


THE U.S. ARMY  
CAMPAIGNS OF WORLD WAR I



THE RUSSIAN  
EXPEDITIONS  
1917–1920



THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS OF WORLD WAR I  
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

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# THE RUSSIAN EXPEDITIONS 1917–1920

*by*  
*John M. House and Daniel P. Curzon*



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# INTRODUCTION

A century ago, the great powers of Europe became engulfed in what was then called the Great War. It signaled a new age in armed conflict in which mass armies supported by industrial mass production brought an unprecedented level of killing power to the battlefield. By the time the United States entered the war in 1917, the combatants were waging war on a scale never before seen in history. The experience defined a generation and cast a long shadow across the twentieth century. In addition to a tremendous loss of life, the war shattered Europe, bringing revolution, the collapse of long-standing empires, and economic turmoil, as well as the birth of new nation-states and the rise of totalitarian movements.

The modern U.S. Army, capable of conducting industrialized warfare on a global scale, can trace its roots to the World War. Although the war's outbreak in August 1914 shocked most Americans, they preferred to keep the conflict at arm's length. The United States declared its neutrality and invested in coastal defenses and the Navy to guard its shores. The U.S. Army, meanwhile, remained small, with a regiment as its largest standing formation. Primarily a constabulary force, it focused on policing America's new territorial possessions in the Caribbean and Pacific as it continued to adapt to Secretary of War Elihu Root's reforms in the years following the War with Spain. It was not until June 1916 that Congress authorized an expansion of the Army, dual state-federal status for the National Guard, and the creation of a reserve officer training corps.

In early 1917, relations between the United States and Germany rapidly deteriorated. The kaiser's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare threatened American lives and commerce, and German meddling in Mexican affairs convinced most Americans that Berlin posed a danger to the nation. In April 1917, the president, out of diplomatic options, asked Congress to declare war on Germany. But the U.S. Army, numbering only 133,000 men, was far from ready. The president ordered nearly 400,000 National Guardsmen into federal service, and more than twenty-four million men eventually registered for the Selective Service, America's first

conscription since the Civil War. By the end of 1918, the Army had grown to four million men and had trained 200,000 new officers to lead them. As it expanded to address wartime needs, the Army developed a new combined-arms formation—the square division. Divisions fell under corps, and corps made up field armies. The Army also created supporting elements such as the Air Service, the Tank Corps, and the Chemical Warfare Service. The war signaled the potential of the United States as not only a global economic power, but also a military one.

In June 1917, the 1st Division deployed to France, arriving in time to parade through Paris on the Fourth of July. The first National Guard division, the 26th Division from New England, deployed in September. By war's end, the American Expeditionary Forces, as the nation's forces in Europe were called, had grown to two million soldiers and more than forty divisions. During 1918, these American “doughboys” learned to fight in battles of steadily increasing scale: Cantigny, the Marne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne, adding thirteen campaign streamers to the Army flag. Overall, in roughly six months of combat, the American Expeditionary Forces suffered more than 255,000 casualties, including 52,997 battle deaths (as well as more than 50,000 nonbattle deaths, most due to the influenza pandemic). The war that the United States entered to “make the world safe for democracy” ended with an armistice on 11 November 1918, followed by a controversial peace. American soldiers served in the Russian Expeditions until 1920 and in the Occupation of the Rhineland until 1923, before withdrawing from Europe altogether.

The United States will never forget the American soldiers who fought and died in the World War. America's first unknown soldier was laid to rest on 11 November 1921 in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, where soldiers still stand guard. The United States created permanent American military cemeteries in France, Belgium, and Britain to bury the fallen. To this day, memorials to their sacrifice can be found across America, and the date of the armistice has become a national holiday honoring all those who serve in defense of the nation. The last surviving U.S. Army veteran of the war died in 2011. It is to all the doughboys, those who returned and those who did not, that the U.S. Army Center of Military History dedicates these commemorative pamphlets.

JON T. HOFFMAN  
Chief Historian



# THE RUSSIAN EXPEDITIONS 1917–1920

In early 1917, the Allied coalition in the First World War was in crisis as German pressure pushed the war-weakened Russian Empire to the brink of collapse. The other Allies sought to prop up the staggering Russian government as it fragmented internally over the following months. It finally fell in November 1917 with a new regime replacing it that promised to exit the war. Desperate to maintain the Eastern Front against the Central Powers, the Allies decided to intervene. However, with their resources committed elsewhere, they needed a source of military forces for deployment to Russia. After continued Allied calls for assistance, President Woodrow Wilson reluctantly agreed in July 1918 to supply American troops for two expeditions.

Wilson's goal was to placate the Allies without intervening in Russia in a major way. The American contributions, the American North Russia Expeditionary Forces (ANREF) and the American Expeditionary Forces–Siberia (AEF-S), consisted of roughly 14,000 men. Wilson hoped that this commitment of forces, however small in number, would strengthen the American position in postwar peace negotiations. However, he had no specific or long-term objective in Russia, which led to questions from participants and the American public as to the purpose of the expeditions. Without a clear mission or tangible achievements, the expeditions accomplished little before being withdrawn in 1920. They eventually faded into the background of public consciousness, leaving the questions of their overall meaning largely unanswered.

## STRATEGIC SETTING

The two American interventions in Russia occurred within a tangle of great power conflicts over resources and territory. Before the outbreak of war in August 1914, the British and Russians had competed over Central Asia and India in a “Great Game” of small wars and political manipulations. The Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 damaged its relationship with Japan; at the



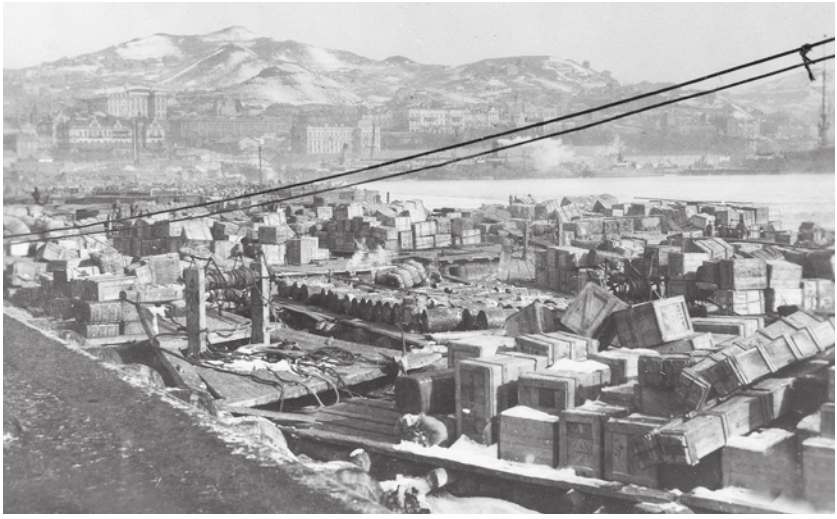
same time, American, British, and Japanese economic rivalry over access to China contributed to instability in East Asia. However, conflicting imperial policies did not mean collaboration was impossible. The wartime alliance between Great Britain, France, and Imperial Russia provided a loose framework for cooperation. Although Russia remained somewhat apart from the Western Allies due to its geography and autocratic government, the importance of a second front against the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria cannot be overstated. Yet even as the Allies waged war against a common enemy, their conflicting imperial designs meant that the coalition lacked a firm foundation.

For its part, Germany dominated its alliance partners and directed overall strategy. After suffering through the costly battles of Verdun and the Somme on the Western Front in 1916, the Germans decided to focus their offensive efforts eastward in 1917. While taking a defensive posture in the west, Germany looked to batter Russia in an effort to relieve pressure on the Austro-Hungarian Empire and counter Russian gains made during the Brusilov Offensive the previous year. That operation had achieved clear success, but proved a Pyrrhic victory as extraordinarily high Russian casualties contributed to flagging domestic support for the war.

In fact, by 1917, internal factors had rendered the Russian Empire vulnerable to a catastrophic break. A revolution in 1905 had nearly overthrown Tsar Nicholas II and revealed the fragility of Russia's autocratic government. The cost of waging an industrial war threatened what little stability remained. The populace was fragmented among a nobility with a nebulous identity, a rising professional class with new political ideals ranging from democracy to Marxism but with limited say in the government, and a rural and industrial laboring class with few avenues for redress apart from mass rebellion. The declining military situation exacerbated these issues. By the end of 1916, the Russian Army had lost hundreds of thousands of men and struggled to supply its forces. Morale deteriorated in early 1917 as roughly one million troops began to desert. As conditions worsened, liberal reformers in Russia became voices around which discontented nobles, peasants, and, most importantly, soldiers could rally.

The economic situation in Russia by 1917 also was poor. Throughout the war, the Allies attempted to prop up Russia's economy through loans for purchasing and transporting war





*Frozen supply barges, Vladivostok harbor (National Archives)*

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materiel. Britain even helped build up Murmansk, a year-round ice-free port in North Russia, and constructed a railroad connecting the port and Petrograd (present-day Saint Petersburg) to deliver supplies sent from abroad. The United States also provided goods purchased with Allied loans. However, vast quantities of supplies began to pile up in port cities like Murmansk, Arkhangelsk (Archangel in English), and Vladivostok as the Russian infrastructure collapsed. The Russian inability to deliver goods efficiently also contributed to urban riots, especially in Moscow and Petrograd. Throughout the war, inflation crippled factory workers' ability to buy what little food reached the cities. The tsar blocked attempts to fix the situation through reforms, and by early 1917 the Russian people had reached their limits.

### *Collapse of the Tsarist Regime*

The February Revolution of 8–16 March 1917 (23 February–3 March on the Julian calendar)\* began as a food riot. On 8 March, International Women's Day, thousands of housewives and female

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\* Gregorian calendar dates are used throughout the pamphlet.

factory workers in Petrograd marched to protest the rising cost of bread and the ongoing war. The women appealed to their fellow workers, men and women alike, prompting roughly 200,000 to go on strike the next day to demand cheaper food, the overthrow of the tsar, and an end to the war. As in previous instances, the tsar responded by ordering the use of military force. After some firing on protestors during the night of 11 March, the troops refused to take further action and many soldiers joined the rebels the next day.

As the riot turned into a revolt, two political organizations grew in Petrograd. The first was the Petrograd Soviet, a collective council of laborers and revolutionaries committed to representing the views of the workers. The second was the Provisional Committee, an element of the State Duma (the Russian parliament). Composed of representatives who aimed to liberalize Russia, it constituted a nationwide elected body. The Petrograd Soviet, meanwhile, represented the Russian people's desire to foment more radical change in the country.

As political organizations rose in Petrograd and soldiers mutinied, some Russian generals, believing the tsar's continued leadership hindered their efforts to win the war, demanded that Nicholas step down. He abdicated on 15 March, nominating his brother, Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, to succeed him. The Grand Duke would only accept the nomination if the Duma approved, which it did not, and thus the 300-year rule of the Romanov dynasty came to an end. In its place, the State Duma formed a Provisional Government. Although this new body did not formally include workers and revolutionaries, the Petrograd Soviet mobilized sufficient popular support through its public speeches and political magazines to seize space in the same building as the Duma and to call for the formation of soviets in other towns. In the wake of the tsarist regime's collapse, Russia was quickly fracturing into groups competing for political power.

The Allies and the United States reacted to the change in government with both hope and trepidation. The public was ecstatic over the birth of a potential new democracy, but those in power were more cautious. American leaders, especially President Wilson, hoped the Russian Provisional Government would live up to its democratic rhetoric. Liberal democrats dominated the Duma-created Russian Cabinet, but they had limited power as the Petrograd Soviet spoke more directly to the masses. The only socialist in the cabinet, Aleksandr Fyodorovich Kerensky, eventually became a key conduit for utilizing the soviets' popular

appeal. On 22 March, the United States became the first nation to recognize the new Russian government. The British and French were less sanguine about the revolution, fearing that Russia would make a separate peace with Germany and withdraw from the war. To prevent such a development, the Allies made secret promises to the Provisional Government regarding Russian control over the Dardanelles Strait that links the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. The Russian foreign minister, Pavel Milyukov, agreed to continue the war, advocating it as a means to expand Russian territory. However, popular discontent forced him to resign on 16 May, leaving Kerensky as the real power in the government—and the future of Russia's war effort in doubt.

### *Continuing Deterioration*

Before the 1905 revolution, various political groups had been advocating radical plans for Russia. Several of these groups had founded the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in Minsk in 1898, espousing a revolutionary socialist political agenda. In 1903, the party divided into its two leading factions: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. By 1917, the Bolsheviks were one of the most prominent voices in the revolutionary dialogue in Russia, advocating a modified Marxist ideology that divided society between the political and working classes and refusing to compromise with other ideological visions. Their efforts gained momentum as exiled revolutionaries sought to return to the country, the most important of whom were Lev Davidovich Bronstein and Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Leon Trotsky and N. Lenin.

Trotsky, a key supporter of the Bolshevik cause before the war, was in New York City when the tsar fell. In late March, he boarded the SS *Kristianiafjord* and headed to Russia. The British intercepted the ship off the east coast of Canada and placed him in a Halifax prison camp as a suspected provocateur. His time in the camp roused a hatred for the British, and after he reached Russia in mid-May he wrote numerous anti-British tracts. Meanwhile, Lenin worked to return from exile in Switzerland. The German High Command, sensing an opportunity, arranged for him to travel through Germany. After being rebuffed by the British and French, Lenin and thirty-three other exiles accepted the German offer and departed Zurich in April 1917 on a sealed train. The group crossed the Baltic Sea by ferry and resumed rail travel through

Sweden and Finland. Lenin arrived 29 April at Finland Station in Petrograd, where enthusiastic supporters greeted his arrival. His charisma and oratory skills drew crowds and energized the Bolsheviks, inspiring ideological fervor and tapping into the people's underlying desire to leave the war. By embracing an antiwar platform, Lenin secured considerable popular support for his brand of Marxism.

With events starting to spiral out of control, the French and British dispatched missions to convince all elements of the Russian government to stay in the war. The Americans, who had joined the war on 6 April 1917, also sent a pair of missions. John F. Stevens, an experienced railroad manager and engineer, led one and Elihu Root, who had previously served as secretary of state and secretary of war, led the other. The Stevens Mission, responding to a request from Russia's Provisional Government for help with its railways, arrived in May 1917. The mission concluded that there were serious inefficiencies in the system, particularly with the Trans-Siberian Railway—the sole connector between the Russian Far East and European Russia—and recommended forming a corps of American railroad experts to help oversee it. In August, the Provisional Government agreed to the plan, leading to the creation of the Russian Railway Service Corps (RRSC). The U.S. government announced on 12 May the Root Mission, which included Maj. Gen. Hugh L. Scott, the U.S. Army chief of staff, with the purpose of evaluating diplomatic, economic, and military issues in Russia. Once in Vladivostok, Scott commented on the inefficiency of the Russian rail system, noting “seven hundred thousand tons of freight piled outdoors at Vladivostok and 8,000 automobiles . . . which had been lying there for a year.” The mission reached Petrograd on 13 June and returned to the United States on 9 July. Like the British and French missions, the mere presence of the Root Mission pressured the Kerensky government to continue the fight. Kerensky responded by overriding his army chief of staff and ordering an offensive in Galicia to begin on 1 July. General Scott observed the first days of the offensive, which favorably changed his opinion about the Russian military. Unfortunately, the offensive achieved little on the battlefield and worsened the domestic situation.

As the offensive struggled on, the Provisional Government sought to undermine the Bolsheviks because of their agitation for an end to the war. On 18 July, the government published evidence that portrayed Lenin and his associates as German agents. Popular



*American truck in Siberia (U.S. Army Center of Military History)*

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opinion swung against the Bolsheviks, allowing the government to arrest key members including Trotsky, and to destroy the printing press of the party's *Pravda* newspaper. Lenin went into hiding. The government, however, remained unstable and the offensive petered out on 19 July.

### *Fall of the Provisional Government*

When the Russian offensive failed, the Allies feared that the consequences would be a complete Russian withdrawal from the war. In an attempt to reinforce the Eastern Front, French leaders suggested a Japanese expedition in late July. Japan had declared war on Germany in August 1914 and focused its efforts on seizing German-held Pacific islands and increasing its influence in China. In the summer of 1917, the Japanese still had considerable military resources from which the Allies wanted to draw to support operations in Russia. However, the Japanese government preferred to avoid the cost of an expedition at this point. Even so, the effort to secure Japanese involvement was the first attempt by the British and French to bring in another ally to reinforce Russia—a sign of their loss of faith in Kerensky's government.

As domestic convulsions weakened Kerensky's position, the Germans launched offensives designed to break the Russians' will. Successive attacks at Riga and in western Estonia in September and October crushed Russian morale, effectively ending active operations on the Eastern Front. The loss of Riga prompted Russian General Lavr G. Kornilov to attempt a coup d'état. Buoyed by informal promises of support from the Allied officials, Kornilov maneuvered troops near Petrograd and delivered an ultimatum to Kerensky on 8 September. While the Allied ambassadors sent Kerensky offers to mediate, the Bolsheviks offered support. He accepted. In what became the Bolsheviks' *modus operandi*, agitators infiltrated Kornilov's troops while masses of workers and soldiers assembled for an assault. The infiltrators succeeded in convincing Kornilov's troops to join their cause, effectively ending the coup.

Sensing that the Provisional Government was too weak to maintain control over the country, Lenin persuaded the other Bolshevik leaders that it was time to seize the capital. Troops loyal to the Bolsheviks took key points around Petrograd on 10 October, enabling Lenin to come out of hiding on the 24th. Members of the Bolsheviks' voluntary paramilitary force, the Red Guards, stormed the Winter Palace, the former residence of the tsars and the current seat of the provincial government, on the night of 6–7 November, formally overthrowing the government. This coup d'état was later dubbed the October Revolution. Lenin began forming a new government and Trotsky dispatched representatives to the Germans on 17 November to negotiate a limited armistice. They eventually scheduled formal talks in Brest-Litovsk, with the Bolsheviks inviting all of the belligerents in an effort to sell the negotiations as a general peace. The Bolsheviks' actions infuriated Allied leaders, but their anger became mingled with embarrassment when on 22 November Trotsky started publishing secret treaties stored in the former Russian Foreign Ministry detailing the Allies' plans to divide the spoils of war—including other countries' territories—after their victory.

The Russian collapse sent a shock wave through the Allies. Whether the Bolsheviks would succeed in withdrawing Russia from the war remained to be seen, but the Allies were already feeling the effects of the disintegrating Eastern Front. On 24 October, a German and Austro-Hungarian attack across the Isonzo River delivered the Italian Army a crushing defeat at Caporetto. In the battle, which lasted until 19 November, the Italians lost over



300,000 men—most of them captured—while retreating over one hundred kilometers in some places. In achieving their success, the Germans utilized former Eastern Front forces in the assault, along with new tactics—commonly referred to as infiltration tactics—they had employed at Riga. They used the tactics again after a British attack at Cambrai on 20 November, retaking most of their lost territory and inflicting a severe blow to British morale. Several of the German units engaged in the counterattack had served recently on the Eastern Front. Their appearance on the Western Front, combined with the disaster on the Italian Front, reinforced Allied beliefs that maintaining the Eastern Front was essential to preventing a German victory in the war.

The crisis in Russia prompted the Allied governments to dedicate a session of an Inter-Allied Conference, from 29 November to 3 December, to discuss the problem. General Ferdinand Foch, the French military representative, proposed a joint American-Japanese expedition to European Russia to stabilize the Eastern Front. The French, with some British support, believed that the operation would serve as a rallying point for pro-Allied Russians, even though it would require the Americans and Japanese to appropriate the Trans-Siberian Railway for logistical needs. However, the American, British, and Japanese representatives rejected the plan. “Colonel” Edward M. House, a close adviser to President Wilson, opposed the idea on the grounds that such an action would likely drive the Bolsheviks into the arms of Germany.

In response to House’s report on the conference, Wilson formulated an explicit statement of American war aims, known as the Fourteen Points. Believing that Russia should make “independent determination of her own political development and national policy,” Wilson resisted Allied calls to intervene. However, the loss of the Eastern Front posed a significant threat to the Allies and their ability to win the war. The slow buildup of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) on the Western Front necessitated keeping the Russian front active for as long as possible. Wilson also knew that he needed to appease the Allies to achieve his larger strategic aims at any peace conference.

The British and French continued to propose an American, Japanese, or joint American-Japanese intervention from late 1917 to mid-1918. Wilson repeatedly rejected the proposals. He believed an intervention would violate national sovereignty by interfering in another nation’s domestic situation. Domestic political concerns supported this position, as the Republican Party had criticized



Wilson for intervening in Mexico in 1916 and likely would do so again if he ordered expeditions into another country without a declaration of war. American leaders considered any military force sent to Russia would detract from the perceived main theater of operations—the Western Front. Moreover, the logistical requirements of such an expedition would tax already stretched resources. Finally, American leaders were concerned that the intervention would serve Allied colonial interests. In particular, they were afraid that Japan would annex Russian territory.

### *Russia Divided*

The Bolshevik seizure of power caused a ripple effect as different Russian groups considered whether to back the takeover. Those factions that supported the Bolsheviks became known as the Red Russians and those that opposed them, the White Russians. Unlike the Reds, who (in principle) shared an ideology, the Whites' factions ranged in political orientation from monarchism to democracy and encompassed nationalist independence movements in diverse regions from Estonia to Ukraine. Additionally, whereas the Reds could be found primarily in western Russia, the Whites spanned the country from the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Russia had thus devolved into a patchwork of conflicting polities with roving bands of Bolsheviks attempting to infiltrate and seize control over local governments. They clashed with a mélange of White Russians who refused to recognize the Bolshevik regime. Other Russian groups organized local, and even provincial, governments of their own as central authority in Russia collapsed.

The Allies reacted to the crisis as it spread to the Russian Far East in December 1917 and January 1918. The Bolsheviks attempted to penetrate the city government of Vladivostok, a key Pacific port that held tons of Allied war materiel. Allied diplomats in the region advocated opposing the Bolsheviks, whom they believed acted as German agents. The Japanese, followed by the British and Americans, responded by deploying warships to Vladivostok to protect Allied interests and monitor the situation.

The Allies, especially the British and the Japanese, also attempted to cultivate key leaders to secure the greater Siberian area. The British and Japanese cooperated with a newly elected Ussuri Cossack Ataman (chieftain), Ivan Pavlovich Kalmykov, to help secure the region outside Vladivostok. In Harbin,



*Cossacks drilling* (National Archives)

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Manchuria, General Dmitriï Leonidovich Khorvat, the director of the Russian-controlled Chinese Eastern Railway, also decided to resist Bolshevik influence. With the support of the Allied consuls and later Chinese troops, Khorvat managed to maintain control of the railway. In addition, the Allies, particularly the Japanese, gave assistance to Grigory Mikhaylovich Semenov, a Cossack officer who claimed to have a commission from Kerensky as the Far East military commissar. Semenov had developed a base in the Transbaikal region and was attempting to rally or convert any soldiers he could find to oppose the Bolsheviks.

A ray of hope for the Allies appeared when negotiations between the Bolsheviks and Germans broke down in January and February 1918. On 16 February, German units already in Estonia resumed their advance while the Germans also deployed forces to support the Whites in the Finnish Civil War. Reports of German forces advancing toward Murmansk prompted the Allies to dispatch the British cruiser HMS *Cochrane*, as well as the French cruiser *Amiral Aube* and the American cruiser USS *Olympia*, to reinforce the squadron they had in theater. Concern over German actions in Finland and Russia continued to demand the attention of the Supreme War Council, an organization formed in November 1917 to coordinate Allied military strategy, as it sought the means

to address both situations and gain some form of consolation out of Russia's collapse.

One unit that fought well during the retreat from the German advance was a foreign legion of Czechs. Originally formed in 1914 from ethnic Czechs and Slovaks living in Russia, the group fought well as part of the Russian Army. By 1917, Russian leaders authorized the recruitment of Czech and Slovak prisoners of war, who agreed to join the group to fight against the Austro-Hungarians for Czechoslovak independence. In late January 1918, the force, known as the Czech Legion and numbering around 50,000 men, declared that they were no longer part of the Russian Army but rather a part of the Czechoslovakian Army in France, which was fighting to carve out an independent nation from Austria-Hungary. The French approved and opened discussions with the Bolshevik government about the Czech plan to redeploy their members to the Western Front.

In March, Lenin accepted German terms for exiting the war. The resulting Treaty of Brest-Litovsk required considerable Russian concessions, including the immediate return of roughly two million Central Powers' prisoners of war, who were mostly in Siberia. The treaty threatened to sway the war to the Central Powers. The agonizingly slow buildup of American forces on the Western Front meant that the potential transfer of hundreds of thousands of German and Austro-Hungarian troops from the Eastern Front could give the Central Powers a numerical advantage over the Allies in the west. Keeping the Eastern Front active thus became a strategic priority for the Allies. (*See Map 1.*) With that in mind, the British navy landed a contingent of Royal Marines on 6 March 1918 to protect Allied supplies from falling into German hands and to secure Murmansk for potential future operations. Planning for more robust British operations in North Russia began in mid-April, with the Supreme War Council considering the Czechs as the most promising source of forces to support Allied efforts at Murmansk and possibly Arkhangelsk.

As the Allies searched for a way to keep the war going in Russia, the Bolshevik government worked to quell the fighting. After failing to convert the Czechs to Bolshevism, the Bolshevik government finally agreed in late March to let them leave the country. Reluctantly, the Czechs partially disarmed and boarded trains for Vladivostok. As the Czechs began moving east, the Allies responded to Red Guard forces amassing in Vladivostok. The Allied navies prepared an operation to land troops in case of

trouble. They did not have to wait long, as three Japanese clerks were murdered in early April. In response, two Japanese naval troop companies landed on 4 April, followed the next day by four more, bringing the combined number to about 500 men. Fifty British marines from HMS *Suffolk* also went ashore. Admiral Austin M. Knight, commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, and the French consul voiced support for the landing, even if they could not commit their own forces.

As Vladivostok settled into the routine of Allied military patrols, the Czech Legion's vanguard began arriving on 25 April. The remainder of the Legion stretched back into central Russia. On 14 May, at a railroad station near Chelyabinsk, violence broke out between Austro-Hungarians returning from Siberia and Czechs waiting to continue their journey to Vladivostok. The clash sparked a general uprising among the Czechs as news of the engagement spread. Czech echelons gathered any available weapons and attempted to seize the stations and towns along the Trans-Siberian Railway. Luckily for the Czechs, the Red Guard along the railway had redeployed to counter Semenov's growing forces in the Transbaikal region.

The Czech revolt changed the situation for the Allies. In early June, the Supreme War Council asked Japan to take part in a joint expedition to Russia. Different factions in the Japanese government debated the point and decided to await an American response. The French High Command, now in charge of the Czechs through a liaison officer, ordered them to hold their positions on the Trans-Siberian Railway, as they saw the Legion as the key to defending Murmansk and possibly reopening the Eastern Front. On 2 June, the Supreme War Council issued Joint Note No. 31, authorizing an Allied intervention in North Russia under British overall command. The council members hoped that "the available Serbian and Czech units [in Russia could] render the land defence [*sic*] of the maritime bases possible without the transport of any considerable expeditionary force." They further stipulated that supporting the Czech Legion would require "the moral and material support of a few Allied units on the spot to co-operate with them against the Germans." Along these lines, President Wilson agreed the next day to a request by Foch, who was now general-in-chief of Allied forces on the Western Front, to deploy American troops to North Russia. Initial projections called for a limited force of four to six Allied battalions "at the most." With the Americans agreeing to some form of an intervention, the Supreme War Council bowed



MAP 1



to British and French pressure and asked on 2 July if the United States would also join an Inter-Allied expedition to Siberia. The proposed force would consist mainly of Japanese soldiers and would operate under Japanese command.

*Decision to Intervene and Wilson's Aide-Mémoire*

Widespread public support for the Czechs, combined with strategic and diplomatic factors, led Wilson to agree to an intervention in Russia. Assisting the Czech Legion would weaken Austria-Hungary from the inside while encouraging other ethnicities to revolt there and in the Ottoman Empire. Most importantly, an intervention would placate the Allies. After signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Germans had shifted roughly fifty divisions to the Western Front and launched a series of offensives beginning in late March. Although the German assaults eventually stalled, they gained considerable territory and came close to dividing the British and French armies. Even as the Americans rushed into the lines to help, the situation on the Western Front remained precarious. Anything that might draw German attention back toward Russia and away from the west now became vitally important to the Allied cause. Wilson, therefore, contacted the Japanese to discuss a limited joint expedition. The talks resulted in an agreement for both nations to deploy around 7,000 men apiece to safeguard the retreat of the Czech Legion and enable it to sail from Vladivostok for service in the west.

With the Allies moving in the same direction, the pace of actions increased. On 9 July, General Khorvat proclaimed an all-Russian government. The next day, the British ordered elements of the Middlesex Regiment, stationed in Hong Kong, to deploy to Vladivostok. The French sent in a limited force soon after. On 12 July, the Japanese delivered supplies to the Czechs and the Japanese cabinet approved the intervention plans. The mobilization of the Japanese 12th Division followed within a week.

Wilson finally announced the Russian intervention on 17 July. He had prepared an aide-mémoire, which he shared with his cabinet and then with foreign diplomats. As Wilson argued that an intervention in Russia would break with American principles, he stated:

Military action is admissible in Russia, as the Government of the United States sees the circumstances, only to help the



Czecho-Slovaks consolidate their forces and get into successful cooperation with their Slavic kinsmen and to steady any efforts at self-government or self-defense in which the Russians themselves may be willing to accept assistance. Whether from Vladivostok or from Murmansk or Archangel, the only legitimate object for which American or allied troops can be employed, it submits, is to guard military stores which may subsequently be needed by Russian forces to render such aid as may be acceptable to the Russians in the organization of their own self-defense. For helping the Czecho-Slovaks there is immediate necessity and sufficient justification. Recent developments have made it evident that that is in the interest of what the Russian people themselves desire, and the Government of the United States is glad to contribute the small force at its disposal for that purpose.

For Wilson, the expeditions to Russia were minimalist contributions to satisfy Allied demands. Even so, Army Chief of Staff General Peyton C. March opposed diverting any resources from the Western Front.

The four-page aide-mémoire was the only guidance Wilson provided for American military commanders in Russia. As the wording was vague, American officers would have to rely on their own judgment rather than clear policy guidelines. Moreover, Wilson habitually expected his military commanders to carry out their missions without further instructions, caring little for day-to-day military operations. Protecting the Czechs in Siberia was a seemingly straightforward task, but for operations in North Russia, the aide-mémoire deferred to the judgment of the Allies, who proposed to “establish a small force at Murmansk, to guard military stores at Kola and to make it safe for Russian forces to come together in organized bodies in the north.”

## OPERATIONS

With the Supreme War Council authorizing an intervention in North Russia in April, the British began planning two operations. The first, SYREN, was to secure Murmansk and Allied supplies while preventing the port from becoming a potential German submarine base. The second, ELOPE, aimed to protect Allied supplies in Arkhangelsk and to link up with the Czech Legion in central Russia. The British government assigned overall command to General Frederick C. Poole, an artillery specialist



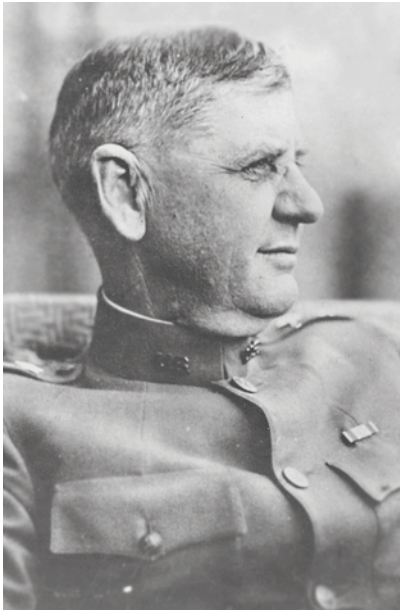
*Czechs in a skirmish line* (National Archives)

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with Russian and colonial military experience, and gave him a mixed force of around 2,500 Royal Marines, French gunners, and Serbian infantry.

Poole reached Murmansk on 24 May and assessed the situation. The first batch of troops arrived on 23 June. By 3 July, around 1,000 British, 400 French, 100 American sailors and marines from the *Olympia*, 2,000 Serbians, and 2,000 local levies faced an estimated 3,500 Red Guard in the region and 55,000–70,000 Germans and White Finns in the larger area.

The British were willing to expand the naval contingent, but they would not commit to providing additional ground troops. They had few military resources available to redirect to North Russia. After the Japanese refused to provide forces, the Americans, with their vast untapped resources, were the natural solution, regardless of the limits Wilson placed on their involvement. The American decision to participate encouraged the Murmansk government to oppose the Bolsheviks, leading them to sever diplomatic relations with the Bolsheviks on 28 July. With that in mind, a member of the American Diplomatic Corps' American Military Mission to Russia



*General Graves*  
(National Archives)

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commented that the United States was “doubly responsible for the beginning of military operations.”

Although they would provide ground troops, the United States was not responsible for the North Russia expedition’s logistics, which took some time to arrange. As the lead nation for the Supreme War Council mission, the British handled logistical support, relying on local resources where possible. However, food shipments from Bolshevik-controlled areas to the south eventually ceased as the Allied interventions grew more robust, requiring more British shipments to make up the difference. Although the war had strained British logistical resources, they managed to compensate for the losses.

The War Department began to mobilize the different Russian expeditions following Wilson’s decision. In mid-July, it checked the status of the 27th and 31st Infantry regiments in the Philippines. The units had a total of ninety-one officers and 2,692 enlisted men—well under their full strength. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, acting on advice from General March, designated Maj. Gen. William S. Graves to lead the AEF-S, directing him to select 5,000 men and officers from the 8th Division at Camp Fremont, California, to fill out the two regiments in the Philippines. Finally, on 29 July, the War Department ordered AEF commander General John J. Pershing to select a force for service in Murmansk.

As the Americans readied their units, the British organized Allied forces at Murmansk for an expedition to occupy Arkhangelsk. On 3 August, General Poole landed in the city with 1,400 troops from eleven nationalities, including fifty marines under the command of Capt. Bion B. Bierer of the *Olympia*. In response, Lenin bargained with the Germans and secured military support.

The Allies soon learned of the agreement, leading to concern that the Germans would march on either Murmansk, or Arkhangelsk, or both, to seize Allied supplies or establish a submarine base. The fears came from Allied intelligence estimates that a German and White Finn Army of 55,000 to 70,000 men under General Rüdiger von der Goltz was successful against the Red Finns and could endanger the Murmansk supply cache.

Facing this menace, Poole called on British leadership for more combat resources. His initial advances out of Arkhangelsk had met with some success, and by mid-August his forces in Murmansk and Arkhangelsk defended an area larger than England. Poole wanted to continue his drive south against the Bolsheviks and link up with the Czechs, but he lacked the manpower. Fortunately, the United States had dispatched reinforcements from England, and Poole intended to use them in the offensive.

Unlike the intervention in Arkhangelsk, the American expedition to Siberia was fraught with imperial competition. Whereas the Arkhangelsk expedition could be viewed as an extended counter to German intrigues in Finland and Russia, the Siberian effort was a balancing act for the Americans. The British and French wanted to support anti-German elements within Russia to prevent the Central Powers from exploiting Russian resources. They also advocated training these forces for potential use in various regions in Russia which could help divert German resources away from the Western Front. The Japanese, meanwhile, aimed to establish a Siberian buffer state against Russia, no matter which Russian government emerged. Each Ally supported different White Russian groups who pursued their own goals of regional control. Amid all this, American forces in Siberia would try to remain neutral.

The War Department gave General Graves official orders dispatching his forces to Siberia on 5 August. Four days later, the AEF designated Lt. Col. George E. Stewart's 339th Infantry regiment; the 1st Battalion, 310th Engineers; the 337th Ambulance Company; and the 337th Field Hospital, all from the 85th Division, as the "Murmansk Expedition." (The War Department later changed the expedition's name to ANREF.) Pershing had selected Stewart because of his military experience. A naturalized American from Australia, Stewart had earned a Medal of Honor in the Philippines and had cold-weather experience from service in Alaska. The force of 143 officers and 4,344 enlisted men sailed from England on 27 August.

Unlike Stewart, Graves received the aide-mémoire directly from Secretary Baker, along with a warning that the assignment was akin to “walking on eggs loaded with dynamite.” In his memoir, Graves noted:

When I left the United States for Siberia, I did not anticipate that I would be involved in the political squabbles of the Far East, but very soon after my arrival in Vladivostok, I learned that every act of an American, civil or military representative, was represented as designed for political effect in the Far East. This was true of all Russians and practically all Allies.

The situations surrounding the interventions in North Russia and Siberia were politically charged and American participation reflected different on-the-ground understandings. The American commanders, with the limited guidance from the aide-mémoire, found themselves walking a political tightrope. As Graves understood his orders, American objectives seemed to be threefold: secure Allied supplies, guard the railroad, and protect the Czech Legion’s retreat route. The expedition’s goals only superficially lined up with those of the other Allies. He later noted, “There were basic differences in our policies which could never be reconciled as long as my instructions remained.” By comparison, Stewart followed British orders and, after refusing an offered command position, remained in Arkhangelsk. His soldiers, meanwhile, were amalgamated into Allied units to be used as the Allied commanders saw fit. Wilson’s lack of clarity, therefore, left Graves and Stewart to operate under ambiguous mission parameters. Graves attempted to remain neutral, while political and operational factors sidelined Stewart.

The human terrain in Russia presented a host of political hazards to the incoming American expeditions. Russia was a fragmented political landscape with various factions receiving support from different countries. The Allies perceived that the Bolsheviks had ties to Germany, whereas the Allied ambassadors who had fled from Petrograd managed the White Russian government in Arkhangelsk. The French helped the Czechs. The British, and later the Japanese, supported Khorvat and his successors. The Japanese also assisted Atamans Semenov and Kalmykov as they contended for regional power. Amid these various players, the United States, seeking to assist the Czechs, was drawn into contrary positions in its two expeditions.

## AMERICAN NORTH RUSSIA EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

The North Russia expedition was fraught with confusion. The necessity of thwarting German goals underlaid the effort, but the methods for doing so were never clearly defined. The physical and social environment constrained the Allies as they sought to defend an extended front for an ad hoc local White Russian government. Small detachments of soldiers deployed across vast distances to hold positions along rail lines and rivers against numerically greater and ideologically inspired opponents. Diplomats and generals fought battles along blurred lines of authority as national goals evolved. The expedition succeeded in achieving American policy objectives by supporting the Allies, but ultimately failed by abandoning the White Russians.

### *Initial Contacts*

American and British interactions in North Russia had commenced when Capt. Hugh S. Martin of the American Military Mission to Russia reached Murmansk via Arkhangelsk on 15 February 1918. Unofficially, Captain Martin began to attend meetings of the local soviet, affiliated loosely with Lenin's government. The Russians, concerned by the chaos in Finland, feared Germany might attack Murmansk. In early March, the Murmansk Soviet took advantage of a British offer of protection against the Germans and White Finns by allowing the British to secure the city.

The ratification of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk further agitated the situation. The local governments, especially those at Arkhangelsk and Murmansk, opposed the treaty and started consulting with Allied representatives at Murmansk about a possible military intervention. The American ambassador, David R. Francis, authorized Martin to attend the meetings, where he gleaned two pieces of information. The local government would gladly continue to fight Germany but required outside support, and "American participation was absolutely essential" as the soviets were wary of Britain's "selfish designs" toward Russia. Local leaders saw the Americans as a counterbalance to ensure a neutral military intervention.

Besides engaging in agitation in the north, German agents around Petrograd used the new peace to acquire supplies for Germany. An American military mission under Col. James A.



Ruggles coordinated with the British and French, with the consent of soviet authorities in Petrograd, to prevent German agents from shipping supplies to Germany. Other clandestine Allied actions included incendiary bombings arranged through paid agents of the right wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which was bitterly opposed to the Bolsheviks. Such attacks prevented the Germans from moving supplies from Moscow.

### *A Challenging Environment*

The terrain and climate of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk were the most obvious obstacles for Allied operations. A sprawling morass of forests, impassible in the summer and snow-covered in the winter, blanketed the region. Russians based their transportation infrastructure on rivers and had few railroads. One wide river, the Northern Dvina, started in the Ural Mountains to the southeast and spread toward the White Sea like an open fan. The Vaga River, a tributary of the Northern Dvina, was narrower and swifter with high banks along its route north. In describing the region, a British officer noted:

There were no roads, so that mechanical transport could not be used, but countless tracks led in every direction and no existing maps showed where they ran. The port of Archangel would be cut off from Europe, except for occasional mails brought by sleigh across the long road from the Murmansk Railway.

Severe cold and variable light also hampered the expedition. Winter began in November, with temperatures plunging below freezing before abating in April or May, making water transport impossible for half the year. Allied soldiers unaccustomed to the subarctic climate had to operate in perpetual twilight, which limited visibility and damaged morale. Even though the Russians were inured to the harsh conditions, all soldiers needed to consider basic elements of survival. The environment thus dictated that winter engagements revolved primarily around shelter.

Additional factors made operating in North Russia a challenge for the Allies. The Bolsheviks had overthrown the Kerensky government, but they were not the predominant political group throughout the country. Their strength came from factory workers and radicalized soldiers. Town governments and agrarian Russians leaned toward less extreme views focused on their communities.





*Supply sleds en route* (National Archives)

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Some American soldiers, particularly those who came from similar small-town or rural backgrounds, got along well with the North Russians. It was common for American soldiers to visit Russian peasants' homes, "playing with the children and trying, as best they could, to speak and be pleasant with all." By comparison, the middle class in North Russian cities tended to bond with American soldiers over ideas of democracy. However, Russian intellectuals generally were divided between those advocating for democratic reforms and others promoting socialist or Marxist programs. Establishing and maintaining support for the American mission among the competing elements of Russian society proved difficult.

The North Russia campaign consisted of two primary theaters and multiple fronts. The Murmansk Theater included Murmansk, Kem, and Kola, and dealt with German and Red forces in Finland and Karelia. The Archangel Theater evolved into five fronts around Arkhangelsk. To the southwest was the Onega Front, which had operations that pushed south and east. Directly south of Arkhangelsk was the Seletskoye/Kodish Front. Bridging the gap between the Onega and Seletskoye Fronts was

the Railroad Front, linking Arkhangelsk to Vologda and Moscow. The River Front, east-southeast of the Railroad and Seletskoye Fronts and located between the Northern Dvina and Vaga Rivers, followed the rivers as they moved southeast. Finally, the Pinega Front, east of Arkhangelsk, was a minor posting but protected the Allied flank.

### *Poole's First Offensive*

Despite Bolshevik claims of authority and the presence of local officials working with the Allies, Poole believed that no real government existed in Russia. To fill the perceived power vacuum, Poole lobbied for two rapid thrusts: the first down the Murmansk Railroad toward Petrograd and the second split between the Arkhangelsk-Vologda Railroad and the Northern Dvina River. He believed the Bolshevik position to be insecure and that an additional 5,000 Allied troops could topple their regional influence. Poole planned to use the incoming American force to build on the gains made by the Allied units already in North Russia.

Poole's operational plans were optimistic considering the specifics of the Arkhangelsk Theater. The two advances he proposed were along routes that would move the columns away from each other, limiting cross-column support. The climate also ensured that the Arkhangelsk contingent would be cut off from easy resupply for a majority of the campaign by the frozen White Sea. Poole's plans also did not properly take into account the Bolsheviks. From the beginning, he considered them disorganized mobs, which his colonial experience showed could be pushed aside by smaller, better disciplined forces. Yet although the Bolsheviks in the theater were disorganized, they had more air, artillery, and riverine support than the Allies, and wielded propaganda to great effect. Furthermore, they had unity of command enforced through party mechanisms.

Despite increasing Bolshevik opposition, the Allied landings at Arkhangelsk benefited from unrest among the city's residents. Georgi Chaplin, a Russian who was a British agent, organized a coup that occurred four hours before Poole's troops landed. A citywide revolt swept out the appointed Bolshevik local government and replaced it with a socialist government under Nikolai V. Tchaikovsky. After the joint forces seized the fort guarding the Northern Dvina estuary inlet in a nighttime sea assault, they landed at Arkhangelsk on 2 August, where a cheering

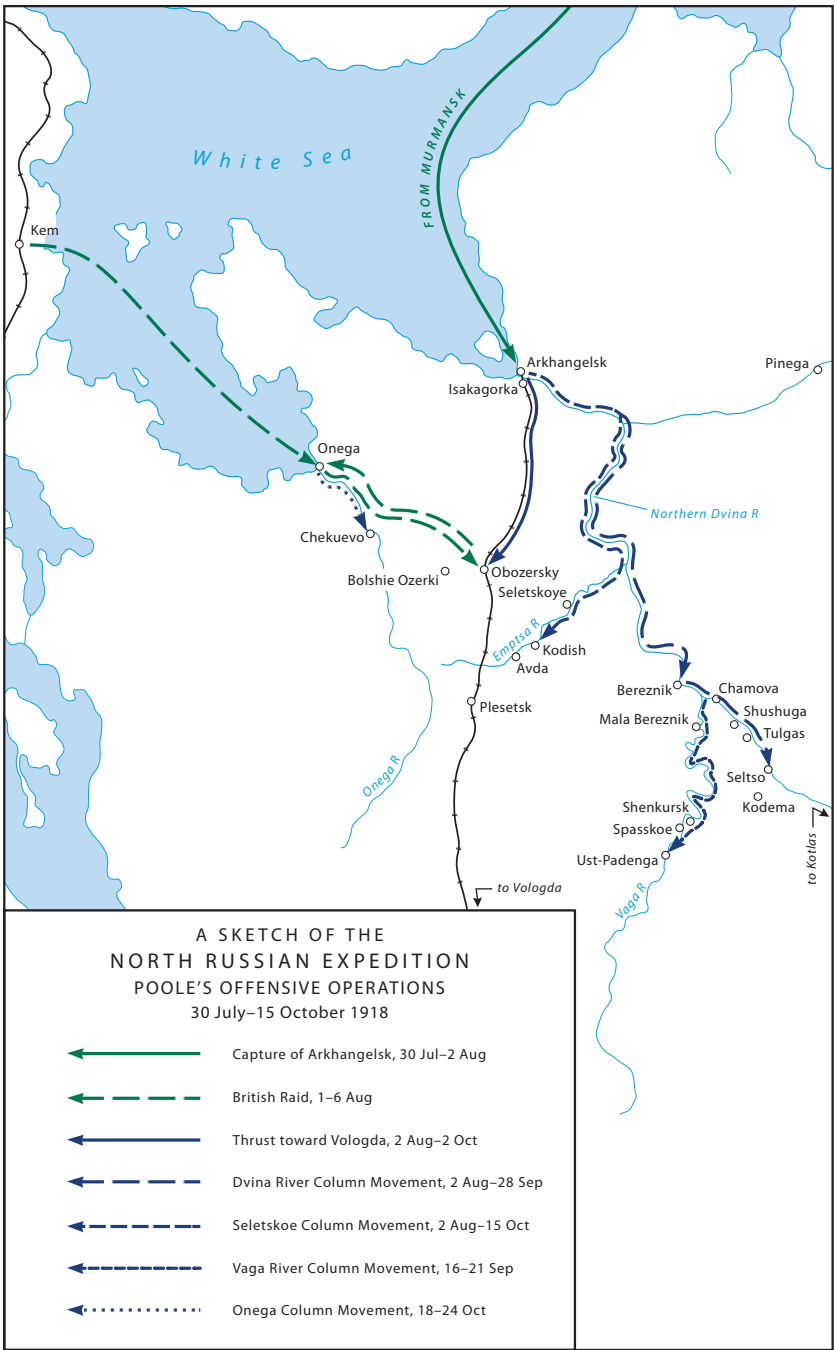
throng of middle-class citizens greeted them. The good cheer lessened, though, when the celebrants realized the contingent only included 1,400 soldiers. The Russians had believed the force would be larger and capable of advancing to other cities, such as Vologda.

Once his forces established their position in the city, Poole made several decisions that would set the tone for the expedition (*Map 2*). First, he treated Arkhangelsk like a colony, despite the Tchaikovsky government, and placed it under military jurisdiction with a French colonel as military governor and a small security force. Second, he deployed his command in four columns, with the two largest groups advancing south along the railroad and up the Northern Dvina, respectively. Two smaller forces operated as fighting patrols, designed to chase remaining Bolsheviks and secure the flanks. Finally, Poole sent an American and French officer to France to represent his needs to the war council, especially the necessity for more troops.

The Supreme War Council received Poole's request on 2 September. General Tasker H. Bliss, the former Army chief of staff and the permanent American representative, knew the council had stipulated that no further reserves would go to the northern expedition. He angrily wrote to March, stating that it was an attempt by the British to shift responsibility onto someone else. March shared the information with Wilson, who agreed with Bliss' assessment.

While Poole expanded the Allied position around Arkhangelsk, the German threat began to evaporate. Despite fears throughout July of a White Finn–German offensive and desperate requests for more troops, British General Sir Charles Maynard arranged his small command in the Murmansk area to hold strategic towns. A small British contingent out of Kem, a town south of Murmansk on the White Sea, in coordination with local Imperial Russian Army veterans, began a series of small engagements that drove the Germans and White Finns out of the Murmansk and Karelian regions.

Meanwhile, Poole's detachments pushed down the rivers and rail lines, making considerable gains. The few hundred British and Russian troops operating from Kem launched an extended raid to support the Arkhangelsk assault. They landed at Onega and marched on Obozersky, taking their objectives before retreating in the face of a larger Bolshevik force. From Arkhangelsk, the American marines and sailors, with support from the arriving French 21st Colonial Battalion, prepared to chase the Bolsheviks



**MAP 2**

down the Arkhangelsk-Vologda Railroad. Shortly following their arrival on 25 August, the 2d Company, 10th Battalion, Royal Scots, with a local Russian detachment of around 400 men, headed south on the Northern Dvina by barges. The objective was to seize the town of Kotlas and its railroad spur to the Trans-Siberian Railway. One of the roving patrols operated on the Emptsa River with the goal of reaching Kodish and securing the Allied center. The initial advances slowed as the Bolsheviks began to rally. By early September, British General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson, commanding ELOPE and then the Allied forces on the Dvina Front, thought the expedition might be better served by fortifying Arkhangelsk to serve as a jumping-off point for the next year's operations. It was clear that the Allies needed the American reinforcements.

### *American Arrival and Continued Offensive*

The American 339th Infantry's arrival in early September 1918 allowed the initial offensives to continue. The regiment, along with the battalion of engineers and medical companies, landed on 3–4 September after a rough voyage, during which significant numbers of troops contracted influenza. The units disembarked over two days and immediately went forward. The 1st Battalion under Lt. Col. John G. Corbly went to support the Dvina Front, while the 3d Battalion under Maj. Charles G. Young moved to the Railroad Front. The 2d Battalion under Maj. J. Brooke Nichols served as a reserve at Arkhangelsk. The city remained the central hub for rest, refit, and medical care. When the Americans arrived, the British hospital had only twenty-five beds and could not treat the large number of sick doughboys. The American medical detachments, with strong support from the American Red Cross, eventually set up a separate hospital and an influenza ward.

Pershing's confidential orders placed the 339th Infantry's commander, Colonel Stewart, under General Poole. Stewart understood Ambassador Francis had greater authority, but Poole and Francis shared a dislike for the Bolsheviks, and Francis allowed Poole to use American troops more aggressively than Wilson's aide-mémoire permitted. Stewart did not see Wilson's instruction until 5 October, but had orders from AEF headquarters to defend the northern ports and render aid to the local Russians. With Francis' support, Poole used his authority to absorb the American units into his command and effectively shunt Stewart to



*Buying supplies (National Archives)*

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the side. Unfortunately for Stewart, he received the aide-mémoire too late to alter the situation.

Confusion over authority was not limited to the senior commanders. Although operational command was firmly in British hands, Capt. Joel R. Moore of Company M observed that “many a British officer was decorated with insignia of high rank but drew pay of low rank. It was actually done over and over again to give the British officer ranking authority over the American officers.” British officers justified the practice on the grounds that the American units lacked “superior organizations” to exert proper command and control over their men beyond the tactical level. The Americans protested, and the British commander resolved the issue by late October by replacing incompetent officers. He also offered Allied and American officers command positions on the different fronts. The staffs, however, remained British.

Command issues aside, the British deployed the Americans throughout the theater because of their capabilities. Not only did they include the only combat engineers Poole had, but the Americans were young and physically fit, if inexperienced. By



comparison, the British and French soldiers were older and had usually served and likely been injured on another front. The American units also had some soldiers who could speak Russian, having come from immigrant communities in Michigan. Finally, the roughly 5,000 Americans were the largest Allied unit in the region. The British had more men, but they were divided between Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. Not surprisingly, the Americans routinely complained that they did the majority of the fighting for the Allies.

As they deployed, the Americans experienced the chaos afflicting North Russia. Since the collapse of the tsarist government, Arkhangelsk's population had nearly doubled to 100,000 because of the influx of refugees and army units. Food was scarce as the local economy struggled to satisfy increased demand after the Bolsheviks cut off supplies to the city. On the night of 4–5 September, less than twenty-four hours after the Americans arrived, another coup rocked Arkhangelsk. Georgi Chaplin, orchestrator of the previous revolt, had grown unhappy with the Tchaikovsky administration and sought to overthrow it, capturing the government's cabinet. The coup enraged local workers, who declared a general strike on the 7th. Poole ordered the 2d Battalion, which had men from Detroit with streetcar experience, to fill such roles during the strike. Ambassador Francis objected to Poole's use of the American soldiers in this way and feared that unrest in the rear would destabilize efforts at the front. Francis and the other Allied ambassadors secured the release of the ministers on 8 September and the general strike ended on the 10th. The British eventually put Chaplin under house arrest, but Poole found his authority weakened for allowing the coup.

While the 2d Battalion dealt with civil strife, the 1st and 3d Battalions deployed to the fronts. Poole intended to use the American battalions as sledgehammers to break the Bolsheviks' solidifying positions. The 3d Battalion arrived at Obozersky, about 161 kilometers south of Arkhangelsk on the Railroad Front, where it joined the French 21st Colonial on 6 September. That morning, Companies I and M took over the front line. The first clash between Americans and Bolsheviks on the Railroad Front occurred on 11 September as a patrol of two Company M platoons pushed south from Obozersky along the rails. After advancing about seven kilometers, the patrol encountered a Bolshevik force, which began withdrawing. The Americans followed and captured an outpost. Company K, French machine gunners, and



British soldiers occupied Seletskoye on 14 September and used it as a springboard for an advance along the Emptsa River toward Kodish. Finally, detachments from Company H along with Russian volunteers arrived at Onega on 18 September and moved along the river to secure the theater's left flank.

In the theater's center, the first fight around Seletskoye did not go as well as the other initial meeting engagements. On 16 September, heavy machine gun and artillery fire drove the Allied forces from the Emptsa bank near Seletskoye to Tiogra on the river's opposite side. With a change of British leaders and the arrival of reinforcements on the 17th, the combined force retook Seletskoye two days later.

Meanwhile, Americans also engaged the Bolsheviks on the Onega Front. Between 18 and 22 September, the detachments from Company H deployed forward to take Chekuevo and secure the Railroad Front's left flank. On 24 September, an enemy unit spent five hours trying to dislodge the Allies from the town before retreating in disorder. After the initial Bolshevik attempts to retake Chekuevo proved unsuccessful, the front remained quiet.

On the River Front, the 1st Battalion reached Bereznik at the junction between the Vaga and Northern Dvina Rivers on 11 September after a five-day, disease-ridden ride on barges. They began to chase Bolshevik forces up the river, replacing the Royal Scots as they advanced. The first engagement on the River Front between the Americans and the Bolsheviks occurred near Tchamova. Upon hearing gunfire near the riverbank around 0500 on 16 September, the Americans discovered a small Bolshevik party landing from a gunboat. It had lobbed shells into the town and fired on a group of unarmed Scots who thought the boat was delivering supplies from Bereznik. After a short exchange of fire with an American platoon, the Bolsheviks reboarded their boat. As the Americans sought a means of pursuit, a British gunboat appeared and engaged the Bolshevik vessel, quickly setting it aflame.

In late September, the Allied forces continued the advance. Poole's goal was to take Plesetsk, a key railroad and river junction, before winter began in order to unify three of his columns. At this point, Major Nichols, who had proven his competence leading the 2d Battalion, assumed command of the 3d Battalion. Following intermittent skirmishing between armored trains and Bolshevik artillery, the Allies resumed the advance. However, failed attacks against Bolshevik positions forced another halt. After receiving

reinforcements, the force near Seletskoye maneuvered toward Kodish on 26 September, but Bolshevik machine gun and artillery fire at a bridge held them up on the following day.

Compared with the delays on the Railroad Front, the advances on the River Front made considerable progress. In a riverine blitz up the Vaga from Bereznik, Company A, under Capt. Otto A. Odjard (the “Viking”), rapidly took Shenkursk on 18 September and Ust-Poiskoi three days later. The remainder of the 1st Battalion continued to push south from Chamova on the Northern Dvina, reaching Shushuga on the 18th with patrols as far as Tulgas. Two days later, a combined Allied assault on Seltso along both banks of the Northern Dvina drove off about 500 Bolsheviks with machine guns, artillery, and gunboats. On the 26th and 28th, the column captured Poutoouga and Kodema, respectively. With the two riverfronts stable, 1st Battalion headquarters shifted to Shenkursk, the province’s second-largest city and home to a sizable anti-Bolshevik contingent. The regional British headquarters remained at Isakagorka.

The Allied advances out of North Russia in September sparked panic within the Bolshevik leadership. They had recently begun organized purges and a terror campaign among revolutionaries and civilians before applying similar tactics to the Allied representatives. The Bolsheviks sacked Allied embassies and consulates in Petrograd and Moscow, and arrested British and French diplomats. Intelligence reports noted that the advances on Vologda and Kotlas resulted in unorganized uprisings among the rural population and fear among the Bolsheviks and Germans. After the Siberian expedition secured the Czech Legion’s rear echelons in late August and early September, the Bolsheviks now found themselves fighting encircling Allied forces.

### *Reorganizing Allied Forces*

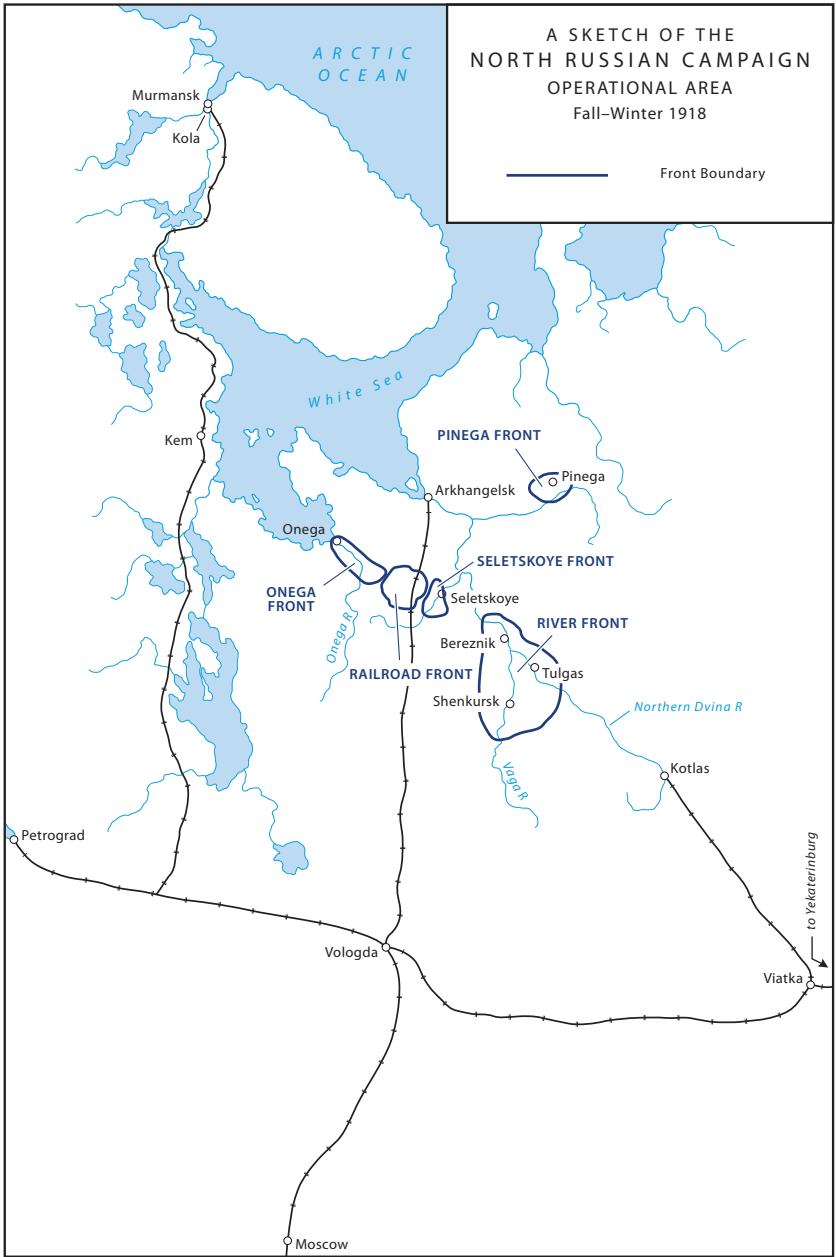
With the ELOPE mission evolving from the defense of Arkhangelsk to offensive operations, Poole proposed a reorganization of his command to continue the two thrusts begun in August. The units advancing on the Railroad Front would be redesignated as the Vologda Force, composed of three columns: Onega, Railway, and Seletskoye. Units fighting on the River Front would become the Dvina Force and keep Kotlas as their goal. As a part of the reorganization plan, an American detachment with Russian auxiliaries went to Pinega to protect the theater’s eastern flank, arriving on 22 October.

To support the reorganization, the command received artillery batteries from the battle-hardened 16th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, on 30 September–1 October.

At the same time, British Brig. Gen. William Edmund Ironside, an energetic officer with combat and staff experience, arrived to serve as Poole's chief of staff. To familiarize himself with the theater, Ironside went on an inspection tour of the two primary fronts and discussed the situation with Dvina Force commander Gordon-Finlayson (*Map 3*). Ironside supported reorganizing the campaign and wanted to keep Gordon-Finlayson in command. Choosing a commander for the Vologda Force, however, was a more serious problem. With a dearth of available, competent British colonels, Ironside proposed using Colonel Stewart. Initially surprised by the offer, Stewart refused command, "saying that he would be exceeding his instructions if he left Archangel." Ironside eventually secured a French commander for the Railroad Force.

The British government recalled Poole to England on 14 October for consultation, but in reality, he was being relieved. Poole's heavy-handed behavior and poor treatment of the diplomatic corps led to his replacement. In the background of Poole's ouster was a larger policy debate among the Allies as to how to proceed in Russia. Poole was part of a group who believed that Lenin's government needed to be overthrown by the military. Another camp supported containing the Bolsheviks, believing that Lenin's regime could be convinced to follow international norms or would collapse without outside support. For his part, Wilson saw the Russian expeditions as sideshows from the beginning, and feared that Allied involvement would only strengthen the Bolsheviks. Although apolitical, Ironside understood his position as one of securing the region for the White Russians when he assumed command of the Allied mission in North Russia.

Policy concerns continued to absorb Ironside's attention in October as the Supreme War Council ordered him to prepare for a winter campaign. He hoped Tchaikovsky's government could expand its military and take over from the Allied troops, but the Russian responses did not fill him with confidence. Ironside also sought support from the ambassadors to push the Russians to take a more active role in their defense. Unfortunately, he gained a sense from the diplomats that "there would be a tacit cease-fire as soon as the Germans were out of the struggle. They did not think we should have a strenuous time during the winter."



**MAP 3**

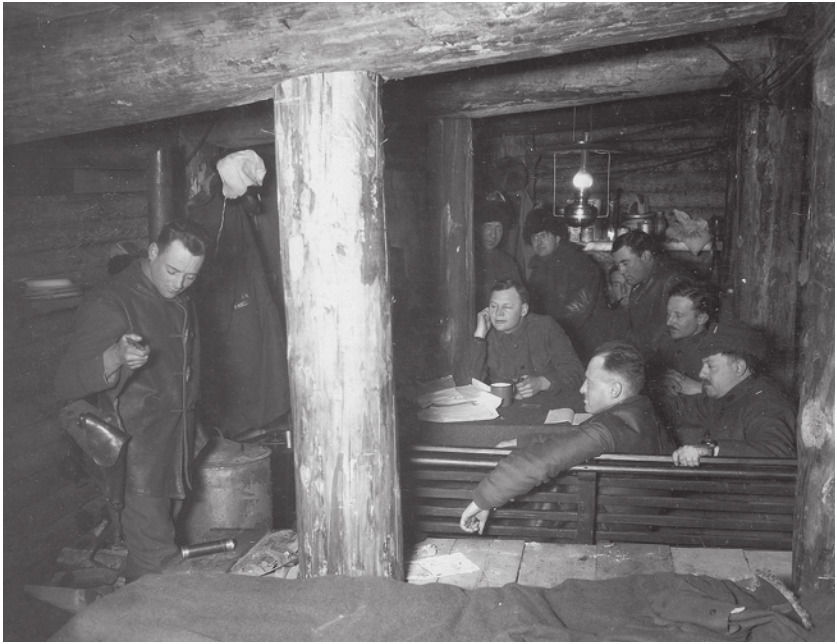


*General Ironside inspecting Russian recruits* (National Archives)

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As Ironside managed theater-level issues, fighting continued as the column commanders tried to consolidate their positions. On the Railroad Front, American and French soldiers pushed toward Plesetsk, conducting flanking attacks on outposts along the route, until a destroyed bridge stopped the drive. From mid-October onward, the Vologda Force maintained a defensive position, fending off several sizable attacks, including one on 4 November by an estimated 1,000 Bolsheviks. The Allies on the River Front, meanwhile, also went on the defensive. The Bolsheviks cut off Company A, 1st Battalion, from downriver support on the Vaga, while other Red units attacked Seltso. The Allies beat back the separate attacks, but Ironside ordered a consolidation across the theater. Company A withdrew to Ust-Padenga in late October, fortifying defensive positions outside of Shenkursk, while forward elements on the Northern Dvina redeployed back to Seltso and Tulgas. Patrols kept tabs on the Bolsheviks and tried to disrupt potential buildups in December.

The Seletskoye column also attempted to consolidate its area in October by seizing Kodish. Two batteries of Canadian artillery



*Life inside a bunker* (National Archives)

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reached the front on 7–8 October. Four days later, the Seletskoye column split into two detachments and crossed the Emptsa. On the 13th, three platoons from Company K, with machine gun and artillery support, attacked the riverside defenses of Kodish. A simultaneous flanking attack, composed of Company L with a platoon from Company K, became lost in a swamp and returned to their initial positions. The next day, the flanking force tried again and secured Kodish before continuing its pursuit of the Bolsheviks on the 15th.

The Bolshevik commander knew that Plesetsk, which the Vologda Force now threatened, sat near the junction of the north-south railroad and the Emptsa River. Despite his men's sinking morale, he gave orders to hold this vital point. At the same time, Ironside also ordered the Allied troops to "hold on and dig in." He then visited the front lines south of Kodish where he watched an American unit annihilate a probe from cover in the dim afternoon light. Ironside and others went outside following the engagement to check the enemy. The Red soldiers had died within minutes of



being hit, becoming “frozen stiff in the intense cold.” The incident caused Ironside to reflect on the nature of warfare in a Russian winter:

Life inside the blockhouse was very comfortable. Lighting and heating were good. The manipulation of arms easy. Outside everything was different. Reconnaissance of such a position was impossible, chiefly because of the wire which was buried in the snow. . . . Observation for gun-fire, sufficiently accurate to get direct hits upon a blockhouse, was out of the question in the darkness even of midday.

Sensing trouble on the Dvina Front, Ironside ordered the redeployment of units from the Seletskoye column, leaving fewer than 200 men to hold positions south of Kodish. Because the Allied forces were stretched thin, they would leave Kodish in early November.

### *Winter in North Russia*

November proved a difficult time for the Allies in North Russia. At the political level, an ill Ambassador Francis departed on 6 November, leaving a vacuum. As dean of the diplomatic corps, he had allowed the military significant latitude to intervene in support of the Whites while also propping up Tchaikovsky. No other diplomat could fill the void created by his departure. For the men, news of the Armistice of 11 November was bittersweet. The agreement seemed to end the war, effectively removing the underlying purpose for the entire North Russia expedition. And yet on the ground, nothing changed. No announcements came of a planned withdrawal, or even an end to the campaign. Winter approached, and the men still engaged in regular and intense battles with the Bolsheviks. Allied morale declined as officers struggled to explain why they were still in North Russia. Without a clear rationale, many soldiers believed their primary purpose was to fight the Bolsheviks. Others resented their ongoing service and small mutinies began to occur among all forces. The only good news came with the arrival of the British 6th and 13th Battalions of the Yorkshire Regiment and the 252d Machine Gun Company in Murmansk on 26 November. The approximately 3,000 reinforcements eventually made their way south to join the troops around Arkhangelsk.





*An American snowshoe patrol (National Archives)*

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December was mostly quiet along the fronts. East of Arkhangelsk, Allied troops at Pinega had pushed up the river valley in late November to ascertain Bolshevik positions, but a Bolshevik attack on 4 December convinced the Americans to fall back to Pinega. Meanwhile, a White Russian mutiny occurred in Arkhangelsk on 11 December. Soldiers from the Headquarters Company, 339th Infantry, as well as others from trench mortar and machine gun units, surrounded the barracks held by the mutineers and opened fire when the Russians refused to surrender. After a fifteen-minute fusillade, the White Russians gave up. The affair did little to improve the spirits of the men holding Arkhangelsk.

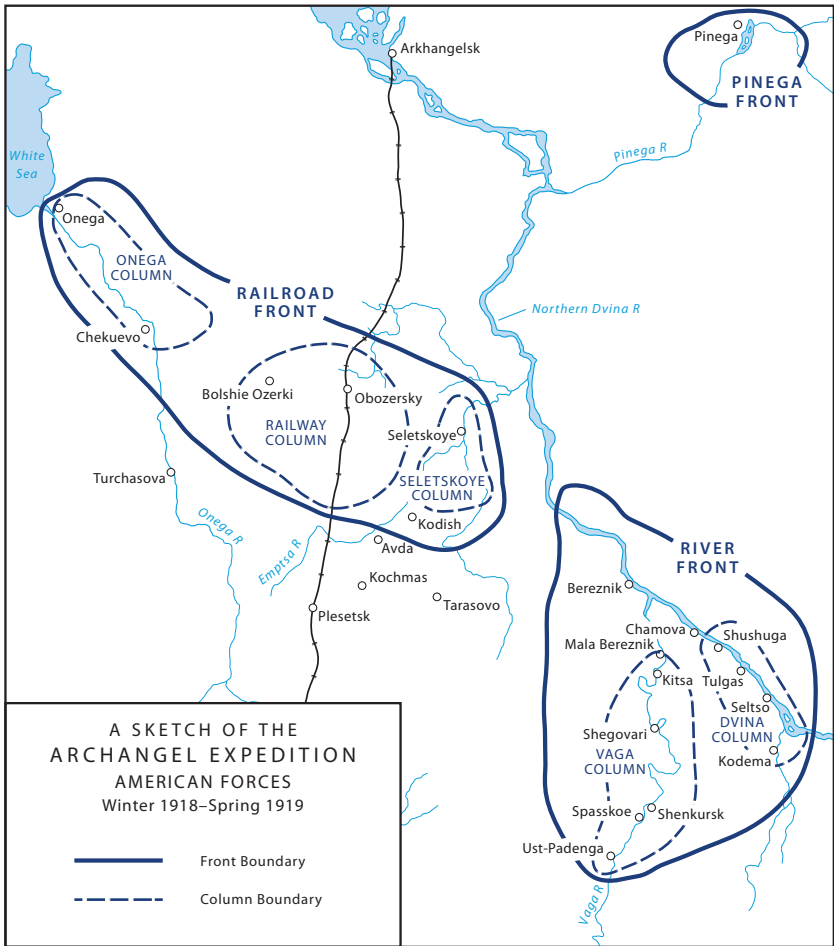
At the end of December, the Vologda Force renewed its push toward Plesetsk. The British government had reports that Czech General Radola Gajda intended to link up with Arkhangelsk despite the fact that the Czechs were fighting more than 500 kilometers to the southeast near the Ural Mountains. To ready for the potential arrival of Czech troops, Ironside ordered a joint convergence on Plesetsk by the Onega, Railway, and Seletskoye columns. The Onega column continued up the river valley, encountering light resistance until 29–30 December when it seized Turchasova. However, the column had to withdraw to Kleshevo on 1 January 1919 in the face of heavy Bolshevik counterattacks. The Railway

column attempted its push on 29 and 30 December to little avail. The Seletskoye column launched an attack along the Kodish-Avda-Kochmas Road on 30 December. The Americans, backed by Canadian artillery, managed to retake Kodish that afternoon before receiving orders to “Hold what you have got and advance no further south; prepare defenses of KODISH.” With two of the three columns stalled, the Allies canceled the advance.

### *Strategic Wrangling and Popular Concerns*

At the Paris Peace Conference, which began on 18 January, delegates debated not only the end of the war with Germany, but also the proper approach to Russia. The Allied and American governments, exhausted from war, had three options: reconcile with Lenin’s Bolshevik government and support its consolidation of power; unilaterally withdraw from Russia; or institute a blockade and support “Anti-Bolshevik Governments and Armies already in existence in Russia.” Rather than supporting more militaristic British and French postures, in February President Wilson proposed a meeting of all Russian governments at Prinkipo Island (Büyükaada in Turkish) in the Sea of Marmara to discuss Russia’s future. Concerned that the Allied interventions were driving unaligned Russians into the Bolshevik camp (a perception corroborated by British intelligence), Wilson sent an unofficial representative to talk with the Reds. Lenin’s government was willing to make several concessions to the Allies in exchange for recognition, but refused an armistice. The French, who had been Tsarist Russia’s closest military and financial ally, ultimately undermined any reconciliation with the Bolsheviks, leaving the Allies to adopt a policy of containment that included nonrecognition.

The Paris Peace Conference delegates’ growing anxiety over the spread of Bolshevism partially motivated their decision. They were concerned that it was reaching the public consciousness in the United States and elsewhere. In Seattle, a general strike occurred in January and February, raising nationwide fears about anarchy and Bolshevism. In Washington, in early February, the U.S. Senate’s Overman Committee, which had powers to investigate German actions against America, linked Bolshevism with wartime German maneuvers. In Europe, leaders feared countries falling to mobs inspired by Bolshevism. Headlines such as, “FEAR REDS IN EAST: Statesmen Concerned Over Spread



**MAP 4**

of Bolshevism—MORE DANGEROUS THAN HUN” abounded. The evolving opinion among American citizens was decidedly anti-Bolshevik, putting pressure on the Wilson administration to take a more aggressive stand on Russia.

Operationally, January 1919 was a difficult time for the North Russia expedition (*Map 4*). After exchanging Kodish a few times, the Seletskoye column finally abandoned the village, burning the buildings on 21 January. The Dvina Force also suffered a setback. On 22 January, the British ordered Company A, still



*Standing guard outside a bunker (National Archives)*

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under Capt. Odjard, to withdraw from Ust-Padenga to Spasskoe, near Shenkursk. They departed just ahead of a Bolshevik raiding force sent to block them. The Americans received support from Capt. Oliver A. Mowat's 68th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery, which rushed forward with a pair of 18-pounders to cover the withdrawal. Although Bolshevik guns outranged the Canadian ones, the combination of American machine guns and Canadian artillery fire provided enough cover for the Allies to reestablish a line outside of Shenkursk.

Red units converged on Shenkursk from four directions using packed snow and newly cut trails through the forests. On 23 January, a raiding force attacked Shegovari, north of Shenkursk, threatening the Allied line of retreat and cutting a signal line. The column commander, British Lt. Col. C. C. Graham, realized by 1600 on the 24th that Shenkursk was in danger of being surrounded and could not hold out against the Bolshevik artillery. Captains Odjard and Mowat had been hit by an artillery shell that day, causing the line outside the city to pull back. That afternoon, a Royal

Air Force observation plane reported enemy shells striking the town. Gordon-Finlayson, the Dvina Force commander, authorized Graham to withdraw from Shenkursk at his discretion but later expressly ordered the evacuation. The British estimated that the 1,700 Allied soldiers at Shenkursk faced 6,000 Reds.

The Allied and civilian retreat toward Bereznik began during the night of the 24th, with Companies A and C under Colonel Corbly acting as rear guard. In pitch-black, arctic conditions, soldiers and townspeople struggled over icy trails and through deep snow. The column reached Shegovari, the nearest friendly outpost, late on 25 January. Patrols on the 26th reported the enemy was closing on the town, prompting a further evacuation. On the 27th, the column reached Kitsa, which became the new headquarters. The Allies erected a defensive line from Vystavka through Yeveevskaya to Ust-Suma. The new fortifications soon faced constant pressure from the Bolsheviks but held until March. Total American losses were twenty-nine killed, fifty-nine wounded, and nineteen missing.

### *Red Army Spring Offensive and the American Withdrawal*

The Bolsheviks slowed their operations in February as the Allies held their positions with routine patrols and unit rotations. The buildup of Bolshevik forces in the theater, however, was anything but routine. At the beginning of November, the Bolsheviks had 12,900 troops in the region, but by 1 February that number had risen to 36,300. By the 20th, they had 45,500 troops. The Allies, including the White Russians, had 23,270 troops deployed throughout North Russia, of which 13,300 were in reserve. The British with 5,964 soldiers and the Americans with 4,971 made up the two largest contingents. Allied intelligence predicted heavy Red offensives beginning in March. In preparation, Allied units fortified their fronts with extra wire, booby traps, and dummy gun emplacements.

By mid-February, Wilson had decided it was time to withdraw the Americans in North Russia as he thought the expedition hindered the proposed Prinkipo talks. To that end, Pershing placed Brig. Gen. Wilds P. Richardson in command of the ANREF in mid-March. In a brief conversation with the president, who was in Paris for the peace talks, Richardson learned that Wilson “desired our troops withdrawn as early as practicable after the opening of navigation” and that he disapproved of Poole’s initial offensive

policy. Wilson did, however, agree with Richardson's suggestion of an offensive blow to cover the withdrawal.

To help with the American withdrawal, Wilson, in concert with the British, decided to commit railway troops to Murmansk to keep the rail lines open to Arkhangelsk. The AEF headquarters directed the 167th (Operations) Company and the 168th (Maintenance) Company, totaling 720 officers and enlisted men from the AEF Transportation Corps, to form the "North Russia Transportation Corps Expeditionary Force" under Maj. Edward E. MacMorland. Tactical command would be exercised by General Maynard, the British commander in Murmansk, while Richardson would maintain administrative control of the force. The mission's goals were threefold: to increase the safety of Allied forces; to protect the supply line; and "to facilitate the prompt withdrawal of American and Allied troops in North Russia at the earliest possible moment that weather conditions in the spring will permit." After making preparations in England, the 168th Company reached Murmansk on 25 March, followed by the 167th Company on 8 April. The force began work on the Murmansk-Petrograd Railway, repairing track and telegraph lines. A small detachment operated an armored train between May and July, engaging in several minor actions against elements of the Bolshevik Seventh Army. The White Russians eventually took over maintenance and repair operations on 12 July before the railway troops began withdrawing at the end of the month.

General Richardson departed Harwich, England, on 2 April along with some of the railway troops. Traveling on American naval vessels, the group stopped at Murmansk on 8 April before delivering Richardson and his staff to Arkhangelsk on 17 April. After establishing his headquarters, Richardson visited the American advanced positions on the Railroad Front on the 21st. During his five-month deployment, Richardson toured every American position, conducting five separate trips and talking to most of the troops. By contrast, Stewart had only left Arkhangelsk to inspect his forces on one occasion in his eight months in Russia.

Before Richardson arrived, the Bolsheviks had begun their spring offensives. The operations in North Russia were the first serious test for Trotsky's newly reorganized Red Army, constructed around political cadres and heavily reliant on conscription. The first attack by the Red Sixth Army occurred on 16 March near Bolshie Ozerki, a key link between the Vologda Force's Onega and Railway columns. The Reds cut off a combined American, French,





*General Richardson (fourth from left) and staff at ANREF Headquarters, Arkhangelsk (National Archives)*

and White Russian patrol of around fifty soldiers and the unit surrendered on the 17th. Red Army troops killed two of the patrol's six Americans from Company H during the fight and captured the other four, including two wounded men. The next day, the enemy force of between 1,000 and 1,500 men occupied Bolshie Ozerki, severing Allied communications with Chekuevo.

Ironside took personal command at Obozersky and rushed reinforcements to reclaim Bolshie Ozerki and hold the railhead. The Allies probed the new Bolshevik position before launching a coordinated assault from the Onega Valley and Obozersky on 23 March. The Bolsheviks, having fortified Bolshie Ozerki with artillery and machine guns, beat back the Obozersky attack. The Onega column fell back after enduring a five-hour bombardment. The Allies set up a perimeter near Bolshie Ozerki, while holding off attacks on the Railway column's front.

After a slight pause to bring up reinforcements and to reposition units, the Red Army attempted to exploit the Bolshie Ozerki bulge



on 31 March. After cutting a telephone line between Bolshie Ozerki and Obozersky during the morning, they attacked the Allied rear with three battalions. At 1000, an hour after the initial attack, the Bolsheviks launched a frontal assault. The Red Army committed three regiments, around 7,000 men, divided between their two advances. They faced 200 men from Company M and 400 White Russians in newly fortified positions. The Americans repulsed the assaults and a follow-on attack the next day with heavy casualties.

The Onega column, with a mix of American, British, and Polish troops, attempted an attack on the Bolshie Ozerki positions on 2 April to repair the break in the line. The thrust did not dislodge the Red units, but it did distract them. Relief forces replaced Company M and auxiliaries on 4 April. A few days later, the Red Army units abandoned Bolshie Ozerki after suffering 2,000 casualties. The Allies retook Bolshie Ozerki on 18 April, capturing a dozen prisoners and 1,000 artillery shells in the village.

The Red Army offensive continued with a shift to the River Front. They targeted the Northern Dvina and Vaga Rivers, which had begun to thaw. At midnight on 19 April, using dummy guns to deceive the Bolsheviks, American units retreated from their exposed positions around Kitsa to heavily prepared ones at Mala Beresink and Nizhni Kitsa to the north. Kitsa and Maksimovskaya caught fire during the retreat as Russian artillery bombarded the deserted defenses. The Canadian artillery drove off the Reds' river flotilla as members of the 310th Engineers shattered river ice to accelerate the Allied riverine fleet's deployment. In the skies, on 24 April, enemy planes bombed various sites, including the Dvina Force's headquarters and also dropped propaganda.

The Bolshevik efforts appeared to bear fruit on the River Front with the outbreak of another White Russian mutiny. Members of the 2d Battalion, 3d North Russian Rifles, let Red troops into Tulgas during the night of 24–25 April. The Reds and mutineers surrounded the White Russian officers' barracks and opened fire, killing several of the men. An estimated 300 White Russians joined the Reds, enabling them to take over the town. White Russian artillery and the loyal part of the garrison withdrew to Shushuga. As the fighting drove the Allies down river, navigation on the Northern Dvina finally cleared on 25 April, allowing British gunboats to counter the Bolsheviks and stabilize positions.

The higher tempo of Red operations continued along the River Front into May as perpetual day replaced constant night. After regular patrols and probes near Mala Bereznik, the Red

Army launched a coordinated attack on 1 May. The Allied units held, despite having their flanks compromised and losing communications. Allied heavy artillery dueled with the Red Army over Mala Bereznik and forced the enemy gunboats to retreat. The Red Army's assaults failed to make headway. Meanwhile, as the Bolsheviks attacked on the Vaga, the British did the same on the Northern Dvina. On 6 May, a British patrol broke through Red outposts near Tulgas and destroyed enemy defenses and supplies. Patrols and counterpatrols held the Reds at bay throughout the month, recapturing Tulgas on 18 May.

As the Bolshevik spring offensives continued, American units began to withdraw from the line. To cover the movements, British reinforcements arrived on 26 May with American R. Adm. Newton A. McCully and his warships. Through the end of May and early June, American detachments filtered in from the various fronts to embark in four waves from Arkhangelsk during June. The railway transportation troops left from Murmansk on 30 July, and the ANREF headquarters officially closed at midnight on 5 August. Richardson and his staff departed by 23 August 1919, having also helped with some of the logistics for the British withdrawal.

Considering the growing cost of the expedition and of supporting White Russian forces, the British chose to withdraw as well. However, even after deciding to leave on 12 August, the British would take another two months to complete operations in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. To cover their withdrawal, the British launched an offensive in August. The British expeditionary force and refugees left Arkhangelsk in September, whereas those in Murmansk followed suit in October. Without Allied support and under increasing pressure, the North Russian government collapsed in short order.

In his formal report on the expedition, Richardson declared:

[American soldiers] were in a distant and strange land, surrounded by unusual conditions of darkness and cold, far advanced from their base, frequently in small and isolated posts; with menacing conditions at times along their lines of communication to the rear, and facing an enemy of whose strength they had but vague knowledge and who had one advantage at least of being on familiar ground. . . . The quality of courage required to meet [such conditions] is of high order, and it was born there among our men and maintained with few exceptions, during long months.

Richardson also noted that his men did not get the credit due them, as people were suspicious of the expedition's motives. He believed that the effort concluded "at a time when the appetite for giving credit and reward had in large measure become appeased." Richardson further lamented that the expedition suffered from the "absence of a pronounced and sustained policy," which was carried out with insufficient forces. Whatever questions emerged over American participation, the soldiers who served in Russia did so with distinction, operating in difficult conditions against an unclear enemy. In doing so, they suffered a reported 553 casualties, including 194 deaths.

### AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES—SIBERIA

The situation in Siberia was a whirlpool of imperial and regional intrigue. The Czech Legion seized most of the Trans-Siberian Railway and dominated the local White Russian governments that took control of towns along the route. Cossack leaders sought to carve out their own domains with Japanese support. The British assisted Khorvat and his successor's government to maintain their regional influence. Finally, Bolshevik partisans attempted to convert democratically inclined locals to expand their numbers. The Americans operating in Siberia spent as much effort avoiding getting involved in these local and regional conflicts as they did executing their mission. Ultimately, the regional and international gamesmanship collapsed along with the White Russians, leaving the Americans to again wonder as to the meaning of their intervention.

Siberia is a diverse region. At the time of the intervention, it stretched from the Ural Mountains in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east and from the Arctic Circle in the north to Afghanistan in the south. It comprised a landmass 70 percent larger than the continental United States. The region is primarily taiga or "snow forest," with the southern reaches consisting of temperate forests and steppes, and mountain ranges along the coast. As the rivers run north, they turn the landscape into a morass. Siberian temperatures range from  $-48^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $104^{\circ}\text{F}$ , and winter could begin in October and last until May. Summer generally lasted only two months.

The transportation network was subject to Siberia's climate extremes. The sole logistical route binding the expanse together was the Trans-Siberian Railway, extending over 11,000 kilometers



*An American patrol in winter camouflage (National Archives)*

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from Vladivostok to Moscow. Apart from the railroad, the region relied on dirt roads, which turned to mud when the ice thawed and were rutted deeply by cart traffic. During winter, the roads and waterways froze, allowing sled transport, which was faster than carts. In the warmer months, ferries crossed Lake Baikal, the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Coal was essential to keep the trains running and provide warmth in the winter. The Suchan Mines complex, east of Vladivostok, provided most of the coal for maritime Siberia and Manchuria. The Bolsheviks seized the mines in September 1917, but their mismanagement resulted in a 200 percent decrease in productivity, alienating a population already averse to centralized control.

The largest settlements were along the railroad and contained people accustomed to greater freedoms than those enjoyed in European Russia. Cities had some stone structures, but peasants tended to live in log homes. Sanitation facilities were nonexistent, resulting in rampant disease. Siberia was a harsh environment, and it was sparsely populated by hardy and independent-minded people.

The Kerensky government had arranged for the Americans of the RRSC (Russian Railway Service Corps) to help manage the railroad, which was essential for logistical and political control for much of central and eastern Russia. However, by the time the first contingent arrived in Vladivostok on 14 December 1917, the Bolsheviks had overthrown Kerensky, plunging much of Russia into turmoil. Some of the railroad soldiers returned home; others went to Japan to wait. The remaining men, commanded by Col. George H. Emerson, deployed in April 1918 to help manage the Trans-Siberian Railway and parts of the Chinese Eastern Railway. The RRSC would remain beyond the duration of the American intervention, staying until 1922.

### *The Czech Legion and Allied Intervention*

The first detachment of the Czech Legion arrived in Vladivostok on 26 April 1918. After the Chelyabinsk uprising on 14 May, legionnaires seized points along the Trans-Siberian Railway including Ufa, Penza, and Samara. The Bolsheviks sought to halt the conflict and secured an armistice in late May with the assistance of Colonel Emerson. However, some Czechs, concerned that freed German prisoners were using the Bolsheviks to exert control over Russia, resumed fighting. They captured Omsk on 7 June and shepherded German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners back to detainment camps. Fighting in central Siberia broke out on the 16th as local White Russian governments in Tomsk and Omsk rose up with Czech support. The Czechs received congratulations from French Ambassador Joseph Noulens on 18 June, along with news that the Allies now intended to intervene in Siberia.

With their revolt recognized by the Allies, the Czechs in central Russia realized they needed to protect their position. They decided to conduct three operations. One column would move west-northwest toward Moscow while another would advance northwest toward Vologda. At the same time, General Gajda would lead a force east toward Vladivostok, securing the all-important Czech rear and logistics route. The plan was for Gajda to march from Omsk toward Lake Baikal, while Ataman Semenov's Cossacks would advance westward from Manchuria to meet up with Gajda at Chita or Verkneudinsk. A Czech force under Maj. Gen. Milo K. Dietrichs, the Czech Legion's chief of staff, would also proceed north from Vladivostok toward Khabarovsk

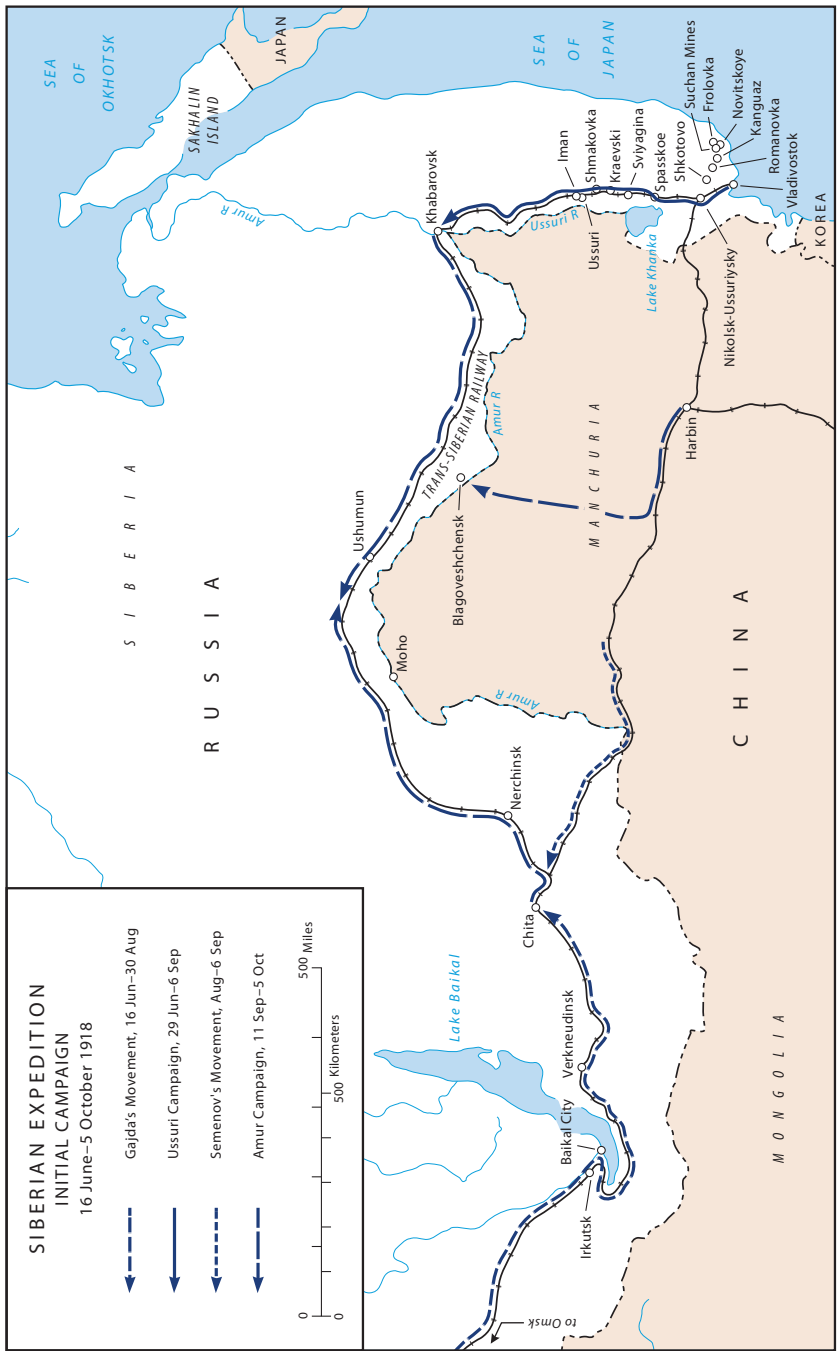
and then turn west to support the joint attack toward Chita and the Amur River Valley.

The operations began during the summer as the Bolshevik and Czech relationship deteriorated (*Map 5*). Claiming an intent to protect war materiel, Dietrichs and 10,000 legionnaires seized control of Vladivostok on 29 June. The Czechs then marched northward, capturing Nikolsk on 4 July and Spasskoe twelve days later. In response to the chaos in Vladivostok, the Allied naval commanders issued a proclamation on 7 July announcing their protection of the area, enabling them to support the Czechs as needed. However, Dietrichs' advance stopped south of Khabarovsk because of a lack of arms and the discovery of reinforced Bolshevik positions. Three to four thousand Red Guards with ten artillery pieces attacked south on 1 August, forcing the roughly 2,500 Czechs in the assault column to fall back south of Shmakovka by 4 August. The Czechs halted between the branches of the Belaya River, where Ataman Kalmykov and around 800 Cossacks joined them.

In western Siberia, Gajda's forces slowly advanced as the Bolsheviks fought a delaying action. The Reds destroyed bridges and railroad infrastructure, but could not prevent Gajda from occupying Irkutsk on 12 July. He then hurried to take vital tunnels around the southern edge of Lake Baikal, which the Bolsheviks had only partially destroyed before the Czechs arrived. Gajda's forces annihilated the local Red Guard and, with Colonel Emerson operating in an advisory role, cleared obstructions by 10 August. The advance continued along the railway, and by mid-August the Czechs had captured sixty-one Bolshevik groups and forty-one field pieces. On 20 August, Gajda's troops seized Verkneudinsk but faced more delays as Bolshevik efforts to destroy railroad infrastructure became more effective. Despite the setbacks, Gajda took Chita with White Russian troops out of the new government in Irkutsk on 30 August. The next day, Gajda's forces linked up with Ataman Semenov's column, enabling him to establish a liaison with the Allies in Vladivostok by 3 September.

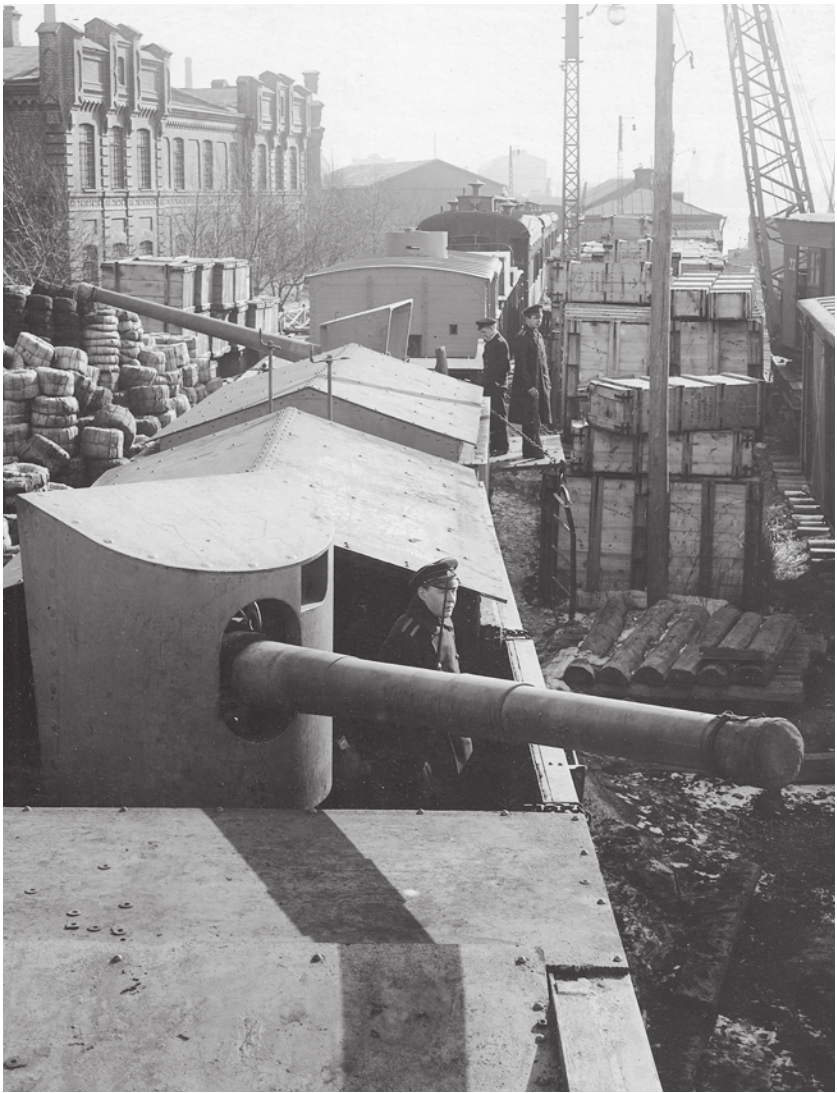
### *The American Contingent*

As the Czechs mounted their Siberia campaign, the AEF-S mobilized. In July, American units in the Philippines made preparations for service in Siberia while General Graves readied forces in the United States. Orders on 17 July dispatched the 27th Infantry, the 31st Infantry, a provisional intelligence section, a



**MAP 5**





*An armored train (National Archives)*

field hospital, an ambulance company, an engineering section, and Company D, 53d Telegraph Battalion, to Siberia. Col. Henry D. Styer's 27th Infantry embarked from Manila on 7 August, followed by Col. Frederick H. Sargent's 31st Infantry on the 12th. Two days

later, General Graves, along with 43 officers and 1,888 enlisted men, sailed from San Francisco for Vladivostok.

As the Americans made ready, the situation in Siberia intensified. On 3 August, the British landed 800 troops from the 25th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, out of Hong Kong. Once in Russia, they rushed to Shmakovka to assist Dietrich's Czechs. Finding that Bolshevik artillery threatened the position, Lt. Col. John Ward, commander of the British battalion, requested and received two armored trains assembled by the Royal Navy equipped with naval and machine guns. The arrival of the trains almost equalized the artillery disparity between the Czechs and the Bolsheviks, providing cover for the Allied troops to continue their withdrawal south.

With the British supporting the Czechs, the French landed 1,200 troops on 9 August, followed by the Japanese landing 3,000 soldiers two days later. The first American troop ship reached Vladivostok on 15 August, after having stopped at Nagasaki on the 12th to board RRSC members. Colonel Styer immediately met with Lt. Gen. Oi Shigemoto, commander of the Japanese 12th Division, to discuss operations. Oi suggested that any joint actions be delayed until the arrival of his superior, General Otani Kikuzo, on the 18th. Oi also noted that "on the request of the American Government General Otani had been designated General-in-Chief of all Allied Forces." Styer replied that he had no orders to that effect, but was "glad to cooperate." Later that day, Styer met with Dietrichs, who explained that the lack of men and artillery had caused another slight withdrawal along the front. However, Dietrichs noted his pleasure at the arrival of the Americans and suggested a joint meeting to coordinate the commands.

With the first three American transports safe in Vladivostok, Styer issued General Order No. 1 on 16 August, placing himself in temporary command of the expedition as Lt. Col. Charles H. Morrow took over the 27th Infantry. Styer proceeded to establish an interim headquarters and dispatched Companies F and G from the 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry, to relieve the Czechs guarding the railroad from Vladivostok to Nikolsk. They did not stay long, as the 3d Battalion, 31st Infantry, relieved them upon the regiment's arrival on 21 August.

The meeting to coordinate Allied forces finally occurred on the 19th, with Otani's staff presenting their intelligence and operational plan. The first goal was to take Khabarovsk, the second-largest city in the region and a key industrial center. The Bolsheviks had

15,000 troops in the sector, and 40,000 in the theater, including some former German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war. The Japanese described the Czechs as in a “pitiable plight” in general, and those west of Irkutsk as low on ammunition. To address the situation, the Japanese advocated a rapid advance, entreating the Allied commanders to request reinforcements from home or accept additional Japanese troops. Finally, Otani “stated his intention of ordering an immediate concentration of all available forces for an attack.” Styer agreed to the Japanese plan as it appeared directed toward fighting Germans and assisting the Czechs, and began readying his forces.

### *Battle of Kraevski and the Ussuri and Amur Campaigns*

While the Allies discussed operational plans, the Bolsheviks went on the offensive. An attack on the 18th dispatched several “parties of Magyars” over Lake Khanka, threatening the Allied western flank. On the 20th, the Reds engaged Kalmykov’s forces between the Ussuri and the Belaya Rivers, forcing the Cossacks to retreat to Kraevski on the 22nd. The Japanese plan called for the American 27th Infantry to reach Sviyagina on 26 August before attacking on the 28th. After sending the battalion from the 31st Infantry to relieve the Americans guarding the railroad, Styer ordered the 27th Infantry to the front on the 24th. However, the Japanese launched a sudden offensive that same day with little notice to the other Allies. After an initial assault cut the line above Kraevski to prevent Bolshevik armored trains from retreating, the main push started at 0300 from Dukhovskaya to Kraevski. The attack, composed primarily of Japanese troops, reached the hills above Kraevski by 0800.

With the enemy in flight, the Japanese ordered the 27th Infantry to join the advance. The trains left Vladivostok on the 26th and the next day the regiment concentrated at Sviyagina, where they received orders to turn over their trains to the Japanese. The Bolsheviks had blown up bridges on the way to Ussuri Station, and repairs delayed the Allied infantry’s pursuit. However, the Japanese cavalry was able to continue its advance, capturing Ussuri and a Bolshevik steamer on the 29th.

When the Americans joined the Allied force on the 28th, they received orders to protect the column’s right flank. The American troops moved out on the 30th and soon received additional orders to proceed to Ussuri. Although they were moving over

rough terrain, they quickly finished the roughly 110-kilometer march, reaching Ussuri on 4 September. While the Americans maneuvered, Kalmykov's Cossacks and the Japanese maintained contact with the Bolsheviks. The Japanese occupied Iman on 30 August, and their cavalry reached Vyazemskaya by 3 September. During the night of 4 September, the Allied vanguard scouted Khabarovsk, capturing the city the following morning. Company E, 27th Infantry, reached Khabarovsk on the 7th and joined the formal occupation.

Back in Vladivostok, additional American forces began arriving from California. On the morning of 2 September, Styer met Graves on the USS *Thomas* to outline the joint maneuver to Khabarovsk. As the enemy appeared to be Bolsheviks and German prisoners, Graves approved of American participation in the operation. The general then met with Admiral Knight aboard the USS *Brooklyn*, gaining a description of the terrain and offers of assistance as necessary. That afternoon, Graves met with General Otani at Japanese Army headquarters in Vladivostok. During their discussion, Graves explained that he had no orders placing American troops under Japanese command and had limits on what the Americans were authorized to do. He agreed to support the operation at Khabarovsk because of the German presence, but would need to issue all orders to American forces in the future.

Graves found Otani to be agreeable and fair, although his staff proved frustrating. He later speculated that a diplomatic miscommunication caused Otani's overreach:

I came to know General Otani quite well, and I feel that some one [*sic*] had led him to believe that he was to be in command of all Allied troops. He was not a man to assume such authority and, besides, he was a soldier and well knew that Allied Commanders could not give up command of troops without specific instructions.

The initial confusion between Graves and Otani reflected larger problems with the Allied coalition. The Supreme War Council had offered the Japanese command of an inter-Allied intervention in Siberia, but the deal between Washington and Tokyo did not specify any command relationship. Following the diplomatic corps' tradition, the senior officer in theater tended to serve as the coordinator for the various contingents. In practice, this made General Otani the senior commander in Eastern Siberia. Graves

had only the aide-mémoire for his orders and it did not specify a command hierarchy. Therefore, although American forces remained independent, Graves needed to coordinate effectively with others.

In this spirit, Graves assigned the 31st to garrison duties behind the Allied advance north. As the Bolsheviks retreated, they relinquished control of the Suchan Mines. Lt. Col. Sylvester C. Loring of the 31st Infantry took command of the mines' Allied guards, consisting of an American, a Japanese, and a Chinese company—each allegedly 250 strong—and a Cossack detachment. Graves selected Company M, 31st Infantry, for the assignment and the Allies settled into an extended garrison and patrol pattern to secure the mines and valley. With detachments guarding the rail and foot routes into the Suchan Valley, most of the 31st Infantry went into winter garrison in Vladivostok. Company B, meanwhile, garrisoned at Harbin, Manchuria, with the Chinese and Japanese. Companies F and G took up positions at Spasskoe, while Company L garrisoned at Razdolnee.

Otani declared the Ussuri campaign over on 6 September and initiated a follow-on blow to capture the Amur Valley. On the 8th, Styer retook command of the 27th Infantry in Khabarovsk, and Graves gave permission the next day for the regiment to continue its advance with the Allies. The Japanese 12th Division along with Company E, 27th Infantry, and a Chinese contingent comprised the Khabarovsk column, while a Japanese cavalry echelon deployed out of Manchuria. The Czechs under Gajda and Cossacks under Semenov traveled east along the rails with some reinforcements from the Japanese 7th Division. The main target of the operation was Blagoveshchensk. Oi's forces started out on 11 September. The units from Manchuria left Qiqihar on the 10th while the Czechs and Cossacks continued their eastward advance.

The Amur Campaign was relatively short as Japanese cavalry drove away any Bolsheviks they found and the 27th Infantry repaired bridges and garrisoned towns. The Czechs moved from Nerchinsk to Nogotchka and Oi's column took Kinkan, roughly 300 kilometers east of Blagoveshchensk, by the 13th. Behind the main column, four companies from the 27th deployed westward to secure the rear and rail lines. Japanese cavalry detachments from Qiqihar and Khabarovsk captured Blagoveshchensk on the 18th.

With the campaign essentially complete, the Japanese cavalry pursued the Bolsheviks through Aleveievsk and Ushumun, while Japanese gunboats cruised up the Zeya River to flush out any



Bolshevik gunboats. Company E reached Ushumun on the 20th and went into quarters. Two battles on the 22nd nearly wrapped up the fighting by crushing the Bolsheviks near Ushumun and Moho, Manchuria. Afterward, the Japanese split into pursuit commands to catch Bolsheviks who had fled north of the Zeya and Amur Rivers. On the 23rd, Company E dispatched a patrol to the Zeya River to investigate a potential enemy gunboat sighting. Japanese vessels reported the river clear on the 26th, and the Americans returned to Ushumun. Oi declared the campaign a success on 5 October and ordered most units into winter quarters. Six days later, Company E rejoined the 27th Infantry at Khabarovsk.

With the Amur campaign over, Graves assigned the 27th Infantry to guard work. After a tour of the front, he returned the detachments from their positions west of Khabarovsk. In mid-November, Company E took over the Krasnaya Rechka Prison Camp south of Khabarovsk, holding roughly 2,000 Austro-Hungarian prisoners. The 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, was stationed at Spasskoe with one platoon at Ussuri. The remainder of the regiment stayed in Khabarovsk proper.

### *International Competition and the Rise of Kolchak*

As 1918 drew to a close, several aspects of the Siberia campaign began to concern the Americans. Allied intelligence indicated that between 5,000 and 40,000 Bolsheviks and armed Central Powers' prisoners were in the region. Although roughly a hundred Germans were captured during the operation, Graves thought the overall intelligence flawed because of either a lack of information or a desire to manipulate U.S. forces. Moreover, the Japanese had exhorted the Allies for reinforcements and yet attacked with limited Allied assistance. During Graves' visits with his troops after the campaign, he confirmed that the Japanese had committed around 60,000 troops, later revising it to 72,000. In essence, the Americans believed the Japanese were attempting to establish a buffer state in Russia without provoking a diplomatic crisis with the United States. With only 253 officers and 8,699 enlisted men in the AEF-S, Graves had the second-largest expeditionary force in theater, and his position as the American commander allowed him to moderate some of the more aggressive ideas proposed by the Allies.

British policy also shifted after the Amur campaign. In mid-October, Khorvat, the former Chinese Eastern Railway



chief, and his provisional government absorbed the Siberian governments, unifying them at Omsk. Khorvat's regime included Alexander Vasilyevich Kolchak, a former admiral in the Imperial Russian Navy. After tossing his sword into the Black Sea following the revolution, Kolchak traveled first to Japan and then to China. While abroad, the British recruited him, and he joined Khorvat in May 1918 as head of the Chinese Eastern Railway troops.

Kolchak rose to prominence in November after the Armistice removed the impetus to fight the former German prisoners in Siberia. With the need for an Eastern Front eliminated, the British attempted to recast the intervention as entirely anti-Bolshevik. The French

and Japanese supported the idea, but Graves opposed it. During this period of uncertainty, Kolchak launched a successful coup against Khorvat on 18 November. The British supported Kolchak, helping him craft statements to the Allies that appeared to lessen his dictatorial appearance. Much to Graves' consternation, U.S. Consul General Ernest L. Harris supported Kolchak and "helped him in every possible way." Graves' efforts to maintain neutrality angered the Allies, with some believing him to be pro-Bolshevik for not actively supporting Kolchak. Allied efforts to remove Graves ultimately failed as Washington's support remained firm.

The British believed that Kolchak might be able to unify the White Russian cause. However, even though Kolchak had a certain cache in British eyes, he tended to appoint incompetent and corrupt subordinates who partook in "such temptations as certain Foreign Interests might care to offer." Additionally, his oppressive governing style did not produce the same passionate commitment from the people that the Bolsheviks inspired. Moreover, his conscript armies performed poorly, forcing the Czechs to do the



*Admiral Kolchak*  
(National Archives)

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majority of the fighting. Even so, the British continued to support his regime well into 1919.

With the British and Japanese meddling in local politics, Graves attempted to correct misperceptions about the American mission. Because of the initial campaigns, American soldiers thought their purpose was to fight the Bolsheviks. After settling into guard duty, they saw arresting Bolsheviks and suppressing political meetings as part of that job. Graves responded with the simple message that they were neutral in Russian affairs, having been sent to support the Czechs and protect the railroad. He later noted:

The United States never entered into a state of War with Russia, or any faction of Russia. It was equally as unconstitutional to use American troops in hostile action in Siberia against any faction of Russia, as it would have been to send them to Russia with a view to using them in hostile action against the Russians. If I had permitted American troops to be used in fighting "Red Armies," as stated, I would have taken an immense responsibility upon myself, as no one above me, in authority, had given me any such orders. The fact that I did not permit American troops to be so used was responsible for nine-tenths of the criticism directed against us, while in Siberia.

Due to Wilson's orders, the AEF-S had a complex relationship with the Russian populace, who saw the Americans as a counterbalance to the different sides. When faced with Cossack depredations, the townspeople turned to the Americans. At various points, Americans operated with and against Red and White Russians. For instance, American intelligence officers received information from Bolshevik sources and dealt with anti-American propaganda generated by White Russian leaders. As in North Russia, American soldiers worked with the local communities, organizing joint social events, playing with the children, and even providing Christmas trees and treats. The lack of clarity in their mission in Siberia put the Americans in an uncertain position, leaving many soldiers to wonder what they were supposed to do as the country descended further into chaos.

### *Clashes with the Cossacks and Spring Reorganizations*

After the Americans moved into winter quarters in the late fall of 1918, the 27th Infantry had to deal with increasing outrages by

Kalmykov's Cossacks in Khabarovsk. Locals begged the Americans to intervene and halt Cossack extralegal killings. Graves viewed Kalmykov as the worst kind of scoundrel, but he had instructions limiting his ability to take action. Meanwhile, Kalmykov's brutality extended to his mixed command, including former Red Guards impressed into service through terror tactics.

Luckily for Graves, cracks began to appear in Kalmykov's organization in late December. Some of his men asked to enlist with the Americans; others sought assistance in fleeing altogether. On the night of 27–28 January 1919, Kalmykov's Khabarovsk garrison fell apart as around 700 troops mutinied. Three hundred mutineers fled into the nearby hills, while a further thirty escaped to the Chinese detachment. Another 398 Cossacks—with animals, arms, and artillery—sought shelter with the Americans. The mutiny rocked Kalmykov's government, whose authority stretched from Nikolsk to Ushumun. On 12 February, Kalmykov's position worsened when the Volna Special Cossack (Ussuri) Assembly removed his Atamanship and voted to hand him over for a military court-martial. As his position imploded, the mutineers finished departing by 15 March. Newspapers in Khabarovsk ostensibly blamed the Americans for the mutiny—repeating opinions from Japanese papers and from Kalmykov himself. Kalmykov survived the collapse, however, thanks to Japanese protection, and continued his attempts to gain regional power.

As Kalmykov's position disintegrated, Kolchak's standing was seemingly on the rise. In January, partially because of British pressure, other White Russians recognized Kolchak's regime as the overall government in Russia. Kolchak sent officials to coordinate with the Whites in Finland and Estonia to demonstrate his government's new position. However, Kolchak's regime did not evolve into a functional central government as its officials proved to be corrupt, inept, and often unreformed tsarists disliked by the Russian populace. To fill out his armies, Kolchak instituted a draft, which increased public resentment of his government. Gajda, serving under Kolchak, attempted to fix the broken and corrupt logistical network behind the Urals Front, but higher-ranking officers in Kolchak's army derailed his efforts. Despite his issues with Gajda's Czechs, Kolchak had some success reorganizing and training his army, providing his regime with a degree of increased stability.

As Kolchak improved his position, the Allies sought to rectify management issues with the Trans-Siberian and Chinese Eastern



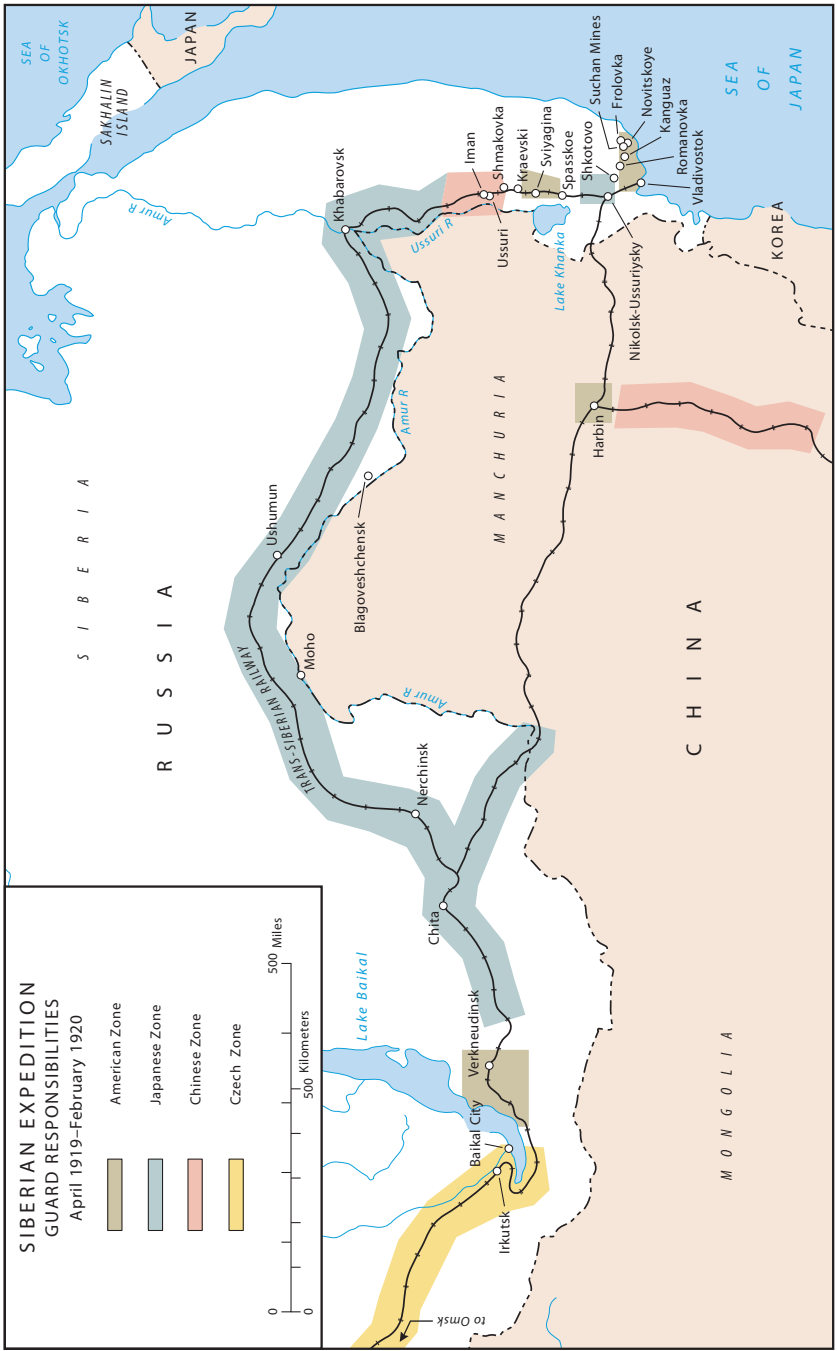
*Tracks destroyed by Bolsheviks (National Archives)*

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Railways. The RRSC's mission was to improve the Trans-Siberian Railway's efficiency, but the graft of local officials and competition for control over the railroad hobbled efforts to improve service. Because the railways were instruments of power, no group would allow another to unduly benefit. Discussions began for a Special Inter-Allied Committee in the autumn of 1918, but it was not approved until February 1919. The Russians were the nominal head of the commission, with all of the Allies contributing money to an operating fund and providing security. In mid-April, the military side of the negotiations reached an agreement detailing who would protect various railroad sections.

For the men of the AEF-S, the new agreement had a direct impact on their deployments once winter abated (*Map 6*). The 27th Infantry was split roughly in half with the 3d Battalion and Companies A and B from the 1st Battalion assigned to positions near Verkneudinsk and Baikal City, whereas the rest of the 1st and the 2d Battalion stayed around the Spasskoe and Nikolsk-Ussuri sectors. The 31st Infantry maintained operations in the Suchan Mines, and guarded the sector from Vladivostok to Nikolsk-Ussuri. In total, the Americans were now responsible for roughly 500 kilometers of rail lines.

With the Allies settling their issues over the Russian railroads, the White Russians made gains against the Bolsheviks. In the



MAP 6

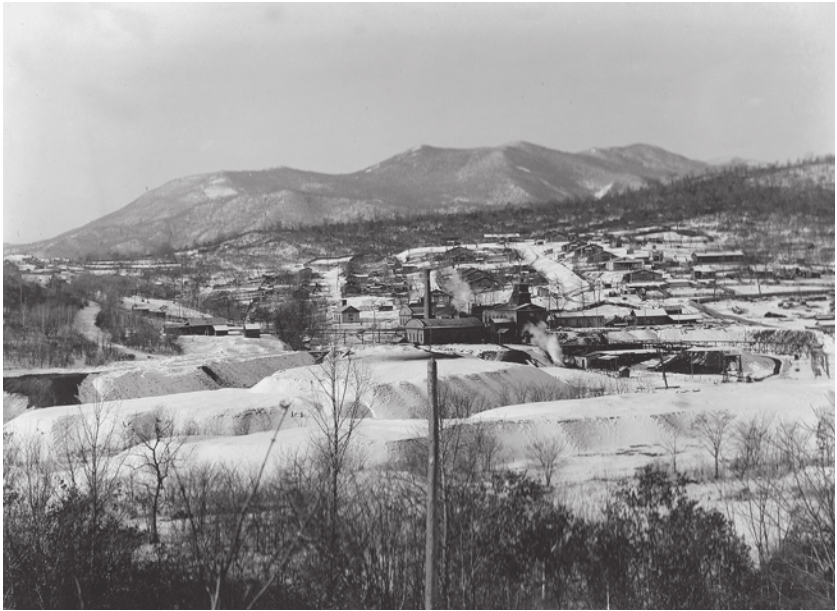
northwest, Finnish and Estonian forces threatened Petrograd. In North Russia, the Allied expeditions diverted Bolshevik resources from other fronts. The greatest White Russian successes, however, were made by Lt. Gen. Anton I. Denikin and General Baron Pyotr N. Wrangel who led the remnants of an anti-Bolshevik army that had fled to southern Russia after the October Revolution. Denikin's force had done well in late 1918, and gains in the spring of 1919 positioned them for an attempt to link up with Kolchak's southern flank for a potential campaign toward Moscow. With these gains, the White Russians effectively had the Bolsheviks surrounded.

Unfortunately for the Allies, even as the Bolsheviks looked increasingly weak, Kolchak's position began to deteriorate. After taking the winter and early spring to reorganize, the Red Army forced Kolchak's forces east of the Ural Mountains, with entire White units deserting as they retreated. As one British observer commented, "the uniforms [given by the British] walked over to the Reds, thousands at a time, with the Whites inside them." On 12 July, Kolchak fired Gajda from command of the Urals Front. The next day, the key town of Zlatoust on the southern branch of the Trans-Siberian Railway fell to Red commandos, who had infiltrated across the Urals. The Kolchak regime remained off-balance, undermining White Russian successes during the spring.

### *Russian Partisans*

Even as the conflict between Red and White Russians remained a central issue for the Allies, the situation on the ground for the AEF-S became increasingly complex over the summer with the rise of partisan groups. These groups, generally composed of a mix of local anti-Kolchak agitators, Red cadres from the west, and brigands, attacked trains, bombed bridges, tore up rails, and raided stations for supplies. On 22 June, partisans in the Suchan region kidnapped 2d Lt. Custer Fribley and five soldiers from Company H, 2d Battalion, 31st Infantry, who had been fishing. Two platoons from Company M, 3d Battalion, went to Novitskoye to secure the release of the prisoners, but when 2d Lt. Albert S. Ward approached the town, he was shot dead. The Americans stormed the town, prompting around 150 partisans to flee. The prisoners, however, had been moved to Frolovka. Negotiations lasted until 26 June when the men were exchanged for a Bolshevik prisoner from Vladivostok.





*Suchan Village and Mines* (National Archives)

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Concerned by increased partisan activity in the region, on 22 June, Graves ordered Maj. W. H. Joiner to form a provisional battalion from Companies C and D of the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry, a machine gun platoon, and three 37-mm. guns to respond to such attacks. In late June, Lt. Col. Robert L. Eichelberger, assistant chief of staff and head of expedition intelligence since March, and Maj. Sidney C. Graves, an intelligence officer and General Graves' son, accompanied Joiner's battalion to the Suchan area. Eichelberger and Major Graves gathered information on the situation and examined the damage to the logistical network. On 23 June, the force moved from Shkotovo to Kangauz to secure an operating base and arrived in the Suchan Valley by the 26th after traversing rough terrain under occasional sniper fire.

By this point, General Graves had lost communications with the Suchan Valley as partisans destroyed bridges and occupied towns like Novonezhino. To rectify the situation, on 29–30 June, General Graves conceived an amphibious resupply plan in which the USS *Albany*, a protected cruiser, and Allied transport ships would bring supplies and one hundred men each from Company

G and a White Russian unit to Amerika Bay (Nakhodka Bay). At the same time, Lt. Col. Gideon H. Williams, commanding officer of the Allied mine guard, would push down to meet them. A courier relayed the plan to Williams, who began preparing for the operation.

As Graves acted to improve the situation in Suchan, a rail-guard detachment from Company A was hard-hit. Around 250 local partisans attacked the unit near Romanovka. Sentries bungled their handoff, which allowed the partisans to reach the barracks and open fire on the sleeping detachment between 0400 and 0500. The Americans rushed outside to respond, whereupon 2d Lt. Lawrence D. Butler, despite severe wounds, rallied his troops and encouraged them to drive off the attackers. He received a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions. His command suffered eighteen killed and twenty-four wounded during the fight. Additionally, the partisans destroyed a fifteen-meter bridge to the west of town.

As the situation intensified, Colonel Williams absorbed Joiner's provisional battalion, increasing his command to roughly 1,250 men for a counteroffensive. He intended to clear the partisans from the valley and reestablish communication and logistical connections with Vladivostok. His field orders for 1 July called for a converging attack on Novitskoye to take place on 2 July. The maneuver coincided with an operation by American, Chinese, Japanese, and White Russian troops moving out of Kangauz toward the coast to support a landing and assault on Petrovka. Company M with two machine guns and one Japanese company, all under Williams, would attack from the southwest, while Company C with two machine guns, under Major Graves, would advance from the northwest. The Novitskoye push was a prelude for a joint attack on Kazanka, the partisans' regional headquarters. That assault was scheduled to take place on 3 July as Joiner's force would push from Mine No. 2 toward Kazanka, while Williams' united column would converge from Novitskoye. The pincer movements succeeded and forced the partisans to abandon the town. As they left, they sniped at the columns, inflicting five casualties.

With his rear secure, Williams left Company C to guard the mines and proceeded approximately thirty kilometers south with around 700 men to meet the amphibious resupply. By this point, the Allied forces in the mine region were running dangerously low on provisions. The march began early on 5 July and occupied Vladimirovka that evening after assaulting a partisan position. Williams dispatched a patrol to Amerika Bay the next morning.

Around 1500, the detachment sighted the Allied ships and established contact with the USS *Albany*. Company G landed with the supplies that day and began marching north on the 7th.

The joint operation settled the Suchan Valley situation. However, although it reestablished communications and logistics between Vladivostok and the Suchan Mines, numerous destroyed bridges obstructed the movement of materials, especially coal. Reconstruction would take months. The last American action against the partisan contingents in Suchan occurred on 8 August when Capt. Owen R. Rhoads and a platoon from Company M, 31st Infantry, assaulted a partisan detachment near the mouth of the Novo Litovskaya River. The attack annihilated the small partisan band, killing seventeen and capturing six. Two of the partisans escaped by running between the central position and the right flank detachment. The Americans suffered no casualties in the attack. After Rhoads' successful assault, American intelligence believed that most of the partisans in the valley had fled northeast and locals started handing over or burying their firearms. Despite reducing the partisan threat in the region, Graves ultimately decided to redeploy the troops from Suchan because of the inability to transport coal. On 16 August, he ordered the United States Army Transport (USAT) *Merritt* to Amerika Bay, evacuating the two American companies remaining in Suchan on the 18th. The Americans left the mine and valley in the hands of the Japanese and the White Russians.

### *Fall of Kolchak*

While the AEF-S dealt with the partisan uprising in the Suchan Valley, the overall situation worsened as two more stops on the Trans-Siberian Railway fell to the Bolsheviks. After capturing Yekaterinburg on 14 July, they took Chelyabinsk ten days later, the birthplace of the Czech revolt, and threatened the railroad to Omsk. With Kolchak's capital in danger, the Japanese increased their influence among his supporters, coupling it with a rise in anti-American propaganda over the summer. The Japanese Army wanted to convince the Americans to leave so they could create their buffer state without further hindrance.

In September and October, relations between the Americans and the Cossacks and some White Russian factions continued to deteriorate. On 4 September, Kalmykov's Cossacks seized two AEF-S soldiers at Iman. Kalmykov's men released them after an



*Czechs in trenches* (National Archives)

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exchange of threats with the American headquarters. Almost two weeks later, local Russian papers reported an upcoming American withdrawal. Although the Americans countered the rumors, the reports left people unsettled. On 26 September in Vladivostok, White Russians under Commandant General S. Rozanov murdered an American and a Czech soldier. The Allies demanded that Rozanov leave, but he refused, and Kolchak and the Allied representatives at Omsk supported him. Rumors circulated by the end of the month that the Cossacks intended to attack the Americans during October or November, prompting nearby AEF-S units to concentrate at Spasskoe. Although no attack came, tensions remained high.

The only apparent bright spot among the White Russians was the fact that Kolchak and Semenov had somewhat improved their relationship over the summer. To further help Kolchak's cause, the United States sent rifles to support his defense of Omsk in October. Forty men under 1st Lt. Albert E. Ryan accompanied the supply train carrying the rifles along the Chinese Eastern Railway until Semenov and his men stopped it in Chita on 24 October. Semenov demanded 15,000 of the firearms. Ryan refused and had his men dig in under the train to defend the rifles. Semenov sent an armored train and infantry to force Ryan to surrender the

weapons. Fortunately, a joint diplomatic effort by the Japanese, the American consul in Chita, and members of the RRSC resolved the crisis, and Ryan was able to deliver the rifles to Omsk. One of the RRSC members explained later that the Japanese “had really forced” Semenov to back down.

Kolchak’s inability to moderate the Cossacks’ excesses clearly indicated the deterioration of his regime. When the rivers in western Siberia froze in November, the Red Army marched on Kolchak’s capital of Omsk, capturing the city without resistance on the 14th. Kolchak fled for Irkutsk. Unable to trust his own troops, Kolchak took a train with the retreating Czechs. While they withdrew, he attempted to prevent a complete Czech withdrawal, ordering Semenov to sabotage the train tunnels south of Lake Baikal. The Cossack ignored the order, a further indication of Kolchak’s weakening position. Finally, in early December, ministers within Kolchak’s government orchestrated a coup, keeping him as a figurehead without any power. Kolchak remained a de facto prisoner on the Czech trains until he reached Irkutsk where the Czechs traded him on 15 January to the local Bolshevik-leaning government in exchange for passage out of Siberia. After securing Kolchak, the Reds decided to let the Czechs retreat with minimal interference.

Kolchak’s collapse radiated throughout Siberia. Along with the new government in Irkutsk, other political groups decided it was time to act. Local political factions around Vladivostok began working to get rid of Rozanov. The Japanese had tried to convince the Allied military commanders in the city to agree to prevent Rozanov’s overthrow, but they refused. When revolutionaries reached Rozanov’s house on 31 January, the Japanese attempted to drive off the rebels by proclaiming that the Allies would not permit the coup. Colonel Eichelberger, who watched the scene unfold, noted the Japanese proclamation was a lie and then reiterated American neutrality. The revolutionary Russians fired an artillery round at the gate, forcing Rozanov to flee out the back while dressed as a Japanese officer. He eventually made it to the Japanese consulate and then to Japan.

### *American Decision to Withdraw*

As the situation in Siberia unraveled, American policy began to shift. President Wilson suffered a severe stroke in October 1919, and the State Department took over American policy in

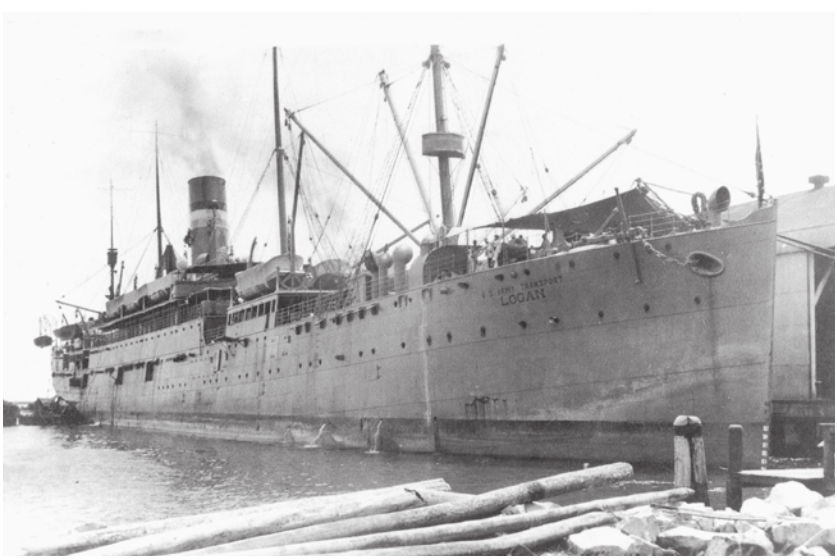


Russia. The State Department was virulently anti-Bolshevik and tried at various times to help the White Russians. By late December, though, U.S. officials began to realize that Kolchak was a lost cause. With the Bolsheviks allowing the Czechs to leave Russia, the stated reason for the American intervention disappeared. Moreover, Graves reported to the War Department that the situation was becoming more dangerous for the isolated detachments of Americans guarding the Trans-Siberian Railway as anti-Kolchak and Bolshevik forces were on the rise in Siberia. As one anti-Kolchak leader explained to an American officer, “they did not desire conflict with Americans, but by guarding the railroad, we were helping the reactionary crowd and delaying the final settlement of their difficulties.” In response to Graves’ message, the War Department authorized him to concentrate forces and asked him “to assign some reason, other than the real one, until the time came to announce a withdrawal.” Washington needed time to confer with the Japanese about a withdrawal as the agreement for an intervention was between Washington and Tokyo. Graves issued orders on 31 December for the troops to concentrate at their regional headquarters. On 5 January 1920, he finally received the official orders to withdraw. The general instructed the regiments to move to Vladivostok by train where they would embark for their return to the Philippines.

The concentration and withdrawal outside Vladivostok was fraught with tension. Although Bolshevik partisans let the Americans pass without issue, the Cossacks did not. In the most egregious incident, a Semenov-connected general used an armored train to launch a surprise attack on the withdrawing Americans. The Cossack train pulled into Posolskaya Station during the night of 9–10 January and opened fire on an American platoon led by 2d Lt. Paul W. Kendall. The initial enemy fire missed and the Americans returned fire. A well-placed grenade damaged the train’s engine. The enemy train retreated out of town and the engine died near Temlue. American reinforcements from Selenga accepted the Cossack surrender. Although some American officials doubted that Semenov authorized the action, the incident demonstrated Siberia’s dissolution into chaos.

The first batch of American units left Vladivostok in January 1920. Around 9 January, Secretary of State Robert Lansing declared America’s intention to leave Siberia to the Japanese after the “first important contingent of the Czecho-Slovaks” left around 10 February. Between 8 and 13 January, the units in the





*A U.S. Army Transport in Vladivostok*  
(U.S. Army Center of Military History)

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Spasskoe-Ussuri sector concentrated at Spasskoe. A headquarters detachment from the 27th Infantry and Companies C through H boarded the USAT *Great Northern* in Vladivostok on 16 January and left for Manila the next day. Units in other sectors, especially the ones by Lake Baikal, took longer to reach Vladivostok. On 15 February, the 31st Infantry's headquarters, along with Companies A, C, E, H, and I, and some auxiliaries, proceeded to Manila on the USAT *Crook*. The majority of the 27th Infantry departed Siberia on 10 March aboard the USAT *Thomas*. They had been delayed along the Chinese Eastern and Trans-Siberian Railways by worker strikes and destroyed rails. Graves departed last, boarding the USAT *Great Northern* on 1 April. Of the final days, he noted: "The Americans had a very uneventful two months, from the overthrow of [Rozanov] to the departure of the last 'echelon.'"

Siberia remained chaotic after the American departure. The British, Czechs, and French also withdrew in 1920, with the last of the Czechs reaching Vladivostok in June. An Allied agreement enabled American and British transports to carry the Czechs from Vladivostok to various European ports from which they could travel to the recently created Czechoslovakia. Of the

Allies, the Japanese extricated themselves last. The Japanese government had considered how to leave Siberia and the American withdrawal provided a potential option. However, on 4 April, the senior Japanese officers in the theater, without their government's knowledge, contrived an attack on Japanese interests which "forced" the army to intervene and take Vladivostok. That, along with an incident in February in which the Bolsheviks murdered Japanese soldiers and civilians after taking them prisoner, sparked a reinvestment in Siberia that included the seizure of northern Sakhalin Island. The Japanese remained in Siberia until 1922, but the tumultuous nature of local, national, and international politics forestalled their attempt to create a buffer state there.

In his final report, General Graves described how he had had to chart a delicate course in Allied relations by maneuvering to remain neutral while fulfilling stated policy goals. Graves argued that "it was impossible to determine, without specific instructions, which I never received, who constituted the Russian people. The factions were so antagonistic that it became impossible to extend help to one faction without taking part in the controversy between different Russian factions." By maintaining that policy, Graves provoked responses from the Allies, and from one nation in particular:

[The Japanese] constantly tried to force me into [interfering]. When I refused to be drawn into any movement which would result in fighting a faction of the Russian people, the Japanese-controlled press in Siberia, and the Japanese press in Japan, would start a campaign of abuse of American troops, along the lines that they were assisting Bolsheviks.

Graves also contended with Cossack efforts to pull the Americans into deeper conflicts. The Cossacks continually harassed the Americans and committed various atrocities, leading Graves to remark that the only difference between their leaders was that "[Kalmikov] murdered with his own hands, where [Semenov] ordered others to kill."

Despite complications at the operational level, the American soldiers successfully carried out their duties, conducting diverse operations while guarding the railroads and other key points. Their relations with local Russians tended to be good. In combat, despite their lack of artillery, American troops held their own as a regional peacekeeping force for nineteen months, losing thirty-five



*Bringing the fallen home* (National Archives)

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men killed and fifty-two wounded out of the approximately 9,000 original and 5,000 replacement soldiers committed.

### ANALYSIS

The American experiences in North Russia and Siberia, although important for the participating soldiers, had a limited impact on the chaotic forces at play in Russia. For all its purported might before the First World War, Russia proved the most dysfunctional member of the Allied Powers. Its collapse into revolution in 1917 and its civil war in the ensuing years continued a pattern of instability, prompting the Allies and the United States to intervene in an effort to salvage the wartime Eastern Front and quell Russia's internal chaos. At the regional level, different Russian governments strove to reunite the provinces of tsarist Russia and remake the political institutions. At the global level, the intervening great powers pursued their own agendas. None of the interventions proved successful as the Russian people charted their own course that ultimately resulted in the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922.

For the United States, the Russian operations produced little of strategic worth. President Wilson authorized the American expeditions to North Russia and Siberia as minimal contributions designed to strengthen his position at the postwar negotiation table. They were proof to the Allies that the United States was doing its part. In a strategic sense, however, the benefit Wilson received for America's contribution was limited and in February 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference he chose to pull out U.S. troops. By doing so, he lost the capacity to leverage the expeditions as political capital for America's global goals.

The vague wording of Wilson's aide-mémoire preserved America's policy position at the cost of sowing confusion among his commanders. In North Russia, the primary mission was protection of Allied supplies from German intrigues. Instead, Stewart allowed Poole to amalgamate the 339th Infantry into his command and use it in an unsuccessful attempt to topple the Bolsheviks. Ironside, Poole's replacement, soldiered on, only to be evacuated as the situation deteriorated. In Siberia, the stated goal was to guard the Czech Legion's retreat route. Despite the other Allies' objectives and actions, Graves secured the Czech Legion's rear and did so without a full-scale war against the Bolsheviks. However, by that time the situation in Siberia had altered, and further American involvement would have required active engagement in internal Russian politics, which American leadership sought to avoid. In both operational cases, the expeditions fulfilled their limited objectives of defending supplies and supporting the Czechs, but at the cost of antagonizing the Allies and different Russian groups.

The tactical outcomes of the expeditions, like the operational ones, were mixed. In North Russia, the Red Army had superior numbers and materiel. Under such conditions, American soldiers swiftly became combat veterans, and often performed their duties against great odds. In Siberia, American troops maintained a defensive posture, mainly guarding the rail lines. They fought Cossacks and partisans, protected the Czech line of retreat, and secured Allied supplies. Whether in active combat or peacekeeping operations, American troops lived up to "the best traditions of the Army."

Notwithstanding their tactical performance, the U.S. Army experienced little lasting impacts from the expeditions. Some young officers gained experience which they shared through papers in the Army school system but otherwise produced no doctrinal lessons for how to fight in subarctic conditions or to

conduct peacekeeping missions. And yet, although Americans generally do not recall the expeditions, the Russians remember them. In the decades that followed, Soviet politicians trumpeted examples of American ideals clashing with its actions and used the interventions to foment distrust of Western democracies among the Russian people. The expeditions are thus reminders that minimal actions can have outsized impacts and repercussions on international affairs.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Col. (USA, retired) John M. House was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, Field Artillery, on 5 June 1975 after graduating from Auburn University with a bachelor of science degree in business. He served in command and staff positions with a variety of units in the United States, Germany, South Korea, and Southwest Asia (DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM). Colonel House retired from the Army in 2001 after spending twenty-six years in uniform. Since retirement from the Army, he has worked as a consultant and an Army civilian employee. Colonel House has taught public administration and homeland security for several universities after earning a Ph.D. in business with a major in public administration from Northcentral University. His works include *Why War? Why an Army?* and *Wolfhounds and Polar Bears: The American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918–1920*. He has also authored a chapter in a homeland security textbook and more than 300 periodical articles, opinion columns, and news articles. He currently resides in Columbus, Georgia, with his wife Marilyn. They have four daughters.

Daniel P. Curzon is a Ph.D. student in history at Ohio State University. He earned his bachelor's degree from St. Joseph's University in 2010 and his master's degree from Ohio State in 2014. His dissertation examines the shifting geostrategic relationship among Great Britain, Japan, and the United States around the Pacific Rim between 1900 and 1920. He served as a coeditor and co-organizer with Dr. Robert S. Ehlers and Dr. Sarah K. Douglas for the book *Technology, Violence, and War: Essays in Honor of Dr. John F. Guilmartin, Jr.*, published in 2019. From August 2018 to July 2019 he was a graduate research assistant at the U.S. Army Center of Military History.







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