvement in conditions. Comrade Stalin himself wrote of this in one of his letters to the Central Committee in 1919, saying that he was being “turned into a specialist for cleaning out the stables of the War Department.”

* The present article was written by Comrade Voroshilov on the occasion of Comrade Stalin's fiftieth birthday—December 20, 1929.—*Ed.*



THE DEFENSE OF TSARITSYN.

(From a painting by Sokolov-Skalva.)

TSARITSYN

COMRADE Stalin began his military activities on the Tsaritsyn front, rather by chance. At the beginning of June 1918 Comrade Stalin with a Red Army unit and two armoured cars left for Tsaritsyn in the capacity of Commissar-General of food supplies in South Russia. In Tsaritsyn he encountered incredible chaos in Soviet, trade union and Party organizations but the confusion and muddle in the various departments at military headquarters was even worse. At every step Comrade Stalin ran into obstacles, arising from the general situation, which interfered with the performance of his immediate task. These obstacles were

mainly a result of the rapidly growing Cossack counter-revolution, extensively supported at that time by the German army of occupation which had invaded the Ukraine. Counter-revolutionary Cossack bands soon seized a number of points near Tsaritsyn and thereby not only made it impossible to organize a systematic supply of grain for starving Moscow and Petrograd, but also placed Tsaritsyn in extreme danger.

Things, at the time, were equally bad in other places. In Moscow there was the uprising of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. In the East, Muravyov had turned traitor; in the Urals, the Czechoslovakian counter-revolutionary revolt was developing; in the far South the English were closing in on Baku. The whole country was encircled by a ring of fire. The revolution was experiencing its severest trials. Telegram after telegram flashed over the wires between Moscow and Tsaritsyn, between Lenin and Stalin. Lenin warned of dangers, offered encouragement, called for decisive measures. The fate of Tsaritsyn acquired paramount importance. An uprising on the Don and the loss of Tsaritsyn would involve the loss of the entire rich North Caucasian granary. Comrade Stalin thoroughly understood this. As an experienced revolutionary, he was soon convinced that his work would be of no avail unless he could influence the military command, which played the decisive role under these conditions.

"The line south of Tsaritsyn has not yet been restored," he wrote to Lenin in a memorandum of July 7, that was transmitted with the characteristic superscription: "I am rushing off to the front, am writing only on business."

"I am driving and bawling out everyone who needs it. Am in hopes that we shall soon restore the line. You may be sure that we will spare nobody, neither ourselves nor others, and that we shall deliver the grain in spite of everything.

"If our military 'experts' (bunglers) had not been loafing on the job the line would not have been cut. And if the line is restored it will not be because of them but in spite of them."

And further on, replying to Lenin's apprehensions as to the possibility of a revolt by the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries in Tsaritsyn, he writes briefly, but forcefully and plainly:

"As regards the hysterical ones, you may be sure that our hand will not falter; with enemies we will deal as such."

The more he examined the military apparatus, the more Comrade Stalin became convinced of its complete helplessness and, in some sections, even of its direct reluctance to organize resistance to the counter-revolution that was raising its insolent head.

And on July 11, 1918, Comrade Stalin wired to Lenin:

"Matters are complicated by the fact that the Military Headquarters of the North Caucasus Area has proved to be utterly incapable of adapting itself to the requirements of combating counter-revolution. The fact is that our 'experts' are not only psychologically incapable of ruthlessly combating the counter-revolution, but likewise, being 'staff' workers, who only know how to make 'field sketches' and draft plans for realignment, are absolutely indifferent to actual operations . . . and, in general, regard themselves as outsiders, as guests. The military commissars have been unable to fill the gap. . . ."

Comrade Stalin did not confine himself to this devastating characterization; in the same memorandum he drew his own practical conclusion:

"I consider that I have no right to regard matters with indifference when the front held by Kalnin is cut off from the supply base, and the North is cut off from the grain districts; I shall correct these and many other shortcomings on the spot; I am taking a number of measures—even to the point of removing the officials and commanders who ruin matters—and shall continue to do so, in spite of formal difficulties, which I shall brush aside when necessary. It is understood that I assume full responsibility before all higher bodies."

The situation became more and more critical. Comrade Stalin worked with tremendous energy, and in a short time from Commissar-General of food supplies he became the actual leader of all the Red forces on the Tsaritsyn front. This state of affairs received official recognition in Moscow, and Comrade Stalin was charged with

“ . . . establishing order, consolidating the detachments into regular units, establishing a proper command, after dismissing all insubordinates.” (From the telegram of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, with the superscription: “The present telegram is sent with Lenin’s approval.”)

It was at this time that the remnants of the Ukrainian revolutionary army reached Tsaritsyn, having retreated across the Don steppe under pressure of the German forces.

A Revolutionary Military Council was formed, with Comrade Stalin at its head, which undertook the organization of a regular army. The dynamic spirit of Comrade Stalin, his energy and will, accomplished what had seemed impossible only yesterday. In a short time divisions, brigades and regiments sprang into being. The headquarters, the commissary and ordnance departments, and the entire rear were thoroughly purged of counter-revolutionary and hostile elements. The Soviet and Party apparatus was improved and began to function more efficiently. A group of old Bolsheviks and revolutionary workers rallied around Comrade Stalin, and in place of the helpless staff a Red, Bolshevik stronghold grew up in the South at the gates of the counter-revolutionary Don.

At that time Tsaritsyn was full of counter-revolutionaries of every possible hue, from Right Socialist-Revolutionaries and terrorists to rabid monarchists. Before the appearance of Comrade Stalin and the arrival of the revolutionary detachments from the Ukraine all these gentlemen had felt practically at ease and lived in hopes of better days. The reorganization of the Red forces at the front necessitated a ruthless purge of the rear, administered with an iron hand. The Revolutionary Military Council



STALIN PRESENTING THE LEGANSK REGIMENT WITH REGIMENTAL COLOURS.

(From a painting by Kirilov.)

headed by Comrade Stalin set up a special Cheka, and commissioned it to purge Tsaritsyn of counter-revolution.

The testimony of an enemy is sometimes valuable and interesting. This is how Colonel Nosovich (former Chief of Operations of the army), who had betrayed us and deserted to the Krassnov forces, describes this period and the part played by Comrade Stalin in the Whiteguard paper *Donskaya Volna* of February 3, 1919:

“Stalin’s chief commission was to furnish food supplies for the northern provinces, wielding unlimited authority in the performance of this task. . . .

“The Gryazi-Tsaritsyn line had been completely cut. In the North there was only one means of receiving supplies and maintaining communications: the Volga. In the South, after the Volunteer Army had occupied Tikhoretskaya, the situation also became extremely precarious. For Stalin, who obtained his supplies exclusively from the Stavropol province, this situation virtually spelled the end of his mission in the South. But evidently it goes against the grain of a man like Stalin to give up a job once he has undertaken it. In justice to him it must be admitted that any of the old administrators might well envy his energy, and his ability to adapt himself to circumstances and to the business in hand might well serve as a model to many.

“Gradually, as he was left with nothing to do, or rather, as his direct task diminished, Stalin began to go into all phases of the city’s administration and into the extensive work of defending Tsaritsyn, in particular, and the whole Caucasian so-called revolutionary front in general.”

Further on, describing the situation in Tsaritsyn, Nošovich writes:

“By this time the situation in Tsaritsyn, in general, had become very ominous. The Tsaritsyn Cheka worked full speed. Not a single day passed without various plots being discovered in what

had seemed the most trustworthy and secret places. All the city prisons were overcrowded. . . .

“The fighting at the front became extremely intense. . . .

“The supreme force and supreme authority after July 20 was Stalin. A simple conversation with Moscow over the direct wire on the inconvenience and unsuitability of the existing system of administration of the district resulted in Moscow’s issuing an order over the wire which placed Stalin in charge of all military . . . and civil affairs. . . .”

But Nosovich himself further acknowledges how well founded were the measures of repression. Here is what he writes regarding the counter-revolutionary organizations in Tsaritsyn:

“By this time the local counter-revolutionary organization, which supported the political platform of the Constituent Assembly, was also considerably strengthened, and, having received money from Moscow, was preparing to take active steps in support of the Don Cossacks in the work of liberating Tsaritsyn.

“Most unfortunately, the head of this organization, the engineer Alexeyev, and his two sons, who came from Moscow, were ill-acquainted with the actual situation, and the organization was discovered because of a fallacious plan which hinged on the active participation of a Serbian battalion which had been in the service of the Bolsheviks and attached to the Cheka. . . .

“Stalin’s order was brief: ‘Shoot them!’ The engineer Alexeyev, his two sons, and together with them a goodly number of officers, some of whom belonged to the organization while others were merely suspected of being accomplices, were seized by the Cheka and immediately shot without trial.”

Touching further on the subject of how the rear (the military headquarters of the North Caucasus Area and its departments) was purged of Whiteguards, Nosovich writes:

"The characteristic feature of this drive was Stalin's attitude towards telegraphic orders from the centre. When Trotsky, disturbed at the destruction of the regional administrative departments which he had taken such pains to create, sent a telegram to the effect that the staff and commissariat must be left as they were and that facilities be given them to go on with their work, Stalin wrote a superscription on this telegram which was as categorical as it was significant:

"To be disregarded."

"And so this telegram was disregarded, and the entire Ordinance Department and a section of the Headquarters staff remain under arrest on a barge in Tsaritsyn."

In a short while Tsaritsyn became utterly unrecognizable. A city where till recently music had played in the parks, where the fugitive bourgeoisie had openly thronged the streets in company with White officers, was transformed into a Red military camp, where the strictest order and military discipline prevailed. This strengthening of the rear immediately had a good effect on the morale of our regiments fighting at the front. The commanding and political personnel and the entire rank and file of the Red Army began to feel that they were being directed by a firm revolutionary hand which was fighting for the interests of the workers and peasants, meting out merciless retribution to all who stood in the way of this struggle.

Comrade Stalin's leadership was not confined to his office. When the necessary order had been established and organization restored on a revolutionary basis, he left for the front, which at the time was strung out for over six hundred kilometres. And only a man of Stalin's superb ability as an organizer could have grasped the special military problems of the extremely difficult situation at the time without having had any previous military training (Comrade Stalin had never served in the army).

I remember the beginning of August 1918 as though it were yesterday.

The Krassnov Cossack units were attacking Tsaritsyn, hoping by a concentric blow to throw the Red regiments back to the Volga. For many days the Red troops, headed by the Communist division, which was entirely composed of workers from the Donetz basin, withstood the powerful onslaught of the splendidly organized Cossack units. It was an extremely tense moment. One should have seen Comrade Stalin then. He was as calm and self-possessed as ever. He went without sleep literally for days on end, his intense activities divided between the theatres of operations and army headquarters. The situation at the front became almost catastrophic. By a well-planned manœuvre the Krassnov units under the command of Fitzkhaláurov, Mamontov and others were pressing our harassed troops, which sustained terrific losses. Shaped like a horseshoe, the enemy's front, with its flanks reaching to the Volga, contracted from day to day. We had no means of retreat, but Stalin did not worry about that. He was filled with one concern, with one single thought—to achieve victory and destroy the enemy at all costs. And Stalin's indomitable will to victory spread to all his closest comrades-in-arms, and in spite of the almost hopeless situation no one doubted that victory would be ours.

And we did achieve victory. The enemy was crushed and flung far back towards the Don.





LENIN, STALIN AND KALININ IN 1919.

PERM

AT the end of 1918 a catastrophic situation arose on the Eastern Front, especially on the sector held by the Third Army, which was compelled to surrender Perm. Caught in a semi-circle by the enemy, this army was completely demoralized by the end of November. Six months of unrelieved fighting, with no reliable reserves to speak of, an insecure rear, and utter disorganization of supplies (the Twenty-Ninth Division repelled the enemy's attacks for five days literally without a crust of bread), at thirty-five degrees below zero weather, coupled with the complete absence of roads, a tremendously long and straggling front

(more than four hundred kilometres), and an incompetent staff, had incapacitated the Third Army from withstanding the onslaught of the superior forces of the enemy.

To complete the discouraging picture there must be added wholesale treason by the commanding staff, composed of former tsarist officers, and the surrender of entire regiments, a result of the poor class selection of the replacements, and utterly incompetent commanders. Under these conditions the Third Army had completely collapsed, and was retreating in disorder. In twenty days it had fallen back 300 kilometres, losing 18,000 men, scores of field guns, hundreds of machine guns, etc. The enemy was making rapid headway, creating a real threat to Vyatka and to the entire Eastern Front.

These events made it imperative for the Central Committee to ascertain the causes of the catastrophe and immediately restore order among the units of the Third Army. Who should be sent to carry out this extremely difficult task? Lenin wired to the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic:

“A number of communications have been received from Party organizations around Perm reporting the catastrophic condition of the army and drunkenness. I thought of sending Stalin. I am afraid Smilga will be lenient with . . . , who, it is said, also drinks and is incapable of restoring order.”

The Central Committee adopted the following decision:

“To appoint a Party investigating commission consisting of two members of the Central Committee, Dzerzhinsky and Stalin, to thoroughly investigate the causes of the surrender of Perm and the recent defeats on the Ural front, and to fully ascertain all attendant circumstances. The Central Committee authorizes the commission to take all measures necessary to effect the rapid restoration of both Party and Soviet work in the entire district of the Third and Second Armies.” (Sverdlov’s telegram No. 00079.)

This decision seemingly limited the functions of Comrades Stalin and Dzerzhinsky to "investigate the causes of the surrender of Perm and the recent defeats on the Ural front." But Comrade Stalin transferred the centre of gravity of this "Party investigation" work to the taking of effective measures to remedy the situation, consolidate the front, etc. In the very first telegram to Lenin, dated January 5, 1919, on the results of the commission's work, Stalin does not say a single word about "the causes of the catastrophe," but promptly poses the question of what must be done to save the army. Here is the telegram:

Comrade Lenin, Chairman of the Council of Defence.

Investigation begun. Shall report progress as investigation proceeds. Meanwhile we consider it necessary to inform you of one urgent need of the Third Army. Of the Third Army (over 30,000 men) there remain only about 11,000 weary and battered soldiers, who can barely withstand the onslaught of the enemy. The units despatched by the Commander-in-Chief are unreliable, in part even hostile to us, and require a thorough sifting. In order to save the remnants of the Third Army and prevent a rapid advance of the enemy to Vyatka (according to all reports from the commanding staff of the front and the Third Army, this is a very real danger) it is *absolutely* essential to *rush* at least three *thoroughly* reliable regiments from Russia and place them at the disposal of the army commander. We urgently request you to exert pressure on the appropriate military bodies to this end. We repeat that unless such measures are taken Vyatka is threatened with the fate of Perm. Such is the general opinion of the comrades on the spot, and all the facts at our disposal lead us to endorse it.

STALIN, DZERZHINSKY

January 5, 1919, Vyatka.

And only on January 13, 1919, did Comrade Stalin together with Comrade Dzerzhinsky send a brief preliminary report on "the causes of the catastrophe," which were summarized as follows: exhaustion and weariness of the army when the enemy launched its offensive; our lack of reserves at that time; isolation of the staff headquarters from the army; mismanagement on the part of the Army Commander; criminal methods of directing operations at the front on the part of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, which paralysed the Command of the front with its contradictory orders and made it utterly impossible for the latter to come to the prompt aid of the Third Army; unreliability of the reinforcements sent up from the rear, to be explained by the use of the old methods of recruiting; and complete instability of the rear, to be explained by the utter helplessness and incompetence of the local Soviet and Party organizations.

At the same time Comrade Stalin drew up, and immediately carried out with his customary promptness and firmness, a whole series of practical measures for improving the fighting capacity of the Third Army.

"By January 15," we read in his report to the Council of Defence, "a force of twelve hundred men, reliable infantry and cavalry, were sent to the front; two days later two squadrons of cavalry were despatched. On the twentieth the Sixty-Second Regiment of the Third Brigade (having first been carefully sifted) was despatched. These units made it possible to check the enemy's advance, completely changed the morale of the Third Army, and began our offensive on Perm, which is so far proceeding successfully. Behind the lines a thorough purging of Soviet and Party institutions is going on. Revolutionary committees have been organized in Vyatka and in the county towns. The formation of strong revolutionary organizations in the villages has been begun and continues. All Party and Soviet work is being put on a new footing. The military control bodies have been purged and reor-

Врученному Ленину Сталина в Вятку
М-ну Ленину.

Расположение врагов. Окружающее положение будет
сложнее, потому что враги будут
идти со стороны, не ждущей отпора, и, кроме
10-й армии, будут в том, что от 10-й армии (была
до войны) осталось лишь около 10 тысяч человек, истре-
нительная сила, все сдерживающее начало провалилось.
Противником вражеской власти неадекватно, потому что все
враждебное к нам и направлено в серьезной борьбе.
Для нас остается 10-я армия и превраща-
ется в серьезную противостоятелем вражеской во Вятке
(по всем данным, полученным от Камышловского
слова фронта и 10-й армии, на опасный случай
мало реально). Важно необходимо спешно пере-
кинуть из России в неопытные командармы
по крайней мере 3 сериальных истребителя по-
ли. Подразделение против сдерживает в этом направ-
лении на пути на соответствующий военный
жизни. Подразделение: все время и в том числе
такой власти Ленин, такое общее мнение против
нас и в силу существующей, к которому мы присла-
направляем на основании всех существующих у нас
данных.

Сталин,

5/1 1919. Москва
8 часов вечера.

В. Д. Зверев

A TELEGRAM TO LENIN FROM STALIN AND DZERZHINSKY,
IN VYATKA, JANUARY 5, 1919.

ganized. The provincial Cheka has been sifted and reinforced with new Party workers. The congestion at the Vyatka railway junction is being relieved . . .” and so forth.

As a result of all these measures not only was the enemy’s further advance checked, but in January 1919 the Eastern Front launched an offensive and on the right flank Uralsk was taken.

This is how Comrade Stalin understood and carried out his task of “investigating the causes of the catastrophe.” He investigated and established these causes and, right there and then, by his own efforts, eliminated them and achieved the necessary improvement.

PETROGRAD

IN the spring of 1919 the Whiteguard army of General Yudenich carrying out the task set by Kolchak of "seizing Petrograd" and diverting the revolutionary forces from the Eastern Front, with the help of Esthonian and Finnish White troops and the British fleet, suddenly took the offensive and placed Petrograd in immediate danger. The seriousness of the situation was further accentuated by the fact that in Petrograd itself counter-revolutionary plots were discovered, the leaders of which turned out to be military experts serving in the staff headquarters of the Western Front, in the Seventh Army and the Kronstadt naval base.

While Yudenich advanced on Petrograd, Bulak-Balakhovich scored a number of successes in the direction of Pskov. Treason raised its head at the front. Several of our regiments went over to the side of the enemy; the entire garrisons of Fort Krassnaya Gorka and Fort Seraya Loshad came out openly against the Soviet power. Dismay seized the entire Seventh Army. The front began to waver; the enemy was nearing Petrograd. The situation had to be remedied immediately.

The Central Committee again chose Comrade Stalin for the job. In the space of three weeks Comrade Stalin succeeded in effecting a radical change for the better. Laxity and consternation among the troops were soon eliminated. The staffs were whipped into shape; mobilizations of Petrograd workers and Communists were carried through in rapid succession; enemies and traitors were mercilessly destroyed. Comrade Stalin intervened in the field operations of the military command. Here is what he telegraphed to Comrade Lenin:

“Following the capture of Fort Krassnaya Gorka, Fort Seraya Loshad has been captured. Their guns are in perfect order; the rapid [illegible] of all forts and strongholds is under way. The naval experts assert that the capture of Krassnaya Gorka from the sea runs counter to all naval science. I can only deplore this so-called science. The swift capture of Gorka was due to the grossest interference in the operations by me, and by civilians generally, even to the point of countermanding orders on land and sea and imposing my own. I consider it my duty to declare that I shall continue to act in this way in future, despite all my reverence for science.—*Stalin.*”

Within six days Comrade Stalin reported to Lenin:

“A change for the better has begun among our troops. For a week we have not had a single case of individual or group desertion to the enemy. Deserters are returning in thousands. Deser-

tions to us from the enemy camp have become more frequent. In one week some four hundred men have come over to us, most of them armed. Our offensive began yesterday. Although promised reserves have not yet come up, to have remained on this line any further was out of the question—we were too near Petrograd. So far the offensive is developing successfully. The Whites are on the run. The line occupied today stretches from Kernovo via Voronino—Slepino to Kaskovo. We have taken prisoners and captured two or more field pieces, quick-firing guns, and cartridges. Enemy vessels have not shown up; evidently they are afraid of Krassnaya Gorka, which is now entirely ours. Urgently despatch two million rounds of cartridges to me for the Sixth division. . . .”

These two telegrams give a clear picture of the tremendous work carried through by Comrade Stalin in remedying the extremely dangerous situation that had arisen near Petrograd.

THE SOUTHERN FRONT

EVERYONE remembers the autumn of 1919. The crucial moment of the whole Civil War was at hand. The Whiteguard hordes under the command of Denikin, equipped by the "Allies" and supported by their staffs, were approaching Orel. The whole vast Southern Front was steadily falling back. The internal situation was equally grave. Food difficulties had become extremely acute. Industry was at a standstill for lack of fuel. Inside the country and even in Moscow itself counter-revolutionary elements were beginning to bestir themselves. Tula was in danger, Moscow was threatened.

The situation had to be saved, and the Central Committee sent Comrade Stalin to the Southern Front in the capacity of a member of the Revolutionary Military Council. There is now no need to hide the fact that prior to his appointment Comrade Stalin submitted three main conditions to the Central Committee: 1) That Trotsky do not interfere in the affairs of the Southern Front or cross its lines of demarcation; 2) that a number of people whom Comrade Stalin regarded as incapable of coping with the situation in the army be immediately recalled from the Southern Front; and 3) that new people selected by Stalin and capable of coping with this task be immediately despatched to the Southern Front. These conditions were fully accepted.

But it required a precise plan of operations and a clearly formulated objective to set in motion the huge, cumbersome machine (extending from the Volga to the Polish-Ukrainian border) known as the Southern Front, which comprised several hundred thousand troops. This objective could then be placed before the troops, and by regrouping the army and concentrating the best forces at the main points a blow could be dealt to the enemy.

Comrade Stalin encountered a most uncertain and precarious situation at the front. On the main sector, the Kursk-Orel-Tula line, we were suffering heavy reverses, while the eastern flank was helplessly marking time. As a plan of operations, the old (September) plan was submitted to him. This provided that the main attack be launched by the left flank, from Tsaritsyn towards Novorossiisk, across the Don steppe.

After acquainting himself with the situation Comrade Stalin immediately took a decision. He categorically rejected the old plan, formulated new proposals, and submitted them to Lenin in the following note, which speaks for itself. This note is so interesting, it so clearly displays Comrade Stalin's strategic ability, and is so characteristic of him because of the categorical manner in which the question is put, that we think it worth quoting in full:

"Some two months ago the Commander-in-Chief did not object in principle to launching an attack from West to East through the Donetsk Basin as the main line of attack. If, after all, he hesitated to launch an attack in this direction, it was, he maintained, merely because of the 'heritage' he had received as a result of the retreat of the southern army during the summer, namely, the haphazard disposition of the troops on the Southeastern Front, the rearrangement of which would involve a huge loss in time, and this would be to Denikin's advantage. . . . But now the situation has radically changed and, with it, the disposition of the troops. The Eighth Army (the main army on the old Southern Front) has changed its disposition on the Southern Front and directly faces the Donetsk Basin; Budyonny's cavalry corps (the other main force) has also changed its disposition on the Southern Front; and another factor has been added—the Latvian division, which within a month, after it has received reinforcements, will again become a formidable threat to Denikin. . . .

"What induces the Commander-in-Chief (General Headquarters) to persist in the old plan? Only stubbornness, apparently, or, if you like, factionalism—factionalism of the most stupid kind and most dangerous to the Republic, fostered in the Commander-in-Chief by the bantam cock of a 'strategist' on his staff. . . .

"The other day the Commander-in-Chief gave orders to Shorin to advance on Novorossiisk across the Don steppe, along a line which our aviators might find convenient to fly, but which our infantry and artillery would find impossible to trek. It requires no proof to show that this harebrained (but proposed) advance amidst hostile surroundings, with roads totally lacking, threatens us with complete disaster. It is not hard to understand that, as recent experience has shown, this campaign against the Cossack villages can only serve to antagonize the Cossacks towards us and make them rally around Denikin in defence of their vil-



STALIN AND THE MEMBERS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MILITARY COUNCIL OF THE SOUTHERN FRONT
REVIEWING THE FIRST MOUNTED ARMY. 1919.

(From a painting by Avilov.)

lages; it can only put Denikin in the light of a saviour of the Don; it can only create a Cossack army for Denikin; that is to say, it can only strengthen Denikin. It is therefore necessary right away, without loss of time, to alter the old plan, which experience has already discredited, and replace it by a plan according to which the main attack will be launched on Rostov—by way of Kharkov and the Donetz Basin.

“Firstly, here we shall be in surroundings which are not hostile, but on the contrary sympathetic to us, a circumstance which will facilitate our advance. Secondly, we shall secure an extremely important railway system (that of the Donetz Basin) and the main artery feeding Denikin’s army—the Voronezh-Rostov line. . . . Thirdly, by this advance we will cut Denikin’s army in two. One part, the Volunteer Army, we shall leave for Makhno to devour, while the other, the Cossack army, we shall threaten with an attack in the rear. Fourthly, we shall be in a position to set the Cossacks quarrelling with Denikin, who, if our advance is successful, will try to move the Cossack units to the West, to which the majority of the Cossacks will not agree. . . . Fifthly, we shall secure coal, while Denikin will be left without coal.

“This plan must be adopted without delay. . . .

“Briefly: the old plan, which has already been discredited by events, should not be revived under any circumstances—that would endanger the Republic and would be sure to improve Denikin’s situation. It must be replaced by another plan. Circumstances and conditions are not only ripe for, but imperatively dictate such a change. . . . Without this my work at the Southern Front will be pointless, criminal, and superfluous, which will give me the right, or rather, make it my duty, to go anywhere, even to the devil, only not to remain on the Southern Front.

Yours, STALIN”

All comment on this document is superfluous. Worthy of note is the way Stalin gauges the shortest line of operations. In civil war simple arithmetic is sometimes inadequate and often misleading. The Tsaritsyn-Novorossiisk route may prove to be much longer, because it leads through hostile territory inhabited by the class enemy. And, on the contrary, the route from Tula to Novorossiisk may prove to be much shorter, because it goes through working-class Kharkov and the colliery districts of the Donetz Basin. The gauging of the direction to be taken reveals Comrade Stalin's principal qualities as a proletarian revolutionary, as a real strategist of civil war.

Stalin's plan was accepted by the Central Committee. Lenin himself wrote the order to the field headquarters immediately countermanding the directives that had become inept. The Southern Front launched its main attack in the direction of Kharkov-Rostov via the Donetz Basin. The results are known. It was the turning point in the Civil War. Denikin's hordes were hurled back to the Black Sea. The Ukraine and North Caucasus were delivered from the Whiteguards. A great share of the credit for all this belongs to Comrade Stalin.

Another extremely important historic event on the Southern Front connected with the name of Comrade Stalin deserves attention. I have in mind the formation of the Mounted Army. This was the first attempt to combine cavalry divisions into so large a unit as an army. Stalin saw the power of massed cavalry in civil war. He concretely perceived its tremendous significance in decisive manœuvres. The past, however, could provide no precedent for such an original experiment as the placing of mounted armies in the field. Nor was there anything on this subject in scientific works, and therefore a proposal of this kind either failed to be understood or gave rise to opposition. But Comrade Stalin was not to be discouraged. Once he was sure of the expediency and correctness of his plans, he always carried them out, regardless of obstacles. On November 11 the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic received the following report from the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front:

“To the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic.

“The Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front at its meeting of November 11 of this year resolved, in view of present conditions, to form a Mounted Army to consist of the First and Second Cavalry Corps and of one rifle brigade (a second brigade to be added subsequently).

“The Revolutionary Military Council of the Mounted Army to be composed as follows:

“Army Commander—Comrade Budyonny; members—Comrades Voroshilov and Shchadenko.

“*Refer:* Decision of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front dated November 11, 1919, No. 505/a.

“We request endorsement of the aforesaid decision.”

The Mounted Army was formed regardless of and even in spite of the desires of General Headquarters. The initiative in its formation belongs to Comrade Stalin, who clearly realized the absolute necessity for such a body. The historic consequences of this step are well known to all.

Still another characteristic feature of Comrade Stalin's was clearly revealed on the Southern Front—his method of action by means of shock groups: choose the main line of attack, concentrate the best detachments at that point, and crush the enemy. In this, just as in choosing the direction of attack, he acquired great skill.

After Denikin's defeat Stalin's authority as an outstanding organizer and military leader became indisputable. When in January 1920, near Rostov, as a result of gross mistakes on the part of the command of the front, a dangerous delay occurred in our advance, when danger again loomed large that the whiteguards, having rallied, might bring our victory to naught, the Central Committee sent Stalin the following telegram:

“In view of the necessity of establishing absolute unity in the command of the Caucasian Front, of strengthening the authority of the Commander-in-Chief of the Front and of the Commander

of the Army, of utilizing local forces and supplies on a broad scale, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee considers it imperative that you be immediately included on the Revolutionary Military Council of the Caucasian Front. . . . Report when you will leave for Rostov."

Comrade Stalin abided by this decision, although he was of the opinion that in view of the state of his health he should be allowed to remain where he was. Then again, he was extremely worried lest these continuous shifts should be misunderstood by local Party organizations, which would be inclined "to accuse me of irresponsibly jumping from one field of administration to another, since they are unaware of the decisions of the Central Committee." (Comrade Stalin's telegram of February 7, 1920.) The Central Committee agreed with Comrade Stalin, and Lenin telegraphed him on February 10: "I have not lost hope that . . . everything may be straightened out without your being transferred."

When in the din of the White Polish campaign Wrangel sallied forth from the Crimea and created a new and dangerous threat to the liberated Donbas and the entire South, the Central Committee on August 3, 1920 adopted the following decision:

"In view of Wrangel's successes and the anxiety in the Kuban, the Wrangel front must be regarded as an absolutely independent front of tremendous significance and dealt with separately. Comrade Stalin is instructed to form a Revolutionary Military Council and concentrate all his efforts on the Wrangel front; Yegorov or Frunze is to be appointed in command of the front, by agreement between the Commander-in-Chief and Stalin."

The same day Lenin wrote to Stalin:

"The Political Bureau has just divided up the fronts so that you may occupy yourself exclusively with Wrangel. . . ."

Comrade Stalin organized the new front, and only illness forced him to relinquish this work.

In the Polish campaign Comrade Stalin was a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southwestern Front. The defeat of the Polish army, the deliverance of Kiev and the territory of the Ukraine on the right bank of the Dnieper, the advance far into Galicia and the organization of the famous raid of the First Mounted Army—the child of Stalin's military genius—were all largely the result of his able and skilful leadership.

The defeat of the Poles along the entire front in the Ukraine and the almost complete annihilation of the Third Polish Army near Kiev, the crushing blows at Berdichev and Zhitomir and the advance of the First Mounted Army in the direction of Rovno made it possible for our Western Front also to launch a general offensive. The subsequent operations on the Southwestern Front brought the Red troops to the very gates of Lwow, and only the setback of our troops near Warsaw halted the Mounted Army as it was preparing to attack Lwow, which was only ten kilometres away.

However, this period is so rich in events and its historiography requires such ample documentation and careful analysis that it would take us far beyond the bounds of our article.

* * *

This short description of Comrade Stalin's army work falls far short of even a characterization of his principal qualities as a military leader and proletarian revolutionary. What is most striking is Comrade Stalin's ability rapidly to grasp the concrete situation and act accordingly.

A merciless foe of laxity, insubordination, and haphazard methods, Comrade Stalin never hesitated, when the interests of the revolution so demanded, to take upon himself the responsibility for extreme measures, for making a clean sweep of things. When the revolutionary situation required it, Comrade Stalin was ready to defy any regulation, any order from above.

Comrade Stalin was always an advocate of the strictest military discipline and centralization, on the absolute condition, however, of intel-

ligent and consistent direction on the part of the higher military bodies. In the above-quoted report to the Council of Defence, dated January 31, 1919, Comrade Stalin together with Dzerzhinsky wrote:

“The army cannot act as a self-contained, fully autonomous unit. In its operations it depends entirely on the armies adjacent to it, and first and foremost on the directives of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic. Other things being equal, the best fighting army may meet with disaster in case of faulty instructions from the centre and lack of effective contact with adjacent armies. It is necessary to establish on the fronts, and first of all on the Eastern Front, a system of strictly focussing the operations of the separate armies on the execution of a definite and seriously thought-out strategic plan. Arbitrariness or irresponsibility in defining directives, without serious consideration of all factors, the consequent rapid changing of directives, not to mention the vagueness of the directives themselves, such as is the practice of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, makes it impossible to direct the armies, results in loss of effort and time, and disorganizes the front.”

Comrade Stalin always insisted on personal responsibility for work assigned, and could not stomach “passing the buck.”

Comrade Stalin devoted serious attention to the organization of supplies for the troops. He knew and understood what good food and warm clothes meant to the men. In Tsaritsyn, in Perm, and on the Southern Front he would stop at nothing to ensure the supply of the troops and thus make them more stalwart and strong.

Comrade Stalin embodies the best traits of an organizer of the proletarian class front. He paid special attention to the class composition of the army, making sure it really consisted of workers and peasants “who do not exploit the labour of others.” He attached tremendous importance to political work in the army; on many occasions it was he who took



STALIN AND VOROSHILOV IN 1935.

the initiative in mobilizing Communists, for he considered it essential that a large proportion of them enter the ranks as ordinary combatants. Comrade Stalin was extremely exacting in the selection of military commissars. He sharply criticized the All-Russian Bureau of Political Commissars at the time for sending out "greenhorns."

"Political commissars," he wrote, "must be the leading spirits of military work, giving their lead to the experts." (Telegram from Tsaritsyn 1918.)

Comrade Stalin attached vast importance to the political state of affairs in the rear of the army. In his report on the Third Army he wrote:

"The sore spot of our armies is the instability of the rear, which is mainly to be explained by the neglect of Party work, the inability of the local Soviets to put the directives of the centre into practice, and the abnormal, almost isolated position of the local Chekas."

Comrade Stalin was exceptionally strict in his choice of people. Regardless of office and "regardless of person," he ruthlessly removed incompetent experts, commissars, and Party and Soviet officials. At the same time, however, Comrade Stalin more than anyone else always supported and defended those who in his opinion had proved worthy of the confidence accorded them by the Revolution. This is how Comrade Stalin acted in relation to deserving Red commanders known to him personally. When in the beginning of 1920 one of the real proletarian heroes of the Civil War, Comrade Parkhomenko, subsequently commander of the 14th Cavalry Division, who made the supreme sacrifice in the struggle with the Makhno bands, was as the result of some blunder sentenced to the supreme penalty, Comrade Stalin, on learning of this, demanded his immediate and unconditional release. Many such and similar instances might be adduced. More than any one else among the outstanding leaders,

Comrade Stalin knew how to value people who had devoted their lives to the proletarian revolution; and the commanders knew this, as did all those who fought for our cause under his leadership.

Such was Comrade Stalin during the Civil War. Such he has remained through the subsequent years of the struggle for Socialism.

The Civil War required the exertion of tremendous strength, energy, sagacity and will-power on the part of Comrade Stalin. He gave himself wholeheartedly and unreservedly to his duties, but at the same time he acquired tremendous experience for his later work.

During the Civil War Comrade Stalin displayed tremendous ability as a revolutionary strategist under varied and complex conditions. He always correctly determined the line of the main attack, and by his masterly application of tactics suited to the circumstances he achieved the desired results. These qualities of proletarian strategist and tactician he has retained after the Civil War as well. These qualities of his are well known to the whole Party. The Trotskys and their ilk, who paid with their hides for the attempt to substitute their petty-bourgeois ideology for the great teachings of Marx and Lenin, could testify to this better than anyone else. The Right opportunists, who only recently were completely routed, are equally well aware of this.

And in time of peace, no less successfully than during the Civil War, Comrade Stalin, together with the Leninist Central Committee, conducts a relentless struggle against all conscious and unconscious enemies of the Party and of Socialist construction in our country.

But at the same time, though, formally, he long ago ceased to be a military man, Comrade Stalin has never ceased to pay keen attention to the problems of the defence of the proletarian State; and today, just as in former years, he knows the Red Army and is its closest and most cherished friend.

