



STALIN  
*and the*  
ARMED FORCES  
*of the*  
U. S. S. R.



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## STALIN AND THE RED ARMY



HE PERIOD of peaceful construction in the history of our country is replete with events of tremendous importance. Rivers and oceans of water have flowed under the bridges in recent years. Great changes have taken place all around us, our perspectives are rather different from what they were, and accepted ideas of volume and scale have been completely upset. Inseparably linked up with all these events is the teeming and manifold revolutionary activity of Comrade Stalin. During the last five or

six years Comrade Stalin has been in the centre of the developing and surging struggle for the Party, for Socialism. Only these circumstances can explain why the role of Comrade Stalin as one of the most outstanding organizers of the victories of the Civil War has to some extent been kept in the shade by these events and has not yet received due appreciation.

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

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

In the period from 1918 to 1920 Comrade Stalin was probably the only person whom the Central Committee shifted about from battle front to battle front, selecting the most vulner-

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

able spots, the places where the threat to the revolution was most imminent. Stalin was never to be found where things were comparatively quiet and going smoothly, where success was attending our arms. But wherever, for various reasons, the Red Army suffered reverses, wherever the counterrevolutionary forces, pressing their successes, threatened the very existence of Soviet power, wherever alarm and panic might at any moment develop into helplessness and catastrophe—there Comrade Stalin was always sure to appear. Foregoing sleep, he organized the masses of the Party members and of the workers, the Red Army commanders and their men; he took the reins of leadership into his own firm hands and broke down the confused state of mind. He was merciless not only to enemies but also to panicmongers and saboteurs; he crushed conspiracies both in the rear and at the front, created a healthier atmosphere, achieved the necessary change and constantly worked for the victory of the Red Army. Comrade Stalin himself wrote of this in one of his letters to the Central Committee in 1919, saying that he was being “turned into a specialist for cleaning out the stables of the Department for Military Affairs.”

## TSARITSYN

Comrade Stalin began his career as a military man on the Tsaritsyn Front. At the beginning of June 1918 Comrade Stalin together with a detachment of Red Army men and two armoured cars left for Tsaritsyn in the capacity of director of food supplies in South Russia. In Tsaritsyn he encountered incredible chaos in Soviet, trade union and Party organizations but the confusion and muddle in the various departments at military headquarters was even worse. At every step Comrade Stalin ran into obstacles, arising from the general situation, which interfered with the performance of his immediate task. These obstacles were mainly a result of the rapidly growing Cossack counter-revolution, extensively supported at that time by the German army of occupation which had invaded the Ukraine. Counterrevolutionary Cossack bands quickly seized a number of points near Tsaritsyn and thereby not only made it impossible to organize regular procurements of grain for starving Moscow and Petrograd, but also placed Tsaritsyn in extreme danger.

Things, at the time, were equally bad in other places. In Moscow there was the uprising

of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. In the East, Muravyov had turned traitor; in the Urals, the Czechoslovakian counterrevolutionary revolt was developing; in the far South the English were closing in on Baku. The whole country was in a ring of fire. The revolution was experiencing its severest trials. Telegram after telegram flashed over the wires between Moscow and Tsaritsyn, between Lenin and Stalin. Lenin warned of dangers, offered encouragement, called for decisive measures. The fate of Tsaritsyn acquired paramount importance. An uprising on the Don and the loss of Tsaritsyn would involve the loss of the entire rich North Caucasian granary and the Baku oil fields, and would permit the Whites to effect a union between the Don counterrevolutionaries, Kolchak and the Czechoslovak counterrevolutionaries and then to march jointly upon Moscow. Tsaritsyn had to be held at any price. Comrade Stalin thoroughly understood this. As an experienced revolutionary, he was soon convinced that his work would be of no avail unless he could influence the military command, which played the decisive role under these conditions.

"The railway south of Tsaritsyn has not yet been restored," he wrote to Lenin in a

memorandum of July 7, that was transmitted with the characteristic superscription: "I am rushing off to the front, am writing only on business."

"I am driving and bawling out everyone who needs it. We hope to restore the line shortly. You may rest assured that we will spare nobody, neither ourselves nor others, and that we shall deliver the grain in spite of everything. If our military 'experts' (bunglers!) had not been loafing on the job the line would not have been cut. And if the line is restored it will not be because of them but in spite of them."\*

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

"As to the hysterical ones, rest assured that our hand will not falter. We shall treat enemies as enemies."\*\*

The more he examined the military apparatus, the more Comrade Stalin became con-

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\* J. V. Stalin, *Collected Works*, Russ. ed., Vol. 4, p. 118.

\*\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 27, p. 492.

vinced of its complete helplessness and, in some sections, even of its direct reluctance to organize resistance to the counterrevolution that was raising its insolent head.

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

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

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

"I consider that I have no right to regard matters with indifference when the section of the front held by Kalnin is cut off from the

supply base, and the North is cut off from the grain districts; I shall correct these and many other shortcomings on the spot; I am taking a number of measures—even to the point of removing the officials and commanders who ruin matters—and shall continue to do so, in spite of formal difficulties, which I shall brush aside when necessary. It is understood that I assume full responsibility before all higher bodies.”

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

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

It was at this time that the remnants of the Ukrainian revolutionary army reached Tsari-

tsyn, having retreated across the Don steppe under pressure of the German forces.

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

At that time Tsaritsyn was full of counterrevolutionaries of every possible hue, from Right Socialist-Revolutionaries and terrorists to rabid monarchists. Before Comrade Stalin appeared on the scene and before the arrival of the revolutionary detachments from the Ukraine all these gentry had felt almost at ease

and had lived in anticipation of better days. The reorganization of the Red forces at the front necessitated a ruthless purge of the rear, administered with an iron hand. The Revolutionary Military Council headed by Comrade Stalin set up a special Cheka and commissioned it to purge Tsaritsyn of counterrevolution.

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

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

“The Gryazi-Tsaritsyn line had been completely cut. In the North there was only one means left of receiving supplies and maintaining communications: the Volga. In the South, after the Volunteer Army had occupied Tikhoretskaya, the situation also became extremely precarious. For Stalin, who obtained his supplies exclusively from the Stavropol province,