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### **"The World Will Never Know What We Did To Them": The Western Press Coverage of the Romanov Family Murder**

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“THE WORLD WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT WE DID TO THEM”: THE WESTERN PRESS  
COVERAGE OF THE ROMANOV FAMILY MURDER

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
Honors in History  
in the Department of History  
The School of Arts and Sciences  
Rhode Island College

2019

## **ABSTRACT**

On July 17, 1918, three hundred years of monarchy had ended in Russia with the brutal murder/execution of ex-Tsar Nicholas II and his entire family. In the midst of this, the Russian Revolution had been in full swing and Lenin rose to power. He also intended to keep this power and would do so by any means necessary. While keeping the Romanovs under house arrest, Lenin and the Bolsheviks pondered for months about what to do with the former royal family. He concluded that they could not be kept alive because of the possibility that one member could be reinstated as the monarch. However, Nicholas had been the individual to blame for Russia's descent and the world would be shocked to discover that Lenin had murdered innocent women and children to keep his power. Therefore, it was imperative that Lenin and the Bolsheviks mislead the West, specially their reporters who had been the main sources of information coming from Russia. This paper analyzes the effect that this deception had on the press and the stories that it generated. Many of these fabrications could not be verified because of the lack of physical evidence and the overall suppression of speech regarding the monarchy. It was not until the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent DNA analysis of the remains when the true fate of the Romanovs emerged.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Romanov dynasty's demise in Russia was a tragic event which marked the end of the country's absolute monarchy. The officially announced assassination of Nicholas II and unconfirmed reports about his wife and children left unanswered questions. Curiosity arose in the Western world as to how and why a royal family had been brutally murdered, or if some had actually survived the debacle. The execution of the former Tsar and his family occurred in the wake of the Russia Revolution led by Vladimir Lenin. Yakov Sverdlov, one of Lenin's most trusted advisors, announced on July 18, 1918 that Nicholas Romanov II had been executed and that his family had been taken to a safe place. This announcement, the lack of physical evidence (i.e., the family's bodies), as well as interviews with individuals who gave false reports contributed to the variety of stories which addressed several possibilities as to the family's fate. Through the analysis of Western newspapers reporting on the murder of Nicholas and his entire family, evidence emerged that several stories contained false reports, details, and supposed sightings which had been influenced by Bolshevik manipulation of the message.

Lenin was fully aware that all of the Romanovs had been executed as he, Sverdlov, and Leon Trotsky had deliberated about the matter on several occasions. Although this mindset had been typical among many factions of revolutionaries, it had been clear through Lenin's publications and speeches that he wanted the Tsar dead.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, his general hatred for the monarchy had been exacerbated when his elder brother, Alexander Ulyanov, had been executed following an assassination attempt on Nicholas's father, Tsar Alexander III. Because of the precedent set by the French

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<sup>1</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin: A New Biography* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 207.

Revolution, it seemed as though Lenin had no other option and that Nicholas's execution had been necessary.<sup>2</sup> It was imperative that the press did not associate these intense feelings of hatred towards the Tsar to Lenin, so he needed to justify the act. Although Nicholas's execution had been one of Lenin's revolutionary goals, he knew that he had to address the public in a particular way in order to sustain his hold on power. The senseless murder of an entire family, including the innocent children, would have received a negative reaction from Western leaders and the general public. Through elaborate communications with the Bolsheviks in Moscow and the Ural Regional Soviet in Ekaterinburg led by Yakov Yurovsky, Lenin made sure that he could not be directly tied to the execution, even though the act would have never been carried out had he not authorized it.

With the help and translations provided by Professor Joanne Schneider, a comparative analysis of the Austrian newspapers to the American and British publications was made possible. The Austrian press response to the Romanov family murder as well as the events preceding the act, such as Nicholas's abdication and the progressing revolution, reflect the coverage of American and British newspapers in several ways. Many articles published in 1917 were concerned with the former Tsar's whereabouts post-abdication as well as his life as a prisoner. The Austrian and Anglo/American newspapers reported that Nicholas had been executed after being found guilty at a trial (which never happened) and stressed the progressive loss of rights each day after the family had been transported to Siberia. The confusion caused by Bolshevik misdirection of the press was not unique to British and American sources.

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<sup>2</sup> Volkogonov, 208.

The uncertainty and mystery surrounding the information which emerged from revolutionary Russia contributed to the hope that perhaps members of the family had lived and not having the Romanovs' physical bodies allowed for individuals to claim they were one of the royal family members who had miraculously survived the brutal murder. However, Lenin had planned to prevent the Romanov dynasty from ever becoming reinstated by authorizing the execution of all the extended family members. Although Lenin knew the truth, the hope of the Romanovs' return in the Western press would never be realized and this was finally confirmed after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

As a result of Lenin's need to control the message of the Tsar's fate, the true events of July 17, 1918 were not revealed for nearly ninety years. Lenin's control of the message carried over to in the rule of his successors, as it had been made illegal to discuss the monarchy in any fashion. Because of these reasons, a proper investigation of the execution had not been conducted until the Soviet Union fell and a new regime took power. A variety of primary sources have been consulted which contain different details of the execution. The Western newspaper articles published about the execution were riddled with confusion, false details, and imaginary courtroom scenes. All these inaccurate reports that had been published aided in the Bolshevik agenda to legitimize Lenin's power and hid the true fate of the former dynasty of Russia.

## **CHAPTER 1: History of Nicholas II's Rule**

The last absolute monarchy led by the Romanov family, who had controlled the Russian Empire for three hundred years, met its end in 1917. The demise happened in part due to Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, Nicholas II, and his attempts to hold on to complete authority amidst a changing political world. His resistance to reform, neglect of his subjects, and naivety about events occurring around him culminated in the Russian Revolution and forced his abdication from the throne. Following this shocking and drastic regime change, Nicholas, his wife, and his five children were held prisoner and kept in hiding by the Provisional Government in Tsarskoe Selo, later transported to Tobolsk away from approaching revolutionary activity. When Lenin and the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, the Romanovs' house imprisonment continued. After moving from Tobolsk to Ekaterinburg, locations which were a long distance from European Russia, the former Tsar and his family were executed in an extremely brutal fashion in a small basement room on July 17, 1918 around two o'clock in the morning.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile in Western countries, no one could officially determine the whereabouts of the Tsar or his family as stories began to emerge from revolutionary Russia.

Because Lenin wanted the support of other world potential revolutionary actors, he needed to make politically correct decisions and also secure his power. With the Romanovs alive, Lenin could not risk the possibility of them being rescued by the Czech forces or the British and Nicholas being reinstated as absolute monarch. On the contrary, Lenin could not have the deaths of innocent children as a means of securing his power known nor could he spare the Romanovs' distant relatives. As a result, a number of false

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Rappaport, *The Last Days of the Romanovs: Tragedy at Ekaterinburg* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 191.



reports published in the press circulated throughout Europe and the United States which pertained to how, why, and even *if* the family had actually been executed. In order to understand the brutality of the murder and the immense effort to cover it up, it is important to be familiar with the events of Nicholas's rule that led to the Russian Revolution.

When Nicholas II became the Tsar following the unexpected death of his father, Alexander III, he inherited an extremely dangerous, important, and authoritarian power which came with incredible responsibility. Unfortunately for Nicholas and the rest of Russia, he had never learned how to engage in politics and had no formal experience in the military. Nicholas was also the polar opposite of his father. Alexander III actively suppressed political opposition and fully embodied the role of absolute Tsar by ruling with brute force. This was in response to the constant threat of assassination which had been the fate of Alexander II, Nicholas's grandfather. Although Nicholas recognized that he was not ready to be Tsar, he nonetheless viewed his authority as a God-given right and expected his people to deeply appreciate him.<sup>4</sup>

Less than one month after Alexander III's sudden death, Nicholas married German Princess Alix of Hesse. She spent the majority of her childhood in Great Britain being raised to be a proper lady by her grandmother, Queen Victoria. Regardless of where she grew up, she had not been born in Russia and this caused many to believe that the marriage was problematic. The wedding ceremony itself seemed ominous and Alexandra believed that marriage was a continuation of the funeral services.<sup>5</sup> Although she had been raised a devout Lutheran, she promptly and zealously converted to Russian

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Wortman, "Nicholas II and the Revolution of 1905," *Academic Studies Press* 14 (2013): 199.

<sup>5</sup> Candace Fleming, *The Family Romanov* (New York: Schwartz & Wade Books 2014), 30.

Orthodoxy and changed her name to Alexandra Feodorovna in order to marry Nicholas. Regardless of what Tsarina Alexandra did in order to please the Russian people, she had difficulty following the demanding and strict traditions that had been present for hundreds of years, especially when engaging in political and diplomatic affairs. Her French and Russia were mediocre, and she made it clear that she did not enjoy social interactions with her often hapless moods and facial expressions. Despite this, she took her role as Tsarina very seriously and was aware that her primary duty was to provide Nicholas with an heir to the throne.<sup>6</sup>

The task of having a son to become the heir proved to be more difficult than expected for Nicholas and Alexandra. This spoke to Alexandra's capabilities as Tsarina and also confirmed that the Romanovs had a God-given right to rule. In monarchial Russia, only a Romanov male could inherit the throne. The family had ruled for nearly three hundred years by the time that Nicholas became Tsar and because of this, immense pressure burdened the royal couple, especially Alexandra. With the births of their first children, it seemed that the 300-year old regime had no longer been workable from Russian people's perspectives.

Nicholas and Alexandra had five children in total, the first four were daughters: Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia. Even though the royal couple loved their daughters, they longed for a son in order to relieve the pressure placed on them by societal standards to produce an heir. The Romanov daughters were often identified as a group, 'OTMA,' using the first letter of each of their names, which had been reinforced with the birth of

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<sup>6</sup> Rappaport, 64.

their brother, Alexei.<sup>7</sup> He became the center of the royal couple's attention, especially that of Alexandra who did everything she could to take care of him, the Tsarevich.

Alexei Nikolaevich Romanov was the son about which Nicholas and Alexandra had dreamed and who overwhelmed them with joy when he was born. Shortly after his birth, Alexei started bleeding from the naval, which was an unmistakable sign of hemophilia, a deadly disease that was passed to him through Alexandra.<sup>8</sup> This condition prevented the blood from clotting whenever an injury occurred. The disease ran through the female line of Alexandra's family and caused the untimely death of many of her male cousins.<sup>9</sup> It also affected men earlier in life than women and generally the men did not live to adulthood. So, the heir to the Russian throne had a life-threatening disease because of which he had not been expected to surpass age sixteen. This was a devastating blow to Nicholas and Alexandra and they felt obligated to keep Alexei's condition a secret for his and the dynasty's protection.

Due to the constant threat of assassination and rising political tensions, Nicholas and Alexandra had sheltered themselves and their children from the outside world. Because of Alexei, the Romanovs had another reason to stay in isolation at Tsarskoe Selo. The Russian people were completely unaware of Alexei's condition as were a number of close advisors and family members. Some Russians had been suspicious of Alexei and often questioned why he was carried around everywhere during the few times the family appeared in public.<sup>10</sup> Even though Nicholas and Alexandra tried to shield their

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<sup>7</sup> Rappaport, 75.

<sup>8</sup> Rappaport, 88.

<sup>9</sup> Fleming, 55.

<sup>10</sup> Fleming, 57.

son from those who opposed the Tsar, this caused political tensions to rise as the royal family ignored the Russian people.

Literacy increased among the workers of St. Petersburg and Moscow at the turn of the century and added to their desire for a better life.<sup>11</sup> Most working-class men and women had come from peasant villages in search of better economic opportunities, but instead they faced a whole new set of challenges. They worked unbearably long hours for very little pay and barely had enough food to survive the day. Living conditions were highly problematic for them, as well as “overcrowding led to diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and tuberculosis that cut through the city’s poor.”<sup>12</sup> Despite these grueling conditions and daily sufferings, the working class first sought the Tsar’s help and guidance by means of a peaceful protest. With the hope that Nicholas would listen to their problems and help to find solutions, the workers went on strike and marched on the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg in January 1905.

However, the Tsar was fifteen miles away in Tsarskoe Selo, fully aware of the event taking place, ordered his soldiers to be armed and ready when the protestors arrived. As the demonstrators chanted “God Save the Tsar,” the soldiers blocked their path and began shooting, killing men, women, and children.<sup>13</sup> This event, known as “Bloody Sunday,” sent revolutionary shockwaves throughout Russia and by October 1905, Russia was plummeting into a disorganized revolution. Discontent among the working class and peasantry was rampant, but the only aspect of the revolution that united the people had been the desire to change the regime. Regardless of disorganization

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<sup>11</sup> Fleming, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Fleming, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Fleming, 61-62.

among the revolutionaries, nation-wide strikes of railroads and factories put Russia at an economic standstill.

Although several of Nicholas's advisors had urged him to listen to the people's demands, he blamed the entire event on the protestors and insisted that his soldiers had no other choice when faced with a mob.<sup>14</sup> Nicholas believed that the Orthodox faith and "the national sanction for his power entitled him to exert authority as he wished, blinding him to constraints, both of institutions and reality."<sup>15</sup> However, the general strike that took place in October 1905 halted economic activity in Russia and Nicholas was forced to issue the October Manifesto which established the Duma. Prime Minister Petr Stolypin was also given the authority to initiate agrarian reforms with the goal of helping the peasantry, but also to bolster support for the Tsar.<sup>16</sup> The Duma was the first democratically elected body in Russia and no Tsar in history had given up a portion of his absolute authority. Even though Nicholas granted himself the power to dissolve the Duma whenever he pleased or to strike down any legislation of which he did not approve, the Russians had had a taste of freedom and self-government which was not satisfied by the Duma.

Calls for revolution quieted in 1914 after Germany declared war on Serbia, Russia's ally, thus bringing the Russians into the Great War. Wartime mentality, along with the Romanov Tercentenary that had occurred the previous year, briefly united the Russian people to defend their mother country. During this time, peasants and working-class men were sent to the Eastern front, with the primary goal of occupying

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<sup>14</sup> Fleming, 62-63.

<sup>15</sup> Wortman, 201.

<sup>16</sup> George Tokmakoff, "Stolypin's Agrarian Reforms: An Appraisal," *The Russian Review* 30 (April 1971): 136-137.

Constantinople and the Black Sea Straits in order to secure an accessible trade route for war goods.<sup>17</sup> Nicholas anticipated that Russia, being a great and wealthy monarchical power, would successfully and swiftly defend itself against the Germans. The slight jolt of national pride would only last for about a year until the Russian army started experiencing massive defeats and lost faith in the Tsar's wartime leadership.<sup>18</sup>

The Russian soldiers had been poorly trained and Nicholas was gravely misinformed as to the amount of fighting this war would entail. The Ministry of War believed, similarly to other world powers such as Great Britain, that the Great War would end quickly and thus did not make the necessary preparations for a more lengthy campaign. The Russian army, which mainly consisted of peasants, unexpectedly found itself in shortage of basic supplies needed for war, such as food, shelter, warm clothes, boots, and weapons.<sup>19</sup> Some soldiers were forced to fight with no weapons at all and also instructed to pick up the guns of fallen soldiers to continue the fight. Nicholas remained unaware of these problems and believed that the Russians would fight more bravely if he was commanding the army. So, with no formal battle experience of any kind, Tsar Nicholas replaced his cousin, Grand Duke Nikolasha, as commander and chief of the Russian forces.<sup>20</sup>

This decision, along with many others, had been heavily influenced by Alexandra and her most trusted advisor, Grigory Rasputin.<sup>21</sup> At the time of Nicholas and Alexandra's rule, medical science had not yet discovered an effective treatment for

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<sup>17</sup> Dmitrii V. Likharev, "Constantinople and the Black Sea Straits as Russia's War Aims in 1914-1917: A Comparison of Russian and American Interpretation," *The Historian* 81 (Summer 2019): 260.

<sup>18</sup> Rappaport, 52-53.

<sup>19</sup> Fleming, 134-135.

<sup>20</sup> Fleming, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Rappaport, 66.

hemophilia. This meant that whenever Alexei injured himself in the slightest way, he would experience excruciating pain for several days, sometimes weeks. The doctors could not help the pain, so Alexandra turned to a spiritual remedy, which she found in Rasputin. He was a peasant from the small village of Pokrovskoye in Siberia and had left his family behind to become a priest and a mystic. He made a name for himself in St. Petersburg as someone who could work miracles. Having no other options, Alexandra contacted Rasputin and requested that he help the Tsarevich. Inexplicably, he was able to ease Alexei's pain and the religiously zealous Alexandra believed in his mystic abilities wholeheartedly. Many historians have speculated that Rasputin's ability to remain calm and comfort the Tsarevich lowered his blood pressure thus relieving him of the pain.<sup>22</sup> However, it is still not known how Rasputin managed to do this, let alone gain significant influence over the royal couple.

Alexandra and Rasputin were left in control of Russia while Nicholas had been at military headquarters in Stavka, one hundred miles from any actual fighting. Not only was it problematic that Alexandra was German-born and free to make political decisions, the peasant-born Rasputin was the individual orchestrating many of these policy and appointment changes. This perplexed many Russians as stories circulated throughout St. Petersburg that described Rasputin's mischievous behavior. The Tsarina, however, did not believe those stories and criticized those who spoke ill of Rasputin.

Distrust towards the Tsar, the loss of two pointless wars which had been the 1905 Russo-Japanese War and the Great War, along with hunger, mutiny, neglect, and poverty had built up in Russia over the course of Nicholas's rule and culminated in the March Revolution of 1917. While Nicholas was in Stavka, hunger riots broke out which brought

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<sup>22</sup> Rappaport, 91-92.

St. Petersburg, now Petrograd (renamed during the war to sound less German and more Russian), to a complete standstill. Several telegrams the Duma sent to Nicholas informed him of the anarchical situation went ignored because the Tsar needed to “rest his brain.”<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, “the dockers and factory workers paraded under the red flag of socialism. The Tsar hardly noticed. The German ambassador did; he shook his head, and gravely reported the state of Russia to Berlin.”<sup>24</sup> Nicholas had been angry with the working-class people for initiating a rebellion during a time of war and decided to send the palace troops of Tsarskoe Selo to suppress the rebellion. However, the soldiers could not bring themselves to murder their fellow citizens and thus mutinied by joining the revolutionaries’ side.<sup>25</sup>

Nicholas could not grasp the severity of the situation until the munity in Tsarskoe Selo. He immediately left Stavka for Pskov where he received several more telegrams from his most trusted advisors that informed him of the dire need for change. Finally, he abdicated the throne in March 1917 in favor of Alexei. Historians have speculated several reasons as to why Nicholas promptly abdicated. Some have said that the action was one of patriotism and reflected a genuine concern for his subjects. Others said that he was simply tired and desired to be at peace.<sup>26</sup> Another argument, Nicholas saw this as part of God’s will and his abdication would save Russia.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of his reasons, three hundred years of Romanov rule ended with one phrase and a new Provisional Government controlled Russia.

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<sup>23</sup> Fleming, 162.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Cook, *The Murder of the Romanovs* (Great Britain: Amberley Publishing, 2010), 42.

<sup>25</sup> Fleming, 163.

<sup>26</sup> Fleming, 174.

<sup>27</sup> Rappaport, 53.



Following Nicholas's abdication, he and his family were held under house arrest in Tsarskoe Selo by the Provisional Government initially for their safety.<sup>28</sup> Despite this being the officially stated reason, the new political leaders did not quite know what to do with the royal family. However, the Provisional Government made uninformed military decisions upon the United States' entry into World War I. They believed that a new ally would boost the morale of the Russian soldiers, but they had grown tired of fighting an unwinnable and unpopular war.<sup>29</sup> This led to discontent of which Lenin and his entourage took advantage and also resulted in the family's move to Tobolsk in Siberia. They lived a leisurely existence for that of prisoner, but this changed when Lenin solidified his hold on power and transported the family to Ekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains. Under Bolshevik imprisonment, the family was ridiculed and mocked by the guards and were stripped of all the luxuries they had had in their previous life of royalty. Several guards referred to Nicholas as "Citizen Romanov" and took great pleasure in restricting the family's actions.<sup>30</sup>

The lives of the Romanovs changed drastically over the course of a few years, particularly so after Nicholas's abdication. Slowly but surely, they lost all the privileges that came with royalty but never lost hope that there would be a rescue attempt.<sup>31</sup> Nicholas's cousin King George V of England had been the only one to express desire to give the Tsar and his family asylum, but the English citizens felt skeptical about this. As World War I carried on, hatred for Germany among the British increased, which prompted them to be suspicious of Alexandra, the German-born princess. Even if the

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<sup>28</sup> Cook, 87.

<sup>29</sup> Fleming, 189-190.

<sup>30</sup> Rappaport, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Rappaport, 23.

British had followed through with their rescue mission, Nicholas and Alexandra would have declined to go on a difficult journey because of Alexei's weak state. Unfortunately, public demands led the British government to withdraw its offer of asylum and eliminated one of the only chances for the Romanovs to escape.

The Tsar was just as clueless about his fate as the rest of the world while he was imprisoned. One month before the execution took place, Leon Trotsky released reports that the Tsar was to be transferred to Moscow where he would be tried for crimes against the people. By saying that there was to be a trial, it seemed like the Bolshevik government was giving the Tsar due process before being executed. However, this trial never took place nor was it ever going to, as the fate of the Tsar and his family had been decided prior to this announcement. The crime that took place on July 17, 1918 perplexed the Western world and made everyone wonder how one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the world lost everything and was brutally murdered in a basement.

## **CHAPTER 2: War, Abdication, Imprisonment, and Execution**

Ex-Tsar Nicholas II, or “Citizen Romanov,” could not possibly have predicted what was going to happen to him and his family following his abdication. In the months leading to this world-changing event, Nicholas had been informed of the looming threat of revolution and continually dismissed these reports as being nothing more than minor quarrels among the working classes. Nicholas eventually realized that his abdication was necessary in order to save the nation.<sup>32</sup> Following his decision, Nicholas’s only concern was being reunited with his family after a long period of separation.

Because he had named himself commander and chief of the Russian army during the war, Nicholas and his family had been apart from 1915 to 1917. He left the comfort of the palace in Tsarskoe Selo in an attempt to boost the soldiers’ low morale. Despite his presence, the lack of resources and weapons nonetheless resulted in devastating losses for the Russians. While soldiers continuously experienced defeat, the Petrograd armed forces joined the revolutionary cause and seized weapons. Telegrams arrived frequently from the Duma urging Nicholas to step down. He determined that he needed to leave Stavka for Tsarskoe Selo so that he could discuss the matter with his wife, Alexandra.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the journey, the Tsar’s train stopped frequently due to revolutionary control of the railroads. While halted in Pskov, he received word that the guards who protected the Alexander Palace had joined the revolutionary forces.<sup>34</sup> The revolution had gotten too close to his family, the only people who mattered to him, and he abdicated on March 15, 1917 without Alexandra’s consultation.

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<sup>32</sup> Fleming, 180.

<sup>33</sup> Fleming, 164-165.

<sup>34</sup> Fleming, 173.

Before Nicholas returned to Tsarskoe Selo from Pskov, Alexandra had been informed by an emissary of the Provisional Government that she and Nicholas were under arrest. She was shocked to discover that her husband had abdicated without informing her. She had not even considered this to be a possibility.<sup>35</sup> This was most likely due to her fervent belief that the Tsar was chosen by God to rule Russia which she relentlessly tried to instill in Nicholas as well. With Russia in a state of near anarchy and revolutionaries getting closer to the Alexander Palace, Tsarskoe Selo was becoming increasingly unsafe for the royal family and the newly formed Provisional Government decided to send them to Siberia upon Nicholas's return.

Alexander Kerensky, Vice Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet and official of the Provisional Government, was assigned the task of transporting the ex-Tsar and his family to Siberia, specifically to Tobolsk. Hostility towards the Provisional Government grew in Petrograd as it planned an offensive against the Austrians in a time of bleak military morale. The Bolsheviks were among the protestors and Kerensky began to fear for not only the Tsar, but also for himself.<sup>36</sup> Tobolsk had been chosen because of the lengthy time it took to get there. From Tsarskoe Selo, the royal family rode the train for five then days stopped in Tyumen, where a boat waited to take them up stream to Tobolsk.<sup>37</sup> When the river froze in the winter, it was nearly impossible to get to Tobolsk until the spring. In his interactions with the family, Kerensky was decent toward them and displayed concern for their lives, yet made the elimination of their royal status clear.<sup>38</sup> More so than their future overseers, Kerensky kept the family well-informed and somewhat hopeful of a

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<sup>35</sup> Cook, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Fleming, 190.

<sup>37</sup> Cook, 95.

<sup>38</sup> Cook, 87.

successful escape from Russia. Disguised in trains that had Japanese flags and banners that read “Japanese Red Cross Mission,” the family left the palace in Tsarskoe Selo for Tobolsk, a place foreign to them within the same nation.<sup>39</sup>

While in Tobolsk, the Tsar and his family experienced a leisurely “prisoner sentence,” and were free to participate in many activities in which many ordinary families engage. Nicholas and Alexei chopped wood for the harsh Siberian winter they were to face, and the girls walked outside and sewed with their mother. Nicholas was allowed to read the newspaper, although the editions he received were weeks old and they continually shocked him as he learned about the state of the nation as the revolution progressed. Russia was territorially vast and certain revolutionary waves had not yet reached Siberia. The Tobolsk people showed no hostility towards the Tsar, so his family received donations from the local Orthodox Church or peasant farmers, who brought eggs, bread, and milk to their mansion. Life in Tobolsk was mild and probably the least stressful given the prisoners’ situation. As the Provisional Government grew weaker due to its inability to exit World War I, deal with grain shortages, and strikes, Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power on November 7, 1917 and began plotting the Romanovs’ future.<sup>40</sup>

Ekaterinburg was the last place that Nicholas and his family had expected to relocate to after staying in Tobolsk. They hoped to move to a familiar place like Livadia Palace in the Crimea where they had frequently vacationed.<sup>41</sup> After the departure from Tobolsk, train commander Vasily Yakovlev, who frequently telegraphed Moscow, told

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<sup>39</sup> Fleming, 191.

<sup>40</sup> Cook, 130-131.

<sup>41</sup> Cook, 93.

Nicholas that they were headed to the city where he would be put on trial.<sup>42</sup> Nicholas also hoped that England would possibly provide asylum, while the revolution played its course. After all, Nicholas was a cousin of King George V, who had been initially open to the idea. He was soon talked out of it when his ministers informed him of how controversial a decision like this was in a time of war.

The presence of the Russian Imperial Family in England would have posed several potential problems for King George V. Primarily, he as a constitutional monarch had to listen to the people's demands in contrast to those of Nicholas, an absolutist. In the midst of World War I, in which Great Britain had lost hundreds of thousands of young soldiers, the British people found it difficult to dismiss Alexandra's German heritage and thus the government rejected asylum for the Romanovs. During the war, several pieces of propaganda circulated throughout Russia accusing Alexandra of being in contact with German officials during the war while Nicholas was in Stavka at military headquarters.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, many people around the world hated the Tsar. While traveling, the family needed an alarming amount of security to protect them. The last time the Romanovs had been in Great Britain, they could hardly set foot on the mainland without threat of assassination.<sup>44</sup> In the end, "all of the various royal initiatives to free the Romanovs were stymied by a flabbiness of will, disunity, internal and international politics, and a conflict of political loyalties and agendas."<sup>45</sup> The Romanovs had become unreachable under the custody of the Ural Regional Soviet.

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<sup>42</sup> Rappaport, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Rappaport, 68.

<sup>44</sup> Cook, 21.

<sup>45</sup> Rappaport, 156.

As the Romanovs moved throughout their various imprisonment arrangements, their lives and the activities that they could engage in became more restricted. In Tobolsk, they were relatively free to roam throughout the yard and could receive food and gifts from local townspeople. However, in Ekaterinburg at the Ipatiev House, which was named “The House of Special Purposes,” the family was hardly allowed to look out a window. The guards confiscated and ate food donations meant for the family. They had two rooms in the mansion, one of which the daughters shared and the other Nicholas, Alexandra, and Alexei. With each location to which they were transported, more of their belongings and servants stayed behind. By the time they reached Ekaterinburg, the family had three servants. They received similar food rations as other Russian citizens and ate the same bland meal every night. Nicholas was no longer allowed to read the newspaper and learn about the state of Russia during the Revolution.<sup>46</sup> The children could not play outside and were confined to their bedrooms for a majority of the time. The Romanovs went from having a vast amount of wealth and family status, to a state of restriction. Slowly, they lost control of their situation and were evermore clueless as to what their future held.

Yakov Yurovksy, the man assigned to oversee the Romanov family at the Ipatiev House, had replaced the first drunken commander, despised the Tsar and was committed to the Bolshevik cause. His sentiments stemmed from a series of injustices that he, like thousands of other Russian citizens, had endured. Born a Jew, he had ten siblings and witnessed his father’s exile to Siberia. Despite years of poverty, hunger, and sickness, Yurovksy believed in the “Father Tsar’s” kindness in his younger years. After studying in Siberia, Yurovksy gained social and political awareness to which he had been previously

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<sup>46</sup> Rappaport, 158.

not exposed. He became politically active and engaged in revolutionary work with the Ekaterinburg Soviet, the Ural Regional Soviet, and the Ekaterinburg Cheka, which operated as the Bolshevik secret police. Even though he had several reasons to despise the Tsar, "he kept careful control of his burning hatred for the Imperial Family, on the surface appearing polite, even punctilious."<sup>47</sup> He oversaw the Ipatiev House with brute force and replaced the inefficient crew that had worked under his predecessor, Avdeev. He had allowed his men to get away with drinking on the job and engaging in various interactions with the Imperial Family. The Ekaterinburg Bolsheviks under Yurovsky took great pride in the task of restricting the Romanovs through denying the family basic requests such as religious services. Although they had not been physically abused, these minor indignities progressively worsened their spirits. Yurovsky drastically changed the standards and turned the Ipatiev House into a prison.

Yurovsky constantly received instructions from Yakov Sverdlov, Lenin's most trusted party administrator, which directed him to strictly confine the Romanovs.<sup>48</sup> Even though Lenin did not officially authorize their execution, the act would not have been carried out if he had not approved. Sverdlov kept constant communication with Filipp Goloshchekin, who represented the Ural Regional Soviet in Ekaterinburg. Sverdlov told Goloshchekin to instruct Yurovsky to use his best judgement and to eliminate the family when the time was right. The extensive communication networks were imperative for the survival of Lenin's regime as it ensured that the call to execute the Tsar and his family did not directly come from him. In May 1918, the Bolshevik Red Army had experienced heavy losses at the hands of the White Army which was a counterrevolutionary force

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<sup>47</sup> Rappaport, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Rappaport, 13.



unhappy with the way Lenin ran Russia. After defeating several Red Army legions, the White Army and volunteer Czech forces were closing in on Ekaterinburg and Yurovsky determined that he needed to come up with a plan to secretly execute the Romanovs to protect the Bolshevik regime and also to fulfill the will of the revolution.

Yurovsky made sure that transportation was arranged and a location chosen for the disposal of the bodies. When considering which place to choose, he sought the help of Pavel Ermakov, a Bolshevik commissar who led the Red Army in Ekaterinburg. Ermakov was a political activist who had been exiled in Siberia where his hatred for the tsarist regime festered. His rage earned him the reputation of ruthless killer and as someone who would gladly take part in Nicholas's execution.<sup>49</sup> With Ermakov, one of his most trusted men, as the head of the "disposal crew," Yurovsky decided that an abandoned mine shaft called "The Four Brothers" located in the Koptiyaki Forest outside of Ekaterinburg would be the perfect spot.<sup>50</sup> However, Ermakov drank constantly and neglected to complete simple yet important tasks that would ensure the execution remained a secret. Everything to Yurovsky's knowledge was planned, even the lies that the guards were to tell the Romanovs to lure them into the basement.<sup>51</sup>

Although time had been taken to plan the act of assassinating the Romanovs, the execution carried out was sloppy and disorganized, which led to the murder being far more gruesome than expected. Yurovsky planned the crime to work on a strict time schedule, but several events delayed it. First, the Romanovs were abruptly awakened from their sleep around midnight on the evening of the murder. The guards told them that Czech legions had breached Ekaterinburg and a van waited for them outside. They were

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<sup>49</sup> Rappaport, 170.

<sup>50</sup> Rappaport, 169.

<sup>51</sup> Rappaport, 184.

instructed to get dressed as quickly as possible and did not need any belongings for the journey. This caused confusion among the family, and despite not needing to bring anything, they took almost two hours to get ready. Although this was inconvenient, Yurovsky was more concerned with the truck's whereabouts which was to transport the doomed Romanov corpses to the Koptiyaki Forest. Knowing that he needed to complete the task before sunrise, Yurovsky led the family downstairs into the windowless basement. There, almost in the fashion of taking a photograph, their family and the servants were lined up against the wall waiting for what was to happen next.

As Alexandra demanded chairs for herself and Alexei in the dimly lit and cramped room, Yurovsky and his men sternly entered. Declaration in hand, Yurovsky did not greet the royal family, but instead said:

In view of the fact that your relatives in Europe continue their assault on Soviet Russia, the presidium of the Ural Regional Soviet has sentenced you to be shot. In view of the fact that the Czechoslovaks are threatening the red capital of the Urals -- Yekaterinburg -- and in view of the fact that the crowned executioner might escape the people's court, the presidium of the Regional Soviet, fulfilling the will of the Revolution, has decreed that the former Tsar Nicholas Romanov, guilty of countless bloody crimes against the people, should be shot...<sup>52</sup>

In utter disbelief, Nicholas demanded that he read it again and naively wondered how this was possible. His daughters shrieked and started praying. Before Nicholas could receive the answers to the frantic questions he was asking, Yurovsky and his men started shooting at the family. Smoke filled the room and the scene in the basement instantly became a bloodbath with the Tsar, Tsarina, and Tsarevich the first to perish. The daughters, having had their clothes sewn with precious and impenetrable jewels, suffered particularly gruesome deaths. Their clothes acted as bullet proof vests thus prompting

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<sup>52</sup> Rappaport, 188-189.

Pavel Ermakov, who was stupefyingly drunk, to finish the act with bayonets. Moreover, the daughters not initially wounded, witnessed the terrible deaths of their entire family. Yurovsky had planned for a quick execution, as professional marksmen can complete a task of this nature in thirty seconds, but the ordeal lasted twenty minutes which pressed him even more for time.<sup>53</sup> Yurovsky thought he had planned the perfect execution, truly clueless that he had not accounted for several factors.

One feeling that had united the men in the mission to execute the Romanovs was their extreme hatred of the Tsar. For some, this sentiment could not be transferred to his innocent daughters. Some executioners could not bring themselves to kill the children and ironically, this was one of the main factors that contributed to the murder's gruesomeness. Each of the men was assigned to shoot a specific Romanov and some originally supposed to execute the daughters backed out of the mission. Later speculation suggested that the men present in the room primarily wanted to see the Tsar dead and turned their weapons on him instead of their assigned targets, the daughters.<sup>54</sup> Some neglected their duties and did not shoot anyone. Disorganization among the men and personal feelings created a scene of pure mayhem, one which no royal family had endured before.

Against Yurovsky's strict orders, the executioners had also been drinking heavily before the act, which created chaos during the murder and turned into an enormous debacle with the disposal of the bodies. Mistakenly, Yurovsky had entrusted Ermakov with making sure the disposal site was ready for the family's bodies. However, he failed to inform Yurovsky that the trails leading to the abandoned mine shaft in the Koptyaki

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<sup>53</sup> Rappaport, 192.

<sup>54</sup> Rappaport, 187.

Forest were muddy and undriveable. These conditions made it impossible for the vehicles to get to the destination. Unaware of this, Yurovsky and his crew piled the bodies into a truck and set off for the mine shaft, where the plan was to destroy them by sulfuric acid and fire. This way, the royal family's remains would be gone forever, and no one could try to use them as justification for any worship.

However, these plans did not go exactly as expected. The mud along the unpaved roads leading to the disposal site caused the truck to become stuck. After trying in vain to free the vehicle, Yurovsky and his men gave up and decided to bury the bodies where they were. Yurovsky, not having slept for nearly seventy hours, returned to the site on July 19 and instructed his men to dig graves and burn the bodies in those.<sup>55</sup> He was unaware, as most people were, that cremation takes an extremely long time. The burning and dousing with sulfuric acid did not completely destroy the bodies, leaving DNA evidence. The drunk and sleep-deprived executioners also carelessly left the bodies exposed in a shallow grave within the burial shaft.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, several local peasants who found the actions of Yurovsky and his men to be suspicious had witnessed the transportation of the corpses. Many more pieces of physical evidence had been left in the forest, including some precious jewels that had been sewn into the daughters' clothing. Most ironically, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the discovery of the Romanovs' true fate, all of the family have been canonized as Holy Saints in the Russian Orthodox Church and currently are worshipped by its members.

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<sup>55</sup> Rappaport, 205.

<sup>56</sup> "The Murders at Ekaterinburg," *History Today* 58 (2008): 10.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/ric.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=33225740&site=ehost-live>.

The summer months of 1918 represented a period of utter confusion about the Imperial Family. European powers, such as Great Britain and Germany, had made efforts to locate where the Tsar and his family were imprisoned, but after these stopped many telegrams were sent and no clear reply ever came.<sup>57</sup> More questions than answers arose following Lenin's announcement regarding Nicholas's execution. He did not address the issue of the rest of the family, so many speculated that they had managed to escape Russia. It would take nearly ninety years for the truth to emerge about the Romanovs' fate through modern science and DNA testing. The event was pieced together through the analysis of Nicholas and Alexandra's diaries, Yurovsky's and Ermakov's accounts, and many other articles of physical evidence that had been found in the years after the murder and Lenin's death. However, immediately following the execution, the Western press was riddled with confusion and false reports as Lenin tried to divert attention from the brutal execution of an entire family.

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<sup>57</sup> Cook, 70.

### **CHAPTER 3: Response to Initially Announcement**

On July 19, 1918, the Russian newspaper *Izvestiya* announced the “Execution of Nicholas, the Bloody Crowned Murderer -- Shot without Bourgeois Formalities but in Accordance with our new democratic principles.”<sup>58</sup> This article reported on Yakov Sverdlov’s announcement of the Tsar’s execution and stated that Alexandra and the Tsarevich remained under Bolshevik custody. The news spread rapidly not only throughout western Russia, but also throughout Europe and shocked several people in authority. In his announcement, Sverdlov diverted direct responsibility of the execution from himself, Lenin, and the Bolsheviks to the Ural Regional Soviet. Sverdlov stated that the Czech forces fighting with the White Army had continuously defeated the Red Army and had been closing in on Ekaterinburg as the reason for the execution. He also blamed the Tsar himself for the decision made by Ural Regional Soviet and Yakov Yurovsky, saying that Nicholas had been involved in a counterrevolutionary plot.<sup>59</sup> Due to the vagueness of the announcement and the overall fear among the Russian people instilled by the Bolsheviks, the Western press response to the initial report varied among journalists and set the tone for how the mystery of what happened to the Tsar would be discussed.

In Ekaterinburg immediately after the murders, Yurovsky telegraphed Filipp Goloshchekin, the representative of the Ural Regional Soviet, who had been in contact with Sverdlov in Moscow. The report stated that the rest of the family met the same fate as Nicholas, which had apparently shocked Leon Trotsky, Lenin’s second in command in

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<sup>58</sup> Rappaport, 208.

<sup>59</sup> Associated Press, “Ex-Czar Put to Death: Shot July 16 After Discovery of Plot, says Bolsheviks,” *The Washington Post*, July 21, 1918, 1.

the Bolshevik party and his most trusted advisor.<sup>60</sup> Trotsky's job in the months before the Tsar's execution consisted of extensive deception as he worked toward obtaining one of the key justifications Lenin would need to maintain his powerful position. Although the political climate had drastically shifted against the Tsar during the Russian Revolution, Lenin needed to have a coherent answer to provide the people as to why Nicholas had been executed.

Trotsky had been the one to suggest a show trial for the Tsar in order to reveal that the Bolsheviks had a valid reason to execute him. Because Trotsky had been fixated on the idea of recreating the French Revolution in Russia, historians believe that Lenin allowed the lie to grow and fester in order to keep Trotsky's fiery revolutionary beliefs in check. Although the plan for a show trial had been abandoned, many people around the world believed that it would take place, including the Tsar himself. Following his departure from Tobolsk, he thought he was going to Moscow where he would stand trial or be forced to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which took Russia out of World War I under terms to which Nicholas would have never agreed. American journalists also reported that a trial may not result in the Tsar's execution, but instead he would be exiled from Russia if found guilty.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the rest of the family's fate remained a mystery for most of the world.

On July 21, 1918, *The Washington Post* published a report similar to that of the local newspapers in Russia, stating that the Tsar had been murdered out of necessity. It also acknowledged and debunked the previous announcements made by several reporters that the Tsar had been executed a month earlier. It also mentioned and invalidated a

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<sup>60</sup> Cook, 163.

<sup>61</sup> Rappaport, 133.

previous claim as to how he had been killed, one particular story saying that he had been bayoneted by the guards while being transported. According to the article, Alexandra and Alexei had been sent to a safe and secure place, but their whereabouts remained unknown. Moreover, the Romanov daughters had not been acknowledged. This subsequently contributed to the numerous false reports about them generated in the Western press. In this report, the author promised that all of the Romanovs' diary entries would be published, including the diary of Grigory Rasputin, following careful review of their contents. The possibility that these individuals' personal writings would be publicly released created a sense of anticipation for the next update. The article had been one of the first to acknowledge that the trial had not taken place, yet several pieces to the story remained missing. Nonetheless, the article concluded "that it [was] an official version of the death of the former emperor."<sup>62</sup>

The Bolsheviks used several repressive measures to ensure the true fate of the Romanovs remained a secret. Lenin struggled significantly to secure his position in power and would do anything to maintain it. However, he had very little faith in the Russian people and their capability to fulfill the revolutionary vision of which he had always dreamed. He saw the Russians as uneducated, immature, and unorganized in the way that they had executed the revolution.<sup>63</sup> Although Lenin primarily followed the beliefs of Marxism which denounced authoritarian rule, he believed that "there must be a leadership distinct from and in all likelihood outside of the proletariat."<sup>64</sup> He asserted that the proletariat did not possess the capability of understanding, rationalizing, and

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<sup>62</sup> Associated Press, "Ex-Czar Put to Death: Shot July 16 After Discovery of Plot, says Bolsheviks," *The Washington Post*, July 21, 1918, 1.

<sup>63</sup> S.A. Korff, "The Degeneration of Bolshevism," *Advocate of Peace Through Justice* 82 (May 1920): 161.

<sup>64</sup> Clifford M. Foust, "Lenin," *The High School Journal* 46 (January 1963): 139.



improving its circumstances and therefore, it was Lenin's duty to guide them through the revolution. In order to help the working classes in understanding the cause and goals of a Marxist-Leninist revolution, he used the press to unite the masses under Bolshevism.

Before Lenin secured his power during the October Revolution, he did not have an overwhelmingly negative relationship with the Russian press. In the months leading to the Tsar's downfall, workingmen's newspapers promoted Bolshevism and thus he did not feel the need to suppress the press at the time. Moreover, he advocated for the freedom of *all* the newspapers from the government, censorship, and the economy. Of course, this excluded the publications run by bourgeois capitalists.<sup>65</sup> Their reports blamed the Bolsheviks for demoralizing the Russian army during the war and other atrocities that occurred while the Tsar ruled. Lenin could not refute these claims due to bourgeois newspaper distribution companies refusing to sell his paper. In June 1917 during a crackdown on Bolshevism ordered by Alexander Kerensky of the Provisional Government, Lenin's newspaper, *Pravda*, had been seized and destroyed. After this, vague rumors and publications began circulating accusing Lenin and Trotsky of being German agents, which resulted in Trotsky's arrest and Lenin's temporary escape from Russia to Finland.<sup>66</sup>

This event during the "July Days" of the Russia Revolution had been the tipping point for Lenin and established in him an overall distrust of the press. In the years leading to Lenin's uprising, various newspapers had been published that promoted diverse revolutionary ideas which reflected the disorganization brought on by different political goals. Lenin's advocacy for freedom of the press decreased as he became more influential

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<sup>65</sup> Albert Resis, "Lenin on Freedom of the Press," *The Russian Review* 36 (July 1977): 281.

<sup>66</sup> Resis, 280.

in the revolution and the gradual closure of several publications resulted in a one-party press.<sup>67</sup> First, he shut down all bourgeois papers which he claimed untruthfully reported that the Bolsheviks were promoting civil war and violence as well as misinforming the Russian peasantry. Then, he went after other socialist newspapers which had been allies to the Bolshevik cause prior to and during the revolution. Lenin did this by issuing a general ban on anti-Bolshevik newspapers which broadly included those that had not been wholeheartedly dedicated to his cause. The transition to a one-party press occurred in the October Revolution in which Lenin authorized an emergency ban on all non-Bolshevik newspapers. This decision did not initially prompt resistance among the affected parties because this was seen as a temporary measure. Upon the discovery that this was permanent, journalists defied Lenin and published stories under different names. Although some newspapers continued to publish, the establishment of the one-party press in Revolutionary Russia aided in securing and maintaining Bolshevik influence.<sup>68</sup>

Not only did Lenin go after several Russian newspapers, he also targeted Western reporters and made it increasingly difficult for them to enter the nation and visit the crime scene. If the Russian people were forbidden to utter a word about the Tsar, it was imperative for the regime that this must especially apply to journalists. Captain Francis McCullagh, a British intelligence officer and a correspondent with the *New York Herald*, had been sent to Siberia for a military mission and visited the “House of Special Purposes” in Ekaterinburg. Because the Bolsheviks held the city, he disguised himself as an insurance worker and interviewed several local people in Russian which he spoke fluently. He even interviewed Yakov Yurovsky and confirmed early on that *all* of the

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<sup>67</sup> Resis, 275.

<sup>68</sup> Resis, 289.

family members had been executed. The Bolsheviks discovered McCullagh's journalistic activities and arrested him. He was then held prisoner in Siberia for two years, then sent back to Great Britain, and banned from Russia for life, due to his "extensive record."<sup>69</sup>

An American journalist from *The Washington Post*, Herman Bernstein had been one of the first Western journalists who criticized the Bolsheviks for failing to fulfill their revolutionary promises. Originally born in Russia, he moved to the United States in 1893 to escape anti-Semitism under the monarchy and had initially been supportive of a revolution occurring in Russia. However, he went back there to report on the actual revolutionary events and discovered that Lenin and Trotsky operated in the same tyrannical way that the Tsar had, which shocked Bernstein. He believed that "Lenin was using Russia as his laboratory... and its people as guinea pigs for his great social experiment."<sup>70</sup> Bernstein had not been afraid to report the truth about the Tsar and his shortcomings and made it clear that he would also report on the hypocrisy upon which Bolshevism had been built.

Bernstein actively made trips to Russia and published several articles in *The Washington Post* reporting on the deteriorating state of Lenin's regime. Not only had working conditions not improved following the Bolsheviks' promises, Russia experienced massive food shortages around the date of the execution, which led to further social unrest.<sup>71</sup> Along with revolutionary updates, Bernstein published all versions of how the Tsar had been murdered that he heard from interviews with local Russian peasants and former Bolshevik officials. He detected the Bolshevik deception, stating that the outright hypocrisy of putting Nicholas on trial for his crimes when Lenin had resorted

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<sup>69</sup> Cook, 164-166.

<sup>70</sup> Rappaport, 107.

<sup>71</sup> Lars T. Lih, *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, Limited 2011), 145-147.

to similar authoritative tactics.<sup>72</sup> Lenin banned Bernstein from returning to Russia after “[he] denounced the Lenin-Trotsky government in the American press [following] a visit to soviet Russia in 1918.”<sup>73</sup>

Despite journalists obtaining more information than Lenin and Sverdlov had provided in their announcement, getting to Siberia was extremely difficult and dangerous, especially as a reporter. The primary methods of transportation as well as communication had been controlled by the Bolsheviks, thus making it difficult to extract valid information out of Russia. Several telegrams from foreign ministers had been sent to the Bolsheviks inquiring about the details of the trials and execution, but all of them went unanswered. It was not known whether this had been the result of the overall disorganized state of Russia’s communication system or the messages were deliberately ignored. So little information could be retrieved which left room for journalists to speculate about the event’s details and published reports from untrustworthy sources.

On December 29, 1918, Carl Ackerman of *The New York Times* published an account of the execution that was sent directly to him from the Tsar’s “personal servant” at the Ipatiev House, a man who called himself Parfen Dominin. Ackerman adamantly believed that the document he received was credible. However, this particular story fell into accordance with the Bolsheviks’ plan of deception and contained valid yet untrue reasons for the Tsar’s execution. It had been suggested that this document may have come from the Tsar’s elderly valet, Terenty Chemodurov. However, Chemodurov had fallen ill and left the Ipatiev House in May 1918. At the time of Nicholas’s execution, he

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<sup>72</sup> Rappaport, 217.

<sup>73</sup> “Russia Bars Bernstein: Refuses to Allow Him to See Result of Soviet Rule,” *The Washington Post*, May 3, 1920, 10.

had been in a hospital and had become senile.<sup>74</sup> Ackerman reported this account believing that “it may become a document of great historical importance in establishing the truth as to the fate of Nicholas Romanoff.”<sup>75</sup>

According to Parfen Dominin, Nicholas felt that his death was near and prepared for it by praying frequently throughout his last days. In this story, the only people unaware of his fate were Alexandra and the children. It took them by surprise when he had apparently been led away by Ural Regional Bolsheviks to stand trial in Ekaterinburg. While Nicholas was supposedly tried for his crimes of counterrevolutionary activity, massive amounts of “evidence” were presented to show that he had conspired with the enemy. These pieces of “evidence” included diary entries from himself, his wife, his children, and also the infamous Grigory Rasputin, which contained revolutionary plotting. Nicholas was found guilty and was executed three hours after his conviction. A depiction of Alexandra begging the Bolshevik officials to spare Nicholas was embedded in the article which was inconsistent with Alexandra’s true state of health that confined her to a wheelchair. This account essentially confirmed Sverdlov’s vague announcement of the Tsar’s execution as occurring in accordance with democratic principles and aided to legitimize the Bolshevik regime. Although there were inklings of the truth in this report, such as Nicholas’s religious piety, the restrictive life at the Ipatiev House, and Alexei’s illness, it was drastically untrue and reflected how clueless most of the Western world was about the Russian Revolution as well as the Bolsheviks’ genuine hatred for the monarchy.

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<sup>74</sup> Rappaport, 217.

<sup>75</sup> Carl W. Ackerman, “How Nicholas Romanoff Was Condemned to Death,” *The New York Times*, December 29, 1918, 41.

Even though Nicholas's death was mostly accepted by the general Russian public and the wider world, after Sverdlov's confirmation, several questions remained unanswered. Specifically, many wondered where the rest of the family had gone or if they were alive. Members of the Russian Orthodox Church had been concerned with the whereabouts of Nicholas's body so that he could have a proper burial ceremony in accordance with sacred traditions. Several devoted followers wholeheartedly believed that Nicholas had been given the divine right to rule and demanded to know the fate of their "God-given" Tsar. If he or any of this family members had lived on, that would be proof of God's benevolence and wisdom and would confirm that Nicholas possessed God's blessing to be Tsar. Not only did the Orthodox Church ask questions, individuals reading about the execution in the Western newspapers had something to hope for, follow, and anticipate.<sup>76</sup>

Although Lenin and the Bolsheviks actively hid the true events and victims of the execution, the story was further distorted "by the deliberate feeding to gullible Western reporters of entirely spurious stories about the fate of the family."<sup>77</sup> These reports, many of which lack any sympathy for the family that had been murdered, accused other nations that would not take in the family for being an accessory to the Tsar's death. This was the work of Lenin and the Bolsheviks who strove to divert all attention and blame for the deaths of the former Tsar and his family. Reactions to Sverdlov's announcement of the execution varied among the reporters of the Western press as some had been able to detect the Bolshevik lies (i.e. Herman Bernstein) and others foolishly believed them (i.e. Carl Ackerman). For most reporters, the suspense of the ordeal and the mystery

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<sup>76</sup> Cook, 172.

<sup>77</sup> Rappaport, 216.

surrounding it had become fascinating. For readers, discovering newly uncovered events surrounding the Romanov execution was irresistible despite the constant circulation of inaccurate information.

#### **CHAPTER 4: The Emergence of False Reports**

In the months and years following Tsar Nicholas II's execution, Western reporters had difficulty discovering the Romanov family's true fate. The Bolsheviks confirmed Nicholas's death two days after the shooting at the Ipatiev House, but provided vague details as to the whereabouts of the remaining family members. Due to a limited number of reliable sources from Russia and the nonfunctioning communications network, accurate information had been extremely difficult to extract from revolutionary Russia. Western reporters had published varying accounts of what exactly happened to the family and provided unnecessary as well as untruthful details of the execution in order to entice readers to read about the Romanov family mystery. As the years passed and Josef Stalin's Soviet Union adamantly prevented any further investigation or inquiry to the Romanovs' execution, wildly inaccurate stories began to emerge, some consisting of sightings of family members. Not only had confusion been rampant among the press of the United States and Great Britain, the Austrian press also published those same aspects of the false reports. Even though the Tsar's death had not been universally accepted, many reporters acknowledged that there was strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that the entire family had been murdered. However, the truth could not emerge without the presence of physical evidence which made the reporters' claims easily refutable.

Herman Bernstein from *The Washington Post* had not fallen for Bolsheviks' lies and extensively researched the fate of the Romanovs. Because the bodies had not been recovered, lack of physical evidence enabled reporters to publish conflicting accounts. Instead of writing about his conclusions of the execution, Bernstein provided six possibilities from previous reports and the accounts of witnesses from Ekaterinburg. The



first mentioned the Tsar had been burned alive at a forest near Ekaterinburg. This story originated from witnesses who lived outside of the Koptiyaki Forest, the location where the Romanovs' bodies had been transported. During the disposal process, Yurovsky instructed his men to burn the bodies to eliminate all traces of evidence and remains which would have led some to believe that the forest had been the murder site and not the disposal site. The second version of the Tsar's death stated that he had left Ekaterinburg and had been killed by a bomb. This account emphasized that the execution was an unplanned event and provided the Bolsheviks a rationalization for his death.<sup>78</sup>

The third, and most accurate, version of the Tsar's execution recounted that he had been shot in the Ipatiev House. Bernstein did not specify that he had been killed in the basement of the "House of Special Purposes," but this account had been the most truthful yet uninteresting execution. The fourth story stated that Nicholas had been murdered in a secret passageway during an attempted escape, which suggested that the execution may not have been initially planned but was something that Nicholas had brought upon himself. The Bolsheviks had portrayed the execution to be partly Nicholas's fault as they claimed he engaged in counterrevolutionary activities. This had been deliberate as Lenin could not have the blood of a formerly beloved monarch on his hands for no reason.<sup>79</sup>

The fifth version of the Tsar's fate recounted that Red Guards had been paid to help the family to escape to Germany. Russians would have felt immense betrayal at this because of the scale at which the Russian army had suffered. As Germany wreaked havoc across Europe during World War I and the Russian Army experienced devastating losses

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<sup>78</sup> Herman Bernstein, "Six Versions of Czar's Fate Reflect Doubt in Siberia; Bodies of Grand Dukes Found in Abandoned Coal Mines," *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1919, ES3.

<sup>79</sup> Bernstein, ES3.

under Tsar Nicholas II's command, hatred for his German-born wife spread. Even though she had converted to Russian Orthodoxy and has tried to show her loyalty to Russia and the Tsar, rumors spread quickly that she allegedly had been in communication with Germany while Nicholas commanded the army from the military headquarters at Stavka. Escape to Germany had been suggested to the Romanovs following Nicholas's abdication. However, Robert Wilton, special British correspondent of *The Times* in London, published the depositions of individuals who had remained with the Romanovs during their imprisonment, several of whom confirmed that the Tsar and Tsarina had not been conspiring with Germany.<sup>80</sup> They despised the idea of cooperating with the Germans as well as the idea of taking refuge in a place against which Nicholas had fought and lost. Ironically, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had been colluding with Germany and receiving funding.

While Bernstein did account for Bolsheviks' lies and confusion among reporters, he did not explicitly mention that Alexandra and the children had been murdered as well. However, the sixth version of the Tsar's fate offered an answer that many believed was accurate. It said that the Romanov family had disguised themselves as refugees and resided in the Urals under new names.<sup>81</sup> Locals witnessed a concealed train leaving Ekaterinburg shortly after the evening of July 17, 1918, and believed that the royal family was aboard.<sup>82</sup> Due to the lack of physical evidence and a sloppy investigation conducted by the Soviets, all six of these versions seemed believable. Even though Bernstein had

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Wilton, *The Last Days of the Romanovs* (London: Ostara Publications, 1920), 167.

<sup>81</sup> Bernstein, ES3.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholas Wright, "Infamous assassinations. Episode 23: The assassination of Tsar Nicholas II," (video) Nugus/Martin Productions, Ltd., 2007, accessed on October 20, 2019, [https://fod-infobase-com.ric.idm.oclc.org/p\\_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=57539](https://fod-infobase-com.ric.idm.oclc.org/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=57539).

been very knowledgeable about Russian culture and Bolshevik aims, he could not make a conclusion as to which version was true.

Because Sverdlov's announcement had made a brief mention as to the fate of the remaining members of the Romanov family, reporters speculated about the events leading up to the deaths of Tsarina Alexandra, the Grand Duchesses, and the Tsarevich. Specifically, reporters published stories about the atrocities and indecencies the women experienced at the hands of the Ural Regional Soviet. These accounts horrified readers who could not fathom how such ghastly events could have happened to a royal family.

A significant account came from General Robert Paris, a French military officer assigned to the Czech-Slovak Army in Russia. *The Washington Post* published the story on March 25, 1919 and it included gruesome details which have been proven to be false. Paris claimed that "the women of the once royal family were subjected to indignities and mistreatments in the presence of the former czar".<sup>83</sup> In actuality, Nicholas had been spared the sight of seeing his beloved children and wife murdered. It had been the daughters who suffered the most physically and were forced to witness the brutal slaying of their entire family before the executioners turned their guns and bayonets on them. The only accurate aspect of Paris's account was that jewels had been sewn into the daughters' garments and this report had also been published in other American newspapers such as the *Arizona Republican*.<sup>84</sup> There had been several individuals, like Paris, who claimed to know the details of the execution and emphasized the demeaning treatment endured under the Bolsheviks. However, he had not been present to observe the shooting and Western reporters sought someone who had witnessed it.

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<sup>83</sup> "Says Ex-Czar Saw Family Tortured: Women Mistreated Before All Were Slain," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 1919, 1.

<sup>84</sup> "Czar Was Shot in Cold Blood by Bolsheviks," *Arizona Republican*, March 25, 1919, 1.

In 1934, the Soviet secret police arranged for Pavel Ermakov, one of the lead executioners entrusted by Yurovsky, to meet with American journalist and traveler Richard Halliburton. This interview confirmed the deaths of all the Romanovs and Halliburton believed the details of the story to be the absolute truth.<sup>85</sup> However, Ermakov's account has been disputed among historians for decades and an agreement as to its legitimacy has not been reached. Some emphasize his drunkenness during the execution and how that contributed to the disorganization that came with the removal of the bodies. In his inebriated state, Ermakov, who had interviewed with Halliburton nearly fifteen years after the execution, most likely forgot or changed important details. Ermakov had been given the task of finding a convenient place for the disposal.<sup>86</sup> He chose the Koptiyaki Forest outside of Ekaterinburg and claimed that he could successfully navigate the area, but failed to account for several factors such as the muddy and undriveable roads as well as local villagers who would witness the event. Because he could barely complete his duties under Yurovsky's command, Ermakov seemed like an unreliable source of information for several years following his interview.

Other historians believed that Halliburton's interview had been "a deliberately stage-managed act of misinformation" in which the Soviet secret police fed Ermakov the information to relay.<sup>87</sup> Ermakov had never been rewarded in any way for his participation in the execution and grew bitter towards those who did receive recognition. Therefore, he inflated his role in the execution during the interview, especially so when he explained the disposal and cremation process, which had been riddled with discrepancies.<sup>88</sup> He

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<sup>85</sup> Cook, 164.

<sup>86</sup> Cook, 159-160.

<sup>87</sup> Rappaport, 215.

<sup>88</sup> Cook, 164.

claimed that the bodies had been burned so severely that when he “pinched the ashes into the air... the wind caught them like dust and carried them out across the woods and the fields.”<sup>89</sup> This insinuated that the bodies no longer existed and that there was no point for anyone to attempt to find them. Ermakov’s story has been ignored by most historians because of its inherent bias, but it has not been completely dismissed as there had been some truthful aspects.

Despite the bias surrounding Ermakov’s account, he confirmed the deaths of every Romanov, even though the bodies had not been found. Many people dismissed his account because a woman who claimed to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia enchanted the Western world with her miraculous escape story from the Ipatiev House basement at the time of its publication. In the midst of the impersonation scam, Halliburton believed this account to be true but was discredited for the unreliability of Ermakov. Although Halliburton thought he had struck journalist gold by interviewing Ermakov, he indeed enabled discussion of the event to broaden and it seemed those events of the Romanovs’ fate had not gotten closer to a definitive answer.

Several smaller and insignificant details had been added to the execution story in various publications. These served the purpose of dramatizing the execution and made it more of an interesting read for Western audiences. An example of this appeared on December 5, 1918, in the *Arizona Republican* and described an account of the execution supposedly given by Alexandra’s former valet to Kiev newspapers. In it, the valet stated that “the once royal family was compelled in a single room of a convent at Ekaterinburg, for weeks, for weeks before the murder, under guard of Bolshevik soldiers, who insulted

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<sup>89</sup> Donald Ostrowski, “A Reconsideration of Richard Halliburton’s Interview with P.Z. Ermakov as Evidence for the Murder of the Romanovs,” *Russian History* 25 (Fall 1998): 304.

them shamefully.”<sup>90</sup> However, those men who took part in the execution showed compassion before firing their weapons and granted Nicholas’s last request to have the sickly Alexandra die in his arms.<sup>91</sup> The dramatization of these events became clearer when it had been confirmed that Nicholas was the first one executed, but the world could not decipher truth from fiction for most of the twentieth century, which allowed for outrageously false reports to circulate through the press.

Stories reported shortly after the execution provided extremely detailed accounts of events that had never taken place. For example, *The Washington Post* published a report describing Nicholas’s trial, which had been the event that Yakov Sverdlov had been planning in the months before the execution to provide the Bolsheviks with a legitimate reason for the act, but it never happened. This report, published on August 25, 1918, vividly described the tense scene of the courtroom and how Nicholas denied all charges against him. At this supposed trial, he had been charged with trying to overthrow the government and was condemned without evidence. According to the report, Nicholas had been so overwhelmed with fear about his family’s fate rather than his own that he “tried to maintain his self-control... [but] now collapsed, and was able to stand on his feet with the help of guards.”<sup>92</sup> Following his conviction, the report described Nicholas’s final journey which was on horseback at two o’clock in the morning, apparently witnessed by local peasants.<sup>93</sup> Not only had there been disputes about whether the act of executing Nicholas was justifiable, the location and state of the bodies were also a topic of discussion for many Western reporters.

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<sup>90</sup> “Tells of Romanoff Deaths,” *Arizona Republican*, December 5, 1918, 2.

<sup>91</sup> “Tells of Romanoff Deaths,” *Arizona Republican*, December 5, 1918, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Father John of the Uspensky Cathedral, “The Last Moments of the Unhappy Czar of Russia,” *The Washington Post*, August 25, 1918, SMT5.

<sup>93</sup> Father John of the Uspensky Cathedral, “The Last Moments of the Unhappy Czar of Russia,” *The Washington Post*, August 25, 1918, SMT5.

Robert Wilton, a special correspondent for *The Times* in London, went to Russia and met with Nicholas Sokolov, the lead investigator on the Romanov case. In his book, *The Last Days of the Romanovs*, Wilton acknowledged the months of extensive preparation by the Bolsheviks in the Romanovs' murder and also pointed out how their deliberate and obsessive destruction of evidence actually left an abundance of it. During his visit to Ekaterinburg, Wilton recognized the site where the bodies had been destroyed as there was still charred earth over a year later. Other forms of evidence included vast numbers of expensive stones and valuables worth several thousand rubles found nearby. These items survived because of Alexandra's efforts as she had meticulously embedded several pounds of precious jewels in pillows, blankets, corsets, and clothing worn by her or the children. Items recovered in Sokolov's investigation had been positively identified as belonging to Alexandra.<sup>94</sup> Although there had been overwhelming circumstantial evidence that all the Romanovs had been killed, the Bolsheviks nevertheless stuck to the story that the Tsar had been executed and his family had been taken to a safe place.

Wilton had been one of the first to discover the true fate of the Romanovs, but made baseless assumptions about how this had been supposedly more than a Bolshevik plan to stay in power. Although many of his details accurately portrayed the events of the deaths and subsequent fate of the Romanovs, Wilton argued that the act had been planned and executed by a group of international Jewish communists with the backing and financial aid of the German government. He based this claim on the fact that several men, who participated in the Tsar's execution, had Jewish names.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Wilton, 132.

<sup>95</sup> Wilton, 27.

Other reporters implicated Europeans who had refused to provide Nicholas and his family with asylum as being accessories to the murders. An article from the *Los Angeles Times* blamed Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany for Nicholas's execution because Germany had been openly allied with "Russian Communists headed by Lenin and Trotsky."<sup>96</sup> This article also reflected the belief that Kaiser Wilhelm had his authority given to him by God and neglected his duty to use his divine intervention to save the Tsar and his family. As a result of the devastating effects of World War I, it had been simple to implicate Kaiser Wilhelm for the death of the Romanovs as he had caused the deaths of millions of Europeans.

Not only had the Western press been confused and unaware of the Romanovs' true fate, but the newspapers in Austria also reflected the same themes. The Austrian press published stories about Nicholas's historic abdication and reflected the Romanovs progressively worsening treatment by the Bolsheviks while imprisoned. On June 28, 1918, the *New Free Press* reported that Nicholas had been killed. The *New Vienna Journal* published an article that same day, also saying that Nicholas had been murdered because he was a "tragic figure" and uncertainty remained about the whereabouts of the rest of the family. Even though the Tsar's death had been reported early on, the *Pilsner Daily News* noted the sighting of a false Tsar on August 30, 1918 and exactly one month later, the *Illustrated Crown Newspaper* stated that up to twenty Tsar imposters had appeared.<sup>97</sup> The Austrian Press reflected similar uncertainty and their reporters had an equally difficult task of extracting information from Russia. (See Appendix I)

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<sup>96</sup> "Kaiser Wilhelm as an Accessory to Murder of Czar and Family," *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1918, 114.

<sup>97</sup> Analysis of the headlines from the Austrian Press were translated and provided by Dr. Joanne Schneider, Professor of History at Rhode Island College.



In the years following the Romanov execution, it had been extremely difficult for the Western press to discover what exactly happened to the royal family. Within these various reports, inklings of the truth emerged and slowly the story the demise of the Romanovs became clearer. Interestingly though, following Lenin's death and the passage of many years, the lack of physical evidence left room for outrageous speculation and imposters. Josef Stalin also stimulated anti-Tsarist sentiments by outlawing discussion and investigation of the Romanovs' death which continued under his successors. This prevented the initial discovery of the bodies in 1979 from becoming public as the individuals feared Soviet retaliation or cover-up.<sup>98</sup> They waited patiently for a regime change which occurred in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union and they reopened the Romanov investigation. Meanwhile, impersonators and unreliable sources penetrated the Western press with false reports which provided the vain hope that a miracle had occurred in that basement of the Ipatiev House, sparing some of the family members from a gruesome death.

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<sup>98</sup> Fleming, 249.

## **Chapter 5: The Mysterious Romanov Children**

The Bolsheviks announced and confirmed the former Tsar's execution shortly after the evening of July 17, 1918, but the world had not been ready to accept the deaths of the remaining family members. The announcement, given by Yakov Sverdlov, stated that Alexandra, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, and Alexei had been taken to a safe place yet gave no indication as to their new supposed location. The bodies of the executed family had not been recovered, nor would that happen until sixty years later. Because of this, the Bolsheviks could not have been discredited in their announcement which enabled journalists outside of Russia to embrace various interpretations of the Romanov family's fate.

Although Western reporters had little evidence to determine what happened to Nicholas and his family, they had several other artifacts on which to base their conclusions. Unlike any absolute monarchist family before them, the Romanovs had been one of the most photographed families. This had not only been due to handheld cameras becoming more common, but also because the Romanov children typically used their cameras as toys. Their childhood consisted of constantly capturing random photographs of their siblings, parents, and pets, which have been utilized and analyzed by historians and reporters. Before the Romanovs, rulers typically had portraits painted or professional photographs taken, in which they had been elegantly dressed and strategically posed. However, the royal family captured images of family members in their natural dispositions which created a sense of familiarity to those who read their story.<sup>99</sup> Absolute

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<sup>99</sup> Helen Rappaport, "The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra" (lecture, Lincoln School, Providence, RI, March 29, 2019).

rulers had usually been perceived as being above anything that common people could understand, but a glimpse into the Romanovs' lives enticed readers who wanted to know the mysteries of a monarchical family's life.

The events of the Russian Revolution had been interesting to Western newspaper readers as a result of different cultural or religious traditions. At the turn of the twentieth century, few European rulers claimed to have their authority guaranteed to them by God, which contrasted Tsar Nicholas's views. His sole claim to absolute authority had been supposedly God-given and he adamantly believed that every atrocity of his reign had been a part of God's larger plan for humanity. This belief was perpetuated by Alexandra's zealous faith and her overall devotion to the dynasty, which had been instilled in her by her grandmother Queen Victoria of Great Britain. However, due to the looming threat of revolution that had been present even before Nicholas's coronation, he could not rely solely on the people's loyalty; he and Alexandra had to prove they had God-given power although the circumstances surrounding the births of their children resulted in the Russian people questioning that notion. Contrary with the Russians' skepticism, the Western press perpetuated the hope that the mysterious offspring of Alexandra and Nicholas could have lived through the brutal execution so that they could tell what would be miraculous tales of survival.

Olga Romanov had been the first-born child of Nicholas and Alexandra, and they had been elated with her arrival in 1895.<sup>100</sup> At the time of her birth, the royal couple was still young and had not been disappointed that an heir had not yet been born. In Russian tradition, females could not inherit the throne, and this caused Alexandra to feel more pressure with every girl to which she gave birth. Shortly after Nicholas's abdication, an

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<sup>100</sup> Rappaport, 79.

article from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, published on May 20, 1917, reported on the one tragedy that came to the fallen Romanov regime, that Nicholas had been forced to find titleless men for his daughters to marry.<sup>101</sup> The author emphasized the ineligibility of Olga due to the reduction in status, and further reiterated how this had been a misfortune for both Nicholas as well as the men who had wanted to marry her. This had been the primary focus of the articles that discussed the Romanov daughters, but these “tragedies” had been accentuated especially so with Olga’s younger sister, Tatiana.

Of the four Romanov daughters, Western journalists primarily focused their attention on the fate of Tatiana who had been Nicholas and Alexandra’s second child. She stood out in several publications because she displayed more Western beauty characteristics than her sisters. Olga, Maria, and Anastasia had possessed “Russian” features which had been less appealing by Western standards.<sup>102</sup> The concern that acceptable men no longer could marry the Romanov daughters had been amplified in articles about Tatiana. Within the *San Francisco Chronicle* article mentioned previously, Tatiana was the report’s main focus despite Olga’s name being in the headline. Tatiana had been depicted as the “pretty, younger sister of Olga and the Grand Duchess’s rival... for the affections of the heir to the throne of England. Tatiana [was] one of the most beautiful girls of royal lineage in the world.”<sup>103</sup>

Maria Romanov had been the third daughter of Nicholas and Alexandra. Her birth initiated the sense of disappointment that came with the appearance of another girl, which continued following her younger sister’s arrival. Compared to her sisters, Maria was

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<sup>101</sup> “Mr. Romanoff and his Daughter Olga,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 20, 1917, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Helen Rappaport, “The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra” (lecture, Lincoln School, Providence, RI, March 29, 2019).

<sup>103</sup> “Mr. Romanoff and his Daughter Olga,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 20, 1917, 4.

awkward, chubby, and highly sociable. There had been little mention of Maria after the execution, although she had been old enough by societal standards to be married. It appeared reporters had not been concerned with her not being able to be married into a wealthy European family, unlike her two older sisters. One incident occurred while the family had been held prisoner at the Ipatiev House that has been capitalized on by a modern Netflix series entitled *The Last Czars* (2019). Maria and a guard, who had grown close over time, were discovered in a “compromising situation” by Filipp Goloshchekin, but it had not been clear as to the actions of Maria and the guard. This led to a change in leadership at the “House of Special Purposes” and brought in the man who would seal the Romanovs’ fate: Yakov Yurovsky.<sup>104</sup> Other than this incident during the family’s imprisonment, Maria had been least mentioned in the Western press compared to the rest of her siblings.

The most famous Romanov child has undoubtedly been Anastasia, but her popularity did not come as a result of any of her actions. She had been the youngest daughter and, like Maria, had rarely been talked about in the Western press, immediately following the execution. However, various “Anastasias” began to emerge in Eastern and Western Europe with the claim that they had survived the shooting at the Ipatiev House. These imposters gained a significant amount of attention from the Western press and Anastasia Romanov had become a well-known legend. But, there had been several inconsistencies found with the claimants. Many of them had forgotten how to speak Russian “due to stress” and also could not name important figures that Anastasia would have known.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Rappaport, 30.

<sup>105</sup> Cook, 188.

An imposter named Anna Anderson, a German woman, had most famously been mistakenly identified as Anastasia by several people who actually knew her. One person was Gleb Botkin, the son of Dr. Sergey Botkin, the Tsar's physician. As a child, Gleb has vivid memories of playing with Anastasia and confirmed Anderson as "Anastasia" because she possessed remnants of a birth mark similar to the real Anastasia.<sup>106</sup> Two decades following the death of Anna Anderson, DNA testing confirmed that Anastasia Romanov had been murdered in the Ipatiev House basement with the rest of her family. The most recent claimant appeared in 2002 in the United States, who stated that she escaped execution at the "House of Special Purposes" and moved to the state of Georgia. DNA testing, which was completed almost ten years later proved that all of the claims had been fabricated and that Anastasia had indeed been murdered with the rest of her family. The extent to which the "Anastasia scheme" affected the West is beyond the scope of this paper, but it nonetheless contributed to the hope that there had been survivors from the Ipatiev House in the midst of the chaos.

The Tsarevich Alexei Romanov had been the only son of Nicholas and Alexandra, and therefore their most precious child. He was the youngest of the children, but by far the most spoiled during his upbringing. His birth changed everything in the Romanov family dynamic for several reasons.<sup>107</sup> Alexei was next in the line of succession to be Tsar after Nicholas and had been fully aware of his future from a young age. As a result, his personality had been snobbish, bossy, and demanding, but Alexandra was determined to give her only son whatever he desired so that he could remain happy.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Edvard Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 371.

<sup>107</sup> Helen Rappaport, "The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra" (lecture, Lincoln School, Providence, RI, March 29, 2019).

<sup>108</sup> Rappaport, 89.

Alexei had been treated differently than the other Romanov children not only because he was the heir that Alexandra and Nicholas had been hoping for for years, but also because he genetically contracted the deadly condition of hemophilia. This had been a crushing blow to the spirits of Nicholas and Alexandra who had previously been elated with finally being blessed with a son. The Tsarevich had Hemophilia B, or “Christmas Disease,” which was the technical term established by modern medical science.<sup>109</sup> Individuals with this condition could not produce a vitamin which helped the blood to coagulate following an injury, in order to begin the healing process. Recovery had been significantly more difficult for hemophiliacs as their injuries would bleed continuously resulting in days of agonizing pain. This had been the state of the future absolute monarch of Russia and Nicholas and Alexandra feared that dislike for the Romanov regime would grow if the public discovered the Tsarevich would not live to adulthood.

In the midst of the demoralizing Russo-Japanese War, Alexei’s birth had symbolized hope in several ways for the Russian people and they celebrated at the news. The public had been completely unaware that the future Tsar of Russia, their God-given leader, had a life-threatening condition, which would prevent him from fulfilling his royal duties. The Tsarevich had to be shielded from the public for his safety and for the protection of the dynasty. He had two bodyguards around constantly to make sure he remained uninjured and made few public appearances.<sup>110</sup>

Compared to past royal families, Nicholas and Alexandra had isolated themselves from public view by living in Tsarskoe Selo, away from the capital city of St. Petersburg,

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<sup>109</sup> Evgeny I. Rogaev, Anastasia P. Grigorenko, Gulnaz Faskhutdinova, Ellen L.W. Kittler and Yuri K. Moliaka, “Genotype Analysis Identifies the Cause of the ‘Royal Disease’,” *Science* 326 (November 6, 2009): 817.

<sup>110</sup> Rappaport, 91.

and had not attended important funerals or ceremonies for fear of assassination. Not only did this lead to public sentiment against the Romanov who appeared to have neglected the people, but the isolation also contributed to a sense of mystery associated with the royal family. One of the only instances that Alexei made a public appearance had been during the Romanov Tercentenary and this had done little to eliminate the revolutionary cloud hovering over Russia. The public reacted with confusion when they saw the eight-year old Tsarevich for the first time as he could not walk and had to be carried to his seat by a guard. People began to wonder why their future leader could not walk and suspicion increased as the family once again retreated from public view following the ceremony.<sup>111</sup>

Because of his constant hiding from public view, Alexei had been seen as an enigma to Western reporters and also portrayed as a mythical being, who could have survived the shooting at the Ipatiev House. An article published in the *Daily Boston Globe* on May 19, 1940 discussed a sighting and personal encounter with a man who claimed to be the Tsarevich. In this account, Alexei encountered a man referred to as Count Paul Vassili who was of Polish descent and had served in the Polish Legion in Siberia. Although the article concluded that this individual impersonated the Tsarevich, the man supposedly possessed information that only Alexei would have known. For example, he could recite all the names of the ministers who had been serving during Nicholas's rule. More surprisingly, this man allegedly possessed similar scarring to that of the Tsarevich which would have resulted from the many injuries Alexei suffered due to hemophilia. Vassili held the man in a prison cell while authorities worked to confirm his identity, but "Alexis Romanoff had presumably escaped during the night. His cell was empty, the lock had been forced, a guard had been found dead. Alexis ... had help from

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<sup>111</sup> Fleming, 117.



the outside.”<sup>112</sup> Out of fear his true identity would be discovered, the man broke out of jail and this confirmed to the authorities that he had been an imposter.

Alexei's escape from the Ipatiev House would have been utterly impossible. Shortly before the execution, Alexei had not been able to walk on his own for an extended period of time. Nicholas had to carry his son to the basement when the Bolsheviks informed them it had been time to leave.<sup>113</sup> Even if Alexei had managed to escape the “House of Special Purposes,” he could not have been successful without sustaining some injuries and his condition caused him to be debilitated from any small bump or bruise. Moreover, symptoms of hemophilia appear early in life for males and later in life for females. The Tsarevich had not been expected to surpass age sixteen and at the time of the execution, he was fourteen years old.

This article had appeared in connection with a larger scheme concocted by Princess Catherine Radziwill who had used the name Count Paul Vassili as a pseudonym. She had married a member of the Russian court and “turned Romanov-baiting into a personal cottage industry.”<sup>114</sup> It had been common for people of the Russian court to spread rumors and gossip about the royal family, but Radziwill adamantly tried to slander the Romanov dynasty and wrote several books about Nicholas's descent from power and what she believed happened to him and his family. She gained her fame as a result of her vicious analysis of Alexandra and her reports persisted even more than twenty years after the execution. Through the use of the pseudonym, she had been able to inject false stories about the supposed siting of Alexei and perpetuated the belief that the heir to the Russian

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<sup>112</sup> H. Bedford-Jones, “The Mysterious Disappearance of the Czar's Son,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 19, 1940, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Fleming, 233.

<sup>114</sup> Rappaport, 45.

throne could have been alive, because “the mere notion that the Czarevich might be alive throws these Russians into a panic.”<sup>115</sup>

In the years following the execution of the Romanov family, the Western press had speculated about the whereabouts and wellbeing Nicholas and Alexandra’s children. Russian traditions that have prevailed for three hundred years, the lies told by the Bolsheviks, and the notion of God-given power taken away in an instant influenced the stories that had been published and perpetuated a hope among Western newspaper readers, that perhaps the innocent children of the former Tsar could have survived. This hope stayed alive and the truth had been buried with Lenin’s death and subsequent regime change to Josef Stalin’s direction. As Stalin built his version for the Soviet Union, he prohibited any discussion of the former monarchy particularly that of the Romanov family and the execution. This suppression of speech prevented a thorough investigation from taking place and also enabled Western reporters to perpetuate the lies as well as glorify the imposters. For almost eighty years, the true fate of the Romanov family had been burned and buried in the Koptiyaki Forest. Their story and remains would surface, when these restrictions were lifted with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. With a newly formed Russia, freedom, and the development of DNA analysis, the story of what happened to the family could finally be pieced together to provide historical closure after so many years of mystery.

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<sup>115</sup> H. Bedford-Jones, “The Mysterious Disappearance of the Czar’s Son,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 19, 1940, 6.

## **CHAPTER 6: Secrecy and DNA Analysis Confirmed the Truth**

The precise events of July 17, 1918 had been buried for nearly ninety years before they emerged. As Yakov Sverdlov's announcement and the news of ex-Tsar Nicholas's execution circulated throughout the Western world, the infiltration of Bolshevik deception and the press's desperate need for a story construed the narrative of the Romanov family murder. This allowed for the emergence of imposters to come forward in the hopes that they could claim the infamous Romanov fortune. The lack of physical evidence, particularly the bodies, made it difficult for anybody in the West to conclude what had actually happened. Moreover, the botched attempt to dispose of the corpses left behind significant amounts of circumstantial evidence that indicated something horrifying had occurred. All of this had been buried, found, preserved, hidden away again, and finally identified as the remains of the Romanov family, nearly ninety years after that fateful event.

In the few years following the Romanovs' execution, several published stories described false details of the act. Moreover, few in the Western press had obtained the truth. Robert Wilton, Russian correspondent to *The Times*, went to Ekaterinburg via Serbia and worked with the original investigator of the case, Nikolay Sokolov of the Omsk Regional Court.<sup>116</sup> Together, they visited the supposed site where the bodies had been disposed of and encountered an abundance of circumstantial evidence, which led them to conclude foul play had taken place, but could not necessarily confirm that royalty had been dumped there. On the site where the burning took place, charred earth remained over a year later. Other forms of evidence included vast numbers of expensive stones and valuables worth several thousand rubles. Using these pieces of evidence as well as the

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<sup>116</sup> Rappaport, 212.

testimonies and depositions of local witnesses, Wilton had been one of the first to acknowledge that the entire Romanov family had been murdered and that there were no survivors.<sup>117</sup>

Unlike many Western reporters who had been desperate for a story that would entice their readers and were thus easily fooled by Bolshevik manipulation, Wilton was skeptical of the Bolshevik announcement, which had only confirmed the execution of Tsar Nicholas II. Although he had been accurate in his evaluation of those events, his assumptions as to who was responsible and his mistrust of the Bolsheviks for anti-Semitic reasons were obvious in his writing. Wilton implicated key authority figures in the Ipatiev House, such as Yakov Yurovsky as well as Yakov Sverdlov in Moscow, and Filipp Goloshchekin, as being involved in the larger international communist scheme. He stated that most of the individuals on the Board of Sovdep (the committee that made the decision to execute the Tsar) had been Jewish, thus confirming international Jewish involvement.<sup>118</sup> While Wilton did hone in on the gruesome events in the basement of the Ipatiev House, he also captured the tense and elaborate political atmosphere throughout Russia by showing the Bolsheviks deliberately attempted to erase the Romanovs from existence, something that Lenin had desperately tried to conceal. However, the trail left behind by the killers had been littered with evidence, despite their fruitless attempts to cover up the act from its origins.

Surprisingly, the primary source used to find the location of the Romanovs' bodies had been the Yurovsky Note, which was the account of the execution given by the head of the Ipatiev House, Yakov Yurovsky. He had been the man responsible for

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<sup>117</sup> Wilton, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Wilton, 157.

eradicating the existence of the Tsarist regime and destroying all traces of evidence which could have implicated the Bolsheviks. Yet it had been his account that led to the discovery of the bodies. The report had been utilized by a former policeman from Moscow Geli Ryubov and his colleague, a geologist from Sverdlovsk, Aleksandr Avdonin, who deciphered Yurovsky's account of the murder and figured out the potential location of the burial site.<sup>119</sup> In the early 1970s, there had been a general feeling of nostalgia among Russians of the times prior to the two devastating world wars, especially so for Ryubov and Avdonin. As the sixtieth anniversary of the last Tsar's execution loomed and no reliable witnesses or evidence had emerged over the years, Ryubov and Avdonin secretly worked to figure out what had happened to the Tsar and his family.<sup>120</sup>

Yakov Yurovsky had been the man to carry out the Romanov family execution and had revealed the general location where the bodies had been disposed, outside the Koptiyaki Forest. While examining his account, Avdonin noticed that Yurovsky and his crew had stayed in one location for nearly five hours and believed that this would be a reasonable place to start. Avdonin, Ryubov, and a group of geologists explored the grassy field and encountered an oily black substance in a patch of earth, which tested to be highly acidic.<sup>121</sup> This had been consistent with the many accounts that stated the bodies had been doused with sulfuric acid and then consumed by fire.<sup>122</sup> The group had an eerie feeling as to what could have happened on that spot and were fearful of the information they might uncover.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Cook, 179.

<sup>120</sup> Cook, 178.

<sup>121</sup> Cook, 179.

<sup>122</sup> "Czar's Death Told by Col. Emerson," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1920, 1.

<sup>123</sup> Cook, 179.

Several legal hurdles had prevented Avdonin and Ryubov from conducting an official and proper investigation of the disposal site and the remains. In the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin, speech had been heavily suppressed and it was forbidden to talk about the Tsar in any way, which prevented further discussion on the murder investigation. It had been imperative for Avdonin and Ryubov to keep their mission a secret as Stalin had instilled fear among his subjects at the beginning of his reign through the purges. Even after his death in 1953, Stalin's legacy of "thought control" still pervaded Soviet laws and people's behavior. Thus, obtaining the Yurovsky Note would have been difficult, but fortunately Ryubov had been a former police officer and gained access to the document in the Kremlin archives. They also had to proceed with extreme caution when seeking a permit to dig in the suspected disposal site. It was illegal to disturb a gravesite in the Soviet Union and they purposefully did not report it as such to authorities in order to conceal their mission. Instead, they requested to dig in the area for "geological research" and had then been able to begin their investigation.<sup>124</sup>

Avdonin and Ryubov found three skulls and an assortment of bones which they extracted from the ground somewhat randomly and did not keep any geological record as to the exact locations.<sup>125</sup> Because of several mistakes Yurovsky and his crew made during the disposal of the bodies as well as the number of years that had passed since the execution, modern investigators had to proceed with extreme caution to preserve what they had. They desperately wanted to analyze these findings, but Ryubov's forensic science connections refused to work on the case in fear of their lives. When this overture failed, Avdonin and Ryubov quickly made plaster casts of the skulls and then returned to

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<sup>124</sup> Cook, 179.

<sup>125</sup> Rappaport, 220.

the disposal site to rebury them.<sup>126</sup> Forced to keep their secret, they waited nearly a decade before Ryubov told their story to the *Moscow News*, which had been made possible by Mikhail Gorbachev's presidency. His role ushered in an era of *glasnost*, a new policy of openness. After Avdonin's and Ryubov's findings had been publicized, because Russia's DNA testing technology had not advanced, American and British forensic scientists aided in analyzing the remains.<sup>127</sup>

Although forensic research moved ahead since the Romanov execution, DNA analysis of their remains was extremely difficult for modern scientists. There had been very little left of the bodies by the time they underwent DNA tests, because of decomposition as well as the attempts to destroy the bodies with sulfuric acid and fire. Most of what had been found were various bones, with many still missing. However, using the newest form of testing with mitochondrial DNA from distant surviving members of the Romanov family, forensic analysts concluded that these had been the remains of all the Romanovs.<sup>128</sup>

Due to Ryubov's and Avdonin's careful examination and documentation of the physical evidence they had found as well as the secrecy surrounding their mission, the remains had been preserved for a time when scientists could be properly identified. DNA analysis revealed new pieces of information about the Romanovs that would have never been known if the remains had been destroyed. The Tsarevich Alexei had not been the only member of the family to have the mutated gene which caused hemophilia.<sup>129</sup> From Tsarina Alexandra, the condition had also been passed to Grand Duchess Anastasia.

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<sup>126</sup> Cook, 179.

<sup>127</sup> Rappaport, 220.

<sup>128</sup> Cook, 181-182.

<sup>129</sup> Rogaev, Grigorenko, Faskhutdinova, Kittler, and Moliaka, 817.

However, she did not experience the same effects of hemophilia as her brother because the symptoms usually appear earlier on the males' lives than females.

Had Anastasia lived to adulthood, she would have experienced episodes similar to that of Alexei, which would have led to the rapid degradation of her health. Although these periods of suffering would not have been nearly as severe as those of Alexei, continuous bleeding would have been caused by a minor bump or cut. The DNA analysis had been a helpful piece of evidence which connected Anastasia's remains to the Romanov family. This new information discovered in the DNA evaluation of the Romanovs remains provided further confirmation that the several "Anastasias" who had appeared over the years had been imposters.<sup>130</sup> The real Anastasia Romanov was born in 1901 and her most famous imposter died in 1984.<sup>131</sup> That woman displayed no symptoms of hemophilia as she continued to entertain the world with her fictitious stories of her miraculous escape from the Ipatiev House.

As early as the 1960s, research on hemophilia had significantly advanced as doctors instituted new methods of treatments and testing. Specifically, tests to determine if individuals inherited hemophilia had become available and it was determined that the condition mostly affects males because they tend to display symptoms early in life. Meanwhile, 'Anastasia' continued to profit from pretending to be a Romanov and scientists stated that her claim would have been less controversial if these tests had been performed on 'Anastasia's' male relatives. Her story recounted that she had escaped with an Ekaterinburg soldier from the Ipatiev House on the night of the execution. From there, they vanished into Serbia and traveled to Romania, then finally resided in a German

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<sup>130</sup> Victor A. McKusick, "The Royal Hemophilia," *Scientific American* 213 (August 1965): 93.

<sup>131</sup> Cook, 180.



village. There, she gave birth to a son from the man who helped her escape and handed the infant over to a convent and had never been heard of again. Although it had not been officially determined scientifically in the 1960s, many suspected that some or all of the Romanov daughters were carriers of hemophilia.<sup>132</sup> In order for the claimant 'Anastasia' to confirm her story, these tests would have been necessary. Because this woman had not been the real Anastasia Romanov, tests to detect hemophilia in her supposed son would have discredited her story and perhaps refocused the investigation of the Romanovs. However, 'Anastasia's' son has never been found and the mystery was solved long after her death.<sup>133</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church has been conflicted about accepting the results of the DNA evidence. If these really had been the remains of the last Tsarist family, those people who had been given the God-given right to rule, the church would need to conduct a proper burial in accordance with traditions, even though this had already been done without the bodies shortly after the execution.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the question of whether the Romanovs should be canonized as saints loomed over church officials in the 1990s as they assessed Nicholas's actions as Tsar. Since the fall of Communism, there had been an increased interest in Romanovs and the Ipatiev House became a place of worship for dedicated followers of the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>135</sup> In the Eastern European nations that border Russia, the established Orthodox Church Outside of Russia held sympathetic views of the monarchy and the ex-Tsar Nicholas II. This sect of the church did not hesitate to canonize all the Romanovs and they have been venerated by members ever

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<sup>132</sup> McKusick, 95.

<sup>133</sup> Gleb Botkin, "This Is Anastasia," *The North American Review* 229 (February 1930): 198.

<sup>134</sup> Fleming, 250.

<sup>135</sup> Fleming, 251.

since. In Russia, the Orthodox Church never fully recognized the Romanovs as saints and this discrepancy between the two faiths created conflict among those living and practicing in Russia and those outside of Russia.

Although the gruesome tale of the Romanov family murder shocked the Western world, as time passed the story of the killing itself and how the Bolsheviks deceived the public have been undermined by the two names most commonly associated with the Romanov family: Grigory Rasputin and Grand Duchess Anastasia Romanov. Rasputin, the Siberian monk who practically hypnotized the Tsarina and climbed his way to the top of Russian aristocracy extremely quickly as a result of his mythical power, and Anastasia, the royal daughter who miraculously escaped from the gruesome shooting at the Ipatiev House after witnessing the murder of her entire family, distracted the world from murder's true events. These stories have enticed consumers for decades and the modern media has capitalized on them in dramatizations, the most recent being a series on the streaming service Netflix called *The Last Czars* (2019). The stories of Rasputin and Anastasia, as well as the deception by the Bolsheviks, prevented the truth from surfacing.

The Bolsheviks had successfully confused the Western world for nearly ninety years and hid the events of July 17, 1918. Due to the advancement of forensic technology and the regime change in Russia of the 1990s, the last ruling family finally could be properly laid to rest and the Western world provided with the answers for which reporters had been searching. Despite their meticulous attempts to conceal the evidence of an entire family's murder, the perpetrators had actually left behind a plethora of evidence that could be tested with the proper technology. If the Bolsheviks had not been so adamant on eradicating the existence of the Romanovs in order to prevent Nicholas from becoming

reinstated as Tsar and to stop religious believers from worshiping the remains, the mystery may have been forgotten. Because Yakov Sverdlov had been vague in his announcement of Nicholas's execution, the world wanted to know what happened to the rest of the Romanovs and did not stop until an answer had been found.

## CONCLUSION

Russia had been operating under an absolute monarchy for over three hundred years which ended with the execution of the Romanovs on July 17, 1918. The demise of this family's rule had been inevitable since Nicholas II's father, Tsar Alexander III, died. Nicholas was tremendously unprepared and ignorant to the problems of the common Russian people. Even though Nicholas had not been the ideal ruler, his abdication and family's execution was a tragic story that mystified the Western world. Vladimir Lenin knew that the execution of the entire family, specifically innocent women and children, would be received negatively. So, the Bolsheviks simply left that portion out of their announcement of the act, which enabled them to deceive Western reporters into publishing false reports in order to provide an answer to the many questions that lingered.

The mysteriousness surrounding the Romanovs had been perpetuated by the isolation brought on by Alexandra. Because she had been born in Germany and grew up in England with her grandmother, Queen Victoria, her Russian and French, the two languages primarily spoken at the Russian court, were mediocre. She had zealously converted to Russian Orthodoxy from Lutheranism in order to marry Nicholas and made extensive efforts to please the Russian people. Regardless, they viewed her German heritage negatively and during the Great War, many accused her of colluding with Germany.

Their public appearances decreased more so following the birth of their son and heir to the throne, Alexei. Shortly after he was born, doctors discovered that he had hemophilia.<sup>1</sup> Learning this news had been a crushing blow to Nicholas's and Alexandra's

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<sup>1</sup> Rappaport, 88.

morale as they knew that Alexei would have to be constantly protected and could not participate in young boys' normal activities. Moreover, medical wisdom gave little chance that Alexei would surpass age sixteen which created uncertainty as to the Tsarevich's God-given right to rule and command. It had been imperative that his condition was kept a secret, even from certain family members, to preserve the Romanov family's legitimacy.

When the Great War broke out, Nicholas's government vastly underestimated the time and scope of the fighting as did the majority of the world. Due to the drastic miscalculations and Nicholas's rash decision to take over command of the Russian forces despite having no military experience, morale among the soldiers was lost. While Nicholas was away from St. Petersburg to command the forces, Alexandra and the infamous mystic Grigory Rasputin had been left to make diplomatic decisions. All of this, and the events of Nicholas's rule preceding the war, culminated into intense political unrest in Russia which allowed revolutionaries including Lenin to gain influence. After Nicholas abdicated, firmly believing that this decision would save Russia, the Provisional Government placed him and his family under house arrest.<sup>2</sup>

While under the custody of the Provisional Government, which temporarily held power before the Bolshevik Revolution, the Romanovs had lived modestly. Initially kept under guard at Tsarskoe Selo, they were then taken to Tobolsk, a Siberian town whose citizens were sympathetic to the Tsar. However, a cloud of uncertainty hovered over the family due to the revolutionary atmosphere and several possibilities, such as escape to Great Britain or flight to their vacation home in Livadia, remained potential options.

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<sup>2</sup> Wortman, 201.

When the family later relocated to Ekaterinburg, execution had been the last thing that they believed would happen. Little did they know, this act had been carefully calculated and planned with the objective to permanently eliminate the Romanovs. Lenin and his entourage believed in the necessity of this action to protect their state building efforts. However, the local Bolsheviks eager to carry out Moscow's order did not fare well. The act had been planned based on inaccurate information and unaccounted for several obstacles. Yakov Yurovsky, the commander of the Ipatiev House, anticipated that the murder would be a quick shooting and the disposal of the bodies in the Koptiyaki Forest would go smoothly and unnoticed. Nothing that Yurovsky had expected occurred, aside the execution itself, and all the details of his plan fell through. Particularly, the disposal of the bodies had been extremely gruesome and sloppy, which left an abundance of physical evidence.

A few days after the gruesome murder of the entire Romanov family, Yakov Sverdlov, Lenin's second in command, announced that Nicholas had been executed and that the remaining family members had been taken to a safe place. This, along with the fake trial planned by Sverdlov, allowed the Bolsheviks to manipulate the situation and fool the various Western reporters, who craved knowledge of the royal family's fate.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Western world had been captivated by the idea that members of the family may be alive. The lack of evidence and the vagueness of Sverdlov's announcement made it easy for imposters to appear. Some claiming to be Alexei, Nicholas, and most famously Anastasia captivated the public with their tall tales of a miraculous escape from the

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<sup>3</sup> Rappaport, 133.

basement of the Ipatiev House. Many of these stories lived on and could not be officially verified without the emergence of new evidence and the advancement of technology.

A number of false reports emerged from Sverdlov's announcement which had been the main objective of the Bolsheviks' plan. To keep Lenin's hold on power, it was imperative that the Romanovs' murder had not been tied to him. Because of this, the Bolsheviks actively deceived reporters and the true events of the execution left secret. Soviet authorities made it illegal to talk about the Romanovs and the monarchy. Therefore, a thorough investigation could not be conducted until a regime change took place. Because of this and Stalin's legacy, successors continued to suppress speech in the Soviet Union, but this did not hinder Avdonin's and Ryubov's desire to complete a secret and thorough investigation. In 1991, with the fall of the Soviet Union, these two men who had found and concealed the discovery of human remains could reveal their hardest kept secret.<sup>4</sup> DNA testing confirmed that seven Romanovs, along with the remaining royal servants, had all perished in the basement of the Ipatiev House.<sup>5</sup>

The story of the Romanov family's rule and demise captivated the Western world as many people had been given a glimpse into the lives of royalty. Ruling families had always been a distant concept for common people to understand. The Romanovs' descent from being one of the most powerful families in the world to being executed in an extremely brutal fashion in a basement stimulated intrigue among the West. Reporters capitalized on the idea that the story was a continuation and readers eagerly waited for the next publication about the Romanov family mystery. The stories told by supposed witnesses and reliable sources which had been relayed by reporters only scratched the

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<sup>4</sup> Fleming, 248-249.

<sup>5</sup> Cook, 186-187.

surface of the execution's true events. This had been because of Lenin's need to protect is fragile system and he attempted that by using propaganda as a method of control. The illusion of a trial and the vagueness of Sverdlov's announcement provided justification for executing Nicholas and ensured that he would not receive backlash because of the execution of innocent women and children. It was not until the discovery of Romanovs' physical remains and subsequent DNA analysis nearly one hundred years after the deed that confirmed every member of the Romanov family perished in the "House of Special Purposes."



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## APPENDIX I

Topics covered in Austrian Newspapers about Tsar Nicholas II and the Assassination of the Romanovs as translated by Dr. Joanne Schneider in May 2019.

**1917**

16 March *Russian Review (Russische Rundschau—Vienna)* fall of the tsar, state of the army.

17 March *Foreign News (Fremden Blatt)* dissolution of the Duma, outbreak of Feb/March revolution -revolutionary aims=transfer power from tsar to the Duma.

17 March *Illustrated Crown Newspaper (Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung)* abdication of the tsar.

17 March *German People's Newspaper (Deutsches Volksblatt)* Nicholas was sent away from the front "like a servant", the new government has promised a democracy (exact wording a government like England not Russia).

20 March *Pilsner Daily News (Pilsner Tageblatt)* lengthy article about Nicholas II.

20 March *Linz Daily Post (Linzer Tagespost)* where is Tsar Nicholas II?

22 March *German People's Newspaper (Deutsche Volksblatt)* report of Nicholas's abdication.

22 March *Russian Review (Russische Rundschau—Vienna)* –progress of revolution, tsar trying to deal with Provisional Government.

24 March *Baden Newspaper (Badener Zeitung)* Fall of the House of Romanov.

8 April *Workers' Will (Arbeiterwille)* Nicholas abdicated, he couldn't lead Russia in war.

14 April *German People's Newspaper (Deutsches Volksblatt)* announcing Nicholas's abdication.

14 April *The New Newspaper (Die Neue Zeitung)* glowing evaluation of Nicholas as published in French newspapers.

15 April *German Newspaper (Deutsche Zeitung)* fall of Russia, sketches of Nicholas and the Tsarevich.

21 April *Graz Midday News (Grazer Mittags Zeitung)* story about the royal family in captivity.

22 April *Graz Suburban News (Grazer Vorortzeitung)* the tsar is living in captivity, each day he has less freedom.

11 May *Russian Review (Russische Rundschau—Vienna)* Kerensky visited the royal family.

23 August *Jewish Correspondence (Jüdische Korrespondenz)* tsar and his family are now in Siberia.

15 December *Baden Newspaper (Badener Zeitung)* general article about Nicholas's personality.

## 1918

8 May *New Vienna Journal (Neues Wiener Journal)* Bolshevik government's "case" against Nicholas II that justifies bringing him to trial, mention that he and his family are now in Tobolsk (an unhealthy city in Siberia).

28 June *New Free Press (Neue Freie Presse)* Nicholas is dead.

28 June *New Vienna Journal (Neues Wiener Journal)* Nicholas has been killed, he was a tragic figure, there is uncertainty about the fate of his family.

21 July *Foreign News (Fremden Blatt)* tsar shot in Ekaterinburg.

21 July *Illustrated Crown Newspaper (Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung)* tsar has been shot, general description of life in Ekaterinburg.

22 July *Teplitz-Schönauer Messenger (Teplitz-Schönauer Anzeiger)* presence of the Czech Legion near Ekaterinburg led the local soviet to execute the tsar, the tsarina and children are safe.

23 July *New World Journal (Neuigkeits Welt Blatt)* The End of the Tsar Was the tsar really shot? He was shot by Ekaterinburg Soviet, tsarina and children are reported alive and safe.

25 July *The Tirolean (Der Tiroler)* death of the tsar, Nicholas, Alexandra and Alexei have been murdered.

27 July *New World Journal (Neuigkeits Welt Blatt)* Nicholas taken from the house, given his sentence and was shot. He asked to see Alexandra one last time—the request was denied.

29 July *Vienna General Newspaper (Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung)* death of Nicholas II, no mention of his family.

19 August *New Vienna Journal (Neue Wiener Journal)* claims that Nicholas lies in an unmarked grave near Ekaterinburg.

30 August *Pilsner Daily News (Pilsner Tageblatt)* report of a false tsar.

30 September *Illustrated Crown Newspaper (Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung)* –lengthy story about the exhumation and reburial of the body, many people watched the event, he was placed in a tin coffin then a coffin of the finest Siberian wood and brought to the Ekaterinburg Cathedral. The remains would be moved to Omsk. Meanwhile 20 false tsars have appeared. Others claim that the exhumed body is not Nicholas II.