

MURDER & MAYHEM

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Peter Ermakov, a member of the final burial party, photographed at the clearing in the woods after the grave site had been covered with mining ties. This chilling translation from the original Russian was written by the man responsible for the murder of the Imperial Family and their retainers in the early hours of the morning of July 17th 1918 at Ekaterinburg, now the site of the golden-domed Church of the Blood and a host city for the World Cup.

The Murder of the Imperial Family by their executioner Yurovsky.

Yurovsky's account of the execution of the Imperial Family – February 1, 1934:

On the 16th in the morning I dispatched the little cook, the boy Sednev, under the pretext that there would be a meeting with his uncle who had come to Sverdlovsk. It caused anxiety among the prisoners. Botkin, the usual intermediary, and then one of the daughters asked about Sednev – where, why and for how long he had been taken away – because Alexei missed him. Having received an explanation, they went away apparently calmed down. I prepared 12 revolvers and designated who would shoot whom. Comrade Filipp [Goloshchyokin] told me that a truck would arrive at midnight; the people coming would say a password; we would let them pass and hand over the corpses to them to carry away and bury. At about 11 o'clock at night on July 16 I assembled the men again, handed out the revolvers and announced that soon we had to begin liquidating the prisoners. I told Pavel Medvedev he had to check the guard outside and inside thoroughly. He and the guard commander had to keep constant watch over the area around the house and in the house where the external guard was stationed and to maintain communications with me. I also told him that at the last moment, when everything was ready for the execution, he had tell the guards and the others in the detachment not to worry about any shots they might hear from the house, and not to leave the premises. If there were any unusual amount of unrest, he was to notify me through the established line of communication.

The truck did not arrive until half past one. The extra wait caused some anxiety – waiting in general, and the short night especially. Only when the truck had arrived (or after telephone calls that it was on the way) did I go to wake the prisoners. Botkin slept in the room nearest to the entrance. He came out and asked me what the matter was. I told him to wake everybody, because there was unrest in the town and it was dangerous for them to remain on the top floor. I said I would move them to another place. Gathering everybody consumed a lot of time, about 40 minutes. When the family had dressed, I led them to the room in the basement that had been designated earlier. It must be said here that when Comrade Nikulin and I thought up our plan, we did not consider beforehand that, one, the windows would let out noise; two, the victims would be standing next to a brick wall; and finally, three (It was impossible to foresee this), the firing would occur in an uncoordinated way. That should not have happened. Each man had one person to shoot and so everything should have been all right. The causes of the disorganized firing became clear later. Although I told [the victims] through Botkin that they did not have to take anything with them they collected various small things – pillows, bags and so on and, it seems to me, a small dog.

Having gone down to the room (At the entrance to the room, on the right there was a very wide window), I ordered them to stand along the wall. Obviously, at that moment they did not imagine what awaited them. Alexandra Feodrovna said “There are not even chairs here.” Nicholas was carrying Alexei. He stood in the room with him in his arms. Then I ordered a couple of chairs. On one of them, to the right of the entrance, almost in the corner, Alexandra Feodrovna sat down. The daughters and Demidova stood next to her, to the left of the entrance. Beside them Alexei was seated in the armchair. Behind him Dr. Botkin, the cook and the others stood. Nicholas stood opposite Alexei. At the same time I ordered the men to go down and to be ready in their places when the command was given. Nicholas had put Alexei on the chair and stood in such a way, that he shielded him. Alexei sat in the left corner from the entrance, and so far as I can remember, I said to Nicholas approximately this: His royal and close relatives inside the country and abroad were trying to save him, but the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies resolved to shoot them. He asked “What?” and turned toward Alexei. At that moment I shot him and killed him outright. He did not get time to face us to get an answer. At that moment disorganized, not orderly firing began. The room was small, but everybody could come in and carry out the shooting according to the set order. But many shot through the doorway. Bullets began to ricochet because the wall was brick. Moreover, the firing intensified when the victims shouts arose. I managed to stop the firing but with great difficulty.

A bullet, fired by somebody in the back, hummed near my head and grazed either the palm or finger (I do not remember) of somebody. When the firing stopped, it turned out that the daughters, Alexandra Feodrovna and, it seems, Demidova and Alexei too, were alive. I think they had fallen from fear or maybe intentionally, and so they were alive. Then we proceeded to finish the shooting. (Previously I had suggested shooting at the heart to avoid a lot of blood). Alexei remained sitting petrified. I killed him. They shot the daughters but did not kill them. Then Yermakov resorted to a bayonet, but that did not work either. Finally they killed them by shooting them in the head. Only in the forest did I finally discover the reason why it had been so hard to kill the daughters and Alexandra Feodrovna.

After the shooting it was necessary to carry away the corpses, but it was a comparatively long way. How could we do it? Somebody came up with an idea: stretchers. (We did not think about it earlier.) We took shafts from the sledges and, it seems, put sheets on them. Having confirmed they were dead, we began to carry them out. It was discovered that traces of blood would be everywhere. I said to get some smooth woolen military cloth immediately and put some of it onto the stretchers and then line the truck with it. I directed Mikhail Medvedev to take the corpses. He was a Cheka man then and currently works in the GPU. He and Pyotr Zakharovich Yermakov had to take the bodies and take them away. When they had removed the first corpse somebody said (I do not remember exactly who it was) that someone had taken some valuables. Then I understood that evidently there had been valuables in the things that they had brought with them. I stopped the removal immediately, assembled the men and demanded the valuables be returned. After some denial, two men returned the valuables they had taken.

After I threatened the looters with shooting, I removed those two and ordered Comrade Nikulin (as far as I remember) to escort the bodies, having warned him about valuables. I first collected everything – the things they had taken and other things as well – and I sent all of it to the commandant’s office. Comrade Filipp [Goloshchyokin], apparently sparing me (My health was not very good), told me not to go to the “funeral” but I worried very much about disposing of the corpses properly. So I decided to go personally, and it turned out I did the right thing. Otherwise, all the corpses would wind up in the hands of the White Guards. It is easy to imagine how they would have exploited the situation.

After instructions were given to wash and clean everything, at about three o’clock or even a little later, we left. I took several men from the internal guards. I did not know where the corpses were supposed to be buried, as I have said. Filipp Goloshchyokin had assigned that to Comrade Yermakov (By the way it seems it was Pavel Vedvedev who told me that night that he had seen Comrade Filipp, when he was running to the team. Comrade Filipp was walking back and forth all the time near the house, apparently

because he was anxious about how everything would turn out). Yermakov drove us somewhere at the Verkh-Isetsy Works. I was never at that place and did not know it. At about two-three versts (or maybe more) from the Verkh-Isetsy Works, a whole escort of people on horseback or in carriages met us. I asked Yermakov who these people were, why they were there. He answered that he had assembled those people. I still do not know why there were so many. I heard only shouts "We thought they would come here alive, but it turns out they are dead." Also, it seems about three-four versts farther our truck got stuck between two trees. There where we stopped several of Yermakov's people were stretching out girls' blouses. We discovered again that there were valuables and they were taking them. I ordered that men be posted to keep anyone from coming near the truck.

The truck was stuck and could not move. I asked Yermakov, "Is it still far to the chosen place?" He said "Not far, beyond railroad beds." And there behind the trees was a marsh. Bogs were everywhere. I wondered "Why had he herded in so many people and horses. If only there had been carts instead of carriages." But there was nothing we could do. We had to unload to lighten the truck, but that did not help. Then I ordered them to load the carriages, because it was already light and we did not have time to wait any longer. Only at daybreak did we come to the famous "gully". Several steps from the mine where the burial had been planned, peasants were sitting around the fire, apparently having spent the night at the hayfield. On the way we met several people. It became impossible to carry on our work in sight of them. It must be said, the situation had become difficult. Everything might come to nothing. At that moment I still did not know that the mine would not meet our needs at all. And those damned valuables! Just then I did not know that there was so much of them or that the people Yermakov had recruited were unsuitable for the project. Yes, it was too much! I had to disperse the people. I found out we had gone about 15-16 versts from the city and had driven to the village of Koptiyaki, two or three versts from there. We had to cordon the place off at some distance, and we did it. Besides that, I sent an order to the village to keep everybody out, explaining that the Czech Legion was not far away, that our units had assembled here and that it was dangerous to be here. I ordered the men to turn back anybody to the village and to shoot any stubborn, disobedient persons if that did not work. Another group of men was sent to the town because they were not needed. Having done all of this, I ordered [the men] to load the corpses and to take off the clothes for burning, that is, to destroy absolutely everything they had, to remove any additional incriminating evidence if the corpses were somehow discovered. I ordered bonfires. When we began to undress the bodies, we discovered something on the daughters and on Alexandra Feodrovna. I do not remember exactly what she had on, the same as on the daughters or simply things that had been sewed on. But the daughters had on bodices almost entirely of diamonds and [other] precious stones. Those were not only places for valuables but protective armor at the same time. That is why neither bullets nor bayonets got results. By the way, only they had guilt in their dying agony. The valuables turned out to be about one-half pud. Greed was so great that on Alexandra Feodrovna, by the way, there was simply an enormous piece of round gold wire, turned out as a sheer bracelet and weighing about one pound. All the valuables were ripped out immediately, so that it would not be necessary to carry the bloody rags around with us. Valuables discovered by the White Guards were undoubtedly related to those sewed into other things. After burning, they remained in the ashes. Several diamonds were handed over to me the next day by Comrades who had found them there. How did they overlook the other valuables? They had enough time for it. Most likely they simply did not figure it out. By the way, one has to suppose that some valuables will be returned to us through Torgsin ["Trade with foreigners" stores], because they were probably picked up by the peasants of the Koptiyaki village after our departure. The valuables had been collected, the things had been burned and the completely naked corpses had been thrown into the mine. From that very moment new problems began. The water just barely covered the bodies. What should we do? We had the idea of blowing up the mines with bombs to cover them, but nothing came of it. I saw that the funeral had achieved nothing and that it was impossible to leave things that way. It was necessary to begin all over again. But what should we do? Where should we put the corpses? About at 2 p.m. I decided to go to the town, because it was clear that we had to extract the corpses from the mine and to carry them to another place. Even the blind could discover them. Besides, the place was exposed. People had seen something was going on there. I set up posts, guards in place, and took the valuables and left. I went to the regional executive committee and reported to the authorities how bad things were. Comrade Safarov and somebody else (I do not remember who) listened but said nothing. Then I found Filipp [Goloshchyokin] and

explained to him we had to transfer the corpses to another place. When he agreed I proposed to send people to raise the corpses. At the same time I ordered him to take bread and food because the men were hungry and exhausted, not having slept for about 24 hours. They had to wait for me there. It turned out to be difficult to get to the corpses and lift them out. The men got very exhausted doing it. Apparently they were at it all night because they went there late.

I went to the town executive committee, to Sergei Yergerovich Chutskayev who was its chairman at the time to ask for advice.

Maybe he knew of a place. He proposed a very deep abandoned mine on the Moscow high road. I got a car, took someone from the regional Cheka with me, Polushin, it seems, and someone else and we left. But one and a half versts away from the appointed place the car broke down. The driver was left to repair it, and we went on foot. We looked over the place and decided it was good. The only problem was to avoid onlookers. Some people lived near the place and we decided to come and take them away to the town and after the project let them come back. That was our decision. We came back to the car but it had to be towed. I decided to wait for a passing car. A while later some people rode up on two horses. I stopped them. The fellows seemed to know me. They were hurrying to the plant. With great reluctance they gave us the horses.

While we rode another plan took shape: burn the corpses. But nobody knew how to do it. Polushin seems to have said they already knew that because nobody really knew how it would come out. I was still considering the mines on the Moscow high road and then transportation. I decided to get carts. The plan came to me at the thought of failure in burying them in groups in different places. The road leading to Koptyaki is clay near that gully. If we buried them there without onlookers, not even the devil would find them. To bury them and to drive by with the string of carts would result in a mishmash and that would be that. So there were three plans. There was nothing to drive, there was no car. I went to the head of the military transportation garage to find out if there were any cars. There was a car, but it was the chief's. I forgot his surname; it turned out he was a scoundrel and, it seems, he was executed in Perm. Comrade Pavel Petrovich Gorbunov, who is now deputy chairman of the state bank, was the manager of the garage or deputy chairman of military transportation. I do not remember which. I told him I needed a car urgently. He said "I know what for." He gave me the chairman's car. I drove to Voikov, head of supply in the Urals, to get petrol or kerosene, sulphuric acid too (to disfigure the faces) and, besides that, spades. I commandeered ten carts without drivers from the prison. Everything was loaded on and we drove off. The truck was sent there. I stayed to wait for Polushin, the main "specialist" in burning who had disappeared somewhere. I waited for him at Voikov's. I waited for him in vain until 11 p.m. Then I heard he had ridden off on horseback to come to me but he fell off the horse, hurt his foot, and he could not ride. Since we could not afford to get stuck with the car again, I rode off on horseback about midnight with a comrade (I don't remember who) to the place the corpses were. But I also had back luck. The horse hesitated, dropped to its knees and somehow fell on its side and come down on my foot. I lay there an hour or more until I could get on the horse again. We arrived late at night. The work extracting [the corpses] was going on. I decided to bury some corpses on the road. We began to dig a pit. At dawn it was almost ready, but a comrade came to me and said that despite the order not to let anybody come near, a man acquainted with Yermakov had appeared from somewhere and had been allowed to stay at a distance. From there it was possible to see some kind of digging because there were heaps of clay everywhere. Though Yermakov guaranteed that he could not see anything, another Comrade (not the one who had spoken to me) began to demonstrate that from where he had stood it was impossible not to see.

So that plan was ruined too. We decided to fill in the pit. Waiting for evening, we piled into the cart. The truck waited for us in a place where it seemed impossible to get stuck. (The driver was Zlokazov's worker

Lyukhanov.) We headed for the Siberian high road. Having crossed the railroad, we transferred two corpses to the truck, but it soon got stuck again. We struggled for about two hours. It was almost midnight.

Then I decided that we should do the burying somewhere around there, because at that late hour nobody actually could see us. Only the watchman of the passing track saw several men, because I sent for ties to cover the place where the corpses would be put. The explanation for needing ties was: The ties had to be laid for a truck to pass over. I forgot to say that we got stuck twice that evening or, to be precise, that night. About two months ago, I was looking through the book by Sokolov, the preliminary investigator of the extremely important cases under Kolchak, when I saw a photo of those stacked ties. It was mentioned that the ties had been laid there to let a truck pass. So, having dug up the entire area, they did not think to look under the ties. It is necessary to say that all our men were so tired. They did not want to dig a new grave. But as it always happens in such cases, two or three men started working, then the others began. A fire was made and while the graves were being prepared we burned two corpses: Alexei and Demidova. The pit was dug near the fire. The bones were buried, the land was leveled. A big fire was made again and all the traces were covered with ashes. Before putting the other corpses into the pit we poured sulphuric acid over them. The pit was filled up and covered with the ties. The empty truck drove over the ties several times and rolled them flat. At 5 – 6 o'clock in the morning, I assembled everybody and stated the importance of the work completed. I warned everybody to forget the things they saw and never speak about them with anybody. Then we went back to the town. Having lost us, the fellows from the regional Cheka, such as Comrades Isay Rodzinsky, Gorin and somebody else arrived when we had already finished everything.

In the evening of the 19th I went to Moscow with my report.
– Documentation Centre of the Social Organization of the Sverdlosk Region (DCSOSR) F. 41 Op. 1.D. 151, L. 10-22. Original.

The room in which the Romanovs and their retainers were shot

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This in an effort to mark the centenary of the terrible events that are linked by a Grand Duchess who died with her beloved French bulldog Ortipo ... faithful to the end.

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