Epilogue –

From the White Army to Lienz

Britain's earlier recognition and the fate of the Cossacks in 1945

In 1919, three prominent leaders of the anti-Bolshevik White movement were appointed Honorary Knights Commander of the British Order of the Bath:

General Anton Denikin, Admiral Alexander Kolchak and General Andrei Grigorievich Shkuro.







The Order of the Bath was a senior British honour, recognising distinguished service and achievement. These honorary appointments reflected the standing these three men had attained during the struggle against Bolshevism.
Among them, Shkuro's story provides a particularly striking connection between Britain's support for the White forces in 1919 and the fate that awaited him and other Cossacks at the end of the Second World War.

Introduction – Looking at the wider picture

The story of the Lienz Cossacks does not begin in May or June 1945. To understand how these people came to be in Austria, and why their eventual fate was so tragic, it is useful to look further back.
The Russian Civil War, the collapse of the Russian Empire, the rise of Bolshevism and the subsequent relationship between Britain and the White Russian forces all form part of this background.
Connecting these events is General Andrei Grigorievich Shkuro.
His military career, his relationship with the British and his eventual fate in Soviet hands provide a personal example of how dramatically political and military circumstances changed between 1919 and 1945.

Britain and the White Army in 1919

Following the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik seizure of power, Russia descended into civil war. The White forces, including the armies of General Denikin and Admiral Kolchak, opposed the Bolshevik government.
Admiral Alexander Kolchak was based in Omsk. He was proclaimed Supreme Ruler of Russia in November 1918 and led the anti-Bolshevik government and forces in Siberia. Although Denikin and Kolchak shared the same enemy, their forces operated independently and were not part of the same command structure.

Britain became an important supporter of the anti-Bolshevik movement. It supplied military equipment, ammunition and other assistance, while British military representatives maintained contact with the White commanders.
Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for War, became one of the strongest advocates of this policy.
On 29 May 1919, Churchill defended British military assistance to Denikin in the House of Commons. He spoke of the British ammunition supplied to the White forces and the importance of their military campaign.
On 15 July 1919, he made Britain's position particularly clear:
"We support General Denikin's operations by every means in our power, short of the dispatch of large fighting units from this country."
These were not merely Churchill's private opinions. They were statements made in Parliament while he was responsible for the War Office.
Britain was therefore actively supporting Denikin's military operations, although it was not prepared to commit large combat formations to the Russian Civil War.
The relationship between Britain and the Cossacks would take a very different turn by the end of the Second World War. The Allied policy of forced repatriation, known as Operation Keelhaul, resulted in thousands of Russians, Cossacks and others who had sought refuge in the West being handed over to Soviet authorities, often against their will.
For many of those affected, this represented a profound disappointment and a feeling of betrayal. Britain, which had once supported their struggle against Bolshevism, was now involved in returning them to Soviet control.

General Shkuro and his position in the White Army

Andrei Grigorievich Shkuro (1887–1947) was a Kuban Cossack officer who became a prominent cavalry commander during the Russian Civil War.
He organised anti-Bolshevik Cossack forces and subsequently joined Denikin's White Army.
His military formations became an important part of the White cavalry forces operating in southern Russia.
By 1919, Shkuro had attained the rank of Lieutenant-General. His 1st Caucasian Cossack Division was incorporated into the 3rd Cavalry Corps of the Volunteer Army on 15/28 May 1919.
This placed him within Denikin's wider military organisation at a time when the White forces were conducting major operations against the Bolsheviks.
Shkuro was therefore not simply an individual Cossack leader operating independently. He was a senior commander within a military organisation which Britain was actively supporting.

The British Order of the Bath

According to the Russian memoir and archival material associated with Shkuro, Denikin's Order No. 2633, dated 28 October/10 November 1919, announced that Shkuro had been awarded the Order of the Bath by the British King.
The same account states that the decoration was presented to him at Taganrog by Major-General Sir Alfred William Fortescue Holman, head of the British Military Mission.
The Order of the Bath was a senior British honour recognising distinguished military or civil service.

It had three principal grades:

- Knight Grand Cross (GCB)
- Knight Commander (KCB)
- Companion (CB)

For British subjects, the two upper grades carried titles: Knight Commander became *Sir*, while the corresponding female rank, Dame Commander, carried the title *Dame.* Foreign recipients received *honorary* appointments and were not entitled to use these titles.
The historical account published by the Tallinn Museum of Orders of Knighthood identifies Shkuro, Denikin and Kolchak as having received the rank of Knight Commander (KCB) in 1919.
The original British recommendation and the precise official citation explaining the award have not yet been located.

Churchill, Curzon and Britain's wider interests

British support for the White movement was not based on one single political objective.
Churchill was strongly opposed to Bolshevism and believed Britain should stand by the forces fighting against it.
Other members of the British government were more cautious. For example, Lord Curzon, Foreign Secretary from 1919, was concerned about the possibility of restoring a powerful and united Russia which might once again threaten British interests in Persia and India.
Churchill supported Denikin and the White forces, while Curzon was concerned about the consequences of a restored Russian power.
Curzon's name later became associated with the Curzon Line, originally designated as a proposed eastern boundary for Poland in December 1919. The line returned to international politics during the Second World War and became the basis for the post-war Polish-Soviet boundary agreed at Yalta in 1945.
The subsequent reshaping of Europe's boundaries was therefore connected, in a historical sense, with political questions already being discussed in the aftermath of the First World War.
It is a reminder of how much the political map of Europe changed within a single generation.
Many who had once fought against Bolshevism, and who had found refuge in the West, now faced a very different reality. In 1945, British authorities became involved in the forced repatriation of Cossacks and other Soviet citizens who had sought protection in Austria.
For those affected, the events that followed would have consequences reaching far beyond the end of the war. In the Lienz area, they became part of a tragedy that remains at the heart of this account.

From British recognition to Soviet custody

At the end of the Second World War in 1945, General Andrei Grigorievich Shkuro, whose British Order of the Bath had been presented by the head of the British Military Mission in 1919, found himself in British custody in Austria.
The British handed him over, together with other senior Cossack leaders, to Soviet authorities at Judenburg. From there, they were taken to Moscow, tried by a Soviet military tribunal and executed in January 1947.
General Shkuro's reaction was recorded by witnesses. According to one account, when British officers came to arrest him, he tore off his medal, the British Order of the Bath, and threw it at their feet. He also demanded a weapon rather than be handed over alive to the Soviet authorities.
The contrast between the British recognition he had received in 1919 and his eventual transfer to Soviet custody is difficult to overlook.

The Cossacks in Lienz and the events of 1945

The Cossacks who arrived in the Lienz and Drau Valley area in 1945 were not all part of one military formation or one group of people. They included soldiers, former soldiers, families and civilian refugees, with very different backgrounds and citizenship histories.
At the time of the repatriation operations, however, these distinctions were not necessarily recognised. People were caught up in the same broad process of internment and repatriation. It was only later, in

the DP camps, that attempts were made to establish who these people were, where they came from and whether they were actually subject to repatriation.
Some had left Russia following the Revolution and had never lived under Soviet rule. Others had been born outside the Soviet Union or had acquired different citizenships during their years in exile.
The British authorities were responsible for administering the repatriation policy in their occupation area. The arrangements made at Yalta and subsequent British-Soviet agreements provided the wider political framework.
In practice, the situation in southern Austria was complicated by large numbers of prisoners and refugees, limited manpower, difficult communications and the uncertain status of different groups.
Matthew Miskulin's study, *Chaos and Confusion: British Oversight of Russian Repatriations in Postwar Southern Austria* (2017), examines these events through British military and government records. His research describes how repatriation orders were interpreted broadly and applied inconsistently, including cases in which people who were not Soviet citizens were handed over to Soviet authorities.
This is an important aspect of the Lienz tragedy. The decisions made affected not only military personnel, but also individuals and families whose lives were placed in the hands of military orders, political agreements and administrative decisions.
For many, the return to Soviet hands meant imprisonment, persecution, separation from family or death.
Looking back, the contrast between 1919 and 1945 is striking. Britain had once supported the White forces fighting Bolshevism and recognised some of their senior commanders with British honours. By 1945, Britain and the Soviet Union were allies, and British authorities were handing Cossacks and other Russian groups over to Soviet control. For Shkuro, this change in circumstances was particularly personal. His story brings these two very different chapters in the relationship between Britain and the Cossack world together.

Why this matters to the memory of Lienz

The history of the Cossacks in Lienz should not be viewed only through the events of 1 June 1945. The tragedy has a longer background: the Russian Revolution, the White movement, the collapse of the old Russian order, years of exile, the Second World War and the political agreements made by the victorious Allied powers.
It is also important to remember that the Cossacks were not simply a political label. They were communities with families, traditions, military histories and their own experiences of displacement. The story of Shkuro illustrates one part of this wider history. His British decoration in 1919, his position in Denikin's army and his eventual fate in Soviet hands provide a remarkable personal connection between the Russian Civil War and the events in Austria in 1945.
It was not merely the end of a military episode. It was the fate of people whose lives had already been shaped by revolution, war, exile and the loss of their homeland, and who found themselves once again caught between the decisions of powerful governments.

Their stories deserve to be remembered in their full historical context.

Chairman’s Note

If you have not yet seen our presentation on the Start page, I invite you to take a look. It tells the story of who these Cossacks were, their journey, their plight and the tragedy that unfolded in 1945, including the numbers who were repatriated.