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**WAR AND REVOLUTION
IN RUSSIA 1914—1917**



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GENERAL GOURKO
From a painting by Mrs. Lesely-Cotton

WAR AND REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA 1914—1917

BY

GENERAL BASIL GOURKO

Chief of Russian Imperial General Staff, November 1916—March
1917; Commander-in-Chief of Western Armies,
March 1917—June 1917

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO
MY WIFE

These pages were written when my wife was working in the capacity of voluntary Sister of Charity in a divisional bandaging detachment in the French Army.

Having arrived in France with me, my wife, after three years of war at the Front, in spite of the anxious days through which she had lived during the time of my imprisonment in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, did not care about entertaining the idea of limiting herself to the life of an ordinary woman, with all the unavoidable results which so little harmonise with the events through which we are living.

As at this time we were taking advantage of the hospitality of France, quite naturally, she wished to devote herself to the French wounded soldiers. She made only one condition; that she should work in a medical institution where there were no other sisters and where the first surgical aid is given to the wounded. By the decision of the French high authorities, she was taken, with regard to her experience, into a surgical bandaging detachment, in order to show if a woman can meet the difficulties which are inseparable from the work in a divisional detachment.

On December 14th, 1917, she entered the 221st Bandaging Detachment. In three months the medical authorities of the place were to give their report. But on March 23rd, 1918, a German 10-inch shell fell into the half-ruined cottage which served as the mess of the medical staff, during their lunch hour. Four doctors, two officer administrators, and my wife were struck by the broken shell. Not long before a munition store was placed near the bandaging detachment, and this was subjected to the German fire. After the catastrophe the detachment was sent to another village. The German shell shortened my wife's earthly existence and her self-denying work. But it is not for me, the man who was so near to her, to give the characteristics of such a remarkable woman. Perhaps some time she will find a just and merited reward. But one can already express the hope that her four years' work at the Front, and even more by her death on the field of honour, she helped to ensure the hope of a better future for the country where there are women of such remarkable energy, of so developed a feeling of duty, women able to work and to sacrifice their lives in the name of self-denial and love to suffering humanity.

PREFACE

IN the midst of profound peace, in the active work of economical and social reform, Russia, as by thunderbolt, was struck by the news of approaching mobilisation, and by the urgent necessity of having recourse to the sword to protect her interests and those of the other Slav nations.

To define exactly the position in which the beginning of the war found Russia, it is necessary briefly to survey her political condition at the moment. The country was still feeling the disturbing effects of the Revolution of 1905-6. The intellectual classes which had now received access to and obtained a share in political life and legislation, were engrossed by the struggle with the Government. This turmoil centred specially in the Imperial Duma. With the opening of military action this internal strife of the parties, as in other European countries, and the striving for supremacy between the Imperial Duma and the Government, died down at first, but later became gradually acute again.

This, we observe, was the case with all our Allies and in a certain degree with our enemies. After three years of war, this struggle, becoming still more acute, brought about a crisis which ended in the Revolution of March 1917.

As to Russia's military strength and her readiness to enter the war, it is necessary to remember that the wounds sustained by the Army in unsuccessful war with Japan in the Far East were not yet healed. The imperial Duma, whose representatives were mainly concerned with military affairs, by all its measures incited the Government, without considering the cost, to prepare the Army as quickly as

possible for war, and to take such steps as would save the Russian Army and the Russian military establishment from dependence upon foreign supplies. On the other hand, the Government, basing its policy on the fact that it had never adopted aggressive politics, considered it imperative to observe severe economy in all expenditure and consequently postponed for many years the necessary outlay for the defence of the country. The result was that, in taking military measures, we were far behind our Western neighbours. Finally, the third influence which must be taken into consideration was the realisation of that economic reform which brought about the transition of the peasantry from common to single ownership and its effect on the great mass of the Russian population. It is sufficient to mention that it made it necessary for every peasant landowner to fix new boundaries to his possessions; in most cases, the exchange of one land for another, and finally, for the greater part of the peasantry, the transfer of their farm-buildings from one place to another. This far-reaching reform, though hardly apparent to the stranger, profoundly affected the interests of the great Russian peasant population, which forms more than 90 per cent. of the Army's recruits.

The moral of the Russian Army during the whole three years of the war was deeply affected by these circumstances. Only strict discipline, the habit of obeying his chiefs, and the inborn respect for fate of the Russian peasant, made him conscientiously do his duty, though his thoughts were all at home. Imagine, then, the sensation aroused in him by the spreading Revolution, when at last he understood that all the elements hitherto sustaining him had failed. Dominant in his being was the irresistible desire to return home and to take part in the organisation of his future economical life. And if one adds to this the principle, proclaimed by

the Revolution, of the transfer of the country squires' estates to the peasantry, it will be clear why all the thoughts of the peasant soldier turned towards material questions to the detriment of everything which, till now, had incited him to perform honestly his duties as a soldier. When the Russian soldiers' hostility to the continuation of the war became known to our Allies it excited the most intense astonishment. A comparison was made between the successes won by the young army of France after the great Revolution of the eighteenth century and the debacle of the mighty Russian military machine.

The comparison was, of course, against us. But to what was this due? To forgetfulness, simple ignorance, or intentional perversion of history? If the crowd judges by external signs and superficial knowledge, it is unpardonable that the Press and leaders of thought and policy should form their conclusions on the same meagre premises. Do they forget that the wars of France were the *effect* of the Revolution, that on the fields of Valmy and Jemappes France was protecting her sacred Revolt? In Russia, on the contrary, the war (especially to a superficial observer), was the principal *cause* of the Russian Revolution, as the revolutionary movement of 1905-6 was the result of our failure in Manchuria. In the opinion of the nation, the war had *made* the Russian Revolution. Therefore it had done its work; it was not necessary to continue the war. This was the principal formula of agitators "who were deepening the Revolution," and whose preaching drowned the voices of those who called upon the Russian soldier to fight for the "safety of the Revolution."

But there is another circumstance which entirely precludes the comparison between France's position after the Revolution with that of Russia in 1917. The French Army,

in order to win Valmy and Jemappes, had more than two years of quiet preparation. The whole French Army was recruited from fresh young elements uncorrupted by close association with the effervescence of the Revolution. Why France had an opportunity of two years' preparation for the determined conflict is quite another question, and I shall not touch upon it; its decision did not depend upon France. The conduct of the remainder of the royal troops in France was disgraceful, for these troops, directly after the Revolution, though in another degree, brought about the same scenes of disorganisation which were observed in our country. They also ran shamefully from the weak attack of German and Austrian troops, as our "comrades" ran.

Such were, as was said above, the principal traits which characterised the internal political life in Russia. In Russian external politics the principal attention was directed to the Near East. This attention was especially acute after the so-called Balkan War, 1911-12, which was ended by the disruption of the small Balkan nations, hitherto allied against Turkey. In this unexpected rupture was clearly seen the hand of the diplomacy of the Central Powers. In this case German politics followed the familiar road. This same German policy, after the Japan-China War, awoke the dissension between Russia and Japan. The principal cause of that dissension was the occupation by Russia of the Liaoyang Peninsula, with Port Arthur, accomplished by agreement and in opposition to the plans of Germany who occupied Kiatchao in the Gulf of Pe-Tchi-li. Consequently, in her wish to weaken her probable adversaries, Germany, with the support of the South African Republics, encouraged the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. With the glad consent of Germany, Italy undertook the colonial war with Tripoli.

During the last few years, all the wars of civilised nations were prepared in one way or another by German diplomacy, guided by the War Lord, William. It is enough here to recall his telegram to the President of the Transvaal Republic, Krüger, at the moment when this small State had to decide for war or peace with England.

Germany, by instigating these wars, counted upon weakening her future adversaries and undermining them economically.

Not without the influence of German diplomacy, then, occurred the dissension among the allied Balkan nations. To encourage this dissension was not difficult; the interests of the nations involved were complex in the extreme, and the division of conquered Turkey was a veritable apple of discord among the Balkan States. But it would be a mistake to say that the Balkan question, and the closely associated Slav question, had in 1914 for Germany any essential importance. We see now, when these events are part of the past, that the question most troubling Germany was her rivalry with England. The fact that Germany hoped not to see England among the number of her enemies in the present war confirms that idea. In this case Germany only followed her usual tactics by attacking and endeavouring to dispose of the weakest, in order to make the struggle with her principal enemy easier. The Governments of the European countries concerned understood, of course, the tendency of Germany, and intended to begin the war at the same time, to deprive her of opportunity of beating her adversaries separately.

Germany found herself within a ring of foes. But this discovery, painful as it must have been to Teuton diplomacy, did not change the Teuton tactics. Germany invariably

takes advantage of every chance to attack her weak adversaries and finish with them so as to deal with her more formidable opponents in turn. The only means of meeting such strategy would be the co-ordination of the forces of all the Allies; but to this, unfortunately, there were so many obstacles that the Allies found themselves unable to carry it out. Will they succeed in the future? It will depend upon the wisdom of their rulers, and in what degree they learn to subordinate personal interest to the general interest of the Alliance.

PARIS,
March, 1918.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE MOBILISATION OF THE RUSSIAN ARMY	I
II	THE STRATEGICAL DEVELOPMENT	15
III	FIRST FIGHTING OPERATIONS	25
IV	THE OCCUPATION OF EAST PRUSSIA	38
V	CAVALRY OPERATIONS AND SOME CHARACTERISTIC INCIDENTS	47
VI	OUR DASH THROUGH THE GERMAN LINES	59
VII	THE BATTLE OF TANNENBERG	71
VIII	FIGHTING IN POLAND AND GALICIA	84
IX	BEGINNING OF TRENCH WARFARE — RETREAT OF THE RUSSIAN ARMIES	100
X	MUNITIONS OF WAR	118
XI	THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN OF 1915	129
XII	FLIGHT OF THE RUSSIAN POPULATION — CARE OF THE WOUNDED	144
XIII	THE CRUCIAL WINTER OF 1915-16	158
XIV	SUMMER FIGHTING OF 1916	170
XV	AT GENERAL HEADQUARTERS IN MOHILEFF — ENTRY OF ROUMANIA	183
XVI	GENERAL KORNILOFF — MY APPOINTMENT AS CHIEF OF STAFF	198
XVII	FIRST DAYS AT GENERAL HEADQUARTERS	210
XVIII	THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN 1916	218
XIX	THE FIGHTING IN ROUMANIA	232
XX	FREE POLAND — THE RAILWAY PROBLEM	245
XXI	PREPARATIONS FOR THE OFFENSIVE IN 1917 — THE MURDER OF RASPUTIN	262

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII	POLITICAL CHANGES IN PETROGRAD	274
XXIII	THE INTER-ALLY CONFERENCE	291
XXIV	THE POLISH QUESTION AND FIRST SIGNS OF REVOLUTION	308
XXV	THE REVOLUTION — ABDICATION OF THE EMPEROR	322
XXVI	THE FIRST EFFECTS OF THE REVOLUTION	338
XXVII	THE ATTEMPTED REORGANISATION OF THE ARMY	354
XXVIII	KERENSKY, MINISTER OF WAR — THE CONFERENCE OF THE COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF IN PETROGRAD — MY CONFLICT WITH THE GOVERNMENT	368
XXIX	THE ELECTION OF THE COSSACK'S ATAMAN — MY ARREST AND CONFINEMENT IN THE FORTRESS OF PETER AND PAUL — DEPARTURE TO ENGLAND	381

APPENDIX I

THE TSAR'S ORDER OF THE DAY	399
---------------------------------------	-----

APPENDIX II

GENERAL GOURKO'S LETTER TO THE TSAR, WRITTEN FOUR DAYS AFTER HIS ABDICATION	402
---	-----

APPENDIX III

ORDER OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE WESTERN FRONT, JUNE 8TH, 1917	402
INDEX	411

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

General Gourko	<i>Frontispiece</i>
From a painting by Mrs. Lessly-Cotton.	
His Majesty Nicolai II	PAGE 36
General Aide-de-Camp Samsonoff and General Aide-de-Camp Rennenkampf	67
General Gourko and General Tcherbatcheff: a halt by the way- side	136
Most convenient and comfortable means of transferring wounded on bad roads	154
Mohileff: house occupied by His Majesty (on the right) and by headquarters (on the left) at the Stafka	184
General Gourko as Chief of the Staff, 1916-1917	220
Bedroom of His Majesty and the Tsarevitch at headquarters in Mohileff	236
The conference at Mohileff, 1915, which decided the campaign for 1916	270
Heads of the Allied Military Missions	298
General Gourko and General Russky at Kislovodsk	386
Madame Gourko as a Sister of Charity	398
General Gourko in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul	398

APPENDIX I

THE TSAR'S ORDER OF THE DAY

ORDER OF THE ARMY AND NAVY

DECEMBER 25TH, 1916

It is now more than two years since Germany, in the midst of peace and after secretly preparing over a long period to enslave all the nations of Europe, suddenly attacked Russia and her faithful Ally, France. This attack compelled England to join us and take part in our struggle.

The complete disdain which Germany showed to principles of international law as demonstrated by the violation of the neutrality of Belgium, and her pitiless cruelty towards the peaceful inhabitants in the occupied provinces, little by little united the Great Powers of Europe against Germany and her ally, Austria.

Under the pressure of the German troops, which were well provided with the technical aids to warfare, Russia as well as France were compelled in the first year of the war to give up a portion of their territory, but this temporary reverse did not break the spirit of our faithful Allies, nor of you, my gallant troops. In time, by the concentrated efforts of the Government, the inequalities between our own and the German technical resources were gradually reduced. But long before this time, from the autumn of 1915, our enemy was unable to occupy the smallest portion of Russian soil, and in the spring and summer of the current year suffered a number of severe defeats and assumed the defensive along the whole front.

His strength is apparently waning, but the strength of Russia and her gallant Allies continues to grow without failing. Germany is feeling that the hour of her complete defeat is near, and near also the hour of retribution for all her wrongdoings and for the violation of moral laws. Similarly, as in the time when her war strength was superior to the strength of her neighbours, Germany suddenly de-

clared war upon them, so now, feeling her weakness, she suddenly offers to enter into peace negotiations with her enemies indissolubly united against her.

Particularly she desires to begin these negotiations and to complete them before the entire elucidation of the degree of her weakness and before the definite loss of her military power. At the same time she is creating a false impression about the strength of her Army by making use of her temporary success over the Roumanians, who had not succeeded in gaining experience in the conduct of modern warfare.

But if, originally, Germany was in the position to declare war and fall upon Russia and her ally, France, in her most favourable time, having strengthened in war-time the Alliance, among which is to be found mighty England and noble Italy, this Alliance in its turn has also the possibility of entering into peace negotiations at such a time as it considers favourable for itself.

This time has not yet arrived. The enemy has not yet been driven out of the provinces occupied by her. The attainment by Russia of the tasks created by the war — the possession of Constantinople and the Dardanelles, as well as the creation of a free Poland from all three of her until now separated provinces — has not yet been guaranteed.

To conclude peace at this moment would mean the failure to utilise the fruits of the untold trials of you, heroic Russian troops and Fleet.

These trials, and still more the sacred memory of those noble sons of Russia who have fallen on the field of battle, do not permit the thought of peace until the final victory over our enemies. Who dares to think that he who brought about the beginning of the war shall have it in his power to conclude the war at any time he likes?

I do not doubt that every faithful son of Holy Russia, those who under arms are fighting in the firing lines, as well as those peacefully working in the interior for the increase of her war strength or the creation of her industry, will be convinced that peace can only be given to the enemy after he has been driven from our borders; and then only when, finally broken, he shall give up to us and our faithful Allies reliable proof of the impossibility of a repetition of the treacherous attack and a firm assurance that he will keep to these promises. By the strength of these guarantees he will be bound to the fulfilment in times of peace of the engagements which he will undertake.

Let us be firm in the certainty of our victory and the All Highest

will bless our standards and will cover them afresh with glory, and will give to us a peace worthy of your heroic deeds, my glorious troops — a peace for which the future generation will bless your memory, which will be sacred to them.

NICOLAI.

APPENDIX II

GENERAL GOURKO'S LETTER TO THE TSAR, WRITTEN FOUR DAYS AFTER HIS ABDI- CATION

IN these grievous days that all Russia is living through, and which cannot fail to affect you most painfully of all, allow me, Sire, out of heart-felt affection, to send you the following lines, in the conviction that you will see in this merely the need I feel of telling you with what pain I and millions of other faithful sons of Russia have learnt of the magnanimous act of your Majesty.

Actuated by your wishes for the welfare and happiness of Russia, you preferred to take upon yourself all the consequences and the burden of what had occurred rather than to subject the country to all the horrors of a long internecine struggle, or — what would have been still worse — to expose it to the triumph of the enemy's arms. Your conduct will receive its due reward from history, and the grateful memory of the people. The knowledge that in this grievous moment you decided without hesitation on an act of the greatest self-sacrifice for the sake of the integrity and the welfare of our country, to which, following the example of your crowned ancestors, you were always loyal, indeed the most loyal servant and well-wisher, will serve you as a worthy reward for the unexampled sacrifice you have made on the altar of your country.

I do not find words to express my respect for the greatness of the sacrifice you have made, both in your own case and in the case of your heir. I fully understand that you could not decide to give up to the service of the State your only son, who within four years would have to take within his hands, before they were strong enough, the reins of government. Moreover, there is little hope that by that time Russian life will have returned to its ordinary tranquil course. But the ways of the All Highest are inscrutable, and it may be it was He who guided you. It may be that you are keeping for your

son the possibility of a more regular and gradual education until he is mature, that he may make a wide study of political science and become acquainted with people and life, so that in due time, after a stormy period of life in the service of the State, the eyes of those that wish well to Russia will turn to him as the hope of Russia. Fully equipped with living experience and the knowledge that he has gained, he will then be able to take over his lawful heritage for the welfare and happiness of Russia.

But, apart from the comparatively distant future, it is impossible not to foresee the possibility that, after painful experience of internal troubles, after the reconstruction of the State and a form of government for which, historically and socially, the Russian people is far from being ready, have been tested, the country will again turn to its lawful Emperor and Anointed of God. The past history of peoples teaches us that in this there is nothing improbable, and the exceptional nature of the conditions under which the change of government has taken place in Petrograd, and the fact that to the majority of people this change was just as unexpected to us as it was to your Army, gives ground to suppose that this is extremely probable.

The possibility of this, however, involuntarily compels me to think of those events which now are taking place in Petrograd. The Provisional Government has now proclaimed and is carrying out a full amnesty of all those people who suffer punishment for political crimes, whether judicial or administrative. At the same time it is imprisoning your former faithful servants, who, if they offended in anything, acted at any rate within the bounds of the laws existing at that time. Such conduct with regard to them appears to infringe that very freedom which the people who have seized power proclaim on their banners.

But there is another side to this. If one can foresee the possibility that the country may wish to return to a state of law and order, then it is necessary that those who form a centre able to unite around themselves all who care, not for temporary power, but for regular development and for gradual evolution of the Russian people, must not be stopped by the memory that, in a time when their ideals were temporarily defeated, *has not been obtained even, if necessary, by exceptional efforts the security and personal liberation*, perhaps also the life of those the majority of whom in their time faithfully

and truly served their country, though guided perhaps by laws which were out of date, but nevertheless legally in force.

Allow me, Sire, to direct your attention to this fact merely because, in view of the tremendous events which are so quickly advancing upon you, you may not be able to realise all the importance of that step which in the future may have incalculable consequences, both for your dynasty and for the fate of Russia. Remembering your unfailing graciousness towards me during the few months when by your will I was called upon to be your closest assistant in the High Command, I flatter myself with the hope that you will accept with the same graciousness the out-pourings of my heart, which suffers anguish because of these days which threaten the life of Russia, and that you will believe that I have been guided merely by the feeling of devotion to the Russian Monarch which I have inherited from my ancestors, who always had the courage and the honesty in moments of danger to the Russian State to express to their Emperors their outspoken opinion and the whole truth.

Accept, Sire, my sincere wishes to see brighter days, which at the same time must herald the dawn of Russia renewed after her period of trial, and accept my feelings of unbounded devotion.

LUTSK,

March 4th (old style), 1917.

APPENDIX III

ORDER OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE WESTERN FRONT, JUNE 8TH, 1917

No 1832

31

TROOPS OF THE WESTERN FRONT,

As you have learned from the Ukaze of June 5th, issued by the Provisional Government, I have been retired from the Chief Command. Duty as I conceived it obliged me to declare to the Provisional Government that I did not see my way to justify the confidence that had been reposed in me in appointing me to the Chief Command of the Western Front.

At the same time the Government offered me the position of a General of Division; probably it would have been in the cavalry, as it was at the head of a cavalry division that I participated in the fighting during the opening months of the war. In principle I have no objection at all to this appointment, for there was nothing in the existing circumstances that could prevent me from doing my duty at the head of a division. Owing to its relative smallness I should have been able to enter into personal relations with this force and thus to exert a direct influence over it. Above all, I should have been able to exercise a most potent means of influence in case of emergency, in the course of the fighting, that is to say, the influence of personal example. Not only Commanders-in-Chief, but also the Commanders of Corps, who in the midst of a battle can abandon neither their Headquarter Staffs nor their posts of observation, are deprived of this influence.

While rigorously obeying that military discipline to safeguard which I have fought, I do not consider that I have the right to enter

into fuller details on this question. On taking my departure I turn to you, my dear colleagues and comrades in arms, and I declare my conviction that if the Russian troops be reassembled under the colours, solely to remain in the trenches, my presence among you is useless. But if you are really ready to strike a formidable blow at the enemy, this is possible only on one condition — the re-establishment of military discipline, not cruel, but sound and firm. Such discipline must be founded on the sense of duty which prevails among those who understand the meaning of that word. Such men are the faithful sons of our country, who need have no fear of the rigours of justice or of disciplinary measures, for these are not intended for them. The discipline which has its foundation in the possibility of retribution or punishment is necessary in the case of those who forget their duties towards their country. These always have formed, and always will, I am sure, form but an insignificant proportion of the Army. Nevertheless, a bad example is contagious. The result of this military discipline can only be advantageous to the army, for at all times it is only through discipline that troops have been enabled to prove themselves a faithful weapon and a sure instrument of victory. Never can an army suffer so much, never can so many lives be lost in vain as when troops losing their discipline escape from the control of their chiefs, thus turning the Army into an easy target for the enemy.

If the Russian Army wants to fight; if it has taken this decision as a result of the inflexible and free will of the people, the Army must place itself voluntarily under the sway of sound military discipline. Without that can there be no victory, no salvation of the country. If we in reality wish to be free sons of our country and worthy of the rights conquered for us by the Army and by the people, we must by our own free will impose on ourselves real duties. Of these the primary one for every soldier is that of submission to his Chief, and it is discipline that is the motive power of this submission. Another most important point in the life of a soldier is that he should have confidence in his Chiefs and in their long experience. If from the generals down to the youngest officers we demand that they meet the needs and wishes of the soldiers, then on his part the soldier must boldly and openly meet his officer and his Chief. Both must reciprocally recognise that they are, in the first place, men, and then the subordinate must be regarded by his superior as a man who wants

care and solicitude — and the superior must be regarded by his subordinate as being worthy of all confidence and respect.

This is my farewell to you.

After a period of service together, which, though brief, was spent in days that were exceptionally trying and painful, I offer you my cordial farewell greetings and also the expression of my profound gratitude for your service. If some among you have incorrectly and often in quite a contrary sense interpreted their rights and their obligations, and have thereby caused much mortification to myself, as well as to your more direct chiefs, others, on the other hand, have during the trying times through which we are passing set an example of loyal execution of duty and of fidelity to your sworn oath. Above all do I turn to you young officers and in particular to those among you who have grasped the nature of the changes that have been accomplished in Russia and in the Army, and have contrived to master the mind and the heart of your younger brothers-in-arms in order to lead them through these troublous days of liberty, acquired, but not always understood, towards the road of duty and justice. I am aware to what extent your path has been strewn with obstacles, but this has not checked you, and you have emerged from the trial with honour. You now gather the fruits of the troubles you have endured, and of which you were at times the victims, for as a recompense you have obtained the confidence and affection of your subordinates.

But a still greater reward awaits you in the stormy hour of war-like trial. I know that all of you have not arrived at this result, but in the case of the majority of you it was not lack of good will, but the unhappy circumstances that were the cause of that failure. Be not discouraged; work, strive to ameliorate your environment, and success will be yours. The greater the effort to attain this object, the greater will be the moral reward that success will bring you.

My thanks to you, my assistants, all Chiefs, superior and inferior. Do not think that I have not realised the difficulties of the onerous task you have accomplished. If some of you have had to retire from active service, the greater has been the merit of those who remained at their post to work in the reconstruction of the Army on new principles. Work without losing hope, for the hour is not far remote when at the price of your indefatigable labours and according to the measures of the central authorities the Army will be again a

redoubtable weapon directed against the enemy, against the adversary who already dreams of us as of a negligible force, a force that no longer bars his access to his object, which is the enslavement of the peoples, and the achievement of his greedy designs by treading under foot the rights of the whole of humanity.

My thanks to you, soldiers, my thanks to those who in these days of trouble have not allowed themselves to be carried away by the appeal incessantly repeated to destroy every scrap of order that regulates our lives, which could but lead to the triumph of the enemy in his struggle with an Army deprived of all power of resistance through decay. My thanks to those who have not allowed themselves to be overcome by the flattering counsel of the perfidious enemy and did not go to meet him, who was ready to give you the kiss of a Judas. In particular I express my thanks to those who, with all the strength of their moral influence, have constrained their shaken comrades to execute our sacred duty to the country and who by every means have revived the fighting spirit of our valiant regiments, in the profound consciousness of the justice of our cause and in the unshakable faith in the success of our arms, which we have raised in the defence of the peoples against enslavement by Germany and for establishing the right of the people to obtain a life of freedom and welfare for the whole of Russian life.

My thanks to you, disinterested workers of the Military Committees. It is on you that the whole burden rests of the restoration of order among the troops until the complete re-establishment of the authority of the Chiefs, wherever the authority has been shattered by the senseless and often involuntary acts of badly-balanced hot-heads. In the consciousness of the responsibility which lies upon you, you are directing and pacifying the passions that have been unchained. But if much has been entrusted to you, much will be demanded. Work then to justify the confidence that has been reposed in you, and in full consciousness of the responsibility that rests on you, in the firm certainty that your labour is not in vain, that its final result must bring calm to the troubled spirits as well as the moral strengthening of the people and, as a final result, the victory. Work for the strengthening of the influence of the Chiefs, without whose support no warlike effort can lead to the success desired, and, as a consequence of the success, to universal peace.

May God's aid be with you all, from the humblest to the highest,

in your difficult and responsible though glorious task. As for myself, bear me no ill-will.

This Order to be read in all companies, squadrons, batteries, and commands.

(Signed) Commander-in-Chief of the Armies,
General of Cavalry
GOURKO.

INDEX

- Aa river, 286.
Adrianoff, General, 395.
Aeroplanes, German, 34, 172; Russian, 172.
Alexander Michailovitch, Grand Duke, 214.
Alexandra, Empress of Russia, character, 184; at Mohileff, 218; rumours of her sympathies with Germany, 287-289; interview with General Gourko, 289; reception of the members of the Inter-Ally Conference, 302.
Alexeieff, General, Chief of the Imperial General staff, 9, 184; career, 10; character, 10; method of working, 11, 214; Commander-in-Chief of the north-west front, 126, 135; illness, 204, 208, 210; interview with General Gourko, 218; recovery, 313, 322; member of the State Defence Commission, 317; reception at Mohileff, 322; friendly relations with General Gourko, 323; Conference on military service rules, 364; at the Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, at Petrograd, 369, 372; dismissal, 377.
Alexeieff, Major-General, Chief of Staff, 163, 180, 190; characteristics, 164; Quartermaster-General, 346.
Allenstein, attack on, 53, 59-65.
Allied Armies, Conference of representatives, at Paris, 243; the principle of unity of command, 291, 299; comparison of forces and means on the various fronts, 294; Mission, at Petrograd, 292.
Allies, want of co-ordination, 114; relations with Russia, 374.
Andreieff, General, 111.
Angerburg, 43.
Arapoff, Captain, 208.
Archangel, 398.
Army, Russian, mobilisation, 1-8; system of "hidden reserves," 6; forming the new staffs, 6; strategic development, 17; attack on Austria, 17; impressions of aeroplanes, 34; work of the cavalry, 47, 50; defeated at Tannenberg, 73-76; retreats, 82, 130, 134, 140, 144-148, 240; defeat the Austrians, 86; invasion of Galicia, 86, 114; capture Lemberg, 86; invasion of Eastern Silesia, 101; trench warfare, 105; shortage of munitions, 117, 119-127, 158; methods of avoiding retreat, 130; supply of officers, 131-133; evacuate Lemberg, 140; care of the wounded, 152-157, 206; food supply, 156, 160, 161, 230, 252, 255-258, 374; military operations in Roumania, 238-240; Conference of the Commanders-in-Chief, 251; reorganisation, 264-268; formation of "position batteries," 267; reinforcements, 270; number of deserters, 271; reception of the news of the Tsar's abdication, 326; Oath of Allegiance, 326; disorganisation, 341, 372, 387; formation of "storming" battalions, 356, 387; duties of officers, 358; defeated in Galicia, 386; farewell order of General Gourko to the troops, 393-409.
Arngold, Captain, 163, 208.
Augustoff Canal, 51, 85, 90, 96; Woods, victory at, 112.

- Austria, mobilisation of the army, 3; military operations against Russia, 18, 86; retreat, 86, 101; advance in Italy, 174; checked, 175; military operations in Roumania, 94.
- Babith, Lake, 284.
- Bakeries, use of movable, in war, 87.
- Baloueff, General, 204; in command of the "Special Army," 204.
- Baranowitchi, 148, 176.
- Baratoff, General, in Persia, 264.
- Barbed wire, supply of, 105, 129, 158.
- Bark, N. N., at the Inter-Ally Conference, 297.
- Belaieff, General, at the Conference of the Commanders-in-Chief, 262; appointed Minister for War, 275-278; at the Inter-Ally Conference, 297; on the Polish question, 312.
- Benckendorff, Count, Ambassador to Great Britain, 250; Chief Marshal of the Court, 302; death, 311.
- Beniksen, Count, at the Red Cross Congress, 354.
- Berditcheff, 208.
- Berthelot, General, instructor to the Roumanian army, 234.
- Bezobrazoff, General, 190.
- Björkö, agreement signed at, 2.
- "Bloc," meaning of the term, 314.
- Bobrinsky, Count, Minister of Agriculture, 225, 229; duties, 229.
- Bogaevsky, President of the Conference of Cossacks, 383.
- Bolderoff, Cornet, gallant exploit, 50.
- Bologoi, 332.
- Boris Vladimirovitch, Grand Duke, 214.
- Borjimovsky Wood, 107.
- Bratiano, M., at Mohileff, 294; at a meeting of the Inter-Ally Conference, 290; at Petrograd, 308.
- Brest-Litovsk fortress, 145, 147.
- Brussiloff, General, military career, 13; opportunism, 14; attacking operations, 174-177, 192; at Berditcheff, 205, 208; invasion of Austria, 291; on the Tsar's abdication, 333; at the Conference on military service rules, 364; of Commanders-in-Chief, 369, 370; Generalissimo, 378; at Minsk, 378; ordered to meet Kerensky, 390; dismissed, 391.
- Brzezany, 137.
- Buchanan, Sir George, British Ambassador at Petrograd, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298; interview with General Gourko, 374.
- Bug river, 16.
- Bukarest, defence of, 235; evacuated, 238.
- Bukovina, 194.
- Bzura river, 92, 105, 135, 142, 144.
- Carlotti, Marquis, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298.
- Carpathian mountains, 101, 114, 134.
- Cartridges, supply of, 123.
- Castelnu, General, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298; Order of St. George, conferred, 304.
- Chantilly, Conference at, 263, 293.
- Coal, supply of, 159, 257.
- Coal-mines, result of withdrawal of men, 159.
- Commanders-in-Chief, Conference at Mohileff, 251, 262-273; at Petrograd, 368-373.
- Conference of the Front, 348-352.
- Constantine, King of Greece, efforts to maintain neutrality, 310.
- Corn, supply of, 255.
- Cossacks, character, 149; Conference at Novotcherkask, 383; election of the "Ataman," 382-386.
- Czech question, 279, 304, 305.
- Daniloff, General, Quartermaster-General of the General Staff, 9; Chief of Staff, 179; at Pskoff, 179; at the Conference on military service rules, 364, 365.
- Danube, the, 240.
- Defence, State, Commission of, 315.

- Denikin, General, in command of an army corps, 236; at Minsk, 379, 381.
- Dnieper, the, 182
- Dniester, river, 136, 138.
- Dobroudja, evacuated, 240.
- Dolgorouky, Major-General Prince, 185.
- Doukhonin, Quartermaster-General at the Conference on military service rules, 364.
- Doumergue, Gaston, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298.
- Dragomiroff, General, at the Conference on military service rules, 364; the Commanders-in-Chief, 369, 370.
- Druskeniki, 51; attack on, 90.
- Duma, the Imperial, opened, 274; wishes of the members, 314; relations with the Government, 318; Committee of Execution, 335.
- Durich, the Czech, 306.
- Dvina, the, 348.
- Dvinsk, 148, 164, 173.
- Egorievsky, General, 252.
- European War, 19.
- Evert, General, 135, 176; on the Tsar's abdication, 333; dismissed, 339.
- Ferdinand, King of Roumania, 239; Commander-in-Chief of the Army, 239; plot against, 308.
- France, military operations against Germany, 18; treatment of the wounded, 153; Revolution compared with the Russian, 335.
- Frederiks, Count, Minister of the Court, 185, 288; warning to General Gourko, 314.
- Frost-bite, cases of, 168.
- Galicia, invasion of, 86, 114; Russian army defeated, 386.
- Galitch, capture of, 386.
- Gases, asphyxiating, use of, 106, 201-203.
- Gerard, J. W., American Ambassador to Berlin, 2.
- German army, use of smoke columns, 26; evacuate Marggrabowa, 33; aeroplanes, 34, 172; methods of obtaining information, 36; observation garrets, 36; superiority in guns, 40; victory of Tannenberg, 73-76; plan of operations, 80; attack on Rennenkampf's army, 81; superiority of the troops, 84; attack on Warsaw, 88-92, 100; treatment of the Poles, 88; cruelties, 88, 149; defeated by Siberian riflemen, 91; relations with the Russian troops, 97; retreat, 101; use of poison gases, 106, 201-203; invasion of Roumania, 234; advance stopped, 241; military operations in winter, 310.
- Germany, declares war against Russia, 2; railways, 5, 72, 112; military operations against France, 18; looting in, 98; supply of munitions, 118; declares independence of Poland, 246.
- Gilinsky, General, Commander-in-Chief on the north-western front, 11; career, 11; at Mohileff, 210.
- Golitzin, Prince, President of the Council of Ministers, 274; qualities, 275; entertains members of the Inter-Ally Conference, 301; President of the Polish Commission, 310.
- Golitzin, Princess, marriage, 226.
- Goremykin, J. L., on autonomy to Poland, 246; murdered, 305.
- Goundsadze, General, 111.
- Gourko, General Basil, in command of the 1st Army Cavalry Division in Moscow, 19; at Suwalki, 20; temporary Governor-General, 20; on the duties of a Chief, 22, 31; treatment of his subordinates, 22-24; advance on Marggrabowa, 25-33; crosses the Prussian frontier, 26, 97; at Angerburg, 43; operations at Widmennen, 54; in-

- structions from General Rennenkampf, 59; dash through the German lines to Allenstein, 59-70; in command of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, 73; of the 6th Field Army Corps, 103; defence of Lowicz, 103; in charge of eleven divisions, 110; sent to Galicia, 135; at Lemberg, 137; on leave, 162; in command of the 5th Army, 162, 167; at Dvinsk, 164, 179; inspection of the work of the Staffs, 164; issues editions of regulations for troops in position warfare, 170; in temporary command of the northern front, 179; report on Riga, 179; in command of the "Special Army," 181, 195; at Mohileff, 181, 210, 284, 322; interviews with the Tsar, 188, 189, 210, 219, 249, 283, 317; at Lutsk, 190, 324, 336; inspection of troops, 191, 203, 356-362; temporary Chief of the General Staff, 204; his wife's work as a Sister of Charity, 205; journey to Mohileff, 207-210; meeting with the Grand Duke Nicolai, 208; duties, 211-217, 220; interview with General Alexeieff, 218; on the Polish question, 245, 247, 311; at the Conference of the Commanders-in-Chief, 262-273, 368-373; at Petrograd, 278, 291, 365, 391; interviews with Pokrovsky, 278; with ministers, 279, 306; with Protopopoff, 280-283; with the Empress, 289; with M. Bratiano, 294; at the Inter-Ally Conference, 296-304; the Polish Commission, 310; relations with Goutchkoff, 314-317; member of the State Defence Commission, 315; friendly relations with General Alexeieff, 323; lunches with the Dowager-Empress, 324; instructions to Commanders in the abdication of the Tsar, 326; at Minsk, 329, 340, 374; meeting with his wife at Lutsk, 336; Commander-in-Chief of the western front, 339; on the disorganisation of the army, 340-343, 387; at the Workmen's and Soldiers' Committee meeting, 346; at the Conference of the Front, 349, 352; the Congress of the Red Cross, 354; criticism of the military service rules, 364; interview with Sir G. Buchanan, 374; resignation, 376-380; farewell order to the troops, 379, 405-409; at the Conference of Cossacks at Novotcherkask, 383, 385; speech to the Cossacks, 384; at Kislovodsk, 386; summoned to Headquarters, 387; arrested, 392; letter to the Tsar, 393, 402-404; confined in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, 393-396, 397; released, 396; at Archangel, 398; voyage in the *Umthali*, 398.
- Goutchkoff, A. J., President of the War Trade Committee, 125; political views, 314; relations with General Gourko, 314-317; President of the State Defence Commission, 316; Chief of the Red Cross, 317; Minister of War, 328; at Pskoff, 332; Minsk, 343; reform of the Army, 343-346; at a meeting of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Committee, 346; resignation, 365.
- Grabbe, General Count, 186.
- Graevo, 53, 54.
- Griffiths, Sir John Norton, mission to Roumania, 300.
- Grodisko, 202.
- Grodno fortress, 90, 145.
- Grotten, Colonel, 69.
- Gumbinnen, 97, 103; bombardment of, 82.
- Habaloff, General, commandant of the Petrograd district troops, 320.
- Hand grenades, use of, 106.
- Henderson, Arthur, at Petrograd, 330.

- Hospital trains, in Russia, 155.
 Hvostoff, M., 225.
- Ignatieff, Count, Chief of Staff of the Guards, 190.
 Ignatieff, Count, Minister of Public Education, 227.
 Insterburg, advance on, 40.
 Inter-Ally Conference at Petrograd, 278, 291, 296-304.
 Italy, advance of the Austrians, 174.
 Ivangorod fortress, 93, 94.
 Ivanoff, Cornet, brilliant exploit, 51.
 Ivanoff, General, Commander-in-Chief of the south-western front, 9; characteristics, 9; interview with General Gourko, 136; at the Conference of the Commanders-in-Chief, 262.
- Jacobstadt, 167.
 Janin, General, head of the French Mission at Mohileff, 250.
 Japanese War, 87, 94, 119.
- Kaledin, General, capture of Lutsk, 181, 190; meeting with General Gourko, 191; at Tchernovitz, 195; at the Conference of Cossacks at Novotcherkask, 383; elected Ataman, 385.
 Kalisz, 101; taken by the Germans, 88.
 Karepoff, General, 111.
 Kazan, 2.
 Kemp, Admiral, in command of the British naval forces in Archangel, 398.
 Kerensky, A., Minister of War, 366, 368; at the Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, 373; tour of the armies, 375; publishes the military service rules, 376; at the Conference at Mohileff, 390; treatment of General Brussiloff, 390; orders the arrest of General Gourko, 392.
 Kieff, 1, 208, 324.
- Kisliakoff, Major-General, appointed Assistant Minister of Ways and Communications, 259.
 Kislovodsk, 162, 382, 386.
 Kitchener, Lord, disaster to, 293.
 Klembovsky, General, Assistant to the Chief of the General Headquarters, 254; at the Conference of the Commanders-in-Chief, 262.
 Koanda, General, conversations with the Tsar, 235; appeal for help, 235.
 Kondratenko, General, defence of Port Arthur fortress, 93.
 Konigsberg, fortress of, 47.
 Korniloff, General, 197; taken prisoner, 198; escape, 198; in command of the 25th Army Corps, 199; characteristics, 199; appearance, 200; appointed Commander-in-Chief, 391; dismissal, 397; failure of his "Coup d'État," 397.
 Korschen, capture of, 52.
 Kourloff, General, at Mohileff, 221.
 Koutouzoff, Princess, 324.
 Kouzmin, Lieutenant, ordered to arrest General Gourko, 392.
 Kouzmin-Karavaieff, General, 111.
 Kovno fortress, 83, 90, 145.
 Krakau, 101.
 Kreutzburg, 148.
 Krivoshèyn, A. W., Minister of Agriculture, 229.
 Kruglanken, Lake of, 54.
 Kuropatkin, General, introduction of movable bakeries in the Japanese War, 87; Commander-in-Chief on the northern front, 166; characteristics, 166; tour of inspection, 166; Governor-General of Turkestan, 178.
 Kvietzinsky, General, 345.
- Lechitzky, General, 195.
 Lemberg (Lvoff), 136; capture of, 86, 100; evacuated, 141.
 Loeff, General, 67; thrown from his horse, 67.
 Litvinoff, General, 105.

- Lobanoff, Prince, member of the Legislative Delegation, 319.
- Lodz, 101.
- Lombardy, threatened invasion of, 94.
- Lomja, 38, 144.
- Looting, cases of, 98.
- Lötzen, fortress of, 24, 81.
- Loukomsky, General Quartermaster-General, 255; Chief of the General Staff, 387, 388.
- Lowicz, 103; defence of, 103.
- Lutsk, 207, 324; capture of, 181, 190; meetings at, 328.
- Lvoff, Prince, President of the Council of Ministers, 338; of the Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, 370.
- Lyck, 81.
- Machine guns, supply of, 124.
- Mackensen, General, in command of army corps in Austria, 116.
- Makaroff, M., Minister of Justice, at Mohileff, 220.
- Makedonsky, Captain, 30; killed, 52.
- Maklakoff, M., Ambassador to France, 319; at the Conference of the Front, 348, 349.
- Malevanoff, Captain, 59.
- Manchuria campaign, 10, 15.
- Mannerheim, General, 241; in command of the White Guards of Finland, 241.
- Marggrabowa, advance on, 25-33; evacuated, 33, 34; destruction, 58.
- Maria Feodorovna, Dowager-Empress of Russia, entertains General Gourko, 324; at Mohileff, 334.
- Markoff, General, Chief of the Staff, at Minsk, 381.
- Marne, battle of the, 72.
- Martson, General, 75, 76.
- Maslennikoff, M., at the Conference of the Front, 348, 349.
- Masurian Lakes, 39, 53, 54.
- Maximovitch, General Aide-de-Camp, 211, 212.
- Meat, supply of, for the army, 160, 256.
- Meeshtchenko, General, in command of the 2nd Caucasian Army Corps, 104.
- Mesopotamia, military operations in, 267, 386.
- Miassoiedoff, Colonel, Chief of the Gendarmerie Administration, 20.
- Michael, Grand Duke, refuses to be Emperor, 326, 327.
- Miliant, General, 110.
- Milioukoff, M., Minister of Foreign Affairs, resignation, 366.
- Military Administrative Conference, 251, 260.
- Military service rules Conference at Mohileff, 364; at Petrograd, 369; publication, 376.
- Miller, Major-General, Chief of Staff, 171, 180.
- Milner, Lord, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298.
- Minsk, 329, 374; Council of Workmen, 340; meetings, 346; Socialist delegates at, 361.
- Mitau, 286.
- Mohileff, 10; Headquarters Staff at, 162, 181, 183, 210.
- Moscow, 19, 391.
- Mukden, battle of, 10.
- Murman Railway, 258, 287.
- Narew, river, 16, 85, 90, 95, 144.
- Neratoff, M., at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298.
- Nesteroff Lieutenant, "loops the loop," 35.
- Nicolas II, Emperor of Russia, agreement signed at Björkö, 2; at Dvinsk, 165; Commander-in-Chief, 183; at Mohileff, 184, 248, 323, 334; members of his suite, 184, 212; military duties, 186-188; interviews with General Gourko, 188, 189, 210, 219, 249, 283, 317; receives M. Treppoff, 218; at Tsarskoe Selo, 245, 274; signs Ukaze, 249; at the Conference, of the Commanders-in-Chief, 262-269; leaves Mohileff,

- 268; entertains members of the Inter-Ally Conference, 301; treatment of M. Rodzianko, 313; abdication, 326; at Pskoff, 332; manifesto, 333; calm and self-control, 334; letter from General Gourko, 393; Order of the Day, 399.
- Nicolai Nicolaievitch, Grand Duke, appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Army, 7, 338; resignation, 181, 183, 338; meeting with General Gourko, 208; appeal to the Polish nation, 246; on the Tsar's abdication, 333; in the Crimea, 339.
- Nicolaieff, 137.
- Nicolaieffsky Military Academy, 8, 10, 134.
- Nieman River, 51, 85, 90.
- Niloff, General, 65.
- Nostitz, General Count, meets the members of the Inter-Ally Conference, 292.
- Novikoff, Captain, 67.
- Novo-Alexandria, 136.
- Novogeorgievsk fortress, 16; capture of, 145.
- Novotcherkask, Conference of Cossacks at, 382.
- Odessa, 1.
- Officers, supply of, in the Russian Army, 130-133.
- Oldenburg, Prince Alexander, Commander-in-Chief of the Medical Departments, 243; irascibility, 243.
- Oletzko, Lake, 31.
- Olsoufieff, P. A., 224.
- Osovetz fortress, 95, 144, 145.
- Ouroussof, Prince, killed, 56.
- Paleologue, M., at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298.
- Palitzin, General, Chief of the General Staff, 316.
- Paris, Conference of representatives of the Allied Armies, 243.
- Paul Alexandrovitch, Grand Duke, 190.
- Peter and Paul fortress, rules, 394.
- Petrograd, 1, 147, 391; number of the garrison, 320; Revolution, 328; causes of, 331.
- Pflug, General, 53; in command of the 10th Army, 58.
- Pleve, General, temporary Commander-in-Chief on the northern front, 162, 165.
- Plieszkoff, General, in command of the 1st Siberian Corps, 359; resignation, 360.
- Podolia, 18.
- Pokrovsky, N. N., Minister for Foreign Affairs, 278; meeting with General Gourko, 278; at the Inter-Ally Conference, 296.
- Poland, position, 15; invasion of, 88-91; question of autonomy, 246, 304, 310, 313; promise of independence from Russia, 246, 249; Germany, 246; meeting of delegates, 355.
- Poles, cruelty of the Germans, 88.
- Polivanoff, General, Minister of War, 319; resignation, 319; military service rules, 363.
- Port Arthur fortress, 93.
- Posner, presides over the Council of Workmen, at Minsk, 340, 346; President of the Conference of the Front, 349.
- Postovski, General, 77.
- Poustovoitenko, Quartermaster-General, 212.
- Presano, General, 239.
- Protopopoff, M., question of his dismissal 218-221; at Mohileff, 221; career, 222; character, 223; elected Vice-President of the Imperial Duma, 223; delegate to Allied countries, 223; in London, 224; Minister of the Interior, 225; interview with General Gourko, 280-283; political programme, 282.
- Provisional Government, 339; authority, 340; relations with the Soviets, 331, 363; reorganisation of the army, 340, 343-346; appoint-

- ment of new members, 366; Conference with Commanders-in-Chief, 368-373; at Mohileff, 389.
- Prussia, East, campaign, 27, 38; reserves of food, 41, 98; farms, 42; flight of the inhabitants, 42; invasion of, 72.
- Przemysl fortress, siege of, 101, 105; surrender, 115; retaken, 139.
- Psheloutsky, General, 111.
- Pskoff, 166, 178, 332.
- Railways, influence on strategical operations, 48; German, 112; Russian, 4, 72, 152, 242, 258, 320.
- Rasputin, murder of, 269, 272.
- Ratkevitch, General, in temporary command of the 10th Army, 53.
- Ratko-Dmitrieff, General, 176; in command of the 12th Army, 284; result of his local advance, 284-287.
- Rava river, 92, 105, 135, 142, 144.
- Red Cross, Congress, meeting, 354.
- Rediger, General, Minister of War, 316.
- Rennenkampf, General, reputation, 12; German descent, 13; characteristics, 13; in command of the 1st Army, 20; operations in East Prussia, 38, 71, 81; advance on Insterburg, 40; retreat, 53, 83; instructions to General Gourko, 59; pressure of the German troops, 81; tactical errors, 102.
- Reval, 78.
- Revelstoke, Lord, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 297.
- Rifle, the five-clip magazine, 120.
- Riga, 148, 178.
- Rikkel, Count, head of the Belgian mission, at Mohileff, 182, 211.
- Rittich, M., Minister of Agriculture, 278; interviews with General Gourko, 279, 307.
- Roditcheff, M., at the Conference of the Front, 348, 349.
- Rodzianko, M. V., President of the Duma, 224, 226; at Mohileff, 225; marriage, 226; oratorical talent, 226; at the Polish Commission, 310; interview with the Tsar, 313; at the Conference of the Front, 349, 350.
- Rojitche, 190.
- Romanovsky, Port, 292.
- Rominten Forests, 20, 39, 96.
- Ronjin, General, Chief of the Military Communications, 259.
- Root, Senator, at Petrograd, 330.
- Rostoff, 388.
- Rostovtseff, Count, private secretary to the Empress, 287.
- Roumania joins the Allies, 193; military operations, 193, 232, 234; agreement with Russia, 193; assistance from, 232, 234; character of the army, 234; invasion of, 234; condition of the railways, 237, 242; the roads, 238; difficulties of administration, 294; result of the defeat, 296; destruction of oil-wells, 300; result of entry into the war, 309.
- Roussin, Admiral, Chief of the Naval Staff, at the Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, 262.
- Rudgieri, Count, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298; Russian Order conferred, 304.
- Russia, mobilisation of the army, 1-8; war declared against Germany, 2; railways, 4, 72, 153, 242, 257, 319; military operations against Austria, 17; character of the fortress, 94; stock of munitions, 118; shortage, 119-128; flight of the inhabitants, 148-152; epidemic of scurvy, 156; air-service, 172; agreement with Roumania, 194; assistance to her, 232, 235; promises autonomy to Poland, 246, 249; Revolution, 325, 330; the watchword, 335, 371; compared with the French Revolution, 335; relations with the Allies, 374.

- Russia, Tsarevitch of, at Mohileff, 185, 216; illness, 283.
- Russky, General, in command of the north-western army, 109; illness, 162; at Pskoff, 179, 332; authorises local advance, 284; on the Tsar's abdication, 333; resignation, 386; at Kislovodsk, 386; summoned to Mohileff, 387.
- Saharoff, General, 162; in command of the Separate Danube Army, 233, 240; on the Tsar's abdication, 333.
- Samsonoff, General, character, 13; in command of the 2nd Army, at Lomja, 38; at Graevo, 53; concentration on the East Prussian frontier, 71; defeated at the battle of Tannenberg, 73-77; death, 78.
- San river, 86.
- Sarts, disorders in, 178.
- Sazonoff, M., at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298; scheme for the autonomy of Poland, 304, 311, 312; Ambassador to Great Britain, 311.
- Schwartz, General, commandant of Ivangorod fortress, 93.
- Scurvy, epidemic of, in Russia, 156.
- Selivanoff, General, 115.
- Seliverstoff, General, 222.
- Seret river, 240, 241.
- Serge Michailovitch, Grand Duke, Inspector of the Artillery, 213; at the Conference of the Commanders-in-Chief, 262; at the Inter-Ally Conference, 299.
- Shahovskoy, Prince, Minister of the Board of Trade, 231; interview with General Gourko, 307.
- Shaloya, M., at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298.
- Shataloff, Lieutenant, 32.
- Sheideman, Major-General, 172; in command of the 48th Army Corps, 272.
- Shells, charged with asphyxiating gases, 106.
- Shervashidzy, Prince, 324.
- Shevtsoff, Captain, killed, 67.
- Shidlovskaya, Volga, spirit distillery, attack on, 108-112.
- Shingareff, M., murder of, 319.
- Shishkievitch, General, Chief of Staff, 137, 234, 240.
- Shoulgin, member of the Duma, 319; at Pskoff, 332.
- Shouvaeff, General, Minister of War, 228; character, 228.
- Shouvaeff, M., at the Conference of the Commanders-in-Chief, 262.
- Shtakelberg, General Baron, 182.
- Siberian Corps, the 1st, 359; regiments, transported to Warsaw, 91; defeat the Germans, 92.
- Silesia, Eastern, 101.
- Sivers, General, 58.
- Skobelev, M., at the Conference of the Front, 248, 249; of the Commanders-in-Chief, 369, 372.
- Slavonic question, 279.
- Sluysarenko, General, in command of the 5th Army, 181.
- Smirnov, General, 111.
- Smoke columns, use of, 26.
- Socialist delegates at Minsk, 361.
- Sochatoff, 104.
- Sokovnin, General, 111.
- Soukhomlinoff, General, 11, 94; Minister of War, 11, 16.
- Soviets (Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies) Ukaze No. 1, 328, 341; relations with the Provisional Government, 330, 362; at the Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, 369; disorganisation of the army, 370, 371, 372.
- Stalloupenen, 38, 96, 102.
- Stefanic, M. B., member of the Czech National Council, 279.
- Stohod river, 344.
- Stremouchoff, General, 111.
- Stroudza, General, 241; plot, 308; flight, 309.
- Strounnikoff, Dr., 207.
- Stryj, 139.

- Stuermer, M., President of the Council of Ministers, dismissed, 218.
- Suchomlin, General, 325.
- Sugar, supply of, for the Russian army, 161.
- Sulwalki, 19, 20.
- Tannenberg Wood, 53, 73.
- Taranovsky, Colonel, 26.
- Tatiana, Grand Duchess, Committee, 275.
- Taube, General, 111.
- Tcherbatcheff, General, 136; at the Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, 369, 370.
- Tchernoff, M., at the Conference of Commanders-in-Chief, 369.
- Tchernovitz, 194.
- Tchheidze, M., at the Conference of the Front, 348, 351.
- Tereshtchenko, M., Minister of Foreign Affairs, 366; at the Conference at Mohileff, 384.
- Thomas, Albert, at Petrograd, 330.
- Thorn fortress, 101.
- Transylvania, Russian troops in, 193, 197.
- Tregouboff, General, 110.
- Trench feet, cases of, 168; warfare, 105.
- Trepoff, Alexander F., President of the Council of Ministers, 218; interview with the Tsar, 218; wish to have M. Protopopoff dismissed, 218-221; resignation, 274.
- Trotzky, M., 248.
- Tsheglovitoff, M., President of the Imperial Council, 304, 311.
- Tutcheff, Cornet, 69.
- Tzeretelli, M., at the Conference of the Front, 348, 351; the Commanders-in-Chief, 369, 373.
- Umthali*, the, 398.
- Vandervelde, M., at Petrograd, 330.
- Vasiliëff, General, 111.
- Vasilkovsky, General, Commander-in-Chief of the Petrograd Military District, 392.
- Vistula river, 15, 18, 89, 90, 96, 101, 102, 141.
- Voeikoff, General, 185, 269.
- Voinovsky-Krigier, M., Minister of Ways and Communications, 259, 278; interview with General Gourko, 279, 307.
- Volhynia, 18, 141.
- Volynsky Regiment, 331.
- Vyrouboff, Commissary of the Provisional Government at Minsk, 381.
- War, European, 19.
- War Trade Committee, 125.
- Warsaw, 15-18, 100; attack on, 88-93; surrender, 147.
- Waters, General, 182.
- Widmennen, 54.
- William II, Emperor of Germany, agreement signed at Björkö, 2; proposals for peace, 248.
- Williams, General Sir John Hanbury, 182, 210.
- Wilson, General Sir Henry, at the Inter-Ally Conference, 298; Russian Order conferred, 304.
- Wounded, care of the, in Russia, 152-157, 206.
- Yanushkevitch, General, appointed Chief of the General Staff, 8.
- Zaharoff, General, 110.
- Zamjitsky, Lieutenant-Colonel, 171.
- Zbaràz, 141, 163.
- Zegrie fortress, destruction, 16-18.
- Zerebkoff, General, at Novotcherkask, 383.
- Zviagintseff, A. J., member of the State Defence Commission, 315.

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