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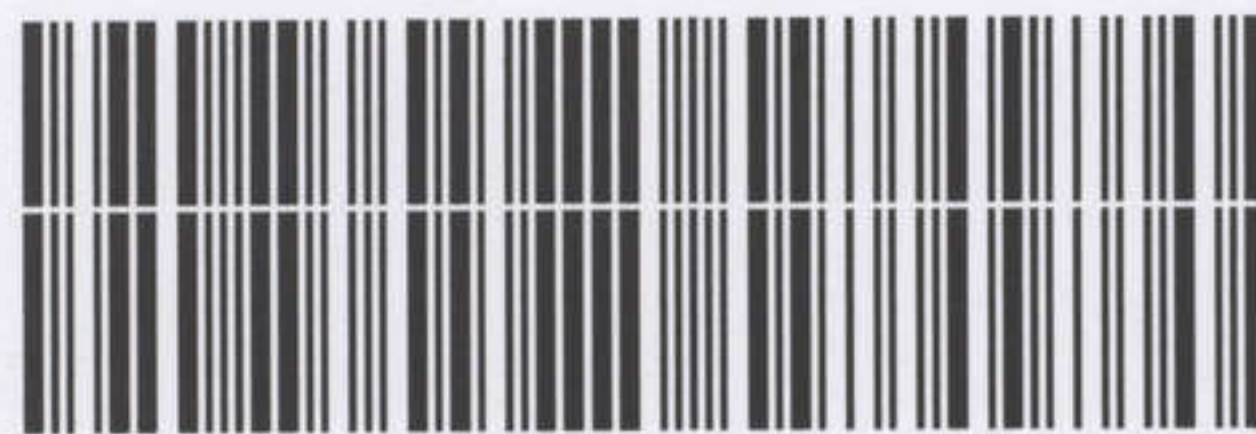
**Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,
1914-18 War**

Miscellaneous (North Russia, Hobart, and groups
returning in 1919)

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Title: North Russian Campaign 1918-1919

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APPENDIX 1.

Part 1.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MURMANSK REGION.

1. Geographical
Description
MURMAN Region
& KARELIA & its
inhabitants &
importance.

The part of Northern Russia which is bounded by the NORWEGIAN boundary at its junction with the Arctic Ocean to the Eastern end of the KOLA Peninsula on the North side: on the South by an East and West line through the town of SOROKA, on the East by the White Sea and the West by the FINNISH frontier, is known as the MURMAN Region. The portion to the South of KANDALASHA being known as KARELIA.

The whole area is a huge expanse of TUNDRA, impassible in Summer and covered with deep snow in Winter; very thinly inhabited with only a few very bad roads. Large lakes, forests and rivers abound everywhere.

The climate is cold in Winter, the maximum cold we ever registered in this part of the country being -59° Fahr. In Summer the weather is often extremely hot and muggy, the maximum heat ever registered being 85° Fahr. Winter sets in at the beginning of November when the rivers start to freeze. The White Sea does not usually freeze till the end of December or the 1st week in January, when all the ports close. The White Sea is clear again for navigation about the first week in May. In Spring and Autumn both seasons are short, and while they last it is hot by day and cold by night, there usually being about 10° frost. The port of MURMANSK is ice free the whole year round.

Other important ports are KANDALAKSHA, CHUPA, KEM (POPOFF) and SOROKA. The second being the best having wharf accommodation for three boats at a time, and capable of taking ships drawing 28 feet draught.

The country is reputed to be rich in minerals, but the chief trade is done in fishing which is some of the best in the world.

The people who inhabit this region fall into four classes.

- (1) North of KANDALAKSHA, Russian Laplanders who live a nomad existence and derive an existence by trading with furs, fish, reindeers etc.
- (2) KARELIANS, are agricultural peasant folk who make their living by fishing, hunting and growing a small quantity of wheat during the summer.
- (3) The small community of traders who live in the ports on the White Sea coast.
- (4) People who were imported as labourers from other parts of Russia to build the Murmansk railway. These people were for the most part a poor class of humanity. During the war with Germany, the Russian Government had made offers of exemption from Military Service to those who would work on the Murmansk Railway. This offer was eagerly taken up by many men of a low type. Consequently as the number of labourers imported was very large, the class of individual in the MURMAN Region was on the whole a bad one, being lazy, untrustworthy and often most dishonest. Moreover the fact that the country was poorly administered and money very short did not tend to improve matters.

2. The MURMAN RAILWAY.

The MURMAN Railway runs from ZVANKA (60 versts west of Petrograd) through the town of PETROZAVODSK, on the shores of Lake ONEGA to MURMANSK, 1,160 versts long. It is a single line throughout all its length.

The railway was originally constructed in 1915 and completed in 1916, with the object of gaining access to the ice free part of MURMANSK to enable munitions to be imported into RUSSIA. In many parts along its length its construction was very crude, and hasty, particularly North of KANDALAKSHA.

By November 1918, owing to lack of labour, bad management, and lazy workmen, the state of the permanent way and the rolling stock was deplorable.

Events in NORTH RUSSIA in 1918, and the formation

237th Infantry Brigade.

Part 2.

1. The original Role, strength & composition, & the landing of the SYREN force N. RUSSIA, & the local levies which were raised. 1918.

The purposes for which the SYREN Force landed in North Russia in May and June 1918 were:-

(1) To prevent the Germans gaining the ice free ports of MURMANSK and PECHENGA with a view to utilizing them as Submarine bases for destroyiny shipping.

(2) To support the loyal elements in North Russia in their struggle against Bolshevism.

The original force which came out under the command of Major General C.M. MAYNARD, D.S.O. consisted of:-
Headquarter Staff (on the basis of an Infantry Brigade)
Detachment of Marines strength about 450.
253 Machine Gun Company 200.
2 Companies 29th Battn. London Regt. 250.

Soon after the arrival of this force, work was at once started on raising local levies to combat our various enemies who existed in North Russia at that time. The various levies raised were:-

- (a) The Red Finn Legion under the command of Colonel BURTON, Canadians. at KANDALAKSHA and KNYADJA GUBA. These were recruited from the Red Finn Army which had been driven across the Finnish - Russian Frontier by the victorious White Finns who had invited German aid.
- (b) The KARELIAN Regt. under the command of Col. P.J. WOODS, D.S.O. which was recruited in the area KEM - VOKNAVOLOK - UKTA - KESTENGA, and composed of Karelians who wished to drive out the White Finns, who had come across the frontier to loot their villages.
- (c) The SLAVO - BRITANNIC ALLIED LEGION, and other Russian levies, the latter officered by Russian Officers of the old Imperial Russian Armies, and were intended to form the nucleus of the new Russian Army. The former was raised entirely under British supervision, and officered by British and Russian Officers.

In addition to the above forces, a strong Battalion of Serbs which had made its way from ODESSA to MURMANSK in April 1918, was included in the force.

This Unit was composed of CZECHS, CROATS and SERBS many of them deserters from the Austrian Army.

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They were magnificently disciplined men and absolutely reliable as troops.

They were commanded by a Serb known as MARINKOVITCH who was an extremely capable man, and originally formed the Unit from the shattered remains of certain CZECH-SLOVAK Divisions which had been fighting on the ROUMANIAN front. A number of N.C.Os. were provided from this Unit as Instructors in the various local levies which were raised. The strength of the Battalion in November 1918 was just over 1,000 men.

2. The Situation
in FINLAND.
Nov.1918.

The first half of 1918 in FINLAND was marked by many fierce internicine struggles. Eventually the White Finns (Greater Finlanders) with the help of the Germans, drove the Red Finns, such as remained of them, across the frontier into Russia, where many were enlisted in the Red Finn Legion, while other found protection under the Bolshevik Government in Russia.

By July 1918 there were 55,000 Germans in Finland the bulk of whom were concentrated in the area round ROVANIEMI, whence it was their intention to push the railway Northwards to PECHENGA and MURMANSK. By so doing the FINNS hoped to gain possession of these ports which would be incorporated in Finland, at the expense of Russia who could not at that time keep them out. The Germans at the same time intended to make use of the ports as Submarine bases, which would have been a most serious menace to us had they succeeded in doing so.

It was in order to combat this movement that the Red Finn Legion was raised.

Simultaneous with this movement, the White Finns started to invade KARELIA with a view to annexing KARELIA and getting possession of the ports of SOROKA and KEM on the White Sea.

By November 1918 both the above movements had failed. The first on account of the withdrawal of the German forces in Finland, owing to the reverses suffered by them in France. The second because the KARELIANS were able to successfully drive out the White Finns from KARELIA with the help of the British.

It will therefore be seen that little or no hostility was to be feared from Finland by the middle of November except small raids into KARELIA by bands of White Finns in search of food and loot.

3. The
BOLSHEVIKS.

The relations between the Bolsheviks and the Allies at the time of the landing of the SYREN force in North Russia were of a strange nature. War had not been declared by Great Britain against the Bolshevik Government. On the other hand Great Britain did not recognise the Bolshevik Government.

Our reason for landing at MURMANSK and PETCHENGA was so as to prevent these ports from falling into the hands of the Germans, it being implied at the same time that any attempt on the part of the Bolsheviks to frustrate our attempts at occupation, would be met by force if necessary.

During the period May - August 1918, bands of Red Guards came North along the MURMANSK railway. These bands were ill disciplined and little better than hooligans. They were whenever possible disarmed and dispersed.

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In all the chief towns along the railway, such as KANDALAKSHA, KEM and SOROKA local Soviets were established and held sway over their own particular areas in all matters municipal and political.

During the summer our troops penetrated South along the line and by the end of July 1918 we had established a small force in the town of SOROKA on the White Sea about 630 versts South MURMANSK.

This last act alarmed the Bolsheviks to such an extent, that fearing further incursions by the Allies to the South; under guidance of two of the chief Bolshevik COMMISSARES in the town, both bad characters SALONIN and SPIRIDONOFF, the more prominent Bolsheviks fled Southward by train, destroying the railway depot at SOROKA and burning all the bridges between OLIMPI and the ONDA river. At which latter place a Bolshevik outpost was established.

During the month of October 1918, owing to the gradual occupation of the country by the Allies, and the ill favour with which the Soviet Government was viewed in, the system of Soviet Government in the MURMAN Area came to an end, thus severing all allegiance with MOSCOW, and a provisional Government of North Russia was established. At the head of the Government was General MILLER Governor General of ARCHANGEL with the Region of MURMANSK affiliated to it, under Assistant Governor General KERMOLOFF.

PART 3.

Policy in Russia at the end of 1918, and the formation and composition of 237th Brigade.

1. Reinforcements

from
ENGLAND.

In view of the menacing situation in Finland during the summer of 1918, reinforcements had been demanded from ENGLAND. These reinforcements took the shape of a complete Infantry Brigade, with some Batteries of Artillery, and some Administrative troops.

The Brigade formed for this purpose was the 236th Brigade, and consisted of four Battalions raised from low category men, under the command of Brigadier-General M. TURNER, C.B., C.M.G. The cadres of the Units came from Battalions which had belonged to divisions which had suffered severe casualties during the various German offensives March - July 1918. The battalions reformed were:-
17th Battn. King's (formerly in 30th Division)
6th Battn Yorkshire Regt. (formerly in 11th Division)
13th Battn. " " " " 42nd " "
11th Battn. Royal Sussex Regt. (formerly in 32nd Division)
280 M.G. Coy.
and were formed at ALDERSHOT,

These Units embarked to proceed overseas in Sept. 1918, but it was not until the end of November that the last Units arrived at MURMANSK.

Of the above the 17th King's Liverpool Regt, went to ARCHANGEL in error, and in view of the situation there, was retained and never joined the SYREN force at all.

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2. Formation of 237th Brigade & the Organisation of the Area occupied by the Allies into two Areas.

Following on the notification that these reinforcements were due to arrive, it was decided early in November to organise the Area occupied by the SYREN force into four Areas.

- (a) Line of Communication area, the railway as far as POLIARNI KRUG under the command of an I.C.E. H.Qrs. at KOLA. This area was divided into two sectors:-
No. 1 MURMANSK to IMANDRA (inclusive)
" 2 IMANDRA (exclusive) to POLIARNI KRUG (inclusive)
- (b) 236th Brigade area from the Arctic Ocean to an East and West Line POLIARNI KRUG (inclusive) - South shore Lake PYAVOZERO. due west to the Finnish Frontier, H.Qrs. 236th. Brigade, KOLA.
- (c) 237th Brigade to be responsible for the area to the South of the above line and East of Finnish Frontier. H.Qrs. KEM.
- (d) The PECHENGA Garrison.

The main Allied troops were allotted to the two Brigades as follows:-

236th Brigade.

Italian Troops. 11th Battn. Sussex Regt. (less H.Q.
French Ski Coy. and 2 Coys. at PECHENGA)
Marine Detachment. Finn Legion.
6th Battn Yorkshire Regt. British Artillery and one French Battery.

237th Brigade. H.Qrs. KEM.

13th Battn. Yorkshire Regt.
253 M.G. Coy.
Karelian Regt.
Serbian Battn.
French Artillery (less one battery) and armoured train.

The H.Qrs. Staff 237th Brigade with the exception of the Staff Captain was mobilised at MYTCHETE Camp at the end of September and beginning of October 1918, and consisted of 1 Officer (Brigade Major-Capt. G. Drake-Brockman Border Regt) and 24 O.Rs. These sailed from DUNDEE on October 12th and finally arrived at MURMANSK on Nov. 26th. The G.O.C. Brigadier-General F.G. MARSH, D.S.O. was at that time already in Russia, but no Staff Captain had been officially appointed.

Role allotted to 237th Brigade during the winter.

In accordance with instructions received from G.H.Q. SYREN, at commencement of November, the role to be adopted by the 237th Brigade during the Winter was to be as follows:-

- (1) To safeguard the railway from KANDALAKSHA Southward.
- (2) To prevent as far as possible incursions by White Finns across the Karelian frontier.
- (3) To open up the route SOROKA - ONEGA, and thus establish communication with ARCHANGEL Force.
- (4) To undertake such offensive actions against the Bolshevik forces as might be ordered by the G.O.C. in C. SYREN Force.

It was also intended to push forces into the Olonetz Region with a view to enlisting recruits so as to form an Olonetz Battn. for service against the Bolsheviks.

3 4. MOBILE COMPANIES.

In order to undertake any special operations which might be necessary during the Winter, it was decided to form Special Mobile Companies from various Units in the Force. These columns were to be composed of Infantry, Artillery, M.G. and Infantry as follows:-

	Officers.	O.Rs.
1 Mobile Coy. of Infantry	3	189.
1 Machine Gun Section.	1	18.
W.T. Detachment.		5.
R.A.M.C. Detachment.	1	6.
65 m.m. Gun Section.	2	28.
TOTAL	7	246.

Everyman was equipped with Skis and special Winter kit. Both equipment and training was carried out under the supervision of Lieuts STENHOUSE and HUSSEY, members of Major Sir R. SHACKLETON'S expedition to the Arctic. Only the most active men in the various Units were to be chosen for work in these columns. Sledges drawn by local ponies were to be used for Transport purposes. The Sledges were of a specially light pattern, but in the end did not prove a success on account of the very rough nature of the ground, which caused the runners to break very quickly.

As events turned out no column was ever used as such, on account of the very slow arrival of equipment from ENGLAND, and because certain Units were withdrawn to ARCHANGEL at an early date, before they had time to complete their training.

Each Mobile Infantry Company was organised into Headquarters and 4 Sections, each section consisting of 4 squads, one of which was a Lewis Gun squad.

The following Units in the 237th Brigade area provided Mobile Columns.

13th Battalion Yorkshire Regt.	1 Column.
Serbian Battalion.	2 Columns.
Karelian Regt.	3 Columns.

In addition a supermobile Unit was formed known as the MALMUTES which consisted of sledges drawn by dog teams and manned by Canadian Personnel. Owing to the late arrival of the dogs the teams were only fully trained when the thaw set in. Some very useful work was however carried out by the MALMUTES.

5. Distribution of Troops 37th Brigade Area 6th December 1918.

The Brigade itself was divided up into two districts. No. 1 District from KEM (inclusive) to POLIARNI KRUG (exclusive) under Col. WOODS. No. 2 District KEM to South of SOROKA under Col. LECKIE. This organisation was subsequently found to be unserviceable and was altered (vide 0.07).

By December 6th. 1918, the troops in 237th Brigade area were distributed as given in the following table:-