

Spring 1983

## Kuropatkin in Manchuria

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KUROPATKIN IN MANCHURIA

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

May, 1983

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## ABSTRACT

### KUROPATKIN IN MANCHURIA

Merlin Van Statzer  
Old Dominion University, 1983  
Director: Dr. Patrick J. Rollins

General Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin's leadership of the Russian Army in Manchuria in 1904-5 is examined. From the rear guard battles at the Yalu and Te-li-ssu through the engagement at Tieh-ling Kuropatkin's direction of the war reflected his belief that the Russian armies were of inferior strength. Whenever a serious threat appeared he retreated to the north to gain time so that more reinforcements would be available to swell the size of his army. He believed that eventually this strategy would provide the preponderant force and eventual victory. But that proclivity to retreat, to be oriented to the defense rather than the offense, determined the outcome of the land war.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In the Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905, with better leadership, Russia could and should have fought a more successful land campaign. By August 1904 Russian strength in Manchuria exceeded that of Japan. The Russian armies were well equipped and adequately supplied. Therefore, an examination of the land battles raises questions about the consistency of the Japanese victories. Was the Japanese soldier invincible? Were technological advances used to better advantage by the Orientals? Did logistic constraints determine the ultimate victor? Was Russian strategy unsound? Was decisive leadership lacking? The number of questions to ponder are almost endless.

The first battle of the war occurred along the Yalu River, the northern border of Korea, during May 1904. East met West in combat and for the first time Asians were the victors. The war was fought with the most modern weapons available. Rapid firing artillery, magazine rifles, machine guns, telephones, telegraph, radios, smokeless gunpowder, and many other innovations were used--some for the first time in combat. While these inventions were important, when held in balance, another variable comes to the forefront--the quality of leadership. Lack of effective leadership was the most decisive factor of the land campaign.

Both belligerents placed their best generals in commanding

positions. The Japanese Genro (Elder Statesmen) considered two officers, Field Marshal Aritomo Yamagata and Lieutenant General Gentaro Kodama, to be their best strategists. Yamagata was too old for combat and Kodama lacked seniority; he would be outranked by the Army Commanders. The situation was resolved by placing Field Marshall Iwao Oyama in command and making Kodama his chief-of-staff.

Tsar Nicolas II chose General Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin to command the Russian Field Army in Manchuria. In making the appointment the Tsar emphasized that victory was necessary to "ensure Russia's supremacy on the shores of the Pacific."<sup>1</sup> Kuropatkin, however, was not to have absolute control of the army; he was to operate under the direction of Viceroy Eugene Alekseev.

Was Kuropatkin the Tsar's best general? What were his credentials? Kuropatkin's career was a continual series of achievements until Manchuria. The son of a retired military officer, he was a graduate of the Pavlovsky Military School and of the Academy of the General Staff. During the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) he served as the chief-of-staff to General Mikhail Skobelev and in 1881 led the Turkestan Rifle Brigade in the main effort against the Tekke Turkomans. His valor in action was a proven asset. He attained rank of general at the age of thirty-four when most line officers were captains well into their mid-forties. The general served seven years on the General Staff followed by nine years (1890-1898) as Chief of the Transcaspian Oblast before becoming Minister

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<sup>1</sup>Germany, Historical Section of the German General Staff, *The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905*, trans. by Karl von Donat, 7 vols. with maps (London: Hugh Rees, 1908-1914), 1:71.



of War.<sup>2</sup> Kuropatkin's duties as oblast chief were primarily of an administrative nature. In fact, most of his career came within the purview of staff assignments. Prior to his appointment to Manchuria his highest tactical command was a brigade. The Tsar's choice held credentials at least equivalent to his contemporaries. In the Russian Army the key to success was exemplary administrative ability rather than tactical knowledge. From regimental level upward commanders were graded on their ability to maintain logistical services and to conduct parade ground ceremonies rather than on their ability to train troops for combat.<sup>3</sup> Kuropatkin was a popular officer with proven bravery and excellent administrative abilities. His appointment to command in Manchuria met with widespread approval.

Kuropatkin's opinion of Manchuria's value to Russia was not consistent. In 1896 he told Count Sergei Iu. Witte that the "Tsar planned to capture Manchuria, to annex Korea, and to bring Tibet under his dominion."<sup>4</sup> When first appointed Minister of War, Kuropatkin mirrored the Tsar's expansionist elan. Acquisition of the Kuan-tung Peninsula and the development of the Naval Base at Port Arthur, linked to the Chinese Eastern Railroad, he considered strategic necessities. When the Boxer Rebellion occurred, Kuropatkin expressed his jingoistic attitude to Witte. "On my part, I am very glad. This will give us an excuse for seizing Manchuria. We will turn Manchuria into a second

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<sup>2</sup>Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History, 1981 ed., s. v. "Kuropatkin."

<sup>3</sup>John Bushnell, "The Tsarist Officer Corps, 1881-1914: Customs, Duties, Inefficiency," American Historical Review 86 (October 1981): 768-71.

<sup>4</sup>Sidney Fay, Origins of the World War (New York: MacMillan, 1929), pp. 366-67.

Bokhara."<sup>5</sup> Without advising V. N. Lamsdorf, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kuropatkin directed Russian troops to move on Peking. It was his belief that Russia should take the lead in suppressing the rebellion and then withdraw into Manchuria.<sup>6</sup>

Witte's Memoirs of Count Witte contain several scathing remarks about Kuropatkin. After the rebellion was put down Witte accused Kuropatkin of making up reasons to keep Russian troops in Manchuria. He attributed flightiness and lack of foresight to Kuropatkin and charged that from the beginning "it was the desire of the military party not only to punish the Boxers but also to permanently annex Manchuria."<sup>7</sup> Kuropatkin was vocal about his beliefs, which he shared with foreign military officers much to the displeasure of the foreign minister. Complaints to the Tsar to restrain Kuropatkin brought the response that the Orientals were getting what they deserved. Witte summed up his attitude toward Kuropatkin in August 1903.

Jesting apart, Count Lamsdorf and myself are more afraid of Kuropatkin than the Chinese. . . . Recently I have had several discussions with him, but to no purpose! He says one thing and does another.<sup>8</sup>

The Tsar heeded those ministers who supported his desires and he held Kuropatkin in high esteem. On Far Eastern Affairs the Minister of War's counsel carried more weight than the advice of either Witte or

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<sup>5</sup>Sergei Iu. Witte, The Memoirs of Count Witte, trans. by Abraham Yammolinsky (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1921; reprint ed., New York: Howard Fertig, 1967), p. 108.

<sup>6</sup>Andrew Malozemoff, Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War (Berkeley: University of California, 1958; reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, 1977), p. 135.

<sup>7</sup>Witte, p. 111.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

Lamsdorf. But between 1900 and 1903 there was a metamorphosis, Kuropatkin's attitude regarding Russia's sphere of influence in Manchuria changed and Alexander M. Bezobrazov became more influential. Kuropatkin remained anxious for Russia's acquisition of territory but became more cautious as the Japanese threat grew.

Following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, the Japanese military was modernized and reorganized. The British Navy and the German Army were used as models. The indemnity received from that war financed the new ships and modern weaponry. A conscript army provided larger forces that could be rapidly mobilized and deployed. Meanwhile, in 1901 a significant change occurred in Japanese leadership. A new Prime Minister with a reputation for being a "hawk," Taro Katsura, was elected. The rancor that had seethed in Japan since the aftermath of the Treaty of Shimoneseki, when the spoils of war were denied by a coalition of powers led by Russia, was to be set right. Japan viewed the growing Russian influence in Korea with alarm. As a counter to the Russian threat, Katsura consummated the Anglo-Japanese Treaty in 1902 which effectively blocked any third party interference in a confrontation with Russia. By 1903 the Japanese Army was prepared to carry out the government's foreign initiatives.

By the summer of 1901 Kuropatkin had altered his position on Manchuria. He advocated retention of the Chinese Eastern Railroad and maintenance of Russian influence in the north but concluded that southern Manchuria had become expendable. He did not want to annex any part of Manchuria for fear that the Chinese would be free to migrate into the Russian Maritime Provinces where they would outnumber the

Russians. He considered southern Manchuria undefensible and placed Korea at the bottom of his list of defense priorities.<sup>9</sup>

In April 1902 Russia agreed to evacuate Manchuria in three stages with the final withdrawal to be completed by September 1903. Kuropatkin was amenable to the first two stages and made preparations to pull the army out of the southern provinces. Before the second stage was completed Nicolas rescinded the orders to withdraw pending assurances from the Chinese that they would protect Russian interests. In July 1903 the Tsar appointed Admiral Alekseev Eugene Viceroy of the Far East with dominion over the Russian Maritime Provinces, Manchuria, and Russian interests in Korea. The Japanese immediately protested.

In November the Tsar received three plans to resolve the Manchurian question. Acting State Councillor Belashov recommended that the Chinese administration be replaced with Russians while Alexander M. Bezobrazov wanted to deny the Chinese the right to grant concessions in Manchuria. Kuropatkin recommended that the Russian developments in Port Arthur and Dalny be sold to the Chinese in exchange for their renunciation of rights in northern Manchuria.<sup>10</sup>

After a trip to the Far East to assess the situation, Kuropatkin reported to the Tsar:

I do not dare conceal from your Imperial Majesty, my apprehension that now that our enterprise in the Yalu region has become known to the world and that the high interest of the autocrat of Russia in the undertaking has also become a matter of common knowledge, both at home and abroad . . . it will invariably preserve a

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<sup>9</sup> John Albert White, The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> B. A. Romanov, Russia in Manchuria: 1892-1906, trans. by Susan Wilbur Jones (Leningrad: A. S. Enukidze Oriental Institute, 1928; reprint ed., Ann Arbor: American Council of Learned Studies, 1952), p. 16.

great and alarming political importance . . . it appears advisable for us to sell it to foreigners if we do not wish to maintain a constant source of danger of a break with Japan.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, Bezobrazov and others had organized a Yalu River Company, a psuedo-military organization in the guise of a lumber company and other enterprises. Bezobrazov also advocated establishment of a protected barrier along the Korean border. Witte, Lamsdorf, and Kuropatkin opposed his schemes without complete success. Kuropatkin specifically objected to the proposal to establish a barrier, for it had no strategic significance. He favored a buffer zone free of Japanese and Russian troops.<sup>12</sup>

Russia's withdrawal from Manchuria stopped when China refused to meet the Russian demands. Kuropatkin drafted seventeen demands that were eventually pared to five. Even those were unacceptable to China, whose resistance was stiffened by England, Japan, and the United States. Japan's negotiations with Russia to delimit spheres of influence failed due to Russia's intransigence in Manchuria and its refusal to recognize Japan's interests in Korea. Japanese Naval forces attacked the Russian squadron at Port Arthur on February 8, 1904 and an almost simultaneous engagement occurred at Chemulpo (Inchon). Japanese troops landed in Korea and occupied the capital of Seoul. As yet undeclared, the war had started. Kuropatkin's orders from the Tsar read:

As regards the command of the army operating against the Japanese in Manchuria, I entrust you with all the powers conferred on the commander of an army by the regulations for the directions

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<sup>11</sup>Witte, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup>Malozenoff, p. 215.

of troops on active service; but you will be guided generally by the instructions of the Viceroy.<sup>13</sup>

The fortress garrisons at Port Arthur and Vladivostok were independent of Kuropatkin's command.

On the evening prior to his departure for Manchuria, Kuropatkin met with Witte and discussed Russia's unpreparedness to meet the Japanese challenge. The Russian army would need several months to gather strength before a decisive battle could be accepted. They discussed Kuropatkin's memo to the Tsar that outlined the general's plan to gain time by falling back along the lines of communications, if necessary, to Harbin. Nicolas did not object to the plan at that time. Port Arthur would have to stand alone until the Field Army was strong enough to attack. Witte concurred in the plan and went on to recommend that, upon his arrival in Manchuria, Kuropatkin should arrest the Viceroy and send him back to Saint Petersburg. It was Witte's belief that Alekseev wished Kuropatkin to fail.<sup>14</sup>

The Manchurian army was under strength due to Kuropatkin's tardy movement of reinforcements. Although seven thousand troops per month had been ordered east since mid 1903, they were not enough. As War Minister, Kuropatkin had been reluctant to send troops to the Far East because he was convinced that Russia's greatest threat was in the west. In his correspondence with Kaiser Wilhelm, Nicolas complained about Kuropatkin's tardy action in reinforcing the army in Manchuria. The Tsar complained that Kuropatkin did not follow his advice until it was

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<sup>13</sup>Great Britain, Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Official History of the Russo-Japanese War, 2d ed., 3 vols. with maps (London: Harrison & Sons for His Majesties Stationery Office, 1909-1920), 3:96-97.

<sup>14</sup>Witte, pp. 128-29; and Great Britain, Official History, 3:96.

too late. The Kaiser commiserated and hoped that no premature move would be made until Russia's army was sufficiently strengthened.<sup>15</sup>

Troops ordered to Manchuria were not first-class units of the line. They were primarily reserve units that had been activated. Large numbers of second-class reservists, middle aged men with families, were ordered to duty in the Far East. First-class European units were not sent east until the later part of 1904. Russia's leaders held the Japanese in low esteem. The "Yellow Monkeys" were not expected to offer much resistance to the Cossacks. How many Russians would be needed to whip the Japanese armies? Obviously, the Russian leaders at first believed that a few reservists were adequate. Before departing for Manchuria Kuropatkin asked for an army that would give him two Russians for each three Japanese. The new Minister of War, General P. S. Vannovsky, thought a ratio of one Russian for every two Japanese was adequate. Those ratios were actually being considered when German and British military experts believed that two-to-one or even three-to-one odds were necessary for attacking troops.<sup>16</sup>

Even with that inflated opinion of the Russian soldier's capabilities, Kuropatkin urged the people to have patience as he departed to assume command. He knew that decisive battle would have to be avoided until sufficient reinforcements arrived. The strategy of 1812, retreat to gain time, was firmly implanted in his mind as was the necessity for Port Arthur to stand alone. The war was to be fought on

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<sup>15</sup>S. S. Oldenberg, Last Tsar: Nicolas II His Reign and His Russia, 4 vols., ed., P. J. Rollins, trans. by L. Milhalap and P. J. Rollins (Gulf Breeze, Florida: Academic International Press, 1975), 2:66; and Isaac Don Levine, ed., Letters from the Kaiser to the Tsar (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1920), p. 112.

<sup>16</sup>Witte, p. 130; and Ian Hamilton, A Staff Officer's Scrapbook During the Russo-Japanese War, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1908), 2:345.

Chinese territory in an area that Kuropatkin did not value highly. As Russian land was not at risk Kuropatkin adhered to his belief that retreat toward Harbin was an acceptable strategy. He would not enter into a decisive engagement until his army could overwhelm the Japanese.



## CHAPTER TWO

### PRELIMINARIES

The Japanese went to war to correct past injustices and to counter Russia's perceived threat to their vital interests in northern Asia. Their nation was united in a common cause. That was not true of Russia. Most Russians believed the war was just another colonial venture; they responded to command without enthusiasm. Nicolas was prepared to grant some concessions so the Japanese would appear to be the aggressors. Two messages to the Viceroy outlined the Tsar's plans. On 27 January 1904 he informed Alekseev:

Keep in mind for your own information, that in case of a Japanese landing in southern Korea or on the eastern shore at a parallel south of Seoul, Russia will look upon it through her fingers and avert her eyes, and this will not be considered a cause for war. We can allow the Japanese occupation of the mountains forming the watershed of the Yalu.<sup>1</sup>

And on 8 February 1904, before the Japanese attack, the Tsar added, "It is desirable that the Japanese, not we, begin military action."<sup>2</sup>

Nicolas was willing to allow the Japanese to operate along

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Malozemoff, Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War (Berkeley: University of California, 1958; reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, 1977), p. 248.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

Korea's west coast up to the thirty-ninth parallel. North of that line Russia would defend.

When Kuropatkin arrived in Liao-yang on 27 March, there had been no action involving land forces. His army of mobilized reserves was poorly and improperly trained, and their tactics obsolete. Although the Russian Drill Manual and Dragomirow's Regulations stressed offensive operations most of the troops had received only very elementary training. Many of the reservists had never fired a magazine rifle. Training rarely went beyond what was given in the first four months of a recruit's service. That amounted to teaching him to march and render military courtesy properly. When these rudiments of the parade ground were mastered, recruits became part of their regiment's work force. Regiments produced their own uniforms and shoes, grew much of their own produce, and except for ordnance and purely military equipment, were nearly self-sufficient. Some government funds were provided but not enough to support all of a regiment's needs. Regiments became plantation type organizations. Soldiers were even hired out to earn money for their units. More of their time was spent in production than in training.<sup>3</sup>

Rapid firing artillery, machine guns, and magazine rifles all added greatly to the army's firepower, but the Russians had not learned how to use them to full advantage. Officers preferred to use bayonets and shock tactics for assaults. Russian infantry were trained to fire their weapons in volleys. Individual marksmanship and fire discipline

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<sup>3</sup> John Bushnell, "Peasants in Uniform: The Tsarist Army as a Peasant Society," Journal of Social History 13 (Summer 1980):566.

were not stressed. Many infantrymen lacked scabbards for their bayonets which were always fixed to their rifles.<sup>4</sup>

The Far Eastern Standing Army consisted of two Siberian Rifle Corps but even these were not kept at full strength. When Kuroki's army began landing in Korea, Russia's Manchurian army had only twelve brigades totalling 70,000 infantry. Six of the brigades were East Siberian Rifles; two brigades were formed from fortress troops taken from Port Arthur and Vladivostok; one brigade was formed from European drafts; and two brigades had arrived from Europe. The twelfth brigade was mobilizing when Kuropatkin arrived, but due to poor communications and the distances involved, the process was very slow.<sup>5</sup> The Russians were fortunate that the Japanese advance was not rapid.

General Tametomo Kuroki's First Army began landing at Chemulpo on February 8 and completed debarking at Chinampo on March 29. He advanced toward the Yalu River with three divisions, 36,000 rifles. At Liao-yang, by late March, Kuropatkin had gathered 96,000 men. That force would have been more than adequate to meet Kuroki provided no other threat materialized. The Japanese possessed an amphibious capability that could simultaneously move two divisions to any part of the coast line that was free of ice. That threat had to be taken into consideration. The inactivity of the Russian navy gave the Japanese freedom of the seas, and therefore Kuropatkin had to maintain sufficient

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<sup>4</sup>Germany, Historical Section of the German General Staff, The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905, trans. by Karl von Donat, 7 vols. with maps (London: Hugh Rees, 1908-1914), 1:59.

<sup>5</sup>Great Britain, Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Official History of the Russo-Japanese War, 2d ed., 3 vols. with maps (London: Harrison & Sons for His Majesties Stationery Office, 1909-1920), vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 79.



reserves to counter any new threat. When the ice melted, the Maritime Provinces and Vladivostok as well as the coast of Manchuria became possible Japanese objectives.

Kuropatkin sent Major General Kashtalinsky, commanding the Eastern Detachment along the Yalu, the following instructions:

Take the most energetic measures to get in touch with the enemy, organize reconnaissance across the river. Order small enterprises against the enemy and alarm him. Pay high sums to native spies. Report to me at least twice daily, even if nothing has happened. . . . Carefully think out all orders for defense and retreat so that no trophies may fall into the hands of the enemy.<sup>6</sup>

Action at the Yalu was to be only a delaying action, the road to retreat had to be kept open. Only 16,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry, and 60 guns were allocated to watch a front that extended 172 miles.<sup>7</sup>

Lieutenant General M. I. Zasulich assumed command of the Eastern Detachment in April, just a few days before the Battle of the Yalu. Kuropatkin's instructions were to not get involved in a "decisive action when the enemy had superior numbers."<sup>8</sup> Zasulich responded that "his majesty has made me a Knight of the Order of Saint George, and I do not retreat."<sup>9</sup> That was a surprising response to the orders of his immediate superior but it coincided with the Viceroy's belief that a stand should be taken in the east.

In addition to Kuroki's army already ashore the Japanese had two divisions at sea. Kuropatkin warned Zasulich of their possible employment at the mouth of the Yalu and again stressed:

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<sup>6</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 1:144.

<sup>7</sup>Great Britain, Official History, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>E. L. V. Cordonnier, The Japanese in Manchuria, 2 vols. with maps, trans. by C. F. Atkinson (Paris: d'Infanterie, 1910-1911; reprint ed., London: Hugh Rees, 1912), 1:107.

I distinctly hope that you will resist the enemy with the necessary obstinacy, and that at the same time clearly remember you are not placed on the Yalu to fight a decisive action with superior forces of the enemy.<sup>10</sup>

Kuropatkin was worried about the situation at the Yalu. He constantly badgered Zasulich for information, reminded him about the smallest details, and even directed some of the troop dispositions. That tendency to become involved in minutia would be repeated.

The battle opened on May 1. Kuropatkin's fears were realized when Zasulich, against orders, became heavily engaged. Zasulich delayed too long in ordering the retreat and led the troops poorly. The Russian emplacements were not mutually supporting and the left flank, covered by Colonel Gromov's 22nd Regiment, retreated without notifying adjacent units. That mistake enabled the Japanese 12th Division to advance rapidly and overtake the retreating Russians. Gromov, subsequently court-martialed, committed suicide.<sup>11</sup>

The deficiencies in Russian tactics at the Yalu were later repeated by other units fresh to battle. Overconfidence in their military prowess contributed to costly mistakes. Defensive positions were not camouflaged and provided no overhead protection from shrapnel. They were poorly placed and had no firing loopholes. Consequently the soldiers had to expose themselves in order to fire. Although Russian artillery was superior to the Japanese in range and rate of fire, it

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<sup>10</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 1:171.

<sup>11</sup>Great Britain, Official History, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 76.

was quickly neutralized.<sup>12</sup> The Russian guns were placed in open pits for direct fire while the Japanese guns were hidden in defilade. The tactics used at the Yalu by the Russians were no different than they had used in 1877-78 against the Turks. With only parade ground training they learned to fight in combat.

The Second Japanese Army, commanded by General Yasukata Oku, landed unopposed at Pi-tsu-wo, on the fifth of May. Its mission was to isolate Port Arthur and to assist in the destruction of the Russian fleet. Kuropatkin then had two Japanese armies to contend with while the threat of still more landings made it necessary to husband his resources. Alekseev wanted Kuropatkin to attack. Two courses of action were considered. Kuroki's army in the east could be held while Oku was attacked or vice versa. The Viceroy sent an aide to urge action. On the twenty-seventh Alekseev summoned Kuropatkin to Mukden and personally argued for an offensive. While the Viceroy favored an attack on the Japanese First Army the choice was Kuropatkin's. The general did not wish to attack either of the Japanese armies. He was spurred to action by the Tsar's instructions to Alekseev: "Inform General Kuropatkin that I place upon him the entire responsibility for the fate of Port Arthur."<sup>13</sup> That message and his shortage of transport and mountain artillery swayed Kuropatkin to move toward Port Arthur.

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<sup>12</sup>The Japanese field gun fired 6-7 times per minute with a range of approximately 5,000 yards. The Russian gun fired three times as fast with 1,000 yards more range. U. S. War Department, Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria During the Russo-Japanese War, 5 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906-1907), 1:19-20.

<sup>13</sup>Cordonnier, 1:171-74; and Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 2:2.

Oku's army had isolated the fortress. The last train escaped on the tenth of May. With 75,000 men Oku was required to remain near Port Arthur until General Maresuko Nogi's Third Army arrived and took over siege duties. Against Oku and Kuroki's combined strength of 120,000 Kuropatkin had 106,000 troops split into four groups. The Eastern Force under Generals Fedor Keller and Paul K. Rennenkampff faced Kuroki with 26,000 men and 90 guns. General G. K. Stackelberg's Southern Force opposed Oku with 33,000 troops and 100 guns, and Major General Mischenko had 4,800 troops and 6 guns to block the Japanese 10th Division situated between the mouth of the Yalu and Port Arthur on the Manchurian coast. Kuropatkin retained 42,000 men and 120 guns in reserve at Liao-yang. Although he was able to mass his force against any one of the Japanese threats, a cautious policy was wise.<sup>14</sup>

Bowing to the wishes of the Tsar and Viceroy, Kuropatkin ordered Stackelberg to advance toward Port Arthur. His mission was to draw away the maximum number of Japanese to relieve pressure on Port Arthur. Kuropatkin urged caution. Stackelberg's mission, to draw the Japanese away from Port Arthur, was ill conceived. He was not provided sufficient troops to fight more than a rear guard action and therefore could offer Port Arthur only temporary relief. Without a coordinated effort to reinforce or resupply the fortress, the effort was wasted. Cautioned to avoid decisive battle and to husband his reserves Stackelberg's advance served only to satisfy the demands of higher authority.

In the interim the Japanese Fourth Army formed around the

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<sup>14</sup>Great Britain, Official History, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 29.



nucleus of the 10th Division, and General Nogi arrived to command the Third Army for the siege of Port Arthur. Oku was then free to move north against Stackelberg, who, on the thirteenth of June ordered his detachment into defensive positions at Te-li-ssu. Unfortunately Stackelberg's cavalry units were also ordered to assume defensive positions. As a result, no one watched the Japanese.<sup>15</sup>

Stackelberg had learned from the Russian mistakes at the Yalu. His defensive positions were well chosen, advantage was taken of the terrain, and the artillery was well placed in defilade. The Russian lines were concentrated on a four-and-a-half mile front. But without knowledge of the Japanese movements and poor internal communications disaster was imminent. Not all units were connected by telegraph, and consequently Stackelberg's orders for the attack on the fifteenth of June were delivered by courier. Some units received their orders after the attack was scheduled to commence. They entered the fight without coordinating instructions or knowledge of the enemy positions.

Oku meanwhile had spread his army over a twenty-two mile front. He planned to close on the Russians like a collapsing circle thereby exerting the maximum amount of firepower at all times. Anticipating his adversary, Oku struck the Russian left flank on the fourteenth and delivered his main attack on Stackelberg's right flank on the fifteenth. Stackelberg reacted, as did Kuropatkin in later battles, as the Japanese planned. He responded to the feint by shifting his forces away from the main thrust. Due to the poor coordination of the Russian units, the Japanese were able to turn Stackelberg's right flank and force the Russians to retreat. At least one unit, under General

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<sup>15</sup>Cordonnier, 1:239-59.

Florian F. Glasko, anticipated the retreat and made an early withdrawal. As at the Yalu that mistake permitted the Japanese to advance rapidly. At Te-li-ssu, however, they moved their artillery into position to shell the Russian avenues of retreat. Only extremely poor visibility due to a heavy rain prevented a worse disaster.

Both the action at Te-li-ssu and the Yalu were designed to buy time to stall the Japanese advance. In both instances Kuropatkin instructed his commanders to give way and not to accept decisive battle. He was following the plan of withdrawal that he proposed to the Tsar before leaving Saint Petersburg. Under the circumstances it was a wise course of action. It would have been extremely foolhardy to commit the entire Russian field army while the Japanese amphibious capability provided the threat of yet another front.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LIAO-YANG

The military agent sees all that is of interest to him, but he does not write the history of the war until it is over.

General Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin

The battle for Liao-yang culminated six months preparation by both armies. The patience Kuropatkin had urged upon the Russians was to be rewarded. By late August the commander-in-chief was ready to inaugurate a new phase of the war. There were to be no more rear guard actions. Commanders who had been repeatedly enjoined not to accept decisive engagements with superior forces were ordered to stand and fight. Kuropatkin planned to fight a great defensive battle at Liao-yang, and he chose the time and the place of battle.

Oyama would have welcomed an earlier confrontation, but the stubborn defenses at Port Arthur tied up Nogi's army and his lines of communication were too vulnerable. The Russian fleet at Port Arthur remained a viable threat. Its ability to sortie, whether used or not, threatened to isolate Oyama's forces from their source of supply. The four Vladivostok-based cruisers had already upset the Japanese timetable. On 10 and 25 June they sank two transports, the Hitachi Maru and the Sado Maru. Those ships were carrying several 11-inch siege howitzers for use against Port Arthur and American wide gauge locomotives for use on the Russian gauge Manchurian railroads. There

were no replacements. The Japanese had to remove coastal defense guns from the home islands to replace the siege guns, and with no other wide-track locomotives they had to convert the Manchurian railroad to the narrower Japanese width. Transfer of locomotives, cars, and the conversion of the track delayed their planned advance. A stockpile of supplies had to be prepared to support a major engagement in the event that the Russian fleet again sortied as it had in May.<sup>1</sup> Oyama was well aware that with each day Kuropatkin's army was outpacing the Japanese in new accessions. The morale of the Japanese soldiers was high due to their past victories, so, with faith in his men Oyama accepted battle against the larger Russian force.<sup>2</sup>

Poor rail service was a major complaint of Kuropatkin. The railroad limitation was a handicap during the first few months of the war until Russian troop strengths were built up. But from Liao-yang onward his scheme of action was not restricted by poor rail service. The Russians were able to purchase huge quantities of produce in Mongolia and Manchuria. The railroad was able to carry their other needs. Prince Khilkov did an excellent job in expanding the railway capacity to meet the military requirements. The limitation of the railroad in restricting Russia's land campaign after Liao-yang has been exaggerated.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E. L. V. Cordonnier, The Japanese in Manchuria, 2 vols with maps, trans. by C. F. Atkinson (Paris: d'Infanterie, 1910-1911; reprint ed., London: Hugh Rees, 1912), 2:17-18, 325.

<sup>2</sup>Army strengths: 125,000 Japanese versus 158,000 Russians. Great Britain, Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Official History of the Russo-Japanese War, 2d ed., 3 vols. with maps (London: Harrison & Sons for His Majesties Stationery Office, 1909-1920), 2:7-9.

<sup>3</sup>Sterling Hart, "The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905," Strategy and Tactics 59 (1976):37.

The remaining battles of the war were fought along the railroad running south from Harbin through Mukden and Liao-yang to Port Arthur and Dalny. Fear that the Japanese would sever this main communication artery preyed heavily on the Russian commander. The terrain west of the railroad and parallel to the Imperial Highway was flat and provided easy movement after harvest when dry. Before harvest, however, the crops of kao-ling, a type of sorghum, grew to heights of over ten feet. It was so thick that troops frequently got lost when crossing large fields and a compass was necessary to navigate the heavy growth. East of the railroad hilly terrain rose into precipitous mountains where travel was restricted to trails. Traffic almost halted in wet weather when roads, poor even when dry, became quagmires. Three rivers traverse the area between Liao-yang and Mukden. The Tai-tzu flows westwardly through Liao-yang joining the Liao River west of the city. The Sha and the Hun flow on essentially parallel courses arching to the north then toward the south crossing the railway fourteen and two miles, respectively, south of Mukden.

The battle of Liao-yang began south and east of the city and developed in four phases along the three concentric defensive lines prepared by Kuropatkin. The Outer Line, constructed roughly sixteen miles south of the city, connected the villages of Kao-chang-pu/Sanchia-kou/An-ping; the Advanced Line (also referred to as the Middle Line) was dug about five miles out and stretched along the line of Ku-chia-tzu/Tsao-fan-tun/Hsiao-tun-tzu; while the Main Line was just outside of the city walls. All three lines were anchored east of Liao-yang on the Tai-tzu River; in the west the Outer and Advanced



Lines anchored on the railroad while the Main Line arched back to the Tai-tzu.<sup>4</sup>

The battle's first phase occurred on 23-26 August as the Russians fell back in to the Outer Line. After three days of inactivity phase two lasted from 30 to 31 August as the Russians withdrew from the Outer Line and Kuroki crossed the Tai-tzu. The third phase lasted until 3 September as the Russians pulled back into the Main Positions and the final phase was retreat. Kuropatkin's decision to stand and fight was made almost at the last minute as indicated in his message to General A. A. Bilderling on 10 August:

In your General Directives you must leave it to your Corps Commanders when to retreat. . . . I leave it to you to retire the troops, even without fighting a rear guard action in certain cases, should the moral qualities of their commanders or the condition of the men demand it.<sup>5</sup>

And again to Lieutenant-General N. P. Zarubaiev on 17 August:

An action, therefore should not be fought seriously by the 1st and 2nd Siberian Army Corps in full strength in their positions against superior numbers of the enemy. In that case the troops of the Southern Front will merely resist with strong rear guard actions withdrawing on the Advanced Positions around Liao-yang. On the other hand the retention of the positions we are at present occupying has for its purpose to procure for us the urgently needed time for the arrival of reinforcements. The position should not be prematurely abandoned therefore. The Corps must retire on Liao-yang only if the enemy intends to attack our positions . . . in considerable force.<sup>6</sup>

Then, just six days later, on 23 August Kuropatkin changed his mind and ordered the army to stand and fight. There was a gap between Bilderling's Eastern Force and Sarubaiev's Southern Force at the

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<sup>4</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 2:10-11.

<sup>5</sup>Germany, Historical Section of the German General Staff, The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905, trans. by Karl von Donat, 7 vols. with maps (London: Hugh Rees, 1908-1914), 2:140.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 2:141.

outset of the battle but as they drew closer to Liao-yang a solid front formed. For six months Kuropatkin's corps and division commanders had been imbued with the strategy of retreat. Kuropatkin still believed that the Japanese outnumbered his forces and he was concerned about the safety of his avenue of retreat. Small wonder that some of his subordinates clung to the idea of withdrawal. Lieutenant-General Sluchevsky, for example, commanded a portion of the Eastern force on the east bank of the Tang (a tributary of the Tai-tzu). Steady rain caused the river to rise and Sluchevsky feared that his line of retreat would be cut if the river flooded. He asked Bilderling for permission to retreat to the west bank. The request was denied.

The Japanese believed Liao-yang would be the decisive action of the war. Oyama positioned his forces to commence the attack on 26 August. As his Guard Division moved to its assigned area near Bilderling's right flank its movement was noticed and reinforcements were moved in to repulse the Japanese attack. Kuroki planned to attack along his entire front in an attempt to break the center of Bilderling's line. He was not successful. The Guard Division suffered heavy casualties against the reinforced line. The only Japanese victory was on Bilderling's opposite flank at Hill 1900. The Russian Eastern Force Commander and Kuropatkin were deeply involved in the action against the Guards and did not provide support to Hill 1900 when it was needed. On 26 August, Sluchevsky twice asked for assistance to save the height but he received none. Although the Russian positions were not seriously harmed by its loss they were now all on the left bank of the Tai-tzu. Kuropatkin advised Bilderling that if Kuroki placed troops on the right bank, the Eastern Force would have to also. Sluchevsky gathered a



force for a counterattack against Hill 1900, but before he could move he was ordered to retreat. The Russians suffered no serious setbacks on 26 August, Hill 1900 was not that critical, and they had inflicted heavy casualties on the Guard Division. Then why retreat?

When Bilderling refused Sluchevsky's request to retreat, his other Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Nikolai Y. Ivanov (3rd Siberian Corps), went direct to Kuropatkin who approved a retreat to the west bank. The only apparent reasons for pulling back were rain and lack of will. Positions that the Japanese could not take by frontal assault were given up without a contest. The retreat of the 3rd Corps triggered a withdrawal of all units to the Middle Line. The Japanese did not pursue. For the next three days they prepared to continue the battle.<sup>7</sup>

Kuropatkin arranged his units from west to east as follows: 1st Siberian Corps; 3rd Siberian Corps, and Xth Corps with the XVII Corps east of the city on the Tai-tzu right bank. The Middle Line took advantage of the terrain and was excellently situated for defense. The only flaw was a small brook, Ta-ssu, that flowed between the 1st and 3rd Corps' positions. West of the brook Stackelberg's 1st Corps faced the entire Japanese Second Army plus the 5th Division. East of the brook the Japanese Fourth Army faced Ivanov's corps. Kuroki faced the Xth Corps in the east.

Oyama ordered all of his forces except the 12th Division and one guard brigade of Kuroki's army to attack on 29 August. He kept one division in reserve to counter an expected Russian advance. Kuropatkin held two corps (2nd and 4th Siberian) in reserve. As expected the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 2:193; and Great Britain, Official History, 2:42.

Japanese made a major effort to exploit the gap along the Ta-ssu brook, but the Russian positions held. The battle was going so well for the 1st Siberians that Stackelberg considered relinquishing some of his reserves. All along the line Oyama's forces failed to break through and took heavy casualties in their attempts.

On the night of 30 August, unopposed, Kuroki crossed the Taitzu with the 12th Division. Pontoon bridges were quickly installed to move across the artillery and heavy supplies. Once they were established, the Japanese moved west to engage the XVII Corps and north toward the Yen-tai coal mines. Their presence was detected and reported at 5:30 A.M. on 31 August but the reports were not verified or delivered to Bilderling until 9:00 A.M. Bilderling immediately issued orders to contain the Japanese advance. The response, however, was slow. Kuroki was given almost an entire day of uninterrupted movement to reinforce his position. By 6:00 P.M. on 31 August his advance elements were within three miles of the mines. Bilderling's counter moves were ineffective. He was unable to locate or determine the strength of Kuroki's force.<sup>8</sup>

Kuroki's move was a gamble and it opened a gap in the Japanese line that did not go unnoticed. Major-General Vasilev's 2nd Brigade (31st Division and Xth Corps) was able to advance without opposition and occupy two villages. Vasilev requested an artillery preparation for an attack by his entire brigade. The corps commander relayed the request to Kuropatkin's headquarters. Vasilev received this response:

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<sup>8</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 2:78.

The forward movement of your left to occupy the height west of Shui-yu is not desirable as it would extend your front and in general weaken you. . . . I have informed the Army Commander of<sup>9</sup> your wish to press forward, but his excellency does not approve.

Kuropatkin's timidity saved Oyama from the very action he feared most, the isolation and defeat in detail of Kuroki. Vasilev's proposal could have cut Kuroki's line of communication. Why this was not done remains unexplainable except by Kuropatkin's unwillingness to take the risk. Russian forces in the east were numerically superior and he was aware that Oyama had split his force. The Russian General Reserve had been used piecemeal to check the Japanese assaults. All of the defensive positions had held. With Oyama's force divided Kuropatkin was given a choice. He explained to Saint Petersburg:

My General Reserve was no longer strong enough to ensure a counter stroke in a southerly direction being successful. A withdrawal to the Main Position shortened the length of line to be defended, making it possible to concentrate a considerable portion of the Army north of the Tai-tzu. There was undoubtedly a danger of Kuroki cutting our communications, and the most pressing duty of the army seemed to be to guard them.<sup>10</sup>

Kuropatkin's Disposition Number Three, issued on 31 August, put into action those moves described to the Tsar. The army was ordered to fall back from the Advanced Line to the Main Positions at Liao-yang. His second line of defense was given up as the first had been: it was simply presented, unbreached, to the Japanese. Kuroki's maneuver gave Kuropatkin an opportunity to attack which he failed to appreciate. His overriding concern to protect his line of communications, his avenue of retreat, is convincing evidence of his lack of will. He failed to demonstrate the decisiveness and strength of character necessary for victory.

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<sup>9</sup>Cordonnier, 2:272.

<sup>10</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 2:112.

Kuropatkin's Disposition Number Three ordered two corps, the 2nd and 4th, to defend Liao-yang from the Main Positions while the remainder of the army moved north of the Tai-tzu to staging areas. Kuropatkin never ordered units directly into an attack. He followed a pattern that never failed. First he assembled a force, then moved it to a staging area, then to attack positions, and finally to the attack. It should also be noted that to defend the Main Positions Kuropatkin used those elements that had seen the least amount of action while he went after Kuroki with those corps that had been the most heavily engaged. Stackelberg's corps was moved to a position three miles north of the river near the railroad. Sluchevsky's corps moved to Hsin-cheng, two miles northeast of Liao-yang. The XVII Corps was already on the north bank, east of the city. The 54th Division was sent toward the Yen-tai Station.<sup>11</sup> There was some confusion in executing the order but the assigned positions were reached without difficulty.

Kuropatkin issued Disposition Number Four at 1:15 A.M. on 2 September. He acknowledged that the Japanese had been unable to break the Russian Advanced Line and that Kuroki had crossed to the north bank of the Tai-tzu. It was his intention to hold the Main Positions at Liao-yang and attack Kuroki's force north of the river. Zarubaiev was to hold the Liao-yang Main Positions with two corps which were augmented to total 64 battalions, 10 squadrons, 128 field guns, and 24 mortars. The remainder of the army (99 battalions, 307 field guns, and 62 squadrons) was to be led personally by Kuropatkin against Kuroki's

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<sup>11</sup> Kuropatkin's Disposition No. 3, Great Britain, Official History, 2:708-16.

force of 24 battalions.<sup>12</sup> The corps were ordered to move toward attack positions that extended northeast toward the Yen-tai mines. The attack would then be made toward the east to drive Kuroki back along his line of communications.

In the meantime Kuroki watched all of that movement and came to the decision that Kuropatkin was retreating from Liao-yang. In an effort to cut off this supposed retreat Kuroki ordered an attack toward the railroad. He was able to capture the hill known as Man-ju-yama before he realized his error and the threat to his positions.

The Russians moved into their attack positions without knowing exactly what the commander had in mind. Coordinating instructions, times, and objectives had not been assigned.<sup>13</sup> Thousands of men were moving and their commanders were ignorant of what tasks they would have to carry out. To compound the problem telegraph lines were not yet installed to all of the new positions. Couriers relayed information and sometimes they were delayed in locating the recipient of a message. The army was also moving into a heavily cultivated area where the crops were still standing. Troop movement was hindered by the kao-ling.

Kuropatkin reached his new command post at 10:00 A.M. on 2 September. Shortly after his arrival a series of messages from Bilderling created confusion over the issue of Man-ju-yama. The first indicated that Japanese attacks had been repulsed; the next that Man-ju-yama would soon be recaptured; and the last message, which actually was the first one sent, that the hill had been lost. From this confusion, a result of poor communications, Kuropatkin decided to create a

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<sup>12</sup>Kuropatkin's Disposition No. 4, Great Britain, Official History, 2:717-20.

<sup>13</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 3:131.

special force to recapture the hill. Sluchevsky was directed to provide troops from the General Reserve to accomplish that task. Once the hill was taken those troops were to be returned to the reserve. Kuropatkin issued no coordinating instructions to clarify the attack force responsibility to Bilderling or to establish procedures for the withdrawal of Sluchevsky's force when its mission was completed. The objective was in Bilderling's zone of action. Man-ju-yama was taken against stiff Japanese opposition and at 2:00 A.M. on 3 September, in accordance with orders, the attack force returned to the reserve. Unfortunately no provision was made to turn Man-ju-yama over to Bilderling. What few of his troops were present pulled back with Sluchevsky's men. Man-ju-yama was abandoned to the Japanese. It is inconceivable that such effort should be expended without proper steps taken to preserve the prize. Lack of direction from the top was all too evident.<sup>14</sup>

Confusion was also apparent near the Yen-tai mines where General Orlov's detachment was operating with conflicting orders from Bilderling and Kuropatkin. The detachment attacked the Japanese positions near the mines. When Orlov encountered stiff resistance he attempted to break contact and retire toward the Yen-tai Station, since his initial orders from Kuropatkin directed him to retire before superior force. Bilderling wanted Orlov to hold but had no direct communication with him. Unable to break contact, Orlov was overtaken by the Japanese and his troops, mostly green recruits and second class reserves, panicked. The retreat became a rout.

Meanwhile the leading elements of Stackelberg's 1st Siberian Corps encountered stragglers from Orlov's detachment. Efforts to rally

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<sup>14</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 2:149.

them failed. When sufficient parts of the corps had arrived, Stackelberg deployed and advanced toward the mines. He summoned Orlov and harshly directed him to gather what was left of his detachment and join the attack. Stackelberg's initiative had already prevented Kuroki from advancing within artillery range of the railroad. This action had, however, drawn the 1st Siberian Corps about four miles north of its assigned attack position. Stackelberg still had not received any coordinating instructions.

When Kuropatkin learned of the situation, he informed Stackelberg that

you are now forming the left wing of the army . . . you must not allow the enemy to attack you in superior force. Do not therefore advance until you are supported by reserves. This can no longer be done today.<sup>15</sup>

One day had already been lost while the Russians positioned their forces instead of moving directly to the attack. Now another day was given up. Although Kuropatkin did not have a firm picture of what was happening, he was quick to take action without verifying perceived threats to his avenue of retreat. Orlov's report of two Japanese divisions at the Yen-tai mines was very unsettling. In the belief that Kuroki was moving in force toward Mukden the Russian commander planned to attack his positions on the morning of 3 September.

That attack never came. Kuropatkin's resolve was shaken by the series of events on 2 September and the reports received during the night. Before dawn Zarubaiev reported that ammunition was running low at Liao-yang and that he needed additional reserves. Stackelberg, not aware of the situation and having been directed not to tackle

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<sup>15</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 3:148.

superior forces, had pulled his corps back two miles from the Japanese and reported:

My situation is serious and . . . considering the great losses my troops have been suffering (the heaviest attacks south of Liao-yang were against the 1st Corps) during the last five days, I am not only unable to attack without being reinforced, but . . . I am unable to fight at all. I have therefore resolved to retire on Li-man-gou where I am awaiting your orders.<sup>16</sup>

Following these reports came the word that Man-ju-yama had been abandoned. Coupled with Orlov's disaster it was too much for Kuropatkin and he ordered a retreat.

Poor communications and ignorance of the true size and mission of Kuroki's force contributed to the chaotic atmosphere of the Russian command. Orlov's report of two divisions near the Yen-tai was a gross exaggeration. Stackelberg's corps had been bloodied but it was still capable of action. Man-ju-yama's loss was not a serious set back--the more dominant terrain was still in Russian hands--and at Liao-yang the situation was not critical. Zarubaiev still had reserves that were not committed. The Main Positions were still intact and the reported ammunition shortage was an error. A full trainload of ammunition had arrived at Liao-yang at 5:00 P.M. on the previous afternoon.<sup>17</sup>

Kuropatkin did not take time to verify these reports. He was too quick to revert to his original strategy of retreat whenever he perceived or imagined serious threat.

The retreat was carried out in good order. The bridges at Liao-yang were destroyed to prevent a rapid Japanese advance from the south and Kuroki lacked sufficient strength to seal off the Russian withdrawal.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 3:150.

<sup>17</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 2:151.



Kuropatkin chose the time and place for this battle and his troops fought well from defensive positions. Oyama's hope for a "Sedan" did not materialize. The Russians gave up three lines of defense that the Japanese were unable to crack. It was the threat perceived from Kuroki and Kuropatkin's lack of will that gave the victory to the Japanese. All of Oyama's forces were committed; he was short of artillery ammunition and was encountering supply difficulty. He himself was considering retreat, for some of the heaviest Japanese casualties were taken on 3 September in attacks against the Main Positions. But the Russian commander failed to heed Napoleon's advice that nothing protects the lines of communication to the rear better than a victorious battle.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 3:212.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SHA-HO

5-18 OCTOBER 1904

Kuropatkin then was saying;  
That to Tokyo he'd repair;  
Why, my chargers, art thou neighing?  
Why art drooping in despair?

Unpublished war song.

Liao-yang marked a change in Kuropatkin's tactics from fighting rear-guard actions to accepting battle from defensive positions. At Sha-Ho Kuropatkin even took the offensive. Although Liao-yang was a defeat for the Russians, by 11 September Kuropatkin was able to report to Nicholas that the army was well rested, well supplied, and ready for battle. Just one week earlier he had contemplated retreat all the way to Tieh-ling. Only the lack of Japanese pursuit enabled him to stop and regroup in front of Mukden.

Perhaps more time should have been allowed to rest the army, but the survival of Port Arthur and the existence of the fleet still influenced strategic decisions. Russia had not given up hope of gaining naval supremacy, and pressure on Port Arthur could be eased by forcing Oyama to draw troops from Nogi's Third Army. Weaknesses in Oyama's force were apparent at Liao-yang. Lack of pursuit indicated that his troops were exhausted and that reinforcements were lagging.

Kuropatkin also needed a victory to lift the morale of his troops. Then, too, there was the Second Manchurian Army to be considered.

On 24 September the Tsar appointed General Oscar C. Grippenberg to command a Second Manchurian Army consisting of the 6th Siberian Corps, the 8th Army Corps, the 61st Infantry Division, and the 4th Don Cossack Division. Alekseev, who retained supreme command in the Far East, restricted Kuropatkin's use of them. Formation of the Second Army posed a threat to Kuropatkin's overall command of the field forces unless he could produce a victory.

One sixth of the Japanese force had been felled at Liao-yang. Losses were so severe that a modification of the conscription laws was necessary to provide more troops.<sup>1</sup> By the end of September Oyama was able to replace his losses but new accessions were few. Only Prince Kanin's Cavalry Brigade and a few Kobi units were added to the roster. Not all the logistic problems had been resolved, although the situation was better. Work continued on the conversion of the railroad track, and the first train reached Liao-yang from Dalny on 1 October. Maximum capacity with the available rolling stock was 2,880 tons per day.<sup>2</sup> Oyama's requirements were 3,000 tons per day. The shortfall, together with material for stockpiles, had to be hauled overland by cart or shipped up the Liao river by boat. A small light railway was built

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<sup>1</sup>Kobi service was extended from five to ten years and the Hoju from eight-and-a-half to twelve-and-a-half years. Great Britain, Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Official History of the Russo-Japanese War, 2d ed., 3 vols. with maps (London: Harrison & Sons for His Majesties Stationery Office, 1909-1920), vol. 1, pt. 5, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>U. S. War Department, Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria During the Russo-Japanese War, 5 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906-1907), 3:74-76.

to support Kuroki's army. In all, four supply routes sustained the Japanese armies.

The Russians, meanwhile, were rapidly receiving replacements and new units. The 6th Siberian Corps and the 1st Army Corps were added to the rolls. Russian strength increased by 50,000 after Liao-yang. At the end of September the combat strengths were 210,000 Russians and 170,000 Japanese.<sup>3</sup> Alekseev, although initially restricting Kuropatkin's use of the 6th Siberians, eventually permitted it provided that they were not used piecemeal. Kuropatkin was not enthused over the creation of another army. He preferred to have it operate in the east and recommended to the Viceroy that it should operate toward Oyama's rear against the Japanese lines of communications.

Kuropatkin needed a victory to keep his job. On 28 September he issued secret orders for an advance toward Liao-yang. The Russians estimated Japanese strength to be ten divisions (there were eight). The error stemmed from poor reconnaissance and a faulty assessment of troop strength in the east. The strength of Japanese forces at Pien-niu-lu-pu and Pen-hsi-hu was over estimated. For the projected offensive Kuropatkin created two maneuver elements: Bilderling's Western Force of 64 battalions, 40 squadrons, and 184 guns; and Stackelberg's Eastern Force of 73 battalions, 34 squadrons, and 130 guns plus some mountain artillery. Kuropatkin held the 4th Siberian Corps, the 1st Army Corps, and the Independent Trans-Baikal Cossack Brigade as a

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<sup>3</sup>Germany, Historical Section of the German General Staff, The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905, trans. by Karl von Donat, 7 vols. with maps (London: Hugh Rees, 1908-1914), 4:16-20.

general reserve. He positioned two detachments on each flank and assigned the 6th Siberian Corps to his strategic reserve.<sup>4</sup>

Kuropatkin's order assigned objectives for the first two days of this operation. The Western Force was to advance south and occupy a line of villages stretching west to east just eight miles south of Mukden. On the second day Bilderling's vanguard was to occupy a line seventeen miles south of Mukden while the main body advanced to positions fourteen miles south of Mukden. Defensive entrenchments were to be prepared at each line.<sup>5</sup>

Stackelberg was to start from Fu-shun, just east of Mukden, and move south through the mountains twenty miles in two days. The initial objective of his Eastern Force was the Japanese position at Pien-niu-lu-pu.<sup>6</sup> On 1 October Kuropatkin secretly fixed 5 October as the day to begin the advance. On 2 October he issued a proclamation to the army, praising the troops for their patience and the hardships they had endured, and told them that the time had come for attack. The secret offensive became public knowledge.

In supplementary orders to Stackelberg on 5 October, Kuropatkin ordered the Eastern Force to continue its advance after the second day, to envelop the Japanese right flank at Pien-niu-lu-pu and Pen-hsi-hu, to cut Kuroki's line of communications, and to advance on Liao-yang from the east. If that was not possible, Stackelberg was to drive the Japanese south of the Tai-tzu river and then assist the movement toward the Yen-tai.

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<sup>4</sup>Operation Order for the Manchurian Army, 28 September 1904. Great Britain, Official History, 2:727-32.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

The Russian advance began as scheduled with bands playing and flags flying. For two days the army moved south according to the plan. Japanese outposts gave way to the advancing Russians. Kuropatkin planned to use Bilderling's force to contain the Japanese and draw as many of them as possible away from Stackelberg. He did not anticipate how successful that plan would be. Both commanders were urged to attack the enemy only when they had a clear numerical advantage and to entrench whenever they encountered a superior force.

The Russian advance was something less than energetic. Stackelberg advanced according to schedule then requested a day to rest his detachment. He planned to place his troops in attack positions on 8 October and to attack Pien-niu-lu-pu on the ninth. While he was resting, Rennenkampf advanced toward Pen-hsi-hu. Kuropatkin concurred in the methodical advance. On 9 October he advised Stackelberg that even

if the enemy should evacuate his positions on the 8th, or during the following night . . . I still do not consider that our preparations are sufficiently advanced to justify us in attacking the main positions on the 9th: I therefore decide upon the 10th for the attack on the principal position. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Bilderling's force stood in place from the night of 7 October until the morning of 9 October in order to remain abreast of the Eastern Force. On 9 October Bilderling advanced his main body to the Shi-li river and pushed his advance guard positions about three miles further south. Simultaneously he prepared three defensive lines, the northernmost along the Sha and the southernmost along the Shi-li.

The Russians' leisurely "attack" allowed Oyama to concentrate his forces and to extricate troops from untenable positions. The

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., vol. 1, pt. 5, p. 22.

Japanese evacuated Pien-niu-lu-pu on the night of 7 October. Stackelberg occupied it without firing a shot early on the eighth before he received Kuropatkin's message to delay. On 9 October Rennenkampff threatened Pen-hsi-pu, while Stackelberg attacked the Japanese advanced positions at the mountain passes without success. The Russian advance had reached its maximum extension.

Oyama, determined to take the initiative, ordered his armies to attack on 10 October. Kuroki was to hold Stackelberg's force with the 12th Division and Umezawa's Kobi Brigade and to strike in the west with the balance of his power. Stackelberg's intended attack on Pen-hsi-hu failed to materialize on 10 October. Instead he spent the day reconnoitering the area. Although Kuropatkin desired vigorous action, his messages counselled lengthy preparation. He advised Stackelberg that it would be wise to devote several days to preparing for the assault on Kuroki's main position.

By attempting to control the movements of both detachments Kuropatkin took away their commanders' initiatives. Inefficient communications and poor or nonexistent maps hampered the execution. He ordered Stackelberg to start his advance on 10 October and to move through the Japanese position to reach objectives that were fifteen miles west, all through mountainous terrain. Kuropatkin could not have understood the task he had assigned. Stackelberg tried to point out the impracticality of the maneuver and requested maps from his superior. He could not advance until Pen-hsi-hu was taken and that was not expected until 12 or 13 October. He sent an aide to plead his case. Kuropatkin insisted that the plan was sound and that the Eastern Detachment faced only a weak enemy force. He left the time of attack up to

Stackelberg. The net result was that on 10 October the Russians were pushed back in the west while Stackelberg remained inactive.<sup>8</sup>

On 11 October Oyama directed his armies to execute a right wheel of the line as they advanced. He intended to push those Russian forces east of the railroad to the northeast away from their line of communications.<sup>9</sup> The Japanese met with little success against the stiff Russian defenses. They were able to capture only two small hills near Bilderling's left flank, and those were taken in a predawn attack that relied on stealth and the bayonet.<sup>10</sup>

The Russians, however, fared no better in the east. Stackelberg's attacks on the mountain passes and Pen-shi-hu failed with heavy losses. In the west the Japanese steadily increased pressure against Bilderling's right flank. Although his flank was holding, Bilderling asked the 6th Siberian Corps to reinforce his flank against the Japanese effort. That corps commander refused because he believed that his role as strategic reserve did not permit him to commit his troops without Kuropatkin's permission. The 6th Corps did assume an increased defensive posture but would not attack or advance. Kuropatkin later directed that corps to cooperate with the Western Detachment.

The crux of the battle came for the Russians on 11 October. Kuropatkin ordered the Western Detachment to hold the Shi-li river line. However, when he learned of the threatened envelopment of Bilderling's flank, he ordered the Western Detachment to fall back to

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., vol. 1, pt. 5, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 4:104; and Great Britain, Official History, 2:296.

<sup>10</sup>Great Britain, Official History, vol. 1, pt. 5, p. 45.



the intermediate line. He did not choose to use the 6th Corps, which was in position on the right rear of Bilderling's line, to attack. Fierce fighting had already commenced against Bilderling's right flank. Believing his position was secure with the Xth Corps on his left and the 6th Corps to his right rear, Bilderling chose to stand and fight rather than try to break off from heavy contact. He was unaware that Kuropatkin had ordered his subordinates to retreat. Kuropatkin also directed the reserves of the Xth Corps to shift to the east to help cover the gap between the Eastern and Western Detachments. Disaster loomed as the two generals gave conflicting orders. This was not the only time that Kuropatkin bypassed his intermediate commanders to deal directly with their subordinates without keeping everyone informed of his actions. His propensity to interfere in this manner was unforgivable in a commander. As the result, on this day the Xth Corps retreated in good order to the intermediate line but left the XVII Corps to bear the brunt of Japanese assaults on its exposed flanks. The 6th Siberian Corps provided some assistance but it was too little and too late.<sup>11</sup>

This was the 6th Corps first real taste of combat and it was not ready. Its officers were expert only in parades. The troops formed for the attack and advanced in broad daylight, shoulder-to-shoulder, in open country without firing a shot and without artillery support. They took more than 600 casualties in thirty minutes and fell back in disorder. The tactic was repeated with the same results.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., vol. 1, pt. 5, p. 74.

<sup>12</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 4:205-6; and Great Britain, Official History, vol. 1, pt. 5, p. 80.

Bilderling was unable to hold the Shi-li line. Pressed hard by the Japanese, he was forced all the way back to the line of the Sha-Ho, bypassing the intermediate line of defense. Kuropatkin, unaware of the collapse of the XVII Corps, again ignored Bilderling and directed the Xth Corps' commander to stand at the intermediate line. Bilderling eventually rallied the XVII Corps and pulled the Xth Corps back to the Sha-Ho in order to cover his flank.

Meantime, in the center Kuropatkin drew forces from the General Reserve to fill the gap between his primary maneuver elements. General Mau's brigade formed part of the center, and he was instructed to hold obstinately but to retreat if pressed hard. "Your position is already advanced compared to the General Front . . . you must not go forward without my permission."<sup>13</sup> When Mau encountered stiff opposition he complied with his orders and retreated, thereby exposing Stackelberg's right flank. The Eastern Force commander went directly to Mau and ordered him to reoccupy his former positions. Fortunately Mau was able to do so.

After the second day of the advance Russian control of the battle was confused and it never improved. Kuropatkin's communication and information services were so poor that he was never fully aware of the situation. Late on 12 October he still was unaware that Bilderling had been forced back to the Sha-Ho or that Stackelberg had given up the attack and was in a defensive posture. In a message to Stackelberg at 5:45 P.M. on 12 August, Kuropatkin reported that the Western Force had held at all points until sunset and that there was no other information to report.

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<sup>13</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 2:377.

Stackelberg was responsible for the army commander's false impression of the situation in the east. His reports indicated that the Eastern Detachment was still advancing. Not until the morning of 13 October did Kuropatkin become aware of Bilderling's plight and began to suspect that all was not well in the east. When he learned of Bilderling's situation, Kuropatkin ordered the Eastern Force to retire:

The XVII Corps has suffered a defeat and was obliged to retire on the Sha-Ho line. The defeat, together with the failure of your operations forces me to abandon the task imposed upon the Eastern Detachment, and to withdraw your troops north. . . . Any further defeat of the Western Force may necessitate a retreat on Mukden tomorrow.<sup>14</sup>

Stackelberg withdrew, without difficulty, to the north bank of the Sha-Ho.

Oyama's orders for 13 October limited the Japanese advance to the south bank of the Sha-Ho. The presence of the 6th Siberian Corps in the west had prevented the Japanese from turning the Russian flank and driving them away from the railroad as Oyama had planned. From 13 to 17 October heavy fighting took place in the center of the line around the railway and Sha-ho-pu. That action culminated in the fight for One-Tree Hill, which the Russians won. But other than skirmishes, the battle was over.

The poor training and tactics of newly arrived Russian units resulted in unnecessary casualties at Sha-Ho. On 14 October Bilderling directed the 6th Corps to counterattack in order to prevent the threatened envelopment of his flank and to relieve the pressure on his center. One brigade of the 6th Corps lined up for inspection in full view of the Japanese. Regimental officers rode up, dismounted,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 2:396; and Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 4:225.

inspected the troops, and then marched them toward the Japanese positions just as if they were on parade. The Japanese allowed them to advance within 700 yards before opening fire with artillery, machine guns, and rifles. After taking severe casualties the troops fell back in disorder. The brigade commander, General Laiming, was wounded on the second attempt or it might have continued. Those antiquated tactics cost the Russians more than 2,000 casualties in just a few hours.<sup>15</sup>

Sha-Ho was not a conclusive battle. Kuropatkin initiated the action and then quickly relinquished control to Oyama. The net result of this action was that the Japanese pushed their lines forward by a few miles. Oyama chose to halt at the Sha-Ho for he was aware that he did not have sufficient forces to defeat the Russians. Kuropatkin sounded his subordinates about continuing the action and found no enthusiasm to do so.<sup>16</sup>

The main Russian reverses of this battle were brought about by the retreat of the Western Detachment which Kuropatkin ordered at a time when adequate forces were in position to attack. The Russian general could not bring himself to exert that degree of aggressiveness necessary for victory. Nevertheless, shortly after the battle, on 25 October, Viceroy Alekseev was recalled to Saint Petersburg and Kuropatkin assumed supreme command in the Far East.

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<sup>15</sup>Great Britain, Official History, vol. 1, pt. 5, p. 145, 2:446-57.

<sup>16</sup>Casualties at Sha-Ho were 3,951 Japanese killed and 16,931 injured; 5,084 Russians killed, 30,392 injured, and 5,875 missing. Ibid., 2:736-38.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SAN-DE-PU

25-29 JANUARY 1905

The battle of San-de-pu on 25-29 January 1905 was but a continuation of the previous action. Kuropatkin reorganized his forces into three armies. General Nicolas P. Linevich arrived from Vladivostok to command the First Army. General Oscar Grippenbergh came from Russia to command the Second Army as did General A. Kaulbars who commanded the Third Army.

As winter set in the Russians encountered some supply difficulties in the distribution of cold weather clothing and the once cooperative Chinese were becoming intransigent. Many of the cart drivers fled the area and local produce was being hoarded. The railroad was required to carry a greater percentage of the armies' consumable needs, but it proved equal to the task. By the end of January the Russians were exceptionally well supplied.<sup>1</sup>

In December Kuropatkin asked the army commanders their opinion about resuming the attack. Grippenbergh stated that no action should

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. War Department, Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria During the Russo-Japanese War, 5 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906-1907), 5:160.

be taken until numerical superiority would assure a decisive victory.<sup>2</sup> The Russians were evidently not aware that they already enjoyed a considerable numerical advantage. The army chiefs were unanimous in recommending that action be delayed. When Grippenbergh later asked permission to attack the village of San-de-pu, Kuropatkin refused. By that time Kuropatkin had decided to await the arrival of the XVI Corps from Russia before beginning another battle. Port Arthur was a continual consideration in Russian plans and had been the reason for some of the earlier engagements. When Port Arthur surrendered, the need for action was just as strong but for a different reason. It then became advantageous to strike before Nogi's army arrived. The northward movement of the Japanese Third Army followed immediately upon the surrender of Port Arthur. Not only did Kuropatkin face the arrival of Nogi's army but a Fifth Army was being formed with one of the divisions from Port Arthur plus one of the new Kobi Divisions.

By approving a cavalry raid against the railroad bridge at Yin-kou and the supply base at Newchang, Kuropatkin hoped to delay movement of the enemy forces from the south. The Russian raid had little effect. Simultaneously the Japanese carried out two cavalry raids against the Russian rear. The amount of damage caused was negligible but the amount of anxiety was large. Kuropatkin did not forget the Japanese ability to strike at his main line of communication. In preparation for the next phase of the conflict he deployed the three Russian armies

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<sup>2</sup>Relative strengths at that time: Russians had 265,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry; the Japanese had 170,000 infantry and 7,200 cavalry. Great Britain, Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Official History of the Russo-Japanese War, 2d ed., 3 vols. with maps (London: Harrison & Sons for His Majesties Stationery Office, 1909-1920), 3:7.

on the Sha-Ho line with the Second Army in the west, the Third Army in the center astride the railroad, and the First Army in the east. His plan for the approaching battle hinged on winning one specific objective before any other development--the village of San-de-pu.

In order that the operations may not assume a more extended form than is advisable until complete information is obtained on the strength and disposition of the enemy, the infantry of the Second Army should not, unless it is absolutely unavoidable after completing the first stage of its advance, which consists of the capture of the enemy's advanced position at San-de-pu . . . press beyond the line Ma-tzu-an-tzu/Hei-kou-tai. . . . Speaking generally the advance should not be carried farther than some two and a half miles south of the line to be captured.

In carrying out the role assigned to it, the Second Army must not become too extended for a rapid concentration in case of a Japanese attack in force.<sup>3</sup>

This order did not give Gripenberg much freedom of action and it afforded no support from the other two armies. The bulk of the Russian troops would be idle. By late January Kuropatkin had over 290,000 infantry at his disposal against Oyama's 180,000. (Russian estimates placed Oyama's strength at 260,000.) Gripenberg had a two-to-one advantage in his sector of the front. Just as Kuropatkin left two armies idle, Gripenberg did not plan to use his entire army. The whole panorama was not to unfold until the 1st Siberian Corps and one other division had taken San-de-pu. To further complicate matters Kuropatkin forbade anyone other than himself to move troop units larger than regiments.<sup>4</sup>

The battle began on 25 January with some initial success but the objective, San-de-pu, was not captured. Other than some supporting

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 3:146.

<sup>4</sup>Germany, Historical Section of the German General Staff, The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905, trans. by Karl von Donat, 7 vols. with maps (London: Hugh Rees, 1908-1914), 6:84-85.

artillery fire the rest of the front had been quiet. Grippenbergr decided to expand the action and to attack along his entire front on 26 January. Kuropatkin, however, disapproved that plan and restricted the Second Army's operations to the vicinity of San-de-pu. As some territory that had been captured was outside the approved area, it was vacated by the Russians and reoccupied by the Japanese. Kuropatkin had a fixed conception and it was not to be changed. The attack on San-de-pu continued on 26 January in a heavy snowstorm. The assault force captured a village and reported that it had accomplished its mission. When visibility improved the mistake was discovered, San-de-pu was still in front of the Russians. Kuropatkin, therefore, approved Grippenbergr's plan to resume the attack on 27 January with fresh troops, but he still refused to employ other forces in supporting attacks elsewhere along the front.

Continued inactivity in the other sectors permitted Oyama to shift units to meet the Russian advance. On 27 January the Fifth Division and on 28 January the Second Division joined the action near San-de-pu. Grippenbergr's attempt to turn the Japanese flank was blocked. The enemy's growing strength around San-de-pu led Kuropatkin to consider the wisdom of continuing the attack as the threat of a Japanese counterattack grew. Defense again became important. On 28 January he advised Grippenbergr that

it has not been discovered from which direction the Japanese main attack will come. . . . After the enemy is repulsed you can continue the prosecution of the task allotted to the Second Manchurian Army.

But later the same day he ordered Grippenbergr to

withdraw forthwith from the advanced line all services. Dispatch



all wounded to the rear. If there is insufficient transport the troops must carry the wounded themselves. The troops are to withdraw this very night and occupy a concentrated position.<sup>5</sup>

Stackelberg's corps bore the brunt of the effort at San-de-pu. He had captured Hei-kou-tai and made some inroads into the Japanese flank. With the support of Mischenko's cavalry he planned to attack a village that lay outside the approved operations area of the Second Army. Gripenberg learned of the intended action and sent General V. Grekov to insure that Stackelberg complied with instructions. However, the 1st Corps commander, with the full support of his subordinates, remained convinced of the correctness of his actions and carried out the attack. The night attack failed with heavy losses and Kuropatkin later relieved Stackelberg of command.

Although the order to cease the offensive came as a surprise, the withdrawal was executed without trouble. Stackelberg retreated to the Sha-ho line giving up Hei-kou-tai and the other territory captured since the beginning of the operation. The Japanese quickly reoccupied the vacated positions. The battle was over.

On 30 January Gripenberg reported himself ill and requested permission to return to Russia. When subsequently queried from Saint Petersburg as to the real reason for his request, he replied that all independent actions were denied him and he did not believe he could be of any further service under the circumstances.<sup>6</sup> After commanding the Second Army for only seven weeks, Gripenberg returned to Russia.

The animosity between Gripenberg and Kuropatkin began when the Second Army commander objected to Kuropatkin's first proposal to advance.

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<sup>5</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 3:204-6.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 3:209.

The commander-in-chief then interfered with Gripenberg's conduct of the action by limiting his field and restricting his movement of troops. Kuropatkin blamed the failure at San-de-pu on Gripenberg's poor control of the army and its lack of vigor. He did not accept his own contribution to the defeat. Kuropatkin's plan itself was faulty in that it failed to support the main attack with pressure at other points along the front. And again, the first threat of a counterattack caused Kuropatkin to pull back and assume a defensive posture as he had at Liao-yang and Sha-ho.

## CHAPTER SIX

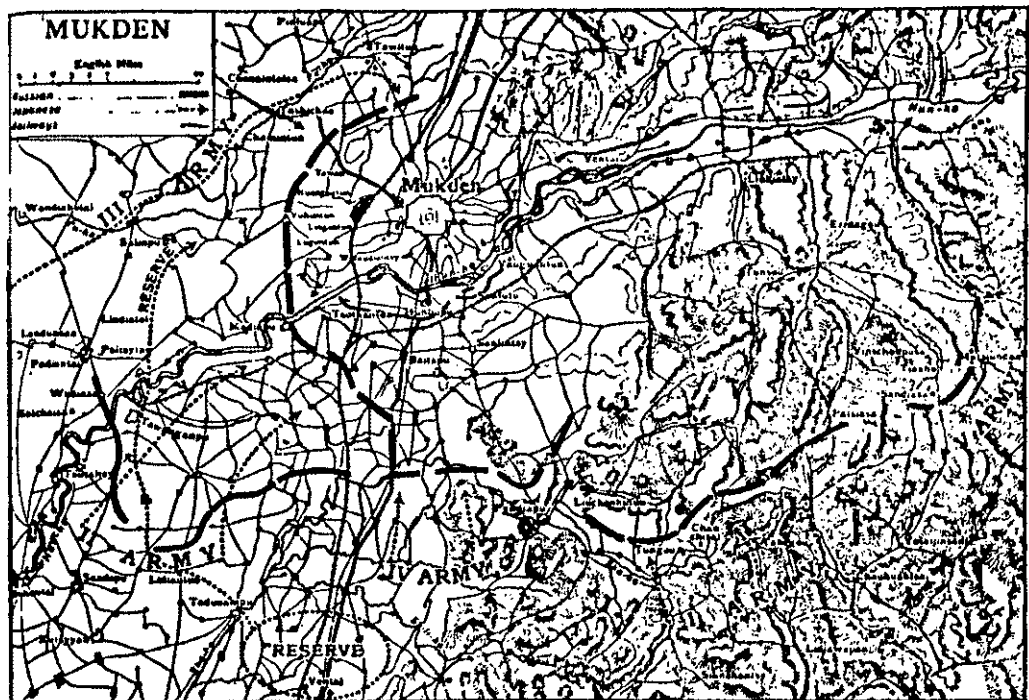
### MUKDEN

The future historian will probably accuse me of having held on too long.

General Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin

It was to Kuropatkin's advantage to strike before Oyama was reinforced. Both his Quarter-Master General and Chief-of-Staff recommended that the action in January be continued. On 12 February Kuropatkin submitted a circular letter to his army commanders (Linevich, Kaulbars, and Bilderling) that discussed several ways in which Nogi might be employed and pointed out the dangers of the Russian position at Mukden. After examining the letter all three commanders recommended immediate action. All that resulted, however, was more discussion. Kuropatkin favored only a limited action against San-de-pu. Kaulbars and Linevich advocated a general action against Oyama's left flank. On 20 February Kuropatkin again asked the army commanders for their opinion of a general versus a limited advance. Bilderling contended that the limited objective of San-de-pu would lead to a meaningless engagement. Linevich argued that advantages should be exploited as the action developed. Kaulbars was noncommittal. From this exchange Kuropatkin decided to attack the villages of San-de-pu and Li-ta-jen-tun on 25 February. Any further advance would be keyed to the degree of success of those operations. The plan of attack was not changed from

FIGURE 3



SOURCE: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed. 1911, s.v.  
"Russo-Japanese War."

the earlier assault on San-de-pu. The Second Army would attack, the Third Army would provide some artillery support, and the First Army would do nothing.

Before commencing action Kuropatkin took steps to safeguard the railroad against further Japanese raids. He took fifty thousand men from the field armies to bolster its defenses. Twelve battalions, forty-two and a half squadrons, and ten thousand troops from the drafts provided the increased security. Kuropatkin still had 270,000 infantry, 16,000 cavalry, 1,200 field guns, and 54 machine guns available at Mukden. Oyama mustered 200,000 infantry, 7,300 cavalry, 1,000 field guns, and 254 machine guns.<sup>1</sup>

The Japanese armies were arranged from east to west: Kawamura's Fifth Army (Yalu Army), Kuroki's First Army, Nozu's Fourth Army, Oku's Second Army, and Nogi's Third Army. Nozu was in the center of the line astride the railroad. Oyama had a sense of urgency, for with Nogi's arrival he was at maximum strength while Russian strength continued to grow. The sooner a decisive engagement could be brought about the less would be the Japanese disadvantage. While Kuropatkin discussed the merits of a general or limited engagement, Oyama acted.

The Japanese marshal planned to take advantage of Kuropatkin's penchant to overreact to pressure. Oyama's orders of 20 February described the plan of advance. In the east the Fifth Army was to attack the Russian left flank on 23 February. To its left the First Army was to attack Wang-fu-ling on 27 February. The Fourth Army was to

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<sup>1</sup>Great Britain, Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Official History of the Russo-Japanese War, 2d ed., 3 vols. with maps (London: Harrison & Sons for His Majesties Stationery Office, 1909-1920), 3:264-69.

hold the Russians to its front in position and be prepared to attack. The Second Army, when directed, was to attack from San-de-pu and attempt to roll up the Russian right. The Third Army was ordered to advance on 26 February against the Russian right and drive to the east. Oyama's instructions read:

The objective of the battle is to decide the issue of the war. The question is not one, therefore, of occupying certain points or seizing tracts of country. It is essential that the enemy should be dealt a heavy blow, and as since in all our battles hitherto pursuit has been very slow, it is imperative upon this occasion to pursue as promptly and as far as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile the Russian armies were poised to strike in the west. By 19 February the Japanese were in position and, on schedule on 23 February, the attack was delivered against the Russian left. The Russians resisted stiffly but were unable to deploy reserves quickly because those elements had been positioned for the pending attack in the west. Prisoners captured in the east were identified as troops of Japan's 11th Division, known to have been with Nogi at Port Arthur. That fact and the growing pressure against his left flank made Kuropatkin wonder if perhaps Nogi's entire army was in the east. On 24 February Major General Ukach-Ogorovich, Secret Service Chief, informed Kuropatkin that spies had reported that the Japanese were aware of the proposed Russian attack scheduled for the next day. Kuropatkin directed Ogorovich to go and repeat his story to Kaulbars:

. . . tell him what you have told me. Tell him too, from me, that I beg him to decide upon the possibility of the offensive, and ask him to let me know at once by telephone whether the Second Army will attack tomorrow or not.<sup>3</sup>

Kaulbars conferred with Kuropatkin as ordered. Once the commander-in-

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3:269.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 3:284.

chief declared that the Second Army would receive no assistance from the General Reserve due to the situation in the east, Kaulbars canceled his offensive. Oyama thereby gained the advantage.

Oyama's plan worked perfectly. Kuropatkin concentrated his attention in the east and hurried units to that area. From the Second Manchurian Army he took the 1st Siberian Corps and all of the army's reserves. From the Third Army he ordered away the XVI Corps but cancelled the order when Bilderling objected that the action in the east might be a feint. In all forty-two battalions and one hundred twenty-eight guns moved east before the Russians discovered where Oyama's main blow was directed. Weakening the Second Army was especially unfortunate for that unit became the target of the main Japanese attack. On 25 February Kuropatkin still hurried additional units east. He personally directed a battalion with mountain artillery of the 2nd Siberian Corps to the left flank. By 26 February the Russians had stopped the Japanese attack while many of the reinforcements were still enroute.

Kuropatkin had developed no overall plan for the employment of the Russian armies after cancellation of the attack on 25 February. Linevich planned to counterattack once all of his reinforcements arrived. In the center, Bilderling worried that the enemy's main attack would be directed toward Mukden through his position. Kuropatkin's headquarters remained uncertain about Japanese intentions but was inclined to expect it to come in the center or the east. Kuropatkin approved a demonstration against the railroad bridge over the Sha-ho in the hope that it would relieve pressure against the First Army. He cautioned Bilderling not to get deeply involved with the

demonstration and to maintain the ability to withdraw. In the east Kuropatkin approved Linevich's attack and suggested that a frontal assault be made by the First Army.<sup>4</sup>

On 27 February the Russians still looked east as Kuroki pressed his attack. Rennenkampff assumed command of the Ching-ho-cheng detachment on the extreme left flank and quickly gained control of the situation. As in the other battles too many generals were providing directions. Commander-in-chief, army commanders, and corps commanders tended to get too involved in the details of their subordinate units.<sup>5</sup> Conflicting orders were the usual result and that was the situation in the west where Nogi was advancing undetected by Grekov's ineffective cavalry.

By 28 February the Japanese were exerting heavy pressure against the Russian right. Kaulbars, stripped of his reserves, was about to become the target of the main attack. The Japanese Second Army struck first; its objective was to hold Kaulbars in place and to turn his flank while Nogi circled wide to the west. When Oku's attacks threatened to break Kaulbars' line, all of his siege guns and extraneous material were evacuated. Not until the afternoon of 28 February did Kuropatkin become aware of the developing threat to his right flank and of Nogi's presence. Little information of value and an unfortunate amount of inaccurate information clouded any effort to make an accurate assessment of the situation.

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<sup>4</sup>Germany, Historical Section of the German General Staff, The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905, trans. by Karl von Donat, 7 vols. with maps (London: Hugh Rees, 1908-1914), 7:6; and Great Britain, Official History, 3:316-20.

<sup>5</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 7:41.



Kuropatkin explained his response to the situation in the west:

The concentration of sufficient force to repel the turning movement demanded several days for which reason it was important to throw out, without loss of time, a screen to the west of Mukden, and to check the advance of the leading units; and under the protection of the screen, to carry out the concentration of force necessary for assuming the offensive.<sup>6</sup>

On 1 March Bilderling's portion of the front withstood a heavy artillery barrage--part of the Japanese plan to hold him in position. In the east Linevich launched an attack with two corps. The Japanese fell back and the Russians captured the village of Si-da-ling. Kuropatkin had to halt Linevich's offensive:

The weakening of the enemy opposite Rennenkampf does not prove that the enemy has retired, but fully justifies us in assuming that the Japanese are continuing farther to envelope our left flank. Hence pushing the 1st Siberian Corps toward the 3rd Siberian Corps may meet the enemy's intentions. . . . Let your Army's main task be now to make the flank of your whole position absolutely safe against a turning movement.<sup>7</sup>

To carry out his plan in the west Kuropatkin had to gather forces for the counter stroke while he protected a ninety-mile front, but the Russian leader seemed unable to cope with multiple actions.

Command and control broke down during the battle. One reason was Kuropatkin's penchant for forming detachments with the resulting breakdown of unit integrity. Kuropatkin claimed that he maintained regimental integrity but the facts do not support his claim. Battalions from different regiments and different corps were commonly assembled in detached elements. Once the General Reserve was expended the practice became even more pronounced. To establish the screen west

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<sup>6</sup>General Kuropatkin's Account vol. 3, p. 153 from Russian Official History, vol. 5, pt. 1, p. 177, quoted in Great Britain, Official History, 3:337.

<sup>7</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 7:112.

of Mukden, Kuropatkin first drew from the General Reserve. Then he formed a Composite Division from elements of the Xth Corps. He recalled the 1st Siberian Corps from the First Army and commandeered thirty-two battalions from Kaulbars, who was already hard pressed. Kaulbars managed to scrape together twelve miscellaneous battalions. By 2 March the screen was in place and the leading elements of Nogi's army were checked. Oku, however, made some small gains at the cost of exceptionally heavy casualties. Although there was no penetration of the line, the Russians had to adjust by extending to the north and pulling in from the west. By 3 March the Second Manchurian Army faced south and west.<sup>8</sup>

Kuropatkin was concerned about his line of communication--the avenue of retreat had to be kept open. He was concerned as to Nogi's objective. Did Nogi intend to strike near Mukden or further north near Tieh-ling? To counter both options Kuropatkin ordered General Gerngross' 1st Siberian Corps to the tombs north of Mukden to defend the city from that direction and General Istomin to Tieh-ling with the 6th Rifle Regiment to organize its defenses. Major General de Vitt's detachment from the Third Army guarded the railroad between Mukden and Tieh-ling, and Colonel Zapolski's detachment protected the Hu-shih-tai terminal. All of those assignments resulted from erroneous reports of large numbers of enemy troops north of the city.<sup>9</sup> Kuropatkin's force eventually checked Nogi's advance and inflicted heavy casualties on one of his divisions, causing Oyama to reinforce Nogi with one brigade from his

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 7:93; and Great Britain, Official History, 3:382-90.

<sup>9</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 3:397-98.

General Reserve. Meanwhile the situation in the west was critical, but the Russians met the threat. General Viktor K. Sakharov, Kuropatkin's chief of staff, recommended that the lines west of the railroad be shortened and that the entire Second Army move north of the Hun river to face west. Kuropatkin agreed. On the evening of 1 March he ordered the remainder of the Second Army across the Hun. Those orders were sent direct to the units of the Second Army from Kuropatkin's headquarters. Some confusion resulted as unit commanders attempted to execute Kuropatkin's orders while simultaneously following Kaulbars' directives.

Late on 2 March Kuropatkin received reports that the Japanese were extending further north along the western flank. Nogi was pulling one of his divisions out of the line and moving it north. The commander-in-chief's plan to hold the Japanese with the screen and attack their left flank remained valid. On 3 March he informed Kaulbars that

I have made arrangements to concentrate on the right bank of the Hun-ho the whole of the Manchurian Second Army with the exception of twenty-five battalions which will remain to form a rear guard . . . provided that this concentration is successfully carried out . . . and we ourselves are not attacked today. . . . We must tomorrow or the next day assume an energetic offensive against the Japanese who are turning our right flank. In view of this it appears undesirable to act offensively pending the time we shall advance with our full strength. Send me your ideas as quickly as possible.<sup>10</sup>

But General von der Launitz, who commanded the portion of the Second Army still south of the Hun, was also getting instructions for Kaulbars:

The commander-in-chief ordered me to tell you that he is going to collect strong forces at Mukden to assume the offensive with them, with the object of destroying the enemy. To obtain this object the commander-in-chief considers it necessary to ascertain strength,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3:422.

direction of march, and if possible also the intention of the enemy. The General thinks it undesirable to make any attacks before our main forces have come up, and before he has himself assumed command in battle. You are to turn over in your mind, until the commander-in-chief arrives on the battlefield, what the best course of action would be to destroy the enemy. . . .<sup>11</sup>

The Third and First Manchurian Armies were still in their defensive positions facing numerically weaker forces. No new initiatives had been undertaken since Kuropatkin called back Linevich's attack. The withdrawal of the Second Army turned into mass confusion as units descended on the bridges to cross the river. The ice was still thick enough to support some troop movement but not heavy transport or guns. Attempts to put up additional bridges failed in the confusion. Fortunately for the Russians, the Japanese did not press this advantage. Withdrawal of the Second Manchurian Army exposed the right flank of the Third Manchurian Army forcing a further modification of the line. One of the most amazing aspects of this battle was that the Japanese failed to take advantage of this situation. A potential Russian disaster loomed but Oku's army was exhausted after repeated assaults against the Sha-ho positions. It lacked the vigor that Oyama requested.

The Russians were permitted to cross the river and even to regain some semblance of order. Kuropatkin still planned to attack Nogi on 4 March. Kaulbars didn't believe that was possible, and the attack was delayed until 5 March. That delay permitted Nogi to extend his line still further to the north. The Russian right flank arched from Hun west around Mukden to the railroad station north of the town at Hu-shi-tai.

Before dawn on 4 March the Japanese captured the important

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<sup>11</sup>Germany, Russo-Japanese War, 7:173.

river crossing at Su-hu-chia-po, between the Russian Second and Third Armies. Kuropatkin ordered it to be retaken. Then he modified those orders to the effect that they were to be carried out only if heavy losses could be avoided. As strong resistance was expected no attempt was made to recapture the crossing.

Throughout the fourth of March Russian headquarters debated two possible courses of action: To attack Nogi's army with the forces that had been assembled or to withdraw from Mukden. Kuropatkin opted for the counterattack but warned the First and Third Armies to prepare for a possible retreat. The attack force consisted of 125 3/4 battalions with 364 guns. Nogi had approximately 93 battalions and 400 guns.

Kuropatkin ordered Kaulbars

to advance early tomorrow morning and, after driving the enemy westward . . . to make good and hold the line Hsiao-yo-shu-pu/Dembouski Position . . . bearing in mind that the enemy is evidently trying to so dispose his forces as to threaten our rear. I consider it necessary to direct your special attention to making the most ample dispositions to meet such a threat. . . . I suggest that it may be possible to mass fifty battalions on your right flank . . . to roll him up from north to south.<sup>12</sup>

The First Manchurian Army was to hold its position. The Third Manchurian Army was to evacuate a portion of the Sha-ho defenses and occupy a new line in open terrain. Frozen ground and heavy opposition meant that the new line would be difficult to construct and precarious for the troops. Objections from Bilderling and some of his commanders brought about the cancellation of the order, but the cancellation came too late. The initial orders had been sent to and were being executed by the subordinate commanders. Two divisions of the XVII Corps had already vacated the line thereby exposing the flank of the 6th Corps

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<sup>12</sup>Great Britain, Official History, 3:454-55.

and the Japanese had occupied the evacuated positions. All attempts to regain the positions failed. The counterattack against Nogi did not come off as expected. Orders did not reach participating elements in time for them to get into position. The 1st Siberian Corps received its orders one hour after it was to have attacked.

At the opposite end of Kaulbars front, General Tserpitsky, reported his position under attack by three Japanese divisions and called for help. Both Kaulbars and Kuropatkin sent reserves to assist. Kuropatkin ordered Tserpitsky to hold his position at all costs and to retreat only with his approval. Tserpitsky had greatly exaggerated the situation. He repulsed the Japanese attack without the assistance of the reserves and still had uncommitted troops. Meanwhile the units sent to his assistance pulled strength away from the intended attack.

Kaulbars planned to attack in three columns with the main effort by the column furthest north. Sixteen battalions had been withdrawn to aid Tserpitsky. As a result of that and a late start, little was accomplished on 5 March. Kaulbars tried again on 6 March with four columns. Maximum pressure was again to be applied in the north in an attempt to push Nogi back in a left wheel type movement. When Kuropatkin received a copy of Kaulbars' attack order, he was not pleased. It seemed to him that not enough strength was allocated to the northern columns. The conduct of the attack, however, was left up to Kaulbars. When Kuropatkin later talked the matter over with Bilderling, he complained that

if we do not succeed today it will be harder tomorrow and then we shall not succeed. The Second Army is not acting energetically; its orders are wretched and, what is most important, yesterday was entirely wasted.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 3:510-11.

Kaulbars commenced the attack with Colonel Zapolsky's column (part of 1st Siberian Corps) against Ta-shih-chiao. The Japanese stopped Zapolsky and Kaulbars halted his other elements until that village could be taken. The entire Second Army waited for one column to take a specific objective.

Failure to take Ta-shih-chiao and unverified reports that 6,000 Japanese were fifteen miles north of Mukden convinced Kuropatkin that it was necessary to shorten his lines again in order to gather more troops for the west. The First and Third Armies were ordered to fall back from the Sha to the Hun-Ho line. Both of those army commanders objected to the plan and Kuropatkin cancelled the order. However, when Kaulbars' offensive failed and the Second Army assumed a defensive posture at 1:00 A.M. on 7 March, Kuropatkin ordered his other armies to retreat.

The Second Manchurian Army held a line extending northward along an old railroad siding from the junction of the Hsin-min-tun road with the railway. Oyama moved Nogi further north and reinforced him with all three brigades from his General Reserve. Against stiff resistance the Japanese made small gains in the west. On 7 March Nogi's leading elements closed toward the railroad. Japanese cavalry disguised as Chinese actually cut the railroad before dawn on 8 March but the Russians quickly reopened the line and rail traffic continued. The Japanese had all of their troops committed and were near the limit of their capability.

Kuropatkin was able to withdraw the First and Third armies to the Hun without difficulty. Mukden and Fu-shun were still in Russian hands and, although the offensive had failed in the west, the Second Army was holding. Nogi advanced to within five hundred yards of the

railroad before he was stopped but Japanese artillery was shelling the tracks. Kaulbars planned a counterattack against the Japanese 9th Division at Pa-chia-tzu but Kuropatkin cancelled it. The commander-in-chief's principal concern became the railroad. He formed another detachment under General Muilov to guard the tracks.

On the evening of 8 March Kuropatkin again considered evacuation to Tieh-ling and issued warning orders. All unnecessary equipment was to be sent north immediately. The armies were to retain only essential fighting equipment and supplies sufficient for five or six days. On 9 March the weather turned particularly bad. Blowing snow and dust reduced visibility to a few hundred yards. Under those conditions Nogi again extended his lines to the north and closed again upon the railroad. Kuropatkin ordered the two detachments that were furthest north to coordinate and counterattack.

Muilov's detachment was the farthest north. On the nights of 8-9 March he captured three villages in preparation for the main attack against the Japanese position at Hei-ni-tun. It was an opportunity that could not be passed. Russians were already on three sides of the village. When attempts to coordinate with the other detachment failed, Muilov elected to continue the action alone. Kuropatkin arrived at Muilov's position and criticized him for not coordinating the attack and for allowing the assault to be directed by only a Colonel (Borisov). After some delay General Gershelmann replaced Borisov and the attack resumed. The delay proved costly. After making some progress the attack force was hit in the rear by the advance elements of the Japanese 9th Division as it arrived to reinforce Hei-ni-tun.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 3:601-15.



Tserpitsky's position, assaulted again by the Japanese 5th Division, inflicted such heavy casualties on the enemy that the attack stopped. The net result of action on 9 March was a continued extension of the Japanese lines to the north. Russian attempts to halt the northward movement failed. The Russian lines were holding and severe casualties were inflicted upon the Japanese. Kuropatkin believed that a large reserve force had to be gathered to push Nogi back while he simultaneously held Oku to prevent him from assisting. He ordered fifty-one battalions into the General Reserve. Kuropatkin gave his assessment of the situation and stated his plan to counter Nogi's threat.

The enemy's strength on the Northern Front has increased and is still increasing. His advanced troops are moving north parallel to the railway . . . the advanced guards amount to a brigade of infantry (was only a company). The attack on Hei-ni-tun, made by General Muilov's order previous to my arrival was unsuccessful . . . the Japanese have now taken the offensive. . . . It has been discovered that another of their newly formed divisions is operating against us on this front. I consider the situation extremely serious. Make arrangements this very night for a retreat to Tieh-ling. It is particularly important to send the artillery on ahead . . . to cover the retirement I will take the offensive tomorrow with the reserves. At present insufficient forces have been assembled.<sup>15</sup>

For several days the situation in the west and north had occupied all of Kuropatkin's attention. Ironically the blow that forced the retreat came in the east. Kuroki broke the Russian line and before dark on 9 March had two divisions north of the Hun. When word of this reached Kuropatkin's headquarters, General Sakharov immediately ordered the retreat to begin.

The plan of retreat initially called for the Third Army to pull back while the other armies protected the flanks. Kuroki's penetration

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 3:617-18.

made that impossible. Instead of attacking the Japanese left flank as he had intended, Kuropatkin was forced to use his reserves as a blocking force to cover the retreat of the Third and Second Armies. Most of the First Army, east of the penetration, was able to pull back in good order. Forces west of the penetration soon lost all cohesion. Only the lack of persistent pursuit and the excellent work of Muilov's rear guard prevented an even greater disaster. The breakthrough was a major victory for Oyama but his troops were too few and too tired to accomplish the mission he had set for them--the destruction of the Russian armies. By 12:00 P.M. on 10 March the last stragglers passed through Muilov's positions, and the rear guard moved north.

Although some additional rear guard action flared, the Japanese did not press. Isolated skirmishes occurred as straggling Russian units were overtaken. One incident illustrates that the fighting spirit still existed in the Russian ranks. The 19th Rifle Regiment became isolated and fought until it had expended all its ammunition. The Russians considered making a bayonet charge but not enough able-bodied men remained to carry it out. When the regiment surrendered, of 2,500 men, it had but five officers left and only two hundred and fifty unwounded men.

By the morning of 12 March the Russians were at Tieh-ling with 65,000 effective infantrymen in the First Army, 46,000 in the Second Army, and 21,000 in the Third Army. Sufficient supplies were available to support the armies for several days although some problems in distribution existed due to the amount of equipment lost in the retreat. The First and Second Armies were in defensive positions along the Fan-Ho just south of Tieh-ling and the Third Army was in reserve. The army com-

manders discussed the possibility of an offensive but it did not get past the discussion stage before the Japanese 2nd Division attacked a portion of the Tieh-ling line. The Japanese attack did not seriously endanger the Russian positions. The attack, however, coupled with persistent rumors of Japanese attempts to envelope Tieh-ling, was enough to convince Kuropatkin to withdraw. The evacuation to Hsi-ping-tai began on 14 March and was carried out with little interference from the Japanese. When the armies reached their new positions, they also had a new commander-in-chief, General Linevich.

Kuropatkin's two major errors after reacting to Oyama's feint to the east of Mukden were the delay in attacking Nogi and the curtailment of offensive action in the east. The belated attack against Nogi allowed the Japanese to extend their lines further to the north. Termination of offensive action by the First Manchurian Army allowed Kuroki to probe, locate, and exploit a weakness in the Russian line. Kuroki was able to concentrate his army due to the stationary defensive posture assumed by Linevich at Kuropatkin's direction. It was during the retreat, forced by Kuroki's breakthrough, that the Russians took their heaviest casualties.

The battle for Mukden was expensive for both nations. The Japanese took 70,000 casualties, the Russians 90,000. In terms of dead and wounded the Japanese had the greater losses with twice the number killed as the Russians. Thirty thousand Russians were captured, most of them during the retreat.<sup>16</sup>

On 16 March the Tsar ordered Kuropatkin to return to Irkutsk. The general pled to remain with the armies in Manchuria, arguing that

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 3:689.

while he may have been lacking in his overall direction of the war he was at least as capable as some of the corps commanders. Kuropatkin was allowed to remain in Manchuria until the end of the war as commander of the First Manchurian Army.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

It will be for the future historian to decide whether the troops we put into the field before March 1905 would have been sufficient for victory.

General Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin

In Kuropatkin's strategy the actions prior to Liao-yang, at the Yalu and Te-li-ssu, were rear guard maneuvers intended to buy time to gather strength. The fault with those battles was not their purpose but their execution. Deficiencies in unit training and antiquated tactics, ineffective leadership, poor cavalry performance, and unreliable communications that surfaced early in the war continued until its end. In spite of these liabilities the Russian soldier proved his tenacity and ability to fight when properly led.

At Liao-yang the army had grown in strength and Kuropatkin was willing to offer stubborn resistance from prepared defensive positions. He ordered three consecutive retreats during the battle in order to concentrate his forces or to gather strength for counterattack. Although he gathered sufficient forces north of the Hun to attack Kuroki with a four-to-one advantage, Kuropatkin finally retreated from Liao-yang because of the uncertain situation and lack of resolve.

Following the Mukden battle Kuropatkin expressed the belief that the Japanese were consistently able to field superior forces.

Data collected after the war clearly indicates that the Russians attained numerical superiority with their field army prior to the battle of Liao-yang and retained it. Was that fact not realized, or was Kuropatkin aware of his advantage? These points have not been resolved.

Examination of the organization of the Russian and Japanese armies reveals an important difference. Japanese strength reports list only combat troops. A separate organization of "etappen" troops provided supply and logistic services for front line organizations. Japanese and native laborers followed the army from its first landing in Korea and provided for the needs of the fighting units.

The Russians also contracted for local labor but they continued to rely upon soldiers drawn from the regiments to provide many of the same logistical functions that they performed in peacetime. The cobblers, tailors, farriers, personnel to provide internal distribution of supplies, and those who aided in the evacuation of the wounded were a drain on regimental strengths. How many of these soldiers were able to revert to their primary role when in battle is unknown.

Russian units rarely attained full strength. Combat losses were more often replaced by new units rather than by troops drafted to replace the missing. That fact coupled with poor administration makes an accurate assessment of actual troop strengths difficult. Even with these facts in mind Kuropatkin must have had more confidence in the superiority of the Russian army than he was willing to admit.

Kuropatkin's continuous admonitions to subordinate commanders to avoid contact with superior forces of the enemy and his extreme caution suggest that when he did opt to fight, he did so with some confidence in the supremacy of his armies. He proclaimed, prior to Sha-Ho,

that the time had come to advance. The initiatives at San-de-pu and Mukden also imply a perceived Russian advantage. Kuropatkin was willing to take the initiative or actually started each of the battles after Liao-yang. The Russians never attained the two-to-one advantage advocated by the British or the three-to-one ratio preferred by the Germans, but the army was strong enough to give the commander confidence to try for a victory. Neither equipment nor logistics were problems. In defending his decision to retreat from Mukden, Kuropatkin cites neither as a contributing factor.

At Liao-yang Kuropatkin informed the Tsar that the most important duty of his army was to protect its line of communications. An examination of his orders to the army at the Sha reveals a greater disposition to advance a series of defensive positions than to make a spirited attack. At Sha-Ho and through every battle thereafter, Kuropatkin relinquished the initiative to Oyama. The Russian commander would not risk his forces for a decisive victory. At Liao-yang he retreated from the threat posed by Kuroki; at the Sha-Ho his leisurely advance permitted Oyama to withdraw from threatened positions and to concentrate the Japanese armies for attack; at San-de-pu the Russian assault halted when Japanese resistance stiffened and a counterattack seemed imminent; during the battle of Mukden the planned attack never materialized and Kuropatkin allowed Oyama to make the first move. Kuropatkin's record plainly indicates repeated instances of reaction rather than the initiative required for victory. At Mukden Kuropatkin faults himself for not retreating sooner. Nowhere is there the indication of the strong will and determination necessary to win.

Kuropatkin blames his defeat at Mukden on the premature

surrender of Port Arthur and the subsequent release of Nogi's army, on the threat posed by that army to Vladivostok and the Primorsk district, on the threat to the railroad that forced him to disperse his troops, and on the poor action of the cavalry in the west. He criticized Kaulbars' and Bilderling's leadership and their armies' lack of energy.

In accepting responsibility for that defeat Kuropatkin gives five reasons: 1) the General Reserve was not large enough prior to the start of the battle; 2) too many troops were pulled away to guard the lines of communications; 3) confusion resulted due to a breakdown of unit integrity; 4) he was not cautious enough--the retreat should have started earlier; and 5) he should have personally taken command of Muilov's detachment and acted as a corps commander.<sup>1</sup>

His assessment that too many troops guarded the railroad and that unit integrity broke down are valid. The other explanations are questionable and belie his style of leadership. Kuropatkin's leadership was the greatest contributing factor to the series of Russian defeats. His penchant for huge reserves--self chastisement for not retreating sooner--and the desire to rush to the focal point of the action and assume personal direction reveal the imperfections of his leadership.

Kuropatkin lacked faith in his subordinate commanders. That lack of faith was justified in some cases, but that lack of trust also contributed to the Russian defeats. An army needs a firm leader, and

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<sup>1</sup>Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, Russian Army and the Japanese War: Historical and Critical Comments on the Military Policy and Power of Russia and on the Campaign in the Far East, trans. by A. B. Lindsay, ed., E. D. Swinton, 2 vols. in 1 (London: John Murray, 1909; reprint ed., Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1977), 2:299-302.



he must be accessible for decisions. His responsibility is to provide direction; his subordinates have the responsibility of carrying out his orders. Those who prove incapable can be replaced.

The lack of reliable communications coupled with Kuropatkin's style of leadership contributed to the ineffective control of the Russian armies. As commander-in-chief Kuropatkin was responsible for the largest military force ever assembled for combat. That force was deployed over a front broader than any in history. The techniques necessary to provide effective leadership under those circumstances were not realized by the Russian commander. Kuropatkin attempted to direct his armies in the same fashion as his predecessors, by being present at the scene of action and personally influencing the outcome of the battle. While that is an admirable trait indicative of courage and spirit, it also reveals a lack of understanding of the realities of the time. Kuropatkin did not have the facilities that today make mobile command posts possible. The size of the force, and their dispersal demanded rapid reliable communications. Heliograph, telephones, and telegraph were available. Radios, also available, were not widely used by either belligerent. The slowest method of passing messages, couriers, was extensively used.

Kuropatkin's attempts to provide central control of the battle could only have been possible with efficient communications. However, he often was forced or chose to use couriers to communicate with his maneuver elements. In critical situations Kuropatkin himself rushed to the scene of action—at Liao-yang he went to the north bank of Tai-tzu to lead the troops against Kuroki—at the Sha-Ho he could be found in forward observation posts—and at Mukden he planned to personally lead

the attack against Nogi. His movement about the battlefield and the relocation of forward command posts before wire communications had been installed to the major subordinate units compelled him to rely excessively upon couriers to deliver messages. Oyama provided an example that the Russian would have done well to emulate. The Japanese commander established a command post central and to the rear of the expected action, and he installed a good communications network. He remained there, accessible, and kept his armies informed and coordinated.

The Japanese had difficulty in supplying their armies after the battle at Liao-yang. The farther they moved inland the greater the problem became. The quality of officers used for replacements deteriorated as the war progressed. Company grade officers in particular suffered severe casualties. Regulars were replaced with reserves. The Japanese were in short supply of artillery ammunition and transport animals. Oyama put everything he had into the battle of Mukden. He won the town but failed to achieve his objective--the destruction of the Russian armies. Mukden convinced the Japanese marshall that he could not accomplish his objective and that a continuation of the war was extremely dangerous for Japan. Russian strength continued to grow at a faster rate than the Japanese. On 13 March Oyama urged his government to initiate diplomatic measures to end the war and on 28 March he sent General Kodama to Japan to urge peace.<sup>2</sup>

Even as he retreated from Mukden Kuropatkin remained confident of eventual victory. He went to Manchuria convinced that the southern

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<sup>2</sup>Shumpei Okamoto, The Japanese Oligarchy and the Russo-Japanese War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 110-12.

region was not defensible and that only the Russian interests in the north should be defended. He was prepared to retreat all the way to Harbin to gain time and strength. He adhered to that plan until relieved of command after the withdrawal from Tieh-ling.

The Japanese won every major engagement of the war in spite of the ever increasing Russian strength. From Liao-yang onward Kuropatkin had the larger force. It was well supplied and had the advantage of internal lines of communications. Training deficiencies in the army became less critical as the troops became seasoned in combat. His excuses concerning poor reconnaissance were justified in some cases but when opportunities were observed to exploit chinks in the Japanese dispositions (at Liao-yang the gap caused when Kuroki crossed the Tai-tzu; at Mukden the opportunity to strike the Japanese right flank) he did not pursue them.

How then was Oyama able to defeat a numerically superior force when he himself suffered personnel and supply shortages? Oyama, with Kodama's assistance, provided sound effective leadership to the Japanese forces. He used all of his resources and committed his reserves wisely to exploit Russian weaknesses. At Mukden the entire General Reserve was committed to action against the Russian right flank. Oyama took advantage of Kuropatkin's timid leadership. The Russian's over-reaction to feints, his cautious direction of the Russian armies, his penchant for the defense, and his willingness to retreat instead of offering tenacious resistance were weaknesses that Oyama capitalized upon.

Kuropatkin initially planned to retreat from the Yalu and Teli-ssu. He planned to fight defensively at Liao-yang but retreated

before an inferior force. Kuropatkin believed that retreat was a tactic just as well as an attack. He gave up Liao-yang; the Japanese did not win it. At the Sha-Ho, San-de-pu, and Mukden the Russians' slow execution and defensive orientation permitted Oyama to maneuver, exploit Russian weaknesses, and seize the initiative. Kuropatkin's preference for a defensive posture negated his advantage of superior strength. In defense he reacted to Japanese moves and used up his reserves piecemeal rather than exploiting his opponent's mistakes.

In each of the later battles of the war the larger Russian force retreated in the face of determined Japanese pressure. Had Kuropatkin used sound strategical planning to take advantage of his numerical superiority, he probably would have contained or defeated the Japanese. The Japanese were not invincible; logistics did not limit the Russian strategic plan. Kuropatkin's personal bravery was never an issue. He was placed in a position that he had requested, but its scope was beyond his capabilities. He was overly cautious and lacked the resolve to continue an action in the face of stiff opposition. Victory eluded the Russians primarily because of Kuropatkin's lack of effective leadership and his strategy of retreat--retreat--retreat.

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