

Volunteer Army

By [Evgenii Vladimirovich Volkov](#)

Summary

The Volunteer Army was the operational formation of anti-Bolshevik forces in South Russia during the period of the Civil War. This army became the basis of the organization of the White Movement. After the defeat of the Whites many soldiers of the Volunteer Army who survived emigrated from Russia.

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Assessments of the Volunteer Army in Historiography

Two opposite points of view exist in the historical research about the Volunteer Army, the forces that fought Soviet power in South Russia during the [Russian Civil War](#). The first, a critical one, stresses the reactionary and counterrevolutionary actions of the Volunteer Army. Supporters of this point of view explain the final defeat of the White troops, including of the Volunteer Army, by the anti-national nature of their goals.

The other position, an apologetic one, stresses the need to resist the Bolsheviks, who seized power in 1917 through a military coup. In this view the Volunteer Army is viewed as a unification of the healthy political forces of [Russia](#) that fought the authoritarianism of the Bolshevik Party, but unfortunately suffered defeat.

The Creation of the Volunteer Army

The first formations of the Volunteer Army were created in Novochoerkassk, the capital of the Don Cossack Oblast', and were based on the Alekseev officers' organization. The first volunteers who arrived with General [Mikhail Vasilievich Alekseev \(1857-1918\)](#) at the beginning of November 1917 settled in Infirmary № 2 (39 Barochnaia Street). The Composite Officers Company was formed on 4 November. The volunteers who joined the Alekseev

organization signed a four-month obligation, but the contract was subsequently extended as the Civil War escalated. The main backbone was composed primarily of officers and cadets who had fought in the First World War and young students.

Initially volunteers received no salaries, only rations. This, however, soon changed. Thus, officers were initially paid 100 rubles a month, and in March 1918, their monthly pay was increased to 270 rubles. In the first months, about seventy-five to eighty new volunteers joined the ranks of the future army each day. By the middle of November the Alekseev organization consisted of the Composite Officers Company, a Cadet Battalion, the Composite Mikhailovsko-Konstantinovskaia Battery, a Georgievskaia Company, and a Student Detachment. During this period more than 30 percent of the volunteers were officers, about 50 percent were cadets, and 10 percent were university students, students in secondary school, and other kinds of cadets.

The Alekseev organization began to wage combat operations against the Bolsheviks at the end of November 1917, and several days after its formation they forced detachments of the Red Guards and representatives of the Soviet government to leave Rostov.

With the arrival of [Lavr Georgievich Kornilov \(1870-1918\)](#) and a number of other generals and officers at the beginning of December 1917 (they had previously been under arrest at Bykhov, accused of an insurrection against the [Provisional Government](#)), the Alekseev organization was reorganized into an army. General L. G. Kornilov was appointed commanding general, and all the armed formations received the overall name "The Volunteer Army". General [Mikhail V. Alekseev \(1857-1918\)](#) headed both the political oversight and the financial unit. General [Aleksandr Sergeevich Lukomskii \(1868-1939\)](#) became Chief of Staff, and General [Anton I. Denikin \(1872-1947\)](#) headed all the formations quartered in Novocherkassk, the future 1st Division. The leadership of the Volunteer Army was initially oriented toward the Entente powers.

At the end of December 1917 the main formations of the Volunteer Army were redeployed to Rostov, where the army continued to expand. By the start of February 1918, the Volunteer Army included the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Officers, Cadet, and Student Battalions; the 3rd and 4th Officers Battalions; the Rostov and Taganrog Officers Battalions; the Naval, Georgievskaia, and Technical Companies; the Detachment commanded by General [Aleksandr Nikolayevich Cherepov \(1877-1964\)](#); the Officers Detachment commanded by Colonel [Vasiliy Lavrovich Simanovskii \(1871-1918\)](#); the Detachment commanded by Colonel [Aleksandr Pavlovich Kutepov \(1882-1930\)](#); the Shock Detachment of the Caucasian Cavalry Division; the 3rd Kiev Lieutenants' School; the 1st Cavalry Battalion; the 1st Independent Light Artillery Battalion;

and the Kornilov Shock Regiment. In total the Volunteer Army had more than 3,600 volunteers and eight field guns.

The Volunteer Army at the Fronts of the Civil War

At the end of February 1918 the command of the Volunteer Army decided to retreat to regions of the Kuban' as a result of the Soviet attack on Rostov. This march by the Volunteer Army, accompanied by constant battles with units of the [Red Army](#), subsequently received the name "The First Kuban' Campaign".

At the [Cossack](#) village of Ol'ginskaia the Volunteer Army, which consisted of twenty-five dissimilar formations, was reorganized to include the Composite Officers, Kornilov, the Partisan Regiments, the Special Cadet Battalion, the Technical Company, the 1st Cavalry Battalion, the Mounted Detachment of Colonel [Piotr Vladimirovich Glazenap \(1882-1951\)](#), the Mounted Detachment of Lieutenant Colonel A. A. Kornilov, the Security Company of Army headquarters, a convoy, and a mobile field hospital. In the middle of March 1918, after reinforcements with the Kuban' Detachment (about 3,000 sabers) under the command of General [Viktor Leonidovich Pokrovskii \(1889-1922\)](#) arrived, the Volunteer Army was reorganized into the 1st and 2nd [Infantry](#) Brigades under the command of General [Sergey Leonidovich Markov \(1878-1918\)](#) and General [Afrikan Petrovich Bogaevskii \(1872-1934\)](#), as well as into a mounted brigade.

The formations of the Volunteer Army tried unsuccessfully for several days to capture Ekaterinodar, the capital of the Kuban', which was defended by superior Red forces. During this period Commanding General Lavr Georgievich Kornilov died from the explosion of an [artillery](#) shell. General Anton Ivanovich Denikin replaced him on 31 March 1918. The army continued to gain reinforcements while retreating from Ekaterinodar to the oblast' of the Don Cossacks. In May 1918 the Volunteer Army was joined by a well-armed and well-supplied detachment under Colonel [Mikhail Gordeyevich Drozdovskii \(1881-1919\)](#), which had arrived from the Romanian front with some 3,000 soldiers with [machine guns](#), field guns, and armored cars. The Volunteer army now included the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Infantry and the 1st [Cavalry](#) Divisions, the 1st Kuban' Cossack Brigade, the Plastun [Cossack infantry] Battalion, and three armored cars.

The "Second Kuban' Campaign" of the Volunteers began at the end of June 1918. They managed to defeat the main forces of the Reds in Kuban' and take Ekaterinodar in August 1918 with the assistance of the Don Army Ataman [Pavel Nikolayevich Krasnov \(1869-1947\)](#). After General M. V. Alekseev's death in September 1918 Denikin became not only the leader

of the military, but also the political leader of the White Movement in South Russia.

During the Second Kuban' Campaign and subsequent combat operations in the North Caucasus, the army continued to gain reinforcements. This, however, occurred predominantly at the expense of the mobilization of the civilian population and former Red Army soldiers who had been captured. As a result, by the beginning of 1919 the Volunteer Army consisted of five corps which were equipped with about 40,000 bayonets and sabers. The Volunteer Army's formations were part of the Armed Forces of the South of Russia (VSluR). Beginning in January 1919, under the command of General Baron [Piotr Nikolaevich Wrangel \(1878-1928\)](#), it began to be called the Caucasus Volunteer Army after a number of formations were removed. In May 1919 this formation was divided into the Caucasus Army, which attacked Tsaritsyn, and the Volunteer Army, under the command of General [Vladimir Zenonovich Mai-Maevskii \(1867-1920\)](#), which attacked Kursk and Orel.

In the summer and autumn of 1919 the Volunteer Army was the main striking force in General Denikin's advance on Moscow. The 1st Army Corps (commanded by A. P. Kutepov), which consisted of select "color regiments" (the Kornilov, Markov, and Drozdovskii), each distinguished by the color of their shoulder-boards and the hatbands on their caps, was the lead formation of the Volunteer Army. They were deployed into divisions during the "march on Moscow". In November 1919 formations of the Galician Army of Western [Ukraine](#) poured into the Volunteer Army under the conditions of a temporary agreement. The Volunteer Army gradually became less effective due to heavy losses.

After the unsuccessful offensive on Moscow, units of the Volunteer Army retreated to the Kuban' under attack from the Reds. There, at the start of 1920, they were absorbed into the Independent Volunteer Corps, commanded by A. P. Kutepov. At the end of March 1920 the remnants of the Volunteer Army were evacuated with great losses from Novorossiisk to Crimea, where they joined the Russian Army of General P. N. Wrangel.

An Assessment of the Importance of the Volunteer Army for the History of the Anti-Bolshevik Movement

The Volunteer Army became the foundation for the organization of the White movement in Russia. Initially created on a voluntary principle, it quickly became clear that it was unrealistic to create a large army of volunteers during a civil war. The army therefore began to be reinforced by mobilizing former soldiers and the civilian population. The Volunteer Army became the linchpin for the creation of the White Armed Forces of the South of Russia and participated in practically all the main battles with the Reds in the Kuban', the Don Oblast', the North Caucasus, Ukraine, and Central Russia. The strategy and tactics used by the

Volunteer Army command were based on the experiences of the First World War, but the characteristics of the Civil War forced them to change their operations. Most of the soldiers of the Volunteer Army who survived, emigrated or remained in part of the territory of Soviet Russia. A considerable number of former soldiers of the Volunteer Army abroad became members of military organizations of exiles subordinate to the Russian All-Military Union.

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External Links

- [Denikin, Anton Ivanovich, General \(in Russian\): Ocherki russkoï smutym V. 5 \(Essays of the Russian Trouble: in 5 volumes\) 1921 \(Military Literature\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Denikin, Anton Ivanovich, General: The Russian Turmoil. Memoirs: Military, Social, and Political, London 1922 \(Internet Archive\) \(Book\)](#)
- [French Map of White Russia/Ruthenia 1919 \(Gallica\) \(Map\)](#)
- [Russkaia armiia v Velikoi voine: Kartoteka proekta \(The Russian Army in the Great War\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Siegelbaum, Lewis: 1917: Kornilov Affair \(Seventeen Moments in Soviet History\) \(Article\)](#)

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