

# THE NORTH RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN 1918-1919

AND

## AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT



**Matt Walsh**

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## *Preface*

When one is asked to undertake a study of Australia's involvement in the various military campaigns, we generally look at the following wars or campaigns

- The Sudan – 1855.
- The Boer War – 1899-1902
- The Boxer Rebellion 1900- 1901 (sometimes)
- World War I – 1914-1918
- World War II -1939-1945
- Korean War 1951-1953
- The Malayan Emergency 1955-1964 & the Indonesian Confrontation 1963-1966
- Vietnam 1965-1972
- and more recently East Timor and Iraq

but how often do we find any reference to Australia's involvement in the North Russian Campaign (the Bolshevik Revolution 1918-1919).

The following is a brief description of Australia's involvement in this campaign.

# *The North Russian Campaign 1918-1919*

## *Introduction*

It is a little known fact that Australians were involved in the war in Russia referred to as the 'Bolshevik Revolution' occurring between 1917 and 1919. This revolution resulted in Russia being taken over by the communists and the eventual formation of the U.S.S.R. (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).

In October of 1917 the 'Bolshevik Revolution' occurred resulting in the communists, who were known as the 'Red Russian or Red Army' taking control of the Russian Government. The Allied Armies who had been involved with the Russians during World War I came to the support of the anti-communists in Russia who were known as the 'White Russians or the White Army' to overthrow the Bolsheviks (the communists). Unfortunately they were unsuccessful.

It is interesting to note that during this campaign only five Victoria Crosses were awarded, two of these being awarded to Australians. These Victoria Crosses were awarded after the Armistice had been signed in 1918.

## *Australian involvement*

Australia's involvement in this campaign was very small with approximately 140/300 men taking part. Our casualties were also very light with two killed. Australia did not have any AIF units taking part the Australians who took part were part of the British Forces known as the North Russian Relief Force (NRRF) and were allocated to the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Fusiliers, whose Unit Shoulder Patch was a White Star, the Australians were also allowed to wear the Colour Patch of their AIF Unit. This would have signified that they were Australians.

However, even though the Australians were small in numbers they showed the spirit they had become known for and were awarded two Victoria Crosses during the campaign.

The first Victoria Cross awarded to an Australian was to Corporal Arthur Sullivan on the 10 August 1919 at the Sheika River in North Russia.

Sullivan a South Australian joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Imperial Forces (1<sup>st</sup> AIF) in the latter part of World War I. By the time he reached England the Armistice had been signed. Like a number of his mates he volunteered to become part of a British Force being formed to be sent to North Russia to fight the Bolsheviks and defeat communism.

After the campaign Sullivan returned home to Australia where he lived until 1937, when he travelled to England with other Victoria Cross winners to take part in the Coronation of King George VI unfortunately, whilst there he had an accident which resulted in his death.



Corporal Arthur Sullivan VC

Our second Victoria Cross was won by Sergeant Samuel Pearce who had migrated to Australia from Wales. He was awarded his Victoria Cross for his courage in action near Emtsa in North Russia on 29 August 1919. He was 'Killed in Action' on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1919 and is buried in Obozerskaya unfortunately the exact location of his grave is unknown.

Sgt. Pearce had been part of the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF since 1915 and fought on Gallipoli and on the Western Front where he had been awarded a Military Medal (MM) during action at Ypres (Belgium). In July of 1919 he transferred from the AIF to the British Forces which was being formed to go to the North Russian campaign.

Unfortunately, like many Victoria Cross winners he lost his life during the action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Pearce and his wife were expecting the birth of a child at the time of his death she was to be given the name of Victoria after the Victoria Cross which had been awarded to her father.



Sergeant Samuel Pearce VC MM

Another Australian to serve in the North Russian Campaign was Captain F. W. Latchford who was in charge of musketry instruction at Irkust.



Captain Latchford in Siberia

## *New South Wales and the campaign*



Private Richard Livingstone

The impact of the North Russian campaign was also felt in New South Wales. Early in April of 1919, 214 Pte. Richard Livingstone of the Garrison Military Police in Sydney was sent to Queensland to escort three Russian Bolshevik prisoners back to Sydney for deportation. Whilst removing the prisoners from a vehicle they slammed the door against him causing internal injuries about which he was unaware. Some two days later he became ill and reported sick and was admitted to the Garrison Hospital in Victoria Barracks at Paddington, he passed away that afternoon.



The Garrison Hospital (now the Officers Mess)

Because his death occurred, as the result of injuries received whilst considered to be on active service Pte. Livingstone was given a Military Funeral this meant that his casket was borne on a gun carriage during the Service.

## *The author*

Matt Walsh JP. MLO ALGA (MCAE), Dip Bus & Corp Law (CPS) was called up for National Service in 1957 and received a deferment, by late 1958 he had become tired of waiting and enlisted in his local Citizen Military Forces (CMF) Unit, 19 Company (Tipper) Royal Australian Army Service Corps (RAASC) at Ashfield. He was to later find out that this was the same unit that his grandfather had served in during World War I.

In 1959 he was finally called up for National Service and posted to 13<sup>th</sup> National Service Training Battalion at Ingleburn, on completion of his full time training he was posted back to 19 Coy RAASC until the cessation of National Service in 1960.

In 1961 he re-enlisted in the CMF with 5 Field Squadron Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) and in 1963 transferred to 1 Division Provost Company (Military Police) and then to 2 Division Provost Company until his discharge in 1969 with the rank of Sergeant.

He has served on the Executive Committee of the Defence Reserves Association (NSW), the Military Police Association of Australia, the Joint Committee for the Commemoration of the Battle for Crete and the Greek Campaign, the Reserve Forces Day Council, the Ashfield RSL Sub Branch and the NSW National Serviceman's Association and is a Director of The Army Museum of New South Wales Foundation..

He has been awarded the 'Australian Defence Medal' and the 'Anniversary of National Service Medal' in January 2006 he was awarded the 'Australia Day Achievement Medallion' by the National Australia Day Council in 2007 he was appointed a "Member of the Order of Liverpool" by the Council of the City of Liverpool. In 2002 he wrote the "History of Ingleburn Military Camp".