

HOW MUKDEN WAS WON

An Expert's Description of the Moves That Decided the Greatest Battle in History.

By Frederick Palmer, Collier's Weekly's Special War Correspondent in Manchuria, Who Was in the Wake of Japan's Victorious Army.

Direst Engagement Occurred at Lokenpa Village, Where the Streets Became Shambles—Whole Russian Division Held Off by One Regiment—Gallant Fighting of Nog's Men. Kurapatkin Lost by Committing the Error of Which He Wounded His Officers.

(Copyright, 1904, by Collier's Weekly.) Two new armies came to assist the main force at the battle of Mukden, one marching up to junction with either end of the winter line. Nog's men had only finished the siege at Port Arthur when they had to begin a tramp of 200 miles in the cold and windy period of late January and early February.

A Part of the Japanese Strategy. You may hear in Tokyo as I heard when I passed through the rear army of the east (the Japanese right) was sent through Korea in order to give the impression that its destination was Vladivostok. By marching around Robin Hood's barn the rear army of the east had fooled the enemy completely. It had sprung out of the air on Kurapatkin's rear and was doing the work of the battle already in progress. This march upon Kurapatkin from the most confidential way, so far as the gossip of the capital. The truth is, however, as I can ascertain, that the Japanese made a great secret of this new army's existence, when as a matter of fact they would have been easily disapposed had not Kurapatkin heard all about it through his secret service. Kurapatkin rose to the bait. He thought that the Japanese were trying to turn his left. He sent his reserves to the east, and that was precisely what the Japanese wanted.

The real secret was to the west, the Japanese left. It was simply an all battle plans are, to wage battle along the whole of the enemy's line, felt on his left and strike on his right. On Feb. 20 Nog was mobilized in the little town of Shantung, about twelve miles west of Liaoyang. The czar was not more carefully watched during the riots in St. Petersburg than this force, which was as large as Lee's army upon its march to Grant. Most of the cavalry at Oyama's command formed a screen in front of him from the left of the Japanese works to the bank of the river. The Cossacks never penetrated it or got around it; no native took the information to Mukden. Kurapatkin never smelled a mouse. The town where Nog was waiting was a very quiet one. The time was not yet ripe for Nog to advance. When he went it must be rapidly, lest the enemy should be warned and prepare for him.

The Beginning of the Battle. It was the plan of the next army of the east to call attention to itself by the first movement of the battle. Its first fight on its advance was at Chin-hoeh on Feb. 23. This was a very serious one. It kept on advancing on the 21st, 25th and 26th, having to meet the enemy in little more than rear guard actions. By this time it was on a line with the main positions of the Japanese, but between these two points there was a bend in the line toward the southward.

Here Kurapatkin's army, which had hitherto formed the right, was posted. Its three divisions were set off to meet and difficult tasks in pressing forward to relieve any pressure on the rear army and to insure that once Kurapatkin had removed his reserves to this side of Mukden he would be kept too busy there to withdraw them until Nog had finally placed himself to the east of Mukden, threatening the railroad. One division was concentrated and sent right around the right of the other two divisions of Kurapatkin. They advanced ten miles on the 21st without opposition, but by the 27th the new army and the first army began to appreciate how strongly Kurapatkin had prepared for the expected flanking movement on his left. With a reserve position in front of them one division of Kurapatkin's army had the assistance of a brigade and a concentrated artillery fire. The division which had wheeled on the 20th attacked Wanfalu. They found the Russians in greater numbers

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than they expected. They had been unable to reconnoiter the slopes approaching the Russian position, which were steeper than they had anticipated. On the 27th weariness and a driving snow storm held them back. On the 28th they moved to their attack and occupied the positions before them, and for seven days the right was to make little further progress, and Nog took the stage. The cavalry which had screened him fell back on to the bank of the Liao river to protect his flank. On the 28th he made fifteen miles without opposition of account. He was now up even with the center. From end to end the Japanese line was a hundred miles long. This first period of the operation may be said to have ended on the 29th. Only the right had been engaged as yet. It had felt of the enemy and found him strong, not even yet realizing how far his strength there was to prove to be his strategical weakness. Nog, proceeding across the plain, was not yet opposed. The casualties were few on either side. On March 1 the issue was fairly joined. There is an impression that the Japanese army takes no chances. That is because it always wins. Had Oyama failed at Mukden all the world would have known it. He had never dared to take such risks, which would then have been pointed out as the reasons of his undoing.

Consider this one thing. When the reserve was still in doubt and the battle its height every single man was fighting. The reserve consisted solely of a supreme confidence that no portion of the line could be driven back. The reserve was the value of the trust of troops in their general. The significant feature at Mukden was the trust of a general in his troops and their commanders. With at least 800,000 men engaged, counting both sides, this was supremely necessary.

The field of Marango or a Chinese town, where the Russian army was beside a Dakota farm. That Napoleon genius of seizing the moment's advantage, of launching a brigade upon a weak point or marching it within arms' length of the enemy's flank, might not be exerted here or if so only by the heads of corps and divisions. To them the grand staff had set each his task. For Mukden was many battles later woven into a gigantic movement. In order to accomplish each his object, which was in keeping with the whole plan, the different generals were expected to make brilliant combinations, and they did.

On the Russian side there was not one army, but three. On the center is Biberling, on the right to the west is Kanibara and on the left to the east is Lauenbach, with his Siberian reserves and sharpshooters, who understand mountain work, facing Kuraki. Surely the Russian army has never won a face survivors of the Yalu, who have never lost.

Kurapatkin's plan, so far as we know, was based on an entire misapprehension of the enemy's. He thought that Oyama was to throw all his strength into a flanking movement to the eastward. This conclusion he drew from the advance of the Yalu army through the mountains, as I have already explained. It was the conclusion Oyama wanted him to draw. From the vital railroad westward to the line which he had occupied, there were no defensive works and none possible while the ground was still frozen. This was plain as day that the west was the easiest direction from which to attack. Although the Japanese have chosen the easiest way in every battle they have fought, Kurapatkin evidently thought that this time he would be able to change the difficult way.

Kurapatkin's Great Mistake. As against the plain to the west, it was all hill work on the east. Northwest of Mukden the mountains extend farther westward and reach the railroad north of Mukden. Kurapatkin already

had a strong force in the east to face any flanking movement, which must fight its way over the slopes for twenty miles before his center was endangered. Had he lost confidence in the courage as well as the intelligence of his troops? If so it seems that it was without reason. We have a woman's testimony to the stubborn tenacity of the Russians when in trenches. Or was he afflicted, as some reports say, with nervous prostration? While he marshaled his reserves to the east Nog was swinging in over the plain from the west. On March 1 he was roughly repulsed, which he promptly fell back. On the 2d he came up with only a few detachments. Like frightened rabbits by the wayside, they took a good look at his columns. Then, like wise rabbits, they ran away. On this day he made seven miles. At night Nog was three miles north of a line drawn east and west through Mukden. He was facing the line of Russian retreat to the railroad instead of in the general direction of the army, to the north.

Nog Strikes His First Blow.

By this time, waiting for the crisis to appear on the left, Kurapatkin must have had news of the danger to his right. Kanibara sent out to meet it without plan two divisions as hastily as they could be dispatched. One was ready to see the other and started off. On the morning of the 3d the first division ran into Nog. Neither side was entrenched; neither could trench. There was the shock of a real encounter. Nog's deployed front and Lauenbach's blow instantly. The Russians were quickly, overwhelmingly beaten. They fled precipitately toward the north. In the afternoon the second division came up and did a little better in that its fragments fell back on the main body. Both divisions belonged to the Sixteenth corps, fresh from Europe. Many of the peasant soldiers did not understand the mechanism of their rifles, let alone the use of sights. Their fate was precisely that of a train load of excursionists in a collision. The Russians left 4,000 dead bodies on the field. Their total of existing men, who had been half of the 20,000 men engaged, the east to Nog was 300 wounded and killed. At the same time he had made a good day's advance. He was within five miles of the railroad.

The truth is that at the juncture the Japanese staff, who had staked all on an offensive stroke, were as much worried as Kurapatkin, who had staked all on the defensive. For his center and left were not budging. It was plain that Nog must not board the lion too far until the other hunters came up. The one time that he had meant to enter, responsibly hard time for Kuraki and Kawamura.

Had the two Japanese corps facing Kurapatkin's right center been no more hurried of execution than Kanibara and Biberling he would never have been shaken. On Nog's right was the bulging army of Oku, whose task from Liaoyang onward has been to fight its way inch by inch against frontal positions, to be the strong pivot while the others waver. As Nog extended his line northward Oku's left had to swing to the northeast, embracing the western end of the Russian works and meanwhile separate one of its divisions from the main body in crossing the river.

Kurapatkin recognized soon after his great error of misunderstanding the Japanese plan that this deadly angle was a vital point, and Nog must wait for the first blow. The two divisions to the east of the Han were atatched to Nodzu, making the center a unit. Oku himself took the north side with the third division and all the reserves were OK at his command. The frozen ground would not permit the men once they had gained a little ground to throw up those hasty line fortifications whose life saving value makes the spade almost as important an adjunct of the modern infantryman's kit as his rifle. The Japanese rifles fired only six shots. These they filled by scraping up the thin surface of the earth which the sun had thawed. Some even carried blocks of wood. One man, we know, had a carpet bag. He was found dead beside it.

Except for the collection of mulhouses a mile or more apart no cover other than ruts or ditches is available. The villages formed strategic points, which became the centers of fierce negotiations of strife.

Likopman was a village in point. There occurred the bitterest fight to the west of Mukden. The streets and the compounds became shambles. Here was the center of those attacks by which the Japanese sought to pry their way into the Yalu, the support of those counter attacks by which Kurapatkin still hoped to retrieve his error and isolate Nog. One regiment is reported to have held off a whole Russian division until the battalions of Kuraki's army at Wioson, the Japanese here were told to stand to the last man. They stood.

Holding the Center.

By this time the center and the use of all his reserves Oku was not only able to hold his own, but to make some advances on the 5th and 6th, when Nog did nothing except to stiffen his line. As for Nodzu, with Oku's reinforcements on the center, it was not expected that he would make any headway. Behind them were the comfortable backs of the howitzers and Krupp, which had on the back of the heads of the defenders of Two Hundred and Three Meter hill at Port Arthur. They could not storm intrenchments which the Russians had been months in making. Their part presently was to hug the enemy, so close that he was always under threat of a decisive charge; that he dared not spare any men for other vital points. In some places Nodzu's men got to within three or four yards

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