Brendan Jackson

BLACK COUNTRY BLACK SEA

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We have reached the highest point of civilisation. All that is left for us is to decay and fall.

– Karl Schwarzschild, German physicist and astronomer, writing home from the Russian front in the First World War.

Burial grounds

Wandering a series of labyrinthine paths that wind up and around the hillsides, it becomes increasingly easy to find oneself lost amidst the overgrown plots and terraces. It's much bigger than it seems, corners hidden away behind trees and bushes. My wife waits patiently in the car at the entrance of the cemetery for hours. She passes the time dealing with emails from work while my forehead reddens in the mid-morning sun. There is a service in the church, the distinctive sound of the polyphonic voices drifting through the trees, the scent of fresh cut flowers nearby. Here and there are some families with picnic tables squeezed in between grave markers, with strong alcohol to raise a toast to the dead, to the lives lived here in another time. I am directed towards one of the summits, the oldest part of the cemetery, dating from the end of the 19th century. Looking down towards the freight yards and docks of Batumi (as it is called today) I can compare the view with old photographs taken in the proximity of that vital harbour from where the Rothschilds and Nobels exported their oil. Inland, there are orchards of apple, mandarin, peach and lemon, thick forests of fir, maple and eucalyptus. It's a beautiful location. They say this graveyard was once used as a clandestine meeting place by young Stalin, after the tavern in the bazaar run by Ali the Persian became suspect.

The GPS on the phone is defunct. I am pointed over another hill to what turns out to be a vast plot of Second World War dead. Fading sepia photographs set in ceramic discs offer a portrait of the soldier, alongside metal markers, some with a rusted five-pointed communist stars, weather-beaten and bent, patriotic lettering long since erased. Sprigs of plastic flowers, tin cans with melted candles, ribbons, empty pop bottles lie about. I'm reminded that out of a population of 3.5 million, Georgia lost some 300,000 men who served with the Red Army during that conflict, but I'm looking further into the past, searching for some sign of the British Military

Cemetery. A photocopy of an old sketch of the site is of no help, showing a roadway, four plots bound by four streams, two bridges, an ice pit nearby, a roadway on the north side. Finally I find it, a memorial wall standing outside the southern boundary of the cemetery, along a side road.

Here are 68 names engraved on Vratza limestone quarried in Bulgaria, men who came from all over the British Isles – Bath, Poole, Canning Town, Stroud, Paisley, Dunfermline, Torquay, Hanley, Birmingham, West Bromwich – and elsewhere. Here too are those who had been recruited to serve with the Balkan Labour Corps, such as Labourer Son Van Tin; nothing else is known of him. Among their number are several Greeks who had come as muleteers from the Macedonian Front. There's a soldier from Nepal, and one from Rajasthan. Among the regiments listed are the Staffords, the Worcesters, the Warwicks, all of whom recruited heavily from the Black Country towns and city of Birmingham, my home territory. There's a Private Albert Jackson, no relation that I know of. Two others catch my eye; Private Frank Lane from West Bromwich and Private Wilfred Cutler from Old Hill. I wonder what brought them here, and what would they have made of this place? We can trace the journey of their regiments and how they came to be part of the Army of the Black Sea, but a significant number of British Army service records from that time were destroyed by fire during an air raid on the War Office in London in 1940. With only about 30-40% surviving, these records are known as the 'burnt documents'.

The memorial wall in Batumi was dedicated on Remembrance Sunday in 2014, along with the refurbished Europe Square in the town, when the British Ambassador Alexandra Hall-Hall also unveiled a red telephone box on the sea front. When HMS Echo, a hydrographic survey ship, visited in 2019 they were greeted at the dockside by a traditional dance troupe. "It was, without doubt, the most athletic and enthralling welcome we've ever had. If you've

never seen Georgian dancing you really should," Commander Warren was quoted as saying before placing floral tributes at the memorial site.

Almost a million British Empire troops died in the Great War. Cemeteries were created at most of the places where the Casualty Clearing Stations and the less mobile Base Hospitals were located. The first to be interred at this location was Private William Fell, aged 24, of the 7th Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment. He came from Bradford, once a machine hand in the printing industry, his widowed mother a rag sorter at a paper mill. Two soldiers buried here both served in France in 1914 – Private William Boyd with the Cameron Highlanders and Driver Alfred Wilkinson with the Royal Field Artillery – surviving it all only to succumb to disease in early 1919. Wilkinson, 26 years old, had married his sweetheart while on home leave in Halifax in January 1918. The site was recorded in July 1919 by Major R.C. Everett of the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, who travelled around the cemeteries in the Near East to report on progress. He visited the military cemeteries at Batoum, Baku and Tiflis, his photographs then printed at Boots the Chemists back in England and glued into a scrapbook.

On arrival, the British had declared Batoum (as it was then called) a free port and later used it to assist the evacuation of the White Russian soldiers and civilians fleeing the Bolsheviks. The Royal Navy and Air Force engaged with the Red Army on the northern and eastern Black Sea coasts and British and Indian troops could be found across the Caucasus, with a naval flotilla on the Caspian Sea and a detachment sent as far north as Petrovsk. Noe Zhordania, leader of the Menshevik Georgian Government, thought the first British military representative he met in Tiflis to be "like a sergeant major, coarse, rude, imperious and masterful." The Georgians felt highly ambivalent towards the British, given the UK government's

apparent preference to restore the status quo of Tsarist rule by supporting the White Armies. As the Red Army invaded Georgia in February 1921 – despite the Soviets signing a treaty in May 1920 recognising Georgia's independence and a non-aggression pact – the Georgian leadership was forced to retreat to Batoum. Here they published the Constitution, which had been adopted by the Constituent Assembly only weeks before, in which they stated their vision of a democratic, egalitarian society. Even as they were printing the first copies, in mid-March the British and Soviet governments signed a trade agreement. When asked in Parliament if he considered that this was a direct recognition of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, Prime Minister Lloyd George made no reply.

On 17 March that year the Georgian leaders boarded an Italian vessel escorted by French warships and headed off for a life in exile, along with the very last British military representative in the region, 45-year-old Colonel Claude Stokes, an Indian Army intelligence officer and British High Commissioner for Transcaucasia. The following day the Red Army entered Batoum.

As Colonel Stokes wrote to the Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon to tell him that the British mission had been successfully withdrawn, all that remained in Georgia to indicate the government's support was a typewriter and a Sunbeam car. While the British also left behind their dead in this graveyard, those lads from West Bromwich, Old Hill, Nechells and Saltley and their comrades, the Democratic Republic of Georgia ceased to exist.

These graves were soon neglected and forgotten. Tea bushes were planted over the site. A photograph from the 1990s shows a small tarmac road and a building used as a Russian military barracks. It was said that the mounds of three or four of the graves were still visible at that time.

The grave of Able Seaman Leslie Joseph Sellick, who died on 8 December 1918, and who was buried in the Catholic cemetery at Batoum. Photographed on 2 July 1919 by Major R.C. Everett.

Sick Bay

In his last lucid moments, he says he's not feeling quite himself and asks when they might dock at Devonport. He does not know the true nature of his condition. Before the delirium sets in he takes his nourishment and is in good humour, notes the Staff Surgeon. The patient has been ill for a few days with what seemed a mild case of influenza. With many of his shipmates also afflicted, he is doing well enough, but on the fourth day he takes a turn for the worse. His coughing is a terrible sound. The lungs clog up and as the body is starved of oxygen his breathing accelerates. His face is pale, his eyelids droop and soon his lips take on that dreaded bluish-purple hue. He doesn't last much longer.

Within the last six days aboard, 126 have fallen ill, complaining of a headache behind the eyes, sore throats, chest pains, fever. Accommodation for the crew is cramped at the best of times, with little more than 12 square feet for each seaman to live, eat and sleep in, even without the additional staff and troops they have carried here. It is easy for infection to spread. This is a man-of-war, not a hospital ship.

The Staff Surgeon can do little. With grim humour, his medical officer reminds him that, according to Aristotle, there are three sorts of people – those who are alive, those who are dead, and those who are at sea. Their patients are given aspirin, a tot of rum with water. He insists they must keep drinking fluids, barley water, limejuice, weak tea or a thin soup. The ship is thoroughly disinfected, the importance of personal hygiene is stressed, the cases isolated as much as possible. The Stationary Hospital onshore is not yet operational. If the influenza attack develops into the realm of the pneumonic, as a secondary bacterial infection takes hold in the bronchial tubes, mucous membranes will haemorrhage, then pleurisy and emphysema will destroy the lungs. At this point little can be done, the patient in great distress, literally fighting for every breath and dear life itself.

The Staff Surgeon understands his predicament, aware of his limitations. He has no previous experience of this kind of outbreak. He expected to have to deal with the fearful damage caused by exploding shells, lacerations, sepsis, burns and scalds. He is familiar with anaesthesia, antiseptics, x-rays, sutures, venereal problems. He has spent his time aboard dealing mostly with cuts and bruises, minor shipboard accidents, or doling out castor oil for constipation. Then there are the constant audits of medical equipment in stations fore and aft, canvas bags stuffed with tourniquets and picric acid dressings for burns positioned in the gun turrets, the batteries, conning tower, engine room and stokehold. He awaits the regular calls to action stations alongside his fellow officers, his designated sick berth stewards and stretcher-bearers. Practice makes perfect.

Checklist:

Bandages in neat rows: roller, triangular. Safety pins, for use thereof. With cotton wool and gauze to dress metal-ripped flesh. Sterile cat-gut ligatures to staunch a haemorrhage. Splints used to immobilise shattered, decimated bones. Glass-stoppered bottles of boric acid and lysol. Ether, chloroform, morphine to alleviate pain. Forceps, probes and scalpels, sponge holders, Spencer Wells artery forceps, tourniquets, syringes, needles for injections.

He runs regular training sessions in basic emergency treatment for both officers and ratings; he is somewhat sceptical of the practical value of these but knows it relieves some of the monotony of life at sea. The Captain places great emphasis on the value of competitive first aid drills and also – when in port – sailing regattas, sporting activities and onerous route marches. The men must be kept active, routines must be followed, discipline maintained. The Chaplain reinforces the point: *The devil makes work for idle hands*. In his spare time, the Staff Surgeon rather chooses to study a lengthy treatise on nervous disorders, fatigue and anxiety. He writes letters home, to friends and family, brief sentences that won't trouble the censor. *Weather pleasant. I hope you are all in good health.* To former colleagues at Haslar Hospital, he recalls the cricket games on the

grounds overlooking the Solent, a belter of a pitch. *Remember that time when Johnson broke his ankle making that spectacular and utterly reckless catch at the boundary rope? Happy days.* But so few replies... who knows where they all are now?

Thankfully, most of those in his care will recover, their records duly written up and presented to the Captain every morning. In less busy times the Staff Surgeon will read to patients in sick bay verses from his collected volumes of Homer, believing the tale of Odysseus gives solace to those long at sea: "A prince of grace divine your aid implores, O'er unknown seas arriv'd from unknown shores." Most accept his foibles, believing that men of his rank and class exercise certain privileges, and as he is privy to the inner ailments of their body they do not hold grudges against him. There is no Kronstadt Soviet at work here. Most do not pine for home as he does. He knows that, with pay and conditions improving, many of the professional seamen would willingly sign on for another term. As for the 'Hostilities Only' men, affectionately known to their comrades as 'Cuthberts', maybe they too will get a taste for this life. There's a world to see, an Empire to protect.

Able Seaman Leslie Joseph Sellick, aged 22, will be the only victim of the Spanish Flu outbreak on board. As the pandemic rages across Europe, they do not realise how lucky they are. The ship's log records that he passes away of 'Pneumonia' on 8 December 1918 at 0.19 am. The following day, his body is escorted to the Roman Catholic church in Batoum, where he is buried in the grounds, the customary three volleys of musketry fired over his coffin by his fellow bluejackets, a local church official intoning the Latin prayer of the dead. Soon enough his mother Minnie and his four sisters will be notified of his fate by receipt of the Army Form B104-82 which states: *It is my painful duty to inform you that a report has been received by the War Office notifying the death of…*

This ship has been Sellick's home for over two years. A dairyman from the East End of London, he enlisted in September 1916 for the duration. His was a quiet war. Steaming around the Adriatic

Illustration from Ministry of Health Reports on Public Health and Medical Subjects, No. 4: The Report on the Pandemic of Influenza, 1918-19.

and Aegean and across the Mediterranean. Alexandria. Port Said. Taranto. Messina. Gibraltar. Spezia. Valletta. Piraeus. Coaling. Loading stores. Cleaning the ship, scraping and painting funnels. Making and mending clothes. Divisions. Prayers. Physical Drill. Standing strictly to attention as the Articles of War are read out to the ship's company. All those naval exercises, again and again – general quarters, night defences, fire stations, anti-submarine zigzagging, abandon ship, gunnery practice. Time and time again he is reminded that he is a part of the greatest fleet in the world.

There are long months at Brindisi and later Mudros. A few false alarms of impending aerial attack. One Sunday morning in the Levantine Sea, after Divine Service, a torpedo track is observed passing ahead of the ship. Then there's a bit of excitement back in May 1917, when three Austrian light cruisers try to break the Allied blockade at night, sinking a lot of the naval drifters lined across the Otranto Straits, and our ships chase after them

The Austrians soon bugger off home, but the Dartmouth takes a torpedo hit from a sub lurking nearby and some their crew need to be taken on board while she's towed back to Brindisi. One of the French destroyers hits a mine just outside the harbour boom, cracks in two and goes down quick with most of their crew and his ship picks up the few survivors. That haggard look on their faces, not something you'd forget in a hurry. There but for the Grace of God go I.

The King of Italy visits. For a regal 20 minutes. He's on board one moment and gone the next. He's a tiny chap, all you can see is the top of his fatigue cap. They say he's a decent enough fellow, but his mates laugh and say all you need to do as monarch is bloody well sign your name, read a newspaper, and know how to get on a horse. Once, the septuagenarian Rajah of Ruthlam is given passage, on one leg of his journey back to India. Sir Pratap Singh, a real life Maharaja no less who commanded his regiments in Flanders and Palestine, is a fine spectacle with his highly embroidered uniform and elaborate turban. He had served in the Second Afghan war

long ago yet still liked to lead his Jodhpur Lancers from the front. He cuts an impressive figure, strolling up and down the quarter-deck with his two Sikh staff officers, also immaculately togged out. On another occasion, the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Samuel Montagu, is taken in the opposite direction, but his party keep themselves to themselves, proper toffs. There's a rumour they brought aboard several crates of champagne.

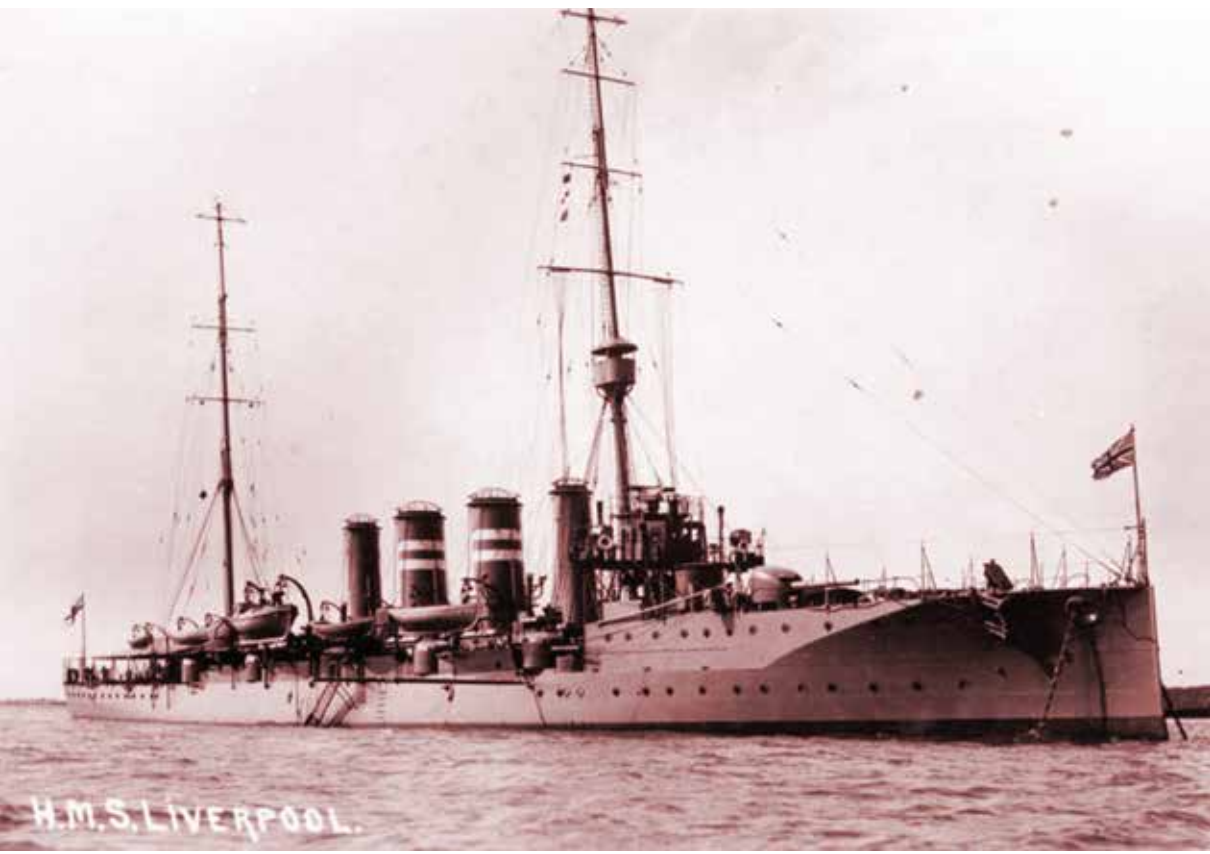
As the war draws to a close, the ship is chosen to pick up Ottoman envoys from a Turkish tug carrying a flag of truce. The enemy up close at last, not quite the grinning hook-nosed fat ogres of popular imagination. So the Turks sue for peace before the Jerries and Fritzes give in and the ship goes up through the Dardanelles past the forts that gave us such trouble, to weigh anchor in the Bosphorus in the grey light of late afternoon, to briefly view the fabled panorama of the conquered capital. The next day they steam into the Black Sea, which is neither as dark nor stormy as they expected.

Late afternoon, Sunday 1 December, 1918

The Royal Navy light cruiser HMS Liverpool edged into the harbour at Batoum to dock alongside the Petroleum Mole. Her searchlight crews and Maxim gun crew were kept on alert until 9 pm, though they didn't anticipate any trouble. Eight days before, she had left Constantinople and sailed to Novorossisk, leaving there a Military Mission to liaise with General Denikin, who commands the Russian White Army. There they received a tremendous reception, crowds waving paper Union Jacks. On this first stage of the voyage, she is accompanied by the French armoured cruiser Ernest Renan, along with two Australian torpedo boat destroyers, one that then escorts her down the coast to Batoum.

The ship is built of steel, weighs 4,800 tons, and can hold 1,350 tons of coal and 1,250 tons of fuel oil. Her maximum speed is 25 knots or 29 miles per hour. Her main armament consists of two 6-inch guns, one aft and one forward, ten 4-inch guns, five on each side, four Vickers anti-aircraft 3-pounders and two torpedo tubes. Armoured decks protect the ship, 2 inches thick over the magazines and machinery, 1 inch over the steering gear; the conning tower has 6 inches of armour, the gun shields and ammunition hoists with 3 inches. She is not the most powerful ship in the fleet, a sturdy workhorse less than 10 years old, barely a scratch on her but already slightly out of date.

She carries a crew of 480. One of them, chief gunner Frank Dolbear, has been reprimanded by the Captain for being under the influence of liquor whilst ashore at Tuapse on 27 November. The local chacha proved unexpectedly potent, even for an old sea dog. The Captain has more pressing concerns now; there were 20 ratings sick when they arrived, but within days over a quarter of his crew succumb to this new epidemic of influenza. Yet operations must continue. As Intelligence Officers disembark to establish local contacts and present the terms of the occupation, the ship's small arm companies


H.M.S. LIVERPOOL.

go through their drill routines ashore, the searchlight and Maxim gun crews stand by, hands are employed scrubbing the sides of their vessel and washing down the decks. It's a blessed relief to get out in the air, however chill, and HMS Liverpool must look pristine to curious onlookers. After colours are lowered at sunset, her officers raise a toast to absent friends.

Many thousands of Turkish troops are still in the town, armed but passive. They just want to go home. They have been in occupation for several months, some of their more nationalistic commanders aiming to take back the land of Elviye-i Selâse, three lost provinces of Batoum, Ardahan and Kars, all Russian gains in the war of 1877. But it is not to be. The ancient dynasties are falling; the Hohenzollerns, the Habsburgs, the Ottomans and the Romanovs. All drenched in blood.

The Aussie destroyer drops anchor out in the bay, and they await the arrival of HMS Theseus ten days later, a far older vessel designated to be on station here as base ship during the coming operation, along with the bulk of the troopships that arrive on the 22nd. The British quickly assume control of both the port and the town; headquarters go ashore on Christmas Eve and a battalion is readied to proceed to Tiflis by rail as soon as possible. Some go straight from ship to train, barely setting foot in the port, the rail tracks lying alongside the docks and running along the main street. As more warships and troopships arrive in port, soon enough the men will go inland to garrison the capital and further afield, and in the coming months detachments spread out right across the Caucasus. Onwards to Baku, Krasnovodsk, Petrovsk, Shusha, Julfa, Erivan, Nakhichevan, Ardanuch, Kars, Gagri. Naval guns are dismounted and shipped off to the Caspian, 40-foot Coastal Motor Boats and Ford Model T cars too. All the necessary supplies and munitions. Artillery is placed atop Anaria mountain in the former Russian Mikhailovskaya fortress, several miles from the port, which provides a perfect viewpoint of the Turkish border beyond the Chorokhi delta. Thank

God for the hardy men of the Macedonian Mule Corps, who make that torturous and winding ascent. Airplane carcasses are taken off ships, quickly craned onto flatbed trains, wings lashed alongside and sent off, their crew reassembling them once they reach their final destination somewhere in the frozen north-east. That was a shithole posting they heard, temperatures so low the oil in the engines freezes. Up there they say there are only two seasons, cold and bloody cold.

The Georgian charge d'affaires in Batoum, Diomid A. Topuridze, keeps a watchful eye on proceedings. Then 47-years-old, he studied law in Moscow, in Geneva and Paris, and has long been involved in social democratic politics. He is relieved to see the Turks repelled, but dubious as to the intentions of the British. An economic expert, a Marxist in his early years, he understands some of their motivations, these sons of the nation of shopkeepers. The greatest tonnage of shipping for this port before the war was always British. But will they now hinder or assist the cause of an independent Georgia? It seems to him, because of their recent dalliance with Germany, his own countrymen will be treated with suspicion, even disdain. Foreign Minister Evgeni Gegechkori provides assurances to the British Military Mission in Tbilisi, telling them "the Georgian government, animated by the desire to work in harmony with the Allies for the realisation of the principles of right and justice proclaimed by them, gives its consent to the entry of the troops."

As these mutable borders move to and fro, Batoum has a different master, while the vanquished Turks, encamped in a suburb of corrugated iron barracks await their fate. While their garrison has been ruthless cracking down on the post-revolution lawlessness, they have been relatively liberal in their administration here, polite in their dealing with the inhabitants, using French and Russian to communicate and gaining a small measure of respect. They did not ransack the city, as many expected, and now they wait miserably to be repatriated.

Robert Cotton Money is a 30-year-old officer serving with the Cameronians and a keen amateur photographer. Upon arrival, he records the scenes in Batoum as the Turks crowd the docks, guarded by Indian troops. He has carried his folding Kodak pocket camera throughout the war, from the retreat at Mons to the flooded trenches of Flanders. Recently married, with a child on the way, he has volunteered for further service in the army. He writes in his diary: "The country is mountainous. The soil is amazingly fertile, every plant and tree seems to flourish – the streets are avenues of Mimosa and orange. Every yard of ground is cultivated. Orange groves and tea plantations are numerous. Sweet scented violets grow wild, and the hillsides are clothed with variegated rhododendrons, merging into firs, the latter only ending at the snow line. Trout streams abound, their banks overhung with alder, bramble and meadow sweet." In a few months he will travel east to Baku, which he finds far less attractive a place. He describes it as "a desert of stone and sand... no trees, no streams, no grass except a few dry blades, no cultivation – only oil."

If you hailed from that great metropolis astride the River Thames, bustling with vessels from across the Empire, or from the ports of Liverpool, Southampton, Bristol, Glasgow, which host the transatlantic trade, or even grew up in the industrious Black Country and Birmingham, whose vast factories tooled the weapons of war, then your first sight of Batoum might seem unremarkable – a white smudge of buildings on a low promontory jutting gently out into the sea, with an octagonal stone lighthouse to guide ships to shore. It is a kind of sub-tropical frontier town, with bazaars and palm-fringed streets, an Art Nouveau bank on Mikhailovsky Street, with some grand European style hotels and numerous shipping offices. It has no buildings higher than two stories; the tallest points in the town are the distinct onion domes of the Orthodox churches and the minarets of mosques. There was a casino, some fine mansions, a theatre, even a cricket pitch and a British yacht club, reminders of better past times, but many buildings are empty, in a sorry state,

Turkish troops on the dockside at Batoum, awaiting embarkation, December 1918. Photograph by Robert Cotton Money, Imperial War Museum Collection Q54849.

The beach at Batumi, 2025.

their owners having fled as war and revolution took hold. Once busy, Batoum has become slowly impoverished in the last few years. Outside of the central part of the town, the dwellings are ramshackle and makeshift; here, where the workers live, sanitation is non-existent, waste pits overflowing.

It has less people than Weymouth, that quaint seaside resort in Dorset, yet the poet Osip Mandelstam calls Batoum "a Russian-style California Goldrush city" – for here is the terminus for the Trans-Caucasian railway, all 563 miles of it, bringing oil from the Caspian to be processed and shipped off. Adjacent the rails, a pipeline brings kerosene from Baku – before the war it pumped 980,000 tons of the stuff per annum. Within days of HMS Liverpool docking, an oil train from the Caspian arrives, the first in many years, escorted by a British Lieutenant and 20 soldiers from the 9th Worcesters.

The sea is calm, a few gusts of wind with broken cloud and rain squalls, the temperature in the mid 50s. Wooded hills rise behind the town, dotted with timber houses, the slopes finally blending into the mountains shrouded in mists. In the words of Mandelstam (again): "A greenhouse. A hummingbird city. A city of palm trees in tubs. A city of malaria and gentle Japanese hills." To the south of the port stretches a pleasant seaside boulevard laid out by a Prussian and a Frenchman, flanked by acacias, palms, cactus and banana trees. On the northern side, refineries and storage tanks blossom alongside the eucalyptus and flowering vines. Beyond them, at Green Cape, an easy drive in a motor vehicle, you can find large Botanical Gardens, opened only seven years before, with nine equatorial zones represented. Here many fine villas have been built.

It rains incessantly, but it doesn't remind them of home. They have come too far, seen too much that is utterly foreign, still holding onto a small fragment of the dear old British Isles, of how they remember it used to be. The Great War is over, yet here they are trying their best to stop different factions flying at one another's throats.

One sailor among many selects a postcard. He could have chosen a picture of the splendid Alexander Nevsky cathedral, a landmark clearly visible from shipside, or the tree-lined boulevard adjacent the shore, or a distinctive flat vista of fields and lines of oil and petroleum storage tanks with the sea in the background, or a view that looks similar to any well-manicured civic park back home. Perhaps a picture overlooking the port itself, beyond which are snow-capped mountains, even one with wooden masted ships? There is a photograph showing the old Tsarist battery – a mound of earth topped with what looks like a large parasol next to two chaps standing to attention, down below, past a set of ornate steps, other soldiers posing alongside their cannons. There are scenes of fine white buildings with pavement cafes, one of the railway station, one depicting Le Gymnase Garcons. There is a view of Le Pont au Tamara, with a steam locomotive crossing it. These postcards, dating from well before the war, were made by a Swedish publishing house, Granberg Joint Stock Company in Stockholm, who produced thousands of such scenes for the Russian market at the beginning of the century up until the Revolution.

The card he decides upon has a picture of a young woman in a white dress and sunhat posing beneath a large Guadeloupe palm (Brahea Edulis) in the garden of the villa of General Baratov, which is captioned in both Russian script and Esperanto. He enquires and finds that Baratov is something of a celebrity, well known to the British, a Terek Cossack of Georgian descent, who was in command of the First Caucasus Corps fighting against the Turks.

Baratov had worked with Allied forces in Persia and Baku, even attempting to relieve the British and Indian forces disastrously besieged and starved at Kut, getting to within 100 miles. Made a damn decent effort by all accounts. Both fair and steadfast, a reliable sort they say. After the Revolution he disbanded his troops and spent some months in exile in India, before joining the White Armies.

The postcard will find its way to Miss Goodman at the Miner's Hall, Great Bridge, Tipton, Staffordshire. On the rear, written in pencil: "Dear Lizzie, Just a card wishing it will find you and all you love in the best of condition as I'm keeping quite fit. Remember me to Mother & Dad also to Fred when you write. Letter follows later. Yours Sincerely, Luke. Cheerio & be good."

He adds in small print: *O.A.S* (on active service). The card is also marked: RECEIVED FROM H.M. SHIP NO STAMP REQUIRED.

What will she make of this particular picture, when most people associate Russia with bomb throwing revolutionaries and impoverished peasants? And there are certainly no palm trees to be found in the Black Country, only those stiff small fronds given out to the congregation on the Sunday before Easter and burnt for Ash Wednesday.