

Fighting Leaders of the Russians



GENERAL KOUROPATKIN, RUSSIA'S MOST FAMOUS FIGHTER.



THE GRAND DUKE ALEXIS, HEAD OF THE RUSSIAN NAVY.

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THE late Archibald Forbes, the famous war correspondent, used to be fond of telling how he met Skobelev, the greatest of Russian generals, after one of the fiercest of the many desperate fights before Plevna.

"I was sitting in my tent writing a dispatch," said Forbes, "when the flap was suddenly drawn aside and in stalked the most terrible and awe-inspiring object I have ever seen in my life. It was Skobelev, whom I knew well, but I had to look twice before I recognized him.

"His smart general's uniform was torn into shreds and stained with blood and gunpowder from head to foot. His sword, which he held in his hand, was simply smothered in blood, and great drops of it fell on the floor of the tent as he greeted me. There was a terrible gash across the top of his forehead, and his eyes still blazed with the fierce excitement of the hand-to-hand fight which he had just had with hundreds of Turks.

"While he stood there telling me about the battle, his favorite captain, Kouropatkin came up and called him away to decide about the disposition of some of the prisoners. Kouropatkin looked even more like a god of war fresh from the scene of carnage. He was bleeding from half a dozen wounds, but he stood as steady as a rock when he saluted Skobelev. The latter suggested that he had better go into the hospital, but he curtly replied, 'No, general. There is work to be done.'

"I heard afterward that Skobelev and Kouropatkin had fought side by side throughout that bloody day, and had slain the Turks literally by dozens. Their exploits formed the theme of many a story told beside the campfires of both armies throughout the campaign."

Captain Kouropatkin, who was the right-hand man of Skobelev all through the Russo-Turkish war, as well as in the fight at Plevna, is now General Kouropatkin, the czar's minister of war, and the most noted of all the Russian fighting men. He was trained in a harder school than most modern generals, and went through enough perils to satisfy the biggest glutton for adventure.

After one of the bloody fights in the Shipka pass, he was left for dead upon the field. All night he lay there, sore wounded and unconscious. It was in the bitter cold of a Balkan night, and he might have frozen to death had he not been almost entirely covered by the body of a dying Turk, who had fallen across him after he sunk to the ground with the agony of his wound.

In the morning Kouropatkin recovered consciousness, crawled from underneath the Turk, and made his way, slowly and painfully, to the Russian camp, where his comrades received him as if he were a ghost.

Kouropatkin became the hero of the Russian army, second only to his great leader Skobelev, by his bravery and fine general-



GENERAL BABRIKOFF, GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF FINLAND AND A FAMOUS FIGHTER.

ship at the capture of Geok Tepe in 1882.

When the Russians, balked of their dream of winning Constantinople by the Berlin congress, were making their great sloop through Central Asia to the gates of Herat, Lord Salisbury told the British public not to be alarmed for the safety of India. "They will not be able to conquer the Turcomans," he declared. "The Turcoman barrier will last for our lifetime, at least."

General Tergoukasoff, the Russian commander in Central Asia, disagreed with Lord Salisbury. He told the czar that the Turcomans might be conquered by three years' hard fighting. "That is too long," said the czar. He recalled Tergoukasoff, and sent Skobelev to command the troops. Skobelev promptly secured Kouropatkin for his chief lieutenant, and together they performed in a few weeks the task which the British premier declared would take a lifetime.

Geok Tepe, the great stronghold of the Turcomans, was carried by assault after

a month's siege. The brunt of the attack fell on Kouropatkin, who commanded a contingent of light troops from Turkestan. It was a great victory, but it sullied the reputation of both the Russian leaders. They ordered their troops to give no quarter to the Turcomans of either sex, and all the horrors usual when such orders are given were perpetrated.

Spectators say that even when the Turcomans fled in a disorderly mob across the desert, men, women and children mingled together, no mercy was shown to them. Artillery and cavalry followed in their rear and mowed them down, until darkness put an end to the pursuit. In that few hours' chase 1,000 pursuing Russians slaughtered 8,000 fugitives, while over 6,000 were massacred in the fortified camp of Geok Tepe.

"The whole country was covered with corpses," said Samuel Gourvitch, an Armenian Jew who acted as interpreter in the Russian forces. "The morning after the battle they lay in rows like freshly mown hay, as they had been swept down by the

mitrailleurs and artillery. Hundreds of women were sabred, and I myself saw babies bayoneted or slashed to pieces. Many women were ravished before being killed. The troops, mad with drink and the lust of fighting, were allowed to plunder and kill for three days after the assault."

This is the single great blot on General Kouropatkin's record. It is true that he was not in supreme command, but his Turkestan troops played the leading part in the slaughter.

He is a great leader of men. The march of his Turkestan contingent across the almost unknown deserts of Central Asia, in order to join Skobelev for the siege of Geok Tepe, was as fine an achievement as Lord Roberts' famous march to Candahar.

"Kouropatkin," said General Annenkoff, who met him at the end of the march, "had been for twenty-six days marching over a sandy and waterless desert, yet his force marched in clean and trim, and as fresh as a daisy."

An English newspaper correspondent, who attended the funeral of Skobelev at Spasskoe Selo in 1882, was there thrown into company with many of the dead general's favorite officers.

"More than once," he said, "I heard a controversy among them as to whether Kouropatkin was not almost as good a leader as their lost general.

"Kouropatkin," said a Turkestan officer to me, during one of these discussions, "possesses all the characteristics of Skobelev cast in a cooler mould. They worked admirably together, Kouropatkin imparting coolness and calculation to Skobelev, and Skobelev fire and enthusiasm to Kouropatkin. We are desolate now that Skobelev is gone, but it is a consolation that we have still got Kouropatkin. He is now the Skobelev of Russia."

"During the first few days succeeding Skobelev's death a strong and angry feeling prevailed in Russia against the government. It was felt that the dead hero's merits had never been properly appreciated by the state, and I encountered various officers at Moscow who were persuaded he had been poisoned. To appease the army the emperor felt that he could not do better than summon Kouropatkin from Central Asia and give him a high appointment at home. Since then he has been treated as a favorite at court, and if he has secured little notoriety abroad it is simply because he has always devoted himself to his profession and left politics alone.

"Skobelev had in him all the elements of a great statesman, as well as those of a great general. His political influence was becoming positively embarrassing to the czar's ministers when he died. Kouropatkin has never sought to form a party in Russia—he is quite content to be a great general, and nothing more."

This judgment was pronounced away back in 1885. It does not hold good today. General Kouropatkin is now the unchallenged

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