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Personal experience

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## MAYDAY

by

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From earliest times, in all parts of the world, this day has been celebrated as the rebirth of nature, the blooming of spring, and the coming of summer. It has been noted for intensive activity, especially in the farm areas.

In many European countries not only the villages but the cities as well were decked out in flowers and garlands on this day. There were excursions and dancing, the election of "kings" and "queens" of May, boating on the rivers, and the close of day was marked by bonfires and fireworks.

The Communists and their fellow-travellers, socialists of various hues, decided to vulgarize this day. Toward the end of the last century, at the so-called "Second International Congress", it was decided to proclaim this day a holiday of "international proletarian solidarity".

Instead of seeking means of converting the proletarian into a useful member of society and state, instead of urging him to better his lot through his own endeavor, the Second International (and, it

might be noted, the following Second-and-a-half and Third Internationals) decided to exploit the poor people as a permanent source of discontent, riots and revolutions transgressing the normal trends of life. Since that time the First of May has lost its wonder and beauty. Instead of flowers and wreaths, fireworks and dancing the streets began to serve slogan-bearing demonstrators — "Down With the Bourgeoisie", "Down With Capitalism", "Long Live World Revolution", "Peace to the Hovels, War to the Palaces", etc.

I was only five or six when the "International" approved this "wise" decision, Therefore, I hardly remember the old, the beautiful Maydays.

The new Maydays with their demonstrations and resulting brushes with the police frightened me as a child. During my youth these demonstrations revolted me since they were organized by the criminal elements and, as result, the small percentage of the "idealistic" socialists and communists went home without their wallets and often without even their handkerchiefs which easily fell into the possession of their more cunning "comrades".

In spite of everything, I shall forever remember this day with pleasure. Thirty-six years have passed from the day so memorable in my life — May 1, 1920. This was at the height of the Civil War in Russia. Only a year before this, the White Army was moving victoriously northward. Such cities as Kharkov, Kiev and Tsaritsyn (now Stalingrad) were taken and some of the units were approaching Orel. General Mamontov made his famous raid deep into the rear of the enemy

and with his Cossacks reached to within 200 miles of Moscow. The summer and fall of 1919 proved to be the turning point in the history of this tragic epic. The white Army began to retreat.

I am not an historian, nor do I claim that my analysis of the causes for this sharp turn of military events is correct. However, I believe that the main cause was the fact that thousands of anti-Communists fled southward at the very beginning of the Bolshevist onslaught. True, they were able to hold the South, for some time, against the Red tyranny, however, the entire vastness of the North and the Center of Russia with all its military industry and innumerable reserves of cannon fodder remained in the hands of the Bolsheviks.

Through unprecedented terror and daily slaughter of tens of thousands, the Bolsheviks succeeded in establishing a military machine, mobilizing all those capable of bearing arms and forcing even non-sympathizers to defend their cause.

The evil genius Trotsky travelled along the front ordering the execution (without trial or evidence) of everyone who displeased him. Through his efforts, the dismembered units of Red partizans were welded into the regular, disciplined Red Army whose rank and file were held more in fear of their own commander-in-chief than of all the counter-revolutionary forces put together.\*

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\* When Stalin succeeded to the dictatorship, all the victories against the White Army were attributed to his "genius" even though he never displayed "genius" of any kind and never left the deep rear of his positions.

The state of affairs among the Whites was considerably different. At first, all army replacements came exclusively from the ranks of volunteers. Unfortunately, there was no unity or singleness of purpose among the generals of the White Army. After the death of Kornilov, who was killed by a bomb, the generals Denikin, Wrangel, Krasnov and others, began to operate independently. Admiral Kolchak was acclaimed ruler of Russia but he was in Siberia and there was practically no liaison with him.

Partizanship developed because the commander of every small unit disregarded orders from above and operated as he willed. Add to this the fact that losses were heavy and replacements scarce and that the Whites were dependent on stores (cannon, shells, cartridges, etc.) captured from the enemy to continue the war, the cause for this unexpected turn of events might become clear. In addition to the aforementioned, it might be noted that from the beginning of 1919, the White Army was riddled by ravaging epidemics of typhus, typhoid and eruptive fevers. It would be no exaggeration to state that losses due to disease greatly exceeded losses suffered through military action.

These were the circumstances under which the White partizan detachment in which I served retreated southward from Kiev, capital of the Ukraine, late in the autumn of 1919. By January of 1920 we already were near Odessa, and by the end of the same month the city surrendered to the Reds.

Some of the army units were fortunate in that they were able to

evacuate by sea either to the Crimea or to Turkey; the main body of troops, under General Bredov, however, retreated to the northwest — toward the Rumanian border. In effect, this was not a simple military retreat but rather a "Great Trek" -- "the Exodus" — since tens of thousands of civilians with wives and children, on foot and by horse cart, joined the military. Hungry, half-clothed, at temperatures of 20 degrees below zero, these people plodded into the unknown in order to avoid coming to grips with "the most democratic of proletarian authorities".

In Odessa I was stricken with typhus. With other officers I was borne by horse cart. On the third day of the retreat I lost consciousness. How long I remained in this state I do not know to this day. However, I shall never forget when I regained normalcy. I was lying on the floor of an "izba" (farmhouse). Red Army men stood around me dividing my belongings — watch, gold cigarette case, boots, money, fur jacket. As they were arguing over their loot, rifle and machine gun fire sounded outside. The Reds fled the izba. A woman approached me and seeing that I was conscious said, "You must leave here. We are right on the road and you'll surely be killed. Go to the school, all the sick and wounded are there."

With her help, I put on my boots which luckily had been left behind by the quibbling "comrades". She steered me through the back door and I began to navigate slowly and unsteadily through the deep snow in the direction she had indicated. Having slipped and fallen several times I

was almost reconciled to sleeping in the snow. The will for life, however, took the upper hand. Somehow, with much difficulty and some misgiving, I reached the school. It was a large building overcrowded by sprawling humanity. The ill and the wounded lay, packed closely, on the floor. Red Army men wandered back and forth over the dead and dying and the helpless dragging off boots and clothing and anything else which they considered of value including tobacco and matches, pencil stubs and safety pins. It was not long before the inmates of this peculiar "hospital" found themselves either entirely nude or, at best, in their underwear.

According to an old Russian saying, and as fate would have it, "the world is not without the kind".

Many of the local residents took part in alleviating our plight. Some of us were spirited away to the individual "izbas", others were helped to the nearest city hospital.

I purposely omit reference to the village where all this happened as well as to the kindly participants of this operation since some of them may still be alive. The Bolsheviki do not forget and, even though well over thirty years have passed since, the Reds would not hesitate in executing anyone who had rendered help to a White officer. \*

I may state, however, that this village was on the Rumanian border and separated from freedom only by the Dniestr River.

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\* The author knows of cases when 85-year old women and 10-year old children were shot with like indifference.

As I learned later, the Reds took this village by surprise and our units were not able to evacuate many of the sick and wounded, including me.

For reasons stated previously, I shall not disclose who gave me sanctuary, nor shall I describe the circumstances under which I was able to participate in an anti-Soviet uprising which was quickly crushed by bands under the leadership of the Rumanian bandit Kotovsky,\* nor yet shall I tell how I was able to obtain false documents and, thereby, become a legal citizen of the RSFSR \*\* as well as many other experiences which overtook me during that period.

At that time only one thought dominated my existence — how to escape from this Soviet hell.

Many tried to cross the Dniestr into Rumania. They gave the boatmen and the smugglers their last money and belongings just so they might be ferried across to the opposite shore, at night. Few, however, were fortunate enough to reach their goal. The Bolsheviks were not sleeping. Day and night, patrols guarded the shore. The captured escapees, along with the boatmen and smugglers were shot mercilessly. Chances for a successful escape by this means were lessening daily until they were practically nil.

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\* In his honor the Soviets renamed a railroad station on the Odessa Railroad from "Razdelnaya" to "Kotovsk".

\*\* Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

My initial idea to cross by boat had to be shelved. This left only one means of escape — to swim the river. After this, I took frequent walks along the Dniestr, checking the speed of the current, scouting the narrower portions of the river, testing the temperature of the water.

It must be said that the Dniestr is not a wide river and rarely does it reach a mile in width. In spring, however, the low shore (on the Soviet side) becomes inundated and one can only approximate the extent of the river bed by the trees and the brush which occasionally shows above the flood waters. After much searching and thought I selected a spot that to me seemed most likely for the successful attainment of my goal. The tall grass, thick underbrush and numerous trees gave rise to my hopes that I might conceal myself in this verdure some evening and await total darkness before attempting my escape. On several occasions I set back the date for my flight partly because the waters were still very cold, partly because weakness still prevailed in my body from my recent illness. Fate itself, however, intervened and chose the day for me.

Late on the evening of April 30, 1920, a friend approached me and said that the Bolsheviks suspected that I was not the individual that I was pretending to be and that, at any moment, I might await arrest. Having told me this my friend disappeared as quickly as he had appeared. Two minutes later I was creeping cautiously along the back yard fences in the direction of the river. I had to pass near the building housing the local executive committee. I saw lights



and heard loud voices. It was rare that someone should be up so late in the village. Then I remembered that in an hour it would be the First of May. Probably the local Communists were discussing the best way to celebrate this day. This gave me heart since I reasoned that the Red Army men would participate in this planning. There were not too many of them in the village and, consequently, there would be fewer patrols along the river.

I was not wrong. I proceeded toward the appointed spot for more than an hour, dropping into the roadside bushes at the slightest sound, encountering, however, nothing more than a few nocturnal animals. Finally, I made my way to the river. I stepped into a clump of brushwood, removed my clothes and footwear and stuffed them into my sweatshirt securing the loose ends with safety pins (all this was thought out and prepared beforehand). I threw this improvised pack over my shoulders tying the sleeves of my sweatshirt around my neck. I was ready to travel abroad! For several minutes I walked slowly along the bank and then stepped quietly into the water which did not rise above my knees. Suddenly, there was a shout behind me, "HALT! Turn around and walk back or we'll shoot!" There was no choice! I had to make a run for it. The whang of bullets around my ears hastened my progress considerably. I ran until, all at once, I hit a deep spot and dived headlong into the welcome water. I hoped frantically that this was the river bed and that there would be no shallows ahead. As my head emerged from the water I heard the splatter of bullets nearby. My pack which had been light not two

minutes before now became like a rock around my neck, dragging me downward. I tried swimming with one arm using my other hand to untie the sleeves which were gagging me.

I finally succeeded and, for a time, dragged the load behind me. I felt my strength was leaving me. Reluctantly I let loose my bundle and it sank in mid-stream. Rallying my remaining strength I swam on, the rifle fire sounding somewhat more muffled behind me. Somehow I struggled to the opposite shore. I was abroad!

I have experienced many turns of fortune during the thirty-seven years since that significant day. My life is drawing to an end, but so long as I live I shall continue to bless the First of May.

I shall continue to bless my fate and the fact that I am a citizen of the United States and that I am able to criticize not only the policeman on the beat but the mayor or the governor, or yet the president himself without the fear of retribution, of execution, of imprisonment.

Through a peculiar coincidence of circumstances, ten years after my flight, I read in a newspaper, that the Rumanians had opened a nudist colony on the Dniestr at precisely the point of my crossing. Although involuntarily, I was that colony's first member.

## Иосиф Константинович Григорович-Барский (19.11.1893-18.05.1959)

Сын члена IV Государственной Думы [Константина Петровича Григоровича-Барского](#) и Елены Иосифовны (урожд. Гимер). Офицер царской и Белой армии. В эмиграции в США преподаватель языков, сотрудник армейской картографической службы, публицист, один из основателей русских православных церквей в Детройте и Вашингтоне.

Жена Людмила Ипполитовна (урожд. Хугоннет) (1893-11.04.1968).

Дети: Кирилл (11.04.1923-23.02.2009), Елена (14.03.1927-06.02.2022).

