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Russia marches South: army reform and battlefield performance in Russia's Southern campaigns, 1695-1739

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PART II - THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGNS 1695-1739

Having outlined the military basis on which Russia and its contemporaries stood during the period in question, the dissertation will study the Southern Campaigns, carried out by the Petrine army and its successors. Through these military efforts, the effect of western-style army reform on the performance of the Russian forces can be traced. In addition, the the dissertation will evaluate Russian military operations in an environmentalien to contemporary European warfare as summarized by authors such as Black, Duffy, and Parker. The following chapter will be divided into several sub-sections, each dealing with a different campaign from the first march against Azov in 1695 to the final gunshot of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1736-1739. Primary and secondary sources will be discussed accordingly and each subsection will be divided into several topics: sources and historiography, historical background and line of events. These will be followed by a detailed analysis of the principal components, defining Russia's military performance: level of logistics, speed of movement, decisiveness of military action, the abilities of the military leaders and the overall potential of the state to mobilize its resources for the conduct of war. Following the examination of each military effort, the chapter's overall conclusion will pinpoint the main trends in Russian military potential, related to the Petrine reforms and demonstrated by the actual performance of the army in the south.

CHAPTER 3 THE FIRST CAMPAIGNS (1695-1711)

During the reign of Peter I, Russia entered a new stage in its administrative and military evolution. This phase, as noted above, was dominated by trends of both continuity and change. The process of conquering and assimilating the vast expanses of the Eurasian Steppe was and still is one of the main elements of Russian domestic and foreign policy. The patterns of expanding, fortifying and further extending the limits of the Empire are clearly visible since the time of Ivan IV and can be traced as late as the October Revolution, after which the Soviet Union dramatically changed the mechanism by which Russia's influence was distributed in the steppe territories. Peter followed the footsteps of his ancestors, but also struggled hard not to repeat their mistakes. He was determined to modify and upgrade his state and army in order to achieve better and long-lasting results. Whether he was successful or not is a notion yet to be defined in the following chapters.

3.1. The Quest for Azov (1695-1697)

Historical Background

The fortress of Azov was the last (or the first, depending on the perspective) entrepôt on the maritime trading route between the Pontic Steppe and the Mediterranean region. Following a long hiatus during the late Antiquity and most of the Middle Ages, it was repopulated again in the thirteenth century. The territory, known by then as Azaq (the Low Lands), was given to the Genoese by the Khans of the Golden Horde. The Italian merchants established a colony, which they named Tana (or La Tana, referring to River Don's ancient name – Tanais). In the 1470s, Tana, as well as Kaffa and Kerch, were conquered by the Ottoman Empire, following a period of rapid Black Sea expansion during the reign of Mehmed II and his illustrious grand vizier Gedik Ahmed Paşa. The vizier was able to defeat and expel the Genoese from Crimea and the Azov Sea and to establish Ottoman presence and superiority over the Pontic Steppe and Circassia. It was during the same time that the Crimean Khanate fell under Ottoman suzerainty, and the Gireis had to submit to the will of Constantinople in exchange for patronage and military aid. The Ottomans were fast to recognize the importance of the Don delta and the strategic value of Tana. They erected a mighty fortress, which was manned by a *yenîçeri* garrison. The new military base renamed Azak became the breaking point for any Cossack expedition in the Black Sea. The restless Don Cossack pirates were lurking on Ottoman commerce in the Pontus, and Azak stood as a bastion of Constantinople's interest in the northern corners of the Black Sea. The Cossacks were able to occupy the town briefly, transforming it into a naval base for predatory raids in the Black Sea. However, their requests for support from the tsar were without success, for neither Mikhail Romanov nor his Aleksey I were willing to risk a war against the Ottoman Empire. Finally, in 1642, the Ottomans reestablished their presence and a swift effort of buttressing the fortress was made. The walls were repaired and renovated following the pattern of *trace italienne*, with additional forts being built on the two sides of the Don River. Apart from guarding the trade, Azak became a valuable lodgment for Ottoman and Tatar operations against the Cossacks, and after Russia's expansion in the 1650s - against the Muscovites themselves. Following Knyaz Golytsin's failures against the Crimean Khanate (1687, 1689), Azak became a focal point of Muslim raids against the Belgorod line and the Cossack *gorodki* on the Don and Volga rivers. Between 1689 and 1694, Russia and its Cossack allies were in defense. Finally, in 1694, following a series of military drills and maneuvers in the so called *Kozhukhovskiy pokhod* (Kozhukhov Campaign), Peter decided to opt for an offensive strategy. During these military exercises, the *poteshnye voyska* were placed against the old *soldat* and *streltsy* units, while the noble cavalry was used as support. Artillery drills and field fortification preparations were also tested.

Peter concluded that the exercises were successful and that the army was, indeed, ready to face the Ottomans in an open battle. In addition, control over Azak would secure Russian presence on the Lower Don and serve as leverage against the “turbulent” steppe population, especially the Kalmyks and their leader - Ayuka Khan, who consistently sought to promote independent foreign policy, which contradicted Muscovite interests. Reassured of the potential of his army to strike hard and fast, Peter was convinced of the eminent success of his endeavor. He soon put his words into action and began planning for his military campaign in the south.

Historiography

There are several primary sources, which deal with Russia's expedition against Azov. First and foremost is the diary of General Patrick Gordon, who led a one-third of the Russian army into the campaign.¹ It is invaluable for its depth and details, regarding troop movement, covered distances, and the exact dates of events during the march south. Gordon also provides details regarding the main problems, with which the army met in the course of the expeditions. These details are not present in official dispatches and the campaign journal and can only be traced via P. Gordon's narrative. A second useful source of information is the campaign journal of Peter I, which includes data on the weather, as well as the preparations, carried out prior and during the expedition.² It is the main source through which the movement of the forces along the Volga River can be traced. Finally, there are several letters, which elucidate the course of events, most notably between Peter I and Fyodor Apraksin, and also, a report from the Habsburg envoy Otto Anton Pleyer to Emperor Leopold I (r. 1658-1705). Pleyer took part in the first Azov campaign and in the military drills, which were carried out during the previous year.³

The campaigns themselves are described in detail in Ustryalov's work on Peter's rule, as well as in the narrative of Lieutenant-General P. Bobrovskiy in his history of the 13th guards' Regiment.⁴ The regiment was among the units, comprising Gordon's corps in all three campaigns. The date to date development of the Azov expeditions is also presented in the chronological index of the Russian army and navy operations.⁵ Soviet historiography in the face of Porfiryev adds to the imperial tradition, by emphasizing on the native developments and neglecting the foreign influence on the development of Peter's

¹ M.R. Ryzhenkov (ed.), *Patrick Gordon - Dnevnik 1690-1695* (Moscow: Nauka, 2014).

² *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1695-1703* (St. Petersburg, 1853).

³ The letters are quoted in N. G. Ustryalov, *Istoriya tsarstvovaniya Petra Velikogo. Poteshnye i Azovskie pokhody*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1858).

⁴ For Ustryalov; see *ibid.*; P.O. Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya 13 Leyb-grenaderskago Yerevanskogo Ego Velichestva polka za 250 let*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1892).

⁵ *Khronologicheskiy ukazately voennykh deystviy russkoy armii i flota (1695-1800)* (St. Petersburg, 1908).

army.⁶ A concise, contemporary narrative of the campaign is given in Brian Davies's work on the warfare, state and society in the Black Sea Steppe.⁷

3.2. The First Azov Campaign (1695)

Preparations

Peter carried out a meticulous preparation, outlining in detail the number of troops, necessary for the campaign. Field-marshal Boris Sheremetev commanded a 120,000 strong force, comprised of Cossacks, streltsy and frontier garrisons.⁸ This large army was to assemble in Belgorod and march against the Crimean Khanate in order to block any attempt from the Tatars to relieve Azak from the planned siege. Apart from its screening purposes, it also had to occupy the mouth of River Dnieper. Peter's plan was to capture this area in order to isolate Crimea from the Ottoman footholds in Budjak, Jedisan, and Podolia.

The capture of the fortress of Azak was entrusted to a selected task-force of some 30,000 soldiers and 200 pieces of artillery, under the joint command of Generals Patrick Gordon, Fyodor Golovin, and François Lefort. Among their forces, Peter included four of the "playtime" regiments – Semyonovskiy, Preobrazhenskiy, Lefortovskiy, and Butyrskiy. The main body of the army was comprised of the *polki novogo stroya* (the foreign-style regiments introduced during Aleksey's reign) and streltsy. In addition to the troops and weapons, Peter issued an order for 20,000 artillery shells to be included as well as gunpowder and other supplies. The army was split into three separate parts. One-third under Gordon, comprised of streltsy, soldaty from Tambov and the Butyrskiy Regiment, had to march from Tambov, following the left bank of the Don River and to blockade the fortress until the arrival of the main body of the task force.⁹ Its strength was 9,393 troops, 43 guns, and ten mortars.¹⁰ The second

⁶ E.I. Porfiryev, *Petr I osnovopolozhnik voennogo iskusstva russkoy regul'yarnoy Armii i flota* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1952).

⁷ B. Davies, *Warfare, State and Society on the Black Sea Steppe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007)

⁸ "A report from Pleyer to Emperor Leopold I, 1st January, 1696" in Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 569; This number is "paper strength", the actual number of soldiers under Sheremetev was probably lesser, due to shortages of men from conscription, as well as deserters. The numbers would fall even lesser in the course of the actual campaign due to supply shortages and further desertion.

⁹ On 21st February 1695, Gordon notes that "as soon as possible, a force of 10 000 strong, including 5-6,000 Cossacks should be sent by land in order to reach and blockade Azov"; see Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 323. The Cossacks were assembled and sent in advance. According to the overall plan, Gordon's infantry should merge with the Cossacks upon arrival and form a vanguard of 15-16,000 men.

¹⁰ In March, when Gordon began his expedition from Moscow, the Butyrskiy Regiment numbered only 900 men;; of whom 894 reached Tambov see Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, Appendix, 32, 77. There, further 11 regiments were added – 4 soldaty regiments, raised fresh in Tambov (3,879 men) and 7 streltsy regiments (4,620 men). The total being 9,393 (Gordon miscalculates them to be 3,384 in his notes – Ibid., 78); 31 of the 43 guns were falconets, the other 12 - howitzers; 6,000 puda (98,280 kilograms) of gunpowder and over 4,600 shells and 4,000 grenades were issued for the artillery. All these, together with the soldiers' belongings, were to be transported by 3,722 wagons and carts; see Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 348-9 - 20 May 1695.

corps, numbering 6,922, was placed under Golovin.¹¹ It included the Preobrazhensky Regiment in which Peter commanded the bombardier company. Finally, Lefort led the largest portion of the army – around 13,000 soldiers. Golovin and Lefort's forces were accompanied by a combined artillery train amounting 104 mortars and 44 guns of a different caliber.¹² Their forces had to follow the Volga downstream, debark at Tsaritsyn and head toward the Lower Don, where the two had to join Gordon's corps. To ship the 20,000 strong contingents, a total of 1,250 boats had to be assembled at Moscow.¹³

In addition to the military supplies, Peter issued a decree on the food rations, which had to be prepared and delivered in advance for the army's march south. The *gorodok* of Panshin was chosen as main supply base. It was situated on the lower Don, northwest from present-day Volgograd, near the town of Ilovlya. Funds were diverted from the Treasury to the Khazan to pay for the supplies, bought from ten contractors, responsible for the implementation of the tsar's orders. Peter's extensive preparations were aimed at preparing the ground for his substantial force to march upon Azov in a surprise movement and, if possible, to capture it quickly, leaving no option for the Ottoman forces to react. The great number of goods, supplied in advance was supposed to provide the Russian forces with enough provisions for the barren steppes of the lower Don, where an army, as large as the one assembled, would hardly survive without them. Peter was determined not to allow the same mistakes, which ruined Golytsin's campaign a decade earlier.

The campaign

Having issued all the orders and projected all the plans, Peter's generals set his will into motion. At 4 p.m., on the 8th of March 1695, the Butyrskiy Regiment of Patrick Gordon left Moscow on its way to Tambov. Gordon covered the distance from Moscow to Tambov for 11 days and arrived at the southern city on 19 March.¹⁴ Here he waited for the assembling of the seven *streltsy* and began forming four *soldaty* regiments out of the local population. His task proved onerous since the money, which should have been gathered in advance (12,000 rubles), were still not available, and Gordon was forced to send several letters to

¹¹ Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 564, According to the official record, Golovin's force consisted of 8 regiments, 2 of which were *soldaty* and 6 – *streltsy*. They were also supported by 77 vessels (*strugi*).

¹² These were transferred on 8 vessel groups (*pauzok*) totaling 39 boats (*strugi*); 36 of the 44 guns were cast in the Netherlands (*pishscaley gollandskikh*). In addition to the guns and mortars, there were 19,974 bombs and shells for the guns (some 6,000 especially for the Dutch guns), 2,360 barrels of gunpowder (for artillery and handgun purposes), as well as additional saltpeter, sulfur, bullets and spare parts for the guns. Altogether, the 8 vessel groups carried a total of 61,754 puds (1,011 tons) of munitions and guns; see Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 562-4.

¹³ *Khronologicheskii ukazately*, 1.

¹⁴ Altogether, the Butyrskiy Regiment covered some 350 *versta* (371 km.). The average daily speed of the regiment was 33.3 km., which was considered fast for the standards of the Age. As it will be later observed, outside the densely populated areas, the movement of the troops was obstructed by terrain, weather and the reluctance of the soldiers; see 8-20 March 1695, Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 326-30.

Moscow, urging for funds.¹⁵ The acquisition of transportation proved to be a further predicament for the progress of the campaign. It was not until 21st April when Gordon was finally able to provide all the wagons, carts, and boats, necessary for the transportation of guns, munitions and men across the Don Steppe, which was also broken by countless streams and several rivers.¹⁶ The specifics of the terrain required the Russian force to halt its further advance and wait for the rivers to return to their stream beds. In addition, Gordon had to wait for the screening force of Boris Sheremetev to move southwards in order to block the possible Tatar movement and hide the Scotsman's vanguard maneuvers. General Gordon had to wait in Tambov until the very end of April. On the 23rd, Gordon's corps finally left Tambov and began preparations for the crossing of the Lipovitsa River, where the general ordered the construction of five bridges. The army was able to traverse the river on 1st May and continued its way to the south. Gordon ordered his troops to move on war footing through the marshes and the broken terrain.¹⁷ The movement was quite slow, due to the bad condition of the roads and the necessity to construct new bridges over any larger river or stream the army had to cross. Existing infrastructure was used as well, but on several occasions older bridges crumbled under the weight of Gordon's supply train. With the reluctant assistance by the Cossacks, Gordon's army was finally able to reach Azov on the 27th of July 1695, only a day before the main force under Golovin and Lefort arrived.¹⁸ The whole plan for an advanced force, which had to reach and blockade Azak prior to the siege, thus fell apart. In the meantime, the Ottomans were able to send reinforcements via the Black Sea. Apart from the usual garrison of the fortress – some 3,000 men (two-thirds of which were *yeniçeri*), another 3,000 came, transported on four ships, each carrying 500 men.¹⁹ Also, a cavalry unit, consisting of 500 men, was placed outside Azov to do reconnaissance.

While Gordon was slowly dragging his forces through the difficult terrain of the Eurasian Steppe, Lefort and Golovin boarded the massive river fleet on

¹⁵ 21st March, Ibid., 330; By 12th April, on Peter's order, were sent 15,000 rubles .

¹⁶ The streltsy proved to be quite troublesome with their constant demands for more transportation vehicles and for insisting on less work on building boats and rafts. At the end, Gordon had to negotiate with the local Cossack leaders in order to build the required number of vessels. The provision of horses was also a nightmare. Out of 750 serf horses, inspected by Gordon between 1st and 25th April, only 28 were fit for service; see Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 337-411, 5-25th - April; Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 77.

¹⁷ The movement formation was as follows: The baggage train was in the middle of the convoy. James Gordon commanded the right flank with 3 soldaty regiments, lined up in 62 rows (*sherengi*). The right flank was held by 4 streltsy regiments, set in 65 rows. The rearguard consisted of 1 soldaty, 1 streltsy and the Butyrskiy Regiment, along with the staff; see Ibid., 80.

¹⁸ “The Cossacks wanted to prevent me from reaching Azov before the arrival of the main army and did all they could to embarrass my daily marches...”; see Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 359, 18th June, 1695.

¹⁹ Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 360 – 21st June 1695; For the *yeniçeri* in Azov see R. Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700*, (University College London Press, 1999), 55; Murphey notes that the *yeniçeri* contingent, which was stationed in Azov, numbered 2,272 men. Since by definition the *yeniçeri* were border troops (apart from the Constantinople units), it can be accepted that the proportion of *yeniçeri* was kept in 1695, especially since the Empire was at war and strategic garrisons had to be kept at any cost. It is quite possible, that a considerable part of the 3,000 reinforcements were also *yeniçeri*.

30th April and set sail for Tsaritsyn. The unfavorable wind kept the fleet at bay for several days. However, following Peter's words, the greatest problem for the progress of the expedition were the incompetent sailors and workers, who called themselves "masters", but there was a striking difference between the name and their actual work was. Besides, the overloading of the supply vessels, carrying the munitions and guns hindered the movement forward. The main forces were stalled in Nizhniy Novgorod until 27th May. The large fleet finally reached Tsaritsyn on 7th June and continued on foot toward Panshin, where it arrived four days later, on 11th.²⁰ The army finally reached the countryside near Azov in 28th, and Peter himself arrived in Gordon's camp on the next day, greeted with salutes from the artillery.

On the 30th of June, Gordon, leading his regiments, as well as 7,000 Cossacks, met an Ottoman-Tatar force that blocked his advance toward Azak. After a brief battle, the enemy attacks were repelled by the Russian infantry and artillery, and Gordon drove the Turks back to Azak. He quickly established a fortified camp in front of the town and started digging trenches. This action eliminated the danger of the arrival of the main Russian force, which established a camp in the following days. Lefort and Golovin finished their deployment on 3rd July when the siege batteries were finally set in place. Peter was the first to open fire from one of Gordon's cannons.²¹ The bombardment by the entire artillery began several days later while the generals and the engineers were arguing over the best option for digging a contravallation line.²²

In the meantime, Russian forces were struggling to capture several watchtowers, east of the fortress, to cover their right flank and also to secure the road from Panshin, from where munitions and supplies were transferred. The first one was captured on 14th July by a party of 200 Cossacks who were able to sneak their way into the tower's vicinity and to overwhelm its garrison. That same night, a Dutchman – Jakob Jansen, who had converted to Orthodox Christianity and became a member of Peter's artillerymen, deserted to the Ottomans and revealed to their commanders – Murtaza Paşa and his subordinate Murad Bey, the position of all Russian forces. Using this valuable information, on the next morning the Turks launched a sortie, taking advantage of the streltsy guards' unpreparedness. In the midst of the summer day's heat, when the Russians had the habit to take a nap, the Ottomans launched an attack on the trenches of General Lefort, which were still incomplete and had not yet connected to Gordon's defense perimeter. The streltsy, who were protecting this sector, along with the sixteen batteries, were thrown in disorder. Jacob Gordon, who commanded the battery, was able to hold his position but was finally forced to retreat. Before the whole defense broke down, General Gordon led his men

²⁰ *Khronologicheskii ukazately*, 1.

²¹ According to Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*: "The Grand bombardier personally threw bombs against Azov for two weeks".

²² For a schematic depiction of the siege; see the Appendix for the current chapter.

into a counterattack, chasing the Turks back to the moat of Azov. Here, Gordon's attack was met by a counter charge of the *yeniçeri*, who broke the Russians, sending *soldaty* and *streltsy* alike into a rout. Gordon, who refused to leave his position until the very end, eluded captivity by chance, due to his sons' last minute actions. The *yeniçeri* were able to beat Gordon's men back to their trenches, capturing part of the Russian field fortifications. After three hours of fighting, the Turks were finally driven back. The Russians lost some 4-500 killed and at least as many wounded.²³ Seven guns were captured and taken by the Ottomans, and several others were damaged. The Turks lost between 500 and 600 killed or wounded. Peter reprimanded the captains and colonels of the *streltsy* regiments, who failed their task to protect the fortifications. It was not until the end of July that the Russian trenches were finally completed, and the left flank of the army was protected from further Ottoman and Tatar sorties. In the meantime, Russian officers and nobles began urging Peter to assault the walls of Azov. According to Gordon's assessment, the desire for an assault came from men who had no understanding of what an assault meant and who just wanted to return home as quickly as possible.²⁴ In any case, the efforts of Gordon to dissuade the tsar from a premature rush towards the walls of Azak failed. It was proclaimed that each volunteer for the assault would receive 10 rubles, and officers could hope for additional rewards. 2,500 Cossacks volunteered right away while the *soldaty* and the *streltsy* were not so much enthusiastic. In the end, the required 4,500 men were assembled, and a preparation for an assault on 5th August began. As Gordon puts it, all that was left for him was to follow the collective opinion in order not to be blamed for any further delays.²⁵

The assaulting forces were divided into three columns. The first, led by Gordon, included the Butyrskiy and the Tambovskiy regiments. It had to take the bastions, located to the left of Gordon's position. A second column had to charge to the right, storming the fortifications near the Don River. Finally, a third party, comprised of Cossacks, had to sail up the river and attack the fortress upstream. *Streltsy* regiments were placed between the three columns to protect their flanks. The night before the operation, a Greek from Azov was able to desert to the Russians and to meet Gordon. The deserter reported that the Azak garrison was reduced to just 1,300 out of 6,000. According to the Greek, most of the Turks had died out of disease and of their wounds. However, the defenders were able to set counter mines against the Russian trenches. General Gordon demanded a personal meeting with the tsar to postpone the assault. The information about the small number of defenders had a different impact on

²³ Gordon lists the casualties as follows: 3-400 killed, among which 2 captains, 4 lieutenants and 5 standard-bearers. Jacob Gordon, two colonels, one lieutenant colonel, twenty other officers and around 500 were wounded in action; see Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 376-8, 15th July 1695. Bobrovskiy quotes Gordon but claims 400 killed, along with 12 officers, and up to 600 wounded, along with 24 officers; see Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 88.

²⁴ Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 383, 30th July, 1695.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 384.

Peter's judgment. He became adamant that now was the time to strike. Gordon had no choice but to comply.

The charge began at dawn on 5th August. The Butyrskiy and Tambovskiy regiments were thrown into attack, although they did not have any ladders to climb the walls. They stormed the bulwarks but came under heavy fire. In the meantime, the poteshnye regiments on the right flank under Golovin remained motionless, failing to support Gordon's attack. Further left, the 400 Cossacks debarked from their boats, stormed the fortress, but with no zeal whatsoever and were quickly repelled. After the first failed attack, they retreated to their vessels. Gordon was left alone in the center, taking fire from all Ottoman positions. By the time the Cossacks left their halfhearted assault, Gordon's men were reduced to one-third, the others - being dead or wounded. Since he got no words from Peter and that his men were hard pressed, Gordon sounded the retreat. The Turks had suffered no more than 200 dead and wounded while the Russians had lost a total of 1,500 soldiers and officers. The assault was a complete disaster. However, no reprimands were given on the next day. The only significant development in the siege in late August was the capture of two Turks, who, after interrogation, revealed new information on the status of the garrison. The new report showed that only one-third of the original garrison was wounded, sick or dead (that left 4,000 able to fight, which is quite different from the 1,300, reported by the Greek deserter several days earlier). Unlike the old information from 4th August, the captives revealed that the garrison had an abundant supply of food and munitions.²⁶ These figures explain how the Ottomans were able to launch almost daily sorties, killing several and wounding dozens of men. The surprised Russians were seldom able to wound the enemy. The siege works were also progressing chaotically and slowly. By mid September, the Russians had failed in several attempts to detonate mines under the moat and the walls of Azov. In Golovin's section, the mine was detonated on a wrong spot and instead of blowing the enemy positions it destroyed a considerable part of Golovin's trenches.²⁷ The second attempt to blow up the defenses took place on 25th September, followed by a new assault on the walls. Again, Gordon expressed doubts about the success of such actions and once more his protests were silenced by the common desire for a breakthrough.

Once again the army was segmented into several units, each responsible for a particular task in what was supposed to be a massive, coordinated endeavor. The extreme left flank was held by a river flotilla of Cossacks, supported by the Semyonovskiy and Preobrazhenskiy regiments. Next to them,

²⁶Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 389, 13th August 1695; Thanks to these captives Gordon found out what was the exact number of the enemy, who fell during the assault on 5th.

²⁷Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 84; Golovin's engineers were able to dig under the bastions in front of their positions, but the 83 pud mine was detonated closer to Russian trenches on advice of Adam Veyde (who then served as a colonel in the Preobrazhenskiy Regiment and later became general). Due to this mistake, 30 people, among which two colonels and one lieutenant colonel, were killed, and around 100 were wounded; see Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 248-9; Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 399, 16th September 1695.

the corps of Lefort had to attack the opposing Ottoman bastions in order to draw fire away from the poteshnye units and the fleet, as well as from the main direction of the assault. Gordon's troops again had to storm the middle section of Azov's southern wall, after the detonation of a mine, which laid in a tunnel, dug by the Russians. Golovin's troops would rush to the right of Gordon's men, supporting another Cossack force, moving on the extreme right. The detonation of Gordon's mine had to be the signal for the beginning of the assault. Since all regiments were to take part in the attack, the camp had to be protected by the Cossacks, who had to monitor the surroundings for a relief attack on behalf of the Tatar cavalry.²⁸

The attack began at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Two mines (93 puda) were detonated, followed by several mines, fired at the defenders. However, the counter mines, set by the Ottomans, came into use and considerably diminished the effect of those of their Russian counterpart. In addition to the smaller scale of damage done to the ramparts, the countermine led to considerable casualties among the Russian troops.²⁹ In any case, the mine was able to break a hole in the defense, wide 37.6 meters (20 *sazhen*). Gordon's troops rushed toward the breach, storming the moat and the outer ramparts. Their charge was supported by Lefort's forces. They were, however, unable to find a suitable spot for their assault and instead turned right, merging with the streltsy and soldaty, who were already fighting the Turks in the center. The defenders, who were able to concentrate their manpower at the breach, counterattacked. 400 *yeniçeri*, led personally by their ağa, made the streltsy form bulwarks in the moat. There, the Russians panicked, and chaos broke among their ranks. Gordon, seeing the fruitfulness of the attack, retreated with his forces to the closest trenches. In the meantime, the Cossacks, supported by the two poteshnye regiments on the furthest left were able to penetrate the defenses. Gordon, learning of this development, commanded the second charge at the enemy. His regiments reached the moat, but were countered by a hail of grenades and salvos from the *yeniçeri* and had to pull back. Finally, upon Peter's orders, Gordon sent his men for a third time, again without success. In the meantime, The Cossacks, along with the troops from Semyonovskiy and Preobrazhenskiy regiments, under the command of Fyodor Apraksin, were able to seize some of the defenses of Azov near the Don River. Their position, however, became precarious when Gordon's troops stopped pressuring the Ottoman defenders, who immediately transferred men to the west sections. Apraksin, who did not receive any assistance from the rest of the army and was pressed by the Ottomans, had to withdraw. The assault, which once again was a failure, was halted, and the Russians returned to their positions.

²⁸Apart from the 500 Ottoman horsemen, additional Tatar units arrived and supported the harassment on the Russian lines and trenches. They totaled some 3-4,000 men; see Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 396, 11th September 1695.

²⁹A hundred or so were wounded, and several were killed; see Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 404, 11th September 1695.

A 3,000 strong garrison was left to protect the newly established Fort Novosergievskiy gorod, which served as a starting point for further attacks on Azov. The rest of the army broke camp on 2nd October and began its march back toward Tsaritsyn. They were followed by a Tatar force of some 3,000 who attacked the Russian column on 3rd October, killing and wounding dozens and taking many men into captivity. It was Gordon's Butyrskiy Regiment which was able to withstand the charges and drive off the enemy. The withdrawal of the Russians was additionally troubled by the cold weather and the lack of supplies. Otto Anton Pleyer reports to Leopold I that along the road, many soldiers laid dead due to the frost and the lack food while steppe wolves were feasting on the dead.³⁰ Peter's first attempt southward had failed miserably.

The performance of the Russian army

While following the course of the First Azov Campaign, several features have to be pointed out. First and foremost, a number of problems can be distinguished related to the human factor behind the Russian effort. As Gordon notes on few occasions in his diary, the troops under his command were inexperienced as were the officers.³¹ Unlike the Ottoman forces, comprised chiefly of the elite *yeniçeri* infantry, most of Peter's troops were either semi-regular *streltsy* or hastily assembled *soldaty*. As Bobrovskiy notes, only the four “new-model” regiments – the *poteshny* Semyonovskiy, Preobrazhenskiy, Lefortovskiy and Gordon's Butyrskiy regiments were of some considerable value, as proven in the drills the previous year. The rest of the army was of dubious quality “even given the fact that they were to fight the Turks”.³² Lack of experience was also combined with a lack of motivation and failure of discipline. The extremely long time necessary for the digging and establishing of a complete trench-line was precarious. It wasn't until September that Lefort's entrenchments were finally finished and linked to Gordon's. Thus, it took more than two months to complete this essential task for any siege of the Age. In the meantime, Ottoman sorties were able to exploit the flaws of Russian defenses and inflict considerable damage to the besieging army. Further proof of troop incompetence comes from the fact that the sentries were surprised and overwhelmed by the defenders on several occasions, of which the 15th of July sortie being the most notorious example. Given the scale of the task, Peter should have considered engaging more men in the siege. Even though his forces outnumbered the defenders 5 to 1, their total number was insufficient to blockade Azov fully and fend off attempts at reinforcing the fortress.

³⁰ Pleyer, “Report” in Ustrqylov, *Istoriya*, 582.

³¹ For example, the journal entry for 4th August 1695 in Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 385-86, where the general evaluates the lack of experience and preparedness of his soldiers and officers for the following assault.

³² Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 77.

Commanding officers were not immune to misconduct and mistakes. Gordon and Lefort's lack of cooperation became apparent on several occasions, as well as Golovin's inability to mobilize his men during the assaults or to support his companions in battle. The failure to build a circumvallation, as well as the lack of experience on such important matters as where and how properly to detonate mines, reveals a general lack of engineering skills among the Russian military elite. Peter is also to blame. The Tsar decided to sit most of the siege out, leaving the task to a joint command of three, equally-ranked generals. This proved disastrous, since the lack of coordination, as well as a single will, directing the effort, revealed its flaws during the two failed assaults. Peter's role as a military *éminence grise* could be explained with the lack of experience and the fear of failure during his first military endeavor. It was failure in south that brought down Golytsin and Sofia in 1689, after the devastating results of the two campaigns against Crimea. Therefore, it seems legitimate that Peter wanted to see how the expedition would progress. In case of success, he would step up, being part of the expedition and claim glory and prestige for his role. In the event of failure, he would step back and blame his generals, who, he would gracefully pardon, giving them a second chance. This scenario would repeat itself four years later during the Narva Campaign. Apart from his inefficient strategic commitment, the tsar also demonstrated his youthful thirst for decisiveness.³³ In both 5th August and 25th September assaults, it was his desire for a quick endgame that drove Russian troops to the point of breaking. Neglecting Gordon's experience, Peter chose to trust his closer but unpracticed companions. What strikes is the lack of reaction from Lefort toward the rash tactics, favored by the tsar. Being an experienced soldier, he should have demonstrated more will and supported Gordon's proper evaluation. Gordon is erroneously labeled indecisive by Soviet historiography, a thesis, which is repeated in Davies's work.³⁴ The Soviet argument insists that instead of laying siege to Azov, Gordon lost precious time building a dock on Koysug River, north of Azak, where he would receive supplies via the Don River. In the meantime, Davies notes, that the Turks were able to reinforce the garrison. This, however, was not the case. Gordon did, in fact, station his forces on the Koysug and built a dock for purposes of supply. His intention, however, was to build it as closer to Azov as possible. His effort was sabotaged by the lack of cooperation on behalf of the Cossacks who lost several days before being able to scout adequately the area for a spot, stationed nearer Azak and more suitable for port.³⁵ Davies's account regarding the failure to intercept the reinforcements is

³³ Peter was 24 at the time.

³⁴ Davies, *War, State and Society*, 184; Davies quotes E.I. Porfiryev, *Petr I osnovopolozhnik voennogo iskusstva russkoy regul'arnoy Armii i flota* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1952), 38-9.

³⁵ Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 65-6, 26th June 1695.

also incorrect since the garrison of Azov was strengthened as early as March when Gordon was yet in Tambov.³⁶

The lack of reliability on behalf of the Cossacks was to hinder Gordon's march ever since his arrival in the Pontic Steppe. The Cossacks proved halfhearted in their support even though the general brought with him an official proclamation from Peter, demanding full support and assistance to his army. As plainly as Gordon puts it, the Cossacks would not cooperate until the tsar would arrive with the main army. They were reluctant to clash with the Tatar or Ottoman forces unless the proper number of Russian troops was present. They did prove their value during the second assault of Azov, but still - the lack of initial action, as well as the indecisiveness of the skirmishes with the Tatar forces, acting in the Russian's rear - diminished their overall contribution to the 1695 effort.

The second feature that should be noted are the logistics. The first impression is of massive provisioning of food rations and military supplies, which Peter demanded for the campaign. A closer look at the figures should be taken. According to an official report, the tsar required a total of 180,000 liters of *sbiteny*, 540,000 liters of wine, 140,000 fishes, 163, 000 kilograms of meat, etc. Though these numbers are impressive, it must be taken into account that these provisions were supposed to feed 30,000 men. Moreover, each person would receive 18 liters of wine, 6 liters of sbitny, 4 ½ fishes, 5 ½ kilograms of ham, 1.3 kilograms of butter and 4.3 kilograms of salt. Assuming that the daily ration per soldier was 400 grams of meat, 100 grams of butter and a cup (200 ml) of wine, this means that the above-mentioned supplies would suffice for 90 days (the wine), 30 days (the sbitny), 14 days (meat), 13 days (butter) and 11 days (fish). Alcohol would probably have to replace water at some point, given the fact that the campaign takes place during the summer heats, as well as bearing in mind that at that time the Don Valley was not abundant with water, suitable for drinking. All in all, Peter had calculated a half month's share of supplies for his troops, and it took two weeks only to place the batteries correctly in front of Azov. The troops would have to rely mainly on additional supplies, which had to be brought down the Volga or the Don rivers with fleets of riverboats. In the context, the idea of Gordon for building a second naval dock on river Koysug seems even more appropriate. Securing the lines of supply was also problematic. It was not until mid-July that the Russians were able to take some of the watchtowers, held by Ottoman troops, turning them into their strong points. Even so, the Tatar and Ottoman cavalry units continued to harass the supplies of the besiegers. As the withdrawal from Azov demonstrates, food

³⁶ Gordon, *Dnevnik*, 360-1, 21st June 1695: "The Greek [deserter] had come to Azov for the purpose of trading in January. On his arrival, the garrison consisted of 3,000 troops. In March, a paşa named Murtaz arrived with 1,000 additional men (...) several weeks ago, four ships arrived from Kaffa, each ship bearing 500 men of the infantry..."

was a substantial problem for the Russians throughout the campaign, since in the end they were dying out of hunger.

Apart from food itself, transportation proved to be another point of logistics' misconduct. As early as April, Gordon was suffering from the lack of carts and wagons to transport his troops and supplies. Things reached a point where the *streltsy* were refusing to march unless the general would not meet their requirements for additional transportation.³⁷ Similar problems were encountered by Peter, regarding the riverboats which had to transfer the army from Moscow to Tsaritsyn. Even though over 1,200 vessels were required, the cargo proved to be overwhelming for the small river rafts and the longboats. In the end, the main force was significantly delayed since the headwind made navigating in the Oka and Volga rivers almost impossible. In addition, upon reaching Tsaritsyn, it turned out that the number of horses, required for the transportation of supplies, was quite insufficient, and only 500 animals were available.³⁸ The same problem was faced by Gordon in Tambov, where no more than 28 out of 750 horses, recruited from the serfs, turned out to be fit for service. Thus, on many occasions, soldiers had to carry the munitions and supplies together with their belongings, which significantly reduced the speed of the army. Gordon's force provides an example. While marching only with the Butyrskiy Regiment, the General was able to achieve an average speed of 33 kilometers per day. However, with the growing of his army and supply train, and with entering the marshy plains of Eastern Ukraine, crisscrossed by rivers and streams, the army speed dropped to an average of 15 kilometers per day. The river flotilla under Golovin, Lefort and Peter did not do much better.

As Brian Davies puts it, the manner in which Peter, Gordon, Golovin, and Lefort conducted their First Azov Campaign (1 May–1 October 1695) shows some effort to learn from the logistical errors that had undermined both of Golitsyn's Perekop expeditions.³⁹ On the other hand, the military conduct also demonstrates that the military drills and maneuvers, carried out by Peter in 1694 were simple field war games, which had little to do with actual fighting. Lack of coordination, the Peter's reluctance to assume the overall command or pass it to a single person, as well as the inadequacy of the logistics prove that Peter was on the right track, but a long way lay ahead before the expected results could be reached. The next campaign carried out in the summer of 1696 would reveal the scale of Russian adaptability toward the requirements of modern warfare.

³⁷ Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 88.

³⁸ Porfiriev, *Petr I osnovopolozhnik voennogo*, 37.

³⁹ Davies, *War, State and Society*, 184.

3.3. The Second Azov Campaign (1696)

Preparations

Following his departure from Azov, Peter wrote letters to the king of Poland-Lithuania (at the time it was Jan III Sobieski) and to the “emperor of Rome” (*kesariya rimskago*), Leopold I that the Russian army was able to conduct a large-scale campaign, against the “enemies of Christendom”, taking several fortresses on the Dnieper River and conquering a few outpost on the Don River.⁴⁰ The tsar had to admit his failure to capture Azov due to lack of guns, munitions and capable engineers.⁴¹ Peter hoped, in his own words, and as God’s will, he would be able to capture Azov next year, descending on the fortress with a larger army. To fulfill his goal, Peter asked the Polish to strike harder the Ottomans in the west and of the Austrians - to provide him with able engineers, who would assist his artillery crews.⁴² Such words, coming from a proud and strong-willed man like Peter demonstrate the frustration he had felt during the last days of September 1695. Although he conducted preparations, meticulous in his perception, the whole endeavor had failed miserably, blasted by the incapability of Russian engineers and the lack of synergy between the commanding generals. Lessons, however, were learned and this time, Peter assured his allies and probably himself that the tsar would walk away with victory.

Peter began preparations for the next campaign only a week after his return from the previous one. On 27th November 1695 a military council was held, including generals Lefort and Gordon, as well as several high-ranking boyars from Peter's inner circle – Streshnev, Troekurov and Naryshkin families, which helped Peter assert his power in 1689. During the council, Peter laid out the main reasons for his lack of success – the inability to surround Azov accurately, the lack of fleet, which would block the Don's mouth and prevent Ottoman reinforcements from Azak, and finally – the absence of a single commander, undertaking the siege and responsible only to Peter.⁴³ The first step was to choose overall leader for the following year. His name was Aleksey Semyonovich Shein. Shein was Russian noble of an ancient heritage.⁴⁴ His grandfather, Mikhail Shein led the Russians in the ill-fated Smolensk War (1632-1634), after which he fell from grace and was sent into exile. Aleksey Shein was able to return to favor during the regency of Sophia and took part in the two Crimean Campaigns, after which he changed side and placed his

⁴⁰ The Information was not quite correct, because Sheremetev had to abandon most of his gains when retreating back to Russian held lands.

⁴¹ Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 257.

⁴² Messengers were also sent to Venice and Berlin, asking for coordinated actions against the Turks.

⁴³ Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 87.

⁴⁴ The Sheins descended from a Medieval Russian noble, who fought alongside prince Aleksandr at Neva (1240).

fortunes with Peter. He was elevated for commander of the guards' regiments, in which *amploa* he took part in the First Azov Campaign.

According to E. Porfiryev, Peter chose Shein, because he could use him as a façade, behind which the tsar would maintain personal command.⁴⁵ However, knowing what happened at Azov in 1695 and four years later at Narva, Porfiryev's idea can be elaborated. To put it in other words, Peter again picked a stunt double, who would take credit for any failure, or step back, overshadowed by his master's glory in case of victory. This is further confirmed by his original choice of overall commander – Knyaz Mikhail Alekukovich Cherkasskiy. Cherkasskiy was an elder man, close confidant of Peter's mother Nataliya Narishkina, who served as a voevoda of Novgorod and Kiev in the 1660s and 1670s. By the time of Azov, however, he was far from his prime and would serve well for the tsar's purpose. Cherkasskiy's ailing health, however, prevented him from joining the campaign and Peter was obliged to use Shein, another officer, whose rise to prominence was closely linked to that of Peter.

The second point of matter was the necessity for a naval force, which was to blockade the Don River. Peter proclaimed himself ship-master and appointed Leford Admiral. Several companies of the Semyonovskiy and Preobrazhenskiy regiments were attached to Lefort's command as a naval regiment.⁴⁶ It was responsible for the manning of 30 galleries and over 1300 boats, which were to transfer the army southwards.⁴⁷ The flotilla had to be built and ready to sail by March 1696. The idea of a new navy, constructed out of the blue, was, in any case, strange. Peter possessed no practical knowledge of shipbuilding and neither did his subordinates. Lefort himself was a Geneva-born Swiss, whose closest connection with water was the famous lake near his hometown. Nevertheless, Peter, stubborn and ambitious, urged the matter forward. To provide the required know-how, foreigners, mainly Dutch and Englishmen were brought in and settled in Preobrazhenskoe and Voronezh to supervise and plan the construction of the vessels.⁴⁸ In addition, the tsar mobilized a considerable number of smiths and carpenters, as well as snipers, gathered from his realm on

⁴⁵ Porfiryev, *Petr I osnovopolozhnik voennogo*, 42.

⁴⁶ The naval regiment consisted of 4,000 troops, part from the guards regiments, part provided by recruitment. They were divided into 28 companies; see Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 261; Porfiryev, *Petr I osnovopolozhnik voennogo*, 42. These 4,000 were headed by 94 officers; see V.G. Ruban, *Pokhod boyarina i bolyshago polku voevody Aleksey Semenovicha Sheina k Azovu, vzyatie sego i Lyutika goroda i torzhestvennoe ottudy s pobedonosnym voinstvom vozvroschenie v Moskvu* (St. Petersburg, 1773), 32.

⁴⁷ Bobrovskiy (*Istoriya*, 87) estimates that over 1,000 boats were required; According to Ustryalov, Peter demanded that 1,300 boats, 32 to 36 meters long and 4.7 to 5.65 meters wide (*Istoria*, 260); Almost the same amount is repeated in Porfiryev's work (E.I. Porfiryev, *Petr I osnovopolozhnik voennogo*, 42). Porfiryev elaborates on the numbers – 1,300 boats 30 to 35 meters long and 5 to 6 meters wide, in addition 300 seagoing boats and 100 wooden rafts.

⁴⁸ Most of them were acquired “willingly or unwillingly” from the port of Arkhangelsk, where Apraksin served as governor; see Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 259, quoting a letter by Peter to Apraksin. According to the letter, Apraksin was to recruit Dutch and English seamen, who were anyhow trapped in Arkhangelsk for the winter, while the White Sea was frozen. These men were to be sent to Voronezh and Preobrazhenskoe in order to support the shipbuilding. Apraksin was to reimburse them for their work and also provide transportation to and from the shipbuilding sites.

an unprecedented level.⁴⁹ Quality and determination overcame the laws of logic and by the end of March a fleet consisted of 23 galleys, two galleasses, and four branders were ready to sail down the Don River.⁵⁰ As with the choice of Shein, Peter bestowed admiralty on Lefort – a man with no knowledge of sailing, a mere puppet, leading his fleet and convenient to take any blame in case of failure.

Together with the preparation of a naval force, Peter set forth the reestablishment of the land army. For that purpose, a proclamation was read throughout Moscow, urging all servicemen to fulfill their duty and also calling for volunteers (*okhotniki*) among the local population. Ustryalov claims that the latter were in abundance, since there were a lot of hungry and poor townsmen and serfs, who sought the army as a place where they could find food, clothing and shelter. Several days later, on 13th December, a large number of serfs left their masters' estates and enlisted in Preobrazhenskoe, while their women and children settled on the tsar's property there.⁵¹ The Cossacks hetman Mazepa was ordered to send no fewer than 15,000 men to Azov, while B. Sheremetev, voevoda of Belgorod had to dispatch a contingent of 10,000 divided into seven regiments under the command of General Karl Ríge-man. The call for troops, proclaimed at the end of November resulted in the following numbers. The servicemen from Moscow provided 3,816 men, 3,500 of whom were organized into 37 cavalry companies, the commanders of which were chosen from their ranks. The other 316 were designated to perform supporting duties in the irregular forces and the supply train. They were also assigned as watchmen in the camps. Thirty soldierly regiments were raised, numbering some 32,590 men along with streltsy regiments, numbering 9,597 troops.⁵² Apart from the 15,000 Cossacks, provided by Mazepa, the Don Cossacks had to raise additional 5,000 footmen and horsemen. The Kalmyks were to send 3,000 horsemen while 500 men had to be supplied by the Yaik Cossacks and the Lowland streltsy. Thus, the total number of the army, which had to march on Azov, was 69,735 men.⁵³

⁴⁹ More than 20,000 men worked at the dockyards and on the caravans bringing materials; see Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 42.

⁵⁰ E.V. Tarle, *Russkiy flot i vneshnyaya politika Petra I*, (Brask, 1994), Chapter II (http://rumarine.ru/books/4/Evgeniy-Tarle_Russkiy-flot-i-vneshnyaya-politika-Petra-I/ - accessed on 16.02.2016); Porfiryev, *Petr I osnovopolozhnik voennogo*, 42; Porfiryev gives some details about the ships. The largest galley had 38 vessels, 5 cannons and a crew of 173 men. The galleasses were larger, carrying 36 guns each.

⁵¹ I.A. Zhelyabuzhskiy, "Dnevnye zapiski" in *Rozhdenie Imperii* (Moscow: Fond Sergeya Dubova, 1997); Later on, after the war with Sweden had begun and when Peter set forth his reforms, the aristocracy was keen on discouraging him from performing such allocations of serfs.

⁵² Ustryalov estimates a total of 38,800 soldierly. This is the only figure, which differs from Ruban's account; see *following note*.

⁵³ Ustryalov puts the total at 75,000, while Ruban states that 64,735 "soldiers on foot and horse" comprised the army under Shein; see V.G. Ruban, *Pokhod boyarina*, 56. Ruban, however, does not take into account the 5,000 Don Cossacks, raised by their hetman Frol Minaev, who are listed in Ustryalov. If these Cossacks are applied to Ruban's account, then the number rises to a total of 69,735 soldiers. Ustryalov gives a total of 75,713 troops. However, he notes that "details on the complete composition of the army can be found in Ruban's description of Shein's campaign, issued in 1773"; see Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 262; Porfiryev gives a total of 70,000. He does not,

The soldiers from the soldaty and the streltsy regiments were divided into three corps led by Gordon (14,150), Golovin (13,738) and Rigeman (10,299).⁵⁴ Additional 4,000 men were issued as infantry in Lefort's fleet. The army had to be gathered and prepared for departure before 20th March 1696 and to arrive at Cherkassk no later than 1st May.⁵⁵ What is important to note is the disproportion between streltsy and soldaty in the composition of the infantry. While in the first campaign the streltsy were the predominant percentage of the footmen, in the second - Peter switched the emphasis on the soldaty, which now comprised over two-thirds of the infantry. This could easily be explained by the flaws and problems, which the streltsy demonstrated not only during their march south but also with their battlefield performance during the siege, especially concerning their guard duties and lack of zeal during charges and counter charges. The proportion of cavalry was also raised. While only 5-6,000 of the 30,000 at the First Azov Campaign were horsemen (a fifth), now there were around 23,500 mounted troops in Peter's army (constituting over 30 per cent of the total force). Again most of them were Cossacks. Apparently Peter constructed a force, which was better suited not only for carrying out the siege but also for the protection from Tatar raids on the flanks and rear.

The letters to Vienna and Berlin proved fruitful. Leopold I, who excused himself with the preoccupation of his engineer corps in Italy and Hungary, was, despite all, able to send artillery Colonel Cassimir de Gagen, along with two

however, state a source for the listed numbers. In addition, the figures, mentioned in his book, account for no more than 63,117; see Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 43.

⁵⁴ In detail: Gordon's force consisted of the Butyrskiy Regiment – 995 men (35 officers and staff and 960 soldiers); Four Tambov regiments – 4,298 men (198 officers and staff and 4,100 troops, 1,025 for each regiment); Two Lowland (Nizovoy) regiments – 2070 men (35 officers and staff and 2,000 troops – 1,000 per regiment); Two Ryazan regiments – 2,067 men (67 officers and staff and 2,000 troops – 1,000 per regiment); Moscow streltsy regiments - 1st – 681 men (10 officers and 671 streltsy), 2nd – 842 men (11 officers and 831 streltsy), 3rd – 618 men (9 officers and 609 streltsy), 4th – 781 men (10 officers and 771 streltsy); 5th – 581 men (9 officers and 572 streltsy), 6th – 667 men (9 officers and 658 streltsy), 7th – 585 men (9 officers and 576 streltsy), or a total of 67 officers and 4,688 streltsy. Altogether, Gordon commanded 13,748 soldiers and 402 officers and regimental staff members.

Golovin's force: Preobrazhenskiy Regiment – 810 men (35 officers and staff and 775 soldaty); Nizovoy regiments: from the Kazan prikaz - 1st – 1,031 men (30 officers and staff and 1,001 soldaty), 2nd – 1,031 men (31 officers and staff and 1,000 soldaty), 3rd – 1,031 men (31 officers and staff and 1,000 soldaty); Ryazan Regiments from the Inozemnyy (foreign) prikaz - 1st – 1,032 men (32 officers and staff and 1,000 soldiers), 2nd – 1,034 men (34 officers and 1,000 soldaty); Vladimirskiy Regiment – 776 men (32 officers and 744 soldaty); Novgorodskiy Regiment – 500 men; Smolenskiy regiments: 1st – 1,013 men (13 officers and 1,000 soldaty), 2nd – 507 men (7 officers and 500 soldaty) - altogether – 245 officers and 8,520 soldaty; Streltsy regiments: 1st – 959 men (12 officers and 947 streltsy), 2nd – 932 men (12 officers and 920 streltsy), 3rd – 633 men (9 officers, 624 streltsy), 4th – 883 men (11 officers, 872 soldaty), 5th – 683 men (9 officers, 674 streltsy), 6th – 883 men (11 officers, 872 streltsy) – altogether – 4,909 streltsy and 64 officers. In total, Golovin commanded 13,429 troops and 309 officers.

Rigeman's force: Efremovskiy Regiment – 1,724 men (28 officers and staff and 1,696 soldiers); Livenskiy Regiment – (31 officers and 1,650 soldiers); Voronezhskiy Regiment – 1,579 men (29 officers and staff and 1,550 soldiers); Dobrinskiy Regiment – (27 officers and staff and 1,570 soldiers); Usmanskiy Regiment – 1,645 men (28 officers and staff and 1,617 soldiers); Kozlovskiy Regiment – 1,563 men (15 officers and staff and 1,548 soldiers); Staroskolyskiy Regiment – 511 men (20 officers and staff and 491 soldiers); altogether – 10,122 soldiers and 178 officers; see Ruban, *Pokhod boyarina*, 32-56. Porfiryev gives other numbers – 14,000 for Golovin, 14,177 for Gordon and 10,500 for Rigeman; see Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 43.

⁵⁵ Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 87.

engineers – de Lavalet and Baron Borgsdorf, along with seven miners and four artillerymen. Friedrich III of Brandenburg sent two engineers – Georg Rosse and David Goltsman, along with four artillerymen. They were supposed to reach Smolensk in April. They finally came to Azov at the end of July, and proved to be vital for the fall of the fortress.⁵⁶

The campaign

The campaign began on 1st April, after a harsh winter and incessant rains and storms in March, which prolonged the time, required for the preparation of the fleet. Nevertheless, by the beginning of April, the weather considerably improved and the Don River, overflowed due to the rains in March, was ideal for sailing downstream. The first unit to move southward was Gordon's corps, or, at least, part of it, comprising of four streletsy regiments and the Butyrskiy Regiment, altogether 3,500 men.⁵⁷ They had to board the large number of vessels and to escort munitions and guns, needed for the siege. The military equipment had to be stored at Novosergeevskiy fort, while food supplies had to be allocated at Korotoyak, from where the food would be transported to Azov.⁵⁸ Gordon's men along with additional 4,000 marines, embarked on one galley and 104 riverboats, and departed from Voronezh on 23rd April, a week after Lefort's naval expedition⁵⁹ Two days later he was followed by Golovin with the Preobrazhenskiy and Semyonovskiy regiments, and later on - by the rest of the army under Shein. Unlike Gordon's troops, the bulk of the land force was to travel on foot to Azov, via the Don Valley. Detached from the main force, Rígeľman's corps of seven regiments moved out of Voronezh in order to serve as rearguard. Following the land force, several segments of the fleet departed during the first week of April.

Unlike the previous march south, which lasted over two months, this time, Peter's forces were able to reach Azov in only five weeks or so. Gordon arrived first under the walls of Azak on 16th May, just three weeks after departing from Voronezh and by the beginning of June was followed by the rest of the army, coming in segments. Peter, who commanded the naval vanguard, reached the Lower Don only a day after Gordon, although the tsar had left Voronezh ten days later than the general.⁶⁰ During the sailing south, on 8th May, Peter issued

⁵⁶ Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 269.

⁵⁷ Ibid.; According to Bobrovskiy, the streletsy were 2,474 men of which 128 were officers; see Bobrovskiy *Istoriya*, 88. This leaves the Butyrskiy Regiment with 1,016 officers and troops. Bogoslovskiy estimates a total of 3,474 men under Gordon, which leaves 1,000 soldiers and officers in the Butyrskiy Regiment; see M.M. Bogoslovskiy, *Petr I. Materialy dlya biografii, 1672-1697, vol 1* (Gospolitizdat, 1940) 303.

⁵⁸ There were around 94,000 ton of wheat and grains; see E.I. Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 44. These were transported on 73 boats, departing from Korotoyak on 27th April; see Bogoslovskiy, *Petr I*, 304 and 309.

⁵⁹ Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 269; *Khronologicheskii ukazately*, 3.

⁶⁰ There seems to be a major dissonance between the sources. According to a note in Ustryalov (*Istoriya*, 272), Gordon Reached Azov on 14th May, Shein on 19th May and Lefort on 23rd May. However, a page later he contradicts, noting that Gordon and Peter came under Azov on 18th May (Ibid. 273); According to the *Khronologicheskii ukazately*, Gordon arrived at Azov on 16th May; Bobrovskiy (*Istoriya* 88-89) supports the

the first naval regulations for his sailors. These included: the order of command, the strict line of communications, which was to be maintained, the necessity for coordination between vessels, and a ban on any shift from the predetermined course. Failing to report for duty during battle, helping another ship in distress or diverting from the course in the face of the enemy were all crimes, punishable by death.⁶¹

The flotilla vanguard and Gordon's troops coordinated their movement upon reaching Cherkassk and then departed for Azov, carrying with them guns and shells, stored from the previous expedition. In the meantime, Peter received a word that a Cossack band of 250 men attacked three Ottoman galleys in the mouth of the Don River. Although the Cossacks lost only four men and were able to do some damage to the enemy vessels, the boards were too high for a successful boarding and retreat was sounded, leaving the Turks' ships at sea. These vessels were carting provisions for the garrison at Azov and Peter decided to seize them as fast as possible. According to the plan, designed by the tsar, Gordon would travel downstream Don and fortify his position on Kalancha Island, where the previous year Dolgorukov's fort was built, while Peter would attack with the galleys, take the Ottoman vessels and transport the captured provisions to Gordon's position. Gordon, having mustered his men early in the morning, went according to the plan and by noon on 18th was able to retake Kalancha Island and thus block any attempt by the Azak garrison to assist the vessels at the Don's mouth. Gordon had left with his Butyrskiy Regiment as well as three streltsy regiments while the fourth boarded the nine galleys under Peter. A Cossack force, mounted on 40 boats, accompanied the tsar. The fleet was to travel westward and engage the Ottomans. Following a brief expedition on 19th May, Peter returned to Novosergeevskiy fort and left a Cossack force of 250 men to observe the sea. The reason for this was because a larger Ottoman fleet had arrived, and the tsar did not want to risk an open battle.⁶² The following night, an Ottoman convoy of 13 transport vessels (*tunbas*) and 11 small ships, manned by *yeniçeri* tried to sail upstream to reach Azov.⁶³ As it turned out several days later, the Ottoman fleet was comprised of 13 galleys, along with the above mentioned 13 cargo ships and 11 small vessels (*ushkol*). The Cossacks under Minyaev were able to sink nine cargo ships and to capture one. The Ottomans also lost two galleys – one burned by the Cossacks and one - scuttled by themselves. The Cossacks were able to capture over 300 artillery shells, 5,000 grenades, 450 muskets and 86 barrels of gunpowder. Large quantities of grain, vinegar, rice, bread and wine syrup were also acquired along with a significant amount of cloth. Twenty-seven Turks were taken into

date 18th May for Gordon's arrival at the Novosergeevskiy fort, after reaching Cherkassk on 14th May. The same date appears in Bogoslovskiy, *Petr I*, 312.

⁶¹ Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 271; Bogoslovskiy, *Petr I*, 310-1.

⁶² Bogoslovskiy, *Petr I*, 314; Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 275.

⁶³ Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 89.

custody, revealing that a total of 800 reinforcements were to join the Azak garrison.⁶⁴ The victory was celebrated with gunshots from the Russian ships.

On 26th May Shein arrived together with Lefort's marines and ships, bringing the bulk of the Russian army in position for opening the trenches against Azov. Two days later, Rigeman's corps along with several thousand Cossacks also reached Azov, ending the major deployment process. The center of the Russian position was held by Golovin with the guards' regiments and the main artillery batteries. On his left Rigeman stood with his seven regiments and 4,000 Cossacks. The right flank was held by Gordon and his son Jacob, along with their soldier regiments and *streltsy*. Shein broke camp at Golovin's position. On 7th June, the two forts, which according to Peter's order had to block the Don River west of Azov, were finished and the army was ready to proceed with the siege. The trenches were opened on that same day and four days later the main body of the Russian fleet blockaded the mouth of Azov with 22 galleys. Unlike the previous year, when Azak was strengthened with additional reinforcements, in 1696 the commander in chief of the fortress – Hassan Bey, received the promised 4,000 troops with a delay from Istanbul. It seems that the slow motion of Russian advance the previous year had misguided the Ottoman authorities, and the speed of the new Muscovite offensive was significantly underestimated. The biggest problem for Peter's army lay at the hands of the *nuraddin sultan*, the leader of the Crimean Tatars, who was able to join forces with the Nogai Horde at Kuban and to march north to relieve Azak. They raided the Russian fortifications for two weeks, but thanks to the lessons learnt in the previous years, the Muscovites were able to repulse the enemy with considerable ease. On 24th June the Moscow noble cavalry engaged a segment of the Tatar Host, striking a decisive blow, which allowed the besieging forces to continue their work on the fortress.⁶⁵ In the meantime, by 16th June, Azov was finally fully circumvallated and a combined bombardment of all batteries began. In addition, at the mouth of the Don River, the Russians were able to repulse three landing attempts by the 4,000 Ottoman reinforcements, sent from Istanbul. This made any hope for the salvation of the garrison impossible.

Nevertheless, success was not instant. While organization, transportation and deployment had considerably improved since last year, the siege works had not made significant progress. The failure to build up mining galleries was so grand that during 1696's siege the Russians decided not to use them at all. Again an assault was envisioned. Gordon, contrary to the common opinion, was obliged to begin the erection of an earthwork, which had to cross the ditch, reach the walls and even outgrow them, allowing the artillery to fire at Azov over its walls. Altogether 15,000 soldiers were daily used for the new project, with front units regularly engaging the Azak *yeniçeri*, who were trying to

⁶⁴ Bogoslovskiy, *Petr I*, 315.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

sabotage the earthwork.⁶⁶ After a hard work under the blazing summer sun, a battery of 25 cannons was placed on the rampart following the directions of Gordon. On 15th July the engineers of Leopold I finally arrived at Azov, putting their minds into action.⁶⁷ Gordon's 25 cannon battery was rearranged and strengthened with six additional guns in order to inflict larger damage on the walls rather on the town behind them. After several days of bombardment, on 17th July, Gordon's men were able to capture a bulwark, exposed by the concentrated Russian fire. Any Ottoman resistance was quickly silenced and the Russians were able to fortify their new position. On the next day, acting on their own will, a force of 2,000 Cossacks under Frol Minaev and Ivan Lizogub was able to overcome a bastion, situated near Don, capture it and even to try to take over the central citadel.⁶⁸ Their final assault was repulsed, but the Cossacks were able to occupy the bastion. Hassan Bey was left with a single option – surrender.

Azov surrendered on 19th June. The paşa gave to Shein and Peter 16 flags and the town keys. 3,000 strong Ottoman garrisons, with their full armament, departed the fortress on a small flotilla of Russian galleys and boats, commanded by Adam Veyde. The Turks were escorted to the sea, where the Ottoman navy picked them. Ten regiments entered Azov to occupy the town, followed on the next day by the entire army. The Cossacks took advantage and tried to plunder Azak, but apart from kitchenware and private belongings, there was no treasure left for looting in the ruined town. The army remained in Azov until the end of July, when, one by one, the regiments and corps began to departure. A division of 6 soldaty and four streltsy regiments (8,305 men in total) was left under the command of *Knyaz* Pyotr Grigoryevich Lyvov.⁶⁹

The performance of the Russian army

It is evident that the Russians performed better the second time, since they were able to capture their objective – Azov. However, the question remains to what extent they were successful. According to Russian historiography they were quite successful. Russian literature from both Imperial and Soviet Eras is

⁶⁶ Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 91.

⁶⁷ Ruban, *Pokhod boyarina*, 120.

⁶⁸ Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 288; According to Ustryalov, boredom and lack of supplies was the major trigger for the Cossacks assault.

⁶⁹ Ruban, *Pokhod boyarina*, 161-8; In Detail: 1 regiment out of Lefort's marines – 30 officers and staff and 1,009 soldiers under the command of Colonel Aleksey Vasilyev; From Gordon's force: a regiment from Tambov and the Lowland recruits – 31 officers and 1,169 soldiers under Colonel Ivan Vilomov; Ryazan Regiment – 17 officers and 500 soldiers under Colonel Efim Efimov; Streltsy regiments - 1st – 11 officers and 677 streltsy under Colonel Feodor Afanasyev; 2nd - 9 officers, 563 streltsy and 149 soldaty under Colonel Ivan Ivanov; From Golovin's force: 1st regiment – 28 officers and staff and 1,105 soldaty under Colonel Vilim Vilimov; Ryazan Regiment – 16 officers and 500 soldaty; Moscow streltsy: 1st regiment – 10 officers and 808 streltsy under Colonel Afanasiy Alekseev; 2nd regiment – 9 officers and 621 soldaty under Colonel Tikhon Khristoforov; From Rígeľman's force: Belgorod Regiment – 30 officers and 1,013 soldaty under Colonel Ivan Ivanov; Altogether – 8,305 officers and troops.

abundant with examples of the great effort which enabled substantial results in limited time in order to manifest the rise of a new military power. Either due to the adamant will and vision of the great “master”- the tsar, or to the large potential of the masses, used by the aristocratic class, Russia elevated itself a level higher. The colossal involvement of laborers in the construction of the fleet which appeared out of nowhere, the speed with which the army reached Azov – twice as fast as it did in 1695, as well as - the short period, separating the opening of the trenches (16th June) and the capitulation of Azak's garrison (18th July) are all evidences of the major transformation, which was accomplished for only a winter thanks to one determined monarch.

With regard to the army movement, the main difference between the campaign of 1695 and 1696 is the point of departure. In the previous expedition, Peter launched his fleet from Moscow, traveling via river Oka all the way down the Volga River to Tsaritsyn, roughly 2,500 kilometers. The fleet, transporting the bulk of the army, the entire siege train, as well as most of the resources, required exactly 38 days (from 30th April to 7th June) in order to reach Tsaritsyn. All in all, Peter's fleet had covered 65 kilometers per day, while Gordon marched 15 kilometers per day after departing from Tambov. In 1696 Peter traveled roughly 900 kilometers from Voronezh to Cherkassk, covering the distance for 11 days, or to put it in other words - marching 80 kilometers per day. This was significantly faster than the previous campaign, although this time there was no major issues with the weather. The same distance had to be covered on foot by the main army under Shein. The Russians performed twice as good, reaching up to 30 kilometers per day. Regarding movement speed, the Petrine force did achieve significant progress compared to the previous year. Planning of the routes, as well as placing the main supply bases was also better thought about. Voronezh, which controlled the middle Don, was excellent port, from which an expedition southward could be launched. Also, Peter picked the time accurately, waiting for the late winter and early spring rainfalls and storms to pass, and at the same time using the overflowed river, without risking the ships. Taking note of the overburdening of the boat flotilla in 1695, Peter and his generals were wise enough to transport the main army on foot and to use ships only for the few navy-transported troops, as well as to issue a demand for more vessels for the transportation of munitions and armament. All in all, over 1,500 vessels were used in comparison to roughly 1,200 the previous year. However, in 1696 most of the river boats (*strug*) were commissioned in larger size than the former, which traversed the Volga River in 1695. This allowed for a greater cargo, without slowing or hampering the movement.

The supply of the army was another important feature upon which the rate of success when it comes to military transformation could be measured. The main difference comes from the fact that the provisioning of the army was transported separately from the main force, using the Volga River. The 73 boats, which carried the supplies, reached Azov on 21st May, less than a month

from their departure from Korotoyak. The Russians did their best to provide more horses for the transportation of supplies from the Volga to Don rivers (over 800 animals were provided, compared to fewer than 500 in the previous year). Unlike the information about the previous year, the exact amount of the provisions is not known. Around 94,000 tons of grains and wheat were provided. It can be estimated that each soldier would receive 13 kilograms of grain and wheat which are the rough equivalent of 1,500 pieces of bread. Even if a man consumed single bread per day, this still left an abundant amount of the most fundamental food a soldier requires.

The next feature that should be pointed out is the establishment of a navy. All in all, approximately 30 vessels were built, along with over 1,300 boats and rafts. 20,000 men were gathered, involving carpenters, builders, and especially serfs. It is misleading to think that no such thing previously occurred in the history of Russia. The first Russian wind-guided vessel – the Frederick was built in 1636 and sent to the Caspian Sea to protect its trade routes. It was, however, destroyed by a storm. The second famous ship – Orel, was a frigate, based on the Dutch pinnacle model. It was built in 1667 for the same purpose as the Frederick, but in 1669 Orel was sunk by the rebellious Cossacks, who captured Astrakhan under the command of Stepan Razin. Apart from the ships, the Russians were quite skilled and accustomed to building riverboats of different scale. As the campaign of 1695 demonstrated, the Tsardom could provide over 1,200 vessels for a considerably short period. Therefore, the high number of boats, built in Voronezh, though still impressive is not surprising, given the fact that Peter had mobilized any able boat-builder and carpenter available in the realm. The acquisition of foreign sailors from Arkhangelsk increased the number of skilled and semi-skilled personnel significantly. Combine that with the abundance of materials, as well as people, able to carve wood for the purpose of sailing, then the establishment of thirty vessels over a period of five months would not seem as astonishing as it could be presumed.

Finally, there is the central element of capturing a fortress – the siege. When the Russians reached Azak in mid-May, they were astonished to find out that the Ottomans had not destroyed the siege works, constructed under the guidance of Gordon the previous year.⁷⁰ This gave Peter's men the chance to reoccupy their old positions and spend considerably less time in entrenching. Given the fact that Dolgorukov's fort on Kalancha Island was still standing and that a strong garrison existed at Novosergeevskiy fort, the prospects for upcoming success were far brighter. Peter did not settle for what he had received as a gift from destiny. The Kalancha fort was rebuilt and strengthened with additional guns. Two new fortifications built along the Don River, to the west of the town, possessed a considerable number of cannons on their own.

⁷⁰This had a lot to do with the fact that the 3,000 strong Ottoman garrisons had to protect Azov and observe the Russian enemies at Novosergeevskiy fort, who were of equal number. Since no reinforcements arrived prior to June 1696, the commandant of Azak did not possess the human resource to dismantle the siege works.

Finally, due to the larger number of men Peter brought, Azov was eventually circumvallated and cut from any source of supplies and reinforcements. Nevertheless, it turned out that the art of siege craft was still lacking. As already noted, mines were discarded as too dangerous, given the results from the previous year. After half a month of futile bombardment, assault seemed to be the only way, although Gordon protested vehemently, as he did the previous year. 15,000 men were preoccupied with the construction of a monumental earthwork, which would allow the army to fire at Azov over the walls (like the siege of Masada). In the meantime, front units confronted the garrison. As late as 15th June, there were no prospects of near victory. Then a miracle occurred. The arrival of the Austrian engineers and gunmen, though underestimated or neglected by Russian historiography, turned out to have a crucial role for the success of the siege.⁷¹ Only two days after Leopold I's men came into action, the first breaches of the main walls were achieved, followed by successful penetration in the southwestern section of the fortress. Two days later, the garrison capitulated.

While the Russians were undoubtedly able to reinvigorate their effort, mobilize their potential and achieve a stunning out-performance of their previous attempt regarding logistics, movement and troop deployment, there were still some elements of the military organization, which needed to be polished. Above all, engineering was in precarious condition. It was evident that Peter's army lacked talented siege masters, who could take down enemy fortifications. While Patrick Gordon did possess some knowledge on the matter, his skills were more a product of a long military experience, rather than of particular training. While Peter did not need an engineering “rock-star” like Vauban, he could surely use men with the abilities of Grage. Though he was not a popular figure in the Habsburg army, he was still competent enough to capitalize on the chaotic preparations, arranged by the Russians upon his arrival. Peter's later reforms would emphasize on the training of an engineer corps, but it was not until the failure at Narva and the rough first two years of the Great Northern War that the Tsar decided to approach the matter more decisively.

The structuring of the land forces was also an issue of concern. What the First Azov Campaign had hinted was that the large variety of different troop types burdened the performance of the army. Peter took some steps in that direction by reducing significantly the number of *streltsy* in comparison to the *soldaty* from the semi-standing regiments. Nevertheless, the lack of a permanent force was evident in the performance of the army during field battles and in the protection of the entrenchments. The best results were achieved either by the

⁷¹Ustryalov disparages the role of the Austrian crew, noting that “*they arrived late, only a week before the garrison surrendered.*”; see Ustryalov, *Istoriya*, 269. Porfiryev gives no mention of the Austrians, as does Davies, who uses the former as his main source of information. Only Bobrovskiy acknowledges their important role; see Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 91.

permanent standing regiments of the toy army (poteschny voyska) – Preobrazhenskiy, Semyonovskiy, Lefortovskiy and Butyrskiy, or by the Cossacks, who, though were not regular troops, were engaged in constant “little war” in the steppe, facing Ottoman garrisons and Tatar war bands. Again, it would require the humiliation of the grand Russian army at Narva before Peter would dare to dismantle and reshape his army.

3.4. The Third Azov Campaign (1697)

Following the successful capture of Azov, Peter began to plan his next big endeavor – the Grand Embassy. The idea to travel around Western Europe to study and understand the latest trends in the military, naval and administrative developments was not a novelty in European history. However, the usual practice was to send agents to conduct the observation and bring back the required data. Peter, always eager to test his abilities and to acquire firsthand knowledge, decided to leave Russia, to travel incognito, and venture around the Old Continent. In the meantime, his generals would have to figure out how to proceed with the southern campaign, following a general design, laid down by Peter. The tsar urged for the construction of a naval base in the Azov Sea, as well as for strengthening and extending Russia's grip on the lower Don. The Third Azov Campaign has received far less attention than the previous ones since Peter was absent. Still, it is a crucial point in projecting imperial power southward and should be included in any conclusive study of the period.

Reforging Azov and the establishment of a southern navy

On the day after Azov capitulated to the Russians, Peter began to restore the fortress. All the earthworks, batteries, and trenches were dismantled. The repair of the walls, as well as the bulwark and bastion, which the Russians captured on 17th and 18th July 1696, also started. Engineers were assembled the task of surveying Azak and making a plan for reestablishment and further fortification of the town. Knyaz Lyvov was ordered to provide an inventory list of the captured military equipment in Azov and the Lyutik fort. Apart from the number of handguns and munitions, the Russians acquired 127 cannons of different caliber – 96 in Azov and 31 in the Lyutik.⁷² These were redistributed among the main fortification and the supporting outer forts. Three days later, on 23rd July, a plan was brought to Peter. As it turned out, an upgrade of the fortress would consume a considerable amount of time and resources, and it was decided that only repairs of recent damage would be carried out. Rebuilding the fortifications took the army almost a month, and it was not until the end of August that Peter's forces were finally able to depart northward.

⁷² Bogoslovskiy, *Petr I*, 336.

Simultaneously with the rebuilding of Azov, Peter began to investigate the Lower Don and the Azov Sea for a suitable location for the establishment of a naval base. After four days of sailing, the tsar and his generals finally spotted a suitable area. This was “rocky coast with cliffs and a deep sea level, which also possessed a spring with clear water”.⁷³ It was called Taganrog. Here, Peter would develop the first real naval base in Russian history, giving birth to the Imperial Navy, which was, though slowly, to change permanently the balance of power in the Black Sea region.

The location was idle since the Don would quickly overflow for most of the year, being overburdened by the high tides of the Azov Sea. Such natural obstacle could not be overcome, and a base, placed in the sea itself would prove far more practical. Since at the time Peter possessed only 26 battleships – 2 galleasses and 24 galleys, it was decided that more had to be built if Ottoman naval supremacy was to be thwarted. As it turned out, the Treasury was left empty, and no money could be spared for the building of ships. To provide funding, the Duma was assembled, and the boyars voted for the establishment of “*kumpanstva*” (companies), each including several noble families and each being obliged to build one ship in 1697 and one - in 1698. Altogether, the Duma voted that 52 *kumpanstva* were to be established. Apart from these figures, Peter demanded new ships to be built in his absence. In total, the *kumpanstva*, along with the Admiralty and the Palace Department were to finance the construction of 80 vessels: one bombardier vessel, six galleys and 60 brigantines for the Azov Sea and other ten ships for the Caspian Sea. The Azov vessels were to be constructed in Voronezh while the Caspian – in Kazan. Two years later, when Peter returned from his Grand Embassy, the results were not as good as he had hoped. Work was not carried out with the vigor expected by the tsar. Money and materials were insufficient and in the end, Peter was able to man and use less than one-third of the force he envisioned.

Preparations

In the winter of 1696, the Russians began preparations for a new march south. No one in Moscow doubted that the Ottomans would try a counter-offensive, aimed at the capture of Azov. In the absence of Peter, Shein took again overall command of the army, while Rigeman and Gordon were to command the infantry. Gordon used the winter months to equip his troops with new uniforms and to pay a wage to his soldiers, amounting to three rubles per soldier of the lower ranks and the NCO-s. When the spring came, Gordon was sent as a vanguard force, marching south along with 136 officers and 4,000 soldiers from the four Tambov *soldaty* regiments and the Butyrskiy Regiment. The main army

⁷³ Ibid., 337, quoting Gordon's diary from 26th to 29th July 1696.

under Shein numbered 35,167 troops, over 12,000 of which were cavalry.⁷⁴ At the beginning of April 1697 both army segments were ready to depart from Moscow.⁷⁵ A meeting point was set at Ostrogozhsk, to the south of Voronezh.

The campaign

Both Gordon and Shein left Moscow on 6th April. Gordon's troops had been sent in advance on 7th March, while their baggage train left Moscow on 12th. By mid-April the Butyrskiy Regiment reached the Sosna River, where Gordon caught up with them, still waiting for the four Tambov regiments, which arrived with a significant delay on 8th May. Shein reached the Urazova River on 9th May where he joined the main supply train and on the next day continued his march to Azov.⁷⁶ Somewhere east of Belgorod the two armies merged and continued their unified march south, crossing many rivers and streams, staying vigilant for any enemy movement. After crossing the river Aydar, the main army continued its progress toward Azov, while Gordon and his regiments were sent forward by Shein to act as a vanguard on the Donetsk Valley. Gordon's task was to reach Myortvyi Donetsk opposite Azov as soon as possible, repair the fleet there and establish a postal service to coordinate the movement and the objectives of the Russian forces.⁷⁷ Gordon finally reached Azov on 26th May, and while en route, he received dispatches that an Ottoman force was heading to the fortress. The Crimeans, on the other hand, did not participate in the 1697 campaign, since at the time famine ravaged Crimea.⁷⁸ Five days after Gordon, Shein also reached Azov and entrenched his forces on five hills, south of the fortress. By mid-June, Rigeman had brought the 4,000 Cossacks from Don and Ayuka Khan, the Kalmyk leader, brought his 3,000 horsemen. An interesting note by Gordon mentions that the Kalmyks received 200 sheep and 20 ovis each week for their food.⁷⁹

While waiting for the arrival of the enemy, Shein ordered his men, following the directions of the engineer la Valet, to construct another fort south of Azov and also to implement the plans for upgrading the main fortress, as laid down the previous year. Hornworks, ravelins, and additional earthworks were to

⁷⁴ There were 9,571 reytary, kopeishchiki and servicemen of Moscow (cavalry), at least 10 regiments of soldaty (11,885 men), 5,817 streletsy (again some 10 regiments at least), 3,825 Don Cossacks, 1,066 Circassians and 3,000 Kalmyks; There is no reliable data about the size of the artillery train; see Bobrovskiy, 94, Note 89. When adding the number of men under Gordon and the Azov garrison, the total number of Russian troops, engaged in the 1697 campaigns amounts to 47,608 soldiers and officers and at least 120 artillery pieces of different caliber.

⁷⁵ The four Tambov regiments were to travel separately from Tambov, while Gordon with the Butyrskiy Regiment would depart from Moscow.

⁷⁶ There seems to be a mistake in Bobrovskiy's text, since the only river with a similar name is a small stream, 22 kilometers long in the vicinity of Arkhangelsk.

⁷⁷ Bobrovskiy is quoting Gordon's diary.

⁷⁸ Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 94.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Gordon's diary for 2nd-16th June, 1697; On average, this meant some 8-9 tons of meat per week, if an average sheep weights around 80 kilos, and a ovis – around 100 and only half of their weight can be used as food.

be erected, along with counterscarps. Gordon's troops were sent to build the new fortifications from the northern part of Azov, next to the Novosergeevskiy fort.

It was not until the first days of July that Shein received valuable information on the size of enemy forces. While previous rumors as usually exaggerated the actual size of the opposing side, a Cossack party under atman Aksen Boldyrev was able to cross the Kuban and investigate the enemy positions. As it turned out, the Nogais had joined the Ottoman effort, accompanied by the Kuban Tatars, as a Kalmyk ranger reported on 17th July. The entire enemy force was roughly 22,000 strong garrisons, with 2,000 horsemen acting as a vanguard.⁸⁰

The Tatars' first attack came on 20th July, when the enemy vanguard pushed its way into the Russian camp, killing several and taking some more into captivity, before being driven back by the Russian infantry. Shein decided to pursue the Tatars and ordered his army into battle, going out of the encampment. The Tatar vanguard linked with the main force – 12,000 cavalry and 5,000 infantry and the enemies continued their attacks on the Russians.⁸¹ The engagement continued for 4-5 hours, with several Tatar charges being met and repulsed by Russian artillery and infantry fire.⁸² Shein, though outnumbering the enemy, decided not to risk an attack, which would expose his position to the enemy horsemen and held his ground instead. Having suffered 2,000 dead, the Tatars finally disengaged and retreated to the Kuban Steppe, unable to reform or continue their campaign on Azov. Russian losses are not mentioned but probably they were substantially fewer. The overall result of the engagement was that the Ottomans decided to recalculate their strategy and project their main forces against the forts on the lower Dnieper, which were taken by Sheremetev in 1695 and 1696.

Until the beginning of August the Russian army remained stationed at Azov. After that Shein began to send his regiments to home. Ayuka Khan was the first to depart, receiving a ruble per each Kalmyk and additional gifts from the Khan and his nobles. Shein himself left on 8th August, leaving behind part of the *streltsy* to supplement Azov's garrison. Gordon with his men joined Dolgorukov at the Belgorod Line (*cherta*) to strengthen Russian position in the face of the increasing Ottoman pressure on the Dnieper.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *Khronologicheskii ukazately*, 4.

⁸² Gordon estimates that it was 4 to 5 hours of fighting; Shein, who places the beginning of the battle at 11 a.m., uses the term “several hours”, while the *Khronologicheskii ukazately* indicates that the whole engagement, along with the earlier Tatar incursion probably continued for 10 hours; see *Khronologicheskii ukazately*, 4; Bobrovskiy, *Istoriya*, 95.

The performance of the Russian army

The main difference between the final Azov Campaign and the military actions of 1695 and 1696 derives from the fact that Peter I was not present. The army, however, was subordinated to a single commander – the voevoda Shein, which clearly suggests that the errors of split command were overcome following the successful siege of Azov in 1696. Shein was right to choose Patrick Gordon as his second in command, owing the Scotsman's experience with the terrain as well as the execution of marches and fighting against the Turks and Tatars, which Gordon had faced since 1687.

Unlike the first two marches under Peter, there is no sufficient information about the exact road and speed of the Russian army. Bobrovskiy notes that there was a substantial delay on behalf of the Tambov soldierly regiments under Gordon. While not as fast as the movement in 1696, the speed of the Russian army was more or less the same as that in 1695. The fact, that the bulk of the forces were transferred on foot instead of using multiple ships, like in the previous year, contributes to the delay. Nevertheless, the Muscovite army was able to deploy at Azov before the enemies could organize any assault or siege.

However, the defensive tactics applied by the Russians have to be pointed out. Instead of risking a march against the Tatar and Nogai positions around the Kuban River, Shein decided to entrench himself at Azov and wait for the enemy. Two primary factors could easily explain this. First and foremost, without Peter being present, Shein did not dare to risk an offensive, which could end with a fiasco, similar to Golytsin's failure against Crimea in 1687 and 1689. Secondly, there was nothing else to gain south of Azov. Apart from the Ottoman stronghold of Kaffa, the steppe south of the Don River was desolated in relation to cities or fortresses, which could be held and maintained to achieve expansion. Even if Shein moved against the Tatars and Nogais, he could only push them further south or drive them east to Circassia. In any case, his troops would march through harsh, waterless grassland with no hope for enough supplies. This situation would have ended either with inglorious retreat somewhere in July due to insufficient food and provisions, or with the trapping of the Russians, surrounded by the enemy cavalry. This would have been a grim prospect, similar to the Crusaders' downfall at Hattin, or Crassus' disaster at Carrhae.

Regarding the actual Battle of Azov (20th July 1697), this campaign was also carried out carefully and without risking any chances. Shein took up a strong defensive position and waited for the enemy charges to drain the energy of the Tatars and Nogais. The Russians were in a better position – they could have remained in their camp for months without any need to strike out. If the Tatars were to achieve anything they had to charge their enemy's positions. Probably the news of an upcoming Ottoman support made them brave enough.

In any case, the attack on the Russian camp was a military folly. As the result of similar raids in 1695 and 1696 demonstrated, the mounted forces of the Tatars were more or less useless against the fortified Muscovite camps. Only in a combination with the Ottoman infantry they could stand any chance of success. Thus, the engagement must be viewed in the context of Tatar frustration due to their inability to either subdue the Russians by a surprise raid, or ambush them in an open battle. By all means this was the same driving emotion, which made the Cossacks storm Azov on several occasions during the two sieges, even though no orders for such actions were given. In any case, the deployment of the Russian army suggests two things. Firstly, the Muscovite infantry was able to stand firm in the face of enemy charges, driving off infantry and cavalry with considerable success. Secondly, Shein did not put too much trust in his cavalry, since the later was used merely to hold the army flanks, with no information suggesting that there would be Russian mounted counter-attacks against the Tatars and the Nogais. Finally, the victory was won only after the Tatars disengaged and left southward, while the Russians remained masters of the field but did not initiate a persecution, probably fearing possible traps – a tactic, very common for a retreating steppe army. Thus, Shein, though not a military genius, was able to achieve victory simply by patience and caution and to obtain all of the campaign's goals.

The Third Azov Campaign was as successful as the second one and demonstrated that the Russians were quickly learning their lessons, regarding steppe warfare and the execution of military marches on the Lower Don. While until 1687 Muscovy was on the defensive, using the military lines (*cherta*) to thwart Tatar raids with some success, the reforms of Aleksey and Fyodor, and the energy of Peter demonstrated that it was Russia, which from now on would go on the offensive. While movement and logistics had to be further improved, it was evident that the Russian army of the last decade of the seventeenth century was far superior in handling their task in the steppe than their ancestors during the first half of the same century or at the time of Ivan the Terrible. The increased usage of artillery and handguns had a lot to do with the greater success of the Muscovite troops not only in sieges but also when facing the enemy in the open field. In fact, it was the artillery that allowed Gordon to repulse the Ottoman-Tatar force before the first siege of Azov and again the cannons proved crucial for Shein's success in 1697. The experience acquired from the foreign engineers regarding siege warfare should not be underestimated, even though it was the Great Northern War and the sieges of Sweden's outposts in Ingria and Livonia which forged the Russian artillery as a substantial element of its military machine. The war with the Ottoman Empire wore on until 1701 with no significant action taking place between the two sides, since the Porte's forces were preoccupied with the last Habsburg offensive in the Balkans. Following a devastating defeat at Zenta (1697), the Ottomans capitulated to Habsburg demands at Karlowitz. They were unable to

strike back north and had to submit to Peter's will, surrendering Azov and its surroundings as well as several forts on the lower Dnieper under the Treaty of Constantinople (1700).

3.5. The Pruth Campaign (1711)

Historical background

The Pruth Campaign is an essential, although not a decisive, part of the Great Northern War. Following an initial setback after the failure at Narva (1700), Russia was able to gain momentum, while Karl XII (r. 1697-1718) was preoccupied with the conquest of Poland-Lithuania. Simultaneously with Sweden's unbroken chain of successes in the south, Peter was able, by mobilizing the full potential of his realm, to mount a series of offensive expeditions and sieges, which brought down Scandinavian control over Ingria, Estland and Livonia. By 1706, when Karl triumphed in Poland, Peter became master of the North, driving the Swedes from Karelia as well. In 1707, Karl XII decided to invade Russia and to deal a decisive blow to the last remaining enemy of the Triple Alliance.⁸³ In 1708, the Swedes had finally subjugated both Poland-Lithuania and Saxony and Karl could focus his entire effort to the East. In midsummer 1708 the Swedes crossed the borders of Russia and tried to provoke the Russians into a decisive battle. Peter, however, decided to apply a different strategy. Scourched-earth and constant maneuvering were used to torment and outperform the enemy. The tsar was well aware that his army was no match for the Swedes, and an open battle could prove disastrous for his cause. The winter, Russia's oldest ally, came to aid. The harsh weather of November to March 1708/9's proved to be one of the chilliest in European history. The Swedish army was decimated by frost, hunger, and disease, unable to conquer any firm hold in Russia. To worsen things further, following a Russian success against a Swedish vanguard at Lesnaya (8th October 1708), Peter was able to push his enemies deeper south, away from their supply centers. By April 1709, Karl's army was in full retreat toward Ukraine.

The wounded king saw no choice but to try to obtain a permanent holding and besieged Poltava. While he led the siege, the field army was placed under Lewenhaupt to meet the relieving force, commanded by Peter and his generals, among which Boris Sheremetev and Aleksandr Menshikov. Lewenhaupt, thwarted by the poor condition of his army and the psychological pressure of a possible failure, was unable to demonstrate his full potential and the troops under his command were soundly defeated by the Russians. Three days after Poltava, the bulk of the Swedes were captured at Perevolochna (11th July 1709).

⁸³Initial Alliance included Denmark-Norway, Saxony and Russia. Poland-Lithuania was engaged in 1704, while in 1701 Denmark was thrown out of the war. By 1708, Sweden had conquered almost the entire Commonwealth and subjected Saxony.

Of over 40,000 Swedes which stepped in Russia in 1708, only 15,000 remained, and they all fell into captivity, denying Sweden of the most battle ready element of its military machine. Karl XII, however, was able to run away and retreat to the Ottoman Empire, finding haven at the fortress of Bender. In 1710 Peter demanded from Ahmed III to hand over the Swedish king to the Russians. In turn, Karl was able to convince the sultan to strike the Russians in order to restore what he had been lost under the treaty of Constantinople. In November 1710 Ahmed III broke off diplomatic relations with Peter and proclaimed war, sending Tatars and Zaporozhian Cossacks against the Russian lands in Ukraine. Peter was adamant in his response – war was to be fought, and the Ottomans had to be defeated decisively. His recent victory over Sweden, the beginning of the full-scale reform of his army and the victories over the Ottomans in 1695-1697 were all factors, contributing to Peter's aplomb. The Ottomans had to be taught a lesson and Russia was to try to benefit from any future success by expanding its authority over the Pontic lands and even stretching further south - toward the Balkans.

Historiography

The Pruth Campaign has been studied in detail by the Russian historiography from the nineteenth century onward. Primary sources include Peter's campaign journal, as well as the Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, who served under the tsar during the march south.⁸⁴ Another valuable source is the memoirs of Jean Nicolas Moreau de Brassey, who was part of the Russian army, as well as the notes of Just Juel, Denmark-Norway's ambassador to Peter.⁸⁵ The official histories of the Guard's regiments also provide substantial information on the campaign.⁸⁶ Peter's expedition in Moldavia has also been researched by Soviet historian Porfiryev.⁸⁷ Recent insight is provided by Brian Davies in his study of empire and Military Revolution in Eastern Europe.⁸⁸ A brief overview is presented in Nikolay Shefov's book on Russian battles.⁸⁹ A recent article by Aleksandr Kulinich provides a short, yet exhaustive source, regarding the

⁸⁴ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1711* (St. Petersburg, 1854); P.H. Bruce, *Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, Esq. - a military officer in the services of Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain, containing an account of his travels in Germany, Russia, Tartary, Turkey, and the West Indies, &c, as also several very interesting private anecdotes of the Czar, Peter 1 of Russia* (Dublin, 1783).

⁸⁵ *Zapiski brigadira Moro-de-Brasse (Kasayushchiesy do Turetskogo pohoda 1711 goda)* – translated into Russian by A.S. Pushkin; *Zapiski datskogo poslannika v Rossii pri Petre Velikom* – printed in Russian in 1899 and reprinted in 2001.

⁸⁶ M.P. Azanchevskiy, *Istoriya Leib-gvardii Preobrazhenskogo polka* (St. Petersburg, 1859); P. Dirin, *Istoriya Leibgvardii Semenovskogo polka* (St. Petersburg, 1883).

⁸⁷ Porfiryev, Petr I.

⁸⁸ B.L. Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution in Eastern Europe: Russia's Turkish Wars in the Eighteenth Century* (New York & London: Continuum, 2011).

⁸⁹ N. Shefov, *Bitvy Rossii* (Moscow: ACT Moskva, 2006).

preparations and the deployment of Russian forces in 1711.⁹⁰ Kulinich gives a valuable new perspective on the organization and functioning of the Petrine army on campaign. He also tries to dispel some of the myths, regarding the conduct of the campaign, which have predominated Russian historiography in the twentieth century

Preparations

Immediately after the Ottoman Empire proclaimed its desire for war on 10th November 1710, Peter began to plan for the upcoming year and the measures he had to take in order to deal with the new threat south. The military engagement with the Ottomans would surely bring a wave of Tatar raids in Ukraine and Belarus, as well as a possible new attack on Azov, which was *de jure* granted to Russia according to the Treaty of Constantinople, following a *de facto* occupation in 1696, as noted above. The Ottoman Empire, which was able to overcome its military embarrassment following the War of the Holy League, had replenished its Treasury while the government was headed by a war party, supported by the sultan.⁹¹ The warmongers in the Istanbul court sought for opportunities to reconquer the lands, lost under the treaties of Karlowitz (1699) and Constantinople. Russia, entangled with a hard-fought war against Sweden, seemed to be the perfect target.⁹²

Peter's plan was to mobilize his resources and establish a massive body of troops which was to march south through Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldavia. The next step would be to reach the Danube and to block any Ottoman attempt to cross the great river. In the meantime, Russian contingents would assist the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia in their uprising against the Ottoman authorities. If things had gone according to plan, all Ottoman lands north of Danube would have been occupied by Russia until the end of 1711, while a series of uprisings would have ignited among the Orthodox Serbs and the Montenegrins as Peter hoped.⁹³

⁹⁰ A.A. Kulinich, "Deyatelnosty russkogo komandovaniya v Prutskom pokhode 1711 goda", *Istoricheskie, filosofskie, politicheskie i yuridicheskie nauki, kulyturologiya I iskusstvovedenie. Voprosy teorii i praktiki* 5, 43 (Gramota, 2014), 109-13.

⁹¹ It is interesting to note, that the Ottoman Empire and Russia had reached an agreement on their dispute about the future of Karl XII and in the beginning of 1710 a treaty, promoting a 30 year-long piece, was signed. The shift in the Ottoman position took place after the warlike Baltacı Mehmed Paşa, a royal eunuch, became grand vizier in the summer of 1710. Backed by the French diplomacy and the aspirations of the Crimean khan - Devlet Girei, the new vizier was able to convince Ahmed III that war was the best solution for the Empires's problems, regarding the lack of prestige of the central authority, following the Holy League War; see Kulinich, "Deyatelnost russkogo komandovaniya", 109.

⁹² Later the Ottomans would fight against Venice (1714) and the Habsburg Empire (1716-1718), being able to reconquer Morea from the Serene Republic, but suffering a new military humiliation by the forces of Eugene of Savoy and loosing Serbia to the Austrians.

⁹³ Whether Peter was aware or not, between 1688 and 1689, the Orthodox and Catholic Bulgarians rebelled twice, rising against the Ottomans in support of the Habsburg armies fighting in Serbia. The Habsburgs were unable to support these rebellions and they were soon suppressed by the Ottoman army, initiating a series of immigrant waves, mainly toward the Banat of Timișoara. By the time Peter would march south, the Bulgarian

Peter's first task was to gather his forces and rearrange his strategy for the upcoming campaign season. While 1710 was dedicated to the capture of Livonia and Riga in particular, 1711 required the distribution of Russian troops on several fronts. The main emphasis was the southern front against the Ottomans. Here Peter allocated his main army. The tsar decided to concentrate his forces in three main columns. The first one, under Golitsin, would serve as a vanguard and secure the route via Dnieper toward northern Moldavia, and establish a chain of supply depotes along the way, preparing food and provisions for the main army, which were supposed to suffice for four months. For his task, Golitsin was to head a force of 10 dragoon regiments and to receive the tsar's permission to extract provisions from Belarus and Western Ukraine.

The main army under Sheremetev comprised of the cavalry and infantry units, distributed along the Livonian and Estland frontier. Sheremetev had to gather these forces and march south through Smolensk and Slutsk, and continue south to the Dnieper. Then Sheremetev had to capture Iași – Moldavia's capital, and muster as many supplies and men as possible.

Finally, Peter himself had to lead the bulk of the infantry and the artillery, and to catch up with Sheremetev at Iași, from where the Russian united force would march further south and block Ottoman attempts for crossing the Danube River. Speed and surprise were the main elements of the Tsar's strategy. Peter emphasized the need to act as quickly as possible and keep the initiative in Russian hands. He wanted to see Russian forces in Wallachia by May or early June. Peter estimated rightfully that it would take only a few weeks for the Ottoman army to march from its gathering center – Edirne to the Danube, less than 400 kilometers north from the old Ottoman capital.⁹⁴

A second force, under Apraksin, aided by the Don Cossacks and the Kalmyks was to march toward Azov and strengthen its garrison in case of possible Ottoman incursions. Finally, a 15,000 strong corps had to be sent to Pomerania to assist the Danes and the Poles in the capturing of Sweden's strongholds in the key Baltic region.

As the memoirs of Moreau de Brassey reveal, Peter's plan was to construct a formidable, yet flexible force, separated into four main divisions, along with a considerable number of cavalry, formed into two dragoon units, which could act separately as a covering force or as a vanguard of the main army. The artillery was detached as a separate unit, under General Bruce. The main infantry force – some 48,800 men were allocated amongst four infantry divisions (11,200 men divided into eight regiments of 1,400 soldiers in each division), headed by the generals Weyde, Repnin, Hallart, and Dansberg. The

population was already badly mauled by the activities of the Ottoman army, while local resources were tapped in order to feed the growing military needs of the Porte's troops. In 1711 no support came from the lands of Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia; see Cholov, *Chiprovskoto vystanie* (Sofia, 1988); I. Parvev, *Habsburgs and Ottomans Between Vienna and Belgrade* (Sofia, 1995).

⁹⁴ Porfiriev, *Petr I*, 218-25

two dragoon divisions (there were 8,000 troops into eight regiments of 1,000 in each division) were commanded by generals Carl Ewald von Rönne and Janus von Eberstadt. Peter, acting as a lieutenant-general was to command the guards' regiments (Preobrazhenskiy, Semyonovskiy, Astrakhanskiy and Ingermanlandskiy, a total of 15 battalions or 15,000 men), along with a bombardier and a cannon company (altogether 1,500 men) and a horse guard, comprised of 300 reytary (heavy cavalry). Additional troops under Menshikov were detached from the main army, serving as garrison troops for the Moldavian capital Iași. According to de Brassey, the main army was further supplemented by 10,000 Cossacks and 6,000 Moldavians, bringing the total number of men to 95,800.⁹⁵ However, these figures represent the official statistics of the army before its departure south. As Porfiryev notes, the Force under Sheremetev was devastated by plague during its march through Latvia and Lithuania, and in the following months many more perished from heat and diseases.⁹⁶ The idea that each regiment in the divisions was in full strength is debatable as the troops were assembled in great haste from winter quarters and garrisons, scattered throughout Livonia and Ingria. In fact, upon reaching the Pruth River in July, what left of the initial force, gathered in March, was no more than 37,538, with additional 10,000 sent forward under Rönne and several thousand left under Menshikov at Iași.⁹⁷ Thus, by the time Peter finally reached the borders of Wallachia, he had lost up to 32,000 men: some left as garrisons along the way, but most - perished due to hunger, dehydration or diseases. Shefov argues that Peter marched with 50,000 from Ukraine, while Porfiryev estimates that there were 51,000 troops under Peter and Sheremetev at Iași, from which 5,000 were the ill-trained and equipped Moldavians. The artillery consisted of some 122 cannons in different calibers.⁹⁸

While the Russians were preparing their forces, the Ottomans did not stand idle. Baltacı Mehmed Paşa, the architect of the anti-Russian policy, took personal command of a massive force, gathered in Thrace. The sources provide very different figures regarding the total Ottoman strength. Peter Bruce estimates that a total of 200,000 Ottomans and Tatars took part in the campaign.⁹⁹ Porfiryev comes to a conclusion that there were 120,000 Ottoman

⁹⁵ *Zapiski brigadira Moro-de-Braze* (<http://militera.lib.ru/memo/french/brasey/01.html>) - accessed on 03.08.2015); According to Peter Bruce the Russian army should have numbered 30,000 infantry separated into 5 divisions, as well as 30,000 dragoons, 50,000 Kalmyks and 20,000 Cossacks; see P. Bruce, *Memoirs*, 39. These figures, however, are not confirmed in any other sources.

⁹⁶ Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 218.

⁹⁷ A.Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 112; De Brassey notes that during an official counting of the troops, carried out, according to Peter's personal orders, on 17th July 1711, there were no more than 47,000 troops left out of the initial 79,800, not counting the Cossacks and the Moldavians. De Brassey himself estimates that out of 4,000 troops under his command (four regiments) 724 had died by mid June, of which only 56 were killed in action on 29 June. As it is, De Brassey's brigade alone had lost over 15 per cent of its personnel without any significant action taking place; see *Zapiski brigadira Moro-de-Braze* (<http://militera.lib.ru/memo/french/brasey/01.html>) - accessed on 03.08.2015).

⁹⁸ Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 222-23; A.Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 112.

⁹⁹ Bruce, *Memoirs*, 42.

troops (62,000 infantry of which 20,000 *yeniçeri* and 58,000 cavalry, most of which *sipahis*) and 70,000 Tatars under Devlet Girei, which concentrated at Bender and joined the Ottomans before their first engagements with Peter's troops in the lower Pruth. The Turks' artillery train, according to Porfiryev, consisted of 444 cannons.¹⁰⁰ Kulinich, using Ottoman sources, provides more realistic figures, and estimates that the Ottomans were around 100,000 in total, accompanied by 35,000 Tatars and a great artillery train – probably of 407 cannons.¹⁰¹ Shefov briefly notes that the entire Ottoman army at Pruth amounted to 150,000 men.¹⁰² Further details are provided by Brian Davies who combines Ottoman sources and the figures given in the work of Virginia Aksan on eighteenth-century Ottoman wars. Davies estimates that a total of 40,000 Crimean Tatars were concentrated at Bender and marched to join Baltacı Paşa at the Pruth. According to Davies, the grand vizier would master a force of some 120,000 of which 57,000 were cavalry (20,000 *sipahi* and 37,000 *cebelis-s* and volunteers) and 63,000 infantry (23,400 *yeniçeri* from Rumelia and Egypt, 10-12,000 *cebecis* and 20,000 *levends* from Bosnia and Albania). Half of the Tatars had to screen the Russian movement and harass the Petrine army as often as possible.

The initial disproportion between the two armies was not as problematic for the Russians as it would later prove to be. Almost 100,000 troops were supposed to march south in order to coup with the opposing forces of 135-160,000 Turks and Tatars. Also, the Russians could muster additional troops in Azov and Ukraine and use them to divert the Tatar Host away from Moldavia. What misled Peter in his choice of strategy were three main factors – the logistics, the reconnaissance of the route ahead and the faith that a revolt in Wallachia and Moldavia would break out and that at least 50,000 rebels from the Principalities would join the tsar's army. As it turned out, these main elements of Peter's campaign plan turned out to be fallacy.

The Balkan factors

Before analyzing the actual development of Peter's southern march, several factors, which played a considerable influence on the political and military developments in the Balkans and the Danube region, must be noted.

First and foremost, Peter's hopes rested on the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which had been vassals of the Ottoman Empire since mid-fifteenth century. As early as 1709, the prince of Wallachia - Constantin Brancoveanu (r. 1688-1714), had secretly promised his support to Peter. Brancovenau hoped to use Russia in order to evade the growing Austrian influence and thwart a possible preemptive move from the Sublime Porte, which

¹⁰⁰ Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 218-19.

¹⁰¹ Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 112.

¹⁰² Shefov, *Bitvy Rossii*, 456.

could try to impose its own puppet in Bucharest. Using his Orthodox faith as key to winning Russian support, Brancoveanu continued to encourage a possible Russian incursion south of the Dniester River. The central issue for the Wallachian prince was his rivalry with the Moldovian ruler Dimitrie Cantemir (r. 1693; 1710-1711), who served as the main Russian ally in the region. Brancoveanu did not want to risk his throne to the possibility that Cantemir could betray him to the Turks. The Wallachians acted cautiously and did not want to reveal openly their support to Peter's cause.

Dimitrie should not be perceived as Machiavellian type of prince who would betray his fellow Christian for the pure aggrandizement of his power and influence. In fact, Cantemir himself was a victim of Brancoveanu's political games. In 1693, when Dimitrie was to inherit the princely title of his father Constantine, Brancoveanu used his influence in Istanbul to dethrone Cantemir and to place a close friend of his – the *phanariot* Constantin Duca, as the ruler of Moldavia.¹⁰³ It was not until 1710 that Cantemir was finally able to regain his father's throne. Then, it is no surprise that Dimitrie was perceived as a threat by Brancoveanu. In the eyes of Peter, however, both princes were viewed as valuable allies, and it was possible that the tsar failed to notice the deep mistrust and even animosity between the Romanian rulers.

Regarding the rest of the Orthodox lands, Russia was to receive even less support. A possible major uprising of the Serbs never took place, with only sporadic activities by armed bands, limited to the mountainous region of Shumadija. The Montenegrins also rose against the Ottoman authorities, hoping to receive funds and help from Russia and Venice. However, this never happened and in mid-1710, Sava, the prince-bishop of Montenegro had to negotiate peace with the Porte. In the spring of 1711 the levend-s from Bosnia and Albania overwhelmed the last remaining rebel bands or simply drove them high into the mountains, where the usually dwelled. As for the Bulgarians, their earlier rebellions were decimated with a great ferocity. In the late 1680s the western lands of Moesia and Macedonia were ravaged during the final days of the Karposh's rebellion (1689) and the Chiprovtsi uprising (1688). Prior to these rebellions, the Bulgarians had risen in the old capital of Tarnovo under a Russian, named Rostislav, who claimed to be a descendant of the last ruling dynasty – the Shishmans. Finally, in 1690, a Bulgarian war-band leader – Strakhil took advantage of the Austrian offensive against Belgrade and raised a unit of 200 men, joined by 4,000 Hungarians, Bosnians and Serbs. After Strakhil evaded the Ottoman siege of Nish, he was able to return to the Ottoman Empire

¹⁰³ Phanariots were members of prominent Greek families in Phanar, the chief Greek quarter of Constantinople, where the Ecumenical Patriarchate is located, who traditionally occupied four important positions in the Ottoman Empire: Grand Dragoman, Grand Dragoman of the Fleet, Hospodar of Moldavia, and Hospodar of Wallachia. They were descendents of the Byzantine Great Houses which survived the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Due to their close ties to the Ottoman court, the Phanariots were viewed as more loyal and trustworthy than the Romanian ruling elite. This is the reason why around 1715, both Moldavia and Wallachia were bestowed to phanariot families while the local aristocracy was left aside.

and to raise a new band of brigands in 1711, acting in the Strandzha region in modern day Southeastern Bulgaria. His actions were directly related to Peter's campaign south, but the small-scale guerrilla could not alter in any way the course of the war.

The campaign

The march of the Russians began in March, when Sheremetev left his winter quarters in Livonia and began to traverse the broad plains of Belarus and Western Ukraine. Because he had to gather his forces from various locations, Sheremetev's column was stretched and moving slower than Peter had anticipated when he laid his plans for the campaign. While still in northwest Ukraine, Sheremetev's forces were befallen by early spring storms and heavy rainfalls, which transformed the prairie into an endless marsh, resulting in what Russians referred to as *rasputitsa*. The usual speed of the army decreased several times and even couriers, of whom Peter insisted on bringing back and forth regular reports on Sheremetev's movement, reduced their speed from the usual eighty kilometers per day to less than forty.¹⁰⁴ Frustrated by the delay of Sheremetev's action, Peter rearranged his orders. The Field-marshal had to gather only the dragoon regiments and march forward to the Dniester. The infantry from Livonia had to catch up with Sheremetev's troops at Iași along with the new recruitments, which Peter brought with himself from Smolensk via Lutsk. Moreover, Sheremetev was supposed to establish supply depots along his way, using the acquisitions, gathered earlier by Golitsin, and to provide further supplies if necessary. While Sheremetev was slowly dragging his forces through the East European marshes, the Tsar concluded a series of negotiations with Dimitrie Cantemir, which resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Lutsk on 13th April. According to the treaty, Moldavia would become a vassal of Russia and Cantemir would assist Peter with provisions and men on his way to the Danube. In return, Russia would guarantee Moldavia's autonomy and recognize Cantemir as a legitimate ruler. Prince Dimitrie had crossed his own Rubicon by signing the treaty. The Porte perceived such actions as high treason and they were punishable by torture and death.

On 7th May, Peter sent a new dispatch toward Sheremetev. The Knyaz had to gather what cavalry he could muster, along with two of the guards' regiments and travel to the Danube with great haste in order to outmaneuver the advancing Ottoman forces and to prevent them from crossing the great river. Sheremetev had to either seize the Ottoman bridgeheads or destroy them. Peter stressed the need to win over the support of the Wallachian and Moldavian rulers. Furthermore, the Tsar expected the Field-marshal to reach the Dniester on 15th May, cross it and prepare pontoon bridges for the bulk of the army.¹⁰⁵ What

¹⁰⁴ Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 110.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 111; B. Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 115.

followed was one of the worst executed orders in the history of warfare. Instead of moving his men rapidly, Sheremetev took his time cautiously and advanced by 6 kilometers per day, reaching Bratslav on 16th May (according to the initial plan, he was supposed to be there in mid-April). On 12th May, he received an order to send forth a *corps volante* of some 900 dragoons and mounted grenadiers, which were supposed to reach the Moldavian capital Iași and raise the locals in Russian support. Only upon reaching Bratslav Sheremetev finally sent the chosen troops ahead, but insisted they should not ride their mounts, but march on foot next to them. This resulted in development which might seem comic or tragic, regarding the point of view. The corps volante managed to cross a total of 12 kilometers in the following five days, reaching the unthinkable speed of 2.5 kilometers per day.¹⁰⁶ The bulk of the Knyaz's forces left Bratslav on 18th May only to reach Iași two weeks later, on 5th June. Their movement was continuously screened by a force of 15,000 Tatars, who had moved out from Bender. At the same time, the corps volante finally reached the Dniester, building a bridge to cross the river. The detachment was attacked by 4,000 Turks, Tatars and the Polish allies of Karl XII, who tried to destroy the Russian vanguard. The Russian troops were able to take a good defensive position and to fight back the enemy forces which finally retreated to Bender. By the time Sheremetev had left Bratslav, the corps volante had finally crossed the Dnieper. While the Russians were followed by their Tatar "tail", Sheremetev decided to appease Dimitrie Cantemir's pleas for military aid and sent forth a detachment of three dragoon regiments and two companies of grenadiers, who had to ride to Iași and occupy the city. The reinforcements reached the Moldavian capital as late as 29th May, just six days before Sheremetev's main force. Thus, it took the Knyaz a month just to traverse a distance of no more than 260 kilometers (an average of 8.5 kilometers per day). By the time Sheremetev reached Iași, the Ottomans had crossed the Danube (on 1st June) and their forces marched upstream to meet the Russians and cross the smaller rivers and streams before being caught up by the enemy vanguard. Peter was frustrated, noting to Sheremetev: "I am amazed by your slowdown!"¹⁰⁷ The failure of Knyaz Sheremetev to achieve his campaign goals not only allowed for a massive Ottoman army to cross freely the biggest obstacle on its route, but also cost Russia its primary military support – the Wallachians. In April Constantin Brancoveanu had gathered an army of 40,000 men and allocated it on the Wallachian-Moldavian border, waiting for the Russians. The Prince of Wallachia had only a single option – to join whichever army reached his position first. When news came that only the vanguard of Peter's army had arrived at Iași while the Ottoman forces were advancing in their entirety, Brancoveanu was left with no possible choice – he had to keep his throne and his head.

¹⁰⁶ Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 115; Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 111.

¹⁰⁷ Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 111, quoting a letter from Peter to Sheremetev.

Sheremetev learned about the Ottoman progress on 8th June and decided to halt his forces at Iași and wait for the main army under the tsar. Another crucial mistake was made. Instead of rushing forward to destroy the existing bridges on the Pruth or, at least, sending a vanguard with this task, Sheremetev decided to stand idle and leave the whole initiative in the hands of the Turks. His decision was strongly influenced by the fact that Cantemir was able to gather only 5-6,000 ill-equipped and trained men, and that no further provisions had been brought up by the Moldavians, whose land, as it turned out, was plagued by draft, bad harvests, and swarms of locust.¹⁰⁸

Peter, leading the main force of infantry, reached the Dniester on 12th July. Frustrated with Sheremetev for his poor choice of actions, the Tsar summoned a military council on 14th July. The council quickly split into two fractions. The so-called *nyemtsi* were: Hallart (Peter's chief strategist), Weyde, Bruce and Rönne, who advised Peter to cease his advance south and wait for the Ottoman army in his current position.¹⁰⁹ Their position was buttressed by the fact that a march further south would expose the army to flanking attacks from the Tatars. Peter did not have exact details on the size or whereabouts of the enemy forces and could easily fall into a trap. On the opposite side were the Russian generals, led by Sheremetev, who insisted that a halt at Iași would betray the Orthodox cause and would leave Wallachia and Southern Moldavia to the mercy of the grand vizier and his army. Peter's compatriots urged their ruler that a move against Bender, as suggested by Hallart, would only result in the escape of Karl XII while gaining no particular advantages for the Muscovite cause. Peter decided to support the "Russian" camp, and at first his decision seemed right since he received an embassy of Wallachian nobles, assuring the tsar that Brancoveanu would join him in open rebellion. It seems that these nobles were either bribed by the Ottomans to lure the Tsar or were misinformed on the latest decisions of their prince. All parts of the Petrine army finally merged on 28th June and began a march south, following an attack from some 20,000 Tatars on Sheremetev's trenches. After an initial enemy breakthrough at one of the pickets, the Tatars were repulsed by the combined fire of both infantry and artillery. Upon marching south Peter, reassured by the Wallachian nobles, decided to send a corps of 5,000 dragoons under Rönne, supported by 5,000 of Cantemir's Moldavians. Rönne had to march south, surpass any advancing enemy columns and strike deep into Wallachia, supporting

¹⁰⁸ Peter Bruce notes that when the bulk of the Russian army went along the Pruth (21st June), the tents of the soldiers were swarmed with locust, which followed the army on its march south and left the soldiers alone only in the end of June (27th, according to Bruce) upon the arrival of the Ottoman army; see Bruce, *Memoirs*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 116. Davies refers to them as "Germans", although *nyemtsi* became a term for Germans only later in the eighteenth century and during Peter's reign was still mostly used to when referring to foreigners.

Brancoveanu in his supposed revolt.¹¹⁰ The rest of the army, under Peter, was to continue along the Pruth, seeking traces of the enemy forces.¹¹¹

On 5th July, Peter finally sent a reconnaissance detachment of 1,000 mounted grenadiers and two Moldavian guides to scout the route ahead and to try to retrieve data about the size and the location of the enemy forces. The detachment was intercepted by the screening Tatar force and a quarter of its staff was wiped out during an observation of one of the bridges on the Pruth, built earlier by Sheremetev. The rest of the troops retreated and on the next day Peter arranged a new vanguard under Janus von Eberstedt and de Brassey. They had to gather most of the available cavalry (some 5,000 strong), along with 32 guns and to go forth to destroy the bridges which the Ottomans could use to cross the Pruth. A day later, the vanguard came across the Ottoman bridgeheads, only 20 miles south of Peter's main position. Instead of attacking the enemy as ordered, Janus, claiming that he had met 50,000 Turks, began retreating in a defensive formation. Ottoman and Tatar vanguard forces came out of their bridgehead fortifications and attacked the retreating Russians. Eberstedt's forces were able to maneuver swiftly into a favorable defensive position. Using a combined fire of their dragoons and the artillery, the Russians were able to beat back the enemy forces and continue their march north. There, at dawn on 8th July, they merged with the main army, though they were again under attack by a formidable detachment of Ottoman cavalry.¹¹² As their retreat was covered by the divisions of Sheremetev and Hallart, the forces of J.von Eberstedt were able to capture some of their pursuers. One of them, a Tatar, gave away information concerning the Ottoman forces which had crossed the Pruth. According to the captive, Baltacı Paşa had only managed to transfer one-third of his cavalry, while the bulk of the Ottoman army was still struggling to cross the river.

Wasting no time, Sheremetev and Hallart advanced with their divisions in attack formations, pushing the enemy forces away from the Russian positions. At that point the Russians could have organized a massive offense against the Ottomans, beating their troops during the crossing of Pruth as Eugene had done at Zenta. Peter, however, was misled by Janus' report of 50,000 enemies who

¹¹⁰ Rönne was able to reach the town of Braila, situated on the Danube, on 14th July and capture it. By that time, however, Peter had signed the armistice at Stănileși on 12th. Although Russian historiography tries to argue that this success was crucial for the favorable terms, delivered by the Ottomans, the fact remains that Rönne's forces played no substantial role in the development of the campaign, though denying Peter of a substantial part of his cavalry.

¹¹¹ According to Davies at that point, the tsar commanded 38,246 troops and 122 cannons; see Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 116. Kulinich estimates that Peter commanded 37,538 men, of which only 6,692 were cavalry. The artillery was 122, compared to the 407 of the Ottomans; see A. Kulinich "Deyatelnost", 112. Interestingly, both authors quote one and the same source – Ya.E. Vodarskiy, *Zagadki Prutskogo pokhoda Petra I* (Moscow, 2004). Davies quotes pages 72-75, while Kulinich uses the data from page 205. Vodarskiy himself gives a total of 38,000 Russians (of which 6,600 were horsemen) and 112 guns; see Ya.E. Vodarskiy, "Legendy Prutskogo pokhoda Petra I", *Otechestvenna Istoriya* 5 (2004), 5.

¹¹² Both Davies and Kulinich dismiss Janus's report as fake. Davies argues that by the time Eberstedt's corps finally reached the Ottoman bridges, there were no more than 10,000 enemy troops. By the morning of 8th July, the Ottomans were able to transfer more of their cavalry and some 15,000 sipahi and Tatars pursued Eberstedt's force; see Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 118; A. Kulinich "Deyatelnost", 112.

had already crossed the river and decided to take a defensive position. At the same time, Baltacı Mehmed Paşa was struggling to organize and speed up the transfer of his troops, which seemed to be demoralized and not ready for a battle as the Russians expected. It was not until the morning of 9th July that the Ottomans were finally able to gather their entire army for the upcoming battle.

Meanwhile, on the night of 8th July, Peter held a new military council, on which it was decided that the army should retreat northwards cautiously, following the Pruth. The current position of Peter's forces was ill-suited for defense, since it was at the lowest point of the terrain, surrounded by hills and forests, which could be used by the enemy. The Tatar captive mentioned that the vizier could position 160 guns, which were not brought during the previous day. With only 122 cannons at his disposal, Peter could not risk to be exposed to enemy bombardment from the surrounding countryside, as his own position would render Russian long-range artillery and they would not be as useful as needed.

The Russians began their retreat at night, carefully observed by the Ottoman-Tatar force. During the next half day, the Petrine forces suffered from the scorching summer heat and the constant raids of the enemy cavalry on its dragging baggage train, protected by the guards' regiments. At 5 p.m. the Russians reached an elbow on the Pruth near Stănileși and had to halt their march, as they were fully surrounded by the Ottoman and Tatar forces, which had positioned on the nearby hills.¹¹³ The Russians had to dig fast to entrench their position, with the baggage train rounded up at the back as a wagenburg, while the divisions of the army took defensive positions in front of it. Only half of the Russian front was buttressed by a low-level earthwork, while the northern sector, facing the Tatars, was protected by a line of sharpened wooden stakes (*rogatky*) prepared in advance by the Russian infantry before their march south of Iași. The only fortune for the tsar's forces was that the enemy artillery was still dragging on, and the Ottomans had only a few mortars, as new guns were arriving gradually. The lack of proper tactics, displayed by the grand vizier aided the Russians. Instead of waiting for his artillery to arrive and properly shell the enemy positions, Baltacı Mehmed Paşa went on the offensive, using his *yeniçeri*, shaped in a wedge formation, without any support from the Ottoman artillery. The second grave mistake of the Ottomans was that they attacked only a single section of the Russian defense – the positions of Hallart's division. If they had used the numerical superiority to penetrate the enemy line at several points simultaneously, the ragtag Russian defense would have collapsed.¹¹⁴ Instead, Hallart's soldiers were able to deploy in defensive stance, fire a storm

¹¹³ See Scheme in the Appendix for the current chapter.

¹¹⁴ According to Sutton's report the *yeniçeri* were likely to attack on their own, without waiting orders from the vizier. This would explain the lack of adequate tactics, but still does not excuse Baltacı Mehmed Paşa for his inability to control his men and impose discipline and order in the army ranks; see B. Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 120.

of salvos at the advancing enemy, while Peter rearranged the army, throwing more regiments at the point of contact and redeploying his artillery to maximize the firepower of his defenses. The ensuing carnage resulted in over 5,000 *yeniçeri* being killed or wounded while the Russians lost only 2,872 men, half of whom were wounded.¹¹⁵ With the fall of the night, the other infantry units arrived and the Ottomans finally arranged their entire artillery. It was, however, too late for a new offensive, for the *yeniçeri* were weary and their *esprit de corps* had dwindled on the bayonets and salvos of the Russian infantry and guns. The Ottoman artillery, on the other hand, began to bombard the Russian position. Peter called for a new military council, which had to decide the fate of the Muscovite army.

Peter sued for the only possible solution – ceasefire. The Russians were badly mauled by starvation, lack of provisions and munitions, as well as hundreds of non-combat casualties, caused by the physical exhaustion of the troops. The Russians had no knowledge of the situation in the Ottoman camp, where the *yeniçeri* refused to charge the enemy positions, and where diseases and heat were taking between 300 and 400 men each day.¹¹⁶ The first Russian proposal was drafted by Sheremetev and called for the reconfirmation of the Treaty of Constantinople (1701). The vizier and Devlet Girei were not inclined to even discuss such terms and renewed the bombardment of the Russian positions. Several hours later, the tsar sent a new emissary – Pyotr Shafirov, who, accompanied by Captain Ostermann and several interpreters, carried conditions which, if implemented, would significantly reduce the effect of Peter's victory at Poltava. Shafirov was to offer Livonia back to Sweden, even including Pskov, if necessary. Peter would recognize Stanisław Leszczyński (the Swedish pawn, installed on the throne in Warsaw by Karl XII in 1706) as the rightful king of Poland-Lithuania and return to the Ottomans all towns and fortresses, taken by the Russians after 1695, including Azov. These terms signal the significant degree of despair that had overtaken Peter's mind at that point.

To the Tsar's relieve, the grand vizier would demand peace, based solely on the Ottoman interest, with the cause of Karl XII sweped under the rug, along with his failed promises for stronger Swedish military presence in Poland. Baltacı Mehmed Paşa pursued his master's interests and included no demands regarding either Livonia or the destruction of St. Petersburg, of which the Swedish King dreamed. Instead, the grand vizier concentrated on regaining the lost lands on the northern Black Sea coast and on decreasing Russian political influence in Poland-Lithuania and the Zaporozhian Host. Although not all of these terms came into being, by 1713, after two more declarations of war on

¹¹⁵ A. Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 112; Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 223-4; According to Kulinich 1,485 Russians were killed while 1,388 were wounded. The Ottoman loses differ. Again according to Kulinich, who quotes Sutton's report on the battle, the Ottomans lost between 2,000 and 9,000 men, while Porfiryev maintains that the Turks suffered no less than 8,000. Davies does not quote specific numbers on the casualties, while Vodarskiy, as Kulinich, uses the numbers, given in Sutton's report; see Ya.E. Vodarskiy, "Legendy", 14.

¹¹⁶ Ya.E. Vodarskiy, "Legendy", 14; Porfiryev, *Petr I*, 224-5.

behalf of the Ottomans, Russia finally returned Azov and destroyed the arsenal at Taganrog, and at the same time the Tsar evacuated his troops from Right-bank Ukraine. The Pruth Campaign, which ended in a tactical stalemate turned out to be a strategic Ottoman victory, rendering Peter's early policies toward the Black Sea utterly useless.

The performance of the Russian army

The Pruth Campaign was the first major setback in Russian military enterprise on the Black Sea frontier since Golytsin's fiasco in 1689 at Perekop. Unlike the lover of his older sister, Peter would not come out of the fight without any political consequences. Russia lost its hold on the Azov Sea and was forced to destroy its only military and naval base south of Voronezh at Taganrog. The Black Sea ships were not sunken, but sent north to Voronezh via the Don, from where they could, in practice, be sent again southwards to retake Azov, but still, they would have to go along way.

Although politically and chronologically the Pruth Campaign has been well studied by historians, especially in Russia, the evaluation of the actual performance of the Petrine army has usually been left behind, since it would trigger too much criticism, adding to the already existing negative notions, regarding the Tsar's probably biggest military failure.¹¹⁷ Only recent studies by Vodarskiy, Davies and Kulinich have begun to pose questions about the actual degree of success and failure, demonstrated by the Muscovite forces. The evaluation of Peter's opponents is a topic of a different debate and the study of the eighteenth-century Ottoman army is a field for future analysis. Regarding the performance of the Russian army, measured by the progress of Peter's military reforms, two main trends of discussion could be pointed out – the battlefield performance of the troops and the organization of the army (logistics, command, and planning).

The battlefield performance of the Russians was their main strongpoint, since the higher percentage of engagements was won by the Petrine army. The first evidence of the Russian military prowess was the siege of Belaya Tserkovy at the end of March (25-26th), when a regiment of only 500 troops and an indefinite number of Cossacks fought off an invading force of Tatars, Zaporozhian Cossacks, and Poles, under Devlet Girei's son. After two daring sorties, the Russians were able to fight off the superior enemy, losing only eight men to a few hundred of the enemies.¹¹⁸ In the following collisions, almost

¹¹⁷ It can be argued that the defeat at Narva was Peter's main misfortune in terms of warfare. However, that is not correct, as Peter did not personally lead the army at Narva, nor the defeat of the Russian army resulted in any major territorial losses, as happened after the Battle of Stănilești and the following treaty.

¹¹⁸ According to the *Khronologicheskii ukazatel* the forces under Devlet Girei were over 33,000 strong, which is an obvious exaggeration. According to the same source, the forces of Devlet lost 1,000 men; see *Khronologicheskii ukazatel*, 39. In his notes Just Juel (<http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus11/Jul/frameset9.htm> - accessed on 06.08.2015) quotes even more astonishing numbers – 65,000 in total: 40,000 Tatars, 20,000

always the Russians gained the upper hand. The vanguard, sent by Sheremetev in May, was able to beat back a far greater Tatar force, as was the case with the forces of Eberstedt which faced the Ottoman-Tatar vanguard on 8th July. The Russians were again successful on the afternoon of the 8th while Sheremetev and Hallart drove off the Ottomans, who were pursuing Eberstedt. Finally, Peter's army was able to repulse all enemy raids during the exhausting march on the 9th, after which the Russians were able to halt the offensive of at least 20,000 *yeniçeri* – the best units available under Baltacı Mehmed Paşa. The grudging acknowledgement, made by the Polish leader at Pruth – Poniatowski, as well as his Swedish allies in the face of Lieutenant-general Axel Sparre, only serves to sum up that Peter more or less had accomplished what he had struggled to achieve with his reforms: “the [Russian] army is a regular army and the Turks cannot surpass it in firepower and will lose heart and accomplish nothing”.¹¹⁹

Despite the ailing mistakes, made on a strategic level, the Russian's tactical performance was beyond doubt superior to that of their enemies. Lessons learned in Livonia, Ingria and especially in the winter of 1708/9 against the Swedes have been understood, if not by most of the generals, at least by the regular troops of the rank and file. The chaos, evident in the fighting against similar enemies at Azov, was replaced by a strict and regulated execution of maneuvers and concentrated fire. The panic and lack of synergy between the separate units, which tormented the Petrine forces at Azov and later at Narva, was exchanged for a proper coordination and the ability to redeploy adequately even under direct attack.¹²⁰ The resilience, sometimes due to sheer physical stubbornness, was to become a trade mark of the Russian infantry, which was going to win awe from its enemies and allies during the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and later during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815).

If the rank and file could take the credit for the more or less honorable field performance, the primary stress of the criticism should be aimed at the people organizing and marshalling the Petrine army. At first glance, the entire responsibility for the Russian military failure could be thrown on Eberstedt for his inability to destroy the Ottoman bridgehead at Pruth, or on Sheremetev, for

Cossacks and 5,000 Poles. Juel's account was based on the vocal narrative of Grigoriy Ivanovich Angelkov – the brigadier who fought off the enemy raid. The fact, that Angelkov held the rank of brigadier means that the forces under his disposal were bigger than a regiment, which was commanded by a colonel. Thus, Angelkov could indeed have only 500 regular troops, but the Cossacks under his command must have been at least twice as many. It must be noted that Belaya Tserkovy was the last garrison west of Kiev, protecting the most important Russian city in Ukraine. It is hardly plausible, that Peter had left it protected by only a handful of men, especially given the fact that Karl XII was still close by in Bender. The fact that the Tatars were commanded by one of Devlet Girei's sons – the khan of the Budjak Horde means that the Tatars against Belaya Tserkovy could not have been as many as the troops under his father at Pruth. It can only be speculated on the exact number of troops that besieged the garrison, but they probably did not exceed 10,000 in total, given that there were at least 2,000 Russians and Cossacks against them. This still gave the attackers a 5:1 advantage.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in B. Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 120. This comment was made prior to the *yeniçeri*'s attack on the Russian camp in the afternoon of 9th July. Poniatowski and Sparre advised the grand vizier to blockade the Russians and starve them.

¹²⁰ This was already evident at Narva, when Sheremetev's infantry executed an excellent maneuver to break the last desperate charge of the Swedish dragoons and heavy horses.

his numerous delays along the way south. Things, however, were a bit more complicated than that. As Kulinich notes in his article, the failure of the Pruth Campaign began on the first day of its planning.¹²¹ The entire logistic scheme was based on the misleading conception of Peter that sufficient provisions could have been gathered from the population of Ukraine and Belarus. As it seems, Peter failed to acknowledge the fact that only a year before, these very lands had been devastated by the ravaging Swedish forces, during their desperate march toward Moscow and later on – toward Poltava. What the Swedes did not gather, the Russians took to feed the grand army, mustered by Peter to screen his opponent's maneuvers.¹²² A year later, the local population was still struggling to reinvigorate the agriculture, while simultaneously was trying to pay the annual taxes for support of the Tsar's aggressive policy in Livonia and the siege of Riga. During the Pruth Campaign Peter required from the same people to provide for four months, for a third consecutive year, this time for an army of almost 80,000 men. Golitsin, who was charged with the task, expressed his concern on several occasions, noting that the volumes of provisions, envisioned by the tsar were impossible to achieve. By the spring of 1711, only 13,000 quarters of bread were gathered, along with 6,000 sheep, 2,400 horses, and 4,200 oxen.¹²³ To clarify the numbers, the 3,000 Kalmyks, fighting under Azov in 1697 would consume 300 sheep per week. The animals, gathered by Golitsin would have been enough for 3,000 men for 20 weeks – the exact time, required by Peter. The trouble came from the fact that Peter's army numbered 79,000. As for the bread, a quarter was the daily portion for a single soldier.

There was also a lack of warhorses – the constant scourge of the Russian logistics under Peter.¹²⁴ In May, Knyaz Dolgorukiy's dragoon regiments did not have enough horses, and some 2-300 men had to march on foot.¹²⁵ The similar problem must have troubled Sheremetev in June when he forbade his dragoons to ride their animals, which were probably exhausted by the summer heat and were insufficient in numbers. The hope that the Moldavians and the Wallachians would provide further supplies on the spot would prove to be a chimera. Moldavia had been devastated by droughts and swarms of locust, which destroyed even the small quantities of grain that the locals were able to collect. While Peter was negotiating the armistice with Baltacı Mehmed Paşa, the latter sent part of his supplies to the ailing Russians - 180 tons of bread, ninety tons of rice and over three tons of coffee.¹²⁶ During their return march north, the army was so exhausted that it marched only two hours a day.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Kulinich, "Deyatelnost", 110.

¹²² The winter of 1708/9 sought the entanglement of no less than 150,000 men in a rather limited areal.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Similar trends regarding the Persian campaign would be observed in the following subchapter.

¹²⁵ Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 115.

¹²⁶ Vodarskiy, "Legendy", 14.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Given these circumstances, it is a small wonder that the Russians were able to march the tremendous distance of over 1,200 kilometers, and to be able to fight well enough as they did not lose any major engagement.¹²⁸ Though the army covered this space for four months it was still a feat.¹²⁹ This was a distance of which western armies did not need to concern, given the distances between the main supply centers and the frontlines. In comparison, the Ottomans had to march 400 kilometers from Edirne to the Danube, which was still a long way to go, compared to the movement of French forces during the contemporaneous War of the Spanish Succession. The Turks would also benefit from their long-standing logistics system, closely linked to the obligations of the local population.¹³⁰ A further problem for the movement of the Muscovite forces was the lack or even the absence of road infrastructure, as well as the limited amount of drinking water. Most of the march in Moldavia went through an area, which Dimitrie Cantemir described as a desert.¹³¹ To sum up – the combination of bad logistical planning, the problems with the weather (great number of rainfalls and storms in the spring and blistering heat in the summer), as well as the lack of proper infrastructure, contributed to the slow progress of the Russian army, and led to a significant number of casualties, exceeding the combat loses in a ratio of at least 10:1.

Last but not least, the performance of the commanders should be judged. Regarding Davies, the main reason for the failure of the campaign was the native noblemen-generals, serving under Peter. The so-called “foreign” party (nyemtsi) was the one giving better advices. In contrast, the too stubborn and not so competent leaders of Peter’s Muscovite clique repeatedly failed to obey their direct orders and demonstrated lack of good decision-making. Such perception of the campaign is as erroneous as the desire of Russian historians to blame the Romanian princes for misleading Peter and failing to support his cause. Indeed, Sheremetev was the one among Russian generals bearing the greatest responsibility, as he was the one to keep the vanguard regiments and he was the person who had to establish a proper chain of supply depots for the bulk of the army and also to prepare a series of bridges along the way. Though Sheremetev did demonstrate a certain lack of decisiveness and resolve, the Knyaz was limited in various ways by the logistical factors already clarified above.

The small number of pack animals and horses for the cavalry, as well as the permanent lack of provisions, were a constant scourge for the movement of Sheremetev’s division. When we add the 15,000 – 20,000 Tatars, regularly screening his movements and threatening his flanks, the picture of the sluggish

¹²⁸ Kulinich, “Deyatelnost”, 111.

¹²⁹ Thus, the average daily speed was 10 kilometers per day, making the rate far less impressive than the distance itself.

¹³⁰ The influence of the local population for the effectiveness of Ottoman logistics is an interesting topic, which require further study. So far, local historiography has done a lot in the study of the so-called privileged casts in the local society but seldom do these studies connect to the overall Ottoman military effort.

¹³¹ Kulinich, “Deyatelnost”, 111.

advance transforms into a process of bitter struggle to carry on marching against all odds. It is true that at certain points of the campaign the Knyaz did not act with the required skill, but this only complemented the already existing problems, and was not a primary factor which hindered the Russian progress. The same can be said about Janus von Eberstedt's actions. Though being one of the so-called "foreigners", Eberstedt was not immuned to the mistakes of his Russian colleagues. During the episode of 8th July 1711, Eberstedt's ill-thought decision to retreat rather than to attack was the direct reason for the encirclement of the Russian army at Stănilești. As for the advice of Hallart that Peter should take Bender instead of marching south, Davies expresses the notion that such a move might have won Peter the war.¹³² According to Davies, such an offence could have brought Karl XII into Russian hands or, at least, Peter could barter Bender for Azov in consecutive diplomatic negotiations. This idea, however, is far from flawless. First and foremost, Bender was far less significant than Azov and Ahmed III, a sagacious politician, would have never opted for such a deal to be made. Furthermore, the rhetoric of Sheremetev, regarding Karl XII's possible escape as soon as the first Russian units appeared in sight was very correct. Though the king of Sweden was by no means a coward, he was determined to win over the foolhardy Ottoman support but if he had fallen in Russian hands he would not have achieved his goals easily. The march against Bender would have denied the Russians any opportunity to attract local allies and would have left the Moldavians and Wallachians to the mercy of the grand vizier. The situation should be rethought through the eyes of the contemporaries. While Bender promised a hard-fought siege with doubtful consequences and no possible allies, the march to the Danube held the possibility of tens of thousands local reinforcements, as well as the probability of better provisioning for the starving army.

No analysis of the strategic flaws of the Pruth Campaign would be full without turning attention to Peter himself. The tsar's major mistake came from his adverse judgment of the resilience of his fellow Orthodox Christian rulers on the Danube. While in no way Panslavist, as Davies incorrectly notes, Peter was seeing himself as a unifying figure of the Eastern Christians, who bore the legacy of Rome and Constantinople, and who was the only great, independent Orthodox monarch in the world. The religious rhetoric, however, is not as convincing, as the practical necessities for more men and supplies and for gaining a better strongpoint against the Ottomans.¹³³ Peter did take into consideration the possible scenario of marching against Bender and ultimately, he made the right decision to go further south. Capturing Moldavia and Wallachia and setting his army on the borders of the Ottoman heartlands would

¹³² Davies, *Empire and Military Revolution*, 123.

¹³³ The lack of religious loyalty was demonstrated by Peter during his Persian campaign, as it will be observed later.

have been of far greater strategic value, than marching a thousand kilometers only to besiege a fortress in the middle of the Jedisan Steppe.

Peter's other main flaw came from his lack of perception regarding the resources his state could muster, as well as from his wishful thinking towards the movement of his army from Livonia to Wallachia in just three months. As it was mentioned above, in 1695 and 1696, his army needed no less than two months to deploy to an area, which was just at the borders of Russia. Then the army was less massive and had a greater number of cavalry. During all Azov Campaigns, river transportation proved crucial for the speed of the Russian progress. In Moldavia, however, Peter could not count on even a single vessel, and all munitions, food, and baggage had to be transferred to foot. In addition, the army had to march through one of the most unfavorable regions in Europe – the Pripyat marshes. Even during World War II, while planning operation Barbarossa, the German General staff avoided to send troops through Pripyat and to use the marshy countryside as a border, separating the Army Groups Center and South. Peter would demand a daring and over the top feat of his men, both from the ordinary soldiers and the generals, organizing the whole enterprise. As noted above, the fact that the Russians were able to reach the Pruth in the first place was already a small wonder, owing to both the resilience of the army and the Tsar's will to go forth with his plans. It was a march achieved not due to, but, rather, despite of the logistics.

Although the political results of the campaign were rather disastrous for Russia, the field experience, gained by the troops and the officers proved crucial for Peter's further campaigns during the Great Northern War. Without the Pruth example, Russia's later engagements in Holstein and Schleswig would not have been possible, and neither would the conquest of Finland. The lessons of combining navy and land forces for mutual support, as well as establishing a solid chain of magazine and supplies, although learned the hard way, proved invaluable for the development of Russian strategic thought in the long run.

3.6. The Kuban Campaign (1711)

Historical background

So far, Russian historiography has perceived the Kuban Campaign as a secondary endeavor, aimed at supporting Peter's expedition in Moldavia by diverting the forces of the Kuban and Crimean Tatars and their local allies. According to the old-school theory, the army of P.M. Apraksin (brother of the famous Admiral F.M. Apraksin), was set in motion only to act as a diversion, which was to draw a substantial number of enemy forces away from the western theater of operations. Recent research, however, has focused on the notion, that the Kuban Campaign was an independent offensive. It was aimed at countering Tatar incursions against Azov and cutting possible Kuban Host support for the

main forces of Crimea. Moreover to assert and extend Russian control over the steppe south of Azov and also to link Peter's domains with the Circassian allies of St. Petersburg. The size of the invading force, the timeline of the campaign, the overall results of the incursion, as well as the way Peter perceived the offensive, point to the fact that it was not a mere distraction, but rather an all-out commitment. Ever since the end of the Holy League War, the Crimean Khanate has continuously hosted raids against Russian possessions in Ukraine and along the Don. The acquisition of Azov was also related to constant confrontation with the Kuban Host. Thus, the upkeep of a substantial garrison was required in order to secure Russia's newly incorporated territories. Apart from the purely strategic factors, a campaign against the Kuban Host was also perceived necessary due to the substantial number of renegade Cossacks who sought asylum under the Nogai Host following the uprisings in 1704 and the Mazepa rebellion. These so-called *Nekrasovtsy* were further supplemented by the old-believer (*staroobryadny*) Cossacks, who denounced the tsar's authority. The incorporation of these renegades and their purging was an essential element of Russian policy along the Volga and the Don for the whole of eighteenth century, as demonstrated during Pugachev's Rebellion in 1773-5.

Historiography

Apraksin's campaign along the Kuban River has received insubstantial attention from scholars of the period outside of Russia. The bulk of available data can be extracted from a number of articles, published in several periodicals. The primary source on the subject is General Nikolay Brandenburg's publication from 1867.¹³⁴ This text is based on a primary source – the “*Posluzhnogo spiska Kubanskogo pokhoda*”, drawn by Count Apraksin himself in 1711. This document includes a substantial number of notes, regarding the preparation of the campaign, as well as names of officers and troops, participating in it. According to Brandenburg's own evaluation, only one-fourth of the whole text is of any particular use - regarding the development and outcome of the campaign.¹³⁵ Additional information can be acquired from modern scholars, dealing with the Kuban expedition. Yu.V. Priymak has contributed with two recent papers, regarding the preparations, historical context and development of the Kuban Campaign, demonstrating critical approach toward the existing sources and the notions, established by Brandenburg.¹³⁶ He presents a revisionist, with regard to Soviet-era works, perspective on the logistics, organization and conduct of the Russian army. The campaign is briefly presented

¹³⁴ N. Brandenburg, “Kubanskiy pokhod 1711” in *Voennyi sbornik* 3 (1867), 29-42.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29

¹³⁶ Yu.V. Priymak, “Kuban campaign of P. M. Apraksin's troops in 1711 (From the History of the Ottoman-Russian wars 1710-1713)”, *Nauchnye problemy gumanitarnykh issledovaniya*, 1 (2012), 88-94; Yu.V. Priymak, “Diplomatic, Military and Political Activity of Russia in the Sea of Azov and the Northwest Caucasus in the context of Kuban Campaign in 1711”, *Nauchnye problemy gumanitarnykh issledovaniya* 11 (2011), 43-8.

from Tatar perspective in an article by O.G. Sanin, who aims at presenting the overall participation of the Crimean Khanate in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1710-1711.¹³⁷

Preparations

Following a series of winter and spring raids, carried out by the Crimean Tatars, Peter I decided to retaliate along the entire southern front. Apart from the force operating along the western front, the Tsar designated a second army to be gathered in central Ukraine and operate along the Dnieper in order to advance against the Perekop. This force was bestowed to Buturlin and Skoropadskiy, who were unable neither to muster the perceived forces, nor to attack Devlet Girei's army in such manner, as to divert his forces away from the Moldavian theater. The second army, which had to operate outside the scope of Peter's direct command, was the one designed to act toward the Kuban. Its creation was not a mere response to the Tatar incursions in the early months of 1711. The Kuban expedition was meticulously prepared by Peter himself as early as the first days of January 1711.¹³⁸ The task of commanding the offensive was given to Count P. M. Apraksin, governor of Kazan. His forces were supposed to operate along the Volga, collecting reinforcements on their way south and to link with the Kalmyks under Ayuka Khan at Tsaritsyn. Apraksin took his time for the preparation of his main forces in Kazan and set sail along the Volga River on 13th May 1711, ahead of some 2,987 troops.¹³⁹ In addition to these soldiers sailing along the Volga, a cavalry force was sent by land, through Sinbirsk and Saratov. There were a total of 3,566 horsemen, of which 200 were sent toward the Kama River, probably to purchase additional horses for the campaign.¹⁴⁰ Apraksin arrived in Tsaritsyn on 30th May 1711 and waited there for the arrival of Colonel Richter, who came from Astrakhan ahead of 1,113 troops from the Astrakhan Regiment. The soldiers (some 20,474 strong) were quartered in Tsaritsyn to wait for the Kalmyk forces, which arrived on 27th June.¹⁴¹ Brandenburg makes an interesting note that some of the Kalmyks were even wearing heavy armor, probably mimicking contemporaries. The number of regular foot and cavalry units was further supplemented by 1,000 Yaik Cossacks, and a number of *deti boyarskie* and *inozemtsy* (foreigners) bringing the overall strength of Apraksin forces to 13,888 men. When it combined with

¹³⁷ O.G. Sanin, "Krimskoe Khanstvo v Russko-turetskoy voyne 1710-1711 goda", *Istoriko-publitsisticheskiy alymanakh "Moskva-Krym"*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 2000), 76-87.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Brandenburg, "Kubanskiy pokhod", 30; Brandenburg makes a mistake in calculating the available footmen. He lists 590 soldiers from the governors' own battalion, as well as 1,197 from the Kazan regiment and 1,200 from Afanasiy Mamonov's regiment. Brandenburg mistakenly calculates them as 2,897 men.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. These included 600 men from Apraksin's own squadron, as well as 1,333 soldiers from the Kazanskiy dragoon regiment and 1,092 troops from the Sviyazhinskiy dragoon regiment.

¹⁴¹ Priymak, "Kuban campaign", 89; Brandenburg, "Kubanskiy pokhod", 32.

the Kalmyk contingent under Ayuka's son Chakdorjap, the Kuban army increased to 34,362 strong.

Further diplomatic measures, undertaken by Knyaz Aleksandr Bekovich-Cherkasskiy provided the support of the Kabardian clans, which were drawn into the Russian sphere of influence.¹⁴²

The campaign

Apraksin left Tsaritsyn on 3rd July 1711 ahead of his combined forces, advised by two generals and 5 adjutants. His army was to proceed to Azov and enter the Kuban Steppe from there, crossing the Don close to the key fortress. Brandenburg has meticulously listed the day to day route from Tsaritsyn to Azov, an advance, which took thirty four days of marching.¹⁴³ The march was carried out in twenty nine stages, covering 816 kilometers or roughly 28.1 kilometers per stage, which was quite an impressive speed, especially given the nature of the terrain.¹⁴⁴ The fact that the Tsaritsyn-Azov route had become a vital military highway probably did buttress the army's ability for rapid progression, given the established communication lines and the well-studied roads, water sources and pastures, which were in constant use since 1695.

The army arrived at Azov on 5th August and remained there for ten days in order to replenish its supplies and to give rest to the troops. The march was resumed on 14th August. Here it is essential to note that by the time Apraksin reached Azov the Pruth Campaign had already ended. He, however, had not received any news about the signing of the peace treaty between Russia and the Porte, in which an article was included regarding the Kuban Host and the suspension of any Cossack or Kalmyk incursions in its territories. According to Russian sources, Apraksin became aware of the treaty in mid-September and continued his operations until then, as if the war with the Ottomans and Tatars was still ongoing. Whether this is true or the Kuban Campaign was continued as a form of retaliation and revenge for what had happened in Moldavia is still a matter of open debate.

In any case, the Kuban valley represented a tempting target with its abundance of livestock and rather limited defenses. According to contemporary Ottoman sources, the fortifications, held by the Porte apart from Taman, were in desuetude, with insignificant number of troops guarding their half-demolished walls.¹⁴⁵ The overall strength of the Kuban Host's forces, along with the 10,000 renegade Cossacks and staroobrydny, was some 23,000, most of whom were poorly armed and ill-trained. Artillery was practically non-existent outside the walls of Ottoman fortifications and even there, the number of available guns was

¹⁴² Priymak, "Diplomatic, Military and Political Activity", 47.

¹⁴³ Brandenburg, "Kubanskiy pokhod", 33.

¹⁴⁴ The army marched 25 days and rested nine, which brings the medium marching speed per day at 32 kilometers per day – a rather astonishing figure for the Age.

¹⁴⁵ Priymak, "Kuban campaign", 89.

insignificant. Apraksin would enjoy the advantage of both numbers and quality – a rarity in the context of Russo-Ottoman confrontation throughout history.

The initial stages of the campaign were rather devoid of events. For two weeks the Russians marched through barren, lifeless steppe, without encountering any resistance whatsoever. On 26th August, approximately 160 kilometers north of the Kuban River, Apraksin separated his forces in two columns. The vanguard contingent, commanded by Colonel Ivan Lyvov and consisting of 18,460 men, moved forward with the idea to prevent the concentration of enemy forces following a series of skirmishes with the Nogais on 24th. The only major enemy concentration was vanquished on 29th near the Kuban River, with 5,000 of the Tatars drowning in the river and almost 22,000 falling into captivity (women and children included). The Kalmyks and the dragoons were able to wipe out the entire force of the nureddin-sultan – some 12,000 men, killing all but 700 who were listed among the overall number of captured.¹⁴⁶ Along with the decisive victory came the opportunity for unopposed plunder. By the end of August, Apraksin was able to acquire 2,000 camels, 39,200 horses, 190,000 cattle and 227,000 sheep.¹⁴⁷

After devastating the entire Kuban valley, Apraksin marched northeast along the river and then back to Azov through the Kuban Steppe. It was in the beginning of September that the Russians received news of a 4,000 Nogai force, returning home after a raid in the Ukraine during the early months of the summer. A strong detachment of Kalmyks was sent forward and the Nogais were badly mauled, losing all of their booty, along with several thousand Russian captives, who were freed by the Kalmyks. A few days later, the main force under Count Apraksin was attacked by 7,000 men, led by the nureddin-sultan himself. Of these, 3,000 were the *Nekrasovtsy* Cossacks. The battle between the two forces took place on 6th September and ended with a new decisive Russian victory, which significantly weakened the Kuban Hosts' capacity to raid in the following years. However, it was at this point that Count Apraksin received the news of the disaster at Pruth and decided to end his offensive in haste. The possibility of a new, larger Tatar force, coming from the west to relieve the Nogais was vexing and the Count would not risk to be cut off from his main supply base. He retreated in good order towards Azov and then traveled further north to Tsaritsyn, finally reaching Kazan on 29th December 1711.

The performance of the Russian army

Apraksin's campaign along the Kuban was probably the first successful military endeavor, carried out in such proportions by the Russian state against the Pontic nomads. The operation's decisiveness and positive results were in striking

¹⁴⁶ Brandenburg, "Kubanskiy pokhod", 38.

¹⁴⁷ Priymak, "Kuban campaign", 89.

contrast to the performance of the armies of Golytsin during the offensives against Crimea in 1685 and 1687. The devastating results of the latter were probably among the reasons why Peter did not want to risk a direct expedition in the steppes for two and a half decades. The fact that the Tsar was willing to send a force of such proportions forward meant that a substantial military self-esteem had been acquired after the successful campaign against Sweden in 1708-1709 and the suppressing of the Mazepa uprising.

Lessons from the three Azov Campaigns have apparently been well learned and Peter opted for a small-sized, regular force, with no substantial artillery or baggage train attached to it, supplemented by a considerable number of local specialist troops – the Kalmyks. The usage of small-scale, independent units was to prove very successful in the following military expeditions, both in Persia and against the Crimean Tatars. What the Kuban Campaign clearly demonstrates is that high-quality, limited-quantity military units were far better suited for achieving considerable success against mobile and evasive enemies in comparison to massive, slow-moving armies, drawn in the fashion of European standards of the Age.

As with the overall conduct along the Pruth expedition, Russian forces on the Kuban performed excellently, winning every engagement with the enemy. Discipline was high, battle orders were well executed and the insignificant number of casualties – 31, demonstrates that Apraksin and his men enjoyed a considerable advantage in terms of quality with regard to their opponents. A fact stands out - that the Count's forces were always superior to their enemies in terms of numbers with the combination of mobile, offensive tactics and the correct disposition of forces. This is a clear indication of not only better military capabilities with regard to the previous expeditions, but also of a buildup in the tactical and strategic thinking of Russian generals. While Shein was reluctant to risk an open battle with the Kuban Host in 1697, Apraksin managed to strike his opponents one at a time, defeating the entire Kuban Host in three separate instances and denying them any chance of concentration.

Logistics prove to work quite fine during the Kuban Campaign. Although the army passed through tracts of uninhabited, waterless regions, there are no indications that sickness, hunger or lack of drinkable water posed any problem for Apraksin's advance. There are no certain figures regarding the size of the baggage train or the way provisions were prepared and distributed during the march to the Kuban River and back. The fact that the army managed to keep its strength and to proceed in a rather unprecedented marching speed throughout the entire campaign, on the other hand, indicates that the Kuban expedition was probably the best organized in terms of army supply for the entire period analyzed in this dissertation.¹⁴⁸ The combination of high marching speed and

¹⁴⁸ Even after entering the barren steppe, Apraksin's men would continue their advance with a medium speed of approximately 25-28 kilometers per day.

excellent upkeep leave no place for doubt in the ability of Count Apraksin to organize and manage his forces.

Although military success in the east was overshadowed by the Pruth disaster, the Kuban Campaign should be regarded as one of the finest examples of Russian military capability during the first decades of the eighteenth century. The pattern of using a second army in the east to open another front against the Ottomans and their local allies would become a *condicio sine qua non* for future campaigns up until the First World War. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1736-1739, General Peter von Lacy would follow Apraksin's steps in operating with a small-scale, mobile force and extracting considerable gains while keeping losses generally low. Another valuable (in Russian terms) example, set by Apraksin and followed by commanders in the generations to come, was the devastation of steppe countryside and the destruction or acquisition of the nomads' main source of income – their cattle. Although not as significant as territorial gains, the destruction of the nomadic economy would devastate the Hosts' potential for waging offensive wars against Russia and in general attributed considerably to the long term success of St. Petersburg in subduing the Pontic Steppe and its people.

3.7. Conclusion

The review of the early Southern Campaigns has outlined several essential trends of the development in the Russian army, which remained fundamental for its further evolution. First and foremost, the rank and file would constantly improve their discipline, military skills and would enjoy increasing superiority over local opponents. Secondly, the military and administrative apparatus would try to plan each consecutive campaign on the basis of previous experience, the disaster at Pruth serving as an important example. The launching of Russia's campaigns in Germany and Denmark after 1713 would have been impossible without the experience, gained during the campaigns in Moldavia. The basic idea of how offensives should be undertaken and which main objectives should be set in order to overcome Tatar and Ottoman resistance was also outlined during these early confrontations with the Porte and its minions. Whether Russia and its administration – civic and military, were able to capitalize on the experience accumulated between 1695 and 1711, is a subject of the following pages of this dissertation.

Following the defeat at Pruth, Peter transferred his attention exclusively in the Baltic region. His expeditions in Finland and the campaigns against Schleswig and Bremen were followed by the slow-motion of the Great Northern War's final years. In 1716 Peter began to probe for suitable means to exert Russian influence toward Inner Asia and sought a possible way of establishing a land route to India and to the lucrative trading networks of the Far East. The rapid development of the Persian crisis and the failure of the ill-fated expedition

of Knyaz Bekovich-Cherkasskiy convinced the Tsar that the route to India went through Dagestan. Before the ink had dried on the peace treaty with Sweden, Peter was already planning his next big move – the invasion of Persia.