

Diary of Eric H.W. Elkington

[Transcribed by William Thackray, Victoria, British Columbia, 2009]

[Typed by Benjamin Isitt, Victoria, British Columbia, 2010]

[Original diary appears in a military notebook – 3" x 5" x 5'16" thick of 3/16" graph paper. A pencil could be carried in an exterior holder attached to the spine. Bound in dark red faux leather paper no longer attached to the graph paper content.]

Captain E.H.W. Elkington, CAMC
16th Field Ambulance, CEF (S)

Diary, commencing Dec 26th/18

p. 1

Left Victoria with 16th Field Ambulance C.E.F. Siberia on board the transport H.M.T. "Protesilaus" for Vladivostok. Words fail to describe the disgusting & uncomfortable conditions of the troops on board. On Jan 11th/19 we ran into a very heavy storm and lost one of our two propellers. This did not tend to make matters any better. But there is one thing that can be said of the boat & that is her wonderful seaworthiness. We reached Vladivostok on 15 day of Jan. The last night was one to be remembered as we slowly made our [p. 2] [sic. "way"] through a sea of ice & glistening in the bright moonlight. In the distance one could make out the steel grey mountains of Siberia. As we got nearer we were met by an ice breaker which made a passage way for us and we arrived in port at 11 A.M. on Jan 15/18 [sic]. The last day was made under uncomfortable conditions as all the latrines were frozen up. Also because our improvised bunks were pulled up to get to the holds & we had to shift to other improvised bunks which were not protected from the chilly frost any too well.

The setting of the town of Vladivostok was indeed beautiful seen [p. 3] from the boat in the early morning. The city follows the half moon curve of the bay & seems to be far greater in length than in breadth. Behind the town were low snow covered hills above which the sun was just rising. We could make out several substantial & well built looking buildings one of which was evidently a Greek church with a large golden dome flashing in the early morning sun.

We stayed on board all the 15th only a few officers being allowed off. The next morning the 260th Bn. disembarked then two companies of the 259th Bn. & then the Field Ambulance & [p. 4] finally the details. It was about 11:30 of Jan. 16th when we first set foot on the shores of Siberia. The men were marched up to the Ordinance to get fur caps & a shot of rum (the latter never materialized). We were struck by the curious inhabitants who were about the wharf. Chiefly Manchurians well built & strong looking Mongolians and not like the Coolie [sic] so frequently seen in B.C. They were employed in unloading the boat & native transport being largely used. They consisted of wheeled carts made somewhat after ½ barrel split lengthwise, extremely rough & primitive, the wheel [p. 5]

held on only by pins in the axils [sic]. They were drawn by small Siberian horses which are capable of pulling very heavy loads. When these carts get in motion one could see for a time which wheel is coming off first. But they never actually do & the whole caravan goes calmly on.

After the men had been supplied with caps we set off on a march through the town to some Russian barracks 6 miles away. It was very interesting going through the place & one was struck by the cosmopolitan aspect of the population. In 15 minutes march I recognized 18 different nationalities. They seemed [p. 6] to represent the worst type of the nation to which they belonged in most cases. Beside the civilians there were the troops of the all the Allied Forces in Siberia mingled. British (Imperials & Canadians, the Hamshires [sic] & Middlesex regiments). American troops who had been there since Aug/18, French, Italian, Japanese (efficient surly looking soldiers), Czecho-Slovaks, of course numerous Russians in all manner of uniforms.

The means of transport appears to be largely done on the backs of Manchurians. Although for passenger traffic there are the droskys, four wheeled carriages drawn by two ponies one of which [p. 7] appears to run beside the one in the shafts more for the sake of looks than for use. These get over the ground at quite a creditable pace. There is a street car service running down the main street – the car is very small always dirty generally crowded, therefore lousy & only runs when it is so disposed. It does not run on holidays in which this place abounds. There was no snow on the streets which are largely paved with cobble stones so the job of marching six miles in moccins [sic – moccasins] was not great.

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[p. 1 (re-numbered)]

April 13/19

Got word that the Bolsheviks were attacking some Russian barracks 50 miles up the line. I had just ½ hour to get together my things & take up 1 N.C.O. S/Sgt Currie & 8 stretcher bearers. We got ready by 10 A.M. & were taken in to Vlady in a truck. Each man carried his rifle and 150 rounds of ammunition. We had two stretchers. We got to the station O.K. & passed B Coy of the 259 Bn. on the way to which Company we were attached. When we got to the station we were greeted by the most varied scene. As an Allied force was going up & this consisted of one Coy 259 Bn., Maj Harte MC & bar in command, French 5 officers & 85 men [p. 2], Italian 1 officer & 20 men, Czecho-Slovak 1 officer & 18 men, Chinese 1 officer & 6 men. The Japanese had already gone up. 2 batns. While waiting at the station we were photographed by "Peggy" the correspondent of the "New York World" who was very dapper in kaki [sic khaki], Sam Browne, high field boots & spurs & darkened eyebrows. We were the first umbrella army composed of 6 allies ever to go into action together. We had a long wait of 3 hours at the station while the Russians got the train for us – They are a useless bunch – dam Bolsheviks the whole lot. We finally got away. Maj Harte being O.C. train & I being A.D.M.S. some job I should say. It was a typical Russian train. The men were in box [p. 3] cars, but each car had a stove so they

kept warm. The officers were in a passenger of sorts 4 class Russian car besides which our Colonist look like palaces. But "c'est la guerre."

We pulled out of the station amidst the cheers of 6 allies – The Americans had refused to go up. As we got some little way out we passed an ammunition dump where there are 100,000,000 rounds of rifle ammunition which we sold to the Russian Gov. during the war. We went along fairly well until we got to the junction with some unpronounceable name where, although we were only 10 miles away from Skotova [sic], our place of stopping, we had to change engines. This took 4 hours & incidentally gave the Bolsheviks plenty [p. 4] of time to get away. The French troops and we amused the natives by singing songs. We had numerous conferences with railway officials as to what had happened to our engine but to no purpose. The Russians remained as ever stolid, stupid & lazy. However we got away at last & got to our destination at 10 p.m. where a certain amount of rifle fire was going on. We then had a long conference [sic] with the Japs and Russians who informed us that the enemy was 15 versts, about 10 miles, away & we were to stay in the train for the night. We spent a very uncomfortable night but did not get "lousy" as we expected to do. We arose early & saw before us many barracks built on the same plan as all Russ. barracks & some little distance the village of Skotova [sic], which consisted of about 100 scattered [p. 5] houses with a very mixed population of Russian, Manchurians, Koreans, etc. It was decided to take us off the train & put us in some barracks. This was arranged after a long international conference [sic].

The officers of the Allied army live together, only the Chinese officer being absent. I don't know where he eats & dumps & sleeps. We, the French, Italian & Czech officers all have one mess. The Japs having their own mess. The French are a splendid lot of chaps. O.C. is Capt. G. Derache, 29 Bn. Blue Devils who was taken prisoner by the Germans & tried to escape 8 times. On the 9th attempt he succeeded.

14th Monday we did not do much beyond cleaning up the barracks & examined the water supply. I had all this boiled. [p. 6] We explored all the village. The inhabitants seemed to be in a state of terror as the Bol. had evidently put the fear of God into them. We saw where the Bol. had come down over the hills & attacked the barracks in which 700 of the Red Guard were prisoners. There were still some traces of them in patches of blood where they had been wounded by a machine gun turned on them by the Russians.

15th Tuesday. We demonstrated to the Jap. Col. who is in command of the Allied forces how the Canadians drilled & also the use of the machine gun. In the evening Derache told us of some [sic "of"] his attempts to escape. They were certainly wonderful. On one occasion he disguised himself as the German major who was in command of [p 7] the prison. He made a high yellow collar out of cardboard, painted his cloak black with ink & then to give it a grey appearance covered it with muslin. "This was fine" & a helm [sic – helmet] cut of cardboard with a potato for a peak. He disguised one of his companions as the major's orderly and in the evening made his escape. He was captured later on. He finally escaped in a swill barrel.

16 Wednesday. Did a little more exploring of the country. Went to see the prisoners graveyard. There are over 1000 graves composed of Germans, Austrians & Turks. The Turkish graves all facing the East with a crescent & the star for a symbol. They had been well kept (monument created) but now [p. 8] they looked forlorn and deserted as if the hands that had once cared for them & gone away. In the Russian grave yard some little distance away one was struck by the number of decorated graves. Well

made artificial flowers are used a greast deal. Most of the afternoon was spent in preparing a feed for the Japs in our mess. A large bowl of strong rum punch was made. I forgot to say that on Tuesday, we had a banquet given us by the Japanese Col Naoki Isobayashi. At 9 A.M. we all filed in & bowed all round & then shook hands with the officers. Bowing is a thing one has to do on all occasions. After this we were shown to our seats. We had been asked previously to bring our knives & forks & cups. We had a cold banquet of prepared meats & drank [p. 9] sakai [sic] (this is a sort of whiskey made from rice & is the chief drink of the Japs used either hot or cold). It tasted to me as if it were weak whisky flavoured with onions. One must never pour oneself a glass but let ones neighbour do it. We all drank much Sakai, the Jap officers drinking it out of little bowls. Evidently the Canadians have a reputation for being able to drink a lot as our cups were constantly filled. We had a wonderful mixture – Sakai, Vodka, brandy & beer all together. The Japs all used their chop sticks. There were two majors sitting opposite. One of them Maj Kuga was a most interesting old chap – told us that his battn. had been in Manchuria for 2 years & that last [p. 10] year they had lived in tents with the thermometer 50 ° below zero. He brought up his three sons to be introduced. The conversation was carried on in broken English & French. Toward the latter part of the evening we all sang songs. The Japs are devoid of any musical sense & when they sang their patriotic songs one wished to get into a padded cell. They reached such a high state of joy that they shut their eyes as they could not see the pain experienced on the faces of their guests. The Chinese officers sang his national song in a high squeaky voice but it was a good deal more [p. 11] agreeable than the Japs. After everyone had drunk much sakai one officer said to me "I hope this night you will drink very much sakai." When everyone was very happy & jolly, we retired to bed, one of the officers going to sleep with his tin hat on.

To continue Wednesday doings. One of the Czecz [sic] officers went to see the Bolsheviki prisoners who are in barracks not far from our own quarters. We saw numerous officials in order to get permission. In fact they were so long that after waiting 3 hours & having long conferences with Colonels we got disgusted & beat it. However we got to the barracks but not inside & saw the Bol. both male & female inside. They were all living together. [p. 12] They looked like the rest of the Russians & a pretty tough lot.

17 Thursday. Sent up a proclamation to the Bolsheviki to disband and depart from the village of Novo-Rossiskaya and leave the people unharmed. If they did not do so we were to make an attack on them. We all had a bath, which was much needed as the train we had come up in was lousy & more than once there was the sensation of some foreigner under my clothes. As there was a public passage through the bath we bathed in full view of the public & several admiring females. However this is nothing as Russian bath both sexes together, etc. Had one casualty when one of the French batmen [p. 13] accidentally shot one of the Japanese through the leg & then carried on & hit one of the Canadian batmen. This was not serious & did not lead to any international complications. This was the morning of the return banquet of the Allied forces to the Japs. This time we prepared a strong rum punch to oil the wheels of international friendship. The Japs arrived, 14 of the senior officers about 7 p.m. We all bowed & shook hands. They brought their chop sticks with them and their saki bowls. We gave them quite a sumptuous meal. The Japs had some difficulty managing streak with their sticks but most

of them had clasp knives. As at their banquet we sang songs and conversation in the French language. One Jap major & Col James did a dance [p. 14] together amid great applause. The Jap Col. had departed before this.

Friday. Received a proclamation from the "Chief of bandit" telling us "to get the Hell out." After this there was a long allied conference at which it was decided to advance upon the enemy. Preparations were made for leaving at 6 a.m. next morning & attacking the Bol. who were some 15 miles away. Reveille was at 4:30 & battle equipment the order. While we were at dinner Capt. Hiro, the Japanese liaison officer brought in the news that the Bolsheviki were going to attack our quarters at 11 o'clock. This news was considered trustworthy as it came from the same sources as rumours of the [p. 15] last attack had come which had materialized. Another conference was necessary at which it was decided the Japs would take the main burden & the Allies would be held in reserve. All the men went to bed fully dressed. Machine guns were mounted in readiness. I fixed up a small room for any casualties. The Japs put out strong patrols & all night long were bringing in people to be examined. There was some difficulty as you can imagine in making all the Allied troops understand much of this. There was a very memorable conference at 10:30 p.m. between Canadian, French, Italian, & Chec [sic]. Major Harte was to Command. We were to fall in on the parade ground & if necessary take up a position [p. 16] in a ditch which was excellent cover. When all was in readiness we turned into bed but not to sleep as all night long Jap batmen came trampling through our quarters getting food for their officers - These anyway were not women disguised as men: their footfall was much too heavy. Every officer we were told had his concubine disguised as a man in the Jap army. There may have been some but I did not see any. Nothing happened however & much to our disgust as it would have saved our long march of the next day.

Saturday. Reveille at 4:30 p.m. Previously 300 Japs had gone on ahead at 4 a.m. as an advance guard. We had an early breakfast at 5:30 as we were to move at 6 a.m. [p. 17] All the Allied troops assembled opposite the officers quarters & it was a most interesting sight to see the 6 Allies drawn up together to advance on the enemy. As we had none of our own transport we used native carts to carry the ammunition, stretchers, etc. As it turned out they were the best thing we could have had. By 6:20 the Canadians moved off. The French, Italians, Chinese, & Chec [sic] & a party of 40 Japs having left at 6. It was arranged that we were to keep the lines of communication clear between the Japs who were in the advance. To do this the Canadians were behind the Japs a mile or so & were the connecting link between the Japs & French. etc who were in their turn in touch with the barracks. We marched up a long flat valley with hills on either side of it [p. 18] & a small river running through it. In fact it was very marshy & with a days rain would be impossible to cross. As it was in several places we had to wade in water up to knees. All the way up we had scouts & an advance guard out. We marched up to a Korean village where we halted for a 5 min. rest. The people were very interested but at first were frightened & would not come out of their huts. We were the first troops they had seen. They thought the camera was the evil eye & for some time would not consent to be taken until they had seen it demonstrated by our taking photographs. One man as riding a bull & when 2 tried to get a snap of him he got so scared that he fell off [p. 19] his charger & hid behind it. After this halt we did not stop until we had got to the place we were to halt at & await developments. This was 13 1/2 miles from Sckotova [sic] &

about half a mile from Novorisokia [sic] where the Bol. H.Q. was supposed to be. We did not see any of the enemy on the way up. Where we halted there was a Korean farm. There [sic] plows were made of wood & drawn by cows. They had a loft full of Indian corn & a great quantity of native tobacco which is horribly strong stuff. Corn millet tobacco seem to be the only thing grown. The land is evidently very rich & in this valley [sic] there are no stones & only few trees so cultivation is easy. The cattle were shod with metal shoes & the old bull [p. 20] was used for riding. As soon as we got to our destination we learned that the Japs were only about a mile farther up. We got a despatch back sent by the Lt. Col. James to Maj Harte. "Enemy attacking in force. Send reinforcements at once. Enemy consists of three old women, two old men, & one dog." Afterwards we learned from the Italian officer that he had ridden through the village with the two orderlies ahead of the Japs & had found the place almost deserted. When he returned there were two armed Bolsheviki mounted at one end of the street. He gave chase but his horse was a poor one and he did not get within range. Although he fired several shots with the hope of bringing one down. [p. 21] He even offered his men 500 rouble if they would bring one in for him. When the Japs came into the village they were greeted by the victorious Italians who had dispersed the enemy riding up & down the main street. The villagers said that early that morning the Bolsheviki numbering 1000 had cleared out & gone east. They had evidently got word of the Allied advance. Well after this triumphal entry into the Bolsheviki H.Q.! with the dispersal of the enemy we decided it was time to return. We made a triumphal march back to Shkotova only stopping once on the way back. The Canadians leading & we demonstrated that we could outmarch the Japs. Several of them fell out but we carried [p. 22] on although there were some who were nearly all in. I carried the equipment for one chap so that we could just show the Japs that we did not fall out on marches. It was a Hell of a march nevertheless but of course it was a triumph. We were all pretty tired when we got home & a good many of the men had sore feet but we had them all bathe the feet in pot. permangan next morning, most of them were well. I don't think I have ever enjoyed a feather bed more than I did the four hard planks than I did that night. Unfortunately when we got back the batman who should have seen to the getting ready of our supper was drunk. He had been left in charge of three 20 gallon tubs of Sakai & these had proven [p. 23] to much for them. The French cook soon had things soing so we did o.k. He makes the best coffee I have had for many a long day.

EASTER DAY [Sunday, 20 April 1919]

Bright & pleasant day with the church bells ringing. This is a very great day among the Russians. For a week previous to this they only fast but on Easter they eat and drink to their hearts' content. They all go to church first in the morning, the service lasting 4 hours. They priest announces the blessing or something of the sort saying "Christus Arobia" [sic] meaning Christ is risen & they kiss the people on either side of them. We the officers went down to the village church about 10 o'clock hoping to be [p. 24] in time for the service but we were told that the service had been over some time & the next would be at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The church was somewhat like an R.C. one but not as tawdry. There were numerous little candles burning & dozens of icons on the walls. After examining the church we went out & wandered up and down the middle of the main street with the rest of the inhabitants. All the girls were in the best Easter

clothes & wore bright flowing veils over their heads. The custom of wearing hats in this out of the way place evidently had not been introduced. Everybody seemed to be kissing everybody else but fortunately we remained immune & there were only two girls I wanted to kiss but when I said "Christus Arovia" they pretended not to understand although [p. 25] I think they wanted to be kissed but however we did not get the chance. As we were wondering up & down taking photographs of the villagers we saw a horseman come galloping down the street carrying a rifle. The villagers got much excited & said he was a Bolshevik but to me he looked like any Russian, he got away however. The Japs during the day presented the Allied troops with 3 tomuran of sakai, 60 bottles of port wine & 3 cases of whisky. This was sent up by Gen. Otani to the allies & also sent up an invitation to a Victory Banquet to be held at 7 o'clock. In the afternoon, Derache, Hearst, Kaye & I went for walk along the beach & came across another Korean [p. 26] village. Here they were boiling shrimps in large cauldrons. They were very small & there were only a few large enough to eat. We had a great time crossing a small river on some floating logs. The people were quite frightened of a camera & had to be trained.

The Banquet

At 7 o'clock we went over to the banquet hall, which was in one of the Russian barracks. It was very nicely decorated with Jap flags & lit by hanging lamps giving a most hospitable aspect. The tables were arranged in the form of a hollow square with Col. Naoki Isobayashi at the head with Col. James & Maj Harte on his right & Capt Derache on his left. There were no benches arranged so every one eating & drinking standing up. The meal was [p 27] a cold one consisting of cold meats & eggs cuts into fancy shapes. There was bread & butter & also cold potatoes & lots of drink. Before the banquet began Col. Isobayashi gave an address in English. It was an excellent attempt but with difficulty I kept a straight face. Here follows the address –

[missing]

[p 28]

After the address the Col. resumed his seat and we all fell to. Maj. S. Kuga also Maj. Nakahira were sitting opposite me. They were both interesting old chaps, particularly Kuga who has promised me a Japanese wife when I go to Tokio & also wants me to go & stay with him. He introduced me to his three sons & seemed to be very proud of them. There [p. 27] is one great thing about the Japs & that is their love for their family also the care with which they look after their aged people. They gave up much to drink brandy, Sakai, port & beer all mixed together. Halfway through the banquet a Japanese band came on to the stage. They played weird music & often made strange sounds through reed instruments. After this a sword dance was done which was excellent. Then there was another which consisted of throwing the body about in wonderful contortions but what it meant I do not know. After this some national songs & then the Jap. Col. was taken up by some of his officers & swung up and down at arms length. This is a very high mark of respect. Then most of us were raised [p 28] aloft & swung. I had the honour & was also kissed on either side of the neck by one of the Jap majors. I suppose this must be an even higher honour. I certainly expect to get the "Order of the Rising Sun." Our hosts were certainly out to oblige us & do all that they could & could not have been nicer. They certainly seemed most human & we all got a very favourable impression of them. Several of the party got very much in their cups but strange to say

the Japs when drunk are not obnoxious but very funny. Pte Charlton was in his cups, but four Jap Lieuts took care of him & brought him safely home. I was leading the way "alone." I was altogether a most successful & interesting banquet & I hope some day that I shall have [p. 29] the chance of seeing some of the Jap officers in Japan again. When we got to our quarters we were told that we had to return to Vlady in the morning leaving at 6 a.m. This was a bomb-shell as there was a conference which resulted in the postponement of our departure until 8 a.m. This was better but not enough. We all got to bed. I remember wondering why it was not steady. I know now! We were all ready to move off by 8 a.m. but as soon as we were ready we were told by the Russians that the train would not be made up till one o'clock. Just like the damn fools. So as we were waiting the Russian general came down to the train & invited all the officers up to lunch. He explained [p. 30] how sorry he was not able to give us a banquet. He had already given orders for the preparation of one for the evening but now we were going away so suddenly we could not stay so he had asked us to come up for lunch. He was a very fine aristocratic looking old chap & no doubt had seen much better happier days. He was not one of the new army generals. We had quite a good band playing while we had lunch & then we drank to numerous healths, the general coming down & clicking glasses with each of his guests. It was very nice to sit down to a meal & have a good band playing. The majority of the junior officers were low looking brutes & no more like officers as a small spade would be the [p. 31] best thing for them to eat their food with. At the station were all the Jap officers as well as the Russians so there was a great deal of bowing & shaking hands. There were about 20 Japs to say good bye to. This meant a salute, a bow, a shake of the hand & another salute & the same procedure had to be gone through with 40 Russian officers. To play us off was the Japanese brigade band as well as the Russian band & all the villagers so it was an imposing & historical departure. We had an uneventful journey into Vladivostok arriving there at 7 p.m. There we had a march past for Gen. Otani and then march back to Gournestai. Thus ended the [p. 32] historical Allied Expedition against the Bolsheviki carried out from Apr. 13 to 21 1919.

[end of text]

[signatures and addresses of Japanese/Allied officers follows]