

7-11-1977

Floyd Lewis Oral History Interview: Polar Bear Oral History Project II

Deborah A. Lenning

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/polar_bear



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Lenning, Deborah A., "Floyd Lewis Oral History Interview: Polar Bear Oral History Project II" (1977). *Polar Bear Oral History Project*. Paper 9.

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/polar_bear/9

Published in: H88-0239.S. *Polar Bear Oral History Project. Records, 1910-1991 (bulk, 1977-1979)*. 1.50 linear ft. PARTIALLY RESTRICTED, July 11, 1977. Copyright © 1977 Hope College, Holland, MI.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Polar Bear Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Hope College
Polar Bear Oral History Project

Mr. Floyd L. Lewis

This manuscript is authorized "open"

Hope College Archives Council
Holland, Michigan
September 18, 1979

The Hope College Polar Bear Oral History Project was conducted from summer 1977 through fall 1979. Three undergraduate History majors, Ms. Nancy Johnson, Ms. Deborah Lenning, and Mr. Glen Johnson, researched the American Intervention in the Russian civil war, located the survivors, and did the interviews. They also typed the rough drafts and attended to the many administrative details related to getting the manuscripts into final form. The latter task was cheerfully completed by departmental secretaries Myra Jordan and Carole Boeve and their assistants. The students worked under the general supervision of G.L. Penrose of the Department of History. Ultimately, the project depended upon the diligence of the students and upon the willing responses of the veterans.

Department of History
Hope College
Holland, Michigan
1979

INTERVIEW II

LENNING: Your first months in North Russia were spent in or around Archangel.

LEWIS: That's right.

LENNING: What were the initial reactions of the Archangel residents to the American troupes?

LEWIS: They were, for the most part, friendly. I especially remember the park right downtown, in which people in the evening would promenade around this circular walkway and always counter-clockwise. It had to do with the social activities there, and one way, those fairly long evenings in Russia, while the sun was still fairly high, in September and early October. The boys, soldiers and sailors from U. S. S. Olympia, they were in Archangel first liked to catch on with the girls, and, if she was friendly, they'd promenade and carry on conversation as best they could with the language barrier. For the most part, however, they were adults, and they were friendly, and the whole thing very orderly. I had an interchange later in the winter relative to a young lady wanting to learn English. And I wanted to learn German. I had had a bit of German, but I wanted to improve it, so the interchange; I'd go to her house, met her folks, and we worked at it for a while rather diligently, and dropped it. The folks were receptive, the home neat and orderly, their name I probably did not hear, people weren't talking much, they could have been Jewish.

LENNING: What are your main impressions of Archangel?

LEWIS: Oh, its quite a city. Very impressive buildings, especially the churches--with their bulbous, gold-plated steeples, and large biblical pictures. You've seen some of them doubtless on TV. They had street-cars, they had running water, telephones; quite a city. Located on the east bank of the Dvena River, it overlooked the White Sea to the north.

LENNING: What do you remember about the people of Archangel?

LEWIS: Well, there was certainly different classes. Some you could see were-- quite well-to-do, and dressed accordingly. We didn't see so many of them, although it was reported that many of that class were refugees coming up from the south to Archangel to get out of the trouble zone. But there were also the poor class, and they were really poor. Women doing chores like brushing and greasing the tracks where the streetcars switched, and brushing the street with their round style of broom. Of the family chores--women did so much of it--one instance a man and his wife (presumably) were hauling some cut wood with their horse and sleigh, coming up from the waterfront a sharp turn tipped the load, and much of the wood slid off. The man obligingly held the horse while the woman loaded it back on. How we've spoiled our women!

LENNING: How did they live?

LEWIS: Well, it's hard to say. As to their private live, I didn't see in very many homes. But some of them lived quite well. How the others lived was a matter of question, though presumably, it was the everpresent poor who carried with them that obnoxious scent of old fish, from the fish-oil soap with which they bathed or washed clothes. Such was typical of a Russian crowd, in a building, on the street, or on a streetcar, the latter often loaded to the gills with several hangers-on.

The life of the moneyed class, or the elite was probably not normal, or in evidence, what with the revolution swirling through the country, and about to strike that would jeopardize their property, and even their very lives.

LENNING: Would you say that the business life of the city was functioning normally?

LEWIS: Well, not normally. There were photo shops, there were barber shops. Women did a lot of the barbering. Then there was the so called public bath. They operated on the principle of the sauna of the Finns, with hot rocks dropped into a tub of water to cause a cloud of steam to rise and with the heat produced perspiration and relaxation. Large steps built across the end of the room allowed for choice of heat-intensity (the higher, the hotter) as well as to sit or lie down. Whole families would sweat it out together.

LENNING: Would you say then, that the civil war in Russia did not affect the life in Archangel much?

LEWIS: It must have affected the life of the city, to what extent, would be hard to say, further.

LENNING: But its effects weren't too noticable?

LEWIS: No. Life carried on pretty well. Possibly I mentioned the fact that we were called out to the White barracks. The British were ordering the Russian civilain troops that they had trained and uniformed to go to the front, to take up a position on the front line. But in my association with this family--on the German exchange--they said realtive to the subject: "Well, after all, they refused because they'd be fighting their own relations." So they were sympathetic to the cause, or at least opposed to the possibility of having a relative die because of their own doing.

LENNING: Do you remember when that incident occurred?

LEWIS: Well, it was in the wintertime. I recall a group of us in a position on a street corner, suddenly we saw a man, a half block down the street, racing toward the White Barracks. Our Top Sargient down on a knee, aimed and fired. The fellow fell, buried in nearly two feet of snow. There he lay for about half an hour, when as suddenly he got up and raced back.

LENNING: Do you remember the flu epidemic in Archangel in the fall of 1918?

LEWIS: Yes, I do. In the early days of being in Archangel, we'd go downtown, when off duty, and, it was almost a daily event for our regimental band, heading down the cortege down the main street and playing the funeral dirge. Now this wagon, serving as a herse, was covered but for the back, had caskets piled two and two and one on top of that, that I saw several times going down the main street, presumably towards the cemetary. Now, these boys were dying pretty fast in those early days because they came off the ship not knowing where they were. Many of them had to be carried off on stretchers.

LENNING: The epidemic started with the soldiers. Do you remember if it spread to the population of the city?

LEWIS: I didn't know that it had. But for our part, we thought--as many did--that the ship that we came up to Archangel on was infested--that we were the only ones in the world that were under the epidemic. But when we got letters from home or newspaper clippings, why we realized that it was a wide-sweeping epidemic involving thousands of people at home as well as in all our outfit.

LENNING: But you didn't know that it had spread around in Russia?

LEWIS: No.

LENNING: Who was in power in Archangel?

LEWIS: The White Russians were not effective at all that I know of. But the people, as we said, were sympathetic only with the hopes of surviving whatever the trouble was. And the Allies were in power because the British, and the French, and the Italians, and Belgians were all represented up there in uniform, as in a show of strength, then we arrived to represent the American phase of the Allies, to help, supposedly, to defend and protect the stores.

The soundest reason I have found, and its all the way from President Wilson: we, the Allies, were there to make it safe for the conservative White Russians to come together.

LENNING: Was it martial law in Archangel?

LEWIS: No, I wasn't aware of any such.

LENNING: What is your opinion of the political desires of the Russians?

LEWIS: If they had desires, they weren't saying. It was as though the curtain had already come down. Of course, there was the language-barrier, and anyone who has seen the Russian alphabet knows what a jumble that appears to be. Our uniforms marked us, I thought, merely as foreigners, to be treated with indifference, and certainly not as liberating heroes, which some of our American sailors, and other military early arrivals, were. However, after some serious study of the translation handbooks, there was real incentive and satisfaction in going out and getting the reaction as you tried out a few words on the natives. Sometimes it brought an eager smile of appreciation, or a baffling response in kind with humor; from the girls, more likely a snicker or a laugh, but in most cases, warm respect for a soldier's try for a break-through.

It's very likely that the Russian people envied the American soldiers for the land and system they represented, compared to their own troubled times with Trotsky and Lenin.

LENNING: Did you know any American soldiers who took a Russian bride home?

LEWIS: Yes. Well, not personally, no. I knew of it.

LENNING: A minute ago you said that the Russians didn't outright object to your presence. Do you think they really supported you?

LEWIS: It's hard to answer that question because there's so little to go on. Outwardly they merely accepted us and didn't seem to care to be involved one way or another--except for the one incident where they did show their sympathy, and that was for their own relatives, doubtless.

LENNING: How were you housed in Anchangel?

LEWIS: We were housed in what they called "Olga Gymnasium." It was a girls' college. It had three floors, some of which were tiled, in the washrooms and such. We had very good billeting, so to speak.

LENNING: How many of you stayed there?

LEWIS: Oh, the band stayed there. How many? Probably, oh, there were about 250 men in Headquarters Company, who called it home; about half of us were there most of the time. Platoons were in and out; I understood our Signal Platoon did the signal work for the front the whole time.

LENNING: Was it mostly Headquarters Company?

LEWIS: All Headquarters, so far as I know.

LENNING: Were they all Headquarters Company and the band?

LEWIS: The band was part of us. I don't know what other platoons were there, but that's where we had to be billeted.

LENNING: Was there any modern plumbing?

LEWIS: Yes, running water, faucets and so forth. That was no life for a soldier. (laughter)

JOHNSON: When did you go to the front for the first time?

LEWIS: I would say it was probably around the last of January, and stayed there until around the middle of March or later. I recall as we neared Archangel, the swift current of the broad Dvina was breaking up the heavy ice, and swirling it out to sea: 'twas dizzying to watch. That was at the Railroad Front.

JOHNSON: What were your duties there.

LEWIS: Our duties? We cut down the tall spruce and pine trees, trimmed them, sawed them in sections, and carried them into the site, where we would build a blockhouse. And that was begun by laying the logs together for the four walls--an estimated four-foot (bullet-proof) thickness of wall strapped together by posts that were wired through between the logs. And then, more of a carpenter's job--building the roof, and fixing the doors and such--windows, they were horizontal slots in the wall left for the machine guns to sweep the wide firing lanes which were cut deeply into the forest to give a view of any enemy approach. And they did approach. Often afterward, or the next morning, bodies and weapons bore proof of the fact that there was a skirmish, and that

some did not return to their base. Block houses were spaced down both sides of the railroad probably a block or more apart.

JOHNSON: Were you ever involved in any of the fighting?

LEWIS: No, not really. Going back to the siege of the White Barracks, I recall the instance of three of us being directed to take position on the street corner. In making the shift, we had to climb through a narrow passage between buildings. I was last, and as I waited those 20 seconds or so, I had thoughts as bullets were zinging through there, would one be singing, "Home Sweet Home" to me. We did arrive at our destination OK, and later witnessed the sergeant fire on the man trying to dash across the street.

Down at the front, they never seemed to come around while we were there, though we always carried our guns, or had them handy. Down the track away, the Boloes came out of the woods and blew up a small section of the rail cap, causing the engineer to pass over it with caution.

We saw plenty of shells explode half a block from where we were working, the splinters flying to the tree-tops. Their marksmanship must really have been good. When the British brought their armored train mounting the long-barreled gun for lobbing 5 inch projectiles to jolt the Boloes, they would respond by dropping their smaller shells directly in front of and within a few feet of the train. Although the British with that power and range could, doubtless, have silenced the enemy, they chose in this instance, obligingly to back up.

The lively French Poilu with their 75s, often would join the argument. They handled their shells like stove wood, their speed and teamwork really had their guns barking, possibly running hot.

Then all would be quiet, except for our racket with hammers and axes and saws, and the shouts here and there of the men, until for some reason I suppose, or maybe none at all, they would start another bombardment, possibly to see if we were still there.

JOHNSON: Why wouldn't the Bolsheviks just blow up the train?

LEWIS: A good question. It was said around, because they had hopes of regaining the territory and all the properties and things of value. 'Twas really a strange situation, an apparent show of marksmanship, but also, as though they didn't have their hearts in it. How could one tell what would be the attitude of the man behind the gun? Not to be depended upon surely, but it is possible, in consideration of the blackmail tactics of the Reds (join us or else), that some of those people over there were Bolsheviks not through choice. However, the extensive lists of Honored Dead and Missing refute any notion that if true, such a state was in any degree general, or for long.

JOHNSON: Were you adequately prepared for your duties on the front?

LEWIS: Yes, I think I was. It was a matter of time. The day we arrived in camp, and were processed for the preliminaries; hospital shots and vaccination and all such, finally at 2 o'clock in the morning, we were ushered into a large hall, a sort of auditorium. We took seats as directed, and the officers up front were calling out for volunteers for the different duties, like one was for machine-gun, which he called the suicide squad, another, did any of you drive Mules, and so various lines of civilian work were called, and of course, men would respond and go up. A young lieutenant, whose name I learned after was Gleason, looked at me and asked, "What do you do in civilian life?" I said, "I'm a teacher of General Shop." He said, "Come with me." So down

the aisle we went, and I found I was in the Pioneer Platoon, Headquarters Company. Others of the Pioneers arriving in camp earlier may have had training, but for we late arrivals, they did well to make some kind of soldier of us. We were what they call Raw Recruits.

JOHNSON: Do you remember Major J. Brooks Nichols, the commander on the Railroad Front?

LEWIS: Major Nichols. Not especially, I saw so very little of him. I understood he was a very fine fellow. I know that I could pick him out in that photograph that I was showing you.

JOHNSON: What size detachments did you operate in? Was the Pioneer Platoon split up, or did you all work in the same place?

LEWIS: On the front we all worked in the same place, operation Block House. We were not a large outfit, about 4 squads of 8 men. There were lots of trees to be cut and trimmed, and logs to be carried in, and the snow was deep. Our immediate boss on the job was our platoon leader, Sergeant Renner.

LENNING: When did you first discover that the American troops were evacuating?

LEWIS: I didn't discover it except that we were ordered to pack. Of course, we felt it was about time.

LENNING: Were you in Archangel at that time?

LEWIS: Yes.

LENNING: How did you find out that you were going home?

LEWIS: We were ordered to pack to go home. We had souvenirs, etc., and we

were given a certain amount of space in a big box to pack in whatever stuff we wanted to take home.

LENNING: How did you feel about the American troops leaving and the campaign not being resolved?

LEWIS: Well, it was really not our concern to start with. And so when we were relieved by other troops, whoever they might be, why, that was good enough. Or better still, let the Bolsheviks come in and take over. If the British did have valuable supplies stored at Archangel, it was time they had them moved out.

Finally, this was Russia's civil war. When the British interfered in our civil war, relative to the blockade, President Lincoln warned them, and they heeded. Russia in the throes of rebellion, was disorganized, and too weak to thwart our invasion, I suppose.

LENNING: Did you know where your orders came from while you were in Russia? At the time you were there, did you know that the American troops were put under British command on the stipulation that they stay out of the civil war?

LEWIS: On the condition that they stay out of the civil war? I didn't know of any such arrangement, no.

LENNING: Did any of the men ever question the legality of their orders?

LEWIS: Well, we didn't question openly to our officers, of course; in the service, it's best to take things in stride, and you'd better keep in step. There were plenty of questions asked around, including our opponents, with their sign, "Why are you Americonskys here?" Armistice had been signed back in November, and we were still at war up there. And the thing went on just

like things do I guess, say, nowadays--little concern by Washington sometimes about this or that. And we were one of that kind--victims of being ignored, more or less.

LENNING: Did any of the men ever suspect that the Americans did not know they were fighting Russia?

LEWIS: No. We knew we were fighting Russia alright, whoever they were. With no news much since leaving Custer, we didn't know who was in, the conservatives, or the radicals (Bolsheviks).

LENNING: How did you feel about interfering in Russia's internal affairs?

LEWIS: If soldiers do have feelings, I'm not sure. We assumed we had business there, or we would not have been sent. There seemed to be units of all the Allies present including the Belgians and the Italians, probably for a show of strength. There were lots of kinds of us, but not a lot of strength, really, as I now see it: 'twas a wonder we weren't all pushed into the sea, stipulation, or not. Obviously we were operating on a general plan, OKed by the higher-ups.

LENNING: You think that was mainly Britain's game up there?

LEWIS: I wish first to say, I have only greatest respect for the heroic Belgians, the French, and the British, who, though unprepared as they were at the start, did muster their forces, and at great sacrifice succeeded in holding-off the Kaiser's great war machine. However, the British were so sadly lacking in artillery early in the war that in their heroic defense at Ypres, Belgium, their regular army of 175,000 men was almost wiped out. But the response to Britain's call for enlistment with the famous poster "Your

King and Country Needs You," was favorable. By the end of the year, nearly 1,000,000 men had enlisted, but a long rebuilding program stood ahead. Ypres was a disaster.

Three years of trench warfare that followed Germany's initial invasion gained little for either side. The planned offensives, artillery barrages, the trench-raids and counter-attacks, the scouting and the continuous vigilance; THAT was the Western Front, when--NOT "All Quiet." The actions of the confrontation took their toll, and nearly a million men died in the effort.

How the British upper eshelon could be caught so ill-prepared, while Germany was arming to the teeth, is difficult to understand, although I believe the whole world was shocked when the Kaiser and his war lords unleashed the fighting power they had secretly put together. The British, short on armaments to begin with, would find themselves short of those doughty British "Tommys," too often sent to their deaths in careless abandon.

Yes, it's likely the British had a game going up there.

LENNING: Did you feel that American involvement was justified?

LEWIS: In North Russia?

LENNING: Yes.

LEWIS: Well, I don't think you'd call it American involvement. We were involved, all right but not officially.

LENNING: President Wilson's decision to send troops to North Russia was a separate decision following his decision to enter World War I?

LEWIS: Yes.

LENNING: Do you feel that American troops should have been sent up there?

LEWIS: Well, General Pershing, in his detailed and very interesting account, "My Experiences in The World War," makes it quite clear as I see it. Right from the start, when he landed in France he was enjoined in a battle, not with the Germans, but with the Allied command, who wanted to rush American troops into the French and British lines as replacements. Pershing stood for a united American front, and against parcelling out of his troops, especially not trained for trench warfare. However, after many diplomatic but pressure sessions with General Foch, and others of the Allied Supreme Command; Britain's Lloyd George; Washington influence, with Secretary of War, Baker, arriving in France; and the flow of troops and supplies; while conditions and morale at the front were becoming more desperate, Pershing submitted to lending a few units of the better conditioned forces to replace some of the badly worn units of the French and the British, and comments on some of the French being retained or replaced whose sad faces were brightened at the sight of the Yanks.

How fortunate for the American army to have a commander who, time and again, resisted the efforts of the French and the British, who in their anxiety, would feed unprepared men into the line, especially as they would be under foreign commanders. The fact remains, that except for the matter of Russia, Pershing did get his army reassembled, and with the on-coming recruits, built a fighting force that turned the tide to victory.

LENNING: Looking back, what do you understand to have been the purpose of the whole expedition?

LEWIS: To North Russia? The only justifiable reason for entering Russia, said President Wilson, would be to aid the Czecho-Slovakians, to consolidate their forces, and to steady any effort at self-government or self-defense. Then too, there was the thought that with Russia's revolutionary turmoil, the

presence of "disinterested" American troops at Archangel and Vladivostok would make it safe for the Russians to come together. Then, of course, there were the stores that were at Murmansk or somewhere. I myself never saw them unless it be our food, or our fur-lined pull-down bonnets, and our white canvas-top Shackleton wrap-around boots. Those boots, with at least three pairs of heavy wool socks, did tend to keep the tootsies warm, though the temperature at 40 below, reminded you, it was a long way to Tipparary.

LENNING: Did you ever discover the fact that the Bolsheviks had carried the supplies out of Archangel before the Allies even got there?

LEWIS: No, I didn't know that.

LENNING: Some accounts of the expedition claim that the British used the Americans for their own purposes--not for Allied purposes, but for British. Do you have any opinions on that?

LEWIS: Well, discounting the story on supplies to be protected, which probably was a ruse that nobody really believed, there is evidence of a bit of international intrigue. Pershing tells that Kerensky, political leader of the conservatives (White Russians), advised propaganda in favor of American aid, and said that all Cossacks and 100,000 Czecho-Slovaks would join them because the Russians believed in the disinterested motives of Americans in Europe. He further suggested, however, that if we should intervene, the entry should be by way of Archangel.

Our Ambassador to Russian, Mr. David R. Francis, in Paris in June, 1918, strongly advocated our intervention, and thought 100,000 men would save the nation. But the Commander was opposed to any undertaking that would deplete his strength in France, and thought that such a diversion would only lead to complications that would not affect the final result. However, Pershing

believed our task clearly lay on the Western Front, and we would have all we could do to beat the enemy there. However the tendency persisted on the part of the Allied Governments to send expeditions here and there, says Pershing, "in pursuit of political aims."

The President was prevailed upon and felt he should cooperate with his Allies, and says Pershing, "I was directed to send a regiment, provided General Foch had no objections. The 339th Infantry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel, George E. Stewart commanding, together with one machine gun battalion, the 310th Engineers, the 337th field hospital, and the 337th ambulance company, were designated for the service."

Our 339th was probably at Camp Aldershot near New Castle, about 60 miles southwest of London, when that directive by President Wilson changed our course to the northward. There were rumors that our 85th division was already in France, supported by the call to exchange rifles. We entrained, and at New Castle marched down the cobblestone street to board the Somali, and headed for the North Sea.

At Archangel and on the front our supervision was by our own officers and non-coms; we saw very little of the British. The duties, as I see it, were of a military nature. I have no complaints, except we were often short on food. In Archangel our company food-detail it seems were able to make up some of it; though the British guarded the stores zealously, the boys usually returned with extras. Any meat would be made into soup, in order to go around. Canned "Meat and Vegetable" ration was regular, too regular. When on the front our rugged work created appetites that the British did not understand, of course they had their traditional 4 o'clock tea. But when we lined up at the official's boxcar Headquarters to politely let our wants be known, our rations were doubled, and the cook's BIG flap-jacks for breakfast were great. On the job,

half a can of Bully-Beef warmed over a fire, and a "Hardtack" biscuit with coffee sufficed; though still hungry I never felt better in my life. We were at the Front to convert tall trees into Block-houses, but our Pioneer Platoon had a basketball team, too, that played other units in the area at the "Y Hut," not far from the front. The writer, despite his mere 5 feet 10, played center; We won some games, with lots of fan support, and everybody enjoyed the recreation.

LENNING: When you returned to the United States, did you find that many people had heard about the expedition? Acquaintances?

LEWIS: Acquaintances--I don't know that it was too well known. I don't remember getting any reaction to that extent, not in a general way, only people who knew you were there. But people outside, no. They might have learned through some of the agitation that was put up about food shortage, or questions of operation here, there, or elsewhere, that happened to get into the press, but I don't know. It wasn't too generally known, at least no one seemed to know much about it.

LENNING: The people that had heard about it, had they heard an accurate account?

LEWIS: I wouldn't know.

LENNING: Would you say that your experience in North Russia changed you in any way?

LEWIS: Well, an experience like that is bound to change you some, of course. When one gets there and gets back, well, that's something. (laughs)

LENNING: How did the whole thing affect you personally?

LEWIS: Well, I can't say I was glad, though I'm not perturbed about it. I had kind of a military yen. In fact, as a kid I used to seek out my grandmother's book that told all about the blowing up of the Maine and things like that; there were pictures of it. At the time, I had an interest in it, and so on. However, other than being part of a big movement--there was a war on, and if one could do anything for it, why, fine, whatever it would be. I did have a desire for aviation, my friend made it, for me as it turned out to be--the Russian expedition from England instead of over to France (flying or else), where everybody thought we were going. So, I have no qualms against it. We were there, and we got back--those of us that did. And it's certainly sorry that we got involved in something that was more or less on the side, and still lost a lot of good men. For what, we aren't so sure. That's the sad part of it, it seems to me.

LENNING: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience in North Russia?

LEWIS: I think the subject certainly has been pretty well covered.

LENNING: Thank you very much.

LEWIS: In a sort of Summary, Deborah, I might try to explain further "Britain's game" in North Russia:

1. A one-time world power, British statesman still think big, though no longer for conquest, or colonies.
2. Russia had for years been a pretty good friend, and until recently an Ally.
3. From the overthrow of the czar, to Trotsky's March 1918 humiliating peace at Brest-Litovsk with the Germans, all must have been very disturbing, especially with the radical terrorists, the Bolsheviks, apparently gaining,

or already in control of much of Russia, after driving out Kerensky's provisional set-up.

4. Britain's sympathies and concern must have been terrific to make the moves she did, as our ambassador stated when urging shipment of troops to Archangel, "To save the country."
5. So drastic was the party in control that many would be noncommittal, so the opposition could not be known.
6. The British, and I believe our President Wilson too, wished to give encouragement and support as far as possible, to the so-called White Russians, by providing a safe place for them to "come together," and also, to demonstrate as in a show of strength by bringing military units of all six of the Western Allies together, to serve in the area, and, to encourage them to organize their political party, and their military.
7. "Britain's game" was quite a strategic effort, certainly.

Addition

LEWIS: Note: Rather than answer all the questions on the last sheets you girls sent me, many of which I have already answered as part of other questions, I may indulge with the risk of repeating, to relate the story of the fire, which in my book under the picture is titled, "Pioneer Platoon Has Fire at Verst 455."

My part in the episode, began as you may recall, when you asked, "Were you wounded while you were at the front?" I said, "Yes I was," just for sport, and hurried to add, that it was an accident, and self-inflicted. I was swinging an axe into a six-inch birch, when it skewed in-and-out of the elongated cut, and down and into the top of my right Shacklton boot. I thought little of it, and proceeded to work when blood was noticed staining the fabric of the boot. Stripping down through three heavy wool socks, a cut on the top of the instep, my "wound," was dressed by the sergeant, and I was sent to quarters, and to report to the doctor. I found his office in one of the box-cars; he gave me a tetanus and sent me to bed. That set the stage, and gave me a ringside seat to see the show, which also proved to be a hot seat, and I had to get out of there to enjoy it.

I'd been resting and ambling about, convalescing for several days, and all was quiet as I lay on the bed, except for the four boys who were playing cards in an adjoining room. A hallway lead from my room toward the front entrance at the left while their room, to the front and right from my room, also lead into the hallway.

I had been in their room, watched the card game a bit, and retired to my own, and about to doze off, when suddenly there was a thundering noise of scrambling feet and crasing furniture, and across the hallway, they dashed to

get outside, flames licking at the last one out as he pressed to escape the heat. They moved out of there in Close formation almost as one, and at least On the Double-Double. The last one out may have gotten a hair-singed, or possibly his blouse or pants, I never heard, but the room got quite a singeing; after the Puuuff, everything burnable in the room was burning. I could hear the Snap-Crackle as I prepared to leave and join the crowd that had gathered outside. The fire was limited to that room, which got quite a scorching; and by the picture, there's some smoke, of course, and about two dozen on-lookers, with someone pushing a bag or bed-roll out the front window. Some things saved from the holocaust are hanging on the white picket fence that surrounded the building, known as the Watch Tower; it stood beside the railroad at Verst 455, as one of the anchor-points on the front, and named for the tower built on its roof which supported a sizable box-like housing high enough to match the tall spruce and pine.

Oh, what caused the fire? That question must have been asked a-plenty, but I didn't hear anyone say. There must have been an official report to be made of it, but to my knowledge, no one was talking. Of course the four card players knew, and my incident with the axe put me in a fair position to know the circumstance at least.

The reporting officer I didn't see, nor would he have learned anything from me if I had, not then, and not there, but strangely Dame Fortune had us booked to meet at a different time and place, quite removed and nearly a year later.

I was in civies and back to teaching Shop in a high school at Sullivan, Illinois, a small town in the corn belt. I was fortunate to be one of a group of lawyers and bankers and other teachers who ate dinner at the home of a doctor's wife, a socialite in town, and who justly prided herself in

setting up a fine table. She loved to dance, and sometimes before dinner she would set the victrola going and we would swing it on the parlor rug.

One day along maybe in November she said, "Lewis, I have another Polar Bear who is coming to eat with us." Of course, that was a real and pleasant surprise. He was a handsome chap, his dark hair and ruddy complexion; he must have looked sharp in an officer's uniform. We met, compared notes, and were not long zeroing in on the fire at 455. What a strange coincidence--sure enough, here was the man, the former officer, charged with the responsibility of reporting on the fire. He told me he never found out the cause of the fire. I responded that I didn't know either, because I wasn't in the room when it started, fortunately, but that I was in there a while before; and as I briefly looked in at the four boys and their cards, I did remember seeing a bag, perhaps burlap, setting open on the floor and containing a peck or more of a material that looked like unwrapped sticks of ordinary chewing gum.

Could that have been Cordite, the High Explosive?

I'm afraid it was. What would set it off?

Hot cigarette ash might do it.

Why was the High Explosive in the room?

A good question--possibly the boys removed it from a Dud shell. Some of the fellows whiled away their spare time, working with those empty shells, tapping out artistic designs in relief; some of them were really good, and for sure went home as souvenirs of a bright moment in a dark situation.

Speaking of souvenirs, I picked one out of the snow beside the dead body of a Bolo, a victim of an attack on a blockhouse. 'Twas a bayonet from his rifle, both units of which were very similar, if not identical, to our own received in England.

As Spring began to break, inspections were current and for the one coming up you'd better be right and ready, for there was a lot of brass out there. I was ready, or so I thought, when suddenly I realized my bayonet was missing. I was asking the others, but it was late and they had already scrambled out. Finally in desperation, I dug out the Bolo souvenir; it fit on my rifle well enough, but had rust spots that would not wipe off.

As any military service person knows, inspections are most meticulous, or was then--clean shaven, neat appearance, rifles clean inside and out, and everything else about the person or equipment. This day was special; no less than some grade of General had shipped up from France to see how we were doing.

I hurried out, entered the ranks from the back, and found my place in the lineup: second squad, front rank, 3rd position, of the platoon. There was more than our platoon, for there was a longer line of us fortunately, and the inspecting "crowd," sure enough headed by the General, was making its way along the line, which was standing at attention.

Often it seems, in life generally, the higher the position, the more humane the treatment of those of lesser station. I observed on the rifle range at Custer an officer of rank, an elderly gent, sprawled out on a tarp, showing a recruit how to handle his rifle. I wasn't looking for sympathy, but I knew if I didn't prove myself something of a soldier, even with a rusty bayonet, I might be in for some kind of comment or ridicule. A spoken word of criticism to break the silence of inspection, or something even worse, like confinement to barracks, might be handed out. The only sound as they approached was the slight rattle of the equipment of the soldier, as he whisked up his rifle to Present Arms, and the click as he yanked the bolt to expose the cartridge chamber. Then all is quiet while the General inspects, and finally, all back to attention.

I was at rigid attention as they moved before me, my eyes were drilled straight ahead and not to be budged for anything. I Presented Arms as sharply as I knew how, the General seized the rifle, and I snapped to attention, my eyes fixed. There seemed to be a pause, or was I a bit anxious? I saw nothing, for just now I wasn't curious. Soon the gun was thrust back to my chest, and I was back to attention.

The procession moved along, however; and although we maintained in good order, they were hardly out of hearing range when a bit of chatter sprung up. The boys about were slyly chuckling, and said, "Did the General ever give you the stare"--"He really looked you over, and that bayonet"

I still have the bayonet and a long Russian shell.

Uh, this story runs on and on, just seems to keep unfolding and out of control; but before I can close, yet is one more question to be answered (I'm sure its on the reader's mind, too).

Why didn't the writer upon seeing the substance in the bag, and knowing what it would do, if ignited, warn the boys?

This is hard to explain, but in the first place, although I wasn't really sick, I was in a relaxed state of mind, let's say, convalescing, and only casually observing anything. The brain, such as it is, just wasn't energized enough to make the connection between the visual image and its potential.

Secondly, modesty sometimes gets in one's way. The boys at their cards were quite self-sufficient, and I, in a sense, was intruding upon their privacy and in no mood to socialize or even comment.

Further, that bag of "sticks of chewing gum," left such a vague impression, like an under-exposed photograph; as well also, even sensing the stuff was "Dynamite" (somewhere I'd seen it before), just did not seem to register until "Disaster" struck. Even then, my recall and logic took a little time in

putting the pictures together to arrive at that conclusion, which, by the way, I cannot prove, circumstantial evidence being what it is.

This is my offering to clear up the Mystery of the Fire in the Watch-Tower Building at Verst 455, on the Railroad Front.

Now for a brief summary, drawn mostly from the historical and detailed account of the campaign, entitled, "American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki," put together by three men who should know as they definitely were part of it. There were: Captain Joel R. Moore, Lieutenant Harry H. Mead, and Lieutenant Lewis E. Jahns, all of the 339th U. S. Infantry. The book is well written, with ample photographs to show something of the country and the people and places and events, but of the fighting and the conditions under which they fought and their dealings under the British, one must glean from the straightforward stories of the printed page. If the book is still available, no library should be without it, as "The World War," as Pershing called it, is for sure not complete without this very extraordinary expedition which touched, and almost became part of, the main event.

I'll finish with a few quotations from Chapter V, the title: "Why American Troops Were Sent to Russia."

1. To many people in America and England and France, the North Russian Expedition appears to have been an unwarrantable invasion of the land of an ally, an ally whose land was torn by internal upheavals.
2. Early in 1918, for the Allied forces, it looked dark. It was at last realized that the controlling Bolshevik faction in Russia was bent on preventing the resumption of the war on the Eastern Front, and possibly might play its feeble remnants of military forces on the side of the Germans.
3. The Allied Supreme Council at Versailles decided that the other allies must go to the aid of their old ally Russia who had done

such great service in the early years of the war. On the Russian war front Germany must be made again to feel the pressure of arms. Organization of that front would have to be made by efforts of the Allied Supreme War Council.

4. There were in North Russia as in every other part, many Russians who could not resign themselves to Bolshevik control, even of the milder sort, nor to any German influence. Those in the Archangel district banded themselves together secretly and sent repeated calls to the Allies for help in ridding their territory of the Bolshevik Red Guards and German agents. While the anti-Bolshevists were unwilling to unmask in their own state for obvious reasons, their call for help was made clear to the outside world and furnished the Allied Supreme War Council just the pretext for the expedition which it was planning for a purely military purpose, namely to reconstruct the old Eastern fighting front.

When a survey of the military resources of the European Allies had disclosed their utter lack of men for such an expedition, and it was found that the only hope lay in drawing the bulk of needed troops from the United States forces; when the statement of the cases in the usual polite arguments brought from President Wilson a positive refusal to allow American troops to go to Russia, it was only by the emphasis, it is said, of the pathetic appeal of the North Russian anti-Bolshevists, coupled with the stirring appeals of such famous characters as the one-time leader of the Russian Women's Battalion of Death, and the direct appeal of General Foch for the use of the American troops there in Russia as a military necessity to win the war, that the will of President Wilson was moved, and he dubiously

consented to the use of American troops in the expedition. (Note: This despite General Pershing's insistence all troops were needed in France.)

Even this concession of President Wilson was limited to the one regiment of infantry with the needed accompaniments of engineer and medical troops. The bitter irony of this limitation is apparent in the fact that while it allowed the Supreme War Council to carry out its scheme of an Allied Expedition with the publicly announced purposes before outlined, committing American and the other Allies to the guarding of supplies at Murmansk and Archangel, and frustrating the plans of Germany in North Russia, it did not permit the Allied War Council sufficient forces to carry out its ultimate, and of course secret, purpose of reorganizing the Eastern Front, which naturally was not to be advertised in advance either to Russians or to anyone. The vital aim was thus thwarted and the expedition destined to weakness and to future political and diplomatic troubles in North Russia, Europe, and America.

5. For various reasons the command of the expedition was assigned by General Foch to General Poole, the British officer who had been so enthusiastic about rolling up a big volunteer army of North Russians to go south to Petrograd and wipe out the Red dictatorship and re-establish the old hard-fighting Russian Front on the East.
6. It appears from the experiences of the soldiers up there that for military, for diplomatic, and for political reasons, it would have been better to put an American general in command of the expedition.
7. President Wilson either should have sent a large force of Americans into North Russia--a force capable of doing up the job quickly or send none at all.

Comment and Conclusion

Pershing was of the conviction that the war must be won on the Western Front, and felt he could spare no troops.

The strategy of reestablishing the Russian Front with a sufficient force, had a double objective:

1. Holding up the Germans to the Eastern Front, and thereby helping to win the war.
2. Help the anti-Bolshevist Russians (many of whom were in the Allied service) to come out in the open, as they did at one time about Archangel when things looked favorable, according to my book, to organize and establish themselves with a freely, elective form of government.

However, the plan failed, and so they and we must live with the Reds, the Communists, the Soviets, rought to deal with, and who threaten the world.