

History

In the footsteps of Troitzky and of the Kubbel brothers (part 2)

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In 1934 Alexander Herbstman settled in Leningrad. The young and multi-talented composer from Rostov-on-Don reported in an article in **EG**65 (“Memories of famous composers”) that he had made friends with Troitzky: “It was the time when he prepared his collection of studies to be published. He was alone, and I helped him to check and annotate them”. The problemist Lev Loshinsky (1913-1976) also contributed. The first volume appeared in the same year but the second volume was never published.

Note that Herbstman writes that Troitzky was ‘alone’: we can imagine that, after more than 30 years spent in remote places, Troitzky had been back in a city that was quite different from St. Petersburg, and that many of his friends from bygone days had died. But the situation quickly changed: Troitzky discovered the pleasure of composing in collaboration with others, e.g. with Herbstman, L. Kubbel and Korolkov, even if the total number of joint compositions in his output is modest. Chess life was intense, of course, in an ‘intellectual’ town like Leningrad. In the 1933 Soviet championship, no fewer than 8 out of the 20 participants were from Leningrad and the first five prizes were won by Leningraders! There was also an renowned circle of chess composers in which the Kubbel brothers were especially active. We also note that a large part of the editorial staff of *Zadachy y Etyudy* (1927-1930) consisted of Leningraders and that *Shakhmaty v SSSR* was published in Leningrad until 1938, as was its predecessor *Shakhmatny Listok* (1922-1931).

In the first part of this article, I quickly mentioned the website www.e3e5.com. This St.Petersburg-based website has rich content: interviews with chess players, portraits, articles on chess history, galleries with pictures. My piece of advice to every chess fan who intends to visit Petersburg is that, prior to your journey, you should have a look at the series of articles written by master Vadim Zelmanovich Faibisovich (three times champion of Leningrad), that can be found in the history section of the website. From 2005 to 2009, Faibisovich published a series of 8 articles, each one dealing with an area of the city and compiling an impressive list of places related to chess in Petersburg or Leningrad (a place where a tournament was played, the house or the apartment of a notable chessplayer, etc.). Unfortunately, only two of the articles have been translated into English. The recent 9th article, a sort of postscript with additional material, was published in December 2011.

My first reflex was to seek for information about Troitzky. Curiously, our composer has been overlooked by Faibisovich: none of the three addresses in Petrograd/Leningrad we know for him from various sources is given. The first one (Rojdestvenskaja street 44) has been given in my previous article. The second address, nevertheless, has been widely known since 1995: an article by Oleg Pervakov in **EG**119 (i1996) reported the putting up of a plaque on the outside of the apartment building where Troitzky lived from 1935 till 1942. **EG**119 (i1996) published on p. 736 the picture of the plaque: a footnote in same issue (p. 751), explains that the commemorative plaque was ‘due to the unremitting endeavours of I.V. Titova, daugh-

ter of Troitzky's wife, with the support from the late M. Botvinnik' (the former world champion was still alive when the plaque was installed in 1995). This second address, located in the historic center of Petersburg, is: Moika Embankment 91 (in Russian: наб. р Мойки, 91).

From this one can assume that Troitzky has spent his last years there as well as his very last days until his tragic death during the Leningrad blockade in August 1942. But, during the preparation of this article, I discovered another source that gives contradictory information about this.

First the situation in Leningrad during WWII has to be described. The pre-war population in Leningrad was around 3-3.5 millions inhabitants. The offensive launched by the German army during the summer of 1941 forced a lot of people from surrounding towns to take refuge in the city, adding to the numbers of its population. After the war, official figures gave a number of (approximately) 632,000 people that died during the 900-day long siege (September 1941-January 1944) the city had to endure. The true figures were much higher (more than 1 million actually died), mainly because many of the victims – those who had come from outside – had not been registered. Most of these people died of starvation: historians have shown that only a small percentage of deaths were brought about by bombs and shells. Another factor contributed to this human disaster: the 1941 and 1942 winters were among the harshest ever. When the Germans left the surroundings of the city, there were only 700,000 survivors, among which 300,000 soldiers. This means that many of the inhabitants had been able to leave before the encircling of Leningrad or even despite it. In 1941-42, three waves of evacuation had allowed 1.4 millions of Leningraders to be saved. The first one, in June-August 1941, was mainly organized by train. The second and third waves, on watercrafts, or, during winter, by foot over the lake Ladoga, were much more difficult and not doable for old persons. Civilians, mostly children, left the

town: Boris Spassky is said to have learned the moves during his evacuation by train. For those who could not leave, life was hell: during January 1942 3,500-4,000 civilians died of starvation every day.



Alexey Troitzky

Several great names of Soviet chess, who had refused to quit, perished during the siege: Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky (born 1894) was killed in September 1941 on a barge on Lake Ladoga; Ilya Rabinovich (1891-1942), four time champion of Leningrad (Petrograd) died of malnutrition in a hospital at Perm (then Kirov) after being evacuated. It was reported that he said: "I was champion of Leningrad 11 times [in reality, if he took part in 12 Petrograd or Leningrad championships, he won the title 'only' four times] and can't leave my city at this difficult moment". Others experienced a personal tragedy: international master Piotr Romanovsky (1892-1964) lost his four daughters within a month and was himself found half-dead in his house. All the furniture had been used for firewood... Romanovsky eventually survived after being evacuated.

So, in such circumstances, what could have been the fate of a 75-year old man? Alexander

Herbstman was among those who left had Leningrad in 1941: in his article “Memories of Famous Composers” he reports that he “hurried to Alexey and tried to persuade him leave with [him]. He rejected the idea”. Herbstman refers to the first wave of evacuation, by train: the scene probably took place by the end of August, since the last train left Leningrad on August 28th. After his refusal, Troitzky did not have much time left.

According to some historians, the death of these hundreds of thousands of civilians has not been sufficiently commemorated or even studied in the years that followed WWII. But today, thanks to amazing work by Russian historians, among which Anatoly Razumov, the director of the St-Petersburg-based *Center for Recovered Names* at the National Library of Russia, the memory of these martyred inhabitants is still alive. The *Moscow Times* has de-

scribed Mr. Razumov as follows: “Anatoly Razumov is a bibliographer and historian of the Leningrad region who pursues his task with almost religious devotion. Day after day since 1991, he has worked to recover the names of the people shot and killed in the camps and prisons of northwest Russia”. Indeed Anatoly Razumov has been first known for his *Leningrad Martyrolog 1937-38* but his team also collected, from 1998 to 2006, data about the names of 629,157 persons who perished during the blockade. The listings can be found in <http://visz.nlr.ru> (for queries by Russian names, see: <http://visz.nlr.ru/blockade/search.html>).

Here is the note about Alexey Troitzky (each note indicates the last known address of the victim, the date of his death, and the place where the corpse has been buried, when known):

http://www.visz.nlr.ru/search/lists/blkd/242_410.html

Троицкий Алексей Алексеевич, 1866 г. р. Место проживания: Смольный пр., д. 4. Дата смерти: февраль 1942. Место захоронения: неизвестно. (Блокада, т. 31)

According to this source, Troitzky’s very last address was: Smolny Pr[ospekt], 4. This place is located near the first one given for 1915 in the *Ranneforth’s Schach-Kalender* (same area: Smolny). Let us hypothesize: maybe, for some reasons linked with the intensification of war, Troitzky had to quit the Moika Embankment, just some weeks before his death? Note also that the date of his death is different: February 1942, not 14th of August as often given (e.g. the German Wikipedia page about Troitzky).

Herbstman also reports in his article (EG65) that he worried about K.A.L. Kubbel’s fate, after failing to convince Troitzky.

He writes: “... then I telephoned Kubbel, asking him to help me with my suitcases to the railway station”. Kubbel also refused to leave the city: “he began to make objections, saying that he could not leave his brothers⁽¹⁾ behind just like that”. Herbstman left the city and never saw Kubbel again. In another text for the collection of Kubbel’s chess studies by Timothy Whitworth (first edition, published in 1984), Herbstman just writes about this last encounter with Kubbel: “The date is beyond recall”.

During the mid-twenties Herbstman had been acquainted with Leonid⁽²⁾, Evgeny and Arvid Kubbel. He wrote that “there was an in-

(1) Arvid Kubbel was already dead (see the part of this article devoted to him) but his family had probably not been notified of his death.

(2) Leonid Kubbel was born Karl Arthur Leonid Kubbel. After the 1917 revolution, he used the names Leonid Ivanovich, but as T. Whitworth remarks in his introduction of his 2004 collection of Kubbel’s studies, “he was still K.A.L. Kubbel when he sent compositions abroad, and even at home he continued to use his original initials as well as his adopted ones. From 1926 onwards, he was often accorded both sets of initials when he contributed pieces to Soviet chess magazines: L.I. (K.A.L.) Kubbel. In 1937, however, with the Great Purge raging, this practice came to an end. From then on, he was simply L.I. Kubbel”.

divisible friendship among them”. All three played chess and composed, as did the Behting brothers. Unlike Troitzky, the Kubbel brothers spent most of their life in their native city. There was one notable exception: during their childhood, their father (of Latvian extraction), decided to move from Petersburg to Riga, for professional reasons, but after some months in Riga, he suddenly died there and the family had to come back to Petersburg.

Arvid Kubbel, the elder, was probably the stronger chess player in the family. He took part in three finals of USSR championships and in several Leningrad championships, always with good results. He also composed a lot (500 compositions, mainly three movers in Bohemian style, but also some fine studies). He was arrested in November 1937 under the infamous article 58-1 or Russian SFSR Code penal, accused of counter-revolutionary activity.

During a lot of years, Arvid's fate remained unknown: in his 1981 article for *EG*, Herbstman was not aware he had been executed in

1938. The 1936-1938 years in USSR are known as the years of the great terror (Вольшой террор in Russian). The repression was especially fierce in Leningrad: the purge began after Kirov's assassination in December 1934 (Kirov, the chief of the local Communist Party was a popular leader, who could have become a threat for the Georgian dictator) and Stalin's mistrust of the Leningraders – reputed to be intellectuals with an independent spirit – was very deep. Even after the victory over the Germans, Stalin never returned to the hero city of Peter the Great. Historians have established that more than 65,000 were arrested in the Leningrad region from October 1st 1936 to July 1st 1938. Arrested people had little chance of surviving: “The Leningrad region was one of the bloodiest in the USSR: 87% of people arrested were executed” (according to French historian Nicolas Werth).

Here is the note about Arvid Kubbel extracted from the *Leningrad Martyrology* (volume 7):

Куббель Арвид Иванович, 1889 г. р., уроженец и житель г. Ленинград, латыш, беспартийный, бухгалтер спортобщества "Спартак", проживал: В. О., 10-я линия, д. 39, кв. 28. Арестован 21 ноября 1937 г. Комиссией НКВД и Прокуратуры СССР 3 января 1938 г. приговорен по ст. ст. 58-1а-9 УК РСФСР к высшей мере наказания. Расстрелян в г. Ленинград 11 января 1938 г.

This is also contradicted by the Wikipedia page about Arvid Kubbel (in German) that gives as the cause of his death a nephritis in the Gulag: the Russian text indicates that Arvid was shot in Leningrad on January 11th 1938, after being tried on January 3rd.

We also learn that, by profession, Arvid was an accountant for the Spartak sports society. His last address is given: *V.O* (i.e. Vassil-

ievsky Ostrov, or Vassiliev Island, *10th line, 39, apt 28*. He was arrested on 21st 1937. He was considered to be Latvian (in the USSR, each citizen had his own ‘nationality’).

It seems that Arvid's brothers were not bothered by the Political Police: at least, this is not known. But, like Troitzky, Leonid and Evgeny died as victims of starvation during the siege. We find their notes here:

http://www.visz.nlr.ru/search/lists/blkd/234_1485.html

Куббель Евгений Иванович, 1894 г. р. Место проживания: ул. Чайковского, д. 40, кв. 7. Дата смерти: 1941. Место захоронения: неизвестно. (Блокада, т. 16)
Tchaikovsky st, 40, ap 7. Date of death: 1941.

Куббель Леонид Иванович, 1892 г. р. Место проживания: В. О., 11-я линия, д. 12, кв. 1. Дата смерти: апрель 1942. Место захоронения: Пискаревское кладб. (Блокада, т. 16)

Again, there is a difference with the known dates: for Evgeny, 1941 is given instead of 1942 in the *Russian Encyclopaedia* published in 1990. For Leonid, Yaakov Vladimirov and Yuri Fokin are more precise: they give April 18th in their 1984 book about Kubbel, and they indicate on p. 30 that his very last problem is dated March 7th.... It is not known where Evgeny has been buried, if he was. But Leonid has been buried in the Piskarevskoie cemetery, opened in May 1960, where about 500,000 persons were buried in 186 mass graves.

These notes also give the last known address of the victims. For Evgeny Kubbel, it was Tchaikovsky str, n° 40, apt 7; for Leonid, Vassilievsky Ostrov (Vassilievsky Island), 11st line, n° 12, apt 1.

Vassilievsky Island (Vassilievski Ostrov in Russian) is a historic neighbourhood with canals that Tsar Peter the Great wanted to make the center of his capital. One peculiarity of this part of Petersburg is the series of ‘lines’ going perpendicularly from south to north. But the projects failed because of frequent floods and it was decided to fill up the canals that nevertheless subsequently kept their name (*line* for *embankment*). Today, it is a large island with many historical buildings dating back to the XVIIIth century. In Faibisovich’s article about Vassilievsky Island, we learn that several chess celebrities have lived in this neighbourhood: for instance, Alekhine (3rd line), Romanovsky (11th line), Schiffers (14th line) and even Karpov (17th line). The family of Vladimir Korolkov’s wife, Olga Izmailova Semyonova-Tyan-Shanskaya, lived on the island (8th).

The Kubbel brothers seems to have been attached to this nice quarter, at least in the

30’s⁽¹⁾, since Faibisovich gives two addresses, one for Arvid (4th line, n° 39) and one for Leonid (10th line, n° 39).

Again, note that curiously Arvid’s address (in 1937) according to the *Leningrad Martyrology* is the one given for Leonid according to Faibisovich. Maybe a mistake about the first name? A mistake in the number of the line (since the number of the house, n° 39, is the same...)? Another possibility is that Leonid settled in Arvid’s apartment after his death...

Seventy years after that tragic year with the death of two of the greatest study composers ever, it is far from easy to know what exactly happened. But we can at least imagine with emotion what were their last pitiful moments after a life full of great achievements.

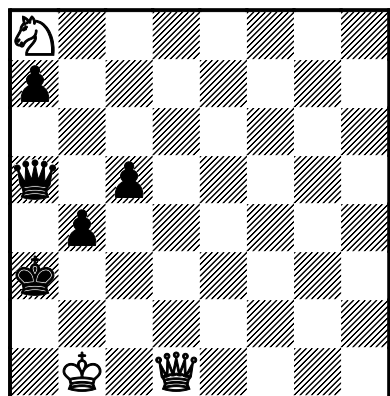
References

- A.O. HERBSTMAN, “Memories of famous composers”, EG65, July 1981
- A.O. HERBSTMAN, “Introduction”, *Leonid Kubbel’s chess endgame studies*, Timothy Whitworth, 1984. This introduction has not been reprinted in the 2004 revised edition (see below).
- Y. VLADIMIROV and Y. FOKIN, *Leonid Kubbel*, Moscow 1984.
- T. WHITWORTH, *Leonid Kubbel’s Chess Endgame Studies*, Cambridge 2004.
- www.e3e5.com: the Petersburg website where Faibisovich articles can be found, in the history section. Their generic title in Russian is: Еще есть адреса (There are still places...). The article about the Vassilevsky island was put on line on June 14th 2005 (only in Russian): www.e3e5.com/article.php?id=303

Special thanks to Oleg Pervakov and Harold van der Heijden.

(1) Another address is known for Leonid Kubbel, from the 1929 *Ranneforths Schach-Kalender* (quoted by E. Winter: <http://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/addresses.html>): Voskressenski Prospekt (Voskresensky Prospekt) 12, W10.

P.1. A.A.Troitzky & L.I. Kubbel
2nd prize *Ceskoslovensky Sach* 1936



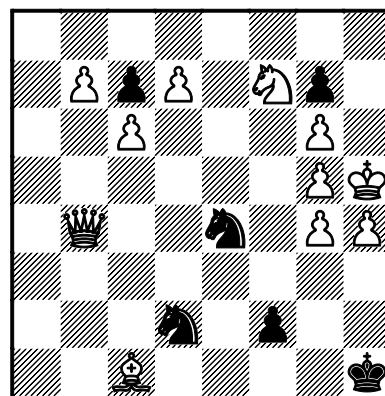
b1a3 4001.03 3/5 Win

(P.1.) 1.Qc1+ Ka4 2.Qc4 Qd8 (a6 3.Kb2 Qd8 4.Qxa6+ Qa5 5.Sb6 mate) **3.Qa6+ Qa5** (black switchback: if 3...Kb3 4.Qa2+ Kc3 5.Qc2+ wins) **4.Sb6+! axb6 5.Qc4** (white switchback) **5...Qa7 (Qa8) 6.Qa2+** wins, or: **5...b5 (Qb5) 6.Qa2** mate.

(P.2.) 1.Qc3 Sxc3 2.d8B (2.d8Q? f1S 3.Qxc7 Sde4 4.Bf4 Se2 5.b8B Sd6 6.Qxd6 Seg3 7.Bxg3 Sxg3 8.Qxg3 stalemate) **2...Se2** (Sce4 3.Bxc7 f1S 4.b8Q Sfg3+ 5.Bxg3 Sf1 6.Be1 Sfg3+ (Seg3+) 7.Qxg3 Sxg3 8.Bxg3 wins) **3.Bxc7 f1S 4.b8B** (4.b8Q? Se4 5.B1f4 Bxf4 6.Bxf4 Sfg3+ 7.Bxg3 Sxg3 8.Qxg3 stalemate) **Se4 5.Bf4** wins.

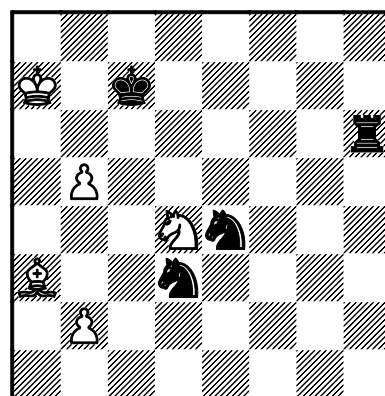
(P.3.) 1.b6+ Rxb6 (Kd7 2.b7 Sec5 3.Bxc5 Sxc5 4.b8S Kc7 5.b4, or 5.Sb5+ and 6.b4 draw) **2.Bd6+! Sxd6** (Rd6; Sb5+) **3.Se6+ Kc6**

P.2. A.A. Troitzky and V.A. Korolkov
1st prize Chigorin Memorial 1938-39



h5h1 1017.73 11/6 Win

P.3. A.A.Troitzky
2nd hon. mention *Shakhmaty v SSSR* 1941



a7c7 0317.20 5/4 Draw

4.Sd4+ (Sd8+? Kb5;) **Kc5 5.Se6+ Kb5 6.Sd4+ Ka5 7.b4+ Sxb4** (Rxb4; Sc6+) **8.Sb3+ Kb5 9.Sd4+** draws.

Errata

In my article about Gurvich (**EG184**), Wolf Rubinchik found the following mistakes :

p. 127, read Lubyanka instead and not Lyubanka.

p. 127, the article in *Pravda* was published on January 28 and not 29.

p. 128, P1: after 1...Ke7 2.Re2+ read 3.Sc3 instead of 3.Sc2.