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DRIVING OUT THE DEVIL

Collapse in the East

> The disintegration of our armies continues to develop. I have received word that in some units the officers are being slaughtered by their own men. Today I received a report that, in one division, the chief of staff was murdered in this fashion.
>
> —Diary of Russian army chief of staff Mikhail Alekseev, June 10, 1917

The tremendous manpower losses encountered by all sides prompted a search to find new allies. Romania was among the neutral nations coveted by both sides, and until the summer of 1916 had sat out the war. Bordering Russia, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary, and Serbia, its geographic position offered many enticing possibilities. If it joined the Central Powers, a new southern offensive into Russia, possibly with Bulgarian support, became a viable possibility. If it joined the Allies, an invasion into the eastern ends of Austria-Hungary could place even more pressure on the withering empire, especially as Austria-Hungary was already heavily engaged in Italy and in Galicia.

As Italy had done, Romania played a waiting game. In such a stalemated conflict as the one that had developed by 1915, neutrals like Romania, Bulgaria, and Italy seemed to hold out a chance of changing the war's fortunes by the possibility of opening new fronts. Consequently, neutrals held bargaining positions considerably out of proportion to their military prowess. Of the neutral nations in 1915, only the United States held the economic and military potential to determine the course of the war. The neutral nations of Europe became a focus of diplomatic efforts, with each

side hoping that the military stalemate could be broken by political means.

Because Romania faced no immediate threats to its interests, the Romanian government had the luxury of waiting for its suitors to assemble the most lucrative dowry before making a decision. Diplomatically, Romania was bound to the Central Powers through a defensive treaty with Austria-Hungary that dated to 1883. This treaty was so secret that only a few members of the Romanian elite knew of the specific terms. The Romanian government, fearful of Ottoman and Russian expansionism, had been careful to renew the pact as late as 1913. By the start of the war in 1914, the Ottomans had become less of a threat due to their defeats in the Balkan Wars. Age-old suspicions between the Romanians and the Russians, however, remained and had led to increased diplomatic, military, and economic links between Romania and Germany.

The Romanian ruling family was a branch of the German Hohenzollern family, providing strong links in the days when such connections might still matter. The kaiser frequently spoke of his confidence that his Romanian cousins would eventually join the Central Powers. Romanian Prime Minister Ion Bratianu received his job in part because of his avowed pro-German feelings, but like most Romanians he remained unenthusiastic about assisting the Austro-Hungarians. Nevertheless, all signs pointed to Romania's eventually joining the war on the side of the Central Powers.

These links to the Central Powers notwithstanding, Romania, like Italy, had territorial goals that could only be met by taking land away from Austria-Hungary. Romania sought Austro-Hungarian territory in Transylvania, Bukovina, and the Banat. Transylvania, which contained a large number of ethnic Romanians, remained the most important prize. In 1914, before the outbreak of war, Romania patched up some of its old disagreements with Russia, exchanging state visits and convincing Russian

Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov to meet with disgruntled ethnic Romanians living under Austro-Hungarian rule. This move infuriated the Austrians, convincing them of Russia's intent to inflame nationalist passions inside the empire.

When war broke out, the Romanian government could find no reason to meet its treaty obligations and join the belligerants. Although most members of the Romanian elite still had pro-German sentiments, the thought of fighting alongside the Austro-Hungarians and their former Ottoman enemies remained an unpleasant one. German promises of giving Romania Russian Bessarabia in return for Romania's joining the Central Powers fell short of Romanian territorial desires. Transylvania remained the key. As a result, Romania remained on the sidelines throughout 1914 and 1915. Germany and Austria-Hungary contented themselves with Romanian neutrality. It seems never to have occurred to them that the Romanians might one day turn to the Allies. Consequently, they left the Austro-Hungarian frontier with Romania almost entirely unguarded.

Romania's first steps toward entering the war came at the end of 1914, when King Carol died. His nephew and successor, King Ferdinand, had more pronounced Allied sympathies, but a weaker presence and an unwillingness to make important decisions. Although he proved unable to sway Bratianu from his pro-German sentiments, the king came increasingly under the influence of his pro-Allied wife, who was the granddaughter of both Britain's Queen Victoria and Russia's Alexander II. His family situation did little to make the king more decisive. Meanwhile, two of his brothers were serving in the German army under the command of their cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II.

In early 1915, the British made a secret commitment to give Transylvania to Romania if the latter country entered the war. The offer impressed both the king and Bratianu, who finally saw a chance to annex this coveted region. Yet the Romanians continued to vacillate, wanting even more and anxious to ensure that

they would fight on the winning side. Bratianu's insistence on adding Bukovina and the Banat stalled negotiations until later in the year. By that time, the Russians had been driven from Poland and the British sat stalemated at Gallipoli. Bratianu decided that the time was not yet ripe for Romania to declare its intentions. The Romanians increased their trade with the Central Powers and waited for more favorable circumstances.

THE ROMANIAN CAMPAIGN

The events of 1916 changed Romania's situation dramatically. Russian success in the Brusilov offensives both wore down the Austro-Hungarian army and placed Russia in an advantageous position to claim the lands that Romania sought, most importantly Transylvania and Bukovina. Neutrality no longer seemed the best option. Accordingly, the Romanians concluded a secret treaty with the Allies in August 1916 by which the latter promised Romania the three provinces it most wanted and pledged to continue pressuring Austria-Hungary from the Russian and Salonika fronts. Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary, but not Germany, on August 27.

The 700,000-man Romanian army had fought inconsistently in the Balkan Wars. Facing no immediate threat and short of money, the state had invested lightly in the modernization of its army in the months before the outbreak of World War I. As a result, it lacked adequate artillery and had an officer corps that was woefully ill prepared for fighting in 1916. Primitive road and rail networks complicated movement and supply. Russia, meanwhile, quickly grew suspicious of the Romanians, criticizing them for entering the war only after Russia had done the dirty work. They saw the Romanians as little better than vultures, anxious to gain territory as a result of the blood spilled by Russian soldiers. "If His Majesty ordered me to send fifteen wounded soldiers to Romania," Alekseev said, "I would on no account send a sixteenth."[1]

His sentiment accurately reflected the mood of the Russian elite, most of whom continued to see Romania as a poor ally, and one with strong pro-German sentiments.

These problems notwithstanding, the Romanian army advanced quickly across the lightly defended Austro-Hungarian frontier. By mid-September they were fifty miles into enemy territory and controlled large parts of Transylvania. Germany, Bulgaria, and Turkey responded by declaring war on Romania. The Germans then sent Erich von Falkenhayn, recently removed as German chief of staff, to crush the Romanians with a new German Ninth Army. The ruthless Falkenhayn took the lessons he had learned at murderous places like Ypres and Verdun and unleashed his veteran forces against the terribly outmatched Romanians. A second Central Powers army, led by Gorlice-Tarnów veteran August von Mackensen and containing Germans, Bulgarians, and Ottomans, crossed into Romania from the south.

Invaded from two sides by experienced and well-led soldiers, Romania soon collapsed. Within just six weeks of declaring war, the Central Powers' double pincer movement had negated all Romanian gains. Russia chose not to reinforce the Romanians, leaving them helpless in the face of the overwhelming strength of the Central Powers advance. On October 23, Mackensen's men seized the key Black Sea port of Constanza, and less than two weeks later Falkenhayn broke through the last Romanian defenses in Transylvania. On December 6, less than four months after entering the war, the Romanians lost their capital, Bucharest. Their armies had not been defeated; they had been destroyed and humiliated. Romania lost more than 300,000 men in total casualties. The only help the Allies provided amounted to sabotage teams sent to demolish the Ploesti oil wells lest they should fall into German hands.

The ease with which the Central Powers devastated the Romanian armies meant that the Romanian campaign did not have a significant impact on the larger war. German treatment of the

conquered nation, however, did have an important legacy. After agreeing to an armistice, the Romanians soon found themselves a virtual colony of the Central Powers. Angered by the betrayal of his relatives, the kaiser turned vengeful. Hindenburg and Ludendorff argued for outright annexation of Romania to the German Reich, but diplomats convinced them to leave a veneer of Romanian independence and divide the spoils with Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria in order to provide Germany's allies with needed succor.

The Central Powers immediately began the process of removing hundreds of thousands of tons of grain from Romania, leaving the civilian population near starvation. They also repaired the damaged oil wells and seized the oil thus produced, depriving Romania of its chief source of income. The Treaty of Bucharest, signed in April 1918, codified the harsh terms of occupation. It gave Germany a ninety-year lease on Romanian oil fields, minerals, and other natural resources. In the span of eighteen months, the Germans had managed to seize one million tons of oil and two million tons of grain. These resources helped to sustain the German war economy in the face of the British blockade. In effect, the Germans hoped to use eastern Europe to compensate for losses caused by the blockade.

The territorial adjustments forced onto Romania were no less harsh. Romania ceded passes in the Carpathian Mountains to Austria-Hungary, as well as much of the Black Sea coastline to Bulgaria, leaving Romania's borders virtually indefensible. The half of the Dobruja region north of the city of Constanza was to be ruled as a shared German-Austrian-Bulgarian mandate. As a result, Romania lost the entire Danube River delta. Bulgaria annexed the southern half of the Dobruja region (lost to Romania after the Second Balkan War) outright. In the final weeks of the war, with the Central Powers collapsing everywhere, Romania reentered the war on the Allied side, giving itself some leverage at the postwar Paris Peace Conference, where it recouped the losses

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A German, a Bulgarian, and a Turkish soldier patrol together in Romania. Invasions by several armies on three fronts doomed the ill-prepared and ill-equipped Romanians. (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis) (HU040549)

of 1916 and even succeeded in annexing Transylvania from the now-defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Germany's brutal treatment of Romania sent a grave warning signal to the Allies. Romania was a relatively small and poor nation, and although it had reneged on treaty obligations, by 1917 it posed no obvious threat to any of the Central Powers. The Germans had treated it with unusual cruelty and had converted it into a virtual vassal state. The treatment of Romania, however, fit in with Germany's prosecution of the war more generally. The Germans had forcibly relocated 120,000 Frenchmen and 100,000 Belgians to German factories and had begun the process of removing Slavs and Jews from Poland to clear land for resettlement by Germans.[2]

German treatment of Romania underscored the possibility that if the Central Powers won the war, their treatment of the Allies would likely be even more harsh. No Frenchman had to be reminded of the immense costs and intentional humiliations that had accompanied Germany's victory in 1871. Britain, France, and Russia soon learned of German plans to annex Belgium, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Courland, and Poland, impose "the most ruthless humiliation of England," and take over control of the rich Longwy-Briey iron basin in France.[3] Only the most unrealistic optimists still held out any hope for a compromise peace. It was now a war of survival. As bad as fighting the war was for the Allies, losing it would be even worse.

THE FIRST RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

For the Russians the possibility of losing the war drew ever closer. The territorial gains of the Brusilov offensive had done little to convince the Russian people of the value of continued sacrifice. Even a victory, many concluded, would only serve to keep the hated Romanov family in power. In November 1916 Brusilov had publicly boasted that "if it were possible to take a vote of the entire population, ninety-nine out of every one hundred Russians today would demand the continuation of the war to a definite and final victory regardless of the price."[4] Privately, however, he had already concluded that his men would not fight for the tsar unless the regime could explain its goals and how they related to the average Russian. Brusilov had no confidence that it could do so. The tsarina and two former premiers were of German descent, and rumors quickly spread that the tsarina's mysterious adviser, Rasputin, was in the pay of German agents. His death at the hands of Russian conservatives in December 1916 did little to quell the suspicions of pro-German activity at the court.

The military leadership of the tsar did little to quell such rumors. Even casual observers could see how incompetent the tsar

Alexei Brusilov led Russia's last great offensive of the war. An aristocratic cavalryman, he developed innovative infantry and artillery tactics, but he later grew disillusioned with the tsar's poor conduct of the war. (Library of Congress)

was in military matters. A joke that circulated in Russia about two Jews living in the war zone in Poland reflects the contemporary attitude toward the tsar and his military acumen. One of the Jews, who is pro-German, boasts about the kaiser, telling his Russian friend (inaccurately) that the German leader runs from army to army, always leading from the front. The Russian Jew then turns to his friend and exclaims, "Your [kaiser] has no dignity; he runs around like a chicken. Our tsar sits at Headquarters and the front comes to him!"[5]

In the words of a November speech given by Duma member Pavel Miliukov, the question was whether the failures of the Russian government were the result of "stupidity or treason." Either way, Russia was approaching consensus on the need for change.

The inability of the government to respond to the miseries of the unusually cold winter of 1916–1917 led to open talk of revolution at all levels of society. The 1916 harvest had provided enough food, but the overtaxed Russian transport system could not efficiently deliver that food from the countryside to the cities. In addition, Russian economic policies produced inflation that removed what food did reach the cities from the average Russian's plate. Eggs, meat, sugar, milk, and fruit all but disappeared from the workers' diet. "A revolution, if it takes place," prophesized one far-sighted Russian official, "will be spontaneous, quite likely a hunger riot."[6]

The condition of the average Russian, never luxurious, declined into outright destitution. In response to these deteriorating conditions, strikes became common, leading to a nearly 50 percent decrease in industrial production at a time when the army desperately needed artillery shells and small-arms ammunition.[7] One strike in January 1917 attracted 150,000 workers in Petrograd. Urban unrest increased, and in the countryside draft evasion became an ever more serious problem. Inside the army, desertion and disobedience rose sharply. Among those soldiers who remained loyal, malnutrition led to high disease rates, further depriving the Russian army of men.

More strikes hit Petrograd in February, timed to coincide with the reconvening of the Duma. Finally, in March, the dam broke. From March 8 to 10, a wave of strikes paralyzed Petrograd. In an important and ominous sign for the tsar, Russian security forces were reluctant to fire on the protesters. Calls for the tsar's abdication became ubiquitous, from revolutionaries who wanted to destroy the old order entirely to conservatives who sought a more effective way of prosecuting the war. On March 9, the Duma formed a provisional government and arrested several of the tsar's ministers.

Nicholas had left for his military headquarters the day before the March strikes began. Ill-informed about the realities of life in Petrograd, he was slow to react. On March 11 he received the news

about the creation of the provisional government and responded by ordering that the Duma be dissolved. When the Duma disobeyed his order, Nicholas headed back to Petrograd. At the city of Pskov, workers stopped his train and detained him. Alekseev and northern front commander Nikolai Ruzsky convinced Nicholas that he had no choice but to abdicate. He did so the next day, also abdicating in the name of his sickly young son. Nicholas then urged his younger brother, Grand Duke Michael, to assume the throne. Uninterested in power or its trappings, Michael feared for his safety, believing that the public would no longer accept the Romanov family as its divinely chosen rulers. The mythic bond that had united leaders and led, Michael concluded, had permanently broken. Thus the Grand Duke, whom Nicholas had banned from Russia for several years for marrying a twice-divorced commoner, refused his brother's request. Power then devolved to the provisional government.

Prince Georgi Lvov, who had been a vocal critic of the tsar's handling of the war, became the premier of the new government. Thirty-six-year-old Alexander Kerensky, who had only been in the Duma since 1912, soon came to be one of the government's most forceful officials. A centrist politician and brilliant orator, Kerensky had spent part of the war in Finland recuperating from illness. He returned to find a system that had entirely broken down as a result of the pressures of the war, leading him to call for the end of what he termed a "medieval" tsarist system. After assuming the office of war minister in May, he assured the Allies that Russia would continue to fight and would fulfill all of its obligations. He then went to the front, asking the men to show the world that "there is strength and not weakness in liberty." Now, he told Russia's soldiers, they would fight not for the tsar, but for their own freedom and the future of their homeland. His words drove thousands of soldiers to "hysterical patriotism" and seemed to open a new era for Russia.[8] Kerensky also persuaded important military and civilian figures to remain with the government. He

Tsar Nicholas II's limited understanding of military affairs placed his government in an awkward position after his assumption of the role of commander-in-chief in 1915. His inability to turn the tide of Russian fortunes cost him his throne and his life. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

convinced Brusilov, who had considered retirement, to accept command of all Russian forces.

Russian determination to continue fighting came in part from Germany's unwillingness to negotiate a lenient peace. Instead, the Central Powers decided on what became known as the Kreuznach program. Developed during an April meeting in Kreuznach, Ger-

many, presided over by the kaiser and attended by key figures Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and army commanders Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the program outlined German war aims in light of the developments in Russia. At Kreuznach, the Germans decided upon the complete annexation of Lithuania, Courland, and much of Poland. The remainder of Poland would form a satellite state linked politically and economically to Germany. The participants also outlined their goals for control of parts of Belgium, France, Africa, and the Balkans. Bethmann Hollweg initially objected, noting that only a complete military victory could bring about such results. He worried that Germany would have to fight unnecessarily long to achieve the ambitious goals laid out at Kreuznach. Nevertheless, the attendees signed the protocol, making it official German policy and committing the German leadership to fighting on in the east at a time when Kerensky might have negotiated.

The Germans also began an active program to destroy the Russian system from within. In April 1917 they transported three dozen exiled Russian revolutionaries to Petrograd in a sealed train. Among these men was Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov, better known as Lenin. Although Lenin came from a wealthy background, his family had a history of revolutionary agitation. His older brother had been hanged for attempting to assassinate Tsar Alexander III in 1887. Lenin had been living in Zurich when he learned of Tsar Nicholas's abdication. The Germans arranged for Lenin's transportation to Russia in the hopes that this "Beelzebub" could help them drive out the "devil," Nicholas II.[9] Lenin's passionate disagreement with Kerensky's calls to continue the war gave him an important common thread with the Germans, who now placed him in a position to take over the leadership of the Bolshevik party.

Lenin advocated an immediate end to the war, pledging to bring "bread, land, and peace" to the Russian people. The day after his arrival in Russia he published an editorial in the Bolshevik

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Pledging "Peace, Bread, and Land," the Bolshevik Red Guards contributed to the pressure on the tsar to abdicate. Their promise to pull Russia out of the war was tremendously appealing to workers and peasants alike. (© Corbis)

newspaper *Pravda* in which he announced the party's intention not to cooperate with the provisional government and to seize power from it by force if necessary. From the front lines, Brusilov noted the growing influence among his soldiers of Lenin's ideas and rhetoric. Kerensky's calls to continue the war had rallied his men temporarily, but were "not at all what the soldiers had in mind" for the long run. Instead, they came increasingly to see the value in a more radical revolution behind the Bolsheviks, whose program even the aristocratic Brusilov could see as "beautifully plain and straightforward."[10]

With the Bolsheviks gaining power and influence every day, Kerensky decided upon an offensive. He believed that he had ral-

lied the Russian soldiers and given them new reason to fight. A battlefield victory over the Central Powers, he reasoned, would restore Russian fortunes and, as important, give him some leverage against the more radical elements inside Russia. If successful, the offensive would also legitimate the provisional government in the eyes of the British and French and might even lead them to supply Russia with more weapons.

Achieving a victory would not be easy. The Central Powers had 80 divisions on the eastern front against just 45 under-strength Russian divisions. The Kerensky government could not identify its exact operational objectives, but it knew the man in whose trust they wished to place Russia's fortunes. Kerensky asked Alexei Brusilov to plan the offensive, hoping that he could repeat some of his success from the previous year. Brusilov himself was less than optimistic. "To tell the truth," he remarked, "the government itself did not know for certain what it wanted."[11]

Aware of his gross inferiority in men and weapons, Brusilov chose to focus his efforts opposite the worn-out Austrians. As he had done in 1916, he hoped to win a battle against second-rate troops, in this case the Austrian Second and Third Armies. Attacking these armies also held out the hope of capturing the Drohobycz oil fields and, behind them, the city of Lemberg, filled with symbolic significance. Brusilov had already routed the commander of this sector, the Italian-born Austrian Field Marshal Eduard Böhm-Ermolli, in 1916. Once the hero of the 1915 recapture of Lemberg, Böhm-Ermolli's career had taken a precipitous decline the following year. After the Brusilov offensives of that year had smashed through his ill-prepared lines, Böhm-Ermolli had been relieved of command at the Germans' insistence. Once the immediate crisis had passed, the Austro-Hungarian royal family convinced the Germans to reconsider. Not only was Böhm-Ermolli allowed to return to his Second Army, but his headquarters was one of the few in the Austro-Hungarian army that remained relatively free of German oversight.

The unfortunate field marshal might have been better advised to remain in retirement, for he was to be Brusilov's target once again. On July 1, 1917, two Russian armies attacked Austro-Hungarian forces in Galicia. Russian forces were tired and so short of equipment that many men advanced without rifles. Their commanders doubted whether the men would even fight. Bolshevik political agitators had circulated among the men, preaching revolution and mutiny. Officers greeted the sight of Russians moving toward the enemy line with an immense sigh of relief.

The Russians not only advanced, they experienced tremendous success. They broke open the Austrian lines along a forty-five-mile front, driving the enemy back twenty miles in some places. Their success came in part from Brusilov's concentration of men and artillery pieces along the main axis of attack. By denuding other fronts of resources, the Russians enjoyed numerical advantages in both the number of men and the amount of shells they could fire in the immediate area of the attack. The Russians also introduced the so-called Hussite Legion, composed of men recruited from Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war of Czech and Slovak descent. These men, believing that they were fighting to create an independent Czechoslovak state after the war, had high morale. The Russians placed them immediately opposite the Austro-Hungarian 19th Infantry Division, which was also heavily Czech. Rather than fight their countrymen, the men of the 19th fled or surrendered in large numbers.[12]

Nevertheless, as happened so often in this war, a temporary breakthrough did not lead to larger gains. Once again, supply difficulties and the lack of any decisive objective limited the attacker's success. The Russians' advance placed them in areas without field defenses, far from their supplies, and exposed to strong enemy counterattacks. These attacks came on July 19, led by General Max Hoffmann, the same man who had been so instrumental in routing the Russians at Tannenberg in 1914. His counterstrike force was heavily supported by artillery and contained nine Ger-

man and two Austro-Hungarian divisions. Brusilov had no choice but to begin a retreat back to his original lines.

The failure of this offensive led to the end of Brusilov's command. Physically and emotionally exhausted, he stepped down as commander of Russian forces in favor of the monarchist General Lavr Kornilov. As commander of the army, Kornilov made extensive use of the death penalty on soldiers thought to have deserted or disobeyed orders. His bombastic political speeches calling for the return of the tsar made him appear a threat to the very government he was supposed to have been serving. Under Kornilov, the fighting power of the Russian army declined even further as the political situation in Petrograd grew ever more tenuous. Kerensky understood that his frail compromise government might not have the strength to survive another crisis.

The crisis that Kerensky feared came in September at the Baltic Sea port city of Riga, about 200 miles southwest of Petrograd. The Germans spearheaded their attack at Riga with newly organized Assault Detachments. The success of the storm troops at Verdun led to the creation of fifteen Assault Battalions by February 1917. The men were all volunteers; in exchange for their more dangerous work they received double rations and extra leave time, and were excused from fatigue and sentry duties. The introduction of light machine guns, flamethrowers, and light mortars gave these troops the mobile firepower necessary to cross No Man's Land and break into the rear areas of the enemy lines.[13] Several armies developed these tactics, but they were particularly effective in the eastern front's more open spaces. Given the low morale of Russian troops and their pitiable material state, a concerted attack by elite soldiers might produce enormous results.

The two men most commonly associated with the new tactics were General Oskar von Hutier and Colonel Georg Bruchmüller. Hutier perfected the idea of developing small groups of elite soldiers who would infiltrate enemy lines and destroy their communications and supply systems. Hutier built on French, British, and

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Alexander Kerensky (right) tried to find a middle ground between tsarist autocracy and Bolshevism. His enthusiasm temporarily bolstered Russian morale, but the failure of his 1917 offensive doomed his government. (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis)

Italian innovations and convinced the German general staff to devote critical resources to the project. Bruchmüller, who came out of retirement on the outbreak of the war, proved to be an important innovator in the use of artillery. He perfected the use of smoke, gas, and conventional shells to neutralize the enemy's command posts, assembly areas, communication nodes, and road crossings. The developments spearheaded by both men aimed to win battles by isolating and surrounding the enemy rather than fighting man for man. In this way, they believed, Germany could win a war on multiple fronts against a combination of enemies that together held superior numbers of men and material.

At Riga on September 1, 1917, Bruchmüller's artillery used a variety of methods to support Hutier's Thirteenth Army. The artil-

lery began by firing more than 20,000 gas shells to terrify or eliminate Russian opposition. Gas had the additional advantage of leaving the terrain intact for the storm troops to cross. The specially trained men of Hutier's vanguard then crossed the Dvina River in boats and captured its north bank. Once there, they fired rockets to indicate their success and began to assemble pontoon boats to permit the crossing of the regular infantry behind them. Upon seeing the rockets, Bruchmüller's gunners began a rolling barrage to cover the German advance.

As Hutier and Bruchmüller had predicted, the plan achieved astonishing success at limited cost. Six German infantry divisions crossed the river on day one, with three more divisions following on day two. By day three of the operation, German forces had entered Riga. At the cost of just 4,200 German casualties, the Thirteenth Army had inflicted 25,000 Russian casualties and captured more than 250 artillery pieces, the equivalent of five entire divisions' worth. While the success had come against a tired and demoralized army, the victory at Riga represented one of the most decisive and dramatic in the entire war. In celebration, the German government declared the first national holiday since the defeat of Romania.

Hutier and Bruchmüller seemed to have perfected a new way of warfare. While none of the individual elements used at Riga was particularly novel, the integration of the system represented a major change in battlefield tactics. For the first time on such a grand scale, artillery, storm troops, and conventional infantry had all fought together in one integrated system. Riga portended great successes if the formula could be repeated. After Riga, Hindenburg ordered that Hutier and Bruchmüller be reassigned to the western front, where they began to prepare German armies in France to repeat the magic of that victory. Four divisions of the Thirteenth Army followed them, with another three German divisions going to Italy.[14]

Still, even the capture of Riga did not promise a quick German

victory. The dreaded Russian winter was fast approaching, and few German generals were confident enough to predict an easy capture of either Petrograd or Moscow. Images of Napoleon's Russian campaign a century earlier still haunted the imagination of German officers. The two-front dilemma thus remained. The Germans did feel confident enough to rescind their halfhearted offer to create an independent kingdom of Poland. The failure of ethnic Poles to respond to the offer by joining the German army sealed its fate. Germany divided Poland between itself (which occupied 90 percent of Polish territory) and Austria-Hungary (which occupied the remaining 10 percent) and transferred the king of Poland's crown to the Austro-Hungarian royal family.

THE SECOND RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

To the Russians, the meaning of Riga was clear. The fall of the city, long believed to be a hotbed of German agitation, had only minor military importance. Nevertheless, it held dramatic consequences for Kerensky and his government. The failure of the 1917 offensive and the loss of Riga demonstrated that his plan to reverse Russian fortunes by remaining in the war had failed. "If the instability of our army makes it impossible for us to hold our defenses on the Riga Gulf," exclaimed Kornilov, "then the road to Petrograd will lie open. We cannot afford to waste time. Not even a single moment can be wasted."[15] But Russians did not agree on how to solve the crisis caused by the fall of Riga. Many soldiers, especially ethnic Finns, Poles, and Ukrainians, gave up altogether and deserted.

Kornilov was among those Russians who believed that the best course of action lay in the return of the monarchy. His dispatch of cavalry to Petrograd in September, ostensibly to protect it from a German raid, frightened revolutionary leaders, who believed that Kornilov's true goal was the destruction of the revolution itself. Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky responded by organizing sym-

pathetic soldiers, sailors, and urban workers into a Red Guard defense force. Kornilov thereupon ordered more men into Petrograd; but most of them, tired, hungry, and demoralized, simply went home.

The Kornilov "rebellion" led to the collapse of the provisional government and created the power vacuum the Bolsheviks needed. In mid-October, the Bolshevik leadership decided to seize power in Petrograd by force. "The time for words has passed," Trotsky told a huge audience in Petrograd. "The hour has come for a duel to the death between the revolution and the counterrevolution."[16] On November 7, Red Guards took up positions in the city and arrested key members of the provisional government, although Kerensky managed to escape, protected by an American flag flying from an America diplomat's car. By the end of the day, the Bolsheviks had control of the government.

Lenin's new government soon announced its intentions to end Russia's participation in the war and cancel its war debts to the Allies. It then published the terms of the many secret treaties it found in Russia's foreign ministry, including those pledging Allied support for Russian control over Constantinople. The Bolsheviks soon became a major political problem for the Allies. The secret treaties proved to be an embarrassment for British and French diplomats who tried to retain the moral high ground, especially with their new partner, the United States. As a result, the Allies soon began an active program of support for Lenin's most powerful foe, the antirevolutionary "White" forces led by many former tsarist officers, including Kornilov.

The Bolshevik takeover offered both opportunities and challenges for Germany. Their insertion of Lenin into the Russian maelstrom did lead, as the Germans had hoped, to the collapse of the pro-Allied provisional government. The Bolsheviks' call for global revolution, however, promised to have a serious backlash in Germany, where a small, but determined, Spartacist movement with pro-Bolshevik sympathies already existed. This movement

opposed Germany's continued participation in the war and began to recruit followers from Germany's urban working classes. Many Germans soon had reason to rue their connection to the Russian Beelzebub.

The opportunity lay in Lenin's obvious willingness to end the war. In December, the two sides began the first discussions toward an armistice on the eastern front, meeting at the German-held city of Brest-Litovsk. Had the Germans been willing to offer Lenin reasonable terms, he might well have quickly accepted. The Germans, however, now saw a chance not only to accomplish their Kreuznach goals, but perhaps even to gain more. German Foreign Minister Richard von Kühlmann told Trotsky that Russia, as a beaten nation, could not expect to negotiate on equal terms. The kaiser put it rather less elegantly, thundering that Germany would "batter in with the iron fist and shining sword the doors of those who will not have peace."[17] German armies continued their advance, coming within seventy miles of Petrograd by February 1918 and capturing the Black Sea port of Odessa as a preliminary step toward a German offensive against British forces in Persia.

At a February meeting at Bad Homburger, the Germans were already planning for more. Hindenburg demanded annexation and occupation of the Baltic States "for the maneuvering of my left wing in the next war." Ludendorff announced that he had promises from wealthy German industrialists to fund even more German expansion. These men, he announced, would provide two billion marks for the conquest and exploitation of Armenia, Georgia, and the oil of the Caspian Sea region. The kaiser suggested a war against the Bolsheviks to chase and kill them in a manner "akin to a tiger hunt" now that they had served their purpose and had helped to expel the tsar.[18] Success in the east had only whetted the appetites of the German elite.

Lenin favored halting the German advance by giving them what they demanded at Brest-Litovsk. Trotsky, while he understood the futility in trying to fight on, nevertheless advocated

stalling in order to increase the chances of a pro-Bolshevik revolt either among the troops of the German army or inside Germany itself. Trotsky's German revolution existed only in his mind, however; Lenin's arguments for capitulation therefore carried the day. On March 3, Russia submitted to the German delegation its intention to sign a peace treaty on German terms. Russian delegate Gregori Sokolnikov contacted General Hoffmann and asked him to halt hostilities immediately rather than await the formal signing of the treaty. Hoffmann refused. Sokolnikov then arrived at Brest-Litovsk and informed the Germans that he would sign a "peace which Russia, grinding its teeth, is forced to accept."[19] Russia's participation in the war was over; its civil war between the Whites and Reds was about to begin.

Along with the Treaty of Bucharest signed shortly thereafter, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk demonstrated to the Allies the extreme cost of losing the war. Under the terms of the treaty, Russia surrendered its former territories of Finland, the Ukraine, Bessarabia, the Baltic States, Galicia, and the entire Crimean peninsula. In all, Russia lost one million square miles of territory and 62 million people. To be sure, many of those people were not ethnically Russian, although few were German, either. Russia also surrendered to Germany vast stores of oil, grain, locomotives, heavy guns, and ammunition, which the Germans planned to use to compensate for the British blockade and to prepare for a 1918 offensive on the western front.

The Germans expected Brest-Litovsk to improve their position in the west by enabling the transfer of large numbers of men and materiel to the western front. Their harsh treatment of the newly occupied territories, however, precluded a mass reassignment of troops. Hungry peasants refused to cooperate with the Germans in handing over grain, and many people simply refused to trade their old Romanov masters for new Hohenzollern ones. As a result of the unrest in the east, German plans to move 45 divisions from Russia to France in the period between November 1917 and March

Leon Trotsky (center, wearing white scarf) arrives at Brest-Litovsk to negotiate with Germany. Knowing that Russia was on the verge of collapse, the Germans offered harsh terms, which Trotsky had little choice but to accept. (© Corbis)

1918 had to be revised downward to 33 divisions. A more lenient occupation policy in the east would have freed up many more troops, but such a policy would not have been consistent with German expansionist goals. As a result, the Germans were still unable to solve their two-front dilemma.[20]

The situation in the Ukraine shows these problems most clearly. The unwillingness of the Bolsheviks to support Ukrainian desires for independence led to a civil war there and the establishment of several competing governments. In February 1918 Germany recognized one of them in exchange for nearly six months' worth of grain and minerals. The Central Powers also returned Ukrainian prisoners of war in German and Austrian prison camps. The Bolsheviks responded by invading the Ukraine, occupying

Kiev, and chasing the German-sponsored government out. In March, Germany and Austria replied with their own invasion, less out of concern for the Ukrainians than out of a desire to ensure the flow of the promised supplies.

The offensive worked, but Ukrainian peasants, expecting another army to come through their fields in the near future, proved reluctant to return to their farms. The Germans then decided to cut out the middleman and dissolved the same government they had played such an important role in creating. Field Marshal Hermann von Eichhorn and his assistant, Wilhelm Groener, declared martial law, then installed a new puppet government. Led by a former tsarist general of Cossacks, Pavlo Skoropadsky, the Germans and their Ukrainian allies attempted to restore order. Skoropadsky's social conservatism, antirepublican government, and obvious reliance on the Germans undermined these efforts and led to further violence.

Bolshevik agitators took advantage of Ukrainian displeasure with Skoropadsky, arguing that the Ukraine's future lay in a renewed relationship with the new regime in Russia. This option did not appeal to most Ukrainians, but the manifest failures of Skoropadsky's government continued to mount. Displeasure with the German occupiers also grew, culminating in the assassination of Eichhorn by a Ukrainian nationalist on July 30.

The upheaval in the Ukraine forced the Germans to spend more resources than they would have liked. In all, the Central Powers had 650,000 troops there, and they consumed far more food than the Ukraine exported to Germany. The disruptions in the Ukraine therefore both directly and indirectly prevented the Germans from reaping the tremendous harvests that they had expected. By one estimate, the Germans saw only one-tenth of the grain that they had anticipated.[21] Neither were the Ukraine's miseries over. The republic became an important battleground between White and Red forces in the Russian Civil War and was the scene of a horrible famine in the interwar years.

Abiding turmoil in the east notwithstanding, the Germans had still won a notable set of victories there. They had also tested a new tactical system that had yielded devastating results. Their task now was to adjust this system for the conditions of the remaining fronts, particularly Italy and the western front. Moreover, the Germans knew that they would need to win the war quickly, as masses of fresh, eager American troops were beginning to arrive in France. Fortunately for Germany, 1917 on the western front had been a terrible year for the Allies, giving the Germans the breathing room they needed to readjust and prepare for what they knew would be the year of decision.