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The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April 1917)

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Wildman, Allan K. *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April 1917)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. 402pp.

In this work, first of a proposed two volume set on the Russian Army's role in the Russian revolution, Professor Wildman aims to describe the breakdown in the system of authority in the Tsarist Army and to show how this phenomenon interacted with the 1917 revolution. It is an ambitious goal, drawing together as "military history" the social, political, and economic facets of a great national upheaval. The author's use of the military to explore sociopolitical revolutionary change may not be unique, but it is interesting. Wildman has succeeded admirably in his aim to produce "new assessments...grounded in newly available information."

He has made extensive use of primary source material located in the Soviet Union, in many cases for the first time. The author acknowledges the limitations and selectivity of the documentation to which he was permitted access. However, reliance on material proffered by a government built upon complete self-aggrandizement and justification must continually nag at the reader, as does the possibility that the author has overgeneralized from the evidence. One is reminded of a recent description of the last remaining "Stalin museum" in Russia (in the dictator's Georgian birthplace) as "now a monument less to the dead leader than to the Soviet power of forgetting what it is inconvenient to remember."

Wildman begins his narrative with the 1904-1905 war with Japan. He describes the well-known, negative effect of this conflict on the Russian Army's professional capabilities. More importantly, he describes in a recurring theme the sociopolitical effects that this war, operating through the Russian Army's peasant-soldiers, had among the

Russian population at large. In Wildman's view, the military defeat was not as important as the war's socializing role. The mobilizing effects of large-scale induction in the 20th century were not appreciated by a Tsarist administration based on 17th-century precepts. Large numbers of peasants were drafted from their villages, exposed to the conditions and weaknesses of a far larger Russia than they had hitherto known existed, and then reimplanted in their home districts as unintended messengers of change, if not outright revolution.

This effect was not completely felt during the first two years of the Great War that erupted in 1914. By 1917, however, the earlier discontent with Tsardom had been exacerbated by two or more years of brutal, bloody conflict and monumental maladministration. The result was a mass army ripe for revolution. It was not, the author argues, a revolution diabolically and deliberately imposed by the Bolsheviks; nor did the Tsarist regime collapse from its own weight. Rather, the ready role played in the revolution by the Russian Army resulted from vast undercurrents of resentment at the war's mismanagement and a determination by army members to improve their lot. Mid-war mutinies also occurred in the French, German, and Italian armies, but in the Russian soldiers' case, the brutalities of the war ignited the deep resentment at the brutalities of their society. Army "mutiny" became part of societal revolution. In March-April 1917, the Russian troops stationed in St. Petersburg and throughout rear areas played a critical role in the downfall of the Tsarist regime. As the city garrison became part of the mobs besieging the government, the army's disciplinary system broke down. This phenomenon soon spread through the military fronts. Fraternalization with the enemy, refusal to obey orders, attacks on officers, and demands for an end to the war were all

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part of the vast reduction in military efficiency of the Russian Army in the spring of 1917, and that army's shift in attention to internal revolution.

Thereafter, the Russian army played a significant role in the downfall of the Tsar and institution of the Provisional Government. What is more, the Army—representing as it did a cross-strata of the Russian polity—served admirably as a vehicle of revolution. It was often a vehicle without control or direction, but one that was certainly not without effect.

The army hierarchy generally fell with the Tsar. The separation of an

army from its government and from its leadership is not an uncommon theme, particularly in "third world" history. Professor Wildman has documented a valuable story—important not only to Russian history but to a study of the military's role in a society as well. Whether he has overemphasized the army's importance to the February 1917 upheaval in Russia is a likely question, but one whose answer must await publication of volume two of this study.

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RECENT BOOKS

Selected Accessions of the Naval War College Library

Annotated by

Doris Baginski, Jane Sanfilippo, and Mary Ann Varoutsos

Breen, Joseph A. *Energy, America, and the Military: Can We Get There From Here?* Columbus: Ohio State University, 1979. 26pp. paper*

The author of this research paper addresses one of the most critical issues of our time—the energy problem and its potential effect on our society and long-term security. Because the majority of our weapons systems are heavily dependent on liquid fuels, it is essential that the Department of Energy develop programs and incentive proposals to insure that sufficient quantities of synthetic fuels are available to the Department of Defense. The author warns that our combat effectiveness is being threatened by a serious fuel/price availability squeeze, making the armed services susceptible to "petroleum anemia."

*Photocopies are available from Energy and National Security Project, Ohio State University, 1712 Neil Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

Buultjens, Ralph. *China after Mao—Death of a Revolution?* New York: International Study and Research Institute, 1979. 79pp. paper \$3.00

Following the Foreword by Indira Gandhi, Buultjens clearly analyzes the recent events in China and gives some thought to its future. His theory is that the Mao revolution has ended, but he is unable to predict the future course of