CHAPTER XVI

In April the troops were enlivened by news of the Emperor's arrival, but Rostóv had no chance of being present at the review he held at Bartenstein, as the Pávlograds were at the outposts far beyond that place.

They were bivouacking. Denísov and Rostóv were living in an earth hut, dug out for them by the soldiers and roofed with branches and turf. The hut was made in the following manner, which had then come into vogue. A trench was dug three and a half feet wide, four feet eight inches deep, and eight feet long. At one end of the trench, steps were cut out and these formed the entrance and vestibule. The trench itself was the room, in which the lucky ones, such as the squadron commander, had a board, lying on piles at the end opposite the entrance, to serve as a table. On each side of the trench, the earth was cut out to a breadth of about two and a half feet, and this did duty for bedsteads and couches. The roof was so constructed that one could stand up in the middle of the trench and could even sit up on the beds if one drew close to the table. Denísov, who was living luxuriously because the soldiers of his squadron liked him, had also a board in the roof at the farther end, with a piece of (broken but mended) glass in it for a window. When it was very cold, embers from the soldiers' campfire were placed on a bent sheet of iron on the steps in the "reception room"—as Denísov called that part of the hut—and it was then so warm that the officers, of whom there were always some with Denísov and Rostóv, sat in their shirt sleeves.

In April, Rostóv was on orderly duty. One morning, between seven and eight, returning after a sleepless night, he sent for embers, changed his rain-soaked underclothes, said his prayers, drank tea, got warm, then tidied up the things on the table and in his own corner, and, his face glowing from exposure to the wind and with nothing on but his shirt, lay down on his back, putting his arms under his head. He was pleasantly considering the probability of being promoted in a few days for his last reconnoitering expedition, and was awaiting Denísov, who had gone out somewhere and with whom he wanted a talk.

Suddenly he heard Denísov shouting in a vibrating voice behind the hut, evidently much excited. Rostóv moved to the window to see whom he was speaking to, and saw the quartermaster, Topchéenko.

"I ordered you not to let them eat that Máshka woot stuff!" Denísov was shouting. "And I saw with my own eyes how Lazarchúk bwought some fwom the fields."

"I have given the order again and again, your honor, but they don't obey," answered the quartermaster.

Rostóv lay down again on his bed and thought complacently: "Let him fuss and bustle now, my job's done and I'm lying down—capitally!" He could hear that Lavrúshka—that sly, bold orderly of Denísov's—was talking, as well as the quartermaster.

Lavrúshka was saying something about loaded wagons, biscuits, and oxen he had seen when he had gone out for provisions.

Then Denísov's voice was heard shouting farther and farther away. "Saddle! Second platoon!"

"Where are they off to now?" thought Rostóv.

Five minutes later, Denísov came into the hut, climbed with muddy boots on the bed, lit his pipe, furiously scattered his things about, took his leaded whip, buckled on his saber, and went out again. In answer to Rostóv's inquiry where he was going, he answered vaguely and crossly that he had some business.

"Let God and our gweat monarch judge me afterwards!" said Denísov going out, and Rostóv heard the hoofs of several horses splashing through the mud. He did not even trouble to find out where Denísov had gone. Having got warm in his corner, he fell asleep and did not leave the hut till toward evening. Denísov had not yet returned. The weather had cleared up, and near the next hut two officers and a cadet were playing sváyka, laughing as they threw their missiles which buried themselves in the soft mud. Rostóv joined them. In the middle of the game, the officers saw some wagons approaching with fifteen hussars on their skinny horses behind them. The wagons escorted by the hussars drew up to the picket ropes and a crowd of hussars surrounded them.

"There now, Denísov has been worrying," said Rostóv, "and here are the provisions."

"So they are!" said the officers. "Won't the soldiers be glad!"

A little behind the hussars came Denísov, accompanied by two infantry officers with whom he was talking.

Rostóv went to meet them.

"I warn you, Captain," one of the officers, a short thin man, evidently very angry, was saying.

"Haven't I told you I won't give them up?" replied Denísov.

"You will answer for it, Captain. It is mutiny—seizing the transport of one's own army. Our men have had nothing to eat for two days."

"And mine have had nothing for two weeks," said Denísov.

"It is robbery! You'll answer for it, sir!" said the infantry officer, raising his voice.

"Now, what are you pestewing me for?" cried Denísov, suddenly losing his temper. "I shall answer for it and not you, and you'd better not buzz about here till you get hurt. Be off! Go!" he shouted at the officers.

“Very well, then!” shouted the little officer, undaunted and not riding away. “If you are determined to rob, I’ll...”

“Go to the devil! quick ma’ch, while you’re safe and sound!” and Denísov turned his horse on the officer.

“Very well, very well!” muttered the officer, threateningly, and turning his horse he trotted away, jolting in his saddle.

“A dog astwide a fence! A weal dog astwide a fence!” shouted Denísov after him (the most insulting expression a cavalryman can address to a mounted infantryman) and riding up to Rostóv, he burst out laughing.

“I’ve taken twansports from the infantwy by force!” he said. “After all, can’t let our men starve.”

The wagons that had reached the hussars had been consigned to an infantry regiment, but learning from Lavrúshka that the transport was unescorted, Denísov with his hussars had seized it by force. The soldiers had biscuits dealt out to them freely, and they even shared them with the other squadrons.

The next day the regimental commander sent for Denísov, and holding his fingers spread out before his eyes said:

“This is how I look at this affair: I know nothing about it and won’t begin proceedings, but I advise you to ride over to the staff and settle the business there in the commissariat department and if possible sign a receipt for such and such stores received. If not, as the demand was booked against an infantry regiment, there will be a row and the affair may end badly.”

From the regimental commander’s, Denísov rode straight to the staff with a sincere desire to act on this advice. In the evening he came back to his dugout in a state such as Rostóv had never yet seen him in. Denísov could not speak and gasped for breath. When Rostóv asked what was the matter, he only uttered some incoherent oaths and threats in a hoarse, feeble voice.

Alarmed at Denísov’s condition, Rostóv suggested that he should undress, drink some water, and send for the doctor.

“Twy me for wobbewy... oh! Some more water... Let them twy me, but I’ll always thwash scoundwels... and I’ll tell the Empewo’... Ice...” he muttered.

The regimental doctor, when he came, said it was absolutely necessary to bleed Denísov. A deep saucer of black blood was taken from his hairy arm and only then was he able to relate what had happened to him.

“I get there,” began Denísov. “‘Now then, where’s your chief’s quarters?’ They were pointed out. ‘Please to wait.’

‘I’ve widden twenty miles and have duties to attend to and no time to wait. Announce me.’ Vewy well, so out comes their head chief—also took it into his head to lecture me: ‘It’s wobbewy!’—‘Wobbewy,’ I say, ‘is not done by man who seizes pwovisions to feed his soldiers, but by him who takes them to fill his own pockets!’ ‘Will you please be silent?’ ‘Vewy good!’ Then he says: ‘Go and give a weceipt to the commissioner, but your affair will be passed on to headquarters.’ I go to the commissioner. I enter, and at the table... who do you think? No, but wait a bit!... Who is it that’s starving us?” shouted Denísov, hitting the table with the fist of his newly bled arm so violently that the table nearly broke down and the tumblers on it jumped about. “Telyánin! ‘What? So it’s you who’s starving us to death! Is it? Take this and this!’ and I hit him so pat, stwaight on his snout... ‘Ah, what a... what a...!’ and I sta’ted fwashing him... Well, I’ve had a bit of fun I can tell you!” cried Denísov, gleeful and yet angry, his white teeth showing under his black mustache. “I’d have killed him if they hadn’t taken him away!”

“But what are you shouting for? Calm yourself,” said Rostóv. “You’ve set your arm bleeding afresh. Wait, we must tie it up again.”

Denísov was bandaged up again and put to bed. Next day he woke calm and cheerful.

But at noon the adjutant of the regiment came into Rostóv’s and Denísov’s dugout with a grave and serious face and regretfully showed them a paper addressed to Major Denísov from the regimental commander in which inquiries were made about yesterday’s occurrence. The adjutant told them that the affair was likely to take a very bad turn: that a court-martial had been appointed, and that in view of the severity with which marauding and insubordination were now regarded, degradation to the ranks would be the best that could be hoped for.

The case, as represented by the offended parties, was that, after seizing the transports, Major Denísov, being drunk, went to the chief quartermaster and without any provocation called him a thief, threatened to strike him, and on being led out had rushed into the office and given two officials a thrashing, and dislocated the arm of one of them.

In answer to Rostóv’s renewed questions, Denísov said, laughing, that he thought he remembered that some other fellow had got mixed up in it, but that it was all nonsense and rubbish, and he did not in the least fear any kind of trial, and that if those scoundrels dared attack him he would give them an answer that they would not easily forget.

Denísov spoke contemptuously of the whole matter, but Rostóv knew him too well not to detect that (while hiding it from others) at heart he feared a court-martial and was worried over the affair, which was evidently taking a bad turn. Every day, letters of inquiry and notices from the court arrived, and on the first of May, Denísov was ordered to hand the squadron over to the next in seniority and appear before the staff of his division to explain his violence at the commissariat

office. On the previous day Plátov reconnoitered with two Cossack regiments and two squadrons of hussars. Denísov, as was his wont, rode out in front of the outposts, parading his courage. A bullet fired by a French sharpshooter hit him in the fleshy part of his leg. Perhaps at another time Denísov would not have left the regiment for so slight a wound, but now he took advantage of it to excuse himself from appearing at the staff and went into hospital.