

What Really Happened to the Romanovs

a note on dates:

On February 1st, 1918, Russia switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, which was in use elsewhere in the world. The Julian system was 12 days behind the Gregorian until March of 1900, after which it was 13 days behind. For the sake of accuracy, the dates listed are what the Russians themselves would have used, being from the Julian calendar until the time the switch was made, and thereafter from the Gregorian calendar.

February 1917

Conditions for Russian soldiers on the battle-front against the German and Austro-Hungarian armies have reached breaking-point. Demonstrations and workers' strikes spread through most Russian cities, including Moscow and Petrograd.

2 March 1917

Nicholas II abdicates, naming his brother Mikhail as the heir to the Russian throne, passing over his own son, Alexei, whom he believes to be too young and frail to withstand the strain of leading the country.

3 March 1917

Mikhail, believing the situation to be already too far gone, refuses to accept the throne.

4 March 1917

Nicholas II and his family are placed under house arrest at the Tsarskoye Selo estate outside Petrograd. A plan is worked out to transport the family into exile in Britain. After a wave of public protest, the British government rescinds the offer.

May–June 1917

Protests and strikes continue. Food and fuel shortages lead to widespread looting.

16 June 1917

The Russian Army launches an all-out assault on the Austro-Hungarian Front. This attack turns into a major defeat for the Russians.

1 August 1917

With conditions worsening in Petrograd, the provisional government decides to move the Romanov family, along with their personal doctors, nurses and private tutors for the children, to the Siberian city of Tobolsk. By 6 August, the family are living in a mansion belonging to the former governor of Tobolsk.

20 November 1917

Russia begins surrender talks with Germany.

16 December 1917

The revolutionary government orders the restructuring of the army. All officers are to be elected democratically and the military ranking system is abolished.

23 February 1918

Pravda, the Communist Party newspaper, demands stricter conditions of confinement for the Romanovs. The Romanov family is placed on army rations and told that they will be moved to an even more remote location – the town of Ekaterinburg, east of the Ural mountains.

30 April 1918

Policed by Red Guards under the command of Commissar Yakovlev, the Romanovs and a few members of their household staff arrive by train in Ekaterinburg. When they arrive at the station, they are met by a large and hostile crowd, who demand that the Romanovs be killed. The Romanovs are interned in the house of a local merchant named Ipatiev. A tall stockade fence is built around the house and the windows on the upper floors are whitewashed to prevent anyone seeing in or out. Guards for the Ipatiev House are recruited from among local factory workers in Ekaterinburg.

22 May 1918

The Czech Legion, made up of ethnic Czechs and Slovaks from the territory now controlled by Austria-Hungary, refuses an order by the revolutionary government to lay down its arms. Although these men are subjects of Austria-Hungary, they have chosen to fight with the Russians during the First World War, in the hopes that a defeat of the Central Powers will guarantee them a country of their own (what eventually becomes Czechoslovakia). Unable to return to their own country, they instead decide to march almost the entire length of Russia, to Vladivostok. From there, they are to be transported half-way round the world to France, to join the fighting on the Western Front on the side of their French, British and American allies. The White Army numbers more than 30,000 men, an unstoppable force, which begins to make its way east, following the path of the Trans-Siberian railroad.

12 June 1918

Mikhail, the brother of the Tsar, is being held prisoner in the city of Perm. Lodging at the Hotel Korolev, renamed 'Hotel No.1' by the Bolsheviks, he and his valet, Nicholas Johnson, are permitted to wander the streets as long as they do not leave the city. On this night, Grand Duke Mikhail and Johnson are ordered from their rooms by a Cheka Death Squad under the command of Ivan Kolpaschikov, taken to a wooded area known as Malaya Yazovaya and shot. The Bolsheviks do not announce his death, reporting instead that he has been

rescued by White Russian officers. In the coming months, 'sightings' of the Grand Duke will pour in from all corners of the world. His body, and that of Nicholas Johnson, have never been found.

4 July 1918

The local guards are dismissed after they are accused of stealing from the Romanovs. Their place is taken by Cheka officer Yurovsky and a contingent of 'Latvians', who are in fact mostly Hungarians, Germans and Austrians. From now on, the only guards allowed inside the Ipatiev House belong to the Cheka. Guards are posted all over the house, even outside the bathrooms. The Romanovs live on the second floor. They are permitted to do their own cooking, relying on a diet of army rations and donations from the nuns of the Novotikvinsky Convent in Ekaterinburg.

16 July 1918

With the White Army approaching the region of Ekaterinburg, Commissar Yurovsky receives a telegram ordering that the Romanovs be put to death, rather than risk having them be rescued by the White Army. This telegram was presumably sent by Lenin although its origin is still unclear.

Yurovsky immediately orders his guards to hand in their issue Nagant revolvers. He then loads the weapons, returns them to their owners and notifies them that the Romanovs are to be shot that night. Two of the 'Latvians' refuse to shoot women and children in cold blood.

Yurovsky details one guard for every member of the Romanov family and their entourage, so that each man will be responsible for a single execution. The total number of guards is eleven, which corresponds to the number made up by the Romanov family, as well as the Tsarina's lady-in-waiting, Anna Demidova, a cook named Kharitonov, their physician Dr Botkin, and a footman named Trupp, who are also to be shot.

17 July 1918

At midnight, Yurovsky wakes the Romanov family and orders them to get dressed. He tells them that there is disorder in the town. Approximately one hour later, the entourage is led down to the basement, which Yurovsky has chosen as the place of execution. When the Romanovs reach the basement, the Tsarina Alexandra requests chairs, and three are brought in. The Tsarina sits in one of them, Alexei in another and the Tsar himself in the third.

A truck, which has been ordered for the purpose of transporting the dead after the executions, does not show up until almost 2 a.m. When the truck arrives, Yurovsky and the guards descend to the basement and enter the room where the Romanovs have been waiting. It is so crowded that some of the guards are forced to remain standing in the doorway. Yurovsky informs the Tsar that he

is to be executed. According to Yurovsky, the Tsar's reply is, 'What?' He then turns to speak to his son, Alexei. At this moment, Yurovsky shoots him in the head.

The guards then begin firing. Although Yurovsky has planned for an orderly sequence of events, the scene rapidly deteriorates. The women are screaming. Bullets ricochet off the walls and, it appears, off the women themselves. One guard is shot in the hand. Having failed to kill the women, the guards then try to finish them off with bayonets, but are unsuccessful. Finally, the women are each shot in the head. The last to die is Alexei, who is still sitting in his chair. Yurovsky shoots him several times at point-blank range.

The bodies are brought up into the courtyard of the Ipatiev House, carried on improvised stretchers made from blankets laid across harness beams removed from horse carriages. The dead are loaded into a truck and covered with a blanket. At this point, Yurovsky realises that the guards have robbed the Romanovs of the valuables they were carrying in their pockets. He orders the items returned. Under threat of execution, the guards return the objects to Yurovsky.

The truck drives towards an abandoned mine which has been chosen as the burial site for the Romanovs and their entourage. Before reaching their destination, however, the truck encounters a group of about twenty-five civilians who have been detailed by another member of the Cheka as a burial crew. The civilians are angry because they were expecting to execute the Romanovs themselves. They unload the bodies from the truck and immediately begin robbing the dead. Yurovsky threatens to shoot them unless they stop.

Yurovsky then realises that no one in the group, including himself, knows exactly where the mineshaft is located. Nor has anyone thought to provide digging equipment for the burials. Yurovsky loads the bodies back on to the truck and searches for another burial site. By dawn, Yurovsky has located another abandoned mine near the village of Koptiaki, which is about three hours' walking distance from Ekaterinburg.

The bodies of the Romanovs are unloaded once again from the truck. They are stripped and a fire is prepared for burning the clothes prior to hiding the bodies in the mine. As the bodies are being undressed, Yurovsky discovers that the Romanovs are wearing waistcoats into which hundreds of diamonds have been sewn, which explains why the bullets failed to kill the Romanov women. The valuables are hidden and later transported to Moscow.

After the clothing is burned, Yurovsky orders the bodies to be thrown into the mineshaft and then attempts to collapse the mine with hand grenades. This is only partially successful and Yurovsky knows that he will have to re-intern the bodies somewhere else.

After reporting to his superiors, Yurovsky is advised by a member of the Ural Soviet Committee that the bodies could be hidden in one of several deep mines located near the Moscow Highway, not far from the original burial place. The mines are filled with water and Yurovsky decides to weigh the bodies down with stones before throwing them in. He also conceives of a back-up plan to burn the bodies, then pour sulphuric acid on them and bury the remains in a pit. On the evening of 17 July, the bodies are exhumed, loaded on to carts and transported towards the Moscow Highway mines.

18 July 1918

The carts carrying the bodies break down on the way to the mine. Yurovsky orders a pit to be dug, but halfway through the digging, he is informed that the hole can be seen too easily from the road.

Yurovsky abandons the pit and orders trucks to be requisitioned so that the group can continue to the deep mines on the Moscow Highway.

On this day, Pravda announces that the Tsar has been executed, but that the Tsarina Alexandra, and his son, Alexei, have been spared and moved to a safe location. There is no mention of the Tsar's four daughters or their household staff. The article implies that the executions were carried out on the initiative of the Ekaterinburg guards and not on orders from Moscow.

19 July 1918

In the early hours, the trucks that have been requisitioned as replacements for the broken carts also break down on the rough roads. Yurovsky orders another pit to be dug. In the meantime, he burns the bodies. The remains are thrown into the pit and acid is poured on top of them. The pit is filled in and railway sleepers are laid out over the burial site. The trucks are then wheeled back and forth over the sleepers to hide any evidence of burial. By dawn, the work has been completed.

Before departing the burial site, Yurovsky swears the participants to silence. The bones remain hidden, in spite of an extensive search launched by the White Army when it overruns Ekaterinburg a few days later. The Whites are eventually forced out and control of Ekaterinburg returns to the Red Army.

In the months that follow, stories surface about the survival of the Tsarina and her daughters. Witnesses report seeing them on a train heading for the city of Perm. Another story involves the appearance of a young woman, one of the daughters, who is reported to have lived for a short while with a family in the woods before being handed over to the Cheka, who then killed her.

A tailor named Heinrich Kleibenzetl claims to have seen the princess Anastasia, badly wounded, being treated by his landlady in a house directly opposite the Ipatiev residence immediately after the shootings. An Austrian prisoner-of-war, Franz Svoboda, claims to have personally rescued Anastasia from the Ipatiev House.

1920

A woman attempts to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge into the Landwehr canal in Berlin. She is committed to a Dalldorf mental institution, where it is discovered that she has numerous wounds that resemble those made by bullets, and one which appears to have been made by the cruciform blade of a Russian Mosin-Nagant bayonet. The woman appears to be suffering from amnesia and is referred to by the hospital staff as Fraulein Unbekannt ('Jane Doe').

1921

Fraulein Unbekannt confides in one of the Dalldorf nurses, Thea Malinkovsky, that she is in fact the Princess Anastasia. She claims to have been rescued from the execution by a Russian soldier named Alexander Tschaikovsky. Together, they fled to Bucharest, where Tschaikovsky was killed in a fight.

1922

The woman claiming to be Anastasia is released from the asylum and taken in by Baron von Kleist, who believes her story.

In the years that follow, the woman is visited by numerous friends and relatives of the Romanovs, including the Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, sister of Nicholas II, and Pierre Gilliard, private tutor of the Romanov children, both of whom declare her to be a fraud. Based on a dental mould of her teeth, the dentist of the Romanov family, Dr Kostrizky, also declares the woman's claim to be false.

Not all of those who meet the woman believe her to be lying. In Germany, the nephew and niece of the Romanov family physician, Dr Botkin, vigorously support her claim amid accusations that they are simply after the missing Romanov family fortune, by today's standards said to be worth in excess of \$190 million (approximately £90 million).

The legal battle that ensues becomes the longest-running case in German history. A private detective, Martin Knopf, claims that, based on his investigation, the woman is actually a Polish factory worker named Franziska Schanzkowska and that the wounds on her body came from an explosion at the munitions plant where she had been employed. Schanzkowska's brother, Felix, is brought in to identify the woman. He immediately declares her to be his sister but then, mysteriously, refuses to sign an affidavit to that effect.

1929

The woman moves to New York, where she resides temporarily with Annie Jennings, a wealthy Manhattan socialite. Shortly afterwards, following several episodes of hysteria, she is once again committed to an asylum, this time the Four Winds Sanatorium.

1932

The woman, now known as Anna Anderson, returns to Germany.

1934

Yurovsky gives a detailed account of the executions and the events leading up to them at a party conference in Ekaterinburg.

1956

Release of the film *Anastasia*, starring Ingrid Bergman and Yul Brynner.

1968

At the age of seventy, Anna Anderson moves back to the United States and marries John Manahan, who believes her to be the Princess Anastasia. The couple live in Virginia.

1976

The remains of the Romanovs are located exactly where Yurovsky had said they would be, but the information is kept secret and the bodies are not exhumed.

1977

Future Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, then Communist Party chief in Sverdlovsk (formerly known as Ekaterinburg), orders the Ipatiev House to be destroyed, noting that it has become a pilgrimage site.

1983

Anna Anderson is once again institutionalised. Within hours of her entering the psychiatric facility, Manahan kidnaps her and the two escape through rural Virginia.

12 February 1984

Anna Anderson dies of pneumonia.

1991

The skeletons of the Romanovs are exhumed. Through DNA acquired from, among others, the Duke of Edinburgh (whose grandmother was the sister of Tsarina Alexandra), the remains are positively identified as those of Nicholas II, Alexandra, their daughters Olga, Tatiana and Anastasia, as well as the three household servants and Dr Botkin. Two bodies, those of Maria and Alexei, are missing.

1992

DNA testing of a tissue sample from Anna Anderson confirms that she is not the Princess Anastasia. The DNA sample is found to match that of Karl Maucher, great nephew of Franziska Schanzkowska.

27 August 2007

Remains, believed to be those of Maria and Alexei, are located in shallow graves not far from the other burial site.

30 April 2008

The Russian government announces that DNA testing has confirmed the identities of Alexei and Maria. On the same day, to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the executions, more than 30,000 Russians visit the mine where the Romanovs were buried.

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