



The Faces of Intervention: The Experience of American Expedition Forces in Siberia

Introduction

In August 1918, the United States sent an expedition force number up to 9,000 to Siberia to 'safeguard[ing] the rear of the Czecho-Slovaks operating from Vladivostok' and to provide protection for military supplies and stores in the Russian Far East. The last American soldiers in Siberia evacuated 14 months later, virtually achieving nothing besides acting as guards of the Trans-Siberian railway.

Objective

The Siberian Intervention is an underresearched topic, and there was only one book that addressed soldiers' combat experiences in Siberia. This research hopes to find out:

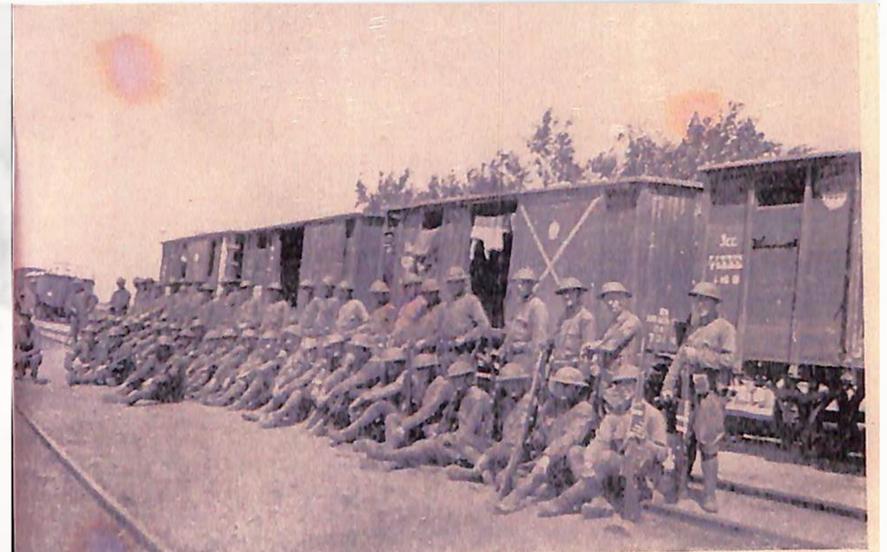
1. What have the American soldiers experienced in Siberia, especially their non-combat experiences?
2. The differences and similarities of the Siberian experiences from other Americans serving in other expeditionary forces (e.g. in France).
3. The factors that lead to their more or less eccentric experiences.

Methodology

This study examined soldiers' diaries, letters, photos, postcards, reminiscences, poems and also their questionnaires for the World War I Research project. Besides, there were a few relevant newspaper articles that allowed this research to look into how the intervention and the soldiers were portrayed at that time.

Findings

1. The soldiers felt that they were sent to Siberia for invalid reasons. The Czecho-Slovaks no longer needed rescue when the Americans arrived. The confusing mission and policy led to a loss of meaning for the soldiers. Private Joseph P. Ahearn questioned, 'what in hell are we doing here?'
2. The off-duty life in Siberia seemed to occupy a larger proportion of soldiers' memory than their actions. A large part of soldiers' diaries was about their leisure activities in cities and rarely about combat actions. One of the soldiers even kept the menu of a Christmas dinner organized by the YMCA.
3. The Siberian Intervention brought a change in soldiers' conception of morality against the backdrop of the prevalent temperance movement. Soldiers drank beer and vodka and gambled to combat the coldness and boringness. Alcohol consumption had also led to disciplinary problems.



A significant proportion of soldiers from the 27th and the 31st Infantry Regiments were assigned with guard duties on the Trans-Siberian Railway. For many months, soldiers garrisoned outside urban areas had to live in freight cars.

4. The White Russian Army was not allied with the American forces. Rather, the Japanese-supported Cossacks (such as Kalmikov and Semenov) constantly posed threat towards the Americans.
5. The American soldiers hated the Japanese despite they were officially allies and would sometimes get into conflicts. They were morally disgusted by the brutal acts conducted by the Japanese soldiers against the Russians. Also, the Americans were well aware of the territorial ambitions of Japan on Far Eastern Russia.

Conclusion

The Siberian Intervention were not well-known by the Americans, even more so when compared with the forces in France or even in North Russia. The lack of publicity and public support made the Siberia veterans feel that their contributions were unrecognized.

The experience of the doughboys in the Siberian Intervention was very different from that of Europe. Siberia was not about artillery bombardment or trenches, but patrolling the Trans-Siberian Railway and had some random Bolsheviks firing at them, while also suffering hostility from some white Russians. It was very rare to see a soldier hate or guard against its allies in Europe, while a soldier in Siberia tended to be constantly afraid of the Japanese and its collaborators, which constituted a unique situation.

Still, American soldiers in Siberia and other theatres of the Great War shared a love for gambling and alcohol as their entertainment. Veterans returning to America seemed to have led to a loosening of moral standards starting from the 1920s.

Acknowledgement

I am very thankful to have Professor Charles Schencking to as my supervisor over the past year. This research project is supported and funded by the Undergraduate Research Fellowship Programme.