Chapter 2
SIBERIA 1918-1920

On August 9, 1918, Colonel Sargent received a confidential letter of instruction from Headquarters, Philippine Department ordering him to prepare the 31st Infantry (then totaling 43 officers and 1346 enlisted men) for movement. Rather than going to France to fight Germans, the 31st was being sent to Siberia, a place few Americans knew much about. The situation there was chaotic. Russia had suffered the heaviest casualties of any participant in the First World War and after three years of poor leadership, mind-numbing hardship, and one defeat after another, its army had fallen apart. Many Russian units shot or abandoned their officers and simply went home. For most, going home was short-lived because few could survive outside the warring factions in Russia's civil war. Ill-disciplined soldiers led by Bolshevik revolutionaries, Czarist officers, and Cossack warlords roamed the land, forcibly recruiting new members and looting the country to feed and equip themselves. By the summer of 1918, the opponents had coalesced into two main factions, Bolshevik "Reds" and monarchist "Whites."

The Western Allies feared Russia's proletarian revolution would sweep across Europe, but they could not stop Bolshevism's advance in Russia without weakening themselves at home where war-weary people had become susceptible to revolutionary influences. Russia's new leaders pledged to reenter the war against Germany, but their ability to do so was practically nil with civil war raging across their country, German troops occupying nearly a third of their territory, and anti-war Bolsheviks controlling Moscow and St Petersburg.

When the revolution came, supplies that had been sent to aid Russia's war effort were left unguarded on the docks at Murmansk and Vladivostok. Vladivostok alone accumulated 725,000 tons, valued at $750,000,000. Allies wanted the supplies protected because Siberia teemed with former German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war who had no way to get home after the Russians abandoned their prisoner-of-war camps. Included were large numbers of Czechs and Slovaks who had been drafted into the Austro-Hungarian Army. When the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed near the war's end, its Slavic minorities, including Czechoslovakia, split off to form their own countries. The Czechoslovak government pledged to join the war against Germany if the allies would help get its men home. President Wilson agreed to do what he could.

A further reason for allied interest in Siberia was Japan's thinly veiled intent to expand its empire into the Asian mainland, an aim frustrated by the American-brokered peace treaty ending the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Japan had joined the war against Germany, but only because it wanted Germany's Pacific territories. Taking advantage of chaos and a power vacuum in Asiatic Russia, over 70,000 Japanese troops entered Siberia, seemingly intent on taking control. Desperate for solutions, the allies decided to occupy Russia's ports, ostensibly to prevent stranded war materiel from falling into hostile hands. An American presence at Vladivostok would help thwart Japanese ambitions, aid the war effort, help the Czechs, and block Red access to allied war materiel.

Major General William S. Graves, a Texan who had been decorated for bravery during the Philippine Insurrection in 1900 and served with General "Black Jack" Pershing on the Mexican border, was selected to lead the American component of the allied expeditionary force. After serving with distinction on the Army staff, Graves had just assumed command of the 8th Division at Camp Fremont, California when he was summoned by coded message to meet Secretary of War Newton D. Baker at the Baltimore Hotel in Kansas City. The message gave no reason for the meeting and Graves did not know if
he would be returning to California afterwards. He hastily departed Camp Fremont by train, meeting the Secretary in Kansas City as ordered. Baker conveyed the President's orders that Graves take two infantry regiments then stationed in the Philippines (the 27th and 31st) to Vladivostok. Most of his staff and 5000 fillers would be drawn from the 8th Division.

SIBERIA

On August 10, the 3d Battalion 31st Infantry was withdrawn from Corregidor to the Cuartel de España in Manila to prepare for departure. The remainder of the regiment moved by barge on the Pasig River from Fort McKinley to Manila. The regiment's main body and 115 tons of baggage, ammunition, and regimental property left Manila on August 12 aboard the USAT Sherman, while the USAT Crook took the regiment’s horses and a 50-man caretaker detachment. The remainder of the regiment was transported aboard the USAT Logan. Among the passengers on the Logan were several young lieutenants who had served long enough in France to earn an inverted gold chevron signifying combat service. An excerpt from "The Log of the Logan," a newsletter published aboard ship enroute to Vladivostok, gives some indication of the men's light-hearted spirit as they headed into the unknown.

"One by one these gallant youths explained and expounded to a gaping and credulous audience of admirers in the first cabin saloon just how we fit (fought) and won the second battle of the Marne. On the first night out, they informed all and sundry among the passengers, sprung from a less valiant race, just how fortunate General Graves was in having this sturdy group of gold stripers ordered to the Far East to tell 'em how it is done. The truthful historian will have to admit that to none of the speakers did it occur that to undertake to teach the Yankee how to fight, anywhere on the planet, is all the same as undertaking to teach a Kentuckian to like whiskey. Be that as it may, the bull brigade performed entertainingly and prodigiously until the second night out, when Major Lay broke up the seminary in a riot with the mild inquiry: 'Lieutenant, don't you think the War Department is making an awful mistake in risking you in Siberia? In view of the fact that every officer and enlisted man in the 32d Division was bumped off but yourself, don't you think the government ought to stuff and mount you, and exhibit you as a curiosity, or at least subsidize a lecture tour for you?"

Enroute to Vladivostok, the transports stopped to refuel in Nagasaki, Japan, giving the 31st a two-day opportunity to see the city a later generation of Americans would destroy in a thundering atomic blast. Landing at Vladivostok on August 21, the 31st Infantry set up a tent camp east of the city in the Gornastaya Valley. Several days later, four companies were sent north to establish strongpoints along the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Regimental headquarters and the

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1 The 8th Division was organized around the 8th, 12th, 13th, and 62d Infantry Regiments.
2 USAT is the abbreviation for U. S. Army Transport.
3 Even in infantry regiments, officers and couriers still rode horses and heavy weapons and supplies were still drawn by horses until after the First World War.
remaining companies moved into brick barracks built just outside Vladivostok shortly before the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

On arrival in Vladivostok, a detachment of roughly platoon size was drawn from the 31st to serve as guards with the 117th Hospital Train. Among them was Private Cesar Pares. Over the coming months, Pares would travel as far as Irkutsk on the Trans-Siberian Railway, picking up sick and injured American and allied soldiers and scores of desperate civilian refugees. More than a few times, bands of Red or White bandits blocked the rail line in hopes of extorting food and weapons. They always left disappointed and Pares found more adventure than he ever expected.4

The 31st Infantry's first combat action occurred on August 29, 1918 at Ugolnaya when a patrol came under fire from local partisans, inflicting the first American casualties on Siberian soil. Under orders from the allied expedition’s Japanese commander, General Kikuru Otani, the 27th Infantry Regiment was dispatched to Khabarovsk and the 31st was ordered to follow. When General Graves reached Vladivostok on September 1, he rescinded Otani’s order, making it clear that U.S. forces were under Graves’ command, not Otani’s. General Graves soon issued instructions to relocate several strongpoints. Companies A, B, and I were sent to Harbin, Manchuria to guard the spur of the Trans-Siberian Railway that passed through a region of China where government no longer ruled. Across the Russian border at the Suchan coalmines, Lieutenant Colonel Sylvester Soring assumed command of the allied mine guard, comprised of M Company 31st Infantry and companies of Chinese, British, and Japanese troops. Major Fitzhugh B. Allerdice took F and G Companies to guard the rail yards at Spasskoye and Captain Francis G. Bishop took L Company to Radzolnoye to guard an important railway tunnel. Headquarters, Supply, and Machinegun Companies, along with C, D, E, H, and K Companies remained at Vladivostok. The rest of 1918 passed without further incident and, except for establishing outposts at several railroad bridges, the 31st Infantry’s positions remained unchanged.

By the end of 1918, the allied force in Siberia included roughly 72,000 Japanese, 70,000 Czechoslovaks, 12,000 Poles, 9000 Americans, 4200 Canadians, 4000 Romanians, 4000 Russian auxiliaries, 2000 Italians, 1600 British, and 760 French. Rather than going home to fight Germans, the opportunistic Czechoslovaks had taken over a large segment of the Trans-Siberian Railway between Lake Baikal and Yakutsk and ran it as their own. Because of their numbers and the arms they had looted from abandoned Russian stocks, no Army was strong enough to force them out.

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4 Cesar Pares left the Army in 1921, but missed the adventure and comradeship. He soon went back in, serving with the 18th Infantry Regiment in New York City. He rose to the rank of Major in Italy during World War II, but reverted to his enlisted rank after the war. He died in Washington, DC in December 2000.
The Canadian contingent included a company of Northwest Canadian Mounted Police. Among their number was a gunnery officer named Raymond Massey who would later become famous as an American movie actor. In the first group of American reinforcements was Major Sidney C. Graves, son of the American commander. Major Graves had earned the Distinguished Service Cross, Britain's Distinguished Service Order, and the French Croix de Guerre while serving as a captain with the 16th Infantry Regiment in France. He was assigned as Executive Officer of the 3d Battalion 31st Infantry.

The 31st grew steadily during the summer, fall, and winter of 1918, swelled mainly by fillers from the 8th Division. Ironically, two of the same regiments (8th and 13th) that had formed the 31st Infantry in 1916 were again depleted to bring the 31st up to wartime strength. From a strength of 1562 when it reached Vladivostok, the 31st Infantry grew to 3589 by December 31, 1918. New troops were given a heavy dose of individual and squad training, marksmanship, and forced tactical marches in a replacement battalion before being assigned to their companies. One of the early replacements was Private Forrest Moore of Los Angeles, who was assigned to H Company in October 1918. In a letter to his mother, Moore describes the barracks and food as good, the locals as friendly, and the men of H Company as "men who really know how to soldier." Moore later served at the Suchan mines where the Bolsheviks captured him. Not everyone shared his view of the barracks and food.

The first three months of 1919 were extremely cold but Army winter clothing was surprisingly suitable for Siberia's climate. It consisted of a woolen shirt and trousers, a woolen jacket, a three-quarter length sheep lined overcoat, muskrat cap, muskrat gloves, and heavy four-buckle overshoes. Troops were equipped with an M1903 Springfield rifle, an M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), or an M1911 .45 caliber pistol, depending on their duties. All of those weapons, as shown by the year of fielding in their model designators, were still fairly new at the time, representing the state of the art in infantry weapons. Soldiers who fought in Korea 30 years later would still be using the BAR and the trusty .45 caliber pistol would remain in service for over 70 years. The regiment's heaviest weapons were 3 horse-drawn 37mm guns with a range of up to 2500 yards. Each was served by a two-man crew.

Drinking water for the Vladivostok garrison was drawn by cutting ice blocks from a quarry in the mountains, sliding the ice down the mountainside, and hauling it to the kitchens where it was melted and boiled. Barracks life left much to be desired. Before the buildings could be occupied, squatters had to be evicted and the incredible filth left by the previous inhabitants had to be cleaned out. Although barracks buildings were substantial brick structures, windows were ill fitting and pot-bellied stoves heated little more than their immediate surroundings. Mattresses were straw-filled, creating a home for bugs of every description and a serious health hazard. They were also a fire hazard, causing the Replacement Battalion's barracks to burn down when sparks from a coal stove caught a mattress on fire and spread throughout the building before anyone could find water that was not frozen. Latrines were outdoors, making every morning a new challenge. Depending on the time of year, ice, mud, or powdery dust covered the barracks' exterior grounds. Yet despite the irritants, soldiers in Vladivostok and other garrison towns lived as comfortably as their counterparts in barracks back home.

In the early 1900s the sources of contagious diseases were becoming better understood, but wide gaps in medical and sanitation knowledge still left soldiers vulnerable to a variety of deadly germs. Twice in the early months of 1919, Headquarters Company was quarantined due to outbreaks of spinal meningitis. Among the victims was Carl Boling, the regiment's Sergeant Major. Influenza was
particularly feared in such cramped quarters. An influenza epidemic swept the world in 1918, killing over twenty million people, including thousands of American soldiers on their way home from the war. Every time a case of influenza occurred in Vladivostok, everyone feared the worst. During the regiment’s service in Siberia, 135 of its members would succumb to diseases or non-battle injuries.

While Harbin, Manchuria and some of the small Russian towns along the Trans-Siberian railway offered little opportunity for entertainment due to the ever-present danger posed by marauding groups of armed bandits, Vladivostok was like port cities anywhere. Off-duty life was reasonably pleasant because most locals were friendly to Americans. Nightlife in Vladivostok was a mix of seedy bars and brothels near the docks and some elegant entertainment establishments at the city’s better hotels. Men could stroll the streets of Vladivostok unarmed but it was best that they stayed together in groups at night in some of the more “entertaining” districts. Perhaps just a little more than in most overseas duty stations, the medical staff had its hands full with the consequences of being stationed in a relatively small city with a large international military presence—drunkenness, fights, and venereal disease. The environment fostered an atmosphere in which men who were inclined toward indiscipline or were overtaken by loneliness could easily stray from the fold. During the regiment’s two years in Siberia, 50 of its members deserted. Some simply melted into the polyglot international community where they could conceal their identities while others managed to sign on to the crews of departing commercial cargo ships or whalers.

A poem by Private Frank Zanfagna of Headquarters Company reveals the depths of some men’s loathing for the part of the world into which they had been cast.

*When the Lord was designing creation,*  
*And laying the ocean and land,*  
*With never an hour of relaxation*  
*Nor a moment to spit on his hands.*

*As anyone will in a hurry,*  
*He lets things go by and then,*  
*In all the excitement and worry,*  
*He failed to do them over again.*

*So rather than mess up the outfit,*  
*He saved every blunder and blob,*  
*and laid them aside in a corner,*  
*to use at the end of the job.*

*And on the sixth day of his contract,*  
*His bonus expired that day,*  
*He bailed out the dregs of creation*  
*And shoveled the litter away.*

*He scraped all the wreckage and tailing*  
*And the sewage and scum of the stump,*  
*And he made on the shores of the Arctic,*  
*A great international dump.*

*He rushed the thing through in a hurry*  
*And because of the rush he was in,*  
*he dubbed the locality Siberia*
and Siberia it has always been.

And then feeling glum and sarcastic,
Because it was Saturday night,
He picked out the dirtiest corner
And called it Vladivostok for spite.

Its there they do everything backwards
And the mud doesn’t dry between rains,
Where money and sawdust is plenty
And thievery is thicker than brains.

It’s the home of the Jap and the Bohunk,
the herring and mud colored crows,
But my strongest impression of Russia
Got into my head through my nose.

It’s the land of infernal odor,
And the land of national smells
And the average American soldier
Would rather be quartered in hell.

But its back to the states for yours truly,
a sadder but wiser young chap.
The Lord played a joke on creation
When he dumped Siberia on the map.

Private Herbert G. McDonald, an attached engineer, had similar sentiments. An excerpt from one of his poems follows:

…..Siberia, they sent me here,
Beneath the flag I held so dear.
Tis here that I must do my bit
And suffer every day for it.
But as I smell your stinking core,
It seems I hate you more and more.
Of every land beneath the skies,
You are the one I most despise.
Oh take me anywhere away,
From all your odorous decay.
And I will offer up my thanks
With every soldier in the ranks.
If I could choose which I would do
Go down to hell or live with you,
It wouldn’t take me long to tell,
For I would answer “give me hell”.

Vladivostok also had a more civilized side. A number of officers in the garrison took weekly Russian language lessons from an attractive young lady who served them tea and played the piano to accompany their singing. She eventually left Vladivostok as the bride of a dashing young American
lieutenant. Many more of the 31st Infantry’s members left Siberia with Russian brides. Wherever Americans gather, there will be sports. Siberia was no exception. The 31st Infantry fielded a baseball team which played regularly against a Canadian team on the old Russian parade ground. History does not record which team had the winning record. Soldiers inclined toward hunting and fishing had ample opportunities to pursue both in the coastal wilderness and swift-running rivers of southern Siberia.

Soldiers and most leaders remained uncertain of their mission, causing occasional disconnects between policies and actions. Some believed their primary responsibility was to help the Czechs fight their way back home. Others assumed they were to round up German and Austrian prisoners of war running loose all over Siberia. Most believed they had been sent to fight the Bolsheviks, derisively nicknamed "Bolos" by American troops. The "brass" had other ideas. When General Graves learned that a soldier had arrested a Russian simply because he was a Bolshevik, he issued the following statement: "Whoever gave you those orders must have made them up himself. The United States is not at war with the Bolsheviki or any other faction of Russia. You have no orders to arrest Bolsheviks or anybody else unless they disturb the peace of the community, attack the people, or the allied soldiers."

After World War I ended in November 1918, the rationale for keeping American troops in Siberia came into question. The mission no longer had anything to do with getting Czechs back into the war against Germany. While allied governments openly favored Russia's Whites over the Reds, American troops trusted neither because Russian leaders on both sides were thoroughly corrupt and brutal. As one officer put it, "The peasantry lives in a constant state of mortal fear, never knowing when the blow will descend on them. No crops are raised--nothing. To do so would be merely to take one's life in hand in protecting them from bandits and guerrillas." The White "government" in Siberia was led by Czarist Admiral Alexander V. Kolchak, who proclaimed himself "supreme ruler of Russia," a wishful title under the circumstances. Three separate factions nominally operated under his command but he had little influence over any of them. The largest was led by Major General Pavel P. Ivanov-Rinov. Rather than protecting the people in whose name they served, Ivanov-Rinov’s troops terrorized and plundered without mercy or remorse. The other groups were even worse, led by Cossack Atamans (Chiefs) Grigori Semenov and Ivan Kalmykov5. Their followers were a polyglot mix of Chinese, Mongols, Koreans, and former Russian soldiers. General Graves claimed the chief difference between their leaders was that Kalmykov murdered with his own hands, while Semenov hired others to kill for him.

In March 1919, more replacements arrived, some of whom had fought in France. They were soon to see more action. That same month, a distraught schoolteacher came to General Graves' headquarters to ask for a guard detachment for her and her brother so they could return home to bury their father who had been murdered by Ivanov-Rinov's troops. The woman said the Whites came to their village seeking recruits. Finding that all the young men had fled, they took ten old men to the schoolhouse, tortured and killed them, and were guarding the bodies to prevent families from burying them. Graves ordered a detachment, led by an officer, to accompany the pair and investigate their report. The officer reported: "I found the floor of the room these men were held in covered with blood and all the walls were splashed with blood. The

5 Their names are also spelled Semenoff and Kalmykof in some references.
wire and loops of rope that were used around the men's wrists were still hanging from the ceiling, covered with blood. I also found that some of these men had been scalded with boiling water and burned with hot irons, heated in a little stove I found in the room. I visited the spot where the men were shot. Each body had at least three bullets in it, and some had six or more. They were apparently shot in the feet first and then higher in the body." In reaction, General Graves ordered his men to stop such acts wherever they were encountered. Representatives of Admiral Kolchak's "government" protested to U.S. Ambassador Morris, who in turn instructed General Graves to avoid any interference with Kolchak. Graves refused, saying he was under War Department, not State Department, orders. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker and Army Chief of Staff Peyton C. March supported Graves. General March wrote Graves a letter saying "Keep a stiff upper lip, I am going to stand by you until hell freezes over."

INTO BATTLE

For a time the Bolsheviks, impressed by Graves' even-handedness, avoided provoking the Americans. That changed in March 1919, when a Red ideologue, Yakov Ivanovitch Triapitsyn demanded the withdrawal of all allied soldiers from the Suchan mines. The mineworkers were openly sympathetic to the Red cause while their managers were sympathetic to the Whites. Major William N. Joiner, the 1st Battalion’s Executive Officer, led C, D, E, and L Companies from nearby Shkotovo to bolster the mine guard. H and K Companies and detachments of the Machinegun and Headquarters Companies were sent to reinforce them. Among the reinforcements was 23 year-old Second Lieutenant Alf Thompson, the regiment's signal platoon leader. His task was to lead patrols along the railway to repair telegraph lines cut by Russian partisans. Alf arrived in Siberia as a sergeant in charge of a machinegun section. When he was commissioned at Vladivostok in October, there were no officers' uniforms available and he had to borrow his rank insignia. He bought his first set of boots (enlisted men wore cloth wrapped leggings) in Vladivostok only to find they were made partly of paper and came apart on his first march, leaving him shoeless in the arctic cold.

In April 1919, reacting to increasing Bolshevik assertiveness and general lawlessness along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, the Allies agreed to assume responsibility for the rail line’s security and operation. Bolsheviks interpreted the agreement as pro-Kolchak. Their view was reinforced when on May 21, troops of the 31st Infantry began rousting an ill-disciplined band of Bolshevik partisans out of the town of Maihe on the Suchan spur. The three-day action resulted in several exchanges of fire, but no American casualties.

On June 21, 1919, a warm summer day, three enlisted men from H Company, Corporal Harlan S. Daly, Private Harold Bullard, and Private Forrest Moore (mentioned earlier) were captured by a contingent of Reds while fly-fishing in the shallow Suchan River. They were being marched to Novitskaya when the partisans came across two other Americans, Lieutenant Custer Fribley of the Quartermaster Corps, and Private Eastland W. Reed of H Company. Lieutenant Fribley’s mule was captured as well. The men were not reported missing until the next morning. At around 11 AM a patrol was sent out and found that the men had been taken to Novitskaya. Outraged, Colonel Gideon H.
Williams, commander of the Allied Mine Guard, dispatched a detachment of the 31st Infantry to recapture them.

On entering the village of Novitskaya at around 8 PM, a 110-man detachment from M Company led by Lieutenant Gilpin Rumans was ambushed by a larger force of Reds. The Americans had to cross a wooden fence to react. The first and third soldiers across, Privates Jesse M. Reed and Charles R. Flake, were killed, forcing the detachment to ground where they remained pinned down under constant fire. Entering the town from another direction to relieve pressure on M Company, Lieutenant Albert F. Ward and PFC Dee P. Craig of H Company were killed by a sudden outburst of fire from buildings on both sides of the street. Furious at their losses and intent on recapturing their comrades, H Company pressed the attack. Pressed from two sides, the Red force fled as darkness descended to cover their departure. Sergei Samushenko, the Red leader, was captured during H Company’s assault. The Reds took the American captives, on whose behalf the assault had been launched, away. Red prisoners reported the men were taken to the nearby village of Frolovka during the battle. Colonel Williams did not allow his men to pursue, fearing the captives might be tortured and killed.

The two companies’ six-mile return march to Suchan that night was worse than miserable. A heavy downpour began around 10 PM, drenching the troops and turning their route of march into a sea of mud. One soldier recalled, “The ambulance could hold no more so two dead men were placed on our droskie (Russian for cart) because of the mud.” The soaked, exhausted column reached Suchan around 1 AM on June 23.

Just after dark on June 24, Lieutenant Lawrence D. Butler of A Company reached Romanovka with 21 men to reinforce Lieutenant Harry Krieger’s 51-man 3d Platoon of the same company. Butler was to take command of the combined force because Krieger had allegedly soured relations with the locals. Krieger’s platoon pitched their tents in a shallow depression at the edge of town. An adjacent steep bluff offered a commanding view of the 3d Platoon’s positions. Krieger’s men outposted the bluff by day but withdrew before dark because the area was known to host large numbers of Reds and an isolated outpost would stand no chance if attacked. Passing through Romanovka that night, Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Eichelberger, the Siberian AEF’s G-2 (Intelligence Officer) admonished Lieutenant Butler that his unit was poorly positioned. Butler’s troops had arrived after dark, however, offering no opportunity for his NCOs to reconnoiter better positions. The reinforcements simply pitched their tents alongside the 3d Platoon’s.

The night passed without incident, giving sentries the false impression that this was just another peaceful summer night. Occasionally a dog barked in the village as they always did, but there was nothing out of the ordinary to observe. Atop the bluff, however, danger approached in the darkness. Just before dawn on June 25, two companies of Reds led by Sergei Lazo positioned themselves among high grass and brush at the top of the bluff to fire down Butler’s detachment. Lazo’s intent was to cut the detachment’s communications, wipe out the Americans, seize their weapons and ammunition, and recruit Red sympathizers in the town. At 5 AM, the Reds opened fire with deadly effect as the early morning light illuminated the somnolent encampment below. The opening volley hit scores of men in their sleep, along with most of the sentries posted at the edges of the little camp. Lieutenant Butler was among the first men hit. A bullet tore away part of his lower jaw but he remained in command, directing his men with arm and hand signals to withdraw to a nearby woodpile and then to a cluster of log houses at the edge of town.

To reach the village, the survivors would have to cross an open area under constant heavy fire, risking many more casualties. Seeing their duty clearly, PFCs Emmit Lunsford of Claremore,
Oklahoma, Roy Jones of Knoxville, Iowa, and George Strakey of Castlegate, Utah covered the withdrawal with their BARs, firing as fast as they could reload to suppress enemy troops atop the bluff. When the rest of the detachment reached safety, the trio helped cover each other’s withdrawal, joined by covering fire from their grateful comrades in the town. All three survived without injury and continued to fight throughout the long battle that followed. Their selfless action at great personal risk was a major factor in the detachment's survival. All three were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). As the situation grew more desperate, Lieutenant Butler, stepped out from his place of cover and swept the main street with a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) to keep the advancing Reds from entering the town. For his bravery and leadership, he too was awarded the DSC.

Any wounded men who could be saved were dragged into houses where they were treated by American medics and Russian women during the battle. A Polish nurse who had befriended one of the American NCOs, Sergeant Almus E. Beck, came under enemy fire as she ran out into the street to help retrieve the wounded. Luckily, she was not hit. In the cellar of one of the sturdier houses occupied by the Americans, a Russian woman helped medics tend to the wounded while her three small children looked on. Asked where her husband was, she pointed to the bluff from which the Reds were firing.

Fearing his battered detachment might be overwhelmed, Lieutenant Butler called for two volunteers to contact E Company at Novo Nezhino, about six miles farther down the rail spur. Corporals Valeryan Brodnicki of Chicago and Leo Heinzmann of Los Angeles promptly volunteered and set out at a run through a hail of fire. Although twice wounded, Brodnicki dashed through enemy lines and sprinted toward Novo Nezhino to summon help. Heinzmann followed close on his heels. Just a short distance from Romanovka, the pair encountered a train with a 17-man guard detachment from K Company. Heinzmann boarded the train and ordered the reluctant Russian engineer to drive the train to Romanovka. Knowing the little train guard detachment would be insufficient to tip the balance, Brodnicki continued on foot alone to Novo Nezhino. Heinzmann’s order to drive the train to Romanovka was countermanded by the guard detachment commander, Sergeant Sylvester B. Moore, who later reported his reasoning. The train bearing his 17 men, an unarmed engineer, and Heinzmann would have to pass under the bluff to reach Romanovka and then would have to sprint under fire across open ground to reach the town, just as Butler’s detachment had done. Any thought of trying a flanking move up the bluff would be suicidal against an enemy force estimated to number around 200 men occupying positions from which they could see clearly in every direction. The train instead went back to Novo Nezhino, picking up the bleeding and exhausted Brodnicki enroute.

When the train reached Novo Nezhino, Lieutenant Lewis J. Lorimar of E Company put his platoon and a machinegun detachment aboard and sped off for Romanovka after signaling for a hospital train from Kangaus. The relief force now totaled 77 men, 58 from E Company, 17 from K Company and the two heroes from A Company. Brodnicki, although suffering painfully from his wounds, refused evacuation, returning to Romanovka with the relief force. Although Brodnicki was later recommended for the Medal of Honor, he and Heinzmann both received the DSC for their heroic actions. The appearance of a train bearing heavily armed reinforcements tipped the balance at Romanovka, causing the Bolsheviks to break contact and flee around 8 AM, although sporadic sniping continued until after the hospital train arrived. The relief force was appalled by what they found. Lieutenant Sylvian Kendall recalled, “The ground was strewn with blood-soaked bodies of American soldiers. Splintered bones and flesh torn with ghastly holes told plainly that dum-dum bullets had been used. Half the men were dead; others were dying or were too injured to rise from the ground. Only a few of those engaged had come through the slaughter without a wound of some kind.”

Captain Oscar C. Frundt, the medical officer in charge of the hospital train, quickly brought order to the situation despite the continuing gunfire. The wounded were taken aboard the train to have their
wounds dressed. Sulfate and morphine were administered to ease their suffering. Those able to eat were given coffee and crackers. When the last of the wounded were aboard, the dead were taken aboard as well. On the return to Vladivostok, a blown bridge stopped the hospital train, causing the wounded to be carried in great pain to another train waiting at the other side of the gorge. They had to complete the journey to Vladivostok in boxcars, adding to their agony. Several days later, when visited by his men in Vladivostok’s military hospital, Lieutenant Butler was found smoking a cigarette. A twisted rag tied over his head and beneath the remains of his jaw took the place of a missing lower lip.

A Company had lost 19 killed and 25 wounded during the action, most of them hit during the enemy’s attack on the tent camp early that morning. Many of those shot in their tents were hit repeatedly and either died on their bullet riddled cots or were shot again as they attempted to crawl away. Three of the wounded succumbed to their wounds that night and two more would die over the next two weeks. A Company's losses were by far the greatest of any during the campaign.

Although the Reds retreated, they had drawn American blood and wanted more. While attention focused on Romanovka, a platoon of E Company under Sergeant James Gardner was the only force remaining at Novo Nezhino, guarding its telegraph connection at the railroad station. Worried about the garrison’s seriously diminished strength and determined not to allow a repeat of what happened at Romanovka, Gardner’s platoon built a log and railroad tie berm around the station to give themselves cover. The precaution paid off. Reds, assuming the platoon would be easy prey, attacked at first light on June 26. Although outnumbered, the Americans held their ground and signaled Lieutenant Lorimar for help. Lorimar hustled his men at Romanovka onto a train and rushed to the rescue but it would take over an hour to reach Novo Nezhino. Meanwhile, several attempts to rush the American barricade were repulsed, each leaving more dead and wounded Reds in their wake. When Lorimar’s platoon reached Novo Nezhino, the Reds’ morale seemed to crumble. The exchange of fire had already diminished to sporadic potshots and it appeared the Reds were abandoning buildings nearest the Americans. At least ten of their dead lay twisted in the street in front of the station. Sensing opportunity, Lorimar ordered an attack. His 58 men sprang over their barricade and charged down the street firing wildly at Reds fleeing in panic. When it was over, 30 Reds had been killed against only one American wounded.

Perhaps recognizing they had stirred up a hornet’s nest, the Red Revolutionary Headquarters at Frolovka sent an emissary to Suchan. They offered to release their five American captives if the Americans would release several partisans they held, including their leader, Sergei Samuschenko. Colonel Williams initially refused. When a second note arrived with a message from Lieutenant Fribley, the situation began to ease. At least Williams knew the captives were still alive and well. Williams asked Lieutenant Colonel Eichelberger to negotiate an exchange of captives. Eichelberger, who spoke Russian, went alone in the dark to meet with a group of Russians behind their lines. He knew his opponents might decide he was a greater prize than those he was trying to free. After negotiating all night, Eichelberger secured the captives’ release, including Lieutenant Fribley’s mule, and brought them out with him at dawn. In exchange, Colonel Williams released Samushenko as Eichelberger had promised.

Nearer the Suchan mines, C and D Companies were attacked by a larger force near Sitsa on June 26. Sergeant Ralph Cranford of Franklin, Pennsylvania, acting as a platoon leader, won the DSC for defeating a numerically superior foe without a single loss to his own men. Corporal Arthur Vogel of Heber, California, ran a railway locomotive past a Red-held cliff three times to draw the enemy's fire so they could be identified and destroyed by D Company's supporting machineguns. Vogel repeatedly exposed himself to heavy fire and his Russian assistant was wounded during the action.

Unable to defeat an American unit by direct attack, the Reds embarked on a campaign of disruption. Over the next few days, they cut telegraph lines and blew up bridges all along the rail spur
On June 30, the 31st Infantry's strength was 109 officers and 3411 enlisted men. Up to that time, one officer and 28 enlisted men had been killed and one officer and 32 enlisted men had been wounded. Over 200 Bolsheviks had been captured and probably an equal number were killed, based on the number of weapons captured by the regiment. Although the grim reaper's toll favored the Americans, comparative tallies of dead and wounded had no meaning. Because they could forcibly recruit anywhere in the region, the Reds had an almost endless supply of conscripts and volunteers.

In response to General Graves’ order, the American counteroffensive’s first target was Frolovia where the Reds were believed to have their headquarters. Major Sidney Graves led a detachment consisting of M Company and two machinegun squads, out of the Suchan garrison shortly after midnight on July 2. The men tied down their equipment and moved as quietly as possible to avoid detection by pro-Red locals. They hoped to surprise the Reds at Frolovia and avenge the deaths of their comrades at Romanovka. Soon after Major Graves’ detachment left, a stronger second column, led by Colonel Williams, also departed the Suchan garrison. C and D Companies, two machinegun squads, a horse-drawn 37mm field gun, and a Japanese rifle company accompanied Williams. His plan was for the two forces to converge on Frolovia from different directions, maximizing the fire they could collectively bring to bear. All units were to be in pre-designated attack positions before first light. At 5 AM, Williams initiated the attack from the southwest. On hearing Williams’ detachment open fire, Graves attacked from the northwest. Red resistance was surprisingly light and the town was secured by 10 AM.

But the fight was not yet over. Reds continued to snipe at the force from a nearby ridge. Lieutenant Fred C. Shepherd of M Company was ordered to take his platoon out to chase the snipers off the ridge. Lieutenant Colonel Eichelberger accompanied the platoon, perhaps hoping to use his Russian language skills to advantage. Now it was the Americans’ turn to be surprised. To reach the ridge, Shepherd’s platoon had to cross several hundred yards of open terrain. As it approached the heavily forested slope, the platoon was met by a sudden, intense outburst of rifle fire. The opening volley seriously wounded Lieutenant Shepherd and one of his men. Seeing the attack falter dangerously in the open, LTC Eichelberger took command of the center squad, directing them to maintain a steady volume of fire while the other squads pulled back with the wounded to safer ground. Grabbing the wounded soldier’s rifle, Eichelberger joined Sergeant Delbert Farrington in covering the remaining squad’s withdrawal. Both men won the DSC for their actions.

In the early morning hours of July 3, Major Joiner, the 1st Battalion’s Executive Officer, led C and D Companies, accompanied by two machineguns and a 37mm assault gun, out of the encampment at Suchan to attack a group of Red partisans at Kazanka. Traveling parallel to the rail line for roughly half the distance and then...
Along a well-traveled path toward the town, Joiner’s column made good time, reaching his planned attack position behind a wooded ridge before dawn. A larger column, led by Colonel Williams, left Suchan after Joiner’s departure, intending to converge on Kazanka from the southeast. The plan was for Williams’ group to initiate the attack from a woodline fairly close to the town. Joiner’s group would key on the sound of Williams’ guns, attacking near-simultaneously from a slightly greater distance. After traveling just over half the distance to their objective, Williams’ group became bogged down in a thick, waist-deep swamp north of Novitskaya. Getting through the swampy tangle with cumbersome 37mm guns and machineguns proved more difficult and time-consuming than anyone had expected. Williams sent scouts to find a way around the bog but the guns were mired and would have to be extracted. Bypassing the extensive swamp would add several more hours to the trip because steep gorges flanked the approach.

With no communications between the two columns (field radios did not yet exist), Williams had no way of telling Joiner what had happened. As the locals awoke and began doing their daily business around the town, Joiner feared someone would encounter his men and sound the alarm. He waited nervously, unsure of what to do. At around 8:30 AM, he decided he could wait no longer and initiated the attack. He began by shelling key buildings with his lone 37mm gun and exploited the resulting confusion with a brisk infantry assault supported by the machineguns. Although the partisans were unprepared, they put up a stiff fight; clinging desperately to hasty positions they took up around the town’s edge. Private Peter Bernal of C Company was cut down by a partisan’s bullet as his platoon maneuvered across an open field.

Throughout the hour-long battle, C Company's runner, Private John Martens of Anaheim, California, carried orders back and forth between platoons under constant fire. Tired of being shot at, Martens turned and single-handedly attacked a group of enemy troops firing at him from a patch of scrub, killing one and driving the rest from the field. For his exemplary bravery under fire, he was awarded the DSC. By about 9:30 AM, the fighting was over. The surviving Reds fled the town, leaving their dead and wounded behind. Major Joiner rested his men while they awaited Colonel Williams’ column. Williams arrived near noon, his men exhausted after their arduous hike. In late afternoon, the entire command marched back to Suchan, taking the easiest route available.

Despite Joiner’s success at Kazanka, things were far from quiet around Suchan. On July 4, the Reds tried and executed a local schoolteacher, a lady who had cooked for the local police, along with an electrician and a telegrapher. The executions happened practically under the noses of the allied mine guard detachment. The next day, Sergeant James Canney of Dorchester, MA was on patrol in the lower Suchan Valley with two other men from D Company when they encountered a 50-man enemy force. Seeing no other alternative, Canney promptly led his patrol in an attack, firing from the hip as they charged. The assault killed one Bolshevik and routed the remainder who were stunned by Canney's bold attack. Canney earned the DSC for his quick thinking, exemplary leadership, and exceptional personal bravery under fire.

On July 5, Colonel Williams took D and M Companies, a machinegun, a medical detachment, and a Japanese rifle company to pick up supplies at Vladimiro on America Bay, a distance of nearly 25 miles from Suchan. D Company’s PFC Alphia Schurter of Hilltop, KS was seriously wounded along with five others as his company neared the village of Piryatina in the lower valley. Although the firing came from several hundred yards away, D Company immediately went into the attack from the march. Unwilling to be left behind for treatment, Schurter ignored his blood-gushing wound and attacked alongside his comrades, firing steadily and reloading his BAR to suppress enemy fire as he struggled forward. Seeing Schurter struggling to keep up, his platoon sergeant ordered a medic to stop him and treat his wound. Schurter angrily brushed the man off and had to be physically restrained from continuing
so the wound could be treated. Unfortunately, it was too late. Schurter died soon afterward from excessive loss of blood. He won the DSC posthumously for exceptional heroism at the cost of his life.

Throughout July, skirmishes continued in the Shkotovo area. Red partisans put the narrow gauge railroad out of order. After being cut off for three weeks, a battalion of the 31st Infantry again fought its way down the Suchan Valley to the Sea. After a stiff fight at Vladimir Alexandrofskoye on America Bay, Lieutenant Colonel Eichelberger, Lieutenant Winningstad, and several enlisted men captured a small boat and headed for Vladivostok, 65 miles away, to get help. Enroute, they were picked up by the cruiser USS Albany. After being withdrawn from Harbin (Manchuria) in July, B Company remained in the Suchan area and fought several skirmishes in the lower valley. At the same time, K Company made an expedition against Red partisans at Olga Bay aboard the British cruiser HMS Carlisle. The company became impromptu marines.

The last skirmish in the Suchan area took place on August 8 when a patrol from H Company, commanded by Captain Owen R. Rhoads, encountered 30 Bolshevik partisans at Litovsk. After a stubborn fight, every Red was killed or captured, without a single loss to the Americans. During the action, Corporal Charles Frankenfeld, caught in the open, came under fire from a hut blocking his squad’s path. Rather than seeking cover, he rushed the hut, killing or capturing all of its defenders. His action broke the enemy line at a critical point, exposing the flanks and rear of other positions and allowing enemy troops to be shot down as they tried to relocate or flee. For his bravery, he won the DSC.

With the rail spur destroyed, the movement of coal out of Suchan’s mines had been halted for over two months. There was no point in repairing the line because it could be cut anywhere along its length and there were too few troops to protect every mile of track. Keeping allied garrisons in the valley became pointless. The American contingent departed Suchan and other points along the spur on August 19, marching to America Bay where they boarded the USS Merritt for the remainder of the trip to Vladivostok. Causing the allies to abandon the Suchan District was a Pyrrhic victory for the Reds because without an operable rail spur to move coal to the main line, the sought-after mines would yield no revenues. Nor did the mines’ closure stop allied movements on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Sources of coal farther north in Siberia were already making up for the loss of Suchan’s output. Moreover, Kolchak’s Whites streamed into the valley to exploit the emerging power vacuum. More than 500 Reds had been killed since the fighting began in June and by September the survivors were disinclined to risk another fight.

As the Reds quieted down, Kalmykov and his Cossack Whites, supported by the Japanese, stirred up new trouble. General Graves described the incident.

"I had on my desk a report that the Russians on September 2, in the presence of Japanese troops, had arrested an American captain and a corporal at Iman, 250 miles north of Vladivostok, for the [footnote]

6 LTC Eichelberger would become a Lieutenant General during World War II, commanding the Eighth Army during operations to recapture the Philippines. Lieutenant Winningstad would become the Eighth Army's Ordnance officer as a colonel during the occupation of Japan.
reported reason that these men had no passports. As they wore the uniform of the American Army, and as there was no recognized government in Siberia, and further, as no military representative in Siberia was called upon for passports, the reason assigned for the arrest of these men was an insult almost on a par with the arrest."

"On the morning of the 7th, I sent Colonel Robinson, my Chief of Staff, to General Rozanov's office and demanded an immediate release of the corporal; the captain having been permitted to leave the day they were arrested. General Rozanov told Colonel Robinson he would investigate and let me know later. This by no means satisfied me, so I directed Colonel Robinson to return and tell General Rozanov it was not a question for him to investigate, and a refusal to order the release of Corporal Spurling would be construed by me as a definite refusal. When General Rozanov got this message, he ordered the corporal released."

Not knowing that General Graves had pressured General Rozanov to order Corporal Spurling's release, Major Ed Shamatoulski, Spurling's Battalion Commander, took a detachment of troops by train to Iman. When he arrived, the local Japanese commander informed Shamatoulski that his men would not be permitted to attack the Cossacks and if they did, they would also have to fight the Japanese. Shamatoulski informed the Japanese commander that he intended to rescue the corporal and that Japanese interference would be at their own peril. Major Shamatoulski then ordered his men to disarm three Cossacks who had dug a trench and were preparing to resist. Japanese troops reinforced the Cossacks in the trench, but lost their nerve and stood aside as the Americans dragged the startled Russians from their midst. The prisoners told Shamatoulski that Corporal Spurling had been moved to Khabarovsk. Shamatoulski and his men then departed, taking the three Cossacks along as hostages. General Graves did not learn of Shamatoulski's actions until afterward, but enthusiastically supported them. Major Shamatoulski's moral stand, risking war with an "ally" who outnumbered him eight to one to rescue one of his men, is testimony to the courage and sense of command responsibility prominent in the 31st Infantry at the time.

When Corporal Spurling was released, it was evident that he had been severely beaten. Outraged, General Graves warned Kalmykov that he would be arrested if his troops ever again harassed Americans. Semenov immediately declared his intention of coming to Kalmykov's aid in the event of a fight with Americans. General Graves responded by refusing to turn over rifles the State Department had promised to Admiral Kolchak's "government", knowing they would find their way into the hands of thugs he might have to fight. Graves wrote: "We will be helping to arm the worst criminals in Siberia; we will be neglectful of the interests of the people....and will be helping Japan to delay the settlement of conditions in Siberia." Kolchak pleaded that his men badly needed the rifles and that he lacked the resources to control the Cossacks. Finally, on War Department orders, Graves reluctantly turned the weapons over to Kolchak himself.

THE FIGHTING ENDS

On October 2, 1919, Colonel Fred W. Bugbee assumed command of the 31st Infantry from Colonel Sargent. The change of command in Vladivostok came just as a new source of trouble arose. On November 16, an insurrection broke out in Vladivostok, led by a Czech named Alexander Gaida, who had been commissioned a lieutenant general in Kolchak's "Siberian Army". Fighting raged for two days through the streets of Vladivostok before the revolt was put down. The 31st Infantry patrolled the city and secured the AEF's headquarters on Svetanskaya Street. On November 22, a train guard detachment was ambushed near Razdolnoye, but the attackers were driven off with no casualties to either side. Four probes were made against C Company in December, but each time the enemy was driven off without inflicting any losses. In the closing days of 1919, Kolchak's infantry mutinied in the Suchan Valley and
at Shkotovo, executing most of their officers and appropriating stores of weapons and ammunition, which they took with them to the Bolshevik side. A Red victory in Siberia was imminent.

On January 8, 1920, the AEF was ordered withdrawn from Siberia. On receipt of the withdrawal order, the 31st Infantry began its departure from the Shkotovo District. In bitter cold amid a blowing snowstorm, the evacuation was completed despite two partisan attacks. Between January 25 and February 3, General Rozonov's Whites were overcome in Amur Province by a combined force of Social Democrats and Bolsheviks, ending White opposition in Siberia. Rioting and looting broke out in Vladivostok in anticipation of the Reds' takeover. A, C, I, and L Companies of the 31st Infantry established police patrols in the city while E and H Companies patrolled outside the city. A Bolshevik government was formed in Vladivostok on January 31. A large parade was held to celebrate the conflict's end and on February 3, American patrols in and around the city were discontinued. On February 6, Admiral Kolchak was apprehended by Czech troops who turned him over to the Bolsheviks at Yakutsk. He was shot and his body was thrown into a nearby river.

On February 15, the first units of the 31st Infantry left Vladivostok. For the next 45 days, the Transports Crook, Dix, South Bend, and Great Northern would carry the "Polar Bears" back to Manila where their odyssey began. In the last contingent departing Vladivostok was a young Pennsylvanian named William G. Hartman. Eager to participate in the Great War as a pilot, he enlisted in the fall of 1918 at the age of 16. When he arrived at the Army's east coast port of embarkation at Hoboken, New Jersey, he was put on a train headed west with hundreds of similarly bewildered troops who thought they had enlisted to fight the Germans in Europe. They had no idea where the train was going, except that it was headed in the wrong direction if their destination was Europe. Arriving at Fort McDowell (Angel Island, California), the recruits were issued winter uniforms and put aboard a ship headed for Vladivostok, but were not told their destination. Because Hartman was literate and exhibited an aptitude for mechanical things, he was assigned to AEF Headquarters as a radio operator. In late 1919, Hartman was sent to G Company 31st Infantry as a replacement near the Suchan Mines. He became the company's clerk on its return to Manila.7

7 Hartman left the Army in 1922, but rejoined in World War II, serving with the 16th Armored Division in the final push from Germany into Czechoslovakia. He retired in 1959 as a master sergeant, 41 years after his military service began. He died in 1997 at his residence in the Soldier's and Airmen's Home in Washington, DC.
The 31st Infantry's last contingent departed Siberia on April 1, 1920. Although the Bolsheviks had come to power in Siberia and the Japanese later occupied Manchuria, the 31st Infantry had carried out its orders with courage, humanity, and dignity. Sixteen members of the regiment had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, 29 were killed in action, 8 died of wounds received in action, and 52 were wounded⁸, testifying to the valor of a generation of Americans fighting in a far-off, miserable place to accomplish an unclear mission. It would not be the last time.

⁸ In addition to its battle casualties, the 31st Infantry lost 135 men to disease and non-battle injuries.
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* Died of wounds received at Romanovka on 25 June 1919
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