

## Colours 2016 Write Up

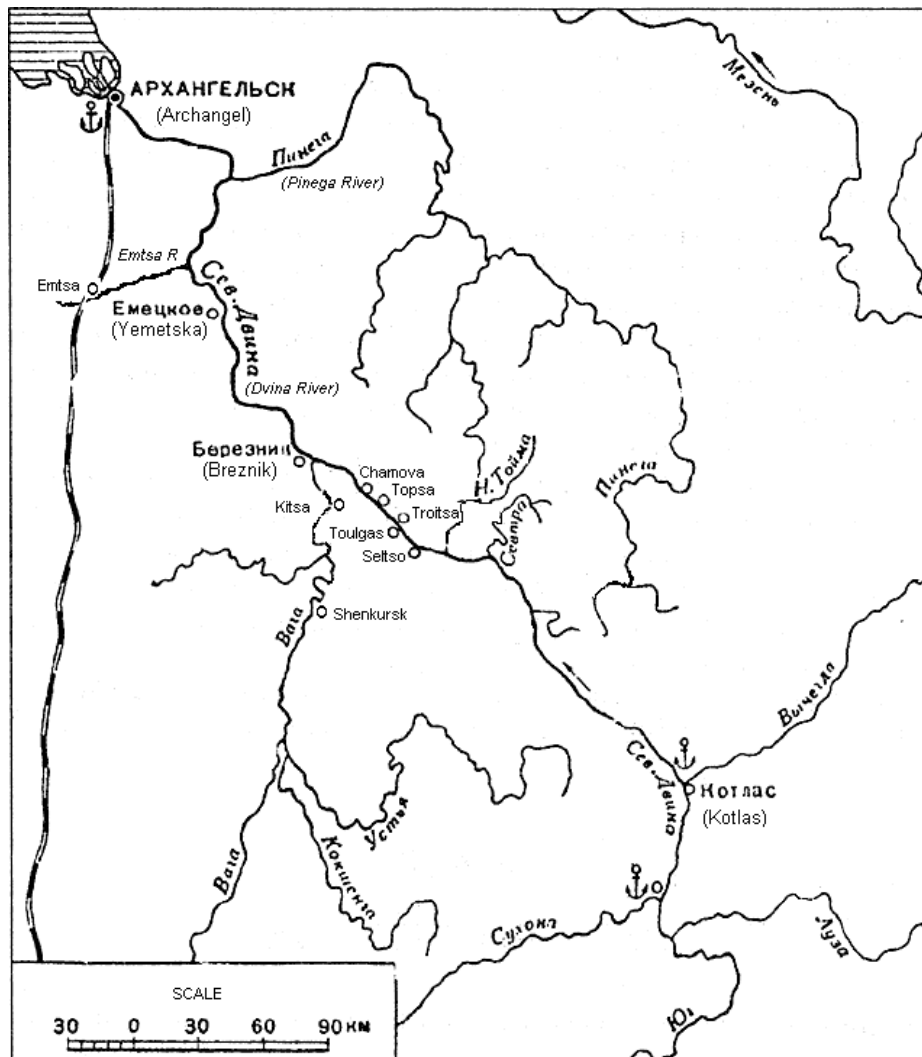
This year's Colours took place at the Newbury Race Course on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September and the NWS presented a game at the show set during the Russian Civil War on the Dvina River in North Russia.

### Historical Background

In early 1918 the leaders of the British and French governments decided that the Allies needed to begin a military intervention in North Russia. They hoped to achieve three major objectives:

1. Prevent the Allied war material stockpiles in Archangel from falling into German or Bolshevik hands.
2. Mount an offensive to rescue the Czechoslovak Legion, which was stranded along the Trans-Siberian Railroad.
3. Resurrect the Eastern Front by defeating the Bolshevik army with the assistance of the Czech Legion and an expanded anti-Bolshevik force and in the process stop the spread of communism and the Bolshevik cause in Russia.

Aside from the railway running south to Vologda, the rivers of the region were the main communication links with the south during the summer months when the great thaw made the tracks and the few roads boggy and often impassable. The only significant settlements lay in the clearings along the river banks which the tracks tended to follow. Over the rest of the land great coniferous forests stretched to the horizon. The river Dvina, a mile and a half wide in places, was nevertheless relatively shallow with shifting sandbanks.



During 1918 the port of Archangel was occupied and limited advances were made along the rivers and railway lines but the forces then available to the Whites and their international allies were diminutive and the lines of communication became overstretched when the rivers froze over during the winter months. The original objectives of the operation had by then become largely irrelevant and over the winter months, during which General Ironside's forces were holding the line, public sentiment and political will had shifted from overt help for the anti-Bolshevist forces to a desire for withdrawal of allied forces.

By 26<sup>th</sup> May 1919 ships carrying the first men of the two brigades of the "North Russian Relief Force" were approaching the now ice free mouth of the Dvina. The then minister for war, Winston Churchill's fervent anti-Bolshevist views and political skill though had managed to turn the British public sentiment into a rallying call that resulted in the raising of two brigades of volunteers. Even Churchill knew that this force was only temporarily assigned, but he planned to make as much use of it as he could in the time available and use it to spearhead an advance along the Dvina and attempt a junction with Admiral Kolchak's forces before it had then to withdraw. To this end Captain Altham was informed that his "river armada" was to advance on Kotlas at once.

Altham's river armada was by this time made up of the following:

- Large river monitor: Humber (1260 tons, 9½ knots, 2x6" Mk XIV, 1x6" Mk VII, 2x4.7" how, 4x3" AA, 6xMG)
- Small river monitors: M23, M25 (540 tons, 11 knots, 1x7.5", 1x3" AA, 1x12pdr, 2x3pdr)
- Small river monitor: M27 (540 tons, 11 knots, 3x4" Mk IX, 2x3" AA, 2x3pdr)
- Small river monitors: M29, M31, M33 (355 tons, 9 knots, 2x6" Mk XII, 1x3" AA)
- Insect class river gunboats: Cicala, Moth, Cricket, Cockchafer, Glow-worm (645 tons, 14 knots, 2x6" Mk II, 2x12pdr, 6xMG)

The Bolshevik North Dvina flotilla under the Deputy Chairman, P.F. Vinogradov was based at Kotlas and formed from volunteer seamen of the Northern Ledovitaya (Arctic) Flotilla that had fled from Archangel. At the commencement of the spring campaign of 1919 the flotilla included 3 combat detachments, in which were counted:

- 6 river gunboats
- 7 armed tugboats
- 6 escort vessels
- 11 motor patrol boats
- 15 transport barges
- 3 dispatch boats

The gunboats were converted from steamboats and armed with two to four 75-130mm guns.

On 19<sup>th</sup> June an operation was launched to capture the high ground between Topsa and Troitsa, the flotilla co-operating with Graham's brigade. HMS Cockchafer did particularly good work in getting up the narrow Kurgomin channel within a mile of Topsa both supporting the assault and helping to repulse a counter attack. HMS Glow-worm and HMS Humber, M27 and M33 were actively engaged with the Bolo gunboats in the main river. This brought the flotilla to the edge of the enemy minefield, and for the next week minesweeping had to be carried out under very difficult conditions; the river levels were falling and the water was so thick that it was impossible to see to any appreciable depth, even from a seaplane. It was necessary to explore channels with small steam-boats, clear mines where discovered, buoy them, and then send up the Dance class minesweepers to sweep up the heavier and deeper moored mines. All this had to be done within range of the enemy flotilla. They were under fire from their guns daily and even at times under direct machine gun and rifle fire.

By 27<sup>th</sup> June a passage had been swept to Troitsa and HMS Cricket ran through a heavy barrage from the enemy guns and arrived under the high cliffs by Troitsa which provided some measure of protection. The following day the remainder of the flotilla and transports carrying the Brigade

Headquarters followed after the British gunboats had driven back the Bolshevik flotilla with their gunfire. In the course of the minesweeping operations however both Sword Dance and Fandango were mined and sunk.

An advance on Gorodok, Borok and Selmenga on the right bank and Seltso and Nijni Seltso on the left was planned for 10th August by the Sadlier-Jackson brigade. In preparation monitor M33 had moved forward on the afternoon of the 9th but the Bolos spotted her and brought forward a couple of artillery pieces and opened fire on her with 2x4.2" guns. Within a few minutes M33 had been hit, so she started to get underway to shift her position, but was hit again before she could do so. Damage was sufficient to necessitate her retirement to the flotilla anchorage. Her place in the advanced position was taken by one of the other M class monitors. During the night she too was shelled and although near missed was not hit but still felt compelled to shifted her position.

The attack was timed to co-inside with flank marches on both the left and right banks. The main attacks were directed at Borok and Seltso, HMS Humber, M27, M31 and M33 providing artillery support to the Borok attack, which was instrumental in breaking the defence, assisted by Seaplanes for both spotting and bombing. A kite balloon tethered to a barge was also used to spot fall of shot. HMS Humber, assisted by HMS Cicala, then engaged the Bolshevik gunboats which soon retired, one with a pronounced list. CMBs were also employed to break up, with their machine guns, Bolshevik infantry gathering on the left bank for a counter attack. Seaplane operations were however severely restricted by mist and rain. All of the allied objectives were eventually taken following a stubborn and well co-ordinated defence, pushing back the Bolshevik forces ten miles.

This operation marked the high water mark of the allied advance. The river was now extensively mined, the forward positions handed over to white Russian forces and the river flotilla withdrawn to Archangel.

The final evacuation of the allies from Archangel took place on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1919, the British and French governments leaving only limited supplies of food and war materiel for their erstwhile Russian allies with which to carry on the resistance and keep the population fed over the winter. General Miller and his White Russian forces did not immediately collapse following the allied withdrawal. In the end though their collapse was inevitable as desertion and mutiny caused Miller's white Russian army simply to disintegrate.

## **The Game**

The game re-created the fighting around Troitsa in June and July 1919 with the British Gunboats and White Russian land forces attempting to advance along the river in the face of Bolshevik defences. Most of the action took place on the river, which was laid out in twisting dog leg, though there were also forces deployed along the banks too. Players chose their flotilla force from the models available, each model having a points value allocated to it, with 15 points allocated for the British and 10 for the Bolshevik. Both sides had hidden resources represented by 5 cards they were dealt at random at the start of the game which were either placed face down on the playing area or played when needed.

The rules we used were Lake Steamer Rules with river supplement by David Manley. The ship models were mostly 1/600th scale PT dockyard supplemented by land and air models from Tumbling Dice.



*i - Allied Insect class gunboat supported by M class monitors*



*ii - Allied Dance class mine sweepers and observation baloon barge come up in support of the gunboat and monitor*



*iii - Bolshevik flotilla under allied air attack*

We ran through our game 3 times on the day with 2-3 players each time, the final score being 2-1 in favour of the Bolsheviks. The game seemed to generate quite a bit of quizzical interest from onlookers too. It was also good to see quite a few NWS members drop by to look us up, including new member Rory Crab who gave the game a go too.

Many thanks to David Manley for providing the rules and for the photos, to Rob Hutton for the paint job on the aircraft for both their help in running the game on the day.

The show as a whole, in its second year in its new guise, was a great success and organisationally was very well run and absolutely no hassle from our perspective. There were many traders there doing brisk business and many club parti and demo games too which, together with the spacious and comfortable venue, really gave the show the feeling of a gathering for the hobby as a whole rather than just a trade fair.

If anyone is interested in getting involved in running the same game at Salute in April please get in contact with me. We are not yet guaranteed a table at the show but given we got our application in early and the show's theme this year is the Russian Revolution, I am quietly confident of our chances.

Simon Stokes