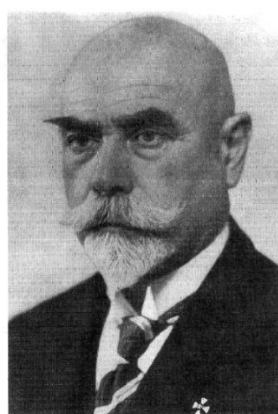


How It All Began ...

Historical Background

General Anton Ivanovich Denikin

His Life, the White Movement, Ukraine and the Cossacks



Генерал Деникин в Париже. 1938 год

04.12.1872 – 08.07.1947

Anton Ivanovich Denikin: born 4 December (16 December 1872 Gregorian Calendar) in Szpetal Dolny, a suburb of Włocławek, Congress Poland, Russian Empire.

Introduction

Anton Ivanovich Denikin was one of the most prominent military leaders of the Russian White Movement during the Russian Civil War. The White Movement fought against the Bolsheviks, who had seized power following the revolution of 1917.

His career took him from an officer in the Imperial Russian Army through the First World War and the Revolution of 1917 to become Commander-in-Chief of the White forces in southern Russia.

Born: 4 December (16 December 1872 Gregorian Calendar) in Szpetal Dolny, a suburb of Włocławek, Congress Poland, Russian Empire.

At the same time, Denikin was a committed opponent of Ukrainian state independence. His vision of “*One and Indivisible Russia*” brought him not only into conflict with the Bolsheviks, but also with Ukrainian national movements.

His relationship with the Don and Kuban Cossacks was equally complex. His movement depended heavily on their military support, yet he did not fully accept their own political and regional aspirations. Denikin held a different political vision. His belief in “*One and Indivisible Russia*” was also in tension with the aspirations of those Cossacks who sought to preserve a high degree of political and regional autonomy.

In 1920, Denikin’s White forces had been defeated militarily, and Denikin had relinquished his command. However, the struggle of the Whites against the Bolsheviks was not yet completely over. Thousands of former officers, soldiers and Cossacks went into exile, where they continued their political, military and social networks.

Novi Sad, in the then Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was one of these places. New Russian and Cossack communities and organisations emerged there. Some of these émigrés and their descendants would later once again become involved in military or political affairs during the Second World War.



Don Cossacks – Novi Sad

In this way, some of the political, military and social traditions of the White Movement continued in exile even after its military defeat. The émigré communities that emerged from this, and their subsequent development, form part of the historical background that eventually led to the events of 1945.

1. Origins and Family

Denikin came from relatively modest circumstances. His father was a former major in the Russian Border Guard, but the family did not belong to the high aristocracy. Denikin's later rise therefore did not rest on a prominent noble background; instead, he had to make his own way within the Russian Army.

His education, many years of military service and practical experience formed the foundation for his later career, eventually leading him to the rank of general.

2. Education and Early Military Career

Denikin first attended a secondary modern school and then the Kiev Infantry Junker School. In 1892, he began his actual career as an officer.

He later trained at the Nicholas General Staff Academy in St. Petersburg, graduating in 1899. This placed him among the professionally trained leadership of the Russian Army.

He initially served in the artillery before being transferred to the General Staff.

At this stage, his career developed entirely within the existing Tsarist military system. There was no reason yet to regard Denikin as a political revolutionary or as a future representative of the "Whites." He was, first and foremost, a professional officer of the Russian Empire.

3. The Russo-Japanese War

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, Denikin took part in the fighting as an officer and gained valuable experience as a front-line officer.

Russia's defeat by Japan also exposed the weaknesses of the Tsarist military system. Nevertheless, Denikin remained in service and continued his military career. The experience of this war provided him with an important practical education and would later prove valuable to him during the First World War and the Russian Civil War.

4. The First World War

The First World War began in 1914. Denikin was initially assigned to the Southwestern Front in Galicia as Quartermaster General of the 8th Army under General Alexei Brusilov.

At his own request, he subsequently transferred from staff duties to active front-line service and, on 6 September 1914, took command of the 4th Rifle Brigade, which later became known as the "*Iron Brigade*."

He initially commanded smaller formations and eventually rose to the rank of general during the course of the war. He took part in important operations of the Russian Army and gained a reputation as a capable and energetic officer.

His wartime experiences strengthened his conviction in the importance of an effective army. At the same time, he witnessed at first hand the growing collapse of Russia's military and political order. In 1917, that order would finally collapse.

5. The Revolution of 1917

In February 1917, Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate. The Russian Empire ceased to exist, and a Provisional Government took over state power. At the same time, the Soviets were gaining increasing influence.



Tsar Nicolas II 1917

For the army, the revolution brought a dramatic change, as discipline and the chain of command came under growing pressure.

Denikin initially became Chief of Staff to General Mikhail Alekseev. He then served under General Alexei Brusilov, who had previously been his superior as commander of the 8th Army.

Denikin subsequently became Chief of Staff to General Lavr Kornilov, who emerged as one of the most important military opponents of the revolutionary left.

In August 1917, the so-called Kornilov Affair took place. Kornilov called for stronger military authority and sought to use military forces to restore order and influence the political situation. He ordered troops to move towards Petrograd, but the advance collapsed before they reached the capital and without a major armed confrontation taking place.



General Lavr Kornilov 1916

The Provisional Government under Alexander Kerensky saw the movement of troops as a threat to its authority and ordered the advance towards Petrograd to be stopped. The move subsequently failed, and Kornilov was dismissed and arrested. Denikin supported Kornilov and was therefore also arrested.

6. Bykhov and the Escape

Denikin was held together with Kornilov and other senior officers in the Bykhov prison. Meanwhile, the political crisis continued to intensify. In November 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd. This marked the beginning of an entirely new phase for Russia. Denikin and the other officers held at Bykhov regarded the Bolshevik seizure of power as the collapse of the existing state order. The prisoners were eventually able to leave Bykhov, and Denikin made his way to the Don region. There, anti-Bolshevik officers gathered around General Alekseev. From these forces emerged the Volunteer Army, which became the core of the later White Movement in southern Russia.

7. The Volunteer Army

The Volunteer Army was initially a relatively small force, whose leadership consisted largely of former officers of the Tsarist Army. General Mikhail Alekseev was one of its principal founders, while General Lavr Kornilov assumed military command. Denikin became one of his most important deputies. The Volunteer Army initially withdrew into the North Caucasus, where it fought its first major engagements against the Bolsheviks. This withdrawal later became known as the *Ice March*, or the "Ice Campaign." On 13 April 1918, Kornilov was killed. Denikin then assumed command of the Volunteer Army. This marked the beginning of his central role as one of the leading military figures of the White Movement in southern Russia.

8. Denikin and the Don Cossacks

The Volunteer Army could not survive on its own in the long term and depended on the support of the Don Cossacks.

The Don region had a strong and distinct Cossack political tradition. The Don Cossacks were generally strongly anti-Bolshevik, but they were not simply Russian soldiers following Denikin's orders.

They had their own interests, their own territories and their own political ideas.

The White Movement therefore needed the Cossacks militarily, while at the same time many Cossacks feared that the restoration of a centralised Russian state could restrict their own rights and regional self-government.

This difference between a common opposition to the Bolsheviks and differing political objectives repeatedly created tensions.

Here lay one of the fundamental problems of the White Movement.

9. The Kuban Cossacks

The situation in the Kuban region was even more complicated. The Kuban Cossacks had their own political organisation, the *Kuban Rada*.

Following the collapse of Tsarist rule, this developed into a strong movement for a considerable degree of political independence or autonomy for the Kuban. In 1918, the Kuban People's Republic was proclaimed.

The Kuban leadership was anti-Bolshevik, but this did not automatically mean that it supported Denikin.

Some of the Kuban Cossacks sought their own Cossack political order, while others looked for links with other anti-Bolshevik movements, including those in Ukraine.

This illustrates an important characteristic of the Russian Civil War: *opposition to the Bolsheviks did not automatically mean support for a united Russia*.

There were Cossacks who fought against the Bolsheviks while at the same time seeking to preserve a considerable degree of political independence for their home regions.

These differing political ideas would later also influence the relationship between Denikin, the Don and Kuban Cossacks and the *Ukrainian movements*.

10. Denikin and the Kuban Rada

Denikin depended also on the Kuban Cossacks militarily, but viewed their separatist or autonomist aspirations with considerable political suspicion.

Within the Kuban Rada, two broad political tendencies became increasingly apparent.

One was more strongly oriented towards a united Russia and was prepared to cooperate closely with Denikin and the White leadership.

The other placed greater emphasis on Kuban self-government and political autonomy and, particularly among the so-called Chernomortsy, descendants of the *Black Sea Cossacks*, who were largely descended from the *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, also maintained stronger Ukrainian cultural and political connections.

These were not two formally organised parties, and opinions within the Kuban Cossack movement could vary. Nevertheless, the difference was significant: while both tendencies opposed the Bolsheviks, they had different ideas about the political future of the Kuban and its relationship with a future Russian state.

Tensions between these different positions and Denikin increased further in 1919.

The murder of the Kuban politician Mykola Riabovol in June 1919 further aggravated the situation. In November 1919, Denikin finally moved against the Kuban Rada and had several of its members arrested. Alexei Kulabukhov, one of the leading representatives of the separatist tendency, was sentenced to death for treason and executed.

This left relations between Denikin and a section of the Kuban Cossacks seriously and permanently damaged.

11. Why This Conflict Matters

Although Denikin was the military commander-in-chief of an army that included numerous Cossack formations, the Cossacks were by no means a politically unified group.

The different Cossack hosts and territories had their own historical traditions, territories, political institutions and experiences, and therefore developed different ideas about their future.

Some sought a federal Russia, others wanted considerable political autonomy, while some even considered the possibility of independent Cossack states or a *federation of Cossack territories*.

Within these movements, there were also differing attitudes towards Ukraine.

This helps explain why the history of the Cossacks developed in different directions after 1920, and why their later political and military paths cannot simply be reduced to a single common line.

12. The Formation of the Armed Forces of South Russia

In January 1919, the various White military forces in the south were brought together under Denikin's leadership. The *Armed Forces of South Russia* (*Vooruzhonnye sily Yuga Rossii*) were formed.

They included the Volunteer Army, the Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks, as well as other Russian and Caucasian formations.

The **Terek Cossacks** came from the Terek region of the North Caucasus. Like the Don and Kuban Cossacks, they had their own historical traditions, territorial interests and political institutions. They were strongly involved in the struggle against the Bolsheviks, while also seeking to preserve a considerable degree of regional autonomy.

As part of the Armed Forces of South Russia, they came under Denikin's overall command while retaining their own structures and leadership.

Denikin was therefore commander-in-chief of a large and diverse coalition of anti-Bolshevik forces, rather than a single unified army in the conventional sense.

His sphere of control temporarily extended over a vast area. A contemporary American diplomatic source described areas along the Don, Kuban and Terek, parts of the Caucasus, as well as large parts of southern Russia and Ukraine, as territories that at that time were largely under Denikin's actual control.

13. Denikin's Fundamental Political Principle

Denikin did not have a developed policy for the immediate restoration of the monarchy. His political outlook was more complex.

His initial objective was to liberate Russia militarily from the Bolsheviks. The final form of government was to be decided later by an all-Russian political representative body.

His decisive political principle, however, was the idea of a "*One and Indivisible Russia*."

This principle had far-reaching consequences.

Following the Revolution, the *Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR)* had emerged in Ukraine as a separate state. In January 1918, it declared its state independence and represented itself internationally as an independent state.

Denikin, however, did not accept the permanent state independence of Ukraine and continued to uphold the idea of a united Russian state.

This created a fundamental political conflict with the Ukrainian national movement and the Ukrainian state leadership.

At the same time, Denikin's vision of a united Russia also came into conflict with those Cossack movements that sought to preserve their own regional rights and a considerable degree of political autonomy.

The common struggle against the Bolsheviks could bring these different forces together temporarily, but their visions of Russia's political future were by no means the same.

14. Denikin and Ukraine



Long Live Free Ukraine

In 1919, Denikin began his major offensive towards Ukraine.

In May, his forces advanced northwest from the Kuban region into Left-Bank Ukraine.

The political and military situation in Ukraine was extremely complicated at this time.

The Bolsheviks, the armed forces of the Ukrainian People's Republic, various local partisan groups, the forces of *Nestor Makhno* and other regional forces were all fighting for control of the country.

The Whites under Denikin also became involved in this struggle.

Denikin did not regard Ukrainian state independence as a permanent political settlement. He continued to uphold his principle of a "*One and Indivisible Russia*."

This placed his political vision directly at odds with the Ukrainian People's Republic's claim to an independent state.



The '*Tachanka*', a horse-drawn cart with a mounted machine gun, was widely used by the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine

This conflict inevitably developed into both a military and political confrontation with the Ukrainian leadership under *Symon Petliura*, who in 1919 led the Ukrainian People's Republic as President of the Directory and Commander-in-Chief of its army.

15. Denikin and Petliura



Symon Petliura

Here, two of the historical figures examined so far directly came into conflict.

Denikin stood for the restoration of a united Russian state, while Petliura stood for the establishment and defence of an independent Ukrainian state.

Both were opponents of the Bolsheviks, but this common objective did not lead to a lasting political alliance, because their visions of the future political order were fundamentally different.

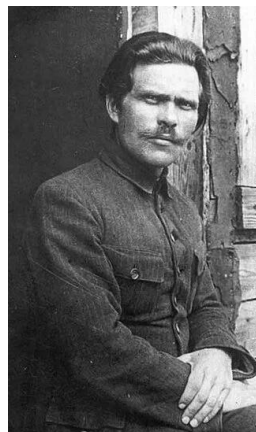
In August 1919, White troops under Denikin entered Kyiv and came into conflict with Ukrainian forces.

This further intensified the confrontation between the White Movement and the Ukrainian People's Republic.

On 24 September 1919, the Ukrainian People's Republic declared war on Denikin's army.

The conflict between the two political and military forces was now openly fought.

16. Denikin and Makhno



Nestor Makhno

Nestor Makhno was neither a supporter of Denikin nor of Petliura. He was an anarchist and led an independent revolutionary movement with its own political and military objectives.

His forces changed their opponents and temporary allies according to the military situation.

The struggle against Denikin, however, became particularly fierce.

While Denikin was advancing northwards with his offensive in 1919, Makhno's forces threatened his rear communications and supply routes.

In September 1919, Makhno's forces initially withdrew towards the Uman area.

On 26 September 1919, they inflicted a major defeat on the Whites at Perehonivka.

The Makhnovists broke through the front and subsequently advanced deep into the rear of the White Army.

This placed important White supply and communication routes under pressure and seriously weakened Denikin's offensive.

Together with attacks by other forces in the Ukrainian rear, Makhno's military advance contributed to the failure of Denikin's planned offensive against Moscow and the subsequent retreat of the Whites at the end of 1919.

Makhno's role in Denikin's defeat is therefore an important part of the history.

17. Shkuro under Denikin



Andrei Grigorjewitsch Shkuro

Andrei Grigoriyevich Shkuro was a Cossack officer from the Kuban region.

In 1918, he raised his own anti-Bolshevik Cossack units in the North Caucasus and later joined Denikin's Volunteer Army.

His forces developed into a larger Kuban Cossack formation.

In May 1919, Shkuro was appointed commander of the newly formed 3rd Kuban Cavalry Corps.

He thereby became one of the leading cavalry commanders within the Armed Forces of South Russia.

His troops fought on various sectors of the front during the following months and also took part in the White Army's operations towards the north.

Shkuro was therefore an important military leader within the White system, while at the same time representing the independent Cossack military tradition of the Kuban.

The connection between Denikin – Kuban – Shkuro once again shows how closely the White Movement and the Cossack military world were connected, without this meaning that both sides shared identical political and military views.

18. The Height of Denikin's Advance

In the summer of 1919, Denikin's army reached the height of its military successes. In July, the major advance northwards towards Moscow began. White troops advanced through Voronezh and Orel, capturing important cities and lines of communication. A further advance towards Moscow therefore appeared to be a real possibility.

However, the further the White armies advanced, the more difficult their military situation became.

Supply lines grew longer, large areas had to be controlled and secured against attacks in the rear.

Uprisings and partisan activity occurred in various parts of Ukraine and southern Russia, while the population was by no means universally prepared to support the Whites. At the same time, the political conflicts with the Cossacks and Ukrainian forces remained unresolved. Denikin's army therefore faced not only a military front, but also considerable problems in its own rear.

19. Military Success Without Political Stability

Denikin was able to conquer large territories militarily. However, military conquest did not automatically bring political support or lasting control. The administration established by the Whites struggled to create a broad and stable political basis for their rule.

Questions concerning the future land system, the administration of the conquered territories and the handling of national movements created considerable tensions. The situation in Ukraine was particularly difficult. Although the Whites achieved military successes there, they were unable to establish a stable political order that was supported by significant sections of the population. The Cossack territories also continued to have differing political interests, while tensions grew over Denikin's centralist vision of a united Russia.

The White Movement was therefore not only fighting the Bolsheviks. It also had to deal with the political, social and national divisions within its own sphere of control.

These unresolved problems increasingly weakened its military position.

20. The White Retreat

In the autumn of 1919, the military situation began to change fundamentally. The Red Army organised a major counter-offensive and gradually regained the initiative.

At the same time, the White forces came under increasing pressure from their extended supply lines, resistance in their rear and growing military losses.

The advance on Moscow came to a halt and eventually turned into a retreat. The White forces were forced to give up important territories and initially withdrew southwards.

The retreat became increasingly disorganised, and the once-large army steadily lost its cohesion.

During the winter of 1919/20, the Whites lost large parts of their former sphere of control.

Denikin's military power had now clearly passed its peak.

21. The Retreat through the Don and Kuban

At the end of 1919 and the beginning of 1920, the White forces withdrew southwards through the Don and Kuban regions.

Once again, the difficult relationship between Denikin's leadership and the various Cossack hosts became apparent.

The Don forces continued to fight determinedly and provided considerable resistance during the retreat.

Among sections of the Kuban formations, however, the willingness to leave their homeland in support of Denikin's all-Russian policy and continue the struggle beyond their own territory began to decline. Contemporary accounts describe a growing decline in the military reliability of some Kuban units, while the Don forces continued to fight particularly hard.

The retreat once again exposed the White Movement's dependence on these regional forces and the difficulty of maintaining unity among them.

22. The End of Denikin's Command

By the beginning of 1920, the military defeat of the Whites in southern Russia could largely no longer be prevented.

The Red Army continued its advance into the North Caucasus, while the remaining White forces withdrew towards the Black Sea.

In March 1920, large numbers of White troops and their families were evacuated from Novorossiysk across the Black Sea.

Other White forces withdrew to the Crimea, where the last major White formations in southern Russia gathered.



Denikin recognised that his army was no longer able to fulfil its previous mission.

On 4 April 1920, in Sevastopol, he handed over command to General Pyotr Wrangel.



Petro Wrangle 1917

This marked the end of Denikin's active role as commander-in-chief of the White forces in southern Russia.

23. Defeat and Emigration

After handing over supreme command, Denikin left Russia and began a life in emigration.

Many of his former soldiers and supporters also left Russia. A new phase of their history had begun.

The White Army no longer existed as a major military force, but the people who had belonged to it did not simply disappear. They became part of a widely dispersed Russian and Cossack émigré community.

Many initially went to Constantinople, and from there continued to the Balkans, France, Belgium, Germany and other European countries.

Later, further groups also emigrated to North America.

Among these émigrés were many Cossacks who continued their own communities, traditions and organisations.

The defeat of the Whites therefore did not mark the end of their history, but the beginning of a new chapter in emigration.

24. The Russian Emigration

The Russian emigration was not a unified political movement.

It consisted of very different groups and individuals, some of whom held completely different political views. These included former Tsarist officers, members of the White Armies, Cossacks, monarchists, republicans, conservatives, liberals, Orthodox clergy, intellectuals and families of former state officials.

Many initially hoped that the Soviet regime would one day collapse and that a return to Russia would become possible. These hopes led to the formation of various political, social and military-oriented organisations in emigration.

One of the best known later became the *Russian All-Military Union (ROVS)*, founded in 1924 to bring together former members of the White Armies.

Denikin increasingly viewed such military and political activities in emigration with concern. In particular, he feared that covert operations against the Soviet Union could be infiltrated by Soviet intelligence services, thereby putting the émigrés at risk.

Among the Cossack émigré leaders was *Vyacheslav Grigoryevich Naumenko*, a senior Kuban Cossack officer who became Ataman of the Kuban Cossack community in exile. He played an important role in preserving its organisation, traditions and historical memory.



Vyacheslav Grigoryevich Naumenko

Once again, it became clear that even those who opposed the Bolsheviks in emigration were by no means a politically unified group.

25. Denikin in Emigration

After leaving Russia, Denikin initially lived in various European countries before eventually settling in France. He no longer took an active role in the political leadership of the Russian emigration, but increasingly devoted himself to writing and documenting the events he had personally experienced. His most important historical work was *Ocherki russkoi smuty* — roughly translated into English as *Sketches of the Russian Time of Troubles*. The five-volume work was published between 1921 and 1926. In it, Denikin describes the Revolution, the development of the Russian Army, Kornilov, the Volunteer Army, the White Movement, Ukraine, the Cossacks, foreign intervention and the Russian Civil War. At the same time, he describes his own political and military decisions and the events he experienced personally.

Denikin's work is an important *primary source and contemporary eyewitness account*, but it is not a neutral overall history. His perspective therefore needs to be compared with Ukrainian, Soviet, Western and other contemporary sources. An autobiographical account of his early career is also available in English translation as *The Career of a Tsarist Officer, Memoirs 1872–1916*.

Although Denikin increasingly concentrated on writing and historical documentation, his fundamental political convictions did not change significantly. He remained firmly opposed to Bolshevism and continued to support the idea of a *united Russian state*. A permanent division of the former Russian Empire into several independent states did not correspond to his political vision.

Thus, the idea of a united Russia remained a central part of his political thinking throughout his years in emigration.

26. The Second World War and Denikin's Final Years

When Germany began the Second World War in 1939, Denikin had already been in emigration for almost two decades.

Although he remained a determined opponent of Bolshevism and Soviet rule, he rejected cooperation with Hitler's Germany. During the German occupation of France, he refused to cooperate with the German authorities.

Following the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, *he opposed Germany and supported the struggle of the Red Army*. In this, he differed significantly from those sections of the Russian emigration that hoped Germany might give them the opportunity to overthrow Soviet rule.

With the end of the Second World War, the situation changed again.

In 1945, large numbers of Soviet citizens and people from territories that had come under Soviet control during the war were located in the Western Allied occupation zones. As early as February 1945, the Allies had agreed at Yalta on the repatriation of Soviet citizens to the Soviet Union. The agreement was signed on *11 February 1945 by Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill*.

For many of those affected, however, returning to the Soviet Union meant the danger of persecution, punishment or forced labour. In the Western occupation zones, this developed into the difficult and, in some cases, violent issue of *forced and sometimes lethal repatriation*.

Denikin followed these developments with great concern.

He was now over seventy years old and had long since ceased to be a soldier.

His position, however, remained shaped by the political experiences of his life: he continued to reject Soviet rule, but was equally unwilling to see Russian émigrés submit to Hitler's Germany.

Against Bolshevism — but not at the price of submission to Hitler.

At the end of 1945, Denikin left Europe and emigrated to the United States.

In November, he left France and travelled via Great Britain to the USA. On 8 December 1945, he arrived in New York.

He spent his final years first in New York and later in Michigan. There, too, he continued to write and remained committed to his fundamental political convictions: his rejection of Soviet rule as well as his belief in a united Russia.

Anton Ivanovich Denikin died on **8 July 1947** in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the age of 74.

This brought to an end a life that had encompassed almost the entire dramatic development of Russia from the late Tsarist Empire to the early post-war period: the Tsarist Empire, the First World War, the Revolution, the Civil War, the White Movement, defeat, emigration, the rise of National Socialism, the Second World War, the collapse of Germany and the post-war forced repatriations.

Denikin himself was not involved in the events in Lienz. His life and the history of the White Movement belong to the wider historical background of the Russian and Cossack communities that developed during and after the Civil War and continued in emigration after 1920.

The connection to the Lienz Cossack Tragedy is therefore one of historical context rather than direct personal involvement: the traditions, political experiences and migration histories that developed during this period formed part of the wider background from which later generations emerged.

Chairman's Note:

2026 — principally, nothing has changed for the Cossacks.

Freedom is still being fought for.

History has a way of reminding us that the struggles of one generation do not necessarily end with that generation. The names, borders and circumstances may change, but the desire to live with dignity, identity and freedom can endure across generations.

"A Cossack desires little – only the return to that human existence which was taken from him by Soviet power. He longs for the life lived in the rest of the free world."

Ataman General V. Naumenko