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### The Battle TSU-Shima: In Memory of "The Suvóroff." A Perpetual Tribute to Fallen Heroes

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# THE BATTLE OF MITSU-SHIMA.

IN MEMORY OF THE SUVÓROFF."

A PERPETUAL TRIBUTE TO FALLEN HEROES.

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Translated from the Russian of Commander Vladimir Semenov,  
Imperial Russian Navy,

[With the Author's permission],

*By Lieut.-Colonel W. E. GOWAN, Retired List, Indian Army.*

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Continued from JUNE JOURNAL, p. 706.

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I have already mentioned that, in the event of the "Suvóroff" having to withdraw from the battle line, the torpedo-boats "Baidóvói" and "Bwistrii" were to steam up so as to convey the Admiral and his Staff to another and less crippled vessel. Meanwhile, in order to avoid confusion, until the Admiral's Flag had been transferred, or until the signal had been hoisted, notifying the transfer of the supreme command, the Squadron was to follow that vessel immediately astern of the van leader that had fallen out of the battle-line.

I will not take upon myself to here decide the following questions:—"Was it possible to see from the other vessels that no torpedo-boats had approached the 'Suvóroff'? Was it evident to everyone that from a battered and burning battle-ship, without masts and without funnels, any kind of signal might be looked for in vain? Would it, therefore, have followed *ipso facto* that the supreme command had already been transferred to the officer next in rank, and that he should, in some way or other, have proclaimed his assumption of authority?" In any case, the "Alexander," or, to speak more correctly, her commander, Captain of the First Rank Bukhvostoff, did in effect carry out the pre-arranged order and perform the delegated duty. For after the withdrawal of the "Suvóroff" from the battle-line, he, without waiting to receive fresh instructions from any one, continued to engage his ship, and, as his vessel was the one immediately behind the withdrawn van-leader, she became the leader of the Squadron.

From the moment that I saw her passing the "Suvóroff," on a S.E. course, the "Alexander" maintained that course for twenty minutes, and then gradually inclined in a southerly direction, thereby endeavouring to prevent the enemy making any considerable advance ahead, or from moving right across the changed course of our Squadron. It was at this time, too, that the Japanese, elated by their first success, were again endeavouring to carry out their idea—that of attacking with all their force our van-leader for the time being. Indeed, so intent were they in their efforts that they opened to the "Alexander" a course heading N.E. which brought her astern of them. Her cap-

tain then improved upon this by sharply turning N., reckoning thereby that if this change of position were successful he might bring all his fire to bear upon their sternmost vessels, and take them with a raking fire. Japanese despatches vary in determining the precise moment of this change of course of our Squadron; some give it as 2.40 p.m., others 2.50 p.m.<sup>1</sup>

According to my personal observation, the time last quoted is the more probable.

If the enemy's Fleet had begun to turn "in succession," as it had done at the beginning of the battle, then the manœuvre of the "Alexander" might have been successful; but, recognising the gravity of the moment, Togo this time decided upon directing his vessels to turn "together" 16 points<sup>2</sup> to port. This manœuvre was not, however, altogether successful. The First Division, consisting of the "Mikasa," "Shikishima," "Fuji," "Asaki," "Kasuga," and "Nishin," carried it out, as it ought to have been done, but Kamimura's armoured cruisers, probably because they could not make out the signal or were expecting a turning movement "in succession," passed ahead of our Squadron on their old course, and thus lay on a course that was the very opposite of that of their battle-ships, thereby obstructing the line of their fire. After this it was only by steaming until they had got clear of them that they could find room to turn once more "in succession," and then, after catching up their battle-ships, follow in their wake.

This was a moment of confusion, for which the Japanese might have had to pay dearly, but our Squadron was unable to take advantage of it, especially in the condition that it was in at this time.

The enemy, on the other hand, by taking advantage of his high rate of speed, not only succeeded in correcting the intervals in his extended line, but reached the goal at which he had been aiming, that of getting ahead of the course of the "Alexander," and again forcing her southwards.

From the starboard ports of our batteries we could now see the "Alexander" quite well as she bore almost on our beam, and was holding a course directly on us. Behind her were the rest of our vessels. As the distance lessened, our glasses distinctly showed her battered sides, her broken bridges, her blazing wreckage, but we also saw that her funnels and masts were still standing. Immediately behind her came the "Borodino," fiercely burning. The Japanese had already succeeded in overtaking them and in cutting across their course. Our own vessels were approaching us from the starboard, but those of the Japanese came out on our port beam.

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I have omitted from the text of this translation the following passage inserted between brackets, which so appears in the Russian text ["the moment of the destruction of the 'Osliába,' which under the concentrated fire of the six armoured cruisers of Admiral Kamimura, had withdrawn from the battle line still earlier than the 'Suvóroff'"] because if the "Osliába" withdrew before the "Suvóroff," and if the "Suvóroff" was no longer in the battle-line, then neither of these vessels could have been in this change of course of the Russian Squadron.—W.E.G.

<sup>2</sup>Or 180°, *vide* note 1 on page 324 of JOURNAL for March, 1907.—W.E.G.

And whilst they fired at us and over us, our fore 12-inch turret (the only one that was undamaged at this time) took an active part in the new phase of the battle. To their falling shells we now paid no attention. Indeed, though I now received a wound in the left foot, I only looked down with some vexation at my torn boot. With bated breath, we all awaited results. It was evident that the whole force of the Japanese fire was being concentrated upon the "Alexander." At times she seemed to be completely enveloped in flames and brown smoke, whilst all around her the sea literally boiled, as gigantic columns of water were thrown up into the air. Nearer and nearer came the "Alexander" until at last her distance from us was not more than 10 cables' length.<sup>1</sup> But just then there came, one after the other, a whole group of hits, which were clearly seen to have struck her fore bridge and her port 6-inch turret. Thereon the "Alexander" immediately turned sharply to starboard, and falling back almost on a reverse course, steamed away.<sup>2</sup> And in her wake followed the "Borodino," "Orel," and the others. "They will speedily circle round, if not 'in succession,' then 'together,' even though they may not regain their line ahead formation," we thought.

A deep murmur ran through our battery.

"They have thrown away everything! They are sheering off! They have not made use of their opportunity!" were the fragmentary exclamations that resounded amongst our sailors.

They, poor simple folk, of course, thought that our Squadron, in returning towards the "Suvoroff," had done so with the object of extricating her from her helpless position. Their disillusion had been a painful one, but it was even more painful to him who understood the true importance of what had taken place.

Relentless memory, inexorable imagination, so clearly, so precisely recreated before my eyes, another, but similar, aye, and a like terrible picture; for in the same hasty, and in the same disorderly manner, our battle-ships had steamed away to the north-west on the 28th July (10th August), after the signal displayed by Prince Ohtomski.<sup>3</sup>

"Opportunity not made use of!" This terrible, this fatal phrase which I had not even dared to think of, much less to pronounce, incessantly clanged through my brain; nay, it seemed to be written in fiery letters upon the smoke of the conflagration, and upon the battered sides of the vessel, and upon the blanched and drawn faces of the crew.

Bogdanoff was standing by my side. We had exchanged glances, and, it seems, we had read each other's thoughts. He seemed to wish to say something, but suddenly stopped in the very effort, then, after taking a look round, he broke silence by saying, in a would-be collected tone of voice:—

"It seems to me that we have a very marked list to port!"

"Yes," said I in agreement, "it will be about eight degrees," and pulling out my watch and my note book, I jotted down: "*Time*

<sup>1</sup> About one and one-seventh miles.—W.E.G.

<sup>2</sup> Whether this change in her course was intentional or accidental, i.e., whether it was the result of some damage done to her steering gear, will always remain a secret.—*Author*.

<sup>3</sup> This signal directed the Russian vessels to withdraw from the fight and make for Port Arthur.—W.E.G.

3.25 p.m.; a strong list to port; in the upper battery a huge conflagration."

Then I more than once reflected: "What is it that we have hidden from ourselves, and from each other? Why had not Bogdánoff at once made up his mind to speak out his thoughts, and why had I not dared to write, even in my own note book, this disquieting, this dread word—*defeat*? It may be that there still flickered within us some sort of confused hope that a miracle might take place, that something of the unexpected might occur, whereby everything would be changed? I know not.

After the last turn of the "Alexander," the Japanese vessels also turned "together" 16 points.<sup>1</sup> This time their manœuvre was successfully performed. Indeed, it seemed that in their case it was no longer a battle, but only a display of naval tactics.

Reverting to their original course, the Japanese vessels passed under our bows, and so close to us that it looked as though the "Suvóroff" would be run down by them. They then turned to starboard in the wake of our Squadron. Of course, it was nothing more than self-deception on our part imagining that our engines had been repaired, for judging not by surrounding objects but by the compass that had been removed from the "fighting post," we were making no way at all, but merely heading now to starboard, now to port, yet all the time remaining almost stationary.

As he passed us, it can be understood that the enemy could not forego the opportunity of concentrating his fire on the obstinate vessel, which had shown no desire to sink. Now it seems that at this time our last turret—the fore 12-inch—had been put out of action.

According to Japanese accounts, at the moment that their larger vessels were passing us, their torpedo-boats attacked us, though not successfully. All I can say is that I did not see them.

One of their shells, however, struck the port-hole so successfully of the 75 mm. gun, that was fourth from the bow in our lower port battery, that after upsetting the gun, it penetrated the armour-plated deck. The water that surged up, in consequence of our list to port, against this smashed port-hole, did not flow back, but found its way through the rent thus made on to the berth deck, and this, of course, constituted a serious danger. Bogdánoff was the first to draw attention to it, and we began to construct out of bags (or whatever else came to hand) some sort of breastwork, so as to secure the rent from any further inflow of water. I say "we" did this because at this time the attenuated band of men now remaining in the battery did not respond to any orders. These men merely huddled together in a sort of dazed condition in corners. We had to draw them out, not by force, but by the display of example, viz., by doing the work with our own hands. We were joined in it by Flag-Torpedo-Lieutenant Leontieff, who came from some other part of the vessel, and by Demchinski. Only a strong sense of duty could have induced the latter to try and help us, for he had both his wrists bound round with bandages.

At 3.40 p.m. there resounded through the battery, and then throughout the battle-ship, a triumphant "Hurrah!" Whence and

<sup>1</sup>See note 1. on page 324 of JOURNAL for March, 1907.—W.E.G.

from whom the shout originated, and of what he was dreaming, remained a mystery. It was given out, as though someone had witnessed it, that a Japanese vessel had foundered. Others even asserted that not one but two had gone to the bottom! In any case, this shout of triumph suddenly and sharply changed the demeanour of the crew; and it shook off the depression called forth by the spectacle of the pounding of the "Alexander," and the sheering off of our Squadron. Men, who had but recently been huddling in corners, deaf to the orders and even to the entreaties of their officers, now of their own accord ran up to them with questions such as these: "Where shall I go? What shall I do?" One even caught the sound of jocular exclamations, such as, "Come on! Cheer up! Courage! These are 6-inch shells, the 'Chemodáni' are all used up!"

And certainly, as the vessels of the Japanese main body increased their distance from us, we came only under fire of the light cruisers of Admiral Dewa, and the shells from these, in comparison with what we had already experienced, were almost imperceptible as to results.

The Captain V. V. Ignatius, who, after the binding up of his second wound in the head, had remained in the sick bay, could, of course, no longer restrain himself at such a moment. So, in spite of the protests of the Surgeon, he rushed up the ladder leading to the battery, shouting as he went:

"After me, men! To the fire! to the fire! If only we could put out the fire!"

After him sped various non-combatants, whose duties lay in the sick bay, such as sanitary orderlies, and some slightly-wounded men, whose injuries had been attended to.

At this moment a random shot struck the hatchway, and as soon as the smoke from the explosion had cleared away, there was no ladder, no captain, and not one of those who had stood around him—no, not a living soul.

Still, even this bloody episode (one of hundreds of others) did not damp the revived spirit of the crew. In the lower battery, where, on account of the deficiency of hands, the conflagrations had begun to require ever increasing attention, men appeared and clamoured for work to do. Of the ship's officers, besides Bogdánoff, I may mention amongst others who then came, Lieutenant Viruboff, Junior Torpedo-Officer, a young, well set-up, healthy man. Clad in an unbuttoned linen coat, he everywhere threw himself with a will into the thick of it, and one of his shouts, "Pull away! don't give in!" that resounded amidst the smoke and flames, seemed to redouble the strength of the workers. Then there soon came up Zotoff, who had been wounded in the left side and arm; and out of the sick bay peered Prince Tsereteli, asking how the work of putting out the fire was progressing. Soon after this they brought along Kozákevitch, who had been badly wounded a second time. And then my orderly, Matrósóff, turned up from somewhere, and he began, though he could hardly stand upright, to drag me almost by force to the dressing-station. I could only get rid of him by directing him to first of all bring me some cigarettes out of my cabin. Bravely shouting: "There are some, your Excellency!" he went off, and we never saw each other again.

<sup>1</sup>For a description of this class of projectile reference should be made to the Author's note on page 467 of JOURNAL for April, 1907.—W.E.G.

(To be continued.)