

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 156

### “Locomotives for Heads”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

*The Jacobins of the twentieth century would not guillotine the capitalists—to follow a good example does not mean copying it. It would be enough to arrest fifty to a hundred financial magnates and bigwigs, the chief knights of embezzlement and of robbery by the banks. It would be enough to arrest them for a few weeks to expose their frauds and show all exploited people who needs the war. Upon exposing the frauds of the banking barons, we could release them, placing the banks, the capitalist syndicates, and all the contractors “working” for the government under workers’ control.*

Vladimir Lenin. Editorial in *Pravda*, July 1917.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 156. Locomotives for Heads.

We last looked in on the situation in Russia back in episode 148, and it’s about time we check in again, as events, you know, continue to transpire. In that previous episode, I told you about the event the Bolsheviks grandly named the “October Revolution,” or sometimes even “The Great October Socialist Revolution.” It actually took place in November by the Gregorian calendar, but the Julian calendar was still in use in Russia at the time, so that explains the “October” in “October Revolution.”

Let me take this opportunity to remind you that for the purposes of this podcast, I’ve been giving you Gregorian dates all along, because I think that’s easier for both of us, all things considered. I’m happy to be able to tell you that the Sovnarkom, the new government installed by the Bolsheviks, switched Russia to the Gregorian calendar less than two months after taking power. Specifically, in Russia Wednesday, January 31, 1918 was followed by Thursday, February 14 for civil purposes. The government explicitly declared that the change was for civil purposes only,

and the Russian Orthodox Church, like most Eastern Christian churches, continues to use the Julian calendar for liturgical purposes to this day.

Setting aside the “October” in “October Revolution,” it’s very much open to debate whether the “Revolution” part of “October Revolution” is a fair description of the event. It was more like a coup, undertaken in secret by one political faction, rather than an out-and-out revolution like, say, the February Revolution. The Bolsheviks themselves must have been a little ashamed of their not-very-revolutionary revolution, which would explain why they played it up as something bigger than it actually was. A huge reenactment was held on the third anniversary in 1920, which was much larger than the actual event. Later Soviet publications would reproduce photographs of the reenactment and pass them off as authentic pictures of the real thing. And in 1928, the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein would direct a film dramatization of the October Revolution, entitled *October*, which likewise would depict the event as far bigger than it actually was.

The October Revolution was not seen as that big a deal in Russia at the time for two reasons. One was that the old Provisional Government was never intended to be permanent anyway; it was merely meant to keep things rolling until the Constituent Assembly could be elected. The Bolsheviks ostensibly seized power to prevent the old government from sabotaging the Constituent Assembly election, or that’s what they said. The new government was still officially a temporary arrangement. The word “provisional” was still used to describe it. The election for the Constituent Assembly was scheduled for November 25, just two and a half weeks after the coup. Once the new assembly was elected and seated, it would take power. So who cares who rules the nation for the next few weeks?

The other reason is that the old Provisional Government hardly had any clout left anyway. Russia was falling to pieces. The economy was collapsing. Law and order were breaking down. The central government in fact controlled very little. Power was devolving to the provinces, some of which were devolving in turn into anarchy. Others, especially the home regions of ethnic minority groups, were moving toward formal independence.

Red Guards, which is what we are now calling the armed workers in the cities who support the Bolsheviks, a sort of socialist militia, seized control of most of Russia’s other major cities within the next few days. Two notable exceptions were Moscow and Kiev. In Moscow, the Bolsheviks captured the Kremlin, the Imperial citadel in the center of Russia’s second most important city, but Provisional Government supporters, including the Mayor of Moscow and the commander of the Moscow Military District were able to retake the Kremlin three days later, on November 10, and capture the arms stored there.

This was not going to be the kind of quick and bloodless takeover as had been accomplished in Petrograd or Minsk or Novgorod. In Moscow, the Bolsheviks now faced their first real opposition. They spent the days that followed recruiting Red Guards from across the region and seizing arms and vehicles in preparation for an all-out assault on the historic fortress. On

November 13, the assault began. After two days of fighting, the defenders surrendered. To their surprise, the Bolshevik commander was merciful, allowing them to leave peacefully, provided only that they surrender their weapons and pledge no further resistance.

In Kiev, the Rada had been setting itself up as the regional government of Ukraine and demanding autonomy from the Provisional Government, probably as the first steps toward independence. The members of the Rada did not necessarily view the fall of the Provisional Government as a bad thing; they had feared Kerensky might move against them. But they denounced the Bolshevik October Revolution as undemocratic and opposed the Red Guards who attempted to take power in Kiev, forcing them out of the city.

Meanwhile, back in Petrograd, there was still the matter of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets. This was the body in the name of which the Bolshevik coup was supposedly undertaken. The Bolsheviks held only a small majority in the Congress, but the representatives from the other socialist parties, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, simplified matters enormously when they responded to the Bolshevik attack on the Provisional Government by walking out of the Congress in protest. This sounded like a better idea than it actually was. The 338 or so remaining Bolshevik representatives took advantage of the absence of their rivals to quickly approve a series of resolutions legitimizing their own coup. They declared all local and regional government powers transferred to the soviets, ordered the release of all Bolshevik prisoners and the arrest of the Provisional Government officials who had imprisoned them. Bolshevik agitators in the Army were ordered released and their right to preach Bolshevik principles to the soldiers was affirmed. Capital punishment in the military was abolished. Again.

But the Bolsheviks were just getting warmed up. Next the Congress passed a decree on land reform which abolished private ownership of land and set out provisions on how to divide land among the peasants and a decree on peace that called on the peoples and governments of all nations fighting the war to begin immediate negotiations for a democratic peace without annexations or indemnities.

This might sound like days or even weeks of work for a body as large as the Congress, but with only Bolsheviks voting, it all passed on November 8, the day after the fall of the old government. They worked through the night, and at 5:15 AM on the ninth, having fully ratified Bolshevik control, the Congress adjourned.

Meanwhile, Alexander Kerensky—remember him?—was trying to rally soldiers to march on Petrograd and retake the capital. But few were willing to follow him. They remembered Lavr Kornilov and Alexander Krymov. Kerensky was able to get a unit of about 700 Cossack cavalry, part of the Third Cavalry Corps formerly commanded by Krymov, to follow him. They headed for Petrograd. Kerensky tried a second time to persuade the commander of the Northern Front, Vladimir Cheremisov, to send additional troops. Again, his plea fell on deaf ears. Meanwhile, the

Bolsheviks in Petrograd were able to rally thousands of Red Guards, who met Kerensky's approaching Cossacks on the outskirts of the city on November 13 and drove them off.

This was the end of Alexander Kerensky as a force in Russia, and he would soon flee the country. But it was not the end of armed resistance. Besides resistance in Ukraine, a Menshevik government seized power in Georgia and declared independence on November 9. Similarly, Cossacks in the Don River region and in Siberia were asserting their own autonomy.

[music: Tchaikovsky, *Piano Concerto No. 2*]

You might be wondering by this time how the other political leaders in Petrograd are taking these developments, particularly the other socialist parties, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. In brief, these other parties still regarded the Bolsheviks as fellow socialists and allies against the forces of counterrevolution. Yes, even now, socialists are more worried about counterrevolution than they are about Bolshevik overreach.

They have a point, in that forces opposed to the new Bolshevik government are massing in the south of the country, including the former emperor's chief of staff, Alexeyev, and Kornilov, the man whose very name has become synonymous with counterrevolution. In contrast, the other socialists regarded the Bolsheviks as misguided, perhaps, too extreme, perhaps, but still fellow socialists and allies in the cause of building the socialist future. They saw no need to resist the Bolsheviks by force, which was just as well since no other party had an armed militia like the Red Guards. The Constituent Assembly would soon be elected, and soon after that, Bolshevik rule will be only a memory, a bump on the road to a better society.

The political party enjoying the most support in Russia just now is the Socialist Revolutionaries. They're likely to have the edge in any democratic election, and indeed, they will get more votes than anyone else when the Constituent Assembly election is held. That's because this is the party of the rural peasantry, and its main policy priority is land reform. But the new Bolshevik decree on land reform pretty much steals the Socialist Revolutionary Party's position on the subject, so that's a reason why the Socialist Revolutionaries aren't particularly interested in picking a fight with the Bolsheviks, even though the party officially opposes the Bolshevik power grab.

In fact, one faction of Socialist Revolutionaries broke with the party over this stance and *endorsed* the Bolshevik takeover. This faction is known to history as the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the other, larger faction the Right Socialist Revolutionaries, which is pretty confusing, but there it is. The Bolsheviks lacked support in the rural regions of Russia and they knew it, hence their embrace of the Socialist Revolutionary proposals on land reform. The Bolsheviks even invited a few Left Socialist Revolutionaries to join the Sovnarkom, the Council of People's Commissars, but the invitation was declined.

Vladimir Lenin was the chair of the council of ministers, making him Kerensky's successor and effectively prime minister of Russia. Other ministers whose names you might recognize are

Joseph Stalin, the token Georgian, who became minister of nationalities, and Leon Trotsky, who became the new foreign minister.

Of course, naming new ministers is one thing; getting the government ministries in Petrograd to obey their new masters was another. When Leon Trotsky visited the Russian foreign ministry for the first time on November 10 and announced himself as the new minister, the reaction of the civil servants was, to quote one eyewitness, “ironic laughter.” Trotsky became angry and demanded they all get to work. Instead, they walked out.

Over the weeks that followed, Petrograd was hit with a series of strikes by civil servants, teachers, and transport and telegraph workers protesting the Bolshevik coup. The world’s first socialist government found itself hamstrung by unrest among its own workers.

The biggest immediate problem was the banks. Banks and bankers were of course principal targets of Bolshevik propaganda. When the Bolsheviks seized power, the bankers shut down their banks and refused to cooperate, in protest against the new government. The Russian State Bank remained open and continued to pay out funds for the military and government workers, but refused to honor Bolshevik checks. On November 20, the new Bolshevik finance minister appeared at the bank along with a force of armed Bolshevik sailors and demanded access to the vault, but the bank directors stood their ground.

The minister returned four days later with more troops. Now the bank directors relented, but the staff at the bank still refused to cooperate. The Bolsheviks declared that unless the workers complied with the new government’s demands, they would all be fired, drafted, and shipped off to the front. The employees walked out, leaving the Bolsheviks empty handed once again. They returned the following day and this time, they took hostages. Five bank officials, including the guy with the keys to the vault. The keys were rushed over to Lenin’s office and presented to him with a flourish. Lenin eyed the keys coldly and explained that he was interested in the bank’s money, not in its keys.

More hostages were taken from among the directors of Petrograd’s private banks. In an episode that sounds like something out of an Austin Powers movie, Lenin demanded a billion rubles in ransom for each of the hostages, but was forced to settle for a million rubles each, and even then, the Bolsheviks were first required to fill out withdrawal slips, which the bank employees reviewed oh-so-carefully before at last releasing the funds.

Clearly, something had to be done about all this counterrevolutionary civil resistance. You will not be surprised to learn that Lenin’s preferred method for dealing with opposition was to create what was initially known as the “All-Russian Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counterrevolution, Speculation, and Sabotage.” It would come to be known as the Cheka, after two of its Cyrillic initials. Cheka would soon evolve into nothing less than the Bolshevik secret police, replacing the hated Imperial secret police organization that had been dissolved after the February Revolution. The Cheka would be the first in a series of secret police agencies that

would be employed to suppress dissent in Russia until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. And, some would say, beyond that. To head the Cheka, Lenin turned to Felix Dzerzhinsky, an ethnic Pole from a minor aristocratic family who had turned leftist radical by his eighteenth birthday. Dzerzhinsky had been in the Emperor's prisons for the previous four years before being released in the political amnesty following the February Revolution, after which he aligned with the Bolsheviks. Under Dzerzhinsky's leadership the Cheka would become notorious for its ruthless suppression of anyone it determined to be counterrevolutionary, acts up to and including mass executions without trial of thousands of people.

In the end, once the Bolsheviks controlled state funds, the resistance among government officials subsided. The Bolsheviks employed a simple strategy—they fired senior civil servants who refused to cooperate, then offered to promote junior officials into those positions, provided of course those officials would first agree to take their orders from Sovnarkom.

With the Congress of Soviets out of the picture, the Ispolkom now firmly controlled by Bolsheviks, and the civil servants neutered, the only remaining obstacle was the Constituent Assembly. The Bolsheviks had pledged to proceed with the election scheduled for November 25 and to hand over control to the Constituent Assembly once it convened. Lenin had no intention of giving up power to anyone, but it would be a little premature to announce that publicly while the Bolsheviks were still struggling to tame the government they supposedly controlled.

For despite the war weariness, the disappointment, the food shortages, the coal shortages, and the general sense of disillusionment in Russia, the Constituent Assembly election continued to be a popular idea. Too popular to oppose. And so, the election took place more or less as scheduled, though there were delays, especially in distant, rural regions, where in some cases the results were not known until January 1918. Over 45 million people voted in the election, making it the largest election in history until this time. No one knows exactly how many eligible voters there were, maybe 80 million, so the turnout was somewhere in the range of 50-60%, a respectable number.

The Socialist Revolutionary Party had the broadest support in the countryside, which was where most of the Russian population lived in 1917, so no one was much surprised that they got the largest share of the votes, about 40%. The Bolsheviks were second, with 24%. Most of the rest of the vote was divided into a variety of regional and ethnic parties, with the Kadets, the Constitutional Democrats, and the Mensheviks each polling under five percent.

Did I say no one was surprised? The Bolsheviks were surprised, or at least annoyed, by their relatively poor performance. Twenty-four percent is not much of a mandate for a political party that claims full control of the government. So that's going to be a problem. The Bolsheviks at once began to question the results and ordered a delay in convening the Constituent Assembly until January 18. And soon *Pravda* was publishing articles questioning why a bourgeois

“constituent assembly” should be granted authority over soviets representing workers, peasants, and soldiers when the latter were obviously more democratic.

But put a pin in that debate for now. We’ll come back to the Constituent Assembly in a future episode, but for now, let’s turn our attention to the war. Do you remember the war?

[music: Tchaikovsky, *Piano Concerto No. 2*]

So the All-Russia Congress of Soviets passed a peace decree on November 8, the day after the Bolshevik coup. What are we to make of that? It may console you to know that the Army didn’t know what to make of that, either. A number of soldiers’ committees in the front-line units passed resolutions approving the peace decree. Others passed resolutions denouncing the Bolshevik takeover of the government. A few of them did both.

The government in Petrograd had then turned its attention to problems closer to home, like getting access to the state funds, leaving the Army to collectively scratch their heads and wonder what the hell was going on. They heard nothing more until November 21, almost two weeks later. On that date, Stavka headquarters in Mogilev received a telegram signed by Lenin, Trotsky, and Nikolai Krylenko, the new war minister—excuse me, people’s commissar for war—directing the commander-in-chief to offer a ceasefire to the German and Austrian commanders.

I wouldn’t blame you if you were finding it hard to keep track of who exactly is the commander-in-chief of the Russian Army lately, so let’s review. Before the February Revolution, Emperor Nikolai himself was commander-in-chief, with Mikhail Alexeyev serving as chief of staff. After the February Revolution and the Emperor’s abdication, the Provisional Government appointed Alexeyev commander-in-chief. Alexeyev picked General Anton Denikin to succeed himself as chief of staff.

I haven’t mentioned Denikin before in this podcast, but his role in the narrative of the Revolution is about to become important, so I’ll mention him now. I did tell you how Kerensky replaced Alexeyev with Alexei Brusilov prior to the Kerensky Offensive, and then replaced Brusilov with Lavr Kornilov after that offensive ended badly. Denikin held on as chief of staff throughout this period.

But then Lavr Kornilov was relieved of command and placed under arrest after the events of the Kornilov Affair, and I should mention that Denikin supported Kornilov during this time and was also placed under arrest. The officer who relieved and arrested both of them was Mikhail Alexeyev, who then became commander-in-chief for a second time, until he resigned just two weeks later, in protest of the way Kerensky had treated Kornilov.

So who’s minding the store at Stavka now? When Alexeyev assumed command for that second time, he appointed General Nikolai Dukhonin his chief of staff. When Alexeyev resigned, he

recommended to Kerensky that Dukhonin be appointed to succeed him. Kerensky never got around to either acting on that recommendation or appointing someone else, so after the Bolshevik coup, Dukhonin was still holding down the fort at Stavka as acting commander-in-chief and no doubt spending a lot of his time wondering just what the new government expected him to do.

Then came that telegram. Dukhonin and his staff puzzled over it. They consulted with the Allied military attachés present at Mogilev, who told them that the Allies had not recognized the Bolshevik government and reminded Dukhonin of Russia's solemn commitment not to enter into a separate peace with the Central Powers. Dukhonin and his staff settled on the bureaucratic quibble that the telegram lacked the proper supporting details from the Ministry of War, like a number and a date, and therefore it wasn't a proper order, and so they took no action. That the telegram lacked the proper documentation was of course because the staff at the war ministry were on strike to protest the Bolshevik takeover. Later that same morning, even as Dukhonin and his staff were still mulling over that telegram, the Allied embassies in Petrograd received messages from Leon Trotsky, laying out a proposal for a general armistice. The Allied embassies agreed not to respond to the proposal on the grounds that none of them recognized the Bolshevik government.

The following morning, at 2:00 AM, less than 24 hours after the initial telegram, Dukhonin was awakened by his staff with the news that Lenin, Stalin, and Krylenko were waiting live at the other end of the telegraph line for an explanation as to why he had not yet acted on yesterday morning's order. Dukhonin told them it was because the Allies had not agreed to the armistice proposal. Lenin had no patience whatsoever with this argument and gave Dukhonin a direct order, forcing Dukhonin to spell out his *real* objection. Lenin's government did not represent the Army or the nation and therefore had no authority to open talks with the enemy. That was all Lenin needed to hear; he told Dukhonin he was dismissed and that Nikolai Krylenko, the People's Commissar for War, would assume personal command of the Army.

Lenin followed up this move by broadcasting a statement to the entire Army, informing them that Dukhonin had been sacked for disobeying the orders of the government and called on soldiers up and down the line to call a truce and begin fraternization with enemy soldiers. He also warned the troops not to allow counterrevolutionary generals to sabotage the peace. Dukhonin countered with his own message to the troops, telling them that Lenin's government was not recognized by the Allies and that Lenin was fomenting civil war.

The following day, November 23, Leon Trotsky dropped a series of bombshells. A sympathetic official had given him access to the foreign ministries secret files, and now he was making them public. The secret Allied agreement with Greece, promising it pieces of Turkish and Bulgarian territory in exchange for entering the war (episode 155). Another secret agreement with Romania, offering Hungarian Transylvania in exchange for entering the war (episode 124). The secret London agreement with Italy, offering her the Tyrolean Alps, Trieste, and the Dalmatian



coast in exchange for entering the war (episode 101). And the biggest bombshell of all: the Sykes-Picot Agreement, in which the British and the French had offered Russia control of Constantinople and the Straits and eastern Anatolia, in exchange for Russian acquiescence to Britain and France dividing up the Near East (episode 120). In the days that followed, *Pravda* and *Izvestia* printed out the full texts of these agreements, airing out the Allies' dirtiest laundry.

Ever since the war began, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had been loudly proclaiming that the war served only the interests of the ruling class, that it was a callous and savage sacrifice of the lives of ordinary people, made so that the imperialists and capitalists could expand their estates and their portfolios. Such accusations were brushed off by most of their opponents as fevered conspiracy theories concocted by a gang of crazed radicals. Now, what had been dismissed as the ranting of addled extremists had been laid out in black and white on documents that were effectively confessions, signed by the most prominent names among the very ruling class that stood accused.

The following day, the same day that the election for the Constituent Assembly was being conducted, the new government transmitted its peace proposal by radiotelegraph to the German Eastern Front military headquarters at Brest-Litovsk. *Izvestia* published an article reporting that the United States government was suspending the line of credit it had offered the old Provisional Government, leaving over \$100 million worth of credit out of the original \$335 million unspent. Ships bound for Russia with American food and military and economic aid had been ordered to turn around and head for home. *Izvestia* editorialized that "the United States has declared a kind of boycott against us...It would seem that the North American plutocrats are ready to trade locomotives for the heads of Russian soldiers."

These developments were a public relations boon for the Bolsheviks, and couldn't have come at a worse time for Dukhonin, who now looked like a lackey for the New York and London capitalists keen on increasing their own profit margins by spilling Russian blood. Meanwhile, Commissar Krylenko was on his way to Mogilev to relieve Dukhonin, bringing with him Red Guards from Petrograd. Dukhonin sent loyal troops up the rail line to intercept Krylenko and bar his way. This forced Krylenko to cool his heels for a time in Dvinsk, but he put the time to good use, sending messages to the Army ordering them to end the fighting, begin fraternizing with enemy soldiers, and above all, to "treat with contempt the lies...of General Dukhonin's gang."

It worked, and Dukhonin's ability to assert authority over the army quickly collapsed. Sensing the inevitable, Dukhonin packed up Stavka headquarters, including the communication equipment, planning to relocate somewhere safer, like the Don Cossack region. That's in the southwest, the region between Ukraine and the Caspian Sea, and north of the rebelling Caucasian region.

Why was Dukhonin interested in this particular region? Well, to answer that, I have to introduce another Russian Army general, the 56-year-old Alexei Kaledin. Kaledin was a career Army

officer, son of another career officer, and a Cossack whose roots were in the Don River valley region. Until recently, he was commander of the Russian Eighth Army. You may recall that the Eighth Army began the war under the command of Brusilov; when Brusilov got promoted to command of the whole Southwest Front, he was succeeded as commander of the Eighth Army by Kaledin. But Kaledin was dismissed from command of the Eighth Army in April 1917 because he resisted the democratic reforms of the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government, and became one of the many, many military commanders sacked by the new war minister, Alexander Kerensky, for insufficient enthusiasm for the government's new democratic army, episode 145.

By the way, after Kaledin was relieved of command of the Eighth Army, he was replaced by Lavr Kornilov, just after Kornilov had resigned the command of the Petrograd Garrison. Funny how these names keep coming up. And that's the Eighth Army, by the way, not the Seventh Army. I believe I mistakenly said back in episode 145 that Kornilov commanded the Seventh Army. Sorry for the confusion.

But getting back to Kaledin: after Kerensky sacked him for resisting democratic reforms like soldier's councils and the end of capital punishment, Kaledin returned to the land of his ancestors, the Don Cossack region. This is an area along the lower Don River, where there is a semi-autonomous Cossack community, and I should say, as the Provisional Government in faraway Petrograd grows weaker, the Don Cossacks became increasingly autonomous. Kaledin went to Novochoerkassk, which is a sort of half Cossack military camp, half unofficial capital of the autonomous Cossacks of the region, where he took up a leadership position among his people.

When the Kornilov Affair erupted, Kaledin emerged as a vocal Kornilov supporter among the Cossacks, so much so that word of his support made it all the way to Petrograd. After Kornilov was imprisoned, Kerensky sent a telegram to the civilian authorities in Novochoerkassk, directing them to arrest Kaledin.

But Kerensky's directives were carrying little weight in the Don valley by then, and nothing was done. When the Bolsheviks took over, Kaledin denounced the new government as illegitimate and declared that the Don Cossacks would manage their own affairs in defiance of Petrograd unless or until the Provisional Government was restored.

In other words, General Kaledin and the Don Cossacks were in revolt against the Bolsheviks, and it seems Dukhonin intended to move all of Stavka to Novochoerkassk, and there link up with the Cossacks and use their lands as a base from which to rally the Russian Army against the Bolsheviks.

Sadly for Dukhonin, his plan never got off the ground. He contacted the Ukrainian Rada to ask permission to pass through the territory of the fledgling nation, but they refused, perhaps suspecting some plot. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik propaganda was having its intended effect.

Even the loyal units Dukhonin had sent up the rail line to block Krylenko abandoned him, and Krylenko made his way to Mogilev.

Dukhonin's last official act as commander-in-chief of the Russian Army was to order the release of the still-imprisoned Generals Kornilov and Denikin. When Krylenko's Red Guards arrived in Mogilev and heard the news that Dukhonin had released the two most hated counterrevolutionaries in all Russia, they took matters into their own hands. Krylenko tried to stop them, even going so far as to stand in their way, but he was shoved aside and the Red Guards took out their rage against Dukhonin, who was beaten and bayoneted until he was dead. The Red Guards stripped the body naked, tied it to a post, and spent the next couple of days using it for target practice.

And so Nikolai Krylenko became commander of what was left of the Russian military, which wasn't much. The Army was disintegrating, and it was just as well, because the Russian state could no longer support it. Even after all the desertions, there were millions more Russians in uniform than the military had the resources to feed. Krylenko had no choice. In early December, he began discharging soldiers wholesale, by year of birth. By this time, the Germans had agreed to an armistice and to the opening of peace negotiations, meaning the Bolsheviks had snatched a political victory from the jaws of disaster. Lenin and company could now boast—and they did boast—that they had fulfilled their promise to end the war and demobilize the army.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, and I'd particularly like to thank Tim for making a donation and thank you Juan Pablo for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help keep the words flowing and the bits going, so if you'd like to help out, visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons. And if you haven't gotten around to it yet, please do leave a rating and review at the iTunes store, which is another way you can help keep *The History of the Twentieth Century* humming along.

In an earlier episode on the Russian Revolution, episode 143, I told the story of Lenin's return to Russia in 1917 and also took the opportunity to ventilate a little about how this story was taught to me in high school history. Which is all well and good, but along the way, I wondered out loud whether it was still being taught that way today and grumbled that yes, it probably was. I must have been feeling grumpy that day. Well, a listener who teaches high school history in New York State recently emailed me to object and assures me that high school history has indeed moved on from Cold War myopia and he and his colleagues now teach a more nuanced interpretation of those events.

Let me just say first, that I am delighted to hear this, and second, yes, I suppose it was a little presumptuous of me to slander an entire profession without any knowledge or evidence to back it up, so I apologize to the history teachers of America for my unwarranted assumption.

I must have been feeling really grumpy that day.

But I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue the story of events in Russia, both regarding the war and the political situation in Petrograd. A Path Strewn with Roses, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I need to get you caught up on the doings of some of these rogue Russian Army generals. Mikhail Alexeyev, the general who had been the Emperor's chief of staff and later twice himself commander-in-chief of the Russian Army, made his way south after the Bolshevik takeover to meet up with Kaledin and the Don Cossacks and began to raise an army to oppose the Reds.

Lavr Kornilov and Anton Denikin, whom Dukhonin had released from prison, also made their way to the center of Cossack resistance. That reunion of must have been a little awkward, considering the last time they'd met, Alexeyev had relieved Kornilov and Denikin and placed them both under arrest. Also turning up in Novocherkassk soon after was Alexander Lukomsky, who had also served in the Russian general staff under Kornilov.

This collection of former Army officers began recruiting a new anti-Bolshevik army and in December, a unit of just 500 Cossacks captured the predominantly Russian city of Rostov-on-the-Don, driving out the pro-Bolshevik soviet. This loose confederation of anti-Bolsheviks didn't agree on much, but they did see eye-to-eye on three points. First, the Bolsheviks had to go, second, Russia must remain a single, unified nation, and third, they would reach out to the Allies for aid and assistance. And so began what history will know as the White Army.

[music: Closing War Theme]