

The US Attack on Kodish, North Russia, Dec. 1918

The Allies conducted another attack to retake Kodish on Dec.29th. The US Cos. E,K and part of L were used in addition to a mortar section and MG platoon. The plan called for the Americans to attack frontally, while the British MG company lie in wait to ambush the expected retreat under the pursuit from a company from the 1st Archangel regiment. In Kodish, a strong the 1st Onega regiment of 1200 Reds and 4 artillery guns waited (another 700 were further back in reserve). The plan called for the U.S. to penetrate to Kochmas and then Plesetskaya by the 31st ! The attack began at 6 a.m. in -20 F, snowy weather with a rolling barrage conducted by 7 stokes mortars and a few artillery guns for 15 minutes. Cos. E and K (with 20 Lewis guns) followed the barrage as over 1000 rounds fell on the Reds. The Reds pulled back but provided stout resistance to the Americans. The White Russian unit never deployed because the commander did not like weather conditions ! And for the British, the MG company never deployed because it's commander was still recovering from the previous nights drunk (Ironside subsequently called the British leader and men, " disgraceful"). The Reds, in spite of outnumbering the US 1200 to 450 men, pulled back in good order allowing the Americans to take Kodish! But any advance past Kodish was stopped cold by the MG fire zones of the Reds. The French were also suppose to attack along the RR, like all of the rest of the allies, they cancelled their attack when their ski detachment failed to make much progress (this was ski unit, "Courier de Bois". It left at 2 PM and due to snow, had advanced only two miles in four hours. By 6 PM, the unit was exhausted. By the evening of the 30th, it still was 10 miles from it's objective, Emtsa.) However, luck had been with the Americans who literally walked into Kodish at 1 p.m. The Americans attempted to move onto Avda. Here , the US met withering fire from the Reds from prepared defenses. During the night, the Reds counterattacked and out of four American platoons, only 100 men remained of which 35 were Wia, and 7 Kia. In one battle, one US platoon was surrounded and armed with only one stokes mortar. This mortar fired 250 rounds directly hitting the Red MG nests, allowing the platoon to escape. The advance was halted at 11 p.m. Cos.E,L had been shattered

replaced by Co.D/ Kings Liverpool's Bn and some White Russian units which held Kodish for a time until retreating back across the Emtsa River by January 15, 1919.

Ironside's main attacking column, the Railroad units which were to strike toward Plesetskaya, did not even become involved. Their planned attack continued to be postponed until the French ski unit was in place. Finally, at 11:30 PM on the 30th, Major Brooks (US 339th) received orders postponing the attack, "until further notice". This was to have been a key asset. The failed advance of the US companies to reach Kochmas (miles south of Kodish) and the failed west flank attack with a company down the Onega valley that only reached Turchasova, happened before the center attacking group (the railroad) was activated. Ironside was willing to order the center group to attack had the Americans reached Kochmas. But he was unwilling to send the railroad force into frontal attacks if the Red flanks were not in danger.

Despite the poor reputation, the Red fighter proved to be a dangerous foe at times. The Red forces at Emtsa amounted to 900 men of the Gatchina Regiment. Opposing the railway forces at Verst 443 were about 200 men and 6 Maxims HMG defending in trenches. At Verst 441, an armor train stood mounting two 75mm guns and several Machine Guns. Another armor train was near Emtsa mounting two 75mm guns and six Maxim MG's. According to the intelligence reports, once the first line was penetrated, no opposition was present until Emtsa.

The Railroad force was the strongest of all the attacking forces, and in view of the intelligence reports, it appears this force could have easily reached Emtsa by itself. And if the variable morale of the Bolo came into play, there would've been a good chance the town could've been taken without any flanking movements.

The composition of the Railroad column was as follows:

INFANTRY

Co. B/ 17th Bn/ Liverpools

Co. G/ US 1st Bn/339th

Co.1 and 3/ French 21st Bn

One French MG company

One Co. / Russian

Reserve: Co 2/French 21st and Co. I/US 339th

ARTILLERY

Three 155mm guns, two 75mm, 1 75mm Naval.

Armor train No.1 (one 18pdr, two 77mm howitzer, 8 Lewis guns)

Armor train No.2 (two 75mm, 2 Lewis guns)

The orders instructed that by the end of the first day Emtsa and Emtsa bridge (to the south) shall be taken. On Day 2, to continue the advance onto Plesetskaya.

It was Co.B (200 men) that had the task of taking Emtsa and the US Co.G to continue the advance to Plesetskaya on Day 2. Co. 1 of the French would support the Liverpools, while Co.3, would provide flank protection for the Liverpools (oddly, no flank protection for the American troops!).

The rate of march of the advancing troops was ordered 30 meters a minute. This means it would take 15 minutes for B Company to reach the first enemy line.

Once storming the trenches, move at the same rate and not less than 200 meters to the rolling barrage which will extend its fire in 100 meter bounded every two minutes. The second enemy position was to be shelled for 10 minutes. The plan called for half of Company B to continue advancing to the Emtsa bridge once the town fell, reaching it by 1800. The US Co.G would then ride on the armor train as close the Emsta Bridge before dismounting and continue advancing to Plesetskaya. On a more humorous note, the detailed attack plans called for a MG gun mounted on an armored "hand" car which would roll down the Railroad preceding the armor train. As far as other factors, the armor train carried 2800 rounds of 75mm and 200 155mm. For communications, the orders stated that a

party of signalman would follow the attacking waves carrying 15km of telephone cable. Also, the train would lay the cable down as it went toward Emtsa. The train carried 30km of rolled cable. Once Emtsa was taken, two red rockets should be shot into the air. Further, each man carried 120 rounds and two hand grenades. For food, each man carried two days rations. The attacking company also had 32 wire cutters, 16 axes and 12 VB grenades. Aboard the trains, a reserve of 100,000 rounds existed, 100,000 French, 2000 grenades, 4000 VB grenades. Finally, at the end of the 11 page attack plan, it's author, Major Alabernarde warns the reader, " Pay careful attention to the uniform of the opposing forces in order to avoid firing on friends". More succinctly, " Beware of friendly fire". This attack plan is incredibly detailed in what actions and times are to take place making for little room for the unexpected. But it was your typical WW1 attack plan. Up to now, it was the biggest offensive in North Russia.

Ironside's purpose of advancing along the Dvina River was to reach Kotlas, which laid several hundred of miles in hopes of forming a solid front with the Kolchak forces. At this time, the forces opposing Kolchak were as follows:

RED ORDER OF BATTLE OPPOSING KOLCHAK

1st Army near Simbirsk with 30,000 men (24th xx, 1st xx), 20 guns, 500 cavalry.

2nd Army near Glazov to Sarapol with 12,800 men (2nd xx, 28xx) 1120 cavalry.

3rd Army at Perm to Osa with 30-40,000 men (7th xx,5th xx, 30th xx, 29th xx) and 50 guns, 4350 cavalry. This army blocked the way of Kolchaks Northern Army led by the young Czech, Gadjá. As time went on, the army would retreat after losing 25,000 men.

4th Army near Samara with 19,000 men, 1000 cavalry and 30 guns.

5th Army west of Ufa with 45,000 men (26th xx, 27th xx, 4th xx) 30 Heavy guns, 50 Lt. Guns

6th Army at Vologda with 10,000 men (18th xx) 250 cavalry, 189 MG, 75 guns

[Note: this was the strength of the division in Dec, 1918; the previously mentioned strengths are as of May 1919].

7th Army at Petrograd with 10,000 men (6th xx, 10th xx, 19th xx, 85thxx, 86th xx) 300 cavalry, 90 MG, 16 3 inch guns. The 86th and 85^{th both} both had become demoralized and withdrawn, replaced by the 10th xx (82,83,84,87th regiments) at Gatchina. The 19th division was comprised of: 183rd reg (500 men, 620 rifles, 73,600 cartridges, 25 Maxim MG, 71 carts); the 186th reg (450 men, 580 rifles, 8 Maxim MG and 41 horses; the 169th reg (110 men, 279 rifles, 8 Maxim MG and 20,000 cartridges); the Finnish reg (500 men and 8 Maxim MG), 1st Artillery division with 8 guns and 50 men and 2nd artillery division with 10 guns.

These were the Red forces opposing the Allies and Kolchak's forces.

Kolchak's Siberian Army at this time consisted of:

The Northern Army (Gaida) from Ekaterinburg to Perm with 28,000 men (5th xx, 1st xx, 4th xx, 7th Ural xx, 3rd xx and Votkin xx, of these, 17,000 were the elite 1st Siberian Corps which acted as a spearhead in the attack) 2700 cavalry, 56 guns, 268 MG.

The Central Army at Sarapol with 8000 men, the 14,000 man 2nd Siberian Corps, 500 cavalry, 50 guns and 67 MG.

The Southern Army at Ufa to Boulgma with 24,000 men, 2200 cavalry and the 3rd Siberian Corps (8,000 men), 459 guns and 71 MG.

Dutov's Army at Orenburg contained 3000 men and 5000 cavalry.

Kolchaks reserves at Ufa contained another 7200 men and at Ekaterinburg, some 4300 infantry and 1100 cavalry. Most of the Czech forces (9800 men) fought with the Northern Army. Many others had been moving by rail to Vladivostock.

While the standard Red division at this was suppose to contain: 927 officers, 24,867 enlisted, 4284 cavalry, 28 guns . In reality, the average Red division might consist of: 5000 enlisted, 200 officers, 3000 rifles, 40 MG and 30 guns.