

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 183

### “1919 – Russia I”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

*Our situation has never been so dangerous as it is now. The imperialists were busy among themselves. But now one of the groups has been wiped out by the group of the English, the French, and the Americans. They consider their main task to be to smother world Bolshevism, to smother its main center, the Russian Soviet Republic.*

Vladimir Lenin, speaking to the Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, November 1918.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 183. 1919 – Russia, part one.

This is the eighth episode in our 1919 World Tour, and it brings us back to Russia, a nation and a topic we've been away from for too long. We talked about Russia most recently in episode 163, when I told you the story of the Czechoslovak Legion and the beginning of armed resistance to Bolshevik rule. That took us up to about summer of 1918. Then in episode 166, I told you about political developments in Russia and the landings of Allied troops in the far north and in Vladivostok.

But we're not yet fully in sync with our 1919 World Tour. There's more to say about Russia in 1918. For example, the other side, the armed anti-Bolshevik resistance in Russia that's just getting organized as the White movement. I left that story hanging in the middle of 1918. So before we push on into 1919, the decisive year of the Russian Civil War, we'll first need to circle back to summer of 1918 and trace the development of the White movement into a force that by the end of the year was ready to challenge Bolshevik rule.

In episode 156, I told you about the early development of armed resistance to the Bolsheviks, which began in almost at once after the October Revolution. It began in the Cossack heartland, organized and led by Alexei Kaledin, a Cossack and a former general of the Imperial Army.

The Cossacks were accustomed to a degree of autonomy from the Imperial government in exchange for their military service, and they had their own systems of democratic decision-making and of military recruitment and mobilization. So it was only natural that resistance would coalesce here. After being dismissed by Karsky, Kaledin was able to return home and get himself elected to a leadership position at Novocherkassk, which you can think of as sort of the Don Cossack capital, and he was able to recruit a force of 15,000 or so Cossacks. All this was already in place at the time of the October Revolution, making it a simple matter for Kaledin to declare that the Cossacks did not recognize the new government, and to back that up with force of arms.

I told you too, the story of the Bolshevik takeover of the Russian Army. Those Imperial Army officers who opposed the Bolsheviks fled south to where Kaledin's Cossacks held sway and began recruiting their own military force, called the Volunteer Army. Among them were military commanders we've already met, most notably Mikhail Alexeyev, Lavr Kornilov, and Anton Denikin. These two forces coexisted in the same territory, an alliance of convenience that will become the White Army. And just to help you get a picture in your head, the area in which the Cossacks and the Volunteer Army were organizing was the region of Russia east of Ukraine. Roughly the lands north of the Caucasus Mountains and east of the Black Sea.

In December 1917, just a month after the October Revolution, Lenin was already calling this conflict a civil war and was using it as the justification for arresting his political opponents in Petrograd. Another month later, the new Volunteer Army, now about five thousand strong, managed to capture the nearby Russian city of Rostov-on-the-Don. The Bolshevik government faced a number of threats, including British troops landing in the far north, Ukraine asserting its independence, and of course the German Army looming in the west. But Lenin and his government judged, probably correctly, that the biggest single threat facing them was the White forces in the southeast and they sent the best soldiers in the fledgling Red Army, about 7,000 of them, to deal with the counterrevolutionaries.

The Red Army was initially successful. By February 1918, they had retaken Rostov-on-the-Don as well as the Cossack city/encampment of Novocherkassk. This latter defeat sent Kaledin, the Cossack leader into a spiral of despair that ended in his suicide. The commander of the Volunteer Army, Lavr Kornilov, led his force farther south and east in a desperate winter retreat and search for supplies that history calls the "Ice March." In April, during a failed attempt by the Volunteer Army to take the city of Ekaterinodar, a stray artillery shell killed Kornilov.

And that's where I left this part of the story in episode 163. The news of the death of Kornilov was received in Moscow with great rejoicing. If you remember his role in the Kornilov Affair,

when Kornilov either tried to overthrow the Provisional Government, or perhaps was framed, his name was synonymous with the worst of the right-wing czarist reactionary enemies of the revolution. Not only among Bolsheviks, but among Kerensky's supporters, too. After the Volunteer Army withdrew, jubilant Bolshevik supporters exhumed Kornilov's body from the grave where it had been laid and burned it on the town trash dump. Take that, counterrevolutionaries. Lenin declared the civil war over. The death of Kornilov was the death of the counterrevolution.

But Lenin's declaration was a little premature, as you're going to find out over the next three episodes. The Red Army may have occupied Cossack lands, but they had few supporters there. Also, by this time the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been signed and the German Army was moving into Ukraine. By May, the Germans had taken control of Rostov, which had been the major Bolshevik base in the region, and its loss squeezed the supply lines of the Red Army, forcing them to pull back. The occupation of Don Cossack lands lasted only a few weeks, but did plenty to alienate the locals.

Those Don Cossacks replaced Kaledin with a new leader, Pyotr Krasnov, another former Imperial Army general, who proved to be an inspiring and popular leader and by the summer of 1918, he had mobilized a much larger Cossack force, now numbering about 40,000. Krasnov was willing to make nice with the Germans, even writing appropriately deferential letters to Kaiser Wilhelm. In return, his sympathetic new neighbors, the Imperial German Army, began supplying Krasnov's Cossacks with modern weapons, including artillery and machine guns. Much of this equipment was captured Russian arms.

So to summarize: by the summer of 1918, the Don Cossacks, despite having been trounced a few months earlier, are back and stronger than ever, with greater numbers and better equipment, and also with their flanks protected by the Germans in Ukraine and by the Volunteer Army covering their rear. All this has happened while the German occupation has hampered any response from the Red Army.

And adding to Lenin's woes, three new enemies of the Russian Soviet Republic have appeared farther to the east. Moscow no longer has the luxury of sending all its best soldiers against a single enemy.

[music: Rachmaninoff, *Études Tableaux*]

Siberia is a vast region of Russia, accounting for more than three-quarters of its total land area, though at this time it was home to less than 15% of its population. Most of the inhabitants of Siberia were ethnic Russian farmers; few were industrial workers or intelligentsia.

In the November 1917 election for the Constituent Assembly, the Bolsheviks had polled less than ten percent of the Siberian vote. The largely agrarian region gave most of its support to the agrarian party, the Socialist Revolutionaries. But Siberia did not have great landowners nor large

numbers of landless peasants, so land reform is a less compelling issue here, though Siberian farmers certainly resented the Bolshevik confiscation of their grain to feed the cities to the west.

As you already know from episode 163, the Czechoslovak Legion rose up against the Bolsheviks in mid-1918 and began taking control of rail stations along the Trans-Siberian Railway from Chelyabinsk to Vladivostok. To put that railroad into perspective, allow me to offer an American comparison. Chelyabinsk to Vladivostok is a somewhat greater distance than Los Angeles to Boston. This is the first of the three anti-Bolshevik forces emerging in Siberia that I alluded to a moment ago.

The Czechoslovak Legion uprising was the catalyst that helped draw other anti-Bolshevik forces out into the open, much in the same way the Don Cossack resistance had drawn anti-Bolsheviks to that region to form the Volunteer Army.

Siberia had its Cossacks, too. And it had thousands of former Imperial Army officers and disgruntled civilian political figures, including many Kadets, who had headed east after the October Revolution. From all these groups formed a Provisional Siberian Government, based in Omsk. It had a flag, green and white, representing the forests and snows of Siberia. And by the end of 1918, it had an army also approaching forty thousand.

But just as the vast distances of Siberia made it difficult for Moscow to assert its authority over the region, it created the similar challenges for the new Provisional Siberian Government. And this government, dominated as it was by liberal politicians and monarchist army officers from Great Russia, was considerably more conservative than the local population, the ones who had supported the Socialist Revolutionaries.

And at the same time this Provisional Siberian Government was forming, a committee of Constituent Assembly members came together at Samara, a city a thousand miles to the west, and claimed for itself the authority of the Constituent Assembly, Russia's first and only elected national government. This committee was predominantly Socialist Revolutionary, as the full Constituent Assembly had been, and was thus almost as distant politically as it was geographically from the Provisional Siberian Government. These two governments even fought something of a trade war in their early days. Omsk would not ship grain west and Samara would not ship manufactured goods east.

It didn't take very long for the military figures in Siberia and the leaders of the Czechoslovak Legion and the military representatives of the Allies to figure out that this was no way to run a counterrevolution. They pressed the two governments to send representatives to meet at a conference in September 1918 in the city of Ufa, which lies between Samara and Omsk. There the parties agreed to combine and form a provisional all-Russian government that would meet in Omsk, with the understanding that the already-elected Constituent Assembly would eventually form the basis of the Russian government, once the Bolsheviks were deposed.

Why Omsk? Because unlike the Siberian government in Omsk, the rump Constituent Assembly in Samara had no military leaders and was incapable of raising the armed forces it would need to hold back the Red Army, which by summer had turned away from the Don Cossack region and the Volunteer Army in the south and was now moving against Samara, which would in fact fall to the Red Army on October 7.

This was unfortunate for the struggling White movement in Siberia. Lenin and Trotsky had chosen to target Samara out of political considerations. They believed a Constituent Assembly led by Socialist Revolutionaries challenged Bolshevik legitimacy, and that this political challenge was a graver threat than some reactionary alliance of Imperial Army officers and Cossacks, who were in fact farther away in the Don River region. The Samara government was closer to Moscow and it also controlled some of Russia's arms factories in the Urals and it had the support of the workers who kept those factories going.

But by the time the Red Army took Samara in October, the rump Constituent Assembly had already agreed to merge with the White government and military and had moved east to Omsk. Behind them lay the Trans-Siberian railway, controlled by the Czechoslovak Legion all the way to Vladivostok. And Vladivostok itself was occupied by Allied armies and patrolled by Allied navies.

The occupation force in Vladivostok was composed of Japanese, American, and British soldiers, and they were there ostensibly to protect stockpiles of Allied arms and munitions that had been sent to bolster the Russian war effort and also to safeguard the evacuation of the Czechoslovak Legion. But the Japanese, who had the largest military force in the Russian Far East, amounting to some 70,000 soldiers had greater designs on the region. They were hoping to carve out a Japanese territory, or at least a Japanese sphere of influence, in the Russian Pacific. Japanese troops occupied positions in Russia as far inland as Irkutsk, near Lake Baikal, about 1400 miles west of Vladivostok, as the crow flies, though Japanese troops would never become involved in the Civil War, and the Japanese government would never get the Siberian territory it coveted.

The second-largest force in Vladivostok belonged to the Americans, who numbered about 8,000. The Americans were there because the European Allies, especially Britain, did not trust the Japanese and pressed the Americans to send troops as a check on Japan's ambitions. Woodrow Wilson and the US Army were never very enthusiastic about this mission at a time when the Americans were trying to get as many soldiers as they could into France, but Wilson grudgingly agreed. These American soldiers never ventured very far from Vladivostok and never got directly involved in the Civil War either.

There were also a few thousand each of Canadian, Polish, Italian, Chinese, British, and French soldiers in Vladivostok to round out the occupation. A few British soldiers traveled west all the way to Omsk to serve as the British military mission to the new Provisional All-Russian Government. The Allies, especially the British, began to think more ambitiously about the

mission of their forces in Siberia, and imagine how this White government, supplied with Allied arms delivered to Vladivostok and then shipped west along a Trans-Siberian Railway garrisoned by the Czechoslovak Legion, might overthrow Lenin and then re-engage the Germans on the Eastern Front.

Yes, this certainly was an ambitious idea. But such a strategy would require a huge Allied investment in materiel and in troops to move it and keep it secure. No such effort would ever materialize. And even if it had, if you think back to the Russo-Japanese War, episodes 31-35, you'll remember that the Trans-Siberian Railway proved to be too long and thin a soda straw to deliver the soldiers and supplies needed to sustain the Russian war against Japan in 1905. It wouldn't have worked any better in the opposite direction.

[music: Rachmaninoff, *Études Tableaux*]

The year 1918 saw the Bolshevik government gradually consolidate its power. In some sense, the story of the Bolshevik government in 1918 is the story of the Provisional Government in 1917, told in reverse. It begins with a nation in chaos and a government whose authority and reach is dubious and ends with a government much more firmly in control.

How did the Bolshevik government succeed where the Provisional Government failed? That's a complicated question I could easily spend a whole episode analyzing it, but at least in part, it comes down to the fundamental nature of revolutions. Revolutions happen when a society reaches a sufficiently large consensus that the existing government needs to go. But once the existing government is gone, the consensus usually breaks down quickly because there never was an agreement over what should replace it.

Such was the case following the February Revolution. The old Imperial government was held in such contempt that in the end there was virtually no one in Russia willing to fight for it any longer, not even the Army or the police or even the aristocracy. In some sense, though, the February Revolution was a victim of its own success. The change of government happened so easily and quickly, and the old Imperial government was so feared and hated that many supporters of the revolution had difficulty believing they had truly won. They never stopped worrying about the seemingly inevitable Imperial counterrevolution, though in hindsight we can see that counterrevolution had virtually no constituency in Russia in 1917.

The fear of counterrevolution was so great that over the course of 1917, more moderate revolutionary leaders gradually discredited themselves by their reluctance to embrace rapid and radical change, the biggest change of all being an end to the war. Public opinion became more radical and the central government became weaker, and in this environment, the radical and dedicated Bolshevik movement thrived.

Once Lenin and his followers seized control of what was left of the machinery of the state, they understood better than any other political group in Russia the need to prove their revolutionary

credentials by actually, you know, changing things. Big things. Quickly. And so we see in a matter of weeks the end of the war, the demobilization of the army, and independence for minority nationalities. And that's just the beginning.

It worked. The Bolsheviks successfully positioned themselves as the *real* revolutionaries. And the corollary to that was that anyone who opposed them was a counterrevolutionary, someone looking to bring back the bad old days of the czar.

But it wasn't merely shrewd political positioning that secured control for the Bolsheviks, who are by now calling themselves "communists." I already told you another part of the story, the Red Terror that began with the assassination attempt on Lenin in August. The Bolsheviks killed some 15,000 political opponents by the end of 1918, consolidating their own power while also making it impossible for any rival socialist political parties, like the Socialist Revolutionaries or the Mensheviks, to support the Bolsheviks from a political distance. You either joined the communists fully, or you were their enemy. Take your pick.

And sheer exhaustion was another factor. Revolutions are tiring. After a while, people begin to yearn for a return to stability. The Bolsheviks were fortunate to be in the driver's seat at the moment revolutionary fatigue set in.

Economically, Soviet Russia was a mess. The Bolsheviks had expected that cutting out the capitalist parasites and fully socializing the economy would create an economic boom. Instead, they got the other thing. Nationalizing the banks did nothing to boost the economy. Factories controlled by their own workers did not suddenly become more efficient. Factories in 1919 were only producing at about 20% of pre-war capacity.

Maybe the capitalists were hoarding the nation's wealth. The communists called on the people to "expropriate the expropriators," as the saying went. Wealthy Russians' homes and properties were looted, but the wealth seized was not enough to make any difference.

So the state of the revolution was still grim on November 7, 1918, the first anniversary of the October Revolution. In Moscow, they honored this occasion with the dedication of a sculpture to Marx and Engels in front of the Bolshoi Theatre. In a speech before the Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Lenin declared, "Germany has caught fire and Austria is burning out of control." Two days later, he told the delegates that "we have never been so near to international proletarian revolution as we are now." But he also had words of warning, which I quoted at the top of the episode. The Allies, now victorious over the Central Powers, were bound to turn their attention next to dealing with the socialist revolution. And the homeland of the socialist revolution was Russia.

At this moment of history, Lenin and the Bolshevik movement he leads still believed that the revolution that they had begun in Russia was about to sweep the rest of the world. Even so, the sudden collapse of the Central Powers surprised Moscow as much as it had Paris or London or

Washington. For the Bolsheviks, the minus side of this development was that, with the Central Powers out of the war, Allied navies could now reach Russia through the Baltic or Black Seas. Allied navies were already patrolling off Russia's northern ports of Archangel and Murmansk as well as Vladivostok in the Far East. The Allies had landed ground forces in both places. The end of the war would open the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea to Allied navies and potentially to further troop landings. And indeed, Allied navies would appear in both the Black and Baltic Seas, and small French and Greek detachments would land on the Black Sea coast.

Now that their quarrel with Germany was over, the capitalist-imperialist powers were moving to strangle the proletarian revolution in its crib. On the plus side, though, the collapse of the Central Powers meant that their armies would no longer threaten the proletarian revolution. Even better, the disappearance of those armies opened the way for Russia to reclaim what it had signed away in the now-repudiated Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

And so began the Red Army advance westward, almost as soon as the Armistice took effect. We already covered the particulars of this advance in the episodes on Poland and the Baltic States, so I won't repeat it all here, so I'll just add two observations to what I said in those episodes. First, with the Red Army moving west to retake the lost territories of the Baltic States, Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine, you might wonder why there was no corresponding effort to reclaim Finland.

The answer is that Finland was something of a special case. Finland had been incorporated into the Russian Empire more recently than any of the other lost territories and even afterward it had maintained a stronger separate identity. Finland was a large country and the revolution in Finland had already been defeated. All these factors combine to make the prospect of reigniting the Finnish revolution look pretty farfetched. Never mind. If Finland can't be made into another worker's paradise, then Moscow can respect its independence while boasting of how anti-imperialist the new Russia is. Such is the beauty of Bolshevik propaganda.

The other question you might ask is why Lenin and his government would prioritize sending Red Army forces westward while all these large White Army forces were gathering in the east and the south with the express intent of overthrowing them. The answer to this question is partly ideological and partly practical. Ideologically, the Bolsheviks believed that central Europe was ripe for revolution and the time to strike was now; practically, the Red Army was large enough that it could spare a few tens of thousands of soldiers for the western campaign. This amounted to only about 10% of the total Red Army, but if they were successful, revolutionary Ukraine or Poland—or Germany or Hungary—might repay the favor many times over by sending their own Red Armies east to put down the looming counterrevolution. It was a low-cost operation with a high potential reward.

But as you know from those earlier episodes, the Red Army had the numbers, but lagged in training, equipment, and organization, and the 1919 advances against the Baltic States and



Poland would fail. Also bear in mind that the Bolsheviks may have thought themselves revolutionary comrades of the oppressed proletarian masses to the west, but the Red Army, with a few notable exceptions like the Latvian Riflemen, was an ethnic Russian army. The Poles and Lithuanians and the other peoples of the lands to the west did not see the approaching soldiers as liberators. They saw only new and not very attractive Red Army uniforms clothing the same old imperialist Russians who had oppressed them for centuries.

On November 17, 1918, just ten days after Lenin celebrated the first anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow and six days after the Armistice took effect on the Western Front, a military coup in Omsk seized control of the Provisional All-Russia Government, less than two months after it had been formed. The two factions that had combined to make the Omsk government never had gotten over their mutual unease. To the liberals and the monarchists, and especially to the military leadership, the Socialist Revolutionaries in the rump Constituent Assembly were a bunch of crazy troublemakers hardly any better than the Bolsheviks. To the Socialist Revolutionaries, they alone held the mandate of the Russian people, while their coalition partners looked dangerously counterrevolutionary—the liberals and the monarchists, and especially the military leadership. It was the same distrust that we saw bring down the Provisional Government back in 1917.

The White military government in Omsk arrested the Socialist Revolutionary members of the government and hustled them out of the city. Senior figures were exiled from Russia altogether; others were merely forced to leave Omsk. Many headed west and returned to Soviet Russia. Victor Chernov, the leader of the Socialist Revolutionaries and former President of the Constituent Assembly, ended up in Paris, and later the United States, where he died in 1952.

This bloodless coup installed the government's war minister as its new leader. He was the 45-year old former Imperial Russian Navy Admiral Alexander Vasilyevich Kolchak. We met Admiral Kolchak before, in episodes 144 and 167. He had taken command of the Russian Black Sea Fleet back in 1916. It was under his command that the Imperial Russian Navy reclaimed naval superiority in the Black Sea, raided Turkish shipping, and began the planning for an amphibious assault on Constantinople, which never happened because the February Revolution happened first. The Provisional Government bowed to public disapproval and cancelled the Constantinople operation.

Kolchak was among the many senior military commanders dismissed by Alexander Kerensky in June 1917. He remained outspoken on the need of Russia to keep up the fight against the Central Powers and vocally opposed the easing of military discipline under the Petrograd Soviet's Order Number One. Kolchak was regarded as a hero by the conservative pro-war, pro-military right, the same groups that supported Lavr Kornilov, which is why in August Kerensky shipped Kolchak off to America, ostensibly to brief Russia's new ally on its naval situation.

Kolchak had completed his consultations with the US Navy and was on his way back to Russia via Japan when the October Revolution overthrew the Provisional Government. Still fiercely committed to the Allied cause, Kolchak offered to serve in the British military, but the British told him that he could be of greater service by returning to Russia to help overthrow the Bolsheviks and bring his country back into the war. So after the Czechoslovak Legion secured the Trans-Siberia Railway, Kolchak entered Russia at Vladivostok and headed east, intending to join the White army forces mustering in Siberia.

But instead, the Siberian Regional Government took him on as its war minister. His status as one of the highest-ranking officers in the old Imperial military, his anti-leftist reputation, and his contacts with the British and American militaries made him an attractive candidate for the post. Later, when the Siberian government joined with the rump Constituent Assembly to form the Provisional All-Russia Government, Kolchak became their war minister.

After the coup, he was named the Supreme Ruler of Russia, basically the military dictator of the White movement. In a statement released the day after the coup, Kolchak declared its only purpose was the creation of a more effective fighting force. He disavowed any political ambitions, stating that his only goal was to overthrow the Bolsheviks and restore law and order so that the Russian people could then choose their form of government peacefully and democratically.

The coup would indeed help make the White Army more efficient, but it also meant the White movement had shed its one and only claim to democratic legitimacy. Future Soviet historiography will accuse the British of engineering the coup, but there's no evidence to support that claim, though it is true that the British had that military mission in Omsk. The head of the mission, a General Alfred Knox, was quite the admirer of Kolchak, and it is not hard to believe he might have given tacit approval, even encouragement, to the coup plotters.

That brings us up to speed on the situation in the east. Let's now turn our attention back to the south of Russia, where the Don Cossacks and their allies the Volunteer Army are rebuilding.

The arrival of the Germans in Rostov gave the Whites some breathing room as did the Red Army redeploying its best troops to deal with Samara. By summer, the Don Cossacks had retaken control of their homeland. With their flanks guarded by the Germans and the Volunteer Army, their leader, Pyotr Krasnov, was ready to go on offense against Soviet Russia. He chose as his target the city of Tsaritsyn, which lies at the point where the Tsaritsa River empties into the Volga. With the loss of Rostov, Tsaritsyn became the most important Red Russian city in the region.

Tsaritsyn was important as a river port on the mighty Volga River and during the Great War it had grown into an important industrial center. The German occupation of Rostov cut the main rail line that ran south from Moscow to southern Russia, an important agricultural region, and the Caucasus, a key source of mineral wealth. With that rail link gone, the next best connection was

an indirect route that ran through Tsaritsyn. The loss of Tsaritsyn would cut off south Russia and the Caucasus from Moscow, while opening up at least the first leg of a potential communication line north along the Volga to connect the White forces in the south with the gathering White movement in the east.

The defense of Tsaritsyn was in the hands of a loyal Bolshevik born in Ukraine to Russian parents, the 37-year-old Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov. Earlier in the year, Joseph Stalin had arrived in Tsaritsyn, dispatched by Moscow to oversee grain requisitions from south Russia to feed the urban masses to the north. Unfortunately for Stalin, there was no grain available to expropriate because the Don Cossacks were in revolt and would soon be laying siege to Tsaritsyn.

But Stalin and Voroshilov, two old Bolsheviks, saw eye to eye on the need to defend Tsaritsyn at all costs as a crucial transportation and communication hub. They were also in agreement on revolutionary military principles, as in they placed their faith in armed workers' militias rather than Trotsky's developing Red Army, commanded as it was by Imperial Army retreats.

Stalin and Voroshilov commandeered the resources of the region in a do-or-die defense of Tsaritsyn, sometimes in defiance of their instructions from Moscow, but it was successful. They held the city and eventually forced the Cossacks to break their siege. Future Soviet historiography will play up the defense of Tsaritsyn as the "Red Verdun," the brilliantly fierce defense of a crucial position that turned the tide of the Civil War. This was upselling the battle. It was never that important, and—spoiler alert—the Whites are going to capture Tsaritsyn in 1919 anyway. But it was a very handy bit of padding for the résumés of Voroshilov and especially Stalin, and this will be the beginning of a long and fruitful partnership for the two of them. In 1925, the year after Petrograd would be renamed Leningrad, Tsaritsyn would be renamed Stalingrad, ostensibly in honor of Stalin's role in bravely defending the city and throwing back the White menace. Those of you who have read ahead in the history of the twentieth century know that this is not the last time Stalingrad is destined to become the site of an important battle.

There's one more military campaign I need to talk about before we wrap up for today. That one is farther south, where the Volunteer Army is still wandering around the Kuban region of south Russia. Recall that the Volunteer Army was driven there by the Red Army last winter in the Ice March. Since then, they have been wandering through the hostile region, garrisoned by much larger pro-Moscow forces, trying to gather supplies and recruits. Recall, too, that Lavr Kornilov was killed in action in April, during an unsuccessful siege of Ekaterinodar.

This was an unpromising beginning for the Volunteer Army, and you could be forgiven if you expected it simply to melt away in the spring thaw and disappear from the landscape of Russian history. But you would be very wrong.

After the death of Lavr Kornilov, most of the outside world thought of the Volunteer Army as Alexeyev's army. That would be Mikhail Alexeyev, the former Imperial Russian Army chief of

staff. He was the most prominent of the ex-Army officers in the Volunteer Army. He was also sixty years old and in poor health and served the Volunteer Army mostly as its symbolic leader, a figurehead, until his death from heart failure in October.

The credit for leading the Volunteer Army back from the brink of destruction following the death of Kornilov and molding it into White Russia's most formidable fighting force actually belongs to the 47-year old former Imperial Army staff officer Anton Denikin.

We've met Denikin before in the podcast, but his was not a well-known name, outside of Russian military circles. He had been a reasonably competent staff officer and...not much else, really. But here is the moment he begins to shine. The Volunteer Army had about 9,000 fighters when Denikin assumed command, and they were wandering around a countryside controlled by Red Army forces with a nominal strength ten times larger, organized around what was now being called the "North Caucasus Soviet Republic," headquartered in Ekaterinodar.

But the key word here is "nominal," as the Red forces were nowhere near as well organized as the official description made it sound. The Bolsheviks had little support in the region. It was not industrial, and the rural folk were Cossacks, sympathetic to the Whites.

The Reds were kind of isolated in the towns and cities. The Cossack siege of Tsaritsyn never took that city, but it did succeed in cutting off rail communication to the north. To the south lay the Caucasus region which, as we have already seen, was brimming with various military forces of the newly declared nations of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, Daghestani rebels, and military units from Germany, Turkey, and Britain. These forces had confused and conflicting goals, but one thing you can say for certain is that none of them were the slightest bit interested in offering aid or comfort to the Red Army.

Over the summer of 1918, Denikin campaigned through the region, routinely defeating numerically larger but poorly motivated Red Army units. By August, the Cossacks in the region, seeing these White victories, began to revolt themselves and became willing to join, or accept being drafted by Denikin. By autumn, the Volunteer Army numbered nearly 40,000, most of whom were not volunteers. Maybe it's time to get a new name, guys.

And yes, they got one. Denikin's victories secured White control over a large region of south Russia and sufficiently impressed the local Cossacks that they agreed to join him in a command to be called the Armed Forces of South Russia. This agreement came just days after Kolchak was named Supreme Ruler of Russia, and Denikin agreed to accept Kolchak as the overall commander of the White Army.

This was merely on paper; in practice Kolchak's army and Denikin's army were out of communication and operating independently. Despite the fact that Kolchak was getting at least some level of support from the Allies, Denikin's Armed Forces of South Russia had accomplished more, and had done it with no Allied aid. Still, the anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia

were now officially united under one leader and with the stated goal of ending Bolshevik rule and creating a new, democratic Russia. They could now appeal for Allied aid and have a reasonable hope of getting it, and if you look at a map, you will see that at least in land area, the Whites control more than three-quarters of the Russian nation.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thank you all for listening. I'd especially like to thank Ross for his donation, and thank you to John for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Ross and John help keep the words flowing and the bits going, for themselves and for everyone. If you'd like to join them in becoming a donor or patron, just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue the story of the Russian Civil War. We'll consider the Allies and their view of events in Russia and the fight for independence in Ukraine. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I told you about the Red Verdun, the Don Cossack siege of Tsaritsyn, and Stalin taking command of the defense of the city, sometimes contrary to orders from Moscow. Those orders came from the commander of the Red Army, the commissar for war, Leon Trotsky. It was Trotsky, you'll recall, who chose to reorganize the Red Guard into a Red Army with a centralized command structure and relying upon the training and experience of former Imperial Army commanders, even when those commanders were considered politically undependable.

In his defense of Tsaritsyn, Stalin rejected these moves. He still held to the older revolutionary view of a decentralized, politically reliable and properly socialist proletarian Red Guard. He was not willing to take the advice of the old soldiers, who told him he was investing too much in the defense of Tsaritsyn, to the detriment of the war effort elsewhere.

This was his dispute with the Red Army command. But he made his decisions stick, because he was willing to go over the heads of everyone else, even Trotsky, appealing directly to Lenin to get his way. His political career in Soviet Russia didn't suffer any for it. He was not demoted or reprimanded upon his return to Moscow.

But it was the beginning of his split with Trotsky, a split that will turn into a bitter rivalry that will only end when Trotsky is murdered at Stalin's command, twenty years from now.

[music: Closing Theme]