

Chapter V11

The House Divided

The untimely death of General Kornilov, leader of the national forces, in the spring of 1918, changed the course of Russia's history and quite possibly, the history of the entire world. Early in 1918, General Kornilov, together with a handful of officers, cadets, and volunteers, mostly high school boys like Zuka Ossinin, inflicted heavy defeats on the unorganized Red Army in a series of strategically brilliant campaigns. Now the national forces were ready to strike again, this time on a much bigger scale.

General Kornilov was a born leader. He made a name for himself in the German war and his personal magnetism inspired confidence and enthusiasm among the Russian people. Volunteers flocked to his camp and his troops were fanatically devoted. With general Kornilov defeat was unthinkable. His word was law and victory was sure!

After his victorious battle at Rostov, the general returned to a small house which served as his headquarters. He retired to his room and soon fell into a deep sleep. Minutes later, a stray shell pierced the roof and exploded near his bed. The staff officers in the next room were unharmed but the general was dead. When general Kornilov died the soul of the Russian national forces died also.

Next in command was General Denikin, a good general, an honest patriot, but a man too small for the job of restoration and liberation of Russia from the Reds. Politically inexperienced he committed one blunder after another. Discipline was lax, profiteering flourished and yet, with these handicaps, General Denikin came close to conquering Moscow in 1919. Only seventy miles separated the national forces from Moscow and victory. With General Kornilov, and without the blunders, victory would have been assured. Then, instead of the mad communist regime, Russia could have been organized as a democratic country. But Saturn swung his scythe and cut off the life of the one man that could have saved Russia from the Reds.

With the death of General Kornilov, the Caucasian troops along the Black Sea fared badly. Prince Hounkalov was able to occupy Gagry and was ready to march on Sochi when the Red navy interfered. The navy pounded Gagry quite heavily. After a couple of weeks of stubborn resistance in the palace of Prince Oldenborge, Prince Hounkalov, short of men, food and ammunition, decided to call it a day. There was no alternative but to retreat to the mountains.

The Sochi contingent found themselves in a dilemma and a counsel was called to decide the issue. *Que fair?* After an hour of heated discussion, Count Bobrtinskoi proposed a march to "Red Dale," his mountain estate. Many agreed that it would be best to go there and await further developments. Ossinin too approved of the idea. Everyone in the Caucasus would be close to their families but Zuka's family was in Samara. He decided to try and join them there. The truth

of the matter was Zuka was homesick. The venture would be risky for a seasoned adult; it was almost unthinkable a boy of eighteen could cross Russia in times of political terror and civil war and make it home safely. However, the impudence of youth and a longing for home overruled his reasoning. He would try.

Zuka returned to Sochi by night, choosing the seldom used lanes and parks. He finally arrived at his grandfather's home. Grand dad was still up and received him warmly. For the first and last time he saw tears in the old nobleman's eyes. Grand dad approved of Zuka's plan to try and join his family. He knew full well that his grandson, now wanted by the Reds, could not stay in Sochi.

Grand dad mustered all the available funds in the house while Zuka changed into his high school uniform and fitted a strong bag with leather straps. Anushka, with silent tears, lovingly packed his meager belongings into the bag. Grand dad, who had been sitting in his comfortable chair in deep meditation, got up and walked over to Zuka.

"Now you must go to Sasha Harkevitch; he is serving as Minister of Finance here. Get some kind of identification papers from him and use an assumed name. Then we will try to spirit you out of Sochi."

Alexander Pavlovitch Harkevitch, was also from Bougoulma. He had known his parents long before Zuka was born. Years ago he had been an officer in the crack Imperial Foot Guard Regiment. As it happened, Sasha dined and drank a little too much and during a maneuver was taken prisoner along with the rest of his platoon by a small detachment of Cossacks. So Sasha did some maneuvering of his own. With one hundred rubles, he captured the Cossack sergeant and his troops. This military exploit became know to the authorities who had strong opinions about Sasha's method of winning a war. Consequently, he was forced to resign from his regiment and was placed on the reserve list. After that Sasha drank even more, gambled recklessly and gradually sank lower and lower. Later he was called up to serve as a lieutenant in the German war. After suffering a slight wound and nervous exhaustion, he was sent to rest in Sochi. As he had successfully squandered both he and his wife's fortune, he was a fit Minister of Finance for a Red Sochi. He lived in a requisitioned house up the road from grand dad.

Discreetly, Zuka knocked at his door. After some moments Sasha himself opened the door. For a change he was stone sober. The family was asleep. Sasha knew about the fighting in Gagry. Zukas' whereabouts during the past few weeks had been no secret.

"Ah, Zuka, come on in," he invited cordially and friendly as if Zuka was a most welcome guest. He led Zuka to his small study and offered a seat on a miniature sofa.

"Can I do something for you?"

"Yes, Alexander Pavlovitch," Zuka said a little embarrassed, "I have to get out of Sochi

and I want to get home if I can. I need some kind of documents or a pass but not in my name. I presume you know about my participation in Kornilov's units." Zuka did not want to take advantage of him if he had not known about his status.

"Yes, I know all about it and I approve. I wish I were there myself but..." For a second Sasha Harkevitch turned his head, "I am what I am. Still I will do what I can for you."

"Thanks so much!" I do appreciate your help. But we both know that it may get you into nasty trouble."

"Forget it!" Listen, Zuka, you are still young, and it might be a lesson to you. I may be a cheap braggart, I may be a useless drunkard, I may be all that and worse, but I was born a gentleman. When tough times come I am not going to shrink from my duty as a gentleman *'Nobles oblige,'* even for such as me. Tonight I will honor the name I bear. Only God knows how many years I have neglected it."

Zuka watched him fascinated by the transformation. For a moment the years of dissipation were gone. He saw a gentleman doing his duty, even though the act involved a great deal of risk.

"Now let me think." Rubbing his long blueing chin, Sasha began to pace up and down in his tiny office. After some reflection he turned.

"Listen! Tomorrow morning at 8:30 come to my ministry," he said with light irony. "I will have the identification papers ready. I will type them, seal them and sign them myself. No one will know. You will be an official messenger from the Ministry of Finance in Sochi to the Minister in Tuapse. At ten o'clock a motor launch will go to Tuapse. Present the documents to the inspector at the landing. Avoid political commissars; they might recognize you. You don't have to fear the militia. From Tuapse you can board a train to Tzaritin (Stalingrad) and God help you! Got it straight?"

"Yes, I got it. Thanks so much and now I see what you meant by being a gentleman." Zuka reached for his hand. It was a long, manly parting handshake.

Sasha led Zuka out into the garden. The night was soft, fragrant with flowers and very quiet. In the distance, a solitary stray dog barked and once again all was quiet.

"Goodbye and my best wishes. If you see your father and mother tell them I was glad to be of service to you."

Grand Dad and Annushka were anxiously awaiting his return. Zuka narrated what had happened and how splendidly Sasha had behaved.

“Well, I never doubted Sasha,” Grand Dad explained “All he needed was a chance to prove himself. I will see him later on.”

“Annushka, being a practical woman, had tea and fried eggs ready. One had only to look at him to realize that Zuka had not been eating properly during the last few weeks. But somehow, with all the excitement, he had never felt hungry. Now he ate hungrily. Suddenly, he felt very tired and sleepy. Grand dad was sitting in his deep comfortable chair enveloped in thought. Zuka could not see his eyes. Annushka watched him eat. Finally she took his hand and lightly stroked her wet face with Zuka’s palm. All knew they would soon part forever.

At 8:30 the next morning, Zuka discreetly appeared in Harkevitch’s office. In a few minutes he was out with the necessary papers. At ten sharp he was at the wharf. Grand dad and Annushka had gone before him. There was quite a crowd at the landing. Grand dad met some friends and was quietly talking with them while watching Zuka out of the corner of his eye. Messenger Ossinin unhurriedly showed his documents to a dull looking official and proceeded with the complete nonchalance of a bonafide ministerial messenger up the ramp and onto the barge.

He picked a space in the open part of the boat and with tears in his heart he gazed longingly at the two beloved figures on the shore. Shortly the launch was off amid all the turmoil of general farewells. No one noticed his waving to the small party on the shore. The boat was gathering speed, the shore receding, and with it, the frail figure of Grand dad and the sturdy figure of his Annushka. There they stood until the boat was out of sight. It was the last Zuka ever saw of them for one year later they were cruelly murdered by the Red Army. His crime? He was a Barin and her crime was she refused to renounce him as such.

Years later Zuka learned that Count Bobrinskoi and Djanashia were killed by the Bolsheviks. Prince Hounkalov, after many adventures finally came to live quietly, but with great dignity in California. On that warm May day in 1918 a page in the life of Zuka Ossinin turned forever.

Homeward Bound

Looking around, Zuka spotted a group of “bourgeoisie” among the heterogeneous crowd of fellow passengers. He was surprised to recognize Doctor Shamov and his pretty young wife. They had come over often to visit grand dad. The doctor had been wounded in the front lines during the German War and after having recuperated in Sochi, was now returning to Kazan. There were two other families: a rich Moscow industrialist by the name of Ledenzov. He was a portly man of about forty with a good looking wife and three youngsters--one boy and two girls. The others were from Nijni-Novogord on the River Volga. Zaitzevs, was an oldish man with a reserved wife and a son with a serious case of diabetes. Then there was Helen, a very pretty and shapely girl of nineteen. They all decided to form a party and travel together.

At Tuapse they went immediately to the railway station. With Kerensky in power it had been disorganized disorder. Now that Lenin was in power it was organized disorder. The small party started to investigate possible transportation to Tzaritzin. The trains were coming and going, only no one knew when or from what track. The country was deep in a civil war. General Denikin was fighting somewhere in Kuban; but there was no definite information about his activities or his exact whereabouts.

Being “bourgeoisie” had its advantages. Zuka Ossinin, never believing in revolutionary virtue, suggested bribing the station master for information about trains to Tzaritzin. For a few good bank notes they were told from what track and when the train would start. They were even escorted to the track. Thus the party had a chance to occupy the most advantageous positions in the empty car – the raised seats. Zuka Ossinin claimed the baggage shelf right under the roof for himself. As soon as the whereabouts of the train became known to the waiting crowd at the station, there was a terrific stampede. Rushing pell mell, men fought with fists to secure entrance, trampling women and children and storming into the freight cars like madmen. A heavy cloud of profanity hung over the train. When the train was filled to capacity and all available space was taken, including the roofs and even the buffers, the train started without warning. Certainly there were no tickets. No one was even attempting to sell them. Neither did anyone care if a dozen or so of the free passengers fell from the roof and buffers to be crushed under the wheels. Life had become cheap under Lenin. Luckily there was just enough space for one man on the baggage shelf so Zuka did not have to face the prospect of sharing his perch with other passengers.

All went well until the important railway junction of Kavkaskaia. There the train was stopped and the demobilized. Soldiers constituting the majority of travelers, were herded into a Red Army Unit. As it turned out, at the next big station a fight with the White Army was in full progress. There a certain young commissar by the name of Stalin, was netting all of the ex-servicemen and ordering them to fight with the Red Army. So far no one molested Zuka's party. They, together with others, scrambled out of the train and found some shelter in the town for the night. Something had to be done. But what?

Later that night, Zuka Ossinin studied the railroad map and discovered that geographically they were in a “V” position. Kavkaskaia could be located at the top of one of the legs of the “V” while the Red and White Armies were fighting at the base of the “V.” Zuka and his party were at the top of the other “V” leg. He found that the V was rather narrow, only about forty miles across the top. If his party could cross, they could reach the right track and bypass the fighting.

Excitedly, he presented his scheme to the others. It was accepted right away and a sufficient sum was collected to hire carriages for transportation. Money talked during the revolution and in a couple of hours, three troikas were hired at a tremendous cost. Soon the party, minus half the luggage, were riding out of town toward the Kuban Steppe. The steppe was as big as the Black Sea and flat like a saucer. The Kuban steppe was an endless plain – a gigantic

sea of land without hills or trees.

The road was good and easy, the horses were fresh, and the ride was a jolly one. The party made a rest stop at a small creek. The danger was past and they could well afford a snack. It was so pleasant to stretch one's legs after spending several hours in a rocking carriage. The muddy water from the creek made excellent tea, the sandwiches were delicious and the Caucasian wine was glorious. The party was indeed a success.

It seemed that after the party there was a problem. The ladies looked embarrassed and hastily called their husbands aside. The trouble was that there was no shelter. Some bodily functions cannot be suppressed. It was decided that the men would scan the horizon some distance from the rest of the group and under no circumstances turn their heads. Later the ladies would show the same profound interest in the skies. Life under the Bolsheviks had taught the people to disregard some previously important formalities.

They finally arrived at the station Yeia where all was quiet and sleepy. "Yeia was an unimportant station but unexpectedly was teeming with a sleeping and patiently waiting crowd. Zuka visited the station master. "No, there will be no trains from here, only passing military trains. The next train will take on a few loaded box cars. Empty cars? Sure plenty." The station master was slowly turning the pages of his big log book. Zuka seated himself opposite him and carefully sandwiched the pages with bank notes. No one spoke a word. At last the station master closed the book.

"Well, we may add one extra car, but no engines to couple the car. Besides, there is quite a number of people waiting; they have to be taken on as well."

"I think we can manage if you give us a box car." To that the Station Master agreed. After all, he was not such a bad fellow. Zuka reported to the party. All enthusiastically endorsed the idea and then he went to the station. The rustics patiently waited for the train. Zuka called them to attention.

A Freight Car to Tzaritin

"Now listen brothers, I have a box car from the station master. If you give me a hand to couple it to the rest of the waiting cars, and if you will allow us first choice of available space, we will give you the rest. How about it?"

The sleepiness was gone in a second. They were plain good country folks, not yet spoiled by communist propaganda. Not only men, but sturdy girls flocked to help. The job was done in record time. It was evident to everyone that Zuka was a barin, but there was not evidence of hostility. They even addressed him as young barin and when the turmoil of pushing the heavy car was over he gave a hearty slap on the appetizing bottom of a comely girl. This was taken as a compliment by the girl and as a good joke by the hilarious crowd. They not only let the party go

in first, but even helped them with their luggage. The revolution had not corrupted these people yet. The party chose a corner on the second story wooden platform, running across the car from one side to the other, leaving the middle open. The rest climbed into the box car in good order, but they kept climbing in.

Normally the car would accommodate forty people or eight horses. Zuka tried to count. He lost count at one hundred and fifty people. The station master shut and sealed the door. Zuka's party put the elderly members to one side of the car, while the younger set was used as protection or a buffer against the rustics. Zuka was the outer guard and next to him was Helen. He spread his blanket and used the rest of his sack as a pillow which he shared with Helen.

The station master had instructed them to sit still, no talk and no noise. They were supposed to be military cargo. After a few hours of waiting they heard the whistle of the in-bound train. A bump told them that they were coupled; a jerk told them they were starting and in a few seconds they were on their way.

A sigh of relief greeted the jumpy motion of the car. With the train underway, some began to compensate for the forced silence. The atmosphere was friendly but smelly. People were sitting everywhere, shoulder to shoulder, back to back. Things went well during the day time but at night, when more space was required for sleeping, it became more difficult.

It was pitch dark in the car. One could hear a plaintive voice say "Come on brothers, have a heart, squeeze a bit for a girl" and they squeezed and squeezed. At the end of the squeeze Zuka found himself by the force of the sheer number of human bodies smashed into Helen's back. She was a good looking country wench. It was hot in the car. The girl was careful about her new blouse, so she took it off. The homemade undershirt gave plenty of room to her more than ample bosom. Zuka felt it's pressure and warmth on his back. He was tired and he desperately needed sleep, but he was in such an awkward position that any slumber was out of the question now.

Helen was also nicely endowed. She was soft, warm and in a light summer dress. She was glued to him by the pressure of all the others. Vainly he tried to increase the distance between himself and Helen but it was like pushing against a wall of rubber. The girl behind him was sound asleep and in her sleep, she cast her ample naked arm over Zuka. He had no choice but to keep his arm and hand on Helen's hip and thigh while the other girl had her arm and hand on his. What with the violent rocking motion of the car the Tantalus tortures seemed like child's play. He was damn cross as he heard Helen's soft chuckle.

"What is so funny?" he whispered fiercely into her hear. "How could I help that?"

"You could not. Nobody could. Relax, it could be worse." she whispered back

"Could be worse! How could it be worse?"

“You stupid, it could be one of those rustics,” Helen answered turning her head, her lips nearly touching his ear. “I am in the same boat you are in, don’t fret, just relax and try to get some sleep if you can.”

She knew what state Zuka was in and even enjoyed it. From then on Zuka abandoned any struggle. He made himself as comfortable as he could, relaxed, and in time slumber rescued him from his misery.

After forty-eight hours of this, the rustics were ready to throw in the towel. They had enough. Zuka watched the events and wondered just how much human beings could take. He admired the fortitude of the ladies. There were no complaints from them. They showed no disgust when the rustic lads, finding themselves in the same predicament as Zuka, took the easy way out and infringed the Decalogue with the consent of the girls next to them. By doubling up it saved space. Zuka, being a barin, was at a disadvantage.

It was the country folks who threw in the towel first and not the soft and pampered bourgeoisie. They began to raised cane in one of the bigger stations. The door flew open and astonished Red officials beheld a howling mass of people instead of the miliary cargo they expected. Zuka Ossinin thought it better to let the common people settle the question of what to do next. After a long and heated palaver the people won and the car was allowed to proceed with the doors open.

A riot broke out in a large, important station ahead. As the train was detained until the next day, Zuka decided to migrate to the roof. Several others followed his example to escape the stink, more than for any other reason. The roof of the freight car was never meant for sleeping. One had to lay in spread-eagle position clinging to the car. To fall asleep during the ride meant flirting with death. There was no joy in roof car traveling.

The big freight car crept into Tzaritin, the last station, in the dead of the night. The party, half crazy with joy, rushed straight to the landing barges to catch the boats up river. Here all were greatly disappointed. The barges, the river shore and even some of the streets were crowded with prospective passengers, mostly demobilized soldiers. At the office they were told that a new rule entitled each passenger to only two tickets and each would have to take a number. The lowest numbers were obtained at Samolet Company. Zuko received number 604. The problem was passenger boats arrived at Tzaritin nearly full from Astrachkan, the point of origin. After a short counsel, Zuka’s party decided the best course of action was to buy ticket to Astrachan and from there, bribe their passage up the river. Zuka wondered if this plan might cost them their lives. Zuka was not in position to participate in such a plan as he did not have enough money for such a trip. No financial help was offered nor expected. So he left his traveling companions with heart felt good byes and hearty handshakes and they vanished from his life forever.

The Last Ticket

Zuka now found himself in a serious predicament. His funds were dangerously low; he was dead tired; in fact, he was totally exhausted from lack of sleep. Gloomily and wearily he walked to and fro in front of the booking office. There was no place to sleep and the night was chilly. The next boat was due about 5:30 a.m. With the first rays of light the barge gradually became animated with people running up and down the gangplanks like a hill of disturbed ants. A queue was forming at the ticket office. The crowd was made up mostly of soldiers going home and they were in an ugly mood. The queue was now a mile long and people were becoming impatient when a low melodious whistle came from down river. Soon the Dostoevskky, a rosy colored boat appeared gliding gracefully over the river. Excitement grew with each passing second. At last the Dostoevskky berthed at the barge. Zuka Ossinin, unchallenged, stood by the office window his back to the wall. In this instance his back really was to the wall. He looked dispiritedly at the endless line of angry soldiers. He had no hope of embarking on the Dostoevsky as his number was 604. At that moment he was too tired to think, hope or make plans.

All of a sudden he was conscious of a nice looking man, neatly dressed and definitely a Baltic type, talking to him. "Excuse me, are you going up the river? If so, I am third in line and my partner cannot go with me. If you wish I can buy you a ticket."

This was one chance in a million! Another of those strange accidents that always happened to Zuka Ossinin when he was in real danger. Or could it have been that he was wearing the uniform of Moscow Imperial High School which set him apart from the grey mass of soldiers. Who knows?

"Yes, I am going up the river to Simbirsk and my number is 604, so normally I would have no chance. I accept your kind offer; you would be doing me a great favor."

At the same moment, the second officer of Dostoevsky who was in charge of passengers, entered the office. "Six third class tickets only."

The crowd howled their disappointment. The office clerk hurriedly distributed two tickets each to the first three people in line. Zuka Ossinin got the last ticket available for many months to come. The man thrust a small piece of cardboard toward him

"Pay me later please, the crowd is getting restless. We better hurry to the boat. "That piece of cardboard was Zuka's ticket to safety. He got the last ticket and he was the last man to board that last boat that would get through. He was going up the gang plank when a huge sailor grabbed him.

Zuka had shown tremendous restraint during these last few weeks, he was damn tired, and had become completely indifferent to what happened to him next. So he threw down his sack, confronted the big Bolshevik and flew into an uncontrollable rage. He began to swear at the sailor and his profanity was a masterpiece. It included all the colorful expressions he had

picked up during his wanderings among the revolutionary elements, the soldiers and some criminals. It even included some cuss words of his own inventions. He must have impressed the sailors, since they were connoisseurs of such outbursts. They responded with loud and delighted laughter as they watched a sparrow attacking a big, clumsy rooster. The atmosphere changed in a moment. Another big sailor came down from the ship, gave Zuka a mighty slap on his back and said with good humor: "Anyone who can swear like that is okay with me, Welcome aboard kid! We have to hurry." He picked up Zuka's bag and helped him aboard.

On the "Dostoevsky"

Zuka half dragged himself, half stumbled into third class. He simply could go no farther. A matronly woman looked at him and exclaimed "Oh my, but the poor young barin is all in. Alesha, move over to my side and let the poor young man rest!"

The woman was very efficient. In no time Zuka was comfortably accommodated on a soft mattress with the scent of a clean pillow under his head. He slept for many hours. When he opened his eyes he saw the matron had some good food ready for him. He would never forget this kind, simple Russian woman. Would the communist government be able to produce such citizens? She was indignant when Zuka hinted at compensating her for her efforts. Refreshed, washed and groomed Zuka found his assigned place which happened to be next to a pretty young girl by the name of Zoe who was returning home from a visit. She and Zuka soon became very friendly.

Neither he nor Zoe liked their third class accommodations. Zuka, well acquainted with boat life and boat rules, began to think how he might secure a cabin. He knew that second officers were in charge of passenger accommodations. He also knew a lot about second officers. He investigated and discovered that a second class cabin between berths, would be available shortly. Zuka shared this information with Zoe. He told her to find the second officer and complain about her third class accommodations. It was important for her to be sweet and friendly. He also warned her that the second officer would invite her to his cabin to pay the additional cost and receive her keys. She was to accept the invitation, pay him and collect her keys; but when he started becoming too friendly, she should go into a coughing spell. He would take care of the rest. Zuka gave her the money. The girl understood what she had to do. She applied more make up and went off to find the officer. Zuka knew she had been successful when she returned with a gleam in her eye.

At nine o'clock they were on the upper deck. Zuka stayed out of the way. Zoe entered the cabin with the brass plate "Second Officer" on the door. Zuka stood outside the door listening. When he heard loud coughing he knocked on the door and called out:

"Zoe, have you got the keys?"

The door opened and a radiant Zoe stood on the threshold.

“Oh, it is my brother. Thanks so much for the cabin. It was so nice of you.” With a grateful and charming smile she was out before the speechless officer could say another word. The conspirators hurried down the passage way and into a spacious cabin. In such cases Zuka had an the advantage being a barin. Zoe wanted an adventure, the first in her monotonous life. As far as she was concerned it was a pleasure to share that adventure with someone of Zuka’s status.

The next day the ship was scheduled to call at Volsk, an important town on the right side of the Volga. But the Captain of the Dostoevsky behaved rather strangely. Instead of closing in toward the town, he raced up river, as far away from Volsk as he could manage. Something is amiss, Zuka thought as he watched the town disappear. To his utter amazement he saw a couple of white clouds of smoke over the shore with bright sparks under them. He heard the distant boom of field guns and a few seconds later, heard a splashing behind the ship. So he made his way to the bridge to talk to the frightened captain. Obviously the ship was under fire, but whose and why? The Dostoevsky continued racing madly up river.

“It was the Czechs that opened fire on us,” the captain explained, but Zuka was still in the dark. Who in the hell were the Czechs and why had they opened fire on a peaceful ship?

Later on, when the danger had passed, the captain shared more details with Zuka. During the German War the Czechs and Slovaks, being brother slavs preferred the Russians to their oppressors, the Austrians. So in 1916 the Russian government formed six volunteer Czech/Slovak regiments from their prisoners of war that had been captured to fight with them. These regiments were well disciplined and well organized. Russia had armed them well. When the new Russian communist government withdrew from World War 1, these Czechs and Slovaks wanted to go home. The Red government said, “Sorry, but you cannot go home. You must stay and fight for us!” The Czechs answered, “We are also sorry, but we are going home just the same.”

The Czechs, under the command of General Sirovoi, believed they could push through central Russia to Vladivostok and evacuate from that city. They believed that their well organized and battle wise army could actually cross nine million square miles of a country in the midst of civil war. While doing so, they encountered and fired on the “Dostoevsky.” The Czechs were only one of many players in this drama. Zuka would encounter them again. He did not realize that his military activities in Sochi was only the beginning. He was already a participant in one of the cruellest and bloodiest wars in human history; a war that would eventually decimate his extended family and cost his country over fifty million lives.