

REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY READER

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1st Edition

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“I do not wish to kill nor to be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both these things would be by me unavoidable. We preserve the so-called peace of our community by deeds of petty violence every day. Look at the policeman’s billy and handcuffs! Look at the jail! Look at the gallows! Look at the chaplain of the regiment! We are hoping only to live safely on the outskirts of this provisional army. So we defend ourselves and our hen-roosts, and maintain slavery.”

—Henry David Thoreau, “A Plea for Captain John Brown”

Anarchist Michael Albert, in his memoir *Remembering Tomorrow: From SDS to Life after Capitalism*, writes, “In seeking social change, one of the biggest problems I have encountered is that activists have been insufficiently strategic.” While it’s true, he notes, that various progressive movements “did just sometimes enact bad strategy,” in his experience they “often had no strategy at all.”

It would be an understatement to say that this inheritance is a huge problem for resistance groups. There are plenty of possible ways to explain it. Because we sometimes don’t articulate a clear strategy because we’re outnumbered and overrun with crises or immediate emergencies, so that we can never focus on long-term planning. Or because our groups are fractured, and devising a strategy requires a level of practical agreement we can’t muster. Or because we don’t teach ourselves and others to think in strategic terms. Or because people are acting like dissidents instead of resisters. Or because our so-called strategy often boils down to asking someone else to do something for us. Or because we’re just not trying hard enough.

One major reason that resistance strategy is underdeveloped is because thinkers and planners who *do* articulate strategies are often attacked for doing so. People can always find something to disagree with. That’s especially true when any one strategy is expected to solve all problems or address all causes claimed by progressives. If a movement depends more on ideological purity than it does on accomplishments, it’s easy for internal sectarian arguments to take priority over getting things done. It’s easier to attack resistance strategists in a burst of horizontal hostility than it is to get things together and attack those in power.

The good news is that we can learn from a few resistance groups with successful and well-articulated strategies. The study of strategy *itself* has been extensive for centuries. The fundamentals of strategy are foundational for military officers, as they must be for resistance cadres and leaders.

PRINCIPLES OF WAR AND STRATEGY

The US Army’s field manual entitled *Operations* introduces nine “Principles of War.” The authors emphasize that these are “not a checklist” and do not apply the same way in every situation. Instead, they are characteristic of successful operations and, when used in the study of historical conflicts, are “powerful tools for analysis.” The nine “core concepts” are:

Objective. “Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.” A clear goal is a prerequisite to selecting a strategy. It is also something that many resistance groups lack. The second and third requirements—that the objective be both decisive and attainable—are worth underlining. A decisive objective is one that will have a clear impact on the larger strategy and struggle. There is no point in going after one of questionable or little value. And, obviously, the objective itself must be attainable, because otherwise efforts towards that operation objective are a waste of time, energy, and risk.

Offensive. “Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.” To seize the initiative is to determine the course of battle, the place, and the nature of conflict. To give up or lose the initiative is to allow the enemy to determine those things. Too often resistance groups, especially those based on lobbying or

demands, give up the initiative to those in power. Seizing the initiative positions the fight on our terms, forcing them to react to us. Operations that seize the initiative are typically offensive in nature.

Mass. “Concentrate the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time.” Where the field manual says “combat power,” we can say “force” more generally. When Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest summed up his military theory as “get there first with the most,” this is what he was talking about. We must engage those in power where we are strong and they are weak. We must strike when we have overwhelming force, and maneuver instead of engaging when we are outmatched. We have limited numbers and limited force, so we have to use that when and where it will be most effective.

Economy of Force. “Allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.” In order to achieve superiority of force in decisive operations, it’s usually necessary to divert people and resources from less urgent or decisive operations. Economy of force requires that all personnel are performing important tasks, regardless of whether they are engaged in decisive operations or not.

Maneuver. “Place the enemy in a disadvantageous position through the flexible application of combat power.” This hinges on mobility and flexibility, which are essential for asymmetric conflict. The fewer a group’s numbers, the more mobile and agile it must be. This may mean concentrating forces, it may mean dispersing them, it may mean moving them, or it may mean hiding them. This is necessary to keep the enemy off balance and make that group’s actions unpredictable.

Unity of Command. “For every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander.” This is where some streams of anarchist culture come up against millennia of strategic advice. No strategy can be implemented by consensus under dangerous or emergency circumstances. Participatory decision making is not compatible with high-risk or urgent operations. That’s why the anarchist columns in the Spanish Civil War had officers even though they despised rulers. A group may arrive at a strategy by any decision-making method it desires, but when it comes to implementation, a hierarchy is required to undertake more serious action.

Security. “Never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage.” When fighting in a panopticon, this principle becomes even more important. Security is a cornerstone of strategy as well as of organization. [EXPAND]

Surprise. “Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which they are unprepared.” This is key to asymmetric conflict—and again, not especially compatible with an open or participatory decision-making structure. Resistance movements are almost always outnumbered, which means they have to use surprise and swiftness to strike and accomplish their objectives before those in power can marshal an overpowering response.

Simplicity. “Prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise orders to ensure thorough understanding.” The plan must be clear and direct so that everyone understands it. The simpler a plan is, the more reliably it can be implemented by multiple cooperating groups.

Many of these basic principles fall into conflict with the favored actions of dissidents. Protest marches, petitions, letter writing, and so on often lack a decisive or attainable objective, give the initiative to those in power, fail to concentrate force at a decisive juncture, put excessive resources into secondary efforts, limit maneuvering ability, lack unified command for the objective (such as there is), have mixed implementation of security, and typically offer no surprise. They are, however, simple plans, if that’s any consolation.

In fact, these strategic principles might as well come from a different dimension as far as most (liberal) protest actions are concerned. That’s because the military strategist has the same broad objective as the radical strategist: to use the decisive application of force to accomplish a task. Neither strategist is under the illusion that the opponent is going to correct a “mistake” if this enemy gets enough information or that success can occur by simple persuasion without the backing of political force. Furthermore, both are able to clearly identify their enemy. If you identify with those in power, you’ll never be able to fight back. An oppositional culture has an identity that is distinct from that of those in power; this is a defining element of cultures of resistance. Without a clear

knowledge of who your adversary is, you either end up fighting everyone (in classic horizontal hostility) or no one, and, in either case, your struggle cannot succeed.

(House cannot stand divided is a similar idea, fighting among each other is a good way to get all of you beaten in decisive conflict. Internal division will reduce to rubble all attempts to coordinate effective action in times of emergency. Dissent and debate is important, but when enemies are closing in on all sides, the culture must be drilled to stand as one against all foes. The principles of mutual aid and solidarity—an injury to one is an injury to all—bring this back to the common people. But if an organization seeking to disrupt power wishes to have a consistent and reliable strategy, this must be agreed upon from the very beginning of the project.

* * *

In the US Army's field manual on guerrilla warfare, entitled *Special Forces Operations*, the authors go further than the general principles of war to kindly describe the specific properties of successful asymmetric conflict. "Combat operations of guerrilla forces"--and, I would add, resistance and asymmetric forces in general--"take on certain characteristics that must be understood." Six key characteristics must be in place for resistance operations:

Planning. "Careful and detailed....[p]lans provide for the attack of selected targets and subsequent operations designed to exploit the advantage gained.... Additionally, alternate targets are designated to allow subordinate units a degree of flexibility in taking advantage of sudden changes in the tactical situation." In other words, it is important to employ maneuvering and flexible application of combat power. It's important to emphasize that planning is *not* about coming up with a concrete or complex scheme. The point is to plan well enough that they have the flexibility to improvise. It might sound counterintuitive, but the goal is to create an adaptable plan that offers many possibilities for effective action that can be applied on the fly.

Intelligence. "The basis of planning is accurate and up-to-date intelligence. Prior to initiating combat operations, a detailed intelligence collection effort is made in the projected objective area. This effort supplements the regular flow of intelligence." That's strategic and operational intelligence. On a tactical level, "provisions are made for keeping the target or objective area under surveillance up to the time of attack."

Decentralized Execution. "Guerrilla combat operations feature centralized planning and decentralized execution." It is necessary to have a coherent plan, and in order for that plan to be a surprise, the details often have to be kept secret. A centralized plan allows separate cells to carry out their work independently but still accomplish something through coordination and building toward long-term objectives. Decentralized execution is needed to reach multiple targets for a group that lacks a command and control hierarchy.

Surprise. "Attacks are executed at unexpected times and places. Set patterns of action are avoided. Maximum advantage is gained by attacking enemy weaknesses." When planning a militant action, resisters don't announce when or where. The point is not to make a statement, but to make a decisive material impact on systems of power. This can again be enhanced by coordination between multiple cells. "Surprise may also be enhanced by the conduct of concurrent diversionary activities."

Short Duration Action. "Usually, combat operations of guerrilla forces are marked by action of short duration against the target followed by a rapid withdrawal of the attacking force. Prolonged combat action from fixed positions is avoided." Resistance groups don't have the numbers or logistics for sustained or pitched battles. If they try to draw out an engagement in one place, those in power can mobilize overwhelming force against them. So underground resistance groups appear, accomplish their objectives swiftly, and then disappear again. "Be like water!"

Multiple Attacks. “Another characteristic of guerrilla combat operations is the employment of multiple attacks over a wide area by small units tailored to the individual missions.” Again, coordination is required. “Such actions tend to deceive the enemy as to the actual location of guerrilla bases, causes him to over-estimate guerrilla strength and forces him to disperse his rear area security and counter guerrilla efforts.” That is, when those in power don’t know where an attack will come, they must spend effort to defend every single potential target—whether that means guarding them, increasing insurance costs, or closing down vulnerable installations. And as forces become more dispersed in order to guard sprawling and vulnerable infrastructure, they become less concentrated and correspondingly make easier targets. Other writers on resistance struggles have shared these understandings. Che Guevara outlined similar strategy and tactics in his book *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961), which itself followed from Mao Tse-Tung’s 1937 book on the subject. Colin Gubbins, former head of the British Special Operations Executive, wrote two pamphlets on the subject for use in Occupied Europe (written not long after Mao’s book). These pamphlets—*The Partisan Leader’s Handbook* and *The Art of Guerrilla Warfare*—were based in part on what the British learned from T. E. Lawrence, but also from their attempts to quash resistance warfare in Ireland, Palestine, and elsewhere.

FORMATION

The ancients who were skilled in combat first became invincible, and in that condition awaited vulnerability on the part of enemies. Invincibility is up to you yourself; vulnerability depends on the opponent. Therefore those who are skilled in combat can become invincible but cannot make opponents vulnerable to certain defeat. This is why it is said that victory can be discerned, but cannot be made.

Invincibility is a matter of defense, vulnerability is a matter of offense. When you defend, it is because you are outgunned; when you attack, it is because the opponent is no match.

Those skilled at defense hide in the deepest depths of the earth; those skilled at offense maneuver in the highest heights of the sky. Thus they can preserve themselves and make victory complete.

Those whose perception of how to win is not beyond common knowledge are not the most skillful of experts. It doesn't take much strength to lift a strand of hair, it doesn't take clarity of eye to see the sun and moon, it doesn't take sharpness of ear to hear thunder.

Those considered good warriors in ancient times were those who won when it was easy to win. Thus the victories of good warriors have nothing extraordinary about them: They are not famed or brilliant, not accorded merit for bravado. Thus their victories in battle are not in doubt. They are not in doubt because the measures they take are sure to win, since they are overcoming those who have already lost.

Therefore those who are skilled in combat take a stand on an invincible ground without losing sight of opponents' vulnerabilities. Thus a victorious militia wins before ever seeking to do battle, while a defeated militia seeks victory after it has already gotten into a fight.

When those who employ military forces put the Way into practice and keep its laws, they can thereby judge the outcome. The laws are as follows: first is measure, second is capacity, third is order, fourth is efficacy, fifth is victory. The ground gives rise to measures, measures produce capacity. Capacity gives rise to order, order produces efficacy. Efficacy gives rise to victory.

Thus a victorious militia is like a weight balanced against another weight that is five hundred times less, while a defeated militia is like a weight balanced against another weight that is five hundred times greater. Those who get the people to fight from a winning position are as though opening up dammed waters into a mile-deep canyon; this is a matter of the formation of force.

TERRAIN

Some terrain is easily passable, in some you get hung up, some makes for a standoff, some is narrow, some is steep, some is wide open.

When both sides can come and go, the terrain is said to be easily passable. When the terrain is easily passable, take up your position first, choosing the high and sunny side, convenient to supply routes, for advantage in battle.

When you can go but have a hard time getting back, you are said to be hung up. On this type of terrain, if the opponent is unprepared, you will prevail if you go forth, but if the enemy is prepared, if you go forth and do not prevail you will have a hard time getting back to your disadvantage.

When it is disadvantageous for either side to go forth, it is called standoff terrain. On standoff terrain, even though the opponent offers you an advantage, you do not go for it—you withdraw, inducing the enemy half out, and then you attack, to your advantage.

On narrow terrain, if you are there first, you should fill it up to await the opponent. If the opponent is there first, do not pursue if the opponent fills the narrows. Pursue if the opponent does not fill the narrows.

On steep terrain, if you are there first, you should occupy the high and sunny side to await the opponent. If the opponent is there first, withdraw from there and do not pursue.

On wide-open terrain, the force of momentum is equalized, and it is hard to make a challenge, disadvantageous to fight [more room for maneuvering]

Understanding these six kinds of terrain is the highest responsibility of the general, and it is imperative to examine them.

So among military forces there are those who rush, those who tarry, those who fall, those who crumble, those who riot, and those who get beaten. These are not natural disasters, but faults of the generals.

Those who have equal momentum but strike ten with one are in a rush. Those whose soldiers are strong but whose officers are weak tarry. Those whose officers are strong but whose soldiers are weak fall. When colonels are angry and obstreperous and fight on their own out of spite when they meet opponents, and the generals do not know their abilities, they crumble.

ZHANG YU: Generally speaking, the entire military leadership has to be of one mind, all of the military forces have to cooperate, in order to defeat opponents.

When the generals are weak and lack authority, instructions are not clear, officers and soldiers lack consistency, and they form battle lines every which way, this is riot. [Internal disunity and poor organization reduce composure and resistance to enemy offenses] When the generals cannot assess opponents, clash with much greater numbers or more powerful forces, and do not sort out the levels of skill among their own troops, these are the ones who get beaten.

JIA LIN: If you employ soldiers without sorting out the skilled and unskilled, the brave and the timid, you are bringing defeat on yourself.

These six are ways to defeat. Understanding this is the ultimate responsibility of the generals; they must be examined.

CHEN HAO: First is not assessing numbers, second is a lack of a clear system of punishments and rewards, third is failure in training, fourth is irrational overexcitement, fifth is ineffectiveness of law and order, and six is a failure to choose the strong and resolute.

The contour of the land is an aid to an army; sizing up opponents to determine victory, assessing dangers and distances, is the proper course of action for military leaders. Those who do battle knowing these will win, those who do battle without knowing these will lose.

Therefore, when the laws of war indicate certain victory it is surely appropriate to do battle, even if the government says there is to be no battle. If the laws of war do not indicate victory, it is appropriate not to do battle, even if the government orders war. Thus one advances without seeking glory, retreats without avoiding blame, only protecting people, to the benefit of the ~~government~~ people as well, thus rendering valuable service to the nation.

Look upon your soldiers as you do infants, and they willingly go into deep valleys with you; look upon your soldiers as beloved children, and they willingly die with you.

If you are so nice to them that you cannot employ them, so kind to them that you cannot command them, so casual with them that you cannot establish order, they are like spoiled children, useless.

If you know your soldiers are capable of striking, but do not know whether the enemy is invulnerable to a strike, you have half a chance of winning. If you know the enemy is vulnerable to a strike, but do not know if your soldiers are incapable of making such a strike, you have half a chance of winning. If you know the enemy is vulnerable to a strike, and know your soldiers can make the strike, but do not know if the lay of the land makes it unsuitable for battle, you have half a chance of winning.

WANG XI: If you know yourself but not the other, or if you know the other but not yourself, in either case you cannot be sure of victory. And even if you know both yourself and your opponent and know you can fight, still you cannot overlook the question of the advantages of the terrain.

Therefore those who know martial arts do not wander when they move, and do not become exhausted when they rise up. So it is said that when you know yourself and others, victory is not in danger; when you know sky and earth, victory is inexhaustible.

Now for probably one of the most important chapters of the Art of War...

[11]

NINE GROUNDS (1/6)

According to the rule for military operations, there are nine kinds of ground. Where local interest fight among themselves on their own territory, this is called a ground of dissolution.

CAO CAO: When the soldiers are attached to the land and are near home, they fall apart easily.

When you enter others' land, but not deeply, this is called light ground.

CAO CAO: This means all the soldiers can all get back easily.

Lands that would be advantageous to you if you got it and to opponents if they got it is called ground of contention.

CAO CAO: Ground from which a few could overcome many, the weak could strike the powerful.

DU MU: A ground of inevitable contention is any natural barricade or strategic pass.

Land where you and others can come and go is called a trafficked ground.

ZHANG YU: If there are many roads in the area and there is free travel that cannot be cut off, this is what is called a trafficked ground.

Land that is surrounded on three sides by competitors and would give the first to get it access to all the people on the continent is called intersecting ground.

HO YANXI: Intersecting ground means the intersections of main arteries linking together numerous highway systems: first occupy this ground, and the people will have to go with you. So if you get it you are secure, if you lose it you are in peril.

When you enter deeply into others' land, past many cities and towns, this is called heavy ground.

CAO CAO: This is ground from which it is hard to return.

When you traverse mountain forests, steep defiles, marshes, or any route difficult to travel, this is called bad ground.

HO YANXI: Bad ground is land that lacks stability and is unsuitable for building fortifications and trenches. It is best to leave such terrain as quickly as possible

[Guerrilla movements have often used bad terrain to tie up/ambush an enemy. The Viet Kong is a strong example of this. From this territory small mobile forces can negate enemy advantages in supply, reinforcement, fortification, etc.]

When the way in is narrow and the way out is circuitous, so a small enemy force can strike you, even though your numbers are greater, this is called surrounded ground.

MEI YAOCHEN: If you are capable of extraordinary adaptation, you can travel this ground.

ZHANG YU: On ground that is hemmed in in front and walled off behind, a single defender can hold off a thousand men, so on such ground you win by ambush.

When you will survive if you fight quickly and perish if you do not, this is called dying ground.

CHEN HAO: People on dying ground are, as it were, sitting in a leaking boat, lying in a burning house.

MEI YAOCHEN: When you cannot press forward, cannot retreat backward, and cannot run to the sides, you have no choice but to fight right away.

So let there be no battle on a ground of dissolution, let there be no stopping on light ground, let there be no attack on a ground of contention, let there be no cutting off of trafficked ground. On intersecting ground form communications, on heavy ground plunder, on bad ground keep going, on surrounded ground make plans, on dying ground fight.

MEI YAOCHEN: Light ground is where soldiers have first entered enemy territory and do not yet have their backs to the wall; hence the minds of the soldiers are not really concentrated, and they are not ready for battle. At this point it is imperative to avoid important cities and highways, and advantageous to move quickly onward.

CAO CAO: It is not advantageous to attack an enemy on a ground of contention; what is advantageous is to get there first.

WANG XI: Trafficked ground should not be cut off, so that the roads may be used advantageously as supply routes.

MENG SHI: On intersecting ground, if you establish alliances you are safe, if you lose alliances you are in peril.

CAO CAO: On heavy ground, plundering means building up supplies.

Li Quan added, "When you enter deeply into enemy territory you should not antagonize people by acting unjustly. When the founder of the great Han dynasty entered the homeland of the supplanted Qin dynasty, there was no rapine or pillage, and this is how he won the peoples' hearts."

[On a similar principle, the leader of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine, Nestor Makhno, did not allow his anarchist comrades to loot the cities that they occupied. Expropriation of the landowners and bourgeoisie was carried out in as just and democratic a process as possible, with punishments meted out by public assemblies of workers and peasants. Although seizing the means is an urgent task, it needs to be carried out with tact and the mandate of the people.]

LI QUAN: On bad ground, since you cannot entrench, you should make haste to leave there.

CAO CAO: On surrounded ground, bring surprise tactics into play.

CHEN HAO: If they fall into dying ground, then everyone in the army will spontaneously fight. This is why it is said, "Put them on dying ground, and then they will live."

Those who are called the good militarists of old could make opponents lose contact between the front and back lines, lose reliability between large and small groups, lose mutual concern for the welfare of the different social classes among them, lose mutual accommodations between the rulers and the ruled, lose enlistments among the soldiers, lose coherence within the armies. They went into action when it was advantageous, stopped when it was not.

LI QUAN: They set up charges to confuse their opponents, striking them here and there, terrorizing and disarraying them in such a way that they had no time to plan.

It may be asked, when a large, well-organized opponent is about to come to you, how do you deal with it? The answer is that you first take away what they like, and then they will listen to you.

WANG XI: First occupy a position of advantage, and cut off their supply routes by special strike forces, and they will do as you plan.

CHEN HAO: What they like does not only mean the advantages they rely on, it means that anything enemies care about is worth capturing.

The condition of a military force is that its essential factor is speed, taking advantage of others' failure to catch up, going by routes they do not expect, attacking where they are not on guard.

CHEN HAO: This means that to take advantage of unpreparedness, lack of foresight, or lack of caution on the part of the opponents, it is necessary to proceed quickly, it won't work if you hesitate.

In general, the pattern of invasion is that invaders become more intense the farther they enter alien territory, to the point where the native rulership cannot overcome them.

Glean from rich fields, and the armies will have enough to eat. Take care of your health and avoid stress, consolidate your energy and build up your strength. Maneuver your troops and assess strategies so as to be unfathomable.

WANG XI: Consolidate your keenest energy, save up your extra strength, keep your form concealed and your plans secret, being unfathomable to enemies, waiting for a vulnerable gap to advance upon.

Put them in a spot where they have no place to go, and they will die before fleeing. If they are to die there, what can they not do? Warriors exert their full strength. When warriors are in great danger, then they have no fear. When there is nowhere to go they are firm, when they are deeply involved they stick to it. If they have no choice, they will fight.

For this reason the soldiers are alert without being drilled, enlist without being drafted, are friendly without treaties, are trustworthy without commands.

DU MU: This means that when warriors are in mortal danger everyone high and low has the same aim, so they are spontaneously on the alert without being drilled, are spontaneously sympathetic without being drafted, and are spontaneously trustworthy without treaties or commands.

Prohibit omens to get rid of doubt, and soldiers will never leave you. If your soldiers have no extra goods, it is not that they dislike material goods. If they have no more life, it is not that they do not want to live long. On the day the order to march goes out, the soldiers weep.

CAO CAO: They abandon their goods and go to their death because they have no choice. They weep because they all intend to go to their death.

DU MU: If they have valuable possessions, soldiers may become attached to them and lack the spirit to fight to the death, and all are pledged to die.

So a skillful military operation should be like a swift snake that counters with its tail when someone strikes at its head, counters with its head when someone strikes at its tail, and counters with both head and tail when someone strikes in the middle.

ZHANG YU: This represents the method of a battle line, responding swiftly when struck. A manual of eight classical battle formations says, “Make the back the front, make the front the back, with four heads and eight tails. Make the head anywhere, and when the enemy lunges into the middle, head and tail both come to the rescue.”

The question may be asked, can a military force be made to be like this swift snake? The answer is that it can. Even people who dislike each other, if in the same boat, will help each other out in trouble.

Therefore tethered horses and buried wheels are not sufficiently reliable.

To even out bravery and make it uniform is the Tao of organization. To be successful with both the hard and soft is based on the pattern of the ground.

CHEN HAO: If the orders are strict and clear, the brave cannot advance by themselves and the timid cannot shrink back by themselves, so the army is like one man.

ZHANG YU: If you get the advantage of the ground, you can overcome opponents even with soft, weak troops—how much more with hard, strong troops? What makes it possible for both strong and weak to be useful is the configuration of the ground.

Therefore those skilled in military operations achieve cooperation in a group so that directing the group is like directing a single individual with no other choice.

The business of the general is quiet and secret, fair and orderly.

MAI YAOCHEN: If you are quiet and inconspicuous, others will not be able to figure you out. If you are accurate and orderly, others will not be able to disturb you.

He can keep his soldiers unaware, make them ignorant.

He changes his actions and revises his plans, so that people will not recognize them. He changes his abode and goes by a circuitous route, so that people cannot anticipate him.

ZHANG YU: When people never understand what your intention is, then you win. The Great White Mountain Man said, “The reason deception is valued in military operations is not just for deceiving enemies, but to begin with for deceiving one’s own troops, to get them to follow unknowingly.”

When a leader establishes a goal with the troops, he is like one who climbs up to a high place and then tosses away the ladder. When a leader enters deeply into enemy territory with the troops, he brings out their potential. He has them burn the boats and destroy the pots, drives them like sheep, none knowing where they are going.

CAO CAO: He unifies their minds.

To assemble armies and put them into dangerous situations is the business of generals. Adaptations to different grounds, advantages of contraction and expansion, patterns of human feelings and conditions—these must be examined.

Generally, the way it is with invaders is that they unite when deep in enemy territory but are prone to dissolve while on the fringes. When you leave your country and cross the border on a military operation, that is isolated ground. When it is accessible from all directions, it is trafficked ground. When penetration is deep, that is heavy ground. When penetration is shallow, that is light ground. When your back is to an impassable fastness and before you are narrow straits, that is surrounded ground. When there is nowhere to go, that is deadly ground.

So on a ground of dissolution, I would unify the minds of the troops. On light ground, I would have them keep in touch. On a ground of contention, I would have them follow up quickly. On an intersecting ground, I would be careful about defense. On a trafficked ground, I would make alliances firm. On heavy ground, I would ensure continuous supplies. On bad ground, I would urge them onward. On surrounded ground, I would close up the gaps. On deadly ground, I would indicate to them there is no surviving.

So the psychology of soldiers is to resist when surrounded, fight when it cannot be avoided, and obey in extremes.

Therefore those who do not know the plans of competitors cannot prepare alliances. Those who do not know the lay of the land cannot maneuver their forces. Those who do not use local guides cannot take advantage of the ground. The military of an effective rulership must know all these things.

When the military of an effective rulership attacks a large country, the people cannot unite. When its power overwhelms opponents, alliances cannot come together.

WANG XI: If you are able to find out opponents' plans, take advantage of the ground, and maneuver opponents so that they are helpless, then even a large country cannot assemble enough people to stop you.

ZHANG YU: If you rely on the force of wealth and strength to hastily attack a large country, your own people will resent the suffering this causes and will not unite behind you. If you pose an overwhelming military threat to rival nations, their leaders will fear you and not dare to form alliances.

Therefore if you do not compete for alliances anywhere, do not foster authority anywhere, but just extend your personal influence, threatening opponents, this makes town and country vulnerable.

ZHANG YU: If you do not compete for allies and helpers, then you will be isolated with little help. If you do not foster your authority, then people will leave and the country will weaken. If you lash out in personal rage, threatening neighbors with violence, then in the end you bring destruction on yourself.

Another interpretation is that if an enemy country cannot unite its people and assemble its troops, and its alliances cannot come together, then you should cut off its relations and take away its authority, so that you can extend your desires and awe your enemies, so that their citadels can be taken and their countries overthrown.

Give out rewards that are not in the rules, give out directives that are not in the code.

Employing the entire armed forces is like employing a single person. Employ them with actual tasks, do not talk to them. Motivate them with benefits, do not tell them about harm.

MEI YAOCHEN: Just employ them to fight, don't tell them your strategy. Let them know what benefits there is in it for them, don't tell them about the potential harm.

[This seems a little underhanded in our case, excepting need-to-know operations]

WANG XI: If the truth leaks out, your strategy will be foiled. If the soldiers worry, they will be hesitant and fearful.

Confront them with annihilation, and they will then survive; plunge them into a deadly situation, and they will then live. When people fall into danger, they are then able to strive for victory.

MEI YAOCHEN: Until they are trapped on difficult ground, soldiers are not fully concentrated in mind; once they have fallen into danger and difficulty, then the question of winning or losing depends on what people do.

So the task of military operations is to accord deceptively with the intentions of the enemy. If you concentrate totally on the enemy, you can kill its military leadership a thousand miles away. This is a skillful accomplishment of the task.

DU MU: If you want to attack an enemy but do not see an opening, then conceal your form and erase your tracks, going along with what the enemy does, not causing any surprises. If the enemy is strong and despises you, you appear to be timid and submissive, going along for the moment with his strength to make him haughty, waiting for him to become complacent and thus vulnerable to attack. If the enemy wants to retreat and go home, you open up a way to let him out, going along with his retreat so that he will not have any desire to fight, ultimately to take advantage of this to attack. Both of these are techniques of according with the enemy.

So on the day war is declared, borders are closed, passports are torn up, and emissaries are not let through.

Matters are dealt with strictly at headquarters.

When opponents present openings, you should penetrate them immediately. Get to what they want first, subtly anticipate them. Maintain discipline and adapt to the enemy in order to determine the outcome of the war. Thus, at first you are like a maiden, so the enemy opens his door; then you are like a rabbit on the loose, so the enemy cannot keep you out.

TEN BATTLE FORMATIONS

Generally speaking, there are ten kinds of battle formations. There are square formations, round formations, sparse formations, dense formations, pointed formations, formations like a flock of geese [V Formation] hooklike formations, confusing formations, fire formations, and water formations. Each of these has its uses.

Square formations are for cutting off, round formations are for massing solidly. Sparse formations are for bristling, dense formations are for being impossible to take. Pointed formations are for cutting through, formations like goose flocks are for handling barrages. Hooklike formations make it possible to adapt and change plans, confusing formations are for deceiving armies and muddling them. Fire formations are used for rapid destruction, water formations are used for both offense and defense.

The rule for square formations is to make the center thin and the sides thick, with the main line at the back. The sparse array in the center is used for bristling. [“Bristling” refers to giving the illusion of being bigger and stronger than one really is, just as an animal bristles when faced with a natural enemy.]

The rule for sparse formations is for added strength and firmness in cases where there is little armor and few people. The warrior’s technique is to set up banners and flags to give the appearance that there are people there. Therefore they are arrayed sparsely, with space in between, increasing the banners and insignia, with sharpened blades ready at the flanks. They should be at sufficient distance to avoid stumbling over each other, yet arrayed densely enough that they cannot be surrounded; this is a matter for caution. The chariots are not to gallop, the foot soldiers are not to run. The general rule for sparse formations is making numerous small groups, which may advance or retreat, may strike or defend, may intimidate enemies or may ambush them when they wear down. In this way a sparse formation can successfully take an elite corps.

The rule for a dense formation is not to space the troops too far apart; have them travel at close quarters, massing the blades yet giving enough room to wield them freely, front and rear protecting each other.... If the troops are frightened, settle them down. Do not pursue opponents in flight, do not try to stop them from coming; either strike them on a circuitous route, or break down their elite troops. Make your formation tightly woven, so there are no gaps; when you withdraw, do so under cover. In this way, a dense formation cannot be broken down.

A pointed formation is like a sword: if the tip is not sharp, it will not penetrate; if the edge is not thin, it will not cut; if the base is not thick, it cannot be deployed on the battlefield. Therefore the tip must be sharp, the edge must be thin, and the main body must be thick; then a pointed formation can be used for cutting through.

In a hooked formation, the front lines should be straight, while the left and right flanks are hooked. With gongs, drums, and pipes at the ready, and flags prepared, the troops should know their own signal and flag.... [Incomplete, not sure how this formation is used.]

A confusing formation must use a lot of flags and insignia, and drum up a racket. If the soldiers are in a commotion, then settle them down; if the chariots are disorderly, then line them up. When all is in order, the battle lines move with a shocking commotion, as though it had come down from the sky or emerged from the earth. The foot soldiers come on unstoppably, continuing all day and long inexhaustibly.

The rules for incendiary warfare are as follows. Once moats and ramparts have been made, construct another moat. Pile kindling every five paces, making sure the piles are placed at even intervals. A few men are needed to set the fires; they must be fast and efficient. Avoid being

downwind; if the fire has overwhelmed you, you cannot fight a winning battle, and you will lose whether you stay put or go into action.

The rule for incendiary warfare is that the ground should be low and grassy, so that enemy soldiers have no way out. Under these conditions, it is feasible to use fire. If it is windy, if there is plenty of natural fuel, if kindling has been piled up, and if the enemy encampment is not carefully guarded, then a fire attack is feasible. Throw them into confusion with fire, shower them with arrows, drum and yell to encourage your soldiers, using momentum to help them. These are the principles of incendiary warfare.

The rule for amphibious warfare is to have a lot of infantry and few chariots. Have them fully equipped so that they can keep up when advancing and do not bunch up when withdrawing. To avoid bunching up, go with the current; make the enemy soldiers into targets.

The rule for warfare on the water is to use light boats to guide the way, use speedboats for messengers. If the enemy retreats, pursue; if the enemy approaches, close in. Be careful about advancing and withdrawing in an orderly manner, according to what is prudent under prevailing conditions. Be on the alert as they shift positions, attack them as they set up a front, split them up as they organize. As the soldiers have a variety of weapons and chariots, and have both mounted troops and infantry, it is essential to find out their quantities. Attack their boats, blockade the fords, and inform your people when the troops are coming. These are the rules of amphibious combat.

Chapter 7

Our sojourn in the village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka. Our meeting with the detachment of Shchus and the merging of it with ours.

Arriving at the village of Bolshe-Mikhailovka, we decided not to enter it by crossing the bridge over the river Volchya. We send a reconnaissance patrol across the river at a ford which prowled up and down the streets and established that the Austro-German troops had not been seen in the village for nearly three days. Then the whole detachment crossed over. We are able to pass quietly through the center of the village and halt at the other side, which was right at the edge of the forest. It was three or four hours till dawn. The detachment settled in beside a courtyard where we needed to post sentries on only three sides. Everyone, with the exception of the sentries, lay down to sleep.

At daybreak we were inundated by a crowd of peasant children. From them we learned about the presence in the forest of the detachment of Comrade Shchus. I had heard about this detachment previously. But then it was under the command of the sailor Brova, whom I didn't know. In the descriptions I had heard, this outfit had been compared to a band of Caucasian brigands. That's why its activities hadn't interested me. But now it turned out to be under the command of Shchus, whom I vaguely remembered. He had been a courageous fighter in the GCAK (Gulyai-Polye Group of Anarcho-Communists) detachment in the spring, taking part in the struggle against the Austro-German invasion. Karetnik jogged my memory some more so that finally I recalled him as a participant in our Taganrog conference.

We were all extremely glad to learn that Shchus had passed safely through the front near Taganrog. And we were also glad he wasn't sitting around idly, but was taking action.

I tried to ascertain in which part of the forest his camp was located. I sent two messengers to find this detachment and bring back one or two members of it. This task was fulfilled. Afterwards I went into the forest myself to visit the detachment.

Comrade Shchus had received my note from the messengers and agreed to meet with me. However, he wasn't sure if it was really me or one of the *Hetman's* agents. Therefore he pulled his whole detachment—50 or 60 men—out of the sturdy dugout they had built, leaving only the wounded behind. Shchus was prepared, if the meeting turned out to be a trap, to offer determined resistance.

When I entered the clearing where I was supposed to meet Comrade Shchus, I saw his detachment drawn up in a square, half of its members wearing Austro-German uniforms. Thinking that I had blundered into an ambush, I quickly turned my horse so as to slink away. But then I heard a voice:

“Comrade Makhno, it is I, Shchus.”



Fyodor Shchus in 1918, wearing his sailor's dress uniform complemented with partisan weaponry. His sailor's cap bears the name of the battleship on which he served during World War I—the *Ioann Zlatoust* [John Chrysostom], part of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. He was a wrestling champion in the Fleet, having acquired some proficiency in jiu-jitsu, unusual for that time. See Skirda (2004), p. 315.

At the same time he released one of my messengers who had remained with him as a hostage. This finally convinced me. I headed straight into the clearing, toward the detachment. I greeted the detachment and Shchus himself. Only now when I had a good look at Shchus, who was wearing a German hussar's uniform (which fitted him perfectly) and was armed to the teeth, did I recognize the handsome sailor whom I had known earlier. We embraced and exchanged kisses. His detachment also made a good impression, despite its varied attire, for it was clad in German, Austrian, and Ukrainian *haidamak* uniforms, not to mention peasant work clothes. Since everyone in the detachment was also armed to the teeth, it exuded an aura of martial ardour. There was noticeably a surge of enthusiasm when Shchus and I exchanged kisses.

Then I posed a question to Shchus:

"Comrade Shchus, what have you accomplished with this detachment up to now and what to do you intend to do in the future?"

His answer was brief and to the point.

"So far I have carried out attacks on *pomeshchiks* returning to repossess their land, and annihilated both them and the Austrian and German soldiers guarding them."

"And what is your attitude towards the *Herman's Varta*?"

"Usually I disperse them."

"Is that everything?"

"I'm not taking on anything else at the moment, because there are still lots of 'reptiles' to annihilate."

In these curt phrases Shchus told me everything I needed to know. He had engaged in the struggle against the oppressors according to his own interpretation of the resolution agreed upon by our Gulyai-Polyans at the conference in Taganrog. Given the short time frame one could hardly expect more. However, after meeting him personally and recalling my friend's opinions about him, I couldn't help but regret that a person of his mettle was sort of mindlessly expending his energies in that mod of struggle which he had embraced up to that point. After a moment of thought, I proposed that I explain to him my objectives, the objectives of our whole insurgent organization, most of whose members were on hand.

I told him about the work we had been carrying on. And in conclusion I said:

"I'm asking you and your detachment to leave the forest for the steppe—go to the villages and hamlets. Appeal to the peasants, especially the younger ones, to throw themselves into the fray with definite goals which everyone can understand. The support of the peasants will bestow upon us, the revolutionaries, the right to pick up our weapon, raise our sword of retribution, and use it against all those who, in the name of state power and privilege, have raised their own sword against the toilers, against freedom and justice, aiming to annihilate all of us. Putting ourselves in the vanguard of the working people who are struggling against the Counter-Revolution and for the Revolution, we, the true sons of the toilers, will hurl ourselves into battle against the butchers."

As I was speaking, Comrade Shchus bowed his head and stared at the ground without interrupting. But from time to time he would glance at his partisans and ask them if they heard what I was saying. He listened until I was finished and then, when I asked if he objected to anything I had said, he quickly straightened up and, with a child-like smile, grabbed me in a bear hug and yelled:

"Yes, yes, I am with you, Comrade Makhno!"

And the voices of the detachment rang out:

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Now we held a little meeting—myself, Shchus, my closest friends, and his closest friends, where we discussed about pulling his detachment out of the forest and into the village where we would immediately proceed to organizing the Dibrivki peasants.

When our meeting wrapped up, Shchus went to his detachment and asked the partisans what they thought about quitting the forest and entering the village, explaining to them the intent of this manoeuvre. The partisans approved our decision. I and my friends took off for our own detachment, and Shchus began preparing to leave the village.



When Shchus's detachment of Dibrivkans emerged from the forest it encountered our detachment of Gulyai-Polyans. The two detachments fused together into one indivisible whole. The resultant new detachment was a military formation strong in spirit and willpower. I had a clear idea of our future activities. It had occurred to me (so far this was just my own idea) that our detachment was now strong enough to carry out a raid in the direction of Yuzovka, Mariupol, and Berdyansk, passing through all the villages, hamlets, and *khutors* on the way with the goal of inciting and organizing a revolt. At the same time we would be collecting weapons and the necessary funds to support this great project.

One thing troubled me: Shchus's detachment included several wounded men. It seemed to me we had nowhere to leave them so we would have to take them with us. I didn't know if we could look after them properly and taking them would slow us down when we were being pursued by enemy forces. But my worries were soon dispelled because it turned out most of the wounded had fiancées in the village. As soon as the detachment appeared, these women found their wounded boyfriends and tended to their needs. And those women whose boyfriends were seriously wounded immediately declared themselves insurgents who wished to share the destiny of their friends and that of the detachment in its campaigns and battles.

Now we were engulfed by a huge crowd of peasant men and women and escorted from the forest to the center of the village. And by the time we reached the center, we were accompanied by virtually the whole working population. Some of them asked what they should prepare to feed us. Others asked to be accepted into the detachment. Our life was becoming more stressful but at the same time more cheerful.

From the very first days of our revolt I had been opposed to feeding ourselves at the expense of the working population, if it could be at all avoided. I asked the assembled people to point out where there were kulaks living who had sheep and heifers, with the idea that we could possibly take two or three animals to make soup for the partisans. Then if the peasants could bring some bread to go along with the soup, the detachment would be fed.

The people pointed out the *kulaks*, some of whom immediately responded by offering one sheep each for the detachment. So the problem of feeding the partisans was resolved rather quickly.

Taking advantage of the huge crowd assembled, I held a meeting on the subject of our struggle against the counter-revolutionary Austro-German and *Hetmanite* troops, as well as the White organization of General Denikin, which aimed at restoring the former regime. And since, in my opinion, the latter organization was more dangerous than the *Hetmanate*, I dwelled upon it in my speech. I noted that the Whites had formed detachments of 20 or 30 men which enjoyed the protection of the *Hetmanate* and the Austro-German command and were roaming about the countryside, terrorizing the working population and at the same time laying the groundwork for further incursions. I pointed out to the toilers how the Whites, in the person of Drozdov and his detachment, had been carrying on dirty work on behalf of the *Hetmanate* in Berdyansk *uyezd*. And in Melitopol *uyezd* agents of a certain General Tillo were also active, operating under the cover of the stupid, criminal *Hetmanate* to advance their reactionary agenda.

"Against the Germans, Austrians, and the *Hetman* and his regime we will raise a revolt such as has never been seen before," I said, "and we will win. But we mustn't lose sight of the fact that Ukraine is being watched by the *atamans* of the White Don and the Volunteer Army of General Denikin. Bandits led by experienced officers are already conducting raids into our region. Denikin's

regime and the White Don are casting greedy eyes at our *raions* which are dotted with the nests of literally thousands of *pomeshchiks*, *kulaks*, and the rich German colonists—and these people are armed to the teeth, armed by the Austro-German armies brought to us by the *Rada*. The restorationist organizations—the Denikinists and Krasnovites—feel they have a potential base in our *raions*. This base is linked to them spiritually and organizationally, even though the Whites are only interested in hanging on to the Kuban and the Don while clearing a path to Moscow. They can't manage this without a suitable base of operations, and South Ukraine fits the bill."

"That's why," I emphasized to the peasants, "while we're carrying on the struggle against the Austro-German occupation and the *Hetmanate*, we must simultaneously root out and eradicate the embryonic White organization. Everything connected with the military preparations of this organization must be wiped out. For this 'organization of generals,' so to speak, being Russian monarchist in temperament, can only be seen by us as one of the most dangerous of our enemies. The Whites have incomparably more potential than the feeble *Hetmanate* or the Austro-German butchers who are criminally toying with our rights and our lives.

"We must show no mercy to any of them!"

With this appeal I ended my speech to the Dibrivki population. And my last words resounded over and over again throughout the crowd: "Show them no mercy!"

[In hindsight perhaps Makhno should have listed the authoritarian Bolsheviks as one of his enemies, perhaps after they furnished them with equipment?]

But when I conferred with my friends, they came down on me for speaking so candidly to the peasants. You'll frighten them, they said, and they'll react just like the city workers by taking a wait-and-see position as regards their enemies. And all our efforts to launch the struggle for revolution will come to naught.

My friends' lack of understanding of the peasants, despite the fact they were peasants themselves, disturbed me. I might very well have shared their opinion at this time if I had not found myself in a leadership position. I might very well have not bothered to make a serious analysis of the current reality in Ukraine and told my friends: "You're right." Even if I didn't say so, I might have passively supported those slogans they mouthed in place of my own: "No mercy to any of our enemies!"

But my role as prime mover and leader, first of our original organization, and now of our combined detachments, compelled me to be more circumspect, but at the same time more decisive. After reflecting on the real state of affairs, I made a firm response to my friends as follows:

"The events which are unfolding are clear for everyone to see; to avoid commenting on them on the grounds that this would intimidate the broad peasant masses is inappropriate. We should rather count on the sympathy of these broad masses towards our revolutionary initiatives and we should build on this sympathy. After all, we have already announced our slogans of revolt. In many villages peasants organized by us have already begun to revolt. Blood has already been shed beneath our banner since our inspirational call to arms: live free and build a new social life based on freedom, equality, and unfettered labor—or perish in the struggle against those who would obstruct us in the attainment of this splendid goal. What else remains for us, the organizers of this revolt, to do other than say openly to anyone who will listen: 'Let the revolutionary tempest rage even more strongly!' And in saying this we shall throw ourselves body and soul into the struggle, guiding it and helping it find the true path."

"You're right," my friends responded finally, "and we haven't the slightest intention of changing our minds about things we decided long ago and which we have already put into practice.

What got us worried was the way the meeting broke up, with the peasants—both men and women—yelling to each other: “No mercy for our enemies!”

Shchus had been actively applying the policy of “no mercy” for some time, but now he and Marchenko were concerned that the Dibrivki peasants would be scared off and it would be hard to get them to a meeting the next day.

Of course the worries of my friends turned out to be baseless. On the morrow the square and the streets leading to it were overflowing with peasants. Even peasants from neighboring villages had come. Some wished to join our detachment; others were seeking weapons and instructions on what to do.

We remained in Dibrivki for another two days. Our detachment grew in size to 500 men. But three-quarters of them were without weapons. Those who had no weapons were registered, but not yet included in the ranks of the detachment proper.

On the third day I held yet another meeting. The peasants had elected their own soviet. Again the topic of discussion was the organizing of an all-encompassing peasant uprising against the *Hetman* and the Austro-German command. This meeting went on until late in the evening. And then I worked through the night writing up instructions and operational directives for all the detachments which were associated with our detachment and its staff. Peasant couriers were dispatched to carry these messages to all the *raions*.

As never before, I felt entirely isolated. More than ever I was seized with anger at all of my ideological comrades of the cities who, it seemed to me, were less and less worthy of the respect of the broad peasant masses. How useful these comrades could be, how much good they could do for our movement, if only they were here among the peasants!

Now I felt a need to speak with comrades Marchenko, Karetnik, Ryabko, Shchus, and some others. But comrade Petya Liuty, who had been assigned to me as a sort of bodyguard since the start of our organization, informed me that none of them was present in the building of the district soviet where I was staying. And so I wearily sprawled on a table to catch some sleep.

Suddenly I remembered that I hadn’t checked to see if guard posts had been set up at the access points to the village. I got up, armed myself, and went to find out.

Everything turned out to be in order. I took a walk around the courtyard of the soviet building where the wounded partisans from Shchus’s detachment were lying. One of them, Comrade Petrenko, was heavily wounded and moaning. His girlfriend was sitting beside him, weeping. It was a shame we weren’t able to put him in a hospital. But there was nothing more we could do for him.

“We need to place him on a wagon for the night,” I told the people who were looking after the wounded, “for if there is an alarm it will be too late.”

They assured me that everything was prepared in the case of an emergency. The wounded would be loaded quickly on the wagons. I went back into the administrative building and lay down again to sleep on the table, since there was no couch. I was given a message from Marchenko that he, Karetnik, and Shchus were stationed among the partisans. This reassured me and I dozed off.

Not for long. Liuty woke me up by banging on the door. Once awake, I heard machine-gun fire. I jumped up and in a frenzy grabbed my weapons and rushed out into the courtyard. All the partisans, with the exception of those on guard duty, were converging on our headquarters at the run. I learned that our guards at the posts in the directions of Uspenovka and Pokrovskoye had opened fire first.

“What’s going on?”

“The Austrians are attacking,”

These were anxious moments. From the opposite side of the Volchya River the enemy was directing machine-gun fire at the courtyard. Some horses harnessed to the wagons for the wounded had already been killed. Shchus and Marchenko were forming up the detachment. Comrade Karetnik had gone to the guard post in the Pokrovskoye direction, where the firing was getting stronger. Some peasants came running up, asking:

“What shall we do?”

Some of my comrades were panic-stricken, which made me furious. I threw myself into their midst and ordered them in no uncertain terms to go into the courtyard, drag out all the *tachankas* by hand—regardless of whether they were empty or loaded with wounded, position them in the street where they would be in the shelter of houses, and harness horses to them.

Marchenko and Shchus were ordered to send a squadron in the direction of the enemy machine-gun which was raking our wagon train rather effectively, and either force it to move or change its direction of fire.

Meanwhile Comrade Karetnik had brought reinforcements to the guard post at the bridge, where they repulsed a tenacious enemy attack. He noticed that among the soldiers in Austrian uniform there were also attackers in civilian dress. But he wasn't able to determine if these attackers were Austrians, *pomeschiks*, *kulaks*, or German colonists.

When the wagons had been dragged out of the line of fire and the horses harnessed to them, we decided it would be best to get out of the village and take shelter in the forest until morning. After having withdrawn our pickets, we headed towards the forest as quietly as possible.

A terrible sight greeted us on our way to the forest. The roadway was crowded with peasants with their small children. Half-screaming, half-sobbing, they said to us:

“Don't leave us at the mercy of our oppressors. Let us help you and somehow we'll drive them off.”

It was heartbreaking to listen to their desperate cries. But without clear knowledge of the enemy's identity, strength, and ordinance, we were in no position to remain in the center of the village until daybreak. We needed to conceal our own strength from the enemy before engaging in battle. All of us were of this opinion. Even Comrade Shchus realized it was not possible to defend his own village. So, despite the wailing of the peasant women and their children, I yelled to our units:

“Let's get moving!” And we set off at a trot towards the gates leading to the forest.

The enemy apparently sensed our uncertainty and fear. Instead of allowing us to retire through the gates to the forest quietly and in the dark, they set one of the peasant homesteads blazing and began firing their machine-guns and rifles in our direction.

This forced us to scramble to another part of the village where there was another set of gates leading to the forest. Here we exercised more caution. Before sending our wagon train into the forest, I ordered 30-35 partisans to dismount and form a skirmishing line with a hinge in the middle so one half of the line could cover the forest in the direction in which we had to advance, while the other half covered the ridge above the Uspenovka—Bolshe-Mihailovka (Dibrivki) road, on that side of the river Volchya from which the attack on us had first started. This would make it possible for us to proceed with our wagons and rather feeble cavalry into the forest without too much damage, so long as the firing from the front direction and into our right flank was not too strong.

But alas! Scarcely had I formed this skirmish line from partisans (from Shchus's detachment) who knew the terrain, and yelled “Shchus, move the wagons forward!” than the forest erupted with a salvo from 15 or 20 rifles and a sub-machine gun. Then there was a second and third burst of fire,

after which the firing became random, but quite rapid, in the very direction in which I and these 30-35 comrades were advancing.

I yelled to them: "Get down!" and then "Fire at will!" and immediately got off two or three shots myself with my carbine. But, unfortunately, these were the only shots taken by our side. My entire squadron had fled to take cover with the rest of our forces.

The enemy continued to lay down a barrage of fire upon our intended route into the forest.

Finding myself alone on an open patch of ground which was still being showered with bullets, I also darted back to where our units were waiting out of the line of fire.

The partisans were becoming restless. Soon it would be dawn. All of us dreaded the coming of daylight. We knew that if the enemy turned out to be regular Austro-German troops and if their numbers were sufficient, they would attack us at dawn. No question about it if they got even a rough idea of our strength. That's why all of us (some consciously, others instinctively) realized the absolute necessity of finding shelter in the forest before dawn.

Noticing the partisans and their commanders were becoming agitated, I gave them a good talking to, then picked another 30-40 men. I set up a Maxim gun in one of the peasant houses and issued instructions that it was to fire continuously at the enemy at a certain time. Then I, together with the chosen partisans, slipped down into a deep ravine which led into the forest. This allowed us to gain the flank of the enemy shooters and subject them to rapid fire. The combination of firing from two directions, evidently with some accuracy, had its effect on the enemy. Those of us in the forest quickly overran the position where the enemy had been and we had to signal our machine-gun to quit firing so we wouldn't be hit.

We found two or three boxes of ammunition and eight saddled horses hitched to trees. The enemy had gone into hiding somewhere.

In short order we secured the entire route from the village into the forest and our remaining units began passing along it.

Upon examining the horses left by the enemy, we learned that our attackers, at least from this direction, were punitive detachments made up of *pomeshchiks* and *kulak* supporters of the *Hetman*. Now we needed to find out if these were the only units attacking us or if they were being reinforced by regular Austro-German troops. The clarification of this matter was insisted upon by my friends, with the exception of Comrade Shchus. He proposed rather we move to his impregnable bunker and wait there, without showing ourselves, while the enemy was present in Dibrivki village.

I understood Shchus completely. He was fearless, but he was afraid for the wounded and afraid for the village which (as we all know) would be subject to terrible reprisals. Because of this he took the position that we should lay low in these inaccessible holes in the ground until a more favorable moment. He had always done this prior to our arrival.

But Karetnik, Marchenko, Ryabko, Royan, Liuty, myself, the whole of our detachment, and at least half of Shchus's detachment wanted to determine the strength of our opponents and, if it was comparable to our own strength, or at least not more than five or ten times larger, engage them in a fight to the finish. We considered these feasible because the whole toiling population of the village stood behind us one hundred percent.

At this time Comrade Shchus still felt he was not bound to follow the directives of the staff of our organization. He didn't wait till the end of the meeting, but formed up part of his people and the *tachankas* with the wounded and headed into the depths of the forest, towards his bunker. The rest of us—myself, Karetnik, P. Petrenko (the brother of the wounded man) and a small number of partisans—decided to make our way again to the gates where we had first attempted to enter the forest but had been turned back because of heavy fire.

Marchenko went with the remaining partisans deep into the forest, while maintaining contact both with us and with Comrade Shchus.

There was no sign of the enemy at the gates. The owner of the house which had been set on fire beside the gates told us that a half-company of Austrians had been there along with a dozen sons of *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*. The latter took advantage of the protection afforded by the Austro-German troops to annihilate any revolutionary peasants in the village and flog with *shrompols* those who, while they didn't appear to be active revolutionaries, nevertheless could not conceal their hatred for the *pomeshchiks* and their authority.

A crowd of peasant men and women from the village was also forming at the gates. Some of them reported to us about the strength of the oppressing force which had just entered the village. Others simply wanted to avoid the searches and reprisals and had left their homes and gone to the forest with the hope of returning soon when things were back to normal.

We were now aware that the force present in the village was comprised of Austrian troops at more or less battalion strength, a detachment of 80 to 100 *pomeshchiks*, German colonists, and *kulaks*; and a unit of the *Hetman's Varta* with about 100 men. We were outnumbered by far, which depressed our spirits considerably. I was not reconciled with the information, at least outwardly, and sent a pair of experienced scouts into the village: Vasily Shkabarnya and another man whose name I forget, both former border guards. Their instructions were to verify the numbers of the enemy, their weaponry, and their positions. At the same time, I sent a message to Comrade Shchus requesting him to return with his people to the gates where we were waiting. After slightly more than two hours, the scouts returned with information which corresponded more or less to what the peasants told us.

Comrade Shchus declined to come to the gates and invited me and the other partisans to join him in his dugout where we could hunker down together until the following evening and then we could take off to wherever it seemed best to go.

Shchus's response made me boiling with rage. Somehow I found the will power to control my anger, send more scouts into the village, and another message to Shchus. It read:

Comrade Shchus, don't behave like a scared little boy. This is not worthy of someone who is committed to the project of revolutionary insurrection and occupies an important, responsible post in the vanguard of this insurrection. Your behavior will raise doubts about your status as a brave fighter and leader, not only among many of us, but among the ranks of your own detachment. I'm not going to mince words, I'm telling you straight up: get yourself and the partisans who are with you to the gates right now. Here we will figure out how to extricate ourselves from this difficult situation.

--Yours, Nestor.

This time Comrade Shchus came to the gates. Shortly afterwards our second reconnaissance scouts returned with information about the numerical strength of the enemy—confirming the earlier reports of our scouts and the peasants. But now we had more precise information about the dispositions of the enemy troops. Our opponent had set up camp in the church square, and his headquarters was in the courtyard of the Soviet.

"There's a rumor going around that the enemy is expecting reinforcements from the village of Pokrovskoye," our scouts reported. (Pokrovskoye is about 14 *versts* from Dibrivki.)

"Aha." I said to my friends, "the enemy is planning to surround the forest and wipe us out completely."

As we were holding counsel among ourselves, we were surrounded by many peasants, some of who had their whole families with them. I sensed that most of them shared my frame of mind—indeed, they butted into the discussions of the armed insurgents, making their own suggestions. I was proposing to my closest associates, including Shchus and Petrenko, that we attack the enemy right away without waiting for him to launch an assault on the forest.

The reaction of the commanders was mixed. Comrade Shchus was absolutely against my proposal, and considered it insane.

As I recall, I replied to him that my proposal was indeed insane, but that a little insanity was a requirement for revolutionaries. And, not waiting for Shchus's reply, I immediately launched into a speech to the partisans and the villagers standing beside them. I spoke simply and directly, without any oratorical flourishes, the way I always addressed peasant audiences. I announced that some of the comrades were hesitant about attacking our killers. I said that in my opinion these comrades had not understood all the implications of my proposal, which would only dawn on them when it was already too late. Full of energy for the struggle against the executioners of the Revolution and facing a situation which was rapidly getting worse, I considered it better to perish in unequal but resolute combat with the enemy than to sit in the forest and wait to be annihilated. Better to set an example before the eyes of the downtrodden working people, who would see how their peasant revolutionary sons were willing to die for freedom, than to wait for the sons of the bourgeoisie and their hired killers to come and exterminate us.

Many of the peasants who had escaped from the village and were now clustered around us agreed with me. As for Comrade Shchus and a few individual partisans, they had to choose between registering their disagreement and leaving us, or completely embracing my proposal like almost everyone else and taking an active part in discussions about the technical side of things.

Shchus was a dedicated and forthright fighter for the people. He could not abandon us. And he finally gave his assent for our attack.

Then all the peasants around us, both armed and unarmed, shouted: "We're with you, Comrade Makhno!"

And there in a glade in Dibrivki Forest, I heard for the first time from all the peasants gathered there:

"From now on you are our Ukrainian Batko, and we will share your fate. Lead us against the foe!"

When the mass of peasants expressed its deep faith in me in its naive but open and honest manner it was hard not to let it go to my head; it was necessary to be a revolutionary with an anarchist orientation to avoid being carried away by this sort of exaltation. It seems I was such a person—my subsequent actions confirmed it.

We, the initiators and organizers, quickly exchanged our thoughts about how to deploy our forces in launching our "insanely" daring attack. I immediately assigned Shchus to take a few partisans and one Maxim gun and go around the enemy's flank and offer supporting fire from there when Karetnik, Marchenko, Liuty, and myself were launching a frontal attack with the remaining partisans.

[In this foul year 2020, 100 years after the anarchist republic in Ukraine was executed by the Red Army, we can see the same reflections of reaction in the present state of U.S. politics. Among us, thousands of reactionaries, patriots, police supporters, and white supremacists carry the same spirit of the American genocide, seeking to bring together their element into paramilitary organizations, clandestine groups, and big-tent organizations. The Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville Virginia on August 11 2017 was an abortive attempt to unify various nationalists and white supremacist organizations, backfiring after James Alex Fields Jr. plowed his car through numerous protesters, fatally injuring Heather D. Hayer, causing the discrediting of the incipient white nationalist movement and infighting and disintegration among white supremacist groups.

That was now three years ago, a far cry from today, where a gutted healthcare system allowed a new disease to rapidly spread and collapse the economy, creating a pressure cooker around the globe and opening a new front in the war for the future.

Now, after this new and unprecedented outpouring of rage, the police cannot respond without violence, and the forces of reaction are now plotting and actively attacking, whether they are a protester or are on the street or outside of their homes, the class war of the police against the people is now felt everywhere. Where the police are limited by the law, new extra-governmental organizations are now being formed to reinforce the status quo, forming farce pro-police protests, making stirs online, or exacting bloody vengeance on the streets for their bruised egos and broken windows.

We must prepare to defend ourselves from the arsenal of reaction; they have firepower and state support, but they do not have the mandate of the population, for anyone with eyes to see can plainly observe their criminal behavior. The string of highway robberies, drug deals, slave trades, ethnic cleansing, and murder, rape, and pillage persecuted by the police has long since been exposed, but American reactionaries benefit from this state of affairs.]