



ORIGINAL PAPER

Around the Revolution: A British report on the situation in Russia in the autumn of 1917

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Abstract:

Alfred Knox was born in Ulster in 1870. He joined the British army and served in India where he reached the rank of major general. In 1911 General Knox was appointed British military attaché to Russia. A fluent Russian speaker, he became a liaison officer with the Russian Imperial Army during World War I. Around the Bolshevik revolution of November 1917 he drew up a report in which he captures in detail the politico-military situation in the Russian Empire. The report contains very important data showing the precarious state of this collapsing country at the end of 1917. Chaos and anarchy encompassed a country that saw as the only way out of this situation the establishment of a bloody dictatorship that encompassed this country for a long time: 70 years.

Key word: *Alfred Knox; Alexander Kerensky, General Kornilov; Russian revolution.*

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I Introduction

Alfred Knox was born in Ulster in 1870. He joined the British army and served in India where he reached the rank of major general [Knox Alfred, (2024),:1]. In 1911 General Knox was appointed British military attaché to Russia. A fluent Russian speaker, he became a liaison officer with the Russian Imperial Army during World War I. [*Smele, Jonathan (2017) pp. 111–112*]. In 1911 General Knox was appointed British military attaché to Russia. A fluent Russian speaker, he became a liaison officer with the Russian Imperial Army during World War I. Knox reported back in London how the Russian people reacted to the outbreak of war: "Wives and mothers with children accompanied the reservists from point to point, postponing parting time and seeing cruel scenes, but the women cried in silence and were not hysterical. The men were generally serious and calm, but the groups cheered each other as they met on the streets. Knox worked closely with important political figures to keep Russia at war. It also included regular meetings with Mikhail Rodzianko: "If there was ever a Government that fully deserved a Revolution, it is the current one in Russia. If he escapes, it will only be because the members of the Duma are too patriotic to agitate in this time of crisis. I saw Rodzianko (chairman of the Duma) and talked about the avoidable suffering of the people and my amazement at their patience in conditions that would have led me very soon to break the windows. He just laughed and said I had a hot head. In addition to working closely with George Buchanan, the British ambassador to Russia, he also made several visits to the Eastern Front. After the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II and the creation of a provisional government in Russia, Knox became convinced that the British should give full support to Alexander Kerensky: "There is only one man who can save the country and that is Kerensky, for this a The small half-Jewish lawyer still has the confidence of the Petrograd mob, who, being armed, are in control of the situation. The remaining members of the government may represent the people of Russia outside the Petrograd mafia, but, the Provisional Government, could not exist in Petrograd if it were not for Kerensky (Kerensky, Alexander, 2024 :1). "During the October Revolution in Russia, they observed the Bolsheviks taking the Winter Palace on October 25, 1917 (according to the Julian or old calendar, which corresponds to November 7, 1917 in the Gregorian calendar or new style). During the Russian Civil War, he was the head of the British mission (Britmis) and the head of the White Army advisers in Siberia under Admiral Kolchak. He barely intervened in combat operations because Kolchak was unwilling to listen to his advice and accept demands for a post-war Russian Constituent Assembly. In 1921 Knox published his Memoirs, *With the Russian Army: 1914-1917*. In this book, he also tells the story of the heroine Elsa Brändström (*Smele, Jonathan, 2017: 111–112*). In 1918, journalist Arthur Ransome was recruited as a spy by the British government. He had a close relationship with Leon Trotsky and Karl Radek. Much of his information came from Trotsky's secretary, Evgenia Shelepina.

Knox did not know this and considered Ransome's pro-Bolshevik articles in the Daily News and New York Times to be treacherous. He suggested that Ransome be "shot like a dog" (Ken Kalfus, 2024: 1). In the 1924 general election, he was elected Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for Wycombe, defeating the incumbent Liberal MP Lady Terrington. He took his place during the 1929 general election and subsequent general elections, serving in the House of Commons until the 1945 general election. Knox remained a strong opponent of communism throughout his career and, following the Soviet invasion of Finland, campaigned for military support for the Finns. He died on

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March 9, 1964. On 1st November, 1917, Knox sent a telegram to London in which he described the situation in Russia round revolution from November 1917. The content of this telegram is presented below. He send a few notes on the general military situation. My last despatch (D 3 of the 10th August) spoke of certain dangers ahead. It was feared that the exorbitant demands of the workmen would cause a general strike or lock-out; that the peasants would not give up their grain in sufficient quantity to feed the town population and the armies ; that railway transport would break down owing to lack of engines and shortage of coal. The whole state fabric was crumbling away owing to the selfishness of the individual and the weakness of the Government. Everyone wanted enormous wages and none wanted to work or much less to risk his skin. There was only the one chance that Kerenski would listen to the pressing demands of Kornilov (Kornilov Lavr Georgiyevich, 2024: 1,) and would take steps to enforce discipline before it was too late. Kornilov is a hard-headed soldier of strong will and great courage, a tried patriot but no politician. He is the son of a non-commissioned officer of Cossacks and his mother was a Buriat woman. Kerenski is a petty lawyer from Saratov ; his father was a schoolmaster and his mother a Jewess. From the latter he probably gets his energy and his juggling political ability. Kerenski may be an honest Ally. We have no evidence of his personal dishonesty, but patriotic Russians constantly wonder whether he has been merely misled by his blind Utopianism, vanity, and ambition in allowing the country to come to its present condition. He impresses the people by his theatrical poses and his frothy eloquence. He must have realised that if he had worked loyally with Kornilov he might have found the force necessary to establish order and save the country.

It is understood that after the Moscow Conference Kerenski became at length convinced of the necessity for a strong Government. Upon his demand Kornilov moved four cavalry divisions that could be trusted towards Petrograd. If these divisions had reached the capital they might have done what they liked. The immediate entourage of both Kornilov and Kerenski, however, worked against their co-operation. The plot—such as it was—at the Stavka was engineered by Zavoiko, the Marshal of nobility of the Government of Podolya, who had made a fortune at Baku and was acting as Kornilov's orderly, and by Colonel Novoseltsev, the President of the Officers Club. Zavoiko, especially, constantly urged Kornilov to act.

Kerenski, on the other hand, was influenced by Nekrasov (Nekrasov Nikolai Vissarionovich, 2024:1), originally a professor from Tomsk, who, as a politician under the old regime, was more "right" than Rodzianko (Rodzianko, Mikhail Vladimirovich, 2024:1], but who has since the Revolution posed as an apostle of anarchy ; by Galpern, a pacifist Jewish lawyer who is constantly with him, and by Baranovski (Baranovski, Vladimir, 2024:1), an ambitious soldier, who, as Russians say, had a double influence, first as the brother of Kerenski's lawful wife and secondly as the cousin of his mistress.

The two men on whom Russia depended were divergent in character and aims. Kornilov was simple, honest and without personal ambition; with him his country came before everything. Kerenski was subtle, vain and ambitious, caring more for the revolution and for internationalism than for Russia. Only an irresponsible meddler was wanted to complete the quarrel. . This role was rilled by Lvov (Lvov, Georgy Evgenievici, 2024:1), who after a conversation with Kerenski, came to Kornilov on the 7th September, and proposed in Kerenski's name three alternatives for a new government. Kornilov agreed with the last, which proposed that he, Kerenski and Savinkov (Savinkov Boris Viktorovich, 2024: 1) should form a triumvirate. Lvov returned to Petrograd and saw Kerenski on the afternoon of the 5th. He then went into the town and, bursting with

his importance, gossiped. The Sovyet received information and at 6 p.m. sent a deputation, accompanied by Nekrasov, to visit Kerenski. Kerenski came to heel at once. He sent for Lvov and arrested him. Nekrasov drafted a telegram to Kornilov, calling on him to resign.

This telegram received by Kornilov on Sunday morning, the 9th, at length goaded him into action in opposition to the Government, but as he believed in the best interests of the country. Philonenko, then Commissary at General Headquarters, told me how he found the unfortunate Commander-in-Chief sitting in the garden at Mogilev with the telegram in his hand, and how he called upon him to explain it, for he could make nothing of it.

If Kerenski had been a bigger man he would have put off the deputation of the Sovyet and would have taken steps to clear up the situation, instead of jumping to conclusions. There seems grave suspicion that he welcomed the opportunity of removing a dangerous competitor. He telephoned to Kornilov to ask if Lvov spoke with his authority, first telling Kornilov that Lvov was sitting beside him. In his examination the other day he was asked why he had said that Lvov was there when he was not.

He replied that he considered it his duty in the "high interests of the State" to lay a trap for Kornilov to induce him to speak frankly. There was a good deal of comic opera afterwards. The Bolsheviks were terrified and some of them actually fled. Polovtsev, who had been dismissed from the Petrograd Command by Kerenski in July, was called for at 1 a.m. on Sunday, the 9th, by Kornilov's creatures, Tugan-Baranovskii (Tugan-Baranovskiy Mykhailo Ivanovich, 2024:1) and Tumanov. He was led to Kerenski, who shook him warmly by the hand for five minutes, and then asked him to take command of the district once more.

Polovtsev declined, but they sat over tea till 6 a.m. Then Kerenski said: "I am more sorry than I can tell you that I cannot persuade you, but tell me—I have a map here—where would you place your guns if you were called on to defend Petrograd?" Polovtsev explained that he did not know the ground. He was amused, however, to observe that the future Commander-in-Chief had placed all his guns on the hill tops. Kornilov's cavalry was cut off from orders. Probably none of the officers realized the situation. If any of them did they acted like idiots. The advanced guard of the Caucasian Native Division detained a few versts west of Pavlovsk and sent a party of 40 men forward to select billets in Pavlovsk. The 40 came upon a battalion of the Paul Regiment, drawn up with machine guns to defend the revolution, and the battalion fled. The Caucasians wondered, but decided that they had stumbled on manoeuvres. They said: "These men seem to be learning how to fight, but they do not know how to commence." When the main body of the Paul Regiment was reached, one of its men called out to ask the cavalry where it was going. They said they were on their way to Petrograd to quell a Bolshevik rising. Then the Paul men said "We will go with you in that case; we thought you were coming to make a counter-revolution." All were delighted that there was no fighting to be done and they walked together, chatting like Bengali babus, to the headquarters of the Army of Defence, where Lieutenant Kuzmin, (Kuzmin-Korovaev Aglay (Aleksey) Dmitriyevich, 2024:1) who was badly flogged by Rennenkampf (Rennenkampf Paul von, 2024:1) in Krasnoyarsk in 1905, was found in a hothouse surrounded by telephones. Before there was time to explain the situation a wild man with long hair ran out and promised everyone an extra acres of land if he would fight for the Revolution.

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This was Chernov the Minister of Agriculture. As there did not seem any immediate danger of fighting for the Revolution, everyone agreed. The stupid business was, however, by no means comic opera for the officers. Their position was difficult before; it is impossible now. The guard cavalry have sent practically all their officers away. The officers of the Petropavlovsk at Helsingfors were called upon to sign a declaration condemning Kornilov as a traitor. Four of the junior officers had the courage to refuse and were arrested. They were sent ashore under a guard of 14 men, who, after using all their ammunition without killing them, finally kicked them brutally to death.

I had some account of the Viborg massacre from an old friend, who was lucky enough to escape with his wife after lying hidden in disguise for six days. The 26 senior officers of the garrison, including the commander of the XLII Corps, General Oranovski, who was Chief of the Staff to Jilinski on the North-West Front at the beginning of the war, General Vasiliev, the G.Q.M., and General Stepanov, the Commandant of the fortress were thrown into the river and shot as they swam. There was nothing against any of these men; they had not in any way declared themselves as sympathisers of Kornilov.

The Government of Kerenski has done nothing to punish any of these murderers. The Helsingfors Sovyet has refused even to enquire into the murder of the Petropavlovsk officers. The Viborg garrison has been sent to the Northern Front. On arrival there, it informed the Commander-in-Chief, General Clirimisov, that the strategical situation demanded its return to Finland. It then marched to the station, seized wagons and entrained. Luckily a member of the Front Committee got some cavalry and stopped the entrainment by threatening to open fire. General Cherimisov promised that the mutineers should remain in reserve (PRO Kew Gardens, CAB/24/34 Image Reference:0041, ff 206 =209)

II The industrial situation

Some people think that there may now be no general lock-out. Practically all factories work for the Government, and the Government has raised the prices paid to manufacturers, so as in some cases, almost to keep pace with the growing appetites of the men. Employers too, are willing to work at a loss in the hope that the present wave of madness may pass rather than close their works and risk their being burnt down. Still the Government prints more and more paper, and as the purchasing power of the rouble falls, the demands of the men increase. In the period, March to July, 568 works, employing 104,372 men were closed, but the number increased progressively each month, and is believed to have gone on increasing since.

The railways.—The percentage of sick engines has not increased as much as might have been expected. It was 24'2 in June and 25-2 in the first half of October. The Ministry of Ways gives the following table, in which the numerator shows the number of sick engines and the denominator the number of engines working in the last half of each month from June to September (O.S.) in 1916 and 1917 : -

June.	. July.	August..	September
1910 ..	3,311	3,475	3,448 -3,554
16,781	16,729	16,665	16,781
1917 ..	5,044	5,180	5,279 -5,417
15,839	15,302	15,544	16,079

The percentage of sick wagons reached its maximum in the latter half of June with 9 per cent. It has since steadily declined, and in the latter half of September (O.S.) it

was 7*6 as compared with 5'I in the corresponding period last year. The following figures show the fall in the output of Russian rolling stock :—

Month.	Engines.		Wagons.	
	1916.	1917.	1916.	1917.
January	54	45	929	226
February	42	31	743	77
March	45	25	776	104
April	49	21	881	269
May	48	34	818	210
June	70	45	1,005	118
July	47	33	930	110
August	52	31	1,108	59
September	39	30	?	?

There have been four orders of American rolling stock-
Engines. Wagons.

1. 398. All delivered. 13,160. All delivered.
2. 375. 98 delivered, and of these 3,500 uncovered. 562 received. 40 assembled. 5,000 covered. None delivered.
3. 500. None delivered. 10,000 covered. None delivered.
4. 1,500. None delivered. 30,000 covered. None delivered.

Old style.

(530)] A 2

Shortage of cord.—The railway breakdown will probably be caused by shortage of fuel. The greater part of the railway system of Russia is fed from the Donetz region, and complete anarchy reigns in the mines.

The number of miners has actually increased since 1916 :1916.—

Total miners, 239,697, of whom 47,582 prisoners of war.

1917.—Total miners, 274,000, of whom 66,000 prisoners of war. The output of coal has decreased :—

	1916.	1917.
July	144 million puds.*	119 million puds.
August ...	137 ...	55 „ „
September	149 „	... 50

The stock of coal on the railways on the 1st September, 1917, was only 22 million puds-less than half the stock on the same date in 1916. The quantity of coal loaded in the Donetz region *for railways* was, in September, 33 million puds, and the monthly expenditure of all lines is 43 millions. Thus the stock on the 14th October cannot have much exceeded 12 million puds, and in spite of the interests of all industry being sacrificed to the needs of the railways, it would seem that the system must soon come to a standstill. An effort is being made to replace coal by wood, but success is thought to be doubtful. Probably a single week's stoppage of the railway service will be sufficient to reduce the army and the town population to starvation.

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Shortage of foodstuffs.—The position as regards food is very threatening; the peasants influenced by agitators, who look upon the holding back of food from the front as the quickest way to stop the war, have not brought in their grain as they should.

It is said that some of it is being used for the illicit manufacture of spirits. Owing to the complete anarchy in the country, such grain as the peasants in the south have given up is often robbed on its way to the capital, in this manner 200,000 puds out of a consignment of 400,000 were looted on the Volga, and the soldiers sent from Petrograd to guard it fraternized with the peasants. If the public official statements of the Minister of Food are to be trusted, it is difficult to see how the supply of Petrograd is to be assured, and once there is a real shortage of bread, the worst disorders are to be feared.

There is grave danger of the men at the front, whether willing to fight or not, being forced to abandon their trenches owing to lack of food, warm clothing and boots. Some days ago it was publicly stated that there was only a single day's forage at the front. The Minister of War showed me a telegram from the Commissary of the Northern Front describing the lack of food in the 12th and 1st Armies as "catastrophical."

Clothing.—The men are said to have received warm drawers and vests, but only 33 per cent, of the padded waistcoats, which should all be issued by the 14th November and there is little chance of the deficiency being made up. The depot troops are well clothed, for they loot the stores provided for the front. Every day and all day in a street near the Jews' Market is held what is satirically called the "Equipment Exchange." There, two or three thousand soldiers openly sell Government boots and while others deal in such of the clothing of the "bourgeois" as they have been able to loot in the 400 or so burglaries of the previous night. Soldiers at the front are said to sell their boots to peasants to get money to gamble. I protested to the Minister of War that we have in the current year, at the risk of our sailors' lives, shipped to Russia over 3,000,000 pairs of boots, 4,000 tons of leather, and 14,000,000 yards of cloth, amply sufficient to equip every Russian who has a taste for fighting. Protests, however, are useless for there is no power to enforce order (PRO Kew Gardens, CAB/24/34 Image Reference:0041, ff 206 =209).

III Scheme of army reform

A scheme for the re-organization and reform of the army was agreed upon at the Stavka in the middle of October. The project is divided into seven chapters.

The army is to be reduced in strength by the dismissal of the older classes. The classes of 1895 and 1896 were dismissed on the 14th October and those of 1897 and 1898 went 10 days later. The class of 1899 will go on the 14th November. It is estimated that the elimination of these five classes reduces the strength of the army by 1,000,000 men, and the military staffs oppose further reduction. The Ministers of Finance, Trade and Food call for the dismissal of an additional 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 and the matter is under consideration.

The depot troops are to be reorganized. -Depot regiments will be reduced in strength and the permanent staff more carefully selected. "Draft companies and battalions will be raised in immediate connection with active units, and raw recruits will be sent to them direct.

The Opolchenie will be reduced as far as possible and its place will be taken in the interior by mounted and dismounted militia, to be raised from old officers and soldiers. The Cossacks are to be collected and grouped in divisions. Volunteer and national units are to be encouraged.

Volunteer units.—There are many Volunteer battalions scattered along the front, composed chiefly of men from line of communication units who express a willingness to fight. These battalions have fought well on several occasions, but they are invariably let down by other units. Committee in some cases do all they can to prevent them receiving boots and warm clothing, for they say they are only prolonging the war. General Verkhovski, Minister of War, wishes to group these battalions into larger units. This is already being done in the 5th Army.

There is an idea in the Ministry of War that it may be possible to territorialise the whole army gradually, forming by degrees the following national units :—

Esthonians and Letts ... 1 corps, containing 1 Esthonian and 2 Lett divisions.

Lithuanians 1 division.

Poles 2 or 3 corps.

Ukrainians 15 divisions.

Moldovans (Roumanians) 1 corps.

Tartars 2 corps.

Armenians 2 corps.

Georgians 1 corps.

The above is, however, only a vague idea without as yet Government sanction. There are many obstacles, chief of which is the unchecked activity of German propaganda, which plays on the petty selfishnesses and jealousies of the various nationalities. The Sovyets, too, who are directed by internationalist Jews that would be shot in any other country at war, do all they can to hinder any reform that has a chance of raising the efficiency of the army.

The remaining chapters of the project deal with discipline, commissaries and committees, the tactical preparation of the troops ("every soldier must work at least 7—8 hours a day"), training of depot troops, supply, increase in officers' pay. It is not worth considering their provisions in detail as they are unlikely to get beyond the stage of pious wishes. Meanwhile the Government has had the cowardice to give way to the clamour of the Sovyets and the death penalty has been virtually abolished.

Schools of Instruction.—Arrangements are being made for commencing work in three large central schools of military instruction on the 14th November at Cherepovets, 14 hours rail east of Petrograd.

There will be a three weeks' general course for young officers, and a six weeks'specialist course for officers and men in trench warfare. Each school will be divided into 11 sections, and on the conclusion of the course the 11 instructors will proceed with their 11 classes to establish schools in the subjects they have studied in the immediate neighbourhood of the front.

These schools will be allotted to fronts according to the number of divisions on each front:—

Northern front 41 divisions ... 2 schools.

Western front 36 „ ... 2 „

South-Western front 67 ... 3

Roumanian front... 54 „ ... 3 „

Caucasian front ... 12 ... 1 11

A third school will train one officer and three rank and file from each infantry and cavalry division for three weeks in grenade work. The personnel trained will go to the front to establish divisional grenade schools. The French are providing ten officers to

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assist in instruction and General Poole's section will give officers for trench mortar and bomb throwing work.

Commands at the Front.-The commands at the front are constantly being changed. The slightest attempt to enforce discipline is sufficient now to procure an officers removal.

Men.-The following figures were obtained from the Mobilization Department : -

Russian strength with colours on mobilization Reservists called up at once
...1,423,000

Reservists called up at once.....3,115,000

Opolchenie called up at once400,000

Classes—

On 14th October, 1914 ; Class of 1914 700,000

On 7th February, 1915 ; Class of 1915 700,000

On 28th May. 1915 ; Class of 1916 550,000

On 20th August, 1915 ; Class of 1917 ... 950,000

On 28th May, 1916 ; Class of 1918 700,000

On 16th February, 1917 ; Class of 1919 600,000

2nd Ban of Opolchenie, white ticket men,* &c. 6,012,000

Grand total from civil population to date ... , 15,150,000

There now remain as possible sources to replace wastage:—

1. The class of 1920 to be called out at the end of the year, 600,000.

2. Convalescent soldiers, say, 60,000 per month.

3. Deserters. Various estimates from 1,500,000 to 4,000,000.

4. A certain number of workmen who might be combed from industry.

5. Men gained by the reduction of the rear services. Of course, only 1 and 2 will yield anything.

Drafts have been sent to the front as follows :—

	1915.	1916.	1917 (till 15th
Infantry	3,094,250	2,336,000	1,692,589
Regular Cavalry—	34,333	24,278	52,239
Horses	38,953	23,961	16,434
Cossacks—	65,458	72,732	27,363
Horses	44,605	53,390	8,575
Artillery	70,000	80,000	76,000
Engineers	22,000	20,000	?
" Horses "	140,000	90,000	211,379

According to information given to the French at the Stavka there are now in the army areas... .. 1 5,925,606

In depot units in the interior 873,519

In Opolchenie in the interior 200,000

Lines of communication, convoys, &c 200,000

Killed, died of wounds, sickness or gas, missing and finally dismissed as unfit for further service, about... .. 1,290,000

f Detail:-

Front.	On Front.	Depot Troops.
Northern	825,371	147,625

Western..	844,531	212,415
South-western	1,464,644	375,711
Roumanian	1,258,097	251,163
Caucasus	366,152	179,902
	4,758,795	

Prisoners, about ' 2,900,000

Sick and wounded under temporary treatment 350,000

Dismissed the service in May, men over 43 350,000

Dismissed classes of 1895, 1896, 1897 and 1898 750,000

Total accounted for12 839,125

These figures were given officially, but they are Russian, and of course their accuracy cannot be guaranteed. The balance, 2,311,875, may be written down as deserters. [PRO Kew Gardens, CAB/24/34 Image Reference:0041, ff 206 =209,]

IV Munitions

Guns.—The following is an estimate of the guns in Russia :—

Calibre.	W. Frontier.	Caucasus.	-Reserve or
3-inch Arisaka or	8,261	657	1.606
4'5-inch, 4'8-inch	1,363	72	
4'2-inch, 60-prs.,	813	..	289
8-inch, 9-2-inch,		67	8
Various	734	..	89

(PRO Kew Gardens, CAB/24/34 Image Reference:0041, ff 206 =209)

- This is the estimate of the Artillery Department, but the Stavka states there are only 5,929—3-inch guns on the western frontier and 524 in the Caucasus. The total of other calibres it estimates at 2,030 on the western frontier and 181 in the Caucasus, with 1,277 " fortress guns " in addition on the western frontier.

Shell:-

Calibre.	Fronts <i>per</i> gun.	Total Interior.
3-inch	2,200	10 millions charged and 4
4-6-inch	2,200	110,000.
4-8-inch	2,800	256,000 and 70,000
4'2-inch	1,900	340,000 and 120,000
6-inch howitzers	2,200	836.000 and 199,000

The following are said to have been lost in the fire and explosions at Kazan :—

60—3-inch guns and 111,000 3-inch shell,

3,000,000 propellant charges.

350,000-90-mm. shell.

2,500 machine guns.

? 52,000,000 Lewis small arm ammunition.

Several hundred thousand 4'5-inch shell.

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At Riga 98 guns were lost, including 30—3-inch, and 5—4-8-inch howitzers, 14-6-inch (120-puds) and 23-6-inch (190-puds) guns.

Including the armament of Ust Dvinsk, all of which went, the Russians lost from 230 to 240 guns in all. [PRO Kew Gardens, CAB/24/34 Image Reference:0041, ff 206 =209,]

V PERSONEL

There have been as many changes in appointments at Petrograd as there have been at the front. Savinkov was succeeded as Minister of War by Verkhovski, whose position is now reported to be insecure.

Verderevsky (Verderevsky, D.N. (2024) 1) is only 31. He was a cadet at the Corps de Pages in 1903, when a Lancer regiment was billeted in the corps riding school during some civil disturbances.

Young Verkhovski went to the men and harangued them advising them not to fire on their fellow citizens if ordered to do so. He was naturally expelled from the corps. At a dinner the other night I heard someone ask him if he had not been expelled from the Corps de Pages on account of his radical opinions. He said: "Not exactly that, I sought the truth, and it was not wished that I should find it.

Still he has shown himself a good man in the field. He went to the far East as a volunteer, and was promoted 2nd Lieutenant for service in the field. He passed through the Military Academy and commenced the present war in the 3rd Finland Rifle Division, fighting at Lyck and Kozyuva. He was wounded and gained the St. George's Cross and the Golden Sword. After the Revolution he, of course, came to the front as "one who had suffered under the old regime." He was fairly successful as Commander in-Chief at Moscow.

As Minister of War he has shown ability, but suffers from lack of experience as an administrator. He agrees with every representation made to him, but lacks moral courage to stand up to the Soviets. In fact he shows signs of out-Kerenskiing Kerenski as a slave of the Soviet. His aide-de-camp told an officer the other-day that he was playing to become Prime Minister. He has an absurd idea to which he constantly reverts in conversation that salvation will be found if we can teach the Russian soldier why he is fighting. He says we should offer the enemy such terms of peace as he is bound to refuse. I told him I could not imagine any terms of peace too degrading for the Russian soldier in his present mood to accept. He acknowledged that the army would not fight for Courland, but said that it would fight for a favourable commercial treaty. This I regard as complete nonsense, and every Russian I have repeated the conversation to agrees. Verkhovski's idea is, of course, to play up to the Soviets by getting us to publish our terms of peace. He is a boy playing at being cunning. There have been five commanders-in-chief of the Petrograd Military District in the last two months. The present man is Colonel Polkovnikov [Polkovnikov, Georgy Petrovich (2024),:1], a General Staff Officer and a Cossack. He is 31. He seems willing to do his best, but complains of the weakness of the Government. His Chief of Staff, Bagratuni (Zhilinsky, 2024), has been promoted Major-General at the age of -58. Bagratuni is an Armenian and is in close touch with the Turkistan Military District, where he served several years. He was lately offered the command there but refused. He tells me he gets frequent letters from Sarts and Kirgiz imploring him to do anything he can to rid them of the plague of Russian soldiers.

The troops in Finland were for six weeks after the Viborg massacre commanded "by a drunken dissolute Captain of the Fortress Artillery called Yelesarev, who was elected by the men. A General Nadejnin has now been found brave enough to take over

the appointment. It would seem impossible if Kerenski remains at the head of a Government which is at the beck and call of the Soviets that Russia should avoid an armistice for many weeks more. Russians whose opinions are entitled to every respect maintain that, though many men will desert from the trenches in winter, enough will remain to hold the line, but no one can remain if he is left without food, and the growing anarchy in the interior seems to threaten that.

German propaganda increases daily. Undoubted German agents are treated as high souled humanitarians. Hindenburg himself could probably live unmolested at Petrograd if he gave vent to occasional platitudes at the Soviet regarding the downtrodden proletariat and the brutal bourgeois.

A few foreign divisions might yet put matters right. Would no price tempt the Japanese ? Patriotic Russians would rather pay Japan than pay Germany. [PRO Kew Gardens, CAB/24/34 Image Reference:0041, ff 206 =209,]

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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Provisional Government. After the October Revolution of the same year, he organized armed resistance against the ruling Bolsheviks. Savinkov emigrated in 1920, but in 1924 he was brought back to the Soviet Union, arrested, and either killed in prison or committed suicide.

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